

“AS IF” Challenge: When Fun Turns Serious

It's a beautiful day, weather seems great, everyone is happy. There's a mix of experienced and less experienced paddlers. We're setting out to have fun. Would it still be fun if the situation changed? What if we had to work quickly as a team to deal with some adversity? What is that weather forecast anyway?

What if the white caps kick up and one paddler becomes seasick. Who will organize a response? What's the best thing to do? What equipment do we need? Wouldn't it be great to simulate this on a local lake before the real thing on Lake Superior? We can have fun with imagination and develop some training experience to draw upon when fun turns serious.

That is the driving idea behind a WHAT IF drill. That, and the time and energy of some gifted and dedicated ISK leaders and planners including Jeff, Michelle, and Peggy. We start with some trip instructions, define roles for team members and go to work on problem solving including using charts to plot course and headings (what if the fog rolls in?).

Trip begins on Lake Minnetonka from a park in Mound. We are divided into small groups with club members with leadership certification acting as participant observers and advisors. Michelle is our observer and Peter steps up to lead and delegate. Corrie steps up to be our navigator as she has done orienteering as a bike racer. Deb and David go along for the paddle and as trip reporters. Small group of five is a nice size. Two other groups head out also.

Our goal is to paddle out to Hardscrabble Point and proceed to Zimmerman's Point. Only 1 small mystery challenge to overcome before we can continue 1 mile towards Wild Goose Chase Island for a pit stop and a snack. Don't want to give away all of the mysteries but it had to do with who we believe is the best kayak club, of course.

Unfortunately, Michelle hurts her wrist early on and we aren't sure she will be able continue to paddle. Not really, but...WHAT IF? No problem after some first aid from Pete. Made us think about the miles ahead and watching out for one another.

Then, believe it or not Michelle got lost and had to call on her VHF radio to get her group to help. We had to use 3 signaling devices before she could find us... after all she was at least 30 yards away. Again, she wasn't really lost, but ... WHAT IF? Our group pulled out signaling mirrors, whistles and paddles to signal Michelle and communicate instructions. It was useful to brush up on standard paddle and whistle signals as well as radio hailing channels.

We finally got back on the water to head toward the Narrows Bridge channel and on to Big Island. Just as we get underway Deb goes over and Peter has to do an Eskimo Recue for Deb. And not only once but twice so it could be done correctly. Water is cold, she reports.

Peter does some real safety checks and does a great job of leading us through the channel with strategy for avoiding shipping lanes and power boats. We almost get to Big Island, but Michelle's shoulders are sore and that's when Corrie develops nausea and can't paddle. She's a good actor. "Are you really sick?" we say.

How fast can we get to out our lines? What if this was the big cold lake that can change it's mood fast. What if we have miles to paddle. David, Deb and Peter set up an in line tow with Michelle and Corrie rafted for stability. We learn a lot here as our tow ropes are daisy chained but not correctly and the line gets tangled. Eventually we get Michelle and Corrie towed a small distance until they feel better. Not likely under conditions. We learn a lot so if it really happens we will be ready.

Can you believe that Michelle gets hypothermic about the time we arrive at Big Island and she

needs treatment? Stumbles, bumbles and grumbles are not like her at all. I can't remember if she convected, conducted, radiated, or that other thing, evaporation. In any event we need to reverse this. We get her some warm drink and calories. Need to get her dry and warm. Pete has magnesium and iron filings to start a fire. We even set up an emergency tarp shelter to keep her out of the pretend wind and rain. Amazing what you can find in your day hatch (and what you might need).

What a beautiful day it was and what a great opportunity to try out some skills in almost real conditions and find out what needs some work. We met new folks and shared a great lunch with all of the groups. And no, we are not telling where the morels grow or where are the eagles' nests.

Oh, and Michelle made it back safe and well (unless she was only pretending).