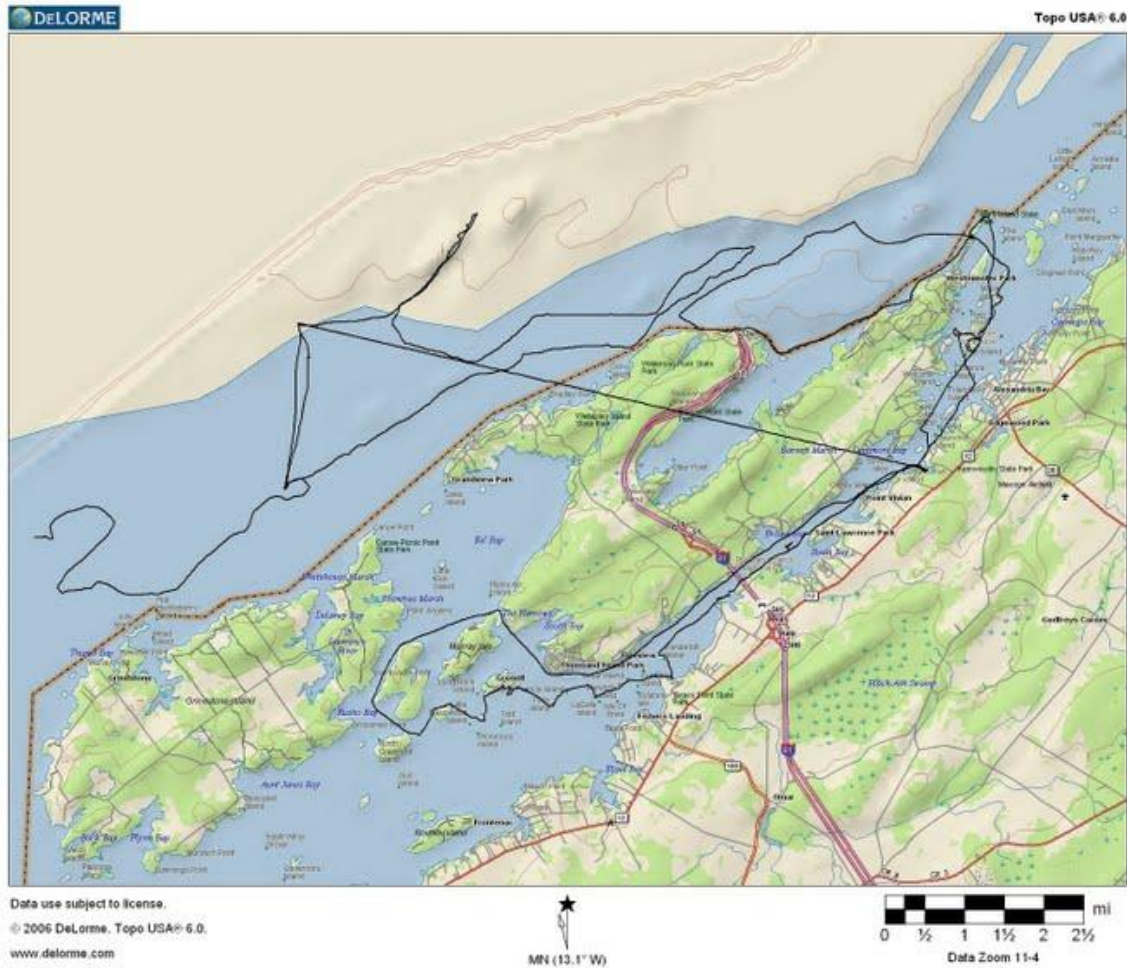


August in the Chesapeake Bay region is hot, hazy and humid, so members of the Chesapeake Paddlers Association often seek a cooler venue for August paddling. In August 2007, thirteen of us escaped the dog days of August in the cool climes of Canada and upstate New York, paddling the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River.



Brian Blankinship, Sue Bauer, Rich Stevens, Todd Angerhofer, Yvonne Thayer, Ed Hershon, Suzanne Farace, Frank Day, Jim Allen, Bela Mariassy, and Jennifer Bine photo by Ralph Heimlich



We began planning early in the Spring, recruiting for this peer paddle, contacting parks and agencies and more knowledgeable members for more information, trading numerous emails, and organizing a planning meeting to nail down the details. In the face of rising gas prices, the group wanted to consolidate transportation by renting a large van and borrowing a kayak trailer to be hauled by pickup. We also agreed to consolidate stoves, pots and other gear, and to have group meals, sharing the cooking duties.

Driving Together—One of the unique things about this trip compared with our typical paddling adventures was driving together. We put 10 boats on the trailer, carefully padded with foam, and two on racks on the truck. The kayaks rode the trailer very well, with no loosening and no damage. Two members did wrap their boats, the lowest on the trailer, in commercial plastic wrap to shield them from road tar and gravel, but with the right trailer design, that may not be needed. Using the pickup allowed us to load all the gear in one truck (other than personal items taken in the van), but because the pickup didn't have a cap, we had to make sure most everything was in dry bags or packed so as not to be hurt by rain. A cap would have obviated the need for this, and all gear rode below the truck sides, so a cap would have worked. Here's a brief rundown of the cost savings from driving as a group:

Comparison of costs					
Item	Method				
	Van	Pickup	Group Total	12 Cars	6 Cars
Miles driven	962	962	1,924	11,544	5,772
MPG	19	20		24	24
Gas cost	\$127	\$120	\$247	\$1,203	\$601
Wear and tear	\$0	\$366	\$366	\$4,627	\$2,314
Tolls	\$6.50	\$10	\$17	\$78	\$39
Rental	\$833		\$833		
Total Cost	\$966	\$496	\$1,462	\$5,908	\$2,954
Cost per person			\$122	\$492	\$246
Notes: 481 miles x 2 x number of vehicles. Assumes \$2.50 per gallon. Wear and tear is IRS mileage allowance of \$0.505 minus the gas cost. Tolls were \$3.25 each way for 2 axles and \$5 for 3 axles.					

We borrowed the trailer from a church camp that had benefitted from CPA's help in the past, so there was no cost for that. Savings from group travel were 2/3 compared with everyone driving their own car and half of the cost if 12 of us carpooled in two's. Savings per trip member equaled \$365 compared with going alone and \$119 each compared with carpooling by two's at the 2008 gas price of \$3.80 per gallon, and \$370 and \$124 each at 2009's more typical gas cost of \$2.50 per gallon. Of course, we had to put up with each other in pretty close proximity for all those miles, and the van wasn't as comfortable as our own cars, but we didn't have to drive, either!

After loading out the trailer and the back of the pickup on Friday at one of our member's houses, we arrived early in the morning and loaded into the van for the long drive into Canada. Participating were trip organizers Ed Hershon and Tom Heneghan (sharing the driving duties), Jennifer Bine, Suzanne Farace, Sue Bauer, Yvonne Thayer, Bela Mariassy, Rich Stevens, Todd Angerhofer, and Ralph Heimlich. Jim Allen, who volunteered to drive the pickup and trailer, shared the ride and driving with Brian Blankinship. Our 13th member, Frank Day, had taken his boat and minivan up for a longer vacation a few days earlier. With very few hitches, and only one minor detour to avoid road work, we arrived at the duty free store on the U.S. side of the International bridge about 8.5 hours after we started driving around Baltimore's Beltway to I-83 north through Harrisburg and north on I-81 through PA and NY to Canada, a distance of 481 miles). We passed easily through Canadian Customs into Canada (you MUST have a valid passport to enter Canada and reenter the U.S) and drove on to our first night's stay.

[Misty Isles Resort](#) is just east of Gananoque, Ontario. We set up camp quickly under impending rain and gathered for a trip to town to buy foodstuffs and have dinner. Gananoque welcomed us with traditional Canadian food—from Czechoslovakia! We had spaetzle, wiener schnitzel and sauerbrauten at a local restaurant, walked around town, and stocked up on fruit, vegetables, and other food needed for our week.



Our first night's stop at Misty Isle Lodge, Ontario, Canada photo by Ralph Heimlich

After an early Sunday morning rain that conveniently ended at dawn, and a well-organized breakfast cooked up by our first cooking crew, we broke camp, packed our gear and headed for the beach. Despite constantly revised gear lists, practice sessions, and last-minute trimming down, all of us worried that the vast piles of “stuff” wouldn’t all fit under hatches for our 2 mile paddle over to Sugar Island.



Is all this stuff going to fit? Photo by Ralph Heimlich

It all did (mostly) and we pushed off around Hog Island for a straight shot to Sugar Island. Several things were deck-loaded or held between our legs, but one piece of essential gear rode jauntily on the back deck of the [good ship “Coffee Pot”](#).



Ralph Starbuck photo by Brian Blankinship

We were astonished by how clear the water was, letting us see easily to the bottom 15 or 20 feet down, and how fresh and cool the air was after the night's rain. After a slight pause to group up at the channel crossing, we quickly found our landing on the [canoe beach](#) at Sugar Island's Headquarters bay.



The Canoe Beach at Sugar Island photo by Ralph Heimlich

Sugar Island

Sugar Island is a [47 acre Island](#) privately owned by the American Canoe Association. It is available to all members for year round use. The island is rustic, with no modern amenities. Staying on the island is a throwback to more primitive camping experiences on an island gem that is pristine and pure. The night skies glow with stars because light pollution is minimal. The air is clean. The water is clear and surprisingly warm in August.



Sugar Island

Our camp on Rochester Bay (the south side of the island) consisted of woodsy tent sites, some lumber platforms we used for a kitchen, dining area and social club, a few primitive outhouses, and spectacular views of Axman, Astounder, Psyche, Bloodletter, Endymion, Dumfounder, and many other islands stretching away to the U.S. side at Grindstone Island.



Our camp on Rochester Bay, Sugar Island photo by Ralph Heimlich



View from our camp photo by Brian Blankinship

After setting up camp and discussing the options, we headed back to the landing for quick afternoon paddle. We were joined by Alf Cheung (a friend from Ontario who has paddled with another CPA get-away group, the Loons of the Adirondacks) and set out eastward along the channel and the north shore of Prince Regent Island.

The “channel” I keep mentioning is more than the usual boating route. The waters of the Thousand Islands used to be a true river bed with channels and many rocks. Until the early 1600s, the French used the name Rivière du Canada to designate the Saint Lawrence upstream to Montreal and the Ottawa River after Montreal. The Saint Lawrence River served as the main route for European exploration of the North American interior, first pioneered by French explorer Samuel de Champlain. Once continuously navigable only as far as Montreal because of the Lachine Rapids, the Lachine Canal and an extensive system of canals, locks, and dams became the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959, permitting ocean-going vessels to pass all the way to Lake Superior. The channel passing between Misty Isles and Sugar Island is the less-busy Canadian Middle channel, but the larger International Shipping Channel through the American Narrows to the south carries ocean-going ships in close proximity to our frail paddling craft.



Canadian Middle Channel off Sugar and Prince Regent Islands photo by Brian Blankinship

We passed through Gananoque Narrows, marked by two large red and green 26-foot lights at the eastern end of Prince Regent Island, then passed Princess Charlotte Island and the channel between Prince Regent and Sugar. We paddled up the southern side of Sugar Island for views of our camp on Rochester Bay, then passed Psyche Island and rounded Sugar to return to the Canoe Landing for lunch.

Life on Sugar Island is very comfortable for being primitive. We had a hand-pump pulling water directly out of the river (which we filtered using one member's Katahdin gravity filter), picnic tables on a wood platform shaded by numerous tarps we had brought, and a utilitarian "kitchen" where we set up the stoves and pots and pans. We swam in the Bay and had warm sun showers set up on another platform. There was even a swanky composting toilet over near the HQ. We were not the only ones on Sugar Island, and shared the muddy paths with an energetic young family and several other groups of paddlers.

Sugar is one of a group of islands known as the Lake Fleet Islands, and we set out to explore them further by paddling south and west toward Camelot Island. Canada has established the St. Lawrence Islands National Park consisting of several ecologically important mainland properties and more than 20 islands between Kingston and Brockville. While most of the Thousand Islands are privately owned and do not permit trespassing, the islands of the National Park are open to

kayakers and provide trails, toilets and other facilities, with some fees. Camelot is one of those islands, and is a favorite of boaters who anchor off the island. We paddled along between islands and poked along the shoreline looking at wildlife and striking up conversations with boaters and residents. One of the most interesting was a rest we took along the north shore of Wyoming Island, at a cabin named “Iona” for the grandmother of the young people we spoke to, whose family had owned it since 1971.



A cabin named IONA photo by Yvonne Thayer

After a leisurely circuit of Squaw Island and some others, some of us returned to camp and some carried on paddling to other islands. After a quick swim in the warm waters of Rochester Bay (about 73 degrees F), we gathered as the night’s crew cooked dinner, snacked, and drank wine. After a fine dinner and the clean up operation, we sat as darkness gathered and sipped fine cognac beneath [flaming cloudbanks](#) and bright stars.



Canadian Sunset photo by Frank Day

On Monday morning, as a cloudy day dawned, we gathered for a quick, healthful breakfast of peaches, berries, granola and yoghurt, and bagels, washed down with plenty of coffee, we headed out for our first full day of paddling. We paddled southwest to see the rest of the Lake Fleet Islands (Deathdealer, Gig, Barge and the Punts), and then north through the Admiralty Islands to Gananoque for lunch.

Shortly after launching, we split into two groups: the tourers and the sightseers. The tourers headed down to the marsh on Grindstone Island (in the U.S.) and the sightseers headed more westerly toward Leek (sometimes known as Thwartway) Island, the southernmost of the Admiralty Chain.

The lightly falling rain dampened our boats, but not our spirits as we paddled through an eerily quiet, gray morning. Rain muffled the few sounds of this Monday morning, all the weekenders gone back to their jobs, and brought out the green vegetation, and the brilliant colors of a spinnaker on a passing sailboat and the odd wildflower on the rocky shores. Every body of water benefits from having a “charismatic megafauna” and for us in the Thousand Islands, it was mink and otter. The muffling rain probably helped us as we paddled close to Leek, another island of the St. Lawrence Islands National Park. We were greeted by the rippling swimming and running of a dark black mink who darted for his den and perched, watching curiously as we rounded “his” peninsula. In the Tourer group, an otter swam directly up to one boat, then dove under and made for shore.



Padding in light rain. The U.S./Canadian border is in the middle of this small channel photo by Ralph Heimlich



Mink or Otter on the pink granite cliffs photo by Brian Blankinship

One of the delights of the Thousand Islands is the diminutive scale of some of the islands and clever tricks some of the residents play with this scale. An example is the chair on Potential Island (Big chair? Small house?).



Big chair? Small House? Photo by Ed Hershon

The two groups united near Lemon Island and paddled up into the busy yacht harbor of Gananoque, where we hauled out in a chilly wind and had lunch huddled in the cavernous tents thoughtfully erected at Joel Stone Park for the Festival of the Islands. After lunch, the sun weakly appeared and we checked out the neighborhood, including the local kayak outfitter, the 1,000 Islands Kayaking Company on Kate Street (<http://www.1000ikc.com/>) and getting some coffee.

As the sun strengthened, we relaunched, exited the marina and headed east along the Gananoque shore, admiring the buildings, marinas and houses. We eventually reached Misty Isles, and turned south to return to Sugar Island.

Monday night was the height of the annual Perseid meteor showers, and we were blessed with a clear night. The nearly full moon had gone down below the western horizon at 2 AM, and several of us rose and trudged down to the vacant shower platform and laid on the boards, staring up into the heavens and making our “oohs” and “aahs” as the meteors scored bright trails across the sky. We all saw our fill, then headed back to cozy beds at about 5 AM.

Tuesday morning dawned bright and clear and we were eager to launch for a destination recommended by Chuck Sutherland: Landons Bay. Paddling north and east from Sugar, several

paddlers broke off to get fuel and other supplies from the vehicles at Misty Isles, and the rest of us coasted along Stave Island's NW coast, the western edge of the Navy Islands, and headed for the Route 2S bridge over the entrance to Landons Bay. The Bay is bordered by steep, high cliffs of gneiss and pink granite that hem in the narrow channel. We saw much wildlife on this paddle, including ravens, hawks circling, turkey vultures nesting in the cliffs, and turtles and frogs in the waters below. We paddled up to the end of the creek, where a waterfall poured into the bay, cold and clear. Landing space was limited, so we double and triple parked, scrambling over boats to reach the shore. Several paddlers went ahead to find a trail that supposedly led around to the east, and everyone else had lunch on the rocks above the waterfall.



Landons Bay photo by Bela Mariassy



Lunch on the rocks, Landons Bay photo by Jim Allen

Relaunching, we paddled out of Landons Bay and around Horseblock Point into the Navy Islands. These islands are set closer together than the other groups, with narrower channels between them, and seem to have a more recreational character. We paddled as a group over to Popham Island, and then split into our two groups, the Tourers paddling down toward the International Bridge, and the Sightseers turning back along the southern edge of the Navy Islands back toward Sugar Island.



International Bridge photo by Ed Hershon

The Tourers went past the bridge, around Georgina Island and started threading their way back to Sugar Island through the Navy Islands. At this point we were heading against the current and the wind had picked up considerably to around 15 knots. There was a decent sized chop, but nothing that we haven't all seen on the Chesapeake. Boat traffic was noticeably busier in this section of the St. Lawrence. We skirted the border of the US and Canada, several times crossing it before we finally turned northwest to go back to Sugar Island.

Wednesday morning, our last on Sugar Island, was a hurry of breakfast, clean up, pack up and load up to be on the water by 10 AM. We beat that time by a wide margin, everyone eager not to be the last, lazy one on the beach. It was a good thing. As we were packing our boats, we could hear thunder in the distance. Looking out over the water, we could see the front moving in from the NW, but it was far enough away that we decided to launch. While on the water for the two mile paddle back to Misty Isles, the thunder seemed to be getting closer. I think instinctively we all paddled a bit harder and a bit faster. It took us less than 30 minutes to paddle fully loaded boats two miles to Misty Isles, even though it had taken us a bit more than 40 minutes to paddle to Sugar Island 3 days earlier. As soon as we beached, [the rain started](#) falling steadily, and within 5 minutes, the storms hit Misty Isles hard.

Thunderstorms in this region are less frequent than in our Chesapeake Bay, but can be sharper

and nastier. The wind picked up to more than 35 knots and rain fell very hard. Lightning was very close and visibility dropped to less than 100 yards. The storm lasted a half hour or so, with several of us in the truck and van. The rest of us waited out the storm in a kayak shed or under an overhang to a garage.



T storm from Misty Isles Beach photo by Ralph Heimlich

After loading the boats and gear on the truck, we piled into the van to go back to the US. Misty Isles is only 6 miles from the Thousand Islands Bridge, so getting there did not take long at all. When we made it through the border check, we drove on to our next destination.

Keewaydin State Park is part of the State of New York's system. The park was right on the river and had a marina with a boat ramp. We had three campsites next to each other and used the two end sites for our tents and made the middle site our common area with three picnic tables, CPA banner and tarps.

Wednesday night was our "in town" night and we drove into Clayton, NY, west of Keewaydin State Park, for groceries, and visited a local outfitter (T.I. Adventures) on the banks of French Creek. Then we drove east of the park to Alexandria Bay, NY, where "Bill Johnston's Pirate Days" was in full swing. Bill Johnston, an earlier Thousand Islands paddler from the 1830's, apparently preyed on shipping coming down the St. Lawrence River, and now the local merchants do likewise to anyone on the streets in August. Because our CPA chapters are known

as “piracies”, we stocked up on pirate flags and T-shirts, but one of our paddlers got the best pirate souvenir—Stripes from a Pirate Queen! We had a very nice dinner at Cavalario’s, strolled around a bit more, and headed back to camp.



Todd Angerhofer getting “stripes” from a Pirate Queen photo by Yvonne Thayer

Thursday, we launched at the boat ramp at Keewaydin State Park and headed west along the American Narrows. There are many quaint houses along this stretch of the river. The bridge is another big theme of houses along this stretch, and we found a lot of [miniature bridges](#) for us to limbo under.

Bridges to limbo under photo by Rich Stevens



Quaint houses and statuary along the American Channel photo by Ralph Heimlich



Bridges to limbo under photo by Rich Stevens

The other interesting thing on this stretch of the river is the very choppy water caused by many powerboats from 2 hp kickers on prams to fairly large tankers transiting through to Chicago. The speed limit on this stretch is 30 knots headed upstream and 15 knots headed downstream, with slightly slower speeds in the vicinity of the International Bridge. With steep, rocky walls, you can imagine the rebounding waves we had to contend with. Some of us tried to do a little “tanker surfing” as the ships passed us.



Tanker surfing (not as close as it looks) photo by Yvonne Thayer

When we arrived at the western mouth of the American Narrows at the Rock Island lighthouse, the group once again split into “Touring” and “Sightseers”, with the more long-ranging group heading further west toward Bluff and Picton Islands and the shorter-haul group angling north along the shore of Thousand Island Park (a resort community) and toward Grenell Island. The highlights of this leg were Mosquito Island, the Narrows between Murray Isle and Wellesley Island, and our “commando” rest stop at the Thousand Island Park community dock in South Bay.



Rock Island Lighthouse photo by Sue Bauer

Friday morning, we had to break camp, pack the truck and van, load the boats and launch for our last leg out to Mary Island State Park (this because at the time we made reservations, there were no sites in Keewaydin for us on Friday night). The paddle east along the American Narrows in the early morning was delightful. This is the area known as Millionaire's Row because of the many Victorian-era mansions (and newer McMansions) on the shoreline of the Narrows. As we approached Alexandria Bay from the west, the imposing bulk of Boldt Castle hove into our view on Heart Island across the channel to the Northeast.



Boldt Castle photo by Ralph Heimlich

At the turn of the 19th Century, the millionaire owner of the world famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel, George C. Boldt, set out to build a rhineland castle in Alexandria Bay as a love-gift for his wife, Louise. George and Louise spent four glorious summers in the Alster Tower while 300 workers including stonemasons, carpenters, and artists fashioned the six story, 120 room castle, complete with tunnels, a powerhouse, Italian gardens, a drawbridge, and a dove cote. In 1904, Louise died suddenly and a broken hearted Boldt abandoned construction and never returned to the island, leaving behind the structure as a monument of his love. For 73 years, the castle and various stone structures were left to the mercy of the wind, rain, ice, snow and vandals, until the Thousand Islands Bridge Authority acquired the property in 1977 and set about restoring it as a tourist attraction. We didn't land, but circled Heart Island and consumed a ton of electronic digits taking photos of it.

After gawking at this stone monstrosity, we pulled out to the north, headed through the channels between Manhattan Island (not that one), Deer Island, Steamboat Island, and past [Fairyland Island](#) to our final camping venue.

Mary Island State Park

One of several island parks in the NY State system, Mary is a little gem. Just 12 acres, it has a dozen campsites in heavy woods that are barely visible from one another, but have wonderful water views. Potable water and flush toilets (but no showers) make up its amenities. We had three sites and quickly set up camp, just before an afternoon thunderstorm blew in. This storm was much gentler than our previous one, and many of us took the opportunity to catch a much-needed nap, while others watched the show with a nice cuppa under the tarp.



Mary Island State Park photo by Rich Stevens

After the rain, a weak sun shone and we stirred to manage an afternoon paddle on our last day. Again, the Tourers headed out around Club Island and up the Middle Channel toward International Bridge. Here the current was swift enough to raise standing waves, but by hugging the shore, our paddlers managed to ascend, pass under the bridge, and duck into the International Rift entering Wellesley Islands Lake of the Isles. The Sightseers opted for a lazier paddle, paddling due west into the narrow channel entering Lake of the Isles and going up the Rift through the Blacksnake Passage. We met, surprisingly enough, just where the Rift passes under

I-81 at the duty free store we had shopped at just a few days before, and headed our separate ways.



The Rift photo by Ralph Heimlich

After a memorable dinner by our intrepid trip leaders (Taco Ed and Tortilla Tom) we all relaxed on the Mary Island Beach and watched the beautiful moon shimmer on the water over Fairyland Island. We still had Yvonne's lovely oatmeal breakfast, yet another packing effort, a morning paddle back to Keewaydin State Park, and a long ride home, but this is a good place to end our trip report on Paddling the Thousand Islands.



Chesapeake Paddlers in the Thousand Islands photo by Brian Blankinship

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