

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

January 2021

Rocks and Ledges: Pacific Baja

Rick Wiebush

The landscape is stunning: mountains dropping down into the Pacific; rock spires and boulders strewn about the sea, the ocean surging, smashing huge waves and spray into the cliffy shore.

The paddling is thrilling, challenging and, depending on the size of the swell, can be pretty scary. There are arches and caves to explore, always with an eye toward what that next set might be bringing. There are pour-overs requiring good

timing. There are chutes to shoot – streams of sea funneled through sinuous, walled passages.

Since 2016, Cross Currents has sponsored an annual trip to the Pacific side of Baja, led by Jen Kleck. There have been about 50 people who have done it with us. Every single one of them said it is an absolutely unforgettable trip.

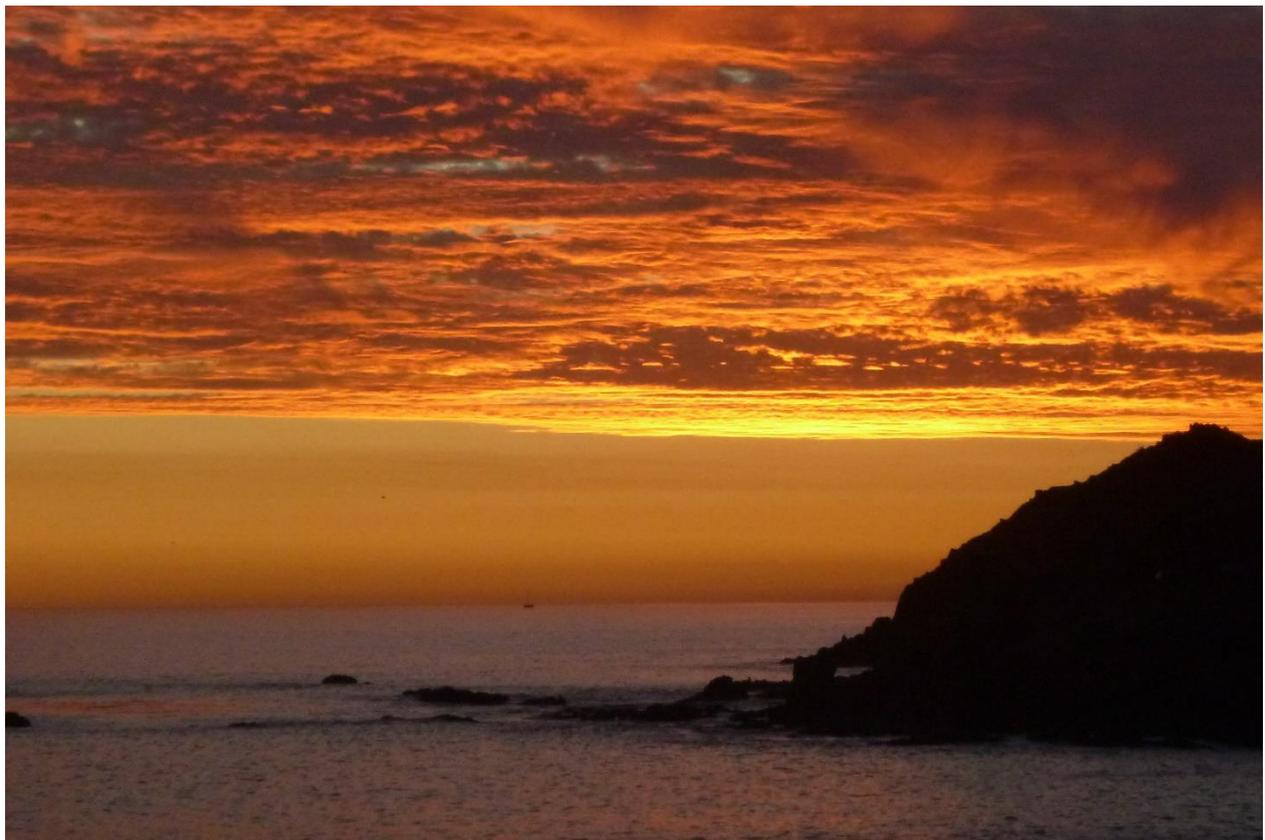
As you might expect, there are stories to tell, and this photo essay tells a few of them.



Near Punta Banda, Baja. Photo: Victor Leon



Sunrise: Punta Bonda from the lighthouse 3 nm offshore. Photo: Rick Wiebush



Sunset at La Bufadora

On the very first day, we go to one of the most fun spots – the blowhole at La Bufadora. Here, the swell rolls down through a rock alley, slices through a slot in the back wall and explodes with a BOOOOM, sending a plume of spray hundreds of feet into the air. Within seconds, the smashed wave

surges back out toward the sea, creating a foamy green sea kayak elevator as the water surges up and down the sides of the rocky alley. The goal for a paddler is to get as deep as possible into the slot, as close to the exploding wall as one dares. The tourists watching from high above “ooh” and “aah”, and cheer you on.



The blowhole exploding. Photo: I forget



Jen Kleck in La Bufadora white water. Photo: Nate Hansen

The shoreline is a paddler's playground. So much so that we spend entire days paddling no more than a mile or two from the put-in. There are constantly new features to explore and play with, whether rock gardens, chutes, pour overs, or caves.

We stop, we assess what the waves and water are doing when they interact with the rock, and decide whether to go for it or not. If yes, we can spend an hour at any particular play spot, each of us taking turns running into, through, or over the feature.



The Baja trip is one of the highlights of my kayaking experiences. My favorite memory is the camaraderie when we're all circling through a pour-over, cheering each other on, laughing, gasping at a close call and generally enjoying the experience of kayaking together in a way that develops even stronger bonds. It's a shared joy that is uniquely Baja.

- Tom Noffsinger



Running a big ass pour-over. Photo: Victor Leon

The Suck

If you want to ride the pour over, you have to face the suck. At the feature, the rhythm of the upcoming swell draws the water back and exposes the rock face in front of you. That's the suck. You feel the backwards tug on your boat. It is a little intimidating looking at the wall of rock.

But it's all in the timing. Blow the timing and you won't get the ride. So you wait. You hold position at the rock as the water drags back. You stare down the rock. You are concentrating. Maybe it's your first time. Seconds slow and your whole body wants to go. Is it now? The bottom of the rock appears, which means it's likely to be a big ride.

Just a supple second more as time suspends. There; the hint of a lift at the back of your boat. The shushing sound of the wave arriving behind you. The power and motion is in that wave. You have to grab that power and GO!

- Jaclin Gilbert



Heather Heller (top) and Laurie Collins (bottom) running chutes. Photos: Victor Leon



The ultimate feature may be the Slot of Boom. The slot faces the ocean. Swell comes. Hits the slot. Gets concentrated. Curls along the sides. Rises up. Looms above you. Crests. Grabs at your gut. You power up into it. Breaks. Smashes you in the face. Drives you back 20 feet. Swirls beneath you. Sends white, foamy rivulets flying through the air and smashes them against the walls of the slot.

So you stay there and do it again.

Related video: <https://youtu.be/u2JZ0rZJFnE>



8 ft wave cresting in the Slot of Boom. Photo: Jen Kleck



Wall of water rolls through the Slot: Photo: Jen Kleck



Slot of Boom: Breaking on your face. Photo: Jen Kleck



Slot of Boom: Sending spray everywhere. Photo: Victor Leon

One of the highlights – besides the paddling, and the scenery, and the weather, and the people – is paddling out to, and spending a night in, an old light house that sits a couple of miles offshore. It's got four bunkrooms, a propane-fueled kitchen, and an outhouse, from which, if you're lucky, you can see whales swimming by as part of their migration. It's a place to unwind, relax and maybe play a game of spoons.

The Shootout at the Lighthouse

As we paddled across the bay towards the island and the lighthouse, everyone seemed in good spirits. But the weight of what we had to do was in the air between us, adding to the humid chill. As the island loomed closer, the anxiety intensified. I couldn't shake the foreboding. We knew the legends, and heard the stories, but we came here with a task. And our attitudes about it all but required we succeed.

After a pleasant dinner of local fare, we sat around a crude table surrounded by the bare walls of what used to be the lighthouse keeper's living quarters. It was time. We got to work.

For the next two hours amid screams, cursing, broken furniture, and several minor injuries with a tiny bit of blood, we finally succeeded in what legend says no one has ever done- we beat Jen Kleck at spoons! She didn't stand a chance. As she sat in shame, we attended to our wounded.

The next day we paddled back victorious, hoping to find a cell signal so we could post it on Facebook. To this day, when the moon is right, and the wind is from the west, you can still hear her cries- "You guys cheeeeaated..."

- Ted Gormley



An ignominious de-feat. Photo: Ted Gormley



The famous outhouse at the lighthouse. Photo: Franca Cioria

Baja Aha

Lasting memories: the weathered outhouse on Isla Todos Santos. A windswept walk from the lighthouse where we would spend the night; the outhouse's slightly sun-dappled walls offering privacy on three sides and an unimpeded, spectacular view of the vast sea. Seated, with the sound of the waves crashing below at the base of the cliff, perhaps one could be forgiven for briefly feeling that she was surveying her magnificent realm.

Soon though, it struck me that I was sat there to realize my own insignificance before the awesome power of nature, which, given her whims, could whip that sea into a fury and pull me unceremoniously from my throne.

Luckily, she was in a good mood and left me to enjoy the company of my fellow paddlers on our crossing back to the mainland, where we thrilled once again riding the pour overs and navigating slots and caves. So what if I swam repeatedly because my roll decided on its own not to make this coastal trip with me? I knew my place and just how lucky I was to be there.

– Heather Heller



The view from the outhouse at the lighthouse. Photo: Franca Cioria

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Photo: Matt Heller

Emails to the Editor

Respect and Reconciliation

Hi Rick, this [Nov. 2020] is another great issue. I wanted to let you know that although I've been a bit disconnected from the paddling and teaching community this year, your Respect and Reconciliation article may be the best thing I've ever read in a paddling publication. It struck a chord with me - several, in fact - and I appreciate you writing it, the sentiment you expressed, and the recognition and respect we should give any time we venture out in a kayak, on a SUP, on a hike into the wilderness or simply biking through a park. Thanks for writing it, and for sharing.

- *Tom Noffsinger*

Thanks for passing along the Coastbusters newsletter - it's great! I'm sharing with my team now; your *Respect and Reconciliation* article resonates in a big way and fits with a growing conversation and practice at Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School.

- *Chris Washburn*

Great Coastbusters! I spend a bit of time on the Susquehanna because it's one of the closest waterways to me and is beautiful. You have inspired me to do a bit of research on the Susquehannock tribe. I've put together a couple group paddles on the river, but some education and acknowledgement of the tribe or tribes seems the proper thing to do. One of my winter projects.

- *B. G.*

Thanks, Rick. Great article on native Americans

- *Bob Adams*

Rick... I just wanted to thank you for the very compelling article you wrote Respect and Reconciliation. How very timely. I do some volunteer work for an organization called OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Instituted) based out of the University of RI. The program I have run in the past was called Kayaking Historic Wickford Harbor. I lead a group of people for a three-hour paddle around the harbor and point out various historical sites and talk about some of the history of the village. ... as I was preparing the program for 2021 it occurred to me that I was only giving participants the history of the area from the 1630's and leaving out a whole bunch of stuff about the people who lived here before Roger Williams showed up. That led me to researching what I didn't know and holy shit there was so much I didn't know. I got in touch with The Tomaqua Museum which is the only Indigenous Museum in Rhode Island and it happens to be in the town where I live. I am continuing to do my research and like your idea of incorporating acknowledgement of traditional stewards of the land in our paddling activities. Again, thanks for the article and stay well.

- *Ken Fandetti*

You do the whole kayaking community such a great service by publishing your newsletter. Keep up the good work.

- *Debbie Anderson*

Indigenous Watertrails: Reflections from the Debsconeags

Eli Walker

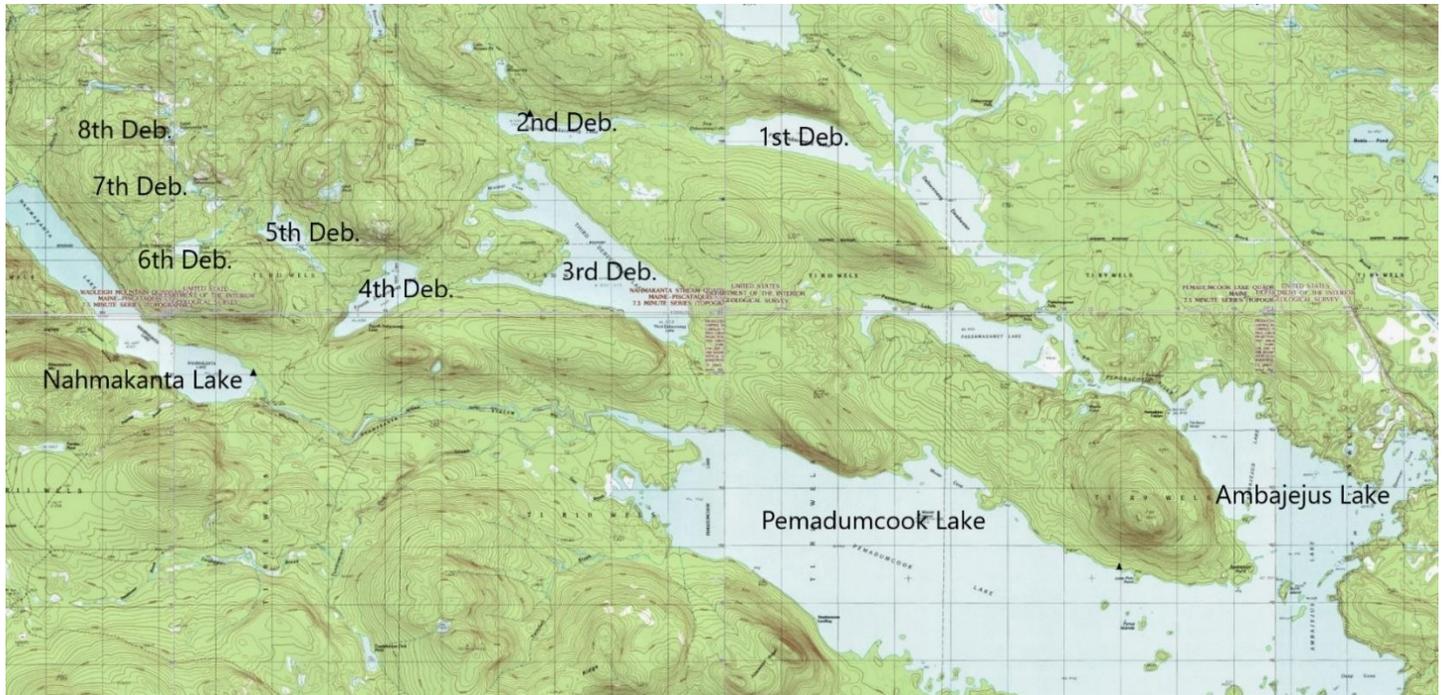
Freeze

It cannot be more than 10°F—ice forms on my boots, the gunwales of the canoe, and beneath my feet within minutes. I inch my way across Ambajejus Lake a half-mile at a time, grateful the summer tourists and camp-owners are long gone, as my attempts to regain feeling in my fingers and toes become increasingly frantic. Paddle a fraction of a mile, stop in the lee of a tiny island, dance around, eat, drink, pee. Repeat. Again. Again. Again.

I nearly turn around, tail tucked between my legs, to retreat to the comparative comfort of the car I left at the put-in. I make it three miles like this before deciding I've had enough. The layer of ice in the bottom of my boat thickens a bit each time I re-enter and becomes a mini skating rink. Cold-induced nausea sets in as I find a less than ideal spot to take shelter and eat an entire piece of cheesecake in three bites. It was packed in celebration of my 30th birthday, which is tomorrow.



Icy 3rd Debsconeag. Photo: Eli Walker



“Tomorrow” ends up being a treat, even without the cheesecake: stunning views, a calm lake, and manageable temperatures. I even see an otter! My plan for the day follows part of a Native American canoe route: paddle west on Ambajejus, which turns into Pemadumcook when it gets wide; Portage into 3rd Debsconeag, and then into 4th Debsconeag; Finally, stash the boat and walk to Nahmakanta. In the past, Native Americans either took this same route or would skip all the portages and go directly from Pemadumcook up Nahmakanta Stream to get to Nahmakanta Lake before continuing north.

Do I Really Know This Place?

I have never been right here before, but this land feels familiar. Huge eye bolts mark the points where log booms were tethered a few decades ago on their journey downriver to the paper mills. I have seen them before on other lakes and rivers. Born and raised in Maine, I keep coming back to this state despite having traveled a bit. These lakes, rivers, and mountains are my backyard and also where I cut my teeth on expedition canoeing as a teenager.

I can name most of the plants and animals in the forest, recognize birds by their songs, and navigate better in the woods than I can on the streets. I can

explain the history of logging and how the shift from water-based logging methods to truck-based methods has been critical to Maine’s recreation industry. Despite all this, I have recently begun to realize that I don’t know this place, as logging is the only history I was taught about these woods

I find myself wondering, ‘What happened before logging?’ These are the Appalachian Mountains, some of the oldest mountains in the world. They must have a story to tell. Despite my knowledge of flora, fauna, recreation, and logging, I don’t know whose ancestral land I’m on without looking it up. I don’t know what the names of these lakes mean, or what language they are in.

Penobscot Land

I am on Penobscot Ancestral Land. Yesterday I set off on foot from Nahmakanta to see 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th Debsconeags, a 12-mile roundtrip trek. This morning I walked back to 4th, and paddled east across it to the portage trail, carried back into 3rd, paddled north across it, and carried again into 2nd. My day was an exercise in transitions.

Now, at dusk, I am writing from 2nd Debsconeag Lake. Debsconeag means “the carrying place”, no



Mt. Kahtadin ("Greatest Mountain") Photo: Eli Walker

doubt because the only way to get here is to portage or bushwhack. I have bushwhacked from the north to get here with students, but this time I decided to paddle and carry in alone from the south.

These lakes meant something to the Penobscot, but I don't know what without looking. For me, they mean quiet, long nights, calm water, and lots of carrying. More carrying and walking than planned as I now realize the other portage trail out of 2nd is iced in.

After trying to break through an icy cove for fifteen minutes, I realize my efforts are futile. Instead of continuing east out of 2nd with one quick portage into 1st Debsconeag, I retrace my route back into 3rd, back into Pemadumcook, and then back to Ambajejus. My trip ends much as it began: cold, windy, and now rainy as well. At the end of Day 5, I arrive at my car as darkness sets in, soaked to the bone and frigid.



Ice bridge. Photo: Eli Walker

Place Names

When I return home, my research begins. Or perhaps it continues. Earlier this year I started creating a place-names resource for the students and staff I work with. I intended to make learning about Native Americans more relevant and accessible than it has been in the past.

In Maine, Native Americans used the waterways as their primary routes. Traveling across the land was impractical due to challenging terrain and thick woods. The names that they gave were often from the perspective of somebody traveling upriver, and they were descriptors of what they saw or experienced there. They described calm waters, good fishing grounds, rocky ledges, and more. I use the present tense here because these are still the names used today, and in many places, the descriptors are still accurate. Where the descriptors are inaccurate is where humans have changed the landscape. Dams have since turned some of these "rocky ledges" into smooth concrete barricades.

Canoe Routes

As I learn more about these lakes and rivers' names, the more I come to understand the land that I expedition through. My route through the Debsconeags made me wonder not just what the names of these places mean but also how and why the Penobscot traveled here. My research from home brings me to Fannie Hardy Eckstorm (1865-1946), a Maine author, ornithologist, and writer who spent the last part of her life researching and writing extensively on Maine's Indians.

I learn that Maine's Native American canoe routes are categorized into major routes, short routes, cut-offs, and neighborhood routes. Major routes followed the largest north-south rivers (Saco, Androscoggin, Kennebec, Penobscot, and St. John), ending in a significant town and eventually the ocean. These were used by tribal messengers and in war to communicate and move people and goods downriver with haste. Short routes were used to visit neighboring regions and people and often connected different watersheds. Cut-offs were used along the coast to avoid long expanses of ocean too dangerous

to paddle an open canoe on. Lastly, neighborhood routes didn't necessarily lead to another waterway or place, but instead to nearby hunting, trapping, or fishing areas.

Today, these routes are still paddled recreationally, but many look different. Whereas the Androscoggin River used to be the equivalent of a highway, it now averages a dam every 9 miles from its headwaters at Umbagog Lake ("clear waters") to where it meets the ocean. The section of the Androscoggin known as Pejepscot ("long, rocky rapids") is now a dam. In other areas, carries between ponds have turned into long lakes, where dams at the outflow have flooded the land upriver. Additionally, many recreational boaters do not enjoy, know how, or perhaps even have the mental or physical fitness to travel upriver and carry across the land, the way Native Americans did.

New Journeys

Learning about these routes has fueled my curiosity about ways to connect some of the waterways I want to paddle and fueled my desire to paddle Maine's entire coast in an open canoe. And yet, writing this piece makes me uneasy. In Eckstorm's introductory words from *Local Indian Place Names* (1921), she writes,

"Where do I get it from? This is one of the first questions most would ask me. I do not get it from anywhere, if you mean from what books. What I am telling you is not as yet in any book, at least in this form. The great trouble with most that has been printed so far is that it is wrong; some of it idiotic, and most of it is incorrect."

Despite my best intentions to provide factual information, my resources are limited to what other researchers and authors have discovered already. At 30, I am working to build upon an elementary understanding of the Native Americans who presently call this land their home despite being savagely removed and actively oppressed.

My short trip to the Debsconeags leaves me wanting more. I find myself forgetting about the long, dark nights and the nauseating cold. Instead, I remember the otter and the beaver, the reflections and the calm water.

I want more of this. I also want more cheesecake. More than any of that (even the cheesecake), I want to continue learning about these woods and waters and the Native American's relationship with them. I beg to borrow friends' books on canoe routes, consider adding a section to my place-names resource, and pour through Eckstorm's papers with map in hand, wondering where this journey will take me next.



The extensive Maine waterway system

Looking Back, Paddling Forward: Outdoor Expedition Participation Over the Lifespan

TA Loeffler

Ed. Note. Most of the people I paddle with are 50 or older, many are 60 + and some (no names please) are over 70! We paddle because we love it – the physical activity; being in nature (whether it’s sunny and calm or rainy and windy); the great sense of support and camaraderie we get from doing it with our friends. Although age may be getting in the way for some things, not so much with paddling; at least not yet. Yet we all know people in their 50’s and 60’s who have “graduated” to less physically demanding pursuits or who have become couch potatoes. What is it about paddlers and paddling that keeps us going strong?

That question was central to a study that I came across recently. It’s a study about people like us. I have paraphrased and liberally excerpted from it for Coastbusters. It’s an easy read; I found it really interesting; and it’s totally relevant to us. Much of it is in the paddlers’ own words.

How the Study Was Done

The study is based on the experiences of 13 people (five female, eight male) who had participated in multiple sea kayaking and/or canoeing expeditions. The average age of the people was 63, with a range from 50 – 71. The study looked at the life influences on older adults who continue to be heavily involved in paddling and other outdoor adventure activities.

Loeffler used an interesting interview approach. People brought photos with them that they had taken on their adventures. The stories connected with the photos (along with an interview guide) became the raw data. The interviews lasted 60 - 90 minutes and were recorded. Loeffler then reviewed all the tapes to identify key themes.



Old guys on an expedition. Photo: Rick Wiebush

There were three major themes identified:

- People’s interest in outdoor adventure activities started in childhood
- The nature of involvement in outdoor adventure activities changed substantially during their lives
- Several factors influenced their continued participation in paddling adventures

A Childhood Initiation

Almost all the participants said they had significant experiences as kids that pre-disposed them to continued involvement in outdoor adventure. Here is what people said:

“Linda (66) recalled exploring a nearby swamp in childhood while discussing a photograph of a forest

This is adapted from Loeffler, TA. (2016). Looking back, paddling forward: perspectives on outdoor expedition participation over the lifespan. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning* 19:2, pages 111-123.

description illustrated a deep sensory experience of the being in the swamp and undertaking an expedition:

“I felt I could almost hear the heat of the sun, which I guess was really the whirring of the insects and things like that. There would be little rustlings that you didn’t know about...it was related to the all the sounds and the smells of heat and the colors of green and the fact that the ferns were so tall. I would just lie down so no one would see me. I mean it was kind of the excitement of isolation and just this little, and maybe this is part of what makes an expedition, it’s this little tiny edge of fear. ‘

“Peter (64) put it this way, ‘We spent all of our time out behind the house in what we called the woods...we were outdoors. You were always out.’ Marty (53) commented that, ‘I think parents would be going to jail today, if they let their kids do that [now].’

Loeffler notes that: “These early outdoor experiences facilitated participants’ skill development, sense of competence, and participation in youth organizations such as Scouts and Guides. Further skill development occurred through reading outdoor and expeditionary literature and through family outdoor trips and mentors.



Starting young. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Things Change and Evolve

Now We Have Kids.

People reported that in young adulthood, they got involved in expeditioning and started doing longer, more frequent trips. That changed with jobs, and especially when they had families. But many people modified their expectations and practices (e.g. shorter, closer-to-home trips) so that they could take their kids with them.



Let’s bring the kids! Stock photo

“These participants described continuing family traditions by going out on trips with their own children, often very early in their children’s lives. Peter took his sons outdoors:

“...Almost as soon as they were born. I mean they were in diapers, well the younger one was in diapers when he was with his grandfather in the second and third picture. And they’ve been walking on their own and they climbed some of the highest tourist mountains in Austria while they were young. They were probably the youngest kids on the mountain...they were always tough and didn’t mind getting out, getting a bit damp...

“Many participants told stories of needing to learn new skills to take outdoor trips with their children such as managing portages and evaluating terrain for hiking with children. Most described a repeat of the earlier pattern of starting shorter and closer to home and progressing from car camping in a developed site to longer and more remote expeditions with their children. This phase ended once the children reached adolescence or young adulthood and left home or moved onto other interests.

Empty Nest, More Money

“Most participants reflected that their expeditionary lives became much freer in the phase following child rearing with greater time freedom and less economic constraints. Both factors combined to yield more frequent trips, longer trips, and/or more remote or exotic trips. Larry (71) described it this way:

In the past, I didn't have the money. Raising the family and starting off, having a house and so on, you just couldn't take on something like, say the Nahanni [River] that we did. That was a very expensive trip. As you get older and you get more settled, you tend to have a little more money so for me anyway, that was a big factor.

Greg concurred:

In our latter years, we tend to go further afield than we used to for longer trips. A couple of reasons, I suppose, financially is one of them. Your kids are raised, families are raised, you're on your own, you can do a little more. There's less guilt about walking away and leaving people home. I think that's really what gets people out in the outdoors anyway, is the need to explore and see what's out there that I haven't seen before...

“Linda also shared that the change in discretionary income allowed her and her husband to increase their tripping schedule once their children left home: ‘But also money. I mean no mortgage, kids are mostly settled, and I've settled into good gigs. So hey, we can afford to do this, which is for us, kind of a big part.’”

But Getting Older Looms

The study also found that as people got older several things happened: 1) they all expressed feeling lucky that they were still able to participate in expeditions; and 2) some younger ones (50's) started thinking about looming decline in physical ability and started prioritizing the trips they could/should do. In addition, older people noticed that peers they used to do things with were now reluctant to take on risk and/or were now less likely to want to put up with the discomfort of sleeping on

the ground and/or had developed physical problems that limited what they could do.

“Linda discussed the influence of changes in risk tolerance and level of adventure over her lifetime: ‘I think when I was younger I wanted more challenges, and now what's really important to me are the people and the nature part of it, other than to kill myself. It's really about seeing.’



Exhausted! Photo: Rick Wiebush

‘Harold (59) described an increasing sense of urgency related to his tripping pursuits:

And then, all of a sudden, your age creeps in, I'll be 60 next year, and then you really, you've got that little push all the time. Do it now. Don't put it off...there's always other things you should be doing, but now ..., I don't have to say that so often. So let's do it.

“Nancy (70) echoed a similar sentiment: ‘My most tough trips, in a way, have been recently... Time is not on my side. So while I'm physically able, I'm trying to do as much as I can now.’ Mary (50):

The other thing is as I get older, maybe I have to shrink my dreams, you know. I used to do, one big mountain and bigger and bigger, and then at this point, should I try, am I at that stage where, because of my physical condition, to shrink my dreams? It's very depressing to do that. It's not fun. I had a few injuries in the past two years. It slowed me down a lot. And so I don't know. [Am] I'm really at that stage? I'm thinking, thinking hard.

What Keeps Us Going

Several factors were identified that facilitated continued participation in adventure pursuits as they got older. These included the physical challenges, which were valued *because* they were challenges, but also because they contributed to fitness and a sense of well-being. Another is the social aspect, the connections with peers, the friendships developed with co-participants that provide a support network during the trips and in some cases afterwards. Finally, people experience a spiritual connection to nature through their travels.

The Physical Dimension

Larry (71) said:

... it's in the genes and it's not that you should do this, it's you want to do this. You want to do it because you're enjoying every moment, not only just the, you know, if I'm canoeing or cross-country skiing, not just the downhill part, but I do enjoy the portages. I mean to me, a canoe trip is not complete without a portage. And it's the same thing when it comes to skiing. I like to work my body. I really like to drive my body as far as I can go. When my heart rate is on bust, I'm at my happiest.

“Nancy (50), like Larry, said,

‘I still get huge pleasure out of trying to push myself physically... it's really important for me to be able to go places and scramble up rocks and go swimming to just able to be physically active. So I guess I'll keep trying as long as I can.

Wanting additional opportunities for these kinds of experiences and resultant growth has kept Nancy participating.

The Social Dimension

“Most of the participants credited the people they travel with as another factor that kept them participating in expeditions over their lifespans. Kristen remarked, ‘These trips are like my

lifeblood. Some of my closest friends come from participating in these sort of trips.’

Harold said that the social kinship parts of the trips were ‘huge’, and that it’s ‘been wonderful’ to have a group of ‘people that really like doing what I like doing’. He mentioned that when the group gets together in social situations, they often ‘refer back to the trips and what happened there’... Harry confessed:

I am now known as ‘All Wobbly,’ partly because of my [camping] chair and partly because of my freakin’ hip [he had it replaced recently], and the last trip, my back went. I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t even pull my kayak up [out of the water] that night.



The group is the thing. Photo: Rick Wiebush

The Spiritual Dimension

“Finally, along with connections to their peers, experiencing spiritual connections to nature and the landscapes they travelled through, was a very important factor in participation continuance. Greg labelled being on expeditions as heaven-like, ‘My heaven would be outdoors, probably sitting on a rock, just looking out in a pond, nothing around me, only the birds chirping or whatever, or the wind blowing slow across that pond.’ Linda described being out on expeditions as, ‘Being good for her soul’. Kyle described being outdoors as, ‘Soul connecting activity’ that had been a part of him since he was a child.”

Winning Photographs: The Cross Currents 2021 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 2021 contest we received 74 photos from 23 different photographers, including international entries from New Zealand, the UK, Canada and Mexico. The photos were then reviewed by a panel of judges who selected their favorites during two rounds of judging and rating the photos.

We would like to thank this year's judges, all of whom said they had a tough time narrowing it down to the winners because there were so many great entries. The judges were Alison Sigethy, Allison Palmer, Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Mike Hamilton, Jill Allbritton, Ginni Callahan, Ted Gormley, Ashley Brown, Dennis Green and Rick Wiebush.

The following pages show the 13 winning photos (12 months + cover) and the winning photographer.



Fishing Pelican on the James River, VA. Photo: Kathy Dennehey (VA)



Willamette River, OR. Photo: Bill Vonnegut (OR)



Norway Kayaks. Photo: Ted Gormley (VA)



Antarctica. Photo: Rupert Kirkwood (UK)



Sailors on the Sea of Cortez, Baja. Photo: Ginni Callahan



Execution Rock, Long Island Sound. Photo: Alan Mayors (NY)



Foggy Chesapeake Bay. Photo: Gail daMota (VA)



Dolphins off Devon, UK. Photo: Rupert Kirkwood (UK)



Southern Oregon Coast. Photo: Bill Vonnegut (OR)



Bay of Islands, New Zealand. Photo: John Kirk-Anderson (NZ)



Manhattan night. Photo: Ted Gormley (VA)



Slot of Boom, Pacific Baja. Photo: Jen Kleck (CA)



Ebenezer Creek, GA. Photo: Don Machis

A Bit of Kit: Gear Story

Randi Kruger

Herein lies the story of my change of heart over a piece of gear that almost every sea kayaker has had, but rarely uses: **the contact tow** aka the short tow. It's a cool piece of gear with many iterations. This is not a review of all the types of contact tows. No, this is the story of me humbly accepting that someone's gear was a lot more useful than I originally judged.

The first contact tow I bought years ago was made by Ed Schiller from Virginia Beach. It was elegant, and seemed functional. It had a quick release "parachute buckle" or snap lock.



Schiller's tow on the deck. Photo: Randi Kruger



The quick release buckle. Photo: Randi Kruger

However, snap locks won't release under pressure. As a matter of fact, the more pressure you put on one, the less likely you'll be able to get it apart. I remember when these first came out on dog collars in the late 80s. Easy on/off unless the dog was struggling. I had a love/hate relationship with them as a veterinary staffer. I quickly came to realize I'd have to cut this bad boy if I needed to escape from a tow using this gear.

Eventually, I changed to the "Gordon Brown" style contact tow, mainly because I'm a maker and I like making my own stuff. As you can see in the pic, there is no quick release. A knife is the emergency release. I thought this was just fine, and have used them for the last few years with no quibbles. But then again, I've never had to cut one, either.



Gordon Brown's set-up. Photo: Randi Kruger

Then I began to sell Whetman Equipment, and the MK-11 Sea Contact Tow. Frankly, while it is a lovely piece of kit, it is long, and the metal quick release buckle scratches my boat. I sell them, but felt "meh," about them myself. I put Whetman's Kraken 'biners on my Gordon Brown, shown above, and kept rocking simplicity.



The Whetman MK- 11 Photo: Randi Kruger

However, my partner Rob loves the MK-11, having wrangled two out of me. One stays with his sea kayaking kit and the other stays with his white water kit as a short tow. In white water we don't carry things on our decks, not even when we are teaching the Long Boats in Currents and Rocks classes. Things on your deck can get tangled in branches, etc., so he carries it in his rescue vest.

The Incident

So here's my story: This summer we were running a Long Boats in Currents & Rocks class, when we had a swimmer who lost their paddle. On this one and single occasion I had not packed the breakdown paddle I normally carry in my hatch. There we were with a student in a 16-foot boat with no paddle and three miles to go, one mile of it through class 1-2 moving water. And oy, the rocks! We were going to have to navigate so many rocks. There was no way to tow them through the rocks.

I asked for Rob's MK-11. I connected us so that the contact tow was tight, keeping us firmly together, under pressure. The student could support themselves on my boat and I could paddle. This was not easy. Maneuvering what was now effectively a 20-foot boat through the rocks and rapids was hard.

Bad went to worse when we got stuck on a pair of rocks sideways. I was pinned between the student and the rocks. I could see my student's upstream

edge going under the water, but the contact tow, under increasing pressure, was keeping them upright. However, if the edge of their boat went under too far the boat could flip, pulling me over too, and leaving us both in a tough place to escape. Shit was about to get real. REAL REAL. I let go of the rock, pulled that quick release so easily, twisted back to the stern of their boat and javelined them forward and down a chute to Rob, who was waiting below. They made it down upright and I was able to easily rotate off the rock by myself and follow them down the chute.

Then I caught them, reconnected the contact tow, and we were back in business. The whole thing took just moments. My opinion of the gear changed just like that.

The MK-11 is too long? I'll deal with it. Scratches my deck? This too I will deal with. Being able to use a functional quick release without destroying the gear was an epiphany. If it had been a Gordon Brown it would have been ruined when I cut it to get us off those rocks. Because of the quick release buckle I still had fully functional gear.

I have the latest version of the MK-11 now. I'm a convert, a believer. This is a good bit o' kit!



The MK-11 quick release. Photo: Randi Kruger

New Freedom: Helping Paddlers with Disabilities

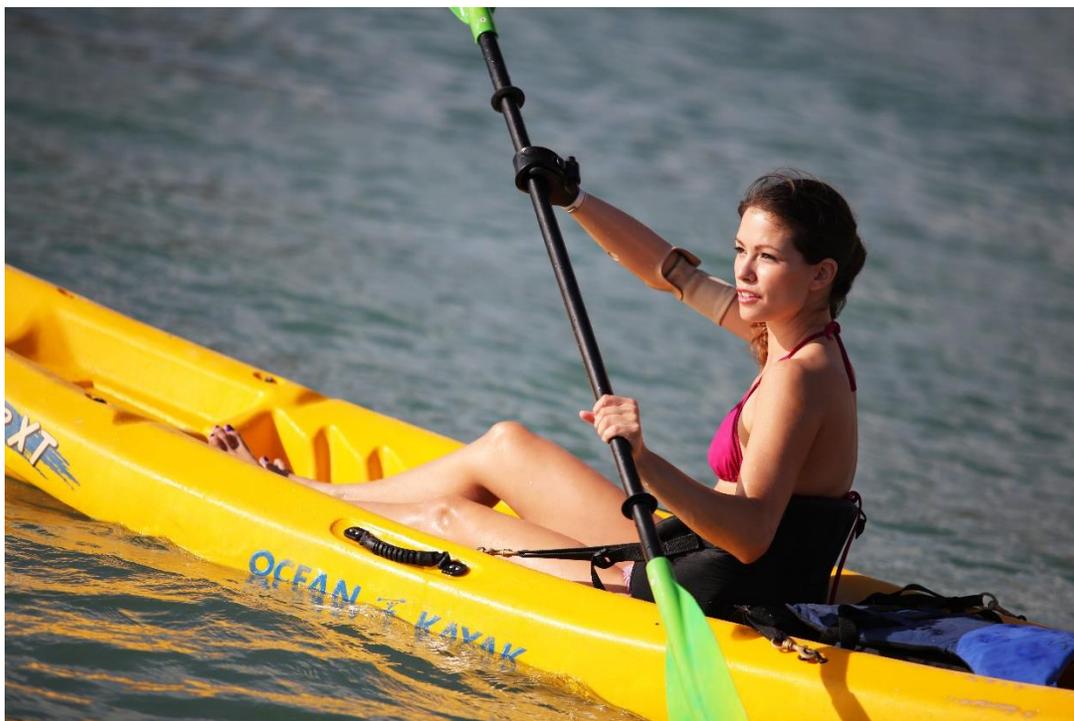
Pete Hohmann

It's all about freedom. The freedom of motion. Freedom to explore nature. Freedom to be included in with typical paddlers who have no obvious disabilities. Freedom to make new friends on the water. Freedom to join a paddling Meetup group or attend a paddling event. Even freedom to be self-sufficient and paddle without others helping you. But, all this depends on you being an advocate, a bridge builder.

A bridge builder is someone who helps a person with a disability to get into the seat of a kayak. People with disabilities need an advocate who has a caring heart, sensitivity, and a little knowledge

about adaptive paddlesports. Most people with disabilities assume they could never paddle. For example, I was recently walking with my neighbor,

Angie, who had a stroke 5 years ago that resulted in very limited use of her right side, especially her right arm. Even though she lives on the water, the idea of paddling a kayak never entered her mind. She just assumed it was impossible. But, there is a very affordable and efficient device called a paddle pivot for those who have lost the use of an arm. She just needed someone to point her in the right direction and encourage her to try.



Shaholly Ayers. Photo: TRS Prosthetics



When you work with paddlers with disabilities, remember that their prosthetic or wheelchair is very valuable and personal to them. Never assume that a wheelchair can be left unsecured at the ramp, or that a prosthetic can be casually shoved into a kayak where it could get wet and damaged. Treat these items with respect and care.

Paraplegic paddlers

I have worked with several paraplegic paddlers over the years. The main concerns are enabling them to stay upright in the kayak seat, and ensuring that nothing sharp punctures their lower body where they have no feeling. A sharp edge could have very serious consequences. If you work with a paraplegic paddler, you will need to read a resource like “Canoeing and Kayaking for People with Disabilities,” available through the ACA store.

<https://www.americancanoe.org/store/viewproduct.aspx?id=714198>

The goal is to pad all sharp edges and protrusions with foam and duct tape. Michelle was a 30-year old woman who became paraplegic through a car accident. I made her a “C” seat with ethafoam to keep her body upright and padded everything inside the kayak. What was the next step after the final fitting? A wet exit in a pool. The paddler with disabilities MUST be able to safely exit the kayak regardless of added adaptations. Michelle had a lot of upper body strength and she not only mastered the wet exit, but also a self-recovery in deep water.

Now that’s something that most typical paddlers can’t do!

Adaptations are both an art and a Science. Creativity is necessary since people with disabilities come in all shapes and sizes and challenges. A very athletic paraplegic paddler in my group simply needed a quick release strap to keep him from sliding down the seat of his sit-on-top kayak. The quick release strap had a 2” red ball attached to the buckle to easily release it. His wide sit-on-top kayak was unlikely to capsize, but practice releasing the strap was still critical.

Hearing Impaired

Several hearing impaired paddlers also came to our Lake Ridge Park (VA) Paddlers Meetup group. We went over visual paddle signals before starting and communicated the best we could, which was mostly through writing since I don’t know sign language. My only problem was the day that two hearing impaired paddlers who didn’t know each other came to the same Meetup event. Can you guess the problem? They were so happy to meet each other that they were continually communicating through sign language, which interrupted their paddling and caused them to fall further behind. Still, it was a great day.

Kids

After retiring from my full-time job, I worked for Prince William County, Virginia Parks and

Recreation for five years. One of my responsibilities was conducting paddling classes for children with disabilities.

We quickly realized that most of those participating would be children with autism. I decided to require a parent or guardian to accompany the child on the water. Our goal was not to provide a respite for parents, as desperately as they probably needed a break from their child for a few hours. Rather, our goal was to create a shared family experience that could be repeated later. I also recruited a paddler from my Meetup group for every child with a disability. So each child had a parent/guardian and also someone who knew basic paddling to serve as a mentor. My job was to give overall direction to the group.

The classes were a success, but success looks different for every child with a disability. For some, just sitting in the front seat of a tandem kayak was success. Others learned more maneuvering strokes in a single kayak. I was always happy to get messages from families who either bought kayaks or routinely rented them after the class.

Inclusion

Part of being the bridge builder for the disabled is being willing to take a paddler with a disability out for a one-on-one paddle before joining the big group. It can avoid a lot of embarrassment later. I did this many times in Lake Ridge Park Paddlers. The one-on-one paddle gave me an opportunity to observe, assess ability, and give instruction.

For example, Kim was a 40-year-old woman with MS who wanted to paddle with us. I made the time to meet her at the park and see what she could do. She initially was interested in stand up paddleboard, but after many tries (I am an ACA and British Canoeing SUP instructor) I realized it just wasn't going to happen. Her balance was very poor. But, after a little instruction, she did fine in my day touring kayak. She didn't need outriggers to help stabilize the kayak (a readily available option for those with balance issues). We worked on some

paddling skills, and Kim joined us for many of our club paddles. In an adult class I taught, a 40-year-old woman with autism insisted that I teach her performance paddling, and she went on enter kayak races.

I met individually with others who were recovering from surgery, or who had arthritis, or maybe were just very overweight with limited mobility. I could then make recommendations on what type and length of group paddles would be appropriate for them. Fortunately, Lake Ridge Park Paddlers had many LEAF paddles (Light, Easy and Fun) that could accommodate those with challenges. I was always careful to accurately describe a paddling event so that members could make an informed decision regarding their ability to participate in the event safely.

Terminology

Terminology is important. Did you notice that I didn't say "autistic children," but rather "children with autism." "Autistic" is not who they are. Yes, disabilities are a challenge in the lives of people, but it doesn't define them. So, it's not a disabled paddler, but a paddler with a disability. Besides, most of us have some type of disability that somehow limits us in life, forcing us to adapt or compensate. Also, I never said "normal" paddler as opposed to disabled paddler. In the world of academia we might use the word "typical" for someone without a major disability, but we don't say normal. This may seem trivial, but it is a big deal to people with disabilities.

Training

The American Canoe Association is a great credentialing organization, and they provide training to become an adaptive paddlesports instructor. When I took the course, both of my instructor trainers had disabilities. Seth was missing his arm below the elbow from birth, yet he finished well in stand up paddleboard races. Joe was missing his leg below the knee from a car accident, yet he was an accomplished white water

kayaker. You can look on the ACA web site to see what workshops are available and what is required.

Building bridges

So, reach out. Be a bridge builder. There are a lot of resources out there. Be willing to meet individually with potential paddlers with disabilities and help them on the journey to freedom on the water and inclusion in the group. It just takes a caring heart, creativity, and the willingness to find out what's available to help that person.

A lot of emphasis is focused on building expensive and complex docks that have launch systems designed for those with disabilities. They have their place, but I think there is nothing as helpful for people with disabilities as a friend who cares and who is willing to be a bridge builder. Personally, I always feel joy when I help another. As a professional counselor, we call it "the helper's high." Whenever we take our focus off ourselves and help others, we are lifted out of our own self-centeredness and we find fulfillment and happiness.

Sometimes I felt a little anxious that I would not find the right strategy to help someone, but then I remembered that doing nothing was far worse. And, a few times I felt disappointment when someone gave up before achieving any paddling success, but that is just the reality of life we need to accept. We can't help everyone, but we can help a lot of people with disabilities. The vast majority I helped did experience a sense of accomplishment. I saw joy on their faces, and growing hope in their souls that there was more to life than living within the perceived limits of their disability.

I hope you will take up this challenge and bring new freedom on the water to those who need it the most.

Resources

You can find adaptive paddles at:

<https://www.creatingability.com/paddle-adaptations/>

That web site also has adaptations for people who have hand or wrist issues that prevent them from using a standard paddle. Some of these devices can be transferred from kayak to kayak, but others need a permanent attachment to the kayak. Helping a person with disabilities find the correct kayak is part of the journey.

TRS Prosthetics also makes prosthetics for kayaking. I had the pleasure of interacting with Shaholly Ayers a few years ago (photo on p. 29). She was the spokesperson for TRS and is a model with a disability. In this video, Shaholly describes her first time kayaking.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqVy_GObK7w

Another web site with many resources is AngleOar. Kayak outriggers is one of their products.

<https://www.angleoar.com/>



Outrigger, Photo: Angleoar



TRS "Hammerhead" Pivot grip. Photo: TRS

Upcoming Events

Date	Event	Location	Website
Feb 22 – 25	Rough Water Skills	Matanzas Inlet, FL	Wavepaddler.com
Mar 14 – 21	SW FL + 10,000 Islands	Sarasota, FL	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Mar 22 – 27	The FL Sun Coast	Tampa, FL	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Mar 26 – 28	East Coast Symposium	Charleston, SC	ccprc.com/1584/East-Coast-Paddlesports-Symposium
Mar 28 Apr 3	Jacksonville Journeys	Jacksonville, FL	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Apr.30-May 2	Oceans 21	Charleston, SC	https://chrisrezac.wixsite.com/kayakoceans
July 14 – 18	Great Lakes Symposium	Grand Marais, MI	greatlakesseakayaksymposium.net
Sept 10-12	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Lower Argyle, Nova Scotia	Bofsk.com
Sept 17-19	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct 6 - 11	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes, DE	delmarvapaddlersretreat.com
Oct 26 - 31	Sea Kayak Georgia Skills Symposium	Tybee Is., GA	seakayakgeorgia.com

Cross Currents Winter 2021

Navigation for Paddlers

Webinar Series: Seven Wednesdays 7 – 8:30 PM

On-Water: Saturday Apr. 24, 10 - 5

March 3: understanding charts: symbols, latitude and longitude, measuring distance, understanding scale

March 10: using chart and compass together to plot courses, and to figure out where you are (i.e. triangulation)

March 17: understanding tides; accessing and reading tide tables; tidal causes and variations; rule of 12ths

March 24: understanding current; interpreting current tables; accounting for current in crossings; 50/90 rule.

March 31: dealing with wind: Beaufort scale, effects of wind on paddlers; strategies for dealing with wind

April 7: trip planning – bringing it all together: factors to take into account; details of the trip planning exercise

April 14: trip planning presentations: participants present their trip plan, including rationales for the decisions

April 24 (Saturday): on water – identifying aids to navigation; determining location; using ranges; dealing with current; comparing the chart and land features; dead reckoning, inter alia.

Cost: \$250 (\$225 if also registering for Weather Forecasting webinar)

To register: email Rick at crosscurrentsseakayaking@gmail.com

LakeErieWX

MARINE WEATHER

In cooperation with

Cross Currents Sea Kayaking

Weather Forecasting for Paddlers

Chesapeake Bay & Mid-Atlantic

3-Part Webinar Series
January 26, February 2 & February 9, 2021

Description

Paddling requires many skills. Regardless of where your adventures take you, no aspect is more important than an understanding of marine weather forecasting. By attending the 3-part *Weather Forecasting for Paddlers* webinar series you will gain an understanding of basic weather principles and learn how to use a variety of forecasting resources.

These skills will improve your trip planning and reduce the likelihood that you will be exposed to uncomfortable or hazardous weather conditions. Attendees will also learn where to find and how to interpret marine forecasts for their favorite areas.

Webinar Schedule

- **Week 1: Reading Weather Maps and Weather Apps 101**
- **Week 2: Wind & Wave & Precipitation Forecasting**
- **Week 3: Forecasting Thunderstorms & Using Doppler Weather Radar**

Live Webinar Series

- When: January 26, February 2 & February 9, 2021 from 7 pm to 8:30 pm (Eastern)
- Fee for the series is \$60. (Attendees also attending Rick Wiebush's Navigation webinar receive a 10% discount.)
- Register at

<http://www.lakeeriewx.com/Seminars/Paddling/PaddlingWeather.html>

Testimonials

- In a single class, Mark was able to bring the basics of marine weather forecasting into sharp focus for our sea kayaking group. Now well equipped with the seminar's tools and resources, none of us will ever again believe that a thunderstorm 'just suddenly appeared'!
- Mark knows weather AND is a very skillful and thoughtful teacher. I've been paddling and diving for many years and I learned a lot in this class.

More Information & Registration

<http://www.lakeeriewx.com/Seminars/Paddling/PaddlingWeather.html>

Contributors

TA Loeffler – is an adventurer who has climbed six of the seven summits and is professor of Outdoor Education and Recreation at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She has been voted one of Canada's greatest explorers and recently complete a 3,000 kilometre canoe expedition from Jasper, Alberta to the Arctic Ocean.

Heather Heller - is an ACA L2 instructor and an incredibly graceful paddler who loves rough water. Heather is also a yoga instructor. She lives in Maryland.

Jaclin Gilbert – is, in addition to being a great writer, an ACA L2 instructor and BC 3* paddler. Jaclin lives in Montgomery County, MD.

Ted Gormley - is a retired NYC Firefighter and EMT. He has been paddling most of his life, and sea kayaking since 2009. He holds a BCU 3* Assessment and is working towards BCU 4* and ACA L3 Trip Leader. He is also a PADI certified Divemaster and Rescue Diver.

Pete Hohmann – is an ACA Adaptive Paddlesports instructor as well as L3 sea kayak and L2 SUP instructor. He also holds the BC 3* awards in sea kayak and canoe, and is an L1 BC Coach. Pete lives in south Florida where he has just organized the Calusa Sea Kayak Meetup.

Randi Kruger - is the owner of Capital City Kayak, the D.C, region's SKUK NDK dealer and representative. She is an ACA Open Water L4 Instructor, as well as a River L2 Instructor. She lives and teaches on the Potomac River, as well as in Southport NC, in the Cape Fear region.

Tom Noffsinger - is an ACA L5 instructor, a sea kayak surfing aficionado, and is experimenting with living on a boat moored in Portsmouth, VA.

Eli Walker – is a Registered Maine Guide and an ACA L4 Whitewater Canoeing Instructor. He lives in Bridgeton, ME on Pequawket ancestral land and works for Outward Bound in the warmer months and as a snowboard instructor in the cooler ones. In 2018, he spent six weeks paddling across the Ungava Peninsula in northern Quebec with a team of three others, using no single-use plastics. He hopes to continue re-imagining what is possible on long, remote trips and to share an Arctic canoe expedition with his mom someday.

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. He has paddled in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Greenland, the Amazon, Nova Scotia, and his favorite place, Baja.

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.