Crystal powers through the Beaufort Channel

The Aberdeen Boat Club's 24th Four Peaks Race was held over the weekend of the 26th and 27th of January 2008 and, with Aedas as principal sponsor for the second year, produced the usual cocktail of drama, elation and disappointment. A northeast winter monsoon brought cold and cloudy conditions to Hong Kong, but it was dry, and the breeze held up for most of the race.

The 15 entrants were divided into a competitive IRC fleet with *Cloud* and *Crystal* favoured to contest line honours and a good fleet of cruisers making up the HKPN Division. In addition, the Hong Kong Island Paddle Club built on its participation in the previous two years by entering male and female outrigger crews to paddle *Koana* and *Ko'olau* respectively. This year, though, the men would have a crack at the full Four Peaks course.

As the crews gathered on the club's patio, race officer Arnold Lunty was studying the recorded wind patterns at Waglan from the previous 24 hours but would wait until on station at the Tai Tam start line before selecting the long, or short, course.

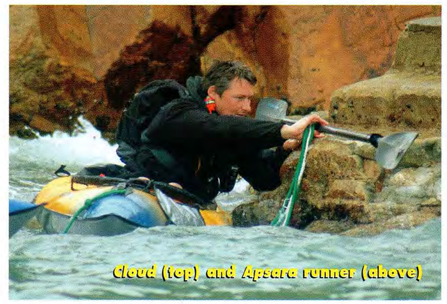
The race relies on the support of many volunteers to man peak controls, safety boats and race control. This year, the core of veteran volunteers were joined by some new hands, including several members of the Lantau Treasure Island facility who established a small encampment on Lantau Peak well before any runners arrived. As usual, Chris Gabriel took up position on Violet Hill and Michael Tsui, Alex Cheung and the Hong Kong Sea School manned Mount Stenhouse. Ma On Shan veteran, Jon Zinke, doing his 10th year, was joined by newcomer Peter Wheeler. Geoff and Jan Dixon manned Lantau Gate for the first time.

The message had gone out at the skippers' briefing that any gifts would be appreciated by the peak controllers as the night promised to be very cold. Who would rise to this challenge?

At the start, the breeze was 10 to 12 knots from the northeast and the long course was set. A windward mark was laid some half a mile into Tai Tam Bay before the yachts had to turn southeast to lay Fury Rocks to port. *The Farr Side*, skippered by experienced Four Peaks campaigner, John Berry, made the most of the pre-race tactics and put in an impressive start at the committee boat end. *Cloud*, skippered by Tristan Stewart and Bernd Hanemann's *Crystal* led the fleet around the mark and settled in to the long beat up to Sai Kung.

The two outrigger crews started 10 minutes after the yachts and, as ever, looked determined as they paddled vigorously over the line to head up the Beaufort Channel.

The northeasterly wind was true to the forecast and the leading four yachts, led by *Cloud*, arrived off the Sai Kung Police Pier in good time and within 30 minutes of eachother. The transfer of shore parties by all the leaders was slick but *The Farr Side* opted to land their runners, Anthony Sandeen and Damien Levy, directly from the boat. This saved some precious seconds but did mean a bit of clambering up the sea wall as the 38-footer slid past the landing steps. At the top of Ma On Shan, the *Cloud* runners checked in 20 minutes ahead of their rivals to give the big Beneteau a good lead as they left under spinnaker.



Cloud (top) and *Apsara* runner (above)

Rhapsody also chose to drop runners off directly, but misjudged the difficult approach and gave a glancing blow to the quay. At this stage *Rhapsody* was leading the Division B race but was to later retire with gear failure, thus ending Emily Chan's winning run of four consecutive victories.

The Ma On Shan Peak prize was awarded to Ben Blain and Greg Farleigh from *Harlequin* with a time of 1:42:00.

The return to Repulse Bay via the Ninepins was to be the end of the race for *Crystal* which retired with mast problems. At the top of Violet Hill, *Cloud* had managed to gain time on all of its closest competitors but particularly on *Kam Loong*, where the margin had now increased to one hour.

The strong conditions did not deter the two outrigger crews but the girls found it more difficult than last year, with a finish over 3 hours later in 18 hours and 23 minutes. The boys, led by Mark Pollard, were pleased with their finish of 20 hours and 19 minutes for the full course.

In Division B, *Koala*, skippered by Steve Metz, was forced to retire with crew sickness, leaving just three contenders in the battle for the honours. *Tamandu* runners, Christopher Lavender and Paul Mayles, claimed the Violet Hill prize in a time of 1:01:00 after arriving at the top of the second peak two hours and 10 minutes ahead of *Yan Ling* in 2nd place. *Yan Ling* had now extended its lead over *Sawadee*. Still, it was destined to be a close finish for the ABC crews.

The runners responded well to the call to provide peak controls something warm for the night. Several crews took the trouble to carry gifts in addition to their usual equipment. In particular, Jon Zinke was rewarded for his 10 years on Ma On Shan with a good range of spirits which hampered his descent in the low visibility. Of particular note was the pink champagne and chocolates from Edith Terry and her pretty paddlers.

In IRC, the race was on between *Cloud*, *Harlequin* and *Kam Loong* as they ascended Lantau Peak. On the return to the gate, the Peak was divided for the first time. *Cloud* runners Frederick Thierry d'Argenlieu and Mathieu Dumas and *GA* runners Jonathan Poon and Ricky Man

—continued overleaf

Paddling the peaks

Ingredients — one canoe, 12 good strong men, a support boat and skipper willing to follow us around the waters of Hong Kong, day or night, rain or shine, come hell or high water, a logistics and contingency plan of military proportions, good luck, more determination, and a good deal of madness . . . probably the reason we did it in the first place.

Instructions — mix together, careful not to freeze, just paddle then run, and repeat three more times.

Island Paddle Club first participated in the short course of the Four Peaks in 2006 with a team of nine. It wasn't about forming a new division, more about officially joining an event, albeit in a new, slightly unofficial category. We typically follow the race rules with the big exception being that we do not round the port and starboard sailing marks. If we were to abide by them we would have to travel significantly further and would get in the way of the yachts; we just follow the rum line.

The other obvious exception being that we paddle our craft rather than sail them. All other elements of the race are more or less even; however it's not really a race for the outrigger canoes it's more about surviving and completing the event. The goal is always to better the previous time or, as this year for the men, to make it and set the benchmark time for doing all Four Peaks.

The race starts at 1100 in Tai Tam Bay and heads to Sai Kung with a run up Ma On Shan. Then back to Repulse Bay with a run up Violet Hill, before heading west to Cheung Sha Beach and a run up the daunting Lantau Peak at night before returning to Lamma and the final run up Mount Stenhouse. The last leg is back to Deepwater Bay and the finish line off of Middle Island.

The key issues we had to address related to contingency planning and how to handle the 'what ifs?' because they do happen. We had successfully beaten our short course time in 2007 but, based on the significant increase in the paddling mileage, from around 65km to around 125km, as well as the need to rest people because of the distances paddled, cold weather and running, we were concerned about running out of gas . . . and interest.

We had to stay dry and warm, and therefore happy, even whilst paddling. Changing paddlers into a canoe usually involves a refreshing swim. With temperatures nearly in single digits, and Force 5 northerlies forecast, though, the idea of going for a swim every 30 minutes lacked appeal.

Enter the rubber dinghy. Every time we changed paddlers we would slow the support boat down and tow the dinghy with three relief paddlers alongside the canoe and then change them with everyone (hopefully) staying dry. This works reasonably well in daylight but, add a 6-foot swell and darkness, and things get interesting. Our support boat was essential to our well being and, thanks to Saffron Cruises, we had a fully equipped junk that kept us sheltered and supplied with hot drinks and bowls of chilli. Important for crew morale particularly when bobbing around off Lantau at 0200 waiting for runners to return. This was no ordinary junk trip.

As a sailing race, the regular entries in the Aedas Four Peaks pray for wind. For paddlers this is a double edged sword — upwind is not much fun but downwind, providing the wind has been blowing, means we get the chance to ride the open ocean wind swell. Paddling across the wind in a canoe is also not much fun as the canoe is slowed as it is pulled upwind. As the outrigger only has a 'float' (the *ama*) on one side, when the ama is upwind the risk of capsize (*huli*) increases significantly.

Coming down from Sai Kung we were still fresh and surfed well. However, with a northerly wind this made the crossing from Repulse Bay to Lantau and back to Lamma, at night, particularly hard work.

This was the second half of the race and was new territory: from the south end of Lamma to Cheung Chau and onto Lantau is empty. There are a few boats out there but that's it. It's pitch dark, you sort of know where you're going but you're not really sure, there's a 6-foot swell over your left shoulder, and there's 4 feet of wind chop coming at you from 2 o'clock and all you see is a glow in the distance which you hope is Cheung Chau. We make it to Lantau and then we have to paddle back, the other way, across the same stuff, this time with the ama upwind . . . after 17 hours of paddling and running.

Completing the Four Peaks in an outrigger canoe was epic, just epic. It took 20 hours and 19 minutes and it was physically and emotionally draining. We came 4th overall and, on corrected, time 1st (but what correction factor do you give a canoe, with six paddlers hammering way, thereby making the point noteworthy, as we don't have a sail, but essentially moot).

The Hong Kong Island Paddle Club is not new to epic adventures: six of us spent 24 hours in relay on a paddle adaptor to see how far we could go for fun; we paddle to Macau and back annually, with six paddlers having paddled the whole way without a break on more than one occasion; and we have done the short course of the Four Peaks twice before. So the long course was an obvious next step.

If someone asked you on the Monday after the Four Peaks what did you do over the weekend and you actually told them they would look at you as if you were mad. Maybe we are, but in reality, all HKIPC is taking are small considered steps whilst also pushing the boundaries of our collective experience. Mad enough to join us? Check out www.HKIPC.com

— by Mark Pollard

Continued from previous page — both recorded the fastest time of 2:02:00. It was still very close between the leading three yachts — the race was going to be won and lost on the leg to Lamma and the tactics for the last climb.

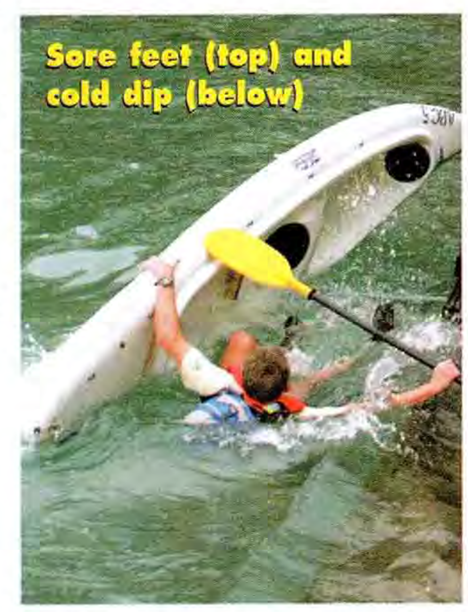
Apsara nears the windward mark

Mount Stenhouse took its toll on the crews with several shore parties getting into difficulty when landing on the south side. Elaine Morgan from *Cloud* found herself clinging to a rock like a limpet and unable to move until rescued by her dashing French crewmates. Two other kayak capsizes occurred in the swell but all occupants were recovered safely. Thankfully, this time the *Sawadee* runners managed to find their way through the elephant grass . . .

Fastest time on the peak went to *The Farr Side* with runners Graeme Brechin, Gilbert Collins and Ian Gordon getting back to the boat in 1:21:56.

Special mention is given to the performance by Choi Kwok Tung off *Ma Cherie* who climbed all of the four peaks.

Tamandu took Line Honours in Division B with an elapsed time of 16:45:14 which was enough to win the Edwin Palfrey trophy for Division B HKPN on corrected time. This was over three hours ahead of *Sawadee* and *Yan Ling*. The rivalry between these two classic yachts continued to the end with *Sawadee* crossing just 14 minutes ahead of *Lan Ying* to take 2nd place.


Sore feet (top) and cold dip (below)

A fast crossing to the finish by *Cloud* ensured Line Honours in a time of 19.17.00 but it was not enough to beat *Kam Loong* which won both the RHKYC San Fernando Trophy and the Four Peaks Race Shield for IRC and HKPN respectively.

As always, the Aedas Four Peaks Race 2008 provided testing conditions and demanded sailing skills, endurance and teamwork from all, including the army of volunteers who made the event from shore.

RESULTS

Sailing

Division A 1 Kam Loong, 2 Cloud, 3 Harlequin

Division B 1 Tamandu, 2 Sawadee, 3 Lan Ying

Hill Running

Ma On Shan Harlequin 1:42:00

Violet Hill Tamandu 1:01:00

Lantau Peak Cloud, 2:02:00, GA, 2:02:00

Mount Stenhouse The Farr Side, 1:21.56