PADDLING CADDO LAKE
April 2023

TRIP BACKGROUND: Colorado people on the trip were Organizer Leslie Taylor, Marsha Dougherty, Anna Troth and Gregg Goodrich, Sue Hughes, JoAnn and Michael Montoya, and Patrick Reardon. In addition there were HASK friends from RMSKC's trip to Houston in 2019 and a joint-club Lake Powell paddle: Linda Davis, Robert Rollen, and Linda and Carl Kuhnen. Constantin Platon, certified instructor and boat schlepper, and other Texas friends of Leslie's also paddled with the group.

Leslie and Marsha drove down before the rest of the Colorado folks to do some scouting with the Texas paddlers. Jo Ann, Mike and Sue flew into Dallas and drove two hours east, arriving Sunday morning, April 16, and Patrick arrived that evening into Shreveport, the closest big town; their boats were trailered to Texas by Leslie. Anna and Gregg also flew, and rented boats from Constantine.

The early birds stayed at cabins in a nearby state park, but moved when the late-comers arrived to a nifty VRBO a short distance from all the put-ins. It was right on the bayou, with a nice deck overlooking the water. They all bought groceries for breakfasts and lunches, but Leslie and her HASK friends planned tasty group dinners.

The Colorado folks who arrived on Sunday only paddled three days, but the scouting that the others had done ahead of time meant that finding each day's put-in and following routes was problem-free. [Accounts of those scouting trips are at the end of this report, to archive the details for our next Caddo adventure.]

Leslie

LESLIE'S REPORT

APRIL 17; BENTON LAKE TRAIL: We decided to go back to Backwater Jack's to start the second portion of our time at Caddo with the *Benton Lake Trail.* At dinner, after we got back to the VRBO, JoAnn demonstrated her online research skills and figured out how to obtain permits for launching legally on Tuesday, the reason we changed the order of the paddles.

When we got on the water with the newly arrived Colorado folks we found that the baby Bared Owl we'd seen the day before was still hanging out, much to the delight of birders Linda Davis, Gregg and Anna. The beaver lodge was still there. The overall beauty was still there.

I offered to charge an extra $800 to make everybody feel European, but I had no takers. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Leslie and the group had been told when they were scouting this area that Europeans fly in to photograph the magical swamp, getting up before daybreak, even wading out from their boats, and pay thousands of dollars for the guided trips to do it.]

Then we headed river right with Constantine as our navigator and we located *Old River II Trail.* We almost lost Robert, but we found him after we discovered we were headed to a dead-end and he had been going the correct way. The trail was not as well marked as the *Hell's Half Acre* that HASK paddlers had done before the RMSKC group got there, but we never felt too lost.

Our larger group really packed the extra long lunch table at Backwater Jack's. Only intrepid paddlers Carl, Constantine, Patrick and Michael did the second paddle of the day back to Haggerty Creek with me. This time I knew where the turnoff was. Total miles for both trips was just at eight miles.

Benton Lake
and
Old River II Paddling Trail

Beaver lodge

Lunch on Day I: Anna, Gregg, Marsha, Bill Oshie and Dan Mindar from HASK, Leslie, Sue's hat, Robert, Michael and JoAnn Montoya, Linda and Ca[illegible] Kuhne (leaning back), Patrick, Constantine

APRIL 18; HELL'S HALF ACRE AND CARTER LAKE: We met at 9AM at Caddo State Park headquarters and kept the friendly, but suddenly overworked, ranger busy entering our requests for Wildlife Management Area permits. It was well worth the twelve-dollar fee because the launch was beautiful and really close to Boat Road C. [LESLIE'S NOTE: Beware if you are trying to replicate this trip in the fall because water plants and low water may make this launch unavailable.]

We turned to the left and went a little over a mile to the cut that takes you to Big Cypress Bayou. Constantine gave us a refresher class in the forward stroke at the turn around. We went back to the launch for lunch.

I pulled out my fancy rain gear to chase the light rain away and used my Garmin inReach for an updated weather report. As the forecast predicted, the rain stopped, and we had another beautiful day. We turned left to follow the Boat Road C signs to Carter Lake.

Campground on Goat Island, in the Wildlife Preserve

At Constantine's suggestion, we took a five-minute silent rest, drifting in the swamp. People agreed it was magical and wished it had been longer. It was the best forest-bathing one could ever find.

The return trail was marked with old license plates

The old maps I had indicated that there would be a bridge, but nary a trace of bridge was found.

We turned around so that we would not overshoot our goal of paddling between six or seven miles. Nobody likes the fun to end before paddling ends. Goal achieved. Paddle miles were just over six.

[The license plates on Day II were easy to spot; other trails had markers that were harder to find; sometimes there was a confusion of signage. The RMSKC paddlers appreciated the advance scouting that Leslie and her Texas crew had done.]

APRIL 19; CATHEDRAL TRAIL: We launched at Shady Glade Resort and paid our $3 launch fees in the honor box. Honorable paddlers are we. We had launching and exiting off a high dock learning opportunities. Yea to Patrick and Gregg who gamely stepped up to practice getting into their boats from the dock, which they did successfully. Only one person swam on the getting-out portion.

Constantine was the Boat Road U spotter. We took a break in what Linda called The Chapel, where he led us in a series of still-in-our-kayak stretches before we entered The Cathedral area.

During the paddle Constantine also gave us a lesson on the side draw. Sue zipped off to practice his directions which made more sense to her than any she'd heard before, and was chagrined to realize she hadn't gone very noticeably sideways at all.

The Cathedral

This is a short trail if you stick to the Boat Road markers. It was a tad longer for us, but it was all beautiful. Total miles was 5.2. Sadly, the Shady Glade café, where we'd hoped to have lunch, was closed. In the spring it is open only Thursday through Sunday. Most of us went into Jefferson.

Constantine
Instructor and boat supplier

The group saw a couple snakes and turtles, but no alligators.

Here is Master Birder Gregg Goodrich's list of the 52 birds he recorded:

Eurasian Collared-Dove
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Chuck-will's-widow
Chimney Swift
Spotted Sandpiper
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Little Blue Heron
Cattle Egret
Green Heron
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Red-shouldered Hawk
Barred Owl
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Eastern Phoebe
Great Crested Flycatcher
White-eyed Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Barn Swallow
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Carolina Wren
Northern Mockingbird
Wood Thrush
Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Brown-headed Cowbird
Louisiana Waterthrush
Black-and-white Warbler
Prothonotary Warbler
Northern Parula
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Northern Cardinal

Our VRBO

Foggy morning view from the back deck of the VRBO

Some people stayed in cabins at the nearby state park

EDITOR'S NOTE: Almost everyone on the trip sent photos, but special thanks go to Gregg, Linda Davis and Constantine, and to Leslie for helping me remember which ones went where. I'm still not sure that some of the swampy ones were put on the correct day, but if not, it's my fault.

Pre-Trip Scouting

By Leslie Taylor,
with Marsha Dougherty, and HASK Friends

Hell's Half Acre Scouting Trip

April 15, 2023

We followed the well-marked Texas Paddling Trail for Hell's Half Acre. The put-in was at Mill Pond in Caddo Lake State Park. The paddle started going downstream on Big Cypress Bayou with the wind at our backs for about two miles on to the cut on river left to Boat Road C.

After the cut, the magically beautiful cypress swamp began. Posts had two signs, one for Boat Road C and the red arrow signs for Hell's Half Acre. At C31 we turned east to find the Caddo Wildlife Management campground on Goat Island for lunch.

Then we backtracked to turn onto Boat Road S along Barb Wire Stretch to Smith Slough, which flows into Big Cypress. Of course, the current and wind was against us paddling back to Mill Pond. We stopped to check out the VBRO to begin the great debate on whether we needed to change the plan for a Hell's Half Acre Repeat with the Rocky Mountain gang. Total miles about 11.7.

Haggerty Creek, Benton Lake and Old River II Trails scouting trip

April 16, 2023

We launched at Backwater Jack's after paying five dollar launch fees and headed downstream on Big Cypress Bayou. About two miles down, Brandi spotted the trail marker sign. Thank you, Brandi. The barking dog audio marker was also on duty as promised by the paddling trail guide. We paddled along using the official trail markers and continued with the unofficial PVC pipe trail markers until we were past the half-way spot for the 5-mile round trip and the creek started getting too narrow for a 17-foot boat turning radius. We turned around to backtrack to the main bayou and paddled upwind and against the current again. Backwater Jack's had an extra long picnic table for lunch.

After lunch, a few paddlers decided to enjoy other pursuits. Bill, Brandi, Leslie, Marsha, Carl, Robert and Richard headed upstream. The lady at Backwater Jack's had told us how Europeans pay thousands of dollars each year to paddle and photograph Benton Lake, so we went river left first.

The lake was beautiful as advertised. A little past a large metal hunting stand at the base of a cypress, Carl spotted a baby Barred Owl. The poor thing could not yet fly, so its picture was taken many times. We were as quiet as we could be, but probably not quiet enough for the little guy. The Benton Lake trail loops around the perimeter. We then tried to find the Old River II trail but gave up because it was time to go check into the VBRO and meet the rest of the Rocky Mountain gang. Total miles for the whole day was a little over 8.

After this paddle, Carl and Linda Kuhnen scouted by car the Caddo Lake Wildlife Management canoe launch off of County Road 805. I had tried to find this by water and by land in the past, but with no luck. The decision was made to go back to Backwater Jack's and start the RMSKC portion with the Benton Lake trial on Monday.

That night after dinner, JoAnn demonstrated her online research skills and figured out how to obtain permits for launching legally for the paddle on Tuesday.