

## Tuckahoe State Park Paddle

By Paul Fofonoff

Fellow and would-be Tuckahoe-ers (Say it carefully, if at all). I'd like to thank the 6 AMC-ers who joined me for a paddle on the Tuckahoe River on the Eastern Shore of Maryland on April 21, 2012. I had planned this trip as a 2-day weekend hiking and paddling event, with an option to camp in the park's pleasant campground. However, the weather had different ideas. The plan was for a long paddle on Saturday, and morning hike and short paddle on Sunday, but a forecast for cold temperatures and heavy rain forced me to cancel Sunday's activities.

I made a couple of scouting trips, exploring the river above Tuckahoe Lake, and paddling the lower river, starting at Hillsboro Landing, just below MD-404, the busy highway which takes people to Delaware's beaches. A few years ago, I had twice paddled from Hillsboro upstream to the dam that forms Tuckahoe Lake, a round trip of about 10 miles, a beautiful trip up a narrow, leafy flatwater river, lined with hardwood swamps and steep bluffs, with twists and



Approaching the log barrier, photo by Paul Fofonoff

turns that challenge a 17-ft sea kayak. This April, I found the river blocked with fallen trees, not far above MD-404, so instead I did a paddle downstream to Coveys Landing, 5.5 miles downstream,, which I intended to do on my AMC trip. But when I returned to the landing, a canoeist told me that there was a channel around that clump of trees, and that one could paddle up to a horse trail bridge, about 2 miles upstream.

I drove to Hillsboro, around 9:30 and met our paddlers at the Hillsboro Landing, a pleasant spot on the tidal river. It was good to see Carl Lohmann, because this was my first attempt at leading a paddling trip, and it was good to have an experienced paddler as a *defacto* co-leader. We launched at a high tide and paddled past a few warehouses, under an aging railroad trestle, under the noisy MD-404 bridge, and then paddled past azaleas, through a watery forest. We reached the log barrier that had looked impassable to me, a week ago, found a narrow channel to the left and emerged on the upstream side.

We passed an Eastern Box Turtle who probably regretted his decision to take a swim. This terrestrial turtle is an awkward swimmer, but they do cross rivers now and then. For the first mile or so, we were in the tidal part of the river, with weak currents. The river narrowed and soon we were paddling against a moderate current. We had some tricky squeezes through narrow gaps between fallen trees and sawn logs.

We enjoyed paddling through a narrow corridor, flanked by steep bluffs or swamps, and with tall trees on both sides. Violets were often blooming at the base of the trees, and the woods were lively with birdsong. After many tight squeezes, we reached a bridge where a horse trail crosses the river. There was a broad grassy lawn, and some handy logs for sitting, so we had lunch. We enjoyed a rest on the grass, except for Alexandra, who lounged comfortably in her boat. Some of us decided to haul our boats a short distance around some fallen trees upstream of the bridge, but we soon came to another barrier of fallen trees which looked impassable. So we returned, and then we all started paddling downstream.

Mostly the current helped us, but there were a few places where the combination of swirling currents and narrow gaps between the logs was challenging. At one place, my kayak got sucked sideways under a log, and gave me a short, refreshing swim. Fortunately, the water was shallow, and not too cold, and the air was warm, so I dried off quickly. A few other people had less spectacular partial immersions. The rest of the paddle was uneventful but beautiful.

On the way up, with a higher tide, we noticed an interesting little hole in a fallen tree's root mass. On the way back, with a much lower tide, the hole was big enough to paddle through, and the water around it was too shallow, so we all went through the arch. We passed under 3 bridges, including the old trestle.

We reached the Hillsboro Landing around 2:30 PM. The paddle was shorter than I expected, but considering the current, it was a good workout. We all considered it an excellent adventure, and a great start to the paddling season. Initially, I was considering a short downstream paddle or a hike, but most people were satisfied with our trip, and I realized I was, too. Those of us with cabins or campsites returned to the campground for a rest. Some of us went to a pizzeria in Denton for dinner. I considered spending Saturday night in my tent, but rumbling thunder convinced me otherwise.

I think all of us can recommend Tuckahoe State Park and River for future hikes, paddles, and campouts. It's not too far away, and the river is surprisingly beautiful. There are lots of trails, with easy terrain but attractive forests and river views. I expect that we'll have future trips there, [EDITOR's Note: If you get a chance, visit the Adkins Arboretum just down the road from Tuckahoe State Park (see [http://www.adkinsarboretum.org/about\\_us/](http://www.adkinsarboretum.org/about_us/))



William Weber and Carl Lohman, photo by Paul Fofonoff