

# The Chesapeake Paddler



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## Paddler's Trip Reports

### Miles River in our Summer Heat Wave

By Sue and Rich Stevens, Trip Coordinators

The week before the event (July 18th), the weather forecasters announced that the weekend was going to be the hottest, most humidity laden weekend of the entire summer; with a scary heat index hovering over 104 degrees; and with more thunderstorms to boot. Not good news again! Our planned CPA June 13 circumnavigation of Wye Island had to be cancelled due to severe advancing thunderstorms; it did dump 3 inches of rain in one day. With our Florida-like daily June thunderstorm's rain and hail events, our Maryland region is now ahead of its normal rainfall annual total by 10 inches. Great for growing corn, melons, weeds, and mosquitoes but not kayaking, as it disappointed 25 CPA kayakers. Everyone was hopeful this weekend. Rich and I were watching to see if it would happen AGAIN. Amazingly, the morning dawned slightly overcast and breezy and it wasn't too hot! We spotted white caps crossing the Bay Bridge before 7 am with steady winds 10-15 mph coming out of the south make for a great sailing day. It was too early for many fishing boats seeking rockfish north of the bridge – but not our kayakers.

Arriving at Royal Oak landing – off MD 33 just a few miles short of the town of St. Michaels, most of our 10 kayakers were already unloading at our very own marked kayak launch spot. There is no county parking permit or fee needed for our car-top kayaks in Talbot County – yeah! [http://www.talbotcountymd.gov/uploads../images/Parks\\_and\\_Rec/Landing%20Brochure.pdf](http://www.talbotcountymd.gov/uploads../images/Parks_and_Rec/Landing%20Brochure.pdf).

We agreed to meet a bit earlier this Saturday morning to beat some of the expected weekend heat wave. Both Tom Heneghan and Al Larson drove over from Virginia from the Pirates of Georgetown, plus Kurt Rodowsky, Bill Smith and Bill McAllister (aka -William of the CPA Orange shirt) from the Pirates of Arundell, and the gals Linda Delaney, Gail Davidson and Nancy Eckert. Our marked kayak launch is a bit of sandy beach at low tide - located at the very end of the long crabbers docking and a paved lot. There is some parking at the far eastern end along with a short fishing pier. No one, except a surprised morning dog walker, was in sight. The crabbing boats were already out and the place was quiet; no one was launching via the nearby boat ramp, and we were not in anyone's way on our own sandy spot. Of course, it was evident local crabbing has been good; a half dozen very large, very dead crabs had washed into the grasses at our launch. The guys tossed some of the crabs to clear an un-stinky path. Those with the closest parking spots to the crabs had a bigger smelly issue: Choose to either step over the crabs or to wade.

This was a trip leaders' dream! During our morning briefing and

[Continued on p. 4, Miles River](#)

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## Pocomoke Camping

By Suzanne Farace, Trip Coordinator

Over the July Fourth weekend, nineteen CPA paddlers gathered at the Pocomoke River State Park for a weekend of camping and paddling. For those of you who are not familiar with it, this Park is located in the southwestern section of Worcester County and is known for its stands of loblolly pine and the bald cypress swamps which border the wild and scenic Pocomoke River. This black water river originates in the Great Cypress Swamp in Delaware and flows southwesterly approximately 45 miles to the Chesapeake Bay.



Pocomoke Campers; Scenic Group

Photo by Leigh Hall

Over the course of the weekend, the group enjoyed paddling the area's well-established water trails: Corker's Creek (a loop from Shad Landing campground), Nassawango Creek (round trip from the campground to the bridge at Red House Run), and the upper Pocomoke River (round trip from the town of Snow Hill to the bridge at Porter's Crossing). We thank the always very accommodating Pocomoke Canoe Company, [www.pocomokerivercanoe.com](http://www.pocomokerivercanoe.com), for allowing us to launch from their floating dock. (Please call and ask permission first, and make a point of buying a few hats, t-shirts, etc. to support them when you do visit). The creeks and rivers in certain areas are very narrow and winding and have a noticeable current, and the lunch stops at the bridges can only hold so many boats, so sometimes we split up the group and staggered our paddles accordingly.

Snow Hill always has terrific fireworks over the river in celebration of the Fourth, but sadly the display this year was moved Sunday because of an organizational glitch. Our paddlers did, however, enjoy a nice dinner out at a local restaurant with great live music on Friday night and a delicious potluck in the campground on Saturday night. For the latter, we were visited by a couple of other CPA members we had just happened to encounter on the water earlier that day, who were on their own, separate trip. One evening at the campground we were visited one of the rangers who told us all about the rescued turkey buzzard he was carrying around on his forearm. And, despite an ominous weekend forecast, the weather was fine. The only time it really rained on us while in camp was at night when everyone was in their campsites anyway. All in all, a very good trip. ☺



River Paddlers

Photo by Suzanne Farace

[Miles River, continued from p.1](#)



Ready to Launch

Photo by Rich Stevens

greetings, nine out of ten of kayakers announced they had their marine radios ready, including two friends who had newly purchased radios in tow! The gang coordinated their radio channels & tweaked the squelch (channel 69 was full of a chatty fishing debate so we picked another channel). We packed up our gear, lots of frozen water, and headed together out on the Miles River, under the highbridge. Counting 5 yellow kayaks, 3 red kayaks and 2 nicely finished CLC wood kayaks, we had just enough kayaks to make for an easy count.

This bridge carries State Road MD 33 over Royal Oak Creek, paralleling the path of the old, now abandoned Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic Railway right of way (later known as the Baltimore & Eastern Railroad). This rail corridor originally stretched from the small waterfront community of Claiborne near the tip of Tilghman Point on the Chesapeake Bay over to Ocean City. Long before there were highways we follow today everything and everyone used our many convenient rivers and the later railroads to get to town and their produce to market. Now there is another well managed boat ramp located at the old ferry landing in Claiborne with its obvious heavy duty ferry pilings still in place. A portion of the old liberated rail corridor runs through the residential side of busy St. Michaels has been rebuilt as a hiking nature trail: <http://www.trailink.com/trail/st-michaels-nature-trail.aspx>.

Heading out on the Miles, the south winds behind us pushed us easily across to the far side of the river with its long wooded shoreline and a lonely wood dock slowly falling into the water at Long Point Island. The crew quickly spotted cownose sting rays, waving their tiny triangular wing tips as they swam by our group: [http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/cownose\\_ray](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/cownose_ray).

No one appears to be living on the island, although there are two bungalows hidden on the rip-rapped front side of the island. Our gang spotted several sandy beaches, a planted American flag flapping in the breeze, and a half buried-in-the-sand picnic table. It's too early in our paddle for lunch, but it would be a nice stop over location on a shorter kayak trip. Now we need choose: avoid the wind and go up short Hunting Creek to the east or go out into the main river. On we go.

It's still overcast and pleasantly breezy as we make our way up the northern side of the Miles *and we have not melted yet!* Two water towers spotted over St. Michaels make for good, tall landmarks as the south winds push several more sailboats and our kayak fleet downriver. We slide into the mouth of Leeds Creek, directly opposite St. Michaels - easily 6-7 miles, and reconvene. The wind is blowing steadily and the building clouds are looking much darker ahead; some chatter on the radio says it is raining over on the western side, but not

[Continued on p. 5, Miles River](#)

[Continued from p. 4, Miles River](#)

around us. Our fleet opts for the calmer waters of Leeds Creek, which will have more protection and quicker places to get off the water if a thunder storm pops up. Paddling along the quiet surface, we quickly spot plenty of tiny beaches, wooded coves, and front yards, and even friendly porches if we need to escape a storm. Many ospreys have built their nests on the dock pilings and are noisily guarding their fledglings. Who wants an aerial fresh fish supper?

Our next landmark is the low wood planked bridge straddling Leeds Creek and its narrow paved, little-used boat ramp at the small village of Tunis Mills: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunis\\_Mills,\\_Maryland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunis_Mills,_Maryland). It was a short paddle to its marshy end and back under the shady bridge. This is a great place to climb out and walk to the middle of the wooden bridge's swimming platform. No bathroom opportunity here unless you can find a vacant wooded lot within walking distance; all of the houses are too close by. We have not melted yet: we have a pleasant breeze, great for the buzzing barn swallows nesting under the bridge and us. An occasional vehicle thumps its way across the open planked bridge, while we sit below eye level on the swim platform wood steps to eat lunch. We discover that peanut butter and jelly is a big favorite for most of us and it doesn't melt! A bit of old painted graffiti written in the bridge tar may tell of a bit of teenage angst right in on the middle of the bridge. The smell of hot wood and black tarred creosote in the sun reminds us of ol' boardwalk days.

Several folks, including Tom, are willing to jump in to cool off but its ladder steps are a bit precariously screwed: NOT today. Linda also spotted the first jellyfish/sea nettle of the season floating along in the

high tide in Leeds Creek; they are easy to spot:

<http://www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/jellyfish>.

Next time we will be checking the swimmers jellyfish report: <http://patch.com/maryland/annapolis/jellyfish-season-has-begun-aedfa795>.

Our next stop after lunchtime proved interestingly brief. All the guys made a bee-line for the next quiet wooded cove for a pit-stop, while we gals headed for an abandoned shoreline duck-blind sandy stop along with assorted mosquitoes who quickly found us. Ah, the joys of summertime kayaking! We also chased a singlet Bald Eagle fishing off the cove, and then spot an elusive little Green Heron: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Green\\_Heron/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Green_Heron/id). The birds were perched there all along our route, but quickly disappeared with a couple of wing flaps into the green of the trees. A big passenger boat, politely trying to slow down for our outbound fleet, instead sent a set of huge curling waves across the quiet creek across our collective bows. It was good to see how our kayak fleet stuck together chatting & paddling with the number of passing boats: a lot of stuff you may notice while being the sweep!

The skies lightened. The darker clouds scurried north across the bay, giving way to fluffy white clouds as we hit the consistent south winds blowing across the mouth of Leeds Creek's Fairview Point. Gathering together again, we lined up to cross. It's a mile plus crossing over the Miles River plus we anticipate more boat traffic into St. Michaels. We picked our shared distant landmark; everyone spotted something way over there. "Shall we aim for that house with a bright green front

[Continued on p. 6, Miles River](#)

[Continued from p. 5 Miles River](#)

door,” “an anchored sailboat or...three”, or “The last house on the right on the point into the harbor.” We DO agree to stay tightly together and to keep abreast.

After a good long time with lots of bouncing waves mid-channel and dodging a few motor boats everyone was surprised to discover the house is not really bright green. It is new insulation and all three sailboats were really anchored. The heavy boat traffic lane into St. Michaels uses the deep side of the right channel for their harbor approach, which is very good for our tiny kayaks. Last year’s trip bumpier route pushed us cross a lot of boat traffic intent on getting into harbor and a crab cake. Along our transit, there was lots of interesting radio chatter back and forth from boaters and the Harbor attempting to find a convenient docking berth; we wondered how long a berth ten kayaks could need (P.S. It’s a dollar a foot for docking boats).

The landmark entrance to St. Michaels Harbor is highlighted by the Chesapeake Martine Museum and its historic 1897 Hooper Strait screw-pile lighthouse: <http://cbmm.org/>. The waterfront Museum is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year – YEAH! It’s a great working



Photo by Rich Stevens

museum to explore and support. You can spend the entire day there and not see everything. Several of our CPA members have won prizes in previous years for their hand-made wood boats and a wooden hand tied skin on frame kayak at the Mid-Atlantic Small Craft Festival held every October (<http://cbmm.org/events/annual-festivals-and-special-events/mid-atlantic-small-craft-festival-and-maritime-model-expo/>). We were lucky to spot the sailing skipjack Rosie Parks and the H.M. Krentz - docked right under the lighthouse: <http://cbmm.org/exhibitions/floating-fleet/>. We quickly grouped up for a photo op before the H.M. Krentz turned out of its berth for a museum sailing excursion.

With the pulse and rumble of incoming boat traffic, our ten kayaks were totally dwarfed and out-matched finding a quiet space to sit and watch the show. Actually, we became part of the busy water show for the nearby diners and boaters as well as part of a floating obstacle course. Somehow, Tom quickly decided it was not a good place to give them a show with a full roll (Tom says they used to roll for Watergate diners on the Potomac River) for a tossed beer since all the beer is in plastic cups these days. A nice surprise to see the Schooner Sultana <http://sultanaeducation.org/about-sultana/schooner-sultana/> is also docked by the Museum. The Sultana, built in the Town of Chestertown, plays a big part in the Chestertown Tea Party (see our JUNE 2014 CPA Paddler article). The Sultana under full sail - was

spotted by Greg Welker later in the week as it was sailing past the Thomas Point Lighthouse: Maryland’s only historic screw-pile lighthouse still on the water: <http://thomaspointlighthouse.org/>.



Sultana at Thomas Point

Photo by Greg Welker

A quick clock-wise tour wisely got us out of the busy side of the harbor as it is very much like navigating Ego Alley in downtown Annapolis-you just have to go do it - by kayak!

There is much to see in St. Michaels area, with its Martine Museum, many seafood restaurants, Main Street shopping district, historic walking tours, biking opportunities, local B&Bs, many local historic houses, and its history dating back before the Revolutionary War – the list goes on: <http://www.stmichaelsmd.org/>. We kayakers cannot really appreciate busy St. Michaels this time; we just get a taste and will be back soon.

Turning away from St. Michaels Harbor, we appreciate the quiet water away from the chop of the river and prevailing south wind, now blocked by the nearby wooded shoreline, and head back up the Miles River. It seems a long way - just over three miles back to the high bridge, and it is now getting much hotter, or the wind is not helping us in this direction. The Museum skipjack is spotted as it sails along the far side of the river to Long Point and turns back. The Museum’s big tour boat painted red/white/blue soon overtakes the sailing boat, but they never come on our side. We pass a lot more rip-rap shorelines with big waterfront houses; there is not much open waterfront on this side of the river. There is one undeveloped wide open sandy beach for a quick stop to stretch your legs spotted along our route and more mosquitoes to discover. The last mile of paddling spreads out our returning kayakers into a long chain of colored boats. That “call of the landing” speeds our crew back to our easy-to-spot landmark, the high bridge, and we still have a nice breeze blowing.

Soon we are all safely landed, a bit tired in a good way, on the lee of the bridge parking lot with no wind to cool us – IT IS REALLY HOT! We quickly load up and all of us find a cool refuge in our nearby favorite pub in St. Michaels for any early supper together: 15.3 miles!

What a great day together! PLUS we missed Maryland’s latest heat wave! ☹️



Trip Map

by Rich Stevens