

PHOTO DESTINATION

BY WAYNE LYNCH

# Vancouver Island Kayak Adventure

*No matter how often I watch the last crimson glow of a setting sun at the end of a summer day I always feel grateful—as though I have been given a special gift from nature reminding me how precious life is, and to never take it for granted. This past August, on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island, shouldered on one side by ancient forests of spruce, hemlock and cedar and on the other by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, I sat with my wife Aubrey of 43 years and reflected on the sunsets.*



**Dr Wayne Lynch** had so much fun kayaking the waters of Vancouver Island with West Coast Expeditions that he plans to return again this summer.

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We were on a one-week kayak and camping adventure organized by the experts at West Coast Expeditions. The trip was advertised as a "Sea Otter Kayak Tour" featuring curious sea otters, Steller's sea lions, and the possibility of paddling with whales, as well as a chance to view black bears as they forage along the shoreline. If you know me, you can imagine how I was sold on the concept from the moment wildlife was mentioned.

My wife and I are novice kayakers, and we were concerned that the trip might be too challenging for us to enjoy. We needn't have worried. Within the first half-day the expert kayak instructors had us safely paddling without a worry. As a photographer, my next concern was how to safely take pictures from a kayak to capture the beauty of the area. Here are seven tips that may help you if you venture onto the water this spring.



## Partner or Go It Alone

The first decision my wife and I had to make was did we want to paddle our own kayaks or paddle together in a two-person craft. We chose the latter. Two-person kayaks are more stable, and with Aubrey paddling in front she could position the kayak for better photographs. This worked out beautifully. You may have noticed that in many pictures taken by photographers paddling alone, the bow of the kayak is shown in the foreground to give the image scale and depth. I think that a person is more interesting as foreground than the pointed bow of a kayak—especially if that person is someone special to you.

## Leash Your Paddle

Whenever I paused to photograph I would balance the paddle in front of me across the deck of the kayak. A few times, the paddle accidentally slipped into the water but I was always able to grab it before it floated away. That's when I realized a leash for the paddle



Raft of Male Sea Otters

Steller's Sea Lion



would have been a great idea. Coiled leashes sell on the internet and in outdoor stores for less than \$20 and they provide an inexpensive safety line for your paddle without hampering your photography.

### Choosing a Camera

Among the seven other paddlers in our kayak group, several took pictures with their cell phones, one person used a waterproof compact camera, and another used a remotely triggered GoPro mounted on the bow of her kayak. For digital file size, minimum noise, and maximum quality, there is no question that the best photographs are produced with a digital SLR, and for that reason I used a Nikon D800 (36 megapixel, FX-format) camera to take all of my kayak photographs.

### The Value of Zooms

While I was kayaking, my photo targets were always the same: landscapes, people and wildlife. I thought it would be risky to be changing lenses while I was bobbing around on the ocean, so I decided to use just one lens, the image-stabilized Nikon 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6, a zoom that offers both wide-angle focal lengths as well as medium telephoto capabilities.

If you are a Canon user, a 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6 might be a good choice although the wide-angle option would be missing. The Tamron 18-270mm f/3.5-6.5 which is available in either Nikon or Canon mount, would also be a great option. No matter which DSLR camera you use, you need to evaluate ahead of time which subjects interest you, and select a zoom with the focal lengths that will best serve your needs.





Green Anemone and Bat Star

## Splash Protection

Saltwater and electronics don't mix, and even a small splash on your equipment can cause serious problems. To protect my camera and lens while I was paddling I used a clear Seal-Line dry bag that I stowed in front of me, secured to the deck of the kayak under two Bungee cords. To seal the dry bag you roll the top and fasten it with clips, but when sea conditions were calm I kept the camera just inside the open mouth of the bag as this made access easier.

I also carried a microfibre cloth in a pocket on the front of my life vest to dry any water that splashed onto my gear, and I frequently checked the front of the lens for water droplets which, if undetected, can produce annoying blurry puddles in your photographs.

Green Anemone



## Funky Photo Angles

Like many photographers, I tend to press the shutter only when I am looking directly through the camera's viewfinder—I obsessively compose the image within the viewfinder frame. In the kayak, I suppressed this obsession, and used the live view display on the LCD screen to take some photos while holding the camera at water level, or with my arms stretched high overhead. Creative discoveries often arise when you break the rules. Don't be afraid to experiment. Digital images that do not work out are easy to delete.

## Get Ahead of the Pack

When you are paddling with a group, if you can be in one of the front kayaks you can photograph the other boats coming toward you, rather than capturing them from behind. At the beginning of our tour I asked the group members if I could photograph them, and in exchange for their consent I offered to give them copies of any photos in which they appeared. Everyone happily agreed, and because they knew that I would be sending them images that would likely be more impressive than their own "selfies", no one complained when I asked them to move to a different position to improve the composition. Of course, I kept my word and sent their photographs right after the trip—don't be one of those photographers who makes promises they never keep!