

The Chesapeake Paddler



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Dog Days Dawn Paddle at Fort Smallwood Park

By Lisa Arrasmith

The new-in-2021 “pocket-change” launch from the west side of Fort Smallwood Park onto Rock Creek was perfect for a dawn paddle during these dog days of summer. A neighborhood friend and I took advantage of Fort Smallwood Park’s 5:30 am opening for a casual early morning peer paddle. We got out on the water for a short and interesting paddle and back before it got too fiendishly hot. Bonus: Breakfast snowball at the park concession stand upon our return.

We unloaded our boats—my 17’6” fiberglass kevlar sea kayak and my friend’s 10’ inflatable kayak—and easily made our way from the fishing pier parking lot along the flat carry to the well-signed put-in right across from the concession stand. Most of the carry is on the wide paved fishing pier path with the last bit across grass to a narrow sandy beach. Although it’s not far, you’ll need a kayak cart or a friend for the carry. A couple with a canoe loaded with fishing gear and crab traps launched just ahead of us.

Once launched from the nice sandy put-in, we paddled past the adjacent Rockwood Beach community and turned left into White Pond, a large, circular bay with Rockwood Beach on one side and the wooded north side of Weinberg Park on the other. Weinberg Park, the rustic companion park to Fort Smallwood Park, has 235 acres fronting on White Pond, Rock Creek and Wall Cove. Whites Pond has low tide beaches that make good landing stops. Weinberg



Sign for the new “pocket-change” launch at Fort Smallwood Park photo by Lisa Arrasmith

also has miles of old dirt roads and trails though the woods, perfect for cooler weather exploration.

We paddled back out to Rock Creek and landed on the Weinberg beach on the west side of Weinberg Park (watch for old erosion control structures in the water at low tide) and dragged over the sand bar to Yates tidal pond. If you time it right the shores of the pond are lined with white swamp mallow in bloom. It looked like we just missed the peak bloom.

We dragged back over the sand bar and kept following the Rock Creek shoreline left around the Maryland Yacht Club point to Wall Cove. Look for the white MYC letters on the blue beach pavilion roof and keep an eye out for boat traffic from the MYC fuel dock on the far side of the point. Although Wall Cove looks like it dead ends at the covered docks at Fairview Marina, that’s an optical illusion. We kept going past the docks and ended up on the secluded part of Wall Cove, with the wooded south side of Weinberg Park on the left and houses on the right. The usual Wall Cove herons were hanging out at the end of the cove.

By then it was past 8 am and already steamy so we headed directly back to Fort Smallwood. There isn’t

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What’s a “pocket-change” launch? A pocket change launch is a put-in created at minimum expense – pocket change – in an existing county park or publicly owned land. The new Fort Smallwood put-in was created by mowing a short path to the water and putting up a sign.

Pocket Change Launch (Continued from [page 1](#))

yet a blue public water access waterside sign at the put-in and the narrow beach in the middle of tall phragmites was hard to see from the water. We finally went as far to the right as we could and the narrow beach appeared. We landed easily and then loaded up. I was delighted to see that the concession stand was open and treated myself to an orange breakfast snowball.

Our short paddle was just one of the possible paddles out of the new Fort Smallwood pocket change put-in. You can paddle up under the Fort Smallwood Road bridge to the top of Rock Creek, passing “bubbler” aerators in the creek along the way, or over to Mike’s Crab House North for early lunch (land at the little boat ramp on the upstream side of the marina) or out to and among White Rocks in the open waters of the Patapsco River (watch out for wind and waves). No matter which way you go, getting started early lets you enjoy the water while avoiding the heat and pop-up thunderstorms of late summer on the Bay.

Getting there—The new pocket change launch at Fort Smallwood is near the 380-foot Bill Burton fishing pier, the new-in-2016 public boat ramp and the renovated historic concession stand. Head towards the boat ramp side of the park, not towards the swimming beach. Park in the fishing pier parking lot, not the trailer boat parking lot. The county charges \$6 per car to use Fort Smallwood Park, with a variety of permits and discounts available.

Fort Smallwood Park is an Anne Arundel County park located in Pasadena, MD. Fort Smallwood Park website:

<https://www.aacounty.org/departments/recreation-parks/parks/fort-smallwood/>

Weinberg Park is an Anne Arundel County park located in Pasadena, MD. Weinberg Park has no admission fee. Weinberg Park website:

<https://www.aacounty.org/locations-and-directions/harry-and-jeanette-weinberg-park>



The “pocket-change” launch at Fort Smallwood Park photo by Lisa Arrasmith