



### Every Paddler for Themselves!

By Jim Mathews

Several years ago after surviving some difficult conditions in the Long Island Sound on an April club paddle, I wrote an article entitled *Don't Be the Last One*, which basically summarized my experiences and emotions as a relatively new paddler on a Connyak Scheduled Event. About 15 kayakers had left the shelter of the lee side of Pine Island and headed out to the Dumlplings. With the wind at our backs we moved quite easily into the rough open waters where one of the troop capsized wearing only a Farmer John wetsuit in water that was 47 degrees and 25+ mph winds. Once the wet one was returned to his boat, the group decided with great wisdom to turn and return to the launch. In the short time it took to turn around in the strong wind, the group was now scattered and each took off on their own.

*What was a group paddle that offered a sense of community and the possibility of safety, was now just a collection of individuals on the run for their lives.*

I thought for a moment that as long as there was someone behind me I would be safe as they could come to my rescue. Then, my hope of security was dashed when I looked and saw the upside down hull and a swimmer who had lost his paddle. So, here I was on a club paddle, which I had assumed meant paddling with some sense of a safety net, alone in the Sound with another relatively new paddler whose name I did not even know. Rafted up to the poor shivering soul dressed in a Farmer John who had now capsized several more times and lost his spare paddle, we were blown down the Sound until luckily we were seen by a sport fishing boat that took us to safety in New London. The "lesson learned" then was that if the group had stayed together, there would have been assistance to anyone who needed it, especially the "last one". Another "lesson learned" then, was that the club should be more mindful of the level of paddlers' abilities when groups venture out on club trips. Now some will argue that it is each paddler's choice and responsibility as to when and if, to launch, but the mere fact that we are sponsoring a group paddle to our members means that the CLUB has

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### MULTI-CLUB PADDLE 2003

By Wayne Smith

The multi-club paddles on Oct 5th were a learning experience for quite a few people. The marine forecast turned out to be a little conservative, and some folks' estimation of their own skills and stamina turned out to be a little liberal, which usually means carnage is in the forecast.

The advanced group launched from Esker Point Beach in Groton, with the plan to paddle to west clump off Fishers Island & paddle the reefs to East Point with the outgoing tide. We would then head outside of Napatree for a possible big reef session, and on to lunch. The return trip would be into Stonington, and along the CT shore back to Esker Point.

In the morning, we were really moving fast, and made it to East Point with plenty of time to spare before lunch at Napatree Point. The tide was still running out through Wicopesset Passage at a good clip, so we went into the passage to play & made our way to the rocks at the end of Napatree.

What we found there was tide current from the north, a swell from the south, and a sustained 15 knot wind from the west. This made for some really confused seas, about 3 feet or so, with the occasional 5 foot rogue wave out of the southwest, that would break near the pilings. As I was making my way across the area near the pilings, a big rogue went under me, and broke across the stern of another paddler who was already surfing another wave. He tried his best to brace, but to no avail. John Lathrop and I got him back in his boat, and away from the pilings.



*The trip back towards the Stonington Breakwall - photo by Carl Tjerandsen*

Just as we completed this rescue, I heard "man overboard" on the VHF. At first, I didn't think it was one of us, because that's usually not a term kayakers use, especially on the radio. Wrong. I then heard where the swimmer was, and realized it could only be a kayaker. As I was looking to see if the new swimmer was being assisted, I got hit across my beam by a big wave, and had to high brace into it, and ride it sideways for a few yards before it let me go. I got re-oriented, and saw she was OK. As we got into lunch, the day was looking great for our group, as we had an exhilarating paddle so far.

The other two groups came in, and they had similar tales to tell of capsizes, combat rolls, and Doug Downey towing one of the novice group into Napatree from Watch Hill. Nobody seemed overwhelmed at this point, but when Jay Babina mentioned running a bailout shuttle from Barn Island, he did get a few takers. There was one member of the advanced group that I had reservations about, and I even had said at the beginning of the day "I'll be towing him before the day is done". I probably should have suggested to him that he go talk to Jay about a ride to Esker.

The day began to fall apart right after lunch. The wind was approaching 20 knots sustained, and all but the novice group had to paddle into it. The biggest problem was no coordination --- all three groups launched at the same time, and didn't group up before they proceeded. Some people got left way back from their groups. Fortunately, I decided to hang back and sweep for the intermediate and advanced groups. And sure enough, my premonition came true: The paddler I had tagged as needing assistance at the start of the day couldn't make headway into the wind. I towed him from just west of Sandy Point to the outer breakwater at Stonington, and then two of us team towed him to just off Stonington Point. Nick Schade suggested we drop him at the point, where Carl Tjerandsen could give him a ride back to his car. To my total surprise, the paddler jumped at the opportunity. A welcome and wise move on his part.

The rest of us re-grouped at the breakwater at Stonington Harbor, and took a break. Several more of the advanced paddlers decided at this point to bail at Mystic & get

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rides. We launched, and about a half mile out, I held up to regain my sweep position. I took count of the boats in front of me, and realized one was missing. I found her, and she was having trouble with a malfunctioning rudder. We repaired the rudder, and contacted the rest of the group by VHF to let them know we would be about 10 - 15 minutes behind them, and that we were the sweep paddlers, and all was OK with us.

We got in to Esker, and there were 2 more missing. I had seen two paddlers about 1,000 yards ahead of me, and way off shore, and assumed it was them. One of them had a VHF, and we established radio contact. They were lost, but they thought they were at Groton Long Point. Two vehicles armed with VHF's tracked them down on land, and brought them back. They had overshot the landing by a mile or two. Everyone was accounted for and on land by this point.

#### **A few lessons should have been learned this day:**

- Group cohesion is absolutely necessary. You can't be rescued easily if you're off on your own, or you can get lost. We had people acting as leaders on all three paddles, but there was a distinct lack of listening, and many people did not stay close with their groups. Plans change as conditions dictate, and if you're not with the group, you're not going to know.
- The launch from lunchtime was a disaster. Each group should have launched separately, and grouped up on the water before they left. What happened was a stampede.
- A number of people overestimated their abilities. Speaking for the advanced group, the conditions were not that bad (15 to 20 kt winds and 2 to 3 foot seas). Anyone who launched with us should have been able to handle it & even enjoy it. Capsizes happen, and the two we had and one other in another group were not out of the ordinary, and I don't count them in the category of overestimation of ability. There were people who could easily have done the advanced paddle who did the intermediate & novice paddles anyway. These people, and the people who decided to bail should be role models for new paddlers.
- What saved the day was the VHF radio. Coordinating between leader & sweep and across different groups is really easy if you have radios. The VHF turned a potential disaster into a fun day on the water. Think about that if you paddle in salt water a lot & don't own one.

Thanks to everyone who participated, and especially to those who helped keep it all together and make it a fun day in spite of a few issues. - WS

## **Triclub paddle**

*- a newbie's perspective -*

*by: Brent Thomson*

First of all I would like to thank everyone at the paddle for their hospitality and patience. One of the reasons for going on this paddle was to see if I wanted to join Connyak -- my check is in the mail.

I have been paddling seriously for less than a year and my decision to go with the advanced group was not made lightly. Greg Paquin advised me to go with the intermediate group, but I wanted to paddle along Fishers Island and I thought I would be able to handle it. I was wrong. A number of foolishly naive decisions combined with extremely high winds turned the day into an extremely painful ordeal. I hope that by discussing these decisions it will save other aspiring paddlers from going through what I did.

I knew by reputation that the waves at Napatree point could get fairly large (especially if the wind picked up). No problem I thought. I have paddled in high winds and surf on the sound before and besides I have a dependable roll. I was totally unprepared for the size of the waves we encountered Sunday and when I got dumped by one particularly large breaking wave I did not even attempt to roll. I panicked and my only thought was to bail out. Being able to roll in swimming pools and lakes and ponds at your choosing is very different from recovery from an unexpected capsizing in extremely heavy surf. Luckily for me two gentlemen came to my rescue and I got back into my boat fairly easily. Thank-you whoever you were. Which brings me to my second poor decision.

I knew that the water temp was about 65 degrees and opted to wear a dry top and light neoprene shorts rather than a full dry suit (which I have). When I bailed out it turned out that the water temp was not bad. However, I did not count on the chilling effect of the wind. My light t-shirt under the dry top was wet and the evaporative cooling from the surface of the goretex jacket left me very cold very fast. By the time we landed for lunch I was shivering uncontrollably. The problem was magnified by this point and I had no dry clothes to change into. Nor had it even dawned on me to bring different clothes for the beach. The entire problem would have been avoided if I had worn my drysuit. I was so focused on water temp that I completely disregarded air temp and potential effects of the wind.

My biggest mistake of the day, however, was my conscious decision to limit my water intake to 1 cup so that I wouldn't have to get out of the boat to answer nature's call. I know it sounds stupid but I am sure everyone will agree that beaching

and finding a place to urinate (especially when others are waiting for you) is extremely irksome. Shortly after lunch on the way back I began to develop extreme leg cramps. Half a mile from the mouth of the Mystic river I had to break down and ask a fellow paddler to give me an assisted tow. At that point my legs were totally seized and I could barely sit up to paddle. Luckily my rescuer (one of the North Shore paddlers) knew what the problem was and we managed to procure a liter of gatorade from another paddler. Also luckily for me the other paddler was only going to Mystic and offered to help me up the river and transport my boat back to the Groton put in point. It took several hours for the cramps to fully subside. When I got out of the boat I was unable to stand and had to be helped off the beach by a couple of paddlers. Thanks to both of you. I have subsequently been told that cramping and extreme fatigue are hallmark symptoms of dehydration.

#### **Lessons learned:**

1. Dress appropriately for both air and water temps. Plan for getting wet and how you will cope with the wind chill.
2. Paddle within your ability. This is a tough one because it is only by challenging ourselves that we will become better paddlers. It is a fine line to cross and one that should only be done with experienced paddling partners who can help you out in the worse case scenario.
3. Practice rolls and rescues in rough water situations.
4. Drink frequently to avoid dehydration. One of my rescuers told me he consumed over two liters of water on Sunday.

There were numerous other lessons learned on Sunday, but these were the big ones. Thanks to everyone who helped me out.

Drysuits and wetsuits are appropriately named! In winter, divers often pre-heat water and pour it in the wetsuit prior to entering the water rather than allowing ice cold water to seep into the suit. Divers also wear wetsuit jackets and hoods and often wear thick undergarments for further insulation. The diver does not have to worry about overheating!



some moral, at least, and legal, perhaps, responsibility to provide a safe framework for those who do choose to paddle.

Now, some five years later we have a multi-club trip involving three major kayak clubs in New England that launch from three different sites on the Long Island Sound into winds that are some 20 mph with waves coming from various directions simultaneously. The groups were organized by self-assessed skill level with each group numbering in the low 20's. By the time they had reached Napatree Point at Watch Hill for the combined lunch meeting, at least five of the 60 some paddlers had capsized. The good news is that four were "rescued" and the fifth rolled up. The less than good news is that the two swimmers in the intermediate group were in the water for an awfully long time. It appeared that none of the paddlers in the group either knew how to rescue in rough water, or was willing to stop paddling in the rough waves to perform a rescue of a fellow paddler perhaps because of fear of capsizing themselves. Because I was in the back of the group serving as unofficial "sweep" for a group that had been quite spread out, it took me a good deal of time to get to where I could help our wet friends, both of whom ironically had the skills to be able to rescue others.

During lunch, some good deal of wisdom was shared and most of the intermediate group decided to return to Barn Island, rather than fight the howling wind on the long trip back to Mystic. That's where the wisdom apparently ended. As if on the shot of a starting gun, all of the advanced group and those who were returning to Mystic took off into the wind and the waves without an announcement and without a count. The Barn Island group apparently seeing this quick departure, also took off without bothering to count or collectively plan the route and this was the group that was billed as "novice", that had now been joined by 20 or so others many of whom had wisely evaluated their skills as not strong enough to return the longer distance to Mystic.

In the wild departure, apparently nobody was paying attention to the fact that there were at least five paddlers still on the beach and one who had just capsized in the mealy. This individual was from the North Shore Paddlers and did not know the way back to the launch site. Perhaps because I am conditioned from my earlier experience of not wanting to be "the last one", I am sensitive to such situations and was able to be of assistance and accompany him across the bay. On the way back to Barn, it was clear that the group had no sense of a collective plan with some going between the Islands and some out to the east. In addition, there was the channel that had to be crossed with a great deal of power boat and sail boat traffic. From my vantage point coming up from the rear, it

clearly looked like many of our paddlers were strung out all over the channel oblivious to the potential chaos and danger they were creating. At the end of the day there were no cars left in any of the parking lots so apparently everybody must have returned safely, but wouldn't it be nice if we had a number so that we could be sure without having to make a flashlight check of launch sites?

So, "lessons learned"? Groups should stay together and Paddlers should not place themselves in conditions that they are not suited for. Funny how these lessons are the same as the ones supposedly learned five years ago. Apparently not very well learned. To be fair, every individual is entitled to learn these lessons for themselves if they so desire. But what has the CLUB learned?

While the debate goes on and on about how to organize a group paddle, Connyak as an organization continues to pass up the opportunity to learn from our experiences, and there have been many of them. As an organization we have an obligation to our members to provide the safest paddling structure that we can. Other clubs have developed some basic guidelines that are not so restrictive as to eliminate the fun of paddling. At the very least we can establish some relatively easy-to-implement guidelines. For starters I would suggest that

- Each club paddle has a "leader" in the front and a "sweep" in the back who communicate by VHF radio to keep the groups from getting too dispersed. With large groups there could be "point people" on both the left and right sides to keep from getting spread out too laterally.
- A count is established and checked from time to time from launch to finish and those on club paddles agree to stay with the group. A simple sign in/sign out sheet could certainly make things easier.
- Typical expectations will be posted with each trip as to miles, speed, and possible conditions that might be experienced to allow paddlers to be more informed and to be more comfortable with what they experience. A quick "chat" at the launch with the group will further bolster confidence and, conversely, may discourage those who should not participate on a trip with given conditions. If they do venture out the group must assume responsibility for their safety.
- Connyak should provide "training opportunities" so that more of its members will be able to perform rescues in rough conditions. We are doing a good job with the annual rescue clinic and now we need to expand that so we are better prepared for open and rough water situations.

Whether we personally choose to believe that CONNYAK is or is not responsible for the safety of our members who join



### DEEP RIVER (I)

Saturday, Nov 8, 10:00 am

Paddle to Selden Island for dinner & then a moonlight paddle around the island. In the water at 5:00 PM. Bring dinner, camp stove & whatever else you need/want.

### EAST RIVER - MADISON (N)

Sunday, Nov 9, 10:00 am

Pack lunch

### BLUFFPOINT - GROTON (N/I)

Saturday, Nov 1, 10:00 am

Lunch either at Flat Hammock or West Harbor, dependent on conditions.

2nd group can paddle out to the harbor around the islands and have lunch at Bluff Point.

### STONY CREEK - BRANFORD

(N)

Saturday, Nov 29, 10:00 am

(Paddle off the turkey)

#### After November our paddle season ends.

Many people still paddle so check the bulletin board for other paddles listed by members - [www.connyak.org](http://www.connyak.org)

our trips, we cannot continue to operate with our heads in the sand. A court of "peers" in Connecticut recently found that a mother was responsible for the death of her child for not providing a "safe" environment for him to live within. Can you imagine what the verdict would be in a case where we lost a member on our trips in the manner that they are currently conducted?

Lets start learning from our lessons and not just writing about them. In group paddles, it should not be "Every paddler for themself". - JM



# CLASSIFIED

**NORDKAPP HM good condition.** Day hatch, rear oval hatch, canvas storage bag, compass. Orang / white \$1600 860-633 7254

**FOR SALE - Janautica "ANADYR" Sea Kayak** 17.5'X 21.25" See Mfg. webpage for complete specs. [www.splashdance.com](http://www.splashdance.com) \$1845- free delivery in CT. E-mail [ritey@lycos.com](mailto:ritey@lycos.com) or call 917 567 9430

**Necky Tormae 15' Kevlar w/rudder, carbon paddle, spray skirt, Yakama rack and saddles** \$1300. all. Must sell - Moving 203-458-2362

**Skin on Frame - Baidarka- brand new- (back problems) Willow Kayaks, only 29 pounds, 18'x 21", 8" depth to shear, skeg, very fast, Rye NY, \$1950 or best offer. 914 698 8354 or [sd.a@att.net](mailto:sd.a@att.net)**

**North Shore Freewater Trek. Fiberglass, Fast, light. 16 ft 22 in, 45 lbs. Great for small to medium sized paddler. \$990 - 203 853 2909**

**02 Current Designs Solstice GT- High Volume, Kevlar, 17'8" Blue/white, Ex. Cond. little use. Rudder, \$2800.**

**Excellent for camping. 860-875-7052.**

**Impex Montauk, fiberglass, ex cond. incl. spray skirt and compass, \$1700. 860-535-4473**

**Perception Pirouette with float bags, \$325 B/O,**

Please contact the Newsletter when classified items are sold.  
Also check the classified section on our web site.

Call Bob 860-716-5993

**P&H Sirius HF w/ skeg- Yellow over white, \$1,000 B/O, Call Bob 860-716-5993**

**Kokatat Gortex Dura drysuit. Size XL w/32" inseam and booties. Never used. Paid list \$809.00. Asking \$650.00. Will pay shipping. Contact Stuart Grant, West Cornwall, CT at 860 672-0039, email [treecats@att.net](mailto:treecats@att.net)**

**Daggar Satitude - Kevlar, white on white w/ black trim. 17'4" x 21.5", Intergal rudder w/toe central pedals, no los of bracing while steering. \$2200. 860-450-1026**

**Walden Sea Kayak. Includes rudders and cockpit cover incl. Good for fishing, children etc. \$365. 860-875-7052.**

Everyone is welcome to attend a general membership meeting of the Friends of Outer Island at the Branford Canoe Brook Senior Center on Tuesday, Nov. 18th 7:30 PM. We now have 53 members who are helping provide attendance on the island for public visits and work parties for island projects.

## Directions:

Take I-95 to exit 54. Turn off the ramp onto Cedar St. (a right if exiting north bound; a left if exiting south bound) Turn right on Rt. 1 (1st major intersection)

Go about a half mile (or less) to the first traffic light (there is a yellow flasher in front of the fire house just before that light) and turn left onto Cherry Hill Rd..

Canoe Brook Center is on the left

## 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 check to:

**ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith**

**680 Browns Road, Storrs, CT 06268-2717**

**E-MAIL: [CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG](mailto:CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG)**

**WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: [WWW.CONNYAK](http://WWW.CONNYAK).**

## T-shirts for Articles

Authors of articles for the newsletter get a free T-shirt.

## ConnYak Over-Dues

On the newsletter you receive, your due-date is on your label. If you fall behind with your dues, you get two months of newsletters which are stamped "over due" and then get cut off the list of active members.

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



# ConnYak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

680 Browns Road, Storrs, CT 06268-2717