

Sea Kayaking with Icebergs – Enjoyment and Respect

Dr. Bob Gagnon

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Bob Gagnon has worked at the National Research Council on ice related subjects including icebergs and ship collisions. He has worked on and in icebergs in the Canadian Arctic and around Newfoundland and Labrador. He is fascinated by icebergs and for the past 19 years has enjoyed observing them from the perspective of his kayak.

Bob's presentation discussed the immensity of icebergs and the damage caused to ships, notably the Grampian in 1909 and the Solberg in 2004, both of which collided bow first and managed to make it safely to port. Of course we were reminded of the Titanic, which sank off of Cape Race.

Bob explained the casual observer of icebergs sees them as a status chunk of ice, however in reality they are constantly moving and disintegrating. Bob illustrated the breakdown of an iceberg with several photos taken of a berg in Bay Bulls in 2000. From May 27th to June 1st the berg rotated 180 degrees and eventually disintegrated as caught in a dramatic photograph which looked more like an explosion.

Bob suggested if you told people that a tunnel to a mine was having frequent rock falls, people would probably not enter! However, kayakers often paddle too close as the allure can be difficult to resist! This reckless paddling must be avoided. All icebergs break up, which result in large waves and chunks of ice. Indeed, Bob stated ice chunks from above represent the biggest hazard to paddlers, or for that matter all boaters.

Bob provided the following guidelines for safe viewing:

- Maintain a safe distance; at least stay as far as the height of the iceberg...twice as far is recommended.
- Never paddle through pinnacles (drydocks)
- Growlers/berg bits must also be avoided. They roll and have tremendous weight. Even in a gentle swell these chunks of ice are unstable and could roll on a boat. Be particularly careful near a wharf.
- Remind your paddling friends of the dangers and to stay well back.
- He also stressed to paddle with others and only paddle alone if you are well trained and have the required equipment.

Bob also discussed the physics of icebergs and interesting aspects such as clear veins of ice. Through Bob's eyes we paddled around an iceberg near Bonavista which had a vein so clear it was possible to see waves on the other side of the berg. These veins are caused when cracks are formed as the glacier flows towards the ocean. The veins fill with fresh

water and quickly freeze in the ice pack. Other than a plane of bubbles in the middle, the veins are basically bubble free and therefore the reason they are clear.

Bob expressed we are very fortunate to have such a beautiful coastline to paddle and in most years, icebergs to entertain us. As per the title of his presentation, enjoy them but with a large dose of respect!