

Birmingham Canoe Club Magazine

May 2007

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Next Issue

The Closing date for the next issue is **end of September 2007**. The preferred method for me to receive magazine articles is via email,

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This magazine is available electronically via the Birmingham Canoe Club Web site
<http://www.birminghamcanoecub.co.uk/>

Happy Paddling – and writing about it afterwards of course for your favourite mag!

Editorial.

Well the summer is finally upon us, bringing the usual low rivers and lack of paddling venues once more.

I for one can't really complain though, the river levels have been quite consistent this spring and we've managed to get quite a few rivers done. We've even had a couple of forays to South Wales, on the likes of the Nedd Fechan and the Tawe.

Closer to home (just), we had a fantastic weekend away staying at the Goat Inn in North Wales. This was very well attended with over 20 people coming along. With this many paddlers, you can be sure the rivers would be dry. The Tryweryn was running however so all was not lost. Davina certainly seemed to enjoy herself on the 'infamous' graveyard section. Pete managed to prove to everyone that we are all 'between swims', with his excellent breaststroke performance below the NRA bridge.

Easter saw a few of us up Scotland for a whitewater pilgrimage. This was possibly the driest trip I've ever had up north. It certainly stretched our imagination to find rivers to paddle. Thankfully the Findhorn was a great back-up and at a good level.

To those who didn't come on the 3 day trip to Loch Awe over the May-day bank holiday—What a fantastic trip you missed!!!! We had it all, from big bonfires, garish tents, big waves, exploring remote castles, Seriously, it really was a fantastic weekend!

I'm now at work recovering from our regular French Alps trip, that took place last week. This is certainly the best alpine trip I've ever done (and I've been on quite a few)! We found a really nice chalet in an ideal location to sleep the 9 of us. Read about the trip later in the mag, I'm still buzzing from the experience!

Ce and I have now completed our level 3 canoe training with Phil Hadley. We'll be looking to log lots of hours and generally learning how to paddle them properly before we look at assessment dates—not really looking forward to that one!

On the subject of coaching, I have to say a big congratulations to John Woodhall for passing his level 3 coach award. Bec Woodhall, Ian Booth and Pete Czajkowski for passing their level 2 coach award. Kevin Sexton has completed his training course too. So we have lots more eager coaches within the club, I hope everyone takes advantage of their expertise.

Ian Dallaway

Chairman's Chat

I've just got back from an excellent whitewater safety and rescue course with Leo Hoare (www.getafix.com). Safe paddling and portaging on the Llugwy on day 1 (this time Pete didn't drop his boat on me), and swimming & rescue on Serpents Tail on day 2. Its always good to see Ian swim - he does it so infrequently he's no good at it!

In addition we have moved to the reservoir for Friday nights, and isn't it an improvement? Space for everyone and proper coaching. I really enjoyed it. The club keeps on going from strength-to-strength. I can see us having to organise a bunch of river trips to help keep all the new and progressing people from the reservoir happy. Keep on nagging the coaches!

This issue I'd like to thank Ian for organising the formal coaching sessions at the reservoir, Pat for inspiring my article, and Rod for writing his - turn to it first, its really funny (and true).

Dave

Pats Guide to River Grading and Swimming

Grade I, Easy.

Fast moving water with ripples and small waves. Swimming is pleasant, shore easily reached. A nice break from paddling. Almost all gear and equipment is recovered. Boat is just slightly scratched.

Grade II, Novice.

Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels which are evident without scouting. Swimming to eddies requires moderate effort. Climbing out of river may involve slippery rocks and shrub-induced lacerations. Paddle travels great distance downstream requiring lengthy walk. Something unimportant is missing. Boat hits submerged rock leaving visible dent on frame or new gash in plastic.

Grade III, Intermediate.

Rapids with moderate, irregular waves which may be difficult to avoid. Water is swallowed. Legs are ground repeatedly against sharp, pointy rocks. Several eddies are missed while swimming. Difficult decision to stay with boat results in moment of terror when swimmer realises they are downstream of boat. Paddle is recirculated in small hole upstream. All personal possessions are removed from boat and floated in different directions. Paddling partners run along river bank shouting helpful instructions. Boat is munched against large boulder hard enough to leave series of deep gouges. Sunglasses fall off.

Grade IV, Advanced.

Water is generally lots colder than Class III. Intense, powerful but predictable rapids requiring precise swimming in turbulent water. Swimming may require 'must' moves above dangerous hazards. 'Must moves' are downgraded to 'strongly recommended' after they are missed. Sensation of disbelief experienced while about to swim large drops. Frantic swimming towards shore is alternated with frantic swimming away from shore to avoid strainers. Rocks are clung to with death grip. Paddle is completely forgotten. One shoe is removed. Hydraulic pressure permanently removes waterproof box with all the really important stuff. Paddle partners running along stream look genuinely concerned while hurling throw ropes 20 feet behind swimmer. Paddle partners stare slack-jawed and point in amazement at boat which is finally pinned by major feature. Climbing up river bank involves inverted tree. One of those spring loaded pins that attaches watch to wristband is missing. Contact lenses are moved to rear of eyeballs.

Grade V, Expert.

The water in this rapid is usually under 2 degrees C. Most gear is destroyed on rocks within minutes if not seconds. If the boat survives, it is need of about three days of repair. There is no swimming, only frantic movements to keep from becoming 'one with the rocks', and to get a breath from time to time. Terror and panic set in as you realize your paddle partners don't have a chance in hell of reaching you. That hole that looked like nothing when scouted, has an undercurrent that holds you under the water until your lungs are close to bursting. You come out only to realize you still have 75% of the rapid left to swim. Swim to the eddy? What %^&*** eddy!/? This rapid usually lasts a mile or more. Hydraulic pressure within the first few seconds removes everything that can come off your body. This includes gloves, shoes, neoprene socks, sunglasses, hats, and clothing. The rocks take care of your fingers, toes, and ears. That £400.00 Palm dry suit definitely leaks. Your paddle is smashed. If there is a stopper, well, just hope it is old and rotten so it breaks. Paddle partners on shore are frantically trying to run and keep up with you. Their horror is reflected in their faces as they stare at how you are being tossed around! They are hoping to remember how to do CPR. They also really hope the cooler with the beer is still intact. They are going to need a cold one by the time you get out! Climbing out of this happens after the rapid is over. You will probably need the help of a backboard, cervical collar and Z-rig. Even though you have broken bones, lacerations, puncture wounds, missing digits & ears, and a concussion, you won't feel much pain because you will have severe hypothermia. Enjoy your stay in the hospital: with the time you take recovering, you won't get another vacation for 3 years.

Anonymous

(Though if you could check the handwriting, I'm sure you would be able to recognise the Kidderminster resident—ed)

Guinea pigs!

I'm at a great stage in my kayaking. I'm still a new enough learner to be useful as a "guinea pig". Browsing UKRGB, I spotted an advert for free coaching. Yes, I need as much coaching as I can possibly get. It was at Mile end Mill. Yes, I know it's okay swimming there. I have plenty of experience of that. Date was good too. I can only come out on occasional Sundays and I'd been saving up my gold stars to exchange for a day out.

Guinea pigs were needed to act as learners for some folks doing their level 3 coach assessments. I was shaking as I PM'd some brief details to the assessor to find out whether I'd be suitable and I was shaking even more when the reply came back as a yes.

I spent much of the day before checking and packing my kit and on the AA route finder site. On the day of the assessment, I set off early and arrived without incident. Water levels were very low and as the meeting time got closer, I got the feeling that not many folks were around. A phone call confirmed a move to Tryweryn. Quick panic! But I knew CT was somewhere near Bala, so I just set off along the A5 and hoped I spot some other kayaks on the way.

I'd forgotten that BCC had a trip at Tryweryn the same day, so it was nice to see some familiar faces in the car park.

I loved the whole day. I mentioned quietly to the assessor that I hadn't been to CT before and that it was above my skill level, so I was assigned to a small group with 3 learners and 2 coaches. We only went on the lower Tryweryn, which was fine.

We had intensive high quality coaching for several hours. Assessors watched the coaches and chatted to us. Our group seemed to be having the most fun with loads of shared laughter. I learned loads and also practised some skills that needed some tidying up.

I can recommend the experience of being a "guinea pig". It felt a big responsibility not to mess up someone's assessment, so I was on "best behaviour" all day; listening carefully and having a go at everything. It was really nice to hear that evening that both of the coaches in our group had passed their L3 assessment.

Helen Hoskin

Loch Awe Exams:

Open Book Ten Minutes. No reading time allowed. Do not write your answers down as you will mark the table.

Question 1

What fuel do you put in a diesel car? Answer diesel. If you put petrol in instead the car stops. The club record for this was set last Friday from Lancaster services to Crawford, in Scotland, a trip of 100 miles. To fail to detect the error you have to believe that your fuel has been contaminated by enemy agents based on the Thames Estuary. Doing this at all frequently is roughly equivalent in cost to owning Kenya.

Question 2

You are a kayaker setting off on a three day camping trip. Your boat is too small to take all your equipment. Which of the following would you leave behind? Which would you take with you? Give reasons for your answers. You may tick more than one item.

1. Food
2. Clothes
3. Cooking equipment.

Question 3

Give the name and support group of anyone you know who chose to leave all three behind.

Question 4

Your group has become split up in a gale that caused large waves on the loch. You are in the front group. Do you:

- A. Stay where you are and wait for the back group to catch up.
- B. Walk back through dense deciduous forest for two miles in the hope that you can see the back group on their way to you or if not raise the alarm.

Question 5

After returning to your landing point, the back group have now turned up. Write a short paragraph using authentic Saxon terms to describe the feelings of those who have spent 45 minutes waiting for you. (Polite language will be penalized).

Question 6

An experienced member of the group has told you that route A is the quickest home. Route B is slower. Which route will you take?

- 1. A
- 2. B.

Question 7

You have taken route B. After a few miles you are stuck at the back of a bank holiday queue made worse by a road accident and torrential rain. Compose a popular song to bring humour to this situation and perform it live in your local pub.

Question 8

Making up time you catch up with the group at a motorway services on the way home. As you arrive they leave, having been there for some time.

Choose one meal from below that will give you blood sugar for four hours and take less than one minute to eat.

- A. Steak béarnaise
- B. Asparagus with startled whortleberries
- C. A Big Mac and fries.

Question 9

Having got home at 11pm you undress and see a small multi-legged character sticking out of your left arm. Do you:

- A: Squeeze it till its flat.
- B: Burn it off with a cigarette like Humphrey Bogart did in the African Queen with those leeches.
- C. Carefully take it out with fine tweezers making sure you leave nothing behind that will give you Lyme Disease and encephalitis.

(Answer is most definitely C supported by doctor's visit if you have flu symptoms.

This information was brought to you by Rod Shelton working in collaboration with Keep Scotland Scottish and the Kayak in Your Front Room Groups.

Rod

First aid course—with a difference!

There were 6 of us, Ce, Pete, Pat, Dave & Sarah Clifft and me. Our first aid course was up for renewal and we wanted to do one that was very practical and tailored to a potential hostile environment, oh and was WET!

I'd heard of something called REC (Rescue Emergency Care) first aid. Apparently everyone in the outdoor coaching industry was doing them nowadays and they were reputed to be very good.

After a few false starts trying to book someone to deliver the 2 day course, Leo Hoare stepped up and was duly booked. It was going to happen at Mile End Mill, Llangollen.

The course started as they normally start, in a small classroom. However we were looking and talking through typical scenario's, climbers having an accident in the mountains, a paddler injury in a remote gorge... This was more like as when professional medical help is a long way away it, the first aider has to do a little bit more.

Then we had a lot of practical in a warehouse where the rafts are stored. We were out of the classroom and it was 'hands on' - literally. We all got to know each other a lot better and even Pete managed to get a fondle, though I think he was with Pat!!!!!!

Then on to the CPR practical—in the middle of a carpark!!!!!! You do feel a bit self-conscious at first, but this could be a place where you might have to do this in anger. When we did the CPR procedure for drowning we were next to the river, with the dummy being fished out of it beforehand.

So the course continued on the Saturday. Lots of practical interspersed with a short session in the classroom to cover things that needed to be included in any first aid course, but would be difficult to fit in to a practical that was only 2 days long.

Day 2 was pretty much totally practical. Lots and lots of scenario's, role playing and generally rubbish acting from everyone. We were having to deal with incidents all over the carpark, on the river access ramp, and anywhere else Leo could come up with. The scenario's were very varied and were very 'real' in terms of what could potentially happen and how we would have to deal with the situation.

We were causing quite a spectacle on such a busy day at a popular paddling site. There were quite a few spectators enjoying themselves at our expense (including a few club members who'd come for a days paddling). With some incidents we had to rope in some bystanders to help, much to their amusement.

The final incident involved 3 of us (Dave, Sarah and me) floating face down in the river. This one made the rescuers react quickly (thankfully). Apparently it was very 'focusing' when you see that sort of thing and you know that time is of the essence!!!!!!

What with the adrenaline pumping throughout the day and the amount of practical we had to do, we were totally knackered by the end of it!!!

What it was though, was a brilliant course that was very appropriate for our sport. Hopefully we'll never have to use our skills in anger but I for one certainly feel that the way the course was put together meant that I'm likely to remember a lot of it more easily.

Ian

Swimming Baths—Great News!!!!

Recently the club had to move to Tipton baths, as our regular swimming baths venue had to close to allow refurbishment work to be undertaken.

As many of you were aware, Tipton baths really weren't big enough to give us sufficient paddling room in the baths, and we were forced to limit the number of boats in the water.

The really good news is that the work at Smethwick swimming baths is almost complete and they expect to open sometime in the next month.

In terms of Birmingham Canoe Club, we are booked in there on our old time slot (the only one they had available to us anyway) so...

Baths sessions commence - Friday 7 September 8:30-10:00pm

I'm sure you'll all agree that it will be really good to get back to the old place!

Ian

Forthcoming River Trips

Date	Venue	Difficulty	Meet Leader	
10 June	open boating	easy/mod	Pat Corish Ce Dallaway	07976 919269 01922 410424
24 June	Washburn	med	John Woodhall	07727 104862
1 July	Severn open boating	easy	Nigel Green Anna	07967 443583 07704 473404
15 July	TBA coaching	mod	Dave Hughes Pat Corish	07780 697337 07976 919269
10-12 Aug	Anglesey sea kayaking		Rod Shelton	0121 444 3014
25-27 Aug	Bude Surfing	mod	Pat Corish	07976 919269
25-31 Aug	Bude sea kayaking		Rod Shelton	0121 444 3014
2 Sept	TBA	easy	Granville/Joyce	01889 800489
7 Sept	SMETHWICK SWIMMING BATHS RE-OPEN!			
15-16 Sept	river skills weekend	med	John Woodhall	07727 104862
30 Sept	TBA coaching	mod	Ce Dallaway Bec Woodhall	01922 410424 01384 878041
7 Oct	TBA	easy	Pat Corish	07976 919269
20-23 Oct	Scotland whitewater	hard	Ian Dallaway	01922 410424

Note - Trips marked as coaching will have an emphasis towards coaching on moving water rather than purely journeying

River grading -

As a rule of thumb, rivers marked “easy” will be predominantly flat water and up to up to grade 1, but may contain isolated grade 2 rapids, such as the Derwent, lower Wye or sections of the Severn below Shrewsbury.

Rivers marked as ‘moderate’ (mod) will have more continuous sections of grade 2 rapids. The aim of moderate trips is to paddle simple whitewater, and will tend to be used on coaching trips.

Rivers marked “medium” will be up to class III. Any trip marked “hard” will be above class III.

Please note that river grading can be open to mis-interpretation. The venue’s will be decided upon by the meet leader nearer the date. This allows for water level fluctuations and gives more flexibility to tailor the trip to suit the needs of who wants to attend. You need to tell the meet leader that you wish to paddle on a particular trip, so that provision can be made for you.

I have left some weekends free for some adjustment as necessary, and to allow other trips to take place on an ad-hoc basis. These trips will be organised at short notice and will tend to be rain dependant. They will be advertised on the noticeboard at the pool whenever possible.

Anyone wishing to put ideas for future trips forward, please contact Ce, Ian or myself.

See you on the river,

Pat Corish / Ian Dallaway

Club equipment hire

If people need to hire club equipment for a trip, please contact the trip organiser in the first instance. If they can't sort the kit out for you then contact Pat Corish and make arrangements with him. Club boats are normally collected on Friday evenings AFTER the baths session, and returned BEFORE the following baths session. Hire charges are £5 per club member for a kayak and the necessary kit to go with it. The cost to hire a 2 man kayak (duo) or a canoe is £10 per trip.

France Whitsun 2007

I had been excited about this trip since I got back from the same one the previous year. A full week of guaranteed water with steep, fast, hard rivers is a joy we never get in this country. So having dispensed with the wife, myself, Nigel and Pete set off for Dover. I was fully equipped with spare paddles, spare decks, and spare underpants.

In total there were 9 of us, the plan was to meet Ian, Ce and Paul Steels in Briancon Saturday morning. Barry, Andy and Sonia were to arrive late Saturday night.

As we arrived in Briancon, it was cold and raining heavily. As we met with Ian, Ce and Paul we decided to have a quick look at the Briancon Gorge. It was a good call as the level was perfect, the speed and gradient of the water in the Alps always takes me by surprise.

After getting changed in the pouring rain, we set off for the Gite we had hired for the week. The Gite we rented is owned by the same people who own the Goat in North Wales and was perfect. With Barry arriving later on we were all set for the perfect week.

Sunday morning and it was decided a run on the upper and middle Guil were in order. As I have my 5* coming up I led the upper and occasionally made a complete hash of it. At one point I lost line of sight and had to get out of my boat. As I stood on the bank, Sonia suddenly rocketed round the corner with a look of terror on her face, swiftly followed by Ian. Fortunately the killer death Chateau Queras gorge is much further on. After chastising myself for an incredibly inept leadership attempt it was on to the middle Guil.

For those of you, who have not been to the Alps, imagine the Ogwens fisherman's gorge going on for 5 miles. It's awesome, and was a great level. The speed and power was taking me by surprise though, at one point I had a three roll attempt dunking, three attempts because a rock connected with my head. It's a queer feeling rolling up and seeing double the number of people as when you went down.

It was also Desperados night, a queer mixture of beer and tequila. They now did a new flavour, with lime as well. It's a lot weaker than the normal stuff. Paul Steels commented on the fact that there was now a 'his and hers' due to the difference in alcohol. Pete then chose to walk in at precisely the wrong moment saying how much he liked the lime low alcohol version.

The plan on Monday was to head up to the Ubaye, but a big dump of snow had closed all the passes. So we headed for the upper Guisane. It was great fun, lots of rocks to boof off and generally try to wreck your boat on. Tomahawk Pete lived up to his name, his face as he rocketed towards me out of control was a picture, until I thought he had broken my arm with the end of his boat. Once the pins and needles had passed it was apparent I was okay and would have no excuse for not doing the lower Guisane. The lower section of the Guisane is my favourite river in the world. There is no way of describing it. The river steepens, then you see a horizon line, after that it steepens again, and there is another horizon line. It was at a perfect level, the lines were obvious, and everyone was paddling well. Nigel had his come-uppance as he laughed at me getting stuck in a stopper which he then followed me into, the 260 litres of volume on his boat may as well have been concrete. We could not have topped the Guisane if we tried, so we decided to drop into a coffee shop.

That night we all went out for something to eat and the French waiter tried to tell us how not to say "I would like my steak punched". Apparently, medium and punched are quite similar in French. I told Pete if he paddled into my elbow again, I would medium him.

Tuesday and glorious weather was finally here. The La Thuile section of the Ubaye was first off and great fun in the warm sunshine. It was then onto the Ubaye racecourse, I was again practising my leadership and on one of the difficult sections that Pat Humphreys had swum on last year was 'Pats stopper', an innocuous grippy thing, it held Pat long enough for me to get to the bottom of the rapid and then run back to the top with a throwline. I was determined to lead the group around it, so I eddy out above it. After signalling it was clear, I had a true moment of muppetry as I dropped in the stopper. I decided to show it who was boss and it then made me do so many unintendos I thought my head had been shoved up my backside. Thankfully it let me go as I blubbered like a salmon approaching captain Birds Eye. A swift roll and I was back in action. It was all uneventful until Nigel dropped his paddles while taking a photo. The lucky git, they just went straight into an eddy and floated back to him.

Having such a strong group meant we could do some of the harder runs. The Durance gorge was one such run that would be a first descent for us all. The level was perfect and the sun shining. It was the most photogenic and isolated run I have ever done. Sheer sides stretching 100's of metres above was awesome.

Paddling through it, you could see all the Via Ferrata pegs and cables. This is climbing for idiots, you are attached all the time to bolts and foot pegs are placed in the rock to help you climb. After finishing the paddle, a few of us decided to try the Via Ferrata. I was hooked and decided to buy my own gear ready for the summer. The view from the rope bridge, crossing the gorge high above what we had just paddled was fantastic.

I mentioned earlier the Chateau Queras gorge. In the guidebook someone describes swimming it as like being flushed down the toilet. I disagree; paddling it is just the same. As we descended into the gorge as I could only see Nigel in front of me and Pete behind. I burst out laughing as I watched Nigel get trounced off a diagonal wave, which then trounced me, then Pete. Thankfully we all rolled up and the massacre continued down the river. The speed and gradient of the Chateau Q is an awesome feeling to behold.

A mellow paddle on the middle Guil followed, Barry ran the supposedly grade 5 staircase rapid no problem, which I had decided to walk. He then decided to get a Paul Smith patented auto ejecting spraydeck on the grade 2 section below. Thankfully Ian, Ce, Paul and Nigel jammed his boat on a rock and it was swiftly recovered with Barry's original spraydeck.

The final full day and it was a run on the Claree. Barry summed it up as, "a cheese grater for your head should you go upside down". If you swim, its skin graft city. It passed without incident and a final run on the lower Guisane was in order. It was a little lower than the first time and a little harder. But it was still great fun.

At the get out, Pete was convinced we were going to steal his towel while he was getting changed. He decided to stay in his thermals just in case and we began to load the boats on the roof. As Pete was holding the boats on the roof, Nigel in a swift movement that can only be practised by men of a certain

nature, whipped Pete's thermals down. Not wearing any speedos, Pete only realised when he felt a draught on his manhood. The image of Pete trying to whip his trousers back up, then realising the boats were falling thus raising his arms again, so leaving him au naturel, will stay with me for a long time.

We went to the same restaurant, where I chose to try snails. (The scene from pretty woman was apt). Followed by kangaroo, or as Pete called it Le Skippy sil vous plait. I cannot remember what I had for dessert; the alcohol fairies have taken away my memory.

It was with sadness I left Briancon, until we got to the top of a pass where we were above the snow line. A mass snow ball fight was started, ended early because Pete decided to slip and use much of Barry's first aid kit. After a 'show us your gore photograph', we carried on to the Romanche.

The Romanche was a perfect river to finish on; the upper part was a tree filled ditch, fast, no eddies, sharp rocks. The lower section was perfect steep boulder garden. Pete decided to get out after completing the hard bit and walked the entire good bit. Pete attempted to try and speak French to the locals and follow the road to the get out. It was a miracle but he eventually appeared unscathed. The video interview he conducted afterwards is a gem, but unsuitable for a family club trip.

A great week, great company, and great paddling were had. Thanks to all who came, it was one of the best trips ever.

John Woodhall

White water safety and rescue course

On the 19-20 May a group of us consisting of the Dallaways, the Woodhalls, Dave Hughes and myself did a white water safety and rescue course with Leo Hoare.

I woke up early on the Saturday morning and travelled to the meeting place at Corwen. It started to rain, as it had for the previous few days – it was promising to be a great weekend! Sure enough, I arrived in Wales and the rivers were up and suddenly a huge smile came on my face followed by the daunting thought of having to swim a raging river. I started thinking to myself - god I hope today's going to be the paddling part of the course. I reached Corwen on time (yes I said on time, and in fact early, fine don't believe me) to meet up with Leo who also had a smile on his face, and what was even better he then went on to say the lower Llugwy was up and we were going to paddle it and not swim it. "Phew!!!" I thought to myself, fantastic!! Just one problem, my arch nemesis the mighty swallow falls stood in my way of a great days paddling. This is the site of a few of my misdemeanours, the very mention of this place fills me with fear and flash backs of tumbling down the steep muddy bank hitting allsorts I'm sure Dave was thinking the same.

We got changed and headed for the get in. The course started off with river leading skills on the easier stuff before the mighty swallow falls. Then came the long arduous portage, and the next lesson – rope work for belaying and lowering kit, now this was something I really wanted to learn! Now Swallow Falls is a 3 tier waterfall. Leo starts walking down the bank after the first fall and begins setting up the ropes for descent.... I thought to my self what the hell is he doing? Leo then says "right we've portaged the hardest part of the falls lets run the rest of it". This is still a serious undertaking and we all looked at each other with rather white faces and almost soiled underwear. This turned out to be a joke as there was no intention of any of us actually running any of the waterfalls. Oh, how we laughed... the b*****d!!!

So off to the horrid dirt track that leads to the river to make use of our newly learnt rope skills, no more tumbling down the hideous muddy bank for me! At the bottom we spend some time learning how to scout drops and how to make an efficient and safe descent. The rapid below swallow falls can be quite tricky especially if you've never done it before as Bec proved getting it a bit wrong and getting stuck. Leo dashed to her aid, but forgetting to take his boat out the water beforehand. His boat than made a pilotless decent of the next rapid, much to his discontentment and our amusement. Fortunately Ce was on hand to save him from too much embarrassment with a big grin.

Moving off downstream to Bench Falls, where John showed off his natural talent for making a

relatively easy rapid look hard! Ok, it is a slightly technical boulder garden, culminating in a small drop with a stopper at the bottom. John's line was sideways on the right. A better line proved to be pointing downstream on the left (for future reference)!!

Without further mishap, we reached the egress at Betws y Coed. We had had a great days paddling and now off to the Goat for some much needed beer and food, oh and to play with throw bags in the carpark there. It was fun but I'm sure we all looked daft to any passers by!

All worn out after a hard day, it was time to have another legendary night at the Goat, with the usual spilling of drinks over John and random conversation (which as always isn't suitable for printing, Shame on you Dave, always lowering the tone, tut tut).

Bright and early the next day Leo comes to the Goat to round us all up for the next exiting part of the course, the wet bit! This was held at the Dee at Llangollen, entailing swimming and rescuing from the infamous grabby middle stopper. GASP!!! This was definitely the day to be grateful for the creation of dry suits, I was certainly wearing mine. After a bit of faffing, it was time to bit the bullet and get in there, we crossed the river to face the inevitable. Leo jumped in first to show us how it was done, followed by John, Ian, Dave and me. We all went in and out quickly apart from Ce who seemed to quite like it and decided to stay in for a play. The courageous John jumped in to fish her out. After a bit more stopper action it was time to head up to Serpents Tail for the rest of the day, this was where the fun started. Most of you may think we were going to paddle this stretch of raging fury but no, ay? I hear you say, surely you didn't swim it? Oh yes we did and it was ace!! Jump in at the top and ride the storm all the way down through the sting of the tail. It feels a lot more powerful when you swim it, like a wet roller coaster, and just as much fun.

So on with the course – throw lining on moving water, quite interesting when you've got some one like John on the other end, I wasn't quite expecting that much force on the rope as I got dragged across the rocks letting go, leaving poor John cluttering down the rest of the rapid. Now comes the best and most fun part, the live bait rescues. This is when all else fails and you have to jump in on a line to rescue some one. This was ace as one person had to swim, one person jumps in off some high rocks and another acts as an anchor / belay. The job of jumping off some high rocks and body slamming a pringle thief (you know who you are, damm you) was by far the best and most satisfying as the aforementioned person gets a good dunking. However the person acting as belay doesn't have such a good time as poor Ce found out trying to belay John and getting pulled over, the good news is, as she was tied down, she is now a few inches taller after being stretched.

As usual I can't go a day with out trying to be a smart arse and paid the price dearly. The final part was to show what happens when the live bait goes wrong and you have to release the harness and as I had just been a smart arse and took the mick out of Leo, it was I who was to demonstrate this, oh dear! For this Leo moved everything where the water was the most powerful, gave me a lot of slack on the rope so I'd get more speed before it pulled taught and as it pulled taught I'm sure he yanked it for good measure. Dear God when I ran out of slack, man does it hurt! I tried to be clever and hang on, nope straight under, rather an interesting experience. It's quite a challenge to try and get your release lever especially when your chest feels like it's in a vice. I find the lever and whoosh I'm fired through the tail at the speed of light. That showed me!

What a fantastic weekend, we all learnt a great deal, if any of you need to do a course that the club can't cater for then I'd definitely recommend Leo Hoare, top bloke, top course.

Pete Czajkowski.

River Severn 1st April

I felt compelled to write this for the club mag to say how much I enjoyed this club run, no it's not an April fool! The run down the Severn from Newtown to Abermule was the farthest I have been up this river. With nearly twenty paddlers it was an impressive turn out, a good variety of kayaks and open boats. Apprehensive as I was, due to tales of rapids and extra bouncy bits. Thankfully, this soon faded when I saw how low the water was.

Dave (the chair) waded out most of the way across the river at the get in hardly getting his thighs wet. With the sun shining down on the group we left Newtown, a busy place with several other groups of paddlers playing on the gentle waves and eddies. Next came a few ripples after the bridge, proving a little frustrating as many found their boats grounding out in the shallows. After this good paddleable stretches with the potential in higher waters for several play spots.

Lunch was at the double horseshoe weir. A pleasant enough spot with the sun beating down, one could have stayed and dallied a while. Back off again then and as we journeyed the wind picked up, at times spinning the open boats around in a slow motion dance. With waves coming back up the river with the force of the wind I had doubted my decision to use the Canadian and not a kayak. Perseverance came though and apart from the last rapid which was a real scrape the end arrived having had a really enjoyable day out with the club.

John Powell

Rob's Severn experience....

A beautiful, warm sunny day at the beginning of June, perfect for kayaking/canoeing the River Severn. We launched from a remote location 5-6 miles upstream of Ironbridge and disembarked at the Boat Inn.

With hardly anyone around other than a few 'hospitable' swans (well we didn't really get that close to find out), the calm water with just the occasional ripple of current may have proved a little too sedate for the young, fearless members of the group but for the more, dare I say it, cautious members (yes we are speaking for ourselves), it was a good opportunity to practise many of the strokes we have been taught by the Club over the past few months.

As we reached Ironbridge some of the more adventurous members proceeded to amuse themselves and many onlookers by sliding their kayaks/canoes down the 3 metre high, 45 degree incline of the bank into the river and also by seal diving from the metre high shore wall.

Just past Ironbridge and approaching Jackfields, the water suddenly gained an edge of excitement, probably the climax of the trip for most, not only for navigating by kayak/canoe but also by abandoning ship (so to speak) and 'swimming' through. But yes, regrettably the more cautious of the group (and yes we are speaking for ourselves again) 'wimped' out, only to regret it later when we reached home. There was unfortunately an involuntary capsize at one point when one member, mentioning no names, (OK it was Rob) unsuccessfully tried breaking out into the current, but nevertheless was impressively rescued by one of the ladies within the group.

Many thanks to Granville and Joyce for their endless patience and 'font' of kayaking knowledge in what proved to be a most enjoyable trip.

We can only improve, we hope!!!!

Rob Stringer