

SOUTHERN MAINE

SEA KAYAKING NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

P. O. Box 4794 Portland, Maine 04112 September, 1999

MISSION STATEMENT

The Southern
Maine Sea
Kayaking
Network is
an association
of paddlers
interested in
connecting with
others who
enjoy the sport
of sea kayaking.
Our purpose is
to promote safe
and responsible
practices and
at the same time
have fun.

EXPAND
YOUR
KAYAKING
HORIZONS

Clyde on Cobscook Bay

by Clyde Sissler

The Cobscook Bay area is in the extreme northeast of Maine and covers an area about 20 to 30 miles along the New Brunswick border. There's not much up there except people, gas stations, mini-marts and a few motels and campgrounds.

Cobscook means boiling waters in the Passamaquoddy Indian tongue. I think this comes from the area's predominant natural feature, which is a reversing falls with about an eight foot drop and 10-14 knot currents. This is such a spectacular sight they've set up a special park for viewing it from shore. Two smaller bays both ebb and flood into the Cobscook Bay. The only way the water can flow is around either side of Falls Island. One side has a huge ledge right in the middle of the channel and the only thing the water can do is back up on one side and then flow over the top creating the falls. When the tide is coming in (flooding) the falls are on one side of the rock, when it's going out (ebbing) it's on the other side.

This is a place of soaring bald eagles, barking seals and wilderness paddling, all in a protected, inshore setting. I had seven eagle sightings the first day I visited and I stopped counting after that. I had as many as 15-20 harbor seals, both adults and pups, following behind my kayak, yakkin' and splashin'. I saw not one powerboat, not one jet ski, not one

other kayak on the water the first week. I did, however, see a couple of canoes, one sailboat and a couple of fishing boats.

Note: When I said "protected" I didn't mean without danger. The tide averages 24 feet here and goes up to 28 feet and the currents are as strong as one might associate with tides of that size, plus the water is very cold. One day the wind was so strong it took me over an hour to go less than a mile. There were gusts where I made no forward progress at all and times when I had no control as the wind pushed me sideways at will.

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Cobscook Bay is a central bay with East, South, Whiting, Dennys and Straight Bays as well as the Pennamaquan River flowing into or out of it. The whole area is made of these bays, plus necks or peninsulas. Each has its own unique geographic features.

Whiting, Dennys and Straight Bays are almost lake like in their fairly flat shorelines. Leighton Neck, between East Bay and the river, has (what I take to be) red sandstone cliffs and beaches with some interesting formations caused by erosion. South Bay and Cobscook Bay on the way to Eastport are more of the typical Maine coastline with jagged granite rocks and cliffs.

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There was a pair of nesting eagles in East Bay with two large chicks, less than a half mile from where I camped most of the time while in the area.

I had many bald eagle sightings at the end of Crow Neck between Whiting and Straight Bays and many more at the head of Denbow Neck near the river's mouth and in East Bay where I was camped. I had a couple of great sights when an eagle swooped down to land in a tree near me with its legs and talons extended, two others where an eagle swooped down to grab a fish and crab. The fish got away but the crab was dinner (and me without my camera ready).

There were two colonies of seals in South Bay and several colonies in Straight Bay with the occasional head popping up out of the water at frequent intervals at other locations. With an incoming tide, I saw dozens of heads bobbing around as the tide brought in fresh runs of herring.

About 25 miles from this region is probably one of the most beautiful spots on the east coast. Rogue Island is about two miles offshore from the Rogue Bluffs State Park, south of Machias, ME. The majority of this privately owned island is large granite cliffs and bluffs. Smaller islands clustered together at one end with more cliffs provide a beautiful wilderness setting that will make you believe you're living in colonial times.

The outside passage of Rogue Island must surely be the place they come to take pictures for all those postcards of the rugged Maine coast. It is exposed with large swells and refracted waves to occupy some of

your attention. Rogue Island has to be included in everyone's "must see" list. (Editor's note: See current MITA handbook for more information about this beautiful island.)

Two more examples of Maine's rugged coastline are West Quoddy Head and the Cutler Coast, both within 20 miles of Cobscook Bay State Park. West Quoddy Head is a large bluff on a very rugged coastline and has the easternmost (candy striped) lighthouse in the country. I hiked the four mile loop trail and it offers some really rugged views of the coast. I checked out a tidal put-in but there was a yellow "Keep Out" sign painted on a big rock. This was a small sandy cove with several clammer boats in it. I suspect the launch is public and that some disgruntled local painted the sign. I chose not to contest the issue, however, this would be a great half-day paddle.

The Cutler Coast is a stretch of about five miles along a Maine Public Reserved Land area of very rugged and picturesque coastline with a good town ramp in the town of Cutler. The conditions were such that this tired old guy only ventured up the coast about half a mile before turning back and opting for the more staid hiking trail.

I think both of these would be truly excellent trips. I would love to do them but in the company of others as bad things could happen to the unwary out there in that cold water.

All of the places I've mentioned are easily seen on DeLorme's Maine Atlas as are the campgrounds. There's also camping at Cobscook Bay State Park and there are several motels in the area as well as a couple of B&B's.

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The newsline is available
24 hours a day.
Call for updates on events.

For a more detailed trip report see:
<http://csisler.com> --> Trip Reports

Editor's Note: Clive has recently retired, sold most of his earthly possessions and has been paddling since mid-June. He is headed down the east coast to Florida and from there, as he puts it, "Who knows!"

Monhegan In July

by Bill Ridlon

In late July, four SMSKN members (Bob, Geri, Debra, and Bill) set out for Monhegan Island from Port Clyde. It was a beautiful day for the 12-mile crossing and conditions were calmer than they had been for the same paddle during the prior two years. The trip across was relatively uneventful other than we've been paddling for a half hour since passing Burnt Island and Monhegan already looks close. Heck, we should be there in less than another hour. We've just passed a whistling buoy so I can find where we are on the chart. Ouch! That can't be right! According to the chart, we've barely started across the open stretch of water. Well, maybe it'll take the entire next hour to reach Fish Beach on Monhegan. The next hour passes and it looks like we're close but we're not in the harbor yet. Maybe another 20 minutes. Thirty minutes pass. We don't seem to be much closer than we were a half hour ago. About that time, the realization sinks in that we won't be crossing any faster than we have in years past. It'll take about two and a half hours. Sure enough, at the two and a half hour mark, we're passing the dock and heading in toward the beach.

The island is as we've remembered it. The roads are narrow and gravel, many houses have interesting trim colors, and most of the townsfolk get around by walking. It's a little dryer this year, though. The lawns look as brown as those on the mainland.

We carry the kayaks from the beach on up to the Monhegan House, our home for the next couple of days. The front desk is closed for the time being and won't re-open until 3:30.

However, as we begin removing dry

bags from the boats, a woman comes out and asks if we're staying at the Monhegan House. We tell her yes so she suggests we come in to register. She'll open the desk for us. It's those sorts of things that keep us coming back to Monhegan again and again.

We decide on dinner at the Island Inn, the other hotel on the island. The menu items are excellent and the view of the setting sun over Manana, Monhegan's little sister island, makes a perfect ending to the day.

Saturday arrives with some clouds overhead. However, it's fairly clear in the east and we're on the eastern cliff side of the island to see the sun rise and the whales playing in the swells. The sun provides a very pretty sunrise for us but the whales never show. A cat comes by to be petted but it's not quite what I came for so I head back to bed while Debra takes the opportunity to draw the sunrise.

Later that morning we paddle around the island while Bob and Geri hike the trails. We've returned to the harbor by early afternoon and decide to paddle over to Manana Island to explore the old Coast Guard station and get a different view of Monhegan. The view is indeed a fine one, as are the raspberries that grow near the station house.

It's beginning to look like rain so we hustle back down the stairs to our boats and head back across the harbor to Fish Beach. We finish the afternoon with some gallery hopping and reading as the rain starts.

Sunday comes too soon and it's time to head back to Port Clyde and home. There's only one minor glitch in our plans. Though the rain has stopped, the fog has settled in overnight so we'll be paddling on a compass heading rather than a visual course. It never ceases to amaze me when we arrive where we expect to through the fog. A mounted compass is a requirement in weather like this. A GPS is also helpful but without the compass it becomes very easy to veer off in a wrong direction without realizing it.

By early afternoon we've reached Port Clyde and the end of another adventure. There have been no porpoises or whales like there will be for the next Monhegan paddle in six days for some other SMSKN paddlers but the Monhegan "memory" will stay with us for another year until we can renew it once again.



A Perfectly Calm Day

by Bob Murray

This is the true story of a trip I was on this summer. It started as a perfectly calm day that nearly ended in a tragedy. The intent is to share some learning and raise the level of awareness of some of the hazards that exist in our sport.

We started off with just a light breeze, a bit of fog and calm seas. We had spent the day exploring down the coast. On the way back we made a short stop in the harbor we previously visited. The swells had increased and the breaking waves were becoming more impressive.

There was a shortcut out of the harbor that was now blocked since the tide had gone out. So we went back out the way we came in. Trying to stay clear of the breaking surf I paddled out noticing a very large swell continuing to build in front of me.

I looked to my left and there was one of our other paddlers facing the same swell except it was much higher and becoming steeper by the second. My last view of the paddler was that of the kayak essentially vertical, leaning slightly to the right fully on the steep face of the wave, but not to the crest which was beginning to break. My hope that by some miracle she would make it through was dashed when I looked back to see the boat hull on the back of a wave. I

signaled on my air horn for help. I felt totally helpless.

To go back into the area would probably mean that there would be two boats to rescue; this was way beyond my ability. I heard her call for help and saw her in the water with the boat nowhere to be seen.

Thank God one of the folks on the paddle who had advanced skills was able to paddle across the surf. Being buried twice by breaking waves, he somehow managed to brace through it and stay upright. He got her to hang onto the back of his boat and pulled her out beyond the surf. Two of the other paddlers worked with him to have her lay across the stern of their boats. A couple of us went into the harbor and found her boat remarkably in one piece thrown up on some rocks. The boat was towed out and she was helped back into it.

Everything finally did work out and no one was injured. There was only minor damage to the boat, a broken rudder.

We were lucky that it was a calm day. The group did the right stuff so it didn't snowball into a tragedy. I think there are some lessons to be learned from this experience. First, no matter what the conditions, how nice a day it is, it pays to have all the safety equipment necessary for the worst case. Paddling in a group is

safer than paddling alone, if the group stays and works together. We were very fortunate to have an experienced paddler in the group without whom we would have had a very difficult rescue to execute. In addition we were fortunate to have two tow lines, one used to rescue the person and one to rescue the boat. Luckily we had plenty of extra dry clothes with us. The unexpected does happen, losing a boat.

How many of us have practiced rescuing a person without a boat? It can be done and may be essential. Group and individual rescue skills are essential. The combination of outgoing tide and incoming surf can build large breaking waves. Rogue waves that are two to three times normal height do happen.

The ocean is a wondrous playground that we enjoy; it occasionally includes conditions that challenge our capability. This is not to discourage, but is a reminder of the need to hone our skills and be prepared.



SMSKN has "adopted" Crow Island in Muscongus Bay so it would be helpful if members stopped by as often as possible to help maintain it.



If you're not getting regular e-mail from SMSKN, we might not have your current e-mail address. To update your e-mail address, contact Bill Ridlon at:

outdoors@gwi.net

An electronic newsletter soon may be an option, so be sure you're on the list!

To Group Paddle or Not To Group Paddle, A Second Opinion

by Bill Ridlon

Dear Editor,

I read the article about group kayaking in the June newsletter with interest. I too have found that some "groups" don't seem to be groups at all but rather a loose-knit band of kayakers that are together at the start and together at the end but could be anywhere during the paddle between start and end. Gregg Bolton, the article's author, makes some good points, especially the one about the "contract" with the group. I agree that, if you're with the group, you should look out for the welfare of the others as best you can. However, I'd like to add one or two things to Gregg's points.

First of all, I think the lack of "groupness" starts at the put-in. The Network has made it a policy to advertise "on-the-water" times for paddles. That's good for ensuring that the group isn't left waiting for upwards of an hour for late-comers to arrive and get onto the water. This, unfortunately, it's not so good for discussing a float plan. At the point where everyone is ready for the discussion, the group is already on the water with some paddlers together and possibly some not. Further, I think a float plan is one of those items that often never sees the light of day. If it does, it often is incomplete. The destination is discussed, the route sometimes is mentioned, and

occasionally times are mentioned. However, way points where the group can "regroup" are seldom discussed. Nor are individual paddling styles or who will be the lead paddler discussed either.

Now, with that said, I think there's a reason why groups don't "group" and float plans don't get discussed in too much of any detail. I think kayaking tends to attract those kinds of people that prefer being alone or being in very small groups. When they find themselves thrust into a not-so-small group, they find ways to reduce the size so that it feels more comfortable to them.

In my opinion, I think we can deal with groups in a couple of ways. We can reduce the size of the groups to something that will feel comfortable for most paddlers. This is an option that is also recommended by the Maine Island Trail Association and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands for other reasons. Alternatively, we can make sure that a detailed float plan is discussed and that a larger group has smaller groups within it with a leader for each. There are probably other options and also other points to the subject. I hope you get other letters about it. I'd certainly like to learn what other Network members feel about it.

"On Celtic Tides; One Man's Journey Around Ireland by Sea Kayak"

By Chris Duff

A book review by Berry Manter

Many of us spend our better hours embraced by the seductive energies of the sea. Is there an unspoken magic that channels up through the slender shaft of a kayaker's paddle to cast the spell that binds him to the sea forever? Is it the sound of the waves or the rhythm of the swells that cradle, calm, enchant, electrify? Chris Duff is a man clearly possessed by such a spell and writes of journeying alone by kayak for three months around Ireland.

His book is not an account of logistics, techniques or how mere man braves a formidable coastline and turbulent sea, but rather a deeply personal, psychological and spiritual memoir.

The circumnavigation of the coast of Ireland is an arduous and formidable physical task by any man's standards. Yet, Duff's writing conveys a deeper, soulful need to examine the nature of his own placement in the Universe, and the desire to plot his personal coordinates of Time and Place on the scale of Celtic history.

His tale weaves the diligently kept writings from his trip journal with supportive information on Ireland's turbulent history. There is something deeply haunting and alluring about a small country whose population is now half that of over a century ago. Left behind are the rich archeological ruins of abandoned villages, isolated

monasteries and pockets of gentle people making their living from the sea much as their forebears did. One senses that Duff has an ability to transcend time and centuries to scribe a unique portrait of a rich and tragic country. Yet he holds the reader in the present with the descriptive drama of his passage upon the often brutal sea conditions of the open Atlantic.

This is a book for those who kayak, or love the sea, or have an affection for Ireland. A book to curl up with and dream of the possibilities that a small seaworthy boat and a skilled hand upon the paddle shaft can bring.

This book has recently been added to the SMSKN library.



Coming out of a harbor on Campobello Island with Glen McGrady paddling. From Bob Murray's photo album.

Second Report on Cobscook Bay

by Bob Murray

Last month I had a great week on the kayaking trip to Cobscook Bay that was listed in our last newsletter. Clark Bowlen, the trip leader, did a great job organizing it. The group was a mix of people from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Maine. Besides myself, Sheila McKenzie was the only other SMSKN member. I want to say up front that I do not endorse this as a paddle for everyone. It requires a leader with a good understanding of the tides and currents in the area. High tides run 22 feet with strong tidal currents, and the water temperature was 50 degrees.

Our paddling trips included Cobscook Bay, Campobello Island and East Quoddy Head, Deer Island which is off Eastport, and a day paddling a series of four inland ponds connected by streams. The two highlights for me were paddling around East Quoddy Head and Deer Island. East Quoddy is just a beautiful spot with the famous lighthouse and high rock shores dotted with shallow caves.

While paddling off Deer Island we saw a number of bald eagles and one with her eaglets. The tides and currents are tricky in both areas which require good weather to negotiate and are best run close to high tide.

Overall the company was great, the weather was clear except for one day and the scenery spectacular.

SMSKN Video Library Expands

by Berry Manter

We have acquired the two new videos produced by H2Outfitters, "The Art of Paddling, Volumes I & II". I hope to find a couple hours to fully view them, but what I saw of these tapes at the recent Castine Symposium looked very good. They were filmed off Orr's Island and feature a few familiar faces.

Volume I covers very introductory level skills: wet exit, forward and reverse strokes, forward and reverse sweeps. Volume II covers draw strokes, braces, sculls, and the Eskimo roll. These are detailed and broken down into steps that make good sense and appear easy to follow.

I think these are an excellent additions to our library. Jeff Cooper sold them to the network at cost. He also offered to come visit one of our upcoming SMSKN meetings and talk a little about the videos.

These are the first two videos of an extended series of instructional tapes. I hope they get lots of use.

