

# THE SEA CANOEIST NEWSLETTER

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## Editorial

Bevan Walker and Nora Flight are back from their kayaking sojourn in Australia, where they paddled both in the Kimberlies and along one of the greatest sea kayaking destinations in the world, inside the Great Barrier Reef, from Port Douglas to Cape York. Nora's report is a taste of what this trip can offer.

Kayak design: is a difficult topic to discuss or write about and it is difficult to gain agreement between two paddlers on design features let alone amongst a group of paddlers. With thanks to *The Drift*, the newsletter of the Metropolitan Association of Sea Kayakers in New York, I have reprinted an article entitled Making Sense of Kayaks by Frank Goodman. A relative latecomer to kayaking, Frank gave up a twenty year career as teacher and art lecturer to form a kayak design and building company in 1970 called Valley Canoe Products, based in Nottingham. In 1974 Frank designed a sea kayak for a six man English expedition to paddle around the northern coast of Norway. He named the kayak after the northern most cape of Norway - Nordkapp. In 1977 Frank and three other paddlers kayaked around Cape Horn. In the northern winter of 1979 he organized a kayak building course for the Baffin Island Inuit as the craft of building traditional skin boats had been lost. Frank returned in the summer of 1980 with a small team of English paddlers to kayak with two local Inuit from Frobisher Bay to Allen Island. Needless to say Frank is quite a character with a great sense of humour. He is regularly requested on the Sea Kayak symposium trail in North America as a lecturer and keynote speaker. This article is an excellent meaty discussion of design features and some of the

experimentation that Frank used. And I am pleased especially to read the comments regarding weight of kayak of kayaks and equipment and that the most neglected 'advanced stroke' is the forward paddling stroke.

Assessors of Professional Sea Kayak Operators: On a serious note, I am concerned that the recently formed Sea Kayak Operators Association has ignored the depth and talent of sea kayakers in New Zealand to bring in two New Zealand Canoeing Association Kayak Instructor Assessors for an initial series of 'grandparenting courses'. Unquestionably Brett Whitely and Mick Hopkinson are eminently qualified for assessing white water paddlers but, if you will pardon the pun, there is a great gulf between the knowledge, skill and experience required for white water paddling and sea kayaking. Paddling, rolling, and bracing skills are identical but I feel the similarity ends there. There is a great depth of knowledge required for safe and efficient sea kayaking in fields such as: navigation, weather, tidal stream and currents, rescue techniques, knowledge of marine fauna and flora etc, etc. The sea kayakers with what I feel is the necessary experience for assessing professional sea kayak operators and guides are here in New Zealand, sea kayakers not only with a broad base of club/group based instruction but a wealth of overseas expedition experience and a sound knowledge of the fields noted above, for starters Bevan Walker in Nelson, Alan Woods in Dunedin and Brian Lodge in Christchurch. Why have they been ignored? The British Canoe Union uses such people as John Ramwell and Derek Hutchinson for assessment of sea kayak instructors, people who are recognized authorities and experts in the field of sea kayaking.

Following on from the April 1993 KASK Forum in Wellington, Bruce Maunsell has put a lot of time and energy into forming the Sea Kayak Operators

Association NZ, and circulating various operators and parties with codes of practice, syllabus etc; and organizing meetings. My only criticism of SKOANZ is that NZCA whitewater instructors have been brought in to assess sea kayakers. Why has the depth of skill, knowledge and experience of paddlers from amongst both KASK and SKOANZ been ignored with regard to assessing guides and operators?

Also Received: an Abel Tasman trip report from Sandy Ferguson and information of kayak trolleys. And a request from Ann Louise Mitcalfe to keep the Wellington area network list up to date. A full KASK membership list for 1993 will be printed in the newsletter. Just waiting on the membership organizer to come to grips a new bit of computer software.

And two newsletters from the New South Wales Sea Kayak Club Inc, a group based in Sydney with a network of some 140 sea kayakers. Yet another attempt to circumnavigate Ozzie is underway with David Hooton from NSW reaching Hamilton Island (N.Qld) and 2,100 kms into his attempt which commenced from Terrigal (just north of Sydney).

## Wanted

Articles, letters to the editor, requests for newsletter articles, adverts, comments on kayak design etc., for the newsletter.

## CALENDAR

Otago Sea Kayak Forum  
4-6 February 1994, to be held at Aromoana near Dunedin. To give beginner and intermediate sea kayakers a better understanding of the skills required for safe enjoyable sea kayaking. Cost of around \$50 to include lunches & dinner. Tent accommodation and a hall is booked for lectures and slide shows.

Contact: Alan Woods, at 4A Alva St, Dunedin. Ph: (03) 479 2618 Home

## Kayaking the Coral Coast

by Nora Flight

The 2,000 km long Great Barrier Reef of N.E. Australia is the longest barrier reef in the world. Soemtimes it is close to the mainland and sometimes up to 200kms offshore. Mostly it comprises shallow coral ledges with occasional gaps opening into the Pacific Ocean. There are also small sand and coral islands and more prominent continental islands which were once part of the mainland.

South-east trade winds blow here most persistently between April and November, but because of the calming effects of the reef, only large chops develop on the inner side of the reef. Within hours of the wind dropping, the sea will be flat calm. During this time of the year, precipitation is at a minimum and temperatures are cooler - between 15 & 25 degrees celsius. There is an absence of the lethal box jellyfish and the big sea-going crocodiles are mostly ensconced up the rivers.

After months of preparation, our group of five rendezvoused at the holiday town of Port Douglas. With 900kms of kayaking ahead of us, within five and a half weeks, time seemed of little consequence. Holiday mode was readily adopted. It was June 4, still early in the dry season so finding drinking water would not be a big problem. In fact, this was found in surprising and delightful locations. Orford Ness was the favourite; pure cold water spilling over a red rocky bank into pools, right at sea level. We often carried water for 4 > 5 days, although we were not drinking anywhere near the 5 litre/day recommended.

On our first 10 days, the wind was often below 10 knots, with some patches of absolute calm. We followed heavily forested hills backing beautiful bays, then the Main Dividing Range swung inland and the coast became flatter and drier, with groves of whispering Casuarinas amongst huge silica sand dunes. Large tangly mangrove forests were dispersed in between, of which we gave a wide berth. We successfully negotiated our first crossing to a coral cay on a compass heading; Pethebridge Islet with cooing Torres Strait pigeons and sunset silhouettes of prawn trawlers anchored nearby. Crossings of 15 to 20kms to a point unseen became common.

Then we reached Cape Melville, one third of the way to Cape York, where the wind became more characteristic of a trade

wind. It would howl night and day, sometimes blowing over 30 knots for a few days, then moderating back to 15 > 20 knots. This made for some thrilling parafoiling and sailing. Concerning parafoils, one lesson we learnt was to buy only those specifically designed for kayaks. Alister spent many painstaking hours trying to hoist his Australian made parafoil, only to be using it as an effective sea anchor. However Alister and Catherine also got in many hours of kiting with a Canadian foil, doing huge zig-zags to stay even with us.

Sailing was a joy. To hear the sail snap as we zoomed close to the wind in our Canadian Feathercraft folding kayak, hearing the hiss of the bow wave, and lazing in the shadow of the sail. When I was attacked by a debilitating stomach bug, the sail helped enormously, even allowing myself to snooze.

Cape Melville eventuated as an excellent location for a storm bound holiday. The three lads became quite addicted to testing themselves on the massive granite boulders forming the cape. A good place to laze and read accounts of horrendous cyclones that washed boats many miles inland and marooned dolphins 12 metres above mean sea level.

From this point, we island hopped across the enormous sweep of Princess Charlotte Bay, camping on tiny remote cays a few metres above the tide and fighting with the seagulls for tent space. Snorkelling was good, and beachcombing even better. Once on the mainland again, lush tropical rainforest hemmed in 10's of miles of white sand beaches, with small coral reefs making for chop free landings.

The double kayak quickly became the 'mothership' of our expedition, being the central pontoon on our many snack and lunch breaks out at sea. It could also carry a lot more gear than the Nordkapps put together. And surprisingly it could clip along at Nordkapp speed, or faster, although the ability to sail saved our energy when we needed to paddle.

The other boat on our expedition was the Australian Pittorak, captained by Kevin our novice sea kayaker, ex white water paddler. He became the object of much envy as he careered past, lounging back with paddle in brace position, sail billowing. The boat's wind harnessing system proved the most versatile for different wind conditions, and very efficient. Also its stowage area was more sizeable and

sensible for a longer expedition.

With half the mileage behind us, Lockhart River Aboriginal Community was quite an education for us on the way the Aborigines prefer to live. We first had to clear the beer cans to make a space for our tents. However the convenience of a store and fresh tapped water made us stay an extra day. We also had to re-load our kayaks with food we'd posted up. In reciprocation, we posted just as many cartons of unnecessary gear and food and beach combings back to Cairns.

The coastline north of here (when we weren't miles out crossing some largish bay) kept delving forth, one gorgeous place after another. Restoration Island with its peaceful and hospitable caretaker. The tropical splendour of the Pascoe River and its alternative style community. The cute cluster of the 'Home Islands.' We certainly hadn't allowed ourselves enough time to linger in each of these places. We often collided with large feeding turtles amongst shallow reefs. Spotting a dugong became no need to shout out our surprise. Hooking sharks on our trolling lines became a daily occurrence.

So time quickly past, the five of us deeply absorbed in the daily routine, kaleidoscoped with the ever changing scenery. Surprises were always ahead. At Albany Passage, the tidal stream and following sea created a massive ocean rapid with haystacks and standing waves 6 > 8ft high, which we had to furiously ferry-glide in front of.

Cape York, the very tip of continental Australia, was appropriately celebrated by the 'brainchild' of our expedition, Bevan, hooking a 30lb bluefin tuna. Fishing was moderately successful up this coast, but not to be relied on as a food source.

The cape area was surprisingly populated with a lodge and several camping grounds catering for the thousands of people who brave a trip by road. However, it still felt like a prominent place, with a bare low finger of rock easing into the deep blue. The tip is only 150kms south of Papua New Guinea with Torres Strait and its many islands in between. These are considered Australian territory, with the administration centre being Thursday Island.

To this populated island we kayaked, our last crossing of 12 kms. As usual a 4ft chop from behind hurried us along, and

with a tail tidal stream, we averaged 8kms/hour. Currents are notoriously strong in this area.

For four days we enjoyed the hospitality of a sea kayaker who lives on Thursday Island. He told us stories of swimming with whale sharks and surfing on the outer barrier reef. Torres Strait seemed worthy of a kayak expedition; paradises more perfect than those we'd left behind on the Coral Sea coast. One could just kayak one's life away it seems.....

We flew out of T.I. bound for Cairns, 28 paddling days after leaving Port Douglas.  
Nora Flight

If Undelivered, please return to KASK: P Caffyn, RD 1, Runanga , West Coast