

Title: *Kabloona in the Yellow Kayak*

Subtitle: *One Woman's Journey Through the Northwest Passage*

Author: Jason, Victoria

Published: 1995

Publisher: Turnstone Press, Canada

ISBN: 0-88801-201-2

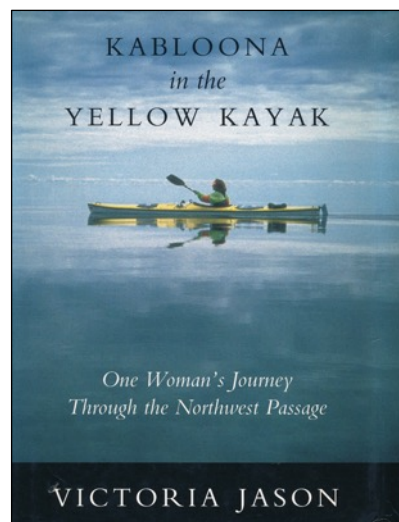
Subject: Kayak trip through the NW Passage;
Hudson Bay to Gjoa Haven with Don Starkell, down the
Mackenzie River and Gjoa Haven to Fort Providence solo.

Cover: Hardback

Contents: 298 pages, 5 maps, 33 colour photos in two sections

Size: 170 x 250mm

Review: Paul Caffyn



In 1995 I heard of a book by Don Starkell, of a kayak trip from Hudson Bay to Tuktoyaktuk, titled *Paddle to the Arctic* and a second kayaking narrative *Kabloona in the Yellow Kayak*. Don Starkell is best known for his trip from Winnipeg in Canada to the mouth of the Amazon River in South America with his son in a Canadian canoe, and the book *Paddle to the Amazon*.

In 1990, at the tender age of 46, Victoria Jason bought her first kayak and a primer on paddling strokes. The following year she joined Don Starkell for the start of a planned trip from Churchill in Hudson Bay through the Northwest Passage to Tuktoyaktuk, near the mouth of the Mackenzie River.

They reached Repulse Bay on the Arctic Circle that first year, then in 1992 had their kayaks and equipment towed behind skidoos on sledges to Spence Bay, near the base of the Boothia Peninsula. Don and Victoria then hauled their kayaks 109 miles south to Gjoa Haven, where Don pushed on solo for Cambridge Bay and Tuk. Overexertion through the kayak hauling, had led to muscle breakdown, heart strain and edema for Victoria. In September, Don was rescued on the Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula with frostbitten fingers and toes, which were later amputated.

Fully recovered, in 1993 Victoria paddled down the Mackenzie River to the sea and soloed eastwards to Paulatuk. In 1994, she soloed the missing leg from Paulatuk through the North-West Passage to Gjoa Haven.

For me the book is an inspirational read. From the worst possible introduction to sea kayaking by paddling with Don Starkell, a temperamental, selfish tyrant who made incredible navigational blunders, this lady kept her eyes and ears open, learned from the early mistakes, and by 1994 Victoria had evolved into an accomplished, veteran solo Arctic kayaker.

Particularly with her solo trips, all the necessary attributes for successful expeditioning are revealed in the text; thorough research and planning, listening carefully to advice of the locals, prior range practice with a shotgun for dealing with bears, and optimizing favourable weather and sea conditions while exercising restraint and patience on shore in bad weather.

The text is semi-diary style, but very readable. I found the short sentence writing style a bit monotonous after a while, and although there are numerous snippets of Arctic exploration history and the flora and fauna, I would have liked more solid meaty descriptions of what transpired at some of the areas she paddled through. Her descriptions of the colourful characters she met and her easy interaction with them are well written. Victoria easily expresses her pleasure and satisfaction of capably surviving in what most people consider a hostile, barren and cold environment.

Details of Victoria's early life are very brief; her first experience of the North was in 1961 when her husband was transferred to work on the Hudson Bay railway. She was 16 years old. She had two babies under two years old, and was trapped in a marriage to a man she hated. After a divorce in 1989, she was

working for Canadian National Railways as a keyboard operator when her love affair with sea kayaking began. A brief quote from the end of the last chapter, when Victoria paddled in to Gjoa Haven, sums up for me how this lady achieved so much:

I could understand what an abundance of respect, determination, and humility could accomplish.

One map shows the entire route, while the four stages are shown in slightly more detail. The maps all lack a scale, and reference to a larger scale atlas or *National Geographic Magazine* map of Arctic Canada is necessary to locate many of the areas described in the text. The photos, in two colour plate sections, provide a simple visual record of the trip, but large white borders diminish the impact of the photos.

To conclude, a superb book of an inspirational adventure by a remarkable grandmother.

(from the *Sea Canoeist Newsletter* {NZ} Issue No. 61, February – March 1996)