



Two views of paddling round Kerrera.



Running the Awe in spate in the 1970s.

Safety: mobile phone in waterproof pack, attached to the canoe.

Clothing: I wear very little on these paddles. I liken my style of paddling to playing football or rugby or going for a run. The players/runners wear very little clothing despite adverse weather conditions, and that's because they are exercising fairly hard, which is what I'm doing. I'm well protected inside the kayak, with a neoprene spraydeck too. So, I wore two thin long-sleeved Gul rash vests, with a Nike running vest on top – no neoprene, no wet or dry suit – far too hot and sweaty for non-stop paddling.

Commentary on the paddle itself

The run down the river is fairly easy. There are no rapids, just a few swirls, but nothing to worry about. Of course, you must paddle with the tide behind you. Plan to start at Stirling just after high tide, keeping in mind, high tide in Stirling is an hour after high tide in Leith. Low tide in Stirling doesn't really exist as such. Ideally, choose Spring tides, which occur just a day or two after full and new moon (if you don't know that already). Moreover, if there's been a fair bit of rain, the river will be higher. Use the SEPA website to check the level of the river Forth. Craigforth is in Stirling and should be over 0.6 metres ideally.

The distance between Stirling and Port Edgar as the crow flies is just 23 miles. However, the river meanders hugely, to the point you are almost paddling round in circles and going back to where you started from. So the total distance from Cornton to Kincardine Bridge is 18

miles. I did that stretch at 8.2 mph with the strong tide and full river behind me. My STW is about 6 mph, so that equates to an expectation of over 2 mph assistance. (3.5 kph)

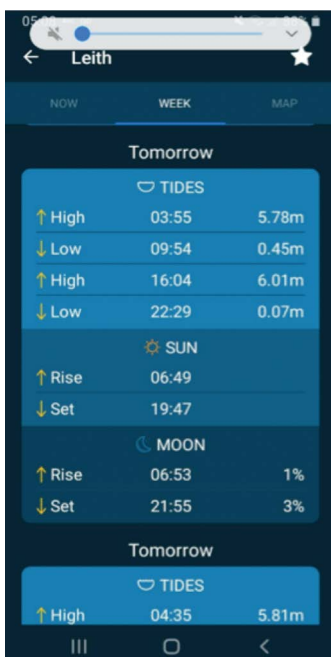
One warning: there are very few places to stop on the river, simply because of the vast amount of mud on the banks. Consequently, my advice is to plan to do the river without having to go ashore. I did the whole paddle to Port Edgar without stopping at all, and that's what I wanted to do.

Once onto the estuary, the tide should still be behind you. Keep in mind that it tends to flow out to sea up to an hour after low tide at Leith. So, you have more than six hours in total, to benefit from the tide. If you think it will take you longer than six hours, it might be worth starting from Stirling at high tide, or even before high tide.

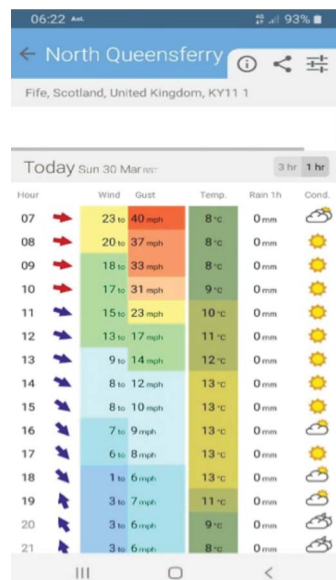
Ideally, choose a following wind too, keeping in mind that you won't benefit from that in the meanders. But once into the Firth a following wind with some waves to help you along, is perfect. It wasn't so for me. I fondly imagined a wonderful 13 miles of big wave riding all the way to Port Edgar, but I was wrong – so easy to err when it comes to paddling on the sea.

The problem with the top end of the Firth is that it's relatively narrow with sandbanks on the south side, which extend all the way down to the bridges. The tidal currents over the banks cause variations in the wave patterns which make it difficult to manage. Back eddies and swirls cause the waves to break too, and there were many white horses. The big waves break on the shallows of course, and there's wave refraction too, if you paddle close to the bank. So I found the paddle more difficult than I expected, and much slower as a consequence – only 7 mph with wind, wave and tide behind me. That's very slow for a RR.

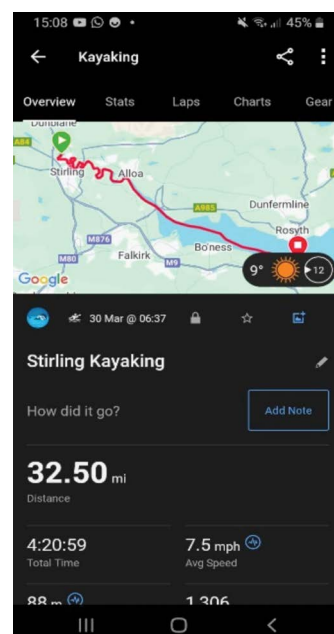
As to other boats/ships on the water – I saw none, and didn't expect big boats, because the tide was fairly low by the time I reached the



Tide times.



Weather forecast.



The route.



Heart rate.