

Byde your time

15/06/18 Bliss. Joseph Campbell. Mortality is the song.

Campbell was in full flow when this I heard. To know I am mortal as we all are is either slavery or freedom. Do I sing my life or mourn it? Do I trudge or dance? Does political correctness hold me down or does a bird sing? Yesterday I went to the post box and as I did, under the wattle tree, overhead a bird sang a brief burst of pure joy. The thrill stays.

While kayaking with three other friends the wind kicked up. A lively breeze became a full on gale, Beaufort scale 8 and beyond. I lost touch with them as the waves leaped higher. At least three wave forms were interacting. In a moment I was on a treble crest then at once in a treble hole; my balance was tested, then heaved up to see the weltering water crashing against the cliffs of the Orme.

I was alone in Gogarth Bay leaving the Conwy estuary to circle the Great Orme to Llandudno. Fewer than three on the sea should never be. Good advice but Nature doesn't follow the rules. I wore a helmet, good gear when a cliff landing is possible. It had slots to allow water to flow out when rolling. These slots in the rising gale struck up a steady howl, a rising wail. Noise tangles thought. The force of the storm increased; could I stay afloat alone?

I did, countering instant balance changes, responding, knowing I must or drown. The bay current sent me closer to the cliffs, waves crashing, while high above the gale roared in the rocks, sending spiralling bolts to the sea. Now the racket was beyond hearing; it was in my head and still I paddled. Experience enables.

That is when I knew epiphany, a moment when I suddenly felt I understood, suddenly become conscious of, something very important to me, my life.

In a sheltered corner I was swept up a great crevice in the cliff, secured the kayak, crawled up a steep crumbling cliff to the road above where I saw my companions a mile away on the same course. Then down the loose soil with scattered tussocks of grass gale flayed to the kayak, the sea, afloat again.

As I went down clutching grass, hoping the roots would hold, I looked down between my feet and knew the nearness of death. I revelled in furious life, still do.

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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Back then

20 years ago



- * At a time when BCU membership was nearly twice as expensive as that of the SCA, paddlers could opt to join an overseas governing body, be registered for a region different from that of their home address or use an accommodation address but were not allowed to join a federation for part of the UK in which they did not live.
- * The British men's and women's world championships polo teams were both beaten by the Australians in penalty shootouts in the finals.
- * The death was reported of Sir Alistair Burnett, author of *The Canoe Boys* and later editor of the *Daily Record* and then *The Scotsman*.
- * Seattle's Maritime Discovery Centre installed two sea kayak simulators with screen displays responding to paddle movements.
- * The Canadian post office issued a stamp to honour Bill Mason.
- * German Ulrich Feldhof took nearly three quarters of the vote in the ICF presidential election against Albert Woods.
- * Americans were facing a tax on outdoor equipment to fund wildlife officials, the previous funding from taxes on angling and shooting being hit by declining numbers of participants.
- * Having survived many serious river runs, Chris Sladden broke an arm, wrist and ribs while portaging.

- * Pairs of stereoscopic pictures of canoeing, bought from a photographic fair at Beaconsfield, turned out to be the work of Maurice Rothwell and included early world slalom championships.
- * The UK won all the events for older paddlers in the world wave ski championships at Newquay while the French took everything else.

- * John Ramwell resigned as editor of the new *Ocean Paddler* to concentrate on the ISKA Newsletter.
- * Duncan Winning urged caution against John Ramwell's wish to promote the BCU coaching scheme and awards for sea kayaks worldwide.
- * The Guernsey raft record was broken with a line of 53 kayakers in Grandes Rocques Bay.
- * Participants were being sought for an expedition in double sea kayaks, led by an Inuit hunter, to Bylot Island, north of Baffin Bay.
- * The Western Isles Challenge featured a range of outdoor activities including over 80km by sea kayak, teams of four each to include a female.

