

CPA Paddler Profile ~ Mary Larson

Interview by Rick Wiebush

CPA Paddler Profile Name: Mary Larson

Lives in: Mechanicsville, Virginia

Real job: Middle school teacher

Member of a Piracy? Yes - Pirates of the James (POJ)

Paddling Buddies: Jon Phipard, Joe Messier, Dianne Campbell, and the Pirates of the James

Number years paddling: 6

How did you get into sea kayaking: Kayaking had always been on my personal "list," but at the time I put it on the list, I certainly didn't know that sea kayaking was an option. I thought a kayak was a kayak was a kayak. My first kayak was a 12.5-foot boat that I thought was pretty cool...until the first time I paddled with the big dogs. It was a lot of fun, but a lot of work to keep up with those 17-foot - 18-foot boats. I sold the short boat and never looked back.

How did you learn to sea kayak: My first few big trips were outfitted trips with coaching. I joined a local paddling group and always tried to paddle with more experienced paddlers, studying what they did and trying to learn and grow. I try to attend at least one class or symposium a year. I attend SK102 when I can get in, and do pool sessions in the winter.

Any formal training or ACA/BCU certifications: No certifications or stars, but I try to spend at least a few days each year in formal training with coaches or at symposia.

Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking? No

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities? Year-round camping

Boat usually paddled: North Shore Atlantic

Type paddle used: Euro, and I just started paddling with an Aleut paddle and expect that I will be using it more than the Euro.

How often do you paddle in summer? Normal years, 1-2 times per week (including piracy paddles) and at least one camping/paddling trip per month

Do any winter paddling? Yes. I try to paddle year round.

Go to pool sessions? Yes. Williamsburg and Powhatan

Favorite local paddling location (within 1-2 hours of your house): The stretch of bay from Lewisetta, Virginia to Mathews

Favorite non-local location: South: Bahamas, North: Maine Island Trail

Best paddling trip/experience ever and why: This is the hardest question of the whole list! Lots of good choices...from the crystal clear waters of the Bahamas to paddling with Belugas in Quebec or paddling in Scotland during a huge rainstorm (I learned that they don't get lightning there--so paddling in storms is routine) and so many local camping/paddling weekends with good friends. Every day paddling is a good day, it seems!

Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why: Smith Island, Maryland, May, 2011. The weather changed, as it tends to out in the middle of the Bay, and a fellow paddler and I had to take refuge in the marshes of the Martin National Wildlife Refuge. We learned (the hard way) that the area is pretty much a 'black hole' for cell phones and VHF and were unable to let the rest of our group know that we were safe and would have been fine to hunker down for the night and paddle out in the morning. We weren't in any danger, but we had no way to communicate that info to others (we tried flares, radio, you name it--finally had to activate my PLB). They thought we were out in Tangier Sound somewhere in the dark and the wind and the waves. It turned into a rescue operation. Definitely a humbling experience.

Bucket list trips: I have several on my list, but the two that are most important to me are the two that I plan/hope to do to raise awareness and funds for two chronic health issues that are near and dear to my heart. Stay tuned!

- Alaskan section of the Inside Passage from Ketchikan to Skagway (400 miles)
- End-to-end Chesapeake Bay from Havre de Grace to Fisherman's Island (200 miles)

Three things you like most about paddling? Serenity, perspective from the seat of a kayak, the friendships I have developed with the amazing people with whom I choose to paddle.

What do you like about CPA? I love paddling with the CPA for three major reasons: expertise, approachability, and emphasis on safety. The skill level of many of our members is top notch while I am more of a work in progress. However, I strongly believe that if



Mary Larson at Mason Neck, Virginia

photo by Clint Boze

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