

## Exploring for New Launches on the Nanticoke River

By Ralph Heimlich

I posted a pop-up trip for early August, back to one of my favorite paddling locations, the mouth of the Nanticoke River at Roaring Point. Unfortunately, either the late announcement or the unusual dates (Sunday through Tuesday) were off-putting, so nobody took me up on the offer. I went anyway, camping three nights at [Roaring Point Campground](#), an RV resort right at Roaring Point. While the resort is mostly RVs, there are three areas for tent camping, two in areas at the back of the campground, and one right on the beach. While the sites on the beach are a bit pricey (\$70 per night at this time of year), they come with water and electricity and a not-to-be-beaten view over Tangier Sound with stimulating breezes that keep it bearable in terms of heat and bugs.

Roaring Point lived up to its name. I did manage to paddle out around the point and upriver on the Nanticoke the first afternoon, trying out my downwind sail in the stiff 5-10 kt



breeze. It worked fine, but there is always the paddle back into the wind (fortunately, somewhat sheltered nearer shore). I ran into some rec boaters new to the sport, and we spent quite a while discussing my long, skinny boat and long, skinny Aleut and Greenland paddles, as well as the sail. Whole new worlds opening up for these folks, just like they did for me starting out.

I had planned to paddle out towards Deal Island (no, the OTHER Deal Island on the Eastern Shore) across the mouth of the river and Monie Bay and sail back with the southwest wind. However, Monday was roaring just a bit too much (10-15kt with gusts to 20 kt) and I really didn't want to practice self-rescue skills on my own in those conditions, so I looked around for an interesting "Plan B". Another way to approach the marshes of the Ellis Bay Wildlife Management Area up the Wicomico River (no, the OTHER Wicomico

River on the Eastern Shore) is to find a launch up in the headwaters of the tributary creeks and paddle down to Ellis and Monie Bays instead of doing the more open-water approach directly from Roaring Point. Rumor had it that there WAS a launch up in the WMA somewhere, and I set out to find it.

On the Chesapeake Bay Chart Book, there is a road labeled "Muddy Hole Road (Rt. 323)" that runs out to a narrow part of the WMA at the headwaters of Muddy Hole Creek. I drove out to find it. It is there, but it is a narrow, gravel, single-track leading out into the bush. With some trepidation, I kept on it, passing several very crude hunting/fishing camps hacked out of the bush before coming up to Trinity Church Road. A little dog-leg right on this led to another narrow, gravel, single-track which eventually led to a dirt turnaround and a very short, steep plank ramp with metal grip strips to get your vehicle back out (if you are quick and lucky). I got my gear together and launched, somewhat precariously, on the slippery wooden ramp, nearly going for a swim when my feet started to slide as I straddled the kayak.

The next issue was my lack of preparedness for this particular adventure. I don't have a GPS, my phone wasn't getting any signal at all, and the charts I had were pretty sketchy. Having paddled little backwater creeks in the marshes a lot, I worried that I would find my way DOWN just fine, then "forget" all the critical turns on the way back UP. I resolved to take 180 degree look-sees at every critical junction to implant my return route firmly in mind. The ramp is located at the end of a long spur of pine forest sticking out into the marsh, so it was surprisingly easy to see where I needed to get back to, even if the exact route might be confusing.

One little back county trick is to leave a visible sign at every critical junction. You can bring a roll of brightly-colored survey tape to do this if you think about it (just pick up your trail signs as you exit), but I didn't have any. Instead, at every important junction, I took a bunch of wild rice stalks and tied an overhand



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knot it them on the side I needed to turn to, and bent this out over the water. I marked three (and should have done one more), and they worked very well...except that I got a little too



**Knotted grass as a "bread crumb" on Muddy Hole Creek photo by Ralph Heimlich**

engaged sailing back up the creek. I finally realized I was off course when I spotted a hammock of trees I'd noted coming down stream, that seemed to be too far south. Backtracking, I found the right channel and kept more vigilant the rest of the way.

Muddy Hole Creek Landing will accommodate about 3-4 vehicles, but be sure to park so as not to block the turn-around for trailers. There are no facilities, but plenty of woods. There are more pictures of this little adventure, and some other paddles on the same trip at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/7LRMwn6irkAmm7Et9>

It is now marked on the [Chesapeake Bay Water Access And Paddle-In Campsite Guide \(interactive map, Chesapeake Bay Region\)](#) on the CPA website, along with nearly 900 other



**Beach camp at Roaring Point Campground photo by Ralph Heimlich**

launch sites and nearly 70 paddle-in camping locations throughout the Bay region. While I've picked up most of these locations from published sources, I find some of them by just going out and looking around, like this one.



**The hammock of trees that saved my bacon photo by Ralph Heimlich**



**Muddy Hole Creek Launch in the Ellis Bay WMA photo by Ralph Heimlich**