

Coastbusters

The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers

September 2023

Alaska!

Laurie Collins and Rick Wiebush

Ed. Note: Cross Currents ran a trip to Alaska in July 2023 that was based in Haines, AK. Run in conjunction with the Alaska Outdoor Science School, the structure included four days of morning classroom sessions followed by afternoon field trips and then a two-day, one night mini-expedition. The following comprises the impressions and reflections of the two authors.

Rick: Even though I've paddled in places ranging from Wales to Australia and New Zealand, and from Nova Scotia to the Amazon I'd never been to Alaska. It was a serious shortcoming. So, when the chance came to organize a trip there, I jumped at it.

Laurie: As the departure for the Alaska trip loomed closer, what kept running through my mind was: "why did I agree to spend my precious few days off in a dreary, cold and desolate wilderness where I would either be eaten by one bear or a thousand mosquitos?" A group of friends had just returned from a cruise to Alaska; in every photo they were huddled together for warmth, wearing insulated rain jackets in front of scenery that could have been spectacular had it been visible through the fog and drizzle. And I wasn't going on a cruise; while we

were spending most of our Alaskan nights in a cozy Airbnb, part of the trip involved kayak camping (cue the man-eating bears).

Rick: I hadn't really thought about rain or bugs; I was focused on developing a curriculum with Scott (Ramsey), a former graduate school professor (course: "Risk and Reward") who runs the Alaska Outdoor Science School. His model, which he had never used with sea kayakers, was to have morning classroom sessions that focused on various aspects of the Alaskan wilderness including geology, hydrology, wildlife, and Tlingit culture, followed by afternoon sessions "in the field" where the morning's lessons would be brought home through direct experience. The field experience with previous students had always been accomplished through hikes and occasional rafting; but Scott was willing to apply the model to sea kayakers. He did a great job of pulling it off. What helped, and what was somewhat puzzling in a town of 1,650 people, was that there was an outfitter who had primarily NDK boats, all in very good condition. Excellent!



Laurie: Too late to sell my spot to another, more intrepid paddler, I channeled my anxiety into finding 98% deet bug repellent and compressing my heavyweight fleece and drysuit, an instrument of true torture if there ever was one, into a suitcase just slightly smaller than a steamer trunk. All the while I kept reminding myself that Alaska was on the bucket list of every respectable sea kayaker. Hadn't I watched more than one video/slide show of kayaking expeditions to the inside passage showcasing glacier topped mountains towering over blue-green water? And this trip involved more than paddling: before hitting the water we were going to begin each day with a classroom session conducted by a geologist and naturalist with a doctorate in sustainability. Surely my love of learning would eclipse any corporeal discomfort.

Rick: One of the most fascinating things to come out of the classroom sessions for me was learning that there were five different types of salmon (King, Coho, Sockeye, Pink, Chum), all of which are born in freshwater and migrate to the ocean before returning to freshwater to spawn. But each of which spawns at different times of the year and in different water environments (e. g, rivers vs. streams vs. lakes). It was also interesting to find out that the Tlingit people and bears aren't the only ones that

feast on salmon runs, but that the area just outside Haines is a gathering spot for the largest congregation of bald eagles in the world (up to 3,000!) who come every November to feed on chum and coho salmon that are running that time of year.

Laurie: At just over four hours, the ferry ride to Juneau offered our first glimpse of Alaska's majestic mountains and blue-white glaciers. As I had anticipated, thick clouds shrouded the mountains, often suspended below the rocky peaks. I spent all but a few minutes inside the ferry hiding from a blustery wind that made it hard to stand outside on the deck but failed to budge the heavy clouds.

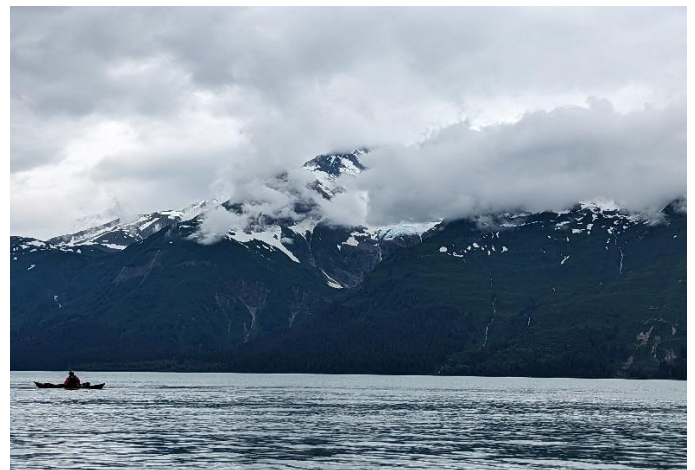


Photo: Jill Allbritton



Haines. Photo: Dean Athanasion

Pulling into Haines by contrast there was weak but welcome sunshine and a charming cluster of houses, shops and restaurants tucked in the harbor. Our Airbnb did not disappoint; it afforded unobstructed views of Haines harbor from your choice of looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows or lounging on the back deck. What struck me most about our arrival was that my long-sleeved shirt was more than enough; no jacket required.

Rick: A funny thing happened on the way to the paddling: the first few post-class afternoons, no matter the body of water we paddled on, we were immersed in scenes of crystal-clear water reflecting the soaring snow-capped mountains that surrounded us. After that, especially on our two-day mini-expedition, I found myself getting bored with the same old, same old, majestic though it may have been. For me, and I know almost everyone in the group feels the opposite way, there were only so many soaring, snow-capped mountains and streaming glaciers that you can carefully attend to and be in awe of. The rivers and lakes were fairly

placid. I think I wanted some bounce and action mixed in with the beauty. The other problem is scale: it's just hard to take it in and process how big the mountains are, how much snow is on them in July, and how much ice is contained in the glaciers.



Richardson Glacier. Photo: Bonnie Gease



Gene K says: the mountains. So awe-inspiring. Feeling engulfed and tiny being surrounded by them every day.

Laurie: In spite of my fears of being cold all the time, not even a jacket was ever required during our weeklong adventure, even late in the evening at our remote campsite. The entire week was uncharacteristically warm and dry (sadly a symptom of global warming?), but selfishly enjoyed by me. Ironically, with limited room in my luggage, I brought only a drysuit, so I basted like a turkey paddling Alaskan rivers in brilliant sunshine. But the water was refreshingly cold and clear and the air was fresh, dry and fragrant with wild flowers and new growth pine. Waterfalls were abundant on that first day's paddle with snow and glacier melt, so a favorite activity was following the sound of falling water to discover the small coves and crannies where the waterfall spilled into the lake.

Scenes and Snapshots

Rick: There are discreet scenes that stay with me even now, two months later. For example, Bridget, wearing her bug head net, whether there were any bugs around or not. She even kept it successfully on her head or rather, plastered to her face, while rolling.

Speaking of bugs, seared into my psyche and skin were swarms of black flies that initially appeared to inhabit areas that were somewhere between 20 yards and 100 yards from shore. They would come at you and hound you; you could swat one away but four others would take their place, circling your



Photo: Dean Athanasion

head, landing on your hat, arms, back and boat, and generally driving you crazy. They defined the word “swarm”. I started having contests: how many of these little suckers can I squash? Unfortunately, that near-off-shore zone to which I thought the flies were restricted did not apply on the last day. They followed us onto shore and attacked relentlessly during the 45 minutes we were unloading our gear and hoisting the boats back on the trailer. After getting bitten about 432 times and having blood dripping down my legs, I realized that during the run up to the trip I too should have been concerned about the pests of Alaska.

The Rafting Day

Another scene that is etched in my memory is the skill and stylishness with which Scott expertly maneuvered a 12 x 18 foot raft loaded with 11 people using two giant oars to negotiate narrow channels, swirling currents, and expertly identifying the constantly changing lines as we cruised down

the river. On that same run, Scott also amazed with his knowledge of wildlife tracks. “This, he said, pointing to an almost basketball-sized impression, “is the left hind foot of a female bear. That, pointing to a clearly canine imprint, is a wolf. Look how the tracks form a perfectly straight line as they head off into the distance. Wolves have to be efficient in their movement; they can’t wander around stopping to sniff every other spot like domestic dogs.” Fabulous.

Huh?

On a more mundane note, there was an outfitting store in Haines— next to the taco place - that catered largely to the hunting and fishing crowd, but who also stocked a good supply of paddling-related equipment, clothing and nautical charts. But what he also had that didn’t quite seem to fit was an array, at the back of the store, of giant safes ranging in size from 2X4 feet - which appealed to gun-owners who needed safe storage for their handguns-



Scott. Photo: Jill Allbritton

for their handguns - to a few safes that were approximately 5x10 feet, the purpose of which the owner couldn't describe. He sold "maybe one a year". Laurie suggests they may be designed to house howitzers and cannons and missile launchers. It was *so* incongruous for these safes to be displayed alongside the bows, arrows, camouflage clothing, camping gear and PFD's. I left scratching my head.

The Chilkat Tlingit of Klukwan Village

Rick: The learning about different types of Salmon was the most interesting thing I learned on the trip, but an extremely close second was hearing the traditional cultural stories and legends of the Tlingit people as represented in their totems. We spent a morning at Klukwan Village, home of the Chilkat branch of the Tlingit nation, and which is about 20 miles north of Haines and about the same distance south of the Canadian border. Getting access was no small deal since Scott had spent several years developing a relationship with the Chilkat community.

Our contact person, Lani, took us into a room at the Chilkat Heritage Center that had four 20-foot-high totem poles in it, each intricately carved and painted with a series of interlocking symbols and figures that represent animals, birds, fish, natural objects and/or people. Each pole told a different story central to the Chilkat cultural tradition. After suggesting that she would tell just one story because it would take too long, she proceeded to tell all four stories. And, rather than taking too long, each was spellbindingly elaborate, detailed, complex and often funny. Who can resist stories of intrigue, betrayal, love, etc. and especially those legends in which animals turn into people, and people turn into ravens, eagles or other creatures?

Rick Leader called it a "lifetime experience", while Bridget felt it was "both beautiful and humbling". I agree.





Photo: Bonnie Gease

Mini-Expedition

Laurie: The classroom sessions and day trips culminated in a two-day overnigher, a mini-expedition of sorts. After a short but lovely paddle, our camping destination was near Seduction Point, at the tip of the Chilkat Peninsula, where the Chilkat River empties into the Lynn Canal. The site was a long, narrow land bridge connecting the mainland with a small island. – covered with reeds, bracketed by big pines, and with a crescent-shaped rocky beach – connecting the mainland with a tiny island.

When our boisterous party of 11 landed, we chased away the only other visitor; a serious looking man in a Zodiac who had not one, but two high-powered rifles for bear encounters. Not to be outdone, our Alaskan guide, Andus, was armed with pepper spray, airhorns, and a sturdy bear-proof barrel at the end of a long rope for stowing our food high in a tree. Did Mr. Zodiac know something we didn't? Were the piles of fresh bear scat near our campsite

foreshadowing a ursine visit? While Andus scouted the best locations for the two most important services: our camp kitchen and the “latrine”, we set up tents. The kitchen was sited at the edge of the woods to our left at a “safe” distance from our sleeping quarters, while the bathroom facilities were in the opposite direction and thus required a solitary walk through some heavy brush. I made note that our human need for privacy and sanitation apparently outweighed our fears of being devoured. Tent set up first required vigorous stomping of crop circles in the reeds to create a level spot. Because our loaner tents were unfamiliar, didn't come with instructions or color-coded components, and in many cases were missing critical poles, our task resembled one of those engineering challenges where middle schoolers build a six foot structure made entirely of toothpicks and marshmallows. Finally satisfied that all tents had floors, a roof, walls and a door, we turned our attention to dinner and the telling of stories around the camp stoves until bedtime. With full bellies, we retired to our tents where some slept while others lay wide awake alert for the shuffling of giant paws or simply unused to sleeping in broad daylight (note to self: bring sleeping mask when visiting Alaska in July).



Camp. Photo: Bridget White

As we paddled back to Haines from our long - anticipated night of backcountry camping, it was clear Alaska had won me over with the cool, casual beauty of her woods, waterways and wildflower displays. While I included all the vexing and inconvenient details for the sake of humor and in

service of the dramatic, after a too-short week I fully understand why Alaska is or should be on the bucket list of every sea kayaker. I'll let the accompanying pictures do justice to the vast and awesome wilderness/wildness that left me feeling both happy and humbled.



Sunset in camp 10 PM. Photo: Bridget White. Dean says: the 2 sunsets the evening we were camping. The first one behind the mountain and then the second on the horizon in the center of the valley. Followed by a beautiful twilight. To be on the tip of the peninsula looking up at the Chilkat River at the moment the sun went below the horizon certainly was a special memory.

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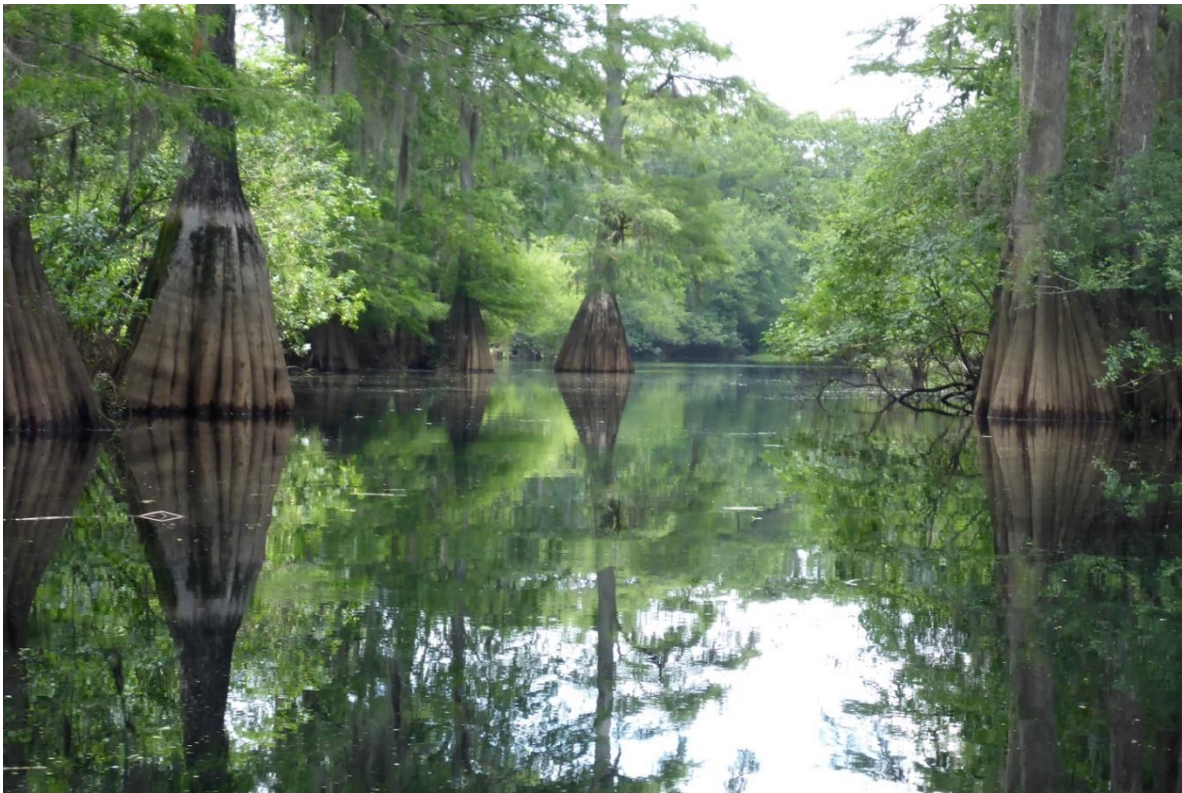
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Smith Island, MD Photo: Mike Allison

Don't Drain That Swamp: Savannah's Ebenezer Creek

Kathryn Lapolla



Cypress trees in Ebenezer Creek. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

One of the joys of running a kayaking ecotour business the last eight years has been sharing with paddlers the beauty of Ebenezer Creek, a rare remnant of a river swamp comprised largely of old growth bald cypress and tupelo trees. Far from the dark, scary place many envision, these “bottomland hardwood forests” are serene, beautiful ecosystems that offer some important “services” like flood control that would be quite expensive to engineer. At the same time, they provide critical habitat for a range of interesting creatures.

Many of you may have enjoyed exploring similar blackwater swamps by kayak, the perfect vessel for the task. You’ll find them along southeastern and Gulf rivers and their tributary creeks as they flow into the flat coastal plain and, for Gulf rivers, up the Mississippi as far as Arkansas.

Old Growth Bald Cypress and Tupelo

Bald cypress and tupelo trees are both uniquely well adapted to a floodplain environment with wide “buttresses” formed at their bases that support them when the water is high. Both develop “knees” as



Tupelo buttress. Photo: Rick Wiebush

part of a large supportive root system. Buttresses on both kinds of trees tend to hollow out with age, the lightness providing greater stability. They thrive in and need to be inundated for several months out of the year.

The cypress, as with many conifers, is an extremely long-lived tree. There are many large old trees at Ebenezer Creek that are between 1,000-1,200 years old. There are also bald cypress at the majestic Three Sisters Swamp on the Black River in North Carolina (Cape Fear River system) that have been core sampled and dated to 2,500 years old! Bald cypress, interestingly enough, are an unusual deciduous conifer, and provide rare fall color in our area before dropping their golden orange needles for the winter.



The tupelo forest in early spring. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

The water tupelo found at Ebenezer like immersion even more than the bald cypress. As the land gets lower in the mile or two approaching the Savannah River, stands of almost pure tupelo command the landscape. When the river is at flood stage, water is pushed into the creek, raising the water level by anywhere from one to eight feet and making it possible to paddle through the forest.

Threats

Much of the Georgia old growth bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and water tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*) that dominate these often-flooded forests were logged in the 18th century to make way for rice plantations. Where these rivers are tidal, as in my local Savannah River (for about 45 miles inland), the ebb and flow proved valuable to rice cultivation, particularly since the freshwater necessary for rice growing floats on top of the heavier salt water.

After slavery was legalized in 1750 and rice cultivation became lucrative, the rice industry grew to be the most important commercial agricultural crop in coastal Georgia, peaking in 1859 with over 50 million pounds produced.

Ebenezer Creek was *not* logged because the early (1734) Lutheran “Salzbergers” who settled the area were opposed to slavery and because most of the ground is flooded enough to make timbering (and cultivation) difficult. Its 11 miles of mostly old growth is largely still in private hands (including many Salzburger descendants), though it’s been designated a Georgia Wild and Scenic River and a National Natural Landmark.

It faces threats from industry and development as new housing, logistics centers, and more spring up all around. For example, a French turpentine plant built nearby in 2017 originally planned to discharge various chemicals such as benzene and toluene in its wastewater onto a field near the creek.

Flora and Fauna of the Ebenezer

Water tupelo blossoms make for delicious honey – but the famed “tupelo honey” comes from the white tupelo (*Nyssa ogechee*), found primarily along the Altamaha, Ogeechee, and Suwannee Rivers in Georgia.



Water tupelo blossoms. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

There are many interesting plants found here, including resurrection fern, an epiphyte or air plant, that lives in the lower horizontal limbs of the cypress and live oak. It becomes green and lush after a rain and then dries back to a messy brown crisp in a dry spell. The Spanish moss seen in the photo is also an epiphyte, taking all its nutrient and moisture needs from the air, not the tree. And no, when on the tree it doesn't have chiggers! Chiggers are ground dwellers and happily occupy many kinds of ground debris, including Spanish moss.



Resurrection fern and Spanish moss. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla



Swallow-tailed kite. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

So many beautiful and interesting creatures here! Two of my favorites are both seasonal residents. The swallow-tailed kite migrates from South America each spring to spend the summer breeding season in southeast river swamps, nesting in tall pines in colonial groups. A gorgeous, agile flier, the kite likes to eat large insects, lizards, and snakes while in flight.

The second one is the prothonotary warbler. It is a neotropical migrant from central and south America that arrives each spring for the summer breeding season. Also called “the swamp canary”, I love that this tiny golden bird is so easy to spot as it flits back and forth across the creek at eye level in search of insects in various shrubbery.



Prothonotary warbler. Photo: Kathryn Lapolla

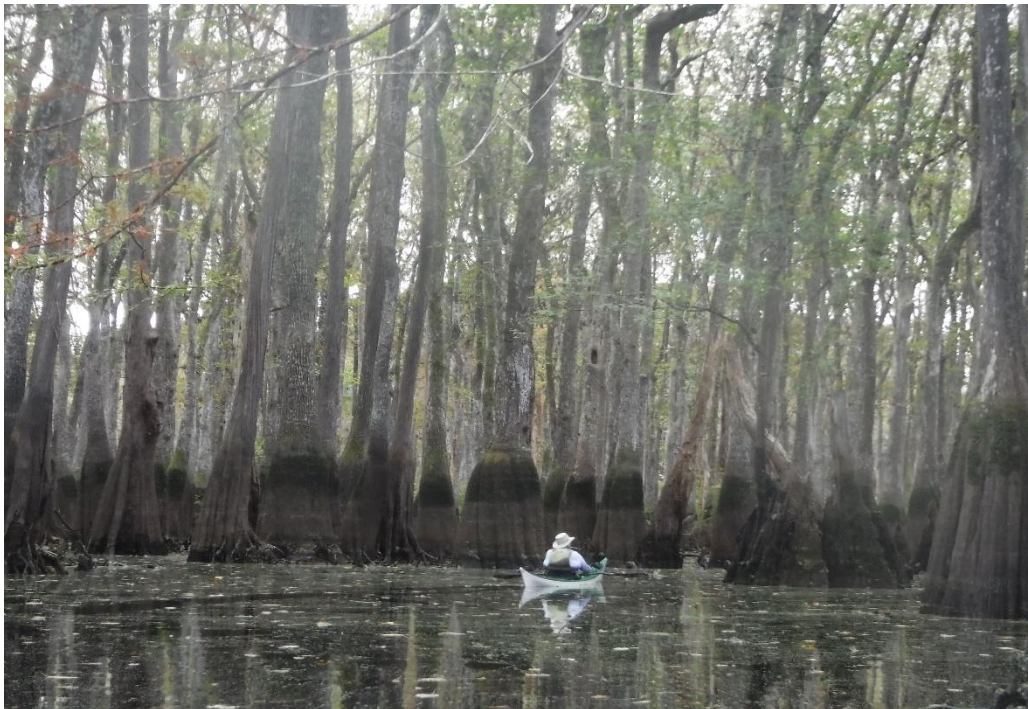


Can you find "The Predator"? Photo: Emma Campbell

Yes, reptiles live in river swamps too. Alligators are more common as you get closer to the Savannah River but are always shy and reclusive, especially as they can be hunted during September around here. The most common reptile I see by far is the non-venomous brown water snake but cottonmouths, copperheads, and rattlesnakes have a part in this ecosystem as well.

If You Go

If you'd like to visit Ebenezer Creek, launch at Tommy Long Boat Ramp in Rincon, GA. From there you can head east toward the Savannah River (tupelo forest) or west toward the headwaters in Springfield (more cypress, higher ground). The USGS gauge for Ebenezer Creek at Springfield can give you a good idea of conditions. The creek is passable down to about 3'. Above 6' or so and you can paddle through the tupelo forest. Above 8' and you can paddle anywhere you want, but the trees look more ordinary, with buttresses under water. Above 8' and you'll definitely want a GPS track as it can be challenging to follow the creek path. Above 9-10' parking may be limited as the lot floods. At lower waters you can stay on track by following the pink or orange tape tags at turns along the way.



Dwarfed on Ebenezer Creek. Photo: Rick Wiebush

Opa: The Saronic Gulf and Poros

Shelly Wiechelt

Our week-long stay at the Odyssey Inn in Poros, Greece - in addition to wonderful paddling and great food - reminded us that goodness still exists in the world. These are the kindest most loving people I have met in a very long time. The place and its people provided us rejuvenation and joy

Denise and I heard wonderful things about the island of Poros, the Odyssey, and paddling in Greece from Gene Kay and Ro Frey. To celebrate turning 60, in 2021 we booked the same trip that they raved about with Adventure Tourism Services (<https://www.adventuretourismservices.com/>).

Well, “Der mentsh trakht und Gott lakht.” (Man plans and God laughs). Thanks to Covid, we postponed the trip twice. Three years later we finally got to do it. One silver lining in our postponements was that our dear friends Greg and Luci Hollingworth joined us for this glorious vacation.

Adventure Tourism Services works with the Odyssey (<https://odysseyactivities.com/>) and Saronic Outdoor Activities (<https://saronicactivities.com/index.html>) to provide accommodations, paddling, cycling, island tours, and cooking lessons. The Odyssey is several rooms and suites with balconies and porches set around a central courtyard where meals are served.

Incredible Food!

The Greek meals were abundant and delicious. Breakfast consisted of a large buffet that included fresh fruits, vegetables, roasted flat breads, meats, cheeses, nuts, olives, egg casseroles, waffles, eggs made to order and always a barrel of fresh oranges that you could juice yourself with a serious old

school juicer. We packed our kayaking lunches from the breakfast buffet.

Dinners were multicourse (about eight!) and included Greek salads and dips (tzatzikii, eggplant, roe), breads, tyrotrigona (fillo stuffed with cheese), octopus, sardines, sea bass, salmon, roasted meats, moussaka, eggplant, roasted vegetables, baklava, custard pie, cakes, etc. etc. Just thinking and writing about the food makes me pine for their lemonade and freddo lattes (neither of these will ever be the same for me in the US; ours tastes like crap compared to theirs.)



Photos: Shelly Wiechelt





The Paddling

Paddling here is under sunny skies, in clear blue water and along very rocky coastlines. The four paddles we went on with Spyros and Katerina (Saronic Outdoor Activities) in the azure to deep blue Saronic Gulf were easy going and fun. Beach stops typically included opportunities for snorkeling (watch out for those sea anemones Luci; ouch).

Our first paddle to a small snorkel beach was mostly a shake-out paddle for them to get to know us and for us to get to know our boats and gear. But the afternoon winds brought us a bit of fun bump.

We covered 10 miles on the second day and paddled along the rocky coast where we played in slots, sea caves and arches. We ended up in a more open part of the sea where we made a short crossing to Lion's Head Island and circumnavigated it. The water and rock formations there are quite spectacular. The sun got a bit hot, so we bow dipped a lot and shot a few Gu's. Late spring, early summer, and early fall are probably more comfortable temperature wise, but early July, with mid-90's temps, was manageable for us.

The next day took us past the town of Poros and the Odyssey Farm. (The Odyssey Farm offers glamping, cooking lessons, and an opportunity to participate in the fall olive harvest). Then on to a half-sunken ship, a lighthouse and a tiny church on an equally tiny island.



Photo: Katerina Chroni

Our final paddling day involved tracking another rocky coast and paddling through a small canal up into a salt lake, where they used to open and close the little inlet to flood the area and then let it dry to make salt. After heading back to the gulf, we spent some time swimming and, of course, snorkeling, before we explored a hidden glass beach where we did some treasure hunting.

We really enjoyed the paddling. But our travels also took us on several side adventures such as a bike ride to Russian beach and walkabout in Poros. Our favorite was our day trip by ferry to the island of Hydra. Hydra does not have any gas or electric



Photo: Katerina Chroni

vehicles. Travel around town and up the steep slopes can only be accomplished via foot or “donkey”. It is a fascinating place. Denise and Luci took a ride on the donkeys while Greg and I sipped lemonade. Unfortunately, Denise came back with “donkey toe” (messed up toe from donkey taking too sharp of a turn). Swimming from the island cliffs with a respite spot for drinks and snacks was totally cool. We felt as if we found heaven.

Our travels took us back to Athens via ferry. Athens is another tale we’ll tell you sometime. Our time on Poros was rejuvenating, relaxing, and fun. We are grateful to have experienced this special time with one another. We now fully understand why Gene and Ro keep going back....



Photo: Katerina Chroni



Photo: Greg Hollingsworth

The Blackburn Challenge: Around Cape Ann, Massachusetts

Reinhard Zollitsch

I have raced rowing shells and all types of kayaks and canoes, mostly on rivers and lakes, but frankly, I have always preferred being out on the open ocean or its many bays and bights.

I worked on freighters as a student, sailed across the Atlantic on a small two-masted schooner as a watch captain, and hitched up and down the Maine coast in my small 22 foot sailboat with my family. But my funnest thing to do since 2002, approaching retirement age, is sitting in a boat with a maximum hull width of 13.5 inches, still out on the Atlantic, and solo.

What is wrong with this picture? I should be stepping up to the next size boat, taking it easy, going for comfort, and being more sociable rather than trimming down. (I hope, though, that this downsizing trend will not continue beyond 13.5" and put me back in a bathtub with a little choo choo tugboat, where all my boating began.)

The Indomitable Gloucester Dory Fisherman H.B. And The Race

So let me tell you about my latest toy and how it all came about. I had read Joseph E. Garland's book *LONE VOYAGER*, the story of Howard Blackburn, the indomitable Gloucester fisherman, who in 1883 got separated from his schooner in a snowstorm off the south coast of Newfoundland and decided to row his dory back to shore, 60 miles away, rather than give up. After five long days and nights, he

finally made it, allowing his hands to freeze to the oars, but he lost his partner and most fingers and toes to frostbite in this ordeal.

He became a hero in that little Massachusetts fishing town, and it is in his honor that in 1987, a good hundred years after his memorable row, the Cape Ann Rowing Club came up with a long distance ocean race. It is a clockwise 22-mile circumnavigation of Cape Ann, starting on the Annisquam River behind Gloucester High School, and finishing on the town beach near the inner harbor.

Me II

What a course, what a historic background and what a major event for Gloucester and Massachusetts, actually the entire eastern seaboard. When I first heard about this event, I could not wait to join in the



Reinhard getting ready

fun, especially when in following years the original rowing race turned into a race for all types of man-powered crafts, including sea kayaks, surf skis and six-person Hawaiian-style outrigger canoes. But my tippy kayaks and flatwater racing canoes were out, for sure, and my rowing days date back to college – I still felt left out.

Outriggers!

Then I learned about those incredibly slender and fast Hawaiian-style solo outrigger canoes – and I was hooked. I ordered one sight-unseen from a manufacturer in Maryland and raced it five days later in the 2002 race. I found myself floundering in the wake of a dozen six-person outriggers at the start, who, fortunately for me in my new type of boat, pulled ahead so fast that I felt I was standing still. It turned out to be one of the windiest and roughest Blackburn races ever, but I managed to stay up and finish the 22 miles in 3 hours 46 minutes, with less than a cup of water in the boat. I was psyched.

In 2006 was the 20th running of the event, as well as my fifth, but it was unfortunately halted four miles into the race by the Coast Guard for thick fog out around Halibut Point and Cape Ann. It was eventually restarted on a short course on the Annisquam River – not what we hardy competitors had come for, and also not in the spirit of Howard Blackburn, as I see it, but a sound call from a modern safety point of view, especially for the newcomers and less experienced and prepared boaters.

The Race

So, could you join in the fun too? Today most any sea-going hand-propelled vessel can find a niche to enter the race. There is a class for traditional fishing dories and the more efficient wherries, for multi-oared gigs and single and double ocean racing shells with top rowers vying for fastest overall honors. Sea kayaks and surf skis make up the bulk of boats these days, and are divided into various sub-classes,

modern carbon fiber wing paddles.

In 2002 I remember seeing Olympic-double-gold winner Greg Barton flying by me, and I was very impressed by the two “local boys” (Tom Mailhot and John Zeigler) who had finished the 2001 rowing race across the Atlantic from the Canary Isles to Barbados, showing off their special craft for that race at the finish line. Everybody who is anybody was there, including the news media, but also a lot of normal mortals like me.

Serious Business

But I kid you not, the Blackburn Challenge is a long and tough race and should only be undertaken by those boaters who have prepared for open ocean paddling and are in halfway decent shape to finish 20 plus miles in often windy and rough conditions. Don't count on the Coast Guard to tow you in or pick you up when you hit the wall – remember Howard Blackburn and tough it out or come as a spectator.

The top two-man racing shells or the six-person outrigger canoes may finish the course in two and a half hours. I felt good finishing between 3 hours 38 and 3 hours 48 minutes these past five years, but some boats were out there for almost 7 hours, and in 2002 and 2003 about 20 boats (more than 10% of the entrants) did not even finish the race. (In 2005, however, all boats finished under 6 hours! Congratulations!) But with almost 200 boats on the





On the beach at the finish line

going off with a staggered start, you are hardly ever all by yourself. Boaters look after each other and enjoy the camaraderie on the water – I do anyway.

The Finish

And then there is the finish line at the “greasy pole“ on the town beach, another Gloucester tradition of yet another town event (balancing out on a long greased horizontal pole 20' above the water, grabbing a flag at the end – if you ever get there!).

There is food and drink, live music and lots of swaggering and tall tales, mostly from the slower contestants, who by then are often too exhausted and dehydrated to know what they are saying, but definitely are having a good time Nancy and I always spend two nights in Gloucester and make a real outing out of the race and enjoy beautiful Cape Ann before heading back up to Maine.

So, what are you paddling or rowing these days? There is still time to get into some shape for a first appearance. Anyway, check out the website of the Blackburn Challenge (<http://www.BlackburnChallenge.com>), and should you decide to enter the race, don't wait too long. There is a limited number of boats allowed in the race, and remember, the pre-race meeting is at 6:00 a.m. Good luck, and remember Howard's historic row. And please say hello to the guy in the all-black carbon fiber solo outrigger canoe when you pass him, or he passes you.

Thanks, enjoy and be safe.



Photos of the Month



Submarine Paddling

Photo: Ricardo Stewart

Photos of the Month



Stunning Alaska

Photo: somebody from the Alaska trip

Photos of the Month



Cape Henlopen

Photo: Keith Betts

RI Rocks Redux

Richard Essex



Photo: Ricardo Stewart

Two paddlers got flipped and pushed into a jumble of rocks by some breaking waves. Nobody was hurt but there was a scary moment or two. That was last year. This August, a small group of Mid-Atlantic paddlers returned to Rhode Island for three days of playing amongst waves and rocks and were determined to avoid similar problems. It sort of worked.

This group was Rick Wiebush, me and five others, all of whom had done this trip at least once or twice before. A clear day with a three-foot swell coming out of the south and a southwest wind was predicted for the first day. Not good for our favorite venue,

King's Beach area in Newport, which is highly exposed since it faces south right into the ocean. The swell was predicted to drop to two feet on the second day, so we decided to put off King's Beach for a day and instead paddle out of Fort Wetherill near Jamestown. The cliffs and reefs in this area are a couple of miles up Narragansett Bay and conditions generally are more subdued. We launched late in the morning and as we paddled out of a sheltered cove, it was clear that the three-foot swell was rolling the whole way up Narragansett Bay. This made for some fun bounce, but some bigger waves and a low tide made many of the rock gardening features inaccessible. Still, the weather

was gorgeous and we had all day to find some entertaining paddling.

We started out by running a few rocky chutes and “riding the elevator” along the cliffy shoreline. Then, we decided to see what was happening at a favorite Play spot - a reef a couple hundred yards offshore. At lower tides, this set of rocks rises a couple of feet out of the water in places and has a fun pour-over when the conditions are right. As we approached, we could see that the swell was making conditions messy around the reef and was breaking just on the seaward side.

Uh, Oh

All morning, one of our group, Dave, had been paddling though any feature that looked passable with the calm composure of someone paddling on the glassy surface of a local fishing pond. Dave decided to shoot through an open spot in the middle of reef. He timed it well and was able to get across the top of the rocks with relative ease. But just on the other side, he got into some trouble. He had crossed going *into* the breaking swell, with the power of the waves against him. The period was

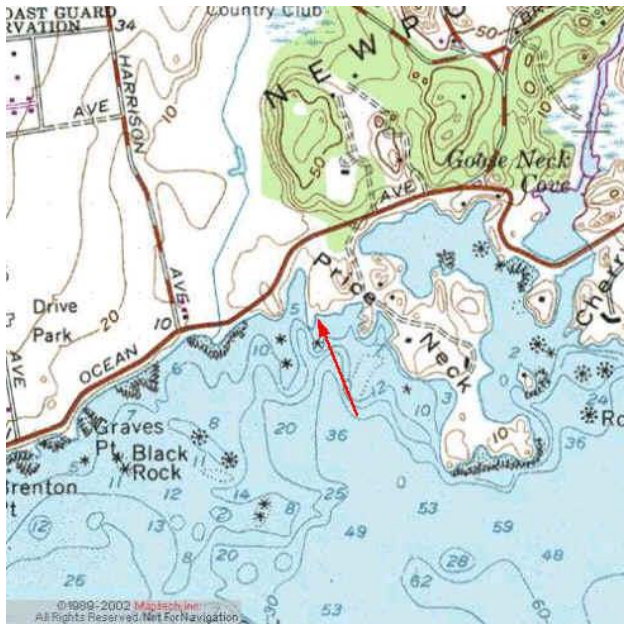
just a few seconds so the breakers stalled his progress and started to push him back towards the reef. After riding over the first few breakers, Dave was backed up against the reef, got hit with a unexpected reflecting wave and got partially flipped, stuck on his side. He tried to roll up, but his hull was pinned against the rocks. He had to bail.

Fortunately, subsequent waves pushed him and his boat to the back side of a high spot on the reef. So, although he couldn't just swim out to an assisted rescue, he was able to get his footing and stand on the rock without being pounded by breaking waves. After getting situated for a couple of minutes, Dave pushed his boat away from the reef and another paddler attached a tow. Rick then had Dave time his jump into the water, swim with his paddle out away from the reef, and ultimately reunited with his kayak.

During all this, thoughts of a repeat of the excitement from last year kept swirling in our heads. But this experienced group knew when to jump in and help and when to stay out the way while monitoring the rescue. Dave was just fine and we played the rest of the day without incident.



The reef off Ft. Wetherill. Photo; Richard Essex



King's Beach, Newport

The next day we launched from King's Beach, a horseshoe shaped cove between rocky headlands with a small reef near the mouth of the cove. On our way out we played around and between rocks forming the reef and then headed around Prices Neck, the headland to the east of King's Beach. As we approached the corner of Prices Neck, it was clear that the two-foot swell from the south predicted for the day was more like three-feet-plus. These were rolling waves that were easy to ride over but they made the rocks and ledges in the area a frothing cauldron of green water and foam. By making our way into the next cove to the east we

were able to find some fun channels to run. But the largish swell made the pour-overs we usually run just too dangerous for our taste. This is a great area for rock gardening, with a myriad of features, so there were still enough spots to keep us entertained and challenged.

Post lunch, we were playing at several spots in the large cove that hosts Gooseberry Island on the south end of Newport. Slowly making our way back out to open water, I noticed the horizon to the south had become rather diffuse, often the first sign of a fog bank rolling in. It was moving fast, so we gathered up the group and decided to head back to King's Beach while we could still see the headlands where waves were breaking dangerously. As we paddled westward, we couldn't help but notice that the



The fog rolls in. Photo: Richard Essex



King's Beach put in. Photo courtesy of RI Canoe and Kayak

waves at the mouth of the cove were building to over 4 feet in some sets. However, they were rolling right under our boats and when the fog reached us the effect was like being in a painter's version of a battered coastline. The fog didn't last long and wasn't the kind of pea soup you can occasionally get on a summer day in New England, so we made it back to King's Beach without incident and soon called it a day.

URI Bay Campus

For the last day of the paddling, we launched from a small beach at the University of Rhode Island's School of Oceanography on the west side of Narragansett Bay. Conditions were good for paddling and the only evidence of the intense thundershowers that came through early that morning was a flooded parking lot at the put-in. A couple miles to the south of this launch was the

scene of last year's rock gardening chaotic drama, but there was no repeat. After a few fun-filled hours of dodging in and out of the rocks along the cliffs to the south, we were pretty wiped out from the cumulative impact of three days. We were also cognizant of the impending slog through stop and go traffic on southbound I-95 in Connecticut, so we called it an early afternoon. Boats, paddlers, and pride all intact.



Photo: Richard Essex

Nick Ray's Scotland Circumnavigation: He Made It!

Angus Cochrane



Ed Note: An article in the July 2022 edition of Coastbusters highlighted Nick Ray's planned sea kayak journey around all of Scotland to celebrate his 60th birthday and his recovery from serious mental health issues and a suicide attempt. He started in August 2022 and finished exactly one year later. This article, which originally appeared in BBC Scotland News, highlights the journey.

When sea kayaker Nick Ray set off on a year-long trip around Scotland's coast, he doubted many people would take much notice.

But as he paddled into Tobermory harbour exactly 12 months on, the mental health blogger was cheered home by an army of social media followers. The adventurer, who also celebrated his 60th birthday on Monday, has explored almost every

nook and cranny of Scotland's mainland coastline on his journey.

Along the way he has been offered food, care packages and even accommodation by those who have been inspired by his journey.

Among those the adventurer has met along the way was a ship's bosun who helped rescue him after the 2019 suicide attempt. Another supporter helped nurse the kayaker back to health after he suffered what was initially feared to be a stroke while paddling around Skye. The condition, which turned out to be Bell's palsy, threatened to end Nick's trip. But having recovered, Nick looked back on it as one of the journey's many challenges he has been able to overcome.



"Every day there has been a delight," he said. "Even though some days have been tougher than others, there's always been something that really I've enjoyed seeing or experiencing."

The trip, which had no fixed itinerary, started with a "fantastic" journey up the west coast, including particularly spectacular paddles around Loch Etive and Loch Hourne. Next came challenging waters and "incredible" scenery around Loch Torridon in the north-west Highlands and Cape Wrath on the north coast. The trip continued back to the west coast via the Falkirk Wheel and Glasgow canal, which Nick described as an "oasis of nature and calmness" snaking Scotland's largest city. Each night the adventurer stopped wherever he felt comfortable, typically spending the night under the stars in his tent.

Nick said the most satisfying part of his adventure was speaking to people across the country about mental health, including the challenging subject of suicide. "Some people's conversations they've not had before with others because it's too painful or difficult to have, but they felt able to have a conversation with me." "I hadn't expected that I would provide inspiration to others but it seems that I do and that's really, really lovely."

Nick said he would continue to share his story online and hoped to set up a charity that will help other people use the great outdoors to improve their mental health.

Nick, who at many stages in his life found it impossible to envisage any path forward, said: "I'm very excited about the future because I feel like I now have a job to do. So in a way this journey is not the end, in a way it's the beginning."



Loch Hourne. Photo: Nick Ray



Snowed in at Loch Etive. Photo: Nick Ray



Welcome home to Tobermory. Photos: Callum Hall

Upcoming Events

Dates	Event	Location	Website
Sept. 20-21	Intermediate and Advanced Surf Camps	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 22-24	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles, VA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Sept 29 – Oct.1	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Lower Argyle, Nova Scotia	bofsks.com
Oct 5 - 8	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes, DE	delmarvapaddlersretreat.org/
Oct. 19 - 21	Sea Kayak Georgia Symposium	Tybee Island, GA	seakayakgeorgia.com
Oct. 22 - 28	Explore The Georgia Barrier Islands	Savannah, GA	crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct. 27 – 29	Autumn Gales Symposium	Stonington, CT	autumngales.com



Toucan. Photo; Rupert Kirkwood

Contributors

Angus Cochrane – is a journalist with BBC News/Scotland

Laurie Collins - is an ACA L3 instructor who frequently teaches for Cross Currents. She is chair of the Teacher Education Department at Howard Community College and lives in Baltimore.

Richard Essex - started sea kayaking on lake Michigan and the rivers near Chicago about 20 years ago. However, it is only after moving to Maryland a few years ago that he started to seriously pursue the sport. Since then he is out on the water most weekends developing his skills as an open water sea kayaker.

Kathryn Lapolla - operates Savannah Coastal EcoTours. She is an ACA L4 instructor and a Georgia Master Naturalist.

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.

Shelly Wiechelt – is an ACA L3 Coastal Kayak Instructor who lives in Maryland. Shelly is also Chair of the Graduate Social Work Department at University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Reinhard Zollitsch - is an avid ocean paddler. He uses a Verlen Kruger Sea Wind sea canoe with a bent-shaft marathon racing paddle. He has paddled around all New England States and Canadian Maritime provinces, a 4,000-mile circle. His longest trip was a 1,000-miler with only 1 resupply stop. Reinhard has also raced the 20-mile open-ocean Blackburn Challenge in Gloucester, MA, 17 consecutive years in a Hawaiian solo outrigger canoe Also check out his website www.ZollitschCanoeAdventures.com

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 some of this month’s contributors are instructors. That is not a requirement. Articles should be limited to about 1,000 – 1,500 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*