

# Anacapa and Channel Island Paddling

by Joanne Schwartz

Just another word on paddling to these jewel islands off Ventura/Santa Barbara coastline. I continue to get a string of calls asking for advice. Many calls are from fairly inexperienced paddlers, compared to this crossing (those who have never been on trips involving ocean crossings or involving 12-15 miles without landing; people who do not have a dependable roll, surf skills, intuitive bracing skills, solid solo rescue skills, etc.; and those with little seamanship skills or personal knowledge of how very nasty crossing that channel can be).

After my first four paddles to Anacapa in 1985, I know that crossing to and paddling on the island can be a real piece of cake, but it can also be a wild and treacherous event. And the cake walk can turn nasty within half an hour. The LA Times carried a report some years ago of three fisherman dying when their 30 foot boat broke apart in rough seas off Anacapa. The day started off just fine, but a Santa Ana condition developed in the Antelope Valley and the seas followed. Their boat was hit by a wave large enough to break it apart. The Coast Guard pulled six crewmen from the water, but three died of exposure. One novice paddler (but a long time board surfer) was never seen again after heading for Anacapa from near Santa Barbara. A local club member was plucked off the cliffs some years ago by a helicopter in a daring night rescue. Two experienced whitewater kayakers "chose" to abandon their double kayak less than a mile off Anacapa when conditions (theirs and the ocean's) deteriorated on the way over. And in 1996 an open-top paddler who took a motor boat over was also plucked from the water in a helicopter rescue when her kayak took on water and she couldn't get back on top. I really don't want to scare anyone from paddling on the Islands, but be sure you are prepared in all ways before you strike out on your own, or go with a very experienced guide.

The national Park Service has prepared a brochure for paddlers wishing to visit Anacapa and the other Channel Islands. Doug and I have enjoyed paddling along the Northern four, San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa, and very much look forward to the entire chain becoming more accessible to kayakers. All of the islands allow camping, but the best news is that kayakers may now camp on some Santa Rosa Island beaches, under certain conditions. Please contact the Park Service folks for details.

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