

This is the Sea 1 & 2

Reviewed by Mary McClintock

With her DVD *This is the Sea*, Justine Curgenven sets out to show the variety and excitement of the world of sea kayaking. Or, as her quirky introduction says, there's more to sea kayaking than "guys with beards getting close to nature." Curgenven accomplishes her goal and then some. A kayaker's-eye view of surfing on Georgia's Atlantic coast, rolling with Greenland Kayak Champion Maligiaq Padilla in Greenland, dodging sea stacks in California, playing in the overfalls in Wales, landing on the surf beaches of the Kamchatka Peninsula in Siberia and working the currents in Deception Pass are just some of the experiences we have in this hour-long DVD. And yes, we even get to paddle with a "guy with a beard," Nigel Foster, as he gets close to manatees in Florida by rolling his kayak and watching them through a snorkeling mask.

Along with the varieties of locations and personalities, what makes *This is the Sea* especially powerful is the amazing variety of camera angles Curgenven makes possible with her deck-mounted mini-cams. We don't just watch someone as a wave curls over their boat—we're there, in the wave. Curgenven is more than just your average adventure filmmaker, she's an expert sea kayaker with an impressive résumé of expeditions that includes a solo expedition to Iceland's West Fjords; a one-day, two-woman, 75-mile circumnavigation of Anglesey, Wales; the Kamchatka Peninsula expedition featured in *This is the Sea*; and more.

It isn't a perfect film. I'm sure some viewers will appreciate the rock-music-video style of featuring music with each

segment. For the most part, I ignored the music or found it distracting when rough editing left the music so loud that it overwhelmed the comments of paddlers. I was most intrigued by the segments that had a story line or compelling personality. A number of shots could have been edited out or shortened. People standing in a circle listening to a kayak instructor, practicing standing on their boats and eating lunch on a beach are a part of kayaking, but not worth time in a film. The "humor" of the introduction—three women paddling in bikinis—was, for me, more off-putting than inviting. Some of the segments were tantalizingly short. I'd like to know more about the women paddling in Greenland.

Nigel Dennis' comment that "very few places worldwide can match what we've got" in Penrhyn Mawr, Wales, is echoed by paddlers from places as different as California, Georgia and the San Juan Islands. Each speaks proudly of the spe-

With a lot of sea kayaking DVDs, it's easy to focus on techniques and safety. These two DVDs never lose sight of why we kayak in the first place: fun.

cial attributes of "their" paddling spots. Whatever its shortcomings, in *This is the Sea*, enthusiasm and love of kayaking come through loud and clear.

This is the Sea Two continues many themes present in Curgenven's first film. In a bit over 90 minutes, *Sea Two* journeys to Japan, Norway, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Michigan and back to Tybee Island, Georgia, and Penrhyn Mawr in Wales. Again, *Sea Two*

excels at taking us onto the water with expert paddlers handling big water with great skill and joy.

Four segments focus on large tidal races. At the Skookumchuck Rapids in British Columbia, Bryan Smith plays in 10-knot currents and large waves. Smith, as well as paddlers doing "black-belt sea kayaking" at the "Bitches," a tidal race in Wales, compares the tidal races to white-water rivers and discusses how skills developed in white-water enhance their ability to handle the tidal races, and vice versa.

Sea Two shows a wide range of sea kayaking with a variety of paddlers. The most involved story line is that of Hadas Feldman and Jeff Alan's six-month circumnavigation of Japan. Thanks to Curgenven's innovative deck-mounted cameras, we roll with Great Lakes paddler Doug Van Doren and watch the nuances of each Greenland-style maneuver. On Lake Michigan, Belinda Lee takes us on an overnight trip to the Manitou Islands. The trip shows the changeability of that big freshwater lake, from an almost tropical turquoise to a wind-whipped gray. Encounters with wildlife include close-ups of thousands of gannets nesting in Newfoundland and a bear climbing tide-line boulders in northern Japan.

I would appreciate more maps, more

women paddlers and less rock music. *Sea Two* is better edited than *Sea*, but I still found the music distracting.

Included with *Sea Two* is a 25-minute film of the first all-female circumnavigation of Tasmania by Curgenven, Trys Morris and Gemma Rawlings. The best of Curgenven's films, it combines her signature superb photography of expert paddlers in daunting waters with the story of a major expedition. We feel the joys of cranking through miles in calm weather and the frustrations of slogging into headwinds and big seas. Facing a long drag over seemingly endless exposed sandbar, Curgenven's characteristic humor shows through as they haul their boats. While I'll definitely be happy to watch any film Curgenven produces, I hope she films more full expeditions. **SK**

Mary McClintock lives in Conway, MA, and is a freelance writer, editor and researcher. She has kayaked for over 20 years and has served as a guide for women's paddling trips.



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Total length: 60 mins. (2004)
THIS IS THE SEA TWO \$29.95
Total length: 90 mins. (2005)
(includes 25-minute bonus feature)
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Cackle TV Productions
www.cackletv.com
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