

# THE SEA CANOEIST NEWSLETTER

Issue 64

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Editor: P Caffyn, RD 1, Runanga. West Coast .N.Z. Ph/Fax: (03) 7311806

E Mail address: kayakpc@scenic.co.nz

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Correspondence to the Secretary: Peter Sullivan, 7 Monowai Cres, North New Brighton, Christchurch. Ph.(03) 388 3380.

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## EDITORIAL

### The June Lake Tarawera Collision

In early August, I wrote to the divisional manager of the Maritime Safety Authority seeking to find out if the collision between the power boat and the double kayak fell within the auspices of the Authority and, if so, was the M.S.A. going to take some action against the two boaties. I did receive a response which said as a complaint had been laid with the Police, the MSA would not be taking any action.

In early September I received several faxes from paddlers with a press clipping report of the court case where the power boat owner pleaded guilty in the Upper Hutt District Court to dangerous driving under Section 65 of the Maritime Safety Transport Act. The court was told that Gary Kingston, aged 41, and a companion were fishing on June 2 in his Haines Hunter powerboat in windy conditions and a one metre swell when he ran into the kayakers.

His lawyer said that because of the glare from the sun, his client had not seen the kayak until he was on top of it. The judge said Kingston has been careless but had not behaved irresponsibly in a boat. The penalty was up to 12 months jail or a maximum fine of \$10,000 under the act. A hefty fine or a short jail sentence would have got the message across to boaties that it is necessary to maintain a proper lookout at all times.

The judge fined the owner \$400.

Is a \$400 fine a slap on the wrist or what? What would be the fine if one of the paddlers had been killed by the powerboat? As the collision occurred at about 11.30am, according to the initial newspaper report, would the sun be in a position to cause glare? I would also beg to differ with the judge on the matter of irresponsibility - the dictionary definition is 'not responsible for conduct; acting done without due sense of responsibility'. I would suggest that acting without due sense of responsibility for paddlers safety and lives is indeed irresponsible behaviour.

When I was a youngster, and paddling Canadian Canoes on the Brisbane River, we were occasionally 'buzzed' by nutters on water skis making sweeping turns as close as possible to the canoes, drenching and intimidating us. The commodore of our canoe club quickly sorted the problem out. We were instructed to swing the stout wooden paddle blades at ankle level if the water skiers ever came to close. They soon got the message. Trouble is these lightweight paddles of today would have zilch effect on a hulking power boat.

## KASK HANDBOOK

Feedback, corrections and additions are slowly filtering through. The deadline for receipt of new or amended material is the end of October.

Feedback on funding the 'mother of all handbooks', requested in the Newsletter No. 63, was not good, apart from a card from Ray Pratt saying he would be prepared to pay an additional amount for the membership fee to help fund the printing.

A suggestion from Gerry Maire at Coastbusters was to keep the Little Red Book in its spiral bound photocopied form; add colour and black and white photos, maps and diagrams and run limited edition print runs using the new generation of xerox copiers. A new edition with updates can be printed as required by simply dropping an amended computer disc to the printer.

In early August, copies of the KASK Handbook were sent to Alan Muir or the NZ Water Safety Council and John Maunsell of the Maritime Safety Authority, requesting feedback. To date there has been no response.

## Forums/Symposiums

Two very successful sea kayaking symposiums were held in October, Coastbusters at Long Bay in Auckland and one at Foxton conducted by the Ruahine White Water Club. Reports on both are included in this newsletter.

And following on from their success at Foxton, a team of Ruahine White Water Club paddlers has jumped in to kick-start organization for the 1997 KASK Forum, which will be held over the Anzac Day weekend at Eastbourne in Wellington.

**RWWCSEA KAYAK  
SYMPOSIUM 1996**

report by Libby O'Connor

In early October, paddlers from Hawkes Bay, Blenheim, Whanganui, Manawatu and Wellington gathered at Foxton for the inaugural Ruahine White Water Club Sea Kayak Symposium.

Max started the day with sobering stories of sea-kayak accidents, and even of a British trip leader's imprisonment after several of his group drowned. (After a while, some of the instructors were starting to look very reluctant about the prospect of taking groups on the water that afternoon. The prospect of several years in Paremoremo obviously didn't appeal.)

David Herrington provided lots to think about with his session on the weather, and Mike Rowley had us charting our courses on a wonderful collection of marine and topo maps.

After seeing the review of Kabloona in the Yellow Kayak in this newsletter, several of us had read about the author's adventures kayaking across almost the whole rugged northern coast of Canada. Kerry's Gear and Gadgets presentation omitted some of the more interesting items that the author of that book included. In fact, he didn't even mention eyelash curlers or butane-powered curling tongs as essential items for the long-distance sea kayaker.

Still, doubts were expressed about Kerry's life jacket's ability to support a human being, once its pockets bulged with gadgets some of us had never even dreamed existed. Perhaps it's just as well he doesn't know about lash curlers. . .

Following this, the group worked through a range of scenarios. We looked at ways not only of dealing with the difficult situation when it arises, but of preventing recurrences. Perhaps there's a place for a document listing some of the collective wisdom that came from that session.

Max had organised a great lunch, which people enjoyed while peering rather dubiously at the airborne beach outside.

After Max's tips on launching and

landing, we had a variety of rescue demonstrations. Most people then battled the breeze towards the bar, and enjoyed surfing the return trip. Max's kite was thoroughly tested, and there were practices of HI rescues and rolls.

The programme covered a stimulating range of topics, and had an excellent balance of theory and practice. Thanks to Max and Margaret Grant, and to all those club members who made it such a success.

Libby O'Connor

**COASTBUSTERS 1996**

Long Bay Auckland  
11 - 13 October 1996

report by Paul Caffyn

In summary, the weekend was another success for the organizing team from ASKNET, despite a bout of diabolical Sunday weather.

The Friday evening entertainment included archival black and white movie footage of early whitewater paddling in New Zealand, presented by Jim Mason and a audiovisual slide show of sea kayaking in the '90s, presented by Paul Buckley.

Many paddlers hit the water for the pre-dawn paddle on Saturday, which led after breakfast to a packed programme of lectures and clinics.

The first key note speaker was Jonathan Iles who tackled the subject of 'Risk, Rough Seas and Rescues'. Jonathan's background includes: 14 years sea kayaking, a BCU senior instructor, Joint Services Expedition Leader, trips across the English Channel, from Scotland to Ireland, and a 1,000km trip around the north of Scotland including the Outer Hebrides and the Orkneys.

The British perspective of sea kayaking in New Zealand is worth looking at in some detail.

The reason Jonathan chose the topic is that there has been a world wide growth in sea kayaking without a corresponding growth in skill levels and desire to learn skills. In Great Britain in the 1970's most paddlers who venture to sea began paddling as

white water paddlers, and hence already competent with rolling, bracing and paddling skills. The kayaks tended to be modelled on the lines of the Greenland kayaks, long, skinny and rudderless. Thus the entry level to the sport was high, the basic paddling skills were almost a prerequisite. Jonathan commented, "I used to dream about owning a Nordkapp."

The came the North American influence; shorter, wider boats such as the Puffin, and with the advent of plastic boats, even cheaper kayaks, and paddlers joining the sport lacked the background of white water paddling skills.

In New Zealand and Great Britain there is now a second generation of kayakers who joining the sport with no previous paddling experience and Jonathan feels that there is too much reliance now on gadgets to get yourself out of difficulty. Gadgets are definitely not the answer - learning the skills is what is required.

Jonathan commented on a recent French designed rescue device, which straps to the deck. After a capsize a carbon dioxide cartridge inflates a 'beach ball' which brings the boat and paddler up close to the surface. He commented on the ensuing problems of manual deflating the 'ball', the dual straps under the kayak, and the one minute manual re-inflation time. The design engenders an attitude that technology can get you out of trouble.

Risk: With risk making decisions, it is better to progressively build up experience, to keep an eye on the weather, the time and who you are paddling with, and when to stop. Jonathan quoted two examples of risk assessment - the first was a positive one of Peter Hillary on K2 who decided to turn back short of the summit when he judged the weather situation was deteriorating; other members of the party continued to the summit and did not survive.

The example of bad judgemental decision making was the Lyme Bay incident (previously described in the KASK Newsletter) where a party of students went paddling with inexperienced instructors with inadequate gear and equipment. Four students died and outdoor centre manager was jailed

for three years on a manslaughter charge.

Rough Seas (second line of defence): good skills are required to survive on rough seas. Forward paddling is one of the most important, plus support strokes; plus the ability to manoeuvre. Following seas cause the most problems with groups of novices. Jonathan and a friend completed a successful two way crossing of the Pentland Firth, which has 10 knot tidal streams and overfalls without trouble, but he recounted a trip in the Mediterranean Sea when he had to call in a rescue. It was a five kilometre crossing from Sardinia to the mainland with eight beginners and two instructors; the sea was calm with moderate winds. When the wind increased, the beginner's anxieties also grew with a loss of paddling skills and the team slowed to a crawl. Pushed by the wind against a cliffed section of coast, and unable to tow all the weak paddlers, Jonathan fired off flares to call in a rescue. It was a lack of basic skills that led to the problems encountered.

Rescues: The two basic are self-rescue and buddy rescue. The fastest self rescue in a roll, and simply an extension of a support stroke. The average time to learn a roll is only four to five minutes. There is a place for paddle floats, but the re-entry and roll is far better in rough seas (only 15 to 20 seconds), whereas a paddle float rescue can take up to 15 minutes.

Jonathan concluded his thought provoking lecture with the likelihood of a Lyme Bay type situation occurring in New Zealand. Hopefully the desire to learn skills will catch up the growth of sea kayaking. The learning can be carried out with professional operators or courses.

A selection of slides followed with several humorous anecdotes. When he and a friend landed on a remote Scottish coastline, below an old castle, Lady Dunbar looked at the bows of kayaks and commented, "it's just like the old days!" - a reference to the invading Viking long ships.

And a military expedition of kayaks and a support boat - the motor on the safety vessel broke down and they

had to tow it for four hours.

A slide show by Conrad Edwards of paddling in Price William Sound followed morning tea, but would have been best at night, as the stunning shots of glaciers were washed out by daylight streaming into the picture windows of the main MERC hall.

Concurrent workshops, up to five at a time, continued until late afternoon and included, communications at sea, fishing from a sea kayak, places to go, paddle and rescue skills, kayaking literature, developing kayaking fitness and two panel discussions on kayak design.

After a 'Trade' show and tell, paddlers separated into their groups for discussion and planning of the Sunday scenarios.

One of the outstanding highlights of the weekend was a flare demonstration by Peter Morris on the beach. Safety precautions were discussed with a demonstration of the visual effectiveness of smoke and parachute flares fired from a kayak at sea. Peter brought a considerable number of flares well past their 'use by' date and then paddlers had a chance to fire them. The sight of a line of 35+ paddlers setting red night flares was a sight from a science fiction movie - an amazing sight. A chance to fire off both big and parachute flares was seized by most paddlers, and Peter exerted close control on the individual firing of these. As most paddlers have never fired a flare, this was both a valuable learning experience and enjoyable spectacle.

The 'entertainment' during the evening meal was unprecedented in the annals of sea kayak symposium history. An apparition appeared at one end of the hall, that caused bearded paddlers to choke on their food, a mistress of ceremonies who was to present various prizes. Mistress Mary, whose real name cannot be divulged in case her husband finds out, was resplendent in black stockings, a bodice ripper top, waist length black wig and her outfit included a longish whip.

To follow Mistress Mary's act with a slide show, was an unenviable task but Malcolm Gunn excelled with his

shots of a South American expedition by four Wellington paddlers in January 1996. The slides were stunning, and a slick humorous and informative patter accompanied the photos. The concept of the trip came from a photograph in a outdoor clothing catalogue, of a glacier with a kayaker dwarfed at its base. This led to two years on research and planning for the trip (see trip report in N/L 63). Malcolm's humour emerged during the introduction of the team. He described Brent Harrison as manager/owner of an outdoor equipment shop. When three members of the team went home to pack for the expedition, Brent went to his shop! Outstanding images were close ups of slumbering elephant seals, llamas on the pampas and towering glaciers.

On Sunday the weather gods were obviously exceedingly disappointed with the indecisive election result and took out their wrath on the New Zealand voters. On the Auckland Harbour Bridge, 115 kilometre per hour winds were recorded. At Long Bay a decision was made early to can paddling. Although a great disappointment to all the scenario participants and the organizers, the scenario sessions went ahead either on land or a nearby river.

As paddlers returned to the main hall, Jonathan Iles showed an Eskimo romance video, set in East Greenland and filmed by Knud Rasmussen. A North American sea kayaking instructional video followed with the scenario groups responding with quiz questions. A debrief brought the weekend to a conclusion.

In conclusion, it was a successful weekend and morale remained high despite the appalling Auckland spring weather. The October time slot however remains too much of a gamble with the weather. Although on shore facilities at Long Bay are good, it is time for Coastbusters to move both the venue and time slot for Coastbusters - the time slot to summer and the venue to a place where on the water activities can still be carried out in inclement weather.

Paul Caffyn

## TRIPREPORT

### *A weekend jaunt to Port Underwood*

by Malcolm Gunn

Off to a bad start - having been dropped off at the ferry terminal and rationalised my gear, it became apparent that my paddle was safely in the back of the car! Nothing a quick trip in a taxi couldn't fix. 30 minutes later I received the reception I anticipated from Brent, Peter and Paul. A gentle reminder of the time Brent brought the wrong tent poles, leaving us storm bound in a tent fly at French Pass shut him up, briefly. Peter went on a bit though. "Let's just hope you haven't forgotten anything", I cautioned.

We had toyed with the idea of starting the trip with another Cook Strait crossing, but the forecast was as discouraging as it was improbable - 15 knot NW decreasing and becoming 15 knot SW, rising to 25 knots in the western straits with seas becoming very rough. The reality - calm, seas smooth to slight.

On arrival at Picton, we were conscious of the late hour and we were away before the ferry commenced its return trip. Conditions were pleasant - calm and mild with light drizzle. We made Dieffenbach Point in 2 hours in fading light and against the incoming tide. A short discussion on where to camp the night failed to produce a consensus so on we went into the tide, into Tory Channel and into the night.

Darkness comes gradually on a calm sea, where reflections of a dim sky eke out the twilight. Phosphorescence provided a welcome distraction from the tide. Bow waves became flashing green ribbons and paddles created a swirling green cloud in the water with every stroke. Eventually we slid in to Ngaruru Bay. Drizzle had matured with the night into rain.

We soon had camp organised and a brew under way under the tent fly.

Saturday dawned wet and still. It was about now that both Brent and Peter realised that they had not brought any film for their cameras - not that I'm the sort to make fun at someone's forgetfulness! In the bay and indeed all the way to Port Underwood, count-

less red lobster krill (*Munida gregaria*) swam near the surface, trailing their distinctive chelipeds. The 10mm long crustaceans provide food for gulls and fish alike.

The entrance to Tory Channel was a maelstrom of confused waves. The incoming tide was producing a mixture of smooth fast water and steep standing waves. As we fought to assert ourselves in the tide, a fishing vessel zoomed alongside. I exchanged pleasantries with the sole occupant while trying to look composed in the wild waves. He reassured me that the forecasted norwesterly was of the "no worries mate" variety and off he went towards Port Underwood. We were to find out later that what doesn't worry mates in a 25 foot boat can be a very different proposition from the perspective of a puffin.

The coastline south of Tory Channel is similar to that to the north - high cliffs, caves, stacks and arches with precious few landing sites. Forget camping. A southerly swell sighed and crashed lethargically against the cliffs producing a backwash that reflected into the incoming waves in a seemingly random fashion.

South of Jordy rocks, a 60m long tunnel through a headland tempted exploration. We looked into it for a long time before deciding it was "not on". We muttered things like "another time" and "If only there was less swell". We continued around the headland and looked through from the other side. It looked slightly less formidable. About 4m wide (no prospect of turning around), it had a roof height determined entirely by the swells passing through no vast cavern this one. Cautiously I nosed the puffin into the entrance and looked hard for any sign of shallowness. Almost involuntarily I committed myself to the tunnel - what a ride! Something like a slow motion rollercoaster in the dark on an untried track. Once through, I was joined by Peter, grinning from ear to ear and then Brent white as a sheet. Of course we did it again but it lacked the excitement of the first time.

Further south we passed gull colonies on offshore rocks and schools of fish feeding on aggregations of krill which had been mustered into a dense

red mass. Not far south of Fighting Bay, the norwester arrived. It took a full five minutes to go from the "I think that's a northerly" stage to the "I'm going for shelter" stage. By then the willi waws were demanding vigilance and the occasional low brace interrupted the paddling rhythm. As we neared Robertson Point at the SE entrance to Port Underwood, we were having real doubts about the future of paddling in the conditions we were likely to meet around the corner. We cowered near the shore for a bit longer edging towards the point and were then forced ashore. With no lee shore for 3000km and visibility reduced by the frequent spray flurries, we had no wish to tempt fate. In these conditions, a capsized was surely only a matter of time.

So there we were on a beach the size of a tennis court. It had only one other similarity to a tennis court - no water. Tennis courts are flat and free of both driftwood and boulders. Our beach was steep, narrow and shrinking with the tide. We levelled a small shelf hard against the cliff for the tent and set about setting up camp.

The fishing boat we'd seen earlier came into the bay and we were told that we were in the best place - ashore. (This, you understand, was no revelation) "First thing tomorrow" we were told, "you'll be right to cross the bay". We were encouraged. The wind raged on and the tide continued to encroach on our little haven. Every 20 minutes or so one of us would shift a kayak further up the beach, closer to the tent - until there was no more room between tide and tent! The waves eventually advanced to within a metre of the tent. Fortunately high tide was at about 10pm so once it had peaked, we knew we could sleep, not that is so easy with one's head 30cm from the base of a cliff and feet a metre from the sea.

5:30am and the tent shook violently as it had all night. Surely we hadn't missed "first thing"! A clear sky and comparative lack of willi waws were encouraging signs. Deceptive ones. The marine forecast was hopeful: NW 40 knots decreasing to 30 and 20 by evening. In the time it took to eat breakfast, the wind was as bad as it had been the previous

*Letters to the Editor*

afternoon. We were still stuck. We decided to have a look around the corner, keeping very close to shore. We packed up, stowing everything below deck to reduce windage. We set off towards Robertson Point never more than a few metres from shore. The downdraughts gave no warning and tested our reflexes. We would never have paddled in those conditions had we not been so close inshore (we could have stood up on the bottom). We were pleased to find a navigable channel between the Point and the mainland. Through we went. We fought harder for the next 40 metres of water than any other section I've paddled. The funnelling of the wind through that passage was so severe that I doubt if I could have stood up on the rocks alongside. At the peak of the blast, progress was impossible and visibility was reduced to about 5 metres. Slowly, ever so slowly, we inched our way forward into Port Underwood. Once into the open waters of Port Underwood things changed abruptly. The wind was still there but it was a constant 20 knots or so and the waves regular and benign. We had a lee shore again. The relief was universal. We had, in the space of 15 minutes gone from being stranded on a beach with no water to being "home and hosed" with two hours to spare. We engaged in some light hearted sparring and water fights in the choppy conditions as we made our way to Oyster Bay, our pick up point for a return ride to Picton and the ferry home.

We had all learned something about how quickly a wind can spring up and the hazards of turbulence in the sheltered waters of a windward shore. Although we were never in any danger, we were very conscious of that which was just a short distance offshore.

Malcolm Gunn  
malcolmg@nz-lawsoc.org.nz

**Concrete 'Slabville'**

Fire totally destroyed the Sisson kayak factory on Wednesday 19th June. Both the business and factory building were adequately insured. Lynda and Grahame Sisson have resolved to rebuild the business and the factory. As of mid-August the business has re-instated the kayak moulds which provide 85% of winter/autumn business. All of the rest of the moulds will be reinstated by the end of September. This will co-incide with a return to full production well before the season of high demand. It will be business as usual in no time. As often happens, much of the media coverage of the fire was wildly inaccurate. Perhaps the most accurate item in our local paper came from a wag who penned the following: 'You cannot have your kayak and heat it too!'

Grahame Sisson.

**Double Canvas Kayak Plans?**

Do you know where I may be able to obtain some plans to build a double, wooden fram, canvas covered kayak.

The plans are not for me but for a friend who has built a single kayak before.

If you can't lay your hands on any plans, an advertisement in the KASK Newsletter might turn up some.

Many thanks  
Dave Herrington  
RD 8  
Dannevirke.

**Coastbusters Sea Kayak Association Inc.**

This year Coastbusters is being promoted in Australia. Vincent Maire, a member of the organizing team, has contacted sea kayakers in South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and Queensland. The 1996 programme will be sent to 400 sea kayakers and it is expected some will follow in the footsteps of Ray Musgrave of Melbourne who in 1995, became Coastbusters first ever 'overseas' delegate.

Apparently sea kayak symposiums do not exist in Australia yet the sport in growing. As part of the deal for

distributing to their members, Vincent agreed to send to the Australian clubs, information on how to run a sea kayak symposium. This has resulted in a 33 page booklet entitled, 'A Guide to Running your own Sea Kayak Symposium'. It is based on experience gained in organizing five of the last six Coastbuster symposiums and is an in-depth study on the management and promotion of this well established event.

It is hoped the publication will lead to the establishment of sea kayak symposiums in Australia. This will be of interest to Kiwi sea kayakers and perhaps lead to an export opportunity for New Zealand manufacturers.

Copies of the guide can be obtained from Vincent at \$10 each; telephone (09) 424 2293.

Coastbusters is in the process of becoming an incorporated society. In recent years Coastbusters has been run by a team of Auckland sea kayakers but the profits always went to MERC, the venue for the event. This relationship has ended and Coastbusters Sea Kayak Association Incorporated is in the process of being formed. The main objective of the association is running the annual symposium with profits being re-invested back into Coastbusters

Vincent Maire

*1997-KASK FORUM*

**Date:** ANZAC Day weekend 1997  
from 7pm Thursday 24 April - 1pm  
Sunday 27 April

**Venue:** Eastbourne, eastern side of Wellington Harbour, at the Muritai Yacht Club.

The 1997 KASK Forum organizing committee, comprised of Dave Herrington, Libby O'Connor, Max Grant, John Brown, Max Grant and Paul Caffyn, has formulated an itinerary for the three day holiday weekend, and booked a beachside venue.

It will include a trip out to Soames Island on the Friday afternoon, and an overnight camp near Pencarrow Head on the Saturday night.

If undelivered, please return to Sandy Ferguson: 12 Dunn St., Christchurch 2.  
Sandy's E Mail address: [http://john.chem.canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:john.chem.canterbury.ac.nz)

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