

Bay Campus Paddle and Potluck

Trip Report by Katherine Imbrie
Photos by Jon Sharlin

So there it was on the [RICKA Sea Kayak message board](#): "12/2 paddle from URI Bay Campus, 10:30 a.m. launch. Brenda R."

Just the previous month, in October, I had bought my first "real" sea kayak, a Cetus LV 17.5 at an end-of-season sale price, expecting it would sit in the garage till next summer. Then in November, I had bought my first paddling suit, a Tropos with a neoprene neck, after learning the hard way that latex neck gaskets are not for me. I'd figured that the suit would allow me to get out on the water earlier next spring than I would otherwise. Hung it in the closet with the tags still on.



Heading out

Now here's Brenda's post, kind of a challenge to see if I really meant business with this new gear. I'd done only two paddles with the new boat, the second in some pretty stiff seas off of Conimicut in November (which caused me to buy the paddling suit). I had paddled once in August with Brenda leading, so I knew her to be a person who would take every precaution to assure the safety of everyone on her trip, especially a newbie like me.

So down to URI I went on that Saturday morning in December, meeting 11 others on the stony beach at the base of the steep South Ferry hill for my first real winter



Carleen – RICKA Sea Kayak Chair

paddle in my first real sea kayak. Boy, did I feel like one of the big kids now!

After introductions and instructions from Brenda, we took to the water and headed south towards the entrance to the Narrow River in Narragansett. The tide was going out, the air temperature was heading quickly upward toward 45 degrees, the water temperature was in the low 50s, and the wind and swell were virtually nil. Really, it might have been a day in June, but still I felt like the real deal in my Tropos suit and pogies for sure.

So many helpful tips and kind words from everyone! I felt absolutely bathed in support, absorbing all the new information like a sea sponge. The water was so unusually calm that it was lake-like, allowing even little me to nose in among sharp rocks that normally would be churning with sea swell and backwash. On one of these passages, Kam was the first to notice a Snowy Owl perched right above us and sitting very still watching us for several minutes before lifting off like a spirit into the gray sky.



Snowy Owl on the rocks

Arriving at the entrance to Narrow River, we saw a little more swirly current action. Carleen warned me that hitting a sandbar can be worse than hitting a rock. So Brenda and Tim led me to the left, avoiding the current that others were already playing in, surfing into the beach like sea otters.

The 12 of us in our dry suits and billowing ponchos must have looked like space aliens to the people casually strolling to the end of Narragansett Beach. I hadn't brought anything to eat, but everyone else shared what they had, and we had a festive picnic there of hot coffee, almonds and energy bars. I went off to pee and was glad that Carleen had made me exchange the men's dry suit that I'd first bought for a women's version with a zippered flap in the back.



A break on the beach

On the way back to URI with the tide, the ocean flattened out even more, becoming glass calm. "It's never this way!" said many, and I knew that this must be a really tame trip for them, although for me as a first-timer, it was tailor made.

After landing on the stony beach and loading our kayaks onto our cars, I followed Carleen to pick up some coffee and food, and from there over to Brenda and Tim's warm Kingston home, all decorated for Christmas, for a pot luck dinner with my new friends.

It could not have been a better initiation to winter paddling, hopefully the first of many more to come. Thanks to all, and to RICKA, for this wonderful experience.