



SEAL WATCHING



We are bobbing in the frigid, slate-gray waters of Fishers Island Sound in January, our eyes fixed on a group of rocks known as the Clumps. From a distance of a quarter-mile, the creatures sprawled on the exposed shoal resemble gulls or cormorants, but as we slowly paddle closer the familiar flippers and curved, torpedo-shaped bodies become increasingly identifiable.

Unfortunately, this is also when we kayakers are more visible to the colony of harbor seals. By the time we are 100 yards of them, the closest one slides silently beneath the waves. In seconds, the rest follow suit, and we are alone in the water. But not for long. A minute later, a sleek black head pops up 50 yards to starboard, and I whisper to my nearby companions, "Three o'clock" just as it ducks under again. Now there's another head, and another, and another. Soon we are surrounded by seals, seemingly as curious about us homo sapiens as we are of pinnipeds.

It's anthropomorphically tempting to call this a marine game of hide and seek, but in all likelihood the seals are probably trying to make sure we're not predators or competitors for the small fish known as sandlance on which they principally feed.

While most of the thousands of seals which migrate annually from Maine and points north along the Atlantic Seaboard wind up at Monomoy, a barrier island off Cape Cod, many continue swimming further south into the protected waters of Long Island Sound and can often be found on rocks and on small islands as far west as New Haven throughout the winter. The largest concentration of seals between Rhode Island and New York, and therefore the most accessible to ConnYak paddlers, is off Fishers Island at the extreme eastern end of Long Island Sound.

Happily, their numbers have been increasing over the years, since the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972. Previously, commercial fishermen and lobstermen routinely slaughtered seals in the mistaken belief that they were competing for the same catch. An examination of the stomachs of 2,000 seals shot a number of years ago in Canada found none contained lobsters, and the sandlance is not a commercial fish.

While there have been motorized tour boats taking passengers from Groton and Mystic to see the seals, the best way, of course, is by kayak. I realize I'm preaching to the choir here, but a kayak offers greater maneuverability, a sense of adven-

ture, and blissful silence. Also, there is something esthetically pleasing and historically enriching about being in a kayak looking at seals, even if our vessels are made of plastic and fiberglass instead of whalebones and stretched animal skins.

Since the skittish animals are especially shy about facing a kayaker, one trick (probably first developed by Eskimos wielding harpoons instead of Connecticutians armed with Nikons) is to paddle backwards and have it pop up in what it thinks is a rear position. This, however, is not always a wise maneuver in the middle of the winter, especially if you're carrying an expensive camera.

It goes without saying that extra precautions and preparations must be made for cold-weather paddling. To all the usual measures a safe and sane kayaker takes - always wear a PFD, check weather conditions before setting out, inform a responsible friend of your itinerary - add the following:

- Never go out alone.
- Wear a dry suit or wet suit.
- Keep your spray skirt on.
- Make sure you and your paddling partners are skilled at open-water rescue.
- Above all, don't overstay your welcome. This is mainly for the benefit of the seals. While it probably is harmless for a handful of paddlers

to spend a few minutes seeing the animals in their native habitat instead of in an aquarium tank, it might be upsetting to have a horde surrounding them for hours. Don't try to feed them or chase them; to adapt the Sierra Club credo, take only pictures and leave only your gentle wake.

GETTING THERE:

The best place to launch your kayak for a trip to Fishers Island is Esker Point in Groton, between Noank and Groton Long Point. From Exit 88 on Interstate-95, follow Route 117 south about a mile until it ends at a traffic light on Route 1. Take a left, heading east, and follow Route 1 to the top of a hill where the road forks. Bear

slightly to the right and keep going straight on Groton Long Point Road (Route 215). St. Mary's Church and Fitch Senior High School will be on your right. Continue down the hill for about 3 miles until you come to Esker Point Beach on your left, directly across the street from The Fisherman restaurant. There is a small parking lot near the beach and a larger one across the street. Launch your boat on the right (west) side of the beach just south of a small bridge, carrying it about 25 yards down a slight grade.

The three Clumps (West, Middle and East) are about 2 miles due south of Esker Point, in New York waters east of the Dumpling Islands and a sandy beach called Flat Hammock. Aim for Clay Point just east of West

Harbor on Fishers Island. On a calm day (the only day you should be out) it will take half an hour to an hour, depending on how hard you want to push. Be especially mindful of strong tidal currents midway across which can produce chop even on windless days.

Prime viewing is at ebb tide, when the rocks are most exposed. If possible, get there a little before mean low so you have some time to hang out before the returning flood makes it difficult to hold your position while drifting. Another strategy is to use the tide to bring you closer to the seals without having to paddle, but this can be tricky, particularly if there's a breeze.

Steve Fagain - *The New London Day*

NOTES FROM THE MEETING

The club officers were elected or "passed" by the members. As much as we have been encouraging people to volunteer for the sake of change, the only new addition to the roster is Phil Warner who is now Vice President - filling a formally vacant spot.

The issue of the Newsletter was discussed with suggestions for various articles of interest to the club members. To keep it diversified and a voice of the club members, input is necessary.

We may start monthly articles on various (favorite) paddling locations. This would cover the launch site as well as the land and water characteristics and what you like to do there. Included in this group would be lakes and ponds. Other topics suggested are: emergency repairs, kayak camping, wish trips, surf kayaking, helpful hints, boat building and outfitting.

The learning experiences of new kayakers would be a welcome addition to all the official advice we normally read. What we are really doing is sharing experiences - like having a conversation with other kayakers. Articles can be written with absolutely no research work whatsoever.

So...if you have a favorite spot to paddle or you're sick of trying to eskimo roll and never want to try it again - share you views with the

club. Your opinion is as valid as anybody's.

"98" CLUB OFFICERS

President - Stan Kegeles

Vice President - Phil Warner

Treasurer - Dick Gamble

Secretary - Jay Babina

As of 2/98, we have 160 members.

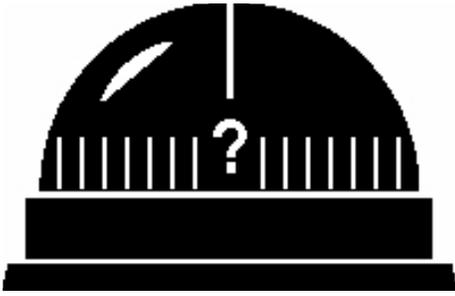
ROLLING SESSIONS-WILTON

8 sessions starting Jan. 11 - Wilton, CT

9:30 - 11:30 Sundays at the Wilton YMCA. Pool practice with instruction. Fee - \$8. per session. Sponsored by CT Whitewater Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Call Jeff Barnard 203-356-0445 or Mark Schappert 203-775-1569 for info.



Heading out from the East River launch ramp over to the Thimbles. L to R. Maite Barainca, Bob Efron, Don Lewie and Bob Ferrante - photo by Bob Caneschi.



You're paddling at a compass direction of 337° heading towards your favorite island with the shoreline a half mile to your right. It's starting to fog in so you decide to head back. You turn around to go back but instead, you decide it would be safer to head in to shore which is now on your left. What's your new heading?

Basic Navigation Refresher Lecture

If you would like to learn all the basic rules and tricks of using the compass for kayak navigation come to the next meeting. Dick Gamble - former U.S. Navy navigator, an avid seaman and active kayaker (also Treasurer of ConnYak) will be addressing all the basic issues of kayak navigation and answering the questions that you have been too embarrassed to ask in public. (like deviation, the compass rose, red-right-return and those weird chart symbols) Bring along all your questions and hand them to Dick when nobody is looking. Everything will be answered in this basic navigation refresher lecture.

Topics:

The Compass:

Variation and the Rose, Deviation, Changing course, Relative bearings -are we on a collision course?

Currents and Wind:

Vector diagrams, Using Ranges, Fetch, Rips and Surf, Tidal Flow "Rule of Twelve"

Navigational Aides

Buoys and Markers, Charts, Longitude - why did the old sea captains have a patch over one eye? Electronics- GPS, VHF etc

The Trip Plan

INTRO TO KAYAKING WKSHP.

Sat. Feb 21. - Cromwell, 3-5 pm

Workshop will feature introduction and demonstration of paddling strokes, turns, braces, Eskimo rolls and rescue techniques. Fee includes indoor pool time, kayak, paddle, pfd and sprayskirt. Taught by BCU Certified Level 2 Coach Fern S. Usen. Call (860)-529-4612 or email: inukshuk@mindspring.com

GREENLAND STYLE WKSHP.

Sun. March 1. - Wilton 9:30-11:30 am

Instruction is provided by BCU Certified Level 2 Coach Fern S. Usen. The workshop will include demonstration and instruction of various rolls, rescues, paddling stroke techniques, braces and sculling. Fee for the class is \$35. Reservation is required. Call (860)-529-4612 or email inukshuk@mindspring.com.

DUES ARE DUE (NEW POLICY)

You'll notice that your mailing label now has the month that you need to send in your dues. You'll receive a notice inserted in your newsletter as well. Members will get a grace period

of two more issues and reminders, and then... no more newsletters!

So... please try to send in your dues in a timely fashion, it will immensely help out those who have to keep tracking all of this !

CONNYPAC POOL SESSIONS

Sundays - Feb. 15, 22 & March 1

ConnYak pool sessions run for four hours - 9 am to 1 pm at Sheehan High School pool in Wallingford. The fee is \$20 for each session or \$50 for all three. Due to the Wallingford Town fee of reserving the pool, we would like to collect money in advance. It's the best bargain around for a 4 hour pool session.

This is open pool time for your own practice. Although no instruction is offered, everyone helps each other in

sharing what they know.

Once again, Mike Falconeri has gone out of his way to set up the dates and reserve the pool for us. We owe him a special thanks for this valuable service. Send checks to: Stan Kegeles, P.O. Box 2006 Branford, CT 06405

Directions: Exit 15 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.



Phil Babina practicing his roll in last year's ConnYak pool sessions. photo by Linda Ivany

CLASSIFIED

Wanted: Betsey Bay Recluse, glass or wood. 860-269-0569

Werner Camino paddle. 1 pc. 80° feathered - \$ 50. 203-481-3221

Thule Rack System: Racks, adapter kit, & mounts - \$90.00 (new: \$220.00) Thule Accessories \$45.00 each: Kayak saddles, Windsurf saddles, Bicycle carrier, Ski Racks. (203) 486-5934 during the day or email: inukshuk@mindspring.com

Wanted: Inexpensive used sea kayak for adolescent - 860-693-0211

ConnYak classifieds are free.



Send newsletter articles and photos to:
Jay Babina E-mail jbabina@snet.net
7 Jeffrey Lane, N. Branford, CT 06471
203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136

NEXT CONNYAK MEETING

WED. FEB. 18 - 7:30 PM
WALLINGFORD PARK & REC.

NAVIGATION REFRESHER LECTURE BY DICK GAMBLE

*Exit 15 (Rt 68) off I-91 in Wallingford. West on Rt. 68. (toward Wallingford)
Approx. 3/4 mile take a right at the Fire Station (Barnes Road). Take your first Rt. off Barnes on to Fairfield Blvd.
Wallingford Park & Rec. is the 2nd building on the left.*

ROLLING SESSIONS-SUFFIELD

8 sessions starting Jan. 9th - Suffield, CT

Fri. Jan 9th for 8 consecutive weeks.
Time - 8:15 - 10:15 pm. - instruction will be offered. Fees are only \$8. per session or \$50 for all 8 payable at the first session. Contact Ed Chase at 860-668-2962.

LESSONS & ROLLING SESSIONS

*Urban Eskimo Kayaking - Mike Falconeri
Skills Workshop Sat., March 21,
Eskimo Rolling, Sun March 22*

Classes held at Sheehan High School Pool in Wallingford. Call Wallingford Park & Rec 203-294-2120 or Mike at 203-284-9212.

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 fees are \$30. Members are automatically joined into the membership of the ACA which entitles you to full insurance coverage on trips as well as a full subscription to PADDLER Magazine. (a \$15 subscription)
Send inquiries to: Stan Kegeles
P.O. Box 2006, Branford, CT 06405



c/o Stan Kegeles
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