

We'd both been looking forward to this day for weeks and it was now finally here. Tom (he thinks that he is our coach, we think of him as designated chauffer) picked us up 3.00. Richie Common had the message from his teacher that he should do some course work whilst away ringing in his ears (you see, his exams were starting the week after we were due back and this is apparently of utmost importance and pivotal in our existence according to those academic types).

In the club, Wansbeck Paddle Sports Club, we are part of a group of five lads, all close friends who have known each since we were toddlers. Only the two of us were able to commit to the 10 days away that were to prove amongst the best days in our relatively short lives.

We've been paddling for 26 months now, and with Tom's support we'd managed to pass 3* Sea and Surf (with 4*training in each) and have the 4** Leader Awards in Whitewater and Open Canoe (another great week at Glenmore Lodge). We are BCU/UKCC Level 1 coaches and our assessment for BCU/UKCC Level 2 will be in July. We thought this was a good level to be going down to our first Anglesey Sea Symposium, especially as we wanted to be clients being led in 5* conditions. We were also keen to experience some of the legendary tidal races and rough water conditions.

The drive was pretty uneventful, with Tom's typically unusual taste in music blasting out. Some was fantastic; Julie Fowlis singing Hebridean folk music was absolutely great and really hypnotic. Tom was shockingly easy to "wind-up": our insistence that Jeff Buckley's version of 'Hallelujah' is far superior to that of Leonard Cohen really hit the spot. You have to be careful when winding Tom up but as he was busy driving he could only assault our ears and taste by tunelessly bawling along to several more Leonard Cohen tracks. At this point we reached Penmaenmawr and were met with an absolutely stunning vista. The sun was beginning to set behind the hills, the sea was as flat as a mirror and the whole place had an awe inspiring golden reflection. Living in an East Coast village (Newbiggin by the Sea) we don't get such stunning sunsets . We do get some sunrises that are pretty spectacular but we only see them on the way home from some equally spectacular parties.

We all went for a curry at the Valley Tandoori - a great place as it doesn't have a license so you can buy your own alcohol (or soft drinks??) from the Spar around the corner and drink it inside and the food is heavenly and fairly cheap!. We met a group of large group of paddlers from the Netherlands who were leaving as we arrived and this meeting with people from different countries became a major feature of the week. Greetings between Tom, Nico and Axel completed it took us a while to realise that we had just met the "Axel" of the much prized "Axel map case" – the one that keeps things dry and that our club is fundraising to buy 10 of!!

We slept on the floor of the centre as it was too late to put the tents up. Leslie, a Danish woman we had met in on a kayaking course in Tarifa 15 months ago, was stopping in the house as well as us. It was good to see her again and to have the mix of the familiar with the exotic.

We were up early on the Friday and whilst Tom was busy coaching some open boating we were willingly drafted in as labourers for Phil Clegg and had honoured seats in the fabled "Vengabus" – a great improvement on the rust bucket that Phil used to drive. We met Simon Osborne and

Peter Bray who were running the last day of a course for Finnish paddlers. We met up with Nigel Dennis, Keirron Tastagh (of Isle of Man Tourist Board advert fame) and Odd. Odd was a very interesting Norwegian looking to see how the symposium was run with a view to running one near Tromso in the future called the “winter paddling” event. We four (us with Phil and Odd) spent the day physically preparing the site and boats for coming week. The symposium is organized by Sea Kayaking UK and they hire the Anglesey Outdoors Centre for the week so the site has to be made ready on the Friday. This included a first for us –rounding up chickens and moving their run out of the way. You never can predict exactly what goes into making such a prestigious international event so successful (we didn’t see Odd making notes)! We also ran into an old friend of ours, George Maskell (or “Millionaire George” as we refer to him), whom we had met in Tarifa at the same time as Leslie and whose photographs are displayed on the Sea Kayaking UK website.

Our duties done, we found a space for our tents and set them up. We wandered over to the centre to sign our names up for activities for Saturday and Sunday. The choice was amazing, including, Incident Management, Sea Kayak Surfing, Rolling and Rescues, Inuit Paddling, Crash and Bash, Navigation, Choosing a Sea Kayak, Paddle Sizing and Forward Paddling, Navigation, Tide Races and Overfalls, and Moving Water, and full day and half day trips at all levels. After some advice from Joanne Hagan who is the administrative force behind the symposium, and with some trepidation we both opted for Incident Management on Saturday and Tide Races and Overfalls on Sunday.

The evening saw people arriving from many corners of the globe. The “books” on the symposium close when 120 people book. There are about 30 staff and when the week of BCU courses begins, most people leave and another 20 or so paddlers arrive. Over the week we met people from an amazing 32 countries, though with our pitmatic dialect we’re not sure that they know where we are from. However, asking “What fettle bonny lad/lass?” always elicited a smile.

Tom loaned us some of his very valuable and beautiful 4 piece Lendal paddles for the week. It was hilarious for one of us to watch the other making every possible conceivable mistake in attempting to put them together, but we won’t say which of us is a common fool.

Saturday was our first paddling day and before we knew it we were on our way to Porth Dafarch, expecting lots of capsizing and rescuing in tricky places. The beach was transformed with dozens of huge flags and trade stands. There were a couple of outstanding photographic posters promoting Rockpool. There were stands from Brookbank, Desperate Measures, North Shore, P & H, Rockpool, Sea Kayaking UK, Tide Race, and Valley. There were also about 25 paddlers who were not involved in the symposium but had come along to try boats and there was a fantastic atmosphere on the beach. The stands, along with the Kari Tek and Reed stands back at Anglesey Outdoors, made a real contribution to our enjoyment of the event as we never get to see such an amazing range of kit.

We were in a large group and had an extensive beach briefing where Kierron Tastagh explained different towing methods until the beach was clear of other groups. We had a fantastic morning of bow presentations, paddle presentation and x-rescues and recovering an unconscious paddler. After dinner we were split into groups, ours had six people in it. We were with 4

women, two Danish Women called Haune and Maurita and two women from York called Alice (French but living in York) and Ruth. We paddled to “little Penhryn Mawr “– the offshore rock where the flow in the channel can tell you what to expect in the tidal race. It was interesting and a lot of fun doing rescues in the bouncy stuff, though unfortunately we seemed to be being chivalrous and doing lots of the swimming! We did an all in rescue and Richard Snell was very glad to be wearing his helmet after he clattered into Richie Common’s boat – a little nose bleed before the re-entry and roll. We then practiced situations involving towing. It was knackerin’!!

Then we did an amazing rocky landing getting 23 people and their boats onto these two little ledges. We compared the re-entry and roll with ‘Bazzer’s bomber’, where you empty it and climb back in over the back deck. The bomber method was a much drier result and far less time and effort spent pumping out but we’re not sure which is most effective in bigger water so we’ll just have to keep practicing. The day really drove home the message of how important regular rescue practice is, we’ve done lots but still feel that we could have done more!

Back on the beach at Porth Dafarch the stands had been supplemented with one from Anglesey Sticks – a local craft manufacturer of Greenland/Inuit style paddles. Later in the week we saw some of those brought over by Danish paddlers who ran the Inuit Paddling sessions and together this has sparked our interest in making and trying some Inuit paddles.

We were really impressed by Keirron, and as we told Tom later that evening, Keirron has the potential to be as fierce as Tom when coaching, he just needs a few tips.

We met the guys from Desperate Measures and picked up some remaining kit from an order we had made. Wansbeck Paddle Sport Club have had to fundraise frantically (thanks to Wansbeck District Council and the Canoe Foundation) to replace a fleet of Pyranha Masters and canoe paddles that Sport England had stupidly removed from the club to sit idle.

That night was the first of the evening talks, we went over to Holyhead Ulcheldre to hear Alon Ohad’s lecture on his Svalbard expedition. This was the first ever attempt to circumnavigate the Svalbard Archipelago, the northern most part of Norway. Alon and his paddling partner Tim Starr had prepared for a potential 10 week long trip but after 19 days the expedition ground to a halt, as part way across a 40 mile crossing the sea was frozen over. Captured in the video he showed us were five hours of them dragging the 80-90 kilo boats across the ice whilst it was moving north very fast, repeatedly falling through, until they could go on no longer and radioed for assistance. It was really interesting and there were some good pictures as well as the video clip. We were shocked to realize that even incredibly good and experienced paddlers can face life or death challenges.

All in all, it was a really good first day.

The second day started with us thanking Tom for the advice to bring two sets of club “wet kit” as 15 hours in the comically named drying room hadn’t even made our kit warm. However nothing could dampen our enthusiasm for the tide races and overfalls day. The experts predicted that the strong south westerly would increase the seriousness of the races so we opted for the intermediate group. As it turned out the winds seemed to have reduced the size and

“cleanliness” of the races which goes to show that even experts are constantly learning about the effect of weather on the sea. Having chosen a race where “The Death Stick” was not pointing we were soon bound for Rhoscolyn . The session was run by none other than the legendary mad Irishman, Harry Whelan, known for his incredible recovery from a dislocated shoulder to catch up with Phil Clegg and Barry Shaw on their circumnavigation of Britain.

We got out to the Rhoscolyn tide races to find the conditions a lot smaller than we were expecting. We had a bit of a “mess around” then decided to go back to the beach for dinner and wait until the tide was flowing. Whilst we were there another group came in to eat and one paddled in standing up in the boat. We decided to develop this skill further over the summer – we’ve tried but the temperature of the North Sea in winter always means that we call it quits as soon as we fall in a few times.

Back out after dinner to find a bit of tide flowing in between the island and the mainland- not big but we played around and then headed over to the other side of the island. It had picked up slightly and we continued playing in it. A good few rides but, it was not so big and it was a bit messy. You’d catch a wave, be surfing it and then it would either disappear to nothing or another wave would join it from a different direction and waste it. Also, you may have been sitting waiting for a wave to come, you’d see it mounting up behind you, you’d paddle like mad to catch it and it would be gone before it touched you. So, not excellent conditions, but we had a good time out there and learned quite a bit. On the way back in people were practicing their rolls. We joined in with the added element of trying to photograph each other but could only get clear shots of the sea bed. Harry gave Richard Common some really useful coaching on his roll that came in useful later in the week.

Over tea time we got talking to an American guy called Clark Weissenger who has his own sea kayaking business in Malta. The description of sunshine, beautiful scantily clad women, hotels, relaxed but professional style came as quite a contrast to our experiences of Tom’s caring encouragement to practice rescues (and do them again if they weren’t right) whilst ice formed on the upturned hulls. Our ears pricked up when he told us he was looking for someone to work for him. We had quite an embarrassing time as we both tried to compete for the job but had identical qualifications, experience, background etc....

Sunday’s talk was by Fiona Whitehead and Tom Parrick, both of whom work for Outward Bound. The talk was really interesting: about their experiences in the Falklands, lots of emphasis on the bird life and about the life of the people who live there. They were particularly interested in the impact of the rural and isolated lifestyle on young people in the Falklands and had put on some development courses for the young people. Without trying to compare our circumstances with those of the Falkland Isle young people it did strike us that the big outdoor agencies doing some work in areas such as Wansbeck, where the schools and local authorities fail to address the needs of young people, would be very welcome.

Our third paddling day was dictated by the constant six and gusting seven south westerly that had kept the tents moving through the night. We were directed to meet in the marquee but, as this was being loaded onto a lorry at the time, everyone squeezed into the dining room/ lounge part of the centre. This wasn’t a sign-up session but there were a mixture of activities being

offered and the opportunity for participants to ask for what they wanted to do. Some of the wide range of qualification courses (2* Sea, 3* Sea, 4* Sea Training, 4* Assessment, 5* Sea Training, 5* Sea assessment, BCU Level 3 Sea Coach Assessment, VHF Certificate, Coastal Navigation, Open Water Navigation) began today. We learnt today that on this day a few years ago Phil, Harry and Barry had wanted to set off on their circumnavigation – with the message “May the 4th be with you” ringing in their ears!! Once again, we stuck together and opted for the day paddle with Eila Wilkinson and Simon Osbourne. We know Eila because she came up to paddle with our club on the north east coast. Simon we only knew by reputation from discussion with Phil Clegg, but he turned out to be a really nice person. The wind was south westerly and so we went for shelter under the cliffs over by Bull Bay. We’d decided that being young and fit we should go the extra mile to help loading boats and this contributed to a prompt start.

We set out from Bull Bay and headed west. We were completely astounded by the scenery. In Northumberland we have some great trips close to where we live but apart from these it is mostly long sandy beaches and repetitive vistas. On this trip one of the first things we came across was a cave, which we paddled into, and then some great rock formations and towering sea cliffs. There were even a couple of small islands offshore (East Mouse and Middle Mouse next to our dinner spot). So we paddled on below these stunning cliffs, with the odd bit of rock hopping, until we came to a bay with ruined brickworks on the other side. The wind was really funneling down through the bay and out to sea; we got stuck in and charged into it until we reached an eddy below the cliffs and waited for the rest of the group. We’d perhaps gone off like greyhounds but no-one seemed to mind. Here we sat in the shelter and Simon coached the group on paddling in strong winds and weather cocking. He did a demo by hopping out of his cockpit, sitting on the back deck letting the wind turn him before shuffling forward and spinning around again. We’ve seen this from Simon’s mate Phil and it is a really impressive demo and helps lock the knowledge into peoples’ heads (they’re sure to remember the info if they remember such good balance in force 5/ 6 winds). Again, this is something we want to incorporate into our own coaching but haven’t got past doing it standing up in an Open Canoe. There is a lot to be said for doing it standing up in an Open Canoe!!

We headed across the bay to the brickworks and rested there for five, whilst taking in the scenery. Apart from the brickworks themselves and the hills and cliffs around them there was a beautiful arch worn out of the rock, all of which had a lot of photographic potential. But as we’d swapped cameraman duties today we don’t have anything to show our friends back home. We paddled on round the cliffs until we came to another small bay which was the site of another ruined building. As we pulled in we had the unusual experience of being complimented on our paddling by the gorgeous and saint like, Leila, a paddler from the Gower.. We had our dinner of treats in a circular ruin, in much needed shelter from the wind.

Heading back to Bull Bay, we did a session on strokes which you’d not normally use in a kayak- J stroke, pry, hanging pry- and a few other useful ones like the bow jam, hanging draw and reverse hanging draw, and stern jam. We had a couple attempts at hand rolling the sea kayak (having done it first attempt in a river boat) but didn’t get up. It was close, however.

We got back to the campsite early for once, and because we didn't have to queue for a shower they were actually hot! Quite a novelty, it was much more pleasant than the lukewarm at best of the other days

The lecture was in the centre tonight and was absolutely amazing. Simon talked about his trip to Madagascar (the first leg of which was with Phil) and the things, animals and people they saw. It was accompanied with some stunning photographs, some great videos and some great stories. For example, the English bloke who owned his own island with his climbing camp and the anti-malarial pills which made you hypersensitive to sunlight or drove you mad. This talk, more than any other incident, planted the idea that we want to do a circumnavigation at some point in the future.

More BCU courses/ assessments would be starting tomorrow, and, to our surprise, Tom advised us to sign up for our 4* sea assessment. We went to sign up but returned to Tom having lost our nerve. When we explained that we were concerned about what our friends would feel and say if we passed the award before them, Tom shared some of his thoughts with us. This included the final words of wisdom using the only acronym not in the BCU Coaching Scheme **jfdi – just do it!** (Don't worry, it won't be adopted – people like us can understand it) This, along with the much more gently expressed (and valued) opinion of Leila got us to thinking that we had nothing to lose and plenty to gain. We did book on, followed by us running about trying to borrow the right equipment from different people. Clark was a good fellow and lent us a bilge pump, a towline and a first aid kit, and Phil lent a bilge pump, Tom lent us spare hatch covers, a group shelter, dry bags, map cases, maps, splits and God knows what else. So, all prepared, we went to the bar. When that closed, we sat in the centre with Clark, a few cans and his hip flask of some whiskey liqueur, burning the midnight oil as he put it.

So, not exactly as planned, Tuesday was our first day of our four star assessment. After breakfast, we ensured our names were on the list and went into lecture room three to meet the other candidates.). There were six candidates, us two Richards, two Danes: Soren and Morten, an Isle of Wight lad called James, and a bloke called Steve. There were assessors, people watching assessors, and maybe people watching assessors watch assessors. However, the programme was run by Phil with the very excellent Pete Jones. We got our maps and tidal information out and had to decide a trip. It was a really strong South Westerly again so we all opted for the North East coast for shelter. Instead, we went to the Menai Straits! We'd all picked a good location for the trip but the assessors wanted to see a little more from us.

On the drive over we passed the place with the longest name in Britain, Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, which we'd seen on Blue Peter. . We started in between the bridges on a slipway; the water was slack so we headed east until the tide changed. We each took turns leading, and Phil gave us all a few questions each then we had dinner. Richie Snell's stretch to lead was to the Swellies, an interesting stretch of water which we thought of as a river that changes direction every six and a quarter hours. This allowed us to lead just like on the whitewater four star - breaking in and out and ferry gliding. It was bang on halfway between neaps and springs so the tidal flow was not massive. When the assessment part of the day was over some of us chose to go to the Swellies rock play spot and had a "bit of surf" there before heading back. The assessment group was really supportive to

each other and made the day into an enjoyable paddle. Richard Common even forgot his cagoule and someone loaned him one of their spare Kokatat cags. It's an ambition of ours to have one piece of Kokatat kit, imagine having spares!!

Several tents were no longer erect after the day's battering from the wind. Other paddlers/campers rallied around and everyone had a serviceable bed. This evening there was no presentation because candidates on a number of courses were engaged in theory work. We had to plan a trip in conditions set for us by Phil.

Feeling some assessment nerves we entered the second half. It was hard to distinguish between assessment butterflies and genuine fear of the howling wind. At the morning meeting today we were given "real" people to lead. The only suitable venue was again the Menai Straits, so we got on by the sea zoo and took turns leading legs – going south east, up the mainland coast, and back across to the Anglesey side. Over dinner we made a repair on our boats and then demonstrated towing. Phil was keen to see us use a variety of leadership strategies and this kept us on our toes. Today required a lot of patience as some of the paddlers were very slow in the wind and, although necessary, it is difficult to lead a group at a very slow pace. Even to our inexperienced eyes a number of paddlers were struggling in boats that weren't right for them. Like all candidates for assessment, we were measuring our performance against that of the others and were surprised that we felt quietly confident as the assessment came to a close. We played around at the end trying to hand-roll - to no avail, but it all helps.

This quiet confidence all disappeared as we waited for the de-brief to let us know whether we had passed or failed. When the news was broken we were over the moon, it was our third 4 star and the one we'd had to work hardest for.

Over tea we talked to both Fiona and Tom about the possibility of employment with Outward Bound. They strongly recommended them as great employers, but we'll have to be a bit older before we can apply. Meeting the people here has shown us the variety of ways that people engage with paddling – lots are hobby paddlers and none the worse for it, whilst others coach for pay, sell boats and kit, do other outdoor activity, use paddling as part of personal development programmes or a combination of them all.

Wednesday night had a very interesting presentation from a local man who has been recognised for his humanitarian efforts in Zimbabwe and who has been supported by symposium attendees in the past. He reported back on what he had managed to achieve in the past year and the things he has seen. We were shocked by his tales of what goes on in the prisons and we all made a donation by putting some cash into the pockets of his jacket.

We celebrated our 4* achievement by having a late night in the centre. Richie Snell got his guitar out (he finds it helps him relax, gather his thoughts, and express himself) and partly entertained people and himself. Some others took up the guitar and a very relaxed and pleasant atmosphere developed. We promised ourselves a rest and stayed up late, thinking to have the day off and to be led on the 5* night paddle.

After breakfast (no cooked stuff today, you grow weary of bacon sausage and eggs after you've had it 5 days running) and having seen the weather, we decided not to have a rest and go night paddling: it was blowing a force 8 and we didn't fancy that too much in the dark. We decided we'd go surfing in Treardur Bay instead. There was shelter from the wind, as out to sea it looked like a force 8, but in the bay it only felt like a 6. There was quite a large group of us today, so we split into beginners (whom Tom coached) and advanced (who were going out just for the crack with Phil, Alon and Simon). We went in the advanced, having done quite a bit of surfing before.

We had some new short boats so we set to with a borrowed file to set up the backrest in one. Richie Snell went in the short boat and Richie Common went out in the sea kayak. Few people realize what a good boat the Pyranha Master is and it was very much at home in the surf. The NDK Romany S was entirely in its element in the waters of Anglesey and a joy to paddle in the surf. The club has 12 glass NDK boats and they are all fantastic but the two Romany S boats are always the first out of the container and it is those that we squabble to get into. We think that our training and assessment has been made easier by having excellent craft for the job. Today the Romany S felt very composed on the waves and this contributed to Richie Common's success rolling the sea kayak in the surf for the first several times. The wind was howling but the sun was shining. The surf itself was smaller than we expected and, because the wind was onshore, it was slightly flattened, messy and had a tendency to break all at the same time. So, not the best in the world. However, trying it with an offshore Force 8 would have been misadventure not adventure. It was mega fun and we had a great time. Towards the end Simon got a three piece boat out in the surf and experimented surfing without one or both of the end sections. We didn't get a picture unfortunately because we had not bothered to charge the battery during our lazy night, but it was amusing to watch and probably quite strange to paddle as well.

While we waited to help Tom's crew off the water we were able to recreate one of our northern traditions of having a nice ice cream after paddling. The southern sunshine takes the edge off it but the ice cream was amazing. We went for the large of course and the large was pretty damn large and dribbled with all sorts of colourful sauces. It was probably the best ice cream van we've ever seen and the girl inside was pretty as well. Next year we'll talk to her if she's still there.

Having finished pretty sharp we were able to go for a walk into Holyhead. Not the most exciting of small towns so we were right at home. However Holyhead does have a Costa Coffi called Jumpin' Jacs where the coffee was excellent, and we had some fish and chips on the way back.

The presentation this evening was from Tatiana, part of an Italian group that did a summer circumnavigation of the Highlands of Scotland. In certain photos the water looked so clear and it was so sunny that it looked like the Mediterranean. There were some great shots of stacks and other rock formations. However the natural beauty of Scotland was balanced by the blight of the midge and these had made a huge impact on their enjoyment of the trip.

Another multi cultural relax in the centre led to a discussion with Alon and about the possibility of a trip to Israel next February looking at sea kayaking and hopefully some surfing. A small

group of seemed to develop into the night owls, staying up late, chatting and joking and cracking on. Great stuff!

On the way back to the tents, the moon was nearly full and gleaming between cloud cover, a very dramatic scene and as we stood there entranced we remembered that we'd failed to put the camera battery on charge again.

Friday, and here it was without warning: our final paddling day in Anglesey. Today we opted to be students for the five star assessment. We got the trailers loaded and down to the SKUK office in Holyhead harbour. The plan was to set out from here and make our way to Church Bay, the forecast was force seven and big swell but it was probably only force five and the swell was about 4 foot. A couple of hours into the trip, for the first time Richie Snell began to feel pretty queasy whilst paddling. A combination of the side-on swell, tiredness, and perhaps some dietary imbalance caused sea sickness. There was an amusing confusion as the candidates all thought it was a set up exercise and the assessors had to step in to take responsibility. The two of us were being led in different groups and the sea sickness delay meant that besides being sea sick Richie nearly went hungry – stupidly we'd put all the food in one boat. Luckily Richie's group landed on the beach as the others were finishing. During the afternoon, Fiona (on behalf of the assessment team but perhaps enjoying it more than most) made a plan for us to be evil to the candidates. Marius decided it would be fun to capsize, pretend he'd injured his arm and then pull Clark (who was leading that stretch at the time) into the water and prevent him from rolling, whilst another paddler capsized at the same time. Clark was extremely gentlemanly about it. Fiona took one of the hatches off Richie's boat - this went unnoticed until he approached the new leading candidate about his seasickness. Richie was genuinely feeling rough but the guy and his second thought Richie was putting it on to make things awkward. Richie's broad pitmatic dialect didn't help as it always gets stronger under stress! Throughout the day the leaders were really keen that we used our skegs which wasn't what we wanted to do – we were trying to surf down the waves and paddling around to find the ride.

We chose the Valley Tandoori for our final meal tonight. In the end there were fourteen people in the minibus.

So out of our nine day visit we'd had great fun, seen some great scenery, added another 4 star to our expanding collection, met people from all over the world and heard about their experiences, arranged to go to Israel, discussed an exchange programme with the Norwegians and decided that this is what we want to do for a living. We also realised that there is nothing stopping us. We had breakfast, packed up and said our goodbyes then hopped in the van for our eight hour haul back to Newbiggin. On the way back we dropped a Rockpool boat off to a friend of Tom's (Doctor Bob) and he talked about the fact that he and other North West Sea Paddlers are coming up to our neck of the woods for the Coquet – Round the Island Race. It struck us that we should be supporting this local event and find out more about local paddlers. Also, that we would want nothing more than for the people coming to Northumberland to be as well received, welcomed and shown hospitality as we had been shown by the people at the Anglesey Sea Symposium. At the service station stop before home we turned our attention to hopes and aspirations, we'll keep them to ourselves for now except to say that Anglesey features large. Tom then threw in the bombshell that Julie Fowlis is from North Uist which has

some fantastic sea paddling, a great sea kayak symposium and local knowledge that the only midgets there are those that follow paddlers from Northumberland!.

Things we learnt

- The Anglesey Sea Kayak Symposium is incredibly brilliant and is really cheap
- The symposium make boats available to hire and provide transport to activities, you can go to the symposium even if you can't get a boat and car there. This really surprised us!
- Make some effort to be "up for it " before you go, a little bit of preparation and practice means you can get the best out of the incredible opportunity
- Go prepared with the kit – we wouldn't have been able to have such a fantastic time without other people's generosity and in future we'd like to be fully prepared and perhaps be generous to others
- If you haven't got kit you can buy it there at the weekend
- The symposium must be far and away the best place to go and try out boats – don't buy before you try
- The site is really busy and you have to accept that occasionally the showers will be cold – learn from teenage boys and remember you can always shower tomorrow, if you must
- The food from the centre is very poor and expensive – go self catering and/or eat out, the pub on site is better value for money for food than the centre
- Prepare for the fact that the drying room won't
- **jfdi**
- The coaches are fantastic, the NDK boats are fantastic, the activities are fantastic, the environment is fantastic, the tide races are fantastic **but** the best thing is meeting so many different people from so many different countries