



SOUTHERN MAINE SEA KAYAKING NETWORK NEWSLETTER

May 2003

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, to have fun.

Southern Maine Sea Kayaking Network
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Lights on the Water

By Susan Payne

Visible, effective lighting is important for safe kayaking at dusk or after dark. There are many ways of setting up lights on a kayak or a kayaker—some are effective but others are hard for other boats to spot after dark. To promote safe paddling, SMSKN is compiling a list of tips about effective lights for kayakers. If you've worked out a way to set up lights that works well, please call or send a short description of your equipment and how you set it up to Susan Payne. She'll post them in a future newsletter. You can contact her at 207-799-4048 before 10:00 PM or c/o SMSKN, P O Box 4794, Portland, ME 04122.

The Starter Guide to Essential Paddling Etiquette

By Berry Manter

Anyone who knows me knows I am not a poster child for standards of etiquette. My manners are marginal even when I am making considerable effort. I find it therefore curious that I have volunteered to write an article on "Paddling Etiquette" for you. However, there is something about being on the ocean in a very small boat that garners my rapt attention, utmost respect and a strong deference to protocol.

Etiquette began as a system of uniformly practiced social behaviors by which members of a community might better communicate their intent to care for one another, to convey their regard and concern for others in the manner they would like others to do for them. This is, perhaps, an expanded practice of the classic "Golden Rule." And, as with all good ideas over time, commonsense and decency evolved into a competitive one-upmanship of intricately absurd rituals intended to separate those of superior social wheat from us bumbling chaffs. I have been taught that the proper gentlemen walks on the street side of the female he is escorting. This chivalrous gesture, I am told, was to protect his lady friend from the flung contents of a chamber pot, which in 14th-century Europe tended to land away from the building, a practice not commonly encountered in recent times.

If we must somehow come to believe that there are commonsense rules of the road for daily life then there must be the same for paddling our sea kayaks. Such rules would enable us to look after one another as we ourselves would want to be looked after and we could call these rules "Paddling Etiquette." It is important to be safe and look out for one another on the water and we should consider ourselves better paddlers for adhering to such habits.

Here is my offering of seven rules for paddling both alone or as a group that will not only save our lives, but better endear us to our fellow paddlers, other boaters, Mother Nature and even our chosen attorney should some unforeseen calamity occur.

1) *The Group Rule:* If you chose to participate as part of a group of paddlers with a common destination, function as if the whole group were a singular unit. The level of the trip concedes to the level of the least experienced paddler, such that everyone leaves and arrives as a group and that no one is left stranded or left behind during the paddle. Nor should the group tolerate the usual "bolters," those who feel obliged to demonstrate their paddling prowess and impatience by leaving the group behind. Consider such behavior rude, unless agreed upon in advance by one and all that the group should safely splinter.

2) *The Safety Procedures Rule:* It should be known by all in advance of setting off just what safety devices are available among the group members and what safety procedures (i.e., rescue skills) will be conducted in the event of a member in distress. Do you know where you are going? Has anyone checked a tide schedule or brought the correct charts? It

is valuable to establish the level of skills required prior to departure and decisions made as to whether the intended trip is an appropriate venture for everyone interested in participating.

3) *The Proper Attire Required Rule:* Though not in tuxedos or ties, the correctly attired kayaker is enhancing the safety of others as well as themselves. I have seen folks show up in shorts and sandals for ocean trips when neoprene or a drysuit is by far the prudent choice. I have seen inexperienced kayakers tuck their PFD's under their bungies as if the extra bulk interfered with their fashion statement, yet what could be more lovely than the safely attired kayaker?


4) *The Tell Someone Who Loves You Rule,* also referred to as a float plan, to be left with someone, ANYONE, who is willing to check their watch or calendar in the event you do not return. This rule politely takes into account that most of us have family or friends who would be bereft if we were swallowed up by the sea.

5) *The Rule of Tonnage:* This aptly translates into "you are in the littlest dang boat on the whole ocean and don't forget it." Kayaks are like bugs in the grass and it is up to the kayaker to know who is coming and how to stay out of their way. It is important to know where shipping lanes are and where working or recreational boat traffic will tend to be heavy. It is considerate to communicate one's location and intended travel via VHF to other larger vessels if you are at any risk to encounter their massive hulls. It is to the advantage of the kayak with its shallow draught to travel where other boats cannot and therefore it is also safest to keep to these areas when reasonable to reach your destination.

6) *The Leave No Trace Rule:* Essentially no different than your mother telling you to pick up after yourself, "pleeeeeeze," (and don't make a mess to begin with, dear). Carry in, carry out—everything. Learn to do the "Crap Wrap."

7) *The Don't Annoy the Wildlife Rule:* There is something utterly annoying to Mainers about the disruptive noisy summer tourists with camcorders trespassing and "discovering" our neighborhoods, so we should practice discretion when visiting the native habitat of seals, nesting birds, and rafts of Eider ducks. If your presence causes a creature to flee you have entered into their personal space and this is considered most impolite and may also endanger their lives.

So, you have by now caught the drift of this idea of etiquette-on-the-water and collectively we might begin to expand upon this meager starter list. Offer to stabilize someone's kayak while they secure their spray skirt. Bring treats to share during an island stopover. Help hoist other folks' boats to the rack of their car. Courtesy comes from thinking of how we would like to be treated and extending that to those around us, whether they be kayakers, lobstermen, ship captains, Coast Guard Search and Rescue or seals and ducks. Taking care of one another's safety and comfort makes us better paddlers in a way that is perhaps more important than the correctness of our strokes or variety of rolls we have mastered. How unlikely, you might think, to be hearing all this from me.



**Gulf of Maine
Sea Kayak Symposium**
July 11th, 12th & 13th
Castine, Maine

Presented by a non-profit organization formed by New England Kayakers for the benefit of the kayaking community

Kayak Demos	Lectures on
Field House Exhibitions	Kayaking Skills
Classes	Marine Life
Guest Speakers	Safety

www.kayaksymposium.org
GOMSKS, P.O. Box 50, Bath, Maine 04530
(207) 751-8998 **info@kayaksymposium.org**

The Gulf of Maine Sea Kayak Symposium

By Bob Arledge

The tradition of an annual sea kayak symposium at the Maine Maritime Academy in Castine, Maine is being restored. The symposium will be called The Gulf of Maine Sea Kayaking Symposium (GOMSKS) and this year it will be held the weekend of July 11th, 12th and 13th this year.

GOMSKS is the descendant of the first sea kayak symposium organized by Ken Fink in 1982. Ken has provided the following history of the sea kayak symposium in Maine:

"The first ever sea kayak symposium took place in August of 1982 in Maine at the Darling Marine Center (University of Maine marine research lab on the Damariscotta Estuary); this was followed by the first west coast event two years later. 'As Maine goes, so goes the nation!' There are now 20-30 symposium events plus paddlefest days around the country. The first event cost participants \$12.50; this included two lunches (prepared and served by Joan Fink on crutches and John Viehman—editor of *Canoe*) and attracted 200 participants from all over the United States and the United Kingdom. I had 30 campers in my backyard. Most of us had never seen some of the west coast sea kayaks manufactured at the time, so nearly one hundred per cent participation by west coast manufacturers after some initial reluctance

gave us the opportunity to experience the variability of approach to design of a kayak for the sea. It was a stunning event that convinced all of us that there was value in gathering and talking about paddling and safety. The next year we needed a venue with greater capacity and we chose the Maine Maritime Academy in historical and Maine-beautiful Castine. We had invited L.L. Bean to participate the first two years and before the third event, L.L. Bean announced they were taking over the event and conducted it for the next 18 years. Then, in 2002, L.L. Bean abandoned the longest running sea kayaking symposium in the world. We began to plan for resurrecting the event last year and have now committed to 2003. We hope to bring enthusiastic paddlers—whatever the level of interest and experience—together again for education, discussion, and simple pleasures at the edge of the sea in Castine, Maine. A tradition reborn!” - Ken Fink

The group that is organizing the symposium includes: Ken Fink, the founder of the first sea kayak symposium, oceanographer, college professor, and owner of Poseidon Kayak Imports; Tom Bergh, expedition kayaker, kayaking instructor, and owner of Maine Island Kayak; Sandy Martin, kayak designer and owner of Lincoln Canoe and Kayak; Phil Wong, owner of Global Outfitters; Gloria Krellman, owner of Kayak Covers, and Bob Arledge, President of the Southern Maine Sea Kayaking Network.

If you have attended symposiums at the Maine Maritime Academy in the past, the basic structure of GOMSKS will be familiar to you. There will be speakers, classes and demonstrations as in the past, and there will be exhibitor booths in the field house and space at the beach for demonstrating boats. The differences from recent L.L. Bean symposiums are subtle, but hopefully will result in a greater appreciation by the attendees. GOMSKS will stress three general subject areas: Kayaking skills and safety; Environmentalism and conservation of resources, and Coastal history and culture. Additionally, each year the symposium will have a unique theme. This year the theme will be “Marine Life of the Gulf of Maine,” featuring presentations focusing on seabirds, whales, seals, lobsters, and their relationships and interactions with the Gulf of Maine. We hope that by changing the theme each year and bringing in new presenters to address the theme we will make GOMSKS a new experience each year. For more information about the symposium go to the GOMSKS website: www.kayaksymposium.org.

We plan on staffing the symposium with volunteers. Hopefully many or most of the volunteers will come from SMSKN. Volunteers will get free attendance, lodging and meals. They will work about six hours a day for the symposium which will give them plenty of time to enjoy the symposium on their own. For more information about volunteering, email Bob Arledge at: arledge@kayaksymposium.org.

Trip Planning Guidelines

By Bob Arledge

One of the primary reasons we exist as a club is to be able to plan to paddle with others. Our website has an extensive Events List which features trips planned by club members. An important feature of the trip planning process is to somehow communicate to others the anticipated level of difficulty of the trip so that interested paddlers can decide for themselves if a particular trip falls within their skill level.

To this end SMSKN makes available a set of guidelines that is intended to make the rating of SMSKN trips more uniform among trip coordinators. They are intended to avoid having paddlers finding themselves on trips that have demands beyond their capabilities; this creates a threat to safety. Safety is of paramount importance, but the guidelines are also useful to establish some minimums for trips. For example, a trip intended for advanced paddlers should not be planned for a pace of two knots. This can create boring conditions.

Obviously the condition with the highest rating should generally determine the rating of the trip; however, the boundaries between ratings are not rigid. For example, if you are planning a trip on a calm, sheltered lake in late August, at a gentle pace, but you want to go 16 nautical miles, there is no reason the trip should not be classified as an intermediate trip. It would be a good idea to let people know that the trip is a little long for the classification, but there is no need to dissuade intermediate paddlers from participating. The most important safety tool in kayaking is good judgment.

The most critical criterion for safety is wave height, and it is the one that is the least predictable. It is never possible to be certain that conditions will not be worse than the guidelines for a rating level. You have to deal with probability. If there is a significant chance that the conditions will be worse than the guidelines or if there is a slight possibility that the conditions will be a lot worse than the guidelines, you should upgrade the rating.

In most cases it is the waves that pose the threat, not the wind. This is the reason that wave height is used in these guidelines rather than wind speed. Exposure to the wind, fetch for waves to build, time of year and time of day are all things that can affect the potential for large wind-generated waves and are things to be considered in rating a trip. As the day of the trip approaches, weather forecasts begin to have pertinence to the probability that conditions will be within the limits for the classification of the trip. The day before and the day of the trip, weather buoy data becomes also becomes pertinent. At this point if the probability is that wave conditions will exceed the rating of the trip, the rating should be upgraded or the trip relocated. A trip can be relocated to a place where sheltering conditions compensate for stronger winds.

Another thing about waves to consider is their steepness. A breaking one-foot wave is a greater threat than an eight foot swell. Swells with long periods gently lift you up and down without any tendency to tip you over. Of course the energy in these swells can become dangerous if you paddle into shallow water where the waves slow down and build up. For the wave height criterion in these guidelines, it is assumed that the waves are steep.

