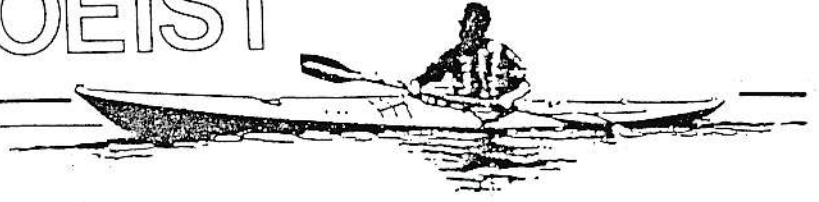


THE SEA CANOEIST

NEWSLETTER

28

P O Box 26
NELSON
NEW ZEALAND



APRIL 1991

When this newsletter was first started, the intention was to produce a kind of New Zealand supplement to the North American 'Sea Kayaker' magazine. Those paddlers who had approached me with the idea of a New Zealand newsletter were all subscribing to that magazine at that time, but felt that the addition of some New Zealand material would be of value. Recently, I received a letter which was critical of the Sea Kayaker Magazine and this caused me to go back to those original subscribers and ask them what they now felt about the American magazine. All six gave a similar view - three of them said that they did not intend to renew their subscription when it ran out, two said that they hadn't gotten around to reading the last couple of issues, and all six said that they failed to find the articles particularly interesting anymore, and no longer relevant to their own style of paddling. The crunch came with the last issue circulated in NZ, Vol 7 No 3. In this article was an account of a trip in New Zealand. The story was fair enough, as it merely reported the participant's comments, however the 'Travel Planner' that went with the article contained some grossly inaccurate statements, and one address that is at least ten years out of date. Clearly not good enough for an international magazine and one that has enough NZ subscribers for the publishers to have at least checked a NZ source to verify the statements. In these days of fax machines, no difficult task.

Comments from subscribers included the following:

1. Considerable space given to arguments about whether to use feathered (offset) paddles or not. This argument has been done to death and few experienced paddlers ever use unfeathered paddles these days.

2. Discussion on wrist problems when using feathered paddles does not mention the shaft diameter of the paddle (anything less than 32mm for most people will create wrist soreness on long paddle trips).

3. Almost exclusive use of high volume sea kayaks, particularly those with large cockpits and high forward decks - ie, kayaks that catch the wind. Little technical information on the English or NZ style kayaks.

4. Too much space devoted to extremely basic skills (issue 7/3 has 8 1/2 pages on basic paddle strokes. Issue 7/2 had 10 pages on similar skills).

5. Attitude to solo paddling needs to be more accepting.

6. While letters to the editor, and the list of contacts at the end of the magazine clearly indicate an international readership, articles are exclusively North American, or if from other places, they report on a trip by a North American to an overseas location. The magazine needs to commission overseas paddlers to report on their own paddle areas.

7. Superficial high-tech articles that misuse science. The most often quoted example were the boat tests that ran some time ago that used a static weight bolted into the paddler's position. Most comments from NZ readers suggested that the best way to test a boat was to take it on a good paddle alongside a reference boat to compare performance.

Overall, all six NZ readers were disappointed in the magazine and felt that at the cost, they could do without it. One reader suggested that his subscription to the American 'Wooden Boat Magazine' provided better articles and information on kayaking.

Interestingly, in January when

Frank Goodman was in NZ he commented upon the debate on the use of bilge pumps that had been going on in Sea Kayaker for some issues. According to Frank, his letter to the Editor was edited to imply exactly the opposite to what he did in fact say, and then published letters that were critical of what Frank was alleged to have said. As the editor of this newsletter, I am reluctant to edit any letter or article except minor grammatical improvements or spelling corrections.

I would be interested in hearing of other reader's comments as a survey of six subscribers is hardly sufficient to give a balanced view.

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The following letter was received 2 April 1991 from Grahame Sisson, kayak manufacturer. It is published without editing.

"...I am concerned that the glitz of North American kayak practices is moving into the New Zealand Sea Kayaking scene. New Zealanders were sea kayaking years before North Americans had heard of the sport. Why the great fascination with their ideas on equipment and techniques? Henry Ford would have rejected most of their rudder mechanisms in 1915 as too crude to fit on a practical product! In the hands of the original North American inventors of kayaking (Eskimos) many of the hyped up modern designs would lead to starvation and death.

Sea Kayaker magazine often has in-depth articles on techniques written by sometimes confessed learners with photos showing things other than the stated intention of the move. They even have ongoing debates as to why paddles are offset! Amazing!

One of these side effects is the

development here of commercial operators running 'Learn to Sea Kayak' courses; the instructor arrives complete with 'Rambo' jacket complete with all the hardware that would make MacGyver envious. Formalities of such things as teaching learners how to get in and out of the boat are overlooked in the rush to hit the water.

The techniques associated with towing disabled paddlers were laid down in New Zealand 15 years ago. Vic Hague, Steve Bagley, Brian Joyce and Brian Ogden did a lot of work on this before attempting the coast of Fiordland. The towline should be fastened to the boat on an area of reinforced deck behind the seat. The line should be NYLON which has some stretch. Shock-cord should never be used! Horizontal bungy jumping is a sport best done in pubs, not on the sea! The towed boat should be fastened at the bow as low to the waterline as possible.

Modern yacht line-jammers would make ideal tow cleats as they offer easy release with the opportunity to allow slip in overload conditions. Towing from 'Rambo' jackets inhibits breathing, paddle technique, footrest thrust, and makes no sense except in a river where the duration of the tow will be minutes rather than hours.

Looking through my latest Sea Kayaker magazine, I only see part of the contents of a single page that would make me believe that the U.S.A. put men on the moon 22 years ago..."

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Perhaps it is also time that readers looked at this newsletter with a critical eye too. Is it still meeting the needs of readers? From comments that have come in from those who have renewed their subscriptions, I would guess that everyone is more than happy with the newsletter. We have a 95% subscription renewal rate, with those not renewing being mainly those who have changed their address and left

no forwarding address. One or two others have sold their kayaks in favour of other forms of boating, and others have gone overseas. From what I can gather, no readers have failed to renew because they weren't happy with the contents (those people never took up subscriptions in the first place, or they have kept their complaints to themselves). However, it would be appreciated if readers could indicate areas/subjects of interest or ways the newsletter could be improved.

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COASTBUSTERS CANCELLED

Notice has come to hand that the Coastbusters Sea Kayak gathering due to be held in Auckland in late April has been cancelled, or maybe postponed until Spring.

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Query from a reader:

"...The different approaches [to sea kayaking - John Dowd vs Paul Caffyn] interest me. I have a fair amount of small boat experience but my canoeing experience is limited to river boats - I taught myself to roll in a pool - to hiring a Puffin for a day. John Dowd's sliding (slouching) down into the kayak to relax and increase stability interests me. Is this practical/possible in the boats available locally? The high bow and lots of rocker of the SEA BEAR kayak also interests me. Does the bow catch the wind to an annoying extent? I know that rowing my longboat in a breeze is a pain!

Am I being unnecessarily being put off the Nordkapp style kayak by the comments of Dowd?..."

Editors comment: Upon re-reading the comments made by Dowd in the various revisions of his book, I tend to feel that he has a rather extreme view on low-volume, low windage boats.

For those who have not done any kayaking before, it might be a bit much to step into a Nordkapp immediately, however there are ample kayaks that have greater initial stability for the novice to try first. It should be pointed out, however, that once you have good self or group rescue skills, the low initial stability of the Nordkapp style of kayak works to your advantage in rough beam-on seas. The high initial stability of the wider boats can never be used in rough water with the same degree of security that the Nordkapp can be. Kayaks such as the Selkie were designed from the Nordkapp for the less experienced, or those wanting a boat with greater initial stability. What has always got to be kept in mind, if you are going out onto the sea, sooner or later you will be caught out in a chop coming from an angle your boat won't like - you need to be able to cope with these conditions, or never place yourself at risk.

Comments on the SEA BEAR and other aspects of this letter from other readers would be welcome.

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Sandy Ferguson is intending to run 'Build your own sea kayak' classes in Christchurch soon. If interested contact Sandy at Phone (03) 332-5155 (H) or 642-421 (W). In a future newsletter I hope to get into more home-built boat articles as it seems to be a style that is coming back into vogue (must be a comment on the economy).

Sandy has also started a phone list for Canterbury Sea Kayakers interested in getting together for trips. An idea that could well be copied in other regions.