



The author rides a glassy 3 footer at Surf Beach, Bateman's Bay April 2007 (photo John Potrowski)

What of this new sport, surf kayaking? It's been around a long time in the UK where it was pioneered in the early '70's, but has only recently surfaced as a viable activity in made-for-the-surf kayaks (rather than playboats) in Australia since Ross Boardman started importing the Mega range from the UK.

My journey into this spectacular sport began about 5 years ago with a whitewater creek boat, a Wavesport Score, which has very similar handling characteristics to a modern surf kayak, minus the fins. As a paddler who learnt the skills of surfing a kayak in a cumbersome sea kayak, this boat seemed to me to be about as good as things could get, with its maneuverability & speed on a wave face. Along came the first of Ross' surf kayaks & I quickly realised just how much more was possible using a craft explicitly designed for the surf. In my old playboat, I would ride the initial face, then inevitably get caught in the break & bump along bracing, surfing backwards, generally out of control. Make no mistake, this is great fun, however it is really only replicating whitewater paddling in the surf zone. Whitewater paddlers will argue that this in itself is terrific fun, but it's not what turned me on. As John Lennon said, whatever gets you through the night, it's alright.....

A true surf kayak with fins allows the paddler to carve like a board rider, whilst also getting the most out of every wave. So, for a sea kayaker wanting to make the jump to surf kayaking, how do you get started?

Firstly, you'll need a reasonably good skills base. You're obviously going to do a lot of swimming if you haven't yet managed to crack a decent roll. Rolling a kayak isn't the black art many make it out to be. I've often instructed paddlers through their first ever roll, & their normal comment is 'is that all there is to it..?' Get yourself some good instruction ([www.balancedboater.com](http://www.balancedboater.com)) and depending on how flexible you are, you will find you're cranking out a decent roll within a few weeks.

Secondly, undertake a careful study of the etiquette of surfing. There is an excellent guide [HERE](#). Watch how surfers treat each other (maybe don't do this at Maroubra), get to know the rules of the break & when you do finally get out there, OBSERVE them.

Finally, get out in a controlled environment with either an instructor or a competent paddler & have a go. Start small – even playing in the broken whitewater is a good learning experience for a novice – and build slowly. Check the weather & surf forecasts & pick the days when you're going to be inside your limits, and get out among the waves. Wear a helmet – if you don't need a head, you don't need a helmet.

Where is the sport headed? With the rivers in this dry continent slowly drying up, it's a good bet that surf kayaking will develop into at least a mainstream sport as whitewater kayaking in the years to come. In Australia we're blessed with a wealth of surf beaches free of crowds, so there is no limit to the development of the sport.

We at Expedition Kayaks have just begun to import the Storm surf kayak from the UK, and it is a real performer. Check it out on the Surf Kayaks page of our website.

Happy Paddling

Mark Sundin



The Valley Storm in Action, Cornwall, UK February 2008 (photo Maurice Leyland)