

# RAY VAN DUSEN

PURVEYOR OF QUALITY GEAR,  
TEACHER, REPAIRMAN,  
AWESOME PADDLER, AND A DEAR FRIEND

Rocky Mountain Sea Kayak Club's

*The NEWS*, February 2018

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AWESOME PADDLER, AND A DEAR FRIEND

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Raymond Van Dusen

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President Clark Strickland wrote, "Long-time RMSKC member and mentor, Ray Van Dusen aka "River Mouse" died February 2, 2018. He had been ill for some time and passed away after a short stay in hospice care.



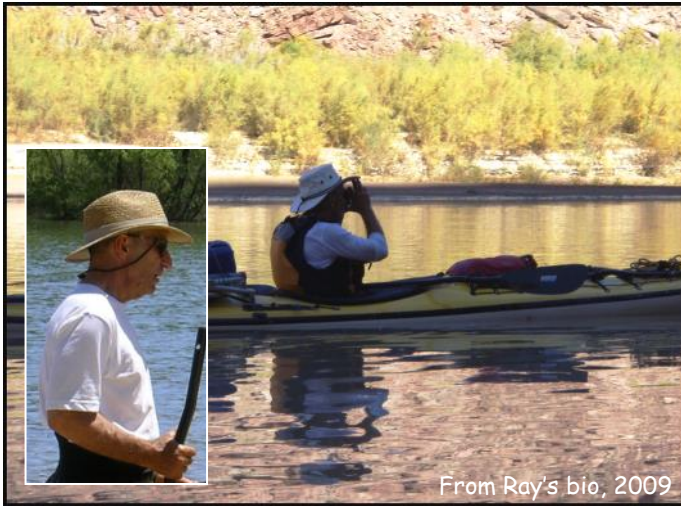
Ray at PaddleFest, 2013

"There was no one like River Mouse. Many of our members benefited from his teaching and skills critiques. As his good friend Gary McIntosh said, "Nobody had an eye like Ray for what was going on in a paddle stroke or maneuver. He could watch for a few seconds and put his finger right on what could be improved, from placement of the hands during a roll, to how to rotate in a stroke and the mechanics of where a paddler's weight needed to be."

"Ray was generous in so many ways. He shared his skills willingly. He could fix anything. He knew about the dynamics of paddles and how to match the style of the paddle with the paddler or the type of paddling. He knew about equipment, sources for boats and every sort of accessory and piece of paddle wear, having tested them personally. He took paddling seriously and was intensely interested in helping everyone move to higher levels of skill, confidence and enjoyment. He was a pillar of RMSKC, and we shall miss him."

In 2009 the *Mountain Paddler* ran a series of biographies about our instructors. Here's what we wrote about him, with the photos we used at the time on the following page:

"Ray started paddling in 1995 after he couldn't backpack or ride bikes anymore. All of his boats have come from Canoe Colorado; he paddles with them on most of the trips he does, and they like to cover distance! Because of that, and since those fellows are bigger and stronger than he is, he says he's had to learn to be more efficient in his paddling. He also picks kayaks that are long and narrow enough to compensate but still roomy enough to carry gear for a week or more.



"Ray has studied every book and video that he could get his hands on to become a better paddler. He gives credit to his friend Gary McIntosh for his help the last few years learning to teach paddling techniques.

"In 1998, Jerry Nyre of Canoe Colorado asked him if he would sell kayaks and gear, and that's when he started River Mouse Kayaks. With each demo and sale of a boat he gives a lesson to help his customers have a better time paddling. He also teaches private lessons to people who haven't bought his boats; call him if you're interested: 303-421-3729.

"About that same time his wrist started hurting so much he thought it was time to quit or try a bent shaft paddle. Lindal, his paddle manufacturer, told him they could install their blades on bent shafts or they would sell him blades and he could buy shafts and put them together himself; that's what he has done. He hasn't had any wrist pain since, and he can fix up a paddle for you, too.

"The places he likes to paddle are the Platte River, in Wyoming; the White River from Rangely, Colorado, to Gas Wells, Utah; the Gunnison River from Delta to White Water, Colorado; the Green River in Utah to the confluence with the Colorado River; the Missouri River in Montana; and lakes in Yellowstone National Park.

"Ray plans to give a roll class and tie a video in with it, but that will wait until it's warmer. His suggestion for improving paddling skills is you need to paddle as much as possible and practice—practice a little every time you go out."

Ray was **ALWAYS TEACHING OR HELPING MEMBERS PRACTICE** to improve their skills, either in scheduled sessions or just out paddling informally with friends. Here's a list of some of the classes he taught, often with his good friend and fellow instructor Gary McIntosh. [The list doesn't begin until in 2008, when RMSKC publications started keeping records.] Ray seemed to hide from cameras, but there are a few photos of him from these events on the next page.

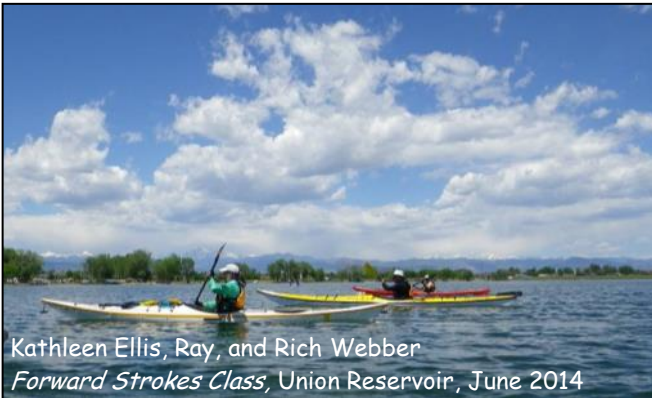
- 2008: Basic Skills Class, Eagle Cove Chatfield
- 2009 and 2010: Informal help before Multi-Club on the South Platte for people new to river paddling
- June, 2010: Advanced Strokes at Soda Lakes, with other RMSKC instructors
- July and August, 2010: ACA Coastal Kayak Skills at Soda Lakes, with Brian Curtiss [photo]
- June, 2012: Bracing Clinic at Soda Lakes, which was cut short by lightning
- June, 2013: ACA Level 2 Coastal Sea Kayaking at Soda Lakes
- May, 2014: Moving Water Practice on the South Platte at Brighton, Ray and Gary McIntosh [photo]
- May, 2014: Edging practice at Union Reservoir with Gary, Rich Webber and Brian Hunter
- June, 2014: Lunch after a Union Reservoir paddle for advice on paddling the Missouri Breaks
- June, 2014: Forward Strokes at Union [This became just practicing maneuvers, but there's a photo.]
- July, 2014: Roll Class at Soda Lakes
- July, 2014: ACA Certification classes
- August, 2014: Moving Water practice on the Colorado River, with Gary McIntosh
- Spring, 2015: Info on Subaru tie-down retrofits and keys without computer chips
- Every Winter: Pool instruction at Meyers pool in Arvada [photo]



Ray rocking George Ottenhoff's boat to help him practice bracing; *Coastal Kayak Skills*, Summer 2010



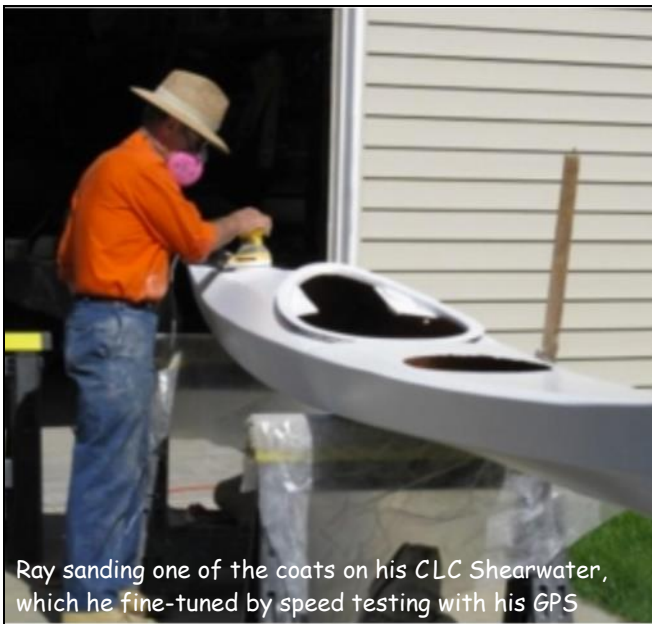
Ray and Gary lining their boats around the drop; *Moving Water Practice*, Brighton, May 2014



Kathleen Ellis, Ray, and Rich Webber  
*Forward Strokes Class*, Union Reservoir, June 2014



Ray analyzing Bernie Dahlen's roll at Meyers Pool, 2013



Ray sanding one of the coats on his CLC Shearwater, which he fine-tuned by speed testing with his GPS

Ray was also **ALWAYS WORKING ON BOATS**—his or other people's. He dropped the seats and added aggressive thigh braces to all his kayaks, and then built one almost from scratch. It was from a CLC Shearwater kit, but he tweaked the design so much it was hard to tell. [Read the specifics in the *Mountain Paddler* 23-2b.]



Ray working on a kinked skeg cable in the parking lot at Union Reservoir. Of course he had the tools in his car!

Ray wasn't a big-group person, but he almost always joined us for **PADDLEFEST AND THE WINTER PARTY.**

Several years ago he brought buoys to set up a race course at PaddleFest. He whipped his boat around them using his extreme edging so efficiently he left everyone except Gary McIntosh and Brian Curtiss far behind! No one has said anything about having a slalom race since.



Ray talking to Kristy Webber  
PaddleFest, 2017



Rich Webber and Ray  
PaddleFest, 2009

Starting as far back as 2009, articles about the Winter Party mentioned Ray's Chile Relleno Casserole. For years, people in the know surreptitiously elbowed their way to the front of the line to make sure they got at least a little bit before it ran out.



Ray's Chile Rellenos



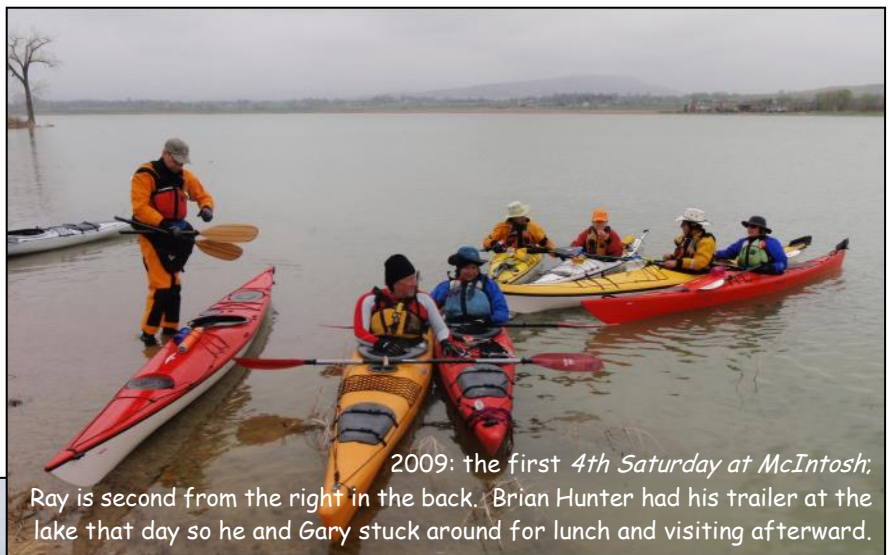
Winter Party, 2012



WINTER PARTY, 2014

Ray Van Dusen on the left,  
visiting with Tim Fletcher, Dick Dieckman,  
Anna Troth, Clark Strickland and Gary McIntosh

HE PADDLED WITH RMSKC FRIENDS, in impromptu get-togethers or on Club paddles.



2009: the first 4th Saturday at McIntosh; Ray is second from the right in the back. Brian Hunter had his trailer at the lake that day so he and Gary stuck around for lunch and visiting afterward.



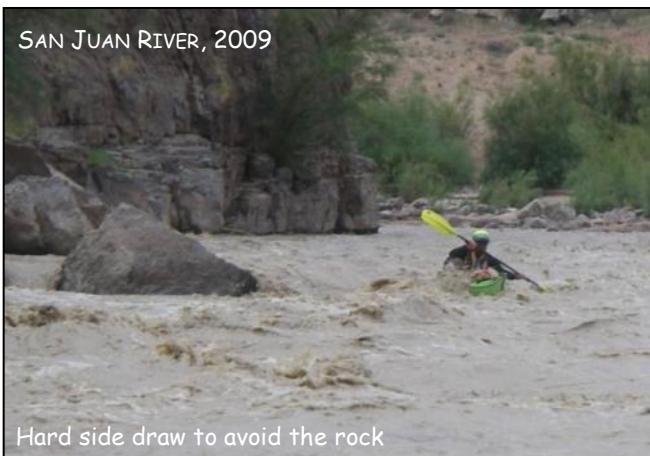
Union Reservoir, Fall 2015; Ray is in his newly built white boat farthest from the camera

A group often came up to Union on Saturdays to avoid the weekday traffic. Start Time was announced as 9:00 but since most people were early it evolved to mean on-the-water-and-ready-to-go at 8:30.

They usually paddled a couple circles around, and then worked on some maneuvers or rolls.

**RAY LOVED RIVER PADDLING.** Here are some photos from trips with his Canoe Colorado friends. [Also check a super article he wrote about paddling the Current River in Missouri, in our *Mountain Paddler* 19-1b. You'll find an article about a trip with him through the Missouri Breaks on the Missouri River, by Kathleen Ellis, in issue 17-3b.]

Here and on the next page are photos that member Pam Noe, and former member Eric Niles, sent from trips on the North Platte, the Green, the Missouri, the White and the San Juan rivers.



SAN JUAN RIVER, 2009

Hard side draw to avoid the rock

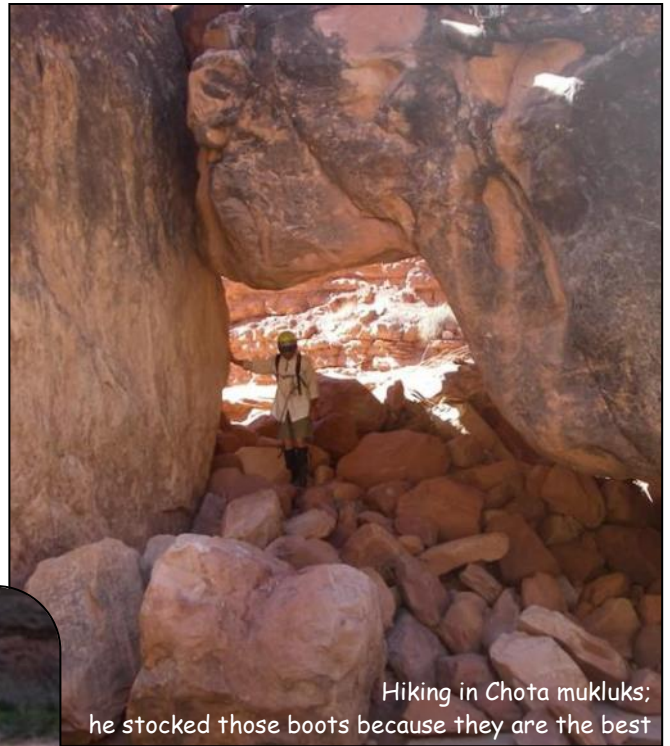


Deep in the hole below the rock

The third photo in this series is on the next page



Big grin after the hole



Hiking in Chota mukluks; he stocked those boots because they are the best



Camping with Canoe Colorado on the San Juan



Visiting with people before the put-in on the North Platte, Saratoga to I-80 run



Somewhere in Colorado or Utah on the White River, 2008

Ray joined RMSKC in 1995; he was already a wonderful resource when the rest of us first became members.

And when we did, he became an important part of paddling, and a friend, for many of us.

On the following pages are some memories of Ray from Club members.

**MATT LUTKUS**, former President and long-time ACA instructor who now lives in Maine, sent Ray this email:

Ray, I saw where you were selling your personal boats. If I were still in Denver I would come down and have a look. But the real reason that I am emailing you is to thank you for getting me into the sport in the first place. I went to the Denver outdoor show in January, 2003. That is when I met you. I was looking for either a canoe or a kayak that I could take on a cross country trip that I was planning to do later that year. You not only got me into a Northwest Kayak's *Pursuit XL* but also hooked me up with the Rocky Mountain Sea Kayak Club. The sport continues to be one of my lifetime passions. Thank you, Ray!

**BRIAN CURTISS**, former ACA instructor who now lives in North Carolina most of the year: Ray was the first person to teach me about sea kayaking. I had gone paddling a few times on my own using rental kayaks but had never had an actual lesson. I first contacted Ray in the spring of 2002 to buy my first kayak and he suggested we meet at Chatfield Reservoir to try out boats. We spent about 3-4 hours with me trying out all three of the kayaks that Ray had brought along that day. As I found out later, he had selected them to illustrate a range of performance characteristics and we spent the day with me figuring out what gave each one its 'character.' I ended up ordering a Current Design's *Storm* that took several months to arrive. In the meantime, Ray lent me one of the boats I had tried out and we spent several more days at Chatfield with Ray teaching me to paddle in a straight line and other basic skills. Over the next few years Ray continued to provide these informal kayaking lessons and was always willing to provide suggestions for improvements when on club paddles. A number of years later in 2007, I accompanied Ray (with several others) on my most memorable sea kayaking adventure, a five day trip down the San Juan River in Utah. I'll always remember Ray as someone who was always willing to spend the time teaching, both on and off the water. He will be missed.

**KRISTY WEBBER**: There was nothing typical or ordinary about Ray. From the first paddle I did with RMSKC until the end of his life he was *always* supportive of me. He would not allow me to feel sorry for myself or to believe that I could not do whatever I wished in my boat. He believed I had the potential to do a solid roll even when I did not. A very high compliment indeed was paid to both he and Gary McIntosh when Shawna and Leon of Body Boat Bladed asked Rich and I where "pond paddlers" like ourselves from Colorado had learned to do so many turns and strokes reasonably competently.

Not only was he an amazing kayak mentor, he had amazing stories about his life to share. He was generally pretty quiet on the water and I always felt honored when he would give me the gift of one of his experiences. It is an unspeakable loss to both Rich and me to no longer be able to learn from and play on the water with Ray.

**KATHLEEN ELLIS**: I just need a single word to remember Ray: ROTATE. He also claimed it was possible to talk while maintaining my paddling form. Here's a fun memory that shows another side of Ray: Once while camping on the Missouri Breaks, he became annoyed by a group in canoes who had partied a little too late for his taste. One of the group was celebrating his birthday the following day. At the crack of dawn before they had stirred, Ray stood on the river bank and sang both verses of Happy Birthday as loudly as he could. I believe he made his point.

**JAY GINGRICH**: We're glad we stopped for a visit with Ray to recall some trips and anecdotes before leaving for Baja last fall; he was still excited about paddling! Let's try to celebrate life as we remember Ray. He didn't do any half steppin'.

**MARSHA DOUGHERTY**: When Ray was teaching me to rotate in the forward stroke, he paddled up to me and said, "You are arm paddling again". I said, "Oh yeah, I forgot," and started to paddle correctly. Ray said, "That's OK. Whenever you catch yourself reverting back to arm paddling just correct yourself, and pretty soon the correct way will be second nature."



**ANNE FIORE:** One thing I am especially appreciative of was the insight he shared with us concerning the route through the Missouri Breaks on the Missouri River. He really offered a lot of insight. He was always willing to share his knowledge.

**SUE HUGHES:** Ray taught me and Jud, and maybe others of us, our first kayak class at Eagle Cove at Chatfield in 2008. The next year he gave the beginners some pointers on river kayaking before the spring Multi-Club paddle on the South Platte, and then ran to pull me out of the bushes when I'd tried to follow Brian Curtiss over a log and had gotten high-centered and pushed sideways into the trees.

I always felt he had confidence in me, even when I needed to be rescued. He's a big reason I have had the self-assurance to do so much paddling and enjoy so many camping trips with RMSKC. I didn't realize some of these insights about Ray until I started to express them when I wrote Judy, his wife. I wish I'd told him before he died.

**ANNA TROTH:** Ray helped me in a lot of ways. He tried to teach me how to roll, and brace with no success, but finally with his help I learned to paddle correctly. He was very patient. He helped me pad my cockpit so it would fit me better. I was also a friend of his wife, Judy, as we are both artists, and were in art classes at Park Hill Art Club.



We will continue to paddle with the kayaks and gear Ray sold us, the boats he outfitted and repaired for us, and with the good paddling instruction and wealth of helpful hints and advice he offered us so generously.