

RNLI Rescue exercise with the PPCA - 07/06/08

The club had arranged to carry out an on water exercise with the RNLI Plymouth lifeboats, this is a short account of the event. 19 paddlers in 18 boats, one open boat, one balloon kayak, a couple of seaboats, and the rest in GP boats paddled around to Jennycliff bay to rendezvous with the lifeboat at 10:45.

In the distance we could see the Plymouth lifeboat and the smaller inshore lifeboat (AIB) coming towards us. There was no dedicated plan as such for the day, so we waited for the lifeboat to turn up. After meeting with the AIB and being provided with one of their VHF radios we chatted about what exercise scenarios to carry out. They left it very much up to us, so we decided to start off with something simple using the open boat. Malcolm volunteered to have a heart attack, which left Linda alone in the canoe to look after him. After alerting the AIB that we had an injured paddler, they sped in alongside the canoe and carried out a delicate transfer of the casualty. Once safely in the inflatable Malcolm and Linda were taken over to the larger lifeboat for onward transfer to hospital ashore (for exercise). The lifeboat disappeared into the distance, last seen heading towards the breakwater.



The lifeboat coxswain was keen to keep the exercise moving along so we went straight into the next scenario. This would involve 4 paddlers capsized and swimming detached from their boats in the water, no major medical problems but starting to show signs of hypothermia. The incident was radioed in and the AIB sped in alongside the swimmers and started pulling them out of the water one at a time. The lifeboat crew's method of retrieving someone from the water is for the paddler in the water to lean back and put their feet into the inflatable then be grabbed by the ba / arms / body and the person pulled into the boat. After all the paddlers were safely in the inflatable they went off to try and retrieve the boats and paddles which had dispersed all over Jennycliff bay.

The lifeboat coxswain again requested that we keep the flow of the exercise going so we went straight into the final scenario, a mass all in rescue involving 12 paddlers capsized and detached from their boats with one having a dislocated shoulder (lucky me). The incident was called in to the AIB who again sped alongside the swimmers. The casualty was pulled in first followed by all the others in quick succession helped this time by the side of the inflatable being deflated making it easier to pull swimmers in. We then met up with the main lifeboat and transferred onboard, again for transfer

to hospital ashore. Much to the excitement of all the paddlers the coxswain took us for a high speed transit out of the sound around the breakwater and back in towards the beach at Jennycliff. During which time we had the chance to look around the lifeboat and chat with the crew. Unfortunately we had to leave some paddlers to marshal the 12 boats to safety on the beach so they missed out on this opportunity (sorry). We transferred back onto the AIB which then took us as close as possible to the beach followed by a short wade / swim to shore.



The exercise was now finished, time had flown by and lunch was beckoning. As we were wet and cooling rapidly we were reunited with our boats and paddled off for a short distance to warm up then landed on a suitable beach for lunch. Time for a warming coffee and birthday buns followed by birthday cake (thanks Mary for a fantastic carrot cake).

Many thanks to the lifeboat coxswain and the crews of both lifeboats for taking the time out to participate in the exercise. It was great to get a close look at and interact with the RNLI to see how they would carry out rescues with kayakers. The club certainly learnt a lot from the exercise as I'm sure the lifeboat crew did as well.

Everyone from the club that took part thoroughly enjoyed the day and hopefully it is something that the club can repeat and arrange again.

As for it happening on my 50th birthday what a coincidence and a brilliant way to start it off, balloons, cake, good company, a swim in the sound, lots of photos and a ride on a lifeboat.

Many thanks to John Dow for arranging the participation of the lifeboat and Andy Smith for leading us on the day. Finally many thanks to the club members who paddled, and what a cross section we had, ranging from Joe the youngest (11) to Tom the elder statesman at (74). All who participated showed a willingness to jump out of their boats with a smile on their faces and made the day such a success.

Terry C