

Clark Island, San Juan Islands

(via Gooseberry Point and north of Lummi Island)

(Washington State Park Site)

Aug 28-29, 2010

With all the summer high peaks and the iffy weather forecast. I started looking lower for a weekend adventure. Weather predictions for the coast and San Juan's was for sunshine. Some initial interest that petered out on choices from the coast to kayaking the islands. With only two of us left the coin flip was paddling to an island. High on my list has been a loop trip CCW around Orcas taking a good part of a week. An abbreviated version for tasters a trip to Clark and if conditions warranted to Matia, Suchia and Patos. Moderate tides and mild currents. So maybe not eh best tide-pooling, I love beaches and islands so there should be plenty to occupy the time. Current predictions needed a launch of 9am to get slack at 10am at the north of Lummi Island and an ebb (water going out) to ride across Rosario Straights to Clark Island. Return trip would be early to catch the end of the Flood (water coming in) to the north end of Lummi, slack at the point and an ebb to ride back to our launch site at Gooseberry Point.

Early, but not that early Saturday loaded boats and headed north. Felt pretty leisure with it being daylight leaving home. Weather radio had forecasted winds 10kn N increasing afternoon 15-20. Hmmm, good for the push to Clark. Sunday winds 10-15 SW increasing to 15-20 later afternoon. Again good for a push back, but there would be apposing current and wind so waves could be a factor (1-3ft). All was lining up for morning paddling and afternoon relaxing and exploring. A stop for provisions in B'ham and west at exit 260. 4 miles and a left on Haxton (big casino on corner). 6.5 miles and we're parked at the "marina" right side on the ferry terminal. Well, I hate to use the word marina. Some delapidated boats, a PU with window broken out and parking near the water for maybe a dozen cars. The "office" looked abandoned, but inside occupied and they said okay to park overnight.

We we're loaded and launched on fairly flat seas at 9:10. (Oh, outhouse is on the shore end of the boat lift/launch). We paddled out passing several people fishing from shore. A direct line to the north end of Lummi Island (Point Migley) 2.5m, 50min. North winds made for some choppy waters hitting the rocks west of the point that we skirted and headed west to let the current drag us down to Clark Island. At times with paddling we hit 6-7mph. I gave a burst to see what we could do with wind and current on our side and pegged just over 8mph! After getting north of Clark, with the sunshine, long rollers and early in the day we took it easy and let the wind and current do the work pulling us at 2+mph. Almost felt guilty being so lazy. Wished I'd had the camera out. We were separated a ways and at times all you'd see is a head floating in the water as the rollers lifted and sank. Along the east cliffy shore of Clark we hugged the land to check out the sites. Around some rocks came upon four Turkey Vultures intent on something in the water. Bummer camera was out of reach. Arrived at the east pebbled low beach of Clark at 11:10 (7.1m, 2hrs).

The east low shore is pebbles with table and tent sites just above highest tide line surrounded by grasses and wild rose bushes. A short walk west over the low bump and down gets you to the sandy west beach (no overnight camping). Four boats were moored and one camper (Jerry). We walked south checking out sites. Finding a new trail on the south end of the beach lead to new campsites and a new composting toilet –luxury (tiled floors, antiseptic lotion, clean...). We paddled the boats from the pebbled beach south around the rocky SE point and tide rips of water rushing and colliding between Clark and Lone Tree Island (Wildlife refuge island south of Clark) to a small pocket beach directly below an campsite nestled in the twisted Madrona and views south. A site with a million dollar view.

A park ranger (Steve) showed up later from Sucia to check on the park (island) and do maintenance. These new south end sites were built two winters ago and have not seen much use (nice to have privacy). After a tour of composting toilet operation it was nearly low tide and we set off CW to explore the island and shores. On the SW bluff two benches to enjoy the stunning views. Easy beach access to pebbles, and tide pools. The beach heading north on the west side varies from sand to solid rock. Well, it's solid, looks like an exposed concrete mix or exploding concrete mixer covered the island. The sandy beach and warm sun had me imagining a Central America beach. Then a mix of up the bluff on a faint path and down to the beach rock scrambling. Was about to grab a piece of discarded rope when I realized it was a snake. A little tidepooling of crabs, starfish, mussels, anenomes... At the north end (1.1m) some tricky rock scrambling and after a short bit turned around from heading south on the east side due to dead ending in water.

Tried bushwacking the east side, but never found a trail and it closed out in solid brush. Maybe not the best idea in Texas... Attempt after attempt was thwarted and the only headway by returning to the west side. Hints of trails ended sometimes in views on a high bluff or in the middle of nowhere to return to the west side. The sticker rips were getting painful on the bare feet... First real success getting to the east side was at the north end of the gravel beach at a protected group campsite. Back down the gravel beach and still plenty of time left in the day for a nap :-)

Timed dinner to enjoy the sunset show (8:01). Jerry showed up and learned some history of the benches and local knowledge. Almost forgot that I'd left the headlamp in the tent and the bluff walk back was interesting. In the dark a wall of lights approached. It was the Alaska Ferry heading north. A beautiful eve watching the moon rise (9:01p). Tomorrow would be an early day to catch the currents.

Morning was warm compared to waking in the high alpine. Launched at 8am and tentatively pushed out past Lone Tree Island into the 2-3' waves with a fairly strong south wind. The two mile crossing was uneventful, the loaded boats were stable, water washed over the deck. Closer to land we had some shelter from the high wind/wave mix. And had fun catching waves and surfing –fun to feel the boat pickup, break loose and glide. Then holding waiting (not everyone is into surfing). North of Lummi a giant tug sat. Migley Point was uneventful except for the wind now hitting face on (4.4m, 1h30m). Our timing was good and current would soon be with us. Wind apposing would add sharpness to the waves. We hugged the shore to avoid the wind. Bluffs, Blue Herons, Sand spit beach and then the mile crossing back to Gooseberry Point. This is where I thought it would be spicy with increasing winds and waves, but it was no big deal and an easy landing at the “marina”.

This was a very good trip. A break from the high peaks and nice to feel the warm summer weather (and to paddle the boat a little). The currents and building wind kept from paddling to Suchia –another day. I was amazed how few boats or people we saw. I've done several small sections in the San Juans paddling (done extensive by sailboat) and hope to start linking the smaller legs together for longer trips. A little trickier and more detail planning than by foot having to deal with currents and wind for timing. Still waiting on that coast trip :-)

Stats: 14.3m rt paddle, 2.6m hike
Gear: kayak (& gear), sunscreen, \$12 for campsite

Happy paddling (and trails),
fwb2