

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

September 2024

An Interview With

James Kesterson

Rick Wiebush

Note: James is a British Canoeing Advanced Sea Leader and Level 3 Coach. He is also an ACA L5 Advanced Open Water Instructor, a Wilderness First Responder and a SCUBA Instructor. He has coached at Kiptopeke for the last 11 years and has taught multiple courses for Cross Currents. People always praise the extent of his knowledge, his style of teaching, his warmth and his humility.

A Dangerous Spot

Rick: Tell me about what has been one of the most challenging situations you've been in as a paddler.

James: I've been very fortunate in that I've never been exposed to that epic, life-threatening, you-got-to-make-it-across-or-die kind of trip. I've never done that, but doing a five-star assessment, in Wales, it's two days and includes a night paddle. You're under the gun for several days, and it's exhausting. And in an assessment, they constantly change the plans, and you have to think on your feet and be able to respond.

There was an incident there. We've been on the water most of the day, and there've been no bio breaks, and the assessor said, we got to make a stop, and here's the beach I want to stop on. It was a tiny



James. Photo: Gil Hildago

little beach enclosed in rocks, and he said, "Take us there, can you find it?" Well, yeah, I found it. I'm sitting outside this tiny little beach, and there was swell that day, not much, but the water was deep, so I watched for about five minutes. I thought, this is good. We landed everybody on the beach, and the beach was so small, we were stacking our boats up on rocks to get them out of the way, and it was on the flood, so that beach was going away really fast.

Suddenly this huge swell came in and broke, followed by half a dozen more, like gigantic. Had we not had the beach, we would have been slammed into these rocks, so I quickly said, everybody, do what you need to do, and quickly, let's launch.

One at a time, we grabbed the boats off the rocks, and I would shove each person off and tell them to go as far out as they could go. One at a time they went, the last person that I pushed off, I saw the swell coming, so I shoved them off, they went up and over the swell, I got my boat, no skirt, and I paddled as hard as I could into that swell, but it broke right on me. When it did, it spun me around, so now I'm facing the beach, and I'm hearing these big swells – that were over my head - come in and they're breaking, so one, two, three, I don't know, five, maybe.

Each one I managed to survive by backpaddling into those breakers and not being swept into those rocks, and then the last one hit me, and it flipped me over. I rolled the boat up, and I escaped that, but that was probably the biggest dangerous spot that I'd been in, because if I hadn't been able to push against those breaking waves, they would have thrown me into those rocks in a big way. We got out of there okay, but the big challenge was the mental challenge of the two days and the night paddle and the physical endurance of making those quick decisions.

Rick: Have you ever been afraid?

James: No. However, many times in hindsight I realized that maybe I should have been afraid. Perhaps it's my infantry training during Vietnam. When things are happening, we deal with them. There is plenty of time to be scared later.

That is not to say that I have not been nervous, knees knocking. That is the time when we evaluate who we are and why we are looking at this challenge. And using our skills and experiences we make good decisions.



James at Matanzas Inlet, FL. Photo: Fran Lapolla

Getting Hooked

Rick: Say a little bit about how you got into this, I know you were a whitewater boater, and I know you came to Lamar's (Barrier Island Sea Kayak) symposium that one year, which now was probably 15 or 20 years ago?

James: Yeah. When we went to the symposium, I realized that not only could I take this small boat out into the ocean - that was fascinating to me that you could actually go out there - but there was math involved. You had to figure out when the currents were going your way, and so I realized, and have realized over the years even more, that whitewater paddling is great, but sea kayaking comes at you in a different way.

Rick: Part of it was the mental aspect?

James: Yeah. I really like that. Now, the physical part, I've always enjoyed being outdoors, I've always enjoyed being fit. I've always enjoyed the water in a lot of different forms, but there was something else about it. I enjoy things that have a certain amount of life threatening to it, like these decisions *really matter*. Sea kayaking really brought that to me. Not that we're risking our lives every time we go out there, but we have to make good decisions, and that's what I liked about sea kayaking.

Rick: The risk and challenge part is a big part of it for you now, but can you say more about what hooked you early on?

James: I really enjoy learning. When I fell into the sea kayaking community, there was a structure there, a method of learning skills, and I was very much attracted to that.

In that first class, Tom Nichols was there, and Ronnie was there. They were teaching strokes. So you learn how to maneuver your boat with these strokes, and then you get an exam, right? So you take the exam, you're a three star! Wow, I can be a three star, and that was a validation of my learning. Then there were all these steps out in front of you. You learn these skills, and you can take this exam, and then you learn more skills, and then you teach those skills. Now I'm in the coaching mode, but it was the validation of the skills that I was learning. That (assessments) shouldn't be a requirement for wanting to learn, but I enjoyed that. I like that pressure, even though I can whine about it a lot, but I like that pressure.

Motivations

Rick: You said risk and challenge are important. Are there other things that keep attracting you to paddling? What do you get out of it?

James: I think all of us, but even more so when we start to reach the age that I am, as we're contemplating retirement and we don't have the challenges of family and work anymore, I think we stay in our comfort zone. We have boundaries around that comfort zone, and staying inside that comfort zone shrinks those boundaries. What I want to do as a 76-year-old guy, I want to stretch those boundaries, I want to challenge my comfort zone mentally and physically, and that's part of my daily thing every day. I'm going to be doing something physical and I'm going to do something mental that's challenging for me. Maybe that's reading Doris Kearns Goodwin's last book, but mentally I'm going to stretch my boundaries and I'm going to widen my comfort zone, and I'm not going to allow that comfort zone to shrink.

Rick: For some people, part of the motivation is that paddling has become part of their identity. Does that apply to you at all?

James: Paddling is my identity? I don't think so. I think I enjoy my paddling, and the feedback from it has been good, but I also enjoy the scuba diving I do, and I enjoy the mountaineering I do. It's not necessarily who I am, but who I am is oh, gosh, being out there. Not necessarily kayaking, but being out there, that's who I am. I want to be in the environment, whether that's scuba, mountaineering, or just going for a hike in the woods, and kayaking is just one part of that. Kayaking is not the whole thing, it's only a part.

As a 76-year-old guy, I want to stretch those boundaries, I want to challenge my comfort zone mentally and physically, every day.

Rick: Based on what I've heard so far, the two biggest things for you and sea kayaking are, one, that you can do it outside, and two, it's an opportunity for you to push your boundaries, to test yourself and to get feedback about that.

James: Yes. And the continuing path of learning

Importance of Relationships

James: There's one other thing. I'm a bit of an introverted person. I do not feel that I need social contact, but I've come to realize from some of the books that I've read, and in a big way, from the coaching, that developing relationships with people is really important. Learning how to develop those relationships has an impact not just in the coaching that I do, but in relationships within my own family. I think I'm a better father and grandfather because I've worked hard at the skills required to develop relationships., Coaching is helping people attain their goals, not necessarily teaching, it's just helping them along the way, and that's about relationships, and it's caused me to work really hard at being a more outgoing person. I kind of like who I am as a result of that.

I love my wife. Bev and I do things together. Bev and I have been partners in everything that we've done. We had a career, a business that we were partners, so that has always been. But developing the relationships that I've learned to do in the last half a dozen years, I think, is something that I would like to pass on to other people; how important that is.

Sea Kayaking and Mountaineering

Rick: You do sea kayaking, you do scuba, you do mountaineering. Is the allure and the payoff similar in each of those things for you?

James: Yes. Every other year we go to some location and we climb, but the mountains have serious hazards. It's life-threatening hazards that you have to pay attention to. Avalanche is a big deal. Crevasses and just dealing with the altitude and the cold. You have to understand how to deal with those things. The mountains have a language,

they have clues, and if you just pay attention and understand what the clues are. Like you can look over an area and see, yeah, there's a crevasse, it's buried, there's a snow bridge over it, but you can see a dip in the snowfield, you can recognize that crevasse and know to walk around that. To prevent error, we're always roped up; we know hiking in the afternoon after the sun's been on a slope is not a good idea; that's avalanche territory.

It's exactly the same in the ocean. The ocean, when you see the water color change, you can feel the difference in a paddle stroke, like against the current. You see that foam line indicating an eddy that you can get on one side and paddle with the current or on the other, against. You can recognize those things. You can look at a forecast and know that that six-foot swell is going to cause an issue for you. It's speaking a language and you can understand the language, you can mitigate the hazards, you can deal with it. Mountaineering is much like that.



The little dot on the top of that rock is James! Photo: Joe Stock

Coaching

Rick: Let's talk a little bit about teaching. What the payoff for you there in that area, what do you get out of it?

James: First of all, I like to use the word coaching, because it forces me to be up on my game. I have to be skilled, prepared, but I also have to have that lesson plan prepared to a level that we still take advantage of the opportunities that come. That's even harder. You have to be ready when that wind really comes, and we're really surprised, then, bam, how do you respond to that, and how do you make that a teaching moment? So being prepared, that's a really big thing for me.

Then to watch other folks, even though it's difficult at times for them to express, they have their own goals and to see them realizing those, that that's a big payoff for me. Then you (Rick) say, "everything I've heard about you has been nothing but positive", that's a payoff, that's another reason I enjoy doing it.

The biggest single moment of teaching for me was in the Outer Banks. We came around the corner, and we're hit in the face with a huge volume of wind that really came as a surprise. But the first thing that happened, I look over at this guy who whips out his tow belt, helps some folks out, and sorts out the issue. I didn't do it. I didn't suggest that he do it, he just did it. A year ago, he was totally focused on himself. That is the biggest payback for me as a teacher, as a coach, for him to come to the realization of who he is and what he was doing. It was a great moment for me.

Philosophy

Rick: Can you talk about your philosophy or principles that shape your coaching?

James: Yes. Three main things: caring, empowering, creative. Caring is of course about safety. But more, it's about developing relationships. Coach to student, student to student.

It's about understanding goals, comfort levels, challenge of risk. Not just students, but fellow paddlers.

Empowering means helping everyone to be responsible for their learning, including homework. Not coming just to learn but to be an active learner.

Being creative means let's do it differently. Search out those challenges and opportunities as they appear. Disregarding the lesson plan puts a lot of pressure on both the students and the coach. Being prepared for whatever comes.

Favorite Places

Rick: Of all the places that you've paddled - up and down the east coast, in Wales, in Pacific Baja. What are your two or three most favorite places?

James: Well, I think that every place that we go, has something really special about it. I can't say that the actual place had the biggest impact on me, I think it was maybe the folks that I was with had the biggest impact. Like Jen (Kleck) laughing at me at this epic wipeout in Baja. Bev was convinced the helicopters were coming for me, but it was a hoot, it was just like it was just a special place. Doing roll practice with icebergs in Alaska is just special. But going to the Baltic Sea and working with the Warsaw, Poland Paddling Club, that was best. Then the UnCon group - we're paddling out to Bogues Inlet, and there's the breakers rolling in in the middle of the inlet, and we were presented with small, medium, large breaking waves. It's all good. I don't know that you can narrow me down to one spot.

As to taking on challenges, I've decided that I'm not old and I'm not getting older. I'm going to continue doing that.

Impact of Aging

Rick: Has aging, getting older affected where you'll go, or what you'll do?

James: The biggest change for me in aging is I need more rest. I've come to accept that. Like the exercise that Bev and I do every day, we don't do the same exercise two days in a row, we skip a day. Kayaking is the same way. I've learned to build rest into the programs that I go to, and that's pretty challenging at times. If I go to Matanzas, that's five days in a row, I don't want to skip the fourth day, I want to continue paddling, and so monitoring that endurance level has become more challenging.

As to taking on challenges, I've decided that I'm not old and I'm not getting older. I'm going to continue doing that, so that part hasn't changed at all. I will tell you one thing, I've purchased a trailer, so I don't have to lift the boat up on top of the car, so some things have changed.

Final Words

Rick: Okay. Anything else you would want people to know?

James: Maybe two things to leave you with. I spoke of physical and mental challenges. I think that's crucial to our continued good life, and I think it should be a part of what everyone considers. What those physical, mental challenges are, of course, would be their choice, but I think always pushing those boundaries of your comfort zone is important. Then lastly, I want to leave you with the essence of kayaking. The essence of kayaking is to be an asset to your group, to be watchful and kind to everyone. That came from Bev.

I guess one more thing is I've had a lot of mentors, a lot of really good people that have helped me, but probably the guy that's been with me the most has been you. You have been instrumental in my progress. You took a chance on me as a coach at Kiptopeke. You've helped me along doing those things, and a heartfelt thanks for that.

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Challenging The Apostle Islands

Jill Allbritton, Maywin Liu, Gail Davidson

The Lake is Boss

Ten thousand years ago, melting glaciers created Lake Superior by drowning a Precambrian Mountain range. The mountain peaks formed the 22 Apostle Islands, 21 of which comprise the Apostle National Lakeshore Park (the 22nd is privately owned). People have been living off the lake since 500 B.C. including, more recently, the First Nation Tribes of Ojibwe and Chippewa.

Lake Superior is the second largest lake in the world with a long fetch (300 nm long and 140 wide). Waves reach up to 12 feet and the largest wave ever recorded was 28 feet. 550 shipwrecks are estimated to be buried in the lake, the most infamous of which is the SS Edmund Fitzgerald, immortalized by the Gordon Lightfoot song.

Because conditions change rapidly, transitioning from a clear bright calm day to storms with stiff winds and crashing waves, daily weather bulletins and warnings are posted at all launch sites. Each launch site sign specifically states: “the lake is boss”. Recreational kayaks are prohibited. The chance of storms increases in August. The mosquito population decreases from June to August, so a July expedition like ours seems to be the optimal time.

With the beautiful landscapes and frequently challenging conditions, the Apostle Islands is on the bucket list of many kayakers. We booked a trip using Trek and Trail, the oldest kayaking outfitter for the Apostle Islands. When booking our five-day trip, we were warned that the itinerary is simply a guide, as many trips never leave the innermost



Caves and arches. Photo: Maywin Liu

islands due to weather conditions. We hoped to be “weather lucky”. And we were incredibly weather lucky.

Getting Ready

Before loading our kayaks for the expedition, our 21-year-old British born guide, George, tested us with rescues and rolling. For safety reasons, the outfitter turns away anyone who is unable to re-enter their kayak with minimal assistance. George reports turning away people is the hardest part of his job.

We were an unusual group, not the typical clientele of Trek and Trail. We had brought our own gear and kayaks, all 17 feet long except one 16-foot Pilgrim. This presented a bit of a logistical challenge. Their clientele usually used tandem



The group: Jill, Gail, Rebecca, Maywin. Photo: George

kayaks with lots of storage space, enough to carry their soft-sided coolers. However, we were unable to fit the coolers in any of our kayaks. We needed one cooler to carry our perishable food. Poor George had to strap the cooler to his back deck.

The (Tentative) Plan

We aimed to use island hopping to gradually reach the secluded outer islands and the scenic arches and caves of Devils Island. Our itinerary consisted of hopping from Basswood Island (our planned first campsite on Oak Island was closed due to bear activity) to Ironwood to Rocky Island. Camping is no longer permitted on Devils Island, so Rocky Island is the staging island to reach Devils Island. It requires a four-and-a-half-mile open water crossing. As a cautionary note, George advised that he had not made it to Devils Island this season and last season reached it only twice due to weather conditions. We resigned ourselves to enjoying the islands we could reach.

The Camping

Each day consisted of kayaking (mostly 13-14 miles) and primitive camping with no running water and a compost toilet. The outermost islands have stump privies out in the open, so while doing your business you can view the lake and the sunrise/set.

We renamed them Elvish Thrones because “stump privy” is too pedestrian for these kayak goddesses. For some of us, the throne was a trip highlight, while others found the mosquitos vicious on the open thrones.

Our primitive campsites were not without luxuries. We were just off the beach with beautiful vistas wherever we looked. And being on secluded beaches we were able to experience the luxury of skinny dipping.

Most days we were able to paddle right up to our campsites, although George did make us pull our kayaks up from the shore. The danger of kayaks disappearing at night is not due to the half-inch tidal variation in the lake but the possibility of the surf picking up and washing the kayaks out.

George prepared a hot breakfast and dinner every day. We couldn't even make a dent in what he prepared. Lunch was a sandwich bar from the deck cooler. The food was delicious and included local delicacies like the famous Lake Superior whitefish (fresh filets!) grilled over an open fire and Cornish pasties. Pasties are common in the Lake Superior area thanks to the large influx of Cornish miner immigrants in the mid 1800's. We finished off dinner with wonderful cookies and muffins from a local bakery.



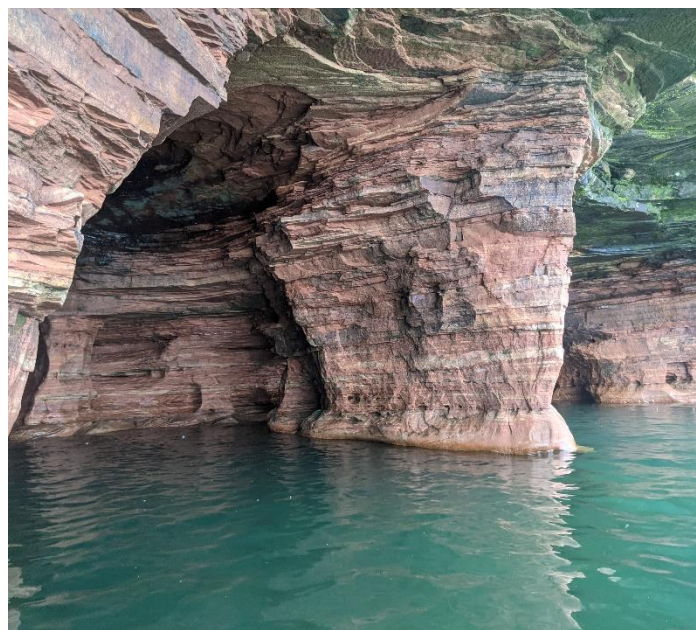
The route. Devil's Island is the northernmost one.

Devil's Island

Most of the trip the weather forecast called for gusts over 30 knots, including on the day we were scheduled to paddle to Devils Island. Luckily the weather, as it often does, changed and for the better this time! For the crossing to Devil's the forecast was for sustained winds at 15 knots, with gusts to 20 knots. But it was manageable for our experienced group. We would have the southern wind at our backs going out but stiff headwinds returning.

Devil's Island is famous for its intricate network of caves resulting from wind and waves eroding the soft sandstone/clay. As the water slams into the caves, a roaring, moaning is heard which Native Americans believed was the sound of evil spirits, hence its name. We coasted to the island to be astounded by the stunning cave network that stretched over a mile. The price to witness the beauty is vicious black flies. Black flies hitched rides on our decks, paddles and congregated on the back of our pfd's. Luckily, neoprene is almost fly proof. George had chosen a short sleeve shirt for this day, so along with the moan of the waves reaching the caves there was a constant slap, slap sound as George regretted his short sleeve choice. The flies peak in June and decrease throughout the season.

After gliding through and past the surreal caves, we rounded the island and prepared for the return trip into the wind. In our heavily laden kayaks, we plowed the almost four miles back to our camp on Rocky Island, battling 15-20 knot headwinds and bouncing over 2-3 ft waves. The spray and sun made seeing difficult, but we were exhilarated to have witnessed the beauty of Devils Island. George timed us; one hour going out (4.5 miles) and only an hour and ten minutes on the way back into the headwind (just under 4 miles). It was a most righteous paddle, a favorite of the entire trip.



Devil's Island. Photo: Jill Allbritton



Devil's Island. Photo: Jill Allbritton

A Final Challenge: Met with Grace and Style

On our last full day, Lake Superior gave us a peek of its true power. We had to cover 16 miles. We started the day fighting a 10+ knot headwind, followed by a leg with 15-20 knot winds and confused three-to-four-foot waves from a nearby thunderstorm. By the time we reached the third island, we were very tired and a little discouraged. Even George lay on the back of his kayak and let out a loud sigh. He told us he had paddled in similar conditions previously but not for so many miles. George checked, but all campsites were booked on the island for that night. We had no choice but to paddle the final three miles to the last campsite.

We pushed on through more headwinds when suddenly someone started singing. The rest of us, except George, joined in. He laughed at our off-key singing. Turns out, none of us know the words to very many songs. So sometimes, we just "sang" the choruses repeatedly or made-up lyrics. Our kayak karaoke seemed to appease the spirits of the Lake. The winds died to five knots. Small, gentle waves helped push us along. The sun finally peeked out and we glided into our final campsite.

Trip Highlights

George: trip leader, skillful, authentic and funny, wise, especially for 21 years of age.

Aiden who owns Trek and Trail. We recommend his company and George to all.

Clear fresh lake water (70s) to bathe and swim

Flocks of seagulls flying above us

Aurora Borealis seen from Sand Island

Caves of Devils Island

Trip Lowlights (But we'd all go back!)

Wind, wind and more wind

Black flies

Mosquitoes

Disrupting Japanese Whaling

Rick Wiebush

The Japanese just launched a huge whaling factory ship and Captain Paul Watson, of “Whale Wars” fame, is going after it. Maybe.

Watson founded Sea Shepherd, an organization dedicated to disrupting illegal whaling and fishing throughout the world. They have used very aggressive tactics like ramming whalers, fouling ships propellers, boarding whaling ships, cutting nets and, in one case, sinking two Icelandic whaling ships in the Reykjavik harbor. A Sea Shepherd boat once tracked and harassed a rogue ship involved in poaching in protected waters across three oceans and 10,000 miles, so disrupting its efforts that the ship scuttled itself (See Coastbusters, November 2023).

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([crosscurrentsseakayaking.com](https://www.crosscurrentsseakayaking.com))

Watson – who has been described as an eco-terrorist - left Sea Shepherd in 2022 and started a similar organization called the Captain Paul Watson Foundation. But he is still focused on disrupting illegal whaling, which in Japan recently took on a whole new dimension.

A Giant Japanese Whaler

In May of this year, Japan launched a new gigantic whaling “mothership”. The Kangei Maru is 375 long (more than the length of a football field), weighs 9,300 tons and has a crew of 100. The boat is designed to be a whale processing facility i.e., all flensing of blubber, butchering, processing and refrigeration is done right on the ship. The “mothership” designation means that a fleet of

smaller ships travel with it. Those smaller ships are the ones who hunt the whales and when successful, bring them to the big ship for processing.

The Kangei Maru is equipped with multiple drones, each with a range of about 60 miles that are used to spot whales. The smaller ships then go after the whales and kill them using cannons. The ship’s slipway, where dead whales are hauled into the interior, is large enough to handle whales up to 80 feet long.

So What?

Although whaling in Japanese waters is legal in Japan, all commercial whaling was outlawed in 1986 by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). And in 2018 it declared that all killing of whales, even for research purposes, should end. But countries such as Norway, Iceland and Japan have continued commercial whaling, the latter under the guise of “research”. Then, in 2019, Japan officially withdrew from the IWC and resumed commercial whaling without the pretense of research.



The Kangei Maru. Photo Courtesy of Japan News by The Yomiuri Shimbun

While the Japanese maintain that they will be hunting only in Japanese waters, their whaling history and the capabilities of the Kangei Maru lead to suspicion about their future practices. For years, the Japanese whaled illegally in international waters, especially the South Pacific near Antarctica. It was that practice in fact that got Sea Shepherd started on its anti-whaling campaigns. In addition, the Kangei Maru has a cruising range of 8,000 miles and can stay at sea for two months.

For those reasons Watson, in an interview with CNN, said that : “The only purpose of a vessel like that is so it can travel long distances to the Southern Ocean to hunt whales, (and) what the whalers are doing right now is really just a test run. They are testing out the new ship in their waters.”

The final “so what” is the whales endangered status. Japan hunts Minke, Bryde’s and Sei whales and, with the capability of the new mothership, will start hunting Fin whales. While Minke and Bryde’s are not threatened species, Sei whales are considered “endangered”. Fin whales – the second largest animals on earth after Blue whales – are considered “vulnerable” by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and are included in the U.S. Endangered Species Act. In fact, in early August 2024 (three weeks ago) Japan caught it first Fin whale, which weighed 55 tons (see photo).



Northwest Passage. Source: Arctic Portal Inc.

Watson’s Plan

The Watson Foundation’s vessels are referred to as “Neptune’s Navy”. The flagship is the John Paul DeJoria which, until recently, was going to harass whaling operations in Iceland this summer. However, upon learning about the launching of the Japanese super ship, Watson changed tack and decided to go after the Kangei Maru in the North Pacific.

To facilitate early engagement, Watson decided to get to the Pacific Ocean via the Northwest Passage, a tricky route that extends from the west coast of Greenland to the Beaufort Sea in Alaska. According to the Watson Foundation, it would be the first anti-whaling ship to make the passage and one of only approximately 250 ships that have ever completed the whole route.



This 55-ton Fin whale was slaughtered in August 2024. For scale, compare to the guys standing behind. Source: Paul Watson Foundation. Photo credit: Unknown.

Plans Rudely Interrupted

Coming from its berth in Dublin, and heading toward the entrance to the Northwest Passage, the John Paul DeJoria stopped for refueling in Nuuk on the west coast of Greenland. There, the Danish authorities arrested and detained Captain Watson pursuant to a “Red Notice” issued by the government of Japan. Administered by Interpol, Red Notices are in effect alerts issued by one country notifying other countries that a person is wanted and requesting a provisional arrest, pending extradition.

It appears that the Red Notice is based on incidents when Sea Shepherd was harassing Japanese whalers in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean in 2010. Japan claimed damage to a ship and injury to one of its sailors. Originally issued in 2012, the Red Notice was apparently taken off the table at some point, but was reactivated in 2024 around the same time that the Kangei Maru was launched. That “coincidence” leads Watson and his supporters to classify the Red Notice as politically motivated, i.e. a way to prevent him from harassing the Kengei Maru in the Pacific

Once arrested, Watson was designated as a flight risk and detained, at least until September 5, while authorities decide what to do about the extradition request.

Interpol notes that the use of Red Notices is subject to stringent guidelines including that they must be based on “serious” offenses such as terrorism, human trafficking and drug trafficking. The agency also notes that in 2021 and 2022, almost half of the Red Notices that were challenged were found to be not in compliance with Interpol’s rules and standards.

So, can Watson and his organization disrupt the new Japanese “super whaler”? We’ll have to wait and see.



Photo courtesy of Ionian Dolphin Project

Fin whales are the second largest whale after Blue whales. They live to over 90 years of age. Adults are typically about 70 feet long and weigh 40 – 50 tons. As of 2018, the worldwide count was an estimated 100,000 individual adults. Range is all the oceans including polar and tropical. In the Mediterranean, they have recorded dives up to 1,500 feet. Fin are also baleen whales and, when feeding can take in up to 18,000 gallons of water in one gulp, before forcing the water out through their baleen and trapping the food inside.

Source: Wikipedia



Photo courtesy of Signs of the Times

Sei whales are the third largest whales, after Blue and Fin. They can grow up to 64 feet and weigh up to 28 tons. Females are typically larger than males. They’re fast – swimming up to 30 mph over short distances. Sei whales are also baleen whales. They are found in all oceans but avoid tropical and polar waters. A census conducted in 2018 estimated a total of 55,000 individuals world-wide. They can live up to 70 years. Source: Wikipedia

Photos of the Month



Norway

Photo: Ted Gormley

Photos of the Month



Port Angeles, WA

Photo: Bill Vonnegut

Photos of the Month



Secure

Photo: Lisa Giguere

Sea Kayaking: A Liminal World

Rick Wiebush

I first got interested in the liminal nature of sea kayaking when I read an article called “Sea Kayakers at the Margins: The Liminoid Character of Contemporary Adventure” by Peter Varley.¹ He had some really interesting observations about the nature of our sport based on his experiences paddling in North Wales. But I couldn’t really get my head around the adjective “liminal”. At the time, and continuing until recently, I kept having to ask myself: What exactly does that mean?

The Merriam-Webster definition gave a clue, but still seemed really vague: “of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition: in between, transitional.” Alternatively, the Oxford definition really helped me better grasp the idea in relation to sea kayaking: “occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold”.

For example, when you are ready to launch and your boat is half in and half out of the water, it is in a liminal space. On the one hand (and as one part of the definition) it is “occupying the threshold” between land and sea. At the same time, the boat is on “both sides of a threshold” i.e. it is simultaneously on the water and on land.

Here are just a couple of examples before focusing on the liminal nature of sea kayaking. In human development terms, the period of adolescence is

liminal in that the teen-ager is “at the threshold” of adulthood, and that period is also “on both sides of the threshold” – the teenager still has a lot of childish characteristics/behavior (e.g. focus on the self) while at the same time displaying many of the characteristics of adulthood (e.g., starting to take responsibility; having a part-time job).

In spatial terms, your front door is a liminal space: it is the transition from outside to inside. If you stand there for a moment, you are outside and inside at the same time. Similarly, when you take the stairs from the first to the second floor, you are in a liminal space – it’s a transition zone.

“In the pursuit of sea kayaking, the social, the body, the mind and the environment become viscerally entwined; each becomes part of the other”

- Varley, (2011, p.92)

¹ Varley, P.J. (2011). Sea kayakers at the margins: The liminoid character of contemporary adventure. *Leisure Studies*, 30(1), 85-98.

Sea Kayaking

Varley captures – in the context of paddling in the tide races and challenging waters of North Wales - several of the “threshold” and “transition” elements of sea kayaking in two elegant sentences:

The ocean is not the natural territory of human beings. The kayakers move from the land to the sea and from comfort to hardship, from security to uncertainty, passivity to commitment and from action governed via ocular experience to total bodily/sensual immersion. (p. 85)

What follows are some of the thoughts I’ve had about the liminality of sea kayaking.

Both Water and Land

When we are in our boats, we are both *on* the water and *in* it; simultaneously on both sides of the surface. In addition, the act of paddling occurs both above and below the waterline: we use our arms, hands and torsos above the water, while we use our feet, thighs and buttocks below.

Moreover, routine coastal paddling is done in a liminal space. Typically less than a few hundred yards off the coast, we are in effect at the boundary, the threshold, of the ocean and the land. The “both/and” part of the definition of liminal is also evident – in a slightly different way - when circumnavigating Manhattan, paddling the St. Johns River through downtown Jacksonville, and similar urban adventures. Unlike coastal paddling, where we are at the edge of two separate natural environments, when urban paddling, we are on the border of the natural and man-made environments.

Speaking of urban environments, given our largely urban, technological and materialistic “normal” lives, we are quite distinct from the natural environment. But when we are paddling in our usual places (i.e., non-urban environments), we are both separate from, and part of, the natural environment.

Surfing also has a liminal physical aspect. When we surf, we in are a liminal space where ocean meets land. We are often in water about 4-6 feet deep – clearly not the depth of most of the ocean and at the same time, even though we can often stand in those relatively shallow waters, we aren’t quite on land either; it’s the transition zone between land and sea. It is both/and.

Both Social and Solitary

Another way of understanding the liminal aspect of sea kayaking is the social psychological aspect of paddling. Several of the people I’ve spoken to claim that part of the appeal of paddling is the ability the individual has to move back and forth between being part of the group and then withdrawing into their inner (or no) thoughts. When paddling with a group we are in a liminal space – both connected to and separate from the others.

Both Safety and Risk

When paddling in open water, we are always on the boundary between safety and risk. We make forays into risky parts (e. g., surf, tide races), only after assessing where the threshold is between safety and risk. And, while surfing we are always concerned with our position vis-a-vis other people. So it’s “both/and”: we are simultaneously involved in risky activity and assiduously attending to safety concerns.

Envoi: So What?

This exploration of the liminal nature of sea kayaking will have zero impact on how or where you paddle. But hopefully, it will give you a new way of thinking about our sport, and help give some insight as to why it often seems so special and magical.

Paddlers Under Pressure

Paul Caffyn

Mark Thornton's "Feeling the Pressure" (*Coastbusters* January, 2024), is a good backgrounder on the technical side of barometric pressure for boaties and yachties who can monitor pressure either digitally or via print, or indeed by 'tapping the glass'. However, I don't know of a single expedition paddler who has carried a barometer.

At home, I do have one of the old-fashioned glass-encased barometers. I sometimes tap the glass to see if the pressure has changed, and to see if forecasters agree with the conditions I see outside, but my barometer does not gauge the rapidity of pressure changes. For sea kayakers it is the rapidity of pressure change that is the best indicator of really spiffing or really nasty impending weather.

Knowledge of barometric pressure changes are vital in areas/regions where marine forecasts are not accessible. The key factor for seeking a hint of impending gales, or no wind for paddlers, is whether the barometric pressure is "flat-lining" or "going up and down like a bride's nightie".

Marine weather forecasts these days are generated by computer programs, without the reliance any more on actual weather recordings at manned remote lighthouses or provided by vessels on the water.

With the use of satellite phones in recent years, expedition paddlers can receive up-to-date hourly

forecasts of wind, swell and sea conditions. Karel Vissel has been providing such data to Freya Hoffmeister for decades, a key factor for safety on her committing expeditions.

For those who can afford the luxury of a satellite phone, there is a handy small accoutrement which was been vital for the success of four paddling summers in East and West Greenland. It is a wristwatch which displays not only barometric pressure, but presents the data in as a graph, with hourly readings.

When Conrad Edwards and I paddled down the east coast of Greenland in 2008 from Isortoq to Narsaq, we both had our barometer wristwatches on the kayak foredecks to keep an eye on significant changes in pressure, up or down. The steeper the pressure gradient, i.e., the closer together the lines of barometric pressure, the stronger the winds.

It is the rapidity of pressure change that is a brilliant indicator of wind strength, either a steep upward gradient or a steep downward gradient. The desired fair-weather pressure for paddling was when the hourly pressure readings had no gradient at all, or 'flat lining' as we called it.

At the time, a low-pressure system was sitting south of Iceland, generating frequent cold fronts with winds far too strong for paddling. As well as keenly observing cloud movement, direction and speed, our barometer watches were a superb factor in predicting and monitor impending weather conditions.



Barometer watch showing pressure reading and graph.

Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Symposium

Marilyn Cooper



Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. Photo: Bill Vonnegut



Lunch break. Photo: Jeff Atkins

The Great Lakes Sea Kayaking Symposium (GLSKS) was held – as it is every year – in Grand Marais, MI, near Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore on Lake Superior. I grew up near Lake Erie and, after getting into paddling in the East, I finally got to paddle in the Great Lakes. Power of Water, the sponsoring organization, brought in coaching staff from around the US including some well-known instructors like Jeff Atkins, Todd Johnstone-Wright, Bill Vonnegut, and many others.

One of the highlights was meeting new paddlers from different areas with different backgrounds. The participants were evenly distributed between those who had been coming for years and first-timers like us. In addition to local folks, participants came from the East and West Coasts, as well as Canada. So many of them were younger and just getting into the sport - something I don't get to see very often. Couples taking up the sport together, in their 30's and 40's knowing they have decades to paddle. There's hope for the future of the sport!



Hugging the coast. Photo: Tami Riley

The biggest stories were the clarity of the water and the beauty of the surroundings. People from the East Coast could not stop talking about the water. Seeing the rocks and thinking they were right there, but realizing they were actually several feet under the water. So much of the water we paddle in is murky and you really have no idea how deep it is.

Similarly, the striking colors of the sandstone cliffs seemed almost unreal. It was interesting to compare the sandstone canyons of our recent hikes in Utah's Zion NP with those of the sandstone cliffs of Pictured Rocks in Lake Superior. In both cases, we saw nature at its best.



Multihued sandstone cliffs. Photo: Tami Riley

The event started with separating into pods based on nothing more than the order you signed in, to spend the first morning together. We paddled out into the harbor, did some stroke review and rescues both self-rescues and assisted rescues. In the afternoon,

we broke into three main groups, or pods: calm water, bumpy water and bumpier-bumpy water. The next couple of days we paddled in our pods, met new people and hung out with some great coaches.



Through the slot. Photo: Bill Vonnegut

A bonus was paddling with Bill Vonnegut whose dramatic photos I have seen for years. He was just a guy who really likes to paddle, normal and friendly, not the just total bad-ass represented in the photos of Pacific Ocean wild water. He had some

great tips. I just wished my dry suit didn't leak, so I could take more advantage of his suggestions. Overall, it was a great experience and I'm looking forward to attending again next year!

Upcoming Events

Dates	Event	Location	Website
Aug. 30-Sept.2	Oceans 24	Seabrook Is. SC	chrisrezac.wixsite.com/kayakoceans
Sept. 18 - 19	Intermediate and Advanced Surf Camps	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 20-22	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct 11 - 13	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes, DE	delmarvapaddlersretreat.org/
Oct. 24 - 26	Sea Kayak Georgia Symposium	Tybee Island, GA	seakayakgeorgia.com
Nov. 1 – 3	Autumn Gales Symposium	Stonington, CT	autumngales.com



Ducks in a row. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Book Review**Sea Kayak Touring and Leadership Manual****Volume 2: Freedom of the Seas**

by

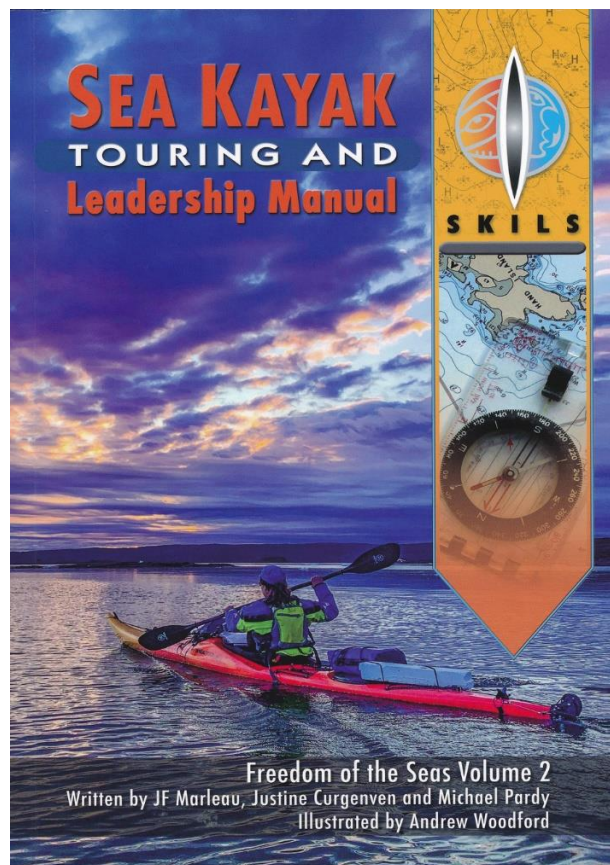
JF Marleau, Justine Curgenvén, Michael Pardy**Paul Caffyn**

With my serious bias to the *Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (KASK) Handbook*, as the best sea kayaking manual in the world, I have to confess that this *Freedom of the Seas, Volume 2* is now the best sea kayak manual in the world. This 2024, 446-page tome is low on words and huge on superb diagrams, figures and photographs. It is a visual delight. And its focus is solely on sea kayaking.

A prior 2020 manual (identical lovely graphic layout) covered navigation, sea state and weather, so this 2024 manual focuses on 'the most complete source of information for sea kayaking touring paddlers worldwide to increase knowledge, safety and enjoyment. It covers day trips to multi-month trips with examples from across the world'.

I'm a big fan of visually appealing layout, be it a book or a magazine, but from the full-page photos leading each chapter to the colourful cartoon diagrams by Andrew Woodford, this manual is a visual feast. The text is tight, not too many words, and each chapter has a superb bibliography for further reading.

What lifts this manual is the inclusion of what we term in New Zealand as 'Bugger File!' moments - actual sea kayaking incidents with near misses, injury, or fatalities along with 'the lessons learned'.



Some cracker chapters like 16, 'Tarpology 101' - so applicable for paddling trips into deepest darkest Fiordland and other wild places - anchors, knots, choice and configuration for erecting tent flies.

Although the emphasis with risk to 'Humans from Wildlife' has a focus on North American and polar critters, there is much for everyone with how to deal with bears, ticks and mosquitoes when heading overseas.

The Risk Management chapter, ('The best way to avoid trouble is to anticipate it'), includes the story of Tara Mulvany and Sim Griggs when they were separated after a huge surf launch off the Heaphy River mouth in New Zealand.

There is much on leadership and group dynamics, also a leaf from the KASK Handbook with a chapter on 'Leave no Trace & Conservation Ethics'. Superbly illustrated with both cartoons and photos, it includes the female straddling technique for a pee with a photo example of Justine Curgenvin.

Much also on planning for overseas expeditions, but a well-illustrated chapter is titled 'Kayak Transportation' – basic stuff, but grand illustrations of lifting, carrying and loading kayaks onto vehicles.

At 446 pages, this is now my recommended sea kayaking manual to source.

The book is available as an eBook and as a print book. Order here: [The SKILS Store - SKILS](#)

The print book also is available from Amazon for \$40 + shipping

YES!

As soon as I received and read Paul's review, I ordered the Sea Kayak and Touring Manual. I totally agree with Paul's assessment – the manual is excellent!

Looking at the first couple of chapters I had the sense that the topics were a little basic and feared that the manual was geared toward beginners. I was way wrong! A closer look revealed that those "basics" chapters were incredibly comprehensive and addressed issues not found in other books e.g. details on proper boat fit, safety and repair kit essentials, caring for drysuit gaskets, etc.

Most impressive however was the amount of space devoted specifically to leadership issues – seven chapters comprising 141 pages including topics such as risk management, risk management for leaders, group dynamics, qualities of good leaders, trip planning, trip logistics for leaders, and one- and two-way communication.

I think this book is a must-have for coaches, instructors, and trip leaders and would be a great addition to the libraries of all paddlers.

- Rick Wiebush

Contributors

Jill Allbritton - has been paddling for 10 years, mostly on the Chesapeake Bay, and loves the challenge of rough water. Jill lives in Maryland and has previously written about paddling Croatia for *Coastbusters*.

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 served for 27 years as the editor of the newsletter of the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers. Check out his website at <http://paulcaffyn.co.nz/>

Marilyn Cooper – enjoys paddling in different conditions including surf and rough water. She has served on the advisory board of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association for several years and is an ACA L3 instructor. Marilyn lives in Maryland.

Gail Davidson - started kayaking in 2000 on a break day during a cycle across Maryland and has been hooked ever since. She's been building her skills a little bit at a time and enjoys all types of paddling in all conditions. She is L4 skills rated and an L3 instructor.

May Win Liu – has been seriously kayaking for over 12 years and is an ACA L3 and BC 3* paddler. May Win's new favorite kayaking area is Croatia. She enjoys kayaking internationally and has kayaked in five of the seven continents. She hopes to add the last two eventually.

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 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.

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