



Floating at the base of a 200-foot-high sheet of glacial ice, it's hard not to be humbled in the presence of one of nature's true wonders. Patagonia, Chile offers a unique opportunity to get up close to the glaciers of the southern ice fields. Paddling right up to one of the steepest and fastest-moving glaciers in the southern ice field is an experience that will stay with you forever. It is simply spectacular to see part of the ice calving off into the water in front of your kayak – not to mention the rush of adrenaline that goes along with it.

Recently, I led an adventure on the Rio Serrano through the glaciers of Patagonia, exploring remote areas only accessible by kayak. Because of its extreme southern location Patagonia is known for its intense winds, unpredictable weather, and scenery that rivals anywhere on the planet. Navigating our way through narrow fjords and following the valleys these glaciers once carved, we would typically spend three to five hours in the boats, paddling up to 10 miles a day depending on the weather. There were times when the headwinds were so strong we barely made any progress at all. While the overall experience was magical we all had to be physically, technically, and mentally prepared each and every day.

Due to the remoteness of our adventure and the risks involved with kayaking in water temperatures just above freezing, our preparation and training was essential to the success of our journey. Our training program for this adventure focused on strength, endurance, flexibility and cross-training activities. The aim of the program was to enable each participant to be able to handle the multitude of conditions Patagonia weather can throw at you. For example, we needed to have the strength in our paddles to be able to gain ground against a solid headwind, the endurance to cover several miles a day, the core strength to keep from turning over in gusty weather, and the flexibility for recovery as well as to reduce leg cramps on long paddles. The program below offers a general guideline of how the sessions were conducted, but it is important to recognize the specificity of the exercises chosen for this particular adventure.

Strength

The strength-training component of the program focused on developing the primary muscles used when kayaking – back, abdominals, shoulders, biceps, and triceps.

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Your Next Kayak Adventure

by Kevin Jackson



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Photos by Robert Jackson of The Southern Terrain

Also incorporated into the strength training were leg workouts to assist in developing endurance as well as providing more stability inside the boat when conditions worsen. I recommend eight to 12 reps and three sets per body part. Keep a journal to track your progress, and try to build on your previous weights and repetitions.

Endurance

The endurance component of the training is designed to get your heart rate up to simulate sustained activity. It is assumed that most people do not have access to kayaks on a daily basis, but if you do, the more time you can spend paddling the more prepared you will be. We encourage our clients to use the rowing machine as much as possible and swim if there is a lap pool available. Endurance training will increase joint and ligament strength, helping to prevent injuries over sustained periods of exertion.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the joint's ability to move through a full range of motion, and balancing the muscle groups you use during exercise and other activities. Flexibility also supports muscular relaxation, which can result in a reduced accumulation of toxins, less muscle shortening or tightening, and less fatigue. It is often the most overlooked component of any training program; but if done properly, and with consistency, it can greatly improve your overall performance. I find yoga and Pilates to be great ways to increase total body flexibility, however it is important to commit to it once or twice a week to achieve maximum benefit. Flexibility in the hamstrings, hip flexors, quadriceps, and other muscles attaching to the pelvis reduces stress to the lower back. This is a common problem during multi-day kayak adventures, and could mean the difference between a great experience and one you would rather forget.

Cross Training

Cross training is an excellent way to add variation to your workout. Try to choose activities such as surfing or paddling, which support your balance and stability while in the water. Prior to participating in any adventure activity, it is important get out and familiarize yourself with the basics – especially if you are a beginner in any particular sport. For kayaking I recommend at least three to four sessions in the water using a similar boat to the ones you'll use on your adventure. Spend a solid two hours on the water each session, to build up your paddle conditioning. This will give you more confidence when you start to paddle and reduce your risk of rolling in rough conditions.

Kayaking adventures offer an opportunity to visit and explore spectacular places

rarely accessible by any other means. To get the most out of your next water sports adventure, prepare yourself for the environment you will be in and remember to bring a dry bag just in case!

* Please note this workout is designed for beginner-level paddlers with minimum fitness and prior experience on the water. It is strictly a guideline and should be altered on an individual basis as needed. ✦

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Closer to Home...

The Pacific Northwest has something to offer whether you are new to kayaking or an expert. With easy access to freshwater rivers and lakes and Pacific coast peninsulas and islands, kayaking can make for an afternoon adventure or a multi-day getaway. The San Juan Islands are the most popular Northwest kayak destination, just a short drive north of Seattle. The Columbia River Gorge area provides opportunities for the sea and whitewater kayaker. There are numerous schools, retailers and tour companies to cater to your adventure. And for the experienced explorer, the Olympic Peninsula, Oregon Coast, and North Cascades lakes offer endless sea shorelines and chains of lakes for multi-day adventures.

For a uniquely Seattle experience visit one of the following rental outfitters on Lake Union or Alki and enjoy a leisurely paddle in the midst of the city's skyline, seaplanes and ferries – and cap it off at one of the local restaurants along the shore. Take a look at www.mosshbay.net, www.nwoc.com, www.aguaverde.com, and www.kayakalki.com

More info on Northwest kayaking outfitters, rentals, classes, guides and trips: www.kayakonline.com or www.gonorthwest.com