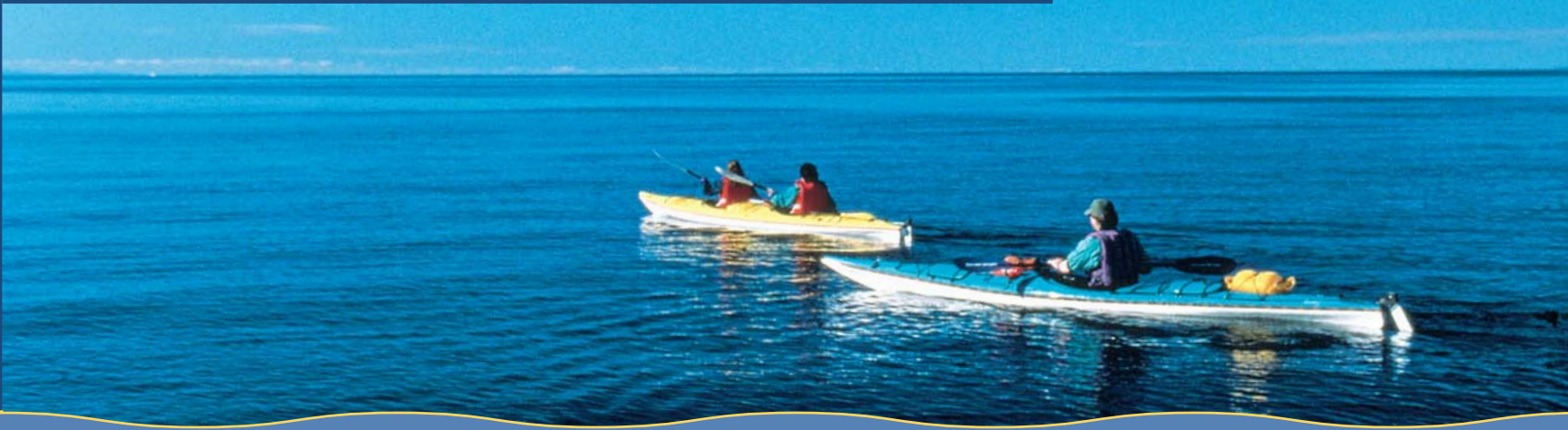


Sea kayaking safety guide



Fédération
québécoise
du canot
et du kayak



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada
Coast Guard

Pêches et Océans
Canada
Garde côtière



SEARCH
AND
RESCUE



RECHERCHE
ET
SAUVETAGE



Saguenay-St. Lawrence
MARINE PARK

Canada

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⁽¹⁾ Sea kayaking safety guide, 1999 Edition, Montréal

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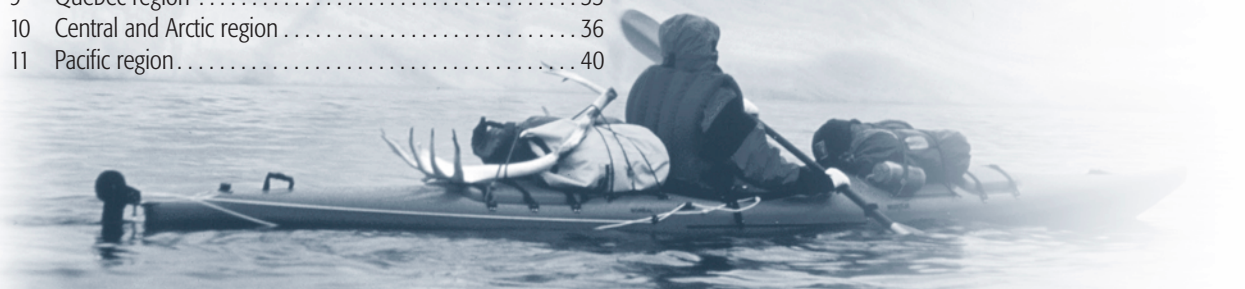
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INTRODUCTION

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
John Masefield (1878-1967)

One Sunday morning in July, the phone rang at our sea kayaking outfitter's shop. "Hello" the caller said, "This is the Canadian Coast Guard speaking. We've received a report that six kayaks, identified as belonging to your company, are currently drifting up stream-upwards of the Grande-Pointe¹. What should we do?"



KIM CROSBY, KAYAKBC.COM

We soon traced this back to a small group of friends that had rented the kayaks the day before for a weekend excursion. Evidently, the group had landed without mooring their kayaks and, surprised by a 20 foot tide, had to watch their kayaks drift upstream. Having wanted to save the 40 dollars required for renting a VHF radio from us, the head of the group had told us before setting out "I know the route very well. Nothing will happen". With no boats and no telephone, at the foot of inaccessible cliffs, the group had no means to turn for help that morning. Thanks to the vigilance of shoreline residents, the Coast Guard was able to return the kayaks one hour later to the somewhat wretched group.

Is this an isolated incidence? No. The Canadian Coast Guard helps many dozen pleasure kayakers annually. Often, many of them do not even have a PFD² or other required equipment. In essence, each kayaker is obliged to have one PFD on board and they are advised to wear them.

Sometimes, a journey begun in bright sunlight is challenged by quickly densifying fog. This may well inhibit you from seeing the bow of your own kayak. Or, at two or three kilometre's distance, a squall strikes, creating waves of up to two metres in height within

¹ True story, yet fictitious name

² PFD - Personal Floatation Device

only a few minutes. Started off in bathing suits, you hadn't thought to bring warm clothes and you now risk getting hypothermia. These types of incidents always have two causes: lack of knowledge of the terrain and the sport, and poor judgment.

A sport that is becoming more and more popular, sea kayaking is an excellent type of boating that allows you to learn and understand the ocean to enjoy great lakes, to experience wildlife and flora, to see regions from a different perspective, and to unwind in nature. Canada, the largest country in the world and bordered by three oceans, offers a multitude of possibilities for sea kayaking.

Sea kayaking is not inherently dangerous. However, to keep safe and to avoid accidents, it requires a sound knowledge of the environment and of the sport in addition to a good attitude. The ocean and great waters present risks that you are well advised to familiarize yourself with before proceeding. How high is the tide at a certain location? What is the speed of the current? The force of the wind? And what effect do all of these factors have on kayaking? If you are having difficulty answering these questions, this brochure is for you.

This brochure aims to sensitize you to the inherent difficulties of the sport and to their associated risks. These challenges can only be truly learned through training and experience. If you have neither, we strongly recommend starting off with a qualified guide. Qualified guides, if they are members of accredited associations, abide to the specific regulations relating to equipment, training and conduct. Finally, be wary of crooked or unknowledgeable outfitters who try to convince you that their kayaks are perfectly safe. Take the time to locate shops that are acknowledged by a competent association.

This brochure is comprised of five sections. In the first you will learn of the equipment and the kayak. The second section introduces you to the main challenges inherent to marine environments. The third section is a very brief overview of all of Canada, the chosen regions of which correspond to the various waterways of the country. In the fourth and fifth section, finally, you will find plenty of advice for preparing a safe trip.

And, remember the two pillars of safety: to understand and to anticipate!