Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

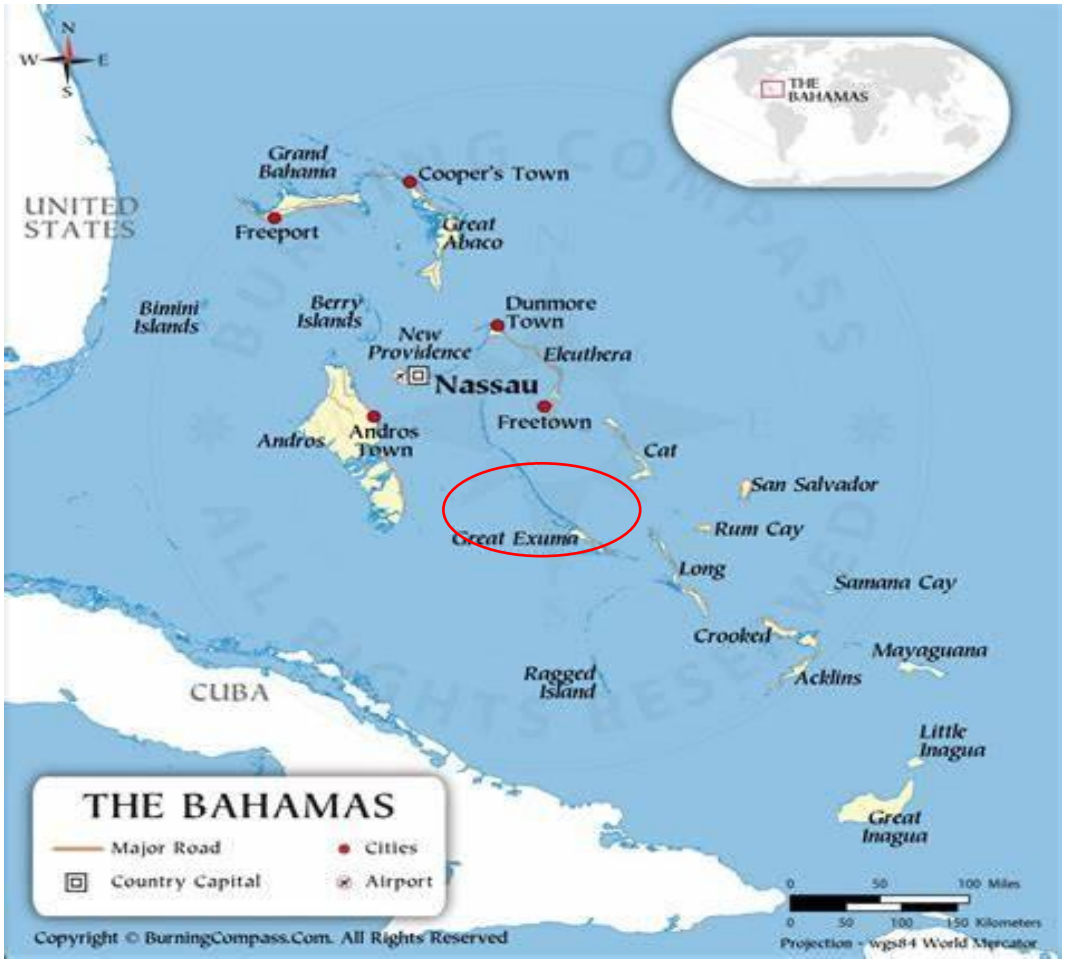
March 2025

Map of the Month

Donald Trump

The Exumas

Sammantha Magsino, Bev Coslett, Joanne Goodall



It was November in Maryland and I wanted to kayak somewhere warm. Bev (Charleston, SC), Joanne (Pittsburgh, PA), and I decided to have an exploratory, island-hopping adventure in the Exuma Cays, in the Bahamas. Bev handled communications with the outfitter (Out Island Explorers) to arrange kayak rental; Joanne found an apartment we could use as a base before and after the trip; I explored conditions and potential routes and camping locations.

A cold front moving in would bring a few days of sustained 25-35 mph winds sometime during our trip. Winds in the area are typically out of the north, but the approaching front made wind directions unpredictable. Given the uncertainties with the weather, we decided to stay fairly close to Great Exuma, settling on a route that would keep us mostly on the leeward side of the islands and offer some protection when the front moved in.

The base at George Town and the put in at Barreterre (both circled)

Turquoise waters and wildlife

The shoreline was a mix of limestone outcrops, sandy beaches, and mangroves. We could camp on any beach other than those on privately-owned islands. We enjoyed four beautiful campsites during our six nights of camping, staying twice at two of the sites.

The clear water and range of colors stunned us every day. Shades of turquoise varied depending on the sun and depth to the underlying white sands, limestone reefs, sea grasses, or sponges. Every turn we took in our boats, and hill we hiked, revealed even more shades of turquoise—it was, literally, breathtaking. It didn't get old after a week.

Having grown up snorkeling and diving in South Florida and the Florida Keys, I knew something of the wildlife we would see. But I wasn't prepared for how easy it was to see it! The sea floor was as clear to us from our kayaks as if looking through glass. Our watery paths often meandered as we followed huge stingrays, stopped to look at giant sea stars, or changed course to look at the sharks or speedy sea turtles swimming by. During one paddle, I curiously followed a trail in the sand 10-12 feet below and finally caught up to a huge queen conch moving along the bottom. On another paddle with a favorable current, Bev had the great idea to jump in the water with our snorkeling gear, clip our tow lines to our own boats, and let the current push us and our boats to our destination while we got an even better view of the sea bottom!

Limestone shoreline Photo: Samm Magsino

Photo: Bev Coslett

Mangrove swamps, tidepools, and blue holes gave us opportunities to see different marine life. Most of the sharks we saw were among the mangroves, although Joanne saw a small shark while paddling slowly along a sandy shoreline near one of our campsites. Joanne paddled next to a large stingray that, when startled, raised its tail straight up and out of the water as if in warning. Its wing enveloped the side of her kayak.

I came face-to-face with a barracuda trapped in an 8-foot-deep tide pool I was snorkeling in (I got out quickly). We found a sea turtle tearing up sponges from the seafloor while snorkeling around limestone outcrops. Several small fish were darting in and around the turtle's head taking advantage of an easy meal (picture).

There were wildlife encounters on land, too. While deciding on a campsite, we saw these bizarre tracks (and wondered if we wanted to camp near whatever made them. Following the tracks, we had the first of our encounters with resident iguanas (!) that we would see again on other cays. They checked us out and slowly shimmy-walked back into the woods, dragging their big tails.

Maneaters

The iguanas weren't maneaters, but DANG, the no-see-ums were, especially in the early evenings if the wind was low. We learned to set up camp earlier in the afternoon and leave our protective clothing out and ready to don after we went and played somewhere for a couple more hours. When we got back to camp, we would peel off our paddling clothes, jump in the water to bathe, and then jump into our tents to put on our mesh. The no-see-ums might stay for a while, or they would be gone once the sun went down and there was a breeze. It wasn't too bad because we didn't need an excuse to get in our tents and stare at the beautiful night skies, stars, and the Milky Way through our fly-less tents.

As beautiful as the marine life was, the diversity or quantity wasn't what we (perhaps unrealistically?) expected. We wondered if the recent unusually high water temperatures experienced in much of the Caribbean might have affected marine life. We did see evidence of coral bleaching here and there. Some sailors we spoke with had similar observations. Back in George Town, locals told us some coral had died off. We can only hope the damage isn't spreading or permanent.

The Front Moves In

We lucked out with the weather and had sunny skies, mild breezes, and pleasant paddling most of our trip. The front hit us the last few days and brought interesting conditions. We considered the charts, watched the wind and water, and decided to choose a protected campsite relatively close to our final takeout and stay there two nights. We scouted for someplace that would give us shelter and play options on our next to last day. We ended up on a small beach on the point of an island surrounded by mangroves and limestone outcrops and protected by

Sea turtle in crystal-clear water Photo: Samm Magsino

Iguana tracks. Photo: Bev Coslett

our own private lagoon. We set up a cozy camp, tied our boats to the mangroves so the tide wouldn't carry them away, made dinner, and settled in for the night. The wind picked up and rain started overnight, but we had chosen an excellent campsite.

We spent our last full day relaxing, snorkeling, playing in the tidepools, and walking and wading around the island. No paddling; we later learned that winds were a steady 35 knots that day.

Fighting Wind, Waves and Currents

We faced a 25-knot wind from the northeast on our last day and the final paddle. The charts told us it was about five nautical miles at a heading of about 115 to the channel that would lead us to the takeout. However, following that heading would quickly take us out of the wind shadow of the islands. It would be a fight to avoid being blown too far southwest. Instead, we took advantage of the five cays aligned roughly east-west between us and our target island for shelter and rest opportunities. It would add mileage, but the paddling would be easier, and we were in no hurry.

The winds were fierce in the channels between the islands, and especially where we had to fight long-shore currents and waves at the east end of the islands. However, the crossings were all a half mile or less, so we got through them relatively quickly. At the fifth cay, we picked a heading, sighted a target on the main island, and chose our ferry angle. My GPS track shows an almost perfectly straight line to our target (that was for you Rick W!).

People and Culture

The Bahamian pledge of allegiance ends "one people united in love and service." The people we met reflected this pledge. Everyone smiles and greets you with a handshake and conversation. School kids enthusiastically waved and shouted "hello!" A groundskeeper at the community center told me about the history of the center and its activities. A weaver in a souvenir shop proudly told me about weaving traditions handed down from her grandmother and mother, explaining how they achieved the colors and textures that are both utilitarian and artistic. Cab drivers happily answer all your questions, provide great suggestions, and then ask questions of their own with sincere interest. There are frequent car horn toots of greeting among residents as they pass each other. Everyone treats you as if you could be their next great friend.

In town on the last night our neighbor and George Town resident invited us into town to join her and friends for dinner and rake-and-scrape—traditional Bahamian music that is something like zydeco, but with an island rhythm. The band we heard had a singer, a guitar player, two skin covered drums (under which was placed a can of sterno to tighten the skins before playing), and saws held at the hip, bent at different angles, and scraped to create distinctive rhythms. No one can stand still when the band plays. Locals begin dancing and pull anyone in. Rake-and-scrape is an important component of Junkanoo, a festival celebrated around Christmas and Boxing Day in Great Exuma. One local described Junkanoo as "like Carnivale, but 'more covered up' [pointing to her cleavage]", with parades, huge elaborate costumes, dancing, marching bands, and, of course, rake-and-scrape.

Crossing between islands. Photo: Samm Magsino

From there, we had an interesting paddle to the channel with the wind at our backs through shallow waters that required constant maneuvering to avoid grounding (those P300s don't like to edge). We attained the channel and then fought the wind the last mile or so to our pickup. It took us a little under five hours to paddle 10 miles. No speed records, but it was an intellectually and physically challenging and fun day.

If You Go

Out Island Explorers' owner, Dallas, was welcoming and helpful with gear and advice. He rents kayaks (and paddle boards and sailboats), gear, and camping equipment, although we chose to take our own for comfort and cost. He supplied brand new Boreal Design Epsilon P300 kayaks, spray skirts, stove fuel, extra dromedaries for fresh water, excellent chart books, and even snorkeling gear. He picked us up for the 40-minute drive up the single two-lane winding road that runs the length of Great Exuma to our put-in at the Barreterre dock. Along the way, he told us about the natural and cultural histories of the area, weather patterns and their implications for paddling, and answered all our questions.

This was an easy trip to plan. There are reasonable flights every day to George Town. Out Island

Explorers provides good quality boats and gear and phenomenal service at excellent prices. There are numerous places to camp and no permits are necessary. There are grocery stores, but they have limited stock and hours, and food is expensive (a loaf of bread costs $10). It is worth planning your camping food ahead and bringing it with you. Being able to carry enough water for the duration allows a lot of flexibility; longer trips will require consideration of where you can refill.

Accommodations before and after camping are available, but they can be pricey and reservations can be "informal". However, good deals are to be had. The three of us stayed in the same apartment on both ends of our trip—a 1-bedroom with a murphy bed in the living room, 2 full bathrooms, a full kitchen, and a washer/dryer for around $100 a night for each of us. It was attached to a small resort and we had access to amenities (a shuttle into town, a private beach, pool, sit-on-top kayaks, and paddleboards, concierge, etc.).

The lack of sidewalks or shoulders on the 2-lane and curvy Queens Highway make walking challenging or even treacherous. The shuttle was handy and taxis are readily available.

It was great to have resort access, but even more fun to get out into the community. All meals we had at restaurants were delicious, but the restaurants run out of food early, and it's polite to keep track of how many beers you ordered so you can let them know when settling your tab. We had two wonderful meals at an area known as the "Fish Fry"—a group of outdoor establishments serving beverages and delicious food. The Fish Fry was packed in the evenings with both residents and tourists (except Sundays—most are closed).

In all, there were no downsides to this trip. We had great paddling partners, great equipment, a beautiful location, delicious food, fun music, and the opportunity to make acquaintance with friendly locals and vacationers from all over the world. I'm already thinking about returning for winter of 2026!

Glad I…/Wish I…

All of us felt well prepared, but here are some thoughts about what I was glad I had with me and what I wish I had brought:

Glad I brought a bug net for my head; wish I had a full suit. Joanne and Bev wished they had some kind of bug repellent in addition to their suits.

Glad I had a mask and snorkel; wish I brought fins to make it easier to swim deeper or against currents.

Glad I brought a sleeping bag (my liner alone was not enough); wish my bag was a little lighter.

Glad I brought .5mm neoprene; wish I left the booties behind. The neoprene allowed me to enjoy snorkeling in 70-degree water for longer. The booties never touched water.

Glad I brought a mat to put on the ground in front of my tent entrance.

Glad I brought work gloves. Great while snorkeling (e.g., to hold onto the sharp limestone rock), gathering firewood, and other tasks around camp.

Wish I didn't leave my general repair kit back in town (I raided Bev's more than once!)

In This Issue

Ocean whitewater. Photo: Mark Boyd

Bill Pinkney: Solo Around The World

Rick Wiebush

As I closed in on Cape Horn, the winds began to pick up. Building from thirty to thirty-five knots, they were winds I was well accustomed to…But the winds continued to rise from forty to forty-five knots … The boat was getting harder and harder to control, so I put up the storm jib. The wind out of Antarctica then increased with such ferocity that all I could do was drop the mainsail completely and keep up the storm jib. Even with the one sail, I was traveling faster than I really wanted. Speeding along at seven, eight and as much as nine knots, Commitment *bashed into the waves, often getting slammed by cross waves. This was not a promising situation, so I took down my storm jib, leaving just the bare poles. Amazingly, with no sail up, I was still traveling into the waves at five knots.*

I had survived wind-swept storms and twenty-foot waves. I had been knocked down and knocked over. I had roiled in bed, dizzied by illness. Through all of this I always felt in control, that there was something I could do, but I was helpless against lightning. My boat was the tallest thing around, and my aluminum mast projected sixty-seven feet into the air – a target just taunting the gods to hurl their bolts at. There was no safe harbor or place to hide, no one to turn to. I was a tiny speck in the great, dark vastness of the infinite sea… As insidious as the lightning was, it was also capricious, attacking at irregular intervals from every direction. It flashed far away, off to the distance, and then right behind me. It flashed from the clouds, hitting the water, and then charged back, as though the very waves were on fire.

These were just a few of the on-going, at times chilling, challenges faced by Bill Pinkney as he circumnavigated the world on his 47-foot sailboat.

At age 55.
For 32,000 miles.
For 22 months.
Alone.
Via the dangerous Southern Capes route, which only a few people had done before.
And the first Black person to do it.

Bill Pinkney died last year at age 87. He left a huge legacy that might not have been anticipated from someone who grew up poor in a single-parent household on the southside of Chicago and who by turns was a professional limbo dancer, an elevator repair guy, an x-ray technician in the Navy, a makeup artist, a Revlon product developer and marketing manager (for African-American women), and a Public Information Officer for the City of Chicago. And who previously had minimal experience sailing long distances solo.

"figured if I could sail 24 or 48 hours alone, I could just keep doing that over and over until I got all the way around the world"

- Bill Pinkney

Pinkney's boat "Commitment". Photo: Yachting Monthly

Pinkney tells it, he was inspired by a book at age 12 to eventually undertake some great adventure in life.- "sailing off to become my own person and to return home a hero". But it wasn't until he turned 50 – and started thinking about what kind of legacy he could leave his grandchildren - that he started seriously thinking about what that adventure might be. He loved the sense of freedom he had experienced as a small-boat sailor when he was stationed in Puerto Rico with the Navy and later on bigger boats on Lake Michigan. When, almost 50, he lost his PIO job, he realized he had to get serious about what he was going to do with the rest of his life. It slowly became clear that the thing that he really wanted to throw himself into body and soul was sailing. He had previously given some thought to a solo circumnavigation and finally decided to put his dream into practice.

His initial plan was to do the circumnavigation via a relatively safe route that would take him through the Suez and Panama canals. But a sailing mentor challenged him to go for it and take the far more challenging and dangerous Southern Capes route.

This took him down to Brazil, across the Atlantic, around the tip of South Africa, past Cape Leeuwen of Western Australia, around the southern tips of Tasmania and New Zealand, across the dangerous Southern Ocean, around the fearsome Cape Horn at the tip of South America, and then back up to his starting point at Boston. Cape Horn is a crux passage for most ships and it was so for Pinkney: when he got there the winds were blowing at 50 knots and the seas were 30 feet!

"The sea doesn't care what your economic status is, your religion, your nationality, your sex. It doesn't care what you think. It cares about one thing: I am the sea"

- Bill Pinkney

Arriving home. Photo: Bill Pinkney

Pinkney as Educator

Pinkney didn't just do it for himself. Throughout the voyage, he maintained contact – via a satellite transponder, radio, and videotaped messages - with thousands of children in the public schools of Boston and Chicago, filling them in on his adventures and sharing his knowledge of sailing, weather, oceanography and, critically, the importance of following your dreams and using commitment and determination to achieve them. Then, in cooperation with the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), he created a television documentary "The Incredible Voyage of Bill Pinkney" that aired on PBS, the National Geographic Channel and Disney.

After the circumnavigation, Pinkney in 1999 developed a "Middle Passages Institute" that saw him and groups of teachers from across the country spend two years traveling 12,000 miles re-tracing the routes of slave ships between various slave markets in Africa, and their destination in the Caribbean and the U.S. During the trip Pinkney and the teachers broadcast their experiences and findings to hundreds of schools in the U.S. Another product of the project was a curriculum for school teachers on the nature and effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

That work continued when Pinkney joined the Board of Mystic Seaport Museum and was named captain of the newly-built replica of the 128 foot schooner the *Amistad*. The Amistad was used (and continues today) to educate people about issues of freedom and justice emerging the slave trade generally, and specifically about the case of the Sierra Leone slaves who while near Cuba seized the Spanish ship that was transporting them to America. Unable to sail back to Africa, the ship ended up being captured and towed to New London, Connecticut. There, the slaves faced slavery or execution. Their cause was taken up by New Englanders and lower courts and eventually (in 1841) the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the slaves and they became free men and women.

Bill Pinkney, a great adventurer and educator, passed away on August 31, 2023 at the age of 87.

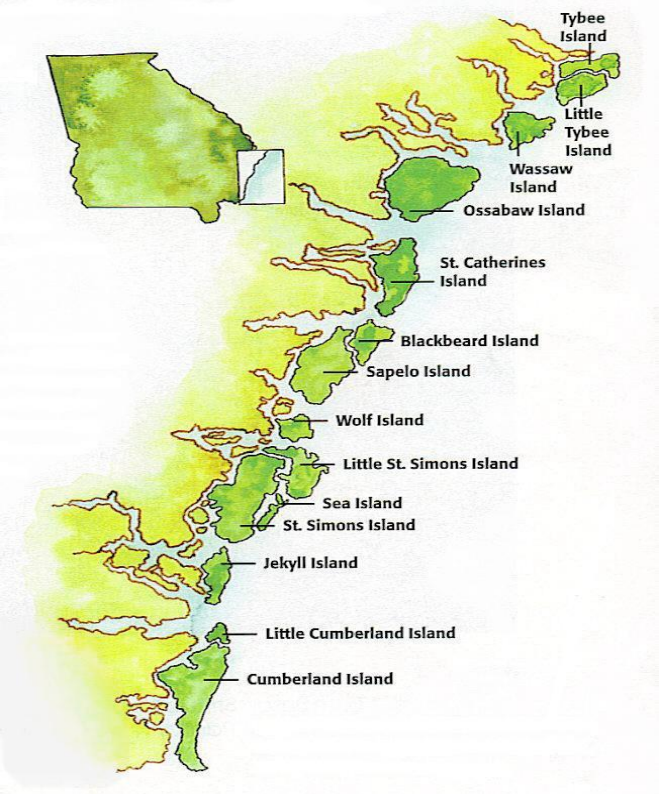
On the Amistad. Photo: Getty Images

Sources

Pinkney, W. (2006). As long as it takes: Meeting the challenge. Bunker Hill Publishing.
William "Bill" Pinkney: 2022 - Mystic Seaport Museum
Bill Pinkney and Solo Circumnavigation - Soundings Online
Capt. William "Bill" Pinkney's Biography

A Rare Summer Day on Wassaw Island

Whitney Sanford



The Georgia Barrier Islands. Source: Pinterest.

Low wind, ideal tides, and clear skies bode well for a day on Wassaw Island. Lured by the siren call of a deserted beach, we launched kayak and board from the Landings Marina on Skidaway Island and rode the tide towards the north end of Wassaw Island.

Wassaw Island is one of several largely undeveloped islands along the Georgia coast, and we can thank wealthy industrialists and financiers for their semi-wild condition. Shortly after the Civil War, the Parson family from Maine bought the Wassaw and later transferred ownership to the US government to prevent development, forming the Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge. Today, Wassaw and nearby Little Tybee, Ossabaw and St. Catherine's provide critical habitat for this marine ecosystem, and the isolated beaches foster an almost unimaginable sense of solitude and wilderness.

These islands are accessible only by boat, a perfect day trip for paddlers. However, this is coastal paddling, so it is important to wait for the right wind and tide conditions. Coastal Georgia boasts tides of up to 8-10′ feet, so that is a lot of water moving in and out of these rivers and sounds.

Path to the Atlantic. Photo: Whitney Sanford

Boneyard on Wassaw. Photo: Whitney Sanford

From the Landings Marina, we paddled approximately 6 miles down the Wilmington River, across Romerly Marsh Creek, and landed on the north end. We carried our gear above the high tide line, hoping the trees might offer even the tiniest bit of shade. Then, a long refreshing float and our first wildlife encounter. A large stingray reminded us to do the stingray shuffle.

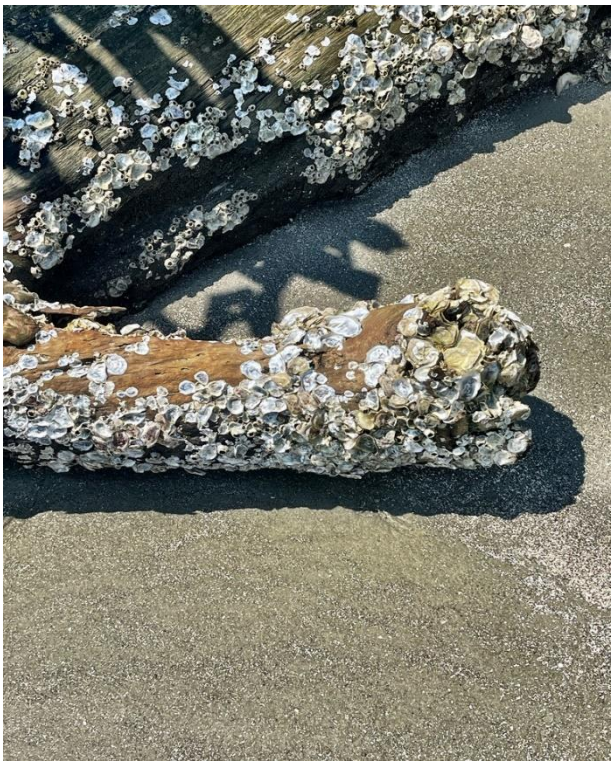
Seeking shade. Photo: Whitney Sanford

Cooled off by our float and Kathryn's watermelon, we walked toward a large stone block just offshore. This, Kathryn said, is what remains of Battery Morgan, a gun battery constructed during the Spanish-American War. That this block was once well onshore reveals just how much the sand and islands change over the years.

Battery Morgan, now well offshore. Photo: Whitney Sanford

The block marked the entrance to the island's dirt roads and a self-guided cell phone tour. We ambled slowly up the road, then quickly marched back out when the mosquito brigade emerged in force. The pond and the birds could wait until the colder months.

After fleeing the mosquitoes and any other critters inhabiting the interior, we wandered through the dead trees on the point. Storms and shifting tides create haunting boneyards of dead trees that appear on all of these barrier islands. These trees also function as a reef of sorts, providing shelter for fish and incubating oysters.



Oysters Rockefeller? Photo: Whitney Sanford

These barrier islands and the marshes surrounding them host great biodiversity, both on land and sea. The dark waters of estuaries—where the waters of rivers and the sea mingle—reveal life, or organic matter, and it is a mistake to dismiss this water as simply "dirty", as some do. The biologically rich waters of marshes and estuaries support juvenile fish, that often need a mix of fresh and salt water, and the microorganisms that feed them.

Horseshoe Crab. Photo: Whitney Sanford

Walking back to our gear, we noticed a horseshoe crab trapped in the sand. As we removed sand to free it, its tail twitched, and finally it swam away. Although horseshoe crabs might seem ubiquitous on the Gulf and Atlantic coast, their number has dwindled, due to both environmental factors and their blood being used for biomedical reasons.

And time for us to leave as well—an incoming tide, and the wind at our backs. Instead of retracing our steps, we detoured past the oyster mound at Dead Man's Hammock, wound our way through Old Romerly Marsh Channel, and then back across Romerly Marsh Creek to the Wilmington River. Kathryn warned me not to take that tempting left up Romerly Marsh Creek. It's a mistake you do not repeat.

Deadman's Hammock Oyster mound. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

We could have detoured more, but thoughts of Leopold's ice cream, a Savannah delicacy that my grandmother remembered from her childhood, fueled a speedy return. We slowed briefly to watch several baby sharks playing and feeding, then went to feed ourselves. Sitting on the marina deck, we reflected on such an unusual summer day—no signs of the afternoon storms. Typically signs of building storms chase us off the water by early afternoon. So while we lucked out on the day's conditions, in reality we are even luckier to have such a biologically and culturally significant area to explore.

Photos of the Month

Antarctica

Photo: Lisa Deziel

Photos of the Month

Cornwall Giant Tuna

Photo: Rupert Kirkwood

Photos of the Month

Curtis Creek, MD

Photo: Mark Baskeyfield

Knowing Stuff Helps: Plotting A Course

Rick Wiebush

Knowing how to plot a course using a chart and compass is an essential part of sea kayak navigation. You aren't always going to be hugging a coastline. You aren't always going to be able to just eyeball your destination and start paddling toward it. Instead, there will be times (e.g., on a long crossing) when you need to be able to: 1) calculate the course you need to follow to get from point A to point B, and then 2) get in your boat and use your compass to paddle on that course. There are multiple steps and considerations involved. But plotting a course is fairly straightforward once you know how to do it and IF you practice regularly.

The only equipment you usually need is a hand compass and a chart of the area in which you'll be paddling.

Some Basics

Parts of the Compass. Since we will be referencing different parts of the compass, it's worthwhile to review them quickly. See Figure 1. All compasses have a red magnetic needle (see "compass needle" in the diagram) that always points to magnetic north, no matter which way you turn the compass or the compass dial. All have a moveable dial with numbers representing 360 degrees (see "Bearing numbers on movable dial"). Most have orienting lines (see several black parallel lines in the diagram) and some type of bearing line (see short green line), although the colors may vary from compass to compass. Not all have a direction of travel arrow.

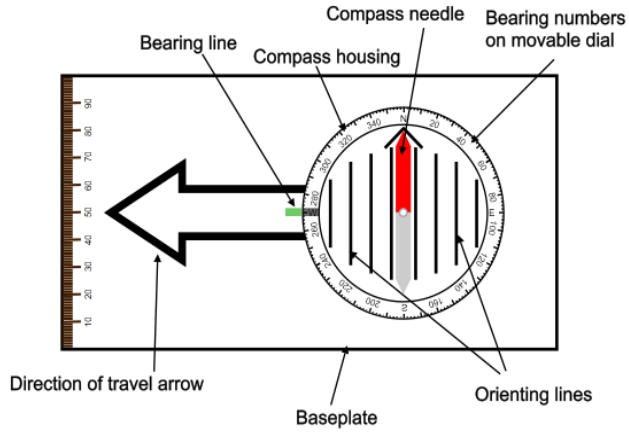


Figure 1. Parts of the compass

Variation: True vs Magnetic North. All nautical charts are laid out to correspond to "true" or geographic north. That is, the chart's lines of longitude run north and south to the poles. However, all compass needles point to magnetic north, which is not the same thing as true/geographic north. Figure 2 on the following page shows the difference between true and magnetic north.

Although they are hard to see, the lines of longitude in the chart on the right are pointing toward true, or geographic, north. The figure on the left shows that magnetic north lies approximately in Baffin Bay, to the southwest of the geographic north pole. True and magnetic north aren't the same place.

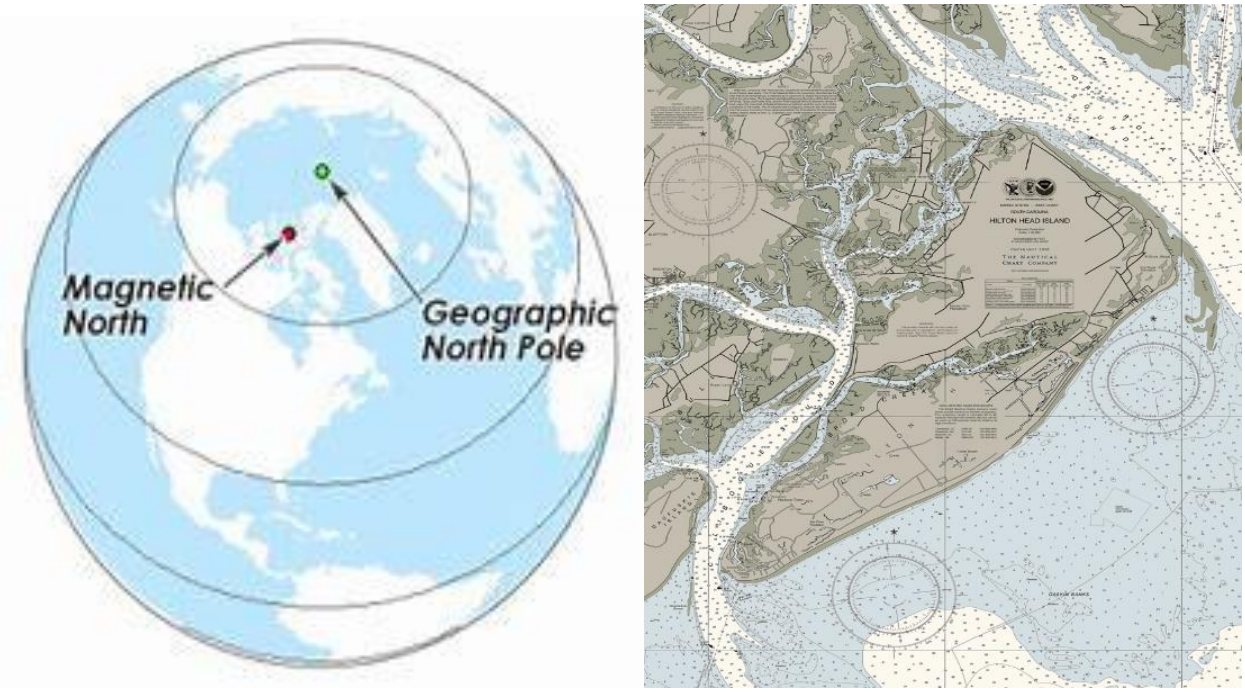


Figure 2. Difference between true and magnetic north

The difference between true and magnetic north is referred to as "variation" (or, on topographic maps, "declination"). This difference is important because a key step in plotting a course is done on a chart in relation to *true north*, but when we get in our boats we are using a compass that points to *magnetic north*. This necessitates a second step in plotting a course, which is taking account of the variation and adjusting our course accordingly. If we fail to account for variation before heading out, we stand a good chance of missing our target..

The difference in degrees between true and magnetic north depends on where you are on the face of the earth. Figure 3 below shows the differences in variation for different places in the U.S. If we were in the Florida panhandle - right next to the Gulf of **Mexico** - we would have almost no difference (0 degrees) between true and magnetic north. However, the further we move up the east or west coast, the greater the variation between true and magnetic. In Charleston the variation is about 5 degrees; Norfolk about 10 degrees; Boston about 15 degrees and, at the northern tip of Maine, it is about 20 degrees. Note that for the east coast, the variation in magnetic north is to the *west* of the north pole (true north), while on the west coast the variation is to the *east* of true north. We will show later why we need to keep this distinction in mind when plotting a course.

Figure 3. *Magnetic variation by U.S. location. Source: U.S. Geological Survey*

How do we know what the variation is for the specific place that we are paddling? All charts have a "compass rose" that shows the relationship of magnetic north to true north for the area covered by the chart. Figure 4 provides an example. The large star at the top of the circle indicates the direction true/geographic north, while the smaller arrow points to magnetic north. In this example (from east central Florida), magnetic north is at 356 degrees, or 4 degrees west of true north. In addition to the graphic illustration, the center of the compass rose (see black circle) shows the variation numerically and with greater specificity: at this place the variation is exactly "4 degrees, 15 minutes west".

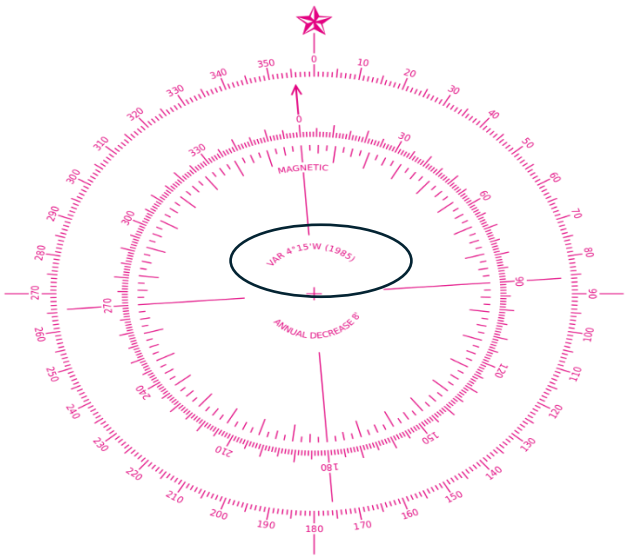


Figure 4. Compass Rose

Plotting a Course

With that contextual background, we are ready to go through the steps of plotting a course that we will follow to get from where we are at Point A to where we want to get i.e., Point B. **See Figures 5 and 6 on the following page.**

Step #1

1. On your chart, find where you are (point A) and where you want to go (point B).

2. Don't worry about orienting the chart – there's no need

3. Use the edge of your compass to connect those two points. (If the distance between the two points is longer than the length of your compass, you can use a ruler or other straight edge to connect the two points and then lay the edge of the compass along the straight edge.)

4. Have the direction of travel arrow pointed toward your destination.

In this example (see figure 5 on the following page), our put-in is at a ramp that is on Amelia Island, FL, near Fort Clinch. We are going to paddle across Cumberland Sound to the south end of Cumberland Island in Georgia, specifically to the entrance to Beach Creek. The ramp and the destination are circled in black in the illustration.

Note that we have connected the two spots using the *edge* of the compass and the red direction of travel arrow on the top of the compass is pointed toward Beach Creek.

Also note that: 1) we don't care where the red magnetic needle on the compass is pointed – it's irrelevant; and 2) we haven't had to do anything with the dial of the compass. Yet.

Step #2

1. Keeping the compass steady, turn the compass dial so that the several red orienting lines are parallel to the lines of longitude on the chart. Longitude, not latitude. Also make sure that the "N" on the compass dial is facing toward north on the chart. (See Figure 6, next page.)

It's hard to see the lines of longitude in this photo, but there is a faint one just to the left of the word "Whiting" and the numeral 63 in the upper right corner of the chart. Double check to be sure that we have made the orienting lines parallel to the line of longitude.

Note that you do not care where the red magnetic needle is pointing. It is irrelevant to this process.

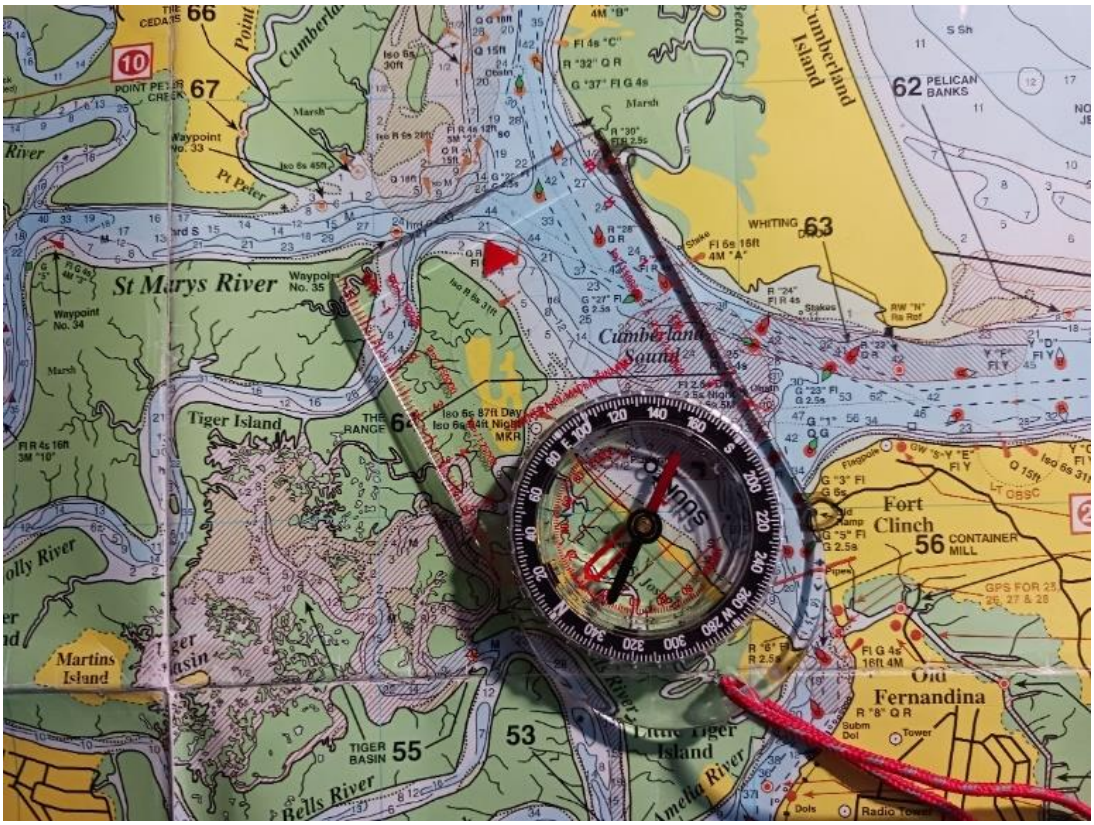


Figure 5. Connecting points A (put-in) and B (destination) with the edge of the compass

Figure 6. Turn the dial so that the several red orienting lines are parallel to the lines of longitude on the chart.

Step #3

1. The next step is to find out what our course is *based on true north.*
2. To do so, we just find the small white bearing line and read the number of degrees it is associated with on the compass dial. See Figure 6 below.
3. The tip of the pen in the photo is pointing to the white bearing line.
4. Reading the dial, we see that the course we want – based on true north – is 330 degrees. (Note that on this compass, each little white mark on the dial represents two degrees.)

Final Step #4

1. The last step requires accounting for variation. Our boat's deck compass is based on magnetic north, so before we start paddling, we have to convert our 330 degree true course to the magnetic course we need to follow.
2. In this example, we are on the east coast of the U.S. and the variation between magnetic and true is to the *west*. As a result, **we need to ***add*** the number of degrees variation (in this case 4 degrees) to the number we got for our true course**. Adding 4 degrees to our true course of 330 gives us a magnetic course of 334 degrees.
3. So when we get in our boat, we are going to turn it until the deck compass point to 334 degrees and follow that course.

Figure 6. Read the number of degrees at the bearing line to find your course based on true north.

Note that if we were on the west coast of the U.S., where the variation is to the east, all the steps for plotting a course would be the same except that we would have to **subtract** the number of degrees variation from our true course to get our magnetic course. So if we were in San Francisco, where the variation is about 15 degrees East, and plotted a true course of 45 degrees from point A to Point B, we would calculate 45 degrees minus 15 degrees to get a magnetic course of 30 degrees.

Practice

In my experience people learn how to plot a course fairly quickly. They also forget it even more quickly if they don't practice it. So here is a practice exercise to help solidify your understanding. All you need is a hand compass. It might help to print out this page, but you could also plot the course right on your computer screen.

Scenario

You are in the Virginia portion of the Chesapeake Bay, specifically at the SW corner of Beach Island. You want to do the 3.8 mile crossing to the southern tip of Watt's Island. Both places are circled in black on the chart in Figure 7.

Calculate your true and magnetic courses. The variation is 11 degrees west.

1. Connect the two points with the edge of the compass with the direction of travel arrow pointed toward Watts
2. Hold the compass steady while turning the dial so that the orienting lines are parallel to the lines of longitude on the chart.
3. Read the number at the bearing line.
4. Factor in the variation.
5. Answers at bottom of page 30.

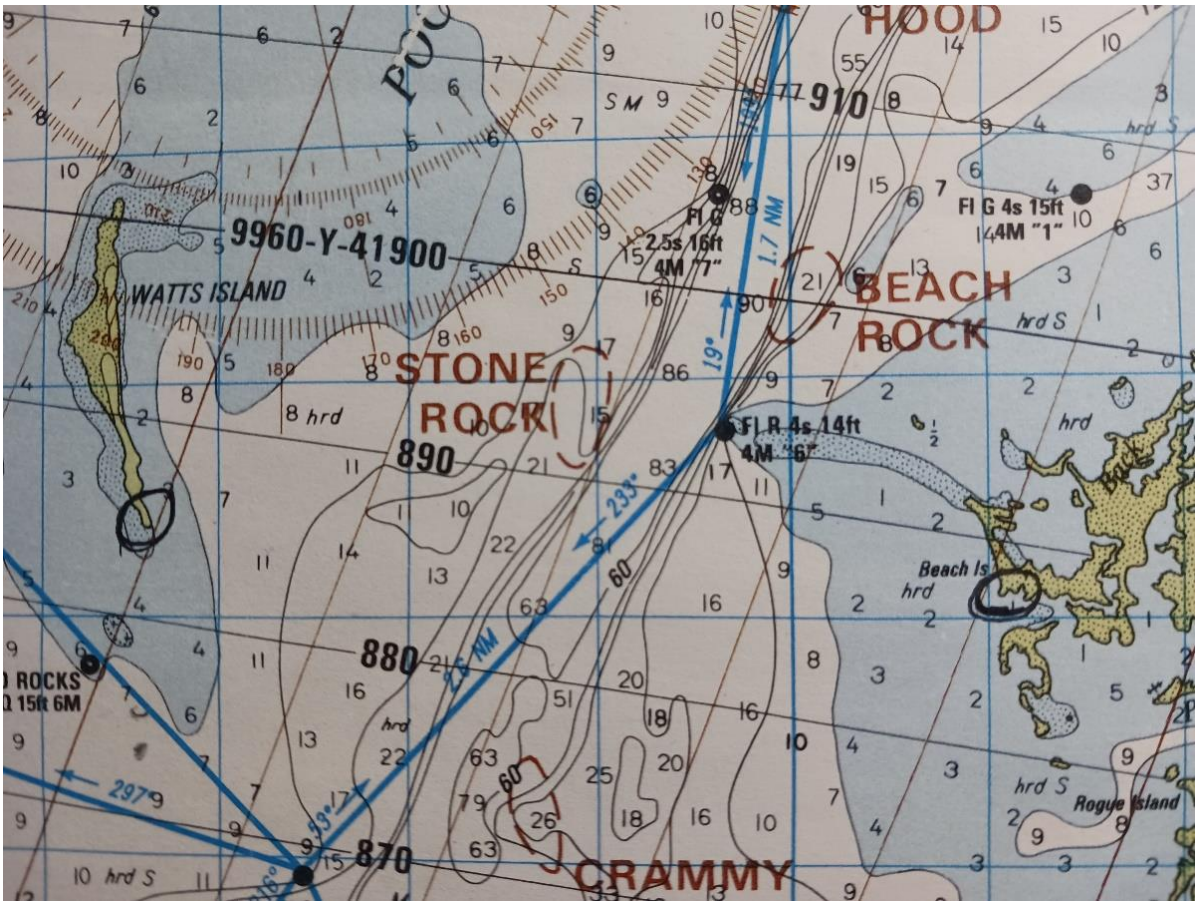


Figure 7 Practice. Establish true and magnetic courses from SW tip of Beach Island to south end of Watts Island.

Sea Kayak Educators Group (SKEG): Building An Instructor Community

Mike Hamilton

I've been lucky. When I first started kayaking in the late 1990s, I fell into good hands. Knowing that taking a few lessons would speed up my skill set development, I reached out to a local kayak shop in Alexandria, VA. The staff at Atlantic Kayak put me in a Necky Looksha Sport and we were off to the races. I took the usual intro courses and connected with the instructors. After a few sessions, they sensed something in me and encouraged me to conduct guided tours for the company. So I did. That went well and it occurred to me that I could develop an even deeper understanding of this paddlesport if I expanded into teaching. So I did.

You know the old adage:

WE REMEMBER 10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what we see and hear
70% of what we discuss with others
80% of what we personally experience
95% or what we teach others

- *Edgar Dale*

Connections Count

But that wasn't enough. I needed connection. I joined the Chesapeake Paddler's Association and experienced a paddling community for the first time. I was astounded that so many doors opened when I found my tribe. I belonged. I gave. I got.

Fast forward to 2004 and I attended the Delmarva Paddlers Retreat for the first time. Similar to CPA but different in so many ways. Focused on Greenland paddling and qajaq building techniques, this annual event connected me to so many paddlers from all across the country and across the globe. A global community that is tightly bound. It's a peer mentoring system premised on the idea that everyone has something to share… and do!

I've been lucky to belong to another community, one within a company. Rick Wiebush and I were both volunteering our time at a CPA skills night at Rocky Point Park. We connected and he invited me to join the Cross Currents Sea Kayaking team. Over the years he has built a community of students, many of whom have gone on to teach. I have learned from him and he from me. I really value my "co-workers," and we support one another. There is also a large contingent of former students and trippers who have connected because of this community. We continue to paddle together. I'm part of the action as a peer and love it.

What I'm getting at is that while I first wanted to learn skills, the part that I truly value is the community. Sharing information, experiences and comradery really made kayaking so much more valuable to me. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy solo paddling too - it is very spiritual. In the long run, give me a group of folks to paddle with that I can trust in times of need. Not only is there safety in numbers, but there is also joy!

Instructor Community

There is another community that I value. This one is much smaller, a subset of the larger communities. It is the community of kayak instructors. I have come to know, respect and value my fellow instructors, be they more seasoned coaches, or those with advanced skill levels, or folks newer to teaching. Within this group I can experience things that matter to me as an instructor: broad-based knowledge through cross-pollination, adventure and service. I'm still learning, all these years later.

From time to time, I look through the ACA website to find other instructors with whom I can connect. I know a fair number, but there are so many more that I don't know. I've made some valuable acquaintances through a cold call; especially when it looks like we share a certain aspect of teaching or kayaking. I keep an eye out for other instructors who have endorsements for rolling and traditional skills, as I do. I wonder if other instructors do the same sorts of things?

Building Community

Recently, I gathered together some of my instructor friends, old and new, and asked if they also feel community among instructors. The answers I got were primarily yes, in a small way. But many also said that as instructors, they desired more connection, more opportunities for development. A few even said they felt that once they were newly certified, they were cast adrift to make their own way. They longed for continued guidance in an informal, not ICW, setting. Perhaps a mentor-protégé' relationship or at the very least, learning alternate ways to think about and teach skills. Some of us also recognize that we have much to share - and welcome these relationships - but also still have plenty of room to grow ourselves.

After some kicking it around, the statement below is what we came up with as a starting point. We'll share it in many forums and emails, but we wanted to use this issue of *Coastbusters* as one vehicle for distributing these ideas.

Building community Photo: ??????

The question for you is… Are you interested? If so, reach out. For the time being, the interim name of this community is SKEG (Sea Kayaking Education Group). Your thoughts?

Sea Kayak Educators Group (SKEG) Statement

Introduction. There is a significant number of paddlers in the region surrounding the Chesapeake Bay (MD/DC/NoVA/DE) who are certified as coastal sea kayaking instructors. Some of them have expressed interest in trying to develop a greater sense of community.

This is a proposal to create a loosely organized group that will provide sea kayak instructors a means of connecting, with the goal of becoming better at what we love to do and laying the foundation for a stronger future for paddle sport instruction in Chesapeake Bay/Delmarva region.

This group is not intended as an alternative to existing paddle sport companies, touring companies, or independent instructors. There will not be formal classes for the public, nor will the group offer assessments or certifications. This group or forum will be largely informal and is intended as a mechanism for instructors to share experience about teaching sea kayaking and enhance opportunities for collaboration and peer mentoring.

Who. The intended peer group for this project is certified ACA (and British Canoeing) instructors in

Photo: R Dennis Green

the Chesapeake Bay/Delmarva region. This group would include all levels of instructors, trip leaders, and instructors with lapsed certifications. *The primary requirement for participation is a desire to learn more about teaching sea kayaking and a willingness to share your knowledge and experience.*

What. The plan is for this group is to use a variety of approaches to enhance learning and collaboration throughout the region. These could include:

- A moderated online forum for discussing instruction-related topics, providing useful updates about changes to ACA curricula or certification requirements, and identifying opportunities for collaboration and/or mentoring.
- Virtual meetings that could include presentations about relevant topics and panel discussions.
- A managed member "mailing list" (with prohibitions on spam, harassment, etc.)
- Planned peer events where instructors at specific levels can work together to refine instruction.
- Off-water social/learning events that could include presentations about relevant topics, panel discussions, etc.

When. We are in the planning stages and your input is critical. We anticipate a fair amount of initial effort to get this launched and will probably have a couple of virtual planning meetings over the next several months. At this time, we don't anticipate having any online resources until the fall of 2025. We hope to be able to schedule one or more in-person events during the spring and/or summer.

Interested?

If you are an instructor and interested in this idea, please provide your contact information and indicate your level of interest using the following scale. Please respond to the interim coordinator Mike Hamilton at SKEGmidatlantic@gmail.com

4: Where do I sign up!
3: Yeah, I think this is a good idea.
2: Perhaps, but I'll have to see.
1: Meh…

Your contact information will be treated as confidential by the coordinator.

Upcoming Events

Dates	Event	Location	Sponsor	Website/Contact
Apr. 8 - 13	Wave Paddler Spring Gathering	Seabrook Is SC	Wave Paddler	ww.wavepaddler/events
Apr 22 - 27	Outer Banks Expedition	Harker's Island, NC	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
July 16-20	Great Lakes Symposium	Grand Marais MI	Power of Water	Greatlakesseakayaksymposium.net
July 31 – Aug 1	Ashley Brown's Surf Camp	Cape Charles, VA	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Aug 15 - 17	Ladies of the Lake	Munising, MI	Downwind Sports	Downwindsports.com
Sept 17 - 18	Intermediate + Adv. Surf Camps	Cape Charles, VA	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 19-21	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles VA	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct. 4 - 6	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Argyle, Nova Scotia	Chris Lockyear	Bofsks.com
Oct. 10 -12	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes DE	Qajaq USA	Delmarvapaddlersretreat.org
Oct 30 -Nov 1	Ocean Gathering	Tybee Is., GA	Sea Kayak Georgia	Seakayakgeorgia.com

Cornwall, UK coast. Photo: Mark Webster

Cross Currents
Spring 2025 Classes and Trips

10,000 Islands Florida Expedition, March 17 – 22, 2025

Basics
Six days, five nights, expedition style;
Everglades City to Flamingo
Leader: Jeff Atkins
Cost: $595
Available spaces: Three

Activities
Paddling about 10 NM per day
Camping
Prep own meals
Navigation
Various skills
Shuttle set up required

Wave Paddler Spring Gathering, April 8 – 13

Basics
Wave Paddler is a Cross Currents partner
Five days/nights at Camp St Christpher, Seabrook Island, SC
Coaches: Jeff Atkins, Ashley Brown, Dale Williams, James Kesterson, Chris Rezac
Cost: $945, includes housing + some meals
Spaces: 15

Activities
Instruction in Surf, currents, touring
Stay in motel-like rooms, double occupancy
Get ready for summer; have a blast!

Cross Currents
Spring 2025 Classes and Trips

Outer Banks Expedition, April 22 – 27, 2025

Basics
Six days/five nights, expedition-style
Harker's Island to Ocracoke; approx. 10 nm/day
Leaders: James Kesterson, Jeff Atkins
Cost: $595
Available spaces: Three

Activities
Paddling, camping; prep own food
Navigation and trip planning/logistics
Maneuvering and rescue skills

Finding Your Way: Practical Navigation; May 3- 4, 2025

Basics
Two days
At Kent Island, MD
Instructors: Paula Hubbard, Marilyn Cooper, Rick Wiebush
Cost: $195
Spaces: 15

Activities
Planning and on-water sessions
Understanding charts, aids to navigation
Plotting course with chart and compass
Route planning/finding
Matching chart to the real world
Ranges
Orienteering games

Contributors

Bev Coslett **– is an L2 Kayaking IT, L4 Coastal Kayaking Instructor, L2 SUP and Canoe Instructor. Bev is also a Wilderness First Responder and Yoga certified. Bev lives in Charleston, SC and owns a small business, focusing on paddle sports instruction and camping expedition adventures. Bev volunteers serving on the ACA Board of Directors and ACA Regional Activity Council.**

Joanne Goodall **– is from Pittsburgh where, as a member of Outkast Paddlers, she paddles on all kinds of water including local lakes and rivers. But her main interest is in expedition paddling and Georgian Bay is a favorite. Joanne is a recently retired nurse practitioner who mostly worked with transgender youth and homeless/high risk youth.**

Mike Hamilton **- is an ACA L4 instructor who specializes in Greenland paddling and rolling. He is the primary organizer of the Delmarva Paddler's Retreat. Mike lives in Sykesville. MD.**

Sammantha Magsino **– started kayaking 30 years ago and was happy but clueless on the water for ages before finally learning some skills. She is certified as an ACA L4 coastal kayaking instructor and is fond of bumpy water.**

Whitney Sanford **– is a Professor Emerita in the Department of Religion at the University of Florida, specializing in Religion and Nature and Religions of Asia. She is an avid sea kayaker and SUPer and was previously an L4 coastal kayak instructor.**

Rick Wiebush **- runs *Cross Currents Sea Kayaking* and is the editor of *Coastbusters*. He is an ACA L3 IT and British Canoeing 4* Sea Leader. Rick lives in Baltimore.**

Coastbusters **welcomes submissions of trip reports, incident descriptions and analyses, skills and "how-to" articles, boat and gear reviews, book and video reviews, and photographs. We are interested in receiving submissions from all paddlers.**

Articles should be limited to about 1,500 – 2,000 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**

Navigation practice: From southwest tip of Beach Island to south end of Watts is 273 T and 284 M