

My Life On (and in) the Water by Rob Holt

I first became interested in paddling in the late eighties when my partner Marie and I moved to Damascus minutes from the Clackamas River. I borrowed an old kayak and spent some frustrating hours trying to roll it. I could tip it over easily enough but ended up swimming because I couldn't get it upright. I hired a local kayak shop owner to work with me at a local swimming pool and soon I was rolling. Along with friends I spent several years paddling the rapids of the Clackamas, Deschutes, Molalla, North Santiam and other Northwest rivers.

At some point I had had enough of river running and decided to try sea kayaking. I bought a sixteen-foot boat and started paddling on the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. I found the rhythmic motion of my body very calming and meditative as I sliced through the still water.

I soon found sea kayaking wasn't always so peaceful. My paddling buddy and I started venturing into the ocean on days when the surf wasn't too big. One early episode taught me of the risks involved in ocean paddling. The plan was to paddle out the mouth of the Salmon River on the central Oregon coast and explore the sea caves on Cascade Head. To do so we had to get through a zone of breaking waves.



As we paddled through them I heard my friend yell and turned to see him out of his boat. As I turned I was slammed by a breaker and capsized. In the dynamic water our rolls failed. More practice! Fortunately a very skilled boater appeared and helped us get to shore.

Another interesting incident happened at Willamette Falls in Oregon City. We were playing in the rapids at the base of the falls when a huge sea lion surfaced right

next to my boat. She could have easily come up under me. Fortunately she was more interested in hunting salmon than me.

A fit paddler can average 3+ mph so it is easy to travel 10-15 miles a day in good conditions. I became interested in longer paddles and having been a backpacker most of my life it was an easy transition to camp out of my boat. We have done a couple of multi-day trips in the San Juan Islands paddling from island to island and camping. I'd like to do more of that.