



## Editorial

Welcome to the first Eagle newsletter for a year and a half. I hope you've each had some time on the water this season, with the club, or with friends or family. I had high hopes of spending huge amounts of time on the water, having bought a canoe at the beginning of the summer (she's called Betty Blue – if you know you know!). But no – fate, and a whole bunch of clients with shirty deadlines meant the only thing she's achieved (it's OK to anthropomorphise your boats, right!?) is an impressive layer of sawdust in the garage, which has been washed off a frustrating four times in eight months. On the flip side, there's been all that time in a kayak on Wednesday club sessions. It's been absolutely ace getting to Eagle most weeks, spending the season working with the group on moving water skills. I've really enjoyed each and every one of those sessions, and so thanks to everyone I've worked with for giving me a reason to get my boat on!

A big thanks to everyone who has contributed this time around, it's great to read your stories of adventures and fun.

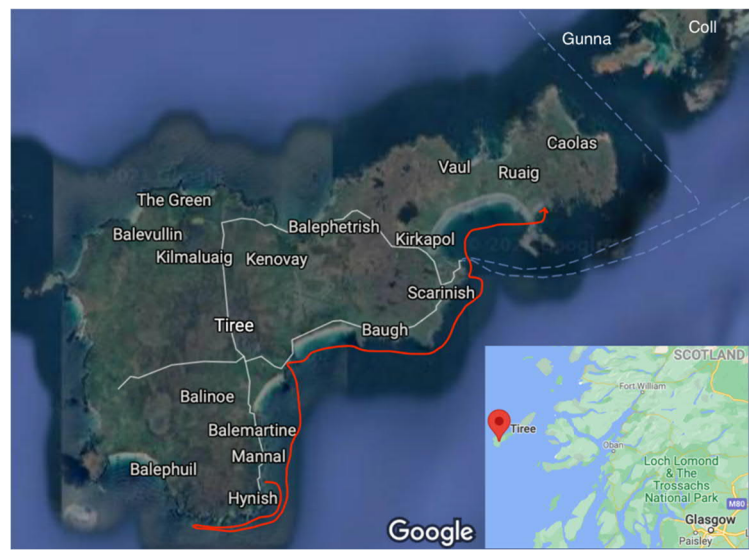
Si

## Musings from a Trip to the Island of Tiree

Each year I go on holiday with a few windsurfing buddies to Tiree in the Inner Hebrides. It's a fabulous island, with long sandy beaches and rocky headlands, plenty of surf, sheep and generally lots of sunshine and wind. And none of those dreaded Scottish midges! The sheep think they own the place – especially the roads – but they keep everyone's lawns trimmed and the hillsides well manicured, so no one seems to complain. Most of all though, it's just a lovely community of around 900 very friendly people. That was truly evident when my friend's trailer broke, and a passing farmer lent him his sheep trailer for the week. He asked where he should bring it back to, and the farmer said 'Oh, just leave it anywhere, I'll find it.'

Although windsurfing is the reason we go there, the wind doesn't always blow, so I've yearned to explore the inaccessible parts of the island by kayak. The solution was to teach my buddies the essential skills and bring along three sea kayaks this year.

No sooner had we arrived than we bumped into some other sea kayakers who had nearly circumnavigated the island, and they invited us to join them on their last leg. We met them the next morning at Hynish to paddle to Ruaig (see map) – roughly 10 miles. I was a bit apprehensive, as the others had not done such





a long trip, but they were keen, and the sea was flat calm, so we decided to go for it. Nevertheless, our new friends insisted on going in the opposite direction first, as the scenery there was supposed to be lovely. It was! Spectacular cliffs and rock islands amidst crystal clear turquoise waters, teeming with birds, fish, and seals. I felt guilty just being there, as this was an absolute haven for wildlife, almost inaccessible to humans by any means other than sea kayak.



An hour later we were back to the start point and set off past beautiful beaches and rocky headlands where the sea picked up significantly, making it a bit stressful at times, so it was nice to pull onto the occasional beach for a rest and a snack. We finished very tired, but only 100 metres from our house, so we were able to carry the kayaks home.

A few days later our landlord, Jim, was going out to check his lobster pots, and he had space in his boat for one other, so I won the toss and went along. I was surprised to see no separate fuel tank, but he assured me there was enough in the outboard's tank. We motored out to the open seas, searching for buoys with a smiley on them, his insignia, as you mustn't touch anyone else's pots! The first and second pots yielded some nice lobsters, but the third became ever more elusive. We went further and further out, and the wind was getting up, with the waves breaking over the bow but he was determined to find it.

Then it happened; the engine spluttered to a halt. We were out of fuel. I hadn't expected this to become another paddling trip, but we were now in self-rescue mode, like it or not. I had taken my PLB, handheld marine radio and mobile phone, but I'm not sure Jim had anything. With him rowing, I stood on the back like a paddle boarder steering and paddling. We had to





negotiate a rocky peninsular to get home, but it soon became clear that our efforts were futile against the wind and waves. So, we turned downwind and found another bay where we pulled in. Nevertheless, every cloud has a silver lining, and Jim felt so guilty that he gave us the lobsters, which went down a treat on some nice granary bread with freshly made garlic mayonnaise!

Well, the wind blew for the following fortnight, so there was no more sea kayaking, although we did have great fun on my surf ski, SUP and playboat whenever the wind dropped. The surf ski is great at surfing, but it's unstable, and therefore difficult to turn around without capsizing in choppy water, so you need to be positioned and ready for a wave. However, the playboat surfs okay, but it can spin around instantly when you come face to face with a big wave, so it catches the best ones.

Later, in the pub, our new friends told us about a classic sea trip, which is to go to the nearby island of Coll via the uninhabited island of Gunna (see top right-hand corner of map). The coves and caves on the island are said to be spectacular. The tide rips between the islands creating overfalls (standing waves where the wind meets the flow), which can be challenging, so timing will be key. Maybe next year.

Keith

## Stepping into Moving Water

Those of you who know me would have, until recently, said that I was a Canoeist, and maybe, a budding Sea Kayaker. So, when I turned up at Eagle on Weds 5th May and asked Simon what kayak I should choose I got a few 'you're in the wrong boat' comments!

What were my reasons for this sudden change? Easy – my (then) 14-year-old son & covid. What a rubbish period 2020 and early 2021 was! Many of us saw changes in ourselves and our loved ones which we knew we had to actively address and find ways to return us to some kind of normality.

Surely, I could have continued with canoeing whilst Matty concentrated on WW kayaking? Not so easy – the Progressive White-Water series of 3 trips are all about progressing our paddling in a controlled and safe way. It would not have been safe for me to paddle the third trip at The Tryweryn in a canoe – I simply would not have been good enough for grade 3 waters (the clue is in the trip blurb – no club canoes are permitted on this trip'). I could have gone along as a spectator, but where is the fun in that? (especially as I was forgoing my weekend at the Women's Sea Kayak Festival in order for Matty to attend).

So, to give Matty the best chance of attending all three trips I switched to WW Kayaking. It is not as though we haven't dabbled with this in the past. We have been to Cardington White Water Centre (a very beginner friendly, safe, artificial gravity fed course) a couple of times albeit a few years ago.

### The First Trip – Symonds Yat Rapids – Grade 2 rapids on the River Wye

We really did not know what to expect but it didn't disappoint. Biblins Campsite is set in a beautiful valley in Ross-on-Wye with direct access to the River. The weather was sunny and warm, and we were woken up by the sound of millions of birds in full song.... at 3am!





After breakfast and the pre paddle briefing we wandered down to the access point where the van met us with the kayaks and paddles. All kitted up we had a further briefing with our coaches for the day then a gentle seal launch onto the river. A bit of a challenging upriver paddle for about half a mile followed by a short portage to reach the rapids. We started off at the bottom rapid practicing a bit of ferry gliding and some S turns and slowly but surely made our way up the rapids, gaining skill & confidence as we went. All the activity was in the same area so everyone could see and encourage each other, take breaks when wanted for food or to take photos. It was an exhausting first day, but we returned to the campsite satisfied with our paddling. Matty was adamant that he was too tired to paddle a second day...

Day 2 – repeat – and I made it all the way to the top of the rapids – big cheesy grins from me. Of course, Matty had reached the top far earlier than I had and was busy watching and learning from others then trying things out for himself. He made amazing progress over the weekend and it was a pleasure for me to watch him. The afternoon was spent on throw line rescue practice – no shortage of volunteers here as the sun was shining and jumping into the river was a great way to cool off.

### **The Second Trip - The River Dee at Llangollen – 3km of grade 2/ 3**

Our stay was at Wern Isaf Farm which is a short walk from Llangollen Town – a lovely small town with a choice of restaurants and takeaways to suit all tastes. The campsite is set on the side of a hill and there is a rather nice walk up to the top to see a medieval castle 'Castell Dinas Bran' and spectacular views across the valley.

Day 1 – A 5 minute shuttle down to Mile End Mill – a gentle put in followed by a spate of jumping in and out of the kayaks to clamber over rock formations heading up the river in order to play practice ferry gliding, breaking in and out, S turns and surfing plus some runs down the river – yay – ran first rapids in a kayak. Ended the day playing at Mile End Mill. Again, with Matty watching others then attempting to do a 360 turn in the bottom wave. The way he throws himself at a challenge is amazing (but I am rather biased!).





Day 2 – Shuttle up to Horseshoe Falls for the full 3km descent - a super duper mega seal launch into the water. Headed up stream for a little bit of play, then a downstream run with play points en-route – including the infamous Serpent’s Tail - yes, we paddled Serpent’s Tail, twice! Ended the weekend at Mile End Mill once again for more play.

**The Third trip – The Tryweryn – A dam-controlled river from Llyn Celyn Reservoir – The National White Water Centre – Lower Section is 6km of grade 2/3 rapids (Upper Section is 2km of grade 3/4 rapids)**

Here we camped at Tytandderwen Camping and Caravan Park near Bala. About 15 minutes from the town of Bala (we did not visit but some members did) but we did climb the nearest hill - not as big as Llangollen but still pretty nice views from the top.

Day 1 & 2 – shuttle to The National White Water Centre – check in and launch on the Lower Section. No fighting against the flow or rocks at the start of this one! Paddling down stream all the way with lots, and I mean lots of places to stop and play and put one’s skills to the test. A few longer really rocky descents to challenge our route-finding skills – I think that we all managed to find a rock or 10 along the way – note to self ‘hug the rock or swim!’. Near the end of the run is Bala Falls (grade 4) so we got out of our kayaks and wondered over to take a peak – then jumped back in them to run..... the leat (an artificial water trench which enabled us to by-pass the rapid).

Day 3 – Yes, a third (half) day! And a really huge seal launch down into the flow of the Tryweryn – yikes! Our group stayed on the upper river playing in the top 200m of water. Fast flow practice for ferry glides, breaking in and out of eddies, S turns etc. We quickly got exhausted and off the water, allowing for our coaches to go and play in the ‘big stuff’ of the Upper Tryweryn before having to head home to the East Coast.

Matty has come on so far this season with Eagle Canoe Club. He joined in March with a few years, mostly, flat water experience so he had good basic skills. During the summer I have watched his skills increase in leaps and bounds. We went



to Horstead Mill on a club night prior to the Symonds Yat trip and I have taken him several times since. His very first roll was at Horstead on 3rd August – by the time we left he was rolling in the flow! By the end of the following week he was rolling up in the flow following unplanned submersions and when we went to club night on 12th the coaches put him through his paces – pulling his boat through the water backwards! I have to take my hat off to him – he has certainly put in the time and effort, dragging me with him along the way.....

(p.s. My very first roll was about 5 minutes after Matty’s – I thought ‘If he can do it...’ But that is where I still am – planned rolls in flat water – I need to take a leaf from Matty and just go for it more.)

Sam

# Women's Sea Kayak Festival: When Sea Kayaking Goes Wrong...

The women's sea kayak festival took place in August this year and I was really looking forward to it, as it had been lots of fun the previous time. I should have realised things were not going to go quite as planned when my tyre pressure gauge went off in the middle of the M25 and I had to pull over behind a couple who seemed to be having similar problems. They had set up their camping chairs on the other side of the barrier and did rather look like they had stopped for a random picnic!

This year however held a few more surprises: – apparently sea sickness can sneak up on you at any time, even if you have paddled on the sea before and were fine.

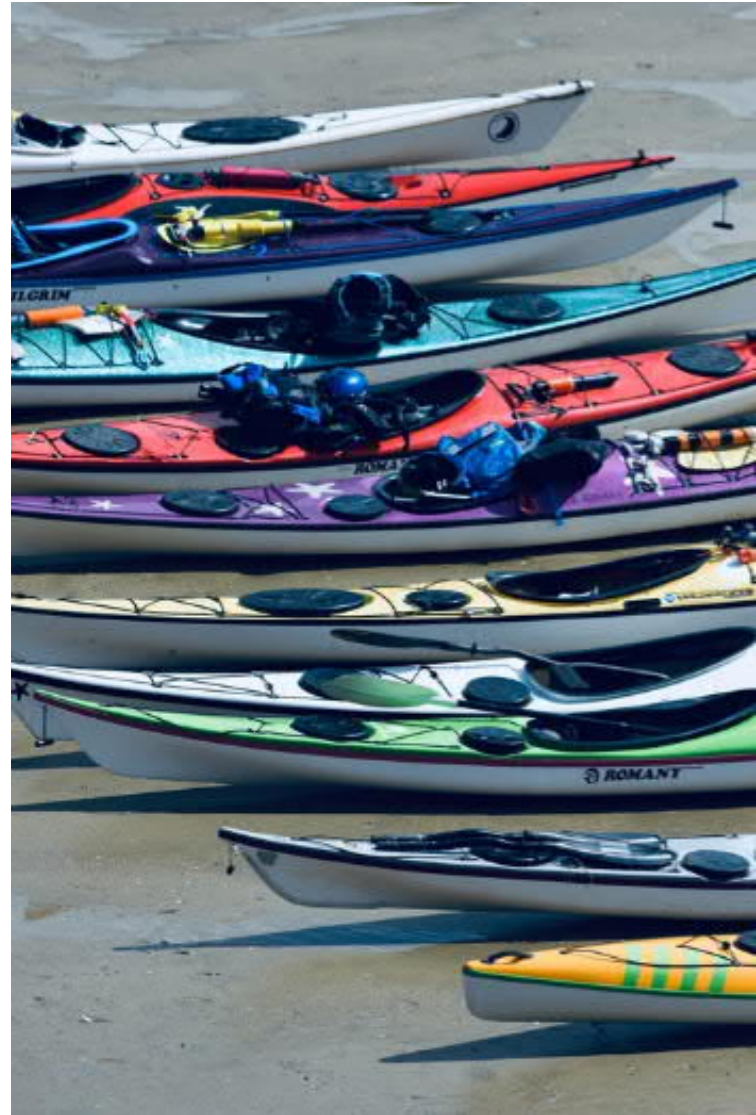
Day 1 was therefore a bit interesting, at least for the other paddlers in my group, or so they tell me, as they were able to practice real life rescue techniques.

It started out ok – getting out into the surf everything was fine – the instructors amended the plan slightly as the wind and swell were greater than had been anticipated and off we went.

The next part was a bit of a blur – starting to feel a bit ill, learning to surf to get onto a beach we were originally going to avoid, as at this point another paddler had also started to feel sick.

The beach break did help but it didn't take long after getting back out there to start feeling the effects of the swell once again. I will say the people on the event were very good and it was great to have some fellow eagle members there with me! (I did however spend a lot of the return trip thinking – just don't throw up on Jaz, don't throw up on Jaz! – I didn't by the way – in case you were wondering) I do remember at one point, whilst crossing the shipping lane, wishing I still had my paddle as it's a bit disconcerting when you are on a tow, feel like you are going to pass out and someone starts yelling "PLF" which if you don't know the acronym starts with paddle like...

Day 2: When life hands you lemons, (i.e. its Sunday and all the chemists are shut therefore no sea sickness tablets) make lemonade – or go for a walk in the very beautiful Dartmoor National Park – which if you haven't visited I would highly recommend.



Day 3: Attempted to paddle again, managed to get round to the sheltered beach we were headed for but the thought of practicing Greenland rolling did not appeal (I'm sure you can understand why) so spent the rest of the morning people and seal watching (there was a young pup who decided to have a nap amongst all the people for some reason)

So, it wasn't quite the trip I was expecting but all in all I did have an excellent time, with some lovely people (especially all those from Eagle) even if my "sea kayak trip" turned into a short paddle, walking, camping with mates trip.

Leigh

# Dog Rescue

A good-news story of the very best kind unfolds below, in the text lifted from an email sent to Mr Chairman earlier in the season. Well done to all involved, not least Sophie, Leigh, Jane and old eagle-eyes himself, Tim....

On Saturday July 10th I was cruising downstream on the Wissey from Hillgay towards the Great Ouse and after passing all the moored craft decided to let my dog, Wally up onto the deck. I had neglected to put up the side screen and Wally, who is a short dog, leapt over the side, expecting to land on a mooring but instead ending up in the river. He swam towards the south bank which was a mass of reed beds. I moored where I could and went behind the reeds to where Wally had been heading and found the banks had a continuous lining of steel piles. After searching and calling for a couple of hours I reached the conclusion that Wally had been unable to get out of the water and had drowned. It is difficult to describe the feeling one gets when the loss of a long-term companion sinks in. I went home very subdued.

At midday on Sunday I got a phone call from a lady asking me if I had lost a dog near the Wissey. The feeling of relief was overwhelming. The lady who called was travelling in a convoy heading for Hillgay and we made arrangements to meet there within the hour outside the only pub. There was no doubt about ownership as

Wally wagged his tail, licked my hands and displayed all the signs of a very happy dog. I was introduced to three ladies who were waiting with Wally but regret that in the emotive moment I only remember one name, Sophie. I gave all the ladies involved my deepest thanks and they then went back to join their friends.

I feel that I should inform you of the kind and thoughtful actions carried out by your club members and the relief and happiness this has brought.

Yours sincerely

Chris Walliman





# The Biggest and Best Family a Person can Have

Some of you have known me since I was a weedy 13-year-old first starting out in a kayak, terrified of capsizing and even more terrifying of talking. Some of you met me when I was 17 and falling on my face every five minutes like an idiot in a play boat. And some of you have never met me, but I'm sure you've heard all about me because I'm obviously the coolest person to have ever gone to Eagle and I'm sure my name is legendary. The two running themes through how you all (might) know me is through kayaking and being part of Eagle Canoe Club, my first kayaking family.

Since I was 13, kayaking was a constant in my life and it one of the things that has made the biggest impact to my personality and confidence. Anyone who knew me when I first started may remember that I hardly talked... at all. I was very quiet and shy. Now look at me, anyone I paddle with now is dreaming of 5 minutes of silence. Eagle and everybody I met there showed me how to be confident and that it is okay to be who I am – so in a sense, it is all your faults I turned out like this.

On a more serious note though, growing up with Eagle prepared me for everything I have done in the last few years. I feel like I've moved 100 and 1 times and there was obviously the added isolation we all felt through the pandemic. At Eagle, not only have I met people who formed my first support network, but it also started to prepare me for life. Not as much in a life skill way, as the main skill I learnt was how to get changed really quickly after kayaking to go to the pub for a pint and a bowl of cheesy chips. But it prepared me in a way because I knew that wherever I moved there would be a place there for me with likeminded people.

I'll admit, the transition to a university canoeing club was probably harder than the transition to my degree, but once there, I had another family for life (a slightly more alcoholic family, but a family nonetheless). And now, with my move to Yeovil, a tiny helicopter and railway town in the far South West, I'm finding yet another kayaking family. I have only paddled with them a few times because I am on a bit of sabbatical, but I already know that everything is going to be okay when I move down here properly, because I've found my safe space

That's the magic of kayaking and starting off in such a close knit, friendly club. Wherever I go now, I have somewhere I can go and be myself and show off that I can fall on my face – And that's all because of you guys. So, carry on being the amazing club you are and fingers crossed I will have a chance to visit you all at some point.

I hope you're all okay and not missing me too much!

Rosie







## Rusty...

Every year a group of friends heads to Scotland for a week's paddling. As I rarely have any annual leave left, I've not previously been able to join them.

At the beginning of 2020 the stars aligned and not only could I go to Slovenia, things fell into place for me to be able to join the Scotland mates trip. It was going to be an amazing year.

Needless to say, neither occurred in 2020, and over the last 18 months I've not really done a lot of white-water paddling, however this October I have made it to Scotland with 12 others for a week's paddling on some amazing rivers.

I've been looking forward to being in Scotland for ages and to being able to paddle some new rivers with friends.

We're currently halfway through the week and at the beginning of the week, we were paddling 2 sections of river a day. We've had some great days and I've really enjoyed paddling more challenging rivers, however I have felt really rusty (as I haven't been paddling for ages) and this has meant that some of my routes down the river have not been that great and that I've fallen out of the boat a few!



Also, for the first time on any of my week-long paddling trips, everyone on the trip has had a "rest day". This is because it's been ages since we've all been paddling and because we're all unfit and out of practice!

I know it's a good few months until we go to Slovenia, but I'm now inspired to start getting fitter, to go to Lee Valley more often, to go to Horstead to practice rolling and generally, to spend more time in my boat!

Stuart

## What a Year (and a Half)!

As we all said our goodbyes at the end of the Tryweryn trip in March 2020, we knew that the rest of the world was changing and that it was heading our way, but I don't think any of us could have predicted what a profound change was about to happen to all our lives.

Within weeks of that trip, most of us were working from home and adapting to all our social life grinding to a halt and learning to live with our families 24/7, with only a nighty walk around our neighbourhood to look forward to.

For the club, we went from looking forward to a packed summer programme with loads of great trips and activities planned, to wondering whether the club would even exist when this was all over.

It's well known in sports, that it takes 6 weeks for us to get into a routine and for that initial interest to become something that we then sustain and continue with in the long run. For the club, I was therefore concerned that if this went on for more than 6 weeks, that was long enough for it to break people's habits and for us to start to lose members in significant numbers. It was therefore my mission to keep the club in everyone's minds and to keep the routines as much as possible. So, weekly emails continued and we found new reasons to stay in touch, old newsletters, shared online articles, training guides, a new members only Facebook page.....

As we were able to start to come out of hiding, we gently started activities again, across every night of the week with limited numbers, then local trips (but only if you travelled by yourself) and only there & back trips. Just as we were thinking about winter programmes, Boris (and covid) had other ideas. Thanks to zoom (and a much-abused works account) we kept going and got to see lots of people we'd not seen all summer. We had some great sessions and also shared these with neighbouring clubs – I'm never trying to teach people how to tie knots on zoom again!

2021, and on it went. While the weather has been rubbish, we have been slowly getting back to something like normal club nights. We've had 3 induction groups and 45 new members, have a current membership of 166 and have managed to run lots of local trips as well as weekends away.





Overall, it's been a challenge, but the coaching team has been amazing and have helped to keep the club alive and I am so grateful for everyone's flexibility and desire to keep paddling.

So what has this period done for me?

Made me appreciate the people I socialise with and the support they give me. Everyone watched out for each other, lots of face time calls just for a chat, zoom birthday gatherings and generally checking in with each other.

It's made me realise how important the club and its members are to my wellbeing. I love the enthusiasm I get back when coaching or on trips, especially the week ends away where you really get to know people.

It's made me value where I live and given me the opportunity to explore it. Simple things like having a garden and being close to Mousehold Heath for nightly walks became essential.

It's bought me lots of new paddling kit! I'm usually away most week ends and generally spend up to £400 a month on fuel – that went into a new dry suit, new paddle and helped pay for a new boat!

Stu

