

The origin of the Newsletter's name

The following is an edited version of Graham's reasons for naming the newsletter the Sea Canoeist Newsletter and was printed in issue No. 1.

by Graham Egarr 1988

There are some readers who will say that the name of this newsletter is a bit of a misnomer. The term 'canoe' has been deliberately chosen in preference to 'kayak' for a very good reason.

Most authorities will tell you that there are two basic types of 'canoe' - kayaks that are related to the Eskimo craft, and canoes which are related to the North American birchbark canoe. In actual fact the modern European canoe dates from a boat designed by one John MacGregor. Since he popularised the sport all European craft have developed from his original. To a large extent MacGregor's boats were inspired by the kayak yet were far shorter, beamier and more boat-like than the Eskimo craft. Over the years these craft have evolved back towards the original Eskimo style and, in 1961 some sea canoeists began to build replica Eskimo kayaks. Today only a handful of craft owe their design to the original kayak style of the Eskimo, most are evolutions of the MacGregor canoe. The term 'canoe' is therefore used to cover the whole field of canoe and kayak like craft that are paddled.

The other aspect of the name 'sea canoe' that might be argued about is the word 'sea'. By far the vast majority of so called 'sea canoeists' do not set off on long coastal expeditions - perhaps Paul Caffyn is the best known of these people, yet most prefer to potter about along the coast and within the many estuaries around the country. Undoubtedly the vast majority of canoeists in New Zealand are river canoeists; and with so many good whitewater rivers this is hardly surprising. There are also those who prefer to cruise on the less boisterous parts of rivers such as the Wanganui River. We tend to call these people Touring canoeists. Sea canoeists, by a matter of elimination, are those who use craft fitted out and designed for essentially still-water rather than rivers, although the sea is anything but still. What you need for a trip that is not current assisted can be quite different from what you need on a coastal trip.

Unfortunately the term 'sea canoeist' causes many to think in terms of the epic expeditionaries and this has put many off. I am what American's would call a 'gunkholer' - a lover of poking about in creeks and estuaries in a kayak - not for me the anxiety of fighting a gale of wind a couple of miles offshore avoiding a 25 foot breaking surf. But our craft are really very similar.

NOTE

Since then the sea kayaks generally paddled in New Zealand are a combination of the two craft Graham talks about. The fine ends of the Inuit craft and the beamier tendency of the MacGregor craft though nowhere as wide as his. However the SOTs definitely tend that way, beamier and sit on rather than sit in and this makes them canoes.

So, a sit-in kayak and a sit-on (SOT) a canoe?

See also Rushton and His Times in American Canoeing by Atwood Manley.