

CPA Paddler Profiles ~ Catriona Miller

Interview by Rick Wiebush



Catriona Miller paddling on the Potomac River
Photograph by DJ Manalo

Name: Catriona Miller

Lives in: Frederick, Maryland

Real job: Director of Research Initiatives, United States Air Force R. Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center

Member of a Piracy? I work late so it's hard to make it routinely. When I can make it I move around to different piracies. I paddled with Baltimore three times last year.

Paddling Buddies: Reggie, Jim Z, Aht, Gina, Peter

Number years paddling: 11

How did you get involved in kayaking? I rowed crew in high school and loved the calm feeling of being on the water. I wanted to get that feeling back, so I started kayaking.

How did you learn to sea kayak? Somewhat self-taught, reading books, playing around with different techniques and experimenting. I also went to SK 102 twice as a student.

Any formal training or ACA/BCU certifications: I had a couple of lessons with Gordon Brown in Scotland. I also took some of the lessons that Rick Wiebush does for the Baltimore Pirates, and I did CPA Trip Leader training a couple of years ago.

Boat usually paddled: I have about seven boats, but my favorites are a P&H Vela and a Nigel Foster Silhouette.

Type paddle used: I now use a wing paddle. My regular Euro blade created some wrist problems.

Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking? No, not really.

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities? I backpack, bike and ski.

How often do you paddle in summer? About once per week.

Do any winter paddling? Yes, I've gone to Florida during Christmas and New Year's for the past four years.

Go to pool sessions? Yes, Fairlands and University of Maryland

Favorite local paddling location: Rocky Gorge Reservoir

Favorite non-local locations: Maine, the Great Lakes and the Virginia Eastern Shore

Best paddling trip/experience ever and why? The first Maine trip we took. We were near Mt. Desert Island at Otter Point doing rock gardening and going in caves and learning to time the swell. There were tourists taking photos of us. We really didn't know what we were doing, but it was a lot of fun.

Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why? On Memorial Day weekend 2013, several of us were attempting the crossing from Jane's Island to Smith Island in 25-30 knot winds and two to three foot waves. The deck bolt that held my seat up was leaking, which I didn't realize until we decided that it was smarter to turn around and not make the crossing. Once we started going down wind, the waves started washing over my back deck and pretty quickly my cockpit was flooded, at which point even with my skeg all the way down, my kayak would only go at a right angle to the wind. Brian Blankinship put me under tow, and after enough force, he'd yank the nose of my kayak down the face of a wave, and I'd go careening. At this point, I was hard pressed to keep upright in an unstable kayak full of water, was leaning back to try to ensure the kayak didn't do an endo, and was trying very hard not to crash into him. I'd fly by the side of him, yanking him, and then we repeated this scenario again and again till we got out of the wind and could empty my kayak. We ended up making the crossing by ferry, and I was very happy that we decided to turn around.

Bucket list trips: I'd like to do a month in Scotland in September. Also the Broken Island chain in the northwest, Baja, Norway and Alaska.

Three things you like most about paddling? 1) The rhythm – it's relaxing. 2) Going to remote places where no other people are around. 3) Rough water.

What do you like about CPA? Generally, the people in the club. Also, SK 102 is a great event.

One thing other people find interesting about you: They are surprised that I actually find time to sleep between the amount of time I spend at my job and all the other activities that I do.