

The Chesapeake Paddler



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Saranac River creates meandering paradise

How many Loons fit in a lock? Adirondack paddlers discover what floats their boats

By Al Larsen

In what has become an annual tradition, a gaggle of CPA paddlers who call themselves the Loons gathered for a week of paddling in the Adirondacks. While I've paddled a fair amount in the ADK, this was the first time my wife Anne and I joined the Loons. Led by Rich and Sue Stevens, we headed out each day for a beautiful, pristine piece of water to explore. The Saranac River creates a meandering paradise, with narrow channels and big



The Middle Saranac is one of the least used sections of the chain. Photos/Al Larsen.

lakes, paddle-in campsites and car access points, large (for the Adirondacks) towns, and very remote locations. For one of our paddles, we chose the Middle Saranac Lake—one of the least used sections of the Saranac chain. The put-in is rather obscure, and the creek leading to the lake is so small it's single file even for kayaks.

We had clear blue skies heading out, and the lighting was spectacular. Veterans of this lake admonished us to look back as we headed out of the creek onto the lake, as the entry point would not be obvious on the return. Middle Saranac was a treat for the eyes—little rocky islands with a handful of conifers growing on them, shorelines with sandy beaches, and coves and interesting features enough to distract from some very large, barely submerged rocks that were awaiting anyone who got too deeply mesmerized.

Our goal was to head across the lake, enter the outlet creek (Saranac River), and make our way onto the next lake, Lower Saranac. To do

that, we would have to enter a lock that separated the two with a considerable differential in water height. Of course, this led to a lot of jokes of the “locks straight ahead, bagels on the right” variety. Apparently in the off seasons, boaters operate the locks themselves. We had the luxury of rangers operating the mechanisms for us, so we all entered the hold at once, sort of sardine style, and held onto ropes that were strung front to back along the hold, while the water dropped on the out-bound journey, and rose on the return. When the water reached

the correct level for the body we were moving into, the lock gates opened and the little fishes, er, kayaks, darted away. Sort of the sea kayak equivalent of paddling over a waterfall to reach downstream. Sort of.

After paddling down a beautiful meander past a big beaver lodge, we emerged onto Lower Saranac to a very noticeable wind that had been blocked by various land features on the trip to that point. We admired the lake, but lunch was calling and we



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Upcoming Events. For the most up-to-date listings, visit the [CPA Meetup Calendar](#)

Date	Event	Summary
Th 11/8-Su 11/11	Chickahominy Camper	12:00 pm 11/8 - 4:00 pm 11/11, car camper, paddles on area rivers, reserve campsites now, potluck Sat dinner
Sun, Nov 11	Non-CPA event: Bohemia River SP Open House	10:00-2:00, Open House, 3864 Augustine Herman Hwy, Chesapeake City
Sat, Dec 8	Holiday Party	7:00-11:00, barbecue provided, potluck of salads, main dishes, and desserts; White Elephant gift exchange w kayak theme
Tue, Dec. 25	Truxton Park paddle	10:00 a.m. launch. Dry suits required; Santa hats optional but recommended!

Sprayskirt Entrapment

get the skirt off. A knife to cut the skirt would be a last resort; you can cause serious injury to the paddler if you cut through a skirt and into their legs.

Prevention of entrapment should always be a high priority. Paddlers don't seem to like to practice wet exits; for many it's an uncomfortable experience. However, it is a critical skill. When someone is uncomfortable with the wet exit, I will stand in the water with them until they are confident that they can remove the skirt and get out of the boat. Remember, doing something once isn't mastering the skill. Any time you get new equipment, go practice: new boat, practice wet exits; new skirt, practice; beginning of the season, practice. During rescue practices, do a real wet exit; don't just jump out of your boat. ♣



A new CPA Steering Committee was elected at the Nov. 4 annual meeting. Left to right: Treasurer, Rich Stevens, Coordinator, Bill Smith, Steering Committee members, Katherine Neale and Paula Hubbard, Secretary, Sue Stevens, and Steering Committee members, Chip Walsh, Shelley Weichelt, and Ralph Heimlich. Not pictured, Steering Committee member Linda Delaney.

Loons

had seen some great-looking sand beaches back on Middle Saranac. So, we headed back up river, through the lock and out onto Middle Saranac, where we caught the full force of the stiffening wind. We paddled through the wind, with a determination that only the



Rain gear is mighty fine.

thought of food can muster. We landed and pulled the boats up—and for me, that meant only one thing: time for a swim. I swam out far enough to see around a jut of land at the far end of “our” beach—allowing me to see what was clearly a storm bearing down on us. I skedaddled (a nautical term) back to shore, to find most of our group with the faces in their electronic devices, announcing that a storm apparently was coming, and might be in here in 10 minutes. I told them—ah, yeah, look in the sky and you'll see it, and by the way, it's here. Kind of funny. A lesson in different approaches to modern seamanship—either look and be aware, or use your electronics. I find the former more consistently accurate and rewarding. With that, everyone pulled their raingear, as well as their lunches, out of their hatches, and we hunkered down for what was actually a kind of fun lunch.

The storm moved through while we ate and attended to other needs, and in the aftermath, the wind died down considerably. What remained for us was a gorgeous paddle across Middle Saranac and finding the little inlet to the put-in creek. As Rich likes to say, we cheated death once again. Actually, a great outing on an accessible but not heavily used lake. Oh—and that swim? It feels like you've been in a spa when you emerge from an Adirondack lake. ♣