

Paddler Profile

Melissa Boyle Acuti

By Bob Browning

Lives in: Edgewater, Maryland

Real job : Park Ranger, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Park Service. I currently work out of the Tawes State Office Building in Annapolis as the Coordinator of Conservation Programs with Maryland State Parks.

Do you regularly attend a piracy? I paddle with the Pirates of Arundel as often as possible.

Number of years paddling? I first paddled a canoe in Girl Scouts as a kid, bought my first kayak in 2001- an Old Town Loon.

How did you get involved in sea kayaking? I went on the Patuxent River Sojourn with a rec boat. A few years later I "upgraded" to kayaks and a friend took me on a CPA trip and the rest is history!

What boats do you paddle? My tried and true "Mango" Wilderness Systems Tsunami 165 has gone almost everywhere, including a KIPP circumnavigation in 2010! I also have a red over white Impex Assateague that I am still trying to get more comfortable in, especially with the seat (suggestions, anyone?) If those two boats could have a baby, it would be my perfect sea kayak!

Rudder or skeg? Either- My Tsunami has a rudder and the Assateague has a skeg .

Type paddle used: Euro, although I'm open to trying a Greenland!

Do you do any other type of paddling besides sea kayaking? I often teach canoeing during the summer with our youth programs. Any day in or on a boat is a good day.

Do you regularly do any other outdoor activities? My husband and I have a Tartan 33 Sailboat, so we like to sail. We also purchased an inflatable kayak to use as a dingy or for explorations.

How often on average do you paddle in summer between May and October? Not as much as I would like. Only about once a week.

Do any winter paddling? No, no, no!

Favorite local paddling location: Anywhere on the Patuxent River, but especially the area near Jug Bay. I think because this was the location for my first kayaking adventure. I spent many summers paddling there on the Patuxent Sojourns. Lake Canoy at Point Lookout is my other favorite spot... I lived at Point Lookout for about five years and this was my "backyard" paddle, with so many eagles and ospreys to watch!



Photo/Rich Acuti

Favorite CPA trip you've ever been on and why: Smith Island. We had the most perfect fall weather for a long weekend. One day, we paddled from Smith Island to Tangier Island and got a crab cake and paddled back, ending the day with a perfect island sunset. Had Smith Island Cake (YUM!). And instead of taking the ferry boat back to Crisfield on our last day, it was so calm, "slick cam" (as the locals call it), a group of us paddled from Smith Island all the way back to Crisfield. This is most certainly one of the most beautiful areas in Chesapeake country, and we are so fortunate to have it nearby!

Coolest paddling trip you've ever been on anywhere: About two years ago, my Dad and I went to Florida, to paddle the Everglades. We stayed in Flamingo and paddled with crocs and gators, and although

that took our kayaking to a new level, that wasn't the highlight of our trip. One day we went out into the Florida Bay for a short paddle, when we were literally surrounded by dolphins! They put on a show for us, right there from the seats of our kayaks. At one point we wondered if a dolphin might cause one of us to capsize. After talking to one of the Rangers, we found out that in that

area where the water is shallow, the dolphins do something called "mud ringing," where they use their tails to stir up the bottom sediment to make a circle to confuse the fish, making it easier for them to catch them.

Scariest/most dangerous trip/experience and why? There were several times during the KIPP Trainings where I wasn't sure I was going to make it, but we always did. Not to say that we didn't have to bail out in someone's backyard and ask for forgiveness... I also had one year on the Potomac River Swim where I was afraid I was going to become a swimmer...near the end of the swim, winds really picked up and waves and current made it really rough for the kayakers. Luckily, we made it!

Bucket list trip? Anywhere I can paddle with sea turtles... suggestions, please?

Three things you like most about paddling: Being out in nature, getting away from day to day stress.

What do you like about CPA? CPA folks have so much knowledge and like to share it. You always learn something, whether it is about kayaking or the best restaurant in that area!

One unusual, non-paddling thing other people find interesting about you? My hobbies include tagging migrating monarch butterflies. You can purchase tiny numbered stickers from Monarch Watch and tag them in September and October. Over the years that I have been doing this only one of my butterflies has been recovered in Mexico! I also participate in Project Owl Net in the fall, and assist with banding migrating Saw-whet Owls as they pass through Maryland.