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WaveLength

MAGAZINE

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SAFE PADDLING is an individual responsibility. We recommend that inexperienced paddlers seek expert instruction and advice about local conditions, have all the required gear and know how to use it. The publishers of this magazine and its contributors are not responsible for how the information in these pages is used by others.

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This issue of WaveLength focuses on the skills and safety aspect of paddling—so important for the enjoyment of a sport that can be both benign and treacherous depending on circumstances and your capability to handle changing conditions, that we keep coming back to it annually.

Probably the single most important word I can think of in terms of safety on the water, no matter what level of skill you possess, is awareness. You need to have a clear and realistic awareness of your ability to handle the conditions and situations you place yourself in, whether it's your first day trip on a seemingly placid lake or a major sea kayaking expedition. And you need to be aware of how your boat and gear will perform in these conditions and situations. The kayak that's sold as a recreational boat with a large cockpit and short waterline may be great for exploring sheltered anchorages, but not at all suitable for transiting open water.

Don't let lack of experience stop you from trying new things, just be aware of potential problems and be prepared with a contingency plan if things don't go according to plan. This might mean being aware that a wind or tide change will make the return trip much harder and longer than getting to your destination, and so you need to take along another water bottle. Or if you're planning to circumnavigate an island instead of your usual paddle along the shoreline, you might need to consult tide and current tables as part of your planning process.

As part of the skills and safety focus, we have included a directory of some of the businesses (mostly on the west coast) that offer lessons and courses year round or seasonally, and some of the paddleests and symposia happening over the next several months that are great opportunities to hone your skills and have fun. There is so much going on wherever people are getting out on waterways in self-propelled craft, that there is sure to be an event or class or course offered close to you. There are also paddling clubs and groups everywhere people paddle (check out the Clubs page on the WaveLength website) that organize outings and training sessions for their members. Take advantage of the generosity of paddling people who always seem willing to share what they know—the more skillful you are and the more you are aware of how to stay safe, the happier you will be when you slip away from land and become part of the marine world.

Diana



photo: WaveLength, Vancouver Island Paddlefest