



Chili at the Beechwood

by Jack Keyes

Yes it was at first! And then the sun came out the next day. New and old friends, sun, and paddling at one of the most beautiful parks in the state. What more could anyone ask for in a great weekend? One of my new friends Charles Gabriel proved once again that even your worst day paddling is better than your best day at work. He didn't securely beach his craft at lunch and it started a slow trip across the lake. This is something that has happened to me and nearly everyone I know that has paddled for a while. He grabbed the boat and went back to sit with about twenty of us in the sun on that gorgeous beach. We ate a leisurely lunch telling tales and talking shop, which I know Al Anderson would prefer we not do on these trips, but I needed a new paddle. My old one is over thirty years old, so I wanted an Eskimo style paddle. I went to Al who I think makes a fine product, asked him what size I needed, and made a decision to get one. He didn't get mad at me so I guess it was OK. After lunch Al and some of the hardier paddlers continued around the base of that great dune to the east arm of Hamlin Lake. I went with them for a while, but since it was my first day paddling this year I turned back at the end of the dunes. Charles went to get back in his boat to go back to camp and couldn't find his PFD. He searched the shore three times, but it wasn't there. He thinks he may have put it on the deck of his boat and when it took that short trip by itself, that it may have slipped off. He searched the area for a while to no avail, so if you find a green PFD with a nice new diving knife attached to it, please contact WMCKA and we will get in touch with him.

An old friend of mine retired and decided to come up and share a campsite. We camped with Tom Huntoon when I was outings committee chairman for the Sierra Club. He was a WMCKA member when it first started



**Paddlers take a break on Hamlin Lake.
Photo by Jim Elickson.**

and dropped out. He is looking for a blue, two-person Dagger if anyone has one for sale and will probably be rejoining the club. I brought my slalom boat along to paddle, but that was a disaster. Vick is used to a boat with a rudder. We hiked the Island trail on Friday and the lighthouse trail on Sunday. We hike fast and are members of the "too many doughnuts last winter club." Vick says, and I agree that as you get older, you seem to be able to gain weight just drinking water. I will miss those magnificent beech trees when they are gone in a few years. It seems they are going the way of

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Kayak for Light 2003

by Anne Keith

Plans are underway for WMCKA's 4th Annual "Kayak for Light," to be held on July 12, 2003, at Ramona Park in Portage, Michigan, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with lunch included. This event is co-sponsored by Lee's Fun and Adventure Store, in Portage, Michigan. It enables sight-impaired and blind people to learn about kayaking, and experience the delights of paddling.

Volunteers work one-on-one with the blind people, either in single or double kayaks, and coach them in the art of keeping the kayak right-side-up and having a great time while doing it. For us, this has been one of the most rewarding and worthwhile events we have ever undertaken. Some of the blind folks get very little opportunity to engage in outdoors activities, and it gives them a chance to do so safely, and with friends.

We need volunteers and extra kayaks, PFDs, and paddles for this outing. You do not have to be an expert paddler to help out; you only need the desire to assist others in having a fun-filled day. If you are able to bring extra kayaks, the very best kind are wide, stable boats with large cockpits, which make learning easier for the blind. Any double kayaks would be very welcome, as well.

If you are interested in this activity, call or email Bill and Anne Keith at 231-779-4349, or elfman@netonecom.net or Jim Ellickson at ellickson@voyager.net for more information. A map is available on the WMCKA website, at <http://www.msfl.org/kayak>, or we can direct you there. We hope to see you on July 12!



**Kathy Burmania, David Moreland, and Anne Keith serve lunch at the 2003 Kayak for Light.
Photo by Jim Ellickson**

Doc Yak's Hypothermia Kit

by Rik Tooker, M.D.
(Reprinted from a previous newsletter.)

When Lori and I take long trips we are well stocked with food, a camp stove, extra clothes, food and emergency gear. As a result we are well prepared for hypothermia (unless separated from our boats that is).

However, on more than a few occasions, a day trip has turned miserable or even dangerous for one or more persons in our paddling group. Hypothermia is a fact of life for water sports enthusiasts even in warm water. This is because wet bodies in water lose heat 25 times faster than in air. Wet bodies out of water lose heat 5 times as fast as dry bodies. To survive hypothermia one must get out of the water and get into dry clothes. Even eighty plus degree water or a rain soaked person in eighty-degree air will get hypothermic, given enough time. Many of us spend the majority of our paddling days in colder water, often between freezing and sixty-five degrees. So, be prepared!

I have decided to pack a hypothermia kit on most day paddles because I believe we all become a bit lax on those short outings. As

we all know, Great Lakes area weather is unpredictable and the unexpected swimmer situation can arise when least expected. Even if you are not the person who is under-dressed or soaking wet, you can become hypothermic providing assistance to that person.

I have also realized it's pretty dumb to be freezing or have a friend freezing while dreaming about all your warm gear. The gear does no good way back at the car or taking up space back at home. Why not store some clothing and gear in a dry bag right in your kayak? I have started doing this and it has already paid-off. So here is a suggested list of items for a hypothermia kit. It is a work in progress and I would love to hear feedback from club members:

Space blanket
Fleece top and long pants
Knit hat, gloves and socks
Small camp towel
Energy and electrolyte drink (bottle and powder)
Concentrated carbohydrate gel, energy bars (carbs and protein)

Lighter and fire starting material
Cell phone (a good place to keep it dry)
Rain poncho or rain gear
Capilene long underwear top and bottoms
Chemical hand warmers (as used for winter sports)

These items will fit in one or two medium dry bags depending on how efficiently you pack. Some items can and should be carried on your PFD (e.g. marine band radio) in case of separation from your boat. I notice many expert paddlers with pouches on the back of their PFDs so they can have a space blanket and mini-hypothermia kit with them. A space blanket of good quality doubles as a small shelter. Fluid is essential because hypothermia is made worse by dehydration and cold people don't recognize dehydration. A cold body needs fuel quickly and frequently until warm. Start with sugar and simple carbohydrates. Next progress to carbs, protein and fat. You can get creative with energy food that has a long shelf life. As for fire starting material you can go high-tech with paste or goo sold at stores or blend dryer lint with finely ground steel wool (yes, it works). The hand warmers last up to seven hours and may be used to warm hands and feet (reduced risk of frostbite) or may be placed against large blood vessels for emergency re-warming. The neck, armpits and groin are good places. These warmers must be used carefully and with frequent monitoring to prevent skin burns.

So that's the kit, version one. If you see me out paddling, I'll be happy to show you the kit I carry. Paddle safe-paddle warm!

A Gear List for Extended Trips

Compiled from lists submitted by Frits Kwant and Joe Leykam Okemos

Paddling Gear

- Paddle;
- Spare paddle;
- Spray skirt;
- PFD;
- Signaling devices, including whistle, flares, signal mirror, glow sticks, strobe light, and VHF radio;
- Waterproof bail-out kit with rescue equipment, safety blanket, matches, food, etc;
- Paddle float;
- Contact tow line;
- Longer tow line;
- Anchor;
- Sling;
- Pump;
- Sponge;
- Navigational tools, including charts, topos, deck compass, hand-held compass, GPS, waterproof pen, and acetate sheets;

Clothing

- Wetsuit or drysuit;
- Neoprene gloves or mittens;
- Neoprene hood or hat;
- Neoprene booties or other appropriate footwear;
- Additional clothing such as dry top or dry pants;
- Polypropylene or fleece clothing for layering;
- Clothing for camp, including long underwear, jackets, warm hats, windbreaker, windpants, and rainwear;

Camp Gear

- Tent and footprint;
- Sleeping pad and sleeping bag;
- Dry bags, including tapered dry bags and compression dry sacks;
- Ursa Sack for hanging food from bears;
- Supplies for drinking water, including pump and/or filter, purification tablets, platypus, and water bottles;
- Cooking gear, including stove, backup stove, fuel, pots, potholders, cleaning supplies, matches, lighter, eating utensils;

Personal Items

- Headlamp, spare bulbs, and spare batteries;
- Journal and reading material;
- Bug repellent;
- Sunscreen;
- Toiletries, including towelette, toilet paper and trowel;
- Sunglasses and repair kit;
- Camera and binoculars;

Food!

First Aid Kit

An Interview with Chris Duff

by Keith Wikle

The story of how Chris Duff circumnavigated Ireland is a startlingly subtle journey of self-examination, introspection, and meditation on what it is to be a small man, in a big sea, in a little boat. For those of us that paddle open water this is an easily identifiable sentiment. Even for those that do not paddle, the tale of his journey changes how you think about people, and their capabilities and culpability.

In the year 2000 Chris Duff set out to circumnavigate the south island of New Zealand. In Chris's four month journey of 1700 miles: he paddled some of the worlds biggest seas, played with dolphins, raced sharks, and ultimately pushed himself beyond his limits. I caught up with Chris Duff, as he was literally packing for the next expedition. On his next expedition he will paddle around Iceland as part of a three-person team consisting of Shawna Franklin, and Leon Somm e.

Keith Wikle: Are you using the same boat that you used on the New Zealand Trip?

Chris Duff: Yes, we'll be paddling the Nigel Dennis Explorer.

Keith Wikle: We'll it's not THE same boat is it? (Editors comment: Chris damaged his old Explorer on the New Zealand Trip, to hear the details, you'll have to read the book...)

Chris Duff: No, it's a new one. But I still have the old one. I paddle it whenever I go out on the water here. But it's just been stressed too badly to take on a big trip like this one [circumnavigation of Iceland]. I get so attached to these boats.

Keith Wikle: Whatever happened to the Nordkapp you used to paddle?

Chris Duff: It's actually hanging on the wall of a local pub. Unfortunately I can't paddle it anymore because I developed Sciatica. It's too bad because it's a beautiful boat.

Keith Wikle: Do you think that your writing style or craft has changed or improved between On Celtic Tides, and Southern Exposure?

Chris Duff: Well it's interesting because I think I'm too close to them really. But I've had many people tell me who have read both books that they think Southern Exposure is better written. But it's very difficult for me to see that. But I think it's a good thing to progress in your chosen profession. I think what I try to do is to put the reader, or the paddler right in the cockpit of the boat. I like to let them feel and taste and see everything that I see. I think I tried to do that for both books.

Keith Wikle: What is your writing and editing process for your books? Do you work straight from your journals, or do you use a computer from day one?

Chris Duff: I work right from the computer, day one. I hand type from the journal when I begin. I try to work from a theme if I can. There's a lot of tossing around of ideas before I sit down and write. But once I do sit down to write, for the first three four weeks, I'll write twenty or thirty pages a day, but after this, I'll go back and hit the delete key quite a bit. So there is a definite refinement process until I come forward with a manuscript. It's not until the second month of writing that I have enough confidence in the piece to feel like I know where I'm going with it.

Keith Wikle: How much do you rely on editorial comments from friends or your publisher to come up with a finished draft?

Chris Duff: Not very much at first. I create the entire manuscript. I'm very cautious about letting other people look at it at first, until it's about ninety-percent done. In this case, Southern Exposure, I had three people that are very close to me read it, but who do not have any type of journalistic background. They made some suggestions that I agreed with. Some big pieces were taken out. I felt there was too much repetition.

Keith Wikle: What sort of things did you take out?

Chris Duff: Well that's the challenge of writing something like this. Paddling is repetitious. There's no getting around that. Part of that is the beauty of paddling, it's singular, and one day is quite similar to the next. You have to be careful when you're telling the story that you don't put the reader to sleep. Such as, "oh here he gets knocked over again." Well I got knocked over sixteen times on the trip, but I only recounted in any detail one of those incidents. You can't recount sixteen times. The reader will say, I've already read this in chapter two, three, and four, so I'll skip this part. I would skip it too.

Keith Wikle: I don't think you mentioned a single capsiz in On Celtic Tides.

Chris Duff: No I didn't get knocked down there.

Keith Wikle: You didn't? Not once?

Chris Duff: No this is what was so unique about the two trips. It shows the severity of the two different seas. Ireland wasn't a walk in the park. But I didn't get knocked over a single time.

Keith Wikle: I've seen the west coast of Ireland and it's very rugged. To me it's amazing that there were no surf landings where you got maytagged.

Chris Duff: There was some very rough open water out far from land, but no surf landings. On the New Zealand trip there were sixteen rough surf landings.

Keith Wikle: The Irish trip you did with its scenery, the early Christian ruins you visited on all the island on the west coast created a sort of journey into the past, or at least a dialog with the past, and this formed a cohesive theme for On Celtic Tides. What aspects of the New Zealand trip helped define the themes for Southern Exposure?

Chris Duff: Well this is what made Southern Exposure more difficult to write than On Celtic Tides. On the Irish trip there was an inner journey, a spiritual journey, visiting the early Christian sites and the other ancient ruins. There was a sense of history far out and beyond the paddling experience, there was another journey going on simultaneously. On the New Zealand book, there was only one journey and that was the physical one. The journey was literally just about physically trying to stay upright, trying to outrace the winds, outrace the waves. This was what made the book more difficult to write, thematically. What I tried to share with the reader was that this journey was very much like life. There are difficulties that we all run into. There are adversarial situations that come up. Ultimately it is how we meet these challenges psychologically and emotionally and how we stay focused on the goal. The quiet psychological focus on all of the trip's challenges is what I tried to thread through out the book. I tried to thread this not only through the paddling journey, but also about how we live our daily lives. Non-expedition lives if you see what I mean.

Keith Wikle: What does writing or storytelling mean to you in regard to these trips. Is it catharsis, is it merely economic sustenance, or somewhere in between?

Chris Duff: All of the above. It's a way in the writing of the book to understand the full scope of the trip. When you're on the trip there's such immediacy to every moment. It's impossible to look at the entire trip as a whole. What the writing does for me, it allows me to sit down and quietly think it through, to relive it. I can put different aspects of the trip into perspective and see it for what it is. I can recognize through the writing that from day one when I launched the boat to when I landed that I changed as a person. The writing really helps discover these changes for me. As far as telling the stories goes, getting up in front of two to three hundred people I start the slide and the story, then it brings me right back to the journey. I'm there mentally. I'm back in the boat. I feel that this is a place of absolute sincerity and honesty and that it isn't a show that's put on for entertainment value. I think that a lot of people tell me that they felt they were right there. I usually forget about the audience when I'm up there. I think this is due to the fact that as a solo paddler; there's no one there to share the moment with. It goes on the hard drive as it were. It isn't diluted by the expression of the events on a day-to-day basis.

Keith Wikle: Because there's no one there to talk to you've saved it all up for when you get back maybe?

Chris Duff: Exactly. It becomes part of my physical being, my bones, my brains, and my muscles. They become part of me, when I tell these stories everything becomes real again. So I try to invite the audience to relive it with me.

Keith Wikle: Do you think there are some things that you give away in your writing that you wish you hadn't? Is there something in either of your books that makes you squirm and say, gee I wish I hadn't said that? Or does the editing of the book guard you from this?

Chris Duff: In the New Zealand book there was a piece that was extremely intimate, about some of my most intimate thoughts. I wrote it in detail, and at the last moment I edited it out. I wrote it, and it was important to write. When I was almost blown out to sea there were a lot of things that I thought about that didn't make it into the book. I almost made myself ill reliving it and retelling it. I think the reason why these books have well received is that they are intimate. I don't hide very much. You have to be careful. There are things I guard, things I leave out. At the end of a slide presentation, I expend a huge amount of energy, just as I do writing the book, and inevitably someone wants to come up, it happens every single time and they want more of you. They want another pint of blood, (laughs). There's a point though where you say, "I've told you everything that I'm going to tell you". There's twenty percent of the New Zealand trip that I haven't told. It's mine, it's my story. Once it's out there it has a life of it's own outside of whatever I intended for it to be. I'm okay with the criticism that is inevitably going to happen.

Keith Wikle: I haven't seen any bad reviews of the book. Did you get a few reviews that were unfavorable?

Chris Duff: Not exactly bad reviews. I know an individual down in New Zealand who read it. He didn't like it at all, he really tore it up. It was very viscous, very viscous. At first I was a little defensive, it was something I spent a year and half writing. Then I realized that it's okay. There will always be people who want to find something wrong with a painting, a poem, a piece of dance and say that it's garbage. Fair enough.

Keith Wikle: Well I suppose they're welcome to paddle around the south island of New Zealand and write their own book?

Chris Duff: That's exactly what it comes down to.

Keith Wikle: It seemed that the writing focused almost exclusively on the present, and that your focus hardly ever shifted from the task at hand because the journey was so physically demanding. However, a few times you allowed the narrative to shift to what you would do once the trip was over and you were back on land so to speak. You sort of wonder aloud whether or not your life outside of expedition paddling has suffered as a result of focusing on sea kayaking. Do you think what you gained while at sea outweighs anything you might have gained on land in a nine-to-five job situation and making paddling a hobby?

Chris Duff: I think this is the question I posed to myself in one of the later chapters. I did have the general feeling of insecurity saying to myself, "here I am again on another big expedition". The issues of security, financial security still hadn't sorted themselves out. And that continues to be the case, (laughs). However looking at the trip now after I've done so many presentations and book signings that after talking for an hour and a half or two hours that I am a quieter person. This is a bit of a paradox after I've been talking for two hours. What I gained from the New Zealand trip was an absolute quiet confidence. Having done something like that met the challenges that I did. I am reassured that whatever challenges I face, whether it's expedition paddling, or it's just getting by in life, that I can do that, I can handle them. I think this that this confidence was reinforced because of the New Zealand trip.

Keith Wikle: Is this to say that when something like breaking your boat in a rocky surf landing and you're stranded on a remote beach with no way to get off that life's other problems seem small by comparison?

Chris Duff: Perhaps. (laughs). And it isn't so much the physical issue. When you're looking at the boat and it's in pieces almost. Psychologically I was sort of broken for a bit.

Keith Wikle: Was this when you literally said, "I Quit."

Chris Duff: Exactly. It was very necessary for me to say, "I quit." I said: "I've done it all, I've done my very best. I'm happy that the boat's broken in half, because now I can quit." I think it was necessary to go to that place of quitting for a day or so. It was good to take a break and quit, but then I decided to get back into it and give it another go. Sometime it's important in life to just take a break and look at things from another perspective. Then once you've had the break, take another look at the goal and decide whether it's worth it to try again. I think those are tools I've gained from the New Zealand trip. I now have the ability to focus, the ability to believe in myself.

Keith Wikle: In the book you described the focus necessary to navigate the surf zone. In this passage you say that having a paddling partner or a buddy would actually be of little use to you or them. Because the sea kayaking community, the ACA and the BCU stresses paddling in groups so much I was wondering if you could explain your thoughts on this?

Chris Duff: I think in most situations that paddling in groups can be safer, up to a point. There is a false sense of security while paddling in groups. Thinking that while you're paddling in a group, you're safe. Ultimately we are all responsible for our own safety. We can't hand that over to someone else when the conditions deteriorate. We each have a paddle in our hands and nobody can take that paddle and paddle that boat for us. Yes we can be towed. A worst-case scenario is where someone gets themselves in a situation where they require a tow. As an instructor I have been in that situation. I have towed people. So part of me says solo paddling is not any riskier than group paddling. I say that with a caveat that a solo paddler who is properly skilled is not at any greater risk. It's not only the hard skills of bracing, rolling, paddling technique, those are obvious, the skills that are absolutely necessary before the paddling skills, are judgment skills. The ability to assess the sea that he or she will paddle, and do you even launch? Or if you're out to make a judgment that the conditions are getting beyond what that paddler is comfortable with and then deciding to get off the water. I think there is a false sense of security in group paddling. Especially when people paddle in groups where they do not know the skills of the paddlers they're paddling with. Sometimes there's a confusion of is there a leader is there not a leader. All we have to do is look at the number of fatalities, near fatalities in the book Deep trouble. In a lot of cases there were two or three paddlers in the groups, and there were still fatalities. In each case there was a lack of skill, a lack of assessment, and a lack of judgment. Well then you look at the solo paddlers in that book, were they skilled? No. What really irks me is when you read these accounts, typically in the newspaper; he or she was an experienced paddler. Well does experienced paddler mean they've been two or three times on protected water? It's very, very misleading.

Keith Wikle: It's not a very objective look at skills is it? For instance within our club one could say that I am an experienced paddler, but when you put me next to someone like Doug Van Doren, who is a 5 star sea paddler and say that I am an experienced paddler, that isn't a very accurate representation of experienced is it?

Chris Duff: There's a whole range isn't there. And Doug is a very experienced paddle, a great paddler and a great person. There are people who would take a critical view of solo paddling. But there are people who have solo climbed Everest without oxygen.

Keith Wikle: Reinhold Messner wasn't it?

Chris Duff: Yes. Exactly. Is that person making foolish decisions? I don't think so. I think that he was very on top of understanding what the risks are and what the consequences of a bad move are. It's the same thing with a solo paddler. If you go solo then you really better have your act together.

Keith Wikle: On the Everest note. Jon Krakauer in his book Into Thin Air described climbing (paraphrasing) Everest by saying that the pain to pleasure ratio was way out of whack, and that really there were only brief moments of pleasure to a ratio of a lot of suffering. Would you say that your experiences on the west coast of New Zealand might have seemed like this? Would you say that there was just too little pleasure to much terror and suffering?

Chris Duff: I think the answer to that is no. It was extreme and there were times where it was very, very frightening. Getting trashed in the surf was definitely not fun. But it was a price I was willing to pay, because there is no other way to see the west coast of New Zealand. Unfortunately I was there in a summer where the seas were a lot rougher than normal. In one way I'm rather glad that I saw that coast on a rough summer, I wouldn't have had a real taste of the Tasman Sea. If it had been flat calm it certainly would have been easier, but I wonder if I would have gotten as much out of it, the power and the raw beauty of a storm on the Tasman Sea. Sure the pleasure to pain threshold was a little tweaked. I was just as happy to have done it in that rough weather than in a flat calm.

Keith Wikle: The passage in the book where you do describe being capsized in the surf zone seemed so dead on, so accurate to me. And the mental gymnastics that you described was gut clenching to me even though I've only experienced the somewhat moderate surf we have here in the Great Lakes. I wondered if you could describe this thought process of waiting out the waves after a capsiz in the surf zone for people who maybe haven't experienced this.

Chris Duff: It's so hard to find the words. I spent seven years as a Navy diver, so I have this background of staying focused. I just go so deep inside of myself, I almost remove myself from the physical trauma of getting whipped back and forth and tumbled. While that is going on I'm just trying to stay physically calm in my mind, saying hang loose, hang loose. I guess it's almost a mantra is running in my mind. It's a meditative state amidst the chaos.

Keith Wikle: Aside from the boat and paddle what equipment makes or breaks your comfort on the trip?

Chris Duff: I live in a 16 by 16 foot straw cabin and it's filled by the gear you're asking about right now. The tent, it's got to be a bombproof shelter. It's got to be a place where you're safe and you know the thing isn't going to come down on you. And it did in New Zealand. So I upgraded to a four-season tent, a bomber mountaineering tent for the Iceland trip. Having equipment that is exactly right is very, very important on this kind of trip because if it isn't, it not only chips away at the arsenal of survival equipment, but also at the psychological edge necessary to finish a trip like the New Zealand one. I think there's a whole expedition frame of mind, and what irks me

is that if I'm putting in one hundred and ten percent of my energy I can't have a piece of gear that's just garbage. Whether it's a three-day trip or a three-month trip it's just too frustrating to have something that doesn't work.

Keith Wikle: Did Mountain Hardwear sponsor this new trip too?

Chris Duff: No unfortunately we couldn't bring them on board for this trip. So I went with a Bibler tent.

It sounds overly simplistic but I guess the important part is the tent is essential to stay dry on land and perhaps the drysuit to be warm and dry on the water.

Keith Wikle: Did I read correctly that you gave up your drysuit halfway during the trip?

Chris Duff: Yes, mainly to make space for more food.

Keith Wikle: Were you not wearing it on the first part of the trip anyway?

Chris Duff: I was wearing it on the east coast a fair bit of the time. Maybe fifty percent of the time I wore it. I made a choice halfway through. I thought the water was warm enough that even if I swam I would be okay. But I have a rule that I never get out of the boat. But here's another caveat: if it were to happen would I be able to survive in the water in a pair of neoprene shorts and a drytop? I felt the answer to that question was yes. So I decided to leave the drysuit behind.

Keith Wikle: After reading about the terror of nearly being blown out to sea, and enduring the many, many surf landings, I was wondering if you could share some of the brighter moments of the trip. What was one of the best days you had at sea?

Chris Duff: Even the terror of being on the face of a very large breaking wave, or being upside down in the surf, and eventually breaking the boat in half, almost getting blown out to sea, I don't see those as negative. I see them as part of the experience. Yes they were difficult, but it was part of the overall trip. I've spoken with a few people who have read the book, heard the story, maybe it's just my personality and the way I share the story, the way I look at things, it's not that I thrive on difficulty. Maybe this relates to the statement I made that I'm glad the summer I paddled these seas that it wasn't absolutely calm. I enjoy a challenge. Even though I'm in terrible conditions, to me it seems real, and I like that. There are going to be parts of my life that are tough, and they aren't going to be things that I didn't wish had happened, I will be glad that I went through them. The easier aspects of the trip, well there were so many of them. Being surrounded on a calm day by twenty dolphins was amazing. They were surfacing and slicing beneath the boat. They surfaced within inches of the paddle blades; they leaped into the air, clearing it by ten feet sometimes. A bottle nosed dolphin is a seven hundred pound animal and seeing it leap ten feet into the air was a high point. You can see a wandering albatross from over a mile away, and it moved in on long slow s-turns and hovered ten feet over my head. That's another image that is riveting, powerful and beautiful, that ocean wilderness experience I had. Meeting Beansprout and Katherine. That was on a very different scale, not a paddling scale, but a human one. Just sitting in their tiny one room gold miners cabin built in the 1800's, just talking by candlelight about life. We talked all night while their kids slept in their parents lap. That's a real high point. They allowed me to come into their life, and their homes. I think perhaps the book maybe focuses a little too strongly on the extreme nature of the journey. There was a lot of that. But your question is a good question, what were the high points? And I wonder if I could have done a better job in detailing what its like when things are calm, when there is a reflective richness and peace. Perhaps I should have spent more time on that aspect of the trip. It's just something that's a rhetorical question.

Keith Wikle: On the New Zealand Trip and the Irish one you were welcomed so often by strangers, I wondered if you felt this was because you were a foreigner, or if this happened on your American trip too. Also what was it like to be welcomed so often by strangers?

Chris Duff: Actually it happened just as often in the U.S. And that's a natural question, one I would have asked as well, comparing foreign travel versus domestic travel. I had an equal outpouring of support on the U.S. trip. I think what happens is that people see you come ashore, for those that aren't familiar with a sea kayak, in a strange looking boat, that is so tippy, so strange, and so unseaworthy, visually, and naturally they're curious. You don't represent a threat as a solo paddler. You represent curiosity and adventure. People are drawn to that boat they see drawn up on the village beach. It's bound to draw attention. It's the icebreaker. The kayak is the icebreaker. I had wonderful, wonderful experiences on the American and Canadian legs of that journey. I started a book about that trip that has about five hundred handwritten pages. I think after the Iceland trip I may come back and finish that book. For me it's an important piece of my history.

Keith Wikle: It was certainly longer than both the Irish and the New Zealand trip wasn't it?

Chris Duff: It was about eight thousand miles long.

Keith Wikle: That's just astounding.

Chris Duff: Well, you know it's astounding to me too. I look back and I think, no way. You didn't paddle a thousand miles up the Mississippi river. And I did. That's why I'm interested in going back and revisiting that trip. Coming from seven years in the military, being on that career path and then two months later, I'm living out of a boat, and out of a tent, and being a river rat. It would be a very different kind of a book I think. I think it would be an interesting read.

Keith Wikle: I think so too, guessing from the little pre-chapter quotes, I noticed you have an affinity for Mark Twain, so there might be a little Huck Finn in you?

Chris Duff: Absolutely.

Keith Wikle: How much do you think corporate sponsorship has aided or complicated your trips?

Chris Duff: I don't feel that it complicated it at all. In no way really. It enabled me to spend more time training and getting ready for the trip, instead of raising money. For the Iceland trip we have tremendous sponsorship behind us. All these sponsors are asking for is a photo and an endorsement, or a write up of the trip when it's completed. There are no timeframes, no press meetings we have to attend. I'm very pleased with the professional respect that they've given the team. All they've done is said 'here's the equipment that you requested. Use it, where are it's strengths and weaknesses. And Good Luck.'

Keith Wikle: I find that I daydream a lot by looking at maps and thinking of trips I'd like to do. How do you decide what trip will be next for you?

Chris Duff: There is another trip, but I can't say right now what it is. It's very unique.

Keith Wikle: I think Derek Hutchinson made the mistake once of telling a journalist what his next trip was, and within a month someone else had already done it.

Chris Duff: There is that element. The trip I'm hoping to do in three or four years, it could be described as the Everest of Sea Kayaking. So I don't want to say right now what it is. Because there is the possibility that someone would go out there and do it first. I don't want to spend the next three years of my life working towards that goal, making arrangements getting resources, to find out that Sally June and Billy Bob have already done it. So there's at least one more trip in me, maybe more, but definitely one more big one.

Keith Wikle: How much does being first matter to you, or when does it matter? Obviously in some cases not too much, in the case of New Zealand Paul Caffyn had already done the New Zealand trip. In some cases it seemed like the fact that Paul had done it helped you mentally, just knowing that it could be done.

Chris Duff: That's absolutely true. It doesn't matter to me about being first, except with this new trip that I've mentioned. It's not that I want to be the first for the record. I want to be the first to see if I can do it. I was the first to paddle around Great Britain, I didn't know it at the time, and I just assumed that someone else had done it. Now there are some people who make a big deal of that, but for me that was twenty years ago. It doesn't matter to me. I did it for my own enjoyment, not for the record, or an award. That doesn't appeal to me at all; in fact it detracts from the overall goal. The idea of this new trip and being first, I want to go somewhere where no one else has been. It's not for the record. I want to be first to pull my boat through waters that a kayaker has never been through. I want to see the rocks and birds that no kayaker has seen.

Keith Wikle: In alpine climbing there is such a competition among that group of athletes to do high altitude climbing, to get sponsorship, to be the one who has done all the 8000 meter peaks on all continents, do you feel that there is that level of competition among expedition sea kayakers to do more and more extreme trips?

Chris Duff: I don't know, there might be, I pay so little attention to that. I don't know that's an interesting thought that somebody would be looking at me and saying that they want to do something that Chris Duff hasn't done. I hope not, because that's an awful focus in life to have. That's a waste of time.

Keith Wikle: What do you think the resurrection, or resurgence of Greenland, or Inuit style paddling and equipment has to offer to the type of paddling you do?

Chris Duff: I've experimented with Greenland style paddling very, very little. I've done a few rolls and used the paddle. I like it, it's fun. I've seen competitors in races with Greenlandic equipment place very high. I guess my knowledge and exposure is so limited, but I think it's wonderful that people are embracing it. And teaching those of us who are not Greenland paddlers the beauty, and style of that discipline. I love watching a Greenland paddler, it's really humbling. It's so pretty.

Keith Wikle: What types of refinement over the years in paddling gear and boats has been the most helpful to the trips you do?

Chris Duff: I suppose it's got to be the boats. The first boat I paddled was a fifteen and a half foot twenty-four inch wide boat. That was the boat I used on the eight thousand mile trip. I thought it was the sleekest sexiest boat that every existed. Now I can't imagine sitting in a fifteen and a half foot boat that's twenty-four inches wide and trying to do anything with it. Now I'm in an almost eighteen foot boat that's twenty-two inches wide. I'm using a carbon graphite paddle that's half the weight of the paddle I first used. I use a dry suit. So there are so many things that have changed. It's a whole different world than it was twenty years ago.

Keith Wikle: What type of paddle training do you think is most helpful for the trips you do? Do you think white water, or play boating has anything to offer towards sea kayaking?

Chris Duff: White water paddling is great. I started white water nine years ago. I took to it pretty thoroughly. It just upped my response time by leaps and bounds. It helped my roll immensely because on the river when you get knocked down, you have to roll up really fast because there are rocks and obstacles all over the place to avoid. It's a brilliant way to train for the sea. Surf kayaking is another one that really helps. In a white water boat you really begin to play on the waves. You understand better how they form, and where the energy comes from. In your sea boat, you're not as maneuverable, but you can tell what the wave is doing. You know what it's telling you by how fast and how steep it is. It's just like cross training for other sports.

Keith Wikle: Are you still swimming to keep in shape?

Chris Duff: I wish I could say yes. I literally haven't done any training for the Iceland trip. It's sort of frightening really. The book came out at the worst possible time in terms of timing for this trip. It's been so stressful. So the three of us, Shawna, Leon, and I are looking at the first three weeks of the trip as training. Starting with very low mileage to start and then ramping up. We're all in the same boat, they just started a business, and I had my book coming out.

Keith Wikle: At the beginning of the trip you decided to take your radio. Obviously that ended up being pretty critical, now knowing how dreadfully wrong things can go, would you ever decide to do a trip without a marine radio again?

Chris Duff: The radio I think has become a real integral part of my equipment. I shunned it for years. I didn't want the technology. I'm in a learning process and I've learned that a radio is very, very valuable. Not only for myself, but also for aiding other boaters. You can call for help. It's a great source for weather. And on the New Zealand trip for an evacuation. Now I have one with me all the time, when I'm running classes, or even when I'm out on the local waters here.

Keith Wikle: Do you carry strobes and flares on your person too?

Chris Duff: I do.

Keith Wikle: I noticed in some of the pictures you had your PFD on the deck. Did you get lambasted for that?

Chris Duff: Not that I know of. But I'm sure those comments are around. And that's ok. When I'm paddling in the group, I wear the lifejacket, where people might think of me as an example. When I'm alone on the open sea and it's calm, I don't wear it. Because after eight or ten hours a day of paddling every day it saps energy away from me. It's heavy and it chafes. I put it on for collision coming in and going out of the surf. I put the jacket and the helmet on. I think there's a misconception that because you have a life vest on that you're safe. Just like if you wear a seatbelt that doesn't make you a safer driver. Some people think this, and they put the belt on and they drive faster. I think there's a similar train of thought, "I wear the jacket so I'm safe."

Keith Wikle: It may just throw off the decision process and change the risks someone is willing to take.

Chris Duff: Things are changing in North American Paddling, people are realizing that skills and experience are very important to acquire. Either from classes or whatever. We can't buy safety equipment and expect it to make us competent safe paddlers. I think in the past that was the case. People would think, "as long as I have a paddle float on my boat, I'm okay." A paddle float is absolutely useless to someone who doesn't have a roll in even two-foot chop or cold water. Like it is here, or where you are in the Great Lakes. A two-foot chop for a person who doesn't have a roll, or maybe has never been out of their boat, are they going to be able to rig that paddle float, hold onto the paddle, hold onto the boat and do a self-rescue?

Keith Wikle: Probably not. A re-entry and roll is probably a better bet.

Chris Duff: I'm hearing people who say why don't you wear your life jacket and where's your paddle float. My response is maybe there's another way to look at sea kayaking and that is the development of skills and experience, instead of the acquisition of...

Keith Wikle: Gear?

Chris Duff: Yes.

Keith Wikle: Do you think that perhaps the American view has been to focus on the venal acquisition of equipment rather than skills. Where as the BCU does seem to focus more on skill development?

Chris Duff: That assessment is 100 percent correct in my opinion. In the past we have been reluctant to develop skills, we just want to get out there and have fun. Well you can't do that on the sea. You really have to respect the sea don't you? You have to invest the time in developing good skills.

Keith Wikle: Thanks for taking the time on short notice to speak with me about your book.

Chris Duff: My pleasure. I came out two or three years ago to the Western Michigan Coastal Kayaker's Association and what a great group of people. I had a lovely time. I thoroughly enjoyed the symposium and met a very talented group of paddlers. I'm always correcting people when they say that the Northwest is the only place to really paddle. And I tell them that it's not, the Great Lakes in a lot of areas is just like the ocean. I was just very impressed with the development of skill out there.

Keith Wikle: Some people tease us about being overly focused on skills and safety. But so far there haven't been any deaths from our club on the Great Lakes.

Chris Duff: All you have to do is take a look at what's going on in the San Juan. This is where all the deaths occurred, because of a lack of skills. I think the most skilled paddlers are in the Great Lakes and in the northeast. It's not out here in the Pacific Northwest and it should be.

Keith Wikle: Is it perhaps because there are so many inside passages and protected bays that paddlers operate under the assumption that they're safe, but then they discount tides, currents, winds, waves and all the other things the sea has even in those protected waters.

Chris Duff: That is exactly it. Man it's amazing that they can assume that because the San Juan is relatively small that they can handle it.

Keith Wikle: Ok thanks for taking the time to talk with me.

Chris Duff: Thanks for taking the time and an interest in my work, I appreciate it.

"I came out two or three years ago to the Western Michigan Coastal Kayakers Association and what a great group of people. I had a lovely time. I thoroughly enjoyed the symposium and met a very talented group of paddlers." - Chris Duff

The View from the Bay

By Al Anderson



We who live in the west Michigan are quite fortunate. In many places spring comes but once a year. Here we get to have spring many times - in March, April and May, even in June if we're really lucky. Our traditional spring paddle usually occurs on or around St. Patty's Day. This spring, we could still walk on lakes that we usually paddle on that date. While the snow left earlier (and, of course, returned a couple times) the ice persisted. Lower Herring Lake actually opened up and then completely froze over again in April. On April 22, I shoveled snow from my deck, being careful not to crush too many of the tulips and daffodils below.

It is interesting to note, while kvetching about the weather, that the current upset in global temperatures is not without precedent. From about 800 to 1300 AD the Vikings had settlements in Iceland, Greenland and even the northeastern coast of the North American continent. During that same period vineyards flourished in the British Isles. Around 1300 things began to cool down and only since 1900 have temperatures been on the upswing, still today not having reached the levels prior to 1300. The Viking settlements dwindled out because of increasing ice in the northern waters, the grapes in England froze out, and the rest is history. Who's to say what's "normal"?

Those of you who read *Atlantic Coastal Kayaker* may be aware that now the state of Connecticut is toying with the idea of canoe and kayak registration. Bad idea. There are dozens of reasons not to register canoes and kayaks, and only one feeble argument made by the state for it: increasing 'incidents' involving kayaks. However, registration provides no funding for improving safety. It does look like a source of revenue for fatcats who don't know the difference between a kayak and a jet ski. In Michigan a few years back, we proved to the legislature that the cost of administering and enforcing the program would exceed the revenues gained. I hope the paddlers in Connecticut can do the same.

President's Corner

Greetings all-

Up here in the frozen north, we are finally starting to get a break in the weather. The ice is completely gone from Lake Cadillac and Lake Mitchell as of April 13. We are looking forward to Spring paddling, as well as to the Chili Confluence at Ludington State Park on May 3-4, and the Symposium on Memorial Day weekend. Our symposium chairperson, Lori Stegmier, and the symposium committee, have been working very hard to plan for a great symposium this year. I hope many of you who are thinking of signing up will do so, as there are still openings.

I would also like to put in a special appeal for WMCKA members to sign up to help with the Kayak for Light event, held July 12, from 10 am to 4 pm, at Ramona Park in Portage, Michigan (lunch included!). In this issue, Anne has written an article explaining Kayak for Light, and we really need club members to come and act as guides for blind people who wish to experience kayaking. If you can attend, please let either Anne or me know, at either 231-779-4349, or elfman@netonecom.net.

Finally, I am stepping down from the office of President of WMCKA, and Anne will be leaving her secretary's position, as of October of this year. Both of us have served lengthy terms as officers of our club, and feel that the torch should be passed to people who will have a fresh outlook on WMCKA activities. We have both greatly enjoyed our time as officers, but think someone else should be willing to step forward. If anyone is interested in either of these positions, please contact us, or any member of the WMCKA board.

I will be looking forward to seeing you at any of the upcoming club activities. Let us know about Kayak for Light!

Bill Keith, WMCKA President

Club Events Calendar



Mark Your Calendar Now!

May 2-4, 2003
Chili Confluence
Ludington State Park

May 23-26, 2003
WMCKA Symposium

July 12, 2003
Kayak for Light

August 15-17, 2003
Twinkie Conflagration

September 19-23, 2003
Platte River Gathering

October 10-12, 2003
Stew Confluence and
Annual Meeting

Other Events

Inland Sea Kayak Symposium
June 19-22.

The 14th annual Inland Sea Kayak Symposium is scheduled for June 19- 22. Held in Bayfield, Wisconsin, the Symposium includes on-water instruction, dry land seminars, Apostle Islands paddle tours, speakers, entertainment ("Riverpance" at the Big Top Chautauqua with Greg Brown), dinner and brunch, and dancing. Yep, that's our theme this year: Dancing Waters, celebrating the wonderful dance of the kayaker.

For program information log onto www.inlandsea.org, email Symposium@inlandsea.org or call (715) 682-8188. Register early to get your desired paddle tours. Early registration (\$185) ends March 21. Before June 5 (\$225). On site (\$250). We filled up last year and expect to do so again so if you plan to register last minute call first to make sure we still have space available.

WMCKA Membership Form

Annual Dues for WMCKA are \$10 or \$25 for a dual WMCKA/ACA membership, and covers 1 year's membership, effective upon date of receipt for new members and added concurrently onto existing memberships. Membership expiration date for current members is on mailing label.

- New Member
- Renewal
- WMCKA only (\$10)
- WMCKA/ACA dual membership(\$25.00) (includes 1yr of Paddler magazine.)
- WMCKA/ACA Family membership (\$30) (includes 1yr of Paddler magazine)

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 E-mail address _____

I would like my name, phone # included in the membership directory.

Mail To: West Michigan Coastal Kayakers Association,
Karl Geisel, 1900 Clearbrook SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

A word about WMCKA paddling events: These events are gatherings of paddlers who share an interest in kayaking and spending social time together. They are open to all interested individuals of any (or no) skill level. There are no leaders, lifeguards, or anyone else responsible for the safety of those who choose to participate. Everyone is responsible for his/her own safety and is expected to use common sense and good judgement on and off the water. Neither WMCKA nor any of its individual members can be responsible for the safety of those attending club events.

Classified Ads

This page lists only non-commercial "For Sale" and "Wanted" ads for WMCKA members and other area clubs. Each ad will appear for two issues unless the individual placing the ad notifies the editor otherwise. Ads should be submitted electronically to the newsletter editor at paul.fishback@wmcka.org.

Current Designs Solstice GT - High Volume: 18' Fiberglass, red deck over white hull, huge fore and aft water tight hatches, spacious and comfortable cockpit, rudder. Composite feathered 2 piece paddle w/oval handgrips, strap down deck compass, neoprene spray skirt, cockpit storage cover, hand held bilge pump, full set of Huley Rollers also included. It's beautiful and great to paddle in the open water, but I haven't taken it out for the last 3 of it's 5 years. Asking \$1800. Call Alan Hartman at 231-343-6117, ahartmann@fleetengineers.com, Muskegon, MI, (5/03)

Wilderness Systems Sealution II—1998, blue, excellent condition—\$850
Daggar Animas—blue and red—very good condition—\$400
 For either boat, contact Joe Leykam Okemos leykam@attbi.com day 517-353-4824 night 517-349-7116

Valley Nordkapp Jubilee, Sectional, HM 17'8". Modified Hull. Sectional/3 piece. Takes less than 15 minutes to put together. Keyhole cockpit. Great condition. Used less than a dozen times. Some gear included. It fits almost anywhere in the house, garage, etc. It can be transported on roof racks and can fit inside some vehicles as well. I carted the boat in the back of my mini van while I was still kayaking. Contact Brenda Hennink at 616-949-0013 to discuss pricing.

Chili at the Beechwood Continued from p. 1

the elm. Somebody in Nova Scotia brought an infected beech from Europe. A fungus kills the tree in patches until it falls apart in a high wind. The fungus is transmitted by scale insects and hit Michigan in 2000. They estimate that it will kill all but one percent of the beech trees.

The chili taster said it was cold so John added some freshly cut jalapeños a wise decision. Little girls running around with leaves in their hair. A story about coons unzipping your tent and how barking like a dog scared them away. Some good wine blended with fresh strawberries, lemonade concentrate, and crushed ice. Hugs, howdys, and handshakes. Great home cooking desserts. Gorp making with the friends. MMMM One fine discussion about how to properly center a cockpit on a boat and what weight materials to use, thank you Al. This much fun is hard to handle, but it is the reason I come back every year. About thirty six of us made it this year. See you next year. Bring some chili, firewood, and a few tales.



4830 12th Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418

Newsletter Submissions

All readers are encouraged to submit newsletter contributions, including opinions, trip reports, gear tips, photos, any news of interest to paddlers, etc. Submissions should be sent electronically as email text or as an email attachment in Microsoft Word format. Contact the editor regarding guidelines for submitting images. Please send new contributions by July 10 to:

Paul Fishback
Email: paul.fishback@wmcka.org
616-249-0104

WMCKA Events in Brief:

May 23-26, 2003, WMCKA Symposium, Camp Pandalouan.
August 15-17, 2003, Twinkie Conflagration, Smith-Anderson Wilderness Complex
July 12, 2003, Kayak for Light, Ramona Park in Portage, Michigan (See details in this issue!)
September 19-23, 2003, Platte River Gathering, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.
October 10-12, 2003, Stew Confluence and Annual Meeting, Ludington

WMCKA Board Members

Title	Name	Phone	Email
President	Bill Keith	231-779-4349	elfman@netonecom.net
Treasurer	Jon Klatt	616-956-6125	kayakklatt@worldnet.att.net
Secretary	Anne Keith	231-779-4349	elfman@netonecom.net
Newsletter Editor	Paul Fishback	616-249-0104	paul.fishback@wmcka.org
At Large 1	John VanWyk	616-669-1565	jjvw@mac.com
At Large 2	Fred McCnky	616-396-5036	fmccconkey@macatawa.com
At Large 3	Karl Geisel	616-452-3239	geisel@iserv.net

WMCKA Website: www.wmcka.org

Webmaster: Keith Wikle Email: keith.wikle@wmcka.org