

# CONN YAK



CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

September 1998

## AROUND MANHATTAN ISLAND

IN TEN HOURS

by Jim Mathews



Bob Efron with his son Jay

Al Ysaguirre (Capt. Al)

Jim Mathews

Once I had become aware of the opportunity to circumnavigate Manhattan Island by kayak, it became something that I knew I had to do. As a newly enrolled member of MASK, (Metropolitan Association of Sea Kayakers) I had received my first newsletter and there to my delight, was the announcement of their annual circumnavigational event to be held on July 11. Immediately I began to experience a set of diverse emotions that would persist up until the trip and then throughout the 33 miles and 10 hours of the paddle itself. I was: thrilled with the opportunity to cruise under my own power around the city that was my home for the first 21 years of my life; scared to go through the legendary wild waters of Hell's Gate (the confluence of three rapidly moving bodies of water), awed by the thought of passing beneath some of the tallest and longest bridges in the world; worried about my endurance to go such a distance; and confident that I could do it.

I read the article describing last year's trip, called and spoke to many people who had completed the trip previously, and received different information from each. For some it was exhausting, for others it was refreshing. For some it was scary, for others it was relaxing. For some it was challenging, for others it was just a long day. I talked about the trip

for several months with my ConnYak friends thinking that there was a lot of interest and gaining in the belief that there would be a lot familiar faces for the day's event. As it turned out, there was only a small contingent of ConnYak members, Bobby Curtis, a veteran of many previous trips, Bob Efron, his son Jay, and me at the Liberty Island State Park launch site at the appointed hour. Bob and I agreed that we would stay together throughout the day.

I had traveled down to New York City the night before and tented at a campground on the water's edge right next to Liberty Park, because there was to be an 8:30 launch and a long day of paddling. The sun had just set, creating a brilliant pallet of colors in the magnificent New York City skyline across the harbor. The wind was howling as it blew across the Hudson River from the World Trade Center making the setting up of a tent a struggle which might have been a foreshadowing of what was to come the next day.

At the appointed hour Captain Al Ysaguirre, the President of MASK, briefed the 23 souls who rallied around him in the warm early morning sunlight. Some had traveled from as much as several hundred miles away and each of us possessed some combination of excitement and anxiety although bravery and

bravado was the primarily expressed emotion. The questions included: how long would it take?, was it going to be rough water?, would the 20 mile an hour wind make the afternoon 13 mile downriver run from the George Washington Bridge an eternity as it was last year?, will the ferry boats keep their distance?

Capt. Al said that the trickiest part of the paddle would occur right away with the two mile crossing of the harbor past Governors Island because the current, winds and large boat wakes all work against themselves and then reflect off the rocky shallow shoreline of the island creating some very confusing water. "Stay away from the shoreline and you should be all right", he cautioned. "Any other questions?". "Okay, we have to get going in order to have the currents going with us all the way." We were off!

The water in the bay behind the Statue of Liberty was like glass and as we made our way out the channel towards the Statue glowing in the morning's golden sunshine, the surface began to take on a few ripples. After taking a picture or two it was out into the harbor where we were no longer protected from the wind that was getting stronger and where the water was becoming more and more agitated. As we headed into the center of the Harbor, a blue New York City Police Boat appeared which would be our

escort for the morning to protect us from the very large boat traffic that plied the busy shipping lanes. The further we went, the wilder the water got, and then the full fury hit and we were in the most turbulent waters I had ever tried to negotiate. Remembering the words of Capt. Al's caution, I pried myself further away from the southern tip of Governors Island and then I heard the loudest drawing of one's breath I could imagine, as veteran Bobby Curtis pumped up his adrenaline. Well, if Bobby was concerned, can you imagine what went through my mind? Then right in front of my eyes, I saw the first of three paddlers who would capsize, then a second, and then the third. Picking our way through the waves that came from every which way, Bob Efron asked me if I should help the overturned man who was closest to us or should he. I would have had to turn around to get back to him and Bob was just coming up along side of him so I said: "do it!" Once we were clear of the island and in the protection of a wharf, we all took time to catch our breath and quietly exchange those looks that only survivors know. Bob had joined us after the rescue. Capt. Al had rescued the second and the Police had plucked the third out and taken him back to the launch site saying that he had had enough.

The next part of the Harbor was much calmer or maybe it just looked so, relative to what we had just been through. A beautiful view of the lower end of Manhattan offered views of the World Trade Center, the Staten Island Ferry slips and the Battery. Once we were safely into the East River, we all joined up again, and proceeded on past the South Street Pier and under the three long bridges that span the river over to Brooklyn. Looking up high from just two feet off the water, you can distinctly see the underside of each structure and can hear rattling of the cars, trucks, and subways busily hurrying from one side to the other. The current was now speeding us along at probably six knots, which made for a super ride except for the wakes of the tugs with their barges, large powerboats and the sightseeing liners, all acting as if we didn't exist. Soon we were over the midtown tunnel, past the Empire State Building, the UN and then under the 59th Street Bridge and alongside the massive building project on Roosevelt Island. Just after this is the

famous Hell Gate where waters frequently collide creating a very unstable platform of water just to be on let alone paddle. The large standing waves can easily catch your paddle instigating the possibility of an undesired roll into waters which had some evidence of sewage floating. Fortunately, Capt. Al had the timing just right and the area was calm and our first of two stopping spots was just ahead. We stopped at Mill Rock, an island in the middle of the river that the New York City Parks Department claims as one of its properties. Henry Espinoza, who rides point for the trip, was directing us into a cove where we took the boats out of the water for a short while. The Island is barren and had just enough room for us to gather, making us wonder how it was possible for them to have had 59 paddlers there last year.

Once refreshed we were off again, heading into the Harlem River where we then had to share the river with 22 swimmers engaged in the annual Manhattan Swim Marathon. Each of the red hatted swimmers had a motor boat and kayak escort, making the river seem quite crowded, especially when other large boats squeezed through the now narrowed channel. Passing under eleven more bridges brought us to Spuyten Duyvil where Columbia University has its boathouse, an old haunt of mine from my days of being on the college crew team. The water had become choppy again at the very northern tip of the Island where we were soon to enter and cross the Hudson River.

It was like *deja vu* with the return of the wild waters we had met that morning. Capt. Al said "set a ferry angle upstream so that we don't land downstream of the park at Englewood, New Jersey" which was just about directly across the two mile wide river and would be our second and final rest stop. Veterans of the wild stuff that we were, we landed exactly on the beach just in front of the porta potty that was a welcome sight and the soft sand that made for an easy landing in contrast to the rocky Mill Rock stop of several hours earlier.

Bobby Curtis checked his weather radio to assess the afternoon winds which could have given us a fast ride home if it was going in our direction or

set up large waves and impede our progress if it was blowing from the south as it had the year before. As luck would have it, there was compensation for our morning thrill ride and we would have a fast paced and smooth three hour trip down the 13 miles of Hudson River, which went under the George Washington Bridge, past Riverside Church, Grants Tomb, The Javitts Center, Chelsea Piers and finally Ellis Island. The group was now well spread out and as we got to within touching distance of the Statue of Liberty for the second time that day, Capt. Al who stayed at the end of the group throughout the journey suggested to the few that were still with him that we turn around and see a view of the skyline of New York that was superb. He was most certainly correct.

Then we were back again at the foot of the great green lady still standing majestically now in the warm late afternoon some ten hours later. It was just a short paddle back up the channel to the launch site where donuts and Gatorade awaited the courageous and invigorated band of paddlers.

Capt. Al looked proud of his flock and his flock looked proud of themselves.



**Bobby Curtis checking the weather on the VHF**

## TRIPS WITH NO LEADERS?

Most clubs run the same trips every year organized by the same people at the same time of year. Somewhere along the line, during the formation of the clubs, those who came forward to do something remained the permanent founder of that activity for life. It seems with most clubs, the majority is run by the few. Once this agenda is accepted, most members assume that this is the way it's supposed to be and will go along with that agenda until they are too old to paddle any more.

I have always been an advocate of running less demanding "social" paddles that would bring the silent majority out of hibernation. With a club of over 200 members, I for one would like to meet these members some day and maybe even paddle with them. I ran an ad last issue, offering members to join in with me on weekends with a response of two women and one man.

If you read the listing "Recreational Paddlers" you will probably agree, that we really don't know our own club. One thing for sure, we are very diversified.

Dean Bertoldi made a suggestion which makes a lot of sense. "Why not have the members write in a few sentences about what kind of boat they paddle and the type of paddling they like to do". ...kind of introducing ourselves to each other. We will do this in an issue to come. We could spread this information out along various issues if it becomes too large.

For many years I have always listed paddles (not trips) to keep things going out of a sense of commitment - not because I felt like being a guide. I have always enjoyed every one of them, especially the new faces that arrive. For me, the destination is secondary. If you want to do a full blown trip with camping gear etc. or a challenging paddle, you're going to have to qualify your partners for ability as well as compatibility.

I think there are many reasons members don't list a "paddle". I believe many feel they're not qualified (a super guide) or feel they are setting themselves up for a sense of responsibility they really don't want. There's also a fear of being legally responsible, fear of commitment, and the pressure of feeling they have to provide a great experience for everyone. All of these are false.

We list a paddle so we can share the event. This is why we're a club and not

a tour guide service. The decisions are democratic based on who shows up, weather conditions and everyone's mood. As Kayakers and human beings, we all share in the responsibility of helping each other all of the time, whether we're in our boats or not.

In the future we will list the paddles as such and not as "trips". They can be as little as three hours or whatever you want to do. Actual trips will be described in more detail.

I feel the club needs to list a group of paddle locations and dates for the year with no designated leader whatsoever. The paddlers who show up for these get-togethers will make (obvious) decisions to meet their desires. The route of the paddle will be listed so those wishing to paddle know what to expect, but changeable based on conditions. This way we can fill an itinerary with paddles and those who want to list themselves as the organizer can still go ahead and do that; or list their own trip. The assumption with these paddles is that you bring lunch, paddle the morning, stop for lunch and work your way back. If part of the group wants to paddle longer, they can do so as long as everyone has company and can get back safely.

This way all kinds of locations could be entered without the feeling that you're suddenly responsible or that you can't get out of it if something in your schedule prevents you from arriving.

The membership wants more listed paddles and trips. We could easily revitalize the club itinerary with this simple move. Besides, I really don't think paddling get-togethers need a guide ... the same way you don't need a guide when you paddle with your friends. You just make paddling decisions based on the desires of your group and watch out for each other.

JB

## RECREATIONAL PADDLERS

(Otter, Keowee, Pongo & the like) If interested in joining others for 2-6 hr. paddles, weekends or evenings contact Susan Cross 860-664-3550

## CONNYPAK T-SHIRTS

Cost to members is \$6. ea. - our cost. They will be at the meetings and at various paddles etc.

## PADDLES



## BARN ISLAND - STONINGTON

SATURDAY, SEPT 19

Paddle to Stonington Harbor for lunch and explore surrounding inlets. Pack lunch.

### DIRECTIONS -

I-95 to exit 91 in Stonington. Right at the end of the ramp - proceed to Stop sign. Take a Rt. and first left heading toward downtown Stonington. At first junction go left on Rt 1. Approx 2 miles is a light with the sign for the Barn Island Launch. Take a right and another immediate right to the launch ramp.

In the water by 10:30 a.m.

## GREAT ISLAND - OLD LYME

Explore Back River - Inland waterways and Shore Line. Pack lunch.

### DIRECTIONS -

**Note: All paddlers on ConnYak trips must wear the appropriate CG approved Personal Flotation Device and wear a spray skirt. The boat and equipment must meet CG requirements, including an appropriate signaling device. All paddlers are responsible for their own safety, including dressing for immersion. Beginners must have taken a basic course and be proficient in performing a wet exit. (always carry extra dry clothes)**

## LAST CHANCE! E-MAIL DIRECTORY

### - OCT. PRINTING

Our e-mail and members list is being mailed out in Oct. - printing. Contact [Richard.f.gamble@snet.net](mailto:Richard.f.gamble@snet.net) and give your name and e-mail address so we can put it in our data base. Include the e-mail address below your name so we get the simplified version with no extra coding that occurs in the address area.

Our future ConnYak (sign up) form will ask for an e-mail address.

**Trip Cancellations** - In doubt due to weather? call 203-481-1881 - a message will be on answer machine.

## CLASSIFIED

Feathercraft K1 Expedition Single (foldable kayak) 15' 11" x 25", sea sock, spray skirt, color teal, 1996 costs \$ 3850.00 sacrifice \$3500.00. Never in the water. 203-772-3174.

2 Woman's Kokatat drysuits, med & small - Bib style, boots incl. New \$275. 860-693-9625

Women's feet heaters, size 5 -\$15. Women's wet suit, sm. farmer John & Jacket \$100. 203-481-1912

Greenland paddle (cricket) \$150. Palm spray skirt \$35. Pump & Paddle float \$35. Thule saddles \$55. Thule outrigger bar \$35 all new cond. 401-596-4482

Necky Sea Kayak Looksha IV. 16' like new, used one season. White and Turquoise. \$1800.00 860-228-0105

Wood Strip built, Laughing Loon "Panache" 18' x 21" totally glassed. \$2300. 203-481-3221

Wanted, used double Kayak Call 203-426-2414

Wilderness Systems 3yr old Sealution—Kevlar w/ rudder, blue/ white. Includes Werner 2-piece Camano paddle, Spray Skirt, Bilge pump, Paddle float, Yakima saddles. \$1500. 860-485-9173

Wanted, Romany Explorer. - email JHotch2@aol.com or 203-656-0521

Wanted - P & H Sirius - low volume or Romany 16' 860-278-7440

Thule rack system, complete with 2-58" bars, 4 saddles without straps, 4 gutter feet with locks. \$150. Call 860-613-0622

Perception Piroutte S (whitewater) - only used for surfing, includes bow & stern airbags, drain-plug, foam backrest. \$425.00 new cond. 860-529-4612 - email inukshuk@mindspring.com

Necky Arluk 1.8 18' x 22", white, glass, includes spray skirt \$1100. 860-747-1223

1996 Necky Narpa, Granite color, expedition model, Bulkheads, rudder, thigh braces, backband. \$800 (860) 727-6927 days and (860) 875-0642 evenings or e-mail wsmith16@snet.net

Betsie Bay Manitou - fiberglass 22" x 18', excellent cond. \$1400. 203-269-0569

Wilderness System Sealution. Glass - all Gray w/ red deck lines, rudderless, VCP hatches, Suunto Compass, Spray skirt, very good condition. \$1100 (860) 521-9054

12 ft Pirogue ( flat bottom canoe) Stitch and glue construction in marine grade plywood. Epoxy/glass. Good for quiet lakes/ swamps etc. Used twice. \$250 (860) 521-9054

Reiver - Derek Hutchinson design, 17' 1 1/2" x 22" - fiberglass, Day hatch, spray skirt. ex. cond. \$1600.00 (203) 457-0149.

**Please contact the Newsletter when items are sold.**

## KAYAK SKILLS & ROLLING

*Urban Eskimo Kayaking - Mike Falconeri  
Skills Workshops and Eskimo Rolling*

On-going lessons and trips by appointment. Call 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 fee is \$15. Members can join the ACA with a club discount for \$15 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 e-mail Connyak@mindspring.com

**Website:** mindspring.com/~connyak

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to: Jay Babina e-mail Jbabina@snet.net 7 Jeffrey Lane, N. Branford, CT 06471 203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136



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