



Pork pies and onion barggies

As I looked out across the sea towards the horizon, I was hoping to see the small tower of the lighthouse. I wondered if it was hidden behind the island or due to the poor visibility. Either way what was clear and some what unnerving was the five destroyers leaving Plymouth Sound and I had to cross there path!

The Eddystone is probably the most famous lighthouse in the British Isles, south west of Plymouth. The original tower, completed in 1698, was the first lighthouse to be built on a small rock in the open sea. Since then there have been four lighthouses built there, (the first had its roof put back on, so some accounts quote five light houses) the last light house was completed in 1892 and despite a few modernisations is still standing. This seemed a good place for me to attempt a longer open crossing, great history, very little tide - only 1kn maximum on a spring tide and about 20nm/40k round trip, and about 6-7 hours paddling.

For the last two and half years I had focussed heavenly on developing our company Coastal Spirit and my coaching approach, ability and "tool box". Personal paddling aspirations of what I wanted to achieve, Id put on hold that is until now. For the last 4 years or so a paddle to the Eddystone has often been on my mind, although in the darker recesses and it was often easy for me to keep the thought there. This time I had eight days down in the Salcombe area, in a super cottage just by the beach, at South Sands with my partner Sonja and good friends Sean, Mandy Jack & Charlie. I was looking for a good break, having had a particularly busy and successful summer.

We had already enjoyed wanderings to various coffee shops, a night paddle to south pool, for a pint or two and at North Sands there had been enough surf to keep me happy for a couple of hours and on another occasion, for the whole day and there was always the bar. Salcombe sand bar was close to the entrance of the sound, and with incoming swell and at a mid to low tide it was always worth while. Some times a couple of surfers would be there and other times you would have it to your self. Its one of those places were I tended to teeter on a fine line between this is totally exciting and really frightening – paddling hard, as a wall of water towers over me, the wave picks me up and I roared down the face, water exploding into my face, salt stinging my eyes and all at mach 10 for 150mts or so and im just

about in balance and control. I have always respected the bar, having had a couple of trashings and found it a great place to train, stretch my comfort zone and catch some amazing steep and fast waves.

Forecast the day before was for winds SE at 9mph increasing to 12mph. So I decided to check again in the morning and as long as it was below 15mph I would go for it. I had decided to go from Wembury beach, mainly due to it being only a 45minute drive from where we were staying, while driving around Plymouth could add another 30 minutes or so on.

Having done shorter solo crossings to The Skerries, Bardsey, Ramsey and Skomer Island, on each of these occasions leaving the beach had been the hardest part and this

time was no different. If only I could have seen the tower! I had my compass bearing which allowed for drift and headed out. I passed the Great Mew Stone, but with still no sign of a tower. After about 50 minutes of paddling and on the rise of the swell I thought I saw the small stick of a tower.

For the first two hours despite the sea beginning to pick up the wind remained the same as the forecast. An occasional trawler passed me out front and a couple of gannets flew by to check me out. Into the third hour and as the tower grew the winds began to increase to around 12-14mph. I was still happy and more relaxed than I thought I would be and on reaching the lighthouse in just over 3 hours, I was really pleased. What I hadn't done so well was choose food that I could



easily eat – the pack of sandwiches which looked great, I couldn't get them out of the plastic wrapper, without concern of capsizing!

On taking a photo, which was difficult enough, I turned around to head back reverting to my compass and using a back bearing. Land was totally obscured by poor visibility and I realised this was the first time that I had been out of sight of land, and it felt quite amazing. I headed off on my bearing and after an hour or so I began to see land. I tried to work out what I was looking at and then made a classic mistake. I decided to ignore the compass and head straight for a prominent pointed feature, which I believed was the shape of the Great Mew Stone.

I had been so engrossed in the journey that I hadn't noticed the change in the wind direction, which had backed to the East North East. When I realised this it also became clear I was looking at Rame Head and I was about 2nm/4k off course, to the west, which also meant I was now in Cornwall!

Changing my angle meant I was now paddling into a head wind, with my sandwich still secure in its wrapper I was hungry and I really .. really .. wished I'd picked up those mini pork pies and onion baggies, they would have been so much easier to manage. I also became suddenly aware a couple of the

Destroyers were on their way back to Plymouth Sound and they were HUGE. It crossed my mind to alter course, use more of the wind and then once ashore phone for pick up. But I had daylight on my hands and so as long as the wind didn't increase I should be ok. I aimed at the stern of the first Destroyer and put my head down.

Two hours later, landing through some surf I was back on the beach I had left just over seven hours ago. I lurched out of my kayak, as feeling began to return to my legs, tired but immensely satisfied with my journey and with 30 minutes daylight to go, I slowly carried my kit and boat up to the car park, now where was that sandwich!

For further information on the history of the Eddystone take a look at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eddystone_Lighthouse and <http://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/interactive/gallery/eddystone.html>

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