



wake



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President's Message

by Dawn Groves



I haven't paddled much this fall. Initially, it was painful to turn down kayaking opportunities. I whined to my husband, gazed at the boats, and swore to paddle next week ... and the next and the next. Eventually it became easy to put on the back burner. I just couldn't fit it into my busy schedule.

Last week, I went for a bike ride with two friends. It was a perfect autumn morning. The sun was bright with a crisp breeze. We rode along Boulevard Park and the bay glistened silver. I stopped the bike. "Oh my God," I said, "We should be paddling!" What stunned me was that I didn't think to do it earlier.

That's how easy it is to lose the very thing that nourishes our spirits. It happens with all kinds of stuff. If you're doing it regularly, it's natural. If you aren't, it leaves your world.

This season, I may need to continue to put my passion on the back burner. I've always been a committed winter paddler, but I'm taking on more work and my schedule is less flexible. This includes releasing the presidency—a bittersweet decision. Being president has been an honor and a pleasure. WAKE has done a lot for me, and I'm glad to have been able to give back. I attribute a lot of my good feelings about it to the board: Tara McDonald, Donna VanderGriend, Kathy McGee, Ed Alm, Dan Barrett, and Roger Lamb. What a dedicated, delightful group. Thanks, folks—and see you on the water.

Speaking of the WAKE board, there are other changes. We're saying goodbye to Donna and Roger and welcoming Gene Davis, Kathleen Murphy, and Eric Moe. Kathy is releasing the newsletter position. I will remain to support the next president.

So the more things change, the more they stay the same. Here it is, almost December, and the annual meeting is upon us. I hope you'll join me at the meeting—which is really just a big party. WAKE had a good year. Next year will be even better. Let's celebrate!

WAKE presents ...

Dan Henderson and Greg Dutton

Efficient Kayak Forward Stroke

November 20th, 2007

Get answers to these and many other questions: What really makes a kayak go forward? What is the story on the high and low angle? How can I paddle and not get so tired? How can I sustain my paddling for longer periods of time?

Bellingham Library ♦ Doors open at 7p.m. ♦ Meeting starts 7:30 p.m.



Kayaker of the Month

Chris Mitchell: When You Teach It, You Own It

by Dawn Groves

Chris Mitchell is a favorite kayaking coach in WAKE. An early member of our club, he learned about paddling as many of the kayaking patriarchs did—by experience and chutzpah. He's now an internationally recognized coach and expert in ocean kayaking, a trainer of trainers. His certifications include American Canoe Association (ACA) Coastal Kayak Advanced Open Water Instructor, ACA Coastal Kayak Instructor Trainer, British Canoe Union (BCU) 5-star award, BCU Coach 4-star sea, ACA Board of Directors, and much more. He was an on-water instructor and lecturer at the Coast Kayak Symposium on Thetis Island in British Columbia. From 2000 through 2004 he was the executive director of the Trade Association of Paddlesports and producer of the West Coast Sea Kayak Symposium in Port Townsend, Wash. He currently owns and operates Secondwind Sports, a kayaking school in Long Beach, Wash. He's also a longtime member and supporter of WAKE.

Dawn: Chris you've been in kayaking for years. How did you get started?

Chris: A friend of mine and I bought an Easy Rider decked touring canoe in the early 70s. That got me paddling but it wasn't much fun. So then I paddled a few dou-

bles and concluded that a single kayak would be best. But I've been involved in waters sports forever. I was in scuba diving for years.

Dawn: Where was this?

Chris: I worked in a dive shop in high school and later started my own in Bellevue in 1972. I was always around Puget Sound in the water.

Dawn: Did you close the shop because you got tired of diving?

Chris: Pretty much. I was teaching every weekend. I taught two night classes a week plus I was working at the shop all the time. My partner bought me out in 1972 and I was just as happy to go back to college. Eventually I moved to Skagit Valley around 1988 after living in Australia for four years.

Dawn: You lived in Australia?

Chris: Yeah. Tasmania.

Dawn: Did you develop an accent?

Chris: People said I did. A lot of Australian phrases still come to my mind. Stuff like, "How'd you like the beer?" I got asked that a lot. (He laughs.) The beer in Australia was phenomenal. Coming back to Budweiser-land was really difficult.

Dawn: What did you do in Australia?

Chris: I built houses. In Australia you needed a certification to do anything. I had to become an apprentice to pound nails. I went through a four-year college in carpentry and cabinet making and was the oldest apprentice they'd ever had. (He laughs.)

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Holiday Dinner Party

Friday, December 7 at 6:30 p.m.
Squalicum Yacht Club

Join us for this annual WAKE tradition. We vote on our new board members, celebrate the past year, honor special paddlers, talk about the future, participate in a silent auction (excellent items, trainings, and trips donated from favorite outfitters and kayak-oriented businesses), natter with friends, and feast on scrumptious holiday fare. This year we're going to have some excellent door prizes as well.

You'll supply the tasty eats and we'll handle everything else. Last names starting with A through H should bring a dessert, I through Q should provide a main dish of some sort, and R through Z should bring salads or finger foods. Everyone: BYOB.

Volunteer Now!

Join the WAKE board. The following positions are open and waiting for you:

- ◆President
- ◆Communications Coordinator
- ◆Newsletter Editor
- ◆Trip Coordinator
- ◆Training Coordinator
- ◆Demo Day Manager
- ◆Registrar

January Meeting Update!

Our January meeting date has changed! The library has bumped us from our traditional third Tuesday and rescheduled us a week early on Tuesday, January 8th.

Our speaker will be author and uber-coach Nigel Foster. Nigel is an international kayak teacher and has become an icon of modern sea kayaking. He teaches simple, functional techniques devoid of dogma. His students gain a greater understanding of not only how a kayak works but also how to maximize their effectiveness as paddlers. He has designed several kayaks and instructs in Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Spain, the U.K., Canada, and the U.S. Nigel presently lives in Seattle and can often be found instructing classes in the famous passes of the San Juan Islands. Mark your calendars:

January Meeting
Nigel Foster
Tuesday, January 8th
(not January 15th)

Chris Mitchell, continued from p.1

I was married to a Tasmanian woman. We moved there so she could be with her family. After four years we were sick of it and moved back here.

Dawn: So you got into kayaks after you came back to the United States?

Chris: Yes. I built a Pygmy kayak back when Pygmy had only one model. It was my first boat. I lived in Skagit Valley when I built it and paddled every single spare moment for several years.

Dawn: In your Pygmy?

Chris: Yep. Right up until 1996. Then I started a retail store for Eddyline in Anacortes. I managed it for one season and then went to work as their general manager of manufacturing. I did that, plus handled all the instruction for the retail store.

Back in those days we didn't think much about skills. It was more important to see what you could fit into your boat for camping. I joined WAKE and basically went camping every weekend. That's kinda what everybody was into. People would just get together and decide to visit Saddlebag or whatever. We had a newsletter, but compared to today's newsletter it was marginal. So it was a word-of-mouth thing.

In 1995 Gene Davis and I went to Canada to train under Mercia Sixta as instructors. Then we both spent 10 years instructing at the Coast Kayak Symposium on Thetis Island. Mercia organized it. She was the first woman in North America to have a BCU certification. She was trained by Derek Hutchinson.

Anyway, each year we went up to Thetis Island and each year more people from Bellingham attended it and coached there. The Thetis Island symposiums stopped two years ago.

Dawn: When people went to Thetis Island, did they go to get certified?

Chris: There wasn't a formal certification process back then. Mercia wasn't part of the modern BCU. She worked as an instructor and retail manager for Western Canoe. The Thetis Island Symposium was a revenue stream for the Sea Kayak Association of BC. Mercia taught instructors who, in turn, coached at Thetis. At that time, the BCU had no presence on the West Coast so the only certification was through the ACA. Gene Davis, Dave Peebles, John Janney, and I brought an ACA instructor up

from California and we all participated in an instructor development workshop. This was part of the ACA certification process. In 1996 I became an ACA certified Coastal Kayak Instructor. Back then they had only one category of instructor; one level. Today there are many levels of certification depending on what level you want to teach. The ACA has evolved a lot.

All the certification process really says is that on that given day with this given set of eyes, you met the minimum standards. It doesn't say you're a great coach, it just says that you met the level on that day. It's like the bar exam. You pass the bar but that doesn't necessarily make you a good lawyer. I've always thought that your effectiveness comes from your students. You want them to get everything you know, plus what they discover on their own. Unlike the things we may learn, the paddling skill set is primarily reactive. You paddle dynamic conditions where you really don't have the luxury to think, "Hmm, now what's the most effective way to avoid that rock?" That takes muscle memory, good experience, and reinforcement. I think a mistake people make is they take a class and walk away saying, "Okay I can do that now." But they've only been exposed to information. They don't walk away with ownership of the skills or knowledge.

Dawn: Were you involved in the development and changes in the ACA?

Chris: Yes, I was on the Board of Directors for two years. I've been off the board now for year, but am currently a member of the Safety Education and Instruction Committee (SEIC) and the newly formed Surf Kayak Committee. Once you become certified as a Coastal Kayaking instructor, automatically you can participate in the curriculum committee for coastal kayaking. So I've had opportunities to paddle with a lot of really great people.



The ACA is a big organization, the largest of its kind in the world. It's been going 125 years and now has some 65,000 members.

For the rest of the Chris Mitchell interview, go to www.wakekayak.org

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