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With Paddles in Hand – The Bruce Beckons

October 16, 2017 - by Melody Wren



I had

kayaked many times but actually taking the time to learn to do it properly helped the overall outcome immensely. Similar to sitting on my dad's knee thinking I was making the car drive, as well as being solely responsible for the steering, taking the time to learn kayaking techniques and picking up helpful tips from an experienced guide made everything come together efficiently and effectively resulting in a smoother ride with less effort.

Thorncrest Outfitters guide, Chuck Marshall, talked us through the whole process. First, we were instructed to pull kayak skirting on like a regular skirt but "high like Urkel", otherwise it moves down while you paddle.

There are two ways to get into the kayak: 1) the downrigger style, using the paddle as a level; or 2) cowboy style – a rougher entry, as guessed by the name. We proceeded to attach the skirting (not flattering by the way) to the kayak

from back to front attaching it like a flexible tupperware lid, that actually takes some doing to keep it tight. I admit I didn't want to wear the skirt as it felt claustrophobic, but was encouraged to and rightly so.

Chuck demonstrated a variety of paddle strokes and shared some basic tips; for me, don't use the death grip on the paddles; scoop from toes to hips and move your upper body, not your arms. Apparently, your arms shouldn't be tired out after kayaking. If they are, you are doing something wrong.



Chantry Island is home to over 10,000 pairs of mating birds, including cormorants, black-crowned night herons, great blue herons and egrets. Chantry Island is a Canadian Wildlife Service migratory bird sanctuary. PHOTO CREDIT: explorethebruce.com

We paddled further and further out into the lake, a gorgeous sunny day inviting us to go further and further towards Chantry Island – a small island in Lake Huron, south of the mouth of the Saugeen River and approximately a kilometre off the shores of the town of Southampton, Ontario. Mindful of having to paddle back, I cut my journey shorter than the others.

The paddle back with the waves was interesting; I was riding the waves instead of paddling into them was a totally different experience as we rode the crest of the waves and tried to stay straight and steer towards shore and keep on route.

I beached my kayak, undid the kayak's skirt easily and exited using my paddle as a lever, grateful to feel the solid ground. I did a superman change in a public washroom from sport gear to out-to-dinner dress and sandals.

Southampton is well known for having the most beautiful sunsets in Ontario, so we headed to High Street to see a bagpiper pipe the sun down, a tradition carried every Saturday night throughout the summer

months to crowds of people watching.

The next day, we met up with Chuck again, at the Chesley Street boat launch in Southampton to kayak on the Saugeen River. I was told we would be portaging and going over small rapids. It felt like we were in for an adventure as we brought packed lunches and set out for a four-hour kayak.

Thorncrest Outfitters provides different kayaks for varying skill set and size: the Pungoa (a 12½ foot-kayak with a wider cockpit offering more stability); the Tsunami (a 12-foot kayak, with a smaller cockpit, offer more speed); and the Tempest (a 16½ foot sea kayak (advanced and easier to control).

As I entered my Pungo, I quipped that I was guessing I was riding the Shetland Pony while Chuck our guide was getting into the racehorse. He agreed it was an appropriate analogy.



River kayaking was easier for me to keep control the paddling. The current was very strong due to high water levels, so I could actually stop paddling and coast, admiring the Herons and various other flora and fauna en route. My tranquility was disrupted by oncoming shooting rapids, a new experience for me. All I had to remember was to avoid a V-formation in the water, as water avoids obstacles such as rocks. If rapids are choppy, paddle right through using your strokes to brace yourself. Once mastered, it was so much fun, I did the same rapids over and over.

After we portaged at Denny's Dam, we had a snack break then got back in our kayaks. After a bite of packed lunch, we headed back to

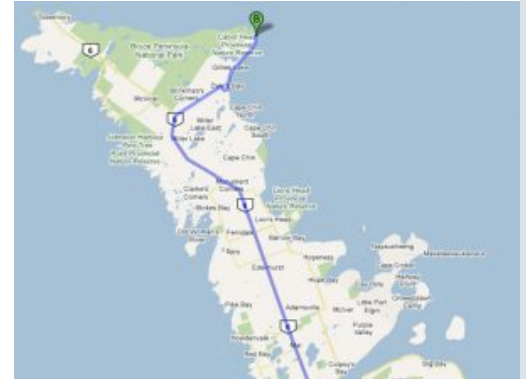
My first portage along the Saugeen River.

enjoy a swim at the beach, we walked up to Main Street to enjoy both the Kincardine Lighthouse Blues Festival and the Kincardine Cruise Night (showcasing classic cars and motorcycles).

Ready for dinner after a full day of fresh air, we headed to the Harbour Street Brassiere boasting a beautiful lake view. Kincardine has a distinctly different vibe than its neighboring Southampton, yet has clientele for an elegant upscale brassiere. White linen covered tables with a hush of simple elegance with murmurs of music make this a welcome and cool respite from the crowded, hot beach we had just left.

Our fellow diners were cottagers, visiting boaters and, of course, the year-round residents. Local farmers are listed on the menu, a simple but effective addition to the unusual menu mix of bison, lamb, steak a vegetarian option as well as the fresh fish of the day.

On Sunday morning, fortified by hearty pancakes filled with local fruit, served at the Evergreen Forest B& B where we were staying, we drove to Lion's Head, map in hand to hike part of the Bruce Trail. Limited by time and heat, we chose a shorter hike. There are large interpretive signs along the way leading up to stunning views that caught us by surprise – the sheer natural beauty. Part of the Niagara escarpment juts through the Bruce Peninsula causing stunning rock and cliff formations over the water. Another surprise was the difference in colors from shore to mid-lake making it look more Caribbean than Ontario.



The shores of Bruce County are part of Lake Huron.

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