

Columbus Day Peer Paddle to Thomas Point Lighthouse

By DJ Manalo



Put-in site at Horn Point Rd, Annapolis, MD (Launch time: 09:45) photo by DJ Manalo

While I've led many trips before on creeks and calmer rivers, this was my first open water peer paddle trip that I organized with experienced CPA'er Marla Aron, so extra effort was made towards planning and research. This included almost 2 years of building my kayaking skill sets, taking rescue courses at SK102, leading a CPA Beginner Series trip and finally acquiring much of the necessary safety equipment and gear for this type of paddle (1st aid kit, marine floatable handheld VHF, marine handheld GPS, tow rope, strobe lights, waterproof phone, backup storm paddle, serrated/utility knife, a rescue PFD and hi-vis drysuit.... *yeaAUo-Ouch!*). I even snuck in a rescue tube from swim supports. As you each know, sea kayaking is not just about feeling sore with swollen joints and muscles and butts, but, divide that all that gear by 18 months, plus add gas money, and you'll feel the serious pain, too.

For an early October day, Monday started off on a very cold snap. The morning air temps dipped into the low 40's (F), while water temps held steady at 68°F with mostly overcast skies. Still, the tides favored our mid-morning to mid-afternoon trip. High tide would be 11:13, and currents were predicted to present lower issues during the paddle to and over the shoals at TPL. It wasn't the most picturesque of weather days, but it was still 'favorable'.

Of note, the selected venue location (TPL) and prospective put-in sites were referenced for info, based on several trip reports on CPA: mostly by Ralph Heimlich, Rick Collins and Saki over the past few years. And while the waters were still relatively warm, the ['near-fatal' incident trip report](#) by "Popeye" last year had imprinted the issue of safety on our minds. Regardless, a handful of hearty and hardy kayaking souls arrived by 8:30 AM, as we warmed up early into our cold water gear; then prepared our boats for the 14 mile paddle from Horn Point Road in Annapolis to Thomas Point Shoal Lighthouse on the Chesapeake.

Of the eight that had originally planned to go, five eventually were able to paddle: Marc B (CD Cyprus), Madeline T (WS Tempest 170), Mark F. (WS Tempest 165, Marla A. (CD Suka) and myself (WS Tempest 170). I was familiar with each of their paddling skill levels and knew that each were as prepared, as I was, for the trip. Three of us had paddled to TPL before (in summer), but each of us had been sea kayaking regularly at least once a week throughout this past season. Dave Wilson, who was unable to join us, instead accepted our Float Plan that included our proposed route plan and kayaker contact info. We told him that we expected to launch at 09:30, return by 14:00 pm, but no later than 15:00. We also agreed to follow up with each other, following our safe return.

It was also reassuring that we each had fully-charged marine VHFs, which we preset to Channel 69 and confirmed operation by radio checks. Predicted forecasts called for 8-10mph winds and 1ft chop during our float plan period from 9:30am to 2pm. The 1st leg of our paddle was quite a ride! At launch, while conditions appeared to be "as predicted", if not better than I had hoped, the Chesapeake often ignores forecasts a bit. Approximately 1.5 - 2.0 miles out, conditions started to intensify a notch. Northerly winds steadily increased up to 10-12mph, as the wind fetched from the north down the bay creating rolling 1.5-2 foot waves.

At this point, Marc had paddled already paddled ahead of the pack by at least 300yds, staying close along the shoreline towards the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. I was still *"surfing and bracing"* along this point, frustrated by my kayak's tendency to turn into the wind and broadside to the waves. Worse, my hip pads, that I had recently readjusted, created an annoying pressure point that rubbed against my left hip and drysuit. I instructed Marc and the others by radio to turn into the CBF beach where we could take time to rest and reassess our float plan. We could opt to wait and see if conditions improved as forecast, or opt for an alternate route along the MD shoreline towards the South River and Thomas Point Park. We also assessed our comfort level for a crossing. Basically, it was 40:60 about crossing; and therefore we decided to paddle along the shoreline. However, if conditions appeared to improve, we would again reassess our float plan to cross, as we approached Thomas Point Park.



Reassessing conditions photo by DJ Manalo

As we prepared to launch, conditions did appear to improve, waves appeared calmer, winds appeared lighter and sunlight started to peak above TPL on the horizon. Was the original forecast hold true? After paddling less than half a mile, we took a break and Marla noted that we could take advantage of paddling E-SE at an angle to the mostly northerly winds. We agreed to paddle close and should anyone feel it was too rough, we would all return together. So after collecting our thoughts, each paddler gave it a thumbs up and we paddled off. We made it to TPL at 12:30.

After celebrating with relief that we made it there under these conditions, we proceeded to head back, basically a B line back to CBR for a needed lunch break. As it turned out, the forecasts for diminished winds mostly held, even though there was still mild chop

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across our beams. After lunch, we soon paddled back. Our muscles felt fatigued, but as Marc described it, we were still running on adrenaline, some on its fumes.

The rougher conditions seriously wore a few of us out, more than expected. Together with the sense of feeling wet and slightly cold (for those in a wetsuit/drytop combo), it was a relief to get back with a mostly serene paddle to Horn Point. shared that this was their toughest, yet most exhilarating paddle to date; and we each felt 'comfortable paddling under these conditions, which were ideal for sea kayaks. I noticed that my hips and legs were less tense and less hyperreactive, than when I started the paddle. I actually enjoyed bobbing with the contours of waves, like riding a horse. :) So we all cheered when we finally made it back to Annapolis.



At Thomas Point Lighthouse photo by Marla Aron

Here's the final route:



The Follow up—We arrived at Horn Point at 15:15, or 75 minutes past originally planned and 15 minutes past, the latest time point that I conveyed to Dave. So upon everyone making landfall, I promptly texted Dave to confirm that we all arrived safely. Dave continued to follow up to make sure that we got back ok; he even emailed, but finally reached me by phone.

Did you notice that I didn't take very many pics (only 80)? All the pics at TPL and on open water are credited to Marc Bernardo and Marla Aron. Here's a link to Marc's Facebook album page, including a few photos that I agreed to photo edit for him. <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/set=4040210358027.159565.1064828304&type=1&l=3394ad0856>. I also posted their pics at Webshots: <http://outdoors.webshots.com/album/583499596dHKtrs>

As an organizer, I grudgingly decided to 'pack it in', literally the camera was inside a dry bag and secured in the forward hatch, mostly inaccessible to avoid my intrinsic and addictive temptations to release that shutter button. The focus, of course, was not on the shot, but on the paddlers... at least this time. Regardless, it was quite a ride! The most challenging to date for me, personally. Sincere thanks to each of the TPL Peer Power Paddlers: Marla, Marc, Madeline and Mark, since I would never have paddled solo.

What better way to celebrate "Columbus Day"!



WE MADE IT!! 14 Miles,.. What'ta ride!! photo by DJ Manalo