

Fall Sea Kayak Basics Course, September, 2003

We ended up with 7 students, about what I like to see. Mike Kincaid and his daughter Kaitlyn, Robin Peterson, Lamar Phillips, Marcia Jenkins, Belita Gordon, and Margy Moremen. Meg served as my "competent assistant," as usual, at least for the flatwater day (Meg's not big for surf).

Saturday in the harbor was fun, not quite as windy as in the past. There were enough inadvertent swims that we got in a good bit of rescue practice without making anyone flip on purpose. The dolphin count was disappointing, only 2 or 3.

Saturday night we hit the Wreck for dinner as usual, squeezing nine people around a 6-top. Plenty of room for good friends. Those of you going to Ft. McAllister, be sure to ask Lamar about interesting plane trips, but give him a drink or two first.

Sunday we arrived at the Sullivan's Island beach 45 minutes before a really high high tide. Actually, there was no beach, the water was sliding up into the dunes in places. Since there was no place to launch, we temporized by practicing braces sans boat, sitting on the sand and edging into the waves, bracing with the paddle. Lots of fun, although the exercise finishes with one's underwear having a lot in common with 150 grit sandpaper.

Once the tide went out a little, I brought people into the surf broadside to get them into bracing mode. It's a timing thing: edge out into the wave and brace on top of it just as it hits you. Too early and your paddle ends up under the breaking wave (not good), too late and the wave knocks you over beach direction. This is a really fun exercise to do, and pretty safe, since someone is spotting you.

After everybody had had a chance to do the edging thing, we paddled out offshore. There was almost no beach break by that time, so no one needed any help getting into the water. Sullivan's Island has a couple of nice areas of clapotis a couple of hundred yards offshore that make great playgrounds. Some of the time you're just getting hit by waves from all directions (Which way to brace?!), and some of the time the waves straighten out and you can get a pretty nice ride.

All of the students flipped at least once, except Marcia, who had to leave early. We all pitched in doing rescues, though I should call them assisted re-entries, because who needs to be "rescued" when you're standing in 3 feet of water on a sandbar? I think everybody was convinced that helmets in the surf zone are a good idea.

Kaitlyn in particular had a good day in the bumpy water. Understand, she's 14 years old and 85 pounds, so her boat was more stable than most. But it's not like she was sitting around waiting for something to happen. Next to her dad, she was probably the most aggressive paddler out there. She was almost the last to go over, and might not have if she hadn't been trying to help me help Robin. Here's a tip: be careful about stowing paddles under your bungees in rough water. They can get spun around 180 degrees and end up short-end-towards-you, long-end-in-the-water, out of your reach. Then the next wave pushes your boat over your paddle and you learn about

leverage in a way your physics teacher never thought of. Right, Katie? Mike swam a couple of times, but attacked the waves with a grin and a fierce determination. I think the Kincaid family will all be out on the water next season.

Margy was the last person to flip, in a very dynamic way on the face of a wave she got a short ride on. I think she was getting tired by then, as she flipped again within a few seconds of getting back in the boat.

One by one folks straggled back to the beach, tired, well-sunned, sandy, and wet, but still enthusiastic.