

Upper Nanticoke is cool, green, and bald

Shady seclusion and a stand of bald cypress beckon the curious

By Susan Green

The weekend of July 14-16, Ralph Heimlich led an excursion to explore the upper reaches of the Nanticoke River. Our base camp was Trap Pond State Park near Laurel, Delaware. Most of us stayed in the primitive camping area, which features lovely, shaded, spacious and secluded tent sites. One can drive and park near, but not at, these sites. The parking areas include a shed with over-sized wheelbarrows for

transporting one's gear to the assigned site. One downside to the primitive campsites is their distance – about two blocks – from the bathhouse with toilets, sinks, and showers. There is only an outhouse with toilet, but no sink, near the primitive sites. Two in our group stayed in one of the cabins at the park. While I didn't see the interior, I understand that they were clean and had air conditioning – something to be grateful for in hot weather.

Weather for the late afternoon-evening of the 14th was predicted to include severe thunderstorms. This forecast thinned the ranks of the campers, with some opting out and others changing plans to arrive early Saturday morning. The rest of us chose to go on Friday and check in to the park as early as possible in order to set up our campsites before any troublesome weather arrived. Having accomplished this, four of us set out for a short paddle across Trap Pond to visit the Nature Center and then on into the bald cypress grove at the opposite end of the pond. There was a warning sign at the park boat ramp about blue-green algae in the pond. Indeed, the pond was covered with an uninviting layer of almost electric green scum. We later learned that swimming in the pond had been prohibited for many years because of the poor water quality.

The Nature Center, a nice new building with bathrooms, sits in a large picnic area and features stuffed critters and lots of photos of plant and animal life, although most of them are not labeled. There is also an aquarium with a live corn snake and another with some fish. It's worth a quick stop on a hot day.

Back in our boats, we headed for the opposite end of the pond where we could follow a creek into the bald cypress swamp. The way was well-marked with helpful arrow signs. The park website states that the



Ralph Heimlich explores the bald cypress stand at the end of Trappe Pond. Photo/Susan Green

park has “the northernmost natural stand of bald cypress trees in the United States!” It was lovely, quiet, and cool in the woods, and the water seemed cleaner. We explored as much as we could and returned to the put-in in order to be off the water before the approaching storm hit. When it did, three of us were happily making and eating our dinners under Ralph's tarp. There was a strong thunderstorm over the park and then steady rain for awhile, but this writer drifted off to sleep easily with the

sound of the rain on her tent, the temperature having cooled off nicely, and her 10" tent fan whirring gently overhead. As an added bonus, the sandy soil soaked up the excess water overnight.

After additional paddlers arrived Saturday, we headed off to paddle the upper Nanticoke and part of Deep Creek. We drove to the Seaford Boat Ramp, parked, and proceeded upstream. It was high tide and scooting under the North Street bridge (13Alt.) was a tight fit. Not long after we went under the Route 13 bridge and followed the many twists and turns of the river up to and under Old Furnace Road and then headed back downstream to find a place to take out and eat lunch. The return included a short exploration of the entrance to Deep Creek. That evening, the group dined at the Laurel, MD restaurant, Abbott's on Broad Creek. Try not to miss the daily happy hour from 4-7 PM!

Sunday Ralph proposed a “butterfly” paddle on Marshyhope Creek, as some of us were heading home early in the day and others, staying another night at the campground, wanted a longer paddle. Some drove the scenic route to Federalsburg, DE, and crossed the Nanticoke on the Woodland Ferry, privately built in the mid-18th century by James Cannon but operated by the Delaware Department of Transportation since 1935. It has an interesting history that I suggest you check out on Wikipedia. We accessed Marshyhope Creek at Federalsburg Marina and Recreation Park where there are two boat ramps, a couple of outhouses, and plenty of parking. We proceeded upstream as far as we could go before returning to the boat ramp for lunch and good-byes to those going home early. The rest of the group paddled on downstream and eventually back to the boat ramp without this writer, so others will have to tell that tale. ♣