

FALL PADDLING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Nancy and I usually plan to get away to the Canadian Maritimes each Fall for some paddling and fun together, but this Fall shaped up differently. Our son Mark, now living in Austin, Texas, had decided to show his two older boys, 7 and 9 years old, where he had grown up in Maine. And that included a lot of boating, hiking and seafood, besides getting reacquainted.

Dad (that's me) had reactivated his 1997 Dodge van so that everybody, including our big and boisterous Yellow Lab Willoughby, had lots of room to spread out. Nancy and I were gearing up for a very active week in early September.

The three "boys" arrived at the Portland airport around midnight. And my, had the two youngsters grown since we last saw them in Bellingham, Washington! The post-midnight snack of fresh, smoked mussels and various other yummy food items disappeared in no time, while father and son celebrated the moment with a glass of white wine; ginger ale for Nancy and the boys.

A scrumptious buffet breakfast in our Portland hotel was appreciated by the three hungry travelers, followed by a lengthy, high-energy swim in the empty pool and a drive out to Portland Head Light. Our daughter Brenda and two kids had joined the watery fun and hike around the lighthouse park. And when it was time for the cousins to get to know each other better, as well as brother and sister to reacquaint, Dad (that is me again) drove down to the Portland Promenade, put in his solo outrigger canoe and enjoyed two hours of solitude around the Diamond Islands and a few more. I needed that! This is about the same loop I have paddled several times with our daughter Brenda in two solo boats.

The river-fest

"Meanwhile back at the ranch", in Orono that is, our "Texans" moved into our guest room in the barn/boathouse, right on the banks of the Stillwater River. The boys were indefatigable, jumping off the ledge shore into the river and swimming around and over each other like otters. Lunch sandwiches finally lured them back ashore.

Then the boats came out. Each boy was fitted with properly sized life jackets and paddles. We started out paddling my Penobscot 16 across to the group of islands in the river, looking for muskrats, beavers, ducks, turtles and the last of the white water lilies. The younger boy Stellan was sitting on the stern seat, facing aft, with

me on the bow seat facing the same direction. This helps with boat trim, and is also easier for the younger kids to get their paddle in the water. (I do the same with our Maine grandson Zachary, also age 7.) Stellan had his heart set on seeing moose. By the end of the week his count was up to seven, while the rest of us must have missed them somehow :-)

Our dog Willoughby felt very much left out of all that watery fun. So he and I finally paddled my old yellow Royalex canoe, he on constant look-out with paws on the bow seat or even the tiny bow plate. Mark, back from making a few business calls, took my place in the green Penobscot with Stellan, while the older boy Aidan was eager to try out my and also Mark's first kayak ever, a touring Baldwin, even using my old but very light home-made double-bladed paddle.

Three generations had now used this boat as their first paddle boat. What a historic moment! I still remember (40 years ago!) putting a long rope on the stern of the boat when 6-year old Mark insisted on trying out Dad's new kayak in early Spring. Since we had no second boat for safety, this way I could reel him back in like a fish. However, he was such a fast learner that he soon learned to steer the boat and could return to the put-in, that is, when he decided it was time to come back, which was always longer than what I had in mind.

(Note: He spent his last high school years in California so he could train year-round to make the national team in Olympic flatwater kayaks, which he did. He sure was one precocious kid.) Fun was had by all, including Willoughby, while Nancy recorded the events with her camera. A big pan of fresh haddock with all the fixings was a fitting ending for the first boating day in Maine.

The coast of Maine

Then we were off to the coast, to our cottage in the small fishing village of Corea. The lobsters were very much appreciated, once the boys learned how to get to the meat - a fun challenge for the boys. Nancy's blueberry pie, made with fresh-frozen Maine wild blueberries and a real crust (none of that supermarket cardboardy tasting stuff!) disappeared in no time. Yum! While Nancy and I did the dishes, "the boys" went to the beach, and at low tide were even able to walk across the bar to Inner Bar Island. What a treat for our little Texans.

The evening got properly cool, so a fire in the cast-iron Franklin stove was in order. I don't know if we toasted marshmallows over the coals, or not. I'll have to check with Nancy. I was nursing a cool beer, you see?

Next morning we were off to Mount Desert Island. We four "boys" hiked to the top, while Nancy was kind enough to meet us on the summit, with the van. This was already our second mountain we had climbed. On the way home from Portland, we had stopped at Freeport/Pownal and climbed Bradbury Mountain, which offers great views towards the ocean, just like Cadillac Mountain, only on a slightly smaller scale.

Our three visiting boys then opted to drive back to Corea to do some more serious beachcombing. We had strategically left a second car at Park headquarters, because this was an optional plan from the beginning.

Each day of their stay was filled with new activities. Our son Mark especially loved trying out my new light-weight solo STORM outrigger canoe, which made me feel very good. Time flew by much too fast, and after one more seafood dinner at home (fried haddock as well as a fancy scallop dish) and lots more swimming and boating, they finally had to catch a bus in Bangor, which would take them to Portland, from whence they flew home to Texas. At the bus stop, in the field behind the back parking lot, Stellan "saw" yet another moose, and he was sure he would like to move to Maine – eventually.

It looked as if the boys liked the place where their Dad had grown up, which made Mark's grandparents (Nancy and me that is) glow with happiness. The boys only wished Maine wasn't so far away from Texas. But who knows, they might move again, maybe to Boston, or anywhere in New England, but preferably to Maine. Till then, memories and lots of pictures will have to do. Nancy and I gave them all a warm grandparental hug, and waved them good-bye with a big smile. "We did it! And I think they had a great time! Thanks, Nancy! Phew!"

The Salzburg connection

Nancy and I barely had a week to recover from all the activity, when a young German paddling friend of mine, now living and working in the Salzburg, Austria area, was planning some serious paddling on the Atlantic with the "old dude" (that is me again). When I paddled along the German coast of the Baltic Sea from Denmark to Poland in 2002 and wrote about it in the German KANUSPORT magazine, he was fascinated and impressed by my venture in an open canoe (an Old Town Penobscot 16). Manfred is a well-known professional tennis coach in the area and an avid canoeist, having paddled several Canadian routes. You guessed it. He found my website with all the reports on trips he wished he had done. So he e-mailed me with lots of questions, about boats and trips, but especially my touring canoe, my Verlen Kruger Sea Wind sea canoe, a totally

new concept for him, and any European for that matter.

"Why don't you come over here and try it out?" was my response, and he did. This September was already his fourth visit with us in Maine. Manfred is the same age as our son Mark. He even has the same initials: MZ. So in September, MZ visited RZ, stayed in the guest room, where our MZ lived as a student, here at the University of Maine in Orono, and over the years has paddled all of RZ's boats, from whitewater and marathon solo and doubles racing boats (mostly Jensen-designed Wenonah boats, all fast wood-strippers, Kevlar and carbon-fiber boats), but also my solo outrigger, and especially my Kruger Sea Wind sea canoe. I forgot to mention, soon after my Baltic trip, Manfred bought himself a Penobscot 16, from the same dealer in Hamburg that lent me his brand-new, green Penobscot 16 for my trip – free of charge, in exchange for my articles and pictures for advertising purposes.

Atlantic sojourns

So here is what we were able to cram into a "perfect paddling week", as he put it.

I took it easy on the "poor boy" the first day, after he had arrived in Bangor the night before with a serious case of jet-lag: just an easy 5-mile loop, dam to dam, on the Stillwater River behind our house. A swim in the river instead of a lengthy shower saved time for a significant cook-out of Angus porterhouse steaks, washed down with a cool Sam Adams Boston lager beer. Dessert was a cherry cream-cheese pie, one of Nancy's very popular sweet concoctions.

Next day we were off early in our van with the Kruger Sea Wind and my outrigger on the roof. We were headed for the Camden/Rockport area. Nancy was kind enough to put us in in the quaint little harbor of Rockport (not Rockland!). The weather could not have been better. We paddled out the bay and around Indian Island Light and the outlying ledges, before we turned north, up Penobscot Bay, towards Camden's picturesque lighthouse on Curtis Island. We took pictures of each other as we looped around it. Camden harbor proper was full of sailboats and even a few windjammers (most of them we saw out on the bay), before taking out at the Camden town ramp beside Wayfarer Marine.

It was lunch time, perfect for some steamed spicy mussels at the Waterfront Restaurant. After that we "climbed" Mount Battie, but let the van do all the work. The view from the top was spectacular. It was especially nice for me to see all the islands I had recently paddled around: Islesboro, North Haven, Vinalhaven, Deer Isle and Isle au Haut, just to mention the bigger ones. I could see Manfred's

eyes turning big and dreamy. Well, maybe some time, you will be doing that too. The islands do not run away.

Rounding Schoodic Point

Since the weather report was good, we headed right out the next day. This time towards Schoodic Point, the eastern part of Acadia National Park. On our last visit, Manfred desperately wanted to round this rather formidable point, but halfway there, we decided the sea conditions were getting worse, and it looked like a chancy undertaking. But he must have thought about that point all winter long. It became his Mount Everest. He had to round it this year. He was again paddling my Kruger Sea Wind, and I was in my older outrigger canoe, my Surfrigger. We put in at Frazer Point near Winter Harbor and paddled a good hour out to the point. By then some wind and waves had built off the bare granite headland. Waves were breaking onto the bold rocks in spectacular fashion, but we were confident we could handle it. He was elated! Nancy even recorded our successful rounding with her camera. We then went on around Big and Little Moose Island, Spruce Point and eventually into Bunkers Harbor, the first take-out spot after 2.5 hours of paddling, about 8 miles.

Another trip the next day. This time to Mount Desert Island, where Nancy put us in at Somesville, at the head of Somes Sound, the only Atlantic fjord in the US, the tourist folders proclaim. The views were spectacular again, but quite different from the views of the open ocean around Schoodic Point. Two hours later we cruised into Northeast Harbor, where Nancy was waiting in the van with a picnic lunch of ham sandwiches. It does not get much better. And yes, we drove up Mount Cadillac again, from where Manfred and I could see where we had paddled the two previous days.

Come tomorrow, we were off again to our cottage in the little fishing village of Corea for some serious lobsters, baked potatoes, steamed corn-on-the-cob and Nancy's *pièce de resistance*, blueberry pie. But Nancy made us work for it again, which we gladly did. She dropped us off at high tide at the very top of Gouldsboro Bay, just off route #1, from where we paddled all the way back into Corea Harbor, again a tad over two hours. Since the lobster COOP there was out of the smaller hard-shelled lobsters, we settled for 2-pounders, and I am telling you, they were GOOD! So was Nancy's blueberry pie. A glass of wine in front of the fireplace after sundown, when it was getting colder, felt real nice.

After some more Corea beach-combing and sightseeing the next day, we returned to Orono for a scrumptious haddock supper, Manfred's favorite. There

was only one more thing he wanted to do: paddle on rather large Pushaw Pond (just west of Orono/Old Town), which we did the next morning as the weather pattern was finally changing. Lake paddling is so different from paddling on the ocean, but a 25-knot tailwind added some excitement for both of us on our way home.

Till we meet again

Next day was the day Manfred would take a bus back to Boston and fly home to Munich, Germany and Salzburg, Austria eventually. But there was still time for one last loop on the Stillwater River and trying out my new STORM outrigger. And then Manfred was off again, having paddled the boats and areas he dreamt of all year. Fortunately the weather cooperated with our trip plans; we felt very lucky and accomplished. And special thanks go again to Nancy who made it all possible. We both think she is a gem. Thanks my dear!

Good-bye, till we meet again, and do some more serious fun-paddling together. It is a joy knowing you and seeing you appreciate the same things I do. You not only have the same initials and interests as our son Mark, you very much remind us of him. And you keep the "old dude", me that is, challenged, which I like very much. So, when will you be back? Any more significant point-roundings in your dreams? Check out the charts and the DeLorme Maine atlas I sent you last Christmas.

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