

Overnight Paddle Trip

June 5, 6 & 7, 2015

By Bruce Julian

I had set up this paddle 6 months earlier and thought it would never get here. Now I am writing about how great it turned out, it was a fast 6 months. The plan was to meet at Little Island City Park in Sandbridge in the city of Virginia Beach. At times we had 17 or 18 who were signed-up for this trip, and then we would lose one or two, but we finely ended up with 15 who were signed-up, until the morning of the paddle, when 2 called and cancelled because they were sick; so we ended up with 14 people. This included Dennis, who had agreed to cook for the group; so this made our total number of participants 14; so we ended up with only 13 paddlers to challenge the waters of Back Bay. If you asked some of the group about this trip; they would tell you that it was a challenge at times. The Bay while being only 4 to 6 feet deep on the average, can become pretty rough when strong winds come in from Northeast or from the West. On the way down to False Cape State Park, where we would be staying for 2 nights, there are 4 Islands on the bay where you can paddle on either side of each island, which helped us avoid some of the stronger winds.

We met at 2 P.M. at Little Island City Park, and everyone helped each other get their boats down into the water, this was about 200 feet across Sandpiper Road. We only had about 6 pairs of wheels to roll the boats down through the sand. Kyle and Andrew were going to be late because of Kyle's work, so we told him we would meet them at the south end of Long Island. I knew both were strong young men and would have no problem catching up to us. Dennis had all of our food in his car and this had to be transferred to a State Truck. There are sadly, no private vehicles allowed through Back Bay Wildlife Refuge to False Cape State Park. A Park Employee; Kathleen, said that she would wait for Kyle and Andrew and also ask them to carry their gear into the park.

When we were all in the water and ready to start our 3 day, 36 mile paddle; we headed out. The water level in Back Bay is determined by which way the wind is blowing and how strong. Sadly to say, the winds had been blowing out of the Northeast for 3 or 4 days and this made the water level pretty low. As we paddled out from the put-in, we had to pole our boats out for a short distance before we reached deeper water. We were now out in the deeper waters and everyone was paddling against strong winds. The plan was to stop at least 3 times along the way; so we could get out and stretch our legs. We had restrooms at the second stop for anyone that needed them. We had been at our first stop, at the south end of Long Island, for about 10 minutes, when Kyle and Andrew come around the corner; now our little group was complete. I wanted to head towards Ragged Island to show everyone the brick foundation left from the old Hunt Club which stood there long ago, but after the wind picked up, I thought it would be better to paddle along side the west side of the Barrier Spit. After having our second stop at Barbour Hill, I thought that for our third stop, that I would ask everyone if we could gather up for a short rest and hear a few stories that I had heard about; "Back in the 90's". After the stories; we headed on to the Environmental Education Center (EEC) where we would be staying. The trip down was about 10 miles long and uneventful, and we didn't get to see the Bald Eagle when we passed the South Inlet.

Arriving at the EEC around 6:45 P.M.; it was good to get out of our boats and walk on land once more. Dennis had unloaded our gear and all of our food, and had our dinner waiting for us. We pulled the boats out of the water and we needed to hang some of the gear on lines to dry; so Jan and Ken pulled out ropes tying them between poles, this worked out very well. Going inside, I assigned the bunks that I had picked out; some upstairs and others downstairs, with the 2 Couples being assigned the rooms upstairs. After a few minutes of rearranging our gear, we all sat down to eat our first meal, which was very good, we had spaghetti with Dennis's Special Sauce. Around 10 P.M., we were all tired, and we turned in to have a good night's sleep; knowing what we had a lot to do on the next day.

Early the next morning, at around 6 A.M., we jumped out of our bunks, or maybe I should say that some of us jumped out, while some jumped slower than others. None the less, we all sat down to pancakes, eggs and bacon at 6:45 A.M., and at the end of Breakfast; there wasn't much left on the table. Dennis had sandwiches, or the makings of, which each person prepared on their own, with turkey, ham, and cheeses, and as always; Peanut Butter and Jelly, to take with us on our trip down into North Carolina to Carova. Everyone was outside and ready to get the boats into the water at about 7:45 AM, and we helped each other until all 13 boats were in and ready to go. Paddling South towards Big Ball Island, the wind was blowing about 10 to 15 MPH from our right side (North), and everyone needed to paddle a little

harder with each stroke. Reaching the island, we took a break to let everyone catch up. On the South side of Big Ball Island is Horse Island Creek, which runs between the two islands. This time I had wanted to paddle around Horse Island, because I thought it was a shorter distance than going down the twisted Horse Island Creek, and it was. With the wind at our backs we moved at a good speed and reached Deal's Creek in about 15 minutes.

As we crossed over the State Line, there was only a small bump in the water and everyone made it O.K. Ha-Ha! We stopped on Mann Island to take our first out of boat break, and to see the old Cinder Block Hunt Club, we meant that we were about half-way on our trip down to Carova. Just past Mann Island, we had two ways that we could paddle, and with the wind blowing for the past 4 days; I was afraid that we may not have enough water to take the short cut. The Creek which we took brought us out into Knotts Island Bay, with a view of the lower end of Knotts Island. It is only about 2 miles across to Knotts Island from this point, which I may do next time on another trip. They have a nice boat dock on Knotts Island and there is a Restaurant where we could sit down in A.C. and have our lunch.

We turned East across the Bay, and then we paddled about 1 mile to the canals, which we would take to our next take-out. Crossing the bay, you couldn't see the entrance to the canals, until a Motor Boat came out; then we pointed the front of our kayaks to that spot, and paddled on. I wanted the group to see and get to hear Ernie Bowden, who has lived in this area all of his life, he just turned 90 this year. When one of our Paddlers asked him how old he was; he said "90 years, 6 months and 4 days old", he wasn't sure about the number of hours. The canals that we paddled were dug by him and his company many years ago, and they did a great job on them; as you can see on Google Maps. He has been a House Mover, a Cattleman, raised Buffalos, and Fisherman. He also ran a Duck Hunting Club and had been the Commissioner for that area of North Carolina. On the day that we showed up, he had just got back from fixing a woman's leaky pipes, under her sink, and was changing his clothes so to look good for us. I had called him when we had stopped at Mann Island; so to remind him of our visit, and then the lady called him, so he only had less than 2 hours to do the job. WHAT A MAN! We ate our lunch out on his deck, while he talked while standing up with a cane an hour and a half, and 'Yes', we did try and get him to sit in the shade, but "no Thank You" was his answer. We thanked him for his hospitality and the use of his bathroom and all of the information that he gave us. We then headed to the local Volunteer Fire Station. Ernie's house is only about 200 yards North of the Fire House, where the take-out is located. We knew that the Station would open at 12:00 Noon, and since none of us had ever been inside, we were all very surprised when we walked in. This is not just a Fire House, but also a Gift Shop, and a small Store, and guess what; they sell Ice Cream, and about everyone bought some. We enjoyed our stay in Carova, for over 2 hours, but all things must come to an end.

We still had to paddle back to the EEC to enjoy our big meal of Steak or Salmon with Bake or Sweet Potatoes, and Dennis didn't disappoint us. The trip total mileage was a little over 14 miles, and it took us about 9 hours. After the initial paddle, some went inside to rest, some went for a 7 mile hike down the beach to N.C., and others went for a 4 mile Kayak Trip out to Little Cedar Island. At around 7 P.M., we all gathered in the dining room to enjoy the Dinner that Dennis had prepared for us, and we talked over everything that we had experienced on this beautiful day. Everyone turned in by 10 P.M. and dreamed of the paddle that we would have, ahead of us on Sunday morning, with the Northeast winds blowing into our faces. Some of us thought of how much fun it would be, while others thought about how hard it would be, but I hope everyone did have a good time on this trip and would want to do it again someday.

The next morning came and everyone packed up, cleaned up and loaded their kayaks for the trip out. As we looked out over the bay, it was as slick as glass and everyone thought their prayers had been answered, but (there is always a but). Mother Nature can and will change very fast. We hadn't paddled more than 30 minutes when the winds picked up, and once again we had the North Wind in our faces, and it stayed that way for the entire rest of the trip. For the last mile and a half, we did scoot around on the West Side of Bread Island and had some relief from the winds. As I had told everyone when we had left, if the wind keeps blowing out of the North, we may have to get out and pull our boats the last 100 feet or so, in order to get back to solid ground, and we did have to do just that. The trip back took us about 6 hours, and after loading up our boats, we all said our good-byes, and headed towards home. Everyone said how much they had enjoyed the trip, and hoped to do it again someday.

P.S. On this trip, some prayers were made; and some may not have been answered; as each wanted, but I had one answered within 2 minutes of asking. As I paddled alone from Little Cedar Island, the winds picked-up and were blowing a Thunder Storm with Lightning towards me and I prayed "Oh Lord can you

please make that storm go a different way for about 30 minutes so I can get out of the water” and He did !
The storm turned South, and as I stepped out onto dry land, it turned back towards the West.