

## **Paddlin' in the Sunshine**

By Vince Dalrymple

A dark overcast looms with a cold rain threatening at 52 degrees as I sit down to write this. Typical late fall weather for around here. I reflect back on a paddle made just days ago, yet it seems more like an entire season.

A fat, orange sun was oozing up over the horizon as I approached the Bay Bridge, heading for an Eastern Shore rendezvous with fellow paddlers Neysa Narena, Mike Vandamm, and Nick Meman in Queenstown at eight o'clock. We unslung our boats and prepared for the day's paddle under pastel skies with the temperature rising through the 65-degree mark. Still surroundings greeted us as we slipped quietly into the water and eased out of the harbor. A Canada goose sounded the alarm and slowly started an exodus of the waterfowl from our area. It seemed to mark the official start of our day.

With the sun and temperature's steady climb, our paddling jackets quickly became uncomfortable and would obviously become unbearable as the day progressed. They were thus shed before crossing the river, having rafted up in pairs to do so. Unencumbered and itching to get some of the yah-yahs out, Nick made a quarter-mile dash to the mid-channel marker with a very out-of-shape me struggling to stay close. During the cool down, Nick let me know that he had incorporated many elements of my power stroke into his own. With imitation being the best form of flattery, and flattery being a great way to soothe a wounded ego, I said, "Thanks, Nick". Allowing Mike and Neysa to catch up, we paddled on as a loose group to Boxes Point.

After a short lunch break ashore, we turned the corner heading west toward Eastern Neck Narrows with three-quarters of the group bee-lining across the shallow bay. In the distance, following the channel. Mike, the great Inuit hunter, swiftly flanked a large flock of waterfowl, sending many of the startled birds across our paths just in front of us. Two mute swans nearly clobbered Nick on their low flight across the bay.

The tide was just beginning to run out through the narrows as we arrived. Searching for nails, shellfish, and other submerged objects hazardous to a folding boat hull, I decided to shoot the bridge, cross-bracing and momentarily getting hung up on the second set as the draft ran out.

Once past the bridge, the current propelled us swiftly out to the bay entrance where we were met with literally tens of thousands of waterfowl of every description, though mostly Canada geese, I think. As Mike paddled an outer course to parallel the main "raft" of birds, Nick noticed a young, wounded Canada goose on our closer-to-shore track, and paddled to investigate. Although the waterfowl hunting season had passed, the bird, which appeared to have been 'winged' was struggling in the water. It then dove underwater to escape as Nick approached. My heart went out to the bird as it bobbed up near motionless about a minute later back behind us, testament to man's intrusion on his natural surroundings--a blemish on an otherwise beautiful day.

The paddle down the west side of Eastern Neck Island was quiet and uneventful as Nick "sauntered" well out ahead of the group and I played telegraph man between Nick and Mike/Neysa. After taking a short break at Cedar Point (Eastern Neck Island's southern tip) and wishing a hammock, some Coronas, and a lime had been brought along, the group recrossed the Chester River toward Queenstown. Some paddled slow so as not to overheat on this windless day, and others paddled faster to create their own breeze.

Sliding back into Queenstown harbor to finish the paddle, the sun radiated into me and through me so I decided to do some practice rolling. Eventually the rolling-induced ice cream headache dropped a notch to just a headache. Nick invited us to join him for sushi at Fresh Fields on the way back, to which we unanimously agreed. After overheating a dead battery with borrowed jumper cables (special thanks to a particular Queenstown resident), we dined on fish, seaweed, and an unusual trailmix to wrap up a truly **exceptional December day of paddling in the sunshine.**

#### **ADDENDUM:**

Not mentioned until now was that the water temperature was 52-54 degrees. That, combined with an air temperature above 70 degrees, creates the potential for some very serious problems for the paddler. Either (a) wear a dry suit or full wetsuit to adequately protect against prolonged immersion, but face the very real possibility of over-heating (what would you do if your boat sunk--no matter how remote the cause); (b) dress warm enough on the bottom  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ " (i.e., a wetsuit pants on farmer john) to minimally protect in an immersion situation while layering a paddle jacket, etc. over a tee-shirt or polartec for "roll immersion" protection (peeled down to the under garment—tee, polartec, etc.) And thus be more comfortable with the air temperature. All of our group chose the latter, more dangerous approach, with three being solid first-time rollers with good group rescue skills.

During this trip the thought kept nagging me about what would happen if someone wearing wetsuit pants and a polartec 200 top, as I was--with their paddle jacket stuck under the rear deck bungees--as mine was, was paddling solo in identical weather (water temperature under 55 degrees/air temperature over 70 degrees) was to have a mishap forcing the paddler to roll, possibly repeatedly, then paddle some distance to safety in cold, wet clothes. Upon entering the split to Queenstown harbor, I decided to answer this question with Nick spotting me in case anything went awry. I set up and hit the water in the first roll--a standard screw roll. It seemed very much akin to stripping half-naked and jumping into a frozen lake--the painful, sudden shock of enveloping cold! Sweep, hip snap, and slowly roll, the process being slowed down by the baggy garment dragged through the water. Looking and feeling like a drowned rat with the cold polartec clinging to me. I noted the experience to Nick while rechecking my systems and setting up for roll #2, a Reverse Screw roll. Seeing the stern deck with the paddle blade as I roll, cold water rushes into the gap between the sprayskirt chimney and my chest--the norm with the roll. Pause, sweep, snap, brace. Once again I check the systems over and clear myself (and Nick) for the finale--a balance brace to roll. Twist and grab gunwale bar behind, unfeathered paddle held just overhead, fall back...and wait. I feel the cold water again enveloping/gripping/penetrating all but my nose, mouth, and brow. On them I feel the radiant heat of warm afternoon sunlight melting them...wait. Despite the sun's warmth,

