

Jug Bay Semi-Hemi Kayak Kamper

By Ralph Heimlich



Another steamy, sweaty August morning on the Pax
photo by Ralph Heimlich

This weekend was a perfect example of why I don't like to do trips in August...and why I do.

We base-camped at the Jug Bay Canoe Camp (a paddle-in site) on Friday and Saturday night and did paddles from the camp. (see <http://www.pgparks.com/places/parks/jugbay.html>)

Friday, Jim Allen, Dick Rock and I arrived and set up camp, then paddled up-river past Jackson Landing (Jug Bay HQ) and entered the Western Branch. We marveled at all the flowers in bloom on the shore (wild rice, pickerel weed, cardinal flower, marsh mallow, marsh marigold, a tall purple thing, Joe Pye Weed, etc.) The butterflies were in heaven. We stopped at Mount Calvert and walked around the house, reading the interpretive sign boards, including pictures of Commodore Barney's attack on the British and the Chesapeake Beach Railroad that crossed the Patuxent in sight of the house.

Back at camp, Marla Aron and Ellen Stefaniak joined the group and set up camp. The reason NOT to paddle in August is it can be sooo darn hot. It got up to about 95 degrees and 100% humidity (It's not the heat, its the humidity!) We prepared our dinners, sweltered, and swatted. A little alcohol is usually a social lubricant, but in the heat, it just broke my sweat out in a sweat. Given the heat and a near full moon, we did a night paddle, having the river to ourselves. Paddled down stream until my memory of the river gave out, then backtracked up to Jackson Landing before pulling in. I left my little LED lantern on at the dock, to avoid the "Are you SURE this is the landing?" dialog on our return. Early to bed, knowing we were the only people in the park (at least legally).

Stumbled out of the hammock for an early sunrise. Very pretty, but it was already about 80 and 100% humidity. Quick breakfast and we got on the water to paddle down to Selbys Landing (about 1/4 mile) to collect our day paddlers, Brad Roberts and Karen Long. We paddled down to the mouth of Mattaponi Creek and up the creek at low tide. We made it to just past the critical area drive bridge. Interesting wildlife included not 1 but 2 rotting deer carcasses, one adorned with vampire butterflies (yeech!). A pack of semi-wild dogs is apparently running deer in the park at night, and we thought the 2 in the creek were victims. Many turtles and a Northern brown water snake.

Paddled down to Lyons Creek and found that a very nice (and shady) escape, especially since the flow up stream a ways was much cooler than the river. An immature bald eagle roosting on a boat house roof surprised us when it turned out not to be a vulture, and mama flew overhead as well. Several snakes and lots of fish visible in the clear water and SAV. A big surprise was a little spotted fawn lying on the bank in "invisible" mode, with mama snorting and running away. It watched 9 kayakers glide by on the upstream and was still there when we came back by. Left Brad and Karen at Selbys Landing ramp and greeted Hedy Sladovich, who joined us for Saturday night. Back to camp for lunch in the shade and sweatesta (new coinage).

Dick noticed something stirring in the tree holding up our tarp. We were being investigated by the local welcoming wagon in the form of a very pretty black and white snake (maybe a northern black racer or a black rat snake). He did some Inuit rope exercises with himself as the rope and then gingerly checked out the tarp while firmly holding on to the branch with his tail. Decided the tarp was not the ground, then moved over to the tree trunk, down and out of there.

We decided to prepare our "feast" for an early, daylight dinner. Sushi, prosciutto, green figs, and cheese for appetizers, broccoli raisin and pine nut salad, chicken cacciatore and turkey breast medallions on couscous were the main dishes, with Mrs. Rocks Nebraska Chocolate Flat Cake for dessert. After the stuffing, we repaired to the dock for a foot splash and leisurely wine sipping.

When it cooled off a bit, we launched an evening paddle upriver to Mount Calvert under oppressive skies. The SECOND REASON I don't paddle in August is thunderstorms, and the weather radio squawked us an alert to turn back as they were approaching from several directions at once. We landed and stowed the boats just in time to sit out a real electric blizzard in the cars for about an hour. As the T boomers moved off to the east, we hit the tents. A bit later (after midnight) there was more lightening and thunder and heavier rain, but it was hard to tell if we were getting wet since we were...wet. The midnight rain dropped the temperature and washed some of the humidity out of the air for comfortable sleeping. I even got a little chilly in my hammock about 4 o'clock, and shortly thereafter the dog pack was heard baying through the park until about 5:30.

After breakfast, Marla and Ellen packed up and took off, and the three muskytears headed downstream for a short paddle. Interesting sighting were 4 white geese in with a group of Canada Geese (didn't look like domestics--no orange bills). We also saw a small head swimming across the river in front of us. Looked like one BIG snake, or a muskrat, but turned out to be a miniature otter (we thought). I now think it was a mink (see mustela vision at <http://links.baruch.sc.edu/Data/SpeciesLists/Mammals.html>) which is listed on the Jug Bay list of mammals. Cool little guy.

As you can see (see pictures at <http://picasaweb.google.com/ralph.heimlich/PaxRiverKayakKamperAugust2007>) the heat and humidity don't show in pictures and fade from memory, but I remain conflicted about paddling in "tropical" Maryland in August.