

WaterTribe Bootcamp- 2018

Preparation for the Everglades Challenge and Ultra Marathon

Welcome -- My background

- Not a BCU instructor
- Not an ACA instructor
- No kayak or canoe certifications of any kind
- I've been small boating in rafts, canoes, and sailboats since the age of 10 give or take. All this with virtually no training.
- I've been sea kayaking in this area since about 1980.
- I've had BCU 3 Star and above training from world class instructors. I've had Greenland style training from Greg Stamer and kayak surf training from Nigel Foster.
- I've been managing and participating in WaterTribe since 2000.
- I still consider myself an average sea kayaker but I did finish the EC2003 in a Kajak Sport Viviane in Class 1 and it was packed pretty much like I'm going to show you today.
- I have since gone over to the dark side in a Hobie AI.
- I am building a Core Sound Mark 3 but it remains to be seen if I will ever finish that project.

OK, now that you know that I have no official standing to provide instruction, let's get to it.

Your Most Important Piece of Safety Gear – Your Lifejacket

When the “STUFF” starts hitting the fan, your lifejacket is your most important safety item.

ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKET!

Your lifejacket will be inspected as the first step in the registration process. At a minimum it must have the following:

- PLB – This has saved WaterTribe lives. It must be attached with a lanyard.
- Safety Knife – This has saved WaterTribe lives. You must be able to deploy the knife with either hand. I recommend a fixed blade knife. But you can use a folding knife if you can open it with a single hand and both right and left hand. Good example is the NRS Titanium Pilot Knife: <http://www.liveactionsafety.com/nrs-titanium-pilot-knife/> . Another option is a diver’s knife like mine.
- Whistle – This is a Coast Guard requirement. It should be on a lanyard so that you don’t lose it.

Of course, you can add optional items to your lifejacket. WaterTribe recommends the following:

- Strobe – the Coast Guard will have a much easier time finding you in chaotic seas and at night. This should be clipped to your lifejacket or be on a lanyard.
- Flares – to get noticed by boats if you see them.
- Basic survival items – Space blanket, fire kit, compass, survival kit
- Water – some even have a Camelbak attached to their lifejacket.

You can add more stuff, but don’t go crazy.

Packing Your Kayak or Other Small Craft

Background Information

- Over the years Sea Kayaker magazine published a series of articles and eventually a book titled, “Sea Kayaker Deep Trouble”
- You can read a condensed version at the MarinerKayaks.com web site. In the 3rd drop down list for Manuals, select Flotation. You will find a very detailed document that discusses some of the problems I have seen over and over in the kayaking community in general and in WaterTribe.

3 Common Problems

1. Too much stuff that overloads the kayak
2. Not enough stuff so that gear can shift resulting in poor trim
3. Not enough flotation when stuff happens

These problems taken individually or in combination lead to a sea kayak that is not seaworthy, cannot be paddled or towed, and is difficult or impossible to be rescued. (Note that we saw several instances of this during EC2015.)

I will be and have been using the term “kayak” because I became interested in this topic as a sea kayaker. But this information applies to all small craft.

Case 1 – Too Much Stuff

This is very common for WaterTribers. Either they aren't thinking like a backpacker and they are carrying too much stuff or they have an efficient load but their kayak isn't designed for kayak camping or expeditions.

Every sea kayak or small boat has a specific payload limit that is a critical factor in the design. Most manufacturers will publish that number. A few do not publish the number but they should.

You need to lookup that number for your sea kayak or small boat.

Many sea kayaks will have a payload between 300 and 400 pounds.

Remember that the payload limit is the maximum. Most boats will handle much better especially in rough conditions or surfing if the boat is not loaded to the max. A much better limit is 80% of the listed maximum payload.

Let's look at my Epic 18X Sport which has a maximum designed payload of 380 pounds which yields a usable maximum of 304 pounds.

So let's do a quick calculation. My paddling weight with all my gear on and a paddle in my hand is about 220 pounds (or at least that's all I will fess up to). 9 liters of water is about 21 pounds. That leaves about 63 pounds for gear and food. It is very easy to meet that limit if I think like a backpacker.

But what if I'm considering a CLC Night Heron. The maximum payload is listed at 300 pounds which yields 240 pounds of usable payload. Myself and my water already puts me over the limit. I need a boat with a better payload like the Epic 18X Sport or a Hobie AI. Or I need to lose a lot of fat.

What about that Hobie AI? The maximum payload is listed at 400 pounds. That gives me a whopping 320 pounds. If I think like a backpacker, I can go even lighter which will help me go faster. Less wetted surface means more speed.

Finding out the max payload and then limiting yourself to 80% of the max will give you a boat that is easier to handle in rough water and faster.

[Rule 1 – Limit Your Total Payload to 80% of the Maximum Payload](#)

Questions?

Case 2 – Shifting Items and Poor Trim

This is not as common for WaterTribers as case 1. But it does happen.

Sometimes people think like a backpacker and have an efficient load coming in at 25-35 pounds not including water. It all fits into a backpack and doesn't take up much room in a kayak.

Normal paddling is no big deal and the gear stays in place . . .

Until stuff happens. You get a nice following wind and some waves to ride and then it happens. The gear shifts and suddenly the kayak is bow down in the waves and over you go.

If someone rolled your kayak in three dimensions, would your gear stay in place?

Rule 2 – Make Sure Your Gear Cannot Shift

Questions?

Case 3 – Not Enough Flotation When Stuff Happens

Most sea kayaks have two or three bulkheads with watertight storage compartments. Even if the hatches leak a bit, it is usually very minor. Many small boats have dedicated flotation compartments. Usually they work just fine. But what if they don't?

Most kayakers with some camping experience put their important gear in waterproof bags. Most of the time these bags do their job as long as you inspect them before every trip. Note that none of these bags are designed for full submersion. Hint: always double bag important stuff.

Very often, people will leave some stuff exposed or in non-waterproof bags because they consider certain things to be safe from water intrusion. For example:

- A tent might be left in its own packing bag that is designed to go into a backpack and is not waterproof.
- Freeze dried food might be thrown into a mesh bag so it is easy to see and pick things out.
- A boat cart for portaging might be easier to pack into the kayak if taken apart and not put in a waterproof bag.
- Sometimes people carry a camp chair that is folded but again is easier to pack if not inside a bag.
- There is all kinds of stuff both necessary and not (see case 1) that people consider just fine in a "waterproof" bow or stern compartment that is not in waterproof bags. But when you put this stuff in a waterproof bag, you are increasing your flotation if your compartments become flooded.

Rule 3 – Everything Goes Into a Waterproof Bag

Questions?

But You Need More

OK, you've got an efficient load that doesn't take up a lot of space.

Your load is tied down or wedged in place and won't shift.

You have proper trim.

Great, but the Gods are about to play with you.

- Your hatch comes off
- Your hatch stays on but there is a leak you can't see
- You hit something and there is a new hole in your boat
- You damaged something when unloading your boat and have a leak you can't see – this happened to me

For whatever reason, your sea kayak is a submarine and you call for help.

Don't let this happen to you.

With proper flotation, you will be able to paddle to shore without calling the Coast Guard.

Rule 4 – Fill all storage compartments with gear that is packed inside waterproof bags.

Rule 5 – Try to put heavier items closer to the cockpit and lighter items further out.

Rule 6 -- Put a flotation bag in the bow and stern.

Fill these bow and stern bags with something very light weight. I use swimming noodles cut to size and/or Styrofoam peanuts (be careful some of these can dissolve in water). If water fills these "waterproof" bags, you will still have flotation.

My Current Load for Epic 18X Sport

Bow

- 3 liters of water
- Sleeping bag, pillow, long johns
- Tent, hammock, ground sheet
- Sil Tarp
- Wag Bags
- Special Bow Bag filled with ThermaRest pad or swim noodles and/or foam peanuts
- Total Weight 22 lb 10 oz

Stern

- 3 Liters of water
- Food for 5 days
- Cook kit with food for 2 days
- Paddling Clothes
- Shower Kit
- Sacrosanct Clothes
- Special Stern Bag filled with swim noodles and/or foam peanuts
- Total Weight 24 lb 0 oz

Day Hatch

- Storm Cag
- Pee Bottle
- Possibles Bag
- Toilet Kit – Paper, WagBags (very important), Purell hand sanitizer
- Lights and Batteries
- Hypothermia Kit
See <http://watertribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/SteveIsaacMakeAHypothermiaKit.aspx>
- Day Food and Ensure, Gatorade
- Total Weight 13 lb 4 oz

Cockpit

- 3 liters of water
- Myself with PFD
- Total Weight 227 lb

Total Payload – 286 lb 14 oz – About 76% of the max load. I'm good to go!

Setting Goals - Very Important

What do you want to accomplish?

- Win Overall?
- Win Your Class?
- Win Your Class and Division?
- Finish?

Your selection will have a great impact on everything you do related to this event.

This bootcamp is aimed at finishing an Everglades Challenge or Ultra Marathon. If your goal is to win, this bootcamp can still help a bit, but you will have to dig deep in your training and prep.

Planning Your Adventure

If your goal is to finish, aim to finish on Friday. This allows you to enjoy each day on the water and savor the experience. You will arrive at Key Largo in time to experience the amazing Kindred Spirits and be rested for the Award Ceremony on Saturday. You have seven days to cover about 300 miles give or take.

So, you need to cover about 40-45 miles each day. That boils down to 12 to 16 hours per day for seven days. Pretty tough! Depending on weather, that can be really tough. If the weather is with you, try to take advantage. If the weather turns against you, maybe it's time to camp and get rested.

Food and Hydration

Bring all the food you need for 8 days. Trying to resupply food at checkpoints takes a lot of time. Food includes meals and energy bars, gels, etc. I like to supplement my food with two bottles of High Protein Ensure each day. One before sleep and one at breakfast.

Load enough water to make it to the next checkpoint plus always carry one extra 3 liters just in case. Most of the time you can buy bottled water. But sometimes you will need to fill up from a hose or water spigot. You might want to carry a Sawyer product to filter city water – especially for taste.

I carry all the Gatorade I plan to use for the entire trip if my overall boat load will allow it. If I can't carry all I want, I will carry some powder, and I will still try to buy bottles at some checkpoints.

Sleep

Sleep deprivation can lead to disaster. You can paddle 16 hours a day and still get 6 hours of sleep each day. Do it!

Sometimes you will decide to paddle all night. Maybe you are taking advantage of some really good weather. Or maybe you are making up for lost time due to bad weather. OK, I've done it too. A 5-hour Energy bottle every four hours helps me a bit. But don't do this two days in a row. You've got to stop and get some sleep.

Give my example of sleep deprivation ----

Read my article at this link: <http://watertribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/SteveIsaacDozingOff.aspx> .

BTW, there are a few other articles I've written that may be a benefit. Type in Chief in the Author box to see a full list.

The CheckPoints

CHECKPOINTS SUCK TIME! Lots of people including myself have spent way too much time at the checkpoints. Try to get in and out ASAP. Hit your SPOT OK, log in and make a pithy comment, refill your water and Gatorade. When your SPOT OK button quits flashing, load up and go.

OK, let's get serious. There's great food at CP2. And sometimes you need to wait for the tide. And sometimes you need to log into Facebook. And . . . the list goes on. Remember that all the fun is at Key Largo. You need to get moving. But I want a Cuban sandwich . . . Yah, I get it. Been there, done that.

CP1 – Stump Pass can be tricky. I like to come down the intercoastal entering anywhere above stump pass. But it's up to you. Getting out of your kayak can be very tricky. There is a small "beach" landing marked on the mapper. All class 1, 2 and 3 should try to use this landing. If you are class 3 or a Hobie, you must remove your outriggers or pull them in. There is a time limit for this landing because it is small, and you need to make room for others. Get in and get out as fast as you can. If you plan to camp at CP1, you cannot use this landing.

CP2 – This is my favorite. It's best to do Indian Key pass with an incoming tide. Sometimes I hit it just right. But if the tide is against me, I will wait at Indian Key and take a nap until the tide switches. If you do it perfectly, you will arrive at the CP a bit before high tide. The Cuban restaurant will be open and after you get a great meal the tide will switch, and you can head out. Remember that you have to stop and get your Everglades Permit on the way to CP2.

CP3 – This year it is going to be not so fun. Usually they have a nice convenience store and an OK restaurant. Hurricane Irma did some real damage to Flamingo. We will get the latest update and discuss it at the Captains Meeting.

Finish – You've made it! Congratulations. The lights can be dazzling. Be sure to have the finish accurately marked in your GPS. There are typically a bunch of moored boats that you will have to paddle or sail through. Unless it is pitch black O'Dark Thirty you will be greeted by many WaterTribers and lots of cheering.

Navigation and Route Planning

You need to spend a lot of time doing this. Don't put it off. Get some good waterproof charts. Have backups. Remember "Two is one and one is none."

Get a good GPS and load all your routes into it. I have two Garmin 76SC units and I have the Bluecharts app loaded into my iPad. All of my routes are loaded into these three devices. I have lots of waypoints and lots of routes. I may add the Bluecharts app to my iPhone as well. You can never have too many backups when it comes to navigation.

At a minimum you should have an inside and an outside route planned for each stage. You should have all passes clearly marked and sometimes alternate routes within your inside and outside routes.

If you are carrying regular waterproof charts, you may want to consider marking your route on the charts. You don't have to mark all the waypoints, but you should mark all the major turns.

Or you can sometimes print your charts with your routes on them. If you do this, be sure to use waterproof paper for printing your charts. I use Rite In the Rain paper.

When planning your routes using your charting software, always view them on Google Earth. Many times, you will want to move a waypoint just a bit.

Special consideration needs to be used for getting a gator tooth, Whitewater Bay, and especially Florida Bay between Flamingo and Key Largo.

Show my charts on iPad.

A Nice Hack

You can take a look at the Record Book and find people who have done well in your class and division. Then go to the mapper and select the event, the Challenger, and one of the detail options to look at their track. Note that we only go back to 2014. This can be frustrating too because sometimes people aren't using their SPOT correctly. And sometimes they do it on purpose because they don't want people to see where they like to camp every year 😊

Piloting Your Boat

I won't say too much about this because you are the captain. But remember that most of you do not have to be right in the channel. You can follow the intercoastal or other markers, but you don't need to be in the channel. Paddle on one side or the other. Let the power boats and big sailboats have plenty of room. Take advantage of your shallow draft to take shortcuts when possible.

Your Shore Contact

Each of you needs to recruit a shore contact for the entire event. This isn't like the typical river race that has bank runners meeting you every few miles to deliver food and water. Typically, it will be a family member or friend. He or she will watch your progress on the tracker and keep a phone handy. This is the person who will be talking to the CP Captains and/or Race Manager when necessary.

You should arrange to have two specific times to call you shore contact each and every day.

My wife knows I will try to make a call about 08:00 and about 20:00 every day.

I usually don't call early, but sometimes I have to call a bit later and she knows this can happen.

She also knows that sometimes I won't have cell service or I can't call for some other reason. In this case I will send an OK message or a Custom message via SPOT. Your SPOT should be setup to deliver an email to your shore contact. **NOTE:** If you change your shared page setup, your link might also change. Verify that your link is still working after making any change to your SPOT shared page. And do this right away.

Sometimes you can't make a call, but you might be able to text instead.

Your shore contact may also have information to relay to you. The Race Manager may call your contact with information that you need.

Make sure your shore contact speaks English.

SPOT – Do It Right

Start the challenge with fresh lithium batteries in your SPOT.

You do know you need lithium batteries, right?

Have one or two sets of backup batteries. You shouldn't really need these but have them anyway. Keep an eye on your indicator lights to watch for a low battery signal.

Mount your SPOT where you can easily see it and easily access the buttons. This is very important. SPOTS mounted behind you will stop working and you won't notice the problem. We see this every year.

Always turn your SPOT on first thing in the morning while loading your boat. Put it in Tracking Mode and leave it there for the entire day. You can hit the OK and Custom buttons while in tracking mode. You SPOT will automatically go back to tracking after your button message has been sent.

Hit an OK every few hours. Usually you can do this at major waypoints. But if you've been on a straight tack for several hours, hit the OK now and then.

If you stop for a break, hit your OK button leave tracking mode on.

If you stop for camping, shut off tracking and then hit your custom button. After the light stops blinking, turn it off.

If you are at a checkpoint hit OK or Custom whichever applies.

Remember, you are always in tracking mode until you shut it off when camped.

After a Storm or Capsize or Whatever – After the Black Wall of Doom passes or you recover from an interesting capsized, you need to hit the OK button. Your shore contact, the CP Captains, and the Race Manager will probably know that you got hit by a storm. They will be watching for your OK. As soon as you are safe, hit the OK. If it was a capsized or something, it will be fun to have the location marked so you can tell your stories better.

HELP – We can't and won't help you. You and your shore contact need to know what to do if you hit the Help button. Your shore contact needs to call the Race Manager with details. When I use Help, my wife knows that I am OK, but I need to interrupt my normal track and go to shore to fix something or take care of something. She knows I will be calling her with details as soon as I can. She also knows I am not in danger – see SOS. As soon as she gets my call she will call the Race Manager with details.

SOS – As a last resort! If your life is in danger you should hit your SOS button on your SPOT and/or deploy your PLB. Remember, try to save yourself first. Kayak roll, re-enter, give first aid, etc. If that isn't possible, then hit the SOS. **Make sure your PLB can see the sky.** If it can't see the sky, it can't send a signal. Literally layback in the water and hold it up and look at it. Turn on your strobe if necessary. Try to stay with your boat and/or start back swimming to shore if you can.

Last Thing – Before you leave, checkout the launch beach and specifically look for shoals at low tide. See where you want to setup for the launch.