

## Florida Sweetwater Kayak Symposium

by Jay Babina

There's 1.2 Denny's for every 23 people in Florida. Wherever you go, there's a Denny's. If you're lost, take a left at Denny's and go two miles until you see another Denny's. Go left on Rt 36, go two miles and look for the Denny's on the right...



It's over 18 years since I've been in Florida and I was long over-due. I attended the Sweetwater BCU symposium held at Ft. DeSoto Park in St. Petersburg. The most exciting and memorable part of the trip was stepping off the plane and being greeted by lush tropical foliage and 70 degree air after leaving the dirty snow plowed roads of NY. I just stood there for a while and took a few deep breaths and absorbed as much of it as I could. I need to get out more.

Florida is now wall-to-wall condominiums and growing. Nobody I spoke to in the 7 days I was there was born in Florida except Greg Stamer. I traveled by Jet Blue for \$100 each way. But when I compared notes with Carlos Vidal (from CT) at the symposium, he made out better by going right from New Haven and taking a connecting flight to PA and going to FL from there.

*Continued on next page*



**This Issue:**  
**Florida Paddling**

**"Don't be  
the last One"**

**Spring Checklist**

**Greg Paquin**

**BCU Presentation**

**Friday, April 1, Essex 0**

**See page 4**

### CONNAYAK

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. Our membership supports our website, the ConnYak library, lecturers, paddles, pool sessions and various functions which require permits, etc.

Wayne Smith - President

Please send checks to:

**ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith  
85 School St,  
Coventry, CT 06238**

**WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD:  
[WWW.CONNYAK.ORG](http://WWW.CONNYAK.ORG)**

**EMAIL:  
[CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG](mailto:CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG)**

## *Florida continued...*

He saved the horrible 3 am \$100. limo ride plus the parking fee; and since I traveled with my brother, that totaled to \$200. Plus... it takes an hour longer to limo from JFK to CT than to fly to florida. However, I didn't want to spend 36+ hours driving and although I love kayaking, I was going for a general tune up and alignment.

Ft. DeSoto Park is at the end of St. Petersburg and about 4 miles from the mainland by a causeway and a few bridges. It's absolutely gorgeous with lush tropical foliage and forests, smooth sandy beaches and crystal clear water. The wildlife is overwhelming. Sweetwater Kayak from St. Petersburg hosts the event and picked a really nice protected lagoon with open access to the sea for their festival. The park is shaped like a large "T" and is approximately 3 miles in length. If you drive and camp, the campsite is beautiful with every amenity you could want and the entire park is pristine. On one side is the open ocean and on the other is protected mangrove lined waterways and islands.

The three day festival includes various levels of BCU training and this year Cheri Perry attended and did demonstrations and teaching along with Greg Stamer and a few others. I was amazed at how many hidden Greenland paddles suddenly made their appearance as the entire beach lined up to watch the Greenland techniques demonstration. As usual, Cheri spent the entire festival waist deep in water teaching anyone who asked or was upside down demonstrating.

6 ConnYak paddlers were there and Turner Wilson who many of you know from MA. The people at Sweetwater Kayak were extremely friendly and do a great job hosting a really nice event. The celebrity instructors like Nigel Foster, Tom Berg and others who I don't know were all there and the levels of instruction varied from beginner to advanced. The Sea conditions are quite mild and many of the instructors were being inventive on the advanced group. (like paddling backward, eyes closed etc.) I saw a lot of rescues going on.

Since I flew in, I borrowed a boat and paddled around and just enjoyed myself socializing as well. Danny from Impex was there along with some other boat vendors: so there were plenty of kayaks to take a paddle in as well as some of the attendees arrived with glass as well as skin-on-frame boats. The event reminded me of our

picnics with boat trials and lots of immediate friendship and the general similarity of interests from kayakers. I expected a BCU event to be a bit rigid and highly structured however it wasn't like that at all. It was pretty lay-back and mellow.

West Florida paddling is generally calm, however the Tampa Bay can kick up big time because generally the waters are shallow compared to New England. The day after the event we saw white caps everywhere on the beach, but you have to remember its only a few feet deep for quite a way out at low tide. When I paddled at the symposium I was really excited to see some surf at the mouth of the lagoon and headed right for it only to find out is was 2 ft deep. No wonder nobody was paddling in it.

There's a paddle sports rental set-up right on Ft. DeSoto Park and the day after the event, my brother and I went for the top shelf, high performance Wilderness Loon 14's. (the kind we sink and beat on at our rescue clinic). The rental owner insisted that we didn't have to wear a life jack if we didn't want to(??) We're so conditioned to wearing them that it's the first

*Continued on next page*



*Ft DeSoto Park*

## Florida continued...

thing we asked for.

Since most of Florida's coast line is Hotels and built up beach front the most beautiful part is in the mangrove waterways. The nice thing about Ft. DeSoto park is that you see no buildings because it's a distance away from the mainland. At the rental area, they give you a map that corresponds to numbered signs along the trails so you can gauge your time traveling and can't get lost. At our typical ConnYak paddling speed, my brother and I easily were at their 1hr. destination point in less than 20 minutes. You often forget how inept people who never paddled actually are.

Wildlife at the park is everywhere and the amazing thing is their lack of fear. Maybe it's because people feed them, or the conditions are so much less stressful ... I don't know. We paddled along side giant egrets, and herons as close as 6 feet. None of the large birds flew away. It was really fun to paddle close to the large birds this way. I don't know all the birds but all the big popular models were there in overwhelming abundance including the freindly pelicans. Manatees do come in there but much later in the spring and alligators never - so rolling is permitted.

I enjoyed the Wilderness Loon and I didn't care what boat I was in considering the environment and temperature. You can also rent real kayaks from Sweetwater Kayak in St. Petersburg as well. Although it can often get cold in Florida, we lucked out and had 65-68 sunny degrees with just two 1/2 days of light rain.

### **(Lessons Learned) Don't feed the raccoons.**

I was eating a sandwich on a picnic table at the park and I threw a scrap to a cute innocent raccoon that was nearby and looked hungry. Big mistake! Out of nowhere there was three. Then 4 more. Then 9. And they kept coming. I have never seen so many raccoons coming out of nowhere. We headed to the car and had our lunch down the beach. They definitely have an epidemic of raccoons. We laughed as we saw one family actually running to their cars after they made the same dumb mistake. There's no shortage of Denny's or raccoons in Florida.

My total trip cost me around \$650. with the rental car going for \$350 for 7 days. You can get nice motels for around \$65. Florida loves tourists and rewards you with about three extra taxes on hotel bills which adds

about \$12. The car rental base prices are also deceiving, because they too have additional charges hidden everywhere. I think you can carve a good \$200 right off my total with some air flight / parking research and if you stayed at the same place for 5 days they would give you a deal. There's also cheaper ones and we found a delightful 45 dollar one. (I do mean cheaper not inexpensive) About 2 in the morning, we could hear all kinds of noises through the wall that you really don't want to hear. Even if you're 16 years old, tell them you belong to AARP and save about 10% - they never ask (or at least not me) for ID. I stayed near the airport on the last night for convenience and they are always higher - \$125+. We never made reservations and had no problem finding places. The cheap ones always sell out first.

Food is available everywhere ranging from gourmet to grocery store.

If you're looking for a Florida getaway, even for an extended weekend, I would highly recommend the Sweetwater Kayak symposium at Ft. DeSoto Park. They definately chose the right time of year and the right place to have it. You could take a paddle course or just paddle the area, ...or sit on a picnic table and read the paper in a T-shirt and forget Connecticut winters for a while.



Ft DeSoto Park

Very often, "Don't be the last One" is humorously referred to as the ConnYak motto. Here's why!

## Don't be the last one!

by Jim Mathews

I could have entitled this article, "Be Prepared for All Possible Conditions", or "Dress for Immersion", or "Know Your Limits" or "Always Carry the Right Equipment for Emergencies", but I think that, "Don't Let Yourself Be the Last One", is perhaps the most appropriate for the experiences of the 25th of April 1998.

Twenty one members of ConnYak, some dressed in one piece drysuits,

some in wetsuits, and one in shorts with rubber boots, paddling crafts ranging from a sit-on-top to sleek wooden crafts, assembled at Bluff Point State Park for the Annual Start-of-the Season picnic/paddle. It was a sunny and cool day with strong brisk winds blowing at 15 to 20 miles per hour. After a paddle across the lagoon, it became apparent that there were not only different levels of paddlers along, but that there were differences of opinion as to what should happen next. Some opted to paddle longer in the lagoon, some poked into the open channel leading to Avery point, while still others headed into Long Island Sound to assess the situation there. The strong northwest wind actually made the Sound more appealing because of the shielding that Pine Island provided from the windy conditions that prevailed everywhere else. I ventured out into the Sound with the third group because it looked calmer than where I was in the channel since we were in the false protection of the island. I would be joining some individuals that I was used to paddling with who I practiced with in pool sessions. The recorded wind force that day built up to a 35 mph sustained with gusts to 40.

Once we were all assembled, we discussed getting to the North

*Continued on next page*



## EVENTS / PADDLES

Watch the bulletin board for impromptu gatherings and events posted by paddlers.

### COBSCOOK BAY ENCAMPMENT

I am organizing a July 18-26 trip to Cobscook Bay, Maine. It is an exciting place to paddle, with a reversing falls, 24-foot tidal rise, trips to Canada, etc. Suitable for all skill levels, sea kayaks only. Six openings in group left. Call Brooks Martyn if you are interested. (860) 651-4367.

### ConnYak Meeting Greg Paquin BCU 5 star training and assessment in Wales Friday, April 1, Essex Town Hall

Greg Paquin will give a photo show / talk on his trip to Wales and taking the BCU 5 star training / assessment.

6:30 Essex Town Hall

### Free T-shirts for newsletter articles

(We need to get rid of T-shirts)

### ConnYak Brochure

We now have a 2-color, 4 page brochure going to press next week so we will have literature to give out at the kayak demo days and to supply the kayak stores with. We are printing 1500.

We will also post it on line for anyone who would like to download it.

## *The Last One cont...*

Dumpling, an island several miles away, and given the prevailing winds and current, it was estimated that we could get there in about 20 minutes. We did not feel the full brunt of the wind from our protected position. So, off we went with the wind at our backs and picking up by the minute as we left the protection of the lee side of the island. A strong following sea created an amusement park type of ride with boats in various degrees of control. Suddenly, one of the boats broached on a wave and then, as a confusing rogue wave came through causing a brace to be made into empty air, he capsized. The group quickly executed a rescue and within a minute or two, the paddler was back in his boat and the suggestion was made that we turn back. Everyone was accepting of this change in plan, except for one "cowboy" who had never noticed the incident and had just kept on paddling going further and further away. Our most experienced and strongest paddler, an instructor and proprietor of a kayak skills development and guided paddling business, accompanied by another strong paddler, took off in an attempt to bring him back. With the wind at their backs propelling them towards the runaway, and our efforts in the opposite direction against the wind the distance between the two groups magnified.

As we bore down on the foot pegs to propel our crafts forward bouncing up and down in the waves, my bow alternated between diving under the dark green water beneath the wave and then rising up towards the bright blue sky. It became quite apparent that the relative ease of running with the wind was now replaced with a tremendous struggle. Not wanting to be left behind, I called out to one of the group members, "wait for me" and wait he did. Now having broken free from the inertia caused by the strong current traveling in the opposite direction, we began to make progress. I noticed that stroke by stroke, we began to spread out a bit at first, and then more and more. Two of the group were now nearer to the shore where Bluff Point stood and another portion of the group was stretching out in front of me. After what seemed like an extremely long time of constant paddling and not making much progress, it became obvious that

we were really being challenged.

I began to realize that the conditions in which we were paddling would require some assistance to effect a rescue in a short amount of time if it should be needed, especially considering the 48 degrees of the water temperature that day. Self rescue with a paddle float would leave the paddler cold and tired and blown backwards, downwind quite a bit. I said to myself, "Don't

be last", and immediately looked back to see what reality held. Fortunately for me, there was somebody back there, and I was determined to make sure it stayed that way in case I went over. Otherwise, there would be no one to notice that I was in trouble. A minute later, I looked back again to confirm that there was somebody to notice me should I get into trouble. We were making relatively good progress and getting closer to Pine Island and its shelter, where we could make the turn back into the lagoon and protection from the wind. I looked back once again to check the situation and to my surprise, where I expected to see the paddler, there was only the white hull of a capsized craft. From behind the overturned kayak, I could also see the white hat bobbing up and down.

"Okay", I said to myself, there's now another mission that has to take precedence, a consummation of what I had been practicing for two years in pool sessions and on the open water: get him out of the water and into his boat. Because of my training, my reaction at this point was never questioned.

Turning into the wind was not that hard and getting back to him was easy as well. Because the wind was so strong, I unfortunately blew by and had to turn back into the wind which was no easy feat. I nudged my cockpit up to his bow, after first checking how he was doing. "Press down on the stern" I said to him. "Lift up on the bow and flip the boat," I said to myself. The water poured out and while holding his boat firmly across its cockpit, I told him to lift himself into his boat. He was in, he was cold and he looked concerned. I noticed that he did not have a dry suit, only a "Farmer John" wetsuit and a paddling jacket, plus... he lost a boot and his gloves.



## *The Last One cont...*

I could see how cold he was and when he finished draining the torrent of water from the sleeves of his paddling jacket, he put his skirt back on. His paddle had drifted away so we reached for the spare. He pushed off, and in seconds was over again. He tried to roll back up, but was not successful and in the process of bailing out he lost his second paddle.

This time I flip the boat from the side, rather than using the "T" rescue, getting most of the water out. Unfortunately, by the time he was back in the boat, there was a good deal of new water that entered from the waves. Stability was difficult because he was cold, losing coordination, and struggling with the sloshing water in his boat. The internal bilge pump (VCP) was not effective and almost impossible to use from its position located behind his cockpit.

I could see that towing was the only option, but without a tow rope I needed to get him around in my direction, and then have him lean over the stern section of my kayak and hold on as I paddled in an angle towards shore letting the wind help us. As he tried to pull his boat around mine so we both would be heading the same way, he went over a third time. It seemed that sheer desire to escape from the frigid water, motivated him up and out once again. With his cockpit half full of water, I quickly pulled my skirt to get to my pump which is stowed against my seat and replaced the skirt quickly, with my hands still gloved. As I pumped, I first noticed that we had floated well past Bluff point and are were somewhere off Groton-Long Point as I was able to see the windmill on North Dumpling. I assumed Noank would be visible next. I was pumping and pumping and pumping while at the same time mindfully plotting a course to follow to the shore once his boat was dry. My attention was focused on this when suddenly I noticed a motor craft coming towards us from the western side of Fisher Island.

"Wave!", I said, as I continued to pump feverously. I stopped pumping for a time to aid in the waving and while my back was to the oncoming boat, I could see out of the corner of my eyes, that it was moving on a course as if we did not exist. Then, after the boat had actually passed us and I was beginning to replot our course for shore, just like in the movies, the Atlantis turned towards us and came up along side. They asked if we needed help. It turned out that the captain never saw us. Several of the passengers who were returning from an aborted scuba diving charter to a wreck off Fishers Island were the ones that spotted us. Because of the several foot

waves and the distance they thought that the waving looked just like a paddle alternating left and right motions. My now shivering friend was helped into the boat from the scuba platform at the stern of the boat and his kayak was hauled aboard. They asked me if I wanted to come aboard and with absolutely no hesitation, I was instantly on the deck of the boat.

The boat sped off to New London Harbor where it is berthed and the now hypothermic and shivering paddler struggled to get his wet clothes off and to swallow some of the hot tea that I always carry in a thermos in my hatch. The boat crew radioed to the Coast Guard who relayed the message of our rescue to the Connyak members who had returned to Bluff Point launch site. As the day would go, we found out later that the exact location of where the Atlantis was docked was not clear enough to the Connyak members who attempted to pick us up. Our plan was for one of us to hitch a ride back to our cars with some of the scuba guys who were still around. I was to be the driver because I had not suffered any of the effects of hypothermia and because I have a double rack. When I went for my keys which I hang around my neck along with my signal whistle, I found that they were gone - probably separated during one of the reentries. So, adding insult to injury, the last act of the eventful day was waiting an hour and a half for AAA to come and open the car.

Although this story did have a happy ending, it could have ended up as a disaster with a capital "D". "Dressing for Immersion", a cardinal rule of the sport, would have lessened the exposure to the cold, increasing the likelihood needing only one reentry and reducing the effects of hypothermia. "Knowing Your limits", might have lessened the chance of the original capsized that led to hypothermia. Paddlers should push themselves only one new step at a time when developing skills, especially when dealing with such complexities as wind and current. "Being Prepared for all Conditions" is not just about skills and clothing, it is also about having the right equipment. The people on the ship said that we were not very visible, despite my white kayak and my bright yellow PFD. On the way home that afternoon, I stopped and bought six flares which I would, if there is a next time, fire across the bow of any boat of which I was trying to make contact. I also bought a waterproof VHF radio so that I can contact the Coast Guard or others for any kind of help that might be needed whether it be because of water and wind conditions or because of a health emergency. One never know when one will need

*Continued on next page*

## The Last One cont...

assistance. With a VHF it would also be possible to keep in better contact with others on a trip. Before I go out again, I will also get a tow line with a quick release to insure that I will be able to assist another in an emergency situation when its occupant needs assistance to get to shore. I am also very cautious about the false sense of protection a land mass can give you with the wind.

Before I go out on any more group trips, I want assurances from the others in the group that they will be vigilant and not let the last paddlers have to fend for themselves. After all, that's what distinguishes a group venture, a number of persons gathered closely together forming a recognizable unit in support of its members, from a solo activity. My previous experience paddling with Connyak members over the past two year has always been wonderful, confidence building, and supportive. The emphasis on safety in the pool sessions and on the open water has instilled in me a sense of camaraderie that I have never experienced before. The instruction and guidance from such skilled kayakers as Mike Falconeri, Jay Babina, and Dick Gamble very probably made the difference in my being helpful and not becoming a casualty myself. So my paddling friends, please make sure you look over your shoulder when we paddle to see who may need your help so that no one will ever have to worry again about being, The Last One.

## Greenland or Euro?

02 issue of Atlantic Coastal Kayaker had an excellent paddle article by Sanjay Gulati who compared and tested paddles with a GPS and heart monitor. The heart rate monitor answers a lot of questions. He test paddled to achieve a consistent heart rate for several minutes and recorded the speed results. The chart is from the article and speed is recorded in knots.

### Paddle Heart Speed Subjective

Wing	115	5.0	moderate
Standard	115	4.7	easy
Greenland	115	4.7	very easy
Wing	140	5.7	hard
Standard	140	5.4	hard
Greenland	140	5.4	hard



## 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. Send check to:

**ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith**  
**85 School St, Coventry, CT 06238**

## ConnYak Dues

ConnYak annual dues are due yearly to the month when you joined. Email notices will be sent when your dues are due. Some people will get a post card until our data base is current.

Newsletter Editor /Design

Jay Babina

Send newsletter articles or photos

to:

**[jbabina@snet.net](mailto:jbabina@snet.net)**

203-481-3221

## T-shirts for Articles

Authors of articles for the newsletter get a free T-shirt.

Visit our web site for the Bulletin Board, Library Information and more information on ConnYak

**[www.connyak.org](http://www.connyak.org)**

# Spring Checklist ✓

by Wayne Smith

*Believe it or not, spring is right around the corner (Yeah, I know, it was 5 degrees when I got up this morning.....) Some folks are already out paddling when the weather permits. It's time to do a quick check and tune-up of your boats & gear.*

Some of these items aren't as obvious as others, but they're all good to do at least once a year.

- Inspect your boats for damage, scratches, cracks, etc. Repair any damage.
- Wash & wax your boats per manufacturer's instructions. If your boat is plastic, a nice coat of 303 will protect it from the sun. You should wash them inside and out. It also is a good time to remove all the power bar wrappers from inside your hatches.
- Check rudders, skegs, backbands, and footpegs for wear, damage, and proper function. Make any necessary repairs.
- Check bulkheads & hatch covers for signs of leakage. Make any necessary repairs or adjustments.
- Inspect declines and bungees for wear. Replace if worn, preferably with reflective lines.
- Replace the batteries in strobes, and other electronic emergency signals
- Check the expiration date on your flares. Replace as necessary, and dispose of expired ones through either the DEP or Coast Guard.
- Check the function of your VHF radio, whistles, horns, GPS, and any other gizmos you might bring paddling with you.
- Wash your wetsuit, booties, and gloves. Always good to start off the season not stinking. White vinegar, mirazyme and sink the stink are good products to use for this.
- Wash & treat your drysuit with appropriate stuff, and 303 your gaskets
- Check your paddles for damage & repair as needed. Re•varnish wooden paddles if they need it.
- Inflate your paddlefloat & check for leaks. Replace it if damaged.
- Spray some 303 into the intake of your bilge pump & work it in by pumping 20 or so times --  
- you'll be amazed how much easier it will work
- Soak towlines or throwlines in a bucket of fresh water & air dry.
- Clean, sharpen, and lubricate all tools, knives, etc, paying special attention to removing rust.
- Empty & re-pack your bailout bag & inspect everything in it.
- Replace your sponge if it looks nasty
- Check your sprayskirt for wear, especially where it seals around the coaming. Repair any wear with aqua-seal.
- Check your racks on your car for tightness, and make sure the saddles are in good shape. Also check to see if your tie-down straps are in good shape.