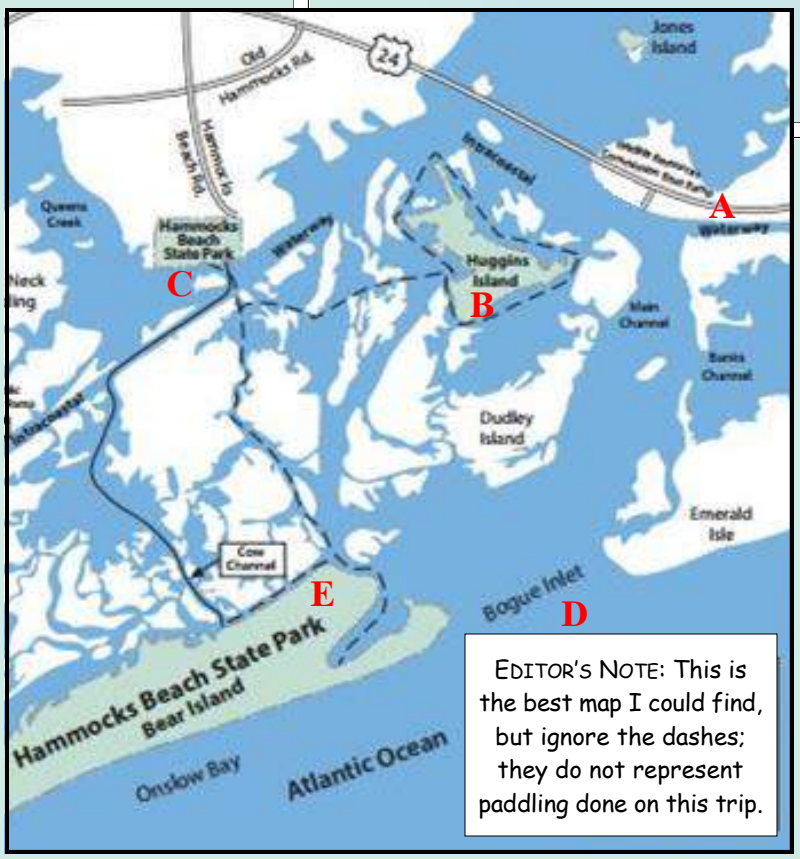
Salt Water Paddling

in

North Carolina

April 2018



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the best map I could find, but ignore the dashes; they do not represent paddling done on this trip.

Near the end of February RMSKC members got an email from Brian Curtiss, a former club instructor who now spends part of the year back east.

He said he'd be happy to guide anyone coming to his place [A] on the central North Carolina coast near Hammocks Beach State Park. He wrote, "There are plenty of back bays to explore if you want to keep it mild and Bogue Inlet is just a short paddle away if you want more of the rough stuff."

The part that really interested people who were sick of winter was: "The water is already warming up (60° in the ocean, 65° in the back bay) and usually hits the 70s by the end of April."

Within a few weeks Jud Hurd, Marsha Dougherty, Sue Hughes, Dave Hustvedt, George Ottenhoff and Clark Strickland were making plans to accept Brian's invitation. As the trip developed three others, former instructors Matt Lutkus (now living in Maine), Dan Bell and Gary McIntosh, joined the group.

The following account is based on Marsha's notes, with details and impressions added by Dan Bell, Dave Hustvedt and Sue Hughes.

TUESDAY, APRIL 10: Most of the group took a 6:05AM flight to North Carolina via Chicago. They rented cars and drove to Brian Curtiss and Stephany Roscoe's in Cedar Point. [Matt Lutkus had driven down the day before and Dan Bell and Gary McIntosh would arrive the next day]. They got settled in their motel rooms, just a short walk from Brian and Stephany's house overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, and walked across the bridge toward Swansboro while the sun was going down—absolutely gorgeous—to the Yacht Club for fried okra and fried pickle appetizers and seafood dinners.

WEDNESDAY: In the morning, Brian suggested Yana's in Swansboro for its 1950s atmosphere, Elvis memorabilia and breakfast basics with a southern flavor. It was a not-to-be-missed destination; the ladies' room had a motion-activated recording of Elvis saying, "Howdy, ma'am" when you entered and "Y'all come back" when you left.

Marsha and The King

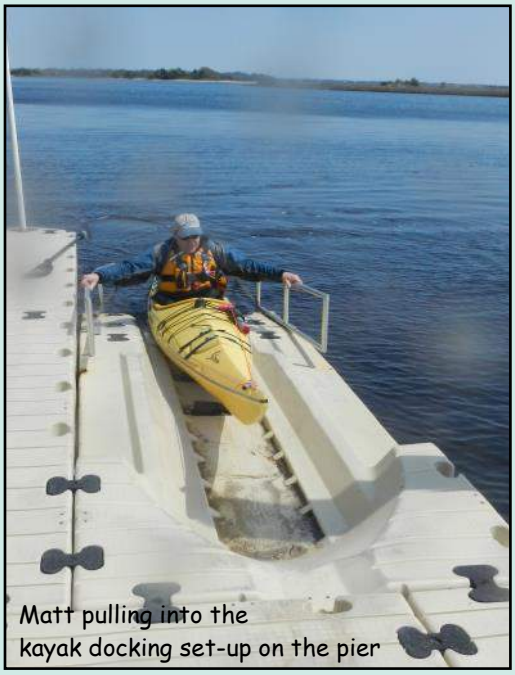
After figuring out who would borrow which of Brian's boats and which boats would be rented from Barrier Island Kayaks, they followed a paddle trail through a maze of small islands and sandbars.

Huggins Island

They stopped to look at the site of a Civil War battery in the scrubby live oak and hickory trees on Huggins Island [B].

Then they paddled to Hammocks Beach State Park [C]. The land had belonged to the Black Teachers' Association of North Carolina, but was donated to the state's park system in 1961 when public parks in North Carolina were integrated.

The Visitors' Center had a fancy kayak dock on one side of the pier, a large deck which was a pleasant place for lunch, and interesting displays of the area's history and wildlife.


Matt pulling into the kayak docking set-up on the pier

After lunch Matt attempted a "Seal Launch" from the dock. It seemed like something that would work.

Marsha, Brian Curtiss, Clark, Sue and Stephany Roscoe enjoying the view looking east from the porch

Then they paddled back to Brian and Stephany's house, visited on their lovely upper level looking out across the water and salt marshes to the waves breaking at Bogue Inlet, and eventually ordered pizza. It was a 6.5 mile day.

Dan, Matt, and Clark laughing at paddling tales with the others

THURSDAY, APRIL 12: They had breakfast of left-over pizza at Brian's and then paddled out to the one mile buoy marker [D]. The waves were not breaking in the deepest part of the channel so they stayed between the red and green markers.

The group by the one mile buoy

Going into them, the waves didn't look so big; coming back they seemed lots larger, the current was pushing to the left and it took work to stay to the right of the green buoys.

The group got past all of that and then Brian led them toward Bear Island [E] for lunch.

There were confused waves along the way for some rougher water practice; a couple of the group got to practice self-rescues in those waves, too. 9.5 miles was the total for the day.

Lunch on Bear Island

Back at Brian and Stephany's water-side deck they had an awesome feast of oysters and clams that Brian had harvested and kept in wire baskets off his dock, and shrimp they'd bought less than a block away. This was a high point of the trip, with Brian and Stephany setting a standard for Club cuisine that will not soon be matched.

Brian sorting through his clams

The steamer set-up

Stephany demonstrating the technique for opening oysters

The buffet on the deck

FRIDAY, APRIL 13: After a traditional southern breakfast at Carteret Café, a local spot with good food but no Elvis, they returned to Bear Island for surf practice. [A couple of paddlers decided to just beachcomb.] Dan said, "My favorite parts of the trip were the paddle out to one mile buoy and playing in the surf or, more accurately, getting played by the surf, on Bear Island. And, of course, the steamed shellfish and swapping kayak stories."

On the way back they stopped at Shark Tooth Island to look for… sharks' teeth! [Photos on the next page.]

Shark Tooth Island with salt marshes in the background

Stephany's finds

Stephany's collection of fossilized sharks' teeth

Brian, Gary and Marsha on Saturday

SATURDAY, APRIL 14: Brian, Matt, Gary, and Marsha went back out to Bear Island to play in the surf. The rest of the group went under the bridge into the Oak River and around an island and back. They paddled over a school of rays and enjoyed looking at the houses and docks along the shore. After they returned to the house, Clark and Sue went out to help some college kids who'd fallen out of their rented kayaks.

The azaleas were gorgeous

SUNDAY, APRIL 15: The last day was rainy, so they picked up bagels and drove to the aquarium on nearby Emerald Isle. Then they visited a boatbuilding workshop and a maritime museum in Beaufort, where they saw a film about Blackbeard, the 18th century villain who preyed on shipping in North Carolina's Outer Banks.

Across from the museum was an old burial ground, with wisteria in the trees and azaleas in bloom. The stones went back centuries; everyone commented on the number of children who died young.

MONDAY, APRIL 16: Jud, Dave and George left early to catch their plane, Matt drove to a symposium in South Carolina before heading back to Maine, and Clark, Dan, Sue, Gary and Marsha took a hike in a nearby longleaf pine forest before they took off for the airport. On the way they stopped at King's, recommended by Sue's friends, which had a lunch buffet to remember. The waitress knew they were from out of the area because not one of the group wanted "sweet tea".

Gray at first

It was a great trip! Brian organized gear and boats, many of them his, and led the group on four days of wonderful paddling around a puzzling number of islands and into the offshore surf for wave handling lessons. Some of the group learned how to paddle through 2-3 foot surf and then practiced reentries after capsizing. Everyone had a fabulous time. They hope the invitation will be extended again!

Sunny by the end of the hike

Brian said that he and Stephany had a good time, too, and would be happy to plan another North Carolina visit, maybe later in the spring or in the fall when the water would be warm enough to paddle without drysuits.

It wasn't an official RMSKC trip, but Brian thought his neighbors would get a kick out of our sign.

This article was based on Marsha's daily notes, with additional information and comments from Sue, Dan and Dave.

Almost everyone sent in photos, and Brian's help getting them posted to a common site was invaluable.

The kayakers: Matt Lutkus, Dave Hustvedt, Gary McIntosh, Brian Curtiss, Marsha Dougherty, Jud Hurd, George Ottenhoff, Clark Strickland, Dan Bell and Sue Hughes. The photographer was Stephany Roscoe.