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as though I had run up against my limits as a sea kayaker and was glad finally to be out of it. On one occasion we found ourselves holed up in a crumbling, abandoned fish camp, trying to escape 2 days of a full blown El Norte windstorm.

Another day, after rounding Punta Chuvato, we sought refuge from the high winds and huge swells by pulling our boats onto a rocky ledge. While we rested, the tide receded to a point that it was impossible to relaunch. And since the next significant tide would be coming in the middle of the night, we had to hoist all the boats and equipment to an even higher ledge, and sleep on a two foot wide rock outcropping.

Of the many highlights of the trip—wildlife, rock gardens, caving along the coast—it was the omnipresent desert mountain ranges and cliffs running down to the sea that formed the backdrop for everything else. Every day's paddle, every meal break and every campsite took place in the context of a truly spectacular wilderness setting—soaring mountain ranges, chiseled cliffs, rocky outcroppings, hardy desert cactus and fascinating wildlife all converging at the interface of land and sea. It is what makes Baja the special place that it is.

When we pulled into Mulege on the last day, my sense was "well, ok, that's done. Not really a big deal." Now that I think about what was involved my attitude is more like: "Whoa!!!"

Abstracted from Rick's full trip report at <http://www.cpakayaker.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=3545>

For more pictures, see <http://sports.webshots.com/album/568749945rrKYDk> and <http://community.webshots.com/album/568816410aWapRn>

Edited by Lynn Erwin

## Breaking beyond Beginner Paddling

by Cyndi Janetzko

As a long time sea kayak instructor I frequently tell my students that the key to becoming a better paddler is "time in the boat". Lately though, I've begun to wonder if that is quite accurate. Certainly all seat time is valuable, but are some types of paddling more valuable than others when the goal is taking your skills to the next level?

I think the answer is yes and that "just paddling" really is not the key. I take as evidence of this all those paddlers who seem terminally stuck at the advanced beginner level. They start out eager, perhaps renting a boat a few times. They take a class or two and then purchase their own kayak. From there the sky should be the limit in terms of acquiring new skills. However too often, after getting their basic strokes "mastered" (if there is such a thing), many paddlers stop learning and just keep paddling.

So why do people get "stuck"? There are likely a myriad of reasons but I think there is one primary culprit – our desire for comfort, ease, or the "routine".

Whether out of habit or necessity, we often paddle in the same area with the same conditions for the same amount of time just about every time we are in a boat. Nothing about these paddles challenges our skills, technique or fitness levels. Sure we're enjoying the view, paddling with friends, getting a little fresh air and escaping our 9 to 5 lives, but are we becoming better paddlers?



To progress as a kayaker you need to challenge yourself and move beyond that comfortable, familiar paddle trip. I like to think of these paddles a bit like, to borrow an idea for the latest exercise theory, interval workouts. An interval workout consists of bouts of high intensity work alternated with periods of lower intensity or rest. Research shows that intervals work. By working intensely, even for short periods of time, you place a greater demand on your system which in turn prompts greater physiological change. Working out at a constant level burns calories but doesn't require your body to get stronger to accommodate higher workloads.

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This is true in paddling as well. If we never challenge ourselves we will not learn to adapt to more challenging conditions. Don't worry; I'm not going to advocate that we all start paddling sprints (although those who know me know that I might suggest that from time to time). Rather, to apply this concept to kayaking all we need to do is change what we consider an "interval". In this case an interval for improving kayak skills is any paddling that pushes you beyond your usual comfort zone – paddling that requires short bouts of intense learning/practice.

Intervals for skill development could take many forms. A few that spring to mind include playing in river current and waves, teaching a newbie a new stroke, trying a different boat, learning to roll, or learning to surf ocean waves. Any paddling beyond your normal outing could be considered an interval. Below are my top five favorite forms of paddling that I think fall into the "interval" zone.

**Take a class.** It doesn't matter how advanced of a paddler you are you can always benefit from taking a class. If you've got the basics down, sign up for advanced strokes. Already taken and know your advanced strokes? Sign up for rolling. Done that? How about surf? Even if you've taken every class offered you can learn by taking them again. You will pick up on nuances you didn't notice before and hone the things you are already doing right.

**Teach a class.** The flip side of taking a class is to teach a class. Many have heard that you don't really know something until you have to teach it. Go out with a group of friends and each take a turn teaching each other something. Volunteer to be an assistant at SK101 or 102. To effectively teach something you need to focus on the steps and break down skills to their individual components. Chances are if you can remember all the steps well enough to teach a skill the likelihood is you'll remember all the steps when it comes time to perform it!



**Ben Lawry fine tunes the forward stroke.**  
photo by Cyndi Janetzko

**Cross train.** Just as with other forms of athletic endeavors paddlers can benefit from cross training. Biking and running might help our fitness level but this article isn't about fitness. What kind of cross training can help our skill? New or different forms of paddling. Sea kayakers can develop an increased ability to read water, deal with currents, and brace instinctually by learning to paddle whitewater. If whitewater doesn't appeal to you, pick up a different paddle. Wing paddles will encourage better rotation. On the opposite end, Greenland paddles teach better "blade dexterity"; how to control your paddle as it moves through the water. Whenever you try these new things, think about them – think about how the mechanics change, what is better, what is worse. The simple act of being tuned into and engaged with your paddling will make you a better paddler.

**Paddle with people better than you.** One of the shortest paths to success is to paddle with skilled paddlers. Their skill will rub off on you. Watch how they paddle. Mimic their strokes. Learn how they assess conditions. Ask questions. Advanced paddlers generally like to share their experience and are happy to help. In the company of advanced paddlers, with their consent, you can explore rougher conditions and push your limits.



**Dave Biss whitewater seakayaking** photo by Cyndi Janetzko

**Explore new venues.** Many of us find it convenient to paddle in the same place time and time again. Sure conditions can still vary paddle to paddle but they often do not vary dramatically. The Chesapeake Bay area offers a plethora of paddling opportunities. You can try your hand at open water from Sandy Point, work on navigating amongst boat traffic in Annapolis, or figure out currents below Little Falls on the Potomac. Try to make it a point to explore one new venue a month. Chances are your paddling will improve as a result.

Lastly, if breaking beyond your current paddling plateau isn't enough motivation to try intervals let me suggest one more reason – intervals add variety to your paddling. By constantly exploring

new aspects of our sport we can keep it fresh while advancing our skills. After eight years of paddling I still find adventure and challenge every time I get in my boat. So the next time you load the boat on your car, ask yourself how to make that paddle an interval paddle. If you put this idea to work, by this time next year you will look back at how much you processed in your paddling. I guarantee it.