# Coastbusters

**The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers**

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## Thrills, Spills and Chills: A Baja Adventure

*Kerry Kirk Pflugh*

*Thrills on a pourover. Photo: Jen Kleck*

*Punta Banda. Photo: Victor Leon*

*As I stood at the bunkhouse window watching the waves crash against the shore, I couldn't help but see how much bigger, wilder and vast the Pacific Ocean is as compared to my much more familiar Atlantic Ocean. It wouldn't be long before I would be in a kayak with my fellow paddlers playing in those waves and facing down pour overs, chutes, slots, ledges and elevators.*

Once on the water, the days went something like this: After safely launching through the five-foot surf, we paddle along the coast of Pacific Baja. Here the landscape is wild, untamed and majestic. We have sun, blue skies and a gentle southwest wind.

We play in some smaller pour overs along the way. It is kind of like follow the leader. Someone would point out a slot or ledge or pour over. We would all stop and watch it for a bit, reading the water, getting the timing, then the bravest of us would take the plunge. Then one by one the rest of us would go through.

When one of us got knocked over, we would take turns conducting the rescue. If someone went over, and managed a roll, the cheers from the group echoed across the water. It was awesome!
It was like this for five days! Except the features frequently were bigger – a lot bigger – and the "spills" often became a euphemism for trashings of epic proportions.

**The Start**

Our Baja adventure had begun in early November in San Diego where our coaches, Jen Kleck, Jeff Atkins and Shan Sethna met our eager group. I was joined in this adventure by my paddling pal, Debbie, and Bruce, Ricardo, Mike, Jaclin, Jill, Beth, and Bea; all skilled and all (but one) east coast paddlers.

*Stunning seascapes near La Bufadora. Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

Loading our gear, food, and all of us into Jen's van was as much a strategic assessment and implementation as some of the features we would be facing in the coming days. At the border, we were stopped by Mexican authorities, and required to exit the van so that the van and all of us could be scanned. We speculated it was the gun cases (for carrying our paddles) that caused the extra scrutiny.

After that, it was smooth sailing to our base at Victor Leon's ranch in La Bufadora, with a brief stop in Ensenada for fish tacos and other goodies at a very popular roadside restaurant, El Trailero Taqueria. Some of our group claimed the tacos were the best they have ever eaten.

As we pulled off the main road and turned down the drive of Victor's ranch, the bunkhouse and kayak shed came into view. Beyond it was Papalote Bay and the vast Pacific Ocean. The terrain around La Bufadora is rugged and sparse. The rough mountains, creations of volcanic action many millennia ago, are both jagged and sharp, and rounded and polished from centuries of wind, heat, waves and storms. Agaves line the edges of the cliffs like silent sentries keeping watch on the untamed ocean below. Aside from the occasional mountain top home, the mountains are vacant except for small brush and cacti.

Our first tasks were to unpack the van, select our kayaks, have dinner and prepare for the next five days. We met our other coaches, Victor and Nick Napoda. There was an energy of anticipation mingled with some apprehension, thinking about the coming days and what we would be facing.

**The Giant Blowhole**

We watch the wave sets waiting for the opening that will allow us safe passage over the pounding surf and through the rocky sea stacks some of which are visible and others which lie just under the water's surface.

One by one Jen, Jeff and Nick help direct us through the surf and we gather on the other side of the stacks to wait for the group. The swell is gentle and rolling. The cold water contrasts the

comfortable air temperature. Wind is nearly absent as we turn north toward La Bufadora, the second largest blowhole in the world. Along the way we stop at a few pour overs that several of the group play in briefly, readying themselves for the day's bigger challenges.

When we arrive at the famous blowhole, Jen talks about the waves and movement of the water. We watch the water as the geyser at times explodes 60 feet into the air and at other times is more like a benevolent puff of mist.

The trick for playing here, and in all the features we will encounter, is timing. I watch as a profusion of water crashes into the rock wall and hidden cave, then spits out a giant vertical explosion of spray like an enormous water gun. This is followed by a sucking of the water so great, it feels as if the sea is reclaiming all the water it just threw at us. In and out the sets repeat - sometimes with gargantuan force and other times a moderate whiff.

After watching for a while and feeling we had the timing down, we each backed into the chute and waited for the wall of water to hit. Each of us encountered a different experience. A couple of spills provided some drama and rescue practice. One spill in particular resulted in our group calling large confused waves, Jaclin's waves.

*The blowhole firing off. Photo: Nate Hanson*

As Jaclin backed into the maelstrom the wave sets increased in intensity. A swirl of white water, foam and waves enveloped her. She was lifted, then dropped, but she braced hard and held her position. Then a wave from the backwash hit the side of her kayak. Despite a stellar brace, the wave flipped her and she had to exit the kayak.

**On to More Features and Fun**

The next big feature we encountered was "the Elevator." The idea is to paddle as close to the mountain wall as possible and wait for a wave to lift you up, while at the same time back paddling slightly to prevent a crash into the wall, then wait as the backwash sucks away the water and drops you into what seems like a hole, only to lift you again when the water comes rolling back in. The up and down felt a little like being in a lock on a river…only way faster and more intense, or maybe a bit like a drop tower at a carnival, but not as scary.

Over the next several hours we stopped at numerous features – pour overs, slots and caves. I watched as each of the group made their way through the slots and pour overs – some handily conquering the challenge, others getting through with a little more effort but everyone completing each feature with a triumphant smile! It was beautiful watching these very talented and experienced paddlers navigate the swish and swash of the waves as they pushed and pulled us and to see them nailing their braces, edging, and rolls.

As the afternoon faded, we made our way back to the bunkhouse for the evening and were treated to a delicious dinner prepared by Jen with assistance from all of us. We spent the evening talking about the paddling day and sharing photos of each other playing in the features.

*Trouble. Photo: Jen Kleck*

**Double Trouble at Double Trouble**

I heard it before I saw it. The surf and swell were significantly bigger than the day before and the water surface was a great deal more textured and confused too. Watching the surf crash hard on the beach below, I was anxious.

After launching, we paddled along and soon passed a colony of sea lions; on the other side of them was the main feature for the day: Double Trouble. At first, it didn't look much different than the other pour overs, but after careful examination it became clear that this pour over was happening in two directions – waves poured over the submerged rocks in one direction, then were sucked back across it in the opposite direction. All this was further complicated by the intensity and unpredictably of the surf.

We watched carefully and took encouragement and coaching from Victor, Jen, Jeff and Nick. Nick, Bruce and Jaclin went first and enjoyed some crazy rides. We witnessed spills, rolls, and even, incredibly, an endo. Bad timing resulting in bailouts and rescues. One of the more interesting wipe outs was when Mike nearly made it through the pour over but got caught in a backwash, disappeared for a moment and reappeared standing on top of a rock holding onto his kayak. Waves swept over him for a bit and he eventually went through the pour over, swimming and holding onto his boat.

*Success at Double Trouble Photo: Jen Kleck*

*Immaculate endo. Photo: Jen Kleck*

However, it was Jaclin's ride that riveted everyone. As she expertly made her way over the first half of Double Trouble and slid down the slope of the second half, her stern got caught in the backwash, burying it and lifting her and her kayak into a perfect endo, her bow pointing straight up in the air, her stern submerged to the cockpit. She nearly hung on but the force of the water on her stern, spun her around and dumped her. Incredible!!

**A Big Chill**

But the Big Chill of the day was Nick. Just as we were thinking about calling it a day and heading back to the bunkhouse, a wild wave flushed over Double Trouble. Nick later said this was what he had been waiting for. He went through and then another wave dumped over him and he disappeared. At first it looked like he made it through, but the force of the confused water knocked him over. He attempted a roll. Another wave dumped in. He was out of his kayak and the hydraulics immediately pulled him under. He came up with his tow rope wrapped around his neck and another wave hit and he got sucked under. We were all watching in horror and waiting for an opening to grab him when he stood up on a rock and dove into the water away from the hydraulic. We grabbed him, his boat and paddle and got him safely back in his kayak. After making sure he was ok and giving him a moment to recover, we called it a day and headed back to the bunkhouse.

*In trouble at Double Trouble. Photo: Jen Kleck*

*The Slot of Boom. Photo: Victor Leon*

**The Slot of Boom**

On day three, it was clear the intensity of the surf had subsided compared to the day before. The sun was bright and the wind was low. Feature of the day: the Slot of Boom.

The Slot of Boom is two giant sea stacks, spaced about 20 yards apart, which create a kind of chute through which the large Pacific swells surge. The waves smash against these two giant rock formations and then detonate into a deluge of white water and foam as it cascades into the chute. The wild water is further confused by a passageway to the right that flings more water into the slot.

Once again it is all about timing and wave selection. We carefully watched the sets and the force of the surf. Victor got out of his boat and positioned himself on the rock wall to help coach and direct us. Jeff positioned himself at the bottom of the chute in case a rescue was needed. We watched and studied the waves hitting the stacks, then we took turns going for it.

My first run was a moderate wave boom and so much fun, I took a second ride after lunch. This time Jen was on the ledge shooting video. As I waited for the Boom, I could sense the energy building beyond the sea stacks. Then suddenly an explosion and an enormous wall of water racing toward me. For half a second, I almost backed up but I could hear Jen yelling, “paddle forward!, paddle forward!,” and I went for it. The wave lifted me high into the air, the foamy confused water swirled all around me. The pour over to my right shot into the air then showered more water on me as I rocked back and forth bracing and riding the wave until the energy passed and I was pushed backward out of the slot. WICKED cool!

My group was heading out, so I left my favorite ride of the week and headed back to the put-in. But on the way, two more adventures awaited us.

*Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

**A Double Spill**

The arch was narrow and *seemed* like an easy pass through, given current conditions. One by one we went. Debbie got about halfway through when conditions went wild. A wave knocked her into the arch wall. She flipped, tried to roll but got knocked over again. She exited the kayak. Victor grabbed her boat, passed it to Bea and went in to get Debbie. Attempting to grab the kayak, Bea flipped and had to bail.

We all jumped in to try to help. Debbie got on the bow of my boat, while Victor emptied her boat. The pull of the surf required assistance from Ricardo who put a short tow on my stern and together we managed to hang on to Debbie without being slammed into the rocks. Bea got back into her boat. Jill held onto everyone's paddles. Once everyone was back in their boats and settled, we continued our journey, somewhat shaken yet pleased with our successful handling of the incident(s).

*Together we managed to hang on to Debbie without being slammed into the rocks.*

**Todos Santos**

The sun was burning bright today. We gathered at the ranch's launch to meet the panga that would take us to Todos Santos Island about three miles off the Punta Banda peninsula. This beautiful island is home to a fish farm, vistas of the Pacific Ocean, a towering lighthouse and a sea lion colony.

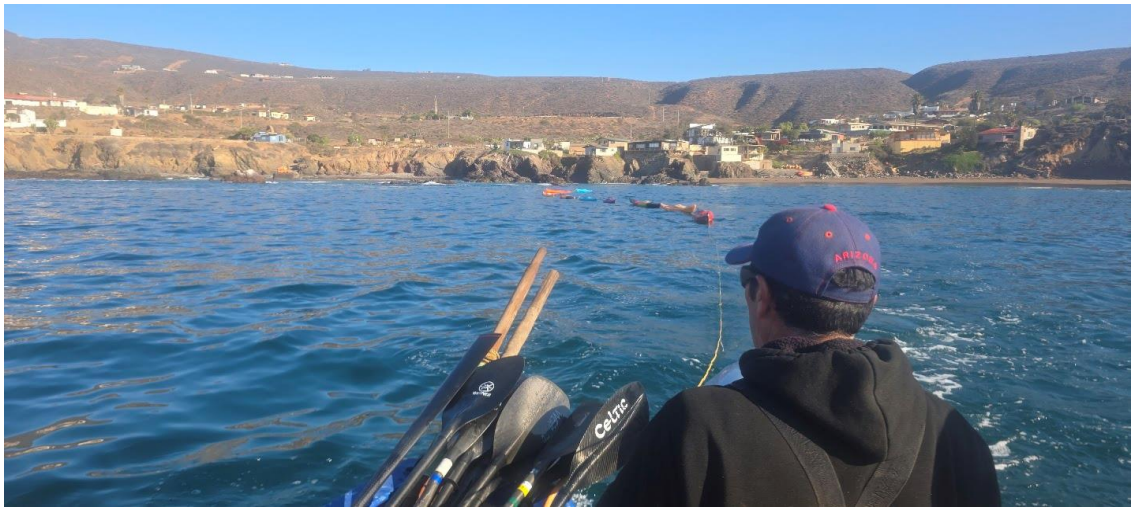
The mechanics of getting to the island was an adventure in and of itself. We paddled from the launch to the panga where the Captain and Mate pulled us into the open boat, stowed our paddles and gear and tied our kayaks in a line behind the boat, towing them to the island. We wondered how the kayaks didn't flip or twist away, but they followed the panga like a group of kindergarteners following the line leader.

When we arrived at the island, we disembarked the panga in reverse. We were immediately greeted by a pod of seals who popped up around us then quickly ducked under the water only to pop up again. Occasionally, one or two got brave enough to follow us and watch as we played in various features making our way around the island.

As we passed the fish farm, hundreds of sea lions watched and barked at us. The giant creatures were clearly in charge of the fish farm and there would be no challenges to them from us. We continued circumnavigating the island, playing in gentle features and eventually landing for a break to take a hike to the top of the island. Standing on top of the 100-foot cliffs, we could see far out into the Pacific Ocean. While we were there, we noticed a fog bank moving in. Once back on the water, the bright sunny day quickly gave way to a misty gray one. Despite the fog, we were still able to play in a number of features.

**Humpbacks!**

We continued our way around the island and back to the fish farm where we had started. The fog continued to envelop us, so Jen took a compass reading and we headed back to the mainland, this time doing the crossing under our own power. It



*A three-mile, 14-boat tow to Todos Santos. Photo: Jeff Atkins*

wasn't until we were a mile from the peninsula that we were able to see some land features like sea stacks and a distant golf course. Nearing the land, the fog became less dense and we were able to see the vast expanse of Punta Banda.

Suddenly, Jen spotted a water spout and a Humpback and her calf breached in front of us three times. We chased it for about a half mile, hoping to get closer, but she and her calf did not emerge again. It was a thrilling end to a beautiful day!

**A Planned Scenic Paddle That Didn't Happen**

The forecast for our last full day on the water was for increased wind, and rain later in the day. The plan was to take a scenic paddle around Punta Banda peninsula and get picked up at the marina on the other side. The swell was gently rolling but steady. As we paddled, the energy of the surf seemed to increase and the pounding on the sea stacks and mountainsides became more intense.

All was going well until we decided to paddle through a chute that took us through two large sea stacks into a small quiet cove on the other side. A mini-island blocked the feature from the full force of the surf, but the buffer was deceiving. Larger sets would engulf the mini-island and flood the feature with huge foamy confused water that swirled through the chute completely encompassing the rocks and stacks on either side.

So once again we watched for a bit, keeping a wary eye on the incoming swell. Jen was first to go through, followed by several others and then me. Ricardo was next. He later said he felt the energy building behind him.

**Extraordinary Explosions of Water**

Sitting in the mostly quiet cove I watched as my paddling comrades came through the chute. It all seemed quite innocuous. I was chatting with Beth, when I heard it before I saw it. A powerful crash against the mini-island. Then I saw it - water shooting into the air, and an enormous swell flooding the chute. It lifted Ricardo into the air and pushed him toward the stacks. I heard myself exhale, "Oh my God!" For a moment all we could see was water. As it subsided to a spray, it looked like the surf threw him with a powerful thrust, and Ricardo landed on his feet ON TOP OF THE SEA STACK WITH HIS KAYAK UNDER HIS ARM unharmed!

*It was the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen*.

Jen immediately yelled, "Let go of the kayak." He did and another wall of water crashed down on him. Again, he disappeared in the surf. When the water retreated, Jen yelled at him to climb up on the other adjacent stack, further away from the surf. After he climbed up that stack, he leaped into the cove's quieter water and Jen began the rescue.

**But Wait, There's More!**

At this point we all thought the drama was over. I turned to say something to Beth when another enormous wave crashed into the chute shooting water and foam into the air. As I looked up, I spotted a red kayak twisting in the air and being flung so hard against the stack I could feel it. When the water retreated, we realized it was Bruce's boat and he had been thrown from his kayak. Beth and I paddled over to recover him, his kayak, and his paddle. I asked, "what happened?" He explained he went to retrieve Ricardo's paddle and before he knew what was happening, the surf captured him and threw him into the air. He said it would be the last time he volunteered to recover equipment. WOW!

After that, things calmed down quite a bit. We paddled around the peninsula weaving in and out of arches, gentle pour overs and caves. The Bay looked nothing like the wild crashing surf of the open ocean. The gentle swell was in direct contrast with the conditions we had paddled over the last five days. As we paddled along the coast, we saw beautiful vegetated cliffsides, and million-dollar homes perched at the top of the cliffs. We eventually made our way to the marina and were given a chance to play in some surf as we made our way to the landing.

*The whole crew Photo: some passersby*

**Final Thoughts**

Our last day in Mexico was a mix of packing, recounting our adventure, a visit to Ensenada for lunch in the famous Sabina restaurant and some quick shopping. Then off to the border for our return to the US.

Our time in La Bufadoro was marked with thrilling elements, some memorable spills and some epic chills as we challenged ourselves and the Pacific Ocean. The important lesson from the week is that the Pacific Ocean is nothing to mess with. You need skill, good judgement, great comrades who have your back, and a little bravery. Combine those four and the Pacific will let you play in her, so long as you always remember she's in charge.

*I heard it before I saw it ....Then I saw it - water shooting into the air, and an enormous swell flooding the chute.*

# *In This Issue*



*Foggy Baja. Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

# Risk Assessment: Structuring Decisions

*Rick Wiebush*

**Professional Judgment in Adventure Settings**

When we think about "risk assessment" in sea kayaking or other adventure-related sports (e.g., rock climbing, mountaineering, scuba diving), I think we make the assumption that professional judgement is the primary, if not sole, foundation for risk-related decision making. That is definitely the case with respect to much of the professional literature that I've looked at regarding assessing risk in adventure sports.

"Professional judgement" refers to making decisions based on the individual's education, training, experience, and philosophy. While professional judgement has a necessary role to play in risk-related decision making, it is important to recognize that the nature and extent of leaders' training, experience and philosophy can and does vary widely. As a result, the assessment of risk - even by experienced leaders – is highly subjective, and therefore very variable. Two different leaders, faced with identical circumstances, might make two very different decisions.

Those with extensive experience and training may typically make good judgements in relation to risk. Yet it is also the case that many outdoor leaders are young and have limited experience, thereby raising questions about the quality of their professional, subjective judgments. Regardless of experience or training, there is substantial evidence that people – including leaders and instructors - do not make decisions in a completely rational way.

**Type I and Type II Decisions**

Daniel Kahneman's Nobel prize-winning research has shown that there are two basic types of processes involved in decision-making: fast thinking (Type I) and slow thinking (Type II). The former is characterized by spontaneous, in-the-moment decisions that do not involve analytic processes, are often outside of our awareness, and rely instead on intuition that is informed by experience, memories and emotions. Quickly fixing on a sturdy-looking tree as a good anchor point for a top rope climb is an example of Type I thinking in relation to risk management. The response is intuitive, not the result of careful deliberation.

In contrast, Type II thinking is characterized by careful, deliberate, effortful thought. It can take multiple factors into account and weigh pros and cons. A person is aware of the thought process and can describe it. Making a decision to cross a snow field only after considering the temperature, the most recent snowfall, forecasted snowfall, the nature of available rescue equipment, and prior incidents or near misses in this same area is an example of Type II (slow) decision making.

*Assessment of risk is highly subjective and therefore very variable*

Unfortunately, one of the critical things that Kahneman discovered was that Type I thinking can heavily influence our Type II process without us knowing it. Consequently, although we may have taken multiple factors into account when selecting that tree as an anchor, we may have been strongly influenced by the fact that it "just felt right", because we have used trees like that for anchors in other places. Type I decisions incorporate both intuition and mental "short-cuts" that are used to make decisions easier, but which can result in errors as a result of bias and hueristics.

*Assessing risk in the surf. Photo: Rick Wiebush*

**The Influence of Heuristics and Bias.**

Heuristics are simple rules or guidelines for decision-making that we apply in unfamiliar situations or when decisions need to be made quickly i.e., they are mental short-cuts. Heuristics are usually associated with Type I (fast) thinking, but can also influence Type 2 thinking. All people use heuristics to help make decisions quickly. It's a way of conserving mental energy. They often work well; for example, you don't need to analyze anything to make a decision when you see a stop sign while driving. It's Type I decision. However, these heuristic short cuts often contain biases or "traps" that may lead errors in risk assessment in the adventure setting.

For example, the *availability* heuristic refers to the tendency to use information that comes to mind quickly and easily (i.e. it's readily available) when making decisions. The recency of other situations/events, or the severity of prior events may make that information jump to the front of a leader's deliberations.

For example, the decision about whether to launch sea kayakers in three-foot surf today might immediately bring to mind a series of capsizes and a resulting injury when the leader launched a group in similar surf last week. But that powerful memory may not be the best basis for figuring out what is likely to happen this time. The trap might be that the decision is made to not do it this time even though other, positive factors are in play (e.g., the waves are less powerful, and/or the group is more skilled).

Conversely, if all the leader's experiences launching here in three-foot surf have gone well, he or she might assume that there will be no problems this time, even though this group is less skilled. Other examples of heuristics and biases that affect risk-related decisions include:

- The *anchoring* heuristic in which people make decisions based on the first piece of information they acquire, even if it isn't the most relevant to the decision. To continue with the surf launch example, arriving and seeing that the surf is only two feet may result in a "go" decision, without taking into account an off-shore wind, tide rips, and an inexperienced group.

- The *consistency* trap: refers to the tendency to want to keep current decisions consistent with earlier decisions about the same issue. The leader decided yesterday that today was going to be the surf day, so that is what is going to happen, in spite of multiple indications it isn't a good idea.

- *Confirmation* bias: looking for evidence that supports a leader's views, while ignoring or minimizing contradictory information. "Yes, thunderstorms are forecast, but let's launch anyway since it will be sunny until noon, there's a 50% chance that the storms won't hit us, and the weather forecast is usually wrong anyway."

These types of decision-making biases, along with wide variations in the experience, training and philosophy of leaders and the subjectivity of professional judgement, all raise important questions about the viability of relying *solely* on professional judgment. The use of more objective and structured decision-making models and tools can help address these issues.

**Structured Decision Making (SDM)**

The use of formal, structured assessment instruments to inform decision making in adventure progams can help offset the problems with professional judgement outlined above. This is especially true with respect to go/no go decisions. "Go/no go" decisions refers to those made about whether to initiate a climbing, caving, skiing, or sea kayaking trip, as well those made at interval stops along the way when deciding whether to continue.

A structured assessment instrument is one that 1) is written and 2) consists of a set of key risk factors that are used to inform decisions related to a specific activity (e.g., climbing, back-country skiing). Such tools can ensure that all relevant factors must be considered by every leader, every time a decision is being made about whether to proceed with a planned trip or class. In the case of paddle sports, those factors might include wind, weather, tide, current, waves, rocky shorelines, and other environmental concerns, as well as human concerns such as skills, experience, and physical/mental condition of the participants.

*Such tools can ensure that all relevant factors are considered by every leader, every time*

Which factors are included in structured tools are typically based either on the consensus of experts and/or on research that has been conducted on the outcome of interest such as injuries or evacuations of participants.

The format of such instruments may be as basic as a checklist of relevant factors. Alternatively, they might utilize a scheme in which the critical factors are assigned weights and a total score is generated which leads to a presumptive decision.

Structured decision-making instruments have been demonstrated to result in better decision making and better outcomes in a variety of fields including medicine (preventing surgical infections), child protective services (preventing abuse/neglect) and juvenile justice (preventing recidivism). Medicine, social work and corrections are all fields that have traditionally relied primarily on professional judgment. But in each field, decision making has been improved through the use of structured instruments.

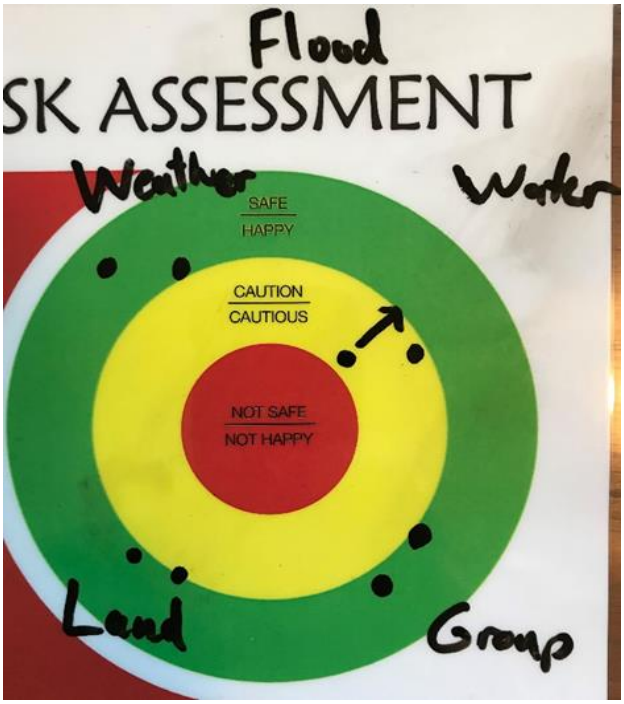
Yet structured assessments are rarely used in adventure settings. Given successful application in other fields, it would seem to make sense for adventure-related organizations to develop, test, refine, and apply structured assessment tools in order to make better and more consistent risk-related decisions. The following section presents examples of structured tools used in one area of adventure - sea kayaking.

**Structured Assessments for Sea Kayaking: *Body, Boat, Blade***

The risk instrument discussed in this section was developed by expert paddlers who operated a commercial training and outfitting business (Body, Boat, Blade) in the state of Washington. The tool consists of a multi-item reference list of potential risk factors (e.g., weather, sea state, characteristics of the group) that are assessed prior to all classes and trips (see Figure 1, following page). The results of the assessment are applied to a graphic organizer that provides a visual summary of the status of each risk element (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Risk Factors


Figure 2. Example visual representation of plotted risk factors




In practice, each item is assessed and then plotted on one of the three color-coded categories of risk: if the risk item is of no concern on the day of assessment, it is plotted in the green or "go" circle; if it is a cause for concern, it may be plotted in the yellow or "caution" circle; and if a factor is considered dangerous, it would be plotted in the red bullseye and considered unsafe.

The primary advantages of this model are: 1) the comprehensive listing of potential risk factors that need to be assessed; 2) the ability to distinguish among factors that may be given the same broad classification (i.e., some "caution" factors may be more concerning than other caution items, and hence would be plotted in the yellow band, but closer to the red bullseye); and 3) the flexibility to apply it in different ways depending on the nature of the group. For example, four-foot surf might be assessed in the green for a group of highly-skilled paddlers, but might be result in a red assessment for beginners.

The primary disadvantage is that: the assessment results do not lead to an indicated decision regarding go/no go. For example, how many, or which, items need to be in the red before the trip/class is called off or moved to a different venue? The lack of structure in this regard means that professional judgment still plays an important role in the use of this tool. Nonetheless, the mandate to consider a whole range of (written) risk factors and plot them on a diagram introduces important elements of structure and accountability.

***Tsunami Rangers Structured Assessment***

The Tsunami Rangers are a northern California group of highly-skilled paddlers whose primary purpose is to paddle in extreme conditions (large Pacific waves crashing into even larger rocks and cliffs). Taking a cue from the white-water river classification system, they developed a risk assessment and classification tool for use on the ocean. Called the Sea Conditions Rating System, it assigns points to each of 10 categories of risk (e.g., wave height, water temperature). See Figure 3, following page.

Figure 3. Sea Conditions Rating System

| Risk Factor | Scoring | Max Points | Item Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Water Temperature | 1 pt for each degree below 72 | 40 | |
| Wind Speed | 1 pt for each mph of speed | 50 | |
| Wave Height | 2 pts per vertical wave foot | 40 | |
| Swim Distance to Safety | 1 pt per 100 meters | 20 | |
| Breaking Waves | 30 pts if waves are breaking | 30 | |
| Rock Garden | 20 pts if paddling in rocks | 20 | |
| Sea Cave | 20 pts if entering a cave | 20 | |
| Night | 20 pts if paddling at night | 20 | |
| Fog | Up to 20 pts if fog is dense | 20 | |
| Other Threats | 10 pts for each additional danger e.g. shipping lanes, sharks | 30 | |
| **TOTAL SCORE** | | | |

**RISK CLASSIFICATION** (divide total score by 20)

| Class | Score | Difficulty/ Risk | Skill Level Required | Check final classification |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | 0 – 1.9 | Low to Moderate | Moderate | |
| II | 2.0 – 2.9 | Moderate | Intermediate | |
| III | 3.0 – 3.9 | High | Advanced | |
| IV | 4.0 – 4.9 | Extreme | Advanced + | |
| V | 5.0 – 5.9 | Very Extreme - life threatening | Expert | |
| VI | 6.0 + | Impossible - death likely | Expert + | |

The total number of points determines the overall risk level, which is then classified into one of six ascending levels of risk. The risk categories range from Class I (moderate risk) to Class 6 (extreme risk; loss of life possible in an accident). The 10 categories are differentially weighted, with the most important factors given higher point values. The tool is used to guide go/no go decisions and to indicate the most appropriate match between degree of risk and paddler skills.

The Sea Conditions Rating System (SCRS) is a highly structured risk instrument that not only requires consistent attention to key risk variables, but also uses a classification system that directly informs go/no go decisions and the match between conditions and paddler skills. However, it also incorporates professional judgment in that the SCRS is completed by multiple members of the group. They then compare scores and, if there are scoring differences, the group discusses the risk issues until consensus is reached.

**Conclusion**

The assessment of risk is a major concern for outdoor education and adventure programs due to the potential costs of accidents for people and programs. Having good risk assessment tools is a necessity. Yet adventure programs rely almost exclusively on the professional judgment of staff to assess risk. While professional judgment may be effective for highly trained and experienced staff, many staff have somewhat limited training and few years of experience. Moreover, professional judgment is highly subjective and is susceptible to error due to Type I thinking and associated heuristics and biases.

The implementation of structured tools to assess risk in other fields has resulted in greater consistency and objectivity in the assessment process. I argue that similar benefits would accrue to outdoor programs were they to develop, test, and implement structured risk assessment instruments.

This is not to suggest that structured assessments should replace professional judgment. Structured tools have no relevance when staff need to quickly assess and act to prevent, or respond to, potential incidents while in the field. However, such tools can provide considerable benefit in terms of objectivity and consistency when making "go/no go" determinations at the beginning of a trip or class, as well as at key decision points during the day. Professional judgment has a role to play at these decision points as well, since there is a need to review and consider the results of any structured assessment prior to making a final decision.

## Upcoming Events

| Dates | Event | Location | Sponsor | Website/Contact |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| March 2 - 6 | Texas Gulf Coast Symposium | Galveston, TX | Kayaking Texas | Texas Symposium |
| July 15-19 | Great Lakes Symposium | Grand Marais MI | Power of Water | Greatlakesseakayaksymposium.net |
| Sept. 11 - 13 | Bay of Fundy Symposium | Argyle, Nova Scotia | Chris Lockyear | Bofsks.com |
| Sept 25-27 | Kiptopeke Symposium | Cape Charles VA | Cross Currents | Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com |
| Oct. 9 - 11 | Delmarva Paddlers Retreat | Lewes DE | Qajaq USA | Delmarvapaddlersretreat.org |
| Oct. 19 - 21 | Ocean Gathering | Tybee Island GA | Sea Kayak Georgia | Sea Kayak Georgia Paddle Tybee Kayak, SUP, Canoe, Yoga |

# Photos of the Month

Meeting in Cornwall

*Photo: Rupert Kirkwood*

# Photos of the Month

Isle of Hope, GA

*Photo: Jean Wunder*

# Photos of the Month

Rangeley Lake, ME

*Photo: Lisa Giguere*

# Mayday, Mayday, Mayday: VHF Distress Calls

*Scott Brown*

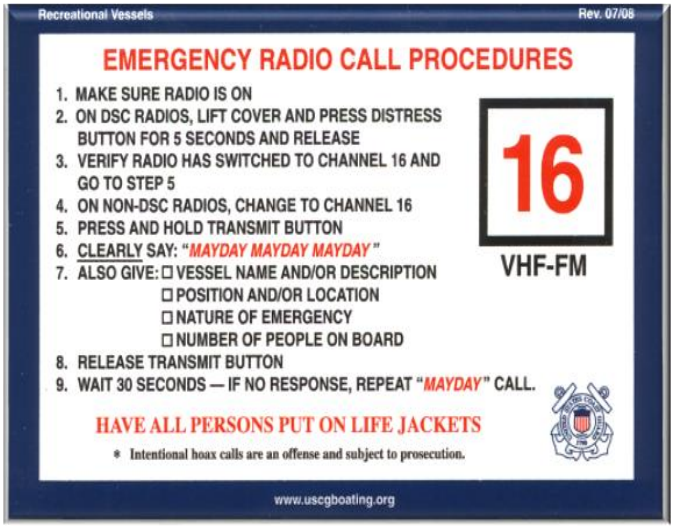
*Note: This article originally appeared in the March 2019 issue of Coastbusters. It's high relevance makes it well worth repeating.*

"Mayday, Mayday, Mayday this is Kayaker 3, Kayaker 3, Kayaker 3." This is a call we all hope we will not have to make on an outing with our group. But even the best plans can encounter challenges that cannot be overcome by our planning, risk mitigation, and foresight. When conditions exceed our abilities to manage the situation with the resources we have, we need to call for assistance. Weather, health issues and equipment failures may warrant a distress call using Channel 16 on your marine VHF radio. In this article, we'll discuss the mechanics of the Mayday call, and introduce the other types of maritime calls that can alert others to a problem or provide situational awareness during our paddles.

## Call Sequence and Content

Since its inception in 1923, Mayday is the international word used to make a distress call via radio communications. It is to be used in situations that represent an ***immediate threat*** to the life of a person or the safety of a boat. The sequence in which Mayday call information is transmitted ensures a standardized process for relaying key information in the fewest radio transmissions. The word Mayday repeated three times initiates the distress call. It alerts all monitoring stations to prepare to copy the subsequent information in order to render assistance if in proximity, or relay the call if necessary.

*Figure 1. Mayday Call Procedure; USCG Auxiliary*

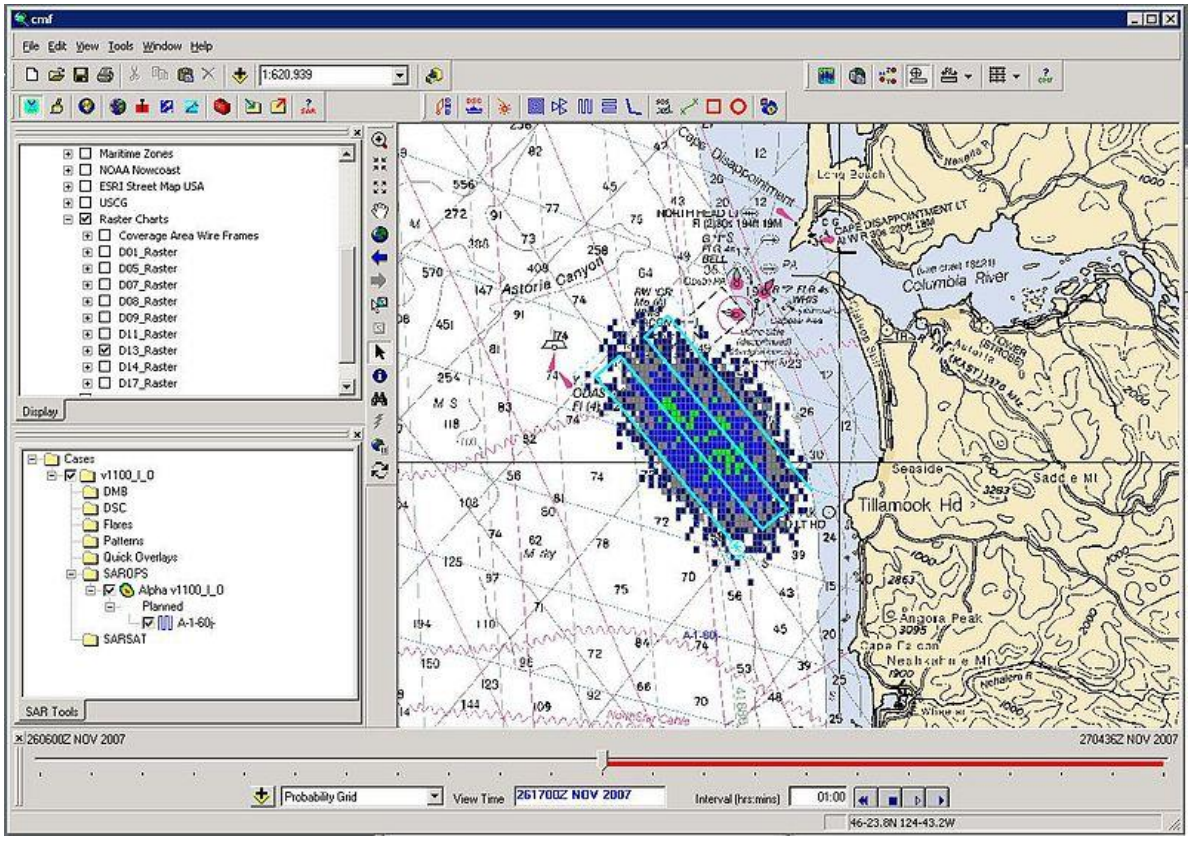



The Mayday Call is initiated on Channel 16. The call begins with saying Mayday clearly and slowly three times. "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday." This alerts all stations monitoring Channel 16 to avoid making routine calls and to prepare to copy the Mayday call transmission.

The second step after the Mayday transmission is the name of your vessel. A best practice recognized by the US Coast Guard for paddle craft is to use the type craft (e.g., kayaker) and the number of people in your group (e.g., five). So, we would send Kayaker 5 three times e.g. "*this is Kayaker 5, Kayaker 5, Kayaker 5."*

The next segment of the call is your position. This is the most important segment of the transmission.

*Figure 2. USCG SAROPS Screenshot Source: USCG*




This can be a latitude/longitude coordinates from a GPS or from your chart, or a bearing and distance to a known point. Example: "*We are 2 ½ miles south of the Morris Island Lighthouse. The lighthouse is on a bearing of 010 magnetic from our position."*

This information is then placed into a computer modeling system (SAROPS; See Figure 2 above) to develop the most probable area for finding you using a deliberate search pattern. Again, ***location*** is the most important transmission you will make during the call sequence.

The nature of distress is the fourth segment of the call. Provide the most pertinent information during the call. This will help the search and rescue (SAR) responders organize the equipment they'll need (e.g. boats, aircraft). The information might be the nature of a paddler's illness or the environmental factor that is endangering the group.

*Example 1: "We have a 55 year-old man complaining of severe chest pains." Example 2: "We are approximately 1 mile off of Oregon Inlet and the winds are blowing us out to sea."*

This information focuses the responders to the immediate need of the paddlers. Detailed information will be requested in subsequent transmissions. More on this later.

The fifth segment of the transmission is type and description of the vessel(s). For kayakers we should broadcast the number of kayaks and the colors. This is transmitted as *"we are in 5 kayaks, 3 white and 2 red in color."* This assists the observers in their aerial or surface scans and ensures they have identified the correct vessel/party.

The final segment of the transmission is the number of people on board. This transmission is "*We are a*

*group of 5 kayakers all wearing PFDs."* I add the wearing of PFDs since the USCG will - in their response to this call – ask you to confirm all personnel are wearing lifejackets. The SAR team is looking to account for everyone. Is everyone in the group located together? Has the group been separated? And most importantly, at the completion of the rescue, do they have everyone?

The word that closes the Mayday transmission is *"Over."* Wait for a response. If you do not receive a response repeat the process. Radio range or atmospheric conditions may prevent you receiving a response. Continue to transmit until you have made contact. The USCG SAR 21 communications system is optimized to receive a 1 watt signal from 6' above the surface out to 20 nautical miles. We sit a bit lower in a kayak and it may require assistance from another vessel to relay our call. A delay in response from the USCG or other SAR asset may trigger another vessel to respond directly or assist with a Mayday relay.

Recall that the Mayday call requires everyone monitoring the transmission to copy the information being provided. This will enable another vessel to relay your situation. After making contact with the USCG, they will maintain contact with you until you are rescued. Information on SAR vessel/aircraft launch and estimated time of arrival or other vessels responding will be provided.

The USCG station will direct you to another channel to maintain communications and gather additional information to assist in the rescue. This information may include the types of signal devices you may have, details about the casualty, food and water provisions, and wind, current and sea conditions at your location. Some of this information will mirror what you included in your float plan for equipment. If you filed a float plan via the USCG Float Plan App this will greatly benefit the SAR team.

So here is the Mayday call with all of the segments placed together:

1. Mayday, Mayday, Mayday
2. This is Kayaker 5, Kayaker 5, Kayaker 5
3. Our position is 2.5 miles south of Morris Island Lighthouse on a bearing of 010 Magnetic
4. We have a 55-year-old man complaining of severe chest pains.
5. We are in 5 kayaks, 3 white and 2 red..
6. We are all wearing PFDs.
7. Over

**Practical tips**

Pretty simple right? There are some tips and tricks to this process. The first is when in doubt call early for assistance. Do not let a bad situation deteriorate to a point that it places additional stress or risk on your group or hampers the ability of SAR assets to respond in a timely manner.

Slow is smooth – smooth is fast. In most cases take time to prepare the transmission. Compose the call in advance so you can transmit each segment smoothly and accurately. Gather additional information that may assist in subsequent calls.

*Coasties retrieving a swimmer. Photo: Laurie Collins*

Use the resources of the entire group. Use more than one radio to ensure the person on the call is transmitting and the transmission is clear. The person monitoring should not be next to the person making the transmission and should have their volume down to an acceptable level to hear but not interfere.

Patience – the deployment of SAR assets or a Good Samaritan responding will take some time. Keep updating changes in your situation. If you are leading the group, ensure everyone is engaged. Also make sure you have 360-degree observation and are scanning for rescuers.

**Pan-Pan and Securite**

Two other calls we can use to assist in either providing information to SAR agencies or other mariners is the Pan-Pan (pronounced pahn-pahn) call and the Securite (pronounced say-cure-eh-tay) call.

The Pan-Pan call is an ***urgency*** call but one that is a step less serious than May Day. It is a notification that the safety of a person or vessel is in jeopardy and, while the situation is not immediately life-threatening, it could escalate into a May Day call. Making the call alerts SAR agencies and other boats and allows them to track the vessel that's in trouble. These are usually mechanical issues on larger vessels, such as taking on water, or a boat adrift due to engine failure.

Sea kayakers might make this call if towing a seasick paddler back to shore in sea state 3 or 4: *Pan- Pan. Pan-Pan. Pan-Pan. This is kayaker 7, kayaker 7, kayaker 7. We are two nautical miles offshore with a magnetic bearing of 020 to Johnson Point. We have a sea sick paddler and are towing him back to shore. We have a head wind of 15 kts. We assess we can make the beach but if conditions deteriorate or we cannot make it, we may need to call for assistance.*

Pan-Pan might also be used if a paddler capsized in a busy inlet and a rescue was being undertaken by the other paddlers. A third example involves an injured paddler (e.g. shoulder separation) who will require urgent medical attention once on shore. The pan-pan call might be a request for an ambulance to meet the group at the take out.

A Securite call is ***navigation safety alert*** used to provide situational awareness to other mariners. It might involve an approaching storm, a large amount of debris in a channel, or a boat that is adrift and is unable to maneuver near other traffic. For sea kayakers, this is a good call to make when crossing busy shipping channels under limited visibility or conducting a night paddle. An example Securite call for a night paddle (or fog) would be transmitted as follows:

*Securite, Securite, Securite. This is Kayaker 7, kayaker 7, kayaker 7. We are a group of seven kayakers departing Demetre Park for the Charleston Battery. Our route is direct via the red number 2 light.*

**Practice It!**

Everyone who has ever had to make a Mayday call probably never thought they would have to do it. Maybe you won't; but maybe you will. Given the stakes, preparing for that possibility makes sense. Learn the different types of calls. Learn the sequence. Practice making calls with friends (with the radio off) at the put-in or in your living room. It may feel awkward at first, but better that than not knowing what to do when you really need it!

*Transfer injured paddler to rescue boat. Photo: Rick Wiebush*

# Winners of the 2026 Cross Currents Calendar Contest

*Rick Wiebush*

Every year we hold a contest to select photos for inclusion in the following year's Cross Currents calendar. For the 2026 contest, we received 86 photos from 35 different photographers. They represented 12 states and three different countries. The photos were reviewed and voted on by a panel of 11 judges who selected their favorites – not easy to do! - during two rounds of judging. 100 calendars are sent free to: 1) the winners and 2) long-term Cross Currents customers.

Thank you to this year's judges: Ken Fandetti, Cathy Smith, Laurie Collins, Kathryn Lapolla, Ricardo Stewart, Scott Winget, Bea Weinberger, Chris Baum, Wendy Adams and Jean Wunder. The following pages show the 13 winning photos (12 months + cover), the winning photographer, and where the photographer is from. Congratulations to the winners and thanks to all who participated!

***Note: a few copies of the calendar are still available. $25 includes shipping (at cost). Contact Rick at rwiebush@gmail.com***

*Apostle Islands, WI. Photo: Gilbert Morris (IN)*

*Marin Headlands, CA. Photo: Bill Vonnegut (CA)*

*Outer Banks, NC. Photo: Sherry Roy (NC)*

*Jug Bay, MD. Photo: Robert Tolley (VA)*


*Isle Au Haut, ME. Photo : Ron McDonald (MD)*

*Okefenokee Swamp, GA. Photo : Ricardo Stewart (MD)*


*Pacific Baja. Photo: Beth Emery (CT)*


*Pavilion Key, Everglades  Photo: Brooke Longval (FL)*

*Arctic Circle, West Greenland  Photo: Uncommon Adventures (MI)*

*Sermilik Fjord, East Greenland. Photo: Anne Hornsby (MD)*

*Pacific Coast, Baja. Photo: Ricardo Stewart (MD)*

*Pacific Baja. Photo: Bill Vonnegut*


*Lion's Head, Ontario. Photo: Bill Gil Morris (IN)*

# In the Wake of York:
## A Missouri River Story

*Janina Edwards*


*The Blackpaddler group. Photo courtesy of Outdoor Afro*

White-capped water churned around me. My kayak was pinned against a rock, the result of missing the downward facing 'V.' I was going under. With no other choice, I took a deep breath and let go.

Upside and underwater, my oxygen-deprived brain remembered my instructor's earlier comments. I tucked my head. My hands traced the cockpit, grabbed the loop of my skirt, and pulled hard. I felt a snap as the skirt released. Gravity took over. My body dropped out of the boat, and I scrabbled to the surface, gasping for air. The Cartecay River taketh and the Cartecay giveth back.

"Good job!" a nearby voice approved. "You okay?" Who is this guy? My waterlogged brain pondered the question. *Mike. His name was Mike*. I nodded, my soaked locs sloshing water down my face, the skirt flapping around me like a rubber tutu. "Your paddle's over there. Let's…" He prattled on, dragging my water-logged boat toward the sand bar.

**Why am I here?**

By May 2021, my optimism that the pandemic would be a short-lived inconvenience was long gone. But with it came a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Outdoor Afro holds an annual retreat and training where select volunteer leaders can meet, hone skills and explore connections to Black history alongside outdoor professionals. I became an Outdoor Afro volunteer leader in 2020 and had yet to meet volunteer leaders from other networks in person. The pandemic canceled those plans two years in a row. But in September 2021, the not-for-profit organization would host the Blackpaddle Expedition, an opportunity to kayak 100-plus miles of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers with other Outdoor Afro leaders. I applied and was accepted.

I couldn't wait. In just four months, I would join fourteen Black kayakers for our adventure. There were just a few teeny tiny tasks to complete first: Learn how to kayak, learn something about York, learn camping skills—or, at the very least, how to pitch my tent.

**Learn Something About York**

Lewis & Clark had never been more than static historical names briefly mentioned in elementary school. But Merriwether Lewis and William Clark led me to York. York, single-named, like Prince, Drake, or Nas. York, barely known and hardly acknowledged. York, the enslaved personal servant to William Clark, a Kentuckian by birth and York's owner. They didn't mention that in history class. I learned York went on the 1804 Lewis & Clark Expedition, officially the Corps of Discovery, commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the newly purchased northwest territory.

"*…As the journals of the expedition testify, this first Black man to cross the continent North of Mexico played a meaningful role in one of the most notable explorations in history*."

The Corps of Discovery left with forty men from St. Louis, Missouri, in May 1804, attaining the Missouri River for hundreds of miles. The expedition ended two years later when they retraced the same route, moving downstream. They'd reduced to 31 men and gained 1 woman, Sacajawea

Cuddled in a blanket at home, reading *In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific with Lewis and Clark* by Robert B. Betts, I highlighted key points to share with my fellow Blackpaddlers. Depending upon who tells the story and when, York is either a buffoon (Caucasian writers in the 1800s) or the Black man who single-handedly saved the entire expedition (revisionist historians of the 1960s).

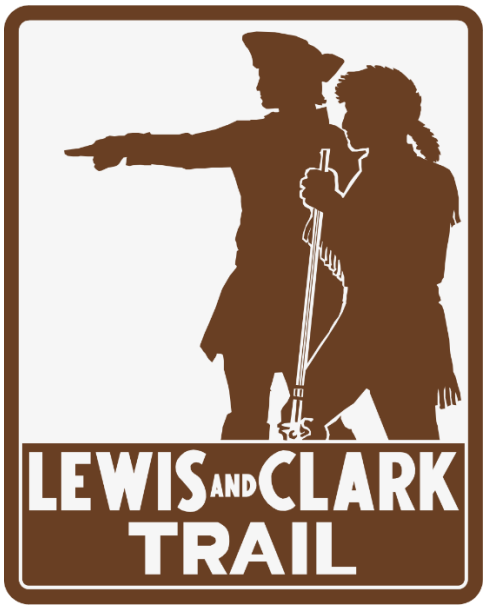
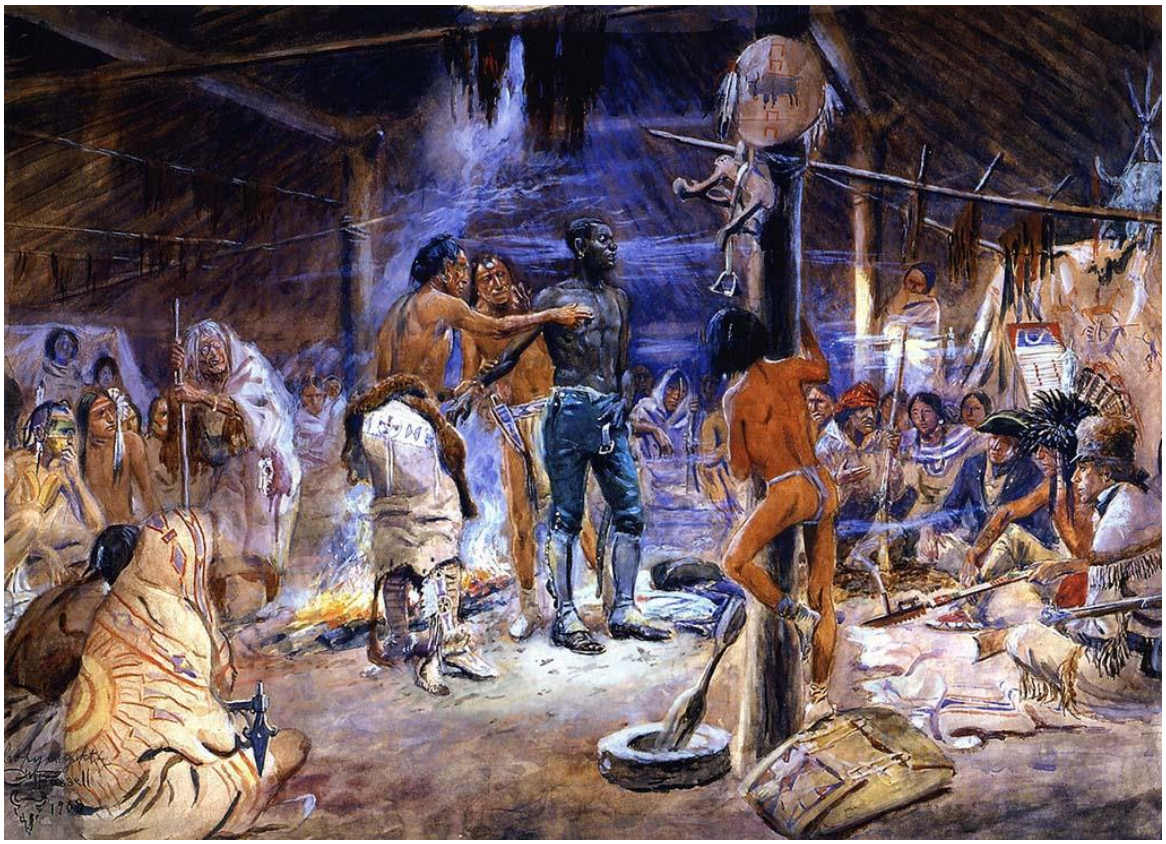


*Photo courtesy of Montana Dept. Transportation*

I struggled to admire Lewis and Clark for their epic journey, yet with York, the historical had become personal. I learned I'm angry at Lewis and Clark. Upon the expedition's completion, Lewis didn't include York's name when he submitted his report to President Jefferson. Why would he?

York, this reputedly large, dark-skinned Black man, was enslaved to a White power system. Yet Clark, in particular, earned my ire. During the expedition, York had a measure of freedom no ordinary slave could have experienced. Yet Clark expected York to "assume the cloak of inferiority and subservience toward his white betters" upon returning home. He punished York for not submitting, hiring him out to a harsh master and keeping York away from his wife.



*York in the Camp of the Mandans. Painting by Charles M. Russell.*

Why would I expect Clark to recognize York's humanity? I shouldn't expect Clark, the slave owner, to be better than his peers. Yet I was disappointed and angry that the broader context of the expedition was less known and that York remained generally invisible.

**Learn to Camp**

I hadn't camped since the Girl Scouts at least 45 years ago. I wasn't sure I'd be an asset in Missouri, but I didn't want to be a liability either. So, I created a test for myself: Go camping overnight.

My research said backpacking and kayak camping are similar: everything you want on your journey must fit in your pack or boat. So, I set up a mini backpacking trip. I reserved a campsite at F.D. Roosevelt State Park, about two hours from my house. Had I packed too much? Could I really put up the tent myself? I'd done it successfully in my backyard, but would it work out here? I wouldn't be able to run inside if I forgot something. Could I boil water on my little camp stove? My anxieties about Blackpaddle bubbled up in myriad questions and self-doubt.

I left in the early afternoon and parked my car at the lot nearest to my campsite. For an hour or so, I hiked two and a half miles of hills and valleys, crossed and recrossed a creek. My shoulders ached from the strain of the straps. Did I have the stamina for the goal I'd set? Would I have the stamina for the Missouri trip in another month?

Arriving at my site, I dumped the pack to the ground. I could hear the nearby creek. Within the hour, my two-person tent stood solidly—the footprint secured, the main section taut and pegged precisely, the fly sheet neatly rolled back. Using my camp stove, I boiled water and poured it into an insulated pouch with freeze-dried food.

Everything had gone according to plan. Maybe I should give myself some credit. Maybe I have the camping skills necessary to do Missouri. Exhausted, I lay down to take a nap.

*You know what? You passed the test. You don't have to spend the night—you can leave.*

I couldn't decide if those thoughts were a cop-out or sound logic. I was nervous but not scared. Physically, I was tired; I was also tired of doubting myself. But I decided to give myself credit. I'd passed the test. What would spending the night prove? Within 20 minutes, I'd started the trek back to the car.

*I got this!*

**On the Missouri: Who *Are* You?**

I'd arranged to meet the rest of the Blackpaddle group at our starting point in Hermann, Missouri. I was celebrating my just-passed 60th birthday. Standing on the boat ramp, I watched the Missouri River flow toward its confluence with the Mississippi. Throughout the town were signs acknowledging Lewis & Clark, but never York. Or, for that matter, the other Corps of Discovery crew members. A light breeze rumpled my locs. I imagined my kayak slicing into the river. The current would carry me.

The Christopher S. Bond Bridge, which crosses the Missouri River in Hermann, is 2,231.3 feet long. The river, also known as The Big Muddy (a name inspired by the enormous loads of sediment it pushes), is narrower than it was during the Corps of Discovery. Still, our trip leader used binoculars to read the mileage markers on the riverbanks, but I suspect they're several feet wide up close.

The river sections we traversed were generally Class I, commercial and urban. Trees, grasses, and bluffs border the edges, and parts are exceptionally beautiful. There was no army of kayaks, tubes, paddleboards, or anglers. Instead, we dodged huge barges and tugboats.

Wing dams or dikes jut out approximately every 1,500 feet, an "improvement" courtesy of the Army Corps of Engineers, inserted after World War I. On the positive, the dikes create an express lane, compressing the current into a narrower, deeper river than the Missouri of the 1800s. Fisherman like to drop their lines in the dike eddies. But the dikes are also a hazard that my group cautiously avoided.

Fifteen Black people paddling and camping down the Missouri draws some attention. Fortunately, the attention was benign—mostly curiosity and fascination—much like York might have experienced. The cover of *In Search of York* features an imagined image of the man. (There are no known photographs of him.) He stands shirtless, being examined by two Native Americans while others look on. York was a rarity wherever he went. Sometimes, I felt that way, too.

More than once, we had boaters come near us on the water. They called out, "Where are you from?" A lone Black woman walking her dog was so intrigued she told her husband about us when she got home. He sped down to the boat ramp on a bike 30 minutes later, delighted to see us and full of questions about who we were and what we were doing. Like him, strangers would inquire, "Who are you?" *Who were we?* The answer was complicated. We were fifteen individual Black outdoor leaders from all around the United States who had come together in honor of York.

***Fifteen Black people paddling and camping down the Missouri draws some attention***

*Launching on the Missouri. Photo: Janina Edwards*

**York!**

On the second day, we stopped for lunch in St. Charles, Missouri. The Lewis & Clark Boat House and Museum beckoned. Their exhibits include a replica keelboat and pirogue built to match the vessels of the Corps of Discovery expedition. I got tired just imagining hauling those upstream.

At the bookshop, I asked, "Do you have anything about York?" "Yes!" The shop clerk grinned at me. "Normally we have copies of the book In Search of York." "I've already got that one. Do you have anything else?" "Umm." She looked around. "We have this!"

Delighted, the clerk held up a cloth York doll dressed in soft buckskin clothes and boots. Smiling beatifically, his hair crimped close, York held his trusty musket in one hand, a knife and a small purse on his waist belt.

"I'll take it."

When I showed my group the prize, my friends bought them out of York dolls!

**On to St. Louis**

The third day dawned bright and beautiful on the sandbar of Johnson Island, but somewhere in there the elements turned against us. The waters ticked up to Class II/III. Wearing my poncho and gloves, I

*York doll. Photo: Mosade Edwards*

*St. Louis arch. Photo: Janina Edwards*

fought against winds and rain that wanted to kick us upstream. Eventually, the rain stopped; we continued to paddle until Sioux Passage Park, our camp for the night.

On the fourth day, we reached the confluence, where the Big Muddy melds into the misi-ziibi, or Mississippi—The Great River. The final twenty-five miles included a portage over the Chain of Rocks, a dangerous low-head dam. A few more hours and we triumphantly hit our take out at Gateway National Arch.

The Arch is a memorial to St. Louis's role in the westward expansion of the United States during the nineteenth century. It commemorates Thomas Jefferson's expansionist vision and the inhabitants of the West who helped shape its history.

But it's also a memorial to Dred and Harriet Scott, who sued for their freedom in the Old Courthouse in St. Louis. The Dred Scott case is infamous in U.S. History for the Supreme Court's 1857 decision that, as enslaved persons, the Scotts "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

The next day, I boarded my flight. As the plane rose, the Mississippi and Missouri rivers twined through the landscape below. I could see myself in their curves and twists. I could feel their surges and draws in my bones because I had been in them and matched their strides. Since that trip, I've continued to kayak, becoming an ACA L2 certified instructor. For me, this trip seeded a deep connection to rivers and a love of kayaking, connected to Black history that I'd never imagined previously.

With my York doll on my lap, I imagined him too, looking back on the freedom he had experienced, if only for the two years of the expedition. Maybe he could see how things had changed since his time. Maybe he could see the path he had inspired by his mere presence in history, publicly acknowledged or not.

*The Missouri Photo: Janina Edwards*

# Cross Currents Winter Trips: Florida

*Anclote Key Lighthouse. Photo: Florida Rambler*

*Okefenokee Swamp. Photo: Riccardo Stewart*

## Florida Sun Coast Feb. 28 – Mar. 7, 2026

Location: Dunedin, FL area
Guides/Instructors: Rick Wiebush
Cost: $795 + housing (about $65 night pp)

We're returning to one of our favorite areas on the Gulf Coast of Florida to explore islands ringed with white sandy beaches, while enjoying air temps in the 80's. This will be a week of house-based day trips to places like Anclote Key, Ft. DeSoto, Caladesi and Honeymoon Islands. Also this year for the first time, we'll be doing an exciting and sometimes wild crossing from Ft. DeSoto to Egmont Key.

*Fort DeSoto. Photo: Pinterest*

## Florida's First Coast March 7 – 14

Location: Jacksonville area
Guide/Instructor: Rick Wiebush
Cost: $795 + housing (about $65/night pp)

Join us in one of our favorite areas in north Florida to explore barrier islands and remote rivers, while enjoying air temps in the 70's. It's the diversity of venues that I really like. This will be a week of house-based day trips to places like Cumberland Island, St. Augustine, the St. Mary's River, the Okefenokee Swamp and more. Arrive Sat. night, March 7. Paddle six days. Depart Sat., March 14

*Remote Upper St. Mary's River. Forms the GA/FL border*

## Contributors

***Scott Brown*** **- is an ACA L4 Instructor who lives in Charleston and specializes in sea kayak trip planning, risk management, and navigation. Scott organizes an annual cross-training event with Charleston area sea kayakers and the U.S. Coast Guard.**

***Janina Edwards*** **– is an ACA L2 instructor who lives in Georgia. Her memoir and personal essays have appeared in Paddle Georgia 2022: Chattahoochee Journey Starts Generational Love Affair With Rivers, The Ethel, the National Parks website, and NRS Duct Tape Diaries. She is currently working on her book Be Wise: A Daughter's Reluctant Journey through Dementia.**

***Kerry Kirk Pflugh*** **- is an L3 Instructor and was for several years the President of the Jersey Shore Sea Kayaking Association (JSSKA). Kerry lives in northern New Jersey.**

***Rick Wiebush*** **- runs *Cross Currents Sea Kayaking* and is the editor of *Coastbusters*. He is an ACA L2 IT and British Canoeing 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 photographs. We are interested in receiving submissions from all paddlers.**

**Articles should be limited to about 1,500 – 2,000 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**