

# Information Briefing: The History of Sea Kayaking in California

by Joanne Schwartz

- At least 8000 years ago people along the Siberian coast and the Aleutian Islands had sea kayaks made of seal skins stretched over a whale bone or driftwood frame. These were used as platforms to hunt seals and other sea creatures for food, shelter and clothing.
- When Russian and European explorers visited the Aleutian Islands in the mid and late 1700's they found thousands of these tiny baidarka, kayaks.
- Russian ships flying the Russian American Company flag placed thousands of Aleuts and their baidarkas into servitude as sea mammal hunters from the late 1700's through the 1860's. These Aleuts paddled down what is now the Alaskan and British Columbia coasts, down through California and on as far as Cedros island in Baja. Most had died or been killed by the time the parties reached Baja.
- These original California kayakers explored the Channel Islands extensively and caught thousands of seals, sea lions and sea otters along their shores. The silent stealth of the baidarka made them perfect hunting craft.
- Local Chumash and other California natives had been paddling tomals, canoe shaped craft. Some of these natives used single and some, double bladed paddles similar to those use today.
- In modern times, a few paddlers in Southern California have been building their own recreational kayaks out of wood, concrete and steel since the early 1900's.
- Since the mid 1980's, kayaking has become quite popular from San Francisco to San Diego, following a similar trend in Washington State in the late 1960's and 1970's. Boats are now primarily made from rotomolded polyethylene plastic and from fiberglass and other composites. Kayaks are readily available for rent or purchase almost anywhere along the coast. Instruction and guided trips are also very popular locally. You can see about 80 models at our [Kayak Center](#) in Irvine, try them at our [Newport Rental Base](#). Join the "craze" that started locally in the 1700's!

**We would like to hear from you...**

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