

A Guide to Paddle-in Campsites on the Chesapeake Bay

By Ralph Heimlich

Kayak touring involves a group loading their boats with all the camping gear and supplies needed for a several-day paddle. Ideally, launches and camping spots for kayak touring are spaced about a day's paddle apart, say 10-12 miles for the average paddler. Another requirement is that the launch spot should be reasonably secure so that you have some assurance of finding an operable vehicle when you arrive back from the trip trying to drive home.

This is a catalog of 57 formal paddle-in sites I know of on the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries. Contact me if I've missed any that you know about. There are numerous other "unofficial" (commando) sites that people have used. These are not suitable for groups or organized group trips.

Patuxent River—The many sites along the Patuxent Water Trail are shown on the Patuxent Water Trail site (<http://patuxentwatertrail.org/>), and on the printed Patuxent River Water Trail Guide and GPS-ready Map by Dave Linthicum available at <http://paxriverkeeper.org/product/patuxent-watertrail-navigation-map-non-waterproof-edition/>. Paddle-in sites are listed by river mile (measured from the mouth of the Patuxent) and from upstream to downstream. Generally, these sites have a picnic table, fire ring, porta-potty and no water (exceptions noted). Reservations should be made well ahead of your planned trip since the process can be time consuming.

- Iron Pot Landing (River mile 44A (45 on the map))—This site is located just below the Billingsley Point manor house on Western Branch. It is steep and wooded and Western Branch is much cooler than most of the Patuxent River. The landing is deep and there is a mechanical launch on a dock at the site. Site is generally steep with few flat tent sites. (38.795882, -76.720858)
- Croom Canoe Camp (River mile 41)—Located one mile upriver from Selby Landing ramp. This site is accessible from a floating plastic dock that may be mud bound at low tide. There is road access to the site if you get the key/gate combo. (38.757712, -76.700902)
- Selby Landing (River mile 40)—There is a campsite directly off the parking lot at the top of the ramp here. (38.752452, -76.700864)
- White Oak Landing (River mile 40A (39 on the map))—This site is located on Mataponi Creek and consists of a lower landing and a large grassed field up on a bluff above it. (38.742422, -76.702406)
- Spice Creek (River mile 35)—This wooded site is located a short way up Spice Creek, which is a wonderful creek for swimming. (38.691552, -76.704761)
- Milltown Landing (River mile 30)—This site consists of a lower grassed landing area and an upper area separated by a hedge. Water is available at Kings Landing Park (Calvert County), a short paddle downriver (38.632726, -76.691461)
- Maxwell Hall (River mile 23)—This wooded site is on a low point just downstream from the narrowing of Swanson Creek and is part of the larger Maxwell Hall park. It is directly across from the Chalk Point Power Plant, which can be quite noisy. Note that this site is mislocated on the printed Water Trail map. There is generally NOT a porta-potty at this site. (38.539340, -76.694504)

- Indian Creek (River mile 20)—This site is directly opposite Indian Creek from the village of Golden Beach and is part of the Patuxent River WMA, and is closed during waterfowl hunting season. (38.498082, -76.688128)
- Greenwell (River mile 9)—This site is located on a steep bluff up Hog Neck Creek and is part of Greenwell State Park. A porta-potty and water are located within a one-mile walk from the campsite in warmer weather. It is currently restricted to parties of 4 or less. (38.372702, -76.531913)

Several of these sites (Iron Pot Landing, Selby Canoe Camp, Selby Ramp, White Oak Landing, Spice Creek, and Milltown Landing) can be reserved through the headquarters of the Patuxent River Park at Jug Bay (http://outdoors.pgparks.com/Sites/Patuxent_River_Park.htm 301-627-6074). This is also the contact for gate combinations at the Queen Anne Canoe launch and other sites for launching on the river. Charles County Recreation and Parks manages the Maxwell Hall site (<http://www.charlescountyparks.com/recreation/recreation> 301-932-3470). The Indian Creek site is managed by Myrtle Grove Work Center (http://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/IndianCreek_NRMA.pdf (301) 743-5161). You may need to speak with a supervisor as desk help often does not know about this site. Greenwell is managed by the Point Lookout Complex at Point Lookout State park (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/pointlookout.aspx> 301-872-5688). Again, desk personnel may not know they manage this site.

There are number of sites under discussion and development for paddle-in sites on the Patuxent. While these are not currently available for reservation, keep your ears open.

Potomac River—The Potomac is shared by Virginia and Maryland, and each state independently works on providing paddle-in sites through a variety of agencies. These will be presented from upriver to downriver using VA and MD shoreline mileage (measured in nautical miles; VA and MD shorelines not equal) from The Potomac Paddlers Map that I developed (<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1VBGolgCem6VwIVuT17STzsZ1ygY&usp=sharing>). Click on the + signs on the shorelines to get river miles and on the destinations for data.

- Pohick Bay Regional Park (VA River Mile 129)—Not really a paddle-in site, but there is a campground here that you can use if you are willing to cart a LONG distance or spot a car here. Nice soft launch here away from the regular boat ramps. (38.676945, -77.168799)
- Leesylvania State Park (VA River Mile 113)—This site is at the Bushy Point Canoe/Kayak launch, has 4 timber-framed pea-gravel tent pads, fire rings and picnic tables, access to porta-potties and the bathrooms at the park, and is reserved through the park (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/leesylvania#cabins_camping 703-730-8205). (38.584685, -77.259656)
- Smallwood State Park (MD River Mile 93)—Again, not really a paddle-in site, but there is a campground accessible by pedestrian bridge from the Sweden Point Marina which is probably cartable, or if you spot a car here. (38.558475, -77.188802)
- Chickamuxen Creek Sites (MD River Mile 90)—These two sites are managed by the Myrtle Grove Work Center (<http://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/publiclands/southern/chicamuxen.aspx> (301) 743-5161). although the desk people may not know it. There are two sites in pretty close proximity and the GPS coordinates are approximate (38.538383, -77.231052)

- Camp Merrick Lions Club Camp (MD River Mile 73)—This is a youth camp run by the Lions Clubs and you may be able to arrange for paddle-in camping by contacting them (<http://lionscampmerrick.org/about/> (301)-870-5858). (38.361614, -77.211840)
- Caledon State Park (VA River Mile 82)—This is the best paddle-in campsite in the region, in my opinion. It consists of six timber-framed pea gravel tent sites with fire rings and picnic tables set in a grassy area backing to small trees, and a paved porta-potty area with a pay station and info kiosk. There is a beach landing and a small gazebo overlooking the landing and a small pond. You can reserve through (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/caledon#cabins_camping 800-933-7275). (38.363852, -77.142550)
- Friendship Landing (MD River Mile 67)—This site is managed by Charles County Recreation and Parks and is on a first-come, first-served basis. It consists of a small wooden platform on a steep bank, a fire ring and picnic table (no sanitary facilities). The landing is a bit difficult and the site is only suitable for a tent or two, so small parties. (38.459105, -77.145808)
- Goose Bay Marina (MD River Mile 60)—On Goose Creek off the southern shore of the Port Tobacco River, this commercial marina and campground has camping available, and is also a safe place to leave a car overnight for other destinations, for a fee (<http://goosebaymarina.com/index.html> 301-932-0885). (38.453303, -77.052951).
- Chapel Point State Park (MD River Mile 60)—There is a paddle-in site about a mile down the Port Tobacco River from the Chapel Point SP launch site. This site has a sand beach, a wide grassy field, fire ring and picnic table (no sanitary facilities). It is reserved through Smallwood State Park (<http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/chapelpoint.aspx> 301-743-7613). There is a plan to lease parts of the park to Charles County Parks and Recreation for cooperative management, including management of the paddle-in site, but that negotiation is ongoing. (38.464538, -77.030614)
- Monroe Bay Campground (VA River Mile 59)—This is a private RV campground with some potential as an overnight spot on a longer river trip (<http://www.monroebaymarina.com/campground/> 804-224-7418). We used it as an overnight parking spot for a trip down to Westmoreland SP (38.238985, -76.966745)
- Westmoreland State Park (VA River Mile 49)—This new site was developed at the park and consists of three timber-framed, pea-gravel tent sites with fire rings and picnic tables. A fourth handicapped accessible tent site is being constructed. Water is available at the picnic pavilion immediately adjacent and the bath houses at the pool are open for camper use. It is currently reserved through a special use permit from the park (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/westmoreland#cabins_camping 804-493-8821), but the park is moving to put reservations at the online reservation site. (38.171478, -76.871243)
- Coles Point Marina Resort (VA River Mile 32)—A marina and RV campground with tent accommodations near the water (<http://colespointmarina.com/> 804-472-4011). Located at Ragged Point (38.142936, -76.613484).
- Point Lookout State Park (MD River Mile 0)—While not strictly paddle-in, there are campsites directly accessible by water in Loop B—Greens, which can be reserved through the online system using Reserve America. Other information is available at the park’s website and phone number (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/southern/pointlookout.aspx> 301-872-5688).

Although not currently available for use, there are plans for additional paddle-in campsites in development. Keep your eyes open.

Rappahannock River—I am not as familiar with the Rappahannock and have done no kayak touring there (yet!), but there are a couple of sites in the tidal portion that are worth mentioning. I'm not aware of any GIS-based set of river miles for the Rappahannock, so only coordinates are given, starting from upstream to downstream.

- Leedstown Campground—While not strictly speaking a paddle-in campsite, this campground is on the river and appears to have grassy areas for tents that could perhaps be rented ((804) 224-7445). (38.110282, -77.005008)
- Belle Isle State Park—In addition to the excellent car campground, Belle Isle has the Brewers Point primitive paddle-in (boat/hike in) site with four tent areas and a common living area with a fire ring, two picnic tables and porta-potty (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/belle-isle#cabins_camping 804-462-5030). Brewers Point is at the upstream end of the park, on the river side from the canoe/kayak launch. (37.784501, -76.617544)
- Gwynns Island RV Resort—Again, not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, and located at the mouth of the Piankatank River, a southern mouth of the Rappahannock. Many years ago, we used this as a base for paddling, and there are grassy areas accessible from the water, however, the recent management focuses on RVs and charges for tents at the same rate (<https://www.sunrvresorts.com/Community/GWY/WaystoStay.aspx#open> (888) 723-2535). (37.489207, -76.273293)
- New Point Comfort Lighthouse—The sand spit leading out to the lighthouse allows primitive paddle-in camping. Note that the Nature Conservancy's New Point Comfort Natural Area Preserve north of the sandy area does NOT allow camping. There are no amenities and no designated campsites, so Leave No Trace Rules strictly apply. (37.312896, -76.279890)

James River—I have also never (yet!) kayak toured the James, but have used one of the facilities below (Chickahominy Riverfront Park) many times. I'm not aware of any GIS-based set of river miles for the James, so only coordinates are given, starting from upstream to downstream.

- Dutch Gap Conservation Area—This area, located at a reclaimed Dominion Power Fly Ash dump, has a camping area for "organized groups" with picnic shelters, tables, and a porta-potty (<http://www.chesterfield.gov/DutchGap/> 804-318-8735). (37.365968, -77.382291)
- Chickahominy Riverfront Park—This county park is located a short way up the Chickahominy River on Gordon Creek. While it is a full-service campground, it is accessible from the water (<http://www.jamescitycountyva.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Chickahominy-Riverfront-Park-2> 757-258-5020). (37.268408, -76.872562)
- Chippokes Plantation State Park—Again, not a paddle-in camp *per se*, it is on the water and has a group site with four tent areas accommodating up to six per area (<http://www.chippokes.com/campground.php> (757) 294-3728). However, the beach is fronted by a steep bluff and there is a half-mile cart to the campground. (37.147112, -76.740590)
- Fort Monroe/Colonies RV and Travel Park—Another full-service campground with tent sites on Hampton River/Mill Creek, and no reservations are required (<http://thecoloniesrvandtravelpark.com/index.php/tent-sites> 757-722-2200, 757-635-0471, 205-332-0059). The fort is located at the mouth of the James as it enters the Chesapeake Bay. (37.021815, -76.300148)

York River—Again, I have not (yet!) kayak toured on the York River, but there are some opportunities for paddle-in camping. I'm not aware of any GIS-based set of river miles for the James, so only coordinates are given, starting from upstream to downstream.

- Camp Whitehall—This is a private group camp located on the Mattaponi River. The camp’s website says tent camping is \$9 per person per night, with a \$75 minimum, so not practical for a few people (<http://www.campwhitehall.com/index.html>) (804) 769-0368). (37.732566, -77.043103)
- Rainbow Acres Campground—Another private campground located on the Mattaponi River with 12 primitive tent sites directly on the river (<http://rainbowacrescampground.com/>) (804)785-9441). I have car camped here and it is highly recommended by some of our paddlers (37.658995, -76.885710)
- Tuckers Recreation Park and Marina—Another private RV campground with some primitive tent sites on the York River (<https://campnative.com/campgrounds/usa/va/shacklefords/tuckers-recreation-park-boat-rental>) (804) 785-4464). (37.473091, -76.728995)

Eastern Shore—I have explored only two areas here for kayak touring: Assateague Island National Seashore and the Janes Island Water Trail. There may be others and I’d love to hear about and include them.

- Assateague Island National Seashore—There are 2 oceanside and 4 bayside backcountry camping areas available by permit (not reservable in advance). These sites have picnic tables and fire rings, but no water and no sanitary facilities—all camping is Leave No Trace. In addition, the National Park Service and State of Maryland have campgrounds for staging prior to your kayak tour (<https://www.nps.gov/asis/planyourvisit/upload/15-backcountry-camping-brochure.pdf>) (410) 641-1441)
 - Little Levels (Ocean side)—3.83 miles from North Beach Parking along beach (38.1522, 75.172788).
 - State Line (Ocean side)—12 miles from North Beach Parking along beach (38.044722, 75.231389).
 - Tingles (Bay side)—2 miles from Ferry Landing paddling (38.17778, 75.175556).
 - Pine Tree (Bay side)—5 miles from Ferry Landing paddling (38.14326, 75.1888333).
 - Green Run (Bay side)—9.5 miles from Ferry Landing paddling (38.08, 75.213611).
 - Pope Bay (Bay side)—12 miles from Ferry Landing paddling (38.047778, 75.23416).
- Pocomoke River SP—Shad Landing Area—While not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, there are car camping sites located within easy access of the landing in the Waters Edge (F) loop (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/parkmaps/shadlandingmap.aspx>) 410-632-2566). (38.140616, -75.440608).
- Pocomoke River SP—Milburn Landing Area-- While not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, there are car camping sites and mini-cabins located within easy access of the landing in sites 30-36. (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/parkmaps/milburnmap.aspx>) 410-632-2566). (38.124319, -75.489754).
- Janes Island Water Trail—Accessible from Janes Island State Park near Crisfield, MD, this trail has numerous paths through the marshes and around on the Bay side beaches and includes 3 backcountry camp sites which can be reserved by permit (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/eastern/janesisland.aspx>) 410-968-1565). These

sites have wooden tent platforms, but no water and no sanitary facilities—all camping is Leave No Trace.

- Long Point—At the southern mouth of the Little Annessex River (37.971370, -75.880591)
- Flatcap Basin—Off the yellow trail near the cut out to the Bay (38.015049, -75.865833)
- Daugherty Canal—At the north end of the canal opening onto the Big Annessex River (38.022161, -75.843703)
- Martinak State Park-- While not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, there are car camping sites located within easy access of the Choptank River in Loop A (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/eastern/martinak.aspx> 410-820-1668). A kayak cart is advisable for accessing these sites. (38.859555, -75.841013).
- Tuckahoe State Park-- While not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, there are car camping sites located within easy access of the upper Tuckahoe Creek (above the dam) in the non-electric Loop (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/eastern/tuckahoe.aspx> 410-820-1668). A kayak cart is advisable for accessing these sites. (38.983766, -75.933965).
- Bayshore Campground—Located directly on the Bay just above Eastern Neck NWR and below Rock Hall, this RV campground has some tent sites for paddle-in campers (<http://www.bayshorecamping.com/index.html> (410) 639-7485). I have car camped here on occasion (39.096344, -76.234648).
- Kennersley Point Marina—This marina on the Chester River above Chestertown offers water-side camping (<http://kennersleypoint.com/> 410-490-0810). (39.152528, -76.039182).
- Taylor Island Family Campground—This RV campground is located directly on the Bay at the northern end of Taylors Island, and there is limited accommodation for tents or paddle-in campers (<https://www.facebook.com/taylorsislandfamcamp/> (410) 397-3275). I have launched from here, but never camped here (38.474266, -76.330759).
- Turners Landing, Sassafras Natural Resources Management Area—Located on Turners Creek off the Sassafras River, this area has a Youth Group camping area that may be available for paddle-in camping access (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/eastern/sassafras.aspx> 410-820-1668). (39.357822, -75.983256 Landing (not campsite)).
- Elk Neck State Park—While not a paddle-in campsite *per se*, the camping cabins at Elk Neck State Park are easily accessible from the water and could serve as a paddle-in stop on some trips, particularly in the Fall or early Spring (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/central/elkneck.aspx> 410-287-5333). Located at the end of Elk Neck on the Elk River in the northern Bay, there are 9 rustic cabins named for trees, served by a central bath house (39.477968, -75.970171).
- Kiptopeke State Park—Located inside the Bay, this Virginia State Park has waterfront sites (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/kiptopeke#cabins_camping 757-331-2267). (37.167324, -75.987649).
- False Cape State Park—Not exactly in the Bay drainage, but pretty close, this Virginia State Park is on Back Bay, below the Norfolk area, and has primitive tent sites with water access (http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/false-cape#cabins_camping 757-426-7128). (36.629047, -75.907059).
- Mockhorn Island WMA—On the Atlantic side at Magothy Bay, this island has a paddle-in campground at its southern tip (<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wma/mockhorn-island/> 804-829-6580). (37.162016, -75.910183).

Western Shore—The highly developed western shore of the Chesapeake has few paddle-in camping opportunities. A few that do exist are the following.

- Hart-Miller Island State Park—This 1,100 acre island is located at the mouth of Middle River (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/central/hartmiller.aspx> 410-592-2897). Formed from dredge spoil from the Baltimore channel, 22 campsites available on a first-come, first-serve basis. There are 6 campsites at the main camping area on Hart-Miller Island, 11 sites at Hawk Cove, and 5 sites on Pleasure Island. All sites have a picnic table, lantern post and campfire grill. Water supply and restrooms are available only on Hart-Miller Island. A registration fee of \$6.00 per site/per night will be collected after you set up (39.233334, -76.395398 Pleasure Island; 39.252801, -76.372233 Hart-Miller Island).