Solo Trip in the San Juan Islands

by Stan White

When I bought my first sea kayak and picked up a copy of *Sea Kayaker* magazine with an article about the San Juan Islands (October, 2009), I knew I wanted to go there. Last August, after months of planning and research, I combined a solo kayak camping trip with a family camping trip to Orcas Island . There's so much information available to help minimize risks that I felt very comfortable kayaking solo.

I planned the trip during one of the periods between the full and new moon in August when tide changes would be smaller, currents minimal and weather more predictable. I focused on Orcas Island because it has a unique opportunity to acquire camp sites without reservations at Obstruction Pass which was our base camp for six nights. From there my family helped with shuttles. Other important benefits include two kayak shops which carry the necessary navigational charts, current atlas and current tables. Shearwater Kayak and Body Boat Blade further helped me learn to read and translate information for increased safety. Finally, Orcas Island has short crossings to other islands.

Beautiful red bark on a madrone tree on Jones Island

The first excursion was a day trip from Deer Harbor [A] through North Pass [B], across Spring Passage [C] and circumnavigating Jones Island [D] in perfect weather. My reservoir kayak became a true sea kayak while I paddled around numerous seals and groups of pigeon guillemots.

The next day I started at West Sound for a three night trip through Pole Pass and around Reef Island to Jones Island . The Cascadia Trail Campsite on the west side was full, so I used the south camp where I counted 35 kayaks on the beach that night. Madrone trees were lit up with the setting sun. The second day

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The second day I started at West Sound [E] for a three night trip through Pole Pass [F] and around Reef Island [G] to Jones Island again. [H].

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The next day I paddled against a slight current of less than one knot between McConnell Island [I] and Bird Rock through Wasp Passage [J] listening to seals crying and had lunch at Blind Island. [K] I camped at Indian Cove [L] using the Cascadia Trail Campsite. On the way I spotted black oyster catchers and seals that couldn't control their curiosity.

The following day I continued circumnavigating Shaw Island around Neck Point [M] and through the Wasp Islands with favorable winds and current back to Jones Island. There were numerous small tide rips and I enjoyed the experience and challenge paddling through them. Increasing winds were approaching 20 knots and the largest tide rips with confused white caps from waves bouncing off the rocky shore were on the southeast point of Jones Island.

For one instant the boat seemed on its side but quickly stabilized itself. Holy salt water, that was scary. After reaching camp at Jones Island the winds continued picking up and the VHF radio reported a small craft warning.

The deer I saw on the first night were still meandering around camp.

After picking up the third camp and paddling on, it started raining during the trip around Jones Island and back to the planned rendezvous at Deer Harbor. Crabs were swimming, sea otters scurrying and cormorants were hanging out. I arrived early and spent a couple more rainy hours around the cliffs and islands in the area seeing more wildlife and enjoying the Pacific Northwest Washington environment.

While I was kayak camping, my family made a day trip to San Juan Island where they saw Orca whales and visited the whale museum and a lavender farm.

After leaving Orcas Island, I also managed to fit in a paddle at Union Lake in Seattle.
I can hardly wait to return to the San Juans. Perhaps the Rocky Mountain Sea Kayak Club will make a trip to the San Juan Islands in the future.

TIDE POOL SEA ANEMONE
by Juli White

The author

EDITOR'S NOTE: Before he paddled by himself in the San Juans, Stan White checked his plans with Leon Sommé and Shawna Franklin of *Body Boat Blade* in Eastsound on Orcas Island. They are BCU 5* paddlers and 4* coaches who have been paddling and teaching for more than two decades.

I've taken workshops from both of them at LoCo Roundup a couple of summers and spent two days in their Foundations of Safety and Rescues. Having taught for years, I'm pretty critical, but I was awed by that class. Their instruction was tightly organized, fast-paced, clear and easy to understand, adapted for individual differences, and serious but leavened with good humor.

I'm interested in Body Boat Blade's Ocean Currents I or II and especially the Yellow Island Expedition. (My mother's uncle bought Yellow Island [located southwest of "I" on Stan's map] in the 1950s and built his home there for $200 and the driftwood that washed up on the shore; he and his wife lived in a tent for two years until it was finished. Eventually the property was given to the Nature Conservancy; his cabin is still in use by their caretaker.)

Body Boat Blade's schedule for 2011 will be posted soon, but check the rest of the information on their website in the meantime: http://www.bodyboatblade.com/courses.php5 and a nifty video clip of the two of them demonstrating and talking about low brace turns: http://canoekayak.com/kayak/virtualcoach/