



Midnight shark teeth photo by Stephen Petrie

Pirates Find Midnight Treasure and Flying Fish

by Stephen Petrie

With daytime temperatures in the 100's the only 'logical' paddling solution was to go for a night paddle...

Mike put out the word Friday that he was going to paddle from one of the beaches at Chesapeake Ranch Estates (CRE) and would head north along the Calvert Cliffs to the Cove Point Lighthouse—after dark. If we were on the water by nine thirty, the moon, which was near full, would illuminate our way. Three other Patuxent Pirates thought Mike might be onto something and agreed to go along for the ride.

I only live a mile or so from the CRE Seahorse beach so I paddled from the house and met Don, Kimberly and Mike from the wet side of the put in. I was on time, they were on time and we were under way slightly ahead of schedule.

The light winds of the day continued into the early night and the glassy surface of the Bay acted as a mirror to several local firework parties left over from the Fourth of July. A great view was had from the water.

As we rounded Little Cove Point, we got our first view of the Cove Point Light. The rotating Fresnel lens sent out a beam of light that circled around, blinded paddlers, continued to sweep its arc and repeat. We had the choice of hugging the shoreline or taking the two mile 'short cut' across the open water bay between the two points. We headed straight for the light.

We four moths came upon our target and Stephen, who has paddled to the beach by the lighthouse a few times before, suggested it was a great place to find fossilized sharks' teeth. Up for a challenge (and the chance to stretch out) we landed, and aided by headlamps, took half an hour to walk the beach and hunt for fossils. Don and Mike came up empty handed but Kimberly proved to be a natural for spotting tooth shaped objects in amongst all the other stones and shells. Stephen with years of dedication to the sport also found a handful of the tens-of-million year old treasures.

As we sat and relaxed on the beach in the dark, all of a sudden the wind picked up. While the water along the cliffs would be in the partial protection of the lee, our crossing would have some reach. Stephen, who had brought his sixteen-inch wide Huki thought it would be smart to start heading back before too much time passed with the stiffening breeze potentially fueling some challenging waves and chop in the dark.

While the water was quite manageable, the stiff breeze and flooding tide made for slow progress. The dark headland of Little Cove Point was easy to pick out against the night sky. Also the lighthouse beam swept through every thirty seconds or so. The cliffs were soon by our side, and all we needed to do was follow them home. There was a pleasant chop that caused the occasional hull slap and the night breeze made 90 degrees feel cool.

On the way out, we had enjoyed the photo luminescence periodically from paddles and rudders. We'd also had the occasional fish jumping. These weren't giant fish but they also weren't minnows. Often they would jump a distance of three to four feet and get a foot or two above the surface. On the way back they seemed a bit more active.

After eight plus miles, the group pulled back into the Seahorse Beach put in. It was about this time that Mike's moon finally found its way above clouds on the Eastern Shore and started to supplement the night light. Very pretty across the water.

After a short stretch on the land Stephen bid good night to the other Patuxent Pirates and headed for the final mile or so home. It was at this point that the fish really started to hop. There were many near misses, fish over the bow and a couple of boat strikes. Fortunately no fish on paddler violence. I don't know what flavor of fish missiles these were, but they were a pound or two in size. The ones that hit the boat sounded like someone had taken a swing with a big stick.

Finally back on the lake, there were some minnows who wanted to join in their big cousins' jumping games. By 'some' I mean hundreds and I could hear the hull getting pelted—very cool. Amazingly not one landed in the foot well or seat bucket.

I got home a little before one AM and had a memorable night paddle. Highly recommended. Thank you Mike for the invite, and Don and Kimberly for the company.