

# ***Coastbusters***

**The Cross Currents Newsletter for Mid-Atlantic Paddlers**

May 2026

## **Isle Royale Expeditions in the Upper Midwest**

***Michael Gray***



*Sunset from Chippewa Harbor. Photo: Michael Gray*

Lifting your kayak onto the roof of a bouncy ferry getting ready to cross to the largest island in the largest freshwater lake on Earth is an experience in deep wilderness. I have done a lot of paddling in Polar regions and Alaska, yet I keep coming back here. It is often cited as being the least visited and the most re-visited of our national parks. Having guided well over 100 trips to the island, I am guilty of adding to that statistic. Although my own trips have always been via sea kayak, the island is veined with a network of trails crossing its Boreal ridges from end to end. Day hikers and backpackers from the Midwest often take the pilgrimage to Isle Royale as a rite of passage. Its rocky lateral ridges of ancient volcanic origins are interspersed with Boreal plant species, offering a pocket of Alaska-style climate refrigerated by Superior.

### Wolves/Moose

ISRO, as it is known in National Park Circles, is also home to the longest predator/prey relationship study in history - the Wolf-Moose Study is closing on 60 years of research. Another unique aspect of an island with a closed loop of wolves preying on moose is that sooner or later, some yahoo would inevitably want to get a closer image of a wolf by luring it with human food. An image posted becomes an infectious attraction to other social media addicts and very quickly wolves discover people food is much easier to obtain than a large mammal that fights back. For over 30 years, I had only seen one wolf in dozens of trips...now, we must actively chase wolves out of camps. Yes, they can peel hatch covers off kayaks. You can turn the boat over, but a 120 lb. wolf can flip it, pry off a hatch and disappear into the night with your food faster than you can don a headlamp and get out your tent door in a pair of flip flops. The Park Service has installed bear boxes in established camps and required campers to use "bear proof" containers recently. Although inconvenient, it has been



amazing to see how fast these animals have adapted and human-wolf encounters like this are unheard of anywhere else. It is complicated and weird and interesting all at the same time.

### Remote

Paddling at Isle Royale is often a canoe culture since the island is crisscrossed with paddle and portage routes. Sea kayaks are not portage friendly, but they do handle open water well as I began to learn in my first trip there in 1988. Although it seems crowded when everyone arrives together on a ferry dock, when you get a day's paddle away, those crowds get dramatically thinner. Although you share waters with power boaters – attracted by legendary fishing - around the island's dock sites, it's a fair trade off when you are waking up to the music of loons and bell buoys. And more than once a chat with a fisherman has yielded a fresh fish dinner.



*Gting there is an adventure. Photo: Michael Gray*



*The Palisades. Photo : Michael Gray*

## Challenges

This is a fantastic place to have a real expedition experience in challenging conditions and sometimes complex logistics. Navigating in fog, planning around poor weather broadcasts, monitoring changing conditions and dealing with water that can very quickly get sporty are all frequent challenges. Exposed coastline areas can be sunny and smooth, but with 100 miles of fetch over 1300 ft of depth, expect at least ruffles and a bit of swell on best days. This national park does have a backcountry permit system here, but it is unique in that you don't have reservations. They don't want to risk campers moving on in dodgy weather to make it to a reserved site.

You can plan a three to five-day trip that focuses on a variety of things to do in the protected 10-mile-long Rock Harbor area or commit to 8-10 days to make the 110-mile circumnavigation which can involve 20-mile days along exposed coastlines.

## Experiences

Wake up to Loon calls around 6 am in an island camp, anticipating a superb day of bay hopping past rocky cliffs under bluebird skies studded with Bald Eagles and gulls. Stop for a picnic in a hidden cove far from hiking trails, go for a brisk swim, fill water bottles with cold clear Superior water and enjoy the long day's run to the next camp.



*The seldom seen NW exposed coast. Photo: Michael Gray*

### The Seasons

Every trip to the island is different and the months offer variety. First ferries arrive in Mid-May while there is still snow in some campsites, waters are icy and bugs are nil. June is in full bloom reflected in wildflowers, trout in the shallows and biting insects. July sees the biggest visitation when Superior starts to creep up over 40 deg F, wild strawberries ripen, fishing is good and daylight is present till after 10pm. Thimbleberries and wild raspberries begin to decorate camps in August, water is warmest and insect density eases as fall approaches during the middle of August. I think of September as Surprise! month...weather can do anything (i.e.. gales, sun, glassy seas, snow), and many commercial facilities close. In September, flexibility is key.

### Getting There

You could paddle the 60 miles to Isle Royale, but trips usually begin with a ferry from Houghton (6 hours) or Copper Harbor Michigan (4 hours) or Grand Portage Minnesota (2 hours). Although Isle Royale is served by sea plane service, there are no overnight rentals of kayaks on the island.

### Do It!

It is hard to beat Isle Royale for cutting your teeth on expedition paddling in level 2-5 conditions with some good bailout options and solid resources. But it is one of those places that you need to go to once or twice to learn how to do a good trip there. There is a vibrant on-line community of Isle Royale enthusiasts who share sometimes good, sometimes inaccurate, information. But there is value in doing a guided trip with a knowledgeable, authorized operator like Uncommon Adventures.

### Background

This island is a volcanic continuance of the Keweenaw Peninsula that juts out into Lake Superior from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Although much closer to Canada, Teddy Roosevelt fought to keep US possession of Isle Royale to retain its mineral wealth. 200,000 miles of copper wire were extracted from Keweenaw over a century ago to power our daily lives. Although some Copper was mined from Isle Royale, most of its natural resources were silver in color as over 100 fisheries used to dot the island to net whitefish and lake trout from these productive waters. Whitefish that arrived in New York by train in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century came from Johnson fisheries on Isle Royale. Isle Royale became a Michigan State Park, but was too remote to administer, so that honor was left to the National Park Service in 1940. Over 99 percent is designated wilderness.

*In This Issue*

**Isle Royale – Michael Gray** ..... 1  
**Table of Contents** ..... 5  
**Upcoming Events** ..... 5  
**WavePaddler Spring Gathering - Laure Bowman**..... 6  
**Photos of the Month** ..... 9  
**Crossing Currents – Paula Hubbard** ..... 12  
**The Upper Hillsborough – Rick Wiebush**..... 15  
**Contributors** ..... 18

*Upcoming Events*

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Website/Contact</b>
July 15-19	Great Lakes Symposium	Grand Marais MI	Power of Water	Greatlakesseakayaksymposium.net
Sept. 11 - 13	Bay of Fundy Symposium	Argyle, Nova Scotia	Chris Lockyear	Bofsk.com
Sept 25-27	Kiptopeke Symposium	Cape Charles VA	Cross Currents	Crosscurrentsseakayaking.com
Oct. 9 - 11	Delmarva Paddlers Retreat	Lewes DE	Qajaq USA	Delmarvapaddlersretreat.org
Oct. 19 - 21	Ocean Gathering	Tybee Island GA	Sea Kayak Georgia	<a href="#">Sea Kayak Georgia Paddle Tybee Kayak, SUP, Canoe, Yoga</a>

## Wave Paddler Spring Gathering

*Laure Bowman*



*Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

I and several other Maryland area sea kayakers attended the Third Annual Wave Paddler Gathering, April 7–12, at lovely Camp St. Christopher, South Carolina. This is a beautiful beach front location at the end of Seabrook Island with access to both the North Edisto River and the Atlantic Ocean! We enjoyed seeing so many birds, dolphins, lots of jellyfish, and some turtles! Ashley Brown and Jeff Atkins, of Wave Paddler in Charleston, SC organized this great event which was a wonderful way to kickstart the kayak season in some warmer temperatures!

### **The Paddlers and Coaches**

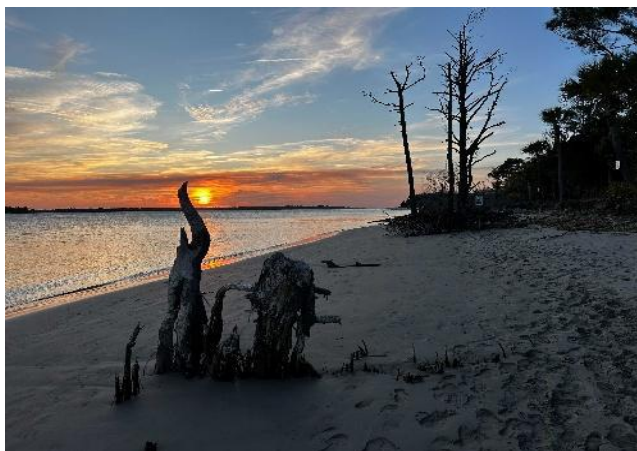
There was a terrific group of about 40 paddlers who participated along with a fabulous group of coaches. There were about 15 states represented including (based on my memory from the first night's icebreaker): Alaska, Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. I have to (proudly) say that the Maryland area was the most represented with 11 paddlers!

This is my fifth season sea kayaking and my third symposium. Two years ago I went to Delmarva Paddlers Retreat in Delaware, last year to Cross Currents' Kiptopeke Symposium in Virginia, and this year Wave Paddler Gathering in South Carolina! Like all the symposia I've participated in, there was a great group of people, and awesome coaches! With the smaller number of participants and large number of coaches, the coach to student ratio was fabulous! I knew many of the coaches from the Cross Currents UnCon Courses I've taken as well as the Kiptopeke Symposium. In addition to Jeff and Ashley, the coaches and mentors included: Matt Barnes, Kathryn Lapolla, Dale Williams and Debbie Kearney from GA; Bev Coslett and Tom Suppan (SC); James and Bev Kesterson (NC); Rob Garfield (NJ); Mike Hamilton (MD); and Alvah Maloney (ME).

### The Classes

Each of the symposiums I've participated in have been wonderful experiences not only due to how well they were run, but also due to the friendly and encouraging paddlers and the coaches willing to share their wealth of knowledge both on and off the water! Each of the symposiums has had a different vibe and structure.

Wave Paddler Gathering was different from the other two I had been to in that it had a more flexible structure. There were not predefined classes or sessions provided ahead of time. The night before or the morning of, as a group, we discussed what



*The beach. Photo: Nananda Cole*



*Harpooning! Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

people wanted to do, learn, or work on and then coaches and their groups were identified based on shared interest. There was one session per day. Some sessions had three people and others 15. There was plenty of leadership in all the sessions regardless of the size. This was a well-received, student-centric approach.

I took advantage of a Greenland Style paddling session, and a combat roll challenge class. Due to rotator cuff issues, I did the Greenland session to gain skills with a Greenland paddle. As a bonus, we could try our skills at harpooning! I wanted to do the rolling challenge class because I had recently acquired a roll but had never successfully done a combat roll. For the challenge, we started practicing our rolls in calm water near camp. We then progressed and practiced 1) rolls with the paddle on the wrong side of the kayak, and 2) a roll where we "lost" our paddle and had to pull the spare from the bungies/deck lines while under the kayak and then roll up, and 3) a series in which we had to paddle fast, roll up and immediately continue paddling. Then we moved out to the Atlantic and practiced in more bouncy water. Then we found some bigger waves/clapotis. Two of us went over there. While I was still unsuccessful doing a combat roll, I was successful doing a reentry and roll - Progress!

There was a lot to choose from and something for everyone Wednesday through Saturday. Sunday many left after breakfast. There weren't any official sessions on Sunday – and a lot of people headed home after breakfast - but there were enough coaches/mentors for two groups to go out



*Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

informally – one to tour Deveaux Island for a relaxed paddle, and another to go in search of some waves to surf.

### **OOOPPS!**

Of course, as with all paddling events, some of what can be done is weather dependent. This was no exception. The first two days there were very windy (15 -20 kts) conditions. We had wind, wind, wind, waves, and currents. One of the windy days a group of the more novice paddlers crossed the North Edisto River but due to the winds and waves could not get back across to camp. They had to leave their kayaks on the other side and call for a John boat to bring them back to camp. As a group, we discussed options to get the kayakers and their kayaks reunited the next day. The winds were much less the next morning and a group of 8-10 more experienced paddlers went over and towed the kayaks back across the river in short order.

### **Off Water**

The accommodations at the camp were hotel-like, with meeting rooms and balconies for hanging out in the evening and chatting about our day. Each morning we had the opportunity to partake in yoga

before breakfast – such a nice way to start the day and warm up/stretch out the body! One night we had a low country boil dinner in a pavilion overlooking the water! Another night we had a bonfire with smores. Most nights we had a planning session to discuss the ideas for the next day, and a debriefing so we could all hear what everyone did and learn from each other's experiences.

Overall, it was a wonderful event, with a lot of fun and a lot of skill building.. Between the coaches and attendees, it was so nice to see familiar faces and have the opportunity to meet some new paddlers. Looking forward to the next Wave Paddler Spring Gathering!



*Pre-dinner meeting. Photo: Ricardo Stewart*

**Photos of the Month**



**Bora Bora**

*Photo: Renee Riley-Adams*

**Photos of the Month**



**Skookcumchuck**

*Photo: Bill Vonnegut*

**Photos of the Month**



**Prince William Sound**

*Photo: Jeff Atkins*

## Crossing Currents

*Paula Hubbard*

Paddling across the current is not something we can always avoid. When you paddle across a current, you will be pushed sideways. If you are paddling towards a specific destination this will tend to push you off course. For every hour you are paddling perpendicular to the current, for every knot of current, you will be pushed 1 nm in the direction of the current. On a long crossing, this could be significant. What are some of the strategies used to make sure that you arrive at your intended destination?

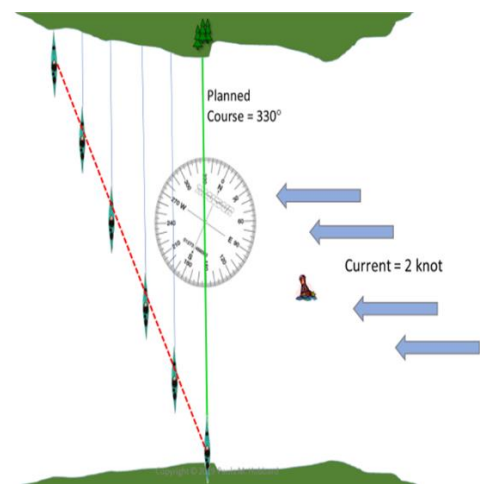
### Follow a Course

Use a compass to take a bearing to an object at your destination and determine your planned course. Follow that course as you do the crossing. Following this strategy, you will have a long paddle back to your destination against the current. If it takes an hour to make the crossing and you have a constant current of 2 kt, the current will push you two miles downstream of your target and you'll have a 2 nm paddle back to your destination. See Figure 1.

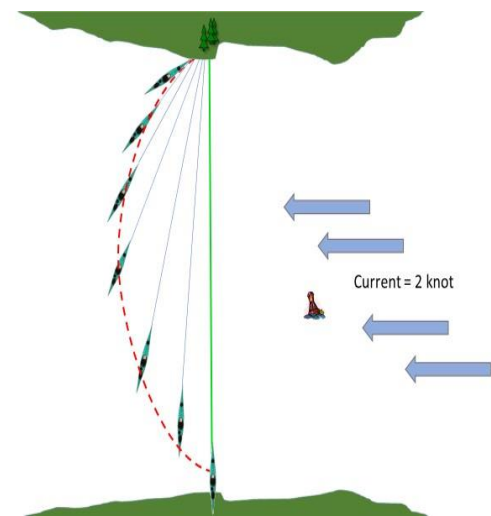
### Pick a Spot, Point Your Bow

Point your bow at your destination and keep it pointed there, maybe using some visual aid, like a tree. This will give you the classic banana-shape course because you are still getting pushed by the current. You arrive at your destination, but have paddled a longer distance and will likely have to paddle against the current at the end. See Figure 2

*Figure 1. Effect of following a simple bearing*



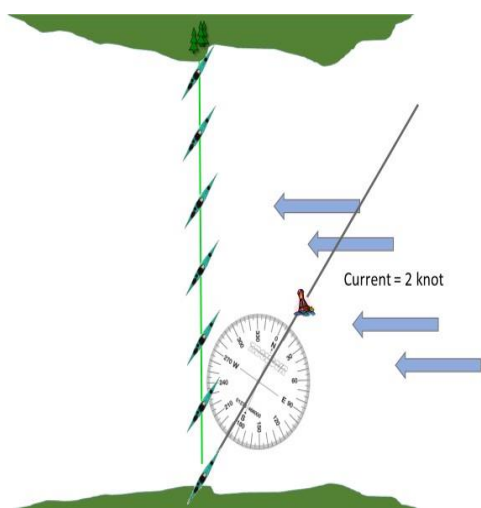
*Figure 2. Effect of pointing your bow at destination*



### Calculate a Ferry Angle

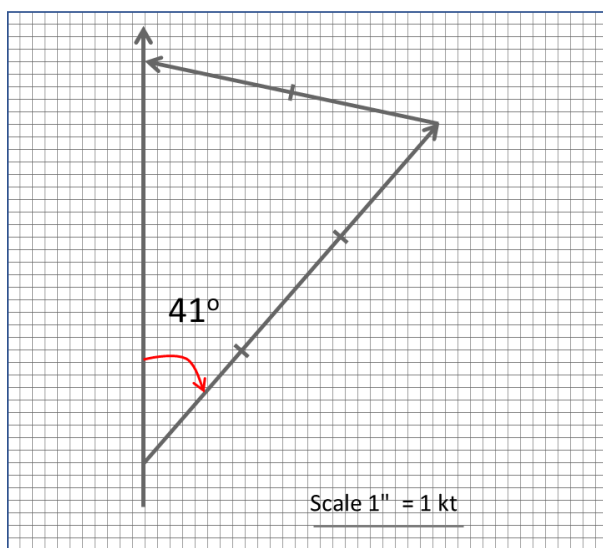
You calculate your course to be  $330^\circ$ . You know from the current predictions that a 2-knot current is expected. You calculate the adjustment you need to make to compensate for the current. In this case you add  $40^\circ$  to your heading, now your heading is  $10^\circ$ . Follow that heading and you will reach your destination following the shortest route.

Figure 3. Ferry angle



What was the process for figuring out that adjustment? We calculate ferry angles by using vector analysis, as shown in Figure 4. First draw a line that represents your course. This line only represents the direction you want to travel and does not represent the speed or distance. Next, draw a line to scale that represents the speed and direction of the current (the top line in Figure 4). Finally draw a line to scale that represents your paddling speed (we assume three kts). This line should be from the starting point of your current vector and the angle is adjusted until you intersect with the line representing your course. The angle between the course line and the paddling speed vector is your ferry angle. That is your *heading* (the direction the boat is facing). By maintaining that heading, the current will carry you along the course you want to follow.

Figure 4. Calculating ferry angle

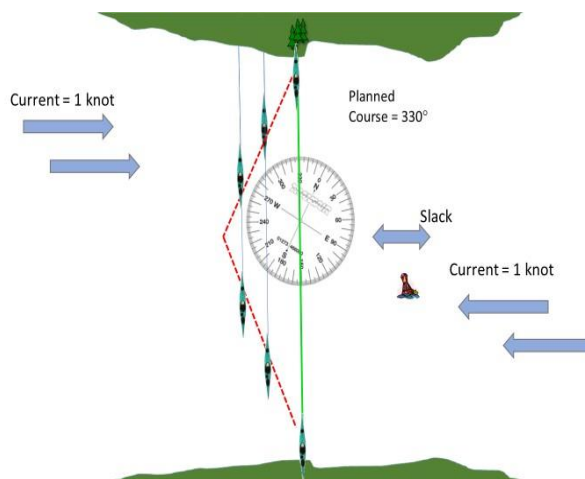


If your paddling speed is 3 kt, the general rule is that you need a  $20^\circ$  ferry angle for every knot of current. Slower paddlers will need a greater ferry angle. Note though, there can be currents that are so strong that you will not be able to maintain a straight line across the current.

### Time your crossing

Time your crossing so that slack occurs when you are halfway across. For the first half of your crossing, you are pushed with the current in one direction, for the second half of your crossing you are pushed back on course. Unfortunately, we can't always rely on timing our crossings.

Figure 5. Timing the crossing



### Using Ranges

A range is a visual alignment of two fixed objects on the shore that are at different distances from you. By keeping these two objects lined up, you create a visual "track" that ensures you are moving in a straight line relative to the land, regardless of what the water is doing to your boat. A range consists of a front object, something closer to the shore such as a rock, a buoy, or a sign, and a rear object, something further back and hopefully higher up such as a tall tree, a house, or a water tower. The only way to ensure that Object 1 (the "front range") visually aligns with Object 2 ("back range") is to remain on that single, straight line. Any visual separation of the two objects means you have drifted laterally off that track, and you must correct your course to realign them. This visual relationship is the entire range concept, simplified.

### Setting Up the Range

To cross a current in a straight line, decide where you want to go, and look for two objects that line up with your destination. As you begin paddling, keep the front object directly in line with the rear object.

Figure 6. On and off the range

### Correcting for Drift

As you paddle into the current, the water will try to push you sideways. Using a range provides instant feedback. If the objects begin to separate even slightly, you can adjust your stroke (or bow angle) quickly before you've drifted too off course.

When we have visual clues, using ranges is a much better way of staying on course than using a compass. While a compass tells you which way your boat is pointing, it cannot tell you which way your boat is moving over the surface of the earth.

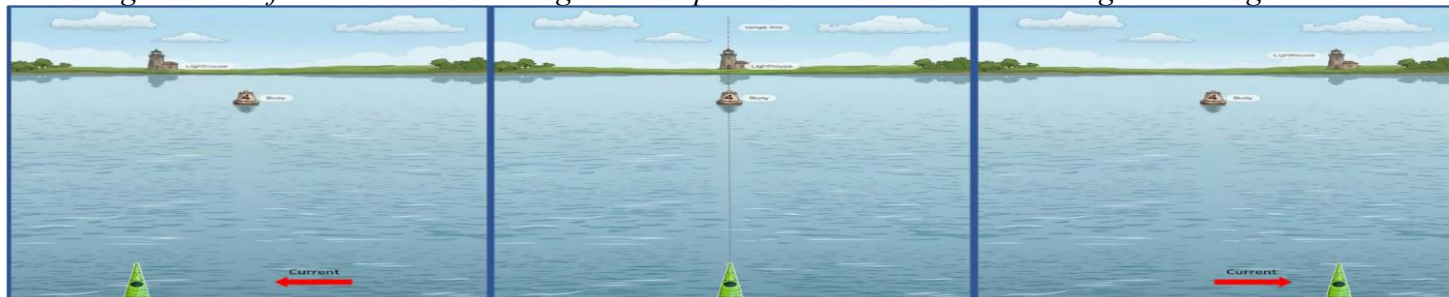
In some areas finding objects to use as a range can be difficult. This is particularly true in barrier islands or in large marsh areas. Learn to be creative in finding objects on the shoreline, buoys, and/or objects on land. The more you practice, the more you can learn to identify a range that will work for you. If you can't find markers in front of you, look behind you. Lining up two objects on the shore you just left also works.

Visual Observation	Meaning	Required Action
<b>Objects stay aligned</b>	You are on a straight track.	Maintain your current speed and angle.
<b>Back range moves left</b>	The current is pushing you to the left.	Point your bow more to the right and/or paddle slower
<b>Back range moves right</b>	The current is pushing you to the right.	Point your bow left and/or paddle faster.

Back range moves left

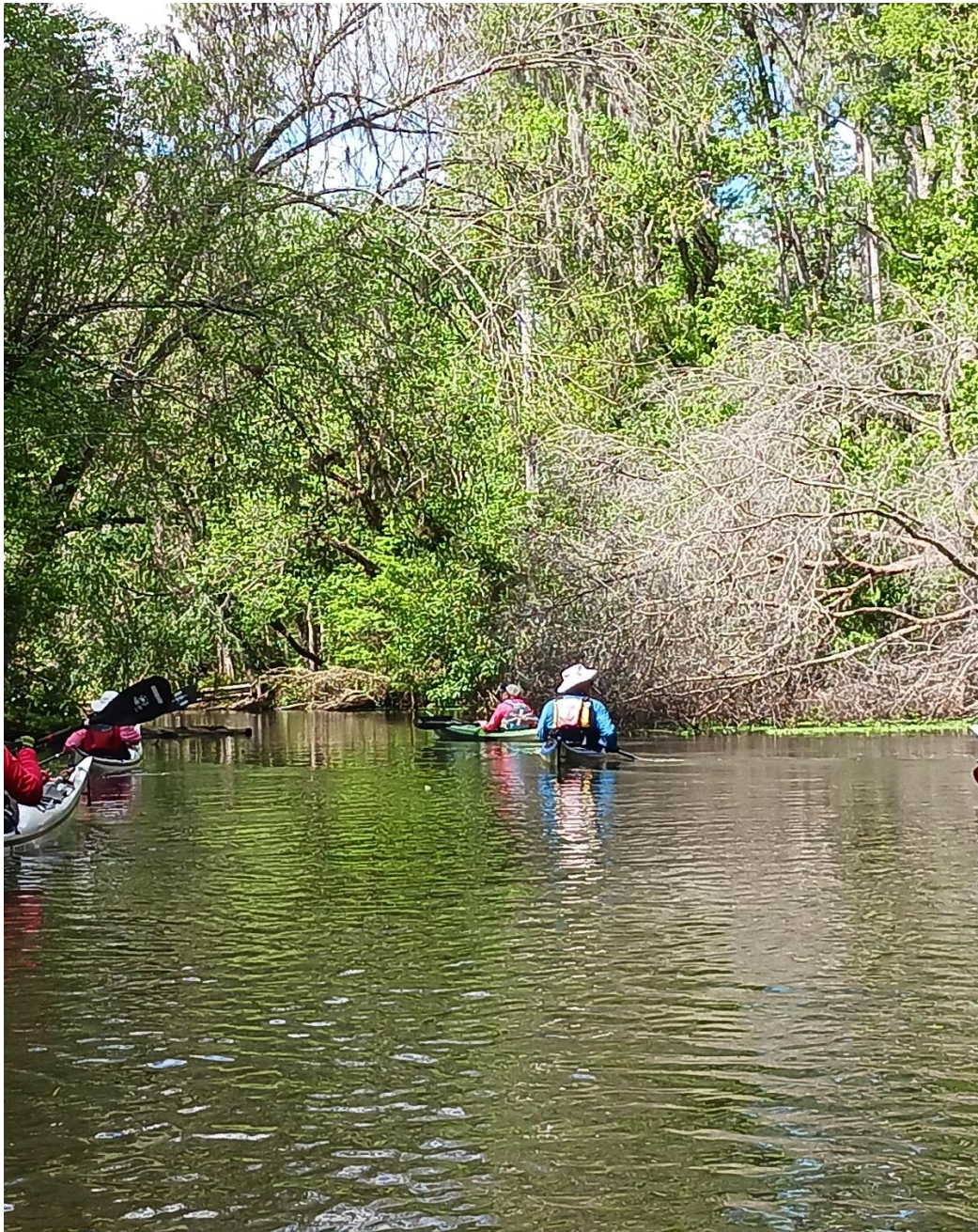
Ranges lined up

Back range moves right



## The Upper Hillsborough

*Rick Wiebush*





*Photo: Rick Wiebush*

So Gene comes flying by me on a section of the river that's about 30 feet wide and, surprised at what he sees on the bank at the last minute, shouts "GATOR" loud enough to scare the shit out of: 1) the 12 foot gator and then 2) me, after the startled gator springs headlong into the river next to my boat while Gene merrily cruises along downstream, largely unaware of the tumult he's created.

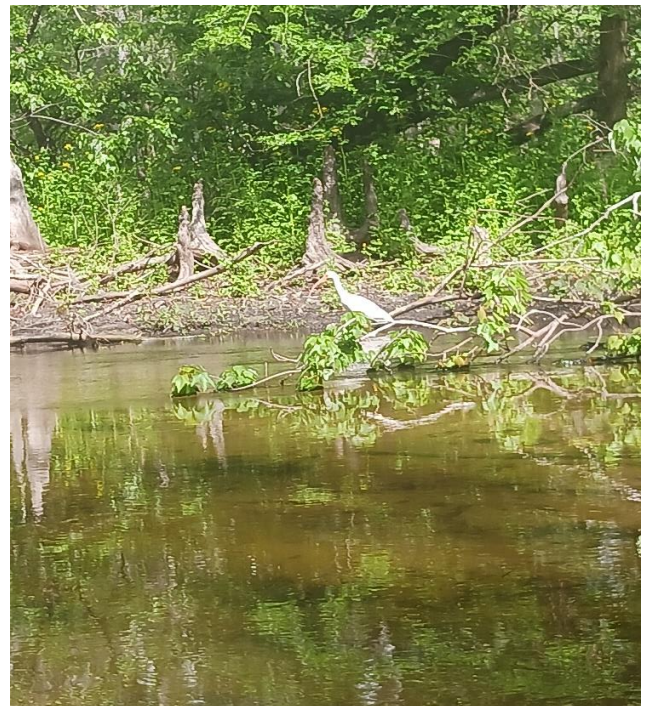
While unnerving, this was the only untoward incident in the seven-mile section we were doing on the Upper Hillsborough River, in spite of the fact that there were gators on the banks or in the water about every 30 yards along the whole stretch. The only place I have seen more gators (albeit a lot more) has been in the Myakka River.

The Hillsborough – at least in this section – is a real mini-wilderness experience, even though it is only about 15 miles northeast of the City of Tampa. In addition to the hordes of gators there is an abundance of wildlife, especially multiple varieties of birds, and very few (we saw two) other paddlers.



*Photo: Rick Wiebush*

It's narrow, tree-studded and canopied, including lots of huge cypress; slow-moving, quiet, pretty and, unless a passing friend gets startled and screams "GATOR", serene. There are also enough palms in places that it has a jungly, Viet Nam-type feel to it. It is a stark contrast to the usual Florida paddling experience of cruising along under blue skies and the white sandy beaches of the Gulf. And, unlike some of those paddling spots on the Gulf, there's not much traffic and it's easy to get to.



*Photo: Rick Wiebush*



*Photo: Rick Wiebush*

The whole river is about 50 miles long, running generally from the northeast near Zephyrhills to the southwest in an urban Tampa neighborhood. Thirty miles of it – starting at Hillsborough River State Park - is considered a paddling trail. There are state and local parks about every five miles along the trail, so there are multiple river access points and opportunities for breaks while paddling.

There are several distinct areas along the river that offer a variety of paddling experiences. One of these, called Seventeen Runs, is located between Dead River Park (river mile 3) and John Sargeant Park (mile 7.5). This section is apparently wild and wooly. I say "apparently" because I haven't done it. I say wild and wooly because the river Paddling Guide warns because it is so narrow and fast, with lots of downed trees that: 1) only the most experienced paddlers should attempt this section; 2) it can take six hours to cover the five miles; 3) you

have to be prepared to get out of your boat into four feet of water to push and pull your boat over or under downed trees; and 4) every year unwary paddlers are rescued from this section by helicopter!

In contrast, the lower Hillsborough River, from about Lettuce Lake Park (mile 17.5) to the end in Tampa has much more development, runs through suburban neighborhoods, is considerably wider and is more likely to have power boats.

The sections we've paddled – and as described above - are the seven miles from Sargeant Park (mile 7.5) to Trout Creek Park (mile 14.5) and the 10-mile stretch from Sargeant to Lettuce Lake at mile 17.5. This is such a pretty, interesting place that I plan to routinely incorporate the Upper Hillsborough as part of Cross Currents' Tampa-area trips.



### If You Go

I highly recommend the Sergeant Park to Trout Creek or Sergeant to Lettuce Lake trips. John B Sergeant Park is located in Thonotassa, FL at 12702 US 301. There's parking for about 15 cars and there are port-a-potties. The ramp is only about 10 ft wide but is paved. There is a \$7 admission fee that is also good at Morris Bridge and Trout Creek parks. These two places also have small ramps, limited parking and port-a-potties. Lettuce Lake is different. It's a big complex with lots of parking, bathrooms, a nature center, a playground and hiking trails. The Lettuce Lake address is 6920 East Fletcher Ave. Tampa. Rec boats are available for rent at Sergeant and Lettuce Lake.

### **Contributors**

**Laure Bowman** – has been kayaking for four years and has completed UnCon I, II and III. She has enjoyed paddling Ebenezer Creek, GA, the Everglades Wilderness Waterway, and across Portugal on the Douro River. Laure lives in Baltimore.

**Michael Gray** – is an ACA Coastal Kayaking Instructor, Leader Trainer, Canoe Instructor and the owner, along with his partner Lisa Deziel, of UnCommon Adventures. Their Islw Royale trips, along with others to such places as Greenland, are part of the Pinnacle Expedition Series, which are offered to those seeking multi-day expeditions requiring a higher skill set.

**Paula Hubbard** – learned to paddle in the big water of San Francisco Bay. She is an ACA L3 Instructor, teaches the wildly popular “Paddle Smarter, Not Harder” series for women and is one of the primary UnCon instructors for Cross Currents. Paula lives on the Maryland Eastern Shore.

**Rick Wiebush** - runs *Cross Currents Sea Kayaking* and is the editor of *Coastbusters*. He is an ACA L2 IT and British Canoeing Sea Leader. Rick lives in Baltimore.

**Coastbusters** welcomes submissions of trip reports, incident descriptions and analyses, skills and “how-to” articles, boat and gear reviews, book and video reviews, and photographs. We are interested in receiving submissions from all paddlers.

Articles should be limited to about 1,500 – 2,000 words and submitted in Word. Photos should be submitted in .jpg format. Please send your submissions to Rick Wiebush at [rwiebush@gmail.com](mailto:rwiebush@gmail.com).

*Coastbusters* is a publication of Cross Currents Sea Kayaking