

Chesapeake Paddler



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UNEXPECTED BIRTHDAY GIFTS Lessons Learned with a Half Paddle

By Rob Pearlman

Sunday June 1, dawned a gorgeous day - sunny, warm, blue skies, mild breezes, perfect! My 52nd birthday. I invited my eighteen-year-old son, Daniel, to join me for what I thought would be a short afternoon paddle. That paddle offered us great gifts, most of which I did not expect. It also caused unnecessary pain for my wife and some close friends.

Many of you have probably heard stories like this before, as have I (I am embarrassed to say). Despite thinking that I take safety seriously, this particular paddle taught me many lessons, some new, some again. These were really simple things that would have made a huge difference, had I paid attention. I've paddled for several years now. Confidence is good. Overconfidence is potentially dangerous.

The previous weekend I had paddled alone three miles up the C & O canal from Pennyfield Lock to Violet's Lock, and from there into the Potomac River, and paddled across to the Virginia side. From there I took the canoe trail that parallels the river and then returned me to the main river for a leisurely mile and half downstream back to Pennyfield Lock. Six miles, a couple of hours, easy. I thought it would be fun to do this same route again and assumed we would be back in time for a birthday dinner with friends at 6 p.m.

The day remained glorious as we quietly paddled together. We cruised three miles, passing rocky cliffs and brilliant bunches of wild yellow iris. Soon we heard the din of the "Seneca Breaks," the river-wide rapids near Violet's Lock - we were about halfway through the paddle, still plenty of time to get home by six. We portaged our boats over the lock's bridge, down to the Potomac's banks, reached the Virginia side and entered the "canoe trail." As we exited the canoe trail we were no more than 20 minutes from

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Lush canal photo by Rob Pearlman



Glacier Bay photo by Marshall Woodruff

ALASKA!

By Marshall Woodruff

I have wanted to paddle Alaska for a long time. Why? An Adventure, a challenge, an understanding of Nature, at least a glimpse. I wanted to paddle next to a whale; see an iceberg calving; see wildlife along the water, see nature in a light I have never seen before. I guess I wanted to see how insignificant I really am...to go to the last frontier. An Alaska trip was something I did not want to miss in my lifetime.

Now where? Read, read and read. Try to find people that have paddled in different areas, keeping in mind my main goal of whales and icebergs. Thru emails, I met people who shared their adventures with me. Asking lots of questions, they helped me find answers. Glacier Bay seemed the best spot after reading, looking at the charts and deciding that for my first time out, there were more choices out of Gustavas, at the south end of Glacier Bay, than anywhere else. Gustavas had a starting point, the National Park, where I could camp and put in. There

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was a small community with people, stores, and gear available if needed. The area is pristine and there are choices of destinations. How would I get there and when? Alaska Airways takes you there easily from the Washington metro. I called the Park Service at Glacier Bay and learned that a good time for the trip is the middle of June. I planned for June 17 to July 1.

Something I never wanted to be was a hostage to outfitters, therefore I wanted a boat I knew and could depend on: a folding boat. The people I know that have the folding boat have them because they do not have adequate space for a conventional boat. Some were the big, wide, open Klepper, and others were the Feathercraft. I just thought of them as a kayak, and did not know what a folding kayak can really do. Dave Isabel made a sensible suggestion, "there are folding boats out there that are just what you want, go look and compare". And I did. First I Googled folding boats and read about them, then I bought Ralf Diaz's "Complete Folding Kayaker". What a door opener to this "new" kind of kayak! Then I talked with Dave Biss and Kingsley Chan, who both have the Feathercraft Khatsalano. Wow, what a yak! Where could I get one? A new one would cost over \$5,000, so the hunt was on. Eventually I found and acquired one. It took awhile for me to become friends with this new kayak. The more I learned about the Khat, the more I liked it, and I was meeting more fellow paddlers that have Khats.

On to other gear. I knew I needed a water purifier, dry bags, and other gear. I needed to get my navigation and paddling skills sharpened. I went to Dave Biss and asked for some help. Winter weekends were spent on the Potomac, rolling, sculling and critiquing my skills. I received my chart to Glacier Bay, and got acquainted with it and started to plan the trip visually. Talking to others, I could now follow their paddle with the chart. Eight months to prep seems like a long time, but it goes fast.

I made lists of gear I would need and gleaned as much info as I could from others that had done the trip. I enjoyed solving this part of the puzzle. My list grew and now I started to categorize my lists. Paddle gear, first aid, clothes, camping gear, emergency stuff and food. The National Park issues "bear canisters" to all campers and paddlers that you must take with you. I couldn't think of the last time I used a bear canister, so I found out that they issue 8"x18" ones. How much food does it take for fourteen days, what is the weight, and where will it go in the Khat? I needed "virtual bear canisters", so I went to Home Depot and picked up some vent pipe cut to 8"x18". I wanted to see how much food I could put in, how much it would weigh and to practice paddling with them on my back deck. The first canister took 8 pounds of food, including 16 days of oat meal, 13 days of dinner and two tuna. I found a way to lash them to the deck behind the cockpit, and was able to make a harness out of strapping and used Velcro.

Dry bags are next. There is a lot of space in the Khat, it is just hard to get the bags through the ribs of the kayak and in the hold area. The tent goes down through the cockpit to the bow with the sleeping bag and mat, water (two large dromedaries) goes behind the cockpit. My food all goes in bear canisters on the deck behind the cockpit. I thought of making dry bags but luck was with me, I found 30 liter Diamond dry bags in the REI Outlet. These were flat, yellow, with a see-through front for \$10 each, what a deal!

Finally, though I would be in the wilderness, I might as well use modern technology as much as possible for safety, so I rented a satellite phone and a EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon).



Practice in the Bay photo by Bob Pullman

Whew, next a couple of practice paddles. Cyndi Janetzko had a trip to False Cape, Virginia, in March. This would be the same type of weather I would encounter in Alaska in June. I learned a few lessons on this trip with Dave, Cyndi, Caroline, Nelson and Gina. Pack flat, not thick, and make it small. In the Khat-salano, this is the only way, so, as I packed I would flatten the gear as much as I could. It sort of looked like dehydrated clothes. I numbered each bag and kept a list of contents.

It is amazing how much I "needed": camping gear, clothes [boat/on shore/rain gear], cooking stuff, water purifier, binoculars, books, washing gear. With food, it totaled about 75 pounds. Despite all the articles I read and all the advice I heard about what to take, in reality it was too much. No one ever mentioned the concept of "living in your clothes".

The next test was bad weather. How would the kayak handle in rough water with the weight and the "bear canisters"? In May, perfect test weather hit, and Bob Pullman and I went out to Kent Island and camped. It was a rough day on the Bay, 15-18 mph and real choppy, a perfect test. The Khat handled it well and I was comfortable with the boat. We were finally "friends" and I was ready.

When I left Washington National the plane was three hours late, so I arrived in Juneau and my gear was three hours behind in an-

other plane. I went ahead to Glacier Bay by small plane and arrived at the Lodge. I had planned to camp and take the ship up to a "drop off" area next day. Instead, I faced a long "hang out" in the lobby, but lucked out when two friendly kayakers had space in their room and let me crash. The gear came the next day, so I assembled the Khat and got everything together for the next part of the adventure.

Everyday a boat leaves GB with tourists, hikers, and kayakers to go up the west arm of the Bay. There are two drop off/pick up areas for kayakers, which change yearly. The first was Mt. Wright, just at the mouth of the East section, and the second was Queen, on the West section. The boat continues to Tarr Inlet and comes back down the Bay to GBNP. I was dropped off at Queen.

After the boat left, I stowed the gear and realized, how much stuff I had. It was so easy adding one more piece back in the States: "it's small, it will fit". I am afraid I said this too many times and lost track. So when I paddled off up into Queen Inlet, I suddenly realized I had way too much gear and the boat didn't feel right, but excitement took over.



Gear on Glacier Bay photo by Marshall Woodruff

I paddled up the Inlet about a mile, 200 feet off shore. Something happened (a wave, shifting of the gear, a slip of the paddle) and the yak tipped over. All I knew for sure was that I was on my side. I tried to right myself but as I got up, I went right back down. The balance was off. I had my drysuit on in the 41 degree water, with my Greenland paddle. I could always wet exit and I had my EPIRB on my life jacket along with a marine radio. Dave and I had practiced sculling most of the winter, sitting up, with the boat on its side, and every other way. That practice meant I did not panic, but realized my situation and went through the options and started sculling. Certainly not a fast way to get to shore, and a little tiring, but I just kept it up and made it to shore. I bailed out the boat and moved things around and went back to the drop off spot, paddling 5 feet from shore. I set up camp and hung everything out to dry and started sorting through the gear. I was going to wait for the next day and give back gear to the drop off boat for storage at the Lodge. I was mad at myself because I knew the boat didn't feel right and I should have realized I needed to shed gear. Dumb!

I had cancer of the tonsils nine years ago and I was treated with chemo and radiation. Because of this, I have trouble eating; my main diet is Ensure, oat meal, soft, bland foods but selective. So my next little problem was that I had bought Mountain foods that you just add hot water to and eat. I had practiced this before the trip and it seemed fine. I also brought along some Pita bread for the peanut butter and the packaged tuna. After seeing a number of bears I decided not to even open the tuna, trying to wash the container out and storing the trash in the bear canisters just seemed too inviting. The Pita bread was soaked from the tip over. The bear canisters came with a plastic sleeve and a tie but I didn't tie it tight enough. What I had forgotten about the Mountain food was that I graze all day to make up my food consumption and here I was with a serving for two: It was just too much food to consume at one time.

A trip like this is much different than a casual paddle at home where you have more options about eating. FOOD is FUEL and you have to keep your fuel tank at a 100% on an expedition. Needless to say, my energy level had dipped after a few days. With the sixteen foot tides, lugging your gear and boat above high tide, the huge currents in the bay, and the tides and wind, paddling takes a lot out of you. I soon realized that paddling closer to shore than my usual 200 feet made paddling easier and less depleting. With my fuel down, I camped for a couple of days, regaining my strength with powdered Ensure, oat meal and some of the Mountain food products. My eating habits changed to accommodate the situation.

Another thing I learned was to check, recheck and recheck again. Do I really need this item? I soon found that you live in your clothes, which cuts down quite a bit on gear. Bring what you wear and one change, then wash! On the water I lived in my drysuit. On shore I changed to zipper shorts and a long sleeve shirt and I slept in silks. You have to put your toothpaste, deodorant, etc. away in the bear canisters, along with your trash. For gear and things, you don't have to support the gear shops: We have a club of 600, so borrow and cut your costs!

Was the trip worth it? You bet. It was the trip of a lifetime! I paddled with the icebergs, whales, sea otters. I saw lots of bears, including tiny cubs; eagles a plenty; moose, scary. I had a chance to feel what being alone in the wilderness really feels like. Yes I was

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Unexpected Birthday Gift *(Continued from page 4)*

It was now 9:30 pm, more than three hours past the time we'd intended to be home. We called home and confirmed that we were OK, just as the police were interviewing Barbara and asking her to describe identifying birthmarks and features in case any bodies turned up. What a birthday. Boy did I feel like an idiot. I quickly countered that feeling by focusing on what I had learned. I did do a few things right and they made a big difference. I had brought a flashlight, a knife, water and energy bars, and insect repellent. I was not alone and neither of us was injured. Though humbled, I learned and will be more prepared for the "unexpected" on future paddles.

LESSONS LEARNED

Always tell someone where you are going

Bring a map and/or a GPS (with extra batteries)

Don't assume you will remember important details

Carry a spare paddle

Bring a cell phone or radio (and make sure the batteries are charged or bring extras)

Carry a well equipped first aid kit, and food and water

Carry a flashlight and knife, a repair kit with essentials/ tools, duct tape, etc

Don't assume you won't need any of these things

[Edited by Lynn Erwin]



There's a bear on shore photo by Marshall Woodruff

Alaska *(Continued from page 9)*

scared at first. Would my first campsite be a bear encounter? As I saw bears along the edge of the water, they just blended in with the adventure, I slept more soundly and I just lived with it. Did being alone bother me? No. There is enough out there to keep you busy between the paddling, setting up camp, looking for water, washing, looking, seeing and feeling the world around you. No radio, TV, people, cars, traffic, news. Silence. But not really—Nature has her own ways of filling the wilderness and I think I found it.

I want to thank Bob Pullman, Dave Biss, Cyndi Janetzko, Dave Isbell, Alison Sigethy, Nelson Labbe, Gail Ferris and many others from CPA and the KIP Paddles, for helping to make this a most successful trip.

My gear: Feathercraft Khatsalano folding kayak, Drysuit-Kokatat, Marmot Swallow tent, Lowrance GPS Expedition with Topo

chip, Epic wing paddle, Wolfgang Brink's Aleut paddle, Patagonia-underwear [better than REI], Marmot Arroyo Goose down sleeping bag with silk liner [double dry bagged], Glacier gloves, divers hood, 2-6 liter MSR Dromedary bags, Snow Peak stove, 30 liter flat Dry Bags, mosquito net for the head, Olympus 720SW along with my camera mount I made for the paddle-worked great, Katadyn Hiker Pro water purifier, marine radio Icom M-88.

Books: "Adventure kayaking trips in Glacier Bay" Don Skillman; "The Only Kayak" by Kim Keaco; "Deep Water Passage" by Ann Linneu; "Spirited Water" by Jennifer Hahn; "Southern Exposure" by Chris Duff; "Keep Australia on Your Left" by Eric Stiller.



Gets a little cold with the wind off the glacier photo by Theresa Bear