

Expedition *continued from Page One*

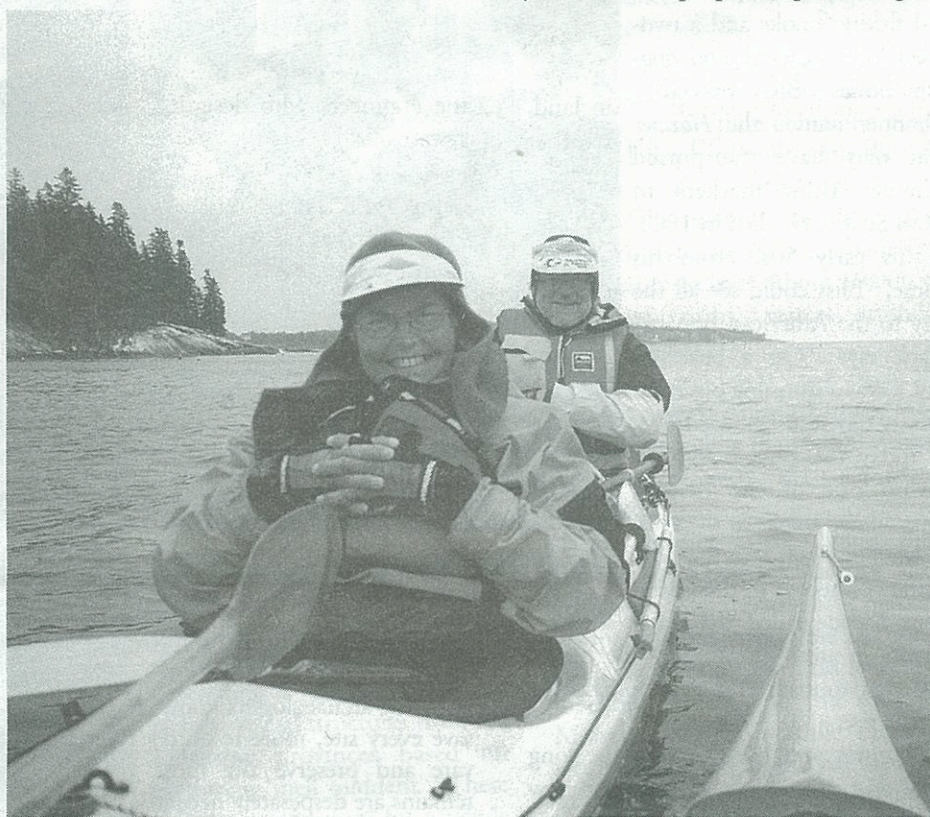
area and travels along a portion of the planet that not many people have traveled through, and has little interaction with people. We are very deliberately taking the opposite approach. We're interested in the stories of folks who live and work in the Gulf of Maine." The team is offering 19 community outreach programs along their route to share what they're learning and observing.

When the expedition members come ashore, people are drawn to their kayaks with their "Gulf of Maine Expedition" logos. Beach walkers in Massachusetts asked them, "Did you really come all the way from Maine in those little things?" Such questions open the door to conversations about the Gulf of Maine being the watershed for three states and three provinces, how it's not just along the coast of Maine. These conversations provide the expedition members with opportunities to hear locals' stories: how the dunes have shifted over the years, or how the area was previously less heavily built up.

"We were surprised that the whole Gulf of Maine coast of Massachusetts and New Hampshire was so highly developed," expedition member Dan Earle says. Another member of the team, Rich MacDonald, adds, "It was disheartening that there was very little natural landscape in Massachusetts and New Hampshire."

The kayakers had to make special arrangements to camp along that part of their journey, and they only stayed at one public camping area. Ironically, that was in the midst of busy Boston Harbor, in the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area. "This lack of opportu-

nity for coastal camping on the Massachusetts and New Hampshire coast potentially puts a lot more pressure on Maine as a recreational destination,



Sue Hutchins and Dan Earle

Photos: Lee Bumsted

since people can't do these trips on their own coast," Earle notes.

When I paddle with the team members off Southport Island in Maine, most of the cottages and homes we pass are small, particularly compared to what they had seen in Massachusetts. Sue Hutchins, who paddles a tandem kayak with Earle, comments that the scale of development seems much better balanced along the coast of Maine than in Cape Cod.

The expedition members are documenting what they are observing in a number of ways. Tucked into their kayaks are a laptop computer, digital

cameras, a solar panel and a set of watercolors. They are sharing their journals and photos on their Web site. Twice each week they troll for phytoplankton and then analyze the samples under a field microscope back at their campsite; they are on the lookout for the phytoplankton species that contribute to red tide. Water samples, which allow them to check levels of dissolved oxygen, temperature, salinity and pH, are also collected twice weekly. The kayakers are recording

the range of various types of vegetation, and they already identified 131 different bird species by the time I meet up with them. They hope their "snapshot in time" will contribute to people's understanding of the Gulf.

While traveling along 1000 nautical miles of often-populated shoreline presents some challenges, such as finding appropriate camping sites, that same population density can be helpful. As Hutchins notes, "The kindness of strangers keeps coming when you need it." They've had people provide them with trips to grocery stores, hot showers and coffee to warm up after an unintended wet exit, even a homemade multi-course meal delivered right to their campsite.

The expedition's public outreach efforts will not end when they lift their kayaks out of the water at Cape Sable Island on September 28. They'll continue to give presentations and plan to publish articles, a final report and a CD-ROM. A Gulf of Maine Expedition Institute is in the works for 2003. The institute will offer "expedition-based education programs for all ages focused on the Gulf of Maine," Springuel says.

Editor's note: At press time the expedition had kayaked the coast of New Brunswick to Alma, crossed the Bay of Fundy to Nova Scotia and was headed to Annapolis Royal. To learn more, visit their Web site at www.gomexpedition.org.

Flagged by the Charles River Watershed Association

Oldest watershed group in U.S. hoists conditions for boaters

By Michelle Vaillancourt

On a recent summer day, the Charles River Basin is teeming with boating activity. Rowers slice through the water while a fleet of small sailboats tack lazily back and forth between the Boston and Cambridge shores. Amphibious duck boat tours introduce tourists to the river with a splash. On days like this, the river becomes an urban oasis that draws thousands of boaters.

Over the years, the Charles River has been plagued with poor water quality, trash and pollution. Today, the river is significantly cleaner, but on occasion, water quality conditions still reach levels that could pose a threat to public health.

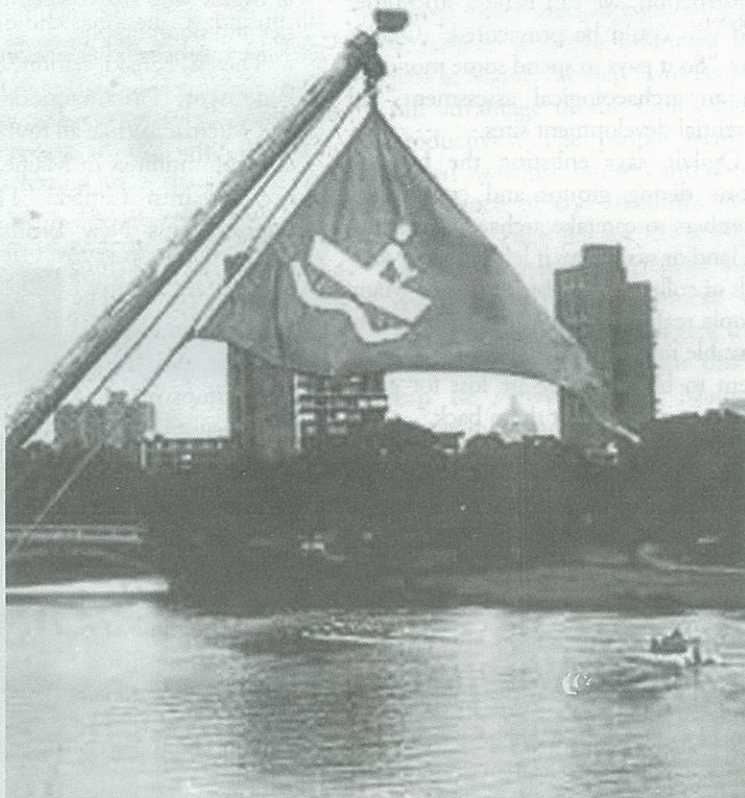
To alert boaters to water quality conditions, the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) runs a flagging program now in its fifth season. "The program was initiated when the boating community asked CRWA to help ascertain the water quality of the river on a daily basis during the boating season," says Kathy Baskin, CRWA project manager.

Flags are posted daily in the summer months at four sampling sites. If a red flag is hoisted, bacteria levels in the water exceed state standards for safe boating. If

the samples do not exceed the state standard, a blue flag is flown. "On red flag days CRWA cautions boaters to wash immediately after they have been on the water," Baskin says.

Samples are taken two to three times a week in the lower section of the river, called the Charles River Basin, where most of the boating occurs. They are tested for fecal coliform bacteria, an indicator of human sewage and animal waste. Sample results are augmented by a predictive modeling computer program that takes recent rainfall into account to estimate when bacteria levels are likely to exceed safe boating standards. To date,

the modeling program has been 85 percent accurate in its water quality predictions.



Courtesy of Charles River Watershed Association

As of mid-August, the association had recorded only one day where three out of the four sites monitored prompt-

ed a red flag event in the Charles River Basin, and a couple of days when red flags flew over just one of the sites, said Peggy Savage, environmental scientist for CRWA. She added that most red flag days occur after a heavy rain because storm drains and sewer systems overflow and flush pollutants into the river. CRWA research shows that the basin does not meet safe boating standards after a heavy rainfall about 13 percent of the time.

Established by a group of citizens in 1965, CRWA was founded to protect and enhance the Charles River and its tributaries years before federal water protection regulations were enacted. The river had suffered many years of abuse and was in a severely degraded condition. Landfills were caving into the river, drums and cars were dumped in tributaries, and water quality was very poor with several daily discharges of raw sewage.

Today the CRWA has more than 5,000 members and 13 staff, making it the largest watershed organization in the country.

Michelle Vaillancourt is a coastal steward and former member of the Gulf of Maine Council's Public Education and Participation Committee.