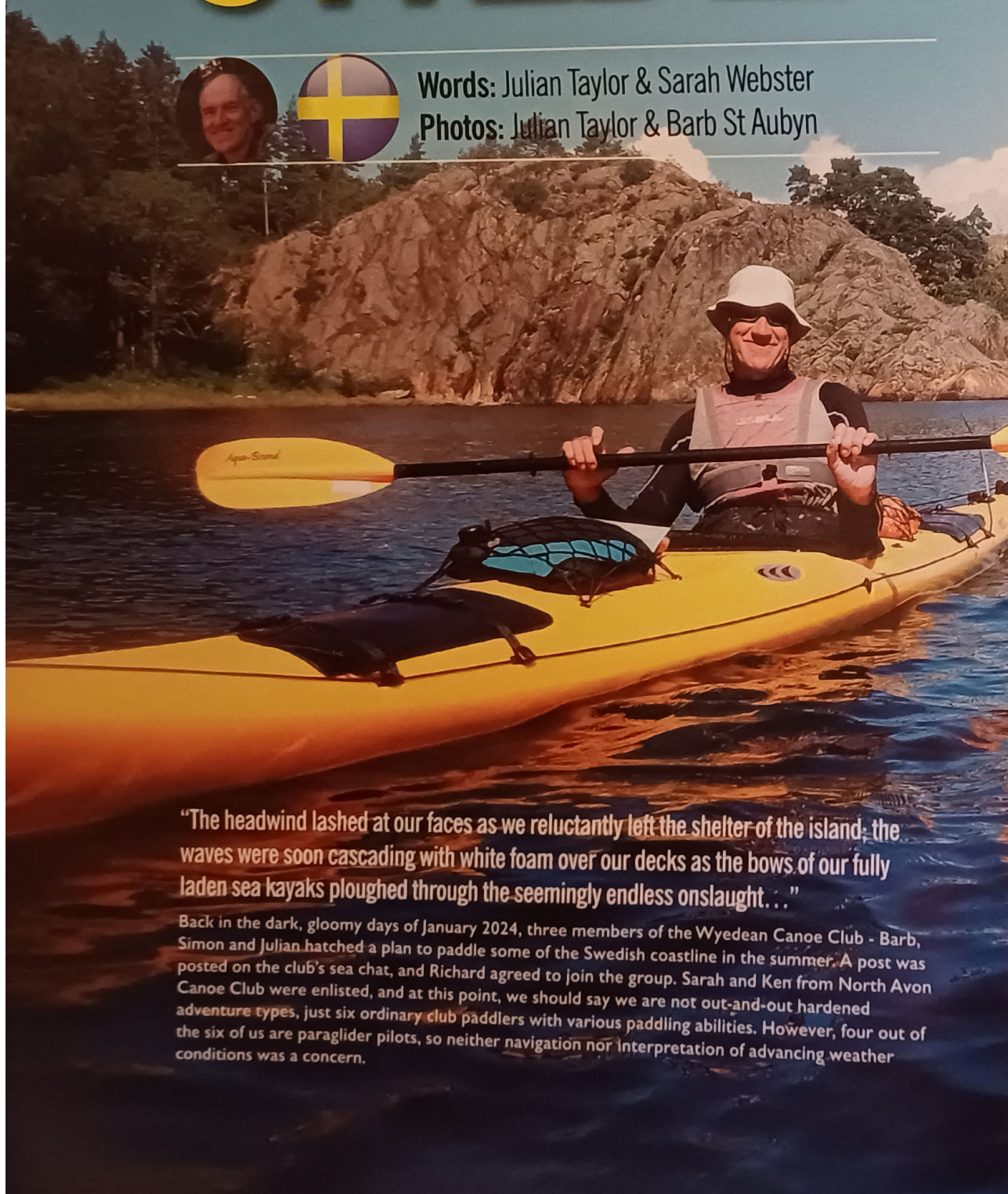


THE BOHUSLAN ARCHIPELAGO SWEDEN



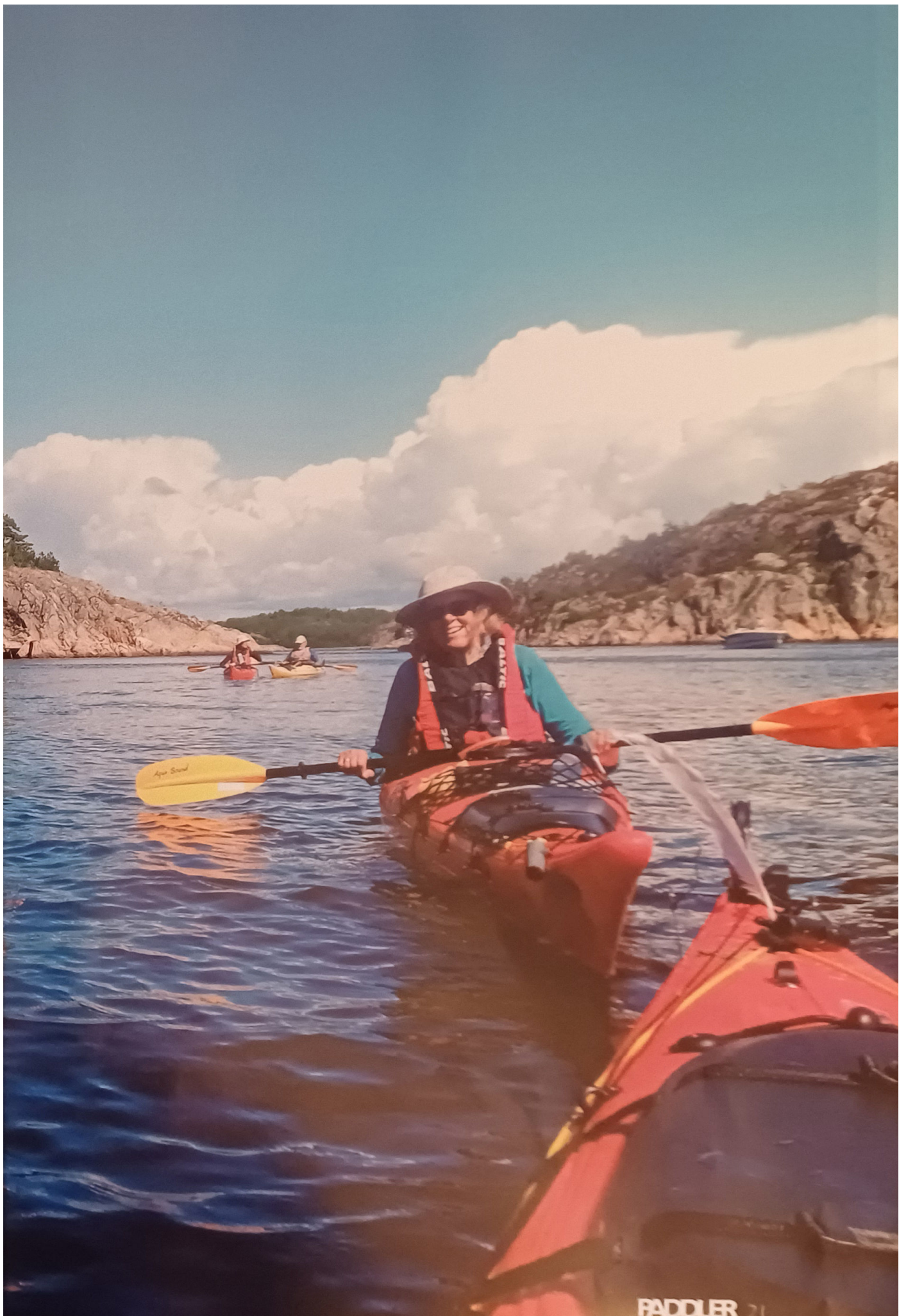
Words: Julian Taylor & Sarah Webster

Photos: Julian Taylor & Barb St Aubyn



"The headwind lashed at our faces as we reluctantly left the shelter of the island; the waves were soon cascading with white foam over our decks as the bows of our fully laden sea kayaks ploughed through the seemingly endless onslaught..."

Back in the dark, gloomy days of January 2024, three members of the Wyedean Canoe Club - Barb, Simon and Julian hatched a plan to paddle some of the Swedish coastline in the summer. A post was posted on the club's sea chat, and at this point, we should say we are not out-and-out hardened adventure types, just six ordinary club paddlers with various paddling abilities. However, four out of the six of us are paraglider pilots, so neither navigation nor interpretation of advancing weather conditions was a concern.



"The freedom to roam in Sweden means you have the right to walk, cycle, ride, ski, and camp on any land except private gardens, near a dwelling house, or land under cultivation. Known as the 'Allemansrätten', "



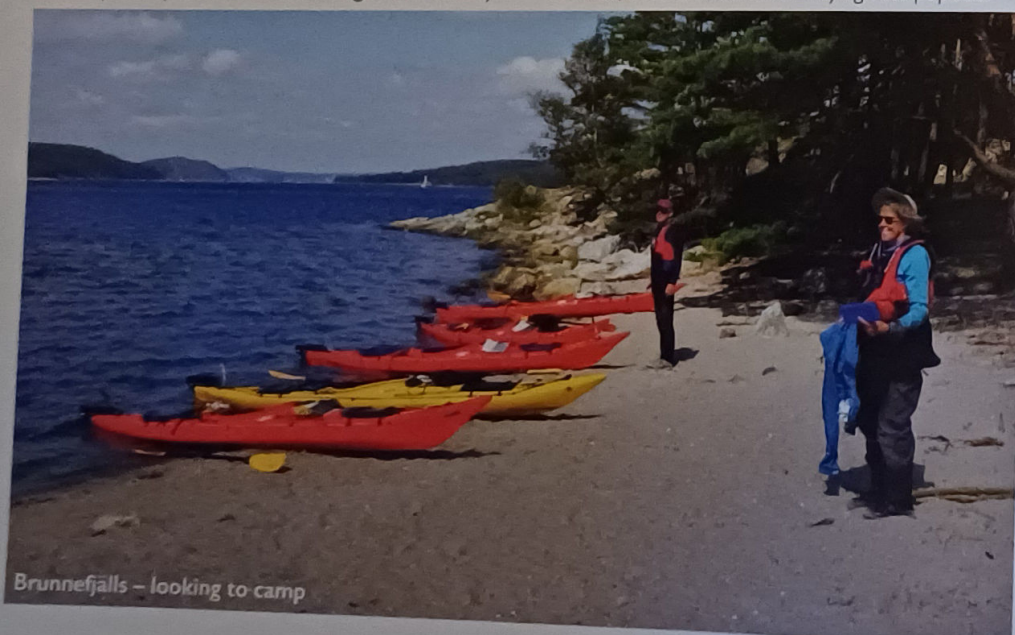
The self-guided trip was booked through Nature Travels www.naturetravels.co.uk/, an eco-tourism company based in Dorset that arranged kit hire and logistical support with the kayak centre

his parents in 1804. We hired kayaks (Prijon Seayaks and Touryaks), paddles, BAs, camping equipment and, importantly, maps from the kayak centre, all in new or excellent condition.

GUSTAFSBERG, THE SPA TOWN FIT FOR A KING

Located in Bohuslän, on the northernmost part of the country's west coast, approximately 40 miles north of Gothenburg, Gustafsberg is Sweden's oldest bathing resort. Already known for the healing properties of its mineral-rich waters, it was re-named after the young Crown Prince Gustav, who made a remarkable recovery from poor health after being taken there by

As we could have been complete novices, we were given a comprehensive briefing at the kayak centre, along with two other groups, and then we were off down the fjord for our adventure! Distinguished by its rocky coast, with over 3000 islands and 5000 skerries, Bohuslän forms the northern part of the Gothenburg archipelago, Sweden's second largest after the coast of Stockholm. The fjords in this part of Sweden are not steep-sided like the well-known ones in Norway, but very wide and very long, surrounded by endless pine-covered, dozens of islands of varying sizes populate



Brunnefjälls – looking to camp



Wild horses in the camp

rolling hills and clear, clean water. The natural vegetation of Bohuslän consists of pine and birch forests, meadows and wetlands. At the same time, the shores of the 'mainland' and the largest islands are peppered with traditional 'falú', which are red houses with white window frames and doors.

THE 'ALLEMANSRÄTTEN' – SWEDEN'S RIGHT OF PUBLIC ACCESS

The freedom to roam in Sweden means you have the right to walk, cycle, ride, ski, and camp on any land except private gardens, near a dwelling house, or land under cultivation. Known as the 'Allemansrätten', literally, 'Everyman's right,' this comes with responsibilities – to take care of nature and wildlife and to show consideration for landowners and for other people enjoying the countryside.

Joakim had suggested a route for our six days of paddling, advising us to adjust this as we went along according to the weather forecast. A first, short day of paddling from Gustafsberg brought us to a camping spot at Tviklippan – a beach with pine trees by the side of Havstensfjord. It had started to rain during the paddle, and we were glad of the shelter of our tents and a tarp that we set up between the pine trees.

The next day, the rain stopped, but the wind increased. The headwind lashed at our faces as we reluctantly left the shelter of the island; the waves were soon cascading with white foam over our decks as the bows of our fully laden sea kayakers ploughed through the seemingly endless onslaught.

We inched our way across to what we hoped would be some respite in a sheltered bay, our arms aching

"The freedom to roam in Sweden means you have the right to walk, cycle, ride, ski, and camp on any land except private gardens, near a dwelling house, or land under cultivation. Known as the Allmänna Stråten."



Camp 5 - L to R Richard, Barb, Simon, Ken Sarah and Julian

from the effort. The next leg was a short, half-mile ferry glide into the wind across a channel to get around a granite headland, but by now, the wind had become ferocious as it funnelled through the gap between the two islands. We sat for what seemed like ages, weighing up our chances of getting across, but there was no going back, or the effort of the last hour and a half would have been in vain, and it was only day two.

WILD HORSES...

After our epic paddle into the headwind, we pressed on to the island of Hjalton, finding a camping spot at the edge of the pine forest and the beach, with nearly level ground, free of rocks and tree roots, and enough fallen dry wood to make a fire with. So far, so good. We had not, however, allowed the possibility of a herd of around 12 young wild horses finding our camp at

4.0am. Julian was wide awake by the sound of multiple hooves thundering on the peaty tracks through the trees towards us, along with the associated snorting. A clonk or two of hooves on the kayaks had him out of his tent like a greyhound at the races, grabbing some clothes as he went; the prospect of this lot crashing through an occupied tent probably wouldn't end well, and we were a long way from help. Simon soon emerged from his tent, closely followed by Barb, who captured the episode on her camera!

It took Simon and Julian the best part of 20 minutes to shoo the horses away. Horses are inquisitive creatures by nature, and the herd kept returning in a state of excitement to see what was going on in "their" patch. After the horse incident, we opted for small uninhabited islands that we had to ourselves and always made sure that we 'left no trace'.



A CHOICE OF ROUTES

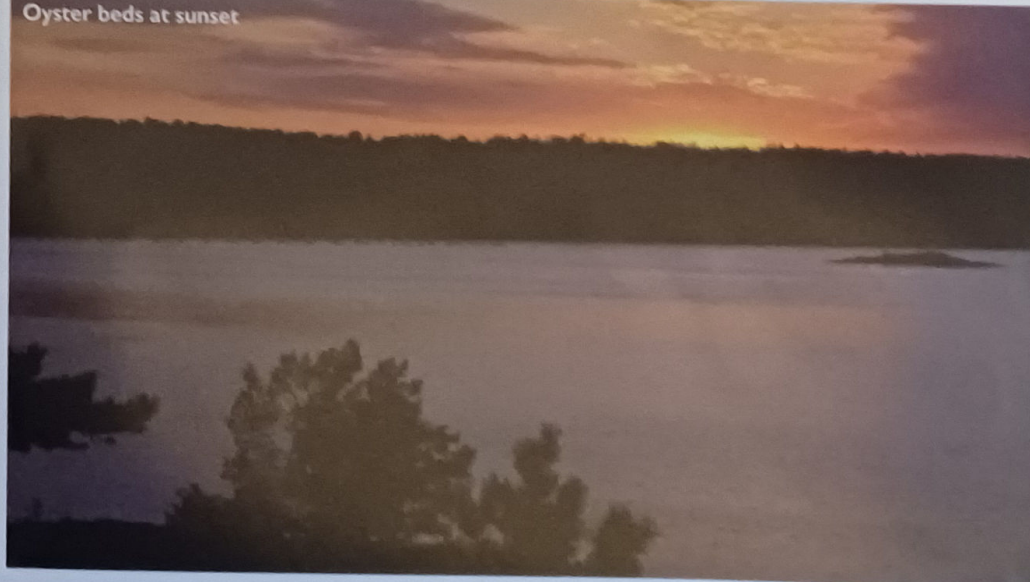
Halfway through our journey, we were to pass a small town where we could get supplies. The approach to Ellös was sheltered from the stiff westerly breeze off the North Sea only by a series of low islands made up of sand dunes, so the approach was significantly choppy, with no real wave pattern and confused water as the waves bounced off the inner island and harbour wall. So we were all glad to get into the harbour for a delicious pizza we hadn't had to cook ourselves.

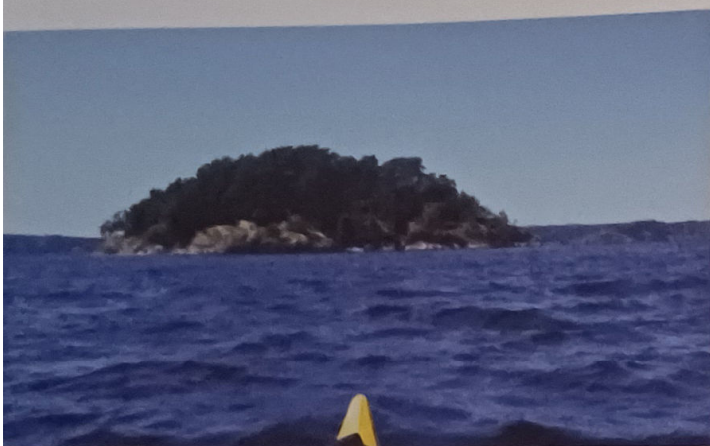
At the kayak centre on the first day, five young German men were planning to make nearly the same trip as us, but apart from the first day, we hadn't seen them, so while sitting on the harbour wall eating our pizza, we watched as, to our amazement, their two tandems and

one single kayak made slow progress through the same choppy seas that we had. We were impressed by their determination but were disinclined to follow, and having watched these young men overtake us and disappear towards the North Sea, we had a long discussion over the forecast and the wisdom of continuing south along the exposed west coast of the island of Tjörn towards our intended destination of Rönning.

It seemed sensible to turn round and stay in the fjord between the islands, as that was windy enough in places and after all, we were there to enjoy, not kill ourselves. When we returned to the kayak centre at the end, we were relieved to hear that our German friends had come to the same conclusion, having turned back and returned safely the day before we finished our trip.

Oyster beds at sunset





Fortunately, we were sheltered from the windy conditions near the coast by the islands, and most days, the weather was kind to us, enabling us to have some very enjoyable paddling with the occasional swim. We camped on the beautiful islands of Lille Kedholmen, which offered views of a lighthouse and Brunnefjälls Holme, where we climbed up to a high point and watched a gorgeous sunset together. Finally, we paddled around the back of several islands under small bridges and walkways, arriving at the wide bay of Ulvesund, which stretches around the picturesque spa town of Ljungske www.vastsverige.com/en/uddevalla-eng/produkter/ljungske-lyckorna/. We contacted the kayak centre to meet us with their minibus and trailer there.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRIP

During the trip, we saw a pod of porpoises, a couple of seals, a few egrets and herons, very few fish but

thousands of jellyfish; most of these, Joakim had assured us, were harmless. These translucent creatures varied in size up to about four inches across and were everywhere where the water was relatively calm. Yachting and power boats were common near the larger settlements, especially at the weekend, with some seemingly oblivious to the wake caused by their speeding craft or maybe the sight of kayaks bobbing up and down amused the drivers.

Camping on a small island with a few friends, almost being kept awake by the complete silence, is a unique experience for most of us these days. Evenings around the fire, swapping tales like friends do on a still summer evening and watching the sunsets together, are a really nice way to spend a holiday.

Most of us started and finished the holiday with a day in Gothenburg, Sweden's second-largest city. Built on the side of the River Gota, it was a big ship-building city in its heyday. It is the usual old town with plenty of parks and gardens, cobbled streets, and craft and food shops, all surrounded by a deep, wide canal constructed as a defensive moat. We visited a church or two, an art gallery, a maritime museum and a viewpoint that was initially part of the fortifications. We even took a tourist boat cruise around the moat and river, forsaking the chance to paddle it.

It was a cracking trip, full of laughs, surprises, and 'happenings' – too many to mention here – and it has changed our view of Sweden – a country full of great paddling opportunities. It was great to hire the boats and kit from a good outfitter who was flexible about the pick-up point, as it was, as always, essential to adjust our route according to the prevailing conditions.

