

HCC Kayaking Fiesta in Menorca

Featuring sea and sun, cliffs and caves, adventure and antics

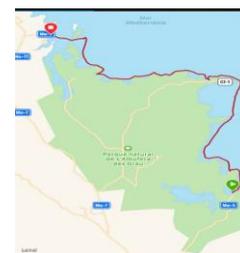
The Cast: Amanda, Andrew, Derek, Jenny, John (Freeman), Jonathan (Fidler), Maxine, Morten, Norma, Paola (Bernoni), Peter, Richard (Bate), Suki (Tan), and Tamra.

By the evening of Saturday 2 June thirteen expectant Hamptoneers (and some honorary Hamptoneers) had gathered in Mahon (the postcard-pretty capital of Menorca) in readiness for the start of 7 days coastal paddling next morning. Peter would not be joining the group until Monday.

DAY 1 Sunday 3 June

The plan was that Menorca-en-Kayak would send their minibus, supplemented by 2 cars the group had hired, to meet us at the bus-stop in the tiny local square at 9.00. The minibus was 5 minutes late and the two waiting cars found themselves blocking the impatiently hooting autobus and confronted by an irate local lady trying to get on. Cars moved, order was restored and minibus arrived, so off we all went to the village of Es Grau to sort out our boats and paddling gear. Kayaks, paddles and other gear were all good quality (unlike the stuff on display for casual visitors). The unexpected stars of the show were the 2 double kayaks, which turned out to be brand new and of fibreglass (not plastic) construction: sleek, comfortable and highly manoeuvrable unlike the usual heavyweight tubs. More than half the group had a go in these doubles during the week.

Our guide, Irina, planned the first paddle to give shelter as far as possible from the prevailing wind. We started out peacefully from Es Grau along the coast towards Na Macaret (10 Miles). After lunch the wind picked up, we went round a headland, the skies clouded over, rain joined the fray and we were in for a serious paddle. All triumphantly (or gaspingly) survived, and for most it was with some relief as well as jubilation we approached the landing spot at Na Macaret. By this time it was raining in sheets, and we were soaked through. Trying to keep dry clothes dry, control shivering and maintain decency while changing in public view was another test of character, but a welcoming bar and hot chocolate saved the day. Warmth and cheerful company even dimmed the mild irritation of the sun coming out again just half an hour later.



Es Grau to Na Macaret
10 miles

A convivial (and sunny) evening, eating al fresco in a huge tapas restaurant, was a gastronomic adventure and a fitting conclusion for the day.

DAY 2 (Monday 4 June)

Wind from the SW, so this was a great opportunity to paddle the northern coast. Travel plan was similar to before but the two supplementary cars were to follow

the minivan to the launch point. We got away smoothly, having learnt from the previous day, but at some point on the main road to Fornells, the second following car lost contact with the Minivan, (always driven at a fair lick despite its heavy trailer loaded with our boats), and having arrived at the presumed destination the latecomers found it deserted. Bless the mobile phone which restored contact and provided the name of the place to head for and the information that there was a lighthouse nearby, and no thanks to satnav which went into meltdown, and delayed the journey further with directions through barred lanes, footpaths and housing estates, till at some point we spotted a distant lighthouse, followed our noses in that direction and eventually found old-tech signposts to get us there. Everyone else was assembled, boats unloaded and neatly lined up, and greeted us with great good humour despite the delay we caused.



Port de Sanitja to Fornells 9.2m

So the group was late on the water at the delightful, crumbling Puerto de Sanitja. The sea was calm, we went past cliffs and caves. As we approached one cave a tourist motorboat drew near: to those near the back there appeared to be an excited reaction to the cave among those at front, but the naked ladies on the tourist boat waving and smiling in friendly fashion to the paddlers perhaps explained some of it. There were only two enterable caves on this route, but the cliffs and rocks were unfailingly absorbing.



We took a lunch break on a quiet beach, and continued along the coast afterwards still in calm warm waters, in pleasing contrast to the previous day. Arrival at Fornells, a popular yachting resort provided a choice of places for refreshment for all, and a longer chat-time for the two sets of car passengers awaiting the return of their drivers. The hard-worked

drivers had to dash into the minibus, be taken back to the start point to collect the cars, and then drive back cross-country to collect us well-oiled (with sun cream of course) passengers, then back to the Hostal Jume. This was the routine for every day's paddling: thank you again, John and Andrew for doing this with apparently effortless stamina and unflappable good humour.

Day 3. Tuesday 5 June 2018

This was a day full of incident. Coincidentally (of course) it was the first day Peter joined the group for paddling. We returned to our finishing point of the day before, Fornells, to travel down the coast to Na Macaret. A beautiful day and the cliffs, caves, and blue waters some of the best we had yet explored. In one apparently inaccessible cove an old white plastic chair was improbably lodged



Fornells to Na Macaret 11.5m

against a rock at the foot of the cliffs, rather spoiling the view of nature at her grandest. This provoked Andrew to perform a rescue, hopping out of the back seat of the double on to an improbable, uneven, algae-coated rock, while I rocked and swayed and tried not to float away. A big wrench to free the chair, and we left with our trophy lashed on at the back, including some disgruntled shellfish tenants.



While some caves in this area could get very narrow, others were large enough for several kayaks to manoeuvre inside. In one of these Derek spotted a trapped bird at the waterline, exhausted with its efforts to escape. He tried to dislodge the entangled wire preventing its escape but could not quite reach with hand or paddle. So he nobly exited his kayak, in deep water, and swam over to free the bird. He returned, nimbly got back in to the kayak (forestalling offers of assistance) and placed the shivering bird on the foredeck. After leaving the cave we passed some low rocks in a sheltered sunny space, and here he placed the rescued bird (a swift) on a rock to dry out. How it fared we shall never know, but 3 cheers for Derek!



The day was warm and sunny; lunch was in an isolated sun-drenched sandy cove. Back on the water after lunch all were relaxed. Peter thought it would be a good time to test the short towline with Richard. What Peter failed to notice, until the peals of laughter and increasing drag of the tow caused him to look back, was the gaggle of free-loaders who had joined the ride: 3 single kayaks and a double!

The wind picked up a bit in the afternoon, and the slightly more exposed route felt cooler and required a small spurt of extra energy against wind and waves. Na Macaret looked much nicer in the sun than it had on our first day. We noticed a line of holiday dwellings alongside the quay where we landed. One of these had a small table outside with a single white plastic chair – seemingly in need of a companion. So we placed our salvaged chair alongside. We regretted we could not brush off the encrusted mini-molluscs, but there were not so many on the actual seat and it looked fine from a distance.

It was an evening of more larks (which I won't go into here but caused much merriment) and enjoyable eating al fresco down in the port area of Mahon.



Day 4 (Wednesday 6 June)

Back to Port de Sanitja (now easily findable) for today's paddle, which would be an out and back since the stretch of coast West of Port de Sanitja was too inhospitable for boat collection by the minivan and landing places were few and far between. The rocks here were reddish in colour (reminiscent of the sandstone in Herefordshire) with some dark, possibly igneous blocks weathering white. Cliffs, sculptured rocks, pleasant conditions with wind at around Force 3 (occasionally 4) except when in the shelter of the shore.

We made a short stop after about 1 hour's paddle at a sandy beach with a shady café up a short track. Then we went on round the headland for lunch in a deep cove and a longer break. As most days, some snorkelled, some practised rolling, others explored inland or simply lazed around. The rolling was enlivened by Peter successfully rolling one of the doubles with an empty front seat. Oddly a further attempt to roll with a front seat passenger failed to work (but this was only a temporary setback, as Peter and Maxine triumphantly rolled it on the final day!).

Having extensively explored the shoreline in the outgoing paddle, we took a more direct route on the way back. Not quite point to point as our guide (Irina) preferred to seek some shelter round the windier headlands, but good after a rather languorous morning. The brisk following wind blew us forward, and sometimes sideways, and that and the spray (the bane of front paddlers in doubles!) kept us pleasantly cool. Port de Sanitja's tiny harbour was as calm as ever, and as the cars were on site and the minivan waiting, landing, loading, and departing back to town were a matter of minutes and a welcome bonus. We met up in the town for dinner later – some in their party frocks.



Day 5 (Thursday 7 June)

A day of caves (again!) and contrasts: dark and light, rough and smooth: in the first session we explored the coast in leisurely fashion, enjoying the caves and changing rock formations. The second session followed straight on making a total of 3 hours 45 minutes on the water) brought us into more exposed waters where we bounced and glided through choppy water and white-crested waves for an exciting 2 hours or more (see Morten's photo below)..



We started at Cala Morell, carrying the boats down a lengthy footpath to a small beach popular with walkers, though the new holiday flats hemming it were only patchily occupied. Some of the caves in the stretch of coast from here were quite spectacular: like one with a wide entrance, narrowing into a narrow tunnel but opening into a domed chamber open to the air, at the far end. We had to queue to get into this one as it was strictly single file. Other caves had room for most of us, and provided an oasis of calmer water. In one of these Irina confirmed that the morning's paddle would last at least 3 hours adding that there remained 1.5 hours or more to go (as

we had made slow progress so far), and was everyone comfortable with that? Norma unwisely admitted some doubt on the latter, and resourceful Irina said she had a solution and (too late for retraction) pointed out that the caves provided the only place where the water was calm enough to land. So 2 boats entered the selected cave, Irina leading the way. There were indeed some low, though inhospitably slippery and jagged rock ledges. While Irina and my



paddling partner were engrossed in planning the landing strategy (including a fantastic gazelle-like jump from Irina on to a slippery rock), the business was completed without their even noticing, and we rejoined the paddlers.



Most of us found the next 2 hours or so paddling in rougher waters than most were used to quite hard work, and when we arrived at the farthest point of the planned route, Cala Blanes, were happy to accept Irina's suggestion that we end the paddle there, rather than do another half hour retracing our route back to the originally planned pick-up point.

Cala Blanes was highly touristy, but a pleasant spot. The smoothest sand we had yet met in a deeply sheltered small cove, with a choice of two bars and decent public toilets. We had to land with care because of the number of small children on the beach, one of whom (a toddler) gave us solemn advice about needing to pull up our boats further or they would float away. Here we ate our lunch, changed, and loaded boats in the minivan in the nearby car park.

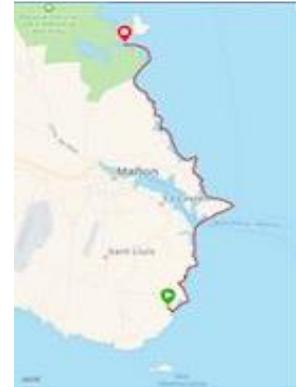


Cala Blanes

We missed Maxine today, who was unwell and unable to join us, but by an amazing feat of technology (or second sight?) was nonetheless able to provide us her invaluable route and mileage map

Day 6 (Friday 8 June)

This day we were back on the north-east coast, starting further south to end at Es Grau (thus a different section of coast from our first day paddle). We started from Cala d'Acaufar, which provided an easy launch, unlike the long staircase at Cala Morell the previous day.



Cala d'Acaufar to Es Grau 13.5m

We had mild weather all day, progressing slowly along in a mild breeze and sunshine past massive cliffs, providing few landing places but fascinating sculptured and fractured rocks, and bedding planes twisted by former



The shoppers & their chauffeur

earth movements.

Some of the caves round here proved to be mansion-sized, often quite shallow, but high-roofed and spacious. Further on were caves with low entrances and exits, with varying degree of narrowness between, and deep purple rocks. Cave exploration and rock-hopping kept us amused, and a light swell kept us awake so it

seemed short time before crossing Mahon Harbour – cautiously, in formation (of sorts) – and taking a short break around midday. We remained on the water for this, as lunch was planned for later and anyway there were no landing places for some miles.

The lunch break was in a rocky cove but there was space enough for rolling (John with Jonathan acting as coach) and for Morten to try out Irina's boat with a view to acquiring a similar one, with Peter joining in both activities, maybe others too. Once again the lunch was excellent (as ever, thanks to our hardy shoppers for their thoughtful selection and variation, efficiency, and amazing economy to boot) and there was also a nearby bar for coffee.

The after-lunch session back to Es Grau was quite short though made longer by plentiful opportunities for rock-hopping and cave exploration. An easy landing on the slipway at Es Grau. It was Derek's last paddling day and he offered his place in the minibus to any paddler while he joined the car passengers for refreshment and chat in the leafy garden of the Bar Es Grau. And later we all dined together in Mahon.



Day 7 (Saturday 9 June) LAST DAY



Cala en Porter to
Binissafuller 8.9m

We had not as yet been to the southern coast, famous for its caves as well as its sandy beaches. The winds were in our favour on the last day so we set off for Cala en Porter. I thought we might have had enough of caves but the caves we were to see had some new variations on the theme. Exploring these caves took time. The paddle was short in distance but long in time and the matter of queuing took on new dimensions, not least because we were a large group and wanted to ensure that everyone had their time in the dark, damp confines of the major caves. Another complicating factor was the swell – only a light swell but that can be magnified in a cave. So entry was sometimes restricted to one or two boats at a time, who might need to back out if there was not room to turn. My favourite was perhaps the one with its separate entrance and exit, but the long dark narrow one opening out at the end came a close second. The coolness, darkness and sound of the swell outside gave it all the frisson of an adventure. Outside though, the cliffs were interspersed with cheerful sunny tourist beaches, well populated on a fine Saturday. Time passed quickly and we soon reached the lunch stop.

Another feature of this day's trip was the strange sight of ancient burial grounds – the Necropolis (or whatever the plural of Necropolis is) since there was more than one bay lined with the symmetrical openings in the rocks, like so many windows, where the ancient inhabitants of Menorca buried their dead, looking out to sea. One of these palaeolithic developments was built round a Y-shaped cove, very sheltered and here, feeling like intruders, we paused for a break and exploration. The place was in the hands of a Trust who seemed to be doing a good job in keeping a balance between looking after the ancient remains and the modern visitors. It was a sobering sort of place with all those black square openings ranged like an abandoned block of flats along the cliffs surrounding you, but on leaving, Morten summed it up differently: "It's a pity you have to wait till you're dead to get a good view".

And so to Binissafullar where we disembarked for the last time; and later celebrated the end of a great holiday, great paddling and great company with a last gathering of the whole group for another lucky restaurant in the port area of Mahon.





Epilogue. This holiday was good paddling and the most sociable and laughter-filled I can remember. Thanks to everyone, for their company, for their mutual support, work on common tasks (eg drivers and shoppers and Maxine on accommodation), and contributions to this report through their photographs and suggestions. Thanks to Andrew for organising and master-minding

the trip as a whole.

Author's disclaimer: I may have muddled some days and have certainly muddled place and/or time of some pictures but be assured that these highlights and pictures all did really happen sometime on this holiday.