

Spirits of George inspire paddle to Mount Vernon

By Jaclin Gilbert

When Laurie and I discussed leading a CPA paddle, Laurie suggested something with an activity or a historical bent. I thought a visit to George Washington's Distillery and Granary on Dogue Creek would fit the bill. George Washington's Distillery at Mount Vernon was the most successful American distillery of its era. His Scottish farm manager James Anderson, who had been involved with the whiskey business



Photo/Paula Hubbard

in his home country, suggested the business to Washington as a way to vary his farm portfolio. The distillery did not create a luxury product; the whiskey was not highly refined or aged but intended to slake the thirst of the masses. The building that housed the distillery burned down in the early 1800s and was excavated and restored in 2007, along with the nearby granary. A modern-day whiskey is now made on the site using period techniques. The old-style buildings make a pretty spot to land, and the picnic tables and restrooms are welcome.

We rated the paddle intermediate because the Potomac is quite wide near Mt. Vernon and can kick up some bouncy water with the right

combination of wind and boat wake. The day of the paddle made this precaution unnecessary as the waters were calm throughout the trip. We launched from the Marshall Hall boat ramp on the Maryland side of the Potomac and paddled north to cross where the river narrows above Mt. Vernon, then retraced our strokes to travel up Dogue Creek to the distillery grounds. Dogue Creek is quite tidal, and we benefited from higher water than usual due to the rainy spring. If

you plan to go yourself, check the tide charts so you don't run out of navigable water just short of the park. The super high water made boat exits a little exciting, but in the end we all made it on shore.

Lunch was leisurely, as some members chose to relax, and others to plunk down \$5 to take the guided tour of the distillery and granary. Sadly, the tour did not include samples of the reputedly fine craft whiskey now being produced. The antique distilling process remains interesting, and the guides explained the details well. After our tour, we undertook a longish crossing of the Potomac, about a mile wide at that point, which took us back to the boat landing and our cars. ♦

The Chesapeake Paddler

Chesapeake Paddlers Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 341

Greenbelt, MD 20768-0341

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