



The P&H Irish Sea Crossing, 23/24 July, 1972

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A 'First' for Midland Canoe Club

At 18.00 hrs on Sunday, 23rd July, George Bazeley, Ian Tatam and myself set off from Whitesands Bay (near St David's in Pembrokeshire, South Wales) to canoe, without escort, to Southern Ireland. 17 hours later at 11.00 hours on Monday 24th, we landed safely at Rosslare Harbour, County Wexford, feeling tired and uncomfortable, but otherwise fit and well.

The idea for the trip came in September last year when I was sitting (dare I say it with feet up?) at work looking at the 'C-in-B map of Surfing Beaches' on the office wall. So far as I know it had not been done before and enquiries revealed no evidence of this.

The other wide crossing, Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead (west to east) had been done for the first time in 1969 by Derek Mayes, Dave Bland and Nick Gough (all of North Wales outdoor pursuit centres) in slalom kayaks and took 20 1/4 hours.

The idea for a trip of this nature is not sufficient in itself. One has then to find a few others keen or mad enough to go along. At the end of the article on the Bardsey Trip last year I wrote "Anyone interested in an Irish Sea crossing?", just to lay the first brick as it were. The really solid foundations were established when George put his name down as 'definitely interested.'

One or two others talked about it but dropped out after a fairly short time. Ian was rather out of touch in Cornwall but I was really pleased when his answer came back in the affirmative.

With what looked likely to be the final three decided, the various aspects of planning the trip had to be sorted out. The fact that Ian was in Cornwall left nearly all the planning to George and I. This arrangement suited us all but it meant that Ian would have to do nearly all his physical training alone; not a pleasant or entirely safe prospect.

The planning could be really divided into various categories, ie;

- 1) Administrative - including masses of correspondence and numerous telephone calls.
- 2) Physical training - deciding on targets and sorting out problems of food & drink, etc.
- 3) Tidal - theoretical and empirical calculations, based on data available, experience and advice.
- 4) Equipment - with its obvious considerations of weight, size and degree of necessity.

I commenced in February by writing to British Rail at Fishguard stating our proposition and asking for their co-operation and general information about the ferry to Rosslare. Their first reply and those throughout the following months were extremely helpful as were the staff at Rosslare, Fishguard and on board the ferry.

Next I telephoned the Meteorological Office at Bracknell, for information on past weather in the St George's Channel. The data they returned was very comprehensive and most helpful in planning and I reprint the accompanying letter, as I consider it very pertinent:-

"Dear Sir,

CANOES ACROSS IRISH SEA

I am sending you copies of data from around the southern parts of the Irish Sea. As I

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remarked on the 'phone these give only average conditions and any particular year or week can vary greatly from the mean. Also conditions can, and do, change very quickly in the S.W. approaches and St George's Channel - I would not consider it at all exceptional to go from calm to full gale within 6 hours.

Visibility is also a factor to be considered. Fog is most prevalent during the summer half year and over the open water it is not likely to be less frequent than it is at the coastal stations where you will see that fog may be expected to occur on up to 9 days per month. Most of the days of poor visibility and fog will occur with the less strong winds so that while the sea surfaces may be acceptable the risk of being run down by the 'invisible' ship will increase.

As a final point I would suggest that you do not assume that because your trip to Ireland by ferry did not encounter adverse weather that these conditions will persist for the return voyage. At least listen to the B.B.C. shipping forecasts and if possible up-date this forecast by a call to the nearest office of the Irish Met. Service.

Yours faithfully,

F. J. Ayres

for Marine Superintendent."

We originally planned to do the trip from Ireland to Wales for a number of reasons. Not least important of these was that we did not know the Irish coast at all but were reasonably familiar with the Welsh coast.

The possible dates for the crossing were really decided by the club programme, and the weather information gave us an idea as to what we could hope for that week. From that angle the picture looked fairly good.

Various possible physiological problems were pointed out to us, i.e. Motion (sea) Sickness, Drowsiness and the possibilities of using drug stimulants, Tino-synovitis (general seizure of the tendons say in the wrist or arms), Dehydration, Boredom, and these were all followed up by letters to the M.O.D. and visits to the doctor.

I wrote to the agent on Lundy Island for permission to camp, as we intended to do that trip while in Cornwall, but unfortunately gales put an end to the idea.

Telephone calls to Beechams and Mars secured us quantities of their respective products 'Dynamo' and Mars bars.

George worked out a plan of action for raising our levels of physical fitness and we set about doing this early in the year. An associated problem to this was how to make the decision, somewhere along the line, that we were definitely going to be fit enough to do the trip. Consequently at least one definite target was laid down; that of being able to complete two 10-hour paddling sessions/Trips on consecutive days, about one month before the date.

Local training was achieved by paddling upstream on the Trent for hours on end, i.e. 6 - 8-hour sessions. This proved really effective because any stops meant backward drift and the inexorably soul destroying monotony of the smelly Trent (please excuse the trace of bitterness) was excellent practice for 'switching off' and turning oneself into an automatic paddling machine.

Throughout the first half of the year we visited North Wales about four times for weekends of sea canoeing. These had trips of increasing length with most weekends having over 30 miles of paddling and possibly one night trip.

Sea canoeing at night was a very necessary part of the training and our first excursion was under the guidance of Ken Rudram, round Great Ormes Head.

Another concern of George's was comparing Ian's level of fitness to ours and we used the holiday in Cornwall to do this. Three excursions of differing lengths marked up another 30 miles each, in sea states from Force 3 to Force 9. George planned the round Anglesey trip for mid-June as both a training stint and an excellent trip in its own right. In preparation for that, George, Phillip Seares and I did a Menai Straits trip of 27 miles to

test the tide timing, which proved very accurate.

The Anglesey attempt covered 57 miles in 15 hours of paddling, at least 10 of which were in adverse weather conditions. This trip was not a failure, even though we pressed the 'Abort' button, because we learnt such a lot from it. One important lesson was making the decision to land while still able to do so. Also it provided a trip of comparable duration without getting out of the boats and was attempted after a forecast whose portents would have ruled out the Irish Sea trip.

By the time we arrived in South Wales, George's 'log' showed the following approximate achievements:-

George:- 9 trips 250 miles and 73 hours

John:- 7 trips 200 miles and 60 hours

Ian:- 6 trips 120 miles and 35 hours, plus considerable surfing time.

Navigation had been described to us as "virtually impossible" which, let's face it is enough to put anybody off. The plan adopted was on the basis of the quickest way to swim a river is at right-angles to the flow, realising of course that you end up further downstream on the other bank.

George and I purchased copies of the 1:200,000 Chart No. 1410 of the Irish Sea and he borrowed Keith Cooper's 1969 edition of 'Reed's Nautical Almanac' while I purchased the 1972 edition.

Once this basic concept of 'letting the tide drift us where-e'er it will' had been agreed upon, George started to plot various courses in earnest. Briefly the approximate procedure adopted was as follows:-

- 1) Draw a straight line from Rosslare Harbour to Whitesands Bay. The distance of this line (bearing 1290 mag.) was exactly 50 statute miles.
- 2) Pick a day and departure time and plot the expected tidal drift on this bearing at the estimated paddling speed (3.5 m.p.h. in our case) using the reference points and tables on the chart.
- 3) Draw another straight line from the departure point to the place where the corrected course crosses the other coast.
- 4) Using the angle between these two straight lines, correct the first line in the opposite direction, i.e. if angle was 40 above line (1) the new line would be 1330 mag. This establishes the basic course to be paddled throughout the trip, unless 'Plan B' suggests a mid-course correction.

Allowances would then have to be made on the day for forecast wind. We assumed a drift of 1/8 wind speed, i.e. Force 4 wind behind us (11-16 knots) would assist us by 1 1/2-2 m.p.h., Force 3 wind across us (7-10 knots) would give 1 m.p.h. sideways drift, Force 2 headwind (4-6 knots) would slow us down by just under 1 m.p.h. As yet we have not had chance to verify this theory as the wind on the trip was almost negligible.

Plan A then was to paddle on one pre-determined bearing all the way.

It was decided, since we intended going overnight anyway, to use lighthouses for greatest range and accuracy of landfall. Therefore the timing of the trip was fixed so that at least one lighthouse would be seen on the way out and Tuskar Rock lighthouse would be sighted on the way in. Consequently the characteristics of all lights in the area were noted and marked on the charts carried.

Most of the equipment was already possessed by one or all of us but some still had to be purchased, or otherwise acquired.

The boats were all fairly heavy P. & H. 'Swifts' with good skegs. Each had substantial buoyancy, either T.A.B.s (by V.C.P.) or 'styrene foam.

There was an assortment of deck-lines/laggies, my boat having a rack on the rear deck. Each boat had toggles on bow and stern and carried a tow-line incorporating an 18" elastic with a snap-clip.

Small red lights were fitted to boats/life-jackets, enabling us to see each other at night.

These are very effective. Boats decks and paddle blades were painted white for similar reasons.

Clothing was with a view to it being cold at night, i.e. Ian and George had full dry-suits whilst I had wet-suit trousers and a dry-suit anorak. All wore bright orange P. & H. anoraks over these and had Ottersports B.S.I. life-jackets. Head-gear was floppy and colourful. Each carried a sleeping bag with 500 gauge poly' bag, about 6' 6" x 3'. Each canoe had a 'Mars' hand-held red flare. George and I had an 'Icarus' rocket Maroon (big bang). My boat also carried one Icarus rocket 'parachute red' flare and an assortment of 'Miniflares' (5 red, 5 white, 1 green and 6 orange-smoke).

Ian carried the SARBE (Search And Rescue Beacon Equipment) type 3, BE 310, on loan to us by courtesy of the manufacturer. This would only have been used in the event of severe danger to life (i.e. ploughed down by passing ship and boats wrecked, or worse, if George suddenly suggested doing the Atlantic!). This SARBE was affectionately called the 'ABORT BUTTON' and labelled accordingly before stowage. My heart stopped every time Ian groped in the back of his boat feeling for the 'ring' on on the top of a bottle of Dynamo.

We carried 100 feet of 7mm polypropylene rope, as advised in 'The Gospel according to St. Byde'.

We had a number of dexamphetamine tablets to combat sleepiness, if and when it became a severe problem. These were prescribed by my local doctor, to whom Ian and I will be eternally grateful.

Extra to this was a transistor radio to relieve possible boredom and up-date shipping/weather forecasts; a camera for photography where possible (beautiful one of the sun-rise!) and a small tape-recorder on my life-jacket for keeping a 'log' of the trip (turned out quite amusing). We had one pare paddle; extremely good tracings of chart 1410 on each deck and used 'Silva' compasses.

Sunglasses were essential, also useful in a headwind, even at night.

In case anyone is wondering how we managed it whilst in the boats, we used poly-bags, approx' 9" x 3". Damned difficult in a dry-suit but made especially easy for me by the zip in my wet-suit trousers (it's a great idea Don, but make sure the bags are big enough!). The Anglesey trip taught us a lot about the best compromise on food. Apart from two flasks of hot soup, one of coffee and a bottle of fresh water, our main intake was 'Dynamo' at about 4 fl. ozs per hour. Our main item of solid food was a substantial stock of 'Mars' hand-held bars, sucky sweets and mint cake. Rather than just to provide solid food, this lot had the combined function of both overcoming what had been described to us as 'dietary boredom' and along with the fresh water, getting rid of the lingering taste of the 'Dynamo'.

We planned to stop 5 minutes on every hour for a small amount of nourishment, as on previous trips we have found a frequent, small intake is the best.

The week of 22nd-29th July was on the club calendar as a week's holiday in St David's, for surfing and sea-canoeing. Since prevailing winds for the St George's Channel are westerly for this time of year, all our planning had been based on a west to east crossing.

Ian's 5 a.m. arrival was unfortunate for him, since I had to wake him at 10 a.m. for us to visit the harbour at Fishguard and make the necessary arrangements with B.R. and the Customs, etc. Whilst there we also obtained as much information as possible about the sea and coast off and around Rosslare harbour from the Mate of the 'M.V. Container Enterprise'. After first seeming very sceptical, this very helpful advisor gradually seemed to become more and more interested in our venture and his confidence in us increased to such an extent that one of his parting comments was, "I think you stand a good chance. Yes, I really think you'll do it."

He emphasised though, the problems of fog and re-iterated the dangers of being run

down. The amusing but not entirely fictitious example he used was that of, "... pilotless 300,000 ton, 'L' plated, Liberian tankers with uncertificated Captains careering down the middle and not knowing or even caring if they ran into anything". Another thing he warned us about were the 'man-eating' seals off Southern Ireland.

He expressed more scepticism about the accuracy of our compasses and emphasised the necessity for warm drinks as a guard against exposure.

Whichever way we went we were told by the Customs to see them immediately we landed at both ends, be it by canoe or ferry. Imagine, with a Welsh accent, "I've never been aboard a canoe before!" This came from one officer as he pondered the problem. We visited the Coast Guard at St David's, gave him all the gen. and filled in the form, C.G.66, "Yacht Passage".

George had arrived on Saturday lunch-time and since things looked good for doing it on Sunday, we actually left the pub early after only 2 pints for a good night's sleep.

I hardly slept a wink!

Clive took my alarm clock and agreed to listen to the 06.30 shipping forecast for us which was as follows:- (for Lundy, Fastnet and Irish Sea), "Variable to south-east 2, isolated coastal showers. Moderate visibility with fog patches." Gloucester more or less confirmed this but added, "... thunderstorms in evening and night".

Once the count-down was started the advance party of Clive Cope, Tony Garside and Carol Waters was packed off to Rosslare on the 2 p.m. ferry, to establish a coastal support/rescue/publicity H.Q. over there.

This proved no mean task as the I.R.A. had blown up the telephone lines between Ireland and Wales, so most of their communications with Wales were via radio, thanks to the assistance of the keepers at Tuskar Rock lighthouse.

They also had problems trying to convince the local life-boat crew they weren't three English nut-cases and that we really were on our way.

For us, Sunday was spent kitting out boats, up-dating forecasts, writing instructions (not wills!), sleeping and checking numerous pieces of equipment.

By 10 minutes to six we were on the beach waiting for the 17.55 shipping forecast which, when it came, finalised the 'GO' decision. A few minutes later we left the beach after farewells, photographs and a multitude of good wishes. With us were Curly, Roger, Neil Edwards, Keith and Dave McGuinness, who intended to paddle out for the first hour and then return to St David's well before 'closing time'.

The accompanying party left us at 19.10 hrs. We checked that our compasses were set on 3080 before George pressed the 'COMMIT BUTTON' and we paddled off with the sun slightly to the left of our heading.

Within 30 minutes we must have been over or passed Bais Bank and the sea ahead of us was perfectly calm, really glassy. It stayed like this as, for the next few hours we paddled into the setting sun, the reflections of which were dancing on the surface directly ahead of us, making us more aware of the necessity for sun-glasses. George took some photographs of this smooth sea at about 8 p.m.

At our 21.00 hr stop we were about 30 minutes taking turns to get properly clothed for the night, either whilst sitting in the boats or by getting out and kneeling in the cockpit. The radio on my rear deck helped break the monotony of paddle splashes by providing music, prayers and hymns (one felt very close to 'Big G' out there!), news items and weather reports. There were reports of floods in Yorkshire, hailstorms and floods in Nottingham and more thunderstorms on the way. Since thunderstorms were also part of our forecast, it left us wondering what sort of a sea they would whip up in a short time. We saw one or two distant ships, before the sun set behind the clouds on the horizon, after which we commenced to use cloud formations as something to aim for, still paddling on the same bearing of course.

By 10 p.m. the sun had been down for some while and the moon was well up but we

could not see South Bishop lighthouse. This was probably due to poor visibility on the Welsh coast.

Towards the end of the next hour one of us sighted the light flashing and we all took bearings on it. Adding these together and dividing by three (Ah-hem!?) produced the unwelcome conclusion that it was just about due South. This meant that we were going much slower than planned and/or were drifting too far to the North. We consulted the chart and then fed all relevant information into the computer in the rear of George's boat and waited. 25 seconds later, the resulting output read, "Alter course 80 to the South, on to a new bearing of 3000". George then proceeded to lighten his load by accidentally losing a full bottle of 'Dynamo' over the side. After this, our first mid-course correction, we resumed paddling until we stopped again for normal refreshments plus a shared cup of coffee at half-past midnight. It was still a clear night with a good moon and the fourth ship to pass us was disappearing in a Southerly direction. We must have been close on 20 miles from Wales and the stop was also timed to coincide with the 00.30 shipping forecast which was still favourable.

At 01.30 we sighted what can only have been the B.R. ferry 'Caledonian Princess' about 6 miles or so to the North, going towards Fishguard. I said to Ian, "This time tomorrow night we'll be on that!" but I wasn't all that sure myself. The hazard of being run down by ships could be rationalised to some extent by observing the relative positions of their mast-head and navigation lights, making it fairly easy to judge direction.

Shortly after seeing the ferry we sighted a ship to the South whose nearness and course suggested a possible crossing of paths. With one eye to the front and one to the left we paddled until we had crossed its heading and then stopped for our 02.00 rest, supplementing normal refreshments with a flask of hot soup. The radio went off at this time and as we were repacking kit, Ian said, "It's stopped!" Sure enough, that now seemingly stationary vessel was broadside on, just a short distance away, possibly 200 yards. It was quite eerie, three of us bang in the middle of the Irish Sea, silence, and this huge illuminated shape sitting on the glassy sea.

"Is it unmanned, drifting with half-eaten meals on the cabin and galley tables?"

"No, it must be manned. Have they seen our red lights?"

Assuming the latter we decided to paddle off so as to give no undue cause for concern. We imagine them arguing; "Canoes! You're drunk!" "I'm telling you I shaw three!" "What, out here?!" "I'll never touch a drop of that shtuff again, hic!".

Our schedule showed the time for our first possible sighting of Tuskar rock lighthouse as 02.20 but we were not too optimistic about this.

During the next hour I became more and more drowsy (hardly having slept since Friday night) until at the 03.00 stop, all other methods having failed to keep my eyes open, we agreed I should attack the Dexedrine bottle and I took one tablet. George then took the lead setting a good pace while Ian stayed with me until the drug took effect. When it did I felt much better, being wide awake and possibly slightly 'high' because I did not stop talking until the next stop at 04.15.

By that time it had started to get light but it was very cloudy and visibility was poor, due to fog. (I imagine it was the first time that any of us had watched the moon rise and set, as it had gone down at about half-past midnight.)

During the latter hours of darkness, without the illumination of the moon and with the stars being hidden by clouds, we were having to paddle continually on the compass, as there was nothing on which to keep taking a sight. Throughout the trip there had been just a slight headwind, which was noticeable because of our swing round to the East every time we rafted up for a rest. I think you could imagine how disconcerting this was after each stop as in the blackness of night, we had to turn round and seemingly paddle back the way we had come! Also the wind could have been putting us a couple of hours behind time.

Rafting-up has many advantages but it tended to cause slight sickness, stressing the point that boats should be as self-contained as possible.

At 05.30 it was fully light with a clearer sky but fog still caused poor visibility although the weather looked promising.

We had seen no ships for some time but our heads were turning like those of spectators at Wimbledon, in case any loomed up out of the mist. Tuskar had still not been sighted but at least we could stop staring at the compass and start aiming for clouds again. (By this I mean we looked at which cloud was on our bearing and then aimed for it, correcting this regularly.)

We had been really looking hard in hopes of sighting Tuskar light, since shortly after 2 a.m. and this had played havoc with our eyesight. All three of us genuinely thought we saw flashing lights many times but had been sadly disappointed. Then, when it had been light for a short while, George exclaimed, "Look! Over there! It's a submarine!" Ian and I stared at this and sure enough that's what it was. Or was it? "No it's not," corrected George, "it's a man in a fishing boat and he's coming this way!"

Overjoyed at the thought seeing an actual human we stared even harder (?) in that direction. Can you guess what it was, or our feelings as out of the mist drifted a full-grown sea-gull on a log?! I can understand how people feel in a desert.

The radio had resumed by this time and there was a fair assortment of music on. Close your eyes and try to imagine being in a canoe, 20 miles from land on a glassy sea, with Johnny Cash stamping out "I'll Walk the Line". Fantastic! You must try it sometime. Then at 05.45, it happened for real, somebody (one of us I might just add!) shouted, "It's there! Look, two flashes every 7 1/2 seconds!" We had sighted Tuskar light. We watched it for a few times then nothing!

Cursing our enthusiasm and jubilation we realised it must be about 'switch off' time and we had forgotten to take a bearing. Which direction was it? It could have been any. We scanned the horizon, then Ian said (not too loud, possibly in fear of blowing it out), "It's there again!" and we all took bearings, 3300.

Within two minutes it had 'gone out' for good. We had been very lucky sighting it during the last five minutes of flashing, but it was there, we were bang on course. (If anyone is thinking, "3300, 3000 bang on course?", remember by this time we were approaching the end of the ebb tide and due to the sine-wave of plotted tidal drift, we should have been to the South of it. The coming flood tide would then drift us back up, virtually past Tuskar, into Rosslare harbour.) It was probably 10-15 miles away though, still a few hours' paddling.

Then behind us we noticed the beautiful sunrise, with the sun just clear of the horizon. It was a magnificent morning and the sea was still really calm. The feeling was marvellous; "Good to be alive" does not even start to describe it.

We paddled on with raised spirits but during the next hour it was quite noticeable that Ian was becoming tired. At about 07.00 we sighted Tuskar Rock in the flesh, probably 6 miles away, a tiny tooth on the horizon.

The next hour saw Ian's drowsiness become extreme together with a feeling of sickness and he started to both sweat and shake. At 07.30 we stopped for him to take a tablet. We resumed with Ian setting the pace and course, which we had altered to 2850 to compensate for increased flood rate, since we were at least 1 hour late.

During the next hour we altered course a couple of times, to avoid being swept past Tuskar, until we were paddling on due West.

We arrived at the rock just before 09.00 and received a really enthusiastic reception from the keepers. After initial greetings the first question was, "How's der Dynamo lastin' out?". We wondered how they knew about that. Their invitation to breakfast we graciously declined but willingly accepted the offer of cups of tea, or, to quote (in a beautiful Irish accent), "Yes, that's what I'll do. I'll be makin' a cup o' tea and bringin' it down t'yer."

One of them directed us round to an inlet that was "... calm as a duck pond". They were so well informed about us it was amazing. When he brought the tea the chief said, "Yer'll be surprised what Oi know" and amongst other things said of George, "... he's an aero-engineer, with four children ..." (and then with remarkable emphasis added) "... and he's married!". We were in stitches at this.

They told us about all the people waiting at Rosslare (not the mayor, he was reported to be drunk) and that they would radio Fishguard for us. We finished off a flask of hot oxtail soup and generally made ourselves more comfortable, while the keepers sampled this 'mysterious Dynamo'. After much thought one looked down and said, "Really good stuff, that."

Shortly after 9 o'clock, with many "Cheerio's", best wishes and thanks, we set off for the last stretch to the mainland. Since the Irish coast is so low there, only about 60 feet high, it had only come into view about an hour before we reached the lighthouse.

We were told it was at least an hour or so before 'slack' so we headed West again, expecting the last of the flood to take us up to Greenore Point and round into Rosslare harbour. As it happened this local 'info' was wrong because we detected little or no drift, so after a short while altered course straight for the point.

Just after leaving the rock we saw the B.R. ferry again going out to sea. Noticing his apparent south-east heading we thought, 'That's a funny course to set for Fishguard'. Then as she was broadside on to us and not all that far away, she gave a loud blast on the horn. And then another. We were tempted to think that it was for our benefit but thought, 'No, it can't be'. We watched it pass Tuskar, still wondering the reason.

Unfortunately the ebb started to flow before we reached the point and after paddling 'upstream' for about half an hour, it was nearly 11.00 by the time we rounded the headland into the entrance to Rosslare harbour.

Well, we'd done it! The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. After a few minutes we saw Clive and Garth running along the beach shouting inaudible welcomes and questions, to which we replied as energetically as we could. We carried on paddling along the coast, right up to the harbour wall. It was quite a struggle against the ebb stream but was still better than carrying the boats.

At 11.20 we stopped paddling and for the first time in just over 17 hours got out of the boats. Our back-sides instantly heaved sighs of relief and infinite gratitude. There were cameras clicking, hand-shakes, welcomes, questions, congratulations and numerous kinds of offers of help or hospitality. There is certainly nothing wrong with the Irish down in that part of the world (a conclusion we had already reached when we left Tuskar).

One kindly couple, who owned the cafe where Carol, Clive and Garth had spent the night, gave us the use of their bath, fed us and then offered us the run of the premises for the rest of the day.

In the afternoon we sent numerous post-cards, slept, made arrangements with B.R. about transport home, secured 10 copies of Monday's edition of the Dublin 'Evening Herald' and went back to the cafe (it felt more like another home) to read about ourselves over tea.

We wandered out and watched the ferry dock from above the harbour and in the early evening, after more congratulations, hand-shakes and last farewells we made our way down. Collecting the boats, etc., we boarded the 'Caledonian Princess' via the car deck. Sinking into the seats we thought, 'This is the sensible way to do it'. After a couple of pints in the bar we were invited on to the 'bridge' by the Captain who confirmed that they had altered course in the morning and the two 'blasts' were just for us. For 45 minutes we watched them navigate out of the then fog-draped harbour and commenced the crossing to Fishguard. George was going to lend a hand but they seemed to be managing fairly well by themselves.

On returning to our seats we then slept until just before 03.00 (Tuesday morning) when

we docked at Fishguard. We shook hands with some still incredulous members of the crew, before disembarking through the gaping mouth of the ship. There was a marvellous reception for us on the harbour, prepared by the rest of the club. It looked as if the whole campsite had come. We waked the red carpet (three rolls of crepe paper) and then opened the 'champers' while answering more questions and relating dozens of experiences. When the last drop was drained we piled into the cars and the convoy set off for camp, to sleep as long as possible.

From the trip we think we can lay four claims:-

- 1) The first crossing of the St George's Channel (Southern entrance to the Irish Sea) by single-seater kayak.
- 2) The first East to West crossing of the Irish Sea by canoe.
- 3) The fastest time for a canoe crossing (obviously ignoring the very narrow top section), the actual time being 17 hours, almost to the minute.
- 4) The youngest person to canoe across the Irish sea (Ian Tatam, 22 years 21/2 months).

Just a few other details and points that may be of interest:-

- a) The stimulant drug was very effective but should only be used as a last resort, when not too far from the destination.
- b) Plenty of sleep beforehand is essential.
- c) Seats were uncomfortable at the base of the spine, scars as evidence.
- d) Calmness of water was dull, but removed the risk of sea-sickness (almost!).
- e) We were 8 hours out of sight of lighthouses and 10 hours out of sight of land. Confidence in the compass is essential!
- f) Mist must have shrouded the lighthouses at either end.
- g) We saw about 10 ships in all; the dock strikes could have had some effect on this.
- h) Ready access to food and equipment is always a problem.
- i) Towards the end, George and Ian had to force themselves to eat and drink. They did not look forward to either.
- j) The actual distance travelled was about 57 miles.
- k) The tape-recorder idea worked well. It is quite humorous but could have doubled as a 'black-box' recorder in the event of the worst.
- l) Tuskar said they were listening on our SARBE frequency all night; a very pleasant and reassuring surprise.
- m) The trip raised £170 for the Derbyshire Society for Brain Damaged Children. The sponsoring was incidental and not planned.
- n) We learnt later that we had been broadcast on coastal reports to shipping as a 'Hazard to shipping', that night.

This account was written with George's help but I would like to print also some comments of Ian's:-

"I had no real preparation for the trip, mental or otherwise. I did none of the organisation and had so much to do at home the weeks beforehand that I did not really think about it. Once a day and time had been fixed, I still did not worry in any way. I just saw the trip as a very long paddle, which I had to do before I could get down to my holiday. Once under way I felt quite happy, enjoying the paddle, with the sun and a glassy sea. Even during the night I did not feel sleepy or worried, but was getting uncomfortable in my boat.

It was soon after dawn that I developed a headache and began to feel sick and faint; then I began to worry. I didn't know what I could do and knowing we still had about 5 or 6 hours to go didn't help. After my 'fix' I kept going (with encouragement from G. and J.) until it took effect, after which I went on quite happy (or high!).

As we approached the harbour I began to feel sorry that it was all over although I was ready to stop.

Once we had landed I had a great feeling of achievement, especially as people started asking us about our trip and taking photo's.

It is a trip I shall not forget and "I will canoe on the Irish Sea, some more - now."

Ian Tatam"

A lot of planning went into this trip in the form of navigational exercises, tidal calculations, mental preparation and physical training, and we are firmly convinced that it was necessary. None of it was wasted! The catch-phrase for the week was that the trip was "... executed with the precision of an Apollo Mission". Our ideal was that if the planning was done properly the actual crossing should be without problems. This turned out to be near enough the case for us although, as with every sea trip, we still learnt more from it.

What we would ask people to bear in mind is that we don't live near the sea. We are Midland canoeists and as such are very proud of our achievement.

Below is a list of people who we would like to thank for over the past months having helped us in so many different ways towards the planning and actual completion of the crossing:-

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The members of the Midland Canoe Club, Derby

'Big G.'

If anyone requires further information of any sort, we will be only too pleased to supply it.

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