

HERE, THERE & (almost) EVERYWHERE

Day trips through the seasons

Everybody always thinks I only like to go on long, hard, lonely solo cruising trips along rough, foreboding ocean shores. Well, I do, and I like doing them, but I do much more paddling in between those trips. Wherever I go, I almost always carry a boat on my car, either my solo outrigger canoe or my Verlen Kruger covered sea canoe. Even living in the cold northland of Maine, I paddle on a year round basis. These two boats are never put up for the winter, as most boats in Maine are. My two boats are amazingly "warm" to paddle, since even my outrigger has a protective K-1 Olympic-style cockpit with sprayskirt and is of foam-sandwich construction. It is distinctly warmer to paddle than a sit-on-top Hawaiian-style outrigger or a low Eskimo skin-on-frame kayak. My Kruger touring canoe also has a full cockpit cover, and the seat is elevated and not on the cold boat bottom, like in sea kayaks.

I live on the Stillwater River in Orono and enjoy observing the seasonal changes around me till the river finally freezes solid. I watch the Canada geese come and go on their way north or south, watch muskrats and beaver build their lodges, and always give perched eagles and ospreys a wide berth so they do not feel they have to leave their favorite look-out or resting spot. There are stunning white water lilies, so plentiful in Monet's paintings, brilliant red cardinal flowers, purple pickerel weed, painted and snapping turtles, hooded mergansers, wood ducks and Barrows golden eyes.

Every season shows off new impressive transient visitors. And then there are the constant color changes in the trees along shore as well as the rich light of the rising or setting sun. Life is good along the river, especially when I can share all this with Nancy in our 2-person canoe. Our big, young and exuberant yellow Lab Willoughby also greatly enjoys river rides with me in our oldest Royalex canoe, standing tall with his front paws on the very bow. Keeping the heavy 2-person boat level and moving forward is a good workout for me and demands my fullest attention.

And when the river finally freezes over, I trek 30 miles south to Ellsworth, where I can paddle for another month or so on the tidal Union River down into Union River Bay, which offers great views of the Mount Desert Island hills and mountains. When that finally freezes over, I move south another 30 miles to MDI, where I mostly paddle along Bar Harbor's waterfront, from Hulls Cove to Cromwell Cove, just outside the breakwater and back, and maybe around a few Porcupine Islands, if the bar to Bar Island is out and the weather permits.

On real cold days, though, when I know my mukluks with polar-fleece socks and my neoprene gloves will not keep my extremities warm, I wish myself down to the Everglades National Park in Florida, which has actually happened a good number of times since 1992 (see EVERGLADES FOREVER in MAIB and ACK and also on my

website). Or I do what everybody else does up here in Maine: enjoy the snow, especially cross-country skiing. Double-poling is a great way of staying in shape for the upcoming canoe racing season, or just making sure you are not losing everything you worked for all year.

Finally May comes around, school lets out, the University that is, and I am off on my first cold, foggy, wet and windy ocean canoe trip. It mostly turns into more of a challenge than a summer joy ride, but I do not mind. I have the equipment and the prudence to know when to switch to plan B or even C. I do not like to set myself up for failure, if you know what I mean.

This year I criss-crossed Casco Bay in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Portland-based Maine Island Trail Association, founded in 1987, which by the way is not officially being celebrated till next year, the 25th year of the MITA guide booklet, I was informed. (I have a hard time accepting that type of thinking: celebrating the birth of a booklet rather than the founding moment of a truly trail-blazing organization.)

Much more fun that time of year, however, are my day trips on the ocean from Rockland to Rockport or Rockport to Camden, when I can choose a fine-weather day, and even pick the right direction of travel so tide and wind are in my favor, and to boot can enjoy a longer car trip and outing, including a picnic lunch, with Nancy, knowing she has a great time finding scenic walks, browsing a bookstore or library in town, or just enjoying the harbor ambiance.

I also greatly enjoy volunteering with the Penobscot Riverkeepers every Spring and Fall, taking groups of junior high and high school students in eight war/voyageur canoes on the Penobscot River at Bangor/Brewer. We introduce them to canoeing, the river and its history, and share teaching sessions on the environment, clean water and air concerns, safety, navigation/orienteering, and the return of salmon, sturgeon and other indigenous fish species. The students are so enthused and appreciative, which makes it fun for us Riverkeepers also. Without a doubt, learning by doing is always more fun.

One of my favorite areas for summer day trips is Frenchman Bay off Winter Harbor. The park at Frazer Point on the Schoodic peninsula is great for launching a canoe and offers several island trips with spectacular vistas of Mt. Cadillac across the bay, as well as the many cute Porcupine Islands, Grindstone Neck and massive Ironbound Island. A tad downeast along the coast is Corea Harbor on Gouldsboro Bay, our family summer home, where I have figured out several significant paddles, like from Route #1 all the way down the bay to Corea, or from Prospect Harbor to Corea, or looping around the Sally Islands.

In June, Nancy and I usually spend a week on Prince Edward Island, Canada, and having paddled around the entire 400-mile island in the past, I know of numerous

splendid day trips in the Cavendish/Summerside/Charlottetown areas, filled with red sandstone cliffs, enticing white beaches and bights full of tall salt grasses.

And then it is time to get ready for the 22-mile ocean race in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the Blackburn Challenge, which is usually held in mid-July. This year was my 11th consecutive race in my black carbon-fiber solo outrigger canoe. This race has turned into one of the major boating events along the Atlantic coast. About 275 hand-powered boats start in their respective classes: rowing shells, dinghies, dories, sea kayaks, surf skis, solo, double and the big six-person outrigger canoes, and recently also SUPs (stand-up paddlers). Each year I have finished between 3:33 and 3:49 hours, always within 16 minutes of my other finishes, regardless of tide, wind and weather as well as my own state of fitness/health, let alone age. And since there are no age classes, and I feel I have to be competitive with some of the best paddlers in the country, my preparation is as serious as my body allows. I still race hard and have not yet allowed myself to consider the Blackburn a rally, where just finishing is enough of a goal. (By the way, this year I came in 4th in the men's solo outrigger class, beating #5 by 7 seconds, 1 boat length!)

Two days after the Blackburn I am usually off again on my second ocean trip of the summer. This year's trip took me from Castine, Maine around the three large islands in Penobscot Bay: Islesboro, North Haven and Vinalhaven, which I had seen on my western horizon when rounding Deer Isle and Isle au Haut last year.

In August, Nancy and I attended a wedding in Nova Scotia, in a country inn just outside the Kejimikujik National Park. I had wanted to paddle that large, lobed lake for a long time, and so I planned in two 2-hour paddles around the entire lake (minus a few smaller bights). It was as beautiful as anticipated, but it was summer, the weather was great, a bit on the too-hot side, and lots of other boaters had the same idea as I. Fortunately I was able to leave them behind quickly and was paddling alone again, as I am used to, enjoying nature on a quiet one-to-one basis, most direct and intimate, without all the trite, noisy chatting that goes on on any group trip.

Before returning to Maine via the Digby, NS to St. John, NB ferry, we stopped in Digby for the night, where I greatly enjoyed paddling on the large tidal Annapolis Basin. This is the large bay Champlain and Dugua had chosen for the first successful French "habitation".

The settlement on St. Croix Island in Passamaquoddy Bay, now right on the border between Maine/USA and New Brunswick/Canada, had failed the year before, 1604. Nancy and I had a great time walking through all the buildings of the replica of the 1605 Habitation. I then also paddled from Digby into Bear River, which was named by Champlain after a friend of his, "Hébert", pronounced something like "a-bear" in French. The Brits again misheard and thought the French were talking about bears, just as they turned Newfoundland's "L'Anse aux Méduse" (bay of jellyfish) into "L'Anse

aux Meadows", or "Cap Despoir" (Cape Hope) into "Cape Despair" on Québec's Gaspé shore.

Ah well, it was a great paddle, though, around the outlying Bear Island, chock full of sea birds (no bears), and back to my Digby put-in. Seeing the ebb tide current pick up through Digby Gut (max 5 knots) was awesome. In Champlain's days that meant that no hostile boat could attack them for 6 hours each tide cycle. The early French settlers had found a tidal lock, just as they were used to from St. Malo in Brittany, France, Jacques Cartier's home port.

Nancy and I have also spent time in Nova Scotia's Mahone Bay area, Canada's Atlantic ocean playground, which offers superb, quite sheltered canoeing around its 365 islands.

On the way home from Nova Scotia via the Digby ferry, Nancy and I often stop in St. Andrews, NB, where I do several great paddles on Passamaquoddy Bay, like to St. Croix Island and around Minister's and Navy Island. Staying in the classic old Algonquin hotel is a real treat.

Whenever Nancy and I visit our daughter Brenda and family in Portland, I always bring my outrigger along for a 2-hour spin around a couple of Casco Bay islands. Nobody misses me for that short a time anyway, I tell myself. Sometimes I even bring a second solo canoe for Brenda, who greatly enjoys her 6-island trip with her Dad (around the two Diamond Islands, Pumpkin, Crow, Cow and Fort Gorges).

And before I notice it, it is Fall again – more work-outs on the river behind my house, day trips to the Camden, Bar Harbor and Winter Harbor areas, and lots of raking, painting, sawing and splitting wood before the first snow falls.

For years Nancy and I had wanted to see the huge flocks of migratory snow geese gathering off Cap Tormente on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River (about 30 miles NE of Québec City). They breed in the high Arctic and then winter in the Chesapeake Bay and Chincoteague area. So this year was it, and it was an awesome sight seeing about 50,000 vociferous white geese grubbing for the rhizomes of the American bulrushes on the extensive mud and rock flats off the cape. We even saw them from our hotel window in St. Anne de Beaupré, practicing take-offs.

But on this trip I did not bring a boat, because I remembered from my 2007 trip along this shore to Tadoussac that it is distinctly difficult to put in and take out because of the extreme tides and extensive mud/rock flats. In 2007 I had to paddle 9.5 hours before I could get ashore just before Baie St. Paul/Isle aux Coudres. I have to admit, though, that I felt a bit deprived looking at the big river with its beautiful, steep rocky shores and not having a boat to check things out.

Soon after our return, Hurricane Sandy hit the NE shore of the US, all the way up to Maine, and days later we got our first snowstorm, on Nov. 8 to be exact. This is the time when MEGO ("mine eyes glaze over") finally sets in, and I wonder how it would feel being in the Everglades, or what is in store for me next year. Time is getting more precious the older one gets, you know, and there are still lots of things I want to do and see, or redo, because they were so much fun. Having turned 73, it is still hard to stop doing what I love so much, but also definitely harder to do with aplomb, if you know what I mean. So here I go again, pushing the grizzled, wizened curmudgeon stage off for yet another year.

Hope to report on more trips, events and happenings next year. Stay tuned, be safe and enjoy what you are doing.

Reinhard

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