

## **Wansbeck Paddle Sports Club Great Glen Trip 8-12 April 2022**

The idea for the trip came from what it would be overly formal to call discussions, more like chats during sessions, questions “could we try...?”, “what do people do....?” and that kind of thing. Over time it became clear that a number of people were interested in challenging themselves with a canoe-camping trip.

Somehow the questions and suggestions coalesced around a group of 22 people with an interest in paddling the Great Glen, a “bucket list” type of challenge. Over time the numbers of participants reduced to 14. A combination of work and domestic issues making it difficult to arrange time, perhaps some realisation of the magnitude of the challenge and a lack of practice over the winter combined to make people think again.

An opening meeting was arranged at the club's base and the daunting task of putting a plan together was set in motion with the key theme being flexibility. Trying to sort out plans for 22 adults with differing opinions and attitudes was always going to be difficult especially when trying to keep them informed and up to date with plans when they couldn't attend meetings in person or via zoom.

A weekend training in open canoes on Ullswater was part of the planning process and would be a recommendation for participants of future trips as a useful guide as to what to expect on an expedition.

The Great Glen Canoe trail suggests participants register and pay a £10 fee for the use of toilets and shower blocks along the route and what a good idea these are. (They were also very clean and warm!), one quick phone call and we were paid up registered users.

The club being as supportive as possible and with future trips and expeditions in mind made contact with GoOutdoors and received a discount on discounted prices enabling the club to buy new tents, sleeping bags, sleeping mats, Trangia cooking systems for anyone needing camping kit for the trip. It's all good kit and will be there for future use for many years to come.

Some members keeping their eye on the Marketplace also found storage barrels going incredibly cheaply and after a trip to Consett the club purchased 7 new large barrels which fit perfectly into Toms van and the Clubs canoes. An order to Lomo to buy out their stock of dry bags means that the club has an abundance of expedition kit.

We need more trips planned for this year and the years to come.

Some discussion within the group focused on the ever-growing challenge to our social and economic security of life today and we committed to sharing transport so far as possible and taking most of the canoes on a trailer. We agreed that the best approach is to share the fuel cost of all the vehicles equally between all the participants.

Similarly, groups of people arranged food groups. This enabled sharing of the work and of stoves, fuel etc.

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Lots of time and effort went into the planning of the trip. For the future having the Ullswater "practice" weekend as an integral part of the expedition process would improve communication.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2022



14 members: left to right

Kay Dani Karen Jacqui Anne Chris Garry Nik Sarah Margaret Linda Shelley Tom Ian

of Wansbeck Paddle Sports Club set off for a 4-day adventure, to paddle canoes through the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness.

In our carshare groups we travelled to Fort William through awe inspiring environment including the A1 through Northumberland and the Trossachs (for some) and then on the majestic route through Crianlarich to Fort William with amazing views throughout. We met at the car park near the pre-booked Chase the Wild Goose Hostel with great views of Ben Nevis recently crowned with snow.

We stored the boats on the canoe rack at Banavie (Banbhaidh), just at the top of Neptune's Staircase, and then unloaded kit into the shelter at the rear of the hostel.

The drivers took cars and trailer to Inverness following Lee who kindly offered to help with the shuttle and bring drivers back to Fort William. We (royal we, it was Lee really) found a car park near to a get off point at the end of the trip.

The non- drivers were unable to access the hostel until 17.00 and so had to sit outside a bar, drinking beer and being inspired by the Ben.

When the drivers returned we enjoyed some food and a relaxed evening, early night ready to be on the water for 8.00 am next day.

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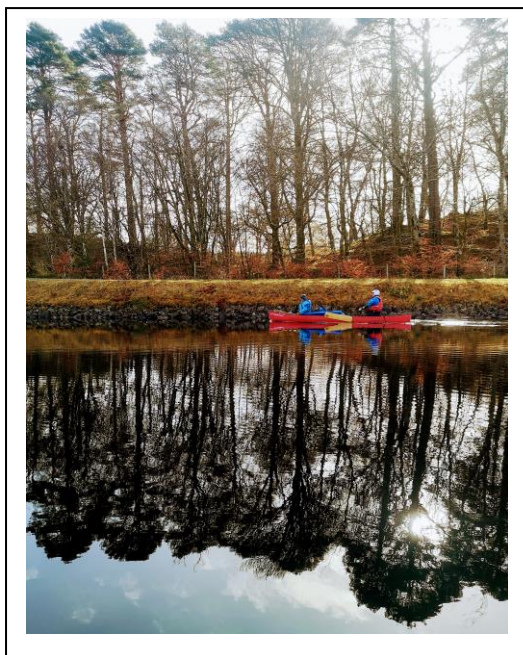
**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Out of bed bright and early, breakfast and on our way with all of our kit to load boats and get them on the water to begin the canoe trail. Again, our saviour Lee along with Chris helped us by transporting kit to the canal side in their cars making the task much easier. Once all kit was in place in the boats – which took surprisingly longer than planned! – we set off on our adventure on the beautiful canal in the Scottish Highlands.



Travelling along the canal everyone was happy to be on the water, weather and conditions were good. Those people who were experiencing the Caledonian Canal for the first time were amazed at the size of the boats that use the canal. We passed a sign warning that boats with a total height above 35m would not pass under the overhead power lines. As a comparison the Angel of the North is 20m tall.

We tried to keep to a schedule of paddling time 2 hours then a break of half an hour. The paddling was easy and at the beginning we easily maintained 4.5k per hour.

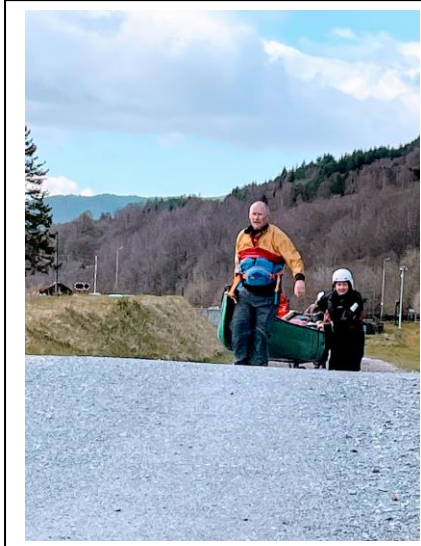




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After approximately 9.5 k we came to Gairloch! This meant a 500m portage around lochs.

Portage is such an elegant word, what it means is an enormous effort to carry, slide, lift, push loaded canoes. There was no blood or tears but a great deal of sweat involved. There was also some “swearing under the breath” as 2 of the trolleys we had brought along proved not to be capable of the task.



After a much-needed break, we paddled a further kilometre into Loch Lochy. We followed the shoreline for just over 17k to Laggan Locks. Like the rest of the canal this site is immaculately maintained by Scottish Canals and we were able to camp with toilets and a shower close by. We learnt again that paddling loaded boats is much easier than moving them overland.



Many of us were quite tired at the end of the day, we cooked our evening meals, relaxed for a while then curled up in our sleeping bags to go to sleep early to replenish our energy levels to tackle the next day's paddling.

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### Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

There was rain and snow overnight. We woke to views of mountains capped with snow that was not there when we went to bed. Some of the tents had a pretty thick coating of ice.

A good early breakfast, kit back in our boats, we set off ready for another day paddling through amazing scenery. After 2.5k of paddling the canal we entered the wider horizons of Loch Oich. We hugged the northern shore for approximately 7k and came close to Bridge of Oich.

Because of some works on the canal we had to use the river, but, would probably have done so anyway to avoid the long portage in Forth Augustus.



Most of the river section was an enjoyable series of small rapids. The challenge of relatively novice paddlers paddling heavily loaded boats is considerable but all seemed to enjoy the experience. One rapid was larger and we chose to line the boats down this section.



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The 9.25k section of river brought us to Inverloch where both the river and canal enter Loch Ness.

After a break where people refuelled in their chosen way, we paddled just over 1k to a camp spot.

The view down the length of Loch Ness is beautiful. It managed to raise the spirits at the same time as reminding us that we had a long way to go! Enjoying another delicious evening meal we enjoyed a bit of social time before going to bed.

### Monday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2022

We managed to be up, fed and watered, on the water and ready to go at 08.20, getting slicker as on Saturday it was after 10.00 and Sunday after 09.00.



The wind forecast was of concern, north-easterly, easterly and south-easterly winds whilst we are planning to go north-east. The winds did appear but at times there was a distinct but gentle wind eddie effect along the southern shore. At other times (probably for half the trip) whilst the overhead clouds seemed to be following the path suggested by the forecast we experienced considerable assistance with a fair wind on our back.

After 17k we arrived at Foyers campsite, which is lovely. The site is run by the Camping and Caravan Club but has spaces for backpackers and as paddlers we would qualify. The staff

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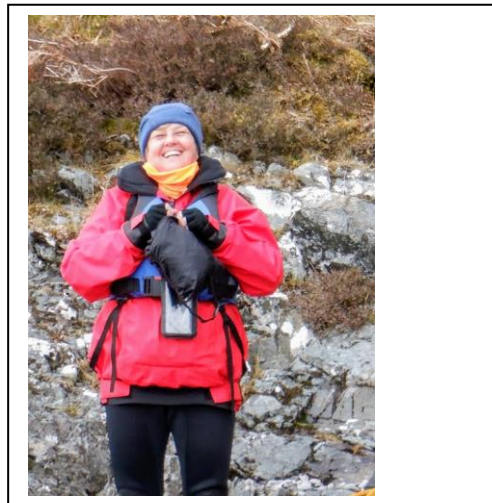
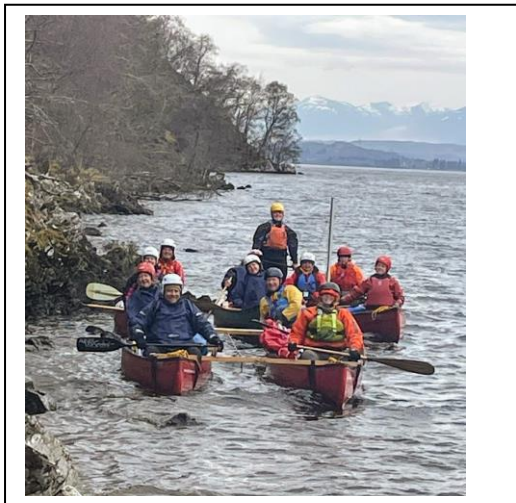
were very helpful and informative. The cost per person backpacking is £9.00 during low season and £11.00 during high season (approximately mid-June to end August).

If planning to do a 3 day trip Foyers is a good stop, making the days 27k, 35k, and 29k

We carried on to wild camp some 15k.



Some of the group experienced difficulty in maintaining steady paddling and used rafts and sails but reported that it was no easier in the raft. The raft did give a sense of safety and security and good humour and singing prevailed to aid our progress.



The campsite was great for a large group and we slept well despite being close to the road. The complexity of the wind direction became apparent when trying to erect the tarp. During a 3-minute spell there were 4 strong gusts, one each from east, west, north and south.

It was agreed that we'd start the last day on the water at 09.00 and we managed this.



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**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Everyone refreshed in the morning packed up and ready to paddle for 9.00 am sharp we set off on the last leg of our journey. This was the only day where the temperature got into double figures. To celebrate Dani took a dip.



The paddling was generally easy, and after 7k to end Loch Ness, through Abban Water and Loch Dochfour, plus 3.5k to Dochgarroch and our last portage. We took our break at Dochgarroch and then made good time over 5.5k to our destination.

Maybe because of the relief of completing the expedition and having the charms of being home in mind we made short work of disembarking, emptying canoes, loading the trailer and heading home



Linda towed the trailer and agreed to take it to near Chris's house. We got to his village and were close but not certain of the exact spot, so asked some people leaving the village bar. Lo and behold this was Sue, a club member!



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The Great Glen canoe trip is a major undertaking, however it is incredibly affordable. Sharing cars and food costs, availability of club kit, free camping and leadership keeps the costs down.

Commercial operations offer a similar trip – slightly shorter, excluding transport and accommodation on the night before the trip, charging in the region of £450 to £500. In broad terms our trip cost each participant:

Accommodation	24.50
Canal register fee	10.00
Fuel and parking	55.00
Food (less for some)	35.00
Club fee	25.00
Total	£149.50

### Some discussion points

It is always difficult to select a perfect time of year for such an expedition.

- A huge bonus with the timing of this trip was that there were very few midges that are usually a blight on trips in Scotland.
- The reason for the lack of midges was the weather. Spring had not sprung and only on the final afternoon did we have temperatures of 13C and we had cold nights but were well prepared. Exercise during a cool day is really enjoyable.
- The other major blight is having wind against you. We chose the Fort William to Inverness route as for the first 2 days gentle but favourable winds were forecast. The forecast then had predominantly easterly winds for the last 2 days. We chose to hug the southern shore of Loch Ness to gain what shelter we could and made progress even when waves were breaking in the middle of the loch.. Some participants felt that we were “lucky” with the weather, whilst there is some truth in that, we dealt with the conditions in a strategic manner.
- Using the river was forced upon us by the works being carried out. However, it was already in mind as a way of avoiding the portage in Fort Augustus. Because it is difficult to access the canal even after walking past the locks the portage can be as much as 700 metres. Participants really liked the river but the excessive loading of the canoes meant that they would be difficult/impossible to rescue if difficulties arose. This is why we lined a considerable section.
- Sails and rafts seem like a wonderful idea. However, in practice they did not make progress any easier except in raising spirits in the group.
- The group. As well as being wonderful in their own right, the group reflected the diversity we are hoping for as a club. Ten women and four men! An age range of fifty years (19-69)

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### Some comments from participants:

*I really did enjoy this one. What a great group and so much teamwork from every single person.*

*Great time was had by all, and the singing was extra special*

*Thanks to everyone for fantastic memories made.*

*Completing the Great Glen Canoe Trip (95km) in 4 days, while wild camping, has been the hardest and most challenging thing I have ever done! But I did it with the most fantastic people. What an amazing experience and such an achievement.*

*Great photos, super trip, with super people.*

*Amazing trip with a great bunch of people. Had so much fun! Absolutely loved every minute of it.*

*My partner really looked after me and I know I wouldn't have managed nearly so well without her help,*

*Lovely company and great team work*

*You are all marvellous, great achievement, an astounding effort, brilliant team work*

*Great Glen canoe trail completed. 94km. Great company and a great achievement*

*Great Glen Trail complete, day 4, top of Loch Ness to Inverness, glorious sunny day to finish the trip, great trip with a great bunch of people.*

*I want to do more white water canoeing.*

### Some comments from other club members

*Wow, that was quick, well done*

*Absolutely amazing*

*Looks amazing, what an achievement*

*What a great experience for you all and a fantastic result for the Wansbeck Wanderers*

*Looked great. Hopefully I can find some time off for the next trip*

*Looks fab, next year*



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*Good stuff*

*Absolutely amazing, well done everyone*

*Great effort everybody*

*Well done everyone*

*Wow, well done everybody*

### Places, Grid reference and distances

Place	Grid	Approx Distance	Combined	Distance Per Day
Banavie	NN 11619 77259	0	0	
Gairloch	NN 17504 84094	9.5	9.5	
Laggan	NN28462 96309	17.5	27	Day 1 27k
Bridge of Oich Weir	NH 33640 03284	9.0	36	
Inveroich	NH 38250 09382	9.0	45	
Camp	NH 38573 08473	1.25	46.25	Day 2 19.25k
Foyers Campsite	NH 49244 21133	17	63.25	
Camp	NH 58904 33476	16	79.25	Day 3 33k
Dochgarroch	NH 61824 40397	8	87.25	
Rowing Club	NH 65443 43532	5	92.25	Day 4 13k