

## A Rescue Example

Last year, the HM Coastguard received a report from a person on the cliff top at Exmouth of capsized canoes at the entrance to the river Exe. This notorious area is known as the 'Bar' and a request was made for the lifeboat to be launched.

Tim Mock, the Exmouth lifeboat Coxswain was having a meeting with the RNLI's Deputy Divisional Inspector (DDI), when he heard the Portland Coastguard talking to the Brixham Coastguard about the incident on the boathouse VHF. Tim commented to the DDI that if the canoes were at the 'Bar' they would be in serious trouble due to the remnants of an easterly gale from the previous day and considerable breaking seas in that area.

It was also an hour and a half before low water, which meant that the Trent all-weather boat (ALB) **could not be launched** because the channel was too shallow for the ALB to get out to sea. The Coxswain asked the Coastguard to also request the launch of the larger Atlantic class inshore boat (ILB) from Teignmouth lifeboat station, as he thought the conditions may prove too much for the 'Spirit of the Exe', the small D class ILB at Exmouth.

The 'Spirit of the Exe' proceeded to the 'Bar' and found an empty canoe in the breaking sea and a group of canoes beached nearby. The canoeists, who were from a nearby college under instruction/assessment, said that another member of their group was in trouble further out to sea. Tim and the DDI drove to the Exmouth ILB station and searched the sea with binoculars. The DDI spotted an object about a mile out that needed investigating. The 'Spirit of the Exe' headed straight for it and located the casualty, a young lady hanging onto the upright canoe with an instructor aboard desperately trying to make for land but being overwhelmed by the tide and dragged towards Dawlish.



The 'Spirit of the Exe' took the seriously hypothermic girl, who had been in the water for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour, and the instructor aboard. The Coastguard helicopter arrived and was asked by the Lifeboat crew to immediately airlift the girl for hospital evacuation. She was very lucky and made a full recovery.

The canoe instructor had without doubt saved the girl's life but could not have resolved the situation without the help of the 'Spirit of the Exe' and her crew, who took risks to reach the casualties and battled with severe weather conditions throughout the rescue.

As Tim Mock, the Exmouth lifeboat Coxswain said *'If our ALB had been stationed at Maer Rocks at the time, we wouldn't have been dependent on the tide and would have been able to launch it and not taken so many risks with the ILB.'*

Once the airlift was completed the Exmouth D class made a search of the area with the Teignmouth ILB before returning the remaining canoeists to the beach. Tim Mock subsequently requested that a Coastguard sector officer paid a visit to the college canoeing group to give them a serious talk on sea safety.