

# **Kayaking Livingstone's Lake of Stars**

**An Environmental Education Expedition across Lake Malawi funded by  
the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust 2009**

**By Mike Lamb**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for making this dream a reality through funding, advice and support. I am truly proud to have become a Fellow of this renowned organisation. I would also like to thank;

Tim Manley (my understanding Headmaster for his support), Dan Higgins (for kayaking lessons and patience), Fred Simkins (for help, advice, support and kit), Dai Thomas and the other instructors at the Martlet Kayak Club (for all their patience and training provided free to all members), Nick Pipe (for kit advice and sponsorship), Neville Bevis (for advice and logistical support in Senga Bay), Sylvia Avgherinhos (for looking after me), Brett and Lara Pollard (for making us feel at home and being so generous and hospitable), KESU (for carrying my kayaks to Malawi!), Lisa Baum (for joining and making the expedition possible as well as being a patient, positive and generally excellent companion), the people of Malawi (for restoring my faith in human nature and allowing us to stay in your beautiful country with such hospitality) and to everyone else who has offered advice, support, encouragement or even concern about this latest venture.

Lastly thank you to my partner Beth, who has been supportive throughout, joining me from the English Channel to Nkata Bay, without whose advice, enthusiasm, support and encouragement none of this would have been possible. She remains throughout our many adventures an inspiration.

## 1.2 Aims

1. To retrace the route undertaken by David Livingstone in his 1861 Lake Nyasa expedition
2. To carry out formal and informal workshops with teachers based at lakeshore schools.

## 1.3 Supporting Objectives

1. To record the route by GPS and disseminate to encourage others to kayak on the lake
2. To record a video diary with the aim of this being used on Teachers TV promoting adventurous ideas for teachers holidays
3. To research opportunities for 'Teacher Exchanges' in Malawi
4. To research opportunities for school trips to Malawi

## 1.4 Background

The seed of the idea was planted two years ago when I helped manage a project building a school in the rural Blantyre district of Malawi. The day that we handed over the school to the children was one of the most amazing days of my life. To see so many children so happy was a moment I knew I would never forget and it was then I vowed to return.

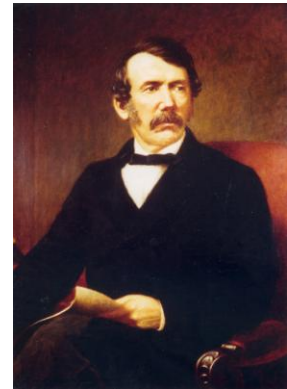
However on my return this time I wanted to explore the country more and make use of my newly acquired teaching qualification. With a passion for adventure and an interest in early African exploration the planning for this latest expedition began.

The plan, to kayak some 300 kilometres along Lake Malawi retracing the route taken by David Livingstone during his initial exploratory expeditions, was born in early 2008. To make use of my teachings skills and experience the expedition also planned to visit four sites where I will undertake environmental education workshops along the way.

In February 2009 the expedition gained the kind support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and the true preparation began.

### History

In 1858 David Livingstone convinced the British government to finance an expedition to source a navigable river in Southern Africa whereby European influences might be brought into the interior. In 1859 he travelled up the Shire River and subsequently reached what he was to name 'Lake Nyasa'. He called it Nyasa because on asking the locals what it was called they replied saying Nyasa or similar. When translated from the local dialect what they said simply means lake, so he succeeded in naming it 'Lake Lake', a name that has stuck until today (this name is still used in Tanzania)!



On September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1861 Livingstone set off north travelling up Lake Malawi on a journey that his colleague John Kirk called 'the hardest, most trying and most disagreeable of all our journeys'. They stopped at the slaving centre Nkhotakota which he called 'an abode of bloodshed and lawlessness'. Further north along the lakeshore the expedition discovered the lakeshore 'strewed with human skeletons and putrid bodies', victims of the marauding Ngoni tribe. On reaching Nkata Bay Livingstone was depressed, exhausted and feared for his life. He turned back underestimating the length of the lake by some 100km.

Although quite a depressing outlook was gained from this expedition it highlighted the bloody slave trade in the area. Livingstone himself met with a major slave trader of the time and sought to make an agreement in Nkhotakota to stop the slave trade. Livingstone's contribution to stopping the slave trade in Africa is considered by some to be considerable. As such this expedition could be considered historically important for this reason alone.

## Malawi and the lake

Malawi, known as the 'Warm heart of Africa' is a small but unique landlocked country in southern central Africa. Malawi is renowned for its friendly inhabitants and relaxed atmosphere as well as being a safe and stable country for visitors. It is dominated by Lake Malawi which covers 15% of its land and is undisputedly the most beautiful of Africa's great lakes. The lake itself is the third largest in Africa and the 11th largest in the world. The lake supports millions of Malawians providing water and fish and as a result many parts of the shore are dense inhabited.



This expedition started in Chipoka and finished in Nkhata Bay as highlighted in the above map. GPS co-ordinates are available on request.

(For more information on Malawi and its history please see The Bradt Travel Guide to Malawi, where much of the above information was sourced.

## **2. The Expedition**

### **2.1 Pre-Expedition – ‘Preparation and Planning’**

Preparation began with a visit to the Royal Geographical Society Map Room and the opportunity to study one of Livingstone's original maps. This provided a unique opportunity to study a 150 year old map and truly brought the adventure to life. My kayak training started in the school swimming pool where I was helped by teachers and pupils alike. By the end of February I had also gained the support of the PACE Project (through Siren and Tusk Trust) who provided me with educational resources that I was able to use as a basis for the workshops that I was to run.

April 2009 and the expedition planning was progressing well. Logistics on the Malawian side were becoming a bit trickier as Kayak Africa, one of the only local kayak safari operators, was unable to hire me a kayak or guide due to the length of my trip, however they were very helpful with local advice. They did however (as did some other operators) express concern about kayaking at this time of year. July is known to be the windiest month on the lake, so much so that the International Sailing Marathon happens annually in this month.

In the UK progress had been good. The WCMT continued their broad based support by providing a set of business cards and introductory letters. I checked out some local kayak clubs and found the very helpful Martlet Kayak Club, who were to provide training up to BCU 2\* level over the coming months. I also managed a mini photo-shoot for an article in the Argus newspaper which involved a foray into the English Channel on what was fortunately a sunny April morning.

Training had to take a back seat for the last week of April whilst I travelled to France to take part in the 33rd Paris Marathon. A combination of training and good luck saw me finish under my target time of four hours (just), leaving me free to concentrate on the expedition.

May arrived and with it the ‘two months to go’ mark. I started to make forays into Ardingly Reservoir under the watchful eye of Dan Higgins (a fellow teacher at Hurstpierpoint College) who seemed intent on making sure that I got cold and wet every week, but I guess that was always part of the deal. During the summer term my school charity day was focused towards supporting the Open Arms Orphanage in Malawi which I was fortunate enough to visit before arriving at the lake.

Media wise I managed a mention in the Times Educational Supplement and was featured on the One World Community Radio Show on Reverb Radio, a local radio station.

By late June the large majority of the arrangements had now been made for the expedition. The expedition had been joined by Environmental Education specialist Lisa Baum who has worked in Tanzania for several years. A qualified teacher she brought education and Africa experience as well as much water based knowledge as a very experienced scuba diver. Also key to the

expedition was the sourcing of kayaks. After much research I decided to go for inflatable kayaks and carry them with us from the UK (A huge thanks to Keynsham Scouts for carrying them on their flight!). This provided an opportunity to train in them in the UK and ensure that they had adequate space for all of our equipment. The flexibility offered by inflatables that pack down to a minimal size and weight outweighed the performance of a hard shell kayak. The decision was aided by the very helpful Nick Pipe at Vortex in Wales who was helpful and informative along the way. He even offered to sponsor the expedition by providing some extra kit free and at trade prices. I would suggest other paddlers who are considering high quality inflatable kayaks to contact him. Some other kit (some of it personal) and advice was kindly provided by Fred Simkins at Hurstpierpoint College where I work.

Training progressed well with the kayaks coping adequately in the sea and the surf. I even doubled up with my 'good deed for the day' in my last week in the UK by towing a sizeable naked man to the beach after he had swum out too far from the nudist beach. Luckily he hung on to the back of the kayak and so I didn't have to hide my eyes! I even competed in the 'Paddle Round the Pier' event, helping by towing an inflatable Orca at one point!

Press coverage progressed well and in fact Teachers TV News joined me to film some pre-expedition packing and preparation days before the off.

## 2.2 The Expedition – ‘Paddling the Lake’

I have split the in-country part of the expedition into four sections, preparation for paddling, the first half of the paddling, the second half of the paddling and then all of the final arrangements/pack up and return to the UK.

### Part 1 –25<sup>th</sup> –28<sup>th</sup> July - Days 1-4 – In country preparation and travel to the lake

The first few days involved various aspects which can be broken down into last minute preparations, educational workshops/visits and travel. I flew into Blantyre on 25th July arriving from Swaziland, Lisa Baum, a teacher from London and my companion for this first section, arrived on the 27th July.

Last minute preparations involved sourcing maps, planning a more detailed itinerary and logistics, buying provisions and arranging travel. Maps were sourced from the Map Sales Office on Victoria Avenue, Blantyre. 1:50,000 maps were available for most of the coast with a few gaps which were covered by a couple of 1:250,000 maps. The staff in the office were really interested in the trip and very helpful and I left with some ten maps feeling like a

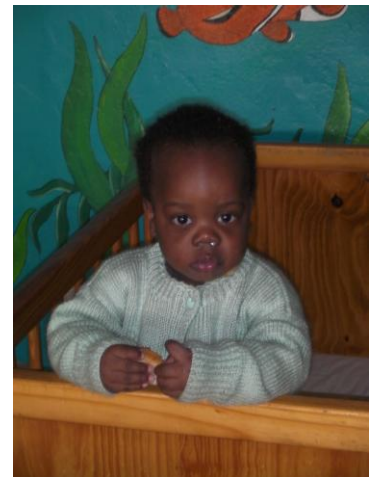


true explorer. With maps in hand it was possible to have a closer look at the itinerary, although with many variables out of our control only a general plan was made. We decided that due to reports of windy weather we would start at Chipoka instead of Cape Maclear to avoid the 20km crossing. If we hit bad weather here we might have to delay the start of the expedition by several days. Provisions were bought at People's Supermarket. We were planning on sourcing some local vegetables and food and so bought staples such as rice and pasta and other food such as garlic, spices, crackers, tea, milk powder, soya mince, soups, sugar, salt, pepper, washing powder/cloths, oil, snacks, porridge, jam, honey and sauces. We had also brought some instant camp meals from the UK in case we got stuck somewhere. We bought sufficient provisions for about ten days although we planned to resupply before then. We also purchased a new gas stove and gas as I had been unable to carry the gas for my stove on the plane. We subsequently identified which bus we would travel on the next day (28th) up to the lake.



Before leaving Blantyre we also undertook various visits. I visited Chitikale Primary

School where I had previously (2007) been involved in the building of two classrooms. Here I met with the Headmaster and Form 1 teacher. I undertook an informal training session introducing them to the PACE resources and providing them with two books and several ideas of how to adapt them to teaching locally. I also visited Chilingane, a community that I plan to run a project with the help of my school (Hurstpierpoint College) in 2010. Lisa and I also visited the Open Arms Orphanage in Blantyre which Hurstpierpoint had supported through sponsorship in 2009.



On the 28th we left Blantyre (and Doogles where we had stayed) and boarded a very busy bus to Karonga travelling up the lakeshore. As is typical with African bus travel it took much longer than planned, the bus accommodated some 30 people standing and it seemed the bus driver was happy to travel considerably faster than was necessary. Lisa and I arrived at a remote road junction in the dark at 8pm. We somehow managed to get off despite people sleeping in the aisle, babies and chickens everywhere and a complete lack of light with some 100kg of kit that had been secreted around the bus. On descending to the road we discovered a man and his bicycle 'taxi'. No sooner had we tied some 70kg to his bike than we were all struggling along the 3km to the lake from the junction, along an unlit road. Despite a complete lack of any common language we made it to a hotel by the lake by 9pm and after some fried chicken celebrated reaching the lake with a 'Green' (the local beer) by the lake. The following day the real adventure would begin!

## Part 2 - 29<sup>th</sup> July - 8<sup>th</sup> August - Days 5-16 - Chipoka to Nkhotakota

The day we had been waiting for had arrived and we awoke to the sound of the waves. On closer inspection the waves were moderate but we could definitely launch. A miserable breakfast started the day (pink sausages, cream soda and half cooked greasy chips should not feature in any breakfast) and after recording our position with the GPS, asking local advice with our maps and inflating and packing the boats we were ready. Setting everything up ready to go took us nearly three hours in the baking sun and we knew we would have to reduce this substantially over the coming weeks. We set off by 1pm heading north-west from Chipoka along the coast, covering around 8km. We landed at a relatively isolated beach near the village of Chisanje, although within minutes we were surrounded, something that we would become accustomed to in days to come. Using our very basic Chichewa we established that the 'mvuu' (hippos) were not too close, there was not too many 'moma' (crocodiles) and soon the acting 'mfuma' (chief) Patrick had arrived and made us feel very welcome. (Apologies to any Chichewa speakers about my spelling, which is not even as bad as my pronunciation). After discussions with Patrick and another elder who also spoke quite good English we cooked a three course meal and headed to 'bed'.



The next day saw us leaving by 10am with a small swell and considerable wind. It was a 'mwera' wind (from the south-east) and so was working with us although caused some weather-cocking of the kayaks. Rather than heading to our proposed destination we headed further east to the Maleri islands. We spotted habitation on the first island and headed straight for it, having covered some 12km. Much to our surprise was a beautiful campsite next to a lovely island lodge. An amazing

surprise and after putting up tents we headed for a sunset paddle (with no kit in the kayaks!) and a snorkel round the island.

The 31<sup>st</sup> July saw us heading across back to the main lakeshore towards Kambiri Point, despite some white horses and a slight SE wind. Having covered some 13km we arrived at the Wheelhouse, erected tents and headed to the local market to stock up. More than an hours walk away, we were delirious on our return having not eaten for some eight hours. We wouldn't make that mistake again. With the prospect of preparing a fire for dinner we opted out and headed to





the restaurant, for vegetable curry. Lisa was so impressed she asked to pass on her compliments to the chef, who personally appeared for the occasion! The local dogs and pigs managed to keep us awake for most of the night and one even peed on Lisa's tent for good measure.

The first day of August started with porridge as normal. We bumped into Neville the Director of the Open Arms Orphanage in Blantyre after recognising his vehicle. He kindly offered to meet us across the bay, whilst sourcing a local charcoal stove (and charcoal) as our gas has run out much quicker than we envisaged. Across towards Senga Bay we spotted an otter rounding the point. Luckily we saw Neville again who kindly provided our stove and then drove us into Salima to get cash and also resupply at the supermarket, a true gentleman. We joined him for dinner at the Red Zebra and stayed at Carolinas in Senga Bay.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw us stepping up our mileage covering nearly 20km. The lake was flat in the morning but we soon met an 'Mpoto' (northerly wind). We were soon out of our comfort zones in choppy water and in an area where reeds lined the banks and hence would have been dangerous to land due to potential hippos and crocodiles. By 4pm we were close to the town we had identified as a stopping point but to get there required going up a small river through the reeds. We decided that due to the time and overcast skies that we would rather avoid this and camped on a nearby island. Some local fishermen assured us it was hippo free despite what looked like 'hippo runs' through the reeds. Concerned by hippos we prepared food quickly, using a fire and charcoal and were in our tents by nightfall. However we soon reappeared when we discovered it was a full moon and incredibly bright and we hadn't heard any hippos since we had arrived. Just before heading to bed again I tried to kick a large spider away from



my tent. To my disgust it exploded into hundreds of baby spiders which spread towards my tent. Needless to say I slept badly between dreams of voracious baby spiders and the ever closer hippo grunts throughout the night. We awoke to singing fishermen, crashing waves and as always a beautiful sunrise, feeling smug to have survived 'Hippo Island'.

Another long day covering some 18km, with a couple of

large crossings. We pushed on past various fishing villages and found a quiet beach some 3km from the nearest village. Mohamed who was passing with his children assured us the beach was 'hippo free' and we set up camp sharing the site with an elderly gentleman who slept in a grass shack there (it didn't even really constitute a shack). Mohamed headed to the local market fetching us fresh veggies, eggs, some mandazis for breakfast (sweet dough balls) and a plate (due to a misunderstanding over bread!). Together with the elderly resident man we gorged ourselves on a protein-hit of soya 'chicken fillets', which due to our immense hunger tasted somehow palatable.



The 4<sup>th</sup> August was none other than Lisa's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. We awoke to eat mandazis and scrambled eggs as the sun rose. We left our elderly 'security guard' some provisions and headed off for the day. Another long day saw us arriving at a tiny fishing village called Mwera that was home to only seven families. We arrived to the now familiar excitement and throng of 'Mzungu' shouts, associated dancing and singing. My arrival was even more spectacular as I managed to fall flat on my face as I left my kayak after being caught by a wave from behind. To our surprise we were introduced to Fred, who was the local teacher and spoke excellent English. After our usual negotiations we were granted the opportunity to stay by the resident elder.

*"Although our skin is a different colour, our blood is the same"* said the elder welcoming us.



He even went down on his knees to welcome us. I also went down on my knees (a mark of respect) and was swiftly told that I didn't have to as I was a 'Mzungu'. I tried to explain that I was happy to do this and that the elder was far more important than me, but I feel it was lost in translation. Fred assured us that we were the first ever white people to visit the village and based on the response I can believe it. There were no roads connecting the village to the rest of Malawi, only a few tracks and the lake.

Surrounded by children for the whole evening we put up tents, played football, visited the local cafe (which sold bread and tea) and were shown the ablutions (some reeds). For dinner we bought a fresh cat-fish (Kampango) and under Fred's direction deep fried it. After dinner we discussed the local education system, Fred's class of 76 children and the difficulties in the area. Interestingly for the first time we heard about some of the problems between religions (Islam and Christianity) and local tribes. We later introduced Fred to the PACE materials and left him a booklet. Quite a unique 30<sup>th</sup> birthday for Lisa and one that she will not forget!

After tea and jam on the 5<sup>th</sup> we left surrounded by the entire village as well as children from the next few villages dancing, singing and observing us as closely as ever. We planned to cut



across a huge bay having been advised by Fred to miss out several villages where the locals were 'uneducated' and dangerous. However a change of wind to a northerly 'mpepo' (wind) meant we had to land prematurely. Our deserted beach soon turned to a crowded mass when news spread. After a half hour break, much discussion and some bananas we headed out to a much reduced wind. We tried landing up the beach but were enveloped by near on 200 people. With more people running from as far as we could see each

way we decided that we couldn't stay. We said our apologies and headed up the coast. With darkness approaching we had to stop at another beach with several people present. With no option we headed in and were surrounded immediately. We were quickly told that we could stay and would be safe, meeting some English elders after assembling to our tents to the usual excited response. The locals had clearly never seen pasta, never mind inflatable kayaks and everything we did was observed very closely. The kids were taken away at nightfall by parents and siblings who had clearly been sent to round them up. Despite much singing from some local houses (Lisa thought that they were singing about eating us!) we slept very well.

After paying our respects and a small gift to the chiefs we left and were on the lake with the rising sun. We ate cold chocolate cake for breakfast (an instant camp meal) but our early start was soon ruined by a fierce wind forcing us into the beach. We relaxed with some local kids, meeting a very well educated blind man called Said Matola and chatted until the wind died down. We headed off ready for a 26km leg passed the Chia Lagoon and the associated crocodile and hippo populations resident there. With sustenance provided by cold chicken curry at 11am followed by Dairy Milk and nuts later on we moved along speedily. With fatigue and hunger setting in as the sky darkened we tucked into our salt and sugar stores to keep us going for the last couple of kilometres. After a 10 hour epic we arrived at the Nkhotakota Pottery excited at the prospect of fizzy drinks, toilets and even a bed! An amazing three course meal and a cold beer later, we were in bed by 8pm, satisfied and exhausted.



The 7<sup>th</sup> August saw us awaken to a fantastic breakfast which really made me realise that it really doesn't matter how good food is, what matters is how hungry you are! We spent the rest of the day doing nothing. Having paddled for nine days solidly we had pushed ourselves a bit too hard. I had woken up with a cold sore, sore throat and cough. Lisa had an even worse cough and cold and had developed a very painful case of tenosynovitis in her wrist, although had somehow managed to struggle through the last couple of days. It was only now that we had stopped that we realised the damage we had done to our health due to not stopping over the last ten days. As a result we spent most of the day (and in fact the next day) horizontal!

### Part 3 - 9<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> August – Days 17-27 –Nkotakota to Nkata Bay

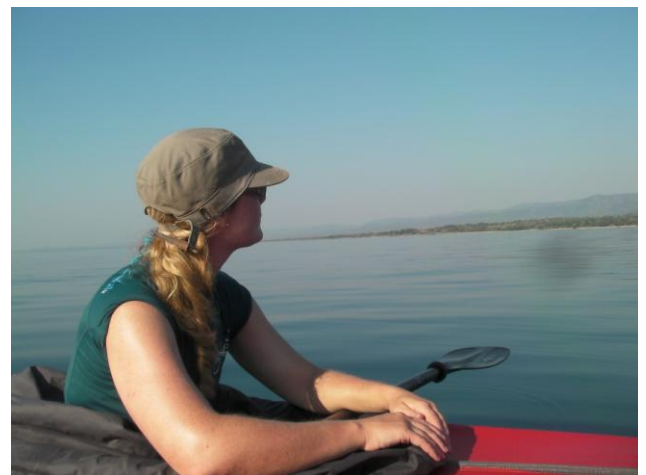
The 9th August was in effect the 'changeover day'. Lisa was leaving the expedition to be replaced by Beth. We started this poignant day by visiting the tree under which David Livingstone had met local slave trader Jumbe and tried to convince him to stop the abhorrent trading of slaves on 10th September 1863. As a treat we also took the day to visit the local nature reserve and see some crocodiles from a suitable distance. We then returned to the Pottery to repack and prepare for part 3.

Hit by increasingly bad weather we were forced into taking a bus a short distance up the coast to what was considered a better launch site. The bus as ever was an adventure in itself, spent holding onto our kit at the front and occasionally passing chickens and children over our heads



as they got off. I felt slightly safer seeing the road ahead until I also spotted the driver texting his mate whilst driving the overcrowded bus much to my anger. Somehow we again arrived unscathed. Once again some enthusiastic locals helped us carry our plethora of baggage to the lakeshore at nearby Ngala Lodge, where we spent a lovely evening with the very attentive owners.

Despite the 11th August being Beth's first day of paddling we had big ambitions. A 28 km slog saw us camping near a well populated piece of coastline by the village of Magonera. Beth was introduced to beach camping with a very enthusiastic group of village children. In an attempt to get them to leave before dark we slipped into the tent with Beth trying to impress them with 'See you tomorrow' in Chichewa. As we hid in the tent there was an uproar outside. The overexcited children danced and sung around the tent for the next hour repeating Beth's words again and again. The local chief kindly appeared and ushered the children away allowing for some limited privacy.



Day 19 of the expedition was to be our longest paddle, over 30km and nearly 10 hours solid on the lake, no mean feat given our amount of kit, the weather conditions and our boats. We pushed on to try and reach a real campsite at Kande Beach. Due to an epic struggle through changing winds we arrived at a remarkably slow pace, the last 2km taking what seemed like days. Cold cokes, a shady campsite and a nice evening by the beach awaited. We slept well after the previous days efforts.



The next day we rested, due to being several days ahead of schedule. Beth even indulged herself in horse riding and swimming with her horse in the lake.

The next day we headed to Makuzi Beach a beautiful beach around the main headland. We paddled close to the shore and were met by much enthusiastic cheering and shouting from the local children. Rounding the point proved tricky due to the waves reflecting off the rocks but we managed to stay afloat and round the point. We were warmly welcomed by Brett whom Beth had met on a previous trip and we set up camp near the beach, unfortunately surrounded by ants. The hospitality and food at Makuzi was the best we experienced in all of Malawi.

Unfortunately over the next few days a small storm hit and we were unable to leave. Despite the beautiful surroundings, I was unable to enjoy myself due to the frustration at being unable to launch. Nkata Bay was so close and yet we now only had a few days left. We waited and hoped.

After three days we could wait no longer, the beach at Makuzi was on the headland and the waves seemed to be magnified as they came off the headland. We climbed a local hill to assess alternative launch sites. Brett kindly loaded our kit into his bakkie (open backed truck) and drove us a couple of km down the coast to an alternative launch site at Chinteche Inn campsite. With our frustration mounting we tried to launch without any kit to test the waves and the swell. Luckily we both managed to get out past the waves which had now reached a couple of metres high. However on attempting to land Beth was caught on a wave and unceremoniously dumped. With so many large rocks around we couldn't risk launching with all our kit. Despite the numerous dry bags we were still carrying cameras, GPS, phones etc and we did not have helmets. The coast further up was less inhabited and there were no roads there. With the weather like it was and only two days left we were in danger of getting stuck on the isolated lakeshore unable to leave. We were also aware that with the weather being so temperamental we could put ourselves in a dangerous position where we could not land due to the rocks and if caught out there would be no way to access help. All we could do was hang on until our last day and hope the wind reduced so we could complete the last 30km.



We awoke on our last day to find that the wind had indeed gone down slightly. However in the night disaster had struck. Rather than cook we decided to eat at the camp restaurant, renowned as a tourist class eatery. However one beef curry later and I was struck down by a nasty case of food poisoning and spent the entire evening in the toilets, suffering from D and V. The next morning I was too weak to do anything and could not keep any liquid down. To continue would have been foolhardy. Frustratingly having travelled some 300km, with one day to go we couldn't complete the kayaking. Like Livingstone we had ended our journey just short of our planned destination due to factors beyond our control.

We could have waited and proceeded in a couple of days however we still planned to carry out some environmental education workshops and visit education projects and to let people down would not have been fair. It was a difficult decision to make but I then had to decide to take a vehicle up to Nkata Bay to reach our final destination. Reaching Nkata Bay felt like some kind of closure for this part of the trip, but due to feeling so unwell and having had to arrive by road it was hard to enjoy the moment.

#### **Part 4 - 19<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> August – Days 27-35 – Final arrangements, pack up and the return journey.**

The journey back down the country was long. After Nkata Bay we headed to Mzuzu in the very green and forested north of Malawi, in sharp contrast to the south. We then travelled down to Lilongwe and onto Blantyre, all the time negotiating making sure the kayaks were strapped onto buses or stored safely, numerous Malawians helping with carrying along the way. Arrival in Blantyre allowed us a couple of days to visit schools and educational projects in the area. We identified potential sites for school and teacher visits, speaking to numerous contacts. Informal workshops were led with local teachers and environmental education materials disseminated. Although away from the lake this in itself was a very rewarding part of the experience.

The return of the kayaks to the UK became a major issue. With South Africa Airways being hugely unhelpful it soon became apparent that I would have to arrange for them to go home separately to myself. A kind friend offered to transport one when flying later in the year and another was left with an air-freighting company. I can only hope that they make it back, with all of the associated parts intact, although I am not 100% hopeful. With everything organised as best as possible we boarded the plane for the journey home.

## **2.3 Post-Expedition – ‘The Aftermath and What next?’**

As often happens arriving back in the UK was more of a culture shock than going away so I buried myself in my laptop and started writing my reports. Thank you letters were sent and all associates contacted to express my gratitude at the help I had received along the way. Dissemination of my findings and experiences began. Firstly the WCMT were provided with a press release. Each of the newspapers that had featured me were again contacted (The Argus, The Mid-Sussex Times, The Times Educational Supplement, Teacher Magazine). I wrote a kayak review and provided images from the trip to be posted on the Vortex website. I updated my blog and Facebook to ensure all contacts knew about the adventure. I also sent a copy of my video diary to Teachers TV who have kindly offered to record another short piece about my experiences. I hope to meet with my headmaster next week to discuss our school trip for summer 2010.

The experience has also provided me with the inspiration to offer other teachers experiences in countries such as Malawi. The company which I helped set up is now to offer teachers the opportunity to take part in a ‘Teacher Exchange’ which involves travelling to Africa and working with local teachers to develop resources and enhance teaching in rural African schools. We hope to run our first programme in summer 2010. More information will be developed about this at [www.inspire-worldwide.com](http://www.inspire-worldwide.com)

### **3. Recommendations**

Having very limited experience of kayaking and water sports before this trip I have learnt a lot and I have also learnt a lot about myself by forcing myself out of my comfort zone several times during the expedition. Allowing yourself to do this (as safely as possible) is a recommendation in itself. Something else key that has been reinforced to me is that although people and cultures can be so very different, no matter where I have been in rural Africa people have been welcoming, generous, kind, thoughtful and forgiving. Despite turning up in isolated fishing villages with our bags full of technical equipment not once did I feel unsafe or that anything would be touched or stolen. The same cannot be said about my home in Brighton where my bike was stolen last month!

Other recommendations that I would suggest based on this experience:

For expeditions in general – Ensure you have the right kit and sufficient amounts of food/fuel etc. The correct equipment used properly will look after you if you look after it. If entering a remote area be prepared to be unable to resupply anything, be prepared for all eventualities. Carefully consider the others in your group, it is essential to work as a group and for an expedition not to become all about one persons ego. Let others know where you are and carefully consider communications and escape routes. Do not underestimate the importance of a local language phrasebook (we did!). Look after yourself and your team or the expedition could be over very prematurely. Always assess the risks carefully and never endanger yourself or others in your group without good reason.

For WCMT Fellows – Plan early and plan carefully, communicating with contacts overseas asap, local knowledge is crucial. Ensure when contacting the media that you clearly mention the WCMT and others that have helped, as not everything makes the cut. Be flexible, the more that you learn and about your environment and yourself the more able you are to make important decisions. Make the most of this unique experience at every turn. Lastly, when it seems that everything is going wrong, or you are met with a seemingly impossible task, or when the waves just won't get any smaller – Smile!



## **4. Appendix**

### **4.1 Itinerary**

### **4.2 Risk Assessment**

### **4.3 Kayak Review**

### **4.4 Media and dissemination**

## 4.1 Itinerary

Day		Date	Activity	Accommodation
1	Friday	24/07/2009	International flight. Leave Swaziland at 5.45pm	Overnight Jo'Burg
2	Saturday	25/07/2009	International flight. Arrive 12.40pm Blantyre.	C/O Sylvias
3	Sunday	26/07/2009	Day in Blantyre - logistics/visiting education projects - WESM	C/O Sylvias
4	Monday	27/07/2009	Day in Blantyre - logistics/visiting education projects - Open Arms	Doogles, Blantyre
5	Tuesday	28/07/2009	Travel to Chipoka	Lake View Hotel Chipoka
6	Wednesday	29/07/2009	Kayak - 8km	Chisanje
7	Thursday	30/07/2009	Kayak - 12km	Nankoma Island
8	Friday	31/07/2009	Kayak -14km	Wheelhouse, Kambiri Point
9	Saturday	01/08/2009	Kayak - 10km	Carolinas
10	Sunday	02/08/2009	Kayak - 20km	Sungu Point
11	Monday	03/08/2009	Kayak - 20km	Magunga
12	Tuesday	04/08/2009	Kayak - 16km	Mwera
13	Wednesday	05/08/2009	Kayak - 20km	Mingwazi
14	Thursday	06/08/2009	Kayak - 28km	Nkhotakota Pottery
15	Friday	07/08/2009	Rest Day	Nkhotakota Pottery
16	Saturday	08/08/2009	Rest Day	Nkhotakota Pottery
17	Sunday	09/08/2009	Visit to Livingstone's Tree/Mission/Nature Reserve	Nkhotakota Pottery
18	Monday	10/08/2009	Travel to Ngala	Ngala Lodge
19	Tuesday	11/08/2009	Kayak - 28km	Magonera
20	Wednesday	12/08/2009	Kayak - 30km	Kande Beach
21	Thursday	13/08/2009	Rest Day	Kande Beach
22	Friday	14/08/2009	Kayak - 10km	Makuzi Beach
23	Saturday	15/08/2009	Enforced Rest - Weather	Makuzi Beach
24	Sunday	16/08/2009	Enforced Rest - Weather	Makuzi Beach
25	Monday	17/08/2009	Travel to Chinteche/Enforced Rest - Weather	Chinteche Inn Campsite
26	Tuesday	18/08/2009	Enforced Rest - Food Poisoning - Travel to Nkata Bay/Mzuzu	Chinteche Inn Campsite
27	Wednesday	19/08/2009	Travel to Nkata Bay/Mzuzu	Mzuzu

28	Thursday	20/08/2009	Travel to Lilongwe	Mabuya Camp, Lilongwe
29	Friday	21/08/2009	Travel to Blantyre	Katz, Blantyre
30	Saturday	22/08/2009	Rest Day	Katz, Blantyre
31	Sunday	23/08/2009	School and site visits/meetings	Katz, Blantyre
32	Monday	24/08/2009	School and site visits/meetings	Katz, Blantyre
33	Tuesday	25/08/2009	Rest Day	Katz, Blantyre
34	Wednesday	26/08/2009	International Flight, depart 1.30pm Blantyre.	n/a
35	Thursday	27/08/2009	Return UK	HOME

## 4.2 Risk Assessment

Hazard	Risk	Control Measures
Kayaking	Drowning	Wear buoyancy aid Adequately trained participants Local advice as required Weather report checks Carry GPS/Maps Carry all essential safety equipment Purchase/hire from reputable dealer
Road Transport	Crash, blunt trauma, death	Choose reputable transport provider Check vehicle and driver before boarding Don't travel at night
Accommodation in towns	Theft	Store valuable in safes Use hotels that are reliable and safe Be vigilant at all times
General lake/river	Drowning/damage from animals	Only enter water where and when it is safe Ask locals about river safety
Sun	Sunburn/Dehydration	Wear appropriate protection Acclimatise slowly Drink regularly/use rehydration sachets
Local Wildlife	Bites/stings	Be aware of local animals Emergency evacuation plan
Local population (political instability)	Harassment, caught in crossfire	Monitor FCO website before travel Register with embassy Regular contact with all contacts
Working with local people	HIV/AIDS/Hepatitis	Avoid any sexual relationships Have selection of rubber gloves available
Working with local people	Arguments/disagreements	Read up on local cultures Discuss issues with chiefs and guides
Open fires/stoves	Burns	Use with care Ensure Flamazine cream carried in med kit
Food/water contamination	Sickness and hospitalisation	Ensure own drinking water clean

		<p>Ensure food cooked thoroughly where possible</p> <p>Ensure broad spectrum antibiotics carried</p>
Water	Bilharzia	<p>Try to avoid water near villages and reeds</p> <p>Towel self off asap when out of water</p> <p>Purify lake water</p> <p>Buy Praziquantal at end of exped</p>
General	General	<p>Let contacts know where I am</p> <p>Carry a mobile phone at all times</p> <p>Carry a medical kit at all times</p>

## 4.3 Kayak Review

### Kayaking Livingstone's Lake of Storms

In February 2009 the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust awarded me a fellowship to complete an expedition that I had been planning for several years. The expedition was to retrace a route taken by David Livingstone across Lake Malawi some 150 years ago. Along the way I wanted to use my skills and experience to make a difference to the country that was going to host me and so I arranged to meet and work with teachers and schools along the route. As a qualified teacher and carrying environmental education materials I hoped to make some kind of contribution.

When I was contacted by the Trust in February the serious planning started. I had only ever kayaked once or twice before and so learning the skills required for the journey became my first priority. Luckily the outdoor education department (Fred and Dan) at my school (Hurstpierpoint College) supported me with this, as did Martlet Kayak Club and their many instructors headed up by Dai Thomas. With their help and guidance I ventured from the warmth of the school swimming pool to the murky Ardingly Reservoir and eventually the unforgiving English Channel.



As well as learning to kayak, arranging the logistics for my travel and all the other planning required, it was essential that I sourced the right equipment and most importantly the right kayak for the job. I would be kayaking some 300km over approximately three weeks, carrying a substantial amount of kit in what could be considered 'sea' conditions. Despite being landlocked the lake can be incredibly dangerous and was once dubbed the 'Lake of Storms' by David Livingstone. July/August is also the windy season and swell of several metres is not at all unusual at this time of year. Not to mention that crocodiles, hippos and tropical diseases abound in the area.

During my training I was lucky enough to try several types of kayaks to start to get an idea of what would be required. However not only did I need the right vessel for the conditions but it soon became apparent that I would also have to get it there. Through my research I soon realised that a collapsible or inflatable kayak would provide the flexibility that I needed. The ability to pack the boat in a bag not only meant that the air travel would be easier but transport at both ends would be manageable and this also provided flexibility if there were problems on route.

I contacted various people and trawled forums and notice boards finding the very useful [www.foldingkayaks.org](http://www.foldingkayaks.org) which has a regular group of knowledgeable contributors. Due to the cost of many folding kayaks I started to seriously consider an inflatable. Considered by many to be unresponsive, heavy and poor in the wind I was sceptical. On top of this availability in the UK was limited. Luckily I stumbled across Advanced Elements who seemed to offer a top of the range 'hybrid-inflatable' that seemed to tick many of the boxes. Nick Pipe at Vortex, one of the few stockists in the UK, was very swift in his response and exceptionally helpful and enthusiastic about my adventure. He kindly offered to send down an Advanced Elements Advanced Frame Expedition kayak. To allay any concerns about whether it would have sufficient space for packing kit he offered to send it down with no obligation to buy as well as throwing in some extras for free. A very kind offer although I did feel a bit stupid sitting in one in my very small living room one Thursday evening in spring.



Practice paddles from Brighton beach soon showed that the kayak was very easy to assemble and launch, handled well in small waves and had enough space for the kit that I would need. The boat was very stable which was considered a huge benefit considering I would be carrying all of my kit and also as



myself and my paddling partner were relatively inexperienced. It was also exceptionally easy to enter from the water. After several runs the kayak (and a second I had subsequently purchased) was deflated, cleaned and packed for Malawi. With a decent weight allowance (which is not supplied by South African Airways) you can check-in an Advanced Frame Expedition onto a plane as packed down it fits into a large holdall and weighs around 23kg. Despite the preparations I arrived at the lake still nervous as to how the three week long trip would progress.

Now sat some 350 km from where we started I feel content, satisfied and very tired. As an inexperienced kayaker I am unable to compare the kayaks that we used with many other models. However what I do know is that two inexperienced kayakers carrying all of our kit (around 30kg each) travelled over 300km on lake/sea conditions with swell up to two metres, covering over 30km on good days. The boats provided sufficient kit space, were very stable in swell and breaking waves and generally tracked well. In strong winds I am

sure they didn't track as well as a hard shell kayak and probably required more effort to paddle, but for our purposes they were perfect.

The zips on top offered easy access to kit, even when on the water, although they did let small amounts of water drip in on long days. The inflatable floor and seat actually meant for a relatively comfortable seating position and when sitting the backbone running the length of the boat and any water in the bottom of the kayak could not be felt. The three part paddle was not the lightest but again it did the job adequately. Deck space on top allowed for a large bag meaning that we had enough kit to travel unassisted several days with no worries.



In summary, for the expedition that we carried out, the Advanced Frame Expedition did the job perfectly. I am sure that there are better boats out there, but if you don't have an endless amount of cash then these are great value for money. I sourced two new boats, paddles, backbones, seats and floors for less than I would have been able to buy one new collapsible kayak. Having completed the expedition only now can I feel smug about that. Clearly if you want to cross the Atlantic then don't buy one of these. Alternatively if you want something that packs away, is stable on the water and you are going to be using it on flattish water then these kayaks really should be considered.

With summer now cooling off the kayaks are wrapped up in bags and packed away in the cupboard, but as soon as the sun shines I will be back down Brighton Beach, pump and paddle in hand.

For more information on this expedition and others see [www.inspire-worldwide.com](http://www.inspire-worldwide.com)





## 4.4 Media and Dissemination

### Printed ;

The Times Educational Supplement

The Argus

The Teacher Magazine

The Mid Sussex Times

### Online;

<http://www.inspire-worldwide.com/home/index.php/news>

<http://www.advancedelements kayaks.co.uk/page.php/news.html>

<http://www.midsussextimes.co.uk/hurstpierpoint-news/Teacher-embarks-on-African-adventure.5277140.jp>

<http://www.radioreverb.com/index.php?id=196>

### Radio;

Radio Reverb – 25/5/09

### Television and online;

Teachers TV - <http://www.teachers.tv/news/36885>

Video diary to feature on Teachers TV (tbc)