

## wetsuit v.s. drysuit - no contest

Jay Babina

When we start kayaking and decide to purchase some type of cold water protection, we're usually making the decision based on our finances ... and it's also based on a bit of apprehension about the longevity of our kayaking interest and the actuality of paddling in the winter. We're usually financially overwhelmed since we still haven't recovered from the purchases of the kayak, spray skirt, PFD and paddle, and that not so inexpensive car rack system. With the average drysuit costing (\$350) - about 2 times as much as a Farmer John, and a basic Gortex suit (\$650+), the decision is a considerable one.

Kayak capsizes are actually rare and are mostly encountered by paddlers with a false sense of self-confidence who venture out into territory beyond their ability. It's this frame of mind that allows paddlers to convince themselves that the paddling Farmer John is all they need for adequate cold water protection.

From the standpoint of performance and safety, there's really is no choice. Kayaking stores carry loads of wetsuit apparel simply because it's an affordable alternative for the beginning kayaker and actually, it's more applicable for the river paddler where land is always close by. Even the fact that paddling Farmer Johns are 3 mm thick v.s. the divers wetsuits

which are 6 mm, gives you an indication of the lack of reality in the thinking or merchandising. If you take a swim into icy waters wearing a wetsuit Farmer John, your paddling day is over to say the least. It will protect you from cold shock for a short period but very quickly the shoulders will flood and you'll have to get out of the water and change into some dry clothes. If the cold wind is blowing and you're far from your car, you may not be able to warm up with out an outside heat source like heat packs, fire, warm drinks, etc. A dry hat or divers hood will help in your body's fight to stay warm and should always be included in your back-up clothing bag along with a towel.

The reason divers can use wetsuits successfully is because they are wearing a jacket and hood that protects water from entering the open chest and shoulder area of the Farmer John and very importantly, it protects the head. The wetsuit concept is based on using the whole system. The collar from the hood seals the top area of the suit and the full jacket protects the arms and under arms and also doubles up over the chest cavity. The most critical areas of heat loss for a submerged swimmer are the head, neck, underarms and groin. These are areas where major arteries run close to the surface without any muscle or fat protection.

The paddler who has no wetsuit jacket

and hood is basically using less than 1/3 of the intended wetsuit system. Your paddling jacket (even drytop) will eventually flood with water as it starts to infiltrate from under the spray skirt area. Don't forget, the whole intention of wearing this apparel is for immersion protection. That means a wet exit etc. Even falling in while launching can be a devastating affair in winter conditions.

So why not wear a divers wetsuit? Our sport is an aerobic one. In minutes you'll over heat, and the wetsuit resistance on your arms will fatigue you and disable your paddling ability very quickly. In contrast to paddlers, the diver never has to worry about over heating since he's underwater and actually swims with mostly leg muscles, using the arms very little. As kayakers, we actually have a unique problem: an aerobic sport with the chance of a cold water immersion.

We all know the term "Hypothermia"; where the body gets cold and many body functions slow down and finally cease to work, eventually leading to death. However it's Cold Shock that can be the real killer that we have to concern ourselves with. Skiers and hikers don't have to worry about cold shock. This is why the term "Cold Shock" is much less known and addressed than Hypothermia.

When you make a mistake and jump under a cold shower, you involuntarily gasp for air and your immediate reaction is "get out". Your heart starts racing and your reactions are out of control. This is just a touch of Cold Shock. Imagine being underwater and gasping like that and not being able to "get out". Ice cold water in your ears can cause nausea, disorientation, vertigo and pain, let alone total panic. The effects of cold shock and hypothermia are truly the most underestimated dangers of all who use the water for recreation. I'm not an expert on cold shock or hypothermia but I've read that once you encounter cold shock, your body will start to slow down to normal after several painful minutes. At that point you have to work fast to get out of the water or signal for help because Hypothermia starts to set in immediately. This means a gradual loss



Bobby Curtis playing in the surf at Napatree Point - photo: Tom Maziarz

of your arms, hands and total body strength making it almost impossible to do your normal self-rescue functions or even speak.

I once encountered a paddler on a winter day in a sweatshirt who noticed my NASA looking apparel and said "I guess I should be concerned about hypothermia". I responded, "don't worry about hypothermia, you'll never make it past the cold shock". He was soon paddling about 5 feet from shore. I don't mean to be cruel, but what do you say to someone who's wants to foolishly gamble with their life in frigid water.

The drysuit is really the protective device that allows us to have full cold water protection yet allows us freedom of movement without the overheating problem. You'll get used to the seal around the neck that bothers most people at first. If you stretch your neck seal over a large bottle or coffee can it will loosen up. However, don't cut it back. A ragged cut on a latex seal can lead to premature tearing.

Sell your couch or dining room set and get the Gortex suit. Since it breathes, it will give you years of protection and comfort whereas the non-gortex suit, although it works fine, tends to heat you up and gather moisture from perspiration. My beat up Gortex suit is 10 years old and is still going fine with one set of seal changes - and I don't plan on replacing it. If you can't part with your couch and are on a limited budget, then get a non-gortex Dry Suit over the Farmer John if possible. You can justify it psychologically by not thinking of it as a kayaking luxury item but necessary health insurance.

It's always a balancing act of how many layers to wear under the suit to maintain safety from immersion yet allowing you to stay cool enough to comfortably paddle. As you get over 24 years of age, your body tends to take longer and longer to warm up with aerobic activity and also tends to overheat more easily with sudden stress. In winter paddling start out very easy. If you let your body warm up slowly, you won't get as hot under the suit whereas if you charge right out with hard paddling, you'll be guaranteed to overheat. If you get too hot, just remove your hat for a few minutes and you'll usually cool right down. Keeping your head warm is key in winter paddling and having a dry hat and towel is a must. Most seasoned paddlers carry a divers hood on their kayak deck for those brutal cold days or just in case they get their head wet. One of the other best warming devices you can carry is hot soup, (avoid caffeine) however this requires you get out of your boat unless you have a day hatch or carry it in your cockpit.

How much underlayerment is enough? The easiest test is to take a swim and find out. It's one of the most realistic learning experiences you can do as a cold water paddler ...and of course, do this near your car when you're ready to quit. Just to exemplify the point of this article: I have never seen anyone swim in the water to test their apparel wearing a Farmer John - they know better!

The Farmer John / paddling jacket combination will give you protection, however, it's important to understand it's short comings. In an actual capsizes, it will buy you a little time to get back in your boat, but you won't be in the mood to hang around and socialize for long afterward and you most certainly won't be going for ice cream. Instead, you'll be in your car with the heater on full, changing your clothes and fantasizing about a hot tub. Believe me, if this unfortunate scenario ever occurs, you will run out and buy a drysuit the next day.

I didn't have a drysuit until my second year of paddling. It was an easy choice after one winter of sweating and discomfort while watching my friends comfortably get out of their drysuits totally dry and warm. It also gives me great peace of mind while paddling and most importantly, it allows me to do more fool hardy things.

Early spring weather brings warm days with frigid water ... and the water from Mass. north is cold water paddling all year long. So, you don't have to be a hard core winter paddler to enjoy the protection and security that the Dry Suit offers.

There is an irony to the entire dressing for immersion conflict. How about paddling in Maine in the summer when the water is frigid and the air is hot? Obviously, people take a quick plunge into the water at the beach and quickly retreat to their blanket and bake in the sun for a while. The real difference here is the "quick" part. If you're offshore and floating around for 10 minutes trying to do an un-practiced paddle float re-entry in 45 degree water with no back up clothing, you're in real trouble. And if the day clouds over and wind picks up the scenario changes dramatically again. People do get Hypothermia in the summer as well as in the colder months!

It's the duration and intensity of being cold and the ability to warm up that's the extreme deciding factors. This is why winter paddling poses a real concern to the paddler and it's the drysuit alone that allows us the necessary security to safely paddle in the winter.

**One last note of advice on winter paddling;  
- GET TO KNOW YOURSELF -**

***We all have a different tolerance of the cold and never forget if you paddle two hours away, you're going have to paddle two hours back and possibly into a head wind when you may start to chill. A sunny day is enormously different than a day that clouds over with an increasing wind even though the temperature remains the same. A 38° day inland feels like 20° when you're at water level with a chilling wind blowing.***

***I'm good for a couple hours in the icy winter. I chill fairly easily and never allow myself to be dragged along on a journey by my well-insulated friends that I will regret.***

***Quiet estuaries are great in the winter and offer wind protection. If you do paddle alone, don't go too far off shore unless you are very experienced and really know yourself, your abilities and have lots of back-up.***

***Remember that no kayaking equipment or skills will outweigh good decision making.***

- Jay Babina

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## cold Water forum

In early Dec. we plan on having a meeting which will include a cold water forum where we can trade advice on cold water paddling, discuss equipment, and experiences. We may have a dry suit seal replacement demonstration as well.

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## flares - demo - training

Paddlers Network will sponsor "Emergency Signaling Devices - Training and Demo on the Use of Flares" under the direction of the U.S. Coast Guard, on Saturday Nov. 11, at 1:00 PM in Norwalk, CT. This event is free and open to the public; pre-registration is required.

Indoor instruction will be followed by an outdoor, on-land demonstration. After Coast Guard inspection and approval, participants will have an opportunity to set off their own flares.

For more information and to register, please call Diane Worden at the Nature Center in Westport, CT at 203-227-7253, E-mail- DWorden@worldnet.att.net

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**Check the bulletin board for other impromptu trips listed by members - [www.connyak.org](http://www.connyak.org)**

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## CONNYAK MESSAGE SYSTEM (203) 603-4615

Information regarding events, trip schedule updates, cancellations, changes etc. will be heard at this number.



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## connyak report Cards

When report cards come out in late Dec., tardiness will be reflected on grades. Our posted departure times for trips is the "in the water, ready to depart and have a good time" time. So, please do your best to not make everyone wait for you.

Our groups usually paddle 2 hours at a medium/easy pace with a stop for lunch and a paddle back. This is what we consider a beginners trip. The normal route is along shore and has some protection available. If you want to paddle with the group, please be aware that this is the scenario and we could end up paddling into a head wind. In the fall, and early spring, the same trips could become very intermediate because of the constant wind which will generate much rougher conditions. Most paddlers with 6 months of paddling experience and average fitness can easily keep up with our groups.

As we get into winter or cold months, we often paddle in estuaries for wind protection. Groups of paddlers who paddle in the real winter, paddle with friends or in smaller groups where abilities are known.

People have inquired about whether ConnYak runs trips in the winter. We don't have organized ConnYak paddles in the winter simply because the paddlers who do engage in this don't want to take along beginner paddlers or deal with large groups. I'm sure there will be some announcements of groups on the ConnYak bulletin board by those who would like to paddle in quite estuaries in the colder months. As was mentioned in the lead article, when someone gets cold, it's over - they come in or the group escorts them in. This is why people with the same general abilities or desires will choose to paddle together in the winter and it's why having large groups during this period becomes cumbersome. If the wind kicks up and everyone wants to hitail it in, nobody really wants to sit there and wait while someone struggles to make progress. It's not that paddlers don't look out for each other, it just that they try to make good decisions from the start. You just have to be so much more cautious when paddling in the winter.

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## T's for articles

T-shirts for newsletter contributions. Mention size when you submit articles.

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**Note: All paddlers are responsible for their own safety, including dressing for immersion. You must wear a CG approved PFD and a spray skirt. The boat and equipment must meet CG requirements, including an appropriate signaling device. Beginners must have taken a basic course and be proficient in performing a wet exit, paddle float re-entry and carry a pump. Kayaks without bulkheads should have floatation installed. (always carry extra dry clothes, food and water) Paddlers are expected to show a sense of awareness as far as staying with the group.**

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## connYak Meeting

Anne & Bill Zeller - Country Canoeist - NH  
FRIDAY, NOV. 17, 7 PM, ESSEX TOWN HALL

### AN ARCTIC BLAST SLIDE SHOW & TALK

Follow paddler/photographer Bill Zeller and 4 friends on a 400 mile canoe expedition through the new Canadian province of Nunavut. Paddle with them through ice choked lakes and rock filled rivers. See large herds of Caribou and Muskox as well as Arctic Wolves, barren grounds Grizzly Bear and a Wolverine. This expedition across the treeless tundra links 5 rivers in 3 different watersheds on it's way across the Arctic Circle to Bathurst Inlet on the Arctic Ocean.

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#### DIRECTIONS TO THE ESSEX TOWN HALL

Approaching from the North on Route 9, take Exit 3. At the end of the exit ramp, turn left and go under the Route 9 bridge to the light. Turn left at this light on to West Avenue.

Approaching from the South on Route 9, take Exit 3. At the end of the exit ramp turn left and go to the light. Turn right at this light on to West Avenue.

**The Town Hall is about a third of a mile up the hill on the left at the corner of West Avenue and Grove Street. Turn left on Grove Street - parking is in the back of the building.**

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## cold Water boot trick

Most paddlers try very hard not to step in too deep on launching in the winter. If you don't have the Chota tall boots, launching into frigid water with short boots with zippers can produce some unpleasant results if water leaks through the zippers or comes over the top. You can buy waterproof socks or you can put a grocery store produce plastic bag over each sock before you put on your boots and it will give you a liner that protects your socks from getting wet if your boots leak a little water. Don't waste your money on a Gortex (breathable) sock inside a Neoprene boot. A wickable sock liner under Polartec socks will do you more good. Best free plastic bag - Stop & Shop Bakery Dept. Don't buy anything fattening!

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## carpet trick

A small piece of carpet is great for taking off your dry suit outside your car and avoids getting sand all over your feet as well as keeps you warm.

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## Arriving on time trick

Ever wonder how some paddlers always arrive at a ConnYak paddle on time? It's easy; pretend it's a job, not an adventure.



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## NOVEMBER TRIPS

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### EAST RIVER - GUILFORD/ MADISON

SATURDAY, NOV 11 - GUILFORD

Inland waterway paddling - pack lunch.

**In the water by 10. We have to depart at 10 to keep the tide in our favor!**

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#### GUILFORD LAUNCH SITE ...DIRECTIONS

Exit 58 off Rt. 95. Head (south) toward water on Rt. 77. Take a right and left around the Town Green and continue on Rt 77 to the end of the Green. Continue Straight ahead on Whitfield street to the end where there's a launch ramp.

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### GUILFORD SHORE PADDLE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18  
MADISON E. RIVER LAUNCH SITE

Paddling along the Guilford coastline towards Branford.

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#### DIRECTIONS -

Rt. 95 - Exit 59 Goose Lane-Guilford  
End of exit head south (towards water) 50 yards to light.  
Take a left on Rt. 1 - proceed 1/4 mile under RR bridge. Continue until you go over a small bridge (Neck river) take your 1st right on Neck Rd. (bear right) Follow Neck rd. to the end and you'll be forced left on to Ridgewood Ave. Continue on to the Madison Boat Launch. Launch time 10:00 a.m. (In the water) pack lunch.

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## INSTRUCTION

Learn or enhance your skills with the art of Greenland style paddling and rolling. BCU Coach and ACA Certified Greenland Style instructor Fern Usen can be contacted at fernusen@aol.com for private or group workshops.

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## CONNYPK TRIP RATINGS

Any trip can change dramatically due to conditions - as in all sea kayaking.

**(N) Novice:** Novice paddlers are expected to be able to keep up with the leisurely group pace or will be turned back.

**(I) Intermediate:** Fully capable of self rescue, confident paddling stroke and braces.

**(A) Advanced:** A dependable roll, able to rescue others, strong, experienced paddler.



# CLASSIFIED

Wilderness Systems Alto with rudder. Yellow Skirt and floatation bags. \$650/obo. Call (203) 457-9983.

Kayook plus with rudder. 8 months old, like new, \$900.00. 860-526-1410, 860-663-2069

Ocean Kayak Frenzy with backrest-1 year old \$325 and Ocean Kayak Yak Board \$250. 203-235-6721 after 6

Current Designs Slipstream 16' X 22", Glass, one year old. Day hatch, skeg.-spray skirt. \$2,000. Men's XL Gore-Tex drytop, one year old, \$250. Call 203-256-1913

Diriego, 17.5' Sea Kayak, Kevlar/Fiberglass w/wood trim & rudder. \$1,200.00 203-734-4452 kck@ashcreek.net

Nautraid One Expedition (foldable) 15'3" red & black \$1800. or best offer. 860-521-6070

Solstice GT, Current Designs. Fiberglass, red over white. Excellent condition, used 2 seasons. Norwalk, (203) 855-9707, \$1700.

Stripper canoe, 18'x36", western red cedar hull, ash. Excellent condition. \$1,000. Call (860) 653-5899..

Necky Arluk 1.9 kevlar 17'x22" 45lbs new in 1996 ex. condition. Call 203 656-0946. mmarkb@juno.com

Touring/Surfing Sea Kayak: Sun Maximum Velocity 13' x, 25" in Xytec \$675. SurfKayakers@aol.com

Daggar Meridian Kevlar 43 lbs. 16' x 22". Yellow / white \$1600. (860) 388-4991, dmiller04@snet.net

Wilderness Systems Pamlico double-2 person \$500. Jim 203- 345-0090

Wilderness Systems Tchaika, fiberglass w/rudder, neoprene sprayskirt yellow/white used 4 times. \$1,500 (203)483-7705.

Old Town Canoe. 17' OTCA, wood/canvas, 1968 vintage, refurbished. \$2900.00, trade/cash for high end Kevlar kayak 203-458-3666 or RichBECsl@aol.com

P&H Sirius(s) Chinese Red / White, skeg - \$1650, 1997 in excellent condition. Call 860 767 0696.

Sealution - Wilderness Systems. 16' 6" x 22" fiberglass, light gray with black trim. Rudderless with compass, spray skirt, VCP hatches - \$900.

Bob (860) 521-9054 (before 10 pm)

Red Perception Spectrum Expedition (rudder, bulkhead, hatch, spray skirt and cockpit cover for \$549. Exc cond.

Yellow Perception Keowee 2 with spray skirt for \$499. 860 434-9785 or ckayakers@worldnet.att.net

2000 Necky Looksha Sport - expedition - front/rear bulkheads & rudder 14' 4" x 22.5" red polymer \$850 1-860-434-0221 or dwc@neca.com

Necky Looksha kayak-poly. 17 ft. two neoprene hatches, bulkheads, rudder, multi-chined hull, spray skirt included. \$700. Call 914-967-3164

Necky Tesla-NM. Used Once. 17', Kevlar, Mango / white, blue trim, large cockpit, rudder, Ckpt. cover. Two Werner paddles. \$2,500. 1-860-526-3344

Two piece 220 cm Lendal crankshaft paddle : Carbon 1F Archipelago blades New \$340 - slightly used at \$240. . oldphoto@connix.com / (203) 281-0066

DRYTOP - BomberGear breathable drytop (S). Brand new (with tags still on). Just \$150! Call Fern at 860-643-8303 or email fernusen@aol.com

Boreal Ellesmere, used one season, Yellow over Yellow, Kevlar, day hatch, drop-down skeg, \$2700 new \$2195.

E-mail ckayaker01@mindspring.com tel 203-481-1881.

17 Boreal Alvik w/ Spray Skirt Fiberglass, yellow over white. Rudder and two hatches. \$1875. 203-393-1461 or email: pleaholmes@worldnet.att.net.

## KAYAKING CLASSES

Urban Eskimo Kayaking

Mike Falconeri / Nancy Lovelace

Skills Workshops: Nov 11, Dec 2

Safety & Rescue: Nov 12, Dec 3

Rolling: Nov 18, Dec 16 & 17

Sheehan High School pool in Wallingford

Call for specifics - Nancy at 860 228 0105

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:

Jay Babina e-mail: jbabina@snet.net

7 Jeffrey Lane, Branford, CT 06405

203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136

## TO JOIN CONNYAK...

ConnYak is a non profit club that is open to all paddlers interested in sea kayaking from any location. ConnYak annual membership fee is \$15. Membership includes monthly newsletter, paddles, functions etc.

Send inquiries to: Ed Milnes

35 Hampton Park, Branford, CT 06405

**E-MAIL: CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG**

**WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG**



c/o Ed Milnes 35 Hampton Park  
Branford, CT 06405