NOVEMBER 11, 2015

International Sea Kayak Guide Snubs Registered Maine Guides: American Canoe Association’s Cover-up

By Mary Fairchild (updated 12/02/2015)

This was my favorite play area from my 2011 guided Coastal Maine trip [2011 report].

The sea kayaking community needs, perhaps most of all, to guard against any shift from safety to one of recognition and getting paid.

Known as “Ocean Camp Maine,” my second guided trip to Maine, September 2013, was set up quite differently than I had experienced a few years prior. After the first night’s dinner, Ryan Rushton (head coach) and Haris Subacius (co-leader) had each of us come into the dining room to share our goals for the week privately. As a commercial guest, it is important to know that your guides know what they are doing. I had asked if the Maine guide had arrived. Rushton said we didn’t have one.

It is my understanding that Maine instituted licensing in response to a rise in incidents. The Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors (MASKGI) is a non-profit organization of sea kayak outfitters, guides and instructors. Membership is open to all sea kayak guides and instructors or businesses employing sea kayak guides and instructors operating in Maine. “Guide” means any person who receives any form of remuneration for his services in accompanying or assisting any person in the fields, forests or on the waters or ice within the jurisdiction of the State while hunting, fishing, trapping, boating,
snowmobiling or camping at a primitive camping area. All members must sign and abide by the Code of Ethics and operating guidelines published by the MASKGI.

During the Ocean Camp Maine trip, several students, including the co-leader, were new to the rocky coastal environment of Maine. If you have never paddled a rocky coastline you are a new student to that environment regardless of your skill level as a sea kayaker. Without much experience at sea, it can be very hard to judge the sea state and conditions. One student, new to the environment, was surfed head-first into a rockface cracking the top of her helmet after being pushed off by the lead guide Ryan Rushton.

Rushton is an American Canoe Association (ACA) Coastal Kayak Committee member. He has a “registered guide status” on the International Sea Kayak Guide Association (I.S.K.G.A) which was founded by Jeff Allen in 2013. A Registered Guide at I.S.K.G.A means that, for a fee, he is using the website for advertising purposes only.

I was told that Tom Bergh might be our registered Maine guide as he had been in 2010 for Rushton’s first coastal Maine trip. I met Tom Bergh, of Maine Island Kayak Company (MIKCo), just after that first trip (Trip report here.), at the Sea Kayak Georgia Skills Symposium where I took my first surf class. It was during my Tybee Island surf class that I first became aware of the fact that many whitewater kayakers can really struggle to understand ocean surf: “Many of the students in my class had whitewater backgrounds and were unfamiliar with the surf.” (Tybee Island Sea Kayak Surfing)

On September 23, 2013, I emailed Kelsey Bracewell at the American Canoe Association after consulting with Bonnie Perry. Bonnie Perry invited me to share my Baja incident report during the Ladies of the Lake Sea Kayak Symposium. On the last day of our 7-day kayak expedition two of us made the crossing and the other four had to Mayday in the building gale force wind and building 3 meter seas. By reading incident reports we can become more aware and hopefully avoid the same mistakes.

On November 4th, American Canoe Association (ACA) members Christopher Stec (Chief Operating Officer), Kelsey Bracewell (Safety, Education, Instruction, & Outreach) and Wade Blackwood (Executive Director), moved forward with my information that our group that was illegally led in Maine and that we had also experienced experienced an incident.

On November 15th, Christopher Stec attended the MASKGI (Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors) fall meeting (MASKGI meeting minutes). The ACA would be collaborating with the Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors (MASKGI) to offer ACA training and awards.

The MASKGI 2012 winter meeting notes read: “...The ACA... had been collaborating with the Maine Association of Sea Kayak Guides and Instructors (MASKGI) in an attempt to “offer ACA training and awards”(MASKGI Spring 2012 Meeting). Past MASKGI president, Marc Bourgoin, had provided an overview of the proposal for MASKGI to participate in an ACA L4 Open Water Trip Leader/Guide Pilot Program... discussed... at the Fall, 2011 MASKGI meeting. The three instructors... would teach the course... and a third instructor (who was not revealed at that time). ... it not only offered great educational opportunities for MASKGI members, but it would be a potential revenue-generating activity as well (MASKGI Winter 2012 Meeting).”

On December 1st, Rushton was set up to train in Maine for the April 24th, 2014, Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Certification Workshop (IDW/ICE) and Update
within two months of illegally guiding in Maine. The $850.00 course promoted ACA Coastal Kayak Committee member Ryan Rushton as the “Registered Maine guide” for this event even though he never became a Registered Maine Guide.

On January 10th, 2014, I inquired with the Maine Marine Patrol about Rushton being called a Registered Maine Guide. I had emailed Chris Stec and Kelsey Bracewell on the 8th letting them know that I had noticed that their ACA website had been calling him a Registered Maine guide.

February 20th, 2014, the ACA Coastal Kayak Committee meeting included, Kelsey Bracewell and Ryan Rushton who had been allowed to remain working on “trip leader awards” even after illegally guiding in September: “Ryan Rushton reported to the CKC that his committee, which had been formed to look at the implementation of the L4 and L5 Trip Leader awards. Ryan stated that the subcommittee transitioned from the implementation of the awards to “is there a market for ‘Guide Certification’”? It was the recommendation of the subcommittee to table both the L4 and L5 Trip Leader award proposals, with an eye toward exploring these as ‘Guide Certifications’.” (02202014_Meeting_Minutes+Final)

John Lull, author of Sea Kayaking Safety & Rescue, posts on the Tsunami Ranger’s blog, “I spent a lot of years working with the ACA and helping structure the earlier (more ‘old school’) instructional Coastal Kayak program which was primarily based on teaching people good kayaking skills and safety. The whole idea…was to address the huge influx of new paddlers, providing enough instruction to allow paddlers to get out on the water with at least a basic understanding of safety and enough technique to survive long enough to learn more—“badges”, “levels”, “awards”, “prizes,” etc. had nothing to do with it. That came later and I fought tooth and nail against it...”L1, L2,...L5 (where’s its end, and what does it mean?) system. It’s all way too complex and relatively meaningless because you can’t really evaluate everyone by slotting them into a given ‘level.’ I won’t judge a paddler’s ability based on a badge they received.”(13)

The sea kayaking community needs, perhaps most of all, to guard against any shift from safety to one of recognition and getting paid. The American Canoe Association (ACA) is a large, pervasive organization. It is a member-based nonprofit organization that reserves the right to revoke or suspend a certification for cause when an Instructor/Instructor Trainer/Instructor Trainer Educator’s conduct has the potential to be detrimental to the Association or its reputation. Any illegal action which occurs during the course of the performance of ACA instructional duties will be considered sufficient cause for revocation of all certifications. Safety Education and Instruction Council Policy Manuel—Section “D”

The risks in nonprofits, especially ones where everyone works hard and knows and likes each other, is that small lapses will lead to larger ones until the damage cannot be ignored or contained. The real focus needs to be on doing the right thing. In the public’s mind, and in the law books, the nonprofit’s board of directors is responsible for all the assets of the group—including its reputation in the community.

Maine Incident

Email, 9/23/13, to American Canoe Association’s Kelsey Bracewell(Safety, Education, Instruction & Outreach(SEIC)).

IMG_6541

Email, 11/04/13; American Canoe Association (ACA) members Christopher Stec (Chief Operating Officer), Kelsey Bracewell (SEIC) and Wade Blackwood (Executive Director).
December 1st, 2013, the *ACA Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Certification Workshop (IDW/ICE) and Update* was promoted and was set up to include Ryan Rushton. (click on images to read)

**Maine**

*Level 5: Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayaking Instructor Certification Workshop (IDW/ICE) and Update; Registered Maine Guide Ryan Rushton-Geneva Kayak Center-ACA L5 AOW IT (second from bottom). ACA Coastal Kayak Committee* member Ryan Rushton is the “Registered Maine guide” for this event even though he never became a Registered Maine Guide.

The American Canoe Association posted “Registered Maine Guide Ryan Rushton,” on their website for almost two years; **10/13/2015 date-bottom left corner.** (Update: This November, the ACA has finally removed Ryan Rushton's name as the Registered Maine Guide from the page; 11/17/15).

**Maine**
My 1/10/14 email to the Maine Marine Patrol and Chris Stec and Kelsey Bracewell about Ryan Rushton suddenly being called a Registered Maine Guide.

**Ryan Rushton Not a Maine Guide**

Jim Tibensky was issued a license on September 15th. Ryan Rushton is not a licensed guide in Maine–Maine Marine Patrol.

Jim Tibensky shared on the [Chicago Area Sea Kayakers Blog](http://www.chicagoseakayakers.com), “This September past I went to Maine, took the Maine Guide test, passed it, and planned a nice long kayak tour of Casco Bay.” Although he may never mention it, Jim Tibensky was named the “Paddler of the year in 2007” by the Illinois Paddling Council. Between 1968-1994 Jim won seven state championships, twenty-five Midwest division championships and eight national championships. He was the course designer for two World Cup races, three Champion International Slalom Series, and two National Championship races. In 1996 he officiated as a Scribe at the Atlanta Olympic Games. Tibensky has also led trips to Greenland, the Queen Charlotte Islands, Georgian Bay, the Everglades, Casco Bay Maine, Matagorda Island Texas, Tybee Island, Cumberland Island, Lake Powell and Glacier Bay Alaska. He has participated on two more expeditions to Greenland, one to Glacier Bay, and four trips down the Colorado in the Grand Canyon as well as rivers in Costa Rica and Canada. Since 1998, he has been the head kayak guide for week long sea kayak trips offered through [Omni Youth Services](http://www.omyouthservices.org) of Illinois, a wilderness therapy program that serves the youth and families of Chicago's Northwest suburbs. (12; [Sea Kayaker Magazine](http://www.seakayaker.com))

The ACA Board of Directors is comprised of people with a wide variety of skills, ranging from environmental scientists to legal experts to volunteers. Kelsey Bracwell and Christopher Stec are whitewater paddlers(river) and Wade Blackwood was a whitewater rafter with a “finance background.”

Crunching numbers in order to survive, Wade Blackwood did not initially share why the new location for the American Canoe Association had recently delayed its opening. “The executive director, Wade Blackwood, said that the delay in sharing the news of the new location for the past few years had been due to the economic slump. Blackwood says the ACA’s focus in recent months has been “to position ourselves to survive” until the economy improves. “These are
challenging times for nonprofit organizations and we are excited to have someone with such a strong financial background as Wade Blackwood step in as the Executive Director. Wade and the ACA team are eager to continue the 130 year ACA tradition of making the world a better place to paddle.” — Former Board President, Dr. Kirk Havens

Maine2013

Dumping surf at ledges near Sea Duck Rock location that was meant to de-boat us for practice in 2013 for Ocean Camp Maine.

Skills alone are not a true measure of a paddler’s competence on the water. John Dowd, founding editor of Sea Kayaking Magazine, author of Sea Kayaking: A Manual for Long Distance Touring and a major advocate of kayaking education and safety believes the keys to the healthy survival of the sport are education through experience and the sharing of information. In the article, John Dowd: Life on the Learning Curve, Dowd imparts, “If you think you are an expert, you've got an attitude problem.” While sea kayakers can achieve a degree of competence through the acquisition of skills, he believes attitude and judgment are the real keys to safe paddling. Although both can be taught, they are much harder to assess.

(12)

“Sea kayaking as I know it is roughly 80 percent seamanship skills (weather, assessment, navigation, knowledge of oceanography, reading of tides and currents, group assessment, coastal survival techniques, etc.) and less than 20 percent boat handling skills (turning, going straight, rolls, rescues, etc.).” John Dowd (14)

The plunging waves that we were set up in the picture above are the “bad boys” which occur most often on reefs. The wave stands up, trips over its own feet and falls forward as solid water. If it falls more than a meter it can blow you out of your kayak. If you launch too soon and get in front of the wave you could nose right into the seaward wall of the reef and that would be the end of your ride (and the bow of your boat). Also resulting from taking the wave too soon, is making it onto the reef only to get banged across the exposed rocks where the wave has yet to reach, resulting in considerable damage to the hull of your boat, or if you tip over, to your head, shoulders and torso.

Ocean Camp Maine

Haris Subacius (co-leader): “To get rescues we needed to create rescue situations. To get rescue situations we needed a high impact area. So we found a reef...with two rocks on each side. 9/14/2013.

The waves were steep and when Haris did an unexpected pirouette he tried to patrol over that area, but soon Mark was ejected in the steep surf and shoved right toward Haris. It is important to know that when steep waves close out, and you get stuck sideways in there, you don’t want to have serious features to contend with. Underwater pinnacles and reefs create a maze of different depths in rock gardens.
Ryan Rushton pushes Mark Anderson off the Island where the incident would soon occur. You can see the drop off in this picture where the water becomes deep quickly. Where waves enter a squeezed area and the water is relatively deep, they surge instead of break. A surge can be very powerful when forced through tight passageways in rock gardens. Some surging waves alternate with dumping waves; the smaller waves surge and the larger break. In ocean rock gardens you are usually swimming with your kayak to a safe place where you can reenter the boat.

Although most of the group did not witness the incident, I was able to photograph the incident within the slideshow above.

After being pushed off by Ryan, Sarah was spun round and surfed toward the cliff head first, back, then into the cliff and then rammed between her boat and the cliff about 5 times as the surf came in with a vengeance. Her helmet was cracked down the top. When she managed to float out from under her boat she was then slammed down by a huge tube. Later she told me she did swallow a lot of water. I was glad she remained conscious. Being knocked briefly unconscious on land may not be that big a deal, but in a kayak in the ocean, swirling around upside-down in a rock garden, it's likely the end of your story.

Since 2010, Sarah Hartman and I have had several rough water training courses together. (Level 4 training post; Tybee Island Sea Kayak Surfing Surfing My First Hole at Piers Gorge; Ocean Camp Maine). As I drove out to Maine with Sarah Hartman she shared with me that she still struggled in surf. She planned to take a “beginners rock gardening class” at the Bay of Fundy Symposium which most of our group would attend immediately following our time in Jonesport, Maine. She said that her advanced trips, like Alaska, did not have
much for conditions and after a club trip that included training in Tybee Island with Chris Lockyer earlier in the year, Lockyer had expressed concern.

“At first glance the whitewater in ocean rock gardens looks very similar to a whitewater river. You’ll see waves, aerated rough water, rocks, currents, and swirling chaotic conditions. They share some characteristics, but are actually very different environments.” John Lull (9)

Sea kayakers are being told that it is good practice for the coast if they paddle whitewater rivers, but there are some extreme differences.

“In river running, a pour-over is a river current that flows over a rocky ledge into a hole below. In ocean adventure kayaking, a pour-over is a flat rock or a reef which a wave surges over into calmer water on the shoreward side. River pour-overs are predictable; that is, what you see when you scout is what you get, as the water flow is constant. Ocean pour-overs are less predictable and thus more dangerous, since the waves pulse in a dynamic rhythm....” Eric Soares (8)

In a river the waves are stationary and the water is moving through it as a current, whereas in the ocean, the wave form is moving through the water and the water is moving up and down in a circle as the wave passes through. When you surf a wave in the river, you'll be standing still.

Sarah's helmet.

“The statistics related to whitewater injuries are unreliable, but we do know that among the fatal cases, the mechanism of death tends to be a combination of impact to the head and drowning. The whitewater industry and the people who enjoy these sports need to begin talking about standards for a helmet that could do a better job of preventing such injuries.” Headlines @ Hopkins

Sunny
Sarah Hartman, Mary Fairchild, Mark Anderson, Matt March, and Joe Keller at the guest house. Picture by Peggy Oneal.

The sun came out and Sarah held ice bags on her face. Boat repairs were part and parcel on this trip of mostly employees. When Haris, the co-leader, put Sarah’s cracked helmet in a few pictures it occurred to me—just like a skier with their arm in a cast looks like a risk taker, broken boats and gear can make you look “hardcore.”

“Perhaps it is because I come from the old school of kayaking when the idea was to miss the rocks but I have been a little alarmed at the antics of some ‘new age’ boaters who seem to think that stuffing your boat on the rocks is all part of the fun. ... if you attempt a pour-over and end up stuck on a rock, you’ve screwed up.” Sean Morely (15)

Ocean Camp Maine

Ocean Camp Maine 9/14/2013; Geneva Kayak Center staff Matt March, Mark Anderson, Ryan Rushton (lead guide/owner), Joe Keller, Sara Hartman (owner), and repeat clients Mary Fairchild and Peggy Oneal; Jonesport, Maine.

Rushton posted his reports on his Geneva Kayak Center company website:

1. Geneva Kayak Center Ocean Camp Maine in Review – Geneva Kayak Center
2. Geneva Kayak Center Lessons Learned from Sea Duck Rocks Incident – Geneva Kayak Center

“Certification’s principle function, so far as I can tell, is to generate cash for rapacious bureaucracies...and our favorite pastime shifts from a freedom activity to one of membership in an exclusive club administered by a hierarchy of bureaucrats with an inflated sense of their own importance and competence.” John Dowd (11)

John Dowd is concerned about trends in certifying guides and instructors and he believes that a misplaced confidence frequently develops among those who have been certified to teach or guide, since curriculum content often replaces real experience. Yet even with familiarity, complacency can cause us to understate the present danger and miss things that would have otherwise caught our attention when we were less familiar with the area.

Experienced guides who chose to launch two separate raft trips on the Illinois River in central Oregon elected to run a stretch of the river that includes a Class V section called the Green Wall that can only be run between 900 and 3000 cfs. The guides choose to put in at 13,500 cfs and two people died—both were river guides with a lot of experience. A paddler who was less familiar with the river and chose to stay on shore commented, “When the river has been coming up a foot an hour all night, when its gone from clear to chocolate milk, when there are no more eddies and there are 18” diameter trees going down at 15mph, its
just not a tough decision.” He saw something the guides missed. Laurence Gonzales, in his book “Deep Survival: Who Lives and Who Dies and Why, concludes that the mindset of the guides fatal decision was, “they probably thought, if they thought at all, that it would be okay. They had a lot of experience at running the river, and it had always been okay. Big water, said their emotional systems, equals big fun.” (4)

Liability waivers don’t prevent people from seeking relief when their guides have behaved with gross negligence, which the law defines as “willful and wanton” actions that indicate a high degree of recklessness. This is the failure to use ordinary care (failure to notice a frayed climbing harness, etc.). But being wrong is not the same as being careless. In California, a high school swimmer was coached to dive into a shallow end of a pool resulting in paralyzing the swimmer. A $11.5 million lawsuit was awarded from the school district. If you enhance the natural risk of a physical activity, you can be responsible for that.

Related Material and References

2. Mary Fairchild, Baja Winter Kayak Expedition: Wind, Waves, and Lipstick
4. Ibid., p. 117.
5. Ibid., p. 132.
   Eric Soares, Paddling Pour-Overs in Ocean Rock Gardens Tsunami Rangers; 9/19/11.
15. Mary Fairchild, Geneva Kayak Center and Yorkville: Catching Waves and Whitewater in the Midwest; 1/30/11.
Tidal Forests to Ocean Renewables

By Mary Fairchild

(Rifle Cut) Buffalo Swamp Natural Area/Cathead Creek, a tributary of Georgia’s Altamaha River.

Just as Egypt used slave labor, the channel pictured above (Rifle Cut) was dug out in the 1820s by slaves to shorten the water route to Darien: “Straight as a rifle shot through the cypress swamp and just as narrow.”

“Mary, can you smell that? … it’s sweet and fresh,” Danny Grissette, owner of Altamaha Coastal Tours incited with a deep breath. “You’re right. It’s fresh and not what you’d expect in a swamp,” I added as we paddled deeper into the ancient tidal forest along the Altamaha River.

Paddling between ancient cypress trees in a globally rare tidal forest.

My first time paddling in Georgia was focused solely on ocean paddling. This year, I was re-visiting Cumberland Island before heading up to the Buffalo Swamp Natural Area with Altamaha Coastal Tours.

Whereas my kayaking had been all about technique and speed, now it was all about “an ecologically important place that you need a boat to see” and the pace was purposefully slow....

(Danny Grissette; Altamaha Coastal Tours, Darien Georgia.)

“My, this area was once a rice plantation...,” Danny began describing the plants and the history and I stopped him with, “I always pictured rice in other countries not here.”

The tidewater ecosystem was perfect for the production of rice. Tides flooded the fields twice a day and the fresh water from the river protected the crops from the saltwater. The abandoned irrigation canals of the old rice plantations provide miles of waterways to paddle. Danny was pointing out a peculiar grass next, “That’s bulrush... are you familiar with that?” “Oh, yeah... the story of Moses,” I replied as I began to look around for the alligators... thinking of the Nile now and it’s crocodiles.

Over 130 rare and endangered species of plants and animals, some found no where else, find refuge among the swamps which totally surround and insulate the Altamaha River. The Altamaha River has been compared to the Nile by its impresssive volume which pumps 100,000 gallons of fresh water every second into the sea. Much depends on that amount of water that flows downstream... If there’s too much withdrawal, either due to large municipal wells, or even the cumulative combination of smaller withdrawals, there may be serious problems for the natural vegetation in the area.

Picture was taken 20 yrs. ago—“Amazing to be on this river and having it to
The best advocate to Georgia’s environment is the stewardship of citizens who are suspicious of developers and commercialism. As more projects go to sea for renewable energy sources, questions of how wave and tidal power devices might affect marine life are being discussed along Georgia’s coast. Currently, **Jekyll Island and Tybee Island** are the two locations with the best potential for connecting power from an offshore wind farm to a transmission grid.

Aspen Skiing Company’s Auden Schendler, also a kayaker, reports that he has rethought his position on renewable-energy credits because he believes that **RECs** do little to encourage new clean-energy development. Most ski resorts make money on real estate today not on lift tickets. (7)

“We need to be careful not to just do things when they truly don’t do environmental good, just because we have that message out there... this lacks integrity. If you bring more people into these natural areas you’ll have more traffic. Do we really want urban sprawl in a rural pristine environment? Soon you will also have water quality issues and air-quality issues there...” Auden Schendler

Plans that truly respect the latest scientific research as well as firsthand experience of local residents should be reflected in support from the central government. It will be an interesting and often contentious challenge ahead as scientists, planners, policymakers, and everyday citizens create and enact plans that truly live up to their green claims. We need to allow more time for thorough review by the local communities and by relevant experts.

In Georgia, data collected by **Skidaway Institute of Oceanography** scientists indicates an average wind speed of about 16 mph offshore. That’s enough for the Georgia coast to score a respectable four on the seven-point scale used to rank wind. Modern wind turbines are larger than previous generations, some as tall as small skyscrapers. That height makes them an eyesore to some and consequently a sitting challenge. But Georgia’s gently sloping coast (the continental shelf stretches 80 miles off Georgia) offers an offshore solution. The waters 10-20 miles off the coast are still shallow enough to allow the building of turbines, but that distance would put a wind farm out of view from shore. The U.S. has no offshore wind farms yet. Large wind projects proposed near Cape Cod and Long Island are farther along than is Georgia Tech’s but have met with concerns about ruined views and injuries to birds. (1)

The “**Environmentally Responsible Wind Power Act of 2005,**” proposed to eliminate federal tax incentives for the development of wind power within 20 miles (which is the horizon of a national seashore, a national lakeshore or a national wildlife refuge) of a “highly scenic” area, including all offshore projects. The bill was set up to protect America’s most scenic treasures – national parks, world heritage sites, national lakeshore and seashore sites. The act does not stop construction of the wind power just the federal subsidy of it for giant wind turbines within 20 miles.
This helps us to re-think what we are doing to some of our most pristine coastlines. Freshwater tidal marshes are globally rare and occur along free-flowing coastal rivers and they are vital to sustaining all life on earth. The Altamaha River and its swamps play a vital role in supporting the rich estuary downstream.

Beneath the surface of the Atlantic Ocean exists a thriving ecosystem of fish, invertebrates, seal, and whales. The North Atlantic Ocean has one of the largest plankton blooms in the world every spring. The change in color of water due to plankton bloom can be seen by NASA satellites. Plankton is one of the most important organisms in the ocean. Although usually quite small, anything that drifts in the ocean’s currents is technically considered planktonic. Jellyfish are considered plankton. If plankton where unable to grow for some reason all life in the ocean would suffer.

The bays, estuaries, and salt marsh along our coasts are considered nurseries for commercial fisheries. The larvae of fish, crustaceans and other marine animals, called meroplankton, if they survive, they will grow into nekton or free-swimming organisms.

“Anytime you alter something that’s so important as a habitat and as a source of nutrients for the other commercial fisheries you’re really playing with fire.” Roylan Hadworth Sealy, Sr. Research Assistant Shoals Marine Laboratory of Cornell University (8)

Freighter headed for Savannah off the northern tip of Tybee Island; a roosting area for shorebirds.

On the northern coast of Georgia, the Tybee Island National Wildlife Refuge is a 100-acre home to waterfowl, crustaceans and marine reptiles. The refuge is not open to the public, but many of the wildlife species from the island are seen near the tourist areas on the island.

Local Tybee Island resident watching the trapped cannonball jellyfish during low tide a few weeks ago.

“Jellyfish thrive in all of the world’s oceans, and there is mounting evidence that human activity in coastal zones, like overfishing, is creating conditions that could cause populations to skyrocket.” The Living Sea (6)

The city of Tybee Island said “yes” to wind energy this past February. A windmill farm with its flashing red lights will be seen from the beach at only 6.8 miles Southeast off Tybee Island. Local communities need some time to stop and think about the locations for clean energy. Usually wind turbines are located in wind farms containing 20 or more, but some can exceed 100. At night, the flashing red lights can be seen for 20 miles. Unfortunately, they work best along scenic coastlines and ridge tops... What do you think? Just 7 miles off the coast of Kent, England, is Thanet Wind Farm, the world’s second largest offshore wind farm since February 2012.
We don’t know whether the underwater acoustics of the turbines harm marine life or how fish and marine mammals might interact with the turbine’s rotors. Many marine species rely on the earth’s magnetic fields for migrating and searching for food and we don’t know yet if electromagnetic fields will repel or attract certain species. Wave, tidal, and hydrokinetic power devices, and the cables that bring electricity they generate to shore produce similar electromagnetic fields and there has not been a lot of research on whether or not marine life might be affected.

By 2020, the state of Maine hopes to produce thousands of megawatts of wind power from turbines on and off shore. The National Wildlife Refuge System hopes to monitor the flight and feeding habits of birds and bats to help with the placement of ocean energy projects.

“Seabird productivity periodically declines on some islands, because the herring disappear and chicks starve. We want to understand where birds are foraging, and what’s going on with fish in the Gulf of Maine.” Beth Goettel

This is a picture at low tide (picture above) in Cobscook Bay, Maine, when I was kayaking there last September. Nearby, Ocean Renewable tidal power was just getting settled in. They have described their tidal turbine as “a giant lawnmower.” Cobscook Bay is a semi-enclosed sea that extends almost 200 miles. The highly convoluted shorelines, intense tidal currents, and the cold waters all contribute to the areas diverse marine inhabitants. Local fishermen wonder if the areas will be closed off to fishing around the turbines since no one has answered that yet. Another unanswered question is why wind turbines are placed only 10 miles offshore when the University of Maine experts suggested 20-50’ was less likely to interfere with coastal marine fisheries. (Fisherman’s Voice, 9/11; Vol. 16, No. 9) Noise Problems on Maine’s Fox Islands; YouTube: Offshore Windmills Could Harm Maine Lobster.

When the Maine coastal current meets low pressure zones created by the wind energy extraction around the turbines, seafloor water is pulled to the surface and is partly diverted around the upwelling of the cold water taking the lobster larvae with it.

From the mid-19th century through the late 20th century, more than a third of the San Francisco Bay was filled and often built on. The state and federal governments have spent hundreds of millions of dollars since 1996 on projects to restore tidal wetlands and only 1% has been restored so far. It is difficult and expensive to reverse mistakes.

San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta remain perhaps California’s most important ecological habitats. California’s Dungeness crab, California halibut, and Pacific Salmon fisheries rely on the bay as a nursery. The few remaining salt marshes now represent most of California’s remaining salt marsh, supporting a number of endangered species and providing key ecosystem services such as filtering pollutants and sediments from the rivers.
Estimates of the value of tidal flats have been increasing as scientists understand more about the vital role that tidal flats play in sustaining urban areas as well as marine ecosystems. We have to be stewards of our own resource. We have to look after it and be interested in it. It all depends on how we view things....

I had started “forest gardening” years ago when I had some serious issues with the poison oak on our wooded lot. We don’t have grass to fertilize and cut anymore! I was so impressed with the natural vegetation and trees that, when we purchased our cabin in Wisconsin I dug up any existing grass and filled it in with native plants and trees as well.

Not only is forest gardening much less labor intensive, perennials reseed themselves and the soil enriches itself just like it does in the natural forests with fallen fruit, leaf litter, and other organic matter. I planted clumps of wildflowers in patches of sunlight and researched types of flowers native to my area and planted them. Woodland gardens require relatively low maintenance and falling leaves add to rather than detract from the appearance.

Ocean renewables, which may seem to be an ideal source of non-polluting energy, are appearing to be a much more complicated issue. The debate between ethics and economics, when human activity threatens the existence of species and their habitats, could go on and on.

References

1. Wind Project Picks up Speed, Savannah Morning News; 2012.
2. Severn Barrage, Wikipedia.
3. The Altamaha River Bioreserve, Sherpa Guides; Richard J. Lenz.
7. “Snow Job,” by Elizabeth Hightower; Outside Magazine; Nov. 4, 2008.
8. Rockweed Coalition, Roylan Hadworth Sealy, Sr. Research Assistant, Shoals Marine Laboratory of Cornell University.
9. Marine Ecosystem Dynamics Modeling: Altamaha River
By Mary Fairchild

Tybee Island is located about 15 miles east of Savannah, Georgia; at the end of an eight-mile peninsula and US Highway 80. Fourteen barrier islands make up Georgia's coastline and Tybee is the northeastern-most of these islands. Like all the barrier islands of the area, Tybee has a sandy beach on its eastern shore and a tidal salt marsh on its western shore.

Every 24 hours, the Atlantic coast has two high tides and two low tides. Georgia's high tidal variance is preceded only by Northern Maine. The world's biggest tides are in the Bay of Fundy which rises 45 feet. (2)

Without the pushing tides, Georgia's marshes would disappear. My group only had about an hour before the tide was to be going out. If we took too long we could have gotten stuck in the mud.

The size of the sandy beach at the southern tip of Tybee Island varies considerably in response to tidal changes. Located between Tybee and Little Tybee Island, is the local ebb tidal delta. High tide is more favorable for surfing. Low tide can yield flat conditions, whereas high tide can produce shoulder-high or better surf on the same day. The optimum time to catch surf is 2 hours before high tide and about 1 hour after.

October 27th through the 31st of 2010 was the 9th annual symposium for Sea Kayak Georgia. SKG is owned and operated by Marsha Henson and Ronnie Kemp. The cost for the symposium week included five days of training and participants could choose whether to complete the whole week or attend a la carte each day. They also could decide whether or not to work on skills training courses or BCU courses or a little of both.

I camped out under the stars comfortably with my fly off for the whole weekend. The following week I did wear my drysuit on a couple of mornings, however, as the temperatures dipped down in the 40s for a few nights. One thing for sure, the water was always nice and warm. Although I did spend one day on the beach in my swimsuit, for kayaking, I was wearing neoprene and layers. Even on some of the warmer days the wind swirling around can be chilling especially if you are wet and you don't have some kind of dry top.

My schedule allowed for me to try two a la carte surf courses at the symposium. I really appreciated the energy and enthusiasm of my first coach, Eila(pronounced Ila) Wilkinson. I wish I had come sooner so I could have heard her talk earlier in the week.

Many of the students in my class had whitewater backgrounds and were unfamiliar with the surf. That's Brad in the white--he was Eila's assistant. Not only does he live in the area, but he also works for Sea Kayak Georgia. Eila Wilkensen and Sonja Ewen, along with Nigel Dennis of Sea Kayaking UK are working with the Outdoor Partnership to bring Kayaking into primary
schools on the Isle of Anglesey. Eila did a presentation Wednesday night on her circumnavigation of Ireland.

That's my blue helmet top left. As we paddled parallel to the waves we edged into each wave as it came—the larger the wave the more we edged into it. A kayak is more stable if you are actively paddling it—you have the support of the paddle in the water. We circled and took turns bracing and leaning into the oncoming waves. In the low brace position as you put some weight on your paddle you will get some support as it drags on the back of the wave. In still water you cannot lean this way, but because the wave is pushing you sideways, the paddle acts like a water-ski and you can put a lot of weight on it.

As the wave passes under your boat, ease off the brace, straighten up the boat and resume paddling. The waves want to push you to the beach, but instead of paddling forward with the wave, stop yourself on the wave with backwards strokes and the wave will slip out from underneath you.

1. If you back-paddle as waves lift the back of your boat, they slip right under you.
2. Sitting up straight when you back paddle slows the boat so the waves slip by you faster.
3. If you paddle forward as the waves come, you can ride them.
4. Leaning forward when you're on the wave speeds the boat for a better ride.
5. Use a stern rudder for directional control and support.

On Sunday, I had Intermediate Surf with Tom Bergh and Dale Williams. Tom Bergh founded Maine Island Kayak Company in 1986. He is a Master Maine Sea Kayak Guide, Member of Professional Maine Guides Assn, MASKGI, BCU Coach 4, A4, ACA Open Water. Dale Williams is an ACA Advanced Open Water Coastal Kayak ITE and former BCU Coach Five Aspirant Sea. He is also the current owner of The Outdoor Inn on Tybee Island and founder of Sea Kayak Georgia which is now run by Marsha Henson and Ronnie Kemp.

Surfing: facing the shore, position your kayak 90 degrees to the direction of the waves. Then, to catch one...

1. Paddle strongly as it lifts the back of the boat.
2. Leaning forward helps the boat accelerate to stay on the wave.
3. Use a stern rudder for some directional control and support.

This should schuss you nicely forward. If you end up broaching, the wave will slue you sideways. When you're on a wave, the water under the back of your boat is moving faster than the water under the bow of your boat. Unless the push from behind is dead straight, the boat will slue to one side or the other.

If you imagine a clock face, with your bow as “12”—as long as your bow is between 11 o’clock and 1 o’clock you’ll stay on the wave. But the moment that your bow veers past 11 or 1, your stern rudder won’t keep you straight on the wave. You have only a few seconds to do the following:

1. Get off your stern rudder.
2. Let the boat turn side-to the wave.
3. Edge into the wave and go into a low brace.
This is the exact move you used when waves were shoving you sideways. As the wave passes, straighten up and use sweep strokes to turn back on course.

Prior to this fall, I had only encountered occasional surf on the Great Lakes on my yearly expeditions. Prior to this trip, I did not have a kayak to surf in. We'll see what evolves in the months to come—I have to admit, I've always liked the rough water and Tybee has been a great introduction for me.

Works Cited & Related

1. Barotropic Tides in the South Atlantic Bight
2. Sherpa Guides; Natural Processes of the Georgia Coast
3. Wikipedia: Tybee Island