

ROCKY HORROR

Canoeists saved from raging sea as Mirrormen raise alarm

PICTURE EXCLUSIVE

By GEOFFREY LAKEMAN
TWO capsized canoeists are at the mercy of stormy seas - driven towards jagged rocks by huge waves.

They were saved after I raised the alarm. I had been passing by chance with photographer Colin Shepherd who took these pictures of the dramatic rescue by a lifeboat and helicopter.

The canoeists were paddling off the tiny North Cornwall cove of Portgaverne when gales blew in from the Atlantic. They capsized within seconds of each other 200 yards from the beach.

One man managed to clamber on an island of rock known locally as The Castle while his friend was driven towards the rocky shore.

My alarm call brought the lifeboat racing from nearby Port Isaac. At the helm was fisherman John Collins, 31. His girlfriend Nicola Bradbury, 28, and Jeremy Thomas, 38, helped guide him to where the two shivering men had been clinging to the rocks for 20 minutes.

As John steered the inflatable craft in, Jeremy risked his life by suddenly leaping ashore.

He wrapped a foil thermal blanket around one of the canoeists who was on his knees, crouching low to avoid the spray and rising tide which threatened to engulf him.

A Sea King helicopter was scrambled 60 miles away at the Royal Navy air base at Culdrose. Within 15 minutes it was hovering above the scene.

The winchman was lowered and the two men were lifted to safety.

The pair, thought to be on holiday from Birmingham, were flown to hospital and treated for hypothermia.

Nicola said later: "It was one rough ride getting there in the lifeboat at that speed."

"I must get home and wash my hair."

Modest Jeremy told me: "I just watched the waves and timed my jump ashore, but one slip and it could have been an even more dangerous situation, with me in the water as well. The lifeboat was almost swamped."

"One of the canoeists had a half wetsuit on but the other chap was only wearing a t-shirt and flimsy shorts. His teeth were chattering."

Two years ago a Port Isaac inshore lifeboat won a Mirror Pride of Britain award after saving a father and son trapped in a cave.

A Port Isaac coastguard said yesterday: "The canoeists were advised by a local not to put to sea in those conditions."

The helicopter pilot, Flight Lieutenant Kevin Rutherford, said: "They were both embarrassed and very cold when we picked them up."



HE'S SAFE: Canoeist winched up



BATTERED: One of the capsized canoeists is driven towards the rocks



FREEZING: Shivering victim waits as the helicopter winchman drops



COMFORT: Lifeboat crewman reaches a canoeist on his rocky perch



STANDING BY: Lifeboat closes in on drifting canoe, watched by canoeist

Pictures: COLIN SHEPHERD

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Lifeboat and helicopter pluck canoeists to safety

by ALASTAIR WREFORD

TWO canoeists were plucked to safety from the foot of cliffs at Port Isaac on Saturday after getting into difficulties.

Coastguards at Falmouth requested the launch of the Port Isaac lifeboat at 3pm on Saturday after a member of the public reported that the pair were in trouble after setting off in "lively" conditions from Port Gaverne.

One of the two men, believed to be from the Birmingham area, had been washed out of his canoe and had managed to get ashore at the foot of the cliffs beneath the Castle Rock Hotel.

His friend, who had tried to assist him, also ended up on the rocks nearby.

Lifeboat spokesman Bob Bulgin said the wind had been Force 5 at the time and the sea conditions lively, which had called for a high degree of boat handling by helmsman John Collins, who managed to get the D Class lifeboat as close to the casualties as possible, enabling crewman Jeremy Thomas to get ashore to help the pair.

The third member of the crew of the lifeboat was Nikki Bradbury.

A rescue helicopter from RNAS Culdrose arrived at the scene and winched the canoeists to safety before returning Jeremy to the lifeboat.

One of the rescued canoeists was taken to Truro Hospital at Truro suffering from hypothermia.

In a curious twist of fate, the rescue was recorded on camera by holidaymaker Colin Edwards from Llanelli in Wales, who later discovered that lifeboat crewman Jeremy Thomas, who went ashore to help the two canoeists, is originally from Llanelli himself.

"Not only that, but his mother, Morwenna, is a friend of my wife, Mavis, and he used to go to school with our son, Jonathan," said Mr Edwards. "We knew he was down this way but never expected to come across him under these circumstances. We didn't realise it was him until we called in to the lifeboat station afterwards. The lifeboat crew did a marvellous job under quite difficult conditions."



The helicopter from RNAS Culdrose lifts one of the canoeists off the rocks.

Picture: Colin Edwards