

# Canoe

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# The seventh Scottish Sea Kayak Symposium

27th-30th May 2005

"Almost overwhelming", was the first reaction of many delegates arriving at the Gaelic College, Sabhal Mor Ostaig on Skye. Not only because of the sheer number of sea kayakers assembled in one place, but also because of the range of sessions on offer.

I was taught that lists are lazy journalism, but just listen to the selection which faced delegates on the first session of day one: 'Reflections' slide show with Franco Ferrero or two seminars; 'Introduction to Tides' with Paul Mills; or 'Science of Maps & Charts' with Donald Thomson. These could be followed by either 'Channel Island & Near Coasts of France' slide show with Kevin Mansell; 'Gathering Tidal Information' with Paul Mills; or 'Making a Map or Chart' with Donald Thomson. It sounds a full morning, but wait a moment – that's just for those who wanted to stay dry! Those who fancied a practical morning, there was even greater choice: 'Global Positioning Systems' with Andy Stamp; 'Introduction to Folding Kayaks' with Mike McClure and Brian Wilson; 'Foundation Skills' with Jas Hepburn and George Reid; 'Forward Paddling' with Sean Morley and Nigel Robinson; or 'Greenland Skills' with Soren Rasmussen. And still we're not finished. Delegates who wanted to explore some of the spectacular Skye coastline (there were visitors from Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands) could choose between three separate full day paddles. By any standards, that was a lot of choice. And bear in mind, this was just the selection for the first morning of the first day - there were three days like that, morning and afternoon! You see what I mean by this event being "almost overwhelming"?

Look at the names in that list and you'll see some you know. Of the 26 level five sea coaches in the UK, only three were not present.

The Gaelic College proved once again to be an excellent venue, providing hearty meals for hungry paddlers, and excellent learning facilities. More on-site accommodation would have been nice, but the campsite or 'swamp' as it became known, was not as bad as it sounds. The beach access was awkward, down a steep track that became churned, slippery mud. And there was the inevitable delay when fifty sea kayakers attempt to launch from the same, small rocky beach at the same time.

Organisers Gordon and Morag Brown, Ken Nichol and Duncan Winning OBE



Experts always make it look easy, and by now the organisers of this event really are experts. Somehow they manage to create an informal, casual atmosphere, and yet keep events running to a complex time-table. Don't underestimate this. If things were too laid back, then nothing would ever happen: People who had to spend a long time hanging about, waiting for sessions to start, would grumble and push off to do their own thing. Alternatively, had the organisers gone around with blowing whistles and ringing bells, demanding people went to their session NOW, then the result

Winning OBE deserve many congratulations.

What's more, they created an environment in which everyone could learn something. For some people it was rolling; others picked up subtle boat handling skills; but best of all were the absolutely priceless 'nuggets' of knowledge you could pick up almost without trying. I'll give you an example. On a multi-day trip many people take a frozen dinner for the first day or two. Howard Jeffs just happened to mention he froze his meals in a poly bag, packed inside the pan in which they'll be used. So they fit the pan perfectly. He stores them in an insulated tube, shaped around the pan from a roll of sleeping mat to which ends have been attached. A simple and effective expedition technique.

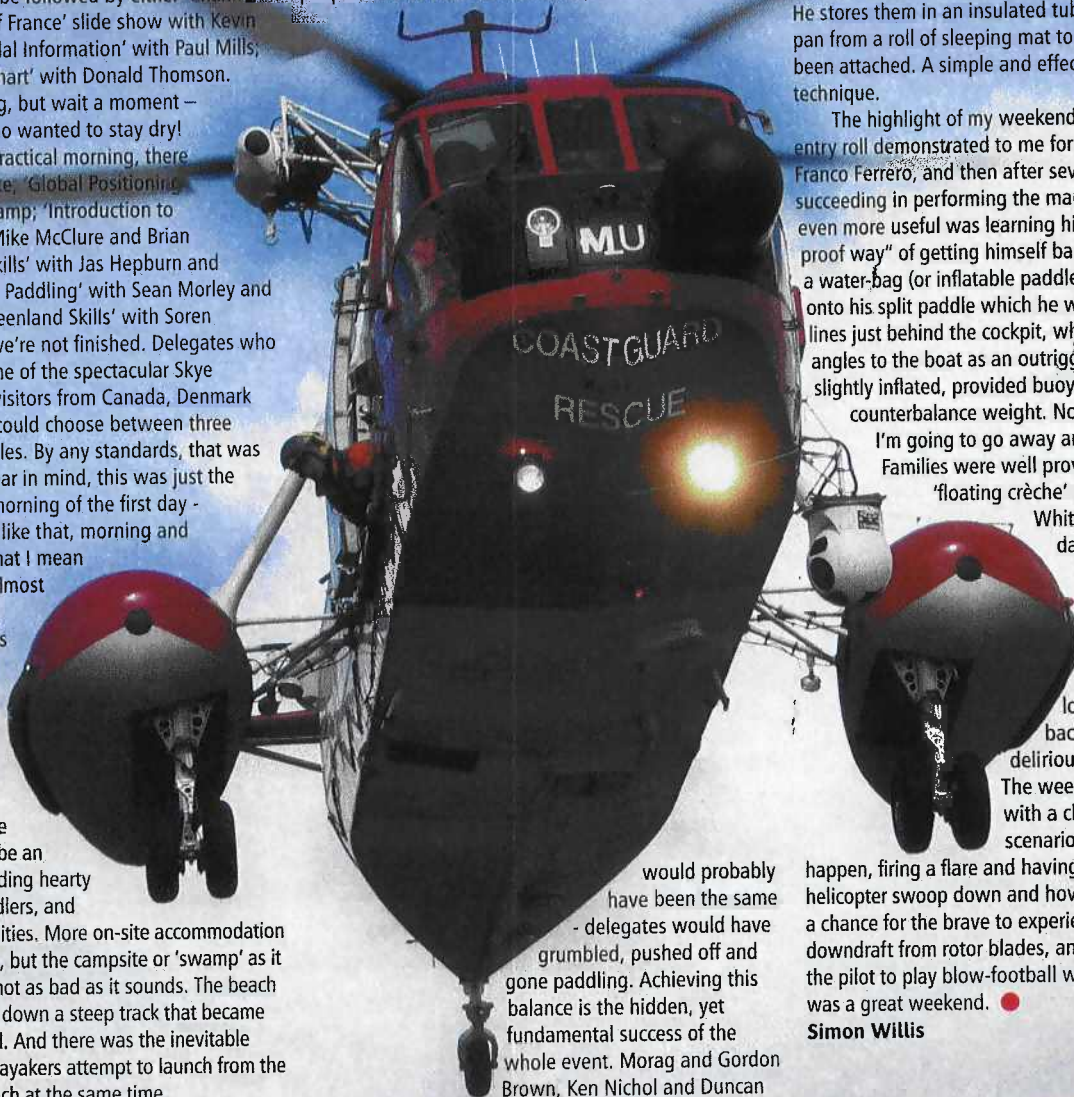
The highlight of my weekend was having a re-entry roll demonstrated to me for the first time, by Franco Ferrero, and then after several attempts, succeeding in performing the manoeuvre. Probably even more useful was learning his "absolutely bomb proof way" of getting himself back in his kayak, using a water-bag (or inflatable paddle-float). This he slipped onto his split paddle which he wedged under deck-lines just behind the cockpit, where it sat at right-angles to the boat as an outrigger. The water bag, slightly inflated, provided buoyancy and a counterbalance weight. Now that is something I'm going to go away and practice.

Families were well provided for, with a 'floating crèche' run by the team from White Wave. On the first day they looked after seventeen youngsters, whose ages ranged from five to twelve, taking them open boating on a sheltered loch, and bringing them back soaked but deliriously happy.

The weekend was rounded off with a chance to experience the scenario we all hope will never

happen, firing a flare and having the coastguard helicopter swoop down and hover overhead. This was a chance for the brave to experience the full force of a downdraft from rotor blades, and the opportunity for the pilot to play blow-football with kayakers. In short, it was a great weekend. ●

Simon Willis



would probably have been the same - delegates would have grumbled, pushed off and gone paddling. Achieving this balance is the hidden, yet fundamental success of the whole event. Morag and Gordon Brown, Ken Nichol and Duncan

'Discovery Learning' with Andy Stamp



Franco Ferrero's "absolutely bomb-proof way of getting himself back in his boat"

