

A peaceful paddle on the Patuxent



The view from Pindell Point on Jug Bay on the Patuxent River. The river provides numerous paddling and kayak camping opportunities in the DC region.

By Paul Fofonoff

After a birthday paddle here in July I returned to one of my favorite areas on the [Patuxent River](#) in August for a slightly longer voyage. Starting at Hills Bridge on Maryland Route 4 (Pennsylvania Ave.), I went downstream to Mt Calvert, continued down the large lake-like Jug Bay and up a tributary, Mattaponi Creek. The creek is beautiful in itself, but it's also home to a large wooden boardwalk that makes for a nice hike.

After launching from Hill's Bridge, I stopped about halfway down Jug Bay at Pindell Point, part of the Jug Bay preserve. I took shelter here last summer during a thunderstorm. Native Americans lived, fished and hunted here nearly 10,000 years ago.

This site is near Pig Point, one of the major archeological sites in Maryland (<https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/bs-md-pig-point-archaeology-20110814-story.html>). There are active archeological digs in the area so please do not disturb them if you happen upon one.

I then stopped at nearby Riggelman campsite, which can be rented from Anne Arundel County (<https://>

www.aacounty.org/services-and-programs/paddle-in-camping). You have to camp on the two platforms, which makes it less attractive, but it is a beautiful location. There is a Port-a-Potty and nearby I found Sweet Pepperbush (*Clethra annifolia*).

I continued down Jug Bay, past Selby's Landing, and then turned into the marshy and meandering Mattaponi Creek. Eventually, you approach trees and a bit of grassy shore and a picnic table at White Oak Landing. There is a large campsite here, frequently used by Boy Scouts and summer campers, but as of publication time Prince Georges County has closed its water trail and other campsites.

I took a break and then walked along dirt roads that are part of the Critical Area Driving Tour which is only open to cars on Sunday afternoons but is open otherwise to hikers and cyclists. The major feature is a boardwalk built for cars, which provides an unusual view of a tidal freshwater marsh. As I walked out, there was a brief and refreshing thundershower. After the thunder ended, I climbed a lookout tower and saw a very low and subdued rainbow.

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The area is home to the yellow-green wild rice, *Zizania aquatica*, an important waterfowl food. It had been grazed down by breeding, nonmigratory Canada Geese, but has recovered, due in part to targeted hunting, and fences which kept out the breeding, molted and temporarily flightless geese. Salt due to rising sea level could hurt this plant in the future.

A shy wading bird, the Sora Rail (I still haven't seen one!!!) depends on the rice for its fall migration, and the recovery of the rice is considered a conservation victory. While I was there, I saw large flocks of Redwing Blackbirds feeding on the rice. Of course, I had to paddle upstream. In the past, beaver dams have blocked the creek, but these seem to have washed away.

After a while, I was above the head of tide, the current was getting stronger and it was 6 PM so it was time to turn around. I went back under the bridge and paddled out to the Patuxent and up Jug Bay. Fortunately, there was a strong incoming tide. As I continued upstream, there was a nice developing sunset.

I got back to Hills Bridge launch site just before sunset, but there was a complication as I passed the fishing dock. I swung out into the river, but nonetheless, a



A hiking trail on Mattaponi creek at White Oak Landing makes for a nice break for birdwatching and discovering plant life.

fishing line got caught in my rudder. I paddled backward to the dock and the fisherman was able to disentangle his lure. I was his biggest catch all day!

I highly recommend the Patuxent and Mattaponi for paddlers, photographers, and naturalists. It's a long paddle from Hills Bridge, about 15 miles round trip, but it's a short paddle from [Selby's Landing](#). I've also led trips from the [Patuxent Riverkeeper's](#) headquarters downstream in Nottingham.

Happy Trails on land and water!

(Note: The Hill's Bridge launch can get very muddy at low tide, plan to leave and arrive back accordingly.)



Heading back to the Hill's Bridge landing just as the sun sets.