

Battling the Elements – Newport to Dana Point

By Kevin Joyce - a.k.a. “yak slam”

What had started as a side comment in an online fishing report, turned in to a tremendous display of the strong sense of community and the adventurous spirit each of us as kayak anglers have. It was only a month before the paddle that I mentioned, half-heartedly, that I would like to paddle from Newport Harbor to Dana Point Harbor. The response was absolutely amazing.

Within few days a core group formed and plans were put forward. Folks that I had fished with maybe once or twice, some that I had communicated with online only a few times and some I had never met before were offering to help in anyway they could to make this trip happen. The biggest hurdle for any one way trip like this to overcome is the logistics of getting kayaks up to the launch or Kayakers back to their cars. That’s where Cabo John came in and graciously offered to taxi anglers and their kayaks up to the launch and cleared the way for a successful trip.

So on the cool morning of November 15 with a crisp fall breeze blowing over the headlands and through Dana Point harbor, it began. It was a little before 5 in morning, dark and my favorite AM/PM pre kayaking coffee warming in my hands when Kayakers from South as far as San Diego county and North from LA County began to descend on the familiar parking lot at Baby Beach. As each kayaker arrived the sense of adventure and excitement became undeniable. After a few introductions and some discussions about the logistics, we began loading the kayaks on to CaboJohn’s trailer and were off to begin our adventure!

Our plan was launch at the southern end of Crystal Cove State Beach at a place called Reef Point. Originally the Idea was to make this a Harbor to Harbor trip. But at 18 + miles and the short days of fall, the trip would become a more of a paddle trip with not a whole lot of time to fish. The launch at Crystal cove, however, presented its own challenges. Under the wrong conditions, this normally tame beach break turns in to a thundering shore pound with riptides and heavy currents. Add to that a sprinkling of Rocks littered throughout the surf line. Fortunately, that was not the description of the launch we encountered. Our conditions and timing could not have been better. It happed to be one of the smallest days of the year, with knee high surf lapping up on the sand.



Crystal cove state beach. Pre launch preparations

One by one, we carried our kayaks down the steep concrete path to the waters edge. This is when the reality started to set in. "I am really going to do this," I thought. Years ago when I first started kayaking with my Brother-in-law for exercise in the tame waters of Lake Mission Viejo, we would often end our afternoon of kayaking with margaritas at Tortilla flats on the lake and talk about making this trip. "To Kayak from Newport Beach to Dana Point, now that would be something." It was a dream trip. But since neither of us has ever kayaked in the ocean at the time, the idea was always shelved. "Someday," we'd say. Finally that day had come, at least for me and the 7 other Kayak Anglers adventurous enough to join me.



*Left – John P. a.k.a. Eagle Eye
Top – The Rest of the Group; Jason, Kevin, Jack, Greg, Paul, Kurt & Chuck*

The tone our trip was set early, perhaps even before any of us arrived at the parking lot at Dana Point. It had a lot to do with the generosity of Cabo John. Although he wasn't able to make the paddle with us, he got up at early on his day off to help a group of guys that, for the most part, he did not know well. I think I was the only one he had actually met prior to this trip. On his lead, it was quickly apparent that this adventure wasn't going to be about who would catch the biggest fish or the most fish or even who could paddle the fastest. No this was not a race or a competition, but really it was about a common sense of purpose. It was about bonding to together as a friends and putting your skills, endurance and will to the test. So after John helped carry the last kayak down the trail, we thanked him several times. And I am certain many of us reflected his generosity and the journey ahead of us as we prepared for our launch not quite knowing what to expect.



*Jason Morton – "jas" from
kayakportfishing.com in front of Abalone point.*

Our first stop was Abalone point. These are the outer rocks on the southern end of Moro Beach. Most of the group stayed just outside the point working plastics in the boiler rocks while DefJack and I moved inside to one of many private coves in the area in search of halibut. We didn't find any halibut. But like the group working the boiler rocks outside, we found some of the clearest water that I have ever seen in Southern California. Easily visible to about 15 feet down were schools of Garibaldi frolicking through reefs that were littered with starfish and anemones. The

view of the reefs below was truly spectacular.

The middle legs of our trip were spent battling fierce head winds through most of Laguna Beach. We stopped a few times to work various reefs along the way. And we tried in vain to locate the submerged barge off of Cleo Street that was supposed to hold good quantities of fish. But the wind and the waves proved to be too much to effectively work these areas. So we decided to press on stopping a few times to rest, explore and fish in tight with the shore line.



Paul L. a.k.a. "PAL" taking a quick break then off to the front of the pack.



The incoming storm



"Yak slam" (me) – battling the rough conditions

By the time we reached the northern edge of Salt Creek State Beach and only a few miles from our destination, the wind had shifted bringing wind to our backs and the storm right on top of us. For me it, it was the first time I could stop with out losing too much ground to the rest of the group. After eating my lunch while enjoying the view of the rain pelting the clear waters of the kelp forest, Eagle Eye and PAL joined me for a quick troll around the whistle buoy for a few last Bonita while the rest of the group took advantage of the wind and paddled directly for Dana Point Harbor.

During the longest sustained paddle of the trip, from Aliso Beach to Three Arch Bay, we finally started getting into the fish. As the group would troll over schools of Bonita and 2 lb Mac-zillas, our assortment krodadiles, rapalas and rebel fastracs would get snapped up like candy from a piñata. This provided the group with more than a few welcome breaks and loads of fun. In a way, this made up for the slow fishing encountered throughout most of the paddle.



Chuck a.k.a. "Sparky" getting about 6 mph with the aid of a Kite.

Over the course of this paddle we faced all sorts of conditions on this trip; flat calm waters, wind in our face, wind at our back, confused white capped seas and rain. So it was fitting that the best conditions we encountered were during the final mile or so through Dana Point harbor and back to Baby beach. There was no wind, the water was glassy and the sun had broken through the clouds for the first and only time of the day. It made a nice accent to the sense of accomplishment we all felt. We had successfully navigated a kayak almost 16 miles through such diverse weather conditions and along the beautiful South Orange County coast. It was an experience that we all will draw from for years to come. The knowledge gained about our physical limits, the limits of our kayaks, how our kayaks reacted under all of these conditions was invaluable. I can't wait to do it all again!