

Title: *Fearless*

Subtitle: One Woman, One Kayak, One Continent

Author: Joe Glickman

Publisher: Falcon Guides

Published: 2012

Contents: 197pp, 6 pp sketch maps, 8 pp b&w photos,

Cover: soft

Size: 140mm x 203mm

Price: US \$16.95

ISBN: 978-0-7627-7287-2

Availability: Amazon

Review: David Winkworth

EXPEDITION IN SEARCH OF A COASTLINE

On a windy Tuesday afternoon 3rd February 2009, I sat on the headland at Tathra, scanning the ocean with my binoculars for a sea kayaker on a mission - to paddle right around Australia.

I picked Freya up about a kilometre out, fighting the white-capping following sea, trying to keep her kayak on course. She'd had enough of the sea that day when she came in, declining to paddle on. We camped at Kianinny Bay, near Tathra that night and the following day we paddled together to Bermagui.

During that paddle I worked out four things:

- firstly, Freya was not remotely interested in our coastal features and early maritime history - Bass and Flinders, the wreck of the *Sydney Cove* and the survivor's walk to Sydney town from Victoria's Ninety Mile beach. Nope.
- secondly, she was deadly serious about a direct crossing of the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- thirdly, this wasn't an around-Australia *attempt* – she was *doing* it!
- and number four, she'd never write a book about the paddle!

That task fell to American Joe Glickman, awarded travel writer, author of *To The Top* and *The Kayak Companion*. Glickman is also a two-time member of the US National Marathon Kayak Team.

Fearless is his book about German paddler Freya Hoffmeister's kayak circumnavigation of Australia, a feat that had been accomplished only once before by Paul Caffyn in 1982.

Hoffmeister came to Australia with impressive sea kayaking credentials: Greenland rolling champion, circumnavigations of Iceland and New Zealand's South Island to name but a few.

Given Glickman's background, it is reasonable to expect a marathon kayaking perspective. And that's what we get. Prior to her Aussie paddle, Glickman introduces Hoffmeister to international ski racing and the prickly Oscar Chalupsky who comes across as a ranting individual. Glickman uses him and the odd Australian surf lifesaving identity to build an impression that the whole world thought she was crazy to attempt the trip.



She wasn't of course – the trip went fairly smoothly. Perhaps the author should've asked some sea kayakers!

Freya Hoffmeister is someone different in the relatively small community of sea kayaking. Tall, black-haired, athletic and branding herself 'The Woman in Black,' she unashamedly uses sex to sell herself. Goodness me, who would've thought of that? Certainly no one else in sea kayaking has yet! Glickman cites an incredible 167 references to full or partial nudity in her trip blog.

Glickman's style is open, breezy and easy to read. I finished the book in two reads but I didn't find it an un-put-downable text.

The author covers periods of Hoffmeister's childhood, including detailed accounts of her parent's lives. I found this annoying - I was more interested in where she was going rather than where she's been, but I suspect Glickman wanted to paint a picture of this fiercely determined woman more than a narrative of the trip.

And it is in this narrative, that the book fails for me. Perhaps I've been spoilt by Paul Caffyn's *Dreamtime Voyage* with its glossy colour plates and laid-back Aussie humour. To invite comparison is possibly not doing justice to either book but for a sea kayaking reader it must be inevitable.

Well more than 13,000kms paddling around the fantastic Australian coastline and it feels to me that the narrative is a, 'what Katy did' and a 'what Katy did next' routine. Where are the colourful descriptions of the Kimberley coastline for example? This is where it becomes difficult for an author, other than THE paddler, to pull a reader into the book. I didn't feel like I was along on the paddle. I found myself thinking that Hoffmeister's 'Race around Australia' could have been done by doing 13,790 laps of a one kilometre lake! I shouldn't be thinking that!

Hype, hyperbole and poor proof reading are in evidence through *Fearless* and let the book down. Foveaux Strait between New Zealand's South Island and Stewart Island magically became 140 miles wide and mention of crocodiles and man-eating white sharks are liberally sprinkled. Paddling around Australia is a long tough trip and embellishment is not needed, certainly not for Australian and New Zealand readers.

For me, missing from the book (and reducing its value as reference material) is a detailed list of the gear used, what worked and what didn't. I would've liked a detailed dietary outline too. I may not want to paddle around Australia but I would like to know what Hoffmeister ate! Six pages of simple sketch maps (with scale) in the book do give the reader an idea of the challenges Hoffmeister faced.

The main problem with this book is that it was obviously produced on a tight budget - and that is very sad. The paper stock is poor and picture-wise we get eight pages of little black and white photos. The book looks cheap and will be a forlorn sight one day in the bargain bins at the local fair. Freya Hoffmeister's 'Race around Australia' (what race?) is a good story that still needs to be told.

So, does *Fearless* belong on your bookshelf? Well, if you're a keen sea kayaker, student of modern sea kayaking history or you're following the current paddling exploits of one Freya Hoffmeister, then the answer is yes. If you're looking for a gripping read, then this book may not be for you.