THE
SEA CANOEIST
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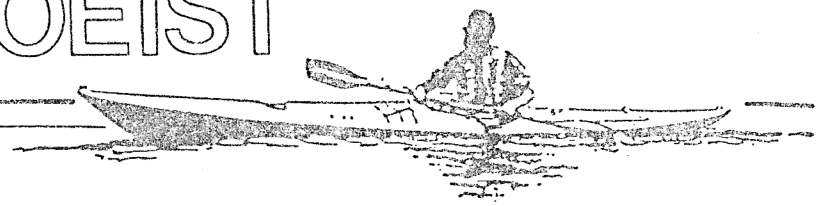

In issue No 25 Sandy Fergusson started off a discussion on the subject of towing, referring to an incident in Lyttleton Harbour. Brian Lodge, who was involved in that incident, replies:

"...In reply to Sandy Fergusson's mention of my experience towing a kayak in rough conditions on Lyttelton Harbour, and contrary to the Editor's further comment, I was using a towline that was attached to a point low on my waist. The towline was fastened through a D-ring to the waist loop and connected to the towed boat by a carabiner. The connection was made as close to the bow of the towed boat as was possible. The towline was 5m in length with a section of shockcord attached to take up the 'snatch'. It was also adjustable through a cam-lock.

The wind and sea conditions were such that the towed boat was in tune with the movements of the towing boat in that both the towed boat and the towing boat were in the troughs and the peaks at the same time. The problem with the tow was not one of equipment design or malfunction, but a physical one. To tow a boat in difficult conditions is bloody hard work, rather akin to towing a bag of cement. To tow a boat for close to 8km demanded an intense physical effort for about 4 hours. To stop and rest meant a slow but sure drift backwards and a loss of hard won progress. The use of a sea anchor would have made a rest possible without the loss of gained distance.

To summarise: If you need to tow a kayak, be prepared for some hard physical work. Have your towing system setup prior to leaving the shore and know that it works before you need it. Be able to disconnect from the system so that you can manoeuvre your boat in the event of a capsize..."

Further comment: The point cannot be emphasised enough that towing a kayak without the towed boat's paddler giving much assistance is a task to be avoided. As I said in issue 25, towing in the sea while on a sea kayak trip is quite unlike towing on a river when tow distances are shorter and currents can be used to assist. The gear set-up has to be well thought out and tested before you are placed in a position where you have to tow in an emergency. A number of points have come from this discussion.

1. Tow from the kayak if at all possible, rather than the body. If you must tow from the body, have the pulling point well down at deck/sprayskirt level.

2. The tow should be able to be ditched from the towing boat, and if possible, also from the towed boat.

3. The ideal point of attachment to the towed boat is the bow. The best point of pull from the towing boat is the stern, however a point just behind the cockpit is also suitable.

4. A major problem with tow lines is the way they will chafe, tangle and cause damage to rudder equipment at the stern of the towing boat. Some form of holding the line clear of this gear is essential.

A SUGGESTED TOW-LINE ARRANGEMENT:

Bolt a cleat to the aft deck on the right-hand side (if you are right handed) behind the cockpit rim where you can easily reach it. Attach a small metal ring to the stern of your kayak by a short length of cord. Now run a tow-line from the cleat, down to the stern, through the ring, and back to an attachment point by the cleat. A snap link (stainless, not a climber's carabiner which will corrode up with sea water) should be spliced to the end of the towline. A similar arrangement should be fitted to the foredeck using a cleat on the foredeck near where your right knee rests. To tow another boat, snap the snap-link onto the bow of the towed boat. To ditch the tow, release at the cleat and thew towline will run free from the stern ring. This arrangement will keep the pull at your stern but still enable you to release the tow. If you are being towed, attach the towing boats line to the snap-link on your deck. If you need to ditch your tow, release the tow-line from the cleat and you are free. Adjustments of the line length can be made by adjustments at the cleat. Shock-cord can be built into the system provided you ensure that the whole lot can run free through the stern or bow rings. 6mm cord is adequate and has sufficient thickness to be held in the hand without cutting into your hand too deeply.

Brian mentions a sea anchor - these are useful devices, however it takes time to deploy and recover these and I would not advise their use just for a short rest as drift can be a problem while you sort out the gear - no matter how you arrange these, the warp always seems to get kinks and tangles. I have seen a plastic bucket with a large hole in the bottom used as an effective sea anchor. Sea kayaks do not need a very large opening to create sufficient drag to keep the kayak head-to-wind. If you stream a sea anchor, use the bow tow-line mentioned above, but also have another line with a snap-link connected to the tow-line outboard of the bow ring. With this additional line you can recover the tow-line back to the cockpit and haul the sea anchor into the cockpit and clip the tow-line back into place.

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Some months ago Ray Forsyth returned from a short trip to Alaska and provided me with a catalogue from Necky Kayaks which is full of interesting details of trips and equipment. The catalogue is more a

newsletter really. Ray did a couple of 14 day trips while in Alaska, one on the south east coast from Juneau and the other in Glacier Bay National Park, as well as a few weekend jaunts.

If you are interested in Alaska (Paul Caffyn will be back there again in May after his session at the Sea Kayak Forum in Nelson) Topsport are arranging a trip this year. The intention is to paddle a short section of the Alaskian Panhandle over a ten day period departing from Janeau on August. 18, returning 27 August. The trip involves 5 days in Tracy and Endicott Arms (less than 1.5km wide with sheer cliffs, glaciers and icebergs) and 5 days paddling to Juneau via the Seymour Canal on Admiralty Island.

Costs are based on the paddling trip from Juneau and return, you have to find your own way there and back: $1975 per seat in a double kayak, $2100 in a single kayak. Topsport require a $500 deposit by May 1 with full payment by July 1st to secure a place. Topsport can arrange accommodation in Juneau, or you can join the trip at Seattle. One option would be to fly from NZ to Seattle and then take the ferry through the inland passages (3 day trip from Bellingham to Juneau $200 (US) whereas the flight from Seattle to Juneau (4 hours) is $180 (US). If you are interested, contact Brian Lodge at Topsport Ph/Fax (03) 891-789

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- ABEL TASMAN - - THE EASY WAY -

Mike MacPhillips reports on an expedition of Venturer Scouts.

On December 3, at an hour when sane people are still tucked up in bed, seven Venturers and two Scout Leaders departed Ashburton for the long haul to the Abel Tasman National Park. A brief stop at Christchurch to gather up the last member and off on the long, slow trip to Marahau via Springs Junction.

The beginning of a trip that had first been mooted in November 1989 as an Expedition for the Unit. For the Venturers it would meet the requirements of Queen Scout or Endeavour Expedition Certificates. After 12 months of planning, fund raising, and training, the reality was at hand. The Unit had raised sufficient finance, some $4000, to fund the entire trip plus a weekend training trip around Banks Peninsula.

At Marahau we were met by Tom Horn of Abel Tasman Kayaks, and after resting and dining at the Park Cafe, we sat down to an excellent briefing by Tom. He covered safety, weather patterns, camp sites, trip planning, and points of interest along our route. Then back to 'the Barn' for sorting out of gear and a good nights sleep.

Day 2 and at 0830 we were on the beach and beginning the exact science of cramming a quart into a pint pot - getting sleeping bags etc through hatches 190mm in diameter. By 1030 we were on the water and the expedition was a reality. Our fleet was a mix of 4 Puffins, 3 Puysegurs, 1 Nordkapp, and a Southern Light (a double for Sheena and Paul). Storage capacity in the singles is 200 litres and 800 for the double. Point to point on the water you are approximately 50% faster than a tramper, that is, a 4 hour tramp = 2 hours paddling, hence Abel Tasman the easy way.

Tom accompanied us as far as Appletree Bay and was very pleased with the skill level of the Venturers, a reflection of the time put into acquiring basic skills, bearing in mind that when the trip was first suggested none of the Venturers had done any kayaking. A brief rest and then onto Cynthea Cove, 1km from what is known locally as the Mad Mile because of the way the sea breeze funnels along the coast creating choppy conditions. We waited for the wind to drop. Movement along this section of coast is governed by this wind which generally comes away at 10000 and dies down anytime from 1500 onward. So the afternoon was spent playing volleyball, eating, swimming, sunbathing, and waiting on the wind. At 1600 we launched and rounded Te Karetu Point into the unwelcome arms of the easterly. This gave us a testing paddle to Te Puketea Bay where we camped for the night. Being only 20 minutes walk from The Anchorage most of us walked over for a look and to refill water bottles. We went to sleep with a strong norwester blowing out to sea.

Day 3 and up at 0630 to a fairly heavy swell dumping on the beach and the norwester still present. The 0725 forecast was promising and by 0800 the seas had moderated but not nearly enough as it turned out. We put to sea. Sea conditions off Pitt Head were really confused and lumpy. A real jobble, a contrary mix of current, swell, refraction waves and wind. Murray chose to feed his breakfast to the fish so into Anchorage we went to see what would develop, weatherwise. At 1145 we paddled across to Boundary Bay and lunched on the beach and had an informative chat with a local. By then conditions had improved and we got back on the water and got around North Head and right into the teeth of the norwester. Our goal was Sandfly Bay but conditions were such that we plugged on to Bark Bay and put ashore to rest up after 90 minutes of tough paddling. Then back on the water and around to Mosquito Bay, another great campsite.

Day 4. Up at 0530 and away by 0730 to get around the 5km of Abel Head before the wind got up. We went via Tonga Island and enjoyed the antics of the resident seals. The easterly started as we passed Canoe Bay and rounded Awaroa Head into Awaroa By at 10000. A late brunch and a couple of pleasant hours exploring the area. The spit held an interesting variety of bird life; black oyster catchers, Dotterels, and a mixed colony of Caspian Terns and Red Billed Gulls nesting together.

At 1200 we relaunched into the

norwest wind trucking straight out of Totaranui, our destination. After 2 hours ad a wild and wet ride we put ashore to camp for the night. Telecom nets a nice little profit from our use of the phone.

At 1900, through a moderate easterly swell, Dean, James and Murray in the double, Chris and myself, paddle up to Separation Point, the expedition's nominal goal. Sitting in a quiet cove under the point we admire the 2m swells marching out of Golden Bay. We don't admire the earthy aroma of the seal colony. Back to Totaranui and an interesting landing in the dark. Chris is broached in the surf and breaks a paddle by leaning the wrong way.

Day 5. Up at 0600 and gone by 0830 for a very relaxed cruise down to Onetahuti Bay. I slipped into Shag Harbour to mount a video camera on the bow, then back out to get some footage along the coast. While the rest of the party run into Onetahuti I paddled across to Tonga Island in search of seals. A small cove yielded footage of a bull seal and a female with a pup. Then across to Onetahuti and with fingers crossed, land with the camera running.

The afternoon is spent setting up camp, swimming in fresh icy cold water, sleeping and preparing tea. An evening walk along the beach upsets a pair of very vocal oyster-catchers with 3 chicks who make it clear that our intrusion is not appreciated. We retreat under aerial attack.

Woken at 0130 by blatant rummaging in James' kayak. Investigation reveals two possums dining on cracker biscuits, Raro and milk powder. They are asked to leave but return 30 minutes later.

Lazy start to the sixth day, on the water by 1030 and down to Sandfly Bay. Here we paddle up to the footbridge across the Falls Creek. Damon and I walk to the falls and enjoy an invigorating swim in the pool at their foot.

The intention had been to camp at Sandfly Bay but real estate is limited so we decide to head for Torrent Bay. Off North head we have a mutiny with some wanting to go on around into the Mad Mile. Off Pitt Head sea conditions are getting interesting so Joanne puts her foot down and we head into Anchorage. Murray and I paddle round to Torrent Bay to use the phone and get an updated forecast. While there we paddled up the Torrent River and visited Cleopatra's Pool, complete with one of her hand-maidens!

Our goal for the next day would be Watering Cove which is only 1.5km from camp. I walked down for a look-see. A very pretty cove but with limited camping space.

Day 7. On the basis of the forecast we had agreed on an early start. Up at 0500 and I'm gone by 0615. The rest protested loudly about the agreed early start so I didn't wait. A very enjoyable paddle down the Mad Mile with calm sea, warm early morning sun and the sea growling at the coast. I landed on Observation Beach, hung the tent fly up to dry, mounted the video and headed back to Te Karetu Point to film the rest of the group as they came down the coast. True to form, the weather forecast was totally wrong and the Mad Mile could have been attempted at any time that day.

We were now within easy striking distance of Marahau so Karla, Murray and myself took the double and paddled down to the camp ground to pick up emergency (junk food) supplies. However I was permitted to buy bread and milk only. On the evidence of the bill we paid I am certain that the shopowner was able to close for the day after our visit. Our return was greeted by expectant faces which dropped when I informed them that the shop was closed. However the likelihood of being lynched convinced us that it would be safer to hand over the goodies - the relief on Observation Beach could be heard all over the district - talk about a junk food fix!

Another lazy day; Joanne fishes, the boys snorkel and I circumnavigate Adele Island. In a rash moment Karla, fully clothed, gets thrown into the stream and an all-in sand fight results.

The last day we awoke to heavy cloud and mist. high tide at Marahau is at 1400 and this must be hit just right otherwise it is a long carry over the shallows. We dawdled down the coast and hit the beach at 1200. The boats are recovered, unloaded, the van repacked, farewells to Tom and we are off home via Motueka, Nelson (shop until you drop) and the coastal highway.

All in all a very successful trip blessed by good weather and good company. They key to the success of such a trip is planning and commitment. All the effort put in by the Venturers on basic skills meant we got straight into the trip. Apart from some minor rudder problems, the kayaks performed flawlessly. To anyone contemplating such an undertaking, go for it, but do your homework.

SEA KAYAK FORUM 1991

The third annual SEA KAYAK FORUM will take place this year over the weekend of April 12,13,14 at the Mapua Leisure Park, Nelson. Starting at 6pm on Friday night with a slide presentation at 8pm by Paul Caffyn, the Forum will have a variety of workshops including a basic skills group running twice during the weekend. This year the Forum is being run by a small team of paddlers who are members of TASK.

Registration forms are available from the Editor, or from Brian Lodge, who is co-ordinating activities. Brian can be reached at phone/Fax (03)891-789 or PO Box 24-005 Christchurch.

A number of manufacturers and retailers of sea kayaks and equipment will be available to discuss their products.