

WA Seakayaker



Issue 38: September ~ October 2002



Newsletter of Sea Kayak Club WA Inc. 28 Aurelian St. Palmyra, 6157
Phone Pres. Ian MacGregor 9383 4319 Sec. Eric Pyatt 9339 2952

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



President, Ian MacGregor
Photo by Marian Dixon

Howdy! I'm going to take the opportunity here to alert members to the fact that our AGM is only a few weeks away and the positions of secretary and president are in need of nominees. This is because Eric would like to relinquish secretary role so that he can, understandably, give some time to interests, other than kayaking, that he has been neglecting. He will still be very much involved, just needs to spread the load a bit. The old viking has done an excellent job managing our business and fine tuning administration, but now deserves a break. Any takers?

And as for me and the position of president, I'm not willing to put my hand up again (even if membership was silly enough to want same) as I don't do the position justice. As we all know the job is best suited to somebody with good organisational and "people" skills, and that is just not me. So, those of you with a vision, enthusiasm and time for our club go get thyself nominated you'll be much appreciated.

As this is the last report of a fairly inactive president I'd like to sincerely thank all those members who have done the real solid work. That has kept and made the club the fun and alive organization that it is. I trust that it will remain so well into the future.
Happy paddling.

WARNING!

Sea kayaking can be a dangerous sport.
Your safety and enjoyment are our concern, but your responsibility.

OFFICE BEARERS & CONTACTS

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Absolute deadline for receipt of material for next issue of WA Seakayaker :

Midnight WST Friday October 18th
But I'd LOVE to have it MUCH EARLIER
Anything received after the deadline will definitely not appear in that issue.

This Month's Fiercely Contested DUCK FOR COVER AWARD Goes to Ian MacGregor



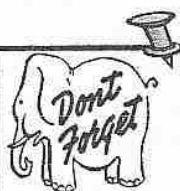
It would be extremely ungrateful to allow Ian to retire as President without once again nominating him for this prestigious award. His tardiness is well documented and has been the subject of many jokes. Whenever we're leaving on a camping trip or day paddle Ian is always conspicuous by his late arrival, his lassitude and his generally laid back attitude. On the occasion of the Serpentine paddle, members waited at the meeting place until the appointed time but there was no sign of Ian. They left without him and just as well. He admitted later that he slept through the alarm clock and didn't wake up until the time he should have met them. Now why didn't that surprise anybody?

Cover Picture: Curious cattle watch paddlers on the Serpentine River

Photograph by Marian Dixon



NOTICE BOARD



Annual General Meeting

October 9th

Please Note Change of Venue.

The meeting will be held at

The Old Quarantine Station

O'Kane Court, Woodman Point, Munster.

It can be identified as the scouts meet there and their sign is about the place.

This issue of the newsletter includes a proxy form to allow members who cannot attend to have a vote in the election of office bearers for the coming year.

If you wish to nominate another member for the positions, please return your nomination form to Eric prior to the meeting.

Kayak Navigation Course

There are still two vacancies for this course but be quick.. If you are interested in participating, give your name to Eric as soon as possible.

Phone : 9339 2952 , Fax: 9319 9987

The dates are:

Lectures: Thursday 24th and 31st October

On the water: Sat. 26th October and

Sat. 2nd November

The Venue:

The old Quarantine Station O'Kane Court, Woodman Point, Munster.

The Cost:

\$30 per head

Avon Descent

Congratulations to

Megan Halvey

John Ross

John Di Nucci

Terry Bolland

on completing the Avon Descent

Walpole/Nornalup Inlets

Long week end

Sept 28th—30th

Please phone Eric if you are interested. We are booked in near the water at The Rest Point Holiday Village . The charge is \$9.00 per head per night for unpowered sites. If anyone is caravanning or prefers on-site accommodation, the phone number is : 9840 1032 and the contact is John.

Error in last issue

The advertisement for sponsorship erroneously stated the price of a full page advertisement in this newsletter as \$260 per yr.

It should have read \$240 per yr.

Web sites

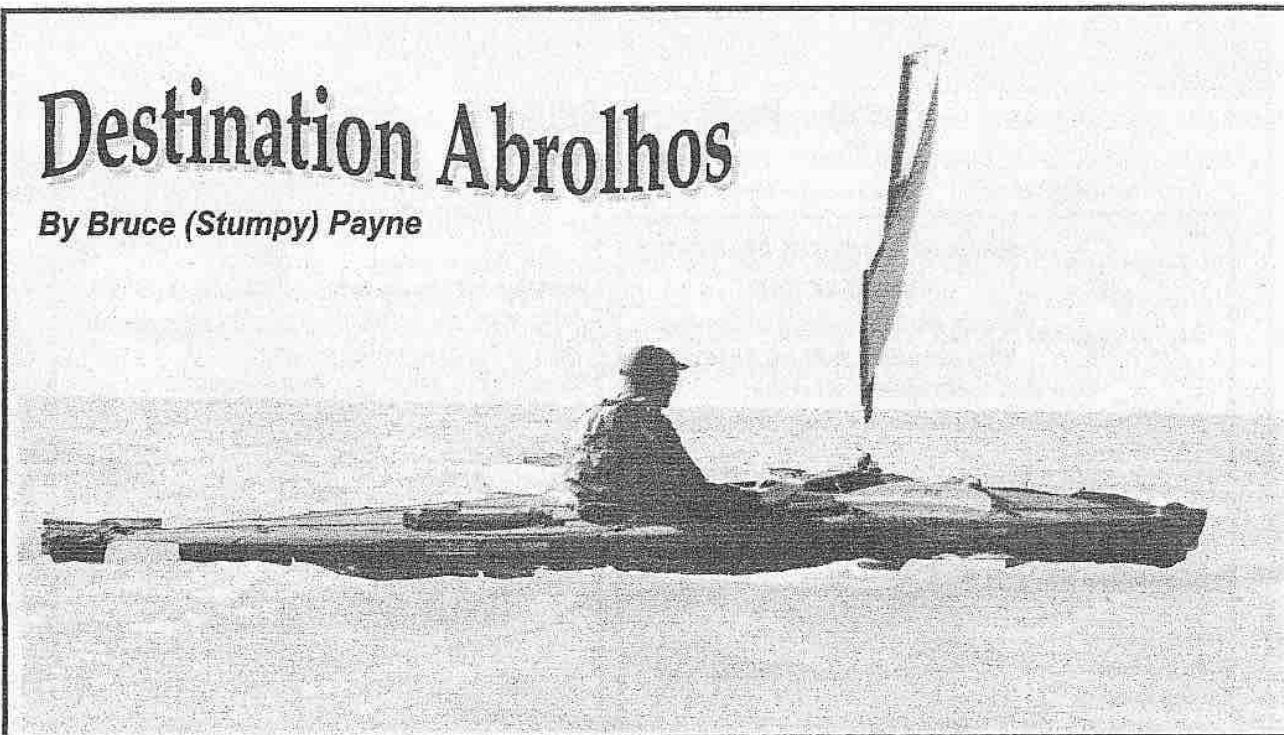
www.energy2go.com.au for energy foods for paddling

CONTENTS

President's Report	Page 2	Briefing Guide	Page 9
Duck for Cover	Page 2	A Thousand Islands	Page 10, 11
Contacts	Page 2	Avon Descent 2002	Page 11 & 16
Notice Board	Page 3	Paddling With Whales	Page 12, 13
Destination Abrolhos	Page 4,5,6	Zoo Capers	Page 13
Stumpy's Windy Farewell	Page 6,7	Putting Training to the Test	Page 14
Les Allen (Adv)	Page 7	Tassie letter	Page 14
Serpentine Descent 2002	Page 8	Mainpeak (Adv)	Page 15

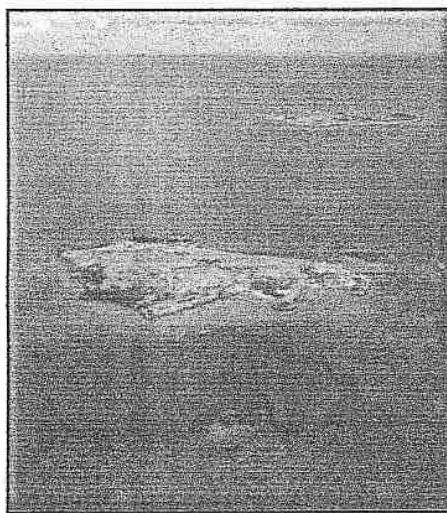
Destination Abrolhos

By Bruce (Stumpy) Payne



The Abrolhos Islands lay approximately 70km off the coast of Geraldton, Western Australia. They are grouped in three main clusters and stretch one hundred and twenty two kilometres. People have been showing up on these isolated barren atolls for centuries, from the Chinese Guano Diggers, to the ill fated Dutch East Indian ships, the Batavia and the Zeewijk which were wrecked on the reefs in 1629 and 1727.

Today the Islands are home to many crayfishermen and their families, who spend up to six months away working to earn a living in this competitive industry. It is these rich historical and natural aspects that inspired my friend Andrew Linton and I to explore the Abrolhos Archipelago, often referred to as the "Islands of Angry Ghosts."



*Pelsaert Southern Island Group
Photo courtesy Victor France*

Our trip began at 5:30 am where we rendezvoused with a supply vessel that serviced the Southern Pelsaert group of islands. After loading our trusted Klepper folding kayaks and associated equipment, it was first in best dressed to find a comfortable possie for the three-hour journey out to the Islands.

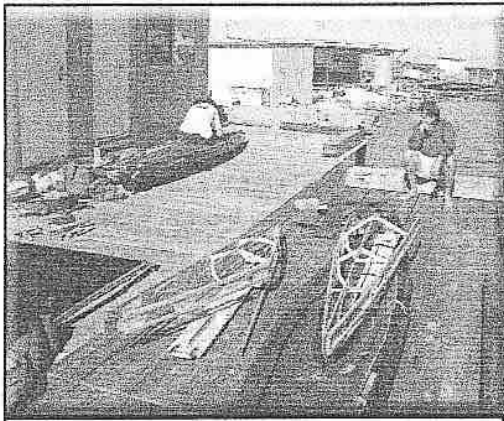
I thought my eyes were playing tricks when we got our first glimpse of the Islands. To me, it looked like a ship dotted with bright coloured containers, in reality, as we drew closer, they were permanent shacks used as base camps by the crayfishermen during the season.

It surprised me how difficult it was to pick up the Islands with the naked eye, even from the fly bridge of our transport. Many of the small atolls stand just a few feet above sea level. I thought to myself that this problem would definitely be amplified when navigating from the cockpit of our kayaks.

With the crossing completed, we were dropped off on Robertson Island where we had arranged to use our host's out building and surrounding jetty as our base to explore the Pelsaert Island group.

After unloading our kit we assembled our folding kayaks hoping that we did not forget any of the vital pieces that make up these unique craft. It is during construction phase that you attract most onlookers and it certainly was no different out here. Crayfishermen who have spent their lives working in a tough ocean environment looked on curiously as our Kleppers took shape. Andrew and I answered questions alleviating concerns over just how seaworthy are craft constructed from wood and canvas were. With our kayaks packed and ready, we

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There's a boat in my baggage!

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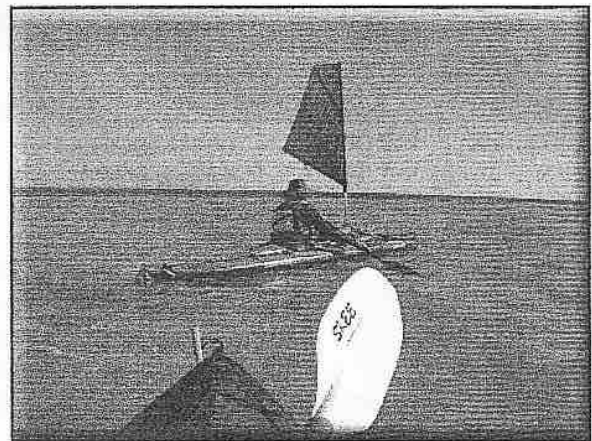
wandered over for a chat with the other residents to gain some local knowledge for our intended paddle.

With nine days to explore the area, we kicked off by heading south to explore Long Island, the largest of the Southern Group. With sails raised, the wind pushed us effortlessly over crystal clear waters that ranged in colour from turquoise to sapphire blue.

The Island is a bird watchers' paradise. Seventeen species of sea bird breed here; more than any other off the coast of WA. As we contoured the Island we observed the Common Noddy, Sooty Terns and the majestic Sea Eagle, just to name a few.

A brief return to our base camp gave us the opportunity to join Skipper Greg Robinson and his trusted deck hand Pete on their cray boat. It did not take long to realise that this profession was tough work and relied on absolute teamwork.

After observing the routine I thought to myself "*how hard could it be,*" that was until I went to pick up my first cray pot. These things weighed up to 90kg and had to be manoeuvred around the deck constantly when retrieving and launching pots. Often the crews encounter extremely rough conditions, making the task at hand difficult, if not dangerous. As far as I am concerned they definitely earn their money.



The Wind God works his magic for us off

Grateful for the experience, it was good to get back into the familiar environment of our sea kayak cockpits and venture back out to the southern tip of Long Island. It is at this location where the steamer ship Windsor an iron vessel of 2892 tons was wrecked on the fringing reef in 1908. The boiler still remains visible above water. A picturesque beach next to the old guano jetty provided the perfect place to land for exploring the island further on foot.



Sunset Abrolhos Islands Southern Group

While the weather remained favourable we set a new compass bearing and headed west for the centre islands within the group. The visibility through the water and kaleidoscope of colours passing beneath our hulls gave you a total feel of relaxation. Just when you thought it could not get any better a large pod of dolphins broke the surface putting on a private performance just inches away from our kayaks.

With the adventure coming to a close we moved back to base camp in preparation for the intended paddle back to Geraldton. Our VHF Marine Band radio boomed into life during the evening broadcast, and informed us that

S/SW winds would be blowing for our return trip "this was good". During the night there was a difference in opinion between the Wind God and Geraldton weather forecaster, instead of the promised winds a howling South Easterly blew. One look at the sea state confirmed for us there would be no crossing by kayak today. We did not want to suffer the same fate as the pair of British rowers who had been rescued when

(Continued page 6)



Greg & Pete working their line of pots

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they attempted a crossing from Kalbarri to Reunion just five days earlier. Greg did not have to ask twice when he offered to ferry us back on his cray boat.

Regretfully Andrew and I pulled apart our kayaks and prepared them for the journey home. Nine days in this unique environment provided a fantastic sea kayak experience and gave a fascinating insight into some of the characters and traditions of the Abrolhos Islands.

(Photographs supplied by Stumpy)

Stumpy's Windy Farewell

By Les Allen



Les Allen
Photo by Marian Dixon

The forecast said 25 to 35 knots over night easing to 20 to 30 knots in the morning. It was confirmed as I got out of the car when an icy blast hit me. It was the Cottesloe to Stragglers paddle and I was at Cottesloe with Don looking at the rough wind blown ocean, shivering. Stumpy pulled up and bounced out of the car to have

Fully awake now I kept paddling the soup trying to see out past the groyne to pick the waves. I couldn't see much so it was lean forward and paddle hard. A big wave reared up and I punched the top to crash down on it's back without it breaking. I was out and could sort myself out as I waited for Stumpy.

There was a squall off to our left and the wind had picked up. I measured it in the car park at 16 to 20 knots with gusts to 25 and I was sure it was 20 to 25 now. The water was steely gray with white caps littering the skyline. There were fingers of foam on the water and that familiar whistle of the wind passing through my helmet as the boat pitched in the messy seas.

"The breaks were significant and I was wondering if I could survive a direct hit"

a look at the conditions with us. The tide was out so you could see the tips of the rocks through the foam and wash on the beach. Don declared the lounge chair was far more inviting. We decided the rocks were too risky on the hull but wanted to paddle. Don waited to direct anyone else to South Beach as we decided to change the paddle and go to Carnac.

"Don declared the lounge chair was far more inviting"

I was sitting in my boat looking out to sea. The sky was dark and foreboding, the largest waves were breaking at the end of the groyne. There was a nasty but small beach break, with the water rushing up to meet me. Hmm, timing is the key to this one. I waited for the last wave of a big set and started pushing off to the water. As the water rushed up I pushed harder and caught the back wash right into a weedy dump that rushed up the boat, smacked my face sending cold water cascading down my neck.

Out to sea I could see what looked like large intermittent breaks out near the bank. As we got closer we could see that the breaks were significant and I was wondering if I could survive a direct hit from one. I slid forward a little locking my legs under my leg braces fearing the worst. I was almost to the seaward side of the bank punching into the wind and quartering sea when I spotted a big one building off to my right. Hard right rudder to meet it head on as it built and built and built. As it reared up I hit full speed. The front of the boat started lifting towards the gray sky, I leaned forward aggressively and punched the top of the wave getting a smack in the face and body pushing me backwards into my seat with cold water running down my back. The top of the wave broke at the back of my boat with a roar as I smacked down hard on the back of the wave. I kept paddling, shaking water from my face. I realized the

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next wave was not going to break and backed off as I flew off the top into space before crashing down again.

"The curl caught the front of my boat spinning me round side on to the wave"

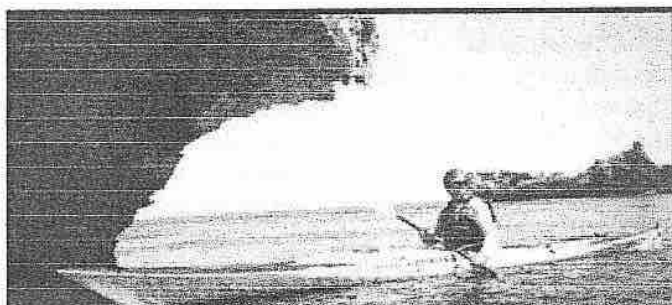
Out past the bank I could relax and that snug warm feeling crept back in. I love being in windy rough conditions while I am warm and snug in my boat. The squall to our left had passed, the wind abated just a little, and the sun was coming out. The water went from steely gray to light green and the white caps were white as snow. The world was perfect. A steep wave approached and I thought I was going to miss the white cap. Not so, the curl caught the front of my boat spinning me round to side on to the wave. My paddle stroke converted into a high brace as the wave hit the side of the boat pushing a plume of water up under my armpit. I took off sideways only to drop over the back of the wave a few seconds later. Well if that's the worst it can do then I don't have anything to worry about.

It took us just under two hours to get to Carnac and I must say it is the roughest I have seen the sound. Be-

cause the sound is so shallow it can't have really big waves. They get steep and fast but not that big, so it is a good paddle in rough weather. On the way back Stumpy wanted to use his sail. He has to go overseas for work and wanted a good paddle and a sail before he left. We had the good paddle, now he wanted the sail. The winds had died down some more but as they were on our stern quarter he was not sure how stable he would be. I left my parafoil down for ten minutes to see how he would go. From the grin on his face it was obvious there were no problems so I launched the parafoil.

"When we landed Stumpy declared it was a cracker of a paddle"

What a hoot. We flew back, cutting down the face of the waves, surfing and at times cutting back up the face as well. Definitely not a hard paddle back as the wind did most of the work. When we landed Stumpy declared it was a cracker of a paddle. As we packed up some of the public were amazed we went out at all. They obviously don't know how to have a good time. I wished Stumpy all the best from the club and hoped he would be back both safe and soon. He said he would drop us an E-mail but for obvious reasons they would not be too frequent. **Les Allen**



"Mirage Sea Kayaks are the best sea kayaks on the market"

Ask me to explain why on a test paddle. If you are looking for equipment, try mine, because the gear I sell is the gear I use.

Les Allen



Les Allen Adventure
Films Gear

Ph 94562129 lallen@touch88.com.au

Trip Briefing Guide

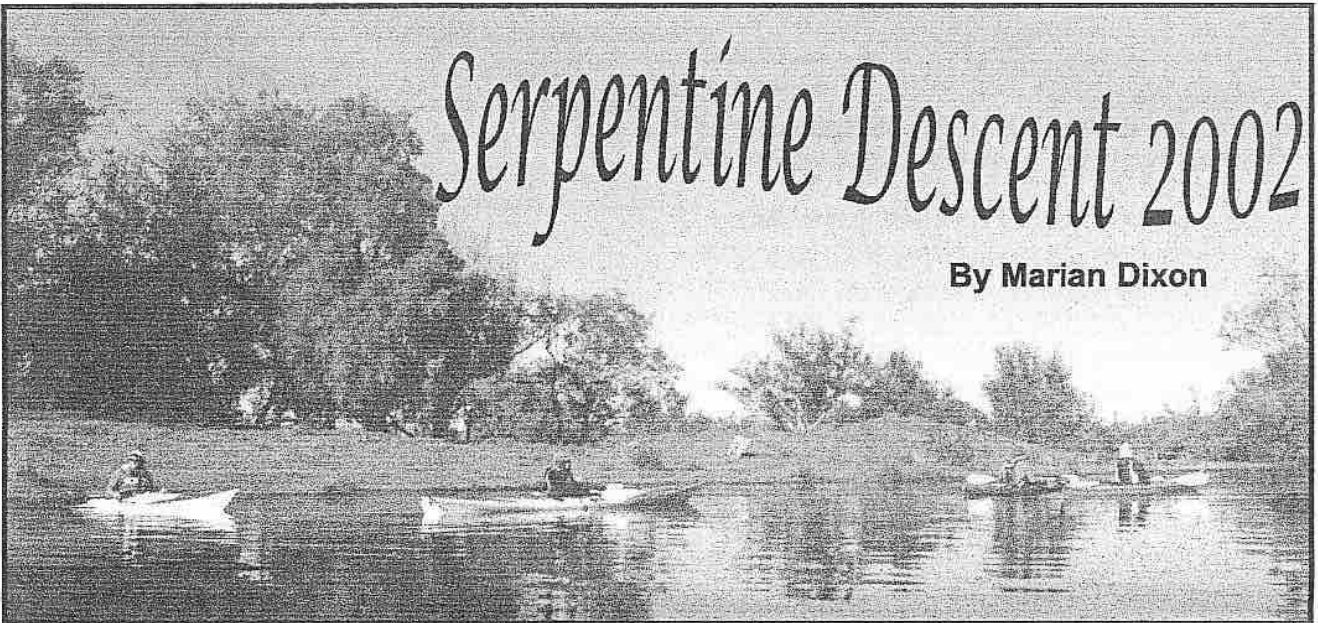
The trip briefing guide for safe sea kayaking reproduced on page 9 comes courtesy of Stumpy. It is suggested as a guideline to anybody contemplating leading a paddle.

The club is currently working on a risk management policy that will include briefing notes for leaders. They will be worked on and modified as we go.

It is important that more members become involved with leading trips, especially now Eric is trying to offer a choice of two groups on many club events.

Serpentine Descent 2002

By Marian Dixon



The paddle down the Serpentine River has become an annual event. We monitored the water level in the days leading up to the paddle and fortunately, some pretty substantial rain in the week before ensured all systems were go.

This year we had a perfect sunny winter day and a good turn out of twelve paddlers. Most met at the

After a car shuffle to the finishing point near Mandurah, we set off at a leisurely pace. It was quite shallow, but more water was flowing than the previous year when we had been battling to find a route through the mud banks.

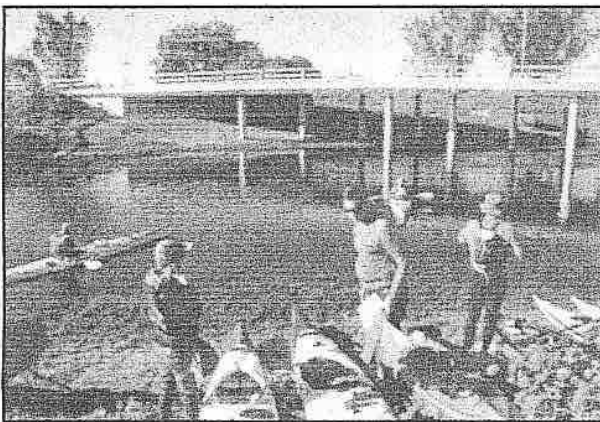
The first section of the river meanders through lush farming country where curious cattle followed our progress along the bank. The New Zealanders showed their true colours by remaining well out in front when we spotted a flock of sheep. According to Kiwi Kinzett, who's seriously clued up on these matters, they didn't want to be left with the ugly ones.

Nervous cormorants, coots, ducks, pelicans and spoon-

where black swans and other water birds gathered.

We stopped for lunch at our usual spot at a small bridge. After resting in the sun, we were all feeling a little sluggish but soon picked up our pace again. Our fearless leader, Don managed to find his way through the network of lakes and waterways till we arrived at the bridge where we had left the club trailer.

This was an excellent social paddle through an entirely different type of scenery from our usual ocean habitat. For bird lovers, kangaroo aficionados, cattle enthusiasts and your run of the mill Kiwi sheep shaggers it was a great day.

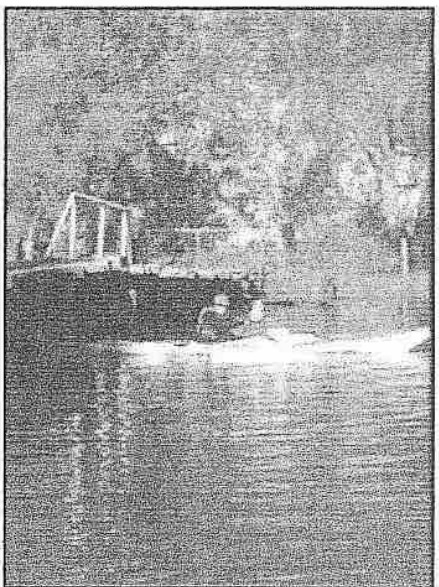


Paddlers preparing to leave at Karnup Rd Bridge
Photo by Marian Dixon

southern end of the freeway but fortunately didn't wait for our president who had indicated a matter of hours before that he would be there but wasn't. He later confided he had slept through his alarm, thereby earning himself a nomination for the "Duck for Cover Award". The final head count was Don, Austen, Graeme, Brad, Peter, Phil, Roz, Sandy (sporting a snow tan to die for), Warren, Bob, Leonie and Marian.

bills swam and dived ahead of our boats and we heard many types of songbird beside the embankment. At one point we saw a kangaroo hopping in a panic across a paddock to escape our weird craft.

In a few places we had to force our way through tea trees, but the river wasn't flowing fast so even the longer boats were able to manoeuvre through without a problem. The river widened out at several points to become a shallow lake



Roz Evans arrives at the lunch spot
Photo by Marian Dixon

Briefing Guide for Safe Sea Kayaking

INTRODUCTIONS

- Waiver, Membership, Skill Levels, Trip Grade

TRIP OUTLINE

- Weather forecast
- Route (charts/map)
- Distances/Legs/Anticipated Timings
- Prominent features/Navigation aids waypoints
- Food and water requirements (lunch at sea)
- Exit/Rendezvous points
- Potential Hazards/Tides currents
- Confirm individual intentions

GROUP MANAGEMENT

- Numbers at start and finish
- Location of Leader/2IC/Navigator
- Identify tail end Charlie (*always*)
- Rest policy
- Maximum spread/routine regrouping
- Automatic regroup policy
- Sub groups
- Communications (radio whistle and signals)
- Emphasise individual responsibilities to these Policies, buddies if needed

NOTES FOR THE TRIP LEADER

- Identify experienced paddlers, choose 2IC, tail end and lead paddlers
- Discuss your plans and alternatives with 2IC review trip grading, assign tasks
- On and from launch, observe the paddlers carefully ask the 2IC to do the same
- Early on identify paddlers who may require assistance
- Do not be afraid to ask people to return to the start if you are concerned as to their ability to complete the trip as you anticipate it.
- Watch for paddlers slowing down or other signs of distress fatigue. If necessary assign somebody to watch over them
- Maintain close watch on the weather, monitor winds compare them to the forecast
- Keep track of your position and progress
- Watch the shoreline and water ahead for hazards and exit points
- Maintain rest, re-group spread policies

SAFETY AND MEDICAL

- Location of safety equipment
- Check personal equipment
- Location accessibility of first aid kits
- Medical First Aid skills within the group
- Medical problems/ check kayaks
- In first aid stick with DRABC

QUESTIONS?

WEATHER FORECASTS

- Bureau of Meteorology WA Coastal forecasts
Tel:

EMERGENCY RADIO CHANNELS

27 MHz Marine Band	Primary channel – Secondary channel –
VHF Marine Band	Primary channel – 16 Secondary channel – 73

TRIP LEADERS NOTES

A Thousand Islands in the Sun

Well, OK maybe a thousand islands is a *slight* exaggeration, but as I stood on the shoreline in Dampier ready to get into my kayak I was sure that the next week of paddling was going to be nothing short of an eye-opening adventure. This was my first north-west kayaking trip and it was approximately 8 months from when Peter Cappendell and I first discussed the possibility of heading north to Dampier to explore the numerous offshore islands of the Dampier Archipelago and the Burrup Peninsula. Over the months the idea had grown into a plan and now matured into reality. I had test packed my boat about 3 times and test-drunk the wine (Cabernet Shiraz Chateau Cardboard 2001). What have I forgotten ??... I figured that if I survived Day 1 then I would get through the rest of the trip without any major hardship.

*"I had test packed my boat and
test-drunk the wine"*

Peter had picked me up from home at about 5.00am on Saturday and we rapidly loaded his 4 wheel drive with my gear. We were due to rendezvous with Paul Sutton & Eric Pyatt at the service station on the Great Northern Hwy & Gingin turnoff. We arrived at 6.00am and were pleased to see that Paul & Eric had already arrived and were raring to go. After a quick "Hello...it's bloody freezing" it was bums in seats and the start of the 18 hour trip north. Lunch was at the Murchison River bridge and it was decided that it was "So far so good". The plan was to put as many hours as possible in on the first day and be in Carnarvon by 5.00pm. We were then going to bush camp somewhere in the vicinity that night and expected to arrive in Dampier 2-3.00pm the following day. We arrived in Carnarvon a bit earlier than expected and found a great camping spot about 50km's north of town. Tents up, chairs out and cold beers down. We were surrounded with birds calling out "Why did you get drunk?" so I figured that Eric had obviously camped here before. A fire was soon on the go and dinner was cooked. It was a clear night and the moon was late to rise, so the star gazing was excellent.

Breakfast the next day and we were back in the 4WD's to finish the drive north. We arrived in Dampier later that afternoon and made our way to the Dampier Caravan Park. We met up with Wolfgang (and family) in the park as he was having an extended north-west vacation (Gee...that retirement must be REALLY hard work !!). We got the boats off the vehicles and organised as much as we could for the following day.

The original plan was to head north up the Burrup Peninsula and then island-hop back down to Dampier in a counterclockwise direction, but the wind and waves caused a rethink immediately. After poking our noses out from behind the safety of a tanker in port it became clear that we weren't going North that day. The wind & waves meant that any attempt would be lots of very hard work so we opted for the easy route and headed in a westerly direction through some of the inshore islands. Eric had a few concerns with the load he was carrying and pulled into shore with Paul after a few hundred metres as he was not happy with the conditions and his seaworthiness. As Peter, Wolfgang & myself were on another island at the time we waited...and waited...and waited....It became clear that we should have established a communications procedure prior to launching and after regrouping this was organised.

Days end saw us on East Lewis Island. My first day on a 'real' adventure for some time and it took some time to accept that we were finally there. Peter caught the first fish of the trip (a queenie... the fish not Peter) shortly followed by a longtom, and later that night our first small shark. Fresh shark for breakfast... Yum !!

*"The score was Peter: 5, Helier: 0...
Not happy Jan !!!"*

The following day we circumnavigated a few islands and the wind had died down enough for us to start heading north which we did, ending up on Malus Island for the night's camp. We encountered a pair of medium sized Manta rays and a sea snake on the way. More fishing and the score was soon Peter: 5, Helier: 0...not happy Jan !!!

The following day conditions were mild enough for us to cross back towards the Burrup. Yet ANOTHER fabulous camping spot and the afternoon was spent snorkelling, fishing and doing bugger all. The following day we headed north through Flying Foam Passage and camped on Gidley Island. That night I finally had success fishing. So far I had hooked a few but landed nothing but that evening I caught the first of my sharks, closely followed by the second. Life was beginning to settle into a very simple routine:- wake up, pack camp, paddle, make camp, do sweet sod all for the rest of the day..I was loving it.

The plan for the next day was to head north to Legendre Island, but the closer we got it became apparent that at low tide it was most likely that the water level

(Continued page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

would mean that paddling would be impossible, so a group decision was made to head south again and we camped on one of the other islands where the water would be a bit deeper.

"Eric produced a potato and amazed us all by having fish & chips ..."

The next day we headed south again through Flying Foam passage and that evening camped at what was voted to be the best campsite so far...easy landing, large flat beach and protected in most directions from the wind. Fishing was again on the agenda and I managed to hook & finally land a good sized Rankin Cod I would estimate at around 5kg's. Dinner that night consisted of cod, wrasse, and Longtom cooked in foil and also the traditional aboriginal method of covering it in hot coals. Eric produced a potato from within his sumptuous food stocks and proceeded to amaze us all by having fish & chips ... I'm still stunned !!!

The next day was our last night camping on the islands and we were on the southern tip of Angel Island, obviously a popular local spot. The trip back to Dampier port was made easier with the tail wind and following seas, although this did build up and make the paddle interesting. It was actually a good way to finish the paddling as so far conditions had been very tame.

Our last night was spent back at the Dampier Caravan Park and then it was the long trip home. As we progressed south, the sky got cloudier and the temperature dropped. A bit of a surprise considering we had just spent a week in sunshine and warm conditions. Our last night was spent at Coronation beach, just north of Geraldton where it was cold, wet and the wind was making life interesting. We arrived back in Perth and the realisation that the trip was over. The wine had been drunk, the islands had been conquered and the company had been good. There were many other highlights that could be mentioned:- the aboriginal rock art, the skinny-dipping lass, Wolfgang's taipan encounter, being surround by school sharks and turtles. I could go on for hours.

"The wine had been drunk, the islands conquered and the company had been good."

My thanks to my fellow paddlers and I can only hope that they enjoyed the trip as much as I did.

And the cycle begins anew....I have an idea for a trip...anybody interested ?

Regards,
Helier Beardsley

Avon Descent 2002

By Megan Halvey & John Ross

'You'll be sorry if you don't do it' John warned Megan as they contemplated entering the Avon Descent 2002. John spoke from experience as he had watched the last three years' Avon Descent.

So from here we set upon preparations for entering the Avon Descent four weeks out from the event start date of 3rd/4th August 2002.

Firstly what boat to paddle - plastic, Kevlar, kayak, ski. Since John already had a plastic Finn sit on top ski (which as Warren Wilson will testify is as robust and maneuverable as a Russian built Lada 4 wheel drive is) - easy decision. Megan bought a go fast Kevlar Phantom for \$400, only problem being that she didn't have the skills to paddle it. Wayne from Mandurah Sportz offered to lend a Finn Kayak (no rudder) and after too many close encounters with magnetic tea trees, rocks and rapids, upgraded the following week to a plastic Tui (looks like a sea kayak but doesn't have bulkheads and hatches for the picnic hamper).

Since we both considered that we did not have the necessary white water skills, we contacted the maestro Terry Bolland.

Terry's Avon Descent Training Courses had already been running for the last couple of months, so we were well behind in endurance and skills training. We arrived for our first exposure to white water training at Lovers Lane ready to tackle the tea trees and the first section of rapids. Terry introduced us to the other members of his group as being experienced sea kayakers and all would be well.

How wrong he was! 20 metres down the track Megan had already tested the water temperature. The look on Terry's face said it all - this is going to be a long day!

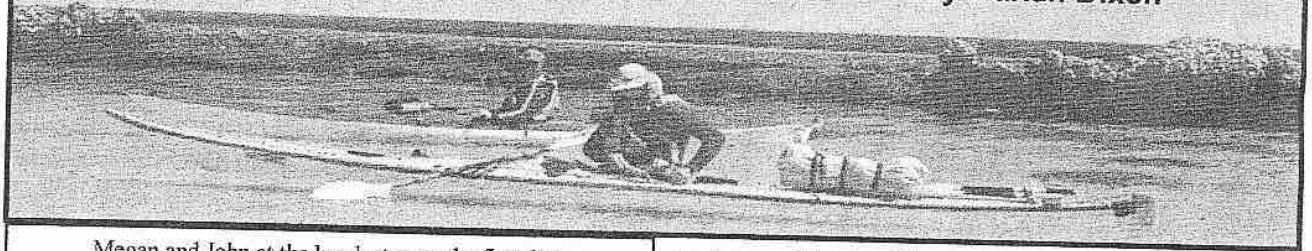
In Terry's briefing he mentioned always lean downstream when pinned against trees and rocks. Good advice but it had to be learnt the hard way with both retesting the water temperature a number of times. By the end of the day the skills had improved (marginally).

With these new found skills we teamed up with Kylie (Crash) Draper the next day and decided to tackle the river from Syd's Rapids to Lilac Hill. After a slow start to the day by Crash, dropping one car at Lilac Hill and driving up to Walyunga National Park we finally got on the water at 11am.

(Continued Page 16)

Paddling With Whales

By Marian Dixon



Megan and John at the lunch stop on the first day.
Photograph by Marian Dixon

Like many other members I had long cherished a desire to paddle the Ningaloo Reef, so in company with two like-minded souls: Megan Halvey and John Ross, we set out from Coral Bay in August to paddle approximately 200 km to Exmouth.

We departed late that morning due to the fact our tent sites were about 500 metres from the water, entailing a marathon portage of boats and gear. The seemingly impossible task of stowing camping gear, personal items, 30 litres of water and food for 8-9 days was finally accomplished and we set off into a stiff north easterly wind with our boats wallowing under their burden.

Later, the wind abated a little and we found a beautiful sheltered lagoon for our lunch stop. It was inside a rocky outcrop where waves broke over the top, forming pools with miniature waterfalls cascading into the lagoon. A walk along the rock shelf revealed a myriad of marine life. Corals, fish, shells, chitons, clams, anemones and various other marine inhabitants could be seen in the crystal clear water and rock pools.

We reluctantly left this idealic spot and carried on. The chart had incorrectly shown the rocky shoreline ending just past Bruboodioo Point but in fact it went on for some distance and we had difficulty finding a landing spot. What appeared to be white sand from a distance was frequently rock shelf extending to the water's edge. Our final choice was not a good one but it appeared to be the only sandy beach for some distance. Our camp at the base of a cliff left little room for tidal idiosyncrasies. We suggested John put his tent closest to the water so he could raise the alarm. Sort of like the theory of keeping a canary in a mine to warn of gas leakage. Aren't women bitches?

"There were no virgins and the feral goat kids were too cute"

We went for a walk and found a large stone altar that Megan and I decided was crying out for a sacrificial offering. A virile male, virgin or newborn goat? There were no virgins in the vicinity and the feral goat kids were so cute that sacrifice was out of the question. Our obvious conclusion kept John glancing nerv-

ously over his shoulder till after the full moon several days later.

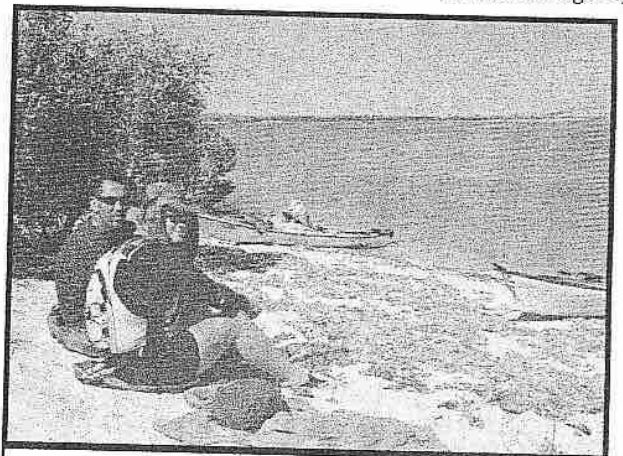
The second day began with another headwind. Our wildlife spotting efforts had included lots of turtles, rays, various fish and dolphins. The wind had made the water a little choppy so it was difficult to see below the surface.

By the third day, the wind had swung to a south westerly. We stopped at the old whaling station in Norwegian Bay. This was of particular interest to me as my father used to work there and I have many old photographs of the station during its operational years. My childhood was peppered with tales of the barbaric slaughter of these beautiful mammals.

We had planned to camp near Sandy Point but it was too rocky. Finally, near sundown we were faced with a desperate decision. Take the only landing place we had seen or continue along what looked like rock for many kms and risk running out of daylight. We landed and once again were up against a cliff with little room for tidal variation.

When we arrived at Yardie Creek we had to drag the fully laden boats over a 200 metre sand bar. We had to cross a 4WD track and I bet it's the first time vehicles have given way to land-locked kayakers. We weren't disappointed as the beautiful gorge provided nesting sites for hundreds of cockatoos that screeched their displeasure at us. We had our longed for wash in freezing water to the amusement of tourists on the cliff top. On the way back we spotted a red-footed rock wallaby in a cave.

(Continued Page 13)



John & Megan at the Mangrove Sanctuary
Photo by Marian Dixon

(Continued from page 12)

John and Megan went snorkelling at Turquoise Bay but I chickened out. They emerged shivering but ecstatic about the coral and fish they'd seen.

The mangrove sanctuary was another highlight of the trip. We entered the shallows and found large numbers of rays. There were lots of kangaroos in the surrounding area and it proved to be a bird-lovers' paradise.

"...an enormous tiger shark wearing a demonic shit-eating grin"

We passed Jurabi Point and found big surf rolling into the beach. We were forced to go well outside the reef that had offered protection till then. I looked down and saw an enormous tiger shark wearing a demonic shit-eating grin as if it knew something I didn't. Perhaps it did! We were fascinated enough to paddle close to take a good look but were probably all hoping like hell we wouldn't fall out of our boats right there. Not long after, John spotted another shark. It was some distance before we were able to get back inside the reef, catching a ride on some big surf. We camped at Jim's Beach that night.

On our final day we expected a hard paddle to reach Exmouth with the rounding of North West Cape an unknown. We hadn't seen a weather report for seven days but the day appeared perfect with no wind at all and a clear glassy sea, even when we were beyond the protection of the fringing reef.

"John showed the determination of Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick"

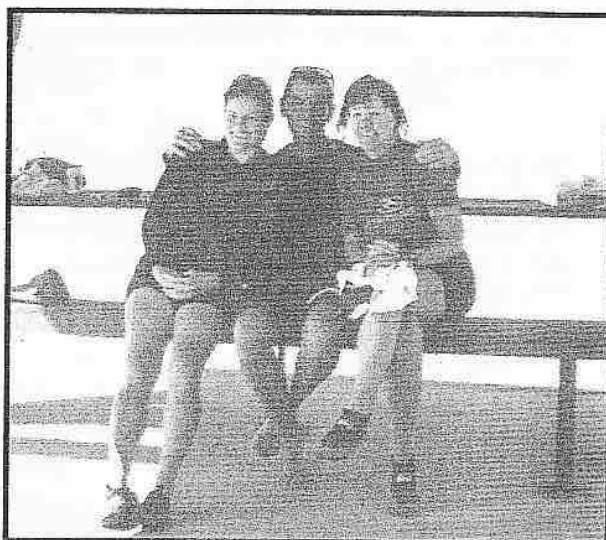
We soon spotted some whales in the distance and were so excited we headed out towards them. John showed the determination of Captain Ahab when he spotted Moby Dick and our speed was clocked at 10.6 km/hr in a futile attempt to get closer. We approached within about 300 metres of them, but even John finally conceded defeat. I tried to envisage how it would have been for the Eskimos hunting down and harpooning whales from their kayaks.

The rounding of NW Cape proved undemanding with just a small swell and moderate breakers. They were easily avoided by paddling wide. We passed the Naval Base at Cape Murat and saw an Osprey with a chick on its nest. We had to go very close before we could read the sign saying there was a 400 metre exclusion zone.

The next 15kms were mentally the hardest of the trip. Our elusive goal was in site but it never seemed to get any closer. A small stand of mangroves provided some distraction with lots of small reef sharks in the shallows. We reached Exmouth about 2pm on our seventh day of paddling.

There were no difficult places to challenge our skills and our only disappointment was in not seeing Dugongs. It was very cold in the sand hills at night, and even during the day if we couldn't escape the wind. There were no mosquitoes, flies were minimal and the strongest wind we encountered was only about 15 knots.

Overall, I have to say the Ningaloo experience was wonderful and I can highly recommend it to paddlers of any skill level.



Three derelicts: Megan Halvey, John Ross, Marian Dixon after seven days in the wilderness of Ningaloo
Photo by Marian Dixon

Zoo Capers

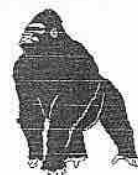
PERTH Zoo had acquired a female of a very rare species of gorilla. Within a few weeks, the gorilla became very cantankerous and difficult to handle. Upon examination, the Zoo veterinarian determined the problem. The gorilla was on heat. To make matters worse, there were no male gorillas of the species available. While reflecting on their problem, the Zoo management noticed Rick, a big Kiwi lad, responsible for fixing the Zoo's machinery. Rick, had little sense, but seemed to be possessed with ample ability to satisfy a female of ANY species. So, the Zoo administrators thought they might have a solution. Rick was approached with a proposition. Would he be willing to have sex with the gorilla for \$500? Rick showed some interest, but said he would have to think the matter over carefully. The following day, Rick announced that he would accept their offer, only under three conditions:

"Furst," he said, "I don't want to huv to kuss-er."

Sicondly, you must niver till anyone about thus."

The Zoo administration quickly agreed to these conditions, so they asked what was his third condition.

"Well," said Rick, "You gotta give me anuther wik to come up wuth the \$500."



Putting Training To The Test

It was interesting on the last Shoalwater paddle to put some systems to the test. It was one of those perfect days with no wind, a light swell and 10 people to enjoy it. Under these conditions and with the paddlers we had, it was certainly a low risk paddle. In fact the conditions invited you to play on the reef which is excellent fun and a good way to improve your skills.

After morning tea we set off through and around the reef at the cape, to head south back to the islands. After we had rounded the reef I stopped to do a head count and we were one paddler missing. In the back were Eric Ian and myself. Now in our briefing I said we would go back in line abreast to the last known point but there was a problem with this. One was the reef. There was the long way around or a short cut along the shore. If he was held up it is possible he would have used the short cut to catch up. The other problem was the group was spread out and stopping them all was going to take time.

We decided that Ian would take the short cut I would go back the way we had come and Eric would stop the others. As I rounded the end of the reef and crested the swell I picked up Graeme's boat just off the shore and a swimmer getting ready to help him bring his boat in. Ian was still going parallel to the shore and had not seen him yet. I turned to the shore and as I got near Ian he finally saw Graeme and we landed. Graeme was ok but after just 15 mins in the water was very cold. It turned out he was the last paddler and cut the reef at the wrong time.

He got the old one, two, three from different directions and went in. Hey, it's a very game paddler who reckons he does not take a swim. Anyone could end up in the same situation as Graeme. He had a paddle float but decided to lay back and drift to the shore as he was out of breath. If the wind had been strong and off shore, self rescue would have been the only choice. ***Can you self rescue in choppy conditions?***

Some of the things that came out of the day were quite interesting. Firstly getting communication with the group was very difficult and it was ideal conditions. Two of us had radios but I did not think to use it. Maybe next time we set up the radios so we can use them for group communication. Eric's whistle didn't work too well either. He ended up shouting to get the message across.

I am in the habit of doing regular head counts on paddles. ***Are you?*** Maybe we need more people doing head counts. It is after all everybody's responsibility to look out for your mates. In bad weather it is even harder to do head counts, which is why we need to look at small groups with radio contact between groups as other communication is very difficult.

It was a nice warm day but after 15 mins in the water Graeme was cold and he was dressed very well for the weather. ***Are you dressed for immersion on paddles?*** When you come out and suddenly find your mates are nowhere to be seen it comes as a shock. It is harder to think and do things under these conditions. If you are not completely comfortable with self rescue in rough conditions you may find these situations overwhelming. This day was not a problem but how would it have turned out with a 15 knot off shore wind on a Carnac crossing? The good thing about these days, is it makes us think.

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Avon Descent (Continued from page 11)

Syd's Rapids proved a breeze and Bell's main drop was conquered for the day, but the Devils Chute claimed John as a victim with his paddle reappearing 5 minutes later and after much cussing about having to buy a new one. By 4:30pm we had only made it to Middle Swan and Lilac Hill was still another 40 minutes paddle down the track. Bearing in mind that Walyunga National Park closes at 5pm desperate measures were called for – Swan Taxis and \$30. Arriving at Walyunga National Park with 1 minute to spare.

Under Terry's guidance the next Saturday's challenge was a valley run (which takes in all the major rapids of the Avon River). This was done at an increased water level (0.7m at Walyunga pool) which was to Megan's liking having only one dip that day whilst John tested the water temperature a few times..... Terry's only comment being "John you worry me".

Further training consisted of further valley and tea tree runs, which involved broken rudders, paddles and further deflated egos and paddling from the finish line to Middle Swan Bridge and return. Lots of fun was always had.

Many thanks must go to Terry and his trusty assistants of John Di Nucci, Pam, Eddie, James, Steve and Erin and the camaraderie and support within Terry's groups. Thanks also to Alberts at Guildford who supplied copious amounts of pea and ham soup and burgers consumed fireside while thawing out after numerous dunkings in the Avon River after training.

The big day loomed with lots of discussion on water levels (0.47m at Walyunga Pool lowest in 20 years), training (lack of), confidence (lack of) and carbohydrate loading (excess of).....

Boats were registered and impounded on the Friday evening ready for an 8am kickoff from Northam. Powerboats were off first, followed by kayaks and then skis with the first challenge being Northam Weir, which at such low water levels required portaging except for the brave few. It soon became apparent that our training lacked any shallow

water paddling which required a completely new paddling technique and use of some muscle groups not included in training such as the legs. Northam to Toodjay proved to be a real grind with what seemed like more time spent dragging the boats across sand bars. The dreaded tea trees became a pleasure to reach. A highlight of day one was passing powerboats wallowing in the shallows and sinking amongst tea trees and we both finished the first day very tired and weary but ecstatic that day one was completed.

More carbohydrates and an early night, then up at 5am in order to get to the start of day two by 7am. Since grid positions were unavailable when we left the finish line on day one, our exact start times were unknown and we arrived with barely 5 minutes to start.

Day two started with the last section of tea trees which proved challenging due to the congestions of boats which required last minute evasive action. The next 35 km consisted of numerous rapids interspersed with long pools. We both decided to portage Emu Falls due to the water level, which proved to be a wise choice as this was the major rapid where damage was caused to boats and bodies. Major rapids including Emu Falls, Championships, Syds and Bells provided spectators regular entertainment with John not disappointing again at Devils Chute.

With the rapid section completed all that remained was 35km of flat water paddling from the bottom of Bells Rapids to the finish line at Hinds Reserve in Bayswater. This proved to be extremely heavy going with fatigue, strong headwinds and driving rain however after some 16 hours of paddling we both crossed the finish line just after 4pm.

Many thanks to our support crew of Caroline and Phiona who provided great encouragement, support and patience in very trying conditions.

Despite the late decision to enter and concerns over lack of training, a great time was had and we thoroughly recommend the Avon Descent to all sea kayakers.

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