

Some Thoughts from the President

There are approximately 13,000,000 people within an hour and a half drive from where I am paddling yet I am the ONLY one on the lake. The weather is warm and there is no wind to even ripple the water. Snow capped mountains are in the distance and I am accompanied by hundreds of birds and ducks.

I have been able to repeat this scenario several times this winter. It makes me wonder what the other 12,999,999 people are doing. Am I the only one that can appreciate these experiences or am I just the luckiest guy in southern California? They say that when it's all over we will not regret so much the things we have done, but the things we have NOT done. We can all come up with reasons for not turning off the television and dusting off our kayaks, but once you have made the effort to get on the water there are no regrets.

Not every winter day is as cooperative as the ones just described, and some of us enjoy the challenge of paddling in wind, rain and cold. After all, these are the conditions where kayaks first evolved. As I recreate in these conditions I can't help but reflect on the early peoples of Alaska and Greenland. They weren't paddling for pleasure but for their survival. They hunted caribou, seals and even walrus.

My fiberglass kayak is much more rugged than their skin covered craft. Some may debate this, but I think my carbon fiber paddle is better to their drift wood stick (paddle). One thing is for sure, my cold weather clothing is superior to those of the early kayaker. Early paddlers problem was actually overheating as their clothing, made of animal skins, would not dissipate sweat and heat. They had no elastic and often sewed their skirts around the cockpit rim.

I also have the advantage of various safety devices. We have marine radios, GPS, compasses, maps and charts, flares and electronic signal devices that automatically give our exact location to search and rescue personal. We have pumps, paddle floats and water proof bulkheads.

As I paddle in these cold conditions, with all the advantages over my predecessors, I must be keenly aware that I am susceptible to the same deadly enemy they faced: HYPOTHERMIA. More importantly, as I paddle on the calm and warm days it is easy to forget how deadly this cold the water is this time of year. Hypothermia may actually be a greater threat on these warm days as I shed some protective clothing.

Are you carrying your safety gear, do you know how to use it? Have you ever tried to roll up in cold water? Have you ever practiced a self or even an assisted rescue in cold water? Are you paddling alone or with a person that could assist you if necessary? Are you close enough to shore so that you could get there if you can't self rescue? I have come across cold water paddlers that don't even wear their life jackets!

If carelessness requires a rescue by park rangers, or even worse, results in a drowning, the aftermath will undoubtedly affect all of us. I have read that in France it is illegal to paddle over a mile off the sea shore! Often the bureaucrats make rules in areas where they have little knowledge. On two separate occasions, on two different lakes I have had my kayaks "inspected" for being safe enough for entry onto their lakes. The first question asked was, "Is that a Kayak?"

I have read that when the Eskimo would go after the walrus, that half the time the walrus would be the victor. Weather conditions also took its share of these brave men. These early paddlers had to take great risks or starve. We do not have to take unnecessary risks.

I encourage all of you to take advantage of the kayaking opportunities we can enjoy while the jet and water skiers are dormant, but please paddle responsibly....

Be Well,
Gary Hakala
President, Valley Wide Kayak Club