

Indian and Trent Hall Creeks, Patuxent River

I thought I might post this for aspiring paddlers. I wrote it up for a group that is putting together a paddling guide for St Mary's county. See below for more info regarding the paddle guide.

Directions: From the capital beltway take the exit for route 4 towards Upper Marlboro. Continue south past Upper Marlboro to Prince Frederick. In Prince Frederick turn right onto Maryland route 231, which is well signed. Follow route 231 to the launch area, which will be on your left immediately before you cross the Patuxent river bridge. To avoid missing the turn and accidentally crossing the bridge, watch for Sea Gull Beach Rd on your left. When you see this road, slow down and keep your eyes peeled.

From the south take route 301 from Virginia to La Plata, MD. In La Plata head east on route 6 (La Plata – Doncaster Rd). In just over a mile turn onto route 488 (La Plata – Bryantown Rd). Route 488 will end at route 5, where you will head south. Route 231 (Prince Frederick – Hughesville Rd) will be on your left in approximately 5 miles. Follow route 231 across the Patuxent river bridge, where you will take a quick right to the launch area.

Launch Site: On summer weekends the boat ramps here [Editor: this the ramp at Benedict's] can be packed with trucks and trailers unloading powerboats. The parking lot can accommodate most of the vehicles and there is an overflow area closer to the highway. While parking may be tight at times, it should generally not be a problem. For kayakers it is easiest to park as close to the water as possible and carry your boat to the right of the boat ramps. There is a sandy area perfect for kayak launching next to the bridge.

Duration: This trip can be split up so that the creeks mentioned here are visited individually. Exploring only Indian creek, the trip is approximately 6.5 to 7 miles. Trent Hall creek, being farther from the launch site, is almost 10 miles round trip. Done together exploring both creeks is about a 13 mile day. You should plan on 4 to 6 hours paddling both creeks.

The Paddle: Crossing the Patuxent can be a little daunting. The river is slightly over half a mile wide at this point. Give the bridge pilings wide berth and watch for boats passing between them. Head downstream (south) along the western bank passing various marinas and docks. The western bank will begin to open up. Follow the shore or, if you are more adventurous, head directly for what is the southwesterly corner of this small bay. Here is the mouth of Indian Creek. You have traveled approximately two miles from the put in. Round the point and leave the drone of the 231 overpass and the powerboats behind. The creek is still tidal at this point, but is fairly well protected from serious waves. It is fairly wide, but is lightly visited by powerboats. Several hunting blinds line the shore. Once you round the point, bear right and head towards the furthest dock visible. Once you reach the dock, bear right again and head into the narrow channel of Indian creek. The creek meanders and becomes increasingly marshy. Blue herons, swans, red-winged black birds, northern water snakes and muskrats all make their homes here. The channel is initially fairly wide, but begins to snake around within the marsh. The main channel is easy to figure out. A current will become detectable as the creek leaves the tidal zone. Unless there have been heavy rains, this shouldn't present much of a challenge. Indian creek will continue to narrow and the turns will become tighter. Eventually you will come upon a small, isolated dock off to the left. If you bear right just before the dock, you can continue upstream for a few more yards, but for all practical purposes the creek becomes unnavigable. The total distance from the launch to here is about 3.5 miles. The hearty and adventurous can probably pick their way ahead a little longer.

Returning to the mouth of the creek where it meets the Patuxent, Golden Beach will be along the southern edge. There are several beaches and parks in Golden Beach, but while they appear tempting as rest stops, they are private property and landing is not allowed. That being said, because of the length of this trip and the limited number of spots to take a boat out of the water in this stretch of the Patuxent, it is a good idea to know that they are there in the event of a true emergency.

Continue south around the point for approximately 1.75 miles and enter Trent Hall Creek. The mouth of Trent Hall creek forms a wide spot in the Patuxent where powerboats are common and waves can build up some steam. Paddle inward and as you approach the back of the bay three channels will appear in the marsh. Both the right and the middle channel will continue upstream. Wildlife is abundant in Trent Hall creek, with very active ospreys. I was treated to a noisy dispute between a family of swans and a family of Canadian geese. Route finding in Trent Hall creek is slightly more challenging than in Indian creek. Following the current won't lead you astray, but part of the fun of paddle trips such as these is going astray and exploring the marsh, just be prepared to back paddle a little. Looking up at the trees will indicate where the firm shores of the marsh are and from there it is possible to gauge your direction relative to the flow of the creek. After about 3 miles (since you passed the point on your way out of Indian Creek) Trent Hall Creek becomes narrow, shallow and choked with growth. It is possible to continue, but probably not much further and not without significant effort.

Unless you still have a lot of energy or in a good-sized group it is probably not the best idea to head directly back to the launch. The heavy boat traffic is not always prepared for solitary kayakers. Rather, head up along the western bank of the Patuxent (the same one you followed downstream) and cross at the bridge.

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