

Chesapeake Bay Office

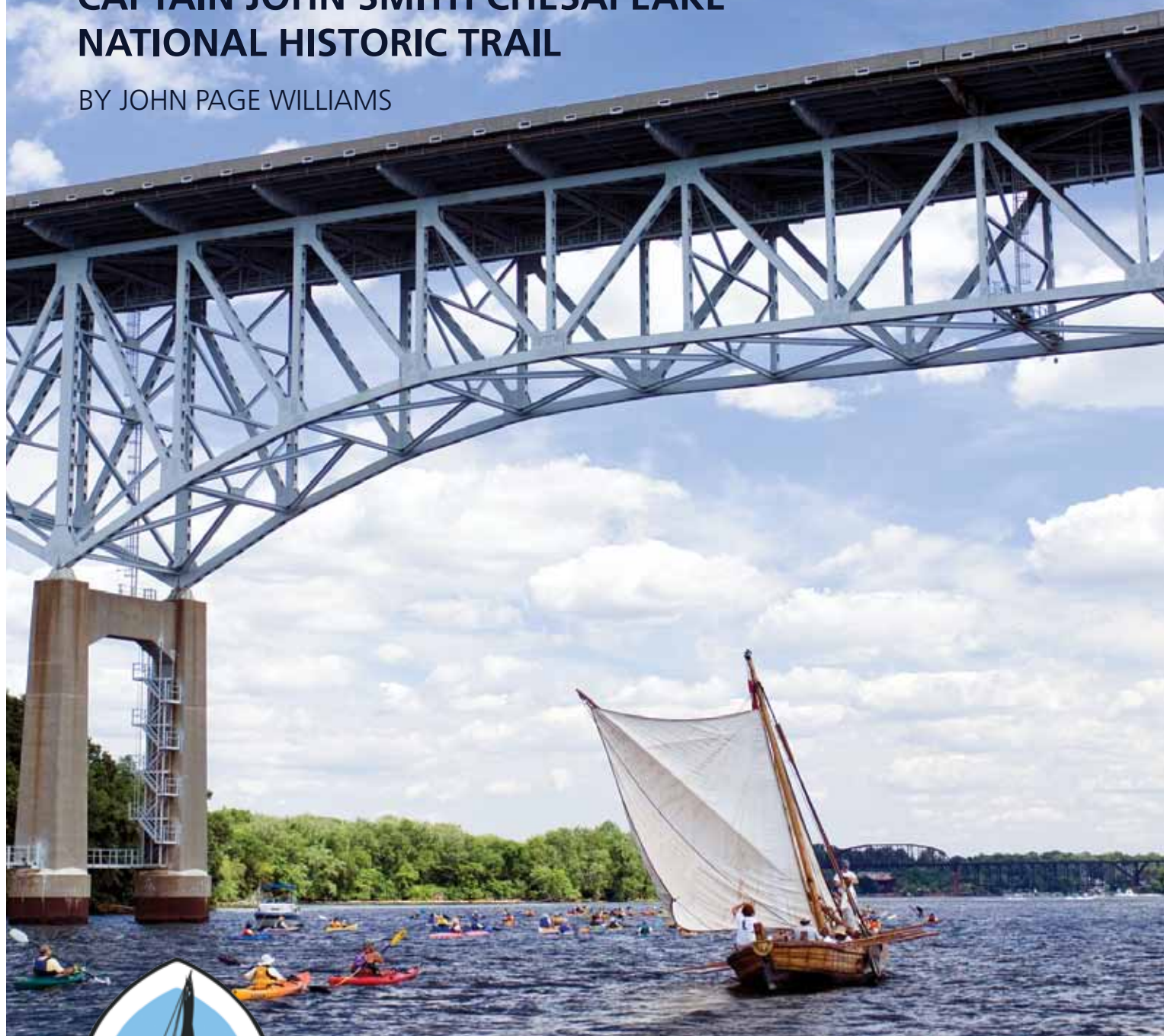
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A BOATER'S GUIDE

TO THE
**CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH CHESAPEAKE
NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL**

BY JOHN PAGE WILLIAMS



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE
CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY
AND THE
CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

PROJECT PARTNERS

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CHESAPEAKE BAY OFFICE



National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office (CHBA) leads National Park Service efforts to connect people to the natural and cultural heritage of the Chesapeake region. CHBA administers the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail. CHBA is a federal partner in the multi-state and federal Chesapeake Bay Program and has a leadership role in the federal coordinated Strategy for Protecting and Restoring the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, in response to Executive Order 13508, issued in 2009.

To learn more about National Park Service initiatives for the Chesapeake Bay and the best places to experience the authentic Chesapeake, start with online visits to the following websites:

Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network
www.baygateways.net

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
www.smithtrail.net

Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail
www.nps.gov/stsp

CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY



The Chesapeake Conservancy is dedicated to ensuring conservation, stewardship

and access for the Chesapeake Bay, its lands and rivers. The Conservancy was created out of a merger between the Friends of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail and Friends of Chesapeake Gateways.

The Chesapeake Conservancy works toward three strategic goals:

- To realize the full potential of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, and coordinate with other Chesapeake Bay trails to promote recreation and tourism along with education about the Bay and its waterways
- To generate and direct public and private financial and technical resources to conserve the Bay's significant landscapes and expand public access
- To advance the establishment of new conservation, recreation and public access corridor designations on the Chesapeake.

To learn more about the Chesapeake Conservancy's programs, visit www.chesapeakeconservancy.org, contact info@chesapeakeconservancy.org, or call 443-321-3610.

CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
 Saving a National Treasure

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) was one of the founding supporters for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. CBF is the largest privately funded, nonprofit organization dedicated solely to protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay. The Foundation offers a wide range of educational, advocacy, and stewardship programs.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation has adopted Captain John Smith's descriptions of the Chesapeake in the early 1600s as a baseline for measuring a rich and balanced Bay. CBF provides an annual State of the Bay report comparing the current health of the Bay to that baseline.

Contact the Chesapeake Bay Foundation at webadmin@cbf.org or 410-268-8816. Visit the foundation online at www.cbf.org.

About the Guide

A Boater's Guide to the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is a joint project of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office, the Chesapeake Conservancy, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. As the first guide to America's first national water trail, this publication introduces paddlers and boaters to the best places to access the trail. Author John Page Williams expertly weaves practical information for today's boaters with the historical context of the Chesapeake's waters explored by Captain John Smith four centuries ago.

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail was designated as part of the National Trails System in 2006. The National Park Service completed a comprehensive management plan in 2011 for the development of the trail. While this Boater's Guide describes many places where boaters can access and explore the trail now, many more access areas and facilities will be added as trail development continues. For this reason, the Boater's Guide is an online publication, designed to be updated as new information becomes available.

The National Park Service acknowledges with appreciation the contributions of the Chesapeake Conservancy and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as partners in creating this first Boater's Guide to the Smith trail. We appreciate also the reviewers who gave feedback to improve the Guide. While we have endeavored to provide accurate current information at the time of publication, trailhead details, in particular, are subject to change. We encourage users of this Guide to verify contact information as they prepare for their travels along the trail. We also invite users of the Guide to notify the author of changes and new information to be considered for future editions. He can be reached by e-mail at jpwilliams@cbf.org.

A Boater's Guide to the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is available for free download from the trail's website: www.smithtrail.net.

About the Author

John Page Williams combines his knowledge of Captain John Smith's voyages on the Chesapeake Bay with a life-long passion for all things Chesapeake in this practical guide to exploring the waters designated in 2006 as the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Williams began fishing and boating the Chesapeake and its rivers as a young boy growing up on the lower Potomac River. As a field educator he has run field trips by canoe, outboard skiff, and workboat on every river system in the Chesapeake. As senior naturalist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and editor-at-large for *Chesapeake Bay Magazine*, Williams is a well-known and respected advocate for the Bay. He writes frequently on boating, fishing, and cruising as well as environmental issues. Among the numerous articles and books he has authored, don't miss reading *Chesapeake: Exploring the Water Trail of Captain John Smith*, published by National Geographic in 2006. Its evocative overview of Smith's travels provides a colorful companion book to this Boater's Guide as you chart your own adventures along the trail.

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 National Park Service
 Chesapeake Bay Office
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John Maounis
 Superintendent

TEXT
 John Page Williams, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

DESIGN AND MAP ILLUSTRATIONS
 Jason Vaughan

EDITING AND PROJECT COORDINATION
 Paula Degen, assisted by
 Lindsay Keiter, National Park Service

ON THE COVER: A replica of Smith's shallop leads an excursion on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail near Port Deposit, MD, 2007.

PHOTO © MICHAEL C. WOOTTON

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RESOURCES

BOOKS

Captain John Smith: A Select Edition of His Writings

Edited by Karen O. Kupperman, 1988

Jamestown Narratives: Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony, The First Decade: 1607-1617

Edited by Edward Wright Haile, 1998

John Smith in the Chesapeake

Edited by Edward Wright Haile, 2008

Love and Hate in Jamestown: John Smith, Pocahontas, and the Heart of a New Nation

By David A. Price, 2003

John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages 1607 – 1609

By Helen Rountree, Wayne E. Clark, Kent Mountford, 2007 (funded in part by the National Park Service)

Chesapeake: Exploring the Water Trail of Captain John Smith

By John Page Williams, 2006.

Exploring the Chesapeake in Small Boats

By John Page Williams, 1992.

WEBSITES

National Park Service

Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail

www.smithtrail.net

www.nps.gov/cajo

Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network

www.baygateways.net

Chesapeake Conservancy

www.chesapeakeconservancy.org

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

www.cbf.org/johnsmith

Includes links to other John Smith and Jamestown websites

NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System

www.buoybay.noaa.gov

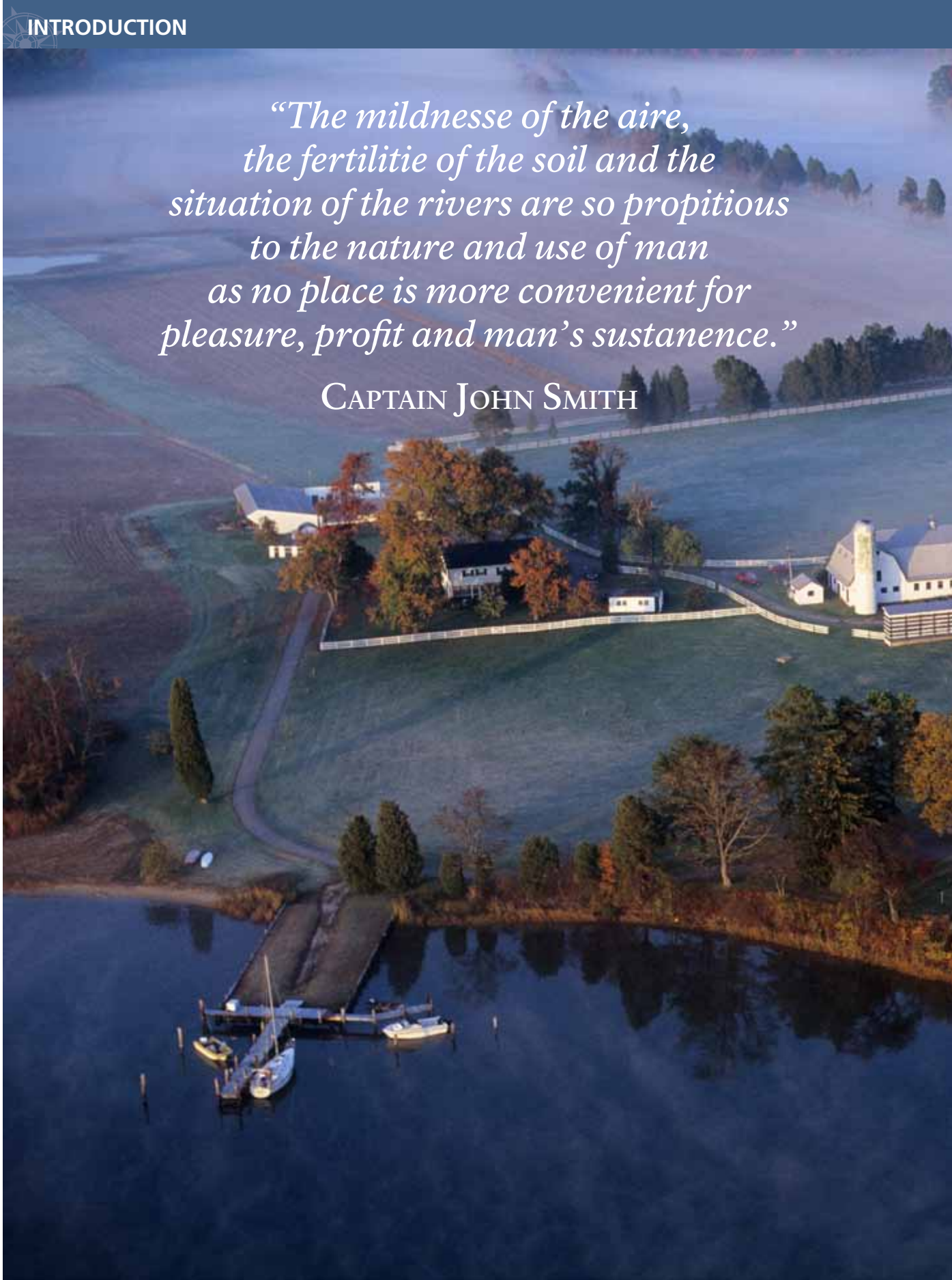
National Geographic

www.nationalgeographic.com/chesapeake

Includes links to other John Smith and Jamestown websites

Virginia's Indians, Past & Present

<http://indians.vipnet.org/resources.cfm>

An aerial photograph of a farm situated along a river. The farm features several buildings, including a large white barn with a yellow cupola, a smaller white house, and a blue-roofed structure. A winding road leads from the river to the farm. In the foreground, a wooden dock extends into the river, with several small boats moored alongside it. The surrounding landscape includes green fields, trees with autumn foliage, and a misty or foggy atmosphere in the background.

*“The mildnesse of the aire,
the fertilitie of the soil and the
situation of the rivers are so propitious
to the nature and use of man
as no place is more convenient for
pleasure, profit and man’s sustenance.”*

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

The Lasting Legacy of Captain John Smith

Captain John Smith got his commission on a battlefield, not an ocean, but he deserves to go down in history as an epic small-boat explorer. During his time on the Chesapeake in the employ of the Virginia Company of London, from April 1607 to October 1609, he and his crew covered 3,000 miles around the Bay in a shallop, a 30-foot open boat, operating year-round in everything from stifling heat and sudden thunderstorms to icy cold and blowing snow.

Where did he go? He traveled every major river system on both sides of the Chesapeake Bay except the Choptank, Eastern Bay, and the Chester.

His goals:

- To find gold and silver.
- To assess the strength and trading potential of the native Indian tribes.
- To find the mythical Northwest Passage to the Pacific.

Though he wasn't successful on the first and third objectives, he did succeed in making extensive contact with American Indian tribes.

MAPPING THE WAY

Captain John Smith mapped the Chesapeake and its rivers with astonishing accuracy, given his relatively simple tools—a compass, a crude sextant, an hourglass, and a notebook. He had help from the Indians who described the lands and waterways beyond what Smith saw directly. Those are the areas depicted beyond the crosses that mark the extent of Smith's explorations.

Smith's extensive notes allowed him to publish the first accurate map of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers in 1612. This map became the essential "cruise guide" for English settlement in the region in the 17th century. It laid a major foundation for development of the country in the next century.

AMERICA'S FIRST NATIONAL WATER TRAIL

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the first water-based national trail in this country, was designated on December 19, 2006. In addition to Smith's explorations, the trail focuses on the American Indian tribes of the Chesapeake region and on the ecology of the Chesapeake Bay, both in Smith's time and today.

It's important to recognize the many contributions the Indians of the Chesapeake have made to the history and culture of the region—and continue



Portrait of Captain John Smith, 1616



Captain John Smith's map of his 1607–1609 Chesapeake explorations first published in England in 1612. The print shown here dates from 1660.

PREVIOUS PAGE

A rural scene from Queen Anne's County, MD, reflects the Chesapeake Bay that Captain John Smith described 400 years ago.

PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

ONLINE RESOURCES

CHESAPEAKE BAY GATEWAYS AND
WATERTRAILS NETWORK
www.baygateways.net

NOAA CHESAPEAKE BAY
INTERPRETIVE BUOY SYSTEM
www.buoybay.noaa.gov
Also available at 1-877-BUOY-BAY

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH'S VERSATILE SHALLOP

Smith's vessel was constructed in England and sent to America packed in two sections in the hold of one of the Jamestown ships. This *Discovery Barge*, as he called her, belonged to a general class of vessels called "shallops." Double-ended and full-bodied at bow and stern, she carried a single mast with main and foresail for winds, sweeps (long single oars) for four to six rowers, and probably a leeboard on each side that the crew could lower to reduce leeway (sideways slippage) under sail. With the boards up, the *Discovery Barge* probably drew less than three feet fully loaded with a crew of 12 to 14 men and supplies.

The hull's underbody would have been fine enough to move easily in calm winds and seas. The full shape above the waterline made the hull seaworthy, but headwinds doubtless made for difficult rowing. Captain John Smith learned quickly enough to take advantage of fair winds and currents.

Smith's two longest voyages of exploration took place in the summer of 1608. In the space of three months, he and his crews traveled to the Upper Bay twice, with a turnaround of only three days in between.

to make today. It is also important to understand how the Chesapeake of Smith's day "worked" so that we can develop solutions to restore the health of our Bay now.

The National Park Service and its partners have been busy building an infrastructure of maps, books, websites, data-gathering buoys, signs, exhibits, and other guideposts to help 21st-century explorers travel the Captain John Smith trail. Two key parts of this infrastructure are the National Park Service's Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network (CBGN) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS).

EXPLORING IN CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH'S WAKE

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail lends itself to a wide variety of boats, from 16-foot canoes and kayaks to 60-foot trawlers. Whatever kind of boat you use, we hope you will follow the voyage routes of Captain John Smith and his crew to discover the treasures of the Chesapeake. You'll experience the excitement of exploring Chesapeake waters, see well-known sites with new understanding, and reflect upon all that the Chesapeake has meant over the past four centuries.

As you travel the trail, you'll find places that still look much as they did in Smith's time, but you'll also see areas where our human footprint weighs heavily on the land and water. We hope you'll learn about the Chesapeake that Captain John Smith saw—the rich ecosystem that developed naturally before heavy human influence. Once you do, please get involved in protecting and restoring its health and conserving its lands and landscapes and its rich cultural heritage for both yourself and future generations of Bay lovers.

RIVERS AS ROADS

The Chesapeake is the "drowned" valley of the Susquehanna River, flooded by tidal water as the sea level began rising at the end of the last ice age, about 12,000 years ago. Unlike other East Coast rivers, such as the Delaware and the Hudson, the Susquehanna has a number of large tributaries entering its lower reaches. The tributaries flooded and created a sprawling complex of waterways that served as instant infrastructure for Indian people and English settlers.

In general, these rivers carry plenty of depth up to their heads of navigation, where their beds meet sea level, but they narrow down and curve through large meander curves. Wooded banks channel winds directly up or downstream. The winds can help or hinder your progress, depending on which way you're traveling. Meanwhile, flood and ebb currents on most of the rivers actually become stronger upstream.

Mariners have dealt with these conditions for centuries, whether carrying out raw materials like timber, tobacco, and produce or bringing manufactured goods to upriver ports, such as Richmond on the James River, Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock, Alexandria on the Potomac, and Baltimore on the Patapsco. Until the early 20th century, they used both sail and non-motorized auxiliary power, especially oars.



PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

This replica shallow, built by Sultana Projects, Inc., traveled 1,500 miles along Smith's routes to help launch the new Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail in 2007.

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail includes Smith's combined voyage routes, 1607–1609.

Boating the Trail

Today, there is still plenty of depth in the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers for all but the largest cruising boats. This Boater's Guide provides an overview of what awaits boaters along each of the rivers and the main stem of the Bay explored by Captain John Smith. Look for the icons described here to suggest suitable vessels for each area. The icons also identify the vessels suited for each of the trailheads where you can access the trail.

Additional access points will be added as the trail develops. In choosing your route, consider your boat's clearance under bridges; her ability to deal with adverse wind and current; and your own knack for reading meander curves with your vision, a chart, GPS chartplotter, electronic depth sounder, or leadline.

See **Scouting Your Trip: How to Use This Guide** for additional information on boating the trail. Keep in mind that the maps included in this Boater's Guide are for illustration and are not intended to be used for navigation. Click on the NOAA link in the box on each section map to learn what navigation charts are available.

Look for these icons throughout the guide to see what types of boats are suited to each part of the trail.



PADDLING AND ROWING

Canoes, kayaks, and recreational rowing boats are wonderful vessels for seeing parts of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Quiet, slow travel makes it easy to absorb the nature of a waterway, to look and listen. For those with the time and training, extended kayak expeditions are extraordinarily satisfying, but even day trips in rented canoes on waters like Mattaponi Creek at the Patuxent River Park near Upper Marlboro, MD, or Gordons Creek at the Chickahominy Riverfront Park just west of Williamsburg, VA, serve the purpose. Many larger cruising boats now carry kayaks for this sort of exploring.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Seaworthy, trailerable center-console skiffs and runabouts of 18 to 24 feet offer a different experience, taking advantage of the large number of public and commercial launch ramps available around the Bay and its rivers. These boats allow day explorations of 50 miles at leisurely cruising speeds of 13 to 17 knots (15 to 20 mph), with plenty of time left over for poking along at slower speeds. Skiffs of 16 to 18 feet with outboards and pushpoles can slip into almost as many places as canoes. Modern, clean, quiet outboards make these trips more enjoyable and less expensive.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

On open water sections of the trail, cruising sailboats are great vessels for extended trips, and they require the same kind of seamanship that Captain John Smith had to exercise. Be ready to deal with bridges and the shoals on the insides of meander curves when exploring the upper sections of rivers like the Rappahannock and the Nanticoke. The scenery will often be stunningly beautiful and the wildlife abundant, but fluky winds will dictate traveling under power much of the time. A rowing/sailing dinghy or a kayak will be useful for short explorations.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising powerboats and trawlers are good choices for exploring the water trail, especially if they have bridge clearance of less than 25 feet and propeller shafts protected by keels or skegs. It's important to pay attention to range and self-sufficiency, because fuel, shore power, and pumpout services can be few and far between on several of the Chesapeake's most interesting rivers.

Trawlers lend themselves particularly well to the trail because they tend to be self-sufficient; their low wakes respect fragile shorelines; and their 6- to 8-knot cruising speeds are conducive to enjoying the river. Having a dinghy or a couple of kayaks aboard can add to the enjoyment of your explorations. As with outboards, it's a kindness to other trail travelers to run the cleanest engines possible and to be courteous with your wake, whether you're running an express cruiser with twin gas engines, a workboat-type cruiser with a single diesel, a trawler, or a sailboat under power.

Trail Overview

THE WESTERN SHORE

On the first voyage of 1608, Smith and his crew ascended the Potomac River all the way to today's Little Falls and walked to Great Falls. They transformed an attack at today's Nomini Creek into a friendly visit, explored a rumored silver mine in the headwaters of Aquia Creek, and visited more than a dozen American Indian towns on each side, taking notes for the map as they went.

They started to explore the Rappahannock River after visiting the Potomac, but Smith suffered his famous encounter with a stingray and found it prudent to head for home. On the second voyage, they traveled all the way to the falls at today's Fredericksburg, surviving three defensive attacks by members of the Rappahannock and Mannahoac tribes. They were sustained by wise counsel and supplies from the friendly Moraughtacund at the site of today's Morattico, on Lancaster Creek.

After the Rappahannock, Smith and his crew explored the Piankatank and Elizabeth rivers but found few people. Just before returning to Jamestown early in September, they met with wary Nansemond Indians at the river of the same name and took corn from the tribe back to the Jamestown colony.

Smith did not go up either the James or the York rivers on the two summer voyages in 1608. He didn't need to, because he had already spent a good deal of time in Virginia exploring them, meeting the people, trading for corn, and negotiating peace with Powhatan, the paramount chief of most of the region. His journals record much that happened on these trips.

Today, all these rivers lend themselves well to water trail explorers. While the Potomac obviously looks quite different around Washington, D.C., Smith would still recognize many of its tributaries, such as Nomini and Nanjemoy creeks. Though clouded by sediment runoff, the Rappahannock retains stunning natural views, especially between Tappahannock and Fredericksburg. The Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers, headwaters of the York, remain largely wild, as does the Chickahominy, a large tributary that enters the James just west of Jamestown. Finally, the James offers much to explore, from wild creeks like Powells to the exhibits at Henricus Historical Park, upriver near Richmond.

THE UPPER BAY

On the first voyage up the Bay, Smith followed the western shore until he found a tributary he thought large enough for the ships of the day. He turned the *Discovery Barge* west and followed it to its head of navigation. That would be today's Elkridge, and the river would become known as the Patapsco. He mapped the Patapsco carefully and even went up to the mouth of the Gunpowder, but the crew ran out of stores and grew increasingly dispirited. A stirring speech from their Captain inspired them, but the weather shut them in for several days and Smith reluctantly turned south. By the time they reached the mouth of the Potomac, they had regained their spirits enough to spend four weeks traveling up that river before heading back to Jamestown to restock supplies.

On the second voyage, Smith made straight for the head of the Bay, finding that it divided four ways (from west to east, today's Susquehanna, Northeast,

“We spied many fishes lurking in the reedes: our Captaine sporting himselfe by nayling them to the grownd with his sword, set vs all a fishing in that manner: thus we tooke more in owne houre then we could eate in a day. But it chanced our Captaine taking a fish from his sword (not knowing her condition) being much of the fashion of a Thornback, but a long tayle like a ryding rodde, whereon the middest is a most poysoned sting, of two or three inches long, bearded like a saw on each side, which she stricke into the wrest of his arme neere an inch and a halfe: no bloud nor wound was seene, but a little blew spot, but the torment was instantly so extreame, that in foure houres had so swollen his hand, arme and shoulder, we all with much sorrow concluded his funerall, and prepared his graue in an Island by, as himselfe directed: yet it pleased God by a precious oyle Docter Russell at the first applyed to it when he sounded it with probe (ere night) his tormenting paine was so well asswaged that he eate of the fish to his supper, which gaue no lesse ioy and content to vs then ease to himselfe, for which we called the Island Stingray Isle after the name of the fish.”

Kupperman, *Captain John Smith: A Select Edition of His Writings*, p.95.

LEARN MORE ABOUT STINGRAYS AT
www.chesapeakebay.net

Chronology of Captain John Smith in the Chesapeake

April-May 1607 | Smith arrives in Virginia and explores the James River to the falls (Richmond); colonists select Jamestown Island for fort.

Summer 1607 | English establish the colony and build a fort at Jamestown.

September 1607 | Smith travels downriver to Kecoughtan (Hampton) and Warrascoyack (Smithfield).

Fall 1607 | Smith makes three successful trips trading for corn along the Chickahominy River.

December 3, 1607 | Smith is captured by Opechancanough (a relative of Powhatan and a war chief) and marched along Capture Route to Powhatan's capital, Werowocomoco on the York River.

January 2, 1608 | Powhatan releases Smith and sends him back to Jamestown with food and an escort.

February 1608 | Smith takes Captain Christopher Newport by water up to Werowocomoco to meet Powhatan.

April 1608 | Smith travels to Nansemond River.

June 2–July 21, 1608 | **First exploratory voyage:** Smith and crew travel across the Chesapeake to the Lower Eastern Shore, up to the Nanticoke, across the Bay and up the Western Shore to the Bolus Flu (Patapsco River); then back down to the Patowomeck (Potomac River) and up to the falls (Great Falls); back down to the mouth of the Rappahannock River, where a stingray wounds Smith; they then return to Jamestown to re-supply.

July 24–September 10, 1608 | **Second exploratory voyage:** Three days later Smith with new crew starts out again. They go to the head of the Bay; meet with the Massawomeck, Tockwogh, and Susquehannock tribes; explore the Pawtuxunt (Patuxent), Rappahannock, and Piankatank rivers; skirmish with Nansemond on the way home; return to Jamestown on September 7. Smith assumes presidency of the Jamestown colony on September 10.

October 1608 | Smith sails to Werowocomoco to meet Newport, who has marched overland; they "crown" Powhatan.

November–December 1608 | Smith trades for corn with the Chickahominy, Nansemond, and Apamatuck (Appomattox) tribes.

January–February 1609 | Smith trades for corn at Werowocomoco and up the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers. Hostile run-ins with Powhatan and Opechancanough ensue, effectively breaking off relations between the English and both chiefs forever. Trading, however, is successful.

September–Early October 1609 | Two anti-Smith factions in the colony split off to establish new, independent colonies up the Nansemond and the James rivers. Smith sails up the James to quell the rebellion there, but on the way back, the gunpowder bag on his belt explodes under suspicious circumstances. Badly burned, Smith jumps overboard to put out the fire. He survives but is so badly injured that he sails to England on October 4, never to return to Virginia.

Elk, and Sassafras rivers). Here Captain Smith and crew encountered several canoes of the Massawomeck tribe off the mouth of the Sassafras, where they had just done battle with the Tockwogh who lived there. Although cautious, the Massawomeck traded food, furs, and weapons with the English. Then they disappeared, while Smith steered up the Sassafras.

The Tockwogh, seeing Massawomeck weapons, concluded that the English had beaten their enemies, and the wily Smith did not disabuse them of that notion. The Tockwogh welcomed the crew and told Smith about a great people they called the Sasquesahanock who lived up the great river that now bears a variant of that name. They helped Smith arrange a parley with the upriver tribe, probably on today's Garrett Island, just inside the river's mouth. Having met these tribes, mapped the head of the Bay, and discovered that it did not lead to a Northwest Passage, Smith turned south. On the way, he explored the Patuxent River, mapping it as far up as today's Lyons Creek, just below Jug Bay.

If Smith were to visit today, he would be stunned by changes to the Patapsco, but he might recognize Garrett Island. The head of the Bay has become a playground for people from Wilmington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. There are still interesting sections of these waters available for the enterprising explorer. Likewise, the upper tidal Patuxent is remarkably well-preserved, despite its proximity to heavily populated Washington, D.C.

THE EASTERN SHORE

On the first voyage, a ship outbound from Jamestown to England took the *Discovery Barge* in tow to the Virginia Capes, from which Smith briefly explored the seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore and then traveled up the Bay side of that peninsula, mapping harbors and visiting the chief of the Accomack. The crew endured a summer thunderstorm around Tangier, then went up the Pocomoke River in search of freshwater, reaching today's site of Pocomoke City.

Returning to Tangier Sound through Cedar Straits, where the Virginia-Maryland state line lies today, Smith and crew explored the east side of the sound until another thunderstorm blew out their sails and broke their mast. They spent a nasty, hot and buggy few days on Bloodsworth Island repairing their boat's rig, and then headed up the Nanticoke. There they learned of a powerful tribe to the north called the Massawomeck.

Sensing the possibility of a Northwest Passage, Smith immediately headed west, through Hooper Strait and across the Bay to the western shore around Calvert Cliffs, and then sailed north. Except for some time spent with the Tockwogh on today's Sassafras River later that summer, Smith never returned to the Eastern Shore.

Today, there is much for modern explorers to see, especially on the Pocomoke and Nanticoke rivers—which have been important to the maritime history of the Chesapeake—and the island chain that runs from Watts and Tangier in the south to Bloodsworth in the north. Some parts of both the islands and the two rivers look very much the same as they did in Smith's time.



Safety on the water is everyone's responsibility.

ONLINE RESOURCES

DELAWARE DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
www.fw.delaware.gov/boating/

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
www.dmv.org/washington-dc/boat

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF
 NATURAL RESOURCES
www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/

PENNSYLVANIA FISH AND
 BOAT COMMISSION
www.fish.state.pa.us/boat_basics.htm

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND
 INLAND FISHERIES
www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/

U.S. COAST GUARD
www.uscgboating.org/safety/courses.htm



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Greenwell State Park in Southern Maryland is one of many places along the trail that offer kayak lessons and rentals.

Boating Safety

Though many of the waterways within the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail are suitable for new boaters, there is also plenty of broad open water that demands respect. Sections of the rivers can funnel wind and develop nasty, choppy seas. Remember that accidents can happen on any type of water.

Whether you are paddling a kayak or piloting a trawler, it is important to build your boating skills, keep your vessel in good operating condition, and review U.S. Coast Guard safety guidelines before every trip.

FOR BEGINNERS

If you are new to boating and want to explore some of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail by water, consider taking day trips with a canoe/kayak outfitter or a tour boat captain first.

Before you pilot your own boat, take a boating safety/operation course. In fact, your state may require it. Many boating safety courses are offered across the country for all types of recreational boaters, and for boaters of all ages. The U.S. Coast Guard can provide a list for your area.

You will find additional information on boater education through these agencies:

- Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife
- District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Harbor Patrol or Department of Motor Vehicles
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources/Boating
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Learn your boat's capabilities and weaknesses. Spend time in your boat, beginning in calm waters. Learn how to handle her in a range of sea conditions. Build redundancy into her operating and safety systems, such as an extra paddle or a handheld VHF radio.

THE RIGHT GEAR FOR YOUR BOATING ADVENTURE

Always wear a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket that is appropriate for your vessel.

Dress for the day and be prepared to get wet. If the weather is cool, dress warmly in layers and bring an extra set of dry clothes sealed in a plastic bag for emergency use. If it's hot, find ways to avoid heat exhaustion, such as taking breaks in shade and drinking plenty of water.

Use sun block. Skin cancer is a real danger but is easily preventable with sunblock, appropriate clothing, and some caution.

Wear a hat on bright, warm days as well as cool ones. Remember that wool and pile vests, sweaters, and jackets retain their insulating qualities even when wet. In cold weather, wear pile or neoprene gloves, especially those that cover and insulate the blood vessels on the undersides of your wrists. Take along a windbreaker or rain gear, including pants or bibs with suspenders to keep your lower body dry.

Always wear boots or shoes to avoid foot injuries. If you are going to wade and want to wear sandals, make sure you choose models that offer protection for your toes and the tops of your feet as well as the soles.

Carry at least one signaling device on every trip—a flashlight or strobe, flares, horn/whistle, cell phone, VHF radio, bright flag, or mirror.

Bring insect repellent. Biting insects can be vicious during the warmer months.

Other essentials: a first-aid kit (Know what's in there; understand how to use it; and keep it stocked and current.), plenty of drinking water, and sunscreen and lip balm.

Take a first-aid course. Know what to do, and how and when to do it.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Respect private property when boating. Land only on public areas or spots where you have permission to be.

If under power, remember that you are responsible for your wake. A high wake can capsize small boats and damage fragile shorelines.

Don't litter or pollute the water. Use the Leave No Trace principles listed on page 13.

Be careful with campfires. Use camp stoves when possible.

Safety 101

- Avoid canoeing or kayaking alone when possible. Two people can solve a lot of problems that one person can't.
- File a float plan with family or friends. Include where you expect to go, when you expect to return, and whom to call (the U.S. Coast Guard is a good first choice) if you don't return as planned.
- When paddling or cruising designated water trails, read important safety information and posted rules. Those rules are there to protect both you and the waterway you are exploring.
- Explore water appropriate to your skills. If you are a novice paddler or cruiser, start with low-risk waterways.
- Learn to recognize water hazards, such as shoals, crab pot buoys, bridge piers, high-speed boat traffic, and strainers (downed trees or branches reaching into the water).
- If you capsize, stay with your boat unless doing so poses immediate danger. You'll be much easier for rescuers to find.
- When paddling in a group, assign a lead and a sweep boat. Both boats should be manned by experienced paddlers. No one passes the lead boat or falls behind the sweep.
- Stay in your canoe/kayak if it becomes stuck on an obstruction. Try shifting your weight carefully as you push off with your paddle or pole.
- Remember that kayaks and canoes are not easily seen by other boaters. Try to stay out of the shipping channels, and be as predictable and visible as possible.
- Never paddle farther from shore than you are prepared to swim.
- During fall and winter, waterfowl hunters are active on or near many Chesapeake waterways. Check for exact dates and seasons.

ONLINE RESOURCES

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
www.weather.gov

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH CHESAPEAKE
 NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL
www.smithtrail.net

CHESAPEAKE BAY GATEWAYS AND
 WATERTRAILS NETWORK
www.baygateways.net

NOAA CHESAPEAKE BAY
 INTERPRETIVE BUOY SYSTEM
www.buoybay.noaa.gov
 Also available at 1-877-BUOY-BAY

NOAA TIDES AND CURRENTS
<http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ports/index.shtml?port=cn>

CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY
www.chesapeakeconservancy.org



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
 ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

The NOAA Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS) marks points along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. “Smart buoys” provide near-real-time data on weather, water conditions, and other features for recreational and commercial users. The buoys are accessible by phone and Internet and via apps for Android and iPhone.

Planning Your Trip

Study a good map or chart of the section of the water trail you plan to explore. If you expect to carry a handheld or fixed-mount GPS, save several key way-points in it for important navigation markers and points of interest. Remember that the maps included in this Boater’s Guide are for illustration and should not be used for navigation.

Scout your trip. Know where your trip will take you and where you can find a safe harbor or takeout in case of a mishap or bad weather. Make sure you understand how to identify and avoid any hazards marked on your map or chart. Note: the maps in this guide are for general reference only. You will find links to sources for official NOAA charts where available.

See the section on “Scouting Your Trip: How to Use This Guide” for tips on using Google Earth to plan your route.

Plan your day. Allow ample time to complete your trip during daylight hours, taking weather and water conditions into account. Even if you have to alter your schedule, having an initial plan will help you figure out how to complete your trip safely.

Check the weather before you go and during the day while on the water. Check the forecast on television and/or online. NOAA’s National Weather Service provides standard and marine forecasts for wherever you are or may be headed.

Carry a compass. Don’t rely solely on a GPS or chart.

Carry a VHF radio—handheld or fixed-mount—with bands for receiving forecasts from NOAA’s National Weather Service while on the water. Don’t rely on having cell phone coverage.

Check the tides and currents. They are especially important if you are paddling or rowing or trying to make a tight schedule under sail or power. Find tidal information at NOAA’s Tides and Currents website.

Check the buoys. In addition, you can get near-real-time information from numerous locations around the Chesapeake from NOAA’s Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System (CBIBS). You can even access these buoys while you’re out on the water where there’s cell phone coverage by calling 1-877-BUOY-BAY or by accessing the website or apps on your smart phone.

Either online or by phone, NOAA’s Chesapeake Bay Interpretive Buoy System will also give you background on Captain Smith’s activities in the area around each buoy and geographical/ecological information about the buoy’s site. Each season, the buoy also offers updated information about what is happening in the surrounding water. You’ll find additional information on the CBIBS website, including curricular material for teachers and a graphing tool that enables you to watch trends through measurements like temperature, dissolved oxygen, salinity, and turbidity.

Travel Lightly

MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF YOUR BAY ADVENTURE

To protect the Chesapeake Bay, the National Park Service supports the Leave No Trace principles and practices of the Center for Outdoor Ethics (www.lnt.org). When exploring the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, leave no trace that you have been there by following the LNT principles. With many thousands of boaters on the Chesapeake, all of our individual actions are magnified, and, when combined with other careless deeds, can greatly harm the watershed.

Leave No Trace principles apply to all outdoor activities, including every form of boating. This is an ethical program, designed to educate users about ways to minimize their recreational impacts through following ideals, rather than using a fixed set of rules and regulations. Remember that you are a guest while exploring the trail. Travel lightly and minimize the impact of your visit as much as possible.

LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES FOR BOATING

PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE

- Know your route.
- Carry the proper equipment and clothing.
- Know your abilities and those of your group.
- Allow adequate time to find a legal and designated campsite, takeout landing, anchorage, or marina.

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS

- Respect the privacy of others, on the water and off.
- Watch your wake!
- Be courteous to other river users. Minimize noise and visibility.
- Respect private property.

CAMP ON DURABLE SURFACES

- Use existing clearings that won't be damaged by your stay.
- Avoid long stays at one site and trampling plants.
- Keep groups small.

LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND

- Leave rocks, plants, trees, and artifacts as you found them.
- Minimize campsite alterations.

RESPECT WILDLIFE

- Enjoy all wildlife from a distance and do not disturb them.
- Keep well away from nests and burrows.
- Never feed wild animals or leave food scraps where they might be eaten by wildlife.

DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY

- In a cruising boat, retain all waste in a holding tank and have it pumped out at one of the many sites around the Chesapeake that offer this service.
- If camping on shore, carry out all waste.
- Do all washing as far from the water as possible.
- Scatter strained dishwater on land away from camp.
- Use biodegradable soaps and minimize use.
- Carefully plan meals to minimize waste.

MINIMIZE USE AND IMPACT OF FIRES

- Use existing fire rings or a camp stove.
- Use only downed, dead wood.
- Leave limbs (dead or alive) on standing trees.
- Make positively sure that your fire has been extinguished before leaving the site.

ONLINE RESOURCES

GOOGLE EARTH

<http://earth.google.com>

NOAA CHARTS ONLINE VIEWER

www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov

Select "View NOAA Charts." On following web page, choose "Atlantic." Scroll down to series of Chesapeake Bay charts.

Scouting Your Trip

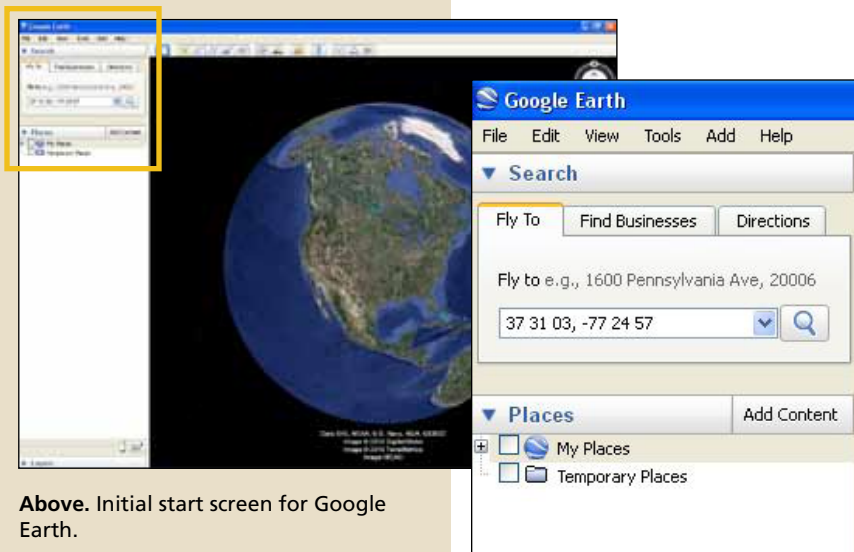
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Scout your trip by satellite using Google Earth. (Captain Smith would be amazed!) You'll find latitude and longitude numbers listed for every trailhead, boating facility, and itinerary in this Guide, making it easy to find specific locations. If you haven't already, be sure to install the latest free version of Google Earth on your computer.

Here's how to scout your trip on Google Earth. Begin at the trailhead you have selected as a starting point. Integrate what you see on your computer with a good chart of the portion of the water trail that you plan to explore. Note the water depths, curves in the waterway, channel junctions, and narrow spots where you may have to pay close attention to other boats, or even tugboats pushing barges. Also note the direction you will be traveling and think about how various wind scenarios might affect your trip, especially if strong ebb and flood currents will be involved. If your trip is one-way, make sure you get a good look at the place where you will conclude your trip.

If you expect to carry a handheld or fixed-mount GPS, save several key waypoints in it for important navigation markers, points of interest, and both beginning and ending locations.

Use Google Earth Maps to get driving directions to the trailhead. From the toolbar at the top of the Google Earth satellite image, put a "placemark" (a yellow pushpin symbol or equivalent) onto the trailhead. Then use the "View in Google Maps" tool at the right-hand end of the toolbar to shift to a satellite image that overlays the system of roadways onto the natural features of land and water. Now click on the "Get Directions" link in the top left corner of the page and fill in the information blocks for your starting point and destination. Google will give you directions, distance, and driving time.



Above. Initial start screen for Google Earth.

Right. Enlarged image of the program's search panel.

ENTERING COORDINATES INTO GOOGLE EARTH

The following is a brief lesson on entering coordinates into Google Earth. The coordinates for this lesson are: 37° 31' 03" N, 77° 24' 57" W.

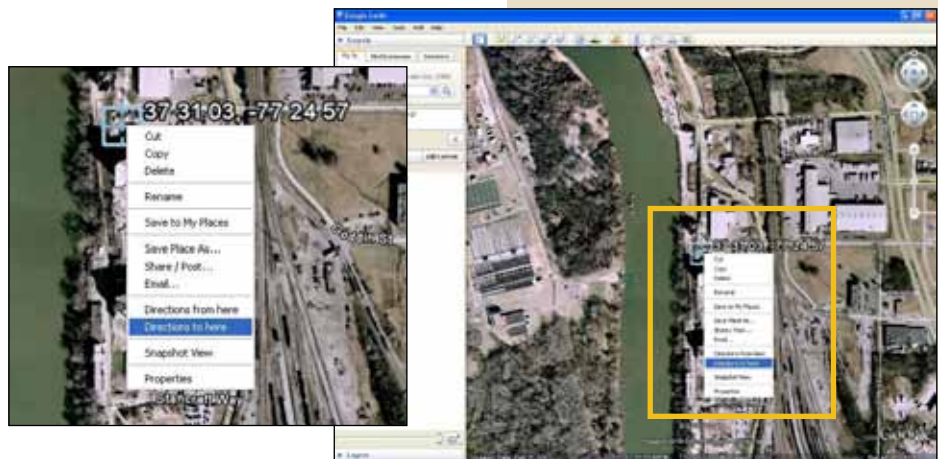
Step One. Open Google Earth and type the coordinates in the Google Earth search panel in the upper left corner of the screen, omitting the symbols. Place a space between each number and a comma between the north and west numbers. Type a negative sign (hyphen) before the second set coordinates.

37 31 03, -77 24 57

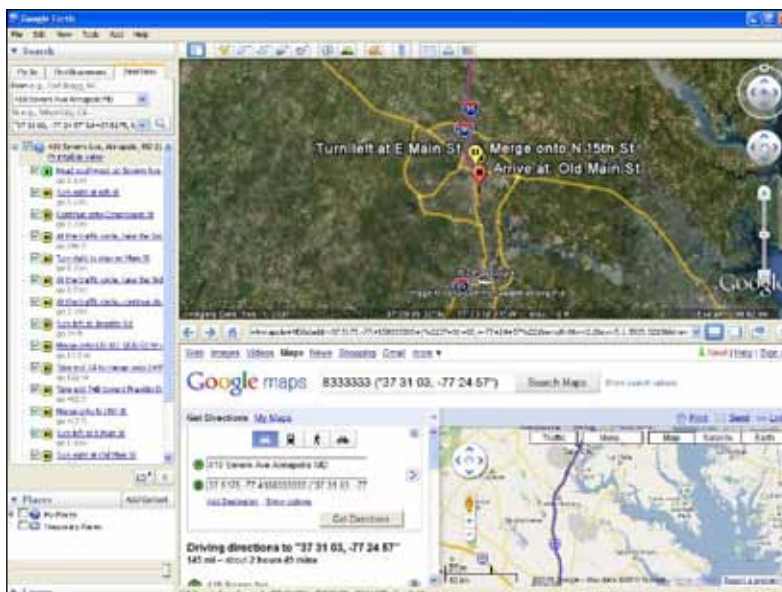
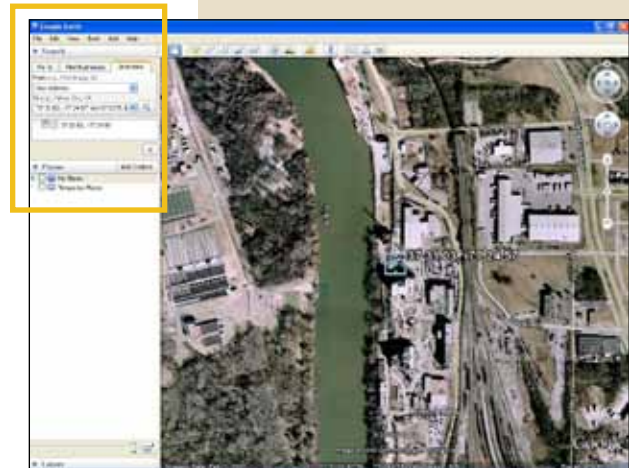
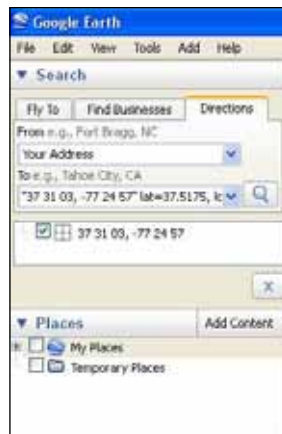
After typing in the coordinates, press the enter key. You will "fly" into the location.

Step Two. Right-click on the point and select “Directions to here” to find how to get to the site by road.

You can also “Save Place As...” to save the location with a name in Google Earth. This saved location can be used later to make a route or for reference.



Step Three. Type in your address in the search bar and press enter.



◀ **Step Four.** Click on “Printable view” for the directions to populate in a Google Maps screen. The directions can be printed from the Internet browser.

“There is but one entrance by sea into this country, and that is at the mouth of a very goodly bay, 18 or 20 miles broad. The cape on the south is called Cape Henry, in honor of our most noble Prince. The land, white hilly sands like unto the Downs, and all along the shores rest plenty of pines and firs. . . Within is a country that may have the prerogative over the most pleasant places known, for large and pleasant navigable rivers, heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man’s habitation. . .”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Smith's Journey Begins

EXCURSIONS ON THE JAMES RIVER

When the Jamestown colonists arrived in Virginia in late April of 1607, they looked for a site that was:

- Uninhabited,
- Easily defensible from attack,
- Safe for the ships in bad weather, with deep water close by for mooring,
- Supplied with adequate fresh water, and
- Far enough up a river to avoid attracting the attention of other ships, especially Spanish naval vessels.

After their first landing at Cape Henry, the colonists explored the first large river they found, named Powhatan, the same as the paramount chief of the region. The English re-named the river after King James I. They traveled it all the way to its head of navigation at the present site of Richmond, Virginia, where they found a village ruled by one of Powhatan's sons.

After some debate, the colonists settled on apparently uninhabited land they named Jamestowne Island, about halfway downriver between the falls and the river's mouth (today's Hampton Roads). The island offered a marshy isthmus at its western end, making it easy to defend. The river out front and the creek out back, today named for Powhatan, offered fresh water. The island was far enough up the winding James to avoid easy detection, and its riverbanks were steep, allowing the ships to tie alongside on high tides.

Their choice was flawed, however. First, although the island had no permanent dwellings, it was territory of the Paspahegh, whose members did not take kindly to the intrusion. Second, though the James River was fresh at Jamestown in spring, the colonists had unwittingly come to Virginia during a severe five-year drought. This reduced the river's flow in summer and fall to the point that the English were drinking brackish water, which made them quarrelsome at best and very sick at worst. Third, the surrounding marshes and woods harbored massive populations of biting insects that certainly toughened their hides.

Even so, the English endured. Captain John Smith got to know the surrounding waters well, especially the adjacent Chickahominy River, the Nansemond River downstream on the south side, and the Indian town of Kecoughtan, just inside Hampton Roads and (Old) Point Comfort. Smith made three trips up the Nansemond to trade for (and take) corn. Kecoughtan became a regular way-station on any trip to the Bay, because the Indians there welcomed the English and fed them well on the bounty of the surrounding waters, especially their oysters.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

John Smith's Adventures on the James River, an interpretive water trail and auto tour guide produced by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, covers about 100 miles of the James River from Richmond to Newport News.

Available online from the Virginia Tourism Corporation:

www.virginia.org/johnsmithtrail

Print copies may be purchased at a nominal fee by selecting "Contact Us" and searching the online store for "John Smith Trail Maps."



PHOTO BY BILL HALEY

Statue of Captain John Smith at Historic Jamestowne overlooks the James River.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Sunset along the James River
PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the James River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE JAMES RIVER

Nauticus: The National Marine Maritime Center
• Norfolk, VA

Elizabeth River Trail • Norfolk, VA

Hoffler Creek Wildlife Preserve • Portsmouth, VA

Mariner's Museum • Newport News, VA

Virginia Living Museum • Newport News, VA

Fort Boykin Historic Park • Isle of Wight, VA

Historic Fort Huger • Isle of Wight, VA

Chippokes Plantation State Park • Surry, VA

Powhatan Creek Blueway • Williamsburg, VA

Jamestown Island • Jamestown, VA

Lawrence Lewis Jr. Park • Charles City, VA

Dutch Gap Conservation Area • Chester, VA

Lower James River Water Trail • Richmond, VA

EXPLORING THE JAMES RIVER TODAY

The nonprofit James River Association calls its namesake waterway “America’s Founding River.” Jamestown remained the center of the English presence in Virginia until the end of the 17th century, when the capital moved a few miles inland to Williamsburg, making Hampton, at (Old) Point Comfort, the longest continuously occupied English community in North America.

The James has been a busy river ever since, carrying steamboats until the 1930s, sailing ships until World War II, and large commercial ships today to port facilities at Hopewell and just below the falls at Richmond’s Deepwater Terminal. Local traffic includes tugs and barges carrying sand, gravel, fuel oil, and even garbage; commercial workboats fishing for crabs and catfish; recreational anglers seeking bass, catfish, and rockfish; and folks just out for a boat ride. Public access is widely available, though access points are not yet as evenly-spaced as paddlers in kayaks and canoes would like.

From the time that colonist John Rolfe first began raising export-grade tobacco on the James in 1620, the river has suffered from a heavy human footprint. Unlike the corn, beans, and squash crops that the Indians had been raising along the James, tobacco farming depleted the soil of essential nutrients and minerals. As settlers pushed west to the red clay soils of the Piedmont and the mountains at the river’s headwaters, the James began to carry a consistent load of sediment that still colors the river red at times.

Richmond and Lynchburg added significant loads of raw sewage and factory wastewater, especially during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Both cities have struggled to reduce the amount of pollution they send to the James. Mandatory pollution reduction under the Clean Water Act of 1972 began to improve the river in the 1980s and ’90s. In this first decade of the 21st century, both cities have accelerated their progress. They still face challenges, especially against the tide of population growth. Sediment remains a serious problem, but today the James is cleaner than it has been for at least 150 years. Organizations such as the James River Association and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation continue to work with state and federal agencies for full restoration of the river.

At Jamestown today, the National Park Service offers a great visitor center on the island with wonderful educational exhibits. You can also enjoy trails out to Captain John Smith’s statue and the site of the original Jamestowne Fort, as well as a beautiful wooded, paved, four-mile circuit around the island that is suitable for driving, biking, or hiking.

After exploring the island on foot, get a good look at its river shore and Powhatan Creek, a little jewel tucked away on the busy outskirts of Williamsburg. Its headwaters north of Jamestown Road are fresh and the color of iced tea, tinted by the cypress trees that protrude from the water. It develops into a broad brackish marsh creek as it flows down to the island. The contrast is striking, making the creek a good place to see how most Chesapeake waterways develop from fresh headwaters to salt downstream. Seeing the brackish marshes around the island may make you cringe for the the colonists who drank the river’s water before they dug a well 400 years ago.

Good Vessels for Exploring the James River



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

Some creeks and protected shores of the James are made to order for exploring in self-propelled vessels. The river itself is large and powerful, with frequent heavy traffic—including deep-draft shipping—and strong currents. If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, by all means explore any of it, but take precautions to stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips inside waterways such as the upper Nansemond River, Powhatan Creek, and the marsh creeks of Farrar's Island, behind Henricus Historical Park. There's plenty to explore, especially if you're interested in the Powhatan Indian stories along the Captain John Smith Trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts make great vessels for day trips exploring the James and its tributaries, such as the Hampton River, Powhatan Creek, the Nansemond, Powells Creek, and the Farrar's Island creeks. They'll also serve well in side creeks, provided they're equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs. This is a big river and its main stem can kick up rough. Deep draft ships use its channel all the way up to Richmond.

If you're going to explore the James, maintain your boat carefully, equip it properly with safety and emergency gear, plan your itineraries, and leave a float plan with family or friends. There are plenty of marina facilities with service shops, tow boat companies, and emergency services. However, it pays to be prepared and to keep your itineraries within your skills. Even short trips can reveal beautiful, fascinating places here.

CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS



Cruising powerboats such as trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls are excellent choices for exploring the James, especially if the vessels are equipped with seaworthy dinghies, canoes, or kayaks.

Whether you cruise at 7 knots or 16, make sure to look actively at the river and don't let the boat insulate you from its waters, shorelines, and wildlife. Even if your boat can cruise faster, don't. As one wise builder of cruising boats once said, "Over 15 to 16 knots, you miss too much."

If you navigate carefully, you'll find that the James offers a wide enough channel that you can cruise relatively close to shore, keeping you in close touch with what's on shore as well as out in the water. But watch your wake; keep it low to protect sensitive shorelines and avoid disturbing people in small boats.

CRUISING SAILBOATS



Among the Chesapeake's rivers, the James is one of the few large enough to offer consistent winds and maneuvering room for cruising sailboats, as well as multiple secluded but deep, secure anchorages. Also, below Richmond, the three bridges (Interstate 295, Benjamin Harrison, and Route 258) are high enough to allow most cruisers underneath.

This river is the third-best river in the Chesapeake Bay system to explore under sail as Smith did—after the main Bay itself, and the Potomac. The James is a beautiful river, and plenty of boats sail it today, but its strong currents in narrow channels will make a modern skipper appreciate the skills of those who have sailed it before. Upstream of Hopewell, the James narrows considerably into long, looping meanders, two of which also have shipping bypasses cut through their bases (Presquile and Dutch Gap) to shorten the passage to Richmond.



PHOTO BY DAVE FUSS

Powhatan Creek Park, a county facility near Williamsburg, VA, provides a small boat/canoe launch, parking area, and fishing piers for the scenic Powhatan Creek Blueway.

Trip Itineraries

HAMPTON ROADS/HAMPTON RIVER TWO-WAY, 9–10 MILES



Hampton Roads is one of Earth's great natural harbors. When the Jamestown colonists arrived, they saw its potential and would not be surprised to see how busy it is today with commercial and Naval shipping, though they would be astounded by the technology exhibited here.

At the time of Smith's explorations, the Kecoughtan people were concentrated primarily along Hampton Bar, which was then a huge oyster reef along the north side of the harbor, and the Hampton River, with its woods and marshes offering other resources. This tribe appears to have welcomed the English, who stopped there periodically as they journeyed up to Powhatan's headquarters of Werowocomoco on the Pamunkee (today's York River) and during Smith's exploratory voyages in the summer of 1608.

In October 1609, about the time Captain John Smith left Virginia for England, the Jamestown colonists established Fort Algernon, a satellite colony, at (Old) Point Comfort. This fort would become part of present-day Hampton, making that city the oldest continuously-occupied English community in North America.

Peterson Yacht Basin's launch ramp and the soft landing just outside its inlet provide access to the north side of Hampton Roads for paddle craft and trailer boats. From there, it's a 3.5-mile trip along the shore to the mouth of the Hampton River. The area looks very different today than it did in the 1600s, so it takes imagination to see it as Captain John Smith, his crew, and the Kecoughtan did. Note that this is wide-open water with lots of traffic of all sizes. Exercise appropriate caution.

NANSEMOND RIVER TWO-WAY, 2–35 MILES



The Nansemond is a great river to explore by canoe, kayak, or skiff. Paddle craft can launch from Constant's Wharf in Suffolk; trailer boats launch from Bennett's Creek Marina downstream. Larger powerboats can follow the channel all the way up to the transient slips at Constant's Wharf.

When Smith visited, the Nansemond was a great resource. Its lower reaches, around the "front village" of Mattanock on the west bank opposite the mouth of Bennett's Creek, were full of oysters, crabs, and fish. The town where the Nansemond leader lived lay at the upper end of the brackish water, on the outside (west) bend around the mouth of Cedar Creek, just above today's Route 125 bridge.

In April 1608, Smith visited here to meet the Nansemond leader and trade. He planted a cross upriver at the town of Teracosick, on the west bank just above the mouth of the Nansemond's western branch. From here up, the river is fresh, with lush marshes on the insides of its deep meander bends and good soils for corn, beans, and squash on the higher lands.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

JAMES RIVER ASSOCIATION
804-788-8811
www.jamesriverassociation.org

Contact the association for maps to the Lower James River Water Trail, covering 110 miles of the Lower James River from Richmond, Virginia, to the Chesapeake Bay.

KINGSMILL MARINA
757-253-3919
www.kingsmill.com.recreation/marina.asp

JAMES RIVER PLANTATIONS
www.jamesriverplantations.org



Much of the Nansemond still looks as it did when Smith explored it, though if you go up its several branches, you'll find large dams enclosing water-supply reservoirs for the City of Suffolk. Try to figure out where the river's Indians would have set up their towns and fishing camps and where Smith would have interacted with Nansemond leaders.

POWHATAN CREEK ONE-WAY, ABOUT 4 MILES



Launch canoes and kayaks at the James City County soft landing with floating dock on the creek to access the Powhatan Creek Blueway. The landing and parking lot lie just above the Jamestown Road bridge, on the east side. Be sure to explore above the bridge as well as below. You can launch and return here, but if possible, use two vehicles or a vehicle and a bicycle to set up a shuttle between the bridge and the Jamestown Yacht Basin Marina, near the mouth of the creek.

Be sure to visit the 400-year-old bald cypress tree growing in the middle of the creek about 100 yards below the bridge. If you visit in late summer, you'll see acres of wild rice ripening in the upper marshes.

JAMESTOWN ISLAND CIRCUMNAVIGATION ABOUT 7 MILES



Caution: Landing is not permitted on Jamestown Island.

Be careful if you choose to circle the island in either outboard or paddle craft, for the James is a mile-and-a-third wide here, with long fetches from the southeast and the northwest that can make it kick up rough. If the weather is fit, by all means circumnavigate, slipping through the slot under the causeway to the island. Be careful at the sharp turn into Powhatan Creek on the backside, because there is a large chunk of concrete on the southwest corner of the turn.

Exploring Jamestown Island will give you a sense of how the colonists saw it the first time. Much of Powhatan Creek still looks the way it did then, especially the ancient cypress tree that Captain John Smith probably first viewed when it was a sapling. Don't miss either one!

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE JAMES

The James and the adjoining Chickahominy are off the beaten track for cruising sail and power boats, but much of the river system is lovely, and there are plenty of facilities, as well as secure and attractive anchorages. In Hampton Roads, the Hampton River on the north side and the Elizabeth River on the south are worth exploring, though it takes imagination to see them as Captain John Smith did. Upstream, the Nansemond and Pagan rivers (the latter the site of an Indian leader's town named Warraskoyac in Smith's time) will take cruisers up to Suffolk and Smithfield, respectively. Both are lovely today but narrow and best suited to power vessels.

Traveling up the river is a challenge, with channels winding back and forth around meander bends, and a good opportunity to contemplate the challenges that captains of 17th-century ships faced in fluky winds and strong currents. Jamestown is easy to visit with a dinghy, tying up at Jamestown Yacht Basin. However the most secure port for a deep-draft vessel is Kingsmill Marina, about three miles above Jamestown on the north side.

For now, pass by the Chickahominy—it is a story in itself and well worth several days' exploration. (See section on Exploring the Chickahominy). Above the mouth of the Chickahominy River, the James winds past a dozen large, old plantations that retain their grand houses. Several, like Sherwood Forest, Evelynnton, Westover, Berkeley, and Shirley, are open to the public. These plantations are representative of the culture that evolved along the James as a result of Captain John Smith's map and the dispersion of English colonists from Jamestown in the 17th century.

The James narrows considerably above Hopewell, with swift currents and deep channels. For cruisers so inclined, this part of the river offers lovely views mixed incongruously with a power plant, abandoned gravel pits, the Port of Richmond's Deepwater Terminal, and other evidences of industry. Be aware that around any bend in this narrow channel, you might find yourself confronted by a ship up to 600 feet in length, so operate with appropriate care. As the condition of the James improves, Richmond is gradually renovating its riverfront. The new marina at Rocketts Landing is a good example.

TRAILHEADS ON THE JAMES RIVER

HAMPTON ROADS

Peterson Yacht Basin, Newport News, VA
36° 59' 03" N, 76° 23' 53" W
(launch ramp inside inlet,
soft beach landing on outside shore)



NANSEMOND RIVER

Bennett's Creek Restaurant and Marina
36° 51' 54" N, 76° 28' 41" W
757-484-8700, www.bennettscreekrestaurant.com
(ramp fee)



Constant's Wharf, Suffolk, VA
36° 44' 22" N, 76° 34' 52" W
757-514-7250, www.suffolk.va.us/parks/cw.html
(canoe and kayak launch,
transient slip rentals for larger boats)



JAMESTOWN

Powhatan Creek Blueway
37° 14' 15" N, 76° 46' 06" W
www.jccgov.com/recreation/parks-trails/powhatan-creek.html



Jamestown Yacht Basin Marina
37° 13' 34" N, 76° 46' 45" W
757-564-7714
(parking fee)



MID-SECTION

Jordan Point Yacht Haven
37° 18' 45" N, 77° 13' 18" W
804-458-3398, www.jordanpoint.com
(ramp fee, transient slips)



UPPER RIVER

Deep Bottom Park and Boat Landing
37° 24' 26" N, 77° 18' 19" W



Dutch Gap Public Landing
37° 22' 55" N, 77° 22' 36" W



Osborne Pike Public Landing
37° 24' 03" N, 77° 23' 09" W



Ancarrow's Public Landing
37° 31' 11" N, 77° 25' 07" W



Henricus Historical Park
37° 22' 32" N, 77° 21' 34" W
804-748-1613, www.henricus.org



Rocketts Landing Marina
37° 30' 58" N, 77° 24' 59" W
804-222-3555, www.rockettsvillage.com/marina.asp
(transient slips)



Henrico County
Parks and Recreation
804-501-5108,
www.dgif.virginia.gov
(use the "search this
site" feature)

JORDAN POINT/POWELLS CREEK TWO-WAY, 5–12 MILES



Jordan Point Yacht Haven is a good jumping-off point for exploring the mid-section of the James. If you're paddling, explore the islands just downriver that separate the main river from Tar Bay, on the south side. Juvenile bald eagles frequent the islands.

If the weather, your skills, and your energy are up to the task, keep going downriver, around Coggins Point, and head up Powells Creek. This creek is part of the James River National Wildlife Refuge, prime habitat for eagles, ospreys, great blue herons, and, in cold weather, migratory waterfowl. The marshes here are loaded with wild rice and other seed-bearing plants that sustain the waterfowl during winter.

The run down to Powells Creek is also great for trailer boats equipped to prowl narrow, winding creeks. For these boats, another great destination is Herring Creek, on the north bank. Mind the channel at the mouth, though. It swings hard to the east bank. Watch your depth sounder as you go up the creek. You'll be surprised at how deep it is further up.

HENRICUS HISTORICAL PARK AND FARRAR'S ISLAND TWO-WAY, 2.5–8 MILES



Farrar's Island is the site of Henricus Historical Park, which offers living history programs and a dock on the James for visiting boaters. The old oxbow slough around the south side of the island offers interesting marshy channels to explore in paddle craft and skiffs. The easiest access point is Dutch Gap Public Landing.






In 1611, two years after Captain John Smith left Virginia, the English Governor Sir Thomas Dale established the "Citie of Henricus" on a wide meander bend about 12 miles downriver from the Indian town at the falls of the James. The English believed this site would be healthier than Jamestown and envisioned it becoming an important port, with a thriving town and even the colony's first university.

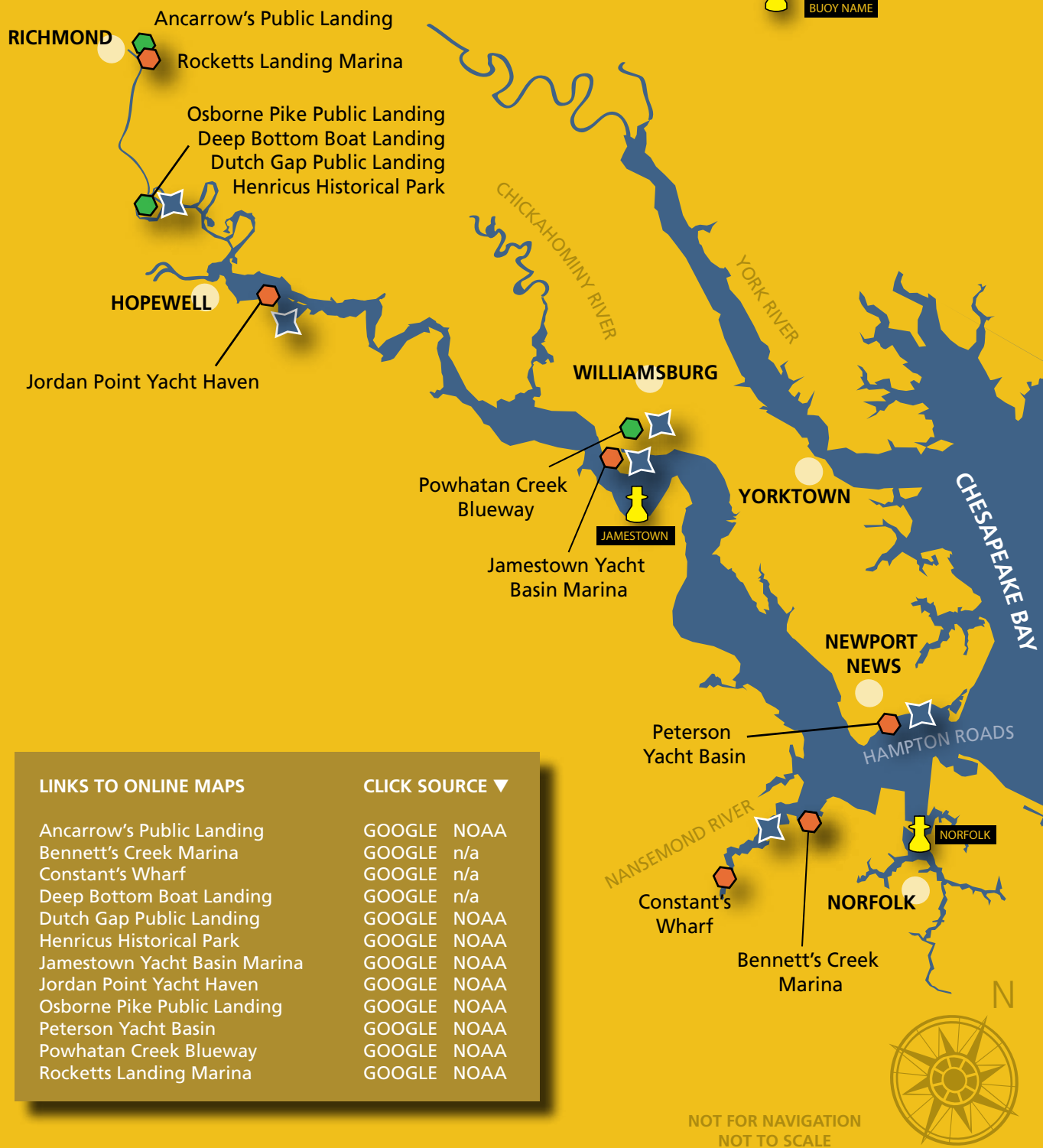
The Indians' attacks against illegal English settlements in 1622 caused the English to abandon the town and those grandiose plans. William Farrar, who had come to Virginia in 1618, settled there and began farming the land. His family continued to live there until they sold the island in 1727.

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James River

SECTION MAP

-  TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
-  TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
-  TRIP ITINERARY
-  CBIBS (NOAA BUOY)
-  BUOY NAME

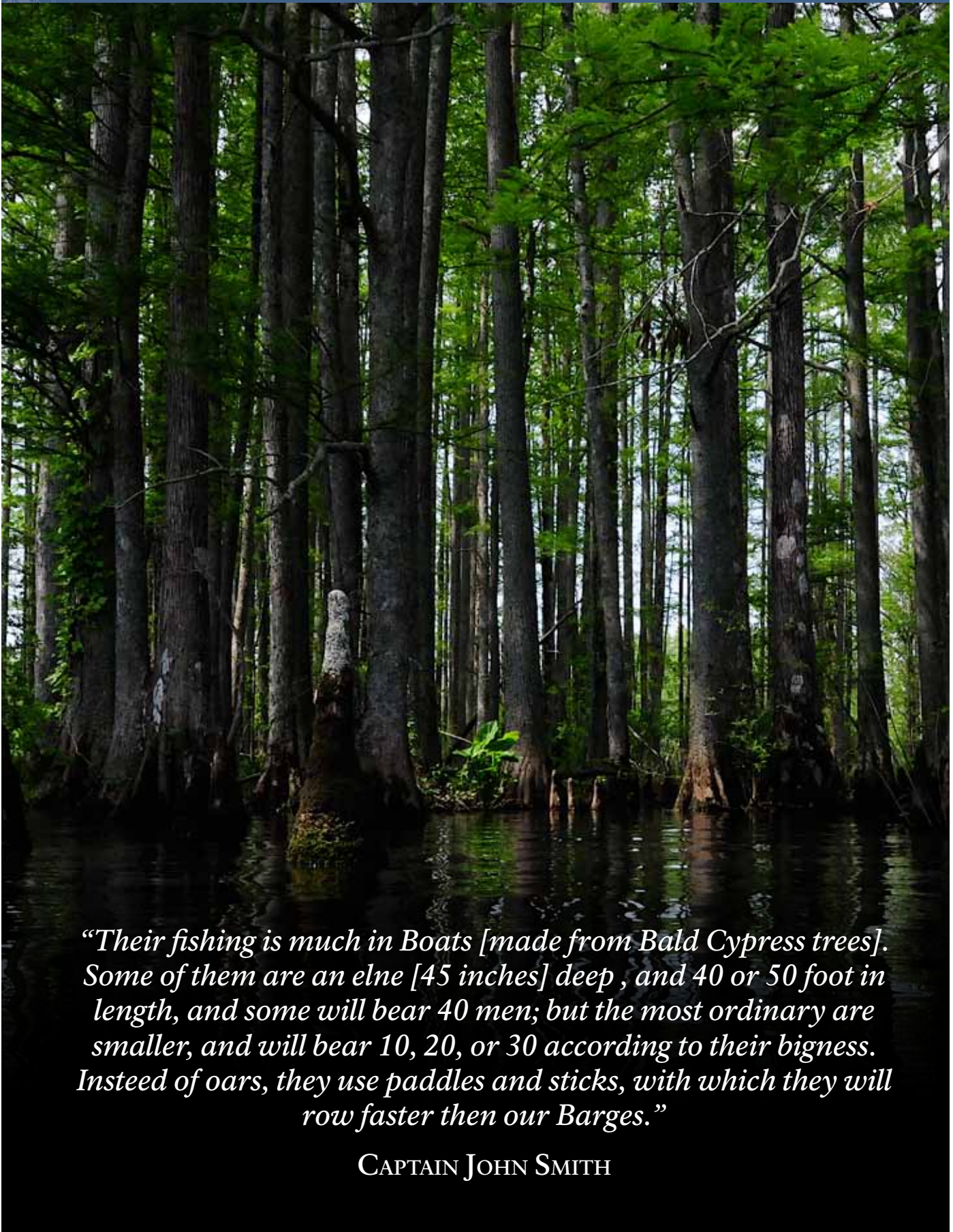


LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

Ancarrow's Public Landing
 Bennett's Creek Marina
 Constant's Wharf
 Deep Bottom Boat Landing
 Dutch Gap Public Landing
 Henricus Historical Park
 Jamestown Yacht Basin Marina
 Jordan Point Yacht Haven
 Osborne Pike Public Landing
 Peterson Yacht Basin
 Powhatan Creek Blueway
 Rocketts Landing Marina

CLICK SOURCE ▼

GOOGLE NOAA
 GOOGLE n/a
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 GOOGLE NOAA
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“Their fishing is much in Boats [made from Bald Cypress trees]. Some of them are an elne [45 inches] deep , and 40 or 50 foot in length, and some will bear 40 men; but the most ordinary are smaller, and will bear 10, 20, or 30 according to their bigness. Instead of oars, they use paddles and sticks, with which they will row faster then our Barges.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Encounters with the Past

HISTORY FLOWS ON THE CHICKAHOMINY RIVER

In the fall of 1607, with no food stored at Jamestown for the winter, Captain John Smith began a series of trips to Chickahominy towns to trade for corn. In October and November, he and a crew took the *Discovery Barge* up the river three times, exploring and mapping as they went. The Chickahominy people received them well and traded baskets of corn for copper pots, blue beads, and other manufactured items. On a fourth trip, in December, Smith left the *Discovery Barge* and most of his crew at Appocant (near today's Providence Forge), the uppermost town to which the vessel could navigate, and hired a Chickahominy Indian guide with a canoe to take him and two crew members further upriver.

Well up into Chickahominy Swamp, they ran into a hunting party led by Opechancanough, the war chief of the paramount chief Powhatan and the leader of the Youghthanund Indians on the nearby Pamunkey River. The hunters killed both crewmen and captured Smith. Opechancanough held Smith captive for six weeks, marching him around much of the region and over the rivers between the Chickahominy and the Rappahannock, before taking him to Powhatan's headquarters at Werowocomoco on what is now the York River. There he met Powhatan, to whom many of the Virginia Algonquian tribes paid tribute in exchange for military protection and food-sharing. According to Smith's later writings, Powhatan spared Smith's life at the urging of his daughter Pocahontas, a story now generally disputed by scholars. Powhatan eventually released Smith to return to Jamestown. During his captivity Smith learned some of the Virginia Algonquian language, as well as the ways of life of the Indians and the geography of the region—knowledge which would serve him well over the next two years.

EXPLORING THE CHICKAHOMINY TODAY

The Chickahominy River rises in a bottomland hardwood swamp north of Richmond and flows east halfway to Williamsburg before turning south to enter the James River about six miles above Jamestown Island. Even though the river lies in the fast-developing corridor between Williamsburg and Richmond, and Interstate 64 crosses its upper reaches in several places, much of it still looks as it did in Captain John Smith's time. Members of the Chickahominy and Eastern Chickahominy Indian tribes still live in the area.

The lower 18 miles of the river are tidal, flanked by cypress trees and broad marshes of wild rice and other freshwater plants. Multiple deep creeks flow into this section from both the east (James City County) and west (Charles City County) sides. Along much of the river, wetlands prevent or minimize waterfront development, though there are several sections on the James City side that are heavily built up. In other sections of the river and up most of the creeks, it is fun to study the shorelines, try to figure out where the Indian towns were, and then compare what you see with Smith's map.

As you explore, you'll understand more about how the Chickahominy people lived then. This river is still full of fish, especially largemouth bass and blue catfish. The cypress trees offer both perches and nest structures for ospreys

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

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Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Chickahominy River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE CHICKAHOMINY RIVER

Chickahominy Riverfront Park •
Williamsburg, VA

Chickahominy Water Trail • Richmond, VA

PREVIOUS PAGE
Cypress trees along
the Chickahominy River.
PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

CHICKAHOMINY WATER TRAIL AND GUIDE MAP
804-788-8811

www.jamesriverassociation.org

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF GAME AND
INLAND FISHERIES

www.dgif.virginia.gov (search by river)

CHICKAHOMINY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=1

and bald eagles, while the seed-producing plants in the marshes provide food for waterfowl. Songbirds nest in the woods, river otters fish the waters, and muskrats live in the marshes. Throughout the seasons, there is still plenty to see and do here.

The head of tide is Walker's Dam, built at Lanexa in 1939 to impound the upper river and form what is now referred to as Chickahominy Lake. Its lower reaches are slow-moving, wide, and shallow, with small creeks made to order for exploring in canoes, kayaks, and 14- to 16-foot outboard skiffs. Keep an eye out for ospreys, eagles, herons, and waterfowl. Pick up a Virginia freshwater fishing license and try for bass, chain pickerel, bream (bluegills), crappies, and catfish.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

Canoes and kayaks are excellent for exploring virtually all of the Chickahominy, including Morris, Gordons, and Nettles creeks. Be aware that the open Chickahominy is a big river that can funnel wind and kick up rough, especially in the broad lower sections.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Outboard skiffs and runabouts of 14 to 20 feet in length are great for exploring the Chickahominy and the creeks. Skippers of these boats should carry push-poles to allow nosing into a marsh edge or two. Be aware that some open water is very shallow. Nayces Bay between Gordons and Nettles creeks is a prime example. Also, note that the channel at the mouth of Morris Creek lies against the south side, with a very shallow flat to the north.



CRUISING POWERBOATS, TRAWLERS AND SAILBOATS

Cruising powerboats and sailboats with mast heights of less than 52 feet can easily explore the Chickahominy River. Note that the channel can be narrow, and winds can be fluky. Big boats equipped with kayaks or dinghies can base at River's Rest and enjoy further exploration from there.



PHOTO BY PAULA DEGEN

Chickahominy Riverfront Park overlooks the confluence of Gordons Creek and the Chickahominy River. Bring your own boat or rent canoes/kayaks at the park.

Trip Itineraries

GORDONS AND NETTLES CREEKS CIRCUMNAVIGATION, ABOUT 7 MILES



If paddling, launch at Chickahominy Riverfront Park and paddle up Gordons Creek, around the tip of Gordons Island, down Nettles Creek to the river's main stem, and back into the mouth of Gordons Creek to the ramp. If possible, pick a day when the tide will be high at noon, so you can follow the ebb upstream in the morning and the ebb back down in the afternoon.

Be sure to explore some of the side creeks on either side of the island, except during waterfowl hunting season when you should avoid the side creeks and duck blinds. Check with Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (www.dgif/hunting/waterfowl) for hunting season dates. Note: Gordons Island belongs to a private hunt club and is posted against trespass.

Don't attempt this itinerary in cold weather or windy conditions, as the river can get quite rough and the creeks tend to funnel wind. Under those conditions, opt for a short out-and-back exploration of Gordons Creek. You'll still find plenty to see.

MORRIS CREEK TWO-WAY, ABOUT 4 MILES



The Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area offers several walking trails and a good boat ramp on this lovely, heavily-wooded creek. Paddle craft and smaller powerboats can explore in both directions. If headed out to the river under power, be sure to hug the south bank at the mouth to stay in the deepest water.

BIG MARSH POINT CIRCUMNAVIGATION ABOUT 1.5 MILES



Launch at River's Rest Marina to paddle or run around the Big Marsh across and just downstream of the landing. Note the direction of the tidal current and plan your itinerary accordingly. The cut through the marsh opposite River's Rest is plenty deep enough for skiffs but not for cruising boats. If you're in the latter, use your dinghy.

Captain Smith mapped the village of Werawehon on the peninsula at the base of the marsh. The high land where River's Rest now sits was probably a "suburb."

TRAILHEADS ON THE CHICKAHOMINY RIVER

CHICKAHOMINY RIVER (TIDAL)

Chickahominy Riverfront Park
37° 16' 06" N, 76° 52' 21" W
757-258-5020



www.jccgov.com/recreation/parks-trails/chickahominy-park.html

Morris Creek
37° 18' 00" N, 76° 53' 57" W



www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/access/?filtertype=fips&fips=036,

River's Rest
37° 21' 46" N, 76° 54' 45" W
804-829-2753, www.riversrest.com



For Cruising Boats TRAVELING ALONG THE CHICKAHOMINY RIVER

Whether you're in a skiff or a large boat, travel the main stem from the mouth of the Chickahominy up to Walker's Dam to see how the river develops in its run from the dam to the James River. Your depth sounder will show you some very deep water, indicative of how much power the river has, and how much land it drains.

If you're in a skiff or dinghy, be sure to explore Shipyard and Yarmouth creeks, which meet to form one waterway east of Wright's Island.

Watch the transitions from high banks to marshes as the Chickahominy River meanders back and forth. The outsides of the curves formed important landings used by the Indians and later the English. One particularly interesting spot is on the James City bank just above Wright's Island and Shipyard Creek. The creek is named for this landing, which was a Confederate shipyard burned in 1862 during the Civil War. This spot later served as a fish house where watermen landed their catch, and most recently it served as part of the set for the movie *The New World*, which is loosely based on the stories of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas. The plot retells the old legend rather than the history, but cinematography of the Chickahominy is excellent.

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Chickahominy River

SECTION MAP

- TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
- TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
- TRIP ITINERARY

LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

Chickahominy Riverfront Park
Morris Creek
River's Rest

CLICK SOURCE ▼

GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA

River's Rest

WILLIAMSBURG

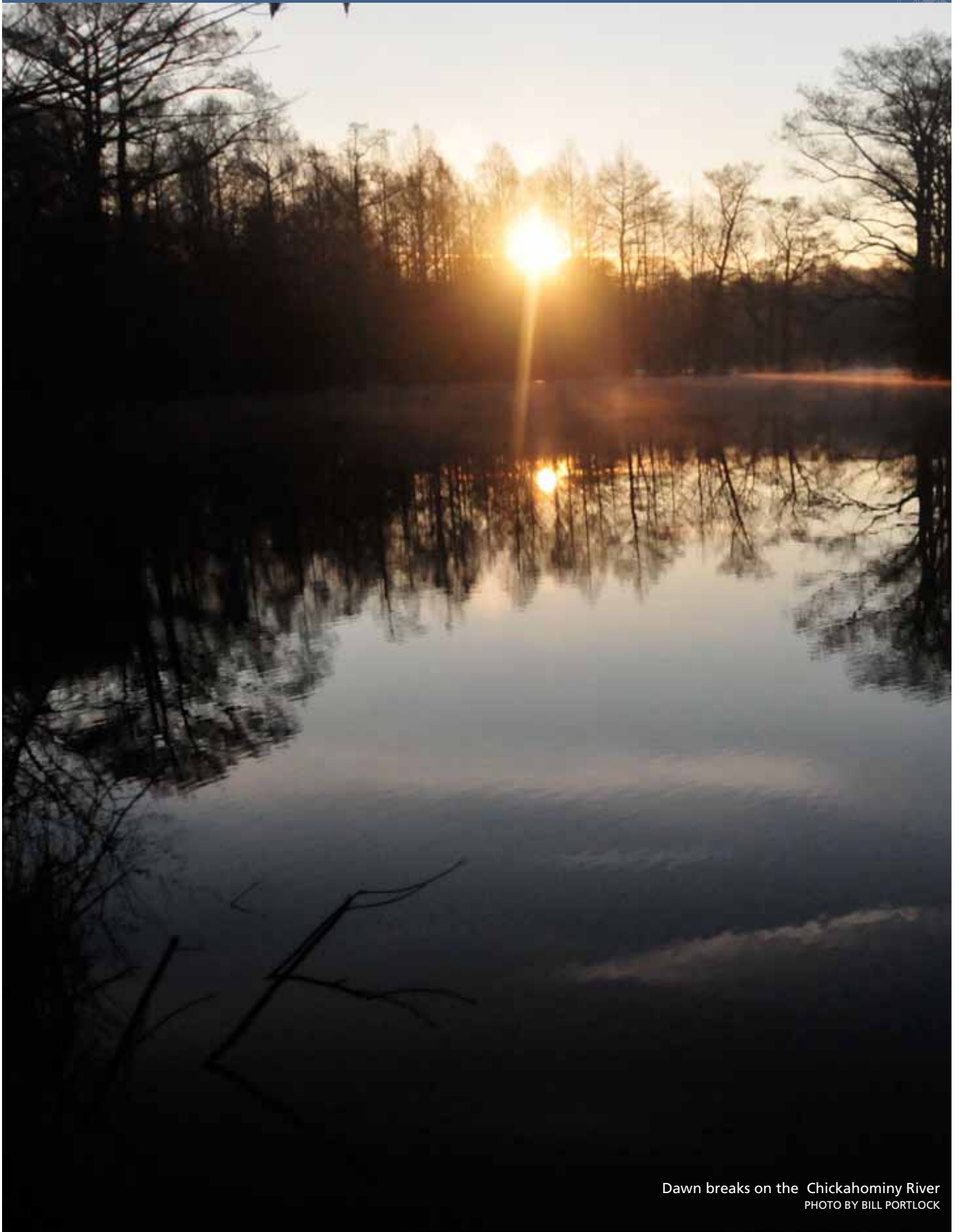
Morris Creek

Chickahominy
Riverfront Park

JAMES RIVER



NOT FOR NAVIGATION
NOT TO SCALE



Dawn breaks on the Chickahominy River
PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

“This River of Pamaunke is not past twelve mile from that we dwell on [the James River], his course northwest and westerly as the other. Weraocomoco is upon salt water in bredth two myles, and so keepeth his course without any tarrying some twenty miles; where at the parting of the fresh water and the salt, it divideth it selfe into two partes.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Smith and the York River System

TRAVELS ALONG THE YORK, PAMUNKEY, AND MATTAPONI RIVERS

The York River system isn't as well known to the boating public as the two big rivers that flank it, the James to the south and the Rappahannock to the north. In fact, the York, with its short, thoroughly English name, is an almost-straight river that runs approximately 35 miles from West Point, Virginia, to its meeting with the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay. It is brackish at West Point and grows progressively saltier as it flows to the Bay.

That's only half the story, though. What forms the York River at West Point is the confluence of two very different rivers: the sinuous, meandering, mostly fresh Pamunkey and Mattaponi, which drain bottomland hardwood swamps and huge marshes springing from the western edge of Virginia's coastal plain. Each contains an Indian reservation for its namesake tribe, whose thoroughly modern people proudly also remain deeply rooted in the ways of their ancestral river.

Both tributaries are longer than the York, with the Pamunkey draining the larger watershed. The Indians of 1607–09 referred to the entire river system as the Pamunkey, which Smith shows on his map as "Pamaunk Flu." The three-dimensional shapes of these river systems amplify their tides, which extend nearly 80 miles upstream from the Chesapeake. Walkerton on the Mattaponi, approximately 70 miles above the Bay, has the highest average vertical tide change in the entire Chesapeake—4 feet every day and 5 feet on the new and full moons.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE YORK, PAMUNKEY, AND MATTAPONI RIVERS

Captain John Smith saw this beautiful system of rivers for the first time in the winter of 1607–08, while a captive of Opechancanough, chief of the Yough-tanund as well as war chief and relative of the paramount chief Powhatan, who ruled all of Tsenacomoco (Tidewater Virginia). During his captivity, Smith traveled most of the upper watersheds of these rivers, absorbing as much of the landscape and the Powhatan language as he could. Smith met Powhatan at his headquarters of Werowocomoco, on today's Purtan Bay, approximately 12 miles downriver from the confluence of the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi.

A month after his release in early January of 1608, Smith led a diplomatic mission back to Werowocomoco by water for Captain Christopher Newport to meet Powhatan. They also briefly explored the lower Pamunkey. Smith returned twice that fall, again on diplomatic missions, and once in December to trade for corn. By then, relations between the colonists and the Powhatan people were strained.

In January and early February of 1609, Smith returned on a long trading trip up both the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi. This trip took place in a hard winter with the York iced up. Smith still traveled in the open *Discovery Barge*, sleeping under a tarp and walking ashore through muddy, icy water when he arrived at Werowocomoco on a low winter tide.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

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CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE YORK, PAMUNKEY, AND MATTAPONI RIVERS

Watermen's Museum • Yorktown, VA

Yorktown Visitor Center and Battlefield • Yorktown, VA

Gloucester Point Park • Gloucester Point, VA

York River State Park/Croaker Landing • Williamsburg, VA

Pamunkey Indian Reservation • King William, VA

Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers Water Trail • Walkerton, VA

PREVIOUS PAGE

Autumn leaves on the Mattaponi River
PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

EXPLORING THE WESTERN SHORE

The estuarine environment of York River State Park offers great freshwater and saltwater fishing. Rent non-motorized boats, enjoy guided canoe/kayak trips in the park, or launch motorized boats for use on the river.



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

This trip was successful in bringing back badly needed corn, but much of it was taken by force from Powhatan and Opechancanough. Deeply offended, Powhatan moved his headquarters far up into the swamp at the head of the Chickahominy River and then into the headwater swamps of the Pamunkey to avoid any further contact with the English.

EXPLORING THE YORK, PAMUNKEY, AND MATTAPONI RIVERS TODAY

The York is a pastoral river on both sides for much of its length. Most of the south bank is taken up by military installations, but just above them is the beautiful York River State Park, which offers a commanding view of the river and an interesting tidal creek (Taskinas) for paddlers.

The site of Powhatan's headquarters of Werowocomoco, on the north bank opposite the park, is now privately-owned and off-limits, but there is a major archeology project taking place there. This project has much to teach us about the native people of this area. Just upriver is a small tidal river, the Poropotank, which was the center of the Indian community by the same name.

The Pamunkey and the Mattaponi rivers have some farmland, a few houses, and several riverside towns, but both look much as they did when Captain John Smith visited them. Both have strong spawning populations of American shad and rockfish (striped bass), along with some of the largest stands of wild rice on the Eastern Seaboard. Bird life includes nesting warblers and ospreys in the spring and summer, large flocks of waterfowl in the fall and winter, and bald eagles and great blue herons year-round.

The Pamunkey and Mattaponi Indian reservations offer a look at how both tribes have adapted to English and American cultures over the past 400 years while retaining strong ties to the rivers. Both tribes are justly proud of their heritage. These two rivers are indeed fertile ground for exploring the history of Captain John Smith, the cultures of the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi tribes, and the natural history of the Chesapeake's rivers.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

John Smith's Adventures on the Pamaunk Flu is an interpretive water trail and auto tour guide produced by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. The water trail portion encompasses three rivers, from Yorktown on the York River, to Zoar State Forest on the Mattaponi, and Williams Landing on the Pamunkey.

Available online from the Virginia Tourism Corporation:

www.virginia.org/johnsmithtrail

Print copies may be purchased at a nominal fee by selecting "Contact Us" and searching the online store for "John Smith Trail Maps."



Good Vessels for Exploring the York River System



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The Pamunkey and the Mattaponi rivers are well suited for exploring in self-propelled vessels. Both rivers are deep and powerful, with strong currents, so it pays to study tide and current tables when planning a trip. The Mattaponi is particularly suited to travel by kayak and canoe because it has landings open to the public at regular intervals, though there are few camping places currently available.

If you're a novice or an intermediate paddler, keep to the shorter trip itineraries. There's plenty to explore, especially if you are interested in the American Indian perspective.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are great for day trips on the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi rivers. They'll also serve well in side creeks, provided they have push-poles aboard and are equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs.

If traveling these rivers under power, carefully tend your wake and stay in the channel if operating at speed. Broad marshes absorb wave energy reasonably well, but banks on the outsides of sharp turns do not. Speeds in the mid-teens are ideal, allowing you to see large sections of the rivers in a day and giving you a sense of how their parts fit together.

Keep a sharp eye out for bald eagles, ospreys, and great blue herons. Slow down or stop occasionally to investigate special places. Remember, there aren't many people to call if you get stuck, break down, or run out of fuel. It pays to be prepared and to keep your itineraries within your skills. Even short trips can reveal beautiful, fascinating places along these rivers.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising powerboats, such as trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls, can cruise the whole system, but there are as yet no facilities for tying up overnight, and anchoring in the Pamunkey or the Mattaponi is tricky because of the strong currents. There is a marina development underway in West Point. When it is complete, cruisers will be able to take day trips up the two big tributaries.

As is true on most of the Chesapeake's upper tidal rivers, there is plenty of depth, but skippers must pay close attention to the channels' twists and turns, especially since there are no channel markers in the Pamunkey or the Mattaponi. These rivers put a premium on a skipper's ability to integrate information from charts, GPS, and visual cues about where the channel is located as the rivers wind through their deep, looping meander bends.

There is a long history of river traffic here. Sailing ships carried lumber and grain from farm wharves on both rivers. Steamboats and lumber schooners ran the Mattaponi to Walkerton into the early 20th century, and until 1933 West Point was a strategic junction where a railroad line from Richmond met steamboats running to Baltimore and Norfolk.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

There are better rivers to explore under sail. The winds are fluky, and the currents can be treacherous. Narrow, winding rivers like the Pamunkey and the Mattaponi can make anyone in a modern cruising sailboat marvel at how the schooner and bugeye captains of old negotiated these waters.

“...broad as Thames, and navigable with a Boate threescore or fourscore miles, and with a Shippe fiftie: exceeding crooked, and manie low grounds and marishes, but inhabited with abundance of warlike and tall people.”

— Captain John Smith
describing the Pamunkey River

A section of the Pamunkey River passes along the Pamunkey Indian Reservation where people work the river as native ancestors have done for thousands of years.



PHOTO BY DEANNA BEACHAM

Trip Itineraries

TASKINAS CREEK, YORK RIVER STATE PARK TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



Rent a kayak or canoe from the park (It's easier than carrying your own up and down the hill.), or take a guided tour with a ranger. Taskinas Creek is a lovely little waterway that shows a great transition from tidal fresh marshes at its headwaters to salt marshes at its mouth. You'll be starting near the latter, using the new pier built for launching paddle craft into Taskinas Creek.

Paddle up to the junction of its two feeder creeks and take the left fork. It will lead you up into a lush marsh full of plants like tuckahoe (arrow arum), wild rice, and Walters millet, which the Virginia Indians harvested for food in Captain John Smith's time. If you have a light fishing rod with you (license required), see if there's a school of white perch in the hole at the junction or some croakers at the mouth.

YORK RIVER EXPLORATION TWO-WAY, 5–50 MILES



Launch your skiff or runabout at Gloucester Point, Tanyard Landing, Croaker Landing (York River State Park), or Glass Island Landing (West Point).

Explore as much or as little of the open York River as you like. In the reach above the Coleman Bridge (Gloucester Point to Yorktown), watch your depth finder to “see” the sharp channel edges and lumps that probably grew huge oyster reefs in Powhatan's time.

In a skiff or kayak, launch at Tanyard Landing and explore the Poropotank River, which is a larger version of Taskinas Creek. Note that Morris Bay in its lower reaches is quite shallow. At low tide, you will have to pick your way through to get out to the York's main stem.

PAMUNKEY RIVER EXPLORATION TWO-WAY, 2–20 MILES



Launch your skiff, runabout, canoe, or kayak at Lester Manor and explore the river in both directions. Note the large marshes just upstream, across from the Pamunkey Indian Reservation. In the spring, you may see members of this tribe tending their drift nets for American shad. Stay out of their way, but feel free to ask them about their fishing techniques and their shad hatchery.

Be sure to travel around West Island, cutting through Cumberland Thorofare at the base of the island and exploring Holts and Big creeks. The marshes up these creeks grow some of the largest stands of wild rice in the Chesapeake, acres and acres, as far as the eye can see. Note the prodigious depths (40–60 feet) in the river's channel on the outsides of the curves.

If you are on the Pamunkey in the fall, the colors of the trees' leaves will be spectacular, but be aware that there

are many duck blinds in the marshes. If the waterfowl hunting season is open, give them a wide berth, especially early and late in the day. Check with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (www.dgif/hunting/waterfowl) for dates.

This is an area you will want to visit by land, too. The museum at the Pamunkey Indian Reservation at King William features displays on the Pamunkey tribe's history, culture, and subsistence over 12,000 years.

MATTAPONI RIVER EXPLORATION ONE-WAY OR TWO WAY, 4–40 MILES



The abundance of landings on the Mattaponi (Zoar, Aylett, Walkerton, Melrose, Waterfence, and Glass Island) allows boaters the opportunity to plan both long and short trips. Google Earth's Ruler feature makes it easy to estimate distances (use the Path option to take lines around curves). The longest stretch is from Walkerton to Melrose Landing (about 15 miles). The transition from Zoar's deep forest through the tidal fresh marshes of Walkerton and Melrose to the brackish water off of Glass Island is striking. Try to plan your trip around the Mattaponi's powerful currents, whichever way they are flowing.

It's possible to set up shuttles to make these trips one-way, but you may find that two-way travel allows you to pick up details of the river on the return that you missed on the first leg. It's also worth visiting the river in all seasons, to see how the variations in temperatures affect the woods, marshes, and the river itself.

MATTAPONI TO PAMUNKEY EXPLORATION ONE-WAY, 30–70 MILES



The narrow neck of land that is King William County allows an interesting opportunity for a one-way trip of up to 70 miles by skiffs. This itinerary is well suited to two or more skiffs traveling together. Get an early start to set up a vehicle shuttle between Aylett or Walkerton (10 miles below Aylett) and Lester Manor. Plan your trip direction and itinerary as much as possible to take advantage of the currents. Figure on traveling at around 13 knots (15 mph) for most of the run, which should give you plenty of time to slow down and poke around in interesting parts of the two rivers.

GOOGLE EARTH COORDINATES

Pamunkey Indian Reservation, VA
37° 34' 30" N, 77° 00' 07" W



“... a little lesse in
breadth, yet extendeth
not neare so farre,
nor so well inhabited,
somewhat lower, and
a white sandie, and a
white clay soyle: here is
their best Terra Sigillata
[earthenware].”

— Captain John Smith
comparing the Mattaponi
to the Pamunkey River

PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

Pristine waters of the Mattaponi River

TRAILHEADS

ON THE YORK, PAMUNKEY, AND MATTAPONI RIVERS

YORK RIVER

Gloucester Point Boat Ramp

37° 14' 43" N, 76° 30' 14" W

www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)



Tanyard Landing

Poropotank River (York River)

37° 27' 17" N, 76° 40' 05" W

www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Note: this is a very shallow ramp and difficult for powerboats over 18 feet in length.



York River State Park (Visitor Center)

37° 24' 55" N, 76° 42' 48" W

757-566-3036, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/yor.html



York River State Park (Croaker Landing)

37° 25' 38" N, 76° 43' 31" W

757-566-3036, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/yor.shtml

Annual parking pass required.



Glass Island Landing, West Point, VA

37° 32' 26" N, 76° 47' 23" W

www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)



PAMUNKEY RIVER

LESTER MANOR BOAT LANDING

37° 35' 10" N, 76° 59' 04" W

www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)



MATTAPONI RIVER

Waterfence Landing

37° 35' 31" N, 76° 47' 55" W

www.dgif.virginia.org (Use the "search this site" feature.)



Melrose Landing

37° 38' 14" N, 76° 51' 18" W

www.dgif.virginia.org (Use the "search this site" feature.)



Walkerton Landing

37° 43' 29" N, 77° 01' 23" W

Privately owned landing, but open to public use with donation to the local rescue squad at lockbox beside ramp.



Aylett Boat Landing

37° 47' 08" N, 77° 06' 11" W

www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)



Zoar State Forest Canoe/Kayak Landing

37° 48' 31" N, 77° 07' 14" W

804-769-2962, www.dof.virginia.gov/stforest/index-zsf.htm



NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.



Take time to enjoy on-shore activities when you visit York River State Park and other sites along the Smith trail.

PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

York River

SECTION MAP WITH THE PAMUNKEY AND MATTAPONI RIVERS



LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

Aylett Boat Landing
Glass Island Landing
Gloucester Point Boat Ramp
Lester Manor Boat Landing
Melrose Landing
Tanyard Landing
Walkerton Landing
Waterfence Landing
York River S.P. (Visitor Center)
York River S.P. (Croaker Landing)
Zoar State Forest Landing

CLICK SOURCE ▼

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GOOGLE NOAA
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GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA
GOOGLE NOAA

“Of birds, the Eagle is the greatest devourer. Hawks there be of diverse sorts as our Falconers called them, Sparrow hawks. . .Gross hawks, Falcons and Ospreys. . . In winter there are great plenty of Swans, Cranes gray and white with black wings, Herons, Geese, Duck. . .Parrots, and Pigeons. Of all those sorts great abundance, and some other strange kinds to us unknown by name.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



Beauty, Wildlife, and History

THE RAPPAHANNOCK FROM STINGRAY POINT TO FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

The Rappahannock drains a large watershed beginning on the eastern slopes of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, home to several American Indian tribes before the establishment of the Jamestown colony. The Rappahannock and its major tributary, the Rapidan, flow through rolling Piedmont land and join a few miles west of Fredericksburg, the city that grew where the riverbed reaches sea level.

The Rappahannock's tidal section, some 80 miles long, flows past old port towns like Port Royal, Leedstown, Tappahannock, and Urbanna on its way to the Bay. This is one of the Chesapeake's most scenic rivers, with lovely creeks, tall sandstone bluffs, and broad marshes. It's an important spawning river for fish, such as striped bass (rockfish) and American shad, and valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl, great blue herons, ospreys, and bald eagles.

The section between Tappahannock and Fredericksburg is one of the most important roosting and nesting areas for bald eagles on the entire Atlantic coast of the United States. Significant lands along this part of the river are now protected by the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE RAPPAHANNOCK

Captain John Smith saw this beautiful river for the first time in the winter of 1607–08, while a captive of Opechancanough, war chief of the Powhatan. Smith tried to return to the Rappahannock on his way south on the first 1608 voyage. At the river's mouth, however, he had his famous encounter with a stingray and decided to return to Jamestown.

Smith and his crew returned to the mouth of the Rappahannock in mid-August on their way south after meeting the Susquehannock people at the head of the Bay. Despite the August heat, he and his crew sailed and rowed their *Discovery Barge* up to the river's head of navigation (the present-day site of Fredericksburg) and back down, surviving multiple adventures along the way. Somehow he found time to write enough notes to produce an extraordinarily accurate picture of the river in his 1612 map. That map attracted English colonists who settled along the banks of the Rappahannock 40 years later.



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Sections of the Rappahannock River are among the most important roosting and nesting areas for bald eagles in the eastern United States.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Broad marshes and abundant wildlife still characterize the Rappahannock River.

PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Rappahannock River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

Deltaville Maritime Museum & Holly Point Nature Park • Deltaville, VA

Steamboat Era Museum • Irvington, VA

James Mills Scottish Factor Store • Urbanna, VA

Belle Isle State Park • Lancaster, VA

Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge • Warsaw, VA

George Washington's Ferry Farm • Fredericksburg, VA

Rappahannock River Water Trail • Fredericksburg, VA

EXPLORING THE RAPPAHANNOCK TODAY

The Rappahannock flows through farm country, with sweeping pastoral views. Two sets of 100- to 150-foot-high sandstone bluffs—Fones Cliffs between Tappahannock and Leedstown, and Horsehead Bluffs, between Leedstown and Port Royal—serve as habitat for the river's bald eagles. For modern-day explorers following in Captain John Smith's wake, the Rappahannock offers plenty of unspoiled views, especially above Tappahannock, where the river narrows. This area offers some of the best scenery on the Chesapeake Bay.

The channel is quite deep; the currents are swift; and marina facilities are non-existent above Tappahannock. There are currently two places on the upper river where one or two self-sufficient cruising boats can tie up securely overnight. Clearance under the bridges at Tappahannock (Route 360) and Port Royal (Route 301) is 50 feet (for the tugboats that still push barges of fuel oil up to Fredericksburg and more barges of sand and gravel back down). The river's entire channel is well-marked.

Over the centuries, the tidal Rappahannock attracted farming families to till large tracts of land. The river served as the highway for local, regional, and even international shipping, with farm landings on the outsides of curves all the way up to Fredericksburg. During colonial times this was a major shipping artery for tobacco, iron ore, and grain. There were customs houses in Urbanna, Tappahannock, Port Royal, and Fredericksburg to serve as ports of entry for European goods.

From the 1850s until the 1930s, steamboats and sailing vessels, especially schooners, rams, pungies, and bugeyes, connected the river communities to Baltimore and Norfolk. Commercial fishing became another vital part of the region's economy. As roadways increased after World War II, water traffic declined, but farming and fishing continued. A growing number of summer visitors built cottages along the river, especially below Tappahannock.



PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

Wild geese near Fones Cliffs add to the beauty of one of the most scenic sections of the Chesapeake Bay.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The creeks of the Rappahannock are great for exploring in self-propelled vessels. The river itself is large and powerful, with regular tug/barge traffic and strong currents. If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, you'll be comfortable exploring the whole river, but exercise precautions to stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips in side creeks like Mount Landing and Goat Island. There's plenty to explore, especially if you are interested in the American Indian aspects of the trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are particularly well suited for day trips on the Rappahannock and its large tributaries, such as Cat Point Creek. They'll also serve well in side creeks, provided they're equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs. Remember, there aren't many people to call if you get stuck, break down, or run out of fuel.

Some of the main river's long, straight reaches, like the channel from Tappahannock up to Fones Cliffs, can get surprisingly choppy if the banks are funneling wind one way while the current is running the other. It pays to be prepared and to keep your itinerary within your skills. Even short trips here will reveal beautiful, fascinating places.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising powerboats, like trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls, are excellent choices for exploring the Rappahannock, especially if they are equipped with seaworthy dinghies and canoes or kayaks. Seven knots is an excellent cruising speed to see this river, with a low wake to protect sensitive shorelines.

For these vessels, the biggest issues are bridge clearance (50 feet at Port Royal and Tappahannock) and the skipper's ability to integrate information from charts, GPS, and visual cues about where the channel is located as the river winds through its deep meander bends. The river is wide enough for over-night anchoring upstream as far as Tappahannock. Above there, the channel is too narrow to allow a boat to swing safely with the changing currents and still avoid tug-and-barge traffic.

The docks at the Westmoreland Berry Farm and Hicks Landing offer secure and peaceful overnight tie-ups for self-sufficient boats. No hookups to water or electricity, nor fuel or waste pumpout are available.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

Modern sailors might marvel at how the schooner captains of old negotiated the winding Rappahannock, especially the river's upper reaches. The winds can change suddenly, and the currents can be treacherous. Sailing isn't recommended.



Creeks of the Rappahannock
beckon exploration by paddlers.
PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE RAPPAHANNOCK

Boaters traveling in vessels over 30 feet tend to know the lower Rappahannock better than the upper section. A sailing friend, speaking about the river above Urbanna, once remarked, “Well, the wind dies there. Why would anyone want to go further?” But for boaters interested in maritime history, wildlife, and beautiful scenery, there are lots of reasons to venture further.

There are plenty of marinas and services for cruising boats of all sorts in Deltaville, Irvington, Weems, and Urbanna. Above Urbanna, the only facility with slips for larger transient boats is Greenvale Creek Marina, on the Northern Neck side a few miles upstream.

Tappahannock has no dockage for deep-draft boats, but there is plenty of space and good holding ground to anchor on the channel shoulder opposite the town. June Parker Marina, just above the bridge on the south bank, allows dinghies to tie up for a small fee. The walk to the center of town is about a quarter-mile. Ask locals about good seafood restaurants in the area.

Fredericksburg is about 60 river miles above Tappahannock. The best place to tie up halfway between is the Westmoreland Berry Farm on the north bank. Call ahead to make sure there is room at the dock. It can accommodate one boat up to 60 feet

in length, and a second if properly rafted to the first. The Westmoreland Berry Farm offers pick-your-own fruits and vegetables in season and a snack bar.

The last upriver option for tie-up is the dock at Hicks Landing (no services), several miles above the Route 301 bridge at Port Royal. Just across the river (a short paddle or dinghy ride) is Goat Island, a combined tidal fresh marsh and wooded swamp that is home to plenty of wildlife, especially bald eagles.

Fredericksburg, at the head of navigation, is a charming city, although facilities for cruisers are currently limited. Explore up to the city dock, but don't try to spend the night there. There is a good launch ramp for canoes, kayaks, skiffs, and runabouts to explore this section of the Rappahannock. Be very careful, though—The currents are fast, and the channel is treacherous above the city dock.

Captain John Smith gave a detailed record of his travels on the Rappahannock in both his map and his writings. Today, the river offers a great array of “Captain John Smith views.” Although facilities are sparse for cruisers and you'll have to do some homework and exercise prudent seamanship as it applies to your chosen vessel, your efforts will reap rich rewards on the Rappahannock River.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

HICKS LANDING

804-742-5210

Dock frequently available for tie up, but call ahead.

JUNE PARKER MARINA

804-443-2131, www.co.essex.va.us/marina.htm
(shallow entrance channel)

WESTMORELAND BERRY FARM

804-224-9171, www.westmorelandberryfarm.com

Below Tappahannock there are many full-service marinas on both sides of the Rappahannock. An online search will lead to the best of them.

Belle Isle State Park is a great place to experience the flavor of the lower Rappahannock River—by land and water.

PHOTO BY STARKE JETT



Trip Itineraries

The Rappahannock River is divided into lower and upper sections for the purpose of this Boater's Guide. The area around Tappahannock shows on both maps where the sections overlap.

BELLE ISLE STATE PARK/MORATTICO TWO-WAY, 6 MILES



For trail explorers in small boats and for cruisers in larger boats with dinghies, Belle Isle State Park is a great place to experience the flavor of the lower Rappahannock River. It's a lovely 733-acre former family farm with extensive forests, fields, and marshes, plus 7½ miles of shoreline. Guided canoe trips, boat rentals, and a launch ramp are available at the park.

The park welcomes visitors arriving by water. Be aware that the Rappahannock is wide here, and Belle Isle is exposed to winds from the south and west. Plan your boating accordingly.

If you want to explore Belle Isle's shoreline by canoe, kayak, or skiff/runabout, consider visiting the village of Morattico, located roughly in the area where Captain John Smith and his crew stayed with the Moraughtacund people in August, 1608. Morattico has a long history as a commercial fishing town, to which a number of watermen and their families relocated from Tangier Island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

If you want to learn more of the history and culture of the area, be sure to visit the Morattico Waterfront Museum, housed in the old general store. Contact the museum for information on where to land and tie up.

A concrete ramp at Simonson Landing provides another access point for trailerable boats to visit Morattico.

CAT POINT CREEK TWO-WAY, 12–14 MILES



Cat Point Creek, on the north bank just west of Tappahannock, is the Rappahannock's most powerful tributary, with three holes deeper than 35 feet (including one under the center span of the Route 634 bridge at its mouth). The east bank is the Tayloe Tract of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

This creek is best explored by skiff or runabout. Launch at June Parker Marina or Hoskins Creek Landing. Be careful of the shallow bar between the Rappahannock's channel and the bridge. Once in the creek, be aware that the deep channel is rimmed by very shallow shoulders. Cat Point is arguably the best place on the river to see more than 10 eagles in the air at once. Like Mount Landing, it is lovely and full of life, including primitive-looking longnose garfish that roll on the surface in the channels in summer, gulping air.



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Have your camera ready. As in Smith's time, the Rappahannock is home to osprey and other wildlife.

RESOURCES & CONTACTS

BELLE ISLE STATE PARK
www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/bel.shtml

MORATTICO WATERFRONT MUSEUM
www.morattico.org
information@moratticowaterfrontmuseum.org

RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock


FRIENDS OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK
540-373-3448
www.riverfriends.org








TRAILHEADS ON THE LOWER RAPPAHANNOCK



LOWER RIVER





(TAPPAHANNOCK AND POINTS SOUTH)

Mount Landing Creek
Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge 
 37° 56' 48" N, 76° 53' 25" W
 804-333-1470, www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock
 Hutchinson Tract canoe/kayak landing built and maintained by the wildlife refuge.



June Parker Marina, Tappahannock, VA   
 37° 56' 04" N, 76° 51' 44" W
 804-443-2131, www.co.essex.va.us/marina.htm
 (launch fee; shallow entrance channel)

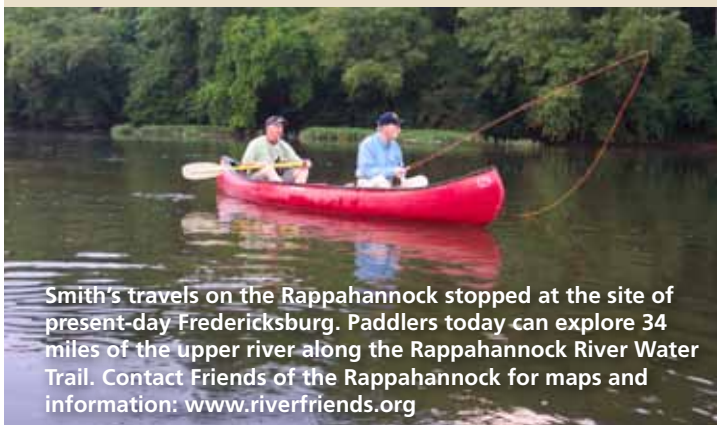
Hoskins Creek Landing, Tappahannock, VA  
 37° 55' 12" N, 76° 51' 25" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Totuskey Creek Landing, Warsaw, VA  
 37° 55' 25" N, 76° 43' 17" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Urbanna Town Marina, Urbanna, VA    
 37° 38' 14" N, 76° 34' 14" W
 410-758-5440
 (launch fee)

Simonson Landing 
 37° 48' 25" N, 76° 38' 01" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Belle Isle State Park, Lancaster, VA  
 37° 46' 26" N, 76° 35' 02" W
 804-462-5030, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/bel.shtml
 (launch fee)



Smith's travels on the Rappahannock stopped at the site of present-day Fredericksburg. Paddlers today can explore 34 miles of the upper river along the Rappahannock River Water Trail. Contact Friends of the Rappahannock for maps and information: www.riverfriends.org

NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.

MOUNT LANDING CREEK TWO-WAY, 2–6 MILES



The Hutchinson Tract in the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge provides a new canoe/kayak landing on Mount Landing Creek, just east of Tappahannock off Route 17. Mount Landing is representative of several powerful, deep creeks on both sides of the Rappahannock that drain large watersheds of rolling farm and forest land.

The creek's meandering channel, with those outside bends as deep as 20 feet, passes broad brackish and tidal fresh marshes that would have been valuable hunting/trapping grounds and sources for grains for the Rappahannock people in Smith's time. Look for herons, eagles, ospreys, and migratory waterfowl. Carry a light spinning rod (license required) to cast small spoons, spinners, and grub jigs for white perch, yellow perch, and largemouth bass.

FONES CLIFFS TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



Fones Cliffs is a spectacular four-mile-long series of sandstone bluffs between Tappahannock and the old port village of Leedstown. In the early 17th century, there were three Rappahannock towns on these cliffs, named Pisacack, Matchopeak, and Wecuppom.

The Rappahannock had previous negative experiences with European visitors. They had already attacked Smith and his crew earlier in the vicinity of Piscataway Creek, and they devised another attack here. They stationed archers at Wecuppom, where the river narrows. The arrows drove Smith to steer close to the opposite bank, where a strong Rappahannock force was positioned to attack. Smith and crew defended themselves with shields arranged along the gunwales of the *Discovery Barge*. The English kept rowing and the Indian arrows bounced off the shields, while the Rappahannock warriors shouted after them. Smith and his crew found a more pleasant reception several miles upriver at the chief's town of Pissaseck, which became Leedstown later that century. Today, a thoughtful boater can explore this 400-year-old battlefield and figure out within about 50 yards where the skirmish occurred.

Carter's Wharf, a public launch ramp maintained by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, lies at the upper end of Fones Cliffs, between Matchopeak and Wecuppom. This is the place to launch a canoe, kayak, skiff, or runabout to explore the battlefield, but do not attempt to land and climb the cliffs. They are both dangerous and private property. Also, be mindful of wind and current here.

Lower Rappahannock

SECTION MAP



TRAILHEADS

ON THE UPPER RAPPAHANNOCK

UPPER RIVER

(TAPPAHANNOCK AND POINTS NORTH)

Fredericksburg City Dock

38° 17' 47" N, 77° 27' 11" W



(located at the foot of Sophia Street)

Old Mill Park, Fredericksburg

38° 19' 01" N, 77° 28' 04" W



540-372-1086

www.fredericksburgva.gov/Departments/recreation

(Use the "search this site" feature.)

Hicks Landing

38° 11' 06" N, 77° 14' 23" W



804-742-5210

Pay launch fee at Betty's Inn General Store, Rt. 17 at Hicks Landing Road, Rappahannock Academy, VA 22538. Dock frequently available for tie-up, but phone ahead to reserve space.

Hopyard Landing

38° 14' 39" N, 77° 13' 33" W



www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Wilmot Wharf

38° 09' 18" N, 77° 04' 16" W



www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Westmoreland Berry Farm

38° 07' 56" N, 77° 02' 59" W



804-224-9171, www.westmorelandberryfarm.com

Overnight tie-up available, but call first.

Leedstown Campground

38° 06' 37" N, 77° 00' 18" W



804-224-7445

Pay launch fee in box by Leedstown Campground launch ramp.

Carters Wharf Landing

38° 04' 17" N, 76° 55' 26" W



www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Mount Landing Creek

Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge

37° 56' 48" N, 76° 53' 25" W



804-333-1470, www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock

Hutchinson Tract canoe/kayak landing built and maintained by the wildlife refuge.

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FONES CLIFFS/HORSEHEAD BLUFFS

TWO-WAY, 35 MILES



If you're traveling in a skiff or a runabout, launch at Wilmot Wharf, Leedstown Campground, or Carter's Wharf and travel the river between Horsehead Bluffs (the hairpin turn just above the Westmoreland Berry Farm) and Fones Cliffs. This makes a good day trip, traveling at 13–17 knots (15–20 mph) and stopping to admire spectacular views, take photographs, or watch eagles soar.

You may be able to tie up at the wharf at Westmoreland Berry Farm; call ahead to inquire. The owner of the farm has donated Horsehead Bluffs to The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org), which will protect this spectacular section of the river permanently as the Vorhees Nature Preserve). Note that Horsehead Bluffs on the Rappahannock are not the same as Horsehead Cliffs that lie along the Potomac River as spectacular features of Westmoreland State Park.

If you're on the Rappahannock in late October, try to end your day running downriver toward Fones Cliffs in late afternoon. The glowing colors of the riverside maple, sycamore, gum, and ash trees will be spectacular with the afternoon light behind you in the long reach from Laytons Landing down to Fones Cliffs, amplified by sunlight reflecting off the exposed patches of sandstone on the cliffs.

GOAT ISLAND

TWO-WAY, 2–3 MILES



Whether you're paddling or skiffing, launch at Hicks Landing and head a third of a mile upriver to the entrance to Goat Island. This large marsh and wooded swamp lies on the inside of a big meander bend, where the current naturally slows down, causing sediment to collect year after year, century after century. Admire the tidal plants that would have formed a breadbasket of grains for the local Indians who foraged, trapped, and hunted here. This is a great spot to look for bald eagles.

Upper Rappahannock

SECTION MAP



“And in divers places that abundance of fish lying so thick with their heads above the water as for want of nets (our barge driving amongst them) we attempted to catch them with a frying pan, but we found it a bad instrument to catch fish with. Neither better fish, more plenty, nor more variety for small fish had any of us ever seen in any place so swimming in the water than in the Bay of Chesapeack, but they are not to be caught with frying pans!”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH
ON THE POTOMAC IN JUNE 1608



“The Nation’s River”

EXPLORING THE POTOMAC FROM ITS MOUTH TO THE NATION’S CAPITAL

Captain John Smith and his crew steered their *Discovery Barge* “with the River Patawomeck” on June 16, 1608, on their way south from the Patapsco River. The weary crew had persuaded Smith to turn back to Jamestown without reaching the head of the Bay during that summer’s first voyage. By the time they reached the Potomac, however, the crew had apparently regained their courage and curiosity about the Chesapeake. They launched a four-week odyssey that Smith described in his accounts and detailed map.

The English sailed, rowed, and allowed themselves to be towed up the river, visiting multiple local Indian communities on the way. They took the *Discovery Barge* to the head of navigation at Little Falls, from which Smith led a small party overland to Great Falls, where they planted a cross. They also met a canoe of local Indians who fed them game.

According to Smith, he and his crew were repulsed by one tribe on the lower Potomac whose chief claimed that his orders came from Powhatan, although there is no other historical indication that Powhatan’s influence extended to the Potomac. During his explorations of the Potomac, Smith was aided in his visits to local tribes by Mosco, an Wighcocomoco Indian with a black beard (possibly a result of European ancestry).

Mosco, whom Smith had met earlier, acted as an ambassador for the English during their visits on both sides of the river. It was Mosco who persuaded the Patawomeck chief to provide Smith with guides who showed him a reputed silver mine on part of what is today the Quantico Marine Reservation near Washington, D.C. In his book *John Smith in the Chesapeake*, Edward W. Haile recounts a version of the Potomac exploration, using clues from Smith’s journals and his map. (See Resources on p. 1.)

Publication of Captain John Smith’s map began to open up the Chesapeake in general and the Potomac River in particular, beginning in 1634 with establishment of the Maryland colony at St. Mary’s City on the river of the same name. Twenty-one years later, upriver on the Virginia side, John Washington patented a plantation he named Wakefield, on the river shore beside a waterway he named Pope’s Creek. His great-grandson, George, was born there 77 years later. The site is now the George Washington Birthplace National Monument.

As the 17th century flowed into the 18th, a sophisticated plantation society developed on both sides of the river, in what became Southern Maryland and the Northern Neck of Virginia. Families like the Brents and Lancasters in Maryland and the Lees and Washingtons in Virginia put down deep roots along the river that endure today. Although both sides of the river have seen a surge of summer cottages and permanent homes of retirees over the past century, the lower reaches of the Potomac still have a lovely pastoral quality, especially beside tributaries such as the Yeocomico River and Nomini Creek on the Northern Neck, and the St. Mary’s and Wicomico rivers in Southern Maryland.



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Smith’s map opened the Potomac to English settlement, including the ancestral home of George Washington. Washington’s birthplace is now a national monument.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Point Lookout State Park, at the mouth of the Potomac River, is a popular fishing spot on the Smith trail.

PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

Learn more about the Potomac's rich natural and cultural resources:

POTOMAC HERITAGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, part of the National Trails System, is a developing network of locally managed trails, parks, and historic sites between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands. Blending outdoor recreation and educational opportunities, the trail network along the tidal Potomac includes the Mount Vernon Trail, various hiking and water trails, and bicycling routes in Southern Maryland and on Virginia's Northern Neck.

304-535-4014, www.nps.gov/pohe

POTOMAC RIVER WATER TRAIL

A water trail map and guide, covering the 115 miles of the lower Potomac River from Washington, D.C., to the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, is available from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/mdwatertrails/southern.asp



PHOTO BY CHRIS SPIELMANN

The 40-mile Occoquan Water Trail joins the Potomac River Water Trail, accessing seven regional parks, a county park, two state parks, two national wildlife refuges, and the town of Occoquan on its way.

EXPLORING THE POTOMAC RIVER TODAY

Establishment of the Nation's Capital at the upper reaches of the Potomac River has resulted in heavy development along both sides of the river, with commuter suburbs now extending south from the Washington area nearly to the Route 301 bridge. Fortunately, land preservation efforts on both sides of the Potomac have preserved some large tracts of forested lands, such as the Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, just above the mouth of the Occoquan River on the Virginia side, and Piscataway Park on the Maryland side, opposite George Washington's Mount Vernon estate. Juxtaposition of old-growth woods and the river produce excellent habitat for bald eagles.

For many years, Washington, D.C., and its suburbs sent excessive loads of sewage and stormwater pollution into the Potomac. The federal Clean Water Act of 1972 initiated a long restoration process that began to bear encouraging fruit in the 1980s, making the river safe again for water sports such as fishing and sailing. The Potomac has certainly rebounded significantly and is well worth exploring by boat. Population growth, however, continues to challenge restoration efforts. With more than four million people living along its tidal reaches and many more upstream in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, and western Maryland, we should never take the health of "the nation's river" for granted again.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The creeks and protected shores of the Potomac are well suited for exploring in self-propelled vessels such as canoes and kayaks. The river itself is large and powerful, with frequent heavy traffic and strong currents. Explore it only if you are an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker and you know the precautions you must exercise to stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips inside creeks like those at Point Lookout State Park and Dyke Marsh. There's plenty to explore there that will delight you, especially if you are interested in the American Indian stories related to Captain John Smith's national historic trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts make great vessels for day trips on the Potomac and its large tributaries, such as Nomini Creek and the Port Tobacco River. They'll also serve well in side creeks, provided they're equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs. This is a big river, and its main stem can kick up rough. If you're going to explore the Potomac, maintain your boat carefully, equip

it properly with safety and emergency gear, plan your itineraries, and leave a float plan with family or friends.

The Potomac offers plenty of marina facilities with service shops, tow boat companies, and emergency services. Even so, it pays to be prepared and to keep your itineraries within your skills. Even short trips can reveal beautiful, fascinating places here.



CRUISING POWERBOATS

Cruising powerboats, like trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls, are excellent choices for exploring the Potomac, especially if they're equipped with seaworthy dinghies, canoes, or kayaks (great combinations for places like Nomini and Mattawoman creeks).

Whether you cruise at 7 knots or 15, be sure to actively observe the river. Don't let the boat insulate you from the waters, shorelines, and wildlife. Even if your boat can cruise faster, don't. As one wise builder of cruising boats once said, "Over 15–16 knots, you miss too much."

If you navigate carefully, you'll find that the Potomac will offer a wide enough channel that you can cruise relatively close to shore, keeping you in close touch with what is there as well as out in the water. Watch your wake—keep it low to protect sensitive shorelines and avoid disturbing people in small boats and other watercraft.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

Among the Chesapeake's rivers, the Potomac is one of the few large enough to offer consistent winds and maneuvering room for cruising sailboats, as well as multiple secluded, but deep, secure anchorages. Also, below Alexandria, the only two bridges (Woodrow Wilson on the Capital Beltway and Morgantown on Route 301) are high enough to allow most cruising sailboats underneath.

This river is the next best part of the Chesapeake Bay system to explore under sail as Smith did (after the main Bay itself). Upstream of Colonial Beach, Virginia, and Cobb Island, Maryland, the Potomac River narrows considerably and turns through a tight east-west dogleg between Mathias Point and Potomac Creek (site of the Indian town of Patowomeck). There are more twists and turns between the mouth of the Occoquan River and Fort Washington. It's a beautiful river, and plenty of boats sail it today, but it will make a modern skipper appreciate the skills of those who have sailed the Potomac before.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Potomac River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE POTOMAC RIVER

Point Lookout State Park • Scotland, MD
Piney Point Lighthouse Museum and Park • Scotland, MD
Historic St. Mary's City • St. Mary's City, MD
St. Clement's Island – Potomac River Museum • Colton's Point, MD
Stratford Hall Plantation • Stratford, VA
Westmoreland State Park • Montross, VA
George Washington Birthplace National Monument • Colonial Beach, VA
Caledon Natural Area State Park • King George, VA
Smallwood State Park • Marbury, VA
Leesylvania State Park • Woodbridge, VA
Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge • Lorton, VA
Mason Neck State Park • Lorton, VA
Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge • Woodbridge, VA
Piscataway Park/National Colonial Farm • Fort Washington, MD
Fort Washington Park • Fort Washington, MD
Huntley Meadows Park • Alexandria, VA
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park • Hagerstown, MD
Great Falls Park • McLean, VA
Riverbend Park • Great Falls, VA
Potomac River Water Trail • VA and MD
Occoquan Water Trail • Fairfax Station, VA



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Boat launch facilities, boat rentals, and campsites are among the amenities available at Point Lookout State Park for Smith trail explorers.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

**POTOMAC RIVER
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
COMPLEX**
703-490-4979
www.fws.gov/masonneck/complex

POINT LOOKOUT STATE PARK
301-872-5688
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/pointlookout.asp

VIRGINIA OUTDOORS FOUNDATION
804-786-9603
www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org

Trip Itineraries

POINT LOOKOUT STATE PARK, MD ONE-WAY LOOP, 3–5 MILES



At the visitor center, pick up a copy of the park's water trail guide (modest fee). Launch your canoe or kayak there to take the Green Points Trail around Lake Conoy (1.7 miles) and continue into the protected Heron Alley Trail (3.4 miles) around Point Lookout Creek. If the weather is calm, sneak out through the jetties toward the western end of the trail into the broad embayment known as Cornfield Harbor for a look at the open Potomac River. Be careful—the river here at the mouth is 7 miles wide, measuring directly across to the Northern Neck shore, or 11 miles diagonally to Smith Point.

After sailing around Point Lookout, Smith and his crew may have anchored here for the night before beginning their exploration of the Potomac. They saw no local Indians, but the Yaocomaco who lived up the nearby St. Mary's River probably collected oysters and fish here, working from seasonal camps. In the late 17th century, this tribe sold their land to the Maryland Colony and moved across the Potomac to the pretty Virginia river that bears a variant of their name today (Yeocomico).

LITTLE WICOMICO RIVER, KOHLS ISLAND, VA TWO-WAY, 4 MILES



Check the regulations for visiting Kohls Island from the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Then launch your canoe, kayak, dinghy, or skiff at Smith Point Marina (modest fee) and head out the marina's channel to the island. Pay close attention to boat traffic in the Little Wicomico's channel as you cross it.

The outer beach of Kohls Island forms the Potomac side of Smith Point. The narrow western end of the island was actually the mouth of the Little Wicomico ("Little River" to locals) until August 1933, when a devastating but unnamed hurricane swept up the Chesapeake and closed it. Afterwards, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredged out a channel to the Bay and stabilized it with the massive rock jetties that hold the mouth in place today. What remains of the old river mouth is a slough that harbors crabs, minnows, and wildlife like great blue herons, ospreys, and river otters. Moor your boat in the area by the slough and explore the island's beach on foot (observing the Virginia Outdoors Foundation's regulations).

The Little Wicomico is named for the Indian town of Wighcocomoco, the home of Captain John Smith's bearded friend and guide, Mosco. Smith visited here at the end of his exploration of the Potomac and mapped the town in the upper reaches of Little River.

NOMINI CREEK, CURRIOMAN LANDING, VA TWO-WAY, 6–8 MILES



Nomini Creek is a lovely, pastoral waterway, with deep, protected coves for anchoring cruising boats and launching dinghies. Skiffs and paddle craft can launch at Currioman Landing and run east across Currioman Bay into the creek. Two bridges impede larger boats, but carefully-piloted smaller ones can make it all the way up to the Nomini Hall site, and even beyond, if equipped with push-poles.

For trailered skiffs, Westmoreland State Park is a reasonable trailhead for visiting Nomini Creek. Using it means making a 10-mile trip down the Potomac River shore to the creek's mouth. The scenery along the cliffs at the park and Stratford Hall is spectacular, but the Potomac is wide here, and a prudent skipper will want to factor weather conditions into the trip. The route into Nomini Creek from Currioman Landing is much less exposed.

This is a long watershed that flows from the relatively high land on the spine of the Northern Neck. Nomini's headwaters cradle those of Cat Point Creek, which flows to the Rappahannock opposite Tappahannock.

The mouth of Nomini Creek, called Onawmanient (with the accent on the next-to-last syllable) was the first place where Captain John Smith and his crew encountered native people on the Potomac. The initial skirmish gave way to a feast at the leader's house, up where the headwaters of the creek fork into two tributaries—a site later to become the center of the Nomini Hall plantation. Local Indian trails (and now winding county roads) kept the tribes and later the English in communication with one another.

PORT TOBACCO RIVER CHAPEL POINT STATE PARK, MD TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



This short but lovely river is a fine jumping-off place for exploring the mid-section of the Potomac River. If the weather is good, launch canoes and kayaks at Chapel Point State Park on the east side of the river; launch skiffs at Goose Bay Marina on the west side.

Captain John Smith mapped a leader's town at Potapaco, a location that was anglicized to Port Tobacco when colonists took over the area. The land between the Port Tobacco River and Nanjemoy Creek (which Smith also apparently visited) was patented by the Roman Catholic Society of Jesus (the Jesuit Order) only a few years after the founding of the Maryland colony. It stayed in Jesuit hands until 2008, when The Conservation Fund (www.conservationfund.org) brokered a purchase by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

At the lower end of the peninsula the Blossom Point Proving Grounds is property of the U.S. Army, which prohibits access to it. An ambitious and skillful kayaker or skiff captain might want to explore this part of the Potomac over toward Potomac and Aquia creeks, where the leader's town of Patowomeck was located—but only under good weather conditions.

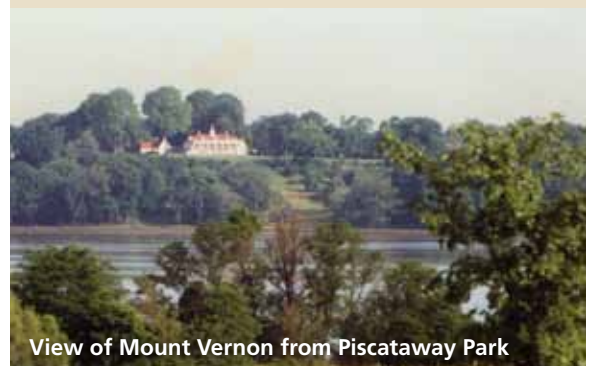
For Cruising Boats TRAVELING THE POTOMAC

In a cruising boat, the Potomac offers lovely rivers for exploring. Examples, starting at the river's mouth and working upstream, include the St. Mary's River (Maryland); the Little Wicomico, Coan, and Yeocomico rivers (Virginia); Breton and St. Clements bays (Maryland); Nomini Creek (Virginia); the Wicomico and Port Tobacco rivers (Maryland); Potomac and Aquia creeks and the Occoquan River (Virginia); Mattawoman and Piscataway creeks (Maryland).

The river's main stem is lovely as well, especially along the wooded banks from the Route 301 bridge up to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge near the Nation's Capital. Keep an eye out for bald eagles—several hundred call this part of the river home for part or all of the year.

Nearing the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, the Potomac becomes much less rural, with the huge new National Harbor complex of marina, conference centers, hotels, and entertainment venues in Smoot Cove on the Maryland side, just below the bridge. Even so, it is a stirring sight to watch the Nation's Capital rise above the river in the long reach from the mouth of Piscataway Creek to Alexandria. We can only imagine what Captain John Smith and his crewmen would think if they returned to sail their *Discovery Barge* up the Potomac today.

Below the Route 301 bridge between Morgantown, Maryland, and Dahlgren, Virginia, there are many full-service marinas on both sides of the Potomac. An online search will lead to the best of them.



View of Mount Vernon from Piscataway Park

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ACCOKEEK FOUNDATION



Paddlers can beach their canoes or kayaks beside the fishing pier while visiting Piscataway Park on the Potomac.

MATTAWOMAN CREEK, MD TWO-WAY, 4–8 MILES



Mattawoman Creek, site of the leader's town of Pamacocack, remains a true jewel today. Despite its proximity to the District of Columbia and the fast-growing suburbs that surround Washington, this long, powerful creek provides invaluable habitat for wildlife, birds—especially migratory tundra swans, scaup ducks, bald eagles, and ospreys—and fish—especially largemouth bass, yellow perch, and hickory shad. (Fishing license required).

The lower creek is accessible to powerboats up to 35 feet, though their skippers must pay close attention to its winding channel and shallow shoulders, which can be hard to see if the tide is up. There is no speed limit around Sweden Point Marina, but as the creek narrows, a 6-knot limit is imposed. Mattingly Park, on the other side of the creek in the town of Indian Head, is a great place to launch paddle craft and skiffs for slow exploration on the upper creek. (Pay launch fee at honor box at ramp.)

PISCATAWAY CREEK AND PARK, MD TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



Fort Washington Marina is a good jumping-off point for paddle craft and skiffs, with transient slips for larger vessels, marine services, and a restaurant. The creek is heavily silted-in—the result of several centuries of intensive tobacco agriculture, followed by suburban development.

This creek was home to the leader's town of the Piscataway at Moyaons on the opposite shore, and it is still a special place to the Piscataway Indians. The land is now part of Piscataway Park, a national park managed in cooperation with the Accokeek Foundation. Paddlers from Fort Washington Marina may beach their boats on the Potomac side of Piscataway Park and visit. Larger boats cannot dock there yet, but a new dock for power- and sailboats up to 25 feet is scheduled to open in 2012. Park officials advise paddlers to visit the park by land first to become familiar with the layout. Be sure to pull canoes/kayaks well up on the bank and tie them carefully to prevent boat wakes on the Potomac from disturbing them.



Fort Washington offers a great view across the Potomac to Washington and the Virginia shoreline. Now a National Park Service site, the fort once guarded the water approach from the Chesapeake Bay to the Nation's Capital.

LEESYLVANIA STATE PARK, VA TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



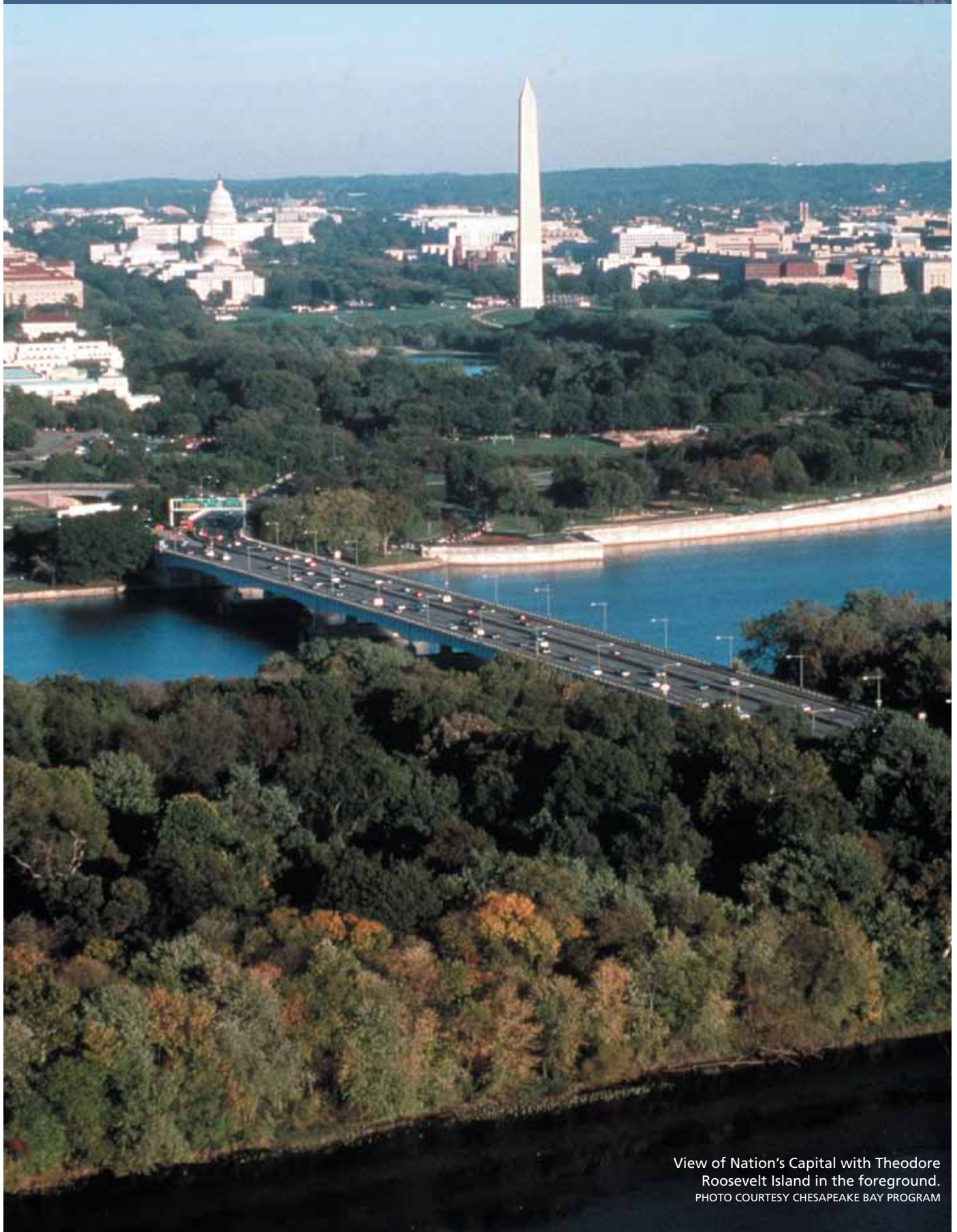
Leesylvania State Park lies on the Potomac shore just downstream of the Occoquan River, between Neabsco and Powells creeks. The park offers launch ramps on the river shore for trailerable boats and a canoe/kayak launch on Powells Creek. Although suburbs surround the park, it is an oasis of woods, trails, and interesting shorelines. These lands were the territory of the Tauxenent Indians. In the later centuries, Leesylvania was a home of the politically influential Lee family.

DYKE MARSH, VA TWO-WAY, 2 MILES



Dyke Marsh, another jewel, is tucked away along the George Washington Memorial Parkway just south of Alexandria. Managed by the National Park Service, it benefits greatly from an active group of volunteers, the Friends of Dyke Marsh. Enter the marsh's boardwalk and walking trail from the Belle Haven Marina, which also offers launch ramps for canoes, kayaks, and skiffs and a few transient slips for larger boats. (There is a modest ramp fee.)



This tidal freshwater marsh is typical of many others around the Chesapeake. It would have served as a place for local Indians to harvest edible plants and to trap both water birds and mammals, like muskrats.








View of Nation's Capital with Theodore Roosevelt Island in the foreground.
PHOTO COURTESY CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

TRAILHEADS ON THE POTOMAC





LOWER POTOMAC



Point Lookout State Park, MD  
38° 03' 31" N, 76° 19' 46" W
301-872-5688, www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/pointlookout.html


Kohls Island, VA 
Mouth of the Little Wicomico River at Smith Point
37° 53' 42" N, 76° 14' 39" W
(For access information and regulations, visit www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org)

Smith Point Marina, Reedville, VA    
37° 53' 00" N, 76° 15' 04" W
804-453-4077, www.smithpointmarina.com (ramp fee)


NOMINI CREEK, VA





Nomini Creek Mouth    
38° 08' 02" N, 76° 43' 20" W

Currioman Landing  
38° 09' 13" N, 76° 45' 41" W
(At end of Virginia Route 622/Currioman Road)
www.mrc.virginia.gov/vsrfdf/ (Use search function.)



Westmoreland State Park, Montross, VA 
38° 10' 27" N, 76° 52' 45" W
800-933-PARK
www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks (Use search function.)

PORT TOBACCO RIVER


Chapel Point State Park 
38° 28' 15" N, 77° 01' 54" W
301-743-7613, www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/chapelpoint.html
(canoe/kayak access only)





Goose Bay Marina    
38° 27' 12" N, 77° 03' 10" W
301-932-0885, www.goosebaymarina.com
(trailer boat access, ramp fee)

NANJEMOY CREEK, MD





Friendship Landing  
38° 27' 14" N, 77° 09' 02" W
www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/boatramps.asp (Search Charles County.)


MATTAWOMAN CREEK

Mattingly Park, Indian Head, MD  
38° 35' 25" N, 77° 09' 40" W
www.townofindianhead.org





Sweden Point Marina, Smallwood State Park    
38° 33' 27" N, 77° 11' 05" W
301-743-7613, www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/smallwood.html
(ramp fee)

PISCATAWAY CREEK, MD, AND UPPER POTOMAC





Fort Washington Marina, MD    
38° 42' 00" N, 77° 01' 27" W
301-292-7700,
www.coastal-properties.com/ftwashington.html
(ramp fee)



Piscataway Park, MD 
38° 41' 33" N, 77° 04' 10" W
Part of the National Park Service under National Capital Parks-East
301-763-4600, www.nps.gov/pisc
For additional information:
The Accokeek Foundation
301-283-2113, www.accokeek.org

POWELLS CREEK, VA

Leesylvania State Park, VA    
38° 35' 09" N, 77° 15' 20" W
703-730-8205, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/lee.shtml
(launch facilities for canoes, kayaks, and trailered boats; ramp fee)

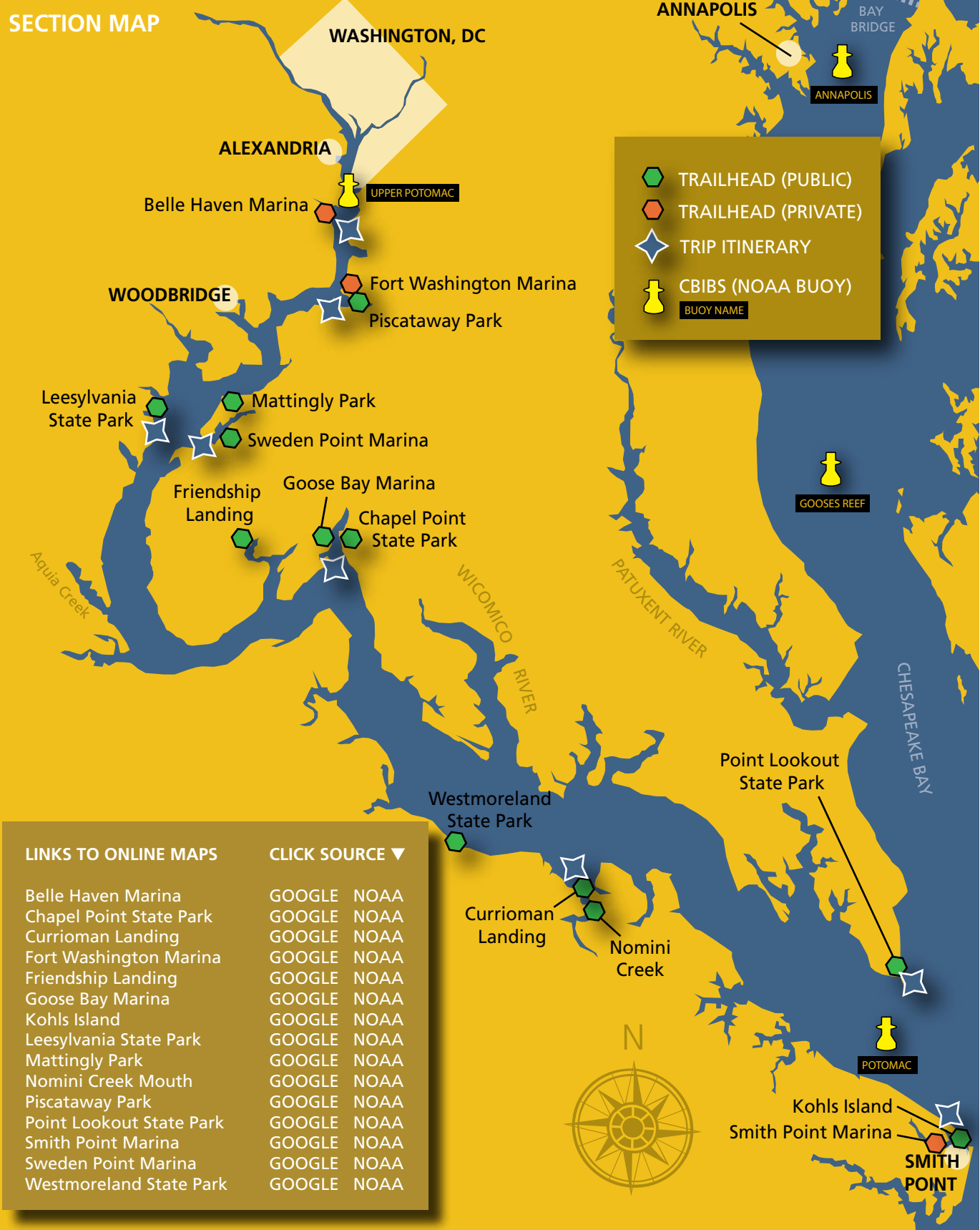
DYKE MARSH, VA, AND UPPER POTOMAC

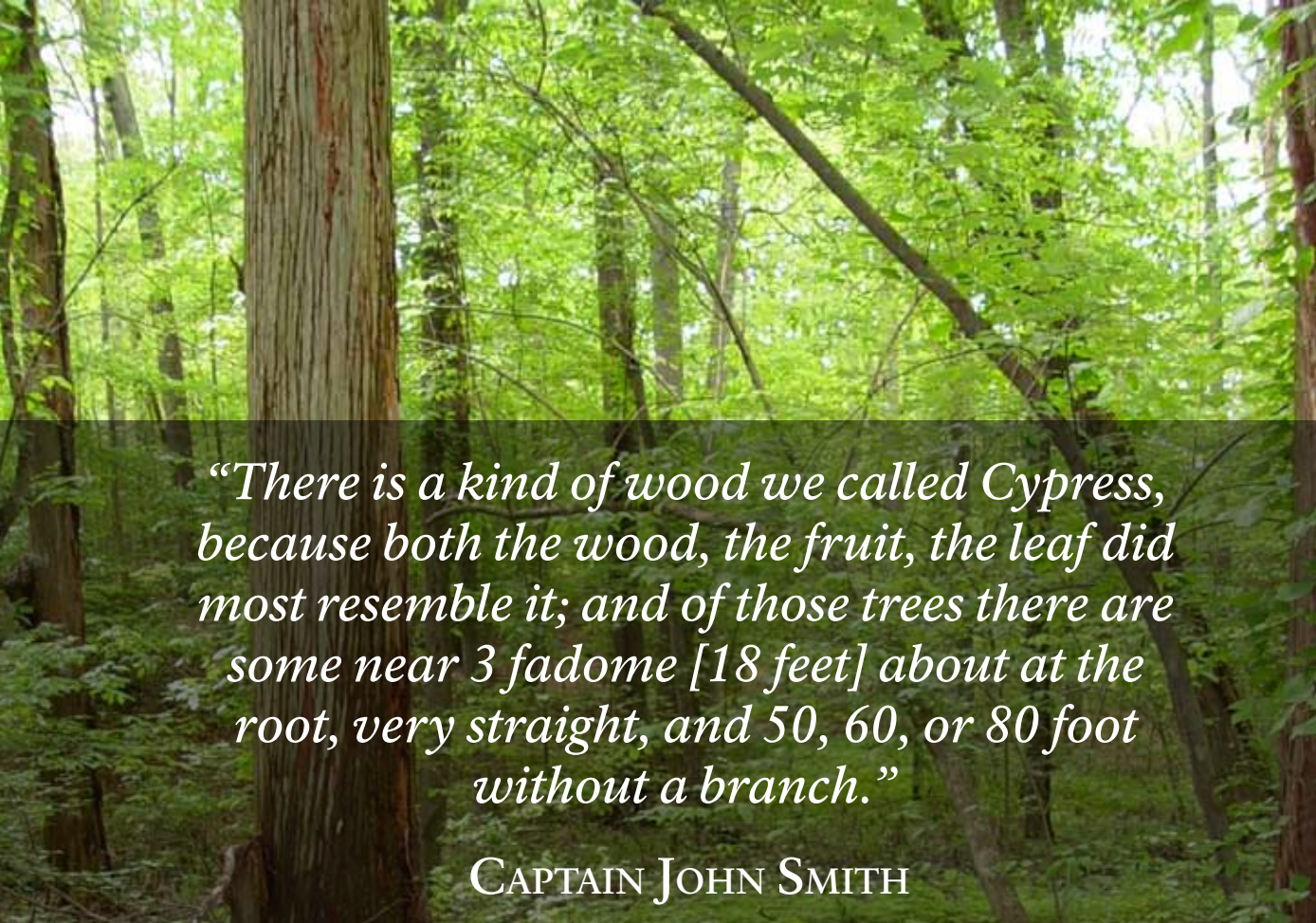
Belle Haven Marina    
38° 46' 40" N, 77° 02' 57" W
703-768-0018, www.saildc.com
(canoe, kayak, and trailered skiff access; ramp fee)

Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve  
Access from Belle Haven Marina
Part of the National Park Service under the George Washington Memorial Parkway
www.nps.gov/gwmp/dyke-marsh.htm
For additional information:
Friends of Dyke Marsh
www.fodm.org

NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.

SECTION MAP





“There is a kind of wood we called Cypress, because both the wood, the fruit, the leaf did most resemble it; and of those trees there are some near 3 fadome [18 feet] about at the root, very straight, and 50, 60, or 80 foot without a branch.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



Maryland's Longest River

EXPLORING THE PATUXENT FROM SOLOMONS TO JUG BAY

The Patuxent is the longest river wholly within the borders of Maryland. In early August 1608, after his encounters with the Massawomeck, Tockwogh, and Susquehannock Indians at the head of the Chesapeake, Captain John Smith and his crew turned their *Discovery Barge* south. Sailing along the eastern shore of what is now Maryland, they passed and mapped Kent Island, Sharps Island, Tilghman Island, the mouth of the Choptank, and James and Taylors islands. Then they crossed the Bay, “fell with the River Pawtuxunt,” noted that its mouth was six fathoms deep (36 feet, enough for a ship), and followed it north.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE PATUXENT

Smith hardly mentions the *Discovery Barge*'s trip up the Patuxent in his journals, but it's easy to figure out where he and his crew went from the details on his map. It shows the Indian leader's town at Pawtuxunt, at the head of today's Battle Creek. The town's people there probably took advantage of the area's cypress swamp that provided them with game, edible plants, and rot-resistant tree trunks for dugout canoes.

In his *True Relation*, Smith writes that the Pawtuxunt chief and his people treated him and his crew kindly. Based on how Smith described other similar encounters with tribes who treated him well, it's probable they threw a feast for the Englishmen and briefed them about what they would find upriver.

John Smith and his men spent only two-and-a-half days on the Patuxent before heading down to the Rappahannock, but they clearly got to know it well. Smith's map tells the story. It shows more than a dozen local Indian towns. It also provides uncanny detail of the Patuxent's meanders up to today's Lyons Creek, which forms the boundary between Calvert and Anne Arundel counties on the east side of the river, and to Mattaponi Creek on the west (Prince George's County) side just upstream.

EXPLORING THE PATUXENT TODAY

The uppermost towns on Smith's map are Mattapanient, on the high ground at the base of a large marsh, and Quactataugh on the opposite side, at the mouth of Lyons Creek. Mattapanient today is the Merkle Wildlife Management Area of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Upstream is Jug Bay, a broad and shallow body of water whose wooded shores are protected by Prince George's County's Patuxent River Park on the west side and Anne Arundel County's Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary on the east.

This part of the Patuxent is still affected by the river's tides, but it is far enough upstream to be freshwater in all but the severest droughts. Because of the work of the counties and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Patuxent still offers some excellent “John Smith views”



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Shorelines of scenic Jug Bay, near the headwaters of the Patuxent River, are protected by the Patuxent River Park and the Jug Bay Wetland Sanctuary.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Bald cypress trees, such as these growing in the Patuxent's Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Sanctuary, were favored by the Chesapeake's Indians for making canoes.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Patuxent River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE PATUXENT RIVER

Myrtle Point Park • California, MD

Solomons Visitor Information Center •
Solomons, MD

Calvert Marine Museum • Solomons, MD

Chesapeake Biological Laboratory •
Solomons, MD

Greenwell State Park • Hollywood, MD

Sotterley Plantation • Hollywood, MD

Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum •
St. Leonard, MD

Battle Creek Cypress Swamp •
Prince Frederick, MD

Kings Landing Park • Huntingtown, MD

Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary • Upper Marlboro, MD

Patuxent River Park, Jug Bay Natural Area •
Upper Marlboro, MD

of water, marsh, and forest. Access is excellent for Captain John Smith Chesapeake Trail explorers in a variety of watercraft. Even better, there are interesting things to see and do in all but the coldest weather. It's hard to believe that this well-preserved network of protected woodland and marsh is only 25 miles due east of Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., but that proximity makes it all the more valuable to people seeking natural areas in the busy Baltimore-Washington urban/suburban corridor.

Downriver, the Patuxent remains pastoral and largely agricultural, with a scattering of old villages like Nottingham and Lower Marlboro, most of them on the sites of local Indian villages that later became colonial American towns. The river was the corridor for a major running naval battle in the War of 1812. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the wharves of those river towns held depots and warehouses for the steamboat lines that ran to Baltimore. Since the boats stopped running in the 1930s, commercial traffic on the river has subsided. Now the river's proximity to Washington guarantees plenty of weekend boaters.

Below Benedict, the Patuxent widens considerably, with a number of large old estates along the banks, interspersed with suburban developments owned by people who commute either to Washington or to the huge Patuxent Naval Air Station at the river's mouth. On the north side of the river's mouth is the busy harbor of Solomons Island, which has made a century-long transition from seafood packing and boatbuilding to recreational boating services, charter fishing, and scientific research.

The tidal Patuxent is still a lovely, fascinating place, but it is a river under considerable pressure from heavy suburban development along its headwaters in the busy Baltimore-Washington corridor. It has plenty of champions, but restoring its health remains an ongoing challenge.



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

Canoes and kayaks are excellent for exploring the shorelines of Jug Bay, and for paddling up Mattaponi Creek, which is bordered on one side by the Patuxent River Park and on the other by the Merkle Wildlife Management Area. The marsh creeks downriver around the Clyde Watson Boat Ramp at Magruder's Ferry and Kings Landing are also worth exploring. Below Benedict, the river itself is large and powerful, with considerable traffic from recreational boats on weekends in warm weather.

If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, explore any portion or all of the area, but take precautions to stay safe. If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips like Mattaponi Creek, launching at the Patuxent River Park's Selby's Landing. It's a classic.

SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS



Outboard skiffs and runabouts of 14- to 20-foot length can explore both tidal creeks and the river's main stem. Skippers of these boats should carry push-poles to access marsh edges and make sure that they are equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs.

Above the town of Benedict, there aren't many people to call if you get stuck, break down, or run out of fuel. Below there, the main river's broad, open waters can get surprisingly choppy. It pays to be prepared, and to keep your itineraries within your skills. Even short trips can reveal beautiful, fascinating places along the Patuxent and its tidal creeks.

CRUISING POWERBOATS, TRAWLERS, AND SAILBOATS



Cruising sailboats and powerboats of all sorts routinely travel the lower Patuxent, especially if they are equipped with seaworthy dinghies and canoes or kayaks. St. Leonard Creek is an especially popular anchorage.

Unfortunately, the river offers no marina services above Benedict. Thus, cruisers are completely on their own. The river carries plenty of depth, but the unmarked channels wind and twist, with shallow shoulders that are all too easy to run aground on. They are also narrow, with strong currents. Choosing an overnight anchorage means making sure that there is enough water to swing as the tide and current change.

If, in view of these difficulties, spending the night up the river sounds too challenging, consider anchoring off Benedict one evening—or tying up there—then taking a day trip the next morning, traveling up the river and back. The upper Patuxent is a lovely, interesting river, and much of it looks similar to what Captain John Smith and his crew saw.



PHOTO BY CHRIS SPIELMANN

A 200-foot fishing pier and a canoe/kayak launch at King's Landing Park provide access to the middle Patuxent River.



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

The marshes of the Jug Bay Natural Area of Patuxent River Park include some of the largest stands of wild rice in Maryland.



Many places on the Patuxent still look much as they did to Captain John Smith.

Trip Itineraries

CANOES & KAYAKS ON MATTAPONI CREEK EASY TWO-WAY TRIP, ABOUT 3.5 MILES



Launch at the Patuxent River Park's Selby's Landing, at the lower end of Jug Bay. Paddle downriver a quarter-mile and turn right into Mattaponi Creek.

This meandering waterway looks very much as it would have during Captain John Smith's time. Thanks to the Patuxent River Park, which owns the right bank, and the Merkle Wildlife Management Area (Maryland DNR), which owns the left, the watershed of the creek is still almost all wooded, providing the kind of "great green filter" that made the Chesapeake's tidal waters so rich 400 years ago.

Paddling upstream, you'll find the first mile of the creek to be marshy on both sides. These are rich, diverse tidal fresh marshes. The high land that begins to appear on the Merkle side was the site of Mattapanient Town, a Patuxent Indian settlement. If you look at a map, you'll notice that it looks out over a very large marsh that lies on the inside of the river's curve opposite Lyons Creek, with commanding views both up- and downriver and landings on both the upstream and downstream edges. In fact, you will soon come to tiny White Oak Landing, now part of the management area, which has probably been in use by humans at least since the time of Smith's visit in 1608. All that is there today is the end of a dirt road, but it remains a good place to stop and stretch your legs.

From White Oak Landing up, Mattaponi Creek winds back and forth between marsh and woods, gradually getting shallower, with increasingly large beds of underwater grasses. You may not like the way they slow down your boat, but they provide habitat and food for fish and birds. You'll pass under the wooden bridge for the park's Critical Area Driving Tour, but otherwise the creek will look much as it must have when the residents of Mattapanient hunted, fished, and foraged on and around it.

On the return to the creek's mouth, if the weather is fit and you have enough energy and skill, consider paddling downstream a half-mile, around the first curve (opposite Lyons Creek, where Captain John Smith mapped the town of Quactataugh) and exploring up into one of the marsh guts that extend into the Merkle/Mattapanient marsh. Bank-side stands of seven-foot-tall cordgrass make you feel as though you're paddling up a tunnel. In the fall, you may surprise flocks of mallard and black ducks that rest and feed there—and they'll surprise you as they explode off the water right in front of your boat.

SKIFFIN' DOWN TO NOTTINGHAM AND BACK EASY TWO-WAY TRIP, ABOUT 12 MILES



If you're running a 14- to 20-foot skiff or runabout equipped with a push-pole, you can take much of the same trip up Mattaponi Creek, though you may not make it past White Oak Landing unless the tide is well up. Note: this is not a good place to be marooned by a falling tide.

The speed of a skiff is useful for getting a broader view of the river itself. Launch at either Jackson's Landing (by the Patuxent River Park Office) or at Selby's Landing. Traveling easy at 13–17 knots (15–20 mph), you can make it downriver to the 17th-century colonial tobacco port of Nottingham and back, with time out for a picnic on the water. Going downriver, you'll skirt the whole of the Merkle/Mattapanient marsh, go through Deep Turn (the lower landing for Mattapanient), and run down the next reach to the curve at Nottingham. If you've equipped your boat with a depth sounder, notice the depths at the landings, several of which are more than 40 feet. You'll also notice swirling eddies in those spots if the tide is running strongly.

The landing at Nottingham is private, so stay in your skiff. On the way back upriver, pay close attention to the marked channel going through Jug Bay. It'll give you 4–6 feet of depth, but the flats immediately outside it are shallow and soft—very difficult to pole away from if the wind is against you. Be courteous of anglers and boats as you enter the narrows by Jackson's Landing.

Captain John Smith mapped the Patuxent Indian town of Wasameus at the site of Nottingham when he visited. The location became an important colonial tobacco port in the mid-17th century, when mariners were still navigating the Patuxent using Captain John Smith's map. The town remained a tobacco port into the 19th century, although after the Civil War it became primarily a landing for the steamboats that connected communities along the Patuxent with Baltimore and other ports.

MAGRUDER'S FERRY AND KING'S LANDING TWO-WAY, 2–5 MILES



A dozen miles or so downstream of Mattaponi Creek is Magruder's Ferry, on the Prince George's County (west) side, part of the Patuxent River Park. Another mile on is Kings Landing Park on the Calvert County (east) side. As is typical on this river, both facilities are on the outsides of curves, with firm, sandy banks for launching. The Magruder's Ferry facility (named for longtime riverman and conservationist Clyde Watson) also has a concrete launch ramp for skiffs and runabouts.

In a powerboat, explore the river up and down as you might have out of Jackson's Landing (near the Patuxent River Park Office). In paddle craft or a skiff with a push-pole, spend some time exploring either Chew Creek, which winds back through a broad marsh on the Calvert County side opposite the Clyde Watson facility, or Cocktown Creek, a short distance upstream of Kings Landing.

The Patuxent is just beginning to turn brackish here, and you may find some crabs, as well as salt marsh plants along the river. Up in either creek you'll find a transition to freshwater marshes. Smith mapped the towns of Pocatamough and Tauskus here. Chew and Cocktown creeks feel very much as they might have 400 years ago. As you make your way up these creeks, you may wonder if a canoe of Pawtuxunt fishermen will appear around a corner.

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE PATUXENT (TWO-WAY, 5–20 MILES)

Launch a skiff or runabout either upriver at Hallowing Point, opposite Benedict, or at Solomons, under the Thomas Johnson Bridge. In a cruising boat, begin your exploration of the Patuxent in Solomons Harbor.

Besides St. Leonard Creek, the lower river offers plenty of additional creeks and coves for exploring, from Island Creek at Broomes Island and Hellen Creek downriver of St. Leonard—both on the Calvert County side (the latter where Captain Smith mapped the village of Opanient)—to Cuckold Creek on the St. Mary's County side. Just be aware that the lower Patuxent is broad, with plenty of fetch where a strong wind can build formidable waves.



No longer accessible by boat, Battle Creek Cypress Swamp merits a visit by land to appreciate the Patuxent watershed's diversity.

A SHORE-BASED BOARDWALK TOUR OF Battle Creek Cypress Swamp

The Pawtuxunt chief lived at the head of today's Battle Creek. It is difficult to get up there now in any boat, but it is possible to visit the Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Sanctuary (another Calvert County park) by land. This is a superb facility, with exhibits that describe bald cypress trees and the ways this swamp supplied the needs of the Pawtuxunt and the English settlers who followed them.

TRAILHEADS ON THE PATUXENT

Patuxent River Park

301-627-6074, www.pgparcs.com/places/parks/patuxent.html
(ramp fee)

Jackson's Landing and Park Office

38° 46' 23" N, 76° 42' 33" W



Selby's Landing

38° 45' 09" N, 76° 41' 59" W



Clyde Watson Boat Ramp, Magruder's Ferry

38° 38' 24" N, 76° 41' 39" W



King's Landing Park

38° 37' 32" N, 76° 40' 33" W



410-535-2661, www.calvertparks.org/Parks/KingsLanding/KLPhome.htm

Hallowing Point Boat Ramp

38° 30' 38" N, 76° 39' 53" W



www.dnr.maryland.gov/boating/boatramps.asp
(Search under Calvert County.)

Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum

38° 24' 00" N, 76° 30' 27" W



410-586-8501, www.jefpat.org

Solomons Island Boat Ramp

38° 19' 43" N, 76° 28' 04" W



www.dnr.maryland.gov/boating/boatramps.asp
(Search under Calvert County.)

NOTE: River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.

JEFFERSON PATTERSON PARK AND MUSEUM

TWO-WAY PADDLE, 2–10 MILES



Just north of the mouth of St. Leonard Creek, Captain Smith mapped the village of Quomocac, which lay on a broad, wooded plain next to the river. Today that land is part of the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, administered by the Maryland Historical Trust. The site houses the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory and offers a great riverside park experience to the public.

If you'd like to paddle the shores here, check in at the park's visitor center. The staff will advise you on where to unload your boat and park your car.

The river shore offers several nearby pocket beaches, set inside of living shoreline projects. Visit the park's website and click on "Environmental" to learn more about these projects, which were designed to protect the park's considerable archeological resources from storms and rising sea level. If you feel like paddling further after you visit the easternmost project, turn left to explore St. Leonard Creek. If the weather is too rough to paddle this stretch of open river, walk the two-mile trail loop along the shore that visits each of the living shoreline projects.



Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum has 2 ½ miles of shoreline where the Patuxent River meets St. Leonard Creek.

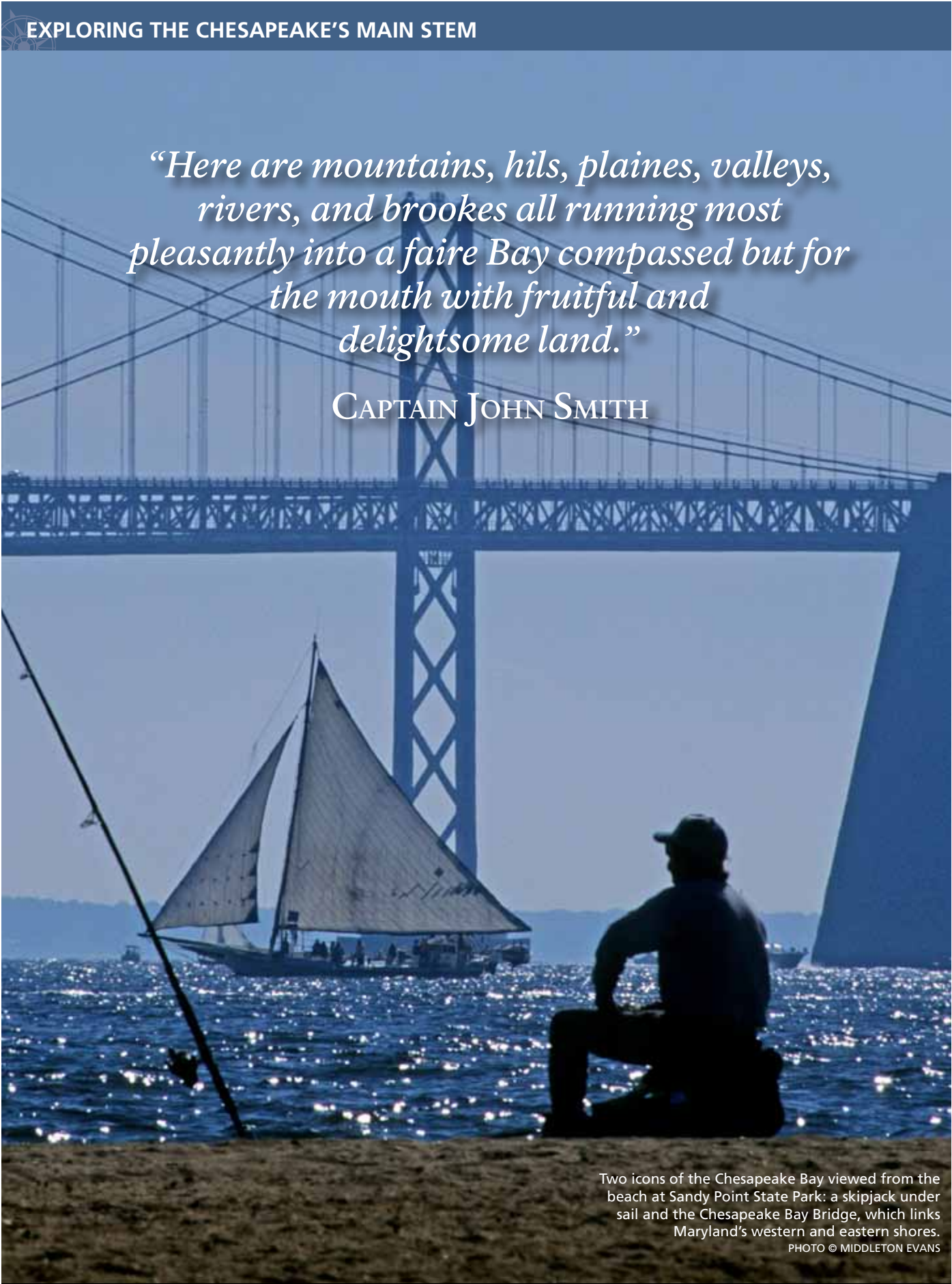
Patuxent River

SECTION MAP



*“Here are mountains, hills, plains, valleys,
rivers, and brookes all running most
pleasantly into a faire Bay compassed but for
the mouth with fruitful and
delightsome land.”*

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



Two icons of the Chesapeake Bay viewed from the beach at Sandy Point State Park: a skipjack under sail and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, which links Maryland's western and eastern shores.

PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

The Chesapeake's Main Stem

EXPLORING THE TIDAL SUSQUEHANNA

Focused on finding precious minerals, searching out the Northwest Passage, and meeting Indian tribes, Captain John Smith concentrated his explorations primarily on the Chesapeake's rivers, rather than its main stem. Even so, he traveled the Bay's main stem, and he appears to have taken seriously the task of mapping the big water accurately for the mariners who would follow.

It is ironic, but understandable, that when he reached the falls of the Susquehanna, Smith did not recognize the degree to which that river is the source of the Chesapeake. In fact, we know now that from Smith's Falls on the Susquehanna to Point Lookout at the mouth of the Potomac, more than 90 percent of the freshwater in the Chesapeake comes from the Susquehanna, having fallen as rain in central Pennsylvania and south-central New York. The Upper Bay is the tidal Susquehanna, just as surely as the tidal Potomac below Washington, D.C., and Arlington, Virginia, is still the Potomac.

Even before the English arrived with seaworthy sailing ships the Bay was a vital transportation route. Indians are known to have traveled the open waters of the main stem of the Bay in canoes. The Bay continues to be a major travel artery important for both commercial shipping and recreational cruising.

CAPTAIN SMITH ON THE CHESAPEAKE MAIN STEM

Captain John Smith and his *Discovery Barge* crews made several short trips into the open Chesapeake on the way to Powhatan's capital at Werowocomoco on the Pamunkey River (today's York), but the bulk of his travel on the open Bay came during the two trips to the head of the Bay in the summer of 1608. On these trips, he and his crews made some impressive passages, including 202 miles (by historian Edward Haile's reckoning) from Kecoughtan (Old Point Comfort, Hampton, Virginia) to Smith's Falls on the Susquehanna (just above Port Deposit, Maryland) on July 27 through July 30. Clearly they had learned how to catch favorable winds and tidal currents.

The crew of the Sultana Projects' shallow, which explored the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail in the summer of 2007, found they were able to make similar passages, thanks in part to having several highly-trained and experienced sailors among their number. Their experience simply reinforces our admiration for how quickly Smith and his men learned to wring the best performance out of their heavily-built work vessel with its early 17th-century sail plan.

EXPLORING THE CHESAPEAKE MAIN STEM TODAY

These parts of the Captain John Smith Trail are the province of cruising boats, both power and sail. To see this water as Smith did, travel at five to seven knots and learn everything you can about the Bay from reading current tables and looking closely at the miles of open water and the shorelines. You can also learn from instruments that Smith could never have imagined, like your GPS chart plotter and your depth sounder. One aspect of the electronic

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CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE MAIN STEM OF THE BAY

First Landing State Park • Virginia Beach, VA
Mathews Blueways Water Trail • Mathews, VA
Mathews County Visitor Information Center • Mathews, VA
Deltaville Maritime Museum and Holly Point Nature Park • Deltaville, VA
Reedville Fishermen's Museum • Reedville, VA
Point Lookout State Park • Scotland, MD
Calvert Cliffs State Park • Lusby, MD
Parkers Creek Preserve • Port Republic, MD
Flag Ponds Nature Park • Lusby, MD
Chesapeake Beach Railway Museum • Chesapeake Beach, MD
Galesville Heritage Museum • Galesville, MD
Captain Salem Avery House Museum • Shady Side, MD
Historic London Town and Gardens • Edgewater, MD
Smithsonian Environmental Research Center • Edgewater, MD
Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Information Center • Annapolis, MD
Historic Annapolis Gateway – City Dock • Annapolis, MD
Annapolis Maritime Museum • Annapolis, MD
Sandy Point State Park • Annapolis, MD
Terrapin Park • Stevensville, MD
Cross Island Trail • Stevensville, MD
Chesapeake Exploration Center • Chester, MD
North Point State Park • Sparrows Point, MD
Baltimore and Annapolis Trail Park and Jonas Green Park • Anne Arundel County, MD



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

The dramatic cliffs that are the namesake of Calvert Cliffs State Park attracted Captain Smith and his crew to the western shore of the Bay.

observations that will strike you is how clearly you'll be able to "see" the deep ancestral channel of the Susquehanna, carved when sea level was more than 300 feet lower during the last Ice Age (15,000–20,000 years ago).

If you'd like to study the details of how Captain John Smith made his passages, consult two veteran sailor/historians, Kent Mountford and Edward Wright Haile in *John Smith's Chesapeake Voyages, 1607–1609* and *John Smith in the Chesapeake*, respectively. They have reconstructed Smith's voyages, even down to studying moon phases, "hind-casting" the tide tables, and speculating on how the typical wind patterns of Chesapeake summers would have made those voyages possible. (See Resources, p. 1.)

Trip Itineraries

Today, cruising boaters have developed some classic passages of 40 to 60 miles each that offer the feel of Captain Smith's voyages. Though these voyages vary according to personal preferences, here is a representative sample:



HAMPTON, VA, TO DELTAVILLE, VA (46 MILES)

Hampton (37° 00' 50" N, 76° 20' 22" W) to
Deltaville (Fishing Bay, 37° 32' 17" N, 76° 20' 10" W)

DELTAVILLE, VA, TO SOLOMONS, MD (65 MILES)

Deltaville (Fishing Bay, 37° 32' 17" N, 76° 20' 10" W) to
Solomons (38° 19' 15" N, 76° 26' 53" W)

SOLOMONS, MD, TO ANNAPOLIS, MD (52 MILES)

Solomons (38° 19' 15" N, 76° 26' 53" W) to
Annapolis (38° 58' 05" N, 76° 27' 38" W)

ANNAPOLIS, MD, TO HAVRE DE GRACE, MD (51 MILES)

Annapolis (38° 58' 07" N, 76° 29' 54" W) to
Havre de Grace (39° 32' 16" N, 76° 05' 27" W)



PHOTO BY GUY STEPHENS

Calvert Marine Museum, located in Solomons where the Patuxent River meets the Chesapeake Bay, is a focal point for visitors coming by land or water.

Main Stem of the Bay

SECTION MAP

◆ TRIP ITINERARY

📌 CBIBS (NOAA BUOY)
BUOY NAME



EXPLORING THE CHESAPEAKE'S MAIN STEM



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Fishing at Sandy Point State Park near Annapolis, MD

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

POTOMAC ITINERARY

SMITH POINT MARINA, VA
37° 53' 00" N, 76° 15' 04" W
804-453-4077
www.smithpointmarina.com
(ramp fee)

POINT LOOKOUT STATE PARK, MD
38° 03' 31" N, 76° 19' 46" W
301-872-5688
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/pointlookout.html
(ramp fee)

ANNAPOLIS ITINERARY

SANDY POINT STATE PARK, MD
39° 00' 46" N, 76° 24' 04" W
410-974-2149
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/southern/sandypoint.html
(ramp fee)

MATAPEAKE STATE PARK, MD
38° 57' 16" N, 76° 21' 20" W
410-279-1619
www.dnr.maryland.gov/boating/queenannes.asp
(ramp fee)

PADDLING AND SKIFFING AROUND THE MOUTH OF THE POTOMAC



To get a sense of the expanse of the open Chesapeake at one of its widest points, launch at Smith Point Marina, Virginia, or Point Lookout State Park, Maryland. From either launch point, it is 11 miles to the other, and about 13 miles across to the line of low, marshy islands that extend from Tangier Island, Virginia, north to Smith Island, Maryland.

This is huge water for the Chesapeake, so pay close attention to the weather before you go and while on the water. If you have charts, GPS, and a depth sounder, watch them closely too. Just because the surface looks like a featureless mass of water doesn't mean that what's underwater is also uniform. In fact, you'll find that there are plenty of interesting features beneath you that will give you a sense of place in this open water.

PADDLING AND SKIFFING OUT OF ANNAPOLIS



To get a sense of this part of the open Chesapeake, launch at Sandy Point State Park, at the western end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge near Annapolis or at Matapeake State Park on Kent Island just south of the eastern end of the Bay Bridge.

Though perhaps less intimidating than the open Bay around the mouth of the Potomac, this is also big water that demands respect from trail explorers in small boats. The combination of wind and current directions is an important issue to watch. The Bay has long fetches from both north and south here. A strong northerly wind (typical after a cold front passes) bucking a flood current or a southerly wind (typical on summer afternoons) bucking a powerful ebb can create a nasty two- to three-foot chop with "sheep in the pasture" (whitecaps). They will give a small boat plenty of trouble. Think of what it would have felt like to live with these seas while making long passages in the open *Discovery Barge*.

As at the mouth of the Potomac, if you have charts, GPS, and a depth sounder, pay close attention to them. One especially interesting spot is the 80- to 90-foot deep trench under the eastern shore high span of the Bay Bridge. That is the channel of the ancestral Susquehanna, a remnant of the Ice Age. Captain John Smith and his crew sailed down it on their way south to the Rappahannock on August 10, 1608. There is no record that he sounded it with his leadline. If he had, he would have been amazed.



Annapolis, Maryland's historic state capital, is a popular port of call for boaters on western shore.
PHOTO COURTESY ANNAPOLIS CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



“We passed; many shallow creeks, but the first we found Navigable for a ship, we called Bolus [Patapsco], for that the clay in many places under the cliffs by the high water marke, did grow up in red and white knots as gum out of trees.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

The Deep Patapsco

EXPLORING BALTIMORE'S RIVER HARBOR

It takes more imagination to follow in Captain John Smith's wake on the Patapsco than anywhere else in the Chesapeake. Smith's map drew Maryland colonists to this great natural harbor in the late 17th century. It has been an important international port since the early 18th century, when Baltimore merchants first shipped barrels of flour to the West Indies. It was also the hub for regional shipping by sail and steam in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Over time, development has hardened most of the tidal shoreline of the Patapsco and its various tributaries. From the huge commercial wharves at the Dundalk Marine Terminal and the condominium/marina developments in the Inner Harbor to the suburban communities on Marley, Stony, and Rock creeks on the river's south shore and on Old Road Bay to the east, commercial and residential growth has impacted the shorelines. Even so, there is still plenty to explore in the Patapsco, including surprising natural pockets.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE PATAPSCO

Captain John Smith and his crew spent only two and a half days on the Patapsco River, but he managed to map it with amazing accuracy. On June 12, 1608, after a very long sail up the Bay from Cove Point, they anchored the *Discovery Barge* for the night off Bodkin Point, at the south side of the Patapsco's broad mouth.

They saw no one on land. Some historians believe this part of the western shore was a buffer area between the Indian tribes to the north and south and the Massawomeck who lived in Western Maryland. That tribe was said to have conducted raids on Upper Bay villages by paddling down the Potomac and up its Monocacy tributary, portaging their birchbark canoes to the Patapsco's headwaters, and paddling down to the Bay.

The next day, Smith explored the river up to modern-day Elkridge, where he planted a cross. As elsewhere, the shallow crew planted Maltese crosses to mark the extent of their explorations. Smith's 1612 map includes areas beyond the crosses, which he filled in based on information provided by Indians he met.

The crew found two kinds of clay in the Patapsco's banks, bole armoniac and terra sigillata, which the English believed had medicinal qualities. Smith named the river Bolus flu after the former. They spent the afternoon exploring and mapping the Gwynns Falls, the Jones Falls, and Old Road Bay, where they spent the night.

It had been four long, hard days since the explorers had left the Nanticoke River and the good food urged on them by its people. Now they were tired, hungry, and in several cases, sick, with most of their on-board food spoiled. They begged Smith to turn south to Jamestown to restock supplies. He responded with an inspiring speech that revived their spirits, but that evening and the next day, the weather shut in on them in Old Road Bay. After a day and a half of rain and wind endured in the open *Discovery Barge*, Smith relented, and they headed south on June 15.

“Regaine therefore your old spirits for returne I will not (if God please) till I have seene the Massawomeks, found Patawomeck, or the head of this water you conceit to be endless.”

— Captain John Smith, 1608

RESOURCES & CONTACTS

BALTIMORE VISITOR CENTER

410-659-7066

<http://baltimore.org/visitor-center>

NATIONAL AQUARIUM AT BALTIMORE

410-576-3800

www.aqua.org

MARYLAND SCIENCE CENTER

410-685-5225

www.mdsci.org

BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY

410-727-4808

www.thebmi.org

FORT MCHENRY NATIONAL MONUMENT AND HISTORIC SHRINE

410-962-4290

www.nps.gov/fomc



PREVIOUS PAGE

Skipjack on the Patapsco River near Baltimore.

PHOTO COURTESY VISIT BALTIMORE

EXPLORING THE PATAPSCO TODAY

With over four centuries of intensive human activity, the tidal Patapsco has grown choked with gravel, sand, and mud from tobacco farming, timber cutting, and all sorts of development. The watersheds of its Middle Branch and Inner Harbor tributaries, the Gwynns Falls River and the Jones Falls River, respectively, are almost entirely covered by rooftops, roadways, and parking lots. Today, the water in Baltimore's harbor and the Patapsco is cleaner than it was before the Clean Water Act of 1972 began regulating the discharges of sewage and industrial waste. Strong storms, however, still pour pollutants down the harbor's stormwater systems, and the sediments are still heavily polluted with organic toxins and heavy metals—legacies of the city's industrial past.

For the past 30 years, the City of Baltimore and the counties surrounding it (Baltimore and Anne Arundel) have recognized the value of this urban waterfront. Former industrial sites now hold condominium/office/marina communities with

plenty of 21st-century amenities, interspersed by world-class institutions like the National Aquarium at Baltimore, the Maryland Science Center, the Baltimore Museum of Industry, and the University of Maryland's Center of Marine Biotechnology. An attractive, well-landscaped, and lighted walkway around the Inner Harbor makes it easy for visiting boaters to tie up at one of the marinas and visit any of these attractions.

There is always something interesting going on in the Patapsco, from tugs docking big ships to events at Fort McHenry that commemorate the War of 1812 and Francis Scott Key's writing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." And there are a few pockets of natural shoreline, such as a wetland restoration project located just west of Fort McHenry, built over the past ten years by staff and volunteers from the National Aquarium. Explore further and you'll find a few natural spots like Tanyard Cove at the junction of Curtis and Marley creeks.



PHOTO ©MIDDLETON EVANS

Both land- and water-based visitors will find plenty to see and do in Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

Canoes and especially kayaks are popular vessels for exploring the Patapsco today. Some marinas allow launching them from floating docks in the Inner Harbor, as does the Canton Park launch ramp on Boston Street. Just be aware that these open waters can kick up rough. There is also a great deal of boat traffic, from water taxis and the Living Classrooms Foundation's 70-foot pungy schooner, *Lady Maryland*, to huge commercial ships which have a difficult time seeing kayaks.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are a bit more visible and seaworthy than paddle craft, but it still pays to exercise caution and give careful attention when operating anywhere in the Patapsco. They make good platforms for day trips around the Patapsco.



CRUISING POWERBOATS, TRAWLERS, AND SAILBOATS

Captain John Smith turned into the Patapsco and paid it close attention as the first Chesapeake upper western shore tributary "we found navigable for a ship." Today, it is made to order for exploring by cruising sail- and powerboats. Be aware of the traffic and read your charts carefully to avoid shallow areas in the upper sections of the river.



There are surprising pockets of nature along the Patapsco's developed waterfront, such as this wetlands restoration project at Fort McHenry where school groups study birds and plants.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Patapsco River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE PATAPSCO RIVER

Baltimore Visitor Center • Baltimore, MD
 Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine • Baltimore, MD
 Baltimore Museum of Industry • Baltimore, MD
Pride of Baltimore II, Baltimore, MD
 USS *Constellation* Museum, Baltimore, MD
 Lightship *Chesapeake* and 7-Foot Knoll Lighthouse • Baltimore, MD
 National Aquarium in Baltimore
 Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park • Baltimore, MD
 Fell's Point Historic District • Baltimore, MD
 Patapsco Valley State Park • Ellicott City, MD
 Jones Falls Trail • Baltimore, MD
 Gwynns Falls Trail and Greenway • Baltimore, MD



TRAILHEADS ON THE PATAPSCO RIVER



BALTIMORE MARINAS

Search "Baltimore Marinas" online for a list of nearly a dozen commercial facilities in various parts of the Harbor.

PUBLIC LAUNCH RAMPS

Visit the online Boating Access Guide of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Click on the Baltimore City and Baltimore County reference maps.
www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/boatramps.asp

The easiest ramp for the Inner Harbor is:
Canton Park
39° 16' 36" N, 76° 34' 21" W  
(located on Boston Street, no launch fee)

For the outer Patapsco:
Fort Armistead Park
39° 12' 31" N, 76° 31' 57" W  
(no launch fee)

NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

A trip to Baltimore is not complete without visiting Fort McHenry National Monument. Private vessels cannot dock there, but visitors can come by water taxi from the Inner Harbor.

Trip Itineraries

HARBOR CIRCUMNAVIGATION ONE-WAY, 50 MILES



You'll travel about 50 miles to circumnavigate the Patapsco and Baltimore's Harbor from any convenient starting point. It's probably not a great kayak project, and making the trip entirely under sail would be challenging, but it's an interesting full-day exploration in a cruising boat, a good-sized skiff, or a capable runabout. Take it at one time or cut it into shorter segments. These include:

- A complete circle of the Inner Harbor;
- A quick look into the Middle Branch (Gwynns Falls) and the Patapsco's silted-in main stem at the Hanover Street Bridge;
- A run out to the mouth of Curtis Bay, on the south side of the Inner Harbor;
- A round trip up into Curtis Creek, past the U.S. Coast Guard Yard to Tanyard Cove and back;
- A run out under the Key Bridge to Bodkin Point;
- A ride across the Patapsco into Old Road Bay on the north side and around the old steel mill at Sparrows Point;
- A careful run past the Dundalk Marine Terminal, with its giant cranes; and
- A good look at the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine on the way back into the Inner Harbor.

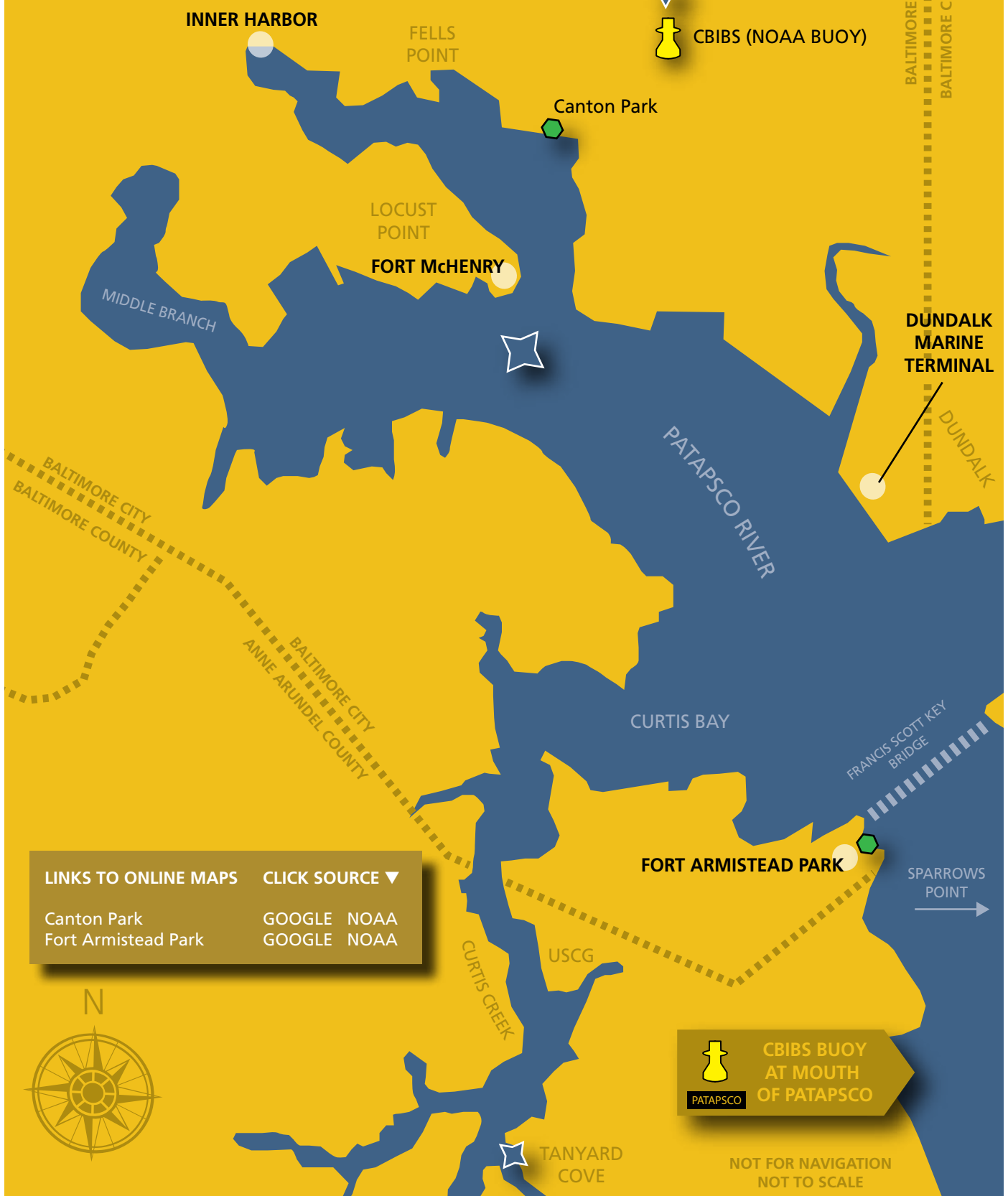
TANYARD COVE TWO-WAY, 11 MILES



Launch at Fort Armistead and run west, under the Key Bridge, into Curtis Bay and then up Curtis Creek to its junction with Marley Creek. The shoreline will be thoroughly industrial until you pass under the Interstate 695 (Baltimore Beltway) and railroad bridges and clear the Coast Guard Yard. Then, remarkably, you'll find a natural wooded shoreline on the east side of the creek, with lovely Tanyard Cove inviting you to enter. Though shallow, the cove offers three to four feet of water far enough in to allow anchoring for a picnic. Turn left coming out of Tanyard Cove, and Marley Creek offers a similar channel south for two miles. The west side is full of houses, but the east side remains wooded for most of its length.

Patapsco River

SECTION MAP





“We went not much further before we might see the bay to divide in two heads, and arriving there we found it divided in four. . . . The best [river of the four] cometh northwest from among the mountains, but though canoes may go a day’s journey or two up it, we could not get two miles up it with our boat for rocks.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



Finding the Source

EXPLORING THE HEAD OF THE BAY

Captain John Smith's exploration of the head of the Chesapeake was important for several reasons. He mapped it with his usual amazing accuracy, firmly establishing the link between the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. He reinforced that link by inviting the Susquehannock chiefs to come down to the tidal part of the river to parley on Garrett Island, cementing the tie between the people of the uplands that would become Pennsylvania and the people of the tidal waters in what would become Maryland. And when the rapids that he named Smith's Falls stopped the *Discovery Barge* from going further, he established once and for all that the fabled Northwest Passage to the Orient did not exist in the Chesapeake.

Ironically, Smith caused confusion that persists today by drawing a distinction between the Susquehanna and the Chesapeake. In reality, they are two sides of the same coin. The Chesapeake's main stem is actually the Susquehanna's tidal basin. Efforts to restore the health of the Chesapeake would be much easier today if more people in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia saw the river and the Bay as a whole.

Smith's map of the Chesapeake and its tributaries drew English settlers to the region as early as the late 1620s, when his friend William Claiborne established a Virginia Company trading post on Garrett Island (then named Palmer's Island). Forces from the Maryland colony shut down Claiborne's enterprise there ten years later, but members of that colony soon spread to the area, founding multiple settlements that endure today.

This part of the Chesapeake, fed by massive amounts of freshwater from the Susquehanna, forms a stark contrast with the Bay's saltier lower reaches. It is an ecosystem with features and a human culture all its own.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH AT THE HEAD OF THE BAY

After being frustrated by weather on their first trip up the Chesapeake in June and early July of 1608, Captain John Smith and crew set out from Jamestown a second time on July 24, making Kecoughtan at the mouth of the James River by evening. By this time, they had learned how to sail the *Discovery Barge* efficiently to take advantage of favorable wind and current.

Adverse wind kept them at Kecoughtan for a couple of days, but then they caught fair wind and current and made the 200 miles to the mouth of the Susquehanna in four days. That is very good time indeed for a 30-foot boat of any sort, much less a heavy working vessel of early 17th-century shape and sail plan. Smith may have received his captain's commission on a battlefield, but he had become a skillful small boat sailor too.

Smith and crew worked their way up the Susquehanna to the rapids that he named for himself (the only time he did so), then anchored the *Discovery Barge* for the night. The next morning, they tied their vessel off to the west (Harford County) bank and walked up to a knoll in what is now Susquehanna State Park to plant one of their brass crosses.



PHOTO BY CINDY ROSS

A slice of life on the Susquehanna Flats at Havre de Grace on the Upper Bay.

PREVIOUS PAGE

A pleasant anchorage at Turner's Creek Park and the Sassafras Natural Resource Management Area.

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Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel around the head of the Bay, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE HEAD OF THE BAY

Gunpowder Falls State Park • Baltimore, MD
 Marshy Point Park • Baltimore, MD
 Susquehanna State Park • Havre de Grace, MD
 Susquehanna Museum at Havre de Grace • Havre de Grace, MD
 Concord Point Lighthouse • Havre de Grace, MD
 Havre de Grace Maritime Museum • Havre de Grace, MD
 Havre de Grace Decoy Museum • Havre de Grace, MD
 Skipjack *Martha Lewis* • Havre de Grace, MD
 Elk Neck State Park • North East, MD
 Mount Harmon Plantation • Earleville, MD
 Sassafras Natural Resource Management Area and Turner's Creek Park • Kennedyville, MD
 Schooner *Sultana* • Chestertown, MD
 Geddes-Piper House • Chestertown, MD
 Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center • Grasonville, MD
 Chesapeake Exploration Center at Ferry Point Park • Chester, MD
 Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge • Rock Hall, MD
 Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway • Chester, MD

Afterwards, they traveled back down the river and around the Susquehanna Flats to the east, visiting Furnace Bay and carefully mapping both the North East River (where they planted another cross) and the west side of Elk Neck.

As they rounded Turkey Point, they met a party of Massawomeck who had just raided the chief's town of the Tockwogh on the Sassafras River. Each group regarded the other cautiously, as they met just above the mouth of the Sassafras. They talked (in sign) and traded. The English spent the night anchored there, expecting to talk more with the Massawomeck in the morning, but the Indians left silently during the night.

The next morning, the English sailed up the Sassafras to the Tockwogh village. The native people were at first suspicious of the English, but seeing Massawomeck shields and spears on the *Discovery Barge* (gained by trading), the Tockwogh apparently concluded that the English had fought and beaten their enemies. They hailed the English as heroes, and Smith cannily did not disabuse them of that notion.

Finding one Tockwogh who could speak the Virginia Algonquian language, Smith inquired about the Susquehannock (whom he had learned about from the Nanticoke chief). Smith asked the interpreter, along with another Tockwogh tribesman, to go up the river to ask the Susquehannock chiefs to come down and talk. The Tockwogh agreed to do so, noting that the task would take several days.

Smith and crew took the two Tockwogh across the Flats to the big river's mouth and set them ashore at the foot of the long path upriver, in what is today the Town of Perryville. While they made their way to the Susquehannock Town (at the site of today's Washington Boro, Pennsylvania), the English crossed the Flats again to explore the Elk River, planting a cross on "Peregryns Mount" (today's Iron Hill, in the town of Elkton).

Several days later, they met the Susquehannock in the river's mouth (probably on Garrett Island). After some conversation and trading, five of the Susquehannock chiefs asked to cross the Flats with Smith aboard the *Discovery Barge*. They did so, arriving for a feast at the Tockwogh village.

The next day, Smith and crew left the Tockwogh village, despite repeated entreaties to stay and protect the people from the Massawomeck. Smith promised to return the next year, though he never did.

The English sailed the *Discovery Barge* across the Bay into today's Bush River, thinking to follow the Massawomeck, and planted another cross. They explored the Gunpowder and Bird rivers, planted a cross on the Bird, crossed the mouth of Middle River, and then returned to the Eastern Shore, spending the night at the town of the Ozinie chief on Swan Creek by the present town of Rock Hall. The following day, they left the Upper Bay, sailing south to the mouth of the Patuxent River.

EXPLORING THE HEAD OF THE BAY TODAY

Today, the head of the Bay shows how successfully Captain John Smith's map attracted people from Europe. This region is rural bordering on suburban, the result of being almost equidistant from Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia. It is the broad-based home of the so-called "Pennsylvania Navy" of boaters who keep their vessels here, tow them to area launch ramps, or seek out soft landings for canoes and kayaks.

Over the centuries, agriculture and population growth have caused many of the region's harbors to silt in badly, and the Susquehanna in flood carries a great deal of sediment. However, the combination of rolling land and broad fresh waters still makes the region beautiful to explore. Garrett Island and Elk Neck State Park still look as they have for centuries, if you can ignore the two large bridges that cross the former. Multiple access points and facilities make exploration of the Upper Bay easy, and a growing number of on-shore facilities like the Havre de Grace Maritime Museum offer exhibits on Captain John Smith that complement the on-the-water experience.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The waters around the head of the Chesapeake are made to order for exploring in self-propelled vessels, but the Susquehanna River itself is large and powerful, with regular tug/barge traffic and strong currents. The Susquehanna Flats can kick up a short, steep chop on a north or south wind. If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, explore all or part of the area, but take appropriate precautions.

Note that the Elk River regularly carries ships up to 700 feet in length to the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. In that narrow channel, they have the right-of-way even over a kayak, and it is very difficult for their skippers to see small craft. Give them a wide berth.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips like a circumnavigation of Garrett Island or an exploration of the upper Sassafras River. There's plenty to explore.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts make great vessels for day trips at the head of the Bay. They'll also serve well in places like Furnace Bay and the Elk River, provided they are equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs.

Note that the Susquehanna Flats, seemingly a vast, amorphous bank of mud and sand, is actually cut with multiple channels, many of them referred to generically as "shad ditches." Some of these are 6- to 10-feet deep, but most of them have blind ends that can strand a skiff on a falling tide. The Flats demand respect. Until you learn your way across them, stick to the marked channels, especially in adverse weather with low tides.

The caution noted above for kayaks also applies for other small craft. The Elk River regularly carries ships up to 700 feet in length. Steer clear of them. In that narrow channel, they have the right-of-way even over a skiff, and it is very difficult for their skippers to see small craft.

The lower Susquehanna, North East, Elk, and Sassafras rivers offer plenty of marina facilities with service shops, tow boat companies, and emergency services. Even so, it pays to be prepared, and to keep your itineraries within your skills. Even short trips here can reveal beautiful, fascinating places.



Elk Neck State Park, located on a peninsula where the Elk River, North East River, and Chesapeake Bay meet, is a favorite destination for outdoor fun in the Upper Bay.



PHOTO BY CINDY ROSS

Kayaking under the Susquehanna River Bridge near Havre de Grace.



PHOTO BY SARAH ROGERS

Turner's Creek Park offers a public boat launch for access to fishing and boating recreation.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising powerboats like trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls are excellent choices for exploring the rivers at the head of the Chesapeake, especially if they are equipped with seaworthy dinghies and canoes or kayaks. Seven knots is an excellent cruising speed at which to see this water, with a low wake to protect sensitive shorelines.

For these vessels, the biggest issue is keeping to the marked channels, especially around the Susquehanna Flats. Also, because of commercial ship traffic, don't plan on dropping anchor for the night in the Elk River. Otherwise, there are plenty of anchorages, as well as marina facilities available for docking and services.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

Cruising sailors can explore this part of the Chesapeake too, but the narrow channels around the Susquehanna Flats will require much travel under power. The first railroad bridge in the river between Havre de Grace and Perryville has a vertical clearance of 52 feet, but there are excellent marina facilities below the bridge in Havre de Grace.

Trip Itineraries

GARRETT ISLAND CIRCUMNAVIGATION ONE-WAY, 3–8 MILES



If Jamestown is the southern anchor of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake Trail, Garrett Island can qualify as its northern anchor. The island is literally the transition point between the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. The rocky northern end of the island faces the gorge of the Susquehanna toward Pennsylvania, while the sandy southern end, with its thick beds of underwater grasses, looks out to the Susquehanna Flats and the Chesapeake's main stem stretching through Maryland and Virginia to the Atlantic.

Three-and-a-half miles upriver from here, the Susquehanna's bed reaches sea level, marking the head of navigation for the big river and its Bay. The rapids here (Smith's Falls) form the only point in the Chesapeake that Captain John Smith named for himself. These rapids squelched the English explorers' hope for the Northwest Passage to the Orient through the Chesapeake.

However, in meeting the Susquehannock chiefs at what was probably Garrett Island, Smith also firmly reinforced the link between the Chesapeake and the Susquehanna uplands that had developed over centuries between Indian tribes. Formerly a volcano, the island offered a 100-foot-high lookout point in all directions and protected shores for landing in all weather. Some scholars believe that the tribes in the region kept it a neutral meeting point for trading and negotiation.

Today, Garrett Island is administered as part of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and is managed by the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge. Only a small portion of it is currently open to the public for landing by boat, but future plans may include a hiking trail around the island.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

**EASTERN NECK NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE**
410-639-7056
www.fws.gov/northeast/easternneck

ELK NECK STATE PARK
410-287-5333
www.dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/central/elkneck.asp



In the meantime, circumnavigating the island in any vessel is an interesting trip. There is plenty of deep water for cruising boats (including a slot 80-feet deep on the Perryville side). Depending on the starting point, the trip covers three miles (from Perryville) to eight miles (from Lapidum). Paddlers should take careful note of barge traffic from the quarry on the Havre de Grace side, just below the Interstate 95 bridge.

TURKEY POINT EXPLORATION **TWO-WAY, 6–15 MILES**



From the Rogues' Harbor launch ramp in Elk Neck State Park, explore the shoreline of Turkey Point, following it around from the Elk River to the west side, which faces the Susquehanna Flats. Choose your distance based on your vessel of choice (paddle craft, skiff, runabout, or cruiser) and the weather conditions.

The views are spectacular from the water, as well as from the Turkey Point Lighthouse, which shines out over the upper Chesapeake from a 100-foot-high bluff in the park. Try to see Turkey Point as Smith and his crew saw it in 1608, and imagine their excitement on spying the Massawomeck tribesmen in their birch-bark canoes paddling out of the Sassafras River.

SUSQUEHANNA FLATS EXPLORATION **TWO-WAY, 7–15 MILES**



If the weather is fit for a kayak or skiff, venture out onto the Flats from Tydings Park in Havre de Grace, Perryville's Community Boat Ramp, or Rogues' Harbor. If possible, wear clothing that will allow you to get out of the boat if necessary in shallow water. In an out-board skiff, carry a push-pole.

The Susquehanna Flats form a fascinating delta where sediment coming down the big river settles as the channel widens out and the flow slows down. Historically, the Susquehanna Flats grew huge, thick beds of underwater grasses that formed prime fish habitat in warm weather and waterfowl habitat in winter. The flood from Hurricane Agnes in 1972 smothered most of the beds in sediment, but in recent years they have begun to recover handsomely.

SASSAFRAS RIVER EXPLORATION **TWO-WAY, 7–14 MILES**



From Turner's Creek Park, paddle or run your skiff up the Sassafras River, exploring its creeks and coves. Archeologists believe that the Tockwogh village Smith and his crew visited was on one of the next two peninsulas on the south (Kent County) bank. Both are now private property.

The Sassafras sees considerable powerboat traffic in warm weather. Be careful of boats and their wakes. There are several large marinas

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE HEAD OF THE BAY

Cruising boats, both power and sail, regularly make the trip up the Chesapeake into the Elk River, and through the C&D Canal to the Delaware Bay. If they linger, they tend to do so at the marinas on the Sassafras River.

There is, however, a lot more to see, but doing so requires careful attention to narrow channels, research about Smith's travels here, and some imagination. The latter involves thinking hard about what it was like sailing and rowing a 30-foot open boat when this area was wilderness. Consider, too, how the Tockwogh and Susquehannock lived—how they chose the sites for their villages; how they fished, farmed, foraged wild plants, and hunted; how they made and traded for their tools; and with whom they built alliances.

Take that point of view and travel around the Susquehanna Flats, learning what you can by visiting Havre de Grace, Port Deposit, Perryville, North East, and the Sassafras. If you go to Havre de Grace, plan to visit the museums there that are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Note that the Havre de Grace Maritime Museum features an exhibit focused specifically on Captain John Smith's explorations of the Upper Bay and the native population at the time.





PHOTO BY CINDY ROSS


Tydings Park in Havre de Grace is home port for the historic skipjack *Martha Lewis*.



TRAILHEADS





AT THE HEAD OF THE BAY

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER

Lapidum Landing, Susquehanna State Park
 Havre de Grace, MD  
 39° 35' 50" N, 76° 07' 39" W
 410-734-9035, www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/boatramps.asp
 (Search Harford County.) (ramp fee)

Jean Roberts Park, Havre de Grace, MD 
 39° 33' 11" N, 76° 05' 27" W
 (ramp fee)



Tidewater Marina, Havre de Grace, MD  
 39° 32' 46" N, 76° 05' 05" W
 410-939-0950, www.tidewatermarina.com


Tydings Park, City Yacht Basin    
 Havre de Grace, MD
 39° 32' 16" N, 76° 05' 26" W
 410-939-1525 or 410-939-1800 (ramp fee)


Port Deposit Launch Ramp  
 39° 35' 58" N, 76° 06' 38" W
 (ramp fee)

Perryville Community Boat Ramp  
 39° 34' 01" N, 76° 04' 44" W
 410-642-6066, www.perryvillemd.org/parks_recreation.html



NORTH EAST AND ELK RIVERS

Charlestown Boaters' Pier  
 39° 34' 17" N, 75° 58' 19" W
 (ramp fee)

Jackson Marine Sales 
 39° 33' 34" N, 75° 58' 08" W
 410-287-9400, www.jacksonmarinesales.com



Rouges' Harbor Boat Area, Elk Neck State Park 
 39° 27' 53" N, 75° 59' 09" W
 410-287-5333
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/central/elkneck.html
 (ramp fee)

SASSAFRAS RIVER

Turner Creek Public Landing  
 39° 21' 28" N, 75° 58' 59" W
 (ramp fee)

BUSH RIVER

Flying Point Park  
 39° 26' 25" N, 76° 15' 34" W
 (ramp fee)

Otter Point Creek Boat Ramp  
 39° 26' 45" N, 76° 15' 59" W
 (ramp fee)

NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.

in the twin villages of Georgetown (Kent County side) and Fredericktown (Cecil County side) at the Route 213 bridge, but the Sassafras is much more pastoral upstream. From the bridge, it is about 4½ miles up to the Route 301 bridge, near the site of the 17th-century village of Sassafras. This is an interesting trip because the upper reaches look somewhat the way they did in the 17th century. It also showcases how much soil erosion has occurred in the intervening years. Prepare for considerable shallow water.

BUSH RIVER EXPLORATION

TWO-WAY, 5–6 MILES







After leaving the Tockwogh, Captain John Smith directed the *Discovery Barge* to “a rocky river where the Massawomecks went up” and named it after his home town of Willoughby in England. He planted a cross on what is now Bush River Point, roughly near the eastern end of the Amtrak railroad bridge.

This river, today known as the Bush, was probably not the one the Massawomeck used, and it is no longer rocky. Some scholars think that the Massawomeck lived in Western Maryland, perhaps on the land that is today Garrett County. If so, they would have paddled down the Potomac and up its Monocacy River tributary (near today's city of Frederick). From there, they would have portaged their boats a relatively short distance to the headwaters of the Patapsco and followed it downriver to the Chesapeake.

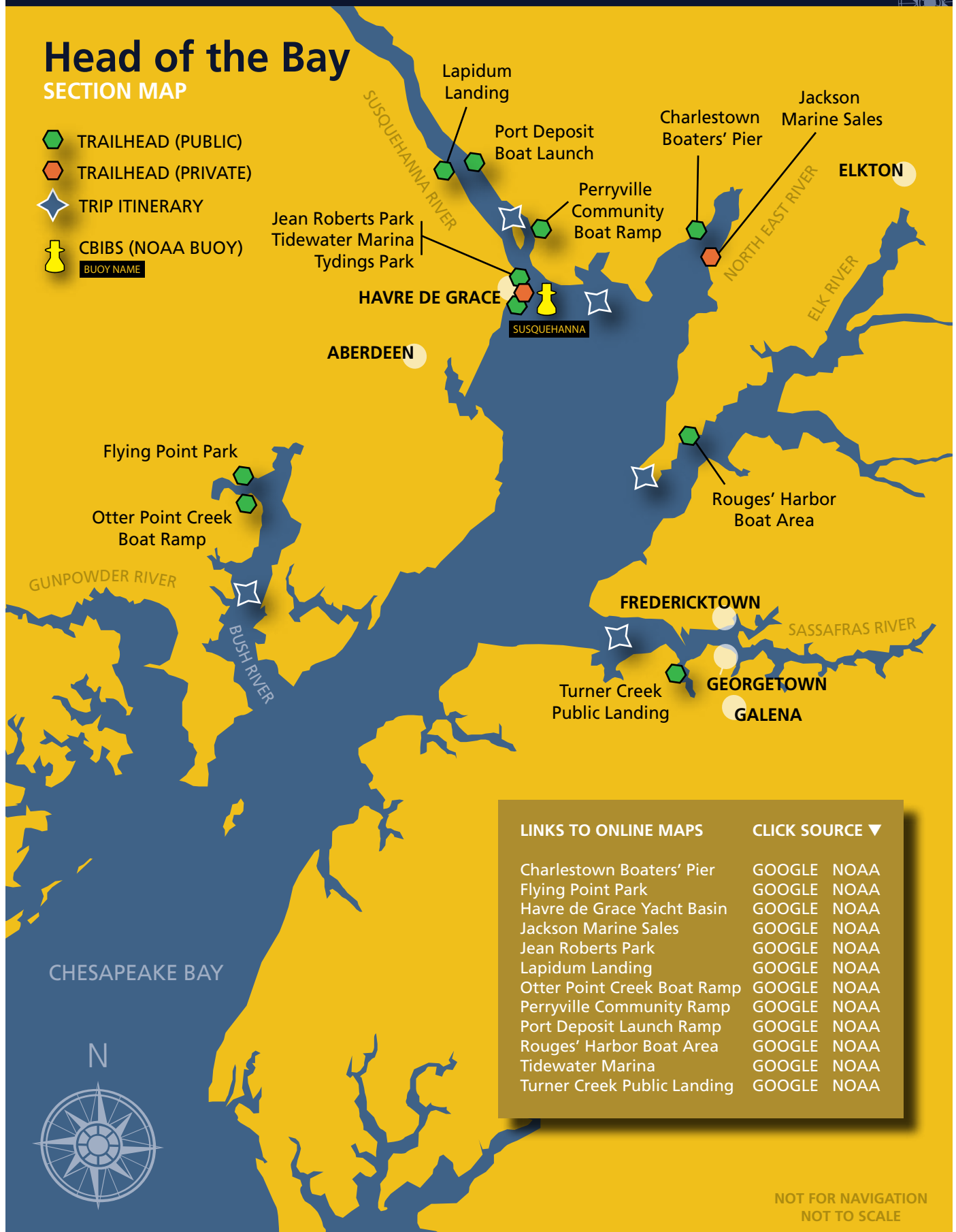
Meanwhile, the Bush has accumulated a great deal of sand, gravel, and mud over the past 400 years. Its headwaters are Winters Run and Bynums Run, streams that begin in the higher, rolling lands of Maryland's Piedmont around the town of Bel Air. They flow quickly to Otter Point Creek (a Bush River tributary) and the head of the Bush, respectively. Since the time when Smith visited, both Otter Point Creek and the Bush have developed marshy deltas built on soil from those headwaters. They are interesting places to visit in canoes and kayaks from Flying Point Park and the Otter Point Creek boat ramp, but they no longer reflect what Smith saw.

Head of the Bay

SECTION MAP

-  TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
-  TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
-  TRIP ITINERARY
-  CBIBS (NOAA BUOY)

BUOY NAME



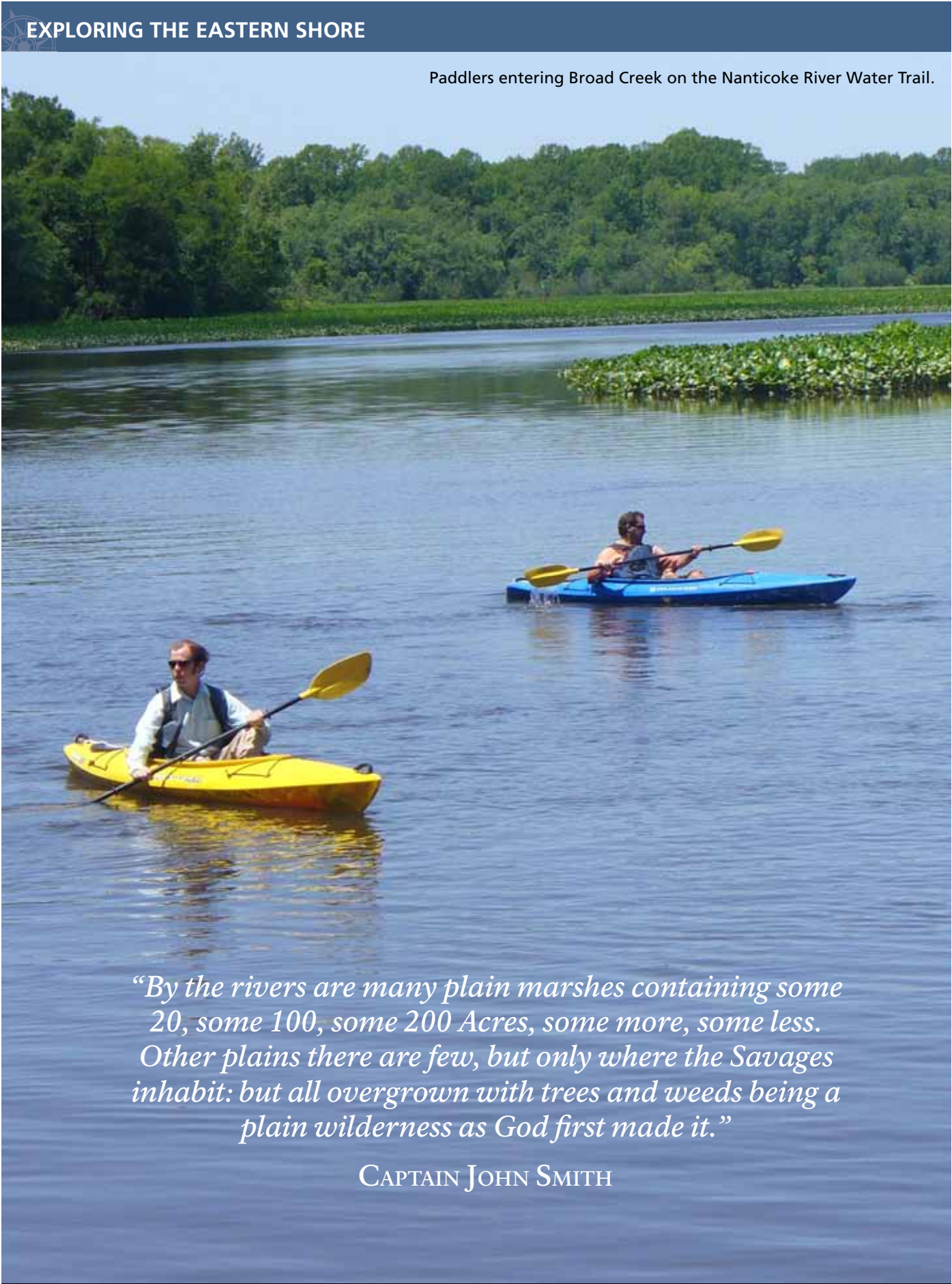
LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

CLICK SOURCE ▼

Charlestown Boaters' Pier	GOOGLE	NOAA
Flying Point Park	GOOGLE	NOAA
Havre de Grace Yacht Basin	GOOGLE	NOAA
Jackson Marine Sales	GOOGLE	NOAA
Jean Roberts Park	GOOGLE	NOAA
Lapidum Landing	GOOGLE	NOAA
Otter Point Creek Boat Ramp	GOOGLE	NOAA
Perryville Community Ramp	GOOGLE	NOAA
Port Deposit Launch Ramp	GOOGLE	NOAA
Rouges' Harbor Boat Area	GOOGLE	NOAA
Tidewater Marina	GOOGLE	NOAA
Turner Creek Public Landing	GOOGLE	NOAA

NOT FOR NAVIGATION
NOT TO SCALE

Paddlers entering Broad Creek on the Nanticoke River Water Trail.

A photograph of two people kayaking on a calm river. In the foreground, a man in a white shirt and sunglasses is in a yellow kayak, holding a yellow paddle. In the background, another person is in a blue kayak, also holding a yellow paddle. The river is surrounded by lush green trees and vegetation. A small patch of green plants is visible in the water to the right.

“By the rivers are many plain marshes containing some 20, some 100, some 200 Acres, some more, some less. Other plains there are few, but only where the Savages inhabit: but all overgrown with trees and weeds being a plain wilderness as God first made it.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Woods, Marshes, and Live Waters

EXPLORING THE NANTICOKE FROM ITS MOUTH TO SEAFORD, DELAWARE

The Nanticoke River may be the most scenic waterway on the Delmarva Peninsula. Its deep channels, shallow flats, wooded banks, broad marshes, and forested wetlands have supported fish, birds, and mammals for centuries. Today, it's a magnet for bird-watchers, anglers, history buffs, and boaters in all sorts of watercraft, from canoes and kayaks to large cruising trawlers.

SMITH ON THE NANTICOKE

The Nanticoke is arguably the least-known of the Chesapeake Bay's tributaries, but it may be the loveliest. The navigable portion of the river winds 41 miles from Hooper Strait at the head of Tangier Sound to Seaford, Delaware. The historic river town of Vienna, Maryland, lies 24 miles above the mouth, or approximately halfway up.

On June 8 and 9, 1608, Captain John Smith and his crew rowed and sailed their *Discovery Barge* up the Nanticoke. The Indians who lived at the present-day site of Wetipquin, on the east side of the river, shot arrows at Smith and his crew. Those living on the west bank befriended them after the crew left small gifts. This must have been a welcome relief to Smith and his men who had been living on short rations of food and water through two serious thunder squalls and clouds of biting insects on their way up Tangier Sound.

Smith's account of the rest of his time on the Nanticoke is sketchy, but his 1612 map of the river is still correct today. The uncanny accuracy of his map combined with his writings allow us to deduce much of how he spent his short time exploring the Nanticoke. Smith listed and identified several towns, wrote that the people were willing to ferry him wherever he wished to go, and showed how far he explored by the placement of the cross on his map. So it seems reasonable that he was taken as far as the cross by Indian paddlers, who could move a canoe much faster than the shallop could be rowed.

It appears Smith was taken to the chief's town of Kuskarawaok on Chicone Creek, just above the present-day site of Vienna. He was told about a powerful tribe to the north called Massawomeck, a probable source of the high quality furs the Nanticoke had. Such information would have made Smith wonder if the Massawomeck lived on the Northwest Passage. He had been instructed by the Virginia Company to find this elusive route to the Pacific Ocean.

Smith clearly traveled as far up the main stem of the Nanticoke as the mouth of Broad Creek. His map shows that he left a brass cross on the west bank just below the creek's mouth. He also noted a deep channel in the river. The next morning, he and his crew turned the *Discovery Barge* west, heading through Hooper Strait, then turning north to look for the Massawomeck.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Nanticoke River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE NANTICOKE RIVER

Emperor's Landing at Vienna Waterfront Park • Vienna, MD

Seaford Museum • Seaford, DE

Nanticoke River Water Trail



PHOTO © MICHAEL C. WOOTTON

The Nanticoke is perhaps the least-known but one of the loveliest Chesapeake tributaries.



The town of Vienna, MD, welcomes visiting boaters to its newly developed waterfront, Emperor's Landing.

EXPLORING THE NANTICOKE RIVER TODAY

Today, the deep channel in the Nanticoke is well-marked for tugboats that push barges of fuel oil, sand, and gravel up to Seaford, where DuPont established its first nylon plant in the late 1930s. The plant is now shuttered.

Much of the Nanticoke looks the way it did when Smith visited. Broad salt and brackish marshes flank looping meander bends on the lower river. Careful skippers will quickly learn the pattern—deep water on the outsides of the bends, mud shoals on the inside. Vienna marks a transition to tidal fresh marshes full of wild rice, backed by wooded swamps. The town is on the outside of a curve, where depths run to 40 feet deep. Vienna was an important 18th- and 19th-century center for commerce and shipbuilding.

For visiting boaters, Vienna has built an attractive marina that offers a free launch ramp for paddle craft and trailered boats, slips on floating docks for boats up to 25 feet, and a bulkhead for self-sufficient vessels up to 60 feet.

Vienna is working its way through an enlightened, community-based master plan that has established a greenbelt around its limits to allow it to grow within while retaining its historic small-town flavor. Food and conveniences are within walking distance of the docks, with more to come.

Above Vienna's bridge (50-foot clearance) on the north side, Chicone Creek winds back into marsh and swamp. These wetlands provided the Nanticoke people with edible plants, muskrats, and waterfowl. It's no surprise they established the town of Kuskarawaok up this creek. It's a good one to explore by canoe, kayak, dinghy, or outboard skiff.

On the Nanticoke's main stem, look for bald eagles which frequent this part of the river. You'll come to the village of Riverton on the south bank. Just beyond it to the north is Marshyhope Creek, a lovely and navigable small river. It has been suggested that Captain Smith and his Nanticoke guides turned into the Marshyhope, but most scholars think they continued on the main stem of the river. Another mile up on the south bank is Sharptown, a town with a long history of building schooners up to 200 feet, as well as rigging boats built at yards on other parts of the Nanticoke River. Cherry Beach Park offers a launch ramp and a picnic pavilion in a pretty setting.

Another couple of miles bring the transition to Delaware and the mouth of Broad Creek. There you'll find Phillips Landing, a small park managed by the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC). It offers picnic tables under tall pines, a launch ramp, restrooms, and a plaque commemorating the brass cross Captain Smith placed across the river in 1608.

Broad Creek runs eight miles up to Laurel. Halfway up is the old village of Bethel, where a boatyard built 36 Chesapeake rams (90- to 120-foot three-masted lumber schooners) between 1870 and 1923. The only surviving Bethel ram is *Victory Chimes*, a member of the Maine windjammer fleet.

Delaware and Maryland have developed water trail maps for the Nanticoke. The Seaford Historical Society is also a great resource. Its museum is located in the old post office building on High Street in Seaford, an easy walk from the Nanticoke River Marina. The marina is located across the river in Blades. For paddle craft, the closest landing is the Seaford Riverwalk.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

NANTICOKE RIVER WATER TRAIL
www.paddlethenanticoke.com

**DELAWARE DIVISION OF
 PARKS AND RECREATION**
 302-739-9220
 For online information and maps:
<http://shop.delaware.gov>

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL
 RESOURCES**
 For free map brochure "The Nanticoke
 River: Explorers Welcome" featuring
 public access and historical information
 about John Smith's travels on the
 Nanticoke River in 1608:
[www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/
 mdwatertrails](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/mdwatertrails) (Navigate to Lower Eastern
 Shore section.)

SUGGESTED READING
*The Nanticoke: Portrait of a
 Chesapeake River*
 by David W. Harp and Tom Horton
 The Johns Hopkins University Press (2008)



Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The creeks of the Nanticoke are well suited for exploring in self-propelled vessels. The river itself is large and powerful, with regular tug/barge traffic and strong currents. If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, explore all or part of the area you want, but exercise caution and stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips in side creeks like Wetipquin and Chicone. There's plenty to explore that will delight you, especially if you are interested in the Nanticoke Indian features of the trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are good choices for day trips on the Nanticoke and its large tributaries, Marshyhope and Broad creeks. They'll also serve well in side creeks like Chicone and the upper portion of Broad Creek, provided they're equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs. Remember there aren't many people to call if you get stuck, break down, or run out of fuel. Some of the main river's long, straight reaches can get surprisingly choppy if the banks are funneling wind one way while the current is running the other. It pays to be prepared, and to keep your itinerary within your skills. Even short trips can reveal beautiful, fascinating places along the Nanticoke.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising power boats like trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls are also excellent choices for exploring this river, especially if they are equipped with seaworthy dinghies and canoes or kayaks. Seven knots is an ideal speed at which to see this river, with a low wake to protect sensitive shorelines.

For these vessels, the biggest issues are bridge clearance (50 feet at Vienna) and the skipper's ability to integrate information from charts, GPS, and visual cues about where the channel is located as the river winds through its deep, looping meander bends. The bulkheads along Vienna's waterfront make a great stop for overnight tie-ups on the way to Seaford. The Nanticoke River Marina at Blades, Delaware, is fully equipped with fuel, electric, water, and waste pumpout facilities, but the town of Vienna is not. Boats staying at Vienna must be self-sufficient.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

A narrow, winding river like the Nanticoke can make anyone in a modern cruising sailboat marvel at how the schooner and bugeye captains of old negotiated these waters. Winds are fluky, and the currents can be treacherous. There are better rivers to explore under sail.

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE NANTICOKE

Skiffs and runabouts can cover much of the water described here for paddle craft. Just remember to be cautious when on the Nanticoke River. All of the trailheads listed are appropriate places to launch, though the Wetipquin ramp is tight for anything more than 18 feet. Chicone Creek, Big Creek, Marshyhope Creek, and Broad Creek are all great waterways to explore in these vessels.

Except for tie-ups at Vienna, Maryland, and Seaford, Delaware, the main channel is the place to stay in a cruising powerboat. Don't let your boat insulate you from the river, though. At seven knots there is a lot to see, including bald eagles. If you carry a dinghy or kayak, be sure to use it to explore the Nanticoke and its lovely creeks.



Nanticoke shorelines offer diverse views of wooded banks, broad marshes, and forested wetlands.

TRAILHEADS ON THE NANTICOKE

Cedar Hill Park, Bivalve, MD

38° 18' 38" N, 75° 53' 21" W

410-548-4900

www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search
Wicomico County) (ramp fee)



Wetipquin Creek Landing, MD

38° 19' 36" N, 75° 52' 01" W

www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search
Wetipquin Creek)



Emperor's Landing, Vienna, MD

38° 29' 00" N, 75° 49' 23" W

410-376-3442, www.viennamd.org/commun.html
(Call ahead for information on docking.)



Cherry Beach Park/Launch Ramp, Sharptown, MD

38° 32' 44" N, 75° 43' 03" W

www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search for
Cherry Creek)



Phillips Landing

38° 33' 51" N, 75° 40' 20" W

(Delaware requires a \$35 launch ramp sticker for non-
Delaware residents. Visit [www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/
rampcer.htm](http://www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/rampcer.htm) for more information.)



Seaford Boat Ramp

38° 38' 00" N, 75° 37' 05" W

(Delaware requires a \$35 launch ramp sticker for non-
Delaware residents. Visit [www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/
rampcer.htm](http://www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/rampcer.htm) for more information.)



Nanticoke River Marina, Blades/Seaford, DE

38° 38' 15" N, 75° 36' 42" W

302-628-8600

<http://nanticokerivermarina.net/area.html>
(free public ramp for skiffs and runabouts and for
launching paddle craft)



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are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned
businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally
managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and
are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.



One of the markers indicating an official site on the Captain
John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Trip Itineraries

WETIPQUIN CREEK

TWO-WAY, 1–4 MILES



The public landing by the bridge on Wetipquin
Road offers good no-fee access to Wetipquin and
Tyaskin creeks, as well as the Nanticoke shoreline at
Wetipquin's mouth. This is a great place to see salt
marshes up close. This section of the river was valuable
to the Nanticoke people for harvesting fish, crabs, and
oysters. Adjust your itinerary to fit your skills and the
weather conditions.

VIENNA AREA

TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



Launch at Emperor's Landing at the town's waterfront.
About a mile upriver on the Vienna side, just beyond
the Route 50 bridge, lies the mouth of Chicone Creek.
If paddling, be careful through this stretch, especially
if there's a tug with barge in the vicinity. Once into
Chicone Creek, follow it up into a deep wooded swamp
fringed with rich tidal freshwater marsh. The land you
see through the trees was part of the chief's town that
Captain John Smith mapped as Kuskarawaok when he
visited. The combination of forested wetlands, tidal
fresh marsh, and fertile soils for growing corn, beans,
and squash was especially valuable for the way of life of
the 17th-century Nanticoke.

SHARPTOWN AREA

TWO-WAY, 6–10 MILES



Sharptown lies more or less halfway between the
mouths of the Nanticoke's two major tributaries,
Marshyhope Creek to the west (downriver) and Broad
Creek, just over the Delaware state line to the east
(upriver). The Marshyhope is a deep, powerful river
in its own right, with a long history of schooner and
steamboat traffic through the 1930s. It is still a beautiful
waterway. If you're up for an extended paddle from
Sharptown, explore Big Creek, just inside the mouth of
the Marshyhope on the west side. Broad Creek extends
about 10 miles up to Laurel. If you paddle up to Broad
Creek, note the beautiful wild rice marsh on the upriver
side as you enter. On the south side is Phillips Landing,
another trailhead and a great shady park where you can
rest and enjoy a picnic. The west side of the Nanticoke
opposite the mouth of Broad Creek marks the area
where Captain John Smith planted this river's cross.

Nanticoke River

SECTION MAP



NOT FOR NAVIGATION
NOT TO SCALE



LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

CLICK SOURCE ▼

Cedar Hill Park	GOOGLE	NOAA
Cherry Beach Park Launch	GOOGLE	NOAA
Emperor's Landing	GOOGLE	NOAA
Nanticoke River Marina	GOOGLE	NOAA
Phillips Landing	GOOGLE	NOAA
Seaford Boat Ramp	GOOGLE	NOAA
Wetipquin Creek Landing	GOOGLE	NOAA



“Finding this eastern shore shallow broken isles, and [the main] for the most part without fresh water, we passed by the Straits of Limbo for the western shore. So broad is the bay here [that] we could scarce perceive the great high cliffs on the other side. By them we anchored that night and called them ‘Riccards’s Clifts.’”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Remote Beaches and Marshland

EXPLORING TANGIER SOUND AND THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE

Looking for precious minerals, powerful Indian tribes, and the Northwest Passage, Captain John Smith spent only a short time exploring the low-lying lands and the islands of the Lower Eastern Shore and Tangier Sound. Even so, this part of his first exploratory voyage up the Chesapeake gave him and his crew their first major tests of hardship and interaction with outlying Indian tribes. Today, this region of the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia remains the least settled in the Chesapeake, with offshore islands and vast salt marshes that still give the modern explorer a distinctive flavor of the Bay that Smith saw.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE AND TANGIER SOUND

On June 2, 1608, Captain John Smith and his hand-picked crew of 13 left Jamestowne Fort in their *Discovery Barge*, heading downriver on the James on an ebb current. They took a tow in the lower river from the Virginia Company ship *Phoenix*, which had just brought a new supply of colonists and various necessities and was now headed back to England.

Just outside Cape Henry, the *Phoenix* dropped the tow line, and Smith and his crew headed north to explore the Chesapeake. They took a short run up the seaside of what is now Virginia's Eastern Shore and planted a cross near modern-day Oyster, before turning back into the Bay. Here they encountered two Accomack fishermen with spears who directed them to the chief's town near present-day Cape Charles. The Accomack chief received them hospitably and told them a great deal about the lands to the north, which were rich in shells for making beads and good soils for growing crops, but not for any of the resources for which Smith was searching.

After a short diplomatic visit to the Accomack chief's brother, leader of the town of Accohanock on today's Occahannock Creek, Smith pressed north until he spied Watts and Tangier islands to the northwest. He headed for them, but then he and the crew were hit by a fierce but short Chesapeake summer thunder-squall. They stood up to it but tucked in behind Watts Island for the night before exploring Tangier Island the next morning and naming the island complex Russell's Isles for Dr. Walter Russell, the expedition's "Doctor of Physic."

Now short of drinking water, Captain Smith and his crew headed for the first big river they could find, which he called "Wighcocomoco," though it would in time come to be called Pocomoke. They explored up to today's Pocomoke City. There they filled their water kegs with muddy water, an irony since they would have found plenty of sweet water had they continued a couple of miles further upriver.

Coming out of the Pocomoke, they rowed around Great Fox Island (just off the southern tip of the Cedar Island Marsh, which separates Pocomoke Sound from Tangier Sound), worked their way past the Little and Big



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

The Pocomoke River is a paradise for birds and other wildlife.



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

The peaceful Pocomoke invites exploration.

PREVIOUS PAGE

An aerial view of Tangier Island
PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

EXPLORING THE EASTERN SHORE



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

The town of Crisfield provides good facilities for cruising boaters, and a chance to watch watermen at work.

Annemessex rivers and found some very warm but fresh water near today's Deal Island before encountering another, fiercer thunder-squall around Sharkfin Shoal, off the mouth of today's Wicomico River.

This storm was more vicious than the earlier one, blowing out a sail, dismasting the boat, and forcing the crew to bail for their lives. Disabled and facing a two-day nor'wester after the squall, they limped under oars to the large nearby island that is today named "Bloodsworth." There they made repairs while enduring enough additional rain and biting insects that they named the island "Limbo." Resuming on June 8, they made their way around the head of Tangier Sound before entering the Nanticoke River.

EXPLORING THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE AND TANGIER SOUND TODAY

The region from Cape Charles (the land at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, not the town of the same name a few miles to the north) up to Fishing Bay, at the head of Tangier Sound, is still the most thoroughly rural part of the Bay region. It is an area of high salinity, fringed by broad marshes with low, fertile land behind them and multiple short creeks with good harbors for boats but not ships.

Though their stocks are somewhat depleted by heavy harvests and localized water pollution, this part of the Chesapeake Bay is still rich in fish, shellfish, and waterfowl, including wintering ducks, geese, and swans as well as summering brown pelicans and eight species of heron. The fish and shellfish sustain the offshore island communities of Tangier, Virginia, and Smith Island, Maryland, though both communities are struggling today to make a living off "the water business." Both towns are aware of their region's ties to Captain John Smith, and they welcome visitors interested in following in his wake.

This area of the Chesapeake has changed considerably in one important way since Captain Smith and his crew came through in June of 1608. Rising sea level, land subsidence (sinking), and long fetches of open water have together allowed wind and waves to chew at marshy shorelines and even wooded "hammocks," greatly reducing land acreage. The islands to the north of Smith Island, several of which made up the then-large Limbo Isle on which the English repaired their *Discovery Barge* after the vicious storm, have been hit particularly hard, with land/marsh loss obvious to observers over periods of time as short as ten years.

Even so, exploring the Lower Eastern Shore and Tangier Sound offers a stirring taste of the Chesapeake that Smith saw, and these broad open waters offer the same challenges to a modern explorer's seamanship that they did to Smith and his crew four centuries ago.



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

The Tangier History Museum, the Chesapeake Gateway on Tangier Island, offers free use of canoes and kayaks to paddle the island's water trails.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

Experienced sea kayakers regard Virginia's Eastern Shore and the islands of Tangier Sound as a wonderful playground, but they must call on all of their training, experience, and stamina to handle these broad open waters, with strong winds, currents, and occasional storms.

For folks with less experience, there are several outfitters available to lead explorations of these waters, and both Tangier and Smith islands offer protected water trails for paddle craft. Outfitters also operate on the Eastern Shore mainland, especially in Onancock, Virginia, and the complex of protected water trails at Janes Island State Park in Crisfield, Maryland. The award-winning Janes Island Trail is also appropriate for intermediate paddlers who want self-guided explorations.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Sturdy open powerboats of 17 to 28 feet make good vessels for exploring the Bayside Eastern Shore and Tangier Sound, if operated prudently. Skippers of boats at the low end of that range will have to watch the weather carefully and be prepared to slow to their lowest planing speeds if caught out in the open by strong winds and storms. They and their crews will be happiest in adverse conditions if they are clothed appropriately, including sturdy foul-weather gear and deck boots.

In Tangier Sound, it is particularly important to pay attention to the combined effects of wind, tide level, and current. The sound offers a fascinating combination of shallow underwater grass flats, sand beaches, and channels that delight anglers, bird watchers, and beachcombers. But inattention to tide levels can leave explorers stranded among a fierce array of biting insects for hours. The best time to visit an island is on a rising tide.

Also, when visiting islands, be sure to check for "No Trespassing" signs. Some islands are in private ownership and landing is prohibited. Other islands are closed periodically to protect nesting birds, especially herons, brown pelicans, gulls, black skimmers, and shorebirds such as willets.

In these waters, a tidal current running against the wind creates a nasty mess of short-period, tall, breaking seas that can cause a small powerboat a lot of trouble. The same wind blowing with the current merely produces easy swells. Captain John Smith and his crew kept sailors' eyes to fair winds and currents, and they waited out adverse conditions. Small boat skippers will do well to follow that example religiously.



CRUISING POWERBOATS, TRAWLERS, AND SAILBOATS

Virginia's Eastern Shore and Tangier Sound are great and underutilized grounds for cruising boats. In particular, Cape Charles, Onancock, Tangier, and Crisfield offer good facilities. At the head of Tangier Sound, boat captains can either turn east into the Nanticoke to visit Vienna, Maryland, and Seaford, Delaware, or go west through Hooper Strait and across the Bay's main stem to Solomons Island at the mouth of the Patuxent.

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CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE

Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge • Cape Charles, VA

Kiptopeke State Park • Cape Charles, VA

Cape Charles Historic District • Cape Charles, VA

Onancock Historic District and Town Wharf • Onancock, VA

Virginia Eastern Shore Water Trails • Onancock, VA

Tangier History Museum and Intercultural Center • Tangier, VA

Smith Island Center • Princess Anne, MD

J. Millard Tawes Museum & Ward Brothers Workshop • Crisfield, MD

Janes Island State Park • Crisfield, MD

Delmarva Discovery Center • Pocomoke City, MD

Pocomoke River State Forest and Park, Pocomoke City, MD

Sturgis Memorial Gateway • Snow Hill, MD



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT



PHOTO BY DEANNA BEACHAM

Boaters of all types of vessels will enjoy Onancock Creek and the Town of Onancock on Virginia's Lower Eastern Shore.



PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

Parts of the Pocomoke River are tidal cypress swamp well suited to exploration by canoe and kayak.

Trip Itineraries

KIPTOPEKE STATE PARK

TWO-WAY, 8–12 MILES



Kiptopeke State Park (named after a 17th-century Accomack chief) is a great facility for bird-watching, fishing, and exploring the southern end of the Eastern Shore. The boat ramp at the park is protected by two long breakwaters (“The Concrete Ships”), but once outside of them, a small boat or kayak is in wide-open water.

It is just under four miles down to Fishermans Island—where Captain John Smith and his men met the two Accomack spear-fishermen—which supports the northern end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. At that point, an explorer can turn east into the small boat channel that leads inside the barrier island that Smith’s crew named for him or turn west to circumnavigate Fishermans Island, which is part of a national wildlife refuge of the same name. This is an interesting small boat trip, but the exposure to open water and powerful currents around Fishermans Island demand the most prudent level of seamanship. Bear in mind, there is no public access to the island.

ONANCOCK CREEK AND TOWN

TWO-WAY, 6–10 MILES



Anyone in a cruising boat entering Onancock Creek can look forward to five miles of well-marked channel leading from open beaches and broad salt marshes past attractive older waterfront houses with natural shorelines and big trees to the town’s docks. These docks accommodate everything from tugs pushing oil barges and large, fast gillnet boats to charter fishing boats and the colorful craft of the local kayak outfitter.

Smith didn’t stop here, but he mapped the mouth of the creek. The Accomack had lived on the creek for centuries. English settlers moved in by the mid-17th century. The Virginia Assembly officially established the town of Onancock as a deepwater port-of-entry in 1680. Today, the creek and the town are well set-up for cruising boats, both sail and power. The creek is also made to order for skiffs, runabouts, canoes, and kayaks. Small-craft operators need to be careful of larger boats’ wakes and pay attention to wind and weather.

POCOMOKE RIVER:

WINTER QUARTERS TO REHOBETH

ONE-WAY, 8 MILES



Check the Pocomoke River current table before you paddle this pretty stretch, and make sure you go with the flow. Then you’ll be in for a delightful canoe or kayak trip through the river’s transition from brackish marsh with scattered cypress trees to full-blown freshwater tidal cypress swamp.

This is also a fine trip for a skiff or runabout, or even a cruising sail or powerboat, whose skipper might be tempted to explore all of the lower river below Pocomoke City. For small boats, the river from Pocomoke City to Snow Hill, Maryland, and even above is lovely too, as is the tributary Nassawango

Creek. These sections are not, however, on the Captain John Smith trail, as he went no further than Pocomoke City. (If he had, he would have found better drinking water.) In addition to two free launch ramps, Pocomoke City offers a linear marina/park along its waterfront where cruising boats can tie up.

Whatever your craft, don't miss the new Delmarva Discovery Center, now open in the former Duncan Brothers Chevrolet building right on the waterfront. If you happen to find yourself in Pocomoke City without a boat, check with the Discovery Center about a trip on the *River Queen*.

JANES ISLAND WATER TRAILS MOSTLY TWO-WAY, 2.5–12.5 MILES



Janes Island State Park sits on a long canal, opposite a large island cut by multiple tidal creeks. The longest trail in this award-winning system of water trails circumnavigates the island. All of the trails are well-marked, and the park offers downloadable GPS coordinates for them, as well as an online order form for a printed trail guide from Maryland's Department of Natural Resources. The trails are great for bird-watching and shallow water fishing.

SOMERS COVE MARINA TO TANGIER AND SMITH ISLANDS



TWO-WAY, 30 AND 24 MILES, ROUND-TRIP, RESPECTIVELY

There are people who have paddled these long routes, but they are exceptional. A better option is to take a ferry and arrange to paddle the trails on the island. Many more people have made the trip in sturdy 17- to 28-foot open powerboats, after careful checks of wind and water conditions. Cruising sail and powerboats routinely make this trip, too, though they must take great care with the channels around the islands. Lodging is available for those in open boats who want to visit overnight. Somers Cove Marina offers a launch ramp and full marina services for cruising boats.

RESOURCES&CONTACTS

For a copy of *Janes Island Water Trail Guide*, visit:

www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/janesisland.asp

For a copy of *A Paddler's Guide to Smith Island*, visit:



www.paddlesmithisland.com/trails.html



PHOTO BY MIKE LAND





Janes Island State Park is dissected by many small waterways, including more than 30 miles of trails marked for paddlers.





TRAILHEADS ALONG THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE



Kiptopeke State Park, Northampton County, VA  
37° 10' 02" N, 75° 59' 15" W
757-331-2267, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/kip.shtml
(ramp fee)





Cape Charles Harbor, Northampton County, VA   
37° 15' 53" N, 76° 00' 55" W
757-331-2357, www.capecharles.org
(ramp fee)



Onancock Town Wharf    
Accomack County, VA
37° 42' 42" N, 75° 45' 20" W
757-787-7911, www.onancock.com, www.onancock.org
(ramp fee)

Tangier Island, VA    
37° 49' 47" N, 75° 59' 36" W
www.tangierisland-va.com
www.tangierhistorymuseum.org

Laurel Street Boat Landing    
Pocomoke City, MD
38° 04' 24" N, 75° 34' 20" W
410-957-1333
www.cityofpocomoke.com (Click on "Tourism.")

Rehobeth Boat Ramp, Pocomoke River, MD  
38° 02' 19" N, 75° 39' 41" W
www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/boatramps.asp
(Search Somerset County.)

Somers Cove Marina, Crisfield, MD    
37° 58' 32" N, 75° 51' 35" W
410-968-0925
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/somerscove.html
(ramp fee)

Janes Island State Park, Crisfield, MD  
38° 00' 35" N, 75° 50' 53" W
410-968-1565
www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern/janesisland.html
(ramp fee)




NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.



Kiptopeke State Park, at the lower tip of the Chesapeake's Eastern Shore, features excellent fishing, bird-watching, and beach activities.
PHOTO BY CINDY ROSS

The Lower Eastern Shore

SECTION MAP

-  TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
-  TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
-  TRIP ITINERARY



NOT FOR NAVIGATION
NOT TO SCALE



**Captain John Smith Chesapeake
National Historic Trail**

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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