

PADDLER

www.ricka.org

Newsletter of the Rhode Island Canoe/Kayak Association Vol. XXXII No. 1 January, 2009

January Club Meeting: Monday, January 19, 7 p.m. at the JCC *This is the Sea* Volume 4

January's program will be a showing of several episodes from the recently-released Volume Four in the *This is the Sea* series.

The DVD series chronicles the entertaining, adventurous and sometimes whimsical side of kayaking.

Volume 4 includes segments on kayaking and camping in the Queen Charlotte Islands of Canada; exploring Lake Superior's Apostle Islands by kayak; paddling the stunning fjords of Norway; kayaking in the Dead Sea; sea kayaking the Class IV Ottawa River; and a segment on fishing from your kayak. There's also a segment on one man's "commando kayaking," using only public transportation, a folding kayak and his own two feet.

The series, *This is the Sea*, is created by acclaimed expedition sea kayaker and adventure filmmaker Justine Curgenvén.

Come prepared to be dazzled by the unique and beautiful locations, the consummate skill of the participating paddlers, and the sheer variety of what our sport has to offer.

Directions to the Jewish Community Ctr., 401 Elmgrove Ave., Providence: From Rt. 95 Southbound: take Exit 24 & turn left onto Branch Avenue. (From Rt. 95 Northbound take Exit 24 & turn *right* onto Branch Ave.) Cross North Main Street at the lights and continue up the hill (past Kentucky Fried Chicken). Cross Hope St. and continue one block to the end at Morris Ave. Go left, then immediately right onto Sessions St., then down the hill to Elmgrove Ave. The JCC will be across the street. Park in the lot or on the street.

British Scout leaders forced on five-day jungle trek after hippo sank canoe

London Daily Mail, 16th December 2008
Three British Scout leaders were forced to trek through jungle for five days after a hippopotamus capsized their canoe, ending a planned 2,500-mile river journey through Africa.

Terrified Brian Sheen, 66, Geoff Ryder, 59, and Michael Billworth, 23, were travelling on the River Niger in Guinea when the huge beast capsized their tiny canoe made of planks of wood.

It rammed them from underneath - throwing Geoff into the water and forcing

them to abandon the boat and trek through the jungle for five days to reach a small village.

Hippos are considered by many experts to be the most dangerous animals in Africa due to their aggressive and unpredictable nature.

They have now returned to Britain and retired chemist Brian, of Par, Cornwall, said the hippo hit them 'like a submarine missile'.

He said: 'We were on full hippo watch and all of a sudden we came to an abrupt halt. I thought we had hit a rock. The front went up and the middle went up.

'Then the back flew in the air and Geoff, who is 16 stone, was suddenly airborne

Epic Kayak sues Chinese manufacturer

By Andy Owens
Charleston (SC) Business Journal
Dec. 10, 2008

A Charleston-based company that sells kayaks around the world has filed a lawsuit against its Chinese manufacturer after the manufacturer refused to release Epic Kayaks' proprietary kayak molds and threatened to put the company out of business in China.

Greg Barton, a two-time Olympic gold and bronze medalist and co-owner of Epic Kayaks, said several American companies doing business in China find themselves embroiled in similar conflicts when they try to end a business relationship with a Chinese manufacturer.

Now, he's concerned about getting a fair hearing in a Chinese court. Barton and his

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and landed in the water beside the boat.

'It burst out like a submarine missile. We didn't have time to be scared. The canoe was going down fast. The hippo was about 20 yards away looking at us.'

The men ditched their canoe - made from a tree trunk - and escaped after scrambling up the riverbank.

They abandoned all their gear apart from their sat nav systems and started a trek through head-high elephant grass and bamboo.

Five days later they reached a village and were fed by the inhabitants, before being given a lift 60 miles (96km) on motorcycles back to the town of Faranah in Guinea.

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Coast Guard issues warning for would-be winter kayakers

By Associated Press

Saturday, December 27, 2008

The Coast Guard is warning winter kayakers of the dangers of cold ocean waters even when warm temperatures are forecast.

Coast Guard officials issued a statement expressing concern that novice kayakers may hit the ocean when, as during Christmas week, temperatures rise into the 50s. They say winter is not the time for people who received kayaks for Christmas to test their paddling skills for the first time.

Coast Guard recreational boating specialist Al Johnson says paddlers who do venture out should wear a dry suit or a full wet suit. He says they should be prepared for the painful shock that can come with a sudden plunge into the water.

California kayaker rescued

The (Eureka, CA) Times-Standard

12/27/2008 The U.S. Coast Guard pulled a man out of 48-degree water Friday after the man's kayak flipped over in shallow water about 500 yards from the north jetty's Coast Guard station.

The man was cold and mildly hypothermic, but did not sustain any injuries, said Petty Officer Jared Barnes.

Officials treated the man, briefed him on kayaking safety and released him.

"He didn't have any of the right training to be out there," Barnes said.

Officers in the station's watch tower had seen the man paddling in the shallow water with some breaks. Officers saw the man flip over and then wave his arms for help, and dispatched a boat to retrieve him and his kayak.

Cold Water Boot Camp Released

BUY IT. WATCH IT. THEN WATCH IT AGAIN.

Cold Water Boot Camp USA takes eight hardy volunteers from across America and puts them into cold water to learn what really happens. The instructor is Dr. Gordon Giesbrecht (known by the volunteers as "Professor Popsicle"), professor of thermo-physiology at the University of Manitoba and an expert on the effects of cold water on the human body.

Produced by the National Water Safety Congress, the video discusses three effects of cold water immersion—cold shock, cold incapacitation and hypothermia—as well as valuable information on how to better survive a fall into cold water.

Among the interesting facts on this DVD: in 40-degree water (the approximate temperature of Narragansett Bay right now), a person with a PFD has at least 30 minutes before becoming hypothermic. The Boot Camp volunteers without PFDs would have drowned in less than half that time without the assistance of their survival-suited escorts, *and weren't even medically hypothermic*—their chilled muscle tissue simply wouldn't work, leaving them with no way to stay afloat.

In 2007, 40% of recreational boating accidents in water under 59 degrees were fatal, according to the US Coast Guard's Drowning Report.

Similarly, the 2007 Lifesaving Society Study shows that 60% of drowning victims died in water under 50 degrees; another 34% in water between 50 and 68 degrees. 43% were less than six feet from safety.

An abbreviated 10-minute video from the Boot Camp DVD is available online and is well worth watching. You can see it at www.nasbla.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1

By the way, if you have any friends of the "I can swim/I can put it on in the water/I'm close to shore" non-PFD-wearing variety, this is the video that may convince them to "buckle up."

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Next meeting: **Wednesday, January 28 @ 7pm**

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EDITOR:

Caryl Salisbury
401-245-1890; email: editor@ricka.org
419 Maple Avenue, Barrington, RI 02806

MEMBERSHIP:

Jim Cole
401-377-1033; email: jimcole@hotmail.com
PO Box 163
Wood River Junction, RI 02894

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Send an mail to: editor@ricka.org for rates, sizes and details.

PRESIDENT: Bill Hahn.....401-524-1612.....bhahn02835@yahoo.com
VICE PRES: Terry Meyer.....401-831-5888.....terry_meyer@cox.net
SECRETARY: Barbara August.....401-725-3344.....b.august@cox.net
TREASURER: Charlie Larocque, CPA...401-822-5425.....charlie2051@aol.com
FLATWATER: Cheryl Thompson Cameron.401-647-5887.. stonefoxfarm@juno.com
WHITEWATER: Erik Eckilson..401-765-1741.....eckilson@cox.net
SEAKAYAK: Carleen McOsker... ..508-636-0546...carleenmco@charter.net
COMPETITION: Position open
SAFETY & ED: Position open
CONSERVATION: Position open
PUBLICITY: Jim Cole.....401-377-1033....jimcole@hotmail.com
WEBMASTER: Alan August.....401-725-3344....webmaster@ricka.org
LIBRARIAN: Position open
MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:
Mike Bussell.....401-568-8605...canoedad@cox.net
Bill Brown.....401-767-7057..kayakBill222@aol.com
Mark Roberts.....401-533-1883...mroberts@cia.com

Epic

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partner hired attorneys overseas and hope, by taking a legal route, that Fuyang-based Flying Eagle will be pressured to come to an agreement.

“They’ve said they can put us out of business or make it impossible for us to do business in that area,” Barton said.

The dispute began over project management and pricing in July, some three years after Epic moved its production to Fuyang, an industrial city south of Shanghai. Flying Eagle manufactures the rowing shells that many national teams used at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The dispute led Epic to try to dissolve its business relationship with Flying Eagle and find a new factory in Fuyang. But four months after agreeing in principle to a separation agreement, Flying Eagle refused to release Epic’s molds and equipment unless it received “hugely inflated, ever-changing fees that, if paid, would sink the company,” Epic said in a statement.

As the demands of Flying Eagle kept escalating, including clauses that could potentially leave Epic vulnerable to penalties up to \$1 million, Barton said it became clear Flying Eagle officials thought they had Epic “over a barrel.”

Epic filed a lawsuit in the intermediate level court in Hangzhou rather than agree to pay a “ransom” for its proprietary property and equipment.

“It’s definitely going to have a significant impact on our cash flow and hurt us quite a bit,” Barton said. “It’s already hurt us for several months.”

Barton said Epic Kayaks has some inventory in the United States and in Europe, so the company is able to fill some orders. Epic produces high-performance paddles and kayaks and was born out of a desire to bring modern, well-designed racing technology to touring kayakers.

“It’s definitely costing some money but not nearly the value of what they’re holding on to,” Barton said. “Unless we’re able to secure, very quickly, the release of our molds and things, we’re going to be rebuilding some of those.”

Watershed completes projects along River New kayak access and portage established

The Charlestown Press, 12/25/08

HOPE VALLEY – The Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association recently completed the construction phases of two local projects.

“The Switch Road Public Access Area” project in Richmond was a partnership between the WPWA, the Rhode Island DEM, and the Rhode Island DOT to provide safe public access to the Wood River and to create a natural buffer zone between the river and nearby Switch Road.

The design, developed by Cherenzia and Associates, and implemented by Central Nurseries, will allow the native plantings to overtake and permanently stabilize the site. WPWA’s “Green Plan” for the project utilized no petroleum products, pesticides or fertilizers, and maximizes the soil’s absorption of rainwater and road runoff.

For decades the baron landscape provided no protection to the Wood River from runoff created by the nearby Route 95 overpass and heavily traveled Switch Road. This valuable habitat restoration effort was made possible in part with funding from The WPWA, The USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service, and The RIDOT and RIDEM. WPWA will construct an informational kiosk and present the completed project to the public in the spring.

The recently completed “Bradford Fish Ladder and Portage Repair Project” in Westerly will allow more fish on the Pawcatuck River to move upstream past the Bradford Dying Association dam and provide the public with a safer path around the dam and fish ladder.

This restoration project was a team effort between federal, state, local, non-profit, and private industry. According to WPWA Executive Director Chris Fox, “Working to coordinate all the different interests in the project was a challenge but proved beneficial to both the river ecosystem and the public.”

The engineering firm of Fuss & O’Neill, tasked with addressing a range of repairs at the site, proposed plans to the WPWA that unified the interests of all the stakeholders.

Wilco Development put in a new portage path to allow boaters to move around the dam and fishway safely. They also modified the fish ladder to accommodate more fish. The WPWA plans to add native plantings, an informational kiosk and interpretive signage explaining how the fish ladder works prior to the spring 2009 fish and boat runs.

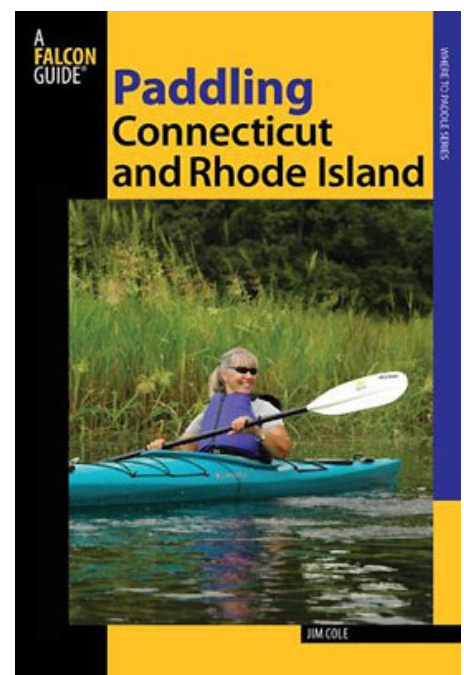
Among those planning to attend the spring unveiling ceremonies are the project owners, Michael Grills of the Bradford Dying Association, the R.I. DEM, as well as project sponsors The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service, The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the R.I. Trail Advisory Committee.

Fox added that the WPWA would like to thank Bradford Dying Association for its enthusiastic project support and Richard Quinn of the USF& WS for his efforts in designing the improved fishway.

Due out in early spring!

Paddling in Connecticut and Rhode Island, by RIC/KA Membership Chair (and past president) Jim Cole.

Pre-order now at Amazon.com for the best possible price.



Fatal Accident on the Blackstone River

By *projo.com* staff writer Michael P. McKinney with reports from *Journal* staff writer Mark Reynolds and *projo.com* staff writer Maria Armental

November 10, 2008

CUMBERLAND — A 17-year-old Cumberland boy died in the Blackstone River yesterday after the canoe he and his father were in capsized at the stone arches of Pratt Dam.

The two were identified by police as William King IV, of 52 Crowell St., and William King III, who was taken to Memorial Hospital, where he was treated and released.

The arches are part of a structure that spans the Blackstone and carries a pedestrian and bike path.

Cumberland police Sgt. Mark England said today that it appears the two were planning to canoe through the arches, or tubes — a practice known as “shooting the tubes.”

The two were heading into one of the tubes when the canoe got hung up on a log and tipped over, according to Valley Falls Fire Chief Brian Jackvony, whose department is nearby. The father fell out of the canoe, and was swept out through the tube.

However, the boy’s leg became entangled in a rope used to tie up the canoe to land and the canoe became wedged after it capsized.

The situation was exacerbated by a strong current swollen by rainfall from the night before. The water was still rushing at around noon today; Jackvony told a reporter at the scene that it was about the same level as yesterday, though not unusually high.

Jackvony today said he knew that the two had both canoed through the tubes before.

William King III told a *Journal* reporter today that he and his son, a freshman at Community College of Rhode Island who graduated from Cumberland High School last spring, did much together.

They recently went to hear British rock legends The Who play in Boston. They liked to go snowboarding and, if they came across a double-diamond trail — designation for most difficult at a ski spot — they would take it.

King said today that the two hadn’t seen any signs or warning near the dam. Even if there had been, he said they probably would have tried the shoot anyway.

But, he said, he thinks the area is dangerous and that people probably should not be allowed to go through in canoes or other types of craft.

He said he and his son had started their journey around 10 a.m., heading from Albion Falls to where the river enters Heritage Park at Cumberland Town Hall.

Just before the arches, he said, their canoe had been pushed into a turn by the current, then sideways against the structure. As the water built up, the canoe went over. King said he went through one of the tubes; his son, another.

In its online Blackstone River and Canal Guide, the National Park Service cautions that paddling through the arches is not recommended for anyone. Instead, it says, paddlers should portage around the area. An online map marks the site with “!CAUTION!”

But, according to Jan Reitsma, executive director of the area called the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, unlike a major national park, the park service does not own such heritage areas and cannot put an outright ban on passing through.

Pratt Dam itself is owned by the town of Cumberland, according to the state Department of Environmental Management.

Rescue workers yesterday said it took nearly four hours to retrieve the teen’s body. A crane was lowered into the river to stem the flow enough to allow recovery, they said. After recovery, the teen was pronounced dead at the scene.

For such heritage areas, the park service partners with local and state government as well as nonprofits to promote stewardship of cultural, historical and environmental resources and to improve safety, he said.

“We’ve always warned people that, especially in a location like that, it’s better not to take any risk,” he said.

Reitsma said his understanding is that people sometimes do pass through the area of the river in question and that those who do need to be quite experienced.

“The whole thing with the Blackstone River,” he said, is it is “not an easy river. The currents are very unpredictable. Conditions change from one day to the next.”

Robert Billington, president of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, called the Pratt Dam area “probably one of the most dangerous on the Blackstone River.”

Joe Sherlock, an instructor and member of the Rhode Island Canoe/Kayak Association and Friends of the Blackstone River, said most of the time canoeists and kayakers go around the dam through the canal or get off the river, go up the embankment, and re-entering on the other side of the bridge.

There is a portage point right before the tubes, Pawlitschek said.

Sherlock said he’s taken groups to the area with the Blackstone Valley Paddle Club but has never allowed anyone to go through the tubes.

“The Blackstone River is a great paddling destination, but you need to be aware of the dangers that go along with paddling an industrial river,” Sherlock said.

Sherlock and Mark Pawlitschek, co-owner of Blackstone Valley Outfitters, said some dams on the river are marked with buoys to alert canoeists or kayakers. The Pratt Dam is not, they said.

Billington said private owners are typically the ones who install the buoys.

“It is safe to canoe. You just have to know where the dams are and where the portage points are,” said Pawlitschek.

Still, Pawlitschek said, “when we do get a lot of rain, the river rises and the current does get strong.”

“Sometimes you can’t even get through the tubes because the water is so high,” he said.

He recommended people get off the canoe or kayak before getting into the tubes because the area tends to get overfilled with debris.

Pawlitschek, who said he’s gone through the tubes “quite a few times,” said, “You definitely need to be experienced.”

Hippo

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The three were on a month-long trip to Africa for Cornwall Scouts to raise the profile of the group abroad and had been meeting local scout groups and dignitaries.

They had set off from Faranah on a 2,500 mile trip along the River Niger and were four days in when they came under hippo attack.

They were making the journey in a 20ft canoe that local boat builders had made specially for them.

Brian said: 'We made our way to Faranah, where we were met by local scouts and introduced to the Minister for Youth and some boat builders.

'The community built us a 20ft plank canoe, to our own specifications, which was much bigger than their normal size.

'They gave us a grand send off with a lot of trumpeting and waving and then we went trundling along.

'Everything was going fine, though we saw the odd hippo and were actually stalked by one one night which came along at 1am started snorting and snuffling around.

'We nervously put another log on the fire and were delighted when it went away. On the day of the sinking we were paddling along nicely, the river was a decent width.

'Suddenly we came to a halt and then Geoff was thrown in. My first reaction was to get him back on board again. I said "What's happened?"

'But all Michael replied was 'hippo, hippo'.'

Retired headteacher Geoff, from St Austell, Cornwall, and Michael, who recently left the Navy, were also both unharmed.

Luckily all three of the Scout leaders are trained lifeguards so could swim over to the bank with their rapidly sinking vessel.

Brian added: 'We were going downstream, getting dragged along by the current but managed to get into the side of the stream.

'Not far away I could see the big hippo's head stuck out of the water, ears wagging at us. We hoped he wouldn't come back for a second bite.'

Prior to their visit, the three men had been up to the West Midlands Safari Park to learn about the dangers of animals in the area - particularly hippos.

Brian said it was a 'huge relief' when they came across the small river-side village and were given help.

He said: 'We were so far from civilisation and knew no-one would come for us, so we had to trek it ourselves.

'We had to ditch all the equipment that wasn't vital - including our laptops - and trudge along.

'Sticking to the river seemed the most sensible option, luckily we had trained hard for it and no-one needed so much as a plaster.

'When we got there the local chief invited us back to his hut, gave us some rice and then used motorbikes to take us to the town.'

2010 MALAYSIA GAMES: Paddlesports, tennis to be axed

December 29, NST online: OLYMPIC sports tennis, canoe and kayaking have been thrown out from the 2010 Malaysia Games in Malacca, a move which does not augur well for their development.

In fact, the Malaysia Games supreme council's decision to not consider these sports goes against the

government's policy of giving priority to Olympic events.

The supreme council threw out appeals from LTAM, FA of Malaysia (FAM) and the Terengganu government for tennis, futsal, canoe and kayaking to be included in the 2010 Games.

NSC director general Datuk Zolkples Embong stated that these four sports were not considered due to budget constraints and the lack of facilities.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: ELECTRIC KAYAK

by Peter Burke (San Lorenzo, CA) Press Banner
Retired Lockheed Martin engineer and Boulder Creek resident John Anson simply couldn't let his mind rest after 35 years working on space shuttles for the high-profile aeronautics company.

So Anson went back to the drawing board, and in less than six months, he submitted a design for his new invention, a motorized electric kayak, to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

"It's for all types of people," Anson said. "It opens the door for everybody."

Anson envisions his invention will allow people with low endurance or less upper-body strength the freedom to enjoy the sport of kayaking.

In Anson's contraption, a kayaker can begin the day paddling but, if fatigue sets in or the wind picks up, can switch on the motor and make for the dock without any trouble.

Anson's kayak has a built-in trolling motor powered by two 12-volt, 70-amp marine batteries. On a single charge, the kayak can cruise for six hours at up to 6 mph; however, Anson doesn't see the motor as the craft's primary means of propulsion.

A kayak is designed for one thing — paddling — and paddling is still the main function of Anson's kayak.

The motor is built into the bottom of the kayak and acts as a keel, causing very little drag while the kayaker paddles.

Anson's longtime friend Dennis Patterson was the "test pilot" on the first trial run.

"It was so amazing," Patterson said. "I thought I was gone for 40 minutes, and it had been an hour and a half."

The kayak is built for both saltwater and freshwater, and an automatic electric bilge pump keeps the kayakers high and dry.

Anson and Patterson see the kayak as a possible tourist attraction for amateurs and as a trolling kayak for fishermen. Anson, who loves to paddle in Loch Lomond Reservoir in Lompico, custom builds each boat and can outfit almost any kayak with the motor.

Oklahoma River chosen for Olympic kayak training site

By Matt Patterson, The Oklahoman
December 12, 2008

Bria Cornforth isn't an Olympian yet, but the 8-year-old wants to be someday and an announcement by USA Canoe/Kayak Thursday might make her dreams a little easier to reach.

USACK will begin using the Oklahoma River as a training and development center for prospective Olympians. Athletes and coaches are expected to begin coming to the river to train as early as next year with activity increasing as the 2012 London Olympics draw closer.

"You've got a world class body of water and amazing boathouse and a huge amount of community support," USACK Executive Director David Yarborough said. "We need to find venues like this where the community is committed to being a world-class place to train and to compete. There are no more than a handful of venues in the country for us to choose from."

Yarborough said during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta kids helped and volunteered by carrying boats and handing out water. Twelve years later, six of those kids ended up on the US Olympic team.

"They would have never likely seen the sport on that lake in Georgia if not for the Olympics coming to Atlanta," Yarborough said. "That's how dreams begin."

Cornforth won two gold medals in kayaking in October's Head of Oklahoma regatta after her father encouraged her to get involved in the sport. She was on hand Thursday to demonstrate technique for the media.

"I love being out on the water," she said. "On your first race you feel kind of nervous, but after that it all goes away and it's just fun."

Yarborough said there are 400 to 500 athletes currently in USACK programs that could spend time in Oklahoma City training. He said as the riverfront continues to grow, USACK could develop a residence program.

New York Man Saves Thousands By Kayaking To Work

Teacher Crosses The Hudson On His Own Power Every Day

NEW YORK (CBS) Dec 5, 2008 Faced with fare hikes and service cuts in mass transit, increasing bridge tolls, and expensive gas, commuters crossing the Hudson River alone spend hundreds of millions of dollars.

Some commuters, however, are coming up with cheaper, more inventive ways to get to work. Such is the case for Sean Patch, who suits up for his morning commute to work...by kayak.

"When I first started doing it, they would come out on the decks and wave their arms and be like, 'What are you doing out here?'" Patch tells CBS 2.

Well, he's saving money. When the Weehawken ferry upped its prices, Patch ran the numbers. He's a math teacher, after all. Supplying his own paddle power saves \$15.50 a day. Since July, that's \$1700 dollars. By the end of the school year the savings will be \$4,175.

Patch says he hopes to keep paddling to work even in the dead of winter. And if this is what you call home, maybe kayaking isn't such a stretch. Turns out, Patch's way is efficient. We timed his commute from the air. From bank to bank it took nine minutes. The ferry takes seven.

But it's not always smooth sailing.

"It's tough for a lot of these boats to see me because I'm low on the water," he says. "There were times when a wave would come and it would prevent me from seeing the skyline of New York. So that was scary."

After Patch locks up his boat, he rides a bike the rest of the way.

Fellow teachers say they're humbled.

"I walk to the train in the morning, a nice mile walk. But my friend here, he goes on an entirely higher level," says teacher David Greenbaum.

Patch is also a licensed captain. He says there are serious risks out there and anyone thinking about paddling across the Hudson should get proper training first.

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· 277 Water Street, Warren 401-245-9025
· www.canoeassage.com

The Kayak Centre:

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· www.kayakcentre.com

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WaveLength Magazine, 2735 North Rd., Gabriola, BC, Canada, V0R 1X7.
www.WaveLengthMagazine.com

Paddling with the Maya

Jon Azpiri, Special to North Shore News (Canada.com)

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, Mexico: You have to wonder what all those tourists were thinking one sunny Sunday at Mamitas Beach in Playa del Carmen.

After a few stormy days, the weather had finally turned and hundreds of sun-worshipping gringos had made for the beach to enjoy a little sun and water sports. The crystalline water was filled with people on catamarans, boogie boards and jet skis.

But then suddenly a very surprised windsurfer was nearly run over by six locals in loincloths paddling to shore in a wooden canoe.

The paddlers were taking part in the Travesía Sagrada Maya (Sacred Mayan Journey), an annual re-creation of the sea journey ancient Mayans once took from Playa del Carmen on the eastern tip of the Yucatán Peninsula to the Caribbean island of Cozumel in order to ask Ix Chel, the goddess of fertility, for good weather, good health, a good harvest and the continuity of life.

This pre-Columbian tradition has now been re-imagined as a festival that takes place every June featuring elements of music, theatre, and water sports. More than 200 paddlers train for months to make the gruelling two-day, two-way, 20-kilometre journey. The original travellers chose early May and June to make the crossing because it was normally a time when the waters were at their calmest, but this year the sea was so rough that one leg of the journey had to be canceled due to wind and rain.

It was the return leg of the trip that turned out to be a particularly harrowing experience for the volunteer paddlers, who came from a wide spectrum of the population: farmers from nearby villages, resort workers, chefs, and marketing executives, joined by a few American, Canadian and European expats living in the area.

Max Schiaffino, an affable television journalist from Mexico City, had attended the first Sacred Mayan Journey in 2007 as a reporter and decided to return as a participant to get a first-hand view of what the journey was like. During the

two-hour trip his canoe was pummeled by waves, and while one set of teammates paddled furiously the others desperately tried to shovel water out of the canoe, which turned upside down on more than one occasion.

When Schiaffino and his boat finally made it to shore on the Sunday afternoon, he collapsed onto the beach wet and exhausted with a ear-to-ear grin that couldn't be wiped from his face. "I'm so happy right now," he said in rapid-fire Spanish. "I'm just so happy to have gotten through it. This whole experience has changed my life."

Schiaffino's epiphany came at the climax of nearly three straight days of music, sports and theatre. The event started late Friday night at Xcaret, an eco-park and archeological reserve 10 kilometres south of Playa del Carmen whose 800,000-square-metre swath of land contains several small Mayan ruins dating back to 1400 AD. Staff from Xcaret worked with local universities and leading Mayan scholars to maintain the festival's historical accuracy.

On the Friday night thousands of visitors, mostly Mexicans, walked past the park's gates to watch a procession of actors and locals dressed as Mayan messengers and shamans who would make the journey across the water to visit Ix Chel. They stayed until dawn to watch stage shows filled with actors, dancers, and locals.

The performances promised to be a bit perplexing to both locals and tourists since much was performed in Mayan, a language spoken by relatively few people, in an effort to be as authentic as possible. Still, the shows, with their broad acting and realistic sets, were easy to follow no matter what language was spoken.

The first leg of the journey between the mainland and Caletita beach on the island of Cozumel was scheduled to start early Saturday morning. Sadly, this leg of the journey was canceled due to inclement weather, but the festival resumed Saturday night at Cozumel with a large stage show where the messengers talk to the goddess Ix Chel and ask for fertility. The goddess, appearing in an elaborate headdress, chastises the voyagers for their neglect of nature.

"What has happened to the rivers? What has happened to the jungles?" she bellows, in an obvious nod to modern environmental issues.

After promising to make amends, the messengers are granted their wishes and make their way back. The last leg of the journey began Sunday morning, with paddlers departing Cozumel's Chankanaab National Park, but driven back by the weather. Instead, a larger group, including Schiaffino, started their journey in Xcaret, which is much closer to Playa del Carmen, and finished at Mamitas Beach. In total, the event involved more than 800 volunteers and hosted more than 2,000 visitors.

Organizers hope that the Sacred Mayan Journey will be one of many events that will highlight the area's rich history and transform the Mayan Riviera into a cultural tourist destination. "The idea is to increase the tourism that comes in from the sun and the beach and add more cultural and archaeological tourism," says Carlos Joaquín González, the Secretary of Tourism for the state of Quintana Roo.

The Mayan Riviera has plenty of history that is often overlooked by visitors principally in search of a beach. Just south of Playa del Carmen is Tulum, the ancient Mayan walled city perched on a 12-metre cliff overlooking the Yucatán Peninsula. One of its highlights is the majestic Temple of the Frescoes, which contains a mural of Ix Chel herself.

While Xcaret and the Mayan strive for historical accuracy, there are times when modern life can creep in. Other than the confused windsurfer who may bump into a wood canoe full of paddlers in loincloths, there's the actor dressed as an ancient Mayan shaman who tries adjusting the volume on his microphone before invoking an ancient Mayan prayer. And there's dancer Fidencio Tzel, who sits in Xcaret's cafe quietly drinking coffee while covered in black body paint and wearing a large warrior helmet. Watching an ancient Mayan warrior stirring coffee in a white paper cup is kind of comical, until Tzel provides a friendly reminder as to why the festival exists.

"It's in my blood," says Tzel, who is of Mayan heritage. "It's a way of showing the richness of the culture and rescuing parts of the culture that are starting to disappear.."

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