

CONN YAK

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

June 2002

ROUGH WATER CLASS

W/ KEN FINK

By Wayne Smith

Last month, a group of us went Maine to take a 3 day rough water training class with Ken Fink, of Poseidon Kayak Imports. We all got to our motel in Wiscasset Friday night, and were ready to go. The weather report looked promising --- high winds and showers. Perfect for a rough water class.

Saturday dawned, and we met Ken at Christmas Cove in South Bristol at the mouth of the Damariscotta River. We spent the morning on land going over various topics of interest, including the fluid dynamics of boat control and paddle strokes, weathercocking, safety, and several carnage stories with analyses of what went wrong. Ken's approach is to start off with the basics, and work his way up to the harder stuff. This way, everyone's confidence is built continually throughout the weekend.

After lunch, it was off into the river for a little basic training. The wind was blowing about 20 knots from the west, which was perfect for the purposes of the day's schedule. Ken had set up the class such that it starts with basic forward stroke mechanics, turning, and edging. No rudders or skegs were allowed to be deployed. Being both rudderless and skegless myself, I put a little extra weight in my stern, which makes my Caribou behave neutrally in winds up to 30 knots. Ken said he'd have preferred I didn't, but if I paddle that way all the time, it would be acceptable.

Ken spent some time with Judith, Steve, Kate, and Rusty, working on improving their stroke mechanics, with the reasoning that paddling would be much easier once they made the adjustment.

Sheldon and I were exempt from this part, because we were using Greenland paddles (Ken admitted that while he's not an authority on Greenland paddling, he can spot bad technique). We all did the exercises regardless, as they are good practice. Now it was time to do drills. Paddling a straight course in beam winds, paddling up and downwind, and surfing waves. All good fun, and with constant input from Ken.

We then went back into the cove, and did rescues. We had to be able to do an assisted rescue in 45 seconds start to finish. Everyone got their crack at it with a few pointers on how to improve what we already knew, and then we discussed alternative rescue strategies.

Sunday was the day we were to get into the meat of the course: swells, rock gardens, surfing over and between ledges, and paddling in breaking waves and clapotis (Reflected waves). Problem was, mother nature really didn't cooperate a whole lot. We had some small swells, maybe one and a half to two feet. We paddled around for a while, until the stage of the tide was just right. We paddled to a ledge that was just above the

surface, and Ken showed us how to time a swell so that you can paddle over the rocks both up and downstream. From there,

we went to another ledge with bigger breakers and another fully exposed ledge just beyond it, and we took breaking waves across our beam while being hit by reflected waves on the other side. We then went up to Thrumcap Island, and paddled right on the exposed side of the island in the swell and reflected waves, and did a little rock gardening in the swells.

On our way back in from Thrumcap, a baby harbor porpoise swam right towards me and veered off about 10 feet away. Very cool stuff. We then headed on to "the mixmaster", which is a ledge that is configured such that it stirs up the swell and waves in a chaotic mess. There wasn't much swell, and the tide was low by this point, so we paddled up a cleft in the rocks just wide enough for a kayak. The swells were running through the cleft, and Ken had us practice running both up and downstream. Downstream was definitely the most fun. He also explained how to assess a ledge or rock garden for hazards before going in --- probably the best advice we got all weekend. Having been pitchpoled once myself onto a jetty, I took this advice to heart. Rocks hurt if you land on them. We took Ken out for dinner afterwards.

Monday looked promising at the start. The weather service said that the likelihood of rain north of Portland was slim until late in the day, the winds would be 10-15 knots, and building, and the tide was running in. Perfect for a little surf training at the mouth of the Kennebec River at Popham Beach. This is not a place to toy with..people have died



(L to R) Sea kayak guru Ken Fink (Poseidon Kayak Imports), Kate Powers, Steve Barresi, ConnYak President Wayne Smith, Judith Meyers, Sheldon Penn, Rusty Norton

Rough Water Class...

here in kayaks because of the currents. The tide has to be running in to be truly safe here. And remember, estuarine currents keep running out for quite some time after low tide, often more than an hour. There were literally scores of seals, porpoises, and osprey all feeding on alewives coming into the Kennebec with the tide. And as we stood there on the beach, it started raining. Harder than any of us would have liked. And it was cold and windy, with little to no surf in sight. We talked with Ken for quite some time, and all agreed to abort. Sheldon and I adhered to my Maine paddling motto: "When the weather gets tough, tough paddlers go to LL Bean". Everyone else made their respective ways home.

We are going to complete the course another weekend this summer, after having some time to practice what we've learned so far. I'll have more to tell then. Ken is a very good teacher, and has a wealth of knowledge relating to paddling. He's also just good fun to talk to and paddle with as well.

Baja

MEXICO

BY PETER SMITH

After reading an article about sea kayaking in Baja Mexico in Atlantic Coastal Kayaker magazine, Claudine and I became inspired -- why not go kayaking where the water isn't so cold that it makes you scream? We had developed an inner sense of purpose common to ducks, geese, and New Englanders in January.

Our previous kayak camping trips have been self-supported, but as we weren't driving to Baja it was clearly time to try out an expedition outfitter. My idea of researching the available companies was to note which one was mentioned in the ACK article and call them up. The company is called Baja Expeditions, and they offer a variety of kayaking trips. We elected to do the one that appeared to offer the most paddling, a 10-day trip covering 65 miles between Loreto and LaPaz. This is in the southeastern portion of Baja, on the Sea of Cortez (just in case your geography isn't any better than mine is).

I won't hold you in suspense -- this trip exceeded our expectations. When I imagined Baja I was picturing a flat featureless desert (OK, so I don't have a sophis-

ticated idea of the world). Wrong. It turns out that a range of mountains extends down the entire coast where we were paddling. We were constantly seeing new variations of wind sculptured sandstone cliffs with a jagged mountain range for a backdrop. At one point we paddled into a sea cave, and later in the trip we paddled through a great arch-tunnel -- two firsts for me. There are plenty of beaches too, many of them suitable for magazine advertisements.

The way the expedition company operated the trip was remarkably decadent, but Claudine and I are so flexible that we quickly adjusted to catered camping. We were supplied with three really good meals a day, plus "happy hour" every evening. It is obvious that the people who run these things figure out how to keep customers contented. There were twelve of us plus two guides, using 4 single kayaks and 5 doubles. We also had a support boat with a captain, cook, and two helpers who would set up camp for us every evening (we did have to set up our own tents though!). They also had an outboard motorboat that was used to shuttle people and equipment to the beach, which we also used for whale and dolphin watching excursions.

Our guides, Jesus and Diego, were two full of fun guys in their twenties who were very good at their jobs. They were always prepared with a new activity even when we were wind-bound, and they were good at pointing out things we would have missed. Without being overt about it they also kept a close eye on everyone. If someone backed into a cactus, a pair of tweezers would be produced and the problem matter-of-factly resolved. I noticed that within the context of our general conversations we were constantly being instructed in little matters. For instance, we didn't want to blunder around in waist deep water and step on a stingray since it would force the critter to live up to his name. The technique for walking in water with a sandy bottom is to "Baja shuffle." The theory is that we bump the rascals with our toes so they could swim off with no harm done on either side. No one encountered any stingrays on our trip, but one of the support crew had been nailed a few weeks earlier so I embraced the new method of locomotion.

Speaking of sea life, we saw three kinds of whales including an enormous blue whale that came up right beside the boat very unexpectedly. We saw a pod of dolphins that numbered in the hundreds, jumping everywhere and playing under

our boat and in our wake. We saw a sea turtle, countless rays swimming near the surface, flying fish, and sea lions. I guess I should expand a bit on the sea lions. At a sea lion rookery and were provided with wet suits, fins, masks and snorkels, and advice. The pups would play with us in the water, but it would be in our best personal interest not to associate with the adults.

Talk about cool! They are like quicksilver in the water, swimming all around a person in a blink. Several times they even jumped over our heads! I took half a roll of pictures with my underwater camera, and most of them are nothing but a blur (I did get one picture of a sea lion looking me right in the eye, so it was a success). After I recovered from my first swim, (for me snorkeling is not actually swimming, it's more along the line of a protracted drowning) I immediately went back for a second. This time I found a new friend who kept swimming directly at me with it's mouth open (I was very impressed with the size of their teeth). It was fascinating how this creature could swim straight at me at high speed to within a foot, and make a 180-degree hairpin turn away without any apparent loss of speed. My speed on the other hand was glacial by comparison, so there wasn't the slightest point in trying to dodge or flinch. We were on his turf, as it were. The sea lion repeated this behavior about six times before it began to dawn on me that: (a) it was bigger than the others, and (b) it might be trying to communicate something to me, (like, "go away or I'll bite you!"). I had been so fascinated watching that I had become oblivious to my situation, but I was about half-drowned again by then anyway so I retreated back to the boat. What an experience! Of course everyone had their own adventures with the sea lions, but I have to say that some members of our group had limited story-telling skills. Several stories were abridged to "wow!" or "awesome!"

Did I mention that this was a kayaking trip? Claudine and I were among those who were confined to a double kayak during our traveling, although we did borrow the singles for side trips around the camping areas. We had prepared ourselves psychologically for being in a double, because guide outfits like this love to use doubles for obvious reasons. In fact we did very well sharing a double, with only a couple of very minor disagreements about which direction to take. I was able to effortlessly resolve that type of issue since I was the person



EAGLE WATCH

By Paul Donoski

Saturday, February 16 during the Essex Annual Eagle Watch Festival 12 ConnYakers and one RICA paddler set out from the Essex town launch for some eagle watching. This paddle was initiated by my Bulletin Board notice looking for some daybreak paddlers to spot eagles on the Connecticut River. I quickly learned that daybreak is not a widely popular paddling time. It might be the best time to watch feeding eagles on the River but not kayakers who have to drive an hour or more to launch their kayaks. In protest I changed the launch time to the more civil 10 am.

I arrived at the launch site about two hours before launch time. I immediately spotted two young eagles perched in a tree at the channel between North Cove and the River. I launched and paddled to the South around Essex Island Marina. Approaching the eagles from the River I was able to get a good view without spooking them. I returned to the launch to wait for the rest of the group. By the time the everyone arrived the eagles were gone and my claim to have seen them met with puzzled looks and disbelief.

We paddled up River past Hamburg Cove to the Southern tip of Selden Island. I have done a couple dozen paddles on the Connecticut but never like this. The River was like a sheet of glass with the only surface disturbance being the wake of our kayaks and paddles. The trip was so smooth that we decided to circumnavigate Selden Island. Up to now other than some hawks we hadn't seen a single eagle. We did see the Selden Island attack swan which made a bluff charge at the last kayak. Again remember the ConnYak motto "Don't be last." I believe the size of our group kept his aggression level down. Someone suggested we capture this swan, train him to attack only jet skis and then clone him. Wow! ConnYak jet ski attack swans for sale. I plan to follow up on this idea.

After a lunch on the North shore of Selden we headed back down river. By this time we lost our glass surface and had a good head wind to contend with. We followed the West side of the river and approached the North Essex Sailing Club where people were gathered to look for eagles. Upon our greeting to the crowd most said they hadn't seen any eagles. Wayne Smith decided to show them some ConnYak skills and did two quick rolls. This probably made the day for some of the crowd. It probably also accounts for the bad cold Wayne came down with the following week.

Back at the launch Judy Myers insisted she had to capsize and do a cowgirl re-entry. She had never had a cold water dunking in her dry suit. I must admit watching her from shore while Wayne and Rusty floated nearby I don't think she even got her face wet she exited her cockpit so fast. After she was back in her kayak she said once was enough for today. We did not see any eagles other than "my two" but we did have a great 9 mile paddle. Now maybe people will take me seriously when I recommend a daybreak launch for wildlife watching. Nah! I doubt it.

in back controlling the rudder. Actually we both enjoyed the boat, it was generally faster than the singles and very easy to handle. We never did get around to trying a roll in it, but the cockpit was so big I'm certain we would have fallen out.

Baja was a great place for us. Imagine having a great dinner on the beach just after sundown while listening to the sounds of whales blowing in the bay. One woman in our group had just done the exact trip just four months earlier. I can identify with her -- we are ready to go back and do it all over again too.



EVENTS



2ND ANNUAL MEET AT THE BEACH

Bluff Point State Park - Groton
SAT. JUNE 15 - 10 AM - ?

Kayak builders gathering. Stitch and Glue, Strip-Built, Skin on Frame - all styles welcome. Non builders - paddlers and interest parties welcome. (Free)

This is a gathering of paddlers (builders/designers) interested in sharing ideas and showing their boats to each other and the public. Most boats are available for trials (with permission).

SAT. JUNE 8TH PADDLES

Four Mile River -10 AM Launch Time.
Bluff Point -10 AM Launch Time.

SUN. JUNE 9TH PADDLES

Four Mile River -10 AM Launch Time.
Bluff Point -10 AM Launch Time.
Pack lunch.

CIRCUMNAVIGATION

JAMESTOWN RI SUNDAY, JUNE 30

Ft Wetherill, Jamestown, RI. In the water promptly at 10:00 AM. Roughly 18 - 20 nautical miles depending on conditions at beavertail point. We will have 2 scheduled stops. Level: Advanced (See launch site directory online for directions)

Rain, predicted thunderstorms, or winds in excess of 25 knots postpone.

Call (860) 875-0642 or email connyak@

June 22, 23 overnight CT river campout

Put in at Vernon Dam in lower VT at 8:00 Sat morning. Paddle down stream 10 miles to Munn's Ferry campground and stay overnight. Continue on down stream 12 miles to Barton's Cove campground on Sunday. This section of the river is sparsely populated except around Barton's cove. A beautiful scenic paddle! The paddle will be limited to 10 persons.

Contact David Cornell at 860-875-4981 if you are interested in attending.

Check the bulletin board for other impromptu trips listed by members - www.connyak.org

We need paddles listed by members this year to avoid overcrowding launch sites.

CLASSIFIED

Derek Hutchinson Toksook paddle new 230 . New \$330 now \$275 or best offer. 860-561-4415 work 860-635-1979 email: bobyak2@aol.com

Prijon Sea Gull 16' 6" x 24" Glass kayak, compass deck bilge pump, Rudder.\$1,350.00 / OBO. 860.767.1728. Email: Kayaker@KayakForFun.com

Dry-tops. Stohlquist. One new, one used.\$100 & \$65. Both mens medium. Tom 413-593-6167.

Old Town Castine Kayak 14' beginners kayak. red, 2 hatches, paddle and skirt. \$600. 860-985-6893

Valley Skerray, Fiberglass, Blue over White, with skeg and Chimp Pump. Great condition! \$1700 203-854-9713 brianenichols@aol.com

Wilderness Systems Sealution, Fiberglass with rudder, 16'8,aqua / white. \$1500, (860) 873-1884

Aquaterra Double - Gemini, poly, tandem,wide beam, great for the kids or lake.Asking\$600.00 or best offer. Call 860-388-2464 Sharon.

BRAND NEW Surf/whitewater kayak. Selling for 1/2 retail. Riot Dominatrix 44. Blue composite. \$600 contact Don at donpwhite@aol.com

Perception Captiva 16' X 25" poly. Rudder, two bulk heads, spray skirt, cockpit cover. Candlewood lake area. \$700 Keith 203-312-0110

'93 Wilderness Systems Tchaika with float bags, fiberglass, no rudder, no hatches, purple over white. \$750.00. 860-444-6950 orriley@uconnect.net.

Paddling partner wanted M/F, intermediate skills - CT shoreline or rivers - Phil Goodsell 860-436-4507

Perception Sea Lion S, 16' 7", fiberglass, 1997, yellow/white, two hatches, rudder, new \$2180, \$1800. 860-572-7461 or vicsitty@aol.com .Paddle, aquabound, fbgl\$100. Skirt \$50. Paddlefloat \$40. Kayak cart \$100.Yakama, hully rollers (4) \$100. 860-572-7461 after May 1, e-mail vicsitty@aol.com

Wanted. Sparrow Hawk - Wilderness Systems call: 413-593-6167Necky Looksha IV for sale, red, poly, with rudder and 2 good sized hatches. Stored indoors, in excellentcondition. \$1000 includes skirt and compass. Email kmack2@earthlink.net

Two Werner paddles for sale; one left hand control San Juan and one right hand control Camano . Both in Fiberglass . \$175.00 each . Call 203 226 9674 days or 203 454 2278 eves .

Double Kayak- Necky Tofino (fiberglass), yellow over white. Sprayskirts and paddles. Extremely stable/seaworthy, excellent condition. \$1800.00 203-270-9134 (Newtown, CT.) or (haeger1@earthlink.net)

Anus Acuta...red deck, white hull, skeg, factory installed pump,new VCP hatch covers..good condition. (718 823-4672)or E-mail...\$1450.00

INSTRUCTION

Urban Eskimo Kayaking Classes
Mike Falconeri 203-284-9212
www.uekayaking.com

GREENLAND STYLE INSTRUCTION

Instructors: Fern Usen, *BCU Coach and ACA Certified* and Donald White.
Call 860-643-8303 email: fernusen@aol.com

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:

ConnYak, P.O. Box 197, Ellington, CT 06029
E-MAIL: CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG

WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

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

Please contact the Newsletter when items are sold.



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