

Paddling Maine's Islands: September 4-12, 2009

by Yvonne Thayer

Leave no trace; no problem. Paddle in cold rough seas, tackle twelve foot tides; why not. Haul in all drinking water, hump boats up craggy slick rocks, eat lobster; what are we waiting for. Let's go.

So we did. In early September, eight pals drove to Maine for a week of kayak camping along a section of the Maine Island Trail off Deer Isle. Established in 1988, the Maine Island Trail is America's first water trail, a 350-mile long chain of some 80 wild fragile coastal islands, some public, some private, available for use by members. Several of us had paddled in Maine before and were eager to explore more of Penobscot Bay's granite islands, pine forests and hidden coves. The deep blue bay is sprinkled with brightly colored lobster buoys and teams with playful harbor seals, ducks, gulls, elusive loons and haughty bald eagles.

We met up in Old Quarry campground (<http://oldquarry.com/>) the Saturday before Labor Day. We checked our radios, sorted



Lobstah Dinner at Old Quarry Campground photo by Yvonne Thayer

gear, and unpacked our drysuits. We'd arranged to share cooking equipment and paired off to make communal breakfasts and dinners. Brian had gotten us charts and many of us had joined the Maine Island Trail Association (MITA; <http://www.mita.org/>).

We celebrated our first night with a lobster feast. Tom and Todd gingerly picked out live hard and soft shelled lobsters scrambling in wire cages submerged off the Old Quarry dock. Todd grappled with an aggressive four pound-plus lobster, which he decided needed taking down. When I told Todd he'd need a hammer to crack its iron thick shell, he started to hum "If I Had A Hammer" and named the creature Pete. Lacking a hammer, we hacked away at our dinner with knives until Brian pulled out his tire iron to finish the job.

We camped the first two nights in Old Quarry, taking a day paddle into nearby Stonington Harbor and surrounding islands to familiarize ourselves with conditions and charts. On Labor Day we separated out stuff to leave in the cars for later pick-up, loaded up the boats, filled water bottles and bags with potable water, and paddled out to Pond Island. We arrived near high tide and set up our cooking area on a rocky beach well above the water line. Several of us walked two miles around the island, climbing over rocks and through woods and marshes, finding washed up buoys and lobster pots, deer and raccoon tracks, a solitary man clamming in the mud. As on most nights, we enjoyed a brilliant striped fuchsia sunset, gentle mauve sunrise and huge harvest moon. That evening we watched harbor seals fight over space atop warm rocks that slowly emerged in the ebbing tide; other less domineering seals simply piled up on top of each other. In the distance we saw majestic two and three-masted schooners. Pond was buggy though, and we were ready to move on after two days.

On the way to Hell's Half Acre island, Jen found a large blue rubber fisherman's glove bobbing in the water. She mounted it on the bow of her boat, the fingers curled like a proctologist in mid-exam. Over the next few days, we found three more single blue rubber gloves and adorned more boats. We dubbed ourselves the Pirates of the Blue Gauntlet and adjusted the gloves on the bow: Thumbs up when we came in peace, and thumbs down when we came as pirates with intent to raid.

In good CPA fashion, our meals were copious and inspired. For some reason, many featured couscous and polenta, which we variously boiled with dried fruits and nuts, fried, or paired with Indian sauces, mushrooms and vegetables. We feasted on wild Maine blueberries, chorizo and stir fry. Dessert was delicious homemade cookies, chocolate, and one night, strawberry cheesecake. Friends passed around wine, cognac, Cuban rum, blackberry brandy. One night Frank invited us to kill off a bottle of Bailey's. We lined up, cups outstretched. It turned out to be a miniature bottle; all we got was a teaspoon or two.



Pirates of the Blue Gauntlet photo by Tom Heneghan

On our first night on Hell's Half Acre, we saw a fishing boat burning nearby, spewing first black then white smoke as it burned down to the water line. Other boats came promptly to the rescue. When we returned a day later the burnt hull was nowhere in sight, presumably towed out to deeper waters and sunk. We heard later that no one was hurt. That day we paddled through rough seas against a strong headwind to our next campsite on Wheat Island. A baldish looking island with a clump of pine trees, Wheat turned out to have spectacular views in all directions. After lunch, Brian, Tom, Todd and I paddled out around the populated Isle de Haut with its clapboard houses, church steeples, and sentry lighthouse. Later we discovered Suzanne's spare paddle had been left behind on Hell's Half Acre.

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CPA Logo Gear Report

Shirts—Logo shirt have been well received by the club membership. Since receiving shirts in May, a total of 87 shirts have sold, which represents 20% of the total 425 shirts the club purchased. We have been averaging about 15 per month, which has been sustained by the popularity of mail orders coming in from the CPA web-page. I take a sample of the shirts with me to various events, and they have sold steadily. My impression is that we have saturated the regular attendee club members. Between that fact and the seasonal end of weekly club meetings, I expect that sales will drop until next May, when the piracies get back out on the water. Some facts to consider:

Sizes—The shirts are in men's sizes and run large in general. Distribution is:

Small	24%
Medium	29%
Large	23%
XLarge	19%
XXLarge	5%

Colors—Sky blue is definitely the most popular, but we received the least of that color—only 6 out of a total 425. These were the extras from an order of 100 volunteer shirts ordered as handouts for SK102 staff and other volunteer recognition. As a fallback, people have selected the pacific blue. Generally women choose blue, while men choose khaki.

Sky blue	3%
Pacific blue	50%
Sage green	18%
Khaki	29%

I recommend that we order some sky blue shirts, particularly in small and medium sizes. There are sufficient shirts in the other color and size combinations. Cathy Jacobs of Open Air Wear, our source, indicated she would be willing to deal on shirt sizes.

Caps—There are 11 caps available, basically in color combinations that don't appeal. 15 have sold since last year, mainly at SK102. I recommend that we order more in the popular tan or tan with green bill combination.

Béla Máriássy
Logo gear QuarterMeister

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master's
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September 11 dawned with a glorious pink and gold sky. Brian raced off early back to Hell's Half Acre in order to reserve a campsite and look for Suzanne's paddle. Meanwhile, I'd noticed a clever limerick in the MITA logbook on Wheat Island. We started making up limericks, laughing uproariously the whole way back at our increasingly inane poems. Once or twice Todd or Frank hailed a moored sailboat in the name of the Pirates of the Gauntlet Blue and demanded couscous or polenta. We would then recite a limerick, to the amusement of the people aboard.

***We, the Pirates of the Gauntlet Blue
Chesapeake Paddlers through and through
We respect this place
We leave no trace
Though we eat lots of polenta and couscous***

***We paddled through Maine without Ed
Seeking shelter sent Brian ahead
His prize was three kisses
From three lovely misses
Til he said, "Take my wagbag instead."
(abridged—heavily)***

Later that day we split into groups. Todd led a paddle to find more seals, other of us paddled back to Stonington to look for a boat we thought might know something about the missing paddle. We saw harbor seals swimming among the moored boats, gulls picking greedily at crabs on the sand, a duck struggling to swallow a fish too big to down whole. Early the next morning we paddled the short distance back to Old Quarry campground for one last hot shower before heading back home.

How to: See the *Sea Kayaker Magazine* article by Michael Daugherty in the December 2009 issue for more pics, map and trip planner info at <http://www.seakayakermag.com/>

See our pictures online at

<http://picasaweb.google.com/HeneghanTailTom/MaineIslandTrailSept200902?authkey=Gv1sRgCPSvnuyc6Mvf4QE#>
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