



# Eagle Canoe Club Newsletter

## Spring Summer 2015

Hello and welcome to the new Newsletter covering the spring and summer activities.

I hope you all have had a fun 2015 season so far. Although the nights are drawing in there is still loads going on at eagle with the club house based sessions and river trips happening on Wednesday and the chance to explore some local rivers in the winter sunshine at the weekend.

In this seasons edition of the newsletter we get part 2 of Joel's epic Dordogne trip, Stu gives us an update to the proposed new clubhouse, Ann gives you some helpful hints for budding trip organisers and Simon tells what he gets up to in the long dark nights of winter.

For me this season has been great as I have seen loads of people progress with their paddling over the course of year and during the summer season. Be it from the crop of budding white water paddlers getting their first taste of moving water at Symonds Yat to club members I remember seeing when they joined a few years ago now running sessions and being integral coach members on trips away. Maybe I'm getting old but I think this is great to see as it means that the club is constantly evolving and adapting to its membership and hopefully any newer members can see that the boating world doesn't stop when you reach 3 star. There are a plethora of options available to you and the club will try and help as much as possible. Maybe you will find a group of likeminded souls and undertake a boating expedition or like the idea of Island hopping in the Med in sea kayaks. While the club can't always run these trips for you what it can do is give you access to a load of people with similar ideas of what constitutes a holiday. Anyway without further ado the Newsletter! **Pete**

## EDITORIAL



## EXCITING TIMES AND GRAND DESIGNS

Eagle Canoe Club has had a long existence at Eagle Canoe Centre, starting out from a range of "sheds" and becoming Norfolk County Council's (NCC) youth centre. Temporary buildings were replaced with portacabins, and then Whitlingham came along. NCC slowly moved their functions leaving only Eagle Canoe Club at the centre with buildings which were slowly falling into disrepair.

When I first joined Eagle the discussion topic at the AGMs was pretty much always about the future of the club at Eagle Canoe Centre and uncertainty about our "home". Even then, there was one lone voice with a dream, a vision of the future of Eagle. While the rest of us were looking at how we could patch up what we had, he was looking at how we could achieve a purpose built club house and changing rooms. Over the last 2 years, Si has made his dream OUR dream.



During 2014 Si and a small team worked up an application for Sport England's Inspired Facilities Grant to not only provide new facilities for the club, but to increase the use of Eagle Canoe Centre by other community groups and as a training centre.

After some issues around securing a lease for the site, establishing a limited company, registering as a Community Amateur Sports Club and securing planning permission, we were rewarded with a grant offer of £75,000 from Sport England. The original estimates for the project were around £100,000, which could be achieved from the grant and club reserves (we have been saving up for some time for this day !), however, once we started looking in more detail at foundation designs and employing an architect, the costs started to increase.

A small "working group" has been working hard to find further grants, reduce build costs and look at alternative options. Revised planning applications have been submitted and a further £50,000 was awarded to the club from the Town Close Trust. We currently have two further grant applications submitted to the Paul Bassham Trust (which will hopefully be considered in September 2015) and the Geoffrey Watling Trust (which will consider the application in December 2015), which will hopefully provide sufficient funding to implement the development.

If we do not secure these additional grants, we will have to consider either a phased development or the construction of a "shell" for the building and to fit it out as funds become available.

To implement this project will pretty much use all the reserves the club currently has, which means there is not much slack in the build project, but also means we need to look at replenishing our reserves for future maintenance / repairs of the boat shed, replacement of equipment etc.

As a club we try to involve members in the running of the club, from feedback about how things are run, to volunteer days, taster sessions etc. For 2016 and beyond we will need more help than ever before to increase the range of opportunities we can offer, increase links with other organisations, the running of courses, and fundraising. If you have any skills which you think would benefit the club (ie marketing, fund raising, publicity, etc) please let me or Jane (volunteer co coordinator) know.





## PROGRESSIVE WHITE WATER 1 - SYMONDS YAT 2015

After being told that the Symonds Yat trip was full and there was a waiting list with three people in front of me, I didn't hold much hope in getting a space. Luckily two weeks before the trip I got an email saying a space had become available. I will say that email made my day! By that time the club had already done all of their Horstead mill practice trip and I had only been there once before, I definitely felt a little bit unprepared, but knowing that I had the club coaches and fellow club members with me, I knew I would have a great weekend and learn lots.

At Symonds Yat on the Saturday morning we set out early, and separated into our group with our coaches. I got put in groups with Jas, a coach I hadn't met before but after a quick chat we all set out onto the water and paddled up the Wye to the moving water, still feeling a little bit nervous, we started practicing ferry gliding and braking in and out of the flow, Jas making it look so effortless and easy as she led us.

It wasn't long before people started go in and swimming and only time before it was my time, in I go, as I set up my paddle hits a rock, I panic and bail, but unlike another time I managed to hold onto my paddle. The second swim I take, I not only hold on to my paddle and my kayak as well, which almost pulls my rescuer on the other end of a throw line in too, sorry Jade! (mental note to self, hold paddle let go of kayak) third time in and I roll, all be it a little help from my paddle on the bottom. By the end I was just throwing myself in to practise rolling in the flow and loving every minute of it! It was an amazing weekend spent with great people having lots of fun in and out of the water.

Thank you eagle canoe club! **Colin Smith**





## DORDOGNE RIVER OPEN CANOE TOUR AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2014

As you may remember from my article in the last newsletter the reccy for this trip was carried out in April 2014. I was hoping to do the actual canoe trip in the summer of 2014. I needed a canoe to start off with. This I bought from Sue's canoes in March 2014. (Red, Charles River 15, Old town, 4.8m long, 36.3kg, shallow arch bottom with moderate rocker). I loved the design the moment I saw him/her/it but this was a heavy boat and this concerned me for long portages on my own. I couldn't afford to go for strength and lightness together so I had to prioritise strength as I wasn't sure what the upper reaches of the river had in store for us. Further down the Dordogne I would be on deep water and strength wouldn't be such an issue but I had to make a choice. With the benefit of hindsight I can now say that the Charles River has great strength and dealt confidently with the frequent collisions with rocks in the early stages of the trip.



I would have liked more time to get to know the boat before the trip but I have a tendency to leave things to the last moment so I had my fingers crossed. I was originally going to share the canoe with a friend, Sally, and our first job was to find a name for our new boat. However inappropriate, we decided on 'Old Geezer'.

I spent the next few months trying to plan the trip in a bit more detail and working out what kit I would need or like to take – I know they're not the same thing but like I said before I like to travel heavy! Another aspect to the trip that I now considered almost essential was a partner to paddle the beginning and end with me. The beginning would be hard because of the potential white water and long portages. The end would be hard because of the tidal flows, exposed water and difficulty of getting in and out of the river and estuary.

Club chairman Stuart gave me an evening of his time to get me started on the planning process and answer some basic queries. Being able to talk to experienced paddlers like Stuart, Tim, Jaz and Peter Knowles gave me the confidence to believe the trip was achievable.

As time went on and the summer approached, I hadn't done much planning, I didn't have much kit and I didn't know anyone who could definitely join me. Various people had expressed an interest but it was difficult for me to confirm a departure time and place and most people couldn't be that flexible. I was also getting lots of conflicting advice about how to deal with the risk posed by the dams in the upper river. I contacted various people and internet sites.



Some people said there wouldn't be an issue in the summer, others that they only released water at night, others said that they had camped by other rivers in the summer and had woken to the whole campsite being flooded and tens of canoes floating down the river.

The most reliable report said that they do open the dams sometimes if there is a high demand for electricity or there has been heavy rain but that this happens slowly so that even if fishermen are in the river they have time to get out. In a canoe you either just keep paddling or get out.

By the end of July my brother Oli had signed up to do the first part of the trip with me. He only had a week to spare and was keen to be on the water as much as possible – not pulling a

loaded canoe up and down steep roads. Although this would be the preference of any normal person I had developed a slightly obsessional streak that was intent on paddling as much of the river as possible, even if this included long portages to get round dams. It was going to be a case of seeing what happened on the day.

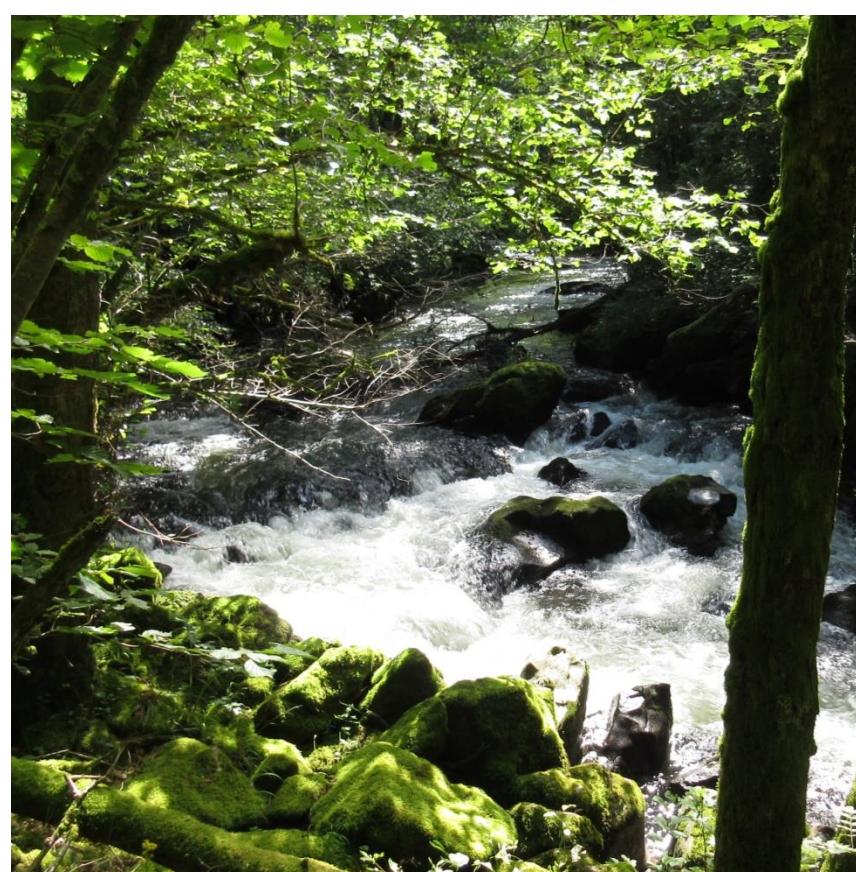
As far as kit was concerned I knew I had to prepare to be on the river for a number of weeks and I wasn't sure when I would have access to shops or help in the upper stretches. I won't go into too much detail here but I divided most equipment into four containers. A 15l barrel for all the cooking gear and food. A 30l barrel for all the camping kit (tent, sleeping bag etc). A 125l waterproof bag for clothes. And another 50l dry bag for electrics, important paperwork etc (if we were going to be separated from the boat this would be the bag to try and grab!). To carry the big barrel I managed to track down a barrel strap (sold as Barrel Mate) at Aiguille Ltd. Despite not having one in stock when I first rang, they got back in touch to say they could make one up and had it sent out just in time. I had 3 paddles in the boat. One of these was a Wenonah carbon fibre paddle bought from Desperate Measures in Nottingham. After trying one of these unbelievably light but strong paddles at the club I really wanted to get one for the trip knowing that I would be paddling for many hours and days in a row. The ordering process got a bit complicated and it seemed like the paddle wouldn't arrive in time but DM were amazing and drove the paddle down to my parents' house in London the day before my departure. I also went through a big dilemma about whether to add lacing to the boat. I read an article on Song of the Paddle (SotP) to help me decide. The main advantage is that you have really convenient points to attach items on the inside of the boat without having to open your waterproof containers all the time. The worries for me were that they could get in the way that they would affect the integrity of the boat and might make the boat difficult to sell if I ever wanted to part with the Old Geezer.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2014 I drove down to London to my parents' house to meet my brother. I was about 5 hours later than I had planned and was intending to fit the Old Geezer with lacing that night. At midnight we started drilling holes, cutting rubber tube and lacing rope. We followed the instructions on SotP and it took about an hour for two of us to complete. I am so, so glad I did. The hooks were invaluable for attaching water bottles, waterproof shoes, containers, knives, cameras etc. I still haven't experienced any disadvantages of having this lacing.

The next day we set off for Dover and that night we camped just south of Paris. We took this opportunity to test the barrel harness and some of the other cooking gear which was new. By mid afternoon on August 21<sup>st</sup> we had entered the Massif central and arrived at Sant Sauves d'Auvergne. There was a fair amount of water in the river but it was still quite rocky. The first thing we needed to establish was whether the campsite at Sant Sauves would allow us to set off from there and leave the car there for possibly up to a month. They did agree to both these things but we decided to drive to the next possible get in just to check what the river was like and to have a back up if we couldn't get in at Sant Sauves. However, this next get in would be a last resort as there was just a small parking space next to a bridge above the river. Between Sant Sauves and here was 20 km of the Gorges D'Aveze which I had only been able to look at in one place. There was one other possible get-in about 10km down the river with a nice field to camp in but again I wasn't keen to leave the car on the side of the road for a month with no clear idea of how I would get back to it as this was not near any town or railway station.

We returned to the camp site at Sant Sauves and decided to have a short practice run down the river for 100 metres or so to get used to the loaded boat and see how he fared in the shallow water.

The practice run went ok although getting into the river from the campsite involved dragging the canoe across a stagnant muddy pool, down a very narrow ditch and under a low iron bar across the opening to the river. These obstacles become considerably more challenging with a heavily laden boat full of gear. We decided we would go for it on the following morning and went to bed with a cold mountain mist enveloping the campsite and the loud rushing water of the Dordogne flowing metres from our tent.





On August 22<sup>nd</sup> we launched into the river. Its quite a scary feeling saying good bye to the safety of the campsite and the bank, not knowing what is ahead, not knowing how or where you can get out if there is a problem. This is compounded by knowing that a heavy boat and lots of gear will be many times more tiring and problematic to get out of a gorge than, say, a lightweight kayak with a days supplies. The river was not deep, but despite bumping over rocks and getting caught up in some fallen trees we seemed to be making good progress. However, the river began to twist and turn more abruptly. With a heavy boat (perhaps 4inches above water), one paddler with little paddling experience and no knowledge of what was ahead it became more and more nerve wracking. There were sections where boulders strewn across the channel provided no clear route down. In other places the river turned so abruptly that it was hard to avoid ploughing straight into the bank ahead. Small drop offs of 50 cm or so seemed much more scary given the risks of trying to steer a sluggish and heavy boat between a small gap in the boulders and risk being pinned or capsized so early in the trip with gear getting wet or lost. Portaging or lining a boat over these obstacles became more and more demoralizing. In addition the banks of the river were getting steeper and steeper and more forested so

that it became less apparent where one could get out. At one point a fly fisherman suddenly appeared on a rock above the river. He must have been as shocked to see us as we were to see him. Looking back, I can't believe many touring canoes have attempted to descend that stretch of river. Seeing him retreat from the river and struggle to negotiate a steep and gnarled path through the trees I couldn't imagine how long it would take us to escape from the gorge with The Old Geezer and all the kit if we needed to.

A short distance ahead our days paddling came to an end. We had spent the last couple of hours having to constantly jump in and out of the boat to grab the side and stop the canoe going down sections of the river where there were big unpredictable turns, large boulders or tree trunks sticking out of the water or lying across the channel. Our feet were wet and cold and we were tired. We'd jumped out river left and were standing waist deep in the river surveying the river ahead. The river was rushing too quickly through this bottle neck to be able to get back in the boat safely and get moving in a straight line. We needed to get to river right where there was a narrow gap between a boulder and a steep, rocky river cliff. Again, the water was too deep and was moving too fast and powerfully to be able to walk across. In the end we tied up, stopped for lunch and then continued on foot to see what was ahead. There was more of the same, possibly worse, and we realized it was going to be very risky for us to continue trying to paddle down the gorge. We walked on and found a very secluded field next to the river surrounded by forest. Not having being able to accurately locate where we were on the river up to that point we realized we had actually only travelled about 1.71 miles in 4 hours. This was depressing but also made it clear that even if we did continue downstream in the boat it was going to take way longer than we had hoped. We began to discuss how to get the boat and gear the half mile or so from where it was tied up to the field where we could camp for the night. The options were to either try and paddle it together or portage the boat and gear along very narrow paths on the steep slope or to carry all the gear and then I, as the more experienced paddler and with no extra weight to carry, paddle down solo. In the end we decided to portage the gear and line the boat. The portage was slow and hard work but made so much easier by having the barrel strap and big waterproof bags with proper back straps. I had done some lining for my 3\* certificate in quite controlled and calm conditions. Oli had no experience of this technique of leading a boat down a river. We used the painters attached to throw lines and began to descend. After the rather disheartening start to our paddling trip we soon developed a good rhythm with the lining.





There were a few hairy moments when large, steep sided boulders or cliff faces jutted out into the river providing no clear passage while still holding onto the ropes but we passed these either by getting into the water and walking round one at a time or by climbing over or round them. This technique allowed us to get the canoe relatively safely down the river without having to carry it or paddle it in dangerous conditions.

We camped, dried out our gear, lit a fire and cooked. We had a box of wine to help us relax and although the cardboard had disintegrated the bag inside was definitely a better option than a glass bottle to transport and dispose of later. Although we were disappointed with our progress it was an idyllic spot to camp in and for me that is one of the biggest joys of canoe touring.

The next morning we began to haul our gear to the top of the forested valley. This was about two km up a very steep and rocky track. We did the first trip together, taking as much gear as possible. Oli then went off walking and hitch hiking to get the car. I went back down to get the canoe and more gear. By this point a local farmer had passed me with his tractor pulling a big log up to his farm. He then appeared in his 4x4 having somehow negotiated the very rutted track to reach me in the canoe. My French wasn't great in those days but I realized he was proposing to take my stuff up to the tarmac road. He had no roof rack and I was apprehensive. He didn't seem to mind and started clearing space for the gear. We put the canoe upside down on his roof and secured it with my straps going through the windows and inside the car. I had been really struggling pulling the canoe with a barrel in it on the trolley. This was much easier and just as we got to his farm at the top Oli arrived in the car. It was about 10.00 in the morning and our friendly saviours took us into the cellar underneath their barn and gave us a few glasses of home made white wine. It was disappointing to have had to pull out of the river after only one days paddling but considering the possible unknown risks in the gorge ahead and the relative ease with which we had been able to leave the river, we had to be grateful.

We headed to Bort-les-Orgues, the town that hosts the first big dam on the river. This hydro-electric dam is 120 metres high and holds back a reservoir of 500 million m<sup>3</sup>. Having seen the turbulence when water was being allowed through its not a place you want to get too close to in a canoe. Downstream of here are a further 4 barrages: Mareges (89.5m); l'Aigle (92m); Chastang (85m); Argentat (31m). Over some food and coffee we decided what to do next. I was keen to paddle as much of the river as possible but the further upstream we started from the longer and harder the portages would be. Although mainly on tarmac they would involve journeys on steep roads of many miles. From the April reccie I know that there were hardly any places where we could leave the car in a safe place and get back to it easily in a few weeks time. Oli only had a week to spare and wasn't keen to spend the majority of that time paddling on reservoirs or portaging up and down steep roads. It wasn't too hard for me to be persuaded and we made a sort of compromise by agreeing to start from Spontour. This is the only settlement on the river between Sant Sauves and just below the Chastang dam. There's not much there but there is a campsite and I knew that we could get into the river easily enough. However when we arrived at the campsite the young guy who was supposedly in charge told us we could not leave the car there. He told us that the campsite would be locked and we might not be able to get back in. There was no barrier and it seemed very unhelpful of him. There didn't seem much we could do to change his mind and I had to accept that I would leave the car in a nearby carpark for possibly up to a month.

We drove around looking for somewhere to eat but could not find anything in the two nearest villages which were not that close. After a campsite meal and a quiet night it was time to get on the river again. The river in these big, steep sided valleys has a strange quality. It is very, very quiet with no noise of moving water and few roads. The water is still and is obviously very deep. With a heavy morning mist lifting off the river it felt rather eerie pushing off from the bank. Certainly very different from where we had been paddling the day before. I also had this irrational anxiety that somehow the canoe was much more vulnerable to sinking here knowing that there were many metres of dark water beneath us. But canoes are amazingly buoyant and despite the huge amount of gear and two paddlers the Old Geezer hardly flinched as we pushed off. We soon felt comfortably secure and got into a good rhythm.



There is definitely a beauty to these flooded valleys behind the dams. The water is expansive and still. The wooded slopes are unspoilt and quiet. There is time to float and appreciate the scenery and the tops of the valleys are high above giving you a feeling of being remote and somewhere difficult to get to other than in a boat. However after 14 miles paddling to get to the Chastang dam there was not much to report. We stopped briefly to inspect the tops of drowned trees, took photos from an island of rock that would have been fun to camp on and had lunch near one of the slipways where locals come down to fish and launch small pleasure boats. A mile or so upstream of the Chastang dam we came ashore on a gently sloping slipway on the right bank. On the reccie we had spent about three hours on the left bank looking for a place to get out. Closer inspection of the map would have revealed this perfect spot which we were now taking advantage of. This was our first proper portage and we were careful to attach the loaded canoe to the trolley so that we could do the whole thing (3 miles) without having to readjust. Lifting the Old Geezer on and off was a challenge even for two of us. I did notice the canoe becoming misshapen where its weight sagged over the supports of the trolley but this did not seem to last once it was unloaded. The road took us over the top of the dam and down the left bank to Gleny where we put in again for the final 3 mile paddle to the Argentat dam. We hadn't found a good get out on the left bank during the reccie and didn't have time to inspect the right bank so I was hoping for the best. We found somewhere that wasn't too difficult to tie up, unload and reach the road from. The final portage to the campsite was just under 2 miles. Argentat is a picturesque town with a lovely old port with fishermen's houses on the riverfront and was the starting point for boats called Gabarres which took wood, wine and other produce up and down the river for many years.

The next day, August 25<sup>th</sup> 2014, turned out to be marvellously hot and windless – perfect paddling conditions – and we travelled 16 miles. Unfortunately I woke with a stomach ache and this got steadily worse during the day later developing into a fever. But despite this it was an incredible days paddling and it felt like we were really on the river now. There were a few stretches of white water where the channel turned abruptly or became shallow or where large rocks lurked just beneath the surface. At a couple of points there was a group of 'life guards' (youngsters wearing red caps and branded t shirts) waiting on the bank with kayaks to the ready. This led us to believe that the river had the potential to be more menacing than it seemed and an old, plastic canoe pinned round a rock was a healthy warning to stay alert. The challenge of negotiating these infrequent sections of fast moving water was enjoyable and without them it would probably be possible to descend the river at a decent pace with only the odd paddle stroke.





We were heading for Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, a beautiful medieval town mostly situated on the right bank of the river. Getting to the campsite is a bit tricky as there is a weir across most of the river. Sticking to the left bank allows you to take the canoe down a side channel/chute and then paddle a few hundred metres in this shallow channel before rejoining the main channel. The campsite is directly opposite the confluence so we turned the boat upstream and ferry glided across. We put our tent up and I collapsed without eating, having got steadily weaker during the day. Oli went for a walk in the town and managed to watch a bit of football.

The next day was pouring with rain but I was feeling a lot better. Our neighbour went to the toilets wearing a silk dressing gown and slippers carrying a large umbrella and newspaper. This all felt a bit too comfortable and luxurious and wasn't the kind of place we enjoyed camping and we packed up quickly and set off into the downpour. We covered 13 miles and found a lovely camping spot on the beach just west of Carennac. There is a weir just before Carennac and we debated running it but decided against what seemed like quite a high chance of capsizing and took the sedate channel on river left which allowed us to tie up at the bottom of the pretty little village. The way out of this back channel isn't immediately obvious but across the river was what looked like an opening and possibly a chute. We paddle across and had a look down the 20 metre slope with wooden rollers on the bottom. We decided that I would run it and Oli would film me. It was an exciting little addition to the day which otherwise was marked by its beauty and tranquility rather than its excitement.

The spot we found to camp on was very quiet although a fisherman was going back and forth in his little wooden fishing boat. We collected wood and the little pruning saw I had brought came in very handy although the wood was quite damp. It had been raining a lot of the day and soon after we had made camp the rain started again and continued for most of the night. Oli, with his superior rope skills, rigged up a tarpaulin and we made a fire. Despite the rain, or maybe because of it and our cosiness in the shelter, we enjoyed one of the nicest nights on the river. I did try a bit of fishing from the canoe and then the bank before it got dark but was unsuccessful.

The next day was clearly going to be hot with blue sky above and the river draped in mist. It was a great pleasure to be on the water early and paddle through the rising mist with grazing cows and large country houses appearing on every bend in the early morning light. Although there are numerous villages and towns along the river here none of them really crowds the river bank and some are hidden behind trees so it can often feel as if you have the river to yourself. There are some particularly nice stretches at the base of limestone cliffs near Creysse and Pinsac and even a little cave which we were able to enter about 20 metres into. We paddled 20 miles to another wild camping spot on a secluded bend in the river just west and out of earshot of the A20 motorway. 'Our' beach was opposite some dramatic limestone cliffs which produced a soothing gurgle all night and provided enough wood for another fire.





The following day was our last one paddling together and we completed 24 miles to arrive at Cenac just below the hilltop town of Domme. We stopped briefly at Souillac for a coffee and wander around and on an idyllic little island which would have made a perfect camping spot. Other than that the day was uneventful apart from being very picturesque and leisurely. That night was not quite so peaceful with a massive thunderstorm which left the ground under our tent full of puddles.

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup>, our parents came to meet us at Cenac, along with a family friend Sally, who I had originally planned to buy the boat with. She took over from Oli and we paddled 22 miles downriver to Le Buisson. This stretch of river is dotted with impressive chateau's perched high up on the cliffs. This is the part of the river that I am most familiar with but it felt strange and satisfying to arrive at beaches where we often came to swim, knowing I had paddled down the river from far away to the east. At Le Buisson we were met by Oli and took the boat back to our holiday home about 5 miles away. I was here for 11 days before setting off again. Damon had agreed to come out and join me for some paddling. The plan was to meet him at Bergerac and continue together as far as we could. This meant I would paddle for two days on my own from Le Buisson to Bergerac. I really wanted to do some paddling on my own as I really value that solitary time and I like the feeling of independence and being able to cope with challenges. But I was definitely anxious about being alone, especially dealing with the two dams at Mauzac and Tuillieres.

On Wednesday 10 September I set off from le Buisson, just me and the Old Geezer, waving rather melancholically to my parents. I felt sad, apprehensive and excited. This was the first time I would be paddling for any length of time on my own. I was unsure about the progress I would make paddling single handedly in a heavy boat but as long as I didn't try to rush and tire myself out I could keep up a decent pace. I left behind the places that I was familiar with and by 2.30 I had made it to the dam at Mauzac. There is a very accessible slip way here and I was soon on the bank having my lunch. Exiting the village there is a very steep section of road which I would have struggled to pull the boat up without unloading but some passing tourists gave me a hand. The rest of the 0.8 mile portage was pretty flat though very hot. The get-in is a bit tricky, involving crossing a bit of field and pushing through high reeds and a boggy patch. The whole day was just under 14 miles of paddling and I camped at a campsite in Pontours. It was early enough to walk into Lalinde and grab a beer before heading back to cook dinner.

Between Pontours and Lalinde I had seen some interesting looking waves caused by protruding rocks. As they were spread out unevenly across and down the river I was a little worried how I would negotiate them on my own. However, apart from coming aground on some shallows I passed by without event. There are hundreds of swans in the river between Pontours and Lalinde and I did my best to get some

photos while trying to paddle and avoid the rocks. The river banks are higher here and mostly thickly overgrown with trees and undergrowth. It was lovely paddling but there wasn't much apart from a wall of greenery and the sky to look at. The next obstacle was a dam at Tuillieres.



We had stopped to check out this portage on the reccie and although the get-in downstream of the dam looked fine, the only get-out I saw involved crossing the parallel canal by means of some steep narrow steps and a footbridge. However, before arriving there in the canoe I came across a very nice little slipway at the foot of an old mill that we hadn't seen from the road on the reccie. It was a fairly simple matter to unload and walk the 1.5 miles past the dam. Although the reccie clearly hadn't revealed all the details of the river, having surveyed the river beforehand certainly allowed me to relax to a certain extent as I knew what to expect and when.

The last section before Bergerac seemed to drag and two bends to the left and then right seemed to go on forever but finally I reached the campsite and hauled everything up to a pitch.

Damon had arrived by train with all his kit and made his way to the centre of town where we met and had dinner. We were both heading into fairly unknown territory paddling down a river of this size for multiple days into the biggest estuary in Europe. It was good to have paddled with Damon before and he had some experience of the tidal estuary at Great Yarmouth so knew that we would be heavily influenced by tides the closer to the sea we got. A couple of miles beyond the Bergerac campsite is a sizeable weir that we needed to portage around. Although the portage was less than a mile and fairly straightforward it was nice to be doing it with someone and sharing the physical and psychological burden of making decisions and moving a heavy load.

It was 16 miles to Ste-Foy-la-grande where we planned to camp and we made it in good time. Unfortunately as we were pulling in to stop, some local kids thought it would be fun to throw stones at us. I wasn't impressed and left Damon to guard the boat while simultaneously chasing the kids and looking for a campsite. The boys disappeared and I found the campsite which involved a rather awkward route round barriers and along a narrow pavement. The campsite was small but very friendly and run by an English family. At first they told us there was not enough room but managed to squeeze us in. Most of the campers were English and seemed to know each other from previous years and we were given a case of beers by our neighbours and had a very quiet night.

The next morning we were directed to a short cut to the river which consisted of a steep track directly down the cliff from the campsite to the river. It would not have been possible to drag the canoe up there but it was manageable to slide everything down to the river. Again, the river banks along here were fairly overgrown and there was not much of a view but you certainly feel surrounded by nature and although there were a few fishing boats there had been no other canoeists since Tremolat which is two days paddle east of Bergerac. 17 miles later and we had arrived at Castillon-la-Bataille where we took advantage of the riverside campsite. This is supposed to be the maximum extent of the Atlantic tide but there was some evidence of tidal change a little further upstream at Flaujacques.

We didn't get started until midday on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September after trying to find out what to expect from the tidal influence on this part of the river. We left being not much clearer and set out once again for a day of paddling on the Dordogne, for a rather shorter stretch of 12 miles. A team of rowers passed us rowing furiously upstream. Shortly downstream of Castillon it was clear that we were in waters influenced by the tide.

We had left at what we calculated to be high tide but there were obvious signs of water level changes on the bank. And as we made progress downstream the water became a sort of milky brown colour as the silt swirled around in the changing current. By the time we got to Moulon that evening (12 miles of paddling) the river had noticeably increased in size and now it was only possible to get in and out of the river by use of pontoons which rise and fall with the water level.

We tied up at one pontoon and went for a walk looking for somewhere to camp. I remarked that it would be perfect if we could find someone who would offer us a place to camp and a shower and water. A couple of hundred metres from the river a couple appeared out of a gated property with their dogs. We asked about camping possibilities and the couple, who were French but used to live in England, said if we wanted we could camp in their garden and use their shower. We declined this and chose to camp in a field they owned next to the river.

They also told us that the mascaret, a big tidal bore, was due to pass by that night and we should get the canoe to a safe place. At one point we had contemplated sleeping on one of the pontoons! We would have had a bumpy, if not very wet, night. We were directed round to the pontoon owned by the couple and told to lift our canoe into their speedboat where it would be safe from the mascaret wave which came all the way up the river from the sea.

It was a strange sight to see the Old Geezer poking inelegantly out of a speedboat but we were glad we had been warned. We watched the mascaret coming up the river that night and although it wasn't at its peak it gave all the boats a good shake and it could be heard coming for some time before it actually arrived. A man who was in his campervan nearby cycled off with his surfboard sometime before the arrival and we never saw him again.

Hopefully he caught the wave and was able to surf down to his van.

We set off the next morning knowing that now we were heading into territory where it would be essential to get the tides right and be on the lookout for places to get out of the river.





If we left it too late and the river dropped too low we would either struggle to get up to the steeply sloping pontoons (the steep, muddy banks would be almost impossible to scale) or we would be caught by the incoming tide and would be pushed back upstream. We passed by Libourne, a relatively large settlement with big bridges and large boats which bring tourists up from the estuary. We were a little shaken by the large whirlpools which develop downstream of the bridge but powered safely through with a few (manly) screams from Damon.

Round another couple of big meanders and the river is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile wide. We kept to river left as this was where the towns were but we didn't really know where would be a good place to stop. It was very hot and as we rested in the shade of some bankside trees we could see how turbulent and silty the water was.

We passed by le Port d'Arveyres and Vayres and became rather demoralized at seeing how high and muddy the banks had become. Some pontoons looked like promising stopping places until we realized they were blocked with padlocked gates up the gangplank.

We debated crossing the river but that seemed risky and there were no signs of pontoons. It was getting late and we didn't want to be still trying to find a get out in the dark as the tide turned. Eventually at St Pardon we stopped at a pontoon and I climbed up the metal work and the open gangplank. I spoke to man, whose name was Cedric, and he offered us his garden right next to the river to camp in for a small price. It turned out to be a great spot and although I prefer wild camping we were glad to have got safely out of the river and be somewhere secure.

Cedric was a keen surfer and explained that the mascaret was passing again that night and we could attempt to surf it with the canoe. Damon sensibly opted to stay on dry land. I was told that an elderly couple who come almost every month to surf the mascaret in a double kayak would be going out later and I could join them.

By the time I arrived they had already departed. I took the canoe out and it felt very strange being alone in an empty boat. For reasons I don't really understand (the current, different weight, being alone) I could not go in a straight line, and spent 5 minutes paddling in a circle. I almost gave up and came back in but then something clicked and I began to go in the direction I wanted. I was heading downstream about a mile where hopefully I would find the other paddlers and surfers. It was unnerving paddling in the dark to an unknown destination knowing that the mascaret was due any minute. After 10 minutes or so I could hear voices and then I saw some silhouetted figures of people standing on stand up paddle boards.

As I neared them the elderly couple suddenly appeared shouting out that I must turn around quickly and face up stream. The mascaret was coming.

I tried to adjust my head torch and gopro camera (important to get your priorities right) as I could hear the roar of the wave coming up the river. Then it was behind me and I started to paddle. The others who had been around me disappeared on the wave and apparently many of them had caught it and surfed up river for a mile or so.

I however had no idea what I was doing and missed the first and the second and the third wave. I was then left in the middle of the river about 2 or 300 metres from the bank. I could see the lights of St Pardon and tried to paddle in that direction. But there was so much turbulence due to mascaret and the change in direction of the current that I could not seem to make progress.

I became tired and rather scared thinking either I was going to get exhausted or be carried up the river without being able to reach the bank or I would lose my paddle and be stuck in the middle of a choppy river in the dark. But the couple in the kayak had been looking out for me and they started calling me to come straight into the left bank rather than head diagonally back to the town. Once there it was easier to head upstream. As I eventually pulled the canoe up the muddy slipway a few people said I was crazy to have attempted to surf the mascaret in a heavy canoe like that. Thanks Cedric.



The next day, Tuesday 16 September, turned out to be our last day of paddling on the Dordogne. I had always planned to stay at Bourg which was on the right bank of the river and the last place with a good get out and amenities before the Dordogne met the Garonne and became the Gironde estuary which is about 50 miles long and 10 miles wide where it meets the sea. If we kept to river left where we were now, we would have a big exposed river crossing if we didn't cross until we were opposite Bourg. But once we crossed over we were pretty much committed to river right for the rest of the trip. We continued about 1.5 miles to where the river curved sharply to the left and made our crossing diagonally. As we neared the centre of the river we began to feel the strength of the wind which we had been protected from before by the curve of the river. The waves began to increase and were close to lapping over the gunwales. It was hard work paddling into the wind and if we tried to steer too directly (e.g perpendicular) towards the bank the boat began to be pushed sideways and tip over. With the noise of the wind and the waves it was also hard communicating to each other. There were tense moments and it was a good reminder of how vulnerable you can become when you are in open water and conditions change. We reached the other bank and took a breather. The wind did not feel like it was going to ease so we carried on cautiously, keeping as close to the bank as possible. As the river changed course again we became shielded from the wind and paddling became easier. It was quite humbling to be paddling on such a big river with the other bank so far away and the current rushing past us at such a rate. We passed a few settlements where we were able to tie up and rest on floating pontoons.



At about 5pm we could see Bourg in the distance but it took another hour and a half to reach. It was not the most controlled of manouevres as we attempted to moor up. The outgoing tide leads to extremely fast currents here which are best seen as they surge round the rusting turrets of a sunken wreck just downstream. While sculling and reversing we grabbed on to some rings on the slipway and after being swung out a few times finally managed to secure both ends of the canoe. In a short time we had unloaded and were wheeling the Old Geezer into the campsite where we had stayed on the reccie.

Damon only had a few days before he had to catch a flight home from La Rochelle.

If we could catch the right tides and the weather was favourable we could maybe make it to the tip of the headland called Pointe de la Coubre just beyond Royan.

From the reccie we knew that there were very few locations along the right bank where we would be able to get out. At low tide pontoons were stranded on the mud and solid land was separated from the moving water by a big expanse of very sticky mud. Having thrown a few stones into this mud we knew it would only be in absolute desperation that we would attempt to walk through it pulling the boat. So we would have to start paddling on high tide and get out when the water level was still quite high. If we left it too late we wouldn't be able to reach land at low tide and there was no way we could paddle against the incoming tide and we would either have to tie up to something and wait or get carried back upstream and start all over again.

When we consulted the tide tables the high tide was going to be in the afternoon for the following few days. That would only leave us a few hours paddling each afternoon before nightfall – not enough time to get to the end of the estuary.



In addition a big storm that night and forecasts of more to come led us to decide that we would have to stop the trip there. The combination of the tides, lack of get outs and weather presented what seemed like a challenge that was beyond us. Once this was decided I had to find somewhere to leave the canoe while I went back and got the car. Luckily while I was staying with my parents I had been able to enlist their help to go and collect it from the car park so it was now waiting at our house near le Buisson rather than a few hundred miles east in the Coreze. A woman who was staying in a caravan at the campsite and lifeguarding in the adjacent swimming pool agreed to guard the canoe for us. So on the 19<sup>th</sup> Damon and I headed for the train station where we parted ways. I took a train east while Damon went to Royan. I had to hitch hike the last few miles back to the house but was home by that evening. The next day I drove back to Bourg, camped and had dinner with my new lifeguard friend and then the following day returned with the canoe and all the kit.

The time actually spent on the river turned out to be shorter than I expected but was a wonderful experience. I don't think I would have done it without fellow paddlers Oli and Damon and Sally and I certainly would never have even dreamed of doing something like that before I had met and benefitted from the patient tuition and encouragement of all the coaches and many friends at Eagle Canoe Club. I still wonder about the possibility of paddling the upper gorge with more experienced paddlers in kayaks but I really don't know if its possible. And I would also like to have a go at paddling the estuary which I think would be possible with a supportive group and the right conditions. Its always good to fulfill some ambitions and have some new dreams to aim for. **Joel**



# MAKING A CANOE PADDLE



When the clocks went back last autumn I decided I needed something to do in the evening aside from sitting in front of the telly, so I thought I'd have a go at making a canoe paddle. When I announced my intentions, my son straight away asked if it would be for him, and by coincidence the first piece of decent hardwood that I came across was perfect for an Ashley-sized paddle. So off I went.

First job was tracing and cutting out. I occasionally use AutoCAD at work, so found a design on the internet, drew it up, printed it out on our A1 plotter and then traced it onto the wood. I cut the wood loosely to size on a tablesaw, and

then cut out the curves of the paddle shape with a jigsaw. The wood was only 30mm thick, but I was surprised how much the jigsaw blade bent out of shape, such that in a few cases I cut slightly inside the line. Next time I'll go wider then and plane or sand it down to the line to avoid this.



This left me with a paddle-shaped plank, ready for shaping. This was to be a three-stage job, first thinning down the blade. I did this with an electric planer, and it essentially turned into a game of chicken – how thin was I prepared to go with my planer before the paddle snapped clean in half?!? The paddle blade shape starts at the same thickness of the shaft at the top, and rapidly thins down, with a gradual taper to the bottom tip. It also has a rib effect too, again all the way down to the tip. This was repetitive work, taking off tiny amounts, checking, correcting and rechecking all the time.

The shaft was made into an octagonal shape using a spoke shave that I found lurking in the garage. Like the planer above, it was a case of manipulating the spoke shave to take off tiny amounts by increments, shaving a couple, spinning the shaft to work on the next edge, then the next, then the next. Once all eight sides were the same breadth, I then started rounding the shaft, using the same method as above. It gets to a stage where the features all look good, but imperfections can still be felt, so as it progressed I spent more time feeling than looking.

Then it was the palm grip, which I did mostly with a surform. This is essentially a cheese grater for wood, and again, it was a case of working on an area, then mirroring it on the other side, until it was perfectly formed. Tying in the grip to the shaft, and the shaft to the blade, both required a combination of the above techniques to get something sleek looking.

Then came the sanding, gradually working up the fineness of the paper, until it was silky smooth. This too was time consuming, especially as I wanted to do it mostly by hand to get as good a finish as I could. The final task was to oil it, with Danish oil. Repetition was the key here too, oil then buff, oil then buff, until it was looking ace and I was confident that it had penetrated enough to give it a degree of waterproofing.



The final product? Well, I'm really pleased. It looks ace, a beautiful colour, lovely grain in the oak, very nearly perfect shapes, and just as importantly Ashley loves it too!

Now let's get on the water! **Simon**



## HOW TO ORGANISE A TRIP

The weekend trips run by Eagle are always a highlight of the program, with old favourites such as Symond's Yat, the Dee, Tryweryn and Waveney; and new ones this year like canoeing the Medway and Sea kayaking in Scotland. They are a fantastic way to immerse yourself (sometimes literally) in the paddling world, and get to know your fellow paddlers better. It's great to bond over shared experiences, whether conquering a fear of a rapid or rough seas, seeing awe-inspiring scenery (complete with golden eagle and porpoises maybe), or being kept awake by an enthusiastic snorer...

It's always great to have new ideas for our adventures, but as I have discovered it can be quite labour intensive (Please remind me not to organise three trips at once again!). I think we have a lot of untapped talent in the club in terms of ideas and organisers, so I have come up with a list of things to consider when planning a club trip. They are all common sense really, I would have found quicker to have a list...

### 1. Where to go?

I am always on the look out for new places to paddle, you never know when you might hear of a potential trip.

- If you meet other paddlers on a trip you like (or down the pub) ask them if they know any other good trips
- Canoe focus magazine
- Guide books such as Canoe classics, regional sea kayak or white water guides
- Websites/forums like UK rivers guide book and song of the paddle

### 2. Get a coach on board - This should be easy if you offer to help with the planning!

### 3. Are other club paddlers interested? - Will there be limitations on numbers due to coach ratios, transport, space in accommodation etc

### 4. Look at accommodation options

Consider location, cost, camping/bunkhouse, time of year, need of drying room, closeness to a pub...

### 5. Estimate costs

Fuel, accommodation, food group or self cater or eat out, parking, river access permits etc

### 6. Advertise the trip

- Ask for deposit to confirm place.
- Give deadline to reply by.
- Any prerequisites/ previous experience
- Consider U18s

### 7. Transport

- This is the most complicated part!
- Can someone take the trailer?
- Boat transport is usually the hardest bit.
- There is a universal roof rack at the club to borrow for club trips...

### 8. Enjoy the warm glow as you watch everyone enjoying the trip you planned, and start wondering where to go next, even though you thought you weren't going to organise another one... **Ann**



# MEMORIAL PADDLE



This was turning into a very leisurely paddle. Lovely.

After feeding the ducks and geese, as well as ourselves, we hopped back onto the water and carried on eastwards on the meandering Bure. Again, I couldn't help but be struck by the nature of the river; paddling with the gentle flow, dense green walls of vegetation on either side, we could have been in the Amazon. We paddled among the occasional heron, kingfisher, warblers and all sorts of other birds I really ought to be able to recognise but can't. I even briefly spotted a swallowtail butterfly dancing from bank to bank, which I've never seen before.

The final stretch into Horning saw the boat traffic increase, with plenty of beautiful, traditional sailing boats, and a couple of massive old wherries trundling slowly upstream in the remnants of the breeze. Motor boats jostled for position, as we darted from bank to bank to avoid traffic. The speed limit for motor boats was such that they were barely faster than us, so Jagoda and I decided to have a crack at keeping up. We managed, but not for long. Aching shoulders and lungfuls of diesel fumes soon put paid to that!

And then we were done; we'd reached our destination. All out for a quick drink at The Swan whilst kit was stowed and the shuttle run. It was a gorgeous day, one that reminds you why you paddle. A great bunch of people, a hassle-free destination, stunning scenery and faultless weather. Chris and Jez would have loved it. Perfect. **Simon**

This year's Memorial paddle took place on the River Bure between Wroxham and Horning. The weather was absolutely stunning – lovely warm weather and beautiful, big blue skies with barely a cloud.

I've not done this trip before (only ever paddled to Salhouse Broad and back) so it was a surprise to see how many amazing houses and boats there were as we headed east out of Wroxham. My impression of the place has always been tainted by the main drag over the bridge between all the shops. Every second place seems to be owned by the ubiquitous Roy, so it's got a certain, um... style, shall we say? It's not the kind of place I'd rush to visit, let's put it that way. So seeing the gleaming with motorboats moored in rows outside architect-designed houses took me by surprise, it was way more appealing (and wealthy) that the main drag through town would have you believe.

We were soon out of the town and into the green of the river unadulterated. There were a few boats chugging past us all day, but it was hard not to appreciate the peace of the place, especially under that sky. We soon ducked into Wroxham Broad, and made for a tea stop next to the sailing club. We all enjoyed something to eat and drink whilst watching the sailing boats flitting across the water, sails gleaming white in the sun, with dragonflies and damselflies darting through the air, pausing mid-flight on the gunwhales.

Pressing on, we persuaded Colin that today was not the day to visit the riverside Naturist colony that he seemed very keen to sample (not with your heart Colin), and instead headed into Salhouse Broad for an early lunch.

