



PPCA Newsletter September 2020

Introduction

Welcome to September's Newsletter. A fairly quiet month this time with no new Covid news (possibly a good thing). For your entertainment, Clive counts to fifty and I go on about open boating. Again.

Editorial

Until Clive kindly pointed it out to me, I had no idea that this was my fiftieth Newsletter as editor. It hardly feels any time since Tracy (our then chair) ~~told~~ asked me to edit the Newsletter. I took it on with some scepticism as I wasn't convinced that the Newsletter had a place in the world of Facebook. I still wonder about that on some Saturday mornings when I stare at a blank screen and wonder what on earth I'm going to fill this month's edition with but something generally arrives in the nick of time to satisfy the loyal readership.

I should point out that although 50 seems like a huge number of Newsletters to have edited, let alone to have read, it's barely half Clive's total of 96, a feat of endurance that has rarely, if ever, been equalled.

Incidentally, while I always read every article before I publish it, I gave up on Clive's at point 10. I can't believe point 11 was very interesting.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor

Next Committee Meeting

Please forward any items you would like considered at the next committee meeting to secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk. They will go to the secretary.

Next Edition

There is no specific deadline as such for contributions but please bear in mind my general sloth and indolence and let me have anything time-sensitive well in advance.

Contributions

Please send any contributions to newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk

Acknowledgements

The cover photographs are from Helga, Paula, Joy, Terry and Kevin.

Features

Fifty Shades of Blue by Clive Ashford

It is probably a little-known fact that this edition of the (most excellent) PPCA newsletter is the 50th edition that editor Ivor has produced. I thought I'd celebrate such an august milestone by giving you 50 little paddling milestones of my own, some of which you may recognise from your own experiences. The blue bit in the title refers to the colour that we associate with water and yes gentle readers, I do appreciate that having to explain that probably indicates a poor choice of title.

- 1) Your beginners course. Remember that? Round and round in circles you went trying to control a boat that seemed to have a mind of its own. You couldn't help but marvel at your coaches who seemed to effortlessly make their craft go exactly where they wanted.
- 2) Your first Tuesday evening. Hopefully someone said "Hello" to you and made you feel welcome. If that someone was me then allow me to apologise for your subsequent trauma.
- 3) A nice warm, balmy Tuesday evening that you weren't allowed to appreciate because your mean and cruel coach insisted on you performing evermore outlandish and wet exercises.
- 4) A manky, wet Tuesday evening spent miserably shivering in less than perfect clothing whilst your coach swanned around toasty warm in the latest gear.
- 5) After a few weeks struggling to master your craft on a Tuesday evening someone joins your group fresh off a beginner's course. You watch their impression of a spinning top and suddenly realise how much progress you have made. Tact and diplomacy stop you from actually laughing out loud but you do allow yourself to smirk and to feel a little smug.
- 6) Your first accidental capsiz. A scary milestone in your paddling career but it does make you realise that your coaches do actually care about you, and that worse things do happen at sea.
- 7) Giving advice to a less experienced paddler. You have just taken your first step towards becoming a coach.
- 8) Someone that you consider to be a paddling god needs rescuing. It dawns on you that there are no paddling gods and that we are all between swims.
- 9) Learning that the craft that you had called a canoe all your life is actually a kayak but that everyone, including British Canoeing (BC), our sport's governing body, quite happily ignores this fact.
- 10) Getting into a canoe and finding out that BC insists on calling this craft an open boat.
- 11) Realising that canoeing is just as hard as kayaking but that the rewards and enjoyment are exactly the same. (This is bound to elicit a reaction from editor Ivor, I put it in just to see if he reads what he publishes.)
- 12) You wonder why our sport's governing body calls itself "British Canoeing" but studiously avoids actually describing anything they govern as canoeing.
- 13) You wonder if our governing body, BC, are fit for purpose, then you visit their website and see the answer laid out before you as clear as day.
- 14) Your first Saturday paddle. How far? You must be joking!
- 15) Your first visit to Drakes Island. You have stood on the Hoe many times looking across the water at this historical site and now you are standing on the beach by the pier looking across at the Hoe. Time was when the gate onto the island wasn't locked and you could explore the buildings and tunnels and see the old cannon that still grace the top of the island.
- 16) You hear rumours that certain club members have camped on Drakes Island. This would be illegal and so these rumours couldn't possibly be true, could they.
- 17) Once you have visited Drakes Island someone will tell you that this is the core of a long extinct volcano. This is true.

- 18) Someone will tell you of a long-lost tunnel that connects Drakes Island to the mainland. There is a deep trench (a drowned gorge) that runs between Drakes Island and the Hoe. The depth of water here is 39 metres, so in all probability rumours of a tunnel that connects the island with the mainland are firmly based in folklore and are a total stranger to anything that resembles a fact. Please feel free to prove me wrong.
- 19) Paddling between Jennycliffe and Bovisand, seeing the folded rock formations and realising just how powerful geology can be.
- 20) Blissful days on oily calm water.
- 21) Hairy moments on water that is anything but oily calm. Thankfully we are all different, which means that someone's hairy moment is another person's pleasant day out. How much you enjoy certain conditions depends on your levels of competency and threshold of fear.
- 22) You learn that there is no shame in deciding that conditions on a given day don't match your skillset and that sitting in the café/pub/home is your best option for your continued enjoyment of our sport. You also learn that trying to persuade a nervous paddler to go where they don't want to go is almost always a mistake.
- 23) Paddling from the sheds at Phoenix Wharf. If you remember this you are showing your age.
- 24) PPCA or Saints? Ditto re showing your age.
- 25) Whilst we are talking about showing our age you may well have heard about seal launching off the diving boards on the Hoe. I have no doubt that this activity took place but I don't think it was such a regular occurrence as some of our older members would have us believe.
- 26) Older members will also remember paddling around the Sound before South West Water's Clean Sweep project which, according to their website, has closed 250 raw sewage outfalls around our regions coast. (Devon and Cornwall.) Paddling is now a far safer and more pleasant activity.
- 27) Realising that a lot of wildlife doesn't see a kayak or a canoe as a threat, so getting close is fairly common.
- 28) Seeing your first seal. Seals are not un-common in the Sound and are quite often spotted around Drakes Island and in between Jennycliffe and Bovisand Harbour.
- 29) Once you have seen a seal you will almost immediately see a number of seal buoys. A seal buoy is a buoy that bobs up and down and gets confused for a seal and leads to much disappointment.
- 30) Seeing your first porpoise/dolphin. Whilst these animals are rare in the Sound we do see them from time to time. Guaranteed to put a smile on any paddlers face it is always a privilege to see these creatures.
- 31) Dolphin buoy/log. Much like the seal buoy mentioned earlier it won't be long before you are annoyed by a dolphin buoy or log.
- 32) Seeing your first basking shark. Much the same as seeing dolphins but not quite so smile inducing. We all know that basking sharks eat nothing larger than plankton but it's still a bit un-nerving seeing a 10-metre-long fish heading towards you with a large dorsal fin scything through the water.
- 33) Moon, Compass, Lions Mane, Barrel, Blue and Mauve stinger are all types of jellyfish found in our waters. The thing with jellyfish is that they don't move very fast so seeing them is relatively easy. The same applies to photographing them but unlike taking photos of our surface wildlife there is no scenery associated with jellyfish photos. Sometimes a paddle turns into a jellyfish safari. A jellyfish safari doesn't travel very far nor very fast, and may become a cure for insomnia for the less than enthusiastic participant. Falling asleep whilst sitting upright in a top-heavy kayak can be hazardous to health and explains why so many of us like to be able to roll.
- 34) While all our native jellyfish are more or less harmless, (you'd want to avoid being stung by a Lions Mane or a Purple stinger) we do from time to time get Portuguese Man O' War visiting our shores. A sting from one of these beasts is very painful and in extreme cases can be fatal. Some of you will be rolling your eyes in a smug and pedantic manner pointing out that Portuguese Man O' War aren't actually jellyfish. I will point out in an equally smug and pedantic manner that I didn't actually say that they are.

- 35) Imagine the scene. You were gently drifting towards what you thought was a basking shark only to discover that this 10-metre long beastie wasn't a basking shark at all. Joy and I never did find out what it was, but we were more than a little scared.
- 36) Arriving at a distant shore just as the sun burns off a thick sea mist to see 2 basking sharks. You drift towards them, camera in hand waiting for that perfect shot, when you spy a pair of sea eagles soaring around the adjacent cliffs. Where to look? what to photograph? Joy was very annoyed at just how unfair this paddling life can be.
- 37) Purchasing Terry Calcott's book "Plymouth Sound, View from a Kayak." A pocket sized guide book full of facts that will be of interest to any water user in Plymouth Sound.
- 38) Purchasing Terry's other titles, "Plym Estuary," "Wembury Coast" and "Yealm Estuary." If nothing else you will see photographs of your fellow club members looking a little younger than their present forms! (And no, I am not on commission.)
- 39) Purchasing either/both of Clive's little collections of paddling anecdotes entitled "Based on Fact" and "Based on Fact Too". There is a smile on every page so you owe it to your face muscles to own copies. (If your face finds that you don't share my sense of humour then you may like to know that these books make the perfect Christmas gift for someone that you don't like.)
- 40) Stories. Some of our experienced paddlers love to hold fort recounting some of their various paddling experiences. (And writing books about them, did I mention that?) In the dim and distant past some of these stories may have been true(ish), but then again, they may not.
- 41) Realising that whilst Plymouth Sound is a beautiful place there is an awful lot of brilliant paddling to be had outside these confines.
- 42) Your first attempt at rolling, which brought a fresh understanding of the word disorientated.
- 43) Your first attempt at kayak surfing. (Otherwise known as swimming.)
- 44) Your first attempt at white water kayaking/canoeing. (Also otherwise known as swimming.)
- 45) You eventually realise that your attempts at rolling, surfing and white water paddling consistently have the effect of flushing out your sinuses. You may pay a lot of money for this treatment at a spa but you will probably be less than impressed when your nose empties itself at 3am.
- 46) After negotiating a steep learning curve you become reasonably proficient at rolling, surfing and white water paddling. Your happy muscles will now be subject to a lot of exercise which is inversely proportional to the activity of your swimming muscles.
- 47) You acquire a whole new vocabulary. Words like eddy, break-in, break-out, stopper and standing wave take on a whole new meaning. You will learn the dark art of the shuttle but probably not before you have starred in a key story. (Often more than one.)
- 48) You view bridges in a new light, always looking at the water and trying to spy a line.
- 49) You become a coach or serve on the committee for a while. The club doesn't just happen, it's our hard-working committee and coaches that make it happen, and you can be part of this.
- 50) Writing your first newsletter contribution. I know most of you haven't done this yet but when you do you will have a nice warm feeling that comes from contributing to the club annals, and you don't need to worry that your literacy skills aren't very good because hardly anyone will read your efforts anyway.

Good paddling

Clive A

The Grand Western Canal by The Editor

The Grand Western Canal, or Tiverton Canal as it's generally known, originally ran from Taunton to Tiverton carrying limestone among other things. These days a part of it is operated by Devon County Council as a Country Park and is used by watercraft of all sorts as well as by cyclists and walkers along the towpath. Needless to say, it's best seen from the perspective of an open boat and we paddled the section from Sampford Peverell to the basin in Tiverton and back, a distance of about 15 miles – about 5 hours of not particularly difficult paddling in a tandem boat.

A permit is required to paddle the canal, even for BC members, costing £5 for a day's paddling. As this goes to help with the upkeep of the canal, we didn't begrudge it particularly since, if you buy it in the Sampford Peverell Spar shop, you also get the combination to the lock on a field where you can leave your car. The Sampford Peverell Spar shop, incidentally, gets two out of a possible five stars on Trip Advisor, largely due to the cheery and welcoming owner. Having encountered this person, I can only conclude that someone was feeling very generous the day they awarded the second star.

The launching point didn't bode particularly well for the trip being under a concrete bridge carrying a dual carriageway but within minutes we were in glorious open countryside on a fairly narrow canal that could easily be mistaken for a river with reeds on the banks and fish jumping in the sun. Having paddled the Exeter Ship Canal the previous day and having spent much of the trip battling through weed we had expected a similar experience here. Remarkably the water was crystal clear with no weed anywhere and shoals of fish visible in the water. We even saw a couple of kingfishers. We had been warned about a particularly vicious swan who guarded one of the bridges but, probably because we were well out of nesting season, he didn't materialise.

The canal is crossed regularly by red-brick bridges which made for stunning reflections. Only one bridge caused any issues – the modern footbridge at the Tiverton Road Bridge car park (also a useful launching place). This footbridge is, frankly, unnecessarily low for canoeists. The best way to get under it is to get up a head of steam, head straight for it and duck at the last minute using your momentum to get under it. In retrospect, I should probably have mentioned to Tracy that this was the plan and so avoided the subsequent recriminations.

There were very few other watercraft about, Covid having put paid to the horse drawn barges and much of the hire traffic. There were, however, quite a few kneel down paddleboards (KDPs). A couple of KDP users were seen to be recklessly flouting the rules of their craft by attempting to stand up on their boards. Thankfully these actions were confined to a lunatic fringe and lasted only a few seconds.

Everyone we met was remarkably friendly with the exception of a couple of fishermen who were clearly compensating for something by having rods that were virtually the width of the canal. Rather than move their rods they glared at us as we manoeuvred through the narrow stretch of water they deigned to leave us.

We got to the canal basin in Tiverton for lunch – even the stretch through the town was quite scenic. It's worth noting that Covid has also put paid to the café at the basin so a packed lunch is currently required. It's only when you go down the steps at the end of the basin to find the toilets that you realise what an undertaking the basin is. It's a huge embankment with a number of arches underneath which, on closer inspection, proved to be lime kilns originally used for burning the limestone brought by the canal.

On casting off we were treated to the beautiful sight of a family of swans, two adults and four full grown cygnets swimming towards us, filling the width of the canal. Unfortunately, they chose this moment to take off. Anyone familiar with swans will know that they require about 100m of strenuous flapping at water level before they can achieve take off. This put us right in the middle of their runway. Fortunately the swans realised that they weren't going to make it at about the same time that we did and took evasive action. Equally fortunately both parties moved to their respective lefts so a collision was averted. Tracy was in the front of the boat acting as a human shield so I would probably have been OK but I was a bit concerned for the boat. For some reason, Tracy neglected to photograph this event.

The journey back was relatively uneventful but was enlivened by the arrival of a kayaking club from a nearby public school who were trying out their racing kayaks and exclaiming loudly about how unstable they were. There is a certain type of public school voice that carries particularly well over water but fortunately they were soon well ahead of us.

By the time we got back to Sampford Peverell we were both surprised to find that our shoulders knew we had been for a paddle despite the fact that there were no tides or currents to battle against. By the same token, however, there were no tides or currents to help us so it was five hours of constant paddling with no variation.

This was one of the most beautiful paddles we've ever done, as the photographs on the next page hopefully show. As the slipway is only just off junction 27 of the M5, it doesn't take any longer to get to than the Exeter canal. For the next few weeks as the trees get their autumn colours it will be stunning. Give it a try.



Caption Competition

I was overwhelmed by the flood of entry for this month's competition. The winner is a Mr C. Ashford of Plymouth. Congratulations, Mr Ashford. A year's free subscription to the Newsletter is winging its way to your door.

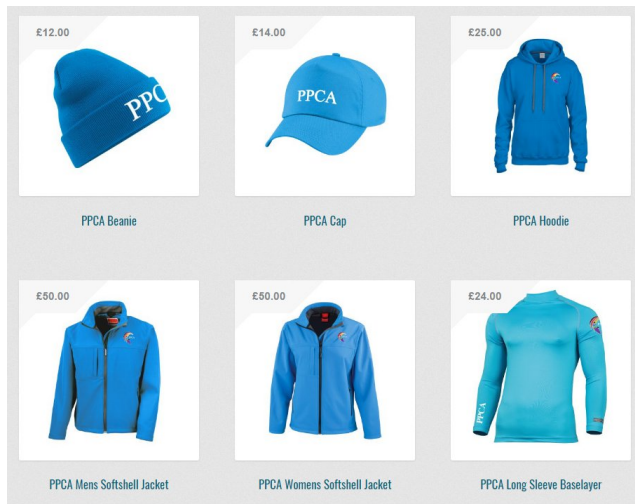
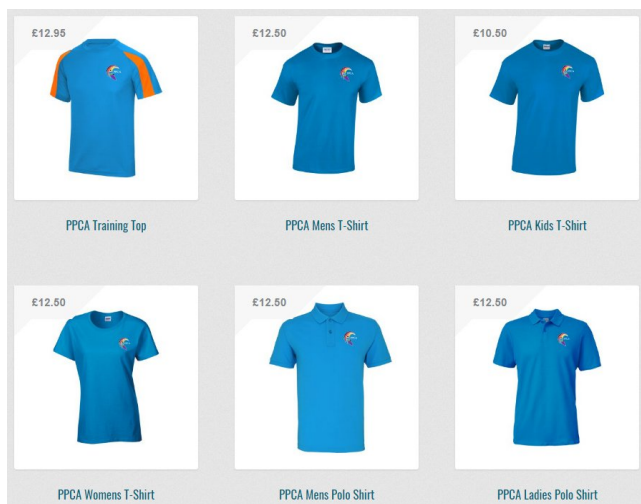


Exchange and Mart

PPCA Club Clothing by Jackie Perry, Publicity Officer

A full range of customised kit in either blue or black is available to order direct from Tailored Branding via the link below

<https://hsclothing.co.uk/ppca-3/>



Discount Available at Millets, 38/40 New George St, Plymouth PL1 1RW

One of our members works in the Millets store (Big 'Thank you' to Lee McKenzie!) on New George Street, Plymouth and has negotiated with his Manager a great discount of 15% on production of your PPCA club membership card. Usual T's & C's apply, e.g. goods already discounted/sales items might be excluded.

Discount Available at Kayaks and Paddles

Kayaks and paddles offer discount to local kayak and canoe clubs. The PPCA and Tamar Canoe club can get a discount up to 15%. This is an offer not a right for the person that is making a purchase, so please do not go upsetting Kayaks and Paddles employees as this discount might be taken away.



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