

SMU Outdoor Adventure Trips:  
2008 Fall Break Sea Kayak Trip-Matagorda Island, TX  
Oct 11-14, 2008

This trip was an adventure for many reasons. Specifically, OA Trips had never gone to this location. So the planning and logistics were considerably more difficult. Our jumping off point of Port O'Connor (POC), TX had only a few sea kayaking references, maps contacts or published information. It was only by luck that we found Chris at Central Marina in POC. He directed us to resources and maps of the area that we could legitimately utilize for the trip. We found out that there were a number of kayaking trails through the smaller islands directly out to Matagorda. A good sign. So right from the get-go, this trip would be interesting. Combine our lack of information with possible affects of Hurricane Ike a month earlier, and we really weren't sure what to expect.

Christina Sanders, Iana Gaidarski, Tommy Dingwall, and Zeng Fan were the "guinea pigs" on this new trip lead by OA Trip Leaders Dexter Jacobs and David Chambers. The trip took an unfortunate turn down the wrong road when we followed MapQuest directions to our first night's camping at Lake Texana State Park, our lay-over point for the push to POC the next day. We were provided directions through Houston with 5 ½ hours of driving to get to our destination. Not knowing any better, we followed these directions and to our disappointment, arrived 10 hours later at beautiful Lake Texana. Rumors had it that Houston was a traffic "vortex" of disappointment. Already, this trip is proving to be difficult.

At Lake Texana State Park, we set up our camp for the night and decided to use the remaining day light to take the group out for some quick sea kayaking instruction in preparation for the unknown paddle distance and duration to Matagorda Island the next day. Except for the warning signs exclaiming "Watch out for alligators", the lake was a perfect spot to demonstrate the ill-effects of wind and waves on sea kayaking. In the back of our minds, Dexter and I were hoping that this is the worst it would get. To our enjoyment, no real problems from our practice session and no lost appendages to hungry alligators.

After dinner, the group crowded around our comforting, albeit, small campfire telling stories and playing mind games. As the time wore on, we eventually called it a night and hit the ole sleeping bags-the evening too warm to get in the bags. Day 2, Sunday, we packed up camp, made ready with our gear and sped for POC, a mere 1 ½ hours away, dutifully watching the wind. The day started and would remain beautifully sunny but as we approached our put-in, we noticed the wind gradually picking up to an estimated 15 mph. We hurriedly packed the boats and prepared to get on the water. At 12:30, we were off.

Our first obstacle of the day would be crossing the Inter-coastal Waterway (ICW), a man-made canal for large boat traffic. My experience with the ICW is from the east coast involved huge tankers and freighters making their way up and down the coast using the ICW as a protected travel route. In POC, it was only about 100 yards wide and served mostly pleasure and fishing boats and the occasional tug and barge. Regardless, it is not a good place to hang-out as these bigger boats can't stop quickly. So we paddled hard through the choppy waves to our inlet where we would follow the small inlets and shores of smaller islands.

Matagorda Island has a long and interesting history, of which I recommend you look up and read yourself. For our purposes, just know that it is a combination of islands, marshes, and dunes with channels cut through for small boat traffic. The islands are uninhabited except for the occasional cattle and abandoned fish camps. Our destination, Matagorda Island, is the larger barrier island and borders the Gulf. It was once a TX state park and is now managed by the federal fish and wildlife department. As we paddled close to the smaller barrier islands careful not to get too far into the boating lanes, we saw plentiful sea birds including pelicans, sea gulls, cranes, and an osprey that we were lucky to watch fish in the waterways around us. Once we crossed out of the smaller channels, we passed a now

abandoned Coast Guard station platform worn from the weather and sea and popped into Matagorda Bay where the winds and waves really picked up. We only had to hug the shore until we reached our destination, Sunday Beach on the thumb of Matagorda Island. At @ 4:30, we reached our destination for the night...total hours paddling 4; estimated mileage: 7. As we stepped out on the island, we couldn't help but notice several groups of people and families on the beach. It seems that this area is frequented by pleasure boaters. Almost immediately upon landing, we walked the 100 yards across the island to the Gulf of Mexico. Another surprise waited as we scanned the beach...trash everywhere. Not just the occasional paper plate or plastic water bottle but debris such as large tree trunks, furniture, toys, and a huge cylinder as big as a small house. You could definitely tell the island had felt the affect of Hurricane Ike. After some frolicking in the Gulf, we headed back to our boats to unload and prepare our camp. Unfortunately the wind had continued to increase and sand blew freely everywhere. Having seen the SMU emblem on our boats, a family introduced themselves to our group. Turned out, the husband was an SMU graduate from 1969, having spent the day on the island with his wife and two grand-daughters. Just goes to show you, SMU has an extensive "reach."

We set up our kitchen as best we could, out of the wind and blowing sand. We found a relatively protected area in the dunes to set up our tents. As the group explored the island, we managed to strike a conversation with the last of the pleasure boaters, curious about what we were doing out on this island in boats with no motors. They informed us of the islands current inhabitants...coyotes and feral hogs, lots of them. Personally, I would prefer to go up against a black bear than a wild hog. Hogs are known for their anger and tenacity. Regardless, we would prep the best we could and make sure to keep an eye out for any unwanted visitors.

After a sandy meal of spaghetti, sardines and smoked oysters (we are on the coast), we built a nice fire beach-side and enjoyed the full moon, stars and lights of the town in the distance. It was a great feeling to be alone in such a place. As it got later, we all began to feel the days paddle and decided to head for the tents. A few brave souls decided it was better to sleep outside with the moon and consistent sound of crashing waves and wind. Those that stayed in the tents were not any better off as the wind continued to hurl sand into every opening. One thing is evident, when camping on the beach; you just have to learn to love the sand because there is no getting away from it.

The next morning, a few woke early to witness an uninterrupted sunrise. As the sky in the east went from bluish gray to pink and orange, we enjoyed the serenity of it all with only the sound of waves and wind. We strolled to the boats only to find that the coyotes had discovered our food storage in the bulkheads of the kayaks. The little buggers even scratched off the hatch covers to get inside. We must have spooked them early enough as luckily, no food was lost. After breakfast, we decided to hit the water and paddle back to POC in hopes of getting back before the afternoon winds picked up and made things difficult. Good fortune was on our side as the wind was now at our backs and the previous day's 4 hour paddle only took 3. Along the way, we took our time and had a little fun exploring some inlets and an abandoned houseboat. At one point, a bottlenose dolphin rose for air not 15 feet from our boats. Literally, we could see its eyes. We reached our take-out point just as the winds began to pick up for the afternoon and the waves occasionally would break across the kayak cockpits. As we unloaded the boats and loaded the van and trailer, we reflected and reminisced about the last couple of days. But before the trip could end, we decided to explore the local cuisine for lunch in Port Lavaca at a little Mexican Sea Food place. Because we had made such good time, the group decided it would be great to get a shower and sleep without sand. So we pointed the van north and drove through the afternoon, evening and night to arrive back at SMU.

Matagorda Island is a beautiful place and the paddle to and from can be intimidating. But the experience was overwhelmingly gorgeous. It is a definite return location for future OA Trips. The island would be great to explore so next time; we will balance the long drive and hopefully spend 2 nights on the island.

