

Chesapeake Paddler



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New Year's Eve Paddle

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It was New Year's Eve and I was out for a night paddle. That in itself is not unusual, except that I launched from an island campsite on the Gulf of Mexico and paddled with four other paddlers I met just a day before. Needless to say, this was not exactly what I envisioned when my relatives first talked about spending the Christmas holiday in Florida.

It all began back in August while visiting my sister in Chicago. She suggested heading south for the Christmas holiday. Never one to turn down some sunshine in December, I wholeheartedly supported the idea.

Once we decided to go, the question became where. Of course,

Dave and I voted for locations to which we could drive so that we could bring our boats with us. After looking at the maps and charts and talking with other family members, we all agreed to meet in Clearwater Beach, Florida (just outside of Tampa) for the week between Christmas and New Year's. We rented a large house one block from the beach. When my sister had to cancel at the last minute, we invited Barbara (the CPA web master) and Anatoly to join us.

Before heading to Florida, I did my homework. I purchased several books on paddling in the area and dog-eared several potential paddling trips by reading them every night. I also checked out a few trip reports that I found on the Tampa Bay Sea

Kayakers' site. One trip report in particular caught my eye. Terry Hobbs told about his New Year's Eve campout and paddle from the year before (http://www.clubkayak.com/tbsk/Trip_Pages/04-37kayakCamping.htm). His trip sounded like a great way to ring in the New Year and convinced us to bring along our camping gear with the idea of doing something similar.

On the Wednesday before New Year's, Barb, Anatoly, Dave and I shouldered the kayaks and made the 50-yard trek from our beach house to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. It was a beautiful day—low 70s, lots of sun, no wind and water temps near 60. What a change from the 12 degrees it had been when we left DC!

We'd been at Clearwater a few days and so far hadn't seen any other paddlers except the stray tourist in a sit-on-top (*sans* PFD of course). We launched and paddled north. After traveling about a half mile, we saw kayakers in the distance; but, these weren't your average tourists! Nope, we had run into a pod of dry-suited, NDK paddling kayakers.

What a group this turned out to be—a plethora of local paddling knowledge! As we paddled they told us where to see the manatees, which mangroves were worth paddling to, which new inlets were

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just appearing and where to surf. Since they seemed like such a wealth of information I causally mentioned the idea of camping somewhere for New Years. It turns out I was paddling with Terry, the author of that trip report I had read online only a few days ago. Their trip was on again for this year! Not only that, they were headed to the very island now for lunch, and we were welcome to come along.

The island at which we had lunch and where we would later camp is called a spoil island. Spoil islands line the Gulf side inter-coastal waterway and were created as the channel was dredged. Debris and soil were deposited along the waterway and formed into islands.

Some of these islands are small, others are large; some have beaches, others only mangroves. No book I found described these islands, but Terry and his friends knew each in detail. Spoil Island Two is the unofficial kayak site. It has several good camping spots and a nice little landing beach on the north end which is free from kayak-destroying oyster beds. After lunch, we bade our farewells and promised to be back on Friday afternoon with the necessary camping requirements: a few extra bottles of champagne.

Friday, we again shouldered the kayaks and carried them down to the beach along with our bags of camping gear. I played with packing configurations for a while as this was the first time I had loaded up my new sleek Silhouette with camping gear. I was amazed to see how much more space it has compared to my old Montauk. Two feet make a difference!

We paddled north along the island of Clearwater, then past the now-dry inlet separating it and Caladesi Island. It was funny to think about how we were originally planning to

circumnavigate Caladesi Island after reading about it in the AAA book. Nothing prepared us for the fact that the island had joined the mainland in 1978 during a hurricane. Someone should update those maps! We continued to the tip of Caladesi and then cut east through a new channel into the Intercoastal Waterway. From there it is pretty much a straight shot east to the island. When we arrived at the island after about a 90-minute paddle, we found the camp already set up with the fire just beginning to blaze. Terry had arrived the day before to stake it out and Bob, Kevin, and John were also there.

After dinner, Terry was itching to go for a night paddle, so six of us suited up and paddled out into the dark. We decided to head back out into the gulf and down toward Clearwater Beach, basically retracing the route we took to reach the campsite. Despite having paddled the exact same waters only hours earlier, we were surprised at how different it all felt in the dark. As we crossed the channel, all was quiet with not a boat to be seen. It was clear that

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2005 CPA Pool Sessions*

Saturdays, now through spring at the Fairland Aquatic Center, Burtonsville, Maryland
4-5:50 pm and 5:50-7:45 pm; \$7 per person. Pay at FAC.

Required:

1. Boats and gear clear of leaves, mud, grass.
2. A reservation; please email Joan at Jspinner2@peoplepc.com (preferred) or call 301-559-3345 by the Thursday before the session. Leave a message and the following information:
 - a. your name and phone number
 - c. date of session
 - d. time slot
 - e. number and type of boats (WW or sea kayak)

You will receive a reservation number. If you do not receive a reservation number, you do NOT have a

reservation. Reservations will not be accepted more than 2 weeks in advance.

Directions: Take your best route to I-95 between Baltimore and Washington. Exit at MD-198 West. Turn left at 2nd light, Old Gunpowder Road. The pool is about a half mile down on the right. Enter through the patio.

*These are open sessions, not lessons. You must bring your own boat and gear. In case of inclement weather, call the center to see if it is open: 301-206-2359.

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the Tampa Bay paddlers had a lot of experience paddling the waters at night. They quickly split us up into groups of two and we all called to each other as we slid forward, searching for the inlet leading into the Gulf.

The tide was lower and it took a few tries before we found the channel and could turn down along Caladesi Island. Our turn-around point was the north end of Clearwater, or less than one mile from the beach house we had rented. We all joked about the possibility of stopping by the house to enjoy the hot tub for awhile prior to returning to our island paradise! Not wanting to turn back quite yet we all floated, watched the sporadic fireworks lighting the sky.



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SharpReader: <http://www.sharpreader.net/>
Another standalone RSS reader for Windows.
(Win; free)

Abilon: <http://www.activerefresh.com/abilon/>
Another standalone RSS reader for Windows.
(Win; free)

SlashDock: <http://homepage.mac.com/stas/slashdock.html>
A standalone RSS reader for Mac OS X.
(Mac; free, donate to disable ads)

Shrook: <http://www.fondantfancies.com/shrook/>
A standalone RSS reader for Mac OS X.
(Mac; \$24.95)

HotSheet: <http://www.johnmunsch.com/projects/HotSheet/>
A standalone RSS reader written in Java 2, so it should run on most platforms with a Java 2 runtime.
(Win, Mac, Unix, Other; free)

NewsMac: <http://www.thinkmac.co.uk/newsmac/>
Another standalone RSS reader for Macintosh.
(Mac; free, donation requested)

FeedDemon: <http://www.feedException.com>
Another standalone RSS reader for Windows.
(Win; \$29.95)

Opera: <http://www.opera.com>
An alternative web browser. The latest version of the Opera email client includes an RSS reader.
(Win, Mac, Unix, OS/2; \$39)

