

Wavewalking the Rockies



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My introduction to paddlesports occurred back in the summer of 06, which I suppose makes me a relative newcomer. My wife, Toni, joined me the next season. As with some other sports I have been attracted to over the years, kayaking has become quite an obsessive warm weather activity. I really enjoy day tripping the mountain lakes and mellow river sections that Colorado offers, I find it to be a profoundly peaceful experience. Of course, this state is best known for it's extreme white water river-runs, and if I could turn back the clock about 20 years that's probably where I would be playing as well. But, until I perfect that time machine, flat water will have to do.

I'm kind of an equipment freak, a character trait that has influenced the purchase of 7 kayaks of various shapes and sizes, so far. I am also strongly attracted to the unique and unusual, words which definitely would be included in a description of the **W**avewalk watercraft. I became aware of this boat from internet wanderings back in 06, and it peaked my interest. Had there been a local source, I might have picked one up then. But, the years passed, and I finally succumbed to my curiosity. In July (09), a new **W**500 arrived by wagon from a land far, far away.

Another example of my attraction to the unique and unusual is the sport of SkiBiking, my wintertime passion (see photo #2). Just like the **W**, there's a definite "what the hell is that" factor. For info: www.ski-bike.org

Having studied the various descriptions and reviews, I was quite anxious to hit the water and see what this little cat could do. There's a bit of a learning curve at first, you sit high off the water in a straddled "ride" position, which takes some getting used to. The correct attitude for this boat is: "keep an open mind without pre-conceptions", easier said than done sometimes when old kayaking habits creep in. But, you adapt, and soon it all feels pretty natural.

I like to "umbrella" sail (see photo #1). It works quite well downwind, there's over 20 sq.ft. of sail area in a 60" golf canopy. I like the portability and the "spontaneity" factor. Just tuck it away in the cockpit, and if the wind gods bless you and you're in the mood, you can open it up and hitch a ride. It also doubles as a nice rain/sun shade.

For sailing info: www.kayak.in-ven-ture.net/sailing.html

During a sailing escapade, your hands are occupied with the umbrella. This fact prompted the installation of a rudder to allow for greater steering control (see: photos- page 2). I believe that this is a first for a **W**, and it works quite well. Sailing aside, several of my yaks have had rudder systems, and I have come to appreciate the directional stability that the magic blade provides in blustery conditions. It like power steering in a car, it's not a necessity, but it's pretty easy to become accustomed to.

Notes & Observations...

- Good tracking (calm) • Exceptional lateral stability, stand-up paddling is possible (and interesting!) • Turning radius is about equal to an equivalent length traditional kayak • Roomy and comfortable, varied seating positions are possible • High cargo capacity • Easy entry and exit
- Solo or tandem capability • High versatility factor
- GPS speed test (calm): Cruise-3.5mph / Sprint-5mph >Aprox equivalent to a 12-13 ft. kayak
- The high profile (windage) creates a strong weathervaning tendency when seated in the middle (balanced) position. Compensatory trimming is possible to an extent by moving fore and aft on the seat.
- I wasn't real enamored with the color choices, a dark *blue* green would have been nice. Copper, Gold, Silver or a creative mix would have been interesting. Of course, color preferences are quite subjective.
- My learning process is ongoing, I seem to discover some new attribute with every trip.

Summary:

A large part of my attraction to kayaks is visual. Sleek and curvaceous, I perceive them as a work of art, especially the beautiful composite and wooden ships. They have a distinctive look and feel, you essentially *wear* a kayak. I don't consider the **W** a kayak, it has closer kinship with a canoe. In actuality, it's a watercraft unique in all the world. The catamaran design contributes some definitive technical advantages. The **W** is pure practicality, like an SUV.

We currently have 4 yaks in the herd, I like variety. I like to be able to go out to the garage and pick a boat on the whim or purpose of the day. I think of the **W** as my experimental craft, it lends itself well to modification (see: page 2). I can see foresee perhaps a larger sailing rig, outriggers, or maybe wings and a rocket? At this point, I can state with confidence that the **W**avewalk will retain an honored berth in the fleet.



#1



My local kayaking website:
www.kayak.in-ven-ture.net



#2



PHOTOS:

- 1:** Rudder system. This is a "Crack of Dawn" universal kayak rudder kit. It utilizes Vectran cord for blade control. I fabricated the mounting strut using 1x1 aluminum stock. It turns out that in this position it's not entirely necessary to have an actuator cord, it's possible to reach out and manually raise and lower the blade. It's windage sheltered between the hulls to an extent, and gets good purchase in the water (about 10"). >**1b:** Control is achieved using sliding footpads cut from a pair of carpeted auto floor mats. Soft carpet on the hull side for sliding, spiky extrusions on the other for shoe grip. They even had a grommeted hole for cord attachment.
- 2:** Spraydeck (fairing), keeps the water out and cuts drag, and I just like the way it looks. It's attached using velcro tabs. >**3:** There is an optional roll-up lap cover.
- 4:** Cockpit cover, good for storage and transportation. It's attached using wide velcro tabs and works well, even at highway speeds.
- 5:** Seat pad. It's attached using PVC tubes pressed into the spaces in the seat. I wanted different colors in the middle to indicate at a glance the center "balanced" seating position. Note my "sail" attached with bungee cording on the side.
- 6:** Custom storage pouch. This is my "emergency equipment" section. Bilge pump above + strobe, first aid kit, rope, space blanket etc in the pouch.
- ***2-6:** Kudo's to my wife, Toni, whose patience and sewing expertise made these items possible.
- 7:** Deck bungees.
- 8:** Paddle holder(s), one on each side. A J-hook install utilizing the factory cockpit bungee. Simple and functional.
- 9:** I attached a bungee cord on the forward seat section for convenient stowage of extra clothing etc.
- 10:** Leash points at all 4 corners of the cockpit for dry bags etc.
- 11:** Portable electric motor. The manufacturer claims it will run for 2 hours using a 6AH battery, I only played with it for 15 minutes. I can stick the prop in the water on one end and steer with the rudder on the other. It's also possible to deploy it off to the side, using rudder assistance to hold a straight course.
- 12:** Yin/Yang, the universal symbol of balance and harmony, an appropriate sentiment for the paddling experience.

Most of the mods have solid functionality, but I was also interested in aesthetic value. I was looking to add color and texture, to achieve a more engaging appearance beyond the basic green plastic. This has been quite an enjoyable creative exercise thus far, I guess a priority project for next season will need to be a cart. There are many possibilities...