

# QSKC Trip Report

Gold Coast Seaway – Feb 18 2017

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On Saturday the 18th of February, I had my first official paddle with the Qld Sea Kayak Club as a new member. I already knew quite a number of them, as retail customers or from other paddles I have done with the club on symposiums, but finally I am real member too. We met on the corner of Burrows Street and Marine Parade at Biggera Waters for a paddle out to sea. I was greeted by Mark & Tony who shouted out to me while I was still driving around. They were pointing to the last good parking spot and guided me in. What a service!

There were 8 of us in total, so a nicely sized group. After a quick welcome and a briefing we cleared the decks and donned our helmets, then paddled out via the rocks on the inlet. A beautiful sea turtle swam next to my kayak and popped its head up, then immediately ducked back down. We hooked a left (N) to make the paddle back easier since we had NE winds and were promptly invited to perform a kayak roll once out to sea proper. After the perfect example from trip leader Mark, a few paddlers volunteered. I was quietly sitting it out until I got *the nod*. This was only the second time I had paddled my new secondhand kayak, so I had only rolled it once before, close to shore in knee-deep, flat water. I mumbled something about that and then capsized because I couldn't really refuse in front of my new friends. Hooray, I came back up nicely and received a standing ovation. Well, Mark clapped at least.

The plan was to get through the surf and land on the beach where we would have a chat and then do some practice moves in the surf. There were a lot of enthusiastic jet ski guys zooming around on their crazy little machines, catching air when they hit a big waves full on, then landing with a huge slam. We paddled until we were out of their way and stopped before we would reach a batch of keen surfers tea bagging in the ocean, waiting for that perfect wave. Compared to the other water users, our feelings were probably more like "Please, let the waves be kind", rather than "Wahoo, there's a big one!!".

One by one we were sent off towards the beach where a bunch of unstoppable waves were heading too. Mark and Tony assessed they were between 0.5-1m in height, with 5-6 seconds in between each wave. This meant the conditions were deemed okay for the group grading and paddler ability. The idea was to paddle in after the last big one in the set, try not to surf the waves in but time it right, avoiding all the turmoil and brace if needed until the waves ran out of power and the sand appeared. Tony went first and demonstrated how it was done perfectly. He then became the guy with the paddle on the beach, our beacon of safety.

It is great sitting behind the breakers to observe everyone paddle off to the beach. It is like watching TV, seeing who makes it unscathed or seeing if it will all go pear-shaped and the kayaker getting pushed over so you can guess if they will roll up or not and go for a swim. You promise to mirror the ones that make it without a hitch, you cheer when someone capsizes, rolls up and carries on, you sympathise with the ones who capsize and swim in and hope that won't be you.

Watching is great...until it is your turn. Then it all looks different. The waves are suddenly bigger, there are more of them, they are faster and it is clear they don't give a damn about you being there because they will swallow you up and spit you out. Yes, you see the land crew and the guy with the paddle vertically in the air to indicate where you should land, which is ideally & exactly & right in front of them. And yes, you are aiming for that spot, but before you know it you find yourself bracing like a madman, bouncing around on top of the whitewash of that big 1meter mother that crashed on top of you. Your plan is gone when you don't anticipate the sudden loss of power and capsize in a split second. Immediately, you are getting dragged around upside down, without any sort of control, to who-knows-where and all you can do is trying to hold on to that paddle come what may. Pretty soon you feel the drag dissipating, and that's when you have the chance to put that paddle you managed to

safe in the right position to attempt a roll. Bang! you are up, but immediately get slammed by another one, down you go once more. Try again, hooray you are up. Now, where am I? Where is the beach? While you are trying to figure that out, someone has already grabbed the bow of the kayak and all you have to do is jump out on the ocean side and carry the kayak back to the guy with the paddle and the perfect landing spot. Time to relax while watching the next paddler do battle with the sea. It is just as much fun as sitting at the back, behind the breakers, but with a better view knowing you had a go and made it.

After some explanations, advice and a practical demonstration, the group got sent out one by one a few times to practice getting off the beach and paddling through the breaking waves. We tried surfing backwards and using a forward stroke to control the direction of the kayak. We practised timing strokes to get closer to or further away from waves. We tried bracing to prevent us from capsizing and we practised rolling in the surf when we stuffed up. It was challenging and fun at the same time. Tony demonstrated surfing backwards very well until he caught a wave that propelled him on a high-speed angle straight into the path of Kay who was paddling out through the surf. They had been miles apart, Kay on the far left and Tony on the far right, but all of a sudden it was like watching two airplane dots on a screen getting closer and closer and closer still. In absence of a wave traffic controller, Tony capsized about ten meters and probably less than 2 seconds away from impact, thereby miraculously diverting the inevitable. Till this day, we believe he did that on purpose and we will all endeavour to mirror this move should the occasion arise, whether as target or missile.

On the last paddle out before heading back, the instructions were to paddle out and, for those who wanted, capsize intentionally just before the last wave break. That way, we could all get a sense of how it feels to be upside down in a wave and roll up. I watched everybody do exactly that until all but Mark and I were still on the beach and then I set off. I spotted the perfect wave and capsized at the perfect moment. I tried to pull off four perfect rolls with my head up, all of which strangely enough failed. After the first failed roll I felt surprised, after the second one I felt miffed, after the third one I was getting impatient, on the fourth one I made an extra effort to set up nicely and when that failed I felt like giving up. I pulled my deck and reluctantly came out. Instead of letting go of my boat and swim to shore, I was now determined to get back in the kayak. I tried but did not get on the back deck as easily as I had expected. I tried again with more success but then spotted my drink bottle, which had been stored behind my seat, drifting away. I thought I'd better go after it. I used the hardly ever used 'sideways' paddle stroke whilst laying sideways over the cockpit of the kayak and slowly made ground. It was a great drink bottle rescue. Then I spotted my sunnies on a retainer floating around on the other side of the boat and rescued them too. Without any more distractions and without a paddle float because I had forgotten to bring one, I tried once more to get back in my kayak and managed a cowboy position across the deck. The cockpit was full of water, which was slushing around and making the kayak unstable. I realised this but kept going regardless. When I tried to shovel forwards and was just about to the drop into the cockpit, I capsized again. By now I was finally coming to my senses, but only because I couldn't execute my stupid plan. I let go of the kayak, watched it spearing off in the direction of the beach at great speed and swam to shore still holding my paddle.

Mark was standing on the beach with my drink bottle and sunnies in hand (how did they get there?). I told him I was surprised how quickly I got tired. He explained I was also getting closer and closer to the massive rock wall that used to be hundreds of meters away. I hadn't been aware of at all. Mark made sure I was okay and that I had a rest before pushing me back to where I came from. Tired and still trying to analyse my actions, I joined the group who were so bored they were paddling around in circles like fish swimming in a fishbowl. Tony told me he had been trying to shout and point for me to let go of the kayak and swim to shore (which was exactly what we were advised to do in this scenario before we set off) but he was too far away behind the breakers and I was not listening or looking at anything anyway. Although I was not panicked and felt perfectly fine whilst trying to rescue myself, I sure hope I will do things differently next time. I am grateful for the experience so I can be more alert about the surroundings in future, stay safe by getting away from the kayak (read: dangerous missile in waves/surf zone) and conserve my energy by swimming back.

Mark was the last one left on the beach and eventually joined us after the biggest wave of the century (it was huge, really, absolutely enormous) smashed him so hard that he capsized and came out of his kayak not long

after setting off. He went back to the beach and something seemed wrong with his kayak. James put his surf skills to great use and paddled back to assist Mark. Together they carried out an emergency repair on the beach. The rudder of Mark's kayak had fallen off on impact. Tony and Mark had made radio contact, so we knew the situation was in hand. In the meantime, I was paddling around in circles with the other fish.

Once we were all together again it was time to head back. We returned to the inlet, then crossed the highway of speedboats, tinnies, young couples with abs on jet skis and some very glamorous looking yachts, to get to calmer waters. We pulled into a little corner where I performed a roll to mend my broken heart and mucked around with various techniques with the help of Tony. Some of us also had a go at the art of sculling and I now have a few more tips given to me by Tony & co to practice with.

On another note, if you ever wonder how my hair looks so shiny and wonderful after all that salt and sand, try spraying on a little bit of diluted conditioner followed by a quick brush with a comb (always start at the bottom for easier detangling and less damage) after you have cleaned your kayak. Haha :). This is a serious tip, much better than the one where you should be humming when you are practising rolling to stop the spontaneous flow of nose water running out when you are asleep or mowing the lawn a day later.

Thanks to the paddlers in the group and especially our trip leader Mark for a well organised trip and an exciting morning on the water. I'll see everyone on another paddle very soon :).

Bye,

Marjon