

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

January 2019

Whale Encounters in Quebec

Declan Treacy

An early rise of 4.30 am was the start of our adventure to the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers in Quebec. This beautiful eastern Canadian province is steeped in history and is a predominantly French-speaking province. The St. Lawrence and Saguenay are known for their rich abundance of whales and our mission was to get a glimpse of minke, humpback and belugas.

Fog greeted us on the first morning of our paddle on the St Lawrence, which made this environment all the more interesting for exploring. We got our boats set up, got into in our dry suits, and launched into the cold water of the river not knowing what we might see over the next few hours. It didn't take long for our heart rates to elevate. About 20 minutes into our paddle in the fog we heard a loud bang and thought that two vessels had collided in the fog. We continued to listen and few minutes later we heard a loud splash coupled with the sound we all wanted to hear: the sound of whales exhaling air.



Photo: Declan Treacy

It was surreal to be paddling in fog and realize that these large mammals were in very close proximity to us and our boats. Over the next 45 minutes we were treated to an amazing display of curious, playful minke whales rising and diving all around us. It was a sight that none of us will ever forget.

At this stage we thought life on the water surrounded by minke whales could not get much better, but little did we know what was in store for us. As we continued, we noticed two whales simultaneously come up for air almost next to us. Watching these two whales glide and rise so peacefully, we realized they were actually humpback whales! And then it happened: a spectacular synchronized display of the two humpbacks diving deep and showing us their massive tail fins.



Photo: Declan Treacy



Photo: Declan Treacy

As we paddled onwards, the fog started to lift so we were able to enjoy the scenery of the rugged, rocky shoreline. Then we heard that familiar noise once again; another whale coming up for air. We stopped to see where the whale was when we noticed that this one was following the same course as we were. We continued to watch and saw that it had changed its course and was coming straight towards us! At this stage we all started to tense up a little as we were not sure what the whale would do. Looking down, we saw the whale quietly glide right beneath our boats. I quickly looked back and saw that the same whale decided to come up for air a few feet from my stern. Then it dived once again and this time it decided to keep on going on its own journey and so did we.

The next day the plan was to explore the Saguenay River which is known to have a large population of beluga whales. Belugas are very noticeable - they are normally white so they stand out in the water. While we only saw two belugas from a distance, it

was still pretty cool to be paddling in an environment that they called home.

Upon our return to shore, we met a Park Canada employee who asked about our trip and whether we had seen any whales. We told her that we lost count of the number of whales that we had encountered on our trip! The Park Canada employee went on to explain about the great work their researchers are doing to try to protect the whale population on the St Lawrence and Saguenay. It was great to hear that we have fellow humans who are devoted to looking after the welfare and continued health of these beautiful mammals. However, the more we listened we discovered that we as humans are making it hard for these whales to thrive and remain healthy due to over-tourism and environmental pollutants. I came away from this trip with a heartfelt passion for whales and a curiosity to learn more about them. I hope to be back one day sharing the water with these magnificent and peaceful creatures.

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Portugal. Photo: Gail daMota

Emails to the Editor

T Rescues

On the T rescues (November 2018): All of my rescues are in the soup, so there are some factors to take into account in addition to those you mention.

All of the following happens after I determine that they cannot rescue themselves or drift to a less dangerous area.

When I am coming in for the rescue I want the swimmer to go to their bow. This does three things. One is that since they are at the bow, they act like an anchor or drogue and the wave action will cause the stern to swing toward shore. Hence the bow ends up facing the oncoming waves. Second, with the bow facing the oncoming waves, less water gets into the cockpit and it is easier to hold on to the boat. Third, when I come in bow to bow the swimmer is in an easy position to either move to my boat or to their cockpit, whichever I see is more efficient to the rescue. (if I am going to empty their boat I will instruct them to go to my bow, if I am not going to empty their boat I will tell them to move to their cockpit and reenter.)

I come in to the swimmer from the beach side, facing the on-coming waves. (If I came in from the ocean side I could be swept into the swimmer and their boat.) That means the boats are in a bow-to-bow position for the rescue.

The bow-to-bow position isn't just an option – it's critical. While we are bow to bow, I can watch what's coming when they are getting into their boat. Also, as they are getting into their boat and especially as they are sorting themselves out with skirt and preparing to start paddling, they are facing the waves. The biggest advantage is that once they are back in their boat and start paddling they are facing oncoming waves.

Last, rarely do I empty their boat until I can get to a safety zone.

- James Kesterson

Communication Devices

The croc story included the use of a EPIRB. While most kayak trips on the west coast of Florida are within cell phone and VHF range, I felt the story reinforced the point that you can't have enough communication devices. In this instance the victim was lucky to not have arterial bleeding or gone into shock but that won't always be the case due to the unpredictable nature of emergencies. Whether a croc, alligator or shark, the damage to human flesh can be devastating and time is the worst enemy. I think more kayakers should consider carrying an EPIRB.

- Harry Tobin

Coastbusters

You nailed it again, Rick. Great edition (Nov. 2018) of "Coastbusters". Very professionally organized and presented with an interesting variety of articles, with each being captivating in text and photos. I love it - the quality of "Ocean Paddler" at a much more acceptable "cost". Keep up the great work.

- Ed Schiller



Maine. Photo: Lilie Potter

The College of Charleston's Sea Kayaking Program: *An Interview with Ashley Brown*

RW: I'd like to find out about a couple of things, including what kind of sea kayaking courses you run, who takes them, how you got the college to do this, and how your courses fit into the overall college curriculum, if at all. But let's start with the courses themselves – what exactly do you teach?

AB: There are four different courses, but they aren't all offered every semester. There is the basic course in coastal kayaking, an expedition kayaking class and now, since I became an L2 IT, an Instructor Development course. I also teach a SUP class and we are about to start a surf class with sit on tops.

The basic coastal kayaking course runs every fall and spring semester and is also a summer course. In the fall and spring there are usually multiple sections of that course, so I'll have one class that meets in the morning and then a second, separate class that meets in the afternoon. The instructor development course also runs each semester. The frequency of the other courses depends in part on what I want to offer and on student enrollment. But I usually end up teaching between three and five classes each semester.

RW: What do you cover in that coastal kayaking course; is there a formal curriculum?

AB: Yep, I had to develop a course syllabus and it is a lot like the ACA L2 skills course. However, students are pretty impatient about pretty strokes – they don't care too much about that and actually neither do I, at least for this type of experience.

There are some areas that I really emphasize and consider course objectives. First, I want them to understand, appreciate, and develop a love for our coastal environment and a love of sea kayaking as a

way to experience that environment. I think our coast and the sport are fabulous and I'd like them to have the same appreciation I do. Second – and as part of that – I spend a lot of time helping them understand tides and currents, and wind, weather and waves. Third, in terms of hard skills, much of my focus is on assisted rescues of all types. In addition to the obvious safety issues, that helps build teamwork. We also spend time on basic maneuvering skills. Finally, and this is also related to appreciating the environment, I also emphasize Leave No Trace principles.

RW: You cover all that in a 2 credit course? How many hours of class are there each week?

AB: These classes run for 14 weeks and three hours per week, so we can get a lot done.

RW: How many kids in each class?

AB: There is a maximum of 10 per class and the courses usually all fill up.

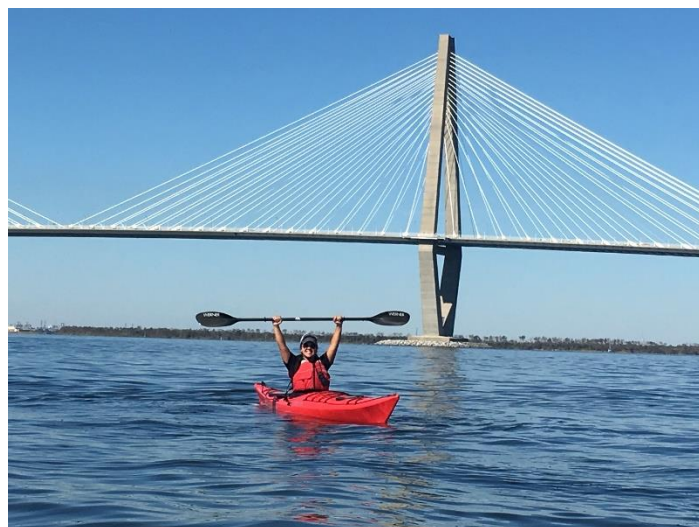


Photo: Ashley Brown

RW: Context: how do the sea kayaking courses that you run fit into the overall college curriculum?

The courses are all part of my department - the Department of Health, Education and Human Performance. We like to provide students with a wide range of experiential courses – in addition to their academic courses - to help with their overall experience at the College. The basic idea is to produce well-rounded students.

RW: Can the kids get regular college credits for your courses?

Yep, mine and other similar courses. The kayaking courses are part of a bunch of “activity courses” that can be taken for two credits and get included in the student’s GPA. But they can only take four activity courses for credit. It’s amazing the things kids can take – things like African dance, sailing, ice skating, yoga, martial arts, and others.

RW: Is there a certain major that kids take that is related to outdoor education?

No, there isn’t any outdoor ed. major at Charleston. But there are a couple of majors in the Department that the activity courses are related to. There’s one in Exercise Science, one in Public Health, and one in Physical Education Teacher Training. There is also a minor in Coaching. But you don’t have to be in one of those majors to take the activity courses. So, someone majoring in history for example could take an activity course and get credit for it.

How did you sell the idea to the college of having sea kayaking courses for credit?

Well, I didn’t really have to sell anything, except maybe expanding the number and type of sea kayaking courses. Kids could always get credit for taking activity courses. Sea kayaking was added about five or six years ago when the Activities Director contracted with Sea Kayak Carolina to offer a summer course. I was the assistant in that first course. It was pretty popular but when the Activities Director became Chair of the Department, the program really took off.

RW: What do you mean “took off”?

A couple of things. First, the new Department Chair was totally invested in the activities courses since he had run them. So they had support from the top. But also at that time I was hired by the college to run the sea kayaking courses. That meant that the money that was previously paid out to a contractor was kept in-house because I’m an employee. So the sea kayaking program became self-supporting.

The other thing that helped the sea kayaking courses take off and gain support is that they have been consistently rated by the students as the best courses in the Department.

RW: Speaking of money, are the sea kayaking courses funded by the tuition that kids pay?

Yes, and no. They pay an additional \$300 activity fee for each of the activity courses they take. It’s like a lab fee. So that money helps pay my salary and goes for things like equipment. That’s why I say they are self-supporting programs. But these class hours also count toward the students’ course load, so tuition also covers part of the program cost.

RW: What are the highlights that you think people should know about the sea kayaking courses?

AB: One unintended consequence connected to the courses has been huge! In addition to the sea kayaking skills, I have seen a lot of personal growth in terms of providing support for, and trust in, others in the group, and – what I think is really important for kids in their late teens and early twenties - taking much more responsibility for themselves and others in the group. When I started I wasn’t really thinking about that as an objective, but it has been one of the big pay-offs.

Overall, I think the program is great because there aren’t too many places where you can take a course and get personal growth, develop team-building skills, get exercise in the sunshine, tour a beautiful city from the water, and in general have a great experience. Oh yeah, and have a lot of FUN doing it!

Photos of the Month



Busy!

Photo: Nate Hansen

Photos of the Month



Busy!

Photo: R. Dennis Green

Photos of the Month



Busy!

Photo: Curtis Warrenfeltz

Skills: Horton Hears a Who – Emergency Signals

Scott Brown

In Horton Hears a Who, it is the collective voice of Whoville that enables them to avoid meeting their doom in a pot of “beezle-nut” oil. The Whos gathered their resources and set about to signal to the outside world their existence, leveraging the talents of all including the tiny Jojo.

The need to communicate and be seen is imperative when things do not go according to plan. Just like the Whos, we too need to ensure our voice is heard or our presence is recognized in our outdoor pursuits. This is true for any backcountry or open water environment where our sense of adventure, connection with nature, or the need to disconnect from the flurry of day-to-day work takes us. Having a plan and the tools to request assistance and signal our position is imperative regardless of how far the trek takes us away from home. In this article, we’ll look at some of the means we have to signal for assistance. The goal is to provide some basic information on available signaling devices and considerations for maximizing their use.



Photo: Bill Lackey

The use of emergency signals as part of our paddle begins with the plan. A good trip plan/float plan will include the number and type of communication and signaling devices that you and the people in your group will carry. Always consider that in an emergency situation *one* of something is *none* of something. Include in your packing list Primary, Alternate, and Tertiary (PAT) methods for signaling

Signaling devices are active or passive. An active signal device requires you to physically operate and attend to (e.g. flashlight), while a passive device once deployed can be left unattended (e.g. signal flag). We can organize these devices into three types – audible, visual and electronic.

Audible Signals

Audible signals include our voices, whistles, horns, banging metal on metal, and gunfire. These active devices are readily available, easy to carry, and are easy to use. Audible signals are generally short - range and are very helpful in pinpointing a location in limited visibility. Pea-less whistles are great since they can be used in cold climates. With all audible signals, the signal should be repeated in sets of three. Three whistle blasts, three bangs on a metal object or three gunshots - with a one-minute pause interval between each signal set - is the recognized pattern for distress. The obvious limitation to these devices is that any help must be within hearing range, and that range may be restricted by wind, waves or other conditions.

Visual Signals

Visual signals are the best method to assist rescuers in locating your position day or night. They provide both a long- and short-range signaling and direct searchers to your position. Visual signals are usually categorized as pyrotechnic and non-pyrotechnic. Pyrotechnic devices include handheld flares, smoke markers, and parachute flares. Non-pyrotechnic devices include flashlights, strobe

lights, camera flashes, signal mirrors, laser flares, flags, streamers, dye packs, and glow sticks (green/yellow). All these devices have limitations associated with shelf-life, range, visibility/illumination, environmental conditions, and operator proficiency.

Keys to Successful Searches

All successful searches are based on the ability of an observer in the air or on the surface to see you after you have made a radio call or activated your emergency radio beacon. Being found is the ability to be seen. And being seen - especially in an open water environment - is harder than you may think.

The objective is to make yourself bigger and brighter than your surroundings, providing contrast cues to the observers. Rafting up in manageable groups (e.g. four kayaks) and deploying your passive signals will aid in making you a bigger target. Using your active signal flares, smoke, and/or signal mirrors will make you brighter. A note of caution in using flares from a safety perspective: always fire the device away from the hull of your kayak, and do it while supported by another kayaker if available. Emergency signals are critical items we need to carry. Understanding the

purpose and limitations of each type, and knowing when and how to use each will help ensure our success of being assisted when trouble occurs. A combination of training and experience will yield confidence in the use of these devices.

Remember!

Inspect all of your devices for functionality and expiration date. Pyrotechnic devices are prone to failure because the propellant breaks down over time or when dropped.

As a group, review who has which signaling devices and where they are stored.

Conduct a radio check before leaving the beach to ensure VHF radios are on, set to a common channel, and set correctly for the location (i.e. US, Canada, or International).

When in doubt call out for assistance. Do not let a situation continue to deteriorate into something bigger.

Deploy your signals when you are confident searchers are in proximity. You will most likely hear or see them before they see or hear you.



Lessons Learned from an Ocean City Surf Session

Ed Rackley

My first open crossing was north of Norfolk on the Chesapeake in Mobjack Bay, years ago. The real novelty was not the open water but the panic of massive following seas. Strong tailwinds and weather cocking overwhelmed me, broaching the boat and throwing me off course. My self-rescue skills were negligible.

No understanding of hull dynamics and no rough water bracing experience kept me fighting capsize the whole time. I knew waves as gifts from the sea that could be caught and surfed, but how? Each new wave presented problems I couldn't solve. Under the heavy wash of one hard broach I nearly rolled, feeling real fear for the first time. Learning how not to broach, with or without a brace, took time in the cockpit and too many capsizes and wet exits to count.

I was reminded of this episode from my early kayaking days while surfing on Assateague a few weeks ago. With good surf reports on the usual websites, I headed out the inlet at Ocean City around midday, end of the flood, expecting to find shore break along the coastline. Rounding the jetty I heard the cracking thud of dumpers on steep beaches, with nothing to surf.

I looked out to sea. A mile or so out a wall of wave break was vaguely visible. Southerly crosswinds were at 15 to 20 knots as I paddled out to investigate. The swell they created was big but with few whitecaps. Gentle giants, basically. A half hour paddle and I'd arrived at a perfect break, with nice rollers popping off a deep sand bar, with no risk of head collision if I rolled. I'd never seen such a clean break at this distance from shore, certainly not in these parts. Unclear if it will last. I managed two long surfing sessions that afternoon. Waves were 4-6 feet and occasionally

higher. More than six feet, unless perfectly glassy, is too big. I've broken fiberglass boats before in that. These waves popped up and crested but did not curl or 'tube'. They were mini-mountains with gentle slopes, perfect for sea kayaks.

A couple of insights from this surf spot.

First, on the importance of knowing tide schedules when returning through a narrow inlet like Ocean City. Tide race conditions in the OC inlet make for good surfing on the ebb or flood, depending on nautical traffic. Current speed on my return felt well over four knots, a lot to compete with if you're already exhausted. There are great standing waves to play on if you've got energy left, but they don't help you clear the inlet. I saw no clear eddy, which means once you're committed there's no place to rest until the finish line. I was impatient and forced my way through at what felt like max ebb. Too much work, and not very smart.

Second, on broaching and following seas. On my return in late afternoon, quartering seas were massive. They were surf-able and fast, but took me way off course. The experience reminded me of big following seas in Mobjack bay, my glaring inabilities, and the panic I felt. As we know, broaching happens when wave speed exceeds hull speed. The stern is overtaken and shoved to one side. We brace and side surf, or roll.

In theory if your hull speed equals that of the wave, you don't broach and wouldn't need any paddling technique besides a killer forward stroke. I found [this](#) visualization of following seas overtaking a boat helpful to understand hull dynamics when following seas or a wave lifts our stern and we try to surf. If you're a strong paddler with quick acceleration, broaching and side-surfing



Photo: Rick Wiebush

are less likely. But proper technique is a lifesaver and there are no short cuts to practicing bracing maneuvers, having a bombproof roll and solid self-rescue options if you wet exit.

Finally, we hear a lot about experiential learning. It is great - if you know the right technique to practice! The first time I hit heavy following seas in Mobjack Bay I had no brace, no roll, and no idea what to do to prevent broaching or capsize.

Little wonder that my next open crossing in Norfolk harbor, days later, I again hit heavy following seas in Mobjack Bay. I rolled, exited and floated for *six hours* before being rescued. So much for experiential learning! I didn't learn proper technique and practice in controlled conditions (i.e., with instructors on hand) until my first symposium. These workshops are excellent venues to acquire both theory and practice, build your skills, and identify your weaknesses.

Upcoming Events

Date	Event	Location	Sponsor	Website
Jan 18 - 20	Wave Play	Southport, NC	Capital City Kayak (Randi Kruger)	Capitalcitykayak.com
Feb 16 - 22	Rough Water Skills	Matanzas Inlet, FL	Sea Kayak USA (Dale Williams)	Wavepaddler.com
Feb 16 - 23	Jacksonville Journeys	Jacksonville, FL	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
March 19	Incident Management	Charleston, SC	Scott Brown and U.S. Coast Guard	kyaker63@gmail (Scott's email)
Apr 5 - 11	Baja Kayak Fest	La Bufadora, MX	Jen Kleck	Bajakayakfest.rocks
May 3-6	OBX Journey	Emerald Isle, NC	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 13-15	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Lower Argyle, Nova Scotia	Committed 2 The Core (Christopher Lockyear)	Bofsk.com
Sept 27-29	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com

“There We Were”: Revisiting The Croc Attack

Dave Winkworth

Note: The November issue of Coastbusters carried the story of Dave Winkworth's crocodile encounter in Far North Queensland. That story was written shortly after the actual attack. This article reflects on the incident and was written 17 years later. It provides some different perspectives on the impact of the incident and how it was managed.

Has it really been 17 years? It seems like only yesterday to me. My memories are still very vivid to say the least. I went for a paddle in the Bega River near home the other day and saw a big odd-shaped log in the water. Everyone would think it's a log, but my brain still says it's a croc - for a second or two. Weird.

Well, here are a few thoughts on that very close encounter with a crocodile. I'll try to keep them in some sort of chronological order.

I remember it as being a very, very windy day – hot and windy. Seas were well up and the lunchtime stop on that offshore little island was very welcome. The quick dip to wash off dried salt was briefly good too.

Arunas' cry as the croc took him was eerie. I remember it as a half cry/a half shout. That's the best way I can describe it. He was being shaken around by the croc. When I got out to him, all I could see was a long fat dark shape in 'boiling' water. I didn't know if it was a croc or a shark at that moment.

You know sometimes, crazy things go through your head - when I grabbed it around the widest part of its body, I remember thinking to myself: “Wow, what a lovely smooth belly it has!”

When the croc had gone and we were standing there in thigh deep water with our combined four legs, I remember thinking we are in big trouble now. That would've been one pissed off croc out there! And going back to the beach I retreated backwards, looking out for the croc's return and being ready to grab it again if it came back. Pretty silly really –

trying to do something to that powerful thing would be like trying to flag down a speeding train with a candle!

So there we were then at the water's edge. Mike and I did a quick assessment of Arunas' wounds. Lots of puncture wounds and rips, mainly on his right leg. The back of his leg was the worst. There was also a big tooth hole in a delicate part of his anatomy. Losing your life is tough but possibly losing your manhood is worse!

There was also a deep open rip across the front of Arunas' leg in his groin. I wasn't sure exactly where the femoral artery ran but it looked to be pretty close to me so I knotted my rashie around his upper thigh and I had a stick nearby to twitch it if the artery popped. Overall though, Arunas was pretty lucky, there wasn't much blood loss. He did accuse me of trying to infect him with my rashie though! (The Thursday Island hospital surgeon said it was only 2cm from the artery)

Mike and I worked as a pretty good team after that I thought. We opened every one of our first aid kits – and there was still weren't enough bandages. We gave up on that in the end. One of us was always with him doing his obs in the tent while the other did things – the V sheet, the signal fire, the sign scratching in the sand.

Mike's PLB was singing away but we didn't know if it was going to work. Just what to do was running through my head over and over. Arunas was alive but infection was surely going to get him if we didn't get help very quickly. I thought of towing him in his kayak with Mike supporting him to Captain Billy's Landing on the mainland but would there be anyone there? Arunas' *Greenlander* kayak had a small cockpit. If we got him into it, would his leg stiffen so we couldn't get him out? All these thoughts.

Wasn't the sight of that plane welcome! It swooped in low, lights on, about five times. They were able to read our sign too. I later heard that they reported many croc tracks on the beach but they weren't croc tracks - just the way we moved the heavy kayaks up the beach!

Another three hours later and we heard the unmistakable low frequency hum of the chopper. That was good! Mike and I had cleared a little helipad, which they appreciated. They weren't there long - into the tent, check Arunas out, stick a line in, get him into the chopper and they were gone to Thursday Island (TI). All was quiet except for the constant wind.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" Mike and I said to each other. "Did all that really happen?" We were so high - we didn't sleep for 48 hours.

We thought we were alone for the night but an hour later in came the navy. That was interesting. Two big rubber duckies full of sailors, all packing automatic weapons. When the croc reappeared off the point, they really wanted to shoot it. You could hear all their weapons being cocked. Mike and I prevailed and they didn't shoot it, which was good.

I remember the commanding officer on the beach asking if we knew what Mike's PLB had done. "Sure," I said, "it got Arunas to hospital."

"More than that" he said. "There are three warships in the Coral Sea standing by to assist!"

HMAS *Huon* took us to TI. They were great on that ship but really, Mike and I just wanted to sit and think. All these thoughts of Arunas being rolled by the croc and water closing over him. Simply awful.

Not much to do on TI for the weeks while Arunas recuperated. We did a story for commercial TV, which was OK. Ever the negotiator, Mike scored us a few nice nights in the up-market Jardine Hotel. They gave us \$5,000, and we gave it all away to the hospital and the Helicopter Volunteer Rescue guys.

So, it was a happily ever adventure for us all. We're all still paddling, Arunas' wounds healed well and the croc still swims.

I later did a solo trip up north and camped with Queensland scientist Mike Bell doing turtle research on beautiful Ingram Island. He'd done a croc survey on all the Barrier Reef Islands - and guess on which island he found the most crocs?



Dave's reenactment. photo: unknown

In Our Backyard: Paddling the Pine Barrens

Jaclin Gilbert



The narrow upper Wading. photo: Rick Wiebush

The New Jersey Pine Barrens is a world apart from most of the landscapes found on the North Atlantic coastal plain. The term Barrens alludes to the early European settlers' opinion that the sandy, acidic soil was not useful for agriculture, though pines and other acid loving plants happily grow there. The Pine Barrens is a blend of mixed use and protected land, with the Wharton and Bass River National Forests as the centerpiece. The area is threaded with waterways that offer great paddling opportunities, and the paddle that I have come to love is the Wading River. It winds (and I do mean winds) its way from the upper reaches of the Wharton Forest down to the broad Mullica river. It's a fascinating

journey that encapsulates the changes from a narrow woodland stream to broad river to marshy estuary. It is particularly enjoyable in the spring and fall, as summer can be crowded.

The drive to the put-in at Hawkins Bridge introduces the distinctive feel of the Pine Barrens. Sandy backroads cleave through scrubby forests and water is everywhere. Here in the heart of the Wharton Forest dwellings are rare. That isolated feeling may be part of what feeds the area folklore - in particular, the legend of monstrous Jersey Devil. Sightings of the bat-like creature go back to the 18th century and persist to this day, though reports of

close contact are rare. Most people fear the blood curdling screams the devil supposedly makes more than its visage, which looks like a camel or a goat. I've paddled the Wading River three times now, and I have yet to hear or meet the devil - but I keep looking!

When you reach the put-in one of the defining features of Pine Barrens rivers becomes obvious. Here at Hawkins Bridge, the stream is narrow and dark brown, and, at first glance, a little suspect. The dark colored water is a result of the tannins that stain the river from cedar leaves and pig iron deposits. The early settlers discovered pig iron on the banks of Pineland rivers and smelted it on site, most famously for cannonballs used by the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Remnants of those communities still dot the Barrens. The water is actually some of the purest on the east coast, and the dark hue is part of what makes a Wading river paddle so atmospheric. So launch by the bridge, and you will soon come across one of the other facets of this river: current.

The Wading has a noticeable current at pretty much any level above dead low. This can range from a pleasant nudge, like we found on a recent Fall paddle, to rather insistently pushy water after spring rains or storms. Midsummer can occasionally bring an opposite issue - low water. It's not a bad idea to check in with folks at Mick's Pine Barrens Canoe and Kayak (google it!) to get a read on the "current" conditions. And remember, keep an eye out for strainers and trees that can create an interesting obstacle course during most paddles, but can present problems at higher flows.

On the upper reaches of the river you move through dim tunnels created by the forested banks close by either side. As streams join the main branch, the waterway widens a little. Soon, the banks feature small sandy cliffs leading up to open woods. Travelling through light and dark is dazzling on a bright day, particularly as the sun glints off the waters.



Strained! Photo: Rick Wiebush

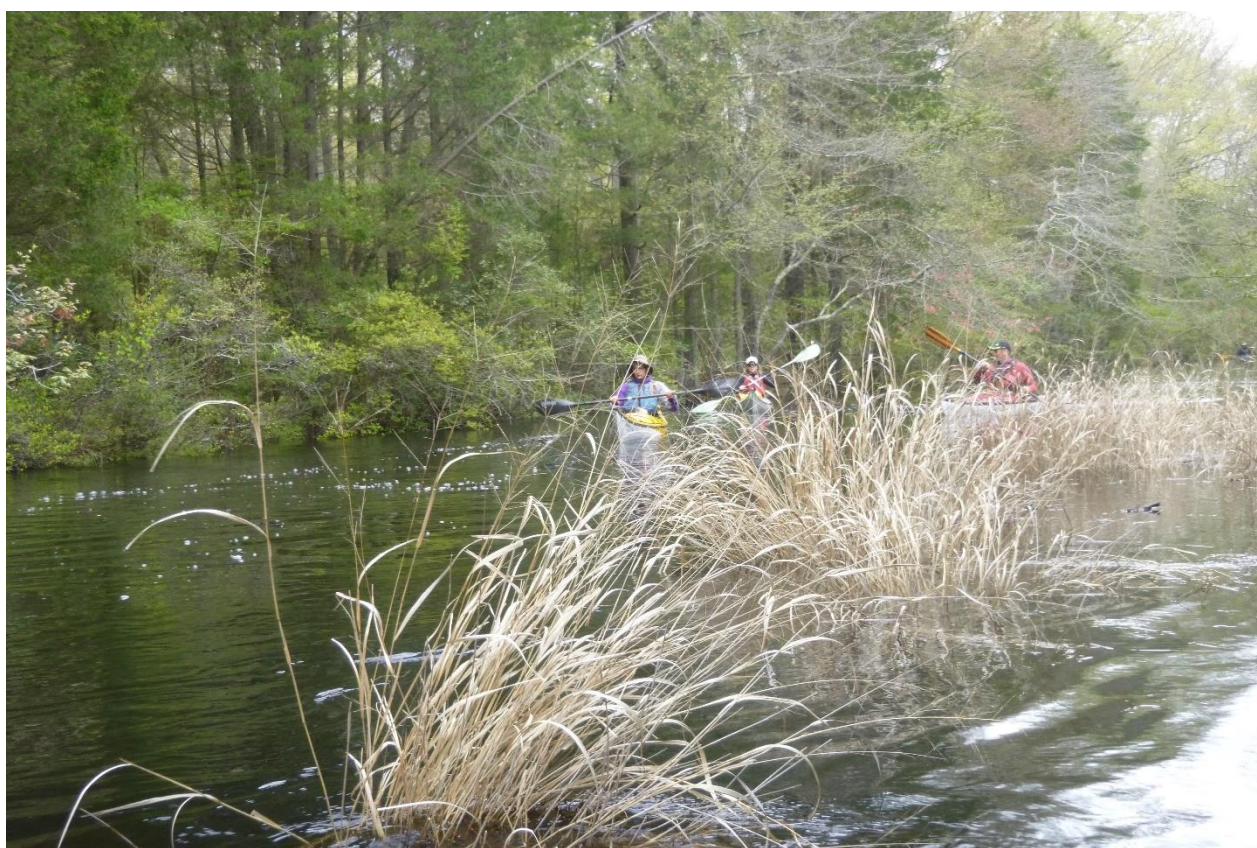
One of the predominant features of the upper Wading is a series of oxbow bends that pop up about every 50 yards and that create a slalom through the woods. The bends intensify the current, so remember that the fastest water on a bend is on the outside of the curve. This gives you an opportunity to play with a variety of strategies and strokes to manage your movement. It's fun to experiment with different ways to slide around the curve as gracefully as possible (full disclosure - I don't always manage graceful!) Side slips, bow rudders, edging, occasional sweeps; what's the combo that will work this time? Add in a small obstacle at the bend and the challenge factor goes up.

The trip is perfect as a two-day excursion, with primitive group camping at Bodine Field handily positioned in the center. From Hawkins Bridge to Bodine Field is 9.3 miles, and Godfrey's Bridge makes an excellent lunch stop. At the end of the first day, you slide right in to the beach below your campsite at Bodine Field. Next morning, pack up and wend the 11 miles to the take out at Chestnut Neck boatyard on the Mullica River. An easy shuttle makes both days simple to arrange.

Below Bodine Field on day 2, the river changes mood as it widens. The current slows, and the oxbow bends become rare. This day's gentler journey takes you through wildlife filled wetlands, and the secluded bays that pop up off the main

channel reward further exploration. The last bit of the Wading is tidal, and muddy estuarial marshes line the shores. Paddling alongside the 15-foot high reeds is a lovely farewell to a beautiful river, but warning - once you hit the marshes there is no easy place to land, so plan a break before you reach the point of no return. The Wading joins the broad Mullica river right above the Rte. 9/Parkway bridge, and the takeout is on the right shore just beyond the bridge.

While the Wading River is my favorite Pinelands paddle, there are other rivers worth exploring in and around the Wharton forest too. The Mullica and the Bastso also transverse pristine landscapes, while the Great Egg Harbor River (just south of the Wharton forest) is a National Wild and Scenic river. For more information on these paddles, the trip reports on Paddling.com are full of good details.



Heading south on the lower Wading Photo: Rick Wiebush

If you go:

Trip Length: Approximately 20 NM

Launch Point: Hawkins Bridge

State/County: NJ/ Burlington

Water Body: Wading River

Address: 3107 State Rt 563
Chatsworth, NJ 08019
(Mick's)

Ramps: Soft launches at Hawkins and Bodine

Port-a-Potties: enclosed pit toilets at Bodine

Launch Fee: No

Camping Fee: Yes, \$3 in-state; \$6 out of state

Camping Reservations Required: Yes

Parking: 15+ vehicles at Hawkins and Bodine

Contributors

Ashley Brown lives in Charleston, is an ACA L5 Instructor, L2 IT, and is Adjunct Professor of Coastal Kayaking at the College of Charleston.

Scott Brown is an ACA L4 Instructor who lives in Charleston and specializes in sea kayak trip planning, risk management, and navigation.

Jaclin Gilbert is an ACA L2 Instructor and BC 3* paddler who lives in Silver Spring, MD

R. Dennis Green lives in Maryland, loves rough water paddling, and is an outstanding photographer.

Nate Hanson lives in Maine and runs Pinniped Kayak. He is an ACA L5 Instructor and L3 IT.

Ed Rackley is a rough water paddler and cyclist. He designs, runs and assesses overseas disaster relief projects. A philosopher by training, he's interested in how adventure evolved from exploration to today's extreme sports - what's been gained and lost?

Declan Tracey is from Toronto, Canada. He is a Paddle Canada Sea Kayak Instructor and BC Sea Kayak Leader who loves paddling in rough water environments.

Bill Vonnegut runs Pacific Coastal Kayak, is an ACA L5 instructor, a Neptune's Rangers leader, and lives in Oregon.

Curtis Warrenfeltz is an avid amateur photographer who specializes in nature photos. He loves paddling the Virginia Eastern Shore and the Back Bay Wildlife Refuge in Virginia Beach.

Rick Wiebush runs Cross Currents Sea Kayaking. He lives in Baltimore and is an ACA L3 IT.

Dave Winkworth is an Australian sea kayaking instructor and expeditioner who lives on the rugged southeast coast of New South Wales

Coastbusters welcomes submissions of trip reports, incident descriptions and analyses, skills and "how-to" articles, boat and gear reviews, book and video reviews, and sea kayaking-related photographs.

We are interested in receiving submissions from all paddlers. It just so happens that many of this month's contributors are instructors. That is not a requirement.

Articles should be limited to about 750 – 1,000 words and submitted in Word. Photos should be submitted in .jpg format. Please send your submissions to Rick Wiebush at rwiebush@gmail.com.

Coastbusters is a publication of Cross Currents Sea Kayaking