

Potomac River Paddle

April 29th was a beautiful day on the Potomac River, and we had plenty of food, courtesy of Gayle. We went up river from Shepherdstown to Snyder's Landing, stopped at Barron's Store for ice cream, and paddled back. But it was a different trip than our previous ones. We were initially joined on the river by a steam boat. Yes, a real steam boat, called the Rumseian Experiment, which is a replica of an old dream borne either of legend or science or a little of both.

Let me say something about the strange creator of this even stranger river boat. James Rumsey was born in 1743, a tavern owner and inventor, he showed George Washington a model of a mechanical boat which he had designed. Washington liked what he saw, and he



wrote a certificate of commendation so that Rumsey could get financial backing for his endeavors. Finally, in 1786, he finished his nautical invention, and it was brought to Shepherdstown, where Rumsey was living. After much testing, on December 3, 1787, the steam boat finally made a very successful public demonstration on the Potomac River at Shepherdstown.

Like the original steam boat, the Rumseian Experiment operates with a unique steam propulsion system, drawing water from the bow into a tubular boiler that runs through a hot box full of burning wood. The steam this produces moves a piston that moves another piston that forces the water out the stern of the boat under pressure. It looks like a still. Today, The Rumseian Experiment sits at a real blacksmith store right behind O'Hurley's "Time Tested Merchandise" General Store. We have many pictures of the trip on:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Potomac_River_Paddlers/

The Rumseian Experiment photo by Gayle Jackson

Bob Cianflone

Prime Hook Creek, Delaware, Paddle

I had been to Bombay Hook and Prime Hook Wildlife Refuges north of Rehoboth, Delaware, by car many times and always wanted to explore them on the water. The tides at Bombay Hook weren't lining up so I tried Prime Hook Creek using the description in Edward Gertler's *Maryland and Delaware Canoe Trails* (5th Edition, 2002 p. 293).

If you go by Gertler's route, you start at the west end of the wildlife reserve, Waples Mill Pond, and end up at the refuge headquarters. The one-way trip is about seven miles. My edition doesn't mention it, but there is a public boat launch at "Brumbley Family Park." If you are coming from the DC area via route 16, turn left and head north when you get to Route 1. Just at the junction with Route 5, there is a liquor store on the right and just before that is a sign for "Brumby Family Park". Enter the park and take a left, tucked back in a corner is a refuge sign and a boat launch. It's \$4.00 per boat and there is a port-a-john there. The parking is off the street and safe. The refuge has a brochure of the canoe trail in a holder at the launch.

The creek is non-tidal and has about a 1 knot steady current flowing toward the refuge HQ. There are new canoe trail signs along the entire route that keep you from getting lost. The first few hundred yards are on a very narrow creek, but that quickly opens up to a wide area that lasts for the first two miles. Then it gets narrow and stays that way for the next three miles. There are no banks and marsh on both sides. Lots of turtles and some huge beaver lodges. There were no trees blocking the creek, but in one section the beavers were working hard on some three-foot diameter trees that may fall across the creek.

At about four miles there is a state access point that isn't mentioned in Gertler's description. If you wanted to do a shorter back and forth trip, this would be a good place to start. It's off Little Neck road which is off Prime Hook Beach Road just north of the junction of Route 1 and 5. I didn't have a way to get from the refuge back to the starting point, so I turned around at about five miles. The current wasn't too bad, but if the wind is from the West you'll be heading into the wind and current. Total time to do the ten miles was about 5 hours, including stops.

I drove to the refuge headquarters to end the day. I put in at their boat launch (\$1 launch fee) and went out for about an hour just at sunset. There was plenty of water, but there are also numerous channels out to hunting blinds, so you can likely get around if the water is low. The area around the refuge HQ is the broad marsh behind Broadkill Beach, lots of birds and other wildlife. To me, this was the nicest part of the refuge. This time of year (April 2 the reeds weren't high and there were no mosquitoes. The office was closed but they keep the bathrooms open until the park closes one half hour after sunset.

If you can arrange a pick-up, the one-way trip from Waples Mill Pond to the Refuge HQ with some extra time to explore around the HQ area would be the best bet. The advantage of this trip is you don't have to worry about tides and there's always a downstream current. There are closures during the winter and some hunting days. I talked to the owner of Bumbley's Family Park, he's not set up to do shuttles. Prime Hook refuge: <http://primehook.fws.gov> (phone: 302-684-8419).

Bill Upton