

The Chesapeake Paddler



Volume 33 Issue I

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January/February 2023

Swim Test Your Gear Every Time You Go Out

By [Moulton Avery](#)

K.P. - A Very Close Call & Miraculous Rescue January 29, 2012 - Thomas Point Light, Chesapeake Bay, Maryland

This is an excellent and candid first-person account of a near-death kayaking incident that occurred on the Chesapeake Bay near Annapolis, Maryland. It takes courage to publicly confess making a mistake that almost killed you, and KP deserves our respect for writing this personal account so that others could learn from his experience.

KP's Story—I'm a 48-year-old man who's been paddling for more than 15 years. I've also been a sailor since I was a kid, having grown up with a father who was a career Coast Guard officer. I'm comfortable on and in the water. I paddle almost every week, year-round, and often solo. I've taken numerous paddling classes and have paddled in all kinds of conditions in lots of places. I've done multi-day kayaking trips, ocean paddling, flat water and moderate whitewater. I have (what I thought was) a pretty decent roll and I know a few different self-rescue techniques (though I hadn't practiced in several years). My kayak is a Necky Looksha IV HV and is constructed of kevlar and fiberglass. It's a great boat. I've had it for 12 years.

On January 29th I decided to take advantage of the sunny day and the warm-for-winter temps and drive from where I live in Washington, DC, to near Annapolis and paddle out to Thomas Point Light. This is a short paddle — about four miles round trip from my put-in. I've done it 4 or 5 times, and I've sailed in the area countless times.

I launched around noon. The weather forecast was for mostly sunny skies, highs in the low 50's, and winds out of the south at 10-15 knots (though building throughout the afternoon.) A small craft advisory had been issued for 6pm and into the night. I expected that, even with some goofing off and photo taking, I still wouldn't be on the water longer than two-and-a-half hours (i.e., back by 2:30pm.) I was wearing a dry top, neoprene gloves, and I used a skirt (of course). I had no hood, dry or wet pants, or boots (I know, I know -- I will get back to this). I did have a PFD on.

It was a lovely day, but breezy as expected. I would be paddling southeast so the winds were off my starboard bow. I had a nice paddle to the lighthouse and dealt with a bit of chop just fine. I took some pictures. The winds were definitely building and the growing waves began to make me uncomfortable with having my nice Nikon camera out. I didn't want to get it wet so, with it hanging around my neck and waves splashing the boat, I paddled to the lee side of the lighthouse and then under it to hold onto a dock piling while putting the lens cover on, getting it back in its dry bag and strapping it to the deck. I drank some water, took a phone call(!) and then took off for the paddle back. Everything was fine.

By this point the winds had built to probably 15-20 knots, gusting higher. The tide was going out (against me) and the winds were off my port stern quarter. With the wind and the tide going different directions -- combined with being right over a shoal -- the wavers were a bit bigger than usual, but still nothing I found alarming. I've handled worse and was actually enjoying the surfing down waves while also noticing the waves were steeper than I was used to. Right around the shoal near the lighthouse the sea was in a bit of a confused state. The wave direction wasn't totally consistent. While on the crest of a wave focus-

Coordinators Note: Here is a story that has been published previously, but is very relevant to paddling in January. I like this story because it had the potential for tragedy but has a happy ending. This article was taken from Moulton Avery's National Center for Cold Water Safety web site. <https://www.coldwatersafety.org/post/rule-4-case-3>

Paula Hubbard



(Continued on page 13)

From the CPA Coordinator

Happy New Year to all! 2023 looks like it's going to be a great year for CPA. We already have dates set for SK-101, SK-102, and Navigation Class, and WFA Class. We will be working on trip leader training and additional wilderness first aid opportunities. We will be holding a trip planning meeting prior to the paddling season.

Navigation Class – February 4th—The navigation class will be held on February 4th at Cult Classic Brewery, 1169 Shopping Center Road, Stevensville, MD. This is an overview of basics of navigation including charts, compass use, planning a trip, effects of tides and currents, and wind and waves. Even if you know a little about navigation, the class is a great review for all levels. We focus on planning a trip, identifying potential hazards, and discuss what conditions we might expect to find while paddling. Anyone who likes to know where they are, and where they are going on trips. Trip leaders in particular will benefit from this class. Sign up for this event is available on the [CPA Meetup](#).



SK 101 – February 25th—SK-101 will also be held at Cult Classic Brewery on February 25th. This is an excellent way to learn about sea kayaking. This event is a great first step in becoming a kayaker.

SK101 covers many topics useful to a beginner or soon to be kayaker ranging from basic skills, kayak safety, how to buy a boat, how to dress, and places to kayak around the Chesapeake Bay.

Thank you Laurie Collins, Marilyn Cooper, Rick Leader and Gary Trotter for organizing the event this year. CPA relies on volunteers to keep things going. Information regarding registration for this event is available on the [CPA Meetup](#).



Planning Meeting – TBD—The annual planning meeting and steering committee meeting will be held before the start of paddling season. You don't need to be a trip leader to attend. Join us to socialize and to find out what is happening in the club.

Trip leading does not need to be difficult or intimidating. It can be as simple as finding a place where you like to paddle and want to share it with other members. Many paddlers worry that they do not have the skills to lead a trip. Remember that there are many experienced paddlers in the club who are willing to work with you. The purpose of a paddling club is to provide opportunities to paddle. We depend on our volunteer trip leaders to do this.

SK 102 – April 28th to 30th—SK-102 is CPA's signature event. This is on-water instruction provided by volunteer instructors that is designed to cover the basics of sea kayaking. You can learn how to maneuver a kayak, what happens if you fall out of your boat, and how to get back in. Further details and registration will be announced mid/late January.

What's Next?—The days are slowly getting longer. We can spend the winter studying navigation, planning paddles, and thinking about warmer weather. In the meantime, CPA remains active. New events are added all the time. Look for our winter hikes, cold water paddles (for those with the equipment and fortitude), culture events, and more on the [CPA Meetup](#).

Paula Hubbard

Coordinator



Taking a Course on Taking a Bearing

By Paula Hubbard

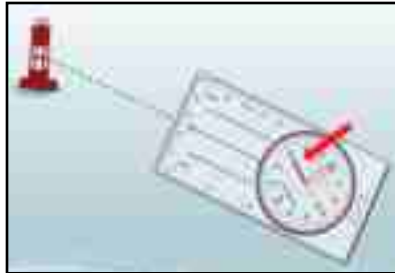
Most of the time when we paddle in the Chesapeake Bay we depend on visual landmarks, but there are times when distance or weather conditions might make it harder to recognize landmarks. Our shoreline tends to be flat and while a chart shows multiple bays, inlets, and landmarks, it's hard to get the same perspective while on the water. Here are some tips to help navigate.

1. Know where you want to go.

Your planned **Course** is the direction towards your destination. You can get this off of a chart, or you can look for a visible land mark when you start out and take a bearing towards that object.

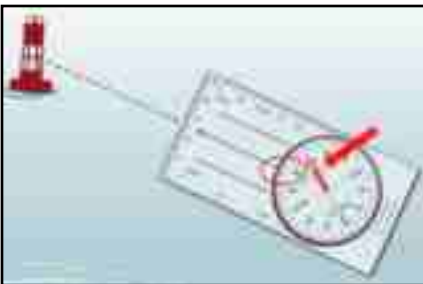
A **Bearing** is the direction towards another object

Your **Heading** is the direction that your boat is pointing. Your heading may not always be directly towards your destination. Sometimes you need to compensate for wind and current.



Know how to take a bearing. Identify an object to use for your bearing. Point your compass at that object. Identify the needle that points to magnetic north.

Rotate the dial on the compass to align the arrow indicating North with the compass needle that points north. This aligns the scale of the compass with the real world.



To remember this, think about putting 'Red in the Shed'.

Once the scale is aligned, read the direction toward the object in degrees magnetic.

A hand held compass works well when you are taking bearings from land, for example to determine your course before you get

on the water. You can also carry one in a pocket or tethered to your deck to use while paddling.

Another way to take a bearing while paddling is to use the deck mounted compass on your kayak. Point the bow of your boat toward the object and take your reading.

Practice reading charts and comparing them to your view from the water. Practice taking bearings. By comparing the chart to your environment, you will learn to transfer the information provided to what you see in the real world.

Like what you see in this article? Maybe you should take the **Navigation Class – February 4th**—The navigation class will be held on February 4th at Cult Classic Brewery, 1169 Shopping Center Road, Stevensville, MD. This is an overview of basics of navigation including charts, compass use, planning a trip, effects of tides and currents, and wind and waves. Even if you know a little about navigation, the class is a great review for all levels. We focus on planning a trip, identifying potential hazards, and discuss what conditions we might expect to find while paddling. Anyone who likes to know where they are, and where they are going on trips. Trip leaders in particular will benefit from this class.

Sign up for this event is available on the [CPA Meetup](#).

Share your paddling adventures!

Do you enjoy reading about the paddling adventures, local and distant, of other members? Do you like getting new ideas for paddling trips?

Are you advocating for paddling access or amenities in your area?

Have you pondered questions relating to kayak gear? Variety is the spice of life, and of newsletters.

Please write an article reflecting your thoughts, experiences, and discoveries to share with our paddling community.

We all become a bit wiser and excited to be on the water again. We need your input to make *The Chesapeake Paddler* the best it can be.

Submit stories or ideas to news_editor@cpakayaker.com. We look forward to sharing your story.



Water Trails in Franklin Point State Park

By Paul Fofonoff

Franklin Point State Park is located on the western shore of the Bay, at the bottom end of the Shadyside peninsula. I began sea kayaking in this area in 2002, and have enjoyed the beauty of the Bay and its occasional challenges. The Bay here is calm much of the time but, with 200 miles of fetch to seaward, and maybe 50 miles to the north, it can change rapidly. The creeks are shallow, so a NW wind or the monthly tidal cycle can leave you with a very narrow, shallow channel, and a whole lot of mud. I have observations on our two launching areas and our four potential water trails. For reference, I currently have a 16-foot sea kayak, and usually use a spray skirt to keep waves out.

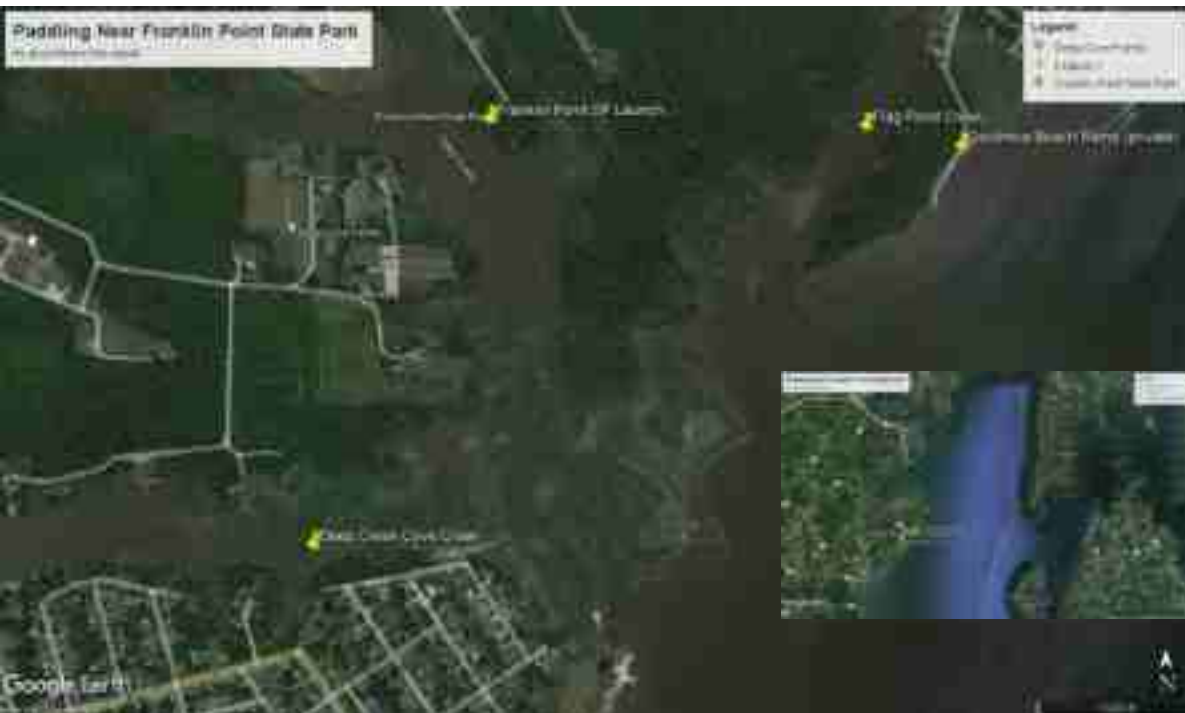
Columbia Beach—I use the neighborhood ramp. To reach Flag Pond Creek, or Deep/Deep Pond Creeks, I paddle along 0.5 to 1 mile of shoreline. On late summer afternoons, winds of 10-25 mph can raise considerable waves. Without a spray skirt, you're likely to get water in your boat. Conditions can change rapidly with afternoon Bay winds, and even faster with thunderstorms. With riprap, there's no safe place to land until you reach the mouth of Flag Pond Creek. There are small patches of sandy beach along the Bay before you get to Deep/Deep Pond Creek.

Dent Road—Deep Creek is misnamed, at least the upper portion, as it widens into a pond. On a NW wind, it's nearly bare mud, with small channels for water. On a normal low tide, it's easy to get stuck here, and it helps to know that the water is deeper near the edge of the pond and too shallow to paddle in the middle. Once you get down past the pond section, the channel is deep. The creek curves to the west, and the branch to the left leads to the Bay. The branch straight ahead becomes Deep Cove Creek. The shallow water and mud at the Franklin Point SP launch here is challenging, but it's a safer location for casual paddlers, and gives you alternatives if conditions are difficult on the Bay.

Flag Pond Creek—As you enter the creek from the Bay, waves can get bigger, until you hit a shallow sandbar, where you can run aground at low tide. As you enter the creek, water is deeper on the right (east). There's a nice park-like spot, Dick's Lookout, on the loop trail, but it's only accessible at high tide, and even then requires a few steps in the mud, and pushing through reeds. However, it's a good lunch or rest stop when you can get to it. The channel shifts and changes direction as you approach the Narrows between the lower and upper pond. The Narrows is currently blocked by fallen trees, and would be a major job to clear. An earlier couple of trees could be passed at high tide, but now the upper pond is cut off completely.. The upper pond is nice with a high tide, with good views of marsh and forest.

Deep Creek—I've described it already. It's nice with a high tide, but can be frustrating otherwise. The channels could be marked with posts to keep people out of the mud. Entering Deep Creek from the Bay is dramatic, with trees rising above the reeds.

Deep Cove Creek can be reached from Columbia Beach, through the Bay, bearing left, or by the Franklin Point SP launch from Dent Road down to the branch. This portion of the creek is dredged, with a small marina in the Franklin Manor neighborhood. You'll pass houses on the R (S) side of the creek, until it widens into a wide pond-like section, with only a few houses. This section narrows



into a creek through marshes lined with tall trees. At high tide, you can paddle a long way into semi-wilderness. Some of the R (N) shore is undeveloped public property, the former 'Turtle!! Run!!!' development purchased by the county.

This may be more detail than anybody wanted, but at least at high tide, this park offers some beautiful paddling.

Happy Trails on land and water!

Introduction to Navigation

By Paula Hubbard

On a cold winter day, there is nothing like talking about kayaking.

The **CPA Navigation class** is back and will be held at Cult Classic Brewery on February 4th at 9AM. Registration is on the [CPA Meetup Page](#). Do you know how to find your way back to the launch site when you go on a paddle? Can you find your way when visibility is reduced? This indoor class provides information on the basics of navigation including charts, compass use, planning a trip, effects of tides and currents, and wind and waves. Even if you know a little about navigation, the class is a great review for all levels.

The class is free for CPA members. If you are not a CPA member the cost is [joining CPA](#). If you've taken navigation before, you can still come, I guarantee you probably forgot a lot of it. I teach this so I don't forget. We focus on planning a trip, identifying potential hazards, and discuss what conditions we might expect to find while paddling.

Who should participate?—Anyone who likes to know where they are, and where they are going on trips. Trip leaders in particular will benefit from this class.

Class Agenda:

Charts:

- Reading a Chart
- Identification of Hazards
- Measuring Distances
- Using a Compass
- Where am I
- Tides and Currents
- Weather, Wind, and Waves

Note that use of a GPS is not included.

What to Bring:

- Charts that you typically use
- A hand held compass
- Ruler / straight edge, pencils with eraser, any other tools you use to plan trips
- An open mind.

Location—The event will be held at:
Cult Classic Brewery
1169 Shopping Center Road
Stevensville, MD 21666

Registration Required—[Intro to Navigation, Sat, Feb 4, 2023, 9:00 AM | Meetup](#)



Intro to Sea Kayaking SK-101

by Rick Leader

It's time again for CPA's popular **SK-101—Introduction to Sea Kayaking** workshop scheduled for Saturday February 25th, 2022 from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. at the Cult Classic Brewery on Kent Island.



Learn the parts of a kayak...

This event is primarily for newer paddlers, those moving up from recreational kayaks who are interested in exploring more challenging trips and waterways. **It's the perfect opportunity for CPA members to refer a friend or family member who may be interested in learning more about sea kayaking.**

The program includes featured guests and short presentations from many of the area's most experienced kayakers. Learn how to select an appropriate boat and safety equipment for your adventure. Learn Basics of paddle and boat design, tips for safe paddling, where to find people to paddle with, and interesting places to paddle. Kayaks, paddles, equipment, clothing, car rack systems, and a variety of kayaking gear will be on display.

Although this event is primarily for the newer paddler, or those interested in learning more about the sport, everyone is invited to come and expand their paddling horizons.

Space is limited and available on a first come, first serve basis. You do not need to be a CPA member to attend, anyone who wants to learn more about kayaking is welcome.

Advance registration is required, walk-ins are not permitted. The registration deadline is Saturday, February 15. Register online at [2023 SK 101 \(eventbee.com\)](https://www.eventbee.com/2023-SK-101).



Brian Blankenship teaches about paddles and strokes



Get up close and personal with a variety of kayaks



See how to make sure your kayak fits YOU!



Learn about safety equipment like the Personal Flotation Device (PFD)

Wilderness First Aid Class

by Ralph Heimlich

CPA, is working with the Randi Kruger of the Capital City Kayaking Meetup to promote the Wilderness First Aid (WFA) class her group is offering. See <https://www.meetup.com/river-to-sea/events/289473897/>.

Take advantage of the rare opportunity to learn from one of the most highly accomplished instructor trainer educators in the country: Todd Johnstone-Wright.

Join Todd for a Wilderness First Aid class over the weekend of April 1 & 2. Expect two 8 hour days of training.

From the SOLO website: # Wilderness First Aid (WFA)

"Accidents happen. People get hurt, sick, or lost. The temperature drops, the wind picks up, and it starts to rain. Would you know what to do? Many backcountry emergencies are preventable, and even when bad things happen, sometimes the wrong care can make things worse. By learning a few basic skills, you can make the difference between a good outcome and a bad one-and maybe even save a life."

This training fulfills requirements for both British Canoe and American Canoe First Aid.

Description of the Class—The WFA is 16 hours long (two days), and focuses on the basic skills of Response and Assessment, Musculoskeletal Injuries, Environmental Emergencies, Survival Skills, Soft Tissue Injuries, and Medical Emergencies.

Todd is a full-time adventure sports coach with almost three decades of wilderness medical and traditional EMS experience, and has been teaching for SOLO Wilderness Medicine since 1994. In addition, he is a British Canoe Union Level 5 Coach Sea, British Canoeing coach educator/leadership provider/safety and rescue provider, ACA Level 5 Advanced Open Water ITE, Level 4

Whitewater IT, BICP Level 1 Instructor, AMGA Rock Instructor Course Graduate, and Single Pitch Instructor, AIARE Level 2 Avalanche Training, and holds the British Canoeing Performance Coaching Diploma. As a result of his training, and extensive expedition and adventure sport experience, he is able to cater the course and supporting scenarios to a variety of adventure sports disciplines and contexts.

The cost for the two day workshop is \$260.



Virtual Public Meeting on Beachwood Park Boat Ramp

by Lisa Arrasmith

Anne Arundel County is holding a virtual public meeting on Wednesday, January 18, 2023 from 6:30 to 7:30 pm on a new public boat ramp at Beachwood Park. Details and zoom link below.

Beachwood Park Boat Launch – Project# P567509

WHO: Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works (DPW)
WHAT: Beachwood Park Boat Launch Virtual Public Meeting
WHEN: Wednesday, January 18, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
WHERE: ZOOM.us
Webinar link:
<https://aacounty.zoom.us/j/81065424513?pwd=SzNFOWUzQ2NJc3p0ck1hSnVUNU9CZz09>
Passcode: #u9Kna.i

Please use the link to join the webinar or One tap mobile:

US: +1-301-715-8592,,81065424513#,,,,*87817327# or +1-470-381-2552,,81065424513#,,,,*87817327#

Or Telephone:

Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

US: +1-301-715-8592 or +1-470-381-2552 or +1-470-250-9358 or +1-669-900-6833 or
 +1-669-219-2599 or 888-475-4499 (Toll Free) or 833-548-0276 (Toll Free)

Webinar ID: 810 6542 4513

Passcode: 87817327

Do You want a new public boat ramp at Beachwood Park on the Magothy River?—A public boat ramp would make it easier for kayakers to use Beachwood by letting us drive down to the water and drop off our boats at an unloading zone. A public boat ramp at Beachwood would make the park usable for people who can not pull their kayak down and back up that steep Beachwood hill. <https://www.aacounty.org/locations-and-directions/beachwood-park>

How YOU can ask for a new public boat ramp at Beachwood Park!—**FIRST:** Attend the virtual meeting on Wednesday, January 18, 2023 from 6:30 to 7:30 pm. Details and zoom link in the box below . Ask for a public boat ramp at Beachwood Park. Remember, a boat ramp at Beachwood is not new. There was a boat ramp at Beachwood Park back when it was an African-American day resort in the days of segregation.

<https://www.capitalgazette.com/lifestyles/ac-cn-column-jeff-holland-2021131-20210130-tianipbqrmfuxgmgdeed253hq4-story.html>

SECOND (and you can do this NOW!): Email the elected officials who represent Beachwood Park and tell them you want a public boat ramp at Beachwood Park. Tell them how it would make getting to the water easier, tell them what it means to you to reach the Magothy River! Remember to include your first and last names and U.S. mail address to they know you are a real person.

Anne Arundel County Executive:

County Executive Stuart Pittman: countyexecutive@aacounty.org

Email list for officials representing Beachwood Park :

D3 Councilman Nathan Volke nathan.volke@aacounty.org

D31 State Senator Bryan

Simonaire bryan.simonaire@senate.state.md.us

D31 State Delegate Brian Chisholm brian.chisholm@house.state.md.us

D31 State Delegate Nicholas

Kipke nicholaus.kipke@house.state.md.us

D31 State Delegate Rachel Munoz rachel.munoz@house.state.md.us

Email address block for cut and paste convenience:

countyexecutive@aacounty.org nathan.volke@aacounty.org
ryan.simonaire@senate.state.md.us brian.chisholm@house.state.md.us
nicholaus.kipke@house.state.md.us rachel.munoz@house.state.md.us;

THIRD: if you want to overachieve (and who doesn't) and you can do this **NOW!** Email the other six Anne Arundel County Council members. Remember, a budget item needs at least four votes to get funded. Again, remember to include your first and last names and U.S. mail address. Email addresses and an email address block for easy cut and paste below:



(Continued on page 9)

Beachwood Park Boat Ramp (Continued from page 8)

Email list for Anne Arundel County Councilmembers:

D1 Councilman Pete Smith: petersmith@aacounty.org
 D2 Councilwoman Allison
 Pickard allison.pickard@aacounty.org
 D4 Councilwoman Julie Hummer jhummer@aacounty.org
 D5 Councilwoman Amanda
 Fiedler amanda.fiedler@aacounty.org
 D6 Councilwoman Lisa Rodvien lisa.rodvien@aacounty.org
 D7 Councilwoman Shannon
 Leadbetter SLeadbetter@aacounty.org



Email address block for cut and paste convenience:

petersmith@aacounty.org allison.pickard@aacounty.org
hummer@aacounty.org amanda.fiedler@aacounty.org lisa.rodvien@aacounty.org SLeadbetter@aacounty.org;

Remember, if YOU don't ask, WE don't get!

Some upcoming events for 2023

- January 28—[Hike: Appalachian Trail -- Weverton Parking to Harper's Ferry and Return](#) —Suzanne Farace and John Sweeney
- January 28—[Mid-Winter Eastern Neck Circumnavigation](#) —Ralph Heimlich
- February 4—[Intro to Navigation](#) —Paula Hubbard
- February 25—[SK-101 Basics of Sea Kayaking Workshop](#) —Marilyn Cooper, Laurie Collins, Gary Trotter and instructors
- February 26, March 18—[Build Your Own Spray Skirt Workshop #1 and #2](#) (you must attend both)—Ralph Heimlich
- Spring 2023—CPA TRIP PLANNING MEETING —Coordinator Paula Hubbard: details TBA
- April 1-2—[Wilderness First Aid Class](#)—Todd Johnstone-Wright and Randi Kruger at Capital City Kayaking
- April 20-31—SK-102 Sea Kayak on the Water—Basic training—Catriona Miller and Jeff Walaszek
- June 3—[Fall out your Boat Day / Gear Swap](#)—Bill Smith and Sue Stevens

All participants should download the [updated CPA Waiver](#) and read the [CPA COVID-19 event guidelines](#) before participating in any in-person Club activity. Check details on the [CPA Meetup Page](#), as appropriate, as details may change at any time.



Paddler Profile: Meet James Higgins

Lives in: Lake Ridge, Virginia.

Do you regularly attend a CPA Piracy? Yes, I'm the chapter Captain for the Pirates of Algonkian in Sterling, VA. I had been in charge of the Pirates of Sugarloaf from 2006-2011.

Number of years paddling? About 16.

How did you get involved in sea kayaking? By accident, I had seen several people using boats referred to as kayaks for fishing. So, I asked and then I was down at the local Hudson Trail Outfitters in Rockville, MD. I signed up for the Potomac Paddlesports introductory class in the spring of 2005.



What boat(s) do you paddle? Stellar 16 foot with rudder; Stellar 18 foot with skeg; P&H Scorpio with skeg; Current Designs Kestrel 16 foot with rudder.

Rudder or skeg? Both.

Type of paddle used? Werner Ikelos carbon fiber. I do have a Greenland paddle, though I like my big blade Euro paddle best.

Do you do any other paddling than sea kayaking? Yes, I prefer calmer water.

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities? Cycling, tennis, hiking, archery, target shooting, walking, photography.

How often do you paddle between May and October? 2-3 time per week, usually, depending on the weather and my other activities.

Do any winter paddling? Nope.

Favorite local paddling location? Planet Earth.

Favorite CPA trip you've ever been on and why? Most camping trips because I like the extended time outside.

Scariest/most dangerous paddling trip/incident and why? Learning how to get back into my boat. I still haven't tried rolling.

Bucket list trips? Europe, Ireland, Germany—for the history, the beauty and to get a better understanding of where I come from.

Three things you like most about paddling?

Being Outside, being active, people, making friends, the beauty of nature, being a part of something different.

What do you like about CPA? Safety, knowledge about paddling, the people, their stories, sharing a common thing.

What other paddling clubs/groups do you belong to? I have inherited a Tennis meetup, I used to belong to an Archery group and a pool shooting group. Plus, I belong to several other kayaking groups, some passive and one active.

One unusual non-paddling thing we'd be surprised to know about you? I used to work at the Harlequin Dinner Theatre in Rockville, for about 12 years. I started out as a dishwasher, and then moved up to busboy, waiter, bartender, assistant service manager. I used to help in striking the sets and rebuilding the next stage. I played on the HS soccer team in the junior varsity for 2 years. I ran cross-country in HS, too. I used to own a 1969 GTO. I'm still single and own a condo in Lake Ridge, VA.

What Does an AI Chatbot Know About Sea Kayaking?

By Ralph Heimlich
and ChatGPT

By now, you've all heard about ChatGPT, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) chat bot that gives extremely rapid and often startlingly reasonable responses to queries posed to it. It has raised concerns ranging from students cheating on term papers to questionable use as an online shrink.

What is less widely known is that it is

amazingly simple to try on your own. Simply go to the OPEN AI website at <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>, create an online account for free, and start posing queries to ChatGPT.

I did this for some simple questions about sea kayaking and here are the responses.

What is a good sea kayak trip to make in the Chesapeake Bay? “The Chesapeake Bay is a great place for sea kayaking, with many beautiful and peaceful waterways to explore. Some good options for sea kayaking trips in the Chesapeake Bay might include paddling through the Calvert Cliffs State Park, exploring the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, or touring the historic city of Annapolis. Other popular destinations for sea kayaking in the Chesapeake Bay include St. Michaels, the Eastern Shore, and Solomons Island. It's a good idea to plan your route in advance and make sure you have the necessary gear and safety equipment, including a personal flotation device, a compass, and a marine VHF radio. It's also important to be aware of any weather conditions and tidal patterns that could affect your trip.” *unedited response by ChatGPT.*

Discuss seven principles for safe sea kayaking—

1. “Always wear a personal flotation device (PFD) and make sure it fits properly.
2. Be aware of the weather and water conditions and plan your trip accordingly.
3. Know your limits and those of your group, and only paddle within them.
4. Know how to self-rescue and assist others in rescuing themselves and others.
5. Carry all necessary safety equipment, including a VHF radio, signaling device, and first aid kit.
6. Stay within sight of shore or other paddlers and let someone know your itinerary.
7. Stay upright: avoid capsizing and consider the consequences of wet exits.”

unedited response by ChatGPT.

I was a bit concerned that ChatGPT's notion of “necessary safety equipment” for sea kayaking was a bit off, so I tried it again. I modified this a bit to **Discuss seven principles for safe sea kayaking—**

1. “Wear a personal flotation device (PFD) at all times while on the water. A PFD can save your life in the event of capsizing or falling overboard.
2. Always kayak with a partner. It's important to have someone with you in case of an emergency or if you need assistance on the water.
3. Know your limits and paddle within them. Don't take on challenges that are beyond your skill level.
4. Know the weather and water conditions. Check the forecast before heading out and be aware of any changes that may occur while you're on the water.
5. Know your route and stay within sight of land. It's important to have a plan and to stay within range of safety in case you need to make a sudden return to shore.
6. Communicate with your partner. Stay in contact with your partner, especially if you're separated on the water.
7. Know how to self-rescue and assist others. It's important to be able to get yourself and others back into the kayak if needed, and to know how to get help in an emergency.”

unedited response by ChatGPT.

Suddenly, no mention of “necessary safety equipment” at all!

Finally, I told ChatGPT to **Discuss nine principles of cold water immersion safety—**

1. “Know the water temperature. Cold water immersion can be dangerous, even deadly, if you are not prepared for it. Water tem-

(Continued on page 12)



(Continued from page 11)

- peratures below 70°F (21°C) can lead to hypothermia, which can be life-threatening.
2. Wear a personal flotation device (PFD). If you fall into cold water, a PFD can help you stay afloat and make it easier to swim to safety.
 3. Stay calm. It can be easy to panic in cold water, but try to stay as calm as possible. This will help you think clearly and make better decisions about how to get out of the water.
 4. Get out of the water as soon as possible. If you fall into cold water, your first priority should be to get out as quickly as possible. This can be difficult if you are not wearing a PFD or if you are in a remote location, but try to find a way to get out of the water and get to safety.
 5. Remove wet clothing. If you are unable to get out of the water right away, try to remove any wet clothing that is weighing you down. This will help you stay afloat and may help you stay warmer.
 6. Try to stay afloat. If you cannot get out of the water, try to stay afloat by using a floating position, such as the "HELP" position (Heat Escaping Lessening Posture). This involves keeping your head and neck out of the water and your arms and legs close to your body to minimize heat loss.
 7. Use available resources. If you are in a boat or near a shore, use any available resources to help you get out of the water. This may include a flotation device, a rope, or a life jacket.
 8. Seek medical attention. If you have been in cold water for an extended period of time or if you are experiencing symptoms of hypothermia, such as shivering, numbness, or difficulty speaking, seek medical attention as soon as possible.
 9. Know your limits. Cold water immersion can be dangerous, especially if you are not a strong swimmer or if you have certain medical conditions. Know your limits and be prepared for the risks associated with cold water immersion."

unedited response by ChatGPT.

I guess it never occurred to an AI that you could actually DRESS for the water. Presumably, I've fallen into the water stark naked, with only my PFD for protection.

When I was much (much) younger, I tried to learn how to ski from the Encyclopedia Britannica. That experience was a bit like getting ChatGPT to teach me about sea kayaking. My advice (not from ChatGPT) is to find a compatible group of knowledgeable sea kayakers and learn the sport from them... **OH! WAIT!!** That perfectly describes the Chesapeake Paddlers Association!

Have some fun and login to ChatGPT to try it out for yourself.



Lois Wyatt in Rhode Island near the Sakonnet Point Lighthouse photo by Ralph Heimlich

K.P.'s Story (Continued from page 1)

ing on balance, I reached back on the port side to brace with the paddle when suddenly water wasn't where I expected it to be. The paddle was still in the air where I expected resistance and I capsized to port.

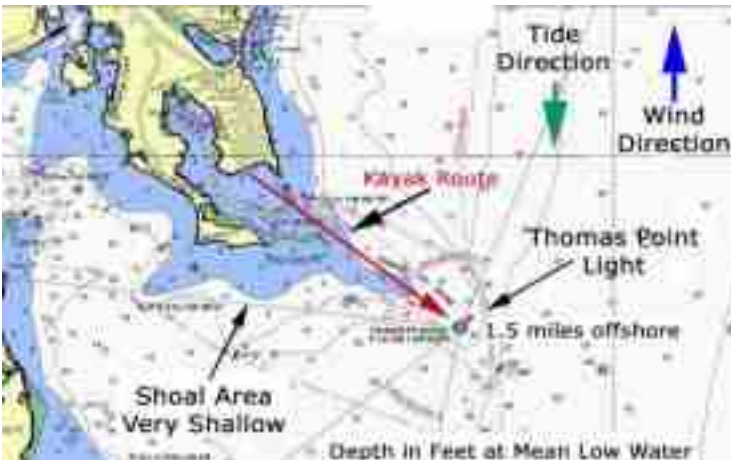
I immediately attempt to roll back up as waves were tossing around the boat and me. I was not successful and then attempted two more rolls. I really wasn't even getting close. I decide to exit the boat to attempt self-rescue using the Ladder technique.

I got to the rear of the kayak and began crawling to the cockpit and got knocked over by another wave. I was realizing I was in serious trouble because the cold water was quickly sapping my strength. I tried another self-rescue and was once again knocked over. I didn't see any boats on the bay. I knew I was in a really bad situation.

I wasn't far from the lighthouse—a couple hundred yards at most. I thought my best chance was to swim for it and to try to climb up on its dock. I began swimming and immediately realized I could not swim the kayak upwind in those conditions. I wasn't making any headway at all. So I made a quick decision to let the boat go, even while knowing that "stay with the boat" is almost a mantra for problems at sea. I didn't think that was an option because of the cold water and being nearly two miles from shore.



Tricky currents around Thomas Point Light



Water depth in the blue shoal area is 2-6 feet at low tide.

boat. I learned later that she is the *Audacious*.

I began yelling. They couldn't hear me and it appeared, at first, that it would just cruise by me when I realized they were actually slowing down to pull up to the lighthouse. I kept yelling but was growing worried that I wouldn't be able to even yell much longer. I was exhausted. Then the boat pulled up to the dock (positioned exactly as in that photo) and someone jumped off the boat with a line to secure it.

He was now facing me and I yelled again with every ounce of energy I had. He heard me! He looked up, waved and immediately jumped back in the boat and headed my way. I wasn't going to die!

There were two men and two women on board. They had to literally pull me out because I couldn't help them at all. I weight 200 pounds, was soaking wet and almost dead weight from exhaustion, and the boat was rocking around because of the conditions. It was really hard for the two guys to pull me up by my PFD, but they were champions and managed to get me on board with some serious effort. I estimate that I was in the 40F water for about 15 minutes.

So I let the boat go and the wind quickly took it. I'll never forget that moment when the thought hit me, "I'm floating alone in the Chesapeake...in January."

I began swimming on my back toward the lighthouse. I was making minimal headway against the winds and the waves. The cold water was causing great pain at this point, and my ability to swim was rapidly leaving me. During those few minutes I knew I was facing death. I was angry at myself for doing this to my father -- his beloved wife of 51 years. I remember thinking that at least they'll know where to look for my body because I had emailed a float plan to him and my sister that morning.

I was swimming as hard as I could with whatever strength I had left and decided to roll over off my back for a second to check to see that I was at least still pointing at the lighthouse. I saw a boat up ahead! It was a classic white Chesapeake Bay fishing



The *Audacious* docked at Thomas Point Light on a calm day.

(Continued on page 14)

K.P.'s Story (Continued from page 13)

They got me inside the small cabin and began drying me off and warming me up. While I was in there they retrieved my kayak and paddle, which must have been a half-mile downwind at that point. My camera in a dry bag was still secured to the deck, which is why I have the photos.

I'm not being overly dramatic when I say they saved my life. I have no doubt that this is true. They were on the water that day—the ONLY boat in the area at that time—to do their annual winter check on the lighthouse. In all the years I've paddled and sailed near Thomas Point Light I have never seen a boat pull up to it. The long odds of them being there at that exact time and within earshot defy description.

Mistakes I Made—I was clearly complacent and over confident in my skills. If there are other paddlers out there, no matter how experienced, who might be taking on needless risk like I did, I hope this story will change their behavior.

- I should not have been paddling solo in the winter on open water like the Chesapeake.
- I should have been wearing pants, shoes, and a hat made for cold-water immersion. I couldn't find my wetsuit pants that morning and went anyway.
- I should have had a submersible VHF strapped to my PFD, as well as flares and/or a smoke signal device.

Solo winter paddling in open water and not wearing pants/shoes/hat for cold-water immersion were total rookie mistakes. "Dress for the water, not for the air." I know this and ignored it. I nearly paid for my mistake with my life.

Other lessons: I must work on my rolls and self-rescue techniques every year, and practice in conditions closer to what could be expected in a real life emergency.

I want to publicly thank my rescuers Henry and Chris Gonzalez, and Captain Howard and Cathy Lewis. Henry is the lighthouse keeper for the Thomas Point Lighthouse and vice-president of the [U.S. Lighthouse Society](#). Howard is the owner and skipper of Audacious, and I understand he lends his time helping out with the lighthouse."

Lessons Learned—This trip was far more dangerous than KP realized when he left shore, and his admittedly complacent attitude was due to non-eventful previous trips, his long familiarity with area, and his lack of personal experience swimming unprotected in 40F (5C) water.

Swim-testing his gear would have vividly demonstrated to KP that that he was not dressed for the water temp. Using the [Sea Conditions Rating System \(SCRS\)](#) developed by Tsunami Ranger Co-Founder, Eric Soares, would have given him a more realistic perspective about the level of risk he was undertaking.

Paddling solo greatly magnified the risk. It guaranteed that in the event of trouble, he would be completely on his own. Any attempt at self-rescue would be unassisted, much more difficult, and with a higher probability of failure - particularly in rough water. His skills were rusty. Regular rolling and self-rescue practice in rough conditions would have improved his technique.

Shoal area: A shoal is a shallow area surrounded by deeper water. Depending on things like current, wind, and wave conditions,

(Continued on page 15)

Public Service Announcement: Dry Suit Repairs—Professional and Local

By Cragg Howard

Do you have a dry suit in need of repair? Broken Zipper, torn or worn out gaskets, punctures? Contact Patrick Donovan. "Pat", a First Responder in the DMV, former Deep Sea Diver and owner of Donovan's Diving Services in Centreville, MD, is professionally trained, as well as licensed and insured, in dry suit/wet suit repairs. Pat offers reasonable rates and quick turn around times from someone who knows first hand the importance of staying warm, and/or dry, when immersed in cold water.

Give him a call at (410) 490-4400 or email him at DonovansDivingServices@gmail.com.

There are many other online or mail-in gasket and leak repair services for dry suits and tops. In particular, if you have a Gore-Tex™ Kokatat dry suit, you can send it back to the factory for evaluation and leak repair for about \$50 (not including gasket repair). If the fabric has delaminated, you may be eligible for a replacement suit free of charge. This does not apply to non-Gore-Tex™ materials and may not be similar on other brands. See <https://kokatat.com/support/warranty-repairs>

Paddle Safe!



K.P.'s Story (Continued from page 14)

shoals can quickly change from tame to extremely rough with breaking waves. As this nautical chart clearly shows, there's a reason why a lighthouse was built 1 mile off Thomas Point: The area between the light and the point is very shallow with a mean low water depth between 2-6 feet for his entire route. Tidal range in the area is approximately one foot. The photo at the top of this page shows the confused conditions and steeper waves around Thomas Point Light on a relatively calm day. Conditions were a lot more intense when KP started paddling back to shore.

Wind and Tide: Conditions on the water were deteriorating rapidly. Waves are created by wind, but their height can be amplified when the wind is blowing in opposition to the current. When his trip began, the wind speed was 10-15 mph; 60-90 minutes later he estimated 15-20 mph and gusting higher. The Small Craft Advisory predicted winds of 25-38 mph within several hours. When he started back, the wind direction was also in opposition to the tidal flow, resulting in much steeper waves and rougher water. Wind was from the south, so the fetch was essentially unlimited for the Chesapeake Bay.

Thermal Protection: His thermal protection was totally inadequate for 40F (5C) water. Without the addition of warm clothing, a drytop provides about as much insulation as a shower curtain. To protect you in the water, a drysuit or drytop must be watertight, not excessively burped, and have sufficient warm clothing to insulate you from the cold. It is not enough to simply "wear a drytop".

Although it delayed cold shock, KP's drytop did little to protect his upper body from the increasingly debilitating effects of cold water. Also, unlike 40F air, which feels cold, 40F water feels like it's burning your skin. This is why KP reported that it was "causing great pain" as he struggled to swim towards the lighthouse.

Loss of Strength: No protection for his lower body made the situation even worse and further compromised his ability to swim. Loss of strength happened very quickly. "I was realizing I was in serious trouble because the cold water was quickly sapping my strength". "The cold water was causing great pain at the point, and my ability to swim was rapidly leaving me".

No head and neck protection very likely contributed to his repeated failure to roll both because contact with the water was painful and cold water entering his ear canal would have been disorienting.

Concerns About Overheating: Many paddlers make the mistake of underdressing when the air is warm and the water is cold. KP was clearly underdressed and didn't have sufficient clothing under his drytop to protect his torso. See the article and video [Keeping Your Cool In The Heat](#) for more information on this topic.

No Margin For Error: Regardless of a paddler's level of experience, 40F (3C) water isn't just a little more dangerous than, for example, 55F water. It's far more dangerous. If the paddler is solo, as KP was, the risk simply cannot be overstated. As many incidents have demonstrated over the years, those are circumstances in which even a small miscalculation like missing a brace and a roll can get you killed.



This isn't overkill for 40F (4.4C) water.

The Chesapeake Paddlers Association, Inc.

The mission of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association is to provide a way for people to enjoy sea kayaking within the Chesapeake Bay area and to promote safe sea kayaking practices through educating the local sea kayaking community and the interested public.

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