

# Southern St. Mary's waterways sparkle in September

*Planning a late season paddling trip requires radical hope. Sometimes, the kayak gods smile.*

By Lois Wyatt

Our consistently dry and summer-like September made for some great days paddling and nights camping. When trip leaders dream and plan outings in advance, they hope for ideal conditions but also know the importance of backup ideas for adverse conditions. Rare indeed is the trip when the ideal is also the real, to be savored and appreciated, as it was for our weekend in southern St. Mary's County. The group included Ralph Heimlich, Jenny Plummer-Welker, Greg Welker, Jim Allen, Jay Perry, Catherine and Greg Martin, and Lois Wyatt.

Saturday morning, we launched from the campsite directly onto St Jerome's Creek. Would we venture out into Chesapeake Bay? First step, check it out and decide. Fortunately, conditions were so benign that most of our day was out there. In the calm of the morning with an outgoing tide, we headed south past Point Look-in to the fishing pier of Point Lookout State Park. On our return, we had an incoming tide, gentle breezes at our backs, and resulting small waves. Not wanting our day on the bay to end too soon, we pushed past the mouth of St Jerome's to the next land feature north known as Point No Point. No landing on the inviting sandy beach, though, because Point No Point hosts an antenna, radar dome, and old building we presumed to be military. With that U-turn, we followed the shoreline back past the house with distinctive red roof marking the entrance to St Jerome's. We had a lovely 17-mile Saturday on the water.

Sunday was to be warmer and humid, so we were grateful for the cloud cover that kept temperatures comfortable. With the more challenging wind forecast, we headed for a launch near the mouth of Smith Creek on the Potomac side of St Mary's peninsula. Out we ventured to see the hazy distant Virginia shoreline and paddle north



*New kayak launch area at St. Inigoes Ramp onto Smith Creek. Photo/Ralph Heimlich*

into the St Mary's River past Joint Base Webster Field property. Posted signs warned us not to venture closer than 75 feet to the shoreline, the irony being that the faded signs with small print were impossible to read until we were about 25 feet away. We turned east into St Inigoes Creek, but, anticipating the lunch bell and the need for some public beach landing, our stay was short. Back at the mouth of the St Mary's, we heeded the siren call of the large fish weir. The structure and the nets were in good condition, but I didn't see any live fish in the enclosures, only a few dead ones floating on top. As the afternoon breezes picked up, we headed back into Smith's Creek. While half the group chose to return to the ramp, others again extended our time on the water by exploring one arm of the creek for



*Pound net off of the beaches at St. Inigoes State Forest on the St. Mary's River (Greg Martin and Greg Welker). Photo/Ralph Heimlich*

a total outing of 13.3 miles.

As for the camp nights, temperatures were comfortable. The whole sky was vivid; the Milky Way, splendid. I brought the right gear. I packed up a dry tent Monday morning. It was a picture-perfect weekend of kayaking and camping. For those of us who could stay

an additional day, a magnificent Monday of paddling awaited. Greg Welker led a Monday paddle with Christine Riegel and Aht Viravaidya joining us to launch from Forest Landing Cove. Along Cuckold Creek onto Patuxent River, we passed under the soaring Route 4 Bridge and Solomons Island into Town Creek. As the kayak gods continued to smile on us, we had one more glorious day on the water. ♦