

CONN YAK

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

May 2004

Off to the Florida Keys

by Bill Anthony

In late January we drove to Florida and visited my wife's brother and others. We decided on camping and at least one night at a guesthouse in Key West along with various paddling destinations. We also wanted some time to see the Everglades. My Chevy Express van was emptied of its tools and equipment and converted into a camper and kayak transportation.

We brought all our basic paddling gear and as the water temperature was to be in the high 70's, I was determined to leave my wetsuit at home. I brought an extra item of most of the basic gear that could be torn, damaged or lost and made sure to bring a VHF radio, signaling devices and a tow rope, the latter a replacement for the one in the hands of the mythical person in Stony Creek who collects expensive kayaking equipment. If he happened to be in the Keys, I was ready for him. Of course, I also had two Greenland paddles. I wouldn't lose one fending off ice flows but negotiating a mangrove-lined channel, maybe.

Our available time away was ten days and driving would consume at least four. Leaving at 3:00 in the morning on March 5th got us to Savannah, GA by 7:30 in the evening and it also got us the first on an incredible run of seafood dinners. We got away early the next morning and explored the northeast Florida coastline from Amelia Island down to St. Augustine on route A1A, including a ferry crossing to avoid Jacksonville. With four hours in St. Augustine and a late lunch, we still made it to a second night on the road at Pompano Beach by early evening. By getting that far in two days including some leisurely touring, we were positioned to make an early morning departure to Key Largo and the John

Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park where we made a 9:00 AM boat to go snorkeling. This was a perfectly calm morning after several days of strong winds. The boat took about fifteen of us five miles offshore to the coral reefs lining the Atlantic side of the Keys. The gear was rented and a cleverly designed diving vest would keep us afloat on the surface if inflated or able to dive if deflated.

I did rent a shortie wetsuit and even though the water temperature was 76 and the air temperature in the 80's, we would be in the water for one and a half hours. My first reaction in the water as I stared at an unyielding blue horizon was "so this is what its like if one capsized in mid-ocean and your kayak was blown out of reach." A quick 180-degree turn revealed our boat and thus relieved, I started a fantastic in the water adventure. Snorkeling and kayaking in the Keys can go hand in hand as well. Always carry a face mask so you can hang on to your partner's bow and roll over into another world or for some just roll and be your own glass bottom boat.



A noontime departure from the Park got us to our campground in three hours. Our site mingled in with older motorcyclists and some "spring breakers" was perfectly situated near the bathrooms and the beach. A word about the bathrooms -the Weather Channel plays 24 hours a day and so morning, noon, evening and two in the morning, one is constantly made aware of the rest of the country's misery, especially New England's and particularly for anyone about to take a paddle in Long Island Sound.

If there is a real paradise to be found by driving somewhere to paddle, then it is Bahia Honda State Park. Located at the western end of the Seven Mile Bridge, this long narrow key comfortably

Continued...



Lunch stop at Barn Island-03

Photo: Tom Maziarz

Florida Keys...continued

accommodates Route 1 and a long, pristine white sand beach on its Atlantic side. I know some ConnYakers have been there. It ought to be on our paddling schedule for a weekend in mid-March. Posted on the BB: " 10 AM paddle at Bahia Honda State Park. Bring lunch. Back at 2 PM." A cold front had come into the Keys the previous night. This is just another way of saying it will be windy. Cold has nothing to do with it. But when the wind blows 15-20 MPH, you have a choice of paddling on the Atlantic or Gulf side and if one chooses the lee side, the water is nice and calm although the wind can easily blow over the low lying keys. At Bahia Honda, it is a long stretch of absolutely clear aqua-blue water over a white sand bottom. Joan's boat looked like it was suspended, as her hull, paddle and rudder were all clearly visible. We spent several hours paddling up wind and then had a nice ride back. Joan did not want to paddle in the chop on the windward side so we kept to the Atlantic side. I explored the western tip by myself. Cloudless days meant endless sun, so protection is important. One needs plenty of sunscreen, wide hats and breathable long-sleeved shirts. A spray skirt and PDF felt very comfortable. Polarized sunglasses allow you to see into the water. After a swim at the beach, we were ready for a break from the sun.

While loading up the van, I had the first of many inquiries about my Greenland paddle. Among its many virtues is how it allows one to meet interesting people. These were not crowded waterways, however, and we did not meet anyone paddling. We saw occasional kayakers on top of vehicles despite the fact it was still the "winter" season. Our setup was a rarity and we always had curious and inquiring onlookers.

The next day was a change of venue as we decided to check out some paddling in the mangroves. I brought two books (listed below) with paddling trips and local information. In both cases they were very helpful in choosing paddles when one had a limited time. Our campground on Sugarloaf Key had its own palm-shaded beach and I launched there and paddled alone for several

hours that morning. In the afternoon we headed west for one Key and launched at a marina for \$3.00. From our campground, twenty minutes in either direction could bring one to a dozen or more launch sites. This site gave us access to a shallow windswept bay a mile or so across. There we were supposed to enter Perky Creek, a narrow mangrove lined waterway, which led to another bay to the west. A slight offset of trees on the far shore gave me a clue to its otherwise invisible entrance. The creek started off wide enough to paddle and had a mild tide rip. It is amazing to realize how much of the Gulf of Mexico flows through the Keys on an outgoing tide and fills back on the incoming tide. Here 60 miles off the tip of Florida we were closer to Havana than Miami and 750 miles further south than Los Angeles.

The tidal ranges are around a foot but given the very low water levels it is easy to get stranded in what is called "skinny water" at low tide. It wasn't skinny water but fast water that we eventually encountered a half-mile up the creek. Here the twenty to thirty foot wide creek narrowed down to under four feet through a mangrove tunnel with a very swift current. I went first and stowing my paddle under the deck straps pulled my way through by the tree roots for about two hundred feet until the creek opened back up. Joan struggled for about twenty minutes to get through. There was no way I could go back to help, as I would have become hopelessly wedged into the mangrove roots. The roots actually made great handles to pull yourself through the tunnel. The hard part was the swift current. Once on the other side, we had nice open water and eventually a fast ride back on the current to our bay through a motorboat channel. The wind was actually quite strong on the open bay but the low water depths of only two to three feet kept the chop down.

A poster at the campground spoke of a Hawaiian Luau at 6PM with free beer from 5 to 6. The idea was overwhelming. This was a Tuesday afternoon I remembered. "Let's see," I thought, "Tuesday and Luau's - Eat your heart out Tuesday Nite Paddlers and there's free beer to boot".

The next day brought us a night in a

Key West quest house called the Angelina which had a palm shaded heated swimming pool. In Key West we had great dining with lunch at the Turtle Kraal on the harbor and dinner at the much acclaimed Blue Heaven. Neither was a disappointment nor was the shopping, quaint back streets, sunset at Mallory Square with its street performers and a replica of the "America" coming in from an afternoon cruise under full sail.

Thursday was time to start back via the Everglades and one more time to paddle. After a fascinating drive across the Everglades on the Tamiami Trail with plenty of bird and alligator sightings, we stayed at a campground in Naples. The Everglades would require more time than we had, so we opted for a paddle off the southern end of Marco Island which is mentioned in Nigel Foster's book. Here desolate white sand beaches and backcountry mangrove keys existed right next to 30 story high-rise condominiums. A well-positioned marina with easy parking gave us immediate and easy access to the open water and a chance to paddle with dolphins. This was clearly a trip highlight. With these massive condos at our back and the open water with an empty sand beach to our front and dolphins swimming in and around us it was a perfect last paddle. Our arrival back in the afternoon at the marina ramp and its park benches now full of curious onlookers reminded me of Stony Creek. Joan and I fielded lots of questions and of course the paddle came up again.

Saturday was time to start heading back. We spent the night in Savannah and returned to Connecticut via Roanoke, VA and the Shenandoah Valley. We never saw a kayak on a car heading south. Try paddling in Florida in March and you will have it pretty much to yourself with plenty of sunshine, warm water and no bugs.

Next year I will post a paddle for the Keys. "In the water at 10AM, bring lunch, back in ten days, warm water protection required".

- Bill Anthony



Clinton Kayak Launch

Good & Bad News

Last year I reported that Clinton, CT had received a state grant to construct a car top boat launch on the South side of the Post Road on the Indian River which empties into Clinton Harbor.

The good news is that this launch is still on the radar screen and will become a reality. The bad news is that it will not happen in 2004. The old Clinton Police Station where the new launch will be built is still in use. The new police station is months behind schedule. The Clinton First Selectman has assured me the launch will be operable for the 2005 boating season. *-Paul*

IN THE WATER AT 10

Please do your best to honor the "IN THE WATER" times posted by the trip posters. Nobody wants to launch and sit there waiting for others to get ready. If you like to leave at 11 or at 2, post a paddle that leaves at that time - you'll have plenty of company.

Everyone runs into unexpected delays, but just realize that the group may not be willing to wait for you. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few"

SURF KAYAK RAFFLE DONATED BY DAVE GRANGER

Proceeds are going to Cheri Perry's Greenland Nationals trip.

Wilderness Systems Alamax Surf Kayak, 11 feet overall length, keyhole cockpit, adjustable foot pegs, yellow - orange fade, electric bilge pump installed, 3 fin boxes. Used in good shape.

Tickets are \$5. The raffle and drawing will be at the "Meet at the Beach" event. The kayak will be there for the winner to take home.

If you can't make the event you can have someone else buy you a ticket(s) or, you can mail me the \$\$\$ (cash) and I will fill out a ticket for you.

Jay Babina

7 Jeffrey Lane, Branford, CT 06405

No receipts/checks - Trying to keep this as simple as possible.

No delivery of kayak. Pick it up at the event or a later pick-up arrangement can be made.

NORWALK ISLANDS LAUNCH CALF PASTURE

MAY 15-16 & 22-23

Dress for water temp. In the Water - 10
Directions - Take Exit 16 off I-95 East Norwalk. Go south on East Ave. .5 mile to small cemetery on left. Go left at south end of cemetery then make a quick right on to Gregory Blvd. Follow Gregory through traffic light, bear left at small traffic circle, then immediate right and continue southwards to Calf Pasture Beach. Go through entrance gate (no permit required until Memorial Day) and follow road around perimeter to launch ramp. Itinerary: set at the launch given conditions and abilities/interest of the group: This can be a 3+ hour paddle depending how many islands circumnavigated. Bring lunch.



MEET AT THE BEACH SAT JUNE 19, 10 AM ON BLUFF POINT STATE PARK, GROTON

The annual Meet at the Beach is a gathering of boat builders - all styles - Skin, Strip, Stitch & Glue and more. New or old creations as well as non-builders welcome. The Greenland paddle raffle and surf boat raffle winners will be announced. Cheri Perry will also do a Greenland rolling demonstration around 1 pm. This is an east coast event and people arrive from many states.

Sponsorship Greenland Paddle raffle tickets are ongoing to help Cheri Perry's trip to the Greenland National Kayaking Championships. Available at trips, events or by mail to me at PO Box 350, Moodus, CT 06469 (receipts will not be sent, to save on postage). Tickets are \$3.00 or 2 for \$5.00. - Joy McNeil

The paddle will be awarded at the "Meet at the Beach" event. Cheri will do a Greenland rolling demonstration on that day.

The Meet on the Beach is a gathering of wood or skin boat builders - any style, who bring their new or old creations. Everyone is welcome.

EVENTS



MYSTIC TO STONINGTON HARBOR SAT MAY 8 (I/A)

Meet at Isham St. launch & paddle to Stonington harbor. Lunch in the harbor by railroad tracks. Return route will be dictated by conditions. Approx 11 miles. Wetsuits/drysuits recommended. Check ConnYak bulletin board for cancellation if weather is questionable.

In the water at 10:00 AM

SELDEN ISLAND CAMPING AND PADDLE

MAY 15-16 & 22-23 (N)

Dave Hiscocks has reserved the Seldon Island campsite for the weekends of May 15th/16th and 22th/23th. He will be at the 15th/16th only. Contact Dave to reserve a spot for the 15-16th.

860 633-7254 Non-campers will paddle from the Goodspeed Launch that day as well. Launch at 10.

WICKFORD TRIANGLE WICKFORD, RI - INTERMEDIATE MAY 22

Launch from Wilson Park, Wickford, RI. Paddle to Hope Island, Prudence Island, Jamestown, & back to Wickford. Approx 12 miles. We will be crossing the high speed ferry channel twice, so group cohesion is mandatory. Wetsuits recommended. Check ConnYak bulletin board for cancellation if weather is questionable.

In the water at 10:30 AM

NORWALK ISLAND CAMPING & PADDLE JUNE 6-7

Norwalk Islands Campout
Sat./Sun. June 6/7

Launch: Saugatuck River (Westport)

Contact: Oliver Bloch,

obloch@sbcglobal.net or 203-750-0362

Non-campers will launch and paddle that day as well.

*Watch the bulletin board for
impromptu paddles posted by
members.*

www.connyak.org

CLASSIFIED

Drysuit for Sale: The Barefoot Company drysuit, men's large, blue, used 3 times, cost \$400, asking \$250. Call Chris 860-989-1918.

NECKY LOOKSHA IV FOR SALE 17' x 22" 62lbs, Almost New, \$900 mmarkb@msn.com

Current Designs Solstice GT 17'7", Neo skirt medium, Ex cond. \$2400 860-875-7052

Perception Carolina - 14'7", Ex. cond. 2 years old. \$575. 860-889-6612 Cell 860-334-5290

Wilderness Systems Shenai kevlar kayak red/white good condition with spray skirt weight 45# and 17' 4" long \$1475 phone 860-267-8194

connYak Trip Ratings

Novice (N) Paddles are generally inland waterways (rivers etc) and usually start at 10 with a lunch stop at 12 and head back.

Intermediate paddles (I) can be the same as novice except usually encompasses open water, the chance of rougher wind and water conditions. Intermediate paddles can be longer distances but not always.

The difference between (N) and (I)

paddles can be very little or a lot depending on who is leading, the destination and the conditions. New boat owners should paddle for a month before paddling an (I) paddle.

Every paddle, both intermediate and novice can encounter very rough wind and water conditions since dealing with changing conditions is the nature of our sport. Even some river paddles in the past have been very rough. Many open water paddles are calm.

Advanced paddles (A) are posted on the BB or in the newsletter and group leaders often request that you contact them before arriving.

Spray skirts and PFD's are required on all paddles. All paddlers should have a pump and paddle float and know how to use them as well as a signaling device (whistle). A basic kayak course is highly recommended before paddling with ConnYak even on (N) trips.

ConnYak is an organization of paddlers with the same interest who paddle together for company and enjoyment. Each paddler is responsible for their own safety. ConnYak is not a guide or instructional service. We promote safety and good paddling habits through example as well as our dedication to upholding good safety standards and practices as best we can.

TO JOIN CONNYAK...

ConnYak is a non profit club that is open to all paddlers interested in sea kayaking from any location. ConnYak annual membership fee is \$15.

Membership includes monthly newsletter, paddles, functions, etc. Send check to:

ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith

680 Browns Road, Storrs, CT 06268-2717

E-MAIL: CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG

WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

T-shirts for Articles

Authors of articles for the newsletter get a free T-shirt.

ConnYak Over-Dues

On the newsletter you receive, your due-date is on your label. If you fall behind with your dues, you get two months of newsletters which are stamped "over due" and then get cut off the list of active members.

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:
Jay Babina e-mail: jbabina@snet.net
7 Jeffrey Lane, Branford, CT 06405
203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136



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