



A Brush with Near-Disaster

By Geoffrey Havens

On Sunday May 3, 1998, five of us went paddling in Fishers Island Sound. The weekend weather report was for a total washout, but Saturday had been pretty nice, and Sunday was looking good too. We set out from Barn Island State Boat Launch in Stonington, in the southeastern corner of Connecticut. This launch provides easy access to all kinds of different waters. Stonington harbor is the last working fishing port in Connecticut, and there are big marinas at the outlet of the Pawcatuck River into Little Narragansett Bay. Paddling into Watch Hill, Rhode Island or out to Fisher's Island, New York lets us look at the "other half's" mansions. The island of Sandy Point is a long beach, totally undeveloped and accessible only by boat. On really windy days, we tuck into the large salt marshes that are part of the Barn Island Wildlife Preserve, but in any kind of good weather we usually head straight for Napatree Point.

Napatree is the exposed top of a glacial moraine ridge running from Watch Hill out to the eastern end of New York's Long Island. Except for Napatree and a few small islands, the ridge is submerged, making the water shallower than either the Atlantic Ocean to the east or Long Island Sound to the west. Some great rips develop when the tide's running, making for exciting paddling. Sometimes big waves come in from the Atlantic side.

When they get to Napatree, the raising of the seabed makes the waves rise up to greater height and they often break there.

Off the end of Napatree Point there's an old, broken-down breakwater. It runs one-big-rock thick, jutting out to about 200 feet out from the point, and pointing towards Fishers Island. It's often almost submerged, but we got there that day under two hours past low tide, and rocks were well exposed. Incoming waves were rising nicely to about six feet and breaking. We attempted to surf, but were constrained by the necessity of avoiding the rocks, so we mostly just hung around and let the breakers crash on us, making for good bracing practice.

We were about to move along to the beach on Napatree's ocean-facing side. I was facing the Point about fifty yards from the breakwater when a big wave rose and broke right beside me. I high-braced into it to avoid capsizing and found myself side-surfing in the foamy face of the wave. Ordinarily this is great fun, and I'll play in the froth until the wave gets close to shore or fades on deeper water, but the wave was heading towards the rocks. It was time to get off the ride. I tried stern sweeps and bow draws to get myself pointed up the wave, but it was too steep for that. Part of my paddle's force was bracing to keep me upright, and there wasn't enough left to turn me up onto the face of the wave. I looked



FEBRUARY MEETING

*The February meeting will be at:
The Essex Town Hall- Friday, February 5
7:00 pm*

Joel Helander of Guilford - chairman of the Faulkner's Light Brigade will present a slide lecture on Faulkners Island. Joel will discuss the history, preservation, it's wildlife, along with their political and physical efforts to save the lighthouse and preserve Faulkner's Island.



Paddling the East River in November - Clay Luce, Jules Racenet, Mark LaComb, Dick Gamble

again at the rocks. They were a lot closer, looking black and mean. I was going at them sideways - and fast! Not good! I figured, "better to make a smaller target." If I was going into the rocks, and it sure looked that way, I felt like I'd better do it bow first to minimize the damage. With a strong bow sweep, I pushed my kayak's bow down the wave. Now I was surfing straight at the low wall of rocks. At forty feet from the breakwater, I spotted a small gap where some rocks had fallen about fifteen feet to the left, and used a stern rudder to steer at it. It was little wider than my Romany, but I hoped to be able to surf right through. It was my only chance to avoid at minimum a broken boat, more likely broken legs and a swim in cold water.

At ten feet I watched with dismay as the wave I was on sucked the water off the rocks. Bye-bye to that little gap - it was now all rock! I slammed on two back-strokes, hard, and slowed, backing up the wave's face. I don't know if I planned it - or was just trying to deny impending disaster - but that action allowed the wave to move ahead of me enough to pile about six inches of water into that gap just before I got there. Zoom! Through I went, the wave leaving me safe on the other side of the rocks.

Once the danger passed, I began to think about how I'd gotten myself into such a bad situation and then allowed it to get to a point where any error could've caused me harm. My paddlework - sharpened by my reaction to danger - had gotten me through this mess. If there had been no gap I'd have been in a bad way. I'd been lucky

ently. While side-surfing, more effort on the stern sweep might've pushed my stern down the face of the wave, positioning me for a forward-stroke exit from the wave. It would've required a push into turbulent foam, so this might not have worked, but this stroke holds more promise than a bow draw to move up the face. Capsizing at that point would have been a bad idea. I was already moving over water of questionable depth in a rocky area, and I knew it was best to keep upright.

Was I wise to have converted to a bow-first approach? Although this allowed my escape, it meant I was rejecting the use of a water cushion between my boat and the rocks. In times past, I've felt the water save me from an imminent impact when it couldn't escape from between my hull and a ledge fast enough. I bounced off the water instead of the rock. Hitting the breakwater with my bow, which is designed to slice through the water, would've resulted in a hard impact. A water cushion requires a broad faced rock to trap the water. Side-surfing, I'd have hit whatever rock I happened against.

When the wave first broke on me, I reflexively braced on it. Had I capsized, before I started to move with it, the drag of my body in the water would've precluded my surfing toward the rocks. Then a simple roll and I'd have been on my way, completely preventing my brush with near-disaster.

Avoiding peril isn't always what sea kayaking's about, but in some cases it's the best approach.



Geoffrey Havens

CONNYPAC MEETING - FEB

FAULKNER'S ISLAND LECTURE

The February meeting will be at:

The Essex Town Hall 7 pm - Fri. - Feb. 5

DIRECTIONS TO THE ESSEX TOWN HALL

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. 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. Turn left onto Grove Street for parking at the rear of the building.

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 at this light 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. Turn left onto Grove Street for parking at the rear of the building.

CONNYPAC MEETING - MARCH

SLIDES OF QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS - BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY FERN USEN.

VIDEO "PERFORMANCE SEA KAYAKING" - 2ND ATTEMPT TO SHOW IT.

*WED. MARCH 17, 7:30 PM
WALLINGFORD PARK & REC.*

DIRECTIONS - WALLINGFORD PARK & REC

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) - at the light. Take your first Rt. off Barnes on to Fairfield Blvd. Wallingford Park & Rec. is the 2nd building on the left.

1999 CONNYPAC OFFICERS

The Club Officers for 1999 are:

President - Ed Milnes

Vice President - Phil Warner

Treasurer - Dick Gamble

Secretary - Jay Babina

Elected as a Board Member - Nora Galvin (along with Board Member duties, Nora will be the Club Librarian which will handle videos, books and related policies).

The January Meeting: Stan Kegeles, President for Life, and one of the founders of the club, was presented with a certificate of appreciation and a lifetime membership in ConnYak. Stan was also given a \$100. gift certificate with a record turn-out for the meeting. Mike Falconeri did his demo on "packing the kayak for trips".

LETTERS:

I'm one of the 200-odd new members who don't show at ConnYak activities. In the November issue of the club paper, Stan Kegeles expressed interest in who we are and what we want from the organization. So here's the kayaking world from my perspective.

I am a recently retired person who, after a lifetime of sailing and canoeing, decided to try the sleek little boats that I had always admired. I took an Eskimo roll class at a local paddle shop, bought a white water Pirouette, then built a Patuxent stitch-and-glue sea kayak. Being retired, I'm free to paddle to my heart's content during the week: weekends are usually reserved for family or church activities. This past year I began to get very lonely on my solo adventures and so decided to join your organization in order to see what was going on in the State and perhaps meet others who could paddle on my schedule. Here's the rub: when paddling alone one does not make waves, literally. The skills don't get practiced, one does not venture into challenging environments, and thus growth as a paddler doesn't occur, at least in my case.

So what do I want from ConnYak? I'd like some way to hook up with other paddlers in the Hartford area who are in the same boat that I am. I really enjoy the articles on kayaking skills in the club paper. It would be nice to attend your pool sessions or a demonstration (most of your activities seem to be down-state, which is foreign territory to me).

That's where one new member is coming from. Now you've got only 199+ to go!

- Brooks W. Martin, West Granby, CT

WINTER POOL SESSIONS

SUNDAYS: JAN. 31 & FEB. 7

ConnYak pool sessions run for four hours - 9 am to 1 pm at Sheehan High School pool in Wallingford. This is open pool time for practice. The fee is \$10 for each session payable at the door by cash or check made to ConnYak. You may pay for one or more sessions with one check if you want. Please bring cash in an envelope with your name on it.

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.

POOL TIME - PRACTICE & POLO

SUNDAY: FEB. 14 - POLO

SUNDAY: FEB. 28 - PRACTICE

Open pool time for kayak practice will be at Avery Point Pool, Groton - 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Fee is \$20/pp but some funds may be returned if there is more than enough money to cover the pool rental cost. Payable in advance to Fern Usen. There is an additional session on 2/14 which is whitewater polo only. Only Whitewater Boats will be permitted in the pool to play... this is not a practice session. No one need fear however, all play ceases upon a capsizing until the paddler is either successfully rescued or out of his boat. The team doing the rescue scores a point. Lots of fun and action predicted. Anyone can show and pay at the door for the polo session. I need to have the reservation and \$ in advance for the open session on 2/28. - Thanks!

Fern Usen, 209 The Mews
Rocky Hill, CT 06067 860-529-4612
email: inukshuk@mindspring.com



1999 PADDLE SCHEDULE

APRIL

10th - Bluff Point Park
17th - Farmington River
24th - Barn Island
(Stonington - blessing of the fleet)

May

8th - Branford Harbor (coastal)
15th & 16th - Selden Island
(day paddle and overnight camping)
22nd - Mystic (coastal paddle)

JUNE

12th - Four Mile River Put-in
(coastal paddle)
19th - Clinton
26th - Great Island (moonlight paddle)

JULY

10th - Hamburg Cove - Connecticut River
17th - Picnic West Hill Pond
25th - Mystic River - Antique Boat Parade

AUGUST

7th - Norwalk Islands
21st - Thimble Islands, Branford
28th - Faulkner's Island

SEPTEMBER

4th - Barn Island
11th - Guilford (coastal paddle)
25th - Hamburg Cove - Connecticut River

OCTOBER

16th - Bluff Point Park

NOVEMBER

20th - East River, Guilford

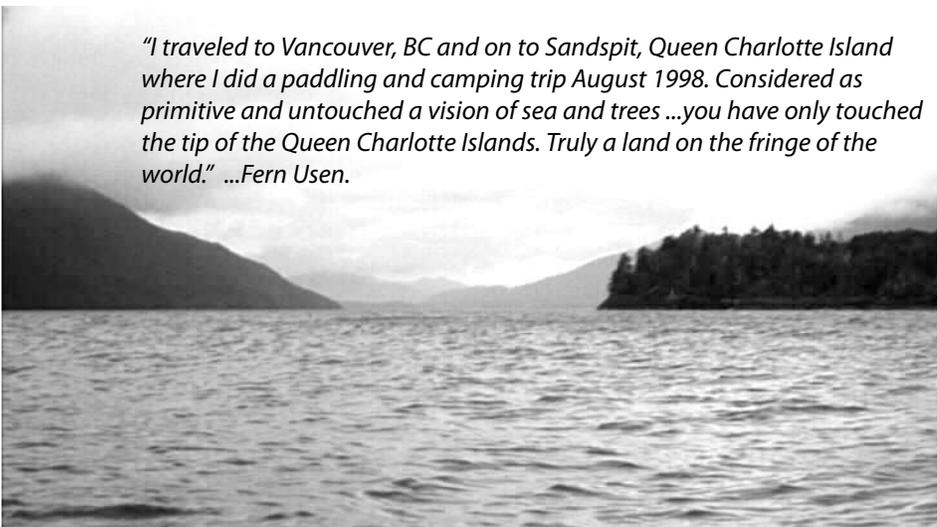
Note: Tentative schedule subject to change. We will refine dates, times and details as each month arrives. Please feel free to (add) lead or organize a trip if you like.

CONNYPAK MESSAGE SYSTEM

(203) 603-4615

ConnYak has a new "Message Center" service at (203) 603-4615. Information regarding upcoming meetings, events, trip schedule updates, weather related cancellations, etc. will be heard at this number. The outgoing message that you will hear can be up to 2 minutes in length and you can leave a return message up to 2 minutes in length if you wish. It will retain up to 20 incoming messages for a maximum of 5 days. We are sure this service will be a great help to all our club members and eliminate midnight telephone calls to our President and others.

"I traveled to Vancouver, BC and on to Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Island where I did a paddling and camping trip August 1998. Considered as primitive and untouched a vision of sea and trees ...you have only touched the tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Truly a land on the fringe of the world." ...Fern Usen.



Queen Charolette Islands

CLASSIFIED

Feathercraft K1 Expedition Single (foldable kayak) 15' 11" x 25", costs \$ 3850.00 sacrifice \$3000.00. 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

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

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

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

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

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

Kayak Trailer - holds 16 boats \$500. 203-265-4147

Nigel Dennis "Greenlander" Kayak. \$1400 203-265-4147

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

Nigel Dennis Greenlander kayak, white over white with skeg \$1350. 860 659-1223

P&H Capella, poly, blue, \$1000 860 659-1223

Orca, Royalex 16' with rudder, demo red over white, \$1400 860 659-1223

Primex kayak cart. Paid \$119, asking \$80. Used twice. 203 426-8286

Aquaterra Chinook, 16' plastic, good beginner boat, \$495. 203 481-1881

Toksook demo paddle, 2 piece, \$150. Ainsworth 1 piece paddle, \$50 860 659-1223

Wanted: Lightweight folding kayak in good condition: \$500 or less, please call 860-872-0812. Also looking for used Keowee or Otter.

Nordkapp HM Loaded; day hatch, foot pump, compass, knee tube, large cockpit, yellow over white. \$1600.00 Day (860)441-8416 Evening (860)535-8087

P&H Capella, yellow, new Oct.98, 17' x 22" stable, fun boat. \$1,250. 401-596-4482 anytime.



Please contact the Newsletter when items are sold.

KAYAK SKILLS & ROLLING

Urban Eskimo Kayaking - Mike Falconeri

Skills Workshops and Eskimo Rolling

On-going pool lessons 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



c/o Stan Kegeles
P.O. Box 2006
Branford, CT 06405