

Mathews Island Winter Harbor and New Point Comfort

By Bill Upton

After reading about Mathews Island in a Washington Post article (Into the Blue Sept. 3, 2004) I've always wanted to go there. I planned a trip with my son to try Winter Harbor and New Point Comfort Lighthouse water trails using "Sea Kayaking Virginia" by Andrea Nolan (First Edition) and the Mathews Island Blueways water trails maps. You can order them from their visitor center for just \$12 (be sure to get the Mathews County road map while you are at it. The visitor center is only open Tuesday through Saturday until 4pm. It's part of the Sibley General store <http://www.visitmathews.com> 804-725-4229). I took Ron Barnett's advice and booked a spot at New Point Comfort RV resort (804-725-5120).

The place was full on Saturday night but emptied out quite a bit on Sunday. If you go for one of the tent sites close to the bay be prepared for some close accommodations. There were three sites squeezed into what is usually one or two sites in other places. There are six tent sites near the beach--the rest are RV sites although there were some tent campers on those. The place has a play area for kids and a pool that opens Memorial Day. Don't use the directions in mapquest-- *they are incorrect*. The directions on their website are correct. There's another spot listed farther North Gwynn's Island RV resort, but I didn't get a chance to check it out in person and don't know if tenting is available (no website 804-725-5700).

Winter Harbor - Using the description on p. 111 of "Sea Kayaking Virginia" I stopped by the Bay Trail Outfitters "kayak farm." The owner said he allowed launching from his site when he's there (not leading a group) and the store is open. Best to call ahead if you plan to leave from there. I didn't check out the Old Mill landing listed in the guide but went over to the Winter Harbor Haven Landing to make the shortest possible trip for my eight-year-old son. We launched from the sand beach at the public launch. The guide says to paddle straight across the harbor for the route but a local fisherman at the dock said the channel takes off from the second red marker to the right. We tried a shortcut the area is quite shallow even at high tide. The wind was blowing very strong from the West which meant going into the wind on the way back. We didn't go far and did not reach the beach at Bethel or the one south of that. But from what I could see it looks like a great trip.

New Point Comfort Lighthouse - Monday morning was clear and warm and started with no wind. I tried to get a jump on packing up and took out the tent stakes and undid the rain fly while my son was still asleep. I went in to take a shower and before I was out I heard the wind howling outside. I came out and it was blowing about 20 knots. My son was standing up on the door of the tent and the floor was perpendicular to the ground. Because it was from the North the New Point Lighthouse trail was in the lee and quite calm. Using the description on p.119 of Sea Kayaking Virginia we made it to the observation platform on Mobjack By and launched about 10 am.

The guide shows an island, New Point Island, near the lighthouse but local people we talked to said the sands shift there all the time. There was no island just a long beach about ½ mile from the put in. The beach at the point is white sand with marshes between Mobjack and the Chesapeake Bay. The nature Conservancy acquired the land and it's a haven for birds. We saw pelicans, ibises, an oystercatcher, terns and lots of herons and shorebirds. It was one of the nicest beaches I've been on. Word of warning;

the place is popular with motor boaters and jet-skiers. There was no one there on Monday but there was a lot of litter from the weekend.

We left for home in the early afternoon. Route 17 through Virginia is four-lane highway with little traffic. Mileage from our house in Calvert County was 155 miles one way but there was so little traffic we made it in just over three and a half hours. We went via route 301 and had time for a side trip to George Washington's birthplace national monument. It was worth the trip.

Mathews is a nice small town with two grocery stores, a pizza place, a couple small cafes and a dollar store to pick up stuff you forgot. We stopped by the Gwynn's Island museum but it was only open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Make sure you buy charts before you go--Bay Trails Outfitters didn't have any.

This is a great place for paddling--I'd go back anytime. 2007-06-02.