

Report of the trip to Spain 14th to 25th February 2008

Participants: Tom, Craig, Richard C, Lee, Richard S, Stuart

Venue: Tarifa in the extreme south of Spain, camping at Torre de la Pena campsite

Preparation: The trip to Spain was designed to improve the sea paddling skills of Craig, Richard, Lee, Richard and Stuart and to prepare them so that on their return they can continue training towards achieving the British Canoe Union 4* Sea Leader Award to build on the range of 3* awards (Sea, Inland, Surf and Canoe) that they have achieved over the winter.. We also arranged to practice surf skills, both in sea kayaks and shorter boats to build on the 3* surf skills as preparation for the 4* training e have booked for April.

For some of the young people this was their first trip outside the UK and for all was the biggest paddlesport trip of their lives.

This report is written by Tom Thomas and relies on the reports of Craig, Richard, Lee and Richard. Stuart who is at college 3 days a week could not find the time to supply a report.

Day 1: Thursday 14th Feb

The feature of the first day was the very early start, Craig woke me at 0330 (by phone) much to my chagrin as we had agreed that he would call when he, his dad and brother were leaving the house. However there is no harm in an early start. We got to the airport and met with the two Richards and Lee. Within the group we often call Richard, Richard and Lee the "Three Stooges" as they always appear together and Craig and Stuart are "The Chuckle Brothers" as this captures their constant bickering. We don't yet have a name for the squad.

We all booked in together and as Craig recalls "the women asked all the usual questions like have you left your bag unattended then she made a slight slip up and asked if I had any sharp liquids. Tom quickly responded from the desk to my left and made a witty comment about lemon juice. I remember thinking I hope that isn't an example of the humour to come". I then managed to make a small dent in my caffeine deficit with a couple of Starbucks best. Lee's perceptions of Starbucks was different to my deep gratitude "After we had checked in the bags we went to Starbucks where some of us had coffees or cakes, I did not buy anything as I was offended by the ridiculous prices the place charged".

The youngsters bought various items from the shops in the duty free area, sunglasses that unfortunately we didn't need and waterproof phone cases that their phones didn't work inside. We had the usual wait to board the plane and the flight was uneventful.

Craig's recollection perhaps says more about him than about the trip "After the usual crap where the hot girl in a uniform waves her arms and her boobs wobble and some one on the speakers rambles about lifejackets so that you are too distracted to imagine her naked". The disembarkation was a little slow however we were quickly reunited with our baggage and met up with Phil Clegg, Nigel Dennis and his daughter Lizzie. As Richard Snell describes it " We arrived in Malaga and met with Phil, Nigel and Lizzy for the first time and then climbed into the old knackered rust-bucket which was the van" Phil drove us to Tarifa and on the way we stopped at a services and we were all really impressed that they served real food, cooked to order. I was pleased that although the group hadn't chosen to learn any Spanish before they departed they all ordered food enthusiastically including; calamari, paella, rabbit and fish.

As Lee records "On the way to the campsite we stopped at a service station for some food and I was amazed by how much better it was than a British service station, it was cheap and the food was actually nice"

The journey to Tarifa included a stop to buy food for us at the local Lidl. The day was warm, sunny and dry. We got the tents up fairly quickly although the teamwork was difficult – Craig stepped into a managerial role and got the lads organized to put up the two large tents we'd loaned from Wansbeck Family Camping Group.

The campsite was excellent and was a new experience for the young people: Craig "the campsite was built around the ruin of an old tower on top of a high crag, palms and cacti were everywhere, the site dropped straight on to a long sandy beach with green water and high waves.... I got more and more impressed the facilities were clean tidy and well done if only all British campsites were modelled around this one... We received a key for a locker on the site these lockers were long and very large secure storage for kit yet another idea I think British campsites could adopt.... On my way down to the bar I realised I could see Africa across the water, this campsite just got better and better.."

The group decided to have a bar meal at the bar/restaurant. This provided tapas, a menu del dia (a bargain 3 course) and a restaurant with a la carte menu as well as alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The youngsters stumbled on a drink they liked (a lot) as Richard Snell says "went to the bar, where we took a liking to a beverage we called the 'red stuff' (latino is it's proper name). We obtained it by pointing at the tap and saying uno at first, our Spanish all being a little shabby" and as Craig puts it "Once in the bar I discovered a very nice drink called Latino, I still don't know what it was but boy it was good"

During the evening we met up with Pete Jones who ran some of the training up in Northumberland and Nigel (not Nigel Dennis) who would share the coaching with Phil for the first few days. We also met Leslie, a Danish woman now resident in the UK, George a Scottish

paddler who knows Tom, and Jessica, a Canadian living on the Isle of Man. This group (and some Americans who had departed) had been in Tarifa for a week but told us that they had been unable to paddle on a number of days because of the strong winds.

I was pleased that everyone set off for an early night.

Day 2 Friday 15th February

Craig's description of the morning reveals a great deal..".The strange tone on my phone alarm woke me at 0730 after a very comfortable sleep on one of the new mats. Still feeling slightly tired and being the only one awake I went for a shower, the facilities were fantastic warm, high powered showers with an area to change. Once I had finished my shower it was a lot lighter so I went into the utility tent and set up the kitchen unit and stove that we took with us. Still no one was up so I put the kettle on and went to see how much of Africa I could see. It felt strange to be standing in Spain but it looked like I could have swam to Africa I had never thought of the two countries as being that close together. When I got back to the kettle it was surrounded by my fellow campersI managed to squeeze half a cup out of it after they had all made there drinksprobably a sign of things to come but being determined to prove that my teamwork was not a total disaster I bit my tongue and enlisted peoples help to get the shopping from the van.

After stealing Craig's hot water the group met at the bar where everyone had coffee or chocolate and the three stooges began their close association with cakes. This was the first of the days on which they ate increasing numbers of cakes for breakfast.

Following a briefing we decided on a downwind paddling trip and began with a short sea kayak surfing session. As Richard Common remembers ... "once we had gotten the sea kayaks out we were allowed to go for a bit of a play in the surf so that Phil could see whether or not we were competent paddlers and within 3 waves I had capsized and ended up on the shore. After I had re-launched my boat we were off paddling down wind in a force 5-6 and the beginning bit I have to say was brilliant as all I did was surf the swell which was extremely fun and lasted right up until dinner time. After lunch I began having the problem of my boat deciding to turn down wind most of the time and after an hour of this I was beginning to get very agitated with it, however my annoyance was short lived as the trip was paddled quickly due to the assisting wind. Once we had got top our destination we did a little surfing however the wind was so strong I ended up along way down wind of the others on the beach which ended up with a long paddle into the wind to get back"..Richard Snell remembers the lunch in detail.." We stopped for a dinner of bread, cheese and chorizo (this was to become our staple diet for the rest of the holiday) on a beach just around a headland.

We continued after having Jessica amazed at how easily the six of us polished off the great block of cheese between us. We carried on for a while and I noticed what first I took for shark's fins approaching, but a second later realised were windsurfers who were picking up astounding speed in the strong winds. A couple of them decided to come full pelt through the group of paddlers, weaving their way precisely through the 15 yard gaps between us and then speeding off again"

We drove back to the campsite and on arrival Craig and I set about preparing the evening meal. The plan was that 3 pairs – Tom and Craig, Richard Snell and Lee, Richard Common and Stuart would take turns cooking a meal for all of us. Whilst Craig and I toiled in lovely evening sun the others had their own plan, as Lee recalls" When we got back to the campsite Richard, Richard, Stuart and I decided to go swimming in the sea and seconds after entering the water realised what a stupid idea it was, although it was a fairly sunny day, seeing as we were only wearing swimming shorts the wind made us feel freezing. We did not attempt it again." The evening meal of ratatouille went down very well... Craig "The meal was extremely nice in the warm air of a lovely evening" Richard Common "they were cooking Ratatouille which was a new thing to me as I was under the impression it was just a child's film however it was a very nice meal and I finished it with a cake from the bar and a few drinks of Latino." ... Richard Snell "We satisfied our hunger on a ratatouille that Tom and Craig cooked us that night"... Lee "I remember that Tom cooked a ratatouille that we all enjoyed but I can't remember much else". The first paddling day was an obvious success and although all the youngsters experienced some difficulty keeping their boats straight they soon got used to paddling in a force 5 wind and the domestic arrangements set into a comfortable pattern for the duration. A slight down was that this included Richard Common's insistence that the sleeping mat and bag did not offer enough comfort and as with some of the other statements this reveals more about Richard than it does about the equipment.

Day 3 Saturday 16th February

The breakfast arrangements followed the pattern of lots of cake in the bar. Each day started with a briefing and then activity. Today we went to a bay with a pleasant beach break ideal for surfing at our level of skill. We were able to use the boats that we had sent out with Phil. Descriptions include Richard common " at the beginning of the day there seemed to be no swell what so ever, but later on the swell picked up brilliantly and we were able to get some good surfing done. I mastered staying on the wave rather than just doing a carving turn and losing the wave. For some odd reason I was unable to do a roll when I capsized and I was unable to work out why because when I practiced I came up every time. The main highlight of the session was seeing Phil get the Master completely airborne and doing lots of other

seemingly impossible stunts' including a nose stand off the front of Toms boat" Lee's memories are "Tom told us that Phil was an excellent surf kayaker but I was still amazed when he took one of our all purpose kayaks airborne" and Richard Snell "all us novices watched in awe as Phil cart wheeled and looped on the waves, even catching some air in the old masters (something we all thought impossible until then).. he also recalls that he found some challenges in the afternoon ..."eventually I went and sat on the shore as I thought it too rough and was tired of paddling out and having to be smashed in the face by 4 or 5 waves before I got past the break zone and the involuntary back surfing entailed by the bigger waves".

This day also saw us enjoy our first fresh ripe pineapple, an absolute joy and a great addition to the midday meal. We returned to the campsite via a stop at Decathlon – a chain of sports superstores that have a few branches in the UK but not in the north east. Stuart, Richard, Richard and Lee steadfastly refused to buy tea towels as they consider them to be a total waste (later they had to use their shirts to hold pans whilst draining pasta. Richard Common and Stuart were able to resist the stereotype of being "tough northern lads" by investing in pillows.

It was Richard and Lee's turn to cook and they have varied reports of the experience, Richard "We drove back to the site where me and Lee cooked an improvised chilli vegetable stew with squash, peppers, tomatoes, aubergine on rice; needless to say I was impressed with my skill, having never cooked much more than a cheese and ham toastie back home, Lee's recollection is different "That night Richard Snell and I cooked a vegetable stew, we would have been clueless without some help from Craig, which made me realise that I can't cook to save my life".

The evening followed the establishing pattern, meal, bar and early to bed.

Day 4 Sunday 17th February

The breakfast routine was slightly more amusing today, Richard Snell tells the tale thus "Today we went for breakfast and Craig told me and Richy Common he'd found a bag of sugar so, overjoyed, we made a coffee and heaped it in. Richy announced 'this is peculiar tasting sugar' quite calmly and I had a sip of mine to discover it was salt, so I hurriedly crammed my toast in my mouth to get the taste away. Defeated by another morning without sugar we went to the bar" – you'll notice that the pair had made no effort to purchase any sugar and came up with what even for Newbiggin must be a new excuse for going to the bar.

This was a very windy day (by my reckoning a Force 8 was blowing out to sea)and we went to an estuary to work on skills that help paddling in strong winds, some of the lads were a bit less than enthusiastic having some strange notion that they deserved a rest. This reluctance was increased when we arrived to launch close to a sewage outfall. We would be fine as long as we stayed upwind and did any rescues that were necessary as quickly as possible. I was really amused that Richard Common became really annoyed with Craig. Richard is always either

playing tricks on people, threatening to push them in or hiding equipment. In particular he likes to paddle into the stern of another paddler causing that paddler to have great difficulty controlling their kayak. This is from Richard's account "Once we were changed into our still semi wet wetsuits we were on the water slogging our way into the wind which was far from nice and Craig had the bright idea of paddling into the back of my kayak and turned me which was highly annoying and forced me to take ages turning back into the wind". We were all once again impressed by Phil's skills in a kayak and Lee records his learning "We were in the estuary learning paddling in the wind techniques from Phil. He taught us that the wind catches the lightest end of a kayak, so usually a sea kayak turns into the wind unless the skeg is down. He also told us that you can in effect make paddling into the wind easier for yourself by putting your paddle strokes further forward, and make it easier for yourself paddling downwind by placing your paddle strokes further back." Phil delivered this message by popping his deck, sitting astride his kayak and sliding himself forward to sit at the bow and then shimmying to the back of the boat – exaggerating the effect of the wind. This would be difficult in a swimming pool but even in the relative shelter of the estuary the wind was still at least a force 5! This mention of Phil's great skill needs to be tempered with the fact that he does these things without any trace of "showing off" and all the lads will try out the techniques they have seen.

We had a fairly short session on the water and returned to the campsite via a bakery where I bought some sugar for the lads and some beautiful bread. We had a late lunch and then experimented with some of the expedition kit that we had bought through a Youth Opportunities Fund bid. I showed the lads how to use the MSR Whisperlite Stoves that operate on pressurized petrol. They are the "bees knees" and I have had one for at least 12 years without any problem. Typically when it came to demonstrating I couldn't make it work. This gave an opportunity for Phil and Pete and Nigel (not Dennis), who all enjoy messing about with kit as I do, to demonstrate their technical superiority. Unfortunately that stove defeated us all and it was only when packing it away- having had to use other stoves for the demo that we found we (possibly I) had twisted the fuel pipe. Stuart and Richard Common, with a little help from me, prepared the evening meal, the day was rounded off by a talk from Phil about his circumnavigation of Britain with Harry Whelan and Barry Shaw.

Day 5 Monday 18th February

The morning was more cheerful than usual when the three stooges discovered that the shop at the campsite sold fresh pain au chocolat each morning. Thus the morning ritual changed to a

run to the shop, a couple of pain au chocolat and a couple of croissants before going to the bar for some cakes.

The strong winds relaxed slightly, down to a 6 out to sea. We planned a trip in the lee of Tarifa Island following the shore back to the campsite, roughly 6 miles. Richard Snell recounts his difficulties and his enjoyment...“I went half of the trip becoming steadily more frustrated at how I seemed to be the only one who couldn’t paddle straight, having to use about 8 strokes on the right for 1 on the left to compensate for the wind; then Nigel reminded me of my skeg, so I put it halfway down and was fine for the rest of the trip. I just paddled off up the front in a world of my own, trying to get close to the birds of prey passing over on their migration route from Africa to Scotland”. The passage of birds of prey across the Straits of Gibraltar is one of the wonders of the natural world – birds of prey are often thought of as great fliers but they really need up draughts to gain height and so use the heat over Africa to give enough altitude that they can glide across to Europe. Often in difficult conditions (such as the ones we’ve been experiencing) they reach Europe fairly low. It is often difficult to judge one raptor from another in the sky but I believe that we saw at least 5 ospreys during our trips close to the campsite.

During this journey we saw what I believe was another example of migration, much more distressing. As we passed close to the shore there was a man holding onto a makeshift raft, about 15 ft square made of timber and barrels with a mast and small sail. The man was holding onto a rope secured to the raft from the beach whilst the raft bounced about in the surf. It seems unbelievable that someone had crossed from Africa in/on such a craft in the kind of weather we had been experiencing. However the coast around Tarifa has over 1,000 bodies washed onto the shore each year from people attempting to escape conditions in Africa to find a new life in Europe. I was sure that the person on the beach had come from the raft and wanted to offer help but was/am unsure what help I could have offered.

We returned to the campsite and had another excellent spell of sea kayak surfing right outside the bar. It cannot be stressed too much that the location of the campsite with friendly surf close to shore made a huge contribution to our learning.

We went out to Tarifa for a meal, wander and a drink. The evening went very well and is most remembered (as other parts of the trip are) for Richard Common. In Lee’s words.. “Later that night we went to a pub run by an Englishman and Richard Common asked the barman for a cocktail called a "Sex on the Beach" we all found Richard's discomfort amusing when the barman replied " it's a bit windy for that around these parts isn't it."

Day 6 Tuesday February 19th

There were no big issues with breakfast and planning today. However when we got to Tarifa where we planned to paddle east we realized that the bag with food in it had been left behind!!

Almost as soon as we launched a storm closed in over us, with thunder and lightning getting ever closer overhead. We landed on a beach to see the storm out, whilst here we discussed the fact that we were more likely to be struck by lightning on the beach rather than at sea, but, if struck on land other people would be able to do more to help. This was one of the many philosophical discussions that came up over the week. I can't remember which evening but the discussion about quantum physics in the bar was certainly entertaining and brain numbing.

We set off after the storm passed and had a beautiful paddle in sunny weather, Richard Snell captures the feeling and demonstrates his growing confidence..." There were quite a few grey mullet hovering on the surface of the water, which would disappear with a splash when the boat got near them, this kept me and Stuart amused puzzling over what they were until we realised they were fish. On the way back, sun shining, the water was crystal clear so you could see the bottom about 3 metres down. I'd get some momentum and stop paddling, then glide up to the packs of fish on the surface and watch them swimming about as they dived away. I decided to capsize the boat and, upside-down, look to see what was down there; but couldn't make much out without goggles, I then rolled back up and carried on."

We finished the sea trip in the shelter of Tarifa Island and the youngsters practiced their re-entry and rolls – this where a paddler capsizes and exits their boat, then repositions themselves in the seat (boat start on the side and then turns upside down during this) and the rolls up. This is followed by pumping water from the cockpit before replacing the spray deck and paddling on. Most of the group "cracked" this difficult skill and some also managed to capsize, empty the boat by lifting the bow (whilst treading water) and then climbing across the rear deck and back into the cockpit. The enthusiasm of trying out these demanding skills demonstrates the growing confidence that comes from paddling lots of days on the trot.

Nigel Dennis had returned from the UK and met us with the van in the afternoon. He reported that there was excellent surf at the campsite and the youngsters gleefully returned to practice their short(er) boat skills. As Richard Common recounts the experience.. "once we got back to the camp site we discovered the surf was perfect and as I could not pass up the opportunity I donned my wetsuit again in the warm shower I might add and was back on the water again surfing which was one of the best sessions I have done". Lee has similar feelings.. "After the paddle we met Nigel Dennis the first person to circumnavigate Britain in a sea kayak, and the manufacturer of the Nigel Dennis kayaks. Nigel took us surfing on the beach at the campsite, and due to the conditions it was one of the best surf sessions we have had". Richard Snell also enjoyed the surf and gives some detail to what he learnt . "The surf at the campsite was brilliant when we got back so we rode that for a couple of hours and I feel I really got to grips

with gliding along and carving out bottom turns. I also thought it great when paddling along on the top of the wave when it steepened, then throwing my weight forward and carving down the face and riding it in”

Craig and I cooked supper (it was quite late when we finished) of mushrooms and blue cheese pasta – it was a little rich for most of the youngsters but very tasty and filling. Richard Snell again captures the evening.. “Craig and Tom cooked a pasta dish with mushrooms and a creamy blue cheese sauce that night, and we went to the bar for a game of pool and a few glasses of the red stuff, or a ‘grande cerveza’ or big beer or pint in our language. Phil and Pete did a presentation on their Greenland expedition, which was really interesting and inspiring.”

Day 7 Wednesday 20th February

We planned a fairly early start to get away for a circumnavigation of Gibraltar. The start went well and people enjoyed playing games in the van on the way. Entry to Gibraltar was made difficult (as usual) by the staff of the border crossing. The continual “game” of being offended by the other parties of the UK, Spain and Gibraltar is played out with the people wishing to pass through the border being the ball in the game. After being asked for non existent paperwork and writing something we managed to gain entry. We drove across the runway that is the border between Spain and Gibraltar and on to a beach to launch. We were able to eat our mid day meal before we launched. We were accompanied on this trip by Norman Garcia, a Gibraltarian paddler who knows a great deal about his home, as Richard Common recounts” and met Norman the one legged man from Gibraltar who was a brilliant guy and took us on the trip, that day” Norman had paddled around to us from a different beach and spotted a dead Pilot Whale washed ashore tightly wrapped in fishing nets. The picture clearly shows this distressing sight. We carried on and visited a cave where the remains of the last ever Neanderthals were discovered and Lee reports “and we got to see the cave where the oldest human remains were found. Ironically Norman who only has one leg coped much better than the rest of us when we had to get out of our boats onto slippery rocks.”

After some practice in leadership we passed Europa Point, as Richard Common puts it..”it was Richard and Lee’s turn to lead they took us around the top of the island and passed a sewage outlet which smelled foul and I accidentally dipped my hands in the murky water not realising it was there, stupidly”. Richard was not the only one to describe him as stupid on this day. After some practice of landing and launching in difficult conditions, which involves re-entry and roll, we stopped on the beach where Nelson’s body was landed after the Battle of Trafalgar. Lee (a good friend of Richard Common’s) takes up the story..” Nigel told Richard to find a cloth to dry his boat with, Richard in possibly his most idiotic moment yet, saw what he thought was a white cloth on the floor and picked it up to dry his boat, only to discover that it was in fact a used tampon. I was laughing so much at him that I almost fell out of my boat on several occasions.”

We continued around the rest of Gibraltar with lots of practice of rescue skills and everyone partook enthusiastically. We spent some time in Gibraltar, one of my least favourite places but the rest of the group found it interesting in parts, As Richard Snell informs us..” We then sought after the shops where I purchased a litre bottle of Jim Beam whiskey for about 6 euros; we also thought we’d look cool if we smoked cigars so 3 of us bought a pack of King Edward’s for a euro fifty and were chuffed”, apparently if you dip your cigar into Port before you smoke it, you are even more cool.

Day 8 Thursday 21st February

The morning session was a discussion about the 4* Syllabus – this group being amongst the first ever to be trained against the new syllabus meant that lots had to be clarified. We also went through kit needed to lead on the sea and how to use it. We had a good session on knots and most of the young people realized that they had plenty to practice if they are to be proficient on the sea. We also covered navigation in some depth and again the 5 trainees realized that they need to spend time to become familiar with navigation on the sea.

The practical session concentrated on rescues, in fairly large swell. The aim was to prepare the students for both the Canoe Safety Test and 4* Sea and this meant spending lots of time going through various scenarios. The students took turns at being the leader in such situations and repeated review meant that over time the group became quite proficient at the various rescues.

Claiming tiredness the group decided that rather than cooking the meal we should eat out at the restaurant. The meal was very enjoyable and again the campsite came up trumps for value for money fare. As Richard Common puts it..” it was too late to cook a meal so we went to the restaurant where Richard and lee ordered a huge T bone steak each and I got chicken and chips which wasn’t bad put paled in comparison to the T bone.”

Day 9 Friday 22nd February

We started with a journey into Tarifa, hoping that there may be some shelter from the pretty dreadful weather so that we could do the Canoe Safety Test, there wasn’t. We decided to do more work on navigation hoping it would improve, it didn’t until teatime. The use of charts and OS maps, familiarisation with tidal streams, use of VHF, phoenetic alphabet,etc took up a fair amount of time. However we had a fairly early finish to the formal teaching element and whilst Stuart and Craig did more navigation exercises Lee and the two Richards returned to the tent.

Richard Snell and Lee were preparing the evening meal and the two Richards used this as a good opportunity to drink the Jim Beam. Lee, Craig and Stuart perhaps helped and when I returned

to the tents at least 4 people told me that they had drunk half a bottle (well it worked for loaves and fishes). At this stage however it was evident that Richard Snell had taken as much as he was currently able and he became the politest drunk I have ever met. When I suggested that he may want to lean against a tree he thanked me profusely for a good 5 minutes. Supper eaten and the youngsters repaired to the bar where unwisely they continued to drink,

Day 10 Saturday 23rd February

This was a planned rest day where we planned to go to Morocco by ferry from Tarifa. For some reason Richard Common did not appear to keen to be up and about, his reasons .” When I woke up that morning it took all of my will power not to throw up everywhere when I saw Craig’s face that morning, not only because it was a sight too terrible to imagine but also because the whiskey gave me an awful hangover, then after spending 30 minutes trying to keep the contents of my stomach inside of me I had to go in the back of the van and get jostled to hell all the way to Tarifa where we were going to ferry to Africa, amazingly I managed to not spew and was doing well” which are gratifying. We had a breakfast in a traditional Spanish café, Richards attempt to order ham (Jamon) resulted in him being pointed to the preserves.

I thought that I was incredibly brave going to a Spanish barbers and having a haircut in a foreign language, the boys showed their maturity by laughing through the window. We went back to the campsite by taxi and the group played cards, Richard Snell is the instigator of card play but on this occasion..” We then went back to the campsite and spent the rest of the day playing cards (the gits must have took about ten euros off me playing pontoon).”

Stuart and Richard Common spent an age not preparing a meal, certainly the least competent skillet work of the trip. Richard Common’s appraisal “me and Stuart spent the rest of the day preparing a meal which went as badly as it could possibly go and as the gas ran out whilst cooking the chicken only myself, Stuart and Lee were brave or stupid enough to eat it in our Tortillas but we were fine the next day”. I was surprised that they were at all fine and I’m re-considering the idea that some people cook for the rest of us, they really don’t have a clue!

Day 11 Sunday 24th February

The weather was better, even though there was some swell. We had a play about during the morning and in the afternoon I assessed 4 of the youngsters for the Canoe Safety Test. Craig has already passed his award and whilst the lads were enjoying their swims he did a great job of packing up much of the communal gear. Indeed it deserves mention that Craig who has sometimes failed to work well in a team because of impatience and lack of communication

made a great contribution to the achievements of the trip. He even offered to help Stuart cook the meal on the previous evening but his offer was firmly rebuffed.

The lads did very well on the Canoe Safety Test and whilst they did not recognize the advantages of some sunshine and warm water at the time they certainly missed them when we did the same test for Open Canoe on the Wansbeck a few weeks later. During the afternoon we were able to watch as the beach and bar filled up with families, windsurfers and some people with stand up and paddle surf boards.

That night we again had a meal in the restaurant and a very civilized end to the time at Torre de la Pena.

Day 12 Monday 25th February

We had to be up early in order to get the coach to the airport in Malaga for our flight. Most of the group slept their way through the trip. We ended up with a fair amount of time hanging around the airport and the services were much poorer and vastly more expensive than at Newcastle, however most of us were pretty hungry so they did well out of us.

The flight was uneventful. I was greatly amused when we were on the bus at Newcastle airport when one man in a black and white shirt asked another about results over the past few weeks, he replied..” Well I know we lost 4-1, but I don’t know how many times we lost 4-1!!”. On the journey back to Gateshead I was amazed at how grey everything appeared – it was quite a pleasant day for February in England but everything had a dull appearance.

Overall

The trip was a huge success. The confidence of the young people grew enormously and this was demonstrated the next time we were out paddling together. This was on whitewater and all the lads were keen to get into it. The kit performed well and the instruction was excellent. As mentioned above the campsite was excellent, it would be so good for there to be similar ones in Northumberland. The surf sessions contributed a great deal as did the rescue stuff. We need to run some more sessions on navigation and trip planning but the on the water elements were excellent.