

# Kayaks

## across the Tasman

*Lot 41*, paddled from Australia to New Zealand in 2007–08 by adventurers James Castrission and Justin Jones, is now on display in our Wharf 7 foyer. It's just one of two incredible trans-Tasman kayaks in our collection, however, representing two incredible quests – theirs and Andrew McAuley's, the Australian kayaker lost tragically within sight of New Zealand the previous year. Curators **Daina Fletcher** and **Megan Treharne** relate both amazing stories.



left: Andrew McAuley in a self portrait that he captured during his Trans-Tasman crossing, 2007. Reproduced courtesy of Vicki McAuley

below: This carefully staged photograph was part of Castrission and Jones's well-managed publicity and sponsorship campaign for their expedition 'Crossing the Ditch'. Photograph Justin Jones and James Castrission, reproduced with permission



IN 2009 AND 2010 the museum acquired two significant collections related to maritime adventuring: the kayaks, equipment and supplies from two separate attempts to conquer the 850 nautical miles from Australia to New Zealand, by muscle-power alone. Both collections tell dramatic and poignant stories. Both explore personal quests, although both attempts were very different in the broadest sense with, ultimately, dramatically different results – for one resulted in the tragic loss at sea of solo kayaker Andrew McAuley.

McAuley set off from south-eastern Tasmania in his 6.4 metre kayak on 11 January 2007. Thirty days later, on 10 February, his upturned kayak was found off Milford Sound on New Zealand's South Island, within sight of land, a day after he radioed that he was sinking. His body was never recovered.

Later that year, in November, James Castrission and Justin Jones left Forster, NSW. After paddling their specially designed and curiously named double kayak, *Lot 41*, for 62 days and a distance of 3,318 kilometres, they arrived at Nganotu Beach on the North Island of New Zealand on 13 January 2008. The pair achieved both the world first of successfully kayaking west to east across the Tasman, and also the world record for 'the longest trans-oceanic kayaking expedition undertaken by two expeditioners'.

Both expeditions were uncomfortably aware of each other's quests to be the first to kayak across the Tasman. The three kayakers, McAuley, Castrission and Jones, had met in 2006. McAuley, a veteran long-distance kayaker who had set his sight on the Tasman crossing since 2004, embarked on his voyage first. He named his quest Trans-Tasman Solo. Castrission and Jones named their expedition Crossing the Ditch.

Almost 20 years older than his rivals, 39-year-old Andrew McAuley was a professional adventurer – a mountain climber and experienced sea kayaker who had completed solo crossings of Bass Strait, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and paddled over 800 kilometres along the Antarctic Peninsula. He was named Adventurer of the Year in 2005 and was highly regarded as a measured, well-prepared expeditioner.

Determined to keep his solo attempt as close as possible to an ordinary kayaking adventure, he chose a conventional kayak design modified for safety, strength, buoyancy and comfort, with extra Kevlar layers and a hammock system to keep him off the hull and allow him to lie down without getting wet. After an aborted departure in December 2006 that kept him wet and cold for 24 hours before turning back, the hull was insulated and drainage channels to a bilge pump were lengthened and widened. But he was never far off the water – it was less than a metre from the water to his eye line as he sat in his cockpit, much of his body below the waterline.

McAuley and his wife Vicky designed a bright-yellow cockpit canopy with a waterproof ventilator to make the kayak watertight. She nicknamed the 70-cm-high fibreglass dome Casper.



The solo kayaker seemed intent on pushing himself and his kayak as far as he could, with a quiet, considered, Spartan approach



above: Andrew McAuley sets out for New Zealand from Fortescue Bay, Tasmania, on 11 January 2007. Reproduced courtesy of Vicki McAuley

left: The modified Mirage Sea Kayak, builder Paul Hewitson, used by the late Andrew McAuley in his ill-fated attempt to paddle from Australia to New Zealand solo. ANMM Collection, photographer A Frolows/ANMM

The homemade canopy slid forward from the back deck on two stainless steel pivot arms, to lock over the kayak's cockpit, providing safe shelter for sleep and to weather storms. It gave the kayak a bubble of buoyancy so that it self-righted if it capsized when it was sealed over the cockpit. However, when not in use, it created the opposite effect and could impede righting the kayak. A rear hatch accessible from the cockpit when using the canopy housed most of McAuley's daily supplies. A front hatch was accessible only from the water. A beanbag seat provided some support while paddling and was used as a pillow at night. The kayak was also covered with an elaborate web of deck rigging that housed cameras recording the voyage.

The fact that McAuley believed it possible to kayak across the Tasman in a simple, small vessel, and very nearly pulled it off, is compelling.

The solo kayaker seemed intent on pushing himself and his kayak as far as he could, with a quiet, considered, Spartan approach, and he left quietly from the east coast of Tasmania.

He chose to cross from Australia to New Zealand below the 40th Parallel so that for much of the journey he was in the wilder Southern Ocean rather than the Tasman Sea. For three quarters of the trip he would be out of helicopter range. He chose this route because the distance to cover was shorter and he knew the winds and currents would favour him compared to safer latitudes further north, where he risked being becalmed. It was a bold decision and suggests that McAuley's mental rigour and determination to push his personal physical and psychological boundaries was, perhaps, just as important to him as the actual crossing itself.

McAuley packed 36 days of food and 30 gallons (113.5 litres) or two to three weeks supply of fresh water. This he supplemented with water extracted physically from the sea each day by operating a manual desalinator. 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 in theory 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 Gore-tex spray jacket, socks and

paddling gloves. A cockpit change bag – a spray skirt that comes up to the neck – allowed McAuley to change clothes without the cockpit being flooded. A comprehensive medical kit was prepared and packed for the voyage. He also wore seasickness pressure-point wrist bands constantly.

He took no books or music, but glued a small photograph of his three-year-old son Finlay in the middle of the kayak's cockpit, his sightline while paddling.

Safety and communications equipment included two satellite phones, a global positioning system (GPS), a GPS tracking beacon able to provide an instant position to his weather forecaster Jonathan Bogais on shore, a dry suit, emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB), flares and water dyes in the cockpit in waterproof bags, and an electric bilge pump. A sea anchor (underwater parachute) was used nightly to minimise drift and put the kayak's nose into the wind for greater stability. Solar panels were used to recharge batteries.

Throughout the voyage of 850-plus nautical miles, McAuley maintained a rigid, precisely timed, once-daily SMS contact with Bogais, who would text a weather report with instructions. Within 30 minutes McAuley would answer with comments and local observations. Bogais relayed messages to the kayaker's wife and ground crew. McAuley's short, cryptic text messages, detailing weather conditions and daily progress, are the most complete record of his incredible journey.

McAuley endured many capsize, yet covered an average 30 nautical miles a day. Three quarters of the way across, he was hit by a Force-10 storm similar to the one that tore apart the 1998 Sydney to Hobart race fleet. He locked himself under the cockpit canopy for 28 hours. Winds with gusts up to 70 knots whipped 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. Yet the systems he had in place worked. He knew days in advance, and was kept informed of the nature of the storm and its progress in relation to him. He had ample time to prepare himself for the onslaught and managed it successfully, in what Bogais has called 'a truly amazing show of maturity and self-control'. A 45-ft ketch was overturned not far from his position, and its crew had to be rescued by a ship in a dangerous operation.

However, from the first week at sea several equipment failures compromised communications. Four days into the voyage he ruled out a helicopter drop to replace an inoperative GPS beacon. Even more dangerously, late in the voyage, damage to his cockpit canopy made him unable to use it safely. After nearly a month at sea McAuley's last text message was sent on 8 February 2007. He reported his position, approximately 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 Royal New Zealand Air Force plane sighted a semi-submerged kayak. No-one was with the kayak and Andrew McAuley's body was not found.

The kayak was retrieved and offered to the Australian National Maritime Museum by McAuley's widow, Vicki, and its builder and owner Paul Hewitson of Mirage Sea Kayaks, a friend of McAuley and an expedition sponsor. The donation was accompanied by the material found inside when it was recovered: the paddle, camera extension pole, dromedary bladder, sail, kite, numerous dry-bags attached to the foredeck, the two satellite phones, camera cases, chargers, batteries, food and half-used medical supplies stored inside.

All were offered as a gift from Vicki McAuley. All are poignant reminders of the man who used them and reveal how he managed to survive in a tiny kayak for over 30 days in the Southern Ocean: how he paddled, communicated, slept, navigated, cooked and coped with

## The journey... was a remarkable achievement and testament to Andrew McAuley's planning, skill, fortitude and above all mental strength

Double kayak *Lot 41*, first to paddle across the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand, on display with a selection of expedition equipment in the foyer of the Wharf 7 Maritime Heritage Centre. Photographer Zoe McMahon/ANMM



## Half way across the Tasman *Lot 41* was churned as if in a washing machine, rolled and dumped by 10 metre waves

the demands of the voyage. The damaged kayak and its contents, the surviving footage, text messages and still images found on board are all that remain as part of a jigsaw puzzle that can be used to reassemble McAuley's experience and contemplate what went horribly wrong.

Much was lost at sea, including the broken or damaged pod Casper, most of the safety equipment, the VHF radio, McAuley's personal flotation device and his dry suit – he is thought to have been wearing the latter and reaching for the former in the rear hatch after the capsizing. His EPIRB was found in the kayak but it was not activated. The inoperative GPS tracking beacon was not present.

A coronial inquiry into his disappearance was held in Invercargill in New Zealand in December 2007. Several experts commented on aspects of McAuley's Spartan operational, communication and risk plans. There was no complete list of the equipment carried on board, and only limited spares and back-up systems were in place. By 4 February he had been unable to recharge from his solar panels, and by 7 February he reported that he was close to running out of battery power for his phone. When the kayak was found McAuley's watch and second satellite phone had run out of power and the primary phone was damaged, inoperative and very nearly drained.

The report focused on the rescue attempt and McAuley's ability to be found, not the cause of the capsizing. It noted the effects on stability of having a water bladder on the kayak's foredeck, and that the damage to the canopy's pivot arms located it further aft than it should have been, so that when capsized it would drag like a sea anchor. The coroner commented that if McAuley had tied his EPIRB to himself, he may have been able to activate it when he fell out of the boat, which would have pinpointed his position and ruled out initial uncertainty about whether his distress call was a hoax. There would have been a much better chance of finding him. The coroner also criticised a delay in the rescue attempt, but it was impossible to say if the outcome could have been any different.

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. The coroner did assert that 'The journey itself, up to the point of disaster so close to destination, was a remarkable achievement and testament to Andrew McAuley's planning, skill, fortitude and above all mental strength'.

McAuley's kayak was modified to endure the open ocean, which it did with great success. There is a terrible irony in the fact that the voyage failed in the zone where a conventional sea kayak is normally operating: close to the coast on daily passages. This is brought out in comments by ANMM curator, boat designer and experienced kayaker, David Payne.

'Perhaps the modifications and requirements needed to achieve that lengthy open-ocean crossing in safety made it more vulnerable in the place it should have felt at home – coastal waters,' David has suggested. 'It was built with a heavier, higher deck, and carried additional gear on deck, including the Casper pod. The gradual reduction in stores consumed during the voyage – initially acting as ballast – would have reduced stability. At the end there was a need to desalinate seawater, held in a floppy 10-kg bladder on the foredeck. All these factors would raise the centre of gravity, which reduces stability, making the kayak more susceptible to capsize.'

'Adding to this was the notoriously rough New Zealand coastline, where the unpredictable sea conditions worsen as you get closer. McAuley entered the most dangerous area of the voyage at a point

when he was most exhausted, and when the boat possibly had its lowest margin of safety in reserve.'

According to McAuley's wife Vicki, the fact that he made it to within sight of land indicates that his quest was realistic for him. Andrew McAuley was posthumously awarded the Australian Geographic Lifetime Adventure Award in 2007.

McAuley's daily text messaging and two phone calls over 30 days reveal the very personal character of his voyage. His attempt to kayak across the sea solo, as much alone as possible, in his tiny, unnamed boat, was a stark contrast to the web-based communication surrounding the Crossing the Ditch expedition and its two young adventurers, James Castrission and Justin Jones. Their quest shows a high level of preparedness nurtured over three and a half years, and an extraordinary level of awareness of the public appeal and marketability of the voyage. The pair chose a longer, somewhat safer, more northerly route across the Tasman, selecting proposed departure and arrival points on their reputations for safety and protection – Forster and Auckland.

Working as a team with an incredible array of equipment and support, these two very young and relatively inexperienced adventurers were able to paddle successfully from Australia to New Zealand. Their journey was broadcast live to millions of people around the world through their website, with daily updates of photos, commentary and GPS tracking. Castrission and Jones spoke regularly to radio stations during their unexpectedly long 62 days at sea, and were farewelled and greeted by thousands of supporters and by television cameras at each end of their journey.

In complete contrast to McAuley's simpler, modified production-style kayak, their atypical, custom-built craft was specially designed to be paddled by two across the notoriously rough Tasman Sea. It was nine metres long and 1.2 metres wide, designed by Rob Feloy in the United Kingdom and built in Australia by Graham Chapman of Adventure Marine. Launched in November 2006, it was christened *Lot 41* after the auction lot number of the legendary New Zealand-born race horse *Phar Lap*, who crossed the Tasman to become Australia's best-loved race horse.

*Lot 41* was wider, longer, heavier and sturdier compared to McAuley's kayak. It featured two cockpits and a cabin at the

stern with modest headroom and the space for both crew to sleep in it. There was a large water tank and storage space for over 60 days of provisions. Both kayakers could stand up and move around on board and when paddling, and were higher off the water. McAuley, by contrast, was right at water level. An abundance of solar panels covered the vessel to charge batteries for the communication systems, bilge pumps and water desalination unit. The kayak's inbuilt support systems included emergency beacons, a life raft, satellite phone, global tracking system and GPS.

The young pair's voyage was also hazardous but they were well prepared. They worked as a team, with constant communication with their larger support crew. They had planned for a voyage of 35-45 days and 2,200 kilometres to Auckland. Half way across the kayak was churned as if in a washing machine, rolled and dumped by 10 metre waves. At times the pair paddled furiously over previously covered water, in circles, chafed, sunburnt and exhausted, lacking the favourable winds and currents of McAuley's more southerly route. After 62 days and 3,318 kilometres they staggered ashore further south than planned, at New Plymouth, engulfed by a huge crowd, massive media coverage, entry into the history records and a future career in motivational speaking and adventuring. (Earlier this year that included an Antarctic trek to the South Pole and back.)

*Lot 41* and a selection of its contents have been donated to the museum by James Castrission and Justin Jones and Crossing the Ditch Ltd. The collection of material reveals the personal world created and lived in by Castrission and Jones, again showing what they used, ate, did and wore during their two months at sea. It is also a unique record of the technologies, equipment and material available in 2007 for long distance sea kayaking. This is also the subject of an extensive repository of written and photographic documentation held by a wide variety of sources, recording, reporting and discussing the extreme nature of the achievement.

You can view *Lot 41*, its artefacts and images from the voyage in the recently refurbished Wharf 7 foyer display. An exploratory multimedia program about the adventure will soon be installed. Visitors on a guided tour of Wharf 7 can also view Andrew McAuley's bare-bones kayak through the window of the large object store; it is destined for



clockwise from top:

James Castrission (front) and Justin Jones together on the ocean during the gruelling challenge of crossing the Tasman Sea on *Lot 41*. Photograph Justin Jones and James Castrission, reproduced with permission

James Castrission with the expedition's sea anchor. Photograph Justin Jones and James Castrission, reproduced with permission

Justin Jones in the cabin of *Lot 41* using the Panasonic Toughbook laptop that was part of their communications package. Photograph Justin Jones and James Castrission, reproduced with permission



Both these collections are a significant historical resource that demonstrates the very different nature of the expeditions

display in the main museum exhibition *Watermarks* in the vicinity of displays on extraordinary voyagers Kay Cottee and kayaker Oskar Speck who paddled from Germany to Australia over seven years just before World War 2.

James Castrission and Justin Jones's successful voyage across the Tasman is inextricably linked with the tragic loss of solo kayaker Andrew McAuley who was attempting to achieve the same historic first on the same stretch of ocean the previous year. Both these collections are a significant historical resource that demonstrates the very different nature of the expeditions – over different stretches of water, under different conditions, by expeditioners of different generations backed by different resources and carrying with them, perhaps,

different perceptions of adventure itself. The collections certainly show how all three kayakers prepared themselves physically, mentally and emotionally in their quests to kayak from Australia to New Zealand, unassisted and non-stop.

The stories of both quests offer opportunities for enquiry into the nature and historiography of adventuring – into the making and unmaking of heroes. ■

clockwise from above:

Equipment and supplies from the *Lot 41* expedition have been donated to the museum through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by James Castrission and Justin Jones of Crossing the Ditch Ltd.