



# PPCA Newsletter November 2022



## Introduction

Welcome to November's Newsletter. This month all the sea kayakers who have been on the edge of their seats for weeks can relax - we have the second part of Adam's article on skegs. Elsewhere, Clive pays tribute to Adam, Terry encounters birds and blocks and has a date for our diaries.

## Editorial

Terry's piece on the wavebreaker blocks on the breakwater ties in nicely with a trip we made (granddaughter in tow) to The Box this week where we saw a video on how the breakwater was built. It really is an amazing structure, especially when you consider when it was built. One minor point that Terry didn't include (or may be saving for a future snippet, in which case I apologise) is that if you paddle up river from Mountbatten (anathema to some of us, I know) on the Oreston bank, you pass the plant where these blocks are made and you can paddle round them while they are being sea-tested. This makes you appreciate their scale even more.

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](mailto: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](mailto:newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

As ever, I have plundered Facebook for the cover photos - my thanks to all concerned.

Club Christmas Paddle, Saturday 17th December by Terry Calcott

It has been a few years since we have managed to have a club Xmas paddle. Brush off those hats and Santa costumes, and come join your fellow club members for a paddle feast and make merry. The paddle venue will probably start and finish from Mount Batten, but if a good weather window occurs it may be away from MB. The minimum dress requirement for this paddle (in addition to your normal paddling and safety gear) is a festive hat. The preferred costume is fancy dress above the spraydeck. We will have a communal picnic of festive fayre, out in the fresh air. I will be compiling a list of sweet or savoury nearer the time.

Please let me know if you are intending coming along by email [terryc1@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:terryc1@blueyonder.co.uk) or a post on the PPCA forum or PPCA Facebook page (I will start these posts nearer the date).





## Adam Coulson by Clive Ashford

Congratulations to Adam Coulson on gaining his British Canoeing Sea Kayak Leader award. I have had a quick look at the British Canoeing (BC) website so that I could inform you what this qualification means, but my limited patience with the BC website has left me without the information that I was looking for. Instead let me tell you that it has taken a lot of time and effort on Adam's part to achieve this award. Adam's progress was more than a little hampered by his ongoing shoulder injury which makes his achievement all the more notable. Oh, and Adam was able to negotiate his way around the BC website so you could always ask him what this award means.

Most of you will remember Bob Grose. Bob had achieved the same award before he passed away and Adam wanted to go down the same route partly in Bob's memory and partly to be able to put something back into the club. (As if spending a few years as membership secretary and now club president isn't enough!)

Whilst offering my heartfelt congratulations to Adam I hope his example inspires other budding sea kayakers out there to follow the same route, but without the shoulder injury!





## Features

### Plymouth Sound Snippets #9, Breakwater Wavebreaker Blocks by Terry Calcott

This snippet carries on with the theme of the breakwater. On club paddles we often paddle outside the breakwater past the large concrete blocks which lay all along the breakwater.

These concrete blocks are known as wavebreaker blocks and have been laid since the 1870s. They are used to provide some protection to the breakwater foundation and especially stop undermining by wave action.



Aerial View of Wavebreaker Blocks (Stephen Johnson)

The standard weight is 100 tonnes. They are cast in moulds on the shore at Oreston. Then shipped out to the breakwater in a special lifting barge where the block is dropped into position. Each block in recent years has a date stamp on it. Next time you are paddling outside the breakwater have a look at the various years stamped on the blocks.



100t Block on top of the Breakwater



Concrete Wavebreaker Blocks (Left)

Over the years many different shapes and weights of wavebreaker block have been tried. The actual number laid each year has also varied but since the 1950s it has been between 6 to 12 blocks each year.



Newly Laid Blocks with Orientation Poles Intact

The wavebreaker blocks are in constant movement, wave and storms shift them and eventually they erode and break into smaller blocks. Some even get washed over the top of the breakwater in severe storms.

## Skeg Cable Repair by Adam Coulson

I mentioned in an article in the September edition that I would write about skeg cable replacement. The skeg is one of the only mechanical devices with moving parts on a sea kayak and as such is one that regularly goes wrong.

If the paddler gets frustrated with a jammed skeg there is a temptation to try and force it to go down with the slider and the end result of this is often a kinked skeg cable. This may still work but ultimately the device becomes rather unreliable and will refuse to deploy. It is not possible to repair a kinked cable and if you remove the cable in an attempt to do it is impossible to replace it due to the frayed ends. You may be able to detect a degree of personal experience and frustration in the previous short statement!

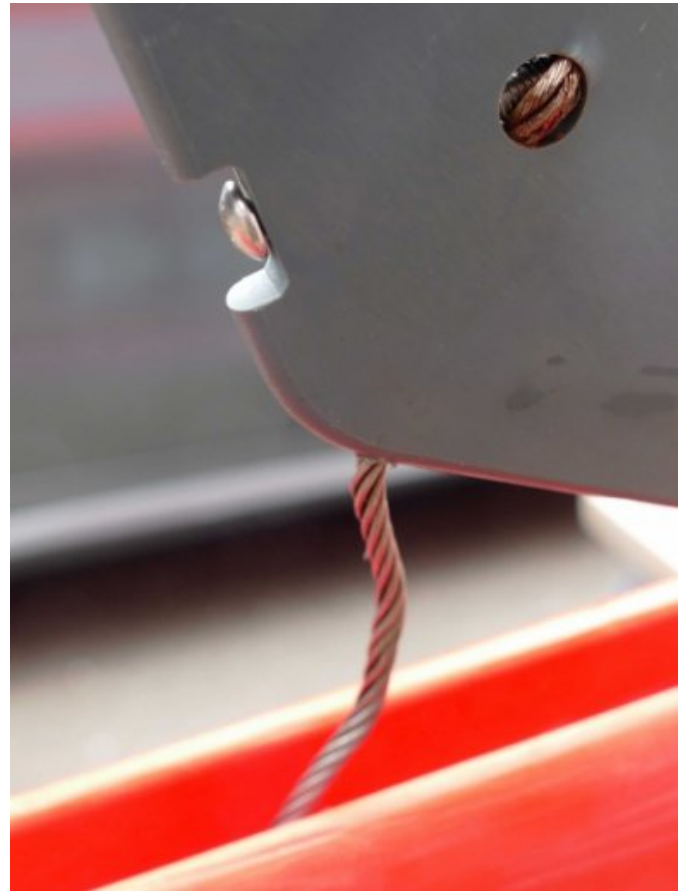


Good Luck Getting That Back Through 2.5mm of Tube!

Fortunately a replacement cable needn't cost a lot. Indeed about £7 spent at a yacht rigging shop will get you 3m of 3mm 7 \* 19 Hamma X-Strand that will do the job perfectly and at less than half the cost of an "approved kayak part". The difficult bit is to prevent the fresh cable end from fraying rendering it impossible to thread through the plastic guide in which it runs.



New Epoxy Treated End to Cable. Any Stray Wires Can Be Filed Off.



The Skeg End of Old Cable. Spot the Kink



The secret is to dip the end in epoxy glue (Araldite or similar) and leave to set. If you get a drip this can simply be filed off to make beautifully smooth ends that will thread easily, especially with a bit of furniture polish on the cable. It is then a fairly simple job to thread through various seals on skeg box and bulkheads.



The new cable can then be clamped into the skeg at one end and the control slider at the other, having checked the range of adjustment achieved with the slider. Excess cable can then be cut off and hey presto, a silky smooth working skeg once more!



New Cable Installed and Marked for Cutting at the Slider End.

## Bass Rock by Terry Calcott

Bass Rock is situated east of Edinburgh on the southern fringe of the outer Firth of Forth. Home to the largest rock colony of Northern Gannets in the world. Known as 'one of the wildlife wonders of the world' according to David Attenborough.

We said a fond farewell to our amazing hosts from the west coast of Scotland, Phil and Jean. We were going to miss their friendship, hospitality, meals and huge single malt whisky collection! Our original holiday plan was to drive from their house across the Scottish borders to the Northumberland coast for the second part of our holiday. However, a discussion on the Sunday evening had planted the seed of heading over to the east coast and a paddle out to Bass Rock.

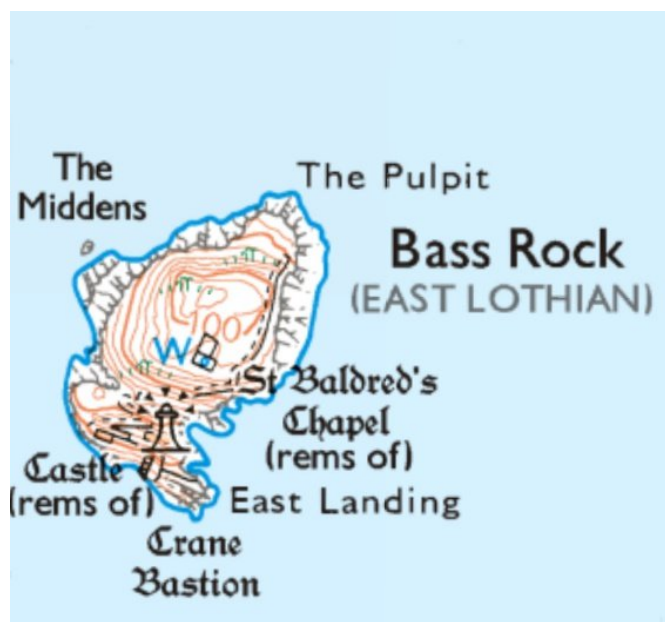
Having lived near Edinburgh many years ago I was familiar with Bass Rock, its location and also its reputation of being a wildlife haven. The other paddlers were also all familiar with Bass Rock and were as keen as me to make a detour to do the paddle.

The weather driving over from the west coast was drizzle and low cloud. But the forecast was for a window of dryer weather in the east. Sure enough as we passed Edinburgh the clouds lifted, and the rain stopped. We drove through some exclusive and expensive looking golfing country following the scenic coast road to North Berwick. A charming seaside town with a huge volcanic peak called The Law, towering over the town. I had found a car park on Google Earth



The Bass Rock is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, due to its gannet colony. But is also an important habitat for numerous other sea birds including Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins. The scientific name for the Northern Gannet is *Morus Bassanus*, derived from the name Bass Rock.

North Berwick is the nearest launch spot for the outlying islands of which Bass Rock is the largest. Around 3 miles from the launch, not a long paddle. Once at the water's edge we had a quick briefing about the trip. Unlike our recent paddle to Ailsa Craig we could actually see Bass Rock from the beach.



to the east of North Berwick which looked ideal as a launch point. As with much of Scotland the free car park was being fully utilised by a few camper vans, which had parked length ways to maximize their view. Undaunted we squeezed in next to the short steps down to the beach.

Bass Rock is approximately 1 mile offshore, and 3 miles northeast of North Berwick. It is a steep-sided 107m high volcanic plug of phonolitic trachyte rock of the Lower Carboniferous period.



Launch Spot at North Berwick



We had arrived a little later than I had hoped and were now nearing slack water out at Bass Rock, so a quick paddle out was needed before the tidal stream picked up too much. We were fortunate that the wind was relatively light and the sea state quite calm. Once around the first headland Bass Rock came into view. We paddled a direct bearing as any tide would be on our nose. Bass Rock resembles a white iceberg floating in the Firth of Forth, due to the rock being smothered in a myriad of bird droppings.



Gannets Overhead

Before long the noise increased as did our adrenaline levels with the sheer numbers of Gannets. The nearer to Bass Rock we got it appeared to be one mass of Gannets occupying every square inch of available space.



As we paddled close in under the cliffs the Gannets were totally oblivious to our presence. It was also a chance to have a closer look at the lighthouse. Most sea kayakers get excited at seeing a new lighthouse. This one was built in 1902 by David Stevenson one of the famous family of engineers. At 20 metres high it sits quite low on the rock.



Bass Rock

It didn't take long before the first Gannets came over to check us out with some inquisitive low fly pasts. As we paddled closer the grey sky started to fill with numerous birds circling overhead. Although none were diving and feeding, which made it a bit more comfortable for us. Compared to the numbers of Gannets on our recent trip to Ailsa Craig this was on another scale with many thousands of birds now filling the sky.



Bass Rock

At regular intervals low flying birds whizzed past in every direction either launching or landing. I can now understand why Sir David Attenborough called Bass Rock such a wildlife spectacle.

We could have stayed for hours but it was evident the tide had turned as we passed the floats of numerous crab pots straining under the flow. Although the guidebook says on springs the tidal stream is less than 1 knot, it picks up speed around the rock and creates areas of turbulent water. We wanted to paddle around the island and explore the tunnel which cuts through the island on a low tide. Heading anticlockwise, we rounded into the next bay it was evident the sea state had increased. In the distance, there was an area of



Bass Rock Lighthouse

quite lumpy water just where we wanted to go. Being unfamiliar with the area and not knowing what was hidden from view we erred on the side of caution and retraced our paddle track back to the lighthouse. Our stomachs were telling us it was definitely time to make our way to the mainland and find a lunch spot. We aimed for historic Tantallon Castle sat high on the cliffs only 1 mile from Bass Rock.



Tantallon Castle

The tidal stream was pushing us towards North Berwick, so a ferry glide was needed to keep us on track. We could see that the beach below the castle was covered in a rocky reef as it was nearing low water, so we went with the flow and found a nice sandy beach for lunch a short distance further down the coast.

The Lions Mane jellyfish were abundant again but were at a much deeper depth, probably due to the cloudy skies. The paddle back was close to the shore, and we participated in a bit of rock hopping back to North Berwick and landing back at our earlier launch spot.



Looking Back to Bass Rock

As much as we wanted to stay and explore more of the area, its coast and the many islands, it was getting late. We still had a drive down the A1 to the Youth Hostel at Wooler in Northumberland for the next part of our holiday.

Everyone was smiling again after another outstanding sea kayaking paddle to see such a wonderful wildlife spectacle. It was well worth the detour. Thanks again to my paddling companions on the trip out to Bass Rock, Mark, Mary and Meryll.



Lunch Spot with Bass Rock in the Distance



## Exchange and Mart

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 10%. 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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