

Australia, a time for firsts

*Our trip out to Kangaroo Island from Adelaide, way back in the later 1970s, was the first ever unsupported kayak trip
The first ABCE Official Ocean Kayaking Course...
The first visit by an official of the BCU...*



Earle Bloomfield, a member of the Advanced Sea Kayak Club, circumnavigator of Tasmania (1979), native of Australia living in Melbourne with his wife, Kate, and young son, Thor, wrote to me and told me about his plans to lay on a course for sea canoeists and suggested I tried to visit Australia for a holiday and at the same time help out with this course.

In actual fact, Earle needs little introduction to canoeists in this country. He had instructed canoeing at Plas y Brenin in Wales and at the Lakeside National Mountain Centre, England.

Having agreed to help out with Earle's sea canoeing course, which was being organized under the umbrella of the Australian Board of Canoe Education (similar to our British Canoe Union), I started to make travel plans.

I flew Qantas from London direct to Melbourne via Calcutta and Perth and returned via Sydney, Darwin, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bahrain.

I arrived in Melbourne on Tuesday 22nd April at 6.00pm 1980 local time (they are nine hours ahead of us) after 23 hours' travelling. As I was experiencing jet lag I was pleased to see Kate Bloomfield there to meet me.

It wasn't plain sailing through the customs as I was carrying wooden paddles. One is not allowed to bring in anything of biological origin which includes wood, of course. Whilst on the subject of paddles, I'd been given a pair of folding paddles, a new invention by Alastair Wilson of Lendal paddles.

So, we were off into Melbourne itself.

This was my first flight ever, on my todd and a journey to the southern hemisphere.

It was quite dark (they were well into their autumn) but, as I felt under the weather, it really did not seem to matter. I was unprepared for the jet lag, from which I was soon to recover.

Nor was I prepared for what followed.

I can barely recall the rush with which I was taken to a venue somewhere in Melbourne where I was scheduled to give a slide show on the canoeing/kayaking scene back home in the UK. I did anticipate having to provide a show at sometime during my trip but not so suddenly.

Fortunately it seemed to go well. It wasn't the last time my English accent gave me licence to give a PPP (piss poor performance) and get away with it.

Here, I particularly remember an incident when Stan Chladek, the organizer of a symposium on sea kayaking based on the Great Lakes, N America, suddenly informed me I was to give the keynote lecture in the morning, to follow a Dr from the Canadian Coastguard Agency who was telling us daring do stories about how his team were rescuing fishermen from the oceans who were virtually dead from exposure. 'Follow that!' I thought.

With nothing prepared I stood in front of a lively crowd armed with a blackboard and chalk and set to to tell my own stories of daring do. Okay, maybe I stretched the stories a little but what seemed to really enamour me to the crowd was my English accent. They loved it!

Australia's first sea kayak course

The next few days were spent in preparing for the sea canoeing course. He and I were the only two coaches as qualified by the BCU available in Australia at this time and thus we were keen to get it right.

Earle and I must have tramped the length of Melbourne to meet up with canoe manufacturers and retailers, chandlers, chart emporia (if there is such a thing) and fishing equipment shops in search of all the necessary paraphernalia.

Difficulty in obtaining charts was a problem. The area we were to cover had not been charted for many years and they were not readily available.

This has changed completely as today the whole world has been minutely mapped to the extent one has to work hard to become lost but back then, which come to think about it is a very short period of time ago, sea kayaking was still very much a new world of sporting activity, both back in the UK where we still led the way and certainly over here in eastern Australia, where there were a few stalwarts such as Peter Carter and others who deserve far more than a passing mention as I reminisce.

On Thursday we left Melbourne for Welshpool, which is just beyond Wilson's Promontory.

Swim at Norman Beach - just a few minutes' walk from Tidal River Campground, or go snorkelling for a unique underwater view of Victoria's largest marine national park. Bring the family and camp in comfort at Tidal River. Choose from powered or unpowered sites or stay in roofed accommodation. Scale the granite peaks of Mount Oberon for sky-high panoramic views over the sea and a majestic sunset. Mount Bishop is a great alternative. You can walk to the summit from the Lilly Pilly car park or take the side track while on the Lilly Pilly Circuit walk. At the top, you'll see amazing views of the Prom's west coast and offshore islands. For a wider view over the National Park, head for lesser-known Vereker Outlook.

So reads the description.

