



Best fish and chips in the world.

a quick and slippery descent back the way I had come and down to the loch. After a third breakfast brew I unpacked and inflated the packraft. Having set up a camera on a tripod I floated myself out onto the loch for some relaxation and respite.

The weather had been dry since I left the croft that morning but now, at midday, there was slight precipitation and the hilltops were slowly being cloaked in clouds. I packed the raft away and took some more time to boil some water and rehydrate a hot meal for lunch to maximize my calorie intake before the descent.

The track was a bit rocky to start with but I soon picked up speed and it was a glorious feeling to be using gravity once more. There is a deep ford to cross before Gaick Lodge; I put on my lightweight overshoes which provided at least 12 inches' depth of waterproof

clear views northwards into the head of Glen Tromie and an obvious track that would lead me out towards Gaick Lodge. It looked like it would be a stunning ride.

One hour and twenty minutes later the wet spongy heather gave way to a smooth carpet of grass as I emerged onto the plateau of An Dùn; I reached the small cairn that marks the northern summit before I continued onto the second, southern summit. I was a solitary figure walking across this broad smooth top, kept company by what appeared to be a solitary ptarmigan, wheeling and squawking around me almost as if it wanted to chase me from its territorial mountain abode.

Having reached the southern summit, I backtracked and started

protection and walked through. The track surface improved as I passed Gaick Lodge and, after a few ups and downs, I passed the dam at the end of Loch an t-Seilich and finally connected with a tarmac surface. The descent from here is pure joy and speed with no reason to stop. Finally, after more than 1,000 ft of descent from Loch an Dùn, the Glen Tromie road meets the B970, a minor road to Aviemore.

Speyside looked as if it has just been battered by a passing storm; it was cold and patches of grey-white cloud hung randomly in the valley. As I started up the road the rain returned, slowly at first and then more intensely. I took shelter in a bus stop for 30 minutes, hoping that it would pass but, as there is no letup in the downpour, I set off again.

Five miles later I took a detour to Loch an Eilein in the hopes that there might be hot drinks at the visitor centre but this was not the case. It was not far now to Aviemore and I followed the tracks through the forest. There were fleeting views through swirling clouds of Creag Dhubh, Cairn Eilrig and Castle Hill before I found myself on a welcome descent through woodland to Coylumbridge and back onto the road to Aviemore and in 10 minutes I arrived back at the railway station. I now had about three hours to kill in Aviemore before the train back to London. As the waiting room was still closed owing to Covid I retraced my tracks back to the Old Bridge Inn. After rehydrating with a couple of pints, I headed back to the chipper for a large portion of take away fish and chips, then it was off to the M&S food store for evening supplies before I made my way back to the station to await the night sleeper back to London. The train arrived promptly at 9.20pm; fortunately I had a sleeping cabin to myself for my return, which is just as well as my clothes were still somewhat damp and were starting to reek a little which would not be pleasurable for other passengers. I also had the luxury of a hot shower.

The train arrived back in London at eight the following morning and, having put on damp clothes once again, I cycled to King's Cross to catch a train back home.

Yet again I had travelled to places, hiked mountains and traversed lochs that I would not normally have gone to. The Foxy's are an excuse for an adventure.

Alan Fox

Don't forget the maths

I must tell you about the Tuesday morning club. It's a bunch of (very) old guys (and girls sometimes) who go paddling on the Forth at 9.30 in the morning, launching at Craighforth and paddling up the River Forth for four to six miles, depending on inclination and weather, then whizzing back to the start. This exercise, often in freezing conditions, is followed by a welcomed scone and coffee in a local café. I often just turn up for the latter, for a variety of reasons, but mostly age and sloth.

I keep a note of all my paddling, and own a Garmin watch which records everything I do. So, it's always interesting mulling over the stats after a paddle. Last year I paddled on 176 days, and covered a total of 760 miles. That's the most I've done for many a year, but I've paddled many miles every year since 1962. I wonder what the total is? I've no idea. No Garmin watches then. In 1962 we were still using log tables, and that's nothing to do with wood.

The other day, on the Forth paddle, I averaged 6 mph (Sorry, still in mph – I'm very old) in my Marlin river racer, which struck me as being on the slow side. I can sustain 6.2 mph for an hour or two on flat water, and manage 6.4 mph on my measured mile with ease. I reckon that as I am staying close to the riverbank on the way up, making maximum use of the eddies, and then paddling back down the middle, which is the fastest, I should be averaging well over 6.2 mph. So what's the problem? Can you solve it before reading on?

Answer: If you think about it, I'm going slowly on the way up and fast on the way down, so the time spent going up is *much longer than going down*. In simple terms, if the river is flowing at 2 mph, and I'm doing 6 mph, two thirds of my paddle is at 4 mph and one third at 8 mph. In three hours, I would cover 16 miles (4+4+8), which averages out at just over 5 mph, rather than the 6.2 mph I was hoping for.

Why do I tell you this? Well, there's a good reason, which applies to sea kayaks and to racing kayaks/canoes; the latter if they are racing on a tidal sea, or up and down a river.

I'm going to stick to sea kayaks if I may, because many more paddle on the sea, than race K1s. I'm also going to stick to the maths, because there's an interesting aspect which many of you may not appreciate – hence the main reason for this short article. I'm also going to work in knots. I hope you sea kayakers work in knots. If knot, you should



be. And I know that most of the racing fraternity work in kph now. However, it doesn't matter what units you use; the principal is exactly the same.

Imagine I'm paddling at 3 knots (STW) (Speed Through Water) against a 1 knot tide. My speed over the ground (SOG) will be 2 knots and I will therefore cover ten nm (nautical miles) in 5 hours. That's a long paddle. If I have the tide behind me, I'll be doing 4 knots, and will paddle the 10 miles in just 2½ hours. That's a huge saving of 2½ hours, which surely makes it very worthwhile knowing when to paddle, to get maximum tidal assistance. If I'm in my motorboat, I can cruise at 20 knots. To save you the calculations, the time difference going with or against a one-knot tide over 10 nm would be just 3 minutes. Conclusion: the faster you go, the less you have to worry about tides. Now let's see this apply to a sea kayak going a little faster – and this is the nub of my argument.

Let's say you decide to put an extra effort on both a paddle against the tide, and a paddle with the tide. I'm going to add a knot of speed to my sea kayak in both directions on my 10 nm paddle.

I'm now travelling at 4 knots, not 3 knots. (That's quite quick for a sea kayak = 4.57 mph or 7.36 kph.)

Time against a 1 knot tide: 3 knots for 10 nm = 3 hours 20 minutes.

I've knocked a whole 1 hour 40 minutes off my slower paddle at 3 knots (STW).