

ConnYak

CONNECTICUT SEA KAYAKERS

February 2005

WILD LIFE AT RANGELEY LAKES

by Brooks Martyn - photos by Oliver Bloch

When ConnYak member and paddle pal Bill Knose asked me to plan our summer camp & paddle vacation to accommodate his visiting son, Bill Jr., I knew exactly where to go. Four previous trips to Maine, two to the coast and two inland, gave me a good insight into the paddling environments that were available to us. Bill the Younger had limited exposure to kayaks and thus very limited skills and we felt that the specter of fog, strong currents, and a large tidal fall that would be encountered on the coast were deterrents for a beginner. The Rangeley Lakes region, however, offered a selection of large lakes, flat water, and manageable rivers. Young Bill's schedule dictated that we make the trip in mid-July, which is high-tourist season. One of my priorities on any trip is to see as much wild life and as few people as possible from kayak level while on a paddling expedition. A relative absence of flying, biting, blood-sucking insects is also a great plus on any trip.

My viewing of wild life began earlier in the trip than expected. While waiting for the two Bills at the Holyoke scenic overlook on Route 91, I became aware of four young women chatting on a hand-held CB radio. Subsequently an 18-

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CONNAYAK

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. Our membership supports our website, the ConnYak library, lecturers, paddles, pool sessions and various functions which require permits, etc.

Wayne Smith - President

Please send checks to:

ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith
85 School St,
Coventry, CT 06238

WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD:
WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

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CONNAYAK@CONNAYAK.ORG

wheeler would pull in, a girl would climb into the cab, then emerge a short time later with a fist full of cash and a smile on her face. It took a while before the full meaning of "rest stop" sank in. Color me naïve! The kind of wild life that I was looking for took place six hours later, south of Errol, New Hampshire, when we had to slow our vehicles to a crawl to avoid spooking a large, skittish moose grazing on the highway shoulder. An hour later we arrived at the Aziscoos Family Campground in Wilson Mills, Maine and went through the process of registering, choosing a campsite, and setting up our gear. With daylight to spare, we decided to launch our boats in the Magalloway River, which runs past the campground. The river is narrow, swift, and deep and we paddled upstream for a mile or so, surrounded by grassy slopes and lofty mountains before we encountered a long gravel rapids, which we chose not to portage. On the fast drift back to camp a pair of beavers splashed noisily into the water beside our kayakers. The last big surprise of the day came just as we were finishing supper. A kayak-laden car pulled into our campsite and two total strangers



alighted. "Is Brooks Martyn here"? asked the driver. "I'm Oliver Bloch and this is my friend Anita Berson. We're ConnYak members. Cheryl Barnaba said we might find you here. She and Fran Griffin will be here late tomorrow". As they were minutes too late to join in our traditional first-night feast of spaghetti and meatballs all we could do was welcome them and watch as they set up their tents on the adjoining campsite.

Next morning found us packing lunches and loading the boats back atop the cars. Our destination was the lower portion of Umbagog Lake. We found this part of the 7 mile-long lake to be the most heavily used and developed. Besides the many neat cottages there was a marina that provided water taxi service with a flat top pontoon boat. This end of the lake is also a favorite jumping off place for canoe flotillas of boy and girl camping groups. It was here that I first became conscious of the fact that the Great North Woods area is so vast that despite the presence of other people there is no feeling of crowding or invasion of privacy that is experienced in the lower New England states. We spent the morning paddling up the



lake, checking out the cottages that dot the west shore and most of the small islands. Almost everything is posted and we had difficulty finding an outcropping of rock on which we could legally embark and eat lunch. The trip back to the launch site became the bane of my paddling experience: the morning breeze, which had been in our faces, reversed itself while we were eating and became a stiff wind, bringing with it whitecaps and rain. Anita and I gutted it out, seeking rest and shelter in the lee of the few small islands we came upon. The rest of the group chose to hug the west shore and take the longer route back. Our miseries ended abruptly when we paddled into the wind shadow of a mountain and we finished the trip in a light mist on flat water.

The next day, joined by Fran and Cheryl, we decided to launch from our campsite and do a one-way paddle down the Magalloway River. After leaving two cars at the ranger station 10 miles downriver we slid our boats down the steep bank and embarked on a fast, current-assisted journey through the pristine beauty of the evergreen forest. We had planned a side trip up the Diamond River to view a reportedly beautiful grotto, but soon found the way blocked by a long shallow rapid. Rather than portage the boats across it, we chose to sunbathe and eat lunch on a sand bar near the mouth of the Diamond. Our efforts were rewarded, however, by seeing a Goldeneye duck with its babies, two mature bald eagles, and another small, cinnamon-colored duck with babies in tow.

The three newcomers to the group had never seen the upper, undeveloped end of Umbagog Lake, so the next day we returned to the ranger station, which is on the Androscoggin River. As we were preparing our boats for launch, a flotilla of chattering kids in canoes paddled by and I thought, "Brother, we aren't going to see a single critter today with all this commotion going on". As we headed up the river I could see a scattering of recreational kayaks ahead of us and my hopes sank even lower. How wrong I was! Within a few hundred yards of the ranger station four tiny otter kits swam into the midst of our group. When they realized what they had done they absolutely freaked out, emitting piercing shrieks and flailing wildly about in the water. We all froze in position until the babies calmed down enough to dive and swim to safety. We paddled on upriver, excitedly talking about what we had just seen when I began to whisper, "Deer, deer, deer, right bank"! There, about 20 feet from us, stood a tiny spotted fawn. Further up the river, before we entered the lake, we were treated to the sight of a mother loon with babies, and two bald eagles, one of which was a juvenile. Later in the day, on the way back downriver, Bill Sr. and I were checked out by a young moose, which snorted and retreated into a swamp. What a day! Speaking of boats, I observed that recreational kayaks and canoes are the most popular watercraft in this area. Most of the paddlers we saw were sans PFD and without a stroke. They were just out there having a good time and we never saw anyone in distress. However, when the wind

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POOL SESSIONS

Watch the bulletin board for impromptu gatherings and events posted by paddlers.

CONNYPAK POOL SESSIONS

ConnYak pool sessions continue every Sunday in January and 3 Sundays in February. The practice sessions are held at Sheehan High School (Wallingford) pool from 9 am to 1 pm. It's a great time to practice rolls, attempted rolls, rescues or whatever you want. The fee is \$10 - paid at the door - bring cash in an envelope with your name on it or checks made to ConnYak. Everyone will have to be democratic and take turns. Although it's a heated pool, wear wetsuits, drytops etc. since it's easy to get chilled, and... don't forget a mask, nose clips etc. unless you enjoy chlorine in your eyes and sinuses.

Directions: Exit 15 off Rt. 91. Rt 68 W. past intersections of Rt 15 & Rt 150. Take fourth left on to Hope Hill Road which is at the light. Sheehan High School is 1/4 mile on the Rt.

GREENWICH POOL

CT AMC - Greenwich YWCA, 259 East Putnam Ave. Jan. 9,16,23,30 & Feb. 6,13,27 (NOT Feb. 20). 9:00 am to sign waiver form. Door opens at 9:15 am. In-water time is 9:30-11:30 am. \$15.00 per person charged to cover pool rental. Anyone arriving after 9:30 am will be charged an additional \$5.00. We encourage you to join AMC but membership is not required for participating in these sessions.

Please contact Jean Trapani at Flatwater@ct-amc.org for info.

kicks up on these big lakes I would suspect that a newbie in a rec boat could be in a whole lot of trouble real quick. We were the only sea kayakers on the water and, with our big boats and safety gear, were probably viewed by the masses as a bunch of elitist weirdoes.

On our last paddle day we awoke to find the mountain peaks on either side of our campground blanketed in fog. After breakfast the weather deteriorated into a steady drizzle and the sky clouded over. Oliver and Anita chose to spend the day sightseeing ashore but the rest of us wanted to explore Cupsuptic River and Lake. We arrived at the launch site after a 30-minute drive and, donning rain gear, proceeded to set up the boats. We set off upriver in a light fog and steady rain. We paddled, widely separated and immersed in our own thoughts, into a world

of unspoiled beauty and muted sound. A few miles up the river a waterfall blocked our way and compelled us to turn and retrace our route, pushing a Great Blue Heron before us. I thought, "You fool! Just fly back over us and you will be rid of our intrusion"! But he stubbornly flew on and on down the river. Once back at the launch ramp we passed under the highway bridge and out onto the lake. Lunchtime found us pulled up in rocky shallows, perched on slimy green logs, eating silently in the rain. No sooner had we finished and launched our boats than the rain stopped and the sky cleared. We paddled on southward toward the narrows where Cupsuptic Lake joins Mooselookmeguntic Lake. In the distance ahead, I could see a strange structure ashore that looked like a giant pyramid. As we drew closer I saw that it was a huge teepee built of driftwood, set back on a wide sandy beach. When I finally beached my boat I could see no posted signs. Apparently this is a favorite picnic spot for the locals and I wondered if they used the teepee for a



giant bonfire or as rain shelter. Cupsuptic Lake was typical of the other lakes we visited in that we saw no signs of activity among the many palatial homes. Although we saw the obligatory ski boats, docks, and assorted water toys, we were usually the only boats in use on the water. Perhaps the owners only come to visit on the weekends. The few motorboats that we encountered while paddling during the week were small aluminum fishing boats or an occasional distant water ski boat.

Reassembling the group in the village of Rangeley for our last evening's dinner out was no problem.

All we had to do was drive slowly down the main drag and look for Oliver's car. We were the only 4 vehicles in town with sea kayaks strapped on top. During their day's exploration ashore, Oliver and Anita had discovered the Thai Blossom restaurant just outside town, which proved to be a popular choice for the group. Perhaps it was a week's worth of camp food or maybe it was just the absolutely divine food, but the most common sounds from our table were groans of ecstasy as we sampled each other's entrees. What a way to end a perfect week. And what a great group of people to share it all with! Young Bill, who is the kind of son any parent could be proud of, after a brief tutorial on the forward stroke, proved to be a strong, fast paddler. Oliver, Anita, and Fran, who must know every launch site in the east, are all great paddlers and camp mates, and Cheryl, the seasoned kayak adventurer, is the life of the campfire circle. My friend, Bill the Elder, is a compulsive, competent navigator and dedicated paddler. Bill, may we share many more of these adventures together.

On the trip back home we stopped one last time to watch a moose grazing contentedly in the middle of the Androscoggin River; it was the perfect ending to a great vacation.

I know a place where you can go kayaking on 70-degree water in the middle of the winter. You can roll or wade in the water and it doesn't hurt or make parts of your body numb! The water is clear, and the underwater scenery soon becomes the predominant interest of paddlers used to looking only above the surface. And the water colors are neon tropical aqua shades that don't happen in Connecticut. No, I'm not talking about the ConnYak pools sessions; this is an article about our two trips to the Florida Keys.

Claudine and I completed our second kayaking vacation to the Florida Keys this last Christmas holiday. There is an active element of Key paddlers and would-be Key paddlers in the club, so I thought I'd offer some of my impressions of the Keys from a paddler's perspective.

Both of our trips took place around the last two weeks of the year, when the weather is fairly cool for Florida. The air temperature probably ran around 55 to 75 degrees during the days we were there, except for our first day, which was unusually cool. Apparently the water temperature never drops below 65 at the lowest, even if a winter cold front pushes the air temperature down into the 40s. We were comfortable in shorts sometimes, but I became a fan of those pants that you can zip the legs on or off. I think someone should get a Nobel Prize or something for inventing them.

We heard that the wind is also much more of a factor during the winter, and on this last trip it was certainly true. A couple of times we had to work a bit harder than we had planned. But the worst thing about a windy day is that the resulting waves interfere with the underwater view – something that is very important on a Keys paddle. Our paddling technique was much different down there, because we spent much of our time looking into the

The Keys

by Peter Smith



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The Keys

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clear, shallow water. Whenever the wind died, or we found a protected area, we tended to spend most of our time searching the bottom for new discoveries. The importance of reaching a particular destination seems to dwindle when surprises can show up anywhere! We have been lucky enough to see a lot of sharks on our trips. The size of the sharks seen relates to the depth of the water. When the water is a foot deep, 1 to 2 foot sharks would be cruising the shallows – often a tiny fin cutting the surface would help us spot them. When the water was 4 to 8 foot deep, we paddled over sleeping nurse sharks. This can be interesting, since the nurse sharks would often wake and bolt upon becoming aware of our presence. Once we woke up six or more at once, and we were treated to the sight of sharks blasting away in every direction. One of them actually bumped into Claudine's kayak in its haste. I probably should point out at this time that the sharks we saw are either quite benign, or too small to consider us as a food source.

Other fish sighted included barracuda, stingrays, tarpon, and many, many fish that we don't know what the heck they were. There were also a good variety of sponges, which are actually quite interesting. We were told not to touch the red or orange sponges, but we took the additional precaution of not touching much of anything. Speaking of touching things, this year we also saw quite a few of the famous Man-o-war jellyfish. They have a pretty translucent clear-to-purple air bladder that looks exactly like it is made out of plastic. We were discussing the stories we had heard about how toxic their poison is, and Claudine demonstrated that she could touch the air bladder without any repercussions. It's nice to have someone brave along to make these demonstrations for the more timid of us, like me.

Since we were able to make a paddling trip on every day except one, we now have accumulated twenty-two days of Keys paddling. However, the Keys are about 100 miles long, and we have a lot left to explore. The areas that we have enjoyed the most to date are about 15 to 30 miles from Key West, on the Gulf side. Traveling down the chain of Keys from the mainland, they form a slender string of stepping-stones for route 1 until Big Pine Key. Then they suddenly spread out into a far-flung area with a myriad of fascinating paddling opportunities. One of my favorite launching sites is at the end of Blimp Road on Cudjoe Key. Since there is a small military base that flies two tethered observation blimps (the local name for the flying blimp is Fat Albert), it would be remarkable if



someone failed to find their way back to the launching site. Once we were able to drive away from the busy Rt. 1 to some of the more remote launch sites, it began to feel like we were getting into backcountry. We've spent whole days on the water in this area without seeing another boat, and other days spotted only one or two boats when we crossed a channel between Keys.

Incidentally, don't think that just because you have just driven 1500 miles you have successfully escaped the omnipresent ConnYak organization. We paddled with Jim and Cathy, and they invited us over for a great Christmas dinner! Thanks!

Of course we visited Key Largo and Key West. Personally, just what I expected, lots of tourists and lots of stores trying to sell lots of tasteless stuff (not that I am above buying and wearing tasteless stuff, it's just that I have a saturation point). On the plus side we saw a very entertaining play at a local theater in Key West, and had quite a few great meals at local restaurants. As usual, we ended up bringing home a lot of the food we carried down with us for camping. In Key Largo I stumbled upon the African Queen next to the Ramada Inn where we spent our last night. That was a fun surprise for me!

There are three state campgrounds: Bahia Honda, Long Key, and John Pennekamp (Key Largo). Of the places we have stayed, we have preferred Bahia Honda because it is the closest to the paddling areas I just described. However, Long Key is the place

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The Keys

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to go if you want to take pictures of your campsite that will make everyone back home sick with envy. Every campsite is directly on the beach, with a few tropical trees or palms tastefully separating each site.

There are also a number of private campgrounds around, but in the ones I observed, there was a lack of screening vegetation between the sites. Another issue is that a remarkably high percentage of campers appear to have some sort of camping vehicle or trailer, so if you intend to tent camp you need to make sure that they can accommodate you.

We used several guidebooks. Kayaking the Keys by Kathleen Patton was probably our most used guide, but we met another kayaker who was using a recently published book, Kayaking in the Florida Keys by Bill Keogh, that appeared to be equally useful. Claudine has already ordered a copy of the second book for the ConnYak library.

Finally, the ride. It was a 1503-mile ride from home to our campsite at Bahia Honda. This time we did almost 1000 miles the first day, leaving at 4:00 AM on Saturday morning and arriving near the Florida state line around 9:00 PM.

Then the second day was a piece of cake. It's really not a bad drive when you have two to share the driving, but of course it's more fun for Claudine because she gets to listen to my stories all of the way.

Sick and tired of the cold and dark? Got two weeks? Consider doing what mobs of Canadians have been doing for years. Drive south until you can't go any further or join Bill Anthony (next page-8)!



I, Pete Smith, attest that I have no affiliation with the Florida board of tourism, or any other Florida agency. During a large part of the year I am quite content to paddle in home waters, and I have nothing whatsoever against Connecticut except on those occasions when the weather becomes completely intolerable, typically between December to March.

Florida Keys Trip

When: March 2005

Travel to: March 4 (or 5)-6 (1 to 2 overnights)

Return: March 12-13 (1 overnight)

Or leave earlier or stay later

Distance: 1660 miles; 28 driving time hours. Where: Sugarloaf Key, KOA Campground
www/koakampgrounds.com/where/09316/index.htm (or make other arrangements)

Logistics: Provide your own transportation. Carpooling can work as well as finding a ride for your boat and flying down. Participants would share fuel costs if carpooling. Have room for 3 boats, possibly 4, on my van. Can carry extra gear and bring stove etc.

It is possible to reach Savannah, GA comfortably in 1 day with a 3 AM Connecticut departure and make the campground by late afternoon on the second day. Other options include an earlier departure and excellent paddling below Marco Island on Florida's west coast or paddling around Georgia's Tybee Is. Tent camping at excellent waterside KOA campground with all facilities. Share 2-person site for around \$25.00/nite (\$9.00 per extra person).

Paddling options: There are over 25 trip options at as many launch sites in a 10 mile area along Rt. 1 to either the east or west of the campground. In addition, one can launch and paddle from the campground beach, which is a few feet from most tent sites. Many trips are under 5 miles and most under 10 miles. They are expandable or shrinkable, one-way or loops as they wind in and out of the 100's of keys (islands). Be reminded of a tropical Thimble Islands multiplied a hundredfold with frequent sand beaches, few houses, shallow water, minimal boat traffic and lots of wildlife. Paddles can take place either on the Gulf side or the Atlantic side depending on the wind. Temperature ranges from 60's at night to low 80's during the day. Water temp -high 70's

Gear: Tent and light sleeping bag. Lots of sun protection, including hats, long sleeve tropical shirt, and sun glasses (preferably polarized for thru water viewing) Standard paddling gear and safety equipment. Spray skirts are not uncomfortable. Extra paddles are advised. Shortie type wetsuit gear would be handy, if only for snorkeling etc. Bring snorkeling gear too.

Other: Guided trips, snorkeling, diving, swimming, fishing, Key West itself (15 miles away), ferry to Dry Tortugas Nat'l Park are all additional options. The food is great!

Ref: The Florida Keys Paddling Guide by Bill Keogh

Kayaking the Keys by Kathleen Patton

Contact: Bill Anthony – wanthony88@snet.net / 203-263-2548

EVENTS

CONNYSK MEETING

Wednesday, Feb. 16

Video Showing

This is the Sea

Library - North Haven, 6:30 pm

Directions:

MapQuest Type in: Elm Street, North Haven, CT 06473 and select 1-25- The star on map is the Library.

Rt. 15 Southbound: Take exit 63- at end of exit light, turn left onto Hartford Turnpike- At next light (200') turn left onto RT. 22- go through two lights and turn right at next light onto Rt 103- At first light turn right onto Broadway- At first light, turn left onto Elm St.- Library is first building on left and entrance to parking lot is just before Library

Rt. 15 Northbound: Take exit 63- at end of ramp light, turn right onto
Rt. 22- go through one light and at next light turn right onto Rt. 103- At first light turn right onto Broadway- at first light turn left onto Elm St.- Library is first building on left and entrance to parking lot is just before building

I 91 Northbound: take exit 11- at end of ramp stop sign turn right onto Rt. 22- at first light turn right onto Rt. 103- at first light
turn right onto Broadway- at first light turn left onto Elm Street- Library is first building on left and entrance to parking lot is just before building

I 91 Southbound: take exit 12 and turn left at end of ramp light onto Rt. 5- go through 5 lights (5th is at Rt. 22 intersection) - you are now on Rt 103- at next light turn right onto Broadway- at first light
turn left onto Elm St.- library is first building on left and entrance to parking lot is just before building.

Notes from the meeting ...

January, 2004

We had our annual election of officers. The three incumbent officers were reelected. Wayne Smith-President, Phil Warner-Vice President, Jay Babina-Secretary. There was a nomination for the treasurer position however, the current treasurer, Dan Maloney was not present and could not comment on his position. We decided to postpone the election of that position for the February meeting. It must be noted that Dan came forth when Dick Gamble left and offered to handle the position. Normally we have non-contested elections and we will have to discuss this at the February meeting.

Our meeting and presentation by Heather Medic from the Mystic Aquarium Rescue Dept. was extremely informative. The seaport rescue group responds to calls about beached, sick or trapped animals who need assistance. They take these animals in to rehabilitate or nurse them back to health and release them back into the sound. They are also very involved in the study of the habits and health of these animals and work in conjunction with other rescue groups throughout the country. BTW, it's illegal to take a seal, whale or turtle carcass. Heather's group would collect them for further research and study.

We learned many startling and interesting facts about the inhabitants of LI Sound. Did you know that we have three types of sea turtles in the Sound! One was actually recorded with a 15ft front leg span. We have 4 types of seals and two types of whales. The seal population is on the rise and their migratory habits are changing quite rapidly. Seal sightings have been recorded as far south as Virginia.

The seals don't arrive to have their young as many people think. They actually have them far up north and make their journey with their pups, many times carrying them on their mother's back. Basically they're here on vacation, indulging in the abundance of food like herring, small cod and mackerel. They are loners. When you see a group together, they are not a family but individuals that decided to rest together. Even the young break away from the mother quite early.

Navigation Class

Saturday, February 26th, 2005 (10:00am - 2:30pm)

Brainard Library in Haddam, CT. (Near Haddam Meadow S.P.) Learn how to read nautical charts, plot courses and follow them, how to use a compass and a Nav-Aid, and how to use a WetNotes book and watch to get a fix on positions when in fog or when disoriented.

COST: \$55, which includes instruction, numerous take-home handouts, and a Nav-Aid.

CLASS SIZE: Minimum of 10 participants, Maximum of 16.

INSTRUCTOR: Adam Bolonsky

To reserve a spot, contact:

Doug Downey

roy.downey@snet.net



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. Send check to:

ConnYak c/o Wayne Smith
85 School St, Coventry, CT 06238
WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

ConnYak Dues

ConnYak annual dues are due yearly to the month when you joined. Email notices will be sent when your dues are due. Some people will get a post card until our data base is current.

Newsletter Editor / Design

Jay Babina

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T-shirts for Articles

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

Visit our web site for the Bulletin Board, Library Information and more information on ConnYak

www.connyak.org