

A Quiet Water Paddling Day

By Sue Bauer

July 15 was our second quiet water paddle trip set for Rocky Gorge reservoir. There were several brand new paddlers along for the day and they were still learning their paddle strokes and getting their boats to go faster. They all had some instruction from other vendors including wet exits, so we were good to go! Most were accustomed to using skirts, so despite the lack of wind or wave action, it prevented that weird half-knee tan on the inside of your thighs. Our group paddled out from Scott's Cove Landing, and that morning, there were few fishermen so we had the quiet surface of the lake to ourselves.

Our group of seven paddlers was spread out a bit, which was okay by me. Rich led the way (working on his RU distance [Editor: an RU or Rich Unit is 30 nautical miles]) and I stayed behind while we slowed to grab up stray bottles and cans that could bereached within a paddle length of the shore. We all got to practice draw strokes to creep parallel into the shore line without hitting the



Rocky Gorge Paddlers Photo by Rich Stevens



rocks. Thank goodness for tough, practical, plastic boats which aren't afraid of gravel beaches and sudden under- water rock appearances! The water level had been pulled down a bit more, so there was more rocky shoreline showing—and more sunken stumps and logs as well as lots of weird underwater algae blobs. The water was crystal clear so we could see many more rocks and small bass swimming under our boats. The globular algae blobs were growing on every underwater log and branch. We have never seen these blobs anywhere else, which makes us all glad we don't go swimming and the water is treated later for drinking. They sure were not worthy of photos, but I bet our local newsletter editor/ naturalist Ralph knows what they are! [Editor: Sue is correct. They are not from outer space, nor is it the result of mutations caused by radioactivity from nuclear power plants; *Pectinatella magnifica* is a member of the animal phylum Ectoprocta (common names: bryozoans, moss animals), a group with a fossil record extending back to the upper Cambrian (500,000,000 years ago!). See <http://www.bio.umass.edu/biology/conn.river/bryozoa.html> for the story of these fascinating globs.]

The rangers must have marked the locations of several nice sized native chestnut trees growing along the western shores. The American Chestnut has long 12" blade-shaped distinctively serrated leaf clusters so it is easy to spot once you know how to identify the tree. I heard of another mature nut bearing Native American chestnut tree over in Howard County that they were trying to cross pollinate to produce a good crop of blight-resistant nuts and future trees. Last summer, I drove past that tree to find EACH NUT CLUSTER individually wrapped in its own little white protective sack and wondered what kind of weird flower was blooming. Not until they harvested (by cherry picker truck) several hundred nut sacks last fall did we know about the unusual white packages that the tree was growing! Now there were several spots along Rocky Gorge with orange flagging tape marking a few more of these elusively rare American species. They sprout from the stump, but rarely mature to bear nuts.

After a bit of a paddle and exploring side branches—nearly 6 miles—we pulled into a quiet cove with a sandy beach for a bite of lunch and homemade cookies made by Mimi. We could see the undergrowth along the shore has either been chopped down by exploring beavers seeking winter food supplies in years past or by the growing deer population. The mature trees create a shady canopy, but the growth is sparse close to the ground. No poison ivy or honeysuckle vines, which the deer do not eat, to intrude on our shore explorations. We all found a nice dry log to settle for lunch, but it sure got harder the longer we sat there in the shade. Back into our boats with padded seats!

Young trees are the favorite food of both critters, but the beavers have no problems tackling larger trees just to get to their tender top branches. Their fallen trees litter the shoreline or occasionally get caught up in the treetops, if they miscalculate the tree space. Sprawling piles of cut branches covering beaver lodges along several of the side coves show that beavers were out in force over the years, but we didn't cross any of their paths. They are active on the upper reaches where we have surprised them coming out of the woods. Quietly going ahead, Rich spotted a fawn bedded down along one cove. We tried out each others' paddles and tested the weight of a wood canoe paddle while doing a J-stroke canoe style.

As we moved along the curves of the creeks, the peace and quiet of the water was only broken by the sounds of woodpeckers drumming in the woods and the cries of surprised Great Blue herons fishing, Green herons, occasional Osprey,



Photo by Rich Stevens

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and Belted Kingfishers. The slider turtles sunning on the fallen logs didn't want to budge until the last second, so they make great photo opportunities if you drift quietly. There were lots of Cliff Swallows swirling around their mud nests plastered on the metal bridge girders under the Route 29 bridge. We also heard an invisible owl practice his evening call and we had to smile because we were quieter than the owl. There was no sign of the resident Bald Eagle pair; the nest site is still hidden on top of a nearby ridge which we spotted this spring. Our new paddlers wanted to explore more—forgetting we still had to paddle the same distance back! Finally, at a one last rocky outcrop where the lake narrows, the wind picked up and the clouds started to gather, so we turned around to explore the opposite side.

By trips end, we discovered we had covered 10 miles of quiet paddling, with at least 3 kayaks full of floating bottles and cans, one large black plastic pot, carefully balanced for the whole trip back, one canning jar complete with lid, several misplaced fishing lures and nylon fishing line found hanging in low tree limbs, one nice large heron feather, some newly sore shoulder muscles, and several more new friends.



Rocky Gorge Quiet Waters Photo by Rich Stevens

Mid-Pax Day Paddle

By Ralph Heimlich

Five of us (Robert Golden, Mimi Pollow, Suzanne Farace, Kurt Rodowsky and I) assembled at the Queen Anne Canoe Launch, near the Patuxent 4H Center, for a shady paddle on an atypically mild July 21. I had originally scheduled this for a kayak kamper, intending to paddle down to the Selby Landing paddle-in site and then down to Magruder's Landing for a take out on Sunday, but I wasn't quick enough getting campsite reservations [Note: the Kamper is on for August 24-26, which will be typically hot, hazy and humid. See http://www.cpakayaker.com/events.html?event_id=508] Launching from the floating canoe dock is a bit different, but we all made it afloat without incident. We paddled upstream, against a weak current to see how the Pax RoughNecks had cleared out the snags and blowdowns. We managed about half a mile, but then the water got a bit "thin", so we turned around for the somewhat more challenging downstream slalom.



Kurt Rodowsky Photo by Ralph Heimlich

Passing the canoe dock, we beheld Bela Mariassy, who had been late getting his permit and lugged his kayak down the road on his shoulder from the locked gate. Makes up for his automotive feat at Assateague. Now six, we paddled leisurely down, checking out the wildlife and enjoying shade.

One mishap. As I tried to "land" a stray inch worm on a branch, Robert Golden, surprised by my sudden deceleration, half-rolled his new Solstice and baptized his boat in earnest. We had fun deploying our 3-boat X rescue and Robert enjoyed the cooling off. After a short wade-ashore lunch (yes Dale, same one we used a week earlier), we headed back to the landing for a nice, easy day.

We saw Paw Paws fruiting on the bank, eagle, osprey, kingfisher, spotted sandpiper, plop of a snoozing otter, turtles, wild turkey (at the landing) and spotted an otter on the road down to the landing as I shuttle Bela back to his car.



Our wade-in lunch spot Photo by Ralph Heimlich