



# Hayle Canoe Club

Affiliated to the British Canoe Union

Established 1983



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## Solo Trip: Sennen to The Scillies and Return, in a Weekend: 2nd/3rd July 2011

So.. I'd seen the forecast at the beginning of the week, would it hold?: If it did, I knew it would be good to get to the Scillies this weekend. I'd already put a message out to the club about doing Sennen to Hayle, and I felt bad about letting down Derek and Charlie - But I had to go... The forecast was too good, coupled with spring tides, the opportunity was just too good.

It was Thursday I made the decision definitely to go. The forecast had remained the the same; It was all looking great. An invite went out to friends to accompany me - but no takers, all too busy. So it was me, by myself. That was good, only one person to lose out there.. The adrenaline started pumping, I started to get hyper, my hands stated to shake - and I was only in the office at work!

I wasn't sure which boat to take. It wasn't going to be a record attempt: after all, I haven't trained for over 2 years, so I didn't contact my sponsor, Valley Sea Kayaks, for the loan of a Rapier, the boat I had used to set the record of 4hrs 31mins three years prior. So I had the choice of my 'everyday' Cetus, or an Inuk that was sat idle in the club. This was the same design Sean Morley had used to set the previous record a few years ago, but a design I had only paddled briefly with Sean in Brittany in 2003. I went down to the club that night, dusted the Inuk off, and went for a 10 minute paddle. The rudder still worked, and I felt safe as houses -the Cetus was ditched there and then.

I then went to JP's to borrow a deck compass and a lightweight stove, given mine had got wet and corroded. He advised me to be cautious about the deck compass, only to use it as a guide. I returned home to do the nav. How fast would I be travelling? I didn't know - I knew it would be more than 3knots, 4, 5 maybe? I hadn't a clue. The boat had felt reasonable but heavy, even when unladen; that's fine on flat water in the harbour, but what about fully laden with a bit of chop and a 5ft swell which was forecast for the return? I did the nav for both 4kn and 5kn, arrived at a bearing, then felt safe in the knowledge if I was slow I followed course for 4, if not, 5. All angles covered. No chance I would go faster, not with a laden boat and no training. Got to sleep about 2pm.

So to Friday. I told my boss I could do with the afternoon off 'cuz I was going to paddle to the Scillies.' I think he thought I was off my head. Thankfully he agreed. So I left work at lunchtime and immediately began getting kit ready: Checking flares, charging batteries, camp kit, repair kit etc, and buying supplies. Tried to suss my GPS given the advice about the deck compass, but failed - OK: I'll just use it as a compass and speed guide. Then went to the club to help with the St Ives leisure trip - A good turn out, and a lovely evening - But where were all the other club members on a night like that? Whilst on the beach at St Ives I received a text: 'Going to the Scillies, hope to bivvy on the Outer Isles.' I thought someone was taking the mick - I'd switched my sim card into a cheap phone for the weekend but hadn't copied over all the contacts, so I didn't no who the joker was.. I replied back: 'So am I. Who's this?' To my surprise the response came 'Me. Guy.' Immediately I rang back, apologised, then Guy let on that he was taking the Scillonian across.. Phew! For a minute I thought I had a race on! A quick pint at the Bucket of Blood followed the trip back, then home to do the nav for the return journey.

Same process: One at 4kn, one at 5. A few more checks then off to bed at approx 1.30pm, with alarm set for 6am.

Woke up a little groggy, but felt better for a couple of cups of tea. Got all the kit loaded then had the trusted old energy breakfast. Emptied the dog, rang the coastguard as I knew I wouldn't get reception at the start point, then set off for Sennen. After heading out of Crowlas and viewing Mounts Bay, I could not believe what I was seeing - A complete millpond, the whole bay a complete sheet of glass. Seldom have I ever seen it like that. I started hooting, knowing it was going to be an amazing trip. The adrenalin flowed even more.

Arriving at the car-park at the end of Sennen, there was no-one else there. I purchased two tickets, one for Saturday, the second for Sunday, and wrote a note saying I had kayaked to Scilly, back Sunday eve, approx 9pm. I offloaded the boat and carried it to the shore, followed by all the kit. As I was getting changed a V-dub van turned up with an Explorer and an Atlantic on the roof. A quick chat with the guys who had come down from St Agnes, and were off to Longships as it was one of their favourite paddles. I felt a little self conscious saying I was doing my first solo mission across to Scilly. Was it showing off? Or was I just stupid? Either way I felt uncomfortable saying it. My leaving party then showed up - Thanks Mum & Dad. I was more or less ready, so it was just a case of Dad helping me lift the boat into the water, saying goodbyes, then preparing for the off.. I turned the GPS on, knowing it took time to 'acquire satellites' then did final adjustments to kit. I couldn't understand though why the boat felt so uncomfortable - The seat was digging into my butt across the middle and across the top: I'm sure I would have noticed it on Thursday had it been this bad. Ah well, too late know.. I got the camera out, took a photo of shore, of the watch, put it away again; Quick wave, then I was off.. Leaving at 10:04:06. A little earlier than planned, but if I was slower than I planned I had given myself a little 'lee-way' at the end.

Paddling across to Longships I was amazed by how much the boat was getting tossed about by the currents: Given it was so calm I hadn't intended using the rudder. However, it was quite clear that with all the gear in the boat it wasn't going to manoeuvre as readily as I would have wished. Down went the rudder - a little sticky as it hadn't been used for so long, but then I was away, just cruising.. Beautiful..

Half way across to Longships I caught sight of the two 'St Agnes' chaps: They had managed to set off as I was going through my final checks and were clearly heading for the middle of the rock-cluster, south of the actual lighthouse. I had to go north of it, so unfortunately I wasn't able to have a chat as I passed. I caught them rapidly, passing them about 400m short of Longships. Another quick wave which was returned by both of them (nice), and that was it.. Just me, my compass (and GPS used only as a compass and speed guide - no waypoints: I've not sussed how to use it yet!) , and 24 miles of open sea to cross. What a feeling. This is what it's all about folks. Total freedom. Unequivocal, natural, beauty..

Initial speed reports from the GPS suggested 4-4.5kn. That's ok, I thought. But what would it be when I got tired? I was a little concerned, but tried to find a little comfort in that I knew the tide wasn't fully with me at this point. Was I in for a long slog, though? The deck compass pissed me off, or was it the GPS that was wrong? The compass was reading almost 30 degrees different to the GPS. I had checked the setup of the GPS the day previous, but couldn't change the magnetic deviation, which was reading just 9s- it should have been around 3.5mins.. I didn't think this would be significant, but would it? I had a handheld compass which I could have used to check, but I just wanted to get going.. So I just got going .

After leaving the confused waters around Longships, the beauty of the surroundings bore their full weight upon me. This was just awesome, almost surreal; To be out here by myself in such peaceful surroundings, but where the savage seas have claimed so many. A gentle south easterly on my back, blue skies, crystal visibility, and not a sound to be heard except the 'splish' of my wing-paddles. An

hour went by like this, just immersed in tranquility: No noisy fishing boats, no tankers, just the occasional helicopter and light aircraft flying back and forth my destination.

So to re-fuelling. I had had a drink from my drinks bladder after half an hour, more from trying to prevent dehydration than by the need to drink. The bladder was placed on my rear deck, beneath bungees. Normally I would have had it in the boat between my legs, with the tube coming up inside the spraydeck waist. However, the deck which fitted the boat was a medium - and I aint no medium any more! So had I done this the tube will have been crushed, preventing me from getting any fluids. So it went on the back deck, with the idea the tube would come over my shoulder, and I would use a cable-tie on the shoulder strap of my BA to hold the tube in place. I forgot to do this whilst at Sennen, so I had a drinks tube flying loose. I put it inside my BA shoulder strap, but the slack at the bottom caught the water and dragged the entire tube into the water, so I was dragging a drinks tube. I stopped paddling, and put the tube back underneath the BA strap, only for it to happen again. So I then put it between the webbing upper and the neoprene lower on the shoulder strap. I was sure that would sort it.

The next half hour was time to eat: Buttered Malt Loaf, a hot cross bun, and more fluids. The deck bag Mum and Dad got me for Christmas proved invaluable for this: All my food - muesli bars, bananas, jelly babies! Was right there in front of me - within arms reach! No popping spraydecks, no rafting up (with who!), no hassle - Fantastic! Then to drink... Where's that drink tube gone? Not within reach, it had managed to release itself from my BA shoulder strap and was now some how balanced lengthwise towards the tail on the back deck, as if I couldn't have positioned it more perfectly - but how could I grab it back there without falling in? And if I couldn't reach it, how could I last the entire trip without hydration? Luckily, I managed to stretch and grab it without falling in. It was obvious this was going to be a recurring problem, so the next tactic was to wrap it around my waist, thinking that given the calm conditions no water would come up on deck and wash it off..

Coming North of Wolf Rock (to the South) brings the next set of problems - shipping. Make no mistake, these buggers are big. And whereas we normally see them moving fairly dosile in harbours, they don't out here! They move fast, unbelievably fast, given their perceived, slow, majesty.

So after an hour and a half we're now into the zone where the tide should start helping me a little more. I look at the GPS and sure enough, rather than 4-4.5kn, it's now reading 6-6.5kn. Shit! Is this for real? Or is it just temporary? I monitor more closely... Nope, we're definitely travelling consistently at over 6 knots.. Whoop, Whoop!!!! And I'm still just cruising... Don't you just love them spring tides! My first real sighting of unusual wildlife follows: A pair of sunfish, together (courting?) on the surface.. I pass within around 10m. Unfortunately I disturb them and they disappear below the surface - Sorry guys.. (Been there before haven't we!).

The next refuel, and again, the tube which was previously around my waist, had dragged around onto the back deck. I was again in the precarious position, now in the shipping channel, of having to reach around to find the drinks tube on the back deck. I grabbed it again successfully, but more annoyed.

Was this going to become a persistent problem? In a moment of frustration I just stuffed the tube underneath the waist of my buoyancy aid.

I continued to paddle across the shipping channel, eyes peeled, looking for these steel monsters that can appear from nowhere. All was ok. No tankers, except in the distance.. Still travelling 6-6.5kn.. Wait a minute.. What about her on the horizon to the left, she looks like she's heading straight for me.. Nah.. She's miles away... Keep going, she'll pass behind you if you keep going.. Even though she was so far away, the frothing white of her bow wave shone even from there - It was obvious I didn't want to get caught any where near her, her bow-wave, or her wash - the consequences were unimaginable..

Pass behind she didn't. We were on collision course. Figuring this fact I thought I best give way.. I

altered course and travelled directly south for about 6 minutes, with the plan to go behind the beast. Constantly in my mind was the thought that if I just paddled hard, I could get past her.. Fortunately I let the conservative nature of my character get the better of me, perhaps wisely.. The photos' show the tanker passing in front of me - but the distance wasn't great, I assure you - I have taken 4 or 5 more photo's and none of them are able to show the whole tanker, because she's too close. I wait for her to pass, avoiding the swirling 'propellor' water, then cross behind her, taking a photo as she continued on her path. Thank you for not running me down.

Heads down, and carry on. Get back in your rhythm. For the first time in the entire trip I manage to catch a run (a ride with a swell), Woohoo! The boat still moves given the chance.. If only I could find more like this - the problem was there was very little swell, and most of it was coming towards me - so I would be relying on counter-swells generated by the superlight wind on my back -not a lot of help coming from there, then..

Two hours gone, again time to refuel. More malt loaf, another hot-cross bun, then the drink, and the drinks tube.. Well I never, it was still there, tucked safely beneath my BA waistband. I've got to be honest, I was feeling pretty shot at this point, maybe the 'spur of the moment, no training' thing wasn't a good idea after all. Keep going, get back into your rhythm. It seemed that directly after re-fueling my pace slowed. The body is amazing, obviously it was taking blood from my heart and muscles and putting it around my stomach. Good to know things are still working correctly!

So we keep plugging away. I see the first buoy of the trip. The current is flowing with me, and fast. I check the GPS: Still 6.5kn, but I'm knackered. The calculations start to go through my head - 6knots, 3hrs, 18 nautical miles. 6.5knots, 19.5 nautical miles... Hell, the trip is only 21nm, we could be talking below 3.5hrs if I keep this up! Keep going! Where am I? Sevenstones lightship - where is it? I look to the horizon to the right - a white dot on the horizon - Is that it? Surely it can't be that far away... Maybe it is. Head down, keep going..

2.5hrs - Refuel again, more malt loaf.. Olive-oil spread on my fingers - don't put them back on the paddle grip or you will regret it.. So I wiped them off on the neoprene spraydeck, then put my hands into the centre of the shaft so I didn't 'grease up' the proper grip. I was paddling 'duracel bunny' style! Wait up, check the GPS - I'm still going 6.4 knots - what's this all about? I'm paddling like a plonker but still going as fast as I would if I was paddling properly - and it's easier! I couldn't work it out.. Then I thought 'Inuit... Inuit paddle..' I was paddling like the Inuits, but with a modern, carbon fibre wing paddle. I had always dismissed those long wooden poles as inefficient, but now it was all making sense. I had lost my strength due to lack of training, but using this daft technique I was still able to go just as fast - Totally MAD!

My bum began to hurt -I can't say go numb, because it hurt. I'd never experienced this pain in a boat before. I stopped paddling and lent back onto the rear-deck, lifting my butt off the seat. Holding it there for a few seconds, I allowed some blood-flow to the area, which began to feel more normal, but wait.. Jeez... Cramp! Cramp in my inner thighs, down to my knees. Stretch it! How can I stretch it? Move my legs: No, that's worse: Lift your knees; No, worse again. Shit.. How can I get rid of this? Just relax, go steady.. The cramp abated, but remained there, hovering in the background, poised to strike again.

Sevenstones - Where is it? Still no sign.. I've been going for almost three hours and still no sign of Sevenstones.. Have I got it all wrong? But wait, what's that on the horizon? Yep, that's land! There they are! The Scillies! I'm not going to get lost!! Head down! We're still below three hours and I can see The Scillies.. So where is Sevenstones? Ahh, that white dot to the right.. It's got closer, a lot closer - Oh, and it has one of them big bow-waves again! A second tanker heading straight for me, again!

3hrs upon us. More malt loaf, another hot cross bun, drinks tube still safe under BA waistband. More

grease on paddle and then Inuit style paddling, no loss of speed.. Amazing! This time I knew I would have to head North around the approaching tanker. A little more confident than last time I cut the corner - close enough to give the guys on deck the 'thumbs up' which they returned, probably thinking I was bonkers... No photo's this time, it was just another tanker, but I probably passed within 50m of her stern, which may sound a lot, but I assure you out there, with all the turbulence from the props and no-one to rescue you, is plenty close enough.

Where's Sevenstones? Sod Sevenstones! I can see the Scillies, I can even see the rock at the entrance to the channel between the main isles. Head down, go for it.. 3hrs 15mins. I can see the finish.

This could quite possibly be faster even than the double ski that crossed a couple of years ago (with support). Keep going.. Cramp: Stay out of it! Stretch again.. Keep going! I was heading straight for the finish line now, as direct as possible. The cramp in my legs was still there, still in the background, but whichever way I tried to move to rid myself of it, only made it worse. Clearly I was stuck with it for the rest of the trip.

3hrs 30. The rock is still there, getting ever closer. Time to refuel again; Should I? I've got 10 minutes to beat the double ski time: Forget refuelling, just go for it - Go, go, go.. The cramp was still restricting; duracel bunny for a bit, putting less stress on the body. Check the GPS - Still good speed, but wait a minute, heading a completely different bearing compared to my planned route. A little odd again, but at least I was heading direct for the finish line. I kept going, direct to the finish..

3hrs 35mins. The finish is closer, but not close enough. I check the GPS. Speed has dropped to just over 3kn, yet I was still paddling hard. Obviously I was now battling against the currents (which you can't see out here). Re-tracing the nav I realised that in going direct for the finish I had unwittingly slowed myself up. I knew now I was not going to beat the double-ski time - I just had to keep going, keep plugging away, and try and keep the cramp at bay. I recall a text I had sent the day before reckoning the trip would be done in 3hrs 50mins.. This was now the target.

Looking ahead, the surface of the water changed from being nice and smooth, to being 'mottled', a sign of changing currents. I knew I was heading into a section where the boat could be thrown off course, possibly even, given my tiredness, throwing me in, which would have been interesting given the ever-poised cramp. I knew I had to be cautious. I relaxed my paddling style, ready to throw in a few braces if required, and entered the changing currents.. The water was swirling and boiling, such a contrast to the solid, smooth swells of the rest of the trip. I was surprised by the strength of their confusion - clearly the ebb and flood of the spring tides were battling against each other. Powerful forces at work of which, given another hour, there would only be one winner..

I got through the confused section unscathed. Again, it was a case now of regaining a rhythm, and paddling as hard as I could to the finish. I was shot.. Nothing was happening, no matter how hard I tried. I checked the GPS again: I was now down to 4kn and again, heading a totally different bearing to both the last time, and the plan.. Basically I knew I had buggered up. Checking the watch, 3hrs 50 had passed. I couldn't understand how I had been paddling at over 6kn for most of the trip, and still ended up outside the time I had planned for 5kn - Obviously the error was in heading directly for the finish line as soon as I saw it: One for the drawing board after my return! The plan now was to just get there, get to the finish line. Duracel bunny again, then normal, duracel, normal.. I eventually got to Hanjaque Rock (pronounced Han-Jake) at 2.07:13pm, total time 4hrs 3mins 7secs, disappointed because it gone from being such a great time, to being 'normal,' within the space of just an hour. I knew I had to photograph my watch, but I had to stretch my legs - for the last hour from my groin down to the inside of my knee they had been on the verge of cramp - That feeling when you know if you move you will set full cramp off, but also if you try and gently stretch you will cramp up also. I was in a no win situation. My butt was killing me, I had to get it off the seat - So I lent back and lifted it, and the cramp set in..

What seemed like an eternity of pain, but in actual fact was a matter of seconds, and slowly the dreaded cramp receded. I plonked my bum back on the seat and went about getting the camera out to

take the photo of the watch. Photo done, I then spotted four seals just behind the rock. I paddled gently towards them to get a close up shot but, too slow... They scarpered: Sorry, seals for aggravating you..

So then to admire the place I had longed to paddle back to after coming across with JP in 2008. Wow.. Just stunning.. Totally breathtaking. The waters crystal clear, the beaches virginal white, the distinctive 'Scillies' aroma of flora and fauna so refreshing. Memories of childhood holidays come flooding back. This place is an absolute treasure. I take a few more photo's, then set about finding my bedroom. The tide was a lot lower than I recall last time, either that or their has been a big sand shift. Carrying all my gear was going to be tricky, but I had to get out of the boat. Bracing across onto seaweed covered rocks I knew I was going to be in for a tricky walk until I reached the relatively thin stretch of sand which marked the entrance to my dwelling: Trying to save weight, I had not worn any wetsuit shoes, and my reefs were tucked away inside one of the hatches. I popped the deck, and slowly lifted my butt from the seat. The cramp returned. I was glad there was no-one around, I must have looked a right idiot rolling around on the back of the boat trying to stretch out, trying to find a position where I could stop both legs going into cramp at the same time. Eventually I was free from the debilitating pain. I slowly sat up and put a foot either side of the boat, slipping them around until I found a point at which I had some grip. A big heave and I was up, but boy did my butt feel sore. It was then I noticed in the bottom of the seat the block of foam which should have been my back-rest. I'd obviously dislodged this as I got into the boat at Sennen and ended up sitting on it, as apposed to in-front of it. No wonder the seat was uncomfy; The block, or rather strip, was about 30cm long by 10cm wide, and about 5cm thick. It was such a size as to 'cut' a line across my bum on it's rear edge, then because it lifted my butt so much I ended up getting another 'rub' from the back of the seat, on which I had obviously been perched. No wonder it was sore and numb, and no wonder my legs were cramping so much, having had their blood-flow restricted over such a long period of time. Note to self: Make sure the back-rest stays a back-rest on the return journey!

I grabbed a few basics from the deck-bag and made my way up to the beach. Each slippy step felt like my legs were going to cramp again. I got to the hot sand and parked myself down in comfort. I took on some more water and a hot cross bun. I'd had enough of salty malt loaf. A jelly baby.. Yes a jelly baby.. How sweet they can be!! Sometimes such a simple thing is absolute food heaven! More water and then I just lay back, admiring the view..

As I lay chilling I noticed the tide was now coming up. When planning a trip such as this it's all about ebb and flood, and the direction and speed of the flow - you take very little notice of high and low, so I hadn't factored in the state of the tide when arriving here. I looked to my right and there was a small passage of sand which I could use once the tide got high enough, which I could use to shuttle my gear up to my camp for the night. I checked my watch - no rush - I intended to go across to the shop at St Martins to get some treats, and a couple of beers. Plenty of time, so I let the tide do the work, lifting the laden Inuk and, slowly but surely, carrying it for me towards my shuttle park. Once it got there I dragged it up the beach far enough for it not to be taken any further, then unloaded the gear and set up camp, in amongst an ancient settlement. I knew I should eat, but I couldn't. I don't know why, despite all the effort I had put in I just did not feel hungry. Very odd - Normally I eat like a horse. Was it the heat? Was I suffering from heat exhaustion? I had specifically packed a sandwich box full of pasta boulognese, complete with titanium fork, ready to eat on arrival. Nope, not interested. I wasn't really that thirsty either. Maybe that was testament to my strict '30min' regime on the water: Thinking back to when I was younger, training for slalom races of perhaps 150 seconds long, I always struggled with the longer distance races. In those days I could go like a bat out of hell for 40mins, but after that, hypoglycaemia, chocolate required. I can even remember doing an 8 mile race at Bristol where I had to be lifted out of the boat at the finish - Hence the 30 min regime. Sure, as we get older we naturally get better at endurance, but I am now absolutely certain that replenishment before, during, and after is the key: Is that where I went wrong as a youngster doing the Hasler races? And my dad used to say I was just greedy...

Having set up camp I paddled gingerly across to St Martins. Yes my muscles were a little sore, but the main pain was from the deep down blisters on my hands. The Inuk felt soooo light! I cruised across, marvelling at the different sea weeds, all of them crystal clear due to the cleanliness of the water. I reached the beach and dragged the Inuk up a suitable distance, and was approached by a couple dragging their tender down to the waters edge. 'Have you come far?' The chap asked in well spoken tone. 'Sennen.' I replied. 'Sennen? Really? Good lord! By yourself? How long did that take you?' '4 hours 3 minutes 7 seconds.' I replied. 'My word! Really? Well done! It took us 12 hours yesterday from Penzance!' A few more questions about tide and conditions and the chap insisted he take a photo of me using my camera. I don't know your name, Sir, but if you do somehow get to read this - Thank you! That was a nice touch, A nice momento of an amazing trip, and something I can keep with me, probably for the rest of my life.

On leaving the beach at St Martins I found the public conveniences: Compact and bejau, but clean and welcoming, if a toilet can be - Ideal! I trudged up the hill to the post office, the sun now dropping and beginning to give a little much welcome shade behind the cottages as you make your way up.

Approaching the top of the hill you are able to take in the full splendour of the Scillies: To the left St Mary's, Tresco, Sansom & beyond, behind Ganilly (Great & Little), the Eastern Isles, and other smaller isles, many of which have become wildlife reserves, rightly so.. I took a few more photo's, the dropping sun providing an amazing canvas. I continued to the post office to pick up my treats. One would have thought people would have looked at me a little oddly, given I was wearing just a rash-vest and neoprene shorts, and also covered in salt, as I hadn't yet taken a dip in the sea. Nope, no-one batted an eyelid - Obviously they're used to it.

I picked up my treats, including a couple of beers, then proceeded to pay the £12.52 with my card. 'Sorry, it's not been authorised.' The gent said. 'Sorry?!' I replied. 'Your card hasn't been authorised.' 'Really? I only got paid yesterday?!'. The gent put it through again, and as doing so it seemed everyone involved with the shop, and the locals therein, all gathered round to see how a payment of £12.52 could be refused.. One lad grabbed my car keys and jokingly said 'Audi.. We'll have an Audi for £12.52!' I responded playfully 'You can have it, but it's 26 miles *that way*..' He just laughed and said 'Don't worry, we'll get it!' I'm sure they would have done if needed be! So I had to pay for my treats with the cash I had brought, and that kind of put a dampener on the evening. I had fully intended to go out and grab a decent meal that evening. Now I knew I may not be able to pay with my card for whatever reason I was now forced to having dinner 'chez moi'. I didn't particularly mind as it would lend a little more credence to the 'self-supported' aspect of the trip - Basically I did end up sustaining myself from the supplies I had carried with me. I took a few more photo's on the way back down the hill, then paddled back to my island.

I was now feeling hungry. Down went the pasta. Down went the Philips pasty. Fruit. Then the nice cold can. I brief walk around the isle after tea, then a dip in the sea. On returning to the boudoir I noticed a white sea kayak passing by the eastern end of my island. I didn't think it was Guy, as his gear seemed the wrong colour. Nonetheless I shouted. Whoever it was turned and looked, but then paddled on. They looked again, and I waved. They continued. Ah well, perhaps it wasn't Guy. Beginning to feel tired I then sat back admiring the seals, the birds, and appreciating the views in the setting sun.

It had been my intention to watch the sunset, but I later woke to the sound of seagulls fighting over a nest just opposite, and seals seemingly singing to each other. It wasn't dark, but the sun had set. Had I not cracked that can open I may have stayed awake to see what turned out, by all accounts, to be a truly amazing sunset. Ah well, I'll just get up and do the bedtime routine before settling in for the night. Ahhhhh! Cramp again.. In my legs, and now in my inter-costals (ribs). I was temporarily paralysed. A minute or so passed and I was up.

A poor night for sleeping. I was kept awake by cramp, both legs and ribs, seaulls arauina, and by the

I woke at almost bang on 7, a little groggy, but not bad considering. My body didn't want move but I knew it had to - the morning routine was upon us! A poor attempt by any accounts at the 'bury and burn' concept, partly due to the fact it was more or less high tide; and the reasonably stiff breeze heading straight in from the south east was determined to not let the lighter stay ignited.. Breeze?

What was all that about? There shouldn't have been any at this time in the morning - how was that going to affect my trip back, given that normally the wind will increase throughout the day. I cast my mind briefly back to our Lundy trip almost a year ago when, despite all the planning, a strong south westerly blew up and took us completely off track, but this time I was on my own.. In a way I felt more confident because I was the only one who would have to deal with the consequences: Obviously I am confident of my own paddling ability, and given I wouldn't be racing back it would only be a case of keeping fuelled up and being vigilant with the nav.. Not to make the mistake I had made on the way out; Just trust the nav..

Returning back to camp I sat down and put a brew on, then pondered breakfast. Yes, I had brought porridge with me, but I just didn't fancy it. So on went the mexican style cous cous, chilli bean big soup and pre-cooked chicken pieces, all of which I had brought across with me, and which was originally intended for last night's supper. I finished off the making the brew. After letting it cool a couple of minutes, man, what a brew! The best brew I'd seemingly had for ages! Yes it had only been a matter of 24 hours since my last cup of tea, but given my fluid intake since then had been a mixture of energy drinks followed by the odd beer, it was fantastic to get a 'normal' drink down my throat - with real milk

as well, instead of the powder I had brought across - Another of the 'treats' I had bought the previous evening in St Martins - Simple pleasures!

At first the cous cous/chilli bean mix went down well, but from about half way through it became a real effort. I had to force it down though: Who knows how much my energy stores were depleted, and who was to know how the trip back home would go. The return trip on my last outing had been absolutely fine for me, given I was paddling well within myself, but that was on the back of an outward trip where I had been within myself as well, and then I was reasonably fit! I knew today would be different: I had pushed myself the previous day, my uncomfortable night proved it. How were my energy levels, and how was my backside going to cope? On top of that, I also had a day lounging around in the sun to contend with. I knew keeping myself hydrated was paramount. I was mindful of some of the horror stories we had heard of people's return journeys - the fact that at Longships for many it had all seemed to go pear-shaped.. Had we just been lucky on our last trip?

The cous cous eventually disappeared, followed by another amazing brew. As I was eating, I watched the tide slowly retreating, eventually estimating I had approximately 1 hour to pack my gear and get it back into the Inuk, before I would be left high and dry as far as an easy passage to St Martin's was concerned. I say St Martin's as I had already planned to get across and spend the day there, rather than on my island. Although I had enough fluids and supplies to get me back across to Sennen, I hadn't brought across enough fluids to keep me hydrated all day in this brilliant sunshine, plus St Martins had some facilities, and most importantly I knew I would be able to find some shade over there, whereas there was no chance of that where I was.

I did the washing up, brushed my teeth, then packed my bags, even got excited at how much lighter my load was for the return journey! I carried the gear across the beach ready for loading, then from nowhere I was greeted by the broad smile of Guy. It had been him that I had seen the night before, he just hadn't seen me! We chatted for perhaps half an hour or more about his new boat, our trip down to the Lizard a couple of weeks prior, and he explained he had bivvied on the next island over, almost parallel to myself but on the opposite side. I was jealous as it appeared he had got himself a reasonable night's sleep! He eventually let on he had come to my island to have a look at the ancient settlement which he duly did, and seemed somewhat miffed, being a National Trust man, that 'they' hadn't yet cut back the gorse and bracken, to expose the stonework a little better. At this point I was also a little miffed, because if they had, I probably would have got myself a better night's sleep!

As we continued talking, a Rhib arrived, towing a small tender. On board was a couple clearly intending to spend some time on the beach behind us. After sorting their day's gear into the tender, the gent slowly rowed his good lady across the narrow stretch of water that lay between us. "Sorry to steal your island!" The gent said as the tender beached. "No problem!" I said, and guessing they were Scillonians, "I think it's more a case of me stealing yours!" They both set off up the beach with their supplies for the day.

Given the tide had receded yet more whilst we were talking, Guy kindly offered to help carry my gear closer towards the water's edge, which we duly did. Anxious to get more exploring done, we then said our goodbyes and I watched as he paddled gently back across to the Eastern Isles from whence he had come, en route to those lying further out which are classed as nature reserves. I would have liked to have joined him, but I was anxious not to over exert, or de-hydrate myself given the brilliant sunshine. The plan of heading to St Martin's to find some shade remained at the forefront of my mind.

Whilst sorting my gear into the Inuk, the Gent who had come over in the Rhib came back down, obviously inquisitive as to what I was up to. I wasn't sure at this point whether he was friendly native or about to lambast me for camping where I shouldn't. It turned out the former, introducing himself as Alan, the Assistant Harbour Master from St Mary's. He questioned whether I would be ok on my return

given he had noticed the increased swell size earlier that morning as they had been tending the Cruise Ship I had seen moored up. I assured him I would be fine, but questioned him about the tidal flows around the Isles. We had quite a long chat and I think somewhere along the way he realised I wasn't a total looney and did have a small clue about what I was doing! He did ask if next time I could ring and let them know, for no other reason than the Islanders are always interested when 'things like this' are done. He gave advice on where I should go on St Martin's, and also recommended the Fish and Chip Restaurant, but I said I wouldn't be going there as I doubt whether I could paddle for 5 1/2 hours with a belly full of St Martin's finest! He offered help with loading the kayak which I politely refused, given I wanted to know exactly where everything was, and the weight distribution. He stayed, watching inquisitively, as I got in the kayak and slowly turned to head off to St Martin's. He bade me farewell, and goodluck, I thanked him for his help and vowed to let him know when I would next paddle over.

The short trip over to St Martin's was absolutely stunning: Low tide sand banks appearing between the isles, making the waters appear a vibrant turquoise blue. Not a breath of wind. Glassy, clear waters, punctuated only by the odd insect floating on top. This was paddling heaven!!

I arrived on St Martin's at about 11.30. Not early, but early enough on a lazy Sunday for there not to be many people around. The dive school kiosk was a hive of activity with about half a dozen preparing to go out on their first dives. One of the youngsters remarked on how thick the wetsuits were; the Instructor replied how much colder the water was out here compared to the mainland. I continued up the hill towards the shop, the intention being to buy some water and fruit - I knew a day on malt loaf and pitta breads would play havoc with my stomach. As I approached the shop it was clear it was closed. I was gutted. I didn't have a great deal of cash on me now, and given the problems with my bank card the previous day I didn't really want to go to a restaurant, not least I would feel uncomfortable in my smelly wetsuit shorts and rashy. As I turned A chap appeared from within a workshop across from the shop, 'Excuse me?' I asked. 'Do you know what time the shop opens?' It turned out it had already opened for a couple of hours but I had just missed it. 'What are you after?' The chap asked. 'Well, I only need water really...' 'Wait there..' He said. He crossed the track and disappeared into the middle of a row of cottages. I could here voices from within, and after a couple of minutes the lady of the house came out and said 'Would that be big enough?' Holding up a small plastic water bottle. I was grateful of anything - The sun was beating down and we weren't yet into the main heat of the day. After disappearing to fill the bottle she returned with it full and handed it over. I thanked her most kindly and took a couple of swigs. 'That's not going to last long!' She joked, promising to re-fill it. More questions followed about what I was up to, in between getting a second, and then third top-up. I offered money but this was politely refused. The bottle was filled a final time and I left feeling very humbled.

I made my way back towards the beach with the sole intention of finding some shade under which to rest. On passing the chapel a couple of senior years emerged. 'You look like a kayaker..' The chap said, and started asking questions about what I was up to. It turned out their son was a sea-kayaker by the name of Steve Wetherall. I had to be honest and said although I was familiar with the name I didn't know him. They chatted at length about what he was up to at the moment, if I recall correctly I think it was Norway. We sat on the bench in front of the chapel whilst they had their packed lunch. The doves were cooing away, their sound crystal clear against the background of silence. We were visited by various other birds, totally unperturbed by human movement, all vying for a crumb or two to drop to the floor! We stayed for perhaps an hour or so, just basking in the sunshine and glorious views - perhaps longer than I had originally wished for, but given I wasn't concerned about the speed of the homeward journey I make no apologies for just 'chilling' with people with whom I had a common interest.

Eventually Mr & Mrs Wetherall departed, heading for the coffee shop, which was my cue to return to the beach and ensure nothing had happened to the Inuk. All was fine, so I headed for the facilities, which as much as anything, provided a welcome break from the burning sun. On the way in I spotted a drinks fountain - Ideal! Next stop after the loos!

After re-filling my drinks bottles at the fountain I then had roughly half an hour to prepare myself and the Inuk for the return trip, and have some lunch. As I checked my kit, I recognised one of the teachers looking after a group of school-kids at the waters edge. 'Tough work!' I joked. 'We're *supposed* to be on the boat back this afternoon!' Came the reply: No chance they were going to make that - A good day to be a teacher! At this point the tide revealed it had finally turned, flooding rapidly over the flatter low tide sand-banks. What a relief! It doesn't matter how much you go over the Nav, you always question whether you've got it right or not - Even with the assurances of the Assistant Harbour-Master earlier that morning, it still looked as if it was taking an age to begin flooding. Until that point the doubt had remained. And now the adrenaline began to flow again..

I couldn't wait. I had to get going. I dragged the Inuk back down the beach, made sure that blasted bit of foam was tucked behind the lip of the seat, adjusted the position of the my drinks and food so it was within easy reach, then climbed in. I began paddling slowly, but using the rapidly moving tide to take me to my start point, Hanjague Rock. Passing over the shallows I was acutely aware of the potential damage to the rudder - I didn't want to pull it up (as it had already proved it could be sticky), so it was a case of making sure I went down the mini 'rapids' dead straight, whereas I really needed to head south, to the right a little more. As I approached Hanjague I could only marvel at the clarity of the water. Even though probably 20-25ft deep, I could still see clearly to the bottom. The camera came out again. A few more shots, also some shots of yet more seals basking in the sunshine. Then it came.. Turbulence from every direction! I had obviously moved from the passage where the current was flowing solidly west to east, to the point at which all the currents flowing around the isles would converge back together. Time to put the camera away and concentrate on staying upright!

I eventually got in the lee of the currents, to the northern side of Hanjague. Looking out to the passage of water in front of me I could see nothing but chop, with white horses beginning to form in what was now a considerable spring tide. What had I let myself in for? This was supposed to be the easy trip! At least the look of what was happening out there corresponded to what I was expecting in terms of tidal flow, but I certainly didn't expect it to be that choppy, especially given there was only a light north easterly blowing. Ah well, in for a penny...! I couldn't wait any longer, not least because it was making me more nervous just looking at what was in front of me. So I set off about 5 minutes ahead of schedule.

The first half an hour was awful. What was I doing? I paddled on in the belief that sooner or later the currents would settle and become one, hopefully taking me towards Sennen. I knew that the first hour I would be getting dragged as much north as I would be travelling east. I knew also the current would be dragging me back west, hence the reason staying in the chop for so long - my position relative to the islands hadn't actually increased that much in terms of distance, though in terms of longitude it had.

This was a calculated gamble though - my thinking was to have a rougher beginning rather than a rough end - after ten or eleven hours of paddling in two days the last thing I would have wished for was to get caught in south west heading currents on my approach to Longships, as had happened in my previous trip with JP, especially not with the 5ft swell that had been forecast. So here I was, biting the bullet, just hoping that tactic would prove correct.

The first fuel stop on half an hour was ditched, my only intention was to get away from the chop, so I kept paddling - a cardinal sin by my normal standards, but acceptable I thought given the conditions. I

checked the GPS. Actual speed only 2.5kn. Not good enough. Was this going to be a trip from hell? Surely not.. Surely not with the hitherto fantastic weather conditions. I glanced over my shoulder to see if I was actually getting anywhere. Sure enough, though it didn't feel like it, the Islands had disappeared. The yacht that had set out to the south of me at the beginning was still there to my right, if only a little further south; clearly it too was having difficulty with the current and also the North Easterly which was now beginning to increase to what could be classed as a solid breeze. Not windy, but enough to know you had a head wind. Was this going to be against me all the way? The forecast as far as I could remember was that the breeze should have been on my back.

I continued paddling. Sure enough on the hour mark, the chop began to drop. I was happy that my plans in terms of the current at the beginning had proved right. I began to relax, and took my first fuel stop. I knew from here on in I would be in the first shipping channel. I was also aware I should be able to see Sevenstones lightship. No, it wasn't there. At least I knew my eyes weren't deceiving me on the outward trip. On finishing my malt loaf and hot cross bun, I got got back on the paddle in earnest. Now the chop had receded I was able to get into a rhythm for the first time. The headwind was still there, blowing straight into my face. Surely it wouldn't keep up all the way would it? The GPS was beginning to read between 4 and 5 knots. Not fast, but back to a regular speed which would mean I wouldn't be in for a complete nightmare provided things remained as they were.

For that first hour I was unable to absorb my surroundings, being more concerned about the immediate conditions around me. As I progressed, I became aware of the swell increasing from the North West. Would I be able to catch any as it picked up? I would hope so.. Maybe that would make up for having a slow start.

Soon the headwind would disappear. Unbelievably, the confused surface of the water would be replaced by the glass-like, oily texture. And silence. Nothing, except the rhythm of my paddles as they connected with the water. I stopped momentarily, and looked around. I couldn't believe what was happening. No chop. No boats. The yacht that had been loosely accompanying me had obviously changed tack and was now a dot on the horizon to the right. I started to laugh to myself. There I was in the middle of nowhere, blue skies, blue seas, and not a sound. An increasing swell moving swiftly underneath me again, without a sound. This was absolute bliss. Total tranquility, but with the power of the ocean moving silently, almost intimidatingly beneath me. Absolutely awesome! What had happened to the shipping? Not a boat had been seen nor heard.. Did they have a day off on Sunday? Seemed ridiculous, but given the tranquility of where I was it didn't seem implausible.





