

Self contained camping trip on the River Tay, from Crianlarich to Scone Racecourse, 7th to 12th April 2008.

Group Leader: Tom

Group Members: George , Craig, Lee, Richard, Stuart

Monday 7th April

A little groggy and tired because most of us had spent the weekend at the Surf Fest we met at 9.00, got the boats, trailer and kit together and set off in 2 vehicles to Crianlarich stopping at Stirling Services for a very poor lunch (bad enough that we won't be going back). On to Callander, which would have been a better stopping point, where we got our provisions for the week. Tom and Craig, Richard and Lee, formed two "catering groups" and George and Stuart were individual units. George chose this because he likes to experiment with different products and menus when camping from the boat, Stuart because he slept all the way from Ashington to Crianlarich.

We settled into the very comfortable hostel,

<http://www.syha.org.uk/SYHA/Web/Site/Hostels/Crianlarich.asp>, Tom and George did the shuttle and we all went to the local pub for a meal, pool and listening to an excellent juke box. Tom and George examined the Falls of Dochart section and devised a "portage plan" for the next day. They also decided to break the shuttle into 2, leaving a vehicle in Grandtully (pronounced Grant'ly by those in the know) rather than at the final destination "in case". George and Tom experienced some difficulty at the Grandtully SCA campsite because the signage there that directs paddlers to make queries at the Inn when that arrangement ended 3 years ago, also there is no-one to answer the published telephone number when you have queries.

We agreed to go for early starts and to have the first two days of the trip making significant progress so that should any problems/delays occur we would still complete the paddling in 4 days.

Tuesday 8th April

A day of mixed weather, some weak sunshine, rain, snow and gentle winds.

The start of the trip just downstream of the rail way bridge (a right turning onto a track off the A85 heading north west) NN 386255 was a pretty easy launch. It was quickly apparent that George and Tom's boat was heavily laden, one huge paddler (Tom) and the two older paddlers have accumulated loads of kit over the years compared to some very slim 16/18 year olds with minimal kit. The River Fillan is flat and leads down to Loch Dochart and Loch Lubhair. Incredibly atmospheric start to the journey, despite being close to a major road the river and lochs had a very isolated "feel", maybe we were lucky that the traffic was light. The entrance to Loch Lubhair was shallow and we had to walk the boats through this, good practice for much of the rest of the day. The River Dochart was shallow and rocky,

presenting challenges of navigating big heavily loaded boats (Old Town Kineo 169s) through narrow gaps and over ledges, although this section is described in the guides as pretty straightforward in these water conditions we had to work hard.

We arrived at the pre-decided get out above the falls of Dochart, on river right at the lay-by on the A827 200metres above the bridge in Killin. A 600 m portage, lunch and toilet stop saw us returning to the river above a series of small ledges. Tom and George misjudged the width of a slot and managed to get the boat stuck, a swift jump onto a rock and lift of the stern got George and the boat afloat before any damage occurred. This was the last of the moving water for the day and we happily paddled into Loch Tay. This is one of the most beautiful settings for open boat paddling imaginable. With the snow capped Ben Lawers (1214m) on the left, a long view down the loch with a range of peaks to our right this landscape was distinctly different to the closed in nature of the earlier part of the day. We passed (and discussed) the crannog at NN641362 before selecting a camp sit in early evening sun shine . We were able to camp on flattish grass above the loch whilst leaving boats and kit at the loch side where we were able to cook as a group.

We had made an early start and had plenty of time to make camp. The shallows on the Dochart and the portage through Killin had taken some time but being a pretty fit bunch (we averaged 7 kilometres per hour on the flat sections) we made up for this.

Wednesday 9th April

We paddled a further 18k through the splendour of Loch Tay, to lunch on a beach next to the PGL Water Sports Centre next to the Crannog Centre at Kenmore. We played some of our usual puzzle games as we went along and a great sense of community developed as we had friendly banter paddling along. We were all surprised when Denton (Richard's father) arrived at the beach – he'd come up to take some photographs and was hopeful that he had a few stunning landscapes with us in. He was already set up at Grandtully campsite and agreed to try to take some shots as we passed down the River Tay. Lunch went well and we moved on to the river happily, full of energy and recharged, our souls as well as our stomachs replete.

Entering the river we were much more aware of the anglers, on the banks, in the river and on boats weaving upstream, and had to navigate to avoid interfering with their enjoyment of the environment. After a few gentle meanders the River Lyon joined the Tay and made the river fuller a sit flows through a plain, in fact the river was fairly high. The banks had plenty of evidence of significant recent (ish) floods with debris high in the trees and whilst nowhere near flood level the river had a strong flow with plenty of bounce in the straight forward rapids we experienced.

We decided to get off at the start of the Grandtully rapids – the river was high and the boats heavy laden, whilst we may well have the skills to get down the rapid any rescue of such heavy boats in the strong current could prove difficult. We were greatly assisted by the fact that Denton met us in his car and took George to pick up his – so we had plenty of horsepower to carry our bags to the campsite even though we had the boats to move.

The campsite “misinformation” proved difficult this evening. During the process of setting up camp, moving kit etc the padlock on the gate stopped working with the code were given. At this point there was a vehicle inside the locked gate and one outside and phone calls to the numbers given on site and in advance of our booking weren’t replied to (and still haven’t been). There was a removable panel in the fence and George was able to drive his 4x4 out of the campsite and with Denton do the final shuttle. The SCA site at Grandtully is a great idea, the governing body owning land close to key paddling spots and being able to ensure access is excellent. However the management of the site leaves a lot to be desired – we had to put quite a bit of effort into cleaning the showers/toilets before we used them in order to leave them in a reasonable state for the next users. The incident with the padlock and the impossibility of getting an answer to enquiries coupled with misleading information creates frustration. We either had to remove the fence panel and drive over the grass or smash the padlock off and we wanted to clear these course of action with someone responsible.

Thursday 10th April

We made good time getting on to run the Lower Grandtully rapid which we did without incident. The weather had taken a turn for the worse and the fine word “dreech” was defined for us. The first day had included lots of wading in icy water and having cold water in the boats for most of the day and we were all reasonably warm, this third day we were all completely dry but the cold was bone chilling during the morning.

The strength of the flow and the fact that we were on schedule for shorted distances gave a sense of confidence for the trip – we had plenty of time to complete the journey and had we decided to put a sprint on we could have got to the Scone Racecourse campsite on this third day. Instead we took in the wonderful scenery and enjoyed the trip. Continued friendly relationships with the very many anglers and enjoyable grade 2 rapids mad the day very enjoyable. We had a long lunch break below Dunkeld/Birnam and everyone went off for an “explore “ of the town whilst Tom watched over the boats and kit. It becomes obvious that Tom looked after the kit when you learn that the group failed to find either a chip shop or a bakery.

The afternoon had us paddling very leisurely to camp in the woods river right below Caputh Bridge. The site was wonderful although it is used by dog walkers and some evidence of this activity is left behind. The extra time meant that we were able to camp comfortably and we managed to build an excellent camp fire to sit and chat around. During the evening there was very loud thunder and dazzling flashes of lightning, we were able to watch gratefully a violent storm travelled south and east over Perth and the Tay Estuary. We experienced a few spots of rain, just enough to fill us with apprehension that soon passed.

Friday 11th April

The last paddling day saw us up and at it good and early, packing up each morning in dry weather was a great boon and practice made us a little slicker. A stretch of gently meandering river followed by some straightforward rapids gave a 90 minute warm up before Campsie Linn. After inspection we went down the extreme right hand easy route. We discussed the possibility of the far left and could all see a

possible line, but the possibility of capsize and difficult rescue and many anglers below decided us on the less stimulating descent. Shortly after Campsie Linn we came to Stanley – a large weir followed by many smaller ones and rapids with strong flows on bends, This was a hugely enjoyable section with every opportunity to perform rescues if necessary. No rescues were required but every boat experienced swamping as we skirted some large wave trains and crossed others. The bailers were very important to us on this section although some boats needed them much less often than others.

We stopped for food half way through this moving water section, eating with a view. During this our final picnic George eventually succumbed to the pleading, begging, wheedling and swap offers from Stuart by sharing some “Malt Loaf with runny honey” and may have started a club tradition.

We made our way to the egress for the Racecourse campsite but finding the right spot was more difficult than our earlier examination of the map led us to believe it would be. Between the river and the path shown is quite a high bank that has been increased in height by dumping of waste. However once over this it was a relatively easy walk to an excellent and very good value for money campsite with lots of facilities. Unfortunately the message from Tom that he would drive the trailer down to the river in order to pick up the boats, after the shuttle, was not understood and the group carried the boats the extra 800 yards.

All showered and in the clean clothes we’d left in the van we set out to eat in Perth. The range of what was available was disappointing although we later found more food outlets clustered together that may have offered better than our pretty rubbery pizzas. We sorted out the finance whilst eating and all included the trip cost us around £65 each for transport fuel, hostel, camping, cooking fuel - just leaving people to find food in addition.

We returned to the campsite and slept through a storm.

Saturday 12th April and overall thoughts

On the Saturday we packed up and made our way back to Ashington and then on to home for Tom (Gateshead) and George (East Lancashire). We had a really good time and a great paddling experience.. George was particularly impressed with the group spirit and how we worked together to overcome any difficulties.

We were all surprised at the amount of condensation inside the otherwise excellent Macpac Microlight tents. All the club camping kit, MSR Stoves, Go System Pans, Alpkit Airic Sleeping mats and Alpkit 600 down sleeping bags and Ortlieb Water Bags performed well. However where the sleeping bags touched the tent inner the outer shell of the bags were damp – not enough to seep into the down of the bag but more than was expected. It may have been the result of damp air and pretty strong dew formation – we’ll see in future trips.

Equally the boats were “immense” during this trip, taking lots of knocks and carrying kit and people well through a variety of environments, the modifications we made – swim/lining ropes, D rings and anchoring points were OK – we need to put less stress onto the D rings – 2 came away from the boats..

The bags and barrels performed well. The club wetsuits, buoyancy aids, cags, helmets and paddles all performed admirably in difficult conditions.

The people and kit performed to a high standard in completing an ambitious trip through a spectacular landscape. Craig had done a lot of working in planning the trip and getting the group together that made the trip successful and other people should take on some of these tasks – choosing trip, booking hostel, campsites, setting dates etc in future.

LEARNING POINTS

- Planning menus etc in advance can make life easier
- It takes a lot longer than can be imagined to get breakfast, pack up, load the boat and get onto the water
- It's not really going on an expedition if you don't get map and compass for the trip before you go – it becomes a matter of following those people who do have maps
- A tarp would have been handy
- Just because you've got really good lightweight kit doesn't mean that you always have to take it all (Tom and George in particular)
- The young people paddled in long john wetsuits and were comfortable throughout
- Eating out in Scotland was not good value in any of the places that we found – more research necessary and/or more ambitious meals at the beginning and end planned and catered for
- Probably need to charge people in advance so that we know who is coming in plenty of time – we planned on one extra member and costs would have been significantly less divided by 7 rather than 6

FUTURE PLANS

1. We'll book in for 4 star canoe assessment at Glenmore Lodge in August
2. We'll work on skills for that assessment
3. We'll do a self contained sea kayaking trip – hopefully a circumnavigation of Anglesey before August