

The Chesapeake Paddler



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Independence Day trip to new paddle-in site occasions celebration

Serenity, fireworks, and a dolphin sighting are among unexpected holiday gifts

By Linda Delaney

The Saturday before our kayak camping trip, while I was sitting on a couch in a lobby waiting for a friend to join me, the head park ranger from Caledon State Park called me. I had made a reservation for two nights of camping at Caledon, and she was calling to make sure I knew that it was 'paddle-in' or 'hike-in' camping only. She said that recently some folks had driven to Caledon without checking first and were unable to hike the three miles to the campsites. The paddle-in



Paddlers crossed the Potomac at the Maryland Point Light. Photo/Linda Delaney

campsites are only a few yards from the beach, so paddling in for camping was a short walk for us. I assured her we were familiar with the setup.

We chatted a few minutes about the closest launch for reaching Caledon via kayak, and she asked when we would be arriving on Monday so that she could have a park ranger drive by and check on us. I was thrilled by her professionalism and enthusiasm.

The five of us met at Mallows Bay early Monday morning for the 12-mile paddle to Caledon, so that we could ride the tide and arrive at Caledon between 2:00 and -3:00 p.m. to beat the afternoon heat. To my delight, the other four members of our trip were early, more organized, better paddlers, and had more energy than I, so any apprehension I had about the trip melted away. I now could relax and enjoy the feeling of adventure and excitement that I had had while packing my kayak with everything I would need for three days and two nights of escaping from my normal routine.

The paddle along the banks of the Potomac was scenic and relaxing, with osprey, eagles, egrets, and heron escorting us from time -to -time and watching us when we stopped for lunch. As we paddled by, we marveled at the massive satellite receivers on that part of the Potomac ([Maryland Point Observatory](#)), with an osprey nest at the top of one. We crossed the Potomac at the Maryland Point Lighthouse and paused to rest, hydrate, and take pictures before paddling the last few miles to Caledon.

With perfect weather and a gentle breeze, the faster kayakers (I was not one of them) led the way to Caledon, and we landed a little before 3:00 p.m., right on schedule. The six paddle-in campsites were vacant, so we were able to choose whichever ones suited us, and we started moving our tents, bags, and gear from our tightly packed kayaks to the sites to set up camp.

I was standing on the Caledon beach, gazing out onto the Potomac and giving thanks for such perfect weather, companions, and beautiful camp all to ourselves – when one of our group told me that the park ranger was at the camp with 'gifts.' I shuddered to think what the 'gifts' might be. I suspected that they wanted us to move or prove we had reservations or some other annoyance. However, much to my delight, Nina Cox, the park ranger I had spoken with on the phone and a few 'friends of the park' had driven to our camp and brought us two big chests full of ice, cold drinks, watermelon, and snacks! It was hot, and we had just paddled 12 miles, so those ice-cold drinks and

[Continued on page 6](#)

[Continued from first page](#)

watermelon hit the spot! All of us expressed our gratitude for their thoughtfulness.

Our first night was a perfect, quiet, cool, private evening. After cooking dinner, we sat on one of the benches overlooking the Potomac and watched the beautiful sunset. We had agreed that the next morning we would sleep in and decide where to explore over breakfast. Dan Minton got up early and hiked around Caledon Park while the rest of us snoozed. He saw many deer, and I too saw a young deer watching our campsite from the woods. The

second day we kayaked down the river a bit, and explored a small creek and a WWI cargo ship wreck that had washed up on the beach, part of the Mallows Bay Ghost Fleet. While we were at the shipwreck, we heard thunder and raced back to camp – once more the weather was on our side and the storm completely missed us. Our second night was July 4th, so we arranged our chairs on the Caledon beach and watched several fireworks displays on the opposite shore, behind us,



Paddlers explore a WWI cargo ship wreck, part of the Mallows Bay Ghost Fleet. Photo/Linda Delaney.

and up and down the Potomac. We thoroughly enjoyed seeing a variety of fireworks displays without the traffic, parking issues, crowds,

or aching necks, and one of our group saw a dolphin heading out to the bay while we were sitting there. We experienced another cool, quiet night in our tents at Caledon. The last morning, we got up early to paddle the 12 miles back before the worst of the late afternoon heat. Our return paddle was a bit harder against the tide but easier because our kayaks were a little lighter. On this return paddle, we followed the Maryland side of the Potomac to Mallows

Bay to get a different view. Once more we were accompanied by lovely eagles, egrets, and osprey as well as dozens of ducks scurrying along the beach.

Arriving at a quiet Mallows Bay in the early afternoon on Wednesday, we unpacked our kayaks, loaded our boats, said farewell, and gave thanks for a pleasant, relaxing 4th of July kayak camping trip. ♦

Choptank Paddlefest “poker run” rewards pirates with booty

By Mark Fisher

On a picture-perfect Sunday morning in mid-June, more than 200 paddlers, including a number of CPA members, descended upon the Greensboro Carnival Grounds along the Choptank River in Greensboro, MD. It was time for the annual Paddlefest on the Choptank. This event is run by the Caroline County Chamber of Commerce, and there is a fee to enter. Participants received a bag of goodies and an event T-shirt.

Paddlecraft of all types were present: recreational kayaks, canoes, inflatables, tandems, and a handful of sea kayaks. Participants unloaded their boats at the put-in at Greensboro, then drove down to nearby Denton, where a shuttle bus ran them back to Greensboro. The event was a “poker run” where participants drew cards at various points during the paddle. The best hands won prizes at the post-paddle party held at the Choptank River Yacht Club, which served as the take-out point eight miles downriver from the start.

After a short speech at the start, paddlers got their boats in the water, some using the boat ramp while others entered from the riverbank. The Choptank is rather narrow here, but calm. The river is a

lush corridor of green which gradually widens during the course of the paddle. There are a few homes along the river, but the landscape is largely natural, with forest and marsh vegetation along the banks. Osprey, eagles, herons as well as other wildlife were spotted.

The pace of the paddle was leisurely, with boats traveling in large packs and people engaging in friendly chatter as they made their way downriver. After drawing a card at the put-in, paddlers stopped at three points along the river to draw additional cards for their poker hand. The final card was drawn at the take-out. The boats anchored at these points also handed out liquid refreshments.

At the take-out, volunteers helped paddlers carry their boats and shuttle buses were available to help paddlers retrieve their nearby cars. Everyone had a chance to unwind and grab a cold drink and a hot dog or hamburger. A bluegrass band provided entertainment and prizes were awarded to those drawing the best poker hands. Prizes included a recreational kayak and paddle, a barbeque grill, a cooler, and other gifts provided by local businesses. The atmosphere was light and the paddle on this stretch of the Choptank beautiful. It wasn't long or challenging, but it was a fun getaway! ♦