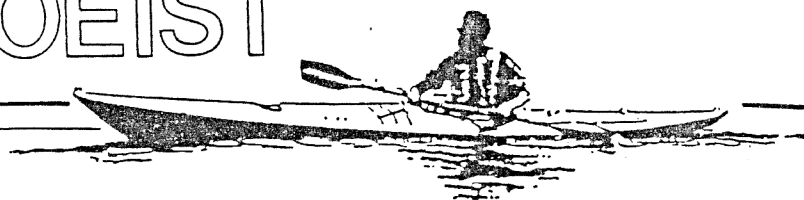


# THE SEA CANOEIST NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1991

P O Box 26  
NELSON  
NEW ZEALAND



## SEA KAYAK FORUM 1991

The last newsletter came out on the eve of the Third Sea Kayak Forum in Nelson. This year the event was organised and run by Brian Lodge from Christchurch's Topsport. Participants came from the central South Island to the Wellington Region and a single paddler from Auckland, the weather immediately prior to the weekend apparently kept some away. However, the weekend turned out nice and fine (isn't it always in Nelson!) and we certainly got some paddling in even if the surf wasn't as good as you get elsewhere.

Brian had the weekend more formally structured than in the past, however it was still a friendly and informal gathering of sea kayak folk sharing their common interest, skills, and enthusiasm for this activity.

A number of new boats were on display, including a new single and double in the Arluk range retailed by Topsport. Most participants took these boats for a paddle, particularly the double which excited considerable interest. There simply is not a big enough range of double kayaks in this country and another boat is a welcome addition. A double for day tripping is a much needed development. While I personally have some reservations about the high foredeck of this double, particularly how it might perform in high winds on the beam, and the hollow waterlines at bow and stern which, in my view, is wasted length, the boat is otherwise well designed.

The discussion on the possibility of the New Zealand Canoeing Association taking over responsibility for looking after the interests of sea kayakers, as presented by Dave Robertson, the new NZCA Sea Kayak representative, caused

considerable consternation. Obviously this issue needs further thrashing out before the NZCA takes it any further. Clearly many of the views expressed by Forum participants were not acceptable to the NZCA representative.

In the meantime, a number of Forum participants got their heads together on the Sunday and formed a working party to form an Association of Sea Kayak paddlers that will be driven by, and for, sea kayakers. The problem with the NZCA proposal depends upon club membership, as the NZCA is a federation of Clubs, rather than of individuals.

Getting back to the Forum, Paul Caffyn ran a number of advanced sessions, and Brian did his now customary basic paddle skills workshops which are a must for those new to paddle sports.

A number of new gear arrangements were seen, perhaps the most novel was a rudder substitute for a Nordkapp. This idea consisted of a pair of angled trimming skegs mounted on either side of the hull inboard of the very stern of the kayak. These pivoted and were kept mounted out of the water, but with a push on the foot pedals, that swung into the water to create a turn, or to trim the kayak on a new course. The degree of trim or course change depends upon the amount of swing you create by the distance you depress the pedal. Fine adjustment at the foot end was made easy by a screw hatch in the deck immediately above the foot-brace. The whole arrangement had a number of features that could be used in the more conventional rudder arrangement.

The session on paddling destinations proved the point that it is high time that we began an effort to document our

best sea paddling areas. Clearly there is now enough information around that is of considerable value in planning trips, to make a guidebook worthwhile.

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The last newsletter contained a number of issues which elicited considerable response. I propose to summarise these in this issue of the newsletter, and in the next newsletters, get back to trip reports and more technical matters. Of the letters, almost all were in support of the comments made.

## SEA KAYAK MAGAZINE:

In the words of one reader

"...the group I sea kayak with, subscribed to this magazine for a number of years and enjoyed it very much. But we have let our subscription lapse now and we don't seem to miss it. I guess that follows along the lines of your comments..."

Another reader wrote

"...personally I'm willing to give the new editor a 'settling in period'. Some things to keep in mind are that there are always new readers coming into any publication and a re-run of old material is put there for their benefit. Offset paddles? - that is always a debatable point..."

Yet another comment

"...Personally I still like Sea Kayaker magazine and will be continuing my subscription. If people have criticisms it might be a good idea to write to SK direct and let them know. They may well change. Also, if you have something to contribute to SK - submit it to them. It might also help to understand that SK was a marketing tool of John Dowd's to help promote his business - and why not?..."

To comment on these last points: Firstly a number of New

Zealand Sea Kayakers have submitted articles and letters - none have appeared in the magazine. The experience of Frank Goodman, as mentioned in our last newsletter, where his letter was badly, and unprofessionally edited, indicates that perhaps the magazine should be accepted as it is for what it is - a very xenophobic and parochial production of little relevance to the international community of sea kayakers beyond the U.S.A.

#### TOWING:

"...Each of our kayaks (this comment from a commercial hire and guided trip company) has a 4m tow fitted and a standard cleat. This has proven adequate for our use. As an extra, I carry a longer tow on my deck. I use a cam cleat but find the standard cleat more secure and quite easy to release..."

"...Grahame Sisson's comment on towing techniques being laid down 15 years ago is a case in point for a newsletter. How many people knew of this or had read of it, or know the source of the material on this technique? That is why this newsletter has a purpose - for people who see questionable techniques being used can point this out and correct methods to the newcomers, or to remind those who have forgotten..".

Grahame's letter was therefore a valuable addition to the debate and I should hope other readers will feel that their contributions are also valued for these reasons.

#### FEATHERED vs UNFEATHERED PADDLES

"...Can I help end the debate? I don't know whether you would class me as experienced or not but I use unfeathered paddles. I used to use feathered. If a law was brought in tomorrow saying we had to use feathered, I would quite happily change. In fact, I can change from one to the other when paddling. So pick what you like and quit

arguing..."

#### THE STATE OF NORTH AMERICAN KAYAKS

"...Doesn't Grahame Sisson know that when the USA put a man on the moon there was a New Zealander in charge - how else would they have succeeded? This was Pickering, head of JPL ex Havelock - Rutherford's old school!)"

Well that says it all!

Wonder if he ever paddled in the Marlborough Sounds as a kid? He could have been a Sea Kayaker!

#### ENGLISH STYLE KAYAKS vs NORTH AMERICAN STYLE KAYAKS.

"...My mate made a kayak out of corrugated roofing iron. He sealed the joints with tar scraped from the road. My first kayak was canvas and wood and no sprayskirts were used on either. We paddled the coasts together. We enjoyed it. We are still alive! Therein lies the principles of Sea Kayaking - Safety & Enjoyment.

Let us end this debate about which kayak is 'superior', just like we can end the debate about feathered paddles.

Kleppers have crossed the Atlantic. Paul Caffyn chose a kayak with a 5" beam for a Tasman crossing, but a Nordkapp for Alaska. Audrey Sutherland, mother of four, paddled Alaska in an inflatable.

What does this prove?

Each individual will find a kayak that suits their needs - be it colour, style, material, stability, handling, speed, weight, size, fittings, rudders, hatches, price and where and when they intend to paddle and in what conditions. So let's not get too picky. If my mate can do it in a "tinnie" then a paddler should be able to pick a modern sea kayak from the range that is available in New Zealand that suits them.

And as for kayak tests? It is a very subjective subject. So take the opportunity to test the kayak yourself over a wide range of conditions..."

#### THE MINIMALIST APPROACH TO SEA KAYAKING

Recently a paddler dropped in for some advice on his sea kayak. It was of rather ancient design and the builder had placed the deck hatches close to the bulkheads. The paddler had problems getting into the ends of the kayak. The diameter of the hatches were rather restrictive, using screw-in plastic hatches of the sort supplied by marine stores as inspection hatches. In fact I have the same hatches on my little day-tripping plywood kayak. The builder didn't have a great range of options at the time he built this kayak. The amount of curve on the deck did not allow him to fit the hatches any further into the ends, and I guess there was not a great range of hatch products on the market at the time the boat was built. All I could suggest was that he fit VCP hatches or make up something bigger of the lines of a cockpit rim with a spray-deck type cover and maybe an outer glassfibre cover along the style that are now being fitted to many sea kayaks. One of those frequently voiced grumbles about sea kayaks revolves around the size of hatches and the ability to get large objects safely stowed away - if it isn't the size of the object, it is the length of the object that is the problem. My visitor didn't like the idea of a cockpit type hatch much and I guess he went away pretty frustrated as I obviously wasn't very sympathetic - you see I subscribe to the minimalist philosophy of sea kayaking.

This all began many years ago when I was into mountaineering. In the group of climbers I joined for trips were two individuals of somewhat extreme views. One went further than cutting the handle off his

tooth-brush - he threw it away completely and cleaned his teeth with salt on his finger. "Nothing", he said "should be carried that has not got at least two functions, both of which have to be absolutely essential to getting up or off the mountain, or for sustaining life".

The other fellow was of the old 'oiled-japara-parka' school of thought. His gear was old and trusty, much loved and cared for. His pack was a canvass and leather device, his clothing was heavy wool and windproofs oiled japara. He carried all manner of useful items in his pack, each packed in a little plastic bag. Meal-times, even at an exposed bivvy, could almost match the local restaurant in so far as the selection of herbs and spices available. He always carried a bag of Tararua biscuits that he cooked up prior to any trip - at least a kilo of these solid biscuits were offered around at most stops - I once broke an ice-axe trying to crumble one!

Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the ideal - my sympathies lie towards the go-light extreme and in this respect I have a friend in Paul Caffyn. Paul has a reason for his minimalist approach - speed. The lighter you are the greater your range per day, or the faster you can get off the water when unfavourable weather threatens. It also helps when you portage over extensive mudflats. My minimalist ideas revolve around strength and laziness - "You take it - you carry it!" was the motto of my climbing friends and I learnt that lesson very early in my outdoor life.

Most trampers can get a 10 day trip quantity of gear and supplies into a pack that is at least half the size of the volume available to a sea kayaker. Apart from an extensive Fiordland trip, no sea kayaker is going to need any more space. Let's assume that the paddler wants something better than every meal a freeze-dry dehydrated meal like the trampers

may be forced to accept, so we can expand our packing into all the available space.

Apart from cooking billies, there is nothing that cannot be pushed through an 8" hole. Some items, like tent poles, may need a hatch in the bulkhead, rather than in the deck. Sleeping bags and tents may need to be feed through the hatch into their stowage bags, but by and large, what's the problem?

Billies can be the real pain. I recall the paddler who once packed his up beyond his footrest. Unfortunately the handle flopped over his toe unbeknown to him until he came to get out - effectively stuck in his kayak without room to reach down to release the offending handle - it took us some time to poke a paddle down the cockpit to flip the handle off his foot.

The balance that represents an acceptable standard of luxury and ease for you as a sea kayaker lies somewhere slightly up on the tramper. I rather suspect that for many sea kayakers, they are trying to get too far to the luxury end of the two extremes. Someone like Paul Caffyn owes his survival to his ability to push his kayak to high speed or distance per day in order to not be where the worst weather is, or to avoid the more exposed landings. If you are going to take the other extreme, you may need all that extra gear to survive the sort of conditions you will find yourself in, conditions that the lightweight paddler can avoid.

Remember too, that not only is it a matter of speed that we are talking about, but extra weight puts additional stress on the kayak - a loop in the surf with 100kg of weight in the compartments will do damage that 30kg will not do.

If we have to have extra sized hatches, then again, the cost of this luxury will be additional costs in setting up your kayak, and will make it even more

vulnerable to stress damage. All in all, that extra weight is going to cost you more than once over.

There is no way that all the available space under the hatches in a sea kayak ought to be filled with equipment. The payload should be kept close to the centre of the boat, up against the bulkheads, and the remaining space left empty or filled with buoyant material. Hatch sizes should be kept to the minimum. We really do not need the high-volume kayaks seen in North America.

The topic of pumps is also relevant to this discussion. If you keep the cockpit volume down to the minimum, there should be no need for a pump. Any pump, a mechanical device in a highly corrosive environment, is bound to let you down. The sort of seats now being fitted to the current generation of sea kayaks - pod cockpits in plastic kayaks and using the seat as the aft bulkhead in the case of glassfibre boats, have the ability to keep bilge water to the minimum. The 'Jap-cap' seat that is now offered in the Nordkapp kayak (Paul Caffyn had the prototype in his Nordkapp for his trip around Japan - hence the name!) keeps all available space for bilge-water to the minimum. Many paddlers will also glue closed-cell foam onto the inner shell surface to reduce cockpit volume as well - all very sensible additions. With such kayaks the paddler can re-enter a capsized kayak and with the paddler's lower body displacing most of the water, can reattach a spraydeck with the cockpit full, and paddle without the balance of the kayak being adversely affected. Once into a sheltered position, you can bail with a mug or even your hands to improve the situation if you need to. Who needs a pump?

The minimalist, therefore, is not some sort of spartan martyr, but is improving his safety margin to an extraordinary degree - far more than many people might

suppose. Safety is not a matter of having more gear - rather the opposite. It's worth thinking about.

#### WOODEN KAYAKS

A number of people have asked about plans for sea kayaks built in plywood. My own boat, a 16' 8" eskimo copy has sparked quite a lot of interest following the last two Sea Kayak Forums. Unfortunately my boat has been built from some rather rough drawings of an original eskimo boat and so far I have not drawn it up for others to follow what I did - sometime in the near future I might get that job done. Most people wanting plans for boats want to build in the 'stitch and tape' method which means that the shapes of the ply panels have to be very accurately drawn and cut if the boat is to be built with any ease.

As far as I know, there are three designs available in New Zealand:

The first is a copy of a genuine Eskimo kayak - the Disko Bay kayak from the book 'Bark Canoes and Skin boats of North America'. This boat was built by Ian Milne in Dunedin and he has plans available which he drew as he built his own boat. Ian can be contacted at:

Ian Milne  
124 Richardson Street  
St Kilda  
DUNEDIN

The second is the 'Sea Bear' by Ron Augustin. Available as kitset or plans as a single or double. Contact Ron at:

Ron Augustin  
37 Beaubank Road  
Kelson  
AUCKLAND 7

The third is a boat of somewhat varied parentage that has been developed from an English design but adapted for sea kayaking in New Zealand by Sandy Ferguson. This boat is the subject of a kayak building class in Christchurch at the

moment. The kayak is 4.6m in length and one has done a number of trips around the Nelson and D'Urville Island coasts. Contact Sandy at:

A.M. Ferguson  
12 Dunn St  
Christchurch, 2

#### WOOD CONSTRUCTION

If you have the time and/or lack the money for an off-the-shelf kayak, or just like using something that you have made yourself, then the answer could be a wooden kayak. You don't have to be a good woodworker but if you take your time and go carefully you can build a good kayak.

Wooden boats are as good as most fibreglass or plastic kayaks, not as robust, sure, but at a fraction of the cost they are a worthwhile alternative. Sandy claims his boat can be built for \$200, I would say that with paint and all-up fittings etc, buying all new wood rather than using scraps, a kayak will cost you around \$400 to put on the water.

Disadvantage - they are more prone to damage if used carelessly. They are as easy to repair as a fibreglass boat and if damaged during a trip can be patched easily if epoxy is carried or taped with 'Sleek' or 'Duct tape' until more permanent materials are available.

Advantage - low cost, light weight (18 kg). Custom built to your own needs.

There are a number of designers and builders in the USA and a few in the UK:

John Lockwood has 3 "Queen Charlotte" stitch and tape kayaks from 16'10" to 19'.

Pygmy Kayak Co.  
Dept 8,  
P.O. Box 1529  
Port Townsend  
WA 98368  
USA

Betsie Bay Kayak  
P.O. Box 1706  
Frankfort  
MI 49635  
USA

Loon Sea Kayaks  
Box 253  
Smallpoint Rd  
Sebasco Estates  
ME 04655  
USA

Percy Blanford's plans are available in the USA from :-  
Clark Craft Boat Company  
16 Aqua Lane  
Tonawanda  
NY 14150  
USA

Not sure what the UK address is.

Denis Davis Design  
38 Redditch Road  
Bromsgrove  
Worcs. B60 4JN  
England.

Almost all these boats are for the stitch & tape method and WEST (wood epoxy saturation technique). This gives a strong long-lasting boat and is a well proven method.

More traditional methods of building in ply - ply over chines and gunwales using frames will allow you to build without knowing the exact shape of the panels, and you can change the shape as you go along - much easier for the home designer/builder and will result in a stronger though heavier boat than a 'stitch & tape' boat.

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