April 1989

VICTORIAN SEA KAYAK CLUB c/- POST OFFICE, MALLACOOTA. 3892.

April '89

Dear Member,

Apologies for the delay in getting this issue out, but difficulties in printing have been the main cause. It's very difficult keeping people up to date in a publication which appears at three-monthly intervals. Notices of coming events are either too early or too late, not to mention the problems involved in planning such events so far ahead, given the disparate nature of our membership. Hence the inclusion of the Membership list in the hope that members may keep in touch more effectively by 'phone.

The most likely people to be running sessions are Malcolm Cowell, Frank Bakker or Larry Gray, although they too use the "ring around" technique when looking for "starters".

If your 'phone number is not included & you'd like it published, please let me know and I'll remedy the situation as soon as possible.

In the meantime, things are toddling along very well. The recent Prom trip went off very successfully (see John Basemore's report) & the PNG expedition is coming together nicely (see President's report).

As always, all contributions are very gratefully accepted, so keep 'em coming!

Cordially yours
Sally Barton.
Secretary-Treasurer

Papua New Guinea

JOURNEY BEYON
ADVENTURE TO

first Prom trip

President's Report

Since the last bulletin progress towards the Papua-New Guinea Expedition has advanced by leaps and bounds, with a team preparing for a voyage from Lae to Rabaul (New Britain). If time allows, we plan to circumnavigate the whole island. On tour, we are committed to survive off land and sea, as inland hikes and remote river voyages to distant villages take up a lot of time. A volcanic belt winds its way among tropical islands and mountain spurs through central New Britain.. Some coral cays, some active cones. On average, the area has some 500 earth tremors per year.

Information gathered by team members (Colin Sonnaveld, Bryce Grunden, Mark Tragellas and myself), although useful, still lacks important logistics, therefore a reconnaissance is necessary within the near future. A departure time for August the 1st may fluctuate, according to presale of film. We have overseas interest, also the ABC on the boil. Things are shaping up and building all the time.

On April the 26th, the TV Science program "Beyond 2000" put the Pittarak sea kayak through a hand rolling test in comparison with general kayaks. Iain Finlay, head of "Beyond 2000" was delighted with the ease in righting a fully laden Pittarak by hand. Not a real water person, he took to a heated pool at LaTrobe uni and went through the paces of typical Eskimo roll drill while filming others also at the training stage. After experiencing the difficulties, we commenced filming a small sea kayak sequence off Black Rock pier, where he actually rolled a laden Pittarak by hand.

It's good to see potential members enquiring about sea kayaking allthe time and with Secretary Sally constantly on the go,. the word and the sport are growing at an alarming rate. I would have liked to attend the last Prom weekend. It sounded like a success from all the reports I've heard, with Frank Bakker taking the initiative to organize the event. My apologies for not being able to attend.

Larry Gray
President
Technical Advisor VSKC

"A Beginner's View of the Prom Trip"

John Basemore

We rendezvoused at Fish Creek and travelled in convoy to Walkerville, where we set off for Cape Liptrap by kayak. We left from a picturesque little bay with a rocky headland with a rock as big as a townhall out from it. Colin, our leader, followed by Jim went through this gap.. Kathy Desley and Old John had a great talk before attempting this, our first obstacle. Desley had only been on lakes before. While I have been practising for three weeks within swimming distance off shore on Port Phillip and rolled for the first time the Tuesday before going away. So, when we struck the open ocean swell for the first time coming through the gap we were, to say the very least, hesitant.. I was in my little 20" wide Eskimo replica and found I could not relax without fear of going over. We were soon stretched out over half a mile. Some inshore and others keeping well out away from the break of the waves and rocks. I felt very much alone and vulnerable. Colin appeared at times to be between the break and the shore, but was in fact riding along the back of the wave. The view from there must have been electric.... like looking into Hell and not being burnt. Surf, rocks, cliffs and surging turmoil between. A little closer to shore is destruction. Even out were we were you could hear the crash and feel the power that the rollers contain.

All this on a calm day! What must it be like in a storm? It has given me a totally new view of what the sea is all about. To my surprise, we all made it to the beach just short of the cliff on which is perched the lighthouse. Before going in to shore, Colin gave us instructions in how to handle the surf. I think Jim was first ashore, but I was too busy to be certain, but made it intact, only to come unstuck when I hit the beach. But what a relief to be safely ashore. Over lunch it was decided to go no further.

Before returning, we had a play in the surf. I was going out a little to the right of where Jim was coming in. He lost it and slewed across the face of the breaker upside down coming my way. I could see myself being clobbered by this wave-driven kayak, but Jim rolled up on the crest of the wave and paddled away. Great stuff! Shortly afterwards, while trying to turn back over the crest of the breaking wave I came unstuck; tried to roll up, but failed; baled out; swam to the end furthest out and hung on, but not tight enough...

Frank says the breakers travel at 40km, so I had the longest swim I havehad for years; by this time I was buggered. Those breakers hit you like a ton of bricks. Even Colin fell out and Kath and I rafted up to get him going again. Another first for me. The wind had sprung upand was blowing waves across the swell into our faces.

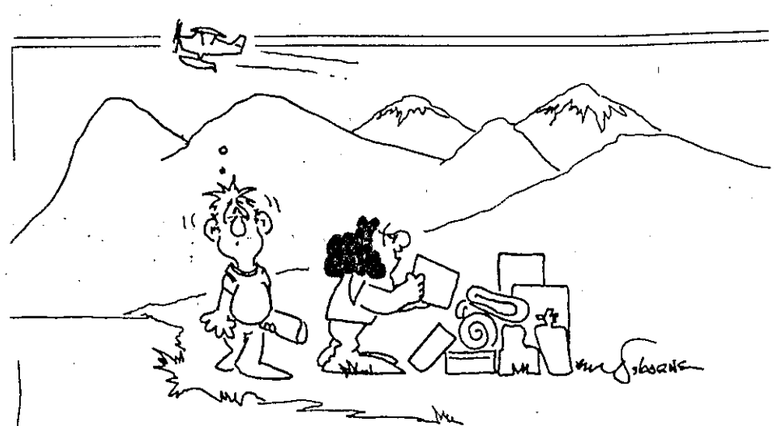
"A Beginner's View of the Prom Trip" (continued)

For me this was a nightmare trip. Don't make one mistake or lose concentration, or over you go. No reserve of energy. Keep a steady stroke. Stop for nothing. Don't look about. Is that next headland the last? Eventually, that big bloody rock, through the gap and home. I sat in the kayak a long time before being able to get out. This is one of those rare experiences most people never have. My life has been enriched.

Four days later I'm still on a high. The rest of the trips were an anti-climax thank God! The next day a short trip from Tidal River to Squeaky Beach, but I couldn't raise the guts to go. A good decision. You should see the surf at Squeaky Beach! On their return the kayakers played in the smaller Tidal River waves for a long time and I wished I had joined them.

By Monday, our numbers had dwindled to four. We had a look at historic Port Albert, then crossed, I think, to Tarraville for a lesson in navigation. Also had the chance to put my rolling to the test. A good thing a trifle over-done, as I kept rolling up and straight over again. Jim got his bow into my hand and saved me getting wet. Had tea at the oldest pub still operating in Victoria. The last day we went down the channel towards the Prom. A beautiful sight, as many others were, all weekend, then returned with the tide. A little sad as we approached land for the last time. It was almost over. Nice people. Great weather. Superb scenery... and an adventure I shall never forget. And 48 photographs to relive it with.

by John Basemore



Okay, Bob, while I unpack these things, why don't you start putting the kayak together?

The Age 4 March 1989

ALASKA: **IAN THURLAND**

KAYAKING IN THE ICY WASTE

A powerful glacier, dangerous ice-flows and an encounter with a bear are all part of a day's kayaking

I HEARD a dull rumble and the sound of ice tumbling into water. Turning my head I saw that large slabs of ice had broken loose from the glacier and were sliding into the water sending up spray and setting in motion a low, broad wave. It was a captivating display but also a reminder of the danger if we were to go too close to the face of the glacier.

My two companions and I were paddling by kayak up the western arm of Glacier Bay at the top end of Alaska's "Pandhandle". This is one of the few places in the world outside Antarctica and Greenland where one can see "tidewater" glaciers — those that end in the sea. The area is mountainous and is inaccessible by road or walking track. It can only be entered by boat or seaplane.

We had been paddling our kayaks for more than a week and were 100 kilometres from the entrance to the bay where we had begun our journey. Only 200 years ago all of that distance had been solid ice. Since then the glaciers have retreated leaving deep inlets in the same manner as the fiords of Norway and New Zealand were created. Mature forests of spruce and hemlock have established themselves in the areas that have been free of ice the longest, but the vegetation becomes sparser and biologically simpler the farther up the bay one travels.

We continued up the inlet, often negotiating our way between floating ice, the result of previous falls from the glaciers.

Some hours later we reached the upper end of the inlet. This is dominated by the John Hopkins Glacier, two kilometres wide and almost 100 metres high. We felt puny and vulnerable in our small kayaks. The water was cold and the ice-flows surrounded us now. We decided to keep our kayaks close together in case of any mishaps.

It was getting late in the day and we needed to find a campsite. The rocky sides of the inlet rose steeply from the sea leaving only one suitable site. This was on the opposite side near the face of the glacier. The wind had packed the ice-flows together, hindering our progress across the inlet. I headed off. By manoeuvring my way around the larger pieces and ramming through the small ones I made slow but steady progress. The others followed in the path I created.

I could see movements on some of the ice-flows — seals. There were dozens of them lying out on the ice. Those we came near scurried from their resting places into the water. Seals had frequently been with us as we paddled up the bay but this was the first time I had seen them out of the water. Previously they had only appeared to us as disembodied heads protruding from the water in front of our kayaks, staring at us with an endearing, yet almost idiotic, appearance. They would suddenly submerge when they decided we were too close, only to appear a little later behind the kayaks, silently watching as we moved away.

Eventually we passed through the densest of the ice-flows and reached the shore.

The kayaks were pulled on to the rocky beach and we set about organising our camp. And what a campsite! We set our tents on a rocky outcrop looking out over the inlet and across the face of the glacier. It was for such that we had travelled so far — the striking scenery and the solitude of the wilderness.

Well, relative solitude. A few minutes later two other kayakers appeared from around the rocks. We yelled greetings to each other as they drew near to shore. We had met only one other group of people since beginning our kayak trip and did not object to some company. There were large tour boats which we saw once or twice a day, but these always passed us anonymously at a distance.

The following day was a long one. We had to paddle out of the inlet and over to an island. This was to avoid any encounter with a bear whose territory was at the entrance to the inlet. Apparently it had been making a nuisance of itself by chewing campers' food, cameras and whatever else might be left about.

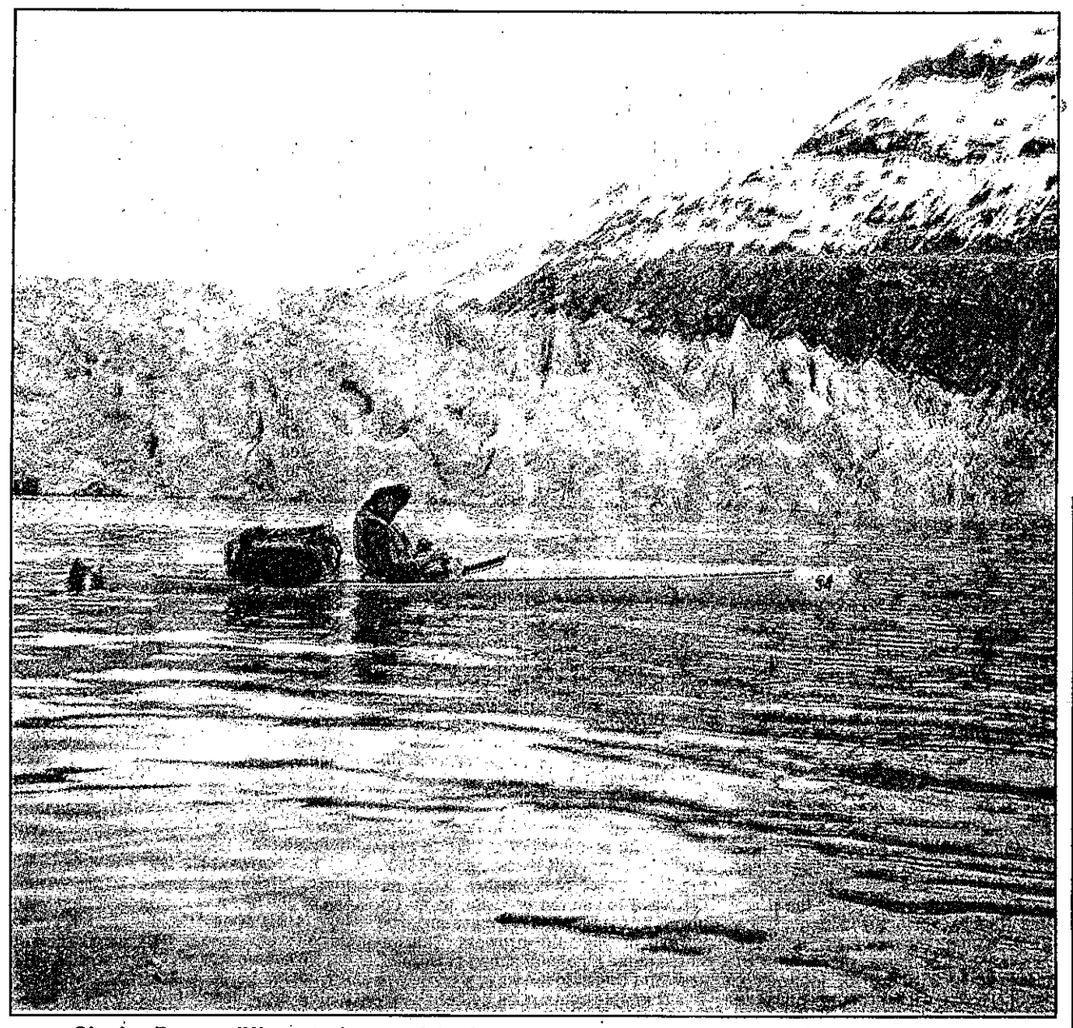
We had already had a close encounter of the bear kind and did not relish another. At Bartlett Cove, at the entrance to Glacier Bay, there was a "black" bear (black by species name, though this individual was brown in color) which did the rounds of the camp ground in the mornings to see whether any titbits has been left around. Our breakfast came under that category.

We had prepared breakfast in the intertidal zone, that is, in the area of the shore between the high and low tide marks. This is in accordance with instructions from the National Park Service, and is done so that food smells will be soon washed away, thereby reducing the chances that bears will associate human smells with food smells.

But our bear caught us right in the act, powdered milk in billy and muesli in bowls. He emerged from the bushes and moved slowly, rather gingerly, towards us. If he were a brown bear, a larger and potentially more dangerous species, we would have invited him to eat his fill while we beat a hasty retreat. Black bears, although requiring caution, do allow greater latitude of action. We started yelling and banging stones together in an attempt to scare him away, but that did not work. Finally, a rock thrown in his vicinity sent him hightailing back into the bushes. He came back later and a repeat performance was required. Thereafter we experienced no further bear encounters on our trip.

We did, however, see plenty of tracks and droppings and there was a story about a man who had been eaten by a brown bear in Glacier Bay that we had been hearing ever since we arrived in Alaska, and even before. It was rather discomforting. We took all the required precautions, such as preparing meals and eating in the intertidal area and camping a decent distance from where we stored our food. Despite our precautions I still felt nervous when I heard noises in the night.

Thoughts of bears produced a con-



Glacier Bay: a different place to kayak. Inaccessible by road or walking track, it can be entered only by boat or seaplane.

stant anxiety from which we rarely felt free except when on the water.

I am sure that these fears were out of proportion to the danger. Bears will normally avoid humans and rarely attack unless they feel threatened or are protecting cubs. Polar bears are an exception, but in Alaska they are restricted to the arctic region much farther north than we were. The story about the brown bear eating the man was true, as we later learnt from the ranger back at park headquarters. It had, however, occurred 11 years ago and there had been many visitors to the area since then and no serious incidents.

Our exploration of Glacier Bay lasted two more weeks as we paddled up several more inlets, enjoying the mountain scenery, glaciers, rocky shores, forested islands and the relaxed freedom that an extended period in a wilderness area imparts. Certainly some of the paddling was tedious, particularly when crossing large stretches of water. But overall, the experience was a satisfying one.

Our final day of paddling was to have taken us to the small settlement of Gustavus just outside the entrance to Glacier Bay. A calm sea, however, tempted us to cross a sometimes treacherous body of water known as Icy Strait.

It was an arduous paddle across the strait but we were rewarded on approaching the other side. We found we were in the middle of a group of orcas, or "killer whales". We had seen whales previously and on one occasion a large humpback had surfaced within 30 metres of us. This, however, was our most exciting encounter.

Orcas hunt in packs, feeding on various marine animals including fish, seals, porpoises and even other whales. Fortunately they are not dangerous to humans. We did not feel threatened even when they were close to the kayaks, which was just as well because we were never sure exactly where they would surface. Their dorsal fins and black backs would suddenly appear before they again submerged.

Eventually the orcas left us and we paddled on to our last campsite. Our adventure ended the next day when we arrived at the Indian fishing village of Hoonah. Here we put ourselves and our kayaks on to the next ferry back to Juneau, Alaska's capital.

Game for a Laugh" by Mark Tregellas (continued)

Hunting in the Amazon proved to be a fun packed affair. A lot of the terrai either very clear undergrowth due to the heavy canopy overhead, or horizontal forest, used by old trees falling due to age or lightening strike, or decay, and letting sunlig to the ground. Unfortunately animals seemed to like the horizontal jungle to hid in. is sort of jungle has to be experienced to be appreciated. You pick a compass bearing d go for it, and if your lucky you might trip over a sleeping animal. Not that I didn ar any animals though, I heard lots, all running away. Whenever I did manage to catch fleeting glimpse of something that must have been stone deaf not to have heard me comin was either flat on my stomach crawling through spin encrusted thickets, up to me neck decaying jungle matter, or in thorn bush so thich visibility was reduced to a few metr was great fun to be walking along what you thought was the jungle floor, only to crash rough the false floor created by the horizontal jungle, to the real floor which at time s up to thirty feet below you. Of course there were all sorts of interesting varietie insect life just dieing to meet you when you fell through the canopy. Three hours la arrived back at camp with clothes soaked in sweat, badly scratched arms, an amusing ssortment of insect bits, and an appreciation bordering on idol worship for my compass.

Every morning we would wash ourselves in the river keeping an eye out for andiro. These small pencil shaped fish are the terror of the Amazon. They swim up he anus or penis or vagina of a person and cant be pulled out because of the dorsal fins aving to be surgicaly removed. Pirhana aren't even in the same leigue, as later on we ould swim with them, even in still water. I would watch them swim between my legs, the ere cut to ribbons on rocks from dragging the canoe up rapids. They do make good eatir hough, if you dont mind a few bones, and they're not small; we caught them up to seven ounds.

About two weeks upstream from San Antonio we came across a large rapid. I t o wade my way up the middle of it but the current was too strong. John tried the same p the right bank, but was swept back underneath the jungle growing on the bank. We lso tried the left bank but it proved even worse. It looked like we might have to hacl ur way through the jungle when we eventually suceeded by roping the canoe between outcr f rocks. The last rapid at the head of it all was frightening though. It was about rade four and there was no way around it. There was an eddy, but it was on the other s f the rapid from us. John and me looked at each other and thought, "What the hell", a launched ourselves into the rapid paddling like maniacs. This sort of excitment so far rom help I could do without, but looking at what could happen if we were swept back int he rapid provided us with the necesary incentive to finally make it to the eddy, and efety. Later that day we camped in a beautifull little bay, with beach the color of old, and caught twp small fish for supper.

Waking up one morning I found a small track at the back of the camp, and we ecided to follow it for a while. It didn't lead anywhere, and may have been a rubber appers trail. The river turned into a narrow canyon, and we paddled along close to th alls looking at the strata in the rock, and the small bats that clung to the underside there. Shortly after we came across two abandoned houses and stopped to check them out We were looking for any fruit trees the occupants may have planted, but all we found was a pineapple plant that wasn't ripe enough to eat yet. Another rapid further up forced to rope the canoe through. Another one two hundred yards further on pissed us off no e so when we found yet another one it was time to sit down and make a cup of tea. This third one was about grade three and would need to be portaged. There was a good camp s on the other side of the river, so we crossed over, (a major achievement in itself given the canoe we were paddling and the grade of the rapid), and I put the billy on while Joh tried a few casts with the rod. On his last cast before stopping for smoko a huge Tucunera struck the lure and the fight was one. Tucunera are the prime Amazon game fis and magnificent eating. This one was no exception and for fifteen minutes John played it like a champion while the Tookers made spectacular leaps out of the water thrashing i head from side to side before finally tiering enough for me to grab it.

The smell of fresh Tookers frying in the pan was mouth watering and John was on a winning streak as he landed another unknown fish. It was the best meal we had had so far and was disturbed only when a Tarantula the size of a dinner plate wandered in camp scaring the living daylights out of John who was sitting nearest it. We let him go his own way as they're realy harmless, and besides we didn't want to make it angry. The thought of waking up with one of them sitting on our face made us reconsider our decision , but by that time he had gone.

John and I are starting to believe we picked the hardest river in the Amazon to go up. We met a local and he asked us if we had made a vow to God to heal someone we paddled up the Jari. Funny guy! Cucuri, our second major rapid was one of four portages we made that day. I've never been so tired in all my life. Our tempers are starting to get a little thin as we didn't expect the river to be this hard so far down. Thunderstorms caught us unawares at dinner and no matter how fast we put up the tarps we soaked when we eventually get to bed. The river is starting to change. At first it was fairly narrow, now it broadened out into an island maze, where swirling eddys and cur pushed us all over the place. Every Island we came to necessetated us stopping for a recce. We'd look at and discuss the different possabilities for getting up to the next Island. They'd go something like,"Ok, we'll nose out into the current and let it take us down between those two big rocks, then paddle like blazes to the left to avoid the whirlpol, then when we get to the point of the Island you jump out onto the rocks and swing us into the eddy on the other side. How does that sound?" Not once did our carefully thought out manouvers ever go exactly according to plan, but that just made for a little extra fun.

Roping the canoe round rapids, sounds a simple enough thing and requires a bi of explenation. You pick whichever side of the river is easiest and the person who wins the toss takes the rope attached to the bow of the canoe and makes his way along the ba to the head of the rapid. There he gets into a good position to take the weight coming up the rapid. The poor sucker who looses the toss then goes to the front of the canoe and attempts to manually drag it up the rapid. This is great torture, as your crushed against rocks, half drowned, have your shins cut to shreds as you struggle for purchase, and strain every muscle in your body to avoid the canoe being pulled broadside on and swamping. Having to do this half a dozen times a day, gives a small insight into what Jari was like.

At times the river calmed down and one day we were looking for a place to ca when a giant Tookers leaped over the bow in front of me. As we drifted passed John thr out the lure and before long dinner was secured. We made camp soon after and as I set the camp I turned around and came face to face with an Indian. Ten years growth was scared out of me as I hadn't even heard him approach. Turned out he was living just ro the next bend and had decided to invite us over for a cup of tea the next day. Sort of ruined our illusion of being totally alone on the river, living of the land, etc, etc. We went to take him up on his offer the next morning but he had already left to go hunti so we decided not to stay and wait.

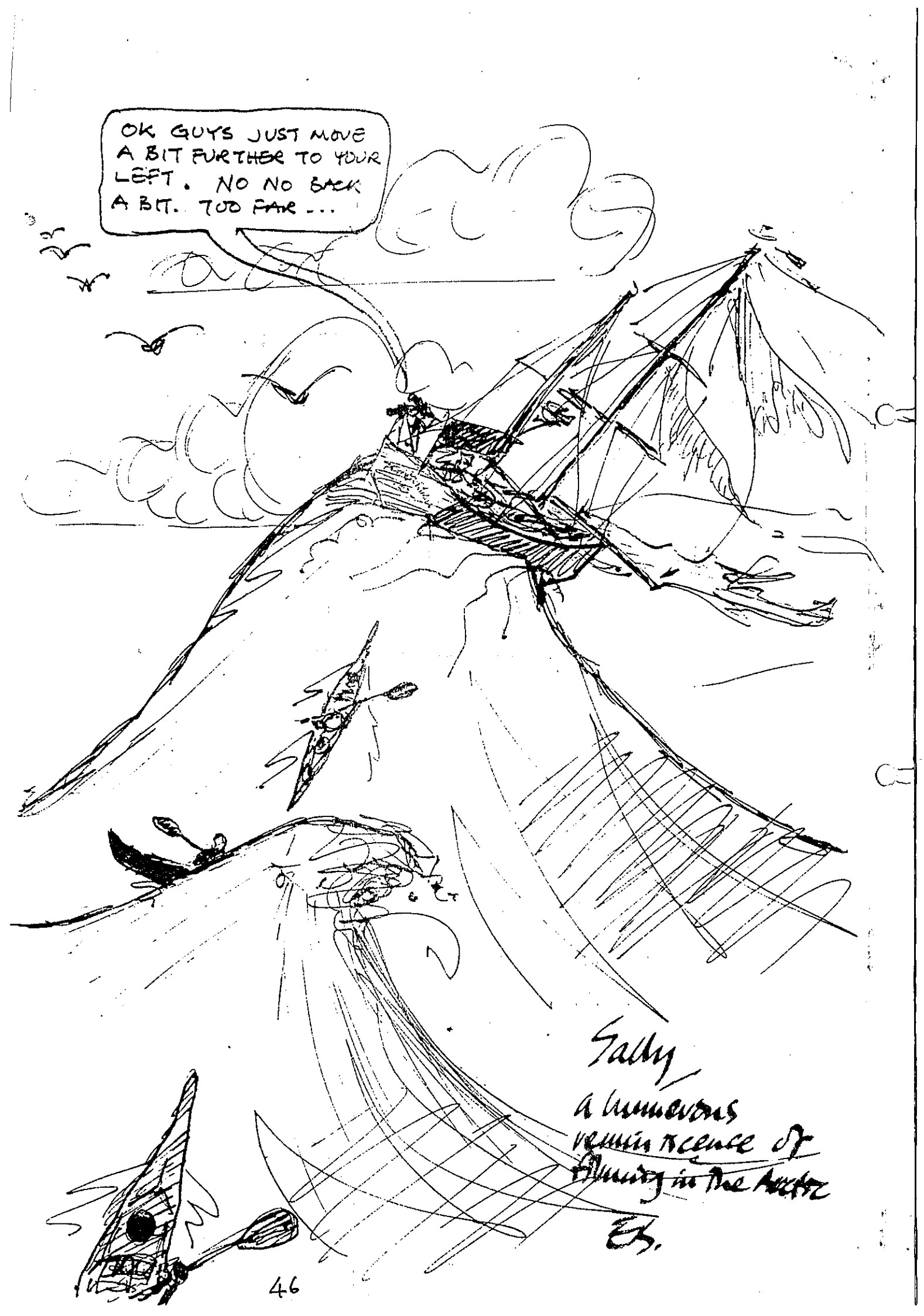
It happened when we least expected it. On a small insignificant little rap John was on the rope and I was in the water, struggling and cursing to get the canoe up. Suddenly I lost my footing and was pulled under the water. I struggled to the surface, desperately trying to get my breath back and find a foot hold, when I heard John scream, "Look out!" I spun around and saw that the canoe had swamped. "Let go!" I screamed t John tried to guide the canoe back down the rapid. Unfortunately I didn't succeed and the canoe sunk and pinned itself and me against a rock. John dived into the water and pried the canoe off the top of me before I'd broken anything. Oxygen up to that point w a scarce commodity, but watching everything we had float down the river sidetracked my thinking to what could have happened and we both got on with the job of prying the cano off the rock before the force of the water broke it in two. Every muscle in our bodie strained and miraculously the canoe came free. John swung it round into an eddy and I started swimming down stream to collect the rest of our gear. It was shortly after th that John asked if I'd got the shotgun? I hadn't seen it so we started diving into th river to find it.

The gun was irreplacable and to loose it would severely handicap our chances of completing the trip. Luckily, John found it wedged under the same rock the canoe had been wedged against. Lucky. It was then that we discovered that a lot of our main ood supplies had gone off. They were all triple rapped in plastic, but it hadn't been ough to stop water getting into it. Praying that it didn't rain we laid all the food out dry in the sun and took stoke of everything. All up we were very lucky, we only lost e tire inner tube (firelighting) and one of Johns sandles. It was late when we finally packed the canoe and started to look for a place to make camp. Eventually we found a ot and set up camp in total darkness while the local mosquito's drove us insane. Some w we managed to get a fire started and boil the billy, but before we could cook any od the heavens opened up and in try Amazon style pelted down on us. We erected a shelter t not before the fire had gone out. We sat there staring at the dying fire till it stopped raining then erected our hammocks and collapsed into them. Two hours later another thunder storm sent us scrambling for shelter where we sat and watched our hammocks fill up with water. Finally it stopped and we crawled back into our sodden hammocks, cold, wet, and hungr Our moral at this point was slightly less than 110%. We felt that the river had it in for us and was throwing everything it had against us. This only served to strengthen our resolve to continue because we knew that the river just had to get better. We also knew that neither of us wanted to have to go back down through all the shit again.

This river doesn't let up. The island maze continued, with either channels having too strong a currents to paddle up, or shallow rapids making us pull the canoe up them. At one point we were paddling like blazes only to find we were going backwards. amn demoralizing. John almost trod on a coral snake, but luckily I saw it first and warned him. Another channel saw us pulling the canoe along with John and I removing stones from the river bed in order to have enough water to float the canoe along, luckily nothing hasty was waiting underneath any of them. Fallen logs and overgrowing thorn trees blocked he river at times and we'd have to us our machettes to cut our way through. We came across another abandoned house and finding a Papaya tree, quickly made off with its fruit.

The river is getting worse, (if that's at all possable). We came to a junction with four alternatives, neither of which we were abie to get up. We had to go back and find nother route. John went in one direction and came across a humungeous Tapir. It was huge, bigger than anything he'd seen before, jet black all over, and four times as ugly. Shooting it was out of the question, we'd have to camp for a month to eat it all. John stared at it and it stared back. He finally had to scream at it before it moved off. The river was as beautifull as it was harsh. It was a pity most of our time was spent up to our necks in water dragging the canoe along. I found a way on and we made camp in a beautifull quiet cove away from the main channel. My snake count for that day reached six, including one Anaconda about fourteen foot long swimming underwater across the channel. Red and Blue Macaws screeched overhead, always travelling in pairs. John definately has the fishermans touch and produced two Tookers for dinner. Later that night as we were eating, a noise start at us. Even though we'd eaten our fill of fish the thought of freshly roasted haunch of Paca sent John scrambling for the gun. By then it was too late though and we said goodbye to our breakfast.

I made jam out of the Papayas, and we had them with pancakes for breakfast. ur night line was broken, it must have been some fish to have broken the thirty kilo wire race. It's raining most mornings now, (some dry season), but were now experts in erecting shelters and we sit around the fire munching our pancakes while all around us gets drenched. he next few days were right on per, that is pulling the canoe up rapids that never end. t one point my concentration wandered and I slipped on a rock. My foot jammed into a rack and as the current twisted me back I felt the tendons strain under the pressure but ohn grabbed me just in time. How easy it would have been for me to have broken it. It's tarting to rain more and more frequently, but were used to it now, although both of us re starting to pray for a nice easy stretch of slow water.


OK GUYS JUST MOVE A BIT FURTHER TO YOUR LEFT. NO NO BACK A BIT. TOO FAR ...
Sally
a humorous reminiscence of filming in the Arctic
ES.