

CONN YAK

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

March 2003

A Lesson in Greenland-Style Paddling

with Doug Van Doren

By Bianca Wulff

Aurora, Illinois? Kayaking was not the first thing that came to my mind when I found out that I would have to fly to Aurora for a business trip in late December of 2002. But it didn't take long. Aurora...means flying into Chicago...which is located on Lake Michigan...wonder if I could squeeze in a kayak trip while I'm there?

That evening, I opened my mailbox to find the Greenland Kayaking video by Doug Van Doren that I had ordered. I had recently switched to a Greenland-style boat (a Betsie Bay Valkyrie) and paddle, and I wanted some instruction on paddling technique. This video had been recommended to me by fellow ConnYak members. Doug has studied Greenland-style paddling (he refers to his approach as "narrow-bladed paddling" for more than a decade. He wrote the traditional paddling curriculum for the Nordkapp Trust, is a level three BCU coach, and an excellent teacher. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and paddles on Lake Michigan regularly. I watched Doug's video that night, and called him the next morning.

"Hi Doug, you don't know me, but I'm

going to be in your neighborhood next week, and I wonder if you have the time to do a lesson?" Doug is a member of the clergy, and "next week" meant the Saturday before Christmas. Not exactly perfect timing. It took him at least ten seconds to decide. "Paddling? Sure. All we need to do is find some open water, so we'll stand a chance." We agreed to meet at the beach in Grand Haven, Michigan, on Saturday morning.

Saturday morning came, and I was on the beach at Grand Haven. I had driven six hours through a snowstorm the night before to get there, and now the temperatures, and the winds, were in the 20s. Lake Michigan was in motion, with six lines of surf pounding the beach. Not exactly perfect conditions for a lesson on stroke mechanics. After Doug arrived, we drove about a mile up the Grand River, which empties into the lake at Grand Haven. The river is often iced over at this time of year, but today the water was open. The wind was still blowing 20+ knots, but the water was flat. Time for the fun to begin.

We started in the parking lot, sitting on the ground. Doug showed me the basic stroke. "Grasp the paddle with your hands about shoulder width apart. Sit up straight. To begin, just practice torso rotation. This is the key to the stroke.

"Hold the paddle low, near your lap, with your elbows by your sides and bent

continued...



Alright, alright, we give up! Enough! Photo - Tom Maziarz

KAYAK REGISTRATION CT PADDLERS FIGHT 2 SMALL BOAT REGISTRATION BILLS

by Wayne Smith

Round 2 of the soap opera "As regulation spreads" played out on a snowy February 18th morning in Hartford. A group of about a dozen paddlers, rowers, outfitters, and one state representative showed up to testify against SB 600 and HB 6205.

The transportation committee was apparently prepared this year for public outcry on the issue. After last year's "Homeland Security" charade, Representative Panaroni changed his tactics to those of the Connecticut Marine Trades Association (CMTA), and relied on some very questionable and partly irrelevant statistics. By irrelevant, I mean they were not relying on statistics for just Connecticut, they were using data from other states in the First Coast Guard District as well, which is not good lawmaking. Our legislature should only be interested in events and people in Connecticut.

The public hearing began, and the first opponent to the bills was a legislator. He came right out and said that he didn't see any need or compelling reason for this legislation, and that it should be dropped. The other speakers then gave their testimony.

I attacked the bills on their stated purpose - that registering kayaks, canoes, rowboats, etc, would somehow magically make them safer. I also added that the DEP would have to be enlarged considerably to enforce the law, and that the bills were just an excuse to create more government where none is either needed or wanted. Rep Panaroni questioned me afterwards and tried changing the subject to rental safety, an unrelated bill of his that would require

continued...

at 90 degrees. Now, see how far you can move the paddle forward and back just by rotating your torso. Don't think of it as pushing your shoulder forward. You need to rotate your entire spine, down to your tailbone, so think of the rotation as originating very low in your back. Your head remains looking straight forward.

"Next, you can include your arms in the movement. As the right side of your torso rotates forward, your right hand moves straight forward along the line of the gunwale (not across the boat). When your arm is almost completely straight, open your right hand so that you are only gripping the paddle shaft with your thumb, index, and middle fingers. This gives you just a bit more reach than if you keep your hand closed.

"Now, with the blade as far forward as you can get it (still sitting up straight, don't lean forward), plant the blade straight down into the water. Pull the blade back by twisting your torso. As you rotate back, complete the recovery by bringing your arm back until your elbow is at your side. Continue to twist your torso so that your left side comes forward, with your left arm simultaneously moving forward in a straight line along the gunwale. Again, open your hand to obtain just a bit more extension of the blade, then plant the blade firmly down into the water, and twist your torso to pull the blade back."

With the basics mastered in the parking lot, we moved to the water. Doug has two Valkyries, and he was kind enough to loan me one for the lesson, along with a featherweight wood/carbon fiber Greenland paddle (also built by Betsie Bay). Once on the water, he corrected my stroke, and added further refinements.

My natural tendency is to hold the paddle with my hands wide, and to lean forward. Doug pointed out the advantages to sitting upright, and to keeping the hands not more than shoulder width apart. Sitting upright allows the paddler to keep the chest open. This, in turn, allows much greater torso rotation. Greater torso rotation means getting the blade further forward, leading to a more efficient stroke.

Although it seems counterintuitive, a narrow grip on the paddle shaft also increases the efficiency of the stroke. With a narrow grip, there is more shaft and paddle beyond the hands than there is with a wide grip. This puts the paddle blade further forward at the "catch," increasing the length of each stroke. Of

course, it takes more effort to pull the blade back under these circumstances due to the greater leverage of the blade. However, if that effort is supplied through torso rotation, as opposed to pulling with the arm and shoulder, it is not a problem.

Torso rotation, combined with keeping the paddle low, is the core of this stroke. Torso rotation is powered by the internal and external oblique muscles, which wrap around the lower abdomen. These muscles are designed to produce powerful, repetitive motion. When most of the movement of the blade is produced by torso rotation, most of the work is being done by the obliques. Keeping the paddle shaft low, with the elbows tucked close to the sides, transfers even more of the load to the obliques. (A more vertical paddle shaft, in contrast, sends some of the load to the shoulders and arms.)

While some people have very powerful arms and shoulders, others do not. Most healthy people, however, have more than sufficient strength in their obliques to drive a kayak at a very good speed. Because obliques are designed for repetitive, twisting motion, paddling with torso rotation is a natural movement, with a very low risk of injury. Arms and shoulders are not designed for the repetitive motion of an arm-based stroke, and therefore this type of stroke carries a higher risk of injury. Doug's bottom line: "Transferring most of the load of paddling onto the obliques takes maximum advantage of the body's design characteristics, resulting in greater speed for less effort, and a much lower risk of injury."

The hips, feet and legs play a critical role in the stroke Doug taught me. As the right side of the body rotates forward, the right hip twists forward and the left hip twists back. Consequently, the right knee bends, and the left knee straightens. As the paddle is planted, the right side of the torso begins to rotate back, and the right leg simultaneously drives forward. Doug suggested that I imagine the paddle blade stuck in one place in the water when I plant it. Driving my leg forward by rotating my torso is what drives the boat forward past the paddle. The amount of force it is possible to generate with this technique is impressive. Doug is not a large man, yet he is easily capable of bending the foot pegs in a boat when paddling. His own boat has wooden blocks against the forward bulkhead instead of foot pegs for this very reason.

The bulk of the power in Doug's stroke

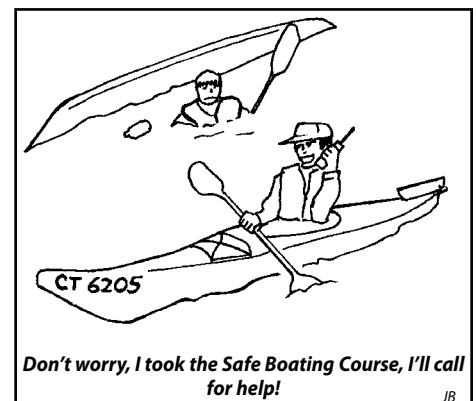
is generated in the beginning. He emphasizes the importance of planting the blade down firmly into the water, and rotating strongly while driving forward with the leg and foot. He advised me to tilt the top edge of my paddle blade forward just enough so that it would be pulled down quickly at the plant. He ends the stroke with the elbow at the side, and the blade not much further back than the hip.

For normal cruising, Doug paddles at about 84 stokes per minute and can maintain a speed of 5 and a half mph for hours at a time with his 17 foot boat.

On my first group paddle after my lesson with Doug, I found myself paddling comfortably near the front of the group while traveling against a 15 knot headwind. Prior to my lesson, conditions such as those would have put me at the back of the group, working hard to keep up. Simply taking the burden of paddling off of my arms and shoulders, and transferring it to my oblique muscles through torso rotation has put significantly more power into my stroke.

I would happily drive another six hours in a snowstorm in order to spend a few hours paddling with Doug Van Doren. My paddling skills have improved by an order of magnitude, thanks to his instruction. I know I have a great deal more to learn, but I have a solid foundation from which to build as I continue to unravel the details of this stroke in the years to come.

For those who are interested in Doug's instructional video, it is titled "Greenland Style Kayaking." It is available from Doug, who can be reached at DVDoren@aol.com.



Registration Cont.

renters to first have a safe boating certificate. I obliged him, and said that the scuba community successfully regulates themselves, and that is the vision I have for paddling. I added that I thought the state could not do the job as well, and that safety would actually suffer if such laws were enacted.

Dick Gamble added in his testimony that if the state were truly interested in safety, they would require all boaters and their passengers to wear PFD's at all times. That alone would cut the number of boating fatalities dramatically. The point wasn't even acknowledged. Jay Babina added that paddling skills cannot be taught from a book or by a two hour class and test; they must be taught over the course of time, and in the water. Paul Donoski made the point that registration amounts to nothing more than expanded taxation. Dennis Mc Neil spoke of the current state budget crisis, and asked how the legislature could justify enacting an unneeded law that would necessitate a state hiring spree to enforce it in a time of massive layoffs. Nick Schade testified that the CMTA's statistics were questionable at best, and that in Connecticut, there was an average of about 1.5 paddler deaths per year in the last 6 years, and almost all were not wearing PFD's. Additionally, the number of deaths is DECREASING, and when the increase in the number of boats being used is factored in the RATE of decrease is very significant. Nick got his numbers from the DEP and the Coast Guard, and cited his references in his testimony. Another point Nick raised was that if the state were truly interested in minimizing environmental impact from boating, they would ban 2-stroke motors, enforce existing motor noise, emissions, and fuel spillage laws, and encourage the use of environmentally friendlier sail and human-powered boats. No response from anyone on that point.

All the speakers had different points to make, and Rep Panaroni questioned most of them, and kept changing the subject when someone made a good point. Grant Westerson from the CMTA testified for the bills, simply saying that paddlers were dying "In increasing numbers", and therefore need to be regulated. Nick had already discredited his testimony by this point, and Westerson's presentation was weak.

It became apparent that the people behind these bills are not truly interested in safety, environmental protection, or creation and maintenance of launch

facilities. It also became apparent that the CMTA and Rep Panaroni have very little knowledge about paddling, rowing or sailing, and are just looking to make a questionable money grab. This issue is far from over. We have powerful interests such as wealthy folks along the shoreline and the CMTA who are pushing to force registration on us. Neither group has benevolent intentions towards us. If they did, they would not be trying to force their will on us unilaterally.

What can we do about it? Lots. We need to promote safety education through publication of informative documents (As we have already started to do), and through public demonstrations of rescue and safety skills and equipment. We need to work closely with outfitters, the DEP and the Coast Guard to develop useful voluntary programming that is not only informative, but also interesting and fun. Not only local groups, but also the national organizations such as the ACA and BCU need to get involved, too. Perhaps even form our own advocacy group --- something like a "Connecticut Paddlesports Association".

We need to constantly remind our legislators that we are watching them, and will turn out in force whenever this issue comes up again. We have to remind them that we are highly networked, and can organize quickly. We also need to let them know that we do, can, and will take care of safety issues internally, and without government interference and taxation.

Winston Churchill said it best: "The price of freedom is vigilance". If we want to keep the freedoms we currently enjoy, we're going to have to be willing to defend them, and take actions to preserve them. Otherwise, we are headed for regulation and taxation. - WS

WE NEED EVERYONE'S HELP

It's important to stay politically aware and active during times when our freedoms are under attack by legislators who's intent is questionable and misguided. Our website (connyak.org) is full of information on who you can write to, samples of letters stating points of view and the hearing dates as well as the bills themselves.

If you go to the Connyak site and to the side bar there is a "BILLS" link.

EVENTS



CONNYAK TALK / MEETING

Paddling the Western Pacific - Isles of Micronesia - with Jerry & Susan Wyle

Friday, March 28, Essex Town Hall

Local paddlers and sea kayak instructors Susan and Jerry Wylie visited three islands in the far western Pacific during a government study of ecotourism. They explored the mysterious stone-lined canals and ancient ruins of Nan Madol 'the Venice of the Pacific.

Exit 3 off of Rt. 9. Head into town on West Ave. 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.

Banff Mountain Film Festival Benefit (International outdoor action short films and videos) \$10.

Sponsored by N. Cove Outfitters

Friday, February 28th 7:00 pm
Smith Middle School,
216 Addison Rd., Glastonbury, CT.
Profits - the Connecticut Audubon
at Glastonbury Center

Saturday, March 1st 7:00 pm
Old Saybrook High School
(1111 Boston Post Rd.) in Old Saybrook.
Profits - The Old Saybrook Land Trust

Sunday, March 2nd 7:00 pm
The 1962 Crozier Williams Student
Center at Connecticut College
(270 Mohegan Avenue) in New London,
Profits - The Connecticut College
Women's Lacrosse Team

Monday, March 3rd 7:00 pm
Mary S. Harkness Auditorium,
at the Yale Medical School, 33
Cedar Street, New Haven.
Profits - The Ragged Mountain
Foundation

Call 860-388-6585 to reserve your tickets. Tickets are available at N. Cove or at the door but: Seating is limited, so advance ticket purchase is suggested.

www.northcove.com for info.

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NORDKAPP HM good condition. Day hatch, rear oval hatch, canvas storage bag, compass. Orang / white \$1600 860-633 7254

16'x 22" Yellow/White Dagger 'Meridian SK' f/g kayak with skeg, 2 hatches, Nexus Type 85 Compass, spray skirt, f/g paddle, Milford, CT \$1850 203.877.8493 'clayluce@hotmail.com'

VCP Nordkapp HMC Golden Yellow deck/White hull, oval stern hatch, \$1000.00 also Dagger Outburst Surf/playboat, red, bow & stern airbags, \$700.00. Call Don 860-643-1609, Email: nordkappdg@aol.com.

FOR SALE - Janautica "ANADYR" Sea Kayak 17.5'X 21.25" Adjustable seat and footpegs, 2 hatches, bulkheads, rigging etc. Designed for speed and rough water. See Mfg. webpage for complete specs. www.splashdance.com NEW -\$1699 free delivery in CT. E-mail ritey@lycos.com or call 917 567 9430

Necky Tormae 15' Kevlar w/rudder, carbon paddle, spray skirt, Yakama rack and saddles \$1300. all. Must sell - Moving 203-458-2362

Wilderness Systems Pungo. 12' rec boat. Cockpit cover & spray skirt. Exc. condition. \$325. Perception Pirouette w/w or surf. Cockpit cover, spray skirt, paddle. VG condition. \$300. Outer Island wood stripper. Low volume stripper. VG condition. \$800. Call (860) 653-5899.

**Please contact the Newsletter
when items are sold.**

SMALL BOAT SHOP CANOE & KAYAK EXPO

Sat. & Sun. March 29th & 30th.
Greenwich Civic Center
Harding Road, Old Greenwich, CT
For information and directions call:
203-854-5223

*To all those who have written or attended
the registration hearings, thank you for
your help in this fight to uphold our
freedoms.*

- ConnYak

ConnYak Policy Statement

We do not take ads, list sales, items or services other than member classifieds. We do list opportunities, such as demonstrations, symposiums, free classes, demo-days and will post the phone and email or website for those opportunities. Our goal is to stay free of endorsements and maintain a total friendship with all businesses, clubs and instructors having to do with our sport.

We can't post your event if we don't know about it. Please stay in touch!

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

T-shirts for Articles

Authors of articles for the newsletter get a free T-shirt. If you have written an article and haven't received your T-shirt, please speak up at one of the paddles. The club officers usually have them at the paddles.

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

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:

Jay Babina e-mail: jbabina@snet.net

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