

Rudderless Paddling in Tasmania

By Geoff Murray



Geoff Murray showing good form in his Rockpool Alaw Bach

I have been asked to write an article on Lyn's and my kayaks which are not the typical Tasmanian fare. Lyn paddles a carbon kevlar Impex Force Cat 3 (www.impexkayaks.com) which is a Canadian built boat, 5.3m long and 520mm wide (17' and 20.5") weighing 20kgs. It is a British style boat which means the hull has been designed to perform without the need for a rudder.



Lyn in her Impex Force 3

Turning is normally accomplished by edging (leaning the boat), rudder steers and bow rudders as well as subtle variations of use of the paddle and pressure on the foot pads. It has an adjustable skeg which, contrary to popular belief is not used to make the boat track straight per se. A skeg's primary use is to balance the dynamics of the hull when travelling across wind. All well designed kayaks will "weathercock" when travelling across wind i.e. they will turn toward the direction that the wind is coming from. Weathercocking is caused by the rear of the boat skidding sideways away from the wind as a result of the fact that the bow is pushing through undisturbed water and is therefore locked in place, the stern is travelling through turbulent, disturbed water and is relatively free to move sideways. When the skeg is deployed it helps to lock the stern in place. Ideally, it can be used to either balance the boat across wind, or if lowered all the way it will make the boat "lee-cock" and turn downwind. It can also be useful when travelling with a following sea, reducing the tendency to broach. Skegs have a couple of advantages, they are simpler than a rudder and tend to fail less often and if they do fail the kayak is still fully functional, and they are mounted further forward than a rudder and hence do not come out of the water when cresting waves. Lyn's boat is

built for use as a fast, straight tracking vessel that suits a small framed person, something sorely needed in the kayaking world.



Lyn in her Impex Force 3 near Tinderbox Bay

Many slight framed women (and men) have to tolerate paddling boats designed to suit larger people and as a result they never get the boat to perform as it was designed. My own kayak is a Rockpool Alaw Bach (www.rockpoolkayaks.com) built of fibreglass, 5.3m long, 535mm wide (17' and 21") and 25kgs in original form. It is a Welsh built boat designed for playing in the very rough and fast tidal races that occur around different parts of the UK.



Geoff's Alaw Bach in Peppermint Bay

It therefore differs from Lyn's boat in having more rocker for manoeuvrability, and a flatter bottom with harder chines for better performance while surfing waves. It also has a skeg. I have mounted a sail on mine which performs quite well and the kayak mostly goes where I want it to when sailing :-). The sail differs from the typical Tasmanian design and is the sort used by kayakers in the Victorian and NSW sea kayak clubs being permanently mounted on a 2 way swivel well forward on the deck. As a result it doesn't interfere with paddling, a very important consideration for a non ruddered boat where sometimes a quick rudder steer is called for. Having the sail mounted forward also helps balance the boat whilst sailing across wind, reducing the tendency to weathercock.



Geoff Murray on the Derwent

I sometimes hear that kayaks must have rudders and I would agree that for sailing they certainly make life easier. I am sure that some people have tried paddling their kayaks with the rudder up and found that as soon as there are any cross winds that it doesn't go where they want it to. Paddling a ruddered boat with the rudder up in a cross wind will often be unsuccessful as the kayak will try to weathercock and you will probably find yourself paddling on the upwind side only to maintain a straight course! A non ruddered boat will often be more finely balanced with the hull being designed to work with the skeg.

Lyn's kayak was a special order through the Impex distributor in Australia, Expedition Kayaks (www.expeditionkayaks.com). Rockpool kayaks are not available in Australia and I had mine flown out from Wales, UK (www.rockpoolkayaks.com).

And Lyn's explanation is:

**Why I bought a purple boat
because....**

purple tracks better,

purple is lighter,

purple turns easier,

purple is better in a following sea,

purple goes great into the wind,

and because it co-ordinates well with my wardrobe.

it fits me and is comfortable, and when I ask "does this make me look fat", the answer is a definite "no"

it's a lot easier to drive than I thought it would be, I have control of the gears.

it's enjoyable and fun to paddle.

I can actually lift it myself, I don't need to rely on anyone else, so assists in independence

I haven't fitted the hydraulic rudder that I initially insisted that I would need, and I probably won't.

and the colour assists in calm, confidence and creativity on the water.

Notes on the author from Expedition Kayaks:

Geoff Murray is a keen kayaker & photographer who seems to travel the world meeting with the luminaries of our sport! He has a wealth of knowledge on boat design & performance & is flying the rudderless flag with great dignity in the face of serious scepticism in his home state of Tasmania! You can see Geoff's photography on his website at www.geoffmurray.com (be sure to click on his Kayaking page).