



*THRILL SEEKERS! Neither lightning, thunder nor swarming flies could keep Andrews students Krystian Zygowiec and Olen Netteburg from crossing Lake Michigan by kayak. (Photo by Kristopher Zygowiec)*

# Kayak Across Lake Michigan

Thunderstorms and swarming flies give student thrill-seekers the adventure of a lifetime.

by Jack Stenger

Neither wind, thunderstorms, nor 14-foot swells could keep Olen Netteburg and Krystian Zygowiec from their appointed task: to cross Lake Michigan by kayak.

On Labor Day weekend, the two Andrews students made the 60-mile trip from Chicago to the Michigan side of Lake Michigan in two separate kayaks. In the process of the 37-hour ordeal they encountered enough adventure to last a lifetime—or at least for the coming school year.

On Sunday, Sept. 4, the two 19-year-olds set out on their journey from Meigs Field in Chicago. The lake's glass-like surface and an uninteresting weather forecast might have inspired confidence that nothing but smooth paddling was before them. But by evening, approaching thunderclaps let them know that this would be no cake walk crossing.

"When we heard the storm coming, we said to each other: 'This is going to be a really interesting night,'" said Zygowiec.

Predictably, thunder gave way to spectacular lightning and 30-mile-an-hour winds. At least Columbus had Spanish galleons to brave the elements in; Netteburg and Zygowiec had to negotiate an angry Lake Michigan in the dark of night in two 17-foot plastic-shelled kayaks.

And inclement weather was not the only obstacle the thrill-seekers faced. Swarming flies, looking for heads to fly around, bedeviled them in the middle of the lake. "At one point I had more than 60 of them sitting on the front of my kayak," Zygowiec said.

A lonely bird also kept them company at one point, landing on the kayaks and even on a paddle. ("It looked like he was just tired.")

But more than the environmental challenges they faced, physical wear became the biggest factor against them. Upper-body strain led to lower-body fatigue which led to near-total-body exhaustion. "It was all one big sore feeling after a while," Netteburg said. "We were just wondering how long it was going to take."

The goal behind all this exertion was to be a glorious St. Joseph arrival, paddling right into the midst of an adoring lunch-hour crowd at the popular Lighthouse Brewpub and Restaurant situated on the St. Joseph River, half a mile from Lake Michigan. It didn't hurt that the new restaurant was a sponsor of the pair or that a South Bend TV station was slated to chronicle their heroic feat on video.

But, alas, on-board compasses and better-than-average orientation skills are no match for Mother Nature. The wind and meteorological pyrotechnics of early Monday morning meant the two were blown 25 miles off course, all the way south to Union Pier, Mich.

The weird weather also caused major headaches for their fans on shore. An on-board cellular phone meant the two could keep contact with loved ones, but a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. "communication blackout" made for increased concern—and two sets of worried parents.

The Sunday-night tempest meant a long night for Lois and Kristopher Zygowiec, Krystian's parents, who are employed by Andrews. "Of all nights for an electrical storm, why did it have to be on the night when my son was playing adventurer?" said Lois Zygowiec. Needless to say, she didn't sleep a wink.

a call from land would be a sweeter feeling than a call from the lake."

Though they sited the Michigan side by early Monday morning, (neither admitted to having the presence of mind to yell, "Land Ho!"), the wind, an infernal west-bound current, and their 3 m.p.h. pace meant ten more hours of paddling toil. Never has terra firma seemed sweeter than when they landed at 9 p.m., well after the late-summer sunset. "When we first hit the shore, my only thought was 'We made it!' and then 'We better call our parents,'" said Netteburg, whose parents are Kermit and Ronalee Netteburg, recent employees of Andrews who now live in Maryland.

After a joyful reunion with parents and relieved friends, there was little else to do but rest. During the car ride back to Berrien

Springs, both exhausted adventurers

fell fast asleep in the back seat. But now that they are awake—and fully recovered—there's time to dream of the next great adventure.

Back in the 16th century, Magellan circumnavigated the world in a Portuguese galleon. And in the first moment of the 21st century, two young Berrien Springs explorers want to make some history of their own. Lake Michigan? A mere warm-up.

"There's a rowing race across the Atlantic in 2001," said Zygowiec. "Olen and I have been trying to look for sponsors, but so far no luck."

Whoever said the "Age of Exploration" is over hasn't talked to these guys.



**REUNITED** *The Zygowiecs and Netteburgs welcome the way-faring kayakers at Union Pier beach. From left: Lois Zygowiec, Krystian Zygowiec, Kristopher Zygowiec, Olen Netteburg, Ronalee Netteburg and Kermit Netteburg.* (Photo by Jonathan Zygowiec.)

Their communication impasse was caused by the 10-foot high waves which took every bit of their energy, they said. "We were just doing everything we could to keep from being tipped over," Zygowiec said. "And besides, we figured

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