

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

May 2023

Magdalena Bay, Baja

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Gray Whales by the dozens, smelling of whale breath achieved, eau de rotten pumpkin and fish. Sea lions, dolphins and birds, oh my; frigate birds soaring, armies of nesting pelicans, and feeding osprey. Beautiful beaches, Cardon cactus up to the shoreline, stars bright, Jupiter and Venus brighter and aligned. Coyote prints everywhere in the morning, but never a sighting and not a one licking morning dew off our tents as warned. Inspiring sun rises and sunsets.

Kayak trips are glorious, though there is a price of admission; physical prep, battling the nerves of travel and new experiences, coming to terms with being at the mercy of weather, body and mind management. Get on with it, life is short.

With advice from Kiptopeke friends and articles read over the years, the four of us signed on with Sea Kayak Baja for a ten-day trip in March on Magdalena Bay on the pacific side of Baja, Mexico, about halfway down the peninsula. Owner Gini Callahan greeted us at the send-off and our experienced and delightful guides were Marco Simental and Ramon Arce.



Isla Danzante

Preparation included dedication to back, butt and arms. You have to be physically ready to truly enjoy these trips. Hours in the boat, hours in the gym. Older you are, the more hours. We are an aged and creaky team, but just try to keep up with us, you whippersnappers. This was a relatively low mileage trip, not more than 70 total, but there was plenty of bounce. Plenty of climbing in and out of tents after a cold night on hard ground, constant lifting of boats and gear.

Who's who?

The trip begins. Keep an open mind damn it! First day of grade school all over again. Meeting your fellow paddlers. Everyone sizing each other up. Putting on a face of quiet competence, or trying. Who asks scary questions? Anybody overloaded with gear, strapping bags to the deck. Who won't accept help or wants too much. Will the surf riders mesh with the nature freaks? In our experience, outliers tend to conform to the group norm after a few days. The person that is always late getting ready, gets better to match the group. The muscle guy learns to allow an extra hand to move his boat. The jackrabbit tires, the turtles march on and on. Our foursome knows each other well. New west coast friends rounded out the seven-person team. Everyone solid and interesting, similar experiences, close in the continuum of contemplating or enjoying active retirement. Vibe from the outfitter was positive. Clear communications, high quality



equipment, attention to boat fitting, organized, not too cocky, but cocky enough. NDK boats, Werner paddles, Kokatat pfds, Heliox chairs, MSR tents.

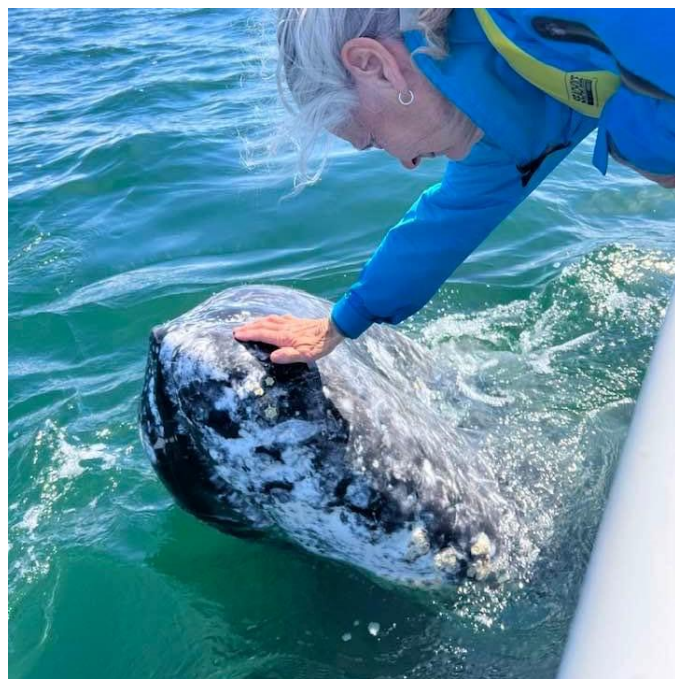
Flexibility

Go with the flow. We froze on this trip, caught in a succession of icy cold fronts that changed plans due to high winds and waves. Note to self, bring the stuffable down jacket. For the first two days the outfitter wisely pivoted to high-wind heel-cooling alternative paddles on a Gulf of California island. This gave us a delayed start on our west coast Magdalena Bay plans and required chopping off a few campsites at the end of the planned trip. We did not get as far south on the Pacific side as we planned. East coast camp sites included Danzante Island and a small beach south of Puerto Escondido. On the Pacific side: San Carlos, Isle Magdalena, Puerto Alcatraz, and Estero Salinas, with take out at Cancun - a one cantina town at the end of a 30-kilometer dirt road. Good paddle distances between sites. Plenty of hard paddling, but time to enjoy and reflect. A couple of two-night stays gave relief from the tasks of setup and tear down. Never neglect taking the time to absorb and enjoy your surroundings, you are not in a race, you are having a lifetime experience.

The Whales

The primary target of this trip was Gray Whales which gather in this area in large numbers to feast, breed and raise young. The waters offer a hearty soup of crustaceans, fish and plankton. Whales that bred last year are nurturing young this year. The breeders are basically having a wild romp with multiple partners. We saw dozens of whales; spouts, tail slaps, breaching, and spyhopping. They range in size from 40 to 50 feet and can weigh 30 to 40 tons. Their skin is mottled light to dark and they are hosts to barnacles and three species of cyamids or “whale lice.”

Whale watching in the prime areas is restricted to skiffs called Pangas piloted by trained local captains, but we also saw whales from our campsites and a few from our kayaks while underway. One in a hundred whales turns out to be



Whale petting Donna Sylvester

extra friendly or inquisitive. We met one such whale that rubbed against the bottom of our Panga and allowed a quick touch; an overwhelming moment.

Along with the whale watching regulations, much of the entire area is under government protection. The guides juggled a number of permit changes as our campsites changed and we each wore different color bracelets throughout the trip to demonstrate that we were correctly permitted.

Camp sites for this trip were all beaches on the edge of mountainous desert or coastal islands. Coarse sand and gravel beaches alternated with those beaches of talc fine sand that sticks to everything.



Photo: Kim Schavender



Spy hopping Grey whale

Some were near small settlements, most were totally isolated. At low tide, one camp was a half mile trek from our landing, carrying heavy gear across wavy wet sand. It was steps away from our boats at high tide.

The Necessities

Nothing beats experience gained from past trips. Always bring a chair, don't forget the wool hat and socks, careful with the drinking water, pack paddle shirts and jackets that suit you, snacks that favor both your energy and a healthy gut, always the handful of Imodium and Pepto on back up. Band-Aids and duct tape for the same spot that always rubs raw under your kayak boots. Bring less toiletries, lots of wipes, more wine and bourbon.

Food for this trip was a gastronomic pleasure, lots of familiar fruits and veggies and some unknown, fresh fish caught by our guides while paddling, stews filled with numerous tasty ingredients and almost always warm tortillas served from the frying pan.

Speaking of the joys of primitive camping, what a relief is that first quality poop in whatever environmentally benign semi-private contraption the outfitter employs. For this trip a combo of tarp targets with toilet paper burn cans, cat holes and the luxurious five-gallon bucket with a seat; always a small shovel to cover the deposit with sand. An army, or kayak group, travels on its stomach, both ends.

If you go

Prime paddling seasons in Baja are March, April, October and November. Summer months are very hot and it can be very windy in January and February. Even though we ran into some very cold days - low of 45 - the temperatures in the prime months are usually in the 50 to 80 range. It almost never rains in Baja.

This is one of those trips you have to save for, transportation and in-country fees are costly. We flew from the east coast to LA on Southwest Airlines then on to Loreto on Alaska Airlines. Cost was approximately \$1,200 round trip. Another option is Philadelphia to Dallas with a connection to Loreto. The cost of the Sea Kayak Baja trip was \$3,400 and was well worth it. That price included all top-notch paddling and camping gear, all meals, numerous permits, guiding and a support boat.

The U.S. State Department has issued warnings for travel in Mexico, but the Baja peninsula is very different from the mainland. Our trip was based out of Loreto, a charming, if well-worn town. We always felt safe. People were friendly and we had no language problems. We enthusiastically recommend this trip.

Ginni Callahan has been leading trips in Baja for almost 30 years and has run Sea Kayak Baja Mexico since 2007. SKBM is the premier outfitter, guiding and sea kayak training organization in Baja. You can find out more here: [Welcome - Sea Kayak Baja Mexico](#).



Grey Whale Migration

Traveling as much as 14,000 miles per year, the gray whale is known to make one of the longest migration trips of any known mammal. Each year around October, the gray whales in and around the eastern Pacific Alaskan waters begin their migration trip from their feeding grounds to their mating grounds around the Baja peninsula of Mexico and the southern Gulf of California.

As the Alaskan waters begin to freeze over and their food supply migrates to warmer climates, these large marine animals also begin their trip to warmer tropical climates. During this migration trip, the gray whale travels at an average speed of around 5 mph for two to three months until it reaches its destination.

Pregnant females are often the first whales to arrive at the mating grounds. They need to find protection for their soon-to-be newborn children from potential predators such as killer whales and sharks, which may be interested in hunting their defenseless children. Non-pregnant but fertile females may also be found arriving early to look for an eager mating partner.

By mid-February to March, most of the population can be seen mating, socializing, and giving birth at the mating grounds. Throughout March, gray whales that have finished mating may begin traveling back towards their feeding grounds in the eastern Pacific with pregnant mothers and females that have just given birth staying behind until mid-April to May before leaving.

This is likely to ensure that they have enough time to recover from the mating season and make sure their young will be able to safely make the long trip back to their feeding grounds around the Alaskan waters.

Source: Whale Facts

[About Us \(whalefacts.org\)](http://whalefacts.org)

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Baja Cave Photo: Kim Schavender

Serious Leisure

Rick Wiebush

About six months ago while working on a study of baby boomer sea kayakers, I was reading about something called “serious leisure”. The more I read the description of what constitutes serious leisure, I came to the realization that the author – Robert Stebbins – was describing the behavior of people I’m around all the time – serious sea kayakers. I was stunned by how well what he was talking about fit our profile. I was like “hey, that’s us! that’s me!” See what you think.

Mike

Sixty-year-old “Mike” is a regular paddler. He paddles once or twice a week from April to November. In the winter, he’ll somewhat uncomfortably get into his drysuit and go out (if it’s sunny and at least 35 degrees). He’s been paddling his NDK boat for 10 or 12 years now.

Mike got started like a lot of us did. A friend told him about paddling and encouraged him to try it with her in a meet-up group. He went, had fun, met some nice people, liked the physical activity, and enjoyed being out in nature. He took an Intro course, realized how much there was to learn, and got sort of hooked. He became a regular in the meet-up and also joined the local paddling club. He gave away the rec boat he had bought at Bass Pro Shops and bought the NDK. Probably not ready for it, but he grew into it.

Part of the motivation for getting the new boat was that Mike was getting serious about paddling. He started doing some open water paddles with more



“Mike” in his first boat. Stock photo.

experienced people. He took more classes, read a lot of sea kayaking books, and watched a lot of videos.

Mike “graduates”

The more Mike got skilled up, the more he realized how much there was to learn and this fascinated him. Wanting to go to more places and deal with more challenging conditions, he took a summer-long program that got him ready for rougher water. And that’s when he really took off.

Mike now has his ACA L3 skills certification. He’s thinking about becoming an instructor. He’s paddled in Maine, Florida, and Baja. He’s been to Delmarva and Kiptopeke. He helped plan and lead the Manhattan circumnavigation. Now his social circle is almost all paddlers. When he’s not paddling, he’s either planning a trip or thinking about something paddling-related. He’s got a good job, but Mike is a serious leisure paddler.



"Mike" in Baja last month. Photo: Bill Vonnegut

Serious Leisure

Stebbins defines serious leisure (SL) as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer¹ core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience".

Those involved in serious leisure typically have been doing it, and doing it frequently, for a long time; have invested time, energy and money in acquiring and expanding the skill set needed to do the activity well. They have a social circle of people who are similarly involved; and they see the activity as an important part of their identity.

Serious leisure applies to outdoor adventure, so climbers, backpackers, surfers, BASE jumpers and sea kayakers may all be involved in serious leisure. But the definition applies to other pursuits too. Other serious leisure people are deeply involved in gardening, model railroading, barbershop singing, pickleball, and marathon running, among others.

¹ Stebbins posits three primary categories of serious leisure. "Amateurs" are involved in an activity that has a professional counterpart (e.g., baseball, ballet, musician). "Hobbyists" do not have a professional counterpart (e.g., stamp collectors,

Casual Leisure

In contrast, "casual leisure" participants are involved in typically short-term or sporadic activities that are undertaken for immediate pleasure, for which skills or specialized knowledge are not needed; and in which the participants are not particularly invested. Examples of casual leisure include television watching, barhopping, sex, sightseeing, body surfing, going to the Y once or twice a week, playing card games. Many recreational kayakers can be considered to be involved in casual leisure. They do it once in a while. They get a lot of pleasure out of it and have fun, but they don't need skills to do it. People involved in casual leisure aren't *invested*, they aren't *committed*; their pleasures are superficial and fleeting.

Components of Serious Leisure and Examples

Stebbins (who by the way is a sociology professor emeritus at Calgary University), has identified six components of serious leisure that help to flesh out the definition: need for perseverance; career-like; effort in developing and using skills and knowledge; unique culture; identity; and "durable benefits", or outcomes.

Perseverance

SL participants have shown perseverance in pursuit of their activity. They have stayed with their activity over the long haul, often in spite of occasional setbacks, injuries, or other potential barriers to continuation. You have to persevere to get the skills to become a good paddler. And it can be a battle – sometimes it goes well, other times you don't think you're making any progress. "Mike" shows one sign of perseverance when he reluctantly breaks out his drysuit to paddle in winter. The baby boomer paddlers I've interviewed show perseverance in the face of aging – it's not going to stop them.

barbershop singers, sea kayakers). "Volunteers" are those who help organize or run activities for others and who are unpaid (e.g., senior center event organizers; environmental center guide, neighborhood crime watch coordinators)

It's a Career

People involved in serious leisure have followed a long-term path that is very much like a career. They start off as “new hires” with fledgling skills. They have to get used to the “way things are done.”

As with a career, there are staff development workshops (e.g., skills classes); there are transitions and promotions (e.g., “Mike” getting his L3 skills award). Mike has also “graduated” to paddling in rougher waters like Maine and Baja. Many serious leisure paddlers have moved up the “career ladder” and now, instead of being part of a led group, they are leading the trips.

Effort

People who are serious about their leisure activity have invested significant time and effort to gain and maintain the skills and knowledge needed for quality participation. They have taken multiple classes, they spend a lot of time practicing, they are always trying to learn new things. As I write this, I am wrapping up an online navigation class. It has 15 people in it and half of them are very experienced, indeed “serious leisure” paddlers. But they are still working hard to jack up their skill set, having to be in class for two hours each week, having to do homework, and having to complete a final project and presentation. They are investing significant time and effort.

A second dimension to “effort” is the work that is often needed to deal with rough conditions on the water; effort needed when applying skills and knowledge. One paddler described that form of effort this way:

I went to (foreign country). I thought I was going to die on that trip. It was crazy big water, crazy weather, terrifying. But I knew I had my skills. It proved that, "Hey, you can handle yourself in these crazy situations." Not that I liked it all that much, but I can handle myself.

Culture

Stebbins talks about SL participants being involved in a “unique ethos” and as a result having a strong sense of group cohesion. I think of “unique ethos” as a culture that consists of shared practices, language and symbols that are unique to that culture. Think about the words we automatically use, but which “outsiders” wouldn’t understand: “wet exit”, “edging”, “rolling”, “ranges”, “knots”, “sprayskirt”. We also have certain expected practices that signal the existence of a culture. When you get to the put in, everyone automatically helps others get their boats off the cars and down to the water. It’s also just understood that while each person on a paddle is responsible for themselves, they also are responsible for all the other members of the group.

That common culture creates strong bonds. One of the things that comes through most clearly in my interviews with SL paddlers is the importance they attach to the social aspect of paddling, both the interaction with others and the sense of being supported by other group members. One person spoke of it in terms of dealing with rough water:

I also knew and trusted that if any of us got into trouble ... it made it a lot easier to get through that because we knew we could be there for each other.

As you know, SL paddlers are a close-knit community of like-minded people. It is a “unique ethos”.



The group creates a culture. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Identity

Stebbins says that passionate involvement in an activity leads to the development of a personal and social identity that is highly valued. In other words, for serious leisure paddlers, sea kayaking informs their sense of who they are and (in part) how they define themselves. In talking about this, one paddler said:

It's kind of part of what I am. I'm a woman, I'm a Catholic, I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a kayaker. It's just who I am.

Another way this notion of paddler identity reveals itself is the way serious paddlers – especially baby boomers - distinguish themselves from other peers who aren't involved in *anything*. They are very proud that they are involved in an adventure sport and the involvement creates a sense of uniqueness:

I mean, people at work will be amazed at my age, not now that my hair is going gray, but because they don't imagine in our world we go out and do these things, and since we're all doing the same thing, we don't think it's a big deal. And then you go back and hang around with other 60-year-olds that you work with, with their aches and pains, and they're not doing anything, and they read a book and sit around all the time, and you realize that it is a big deal and it is really important.

Benefits

The outcomes – or “durable benefits” – of involvement in SL are specified by Stebbins as self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-renewal, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, self-gratification, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of the activity.

Besides just enjoying themselves and having fun, people involved in serious leisure feel competent and accomplished. They feel like they are continuously growing, and they generally feel good

about themselves. Add to this the sense of connectedness to others and belonging that comes from being part of a close-knit group.

What these benefits collectively amount to is a sense of vitality – feeling fully alive - and physical, psychological, and social well-being. A couple of the people I interviewed expressed this extremely well. One person said:

I need something beyond just wake up, go to work, come home, take care of the family, go and get up. Yeah. I need more than that, and when I see people who build their whole life with that, and then the kids leave, or a husband leaves, or something happens, and now they're sitting there going, "What do I do? What I do with my life?"

This paddler's solution to this potential problem is her involvement in sea kayaking which helps her feel - in her words - “*healthy, happy, complete*”.

A second person talked about the “vitality benefit” in a similar way:

My sense of value as a kayaker, as a human being, has nothing to do with whether I achieve or don't achieve the skill. It's more about, am I squeezing the juice out of life, and loving what I'm doing? Like, I want more of this..... It's more about me valuing the fact that I was lucky enough to be born in this life and do something I love, and I can get my head into that space, and my heart into that space.

Does “Serious Leisure” Describe You?

I started this article by saying that my reaction after reading about serious leisure was that it described a lot of the paddlers I know. Now that you've read about it, it might be interesting for you to think about the nature of your involvement in sea kayaking - and what you get out of it - to see whether your involvement feels like “serious leisure” sea kayaking.

Jacksonville Journeys

Gary Leisman and Wendy Adams

We must be masochists! After five days of getting bounced around in the Matanzas Inlet Rough Water Training, we and two of the Matanzas coaches (the fabulous Jeff Atkins and Ashley Brown) moved 95 miles up the Atlantic coastline for another week of strenuous paddling: the 2023 Jacksonville Journeys tour run by Cross Currents Sea Kayaking.

One of the joys of these trips for us is making new kayaking friends and catching up with old ones. When we arrived at our first launch site on Amelia Island, it was clear that this trip would not disappoint. Paddling out Simpson Creek to Little Talbot Island, the group began to get acquainted and to use muscles dormant for the last few months. Everyone enjoyed the balmy weather—most had come from colder climes. We were near a tide race so those who wanted bumpy water could enjoy getting jostled while others enjoyed looking for shells and soaking up sunshine.

Our home base for the trip was St. Mary's, Georgia, a charming town offering easy access to Cumberland Island, Georgia's largest and



Wild horses on Cumberland. Photo: Alan Mayors

southernmost barrier island, which is only accessible by boat. There is a passenger-only ferry, but what fun would that be? We paddled out to the island from three different launch sites, each of which offered unique challenges from tides, winds, and currents. Despite the proximity of Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, there were no submarine sightings. Maybe next time. There were delightful dolphin visitations, however, and a few sea turtles were spotted.

Cumberland Island

Cumberland Island is home to pristine maritime forests, undeveloped beaches and wide marshes. Wild horses roam much of the island and seem undaunted by human visitors. On our three visits to the island, we were able to see some of the natural beauty and also fascinating remnants of human history. Native Americans, missionaries, enslaved African Americans and wealthy industrialists all walked here. We had an excellent tour of Plum Orchard Mansion, onetime home of Carnegie heirs, preserved by the National Park Service and still displaying the opulence of the era. Imagine one of Otis's first elevators, before electricity, powered by



Sunrise at the St. Mary's house. Photo: Gary Leisman



Carnegie's "Dungeness" ruins. Photo: Karen Wilson

water! We also wandered around the remnants of the Dungeness mansion and its extensive estate (another Carnegie family creation), ruined by fire in the 1950s. There was something poignant about seeing the ruins of a previous era of extreme divisions of wealth.

Dolphin "mudding"

One day with strong winds, some of us made the crossing to Cumberland while others opted to explore Point Peter Creek, a protected offshoot of the intracoastal St Mary's River. They were in for an amazing experience. Karen Wilson relates, "we observed a pod of 3 small dolphins who were swimming upstream and hugging the marshy shoreline. As we intently watched the dolphins, they started circling and suddenly, without warning, they simultaneously launched themselves onto the muddy bank and were completely out of the water. After a brief period, they wiggled backwards down the slimy mudbank and back into the water. What would cause dolphins to perform such unusual acrobatics? We spoke with a local who was watching from their dock. They explained that this behavior is called "mudding." It occurs at low tide when the muddy banks are exposed and is only performed by young dolphins who are corralling fish and then driving them out of the water to feed on. The dolphins only eat the fish on their right side because the grit causes their teeth to wear down. By only eating on one side, they

preserve the left-sided teeth for use in adulthood. We were very fortunate to be at the right place at the right time!"

Okefenokee

Another day, conveniently in the middle of the tour, was too windy for the planned activity—so on your own! Time for a nap, doing laundry, cleaning gear, editing photos, catching up on emails and/or work. Three of us opted for a naturalist guided boat tour of the Okefenokee Swamp. Learning about the flora and fauna as well as a lot of history made the following day's Okefenokee paddle more fun.

There is a sort of primal beauty about this place, stark in some ways, but rich with life. The cypress trees were just starting to get their spring leaves, but on the water, flowers were blooming amid the ferns and sedges, including water lilies, blue flag iris and "never wet" plants with their yellow spires.



Never wets. Photo: Wendy Adams

Floating peat fragments were abundant, and we learned that many gradually evolve into islands. Fed by rainwater and not affected by farm runoff, the swamp has water that is very clean, but is brownish from tannins. Multiple alligators were seen, and one Sandhill Crane spotted, but most other wildlife stayed hidden on the cool cloudy day. Sadly, we were alerted before the tour started of a threat posed to the swamp by proposed nearby titanium strip mining.



Silver Springs monkey. Photo: Lynne Basileo

Silver Springs: Monkeys, Manatees, More!

Silver Springs State Park is an *extraordinary* part of this journey. The sensible way to see this scenery is to kayak upriver (current can be 2 knots) and get the assist from the current on the way back. Even though there were many kayakers launching where we did or renting from the concession at the turnaround point, there were plenty of opportunities to go solo around a bend and be delighted to encounter a magnificent Great Blue heron, Anhinga, alligators or turtles. This was Gary's first extended encounter with manatees and our ace photographer, Alan Mayor, had the right equipment (including a waterproof videocam on an extendable arm) to document them. Unlike the Okefenokee Swamp, which is heavily colored due to tannin, the water in

Silver Springs River is clear, which inspired a little exuberant rolling by some. At least 20 movies were filmed on the Silver Springs River including six Tarzan flicks. Local legend says the cute monkeys often entertaining boaters were released when "Tarzan Finds a Son" was filmed in 1939 but "experts" say an entrepreneur thought the monkeys would increase tourism.

Seven of us decided to stop for supper about an hour into the long return drive and found that there were "biker week" events causing an excessive wait at one restaurant. The Cheyenne Saloon didn't have a wait but, well, let's say it was cultural adventure. Even though the adventurous seven didn't get back from the penultimate day's paddle at Silver Springs until after 10:30 pm, the entire crew of fourteen were at the launch site next morning in time to catch the tide for our last visit to Cumberland Island.



Baby and mother Manatee. Photo: Alan Mayors



Trifecta. Photo; Alan Mayors

Over too soon!

As our time together was winding down, we realized that the group had come together into a community we were all going to miss—a community of having fun together, sharing, caring and helping each other on and off the water. People who had greeted each other with handshakes a week before said farewell with fond hugs, exchanged

email addresses and cell phone numbers, and planned for future times together on the water. What an excellent mix of paddling through natural beauty, seeing historic sites, and getting to know wonderful people! How much better could 2023 Jacksonville Journeys have been?



The crew, left to right: Gary Leisman (Wisconsin), Wendy Adams (Wisconsin), Sam Jackson (Maryland), Chris Ward (South Carolina), Luci and Greg Hollingsworth (Maryland), Linda Martin (Pennsylvania), Dean Athanasion (Maryland), Alan Mayors (New York), Lynne Basileo (Florida). Not pictured: Jeff Atkins (South Carolina), Ashley Brown (South Carolina), Rick Wiebush (Maryland). Photo: Karen Wilson (Maryland)

Photos of the Month



Baja White Water

Photo: Bill Vonnegut

Photos of the Month



U.K. Puffin

Photo: Rupert Kirkwood

Photos of the Month



St. Mary's Georgia

Photo: Karen Wilson

Photo Essay

Belize!

Rick Wiebush



Dangriga, Belize

A one-week scouting trip

This was an April 2023 trip to scope out the possibilities for a sea kayaking and/or multi-sport Cross Currents trip for 2024. It included:

- three days 30+ miles offshore on Glovers Reef
- two days in the jungle and mountains of the interior
- a day in Guatemala at an incredible Mayan ruins site

This photo essay will hopefully give some sense of what the week was like. The place has possibilities!

Southwest flies to Belize City

Guatemala: Tikal Mayan ruins

Mountain Pine Ridge: jungle, waterfalls, caves

Dangriga: jump off point for Tobacco Caye + Glovers Reef

Tobacco Caye

Glover's Reef



Dangriga



The Glover's Reef compound. Photo courtesy of Island Expeditions

It Takes a While to Get to Glover's Reef

Glovers is the outermost boundary of the Belize barrier reef. It's a huge oval-shaped reef, that's 20 miles long and 12 wide. Inside the oval is all lagoon, with incredibly clear water (see photo above).

Getting to Glovers required a chaining of shuttles. After an overnight in Dangriga, a 10-person ferry took us 45 minutes to Tobacco Caye, which is about one-third of the way to Glover's. We waited there for a second shuttle that came from, and would take us another 1.5 hours out to, Glover's. This one was basically a panga and it carried a couple of us slapping, swerving, dipping, skipping, pounding, and consequently seriously jostling across two-foot wind-driven waves.

Tobacco is a possible base for a series of paddling day trips. It is surrounded by five or six other cays, ranging from five to eight miles from Tobacco, so they'd make good day trips or a three-night circular expedition covering about 28 miles.



Tobacco Caye. Photo: Rick Wiebush



The glamping tents on Glovers. Photo: Island Expeditions

Glamping

The base camp on Glover’s is run by Island Expeditions. They use really roomy (10 x 14’ and eight-foot ceilings) and comfortable two- or four-person tents. Local folks prepare two meals per day. The food’s good!



Inside: nice! Photo; Laurie Collins

Snorkeling

One of the main draws to Glover’s, besides its remoteness, besides the palm trees, besides the white sand, besides the sunny, warm days, is snorkeling in the crystal-clear water. The water can be 25 feet deep, but you think it’s only about eight feet down.



Snorkeling at Glover’s. Photo: Rick Wiebush

My snorkeling time was drastically limited by the fact that my moustache prevented me from getting a good seal with my mask. So I spent a lot of time dealing with water-filled nostrils. People who spent more time under water were treated to seeing all shapes, sizes and colors of coral, as well as turtles, rays (lots of rays), angel fish, grouper, barracuda, among lots of unidentified others.



Fan coral. Photo: Rick Wiebush

The Wind and Paddling

The flag standing straight out in the photo (right) indicates that the wind was blowing at 22+ knots. For three straight days! There were plenty of kayaks available, but they were used only to paddle 100 yards offshore to snorkeling spots, where they were tied together and securely anchored.

Sailing Saves the Day!

The disappointment of not being able to paddle was (almost) offset by the fact that there were doubles available that were fitted with: 1) rudders and 2) a mast step for sailing. And these guys had some heavy-duty kayak sailing equipment (see photo on right).

So we spent a half-day doing downwinders. When the wind is 22+ knots, you can get going pretty fast and it's quite thrilling!



22 – 35 knot winds for three days. Photo: Rick Wiebush



Multi piece mast



A good way to deal with high winds when you want to kayak. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Parque Nacional Tikal

Tikal is in Guatemala (we just *had* to cross the border into one of the most gang-plagued places in Central America) and is the site of a former (600 BC to 900 AD) Mayan city. It was one of the largest and most powerful Mayan kingdoms, home at one time to 90,000 people. The photos here are of just a few of the 25+ temples and public buildings that are part of the now National Park.

The story is that Tikal was discovered in the jungle in the mid-19th century by workers looking for chicle trees to draw their sap for chewing gum. These workers were called “chicletes”

Tikal is strikingly reminiscent of the Khmer temple complex Angkor Wat in Cambodia, especially with respect to the finely engraved-in-stone figures and decorations. (See photo right.)



For scale, notice people in lower right Photo: Wiebush



The Panther King (section of a wall) Photo: Wiebush



Into the Mountains

By far, *by far*, my favorite part of the trip was driving a big-ass four-wheel drive Nissan on - in places - heavily eroded dirt roads into the Mountain Pine Ridge area of central Belize. In addition to the.



Notice the person in blue going into the cave.

driving itself, the rewards were finding remote, hidden 200-foot-high waterfalls and the caves of the Rio Frio.



200-foot waterfalls. Photo: Rick Wiebush



Rio Frio cave entrance from inside. Photo: Rick Wiebush

In Defense of Dead Reckoning For Small Boaters

Reinhard Zollitsch

Last May, my two sons offered to give me a GPS for my 65th birthday and retirement. A big thanks! But I am sorry to say I turned it down and instead accepted a compact, deck-mounted, high-tech lensatic passive radar reflector.

On the one hand I was touched by their concern for my safety on my solo canoe travels along the Atlantic coast, while at the same time noticing their attempt to update the old guy and propel him into the twenty-first century. On the other hand, I was somewhat apprehensive about the new-fangled thing and a bit leery about all I would have to learn to make this little waterproof gadget work for me.

Reasons for Reluctance

I soon found out that I would have to buy a lot of software for it, for each area between \$100 and \$200. (And I thought my charts were expensive at \$20 a shot! My canoe trips usually cover hundreds of miles across many different areas.)

The experts at West Marine then pointed out that I unfortunately could not program the new GARMIN with my I-Mac, and that I would need a charger, and plug in my GPS regularly or bring along a lot of AA batteries. I had to laugh picturing myself looking for a plug-in on one of those god-forsaken islands I normally go to on my two-to-three-week trips.

I must say, though, that I was impressed with all the

features, but the screen was distinctly too small for a guy wearing reading glasses. I would have to mount it just outside my cockpit rim, where I would have a hard time seeing and reaching it. I have pointed out before that one should not plan on using a hand-held compass or GPS on an always moving and surging ocean. They have to be mounted; you need your hands for the paddle.

And what about the glare of the sun? It would make the screen impossible to read, at least some of the time. And did I really want to be told at all times how fast I was going, etc. etc.? It suddenly reminded me of being in a race, or in my terribly connected office, both of which I wanted to escape from.

But it wasn't really all that which made me turn down the kind offer. I am good at figuring things out, I love my I-Mac, I surf the web for all kinds of info, send e-mails all over the place, use a satellite phone on my longer trips (for brief outgoing calls only!) and love my high-tech Kevlar and carbon fiber boats and paddle.

No, I am not a stick-in-the-mud and do not mind changing my old ways. I also do not scare easily, and definitely would not allow a little box like that to intimidate me. It was none of the above. *I was simply afraid a GPS would change not just my way of navigation but my entire way of life on the water: my attitude.*

Dead Reckoning

Is used to estimate position when no landmarks are available. You must know exactly where you started, what course you have been following, what your speed is over the water, and how long you've been paddling. If you start at point A, paddle a magnetic course of 90 degrees (due east) for 30 minutes and your average paddling speed is 3 nm/hour, your location will be 1.5 nm due east of where you started at point A. Wind and current can affect your course and hence your dead reckoning, so their effects have to be taken into account.

Thrill of the Challenge

Accepting a GPS into my boating life would be much more than getting an air horn instead of a whistle, a hand pump instead of a bailer. Whether I was navigating in the thick-o'-fog around Nova Scotia, ticking off one point after the other with my NOAA charts, compass and stopwatch mounted in front of me, or making out a specific island or passage in a bay, like Mahone Bay or the Bay of Islands, it has always been a thrill for me to figure out where I was and to get to my destination.

Finding out that I had even compensated correctly for wind drift and tide set and that I was even right on time, has always been extremely elating. I often burst out in a loud "YES!", encouraging myself to go on to meet the next challenge.

NOAA charts are like literature for me. I read and study them very carefully before my trip even starts,

and review each stretch for the following day. I take note of the shoreline for wind protection and for possible take-outs and am aware of all ledge outcroppings where the tide could break or develop a rip.

If necessary, I even memorize a good stretch if the tide forces me to be on the water before sunrise. (Is that ever exciting - being out on the ocean at 4:00 a.m. Atlantic time, as well as immensely rewarding, hitting all way points as planned, in the semi-dark, and all from memory!)

I am in no way downplaying the immense progress GPS has made in navigation. Skippers can now know at all times where they are precisely, down to a couple of feet. They can see their speed, their drift, their entire course - I am duly impressed, don't get me wrong.

But for me in my little solo hand-propelled boat it was never important to be told *where* I was, because I knew that already. I was never lost, not along the foggy Fundy shore nor in the Nightmare or the Shark River Delta in the Everglades. My point has always been, never to allow myself to get lost, at least not completely.

Each point, island or bight ahead is like a quest or challenge for me, both mentally as well as physically. Traveling from point A to point B on the chart is not nearly as important as *how* I get there, *how* I figure out the puzzle.

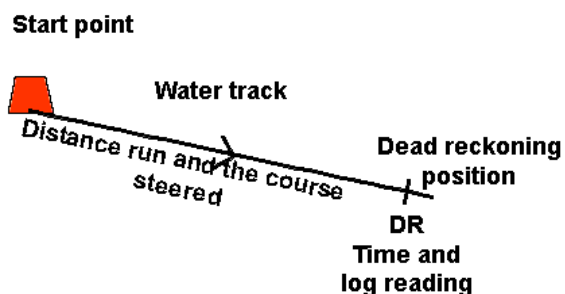


Diagram courtesy of Sailtrain.co.uk

Don't Lose the Art

Using *the age-old art of dead reckoning, navigating with chart, compass and watch*, is an art I hate to see lost. It is my mental challenge and is equally as important as the physical challenge of being out there on the ocean all alone in a 17-foot sea canoe.

If we lose the art of dead reckoning, I am afraid we lose more than “an outdated navigation system”, we lose an attitude, the skill of taking in and evaluating all the information given by the surroundings, plus some basic time-distance calculations. Being able to pinpoint where you are is nice, but simply not enough. Dead reckoning for me is a complex learning process, taking in and evaluating all the information given on the chart, the *Coast Pilot* and in nature, rather than just looking at a tiny dot on a mini screen.

Just knowing where you are is like a kayaker saying that he has learned the eskimo roll in last winter's pool session. Having to execute it successfully on the cold Atlantic, in wind and waves with a laden boat, unassisted, is a completely different story. Being skilled enough to stay up, or even better, avoiding getting into situations where you would have to rely on your roll, is even better.

In my sea canoe (which, by the way, cannot be rolled completely around because of the large cockpit design) I have to make sure not to make a mistake and flip. I am therefore oh-so-alert and quick as well as practiced to prevent such a situation, or at least recover quickly from an almost-dump.

The same is true with getting lost. I don't get lost because I cannot afford to. It is an attitude of mine now. Some small boaters with GPS, on the other hand, don't seem too concerned about that, because they can get an instant fix at any time, so they think, so why worry. But when their batteries run low or the whole thing acts up - and I have seen that more than once - they are in serious trouble unless they have also kept track of their course on a paper chart.

On the other hand, I have seen sea kayakers being so mesmerized by their new gizmo that they forget to appreciate where they are and why they are out there. They remind me of compulsive readers at a foreign movie, who feel they have to read every last subtitle instead of watching the real thing, the movie. When I go boating, I am not out for a “virtual paddle”, but the real thing with all its trimmings - challenges and hardships, but also rewards.

A paper chart in a tied-down waterproof case along with a good deck-mounted compass will never fail you, and working out your fixes on your own is as gratifying as working out a math problem all by yourself, rather than copying the correct answer from a friend and fudging the rest. *For small boaters, dead reckoning should be the main navigational system, with GPS as an optional backup.*

In commercial navigation it is definitely the other way around. Nobody would argue against that. Small boaters, I feel, should not want to miss the intellectual stimulus and challenge of figuring out all the different factors that go into the equation. It keeps me curious and sharp. I guess I have always hated to be given answers but would much rather arrive at them in my own way. I have always wanted to know what is in an answer, i.e., study and understand the forces and variables that go into it.

So far I have done quite well at that, and am looking forward to future challenges, like closing the last 490-mile-gap between Boston and Lake Champlain this summer. That would finally complete my circumnavigation of New England and the Maritimes.

Upcoming Events

| Dates | Event | Location | Website |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| May 19 - 21 | Oceans 23 | Southport, NC | chrisrezac.wixsite.com/kayakoceans |
| 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 |



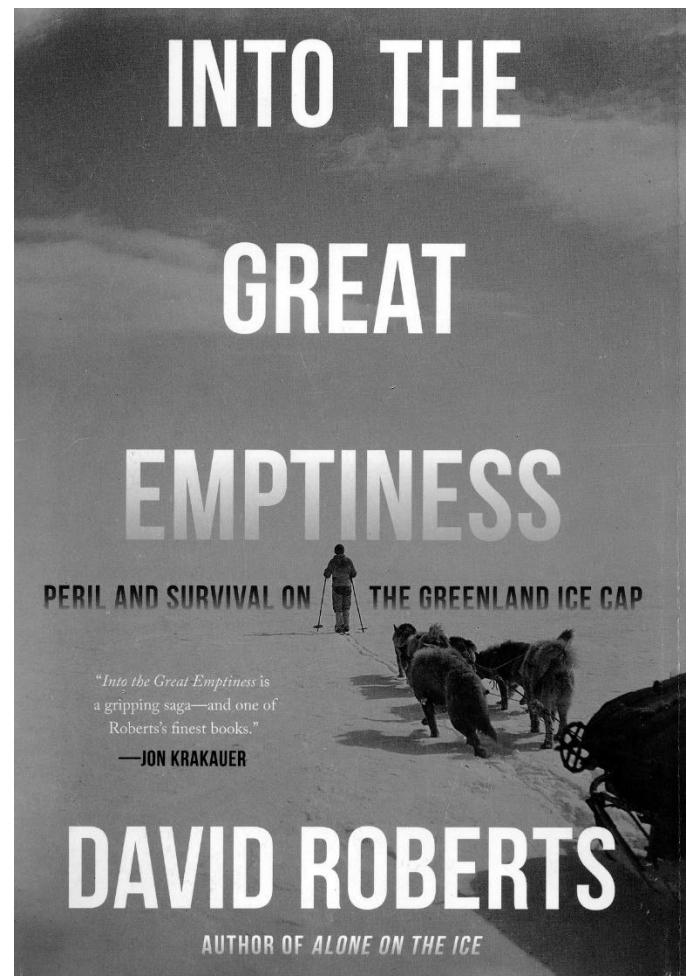
Book Review

Into the Great Emptiness: Peril and Survival on the Greenland Ice Cap by David Roberts

Paul Caffyn

On 20 August 1932, Gino Watkins disappeared whilst hunting seals from his skin kayak in an East Greenland fjord. At the age of only 25, he was leading his fourth Arctic expedition. During the British Arctic Air Route Expedition of 1930-31 (BAARE), Gino was so impressed by the paddling and hunting skills of local Angmagssalik paddlers, he had a skin kayak built and went on to master the skills of paddling, rolling and seal hunting. Gino and other expedition members took their kayaks back to England where they displayed the skills they had learned.

Fellow BAARE team member Jamie Scott wrote a comprehensive biography of Gino, first published in 1935 while John Ridgway penned a slimmer biography of Gino in 1974. When I first saw a May 2021 FB post from accomplished author David Roberts, that he had just finished a new 160,000-word biography of Gino, I was enthused at the prospect of a new book. But David wrote his 'not amused publisher' wanted a 100,000-word text maximum and that his upcoming weeks must be devoted to destroying 'my precious sentences (and Gino's inimitable quirks)'. Diagnosed with throat cancer, and after enduring a torrid time with treatment, David sadly passed away in July 2022



In the book's acknowledgements, David writes due to both 'covid lock-down' and his treatment, he was unable to visit Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) or the Royal Geographic Society in England and thus not able to see any of the East Greenland expedition diaries or photos. He could only source books purchased on-line, being unable to visit the big home libraries in the USA. Due to the same constraints, David was unable to visit East Greenland.

So, with high expectations for a fresh look at Gino, I was disappointed to find the bulk of the book comprises lengthy extracts from the expedition books published in the 1930s, penned by Freddy Spencer Chapman and Jamie Scott. The first chapter starts not with Gino but attempts to rescue Augustine Courtauld from the Greenland ice cap. August was buried by winter snows in the BAARE weather station, 120 miles inland from the coastal base. Following chapters then progress through the four expeditions that Gino planned and led.

Did I learn anything new about Gino from this book? Not a sausage! But to check on names and events, I did delve back into my modest collection of East Greenland expedition books. In the past, I was much more interested in Gino the kayak man, but I came away with a boosted appreciation for the planner, the equipment developer and the charismatic Arctic expedition leader.

The bibliography is not complete, while the lean photo choice adds nothing new. This could have been a sought-after new Gino biography, but the trimming of 60,000 words with David Robert's precious sentences with 'Gino's inimitable quirks' and his failure to access the original expedition diaries and photos held by RGS and SPRI, leaves me unimpressed.

For paddlers not yet aware of this inspirational young Cambridge lad, this book provides a wonderful insight to the short life of Gino. But this book could have been so much more.

Title: Into the Great Emptiness

Subtitle: Peril and Survival on the Greenland Ice Cap

Author: David Roberts

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Paul Caffyn

Paul Caffyn spent four northern summers paddling the coasts of both West and East Greenland. With Conrad Edwards, they have paddled to the base camps of both Gino-led East Greenland expeditions, ventured close to the face of the calving glacier in Lake Fjord (Tugtilik) where Gino went missing. There in their Nordkapps, they toasted his kayaking legacy with nips of New Zealand whisky and ice lumps from the fjord. Their biggest challenge was following the open boat journey achieved by Gino, Augustine and Percy Lemon, from Isortoq down the south-east coast and through Prins Christian Sund to the west coast of Greenland. Prior to one of their expeditions, Paul was given a tour of SPRI in Cambridge and in an upstairs attic, was shown two of the skin kayaks built for the BAARE members. He has also visited the South Australian Museum where John Rymill's BAARE kayak is on display.

Ed. Note: For more on Geno Watkins, the "Watkins Boys", and their expeditions to Greenland (including learning how to paddle from the Inuit), see the January 2022 and March 2022 editions of *Coastbusters*. [Coastbusters | xcv3](https://www.coastbusters.com) (crosscurrentsseakayaking.com)

Contributors

Wendy Adams and Gary Leisman – are from Madison Wisconsin and have been frequent participants in the Door County symposium. They are veteran Great Lakes paddlers but recently got a taste for waves and ocean paddling. They've extensively paddled the Florida and Georgia coasts with Cross Currents and just completed a rough water and surfing course with Dale Williams.

Paul Caffyn - lives on the west coast of New Zealand's South Island. In addition to being the first person to circumnavigate Australia in a sea kayak, he has circumnavigated the British Isles, New Zealand, New Caledonia and Japan and has done major expeditions in Alaska (the whole coast) and Greenland. Paul also has an extraordinary collection of sea kayaking-related books from around the world. Check out his website at <http://paulcaffyn.co.nz/>

Roseria Fry – has paddled extensively in some pretty exotic places like the Green River in Utah, Portugal, Greece, and Baja. Ro is a recently retired adjunct professor of Education at Moravian College. Ro lives in northeastern PA.

Bonnie Gease – is a Maryland resident and an early intervention specialist for children with disabilities. She is a graduate of Cross Currents' "UnCon" program and, in addition to Baja, has undertaken expeditions in New Zealand, Portugal and the Green River in Utah.

Rick Leader – is retired from a thirty-year career as executive director of a number of Maryland conservation organizations. He is a frequent Chesapeake Bay paddler with numerous long-distance trips in the Florida Keys, Calusa Blueway, Green River of Utah, Doruo River in Portugal and Baja.

Gene Kieczkajlo (Gene Kay) – is an ACA L2 instructor who has paddled extensively in the U.S. and internationally including Greece, Portugal and Baja. Gene lives in Pennsylvania.

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 has just completed work on two Master's Degrees: Outdoor Education Leadership (Prescott College) and Experiential Education (Minnesota State University, Mankato). Rick lives in Baltimore.

Reinhard Zollitsch - is an avid ocean paddler. He uses a Verlen Kruger Sea Wind sea canoe with a bent-shaft marathon racing paddle. He has paddled around all New England States and Canadian Maritime provinces, a 4,000-mile circle. His longest trip was a 1,000-miler with only 1 resupply stop. Reinhard has also raced the 20-mile open-ocean Blackburn Challenge in Gloucester, MA, 17 consecutive years in a Hawaiian solo outrigger canoe Also check out his website www.ZollitschCanoeAdventures.com

Submissions

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*



Heading to the jungles and mountains of Belize. Photo: Rick Wiebush