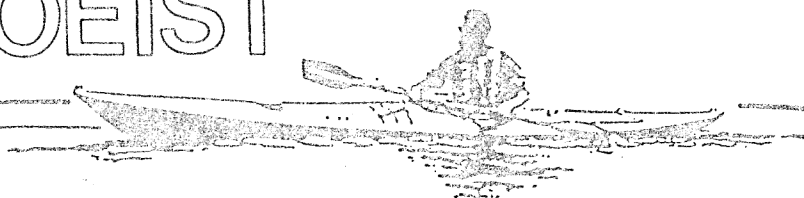


# THE SEA CANOEIST NEWSLETTER

25

DECEMBER 1990

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Sandy Fergusson, some time ago, plugged me into a North American computer mailing system on the subject of recreational paddling. Although mostly on river kayaking, it also has a great deal of sea kayaking information, but not sufficient for me to merely take the whole lot and dump it into this newsletter. Much of the other material may also be of interest to some paddlers. So I have developed a separate section to this newsletter that can also be included with mailings to other paddlers. I intend also to send it off to the numerous canoe clubs around the country. In order to make the whole process more efficient, I have decided to take out of this newsletter, as from the next issue, all the material that dates - notices of events etc, and keep this newsletter to articles and reporting upon trips etc. So, the long and short of all this is that you will find another newsletter with this one from now on, printed in smaller type in A5 format (so you can read it in bed without needing as much elbow-room). Its the throw-away material and adverts. You are welcome to contribute or join in on one of the many debates that will be running in this section of your newsletter. Meanwhile, the Sea Canoeist Newsletter will continue in its A4 format in a readable size type.

The Christmas break has greatly upset my programme in getting this newsletter out to you - you should have received it some five weeks ago, sorry about the delay.

The following two articles have been contributed by Sandy Fergusson, Christchurch.

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## TO STEER THE BOAT

In recent issues there have been descriptions of rudders and skegs, something should be said

about how to operate them.

There are commonly 3 methods of controlling the rudder using one's feet:

1. Sliding pedals (Puffin)
2. Pivoted cross bar (Puysegur)
3. Pedals (Southern Light)

Each of these has different characteristics, (I hesitate to use the word advantages) and from the experience I have, I will list them as I see them.

1.) The sliding pedals (especially as fitted to the Puffin) have few if any advantages but can be a disaster. The original Puffin units were too flimsy, bent and broke, the stronger replacement ones are not much better. To work at all they should be very sloppy in their fit as the slides jam easily either through corrosion or with dirt. The unit as fitted to the Puffin, once it has become stiff, becomes a liability. I have seen the results, in this case the rudder hit the beach or a rock and because the rudder could not shift the pedals, the rudder pivot was torn out of the hull. (Puffins do not glue easily or at all!)

2.) The pivoting cross-bar is usually easy to use and can be made easy to adjust. Their main failing is their height. Unless they come down low enough, people with short feet can have trouble using them comfortably.

3.) The hinged pedal type can (if constructed properly) be the best. The hinge needs to be strong as it has to take reasonably heavy loading. If the hinge-point is mounted on a bar 50 - 80mm above the level that back of the heel rests on then this can be used to brace oneself and the pedals are actuated by one's toes.

The Sea Bear uses type (2) with a bar below that the cross-bar pivots on. Personally I was not

completely happy with this arrangement due to the lack of swing, but that may have been more of an impression than actual. The time spent using the system was not long enough nor in varied conditions for me to make a proper judgement. The Puysegur has the cross-bar hanging from the underside of the deck on an adjustable slide to allow for leg length but nothing to brace one's heels against.

The arrangement I use is of type (3). There are 3 adjustments to be made to set things up. One adjustment to each pedal and one to set the position of the unit. This allows the angle of the pedals to be adjusted to suit ie. how vertical the pedals are and how straight ones legs are to reach the pedals.

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## ANOTHER SUNDAY AFTERNOON

The following is a cautionary tale, we are all too experienced to get into trouble in similar conditions but that is not what it is about, it's about those who are not experienced and who may be accompanying you. Our commercial operator readers should have written this, but haven't.

I had met an American cycling tourist looking for information. As an interesting aside I suggested that she might like to go kayaking on the harbour. She had met a friend who might also be interested and the people she was staying with knew someone with another kayak.

Sunday was grey with a stiff breeze from the south but not too cold, maximum temperature was 16°C. I loaded the kayaks - my wooden boat and George's Puffin - and went to pick up Tracey and Heather and their Dancer. By the time I got there, Clark had given Tracey a good rundown on handling the

Dancer plus how to get out of it. She had been taught to roll a kayak about 13 years before. She was a bit rusty by now but that was not what we were going for.

Instead of launching at the public slip I decided to carry on round to Cass Bay which would put us a little further up wind, the idea being to paddle over to Quail Island and maybe hike over it.

I gave Heather my boat as it is the best for novice paddlers and Tracey seemed happy enough with the Dancer. I took the Puffin, partly because it is a heavy boat and partly because if I wasn't going to be using my own I wanted one that was big enough and fast enough to sort out any problems that might arise.

Brian Lodge paddled in just before we left, having dropped his party off at the Port after a hard paddle from the entrance to Lyttelton Harbour and, I believe, some towing of the weaker members of his group. They had been away over night.

I launched the girls and then leapt into the Puffin - mistake number one - never assume the characteristics of your boat apply to any other. At 45° of list I thought, "Oh NO!". As I went under water, various curses went through my mind. Had anyone seen me? The embarrassment! Forget rolling, the paddle was still on the aft deck.

To comfort the girls, who had missed the whole thing, I admitted to my stupidity. (This was their leader?!) Heather was slow and paddled with a look of grim concentration as we slowly moved up wind and opened up the next bay. This little bit was enough to show that it would be advisable to change our plans, I suggested that we should turn and run with the wind down to the Port and play around the yachts and wharves.

Heather found this much easier and faster but Tracey had trouble keeping the Dancer on a

straight course. I was about two boat lengths away down wind when I saw Tracey go in. I manoeuvred as fast as possible (the Puffin has one of the worst rudder arrangements that it is possible to devise) and came alongside the Dancer to windward, the best side as the wind carried me down onto her and kept me beside the Dancer. It was rolled upright and we did a standard two-boat rescue. The Dancer was fitted with air bags so was floating, although low in the water and the wind was now carrying us down to the nearest beach just about as fast as paddling. I stayed locked on to the Dancer and made a stable raft that responded well to rudder control.

We emptied the Dancer and because it was not the warmest of days decided that it would be prudent to return to the car and call it a day. Tracey paddled off and I went to round up Heather who by now had a grin more like the Cheshire cat having found that a well designed kayak behaves well in the choppy conditions we had.

I found it an interesting little exercise, it appeared that most of the decisions I had made were correct but it had had all the potential for a disastrous day - headlines - "American Tourist Missing, one Drowned. President Bush to send missiles".

So, from this:-

- i. be prepared to change plans.
- ii. never presume another boat handles like yours.
- iii. female paddlers especially are often a great deal physically weaker and it needs to be allowed for.
- iv. conditions, that to an experienced kayaker are normal, can be beyond the capability of an inexperienced person.

As I mentioned, we had met Brian Lodge on the beach as we were about to start. He'd had a hard trip from the entrance to the harbour, where his party had camped over night, back to the port. A distance of about 8 km. In the morning it was

obvious that the return trip was not going to be easy with a head wind gusting to near 30 knots at times.

From the discussion with him a week later it was clear that trouble was experienced when a return was necessary and because the group had a number of weaker members. Two were towed and there appeared to be some deficiencies in the towing arrangements.

The best point for a towing point is just behind the paddler. This is similar to the point where a hook is mounted on a tug. It is also a point that can be reached by the paddler for release of the tow. The tow line needs to be long and have some arrangement whereby it can be shortened to "tune" the line to match the length of the seas. Some means of reducing "snatch" should also be considered, such as two bungees to give progressive dampening as the strain goes on. The alternative to this is to lead the tow line through a lead on the bow of the towed kayak to the occupant who keeps the strain constant.

( Editor's note - There is a trend for some paddlers who are ex-river kayakers to attempt to use river towing techniques in the sea - forget them. They are great in a river environment but are not efficient for a long hard slog. I refer specifically to towing from the kayaker's body by use of rescue jackets with short tow lines attached, or rescue belts. Tow lines should also be attached as low as possible and a point low on the aft deck is far better than a point higher on the paddlers body. The need to ditch the tow is less on a sea paddle than on a river where speed of attachment and release are essential).

Where capsize may occur and time taken to sort things out, a sea anchor may be of great assistance and stop the possibility of a drift to South America.

The two points above could be further discussed and anyone

with experience of such things, especially relating to beginners groups, may be able to provide comments from actual experience.

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The following article was sent in by Mike Rowley of Dannevirke. The group of sea kayakers that Mike paddles with were most interested in the "How to see more at night" article in issue N°22 as they were doing a number of night paddle trips as training for a night crossing of Cook Strait as the ultimate goal.

"...we took note of the suggestions in the article and (after a number of aborted 'selected nights') we had a very successful crossing in late August. Bill Anderson and I were the only ones able to go in the end. We left from Makara as for our earlier crossing, but this time went past the Brothers and into Queen Charlotte Sound. The crossing took 5 hours and a further 7 hours into Picton to catch the ferry.

Some thoughts on the trip and the training sessions on how we found night paddling:

**FORMATION:** Whatever way the front kayaks are positioned, there must be two paddlers at the rear, side by side, so that they can be constantly viewing each other. One kayaker alone at the rear has nobody checking on him.

**LIGHTHOUSES:** After spending much time getting ones eyes used to the dark it was disconcerting to have a lighthouse keep flashing in your eyes.

**STEERING COMPASS:** When a course is needed to be steered it is very useful to have an illuminated deck compass that does not have a bright light. Ken Mercer's ever inventive mind came up with the idea of using an L.E.D. cell under the compass. It worked very well!

**LIGHTS:** We found glow-sticks (Cyalume lightsticks) are the most common. Note that red

Cyalume sticks are now available and are interpreted to be, 'unofficially', distress indicators - Editor) taped to the top of our helmets gave enough light to see the paddler from any direction without harming ones night vision.

A "Big Jim" or "Dolphin" torch in the rear compartment of a kayak helps one to mark a kayak. This could be particularly important should one capsize and be separated from the kayak. The light glows well through both plastic and fibreglass kayaks.

**WEATHER REPORTS:** The 0507 Marine Weather Forecast still gives really good value and in spite of the 'user pays' system, one can still talk to the forecaster in person and discuss what the weather is doing, or likely to do.

**TRAINING:** If this is done on a DARK night when there is a bit of a sea running, leaving and returning to the beach can be exciting to say the least! You cannot see the unbroken seas until they hit you. The only ones you can see are those that are breaking.

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#### COMMENTS ON MIKE'S LETTER

Legally, kayakers should really show an all-round white light when paddling at night. I did this one night when paddling outside a harbour entrance and soon had the Harbour Board's Pilot launch out to rescue me - he had to chase me a bit as I was trying to avoid being run down by what I thought was a fishing boat. Apparently the night watchman had seen a flashing white light out off the harbour. In the quiet of the following morning in at the Harbour Masters Office it transpired that my kayak had been behind the swells much of the time and as I rose to the crests the night watchman had seen a flash of white light from my constantly showing navigation light. After that experience I decided that

perhaps showing a light was not such a good idea. However, almost all my night paddling has been done solo.

Mike's comment about the light in the boat is an excellent one, as, as he so rightly points out, to end up swimming and separated from your kayak could be a major problem in finding your way back to your boat again. Hence it is important to have a light on both the paddler and the kayak. In asking other paddlers what they thought of this idea of Mike's I got a mixed range of replies. Many people thought that to use a boat light as an aid in checking on the location of other paddlers could be a problem with any sort of sea running, as, like my experience, the kayak would be behind the swells for a considerable time and you might have difficulty on a boisterous night, looking up often enough to keep an eye out for other kayaks. To do so efficiently would mean that kayaks would need to travel close together in a tight group and then you run the risk of one kayak surfing up onto another, causing capsizes.

The general opinion seems to be that the best place for a light would be as high as possible - Mike's comment of a Cyalume stick tied to your hat is an excellent one. There still remains, however, the need to mark both paddler and kayak, and Mike's light inside the rear compartment is excellent for a boat marker as it would show even if the kayak was right-side up or capsized. You couldn't use this idea if your kayak is plywood.

With regard to weather, the Met Office have rewritten some of their educational material into a small handy booklet called "A COASTAL WEATHER GUIDE" by Ian P Brown. This is available free from the Met Office (PO Box 722 WELLINGTON) or from the Maritime Transport Division of the Ministry of Transport.