

# Byde your time

## Distance paddling

23/01/2018. Item on TV today, Bondi beach Hawaiian Distance on paddle boards.

Atlantic College, August/September 1974(?) the Australian surf lifesaving team came to the UK to be in the Bude champs. Their surf ski was cut in half to load it on the Boeing 747. It arrived at the college in two parts. Would I join it, please? I did.

I had to cut a hole in the rear deck to make an internal joint. I used a straight beam and a tight line as a building board to keep it straight. That was successful. Then I tackled the external appearance and smoothed it to profile and section using matching colour. It was perfect. After a day or two it was taken to Bude where it competed.

Describe the events and the great success of the Bat Mk 5 (?) with tree. It was obviously a patchwork job. The several Welsh teams used the one rescue ski cobbled together in a week in the garage at the Old PO, Llanmaes, from pieces of Mk 5. It always beat the Oz rescue ski, by the powerful Welsh team but mainly because the BAT was designed by a kayaker, me. There were complaints that we hadn't complied with rules but the Welsh authority asserted we had. Welsh teams beat the Aussies, who were not well pleased.

The Welsh committee invited me the same day prior to the events to describe the BAT rescue ski and its dimensions, which they approved. I can still see the crowd of paddlers going out to the marker buoy on the easy swell and seeing them all turning and sprinting to catch a surfing ride to shore. Whatever the BAT had it was remarkable that it was first on the swell, leaving the others to battle for the next wave along. I think that was because the BAT had a K1 section compared with the Oz less rounded flatter keel. In the circumstances it was the winner.

1975. The journey: summer, neap tides, Llantwit Major beach to Minehead, Somerset. I did the planning using the Admiralty chart for the Bristol Channel. The tidal flow in the channel is almost impossible to predict. The chart has points here and there indicating the rate of flow and direction. Our group could travel about a mile in fifteen minutes.

Starting at Llantwit Spit, used by the Romans 2,000 years previously, I marked a mile on the chart, allowing for tidal flow at that time of the tide. Tide was rising. Flow was not great so I angled to the right of where we were going. In rivers that is known as a ferry glide. From the dot on the chart a mile out and using the nearest direction for tidal rate etc I plotted another mile. As the tide was rising the next mile was angled a wee bit more to the right. Quarter hour by quarter hour I plotted a course to Minehead harbour. Each member of the six man group had a copy of the Roneo print.

We moved easily, chatting the while. In less than an hour we seemed to be about halfway across. Somerset loomed larger ahead with Minehead further to the left than I had allowed so we altered course a little. Thereabouts we found tidal turbulence in a long line more or less central to the channel. Something deep down far off was causing the ripple. The tidal flow on one side was angled differently from the other side. The teeny turbulence was maybe a metre wide and well marked to our right and left.

We angled more to the left as the harbour was a mile or two left of

our predicted course. After another hour or so we were close to the Somerset shore but a mile or two from the harbour to the left. There was a contrary tidal flow between the centre of the channel and the harbour. We entered the harbour and pulled out on flat rocks.

There was a pub on the harbourside where we had a couple of beers; the day was warming as we waited for the tide to reach its highest mark. After a two hour time out we reassembled by the kayaks and set out to the start of the ebb. I used the same method to plan our route, quarter hour by quarter hour. Returning, we allowed for a drift to our left so we aimed a little right. The afternoon was clouding, it was cooling. We were all tired; we did about three hours of steady paddling in the morning. Now we could feel reluctant muscles. I was 47, the others about ten years younger.

Paddling was now a steady plod; we remained together. About half way across we saw Llantwit off to our left but I relied on the ebb taking us back that way. It didn't. Gareth Lucas, farmer and captain of Llantwit Beach Lifeguard Club, came alongside; he was on the surfski that I designed using the hull shape of an Inuit kayak. He asked could he leave us now and return to Llantwit? His craft was a lot swifter than our 4 metre river kayaks.

The afternoon was drawing on; the clouds shaded the sun. The scene looked grey. Our mood was grey, too. I asked him not to do that as we might need his strength. We didn't, fortunately, but it was a 'damn close run thing.' My BS 3595 lifejacket was chafing my upper arms and chest, bare as it had been warm but now my energy store was running low and we still had an hour or two to run. Nearing the Welsh shore, a mile or two out, we crossed a repetition of the turbulent barrier between central flow and the shoreward water.

We were off Summerhouse Point, almost to the Aberthaw Power Station which I knew was six or seven miles east of Llantwit. Although weariness and silent determination was on the group I was confident that the ebb would take us alongshore about a quarter mile out. Wrong! We were plodding in to a reverse eddy a mile wide. We paddled and still Summerhouse Point stayed on our right. We should have been scudding past it. Now, 43 years on, if we had moved out further from shore to cross the turbulent barrier we would have had the surge of the ebb with us but we were too weary to think straight.

Evening was drawing on with doom on my mind. They trusted my planning. The sky darkened until the shore cliffs near Boverton were a dark shade against the dimming sky. There was still a way to go; could we do it? We still were a group. Then in the gloom of the cliffs I saw lights half a mile ahead on the right. We were moving very fast; the tide was with us. Although a couple of the group were ahead of me I took a tight line to the shore and did a high speed breakout, first ashore. Quite a crowd was waiting, lit by stationary car headlamps. Joan, Colin and Enid were pleased to see us. They lifted my kayak onto the roofrack and took me home. It was about 8pm; there was still time to visit the pub. I needed a rest, a long one. I lay on my bed, passed out and woke next day at 11am.

Would I do it again? Now nearly ninety, no, but then with a much improved knowledge of the channel and in proper sea kayaks I reckon we could do it in half the time.

**Alan Byde**

## Memories to share?

Do any of your trips deserve a larger readership? We are pleased to hear from those who wish to share memories of their trips with others.

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