

Tuckahoe obstacle course inspires creative paddle

Pack that "Plan B" in your day hatch. Destination offers birds, fall colors — and toppled trees.

By Paul Fofonoff

Since 2003, Tuckahoe Creek, on the Eastern Shore, and especially the five-mile stretch from Hillsboro to the dam at Tuckahoe Lake, has been one of my favorite paddling locations. I first found out about it in *Sea Kayaking in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay*, by Michael Savarino and Andrea Nolan. The launch site at Hillsboro is one of the bay's most beautiful, a wooded well-kept park on the tidal river. Going upstream, the river is wide and tidal - after that, you're paddling uphill, mostly against mild currents, on a narrow river, through rich bottomland forest, and the fallen trees determine how far you can go. Usually, the park crew cuts enough of the fallen trees in the spring to permit passage through the obstacle course, but winter damage and summer storms can create major blockages, some of which are too big for an easy portage. I was on one CPA paddle here, and I've led shorter beginner-level Tuckahoe paddles for the Potomac Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club.

I was considering scheduling a paddling trip on the Tuckahoe for the AMC, so I went on a scouting trip Sunday, Oct. 6th and drove to the Hillsboro Landing off MD 404. My goal, for a group with mixed abilities in recreational kayaks and canoes, was to paddle upstream to a horse-trail bridge about three miles, but of course, for myself I was hoping to paddle all the way up to the dam. It was a beautiful warm day, and paddling was pleasant on the tidal river, past tall green trees with faint hints of

color. As the river narrowed and the current increased, it became a dodge-em course past logs and snags. Eventually, I



Typical Tuckahoe. Photos/Paul Fofonoff

reached a riffle two miles upriver where the uphill was visible and the current tested my paddling ability. I decide to stop here for rest and lunch. As I ate, a family of three crossed the creek on horseback; the horses were shy about the current here, and the park does not recommend the ford for human hikers. I put in, paddled a short distance, and found the creek blocked by a fallen tree. I beached the boat, followed a path through weeds and mud, and launched again. After a few strokes, I found myself facing a fallen oak about four feet thick with no easy way around. It's clear that the wet summer has toppled lots of trees in the soft bottom soils. It looks like the creek could be blocked for more than a year.

Fortunately, the Tuckahoe has lots of alternatives. Another year when the

Tuckahoe was blocked, I led a group downstream five miles from Hillsboro to Coveys Landing. The river widens, and the shore changes from swamp to marsh. It's lightly developed; we saw lots of birds and a big beaver lodge. A paddler told me that the five miles below Coveys Landing to the next landing, Ganey's Wharf, were nice too. For a shorter paddle, the Tuckahoe above Tuckahoe Lake has about two miles of easy paddling through swamp forest to a landing at the park's non-electric campground. On a couple of AMC trips, I have combined this short paddle with a five-mile hike on the park trails for a pretty good outing. ♣



Always have a backup plan At left, a four-foot thick oak presents a minor obstacle to the original paddle plan. At right, a land-water intersection on Tuckahoe Creek.