

Conn Yak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

Summer 2008

Sea Kayaking with a Minke Whale off Campobello By Nick Schade

Editor's Note: the following account is an excerpt from an article by Nick Schade that recounts a unique event which occurred during a paddling trip to Campobello Island in Canada.

We paddled across the 350-foot deep water towards Spruce Island keeping our eyes open for the large dorsal fin of a whale. One time I thought I saw a large gray back appear, but it was moving away from me and I didn't see it again. We continued across to Spruce Island, a small island covered in spruce, and went around the point where we saw Sandy Island, a small sandy island. Again we were impressed with the thought and care the chart makers put into naming the local landmarks.

We explored up the northwestern side of Spruce, but we still hadn't seen a whale for certain and Jon was starting to look at his watch and worry about the drive home. We figured we would go back out into the current and try to ride the tide down towards Friars Bay where we left the car. I was thinking about lunch.

Back out in Head Harbor Passage Jon saw what he thought might have been a whale but, you know, it was far away, it might have been something else. Jon suggested we cross over and follow the northwest shore of Campobello for a while. I was thinking about lunch.

I pointed out that Casco Bay Island looked interesting. It was covered with spruce plus it had some nice sandy beaches. The combination evidently confused the chart makers so much they named the island after a bay that was several hundred miles away in another country. I also noted to Jon that it was almost time



Jon and Whale Picture by Nick Shade

Summertime Kayaking

By Pete Smith

We have been having a great time kayaking this summer! Claudine and I attended the Meet at the Beach in June, a neat event organized by Nick Shade that provides a forum for kayak designers and builders to showcase their creations. In addition to Nick's own kayaks, many other talented local boatbuilders participated, and Chesapeake Lite Craft came with a small fleet of their kayaks. We spent the afternoon comparing the different kayaks on the water, and had a great time.

Another fun event was the Hudson River Greenland Festival. This 3-day weekend was all about learning Greenland kayaking skills. I would be amazed if anyone who attended did not leave with some improved skills and new appreciation for this classic form of kayaking. This event was supported by the Yonkers Paddling and Rowing Club and a group of dedicated volunteer organizers. Great job!

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for lunch. I think the mention of lunch made the virtues of this small island clear to Jon. Amy knew better than to get in the middle of such a weighty decision.

The choice for Jon was between getting back to the car to drive home or eating lunch on a pretty island in Canada. He made the logical choice. With the current pushing us along, it didn't take long to get down to Casco Bay Island. The beaches at the eastern end looked nice, but we decided to do a quick circumnavigation to make sure we didn't miss anything.

Around the north side of the island a small island protected a small cove. There was not much in it, just a log splashing up against the rocks. I paddled inside of the island and was headed out of the cove when there was a sound.

"PUFFT"

Jon asked, "What was that?"

Again, "PUFFT".

It was the log. Again the log went "PUFFT".

It is not my experience that logs make much noise. The occasional "bump" or "thud", but rarely do they go "PUFFT"

Jon announced, "It's a whale!"

"What's wrong with it?" Asked Amy.

"Its stranded."

"What should we do?"

"Let's check it out."

The small (12 to 15') Minke whale was in amongst the rockweed with its lower jaw up on a ledge.

Jon pulled ashore and went over to get a closer look. Its lower jaw was scraped up with small pieces of skin floating around and blood showing.

Amy and I got out to get a closer look. The whale was breathing heavily and erratically, in evident distress. Jon walked out on the rock and put his hand on the back of the whale. Its breath slowed down and became more consistent.

Amy asked again, "What should we do."



East Quoddy Head Light Picture by Nick Shade

Everybody has heard of whales stranding themselves and resisting all efforts to assist them.

I suggested we could call the Coast Guard on my VHF.

Amy went to pet the whale while I went to fetch Jon's camera.

The whale was breathing evenly, but it looked in bad shape. Its lower jaw was really a mess. It just floated there with its pectoral fins pulled tightly against its body. It didn't seem to be making any attempt to extricate itself from the situation.

The body was smooth and sleek. Light gray on top fading to almost white on the bottom. Its skin was the gently curved and fair surface of an object engineered to move through the water with minimum resistance. As a kayak designer it was a shape that would put my best designs to shame.

Amy asked, "Can you push it off the rock?"

Jon said, "Yea, right. The thing probably weighs a ton."

But he pushed a little and the whale rolled over slightly and slid off the rock. It drifted away from the seaweed and then slowly settled to the bottom. It was too deep to see what was going on, but we could see a little current where it must have been moving its tail.

Amy ran to get her waterproof throwaway camera and pull on her wetsuit with the intention of swimming in to get a picture.

After about five minutes, just as Amy finished putting on



her wetsuit, the whale started to move. At first all you could see was a flicker of light under the surface, then a wave on the otherwise glassy water. The wave did a couple laps off the point where we were standing. When it was close to us we could see the whale stroking with its tail. After two or three laps the whale surfaced in front of us, went "PUFFT" one more time and the last we saw was a wave moving out of the cove to the sea.

"Coooo!" said someone.

We just stood there and looked out towards where we last saw the whale.

What do you do after you have petted a whale and to all appearances, saved its life?

Eat lunch.

The rest of the paddle was exceptionally nice. We paddled around rocks around the end of Casco Bay Island. Then we crossed Head Harbor Passage and explored sea caves. We met up with Clark and the rest of the group. We did some serious gloating and made it clear we were having more fun than they were. Then we played in the surf and surge at the end of East Quoddy Head. Everything we did after the whale was really a lot of fun. But I expect the afterglow of the whale experience cast a light on the trip back to the cars which made it seem much more fun than it would otherwise have been taken all by itself.



Meeting New Friends by Stripping By Jim Hegg

No you don't have to hide this article from the kids. I am of course talking about strip built kayaks. After kayaking for a couple years, a friend asked me if I ever thought about building a kayak. Since I love woodworking this was a logical question. At the time this was the last type of project I was interested in. After paddling with Jay, talking with him about the process and trying his boat I changed my mind and planned on trying my hand at building a boat.

New Friends... Continued

Over the last couple of years I have built two boats and they are by no means masterpieces especially when seen sitting next to some of the other boats club members have built. Sitting by itself at a launch site is another story though. A wooden kayak can be a unique and interesting conversation piece. I can count on one hand the times I have been loading or unloading my boat and have had no one come over to talk about it. It doesn't matter if they are kayaking, power boating or fishing from shore. I always enjoy talking with these people and many times I have ended up paddling with a new group of people. Last year a fellow was sitting on a rock watching people coming up to me. He finally came over and said he wasn't a kayaker but he would love to build a boat. He said he would set it down on the side of the ramp and spend the morning just talking to people.

Its funny but the two questions I am asked most frequently are the two I have the hardest time answering. The first is, "How much does it weigh?" I don't know, I never weighed it because it never really mattered to me. I know one of the boats is lighter than the other and they both are lighter than my production boat. The second question I get is, "How many hours did it take to build?" I didn't keep track. Some nights I worked on it 3 hours and other nights it could have been 15 minutes. I went months without looking at it when I had other more pressing projects to finish. My strongback was on rollers so I would roll it against the garage wall, cover it with a tarp and forget about it. If someone said it took me 200 hours I wouldn't be surprised. If they said it took 500 hours I wouldn't argue. The point is, I used the build as fun project and didn't want to be tied down to keeping a journal.

ConnYak is very lucky to have so many designers and builders as members. Some of the people are well known in kayaking circles nationally and even internationally. I would encourage any of you to talk to these people, try one of their boats during a club paddle and give building one a try. If you are wary because of the time involved build a paddle first. You will catch the building bug when you see how it feels propelling yourself through the water



New Friends... Continued

with something you crafted. Nick hosts "Meet at the Beach" every year where builders from all over come to showcase their boats and discuss the various aspects of building. It is a unique opportunity to observe, learn and try various kayaks. The event has already occurred this year but mark it on your calendar for next spring.

Our web page also has a link to boat builders in the club. This is another source you could use to identify the builders and check out pictures of their different projects. I don't have any more room to store kayaks at my home but I am again starting to think about starting a new boat. I haven't heard of many builders who can stop after they get started with this hobby. Happy building!

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In addition to the summertime events, everyone seems to be taking their vacations now. ConnYak members tend to be all taking their kayaks on vacation. If we could get everyone to write articles at the end of the summer, this newsletter would look more like an issue of National Geographic than a local kayaking newsletter.

If you would like to submit an article for the next ConnYak newsletter, email me at <linktopete@yahoo.com>

See you on the water! PS



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events, classified, and more.**

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