

Sea kayaks will be swarming on the Bay

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SAN FRANCISCO Bay has a chance to look like a big pond Saturday with hundreds of little corks floating around. A big pond because perfect fall weather is forecast, and those little corks will actually be sea kayaks, out for the annual Sea Trek Regatta and special free test paddles for newcomers.

It is set up for anybody to watch or participate, with rental boats and equipment available.

The event starts at noon at Schoonmaker Point Marina in Sausalito, with three different races, one in Richardson Bay, one around Angel Island and one around Alcatraz and Angel Island. For non-race participants, a free introduction to sea kayaking starts at 12:30 p.m. That is followed by a chance to test a wide variety of boats for free, at a manufacturer's Demo Day at the same location.

In addition, a benefit seminar will be provided by Greg Barton, the Olympic gold medalist, from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. It will cost \$20, with proceeds going to Environmental Traveling Companions, a nonprofit organization that provides outdoor adventures for disabled and disadvantaged people.

For newcomers, the easiest way to participate is to show up for the introduction by 12:30 p.m. at the beach at Schoonmaker Point. Several sea kayaking instructors will provide a one hour orientation, which will include advice on paddling techniques, places to go, types of boats and whether to go alone or in a group.

The biggest question everybody has is: "Do I have to know how to do an Eskimo roll?" Answer: No. First off, sea kayaks are far more stable than river kayaks, so they almost never tip over. Second, if you do tip over, with a sea kayak you just slip out; you aren't stuck at any time.

The introductory seminar will be followed by a chance to test a sea kayak and paddle around a bit. There will be a half-dozen different style boats, and many different lengths. This provides a chance to see what it's all about by just showing up, floating around, paddling and having fun.

The first time I tried this I couldn't believe how smooth, easy and quiet the sport is. I even felt a bit giddy about it, like I had discovered a secret passageway to adventure. In addition, the Bay looks

more beautiful from the seat of a kayak than from anywhere else, with all the famous landmarks, Alcatraz, Angel Island, the Golden Gate and the different city shorelines all coming to life in a completely new perspective.

You also get very close to wildlife. Marine birds treat you as one of their own, and sea lions often come up to play Pop Goes the Weasel. This past week in Monterey Bay, there was even a story about how a sea kayaker was paddling along, when suddenly a sea otter popped up and scrambled right over the front of the kayak.

Once you get more involved in the sport, you can take kayaks to the beach and surf small waves, paddle on mini expeditions around Bay landmarks, or, if your timing's right, try a night paddle under a full moon in quiet coves.

Or you can take part in the annual Sea Trek Regatta, the Bay-to-Breakers of paddling. Three races are featured, and just being out among so many other little boats is a curious phenomenon. The idea is to have fun first, although there are always a few misguided souls who think it is important to win.

With the bang of a starter's gun, about 200 sea kayakers are expected to paddle off on different race routes. The most ambitious will take paddlers all the way around Alcatraz, though with Saturday's extremely benign tides, and good weather forecast, it could be like paddling in a big lake.

After the races, there will be a barbecue, dance and auction to benefit Environmental Traveling Companions. That event will run from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m., costs \$20 and will take place at the Bay Model in Sausalito.

For information, phone Sea Trek at (415) 488-1000.<

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