

Basic Detail Report

V00048447

Title

Solution carbon fibre split paddle

Date

c 2005

Medium

Carbon fibre

Dimensions

Overall: 75 x 45 x 1140 mm

Name

Paddle

History

Andrew McAuley was lost at sea on 9 February 2007 whilst attempting to become the first person to kayak alone from Australia to New Zealand. His upturned kayak was found within sight of Milford Sound on New Zealand's South Island, 30 days after he had set off from Fortescue Bay on Tasmania's east coast on 11 January. Throughout McAuley's 850 plus nautical mile voyage across the lonely southern reaches of the Tasman Sea, he maintained daily short messaging service (SMS) contact with sailor and weather forecaster Jonathan Bogais. These short cryptic text messages - detailing weather conditions and daily progress - are the most complete record of McAuley's incredible journey. The Force 10 gales, multiple capsize, equipment failure and extreme mental and physical fatigue McAuley endured are hard to imagine. These text messages, his damaged kayak and its contents, and the surviving footage and still images found onboard are all that remain to tell the story of what a remarkable feat he achieved and also what went horribly wrong. Aged 39 and married with a young son, Andrew McAuley was a very experienced sea kayaker who had previously completed three solo crossings of Bass Strait including the first non-stop crossing in 2003 as well as crossing the Gulf of Carpentaria in 2004 and paddling through Antarctica in 2006. He aimed for 'firsts' and liked doing things alone and unsupported - the hard way. Extremely tall (190cm) and slender (75kg), McAuley had talked about crossing the Tasman for seven years. Known to be painstakingly thorough with preparation and planning, he established Tasman Solo - The Trans Tasman Kayak Expedition in 2006. Drawn to extremes, McAuley seemed intent on pushing himself and his kayak as far as he could. Choosing to cross from Australia to New Zealand below the 40th Parallel, where the ocean is particularly wild and brutal, was an extreme decision. Making his trip at such a southerly point (Tasmania to the South Island) because it was more challenging than the more northerly latitudes is evidence that his fascination with danger and determination to push his personal physiological and psychological boundaries was just as important as the actual crossing itself. For the trans-Tasman expedition McAuley used a Mirage kayak purpose-made by Paul Hewitson. It was modified for safety,

strength, buoyancy and comfort. Extra Kevlar layers were added and a doubled weight hammock system kept him off the hull. The hull was insulated and drainage channels to a bilge pump were lengthened and widened to allow him to lie down. McAuley's wife Vicky designed a bright yellow cockpit canopy to make the kayak watertight. She nicknamed the 70cm high fibreglass dome with a ventilator, Caspar. The homemade canopy slid forward on two stainless steel pivot arms from the back deck to lock over the kayak's cockpit providing safe shelter for sleep and storms and giving the kayak a bubble of buoyancy so that it self-righted if it capsized. A rear hatch opened from the cockpit to allow access when using the canopy and this housed most of McAuley's supplies. A front hatch was only accessible from the water. The beanbag seat which provided some support while paddling was then used as a pillow at night. The kayak was also covered with an elaborate web of deck rigging which was used for housing cameras recording the voyage. McAuley's daily satellite phone text message exchanges with weather adviser Jonathan Bogais were just 15-20 words of text message shorthand and largely weather related. Despite their perfunctory nature the texts reveal encouragement and support from Jonathan Bogais and sea-life sightings and wisecracks from McAuley. Bogais was the conduit for Andrew's messages to his wife and the rest of his ground crew. He paid attention to the clarity and mood of these messages from McAuley to monitor his emotional state and described him as amazingly stable throughout the voyage. At 5pm everyday Bogais texted through his carefully researched weather forecast (not from the Bureau of Meteorology) of likely wind speeds, sea conditions and the location of weather systems such as lows, highs, troughs and fronts. McAuley responded with his position and the local conditions he was experiencing such as wind direction and speed, swells, seas and cloud formations. McAuley also carried a handheld VHF radio to contact NZ authorities when he got closer to land. Three video cameras were mounted on the deck of the kayak to record footage for a planned documentary. McAuley recorded several short video clips in the cockpit over the first 12 days which survived the kayak's partial sinking. He also called home and spoke to his wife one week into the voyage. Thirty-six days worth of food was packed onboard and approximately thirty gallons of fresh water which lasted 2-3 weeks. McAuley supplemented this with desalinated water, extracted by hand on a daily basis. His food pack contents were prepared by a dietician and included Back Country dehydrated meals, peanut butter, chocolate, lollies, Powerbars, cheese, tins of tuna and his mother's Christmas cake. This high calorie diet theoretically contained enough fat, protein and carbohydrates to provide energy and sustenance for over a month at sea. During the voyage McAuley wore Sharkskin neoprene pants, top and booties, dry suit, thermal underwear, a Goretex spray jacket and socks and paddling gloves. He also wore seasickness pressure point wrist bands constantly. A comprehensive medical kit was prepared and packed for the voyage. Safety and communications equipment included two satellite phones, a GPS, a GPS tracking beacon able to provide an instant position to Bogais, an immersion suit, EPIRB, flares in the cockpit in waterproof bags, electric bilge pump and sea anchors (underwater parachutes that minimize drift and put the kayak's nose into the wind for greater stability) were used nightly. Solar panels were used to recharge batteries and a cockpit change bag - spray skirt that comes up to the neck allowed McAuley to use the toilet and change clothes without the cockpit being flooded. McAuley did not take any books, music or moving images to help pass the time. He glued a small photograph of his three year old son Finlay to the middle of the kayak's cockpit, his sightline while he was paddling. McAuley's extreme southern route across to New Zealand - from Tasmania to the South Island - meant for much of his journey he was traversing the Southern Ocean rather than the Tasman Sea. For

three quarters of the trip he was out of helicopter range. After a violent capsize in the first week of the voyage he was forced to bail out 100 litres of water from the cockpit and reported that both his tracking beacon and backup satellite phone were no longer working. He endured many more capsizes during his time on the ocean. Despite these often unfavourable winds McAuley covered an average of 30 nautical miles a day. However, three quarters of the way across the Tasman, he was hit by a force 10 storm similar to the one that tore apart the 1998 Sydney to Hobart fleet. McAuley knew the storm was coming three days before and had time to prepare. He locked himself under the kayak's cockpit canopy for 28 hours. During the storm, wind speeds registered 55 knots with gusts up to 70 knots whipping up monstrous waves. McAuley's kayak would have been airborne and weightless every 15 seconds as it was tossed off each wave's peak like a javelin. Several equipment failures resulted from this storm rendering McAuley severely handicapped in communicating with the outside world and even more dangerously unable to use his cockpit canopy safely. After being at sea for nearly a month McAuley's last text message was sent on 8 February 2007. He reported his position (approx. 67 nautical miles from Milford Sound), his estimated time of arrival and his inability to recharge his satellite phone. On 9 February a distress call was received via VHF radio by the Maritime Operations Centre of Maritime New Zealand. Reception was poor and much of the message was indecipherable but the words 'my kayak is sinking' and 'I need rescue' were clear. A search ensued and on 10 February a NZ Air Force plane sighted a semi-submerged kayak. There was no person with the kayak and Andrew McAuley's body has never been recovered. A coronial inquiry was held in Invercargill in New Zealand in December 2007. Several experts were critical of many parts of McAuley's operational and risk plans and the fact that no complete list was made of the equipment he carried onboard. After much deliberation the Court found that McAuley drowned in the Tasman Sea on 9 February 2007 after making a distress call by VHF radio and becoming separated from his capsized kayak. 'Solo', a documentary tracing Andrew McAuley's quest to be the first person to kayak alone from Australia to New Zealand was broadcast worldwide in 2008 and 2009.