

## CPA Paddler Profile ~ Allison Thomson

by Rich Wiebush

**Lives in:** Silver Spring, Maryland

**Real job:** Research Institute at University of MD/climate change related science

**Do you paddle with a CPA Piracy?** No

**Paddling Buddies:** Mike Kunselman, Mark McKeel, Rick Wiebush, Jay Gitomer, and all the sea kayakers who cross over to whitewater

**Number years paddling:** About three

**Boat usually paddled:** NDK Pilgrim or Pyranha Varun

**Type paddle used:** Euro-blade

**How did you get involved in sea kayaking / How did you learn to sea kayak?** I did tourist sea kayaking up in Maine and the guide was from the Chesapeake Bay area and convinced me to try it down here. I went to SK102 and paddled with a few people at different CPA events, then met Mike through other channels, and he introduced me to kayak surfing, ocean and river. That got me to take some rolling classes and other surf/current type classes.

**Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking?** Whitewater!

**Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities?** I regularly do road cycling—both to commute and just for fun and I enjoy hiking and backpacking. I have been known to dabble in cross-country skiing, rock climbing, and open water swimming.

**How often do you paddle in summer?** I try to get out at least twice a week when the weather is good, between April and October.

**Do any winter paddling?** Yes, depending on the temperature – I have a dry suit but it can still be too cold!

**Go to pool sessions?** Yes, I've been to pool sessions all over the area. Fairlands and UMCP are closest, but I also go to Potomac Paddlesports pool sessions and plan to do a series at the Lee Recreation Center again this year.

**Favorite local paddling location within 1-2 hours of your house:** Various spots on the Potomac— anywhere between Great Falls and Little Falls, depending on the river level

**Favorite non-local location:** The San Juan Islands (Washington State). Amazing water, beautiful scenery and great food.

**Best paddling trip/experience ever and why:** Mike Kunselman and I traveled out to the San Juans last spring for a five day currents class with Body Boat Blade. It was a fantastic experience all around. We spent two days playing in Deception Pass where the currents can reach speeds of nine knots. I became known as the whirlpool finder for the class—and even managed to pull off a T-rescue while being swept in a circle. Then we had two days in the standing waves and currents at Cattle Pass, topped off with a one mile crossing against a 5-knot current. I had fun, was challenged, learned a ton, and can't wait to go back.

**Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why:** The time I've been most afraid in my boat was in whitewater—the Lower Youghiogheny. It was my first time running a river other than the Potomac and I was expecting to spend some time upside down but wasn't worried—I felt pretty confident in my roll. I wasn't expecting so many rocks. I flipped on one of the first rapids called Cucumber and hit my head—hard enough that I was later asked if the marks on my helmet were from running it over with a car! I was freaked out enough that I missed my roll a few times and went for a swim. But I recovered enough to make it down the rest of the way, and even enjoy it.

**Bucket list trips:** I want to make the sea kayakers pilgrimage to Wales, paddle out under the Golden Gate and around the headlands in San Francisco, and paddle in the Skookumchuck Narrows.

**Any formal training or ACA/BCU certifications:** BCU 3 star award

**Three things you like most about paddling?** Being on the water in beautiful places, seeing dolphins in the surf, and knowing there is always room to improve and challenge myself.

**One thing other people find interesting about me:** People often appreciate my baking skills.



Allison Thomson on the Easy Pass Trail in the North Cascades National Park *photo by Mike Kunselman*

## Team River Runner Seeks Volunteers

**Wanted:** A few competent paddlers who can help share their knowledge of the sport with about 8-10 Wounded Warriors a week. Pool sessions on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of every month starting in February. I'm looking for some experienced paddlers (ACA or not) who could help me teach these basics in a pool setting so we can prepare individuals for open water boating when the spring comes. Odenton, Md. Contact Jonathan Forte, fortej2@gmail.com. Team River Runner - Ft. Meade / Perry Point VAMC Chapters, <http://www.teamriverrunner.org>.