

CPA kayak car camping in the age of Coronavirus



Paddlers practice social distancing along the disused rail bridge on the Tuckahoe above Hillsboro.

By Ralph Heimlich

Relaxation of lock-down orders in Chesapeake Bay states since mid-May recognizes that outdoor activities like camping and kayaking are less likely to lead to new COVID-19 infections than many other types of activity, such as opening beaches, bars and restaurants (see <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/coronavirus-what-to-do-outside.html>).

I'd already successfully led a CPA post-lockdown day trip, so my next planned trip was a car camper to base day trips by kayak in the area of the Tuckahoe Creek and Choptank River on Maryland's Eastern Shore, planned for the weekend AFTER Memorial Day.

On May 29, six CPA members (Jim Allen, Helen Dawson, Suzanne Farace, Gary and Michelle Trotter and Ed Johnson) joined me at Tuckahoe State Park for a three-day car camper. Camping is proving a popular escape from the lockdown isolation, so Gary and Michelle had to get a site at nearby Martinak State Park because all the sites at Tuckahoe were reserved.

As I have done in the past, I attempted to check in at park HQ when I arrived, only to find out that Maryland DNR has instituted new contact-less check in procedures. There is a clipboard at the campground entrance with a list of reserved sites, and small blue "Reserved" placards

on each site already taken. You can still try to drive up for a site, paying into a deposit envelope, but my experience is that you really need to make reservations well in advance through their [website](#) if you want to be sure of having someplace to camp. In preparing for my next camper to Belle Isle, VA, I found a similar situation: All sites were reserved well in advance.

After setting up camp, Jim Allen and I drove over to the boat ramp on Tuckahoe Lake and launched to go up the creek from the reservoir. We paddled across the lake and saw a couple of sea kayaks on the beach, which turned out to be Gary and Michelle. We four then paddled upstream against a slight current due to recent rains. The creek was very high, making it easy to paddle upstream, but many trees had blown down, making it harder to pick our way upstream.

We were finally blocked well below the small landing off the non-electric campground loop, and had to turn back. Hopefully the park staff will clear some of the worst blow downs later in the season as this paddle under the green canopy of shady trees is a pleasant one in mid-summer heat.

Following [CPA guidelines](#), we all prepared our meals separately, but got together for a campfire, spacing

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ourselves out by more than the regulation six feet and wearing our facemasks. If nothing else, it confused the campfire smoke.

Probably the most concerning part of post-lockdown camping is using the park bath houses. Maryland DNR posted a twice-a-day cleaning schedule and required masks, but I rarely saw anyone else in the men's room. I avoided using the shower and didn't linger, and also made a point to go at "odd" times rather than first thing in the morning or immediately after dinner.

Helen and Suzanne adopted a complete avoidance strategy, erecting Poo Pagodas (see [here](#)), portable potties (see [here](#)) and [Sun Showers](#). If you do use the park restrooms, wear your mask, wash your hands thoroughly after use (you do that anyway, right?) and carry a small bottle of sanitizer to wipe any surfaces you need to touch.

On Saturday, rather than my usual trip down the Tuckahoe to Ganey's Wharf on the Choptank, we opted to paddle upstream from Covey's Landing and return, due to the timing of the tide change. No one was at the launch when we arrived, and we quickly unloaded (with our masks on) and were in the water before any others arrived at the ramp. We had absolutely perfect weather

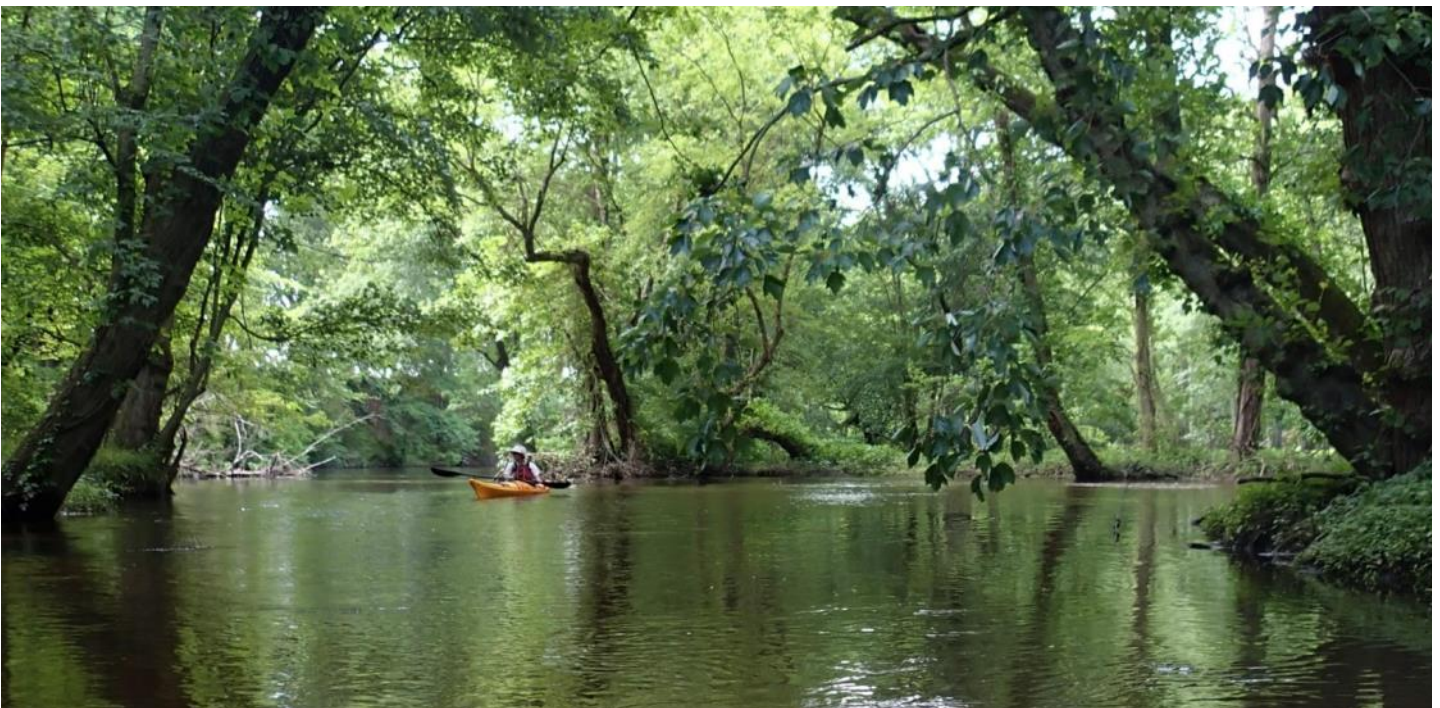
for our paddle, and observed a lot of wildlife on the way upstream. The wild iris were particularly stunning. Hillsboro ramp was a bit crowded by the time we arrived at about 11 AM (another group of kayakers from Easton was having a trip), so we paddled on by.

We went as far as the old railroad bridge, then returned downriver to Stony Point Road landing for lunch. We again masked and social distanced for lunch, and only a few other people drove in, none of whom got out of their cars. More folks were at Coveys Landing when we arrived about 3 PM after a 12-mile paddle, so we waited our turn at the ramp, then masked up to reload the boats.

We again had a campfire on Saturday night, but most people were tired from our day's paddle and turned in early. Next morning, we packed up camp, then headed farther down the Choptank to Kingston Landing, our launch for paddling Kings Creek. Because we had a later launch time (10 AM), there were more people at the ramp, but masking and careful social distancing got us on the water with no problem.

Kings Creek is a beautiful little tributary of the Choptank, with hardly any development along it's length. We saw quite a lot of beaver sign, and lots of turtles out basking, but all the little Nutria platforms that The Nature

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Jim Allen paddles on the Tuckahoe above the State Park reservoir.



CPA members wear masks and social distance during a lunch stop at Stoney Point on the Tuckahoe.

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Conservancy had put out a few years ago to monitor the invasive rodent were gone. Maybe that's one problem solved, amongst so many. At the end of about a nine-mile round trip, we masked up to load up for the trip home.

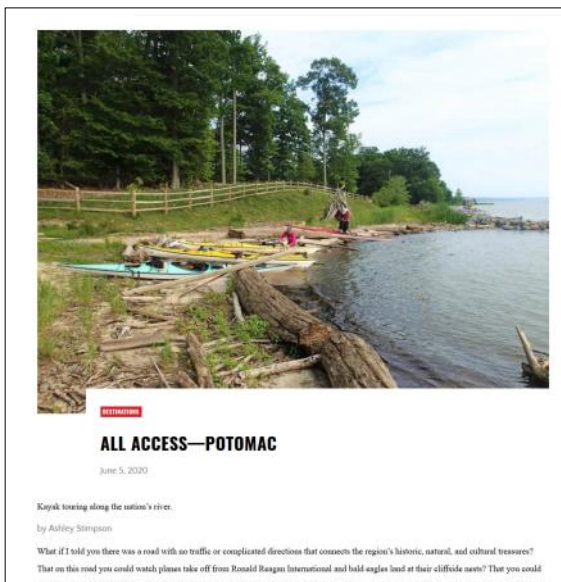
We had three great days of kayaking with beautiful weather and excellent conditions. With proper attention

to social distancing and use of masks at launching, lunching and landing, we felt reasonably safe in paddling each day, following the [CPA guidelines](#).

If you are itching to get back on the water, car camping and day tripping from a base is a great way to do it. Make your reservations early and be sure to take all of the necessary COVID-19 precautions.

Pictures at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/WT63AjX9XtwdCure8> 💧

Chesapeake Bay Magazine features CPA member



CPA member Ralph Heimlich was featured in a recent [article](#) in the June 2020 Chesapeake Bay Magazine about exploring the Potomac river by kayak and the proliferation of access points and paddle-in campsites.

“Google-search ‘kayak’ and ‘Potomac’ and Heimlich’s name will be scattered throughout the top results,” wrote Ashley Simpson in her article. “He’s been leading trips down the river for the Chesapeake Paddlers Association for decades. If anyone understood the need for access—parking areas, launch sites, campsites—it was him. The Ellicott City resident is a fan of kayak touring—packing everything you need in your boat and heading out on the water for days—and he has plenty of stories of aborted trips thanks to the once-un navigable distances between access points.”

Click [here](#) for the full Chesapeake Bay Magazine online issue.