

Chesapeake Paddler



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Paddling Trap Pond and Surrounding Delaware Waters

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Paddling the Trap Pond Water Trail *photo by Saki*

In 2008 and 2009, I explored and paddled the Trap Pond area of Delaware. I found it to be a beautiful place and I thought it would be nice to share it with others. So on April, Suzanne Farace and I scouted the area for a CPA trip. I decided to make [Trap Pond State Park](#) our base of operations. It is a scenic, well-maintained park that features the northernmost natural stand of bald cypress trees in the United States.

Suzanne and I reserved several campsites at the popular state park. She handled the screening of participants, campsite arrangements, and potluck organization. I mapped out the routes. But as with our Prime Hook kayak car camping event at Cape Henlopen State Park in 2010, there was a good bit of overlap in our responsibilities. That was a good thing because having a sane second opinion is something I can use. Otherwise, we might have been taking a plethora of sea kayakers down the James Branch armed with saws, loppers, and Ivy Block.

A day prior to our trip, Suzanne called the park to confirm that everything was in order. She learned that a new well was recently put in place and faucet water was deemed non-potable due to the high chlorine content. But at least the bathrooms were open. Suzanne was also told that there was an outside pump at the campground office that works on a different well whose water was declared safe to drink.

After a great deal of planning and preparation, our event began on the afternoon of Friday, May 20, 2011. We launched from the shore near our campsites (on the south side of the C loop). I took five paddlers on the Trap Pond Water Trail, heading east. Cypress trees were scattered throughout the shallow area with spatterdock filling in many of the gaps. Eventually, we came to the creek that feeds into the pond. Now we were under a dense tree canopy, kayaking through an area about 30 feet wide. Except for the yellow signs with black arrows that told us where to go, I thought things looks amazingly similar to the upper part of the Pocomoke River. Though we hadn't paddled far, it seemed like we were deep in nature.

A wooden foot bridge marked our turn around point. Venturing further would have been difficult for a sea kayak since the width of the creek was now only about 20 feet. Heading back downstream, some of us planned to explore the tributary that leads to Raccoon Pond. This side stream, marked with an easy to miss blue sign and white arrow, took us maybe an eighth of a mile before we had to turn around.

Back in the main part of the pond, we hugged the south side of the shore passing the Baldcypress Nature Center and canoe rental area on the southwest side of the pond. During the last half mile of our 4.2 mile journey, it started to sprinkle. The rain was light and of short duration. Upon reaching the west side of the pond, we looked back and saw a rainbow. From certain angles, it looked like it started (or ended) at our campsite. Paddling back we hoped to find our pot-of-gold.

While the five of us paddled, some folks relaxed out on the pier. Others were still arriving and setting up their tents. About fourteen of us carpooled out to a local restaurant, Station 7, for dinner that night then returned to enjoy the company of the others who stayed behind or showed up later.

On Saturday, Steven told me that water (and we weren't sure exactly what else) was leaking out of the manhole cover in the road and from an unoccupied campground host site. This liquid was then draining into the pond. I called the ranger station (the park office was not

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Paddling the Trap Pond Area (Continued from page 1)

yet open) and reported the problem. After about an hour and a half, a volunteer plumber showed up to turn off the water to the bathrooms. He said sand in the new well was backing up the system. Would we be able to use the bathrooms after kayaking today? We knew not and neither did the plumber.

Our kayak convoy drove out to the [Nanticoke River Marine Park](#) in Blades, Delaware. In attendance were Jennifer Bine, Brian Blankinship, Kristina McCoy, Bela Mariassy, Marla Aron, Marilyn Fisher, Sue Stevens, Rich Stevens, Yvonne Thayer, Tom Heneghan, Dorothy Guy, Jim Allen, Steven Jah-ncke, Emily Bailey, Aht Viravaidya, Amy Friedheim, Dave Gillispie, Suzanne Farace, and me shown in no particular order. At 0945, we launched, did a radio check, then paddled upstream on the upper part of the Nanticoke River. Many of the spring flowers were in bloom. With such a large group, we naturally split up into a "fast" group of 7 led by me and a "scenic group" of 12 led by Suzanne. At each bridge, the groups did a head count. Actually, we were counting kayakers and assuming the people we started with were attached to the boats we counted. I saw a bald eagle and a snake which was swimming about a foot below my boat after my approach scared it. At the split after Sussex Highway (route 20), we took the north branch which eventually led us to our lunch spot in Old Furnace Wildlife Area. Interestingly, both the fast and scenic groups arrived at about the same time after I led my team down a wrong turn.



Trap Pond kayak crew photo by Saki

After lunch, we continued upstream for probably not more than another mile until downfalls prevented us from venturing further. Then we turned around. Kayaking back downstream, we eventually split up again. This time my fast group was down to five. We saw a large dead gar floating in the water and a few beaver lodges. Having gotten quite a bit ahead of the rest, the fast team paddled up Deep Creek heading towards Concord Pond until the others got further downstream. Suzanne called me on her VHF radio to let me know when they got back to the route 20 bridge. Then my group turned around and we all finished around the same time. People paddled somewhere between 12 and 14 miles, depending on which group they paddled with.

Back at the campsite, I spoke to staff in the park office. The bathrooms were all working. We still couldn't drink the water but we could use the flush toilets and showers. Hooray!!!

I asked anyone if they wanted to paddle with me at [Trussum Pond](#). I had no takers so I went alone. Trussum Pond has been described by Ed Gertler as "the closest thing to a bayou in Delaware." I launched on the north end of the pond on a section totally covered by duckweed. Within seconds, I knew exactly what Gertler was writing about. Cypress trees were abundant along with other vegetation that I would expect to find in a bayou. I paddled at a snail's pace so I could take in all the scenery. It was almost visually overwhelming. Turtles were willing to sit and pose for me as I took their photo. Scores of yellow spatterdock flowers dotted the shallowest areas. Even though this was the shortest of my kayak trips this weekend, it was here that I took the most photos. With both hands on my camera, I used my rudder to direct my slow drift.



On Trussum Pond photo by Saki

I meandered between the cypress until I reached the south end of the pond. Then I tried to paddle up the James Branch...the same one that later forms the lower part of the James Branch Canoe Trail. I saw a raccoon swimming through the water, then walking on land. But I didn't get far on the creek. Turning around was difficult. Not only was the James Branch narrow, it was also shallow. Thinking I was only in mud, I used a good bit of force to turn my boat around. Then I heard a loud pop. I pulled up my rudder only to find that about 8 inches of it broke off. Lesson learned: retract your rudder before turning around in a shallow or narrow creek.

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On the Nanticoke *photo by Saki*

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The Chesapeake Paddler

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