



A DEADLY

CROSSING

LAST THANKSGIVING, EIGHT ADVENTURERS FROM VANCOUVER SET OUT BY KAYAK ON WHAT THEY KNEW WOULD BE A GRUELLING TEST OF THEIR PHYSICAL ENDURANCE. BY THE END OF THE DAY, TWO OF THEM WERE DEAD. HERE'S THE IN-DEPTH STORY OF HOW THINGS WENT TRAGICALLY WRONG

BY DAVID LEACH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN ARNOLD



Launch site: The adventurers paddled out from Porteau Cove at sunrise.



“Grouse Grind on steroids.” After charging down again, they would retrace the five-kilometre kayak leg back to the mainland, drive to Squamish, and then mountain bike 60 kilometres to Whistler. Finally, they intended to dash halfway up the ski hill and back to the village—just in time for a seven o’clock beer with their wives and girlfriends at their favourite pub.

The core of the group was the duo of Richard Juryn and Bob Faulkner, long-time friends who had done a mountain-bike expedition in Mongolia that spring. Juryn was 50, but, with his soul patch and cyclist’s physique, looked at least a decade younger; he was the Johnny Appleseed of mountain biking in Vancouver’s North Shore—a tireless rider, event organizer and lobbyist for trail access, who biked with his two teenage sons and his 75-year-old mother. Faulkner was a legend in Canada’s adventure-racing community, a 60-year-old former smoker turned ultra-Ironman who competed in top-level international events (including seven Eco-Challenges) at an age when most of his peers were lounging in golf carts.

At Porteau Cove, the group donned kayaking gear and partnered up. Juryn and Faulkner settled into one of the tandem boats. Cheryl Beatty, a 34-year-old university instructor, and Denis Fontaine, a 40-year-old sportswear sales rep, were a hyper-fit common-law couple who paddled two or three times a week. Troy Dalton and Jon Bula, both 32, had been friends since high school and now operated a fitness studio together in Vancouver. Brent Martin, the 42-year-old CEO of an eyewear company, and Graham Tutti, a 35-year-old triathlete and software salesman, formed the final pair.

They all launched into a stiff headwind from the south and

That morning, clouds shrouded the mountains and cold rain raked the 2,475-foot summit. The runners quickly retreated and split into three groups as they descended. Dalton and Bula kept Faulkner company at the back. Juryn jogged with Martin and described his vision of a new bike trail for riders of all abilities that would run through Vancouver’s North Shore mountains. Beatty split her time between these two mid-pack runners and the pair in the lead. Up front, Fontaine and Tutti talked about balancing careers with recreational lifestyles. The deteriorating weather couldn’t dampen their good humour, as they traded a quip from the movie *Caddyshack*: “Reverend, I don’t think the heavy stuff is gonna come down for a while!”

The runners hit the beach around 11:30 a.m. and shared a Thermos of hot chocolate. Howe Sound is famous for its funnel effect, which produces powerful winds, both the outflow “Squamishes” that sweep south off the Coast Mountains and the Pacific storms that charge north up the inlet; Anvil Island, a five-kilometre-long hump-back of rock and trees, sits in the crosshairs of both. That morning’s gale warning called for gusts from the south of up to 85 kilometres per hour, and moving walls of whitecapped seawater were now chasing the flood tide up the inlet into Squamish Harbour. While they never seriously discussed quitting, the friends made a few concessions to the weather. Faulkner and Juryn, both agile big-water kayakers, would split up for the return journey and paddle instead with Martin and Tutti respectively.

Three of the kayakers were Seaward Passat G3s, 22-foot fibreglass tandems with a large centre hatch, rented from a shop in Deep Cove. They were wide and stable—“bombproof” in paddler parlance. Originally, Fontaine and Beatty had planned to rent a Passat, too, but they already owned a Necky racing kayak, a Kevlar double boat nicknamed The Red Baron. It was lighter than the Passats, and the seats were set a few inches higher, too, which eased paddling but elevated the boat’s centre of gravity. In their nimble boat, Fontaine and Beatty would run a sweep from the rear.

HOWE SOUND IS FAMOUS FOR ITS FUNNEL EFFECT, WHICH PRODUCES POWERFUL WINDS. THAT DAY’S GALE WARNING CALLED FOR GUSTS FROM THE SOUTH OF UP TO 85 KILOMETRES PER HOUR

paddled up and over four-to-five-foot waves. As cold sea spray cascaded across their faces and jackets, they hooted with delight and hollered back and forth. These might be precarious sea conditions for the average paddler, but the eight friends were all experienced kayakers, in wide double boats, and their day of adventure had begun with an invigorating splash.

IT TOOK THEM ALMOST AN HOUR to paddle across Montagu Channel to the near shore of Anvil Island. On the south beach of a small peninsula, they stripped out of life vests, exchanged neoprene booties for running shoes, and dashed into the woods for stage two of their trip: a run to the summit of Leading Peak. They jogged for an hour and a half up a rough forest trail. A steep scramble led to a wooden helicopter pad that offers a stunning 360-degree panorama of Howe Sound—on clear days.

MAP: GARY DAVIDSON

nearest vessel, maybe 100 feet offshore, two men were paddling furiously back toward her position on Anvil Island. Submerged to the shoulders in the cold Pacific waters, a person was clinging to their boat.

The two men dug into each stroke with synchronized intensity—these were clearly strong paddlers—heads bowed into gusts that screamed up Howe Sound and sheared white foam off the waves. Their arms churned like turbines for 10 straight minutes. But against the unrelenting wind and current, they couldn’t gain an inch. They were never going to make it.

ON OCTOBER 7, 2007, while most of British Columbia was still sleeping—possibly dreaming of turkey dinners to come—the eight adventure athletes had awakened before dawn. At a little past seven in the morning, they rendezvoused at Porteau Cove, a tiny provincial park midway between Vancouver and Squamish on the Sea to Sky Highway. They were all from the Vancouver area—mostly the communities of North Vancouver and Deep Cove. Several in the group had been friends for more than a decade; a few were meeting for the first time that morning.

All of the eight were self-confessed “cardio junkies,” the type of after-work athletes who know their resting heart rate (low), lactic threshold (high), and body-fat percentage (minimal). They liked to go fast, go hard and go all day, often at endurance events and multi-sport competitions with names such as the Knee Knacker, the Test of Metal, Mind Over Mountain and Sea2Summit. In fact, it was the disappearance of the latter race last autumn that had set in motion their plan: a do-it-yourself Thanksgiving adventure. They would start by paddling from Porteau Cove halfway across Howe Sound to Anvil Island, where they would follow a steep trail up Leading Peak, what one of the athletes described as the

nearly half past eight, and from the coastal vantage of her island property, cottager Debbie Crockett couldn’t quite believe what she was seeing.

The marine forecast had promised gale-force winds for Howe Sound, and it hadn’t disappointed. In six decades of visiting her family cabin on Anvil Island, 35 kilometres north of Vancouver, Crockett had never witnessed a storm this fast-moving or fierce. With her husband and 23-year-old son, she could only watch and hope that their 19-foot motorboat, anchored offshore, didn’t snap loose amid the heaving seas.

That’s when she saw them: four sea kayakers rounding the peninsula, punching through the five-foot waves, and surfing onto the beach at Fern Bay, as though on a picnic lark. And then eight people, quick as commandos, disappearing into the bush.

Above the high-tide line, Anvil Island is private property, home to a scattering of vacation homes and a summer bible camp, so Crockett wasn’t sure where the kayakers might be headed. Three hours later, she glanced out her window and saw them again, moving across the beach with the same urgency. By then, the gale had worsened, so she decided to ask if the paddlers wanted to warm up inside. She arrived too late, in time only to see the last two kayakers launching back into the storm. As she stood on a dock, cold rain strafing her face, she waved at them, urging them back, briefly locking eyes with a man in the trailing boat. After the kayakers disappeared from view, Crockett knocked on the next-door cabin. “Did you see that?” she asked. “Yeah,” replied her neighbour, also a kayaker. “Those people are insane.”

Crockett crossed to the other side of the peninsula, where she’d be able to watch the paddlers as they made their way across Montagu Channel to the B.C. mainland. By the time she reached the beach, she could see only three of the four kayakers. In the

The group had to launch through the surf, paddle south into the waves for a few hundred yards, and then execute a wide turn around the peninsula before heading north again in the following seas. Rounding the point was the crux. However briefly, their boats would be sidelong to the seven-foot waves, a position that kayakers know as a broach, the most common cause of capsizes.

Faulkner and Martin successfully made the tricky turn, as did Juryn and Tutti. They had all intended to stay close, but with wind-tunnel gusts at their sterns, the boats accelerated away from each other like throttled-down Jet Skis. Bula and Dalton rounded the peninsula next. In the front cockpit, Bula glanced back as Fontaine and Beatty approached the point. Then they disappeared behind the roller coaster of swells.

Twenty seconds later, Bula looked again. This time, something was wrong. His friends were in the water. The Red Baron had flipped.

"They've gone over!" Bula shouted, and hailed the other boats with his paddle. He and Dalton then performed a U-turn and paddled back into the wind for 10 minutes. Fontaine had clambered aboard the overturned boat. Beatty, however, had attempted to retrieve the paddles and was quickly drifting away. "Go get Cheryl!" insisted Fontaine.

Dalton and Bula frequently paddled together and often placed in the top three

Again, they paddled all out, aiming directly for the island as the current shunted the boat on a diagonal course. In the glacier-fed water of Howe Sound, Beatty's strength was fading. "Guys, I'm so cold!" she told them. Dalton held onto Beatty to give her arms a rest, but whenever he stopped paddling, the kayak lost forward momentum and instead drifted parallel to the shore. If they overshot the last beach, they would pass beyond the north tip of the island—and Beatty would likely succumb to the cold.

"Cheryl, you've got to hold on," Bula shouted, "or we're not going to make it!"

Finally, 45 minutes after reaching her, the two kayakers landed the boat and hauled Beatty onto a beach. The air temperature hovered around 12°C but felt colder in the wind and the rain. Beatty's skin was a bloodless white and frozen to the touch. Her body convulsed with involuntary shivering as she slurred: "Can you die from hypothermia?"

They all knew the answer, especially Bula, who had studied hypothermia while completing a master's in exercise physiol-

CHERYL BEATTY'S SKIN WAS A BLOODLESS WHITE AND FROZEN TO THE TOUCH. HER BODY CONVULSED WITH INVOLUNTARY SHIVERING AS SHE SLURRED: "CAN YOU DIE FROM HYPOTHERMIA?"

ogy. Even after people are removed from the water, their survival isn't guaranteed. Their deeply chilled surface tissues can continue to draw heat from the body's vital core, causing what is called an "after-drop" loss of several degrees Celsius. Rescued victims, conscious and talking, have collapsed and died hours after being pulled from the sea.

Quickly, Bula and Dalton stripped out of wet clothes and sandwiched Beatty between their bodies. They didn't know if anyone had seen them reach land. The group hadn't brought a VHF radio or an emergency beacon, not even a set of flares. They had left their cellphones in their cars. The two friends had seen a cottager along the shore. Maybe she could help. At five-foot-seven and 170 pounds, Bula had more body fat than his taller partner. He would stay with

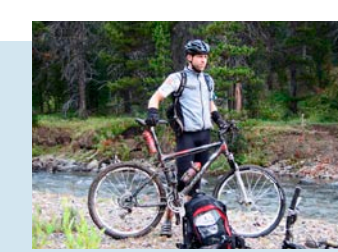
Beatty under an improvised duvet of life jackets and spray skirts while Dalton, a former pro hockey player, bushwhacked through the tangle of undergrowth.

Bula stared up at his best friend. "Troy," he said, "you've got half an hour." And then Dalton sprinted into the forest.

AS SOON AS THEY HEARD A SHOUT, Bob Faulkner and Brent Martin circled back. They spotted someone waving a paddle—and then Dalton and Bula paddling hard for Anvil Island, with Beatty draped over their stern. It took half an hour to fight the wind back to Denis Fontaine, still hunched atop The Red Baron but now considerably colder than when he had first capsized



A few good friends (clockwise): Richard Juryn; Graham Tutti; Denis Fontaine; Bob Faulkner; Jon Bula (left) and Troy Dalton.



into the 8°C water. Juryn and Tutti arrived on the scene a few minutes later.

"You have to let go of the boat," the friends insisted, and Fontaine reluctantly abandoned his expensive kayak. The two tandem kayaks rafted up, with Fontaine between them. "I've got to get out of the water!" he announced, and then pried free the cover from the centre hatch on Juryn and Tutti's boat and climbed into the space between their cockpits.

"He's getting into your kayak," said Faulkner.

Tutti thought this was an agreed-upon rescue strategy, but it was simply an observation, a statement of fact. Scrunched into the improvised seat, Fontaine's knees touched his chin, and he tried to cover the exposed hatch with his neoprene spray skirt. The top-heavy double kayak didn't look stable, but nobody wanted to tell a good friend to get off. Fontaine was as tough as any of them. Tougher. If he needed to get out of the water that badly, he must be seriously cold.

Together, the paddlers aimed north for Porteau Cove. With the first stroke, the boat carrying Fontaine wobbled, and Tutti and Juryn braced with their paddles. The extra weight slowed their progress, too, and a gap quickly grew between the two boats. The paddlers in the trailing vessel decided to veer east. If anything happened, they wanted to be as close as possible to shore.

Faulkner and Martin were surprised to look back and see the other kayak, in the distance now, steering toward the mainland. The two men were more worried about Beatty and decided to keep going. They reached Porteau Cove around half past noon, hurried to their vehicles, and called 911. An RCMP officer from Squamish was on the scene within minutes. (On the rain-slick coastal highway, a second Mountie skidded off a 20-foot embankment but wasn't injured.) Martin then drove to a promontory and scanned Howe Sound for his six friends, but all he could see was a dark expanse etched with white slashes of breaking waves.

AT 12:38 P.M., the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Victoria fielded the 911 dispatch. The centre is staffed round the clock by two maritime rescue coordinators from the Coast Guard, who can muster a variety of boats for water-based missions, and an air rescue coordinator from the Armed Forces, who can task planes and helicopters to search from the sky. The nature of the Howe Sound incident wasn't immediately clear: an overturned kayak between Anvil Island and Porteau Cove. Two capsized paddlers

accompanied by other kayakers but headed in *opposite* directions. "Sounds kind of strange," noted a maritime search coordinator in the incident log.

The Victoria rescue centre fields 50 or so kayaking calls every year, many of them summertime day trips gone wrong when neophyte boat renters get caught in powerful Pacific currents. "We call them 'sea coffins,'" a maritime rescue coordinator once told me, only half-jokingly. Paddlers rarely carry emergency beacons or radar reflectors, and kayakers can venture into shallows that motorized rescue boats can't reach. "When you're searching for them," he said, "you have to search every little nook and cranny."

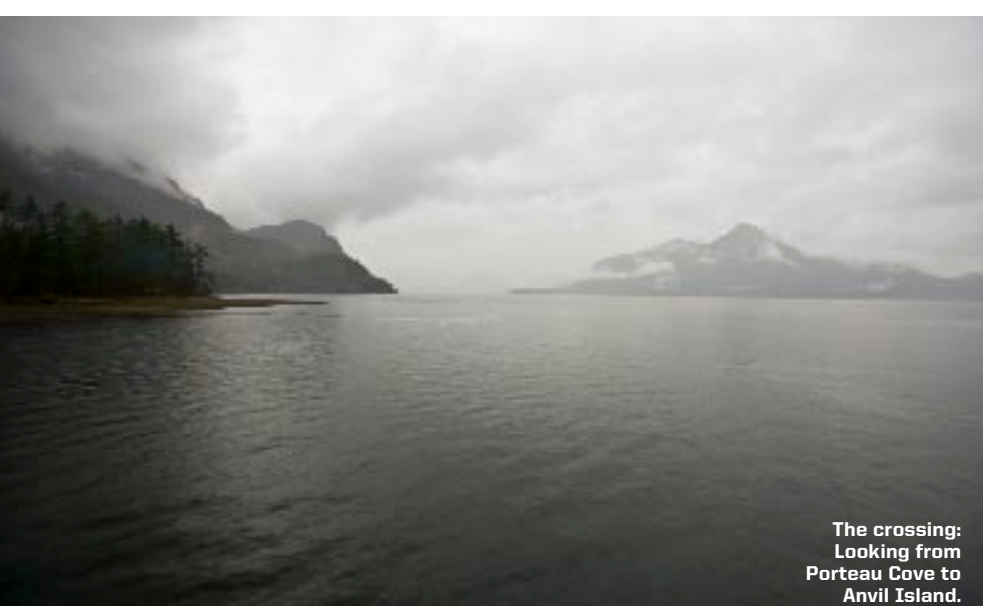
After the 911 call, a search coordinator in Victoria immediately dispatched the *Osprey*, a 41-foot Coast Guard cutter based in Vancouver. Then the rescue team ticked through a list of other available resources. They alerted a pair of 27-foot rigid-hull Zodiacs owned and operated by the all-volunteer Coast Guard Auxiliary. One of the Zodiacs, usually moored closer to Anvil Island at Fisherman's Cove, first had to return from aiding two other storm-caught kayakers near North Vancouver. The rescue centre also summoned two more boats and—because a military helicopter was too far away—it hired a chopper to fly from Squamish.

Nobody knew precisely where to look or what they might find when they got there, but a combined force of professional and volunteer search-and-rescuers was now converging rapidly on the tumultuous waters of Montagu Channel.

ON ANVIL ISLAND, DEBBIE CROCKETT had watched until the struggling kayakers made it to a tiny, hidden beach farther up the coast. Then she returned to her cottage and debated with her husband about searching for the paddlers. The seas were still too rough to launch a dinghy and reach their motorboat. That's when a hammering shook their door.

Troy Dalton stood outside, dripping wet and panting. Somehow he had fought his way along the sloping, overgrown foreshore and found the cottage. "We need help!" he said. "Our friend's been in the water!" Crockett called 911 just before 1:15 p.m. By then, the squall had weakened enough for Crockett's husband and son to risk launching a dinghy, boarding the motorboat, and ferrying Dalton around the peninsula to look for his friends.

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The crossing: Looking from Porteau Cove to Anvil Island.

at kayaking events and adventure race stages. As they chased Beatty, they discussed rescue tactics. "Let's be careful," said Bula. "People panic in these situations."

It took another five minutes to reach Beatty. Dalton dragged her to the boat's stern with a throw bag and rope. Her hands were numb, but she managed to grab the rim of the rear cargo hatch. Dalton and Bula then pointed the boat into the wind and tried to paddle for a north-facing beach about 100 feet away. But with the 135-pound Beatty clinging to the stern, they couldn't fight the wind and current.

They spotted another potential pullout, this one downwind, along the otherwise rock-walled eastern shoreline of Anvil Island.

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After Dalton had left, Cheryl Beatty had stopped shivering. Jon Bula knew this could be a bad sign: the loss of involuntary shivering—which can generate five times the body heat of a person at rest—often marks the transition into the most severe stage of hypothermia, followed by unconsciousness, ventricular fibrillation and cardiac arrest. But Beatty had also begun talking coherently and her body seemed to be warming. By the time Dalton made it back, she had returned from the precipice of hypothermia.

The *Osprey* reached the scene at 1:30 p.m., and the Crocketts' motorboat transferred the three kayakers onto the Coast Guard cutter. Inside the *Osprey's* cabin, the medic treated Beatty with dry blankets and warm air blown into her throat—the best means of preventing a post-rescue after-drop, as heat can quickly reach the hypothalamus, the brain's thermostat. Dalton and Bula stayed up top to help scan the pitching water for their remaining friends. They were cold and exhausted but they were safe. The worst, they hoped, was over.

AS GRAHAM TUTTI and Richard Juryn paddled for the mainland, with their shivering friend hunched between their cockpits, Tutti had an uneasy feeling about their situation. Each stroke they took was a struggle to maintain balance; as water rose around the legs of Denis Fontaine in the 190-litre centre hatch, every breaking wave buried the vessel more deeply than the last. And then it happened: the kayak reached its tipping point, foundered, and all three men spilled into the cold Pacific.

They kicked free of the boat and bobbed to the surface in their PFDs. They gave little thought to trying to right the boat. Performing what's known as an outrigger self-rescue—steady the kayak with an inflatable paddle float, pumping it dry, and climbing back inside—would be next to impossible in these chaotic sea conditions.

The three friends had no idea where the others were or if help was on the way. Even before the capsize, Tutti had decided what to do if they did go over. "Let's swim, guys," he said. The two others agreed.

They pulled on toques and began breast-stroking toward the nearest shore, a rocky projection about a kilometre in the distance. Tutti, a triathlete, led the way. After 10 min-

utes, Fontaine began to struggle. Deeply cold, he flipped onto his back, with his left arm bent rigidly over his chest, while he continued to stroke with his right arm and flutter kick. Tutti grabbed Fontaine's life jacket and began pulling him along.

The tailwind and the flood tide were driving them north, carrying them past the point of land. The shore was getting farther away, not closer. As the icy waves doused their heads, the swimmers could now see RVs parked along the mainland.

"Those camper vans are going to have a surprise!" said Tutti to encourage his friends' efforts.

"Are we going to make it?" asked Fontaine.

"Absolutely," said Tutti.

THE INITIAL BAPTISM into water even as tepid as 21°C immediately causes cold shock, which only feels more severe in colder seas. Victims gasp involuntarily and begin to hyperventilate, and may even drown if they swallow seawater and aren't wearing life jackets. The panting and elevated heart rate lasts for a few minutes, until the body can adjust, temporarily, to the extreme cold. As the skin cools, surface capillaries tighten

and warm blood flees inwards to protect the vital organs. This phenomenon, called vasoconstriction, is a sort of physiological triage; the hypothermic body sacrifices its extremities to create an icy "skin suit" that can insulate the core and forestall serious drops in internal temperature for half an hour or longer.

Swimming, however, undermines this survival mechanism. Any physical effort, in fact, drives warm blood away from the core and back to the muscles, where heat is lost more easily into the water, which has a conductive power 25 times that of air. Scientists have shown that the body loses heat up to 40 per cent faster when swimming in cold water than when remaining still; dog paddlers and Olympic athletes alike quickly succumb to this "muscle cooling" or "swimming failure."

Whatever they do, capsize victims immersed in 8°C seas will be unlikely to remain conscious for more than an hour or two. And in this scenario, it's not survival of the fittest, but survival of the fittest. Ironically, sedentary people with extra natural insulation can withstand the cold better, while health-conscious endurance athletes—with their highly trained greyhound-like physiques—fall prey to hypothermia more quickly.

While several in the group of eight friends had pulled on paddling jackets, nobody had worn a wetsuit—common among expedition kayakers, but rarely employed by adventure racers and competitive paddlers for fear of overheating. A neoprene carapace would have offered the insulation that the athletes' own lean bodies could not provide; according to studies, wetsuits can double survival times. Without such protection, as internal temperature declines from an average of 37°C toward 30°C—at which point unconsciousness and cardiac failure may set in—a person begins to experience the psychological effects of moderate hypothermia: lethargy, mental fogginess, anxiety, amnesia, even hallucinations.

THE SHORE might have appeared within reach, but in the autumnal cold of Montagu Channel, all three swimmers were descending into the twilight zone of hypothermia. After nearly an hour in the ocean, Juryn was lagging behind, too. "I'm having trouble keeping my head above water!" he shouted.

Tutti saw Juryn lifted on the crest of a 10-foot wave, his eyes wide with panic. Later,

SURVIVING COLD WATER

According to the Red Cross, 200 people die in cold water every year in Canada, half during recreational activities. Capsize victims in water as warm as 21°C may experience the following four physiological stages of cold-water immersion.

Cold shock (first five minutes): Hyperventilation and elevated heart rate can lead to panic and drowning, so try to collect your wits until cold shock passes—and be thankful you wore a life vest.

Muscle cooling (5 to 30 minutes): As the skin cools, you lose grip strength and manual dexterity, so fine-fingered tasks (e.g., tying boats together, launching flares, self-rescues) should be performed quickly. Any vigorous movement will result in rapid cooling and "swimming failure"; only swim as a last resort if dry land is close.

Hypothermia (30 minutes and onward): Factors such as water and air temperature, wave action, insulating clothing, and body fat will determine your functional time (how long you can stay fully conscious and able to help yourself) and survival time (when your cold-numbered heart quits beating). To better the odds, remove your head and body from the water or, failing that, float in the heat escape loss prevention (HELP) position.

Post-rescue collapse (up to several hours after being rescued): To prevent fatal cardiac arrhythmias and sudden drops in blood pressure, hypothermic victims should be removed from the water gently and, if possible, horizontally. A body's core temperature continues to cool even after rescue, so keep victims still, warm and dry until professional medical help arrives.

For more info: An educational reality-TV series called *Cold Water Boot Camp*, featuring University of Manitoba expert Dr. Gordon Giesbrecht, will be broadcast on Rogers Cable this fall (coldwaterbootcamp.com). Links to other resources can be found at fataltide.com/hypothermia.html.

Tutti looked back again and could no longer spot Juryn but couldn't recall when he had last seen him. Fontaine stopped swimming, and Tutti began to push rather than pull him through the waves. "Come on, Denis, let's go!" he urged.

Suddenly, Fontaine thrashed epileptically in the water for a minute before losing consciousness. Tutti thought his friend was dead, and felt that if he stayed there, he would die, too. The two men separated. Tutti kept swimming for shore, but circled back to make certain that Fontaine was beyond help. He found him lifeless in the water,

white froth on his lips—a sign of respiratory edema, a symptom of drowning.

Alone, in a hypothermic haze, Tutti rejoined his own struggle to survive. He could feel his body weakening, his will to fight evaporating. His swimming had deteriorated into a clumsy imitation of a proper stroke. He was only about a thousand feet from land, but for the first time he doubted he could make it.

THE OSPREY hadn't patrolled for long, maybe five minutes, when a Coast Guard seaman shouted from the deck: "There's something in the water!" They all saw it: first, a red life vest off the starboard bow, maybe 1,500 feet from land. And then, in its buoyant embrace, a person floating, face-first, in Montagu Channel.

As soon as the Coast Guard pulled the body of Richard Juryn onto the *Osprey*, Jon Bula knew that he was gone. A year and a half earlier, Bula had performed CPR on his own dying sister, when she had suffocated from a blood clot in her lungs, and he will never forget the extinction of the life spark in the eyes of someone he loved. He recognized that same empty look in the cold-blanching features of his friend.

The Coast Guard personnel performed CPR and then transferred Juryn to an Auxiliary Zodiac, which rushed him to shore. The Zodiac returned for Bula, Troy Dalton and Cheryl Beatty, who had largely recovered but was increasingly frantic. *Where was her partner Denis?* Nobody knew.

Near the Porteau Cove jetty, the ill-fated kayak trip was attracting an ever-larger crowd: Bob Faulkner and Brent Martin, a few anxious wives and girlfriends, RCMP officers, ambulance attendants, a pilot from Blackcomb Helicopters, Coast Guard and Auxiliary personnel, curious campers, a TV news crew.

And Graham Tutti, too.

At the end of his fading strength, he had seen an orange shape looming out of the waves. And then hands lifting him free of the unfathomable cold. The volunteers aboard another Auxiliary boat had spotted him swimming not far from the jetty. Tutti was stripped of his clothes and taken to the hospital in Squamish, where he would stop shivering two hours later and be released that day.

Denis Fontaine was still missing. Suddenly, the search helicopter stopped and hovered low over a spot 1,000 feet from

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shore. An Auxiliary Zodiac sped toward the downdraft, and rescue volunteers lifted Fontaine's unresponsive body into the boat. He and Juryn were rushed to Lion's Gate Hospital in Vancouver. Fontaine had been in the water for nearly two hours; Juryn, an hour and eight minutes—his GPS-heartrate watch had recorded his entire ordeal.

Emergency-room doctors would work for hours to restore a pulse in both men,

until past midnight in Juryn's case. With abrupt temperature decline, the body can enter a "hypothermic coma" that preserves brain function: "You're not dead," according to physicians, "until you're warm and dead." At last, that pronouncement would be made. The likely cause in both instances: hypothermia-induced drowning. (The Vancouver coroner's office is still investigating the incident.)

Back at Porteau Cove, before the remaining friends could change out of wet gear and regroup at the hospital for a final, futile

vigil, they looked out toward Anvil Island. A few hours earlier, Montagu Channel had been a roiling, wind-racked spectacle. Now the weather was calm and clearing, barely a ripple on the water. It didn't seem fair.

THE DEATHS made the evening news and sparked front-page headlines across the country. Public reaction was divided. Debbie Crockett, who had watched the accident unfold outside her cottage, couldn't sleep for a week; her family remains troubled by the incident. "The next time that happens, God forbid, I'm going down there with an axe and putting a hole in the kayaks," she says. "They might sue me, but they'll be alive to do it."

Comments on Internet forums questioned the motives of "extreme athletes" and wondered why taxpayers must pay for their rescues. (It didn't help that the CBC initially misreported that the kayakers hadn't been wearing life jackets.) "Maybe they should consider joining the Forces and going to fight in Afghanistan," argued one respondent on the *Globe and Mail's* website. "They could risk death in support of democracy instead of their own selfish pursuits."

The six survivors acknowledged their mistakes. Bob Faulkner admitted to reporters that the group's will to finish had trumped their better judgment. Mark Burnett, producer of *Eco-Challenge* and *Survivor*, once told Faulkner that what he most feared at his own adventure races were the paddling sections—things can go so wrong, so fast in cold water. "It's shocking when it happens," says Faulkner. The following weekend, he sea-kayaked again on Howe Sound to make sure he wasn't afraid of the ocean.

When Brent Martin drives up to Whistler now, he often pauses at Porteau Cove. "Every time, I remember what happened and focus on what a privilege it was to know those guys," he says, "and am reminded of the things that were missing on the trip that could have made it safer." A VHF radio. Flares. Wetsuits. The willingness to call the whole thing off. (Another group of local kayakers had planned to circumnavigate Anvil Island that same morning but the three women cancelled their own Thanksgiving adventure on Saturday night after they heard the marine weather forecast.)

Still, the wisdom of hindsight can never restore Richard Juryn and Denis Fontaine to family and friends. For Cheryl Beatty, the loss of her life partner has opened an

emotional chasm that remains too deep to talk about publicly. Memories of the day are bittersweet for Jon Bula and Troy Dalton; their long friendship and years of training helped them to act decisively when it mattered most, but that simply meant two funerals, rather than three.

Graham Tutti attended several weeks of counselling to push past his own trauma and survivor's guilt. He once met a paraglider who had plummeted 14,000 feet before landing in a marsh, miraculously leaving him alive. "He said, 'Yeah, for six months you're walking on a cloud—and then everything's back to normal,'" recalls Tutti. "I don't want it to go back to normal necessarily. I'd like to take something from this on a long-term basis."

A celebratory wake packed a brew pub in North Vancouver. More than 500 people swapped stories about Fontaine, the fun-loving fitness fanatic ("permastoked" as one friend described him), and Juryn, the family guy and selfless organizer. Another day, at Bula and Dalton's fitness studio, the six survivors reunited to discuss their experiences and emotions. They tried not to dwell on what one called the "coulda, woulda, shouldas." Still, there were many things they would do differently and a few risks they may no longer take. "I don't think I need to be paddling in the winter," admits Bula. "I can do something else."

The six survivors have all vowed to stay in touch and live with the same passion that had animated their two adventurous friends. This summer, when the water is a little warmer and the weather more forgiving, they plan to return to Porteau Cove and complete the original itinerary as a memorial. Once more, they will scramble to the summit of Anvil Island and look out upon the ocean setting of the Thanksgiving tragedy. On the return journey, they will launch sea kayaks again and paddle the same fateful route across Montagu Channel until—together this time—they reach the other shore. **e**

David Leach is a contributing editor to explore and the author of Fatal Tide: When the Race of a Lifetime Goes Wrong (Viking Canada). See review on page 15.

RICHARD JURYN MEMORIAL FUND

A charitable fund has been established to open trails on the North Shore and promote mountain biking to riders of all abilities. To donate, contact nsmba.bc.ca or robin@nsmba.bc.ca.