

CPA Paddler Profiles ~ Dave Isbell

Interview by Rick Wiebush

Name: Dave Isbell

Lives in: Annapolis, Maryland

Real job: Manager, Annapolis Canoe and Kayak

Member of a Piracy? The former Pirates of Pier 7 now the Roving Pirates of Arundell

Paddling Buddies: The Pier 7 crowd

Number years paddling: 27 years

How did you get involved in kayaking? I was about to buy a recreational rowing shell but got to paddle a friend's kayak. Facing the direction I was moving (seeing where I was going instead of where I had been!!) struck me as a really good thing and the kayak moved so smoothly and easily through the water that I decided to get a sea kayak.

How did you learn to sea kayak? I took a two day lesson through Sprin-griver in Rockville in a rented kayak. They were assisted by a few CPA members (there were only a few members in CPA at that time anyway!)

Any formal training or ACA/BCU certifications? Just the above.

Boat usually paddled: I have five kayaks. I paddle a Current Designs Nomad (19' x 21" mango) as my cruising and camping kayak, my Feathercraft Expedition K1 (16' x 25", red deck black hull) if I have to bring it on an airplane, or one of my skin on frame traditional Greenland or Aleut qajaqs on shorter trips or just for fun.

Type paddle used: I switched to a traditional Greenland paddle 12 years ago and have never gone back. I keep my old, big blade paddles stored with my snow shovel so if it breaks I can still clear the walks with my old paddles. :-)

Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking? I have rediscovered canoeing. I had a canoe as a teenager. I paddled a borrowed solo canoe in 2011 for a week in the Adirondacks and subsequently built a skin on frame solo canoe and just bought a Kevlar, 32 lb. Wenonah Wilderness solo canoe. In July, Ralph Heimlich, our esteemed coordinator, and I did a 10 day, 156 mile canoe trip in New England in a tandem 19.5' Kevlar canoe and had a great time.

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities: Camping but usually associated with kayaking or canoeing.

How often do you paddle in summer? At least once a week. Working weekends does get in the way of paddling with Monday to Friday working folks.

Do any winter paddling? Yes. I enjoy the quieter, less crowded waters you find in the winter.

Go to pool sessions? I used to go to Fairlands roll and teach rolling but haven't been in a couple of years.

Favorite local paddling location: The South River with its myriad of creeks and access to the bay.
Favorite non-local location: Adirondack Park in upper state New York.

Best paddling trip/experience ever and why: In July and August 2010 Marshall Woodruff and I did a three week kayak expedition in the high Canadian arctic, 430 miles north of the Arctic Circle in northern Baffin Island. We took seven months to plan and re-search this trip as it was unsupported and unguided. Absolutely stunning scenery with paddling around pack ice and icebergs, camping on the tundra and arctic beaches, 24 hours of daylight, and keeping a lookout for polar bears made this a unique trip that not many people get to experience.

Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why: I have never felt in danger or afraid in a kayak. I went to sea for 20+ years with the Coast Guard and later as a professional captain. I have experienced some pretty hairy moments with storms, wind, waves and breakdowns. With all that in my experience locker, I approach kayaking as a potentially dangerous activity and have developed the skills, strengths, mindset, and equipment to be prepared for the stuff that can happen.

Bucket list trips: More Arctic paddling or a trip paddling Alaskan waters would be great.

Three things you like most about paddling? The fact that you are self-reliant (or should be); the peacefulness of a manually propelled vessel; the comradery of other likeminded people.

What do you like about CPA? I am a life member of CPA (my membership number is #22 if that tells you anything). I like the community service aspect concerning safety on the water and the availability of trips of all types with other CPA members.

One thing other people find interesting about you: I used to chase (and occasionally catch) drug smugglers for a living.



Dave Isbell in the Adirondacks photo by Judy Billage