

## Georgian Bay - Franklin Island Trip Report



Jenny and I returned to Canada this summer for our kayak vacation. We've been going to parts of Ontario for kayaking for the last several years. Our first trip was to the southern section of Georgian bay - Beaulieu Island - several years ago. Nice area, but too many power boaters for our tastes. For the last several trips we have headed further north into Ontario, but this year we decided to go and paddle the middle section of Georgian Bay out of Snug Harbor.

**Trip preparation**--White Squall, a local outfitter/retailer has a great website for paddling this area and we gleaned some information from there. We bought the Canadian marine charts for the area. We had heard that they weren't that good, but we found we didn't have any problem navigating from them. The area has hundreds of large and small islands, so you always need to keep track of where you are, but navigation was pretty straightforward. We carried the full size detailed chart on one kayak and a full size smaller scale chart on the other. Worked well. This was the first long distance trip on which I would have a GPS along and of course there are no detailed loadable topo maps for Ontario, and I wasn't going to pay mega bucks for charting software and electronic loadable charts. I was able to track down several waypoints from other sources to keep in the GPS, but was not confident in their veracity. I also felt guilty about the sack of disposable batteries I was going to carry to keep the GPS supplied. On day trips I usually use rechargeables, but often have to switch them out at the lunch stop, and I couldn't count on solar recharging along the way.

We also packed a small hand charging FM radio to listen to weather forecasts. 88.7 FM "the Moose" broadcasts pretty complete marine forecasts that are understandable. Marine radio weather stations are sometimes hard to pick up in Ontario and difficult to understand as we knew from previous experience.

Having had previous experience with Ontario rocks vs kayak hull, I had added a dynel keel strip to the Pisces I paddle. During the trip there were of course a few random groundings on rocks. After many years of hull scrapes.

**Itinerary:**

- Day 1--drive to Parry Sound, stay at motel in town, approx 12 hour drive from Bowie.
- Day 2--check out local outfitter/retailer and town, launch from Snug Harbor and camp on Franklin island.
- Days 3-10--Work our way northwest along the island chains with potential trips to some of the outer islands if weather cooperates, then return to the launch point.
- Day 10--Pack up, stay at a different resort inn.
- Day 11--Drive back to Bowie.

**What really happened--**A very pleasant drive north, once we got around Harrisburg. We took US-15 north through PA and NY and entered Canada at Niagra. Smooth drive around Toronto, where we took the new electronic toll road. This road tolls you by reading your license tag and sending you a bill. We're still wondering if a bill is in the mail somewhere on it's way to us, but it's a great road. Arriving in Parry Sound, we located our motel in the center of town, and took a walk down to the waterfront for dinner and a look around. Parry Sound is substantially larger than the towns we typically spend the night before a kayak trip at.

Day 2--Visit the outfitter, see other kayakers who are heading out, and get some advice from the store person. Today's weather is a small craft advisory with 1 meter waves and wind from the west. Temps in the 60-70 degree F range. We get to Snug Harbor, which is a government dock - literally, just a dock and rustic ramp. Next to it is Snug Harbor Marina, with a concrete ramp, small restaurant, and more secure parking. \$5/day is the rate stated by the owner, who then proceeds to charge us \$25 for 8 days. Canadian math? There is an outfitter group there about a dozen in plastic boats. As we work to pack, a group of four kayakers we saw in town shows up and starts to unload. Jenny and I elect to go with shorts and fuzzy rubber long sleeve tops. We've got loading down to a science, and we launch within 30 minutes of arriving.

Two hundred feet out of Snug Harbor's marina entrance the west wind hits us. It's strong enough that when we get to the entrance of snug harbor and stop to consult our charts. We are blown back several hundred feet in a couple of minutes. We take the "canoe route" out of the harbor, which gives a more protected passage for small craft. But we come out of that into Georgian bay and it's whitecaps heading at us as far as we can see into the horizon. Franklin island is on the starboard bow and we begin to paddle toward it. 3.5 hours to travel 1.4 statute miles. (Yes! Today is Jenny's birthday - so I bake her a cake complete with birthday candles. What a wonderful paddling partner I have. Paddling with someone in challenging conditions who you enjoy being with, has the same skill set you do, and can save your butt if necessary is a great feeling. Night has stars, with a low in the 50s. We sleep well.

Day 3--The radio says small craft advisory again. Wind from the S, going to NW. Not a day to start going up along the island chain. We decide to circumnavigate Franklin Island. We pass one other kayaker camping west of us as we enter the open water side of the island. It's nice to play in the waves and the swells coming off the open bay. We can see the Mink islands farther to the west, but today is not the day to try and go there! There are good sized waves breaking against the boulders on the western shore of Franklin, and we paddle on and around the north end of the island, entering Corbman Bay and finding four canoeists who had a very tough time coming out yesterday using a more protected route. They look land bound today. Lunch is on a small cove in the northeast of the island, then we head down the eastern channel with the wind finally starting to swing behind us. We come across the group of kayakers who we saw in town and they note that trip planning is tough with this wind - and they've only been paddling on the protected side of the island today! 5.5 hours paddling time, 14 statute miles. Did some fishing. Much colder tonight - into the mid to low 40s.

Day 4--The wind is still in the 20-25 knot range today, but is expected to shift to the southsoutheast, with thunderstorms tomorrow and rain. Our current camp is too exposed for our liking to that direction, so we pack up, scoot around the south end of the island and head up the eastern side looking for a good protected campsite. After much scouting, we find a pocket sand beach with a group of trees in between two large rock formations. Just enough room for a tent. There are two varieties of small green frogs - dozens of them - along the beach and reeds. We set up, eat lunch, and go paddle some more. We explore a bit into the islands northeast of Franklin, several with cottages on them. We see the same group of paddlers who comment that we seem to do a lot of miles in a day. Several of them have CLC boats - and I saw that at least one had loaded pool noodles in his boat for use in landing. I would not want a wood boat here unless it was well glassed! We walk the island a bit, and see a stag - from hoof to top of antlers I guessed it was at least 6-7 feet - and it was a deer. How it got that rack through that forest I have no idea.

Back in camp we play dominoes by headlamp. I think to myself - if you paint the dots with glow in the dark paint you wouldn't need lamps. Then I think that when all the pieces are face down you wouldn't be able to find the pieces. Brilliant Welker. 5 hours paddled, 11 statute miles covered.

Day 5--Small craft advisory again this morning, but it looks better as the morning progresses, and we paddle off on a day trip to the northwest of the island. We paddle around the northern end and down the western shore again, this time poking into the inlets. We find a long inlet, goes almost all the way back to connect to the inlet where we first camped. All water except a 50 foot portage. In between the islands the wind and water are relatively calm, but we do a two mile crossing to one island to the north and it's all whitecaps by the time we get there through the headwind. We work our way back along the mainland shore, then head back to camp, where we brave the water to swim and wade a bit. We use Jenny's paddle float to carry water away from the shore and up onto the island rock to wash our hair. Chilling! After day 2 we've been paddling in wetsuit farmer john/jane suits and fuzzy rubber tops. 3 hours paddled, 10.3 statute miles.

Day 6--Another Small Craft, but from the SW then SE, so we paddle northward along the island group, staying in protected waters. We find Dillon's Cove, which has a marina from which some people launch.

This is a more protected route out to Franklin than Snug Harbor, but it's not mentioned much in the literature. The ramp is a town resident only ramp for parking, but you can launch from the ramp and then park for a fee at Dillons. Dillon's store has ice cream and cokes! We sit in the sun on warm flagstone steps and treat ourselves. As we prepare to leave, we meet an elderly gentleman from Texas, who bought one of the islands in 1942 for \$17 at a tax sale. We talk for a while, and he invites us to come and camp on the one side of his island. We do a little more exploring of the one river, then head back to camp. We put up a fly for the evening's rain, but end up taking it down in the night as the wind rises to the point of risking the tarp's integrity - and we're in a protected spot!. It rains most of the night. 8 hours paddling, 17 statute miles.

Day 7--Once again, a small craft advisory, but this time one for wind, seas, and thunderstorms. We have several thunderstorms and rain showers go through the area from morning to mid afternoon. We would have liked to go visit the gentleman's island, but today is not a good day for being on the water. A day in the tent and walking the island. Day temps are into the 80s, with night temps in the 60s. That evening, sitting on the beach, we see two small hawks land in a nearby tree and preen themselves. Later, a very large dragonfly comes into camp and flies around eating bugs. Suddenly crunch! One of the hawks has flown down and taken the dragonfly out of the air right above me. I could actually hear the crunch of the dragonfly in its talons.

Day 8--Small craft warning - wind, waves, thunderstorms. We make pancakes. The thunderheads go away in the afternoon, and we paddle into the teeth of the south wind, sheltering between rocks, islands, and using the coast for wind breaks. We scout out part of how we can go to get back to our car tomorrow. We are pushed before the wind back to camp. At least the south wind is warmer. I bake another cake. 2.4 hours paddling, 6.5 statute miles.

Day 9--The last day on the water has another small craft advisory. We wake up, breakfast and pack up fairly quickly. The weather is anticipated to deteriorate later today to thunderstorms and much higher winds out of the southwest. Winds from the southwest are the worst possible for getting back to Snug Harbor. We gauge the sky and weather reports, and launch, with contingencies for bailouts along the route. The wind stays fitful while we paddle, and we make good time. Several last photos get taken, and we get into the canoe passage just as the rain starts. If you didn't know there was a passage here, you wouldn't find it even thirty feet away. We coast back into the marina. We load up in rain, the end of another great trip. If you stay flexible in your planning, you can make a great trip and change plans as weather and waves dictate, you can have a great trip. The one big lesson I've learned from kayaking is that when confronted with the impersonal huge forces of nature, you learn to deal with what's there, and the enjoyment comes from knowing that you can exist in and deal well with those forces all around you. 1.2 hours paddling, 4.2 statute miles paddled.

We head back into town with a brief stop at the outfitter to gear browse

Day 10--The drive back to Bowie goes smooth, with one brief downpour happening while eating lunch at a diner at the NY/PA border. Kayak camping in fresh water is great. We had plenty of food. We took along two commercial backpacking meals, mainly because we'd had them a while and they needed to be

eaten. We much preferred our own dried meals. We carried apples and carrots, which lasted all eight days in net bags. All food was stored during the night in dry bags and under hard (not vcp) hatches in the boats. We later learned that the week we were out there was a black bear sighting on Franklin, but we had no problems from any critters. We kept a very clean camp. Waste disposal is an issue. On any of the islands that we saw smaller than Franklin, finding soil to bury waste would be a problem. We carried tupperware for that eventuality. Campfires are discouraged, and not needed. Very few mosquitoes. They don't fly in small craft advisories! A couple of biting flies. For some reason, this year I've had bad swelling each of the three times I've been bitten by that type of fly, and this was no exception. It took a day and a half for the swelling to go down. Never happened before this year.

Gearwise, the fuzzy rubber was comfortable to paddle in. This was the longest period of time I've used it. After day four, it needed a very good rinse in the lake. I would not count on fuzzy rubber for cold water protection - just cold water comfort. Glad we brought the wetsuits. Particularly in the crossings and on the western side of Franklin a wet exit would not have been pleasant otherwise. Outside of the islands there was a noticeable drop in water temperature.

We bought platypus kayak hydration systems this spring. We keep them on the back deck, and find they make getting a drink in rough water much safer and easier. However, the metal spring clips to attach the tube to your PFD rust out at an amazing rate. I've thrown mine away and made my own clip out of fastek pieces and a stainless steel split ring.

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