



By *Sandy Noyes*

Cape Porpoise, a Paddling Paradise in Southeast Maine, June 10, 2008.

About an hour and a half north of Boston, take exit 25 off the Maine Turnpike, and a few miles north on Rt. 9 past the heavy tourism in Kennebunkport you will find the hamlet of Cape Porpoise. Follow Pier Road to the end at the town wharf for a view of the archipelago of small offshore islands, a unique feature on southeast Maine's coastline. You can put in at the causeway 300 yards short of the wharf, being sure you start two hours before high tide, and plan to return no later than two hours after high tide, or else you are in for an unpleasant surprise--a mile or two walk across sand and silt to get back to your car. The tides here are 9 to 10 feet and about 80% of the harbor area is exposed flats at low tide. [You can also put in at the wharf but it will take two people to get kayaks down the embankment.]



Cape Porpoise Harbor – high tide.

There are no fast currents as ocean water is free to enter and exit the harbor from nine inlets. "You can out-swim any currents," said a local fisherman. "The water just goes up and down."

The Cape Porpoise harbor islands are a paddler's paradise, in my opinion. Suggested tour: leave Redin Island to your left as you exit this fully protected put in. Be sure to leave your car off the pavement but higher than the high tide mark.

Immediately you will notice that the water is crystal clear. The water only gets more beautiful. It is a deep blue-green but still transparent at 20-foot depths. On 6/7/08, air temp was about 70F, and water temp was 51F, but up to 70F in spots where it had recently covered sand baking in the sun during the previous low tide. I am told that 65F is typical water temp by Labor Day.

Head for Trott Island, a few hundred yards east and plan to circumnavigate about 80% of this island going clockwise, avoiding the SE section, which is exposed to open ocean. Beautiful granite rocks line the rugged shore of Trott. In fact, there appears to be an outcropping on these islands of the same coarse-grained pink and gray granite that made Stonington famous on Deer Island much further up the coast. Seaweeds 6 feet long lift and sway in the mild swell under you. Blues are herding minnows and they sparkle as they jump out of the water around you.

You can cross to Cape island, a few hundred yards further east, but the east side of it is open ocean with surf crashing on rocks and is considered dangerous for kayaks. The west side is protected from surf and is tranquil.

You can then retrace your steps going counterclockwise around Trott and head for Goat Island, which has a working lighthouse on it, flagstaff with flag, and a good beach for landing. The lighthouse is open to visitors in the summer. The route to Goat Island is along Trott's west shoreline and is fully protected. Look for Eider, Brandt, Willet, and seals. Keep a lookout for submerged black granite rocks, sometimes hard to see under the seaweed, and try not to leave gelcoat on them. They are unforgiving. Polarizing glasses are a great help here.

Beyond Goat Island is the main harbor access channel used by lobster boats, with Green and Vaughn islands on the other side of it to the west. I was warned to stay away from the kelp beds on the far side of Vaughn, as they can cause entanglements when combined with swell.

All the islands are kept in wilderness state, and most are owned by the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust. Full descriptions of them can be found in the MITA Guidebook [Maine Island Trail Association is an environmentally

sensitive group I recommend you join. Your membership card is your permission to land on countless islands]. Go to: www.mita.org or call 207-761-8225. Camping at most Cape Porpoise islands is allowed via permit, easily obtained. See the guidebook for particulars.

I have described a four-hour leisurely paddle. But for those inclined, there are many outlets to open ocean, and breakers are visible or audible for the entire paddle just described. If you go out through the channel, keep away from "Old Prince," a house-sized submerged rock which can cause large breakers to rear up without warning. It is well marked on charts.

I can't emphasize enough how beautiful this little archipelago is, and how wild. I was told that seals can be found on the east side of Trott Island, and definitely on the rough east side of Cape Island if you want to risk open ocean. Fort and Stage are other islands to explore to the northeast. No island is more than a half mile distant from the next, so you can see how the area fits into most paddlers' idea of a fine half-day exploration. Use NOAA chart #13286 which has a special section on Cape Porpoise which you can cut out and take with you.

Another benefit here is that there is little traffic, for the simple reason there's no public ramp for amateur fishermen to put in their speedboats. This is a working commercial lobster-boat harbor.

I recommend that you hire a registered Maine Guide for your first paddle. It will cost \$75 in cash for a half day. Theresa Willette [207 468 3550] is really excellent. Or you can consult www.maine-seakayakguides.com.

Critical phone number: US Coast Guard 207-799-1680. Cell phone reception is excellent here, but your VHF will put you in better contact with the above Coast Guard station at Portland in an emergency.

Finally I recommend that you take a GPS, as fogs are not uncommon. If you leave the unit on, you can back-track your route if necessary and find your way back to the put-in safely. Without GPS in fog, be prepared to use your best navigating skills.

Cape Porpoise is not hard to get to and the effort expended in travel time is richly rewarded.

It's a prime North Atlantic paddling destination that doesn't involve the grueling drive up to Penobscot Bay. I think that Cape Porpoise should be considered part of NACK's territory.



Cape Porpoise Harbor – low tide.