

# Chesapeake Paddler



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## Cape Lookout After Isabel

By Greg Welker

Most people are familiar with North Carolina's Outer Banks and especially popular areas such as Cape Hatteras and Kitty Hawk. However, if you look at a chart, you will see that the chain of barrier islands that include the more familiar Outer Banks continues south past Oracoke to form another cape on the North Carolina coast. This area, known as Cape Lookout, is the center of the Cape Lookout National Seashore and is comprised of the Upper and Lower Core Banks and Shackleford Banks. The area offers paddling in the open ocean, inlets and the shallow yet wide Core and Bogue sounds. I have enjoyed paddling here since being introduced to the area on a CPA roadtrip. In October of 2003, Brian Blankinship and I spent several days kayak camping.

Prior to the trip, we had looked at the local charts, park rules, tide tables, and weather data to develop an itinerary. We were also able to obtain aerial coastal photographs of the banks, inlets and possible camping areas from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website.



Brian wanted to paddle the ocean and I enjoy paddling the sound areas. We compromised on a route which would launch from the National Park Service Headquarters and Visitor Center on Harker's Island, travel up lower Core Banks to Drum inlet, and, if weather looked good, catch the longshore current down the ocean side of the lower Core and back into the sounds through Barden Inlet at Cape Lookout. The aerial photos showed Drum inlet about 200 feet wide and shallow, with minimal surf at the mouth of the inlet. Barden Inlet is protected from the direct ocean surf by the spit of Cape Lookout which would allow a wide breach through the surf zone. The remainder of the

trip would allow us to explore Shackleford Banks before returning to our launch point.

Two weeks before our start date, Hurricane Isabel came ashore directly through Drum Inlet. We called the park and learned that, with a few exceptions, all areas would be open for backcountry camping. We also confirmed that our possible watering spot—the very small town of Atlantic—was still there and that fresh water would be available.

We arrived at the Harker's Island Visitor center around 2:00 pm. After filing a float plan and receiving our permit, we were on the water in a little over an hour.

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With a wind out of the south, we had a nice 11 nautical mile (nm) paddle up the sound to an overwash beach to camp for the night.

After setting up camp, Brian discovered an 8'x10' piece of curved metal with UNITED stenciled on the side. Apparently it had been washed ashore by the hurricane. We also found several, unidentifiable animal tracks.

The next morning, we continued north and paddled another 11.5 nm to the north side of Drum Inlet. There were several wide spots where the



water was so shallow our loaded boats ran aground at low tide. Much to our chagrin, we found Drum Inlet to now be about a half mile wide with significant surf at the mouth. We ate lunch on the north side of the inlet, then paddled over west to the town of Atlantic.

The hurricane had drastically altered the bottom of the sound in this area. We passed a green and a red buoy; they should have marked the channel into the town of Atlantic's harbor. However, now there was a sand spit in between the buoys. As we paddled along the town's shoreline, we saw a commercial trawler and a large sailboat about fifty feet on shore, still there from the hurricane. Heading back to the north side of Drum Inlet, we made camp, ate dinner and watched the surf. On the beach, Brian found a dead ray

with a wingspan of over two feet.

Many inlets will have certain times in their tidal cycle when the inlet waves—and the waves at the ocean side—are less severe. Some inlets have areas just off to their edges on the ocean side where the waves don't break, but almost form a rip or eddy line back through the breaker line. Brian and I had watched the inlet the previous evening and had noticed none of these features. In fact, the inlet looked like it was acting much more like a section of submerged beach or bar, with the waves always breaking at the ocean end. From the shore, it appeared that there were two areas of breakers; it seemed calm in between. The weather forecast was favorable, so we packed up and prepared to try the inlet and then the ocean. Since we would be paddling on the

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## **2005 CPA Pool Sessions\***

**Saturdays, now through spring at the Fairland Aquatic Center, Burtonsville, Maryland**  
4-5:50 pm and 5:50-7:45 pm; \$7 per person. Pay at FAC.

### **Required:**

1. Boats and gear clear of leaves, mud, grass.
2. A reservation; please email Joan at [Jspinner2@peoplepc.com](mailto:Jspinner2@peoplepc.com) (preferred) or call 301-559-3345 by the Thursday before the session. Leave a message and the following information:
  - a. your name and phone number
  - c. date of session
  - d. time slot
  - e. number and type of boats (WW or sea kayak)

You will receive a reservation number. If you do not receive a reservation number, you do NOT have a

reservation. Reservations will not be accepted more than 2 weeks in advance.

**Directions:** Take your best route to I-95 between Baltimore and Washington. Exit at MD-198 West. Turn left at 2nd light, Old Gunpowder Road. The pool is about a half mile down on the right. Enter through the patio.

\*These are open sessions, not lessons. You must bring your own boat and gear. In case of inclement weather, call the center to see if it is open: 301-206-2359.

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ocean side in breaking waves, we took a few precautions. Although we had been comfortable paddling on the sound side in just bathing suits and thermal top, we got into wet suits since the potential for a longer time in the water existed if something unexpected happened and we went for a swim.

Since we were going to be going out through breaking waves and doing a surf landing that evening for our beach camp, we also stripped the decks of anything that could be washed off by the waves. I removed the deck bag and made sure the spare paddle was secure on the rear deck. We had both brought whitewater helmets for the inlet passage and the surf landing.

We started out with a few small waves in the inlet itself. At its ocean mouth, we stopped to assess the waves. Most were two to three feet, and occasionally three to four. A large wave broke on us, pushing Brian back several hundred feet behind me. While he paddled back up, I tried to move further out without much success. Brian caught up and we both tried to work our way into the ocean, but were unable. During a brief conference, I voted for heading back since we were not making any progress going out the inlet. I turned my boat and caught one large wave to surf back into the inlet. I started to broach to the right and set for a high brace on that side. Suddenly, the boat yawed to the left, and I was looking over the right side of the boat at water a foot or two below the bottom of the boat. No time to shift the brace to the left, so I inhaled, tucked, and let it roll me. Upside down, I let the wave break

and go by, then stuck my paddle out to the right and rolled up. I paddled the rest of the way back through the inlet. Brian and I then headed south inside the island. As we left the inlet area, a pod of dolphins swam by, heading out to sea.

That day, we paddled south along the Core banks. Our plan was to find an established campsite near Hogpen Bay. However, when we got there, the boardwalk that led across the marsh to the campsites was in ruins and unusable. We got back in the boats as dusk came on. Now we needed a place for the night. On past trips I had learned the value of a good set of binoculars and now, I scanned the horizon. Most of this area is marsh, so I was looking for the white of a beach where we could land and camp. I saw one possibility to the west, where a strip of white near some pines indicated a possibility. We paddled over. The area looked uninhabited, seemed reasonable, and we set up camp and dove into our tents as night and the mosquitoes set in.

The next morning, we got an early start and had an easy paddle along the western shore to a ranger station for more water. We ate breakfast, reloaded and launched, paddling south to the light house. As we paddled along the grass islands exposed by the lowering tide we saw several of the wild mustangs that live on these islands. The story is that the mustangs descended from Spanish mustangs shipwrecked on the island.

The light had sustained minimal damage from the hurricane, with only one building being destroyed. Pieces of the oil shed building, which had stood east of the light, now lay on the west side near the inlet.

The lightkeeper's residence has a museum about the island, light, and the lifesaving operations conducted in the area. We talked to the ranger and described the animal tracks that we had seen. He said yes, he had seen them several times also but also had no idea what they were. He had only been there two weeks, and was filling in for the regular rangers who were working on the recovery from the hurricane.

After lunch, we started back up the inlet and west along Shackleford Banks. We had some difficulty finding the channels during low tide. I thought, *why do I always seem to end up walking my kayak?* We watched as a local in a specially-adapted motorboat zoomed by us, twisting up the nearly invisible channels. The motorboat, looking like a typical jon boat, had a perch built up about ten feet above the deck from which the operator could look down and see the deeper water. He was having better luck finding the channels than we were!

The day's campsite was about a mile east of the Beaufort Inlet, on a nice sand rise under an oak tree. We set up camp, then paddled west to the inlet

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and out to the ocean. This inlet was nice and calm, at least right now. Here we found the large, dead sea turtle. Back in camp we marveled at the lack of bugs and mosquitoes. Suddenly, a sound like hundreds of cicadas rose from the branches of the tree. It also sounded like a fire station horn and we hoped it would not go on all night. Luckily, it stopped after about fifteen minutes, though we never learned what it was.

During the night, it started to rain. The next morning, the forecast indicated that a front was coming through and that rain and wind were expected for the next several days. We ate breakfast in our tents, packed up and decided to end the trip. Our paddle took us back along the shoreline of Harkers Island to the ranger station. A local shrimping boat



passed us, with its nets boomed out to the side. After lunch in Beafort, and a quick tour of Fort Macon, we headed back to Maryland.

## THE GREAT CHESAPEAKE BAY SWIM June 12, 2005

### Support the swim from your kayak!

We need kayakers to support the open water swimmers as they cross the Bay for the 4.4-mile swim and the 1-mile swim.

This year the CPA will hold an **optional swim support instructional clinic at Truxton Park on May 22, 2005**. We will have speakers educating us on topics such as the safety and coordination efforts that go into the Great Chesapeake Bay Swim and what the swimmers expect of kayak support teams.

- Learn about how to help the swimmers
- Practice towing a swimmer in the water
- Brush up on your open water safety and rescue skills in the water

More information is available on the online CPA Calendar or through the coordinators. If you wish to come to either/both events, please contact one of the following coordinators:

Dave Biss: [bissd@erols](mailto:bissd@erols); 703-241-0036  
Cyndi Janetzko: [janetzko@hotmail.com](mailto:janetzko@hotmail.com); 703-241-0036