



A GOOD CAMP SITE ON AN OLD RAISED LAZY BED

Surviving your first camp -

How did the environment survive your visit?

WATCHING THE SUN GO DOWN, KEEPING WARM AND SHARING STORIES ROUND A CAMP FIRE, WAKING UP TO THE FLAP OF THE TENT AND BIRD CALLS, WATCHING THE SUN COME UP, HAVING A PUFFIN HOP ONTO YOUR FOOT AND FINALLY, REALLY GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL, THESE ARE SOME OF THE INTENSE EXPERIENCES THAT WILD CAMPING FROM A SEA KAYAK OFFERS. IN GENERAL, SEA KAYAKING IS A PRETTY ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SPORT, WE LEAVE NO WORN PATHS AND EROSION LIKE HILL WALKERS AND MOST WILD LIFE (IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS ARE PUPPING SEALS AND RAFTS OF YOUNG BIRDS AT SEA) DOES NOT SEE OUR APPROACH BY KAYAK TO BE A MAJOR THREAT. HOWEVER, WHEN WE LAND AND PARTICULARLY WHEN WE CAMP, THERE IS MUCH POTENTIAL TO HARM THE ENVIRONMENT, EVEN IF UNINTENTIONALLY...

Camp sites are the most fragile parts of the sea kayaker's environment and in any area there are relatively few of them. As sea kayaking is currently enjoying a boom, the pressure on camp sites is increasing. Recent publications have given grid references for campsites and this has exacerbated the problem. Some authors of articles and websites do not give exact locations of camp sites for this very reason. Finding a really great site yourself is part of the joy of sea kayaking!

During summer 2005, I have been saddened to find piles of faeces and toilet tissue (why is it always pink?) and a burn polluted by porridge at a site in the Sound of Arisaig.

I found faeces in an ancient monastery in the Garvellachs; the grass in the burial ground was burnt by disposable barbecues and the sparkling spring, described by Haswell-Smith in the Scottish Islands as

being "overgrown with watercress" was choked with burnt rice.

On Lunga in the Treshnish Isles, amongst the squashed eggs of shore nesting gulls, there were piles of faeces topped with (pink) toilet tissue and piles of scrapings of burnt food from cooking pots.

Lastly, on remote Boreray, in the Outer Hebrides, there were faeces in every corner of the black-houses of the abandoned settlement. A large fire had been built on the machair and an attempt had been made to stop it spreading by surrounding it with stones, stones removed from the nearby ruined church. In a carbon copy of the camping technique of those on the Garvellachs, disposable barbecues had burned the machair, but this time the over-cooked meat had simply been abandoned on the grass.

I have no idea if sea kayakers were involved in any

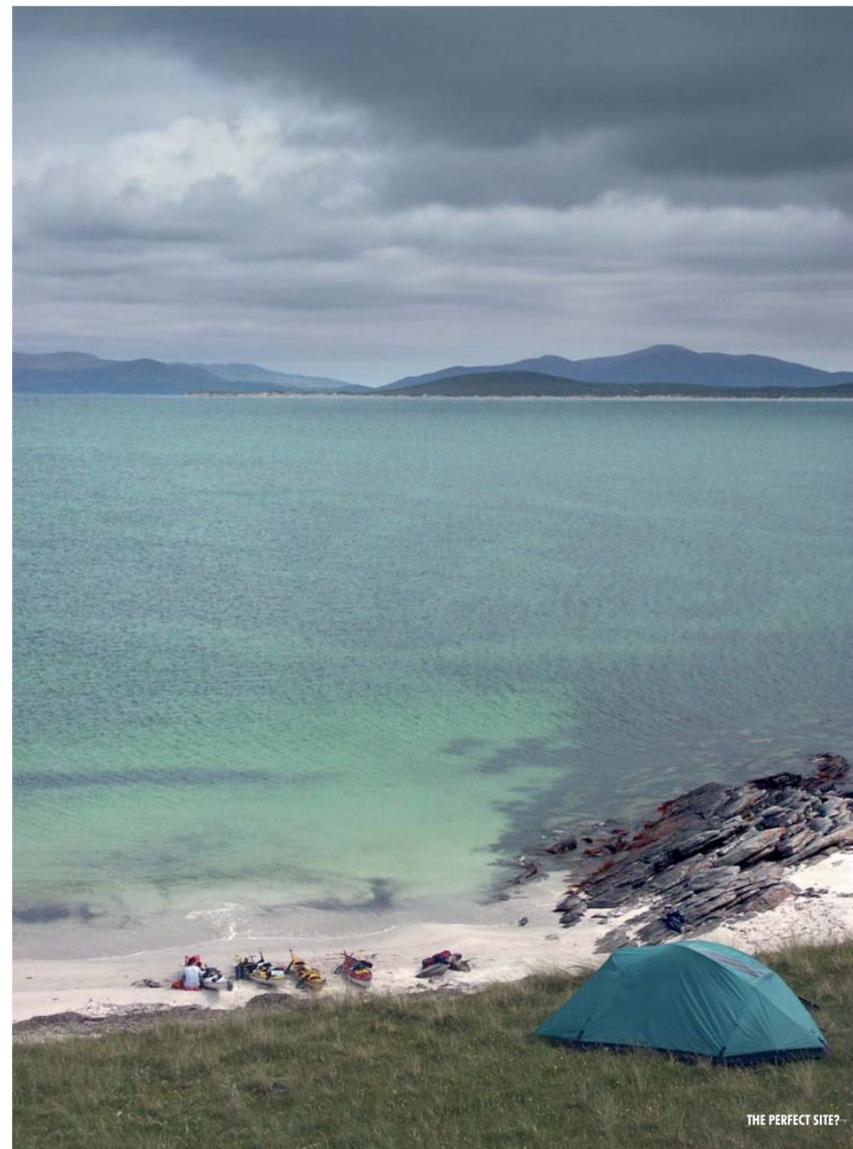
of the above incidents but large parties of sea kayakers were seen in each area prior to our visits and locals put two and two together. As the pressure builds on relatively few campsites (from sea kayakers and others) it is likely that more of us will come across such examples of thoughtless behaviour. A Google internet search revealed 16 commercially operated trips advertising places on camping expeditions to the Sound of Arisaig in the four summer months of 2005. These involved 49 nights under canvas. Clubs also organise large outings to the area. One club website has a photo taken in 2005 of 24 kayaks squeezed onto a very small beach. There is not much chance of enjoying summer wilderness camping in the Sound of Arisaig. Indeed participants may not yet realise it, but, such mass camping is now in breach of the Scottish Access Code, which now gives us the legal right to wild camp, but asks us to be responsible by only camping in small numbers. (See below.)

In the past, many of us learned camping skills in organisations such as the Boys Brigade, the Scouts and the Guides. From the early part of the last century, these organisations were practicing a "leave no trace" approach to camping. Unfortunately, with many competing activities, membership of these worthy organisations has fallen and many young people grow up with no knowledge of camping skills. You would expect that the large activity centres that organise many sea kayaking expeditions would recognise this and provide training, particularly in toileting in the outdoors, but it appears that some may not be doing so. My regular paddling friend, Alan, went on a week long expedition to the West of Scotland with one of the major UK operators. While he received excellent tuition in kayaking skills, he was given absolutely no advice on how to have a shit out of doors. This was in contrast to a similar trip he went on in the Sea of Cortez where the coaches gave detailed instructions on how to use the Coleman "potty", which was carried in an accompanying double kayak.

Fortunately not all operators ignore environmental issues and my own recent experience of smaller companies such as Skyak Adventures and Peakwave Coaching has been very positive. Let us hope that all commercial operators include this aspect in their future



A SECLUDED GULLY IDEAL FOR A TOILET BREAK!



THE PERFECT SITE?

expeditions and training. Perhaps the BCU could help matters by making environmental issues more prominent in the lower grades of the star tests.

Having identified that there is an increasing problem with wild camping, what can we all do to lessen our impact on the environment? The following discusses some personal solutions and tips, to help the newcomer develop their camping craft, but there are many alternative ways to minimise our impact. Mike Buckley has written an extensive and informed article "Coping in the Wilderness - Low Impact Kayak Camping" in the UK Sea kayaking Guidebook. For other sources see the reading list.

Wildlife:

In general, be particularly careful to avoid stressing wildlife, their survival is already precarious enough without having to expend precious energy fleeing from approaching kayakers. This May at 0530 in the morning, I sat for an hour beside a nesting area. The birds ignored me until a puffin came and perched on my foot! Further specific points are noted under each of the headings below.

Where to go and with how many

In England and Wales there is no legal right to wild camp and strictly speaking permission of the landowner should be sought. However, in many coastal situations this is likely to be impractical and if you are discrete,

WORDS AND PICTURES: DOUGLAS WILCOX
WWW.GLA.AC.UK/MEDICALGENETICS/SEAKAYAKING.HTM



BUILD YOUR FIRE ON THE BEACH

camp out of sight of houses, stay only a night or two and leave no mess, then it is unlikely that someone will discover you. Even if you are discovered if you have camped considerably, it is unlikely the owner will ask you to move on or try and discourage those who follow you. A recent article in Trail Magazine states "no one has been taken to court for wild camping without permission of the landowner".

In Scotland, since 2005, there is a legal right to wild camping under the Scottish Access Code. With this right comes responsibilities and wild camping is defined as being "lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place." Commercial and club organisers of "wild camping" with more than "small numbers" will now be breaking Scottish law and threaten the future of this hard won access agreement.

On a recent discussion on wild camping on the UK Rivers Guidebook, community pages, sea section, several contributors felt that a sensible solution was for large parties to visit the "honey pot" beaches only during the day. That they should make prior agreement with a local landowner to set up camp in a less sensitive site elsewhere or use commercial campsites. Common sense would interpret "small numbers" as being, no more than, somewhere between five and 10. Some larger commercial tours use "mother-ships" which seems an



A CAMPING AND LANDING SITE CHOSEN TO MINIMISE DISTURBANCE OF GROUND AND BURROW NESTING BIRDS

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eminently sensible solution albeit, more expensive.

The internet is a marvellous resource, why not research the area you wish to camp in? In addition to discovering any environmental restrictions and required permissions, you will discover lots of geographical, historical and natural facts that will enrich your visit and alert you to things to look for.

Before you launch

Please leave your car in a considerate spot. Be prepared to share a car and to drop your gear and leave the car some distance away to minimise obstruction. Try to visit the loo on the journey to your launch site. A friend who has a house at Carsaig Bay on the Sound of Jura (a popular launch spot) is very upset by the number of people who get out of their cars and urinate. There is a public toilet just a kilometre away in Tayvallich!

Choosing your landing site

Unless in a real emergency, always avoid landing on beaches with pupping seals. Common seals pup in May, June July and grey seals in October, November and December. If your chosen beach is made of shingle,



A LEVEL SPOT ABOVE THE BEACH



TAKE YOUR GASH OUT!

Camp fires and rubbish

Fires are a great fun part of the outdoor experience. We should always try to build a fire on the beach, preferably below the high water mark. Avoid building it against rocks. Those beautiful gold and silver lichen colonies are several hundred years old! Driftwood, below the high water mark, is a good source of fuel, but we usually buy a bag of logs on the journey. This avoids taking dead wood from the ground behind the beach. This is again the home for many insects, which feed the birds, which hopefully you will see and enjoy. Don't break branches off trees!

A fire needs to be big enough to warm your group and no more. Watch out for sparks igniting dry vegetation behind the beach, dried bracken lights very easily. Do not burn every scrap of wood on the beach, just because it is there, think of others. You can burn your own combustible rubbish including toilet paper, but please, do not be tempted to burn the inevitable pile of plastic rubbish, netting and ropes on the beach. It is unsightly but inert. Burning it at low temperature will release a poisonous cocktail of chemicals into the environment, not to mention a thick black cloud that will announce your presence to all. Make sure your fire is out before you leave it and if it was above high water, remove all trace the next day.

Have some large carrier bags to wrap all your non combustible rubbish in and ship it out with you. Some bungee cords will allow it to be carried on deck.

watch out for ground nesting birds in May, June or July. Preferably find a rocky, sandy or large cobble beach. Watch out for burrow nesting puffins in the banks behind the beach in May, June and July. If you do choose to visit an area of nesting birds in the breeding season, then minimise disturbance by keeping the party numbers very small (two or three), arrive late, leave early and leave the singing to the birds please!

Choosing your camp site

Avoid camping near fresh water streams or ponds behind the beach; these are very sensitive wildlife areas. Try to choose a spot where you do not have to rearrange many rocks. Underneath each is an insect colony that will provide food for birds. If you do move a rock, replace it exactly. An area of firm, close cropped grass (kick off the sheep droppings) is much more suitable than a soft bed of wild flowers. If you arrive at a campsite and find it is already occupied, it is probably best to seek an alternative, unless weather conditions or fatigue dictate otherwise.



A FIRE DOES NOT NEED TO BE BIG

Where to "go"

It is best to urinate below high water mark on the beach. If you need a pee during the night, make an effort to go to the beach; don't pee just beside the tent. The next camper may be preparing food on that spot. To avoid a night time excursion, males can use an old plastic milk bottle in the tent at night. Females can purchase a custom device such as a TravelMate. In the morning dispose of the urine below high water mark, never on land near running water.

As sea kayakers it is usually best to defecate below high water mark. Walk well away from the landing beach and find a secluded spot in the rocks. Wrap your toilet tissue up tightly. Some wet tissues are antiseptic and good for washing hands afterwards but beware of dirt under your nails. Put the tissues in a food grade poly bag with a ziplock. Either pack it out or burn it in your fire later. The same goes for female sanitary products. If you are camping at the head of a long sea loch, there may be little tidal movement and it may be preferable to bury faeces. Find a spot at least 50 meters away from running water and dig a small hole with a trowel about 15 cm deep. Do your stuff then infill the hole carefully replacing any surface turf.

If your bowel habit allows, it is probably best to go after preparing a meal and eating, to minimise the risk of stomach upsets.

Washing and water

Camp hygiene is important. An ex army friend can wash himself top to toe in a quarter pint of hot water! Here is how to do it in a half pint! After setting up the tent I boil a pint of water in a Kelly Kettle. Half a pint makes a nice hot drink. The rest goes in to an Ortlieb folding bowl. Sitting on a little stool in the vestibule of my tent, I wash my hair (I do not need much water for that), shave, and then sponge myself down with a small cloth. Then as I dry myself, I sit with my feet in the remaining warm water and enjoy my hot drink: luxury! After dressing in fresh clothes I dispose of the soapy water below the HW mark and I am now clean and ready to prepare a meal.

Cleaning dishes and pans in camp is difficult. Most camp pans are made of thin aluminium or stainless steel which conducts heat poorly and burn thick foods like porridge and stews. If you can afford them, hard anodised aluminium pans conduct heat much better and



A TARP WILL GIVE SHELTER FOR COOKING ON THE BEACH

those with non stick finishes by the likes of MSR are superb. They can be wiped clean with kitchen towel which can then be burned or carried out. Try not to cook excess food as it will need to be bagged and carried out and most certainly not left at the camp site as it will encourage vermin. I also clean plates, mugs, spoons etc with tissues then sterilise them by pouring a little boiling water on them or by using the spoon to stir while cooking. If you need to resort to scraping a pan, remove as much food as possible and bag it then go down the beach and use sea water and sand or gravel, preferably without strong detergent.

Treat any sources of fresh water as very precious and only use them for filling your bottles, never for washing up in. I do not trust even crystal clear streams to be safe for drinking (did you notice the dead sheep just upstream?) and have two water bags, one with fresh drinking water from home and the other for filling wherever, but I always use it only for cooking or boiling. The Kelly Kettle allows you to boil and sterilise water, using almost any combustible material, without burning gas or liquid fuel.

Conclusion

Camping from a sea kayak gives us some of the most memorable days and nights of our lives. We should take pride in developing our camping skills to minimise our effect on the environment. That way, our return visits will be as we remembered them and will leave those special places unspoiled for those that follow us. Happy camping!



A HARD ANODISED NON STICK PAN MINIMISES BURNING AND CLEANING



SIT STILL AND PUFFINS
WILL COME TO YOU

FURTHER READING:

BCU "Earning a welcome":

<http://www.bcu.org.uk/access/earnawelcome.html>

Mike Buckley: Coping in the Wilderness -

Low Impact Kayak Camping,

http://www.ukseakayakguidebook.co.uk/leave_no_trace/art_int_1.htm

Kathleen Meyer: How to shit in the woods: An

Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art,

ISBN: 0898156270

SCA, Environmental Guidelines:

<http://www.canoescotland.com/Default.aspx?tabid=345>

Scottish Outdoor Access Code; Camping:

<http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/default.asp?nPageID=189>

Trail magazine: Wild Camping, October 2005

PRODUCTS:

Kelly Kettle: <http://www.kellykettle.com/>

MSR Duralite pans:

<http://www.msrcorp.com/cookware/duralite.asp>

Ortlieb folding bowl:

http://www.ortlieb.com/v_prod.php?lang=en&produkt=faltschussel

TravelMate:

<http://www.travelmateinfo.com/>