

Sooner Kayaker

This alumnus finds adventure
in his queer sea-going craft

THE great variety of hobbies among Sooner alumni and former students is a constant marvel. Perhaps one of the leading contenders for the most unusual hobby is Willard E. Edwards, '29, radio transmitter engineer now living at Fullerton, California.

Not content with the thrills of ordinary boating, Mr. Edwards has become a kayak enthusiast (we'll explain what that means in a minute), and grew expert enough to get his picture and a story on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*.

A kayak is a frail, one-passenger craft built of spruce and canvas and looking something like a canoe with a lid on it, with a small hole in the middle for the passenger.

Mr. Edwards' daring feats that brought him newspaper fame were hazardous kayak trips from the mainland to Catalina Island, a distance of nearly thirty miles.

He paddled in his twelve-foot craft from Cabrillo Beach at San Pedro to Santa Catalina Island's Avalon Bay in seven hours—faster time than that made by many sailing vessels. Newspapers quoted yachtsmen as calling the feat "impossible" until they saw the Sooner kayaker had done it.

On this trip he wore a life jacket, and carried an apple, an orange and a quart of water, but was without convoy of any kind on the long trip.

Somewhat surprised by the wide publicity he received for the trip, he explained that "I had a boat and I wanted to go to Avalon for the weekend."

"Eskimos," he pointed out, "load their kayaks with their families and provisions and paddle hundreds of miles from islands to the mainland with safety."

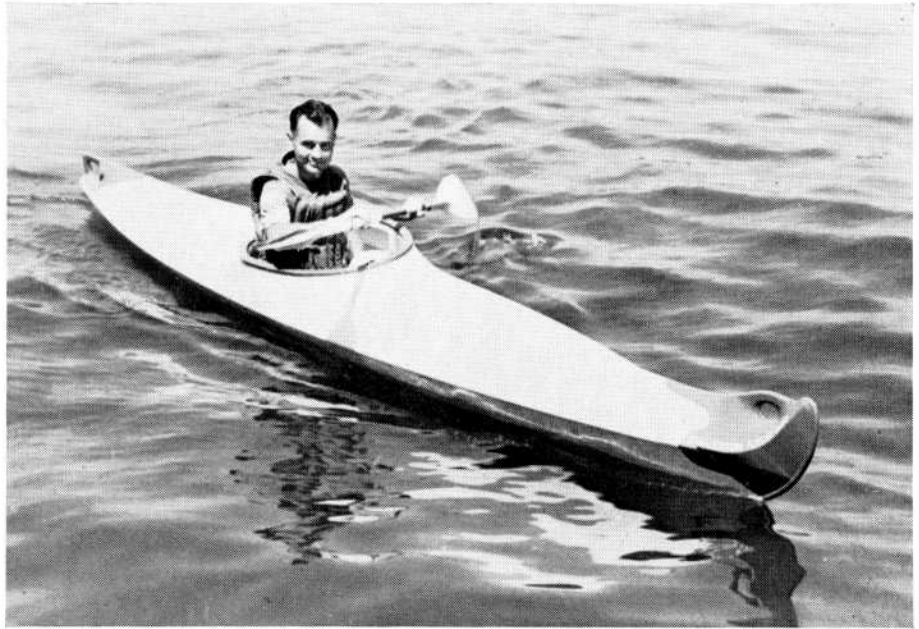
Nevertheless, the people at the Catalina Yacht Club landing were considerably surprised when Mr. Edwards calmly paddled in from the mainland.

The channel has swift currents and rough seas and often is beset by wind and fog. He had to travel a considerable proportion of the distance by compass.

Mr. Edwards had a bad moment when a shark started investigating him.

"Without any warning I felt a sharp tug on my right paddle and instinctively leaned the other way and pulled," he related. "These paddles happened to be painted white with red tips and I did not realize they were the preferred color for lures used to attract big fish.

"I was quite anxious for a time as I



Willard E. Edwards, '29eng, and his sea-going kayak

saw what proved to be a bonita shark about ten feet long. The shark let go my paddle and circled around for another lunge and I thought my trip was over right there, although I had carefully inquired and had been informed that there were no man-eating sharks in the waters along the nearby coast."

After bumping the stern of the kayak with its nose and swimming about for a few minutes, the shark went away. Edwards also saw schools of porpoises, whales and flying fish, but had no other difficulties.

Before making the return trip, he took the advice of Yacht Club members and painted the tips of his double paddle blue instead of red, so that they would not resemble the conventional shark lures.

On the return trip he startled the persons aboard a fishing boat when he appeared out of the fog. A couple aboard the boat brought him a glass of fresh lemonade.

He used an automobile compass, attached to the front of the cockpit, to guide him through the fog.

Mr. Edwards has been interested in radio since 1919. He served as radio operator on eighteen different ships and saw most of the world that way before coming ashore to enter the Engineering Department, Design Division, of RCA in New York.

He later went to the Plant Department, Long Lines, of A. T. and T. Company

at Denver, and went from there to Transpacific Communication Company at San Francisco.

He joined the staff of KFI, Los Angeles, in 1931 as transmitter engineer.

In the summer of 1929, Mr. Edwards took the complete course of aeronautical instruction, including both flying and ground school, at Colorado Springs, but has not done much flying since except for a year in the 120th Observation Squadron of the Colorado National Guards.

However, he became interested in aviation again about a year ago when he had to hire a pilot instead of being able to fly himself over the local floods in the Santa Ana River Valley. After a few hours of reviewing, he obtained a solo pilot certificate and has been flying a J-3 Cub sport monoplane.

Mr. Edwards received an electrical engineering degree from the University of Oklahoma in 1929. He was a member of Sigma Chi social fraternity, Alpha Sigma Delta, Tau Omega, and Knights of St. Pat.

Mrs. Edwards is the former Oleta Hyder, '32ex. They were married when Mr. Edwards was a senior and she was a freshman student in the University. Mrs. Edwards was a piano major and has been a music teacher in Fullerton as well as playing for clubs, church and civic organizations, and singing in church and school groups. They have three children.