

Paddler Profile: Meet Dave Walker



Lives in: Atlanta, GA

Real job: Retired

Do you regularly attend a CPA Piracy? No

Number of years paddling? 33

How did you get involved in sea kayaking? I always enjoyed the water. Growing up in Maryland, 30 minutes or so from the Bay, my dad always had a trailered boat. During the summer months, we'd take it out every few weekends, usually to fish but sometimes to just be on the water, see some sights, and enjoy a day on the Bay. Those are some of my fondest childhood memories: Hanging with dad on the boat, sitting on an ice chest eating canned Vienna sausages with crackers waiting for fish to bite, threading bloodworms onto a fishing hook (I'm not sure which of the latter were, in retrospect, more gross), falling to sleep that night still feeling the rocking of the boat. College and grad school took me away from the area and I just sort of forgot about the water. My first job, however, brought me back to the shore, this time in Connecticut where I lived about 2 blocks from Long Island Sound. One day, while browsing magazines at a New Haven news-stand, the cover of a Sea Kayaker magazine caught my eye. I still remember that cover. It was a photo of a kayak resting on a sandy beach in the Outer Banks. As I recall, the sun was low, and the shadows long, everything bathed in rich warm tones of orange and amber light. It was very seductive and I think it was then that I decided to purchase a kayak of my own. Several weeks later, I bought a boat from The Jersey Paddler (a Sealution II), a paddle and PFD, and a pair of wheels to walk it down to the beach, and never looked back.

What boat(s) do you paddle? A Sterling Grand Illusion. I also own a Chatham 17 but haven't paddled it since a got the Sterling boat.

Rudder or skeg? A skeg that jams if you look at it the wrong way.

Type of paddle used? a carved Greenland paddle

Do you do any other paddling than sea kayaking? A couple of months ago, after more than 3 decades of paddling sea kayaks exclusively, I bought a pack boat (basically a canoe with a kayak hull that's meant to be propelled with a double-bladed paddle). It was just delivered from the manufacturer to the retailer and I will be picking it up by the end of January.

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities? Is hammock laying an 'activity?'

How often do you paddle between May and October? It varies. I'd like to get out at least every couple of weeks, but often it's less than that. About half of my paddling anymore is on out-of-town trips.

Do any winter paddling? I used to, but living in Georgia, I'm more inclined to just wait the winter out and focus on other things.

Favorite local paddling location? Local to me is Atlanta GA (a state with no natural lakes), so nothing too exciting. Charleston is really nice but 6 hours away. The Okeefenokee is also a pretty neat place to paddle and in the same state at least, but again, not really a day trip.

Favorite CPA trip you've ever been on and why? I joined in 2021 because I was planning on traveling through the area with my boat and was hoping there might be a trip I could join, but nothing was scheduled during the time I was passing through. I do get up to the area every now and then however, so still hoping that my first CPA trip isn't too long off.

Cooliest paddling trip you've ever been on anywhere and why? Really hard to say. Maybe paddling through caves in Lake Superior's Apostle Islands, or maybe one time in a little cove in Washington state where, before I knew it, I found myself paddling amongst, and in several instances within arms reach of a bunch of baby seals, apparently napping on the water's surface.

Scariest/most dangerous paddling trip/incident and why? Hmm...I'd have to divide that up into imagined danger and actual danger. For the former, I was paddling one day over on the Eastern Shore - not too far from Crisfield. It was a weekday and there wasn't another boat in sight. Towards the end of the day, I started seeing some odd movements on the surface of the water off in the distance, but the way the sun - low and behind me - was reflecting off the water, I thought it was probably some sort of optical illusion. The disturbance grew nearer and nearer however until eventually there was no doubting it was real. I saw what looked for all the world like dozens if not hundreds of sharks (their fins anyway) heading straight for me. I grabbed the paddle shaft tightly, preparing to brace against the onslaught of sharks that would soon be ramming into my hull. I'm not generally prone to hysteria but I was really quite frightened. They grew closer and closer until I was surrounded by what turned out to be a large school of - perhaps you guessed it - cownose rays flipping the tips of their wing up and down as they travelled leisurely along searching for shellfish in the shallow waters.

As for real danger, I was in Connecticut early on in my paddling career (maybe the 2nd or 3rd year) and had taken my boat out on Easter Day for the first trip of the season. I was maybe a half mile offshore when I started to sense that my boat wasn't sitting quite right and wasn't paddling quite normal. After another 20 minutes or so, it became clear that the front end of my boat was sitting low in the water, increasingly so as more time passed. The tide was approaching max ebb (which would have taken me away from the shore towards Block Island Sound and eventually the open Atlantic) and, to make matters worse, the wind was blowing offshore, there were no other boaters in sight, and the water was still icy cold. I paddled as hard as I could against the tide and the wind, trying to

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