

# OCEAN KAYAKER



NEWSLETTER OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION,  
THE NORDKAPP TRUST & PADDLERS INTERNATIONAL



An international & independent sea  
canoeing association open to all  
interested in this aspect of canoeing  
with the objective of promoting safe  
sea kayaking for everyone



DECEMBER 2002

ISSUE # 49

**Editorial, December, 2002**

First to say how chuffed I am that we have received so many renewals. Although running ISKA is very much a 'labour of love' it is gratifying when so many of you clearly wish to continue receiving the newsletter, 'Ocean Kayaker'. I am sure that one of the reasons you seem to appreciate the newsletter is the improved layout and production. This is largely due to my partner in crime, Graham Edwards. Graham is a retired professional publishing printer and we met when I was trying to launch the 'Ocean Paddler' magazine. He was one of the few good things to come out of this failed project.\*

If there is a renewal slip enclosed with this newsletter - it means you have yet to renew. Maybe I'll hear from you soon. I hope so.

A good friend who runs his own outdoor centre and I shared a night trip off the Anglesey coast recently (part of a L4 assessment - just pleased I wasn't being assessed as I had no idea where we were or in which direction we were meant to be going!) and we got chatting about the increased cost of insurance - for most things - since 9.11. My friend explained how his annual premium necessary to cover him for essential public liability had gone from £3.5K to £10K. Wow!

Clearly this huge increase will have to be passed on to his clients and he may decide not to up-grade his kayaks and equipment, nor pay his staff their due worth, nor invest as much as he would like in their on-going training. What ever decisions he has to take, the up and coming young people will find it harder to obtain good quality residential training courses simply because they will be just too expensive. Ask any aspirant BCU coach about the amount of hard cash he or she has to find to achieve their qualifications. It wasn't necessarily cheap when I went through the system but it was affordable.

Indeed, my own domestic and vehicle insurance costs have jumped alarmingly. Of course I understand that insurance companies took a beating when the twin towers were destroyed but in my view, this is the game they play. We don't see premiums fall when we go through a sustained period of few claims. No doubt like many of you, I have lost on the falling stock market. Does this therefore entitle me to up my invoices to everybody else. Sure, we pay an increased premium if our house keeps flooding or we crash our car, but my buddy running his own centre has never made a claim.

Also like many of you, I am concerned about our present culture of compensation and globalisation where the loss of buildings in New York screws up the business of one of our favourite outdoor activity centres.

If this post 9.11 idiocy prevails there will be fewer opportunities for all of us, particularly the younger element among us to use centres of excellence in order to learn and improve our skills. Of course this reduces our chances of being effectively taught safe practice and leadership skills in a sound environment which in turn reduces opportunity to pass on these skills to others, or indeed to even use them to introduce others to safe yet adventurous kayaking.

Hopefully I will meet many of you at the two forthcoming Canoe Exhibitions. The first being the National Canoe & Kayak Show, 15th-16th February, 2003 at the NEC, Birmingham and the second is 'Canoe 2003 - The International Canoe Exhibition', also at the NEC, Birmingham over the weekend of the 14 - 16th March. See You there.

*\* Unfortunately Graham is not able to help me with this particular issue - so I take full responsibility!!*

**EVENTS**

Note that we are not including an events guide in the newsletter as we only produce this every two months and we believe that events are best kept up to date and so we keep them on our web site at:

<[www.seakayak.co.uk](http://www.seakayak.co.uk)>

All events, wherever they may be staged around the world, should be notified - with as much notice as possible - to Chris Bolton. His Email is

<[seakayak@btinternet.com](mailto:seakayak@btinternet.com)>

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letters/exped. reports/infor-  
mation/opinions/news.....

keep it coming.

The following is an extract from the recent Autumn issue of the ADVENTURE KAYAK MAGAZINE

and below is a response from me.

## ROCKtheBOAT

by alex matthews

Rolling...evil exercise or reliable rescue?

Many sea kayakers will still knowledgeably expound on how the notion of rolling a fully loaded sea kayak is just plain silly. These self-proclaimed experts will even say that learning to roll is dangerous to your health screaming, "It takes only twelve pounds of pressure pounds of pressure to dislocate a


oulder!" Yeah, and it only takes about three pounds of hot air to push many sea kayakers over.

The origins of the you can't roll a sea kayak attitude grew from the very positive and inclusive approach taken to marketing the sport in North America.

Kayak touring has been promoted as an activity that anyone can do. And that's true. Almost everyone loves to get out on the water and skills like the roll should never be a prerequisite. The sport should never become elitist in the way that it has in some places, nor however, should the skill set available to paddlers be misrepresented in an attempt to foster growth of the industry.

In the U.K. for instance, the sport of sea kayaking is promoted quite differently. It is a far more exclusive affair governed by the British Canoe Union (BCU). Ostensibly set up as a club, aspiring paddlers work their way through a rigorous testing system and are judged by accredited coaches in order to improve their skill rating. To its credit, paddle do typically have a very good skill set under this system but it also discourages many potential paddlers.

In America, promoters of sea kayak



ing say it is available to all: the old, the young, the wounded and infirm. As long as you have the cash for a Kevlar sea kayak they will encourage you to paddle it. Of course you'll also need a veritable mountain of rescue accessories. And no, you don't have to learn any pesky skills or even get wet. Rolling? That's much too difficult. Damn near impossible really. It's not necessary and besides you'll get cold and wet... Brrrr. But here, buy this fleece and dry top just in case. And instead of learning to roll, buy a paddle float, it will look really technical on the deck of your new boat!

I say learn to roll dependably and it will immediately replace all other self-rescues as your primary choice for righting your capsized kayak. A dependable roll is the ultimate self-rescue technique, period, end of story.

Surely, you are thinking to

**Yup, that's exactly what I'm proposing; rolling is the first and best option.**

yourself, this guy can't be suggesting that rolling is a substitute for the much loved and cherished paddle float rescue, not to mention the myriad of other solo rescue procedures filling the 'how-to' books over flowing your kayak hatches? Yup, that's exactly what I'm proposing; rolling is the first and best option. This does not mean that I do not carry a paddle float as a back up.

And what is this obsession with the paddle float anyway? Beginners insist that they need one with their rental boat and they tell me it is unsafe and dangerous to be without one. But when asked, their blank looks reveal a beautifully humbling moment of

realization, "Umm, no. How do I use it?"

Sorry to keep kicking a sacred cow, but rolling means staying in the boat, reducing immersion time to seconds instead of minutes. It also reduces what gets immersed by about fifty percent, keeping the lower body relatively dry. Seconds after the capsize, you are upright in an active position to continue paddling, not wallowing around surrounded by gear, wrestling a beach ball float onto your paddle to perform a manoeuvre created by Spiderman and made famous by some bearded old windbag in a Tilley hat.

A friend of mine has been known to refer to a day out in flat, calm, sunny conditions as, "the sort of paddling that gives sea kayaking a bad name." What she's on about is the joy of paddling in wind and waves, catching surf rides and, yes, occasionally even getting knocked over. For too many

otherwise capable paddlers, it is the fear of capsizing that limits them to flat, boring conditions. Just one good surf ride will hook many paddlers and launch them on a quest to build the skills needed to play in the surf zone or enjoy following seas and big swells. If that's not enough, knowing that you won't have to exit your boat unexpectedly means that you can paddle nude.

Despite what a few anointed gurus might wish you to believe there is no hocus pocus, magic beans or philosopher's stone required to learn to roll a kayak. If you are relatively fit and have the desire, chances are you are a roller waiting to happen. Give it a bash. Be good to yourself, get qualified instruction and be patient with your progress. Even if you decide that rolling isn't for you, you'll have learned more about your sport and become more comfortable upside down in your boat. The ability to roll will change the whole way you paddle and give you the confidence to play in your boat like never before.

And if you happen to do a roll in front of one of your buddies who's in a kayak for the first time, and he or she asks, "are these boats self-righting?" Nod vigorously and say yes.

-Alex Matthews

*and here is my response to this article*

To Scott MacGregor

Adventure Kayak Magazine

From John Ramwell

I am a British sea kayaker and whilst visiting the USA recently I came across the Fall issue of Adventure Kayak Magazine.

I was particularly taken with the description of the British sea kayaking scene as given by Alex Matthews in his article "Rock The Boat".

I thought I would write to present the picture as seen by a typically British paddler.

First I have to say I agree with Alex when he gives us the origins of the 'no-roll' attitude promulgated back in the early 1980's by such as John Dowd when he wrote in his book, "SEA KAYAKING", "My personal preference at sea is a stable kayak which braces well and in which the roll is more of a stunt than a reliable solution." John goes on to advocate the use of drogues in rough conditions rather than rely too much on achieving a roll.

Alex squarely puts the record right in his article by making it clear that rolling is the best form of self rescue and as a skill goes a long way in providing self confidence as well as a quick route to learning other advanced kayaking skills such as bracing and sculling for support.

In Britain we have recognised the logic of the case made by Alex and we teach the screw roll as an early and basic skill. The one problem we have in pursuing this policy is accessing heated pools as to teach this skill in the river or ocean can be a 'put-off' to new paddlers. We always make it clear when using a pool to teach rolling that there is a big difference between a

pool environment and the real thing and we encourage new paddlers to go on to pro-active their advanced skills on the sea itself.

Returning to Alex's comments on the British kayaking scene. I have contributed to many American and Canadian sea kayaking symposiums over the years and I am not at all surprised at Alex's views; they are shared by many of your countrymen. But they are simply not a true reflection of the British kayaking scene. The British Canoe Union (BCU) does not make any aspect of canoe sport an exclusive affair. The BCU is not a club. It is the national governing body of canoe sport in Britain and as such is no different to the other national governing bodies around the world such as your own, the American or Canadian Canoe Association. The only time the BCU insists on individual membership is when that individual wishes to become involved in the BCU Coaching Scheme. This allows for effective monitoring and revalidation of effective standards. There are concessions for BCU members such as reduced payment when entering BCU competitions and events or accessing rivers where a fee is involved but otherwise there is no compulsion to membership. There are thousands of paddlers, many of them sea kayakers, who 'do their own thing' without ever being involved with the BCU.

Instruction and local club membership is available to these paddlers with no pressure to ever join the BCU. I believe that potential paddlers are not at all discouraged by our system. On the contrary BCU coaches actively encourage and facilitate new-comers to the sport who might never have even thought of taking up canoeing and these new paddlers are not put under any obligation to join the BCU. There are recreational paddlers who consider that that BCU offers them little and consequently decide not to join. It has to be said that these paddlers are in the minority but they are not particularly disadvantaged.

Before closing I will briefly comment

on the BCU Coaching Scheme. This has been in existence since the 1930's and is overseen by the BCU Coaching Committee. (I was a member of this committee myself for many years). Because it has been given so much attention for such a long period it has become a fairly sophisticated scheme effectively embracing every aspect of canoe sport and has achieved a reputation for excellence around the world to the extent that paddlers from many countries beyond Britain seek to become BCU qualified. Personally I do not think this is the way to go and this is why I have been in communication with the International Canoe Federation (ICF) to encourage them to establish an international coaching scheme that could well be modeled on that of the BCU but adapted to local needs. This might then encourage other national governing bodies of canoeing to re-enforce their own coaching arrangements which I see as being more appropriate - but I am not holding my breath!

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## Over the Sea to Skye

### Early Travels by Canoe to the Scottish Islands and West Coast

1874-1876

Scotland's first canoe club, the "Clyde Canoe Club", was established at the village of Rosneath, just to the south of the narrows on the west shore of the Gareloch, Firth of Clyde in 1873, one hundred and twenty nine years ago. Some of the early members undertook exceedingly adventurous trips in the western seas of the Hebrides. For many years a book containing newspaper cuttings of these early ventures and various old race results was to be found in the clubhouse, now located on the east shore of

Loch Lomond, unfortunately the book has long since disappeared. .. By good fortune, some clear thinking member had transcribed the contents of the book before its loss and they make very interesting reading. This year the canoe sailing specialists

"Solway Dory" in co-operation with the club, now known as the "Loch Lomond Sailing Club, founded as the Clyde Canoe Club, instituted 1873" have published the transcriptions under the title "Over the Sea to Skye", thus making them available to a wider audience. The book, in A4 format, is illustrated with maps depicting the routes taken on the trips and old photographs from the club archives. There are also some very interesting pictures taken during a visit of the Royal Canoe Club to the Clyde club in 1881, which came from an album belonging to the Victorian canoeist E.B. Tredwen. The album turned up recently in Ireland and is now in the care of the Royal Canoe Club. There are also a number of sketches from early canoeing books and modern photographs of one of the early craft, which is still in a paddleable condition.

Bearing in mind that the original cuttings were of reports sent in to the newspapers of the day from what

ing with; list of C.C.C. members, vintage 1873/74; Loch Lomond Sailing Club; canoe "Dolphin"; canoe "Lark";



Obituary of Wilfred Smith, a founding member; Clyde Cruising Canoes; Feathering canoe paddles; Canoe Cruising; The Clyde Tent; Practical Canoeing and The Royal Canoe Club.

This book is

would seem like remote corners of the land, subsequently transcribed, it would not be hard to get a few spellings of Gaelic place names wrong. As an aid to the reader's ability to follow the routes in more detail, should they so wish, the place names have been compared with those shown on contemporary and more modern ordinance survey maps. Where differences occur, the alternative spellings have been added as footnotes.

In addition there are appendices deal-

a fascinating read giving an insight into the exploits of early recreational sea canoeists in this country and will surprise most modern paddlers with the extent of the trips undertaken and the commitment required. I can thoroughly recommend it.

Duncan R. Winning OBE  
"Over the Sea to Skye" published by Solway Dory, 2 The A venue, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria, LA 11 6AP.  
October, 2002

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The Jersey Symposium



# Law and Order...on the water in Canada.

I thought you might be interested in this description of the rules of the sea as seen through the eyes of a Canadian paddler, Rick Snowdon ; Ed

Kayakers tend to be a pretty sensible bunch. There are no fistfights in the dockside bars, and no cross-border trade in endangered species. I've never heard of a kayak hijacking, or about anyone trying to make a fast getaway with a hatch stuffed full of \$20 bills. We tend to agree with the law, which is why we rarely get in trouble. As it applies to kayakers and boaters in general the law is really just out there for our own good. Nonetheless, slip up on the wrong day or get careless, and there you go; a run-in with the Hashing lights and someone in an imposing uniform.

Here, for your continued trouble-free touring, is an overview of law and enforcement on the water.

The law in Canada goes through a complex process to become enacted. You know, the how-a-bi// becomes-a-/aw process we all learned in high school history class. To understand how it all works for us as kayakers, consider that there is no one Act of Parliament describing every law. Rather, each act contains within it regulations that must be complied with and failure to comply is an offence. What we have to contend with is a bit of a mix, especially considering that kayakers are rarely specifically considered when it comes to making legislation.

The Criminal Code of Canada is an act that generally sets out what is considered an offence to society and individuals. If one were creative, one could theoretically commit the same

actions that are considered offenses on land from the seat of a kayak; that is, if it's bad on land, it's bad on the water. In particular, no person may operate a vessel while impaired (a \$600 fine and/or five years in jail for the first offence), and the unwarranted use of a distress signal will result in an arrest and trial in court.



More specific to our preparation and conduct on the water, the Canada Shipping Act (CSA) contains several sets of regulations for it boaters. Failing to carry one of the required equipment items, as set out in the Small Vessel Regulations, is an obvious offence that may be first on our minds when getting ready for a trip (see below).

The Charts and Nautical Publications Regulations insist we carry charts and tide and current tables of the area through which we're traveling unless we can prove we have local knowledge or that the charts don't exist in a useful scale. We must also observe the rules of the road as set out in the Collision Regulations. Interfering with the passage of a larger vessel will result in a court summons and dumping garbage into a waterway is a \$105 fine.

As far as our VHF radios, Radio and Telecommunications Act describes

regulations related to the use of radio and telecommunications equipment in Canada. If you counter the regulations by making a false distress signal or sending interfering, superfluous, profane or unnecessary signals, expect a \$5000 fine and/or one year in jail. The penalties applicable under Canadian law are fairly broad, as is the

manner in which they are meted out. Depending on the specific offence, the province you live in and the judgment of the attending law enforcement officer, you may be given a ticket or fine, arrested and brought to trial for punishment or summoned to court for a judge to decide the weight of your offence (which could lead to a fine or jail time or both). Fines are set federally but can carry other charges as set by the provinces, such as victim fine surcharge,

administrative charges and court costs.

So who's going to make the bust, or intervene for your protection? According to the Canada Shipping Act, the RCMP, any harbour or river police, provincial, county, or municipal police, and designated Department of Fisheries and Oceans officers carry out enforcement of the law. These officers may board and/or examine a vessel or its equipment, require the person in charge to produce identification and license or documents, ask pertinent questions and demand reasonable assistance from the vessel operator. She or he may also direct or prohibit the movement of vessels to ensure compliance with the law or public safety. All of the above enforcement agencies have vessels and conduct patrols within areas of their jurisdiction, but the frequency varies widely. A high-traffic pleasure craft or commercial area gets more attention than does a wilderness coast in northern BC, for example.

"Specific to law enforcement,"

says Sgt. Brad Schlorff, Provincial Marine Coordinator for the Ontario Provincial Police, "the Canadian Coast Guard and US Coast Guard are similar in name only. The Canadian Coast Guard has no authority to enforce the law, despite a greater presence than police in many areas. Both the CCG and the USCG provide

differ."

and our boats. Having a bit of fore-

knowledge will keep you safe and having pleasant experiences on the water and with the enforcers of the law. Read it for yourself on the website for the Canadian Coast Guard [www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca](http://www.ccg-gcc.gc.ca) look for Boating Safety or view it on Justice Canada's web-site at <http://canada.justice.gc.ca>. The Small Vessel Regulations in the Canada Shipping Act are quite specific regarding what pleasure vessels

- A Canadian Coast Guard-approved PFD of correct size for everyone on board
  - .1 5 metres buoyant rope
  - .A manual propelling device (aka paddle) or an anchor with minimum 1 5 metres of rope
  - .A bailer or pump capable of pumping from the bilge over the side (the bailer opening should be greater than 65cm' and have a volume greater than 150ml)
  - .A sound signalling device (aka whistle)
  - .A white light that can be shone in enough time to prevent a collision if you're paddling between sunset and sunrise
  - .If your kayak is over 6m (19.8 feet) in length, you must also carry a waterproof flashlight at all times and 6 flares of type A, B or C.
- If you're found to be lacking any of the above the penalty is a fine varying between \$100 to \$200 for each item missed, plus possible court costs and a victim surcharge that may make the final fine add up to as much as \$255. Is it worth the risk for a piece of equipment that's certainly useful to you anyway? Remember that there's a wide selection of other safety gear that's not required by law. Depending on your trip it may be wise to carry: radio, EPIRB, first aid kit, repair kit, map/chart and compass, spray deck, paddle float, spare paddle and other parts, flotation, warm paddling and shore clothes, towline, matches, and snacks and water.

services such as search and rescue, icebreaking, and marine aids to navigation, but their mandates, histories, and resources

Being as sensible as we are, it makes sense to understand and abide by the laws and regulations that apply to us

need to have on board in order to satisfy the letter of the law.

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From Harry & Chris Simpson  
Hi John,

I have not been totally inactive and have managed to put together a 48-slide Powerpoint slideshow on how GPS works, what is good about it, what is bad about it and what sort of things you can do with it. I also cover all the mistakes and problems that I have had with it. Being aware of its shortcomings, I like it even more.

I have the pitch on a CD and the storyboard can be printed out.

I did it for my own benefit initially but I now have a well known outdoor equipment company interested in training their staff and maybe customers. I have also been asked to give the presentation to a local microlite club. It will be like being back at work.

The file is about 4 Mbytes so I am just as reluctant to email you, as you are to receive it!

If you are interested let me know. Maybe one of my epistles with a condensed version might be better for the magazine.

I have tried out my new spray deck earlier this year and am impressed so I hoped to try the cag and wellies? made of the same stuff. The only problem I can see is that it is all black but I did get the cag in black and yellow.

The material is like soft PVC and lycra but stretches well so gives a nice tight spray deck, a nice soft neck and wrist seal and the wellies (long socks) just pull on and off. The lining is like brushed nylon so is warm to the skin even when cold and wet outside. The result was superb. The cag is 100% watertight. The sleeves don't leak and it must be breathable as I am usually just as wet on the inside as I am on the outside. I was bone dry. I have never had a cag where I did not end up with pools of water in my elbows that inevitably ended up down my back! There is a hood but I did not try it, as it was not bad enough. The neck is unusual in that it is zipped and the same construction as the wrists. The zip comes well down so allows a lot of ventilation but is like a dry seal without the choking. The wellies or knee length socks are great. Cool when I stepped in Loch Lomond to launch but then I have never felt it any different, but lovely and warm almost immediately I was in the boat and certainly no wet feet.

My son uses a vest cum spray deck of the same material for canoe polo and despite the usual gentlemanly behaviour at such events there are no signs of any damage.

I was reading issue 47 and sad to hear from Christine Carter that Arduaine camp site has closed. I did my first sea kayak trip from there and many more since then. It was a simple site, right on the shore with basic toilet and dishwashing facilities as well as a nice hot shower. We did upset the owner one weekend when we were practising rescues and Chris got a bit over enthusiastic about pretending to drown!

He soon got over his perfectly understandable high state of panic when Chris stopped drowning and waved to him. Maybe we should have told him first. It was just before the abortive Mull ISKA trip.

Harry & Chris

## EXPEDITIONS

## Paddle Banks Strait at night? Are you crazy?

Phil Doddridge (Taken from the Investigator Canoe Club Newsletter -May 2002, with grateful thanks, Ed)

For those who have not looked into paddling Bass Strait, Banks Strait is a particularly nasty patch of water between the north coast of Tasmania and the first of the Islands of the Furneaux Group called Clarke Island. It is a crossing



of close to twenty kilometres where the tide runs at a stated three knots but experience has found this to be understated. Stories of four to five metre standing waves when wind opposes tide caused me some concern and many butterflies

in the stomach on my first crossing. On that occasion the tidal information the group had was confusing and contradictory, so we resorted to putting a stick in the sand the day before our intended crossing to get "accurate" information.

This method in hindsight was not too bad, in fact we would have got it spot on if it weren't for a particular photographer (me) stuffing around on the beach when the group launched in a vain attempt for the perfect photo of the group attempting this momentous feat! We ended up half an hour behind schedule and later on had the experience of paddling into a grade two river on the ocean to make landing at the selected site on Swan Island, eddy hopping from one boulder to another along the shoreline. And this was a calm, glassy day. It was no wonder that I wanted to get the tide times spot on for my next attempt. In the Bass Strait Crossing (attempt) made in April this year by a group (including myself), I was the trip coordinator, cook and in charge of major logistics. The trip was to begin at Little Mussleroe Bay on Tassie and tackle Banks Strait first up. This is probably the most technical bit of paddling on the whole crossing and had significant hazards to manage.

On the planned day of departure the tide was not very cooperative. Firstly it was a spring tide, secondly to do the crossing it meant departing at 4:30am and launching in the dark or at 4:30pm and landing in the dark! On the first trip we learnt that the locals do the crossing by "splitting the tide", paddling half the distance in the ebb and half in the flood.

With planning and some luck this means you paddle in a big U shaped course; taken to the east by the ebb flow initially then when the tide turns you are taken back on course by the flood. Sounds easy: all you need to know is when slack water low is. Oh, by the way there is no such thing as "slack water" in Banks Strait on the changing of the tide it is like someone has turned the tap off and pulled the plug straight out: the water is always moving rapidly either one way or the other! Another problem stated on the chart of the region is that the ebb tide can stay up longer in certain conditions. I pondered the options for several months. Initially deciding to launch in the dark because I

Stories of four to five metre standing waves when wind opposes tide caused me some concern.....

knew it was a safe, no surf launch in a nice little estuary and paddling into improving light would be more motivational than paddling into the dark. Also it was more likely to be calm in the morning. However on second



thoughts the beginnings of big expeditions rarely get off on time and this was a time dependent crossing, so I replanned to use the after-noon tide. If all went well we



would only have 60 to 90 minutes of paddling into the darkness and a safe all weather landing at Spike Bay on Clarke Island.

Well you know many sayings about planning I'm sure! What was exactly to plan was the fact that last minute organizing meant there was no way we could have left on the morning tide and I was able to obtain the mathematical calculated tides from a good friend in the tidal Facility at Flinders University. These tables gave us slack water low at 5:22pm. With a predicted crossing time for the 18km of three hours this set our launch from Swan Island (out off the Tassie coast) to be 3:50pm. The group left Little Mussleroe just after 2:00pm for a leisurely paddle out to Swan Island with plenty of time to land have a bit of exploration and be ready for Banks Strait. In the briefing all were told that we would be paddling into the dark and to expect rough (extreme on our rating scale) conditions during the crossing as a 15-20 kn south easterly would be opposing the tide for the first few hours.

On the way across to Swan we encountered the strength of the ebb flow and some of the smaller standing wave

patterns that the area is famous for. One of the group members commented whilst standing on the beach at Swan "I'm glad those waves weren't a metre higher or I would have been worried!" To which I replied "When we get around the corner I think you will see some that big!". Many in the group had purchased "Krill Sticks a marvelous modern device operated by batteries to take the place of the chemical light stick (Cyalume). These were duly mounted on rear decks and hats or helmets prior to departing Swan.

Some memorable sayings were coined on this trip. One from this leg was, "If it involves Krill Sticks it is not easy!" We launched from Swan exactly on time, all was going well. The wind had dropped slightly and as we rounded the north east tip of the island all were in high spirits as after 12 months of training we were at last doing it. It was not long before the standing waves had the group apprehensive and the leaders keeping a close view on all. The group was called together several times as the usual split due to individuals capacity to cope with conditions and adjusting to fully loaded boats took its toll. After 40 minutes or so good group structure and pace was established and all seemed well.

Time marched on and the tide took us to the east at a great rate. Looking back towards Swan Island I questioned whether we weren't being swept much further than theoretically calculated. On earlier expeditions I had learnt to stay to the plan unless undisputable evidence proved that a change was better. Checking the GPS indicated that we were still within the easterly drift calculated. even if it did not look like it. We would stay on the calculated heading unless we were taken further to the east than a calculated spot in the centre of the Strait. Further doubt was seeded

in my mind (mind games) when the group ended up in a patch of three to four metre standing waves. We had observed these well to the east for some time prior to ending up in the middle of them. They looked fearsome. standing vertically and cresting menacingly. Some encouragement was needed to get paddlers stroking into these as just sitting still was actually resulting in being drawn deeper into the "bank" or whatever was causing these monsters! In fact there was very little danger as the waves were just bouncing you up and down but not going anywhere or accelerating the kayak down the face as a similar travelling wave would have done. A study of the chart indicated that the only area that such waves would be produced was the infamous "Moriarty Bank" but this was (hopefully) some kilometres to the north east. Again consult the GPS: the figures stated that all was to calculation. In my mind we were on Moriarty Bank, far to the east. I marked the spot in the GPS for later reference (which was to prove there

"I'm glad those waves weren't a metre higher or I would have been worried!" To which I replied "When we get around the corner I think you will see some that big!".

was nothing on the chart to indicate such disturbance, it is just Banks Strait!) Time for low water came and went. We were still drifting east at two to

three knots. This was a fact and a worry. There was little more to do than continue on. Thirty minutes past the I predicted time of the turn of the tide we were still heading east and it was getting dark. Time to put the glow sticks on and get the group ready for night paddling.

Darkness came and we were still drifting east. This was going to add to the distance and time we were going to be paddling in the dark. The wind had also sprung up again and there was increasing rebound waves from Clark Island or some other source to the north.

There was no moon on this night, it was pitch black. The only lights were ours, Swan Light and the spot lights of a car driving on Clarke Island. One of the group approached me with the concern they weren't handling the conditions of darkness, sloppy, bouncy and steep seas and the uncertainty of not being able to see our destination. I asked if they were likely to capsize. They thought it was a remote possibility but there was no confidence in the reply so I shadowed the paddler. It soon became evident that a capsize was likely and this was not an option in the middle of Banks Strait at 7:00pm in total darkness. A supported tow was organised and the group structure changed. At this time my decision to take an Econizh double as a safety and support kayak paddled by two strong paddlers paid off for the first of several occasions. Neil and I were able to hook on and tow the two kayaks in the raft maintaining the same speed as the rest of the group. An in-line or V-tow in this situation would have proved were difficult. Another thing I was grateful for was the training we had done on both night paddling and towing. Even though our night practice I had been on a perfect night, glass calm

water, with many navigation lights around it did manage to set a group structure and allow the importance of this to be made. Dave Williamson (navigator) had also thought to wear a different coloured cylume stick attached to the back of his hat for the night. This made it easy to see the lead boat and keep formation. This was to paddle next to a buddy in two rough lines so as to keep an eye on all paddlers and keep a tightly knit group although I do remember having to play sheep dog and call paddler to formation on many occasions. We did not want to lose sight of a paddler and have them capsize in these conditions.

Time passed and progress slowed due to the tow but also group apprehension. No option but to keep going. We would soon be close to a prominent headland on Clarke Island and this would break the wind and swell giving calmer conditions: I hoped. I had made a bad decision to pair Pippa, our tenacious and only woman paddler with Andrew, her husband in the raft being towed. I had been in the support role in the past and knew this was an exhausting role due to the effort required to keep two kayaks together in rough seas and the fact the you get cold because you aren't expending energy and creating heat. After battling to do the task asked of her Pippa nearly went over and it was obvious a change needed to be made. Malcolm took over, freeing Pippa to just concentrate on paddling and following that red glow stick. However this created another problem.

With Malcolm and myself involved in the tow Dave had the unenviable tasks of navigating solely using GPS in the dark, and keeping the group together. This was not easy. With a new towing structure organised we set off again but we were going the wrong way I thought. Dave was leading the group off to the east and the double was heading in a very different direction. I called out but he was too far away. It was at this stage that I saw a light house directly in front of me. In the darkness and confusion the double and towing kayaks had turned 180 degrees and I was completely disoriented. With effort we sprinted to catch the group. It was 8:30pm or there abouts as we reached the lee of Lookout Head and calmer water. The tension in the group subsided and it was actually a great

night. I noticed the stars for the first time and could see the shape of the ridge tops. A short time later Dave started to do circuits which was annoying for us towing craft and seemed to have no purpose. On the third such course deviation Neil and I decided just to sit and see what was up however the group continued on and we were some way behind. Another sprint saw us catch up to Dave and ask what was going on. to which he replied that he was looking for the entrance to Spike Cove. "Sorry Dave we still have two to three kilometres to go" was my reply, and this was verified by Neil who was also keeping account of our progress on his GPS. Neil and I took the lead as our GPS units agreed on direction and distance and at about 9:30pm we reached Lookout Rock, which was in the centre on Snug Cove which would lead us to Spike Bay. The paddle in was marked by the glowing lights of fishing boats sheltered in the bay. The water was crystal clear and my dive torch gave a merry glow when placed under water. We were there at last, or so I thought. It took another hour to locate the landing beach hidden behind a five metre wide channel between granite boulders. After a group hug at 11:30pm celebrating our conquest of Banks Strait in the dark we shared coffee and TimTams and pondered the events from many different perspectives. Significant learnings for me were: always have a distinctly different light on the lead boat at night, easily viewed from behind; the best location for night lights is on the top of a hat/helmet; I am going to purchase a Krill Stick as two of my Cyacume sticks failed to work (luckily I had spares); be prepared for the worst through appropriate training as a group (I have always applied this to my expeditions) being the support person in a rafted tow is a demanding role; have two navigators for hazardous sections but get them to check each other's GPS entries prior to launch; in rough conditions the best formation is to paddle in pairs in two lines behind a leader with strong paddler as sweep. Big stable doubles add a significant safety margin within a group.

\* \* \* \* \*

.....what are TimTams???? A great account, Eh. I am delighted to be able to give it a wider circulation. Ed.



# LETTERS.

From Simon Godfrey,  
COTTENHAM, CAMBRIDGE  
17th August 2001

Dear John,

I stumbled across the ISKA site on the net when I was looking for a kayak compass, and enclose my £8-00 to join.

I've been a somewhat solitary sea-kayaker for about 35 years, beginning with a Wessex Sea Rapiere in the mid 60s, and now with 15 year old P & H Eskimo, which I think was built for export and not sold in the UK. I bought it last year from P & H for not very much - it was languishing in the back of their container of used kayaks.

Now in my late 50s, getting fat, not fit, and not nearly as skilled as I ought to be after all these years, I still relish coastal and estuary jaunts at a very gentle pace and usually with the current and/or tide!

Rotting in my garden is a Kayel Angmassalik. I was never good enough to manage it! If anyone wants it they are welcome. But it does need some TLC and may not be worth saving? Let me know if you hear of any

hero who wants to a/ rescue the beast and b/ paddle it!

All Good Wishes, Simon Godfrey  
\*\*\*\*\*

From GuyOGEZ, 10 pare de la Berengere, 92310 Saint-Cloud

Dear paddler friend,

The British have invented the sea kayak, the French the rules!!!

A decision of June 28, 2000, which affects the kayak, issued by the Department dealing with sea affairs, precises the following :

"boats whose ratio (length divided by width) is superior to 10 will not be authorized to go beyond the distance of 300 metres from a shelter".

The Nordkapp with its dimensions of 5,47 m and 0,525 m (if I am not mistaken) has thus a ratio of 10,41 and is classified as a beach toy.

It is very difficult to go against this law which has received the agreement of the FFCK (French Federation of Canoe-Kayak), the equivalent in France of the B.C.U.

Would you have an idea of what could be done ? We would like to create a French section of the Nordkapp

Trust with the owners of nordkapps who should number several dozens. Do you have their addresses ?

Thank you for your help.  
Sincerely yours

GuyOgez

P.S. I myself own two nordkapps.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
From I.R.Cammish, 2, Scarborough Rd., Filey, N. Yorks. YO14 9EF Tel; 01723 514569

Dear John, could you please put the following advert in your newsletter. Skerrey Fibre glass kayak, complete with full expedition deck, Silva 70P Compass, tow cleat, Compac 50 deck pump, retractable skeg, 3 hatches and bulkheads. HJ tubes, extra Keela strip, neoprene spraydeck, neoprene cockpit cover, trolley, sea paddle, two piece Lendal paddle. £900.00. Injury forces sale.

\*\*\*\*\*  
From Ian Stevens on 01756 824260 WANTED...a sea kayak, Skerry, Sirruis or similar.

\*\*\*\*\*A



Duncan  
Winning OBE  
having a chat  
at the Jersey  
Sea Kayaking  
Symposium

From Peter Carter, S Australia.  
John,

Thanks for the latest issue, although I still don't understand why you keep sending two copies. (I bequeath the extra one to deserving paddlers.)

I see you've used Phil's 'Recovery from an imbalance' item. His name, alas, is another of those names like Cyalume®, Prusik, and karabiner that paddlers invariably spell wrongly: it's Doddridge--double d in the middle. (And in case anyone's wondering, I drew the diagrams.)

As for the New Australian Canoeing Award Scheme referred to in the heading, it's gradually being taken up in place of the old scheme, which dates from the mid-1970s. The new one has the magic label 'VET' (Vocational Education and Training) attached, so that it suits the rapidly expanding outdoor recreation industry. Makes it complex, with lots of documentation, much of it sitting on my computer for editing and layout, but will be worth it in the long run.

A bureaucrat in NSW Waterways recently decided that all sea kayaks used by commercial operators ('hire and drive' and 'charter' are the terms) must have 50 litres of fixed foam buoyancy. Commercial providers and AusCanoeing set about explaining that that would be counterproductive, but reasoned argument doesn't work against heads full of expanded polystyrene. Fortunately, there's one bureaucrat in NSW Waterways who has done some sea kayaking and is on our side.

She came to the Canoe Safety Taskforce meeting held by Aus Canoeing in Sydney in early August, along with representatives from white-water and sea paddling, insurance, commercial providers, and a lawyer. Lots of followup for the two teams formed to put things together, but the aim is to have a comprehensive set of standards that can be presented to marine authorities, education administrators, the insurance industry, etc. so

that they can see what is appropriate for equipment, qualifications, and so on for flat water, whitewater and sea conditions.

That way we should not only be able to avoid the absurd, like the 50 litres of EPS, or the PFD 1 and anchor required in Western Australia, by showing that we are regulating ourselves appropriately and responsibly, but keep insurance premiums within reasonable limits.

Wish I had more time for paddling.. One expedition we had planned for early October won't be happening, alas, because owners of the island won't let us camp.  
Cheers,

Peter  
34deg 55' 24.1" S 138deg 32' 9.8" E  
(GDA-94)  
\* \* \* \* \*

From Olaf Wuendrich  
<olafwuendrich@yahoo.de>  
Dear John,

I am right now in ASSC, Nigel says HI!!! The previous two weeks were a fantastic learning experience, and I am truly glad having followed your recommendation to go to Holyhead.

I lately managed to train with Pete Jones in (sort of) rough waters on how to enter a kayak with a paddle-float. I have chosen myself this way of re-entering, because I found it interesting looking in the books, but they only showed this on flat water. And this is probably not the sort of terrain where I am going to need this... So I induced a capsized, bailed out and pulled the float out from behind the seat. A small line connecting boat and paddle would have helped, but I managed to blow the thing up. I managed to put the paddle float with attached paddle into my groin, and lifted the Romany to break the water seal, then I swung it around and with 1st attempt the cockpit was almost empty of water. I wanted to try to push the stern under water, and then rotating the kayak, but it seemed not necessary. I stuck the paddle

under the front deck lines (contrary to the theory, but part of my plan to make re-entry more difficult). The waves were just 4-5 ft, every 3rd being a bit more interesting. I threw my upper body over the deck, and balanced my way in. Once in, the cockpit was 3/4 full of water. I must have looked funny trying to paddle with the float on, but I had no time to rip it off first. It took all my concentration to hold the boat upright and perpendicular to the waves fronts. Finally I pulled the tab off the float, relieved the pressure and ripped it off. The tab came off the pipe, and had to stay in my mouth. (making the paddle float unusable from now on). It was hard work to get back ashore with a full cockpit but I managed. Things to improve: Attach the paddlefloat to a line connected with kayak.

The valve of the float must be built so it can't be destroyed easily (K.I.S.S.) Training to make low braces with one hand, whilst the other tries to attach the spraydeck. A built in electrical pump is very important. If possible, a foot pump, or a hand pump when in safe waters. Get used to paddle a waterloaden kayak in tough waters, develop a technique that doesn't strain muscles.

I strained my muscles a bit, but it was well worth the lesson. Now I am looking forward to going home, and perfect my learnt skills. So if you see me next time, I will probably look a bit better.

I am in the go to prepare an expedition for 2004 in Patagonia this will be South of the Laguna San Rafael. Do you have any ties to the Navy down there? I would love to go for a small 3 weeks pre-expedition Dec/Jan 2003, to sort things out. Justine Curgenvin, who is a very good paddler, will hopefully join in, so it will be a proper small adventure. I am right now preparing my ideas for a possible build up of an outdoor centre, much like the expeditioning centres. This would be of great value for many, I believe. Raleigh could use it (and its skilled (locally trained) instructors/guides, which will make

expeditions much easier. Also the Chilean Navy could use it to train cadets in Seamanship and survival (much like the Kurt Hahn idea). Tourists could use its services for a soft exploration of wild shorelines, and I think of a scheme where some profits from it should be spent to train local guides, make them proficient. This would give jobs to them, and help them promote their natural beauties of that Chile Lindo! What do you think about such? The centre shouldnt only offer seakayaking. The location I think of is offering a wealth of possibilities for outdoorsie people.

Ok, I will now move down to the bar, to drink my last orange juice for this years paddlers return...

Have fun and please forgive me not visiting your swimming pool.

Olaf, hooked to seakayaking  
\*\*\*\*\*

*My reply.....(Ed)*

Dear Olaf, am pleased to hear you are off to Anglesey. I know Nigel will look after you. The BCU call their Awards 1 star, 2 star, 3 star up to 5 star. So you will be working to a BCU syllabus up to 4 star. You should ask the BCU for a copy of their coaching hand book if you are determined to get involved with BCU training beyond your course with Nigel  
\*\*\*\*\*

John Kirk-Anderson  
<jka@netaccess.co.nz>  
Greetings John,

I have just been sent a copy of an article in Ocean Kayaker describing the New Zealand sea kayak scene, as reported by Alan Byde.

Everyone sees things through their own eyes, and I have great respect for Alan - I still try out the strange paddle strokes he describes in Living Canoeing-but my take on things is a little different.

Alan describes roto-moulded kayaks as "plastic pigs", a term from decades ago. Well, time and design have moved on. I felt the same about lowly

plastic, until a trip a couple of years ago around Banks Peninsula, my local haunt.

Exposed to all weather and sea state, with cliffs rising over 100 metres from minimal boulder-beaches, it is a true ocean paddle. Any offshore wind is funneled out of the steep sided bays, and rotors over the cliffs. On this trip I was the only one in a glass boat, the other three paddling different designs of plastic. The conditions were interesting, with strong winds from three directions over three days, and a good swell breaking

To my horror, I didn't have to slow down for the "plastic pigs" to catch up, and when one landing was a choice six foot dumpers onto sand, or a one footer onto boulders, the three plastics were simply paddled hard onto the rocks and then the paddlers came and helped me land my fragile craft. A humbling moment.

While many paddlers here use imported boats, and a Nordkapp is being rebuilt in my boat shed, local designers and builders are hard at work. A few of the results I wouldn't paddle in a pool, while others are a match for the best.

The marathon boats that Alan speaks of are designed and used in multi-sport races, which are usually on rivers, grade two/three. Some of these races now have sea components, and designers have risen to the challenge with very fast, light boats fitted with bulkheads. Few would consider these suitable for standard service as sea kayaks.

I have never seen an Inuit paddle used here, but after speaking to Gordon Brown of Skye, I'm tempted to give them a go. An alloy shafted paddle with plastic blades lives in my shed, where it serves as a drying rack for my booties. Apart from that one it has been years since I have seen one, except as a spare split. Some sea kayakers here are using wing paddles, a concept I thought was daft until challenged to learn to use one properly. There is now no stroke that I can

do with a spoon that I can't manage with a wing. Add to that the advantage of full torso rotation that the technique requires and they make sense. I'll have to wait until my modified-crank Lendal breaks!!!

Rudders! Well I don't intend to go down that path, except to say that I have just returned from a two hour paddle in a Gale Warning that the local wind recorder stated as having maximum gusts of 43 knots. A solid work-out with no sweep strokes, and surfing home with a following sea was a joy. Alan mentions racers in the past cutting rudder cables. I can't think of a faster way to die.

As I said earlier, we all see things differently, and I respect Alan's view. Mine is simply from another viewpoint.

I hope to attend the Irish and Scottish symposiums next year, and look forward to catching up with people I met at Anglesey in 1998. Great to see that the ISKA is going well, and I really must renew my subs.

Cheers  
John Kirk-Anderson  
\*\*\*\*\*



The Jersey Sea Kayaking Symposium



## EXPEDITIONS

## ARCTIC LIGHT - OR ADVENTURE WITHOUT

## ANXIETY BY JON FARR

BEING THERE

I had been travelling for the best part of 24 hours, and the drive from Devon to my parents and train journey to Gatwick, seemed literally a world away when the pilot suggested we look through the Starboard window to see the Gulf of Alaska far below. There was a lot of snow on inhospitable looking mountain ranges. I started to think that maybe I had not got enough warm clothing, and that Steve's assurances about Alaska not being cold were not explicitly written on any of the paperwork about the trip. The DC 10 plodded on for sometime longer, before we made our final approach in to Anchorage, over some very wet looking terrain.

Three days later I woke after an eventful night, I was just starting to question quite what I was doing on a wilderness holiday. I inched open the tent flap imagining another damp start, but instead was fascinated to see a seal in the water, watching the tents about 30 metres from the beach.

Alaska in summer is not that cold or wet (compared to the normal UK climate), but it is a superb opportunity for new experiences, but I am getting ahead of myself, how did I end up there?

PEOPLE AND MOTIVATIONS

I suppose many people reach a time in their lives when they wonder if they are becoming a bit suburbanised, and dare I say it boring.

I had recently become a Dad, not boring, but rather 'settled' down, and I was feeling a bit middle aged -the true facts of the matter are too scary to contemplate. Any way I was looking



for something different to do -even if it was only to extend my small talk



repertoire, which seemed to be focused on nappies, lack of sleep and other recurrent themes.

Why choose Alaska? If exciting small talk is your objective -saying you are going sea kayaking in Alaska tends to grab people's attention pretty well. Usually for the wrong reason -people think you will be paddling in a desolate frozen wasteland, and you must be hard as nails (or stupid) to cope with the hardship. If that was true I certainly would not have been going, but I did not always dissuade people from their misconceptions.

My fellow paddlers, the exception of Steve, were not practised paddlers, but all seemed to be spirited individuals who enjoyed travelling particularly in the wilds. There was

Katherine who was an RAP doctor, who had been kayaking and whale watching in Baja (California), but who seemed to have survived the experience, although she was not a raving paddling enthusiast. Paula who worked in marketing but was changing careers to do a degree course in Zoology, and had a Kenyan Land Rover safari on her C. V. of holidays.

Finally, but by no means least, ~ another Steve, who was an accountant from Sussex, who continually surprised me with his exploits, such as the British Schools expedition which involved camping in a blizzard, on a glacier in Greenland -hard as nails? As well as sharing experiences on this trip, Steve and I shared a tent. "Tell us about how you got there", you ask? Oh all right then.

# EXPEDITIONS

## GETTING THERE

I flew in to Anchorage, to be met by Steve at the airport, who whisked the two of us who arrived on the flight, off to our accommodation. For me the first night in Anchorage was in the Regal Alaskan Hotel, civilised, comfortable and with a lake out the back to park your float plane -can't think why we don't have them at home. You can opt for the campsite, or B & B if you want to save money, or don't have a floatplane.

Despite being jet lagged we sampled a bit of night life (if 'life' accurately reflected my state of consciousness) at 'Blondies' a genuine Alaskan Bar, and our waitress turned out to be a dropped out lawyer from New York, who claimed to be 'on the run from the law'. Despite jet lag, we were up bright and breezy next morning to stock up with last minute essentials before heading off for the majestic wilderness of Prince William Sound.

Our eventual destination was the Growler Island camp, close to Glacier Island, about halfway between Whittier and Valdez. We travelled from Anchorage on the "Backpacker Shuttle" minibus, chatting to the driver about smelly travellers returning from the wilderness (were we self-conscious when we returned? -yes!). After an hour's driving we arrived at Portage, where we transferred to the train to travel to Whittier, this is the only way through the mile and a half of rock between them, unless you have a float plane. That seems more and more attractive every time I think of it.

I mention these place names as they feature prominently on Alaskan maps, but I should explain, Whittier is a ferry / rail terminal with an ex-services block of flats, whilst Portage is a car park between the railway and freeway. Alaska is a big place, but there are not many people there, so these

places take on an importance and charm of their own, which even make some of the villages near me in Devon, seem like an overcrowded metropolis.

At Whittier we transferred from train to high speed sight seeing launch -the Nunatak, to head off in to the Sound. En route we took in the sights taking some time to acclimatise to the scale of the place, the immense size of the even the relatively small Blackstone Glacier, and the impressive sight of a humpback whale feeding off Fairmile Island, all this as we continued to travel out to our first wilderness location.

## GROWLER ISLAND

We eventually made it to Growler Island, where we stayed our second night, it initially seemed quite basic consisting of cabins, permanently erected tents, showers and basic, but flushing loos. We did not realise quite how sophisticated this was going to look nine days later when we returned.

The next day was spent being shown the flora and fauna of the Sound, and learning to pack the boats. The highlight of our first exploratory paddle was an old mine just as it was abandoned some 80 years ago -complete with rusty tools and empty dynamite crates. This trip was lead by Tom and Nancy Lefcoe, who have lived on their yacht in the sound for many years, and what they do not know about the sound is not worth knowing.

The group's lack of paddling experience shaped the itinerary of our trip, but as one of my colleagues often says, "If you can't ignore a potential problem, make a feature of it". Arctic Light have a flexible approach to suit different groups, and were good at making a "feature" of the mixed paddling ability of my group.

Rather than going for high mileage travel, staying on different beaches every night, we stayed at one site for three days at a time, then paddled to points of interest around us. This meant we were not wasting lots of time packing and unpacking, and had more time to travel in unladen boats, which also reduced paddling effort.

## ELDER POINT

When we had finally packed the boats for the first time, it was about 21.30 pm. We set off in the rain which had been pouring intermittently all day, so our first campsite ended up being only 20 minutes paddle from the Growler Island camp, but we had the beach to ourselves.

Elder point, our first camp, looked out towards Columbia Glacier some 12 miles away. At night, when the sun went behind the headlands, we could feel the chilled breeze blowing across the water towards us. During the days vast amounts of ice would "calve" off the face of the glacier, and the resulting icebergs drifted with the wind and tide out into the Sound.

The icebergs frequently seemed to move in the opposite direction to what we expected, and then stay still when you expected them to move. Our group (well our leader actually) said he was sure that they were moved by a group of sea otters, employed by the national park authorities -"Stick it over there Fred, there's a bunch of paddlers taking pictures of the view". They also provided us with endless entertainment -"I spy with my little eye a berg that looks like John Major"... "where?" "no it's a one eared donkey" "no it's not". Looking back, it seems pretty sad -must have been withdrawal from TV.

From our first beach we managed quite a lot, we went West on one trip to a large inland lagoon in Eagle Bay, a small tidal 'rapid' of fast moving water took us in with the tide and suddenly we were surrounded by 800' high steep rock faces, rising straight

# EXPEDITIONS

from the water. We had hoped to find sea otters here but they were nowhere



to be seen in this dramatic enclosed waterway. We crossed to the opposite shore, and taking our lunches with us, heading for the hinterland. Alaskan beaches are almost exclusively made up of pebbles, and are hemmed in by rain forest. Hemlock or Spruce trees are closely packed, the forest floor thickly covered with dense, fast growing vegetation. We followed a deer track through the forest, aiming to cross through a low pass to the Southern shore of Glacier Island (Chamberlain Bay).

It has to be said that deer tracks are pretty narrow, and the path they leave is clear if you are only deer height (1 metre high). For two legged beasts it helped to have the flexibility of a contortionist to get through the thick undergrowth. Frequently we were bent double to avoid environmental damage, ignoring the personal damage caused by emulating Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (mirror, mirror on the wall, who looks the daftest of them all?). One advantage of being bent double was that if you slide, you are already in the "seated position", so you merely dropped a few inches before landing bottom first in the mud. After a steep climb, with occasional views out of the trees and over the lagoon, we made our way down to the shore on the other side of the island, emerging on a narrow beach, by a picturesque small inlet. The shal-

lows revealed the thick vibrant green seaweed covering the rocks in this secluded waterway, which we skirted to reach the beach where we had decided to have lunch.

The beach itself was a true horseshoe shape, which if it was sandy and in the Far East would have been in a holiday brochure, covered in people. As it was, it was made of pebbles, the sun was peeking through the impressive cloud formations and it was absolutely deserted. Occasionally a group of sealions would cruise along the shoreline, and



keep a wary eye on us. I had never felt so remote before in my life. I was also quite struck that it was the wildlife that was watching us not the other way round!

For some reason, on this particular day, all the flies on the beach decide to home in on me, and were not interested in anyone else, I resolved to wash more thoroughly in future!

In addition to these adventures we made a brief foray out to the outer fringes of the ice, sailing the Feathercraft double home on a glacial

breeze, but my other vivid memory of Elder Point, was the impact of watching rolling icebergs and continually changing sunsets over Columbia Glacier, an ultra slow moving animation until the early hours of the morning -Hey this is better than television!

## FAIRMOUNT ISLAND

The group were keen to do some whale spotting (like train spotting, but with Goretex). We all understood that there can be no guarantee that they would be as keen to see us as we were to see them. We decided, guided by Steve's knowledge and our recent experience, that we would head down to Fairmount Island near to where we had seen the Humpback from the Nunatak. So with some trepidation it was decided to pack all our gear back into the boats, no mean task, and move camp 12 miles or so down the Sound. What surprised me, was how our group could eat a significant amount of our food, only to find that it was still no easier to squeeze everything back in the boats. This mystery, like .F.O.'s, is one for which I still have no satisfactory answer for, but unlike V.F.O.'s -I don't suppose it will ever support any fictional TV investigators or armies of dodgy novelists.

We enjoyed travelling to our new location as much as any of our 'out and about' trips. We had started to get the hang of paddling together and had





# EXPEDITIONS

now changed paddling partners to try to match our relative strengths. I have to confess that being more of a solo paddler, I had probably been a bit exuberant whizzing around in the one single boat. I found the change in pace going from the single Feathercraft folding boat to the double a bit slow, but it helped in keeping me from shooting off everywhere, and gave Steve a rest from pushing the large Feathercraft along which seemed to be carrying all the heaviest bits of kit.

One memorable part of the journey was entering a large sea cave at Granite point, this was impressively large, we were able to turn the double around at the end of the cave, and at one point had both doubles and the single in there simultaneously. Later in the trip we returned to the same cave and Steve found what he thought was a dead fish. In a responsible, 'leaderly' sort of way, he flicked it at one of the other boats, the 'recently deceased' suddenly recovered and Steve full of remorse, gently assisted its swimming to freedom and the mouth of the cave. Allegedly it gave him a mournful look as he backed off his kayak to a less intimidating distance -this was the cue for the fish eagle to swoop down from the cliff above and snatch the hapless fish. No wonder he looked mournful being 'helped' from the sanctuary of the cave.

Whilst heading toward the new camp site we saw a group of three humpback whales feeding in the distance. We began a discrete 'chase'. It seems a ridiculous concept, these huge animals weighing in at around 40 tons, and 40' in length, with three dimensional mastery of a huge volume of water, could be 'chased, in 'fragile' craft, operating in a two dimensional environment. These whales were probably aware of our presence, but seemed fairly indifferent toward us. After quarter of an hour or so, their activities attracted the attentions of a more significant

human craft - a medium size sight seeing boat, this did seem to be a lot more successful at worrying the whales, who were quickly driven away from our kayaks. This really brought home to me that the kayak must be one of the best ways to see these huge animals close up, and how low their confidence is in other types of human water craft. Not surprising when you consider how they have been hunted by man. Perhaps more remarkable to me is that these gentle, but mighty animals, could have ever have been successfully hunted from a



kayak.

We stayed several nights on Fairmount Island on a beach facing tree covered rocks, like Wildcat Island in Swallows and Amazons (except the lake is a lot bigger). Our stay here was a bit wet at first, and Steve decided to set up the kitchen just inside the thick rain forest on the edge of the beach. It was then that we discovered we were not the first inhabitants. About 80 years ago, when sea otters had been hunted to near extinction, to satisfy demand for fur, the locals turned their hands to farming arctic fox, keeping them on the islands. In the trees we found the remains of an old trappers cabin, not much bigger than a garden shed, but built in the true interlocked logs, traditional cabin style. As a dwelling it was seriously compromised by the tree which had collapsed on it. What was strange was how quickly you get used to the remoteness, and how shocking the signs of habitation were when unexpectedly discovered.

The fairly long rain showers actually lead to a few lie ins for the group -on one day I don't think I got up until!! 0' clock, in marked contrast to most days when I wanted to be up by 6.00. You quickly learn the importance of keeping warm on days like this, going for a short 2 hour paddle stops chill creeping in to your muscles, even if you are getting rained on. We easily consumed as much food on a day like this, to combat any chilling effect of inactivity. Other days were warm and sunny, and the beach would suddenly look like we were signalling to extra terrestrials -with our kit neatly laid out to dry in mystic patterns round the tents and boats.

As I said we were on Fairmount mainly to spot feeding whales. We would travel out in search of them visiting outlying islands. One particular day there was a slight mist and at times we could not clearly see land or horizon -an eerie effect which was slightly disorientating, I imagine it is

the same feeling as floating in deep space with nothing close enough to seem real. These mind wandering sessions did not last long, especially if we spotted a whale. It has to be said my tent mate, Stephen, would have made a fine Cap'n Ahab, with the ability to spot whales well beyond the range of my visual capabilities.

It was difficult to predict where the whales might be, so we tended to plan trips which took us through where the whales might be feeding, and if Cap'n Ahab did his stuff we would turn off our route, to stealthily head toward a distant and vague plume of a whale blowing

Steve (much to his regret), mentioned in his literature that he would be baking bread in camp. Some of us (the ladies) latched on to this and ribbed Steve mercilessly until he produced a 'loaf'. This obviously had some symbolic meaning, like 'Passover' bread it had not risen. It was brought out for lunch while we stopped on one island. All Steve's efforts were forgot-

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ten, along with a major mickey taking opportunity, as a Humpback was spotted. We waddled down the beach in our bulky waterproofs, looking like World War Two fighter pilots being scrambled to their Spitfires, with loose fitting clothes looking like we were wearing a bit like parachutes. We rushed through the ritual of loading and installing ourselves in the boats.

I remember this encounter vividly, we watched the whale diving in a pattern some 100 metres away, then we thought we had lost it. When it surfaced and blew close behind, most of us jumped, doing good impressions of Polaris missiles being vertically launched from a submarine. Steve, used to being 'surprised', got sweet revenge on the bread mockers.

Alaska is a hugely impressive place, and the whales suitably huge and impressive, but they are just part of the experience.

A large part of the food chain revolves around the half dozen different breeds of salmon, some of which can be fished for as little as six hours a year, and then only after enough fish have made it up the rivers to the spawning grounds. Despite the rather short open seasons, they still managed to catch six hundred thousand of one species alone whilst I was there.

Alaskan fishing boats are some what different to ours being equipped with Chevy V8 engines which can be heard for miles, doing a lot more knots than your average British trawler. The fishing equivalent of comparing the 'Dukes of Hazard' and 'Postman Pat'. It might be that they need to be that fast to evade the fishery protection vessel, which we nearly 'bumped in to' rounding a headland one evening. I often thought that if the salmon was that bountiful we ought to catch them on our travels, but apparently we would need a fishing permit, so I slunk past the protection boat, feeling guilty for even hav-

ing thought about it, despite the fact we could have had only the slightest impact on the balance between fish and fisherman.

I got up at six one morning and went for a wash, I met a medium size dear wandering down the beach. Standing still a few yards apart for several minutes, we watched one another not too sure what to do, neither having been in this sort of situation before. A Unique experience, which ended when the dear's instinct convinced it to wander back up the beach. I won-



dered if I was the first human this dear had seen. We sadly left the Fairmount whales behind, but it was quite exciting to be on the move again, and getting to our next camp involved an open crossing, and a long paddle down an fairly unforgiving rock cliff coast with few landing points on the way.

### FINSKI POINT'

To reach Finski Point, located on the North Eastern tip of Glacier Island, we retraced our steps Granite Point and the sea cave. From here we made a three mile open crossing to the southern coast of Glacier Island. On the other side the cliffs rise dramatically out of the sea in an almost sheer face of ocean rock, forced up from the sea bed by the huge volcanic movements between the Tectonic plates. On this side of the island we faced out toward the Pacific, albeit protected by a distant line of islands in the mouth of the Sound, the swell

was more noticeable here, although it was by no means rough.

The boats were still pretty full of kit, despite having eaten much of the food, and for some reason I had a fuller than usual dry bag / rucksack between my legs. Ordinarily this would not have been a problem, but as we were going for some distance without being able to get out easily to stretch our legs, this immediately made me very aware of my inability to wriggle around and get comfortable in the Feathercraft's cockpit (fidget bottom that I am I).

Travelling down the coast, I paddled offshore a way to get a picture of one of the doubles in the turquoise sea at the base of this huge cliff (more than 1000 feet high), while my back was turned the others disturbed a Harbour seal which almost jumped over the boat to get away the action always happens just at the wrong moment.

Looking at maps of Alaska you can see that the early European explorers rapidly got bored with naming the features in this vast land, and reverted to functional names such as 'Deserted Point', 'Useless Ridge' and more famously 'Anchorage'. This was probably quite useful if you did not know the area, but a bit uninspiring. We passed a natural harbour that looked like it was man made with vertical walls of stone, I was really quite surprised when I looked at the map, to find it was not man made, and even more surprised that it was not called something like 'Safe Mooring Bay'. We continued on our way until we reached 'Good Place to Stop for Lunch Beach'.

One of the key sites on this paddle is a sealion colony at Bull Head and we wanted to get there quickly, but force of bladder pressure, twisted leg arrangements and hunger forced us to land first, at the recently renamed beach. This was another idyllic location which I will remember for a long time. It was almost sandy

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by Alaskan standards, the sun was shining, fresh water cascaded down a cliff at one end of the beach, whilst a clump of rocks, just off shore provided a good vantage point for the gulls to perform flying displays and watch us from. I am not sure whether it was this, or the ability to stretch my misshapen legs, and empty my bladder discretely behind a rock that gave me more pleasure. Either way we had a very pleasant lunch while we prepared ourselves for the sealion colony.

Having been briefed that we should stay 200 meters away from the colony to avoid the occasionally aggressive 2500 pound, dominant male bull (his weight not his value to a circus act), we re-packed the boats and started to paddle. Leaving the bay we made our second human contact since leaving Growler, a group of sea kayakers seemed to ignore us in a 'very British' embarrassed manner, which was quite a contrast with the 'cowboy' who had made a point of visiting as he had passed us at Elder Point. He turned out to be quite friendly despite the large Magnum pistol he had strapped to his hip. Perhaps we had infringed on the kayakers wilderness experience?

The colony was first detected when our noses detected a whiff of fishy breath on the breeze, and the occasional sea lion surfaced, before diving back down in alarmed way (probably thinking those kayakers don't smell to good). The alarm was mutual, despite looking cute in zoos these animals are big, and are quite intimidating as a group of young immature males (lightweights -only 300 lbs) come to check you out. In practice the old saying about them being more scared of you than the other way round seemed to be true, and they dived under the boats at the last minute.

Later Steve explained that the last time he had been here they had not even got off the rocks, but on that occasion it was more to do with the Orca fins cruising around behind him.

They were rightly more afraid of 'us' on that occasion.

A couple of months later whilst surfing off a South Devon beach I was struck by how similar hoards of noisy, sunbathing holidaymakers looked to the sealions at the colony! I even glanced over my shoulder looking for Orca.

After a long day we ended our trip arriving at our new campsite, again looking toward Columbia Glacier. It would be an exaggeration to say that setting up camp was effortless, but we were soon ready to explore our new surroundings. At one end of the beach was an odd small lake, at the top of the shingle, a stream flowed from a small dam created by fallen trees, and providing our fresh water. The lake was surrounded by the rain forest and the fallen tree stumps, and created a strangely peaceful, prehistoric flavour.

All over the beach was evidence of debris, but it was mostly focused at one end of the beach, near our tents. My first impression was that these were the remains of some derelict factory building, with huge pitch treated timbers, twisted metal plate and hawsers. There is a story associated with this, which is a bit disconcerting to hear when you are sitting in the middle of Prince William Sound. It is rumoured that the 30 foot long logs I was sitting on, were part of the landing stage at Valdez, which was washed away by a wave caused by the last major earth tremor. This does not convey the alarm it should until you realise that Valdez was 40 miles away from where I was sitting, and the wave was estimated to be between 100 and 200 feet high. The scale of the place, and the forces which continue to form it suddenly come home to you at times like this. Momentarily, surfing on 6 foot high Atlantic rollers seemed a wimpy, as I imagined the horror of the immense wall of water rushing past where I was sitting. The hazards of boogie and board surfers

in the surf at home, trivialised by the thought of the vast lumps of debris screaming along in a hundred foot wave.

By this stage of the trip I was starting to get a bit more of a feel for camp life and started trying to improve my wilderness skills. Firelighting in the past this was a game of chance for me, involving three tons of newspaper and unconsciousness induced by smoke inhalation or hyperventilation whilst blowing on the feeble embers. By comparison, it now seemed that if I reached for the matches too quickly, the firewood would spontaneously ignite.

The first of two memorable trips from Finski point were right into what had been the backdrop for most of the holiday, Columbia Glacier and the Icebergs Which had dominated most of our days. It was quite a long paddle across to approach the ice wall. We crossed to the opposite shore against the out going tide, nosing our way round headlands, trying to make the most of the eddies in both the wind and current. As we got closer to the glacier the berms had gathered in a huge cluster, sitting on the rubble of the moraine left by the retreating ice sheet. Slowly we moved forward in amongst ice blocks (transit van size), the narrow passages between them testing our manoeuvring skills (especially in the doubles).

For me this was something special and magical, which I was not expecting. The glistening crackling lumps of ice, glowing with a deep, blue / white that soap powder advertisers could only dream of. Eventually we were able to thread our way through this frozen maze, accompanied briefly by a squadron of float planes ferrying parties of tourists above the glacier, until we landed on the moraine itself. We stopped for lunch and photographs, these would be good for fostering the 'hard as nails' reputation with people who were easily fooled. In actual fact we were in more danger of sun burn than freezing -still no one went in the water to cool off!

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The gravel 'beach' was scored with grooves which reminded me of the tracks, created by rocks embedded in the glacial ice dragging across the surface of the deposited bow wave of debris pushed in front of the ice river flowing from the mountain ranges behind. The lateral moraine where we ate our lunch was supposed to be standing in over a thousand feet of water, but instead of sitting at the front of the glacier, the moraine was now some 14 miles away. For over a decade, the glacier had been in retreat - more ice was calving in to the sea than was being pushed down from the ice fields behind. The geography of all this is not completely understood by the experts, and certainly not by me, but I did understand that as the glacier retreated, it exposed land that it had created and covered for many thousands of years. Spooky.

The second trip from Finski Point which was dramatic, in a different way, was the Schraeder Island burial caves. This ended up being probably the longest paddle of the holiday, by my reckoning about 16 miles. We made our way past the Glacier again heading for a remote island used by the Tutiliak people to bury their elders. We were aware of the sacred nature of the island, and I felt that the plant life looked subtly different to that of the rest of the Sound. We followed a small track away from the beach we landed on, past a tree warning us of the legal consequences of theft from American Heritage sites. This confirmed we had found the right place, but was at odds with the environment, especially as we had not seen 'officialdom' for over a week. We pushed carefully, and quietly on. The graves themselves were unremarkable, marked with small, simple wooden crosses, just under the overhang of a cliff face, but I still sensed the feelings of family, history and grief in this remote tree filled place.

## THE END OF THE TRIP

Finski point was not very far from the camp back at Growler Island, so our paddle 'home' was a short one, many pictures were taken as we left our last camp.

Coming back to Growler was not the end of the holiday, but it was the end of our holiday way of life, which had been ingrained in our beings in the last few short days. Suddenly the toilets and warm showers seemed like the height of luxury, although I had never felt particularly dirty or cold.

The small gift shop (a shed really if we are honest), seemed like a centre for finance and commerce, our money was retrieved from various bits of luggage, unused since leaving Anchorage many days ago. Our 'wallet muscles' were warmed up for a return to America's consumer society, buying small gifts and books to remind us of the sights we had seen but not captured on the hundreds of frames of film we had taken. It seemed quite crowded with even a few extra people around, and an incident with a stupid holidaymaker who insisted on getting stuck up one of the adjacent mountains and had to be rescued by helicopter, emphasised how vulnerable you could be if you had not got the right support or attitude, even close to well established camps.

We were sped away from the Sound on the Nunatak cruise boat, travelling distances that we would have spent many days covering in the kayaks. In Anchorage I was staying at a bed and breakfast, which was very comfortable, although I did not see much of it. Alaskan 'B and B' is not like ours, if that expression conjures up pictures of rules, threadbare carpets and uncomfortable beds you need to be re-calibrated, they are comfortable and the people laid back. Most of the last

evening we spent time having a meal together, back at 'Blondies'. Steve continued to look after us, I had not fully realised from the brochure was the holiday was more 'all inclusive' than other 'all inclusive' deals, even in Anchorage all the meals and odd coffees were taken care of.

As if to heighten the contrast between being looked after and not, our major human interactions suddenly took on a different perspective whilst travelling home. 'Have a nice day' quickly descended into brusque and surly responses as airport staff wrestled with first a computer failure, followed by a flight diversion. Customer service was not in much evidence, the jumbo jet of Japanese tourists who didn't understand English in front of us probably did not help. The unexpected stop over for 24 hours in Minneapolis could have been as a great opportunity, but by now I just wanted to be home, I had enjoyed the holiday tremendously but I was now missing my wife and daughter. Arctic Light had made the holiday a great experience, often through Steve doing ridiculously long hours and with great patience, not being phased by all sorts of behind the scenes hassles or the individual whims of the group.

## HOW DID IT DID IT MEET MY EXPECTATIONS ?

I remembered my anxiety high over the Gulf as I flew in to Alaska, and how I had been concerned about unscheduled meetings with irritable bears. The reality is that while my wife was expecting me to come back from this trip nursing injuries and worn out (like I normally do if I try getting adventurous), in practice I came back very mellow and relaxed, my taste for adventure both satisfied but stimulated at the same time.

The Alaskan wilderness is just that, but the way Arctic Light have constructed these tours has made them both safe, but without obvious and intrusive safety procedures,

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which in themselves can cause anxiety. You are not totally isolated, there are people about, but they are certainly not 'in your face'. I specifically wanted to paddle with a new group of people, who were not trying to clock up huge mileage's, and wanted to savour what the country is about. To this extent I feel I was very lucky, and thoroughly enjoyed their company, but also felt able to have my own space and use the huge landscape as a 'sounding board' for my thoughts on life in general.

Anchorage was a place I would have liked to have more time to explore, the 'kit' shops in particular, offer some genuinely different products to those in the UK. I think Steve is trying to arrange this for the future. I was relying on getting some of my equipment there -like a Thermarest sleeping mat, which saved some money, but potentially they may not have the item in stock or not the right size, so be careful if copy this approach. Steve has got internet links to some of the stores so it might be possible to order kit for you if you want to make sure it is there when you are!

Overall I am not sure the trip met my expectations (in a positive way), in many ways I tried not to have preconceived ideas about what it would be like, but I was not expecting for it to be so hassle free, this was emphasised by the hassle getting home -that was more to do with air travel generally, than the holiday.

I was expecting the climate to be wet, I was not disappointed, but taking the right equipment and the sensible management of the groups food intake, rest and exercise, I never felt cold or miserable, and remember I am not particularly a roughie -toughie type.

I came home, wanting to be home, but I would definitely do it again, probably somewhere else in the world, as once in a lifetime experiences are by implication best not repeated, or

they lose their effect. That is what this holiday represents for most people, I would heartily recommend it not to just the seasoned traveller or explorer types, but anyone wanting the spice of adventure without unnecessary anxiety. If you were thinking of doing something different this could be just the thing for you.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

For any potential clients here are some additional thoughts on the trip, which I had thought about prior to going:

### LOW IMPACT CAMPING

One of the questions I think people want to ask, but think it is tasteless to ask, is how do you go to the toilet? The answer is carefully. As Prince William Sound is a popular location with outdoors people, you don't want to find your chosen campsite has been previously visited and the signs are obvious and I or a health hazard. I am told that current outdoors teaching involves squatting over flat rocks, then lobbing the rock plus products in to the sea, which apparently can break things down much quicker. Apart from the irritatingly spherical nature of the majority of Alaskan rocks, this is an acquired skill, and Steve has dedicated significant effort to de-traumatising the experience.

I will not give away his trade secrets, but it involves a novel application of a folding camp stool (no -the small chair, not the other sort). Bears can be a problem although we camped on islands as this significantly reduces the risks, however we still took the proportion of burning our rubbish, and keeping food away from the tents. On the mainland bear caches are used to suspend food out of reach.

I am not sure whether it was to dissuade bears or for hygiene reasons or just because Steve has a warped sense of humour, but we were encouraged

to burn our toilet tissue at 'the point of use' in a carefully vented food can. Anyway hours of entertainment was afforded to all, as we tried to light the reluctant paper.

While we used fires to keep the camp hygienic and smell free, as well as providing heat and cooking, we also made sure that the blackened rocks and ashes around the fire were thrown in to the sea, and once rubbish was as burned as it was going to get, we packed it back in the boats and took it back to civilisation to be dumped. Literally, we aimed to leave no trace of our passing.

### FOOD

Multiple fads :- veggies, non -fish eaters, non -shell fish eaters, home baked bread junkies -they were all on this trip! Steve was almost caught off guard by some last minute revelations on this just as we left Anchorage, possibly because most people might not have expected the variety of food Steve serves up. Pasta and rice provided warmth and the backdrop to most evening meals, all of which were very edible, lunch of necessity tended to be a bit more pre-prepared, squeezy cheese went down well as did the peanut butter, Breakfasts were impressive, pancakes, maple syrup, porridge, omelettes a good reason to get up in the morning.

### EQUIPMENT

This bit is for the kit junkies amongst you (unfortunately I fall in that category), Steve does a thorough write up of what you need to take with you, I would advise you to follow it. For example, I needed more thermals than Steve had suggested, so packed some more. They came back unused.

The boats we used were a Feathercraft folding single and double, and an Amaruk plastic double. The folding boats were interesting in that they feel quite different to fibreglass sea kayaks which I have got used to. Some of Steve's clients criticised them for being slower than the rigid

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equivalents that we might paddle more in the UK, but their shapes are generally designed to give reassuring stability, something they do admirably. They are also very seaworthy, the flex in the frame I skin, allows the boat to sink more gently in to the troughs, and the bow closely hugs the back of the wave as you go through the crest, so there is none of the "slamming" that is experienced with rigid boats. The resulting ride is smooth and the increased stability makes up for any shortcomings in speed. In practice I enjoyed the opportunity to try out a different sort of boat, and after a day or two, I became used to the it and it was no longer an issue. I am not convinced that we would have covered any more distance if we had more "conventional" boats. I think Steve will either be using fibre-glass boats in the future, or a mixture including Feathercraft.

I was really impressed with the Aquabound paddles we used, they had very tough symmetrical 'leaf' shaped blades, made from an injection moulding process also used to make high speed jet aircraft radomes (the pointy bit at the front).

I had worried about getting a reoccurrence of tenosynovitis, and had even gone out to get split cranked paddles, but in the end could not find space to pack them. Compared to my 'state of the art', all carbon, modified crank Nordkapp blades these felt very stable in the water, and pulled very smoothly, which is important when you are trying to avoid wrist damage in a heavily loaded boat.

Although we were not doing too many slalom style manoeuvres, the

blade was smooth and balanced on sculling and draw strokes, highly predictable in the water without any quirks. I had no injuries from the end of nearly two weeks paddling -my wife was amazed, as I normally manage to hurt myself one way or another. These are good paddles for putting in effortless miles, with minimum muscle strain.

As well as their performance, I was impressed with their ruggedness and ability to take knocks. Having seen the blades which came back at the end of



the season, I was amazed at their condition. Even responsible customers will not treat equipment as kindly as their own, but these were remarkably unscathed.

If you are used to living out of a kayak, you will probably already have

your own ideas, but I would still encourage you to listen to what Steve suggests. I picked up a few tips which I particularly liked. Ziplock bags, available from large Sainsburys stores, not only provide a cheap additional water barrier to the dry bags (provided by Arctic Light), but they can be compressed before sealing, making packing quite a lot easier.

I took the opportunity whilst out in Anchorage to buy some drybags which I had been impressed with, the Americans seem to be very good at producing this sort of stuff cheaply and still good quality. Arctic Light provide maps for your tour, and at the end of the trip these were given to the customers. This was an unexpected bonus, although many of us seemed reluctant to hand back the waterproof map cases, which were not only good, but at less than a tenner cheaper than anything equivalent I had seen in the UK. Another last minute purchase had to be made.

All of these products are made by the makers of Thermarest sleeping mats, and I got one of those as well while I was there - if only I was Victor Khyam I would buy the company!

In terms of kit, you really do not need to take too much, tents are provided as are all the specialist kayak bits, but you should take personal equipment that would get you through a typical spring / autumn camping trip in the UK.

So if you think it sounds good give Arctic Light a call.

Arctic Light -01752 847762, they also have a web site on the internet. Arctic.doc

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NO APOLOGIES FOR DEVOTING SO MANY PAGES TO THIS REPORT - A THOROUGHLY ENJOYABLE READ.