

## Jeff's Review:

I was thrilled to be able to bring [Mark Tozer](#) to [Inland Sea Kayakers](#) for [BCU 3 Star](#) training. The BCU training path has had a profound impact on my paddling with regards to new skills, new values, new venues and new friends, and my hopes are to share this passion with others.

Eight participants jumped on the registration and it was nearly filled within the first hour. The logistics of bringing students and coach together, to an out of town venue, ended up working out quite well; three days dedicated to a focused class, without distraction, proved to be a successful way of learning. We look forward to hosting this event again, so if you have an interest, let me know. I'm definitely inviting Mark back, and I'm thinking of adding a day for an assessment.



The coaching Mark brought to us was phenomenal and extensive. Most 3 Star coaching consists of only two days, whereby at this event, Mark went way beyond his commitment. Don't be fooled by the description of the day starting with coffee at 8:30; there were always several topics covered in depth, to provide a broad knowledge. Discussions and topics went on through dinner and into the night, with stories to emphasize the lessons. I encouraged Mark to take some time for himself and have some relaxation, but his work ethics and passion for the sport drove him. Besides, he truly enjoyed his students and wanted only the best for them. This is often the theme with quality coaches.

What was most noticeable to me, was the increase in confidence each participant had by the end of the weekend. They all realized the mantra Mark bestowed on them: "Become

independent, open minded, free thinking, cynical paddlers”, meaning: learn the skills different ways and choose the method(s) that works best for you.

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### **Katie’s review:**

When I was approached last winter about my opinion on participating in BCU 3 star training I very quickly said I was not ready to do this. I have only been kayaking for about a two and half years and still felt I was too new to the sport and still at the beginning stage. So the idea of being ready to follow in the foot steps of those that have lead me down the path so far and complete the course to go onto completing the 3 star assessment still seemed too far fetched for me. But these trusty leaders of mine convinced me that I was ready and that it was not about being “perfect” at everything but more about challenging myself for the next level of kayaking. So I began to get excited (really excited) about this idea, of completing the next phase of my obsession (and yes, I say obsession) with kayaking.



All summer I begin the training for 3 star training, but was often reminded by Jeff that the course was just training and it was okay to not have everything down yet. It was to test your abilities and see where you are at by what you already have down, and to learn skills defined for the 3 Star level.

8 of us arrived at Little Sand Bay on Friday evening to meet our trusty coach, Mark Tozer, and his side kick, Jeff. Mark showed us the difference between a coach and an instructor. He was there to guide us, keep us safe and show us how to work with what we already had

down. Mark was an amazing storyteller who always had a great story to tell with a lesson to be taught or an experience he had. He was patient, kind and very giving of his time. He was with us from 8 in the morning until after midnight every night talking. He was available to answer all questions and truly cared about our success.

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We set up camp and Mark introduced us, go getting MN students, to a new concept of having coffee at 8:30am, ready to talk and take our time getting on the water. I enjoyed this way. Mark introduced us to what the is: 3 Star is about being a better group It is not about the having the paddling perfect, but working with what you know and making it work. It is about knowledge and equipment to overcome obstacles, while out on a journey. obstacles could be: fixing a boat on the water or land, assisting in a medical need both on and off water, towing, how to deal with different group dynamics, etc.



On our first days journey we paddled about 12 miles. We took our time and worked on our forward stroke. Mark taught us that you do not always have to be going 100% but that you can change your paddling styles depending on what you are trying to accomplish. He gave us different exercises to work on and take home with us to work on these. We enjoyed our wonderful day of paddling together and trying to stay as a unit when it was necessary, but also at times it was okay to spread out in a controlled situation where we can still see each other in case we have an emergency.



Our second day was the wet day. We again started our day with our morning coffee chats and talked about what to take with you on a journey. Again, he said it is up to you what you choose to take or not take but you should be able to justify your decisions. We then were on the water to show our rolls, work on all-ins, and work on rescues and incident management. It was a fun putting together the prior knowledge I was taught in other classes and playing with these.

The third day was filling in the missing pieces. We worked on different strokes and maneuvers we would be expected to perform at different times during our assessment. We also talked about what our achievable goals are after this weekend. Most of us would like to take the assessment sometime in the next year.

My favorite part of 3 star weekend was the evening sharing time. We would have dinner, tell some stories, and then we would all sit around the campfire sharing our highs and lows of the day - and we all had some. Our lows were things we personally would like to work on and our highs were the things we thought we couldn't do yet, but could.

I gained a great deal of confidence and knowledge over these three days. My personal goal is to take the assessment in the next year and begin to work towards my four star.

The weekend could not be complete with out talking about Jeff. Jeff was Mark's sidekick for the weekend, along with another coach for all of us. Not only did we have the opportunity to be coached by a 5 star coach but we also had coaching from Jeff. Jeff and Mark made a great combination in helping the 8 of us become better group participants and show us that we all have the ability to complete our 3 star assessment.

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### **Bernie's Review:**

Over the Labor Day weekend this summer the club arranged for training to be conducted for the BCU Three Star level. The British Canoe Union, or BCU, is



an English organization concerned with paddle sports in general, which includes both canoeing and kayaking, and they have a presence all over the world. They have courses to develop both coaches (instructors) and participants, and they conduct assessments for skill levels.

The Three Star level is aimed at developing the skills necessary to be in “a led group with winds no more than Force 4” (~17 MPH). The skills covered include most things that a paddler would need to do on a multi-day trip on a big body of water, such as Lake Superior. They include personal paddling skills such as forward and reverse strokes, moving sideways, rolling, launching and landing; rescue skills such as towing, self rescues and assisted rescues; safety, leadership and group skills; and theory, such as equipment, sea safety, weather, navigation, group awareness and more.

Our instructor was Five Star BCU coach, Mark Tozer. Mark is British, has been paddling for 25 years all over the world and has a PhD in expedition leadership. We were very fortunate to have someone of his experience level in town for three full days of instruction.

The daily routine included a on-the-water session. In the an open air pavilion, we had into small groups and worked to discussed equipment priorities, weather and navigation. The on-day to day. Our first day was to covered about 10 nautical miles. forward stroke with some fast landing in waves and wind (not extreme, but enough to keep you on your toes). Following days included rolling, rescues, various strokes, emergency boat repairs and navigation.



classroom session and an classroom, or in our case, lectures from Mark, broke resolve scenarios, leadership, group dynamics, the-water activities varied get the “kinks” out and we It was centered on the paddling and launching and

Why bother to take training like this? If you want to be a competent paddler on a large body of water (like Lake Superior or one of the coasts), do multi-day trips, be an asset to the group you are traveling with, or aspire to lead a trip of your own one day, this is a great place to start. If you ever plan on taking a guided trip or renting a kayak someplace and they want to know what level skills you have, you can state “I have a Three Star BCU”

rating. It will communicate where you are with your abilities and should indicate if you are capable for what they are offering.

You should be in shape to sign up for this training because it will tax you; it's three full days in a row in your boat. You also should be out there on the water paddling regularly so that you feel comfortable and practiced. But you don't have to have a perfect stroke or flawless form, after all this is a training course! The assessment for the Three Star rating is conducted separately and can be done at a point in the future when you feel ready. This is a great vehicle to take your paddling skills up to the next level.

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Special thanks to [Boreal Shores](#) for the lend of a TideRace Kayak for Dr. Tozer.

