

Who's Paddling? Marshall Woodruff

by Dave Biss



Marshall lives in Kensington, MD and has been a member of the CPA since early 2006.

What got you started on paddling? Six years ago after cancer I wanted to take up something serious. When I took up kayaking, I knew that I did not just want to paddle a few times a year. I also knew that it would be too difficult to devote time to lots of different sports like skiing, tennis, etc and be efficient at them all. I wanted to find something I could devote to and get good at. I used to also fence, but that was not an all day sport. Then I found kayaking. Kayaking feels easier on the body than many activities yet offers exploration, allowing you to go anywhere and discover many things. Kayaking allows you to challenge yourself as well. I was pulled in, and my paddling quickly took me from the river to the Bay and then to the Ocean. I like going against the wind, doing distance and being out in nature.

If you could describe your favorite boat what would it be like? I like my Nordkapp. It is fast. It has a small ocean cockpit. The way I fit into this boat make it feel like a part of me. A keyhole cockpit makes me feel lost in the extra space. As much as I like this boat, I would rather a lighter boat now. Maybe something in a graphite design.

Whats your next big kayak adventure? Alaska. I am planning a two week solo kayaking trip to Glacier Bay Alaska. In fact I have been sharpening up my paddling and navigational skills so that I will feel safer. I've already got my ticket and will be away the end of June through the beginning of July. I go from here to Juno then onto Glacier Bay. I have been working on how to pack my gear in my folding kayak, and dealing with the added weight of a fully packed kayak. No easy task there. I will camp the first night out, then go north in the Bay. I will have no definite itinerary. I just want to taste what is there. My main goal is to see whales and icebergs. I want to feel the adventure in a frontier with no one around... except bears. For safety, I am taking a global phone, an EPERB, a radio, and lots of other gear. I'll also let the Coast Guard know where I'll be. I made a camera holder for my paddle last year, so it will be right at my fingertips at all times. Hopefully I will not lose any good shots.

If you had a paddle philosophy, how would you describe it? What I learn, I try to pass on. What I don't know I try to learn. I do consider paddling a dangerous sport; it's possible to get hurt out there. I try to be prepared. But I also want to know that I am enjoying myself out there in nature.

Can you tell me about the series of paddles you have lead with the CPA? Good thing you asked me that! The Kent Island Paddle (KIP) came to me a couple of years ago. I thought; "Here there's an island and I want to paddle around it. Who has done it? Why not have an event with this? But you cannot have an event where you suddenly paddle 35 miles without preparation, so why not have a practice." So I went and took pictures of all the access points, and broke the circumference of the island down to monthly events where we practice and then culminate in a final circle all the way around. Then I presented it to the club. The first session had 20 participants. A great turn out. The last full circle we did late last year had 14 people working to go around the island. That is great! It has certainly been a learning experience for me, if not everyone else involved; organizing events, taking leadership, and experiencing the events as they occur. We learn about the Bay and also about real life conditions. Everyone tries to be as safe possible, but usually nature casts more at us than we expect. To be able to use the skills we learned before in practice to help out when it is needed in a real life event; that is what I think we all want to achieve. We don't know what will happen every time we go paddling. We try to prepare for anything. Practice sharpens your skills more when you get to try out your skills in a real situation when it is unexpected; far greater than if you were practicing in a class or a pool.

When an unexpected event happens unexpectedly, where everyone has to react, we see how good everyone really does react. It is a great feeling to see this in action. On a KIP adventure, all the lessons learned come into action. Heat exhaustion, towing, rescues. You are prepared for real life experiences after going through real experiences like the Kent Island Practice Paddles (KIPP).

Eastern Neck is just a fun trip. It is five paddles, 5 times a year throughout the seasons; a delightful paddle, ten miles around. In the summer it can be open to just about any paddler from experienced paddlers to new paddlers. There are always enough people around on one of these trips to share good advice on techniques as well as just to share friendships. My main goals are to, by the end of the paddle, have everyone get to know each other. On some paddles you don't know anybody. I think a good paddling trip is where you meet a lot of people and where friendships develop. I like that. The joke on one Eastern Neck paddling trip was when we had 35 paddlers, we all got name tags to wear so that we could have an avenue to get to know each other by the end of the trip. The tags were not waterproof. That idea didn't work out the greatest, but everyone was willing to wear a name tag outside and laughed when they fell off the PFDs. I was trying to show how getting to know each other makes for a stronger paddle where we can count on each other in the end, in an emergency. No paddle can be done by one person; it is always a make up of everyone in the group.

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