

THE SEA CANOEIST NEWSLETTER

Issue 42

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The Sea Canoeist Newsletter is published 6 times a year and is the official newsletter of the Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers (N.Z.) Incorporated. Subscriptions are \$8.00 per annum and should be made out to K.A.S.K. (NZ) Inc.

EDITORIAL

Eric Van Toor tied the knot to another paddler before Xmas, and moved from the West Coast to the big smoke of Christchurch. He will carry on as secretary/treasurer of KASK, dealing with the newsletter subscriptions and the mailing list. I will continue as editor of the newsletter for another 12 months. Any articles, trip reports, unclassified adds, or letters to the editor should be sent to:

P: Caffyn, RD 1, Runanga, West Coast
Tel: (03) 7311806

while subs should be sent to:
Eric Van Toor, 133 Port Hills Rd, Christchurch.
Tel: (03) 3844844

ROUND AUSSIE PADDLERS

From the quarterly newsletter of M.A.S.K., the Metropolitan Association of Sea Kayakers which is based in New York, I learned what happened to Tony Brown and Eric Stiller with their attempt to paddle around Australia. I have reproduced Eric's article in full as their sail powered 370 mile crossing of the Gulf of Carpentaria is a superb feat of endurance.

The broad area of the gulf lies in the south-east trade wind belt. Once the boys left Booby Island, they were fully committed to the crossing with no show of turning back against the day and night 20 to 25 knot trade wind. The discomfort of sitting in the double klepper with only snacks for sustenance and five hours sleep for the five nights on the sea, plus the strain of maintaining a compass course in the choppy seas for six days seems to have

led to the Round Aussie trip being abandoned.

I can imagine the intense emotional relief the boys felt when they stepped ashore in Arnhem Land. When Max Reynolds and I finished our first sea kayak trip, around Fiordland from Te Waewae Bay to Jacksons Bay, we swore we would never sit in a sea kayak again. Our next trip was going to be across the Sahara Desert, as far away from the sea as possible. So I can sympathize with Tony and Eric as they gathered their wits at a remote Aboriginal community, in possibly never wanting to get back into the klepper. It was sufficient that they had taken on the greatest challenge of their lives and simply survived.

TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Alan Woods of Dunedin has written a superb article on the skin boat festival that he, Bevan Walker and Nora Flight, attended in Siberia. Nora and Bevan's report in the last newsletter briefly covered their Siberian experience. Alan's story is a fascinating insight to the interaction between the Russian and the Eskimo people, and the contrasting attitudes of the people who attended the festival. A feature on Alan's trip appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* (16/12/92) with two excellent colour photos, one of Alan broaching in the St Clair surf and the second of the kayakers and villagers at Sereniki in Siberia. I have included a map to show where Providenya is located.

Alan will be supplying future reports of kayaking news from the Dunedin area for the newsletter. Before Xmas he completed

trip from Bluff to Dunedin: "Apart from gale-force winds around the Nuggets, had few problems and an enjoyable trip."

Alan noted three commercial sea kayak groups have commenced operations in Doubtful and Milford sounds.

Maggie Oakley and Alan are tentatively scheduling a southern mini-sea kayaking forum for the 11th and 12th of December 1993, to be held at Aromoana, just north of Dunedin. It is intended to have a more practical experience slant for a large number of budding sea kayakers in the Otago area.

BOOKS

I have copies of *Cresting the Restless Waves* and *Dark Side of the Wave*, the North Island and Stewart Island stories, for sale also a secondhand copy of *The Cockleshell Heroes* by Lucas Phillips.

1993 CALENDAR

Friday 2nd - Sunday 4th April
Fifth annual Graham Egarr Sea Kayak Forum
Star Boating Club, Wellington
Enquiries:
P. Caffyn, RD 1, Runanga.
Tel: (03)7311806

Friday 30 April - Sunday 2 May
Coastbusters, Sea Kayak Symposium at Long Bay, Auckland
Enquiries to:
D. Robertson, 146 Hinemoa St, Birkenhead, Auckland.
Tel: (09) 480 0765

The First Small Boat Crossing of the Gulf of Carpentaria

Right from the start we were in it. We launched from Bondi Beach in Sydney on March 10, 1992, and in the first two months we hit the tail end of a cyclone, which threw up waves almost 17 feet high. We capsized in monstrous surf. We mangled our rudder and on two separate occasions broke our mast.

Fortunately, this section of the coast is rather well developed, with towns every hundred miles. So when we do make land, we usually load up on calories and fat. I've gotten to the point where I can devour a gallon of ice cream in a single sitting.

Despite it all, we're averaging 30 miles in the course of ten hour days and have flown through the 1200 miles of Great Barrier Reef, arriving at our 1/4 way mark and the point of our greatest danger, the 400 mile crossing of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

We arrived at Cape York, the western most reach of the gulf, on June 10 and took a week and a half down time to rest and reclaim some body mass. We began our crossing on June 20, from Thursday Island. The seas were flat and there was no wind, an unusual circumstance for this time of year. In a few hours we ran into an even more unusual westerly, which nudged us all the way to Boobie Island, 20 nautical miles WNW of Thursday Island. We followed Magellan GPS course, until the radio astennae of the island became visible.

Boobie Island is one of the last manned lighthouses in Australia. We arrived in pitch black and nearly circumnavigated the island to find the one and only landing area, where we could set up our Bivvy sacks and sleep.

The next morning we paid our respects to the lighthouse keeper, asking for weather information. He informed us, however, the only information he receives is what he sees outside.

"It became clear that real rest was going to be rare and sleep all but impossible!"

That morning he saw 17 knots from the southeast. When we asked how rough the seas got? He nodded sagely and said rough. When we asked if it was just large swells or swells with chops and confusion, he nodded to chops and confusion.

We thanked him for his insights and bid him farewell, taking our butterflies with us. Tony half rhetorically asked aloud could we do it? And I half rhetorically answered, "We'll see when we get there."

We put in and immediately started paddling into a sea of confusion. I was optimistic that once we got into deeper waters everything would settle down. However, after the first few hours, it became apparent that what I had hoped was just shoal sea, was the sea we were going to encounter the whole way, and it was a chaotic intersection of overlapping waters. There was water on, in, and through every wave.

Very quickly we were greeted by our first 'thwack', the top of a wave shearing off on top of us. These 'thwacks' were consistent in occurrence, but random in direction. They would strike from both beams, plow right over the bow, or dump on the stern, or any combination of the three.

This was a foreshadowing of the week to come, a constant 5 days of 20 to 25 mile winds, with 8 to 12 foot waves, with every 3rd and 4th wave a breaker.

It became clear that real rest was going to be rare and sleep all but impossible. Even if we could achieve a comfortable position, the motion of the sea was so confused, and the 'thwacks' so consistent, it soon became an act of courage just to close your eyes. So much for our plan of alternating shifts of sleeping and paddling.

And if that wasn't enough, we soon discovered that the nights were long and cold. Really cold! Not arctic, but a bone-chilling drain of heat that sucked the life right from your core. Pile, drytop, parka, rainpants, woolhat and hood, barely got your through to the 8:00 am reappearance of the sun. Fortunately, Tony found his Australia Sport Suit made the big difference. Unfortunately, mine had been sent back to Sydney, in anticipation of tropical heat. In addition, we were undoubtedly more susceptible to the cold since our nutritional intake was limited to the snack foods we were able to store around our seats.

Another problem was maintaining a West Southwest heading with a wind gusting from South to Southeast. Leeboards helped a lot, but the angle of cutting across and sometimes through waves gave no room for day dreaming. This course was always 20 to 30 degrees different from what the boat would have found ideal. We refereed constantly to the compass, which became most trying at night, when we were unable to see the boat's line on the waves and the stars, our only other reference, were lost in the haze.

"The nights were long and cold.... a bone chilling drain of heat that sucked the life right from your core."

During the daylight hours, we could average 35 to 40 miles, while our 12 hour nights would crawl by with 25 miles or less. The hopes of a quick 4 day crossing quickly died. We were in it for the duration and we dejectedly prepared for a full 5 nights on the water. Not that we had any options. Landing was out of the question, since we were too far out to make it in. Besides which, the entire perimeter of the Gulf of Carpentaria was the breeding grounds of the giant salt-water sea crocs.

By night two, the hallucinations started, 'commercial breaks' we called them. You'd be rolling along, sometime even be in the middle of a sentence, and your mind would simply tune out anything you were doing, and then tune back in with a start, refocused and slightly refreshed. The episodes became more frequent as night progressed and less frequent during the day. Tony described his 'time outs' as suddenly being in a much more pleasant environment, usually on dry land, after which he would always feel a lot better about his present situation. Mine were similar.

By night three, the inability to significantly change positions and the constant rubbing of salt-encrusted, wet clothing started to wear down all the tender little points we suddenly discovered all over our bodies. Very quickly those 'points' reddened, turning into rashes along the inner arms, top of the hands, and waist. The worst were the deep ulcerating holes along the spine and coccyx which made even the easy tasks, like sitting, a lesson in agony. By the 5th night, uncontrollable body shivers were the norm. We were, for all intent and purposes, trapped in an 8 x 3 prison, unable to move, unable to eat, and unable to sleep; I counted 5 hours total sleep for the whole 5 days.

Early on the 5th night, we saw the dunes of land in the distance. What a thrill, the Magellan had kept us true. Pilots must have a similar sensation when coming out of cloud right over their destination. By this time, we were 23 miles away, which in our minds seemed like the end. This was a mistake, as our mental guards started to come down and we imagined ourselves to be home free. And sure enough, about an hour later, the winds shifted to the southwest. We had to close-reach at 2 1/2 knots, just to stay on course. As we started to get closer, the water grew shallower, resulting in an increase in the frequency of the 'thwacks'. The wind was strong, we were cold, we hurt all over, and we both screamed.

Meanwhile, the dunes of Gove Harbor started coming agonizingly closer. We were still hopeful, with just a little more time we would get there. Nope, wrong again. As daybreak came, we found ourselves in a stall. The tide had started to ebb and the wind was building against us, and slowly we began losing ground. We were near the end of our rope and in a quagmire. What to do? Do we put out a drift-stopper and wait 6 to 7 hours for the tide? Waiting was unimaginable. Do we paddle? Paddling seemed impossible because of the rashes and the pressure point sores. Do we set off the EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon)? We considered it, but knew that would shame us forever. Ultimately, there was no choice. We needed to clear room for proper paddling, so we began the process of derigging, which seemed a monumental task in our state of mind.

Initially, the paddling felt good, but this sensation only lasted minutes at a time, and energy faded fast. Problem was, we had hours of hard, against-the-tide paddling, not a few minutes of an intermittent sprint.

Eventually, hours later, numb and feverous, we made shore somewhere west of Nhulumbay. We were gathered up by an angel of mercy who bathed us and fed us. But even with her tender ministrations, it took us days to even walk properly. The deeper wounds will take much more time, and as to the scars that Carpentaria left on our psyche, all I can say is: **We did it and we're alive.**

Best wishes from Oz - Eric Stiller & Tony Brown

Shortly after this communication, we received word that the trip had been halted for undisclosed reasons and that Eric was completing the return trip solo via bicycle.

To Russia With Love

It all started in October 1991 with a small ad in the Sea Kayaker magazine advertising a Sea Kayak Proznik in Provideniya Russia. Put that in front of someone with itchy feet and a desire to see Russia and you get instant drooling at the prospect of the trip.

So started seven months of letters, training and phone calls to organize the trip. Most of Telecoms profit this year would have come from my calls to Alaska and Russia trying to find out what the hell was happening. Finally after throwing lots of money into a ever deepening pit I headed for Alaska and a meeting with my paddling partner Marin Kuizenga of Fairbanks. I still didn't know if paddling a Klepper double in a cold hostile land with someone you had never meet before was going to work out, but the time was past for worrying.

We got our first indication of the fickle weather in the region, when we couldn't leave Nome which was nice and sunny because Provideniya was fogged in. At least this gave me a chance to meet the group and to form first off biases. First of all and most importantly for them was 10 U.S Special Forces Soldiers all done up in matching Patagonia clothing. The Top Sargent and myself took a instant dislike to one another, to him I was a noisy useless civilian and a non U.S one at that and to me he was a product of a overly arrogant "we are god's gift to the world" type of Yank soldier. Bevan Walker and Nora Flight, good fellow Kiwi's who I was very pleased to see. George Headly, a wandering Canadian who occasionally seemed to fit in some work around his kayak trips. Tully Hammil who when I first met him was bouncing off the walls with coffee addiction, but who turned out to be a very well informed and enjoyable companion. Finally Joel and Patti Mieir a very fit laid back couple from the states.

Finally we got clearance for Provideniya and took off at last for Russia. Our first indication of the difference in the countries was the

S.A.M missile and Radar sites we crossed over on the trip. Landing on the very rough gravel runway was very disconcerting with stones flying in all directions including into our propellers.

Our first sight of the locals were the border guards who greeted us on arrival, most of whom looked as though they should have been in nappies not uniform. Customs was easier than I had expected. Once through the customs we became acquainted another much more important custom in Siberia, the dreaded "Tundra Time" where the time taken to do anything is inversely proportional to how long you wish it to take.

After introductions to Oleg Guyfullin, our host for the trip, and a official welcome from the local commissar and some of the local Eskimo's, we quickly realized that speech making is a passion second only to vodka drinking amongst the Russian people. Finally after four hours we headed for our campsite at Svetok (flower) bay. On the way there we passed through the military township of Ureliki, and although I had seen video's of the area it did nothing to prepare me for the dirt and state of decay.

Once at Svetok bay we set up camp and assembled our kayaks, a new and novel experience for me, never having used folding boats before. We were watched with some amusement by the local children, who apart from looking like grubby little urchins were very friendly and seemed to enjoy helping us set up our equipment.

For the Russians life begins at 10pm, so Oleg was all for us going to the local disco. We were very reluctant as we had bounced around to many time zones to go partying with young Russian teenagers. The next three days were taken up with lots of speeches, cultural displays and a very large picnic where all the locals were invited to try out the kayaks and umiaks. We spent the evening demonstrating kayaking skills and taking the locals for rides in the boats, they all seemed to pick up the basics very quickly.

I think at this stage a description of the umiaks is in order, the umiak (or Bidaria in Russian) is a distant cousin to the kayak. The local umiaks are about 6 to 7 metres long and 3 metres wide, the frames are made of wood gathered as drift wood or scrounged from the wharves, the frames are lashed together which makes a strong but flexible framework. The outer covering is of walrus hides, the hides are prepared by burying them for a month or two in straw to rot the hair off it. As the skins are to thick to use at this stage the skin is split so it is about two thirds of its original thickness, this is a skill that is fast disappearing as the old timers die off. The hides are then trimmed and draped over the frame, the first skin is stretched into place and lashed to the frame, the next skin is butted up against the first and blind sewn to it so there are no stitches through the hides, both hides are stretched again and relashed. This continues until all 3 or 4 skins are fitted, the skins are continually stretched until they are drum tight, the seams are then sealed with walrus blubber or in the working boats by painting. The umiaks are fitted with sails and paddled, but the more common thing nowadays is to fit a outboard to them. The Umiaks are extremely tough and sea worthy boats, the walrus hides being tougher than wood for beach landings, and the boat being flexible absorbs a lot of the wave energy that can break normal boats.

On the fourth day we were due to paddle to Sereniki village, a distance of about 60km. After many discussions with Oleg about the time we were to depart, it was decided that a compromise between the 6 am that we wanted and the 12pm that he wanted would be 9am. We were ready at the appointed time, but no Oleg (tundra time had struck again), Oleg finally arrived at 2pm, by this time we were more than a little hacked off as some of our gear had been stolen while we were waiting for him.

As usual the by early afternoon the wind had picked up, so it was a

good bouncy paddle down to the old Providenyia township on the coast. This township was abandoned in the early 60's after a landslide, there were old aircraft and boats lying where they had been abandoned 30 years ago, they were still in quite good order considering their 30 year life in the open.

We hung round for 2 hours waiting for the umiaks to catch up, they had stayed behind to load all the gear and food. While we were waiting Bevan, Nora, Marin and myself went exploring around the site, we found old walrus skulls and a lot of abandoned junk. We finally left for our overnight campsite, by this time the wind was quite brisk so it was a case of head down and paddle for the next couple of hours. We finally got our camp set up and dinner cooked by about 10pm, more caribou meat and pickled cucumbers for dinner, a vegetarians nightmare.

The beach had a pile of rusting fuel drums that were slowly leaking their toxic wastes into the soil. It was the first time I had seen any attempt to clean up the environment at all, even if it was only to concentrate the pollution in one spot.

The next day we were away fairly early after a breakfast of burnt boiled rice. We paddled round the bird bazaars on the Sereniki cliffs, it was great to see the thousands of birds lining the cliff and swimming in the water. Some of the birds were molting so after launching their take off from the cliff their lift off altitude was about 2 fathoms, we were bombed by falling birds several times on the trip. The most impressive part of the coastline was the large vertical tors sticking out of the rounded bare weathered landscape.

By early afternoon the wind had got up once again and it was almost impossible to paddle into it. After fighting our way past one of the cliff faces, Oleg told us to turn back to one of the previous beaches to wait for the others to catch up. this was not a popular idea even if it did make sense, as we had expended a

lot of energy getting to where we were.

We stopped at the beach for 5 hours while waiting for the wind to die down, we had lunch of red caviar and boiled salmon soup with seaweed, it was actually quite good and was one of the few meals I went back for seconds for. The wind died marginally in the late afternoon so we headed off to Sereniki village. It took 3 hours of dodging in behind bluffs and lots of grunt to get to the village, the army boys as usual took the direct route and used bloody minded strength instead of skill to beat us to the landing site. By the time we landed we were cold, hungry and losing our sense of adventure. We were welcomed on the beach by the local Eskimo's and the inevitable border guards with their passport and visa checks. We had a few problems with the local drunken Eskimo's who insisted on hugging us and inviting us back to their apartments for dinner. I found it disconcerting to be hugged by a large vodka soaked Eskimo lady, intent on warming me up I think. We finally got our camp set up and went into town for dinner at the only restaurant in town, the food was no different to our own, just standard walrus and caribou meat with pasta.

Sereniki was a much tidier town than Providenyia, you could almost detect a sense of local pride. Unfortunately the beach was rancid with old walrus blubber and the fox farm behind us added to the cocktail of smells. the farm held several thousand small blue foxes in primitive battery farming conditions, it was very hard not to sneak up there at night and let them go free.

The next morning the sea was quite rough and the wind had changed to the north with a corresponding drop in temperature. We had a day of looking round town, when we toured the blubber rendering factory we met our drunken Eskimo friend from the night before, her job was to scoop the left over renderings out of a large vat by hand. The smell was horrendous, I

now saw why she would get drunk all the time, if I had her job I would make sure I would never get sober.

We had a opportunity at Sereniki to talk to the local Inupiqu Eskimo's and Chuchi herders about their lives and how they got on with the Russians. Most of them disliked the Russians intensely for taking their culture away from them and forcing them to adopt the standard Russian food and customs, in the last 30 to 40 years most of their traditional skills have been lost by the old people dying out and the forcing of the children to learn only the Russian customs and traditions.

That night we had a display of Eskimo dancing by a small group of women that were trying to revive the old dances. We then competed in some Eskimo games, which were all very physical, like throw the harpoon which was a 6 foot length of 3 inch timber that was very heavy. For the first time our military friends came in handy, as they were both strong and stupid enough to compete with the locals.

The weather did not improve the next day so we filled in time visiting people and looking round the area. That night the army got into a fight with the locals over their attempts to go to bed with any women over the age of 16, so it made it necessary to leave town in a hurry. We loaded our boats onto a truck and drove overland to Providenyia bay, the trip was only 36km but it took 5 hours of bone jarring and teeth rattling driving to get there. It was very cold and uncomfortable and by far the most depressing day of the whole trip. It was hard to summon up any interest in the bleak but still very beautiful tundra we were crossing.

We reassembled our boats and the next day paddled down to the end of Providenyia bay to look at the seal colonies there, it was good to paddle with the strong northerly behind us and we made good time surfing down to the end of the bay, Joel and Patti put the sail up on the feathercraft and had a free ride down, I can see the advantages of the sails now. When we pitched camp the wind was so strong I had

to put extra guys out on the tent to hold it down. It was very cold and even with a wind break the fire seemed to put out little heat, we all headed for bed early to get warm.

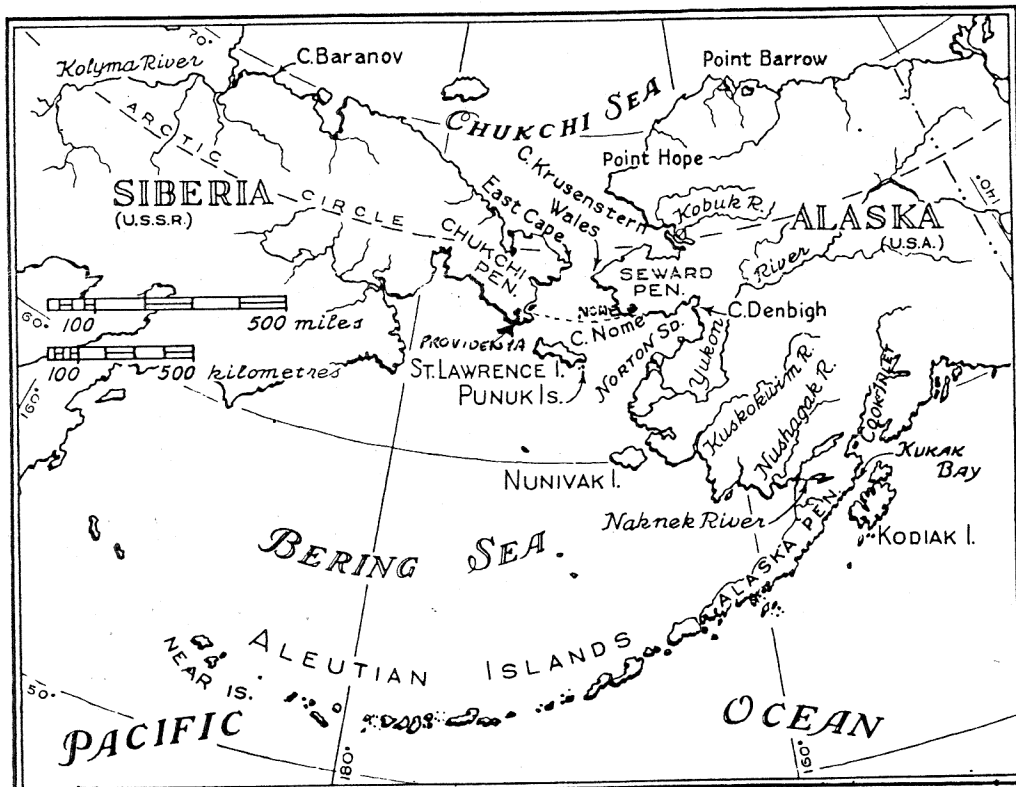
The wind had dropped a little the next morning, but we were faced with a very stiff paddle into the wind to get back to Svetok bay. It was very much woolen hat and pogies temperature today. We had to work hard to make progress into the wind and for the first time on the trip I started to burn out, slip_streaming the very much fitter Bevan and Nora gave us enough of a break to make Svetok bay in good time. Our army friends still insisted on taking the direct route which must have been brutal on their arms even for people as strong and fit as they were. We dismantled the boats and got changed, then had to hang round for 2 hours in the freezing cold for the bus to Providenyia. Finally it arrived and we piled on, happy to be heading for a warm apartment and a hot shower.

We had two days to fill in before the flight back to Nome so we drove over to New Chaplino, there for the first time on the trip we caught a glimpse of the true culture and-pride of the Inupiqu Eskimo's. The joy and intensity they put into dances was great to see, for the first time we saw men participating in the dances, they played Walrus skin drums to provide the beat and chanted the songs. The dances were very realistic with scenes of hunting and village life played out in dance and song. the pride these people had in themselves as a race was reflected in the tidiness of their village and the liveliness of the people. I was please we had gone to New Chaplino last as it restored some of my dreams of how the Eskimo lived and finished the trip off on a positive note.

After spending as many rubles as I could, we boarded the bus to the airport and the usual 4 hour wait to argue with customs and to have the farewell speeches. I was sorry to leave Oleg and his group who tried hard to show us a good time and to accommodate our various weird

and wonderful ways. It was also sad to split up the civilians of the group, all of whom made excellent traveling companions.

Alan Woods



**1993 Graham Egarr SEA KAYAK FORUM
Programme & Registration Details**

The fifth national K.A.S.K. Sea Kayak Forum will be held in Wellington on the weekend of Friday 2nd - Sunday 4th April, 1993. The venue is the Star Boating Club, opposite the Michael Fowler Centre. This is on the edge of a lagoon which opens into Wellington Harbour.

The aim of the forum is to inform and educate budding paddlers on all aspects of safe and efficient sea kayaking. The KASK {NZ} Inc. A.G.M. will be held prior to the Saturday night meal.

The forum will have a similar schedule to the successful one held last year at Sumner. Friday night will be a wine & cheese/registration/chin wag session at 7pm followed by a slide session by some of KASK's famous and infamous paddlers. Saturday morning will commence with a two hour show and tell, which is a chance to listen to the manufacturers and try out their boats. Workshops, on the water sessions, and panel discussions will then take up the rest of Saturday and most of Sunday. The highlight of the weekend will be on Saturday evening with an audio-visual extravaganza by the Kiwi paddlers who attended the Siberian skin boat festival last August.

Topics will include: paddles & paddling technique, customizing your kayak, navigation, weather, trip & expedition planning, seamanship, kayak construction and repairs, kayak sailing, surf and surf landings, safety and rescue techniques and anything else by request. Lecturers and panel members to date are Bevan Walker, Eric Van Toor, Grahame Sisson and Paul Caffyn.

Live in accommodation is available at the Boat Club for out of townies; bring sleeping bag, pillow and thermarest. Tentative cost is \$60 for the weekend which will include lunches and a Saturday night feed.

My special thanks to Brent Harrison of Mainly Tramping for helping with the Wellington arrangements.

To register your interest in the forum, please drop a line to P.Caffyn, RD 1, Runanga, West Coast. If there is a topic you would like included in the list or a speciality topic in which you could talk/demonstrate for an hour, please note this on the rip off section below.

Registration Intention

I wish to register my intention to attend the 1993 Sea Kayak Forum.

Name:

Address: