



Alaska Sea Kayaking Symposium

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AKSKS Core Lecture Trip Planning & Safety

The following questions will help you plan and organize any sea kayaking expedition, overnight or day paddle. Many of the questions listed below will probably lead you to numerous other questions and hopefully more answers. By planning ahead you will be prepared and therefore be able to enjoy your trip more.

Remember your “6 P’s” = Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance

What do I want to do? What are my goals?

- 1) “Smell the Roses” – toodle around, drinking coffee, sleep in, relax, get away from everything – No specific goal in mind but hanging out.
- 2) “To Reach the Summit” – a goal oriented trip with a specific destination and route in mind of the planner. Other goals: hard core birding (identify 30 new species), fishing for salmon/halibut from the kayak (fishing), paddling around Knight Island (destination, circumnavigation), kayak surfing (skills), from Bellingham WA to Anchorage, AK (the miles and actual time paddling).

Why do I want to go? What are my needs and desires?

Understanding your personal goals and needs is important. Your thoughts need to be communicated carefully and clearly to fellow participants. Everyone in the group should be aware of the reasons for going paddling. There are a lot of examples of not-so-great-trips. Poor communication and not understanding each other’s expectations are usually the cause for the friction. With good communication, flexibility and a positive attitude most differences can be worked out.

With whom do I want to go?

Go with people who have similar interests.

Spend time together planning and prepping prior to the trip.

Delegate responsibilities for the trip: food, equipment, charts permits, first aid kit, emergency plan/contact.

Are there any medical concerns among the group?

How long can everyone be out?

What are the paddling backgrounds of all the participants?

Have you camped with them before?

How many do you want in your group?

Where do we want to go?

- 1) Specific destinations like Montague Island, Holgate Fjord, the Lofoten Islands in Norway or mirror lake.
- 2) Loose destinations; no particular place in mind, wherever we end up type-of attitude, maybe we should see where the currents will take us....

How far do we want to paddle?

An average paddling day in good conditions is around 6 – 15 nautical miles. It's possible to paddle 30 miles in a day but it is usually not that much fun after 20 miles. In good conditions most intermediate paddlers will go 2 – 4 miles per hour.

How many miles per day do we want to go if we are out for a week?

What are our chances of turning around?

Can we charter out or in? What is a charter boat going to cost?

Do we have doubles and/or singles in our group?

What is the shoreline like?

Once you have decided on your destination, you need to start looking at maps and charts.

What maps and charts do we need?

Do we need permits?

What kinds of hazards can we expect? Reefs, points, crossings, traffic, surf, storms, beaches, kelp, marine mammals, ice, glaciers, commercial fishing openings, hunting season, strong winds, extreme currents.....

What's the camping like?

Will we be able to find fresh water?

Cobble beach versus sand beach, what will our landings look like?

Are the beaches protected or exposed?

Will there be bear-hangs or food wires available?

Is it a popular spot?

Beach camping or forest camping?

What are the tides like?

Are there any particular spots of interest along our planned route?

Hot springs, bird rookeries, marine mammal haul outs, salmon streams, hiking trails, historical marks, villages, glaciers, ice cream stores....

Should we write a Passage/Float Plan?

Yes. It is a good idea for you to leave a written plan with a person you trust. This plan can be used as an Emergency reaction plan. If your group runs into trouble or doesn't show up on time you will know that there is someone who knows where you intended to go. What's that person's "panic time"?

A written tentative plan per day works well on short trips. On longer expeditions you might have to simply give the broader picture of your planned route.

- Dates of the trip, name of the members, name and numbers of charts you are using
- Drop-off time and location, pick-up time and location, charter company, phone numbers, alternative pick-up sites
- High and low tide times during your time out
- Destination for each day
- Route description (inside or outside islands, through the channel or not, around the whole island or backtrack...)
- Potential hazards you anticipate along the route, where and when you might encounter them, plan of action
- Pull-outs along the way, sandy beaches or rocky, gravel bars
- Spots of interest along your route
- Places where you can make a call or get help if needed along your paddle

What equipment should we bring?

The amount and type of equipment you bring depends on what type of trip you are planning. Though knowledge of your gear is just as important on a few hour day trip as it is on an extended expedition. Proper prior planning prevents...

- Personal Gear – proper clothing, wool or synthetic warm layers, good rain gear, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, right foot wear, sunglasses, toiletries
- Group/tent gear/cooking gear – fuel, matches, lighters, tents, tarps, stoves books, utensils, fishing gear, knives, filet board, cutting board, grill, coffee sock, thermos
- Safety gear – PFDs, signal devices, correct charts/map, EPIRB, VHF marine radio, spare paddle, flares, tow rope, sling, extra dry clothes, signal mirror, common sense, repair kits, spare batteries, flashlight, paddlefloat, rescue bag...
- Boating gear – pump, sponges, spayskirt, seasock, paddles, chart case....
- Doubles or Singles?

Does everyone know how to use the equipment? Test new stuff with all members coming along on the trip. Does someone have to buy new equipment for the trip? Is someone borrowing gear? What shape is the gear in? When was the gear used last?

How much is this trip going to cost?

Do we all pitch in equally? Is someone in the group providing much more equipment or time to our trip? Does someone have to buy a lot of new gear? How much do the tickets cost? What if we break some equipment? Who picks up the tab? Have you compared rental cost at different stores?

Do we need permits and Visas?

If you are planning a trip to a foreign country you probably need some kind of visa to enter. Be aware of custom regulations – call the Embassy for the country you plan to visit and ask for visas, permits and customs regulations.

How are we going to get there? What kind of transportation is needed?

Transporting sea kayaks on airlines is very expensive unless you have a folding boat.

Who has a roof rack?

What are some of the more dependable charter vessels? How much do they charge per mile or do they charge by drop-off and pick-up location.

What are we going to eat? What kind of food should we bring?

Food is important!!! The food you bring can make or break a trip. Make sure everyone is involved in the food planning.

Menu's for each day can be made up.

Each person presents a menu prior to leaving, and then is responsible for bringing the food for that meal or day.

Each member is in charge for a day, or week, or month...

ON longer expeditions the food is often planned out by pounds of food per person and day. 1.75 pounds/person/day is average on trips in the Pacific Northwest, Alaska and Scandinavia in the summer. (2 pounds/person/day for cold rainy trips.) In warmer climates like Baja California, one usually eats 1.5 pounds/person/day but need to drink more. Water can be difficult to come by and most paddlers in these regions carry 5 – 7 gallons of water with them.

Who eats what? Are there any allergies? What does your food repair kit look like? Be sure to have 1) enough, 2) a variety, 3) food that everyone will eat.

Eleven Elements of Food Planning

- 1) Palatability/variety
- 2) Cost
- 3) Availability (can you get it where you plan to shop?)
- 4) Ease in handling & packing
- 5) Ease in preparation
- 6) Spoilage

- 7) Wild Supplements
- 8) Calories, energy content
- 9) Nutritional balance
- 10) Weight
- 11) Purpose of trip

How much Good Judgement shall we bring?

Bring lots of it! You can never have enough.

What are we going to do if we have an emergency?

Call 911!! Not an option!

Don't count on your VHF radio, EPIRB or flares. VHF radios are often line of site only, the batteries might be dead, your flares might be soggy, or there might not be any boats in the area to see them.

Know your First Aid, have a back up plan, be prepared! Do you have extra food with you? Are you prepared to stay out a night even if you only planned a few hours of cruising?

- 1) Never go to your limit where you have no extra energy to deal with the worst nightmare. What if your camp got washed away by a tsunami? What if there is no beach to land on after you have been paddling for 15 hours? Can you help someone with injuries?
- 2) Never count on a rescue, be self sufficient.
- 3) Have Advanced First Aid training including CPR.
- 4) Leave your float plan to a level headed experienced wilderness traveler in town. This person should know when to start to worry. "If you have not heard from us by day so-and-so you should call the Harbor Master and see if we have checked in. Ask about the weather, too. By day so-and-so if the weather has been good and nobody has heard from us, please notify the Coast Guard or....."
- 5) Realize that once you called for help, people will risk their lives to "save" you, whether you need it or not.
- 6) Know your resources. The fishermen might be willing to help, but their season is short and a trip into town for "your sprained ankle" might cost them thousands of dollars in revenue. What are the ferry schedules in the area? Where is the nearest Coast Guard asset?

"When the sea is calm the careless sailor takes his ease." -Ovid-

"If you wish to learn how to pray, go to sea." – Spanish proverb-

"A wait on shore beats a swim with the fishes."

I rather sit on shore wishing I was to sea, then being on shore wishing I was on shore."

Courtesy of Lena Conlan, Crossing Latitudes, Inc.