



RICHARD TAYLOR, CORACLE MAKER

Meet the signaller keeping traditional boat-making alive

Richard Taylor is a signaller at the manual lever crossing box in Newark Castle. In his spare time, he's a wilderness survival expert who enjoys getting back to basics.

He's one of only two traditional coracle makers left in Britain. The boats – which originated in Wales – have been used for centuries, primarily for fishing. Easily transportable over land and highly manoeuvrable in the water, Richard described the coracle as “a great pathway to get closer to the natural world”.

“I wanted a boat I could make under bush conditions, just using the materials I find around me with minimal tools,” explained Richard. To make the coracle he uses materials cut from woods and riverbanks, and works with simple hand tools.

He began his craft after a mutual friend introduced him to Ronnie Davies, one of the last of the traditional coracle craftsmen. “I design my coracles to serve a practical purpose, but also to recognise the importance of keeping the coracle tradition alive,” said Richard.

His wilderness adventures have taken him far and wide – he celebrated a recent birthday during a solo Arctic expedition and makes frequent trips to the Scottish Highlands.

He's also used his hobby to raise money for charity. “After a chat in the pub the idea of a trip for the Imperial Cancer Research Fund came about,” Richard recalled. “A friend and I took two coracles and paddled them 70 miles down the Teifi River. It took a week to get from mid-Wales right through to Cardigan Bay. We had the worst rains for years – it was a mad man's paradise!”

Richard said he most enjoys the solitude and the closeness to nature that the coracle provides. Although he's sold several coracles he admits “there's no money in it” so won't be packing in the signalling job!

➔ If you'd like to get some more information about coracle making visit Richard's website www.coracle-craftsman.com