

INTO THE UNKNOWN



■ Mathieu Morverand waves to onlookers as he leaves Provincetown yesterday in the fog.

Kayaker bids the Cape adieu

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PROVINCETOWN — With a sweet smile and a small wave, Mathieu Morverand of France slowly set off into a pea-soup fog yesterday morning, determined to become the first person to paddle a kayak across the North Atlantic.

With a small group of friends and the press looking on, Morverand, 22, left around 8 a.m., half an hour after he and his 25-foot kayak *Capitaine Cook II* received a blessing from the Rev. William Blottman of St. Peter's Church in Provincetown.

"Bless this kayaker. Protect him from wind and rain and perils of the deep," Blottman said.

"I feel good today," Morverand said after putting final provisions aboard his kayak. They included toilet paper, candy bars and enough bottled water to last several days, after which he will use

an on-board desalination unit to process sea water for drinking.

Morverand said forecasts called for southwest winds yesterday and today, and northwest winds tomorrow, when he hopes to have made headway southeast through commercial shipping lanes toward the Gulf Stream he hopes will help him get to Cherbourg, France by early August.

"Forecasting is not an exact science," he said.

He may have had his first ordeal at sea last night as thunderstorms and high winds were expected to move through the area. However, he was prepared: His self-righting kayak has enclosed compartments in which he and his equipment can seek shelter.

Morverand, whose trip is sponsored in part by the French sea food-processing company from which his kayak takes its name, had originally planned to leave

Provincetown last June, but postponed his trip because of equipment problems and concerns about leaving too late in the year.

This year, Morverand had planned to leave in early May but was delayed several times — first by problems with his kayak's solar-powered electrical system, and then by persistent bad weather and easterly winds.

Although most of Morverand's French entourage, including his mother and grandmother, had to return home last week, a small group of local residents yesterday came to the dock to wish him well.

He seemed genuinely touched by the hospitality he had been shown on the Cape. But the time had come to begin his adventure, and he said he was ready.

"I'm happy, although I'm afraid," he said. "But it's a good day to leave."

Six solar panels on the *Capitaine Cook II* will generate enough power to allow Morverand to communicate two or three times a week with colleagues in France. They will track his progress over the course of the trip, which is expected to take 70 days.

Nell Cronin of Harwich, a kayaking enthusiast and Cape Cod Community College professor who helped coordinate Morverand's departure, was on board a local sport-fishing boat, the *Cee Jay*, which accompanied Morverand for the first 2 miles of his trip, then returned to Provincetown Harbor.

Cronin said Morverand appeared to be a small figure heading into a vast unknown as he paddled away from the mainland into the lingering fog late yesterday morning.

"The reality of what he was doing became clearer," Cronin said.