

# The Chesapeake Paddler



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## A Wye Island circ in autumn yields up visual feast

*Brilliant leaf displays, abundant waterfowl, and cooler temps are hard to beat*

By Sue Stevens

The faint call of an osprey can still greet kayakers preparing to launch from the popular Wye Landing: <http://www.talbotcountymd.gov/index.php?page=418>. This location is departure point for a semi-annual circumnavigation trip of Wye Island, located on the Eastern Shore just below Wye Mills off MD 404. It is a worthwhile 12-13 mile day-trip following the shoreline of the wooded island. There are lots of



sights along the way: sailboats, crabbers, geese, skates, bald eagles, and other bird life. The crabbers are usually already out on the water; even with uncertain forecasts; typically there are lots of boat trailers lining the narrow road down to the filled parking lot. In mid-morning, we kayakers often have the two double-wide ramps, as well as a narrow slot for a sandy kayak launch, to ourselves.

Hearing predicted NE winds, or even a small craft warning, we can choose which direction to go around the island, either clockwise or counterclockwise, to keep the winds behind us. It's a lot more fun going with the wind in a kayak; tide is not an issue here. Wye Island waters are fairly well protected from most wind and fetch. Quickly you learn that every corner along the route looks totally different going the opposite way! The kayakers take off like a flock — or a herd of cats some say — as the shoreline recedes because there are many places to explore. With the wind from behind, it is easy paddling the first six miles (if you go counterclockwise that's under the Wye Island Bridge)

to the half way beach. It was sad to lose a landmark structure on the far northern side of the river, where a large white-frame, columned house stood on a grassy point with a duck blind out front. Vacant land is all that remains now because the house was demolished in 2016. Its three-story white brick chimneys, which stood out like a lighthouses, are now missing; only a large for-sale sign sits on its green lawn. What an expensive and lovely view it offers!.

The usual lunch stop has a shady, wide sand beach under some leaning Osage Orange trees and a handy picnic table. For hikers, it is located at the end of several wooded trails. Sometimes, if the site is occupied by horseback riders or a troop of Boy Scouts, kayakers have the option of pulling out nearby in the shade and walking along the sandy shoreline; there is plenty of space. Further up the main trail, there is a primitive necessity outhouse...or one can find alternatives. It can be slightly warmer standing in the water than sitting on the beach, depending which way the wind is blowing. It's a good time to chat and eat lunch together. It's always fun to see what folks bring to share — cut up watermelon, cantaloupe, grapes, chocolate, cookies, and M&Ms go over big!

A northeast prevailing wind can easily push kayakers all the way to the western end of Wye island, so the fleet may be tempted to go

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further west. Down river on another far point, paddlers can see a lighthouse structure, but it is too far away. At the western point, the island's treeline may block most of the wind; the wider coves get hit with more fetch. Everyone agrees the best kayak surfing waves can come from boaters or large motoring sailboats. The wooded coves along the southern side of the island shield more anchored sailboats; maybe they are going to visit the nearby town of St. Michael's.

Though it is hard to track even the shifting patterns of colorful kayaks and flashing paddles along the shoreline, it helps a group to keep together with a lead paddler and one or two sweeps.

Sometimes it is also helpful for the lead to slow the pace of the trip down, to gather round, and grab a granola bar or a drink of water. It is always good to stop at convenient points to let everyone rest and



chat. For a trip leader, it's helpful for everyone to keep their marine radio handy!

Paddlers may choose to take shortcuts across the inner coves or to parallel the far shoreline to check out the sailboats and spot blue herons fishing. It helps to anticipate the faster crabbing boats, which appear suddenly around the wooded corners. For each trip kayakers keep in mind that the island is always on their left – or is it their right?

Rounding the last wooded point, there is usually another eagle to spot in the treetops and the landing is in sight. Usually less than six hours, Wye is a great location for a successful kayak

day trip! The bay waters stay warm in September and early October when the autumn leaves are brilliant; it makes for some great sight-seeing while kayaking! ♦

## When you circle Wye Island, you paddle past the past

*Here are some resources and historical notes to help you make the most of your paddle*

Here's some background information on the interesting history and current management of Wye Island NRMA overseen by DNR: <http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/pages/eastern/wyeisland.aspx>.

There are a number of historic sites surrounding Wye Island - some we can spot while others sit far back from the water. Most historic plantation houses did not want to be close to the water as today's big houses are. Their wharfs – now long gone - were used for commerce and shipping.

Across from the Wye public landing, we can spot the green fields of Wye Heights Plantation. Its historic white brick plantation house sits on top of a rise, and their flocks of black Welsh mountain sheep are often scattered across its shady fields: <https://www.wyeheights.com/>. The property features 10 acres of formal landscaped gardens, which may be visible from the water of Skipton Creek.

For added paddling mileage, it is possible to start further up toward the headwaters of Skipton Creek. Another smaller Talbot County public launch is located at the end of Skipton Landing Road off US 50: <http://dnr.maryland.gov/boating/Pages/water-access/talbot.aspx>. Paddling.net also describes it well: <https://paddling.com/paddle/trips/skipton-creek-mill-creek-maryland/>.

The next large creek to the south hides Pickering Creek Audubon Center, a large working farm and nature center open to the public,

which also has a small kayak /canoe launch at a dock: <http://md.audubon.org/chapters-centers/pickering-creek-audubon-center>. That's another shorter outing option.

On the south side of the Wye River on the west side of the wide Lloyd Creek sits Wye House Farm, another historic plantation with well documented archeology digs by the University of Maryland. The region's plantations widely used slave labor to produce most of its profits. The widespread effects of the cruelty of slavery was exposed by the abolitionist and scholar Frederick Douglass: <http://www.frederick-douglass-heritage.org/wye-house-plantation/>. The plantation includes an orangery; a similar brick and glass greenhouse is located at Mount Vernon. It is a rare surviving early garden structure where orange and lemon trees were cultivated, and it retains its original 18th century heating system of hot air ducts.

During its peak, the plantation surrounding the house encompassed 42,000 acres and housed over 1,000 slaves: <http://aia.umd.edu/wyehouse/>. It is still a working farm owned by the descendants of Edward Lloyd. It is well known that Frederick Douglass, around the age of seven and eight, spent a few years of his life on the plantation and spoke extensively of the brutal conditions of the plantation in his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.

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