

Chesapeake Paddler



Publication of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association, Volume 15, Issue 8

October 2005

East Side, West Side, All Around the Town

by Yvonne Thayer

Paddling around Manhattan Island is as exciting as it sounds. Thirty-one miles of heaving water, turbulent currents, New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty, shimmering skyscrapers, soaring bridges, massive barges, tree-topped bluffs, a peerless skyline—This trip can't be beat!

When Yonkers-based CPA member Jerry Blackstone posted the invitation in July, I signed right up. I'd lived in New York briefly after college and crossed the George Washington Bridge countless times, but couldn't wait to see it by water. Dave Moore, who made the trip last year, was also going and we drove up together. We arrived at Jerry's by 11 PM for a few hours sleep before heading down to the Downtown Boat House at 5:30 AM.

Just after 7 AM on August 20, 25 kayakers set off down the Hudson River. Jerry had called the Coast Guard operations officer to inform him of our float plan and was happy when he wished us a great trip. Jerry was even happier to hear the Coast Guard on his marine radio notify marine traffic in the Harbor of the "25 kayakers heading to the Battery to circumnavigate Manhattan."

It was somewhat foggy and gray, threatening rain for much of the day, but only a few sprinkles fell. We were grateful that the overcast day kept most of the noisy pleasure boat crowd off the river. We did pass a number of Circle Line ferry boats, cargo boats, a caravan of barges, some power boats, jet skis and tug boats.



Yvonne and the Big Apple

As we rounded the Battery, with the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Governors Island, Staten Island and Queens on our right, trip leader Steven Blumling directed us well away from the sea wall. The intent was to avoid the reflected waves, strainers and frequent ferry traffic. We passed under many bridges, including the monumental BMW (Brooklyn, Manhattan and Washington) bridges, hearing the screech of car, truck and train traffic far overhead. Spurred by the powerful current and the effect of the full moon, we flew up the East River. David clocked us at over 11 mph and others said they got up to 14 mph.

We took the east channel by Roosevelt Island and made our first stop at the beach in Halletts Cove in Astoria, Queens. The Socrates Sculpture Garden installation had just been taken down, but we took the time to snack, walk, take pictures, visit

(Continued on page 5)

East Side, West Side, All Around the Town (Continued from page 1)

some of the permanent sculptures and chat up an artist preparing wood frames for some massive cement exhibit. Jerry passed out diagrams of the flood tide progression for that day, demonstrating the logic of our layover before entering the Hudson River at just the right moment to catch the tide home. We continued on up the East River past the lighthouse at the north end of Roosevelt Island and exhorted the spread out paddlers to join up for a quick, tight crossing through the heavily traveled channel to the Manhattan side of the river. We hugged the shore, passing joggers and even a slow-moving red truck, staying left into the west boundary of Hells Gate, where the East River turns into Long Island Sound and the Harlem River empties into the East River.



NY paddlers take a break

Continuing past Randall's Island, we entered the narrow Harlem River. Under the moon's spell, it carried us quickly along, under a number of small car, train and pedestrian bridges, passing gritty Brooklyn streets and rusted-out boat graveyards. We stopped at a beach beyond the gaily painted but closed Peter Sharpe/Bette Midler boathouse on the Harlem River at 190th Street. Unwilling to miss out on the forceful Harlem River current, we postponed lunch and continued on around the top of Manhattan island. Thick pines (some say it is original forest) stretched down to the shore, creating a quiet wonderland of trees, vines and wild blossoms. We soon passed under the Henry Hudson bridge and the open Amtrak rotating railroad bridge, spilling back into the Hudson River, past the Columbia University boathouse and the gigantic blue "C" painted on a massive rock face.

Heading down through the Palisades, we arrived at Tubby Hook around 1:30 for a lunch break. There we met up with several other kayakers on shorter river trips. Some decided to join us for the trip back to the boathouse. Several people were fishing on the pier. I saw a tiny flounder, a small snapper and a smaller crab swimming frantically around in the bottom of a fisherman's bucket.

We set off in a dash down the Hudson, nominally intending to join up at the 79th street boat basin. Wherever the river narrowed, the waves and swells increased, to nearly two feet in places. The first boats made it back to the boat house around 4 PM and the last, Jerry, pulled in at 4:35 PM. Our 31-mile trip around Manhattan took just over six hours paddling time. We cleaned up and headed over to the Spaghetti House at Bleeker Street in the East Village for a well-deserved *après paddle*.

For another, more detailed paddle trip report, see http://www.hrwa.org/reports/manhattan_circ.html.

Piracy Reflections (Continued from page 4)

CPA's newest piracy had a short but sweet paddling season. With a late start on the paddling season, we quickly became the Pirates of the North who Navigate at Night (and sometimes Knock into Navigational Nuns)*. Scattered over 4 states, we often found ourselves paddling alone in the past, and the chance to paddle with others drew us irresistibly. As one excited pirate was heard to say "THIS is what I've been hoping for!!" It's a fine crew. We'll lay up in Tortola for the winter and be back to ravage the Northern reaches of the Bay in the Spring. * Distant relations of the "Knights who say Ni"

Wendy "The Amish Terror" Baker Davis

With no one single individual able to lift the crown of our long time Pier 7 pirate king Alan Avery, a trio of mates and all the pirates of Pier 7 pitched in to make this another wonderful paddling season on the South River. The Pier 7 paddling nights were highlighted this year by a number of different events. As usual, Chesapeake Light Craft brought boats down for us to paddle, and Greg Welker taught classes on kayak cookery and places to camp. Thank you to Dave Shamus for organizing an on-the-water class with Olympic medal winner Greg Barton. Believe it or not, the pirates ate on tablecloths this year, provided by Sue Bauer, which created an elegant setting for the always well received FOOD provided by the paddlers. We've been known to eat almost anything, but we were always on the lookout for the tasty morsels provided by Jackie Castle. Now if we can only keep the leftovers out of the new refrigerator, donated by Rich Stevens, who also provided our dinner lighting, we'll have room for the beer. We look forward to seeing all of you, and new faces too, when the water warms next spring.

Rob and Jackie Castle, Brent Cogswell, Greg Welker