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Skylark by Eddyline Kayaks**

February 2005

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www.seakayakermag.com

The smaller X-Treme model has a slightly thinner cushion that I found much easier to adjust to in my surf-ski, where stability and balance are hard enough to achieve even when sitting as low as possible in the seat. The X-Treme was a perfect compromise, and it will become part of my standard gear in both my surf-ski and my touring kayak.

Either of the Skwoosh Paddling Cushions will make an impressive contribution to your comfort and increase the number of hours you can spend kayaking.

Paddling Cushion \$39.99

X-Treme Paddling Cushion \$29.99

Skwoosh

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Expedition Compression Bag by Seattle Sports

Dry bags are fairly simple pieces of gear. Put your clothes or gear inside, roll it up, and clip it shut, then take the contents out at the end of the day, and they're dry—in theory, anyway. And yet dry bags, following the natural evolution of all gear, are continually getting lighter and more tricked out with innovative features. But with each advancement in performance and design there often comes a chance of failure. Ultra-light-

weight materials mean that they're easier to tear or puncture. Add a purge valve and you add another opening for water to possibly get in. A welded window of clear material means more seams that can leak. Zippered closures—well, you get the picture.

Still, Seattle Sports continues to push the dry-bag design envelope. The Expedition Compression Bag is available in three sizes, from 1,560 to 2,700 cubic inches, and features a urethane-coated 200-denier nylon body with attached end caps laced through with four adjustable straps, one of which has a quick-release buckle to improve access to the top of the bag when packing it. The bag has a roll top with a buckle closure and a one-way purge valve installed to vent excess air as the gear-filled bag gets compressed.

To test the bag, I filled it with a synthetic three-season sleeping bag that left about 10 inches unused at the top of the dry bag. With the top prepared for closure, I "burped" the bag down with my knees and achieved about a 50-percent reduction in size. Once the top was buckled shut, I put all my weight on the bag and reduced it down perhaps another 10 percent through the purge valve. Finally, I pulled the end-cap over the top and started reefing the



The Expedition Compression Bag reduces a bulky sleeping bag to a compact package that will take up much less cargo space.

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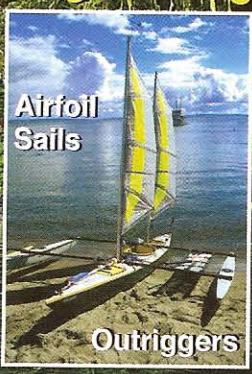
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compression straps one by one, working my way around the bag purging still more air. By the time the compression straps reached their ends, the bag had been reduced to a well-sealed, compact package the size of a basketball.

The end caps, in addition to being integral in the bag's compression system, also serve to protect the roll-top closure and purge valve from direct splashing, further reducing the chance of leakage.

Maximizing usable space in a kayak is essential to a paddler's comfort, safety and enjoyment of overnight or longer outings. A sleeping bag doesn't weigh much, but it can take up the best part of the space below decks. The Expedition Compression Bag is a great way to reduce the size of what is perhaps a paddler's largest single item to half its ordinary packed size—or less.

Expedition Compression Bag

\$36, \$38.50 or \$40, depending on size
Seattle Sports
800-632-6163 or 206-782-0773
info@seattlesportsco.com
www.seattlesportsco.com

Hydrostar MultiStrobe by Seattle Sports

An unlit kayaker at night is about as visible as a piece of driftwood. Reflective tape applied to a PFD, paddle blades, and up and down your kayak deck like racing stripes is beneficial, but only if other traffic is casting beams of light in your direction. Reflectors are, as the name implies, "re"-active—but safety in any context is best approached proactively, and that's exactly what Seattle Sports' new Hydrostar MultiStrobe light is designed for.

The MultiStrobe is powered by four AAA batteries and uses nine LED bulbs: three white, three red and three green. (Though the "strobe" part of the name suggests extremely brilliant and short bursts of light, LEDs do not function that way.) It has five settings: white light in



The MultiStrobe can be used as a flashlight or, with its suction-cup base, as a deck light.

three levels of intensity, flashing white, and side-by-side red and green running lights. (Coast Guard regulations require that the red and green running lights not be visible from astern. The lights will be blocked by the paddler somewhat, but the proper 135° angle can be obscured by putting a piece of 2-inch-wide duct tape on the back of the lens.)

The 4.75-inch-tall light has a magnetic bottom that helps secure it to the included suction-cup base, which brings its total mounted height to about 6.75 inches. A short bungee leash and plastic clip can be used to lash the light and base to the kayak's deck lines. The light floats in a "light up" orientation, either on its own or with the suction cup base attached. The suction cup by itself, however, does not float.

With the MultiStrobe set to red-and-green running lights and mounted on the deck of a fiberglass tandem, my wife Heather and I launched in the dark of an autumn evening, and paddled our double at about five knots directly into one- to two-foot chop on the lake near our home. As the bow broke through the first good-sized wave, I thought for sure the light would be torn from the deck and be left dangling from its leash. For an hour, though, we battled through the waves and gusts, putting the light (and Heather, the bow-paddler) through literally hundreds of good dousings without a flinch or a flicker. While we were surfing downwind, the light stayed lit and securely in place even when the bow was fully submerged.

Heather mentioned that the light, mounted directly in front of her, took a bit of getting used to but didn't have an adverse effect on her night vision. Paddlers differ, though, so it would be prudent to test it out close to home before heading out for a night trip.

On shore, one twist of the base changed the MultiStrobe to its flashlight setting to help with loading gear.

The suction-cup base adhered equally

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well to a plywood kayak despite flaking varnish. The base did not, however, keep its grip on a rough plastic kayak deck for more than a few seconds. Creating a smooth area with silicon-type adhesive may be a possible solution to creating adhesion. Also, the magnetic base that holds the light to the suction cup began to affect our compass when mounted within eight inches of it. This should be an easy distance to exceed with most boats, however.

The MultiStrobe is a very versatile and useful device and is a considerable step toward making yourself more visible at night and increasing your safety during night paddling.

Hydrostar MultiStrobe \$29.95

Seattle Sports
800-632-6163 or 206-782-0773
info@seattlesportsco.com
www.seattlesportsco.com

Guide Vest by North Water

The new North Water Guide Vest is to a kayaker what a tool belt is to a carpenter: portable storage. A dedicated sea kayaker or a guide should be outfitted with an arsenal of carabiners and towlines, a VHF radio, energy bars, flares and a hydration pack, first-aid kit, knife, maps and a pocket-sized notebook. But when that same kayaker or guide heads for the racecourse, or into the surf zone, that unused gear is nothing but extra weight.

The Guide Vest makes it possible to leave your PFD unladen and ready for racing or surfing, as it easily removes every bit of gear, leaving it perfectly organized for the next big outing. The Guide Vest lets outfitters arm their guides with the required equipment while allowing them to wear their personal PFDs. On land, the vest lets you carry important safety gear during hikes. Just leave the PFD behind and head inland with the same set of essential equipment.

The black nylon-mesh vest includes two front pockets bigger than those standard on most PFDs and a padded radio pocket on the right breast, two large lash tabs and a carabiner clip on the left breast and one lash tab on the back left shoulder. It features a back-mounted hydration bladder pocket, a tow belt and a zipper closure with seven adjustable straps—one at each shoulder, two on

each side and one at the bottom front. The bright red pockets and retro-reflective material front and back make the vest easy to spot, day or night

My own PFD has a small pocket for an energy bar-sized payload and a whistle—not much more. With the Guide Vest, I could carry everything mentioned in the first paragraph. The adjustable straps allow the same custom fit as is standard on modern PFDs, and with seven cinches, I had it tightly in place.

For the return paddle, I passed the vest to my wife Heather, who is a foot shorter than I am and a hundred pounds lighter. She quickly adjusted the vest down to her size and, like me, thought it was a functional, intelligent piece of gear for those who vary their paddling. Her only suggestion was that zippered closures would ensure more security than the “flap-type” pocket closures for small items if you were to get maytagged in breaking surf.

Despite the extra weight of the gear, any sense of having added another layer is cancelled out by the overall fit of the vest and evenly distributed pockets. The generous cut of the armholes kept the



The Guide Vest adds carrying capacity, versatility and visibility to any PFD.

vest from creating any extra chafe points, as I'd feared it might. The Guide Vest effectively transformed my low-profile racing vest into, well, a fully equipped guide vest. **SK**

Guide Vest \$129

(available Jan. 3, 2005)
North Water, 604-264-0827
northwater@northwater.com
www.northwater.com

Brandon Nelson is a professional home inspector and adventure kayaker living in Bellingham, Washington.



photo by Martin Sundberg

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