

PPCA - Isles of Scilly camp 2007

I have been asked to put together a few words about the recent PPCA camp to the Isles of Scilly. This years camp ran for 2 weeks from the end of July to early August, with campers staying for one or both weeks. I opted for the all inclusive fully escorted 2nd week option. Therefore this article will be biased towards what happened during that week. I am reliably informed that the programme of events is virtually the same for both weeks.

As with any holiday the trip starts with the detailed planning and packing. The planning was excellent, Joy had sent me lots of detailed information about the holiday. However being a 'Scilly' virgin I really did not know what or how much stuff to bring, so I settled on 2 bags (one full of paddling gear the other non paddling). On arrival at Penzance the luggage was loaded into the PPCA container. I watched what other people were loading, it became apparent that I was travelling light. I did wonder if we were providing disaster relief to the islands as huge quantities of food/luggage/chairs/cool boxes were loaded, no just experienced PPCA Scilly campers who liked to take a few home comforts with them.

The journey to the islands takes 2 hours 40minutes onboard the good ship Scillonian, which has been plying the route for a number of years. A nice flat calm uneventful crossing, although the slight rolling of the ship did have an effect on some of the passengers.

On arrival at St Mary's (the capital village of the islands) we are met by the happy, smiling, chilled out Joy (who had already been there for a week). Joy took charge of us and directed us to the campsite. The PPCA travellers split into groups and made tracks, our group via the nearest pub. What struck me was how quickly the other crowds who disembarked from the ship disappeared, and the walk to the campsite was lovely along deserted flower lined lanes, very little traffic (human or motorised).



The first afternoon is used as personal orientation to enable you to get used to the layout and facilities of the site and surrounding area. The Pelistry camp is set in fields high on a hill over looking the beautiful bay and various other islands. The site is well established with onsite toilets, kitchen tent, dining tent and the adjoining farm with fridge freezers, electric shower (Ben's favourite place). Once unpacked (it didn't take me long) time for a communal evening meal (cooked courtesy of Verity). Cooking arrangements are either DIY or sort things out and do a communal cook up.

After the meal we had a detailed joining brief covering all aspects of camp life, including toilet cleaning duty. (campers on the first week had fun with the toilet plumbing and associated discharge).

The evenings generally follow a well proven format. Either go into St Mary's and eat, drink beer/wine etc or stay at the campsite and eat, drink beer/wine etc.

The main purpose of my holiday to the Islands was to paddle as much as I could. I should point out that the camp is not the exclusive domain of paddlers. Various family groups were also using the facility, the islands are a fantastic place to take a family. Lots of open space, quiet beaches and very little traffic. The camp soon gelled together, with the new 2nd weekers being accepted and the sounds of laughter & joviality resonating around the camp.

The first paddling day dawned, and I mean dawn. Not helped by strange noises (dwarf shrews under the tent boards) and the excitement of getting out on the water. The early mornings followed much the same routine, cup of tea, bowl of cereal, cup of tea, toast, wash, cup of tea, make lunch time sandwiches (which for myself Neville and Sharon consisted of cheese & pickle every day for the whole week). Then Ken (our paddling leader and fountain of knowledge all things Scilly) would arrive, brief us on where we would be going and we would be off down the lane to the white sandy beach to launch our boats.

I won't bore you with detailed descriptions of each paddling trip we undertook just elaborate on some of the more memorable moments.

The Isles of Scilly are made up of an archipelago of islands varying in size, all of which we either went around, over or through at some time. The way they are arranged in a rough circle means that sheltered safe paddling can be had if you stay within the centre. All of the islands have their own characteristics and distinct feeling. We would paddle off to an island, land on a pristine white sandy beach, enjoy a walk to a high point (or café selling tea and cakes). The island cafes do some great cream teas (Joy even has a scoring system for the cream teas).



One of the first paddles was to the eastern isles, usually frequented by colonies of seals. Impressive creatures to observe at close quarters, they bask on the rocks and when in the water pop their heads up to watch you. I was so amazed by them, I had to jump out of my kayak and experience swimming with them. Wearing only a T shirt

and shorts, the waters around the islands are a lot colder than mainland UK (No wonder no one else joined me).



There is a lot of paddling between the narrow gaps which separate some of the islands. Depending on the weather the sea can be either flat calm or rise and fall with the ocean swell. One of the gaps on the north of Bryher leads into an area called Hell bay, which was living up to its name, change of mind and a quick retreat back to the other side (one of Helga's favourite moments!). Later in the week we transited Hell bay in flat calm conditions.



One of the paddling highlights is the paddle out to the Bishop rock lighthouse, a serious open water paddle, involving a 3 hour paddle out into the exposed ocean and return, perfect timing using the tidal flow and a suitable weather window are required. The paddlers on the first week experienced this and made it to the lighthouse and undertook the PPCA ceremony of 'rock and rolling'. The paddlers on the 2nd week experienced something completely different, a late afternoon start, wind from the wrong direction and a large swell. After reaching some of the out lying islands our leader gave us the news that we could probably get to the lighthouse but we would probably not make it back. With long faces we then turned and headed home around

a headland into some very interesting sea conditions (one of Neville's favourite moments).

Another paddle was to the island of Tresco. The group split up, some exploring the sub tropical island others paddling over to Bryher. Martin & Denise had decided to take the look around Tresco option and experience a chilling swim in a cave called Pipers Hole. Later in the afternoon that well known PPCA romantic Martin went down on his best canoeing knee and proposed to Denise (congratulations).

The week's holiday soon came to an end and the chore of packing up and travelling home was upon us. A thoroughly lovely relaxing holiday spent with great company. The islands are unique, so peaceful and quiet with stunning scenery. The late evening skies are impressive, with very little light pollution we were witness to a nightly display of shooting stars.

Terry C