

Memorial Day Trip to the Bodkin 2012

By Lisa Arrasmith

Trip Motto: "Radio Check, Radio Check, Radio Check"

I instigated a Paddle-To-Eat-Lunch-Bunch peer paddle from Fort Smallwood Park, at the mouth of the Patapsco River, into the Bodkin to the Cheshire Crab restaurant and back. Paddling against the tide both ways, predicted high in the 90s, heat advisory, 11+ miles, wind SW – SSW, what's not to like? And I like paddling the Bodkin—the name itself sounds like something out of Shakespeare.

Fort Smallwood Park is an Anne Arundel County park a few miles south of Baltimore's Key Bridge and a few miles north of Bodkin Creek. The park is where the Patapsco meets the Bay so expect Bay weather and Bay conditions. It has a big, sandy kayak launch beach and is my new favorite local put-in. On Memorial Day, I was running my usual efficiently disorganized 11.5 minutes late. I started getting phone calls and texts. "Maywin - running late!", "Debbie - where are you guys?", "Steve - no show, sorry!" Getting to the park, I run the amazing bright yellow traffic slalom at the park entrance. It looks like a driver education course. Don't flunk.

The earnest volunteer in the gatehouse checks my annual pass sticker. If you show up with a boat on your car they will ask for your name, cell number and license plate number. If you don't come back and get your car before the park closes they will fink you out to the Coast Guard. And they might tow your car.

Debbie Schmiel is already at the beach with Tom Blount, who I've not met before. Madeleine Towle vouched for Tom, so I know he's good people. Mark Fisher arrives, as does Maywin Liu. Introductions, boats unloaded onto the big sand beach, gear strewn upon our boats and our persons. Who has a radio? Me, Maywin, Debbie and Tom, but Tom's radio is at home. **Radio Check Moment One:** Is your radio with you?

Last run to the spot-a-pots near the kayak beach. There are proper indoor lavatories all the way on the other side of the park near the pretty pavilion. There's a woman sitting in a chair on the way to the spot-a-pots, a woman with an ENORMOUS tripod telescope set up. I say hi and ask her what she's watching. It's the tail end of the turkey vulture migration and she's keeping watch. Bird Nerd Alert—the park's an Audubon Important Bird Area.

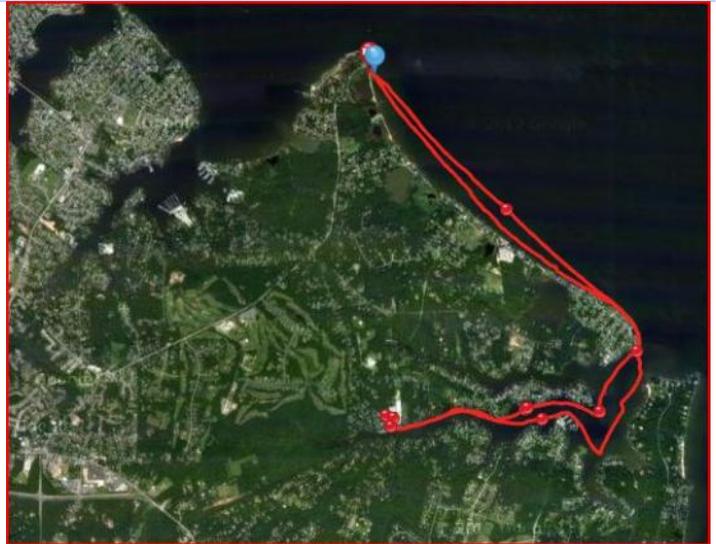
We're ready to roll, but where are Jeff Thompson and Nora Moynihan? Checking my cell, I have a voice mail from Jeff. They left Towson late and need to detour their dog to Bowie, so we go on without them.

It's 3 miles southeast to the mouth of the Bodkin, then 2 miles and a bit west to the Cheshire Crab in the Pleasure Cove Marina. There's a good breeze in our faces, and easy water. Tom's retired Navy and he's flying the U.S. flag on his bow. Sparrows Point steel mill hulks like Mordor across the water to our left. We meet one tired guy in a surf ski heading back to Fort Smallwood. He's the only other kayak traffic on the water. No serious big boat traffic until we reach the narrow mouth of the Bodkin, and that's where the big boat fun starts. The Bodkin has several coves, creeks and channels and it is one of those "leave breadcrumbs" navigation challenges. It's hard to spot the channel markers and boats come from all directions. We line up and cross the channel north to south at the mouth of the Bodkin and cruise along the south shore. We have our second radio check moment when Debbie proves that she had perfect balance all the way from Fort Smallwood. "Where's my radio?!?" Debbie's radio is on her back hatch cover, high, dry and unsecured for the 3 miles from Fort Smallwood. **Radio Check Moment Two:** Is your radio still with you?

The Bodkin splays out like a hand with 5 possibilities. There's a "dividing point" dead ahead as you enter the creek that blocks the view of Main Creek. It will fake you out. There's only one restaurant on all of the Bodkin, tucked away towards the end of Main Creek. Look at your left hand. The "dividing point" is the crotch between your thumb and first finger. There's a plausible looking creek to the right/north side of Bodkin Creek. If you make a hard right into the big first/north channel, the "thumb", that's Back Creek. No restaurant there. So skip the "thumb" and go to the left/south of the dividing point. If Back Creek doesn't fake you out, you're still not done. The first big round cove on the south side of the Bodkin (the "pinkie finger"?) is lined with tasteful waterfront McMansions, but no restaurant. The promising big channel on the left with the small round grass covered island (the "ring finger"?) is Locust Cove. You'll end up in the innards of Downs Park, and no restaurant there. The next cove (the "middle finger"?) has more houses, but no restaurant. There's a marina on a point on the south side of Bodkin Creek where Main Creek heads west. Keep your eyes peeled for it and paddle up the "index finger" of Main Creek. It's about a mile west to Pleasure Cove Marina and the Cheshire Crab restaurant on the right side of the creek.

We arrive at Pleasure Cove Marina, which has a boatel the size of an airplane hanger, with yellow and white stripes. This boatel can be seen from space (Seriously, check it out Google Earth). However, it's a stealth airplane hanger size boatel. You don't see it

(Continued on page 8)



Bodkin Creek from Fort Smallwood, GPS track by Tom Blount

Bodkin (Continued from page 5)

from the water until you're almost right up on it. Go figure. Finding the kayak usable tie-up at this big-boated, rip-rapped marina requires an act of faith. Go past the marina, take a hard right at the end of the boat docks and peek between the dock walkway and the land. There's a sliver of shallow mud and rock-bottomed accessible waterfront squeezed behind the boat docks. I've seen bigger pieces of pie. Bring line, rope, cable, boat straps to tie up your boats. They're not getting out of the water.

We head up the hill to the Cheshire Crab. The lunch of the zombie wait staff begins. Multiple people try and wait on us (really, this is not a good thing), orders are taken, and taken, and taken . . . I suspect confusion in the kitchen as well, buffalo shrimp are not spicy shrimp. "Bring me a menu and I will point at what I ordered." The food is good and given a choice between zombie service and good food or good service and zombie food, I'll go for the good food.

Then what to our wondering eyes do appear? Our not-so-late paddlers Jeff and Nora walking across the parking lot. Jeff and Nora teleported themselves from Towson to Bowie to Fort Smallwood and arrived at the park just as we pulled away. Jeff radioed us with a clever hail based on the paddle instigation email subject line. I didn't hear him, Maywin didn't think whoever-it-was on the radio was talking to us. By the time they offloaded we were gone thataway. **Radio Check Moment Three:** Dogs respond to their names. So do kayakers.

We eventually pay the bill (3 iterations before getting a correct-enough bill) and get back in our boats for the return leg. Heading back to the Bay, we stick to the north shore of the main channel. There's lots more big boat traffic as the post-holiday beauty parade back to dock begins. Sticking close to shore does not get us out of big boat traffic—there is a big sailboat under power cruising right off the end of the docks. We cut across Back Creek to the north side of the mouth of the Bodkin. Not as much big boat traffic going in and out of Back Creek The wind's breezy back on the Bay that the water's kicked up enough with wakes and wind and reflected waves to be interesting but not hard. We're paddling with the wind and against the tide and it's a good combination.



Landing at Pleasure Cove Marina, photo by Lisa Arrasmith



Lunch at the Cheshire Crab, photo by Lisa Arrasmith

Hailing Jeff on the radio on the return leg, we can't reach him. His radio isn't working. The detachable, floating radio battery detached, probably when we were getting back in the boats at the Cheshire Crab. **Radio Check Moment Four:** Is all of your radio still with you?

We land back at the Fort Smallwood beach. Little kids are playing in the water, people are walking dogs, a couple are in a canoe: A good Memorial Day was being had by all of us. Tom's GPS said we paddled 11.3 miles. It was a remarkably comfortable paddle given that the temperature was in the 90s. Steady breezes all day saved us. We all load up slooooooowwwwwly in the heat. Tom and I head back to the Cheshire Crab for a drink and an unsuccessful search for Jeff's radio battery, while Mark goes in search of the black cherry snowball with marshmallow that is calling his name. It was a great Memorial Day on the water.

If You Go—Anne Arundel County took over Fort Smallwood Park from Baltimore City in 2006 and comprehensively renovated it. The park used to be dirty, rundown and unsafe. The park is now meticulously clean and well patrolled and it has a new fishing pier, new playground equipment, nice picnic areas—and a sand beach kayak launch. Fort Smallwood Park has a \$6 per car admission fee, cash or check ONLY. NO cards. The park's sandy beach kayak launch is so sweet that I bought the \$40 calendar year pass for all Anne Arundel County parks. The park is closed on Wednesdays. There's a small stand selling hot dogs, soda and chips near the kayak beach.

The trip is an "advanced" Advanced Beginner moving into Intermediate paddle. Our paddle was 11.3 miles round trip. I'd budget 12 miles because there's meandering inside the Bodkin and Back Creek might fake you out. There are lots of potential bailouts all along the way. CPA guidelines say Advanced Beginner trips are "up to 10 miles". However, 6 miles of this paddle are on the Bay, the rest of the paddle is inside the sheltered Bodkin Creek. You may have a good day like we did, where you come out of the Bodkin for the return leg and all is well and good and fun, or you may have a day where you come out of the Bodkin and all hell has broken loose and you should go back to the Cheshire Crab and call a cab.

Links

Fort Smallwood Park: <http://www.aacounty.org/RecParks/parks/ftsmallwood/index.cfm>

Audubon Fort Smallwood info: <http://iba.audubon.org/iba/viewSiteProfile.do?siteId=369&navSite=state>

Cheshire Crab: <http://www.pleasurecovemarina.com/cheshirecrab/>