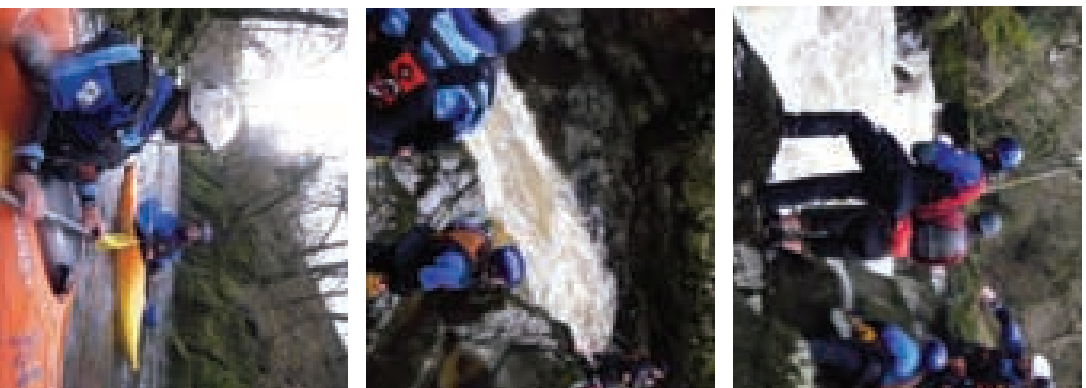


# STEEP CREEKING

WORDS AND PICTURES: GRAHAM 'BERTIE' BECKRAM

JUST BEFORE XMAS, I JOINED MARK RAINISLEY FOR A BLAST DOWN THE UPPER DART. IN THE 40 MINUTES IT TOOK US TO COMPLETE THE TRIP, I SOON CAME TO REALISE THERE WAS MERIT IN OWNING A CREEK BOAT. IF ONLY TO KEEP UP ON THE FLAT BITS! HOWEVER, I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO BUY A CREEK BOAT. IF ALL I WAS GOING TO DO WAS PADDLE RIVERS THAT I'D BEEN FINE RUNNING WITHOUT ONE – ESPECIALLY AFTER GIVING SO MANY PEOPLE HASSLE OVER THEIR CHOICE OF A 'BIG BOAT'. SOME FRIENDS OF MINE FROM SALFORD UNIVERSITY CANOE & KAYAK WERE KEEN TO DO A 'STEEP CREEKING' COURSE AND I DECIDED THAT THIS SOUNDED LIKE AN EXCUSE TO OWN A LARGE BOAT. CHRISTMAS EVE SAW ME CHASING AROUND DORSET, TRACKING DOWN A H3 245. ONCE PURCHASED, PLANS WERE SOON BEING DRAWN UP TO GET ON A COURSE...



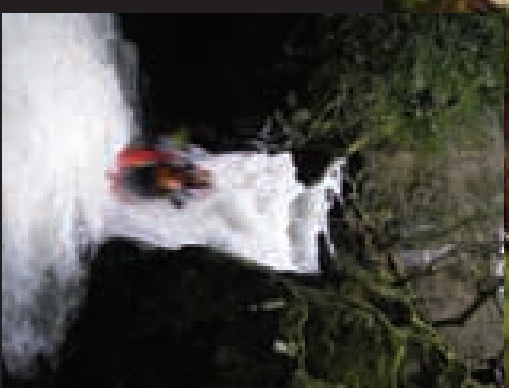
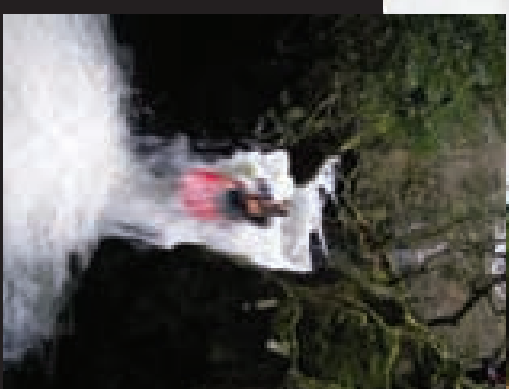
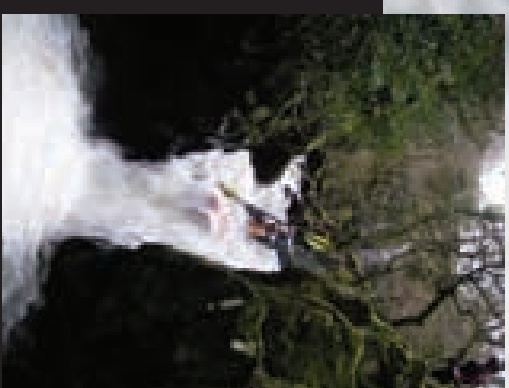
**T**hese days, if you paddle on Dartmoor, you can't help noticing Genev? Simon Westgarth around. Given the strength nature of the group's paddling and coaching ability already, we didn't want just a standard 'off the shelf' course and through Simon we were able to tailor a course specifically to address our needs. It was clear that a lot of thought had gone into the course preparation – the quality of the discussions we had with Simon, along with the schema documenting the skills and learning outcomes was testament to that. Matt Tidy was roped in to deliver the course, and after a slight delay, caused by a leak of water and an accident involving me, a snowboard ramp, and a suspected spinal injury, we found ourselves in Lanberis' ready and eager.

#### Day One - Saturday

After an early meet in 'Pete's Eats', we soon set about discussing our backgrounds, and what we wanted to get out of the weekend. It was decided that we would start on the Upper Conwy, continue down the Middle Conwy, and then head off to the Arddu in Lanberis, all in the first day.

Once on the Conwy, Matt quickly set to the job in hand. Almost from the start we were making the most of small drops looking at flaring techniques, improving our route accuracy using markers, and generally correcting different elements of our technique. Once on to the Middle Conwy, discussions at the two major grade 5 sections were used to improve route selection, hazard identification, and how to decide whether to run the rapid or not. Conveniently a swimmer in another group at the first grade 5 gave us an opportunity to test our rescue skills and to discuss rapid protection!

As we moved further down the Conwy, we further developed flaring and river running techniques on the numerous drops. The second grade 5 arrived, and



Following a quick discussion, Helen decided that she would run it for the first time, but only after Matt paddled it showing her the line.

Apart from an impromptu break-out, Matt ran this in typically expected style. Helen then decided to show us an alternate route. I have to say Helen's route, which consisted of a roll at the top, paddling the first half backwards, then the final half backwards and upside down, before being ripped out of her boat by the bottom stopper didn't look quite as appealing or indeed as stylish as Matt's!

By the time we got to the cars at Conwy Falls Café, we'd had a long day and were starting to feel the cold, but we quickly shot off to the Arddu for a look. Once there, a quick decision was taken not to paddle it, but to return to it first thing on Sunday.

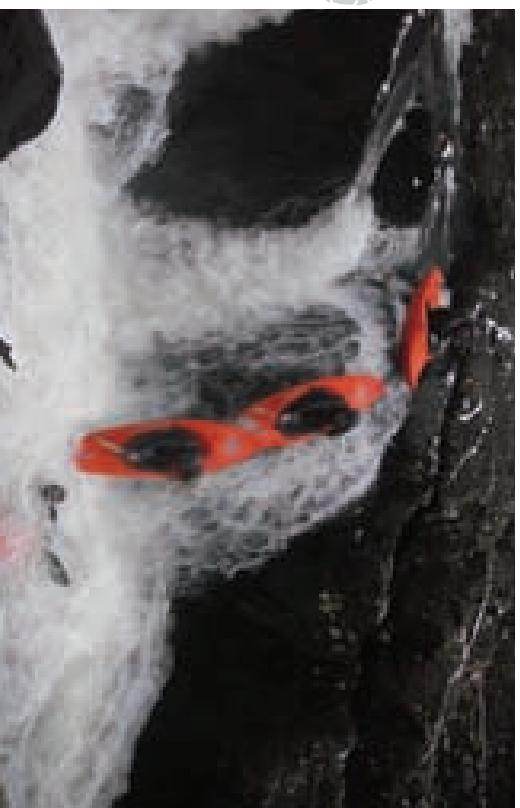
After a fruitless search for space in one of Llanberis's restaurants, we returned to Pete's Eats for grub, followed by a few beers in the pub opposite. Matt used this as an opportunity to look at the video footage and give us each some specific feedback and things to think about. He then graciously endured us whilst we recounted trip stories, until we were kicked out of the pub.

#### Day 2 – Sunday

We returned to the Arddu, fed, watered and refreshed. This was my first time on the Arddu or indeed on any river less than 400m in length! However, it has two great drops for practicing technique, the first requires good flaring technique, to avoid hitting the sides in the drop pool, and the second needs good boofing technique, to land it without hitting the sides in the drop pool. As you can tell, air-bracing through the gaps would result in leaving a wedged paddle behind you!

We spent the morning repeatedly running the two drops, using video to analyse performance, and watching each other for specific aspects of technique – all extremely useful!

Unfortunately, attrition was starting to set in by this stage. Helen had injured her shoulder whilst finding her 'interesting' line down the Conwy, and my old



snowboarding injury had flared up while landing the boof on the second Arddu drop!

At the end of the morning, we left the Arddu and headed for Pont Cyyng on the Llugwy. This is the sort of place every steep creeking course heads for. I'm sure, and we were no exception. Here Matt wanted to look at an alternate approach to running drops – pencilling in, rather than boofing or flaring. Attention had really set in by this stage, and so it was left to Tasha to uphold the group's honour and run the drop, whilst we yelled encouragement and secretly kept the video running for any 'You've been framed' moments! And we weren't to be disappointed, with Tasha dropping sideways from the tongue of rock she was meant to slide off the end of! However, after a few words from Matt, she stayed her next go.

Finally, we retreated to a Café in Bawe-y-Coed, where Matt summed up the weekend, used some more video footage from the day to highlight key action points to take away and demonstrated extreme patience when interrupted by some guy trying to impress his partner

through 'witly' observation about our use of terms such as 'tail squirting'.

I went into this weekend wanting to learn more about 'modern' techniques such as flaring and boofing, and to use it as an opportunity to gain some confirmation about my own paddling ability. And, if truth be known, to get a sneak at a top UK coach in action to further develop my own coaching.

Although my snowboarding injury curtailed some of my activity, I felt like I went away with a much better understanding of these modern techniques and how to apply them and with a renewed confidence about my own paddling ability. Matt followed it up with individual emails to each of us with key action points, and these were spot on. Matt, I will do more work on strengthening my back through some easier kayaking, but I'd better address it quickly as this summer 'I'll be off in search of more drops to flare, boof and have fun on!

All in all, a great weekend, with lots learnt thanks to some excellent coaching from Matt Tidy.

#### Tasha Lucas

I had in mind that I would like to work on my confidence on bigger, harder water - learn how to run big drops and creeks and the safety aspects involved in running such drops. I wanted to acquire the skills to go out with group of mates and run creeks safely and competently. Oh and last but not least have fun! I was encouraged to pick markers on rapids and to hit them with more accuracy than I had before. Each time I made a marker my confidence grew, even when I missed one, if I then managed to make the next one I felt doubly confident that I'd pulled it out of the bag. Slowly but surely it ended up that I was building my own confidence on each rapid, my grin getting bigger and bigger! By the end of the weekend I felt confident that I could go out and run creeks with my friends safely and competently. I appreciated that it wasn't a course in how to become dependent on coaching, but a course aimed at giving us the stepping-stone to improve and progress together. After the course Matt sent us action plans. Mine was bang on the mark, providing me with areas to develop, encouraging me to pro-actively go for the lines I have picked and to have confidence in myself that I can paddle it and get it right. The coaching was superb and I gained all I wanted out of the course and more!

#### James Devlin

I went on to this course not really knowing what to expect and very open to learn anything that was thrown at us, what I mainly wanted from the course was to get my paddling technique refined and improve on my confidence in higher graded water. (and I'd be lying if I didn't say I just wanted to use my boat for what it's for). Well I can certainly say that I felt I learnt a lot! Matt seemed to provide something relevant to everyone, not only practically, but also psychologically. He passed on lots of information from his past experiences. At the end of the course I was most impressed that everyone knew what they had to do and how they were going to get there. The course was very much aimed to be individual to each person, and by the coaching methods used and the feedback given. I felt that what was shown or told was very relevant to me and highly influential to my paddling. In all it was a great course, which I enjoyed and would recommend to anyone.

#### Helen Brown

I didn't have many expectations for the weekend only hoping that I would learn some stuff and have fun. We had been emailed in advance and asked what we want wanted from the course - I'd asked for techniques for running steep drops, ideal boofing technique and generally dealing with big water stoppers and cushion waves. The group was all made up of kayak coaches of varying levels and so once we had established the key points to look out for peer coaching started almost immediately with Matt giving us lots of opportunity to do so and giving great guidance. Over the weekend I found Matt's coaching to be spot on, he moved around the group giving individual feedback and advice without interrupting the flow of the day.

# PROGRESSIVE CREEKING

