



Eagle Canoe Club

Newsletter June 2018



Editorial

Welcome to the summer edition of our Newsletter! If someone could let me know where Spring went, that would be useful, it's raced by, hasn't it? But what a Spring it's been at Eagle – we've squeezed in so much already. Club nights are buzzing week after week, with fantastic attendance numbers, and all the groups - from the new faces in the induction group, to the youths and all the star awards – having a lot of fun on the water. Couldn't be better.

The trips have been ace too. John's sunny saunter from Ludham to Stokesby was really beautiful. Stu's Bure trip from Wroxham to Salhouse and back, the Waveney Weekender, organised by Pete and Jane, the Symonds Yat whitewater weekend all ace. Let's not forget a week sea-kayaking in Scotland, and a week in the Ardeche!!! And there are plenty more on the horizon, so get stuck in!

Sitting here on the sofa on a Wednesday night writing this, whilst you guys are all on the water, I can't help but think back to when I joined the club, fifteen years ago (really!?). The club back then was just as warm and friendly as it is now. Slightly smaller in terms of membership, and with fewer coaches though, and I can't help but think about how this contrasts with now. In the first few years after I joined, we'd split into three, or maybe four groups on the water (not the eight or nine we have now) and get some coaching. Sometimes, when coaches were thin on the ground, the whole club would just hop on the water and head on a trip for the night, in one group with the coaches that were available. It was a means of providing paddling safely, when there wasn't enough cover for the usual groups. This was the case every few weeks, and so when I look at the club now, and the breadth of opportunities that we offer each week I can't help but be proud to be part of the team that gives what it gives.



I'm also amazed that for the first time ever, this Spring has become a seven-day-a-week offering. Not every week, mind, let's not overdo it. But with star award groups on a Monday, This Girl Can on a Tuesday, the usual Eagle session on a Wednesday, a practice session on Thursday, pool session on Friday, and a weekend trip too, it's new territory for us, and a credit to the tenacity and dedication of the coaching team and all the support that they receive.

So, enough rambling from me. Enjoy this newsletter, with articles on Symonds Yat, Barton Broad, a youth viewpoint on the Waveney Weekender (thanks Eve!), the Ardeche and plenty more. And enjoy the rest of the summer!

Si



There Can Be No Better Place to Paddle?

I moved to Norwich from the outskirts of London some 3 years ago. Finding it difficult to experience much of the rivers and broads on foot I felt one had to get on the water with a canoe and paddle so joined the club in April. Feeling confident I took a friend out to Wayford Bridge (boat hire at Banks Boats) on Saturday 2nd June and we paddled up the old Walsham & Dilham Canal. It was fantastic.

The main channel is just under 4km (2.5miles) and curved and twisted along the route, which was sometimes wide but more often narrow. Occasionally we had to duck under trees hanging across the channel or push through reeds. There was a flow fed by a sluice at the north end, which keeps the water fresh. The canal was full of dragon flies, heron and nesting swans. But for some reason as I have noticed elsewhere very few ducks - why?

To top it all we experienced our first monsoon rainfall on the water on the way back. This did not detract from the adventure but added to it. We could not think there can be a more beautiful place to paddle than here – can you suggest one?

Willem

Waveney Trip

Eve (age 10) and I (age somewhat older) joined the Waveney trip in June with about 20 other Eagle members. It was our first weekend trip with Eagle – why has it taken so long for us to do this? We had a brilliant time. The sun shone, the river provided some long reedy bits, some wide-open bits through fields with curious cows, numerous overhanging trees, and a tour of the back gardens of Bungay.

I had been a bit worried about being able to keep up with the group, but we managed ok and didn't fall in once. I particularly enjoyed the many and varied hairstyles Ann allowed Eve to give her at the pub, watching people ride down through some of the weirs, and Katie and John's on-going battle, which saw them both in the river by the end of the trip. It was lovely to spend time with other club members who were all so kind and welcoming.

I asked Eve a few questions about her experience of the trip...

Flo: So, Eve, what did you think the trip would be like?

Eve: I thought it would be a really big wide river, with clear water. I was worried that I might get attacked by swans. I thought I would be the youngest person, but maybe not the only child. I was looking forward to it.

Flo: And what actually happened?

Eve: Well. We got in our canoe, we paddled through lots of reeds (they were quite hard to get through!), then we got to the campsite. We had a lovely



meal, and a nice sleep. In the morning we packed up and got back on the water. At first I thought we were heading back upstream, but I realised we weren't. There were lots of reeds on the second day too, and one swan hissed at us.

Flo: How much paddling did you do?

Eve: I did all of it! And my lazy mum didn't do any of it!

Flo: Really?

Eve: maybe not... maybe it was the other way round, although I did do quite a lot of it.



Flo: Have you got any tips for other children going on trips?

Eve: Definitely be prepared because trips are very long. A wet suit was good, a sun hat, sun cream, food and water. BRING SOMETHING TO DO IN THE EVENING AT THE CAMPSITE!!!! – Grownups just want to sit and chat!

Flo: What was your favourite thing about the trip?

Eve: My favourite thing was definitely the bit of the river near the campsite on the first day where there were loads of reeds that we had to dodge round. It felt really adventurous, and at some points, you couldn't tell if you'd gone the right way or not!

Flo: Did anything go wrong?

Eve: Yes, well, when my mum was being very silly, and watching all the birds in the sky, not paying attention, being very annoying, and steered me right into a tree branch. VERY ANNOYING. (never trust your mum in canoes).

Flo: Anything else you'd like to add?

Eve: I'd like to go on more trips with other children.

Flo Harrison & Eve Wickerson



The Ardeche

Always do sober what you said you'd do drunk. That will teach you to keep your mouth shut – Ernest Hemingway.

It all started on a drizzly evening in Scotland back in April 2017, when the chemical rush of adrenalin had worn off from the days white water paddling, and Jaz and Pia were making a good job of replacing said chemicals with wine. The conversation turned to paddling destinations and Jaz mentioned that it had been years since she had paddled in the Massif Central and it would be good to get out there again.

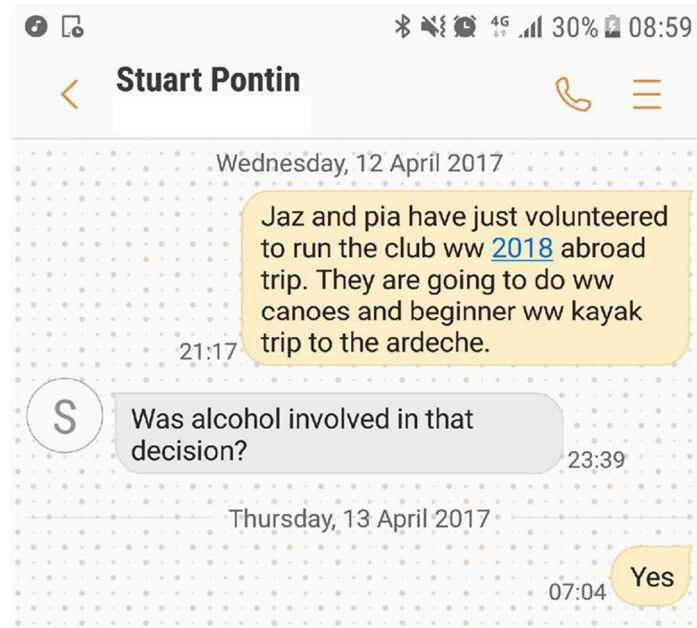
Now everyone knows that Jaz can hold her drink quite well so what happened next is something I can only put down to the weather / the altitude / being North of the Kings Lynn rather than the half bottle of vino. Aply assisted by her partner in wine Jaz declared that she would organise the overseas 2018 trip to the Ardeche for Eagle. (Proof attached – see right!)

At the club we all know "Your word is your bond" so the trip was pencilled in for next year at that very moment so there was no backing out. Fast forward 13 months and we are all ready to go. 30+ Eagle people are all packed and chomping at the bit to make the journey and get paddling.

What is always nice on these trips is to split into different factions early.

"Them" are the flyers in this story. Never a more pampered bourgeois group of characters will you ever see.

"Us" are the drivers in this story. A grizzled bunch of hardened pioneers blazing a trail across hostile toll roads.



Once the fun and excitement of being on the road had worn off I was beginning to think I should have put my hand up and chosen to be one of "them" as the scenery isn't exactly mid blowing across the middle of France and after a couple of hours I was beginning to be rather tired of this journey.

However, one of the vans decided to turn group "Us" into two subsets..... "Us with headlights" and "Us with no headlights" which focused the mind somewhat. Luckily for us it was getting dark and we still had still had 200km of driving to do after being awake since the wee small hours of the morning! A slightly unorthodox "front and follow" method of stewarding down toll roads, wiggly mountain roads and to the campsite followed and we arrived all safe and sound and then promptly collapsed into a deep sleep.

The next day was a combination of shopping, sunshine, setting up tents, drinking beer for lunch and quick afternoon paddles on our own private white water rapid while waiting for the flyers to arrive after their various trials and tribulations.

We awoke the next day to glorious grey skies full of rain and baking 8 degree warmth! Jokes were made about Jaz not ordering the correct weather but being tough Eagle paddlers, we got on with our task of paddling and set about having an explore on a



short section of the Ardeche from the campsite to the pretty town of Vallon Pont de Arc. This section had a number of chutes and slides which were great fun to whizz down with everyone gaining an impressive turn of speed as they ploughed into the calm waters below.

As the weather took was still cold and people were wondering whether they had packed correctly for the trip, blatant lies were told by the lead group in order to keep moral high, "only 500m to go" was told more than once with ever decreasing smiles registering on the faces of those who heard. The memories of paddling in the cold and wet were soon forgotten and were replaced by the warm fuzzy feeling you get from beer / wine

and pizzas and everyone retired happily to tents they wished they had checked were waterproof before coming on the trip.

The following day was nothing like the first as a strong breeze had picked up and turned downwards rain into sideways rain. Jokes about Jaz not picking the right weather were disappearing nearly as fast as the firmness of our campsite floor.

Paddling today was the Chassezac, a tributary of the Ardeche. After being told the French equivalent of "get off my land" we launched at alternative point and were on our way. Around lunchtime we managed to see the colour blue and a strange round yellow blob in the sky. This was clearly a sign so we all stopped and promptly started skimming stones to show this new feature that we were worthy of its presence. Clearly happy with the prowess shown, this new sky feature decided to stick around for the rest of the week.



About half way down we were found ourselves at the first proper white water of the trip. A cool little rapid which enabled people to pick lines and get a proper taste of alpine water. The sunshine clearly having an effect on the group meant that multiple runs of this rapid were undertaken. The rest of the river was a mixture of grade 2 wave trains and stunning gorges. Beer and wine flowed once back at the campsite and plans for the next day were formulated.

Day three had us paddling downstream from Balazuc to our campsite. This would enable us to take in some of the amazing "mini" gorges on the Ardeche. This section was stunning with the strata of the rock making it seem like the entire river was disappearing under down a plug whenever we got to a tight meander.

Once in Roums we were treated to a steep canoe chute. After day one we were seasoned veterans with these sorts of river features and then promptly found out that the builders on the upper sections of the Ardeche clearly hadn't read the instruction manual when completing this one. This chute had a random habit of firing you out at the bottom into an overhanging gorge

wall with scant regard for the wellbeing of paddlers.



As gorge walls retreated we bimbled slowly to the campsite but the river had one final sting in the tail with a 100m long rapid culminating in some steep grade 3 river wide wave trains. As the sun was having the desired effect of making everyone brave we tackled this head on and all made it down to whoops and cheers. The short float back to campsite allowed the adrenaline to subside and we all settled into an evening of stories, food and drink. Tomorrow would be an optional rest / exploring day for people to recharge the batteries before the long trip through the world famous Ardeche gorge.

While some used day four to explore the local town a few others paddled a short section down



to the famous Pont de Arc. A huge natural arch that signifies the beginning of the Ardeche Gorge we were going to undertake tomorrow. This mini section has lots of fun waves and stoppers to play on so while the miles were not long we managed to create enough of an energy deficit to treat ourselves to piles of food and drink that evening.

When shuttle runs take almost 2 hours at each end of a paddling section you know you are going to have a long day on the river. The Ardeche Gorge section is 32km and once you are in you are in. Luckily within the gorge there is no real danger other than scenery overload. Pictures don't really do the scale of the place justice but it is pretty mind blowing. Given the length of the trip we stopped for 2 different lunch breaks which made pacing one's sandwich consumption a tricky endeavour.

After gaining a few Eagle karma points by rescuing stricken tourists we exited the gorge at the pretty town of St Martin d'Ardeche and settled into ice creams while waiting for the mammoth shuttle to be completed. An evening of beer, wine and food followed.

The final paddling day was to be on the lower stretch of the Chassezac. This would be a pleasant end to the trip and it enabled us to join up all the sections of river we had paddled that week. The scenery alternated between mini gorges and green grassland punctuated with small waves to surf and islands to navigate around while floating on crystal clear water. The evening was spent in a local restaurant telling stories and preparing for the long trip home.

I think everyone would agree this trip was a great success and it is testament to the club that 30 odd paddlers can rub along so well for a week in each other's company. Thanks to all the paddlers for pitching in and making this week run so smoothly.

Special thanks go to Jaz for organising the awesome holiday however having spoken to her she said "it was pretty straight forward moving that many people across Europe so I will probably put my name down for sorting the next foreign trip" – I think that is what she said but I might have misheard as I was still chuckling after finding out how many people had signed up for this one. To think this all wouldn't have happened without a cheap bottle of plonk brought in a Scottish Morrisons on a wet April day. Happy Paddling...

Pete



Trips for Youth Members

Over the last few weeks I've been discussing with youth members and their parents what we can do to increase the number of youth members joining us on day and weekend trips. From these discussions the following points have been highlighted and I thought it would be useful to try to answer some of these in this article and to explain what we are going to do to make this information more available to current and future members. I'm sure lots of this will be useful for adult members too!

1. Would be helpful to be introduced to other youth members who are a similar age and have similar interests.
2. Would be useful to know what activities the club has planned to be able to see what trips are coming up throughout the year to plan the family's calendar.
3. To know more about the suitability of the trip for youth member and their parents.
4. To know what happens on trips and who does what.
5. What happens on the water and who'll look after the youth member.
6. Is it possible to share tents on camping weekends or for a family member to attend.
7. Potential for youth members to join week end trips for just 1 day.
8. To know what equipment / kit is needed and what can be borrowed from the club.

Here are some answers:

1. A number of years ago we introduced the "induction" group which runs for four weeks from when you join. Depending on the number of youth members that join in a month, these new youth members may join the induction group or may join the youth groups. Either way, we can try to introduce you to other members who have similar interests, similar abilities etc.

Rosie is our current youth rep who attends coach meetings and is on the committee to represent youth members. She has been a member for many years and has been on many day and weekend trips and I'm sure she would be happy to answer any questions you have.



2. We publish the summer programme (April to October) in March each year. This is available on the website by clicking on "view more" below the "upcoming events" section. When you view an activity, at the end of the row in the programme is a magnifying glass icon which takes you to more details about the trip. This includes a "description" section.

To date, we have only really completed this once we start to plan the trip in detail and promote it (which is usually about 2 weeks before the trip). However, I think it would be a good idea for us to provide more details for each activity as soon as we publish the programme and I'll try and get these completed for the remaining trips this year.

3. Most of our day trips are aimed at all members, including youth members, and are a length appropriate to newer members. The trips are at a steady pace and we stop regularly to ensure the group stays together and for rests. Newer members are also welcome to join other members in a canoe if you want to join us and aren't confident to paddle on your own.

Some of our coastal trips or white-water trips do require members to be more competent in their boat, but this does not exclude youth members. There will be coaches on the trip with appropriate experience / qualifications and the number of people attending will be matched with coach / member ratios.

The e mail promoting the trip will give more details and we will also look to add these details to the website programme.

Upcoming Events

20th June

[Club Night](#)

22nd June

[Broads Evening Paddle- Change of venue from Programme - Malthouse Broad, Sth Walsham Broad](#)

25th June

[Star Awards](#)

[View More](#)

4. For most trips we try to minimise the number of vehicles that we take, so lift-share as much as possible. For day trips we will meet at the club, will sort equipment needed and make sure that everyone has what they need for the trip. Club kit can be used for all club activities (see below for more information). We then travel, usually in convoy to the start. All coaches receive annual safeguarding training and this is considered when organising transport etc. For week end trips, we usually hire a mini bus and vans to move equipment and people.

Once we arrive, we'll get on the water as a group and if necessary split down into ability levels and into skill groups if appropriate. For most day trips we will paddle as a big group and stop regularly for breaks. People can swap around in boats if others wish to swap too.

For weekends away, everyone mucks in and helps with cooking, washing up etc. We have a white board which shows details of what time we'll have breakfast, what time we aim to leave the campsite, who'll be in which group with which coach etc. Lunch is provided, but you make it yourself!

On evenings we tend to chat as a big group and often will go for a walk to a local point of interest. The lead organiser will let people know what's happening and when both on the run up to the trip and during the trip.

5. Hopefully what happens on the water is that you have fun! We try to put everyone at ease and will look to create a learning environment which meets the needs of the individuals. As described above this will vary from one trip to another based on the nature of the trip. Coastal trips and white-water trips mean that we manage the group slightly differently to touring trips.

Following recent discussions with parents, it was felt that having an identified "go-to" person on a trip, who can answer any questions and who'll also be responsible for making sure that youth members are in the correct place and the correct time with the correct kit, would be useful. This is certainly something that we can facilitate.

6. Some members do share tents when we are away and if we know that you would like to do that, we can certainly see if others are happy to share. Similarly, if family members want to join us for the week end (but not paddle, unless they are a member), then again, we can facilitate that.

7. There is potential for members to join in for just one day of week end trip, but we would need to know this in advance in order to work out the logistics of moving people and equipment.

8. For most trips you do not need specialist equipment (unless its winter), and as a club we'd encourage you to try out lots of activities so you can work out what sort of paddling you like best. You can then buy equipment which most suits that form of paddling. Coaches will always be happy to give you advice on what kit is available and the pros and cons of different makes etc. (i.e. Palm boots always fall to pieces!).

The club has lots of equipment including waterproofs, buoyancy aids, helmets, as well as boats, paddles, spraydecks etc. that you are welcome to use on any club activity.



On weekends away, the club has two big group shelters that we use to cook in. We cater as a big group and use the clubs cooking equipment. You'll need camping and sleeping bag etc., camp chair and plates / cutlery etc.

I hope that the above answers some of the questions. It's been really helpful to get people's views and questions. If you have any further questions please feel free to ask. To me the trips are a great part of the club and are where you really get to know the other members and form friendships rather than acquaintances.

Stuart

One Green Bottle

I signed up for this first of three white water trips wondering whether I would be capable of handling a kayak in fast moving water, yet also, having been a member of Eagle for over a year, confident that I would be in good company and would be assisted and coached at my level. Indeed, this was the case. First, though, I have to say how impressed I was - on this, my third weekend trip with the club - at the organisation. No sooner had we arrived at the campsite on Friday evening with daylight fading fast, than I had offers of help to put my tent up.

Lulled to sleep by a chorus of owls, I woke just in time for breakfast on Saturday morning. This seemed to be seamlessly followed by an efficient frenzy of sandwich making and then we headed for the rapids. I had already been assigned to a group coached by Martin and Leanne, and felt reassured by their obvious level of expertise and experience. I wonder if it's a bit off putting for young coaches to have to deal with considerably older yet very novice paddlers like myself, but they were great at balancing constructive feedback with reassuring and encouraging comments.

I'd been dreading capsizing, but after the first time I felt much better and was surprised at how warm the water was. I apologise to everyone for forgetting to pay any attention to my kayak or paddle - i just had to concentrate on extricating myself! One very



useful fact has been confirmed and addressed this weekend: I am pretty small as adult paddlers go, and every boat at the club that I've tried so far has been too big for me. Also, I have relatively long arms and legs and a short body! What to do about this? Martin: Fashion me a 'booster cushion' from foam matting and Gorilla tape, and I am in a far better position in the boat and on the water. On Sunday, with this useful addition to my kit, I felt much better and really appreciated the observations that led to it.

I have been a member of several sports clubs over the past few years but Eagle stands out for me as the one with a superb sense of community and mutual support. I was so grateful during the weekend for all the offers of help with: swapping to a boat which fitted me better, borrowing a helmet and spray deck, help carrying my boat,

getting in and out of it.... and much more. I know from experience that many clubs often rely on a few core members to do everything, and yet at Eagle there appears to be a well-established culture of sharing out tasks, then getting them done.

Finally, the green bottle of the title - this refers to my aluminium water bottle which I had with me in the minibus on our return and was convinced I had left on that bus but later found in my bag.

Penny

Symonds Yat – Best Trip Ever!

As a reluctant white-water paddler who only went because she promised her son, I had the most fun.

Having only ever paddled from the club, moving water was totally new. Our first day began with paddling down a wide, slow-moving river in beautiful scenery. My first site of moving water was like being on a roller coaster just before the first big drop. With excellent coaches steering you in the right direction it was thrilling and great fun.

All the coaches and experienced paddlers were looking out for you. When someone did go for a swim they were so quick to rescue, making you feel very safe. The beautiful sunny weather didn't hurt of course and I found myself voluntarily jumping in the river for throw line practice on day two.

I thoroughly recommend this trip to anyone thinking of paddling anywhere with moving water. A beautifully scenic place to explore walking if accompanying someone else. Be warned, it is addictive. I will definitely be there next year.

Sarah

Choosing a Boat.... How Hard Can It Be?

Chances are if you are reading this as a member of our canoe club you have at some point thought about buying a boat, are looking at buying a boat, have bought a boat or already have a small fleet gathered at home. So here are some tips and thoughts on the process of choosing a boat from me.

I have recently spent around 2 years trying to decide which boat to buy to replace my first river running boat, a Dagger Mamba. In the end, I finally decided on a Pyranha 9R after trying almost every other boat on the market in a similar class. Here are some top tips....

Always try BEFORE you Buy

No amount of reading reviews or watching promo videos is worth sitting in a boat and getting on the water for a couple of minutes. Although this point might seem obvious, it is worth mentioning as it is probably my most important tip. As my mum always points out when buying a car, the best bit is test driving them all! Please don't fall into the trap of trying one boat and then buying it right away, paddle as many as you can. It's worth mentioning that many paddling shops these days have a demo fleet (The boathouse at Attleborough defiantly do) and are more than happy for you to take boats out for a paddle.

What works for ONE doesn't work for EVERY-ONE

Boats are very personal things, everyone is different in terms of build, size, weight, paddling style and other factors. What works for one paddler will not necessarily work for you! It also depends on what you plan on using the boat for, no point having a playboat to run your first grade 5 or a big creek boat to learn to do cartwheels.

Outfitting

Once you have finally got your new boat, hopefully you will be spending lots of time paddling it and therefore you want to be comfortable in it for long periods of time. It's also important to ensure that you can get good connectivity to the boat while being comfortable. In playboats especially, this is a big trade-off. If you can get this balance right it will massively help your paddling. It's also worth checking that you can get in and out of the boat with ease and move it around off the water as you need to. These are all things to check when test paddling a boat.

Remember, even the nicest, comfiest outfitting will need constant tweaks along the way, foam on the foot plate compresses over time, hip pads slip, paddlers lose and gain weight, kids grow and screws come loose from plenty of use. Outfitting can take a lot of trial and error to get right. If you are trying a boat, be sure to fiddle around (with the owners' permission) to see what works for you.



Should I buy Second Hand?

Having owned a new boat, I know the feeling of waking up in cold sweats over the first few scratches, which lose £100+ the first few times you put it on water. There are loads of top deals out there on the second hand market with every kind of boat going up for sale.

Websites that are well worth keeping an eye on for all things paddling related include; www.ukriversguidebook.co.uk and Facebook groups like "Used Kayaks UK" and even Gumtree. This is a great option to look at so that while you are trying out boats and deciding which one you would like, this gives you more experience in learning the re-sale value of boats and how much your boat will be worth in a few years if you do buy brand new. Don't forget you can outgrow a new boat as your paddling develops. A boat isn't a puppy, don't be afraid to get rid of it after Christmas...

If enough people would like one I would happy write an article about buying second hand boats. If something you are interested in let me know.



Bigger is not always Better

Specifically, this rule applies to white water boats (this is where I put my head under the axe). For beginners to intermediate paddlers, a large volume boat is often not the best way to go in my opinion. Having a boat designed to have enough volume to make it forgiving on grade 4 rivers is not going to give enough feedback when new paddling grade 1 or 2 rivers. A big boat needs a paddler to drive the boat around with confidence on a river. Over time, having a big unsuitable boat can lead to bad habits developing in core paddling skills. Unless the paddler has constant coach feedback or is nagged by a peer, the boat can quickly become detrimental to learning. Skills paddlers struggle with on flat water are only amplified on white water and paddling becomes harder, by which time the bad habit has become so engrained it will take a lot of time and effort to remove.

What I'm trying to say is, buying a boat in the beginning with just enough volume for the type of water to paddle, will give the paddler feedback when a mistake in technique is made. Bouncing over the lower grades in a big boat doesn't practice skill and makes learning to paddle bigger water later much harder. Do not be afraid to challenge yourself a little when learning (that's an entirely different article), a smaller boat is by far the best way to go in my opinion. I have always found it easier to move from a low volume boat to a higher volume boat than the other way around.

So why did I pick the 9R? The first time I paddled it I had a massive smile on my face the whole time. I realised afterward that I found myself comparing every other boat I demonstrated to how I felt in the 9R. I then paddled it twice more and the same thing happened...massive smile. By my own admission, it is not necessarily the best boat on the market as it does not surf, glide or turn as well as its competitors but more importantly it has got that something I can't put my finger on; some magic spark which puts a smile on my face and obviously something I could have never of realised by just watching a promo video or talking to someone. Try your boats, get a feel for how they paddle and what YOU like..... have I said it enough yet?

See you on the water...

Adam

Five Steps Forward

It's fair to say that progression in any sport is never linear, and paddlesport is no exception. Despite your best intentions, you just don't get constantly better. There are slow curves of steady improvement, big leaps forward, and plateaus, when you just don't seem to be making any progress – sometimes short, sometimes annoyingly long. There are also set-backs.

Improvements, either gradual or sudden, are often just down to hard graft and practice. Being coached. Watching, listening, trying, thinking, changing, and improving. And realising you've improved, mastered something, or at least taken a step forward, is the best feeling ever. Sometimes, though, there are specific events that happen beyond time in your boat, that move you forward. I've had a think about decisions and events that have helped me improve my paddling. Here are a few of my thoughts...

One – Buying my first buoyancy aid.

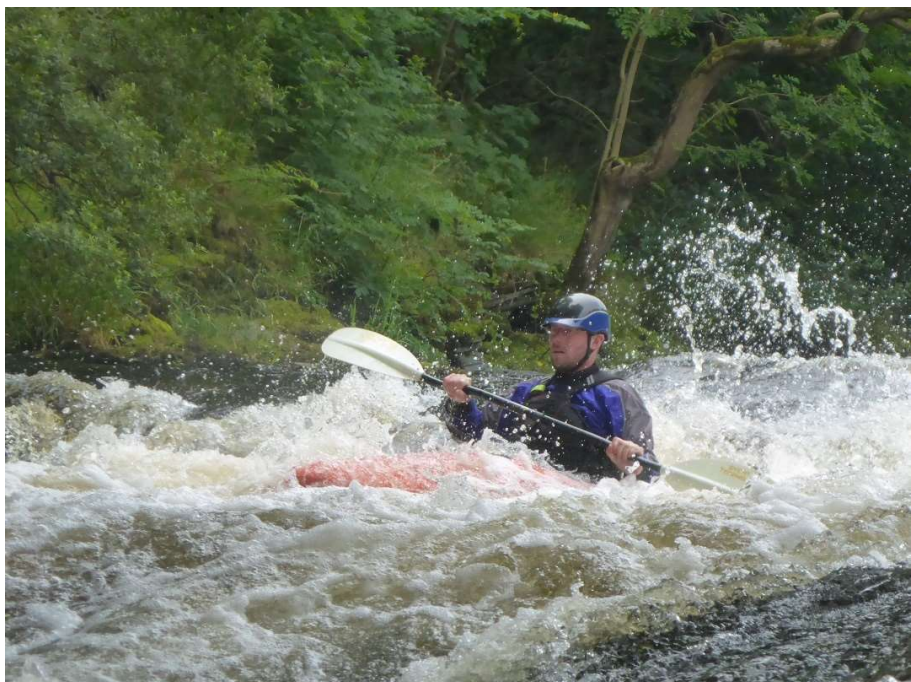
This was the first bit of kit that I bought, and was my first step to buying all my own kit. Simple as that. It represented the first time I invested some money in my paddling. I started basic, with an entry level BA, which I still have. Getting my own BA meant I had one that I knew fitted well and was comfy, and I didn't have to find one from the boatshed every Wednesday. Then came the spraydeck, then rashie and shorts. Cag. Paddles. Boat. Helmet. Second buoyancy aid, replacement deck... You get the idea!

Two – Fitting roofbars on the car.

Or more accurately, my (then) girlfriend's car. (She's now my wife, poor lamb). So, beyond getting my own kit to use at Eagle on Wednesdays, this was the unblocker to paddling elsewhere, outside of Eagle. Meant I could get to Horstead Mill, or the coast, or wherever. It meant I could paddle more often, so meant I got more practice, so I got better at it.

Three – Mastering my roll.

This took ages, absolutely ages, of practicing on Wednesdays, practicing at Horstead, practicing at pool sessions, practicing in the warm, practicing in the cold. Sometimes it worked, sometimes I had to get recued, sometimes I swam. But my success rate slowly went up and up, until suddenly, miraculously, I took a leap forward and it was working pretty much every time. From here, cos I knew I could roll, I was happy to push myself into situations where a capsize was more likely, cos I knew I could happily flip up without a swim. And by pushing myself into these new situations, my overall paddling improved.



Four – Getting a drysuit.

Much the same as above, I guess. A dry suit (which replaced a cag and dry trousers) meant when I capsized, either intentionally or not, I stayed dry. No freezing water sneaking down between top and bottom, which meant I stayed warmer for longer. And hence stayed on the water for longer. Which meant I got more paddling time.

Five – Getting social.

This was all about using social media to sort padding sessions. Back then we used Yahoo groups to get the gang out and about, and looking back it seems like there we were spells when we were out most weekends larking around at Horstead. But it wasn't so much the tool itself as the means of developing a wide peer group with whom to spend time on the water, which moved us forward. First Horstead, then tentative steps to the coast, then those first forays over to north Wales just to get some miles under our belts.

So, there you go. A few triggers that helped me progress as a paddler. Reading back through, they're all essentially saying one thing I guess – that Eagle is awesome at giving you skills and a nucleus, and that using those skills to get on the water at other times, and in other places, really pushed my paddling on...

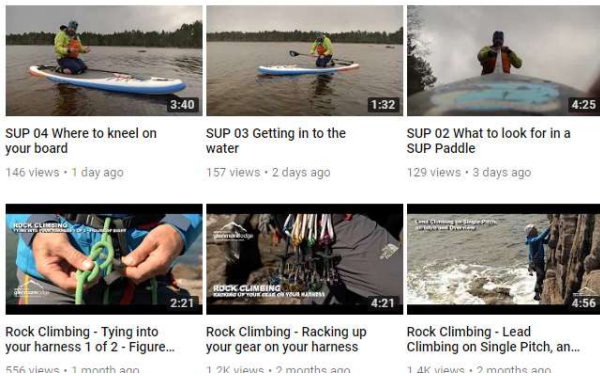
The Socials

Finally for this edition, here's a roundup of a few more gems from social media. This time around, we look at YouTube!

First up, a playlist of films as selected and shown by the Banff Mountain Film Festival during their yearly world tours. This playlist includes 89 movies of varying lengths, so is spot on for some sustained procrastination at work or at home. Kayaking, canoeing, skiing, mountain biking, climbing, exploring... There are profiles of people, places, expeditions - a lot of cool stuff in there to inspire. [Click here](#) for the link...



For something more UK centric, try the good folk at Glenmore Lodge. With plenty of playlists for various outdoor sports, of course including kayaking and canoeing, on skills, kit, trips and the like, [click here](#).



For something a little more gratuitous, make your way over to the Gnarnivores channel. For endless paddling disasters and epic fails, swims and dunkings, this is the place to be. [Click here](#) to visit.



Next up – interesting in picking up some skills? Whilst sitting in the dry? Check out some of the tuition vids courtesy of CanoeRoots on their Youtube channel. Billed as an extension of the only true canoeing magazine out there – CanoeRoots, where you'll find lots of video gear reviews, paddler interviews, techniques, tips, and places to paddle. For more information please visit us online using the links below. Skills and techniques, gear reviews, places to paddle, this channel has plenty. [Click here](#) to visit them.



Or if you prefer a slightly more competitive edge, visit our friends at our National Governing Body, British Canoeing. In amongst all the competition and disciplined stuff there are movies from top athletes and coaches on how to master some of the basics, and their Go Canoeing! Series of movies too, featuring yoga and Michaela Strachan. (But not at the same time...) They're [here](#).



And finally, don't forget the pick of the bunch, the Eagle Canoe Club YouTube channel (yes, we have a YouTube Channel!) – get involved [here!!!](#)

