



PHOTO BY J. ERIC ECKARD

JAMESTOWN, VIRGINIA

A kayaking adventure

BY J. ERIC ECKARD

Perched inside a kayak in the middle of Sandy Bay off Jamestown Island, it's easy to imagine America's earliest settlers paddling the same waterways more than 400 years ago.

Except for the Colonial Parkway concrete bridge that spans the mouth where Sandy Bay empties into the James River, the landscape here hasn't changed much since 1607. Paddling the waterways around the Jamestown Settlement, America's first permanent English colony, was the preferred mode of transportation for both settlers and Native Americans alike. But today's molded plastic or fiberglass boats are far more advanced than the chestnut dugout canoes used four centuries ago.

• With dozens of creeks, bays, lakes and rivers around Virginia's historic triangle—Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown—it's easy to find a waterway and see the

United States' birthplace from the early settlers' perspective.

Large cypress trees tower over arrow arum and pickerelweed plants along the shores of what are now Powhatan Creek, James River, Sandy Bay, Chickahominy River, Queen's Creek and the York River. Kayaking some of these waterways provides a communion with nature while retracing history's watery footprints.

PERFECT FOR KAYAKING

Powhatan Creek is a tidal freshwater marsh with three put-ins for kayakers along its four-mile length until it converges with Sandy Bay. The Powhatan Creek Canoe Access on Jamestown Road is the only public put-in on the waterway. Ranked as one of the most biologically diverse areas in Virginia, Powhatan Creek features several rare or endangered plants, as well as a bald eagle habitat. Travelers might not see an eagle on

every trip down the Powhatan, but they likely will spot plenty of kingfishers, egrets, blue herons, cormorants and hawks.

"You can paddle all the way around [Jamestown] Island, but it can get really windy in some spots," said Sarah Serra of Williamsburg, a nature enthusiast who cruises Eastern Virginia regularly. "You can go right through Mill Creek and see blue herons and eagles."

Like most of the inland waterways, Powhatan Creek offers an easy ride for kayakers, with an abundance of flat water and cut-ins to explore. Spartina grass dominates much of the creek, much like sawgrass rules the Everglades.

OH...IT'S A WORKOUT

Even without the wind, plus frequent stops for wildlife and bird watching, boaters can get a good aerobic workout. Whether it's an easy flat-water trip or a technically advanced

paddle with the proper stroke, kayakers can work their shoulders, upper back, biceps, triceps and forearms. Many beginners use just their arms to paddle, but by rotating the entire upper body, twisting at the waist will maximize the stroke and offer the best workout.

"If you don't use your torso, you'll tire more quickly," Serra said. "You can make kayaking a good workout. You can go at a good clip and really get your heart rate going, or you can just mosey along. I do a little bit of both."

Kayaking works mostly the upper body, but it burns about as many calories as moderate jogging or swimming. And the mental aspect of paddling scenic water routes also allows kayakers to relieve stress and tension. The back-to-nature feature of a kayak trip provides plenty of enjoyment and relaxation.

But it's not just flat-water floating and bird watching when it comes to this region's waterways. Exiting the Sandy Bay under the Colonial Parkway bridge takes kayakers out into the James River, where they can get an even more rigorous workout. Taking the same route Capt. John Smith took when he and a group of settlers sailed up the James River to Jamestown Island and beyond, paddlers can head west from Sandy Bay and catch a glimpse of Smith's world.

Staying along the north shore of the river, kayakers can paddle right up to Jamestown Settlement, where replicas of the three ships that sailed from England to Virginia in 1607 sit docked in a small harbor along the river. The water there is calm enough to pull out a camera from a dry bag and snap a few shots of the *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed* and *Discovery*.

EXPLORATION AND HISTORY

Continuing west on the James River, kayakers will come to the intersection of the James and Chickahominy Rivers. This requires strong paddling, but after the turn into the "Chick," travelers can cut into Gordon Creek, a salt marsh area that also features an abundance of spartina grass. Or paddlers can put in at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park, a public access at the convergence of the "Chick" and Gordon Creek.

Gordon Creek, which serves as a practice area for the William & Mary crew team, turns inland, opens up into a bay and also has plenty of cutins to explore for turtles,

frogs, osprey and deer on the shoreline. Kayakers can take the three-mile Gordon Creek back to the "Chick" or exit the bay via Nettles Creek to the north.

The Chickahominy River also holds special historical significance. Capt. John Smith was exploring the river during the early days of the settlement in hope of finding a route to the Pacific. But he was captured by the Chickahominy Tribe and taken to Chief Powhatan. Immortalized in books, film and song, the rest of the story recounts how the chief's daughter, Pocahontas, rescued Smith from death.

Jan Towne, who operates Bay Trail Outfitters in nearby Onemo, Va., guides one tour on the Chickahominy and James Rivers called "Three Ships and a Kayak." It's a three-hour tour that's designed to provide a peek into the world of Smith, Pocahontas, Powhatan, John Rolfe and the rest of the settlers and natives from where they spent much of their time—on the water.

The James River also is part of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historical Trail, the country's first national water trail. The state of Virginia also assigned a section of the James as a waterway trail in Smith's name.

Hiking, biking or driving will allow visitors access to most of these sites, but kayakers will be afforded many vantage points only a paddler can get, whether they take the easy inland creeks and bays or the more challenging large rivers of the region. A picnic along a secluded beach on the shore might appeal to some more than a five-course meal at the Kingsmill Resort. And a panoramic view of the shoreline from the water might be more tempting than the sights on land.

CHALLENGE QUEEN'S CREEK

North of the peninsula that's home to Virginia's historic triangle is the York River, which, like the James, feeds into the Chesapeake Bay and eventually, the Atlantic Ocean. Queen's Creek is a York River tributary that affords kayakers a paddle similar to those on the Powhatan and Gordon Creeks. Queen's Creek provides views of tall cypress trees and marsh grass, as well as kingfishers and perhaps an eagle or two. "We do have a variety around here," Towne said, referring to diverse flora and fauna in the region.

For the boldest kayakers, try Queen's Creek which flows into the unpredictable

and often choppy York River. The York definitely is a paddle for the more experienced kayaker. Past Yorktown, the other end of the Colonial Parkway parallels the shoreline, giving boaters a view of a colonial-style highway that connects Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown. The most ambitious traveler can continue and head out into the Chesapeake Bay. But be warned: Locals say the York has "funny little currents" and can get "dicey" sometimes.

"Paddling is good here because you can combine the historical and natural aspects of the area," Towne said.

The combination of the region's history with its immense variety of plant and wildlife makes kayaking around the historic triangle of Virginia more than just an appealing trip.



Add in the fitness benefits kayakers receive from a paddle on any one of the waterways in the area, and that makes a visit to James City or York counties a true trifecta of paddling pleasure. **AF**

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