



Wilson's Promontory was to be the venue for the three day course. It is a huge mountainous spit of land that juts out towards Tasmania in the Bass Strait.

Following a great night at the local in Welshpool we found ourselves assembling on the Friday morning on the beach.

You know what it is like making final preparations and packing sea kayaks for a trip. There is a period of stress as we try and pack everything in the kayaks.

This was my opportunity to meet up with the course participants. Half of them were local people and the others had travelled great distances (by our standards at least) from South Australia to attend.

The gathering this evening was for a few mini lectures on meteorology, navigation etc and for a final briefing.

There were sixteen of us preparing for the three days and two nights out. It seemed like disorganized chaos but we got there in the end and by mid morning sixteen canoeists in sixteen Nordkapps set off for Wilson's Prom.

We met some disturbed water once we were out of the lee of the mainland and it basically remained disturbed until Sunday morning when we had a very calm paddle back to Welshpool. The first day was spent on completing various exercises and experiencing some interesting sea conditions.

Our campsite for the night was ideal, amid huge gum trees actually on the promontory itself.

The second day we divided into two groups of similar ability and my group travelled along the coast and spent time surfing, fishing and just paddling.

Though I was told there is usually an abundance of fish, they were not offering themselves up for capture and so we had to rely on our own rations for sustenance.

The two groups met up again in the evening and we had another excellent night's camp.

As if by magic, bottles of port, whisky, beer and hot drinks materialized as we sat around the fire, from where precisely we never knew nor cared. We had a fantastic evening which only got better as the night wore on.

Sunday was a fine calm day. We paddled our way back to base, Welshpool, where we had a demonstration of marine flares followed by a course debrief.

Without exception all felt they had enjoyed a great course which, though set out to be a beginners/improvers course, because of the sea and weather conditions prevailing had developed into a fairly advanced sea type course.

The weather around the Wilson's Promontory area is worthy of special mention.

It changes so rapidly it is unbelievable. Now a calm sea and sunshine to an overcast squally disturbed sea in a matter of a few seconds. There is a saying used round these parts of the country; if you don't like the weather wait five minutes!

Sea canoeing in Australia was as advanced as anywhere else in the world.

They didn't need me or anyone else to turn up from foreign places to show them how to use the wind and waves. The fact that our sport was very much in its infancy means there was some opportunity to share some tips but when it came to experience and ability, they didn't need anyone to show them how.

Apparently, Dr Mike Jones was over here very recently based out of Melbourne and he went down a storm.

There are two great reasons for giving Australia a shot, first the excellent coastline and second the natural wildlife, in other words,

the obvious opportunities for sea kayaking compensates for the lack of fast wild rivers for most of the year. Australia is basically a dry state and water has to be conserved, hence there is a danger of young rivers disappearing as dams and reservoirs are built.

This is particularly the case in Tasmania where there is a move to stop the River Franklin from suffering this fate. It may be a case of thirst versus canoeing and the outcome may be inevitable but it does go much further than this as the heritage and the environment of the Australians is in danger.

Before visiting Adelaide I spent a day with John Wilde. John is known to many British canoeists. A Brit himself, he has made his home in Melbourne and works full time for the Australian Board of Canoe Education.

John was taking a group of students down the upper reaches of the River Yarra, the mighty Yarra. The scenery was out of this world, huge gum trees lining the hills, coming right down to the waterside with the bell birds making their distinctive bell like call.

The trip to Adelaide was impressive. We travelled the Great Ocean Road which was fantastic, great cliffs and rock formations all the way along the hundreds of miles of coastline with great rolling surf, truly a surfers' paradise (not to be confused with Surfers Paradise on the east coast). Surprisingly, we saw few surfers and so there is plenty of room if you fancy Australian surf.

Whilst en route for Adelaide we visited a sheep farm deep in the Australian bush at a place called Chetwynd.

The owner, a flamboyant character, is related to Earle Bloomfield. Here we stayed a couple of nights and were made very welcome by Enid and Les Humphries (no relation to Barry), a great place to be, the Australian bush again with the abundance of gum trees and sheep. I was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of wild kangaroos.

Then it was on to Adelaide and the chance to visit several places en route to explore such attractions as the old time port at Warrnambool, Lake Gambier, which, at a certain time of the year, changes colour overnight, and then the huge cave which is remarkable for its stalactites and stalagmites.

There is not the space here to describe these places, nor to enthuse about so much more I saw, like, for example, the endless pine forests, the Adelaide hills and the Coorong, a road running along a vast peninsula.

No sooner were we in Adelaide when I was making plans to cross Backstairs Passage by canoe, a stretch of water between Cape Jervis on the mainland and Kangaroo Island.

This turned out to be a great trip.

The weather was perfect and so was the company; we even had a press reception on our return to Cape Jervis.

