

Who's Paddling? Pirates of the Patuxent - Jenny Plummer-Welker

By Dave Biss



Photo by Greg Welker

Tell us about the area where the Patuxent Pirates paddle. The Patuxent Pirates meet at Solomons in Calvert County, near the mouth of the river. We launch from just north of the Island. Solomons is actually an island, but it is only 30 feet from the mainland.

Over time the oyster industry had off-loaded shells here and the island moved closer to the mainland from this addition of material. The Pirates launch from the mainland. There is a beach right in front of a public parking. There is no fee to use this lot, and there is a public restroom down the

way so that people can change.

From the beach we have several options to go paddling. We can go upriver which will take us under the Thomas Johnstown Bridge. This is a single span bridge that crosses from Calvert County to Saint Mary's County. And if we go up past that the river curves off to the left and we pass by Point Patience which sticks out into the river. It was named Point Patience because when the primary mode of traveling was sailing, here where the river juts out to the left and then turns right at a very sharp angle, the sailors had to be very patient in order to get the tide and the wind just right so that they could pass by the point. This land is also owned by the Navy. It is not a place where we can land. It is part of the Navy Recreational Center; the Pax River Naval Station. From Point Patience we can look up river to Broomes Island and Saint Leonard Creek, or we can look across the river to Greenwell State Park. Often in the evening we will go up to that point, hang out there and either turn around or continue up river to some of the creeks on the Calvert County side.

In addition to going up river, we can go across the river to the St. Mary's side where there are many little finger creeks (most are lined with residential development) or we can paddle South down along the Island and out to the point to the tip of Solomon's Island. You can look out into the Chesapeake Bay from there. On the right hand side you can see the Patuxent River Naval Station. There are a lot of Military aircraft that fly over this area. In fact many of our members are employed by the Navy or are naval contractors. We pass by Chesapeake Biological Laboratories. They have a Pier that juts out into the river. This Laboratory has been in existence since the 1920's, focusing primarily on the ecology of the Bay and the Patuxent River. From there you can round up into the Harbor. Solomons is a protected Harbor. There is an area where steamboats used to come up. The water used to be so deep that a pier did not have to be built. Steamboats could just pull up along the land and drop their gangplank so that people could get on and off. And the steamboats were a primary mode of transportation until about the

1930's or so when they stopped because of better roads and also the hurricane of 1933 wiped out many of the piers.

We can paddle into the Harbor and then from there either go into Back Creek or the Narrows and see the marinas up in there. We can see the different sailboats moored there. Or we can paddle further up and visit the Drum Point Lighthouse at its second location at the Calvert Marine Museum. Its original home was at Drum Point, but it was cut off at its pilings and moved it. It is a screw pile lighthouse similar to the more well known Thomas Point Lighthouse.

How did the Patuxent Piracy get started? I believe that we were the second Piracy started after Pier 7. There was a group of us who wanted to paddle every Wednesday night, but could not always get up to Pier 7. For me, it was because I lived in the area of Solomons at that time. During the first year the core group consisted of myself, Joq Martin, Cindy Vivaldi, Don Polakovics, and another older gentlemen named Len, who is no longer with the group. We decided to create an off-shoot group and meet down there at the beach. The Patuxent Pirates started probably in 1995 or 1996. Now that I live in Bowie, I paddle at both Patuxent and Pier 7 Piracies. I was the Pirate Queen of Patuxent for several years, about 3 or 4, until I abdicated and moved to Bowie. Currently, we have about 5 or 6 core members of the group including me, Don Polakovics, Dan Wells, and Jennifer L. Moore.

What makes the Patuxent Piracy different? Each Piracy is a little different. One of the unique things about us in Solomons is we don't have a boathouse or a grill where we can cook, unlike Pier 7. We often do not go out to eat. Patuxent Pirates often just gather, go paddle, come back, and then go home. Our group is not focused on eating so much, except for the beginning and the ending of the season. Although, since Solomons Island does have a lot of restaurants, we can usually tell which way the wind is blowing by what food we can smell. When we do go out to eat it will often be to the local family-owned grocery store called Woodburn's. Woodburn's has a gourmet salad bar, a deli and a sushi bar. The neat thing is that they do not mind wet kayakers, because everything is waterproofed. Woodburn's was challenged when Food Lion came into town. We figure if Woodburn's would ever really be in trouble, the sushi chef would be the first to go, but the sushi chef is still there.

Can you tell me about a memorable trip? One of the things we did at the Patuxent Piracy was to meet up at Broomes Island and to launch from Lenny's Marina and paddle across to the Sotterley Plantation on the St. Mary's side of the Patuxent. We had contacted Sotterley's in advance and they did an evening tour for us through their historic house.

Tell me about paddling conditions at Solomons. Depending upon which way the wind and waves are coming, the area can be very bumpy, so if the wind is from the SE we have a long fetch across the Bay. Therefore it is not always flat. We often, in the summer, experience thunderstorms. It seems like the thunderstorms like to bounce off between the Calvert County and the St. Mary's sides. It can be a magnet of activity.

The jelly fish arrive at Solomons about mid-June each year. At that time the jelly fish are little but soon they become much more "mature" jelly fish. So rolling practice is best done early in the season. Later in the season we have to be careful of not getting "jelly-fished."

Has the Patuxent Piracy used the Piracy Funds? We used it for the first time last year. We did an end of season dinner at the CD Café in Solomons. We had a good time. That was the only time we have used our CPA funds.

Give me a short lure to bring people to the Patuxent Pirates. Friendly people and a gorgeous place to paddle. The Thomas Johnstown Bridge is quite striking and then the views along the river and across the Bay make it a beautiful spot to paddle. Also the sailing group has their races on Thursday nights so we often get to watch the small sailboats race.

Interview for this *Who's Paddling?* was conducted on March 22, 2008.