

freshwater seas bordered by an incredible variety of landforms and wildlife habitats not found on smaller lakes. Sea kayaks offer us the opportunity to discover this vast and beautiful wilderness that is right at our doorstep.

My sea kayak does not replace my canoe, but rather compliments it. I still love the marshes and lakes, the rivers, the rapids and falls of the Precambrian Shield; and when I want to enjoy this familiar and cherished wilderness, my old and battered canoe will continue to be a faithful companion. But now I know, and am coming to cherish, another kind of wilderness as well, one of big seas and open water. And when I want to explore this new wilderness, my sea kayak will be a fresh but equally trusted companion.

There are many designs, but each is a sea kayak: a silent, responsible craft, with clean lines and one of the most basic forms of propulsion there is: a boat that impels the lone paddler into reverent harmony with the sea and enables the explorer to probe where no other vessel can reach, so silent the photographer or hunter can slip up to wild animals without ever disturbing them, and so rugged and indomitable it can ride out gales on the open sea.

John Dowd



TWO SEA KAYAKING MANUALS

SEA KAYAKING

Author: John Dowd
Publisher: Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver

GUIDE TO SEA KAYAKING

Author: Derek Hutchinson
Publisher: Pacific Search Press, Seattle

Reviewed by: Sandy Richardson

These two sea kayaking manuals cover essentially the same material: equipment, technique, seamanship, self-rescue, navigation, weather, reading the sea, hazards, storm procedures, camping, first aid, survival, and expedition planning. Both assume a minimum level of experience on the part of the reader, and hence do not describe all the basic techniques and manoeuvres. (The level of experience assumed is quite basic; anyone familiar with basic canoeing strokes will feel quite at home.)

John Dowd and Derek Hutchinson are, however, very different people. Hutchinson is a pro-certification kayak instructor from Britain; Dowd is an anti-certification paddler, and the editor of *Sea Kayaker* magazine, from Vancouver. And their different approaches to sea kayaking are clearly evident in their books.

Hutchinson's *Guide to Sea Kayaking* is the standard how-to manual. It presents its information in the detailed and prescriptive, if somewhat dry, manner of a physical education instructor who views sea kayaking as essentially a physical activity. What makes this book particularly useful to newcomers to sea kayaking, is the excellent use made of line drawings. Nearly every technical manoeuvre is well illustrated with a series of step-by-step diagrams.

Hutchinson, however, describes a number of techniques which can most charitably be described as questionable. His "side drop" for launching from a ledge or jetty (where the kayaker enters his boat and drops 1.5 or 1.8 m to the water) and "seal landing" (where the kayaker lets a large swell deposit him on top of a rocky point, then quickly exits and carries away his boat before the next swell washes him away) are but two examples that stretch the credulity of even the novice reader.

Stranger still is his rescue procedure where a capsized kayaker "keeps calm and bangs hard and quickly on his upturned hull to attract attention." The paddler thus attracted comes over and assists the boat so that the

capsized paddler can grab the bow to help right himself. Having paddled a few times in large waves, I cannot imagine anyone even hearing the banging to begin with, let alone being able to bring his boat into position to help in time; especially in conditions wild enough to cause an upset in the first place.

The inclusion of techniques such as these in *Guide to Sea Kayaking* is unfortunate. They are so questionable that they tend to undermine Hutchinson's credibility in other places where his advice is probably quite sound.

Dowd's *Sea Kayaking*, on the other hand, is the classic guide to long-distance kayak touring, and deservedly so. (It is probably worth noting that a revised edition of this book is in the works and should be coming out soon.) It is practical and thorough in its treatment of the subject, and in its approach is clearly the work of an individualist who sees sea kayaking as essentially a wilderness pursuit.

Dowd is contemptuous of orthodoxy, and in place of Hutchinson's prescriptive instructions, this book offers the reader helpful suggestions and general principles for dealing with various paddling situations. His approach is one of common sense; he dismisses many of the questionable techniques of Hutchinson and others as "perfectly hopeless under real conditions." His own suggested techniques are much more realistic, and generally are ones he has personally tested on trips; where they are not, he tries to make it clear that he is guessing.

Sea Kayaking is also the more literal and readable book. Manuals, as a general rule it seems, tend to make rather dry reading. The author who can impart information in a style that is fun to read is rare; Colin Fletcher, Harry Roberts, James Davidson and John Ruge, and Bill Mason are among the few who have succeeded in the wilderness field. John Dowd should be added to this list. His *Sea Kayaking* is written with a style and sense of humor that makes reading fun.

We have then, in John Dowd's *Sea Kayaking* and Derek Hutchinson's *Guide to Sea Kayaking*, two quite different books on the same topic. Both contain a wealth of useful and interesting information that will be appreciated by novice and more experienced sea kayakers alike. Their different approaches probably both have merit, and different readers will no doubt prefer one or the other depending upon their own outlooks. If I were to select one of these manual it would be Dowd's; it not only contains much sound and practical advice, it is also fun to read. Others might prefer Hutchinson's more didactic approach. Or, one could do as I have ultimately done: purchase a copy of both