

Racing for Skills and Confidence

by Dian Weimer



Mark (my paddling partner Leslie's husband) and I loaded a rented Nootka Plus double on the top of his van at Ecomarine Kayaks on Granville Island late on a Friday afternoon in June. Leslie picked up the wing paddles we had rented from Deep Cove Canoe and Kayak Centre, and met Mark and me on Bowen Island. We were trained and psyched up for our first race.

Despite not possessing competitive natures, Leslie and I have completed the Round Bowen Race twice in a double kayak. Preparing for and competing in these races provided a great opportunity to improve our paddling skills. Our first race in June 2002 gave us the greatest one-

day adventure we have had in our years of paddling together.

The Round Bowen Kayak Race is an offshoot of a race that used to include sailboats as well as kayaks. The kayaks kept winning and the logistics of sailboats tacking among racing kayaks prompted Martin Clarke, the owner of Bowen Island Sea Kayaking, to organize a race just for kayaks in 2000. It remains the longest single day race in North America at twenty-two nautical miles around the island. About the same length as a land marathon, it has similar completion times.

When we arrived at Snug Cove on Saturday morning to offload the kayak in preparation for

the 11 a.m. start, there were boats all over the place—ninety or so surf skis and single and double kayaks. Although we had spent many hours training, we were both nervous about actually being able to complete the race. Following a briefing from Martin, we put in and gathered with the other boats in the cove, all jockeying for a position at the start line. When Martin hollered, "GO," this splashing, colorful chaos of boats headed off around the point at the end of the cove, and west along the south shore.

Those in the surf ski and fast kayak classes quickly became tiny specks on the horizon and disappeared from view, but a number of kayaks

*My name is Chad. I am 29 years old.
I love surfing - everything about it.*

*I live the lasting impression
at OceanWest.*

OCEANWEST, a new master-planned oceanfront real estate development in Ucluelet, B.C., which when completed will include a mix of permanent residences and vacation homes, as well as three hotels and a few retail stores. It's one of the few remaining pieces of undeveloped land in the Pacific Rim area of Vancouver Island. Now that it has hit the market, act quickly for premium lot selection.

Live out your dreams today!

www.OCEANWEST.com

call toll free 1-800-600-1718

Judy Gray, Sales Representative

RE/MAX
MID ISLAND REALTY

Each Office Independently Owned & Operated
103 - 1801 Bay Street - Ucluelet, BC, Canada - V0R 3A0



OCEANWEST
Live the Lasting Impression



were still behind us. We paddled steadily, facing a slight breeze and rippled seas. As we approached Cape Roger Curtis, we found ourselves riding large swells. Our Nootka took these in stride and we paddled confidently. As we rounded the light at the cape, one of the rescue boats hailed us.

“The conditions are much worse ahead.”

Well, what were we supposed to do with that piece of information? We could hardly turn around, so we pressed on, knowing that the rescue boat was keeping an eye on us. With wind and tide opposing at a headland, dangerous conditions can quickly arise. Almost immediately, ten-foot waves, mostly coming on in pairs, assailed us. It was a humbling sight to see a wall of water rise up in front of our increasingly insignificant kayak. We paddled hard and rode out the onslaught. Challenging an approaching wave, we were met with another coming at an angle to the right. Leslie turned the rudder to take this second wave straight on and I suddenly found myself airborne in the front cockpit of the boat.

Leslie yelled, “Keep paddling!”

The kayak slammed down on the backside of the wave and a now looming second wave crashed over the bow of the boat, soaking me completely. This episode was repeated several times as we rounded the cape. We passed one of the rescue boats with two surf skis on board in the process of picking up a paddle. I was amazed that any of the surf skis survived these waves. Close by, another dumped kayak waited to be retrieved. Our sense of self-preservation drove us on and we soon reached more reasonable waters in Tunstall Bay.

All along we had been paddling in close proximity to two men in singles, and had passed them both in the wild waters outside, but now greeted one close to us in the bay. We engaged in a little conversation with him about the harrowing conditions we had just experienced, and

as we passed the halfway check-in were jokingly hailed, “You’re not supposed to be socializing. This is a race! Would you like a whiskey?”

If paddlers do not reach the halfway point within three hours of the start, they are asked to withdraw and beach their boats at Tunstall Bay. The time for clocking paddlers at the finish is five and a half hours. Anyone completing the race after that does not have a time recorded. We passed the halfway point after two hours and ten minutes and were buoyed by this as we were now paddling across the north shore of Bowen—very familiar territory for us—with the wind at our back.

Having passed several boats, we were greatly enthused on the last leg. Neither of us was experiencing problems with the wing paddles. We were excited by our performance in our very first race and paddled confidently toward Snug Cove. As we crossed the finish line, the timekeeper called out our time—4:41:10. I hadn’t thought that we would complete this race in less than five hours, but we were awarded the plaque for second place, women’s doubles. The first place finishers, two young women from Bowen Island, were only twenty minutes ahead of us. Our confidence was certainly increased for future paddling challenges. What a great day!

The Bowen Challenge

by Martin Clark

For over 20 years, the Bowen Island Sailing Club had run a successful annual race around the island. Almost from the start, a few kayakers had entered the race as unofficial competitors, and usually they did quite well. So, in 2000 it was decided that the race was too good a thing to be left in the hands of the sailors and the Round Bowen (now the Bowen Challenge) was born.

At 34K, it is a challenging course demanding stamina, technique and good judgment on the water, since, at different times in the race, competitors are with or against both tide and wind. With an average field of 110 paddlers, the race is seen as the premier competition on the west coast and each year, it seems, course records fall. Last year, Heather Nelson of Bellingham knocked two minutes off the women’s time, while a year before, Wes Hammer of Maple Ridge had an amazing time of 2 hours 3 minutes.

A feature of the race is a great post race barbeque and party on the dock. Also, this year, two extra races have been added to be run on the same day (Sunday, June 8th): a relay for OC-1s and 2s as well as a short 8K course.

For details call 1 800 60 KAYAK. [↓](#)

Round Bowen Challenge
Sunday June 8, 2008
 Events for sea kayaks, surfskis & outrigger canoes:
 32km Round Bowen Challenge
 8 km Finisterre Dash
 32km Outrigger Canoe Round Bowen Relay
www.roundbowenchallenge.com
 1-800-60-KAYAK
 Presented by Bowen Island Sea Kayaking
 Advertisement sponsored by www.thinkkayaks.com