

## Into the Blue – Milos Trip, May 2012

Listen, I really was there for the paddling, but let me just start with the food: roasted vegetables, succulent kebabs and sausages cooked on an open fire on an Aegean beach; wraps with chicken and salad and tsatsiki with the light fading and dark starting to run in; stuffed vine leaves, olives, tapenade, baked bananas with nuttella (a revelation!), cake, fruit ... all washed down with cartons of the slightly worryingly named “Reddish Wine”... Okay, I’ll stop there, but Dave and Sue produced some magic camping fare.

And what else? Well, the swimming, twice, three times a day when we tipped up on a beach for a break or lunch; warm turquoise seas, patches sometimes heated by underwater hot springs; jumping from cliffs and arches (entirely voluntary!); sleeping with the whoosh of the sea and the dark starlit skies when I got up in the night. Listen, really, I had gone there for the paddling, but let me tell you about the place: strange formations of wind-carved volcanic ash; painted fishermen’s huts on the shore; archetypal Greek villages but also iconic ruins of sulphur mines; slender basalt columns launching themselves out of the sea on Kaloyeros; the small industrial port at Voudia with big rough beasts of ships poised in the harbour, waiting to pick up their load of bentonite, the importance of mining, both past and present, as much a part of the island’s life as the pretty churches, blue and white houses and narrow, cobbled streets in Plaka and Tripiti.

We were there to attempt a 5 day circumnavigation of Milos. Sunday was a great shake-down day paddling 12km from Adamas, the small sea port, up the coast to The Bears, two large rocks, the biggest of which looked like...well, actually, a huge rabbit, although its bear-like qualities became much more obvious as we moved around it. I kind of liked the rabbit. On the way back, we stopped for some entertaining self-rescue practice and then headed back to our base in Triovalos, where Sea Kayak Milos operates from – a comfortable, friendly and helpful set-up, headed by Rod and Petrinela, his wife. On Sunday evening, Dave took us through the route planning, opting to start at Provatas in the south of the island and travelling anti-clockwise to avoid the worst effects of force 6/7 winds coming in on Tuesday. Clear skies and sun were forecast for the whole trip but wind speed and direction would eventually mean that half way through our trip, we would have to turn and retrace our route out although, surprisingly, this took nothing away from the adventure, variety and sheer fun of the experience.

Monday morning, we drove out and packed up the kayaks. It was my first multi-day journey and I was amazed by the tardis-like qualities of a sea kayak. We were using Rainbow Lasers which proved to be stable as well as responsive in the variety of sea conditions we encountered, and felt at home when loaded. So, off we went, travelling 16km, the paddling straightforward, but by the time we got to our camp at Sulphur Mine, the wind was increasing and by dark, with a big driftwood fire burning, the sea was on the move.

It was not a peaceful night. Great blasts of wind which jostled the tents (and sent one into orbit) and hurled shovelfuls of beach gravel against the fly sheet. By morning, a strong

offshore wind was blowing and Dave had planned a shortish day, ending at Pollonia 10km up the coast on the north-east corner of the island, to keep us out of the teeth of the gale.

We were relatively sheltered by cliffs for the first couple of hours, although the sea was busy, wind gusting where it had funnelled down valleys and dips in the land, knocking us sideways and grabbing the paddles from our hands. A detour under a small sea arch took us into a tiny, calm cove with the most beautifully patterned boulders I have ever seen. We ate lunch, shook out and played games with pebbles. We continued up the coast and as we rounded the point just NE of Voudia, between Milos and the small neighbouring island of Kimilos, the sea's character changed completely and we were into a wild and very bumpy environment, surf over the deck and the wind seeming to strengthen all the time. On previous training sessions with both Dave and Mike Hislop, I'd been encouraged to paddle with my eyes closed; this proved unexpectedly useful as the sting of the salt water made it impossible to keep them open all the time, and so locked into my little dark rolling world, I paddled on, the boat tracking well, and Dave and Sue supporting us calmly and confidently. It seemed a long time before the point we were heading for seemed to get any nearer, but it did, and the experience of these kinds of conditions was exhilarating and strangely calming. A memorable day.

Although all days were memorable. The beauty of the rock architecture along the coast was breath-taking as was the play of light as we paddled through vast caves and narrow underground galleries into darkness, the slap and sploosh and a deep boom somewhere down the way; the swell and pitch of the kayak, and then back out into the blue. Rock-hopping through little channels; cruising through swell or catching a free ride; the changing texture of the water. Sarakiniko with its white, moon-like landscape and fabulous green lit cave ceilings and water floors.

In total, we travelled 57km over the five days. The pace allowed us to take in the sense of the place we were in, enjoy each other's company and develop our paddling and understanding of journeying on the sea. Dave's knowledge of the island and its coastline added to the feeling that we had had the opportunity to spend time in a very special place. We still have a lot to see and I suspect we will be back.

Thanks to Dave and Sue for their support, instruction and culinary flair and also to the group - Chris, Steve, Jess and Noel - for all the laughter, philosophy and general carousing.

In Arcadia Ego!

Jan