

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

March 2023

Why Do We Do It?: Motivation and Baby Boomer Sea Kayakers

Rick Wiebush

Introduction: The Baby Boomers

The baby boomer generation – that age cohort born between 1946 and 1964 – are now all between 58 and 76 years of age. Previous generations reaching this age would have been looking forward to - or would be in – a retirement characterized by “taking it easy”. That is not the case for large segments of the baby boomer group. They see themselves as 10 -15 years younger than their chronological age and reject the notion of getting “old”. One corollary of this attitude is that approximately half of them – as reported by the Outdoor Foundation in 2021 - are involved in outdoor activities of one type or another, and large numbers of them are involved in outdoor adventure activities. For example, in 2019, there were almost 1.5 million baby boomers involved in sea kayaking, the subject of this article.

During the past two decades, there has been increasing attention paid to the involvement of older adults in outdoor adventure activities (OAAs) and to their motivations for that involvement. That interest has been spurred by:

- the size of the baby boomer generation (about 20% of the U.S. population);
- their economic clout (boomers control almost 70% of the 17.3 *billion* worth of disposable income in the U.S.);
- the fact that about half of them are retired and have time available to participate in OAA;
- the potential for healthy lifestyles to positively impact expected dramatic increases in health care costs due to the size of the aging baby boomer group; and
- the need for outdoor program operators to understand the interests and motivations of baby boomers so they can offer relevant programs.

Although there have been several studies of motivations of older people in outdoor activities, most of them have focused on people who were involved in highly structured, short-term, commercial programs led by trained guides (e.g.,

ElderTreks). Few have examined the motivations of people who are deeply involved in sea kayaking and for whom paddling is part and parcel of their lifestyle, rather than an occasional short-term “experience”.

To address this shortcoming, I conducted a large survey in the winter of 2022 that sought to expand our understanding of why baby boomers are involved in outdoor adventure activities generally, and sea kayaking specifically.

These Reports

This issue of *Coastbusters* contains a series of reports on the results of that survey. It expands upon a preliminary report that appeared in the May 2022 edition of *Coastbusters*.

This article serves as an introduction to the study results. It focuses on the characteristics of the people who participated in the survey. It also describes the structure of the survey instrument. Understanding the nature of the survey instrument is important for grasping the study findings.

This article also presents the basic findings. It identifies the motivations that the respondents considered most and least important in driving their involvement in sea kayaking.

A second article in this issue compares the motivations of baby boomers with a group of younger, mostly Gen X, paddlers (see p. 10). It examines whether and to what extent the older and younger groups might have different motivations.

How boomers differ from younger paddlers in terms of risk taking is the subject of a third article on the results of the survey (see p. 18).

This is about the motivations of baby boomers who are “lifestyle” sea kayakers



A prime motivator: enjoying nature. Photo: Rick Wiebush

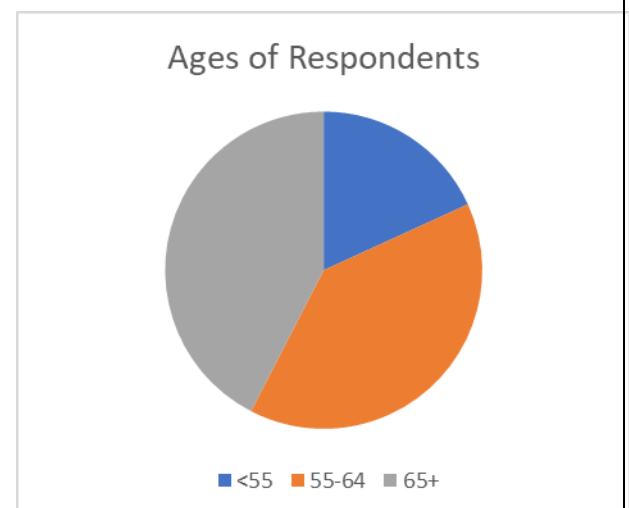
Profile of the Participating Paddlers

The study involved 421 paddlers, each of whom completed a 61-item formal questionnaire, and a 20-item “Paddler Profile” which was a series of questions about demographics and paddling practices. This section summarizes the characteristics of the people who completed the survey.

Demographics

- Four-fifths of the respondents (82%) were 55 years of age or older. Only about one in five people (18%) were under the age of 55.

Figure 1. Paddlers’ Ages



- Two-thirds (69%) of the respondents were from the Mid-Atlantic states (NY, NJ, PA, MD, DE, DC, VA), while 16% were from New England and 10% were from the southeastern U.S. Four percent came from other states in the U.S.
- The majority of respondents were male (59%) and overwhelmingly white (93%). Eighty-four percent had college degrees and half (51%) had a graduate degree. Slightly more than half the group (56%) was still employed, while 42% were retired.



Surprisingly, two-thirds of the people said they enjoy paddling in rough water and surf. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Paddling Profile

- The paddlers who participated in the survey were a very experienced group. 61% had been paddling for 10 years or longer. Another 19% had been paddling for between six and nine years. 20% had been involved for less than six years, and just 7% for less than two years.
- Two-thirds (66%) of the group reported paddling at least four times per month during their paddling season. Another quarter (22%) of the paddlers go out 2-3 times each month. A relatively small group (51 people or 12%) are infrequent paddlers, going out just once per month.
- Surprisingly, over half the group (54%) had taken six or more formal skills training sessions, while only 7% had never had formal training
- Even more surprisingly, almost two-thirds (64%) of the respondents said that they “enjoy paddling in surf, strong current or rough water”.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument that people completed is called the Recreational Experiences Preference (REP) scale. It was originally developed in the 1970’s and has been used in dozens of studies of motivations for outdoor leisure pursuits. It repeatedly has been validated as an accurate tool for measuring motivation. Each of the 61 questions is answered using a five-point scale, ranging from “not at all important” (1 pt.) to “very important” (5 pts).

The 61 questions are divided into 18 “domains” or concepts. Each domain has between one and four questions that inform the scoring for that domain. For example, “Enjoy Nature” is one of the domains. That domain incorporates three questions to measure the extent to which “enjoying nature” is a factor in paddler motivations. Those questions are: “how important is viewing the scenery to you?”, “how important is it to you to feel close to nature?” and “how important is it to you to enjoy the sounds and smells of nature?”

The 18 domains and the key questions associated with each are shown in Table 1 on the following page. Many people don’t like reading about “methodology”. But if you want to understand the answers (i.e., the findings), you need to understand the questions that were asked.

Figure 2. REP Domains and Key Questions

Domain	Key Questions ("How important is it to:")
Achievement/ Stimulation	Increase self-confidence
	Make a good impression
	Improve skills
	Test competence
Risk Taking	Have thrills
	Take risks
Similar People	Deal with potential danger
	Be with friends
	Be with my group
New People	People with shared interests
	Talk to new, varied people
Learning	Meet others in the area
	Learn about places I paddle
	Learn more about nature
Enjoy Nature	Experience different things
	Be close to nature
	Enjoy scenery
Autonomy/Leadership	Enjoy nature's smells, sounds
	Make my own decisions
	Feel independent
Introspection	Act as a leader
	Develop spiritually
Creativity	Think about who I am
Nostalgia	Be creative – paint, draw, etc.
Physical Fitness	Think about past good times
Physical Rest	Get exercise; keep fit
Escape Personal Pressure	Rest; relax
	Reduce tension, anxiety
	Escape feeling overloaded
Escape Physical Pressure	Give my mind a rest
	Get away from crowds
Security	Experience tranquility
	Be with respectful, considerate people
Teach, Lead Others	Be with family awhile
	Teach, share outdoor skills
Risk Reductions	Lead others
	Be near others who could help me if needed
	Be sure of what will happen
	Avoid the unexpected

Motivations

Table 1 ("Strong Motivators"; opposite) shows the motivation *domains* that were most often selected by the 421 respondents as "important" (score of 4 pts) or very important" (5 points). Table 2 on page 4 then shows the motivation domains that on average were considered "somewhat important" i.e., had an

average score of about three points. Table 3 (p. 5) presents the motivation domains that were most often selected as "not at all important"(1 point), or "not very important" (2 pts).

What's shown is the average (mean) score for each of the items. A motivation domain that had a mean score of 4.4 (for example), was one that – on average – was marked as "important" or "very important". Conversely, a domain that had a mean score of (for example), 2.3, was one that – on average – was "not very important" to the paddlers.

Strong motivators. Table 1 shows the strongest motivators emerging from the survey. These items with high average scores were those most often rated as "important" or "very important".

Table 1. Strong Motivators

Motivation Domain	Mean Score (n = 426)
Enjoy Nature	4.3
Physical Fitness	4.1
Learning	4.0
Security	3.8
Being with Friends	3.7

The strongest motivational domains included:

- Being in and **enjoying nature** (including questions about enjoying the scenery, being close to nature, and enjoying the sounds and smells of nature)
- Maintaining **physical fitness** (including questions about paddling to get exercise and to stay physically fit)



- **Learning** new things (including exploration, learning about different paddling locations, and learning more about nature)
- **Feeling secure** by being with respectful, considerate people; and
- Being with **friends** (including being with my group, being with people with similar values and interests)

In addition to these important *domains*, one of the individual questions - about skill development, with a mean score of 4.2 – was also cited as a strong motivator.

Note that previous research has consistently shown that people involved in OAA – including older people – have multiple motivations for their involvement. Those findings are supported and reinforced here. Most people don’t just paddle for reason A or B. Instead, they paddle for reasons A, B, C, D and maybe E and F as well.

Moderate Motivations. Table 2 highlights the domains that were identified as “somewhat” important i.e., they had average scores that clustered around 3 points. It’s interesting that many of these moderately strong motivations are about getting away from daily life and having an opportunity to just relax. For example, the “Escape Social

Pressure” domain includes questions about escaping routines, releasing built-up tensions, and escaping role overloads. Similarly, the domain “Escaping Physical Pressure” has to do with getting away from crowds and having an opportunity to experience solitude and tranquility. The domains “Physical Rest”, “Nostalgia” and “New People” follow this same general theme. It’s about getting away from the familiar and the daily grind.

The final domains that emerged as moderate motivators are “Achievement/Stimulation”, (a category that captures multiple factors including to develop skills, test competence, and have thrills), and Risk Reduction. This suggests that in addition of getting away from it all, people want to have some challenges, but challenges that involve minimal risk.

Table 2. Moderate Motivators

Motivation Domain	Mean Score (n = 426)
Escape Social Pressure	3.5
New People	3.4
Escape Physical Pressure	3.3
Nostalgia	3.2
Physical Rest	3.0
Achievement/Stimulation	3.0
Risk Reduction	2.9



Learning new things is a major motivational factor. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Weak Motivators.

The final group of domains are those that have little influence on these paddlers’ involvement in sea kayaking. The average scores for most of these domains (between two and three points) indicate that they fell somewhere between being “somewhat important’ and “not very important”.

The data in Table 3 serve to elaborate on the theme of “getting away” seen in the preceding section. While “getting away” is important, these paddlers: 1) do not want to get away in order to take potentially nerve-wracking risks; 2) are not motivated by getting away from their families; and 3) the getting away isn’t for purposes of typically solitary pursuits like introspection and pursuing creative projects. (Recall that a strong motivator was the social aspect of being with friends.)

Finally, it is clear that these paddlers do not attach much importance to roles that involve controlling, directing, leading or teaching others while on the water (Autonomy, Leadership; Teach, Lead Others).

Table 3. Weak Motivators

Motivation Domain	Mean Score (n = 426)
Escape Family	1.7
Creativity	2.3
Teach, Lead Others	2.5
Risk Taking	2.6
Introspection	2.6
Autonomy, Leadership	2.7

Comparison with Other Motivation Research

These findings reflect the results of previous studies of older people involved in OAAs. For example, the strongest motivations of nature, fitness, and learning were also strong motivations in:

- a study of over 750 Elderhostel participants (average age 65) involved in short-term outdoor programs (Sugerman; 2003);
- a study of 175 paddlers (average age 45) at several Great Lakes sea kayaking symposia (O’Connell, 2010)

- a qualitative examination of baby boomer expedition canoeists (Loffler, 2019); and
- a survey of 80 participants (average age 67) in “soft” adventure programs in New Zealand (Boyes, 2013)

There is one significant difference. The sense of achievement and accomplishment that results from successfully meeting OAA challenges has often emerged as a strong motivator in previous studies. In this one however, it (Achievement/Stimulation”) was found to be only a moderate motivation.

Conclusion

The vast majority (82%) of paddlers who participated in this survey were age 55 or older i.e., baby boomers. They were very experienced paddlers, for whom sea kayaking was part of a lifestyle, rather than a short-term “program” or “experience”. This meant they were a very different population than those involved in other research on the motivations of older people involved in OAAs.

Yet the strongest motivations that emerged from this study largely reflected the findings of that earlier research. That is, what matters to baby boomers involved in sea kayaking is not the traditional notion that it is the thrills, spills, and risks that draws boomers to adventure pursuits. Instead, people are motivated to participate by multiple and somewhat varied factors, including the opportunity to enjoy natural settings; learning new things about kayaking and the environments in which it takes place; getting away from the pressures of everyday life, and doing so with trusted friends, all while getting or staying in shape.

References

Boyes, M. (2013). Outdoor adventure and successful ageing. *Ageing & Society*, 33(4), 644–190.

Loeffler, T. (2019) Looking back, paddling forward. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 19:2, 111-123,

O’Connell, T.S. (2010) The effects of age, gender, and level of experience on motivation to sea kayak, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 10(1), 51-66.

Sugerman, D. (2003). Motivation of older adults to participate in outdoor adventure programs. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 25(3), 346.

In This Issue

Motivation and Baby Boomer Sea Kayakers – Rick Wiebush.....	1
A Classroom with 40 Foot Waves – Kirk Johnson.....	7
Baby Boomers vs. Gen X: Motivation Differences – Rick Wiebush.....	10
Exploring Bear Glacier by Kayak – Whitney Sanford.....	12
Photos of the Month	15
Baby Boomers and Risk – Rick Wiebush	18
Steamrolled by Complacency - Paul Thomas	19
Steamrolled Redux – Aiden Frew	20
Can You Tell When a Person is Drowning?	21
Upcoming Events and Symposia	23
Supplement: Cross Currents 2023 Courses and Trips	24
Contributors	26



Smith Island, MD. Photo: Mike Allison

A Classroom with 40 Foot Waves

Kirk Johnson

Note: This article originally appeared in the NY Times on Feb.19, 2023. It has been edited for length.

Metal clinked on metal as three small groups of U.S. Coast Guard students and their instructors clipped canvas waist belts to both sides of their 47-foot rescue boats, vital lifelines for staying on board when the big waves come.

And on these waters, they always come.

The Columbia River, the fourth largest in America by volume, surges into the turbulent tides and currents of the Pacific Ocean here at a spot called the Columbia River Bar where two far west corners of Oregon and Washington meet at the river's mouth to form a pincer. Waves 30 to 40 feet high common in winter as river energy and ocean energy collide and then perversely recombine, swirling in complex patterns driven by tidal surges, winds and storms.

More than 2,00 boats and ships over the last two centuries have sunk or split apart on the sands and rocks around what locals simply call "the bar". At least 700 lives have been lost, as vessels attempted to find a way through the unmarked and often fog-shrouded crossing, known as the graveyard of the Pacific. Cape Disappointment itself was named by a sea captain in the late 1700's who searched in vain for a way through it.

But to the U.S. Coast Guard, all of that hazardous, churning turbulence has become a prized asset too—as a classroom. The Coast Guards' National Motor Lifeboat School was founded here because the danger of the water is so extreme that it is perfect for training.

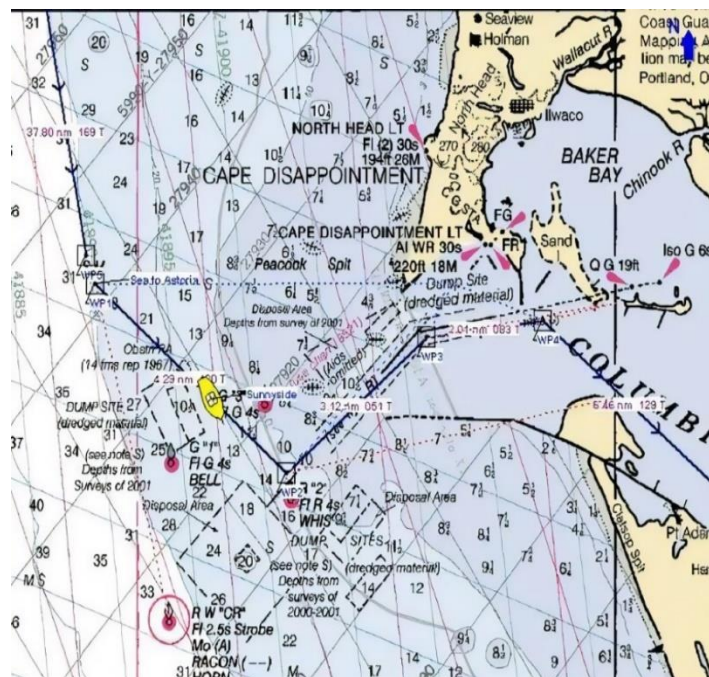


Chart courtesy of Irwin Yachts

"It's a conundrum" said Chief Warrant Officer Tim Crochet, the school's commanding officer. "We want the weather to be nice and flat, so we have a safe maritime environment for those who choose to make their living or recreate here." But, he added, severe conditions prepare the Coast Guard to fulfill its mission, which is to keep the water's safe.

Eighteen Coast Guard officers a year are accepted for enrollment in what maritime experts say is one of the most challenging water-rescue training programs on the planet – the month-long Surfman course – conducted only in late fall and winter when sea conditions are at their roughest.

What the students learn, in piloting boats, providing aid to stranded vessels, and plucking people from the waves (though dummies are used for passenger-overboard exercises), builds skills and confidence



Photo:Pinterest

That can save lives when students return to their home bases around the country. And getting through the course is just the beginning; full certification as a surfman can take years after that in order to prove to superior officers that those skills have been mastered.

On the first day of the course in January, I went out with a training crew, suiting up in helmet, goggles, and anti-exposure coveralls. After a few hours with the class members, I was wet inside my suit from the waves that smashed into the boat and found a way down the back of my neck.

Unlike the mouths of other great rivers, like the Mississippi and the Amazon, the Columbia has no fan-shaped delta to dissipate its force, and so it hits the Pacific in a narrow channel like a firehose.

Petty Officer Second Class Melissa Hiatt, 25, who grew up on the New Hampshire coast and now serves at the Coast Guard Station at Barnegat Light in New Jersey, said that training here could be a source of humility and confidence at the same time. “You don’t realize how small you are until you look up at this gigantic wave coming at you,” she said.

She and the others in the January class said the cool heads of the instructors on the boats could feel like a natural wonder.

“They definitely have some ice in their veins” said another student, Petty Officer Second Class Brock Kler, 24, who was born and raised in Oregon near the Columbia River. He grew up crossing the bar – at least occasionally, when the conditions were calm – to fish for salmon in the Pacific with his family.

One of the first lessons the instructors impart is that piloting a rescue boat here means thinking like a chess player. Every block of space has energy and wave conditions that are unique to that space and time, which means that getting from point A to point B involves thinking three to four moves ahead, reading the wave conditions and often zigzagging around the worst threats.

piloting a rescue boat here means thinking like a chess player... getting from point A to point B involves thinking three or four moves ahead.

And be ready to improvise. Near the end of the course in early February, for example, the students were sent to handle an actual emergency rescue

after the operator of a private boat that was foundering in 20-foot seas and high winds called for help.

“Every second, you’re making decisions” said Petty Officer Second Class Bryan Rojas Lugo, 25, who grew up surfing off the coast of Puerto Rico, a skill that he said had helped him read the waters here as a student. “I’m going to go with this wave, turn in toward this one, take this one square up so I can take all this energy in the bow and then keep moving – it’s very dynamic,” he said.

But sometimes, when a wave hits with a force or from a direction that a pilot cannot avoid, the boat can capsize, pulling everyone onboard completely underwater, or the vessel can fall over to one side in what surfman instructors call a “knockdown.”

Students are prepared for that possibility – and told that their boats are engineered to right themselves in as little as 10 seconds, said one of the instructors, Chief Petty Officer Cameron Katelnikoff. He said he has warned students that time itself seems different, though, when you are underwater and locked into the boat by your belt clips, “It can feel a lot longer,” he said.



Photo: Pinterest

Baby Boomers vs. Gen X: Differences in Motivations for Sea Kayaking

Rick Wiebush

Variations in Motivating Factors

The survey research that was conducted in 2022 was also interested in finding out whether and to what extent there might be differences in motivational factors within the study sample. For example, are older people motivated by factors that are different from younger people? Are there differences between those who are still working vs those who are retired? Are women motivated differently from men?

This article looks at differences in motivation between the baby boomer generation of sea kayakers and the next youngest generation of paddlers i.e., the Gen X generation. A subsequent article (in the May 2023 *Coastbusters*) will examine differences between male and female baby boomers.

Baby Boomers vs. Younger Paddlers

To address the question of differences in motivations by age, we split the study sample into two groups: 276 baby boomers i.e. those 60 and older, and 145 people who were 59 and younger. (The latter group is primarily GenXers.) We then compared the mean scores for each group on the 18 REP domains and tested (using ANOVA) the differences between the two groups to see which, if any, were statistically significant.

This analysis showed that there were **statistically significant differences between baby boomer and younger paddlers in half of the REP domains.**



Gen X Paddler



Baby Boomer paddler

Table 1. Domain Means, Boomers vs. Gen X

Domain	BB Mean	Gen X Mean	p ¹
Achievement/Stimulation	3.2	3.3	.05
Autonomy/Leadership	2.7	2.7	ns
Risk Taking	2.5	2.6	ns
Similar People	3.8	3.6	.05
New People	3.5	3.3	.05
Learning	4.0	3.9	ns
Enjoy Nature	4.4	4.3	ns
Introspection	2.5	2.7	ns
Creativity	2.3	2.4	ns
Nostalgia	3.2	3.0	ns
Physical Fitness	4.2	4.0	.05
Physical Rest	3.0	3.2	.05
Escape Personal/Social	3.4	3.8	.001
Escape Physical Pressure	3.2	3.3	ns
Security	3.9	3.6	.01
Escape Family	1.7	1.9	.05
Teach- Lead	2.6	2.4	ns
Risk Reduction	2.9	2.7	.01

There were five domains to which the baby boomer group gave more motivational importance than the younger group. Baby boomers were more likely to be motivated by:

- being with similar people/friends (p = .05); being with considerate and respectful people (“Security”, p = .05); and meeting new people (p = .05)
- keeping physically fit (p = .05); and
- taking steps to reduce risk (p = .01)

Conversely, there were four domains on which the younger people placed greater value than the baby boomers. The younger group was more likely to be motivated by:

- Achievement/Stimulation – including testing skills and competence, thrill seeking, and self-pride (p = .05)
- Escaping personal and social pressure (p = .001), escaping family (p = .05); and being able to physically relax (p = .05)

These findings suggest that the baby boomers placed somewhat greater emphasis on the social aspects of paddling, keeping fit and controlling risk, while the younger people were more likely to emphasize both the more challenging dimensions of paddling (e.g., competence testing, thrill seeking) and, at the same time, the escape and physical relaxation dimensions of paddling.

It is important to note that: 1) there *were not* significant differences between the groups on two of the strongest motivators, nature and learning; and 2) statistically significant differences may not equate to practical significance, e.g. means of 4.2 vs 4.0 on fitness, while significant, are not substantial. The bottom line is both groups say it’s important.

¹ P = probability. .05 means there is a 95% likelihood that the observed difference between the two groups is true and NOT the result of chance. .01 = 99% likelihood it’s not chance.

Exploring Bear Glacier by Kayak

Whitney Sanford



Crackle swoosh boom! The sounds of a melting and calving glacier. Twelve kayakers awed by the ethereal blues of house-size icebergs floating in a glacial lake. We sat quietly, in communion with this living glacier until one large splash of falling ice broke the spell. We were in Alaska, far from my home in Florida.

We paddled to Bear Glacier on our last full day of a week-long trip to Resurrection Bay. Our home base was the Kayakers Cove Hostel, about a 12-mile

paddle from Seward, on the Kenai Peninsula. During our week there, we watched whales, otters, and sea lions and explored caves and rock gardens. With Levi Hogan of Turnagain Kayak, along with Dale Williams of Sea Kayaking USA, Tom Noffsinger, and Tony Hammock, we practiced rescues, rock gardening, and strokes along the rocky coast.

Our weather was spectacular, mostly clear and sunny, which meant we traded rough conditions for terrific views. Kevin and I had done the



Resurrections Bay. Courtesy of Wilderness images

Resurrection Bay trip in 2015 with rougher conditions, so this seemed like an entirely different experience. A combination of sea swell, tide, and wind direction dictated each day’s activities. Last year, the winds mostly blew from the north, so we headed out towards the open waters of the Gulf of Alaska. This year’s winds blew southerly, offering a different set of explorations.

Off to the Glacier

Towards the end of the week, Levi announced that conditions were favorable for Bear Glacier, and we leapt at the chance to kayak among icebergs. We would paddle the 10-ish miles to Bear Glacier, then return by water taxi in two shifts, six paddlers and six kayaks on each trip.

We launched at 9 a.m. with drysuits, helmets, and extra food and clothes – just in case. As we passed the southern tip of Fox Island, Levi checked for confirmation of our pick-up. We had little or no cell service at Kayakers Cove—a wonderful cyber-vacation, but missing a text from Joe, the boat captain, would have resulted in a long, cold, and unexpected paddle home.

As we paddled around to the east of Fox Island, we moved to the middle of the channel to ferry glide across and surf the wind swell. To quote Tom Noffsinger, “When asked if you want to surf, the correct answer is always ‘yes’”. I agree. The wind and swell gave us an easy ride across Resurrection Bay, and we soon reached Callisto Head.

Ooops

As we paddled around Callisto Head, Bear Glacier appeared in the distance. Resurrection Bay gave us some small swell, and we played among the rocks along the way. Navigating a 17’ kayak through rocks can be like threading a needle, and a fun challenge with the right swell. Levi reminded us that fiberglass NDK boats and rocks do not mingle well and warned us not to go over any overfalls, where swift currents flow over exposed rocks. A severely damaged boat would be dangerous in this remote area. Soon after, I misjudged a swell and flew towards an exposed rock. Fortunately, an opposing swell covered the rock, and I sailed over it unscathed. I did not make that mistake again.



Photo: Whitney Sanford



Photo: Whitney Sanford

The entrance to Bear Glacier Lake was still several miles away. As we paddled across, seals and sea lions popped their heads up, curious about our strange crafts, and played in our wake. The mouth of the Bear Glacier River created a tidal race where we surfed in the waves. This water was cold—glacial melt.

After we played, we landed our boats, carried them up and over the rocky ridge, and launched again in the slower and deeper section of the river. This shallow braided river is the only access to Bear Glacier, so only those willing to paddle or walk (or pay an exorbitant helicopter fee) get to see the glacier. (In 2015, Kevin and I saw the Aialik Glacier on a Kenai Fjords tour.)

We eddy-hopped our way upstream, where house-sized and larger icebergs floated in the lake. Although we were still at least a mile from Bear Glacier itself, its presence enveloped us in the sights and sounds. We paddled carefully around the floating ice, knowing that our helmets offered little protection from falling chunks.

Disappearing

I sat in my kayak, mesmerized, but I wondered about its future. What will Bear Glacier look like in twenty years in an era of rapidly retreating glaciers?

In India, Gangotri Glacier, the source of the Ganga and sacred to Hindus, has receded dramatically in recent years. In the late 18th century, Gangotri Temple sat at the foot of the glacier, but by 1992, when I visited, pilgrims trekked 12 miles over two days from the temple to Gangotri Glacier.

Though Alaska seems remote from Florida, retreating glaciers and melting sea ice contribute to the rising sea levels that erode our shores and flood our seaside cities. Maybe Alaska and Florida are not so far apart after all—a baked Alaska means a soggy Florida.

We paddled back towards the river, carried our boats back across the ridge, then headed towards our pick-up point. Our captain Joe ferried us back in two groups and took us past a sea lion haul-out. I was fortunate to be in the second group, leaving me with more time to relish this exquisite beauty and to play among the rocks. Back at Kayakers Cove, we relaxed over wine and fresh-caught fish, cleaned and caught by Joe, demonstrating [Alaskan hospitality](#). Bev and James treated us to their amazing fish-cooking talents that evening. Our week in Resurrection Bay was filled with highlights—great paddling and great friends, but our trip to Bear Glacier stands out among these highlights.



Photos of the Month



Fog-Enveloped Cape Henlopen Light

Photo: Keith Betts

Photos of the Month



Shanks Island, MD

Photo: Mike Allison

Photos of the Month



Lucky Frog*

Photo: Angus James

*The frog was in the mouth of a fish that Angus caught and was preparing to release. The frog jumped out.

Baby Boomer Sea Kayakers and Risk

Rick Wiebush



High risk. Photo: Bill Vonnegut

One of the questions which I was particularly interested in for this study is the extent to which risk-taking is a motivator for baby boomer sea kayakers. By their nature, sea kayaking and other outdoor adventure activities involve some degree of risk. But anecdotally, my experience is that there is variation among paddlers in the degree to which taking risks is part of the draw in sea kayaking. Some “hair-on-fire” paddlers frequently want to be in the biggest, roughest water they can find. Others enjoy the challenge of rough water on occasion, but don’t necessarily go looking for it all the time. Still others want to minimize risk and consequently spend most of their time on flat water.

To get at the question of risk as a motivator, the REP scales include two domains and several questions about risk. In addition, the paddler profile section of the survey asked a question focused on risk.

As shown previously, the “risk taking” domain (“I paddle to take risks; to deal with dangerous situations”) on the REP instrument was a weak motivator for both the boomers (mean score = 2.6) and the younger group of paddlers (mean = 2.7).

In addition, the “risk reduction” domain (“to be sure of what will happen to me; to avoid the unexpected”) was a marginally moderate motivator for both groups. However, risk reduction was statistically more important to the baby boomers, indicating a greater aversion to risk.

The clearest picture of the role of risk as a motivator emerged from a paddler profile question: “As you get older, are you more or less likely to take risks on the water?” The responses to this question made clear that boomers are much less interested in taking risks than younger paddlers (2.5 vs. 2.8; $p = .0001$).

Stated differently, the *proportion* of baby boomer paddlers who said they were “much *less* likely” or “somewhat *less* likely” to take risks was significantly greater than the younger paddlers (56.7% vs 37.2%). Conversely, the proportion of younger paddlers who said they were “somewhat *more* likely” or “much *more* likely” to take risks on the water was significantly greater than the baby boomers (26.1% vs. 11.9%).

Consequently, although the results of the risk-related domains on the REP were somewhat mixed, the “willingness to take risks” question makes clear that: 1) the majority of baby boomers (56.7%) are less likely to take risks as they get older and 2) baby boomer paddlers are more risk averse than their younger counterparts.



Low risk. Photo: Mark Baskeyfield

Steamrolled by Complacency

Paul Thomas

Note: This article appeared originally in the December 2022 issue of SALT, the newsletter of the New South Wales (Australia) Sea Kayak Club – Ed.

I now know that golden rules are golden for a reason. The golden rule when you come out of your kayak in surf is to stay on the upstream side, i.e., the side from which the waves are coming.

It makes perfect sense. A kayak being carried by a broken wave, even if the kayak doesn't contain water, is a large hard object moving fast. You don't want to be in its pathway. I did know that. But I had already finished my paddle last Sunday and I was relaxed. I was appreciating the Big Foot pedal system that I had recently installed, and which has resolved the leg numbness that I would sometimes get. And the dolphins had put on a good show as I came back into the harbour. Besides, I was landing on a little beach just inside Newcastle Harbour. It wasn't exactly a surf beach.

I had put various gear in the car and now I just needed to drag the kayak back into the water, get the sand off the bottom, load it up and go home. I must have done this a hundred times before. There was a dumpy little surf break on the beach which had given me a little trouble heading out, so it should not have been a complete surprise.

But it was. The little wave formed in about three seconds and broke with me and the kayak in the worst possible position – kayak parallel to the wave and me standing in the middle of the kayak on the beach side. I knew I was in trouble. Next thing I knew I was getting up out of the shallow water coughing and spluttering. The kayak was now on

the beach having just steamrolled me without stopping. I staggered onto the sand to sit down and examine my wounds. The pain in the shin made sense, and I copped a whack to the ear that hurt like hell and even produced a little blood. Later I realised that the watch had been ripped off my wrist, never to be seen again. Of course, my pride was also a little injured, even though there were only a couple of witnesses. It must have looked like a good walloping because they did come over and ask if I was OK.

So, there you have it. Nothing like a bad experience to drive a lesson home. In this case a cheap lesson, because no doubt the damage could have been worse. I hope that my little mishap can be a reminder to others that where waves are breaking, even when they are only occasionally breaking and small, ALWAYS stay on the wave side of the kayak.



Photo courtesy of Aqua Bound

Steamrolled Redux

Aiden Frew

Note: this second "Steamrolled" article originally appeared in the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (KASK) newsletter, June 2016.

Aidan Frew recently headed off for a short paddle from his local beach. On return he found the beach slope to be quite steep. As he exited the cockpit in the surf wash, his kayak slipped back down the beach. Aidan takes up the story:

"I quickly got up onto my feet, looking around at my kayak as a large wave came in, sweeping my kayak towards me. I tried running up the beach but not fast enough in the soft sand and the kayak hit my shin. I heard and felt a "CRACK" and looked down to see the lower part of my leg bending in an unusual way.

I twisted around, landing on my rear and dragged myself backwards up the beach yelling for help. A fisherman ran down the beach asking if I needed some help but looking at my leg spoke for itself. He grabbed me around my shoulders and dragged me up the beach away from the surf."

Aidan sustained clean breaks in both the bones in his lower leg. "Less than 20 seconds" he says, "and an ordinary kayak trip can turn into a real emergency." LESSON: Never exit on the shoreward side of your kayak on a surf beach. Even low surf can propel a heavy kayak onto your legs. Stay on the seaward side or go to the ends of the boat. This is an injury you cannot afford on a kayak expedition (or, for that matter, any other time!)



Photo: Pinterest

Can You Tell When a Person is Drowning?

Mario Vittone

Note: this article originally appeared in the boating magazine, Soundings.

The captain jumped from the deck, fully dressed, and sprinted through the water. A former lifeguard, he kept his eyes on his victim and headed straight for a couple who were swimming between their anchored sportfish and the beach. “I think he thinks you’re drowning,” the husband said to his wife. They had been splashing each other, and she had screamed, but now they were just standing neck-deep on a sandbar.

“We’re fine, what is he doing?” she asked, a little annoyed.

“We’re fine!” the husband yelled, waving him off, but his captain kept swimming hard toward him.

“Move!” he barked as he sprinted between the stunned owners. Directly behind them, not 10 feet away, their 9-year-old daughter was drowning.

Once the girl was safely above the surface in the arms of the captain, she burst into tears and screamed, “Daddy!”

How did this captain know —from 50 feet away— what the father couldn’t recognize from just 10? Drowning is not the violent, splashing call for help that most people expect. The captain was trained to recognize drowning by experts and years of experience. The father, on the other hand, assumed he knew what drowning looks like because he watched television.

A swimmer doesn’t splash and wave for help. Here’s how to know when someone is in trouble, and how to respond.

Until that young girl who was rescued by the captain cried a tearful “Daddy,” the owner’s daughter hadn’t made a sound. As a former Coast Guard rescue swimmer, I wasn’t surprised at all by this story. Drowning is almost always a deceptively quiet event. The waving, splashing and yelling that dramatic conditioning (television) prepares us to look for is rarely seen in real life.

If you spend time on or near the water, then you should make sure you and your crew know how to detect when a person is in distress. Honing this skill is critical, particularly in light of new statistics that reveal drowning is the leading cause of accidental death for children under 5 and the second leading cause of accidental death for children 5 to 15 years old. It is estimated that over 80 percent of childhood drownings occur when the child is supervised. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, well over 50 percent of all drownings are adult men. Yet regardless of who drowns, in

some cases, people are watching or are within yards of the victim and have no idea it is happening.

Francesco A. Pia, Ph.D. is the person who coined the term *instinctive drowning response*. This is what people do to avoid actual or perceived suffocation in the water. When someone is drowning there is very little splashing, and no waving, yelling or calling for help of any kind.

Dr. Pia, in an article he wrote for the Coast Guard's *On Scene* magazine, described the instinctive drowning response like this:

- Except in rare circumstances, drowning people are physiologically unable to call out for help. The respiratory system was designed for breathing. Speech is a secondary or overlaid function. Breathing must be fulfilled before speech occurs.
- The mouths of drowning people alternately sink below and reappear above the surface of the water; they are not above the surface of the water long enough for the victims to exhale, inhale and call out for help. When the mouths are above the surface, they exhale and inhale quickly before sinking below the surface of the water
- Drowning people cannot wave for help. Nature instinctively forces them to extend their arms laterally and press down on the water's surface. Pressing down on the surface of the water permits drowning people to leverage their bodies so they can lift their mouths out of the water to breathe.
- Throughout the instinctive drowning response, drowning people cannot voluntarily control their arm movements. Physiologically, drowning people who are struggling on the surface of the water cannot stop drowning and perform voluntary movements such as waving for help, moving toward a rescuer or reaching out for a piece of rescue equipment.



Photo courtesy of Soundings online

- From beginning to end of the instinctive drowning response, the bodies of drowning people remain upright in the water, with no evidence of a supporting kick. Unless rescued by a trained lifeguard, these people can only struggle on the surface of the water from 20 to 60 seconds before submersion occurs.

Visual clues to help recognize a drowning person

- Head tilted back with mouth open
- Head low in the water, with mouth at water level
- Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus
- Eyes closed
- Hair over forehead or eyes
- Not using legs
- Hyperventilating or gasping
- Trying to swim in a particular direction but not making headway
- Trying to roll over onto the back
- Appears to be climbing an invisible ladder

This doesn't mean that a person who is yelling for help and thrashing isn't in real trouble—they are experiencing aquatic distress. Not always present before the instinctive drowning response, aquatic distress doesn't last long, but unlike true drowning, these victims can still assist in their own rescue. They can grab lifelines, reach for throw rings, etc.

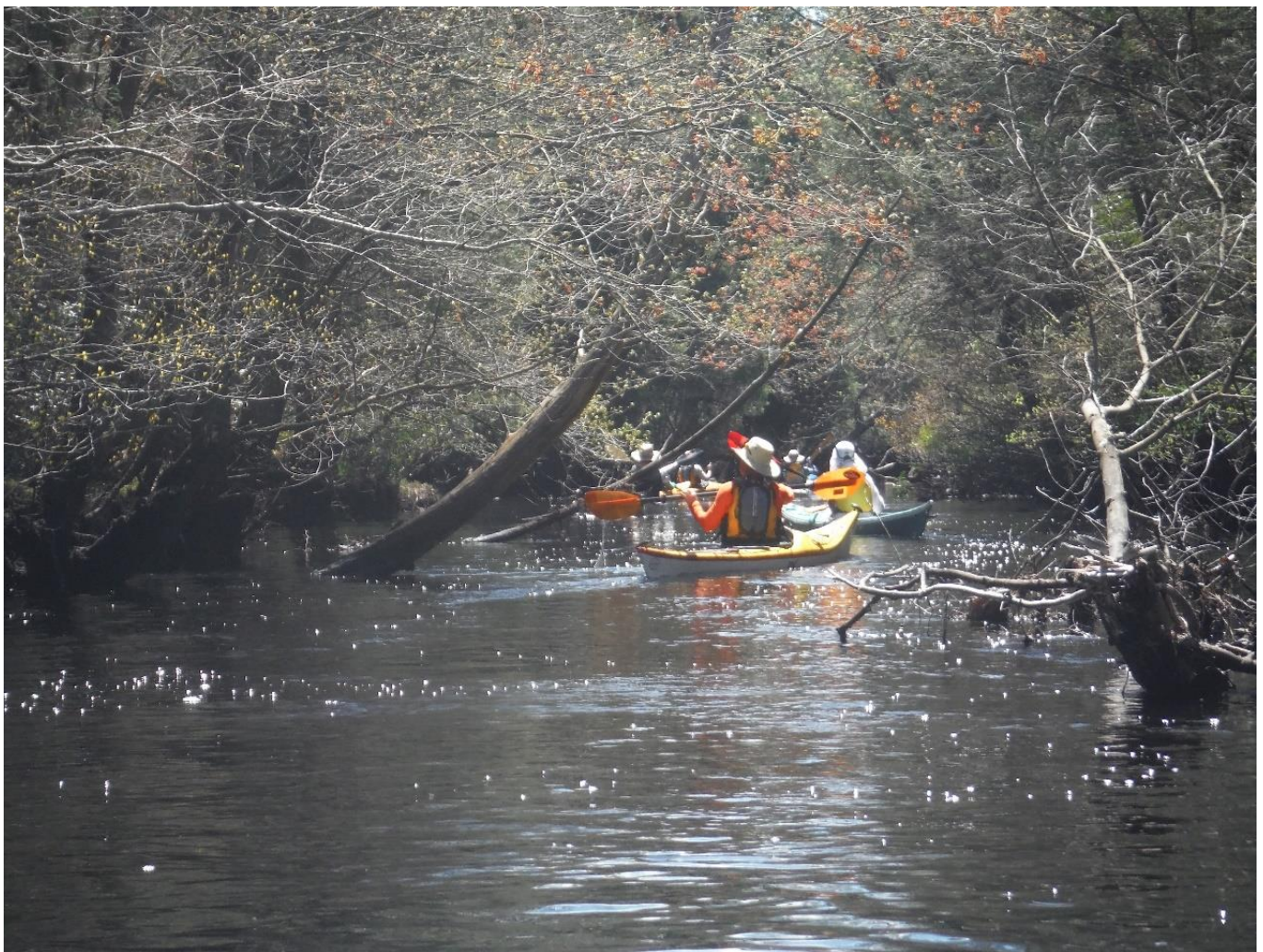
So, if a crewmember falls overboard and everything looks okay, don't be too sure. Sometimes the most

common indication that someone is drowning is that they don't look as if they're drowning. They may just look as if they are treading water and staring up at the deck. One way to be sure? Ask, "Are you alright?" If they can answer at all, they probably are. If they return a blank stare, you may have less than 30 seconds to get to them. And parents, children playing in the water make noise. When they get quiet, you need to get to them and find out why.

Upcoming Events

Dates	Event	Location	Website
May 19 - 21	Oceans 23	Southport, NC	chrisrezac.wixsite.com/kayakoceans
July 9 – 15	Alaska: People and Ecology of Place	Haines, AK	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
July 12 - 16	Great Lakes Symposium	Grand Marais, MI	greatlakesseakayaksymposium.net
Sept. 20-21	Intermediate and Advanced Surf Camps	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 22-24	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 29 – Oct.1	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Lower Argyle, Nova Scotia	bofsks.com
Oct 5 - 8	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes, DE	delmarvapaddlersretreat.org/
Oct. 19 - 21	Sea Kayak Georgia Symposium	Tybee Island, GA	seakayakgeorgia.com
Oct. 22 - 28	Explore The Georgia Barrier Islands	Savannah, GA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct. 27 – 29	Autumn Gales Symposium	Stonington, CT	autumngales.com

***Coastbusters Supplement:
Cross Currents 2023 Courses***



The Wading River in the New Jersey Pine Barrens

Pine Barrens Mini Expedition

May 5 – 7, 2023

Day/Date	Course	Location	Instructors/Guides	Cost
I. Unconscious Competence Series				
May 21 – Aug. 26	UnCon I	Multiple	Rick Wiebush, Paula Hubbard, Laurie Collins	\$1,195 (12 days)
II. Individual Courses and Trips				
Wednesdays Mar 15 – Apr 26	Navigation for Paddlers (7 online sessions)	Your house + On water session Apr 29 Annapolis	Rick Wiebush, Paula Hubbard	\$295 (\$200 if no on-water session)
Sun – Sat Mar 5 – 11	The First Coast: Jacksonville Journeys	St. Mary’s GA, Jacksonville, FL	Ashley Brown, Jeff Atkins, Rick Wiebush	\$695 + housing
Sat. Apr 29	On Water Navigation	Annapolis, MD	Paula Hubbard	\$125
Sat – Sun May 6 - 7	Pine Barrens Mini Expedition	Wading River, NJ	Rick Wiebush	\$175
Sat - Sun May 20 – 21	Intensive Intermediate Skills	Rocky Gorge Reservoir, Kent Narrows, MD	Denise Parisi, Shelly Wiechelt	\$225
Sat June 3	Intro to Kayaking	Spa Creek, Annapolis MD	Denise Parisi, Shelly Wiechelt	\$125
Thurs – Thurs June 1 -8	Outward Bound Staff Training (Private)	Lower Chesapeake Bay	Rick Wiebush	n/a
Sat – Sun June 17 - 18	Rescues, Rolling in Rough Water	Metompkin Inlet VA Eastern Shore	Mike Hamilton Greg Hollingsworth	\$225 + housing
Sat – Sun June 17 - 18	Paddle Smarter: Women’s Weekend	Chestertown, MD	Paula Hubbard	\$225 + housing
Sat July 8	Intro to Kayaking	Spa Creek, Annapolis	Paula Hubbard	\$125
Sun – Sat July 9 - 15	Alaska: People and Ecology of Place	Haines, AK	Scott Ramsey, Rick Wiebush	\$1,395 + housing
Sat. July 15	Intro to Surf and Open Water, Pt I	Kent Island, MD	TBD	\$125
Sun July 24	Incident Management	Chestertown, MD	Paula Hubbard, Marilyn Cooper	\$125
Sat July 30 – Sun July 31	Intro to Surf and Open Water Pt II	Metompkin Inlet, VA Eastern Shore	TBD	\$225 + housing
Sat. Aug 5	Intro to Kayaking	Spa Creek, Annapolis	Denise Parisi , Shelly Wiechelt	\$125
Fri - Sun. Aug. 18 - 20	Introduction to Rocks and Ledges	Newport, RI	Rick Wiebush, Ken Fandetti	\$325 + housing
Sat – Sun Aug 19 - 20	Intensive Intermediate Skills	Rocky Gorge Reservoir, Laurel MD	Laurie Collins, Luci Hollingsworth	\$225
Weds - Thurs Sept. 20 - 21	Intermediate and Advanced Surf Camps	Cape Charles, VA	Dale Williams, Tom Noffsinger, Ashley Brown, Jeff Atkins	\$275 + housing
Fri – Sun Sept 22- 24	11th Annual Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	Williams, Atkins, Brown, Noffsinger, Hamilton, Hubbard, etc.	\$375 + housing
Fri – Sun Oct. 13 - 15	Ches. Bay and Intro to Kayak Camping	Onancock, VA	Rick Wiebush + TBD	\$295
Sun – Sat Oct 22 - 28	The Georgia Barrier Islands	Savannah, GA	Kathryn Lapolla, Rick Wiebush	\$695 + housing

Contributors

Aiden Frew - is a New Zealand paddler and a member of the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (KASK).

Kirk Johnson - is a reporter for the New York Times. He has covered the American West for more than a decade. Born and raised in Utah and currently based in Seattle, he has written extensively about public lands, rural economics and the environment.

Whitney Sanford - is an L4 sea kayaking and L2 SUP instructor and Religion Professor Emerita at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Her most recent book is *Living Sustainably: What Intentional Communities Can Teach Us about Democracy, Simplicity, and Nonviolence*. She is currently conducting ethnographic research on the St. Johns River in Florida, exploring human attachment to place and water.

Paul Thomas - is an Australian paddler who lives in New South Wales (Sydney). He is a former Secretary/Treasurer of the NSW Sea kayak Club.

Mario Vittone - is a retired U.S. Coast Guard helicopter rescue swimmer, who for 22 years rescued boaters in distress from the turbulent waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. An expert in immersion hypothermia, drowning, sea survival and sea safety, he writes and lectures on safety and search-and-rescue topics for popular print publications.

Rick Wiebush – runs *Cross Currents Sea Kayaking* and is the editor of *Coastbusters*. He is an ACA L3 IT and British Canoeing 4* Sea Leader. Rick is currently completing work on two Master's Degrees: Outdoor Education Leadership (Prescott College) and Experiential Education (Minnesota State University, Mankato). Rick lives in Baltimore.

Coastbusters welcomes submissions of trip reports, incident descriptions and analyses, skills and “how-to” articles, boat and gear reviews, book and video reviews, and sea kayaking-related photographs. We are interested in receiving submissions from all paddlers. It just so happens that some of this month's contributors are instructors. That is not a requirement.

Articles should be limited to about 1,000 – 1,500 words and submitted in Word. Photos should be submitted in .jpg format. Please send your submissions to Rick Wiebush at rwiebush@gmail.com.

Coastbusters is a publication of *Cross Currents Sea Kayaking*