

### ON THE WEB



## Paramedic riled up about stats

A local paramedic has written an essay about the issue of wait times for local ambulances after reading a story in *The TIMES*.

You can find it in our Web Exclusive section at [www.mrtimes.com](http://www.mrtimes.com).

In it, the paramedic, Gene Benoit, discusses the lack of staff working in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, and how those staff are also stretch with other nearby communities.

"However, this does not guarantee the ambulances are even near Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge. When I commute home from my ambulance station I often see ambulances sitting on the Port Coquitlam side of the Pitt Bridge and I can only surmise that they are covering the Tri-cities areas and Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge due to inadequate resources in all five communities," Benoit writes.

Also in Web Exclusive, columnist Matthew Claxton writes about how not enough is said about the "barbarism" of countries Canada deals with.

"The attitude that women have their own, special, pre-ordained place is far from gone. Scratch the surface of many a young Lower Mainland male and you'll find someone who believes women exist to provide sex, food, and subservience," Claxton writes.

You will also read a lacerating review of the memoir of News Hour anchor Tony Parsons, plus a kind review of a book culled from the tales of cats at Maple Ridge's Katie's Place.

### FLYERS

- Marks Work Wearhouse\*
- Bay \* ► Safeway\*

- \* Full delivery to area homes; others partial delivery only
- Bosleys Pet Food Plus
- Toys R Us ► Sportchek
- Michael Hill Jewellers

# Spirit journey captured on film

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One of Chris Cooper's favourite moments during his Spirit Dancer canoe journey on the West Coast of Scotland this summer was when an entire busload of people disembarked and helped carry the 2,000 pound canoe above the high tide mark after the paddlers encountered stormy water on the River Clyde and had to come ashore.

Cooper describes the situation as "unbelievable."

"Can you imagine trying to do something like that here? I don't think so," he said.

Cooper's British Isles odyssey in the Spirit Dancer began in 2008 and he's got at least another two years planned. The plan is to circumnavigate 6,000 kilometres or 3,200 nautical miles of coastline in the 42-foot Spirit Dancer canoe, which is a replica old Montreal canoes from Eastern Canada. So far he's done about 800 nautical miles and 1,500 kilometres.

A documentary film about the 2009 portion of the trip will air at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival next February. Cooper is also starting work on a book about his previous adventures paddling down the entire B.C. coast.

In 2008, the journey began on the River Thames and Cooper and his paddlers then travelled to the North Sea, into the Strait of Dover, into the English Channel and to the Isles of Scilly off the southwest coast of Britain.

This summer the canoe launched from Glasgow, Scotland after a send off from the Glasgow mayor, out the River Clyde to the West Coast of Scotland. The canoe travelled to Portree on the Isle of Skye and then to Wick on the east coast of northern Scotland for a boat festival and then to some Orkney islands. Cooper has taken a variety of people with him

on the journey, including members of the Vancouver Police Department, UBC university students and an Okanagan Nation youth group.

Another moment that stands out for Cooper about this year's leg of the trip was when they had to seek assistance from tough-looking bikers from Edinburgh who rode Harleys.

The group had set off in the canoe but the water was too tough so they had to come back in. Once again they couldn't lift the Spirit Dancer without assistance so Cooper enlisted the bikers who they'd seen earlier while having dinner at a hotel before setting off.

"We ended up going back to the hotel and went over the meanest, toughest looking biker and said, 'Excuse me. We're a group of Canadians in a big canoe and we're in a bit of a pickle. We need a hand to lift this canoe up. Would you biker friends consider coming and helping us.' And of course he looked at me and said, 'No problem Chris.'"

### QUOTE:

"We want to make Canada proud. I also want to give youth an opportunity to do something very unique."

Chris Cooper

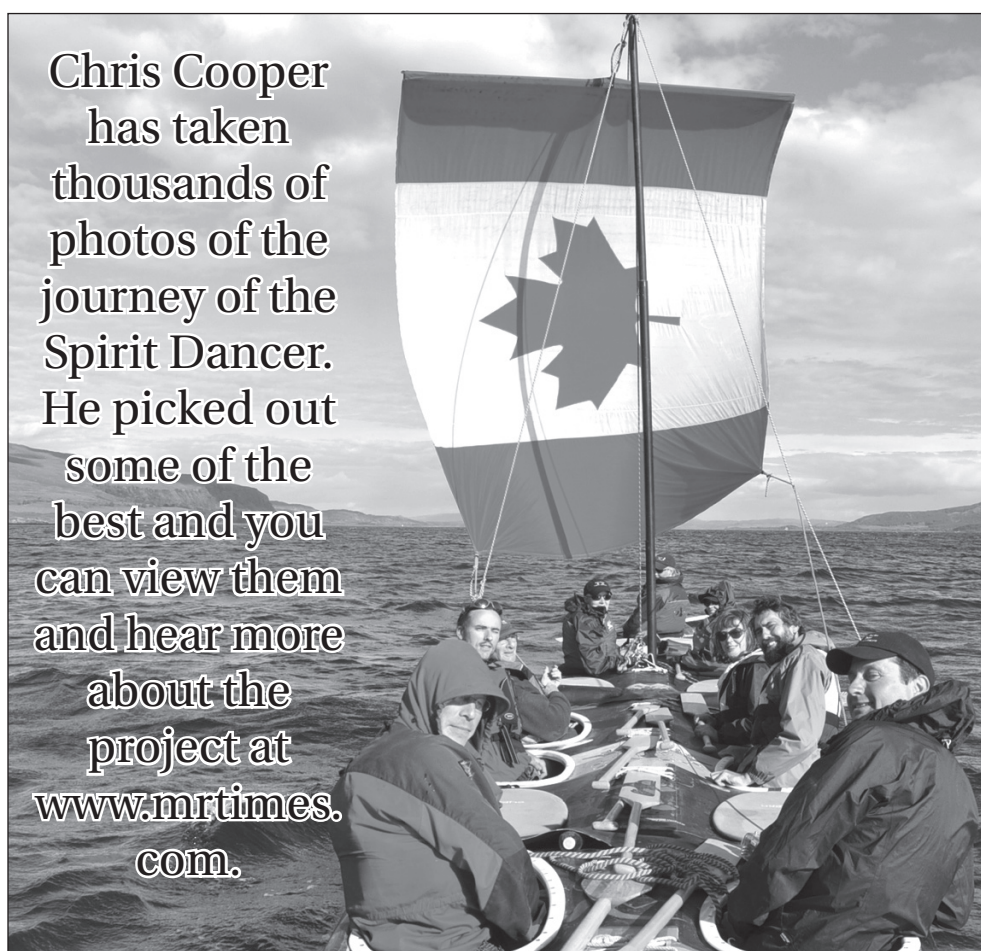
Cooper has been astounded by the level of kindness and hospitality that he and his fellow paddlers have encountered. In one small community Cooper and friends were put up in the home of the sergeant of the local police department with his three children.

"What can you say but people were just so incredibly kind to us," said Cooper.

Along the way the Spirit Dancer also carried English and Scottish passengers who were interested in experiencing part of the journey.

There were times where the Spirit Dancer was in extremely stormy waters and the locals looked out for hem. Once in 2008 along the Cornish coast locals were worried because of the heavy seas the Spirit Dancer was in and called the harbour master who called a lifeboat out.

"The canoe felt pretty



Chris Cooper has taken thousands of photos of the journey of the Spirit Dancer. He picked out some of the best and you can view them and hear more about the project at [www.mrtimes.com](http://www.mrtimes.com).

This Chris Cooper image and many more can be viewed in a slide show at [www.mrtimes.com](http://www.mrtimes.com).

good but it was definitely big enough to have you really paying attention," said Cooper.

He said the canoe was in breaking seas of two and a half metres high.

"The canoe's getting bounced around quite a bit. I don't like to say this but I do know that I feel very focused about getting the crew off the water because I don't want them to be concerned for their own personal safety although at times I have felt slightly nervous to say the least in some of the seas there," said Cooper.

Cooper said there are portions of the coast where you have to know where you can get the canoe ashore safely because there are sometimes 10 or 15 mile sections where you can't safely get ashore. Cooper describe those parts of the coast as "committing sections."

"You really have to be very much in tune with what the weather is doing and what the weather forecasts are for," said Cooper, adding

he keeps in touch with the coast guard every day.

People who encountered the Spirit Dancer along the way were both "shocked" and "inquisitive" and also supportive.

"You can tell that they're really excited for us but they're kind of wondering what kind of a craft it is," he said.

The expedition has boasted plenty of beautiful locales but Cooper's favourites so far are the Isles of Scilly, which had warm, turquoise water and plentiful white sand beaches, and the Orkney Islands with their treeless, Arctic looking landscape.

Cooper said there are close ties between the Orkney Islands and Canada because many of the Hudson Bay Company explorers and High Arctic explorers were from Orkney.

The Orkney islands also are home to talented musicians and the Spirit Dancer crew made sure to be at every musical occasion they could where the accordion

and fiddle came out.

"It's very captivating music," said Cooper.

In 2010 the canoe will travel to the remainder of the Orkney islands and the next year Cooper will take the Spirit Dancer to the Shetland Islands.

Cooper sums up the goal of the odyssey in a few words.

"We want to make Canada proud," he said. "I also want to give youth an opportunity to do something very unique."

Cooper said as soon as any steps into the canoe they're "hooked for life."

"It's an extraordinary experience to actually step into that canoe and pick up a paddle and paddle in a foreign environment," he said.

► Cooper is hoping to get some corporate sponsorship to help fund the upcoming legs of the trip and also pay for a support boat for safety reasons. For more information on the expedition you can go to [www.spiritdancer-canoejourneys.ca](http://www.spiritdancer-canoejourneys.ca).