

**REPORT OF THE  
INVESTIGATION INTO  
THE DEATH OF  
MR JOHN BUCKLEY  
ON LOUGH DERG, CO. CLARE.  
22nd JANUARY 2006.**

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was established on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2003 under The Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act 2000

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## 1. SYNOPSIS

- 1.1 On 22nd January 2006, Mr. John Buckley and Miss Lucinda Murphy undertook an excursion on Lough Derg, Co. Clare using a Canadian style open canoe, launching the craft from a slip at Two Mile Gate, Co. Clare.
- 1.2 After travelling some distance in a northwesterly direction, parallel to the shoreline, they arrived at the Lough Derg Holiday Cottages Marina, in the town land of Annacarriga.
- 1.3 Here the craft got into difficulties and capsized some 25 metres offshore.
- 1.4 Mr. Buckley was drowned.

## 2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 The Canoeing Party:  
Mr. John Buckley, Glin, Co. Limerick

Miss Lucinda Murphy, Bird Hill, Co. Tipperary

2.2 Canoe Details:  
Canadian Type open canoe

Model: Water Quest, 14C Camouflage 3 seat canoe.  
The craft was equipped with two paddles, and one lifejacket.

Length: 14ft

Beam: 42"

Weight: 95lbs

Capacity: 725lbs

Three seats

Hull Material: Polyethylene with camouflage markings

Manufacturer: Johnson Outdoors Watercraft, Sport & Leisure Group  
4885, Broadmoor SE, Grand Rapids ML 49512-5360, USA

## EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

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### 3. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE INCIDENT

- 3.1 Prior to the incident, weather conditions were moderate, the day was mostly dry and bright, with some sunshine in the morning but clouding over during the course of the afternoon.
- 3.2 Winds were noted as light to moderate Southeast to South, Visibility was good; there was no rain or fog at the time of the incident.
- 3.3 Lake conditions were calm inshore, with slight wavelets on the lake.
- 3.4 The ambient air temperature at the time of the incident was estimated to be about 1 degree Celsius, with the water temperature a few degrees above.
- 3.5 The canoe was borrowed from a friend of Mr. Buckley's brother. It was equipped with two paddles and one lifejacket.
- 3.6 The canoe was designed for three people. The sole lifejacket provided was a 150 N gas inflatable type, requiring manual operation.
- 3.7 Mr. Buckley and Miss Murphy had only limited experience of boating on the lake, and no prior experience of operating this type of craft.
- 3.8 The owner of the canoe had given basic instructions to Mr. Buckley on where to sit, and how to paddle an open type canoe. Miss Murphy's sister had offered her advice on how to extract from an Eskimo type canoe in the event of a capsiz.
- 3.9 Mr. Buckley was noted as being a strong swimmer, Miss Murphy while not a good swimmer, could tread water.
- 3.10 Neither person was wearing any specialist clothing associated with venturing on the water in January, in this type of canoe. Miss Murphy was wearing a three quarter length coat, jeans, boots, pullover, with gloves and earmuffs. Mr. Buckley wore a fleece jacket over a light tracksuit.
- 3.11 The canoe was launched at approximately 14.15 hours, at Two Mile Gate, a frequently used launching site for small craft approximately two miles northwest of Killaloe. The couple proceeded to travel parallel to the shore, in a northwesterly direction, for a distance of approximately one mile.
- 3.12 Miss Murphy wore the only lifejacket on board, but due to difficulty experienced in adjusting it, the unit did not fit her correctly.
- 3.13 Mr. Buckley was not wearing a lifejacket.
- 3.14 Mr. Buckley was positioned in the rear on the craft. Miss Murphy sat in the forward end on the canoe.

- 3.15 Lucinda Murphy's small dog was also carried on board the craft.
- 3.16 The journey along the shoreline was uneventful, the canoe did not venture more than 30 metres from the shore.
- 3.17 Miss Murphy's small dog jumped into the lake on a number of occasions but was recovered each time without difficulty.
- 3.18 At 14.30 hours they each made mobile phone calls and sent text messages, to various family members describing where they were.
- 3.19 The canoe travelled a distance of some two miles coming to an area known locally as the "stones" which form part of the breakwater of Lough Derg Holiday Cottages Marina, in the townland of Annicarriga.
- 3.20 They stopped at this point, for a period of some 10 minutes.

## 4. THE INCIDENT

- 4.1 Prior to recommencing, both were relaxed and rested. The canoe was stationary, some 25m off the shoreline adjacent to the Lough Derg Holiday Cottages Complex.
- 4.2 There was a brief discussion as to where to go next, Mr. Buckley wanted to move further out into the lake and away from the shore. It was agreed to do so.
- 4.3 At approximately 14.40 hours, prior to getting under way, the sudden unplanned movement of one of the occupants caused the canoe to capsize, throwing both into the water.
- 4.4 The canoe ended in an inverted position, some 3 meters from the occupants, with Miss Murphy's dog trapped under the hull.

## 5. EVENTS AFTER THE INCIDENT

- 5.1 Mr. Buckley was not wearing a lifejacket. Miss Murphy who was wearing an inflatable type PFD, experienced difficulties with it riding up over her shoulders, and took some five minutes before she was able to locate and operate the firing mechanism.
- 5.2 Both returned to the upturned canoe, a young boy later identified as Emil Benson, was seen on the shoreline some 25 metres away, John Buckley called out to him to fetch help. At this point neither occupant of the canoe were panicking. The boy left the shore and headed towards the Cottages to fetch assistance.
- 5.3 Miss Murphy concerned at the weight of her clothes, attempted unsuccessfully to remove her coat, but did manage to remove her boots. She at this point, succeeded in operating the lifejacket which inflated, but due to the incorrectly adjusted straps, now rode up above her head.
- 5.4 Mr. Buckley did not attempt to remove any items of clothing and was still wearing his heavy outer fleece jacket.
- 5.5 At this point Mr. Buckley climbed onto the back of the upturned canoe, possibly in an unsuccessful attempt to right it.
- 5.6 Both had been in the water now for a period of approximately 10 minutes, and an element of anxiety and panic was now present.
- 5.7 It was mutually agreed to leave the upturned hull, and to swim for the shore, which was some 25 metres away.
- 5.8 Lucinda Murphy left the upturned canoe and commenced swimming towards the shore, John Buckley was behind her. She made little progress due the incorrectly donned lifejacket, which proved a hindrance to movement through the water.
- 5.9 Having swallowed water, she stopped and looked back towards Mr. Buckley, he was some 3 metres behind her and appeared to be in difficulty. Lucinda Murphy returned to Mr. Buckley, and attempted to keep him afloat, while shouting for assistance from the shore. Despite her efforts, he sank below the surface of the water.
- 5.10 Emil Benson had returned to his residence, which was some distance from the incident and alerted his mother Ms. Prue Benson, she notified Killaloe Gardai of the incident.

## EVENTS AFTER THE INCIDENT

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- 5.11 Emil Benson then obtained the assistance of a neighbour Mr. John McKeogh, together they returned to the shoreline, they observed Miss Murphy in the water, some distance from the canoe. They did not see any sign of Mr. Buckley. Unable to offer assistance they left the scene to look for a boat to use in a rescue.
- 5.12 A man identified as Mr. John O'Brien, who was resident in one the cottages adjacent to the lake, now appeared on the shore, alerted by Miss Murphy's cries for help. She shouted to him that Mr. Buckley was drowning, and to fetch help. Alone now in the water, with the canoe having drifted away to the west of her, she commenced to attempt to reach the shore.
- 5.13 Mr. O'Brien left to fetch his surfboard, returned and entered the water to assist Lucinda Murphy from the lake.
- 5.14 There was no sign of Mr. Buckley. However, Mr. O'Brien re-entered the water and commenced a search for him.
- 5.15 Killaloe Ballina CIRS (Community Inshore Rescue Service) were notified by the Gardai, and at 14.52 hours, informed the Coast Guard MRSC (Marine Rescue Sub Centre) Valentia on VHF of the incident some 2 miles north of Killaloe.
- 5.16 Ms. Benson then proceeded to the beach, and arrived to witness Mr. O'Brien entering the water with his surfboard. She noted that Miss Murphy's lifejacket while inflated only appeared to be fitted over one shoulder.
- 5.17 Mr. John McKeogh, and Emil Benson had attempted to start a number of boats in the nearby marina, to use in a rescue attempt. Their efforts were unsuccessful and both returned to the shore adjacent to the incident, arriving as Lucinda Murphy was brought ashore.
- 5.18 Killaloe Gardai also arrived on scene as Miss Murphy was brought ashore. At 14.55 hours they confirmed to MRSC Valentia, one person was safe, and one person was still missing.
- 5.19 The Shannon Airport based Coast Guard SAR Helicopter was tasked at time 15.01 and the RNLI Inshore Lifeboat based at Dromineer was tasked at 15.08 to join the search. The helicopter remained on scene from 15.22 hours until returning to base at 16.51 hours.

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- 5.20 The hull of the overturned canoe was located on the lakeshore some distance to the north west of the incident site. The remains of Miss. Murphy's terrier were found under the canoe.
- 5.21 At 15.09 hours, Killaloe Ballina CIRS arrived on scene, positioned a marker buoy at the incident site and commenced an underwater search for Mr. Buckley using local divers.
- 5.22 Limerick Rescue arrived on scene with a team of four divers at 19.30 hours. They made a series of three dives, locating the body of Mr. Buckley at 21.00 hours on the bottom of the lake, in some 4 metres of water, in the vicinity of the incident. The remains were brought to Killaloe.
- 5.23 The search was suspended at 21.09 hours, and all rescue units stood down.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Neither occupant of the canoe had any prior experience or instruction in the safe use and handling of this type of open Canoe.
- 6.2 In inexperienced hands this type of canoe can prove to be unstable, it is essential that weight is correctly distributed throughout its length, and that the correct method of paddling is used. Any sudden movement may result in the craft capsizing suddenly.
- 6.3 The Manufacturers of the Canoe do offer some guidance on its safe usage, in the form of an instruction manual. This was not available to the occupants. The manual advises to remain seated in order to maintain a low centre of gravity in the craft.
- 6.4 The canoe was inspected subsequent to the incident, it was noted as being in good condition, with the hull intact and undamaged.
- 6.5 There was only a single lifejacket carried on the canoe. It is a legal requirement, that lifejackets be worn by all occupants in a recreational craft of this size. S.I. 921 of 2005, Pleasure craft (Personal Floatation Devices and Operation)(Safety) Regulations. The lack of a suitable lifejacket by one of the occupants was a contributory factor in the loss of life.
- 6.6 The canoe manufacturers operating manual, specifically refers to the need, to always wear suitable Personal Floatation Devices (PFD) when in the craft.
- 6.7 The correct donning, adjustment and operation of the lifejacket was an issue during the incident. Miss Murphy was unfamiliar with the Lifejacket, and received no instructions in its correct donning procedure. There could be some debate as to whether this inflatable type lifejacket was an appropriate choice for use on this type of craft. It is not a type generally used by canoeists. A vest type PFD would have been easier to don, wear, and provide immediate buoyancy once the wearer was in the water.
- 6.8 The decision to leave the upturned canoe, and attempt to swim the short distance to shore had fatal consequences, particularly as the craft despite being overturned, offered some support and buoyancy, and that people on the shore were aware of the situation and assistance was imminent.
- 6.9 The clothing worn by the occupants was unsuitable for that type of craft taking into consideration the time of year, and the negative effects on the wearer's buoyancy once the clothes became soaked in water.
- 6.10 Services rendered by the Gardai, Irish Coast Guard, Killaloe/ Ballina CIRS, Lough Derg ILB, and Limerick Rescue was delivered in a prompt, efficient and professional manner.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 A suitable PFD/Lifejacket must always be worn by occupants on this type of craft.
- 7.2 Such craft should not be used by the public unless they have been suitably trained in their use, or accompanied and supervised by competent personnel, who are trained and equipped to undertake a rescue in the event of a capsized.
- 7.3 On an open lake such as Lough Derg, such craft should not be used on their own, operating in company with other canoes offers assistance and support in the event of an incident occurring.
- 7.4 The requirement by law to wear a lifejacket on any recreational craft less than 7.0 meters has been in place for some years. However it is apparent that many people are unaware of its existence. The MCIB strongly recommends a public awareness campaign should be put in place to highlight the law, and advise the boating public of their obligations.
- 7.5 It is strongly recommended that the Department of Transport make freely available to all recreational bodies and groups a copy of the recently published Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft.
- 7.6 Local Authorities, Harbour and Port Authorities, and the operators of private facilities, should arrange for such signage, to be prominently and permanently displayed at popular launching sites for recreational craft.
- 7.7 Occupants of any capsized craft should remain with the boat. An upturned hull will offer some element of buoyancy, and provides a greater target for the rescue services than an individual in the water.
- 7.8 Occupants of such craft should wear correct clothing.

## 8. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 8.1 Arial Photograph of area.
- 8.2 Photographs of the incident location.
- 8.3 Layout of the canoe.

Appendix 8.1 Aerial Photograph of area.



## APPENDIX 8.2

Appendix 8.2 Photographs of the incident location.



Appendix 8.3 Layout of the Water Quest 14C Canoe.







