

# CONNAYAK

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

February 2001

## *An Escape to Quietude*

I am standing beside my kayak looking into the infinite sea and sky before me. The surf sweeps across my feet. It is time to launch and welcome the gift of another solo journey and all of its unexpected offerings.

I have a deep respect for the open sea. Although it has been over two and a half years that I've been paddling, there always is an ongoing list of choices for enchanting places to kayak, challenging waters to conquer, and skills to be learned through continued practice. The best judgement one can use when travelling alone is being prepared for any type of emergency situation. Flares, paddle float, spare clothes, drinking water, whistle, first aid, spare paddle, and the list can go on. Being informed and aware can save your life when you choose to go it alone and put yourself out into potentially dangerous events.

I love being alone on the water. Feeling so free is bliss! I trust my imagination will be my best company during solo trips. However, some occasions have featured lively interaction with sea turtles, seals, feathered friends, and members of the fish kingdom. There are always gifts out there to enjoy, like the time I kayaked from my home by the Niantic River toward Ledge Light in New London. On the way, I stopped the trip to experience a symphony orchestra practicing for their evening concert at Harkness Memorial Park in Waterford. That was a gorgeous, sunny, summer day to remember. Fortunately, the journey of solo paddling is unique to each kayaker who tells a story. It is great to hear them all! The way I grasp it is somewhat of

## Solo Paddling

THOUGHTS FROM PADDLERS



a spiritual blessing that gives me time to empty my mind, listen to intuition, and enliven all of my senses. It is an ambiance of love where I feel that for the moment – “I belong out here now.” May all of you take on meaningful journeys in 2001!

*Yours in Kayaking - Karen Duffy*

While my club activity is focused on leading sometimes week-long trips in far flung places - the ultimate group experience - most of my paddling is done alone in my own backyard. I live on the bank of the Connecticut River just south of the I-91 bridge in East Windsor and claim backyard familiarity with, though not title to, several miles of river up and downstream from my boat rack.

Alone and familiar are potent qualities. During the spring freshet, I sneak up flooded tributaries in search of wildlife: an otter or owl in the Scantic River, a mink, a merlin, a turkey in Namerick Brook or snow geese at its mouth. On the main river the eagles let me paddle under their tree-top perch if I pretend not to notice them. I have sat still in an eddy and watched deer

swim to greener pastures on Kings Island and shared an eddy behind a sand bar with the summer gaggle of gulls. Only the shore dwelling ducks, disliking surprises, fly off in a huff as I paddle by.

The river itself is a living thing. It topples new trees. It subtly shifts sand bars, opening new routes and closing others. Its islands change shape. Eddies and riffles and little waves appear and disappear with water level.

None of this is evident to a one-time traveler or to a posse, but having the grace and stealth of a kayak and being alone in familiar territory, I can at once enjoy my state and build up a longing for some exotic terrain with a bunch of good people.

*- Clark Bowlen*

These days, I'm more prone to enjoy paddling with other people than paddling alone. There were, however, many years I enjoyed and did a lot of solo paddling. Today, my solo paddling is mainly used to practice my rolling and other skills.

Solo paddling has afforded me a variety of experiences. They've ranged from the serene to the exciting. Paddling solo in the Maine fog offered me the opportunity to develop navigational skills using charts and a compass. While camping alone on deserted islands I have come in touch with both the beauty and force of nature. Alone on an island at the end of a long day's paddle I've seen spectacular sunsets. I've spent nights under a full moon that turned the islands surrounding me into a mystical landscape. I've also been stranded on an Island in a storm where the wind speed was over 50 knots and the rain so heavy it felt as if it were going to crush my tent. I was stranded on that island for a few days.

Getting lost also has caused some panic. Paddling off in the morning then returning back to my island campsite I was surprised to find that I didn't recognize the terrain at all. After a while of paddling around the surrounding area and checking and re-checking my charts and compass I realized that I had left when the tide was high but had returned when the tide was very low and the landscape was completely



*Russell Norton enjoying the tropical conditions in the Wallingford Pool - photo Tom Maziarz*

changed

Meeting a variety of other paddlers, some solo others in groups was a very enjoyable experience. Meeting animals was also very satisfying.

In Nova Scotia I had the opportunity to paddle among many seals. Once in Maine while paddling in Somes Sound, a pair of Dolphins swam along side and around me for a long time. Meeting some insects though wasn't so satisfying. One time I landed on a beach on the northern side of Prince Edward Island and encountered a bunch of the biggest horseflies I've ever seen. I still remember their teeth biting me as I ran madly away from them to get back in my boat and paddle away.

Paddling alone can be dangerous. In Nova Scotia while paddling alone and camping on the islands off the Eastern Shore I once encountered a change in the weather that prevented me from paddling around a headland that I needed to in order to get back to my campsite. In that instance I portaged my kayak about 3 miles overland on an old Indian trail that I had read about and charted before I went paddling. It was an experience I'm glad I had, but don't want to repeat. I always had a good set of charts and some backup plans when I paddled alone.

I still paddle solo, mainly in Long Island Sound. I love to gunk hole along any shoreline. I'm pretty watchful of the weather, and don't take the chances I used to. The first few times I paddled into a head wind it was challenging, but now it is just plain painful. When I was new to paddling, I once paddled out to Faulkner's Island and had the wind come up unexpectedly. The waves looked really big to me (much bigger than they probably were). I was terrified all the way back to Guilford. I know now I was lucky that I didn't capsize, for if I did, it could have ended in disaster.

- Bobby Curtis

Solo - At Night

**P**addling at night is exhilarating ! However, without a cloudless sky and a full moon, it is harder to "read" the water and you have to "feel" it. By law, a single white light with 360 degree visibility is required. In traffic areas, I have port and starboard lights (red and green, respectively) and a white light on my back. Although it is important to be seen, you yourself must also be able to see to be able to navigate. Night vision is best when you don't see the light(s) you're carrying. In addition, I usually keep a diver's light (4-cell) on the deck - ready to let someone know where I am if they get too close.

Let someone know your plan so if you don't call in or return by the schedule time,

they can call the rescue services. A kayak is extremely hard to see at night. You should carry an emergency strobe, flares, and a VHF radio for safety.

If the water is clear, a waterproof headlamp can open a new realm. It's amazing how much marine life you can see at night with an eskimo roll. However, most of the creatures coming to inspect you won't stay around too long.

If the weather starts to deteriorate, head for shore or dock - safety is always the first concern in solo paddling.

- Phil Warner

**I**totally enjoy the companionship of my paddling friends, however, there are times when I want to leave my house to go paddling without looking at my watch. Ultimately, I'd like to go in the direction I want, paddle at whatever speed I want and enjoy the silence and sounds of the sea.

Solo paddling also allows me the opportunity for great exercise that I can do at my own pace. Sometimes I like to push myself hard and paddle vigorously for an hour or so and wind up with a gentle paddle back. This is very enjoyable by yourself and throughout the warmer months I do this twice a week - and it can get very addicting. Other times I poke along and just sit there and bob up and down in the waves talking to the Sea Gulls and feeling the water under the kayak. I couldn't imagine having another kayaker cater to my desires since their timing and mood is not going to coincide with mine. It's just one of those things you do alone.

I have never been one to paddle with grand destinations or goals in mind. I paddle for the visual and tactile experience of paddling and like to make my decisions on the fly as my mood directs me.

It's true that in kayaking there's safety in numbers, however learning kayaking skills and becoming a proficient paddler offers you a freedom that you will never have if you always feel dependent on someone else to watch out for you.

I think many kayakers feel that a solo paddle has to mean a courageous adventure of some type. You're the captain and call the shots and therefore can paddle where and when you want and as safely as you want. For many paddlers, myself included, it's often a solo paddle or no paddle.

I found my desire and need for the freedom of solo paddling a great impetus to learn to roll and become a competent paddler. It actually allows me to more fully enjoy the companionship of my fellow paddlers because I have my regular diet of solo paddling as a balance.

- Jay Babina

**S**olo paddling is only as realistic as you make it. You are only as safe as your knowledge and understanding of your boat, the waters and conditions you are paddling in. There are old paddlers and there are bold paddlers but there are no old and bold paddlers.

- Gail Ferris

*A Little Black Magic...*

**S**olo paddling is like a narcotic for me and the seduction only intensifies in winter when visual and audio pollution is minimal. The chance of an intimate non-human encounter increases since creatures aren't so easily spooked by a party of one. I never tire of glimpsing a blue heron. My heart races being in the midst of a feeding frenzy, when the water boils, birds scream and fish jump the bow, but I want more. I want seals.

Desire is a trap. Last winter someone drew me a map to a local migratory seal home, but all my voyages were unsuccessful. On a recent paddle, I had no plans to cover that terrain, but it was a windless sunny day and I decided to wander. As I came closer to the spot, I tried not to think about seals, but being alone doesn't stop all the noise in my head. I saw a small black head swimming in the distance, but as I came closer, it disappeared. A few moments later, I had an overwhelming and visceral feeling that seals were in the water right underneath me. Nothing happened, so I let go of wanting and thought about moving on. Suddenly three heads popped up to check me out. I was overwhelmed with excitement. When they tired of my company they submerged, but seals are sometimes attracted by Labrador dogs, so I sang my best barks to them. It worked. A baby surfaced and eagerly swam towards the boat. More adults surfaced and performed a brief diving extravaganza. The show ended. I barked more, but to no avail. As I turned to leave, six seals were at my stern, scoping me out on the sly. They went their way and I went mine, but the experience pleasantly haunts me and I may even moan a tiny bit less about enduring the endless winter cold. These are the days of miracles and wonder.

- Faith McGrath

## Deserved Recognition

Whenever we conclude the year with a note of thanks, we hold our breath because inevitably someone is left out. This year we failed to recognize the very important efforts of Bobby Curtis who silently behind the scenes maintains our bulletin board and web site. Thank you - it's a very valuable part of our club.

**I**paddle solo because I want to paddle when I want and where I want. Adding another person to the planning complicates it and makes it less likely that the trip will happen.

Several years ago I wanted to do a circumnavigation of Mt Desert Island in Maine. I figured it would take two or three days. I had some friends coming up to join me in a few days, but they were less experienced paddlers and unlikely to feel ready to do a long distance paddling. Instead I got up in the morning, threw some essentials in my kayak and paddled out into the fog. By the time my friends arrived I had paddled the 60 miles in two days and was ready for more. They admitted that they would not have wanted to do the trip. The trip was worth the apparent risk.

Paddling alone seems to remove one safety net from sea kayaking. This safety net is based on the assumption that the people you are paddling with will be prepared to help you if you get into a bad situation. This can be a good assumption if you know your fellow paddlers are skilled kayakers with good rescue skills, but it could be that you are the best prepared in the group and they are depending on you to help them. In this case you are put more at risk by paddling with this group. I still enjoy paddling with groups because there is a satisfaction in sharing experiences with friends, but it is a different kind of experience. I just don't see safety as a reason for going with a group.

Paddling alone leaves me free to make decisions based on my own skills. Group pressure will not force me beyond my limits and I am free to go where I know I can without worrying that I am leading anyone else beyond their limits. When I'm paddling with a group I am often confronted with the thought "Maybe I shouldn't go over there because someone might follow me and I don't know if they can handle it." I can deal with this in one of two ways: I can go and hope people are aware of their own skills and will make appropriate decisions, or I can refrain and miss out on some fun. Neither choice is entirely satisfactory.

Paddling alone provides freedom. It is a chance to think my thoughts and go when and where the spirit moves me. It has its own risks but by staying within my abilities I don't feel it is more risky than paddling with a group. Silently cutting across a mirror smooth ocean as the morning sun lights the receding fog is reason enough. Sometimes you just need to go.

- Nick Shade

**Slides and talk on paddling in Greenland by Gail Ferris in March.**

## BREAKING THE ICE

It was 4:30 AM Sunday morning. The thermometer read 10°F, not too bad for December. It was time to pick up Kurt and go kayaking. We were in our dry suits and on the Connecticut River near East Haddam before 6 AM. Headlamps cut through the darkness as we pushed the Double Helix through thin sheets of ice. The spray thrown from our paddles froze to anything it landed on. Our pogies were the first item to become encased with ice. Slowly, the ice progressed up our arms to cover our torsos. Kurt's wide brimmed hat resembled a sombrero with tassels because of the numerous small stalactites that had formed. In the morning twilight we were meet at our put-in location by Darin Artman and Eric Marshall. Both braved the cold to take photographs for use in future event-related publications. Kurt and I zig-zagged through the ice floes in the ever increasing morning light while Darin and Eric took photographs and video from various angles to document our training session. For fun, we left our craft's safe refuge and floated around with the ice for the final shots.

After bidding farewell to our friends and drinking some hot coffee, we headed back to the water. It was 9 AM and the tide was still surging upstream, preventing the ice floes from escaping to the ocean. We pushed upstream, skirting past the thicker slabs, following small leads of open water. Occasionally our luck ran out and we became boxed in. Forcing through these blockades was difficult, and it took its toll on us and our fine craft. Finally, after 15 miles, we reached Middletown. A final ice-crunching run across the river landed us at the Harbor Park Restaurant, where we stopped to fill our thermos with hot tea. Near noon we returned to the water and worked our way back. An ice-covered mile later, we visited a secluded snowy beach for lunch. As I stood in the shallow water to help steady the craft for Kurt to exit, I discovered that my feet had frozen to the ground under the water, a sign that the tide was still coming in. We took our time eating, and by the time we were done the tide had turned. It had also warmed to above freezing. The combined effect made the downstream journey relatively free of ice floes and we reached our put-in before sundown. It was a good day.

Training for The Great Mississippi River Race for Rett Syndrome, May 2001 continues despite freezing temperatures and icy conditions. We push ourselves through these conditions to prepare for the longest, toughest human-powered water race in history. It is extreme because of the extreme need to help those affected by Rett



## connYak Meeting

**Clark Eid - "The Great Mississippi Race"**  
Wed. February 21 - 7:00  
WALLINGFORD PARK AND RECREATION

Connecticut resident Clark Eid - organizer and competitor in the scheduled Great Mississippi Race (May 2001) will be speaking about the 2400 mile race, training, and will have his custom double kayak along. This 29' kayak that sleeps one, was designed by Nick Shade and built by Clark, specifically for the race.

### DIRECTIONS TO PARK & REC.

Exit 15 (Rt 68) off I-91 in Wallingford. West on Rt. 68. (toward Wallingford) Approx. 3/4 mile take a right at the Fire Station (Barnes Road at the light). Take your first Rt. off Barnes on to Fairfield Blvd. Wallingford Park & Rec. is the 2nd building on the left up the hill.

syndrome. Training under these harsh conditions also helps to maintain a media presence, permitting us to "break the ice", metaphorically speaking, in getting our story out. In December, the event gained coverage in Science, Chemical & Engineering News, Neuroscience Newsletter, the Calypso Log, and several newspapers. Additionally, Channel 8 TV News carried a small story on the event with footage from an all night training run in freezing rain on December 16th. In January, Nobel Prize winners for discovering the structure of DNA, James Watson and Francis Crick, added their signatures to the Double Helix. You are invited to be a partner in this journey. Follow us as we train for the race of the century! For more information, please visit our web site located at <http://www.dreamkeeper.org> or call Clark Eid at (203) 271-2484.

- See Feb. 21, Meeting (Above) -

## WINTER POOL SESSIONS

SUNDAYS: FEB. 4, 11. 9 AM - 1 PM \$10.

**Directions: Exit 15 Rt. 91. Rt 68 W. past intersections of Rt 15 & Rt 150. Take fourth left on to Hope Hill Road which is at the light. Sheehan High School is 1/4 mile on the Rt.**

## CONNYPAK MESSAGE SYSTEM (203) 603-4615

Information regarding events, trip schedule updates, cancellations, changes etc. will be heard at this number.



# CLASSIFIED

Wilderness Systems Alto with rudder. Yellow Skirt and floatation bags. \$650/obo. Call (203) 457-9983.

Kayook plus with rudder. 8 months old, like new, \$900.00. 860-526-1410, 860-663-2069

Ocean Kayak Frenzy with backrest-1 year old \$325 and Ocean Kayak Yak Board \$250. 203-235-6721 after 6

Current Designs Slipstream 16' X 22", Glass, one year old. Day hatch, skeg -spray skirt. \$2,000. Men's XL Gore-Tex drytop, one year old, \$250. Call 203-256-1913

Diriego, 17.5' Sea Kayak, Kevlar/Fiberglass w/wood trim & rudder. \$1,200.00 203-734-4452 kck@ashcreek.net

Nautraid One Expedition (foldable) 15'3" red & black \$1800. or best offer. 860-521-6070

Solstice GT, Current Designs. Fiberglass, red over white. Used 2 seasons. (203) 855-9707, \$1700.

Necky Arluk 1.9 kevlar 17'x22" 45lbs new in 1996 ex. condition. Call 203 656-0946. mmarkb@juno.com

Touring/Surfing Sea Kayak: Sun Maximum Velocity 13' x, 25" in Xytec \$675. SurfKayakers@aol.com

Daggar Meridian Kevlar 43 lbs. 16' x 22". Yellow / white \$1600. (860) 388-4991, dmiller04@snet.net

Wilderness Systems Pamlico double-2 person \$500. Jim 203- 345-0090

DRYTOP - BomberGear breathable drytop (S)-(New) \$150. 860-643-8303 - fernusen@aol.com

Wilderness Systems Tchaika, fiberglass w/rudder, neoprene sprayskirt yellow/white used 4 times. \$1,500 (203)483-7705.

P&H Sirius with skeg - excellent condition. \$1650 Call 860-767-0696.

Yellow Perception Keowee 2 with spray skirt for \$499. 860 434-9785 or ckayakers@worldnet.att.net

2000 Necky Looksha Sport - expedition - front/rear bulkheads & rudder 14' 4" x 22.5" red polymer \$850 1-860-434-0221 or dwc@99main.com

Necky Looksha kayak-poly. 17 ft. two neoprene hatches, bulkheads, rudder, skirt. \$700. 914-967-3164

Necky Tesla-NM, Used Once. 17', Kevlar, Mango / white, blue trim, large cockpit, rudder, Ckpt. cover. Two Werner paddles. \$2,500. 1-860-526-3344

Two piece 220 cm Lendal crankshaft paddle : Carbon 1F Archipelago blades New \$340 - slightly used at \$240. . oldphoto@connix.com / (203) 281-0066

Wilderness Systems Pamlico double-2 person \$500. Jim 203- 345-0090

Borel Ellesmere, used one season, Yellow over Yellow, Kevlar, day hatch, drop-down skeg, \$2700 new \$2195. E-mail ckayaker01@mindspring.com tel 203-481-1881.

Heritage Nomad 16' fiberglass open-deck kayak. 42 lbs., removeable skeg, rear hatch and deck rigging. Ex cond:\$1350. Mens 3 mm farmer-john wetsuit, small \$20.Jeff 860-267-9563 - jbrooks@wesleyan.edu.

**Dry Suit Seals-** Collinsville Canoe contacted the newsletter - they have dry suit seals and lots of Aquaseal in stock. Also Aquaseal tubes have metal and shouldn't be used in the microwave.

## INSTRUCTION

Greenland style paddling and rolling. BCU Coach and ACA Certified. fernusen@aol.com for private or groups.

Urban Eskimo Kayaking  
Indoor Pool Sessions at the Sheehan High School, Wallingford.  
Skills Workshop: March 10, 18, May 5.  
Safety & Rescue March 11, April 7, 14, May 6, May 12. Eskimo Rolling March 17, April 8, 22, May 13.

To register please contact: Wallingford Rec Dept. 203 - 294 - 2120.  
Call for specifics - Nancy at 860 228 0105

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:  
Jay Babina e-mail: jbabina@snet.net  
7 Jeffrey Lane, Branford, CT 06405  
203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136

## TO JOIN CONNYAK...

ConnYak is a non profit club that is open to all paddlers interested in sea kayaking from any location. ConnYak annual membership fee is \$15. Membership includes monthly newsletter, paddles, functions etc.

Send inquiries to: Ed Milnes  
35 Hampton Park, Branford, CT 06405

**E-MAIL: CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG**

**WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG**



c/o Ed Milnes 35 Hampton Park  
Branford, CT 06405