

ConnYak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

January 2005

WINTER GAMBLING

by Jay Babina

In many ways, winter paddling is a gamble since dressing for both the air and water forces us into many calculated compromises. We are trapped by an aerobic activity that generates heat and we also need to protect ourselves against the possible dangers of ice cold water. Other than astronauts, no other activity has a protective clothing challenge that's this extreme. Divers can dress for the water and skiers can dress for the air.

Years back, I went to shoot some video of rolling in icy conditions. I layered up extra heavy under my drysuit and when I entered the water the only thing I felt was a sting on my face. However, I could not paddle for more than 10 minutes dressed that way without getting uncomfortably overheated.

I know when I paddle and decide to roll in the dead of winter with 40°- water, I can feel the cold water under my PFD and all the paddlers who do a roll always agree... "I would never want to wet exit in this water".

I think it's safe to say that we all gamble quite a bit in winter. We toe that fine line of being protected from the water and light enough to allow us to paddle without overheating. To enter the water with no hood, flooding our gloves and filling our boots would be a shocking episode to say the least. We all gamble or make an assumption that we will never capsize or be able to get back into our boats with or

Photo by Tom Maziarz

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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**

**EMAIL:
CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG**

without assistance. I personally have no lack of belief that even the most skilled paddlers would be in great distress with a wet exit in the heart of winter with their normal paddling drysuit underlayers. Our drysuits allow us the time to get out of the water as quickly as possible without going into cold shock or extreme hypothermia while allowing us to paddle without overheating. However, I have witnessed a hypothermic paddler (unable to paddle) who was wearing a drysuit, wet exited and was put back into his boat. "Survival time" in the water is being alive but not necessarily free from the debilitating effects of hypothermia which can begin quite rapidly.

What I'm advocating is awareness and a greater sense of reality in the winter. What would it be like to get totally wet in your drysuit 10 miles from your launch site? Would you be able to re-warm up on a cold day with 20-mph winds blowing on a freezing day? Do you carry a warming beverage and heat packs? How about the extreme event of a solo reentry with several long minutes swimming in 40° water with a cumbersome drysuit on. Unfortunately cold water is only half the equation. A cold wind with a strong wind-chill factor makes winter paddling even more dangerous. I've paddled back cold with numb and aching fingers more than once and I'm now quite cautious about my time out there during the winter. Once again, I am not advocating to refrain from it but to fully realize the realities of what you are dealing with. It's easy to forget what's really there once we're in the comfort of our drysuits with half of our bodies tucked into the protection of the kayak.

The numbers do speak for themselves. Drysuit users don't die. There's probably a correlation between paddlers who invest in a drysuit and the skill level and experience that goes along with that group; whereas beginner paddlers usually don't spring for the drysuit until they paddle for a while. Many novice paddlers get over confident and plunge in to dangerous paddling situations propelled by their ego coupled with a lack of real experience. Even though the drysuit group is generally safe and incident free, extreme caution has to be used in winter paddling.

Paddling alone is one of the greatest risk factors in the winter paddling equation. I do it and so do a lot of paddlers and not always by choice. Having other paddlers not only makes the obvious assisted reentry relatively easy, but it also allows for additional support

with radios, extra clothing, moral support, decision making and the possibility of towing.

The casual 12-mile paddle in the summer is a totally different ball game in the cold of winter. The choices of destination, length of paddle and time on the water become very important considerations. You have to know your body - it's ability to handle the cold and have a realistic view of your skills. A capsize in the surf during August can be a fun event, but in the winter it can be devastating. Even a capsize followed by a successful roll can be totally shocking as ice cold water enters your ears and sinuses and wets down your protective clothing. The shock of ice water on the head along with some confusion under water can also have a very negative effect on your ability to perform your old trusty roll and it can also cause nausea and vertigo.

I've been paddling long enough to know that paddlers don't practice rescues in the winter for obvious reasons. I have attended cold water clinics where people take a swim and experiment a bit. However they are usually not dressed in their gambling/paddling underlayers. Lets face it, floating around in 32° water is not a fun event even in a controlled environment unless you're pretty well insulated. Most paddlers, myself included, bank on the fact that we know how to do these things and are cautious about not getting into situations where we will ever need to use them.

For most of us, a more conservative approach to our paddling habits usually gets us through the winter with a

lot of rewards and with a fairly good margin of safety. Fortunately, in CT we're blessed with a lot of quiet inland waterways and small islands where we can be shielded from the wind and surf and still get in our kayaks during the winter.

Once you admit to yourself that there are a lot of calculated risks in winter paddling, you have taken the first and greatest step towards paddling safety. That alone will govern your paddling

decisions and will call on your sense of judgement and experience. If you live in denial and are always convincing yourself that it's paddling as usual, you are heading into an area that may result in a few unpleasant surprises when you least expect them.

We all learn a lot by our mistakes but the winter is not the time to gamble when the stakes are so high and when it's so easy to play it safe. No gambler wins all the time.



eight is enough

by Dean Bertoldi



During the last week of February-98, I received a call from my brother, Dale, a novice paddler (3 to 4 times in the ocean), asking me to take him out paddling on the following Saturday morning. I agreed, and when Saturday rolled around we met at my house to load all the gear. I was aware of the marine forecast, which cited SE winds of 20 to 25 knots and waves in the sound of 3 to 5 feet, and made this information available to my brother before departing.

We arrived at the Thimbles by 8:00 a.m., and upon launching, discussed our proposed route. I felt we should have hugged the coast considering his limited experience, but he said "I feel good, lets head around that island and if its too bad we'll head back in." I agreed, and with those words he sealed his fate.

THE INCIDENT

Paddling into a 6" to 9" chop was fairly easy and confidence was oozing out of my brother's kayak (actually a Piccolo on loan from my son). We reached the island in about 15 minutes, and turned the corner to assess conditions. Here I could see the effects of the wind and fetch banging against the outgoing tide — 2 to 3 foot waves, some of them breaking. I suggested we turn downwind and head back — an agreed upon idea except for the fact that Dale could not turn his boat. We decided to head straight over to another island, a 3/8

mile crossing, with the waves on our right beam. At about the half way point, with my brother paddling very tentatively in front of me, I heard that ever so familiar two part thud. He was in!

THE YARD SALE

After a flawless wet exit, Dale had all the normal reactions of someone plunged into 40 degree water — bewilderment, panic and an overwhelming sense of pure survival. He would revisit these feelings seven more times in the next 90 minutes.

As I raced toward him, I noticed various colors and familiar objects floating everywhere. He had let go of his paddle and the kayak and other items just detached themselves from the deck or fell out of the cockpit. The wind was really blowing and everything including my brother was surfing down the channel. I grabbed his kayak and paddle, while saying farewell to other minor gear. He was able to swim to my kayak and hang on. With him tugging on one side of my kayak, waves breaking on the other, one hand holding his boat and the other trying to brace, I was wishing my nose plugs were on.

I managed to empty some water out of his kayak, but found it almost impossible to pick the swamped boat up far enough over my deck to be 100% effective. The lack of bulkheads in sea kayaks has always been a concern of mine and this incident

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

CONNYPAK POOL SESSIONS

ConnYak pool sessions start every Sunday in January and the first Sunday in February - 6 total. The practice sessions are held at Sheehan High School (Wallingford) pool from 9 am to 1 pm. It's a great time to practice rolls, attempted rolls, rescues or whatever you want. The fee is \$10 - paid at the door - bring cash in an envelope with your name on it or checks made to ConnYak. Everyone will have to be democratic and take turns. Although it's a heated pool, wear wetsuits, drytops etc. since it's easy to get chilled, and... don't forget a mask, nose clips etc. unless you enjoy chlorine in your eyes and sinuses.

Directions: Exit 15 off Rt. 91. Rt 68 W. past intersections of Rt 15 & Rt 150. Take fourth left on to Hope Hill Road which is at the light. Sheehan High School is 1/4 mile on the Rt.

GREENWICH POOL

CT AMC - Greenwich YWCA, 259 East Putnam Ave. Jan. 9,16,23,30 & Feb. 6,13,27 (NOT Feb. 20). 9:00 am to sign waiver form. Door opens at 9:15 am. In-water time is 9:30-11:30 am. \$15.00 per person charged to cover pool rental. Anyone arriving after 9:30 am will be charged an additional \$5.00. We encourage you to join AMC but membership is not required for participating in these sessions.

Please contact Jean Trapani at Flatwater@ct-amc.org for info.

reinforces my dislike of sea kayaks without them.

THE MITTS CAME OFF

Complicating matters was a lack of dexterity due to my paddling mittens. A great product for cold weather paddling. I wholly endorse their use, but found serious limitations when trying to grab and lift another kayak. The grip is very slippery, especially when emptying a swamped boat. Trying to secure a spray skirt also proved to be a challenging and time consuming process. I decided to shed the mittens during the rescue. One note; these mittens are very difficult to get back on when your hands are wet. I always wear a pair of polypropylene liners under them to facilitate this task. Even wet, the liners make it possible to slip the mittens back on easily.

Once in his boat, Dale completed only a couple of forward strokes before he capsized again. This time I realized he was in no condition to get back in or paddle. Since we were now only one hundred feet or less from shore, we decided to head in and regroup. With my brother and his kayak in tow, I managed to reach the safety of the island. Once ashore, Dale put on a wool hat and some dry gloves that I had stowed away in a dry bag. He indicated that the drysuit I had lent him was working, but I couldn't help noticing his uncontrollable shivering and slurred speech. This was a product of 20 to 30 minutes of cold water immersion.

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A ...

We emptied the boats, collected the paddles and readied for another launch. The wind was stronger, the waves a little steeper, and all that initial confidence oozed out during the first and second wet exit, but he was determined to make that short crossing to the safety of sheltered water.

About 2 minutes and 17 seconds into our heroic attempt, I glanced over to see my brother fearful to touch the water with his paddle, heading at warp speed into an exposed pile of rocks. By the time I swung around to try and divert him, he was laying on his right side in a sculling position firmly attached to the pile of stones. Waves were washing over his boat constantly putting his head underwater. He grabbed the bow of my boat, and I was able to free him from this peril only to watch him blow sideways again, this time into a 4 foot breakwater.

As he slammed into the wall and was rocked back and forth by reflecting waves, I tried desperately to pull him back to open water. Much easier said than

done. Both boats were at the mercy of the wind and water, and within a few seconds he was over again, upside down being pummeled into the stone wall. Waves were crashing over his boat when I noticed he had clawed his way up the wall and to the surface. I worked my boat around him and he took the bow again. In this one area he would eventually take four bow rescues and one "scoop" type rescue before moving 50 feet to the safety of another island.

PLAN B

At this point I was beginning to think we had a problem. Only 3/4 mile from shore, and he can't launch into the prevailing conditions or paddle once he's on the water. How are we going to get back?

The symptoms of hypothermia were becoming very evident and I knew he had to be back on the mainland quickly. I decided to portage both kayaks over to the sheltered side of the island, a hike of about 130 feet. Here we could launch in relatively calm conditions and approach the shore in a quartering wind. My brother was game, we made the trek, put the boats back in and headed home.

I constantly tried to boost his spirits while monitoring his condition. He was paddling slowly and cautiously, but making steady progress. The sea on that side had a one foot chop and the winds were diminished considerably.

As we moved from the security of sheltered waters to the full fetch of the wind, things got interesting. I could see the apprehension creep right up the loom of his paddle, and within 5 minutes he would capsize again for the eighth and final time. Tenacity prevailed, and he dog paddled to the surface and remained there long enough for me to give yet another bow rescue.

At this point I decided to tow him in. I always carry a towing rig in my PFD, primarily for towing a tired 11 year old paddler, my son James. This was the first real test of this home-made piece of equipment. Again the mittens were a hindrance in opening the velcro pockets on the PFD, and in securing the rig around my waist. I finally hooked the rope to his bow, explained the mechanics of a low brace on the windward side and towed him back to our original launch area where we were met by Jay Babina and Dick Gamble. My brother's tenacity was commendable but he was physically and mentally battered, and suffering from mild hypothermia. At the car I learned that he had, for some unknown reason, pulled the neck seal back on the drysuit while he was in the water. This let in enough water to soak all the underwear on his upper

body, accelerating the hypothermia.

He felt ill for a couple of days but was soon back to normal. The greatest damage incurred was mental; his confidence to paddle a kayak in any conditions was greatly reduced, and it will take some recovery time before he paddles in the ocean again, if at all.

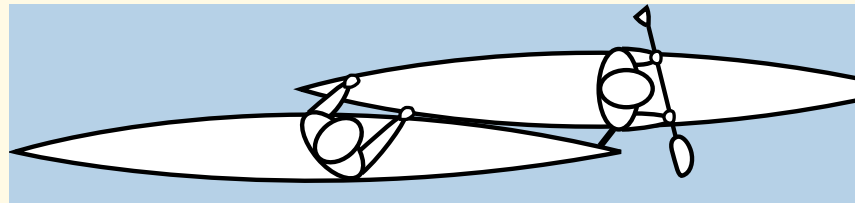
CONSIDERATIONS

1. Beginners are beginners — regardless of their bravery or willingness to venture out. As a leader or guide, your own common sense should always prevail.
2. Do not underestimate how confused and panicked someone is after they go in — especially in the middle of the winter.
3. Remember that kayaks without bulkheads are more difficult to pick up and empty, and make sure there is adequate flotation.
4. Once rescued, most paddlers will be incapacitated to varying degrees. We were lucky to be close to shore. What if this happened 5 or 6 miles out in open water?
5. The towing rig most of us use is really useless in this situation. A modified version that keeps both kayakers raftered is the best way to deal with someone who cannot paddle. (see “The Rafted Tow”)
6. Although necessary, neoprene gloves and mittens make all aspects of a cold water rescue more cumbersome and time consuming.
7. Shout out clear instructions to the victim in the water, they expect to hear them. This includes hanging on to the paddle and/or kayak.
8. Be prepared for situations not practiced; i.e. pulling a kayak with paddler off rocks or away from walls.
9. Practice turning your kayak in winds and waves. This rescue involved a fair amount of maneuvering in wind, waves and confined areas.

THE RAFTED TOW

When an incident like this arises, the affected paddler is going to need something to keep him upright. The rafted tow uses one or more kayakers to form a stabilized raft by either holding on to each others’ kayakers and using the paddles to bridge them together or by having the victim hold on to the rear or front of the rescuer’s kayak. The sea conditions do not have to be extreme to need this tow. A paddler may become seasick, hypothermic or injure a shoulder and not be able to keep from going over.

Use the wind and currents to your advantage if you can, rather than spend a lot of energy fighting them. It’s also a good idea to have a short tow line so that you could strap the front of his/her kayak to your tow belt ...or tie a short length of your tow line. A quick release system is totally necessary on the towers belt. With the short tow line in place, the victim can hold on to the rescuer’s kayak for support if needed. You may have to tie to the victim’s deck lines if the kayak is too long.



The Rafted Tow

- 10 Having the proper equipment at your disposal (not in a hatch), and dressing for immersion, were key elements in eliminating the disastrous ending this story might have had.
- 11 A second experienced paddler would have made this incident much easier to handle.

2-98 Dean Bertoldi



THE GASP REFLEX

by Brian Nystrom

It was warm (mid-60's) and sunny. The water temp was around 50 on the dead-flat-calm lake and I was clad in my usual dry suit and fleece. One of the students in the beginner's class who I was assisting, asked about balance bracing, so I took the opportunity to do an impromptu demonstration without my hood or nose plugs. After sculling down, I rested on the surface for a few seconds and all was fine. The water was brisk but not uncomfortable. To recover, I normally submerge momentarily, set up and do a lazy roll onto the aft deck. No big deal, right?

This time, however, as soon as I went under, I started gasping uncontrollably. I managed to avoid sucking in any water, but became disoriented and felt that insidious feeling of panic creeping up on me. Things went downhill from there in a hurry. A rushed setup and head-up exit resulted in a blown roll. Sculling furiously kept me above water for a few seconds, but I was gasping hard and so far out of position that I couldn't stay up. The partial breath I got wasn't enough and when I submerged again, I knew I was in trouble. The fastest way out would have been to set up and roll as I had originally planned or simply scull to the surface, but reason was overridden by the desperate need to breathe RIGHT NOW, and I grabbed the release loop and bailed. I even let go of the paddle, something that never do.

UGH! How embarrassing!

Although my body was warm and dry, I could not control my breathing, having inhaled a bit of water during the wet exit. Since I was swimming, we took the opportunity to demonstrate a T-rescue for the students.

Lessons learned:

- 1 The gasp reflex can strike you even when you're comfortable, relaxed and paddling in benign conditions. I have been swimming and rolling in much colder conditions without problems, but I was always wearing a hood.
- 2 The gasping is absolutely uncontrollable and can incapacitate you quickly. Self rescue would have been quite difficult until my breathing calmed down. **I don't know if I would have been able to execute a re-enter and roll at all.**
- 3 Always wear a hood when playing in 50 degree water. I suspect that it was the lack of head insulation that triggered the gasping.
- 4 Even a reliable roll isn't 100% reliable. Although I was executing moves that I had practiced many times, the effects of gasping were so overpowering that even muscle memory failed me. Unexpected occurrences can disorient you to the point where your skills will desert you.
- 5 Spend lots of time in the water, especially upside-down, to help alleviate the feeling of panic that can occur if you're not comfortable being submerged. I thought I had licked this, but I was obviously wrong.
- 6 Regardless of your skill/confidence level, you should not take the effects of cold water lightly. Unless you have gills, it's a foreign environment that can hurt you. I was never in any real danger, as rescue was close at hand, but this was certainly an eye-opening experience.

Paddle safe - BN

Send them to Greenland Calendars

(3 calendars left)

Calendars are \$20. They are available from Cheri Perry.

203-284-9453

Florida Keys Trip

Travel to: March 4 (or 5)-6 (1 to 2 overnights) Return: March 12-13 (1 overnight) Looking for a few paddling companions.

Bill Anthony: 203-263-2548

Mammals of Long Island Sound

Friday, January 14 - Town Hall - Essex, CT

Note: this will take the place of our January club meeting.

Heather Medic, who works in the marine mammal rescue dept. at Mystic Seaport will be making a presentation about Seals and other marine mammals. This should be really informative and interesting since Seals and other relatives are an obsession with ConnYak paddlers.

DIRECTIONS: 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 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. Parking is in the back of the building.



Notes from the meeting ...

December 15, 2004

"THIS IS THE SEA" DVD will be shown at the February meeting due to the high positive response and reviews of the video. Possible location might be North Haven or Clinton.

We are honing in on the Connyak cards solution. We will print a legal post card size document with a full color picture and card graphics on one side. The other side will have a box outline in the center, reflecting the business card placement on the color side for the recipient to cut out. The label will go in the outline. Members will now have full color Connyak card and a label on the other side reflecting their due date. (clever?) The first posting will be done by group effort at a meeting. It was also suggested the Wayne will do further dues notices and mailings by himself. That motion was seconded and unanimously passed. (*When Wayne's away, the club is at play*)

The (*sveal killing / food*) posting issue was brought up and the general consensus was that we do want to maintain freedom of posting and that clowning around once in a while is something we all do. The group did decide that webmaster Bobby Curtis would have the right to delete any posting in bad taste written with a fake authorship.

Phil Warner does have a found Kayak that washed up in Stratford. A 16 ft. full kayak - plastic. If anybody has information on it's owner or what happened, please contact the club or Phil.

Nick Shade brought along a beautiful strip & carved wood kayak seat he made for a double kayak project that could double as an elegant serving tray with a lazy-susan base.

Recreational Boating Course offered in Florida



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
WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

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

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