



# Munro's Mariners 2009

Members of the IPA Bournemouth Branch, including Phil Austen-Smith, took part in an IPA sponsored charity event, Munro Mariners 2009, between 27/11/2009 to 02/12/2009.

Munro's Mariners 2009 was a kayak expedition up the Gironde and Garonne rivers to Bordeaux to raise funds for 3 chosen charities.

This expedition was in memory of Police Inspector 770 Neil Munro of the Dorset Police who tragically died on March 13th 2008. Neil Munro was a serving Dorset Officer and an active member of Bournemouth Branch. This new expedition also honoured the heroic efforts of the marines who successfully undertook the original expedition in 1942. A route was chosen that loosely retraced the original route taken by Operation Frankton during the Second World War. An operation popularised by the 1954 film "Cockleshell Heroes".

The expedition consisted of 10 paddlers the

majority of whom were serving Dorset Police officer's who used their own leave allocation in order to paddle the 70 miles, over 4 days, from the Bay of Biscay to Bordeaux.

### The story behind Munro's Mariners

Phil and Neil met in 2000 while competing in the 'Three Peaks Challenge' and worked together for several years in Bournemouth, where they remained good friends until Neil's death in the spring of 2008. His death had a profound effect upon Phil, to the extent that he felt the need to take steps to make something positive emerge from something almost incomprehensible. The idea was to undertake a challenge that Neil would have approved of and to raise money along the way for people who Neil would agreed were worthy beneficiaries.

The reason behind the choice of expedition was a desire to maximise the fund raising potential. Phil wanted to achieve something significant in Neil's memory while raising as much money as possible.

The idea was discussed with the proposed team; this in itself was a daunting task not least because organisation of something on this scale was something Phil had never undertaken before.

Phil's fears also included that look on peoples' faces when you suggest something that is perceived as ridiculously stupid - a 'you want us to do what?' reaction! To Phil's absolute delight the majority of the team he had hoped would be involved were instantly raring to go. The support team volunteers soon came flooding in.

The expedition was, without doubt, a big ask of anyone and the team were under no illusions regarding the scale of the event and the commitment required to complete the task safely and on time!

The paddling team was assessed over twelve months at regular intervals by a British Canoe Union (BCU) coach, Steve O'Donoghue. He instructed the team so that they could reach the standard of BCU 4\* (four start grading) along with extended periods of rescue and recovery tuition.

There was a lot to be organised before the start of the expedition, not least the training and practice schedule! The team used the old ethos 'train hard, race easy and that meant they were out in almost all weathers, night and

day (more night than day!) endeavouring to attain the skills through experience rather than luck during a test period.

All paddlers paid for their own tuition, specific winter dry trading kit, glow sticks, and more. The cost to each individual member of the team, as well as the huge amount of time committed to training was extensive - especially as it was all done on rest days and leave.

### Doug Forsyth, Asst. Treasurer Bournemouth Branch adds:

The team pulled off a major feat of endurance, not only in paddling against the elements for over 70 miles of the mighty Gironde, but also in pulling together and organising such a mammoth task. This expedition took over 18 months to plan and executed by a team of willing volunteers and enthusiastic paddlers, some of whom had no previous experience.

This Expedition has given us all the opportunity to see, at first hand, the task before the original Cockleshell Heroes, and the real sense of debt still felt by the French in this region, for the selfless sacrifice of Operation Frankton, both for this and other actions by the British forces leading to their liberation. I for one felt at times almost overwhelmed by their generosity and friendship. Our new friends of the "Frankton souvenir" deserve our special thanks. We are also most grateful for the help given by the Bordeaux Branch IPA for their kind help,

sadly our hectic schedule prevented us from meeting with them on this occasion, but I see that as a pleasure deferred.

Mr and Mrs Pipe of "Tinity Kayaks" and Island residents on the Gironde were the most delightful and generous hosts to 21 dirty cold and wet team members, their time and unstinting generosity will long be remembered.

The IPA's donation, which effectively gave the expedition the funds to achieve their goal by covering the cost of transport to and from the real work of the Expedition, has also served to generate new and vibrant blood within the organisation, and to show others that the IPA is not about a few old coppers swinging the lantern in a pub, but about young and active officers seeking new goals and being rewarded in the satisfaction of a magnificent team effort and helping our local communities.

The initial goals of the Expedition have now been achieved and our original financial targets reached for our three Charities. It would be wonderful to completely smash the targets, I implore you to go to our website, [www.munrosmariners.com](http://www.munrosmariners.com) and make whatever donation you can, to assist the Dorset Police Benevolent Fund, The Poole Hospital neonatal Intensive Care Fund and the Special Boat Services Association. Without the assistance from IPA Section UK and IPA Section France the team would have struggled to get the

event off the ground. The generation donation from IPA Section UK of a week's stay at the IPA House at St Andrews, was a welcome donation and I am sure raised a good amount of money at the Charity Auction.

The final total raised was £9,412. This figure will rise again when the result of the charity auction is published.

### What to do now? Phil states:

The team are now all wondering what on earth they will do with themselves, when you think they have trained together now since the 1st Monday back in September 2008 and had at least five long weekends away plus several training courses and not forgetting the actual expedition, it's no wonder really. I have no doubt there are many wives and partners waiting with a list in one hand, a drill in the other (boats with holes don't paddle nearly as well!). The fact I've mentioned the wives now is no mistake, they are the silent majority in this expedition, many of whom have all hated me at some point I have no doubt, I thank you for keeping it bottled up! They have all however consistently supported their respective paddlers 100% and in so doing supported the team and the expedition, they have lent me their husbands for a good chunk of the last 16 months... They all deserve a big thank you, this was no normal challenge and the commitment shown by the paddlers, has without doubt echoed through their families.

### POINTLESS FACTS :

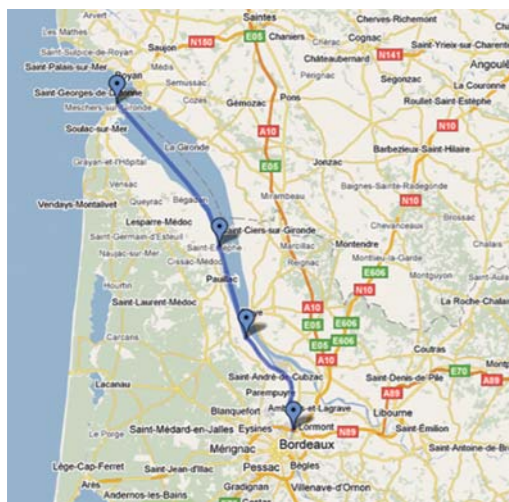
- 1 We paddled for 56 'almost' consecutive Mondays (I gave them August off!)
- 2 We have paddled well over 2 million paddle strokes between us - don't shake any of our hands!
- 3 We have all accepted a teddy bear within the group - Fudgemeister
- 5 We have all remained largely unable to speak French - sorry!
- 6 We must have collectively eaten Gaz's body weight in jaffa cakes since we started - addiction is an issue
- 7 We all know how to recognise a German Shepherd dog by its bark in the dark - woof dill woof



Thank you one and all for your support. It was, and is, genuinely appreciated. I hope your reward will be the sense of pride you have for your partners, they did a tremendous job all round.

### Phil sums up

The team have other interesting plans for next year and beyond (don't tell their wives yet please!). It will be nice to embark on other challenges in the future without the sense of the sometimes relentless pressure that was very evident during this specific challenge. Munro's mariners was established to honour a man, my friend and my mentor, Neil Munro and to raise money for three worthy causes in his memory. We have achieved this goal without doubt, but more than that the team has become a group of close friends. What better tribute to my friend and colleague, I cant imagine. Rest in peace mate.



### The money raised from the challenge will go to 3 beneficiaries:

- 1 The Royal Marines - due to close local links and their outstanding efforts worldwide.
- 2 The neonatal intensive care unit at Poole Hospital. The unit were close to Neil's heart as they provided care to his son Jack when he was born.
- 3 The Dorset Police Benevolent Fund - which assists and supports widows of police officers.