

Sea Trek



Summer 2021



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Australia

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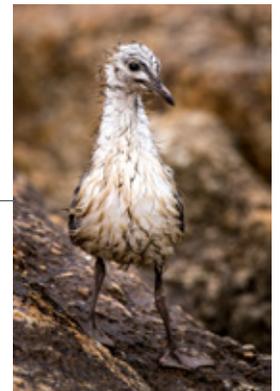
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President's Heads Up | *Sea Trek Summer 2021*



Happy 2021 greetings to all. Here is hoping that we get to do a lot more paddling this year than last year.

Our plans for Paddle Australia assessments in February are not going ahead as most of us were not able to paddle much or at all during the lock down. Some assessments will take place later this year or early next year.

Regardless of when the assessments occur, I encourage all paddling members to think about aiming for the next level of Paddle Australia assessment. The assessment guideline documents provide a great list of skills to learn, practice and master that will make your paddling that much more enjoyable, even if you do not plan to be formally assessed.

Our club continuously needs regeneration, paddlers who are improving their skills and becoming paddlers that add strength to the group by encouraging and supporting others. Skilled paddlers are better placed to assist in managing rescues. The club needs new trip leaders, putting on the trips that we all want to go on.

Please consider how you can contribute to this fantastic club by becoming a more skilled paddler and in this way making trips safer and more enjoyable for others or even possibly by leading them yourself.

The club also needs members who are prepared to join the committee as there is a surprising amount of administration needed to run a club. Contact me if you would like to become a committee member in November when we have our AGM.

The committee has booked Barwon Heads for our Paddlefest in November. This is an easy choice given our current uncertainty about any future Covid related restrictions. No decision has been made as yet as to whether the AGM will be via videoconferencing or at the Paddlefest.

A lot of work has been going on in the background to make sure that all paddlers going on club trips have the basic skills needed to obtain the Sea Kayak Basics grading. There are still some members who paddle intermittently who do not have this qualification. Trip leaders will not accept you on a paddle if you do not have at least Sea Kayak Basics.

The committee was busy last year working on researching and developing our new website and updating documents. Many members have good things to say about the new website and particularly like the emails that alert members to new posted paddles. It has certainly made renewing and membership management a lot easier for members and for the committee.

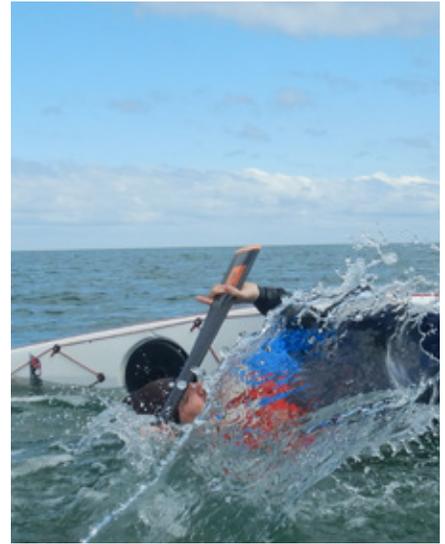
I hope to see you all back on the water soon particularly in this gorgeous weather.

Kate Alberico
VSKC President





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Cover Photo

Lock Down Play @ Mentone Beach

Hugh Bramwells

Red Eye : Photo: Graeme Weeks



That's not a stick Grant!

Editorial Musings



Photos: Peter Newman

How do we improve as a paddler? A number of ways come to mind. Firstly we need to have the desire to improve, then we need a plan or an idea on how we can improve. It's really up to the individual to learn and practise the techniques that will make them a better paddler. The club has adopted a grading system that is used Australia wide to make it easier for new paddlers to work out what they need to focus on to improve. Forward stroke, brace stroke, paddling in rebound, surf landings and rolling are all different activities we can do as a Sea Kayaker. If you hear about or see some technique that you are curious about, you are best to ask other club members what it is and how do I do it. Even better, one can learn plenty new techniques and terms by taking on the training sessions and sit the assessments to get Sea Skills, Intro to Sea Skills accreditation. Kate touched on this in her president's heads up. Not only will this help you build skills but it will also enable the VSKC Sea Leaders to choose you to go on the more adventurous paddles in the club.

Here's some other manoeuvres to become acquainted with. If you don't know what they are best to start asking and practising.

Endo, Norsaq, Window Shade, Combat roll, Pawlata, Butterfly roll, Broach, Brace, Bongo, Greenland paddle, Chine, Scull and many more.



Editor: Ben Flora

Feb 2021



Happy learning, paddling and improving.





Seal Islands Wildlife

Words and Photo's Tom Mackie



Practically throwing my laptop shut Friday evening, I made a run for the car without saying goodbye to anyone at work. Swinging by Georgia's cafe, we then scooped up Andrew Lerk to make Port Welshpool by late evening. A cheeky beachside camp allowed us to be up early, pack the boats, and hit the water with a splash just in time to catch the last of the falling tide out through the entrance of Corner Inlet. Game on.

Stopping on the south eastern point of Snake Island for a hot brew of coffee, we noted the low visibility facing south, where we saw only water and low mist - not an island in site.

Back in the boats, we made good time running parallel to the pumping surf breaking on the sandbar to our East. Hearts in mouth, we realised the break extended out before us, hooking around between us and the now visible island group. We paddled on tentatively, until the towering white wash was immediately before us. Timing it carefully, we managed to dig deep, almost flying across the turbulent, confused water without wearing a single drop of white water... Phew...



After approximately 37km's, we were bobbing around Seal Island, deciding how to best make our approach on the beachless, boulder-strewn shoreline, with small surf crashing in. Awkwardly, I disembarked our double kayak, and swam to shore. Throwing my PFD on a nice flat looking rock, I then helped Andy with his heavy, loaded kayak by pulling the bow up on the soft PFD, and used it as a slide to get the boat safely off the water without puncturing any holes. Andy and I then helped to get Georgia and the double in without too much trouble.



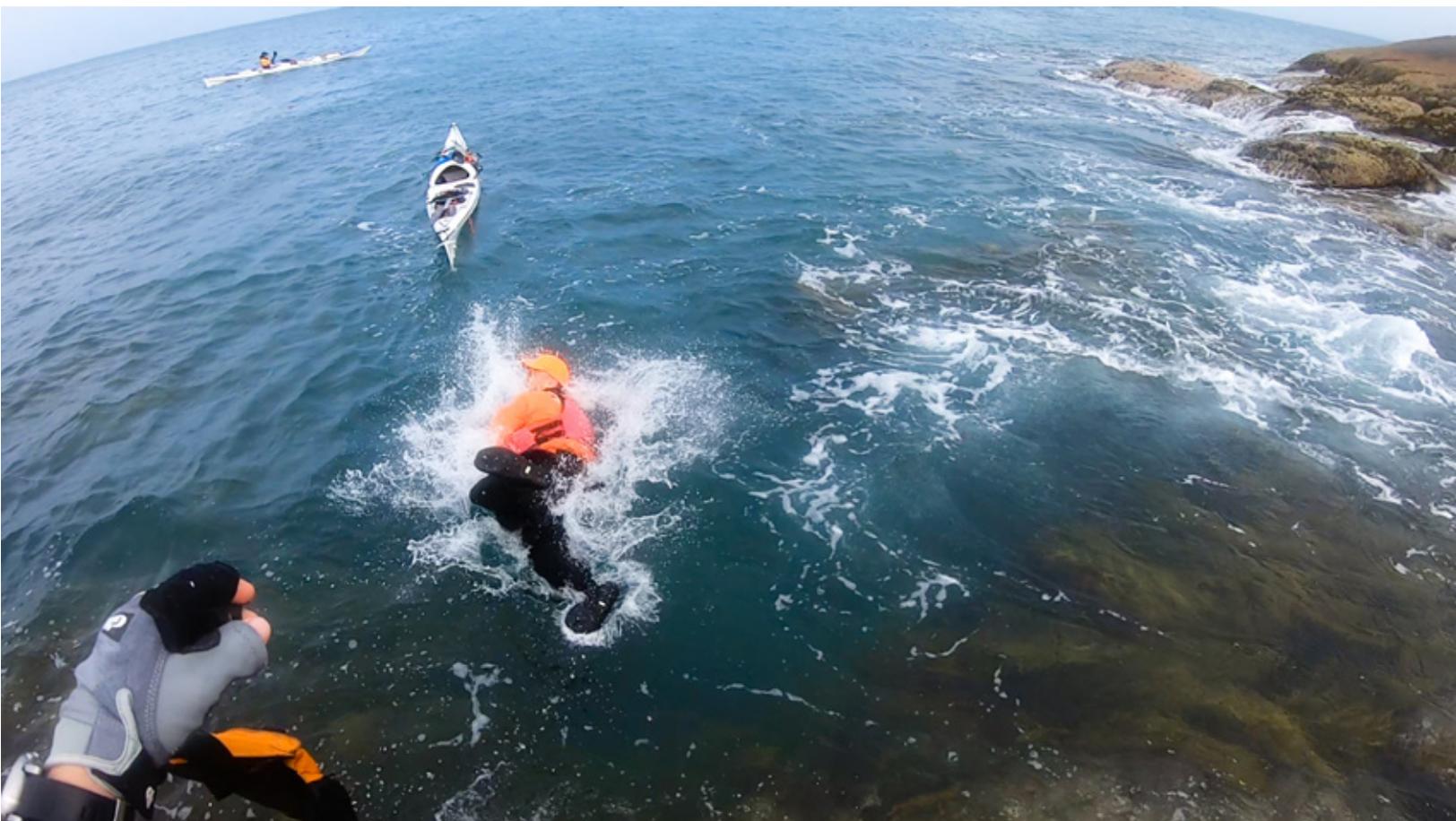
Wiping the sweat from our eyes, we suddenly looked around in awe at the island before us. It was such a surreal moment, seeing a rare space completely devoid of human impact. Just grasses, rocks, birds and serenity as far as we could see!

The evening that ensued included more paddling, exploring on foot, bird watching, spearfishing (we even caught dinner!) and finished with a good dose of home-made gin. That's when the wind really kicked in.

We all knew the forecast - 20 knots from the East. This was a training paddle.

So after a restless night of listening to the tent flap wildly, we woke early to get some breakfast in and prepare to paddle. The small bay which we had landed in was now receiving heavy barreling waves, so we opted to (literally) throw our loaded boats off a rock shelf on the Western side of the island, and dive in after them. It was a hilarious affair, but all went to plan, and we were soon sitting, soaking wet in our kayaks in the lee of the island.

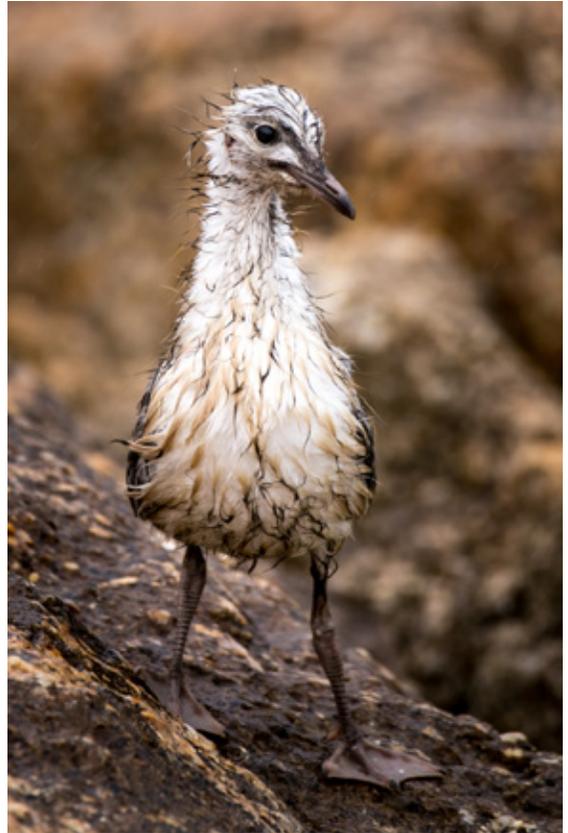
Paddling out, the waves grew and so too did the wind. We raised our sails and made excellent



progress across the SE wind which was already blowing 25 knots. The next few hours (after pulling our sails back in) were a chaotic, white knuckled blur of big waves and howling winds reaching 37 knots. Eventually the steep breakers had us surfing involuntarily, and we seemed to spend more time going up and down than moving forward. Kayaks did endo, and people did swim. An Albatross flew by. We were flooded with adrenaline.

Safely back inside Corner Inlet once again, we stopped on a random beach to catch our breaths, debrief, and wrap ourselves in a big group hug.

Back at work on Monday morning, someone stopped to ask how my weekend was. They had brunched, cleaned the house and watched some Netflix. I paused, thought hard, smiled inwardly and replied, "Good thanks". How could they possibly understand?





Fawkner Beacon sunrise : Photo: Graeme Weeks

NOORAMUNGA MARINE & COASTAL PARK



“GOURMET” PADDLE & CAMPING EXPERIENCE

Paddlers: -

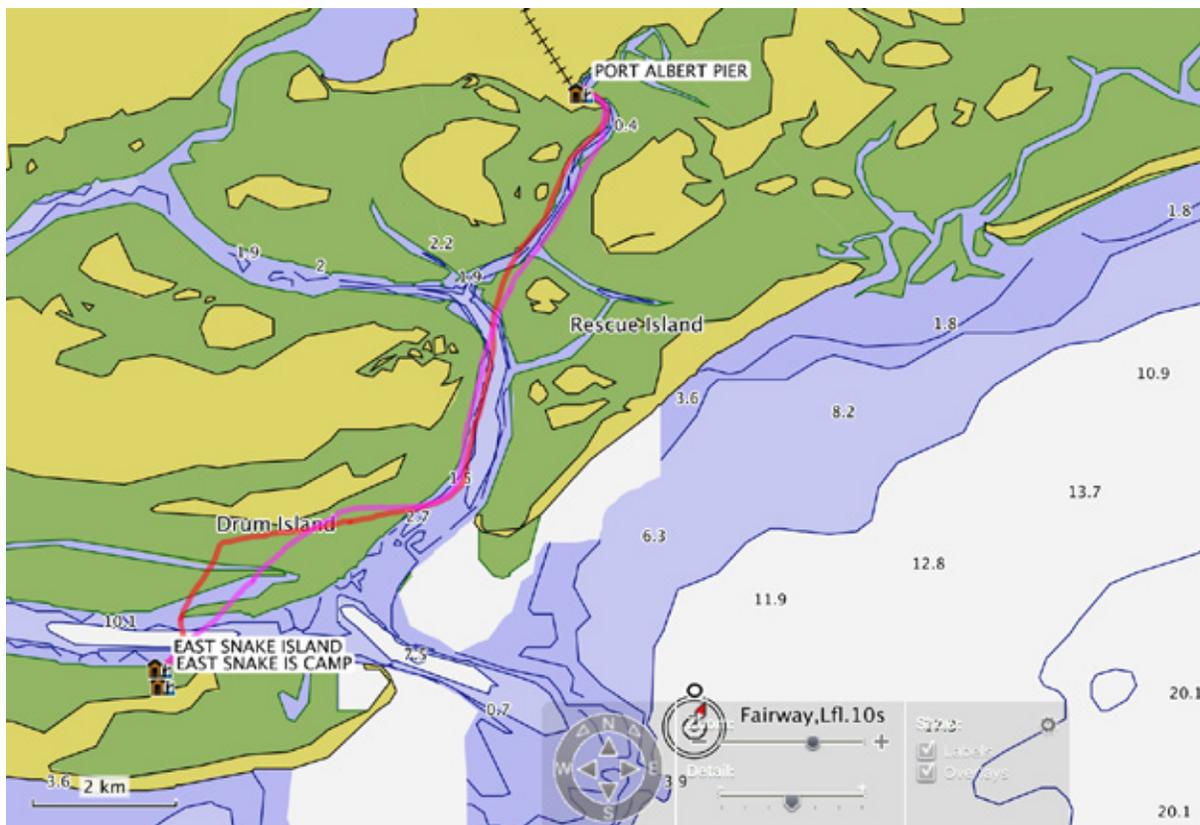
Words : David Golightly

Raia Wall (On Water Leader) – Seaward G3 Double Sea Kayak partnered with-
Neil Brenton (Trip Coordinator and Master Chef)
Kate Alberico – Nigel Dennis ‘Romany’
Joe Alberico – Valley Aquanaut
Heather Torbet – Northshore Atlantic 11 Double Sea Kayak partnered with-
David Golightly Launch and return site – Port Albert,

East Gippsland, Victoria

Destination – East Snake Island, Nooramunga Marine & Coastal Park

Route – Red (Outbound): Mauve (Inbound)



The attraction of the VSKC website 'billing' promising a 'relaxed Cruising and Dining' long weekend in the wonderful environment of Victoria's Nooramunga Marine park was irresistible. Trip Coordinator and 'epicurean extraordinaire' - Neil Brenton, had promised a mouth watering tantalising & healthy menu for both nights in camp. This event therefore promised to be a very different experience for all who took part.

Who could resist a menu which inter alia included Smoked Salmon & Caviar, Crispy Duck Breast, Roast Potatoes (in Duck fat), followed by Cheesecake - and that's just the Saturday night!

Nooramunga Marine Park is a well-known destination for VSKC paddlers with trips to the Cattlemen's Huts and other designated campsites on Snake Island being always popular.

The reason for the popularity of this area is not hard to understand. Protected from the pounding surf of Bass Strait by barrier islands, the quiet waters of Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park create an intricate network of waterways and islands of outstanding environmental significance and scenic beauty, framed by the majesty of Wilsons Promontory. The park consists of shallow marine waters, isolated granite islands, inter tidal mudflats and a complex of over 40 sand barrier islands.

History shows that the Brataualung clan of the Kurnai (Gunai) people occupied the area including the waters and islands of Nooramunga for over 6000 years. They fished the inlet using bark canoes and there are many middens (shell heaps) to indicate the location of their old campsites. Of special significance is Snake Island, which was used as a nuptial island by newly wed couples.

European settlement began in the early 1840's when Angus MacMillan and his party forged a route from Omeo to Corner Inlet in their search for a way to ship cattle quickly to Tasmania. A settlement was established in 1841 but the original site was difficult for ships to reach and the settlers almost starved. In 1842 a new settlement was established at Stockyard Point, the site of the present day Port Albert, our planned departure point



for our trip.

Port Albert was the major port for South and East Gippsland up until the 1890's and the area depended on ships for transport and supplies well into the early 1900's. Several shipwrecks are evidence of this sea-faring past, the most notable being the paddle steamer Clonmel, which ran aground near the Port Albert entrance in 1841. The Clonmel is now a declared historic shipwreck. Clonmel Island is also a popular day trip for VSKC paddlers based on East Snake Island.

Today the area supports an extensive commercial fishing industry and is a popular recreational fishing destination. Nooramunga and Corner Inlet Marine and Coastal Parks were declared in 1986.

Whilst our paddle distances were modest over the weekend, we kept a sharp eye on the weather forecast which at the time of departure showed we could expect maximum ambient temperatures of 19 C – 21 C, chances of rain in the range of 10% -60% and wind velocities 10 – 17 km/hr generally ESE – SE in direction. Clearly this forecast made our weekend very do-able notwithstanding our collective use for the first time of two double sea kayaks.



Neil, Raia, Heather and I were somewhat nervous in anticipation of first time loading of the double kayaks. However in the case of the Seaward G3 it literally swallowed all that Neil and Raia packed into it, the advantage of the huge centre hatch and the long waterline soon made light of the extraordinary load, which because of the 'gourmet menu' included camp ovens, pots, multiple frying pans and assorted utensils and two -'Whisper-light' stoves plus food for SIX paddlers!



2020

This loading performance was in complete contrast to Heather and David who laboured to squeeze in the most basic of modest camp comforts required by 'septuagenarian' paddlers such as chairs, tables, soft pillows and the like. However the pod finally launched exactly on time at 10.30 am, catching the favourable outgoing tide to turn around the Port Albert jetty and the onlooking anglers to head due south out the shipping channel en-route to East Snake Island.

The first point of interest as we made our way from port marker to port marker, was Sunday Island, a large privately owned land mass specifically used by hunters from around the world to shoot wild Hog Deer. As a result, Sunday Island has a substantial jetty and modern day facilities available for its guests and owners. We couldn't help but wonder about what happens when a projectile misses its intended target and continues out to sea before losing its considerable force and trajectory – hopefully without encountering an innocent paddler along its journey! We were however, earnestly assured by a volunteer island manager we met that there are very strict rules and protocols in place for the hunters – we were indeed pleased (and relieved) to learn of this.

With the benefit of the outgoing stream it wasn't long before we were turning west at Earthquake Island, a smaller island lying parallel to and south of Sunday Island where a long east pointing sand spit marks the end of the main boating channel and our westwards turning point. As a side note, VSKC interested paddlers should consider the alternative track through this area which involves a meandering trail through the mangroves located between Sunday and Earthquake Islands – however it is really only navigable at high tide or an hour either side because of shallow sandbanks and silting in the channel.



Only an hour had elapsed since we had left Port Albert. Raia, as our on water leader, directed us to continue west for some time, in fact until we encountered a long sand bank jutting southwards from the shoreline where we then turned and headed straight for our campsite on the northern shore of East Snake Island. Our twelve-kilometre paddle was over in two hours as we landed safely and began the task of unloading and lugging the gear into the bush to set up camp.

This bush camp site whilst only a short distance from the mainland gives a great sense of remoteness, it's also a classic 'barrier' island measuring only a few hundred metres in each direction and lying on roughly an east – west axis. Given that its actually connected to Snake Island 'proper', East Snake is not a true disconnected island, but this fact takes nothing away from its sense of isolation, particularly with the sound of the pounding surf on the Bass Strait coastline constantly with us in our camp.

This is a campsite already well set up with driftwood seats as well as a fire-pit, however it can be greatly enhanced by intended campers bringing with them as large a 'tarp' as is possible – Neil didn't disappoint as he unveiled his five by five metre latest acquisition and proceeded to erect it above the seating area. We were all immediately comfortable, particularly when light rain started to fall.

With only six paddlers in our 'pod' we had plenty of space to set ourselves up as well as construct our intended enhancement to the area – a camp table suitable for the repast we were all anticipating to share over the weekend.

The scouting skills of the lads in the group soon had the bush-timber framework of a 'banqueting' table built with the addition of a remodeled grillage that had at one time been a serviceable indoor clothes-drying rack. In turn the framework acted as the base for the corflute tabletop and of course as only befits the setting - the white tablecloth, albeit someone forgot the candelabra!



Neil lost no time in preparing for the evening meal and 'Happy Hour' was declared – admittedly earlier than usual! Meantime Raia was researching the weather forecast in relation to options for the next day, which resulted in a decision to use our time to explore the island on foot as far as was practicable

The pictures omit the need for further explanation but as you can see, Neil supported by Raia and the expert use of double camp ovens and multiple stoves soon had everything 'on the boil', at the same time we were all served with delicious starters consisting of Smoked Salmon, Rocket Salad & Salmon Caviar!

With the paddlers seated comfortably around our banqueting table vino to hand, this was shaping up to be a sea-kayaking trip like no other. Soon the main course of Crispy Duck with Blueberry Jus, Green Beans, Duck Fat Roast Potatoes with Rosemary & Truffle Salt was 'plated up' by Neil and Raia, handed out and consumed with gratitude by all of us, it was delicious, none of us could believe this was possible on an open fire, on a





remote island and subject to the transport limitations we had to deal with – how was all this possible?

Not surprisingly an early night was declared but not before the usual tall tales of sea kayaking and other outdoor exploits were exchanged. Among the pursuits learned about that night was not only Joe's significant background and experience in Nordic ski-ing, including remote camping above the snow line in North America as well as in Australia but also Neil and Raia's extensive experience and knowledge of caving in Australia. 'Chatham House Rule' having been agreed to, no details of the extraordinary (and romantic) circumstances of Joes' first meeting with Kate on a NZ mountain trail can be further revealed - in this story at least.

It never ceases to amaze us when we learn all about the diverse nature of outdoor pursuits experienced by VSKC members, its quite inspirational, even to our age group.

The next day dawned and slowly the pod members emerged from various cocoons around the bush campsite only to find Neil in full flight with promises of pitta bread wrapped bacon and egg for breakfast – "how good does this get"? Not surprisingly a slow start was agreed as we relaxed and enjoyed this unscheduled start to the day – what a lovely alternative to Scots Porridge Oats!

As was previously agreed, Sunday was our walking day and firstly we headed east to attempt to round the head-land leading to Bass Strait. Unfortunately this proved impossible due to all the tree debris hampering progress, so back to camp we went, adding distance by contouring the tide line which at this point was quite low.



Photos : Peter Sharp



Back in camp we were about to get a surprise as in true 'Rambo' style into our camp walked a real 'Wild Life Hunter' – stripped to the waist and sporting the prerequisite 'tatts' this young man, when realising the island he had landed on had other residents (us), he kindly came into our camp to introduce himself and explain his presence.

As this young hunter described, he had, despite paying \$200 for the boat journey from Port Albert, been dropped off on the wrong beach! He was in fact about two kilometres away from where he should be. Nothing daunted the VSKC 'pod' as we shared the balance of his gear out, (he made sure he kept hold of the gun!) and helped him carry it to the beach where his balloted shooting licence was valid for. He was most grateful. Good deed done, our group soon finished the second of our exploratory walks for the day.

Sunday evenings repast was very soon under preparation with promises of entrée comprising Chicken/Turkey Terrine, and a main course of Butterfly Lamb, sweet potato mash and mint peas. Finally, for pudding and to sate the most discerning sweet-toothed paddlers in our camp, Raia's special recipe for camp oven based Apple Crumble!

Pre-warned about what to expect from our gourmants, the rest of the pod had come armed with a couple of nice bottles of celebratory 'bubbly' for the occasion – tonight Joe and Kate uncorked a lovely Shiraz Sparkling Wine, just right to toast the chef (and sous chef) in appreciation for what were wonderfully well thought out, well prepared and beautifully presented dinners over two nights.

By now the camp fire was just right for Neil's camp ovens and while entrée was underway he made sure all was in



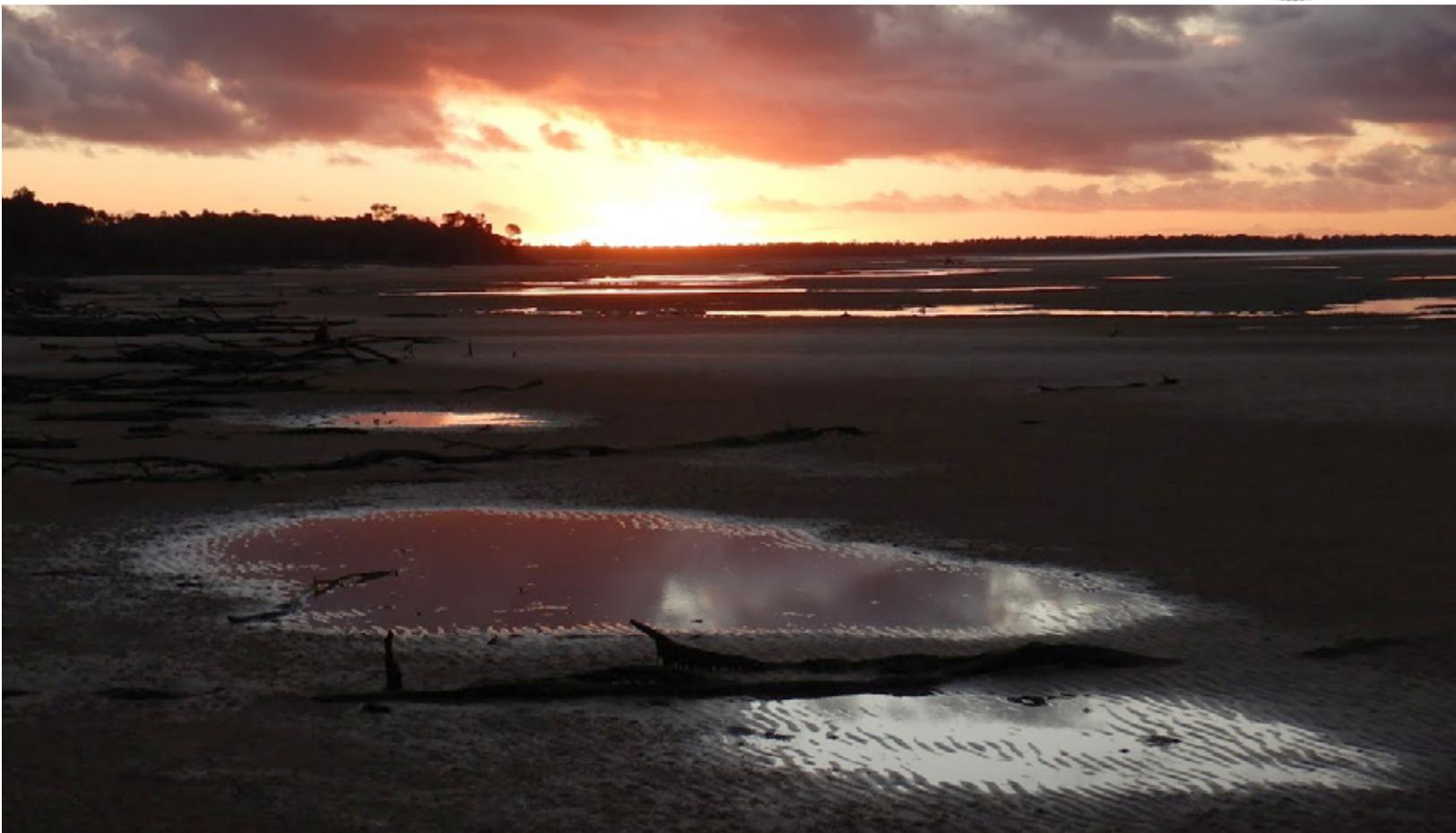
order having seared the lamb before placing it in the camp oven for roasting. Our camp table was proving to be invaluable, with its solid top and well judged height to suit our lightweight camp chairs it was ideal.

Sheltered under Neil and Raia's enormous five by five metre tarp, life in camp was great and the group relaxed as they feasted in the setting sun.

Fortunately no great rush was determined for our departure back to Port Albert on Monday morning. Raia advised the pod of a targeted 9.30 am departure and we managed this without undue stress. Into the face of a light breeze we headed off for the entrance into the shipping channel by firstly making for the shoreline of Earthquake Island. Despite the headwind we effected the turn north to come alongside the main shipping channel after an hours paddling, the waters in these parts are too shallow for major craft so its really just fast moving small vessels that one has to keep a lookout for.

Aside from the fish the local anglers are seeking to catch, Stingrays are a common sight in

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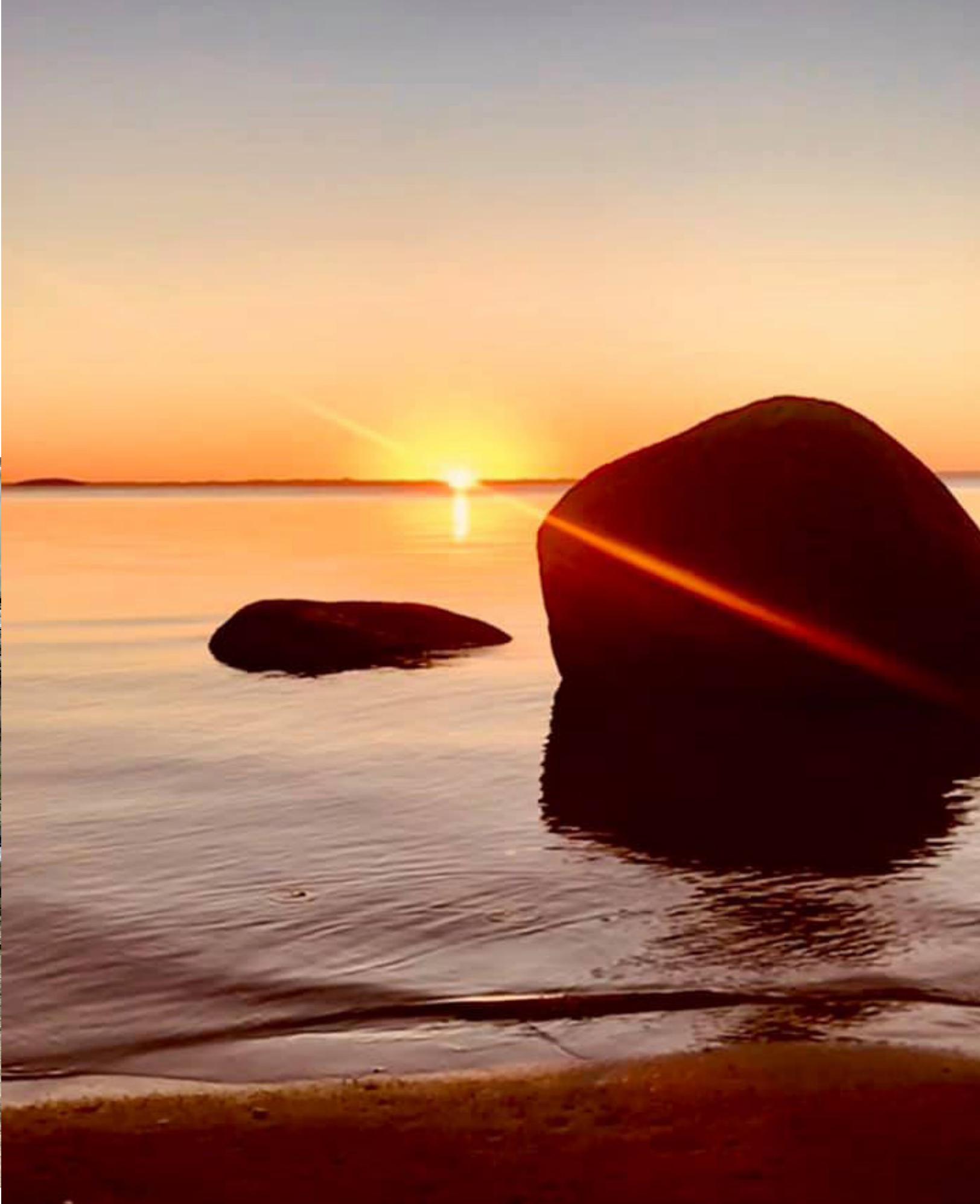
these shallow waterways and it's not unusual to have one glide under your kayak, something that always adds interest to the journey.

In a dropping breeze and calm seas we spent the next hour making for Port Albert with the backdrop of hills and wind farms at Toora to the west. Finally we once again rounded the Port Albert jetty, once again surprising the keen anglers hoping for a bite. We then headed straight for the small bit of exposed sand that is really the only 'soft' launch site in the port and lost no time in unloading, changing and cleaning up for the long journey back to Melbourne but first the famed Port Albert fish and chips lunch awaited.



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Johnny Souey sunrise. What can we say? Photo: Suanne Elstob

Before Bushfires and Covid 19

NSW coast road trip with sea kayaks Nov - Dec 2019. Joe Alberico

Kate and I had previously wet our boats in the New South Wales waters of the Murray River, but we had not visited NSW coastal waters, a deficiency that needed correcting. My 2008 vintage Valley Aquanaut had been there before as it was owned by a NSW paddler in its early days.

We set aside a month from late November 2019 for a road trip, originally planning to visit Myall Lakes National Park for a short overnight paddle and working our way south back to Melbourne, doing short day paddles, to be chosen along the way (known as “winging it”). This rough plan changed when we learned that Myall Lakes National Park was closed until further notice due to fire danger, with the 2019-2020 severe bushfire season in parts of northern NSW already well underway in November.

We drove direct to Sydney, camping at the caravan park at Lane Cove National Park. This park is only a few kilometres from the city and while it is not particularly close to the sea, it is, like Alice Springs “equally convenient to all beaches” and an attractive location. The rest of this article gives a brief description of some of our NSW paddles, not intended to be a detailed guide for these particular trips. Distances are approximate only. These trips were done by our pod of two except for those noted in the company of NSW paddlers.

Malabar Beach - Little Bay – Malabar Beach (6 km) (with Rob M, Sea Instructor)

Being moderately experienced, cautious paddlers, we kicked off in Sydney with a paddle under the guidance of Rob M, a well-known local sea instructor. Rob recommended a blue water venue and provided some skills coaching. This worked very well for us. We weren't sure what coaching we needed. We thought our skills weren't too bad. In the choppy swell, Rob quickly identified boat handling weaknesses for both of us to improve on and treated us to a really enjoyable short paddle, out of Malabar Beach, around Tupia Head into



Little Bay. This is a beautiful, sheltered (on the day) cove, which Rob suggested can be accessed even in quite large swells, if you take the right line of approach (get local advice first or better still go with experienced local paddlers if uncertain!) There is a café close by for post paddle refreshments, for those who prioritise this sort of thing.

Our second Sydney orientation idea was to introduce ourselves to the NSW Sea Kayak Club (NSWSKC), take out a one month temporary membership and register for their regular Friday and Saturday paddles of the week of our stay. I can't wait to go out again with the friendly NSWSKC local paddlers (just like the VSKC paddlers!). We came away with more than one holiday worth of recommendations and later visited some of the recommended locations. We were also invited to the NSWSKC Tuesday evening paddle outside Sydney Harbour. This trip runs year round in most conditions, attended by a group of capable paddlers. With a southerly buster forecast about the time of the paddle, we self-assessed and gracefully declined (our courage failed us). But next time!

Clontarf - Middle Head - Balmoral - Clontarf (8 km) (with NSWSKC)

Launching from the park at Clontarf, the trip aimed to cross Sydney Harbour towards Watsons Bay, but with south-east wind exceeding 20 knots on the day, the Harbour is a place to be treated with respect. After paddling into the wind and waves past Middle Head towards the main shipping channels, the pod turned around



Returning to Clontarf with NSWSKC (Photo- J. Alberico)

and enjoyed a downwind run back to shelter behind Middle Head. This area has grand scenery with views through Sydney Heads to the ocean beyond. The extra time gained from shortening the paddle was put to good use for a coffee stopover at Balmoral, before a leisurely return to Clontarf, admiring the harbourside homes along the way.

Vaucluse Bay - South Head - Diamond Bay - South Head - Watsons Bay - Vaucluse Bay (with NSWSKC) (14 km)

This NSWSKC Saturday trip took advantage of relatively calm sea conditions to paddle from Vaucluse inside Sydney Harbour, past Watsons Bay, then out of the harbour around South Head to paddle south along the sea cliffs towards Bondi, in a light south-east wind. We were able to travel very close to the cliffs, including the notorious area known as The Gap. I tried capsizing and rolling up, for a look into the blue depths. There is something about that blue and what might be in it. I didn't do any more rolls... Coffee stop at Watsons Bay before returning to Vaucluse. Cannot wait to do this trip again.



Little Manly Cove – North Head – Manly Wharf – Dobroyd Head – Little Manly Cove (12 km)

This is a great short paddle to view the sea cliffs running north from North Head and experience the swell, followed by a short loop past Manly (harbour side) and Dobroyd Head before returning to Little Manly. We considered paddling up the coast to land at the attractive Shelley Beach, near Manly surf beach, but our pod of two decided against it in the forecast strengthening north east wind. Definitely a trip for us to try again to visit Shelley Beach, as part of a stronger group or on a lighter wind day.



Palm Beach (Pittwater side) – West Head – Lion Island –
Barrenjoey Head – West Head – The Basin campground – Palm Beach (16 km)



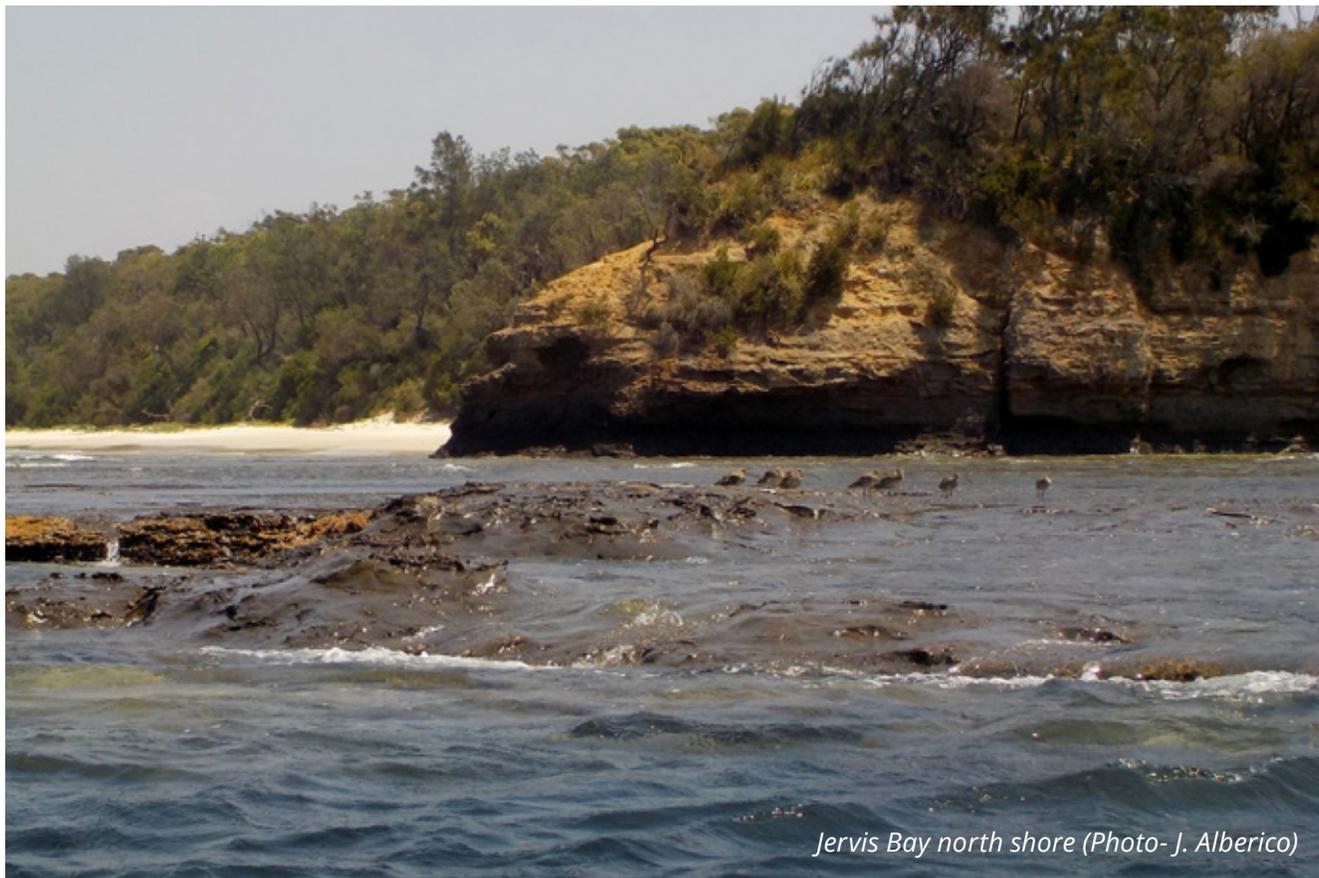
Lion Island, Broken Bay (Photo- J. Alberico)

One of the NSWKSC recommended paddle venues and we were lucky to be able to enjoy a scenic 16 km loop in the Pittwater and Broken Bay / Hawkesbury River mouth, including around the shore of Lion Island, in perfect conditions, with just a bit of bounce to add interest.



Barrenjoey Head (Photo- J. Alberico)

Jervis Bay: Callala Bay jetty - contour north shore of Jervis Bay to Cararma Creek - Callala Bay jetty (12 km)



Jervis Bay north shore (Photo- J. Alberico)

Our first planned paddle in Jervis Bay aimed to launch on the east shore (Beecroft Peninsula side) to paddle south towards Point Perpendicular, with favourable wind forecast for this side of the bay...but ...the entrance boom gates were down and the peninsula off limits for defence force activities on the day!

The 12 km trip out of Callala Bay was a pleasant alternative, with bird life, rocky reefs, mangroves, sea grasses and a feeling of isolation in Cararma Creek.



Cararma Creek (Jervis Bay) (Photo- J. Alberico)



**Jervis Bay: Hyams Beach –
HMAS Creswell – Hyams Beach (6 km)**

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We intended to contour the west shore of Jervis Bay from Hyams Beach south towards Murrays Beach and Bowen Island at the mouth of the bay. We launched with a strengthening north east wind, which would have made for an easy trip south and a tough (maybe impossible for us) return paddle into the wind (must read those wind forecasts more carefully!) We soon turned around, off HMAS Creswell naval base only 3 km south of the start, to return to Hyams Beach against the 15-20 knot north east wind and steep, building choppy waves and were relieved to get back. Not one of the better trip planning efforts but it gave us a work out. We managed a controlled landing back at Hyams Beach, threading our way past swimmers into a sheltered nook of smoother water in the lee of a small reef, without embarrassing ourselves in front of the crowd of beachgoers.

Ulladulla Harbour - Warden Head - Ulladulla Head - Mollymook Beach - Ulladulla Harbour (10 km)



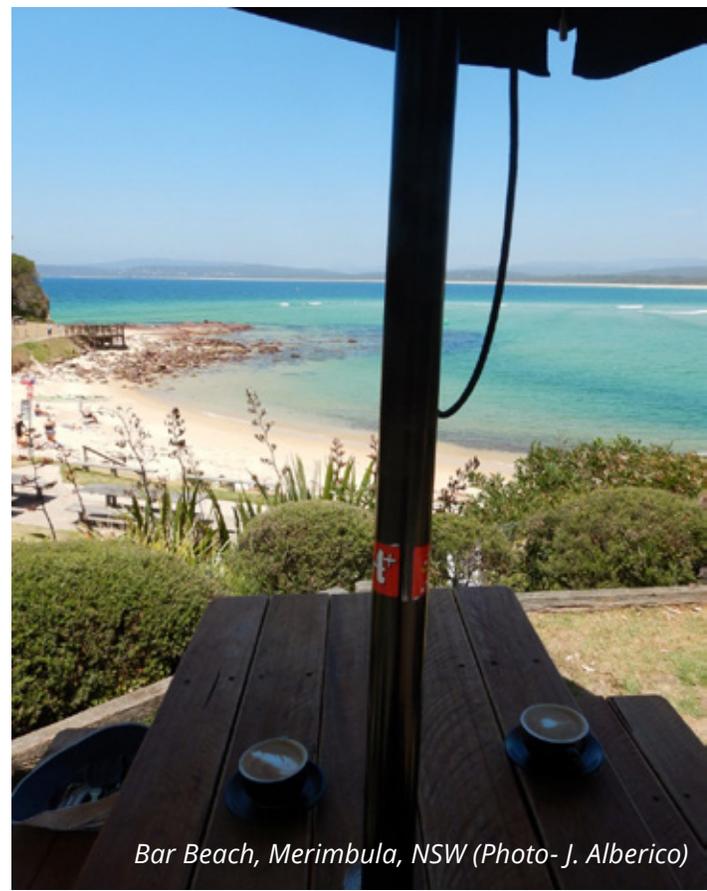
Contouring Ulladulla Head towards Mollymook beach (Photo- J. Alberico)



Bushfire smoke plume over Ulladulla Harbour (Photo- J. Alberico)

The NSW bushfires developed further south during our time in the Sydney area and we discovered on the drive from Jervis Bay towards Batemans Bay that the Princes Highway was closed between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay so a stopover in Ulladulla looked good. The bushfire smoke plume to the south looked ominous. It felt strange camping on holiday, meeting people at the same campground that were bushfire evacuees.

Rob M had recommended Ulladulla as a paddling venue, with direct blue water access out of the harbour. We considered launching from a convenient beach and launch ramp just outside the harbor, but noticed that the fish cleaning station at the ramp acts like a take away food outlet for crowds of large stingrays, waiting patiently in the shallows. We opted to drive around to the waterfront inside the harbour, well away from the fish cleaning area and where there is also easy launching from small beaches within the harbour. Light south east wind and slight swell made for scenic paddling, contouring the rocky shore of the south side of the bay towards Warden Head before crossing northwards to Ulladulla Head to contour around to Mollymook surf beach, which was on its best behaviour.



Bar Beach, Merimbula, NSW (Photo- J. Alberico)

Merimbula: Bar Beach – Merimbula Point – Bar Beach (5km)

We had planned to stay at Batemans Bay for a few days, but to avoid the huge Currowan bushfire, had to detour from Ulladulla back towards Sydney to pick up the Hume Highway and travel to Merimbula on the coast well to the south, passing through areas such as Kangaroo Valley, Monaro Highway and Bega that have since also been impacted by fires.

Light north east winds and low swell allowed us to paddle out over the Merimbula Bar to explore the rocky headland of Merimbula Point and admire the view north along the coast, before returning for some surfing practice on the bar. There is a great beachside café at Bar Beach, just inside the bar. Lots of scope for blue water paddling out of Merimbula in suitable conditions.

With the end of our month approaching it was time to head back into Victoria. We would have liked to stop over at Bittangabee Bay in Ben Boyd National Park but decided against camping in this remote forested area, in the high bush fire danger conditions at the time.

Merimbula Head (Photo- K. Alberico)



Wilsons Promontory, Victoria

Back to home waters! We were lucky to be able to coincide with Les A, Jenni H and Steve C for a magnificent paddle on smooth seas, contouring the shore of Wilsons Promontory towards South Point, before turning around into a blast of head wind, just to remind us where we were. A lunch stop was enjoyed at the calm (on the day) waters of Little Oberon Bay beach, a place that usually makes me break into a cold sweat when I see its typical rough dumping waves. A round trip of about 25 km.

In spite of the bushfires, our visit to the NSW south coast felt like a success for us. We enjoyed a series of modest sea kayak day trips in really scenic locations, with so much more to see. Planning paddles at new locations adds to the sense of adventure. It was a pleasure to meet and paddle with some of the local Sydney paddlers. It would be great to do a future extended paddle trip along the beautiful NSW south coast, spending more time in the boats and less time in the car.

Back in home waters – Leonard Cove, Wilsons Promontory (Photo- J. Alberico)





Red Eye (Photo- Andrew Campbell)

British Columbia's West Coast

Words and photos Evelyn Feller



Two Paddling Trips on British Columbia's West Coast

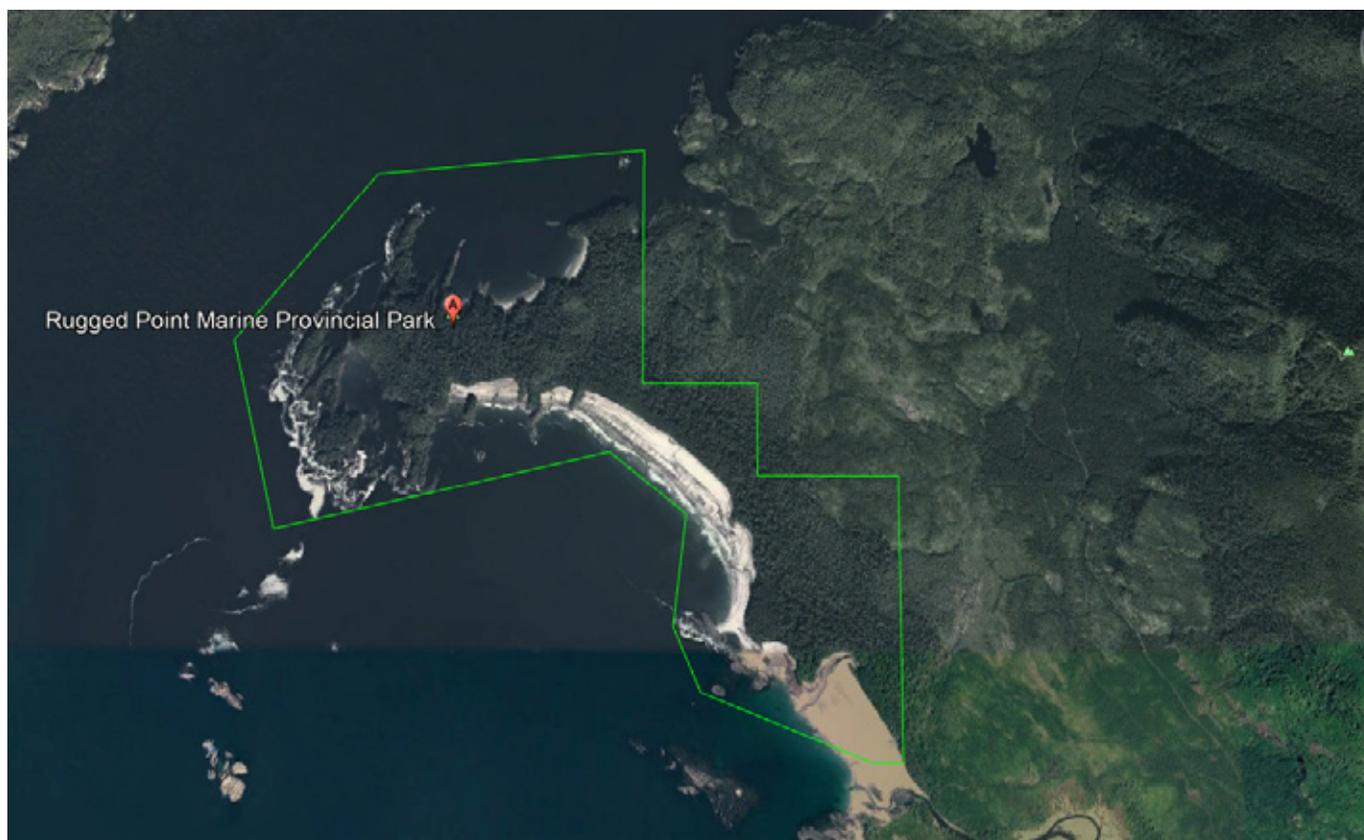
The west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia was my introduction to sea kayaking and I welcome any opportunity to return there. Part of the attraction is the rich intertidal marine life and the opportunity to see bears, wolves, sea otters and even a cougar. This year I wanted to go to the Rugged Point or the Bunsby area. I would do these trips with two commercial operators:

West Coast Expeditions: <https://www.westcoastexpeditions.com/>

Blue Dog Kayaking: <https://bluedogkayaking.com/>

Trip 1 - Rugged Point

Because my usual paddling partners were not available, I joined a commercial group, West Coast Expeditions, to go to the Rugged Point area. Rugged Point is located about two thirds along the western Vancouver Island coast facing the Pacific Ocean. It is an area of fjords, islands and fringing reefs. It is accessed from the small settlements of Zeballos and Fair Harbour.



The six day trip was for intermediate paddlers and we were a group of four with two guides. We were taken by water taxi to West Coast Expeditions base camp on Spring Island. West Coast Expeditions is a long established company in the area and as well as offering more challenging multiday trips it also offers hike and paddle options for less experienced visitors. The base camp appeared rustic but was really quite luxurious with semi-permanent tents along glamping lines. While the meals are usually excellent they were particularly outstanding during my stay because they had hired a young chef from Germany who was on a travelling holiday.

The first afternoon was spent getting set up with kayaks and taking them for a test paddle in quite stiff winds around the island. The next day we headed towards a campsite past the main Rugged Point beach which was more sheltered and protected should we have to do surf landings. We were in fairly good surfable swells and needed to keep alert. As we paddled, we saw sea otters and sea birds like marbled murrelets (birds which nest on high mossy platforms in the trees and specialize in crash landings).

Andy, our main guide, was very knowledgeable about many aspects of the coast. He had lived on the west



the group.

Andy told us an interesting story about the sea otters, which had been hunted to extinction in the area for their fur. He told us how, during a time of American bomb testing in the Amchitka area in Alaska (which was rich in marine life) efforts were made to save the sea otters in that area by relocating them to areas such as the British Columbia coast where they had previously been abundant. As a consequence, despite having been hunted to extinction, the sea otters were successfully reintroduced to British Columbia. Since the 1960s the



sea otter population has increased in these areas.

On our third day, the morning was overcast with showers and drizzle, which restricted our planned paddle south along the coast. However, we spent the afternoon paddling and doing a favourite west coast activity - rock gardening. This involves timing swells to get through narrow gaps in the reefs or paddling into caves. The highlight for the evening was watching a bear and her cub turn over rocks for crabs on food on the far side of the beach.

Our fourth day was particularly enjoyable. We headed out to Grassy Island where we watched sea otters feeding in the cylinder like surf breaks. On a hike around the island we explored tidal pools filled with sea anemones and other marine life and found interesting fossil deposits. On paddling back to the coast, we saw more sea otters, marbled murrelets, loons and oyster catchers. We explored the estuary of a very ecologically rich marshy creek. Creeks like this are important salmon habitat but unfortunately, they have been severely impacted by silt from logging operations.

On our final day of paddling we decide to head early back to Spring Island because of forecast storms and 80 kph winds. On route we explored the cliffs and small channels around Rugged Point. This was a sad experience in that I noticed the normally abundant intertidal marine life of purple and orange sea stars and bright anemones was somewhat diminished. Andy confirmed this observation and commented on the loss of certain sea stars which were critical in keeping the sea urchin population in check. Now kelp beds were being decimated by the sea urchin and the rich marine habitat was declining. Not surprisingly increased sea temperatures were said to be the factor that was affecting the sea stars.

Our paddle back to Spring Island was in increasing chop and larger swells. Our decision to return earlier was justified as up to 80 kph winds did materialise in the area and in fact snapped one of the sturdy supports of the glamping tent I was in.

The final morning was spent hiking through the rich forests of Spring Island with some very impressive old growth Sitka Spruce trees. This is where the marbled murrelets launch themselves from mossy platforms towards the ocean. The sea was still turbulent and lots of kelp and seaweed had been hurled along the beach. I can certainly recommend the area as an outstanding sea kayaking area and West Coast Expeditions is an excellent company to paddle with. The company owner is very involved in working to ensure good recreation

management for sea kayakers which protects the coastal environment and improves paddler safety.

Trip 2 - Nuchatlitz

This trip was a different kind of trip to the Rugged Point trip as the focus was on improving recreational paddler's skills.

As I scrambled to pack up my camping gear in the dark in order to be on a 7 am water taxi, I definitely knew



this was going to be a demanding trip. This six day trip was located further south of Rugged Point in an interesting archipelago of islands called the Nuchatlitz.

Nuchatlitz is an area rich in sea otters. On a previous trip here I had watched what looked like kelp heads roll only to realise they were actually over 100 otters.

The owner of Blue Dog Kayaking, Dave Nichols, is the Nigel Dennis representative in British Columbia. He is an Instructor and assessor for Paddle Canada for Levels 2 and 3 (the requirements are somewhat similar to Introduction to Sea Skills and Sea Skills). His main interest is improving the skills and safety of recreational sea kayakers and training instructors and assessors. He simulates an expedition experience incorporating assessment and skill development. His company organized the trip food, but participants were required to work as a team to prepare the meals, organize the camp and lead sections of the trip. We were a group of 6 who with the exception of one couple had not met before and had to work as a team. Four of the group were being assessed for Level 3, while the other group member and I just wanted to improve our skills.



After leaving Rose Island where we landed, we paddled through a maze of reefs and islands and arrived at a base camp at Benson Point. This area had attractive beaches around a rocky headland. We saw wolf and bear tracks on the beach but no sign of the resident cougar. The afternoon was spent performing several rescues including the T rescue and pillion rescue both of which involved scrambling up the back of the boat. There was lots of rolling practice and I surprised myself being able to roll the Romany that I was paddling on my first try. Most mornings there were presentations on topics such as interpreting the weather given VHF information, navigation, risk management, currents and tides.

David came from a sailing background and was a firm believer in preparing charts in advance by drawing the magnetic declination lines on the maps and using a square plotter with string attached to set a bearing and estimate nautical miles. The following morning was spent improving paddling strokes and learning a variant of the bow rudder - the Newfie swirl! The afternoon's paddle focused on rock gardening, exploring sea caves, paddling under a waterfall and practicing extricating a kayaker from a sea cave.

Navigation was the focus of our next day. We were given a course with a number of checkpoint descriptions such as a submerged reef at a certain depth or a river estuary. The challenge was to interpret chart symbols, recognize features on the land and accurately maintain a bearing. We enjoyed our lunch near a lovely series of cascades.

Each day's paddle was the responsibility of the level three candidates to lead. We headed back to Rose Island with the plan of continuing on to a large outer island - Catala Island - but worsening forecasts resulted in a decision to camp on Rose Island and explore Catala on a day trip. Because of the potential for heavy winds and rain on the west coast, David really emphasized effective tarping skills and proficiency with knots. The rest of the day was spent practicing strokes which included the hanging draw and reverse sweeps. We circumnavigated Rose Island which had rugged sea caves and practiced bow rescues in one cave.

The second last day started with a dead reckoning exercise. The exercise was to simulate navigating in dense

fog. We had to use our square plotters to set a bearing to a point across the channel, maintain that bearing with our deck compasses and estimate the time it would take to cover the distance. (A few years ago, I had actually navigated to the island with friends in very thick fog. That was an interesting experience where the compass proved more reliable than the GPS which wanted to head us to Japan.) We then circumnavigated Catala Island, rock gardening where it was possible.

After lunch we had a towing exercise where we had to tow an injured paddler (Amber, the other instructor). The exercise consisted of three people doing the towing, another person supporting the injured paddler and another person who would rotate with the towers. Dave and Amber tried to make this as exercise as difficult as possible for us by requiring us to capsize and self-rescue if we missed or lost time clipping or unclipping from a tow. The approach and equipment for towing is quite different to what the VSKC uses. We would probably do a V tow rather than a 3-person tow. And we use tow loops rather than towing from the paddler's belt. After the exercise we continued with more rolling practice, going over an exam and dismantling camp. On our final day we caught the water taxi back to Zeballos. On the way we watched a humpback whale breach and a couple more bears wandering the shore line.

I was glad to have had this opportunity to participate on this trip and see how Paddle Canada approaches skill development and assessment. Amber and David were excellent instructors and effectively pushed us beyond our comfort zones to improve our skills. Although I didn't participate with assessment in mind, David told me that I had reached Paddle Canada 2 standard and I was awarded my certificate.



Feb



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Johnny Souey (Photo- Suanne Elstob)

THE VSKC NEEDS YOU



BECOME A SEA LEADER

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So you joined the VSKC because you want to participate in enjoyable and interesting trips.

You pass your Sea Kayak Basics, gain experience, progress through Intro to Sea Skills and become the proud holder of the Sea Skills award. Beauty you think. Now I can go on all these fantastic trips that appear on the Trips Calendar.

But wait a minute. Have you thought about who is running these trips you want to go on? Have you ever thought that maybe you would like to run some of these trips yourself?

A jam packed Trips Calendar is integral to the club's success. However we need more Sea Leaders to ensure we can fill the calendar. It is essential to the club's success that we maintain the supply of new Sea Leaders who we can rely upon to run these trips. And that is why the club runs a comprehensive Training Program. We need to keep turning out new Sea Leaders to ensure the club can continue to offer more trips.

So do you think you might be interested in becoming a Sea Leader yourself? If so, then this is the process you need to follow:

- 1. Skills and experience consolidation period. To be a Sea Leader you need solid skills and experience. As a guide you will need around 12 months of regular ocean paddling after gaining Sea Skills.*
- 2. Register for Sea Leader qualification. First step for this is to contact one of the club instructors (Terry Barry, John Evertze, Tina Evertze, Keith Russell, Pete Wilson or Helmut Heinze).*
- 3. Be mentored. You will need to choose one of the club instructors (by mutual agreement) to be your mentor. Your mentor will guide you through the next phase of gaining experience. This will include you organising and leading a number of club trips in a variety of locations and in conditions ranging from easy (such as enclosed waters) to more demanding ocean paddles. A qualified leader will accompany you on each trip and provide you with feedback and make sure the trip is safely run. The leader will report back to your mentor on how you went.*
- 4. Sea Leader Assessment. Once you and your mentor are satisfied you are ready, you will be formally assessed for the Sea Leader award. This will be a similar process to what you followed when you gained your Sea Skills award.*

Once you have gained your Sea Leader award, the club will pay for your registration costs.

And of course, once you have gained your Sea Leader award, the club is always on the lookout for new instructors! Being an instructor requires a bit more than being a good leader, with intake to the instructor program being by invitation. Once you start leading trips you will become better known and might just get a 'tap' on the shoulder.

By Terry Barry



PADDLING WITH THE SHETLAND CANOE CLUB

By David Golightly



Photo : Ian McBride

Prior to leaving the Scottish mainland for a long anticipated visit to the Shetland Isles, I contacted Angus Nicol, a prominent and experienced sea kayaker who lives with his family in this far-flung island group which sits just six degrees south of the Arctic Circle. Aside from running trips and events as a senior officer of the Shetland Canoe Club, Angus also runs his own business – Sea Kayak Shetland - <https://www.seakayakshetland.co.uk> - which provides opportunities for visitors to experience first hand this amazing land and its coastline.

Heather and I and a group of friends from Australia were planning some coastal walks in Shetland during a northern summer visit. I contacted Angus in the hope I might also have an opportunity during our visit to paddle with the Shetland Canoe Club.

Situated around a latitude of north 60 degrees and a longitude of 1 degree west of Greenwich the archipelago including Fair Isle (which sits half-way between Shetland and Orkney) stretches around 200 kilometres north to south – this is indeed a challenging but beautiful land. There are over 100 islands in the group, of which only sixteen are inhabited. This northern outpost of the British Isles is as close to Bergen in Norway as it is to Aberdeen on the Scottish mainland. With these locational attributes, the history of Shetland is linked much more with Scandinavia than to mainland Scotland. Indeed as Hamish Haswell-Smith in his book “The Scottish Islands” says – Shetland was to Norsemen what Gibraltar was to the British, a key naval base conveniently situated where world sea-routes converged.





Shetland was a vital way point for the Vikings as they headed west from Norway to places like Iceland, Greenland and even North America without the aid of even rudimentary navigational tools. Indeed, Shetland was occupied by the Viking race from the 9th to 15th century, and there are a large number of historical and archaeologically significant Viking sites peppering the Shetland landscape.

There is a saying we learned when visiting The Orkney's, an island group lying just a few degrees south of Shetland. It goes something like this: "Oradians are farmers who fish, Shetlanders are fishermen who farm".

This adage is not hard to comprehend when you visit these island groups; Orkney is a well-developed fertile land, given over to traditional farming methods such as crops and cattle. Shetland by contrast, with its different geology, poor soil and weather beaten tracts, is a very challenging terrain to work and farm. It is more common therefore to find sheep grazing the Shetland hillsides than dairy cattle, and it is no wonder the sea has traditionally been the main source of food and income for Shetlanders, with many crofters fishing to supplement their diet or income. There was also once a strong herring fishery centred on the Shetlands' capital Lerwick, however this has been in decline since the mid-20th century.

For a long time, Shetland's population was in decline as Shetlanders left for better opportunities. Only after the discovery of North Sea oil was this population loss slowed. Indeed, the oil industry had had a major impact on Shetland's traditional way of life, with a major oil terminal being built in the 1970s at Sullom Voe in the north of Mainland. Pipelines run from the North Sea fields to that depot, which is approached by tankers using the sheltered deep water provided by Yell Sound.

Other than oil, about two-thirds of Shetland's economy is today derived from the sea; fishing, fish processing, fish marketing, crab and lobster fishing, mussel and salmon farming all contribute strongly. Tourism is as yet a largely untapped market but as other Scottish islands such as Skye are finding, too many visitors can strain the limited resources in these fragile areas. For example whilst visiting cruise ships provide potential customers for the wonderful local craft producers, the sudden impact of several hundred passengers into a small community needs a degree of planning and managing to avoid negative issues.

The ancient history of Shetland tells us that during the 7th and 8th centuries missionaries from Ireland or western Scotland began conversion of the population to Christianity. However in the 8th and 9th centuries, Shetland was invaded by Norsemen, who ruled the islands until the 15th C when the islands, together with Orkney, were annexed to the Scottish crown as security for a dowry for Princess Margaret, the prospective wife of James III of Scotland, and daughter of King Christian of Norway and Denmark.



Photo : Angus / Wendy Nicole

King James was to wed Princess Margaret as part of a political arrangement and as such both the isles of Orkney and the Shetlands were to be held by the Scottish crown as a pledge, redeemable when the impoverished Scandinavian King made the dowry payment of 50,000 Florins. However the dowry was never paid and the annexure of the Earldom of Orkney and Lordship of Shetland to the Scottish Crown was confirmed by Parliament in 1472.

Shetland today offers many great visitor experiences. One such experience is the almost guaranteed ability in winter time to view the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis, known locally as the 'merrie dancers'. The northern sky takes on a greenish glow with showings of other colours such as pink, orange and purple also present at times.



Photo : Angus / Wendy Nicole

With a coastline exceeding 2,700 km and 300 offshore islands, one can see how this region has a fascination for Angus Nichol and his fellow paddlers based in Shetland. Indeed the local paddlers run a Shetland Sea Kayaking Symposium each alternate summer, suffice to say places book out very early and only those who register quickly are assured of a place.

For readers of this publication based in Melbourne and familiar with largely benign, warm weather patterns and summer sea temperatures around 22 C, paddling in the Shetlands poses unfamiliar risks with sea temperatures of around 6 C in January and 13 C in August. Full dry suits are therefore de rigueur for everyone, even in summer!

However there is an upside for adventurers in these parts. Because Shetland is so far north, from mid-May to mid-July summer twilight exists, locally known as the 'simmer dim' as viewers of the detective series 'Shetland' would know. The sun only dips below the northern horizon for a few hours and in fine weather this can result in up to nineteen hours of daylight. By contrast, in mid-winter there are fewer than six hours of daylight!

With that brief background into Shetland and its history, let me now tell you something of the amazing summer night of paddling I had on Shetland waters.

Given we were only going to be in the islands for about a week, it was lucky for me my visit coincided with an outing the Shetland Canoe Club was planning off the west coast. I was quick to accept an invitation to go out with them. The fact that I had my plastic Northshore Atlantic single with me, which I keep stored in Scotland for use on our frequent visits, meant I was independent and therefore able to seamlessly join the pod at the appropriate time.

The paddle was to commence at the small settlement of Hamnavoe on the island of Burra on the west coast. I was asked to be there and ready to launch at 6.30pm (this is in the 'simmer dim' remember). I duly arrived to find a large group of club paddlers in various stages of unloading boats or donning dry suits in readiness for the outing. I quickly found Angus and Ian McBride the Trip Coordinator and they made me most welcome.

Hamnavoe overlooks the sheltered inlet of Hamna Voe, protected from the open Atlantic by the arm of



Photo : Ian McBride

Fugla Ness and its lighthouse. Incidentally, a 'voe' is to Shetland what a fiord is to Norway or a Loch to Scotland. Derived from the Viking times, the word Voe can be found in many place names in Shetland.

The settlement of Hamnavoe was once an important fishing centre. These days, although full-time fishermen still live in the area, the fishing tradition is more evident in fish farming; there are several mussel and salmon farms around Burra.

Anyway to return to our paddle preparation, we assembled for the pre-departure briefing to be told that the conditions were expected to be so benign that a rare opportunity had presented itself – out into the open waters of the Atlantic and head north before going around the islands of Oxna and Papa before turning south again for Hamnavoe.

I was very fortunate given a calm night is extremely rare in these parts – this is one of the windiest places

in Great Britain, so taking a group of paddlers with a mixed range of abilities out on such a sea route was an even rarer event. Our excitement was palpable as we took turns using the slipway to launch.



(Route map by Jim Tate)



Out on the water I noticed the Shetland paddlers had an impressive gender balance, something the VSKC in Melbourne has been aiming for over recent years. I also noticed that the majority of the kayaks were plastic, which I took as a sign that the Shetland coast with its impressive array of caves and rock gardens was



Photo : Angus / Wendy Nicole

something that tempted close inspection by the local paddlers.

It was a superb night and as we paddled leisurely along I enjoyed the 'criak' and good-natured banter about us Australians paddling in 'soft conditions' in the antipodes. However I think some of the local paddlers may have been secretly envious of our Australian sub-trop-



Photo : Ian McBride

ical life-style! I was asked many questions about the VSKC and our paddling activities, so who knows we may one day get a visit from a Shetland based paddler. If we do, I'm sure they will be made most welcome.

A light breeze and a little sea chop eventuated as we hit the Atlantic and changed course to the north. As we paddled parallel to the uninhabited island of Oxna, the scenery was wonderful and the sun still high enough to give some welcome warmth.

The more experienced paddlers in the group headed for the exposed western shore of the outlying islands to play in the rebound and rock gardens – I chose not to, I didn't really fancy the thought of bailing out in water temperatures akin to Port Phillip Bay in mid-winter!

In the setting sun we turned east to paddle through the confused waters bordering Oxna and the next group of skerries to the north. Back in the calmer waters in Oxna's lee, we slowly paddled back towards Hamnavoe. No one was in a hurry as this was a night



Photo : Angus / Wendy Nicole



Photo : Ian McBride

to savour, the local paddlers knew it and were determined to make the most of the opportunity.

The setting sun made for a wonderful backdrop to the pod as we finally turned for home and a well-earned hot dinner.



Photo by Ian McBride)

Photo : Ian McBride



Photo : Ian McBride



Photo : Ian McBride

I am indebted to Angus and Wendy Nicol, Shetland Canoe Club and Sea Kayak Shetland for inviting me to participate in what turned out to be a wonderful night in the 'simmer dim'. Special thanks to Ian McBride for allowing me to use his excellent photographs and to Jim Tait for the route map used in this story.

David Golightly

Life member

Victorian Sea kayak Club



(Photo by Ian McBride)



Good things come in
5 meter packages.



Flinders After Action Report



Lessons for a leader

Sometimes we prepare for events, think through the possible consequences, consider the relevant actions we would take, but when the incident occurs, our thought process' turn out very differently to how we perceived it would be. That was the case on the 6 June 2020.

It was a perfect paddling day out of Flinders. Early winter, gentle winds, cold water temperature, but minimal swell and a beautiful blue sky.

We started with 8 paddlers. All were what I regarded as competent paddlers for the conditions, and more than capable of conducting the planned paddle. The route was decided, out of Flinders, head West, and follow the coast towards the blowhole, playing in the rebound and seeing some of the sights. A paddle I had done many times before, and water I was comfortable leading in.

Final parting words before hitting the water, "let's try and push everybody's comfort levels on this one". Famous last words!

It was a great paddle, some nice clean rolling swell, good conversation and lots of smiles. After a period of time, one of the paddlers was showing signs of fatigue. No big deal, It's a position we have ALL been in before. Sometimes it's lack of paddle fitness, sometimes it's a fast strong group, sometimes it's just one of those days. Decision point 1: turn around or keep going. To turn around would mean about an 9km paddle back to the landing spot. There was the possibility of landing at Flinders surf beach, but that was still a 6km paddle with a surf landing, then a surf launch to get everybody off again. I knew there was a small but rocky beach about 2km away, which was somewhat sheltered in the given conditions. I took the option to continue to the rocky beach, with the view to give the fatigued paddler a chance to recharge his batteries. It would increase the paddle by about 4km overall, but with a rest and food, I figured the paddler was more than capable of doing it. We put the paddler on tow and headed for the beach. No stress, no issues, something that happens on a regular occurrence.

As we were on the beach having a well deserved rest, we saw 2 sea kayaks approaching. Quick count, nope, I still have 8 on the beach. Wonder who it could be?

Well, It was none other than club instructors, Helmut and Keith! They had some story about being out for a training run. My mind instantly thought suspiciously of this 'coincidence'. I was the newest Trip Leader in the club, with minimal trips under my belt. My first thought was that our esteemed Terry Barry has sent these 2 as spies to check my leadership skills.... I was wrong, but More on this later.

Decision point 2: A few people in the group were keen to go have a look at the caves and blowhole further along the cliff lines. Well, it was a ripper day and I didn't want to disappoint! So Helmut and Keith offered to stay on the beach with the fatigued paddler, who was now in much higher spirits. I took the rest of the adventurers, and after a comical beach launch by me, we went out to explore the rebound and some small caves. What a blast that was!

After about 30 minutes, we started to return to the beach where we had left our fatigued paddler in the safe hands of Helmut and Keith...

As we approached, I observed there boats, not on the beach, but on the water and heading back towards Flinders. As I approached, I saw Helmut was towing, and Keith was rafted up with the injured paddler. Right, I thought. I'm onto you Terry! Throwing in a scenario to test my leadership! Well, I wont be fooled!

But fooled I was. It was very quickly apparent that this was no test, and the paddler had genuinely injured himself. Whilst we were gone, the swell had been increasing, and Helmut and Keith made the correct decision to launch from the beach before the swell got any larger. In the process, the paddler had dislocated his shoulder. 49

Ouch!

The group were briefed, and tasks arranged for towing and paddler support. A pan pan call was made, which was answered by the coast guard. Lesson 1: after acknowledging receipt of the call, no further information was provided about whether they were going to respond, or estimated times.

We put the paddler on tow, and continued to tow him towards Flinders. Lesson 2: Dislocated shoulders are painful! Although it may seem like a good idea pop it back, the possibility of real damage to the shoulder should exclude this. The best option was to try and reduce the pain by splinting it in a comfortable location. I finally found that a split paddle shoved in the paddles PFD as a support, and placing my boat heavily on edge so that his arm could be supported by the edge of my boat, was the best makeshift way of reducing pain to a bearable (just) level.

I decided that we should notify emergency services via mobile phone. Lesson 3: my touch screen phone does not really work inside its wet case. Luckily, it was a waterproof phone, and I could remove it from the case to make a 000 call.

Lesson 4: The call takers at 000 want to know your location based on street references. (I should have known this). The directions to the call taker of '8km W/S/W from Flinders' made the call takers head spin. We settled that the location was the end of some street in some melways reference I had no idea about.

Lesson 5: after putting a call in to 000, they inevitably call you back multiple times, from a blocked number, to ask for updates etc. Despite informing the call taker to contact us via the UHF radio, they still resort to multiple phone calls. When you are assisting injured paddlers, your phone is tucked back onto your PFD, it is nearly impossible to answer these calls. Designating another paddler to make the call and be the designated 'communications' person would have been a much better idea.

With rescue agencies on their way, but no idea how long they would take, there was nothing that could be done other than continue with the tow, and continue to try and get the injured paddler off the water.

Lesson 6: This is important. It is no good sitting waiting to be rescued. You don't know how long it will be, and it is bad for morale. Continue to do everything in your ability to self rescue, don't become a victim, and if rescue agencies do attend to help, great. If not, oh well, keep going.

The group continued to do all the right things, performing excellent tows, supporting the casualty, keeping good communications with each other. It is this stage as a leader, which is the hardest. You feel like you need to constantly be doing something. But sometimes, there is nothing to do. Sometimes everything is ticking along, and you just need to sit back and let things happen. This is the toughest thing to do as a leader.

After about 40mins, the coast guard could be seen maybe 2 kilometres away. The police airwing also arrived.

Lesson 7: Although we could easily see the coast guard vessel, they could not see us. We used radios to contact them and talk them onto our location, but without these, it is unlikely they would have located us in a timely fashion. Although we had a group of 10, in rather benign conditions, the swell was clearly just enough to obscure our low lying sea kayaks. I have decided that a signalling device such as a flare or sea dye, is a require-

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ment for visually signalling once a vessel is within range.

Once the coast guard vessel located us, the cameras came out, and the injured paddler was transferred onto the coast guard vessel. This became a difficult task in itself, and it became clear that nobody had practiced getting an injured paddler out of a sea kayak, and into a vessel from the starboard boarding door. This raised a training short fall which would be good to rectify in the future by means of combined training exercises with the coast guard.

After boarding the paddler and his boat, the rest of the pod, now at 9, continued to make their way back to Flinders.

On returning to Flinders, the paddler had been taken by ambulance to hospital. A brief call with him to make sure he was alright, and we thought his boat had been taken to the coast guard depot.

Lesson 8: talk to the rescue agency about where the equipment will be taken. After having lost the paddlers boat for about 48hrs, us thinking the coast guard had it, and the coast guard thinking we had it, it was finally reunited with its owner by a helpful local. We should have communicated clearly with the rescue vessel about where to leave the boat and equipment.

So I am glad to report the paddler was successfully taken to hospital, without further complication. The group did a terrific job in assisting as much as possible, and making for a fluid and seamless rescue. There were some great lessons I have taken from the experience, and everybody's comfort levels were pushed, especially mine!

And, it turns out Terry, Helmut and Keith had not conspired to test me out... At least, that's what they claim!

Ron Morris





Flinders AAR continued



Photos : Ben Flora





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