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PADDLER

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FREEZE: FUSCO AND BRADDOCK AVOIDING THE CLINK.



COPS SCUTTLE CROATIAN CROSSING

Ray Fusco and Shane Braddock had planned for a challenging 190-mile crossing from Croatia to Italy. In March, they proved themselves equal to the Adriatic's infamous *bura* wind and a 45-mile open-water crossing, only to confront a force they never anticipated: a chief harbor master whose Soviet-style obstinacy outlasted civil war, a decade of reforms and Yugoslavia itself.

Fusco and Braddock to island-hop toward Italy, but only if accompanied by a support vessel, and only if they agreed not to leave Croatian waters. The kayakers accepted, secretly planning to ignore the territorial restrictions and continue to Italy. Local supporters volunteered a sailing yacht, and soon the pair set out on the adventure they had scripted, a challenging tribute to seafaring history and their ancestry—Fusco is Italian-American and Braddock is Croatian-Australian.

"The day of the long open water crossing we had 25-knot winds at our back and 10-foot

THE APPARATCHIK DECLARED THAT CROSSING THE ADRIATIC IN KAYAKS IS TOO DANGEROUS AND, THEREFORE, STRICTLY FORBIDDEN.

"We were fighting Croatian ex-communist military and Coast Guard, 90-knot winds and ignorance to the sport of kayaking," says the ebullient Fusco, president of the Trade Association of Paddlesports.

Ultimately, ignorance triumphed. In a war of words that soon consumed the country's three largest newspapers, the apparatchik declared that crossing the Adriatic Sea in kayaks is too dangerous and, therefore, strictly forbidden. "People were grabbing us on the street and saying 'You are the kayakers, you can do it,'" Fusco says. "We destroyed them in the press."

Finally, the authorities agreed to allow

seas," Fusco says. Their final 35-mile leg to Italy seemed also to enjoy Poseidon's blessings. The paddlers were less than two miles from Italian territorial waters and a mere 20 miles from the Italian coast when Croatian authorities hailed the support yacht. They demanded to know the kayakers' position and then requested permission to enter Italian waters to apprehend "the criminals and traitors to the Croatian State."

Facing possible jail time and loss of their friend's sailboat, Fusco and Braddock had no choice but to turn around. Back in Split, Braddock summed up his feelings in the Croatian press: "Stalin and Tito would be proud." —jm