

Conn Yak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

Fall 2008

PADDLING WITH WHALES OFF PROVINCETOWN



“Come ah... come left a little... or I’m sorry, right... no, left... I’m sorry,” I sputtered to Jon as we followed the spout of a Humpback whale that had appeared left in front of us. We were offshore in Jon’s tandem, near Stellwagen Bank, which lies north of Provincetown on Cape Cod. We were paddling southeast when we encountered the whale.

The day had started in Yarmouth, MA where we had met up to consolidate into one vehicle. In addition to the tandem, we were also bringing single kayaks with the idea of rolling while wearing masks if we encountered whales. Looking back, I’m not sure now if I would have been able to do that then. Our plan was to meet a park ranger Jon had been speaking to at the Visitor Center, find a good place to park, launch from the beach, and go find whales. We had a 100% chance of doing everything we wanted to do except for the last item. You are not always guaranteed of seeing a whale.

Off the Cape Cod National Seashore there are a variety of marine mammals, including harbor seals, gray seals, dolphins, Pilot whales, Minke whales, Humpback whales, Right whales, Sperm whales, Fin whales, and Blue whales. The whale watching boats that leave from P-town tell each other where they’ve sighted whales to allow the whale watchers on board to see them. These boats speed around until they see one, and then stop their engines.

In a tandem sea kayak, the story is a little different. We planned to go where there had been the most frequent sightings because we can’t cover the same amount of area as the whale watching boats. We also thought that we had a good chance of seeing something on Stellwagen Bank

Humpback whale

Picture by Phil Warner

As we headed out we ran into a whale watching boat that had a Humpback playing around it. The whale was slapping the water with its flipper and putting on a show. We didn’t want to get too close because we thought that was “their” whale. As other powerboats came in to see, we thought that we should stay out of the way of traffic and go find our own whale. Shucks, this is easy !

The closest portion of Stellwagen Bank lies about 6 miles to the northwest from Race Point. Even though conditions were calm, we decided to go there first in case of changing conditions. There were no signs announcing arrival to Stellwagen, but we saw more gear for lobsters. The water shallows to about 70 feet in this part of Stellwagen.

Fish On ! Jon called as his rod bent down over the water. When he brought his catch to the surface we found out it was a shark. Dogfish are a protected fishery and apparently, the only fish out there. Jon caught three more and we saw nine in total. Using a special hook grabber, he easily removed the hook and safely released each catch. They had been attracted to a little fly on the line, not the main hook.

While we were out on Stellwagen, we caught a glimpse of a Fin whale. Fin whales are about 75 feet long and are second in size compared to Blue whales. They spout low and this one was on a mission – three blows and it was gone. It had just barely broken the surface.

We sat around for a while listening – trying to hear a nearby whale.

Continued



Padding with Whales... continued

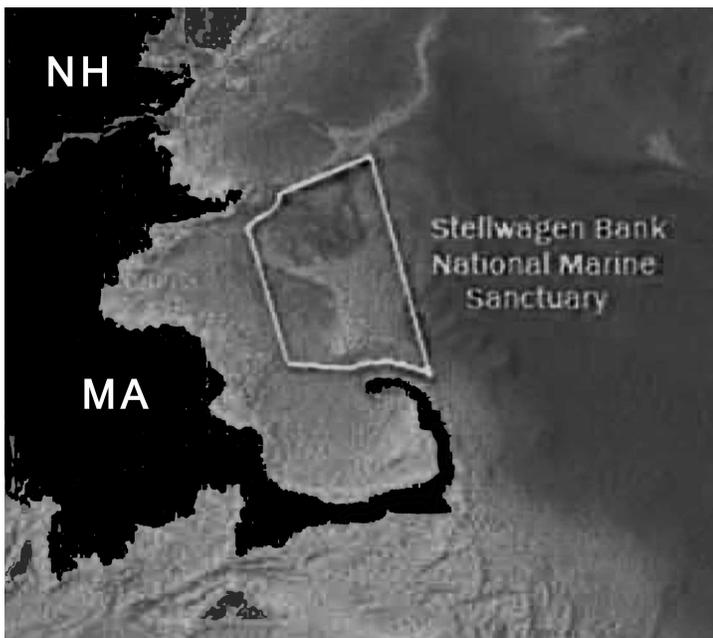


Jon with Dogfish

Picture by Phil Warner

After a while we decided to head back in – we were still a long way out. We ran into a lobster boat and they looked all around and said “Where did you come from ?” We pointed toward P-town, which was a very thin strip on the horizon. Everywhere else was just water. Way to the west we could just make out Plymouth and the coast of Massachusetts. They were surprised to see us out there.

When we were about three miles offshore and on the edge of Stellwagen, we saw one spout and then another. We headed that direction to investigate. The sound of a whale blow is unmistakable. These were blowing high and we figured the source to be Humpback whales. We found out it was a cow and her calf. She was about 45 to 50 feet long and absolutely incredible. The calf



was probably 25 feet long.

The camera was out and clicking. It looked like baby was learning how to fish. We would see a big blow and then flukes as they dove deeply. We were close, but cautious. For the next 45 minutes we followed “our whales” in awe and excitement. They would swim slowly on the surface for a few minutes between dives. We tried to anticipate where they would surface and get there first. They moved gracefully through the water.

It was after 3:00 when we decided to leave “our whales” because we were about four to five miles from our beach and likely fighting an ebb tide. We headed back in, still amazed by our encounter. In addition to stills, I switched the camera to “movie mode” and recorded the last encounter. I hope to get this on You Tube.

If you want to see whales this is the place to go and only a short drive – there is also a tidal stream to play in off Race Point. Check the weather forecast for conditions – .



Tales From the RWS (Rough Water Symposium) 2008

By *Leanora Kovacs*

In his video, Nick Schade describes the RWS as being about: expert coaching, expanding your limits, having fun, meeting new friends and creating community. I can attest that it is all of that and more.

Before I report on my RWS experience, I want to talk about the ConnYak paddling community. Thank you for taking the RWS up on their offer to send a member to the symposium. I somehow thought that there would be lots of names in the hat for this - and was surprised to have won. I am one of those people who never win anything, but I can't say that anymore. I live in New York's Hudson Valley, and I don't get to as many ConnYak events and paddles as I would like. Nonetheless, having grown up in Guilford and still having family there, I feel rooted in Connecticut. There is no comparable paddling community here in NY. I know that people complain, but you all have created a very special paddling community. While the RWS created a paddling community for three days, there really is no paddling community like ConnYak. So much of what I have learned about the art and sport of kayaking has come from you. Thank you to those who journeyed with me and first took me into some roughish water off Tybee Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Maine, the Hudson River, Lake George and in home waters. Thank you for teaching me to make a Greenland paddle, and thank you to those who helped me over and over and over again until I got my first roll. I did not need to go to the RWS to learn about creating a paddling community.

The RWS offers some very fine coaches; some of them come from our home shores.

The first day I found myself in the Greenland rolling class. The class I had signed up for had only one person in it (me) so I



switched. There were six of us in the class and our coaches were Turner Wilson and Greg Stamer. The class started referring to Turner as the "Reverend of Rolling." Turner deconstructed my roll and put it back together again. My roll is stronger and much more consistent as a result. Greg has to be one of the most patient and easygoing coaches I ever spent time with. The real "rough water" folks found the conditions off Rhode Island this Labor Day weekend disappointing. I had hoped to get out into more challenging conditions, but that didn't happen because of the general water conditions and because the class schedule was changed due to water conditions, available coaches and number of sign-ups. One of the other participants attended the Greenland classes at the Narrows River on Sunday. She reported that the "rough" part of the symposium that day was a disagreement with some power boaters who thought the folks with the skinny boats and sticks were taking up too much of "their" beach. I was told that the police were called, but that the kayakers left in order to avoid a physical confrontation. I had been there the day before and, even though it was rainy, we had the place mostly to ourselves. A large number of motorboats were an issue as well in the venue I paddled on Sunday. Despite exhaustion and having pains just about everywhere, I am really glad I went to RWS. I pushed against my limits, gained confidence, had fun and connected up with other paddlers. I encourage you to watch the video that Ron and Nick put together. If one picture is worth a thousand words...

(<http://maineislandkayakco.blogspot.com>).

Thanks again for giving me this opportunity.



The Connecticut premiere of Justine Curgenvén's latest video, 'This Is the Sea 4,' will occur on the evening of November 20, 2008. At the time of this writing, the venue has still not been resolved. Keep an eye on the ConnYak web site at connyak.org for information on this event.

The ConnYak library has a very good selection of tapes and DVDs on kayaking, including the previous incarnations of 'This is the Sea 1, 2, and 3. There are a lot of fans of these videos, which present an adventurous side of sea kayaking. Based on past experience, we are looking forward to seeing this one. Here is a short blurb about this video:

"This is the Sea 4" COMING SOON
3 great expedition stories – a 3 month circumnavigation of the windswept, surf-ridden South island of New Zealand, island hopping across the Bass Strait between Australia and Tasmania, and a circumnavigation of the beautiful Queen Charlotte Islands encountering whales, eagles and Haida culture. Also featuring kayak fun in Norway's stunning fjords, paddling on the Dead Sea in Israel, seakayaking down the Ottawa river, kayak fishing in San Diego, rockhopping in Baja, exploring caves and waterfalls on Lake Superior, and a feature on Dubsidie including rough water rolling at Deception Pass, rope gymnastics and Commando kayaking.

Check <connyak.org> for the bulletin board, events, classified, and more





Kristine at Lake George

Picture by Pete Smith

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