

1 | HALLOCK BAY

Orient, Town of Southold

DISTANCE: The bay, including its many tidal creeks, smaller embayments and dredged channels, has over ten miles of shoreline to explore by canoe and kayak.

ACCESS: 1) Orient Beach State Park: No permit needed (pay State parking fee at park entrance). From Greenport, travel 8 miles east on Rte. 25 to the well-marked entrance of Orient Beach State Park and follow the park causeway to where it ends at a circle. Look for a sign marking the boat drop-off halfway around the circle. Park in the nearby lot and carry over the gravel road to the put-in (30 yards to Hallock Bay and 50 yards to Gardiners Bay).

2) Narrow River Road: Town of Southold parking permit is required. Eastbound on Rte. 25, travel 5.6 miles from the intersection of Rte. 25 and Rte. 48 north of Greenport and turn right onto Narrow River Road. The access is just past the Narrow River Marina.

3) Orient Harbor: No permit needed for the NYSDEC-owned portion. Follow Narrow River Road (see directions above) to its southwestern end on Orient Harbor. Parking on the road requires a Southold Town permit. The NYSDEC parking area is on the east side of the road. NOTE: This puts you in a fairly exposed part of Orient Harbor, with a 0.75 mile-long paddle to the entrance of Hallock Bay.

TRIP NOTES: Orient Beach State Park naturalist Mary Laura Lamont hosts excellent natural history programs at this outstanding park. Call the park (631-323-2440) for information and schedule.



December

The sun is as high as it gets in late December when Rob Battenfeld and I park at Potato Beach on the west side of Narrow River. On the one hand, the sun has done its work, warming the frosty morning air to a delightful 50°F. On the other, considering December's short days, we are getting a very late start for a paddle around Hallock Bay.

Hallock Bay is named for George W. Hallock, the Thomas Edison of agriculture. In 1870, Hallock took over a run-down farm bordering Orchard Street and the west side of Narrow River. In those days farming practices often depleted the soil of minerals and nutrients and, according to a publication of the Oysterponds Historical Society entitled *Historic Orient Village* (1976), the Orient farms of the 18th and early 19th centuries never produced much above

subsistence level. Hallock, through careful management of the soil, increased crop yields tenfold and completely revolutionized farming.

Some maps and charts label this stretch of water Long Beach Bay, referring to the four mile-long sliver of barrier beach that comprises Orient Beach State Park. Long Beach forms the bay's eastern and southern border, separating and protecting it from Gardiner's Bay. Gardiner's Bay, having a long fetch to the east here, can be a rough stretch of water. It is constantly rearranging the barrier beach's shoreline and wreaking havoc on the paved causeway that provides access to Orient Beach State Park.

Part of Hallock's very successful operation included his own steamship to ship produce to New England markets. Potato Beach was close to, if not the actual site of, Hallock's wharf. While Rob and I begin unloading boats and gear, we strike up a conversation with a gentleman packing up after a successful morning of clamming. Hallock Bay is well known among baymen for its shellfishing. At one time it was one of the most productive scallop areas on the east end. "Any **Bay Scallops** show up in your clam rake?" I inquire. "Naw, just a few bugs," a reference to small, one-year-old scallops.

A long discourse ensues on the various theories attributed to the mysterious decline of scallops. When we are ready to go, we wave to the clammer watching us from his truck and set out across the mouth of Narrow River. We are planning to do a clockwise paddle around Hallock Bay, and hope to have enough time to explore some of its tidal creeks, man-made lagoons and ditches, and a long, narrow appendage of Hallock Bay called Little Bay.

We are headed for a point of land labeled Barnfield Point on some maps, Eagle Point on others. This area has a long history of use by a Native American group called the Corchaugs and English settlers, the latter dating back to 1661. As a result, many of its prominent geographical features have a number of different names. For example, the whole area east of the Rte. 25 causeway and Dam Pond was once known by its Indian name, Poquatuck. The early English settlers called it Oysterponds. In 1836 its name was changed to Orient.

At Barnfield Point we pass by one of over a dozen **Osprey** nest poles found in the Hallock Bay area. Paul Stoutenberg, a well-known naturalist residing on the North Fork, was involved in placing a number of these structures in the marshes along the Rte. 25 causeway, and may have had a hand in these as well. Osprey are still rebounding from their pre-DDT numbers. If you are paddling during their nesting season, please keep your distance to avoid flushing incubating adults off their nests.

By December the Osprey are all far to the south, some as far as Brazil. But another magnificent piscivore, the Great Blue Heron, stalks for prey in our waterways all winter long. On our approach, one takes flight with a loud "Arawnk!" and disappears around the bend.

A large channel cuts into the salt marsh east of Barnfield Point, and we turn in to explore. My U.S.G.S. topographic map shows approximately ten of these curious channels along the north and west sides of the bay. Most parallel the

bay's shoreline and are located on the landward side of the salt marsh, adjacent to farmland. They are clearly man-made features, but much wider than the ubiquitous, grid-like **mosquito control ditches**.

We follow the channel for a third of a mile, where it dead-ends. It reminds me of the lagoons adjacent to Moriches Bay that were created for raising ducks, but I can't recall any reference to duck farms in Orient. Along its entire length, on our left, is a tall, steep-sided earthen berm, most likely the spoils from the dredged channel. Examining my map more carefully, I notice the symbol for levee where the berm is located, and a series of these disconnected levees extending along most of the bay's northern shoreline.

A post-paddle call to local historian Elinor Williams solved this mystery. Storm surges periodically inundated low lying portions of farmland bordering the bay. The salt water not only damaged crops but ruined the soil for the next growing season. The Hurricane of 1938 did extensive damage. It took years before rainfall flushed the salt out of the soil and crops could be grown again. Sometime in the 1940s, to prevent that from happening again, the berms were built. Instead of using valuable topsoil to construct them, farmers dug into what they considered at the time to be worthless salt marsh, creating lagoons in the process.

Continuing east along the edge of the marsh, we pass a large area of cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) that has been heavily grazed, probably by geese. A large waterway on the west side of Eagle's Neck leads into another dredged channel bordered by a steep-sided berm. Both Eagle's Neck and Barnfield Point, as well as the west side of Narrow River, are depicted on an Oysterponds Historical Society map as sites of Poquatuck Indian camps. Roy Latham, in addition to being a great naturalist, was an amateur archeologist. Some of the Poquatuck artifacts he uncovered in this area can be viewed at the Southold Indian Museum.

Despite the names of the neck and point, there are no records of eagles nesting in this area, at least as far back as the late 1800s. However, some readers might be surprised to learn that Latham reported a pair of bald eagles nesting on Gardiner's Island up until the 1930s. Wouldn't it be something to see them return to nest some day!

Turning in my kayak to look for the source of an odd, soft grunting sound drifting across the bay, I could barely make out the dark blotch on the water that marked a large raft of **Long-tailed Ducks**. Formerly known by the politically incorrect name Oldsqaw, these striking sea ducks were making quite a racket.

Paddling through the narrows off Eagle's Neck and entering Little Bay, we head for its far end. There, alongside a rubble-strewn levee, both of us make an awkward exit to stretch cramped legs and have a bite to eat. Following one of many deer paths through groundselbush that marks the upper edge of the salt marsh, we make our way to the causeway where there is a great view over Gardiner's Bay. From north to south, Orient Point, Plum Island, the Ruins at

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

It is no surprise that the Osprey is one of the most popular wildlife species on the East End. Its six-foot wingspan, habit of hunting in broad daylight over open water, and large, highly-visible nest all combine to make it the most easily recognized bird of prey in our area.

It is not uncommon, particularly among paddlers, to witness an Osprey circle high overhead, hover for a moment, and then tuck its wings as it dives head first towards the water. Adjusting itself at the last moment to hit the water feet first, its momentum sometimes carries it completely underwater. Back at the surface, it unfolds its wings and struggles to get airborne again. More often than not, it rises from the water empty-taloned.

A successful plunge is evident in the form of a wriggling fish in its talons. Once airborne, the Osprey will reposition its feet such that the head of the fish faces forward while flying, apparently making its load more aerodynamic for the trip back to the nest or a favorite dining perch.

Fish are the main prey of the Osprey, so much so that it is also known as the Fish Hawk. Its arrival here in mid-March is closely synchronized with the movement of Alewives from their deep water overwintering sites to the shallows of bays and tidal creeks and the start of the spring spawning run.

The Osprey has a few unique adaptations for catching and hanging onto fish. It's front talons are the most flexible of any raptor, and can turn completely backwards. And the rough pads on the undersides of its feet and toes have spines for holding onto slippery fish. Despite its strong preference for fish, the Osprey is sometimes seen hunting over land, and will occasionally catch other types of prey.

On their Atkins-style diet, the fledglings grow quickly, reaching adult size by late July or early August. At this point, it's not easy to distinguish the adults from the young by size alone. With the aid of binoculars, look for a distinctive flecked or dappled color on the topside of the wings, marking the young-of-the-year, as opposed to the uniform chocolate brown of the parents.

In August, Ospreys begin heading south to their overwintering areas in Florida, the Caribbean and as far as the Amazon basin. I've always wondered why this fish-lover leaves so early, just before the big fall run of Bluefish, Striped Bass, herring, and Silversides on the East End. Must be better fishing in the south.

Gardiner's Point, Gardiner's Island, Springs, and the sandy bluffs of Hedges Banks in East Hampton Town are visible on the horizon.

Long Beach, or what is now Orient Beach State Park, has never been privately owned. Since the area was settled by the English in the 1600s until 1929 when it was deeded over to New York State for a public park, Long Beach was held and managed as common lands belonging to all the male inhabitants of the Orient area. Leases were drawn up for uses such as pasturing, beach rights and, from 1865 to 1895, a fish factory that processed menhaden into oil and fertilizer.

In addition to outstanding views over the surrounding bays, the park boasts a number of rare and unusual plants and is designated a National Natural Landmark. This is the only place on the East End that I have seen the Blackjack Oak (*Quercus marilandica*). I was surprised to learn from the Suffolk County Soils Map that most of the park's upland area, including the nature trail through the Blackjack Oak forest, is classified as fill.

Back in Hallock Bay we hug the park's shoreline, enjoying the late afternoon sunlight that illuminates the golden-browns of the marsh grasses and greens of the eastern red cedars. Waterfront signage here reflects a tug-of-war between boaters coming ashore to picnic and park managers trying to avoid disturbance to rare plants and nesting birds. Until 2004, canoes and kayaks were actually prohibited from the park.

Fortunately, this policy has been changed. With that change comes the responsibility to practice good stewardship of which all paddlers should be aware. Steer clear of nesting birds, avoid trampling sensitive beach and dune vegetation, and leave nothing behind but your wake.

At Jupiter Hole we follow the incoming tide into a small creek, bearing right at the first fork on the narrow waterway. Soon the creek opens up into a small salt pond that appears to be a dead end. I became familiar with this area last winter while on the Orient Christmas Bird Count, and knew that a short navigable section of mosquito ditch linked this with another, larger salt pond approximately a half-mile in from the bay.

Soon Rob and I are standing next to an interpretive sign on an old roadway, enjoying some of the most beautiful scenery on Long Island. At our feet are hundreds of specimens of Long Island's only native cactus, the Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*), and in the woods nearby were remnants of the fish factory that operated and housed a small village of workers in the 1800s. The Park Superintendent has some great photos of the fish factories, an interesting era of East End history. I would love to see these ruins made more accessible and interpreted some day.

Paddling back to the bay, I try to photograph the oddly-shaped, multi-stemmed Eastern Red Cedars that border the marsh and salt ponds here. The low, late afternoon sunlight seems to illuminate my subject perfectly, but it just doesn't look quite the same in my view finder.

Back in the bay, we cross over to Peters Neck Point to explore the small embayment formed by it and Brown's Point. It is now getting late, and we are pushing our luck with getting back to the cars before dark, but neither one of us has been in this section of the bay before. It turns out to be well worth the time and effort. An island of oaks called Gid's Island divides the embayment in two, with the southern arm leading to a small but navigable tidal creek that passes under Peters Neck Road. A beautiful stretch of water, this creek hugs the back edge of the bay dune and winds its way westward to Hog Pond, not far from the site of the Old Slave Burial Ground on Narrow River Road.

The historic burial ground has an informative monument and is worth visiting. Unfortunately, the well-protected creek does not appear to be navigable all the way to Hog Pond; my guess is it's 0.2 mile short of Narrow River Road.

The sun has now set but there is plenty of twilight to navigate by. Noticing a series of ditches running along the landward side of Gid's Island and Brown's Point, Rob and I hope our good luck will hold as we try to cut across the marshland and avoid the longer paddle around the island and point.

The channel separating Gid's Island is wide and a nice passage; the contorted route across Brown's Point is another story that ended with an awkward carry and wet feet. But we have managed to explore quite a few of the nooks and crannies in Hallock Bay, one of the East End's outstanding waterways, and it has been an exceptional day on the water.

