

Chesapeake Paddler



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Matthews County, Virginia—Paddling Paradise

By Ralph Heimlich



New Point Campground by moonlight *photo by Jenny Plummer-Welker*

After a leisurely breakfast and a scan of the weather radio, the group decided to paddle the peaceful Piankatank River, which joins the Bay just south of the Rappahanock's mouth. We launched from the Berkley Island ramp on the north side of the river, just west of the Route 3 bridge, and paddled upstream for about 5 miles to the old Freeport ferry landing. What Greg remembered as an old country store is now a laid-back marina. We landed and had our pic-a-nic under shady trees at picnic tables, under the watchful eyes of a beggar cocker spaniel. We relaunched just as a sailing regatta was getting underway, but managed to avoid becoming part of the race.

Saturday night saw us returning to the restaurant our early-comers had scoped out on Thursday. On the very first Matthews County trip, Bill, Dick Rock, Mark Taylor and I had checked out the restaurant in this stately old Southern mansion only to scare up a gaggle of Red Hat Ladies in their purple dresses posing for pictures. The place has been reincarnated as the Pelican Cove Bistro, an Italian/seafood restaurant of great promise. Definitely a keeper!

Sunday dawned early for some of our paddlers (Jenny, Greg, and Ron Barnett) who mounted a dawn patrol in the direction of Winter Harbor. Dan Hoke, Jennifer Bine, and Bob Pullman also opted for an early start, heading south to New Point Comfort Light, as did Mike Cohn and Linda Witken. The rest

Once again, Bill Dodge led a band of stalwarts South to the paddler-friendly waters of Matthews County, Virginia, nestled between the Rappahanock and the York on Virginia's Western Shore. Bill, Woody, and Ron Barnett got a jump on things by driving down on Thursday. They paddled the quieter waters of the Milford Haven and White's Creek, part of the Matthews County Blueway that is giving this area the reputation of a paddler's paradise. The rest of us filtered in throughout Friday as our schedules permitted, with the latest comers arriving from North Carolina (Debbie Hoffbeck) and Glen Rock, PA (Bob Pullman).

One of the things that makes Matthews County nice is the variety of restaurants in town. Friday night we revisited a long-time favorite, the South Wind Café, to find some changes had been made. South Wind is now an upscale pizzeria featuring boutique beers and very delicious local combo pizzas named after the points of interest. The verdict was positive, and we expect to consume many gourmet pizzas at this local stop.



Put-in on the Piankatank River *photo by Ron Barnett*

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New Point Comfort Light and "Hurricane Bill"
photo by Jenny Plummer-Welker

of us (Bill, Joan, Dick and I) had a leisurely breakfast and broke camp. Joined at the last minute by the dawn patrol, we also headed south to New Point Comfort. We had a delightful paddle, gamming with the early crowd, circumnavigated the Light and landed for lunch at the sandspit just north of the abandoned lighthouse. After lunch, we paddled back, taking the opportunity to surf whenever we could along the way back.



Wolf Trap from Bethel Beach photo by Robert Woodard



Wolf Trap light photo by Robert Woodard

While all these various paddles took place, Woody snuck out and pulled off a coup by paddling out to the Wolf Trap light, some 3-4 miles off shore from the Bethel Beach Natural Area. The Wolf Trap is now inhabited by a "landlubber" owner since it's sale to the highest bidder as the Coast Guard pulled out. Imagine what a great paddling clubhouse that could make for a Piracy!!

All in all, Matthews County once again proved to be a paddlers paradise. Check it out, next time you have a yen to get away to white sandy beaches and inviting waters.



Captain's Quarters

If ever there was a Forward Stroke Guru, it's Dave Shames. Starting on dry land with a detailed discussion of the types, uses and proper positioning for a good, effective forward stroke, the group of ten paddlers then ventured to the water to "practice makes not-so-perfect". In addition to sharing his wealth of knowledge of the elements of the Forward Stroke and proper body positioning, each paddler was video taped in action on the water. The evening ended with a video playback and critique accompanied by good eats in the parking lot. We're lucky to have such talent among us and Dave's offered to provide other instruction on other strokes and paddling techniques through the season.

Thanks to Natali, Nigel, Susan (the Pennsylvania State Champion) and James Higgins for coming out and joining in on the fun.

Deb McKenzie
Pirate Queen
Pirates of Sugar Loaf

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