

# "WHAT IS THAT WEIRD THING ON THE FRONT OF YOUR BOAT?"

*By Harv Mastalir*

Pointing to a long blue tube-like bag attached to the bow of my kayak, people often ask, "What's that?" When I respond, "A sea anchor," they nod knowingly and leave as quickly as possible probably wondering why this idiot would think he needs an anchor on a sea kayak.

Sea anchors have been around a long time—the first written accounts date to the 1760's. There are contemporary accounts of sailors using sea anchors to ride out 100 knot gusts and 65 foot waves in mid-ocean storms. So what is this strange thing and what does it do?

A sea anchor is used to slow your downwind drift when you are not paddling. When paddling into a wind it will allow you to rest without losing so much of your hard earned mileage. It also keeps your bow pointed into the wind. A sea kayak at rest naturally "lies in the trough" meaning it turns parallel to the waves and takes the waves on the beam. By holding your bow into the wind it leaves you in the most stable position possible.

My sea anchor, a 'DriftStopper,' designed and manufactured by Alan Boulter is the only sea anchor I am aware

of that is designed specifically for sea kayaks. It consists of a 32 inch diameter ripstop nylon parachute attached to a 42 foot anchor line that connects to the cockpit coaming of the kayak. A float on a 10 foot line at the top of the parachute keeps the anchor from sinking too deeply. All of this is housed in a tubular control/storage sack that comprises the ingenious deployment and retrieval system which makes the DriftStopper very easy to use. Pulling on the float line draws the sea anchor from its storage bag. Retrieval consists of hauling in the anchor line, which pulls the anchor back up into the storage bag ready for its next use.

I consider the sea anchor an underrated and valuable piece of safety equipment. As a solo paddler, I want all the back-ups I can reasonably have. In the event of a capsized, re-entry would be made much easier in large seas by holding the bow into the wind. If you have any doubts about this, read the accounts of accidents in Deep Trouble (available in the club library). It could also be used to hold you in the most stable position if the wind and waves get overwhelming. A sea anchor

can also be used for surf landings (see "Sea Kayaker" April, 1995). Most accounts of sleeping in kayaks will also include the use of a sea anchor. It will also keep you from drifting downwind while you stop to take a picture or eat your lunch. While not necessary for paddling Colorado's reservoirs, I wouldn't paddle the coast without one.

So that, in a nutshell is what that strange-looking thing is on my kayak. The next club paddle on a windy day I would be happy to demonstrate how it works — just ask!

## SOURCES

DriftStopper sea anchors are available from:

Long Haul Products  
970-856-3662  
Mark Eckhart, RMSKC founder

Boulter of the Earth,  
201-722-0033.

Approximate cost is \$135.