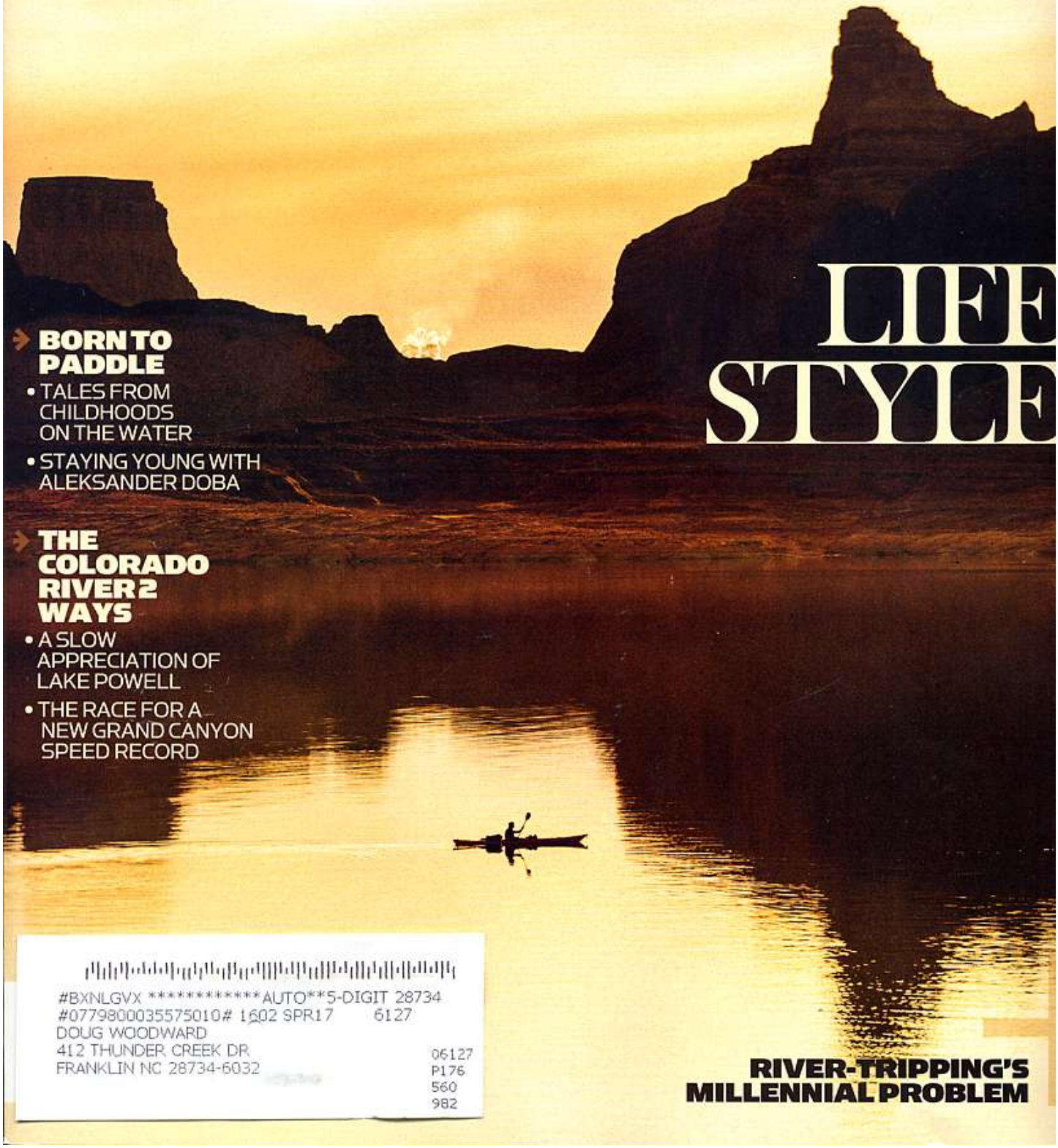
REVIEW: 6 LIGHT TOURING KAYAKS TESTED // 2016 DRYSUIT AND ACCESSORIES GUI

CANOE & KAYAK



LIFE STYLE

BORN TO PADDLE
- TALES FROM CHILDHOODS ON THE WATER
- STAYING YOUNG WITH ALEKSANDER DOBA

THE COLORADO RIVER 2 WAYS
- A SLOW APPRECIATION OF LAKE POWELL
- THE RACE FOR A NEW GRAND CANYON SPEED RECORD

RIVER-TRIPPING'S MILLENNIAL PROBLEM

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DOUG WOODWARD
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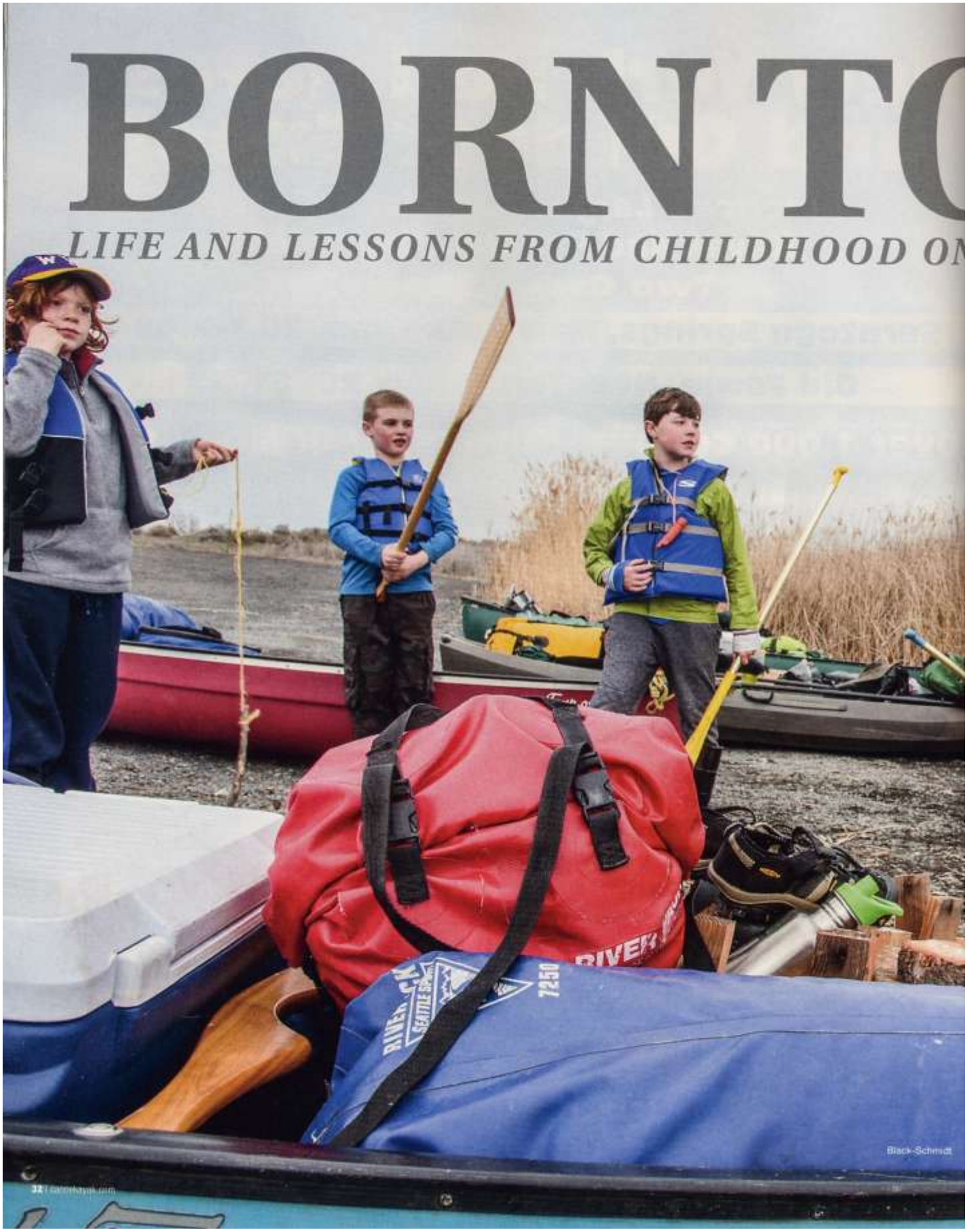
BORN TO

LIFE AND LESSONS FROM CHILDHOOD ON



Black-Schmidt

PADDLE

HE WATER

WHAT'S THE SECRET TO RAISING A PADDLER? THERE'S NO SECRET. YOU JUST POINT THEM TO WATER, KEEP THEM SAFE, AND LET THEM DISCOVER THE JOY OF PADDLING FOR THEMSELVES. THEY'LL LEARN AS THEY GROW, AND SO WILL YOU.

SNAGGLETOOTH

Zak Podmore // Dolores River

If first memories are a kind of birth to those who carry them, then I was born on the banks of the Dolores River at the age of four.

The place I landed was red and dusty. I was alking down a rocky path, holding my mom's hand. knew she'd been with me for a long time, that ere was a river nearby, that we were safe. Mostly hat I remember is the sunlight. It arced through the oughs of pinyon and ponderosa, almost palpable in e dancing air, and sent radiant spangles out across e dirt. I stepped on them cautiously, not knowing if ey'd spring to life. The trunk of long-dead juniper ee twisted out of the earth like a grey, frozen flame.

It's funny, but that's where the memory fades. ll the action that followed has since slipped back into the blankness. My mom and I had been walking around Snaggletooth Rapid, the crux of a 28-mile wilderness stretch of the Dolores River in southwestern Colorado. On the far side of the memory, she led me off the glowing trail and we climbed down to the river to watch my dad's run. His boat slid sideways onto a rock, folded and wrapped. There was yelling, ropes.

That evening around the campfire I asked a family friend, Steve Arrowsmith, to lie down on the ground. He played the role of the river. My trusted stuffed animal, a white snow leopard named Mountain, became the rock. Gathering other props, I recreated the day's excitement: the wrap, the rescue, the rest of the run.

I know all this now because when I was growing up, a photograph of Steve, Mountain and me reenacting the wrap sat on our family's mantle. I've heard many times how I worked through the traumatic scene, recreating it on a stage that was closer to my scale and entertaining the group in the process. That day must have left some mark on me, but what I remember now is the light.

–Zak Podmore is C&K's online editor.

AWAKENING

Alan Kesselheim // Yellowstone River

It sounds cliché to say my appreciation for the wonders of nature came alive through my children. But like most clichés, it persists because it happens to be true. As when we pulled over at a small tributary stream along the lower Yellowstone River with Eli, at a barely-walking nine months old. He was mesmerized by the tiny waterfall sheeting over a ledge of sandstone. He crawled over and parked in front of it, cherubic and pink, putting his hand slowly and deliberately into the curtain of clear water and pulling it back out, trying to make sense of this new element, this new awareness, as he had repeatedly over our month-long journey down the river, exploring everything from the marvel of warm sand to the taste of goose poop. So yeah, cliché. Also totally true.

TIME TO EXPLORE

Karrie Thomas // Lobster Lake

an Upper Cherry Creek when I was four months egnant, simply because I didn't know if I'd ever t another chance. Parenthood was coming fast, on a collision course with my life of nonstop kayaking and adventure. Even though my husband and I had wanted to start a family, the thought of giving up those freewheeling ways was far scarier than the stair-stepping waterfalls of California's most-famous Class V.

I needn't have worried. When our boys were still in diapers, my husband and I took them on short paddling trips and riverside campouts. Last summer, when the boys were three and six, we took them on their first multi-day canoe trip in northern Maine. A friend told us everything we needed to know: "Don't try to do too much," she said. "Allow yourself time to just enjoy it."

We started our five-day canoe trip at Lobster Lake, a magical place with narrow sand beaches, mountain views and wide-open sky. For the first two days we stayed right there, swimming, messing about in the canoe, catching crawdads and frogs. We spent the last three days paddling all of 23 miles down the West Branch of the Penobscot River. We camped early and spent afternoons jumping off rocks, riding the currents into broad eddys, jumping again. Our last campsite was nestled in the trees just above Chesuncook Lake. We explored a nearby island where we found an abandoned duck's nest and animal prints in the sand. The kids were inspired adventurers carefully studying their discoveries, eager for the next treasure. At our take-out the next day, the boys blinked back tears. They didn't want the trip to end.

–Karrie Thomas is Executive Director of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail.

Doug Woodward

HOMECOMING

Canyon Woodward // Gates of Lodore

I float through the Gates of Lodore, oars at rest. I gawk at the deep red and black sandstone cliffs rising up from the water and towering above. I feel as small as an infant. Something stirs in me, like water breaking free of a dam and reacquainting itself with its familiar course. Waves of memories break over me. Holding Mom's hand as we walk around Hell's Half Mile. Catching lizards under the careful tutelage of my sister. Running Hell's Half Mile for the first time, water crashing above my head. Running my little fingers over the pictographs left by those who first knew these canyons. Chasing the sparks of a campfire or the shadow of the canyon rim cast by a rising moon.

Returning for the first time since I was a child, I find the rapids less intimidating and the beaches less expansive than I remember. But the other things–from the smell of the groover to the steepness of the canyon walls–ring of familiarity. The powerful energy of the canyon and the life-giving water that flows through it are as enchanting as ever. I am reminded that this place is a deep part of me, filled with stories and ruins, star shine and moonshine, echoes of the past and reminders of the present. It is here, adrift in the swirls of canyon current, where my soul resonates with the echoes of water moving through time, full and free as the river wild.

–Canyon Woodward is an instructor at the National Outdoor Leadership School. He was 7 months old his first time through Lodore.

DOUBT NO MORE

Doug Woodward // Nantahala Falls

Doug Woodward

Oh shit, he's over. Not rolling up. Or coming out. *What were you thinking, Dad?*

Then, suddenly, Forest's small face breaks the surface, with that "I wasn't sure I was going to make it" look spread across his 6-year-old countenance. I'm beside him now, but a moment ago I was a stroke too far away to give him a grip on my bow when he needed it. We ease through the eddy to t rocks below Nantahala Falls. I hate to think what's going on in his head.

I know what's going on in mine. Soul-searching questions. Too far, too soon? Have I bec a pushy parent, believing that Forest's paddling skills were further along than they really are We've worked together on kayak strokes, wet exits, rolls. But he's never done a combat roll.

Just follow my line, I told him. You can do this. Except for that last move.

I never asked him if he *really* wanted to run the falls. Have I set his paddling back a decade? A lifetime? *Back off, Dad.*

But Forest is tough. His whitewater enthusiasm was dampened for a while, but returned spades. His older brother, David, picked up where I eased off, eventually leading him down steep creeks of the Southern Appalachians, waters where I had never ventured.

When Forest was 27, he returned the confidence I had shown in his paddling skills by inviting me, at age 77, to run the Colorado River with him. Together, the two of us piloted a 16-foot oar rig through the Grand Canyon. Later, my son made an award-winning film about the adventure we shared and the bond between us.

I no longer question those early years.

–Doug Woodward and his wife Trish have raised six children, river-runners all. He is the author of Wherever Waters Flow: A Lifelong Love Affair With Wild Rivers *(Headwaters).*

The girls discuss Nsync, boys at school, irritating brothers, and Posh Spice.

Peter Mather

THE GIRLS IN THE BOAT

Sue Leaf // Boise Brule River

We are daytripping on the Boise Brule River of northwestern Wisconsin, my husband and I in one canoe, our youngest daughter and her cousin, our niece, in another. The two girls, age 10, have just returned from a week at the Audubon Center of the Northwoods at Sandstone, Minnesota where, among other activities, they learned how to paddle a canoe. They learned the whitewater alphabet below Devil's Gate on the frothy Kettle River, and they are eager to show us what they know.

This particular stretch of the Bois Brule is rife with riffles, one set of Class Is after another. None is especially challenging, but there is a Class II, the Little Joe, at the end of the trip that offers some excitement.

Tom and I watch the girls push off and work together to avoid being swept into an outside curve. I can tell they are used to being a team. There's minimal chat. Each knows what the other is doing. They thread through the first riffles. They sense we are watching them, and enjoy, I think, displaying their skill.

When the river calms down a bit, I can hear normal chatter wafting from their canoe. The tweens discuss Nsync, boys at school, irritating brothers, and Posh Spice. They have opinions on all of these.

When they hear the approach of the Little Joe Rapids, I see a new attentiveness in their posture, in the tilt of their heads. Linnea, the bowman, gestures to Christina. There's no hesitation, no apprehension. Christina positions the canoe and into the whitewater they go.

I think: they're set for life.

–Sue Leaf is the author of Portage: A Family, a Canoe, and the Search for the Good Life *(University of Minnesota Press).*

THE SAVE

Alan Kesselheim // Main Salmon

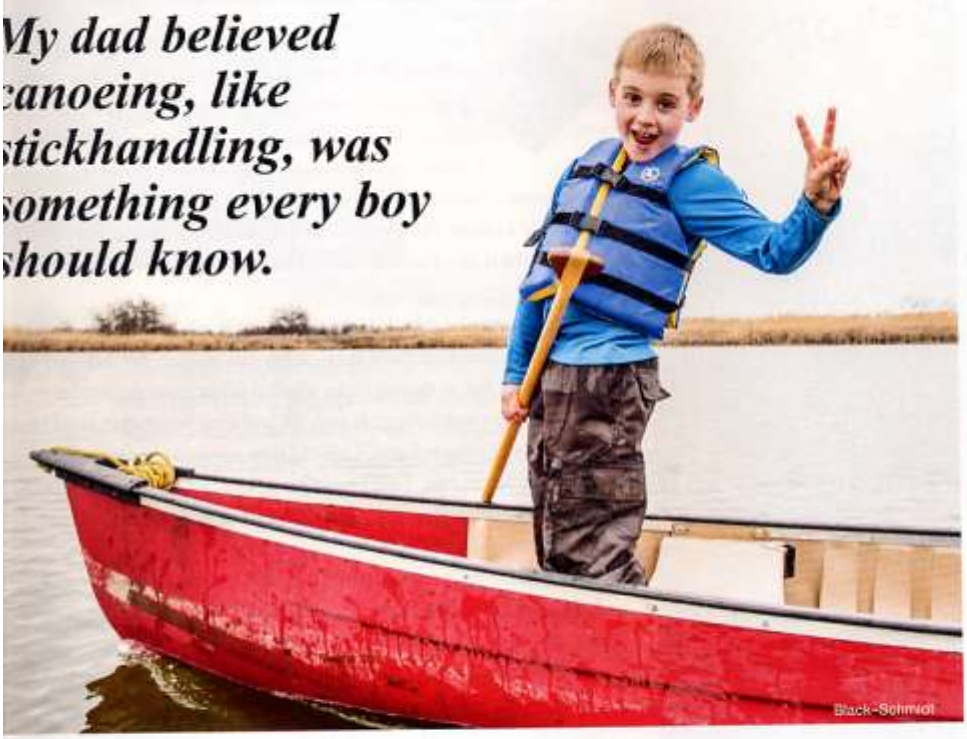
Krystal Zitzer

on't remember ever conducting a paddling lesson for our kids. w to grip paddles, read water, eddy out, forward ferry, sneak a d, none of it. They sat in boats and absorbed it. They watched us our strokes. They noticed tongues of water. They picked up on anxiety caused by a logjam. They saw us hug the insides of tight bends, stop to scout, talk about strategy, make mistakes. They couldn't have said what a draw stroke was, but by God, when they wanted to get to a sandbar for lunch, they could execute classic draws to beat the band.

And so, back when Sawyer was 12 years old, wiry and lean, barely 100 lbs., I found myself partnered with him in Class IV water on the Main Salmon. Crappy day–drizzling, cold, hypothermic as hell. We scouted. Spotted a line. Everyone peed. Sawyer and I strapped in, talked it through one more time, and angled into the current. All went according to plan. We skirted the snarling hole, rode the edge of the biggest waves. Then, near the end, a big, unexpected diagonal reared up and smacked us sideways. The boat started that gut-tightening roll. I reached for a low brace but the inevitability of capsize loomed. Then I saw Sawyer swivel his torso, lean downstream with all his tiny mass, and plant the mother of all saving cross-bow draws. It was textbook, magnificent, and absolutely instinctive. The boat paused, teetered on that edge, and started to recover. I heard the spectators on shore cheering. They were not cheering for me. They were roaring approval for Sawyer and the pure, uninstructed instincts honed by raw experience and simple observation.

–Alan Kesselheim is a C&K Editor-at-Large, and author of Let Them Paddle: Coming of Age on the Water *(Fulcrum).*

My dad believed canoeing, like stickhandling, was something every boy should know.



THE NEXT GORDIE HOWE DOESN'T PLAY HOCKEY ANYMORE

Conor Mihell // Goulais River

I was 13 when my dad suggested we go on my first canoe trip. It was June, the one month of the year that hockey didn't dominate my life, a break between spring tryouts and summer scrimmages. "It's time we go down the river," he said.

We picked up a rental canoe, packed tent and sleeping bags in a gym bag, filled a cooler with pop, beer and hotdogs. I approached the weekend trip with the indifference of a newly minted teenager torn away from the television in the middle of the Stanley Cup playoffs. My dad believed canoeing, like stickhandling, was something every boy should know. "This is the J-stroke," he said, levering his paddle off the gunwale to make the canoe track a straight course.

"The Jagged Wall of Rocks!" he yelled theatrically at the first rapid, where we pinballed down a Class I. Later on, in another rapid, my paddle broke and I was forced to use the blade like a tennis racquet for the rest of the trip—we had no spare. "Should've brought one of your goalie sticks," dad quipped.

I didn't realize at the time that the trip would become a touchstone for me. The memories are still so strong—swimming at our island campsite, sitting quietly by the fire with my dad, listening to the sounds of the springtime forest overtake the river's chatter at sunset. On the river, there was no pressure to perform, no fear of choking in a big game. I'd found a new passion, and as my hockey career fizzled I kept Bill Mason films and Cliff Jacobson books on permanent loan from the library, and dreamt of my own canoe. That first trip, I discovered the freedom of paddling. "Tomorrow we hit the long rapids," my dad said, grinning in the firelight. "You're gonna love it."

STAY OUT OF THE WAY

Jason Self // California Coast

Within five minutes of launching, I noticed 12-year-old Nate Ferguson standing up in his kayak, paddling backwards. My initial reaction was to 'correct' this behavior, but I managed to keep my mouth shut. Nate was having a blast doing it the 'wrong' way, and I quickly realized that if the kids were having fun, they would want to paddle more. My job was to provide the opportunity and make sure things stayed safe. Nothing more.

–Sea kayak coach Jason Self works with kids and grownups in Trinidad, California.

My initial reaction was to correct Nate's paddling, but I managed to keep my mouth shut.

Courtesy the Reimers Family

WILD BOYS

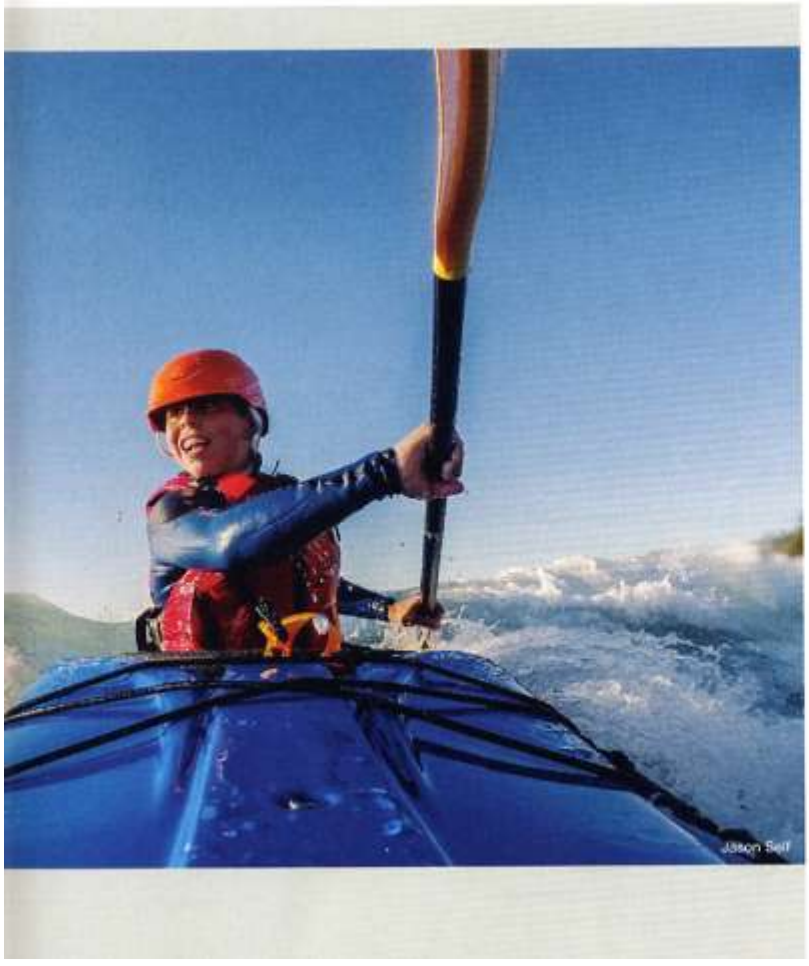
Frederick Reimers // The North Woods

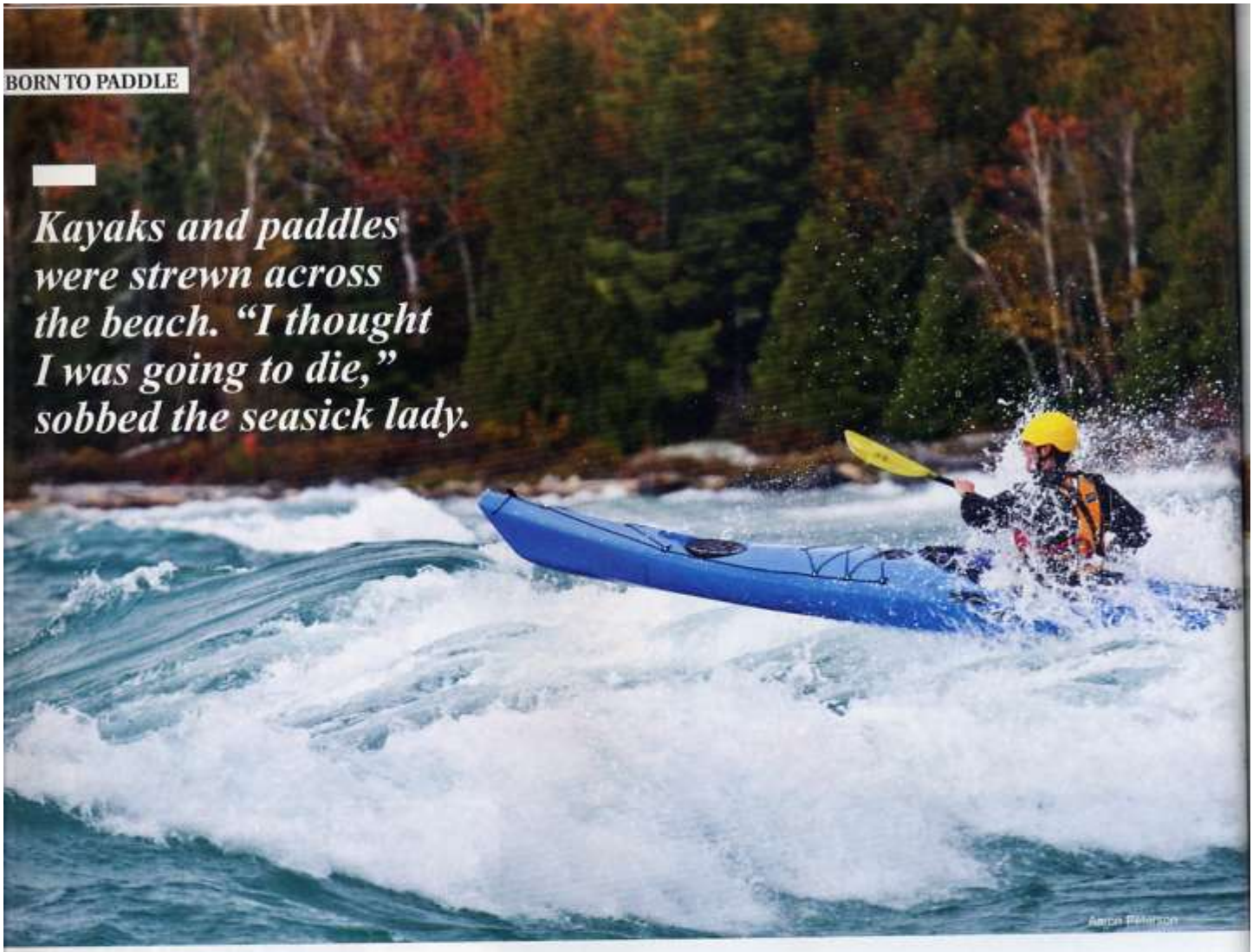
At Camp Keewaydin we canoe tripped the hard way. We cooked over fire, fueled by trees we cut down and sawed up. On portages, we lashed leather tumplines to awkward wooden wannagin boxes full of flour, beans and bacon. We paddled and carried 70-pound wood-canvas canoes. We could have gone with stoves that ignite with a flick, with lightweight, indestructible plastic canoes, and even packs with shoulder straps, but we wanted to do it the old way.

Teenagers showed up soft in June and went home lean and strapping in August. That was one reason for the heavy gear and wood chopping, but not the main one. Camp leaders wanted us to understand that kids had been using these same techniques at Keewaydin for more than 100 years. Campers had plied the same bedrock-lined waters, trudged the same root-crossed portages, and fallen asleep to the same eerie loon calls for more than a century. Furthermore, those techniques, portage trails and campsites had been used by the Ojibway and Cree people for thousands of years. It was canoe tripping as ritual.

Like all rituals, it's there to instruct. As a teenager trapped in a confusing, churning, adolescence, it was a comfort to understand that I was slotting into a practice much larger than myself. I understood, gliding across lakes with all my gear stowed between the gunwales, that humans had evolved this way, traversing the landscape in hunting parties, war parties, migrations. But camp also broke me out of my routine at home. I got away from my rigid, if well-meaning parents, and spent time with adults who weren't judging me the way my teachers and coaches did. I hung out with kids who weren't bristling in cliques. I got to evolve into myself away from those codified relationships back home. My cabin-mates became a new family, one united in the journey, and I was a better member of that family. We weren't going anywhere unless we all pulled together. That prime, sun-splashed campsite would be waiting there across the water, until the last kid stumbled over the portage with the big, heavy, gorgeous, cedar-strip canoe on his shoulders.

–Frederick Reimers is a former editor of Canoe & Kayak magazine.


Jason Self



Kayaks and paddles were strewn across the beach. "I thought I was going to die," sobbed the seasick lady.

TAKING CHARGE

Conor Mihell // Lake Superior

I was 18 when I guided my first season on Lake Superior. I never thought twice about the wealth and influence of the people I was guiding, or how they may have perceived the relative maturity of their guide. I was just happy to be paddling the coastline of my dreams, making $60 per day.

That first year I worked as an assistant to a more experienced leader, until somebody made a scheduling mistake and I had to guide a trip by myself—five guests on a four-day journey along the wilderness coastline of Lake Superior Provincial Park. The company was short on safety equipment, and I was travelling without a weather radio. Cell phones were rare in those days (and even now there's no service on this stretch of coast), and cheap satellite communication devices had yet to be invented. I was on my own.

We enjoyed three days of sunshine and calm water. On the final day, I woke at sunrise to the sound of waves pummeling the beach. I'd been guiding long enough to know the prudent decision was to wait out the storm, but I was still a kid. The clients were my parent's age. I asked them, "What do you think we should do?"

That was my big mistake. No one—especially not doctors and lawyers—wants to be delayed on the last day. They were oblivious to the hazards of wind, surf and reflection waves, but they all had schedules to keep. I launched them one by one and sprinted out to join them in a six-foot swell.

We made it barely a mile. "I'm feeling seasick," a woman said. Never before and never since have I landed a group in such waves. There were multiple capsizes, kayaks and paddles strewn across the beach. "I thought I was going to die," sobbed the seasick lady.

She didn't, but for the next week I imagined the various ways in which she could have. I blamed myself and vowed never to guide again. But I longed for Superior's big horizons, and as I turned the episode over in my mind, I realized that I'd known what to do all along. I just hadn't trusted myself. So I pledged always to trust my gut, and when the call came to guide another trip, I jumped at it.

–Conor Mihell is a C&K Editor-at-Large and author of The Greatest Lake: Stories from Lake Superior's North Shore *(Natural Heritage Press).*