



PPCA Newsletter January 2023

Introduction

Welcome to January's Newsletter. As befits a New Year, there is an element of looking back this month as Terry talks about the history of the Club Awards and Clive resurrects some "beloved" characters from Newsletters past.

Editorial

I have to start the New Year with an apology. Terry's piece on the Club Awards should have been in December's edition but got missed. I assign no blame for this but a process of transformational change has been instigated in the middle management levels of the editorial team and the relevant staff have been invited to reflect on their learning outcomes.

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

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

Features

Plymouth Sound Snippets #11, The Breakwater Beacon by Terry Calcott

The first snippet of 2023 is a short one to whet your appetite for the snippets to follow this coming year. This one carries on the theme of the breakwater and gives a few facts about the breakwater beacon.

During the construction of the breakwater the original plan was to build a lighthouse at the eastern end of the breakwater like the one at the end of the western arm. Due to cost and the eastern entrance into the Sound being less important, the plans were revised. A beacon was built to mark the end of the breakwater, a much cheaper alternative to a lighthouse.



The Breakwater with the Beacon in the Foreground



The Beacon at the Eastern End of the Breakwater

The beacon was built in 1845. The stepped base is 25 feet high and topped by an African Oak pole 17 ft high. On top of which is a wrought iron cage known as the survivor's cage. It is 6 feet in diameter and capable of holding several shipwrecked mariners.



Late 1880s Photo of the Beacon

PPCA Annual Awards - A Short History by Terry Calcott

As the unofficial, unpaid and probably unknown club historian I thought I would share a short article about the PPCA awards. Most sports clubs have their own trophies and hold an annual awards evening. It is a great way of recognising club members and their contributions and achievements during the previous year. Unfortunately, COVID has prevented our club awards being presented over the past few years. Hopefully at the AGM in 2023 the awards presentation will be resurrected.

Some of our club trophies have been named after club members who have sadly passed away while active in the club, they are a great way of remembering them and marking their name.

Although there are very few club records from the early days in the 70s there were a couple of awards presented in the 1980s which are known about.

- The Edna Searle Shield (Enthusiastic paddler) awarded up to 2017.
- The Max Bailey Trophy (Coaching / Leadership).
- The most improved paddler trophy.



During the early 2000s there were numerous trophies awarded, and several new awards were purchased.

- The Ian Goddard Trophy (Achievement).
- The Endeavour Trophy - This award was gifted to the club by the City of Plymouth Amateur Swimming Association.
- The Bob Dyer Trophy (Services to the club).
- PPCA Outstanding Contribution (Glass cup).
- The Paul Soanes Award for Inspiration (Glass cup).
- Leadership award (Glass tablet).
- Edna Searle Shield.



In 2018 the committee revamped the club awards, still keeping 6 separate awards, but changing the names to reflect a cross section of the club activities. They also presented a certificate of achievement to go with each award.

- The White water award.
- The Sea kayak award.
- The Open boating award.
- The Coaches award.
- The Oscars award.
- The Leadership award.



2018 Awards

During 2019 the committee presented just 3 awards.

- Most improved paddler.
- Outstanding contribution award.
- Coaches award.

2020 – no awards presented.

2021 – no awards presented.

2022 – no awards presented.

It Was About Now by Clive Ashford

I'm going to start off with a couple of history lessons, the reason for which will eventually become clear. The history lessons refer to a time when my face had fewer wrinkles, a time when my hair still had a bit of colour to it and a time when I was the editor of the club newsletter. In those days the club newsletter languished under the title of "Wet News" and I always claimed that I produced it using my trusty old John Bull printing set. I see no reason to change that claim now but the children reading this (anyone under the age of 50) may like to google "John Bull printing set." History lesson number 1. Back in the day the club had the services of Old Nosey, our roaming reporter. No-one ever knew the true identity of Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, but he (or she) was a despicable character who liked nothing more than to poke around in the dark recesses of the club to report on any little mishaps that may cause embarrassment to our members. Readers of the modern day, very marvellous, PPCA newsletter will have read Terry Calcott's historical pieces on subjects such as The Bridge and The Breakwater. Terry has taken the time to properly research and authenticate these pieces, so they can be relied upon to be both informative and accurate. By contrast, Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, has a far more tabloid attitude to journalism and would publish stories based on the slightest of rumours. Words like research and authentication are alien concepts in Old Nosey's world.

History lesson number 2. At the same time as Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, was plying his (or her) grubby little trade, the waters around Mount Batten were infested by an evil, malevolent creature called the Mount Batten squid. This demon of the deep took great delight in wrapping its tentacles around an unsuspecting paddlers boat, thus causing the hapless victim to capsize. Needless to say, a visit from the Mount Batten Squid was neither a pleasant, nor a welcome experience. The Mount Batten squid would quite often join us on our Saturday morning excursions around the Sound, but its activities have diminished in recent years.

History lesson over. I will now get on with the story.

The 31 December 2022 was a Saturday but there was no Saturday paddle planned in the PPCA calendar. Being the wonderful chap that I am, I did think about running a rec paddle but the forecast was a bit grim, so I asked Colin, our esteemed leader, if I could run a river trip on that day instead. Colin kindly granted my request and so a post appeared on the club forum advertising a Saturday River trip. This was quite possibly the first club river trip that has ever been planned for a Saturday. The club traditionalists are no doubt writing letters to the Times even as you read this.

The river levels were reasonable so on Friday evening I posted a plan to run the river Walkham with the proviso that I would check levels in the morning before making a final decision. That proviso turned out to be very fortuitous because looking at the river level graphs on Saturday morning didn't make my heart sing. The river levels were already at the limits of what I would consider to be sensible for a club trip, and they were rising. It was about now that I abandoned all thoughts of running the Walkham and instead posted that I would be happy to go to Cadover Bridge, with a view to running the river Plym from Ditsworthy to Cadover. (The Upper Plym.) I explained that this is a reasonably easy grade 3 river, but that it involved a walk-in of about a mile carrying the boats etc across the moor to get to the start point. I observed that it was windy, leaving the (not so) gentle reader to work out that getting to the river would be a walk in the park, but that the park in question was the National Park. Sometime later, and much to my surprise, 9 paddlers had changed, loaded boats etc and set off from Cadover Bridge car park to drive to Gutter Tor where our little adventure would begin. We didn't know it at the time, but in addition to the 9 paddlers we also had the Mount Batten squid and Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, in tow.

We arrived at the Gutter Tor car park, unloaded our boats and prepared for the walk-in. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, very helpfully makes the point that a helmet is just an ornament if it is happily sitting in your bucket in a car that is parked at the wrong end of the trip. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, also very helpfully points out that the same information applies to a spray deck. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, informs us that our walk-in was

delayed while Emma and Dave drove off to respectively collect the above-mentioned items of kit.

It was about now that Ben mentioned that Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, would be having a field day right now, (and as you have just read, he or she was indeed having a field day right now) thus sowing the seed that inspired me to write the little story that you are enjoying reading so much.

Suitably kitted out, our wayward paddlers were eventually ready to set off, but not before those waiting had experienced a nice cooling shower. The walk-in follows a good, fairly level track that isn't hard to follow, but there was a breeze blowing that made one's boat and paddle behave like a weather vane. In addition, we were walking in misty, drizzly rain accompanied by a few showers. The mist definitely didn't allow for anything as pleasant as a wide-open vista so the paddlers plodded along, quietly studying their feet and, for the most part, deeply absorbed in their own thoughts.

There were 2 methods of boat transportation on display. Some of us elected to carry our boats on our shoulders while others dragged their boats along the ground. I suspect one's chosen method of transportation rather depended on whether one has more respect for one's body or one's bank balance. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, informs us that Lee demonstrated a high level of disregard for his bank balance by dragging his brand-new boat along the ground. That particular memory still makes me wince.

I believe that this is just the second time that the club has ever paddled the Upper Plym, and that I led the last trip. Although that was way back in December 2009, I still have vivid memories of having taken part in an epic. I didn't want another epic, but as things hadn't got off to very auspicious start I was beginning to harbour doubts. We arrived at the river where I pointed out that we were going to paddle a small river with very few eddies large enough to accommodate 9 paddlers. I suggested that we run the river in single file, giving each other enough space to avoid any collisions, and that we would stop wherever we could. In a vain attempt at avoiding a repeat of last times epic I asked that anyone involved with boat chasing should limit their activity to 200 yards. 1 of the children present asked for a metric conversion so I demonstrated a huge degree of patience, way over and above the call of duty, by carefully informing said child that, for the purposes of this trip, 1 yard could equal 1 metre.

Bekky and I had paddled the Upper Plym just a few weeks earlier so we led the trip, and I placed Ben at the back. Ben was wearing a bright white helmet so when looking back up the river he was easy to spot. Counting the group became less of an issue, I just had to see Ben's helmet to know that all was well. It didn't take long before I had the opportunity of putting this theory to the test. I've no idea what happened but I do know that the Mount Batten squid was lurking in the depths of the river and that it took the opportunity of playing with Dave and Ryan. Later I asked Ben about the incident and he advised, "It was indeed a team effort, where both Ryan and Dave pre tested the water quality for the rest of us." I'm sure we were all very grateful. During the ensuing mayhem Ryan took the opportunity to throw his paddle away, thus allowing me to demonstrate the value of carrying splits on a white-water trip. I may not have wanted an epic but I could sense the growing evidence to support the theory that I was getting one.

It was about now that the drizzly rain morphed into proper rain.

Everyone got back into their boats and we set off again. We ran the first proper rapid, at the bottom of which was a place where we could all gather together. I was sitting in an eddy watching proceedings and was struck by contrasting attitudes of some of our paddlers. Lisa came down the rapid wearing an ear-to-ear smile that would make a Cheshire Cat look positively grumpy. On the other hand, Dave came down the rapid breathing hard and with his eyes on stalks, stalks that were so long that I swear his eyes actually preceded his boat down the rapid! Being a perceptive creature, I concluded that Dave might not have been enjoying himself quite as much as Lisa was. The rapids were about to get a bit more serious so a few hundred yards (metres) later I took the decision that Dave ought to further practice his portaging skills by walking out. Oh, the loneliness of being a leader, but quite possibly nothing compared to the loneliness of Dave as he trudged down a rain-swept, wind-swept river bank. At least he was walking downhill. Sometime later, with the marvellous advantage of hindsight, I came to the conclusion that my decision had been a good one.

It was about now that I finally admitted that we were having an epic.

The Mount Batten squid now took a liking to Lisa by introducing itself not once, but twice in a space of time that probably measured about 30 minutes, but in a distance that probably measured just a hundred yards. (Yes, metres for you children.) On the second occasion Lisa had the unpleasant experience of watching her boat float off down the river, picking a nice clean line that any paddler would have been proud of. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, can only imagine the emotions that Lisa was going through as she watched her boat disappear containing, as it did, her car keys. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, points out that car keys should be kept securely about one's person, not lodged inside a boat that may, or may not, finish the trip in the same place and at the same time as you. Good Old Nosey, helpful as always.

Bekky chased Lisa's boat down the river. Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, notes that it wasn't the difference between the imperial and metric systems of measurement that confused Bekky, rather it was the number 200. If Bekky thinks that she stopped after 200 yards then I would hate to walk a mile in her shoes. Or, to put it another way, if Bekky thinks that she stopped after 200 metres then I would hate to walk a kilometre in her shoes.

Lisa's boat eventually wedged itself against a rock. It was recovered with the aid of Ben who waded across the river to attach a line, thus demonstrating the value of a dry suit.

During all this excitement we had all got fairly well spread out, so re-grouping took a bit of time.

It was about now that the proper rain morphed into heavy rain.

There was just one hard rapid left to paddle, a rapid that we got out of our boats to inspect. There was all the usual imming and amming while people assessed lines and tried to match their paddling abilities to the demands of the rapid. Some of us walked while others got back on the water and ran the rapid. Unfortunately for Ben the Mount Batten squid decided that Ben should have the opportunity to further test his dry suit, but his predicament was soon rectified by the timely arrival of a throwline, courtesy of Emma. Poor old Ben, Emma had firmly blamed him for leaving her helmet in the wrong place at the start of the trip and now she had him dangling off the end of her throwline while effecting a rescue. I don't want to get involved in any domestics but for Ben this trip probably proved to be quite an expensive one.

It was about now that the river started rising. Quickly.

Ben's boat ended up conveniently wedged against the bank and was easily recovered, but just as we thought nothing else could go awry the Mount Batten squid turned its attentions to Jane. It just goes to show that a river trip is never over until it is over, and that you shouldn't relax until you are standing on the bank next to the car park.

It was about now that the heavy rain morphed into pouring rain.

We paddled the last few hundred yards (or whatever) to Cadover Bridge and egressed the river, a river that I was quite pleased to be walking away from. You will remember that by now the rain was of the pouring variety, so by the time we had got changed, sorted out the shuttle and loaded boats etc onto cars for the homeward journey I was soaked. We have often changed in a windswept lay by in the pouring rain but I can't remember ever being quite so wet after a trip. I got home and changed every piece of clothing that I had on.

So ended what turned out to be another epic on the Plym. I would never set out to be involved in an epic but sometimes, just like the Mount Batten squid and Old Nosey, our roaming reporter, epics do come along, uninvited. Despite all the excitement, or possibly because of all the excitement, I found that I had quite enjoyed myself and that I would do it all again if the opportunity arose.

Now in dry clothing I was curled up on the sofa with a cup of tea reflecting on the day's events. As well as the paddling, there had been the walk-in carrying my boat, I had got in and out of my boat many times to check what was going on and to assist where I could, I had deployed throwlines, I had recovered throwlines and I had helped to empty boats. All this was done on a day where the weather conditions were constantly deteriorating. In addition, I had kept an eye on the group to check that they were coping with what was going on, and I had kept tabs on where people were and what activity they were engaged in, either on the river or somewhere along the river bank. I admit that I had missed a few things, like Emma getting acquainted with the Mount Batten squid for example. I ached on the outside and I ached on the inside, but I think it's fair to say that I had every reason to ache. I admit to being older than my paddling companions but I will be very grumpy if I find out that they didn't ache too.

It was about now that I fell asleep, maybe dreaming about a warm, sunny place, far far away from any river.

My thanks to all the paddlers for your company, assistance and entertainment. Not necessarily in that order.

To sum up, we set out across the moor on a wet December morning to have an adventure. We had an adventure and then we went home. Box ticked.

Footnote. I hope that the above article has both amused and entertained you, but it is somewhat self-centred, so in the interest of balance I will finish on a more serious note. 9 of us set out on a wet Saturday morning for an adventure on the Plym. We were a team. Everyone contributed to the team effort to the best of their abilities, some of which were very excellent. During our adventure we were presented with incidents and problems. We dealt with the incidents and solved the problems, all with the minimum of fuss and without the presence of any egos. The attitude of the team instilled the confidence that despite all that was going on we were still going to be "alright." That's not to say that we should be complacent. Whilst what we did got the job done very well, there were things that we could have done better.

The reader needs to ignore the impression given by the main narrative of this article because there is very definitely no "I" in "team." We did it together, and that's why paddling with the PPCA is such an enjoyable and rewarding experience. For the record the team, in strictly alphabetical order, were: Bekky, Ben, Clive, Dave, Emma, Jane, Lee, Lisa and Ryan. It was a delight to be a part of it.

And finally, if you look at those names again you will see that nearly 50% of the team were female. In a predominantly male dominated sport, we in the PPCA are extremely fortunate to have such a high percentage of female members, a percentage that is evident throughout the whole club, from the novice through to the competent paddler, and from the grass roots through to those involved in coaching and serving on the committee. The PPCA is a special club and we need to be very proud of that fact.



Photo by Dave Wensley

While walking down the Plym Valley Dave took this photo and subsequently posted it on the PPCA Facebook page, adding a comment along the lines of, "If a picture paints 1000 words, then this one says it all." We need to be very grateful to Dave for allowing me to publish his photo here, just imagine if this article had been 1000 words longer!

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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