



PPCA Newsletter

August 2023

Introduction

Welcome to August's Newsletter. This month Clive discusses everyone's favourite Ford van while Terry talks lighthouses and gives us an insight into the world of Beauty Queens in the last century.

Editorial

I'm currently reading the excellent book *Coastlines* by Patrick Barkham, a potted history of the National Trust's Project Neptune. Apparently, when the project started, a geography professor sent his students out in their summer holiday to survey the entire coast and classify it as either unspoilt, some damage but could be saved or damaged beyond hope of saving. Interestingly, one of the areas they felt was beyond hope was Wembury Point, then the site of HMS Cambridge, a naval gunnery school. It just goes to show that with a bit of work and willpower, you can change almost anything.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor

Breakwater Race, Saturday 16th September by Clive Ashford

HELP PLEASE!

The PPCA has been asked to provide safety cover for this year's Breakwater Race and I have volunteered to run the kayak safety team. Here are some FAQ's about the Breakwater Race.

1. What is the Breakwater Race? The Breakwater Race is run by City of Plymouth Amateur Swimming Association and involves competitors swimming from the Breakwater to the Hoe.
2. How many swimmers? There will be a maximum of 10 swimmers.
3. What will the PPCA's role be? We will provide a kayaker to accompany each swimmer. This is a unique opportunity to be a part of someone else's fun and is very rewarding.
4. What's involved? Paddlers will leave Mount Batten at approx. 15:30 on the day and meet the organisers and swimmers at the Breakwater. (Near the lighthouse.) The swimmers then enter the water and swim to the Hoe. We paddle beside each swimmer as safety cover. The race is expected to start between 17:00 and 17:15. All being well we should be back at Mount Batten by 19:30.
5. Do I need to be a brilliant paddler? No. You just need to be able to paddle from Mount Batten to the Breakwater, then to the Hoe and back to Mount Batten. Will paddle out and back together and while you are escorting your swimmer there will be safety boats keeping a watch over you.
6. What boat shall I use? The clue is in the title "kayak safety team." Most people opt to use sea kayaks but small boats and sit-on-tops work well. Club boats will be available for this event. Open boats and stand-up paddle boards are not suitable.
7. What's my reward? You will end the day with that wonderfully warm feeling you get when you have helped somebody to achieve something. You will be smiling and will want to hug people.
8. You want to take part? Brilliant. Let me know. 07854648584 or cliveandjoy01@gmail.com You won't be disappointed.

Features

Plymouth Sound Snippets #18, Smeaton's Tower by Terry Calcott

This snippet is about that well known and much loved local landmark on the Hoe, Smeaton's Tower. As paddlers we often use the prominent red and white banded tower as a waymark when out paddling in the Sound.

I'm sure most club members will know that the lighthouse on the Hoe once stood out on the Eddystone rocks. Although what we see on the Hoe is only around 2/3rds of the original lighthouse as the last third remains out on the rocks. A few club members have made the long paddle out to the reef over the years to see the remains known as the stump.



The Stump at the Eddystone Rocks

The Plymouth population were very fond of Smeaton's Tower and a suggestion to move the lighthouse from the Eddystone Reef to Plymouth Hoe was welcomed. The Duke of Edinburgh laid the foundation stone on the Hoe on 20th October 1882 and the lighthouse was opened to the public on Wednesday 24th September 1884.



Why did Smeaton's Tower end up on the Hoe? Well, it's a long story and as this is only a short snippet, I will give a short answer. The lighthouse was supposedly being undermined and the rocks it stood on considered likely to lead to the tower being destroyed. However, the stump is still there today and testament to Smeaton's design and building techniques back in the 1750s.



The colour scheme of Smeaton's Tower has changed over the years but started off as the traditional red and white stripes. This colour scheme lasted until 1937, when it was decided a new paint scheme of green and stone would be adopted to coincide with the coronation of George VI.



1960s Colour Scheme

This colour scheme lasted until the late 1970s but by 1980 the original red and white banded colour scheme, which we see today, was once more adopted.



Post-1937 Colour Scheme

The new colour scheme was adopted and lasted into the 1960s when the tower was repainted white with the lantern part painted red. A black band was painted around the base of the lighthouse a few years later.



Transits by Clive Ashford

I was down to run the Saturday paddle on 22 July 2023. The 22 July 2023 was the first day of the school holiday so quite predictably the weather forecast for the day was wet and windy. Just how wet and windy? Well, the prediction was for a force 4 – 5 WSW wind increasing during the afternoon, with light rain in the morning set to become a deluge in the afternoon. Lovely jubbly, just the sort of day to stay at home and watch the grass grow, or maybe watch the water butts fill up. The sensible thing to do would have been to cancel this trip, but sometimes a bit of a beasting can be quite entertaining. I put a suitably grim note on the forum inviting experienced paddlers to come out to play.

On Saturday morning I sat in the council car park at Mount Batten looking out across the Sound. The sky was grey, the sea was grey flecked with white and the almost horizontal drizzle put the whole scene into a kind of soft focus. Disappointingly the forecast was proving to be accurate with conditions leaning towards “marginal.” At least my grim post on the forum hadn’t raised any false expectations! At the usual time of 10:00 three of us launched into the salty stuff at Mount Batten, Adam and Brim in sea kayaks and myself in my small boat.

The plan was to paddle a clockwise circuit of the Sound so we headed for the end of Mount Batten Breakwater. At about this time I mentioned that a circuit of Sutton Harbour was quite appealing but my companions seemed to think that I was joking, so we rounded Mount Batten Breakwater and headed out into the Sound. Conditions were choppy with waves coming from at least two different directions, causing my boat to behave somewhat like a cork. Sometime later my cork and I, along with my other paddling companions, arrived at the Dunstone Buoy. We knew we were at the Dunstone Buoy because it was big and yellow and had the words “Dunstone Rock” painted on it in shiny black letters. Visibility was poor, I’ll take all the help I can get! (That’s two exclamation marks so far, I promise there won’t be any more.)(!)

Our next objective was the safety cage at the eastern end of the breakwater. With the noise of a force 4 – 5 headwind and the splashing of waves hitting our boats conversation was sparse and wasn’t of a deeply philosophical nature. However, Adam did point out that, “We’re being pushed a little left.” I have always been amazed at the way our Saturday paddlers allow themselves to drift on the tide causing them to paddle a lot further than necessary, and yet here I was drifting on the tide and therefore potentially paddling a lot further than necessary. Time to wake up and add navigation to my list of tasks. (I was already working hard on keeping upright, generally pointing my boat in the right direction and blinking salt water out of my eyes.) The obvious form of navigation on this occasion was to use a transit. (If in doubt get a salty paddler to explain transits to you, using them is always very worthwhile, but be aware that if you are in a large group then the transit users will gradually drift apart from the tidal drifters and the group will get spread out. Not your problem, the tidal drifters need to learn how to navigate.)

As a little aside the fulmar is a very graceful bird that has the unpleasant habit of excreting salt through its nostrils. My tongue emulated a fulmar’s nostrils by constantly pushing salty water out of my mouth, allowing it to dribble down my chin. Obviously keeping my mouth shut would have solved the problem but I was working hard and my lungs needed the oxygen. The fulmar analogy continues because I labour under the impression that my paddling is as graceful as a fulmar’s flight. Any thoughts?

I was carrying a VHF radio. It was switched on. Progress into the wind was slow and as previously mentioned conversation was sparse. I had plenty of time to think. I had two thoughts. (Thoughts tend to come quite slowly at my age.) 1) With my boat behaving like a cork every paddle stroke had an element of support in it. I wasn’t going to let go of my paddle in order to use the radio. 2) We were battling into a force 4 – 5 wind. That was noisy. My old man’s ears wouldn’t have been able to hear any radio transmissions anyway. I came to the conclusion that in this instance the VHF radio qualified as an ornament.

The waves gradually subsided as we approached the Breakwater and paddling became a little less cork-like. It had taken 65 minutes to paddle from Mount Batten to the Breakwater so a minute’s rest was in order after which we paddled towards the lighthouse, chasing many small birds along the way. Some of these birds were turnstones and others weren’t.

“We’ll head to that headland over there,” I said pointing to a headland adjacent to Barn Pool. I promised Adam that I would look up the name of said headland in Terry’s most excellent “View for a Kayak, Plymouth Sound” book, but in the end the Ordnance survey map informs me that we paddled towards Ravensness Point, so Terry’s most excellent book remained sitting on my bookshelf, dusty and undisturbed.

It was now over 2 hours since high tide. While not a particularly big tide it was flowing out at a steady rate with the wind doing its best to stop it. There were waves. Some of these waves were small, some were bigger and some involved sitting in a trough and not being able to see over the top of the wave. As is often the case these bigger waves came through in sets of three, so for the next 20 minutes counting to three became a bit of an obsession and the number three became my favourite number. Another transit kept us on course while the wind, tide and waves did their best to make us paddle further than was necessary.

These were the toughest conditions of the day. (Lumpy on Clive’s scale of conditions.) I looked around at my paddling companions. Adam was making the conditions look like a mill pond, Brim looked like he was happy but concentrating and I was having grade two fun. (See footnote.)

We had lunch in the Greek Temple in Mount Edgcumbe Park where Adam gave us an appraisal of the effectiveness of dry trousers. (Not complementary.) We watched damp/wet walkers wandering past and felt more than a little smug while we consumed lunch, nicely sheltered from both the wind and the rain, which was obviously the result of careful and meticulous planning. I trust that my companions were suitably impressed.



Strava Route from Adam.

Adam tells me that the wiggly lines are the result of him surfing

Back on the water and we paddled to the pier on Drakes Island in almost calm conditions, but the flag flying from The Citadel in an extended fashion warned of things to come. As soon as we left the shelter of Drakes Island we were hit by the wind, which gave us something to think about and more practice at using transits. As we progressed across the Sound conditions changed from almost calm to what could variously be described as lively, interesting, sporty and oh goodness me, causing more cork like behaviour from the boats, but at no stage would I claim that the conditions had become lumpy.

By now it was raining properly, thus we alternatively had a salty shower followed by a fresh water rinsing. I’m sure you could pay a lot of money for that in some posh spa somewhere.

The wind was more or less behind us so it wasn’t long before we reached South Winter cardinal buoy, quickly followed by South Mallard cardinal buoy and then on to the shelter of Mount Batten Breakwater where the waves once again became benign.

Getting off the water on the slipway caused me an embarrassingly damp moment but I won’t tell anyone if you don’t. Suffice to say that even Adam’s waterproof trousers wouldn’t have been of much use.

I confess that when I got home I was more than a little bit weary, but that I had quite enjoyed myself. My thanks to Adam and Brim for their company.

Footnote. Daughter Jane says that activities can be given one of three grades of fun.

Grade 1: You enjoy the activity while you are doing it.

Grade 2; You enjoy the activity once it has stopped.

Grade 3: You didn’t enjoy the activity at all, even after it has stopped.

National canoeing day

PEOPLE can try out a canoe as part of the local events to celebrate National Canoeing Day on Saturday.

The Port of Plymouth Canoeing Association is holding a canoeing extravaganza on Commercial Wharf, between the Mayflower Steps and the Mayflower Sailing Club.

Members will give demonstrations of canoes and kayaks, paddle skills and rescue techniques as well as games and canoe polo at 11am and 3pm.

Come and Try It sessions will be run from noon with the official launch by Miss Plymouth who will be taking to the water in a canoe.

National Canoeing Day has been organised by the British Canoe Union to raise public awareness of the sport.

From the Plymouth Extra, September 3rd 1992

Exchange and Mart

Discounts and Offers

A selection of discounts and offers are available on the PPCA website. [Click here](#) to see them.

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.

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