

San Diego Kayak Club

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A monthly newsletter for the San Diego Paddling Community



The club members and their expert instructors (left to right) Robert Henry, Marie Humphrey, Dan Bedore, coach Bob Campbell, Anne Ainsworth, coach Tom Long, Steve Bogdan, Janice Takade, Scott Ostrem, Kevin Donohue, Olympic gold medalist Joe Jacobi, Gilbert Siegel.
Photo by Christine Marr

Skills and Drills . . .

SDKC Members Attend Gold Medal Camp

By SDKC member Scott Ostrem

Nine members of the San Diego Kayak Club attended the Gold Medal Kayak Camp organized by the Kern River Alliance (KRA) on the weekend of March 31 – April 3. Included in the group were Anne Ainsworth, Dan Bedore, Steve Bogdan, Kevin Donohue, Robert Henry, Marie Humphrey, Scott Ostrem, Gilbert Siegel, and Janice Takade. The camp was held on the Rio Bravo run of the Lower Kern, and most attendees (including the San Diego contingent) stayed at the Rio Bravo Resort.

The instructors at the camp included Bob Campbell, a coach with the US National and US Olympic teams; Joe Jacobi, a member of the team that won the first and only US Olympic Gold Medal in kayaking (C-2 with Scott Strausbaugh at Barcelona in 1992); Tom Long, the founder of the Cascade Raft and Kayak School and one of the foremost innovators of paddling instruction for children; and Chad Long, Tom's son and a former member of the US National Team in C-2 with his brother, Kenneth. The camp was organized and coordinated by Chris Nutthal with KRA. Chris did a fantastic job handling all of the small details so that the rest of us did not have to worry about anything except how to stick that next bow draw.

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Gold Medal Camp

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The rooms at the resort were large and clean, with plenty of space for communal living. Robert, Anne, Marie, Janice, and I shared one while the weekend bachelors shared the adjoining room. Both of our rooms had balconies where, if a couple of minor obstacles could be overcome, gear could be hung to dry at night. The first, easily solved, was the presence of a small sign on the balcony asking that you not hang your gear “over the fence” to dry. After several minutes of consideration and debate, the group decided that “over the fence” did not include “hanging from the inside of the fence but not visible to the outside world.” This would have worked fine, and did on the first two nights, if not for the second obstacle.

On the third night we returned from our evening meal to find our patio and gear soaking wet, and our boats full of water. We were somewhat confused and decided to have a beer or two and think about it. Several minutes later, during

a serious discussion about the corrosive qualities of pigeon poop, we were startled by a sound at the balcony window. We opened the curtains to find a cascade of water being deflected off of the bottom of the balcony above us. After careful observation, we determined the cause of the deluge to be the fountain of water erupting from the broken sprinkler head just outside of our room.

We were somewhat amused by the irony of the situation. We were also puzzled by the irrefutable conclusion that this was not the first time that evening that it had occurred. I don't have a lawn in my condo, so I have no use for a sprinkler system. If I had one, I can't imagine why I would want to water more than once in any day. After the eruption had subsided, we drained our boats, wrung out our gear, called the front desk of the resort to report the problem, and returned to our intellectual pursuits.

In hindsight, it's lucky we remembered to close the door. Not twenty minutes

later it happened again. To make a very long-winded story short, there were two additional incidents that evening, separated by increasingly animated discussions with the front desk, before whatever seismic pressure was causing the eruptions was finally exhausted. Looking back on it, I can't help wondering if that sign was really a warning. I don't think so, but you never know.

Geysers aside, the amenities at the resort were outstanding. There was a swimming pool to practice rolls (unheated due to the power crisis, but not unbearable), weight room, tennis courts (who had time for tennis?), bar and grille (Sierra Nevada on tap), free continental breakfast after the first morning, and a lovely duck pond-cum-polo grounds. Lunch and dinner were both included in the price of the camp. Lunches were catered by the resort and served during a break between the morning and afternoon sessions when we would get together back at the resort and talk about what we had done that morning, and about plans for

the rest of the day. There was a choice of one of five entrees each day. Consensus feedback was that the food was good, but not great. It was very nice to have it waiting as soon as we returned from the river.

On one evening we had marginal pizza at the resort while we watched videos of past slalom competitions with commentary from Bob and Joe, and listened to stories about their Olympic experiences. We watched the video of Joe and Scott's gold medal run from the 1992 Olympics. Joe mentioned that he had named his daughter, born only 12 days ago, after the city outside of Barcelona where the race had taken place. It was a very pretty Spanish name, I don't recall what it was. From the back of the room, Kevin Donohue observed, “she's lucky it wasn't in Dusseldorf.”

Joe had his Gold Medal with him and passed it around the room. When it got to me I was struck by how well worn it was. There were nicks where it looked like it had been dropped, the ribbon was wrinkled and slightly faded, and there were several patches on the medal where the gold finish had been rubbed away. This was definitely not an object locked away in a trophy case somewhere. This was a living and working symbol that he uses primarily to impress upon school children, to which he speaks frequently, what can be achieved with hard work and dedication. He estimates that 25,000 people have held the medal since 1992. Having never seen a gold medal or met a medalist, I can't say if Joe's attitude is rare or not. I do think that it says a great deal about his character.



Kevin Donohue practices his vertical paddle stroke on an upstream gate. Ninety percent of instruction is done on flat water.

Photo by Scott Ostrem

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On two nights we ventured forth from the resort into the community to dine. One night we went to a Chinese restaurant run by one of Chris' friends, who happened to be Korean. I only mention this because somehow the conversation got around to Kim chi. When Chris found out that I had never tried it he insisted that his friend made the best around and would whip us up a special batch. The combination of garlic, vinegar, spices, and cabbage was delicious. I'm not sure my roommates appreciated it as much later that night. The rest of the food was delicious as well. We must have had five or six dishes. All of them were excellent. Another night we dined at a private home of another of Chris's friends. The menu included salad, lasagna (veggie and meat), and several varieties of bread. The meal was topped off with warm apple pie and French vanilla ice cream. Seconds, anyone? Thirds? Does that spray skirt still fit, Robert?

I guess I should spend a few words talking about the reason for the trip. The Gold Medal Camp is run by the Kern River Alliance. Proceeds from the camp are used to fund a variety of programs aimed at promoting paddling among the youth of the area. The camp was based around learning techniques used in slalom racing, and the instruction took place primarily on one of two different sets of slalom gates, but it was not strictly a "slalom camp". The skills we learned can be applied to any kind of paddling, and were more about precision paddling and putting your boat where you wanted it to be and less about learning how to race slalom.

There were about thirty people at the camp, and it

impressed me that half of them were repeat customers, and several had been every year that the camp has been held, four or five years. We were divided into two groups based not so much on paddling experience as experience with slalom techniques. I think the groups were cleanly divided among those who had and those who had not previously attended the camp. All of us except Gilbert were in the second group. Gilbert already knew most (all?) of the people in his group, so I'm sure he was not lonely without us.

There were two courses where instruction occurred. Our group's introduction to slalom paddling came on the moving water gates, while Gilbert and the big kids went to the whitewater gates. All kidding aside, the moving water was challenging enough with the slalom gates thrown into the equation. While there were no rapids, the water was moving at a brisk pace, and there were well-defined eddy lines that made life just a little more interesting. I never thought I could have so much fun on Class I



Scott Ostrem (left) appreciated spending time with expert coaches such as Olympic gold medalist Joe Jacobi
Photo by Marie Humphrey

water. I plan on going back as often as I can.

The only downside to this course was the 250 yards or so we had to walk from the parking lot to the water. That would not have been so bad except for the 50 to 60 foot hill we had to go down and, of course, back up. As many of you know, my wife Janice had knee surgery several weeks ago. She was still in considerable pain during the camp, and had trouble getting in and out of her

boat. Needless to say, she would not be carrying the boat up and down the hill 16 times in four days. Any guesses who got to help? I'm not complaining, just observing. I am thankful that she was able to tough it out, despite all the pain she was in. Carrying the boat was a (relatively) small price to pay for her company. The group took a vote, and we have decided to contract with a local team of Sherpas for next year's camp.



Janice Takade ferries across the moving whitewater to the slalom gates. Photo by Scott Ostrem.

Gold Medal Camp

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We spent most of our time on the moving water course. While concentrating mostly on one or two gates at a time, we worked on a number of specific skills such as pivot turns, upstream ferries, negotiating gates in reverse, upstream gates with a carving turn, and upstream gates with a bow draw. After we had practiced the specific skills, the challenge was to put them together in combination while negotiating a course made up of the gates we had already practiced one at a time. As you might imagine, the more gates you included in the mix, the more difficult it became. We learned that the move that you make in one place can dramatically affect your ability, both positively and negatively, to make the next move and the move after that. We spent a lot of time talking about the importance of having a plan for running the course, and about thinking more about what you want your boat to do and where you want it to be.

In addition to being enormously gifted paddlers, I cannot state strongly enough what an extraordinary teacher each of our four instructors was. I heard this sentiment echoed among many of the attendees. Although the ratio of students to instructors was relatively high (8 to 1), I felt like I got a great deal of personal attention. After every run that I made one of the instructors would comment on something that I had done well or something I could do better next time. One of the highlights (for me, at least) was the morning that the instructors videotaped each of us doing a complete run through the moving water course. During lunchtime, we watched each run and the coaches offered comments. It was a different experience for me to watch myself paddle. I remembered doing some things during the run that I was not quite sure of (a couple of unnecessary strokes here and there). Seeing it on video really reinforced for me that it is very easy to make paddling look hard, and very hard to make it look easy.

Our group did get to visit the whitewater gates on two occasions. While the rapids could be only generously described as Class III, once again the presence of the gates

put a whole new spice into the mix. It was more challenging than I expected to ferry into the current with enough precision to accomplish a clean turn and negotiate a few gates downriver. It was also the first whitewater experience for at least two members of our group including our own Dan Bedore. Although Dan is an accomplished surf and polo paddler, this camp was his first introduction to river paddling. In his first experience on whitewater, Dan was several times able to negotiate every gate on the whitewater course, including the gate at the top of the rapid, which many people had trouble with.

Marie Humphrey and Anne Ainsworth did great on this course, as well. I think that both of them were a little nervous about running the rapid the first time, as the waves were pretty big and the water a little shallow. They both cruised through without a hitch. When the instructors asked us if we wanted to run it again, I'm sure that Anne's hand was one of the first raised. One of the unusual things we did on this course was to run it in tandem, with the second paddler following as closely behind the first as possible. I thought it interesting that, for me anyway, it was harder to be the first paddler than the second.

In addition to all of the on-water instruction, the coaches were very generous with their time back at the resort. Twice after the afternoon sessions, Tom conducted roll clinics for anyone who was interested. The emphasis was on learning a number of different rolls, including front and back deck hand rolls, C-to-C rolls and Tom's favorite, sculling up without rolling. During the lunch break one day Chad tried to teach a few of us some rodeo moves, specifically flat water cartwheeling. I don't think anyone got a fully vertical cartwheel, but Steve did a bunch of the less-than-vertical variety. We had a morning session with Tom on nutrition, one with Tom and Bob on stretching, and an afternoon class in the weight room with Joe.

Our own Robert Henry and Steve Bogdan also conducted an on the water class on the finer points of kayak polo that was enjoyed by Bob and Tom, and several of the other camp attendees. The pool was too small so we had to play in the duck pond, which was fine with everyone except the ducks. The live ones mostly stayed out of the



Robert Henry (left) in his whitewater boat and Gilbert Siegel (right) in his slalom boat both use the bow draw stroke to maneuver through the gates.

Photos by Scott Ostrem

Gold Medal Camp

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way. The decoys were anchored, so there wasn't much we could do about them. One decoy was particularly annoying because it was right in the middle of the course. Luckily it already had a hole in it so that when the boater-who-shall-remain-nameless ran it down it sank pretty quickly.

Bob, in particular, was excited by the experience of playing polo for the first time. There was some preliminary discussion about the possibility of creating a polo-specific program at some point down the road. I think Tom was a ringer. Either that or he is the fiercest competitor in the world. Or maybe a little of both. We could not get a goal past him. He was blocking shots with the blade of the paddle, the shaft of the paddle, even his head.

Our weekend concluded on the fourth afternoon with a timed race down the moving water slalom gates. We were able to put together all of the skills that we had learned to run a fairly challenging course. Everyone in the group had two runs, and I think everyone was able to hit all of the 11 or 12 gates. Joe obviously finished first, followed by two of the members of the repeat class, Gary Valle and Alex Izmailov. After the race we went our separate ways, exchanging e-mail addresses with our new friends and promising to meet again at the class next year. All in all it was a wonderful weekend. Good company, comfortable accommodations, superior instruction, and a great value to top it off. I highly recommend next year's class to anyone who is interested in improving their precision boating. I'm sure there will be more than a few repeat customers from this year's group.



Steve Bogdan practices cartwheels during a special lesson with Chad Long Photo by Marie Humphrey

Classified Ads

Kevlar Sealution purchased in June 1997. Used extremely little by a very timid person. Has been sitting in garage for last few years. \$2200. It is gold with red and black trim. Some extras but they would be priced separately. Contact Ann Powell at 949-661-7587 or elizabethapowell@home.com

Dagger Crossfire blue and white, great whitewater river runner. Excellent condition, never hit a rock. Sprayskirt included. Discounted to \$375. Contact Mary Palmer at eaglesoft@compuserve.com or phone 858-259-1766.

Lotus Designs Lola Type III PFD's. One Blue and One Yellow, size Large/XLarge. Both in excellent condition. \$40 each. Contact Dallas at 619-423-6224 or dallast@meinet.cc

Wavesport Frankenstien blue, black and white, whitewater boat. Great for beginners looking for a very forgiving boat. \$450 OBO. Contact Amanda Washburn at awashbur@pacbell.net or phone 619-758-9564 or 619-807-9564.

Wilderness Systems Kaos sit-on-top, great for surfing. Only in the water three times. Comes with thigh and back strap and helmet. Contact Leonard Baron at 760-510-9260.

Wavesport Z, black & blue, used very little in surf only, \$600, obo. **Wilderness System Echo**, Kevlar tandem in mint condition. Clear hull, black deck, red trim. \$3000, obo. Contact Udo Wald at 619-865-1430 or udowald@earthlink.net

Want to Buy: 1) Used lightweight sea kayak. Boat must weigh no more than 50 lbs and be in good operating condition. Aesthetics not important. 2) Used kayak wheels. Contact Mike at 858-549-3396 or michael.dick@excite.com.

Kayaks Want to Buy: One double kayak (like Necky Tofino), one sit on top (like Scrambler XT) and one trailer that can carry 2-4 kayaks, or can be modified to carry 2-4 kayaks. Contact Mike at (619) 993-4914 or mikerakowski@home.com

Want to Buy: One or two sets of Hully Rollers. If anyone wants to clean the garage early, let me know. Contact Tom Camp at tomcamp@compuserve.com or 619-447-3806.

Kayak Wanted: Used Wavesport Godzilla, contact Dick Press at 619-442-6868 or rupress@home.com