



MCIB

Marine Casualty Investigation Board
Bord Imscrúú Taismí Muirí

**REPORT INTO A
FATAL INCIDENT
ON LOUGH GILL
29th JANUARY 2019**

**REPORT NO. MCIB/285
(No.2 OF 2020)**

The Marine Casualty Investigation Board (MCIB) examines and investigates all types of marine casualties to, or on board, Irish registered vessels worldwide and other vessels in Irish territorial waters and inland waterways.

The MCIB objective in investigating a marine casualty is to determine its circumstances and its causes with a view to making recommendations to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport for the avoidance of similar marine casualties in the future, thereby improving the safety of life at sea and inland waterways.

The MCIB is a non-prosecutorial body. We do not enforce laws or carry out prosecutions. It is not the purpose of an investigation carried out by the MCIB to apportion blame or fault.

The legislative framework for the operation of the MCIB, the reporting and investigating of marine casualties and the powers of MCIB investigators is set out in the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000.

In carrying out its functions the MCIB complies with the provisions of the International Maritime Organisation's Casualty Investigation Code and EU Directive 2009/18/EC governing the investigation of accidents in the maritime transport sector.



Leeson Lane, Dublin 2.
Telephone: 01-678 3485/86.
email: info@mcib.ie
www.mcib.ie

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

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Produced 30th March 2020.



	PAGE
1. Summary	4
2. Factual Information	5
3. Narrative	7
4. Analysis	9
5. Conclusions	11
6. Safety Recommendations	12
7. Appendices	13
8. Natural Justice - Correspondence Received	20

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 On Saturday the 26th January 2019 a canoeist departed from a pier in Trawane Bay, opposite the small island of Inishfree, on Lough Gill, County Sligo, in an open Canadian canoe. He was alone and travelled a short distance west along the shore of Lough Gill to Slish Woods where he set up a campsite close to the shore on the mainland.
- 1.2 On Tuesday the 29th January 2019 the canoeist's partner who visited the area, having been concerned by his lack of communication, saw the vessel overturned on the lake shore, east of the pier near Cullentra woods and to the east of the camp site and called emergency services via the '999 system'. The Coast Guard was alerted and commenced a search of the area.
- 1.3 The Casualty was discovered by the Coast Guard helicopter R118 and was lifted from the lake and was taken to Sligo General Hospital where he was subsequently pronounced dead. An autopsy was carried out and the pathologist recorded his death as being due to fresh water drowning.

All times have been standardised to local time (UTC).

2. FACTUAL INFORMATION

2.1 Vessel Details

The vessel is described as a Canadian Canoe, constructed of Polyurethane materials, with double ends. The vessel is of open design with two thwarts. It is propelled manually by persons using single paddles. (see Appendix 7.1 Photographs 1, 2 and 3)

Particulars

Name:	Dagger Reflection 16.
Type:	Canadian Canoe.
Construction:	Polyurethane.
Length Overall:	16' 00".
Beam:	2' 10".
Depth:	1' 2".
Freeboard:	00' 4".
Displacement:	200 to 350 pounds (approximately).
Max Load:	350 to 650 pounds.

2.2 Safety Equipment

The Casualty was wearing a Gul brand 50N Personal Flotation Device (PFD). No other safety equipment was found at the scene or at the camp site. (see Appendix 7.1 Photograph 6).

2.3 Crew Detail

The only person on board was the sole male occupant, who was operating the canoe alone.

2.4 Voyage Particulars

The vessel set out from a pier in Trawane Bay opposite the island, Isle of Inishfree, on the south western corner of Lough Gill. From evidence available it appears that there was only one person on board the vessel. It is known that he camped overnight on Saturday the 26th January 2019. The Casualty was found by Coast Guard helicopter R118 at 11.47 hrs on Tuesday the 29th January 2019, approximately 0.75 km to the east of the campsite. The vessel was found later on the shore by his partner approximately 0.4 km east of the campsite.

2.5 Type of casualty

This was a very serious marine casualty leading to loss of life. The autopsy recorded that the Casualty died by fresh water drowning. Some superficial grazing was noted to the forehead, chin, both hands and his right forearm.

2.6 Emergency Response

The 999 call was made at 10.39 hrs on Tuesday the 29th January. The Coast Guard, Gardai and the Civil Defence were alerted. The Coast Guard helicopter R118 was on-scene at 11.18 hrs and the Casualty was recovered by the Coast Guard helicopter at 11.47 hrs.

2.7 Weather

The weather over the period would be considered adverse with the air temperature for the period between 2 to 7 degrees Celsius and winds over the period ranged from north to west with speeds of 90 km/hr to 20 km/hr.

Saturday 26th January:

Winds from north force 8 (mean speeds of 48 to 52 km/hr) and occasional gusts of 90 km/hr. Air temperature of 4 to 6 degrees Celsius.

Sunday 27th January:

Winds from northwest force 8 (mean speeds of 50 to 54 km/hr) and occasional gusts of 95 km/hr. Winds eased back gradually by the afternoon and were force 4 or 5 by evening.

Air temperature of 5 degrees Celsius.

Monday 28th January:

Winds from west force 2 to 4 and increased to force 5 or 6 for afternoon and evening.

Air temperature of 2 to 4 degrees Celsius.

Tuesday 29th January:

Winds from west force 5 to 6 (mean speeds of 20 to 24 km/hr) and occasional gusts of 40 km/hr.

Air temperature of 4 to 6 degrees Celsius (see Appendix 7.3).

3. NARRATIVE

3.1 Lough Gill is a large freshwater lake of approximately 10 nautical miles in length and lies to the south east of Sligo town. The lake is reported to have an average depth of 16 metres. The lakeside is mainly sheer or steep with many boulders along the shoreline. There are only a few public launching places along the lake shore. Given the weather and time of year the water temperature for the lake would have been low.

3.2 Timeline:

Saturday 26th January, 15:30 hrs:

The Casualty departed from a pier opposite Inishfree Island where he launched his canoe, having packed his camping equipment onboard, and donned his PFD. He then set off west, to a campsite in the vicinity of Slish Woods, intending to spend a few days there.

Saturday 26th January, 18.27 hrs:

The Casualty sent a text message to his partner to say all was well. It was confirmed that he would normally have turned off his phone and only used it for contact when and as required.

Sunday 27th January:

There was no contact from him on this date. The partner of the Casualty confirmed that she received no texts or communication from the Casualty on Sunday.

Monday 28th January, 16.30 hrs:

The Casualty's partner went to the campsite on foot and found the canoe was not there. All looked normal. She noted there was no sign of a campfire having been established and that his knife and torch were there and his carving tools were not packed away. She also noted that a saw, axe and spoon knife were lying exposed to the elements. Additionally there was a wooden cup that he had been carving before his departure from the site. She left a t-shirt hanging as a signal to him indicating she had visited the site and as a prompt for him to contact her on his return.

Tuesday 29th January, 10.39 hrs:

The partner returned to the campsite and saw no sign of the Casualty in the vicinity. The campsite was undisturbed from the previous day apart from some food which appeared to have been disturbed by wildlife. The t-shirt was still where it had been placed. She observed that from the provisions left at the camp site he had made several cups of coffee while he was there and before his departure.

She then made her way back up towards higher ground and from here observed the canoe, with two paddles aboard, overturned on the shore line near Cullentra Woods. She then called the emergency services via the '999 system'.

Tuesday 29th January, 10:30 hrs:

The Coast Guard, Gardaí and the Civil Defence were notified of the incident.

Tuesday 29th January, at 11.18 hrs:

The Coast Guard helicopter R118 was tasked (based at Sligo Airport) and arrived on scene at 11.18 hrs. At 11.47 hrs the helicopter located the Casualty and he was recovered from the lake.

- 3.3 The outer clothing worn by the Casualty comprised denim jeans, waterproof jacket, a 50N PFD and open top wellington boots.
- 3.4 The Casualty's partner advised that the Casualty was inexperienced in the use of this type of canoe and was not experienced using any craft on the water. He was, however, a competent swimmer having gained several certificates for achievements in swimming. The canoe had been purchased privately by the Casualty within the past twelve months.
- 3.5 There were no witnesses to the actual incident nor are the exact circumstances known from any direct evidence. An unofficial chart used by local boat users of the lake was examined and the location of the campsite was established, as were the locations of the canoe and Casualty (see Appendix 7.2 Map of Lough Gill).
- 3.6 The Coast Guard helicopter crew reported that the Casualty was lying face down in the water when located. His PFD had numerous scrapes and rips. There were also superficial abrasions to the forehead and both arms, indicating that he may have been in that position for some time.

4. ANALYSIS

- 4.1 The incident happened after 18.27 hrs on the 26th of January when the last text message was received and before 10.39 hrs on the 29th of January when the Canoe was sighted. The Casualty had given his partner details of departure, locations and return details. He had a mobile phone but had no other means of communication.
- 4.2 The lack of a campfire could be explained in so far as by the time he arrived on the island on Saturday evening it was too wet and windy to build one. Had he been on the island overnight on the Sunday he would have established a campfire as was his normal routine when on this type of expedition.
- 4.3 The chart provided shows that the passage inshore of the island of Inishfree, near Slisn Woods, was relatively sheltered. However, when canoeing to or from Cullentra Woods, the first 100 metres of his route from Slisn would have been exposed to wind, making this type of canoe difficult to control and would have rendered it unstable (see Appendix 7.2 and 7.2.1).
- 4.4 The weather from Saturday the 26th to Sunday the 27th of January was very poor, with strong winds and intermittent rain.

The air temperature for the period was between 2 to 7 degrees Celsius. The winds over the period ranged from north to west with speeds of 90 km/hr to 20 km/hr.

Saturday 26th January:

Winds from north force 8 (mean speeds of 48 to 52 km/hr) and occasional gusts of 90 km/h. Air temperature of 4 to 6 degrees Celsius.

Sunday 27th January:

Winds from northwest force 8 (mean speeds of 50 to 54 km/hr) and occasional gusts of 95 km/h. Winds eased back gradually by the afternoon and were force 4 or 5 by evening. Air temperature of 5 degrees Celsius.

Monday 28th January:

Winds from west force 2 to 4 and increased to force 5 or 6 for afternoon and evening. Air temperature of 2 to 4 degrees Celsius.

With the ambient temperature and very poor weather over the weekend the water temperature in the lake would have been cold to the human body on immersion. This would lead to the potential of cold shock for a person being suddenly immersed in the cold lake water.

- 4.5 Given the location of the body when found and the location of the canoe, and having regard to the weather and prevailing winds, the condition of the PFD and the post mortem report, it is considered probable that the canoe may have been

travelling between Slissh and Cullentra or somewhere in that area, when the incident occurred.

- 4.6 The canoe and the Casualty were found in separate locations indicating they became separated after the incident. There were no grab lines fitted to the canoe and no additional equipment was recovered from the scene, apart from two paddles inside the canoe. By leaving his torch and knife at the campsite and not packing away his tools it would indicate that he did not intend to travel far from the camp, nor in darkness, on the lake.
- 4.7 The footwear worn by the Casualty was wellington boots. These would have filled with water when he left the canoe and would also be held tight on the leg as the water pressure acted on the boots. This could act as a weight pulling the person downwards in the water and acting against the inherent flotation characteristics of the 50N PFD.
- 4.8 The Coast Guard helicopter crew reported that the Casualty was lying face down in the water when found. His PFD had numerous scrapes and rips on the front and given the superficial abrasions found this would indicate that he was in this position for some time, moving in and out on the shore with the waves. The PFD being worn was rated at 50N and such PFDs are regarded as buoyancy aids.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The actual time of the incident is not known definitively. However, it is probable given the evidence available that the incident happened between 18.27 hrs on Saturday the 26th January and sometime before the next evening, Sunday the 27th before darkness fell. In all probability given the indicators at the camp site, the incident occurred on the Sunday evening. It would not be suitable or advisable to be out in the water alone in a small boat during this weather. The requirements set out in Section 7.4 of 'The Safe Operation of Recreational Craft (2017)' states that 'Canoeing in a wind force 4 or above should only be considered by the very experienced'.
- 5.2 The PFD worn by the Casualty would not keep him afloat as an inflatable life jacket would have done. It was designed to aid the person to stay afloat and swim to safety. The footwear worn by the Casualty was open top wellington boots which would have weighed him down on immersion.
- 5.3 The boat and the Casualty were found in two different locations indicating that the Casualty entered the water and became separated from the canoe due to some incident. There were no grab lines attached to the canoe to assist recovery.
- 5.5 The charts provided clearly shows that the passage inshore of the Isle of Inishfree was sheltered. However, when leaving Cullentra Woods, if the Casualty went there, the first 100 metres of his route would have been exposed to wind, making the canoe difficult to control even in reasonable weather.
- 5.6 Once the Casualty entered the water he would probably have immediately felt the shock of the very cold water. The boat may have drifted away and he may not have been able to stay on or with it to achieve adequate buoyancy, despite being an accomplished swimmer.
- 5.7 The Casualty only had a mobile phone at the camp and it is believed by the Casualty's partner to have been turned off. He did not carry any other means of signalling for help, such as flares or a Marine VHF handheld transceiver.

6. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The requirements set out in Chapter 7 of the Code of Practice (CoP)* for Recreational Craft for canoeing/kayaking should be highlighted by means of a Marine Notice.

In particular attention should be paid to:

- Section 7.1 Training. ‘undertake a recognised training course in the correct use of the specific type of canoe you wish to use’.
- Section 7.2 Prior to entering the water, ‘ensure that you carry a mobile phone or Marine VHF radio in a suitable watertight cover for use to summon assistance in emergency situations’.
- Check the hull is fitted with grab loops/towing lines.
- Ensure that you are a competent swimmer and capable of surviving in the areas you operate.

6.2 Canoeists/Kayakers should ensure that they wear clothing and footwear that will not affect their chance of survival in the water.

**Updates to the Code of Practice: The Safe Operation of Recreational Craft 2017 (Marine Notice No. 51 of 2019 refers) were published in November 2019. The updates can be downloaded in electronic format at:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/66ff7e-safe-operation-of-recreational-craft/>*

Appendix 7.1 Photographs



Photograph No. 1 - The Canadian Canoe.



Photograph No. 2 - Canadian Canoe underside.

Appendix 7.1 Photographs



Photograph No. 3 - Canadian Canoe, showing paddles recovered.



Photograph No. 4 - The campsite at Slissh Woods.

Appendix 7.1 Photographs

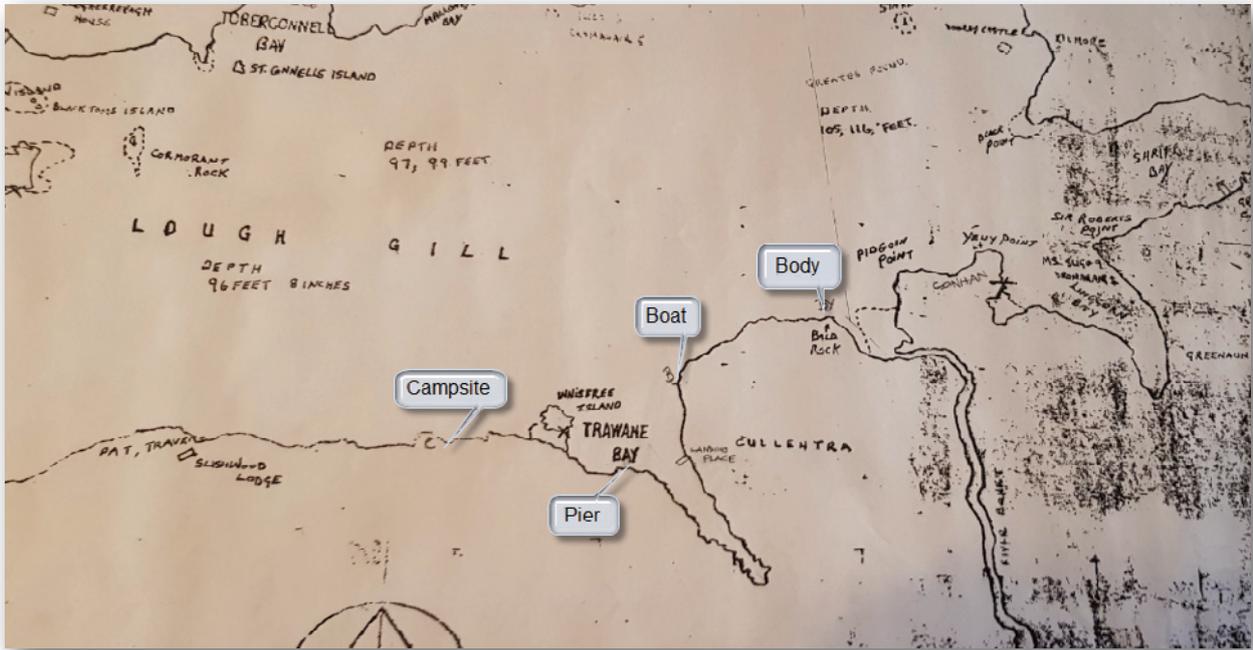


Photograph No. 5 - View towards Lough Gill from campsite.



Photograph No. 6 - PFD/Buoyancy aid (actual) showing abrasions and an original.

Appendix 7.2 Map of Lough Gill



7.2.1



Appendix 7.3 Met Éireann Weather Report



MET ÉIREANN

The Irish Meteorological Service

Glasnevin Hill,
Dublin 9, Ireland.

Cnoc Ghlas Naíon
Baile Átha Cliath 9, Éire.
www.met.ie

Tel: +353-1-806 4200
Fax: +353-1-806 4247
E-mail: met.eireann@met.ie



22 August 2019

Our Ref. WS1730/1908_1
Your Ref. MCIB/12/285

Re: Estimate of weather conditions on Lough Gill, Co Sligo between 18:00 hours on the 26th to 06:00 hours on the 29th of January 2019.

26th January

Weather: A very strong and unstable northwest airflow covered the area during the evening.
It was cold and very windy with outbreaks of rain. The rain was intermittent and showery in nature. I estimate totals at 5 to 8 mm.

Temperatures: The air temperature ranged 4 to 6 degrees Celsius.

Wind: Winds from the north were gale force 8 (mean speeds of 48 to 52 km/h) and occasional gusts up to 90 km/h (Strong gale force 9)

Visibility: Moderate to poor (1500 to 2000 meters).

27th January

Weather: The very strong northwest airflow eased late in the day.
The morning, forenoon and early afternoon was cold and very windy with frequent showers. The showers were blustery and some may have contained soft hail. Showers became isolated in late afternoon.

Temperatures: The max temperature was 5 degrees Celsius early morning; the min 1 degrees later evening.

Wind: Winds from the northwest during the morning were gale force 8 (mean speeds of 50 to 54 km/h) with occasional gusts up to 95 km/h (strong gale force 9). Winds eased back gradually during the afternoon and were Force 4 or 5 by evening.

Visibility: Moderate (4 to 6 km).

Appendix 7.3 Met Éireann Weather Report



MET ÉIREANN
The Irish Meteorological Service

Glasnevin Hill, Dublin 9, Ireland.	Cnoc Ghlas Naíon Baile Átha Cliath 9, Éire. www.met.ie	Tel: +353-1-806 4200 Fax: +353-1-806 4247 E-mail: met.eireann@met.ie
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28th January

Weather: A fresh showery westerly airflow covered Ireland.
Much of the 28th was dry with a few clear/sunny spells. Passing showers did occur too – these mainly during the late afternoon and evening.

Temperatures: It was a cold day; maxima of 5 to 7 degrees Celsius occurred during the afternoon; minima of zero to 1 degrees occurred during the morning when slight ground frost arose.

Wind: Winds from the west were moderate (Force 2 to 4) up to midday, but increased fresh Force 5 to 6 (mean speeds of 28 to 32 km/h) for the afternoon and evening.

Visibility: Moderate to good (8 to 12 km).

29th January (00:00 to 00:600)

Weather: A fresh west airflow covered the area with a cold front approaching from the west. It was cloudy and breezy with outbreaks of rain. The rain was continuous and moderately heavy – and sometimes falling as sleet. I estimate amounts during period at 5 to 7 mm.

Temperatures: It was cold. The air temperatures ranged 2 to 4 degrees Celsius. A slight grass frost occurred.

Wind: Winds from the west were fresh Force 5 to 6 (mean speeds of 20 to 24 km/h) with occasional gust up to 40 km/h.

Visibility: Moderate (3 to 5 km).



NATURAL JUSTICE - CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

Section 36 of the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 requires that:

- '36 (1) Before publishing a report, the Board shall send a draft of the report or sections of the draft report to any person who, in its opinion, is likely to be adversely affected by the publishing of the report or sections or, if that person be deceased, then such person as appears to the Board best to represent that person's interest.
- (2) A person to whom the Board sends a draft in accordance with subsection (1) may, within a period of 28 days commencing on the date on which the draft is sent to the person, or such further period not exceeding 28 days, as the Board in its absolute discretion thinks fit, submit to the Board in writing his or her observations on the draft.
- (3) A person to whom a draft has been sent in accordance with subsection (1) may apply to the Board for an extension, in accordance with subsection (2), of the period in which to submit his or her observations on the draft.
- (4) Observations submitted to the Board in accordance with subsection (2) shall be included in an appendix to the published report, unless the person submitting the observations requests in writing that the observations be not published.
- (5) Where observations are submitted to the Board in accordance with subsection (2), the Board may, at its discretion -
- (a) alter the draft before publication or decide not to do so, or
 - (b) include in the published report such comments on the observations as it thinks fit.'

The Board reviews and considers all observations received whether published or not published in the final report. When the Board considers an observation requires amendments to the report that is stated beside the relevant observation. When the Board is satisfied that the report has adequately addressed the issue in the observation, then the observation is 'Noted' without comment or amendment. The Board may make further amendments or observations in light of the responses from the Natural Justice process.

'Noted' does not mean that the Board either agrees or disagrees with the observation.

8. NATURAL JUSTICE - CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

	PAGE
8.1 Correspondence from Partner of Deceased and MCIB response	22

Note: The names and contact details of the individual respondents have been obscured for privacy reasons.

Correspondence 8.1 Partner of Deceased and MCIB response



12 December 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

REF: MCIB/12/285

Many thanks for the draft report dated 4 December 2019.

I, as well as [REDACTED] family, are pleased to note that the possible date of his death correlates with our observations and intuitions.

What follows are my observations into what i found at [REDACTED] camp and items not found on his body, that lead me to believe [REDACTED] death occurred between the hours of 10am and 3pm on Sunday 27th January 2019.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted.

[REDACTED] always carried his knife with him when he was out and about. If he intended to be away from camp for a few hours, he would have firstly packed up his carving tools. Saw, axe and spoon knife were all left exposed when i found his camp on Monday 28th at approximately 4:30pm.

Whatever his plan was, he only intended to head out for a quick paddle. He didn't take his knife with him, nor did he take his torch; which means that he knew he would have sufficient daylight to get him to and from his desired destination.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted and report has been amended.

There was also no evidence of a camp fire. It would have been dark by the time [REDACTED] had set up camp, so between it being a very windy night and darkness; [REDACTED] did not make a fire. Had [REDACTED] spent Sunday night at camp, he would have made a fire.

As it was dark by the time [REDACTED] set up camp and he was found without his torch; [REDACTED] definitely did not canoe from the time he arrived at the camp spot until at least good daylight on the Sunday.

Correspondence 8.1 Partner of Deceased and MCIB response

Other factors which exclude Mon28th and Tue29th as days of death:

Only 1/3 of the cream he brought was used for coffee. [REDACTED] usually woke up at 6am. He would have made 2 coffees before setting out for a paddle.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted.

Aside from food being disturbed by night time animals, the camp was completely undisturbed between Monday 4:30pm approximately when i found his camp and Tuesday 10:30am approximately, when i returned to his camp.

Other notes:

4.1 ammendment needed: "...when the casualty's body..."

i arrived at camp approximately 10:30am. Body was found at 11:47am. I, [REDACTED] sighted the canoe and not the body.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted and report has been amended.

4.5 Canoe and two paddles

When i came across the canoe, it was capsized but the two paddles remained within the canoe. My understanding is that whenever [REDACTED] first entered the water, he was not immediately panicked; or at least had the sense/foresight/time to put the paddles into the canoe.

5.6 "...described by his partner he was not a good swimmer.."

[REDACTED] held swimming certificates and badges for achievements in swimming. I, [REDACTED] partner, stated that [REDACTED] had an intense dislike of being cold and wet.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted.

5.6 "...the incident could have ocured...hours...17:00hr approx..."

As stated before, [REDACTED] did not have his torch with him; therefore wherever his desired destination was, he knew he would have sufficient time to get there and back with plenty of daylight to spare.

[REDACTED] was carving a cup while at camp. he found the wood on site and when i arrived at camp on the Monday, he had been working on hollowing the wood for the cup. From the

Correspondence 8.1 Partner of Deceased and MCIB response

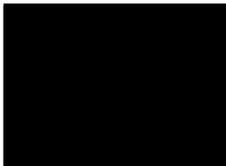
moment of shaping the wood with his axe, until the form it held when i came to camp, would have taken a good few hours of carving. This is another indication that the accident definately did not occur on the Saturday night.

MCIB RESPONSE: Noted.

I trust you have found my observations helpful. Sadly, it does not change the outcome for myself and [REDACTED] family; but it is important to us that the date of his death is ammended so that we can honour his anniversary on the most likely day of his passing.

Please make contact with me if you have any further questions or seek any clarification.

Be Well





Leeson Lane, Dublin 2.
Telephone: 01-678 3485/86.
email: info@mcib.ie
www.mcib.ie

