

# CONNAYAK



C O N N E C T I C U T S E A K A Y A K E R S

June 1998

## Don't Let Yourself be the Last One

BY JIM MATHEWS

*I could have entitled this article, "Be Prepared for All Possible Conditions", or "Dress for Immersion", or "Know Your Limits" or "Always Carry the Right Equipment for Emergencies", but I think that, "Don't Let Yourself Be the Last One", is perhaps the most appropriate for the experiences of the 25th of April 1998.*

Twenty one members of Connyak, some dressed in one piece drysuits, some in wetsuits, and one in shorts with rubber boots, paddling crafts ranging from a sit-on-top to sleek wooden crafts, assembled at Bluff Point State Park for the Annual Start-of-the Season picnic. It was a sunny and cool day with strong brisk winds blowing at 10 to 15 miles per hour. After a paddle across the lagoon, it became apparent that there were not only different levels of paddlers along, but that there were differences of opinion as to what should happen next. Some opted to paddle longer in the lagoon, some poked into the open channel leading to Avery point, while still others headed into Long Island Sound to assess the situation there. The strong northwest wind actually made the Sound more appealing because of the shielding that Pine Island provided from the extremely windy conditions that prevailed everywhere else. I ventured out into the Sound with the third group because it looked calmer than where I was in the channel. I would be joining some individuals with whom I was used to paddling and with whom I had trained in the pool sessions during the winter.

Once we were all assembled, the goal of getting to the North Dumpling, an island

several miles away, was discussed, and given the prevailing winds and current, it was estimated that we could get there in about 20 minutes. So, off we went with the wind, picking up by the minute as we left the protection of the lee side of the island. A strong following sea created an amusement park type of ride with boats in various degrees of control. Suddenly, one of the boats broached on a wave and then, as a confusing rogue wave came through causing a brace to be made into empty air ...a capsize. The group quickly executed a rescue and within a minute or two, the paddler was back in his boat and the suggestion was made that we turn back. Everyone was accepting of this change in plan, except for one inexperienced paddler who had never noticed the incident and had just kept on paddling further and further away. Our most experienced and strongest paddler, an instructor and proprietor of a kayak skills development and guided paddling business, accompanied by another strong paddler, took off in an attempt to bring him back.



With the wind at their backs propelling them towards the runaway, and the rest of us heading in the opposite direction against the wind and current, the distance between the two groups magnified.

As we bore down on the foot pegs to propel our crafts forward bouncing up and down in the waves, my bow alternated between diving under the dark green water beneath the wave and then rising up towards the bright blue sky. It became quite apparent that the relative ease of

running with the wind was now replaced with a tremendous struggle. Not wanting to be left behind, I called out to one of the group members, "wait for me" and wait he did. Now having broken free from the inertia caused by the strong current coursing in the opposite direction, we began to pick up some speed. I noticed that stroke by stroke, we began to spread out a bit at first, and then more and more. Two of the group were now nearer to the shore where Bluff Point stood and another portion of the group was stretching out in front of me. After what seemed like a very long time of constant paddling so that one would not be blown backwards obliterating any progress that was made for the last hundred or so strokes, it became obvious that we were really being challenged. I began to realize that the conditions in which we were paddling would require having some assistance to effect a rescue in a short amount of time if it should be needed, especially considering the 48 degrees of the water temperature that day. Self rescue with a paddle float would leave the paddler cold and tired and blown backwards, downwind quite a bit.

I said to myself, "don't be last", and immediately looked back to see what reality held. Fortunately for me, there was somebody back there, and I was determined to make sure it stayed that way in case I went over. Otherwise, there would be no one to notice that I was in trouble.

A minute later, I looked around again and as with the subsequent looks, I confirmed that there was somebody to notice me should I get into trouble. We were making relatively good progress and getting closer to Pine Island and its shelter, where we were to make the turn back into the lagoon. I turned once again to check the situation and to my surprise, where I had expected to see the dark green hull top and the white hatted paddle, there was only the white hull of a capsized craft. Then, from behind the overturned kayak, I could see the white hat bobbing up and down. "Okay", I said to myself, there is now another mission that has to take precedence, a consumma-

tion of what I had been practicing for two seasons in pool sessions and on the open water: get him out of the water and into his boat. Because of my training, my reaction at this point was never questioned.

Turning into the wind was not that hard and getting back to him was easy as well. However, the wind was so strong, I unfortunately blew by and had to turn back into the wind, no easy feat. I nudged my cockpit up to his bow, after first checking as to how he was doing. "Press down on the stern" I said to him. "Lift up on the bow and flip the boat," I said to myself. The water poured out and while holding his boat firmly across its cockpit, I told him to lift himself into his boat. He was in, he was cold and he looked concerned. I noticed that he did not have a dry suit, only a "Farmer John" wetsuit and a paddling jacket and he lost a boot and gloves.

I could see how cold he was and when he finished draining the torrent of water from the sleeves of his paddling jacket, he put his skirt back on. His paddle had drifted away so we reached for the spare. He pushed off, and in seconds was over again. He tried to roll back up, but was not successful and... in the process of bailing out lost his second paddle. This time I flip the boat from the side, rather than using the "T" rescue getting most of the water out. Unfortunately, by the time he was back in the boat, there was a good deal of new water that had settled in from the waves breaking over the boat. Maintaining stability was difficult because he was cold, losing coordination, and struggling with the sloshing water in his boat. The internal bilge pump was not effective and almost impossible to use because of its position behind the cockpit of the kayak.

I could see that towing was the only option, but without a tow rope I needed to get him around in my direction, and then have him lean over the stern section of my kayak and hold on as I paddled in an angle towards shore letting the wind help us. As he tried to walk his boat around mine so both would head the same way, he went over a third time. It seemed that sheer desire to escape from the frigid water, motivated him up and out once again. With his cockpit half full of water, I quickly pulled my skirt to get to my pump which is stowed against my seat and replaced the skirt as quickly, with my hands still gloved. As I pumped, I first noticed that we had floated well past Bluff point and are were somewhere off Groton-Long Point as I was able to see the windmill on North Dumpling. I assumed Noank would be visible next.

Pumping and pumping and pumping while at the same time mindfully plotting a course to follow to the shore once his boat was dry was where all of my attention was focused. Then I noticed a motor craft coming towards us from the western side of Fisher Island. "Wave!", I said, as I continued to pump feverously. I stopped pumping for a time to aid in the waving and while my back was to the oncoming boat, I could see out of the corner of my eyes, that it was moving on a course as if we did not exist. Then, after the boat had actually passed us and I was beginning to replot our course for shore, it turned towards us and came up along side just like in the movie the "Atlantis". They asked if we needed help. It turned out that the captain on the top deck never saw us. It had been several of the passengers who were returning from an aborted scuba diving charter from a wreck off Fishers Island who were the ones who saw us. At first, because of the several foot waves and the distance they thought that the waving looked just like a paddle alternating left and right motions. My now shivering friend was helped into the boat from the scuba platform at the stern of the boat and his kayak was hauled aboard. They asked me if I also wanted to come aboard and, with absolutely no hesitation at all, I was instantly on the deck of the boat.

The boat sped off to New London Harbor where it is berthed. The now hypothermic and shivering paddler struggled to get his wet clothes off and to swallow some of the hot tea that I always carry in a thermos in my hatch. The boat crew radioed the Coast Guard who relayed the message of our rescue to the Connyak members who had already called by VHF.

As the day would go, we found out later that the exact location of where the Atlantis was docked was not clear enough to the Connyak members who attempted to pick us up. Our plan was for one of us to hitch a ride back to our cars with some of the scuba guys who were still around. I was to be the driver because I had not suffered any of the effects of hypothermia and because I have a double rack. When I went for my keys which I hang around my neck along with my signal whistle, I found that they were gone ...evidently separated during one of the reentries. So, adding insult to injury, the last act of the eventful day was waiting an hour and a half for AAA to come and open the car, after we got back to the Bluff Point launch site.

Although this story did have a happy

ending, it could have ended up as a disaster with a capital "D". "Dressing for Immersion", a cardinal rule of the sport, would have lessened the exposure to the cold, increasing the likelihood needing only one reentry and reducing the effects of hypothermia. "Knowing Your limits", might have lessened the chance of the original capsizing that led to hypothermia. Paddlers should push themselves only one new step at a time when developing skills, especially when dealing with such complexities as wind and current. "Being Prepared for all Conditions" is not just about skills and clothing, it is also about having the right equipment. The people on the ship said that we were not very visible, despite my white kayak and my bright yellow PFD. On the way home that afternoon, I stopped and bought six flares which I would, if there is a next time, fire across the bow of any boat of which I was trying to make contact. I also bought a waterproof VHF radio so that I can contact the Coast Guard or others for any kind of help that might be needed whether it be because of water and wind conditions or because of a health emergency. One never know when one will need assistance. With a VHF it would also be possible to keep in better contact with others on a trip. Before I go out again, I will also get a tow line with a quick release to insure that I will be able to assist other paddlers in an emergency situation where help is needed to get to someone back to shore.

Before I go out on any more group trips, I want assurances from the others in the group that they will be vigilant and not let the last paddlers have to fend for themselves. After all, that's what distinguishes a group venture, a number of persons gathered closely together forming a recognizable unit in support of its members, from a solo activity. My previous experience paddling with Connyak members over the past two year has always been wonderful, confidence building, and supportive. The emphasis on safety in the pool sessions and on the open water has instilled in me a sense of camaraderie that I have never experienced before. The instruction and guidance from such skilled kayakers as Mike Falconeri, Jay Babina, and Dick Gamble very probably made the difference in my being helpful and not becoming a casualty myself. So my paddling friends, please make sure you look over your shoulder when we paddle to see who may need your help so that no one will ever have to worry again about being, The Last One.

- Jim Mathews

## EAST COAST TRIP PLANNED

We are two newly retired paddlers who are getting ready to explore the east coast of the United States by sea-kayak. In January, 1999, we will start from Brownsville, Texas and paddle our way along the Gulf Coast, around Florida and up the Atlantic Coast to Maine.

We will be paddling our newly acquired Necky Nootka Plus, our first long trip in a double. Our previous trips have been done in two singles. We expect this trip to take about 8 months. This pace should put us in your neighborhood in June/July. We are very interested in meeting local kayakers along the way by having club members come and paddle with us for a while.

We will be carrying a cellular phone and will call when we start to approach your vicinity. We look forward to meeting you on the water. Sincerely, Dan Earle and Sue Hutchins.  
EarleLA <EarleLA@aol.com>

## BASIC KAYAKING & ROLLING

June 8- Basic Kayaking, June 9 - Rolling  
East Hartford - The Kayaking Company

Registration is required from East Hartford Park & Rec. 860-528-1492

July 14- Basic Kayaking, July 28- Rolling  
at Wallingford Outdoor Pool

Instructors Cherri Perry, Cheryl Hensel and Beth McCabe. For course information call - The Kayaking Company 203-265-4147

## CONNECTICUT RIVER ESTUARY KAYAK TRAIL

One of our favorite paddling areas has been enhanced by the good works of the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA). The official opening dedication ceremony for the Great Island area trail is scheduled for April 23, 1998 at the DEP headquarters building in Old Lyme. The classy water-proof brochures describe the points of interest, early history, plant life, and wildlife to be seen along the way and the paths to paddle. The final version of these will probably be available at town halls and outfitters by the time this newsletter goes to press. We have been assured that ConnYak will get several copies for member's use.

The put-in is at the State Boat Launch at the end of Smith's Neck Road, Old Lyme, familiar to many of our ConnYak members. Two trips are described: one to the South to Griswold Point and the mouth of the Black Hall River which is said to be 1 1/2 hours duration and one to the North, 1 1/2 miles, to Watch Rock for three hours. The distances are not enough to account for the trip times so you must stop along the way to smell the flowers listen to the birds and enjoy the tranquility of the area. This is a kayak trail that can truly be enjoyed by people of all skill levels, from beginner to expert.

Late March, ConnYak paddlers paddled the trail along with (CRERPA) members and a photographer / writer from the N.Y. Times. Sunday April 26 the Times ran the article about the trail with a picture of Clark Bowlen and other ConnYak paddlers.

Dick Gamble

## EVENTS

### SHETUCKET RIVER CRUISE

Sunday, June 21, 11:00 am

12 miles quick water, dam released with 1 1/2 mile lake and a 100 yd. portage.

Sponsored by the Columbia Canoe Club.

This is fast (but not whitewater) water. Last year 130 mostly canoes and some kayaks participated. The cruise takes the slowest boat 3 hours including a lunch stop. Everyone helps each other with the portage. This is a cruise not a race!

You must arrive by 9:30 unload and drive to the town of Baltic where a shuttle bus brings you back to the start. You must sign a waiver. Pack lunch.

**Directions:** Start at Lauter Park on the N. side of Willimantic. Follow Rt. 195 to intersection of Ash and Jackson Streets - opposite FOOD MART, a Sunoco gas and a convenience store. Look for signs. Start is on the Natchaug River which joins the Willimantic River forming the Shetucket.

### WESTBROOK TOWN BEACH - DUCK ISLAND

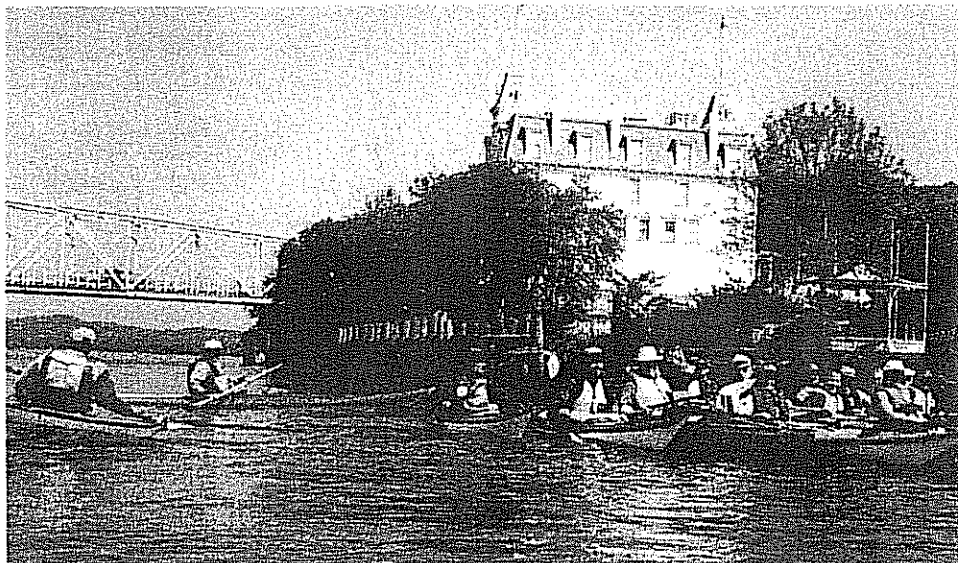
Wednesday, June 17 - 5:00 P.M.

Round Trip to Duck Island and Grove Beach area.

**Directions:** From I 95 . take exit 64 (Rte 145) Take 145 south. Take left after crossing Menunketesuck River Bridge. Follow to Rte 1. At light, take left onto Rte 1 (By Marty's restaurant). Stay on Rte 1 past Pilots Point Marina and take first right after Post Ave. (Across from car dealership). Follow to end. Take right. Town beach is about 1/2 mile on left.

**Note:** All paddlers on ConnYak trips must wear the appropriate CG approved Personal Flotation Device and wear a spray skirt. The boat and equipment must meet CG requirements, including an appropriate signaling device. All paddlers are responsible for their own safety, including dressing for immersion. Beginners must have taken a basic course and be proficient in performing a wet exit. (always carry extra dry clothes)

**Trip Cancellations** - In doubt due to weather? call 203-481-1881 - a message will be on answer machine.



16 paddlers join in for the Connecticut River paddle and camp at Selden Island.

## CLASSIFIED

Feathercraft K1 Expedition Single (foldable kayak) 15' 11" x 25", sea sock, spray skirt, color teal, 1996 costs \$ 3850.00 sacrifice \$3500.00. Never in the water. 203-772-3174.

Necky Tesla, Kevlar. 17 ft X 24", 45 lb. Teal Deck, white hull. \$1650 or BO. 860-693-8205

Kokatat Drysuit, men's large \$225, Cricket Greenland paddle - \$150 - 401-596-4482

2 Woman's Kokatat drysuits, med & small - Bib style, boots incl. New \$275. 860-693-9625

Women's feet heaters, size 5 -\$15. Women's wet suit, sm. farmer John & Jacket \$100. 203-481-1912

Toksook Paddle - two piece - carbon fiber Ex. cond. \$230.00. 860-529-4612

Arluk II, Kevlar, 18 ft x 22", 45 lbs, rudder. Teal. \$1500. 860-521-9054.

Keowee - 10 ft. x 26", spray skirt & Paddle \$325. 860-793-1285

Aquaterra Spectrum, 15' x 25", Rudder, skirt, Red - \$450. 860-673-4736

Wilderness Systems Sparrow Hawk- fiberglass, includes day hatch, pump, skirt, paddles. \$1100. 203-263-3437

Nordcapp HM, expedition w/chimp pump, great condition \$1350. 860-278-7440

Wilderness Systems soltice ST, with Compass \$1995. firm. Other items avail. 401-596-4482

### CONNYPAK WEBSITE OPEN

[www.mindspring.com/~connyak](http://www.mindspring.com/~connyak)

Rob Osit's son Stephen who is 16 built the new web site. We owe him special thanks for his patience with us. We will be occasionally changing photos and updating events and links as well as expanding the overall content. Any comments or suggestions are welcome.

### GREENLAND PADDLING WKSHP & SKILLS & RESCUES CLASS

*June 7 - Greenland Paddling Wkshp.*

*June 28 - Skills - both in CT thru the AMC Reservation and fee is required.*

BCU Instructor Fern S. Usen  
INUKSHUK Kayakers -(860)-529-4612  
or email: [inukshuk@mindspring.com](mailto:inukshuk@mindspring.com)  
*Greenland paddles will be available.*

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:  
Jay Babina E-mail [Jbabina@snet.net](mailto:Jbabina@snet.net)  
7 Jeffrey Lane, N. Branford, CT 06471  
203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136

### KAYAK SKILLS & ROLLING

*Urban Eskimo Kayaking - Mike Falconeri Skills Workshops and Eskimo Rolling throughout June and Summer.*

Classes held at Sheehan High School Pool in Wallingford. Call Wallingford Park & Rec 203-294-2120 or Mike at 203-284-9212.

### 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. Members can join the ACA through the club for \$15 which entitles you to full insurance coverage on trips as well as a full subscription to PADDLER Magazine. (a \$15 subscription) Send inquiries to: Stan Kegeles P.O. Box 2006, Branford, CT 06405 e-mail [Connyak@mindspring.com](mailto:Connyak@mindspring.com) Website: [mindspring.com/~connyak](http://mindspring.com/~connyak)



# ConnYak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

c/o Stan Kegeles  
P.O. Box 2006  
Branford, CT 06405