



National Parks

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Yellowstone in Danger

Tracking the Cats

Maritime Parks

Kayaking in the Parks

A Question of Integrity



Exploring the Backwaters

Kayaking is an ideal low-impact way to enjoy the national parks from the Virgin Islands to Alaska.

BY DAVID N. B. LEE

PADDLING A KAYAK in silence along a remote lakeshore or gliding across the water at dawn, a traveler realizes few more exhilarating ways exist to enjoy many of the national parks. From Alaska to the U.S. Virgin Islands, kayaking is often the ideal way to see the parks.

The practical advantages of kayak travel are many. Unlike backpackers, paddlers do not have to be as space and weight conscious, and on most guided trips prior experience is not necessary. Often the kayak has room for extra supplies that make the overnight trip that much more pleasurable, and, unlike backpacking, the goods are carried by the boat.

Kayaks allow unobtrusive access to remote areas where crowds cannot follow. Out on the water, solitude, natural quiet, and true wilderness are the rule. Bears, sea lions, eagles, and even whales have little fear of human paddlers, allowing a closer approach than would otherwise be possible.

National parks offer an opportunity to pursue a variety of water-related activities, including kayaking. Here is a close-up look at five of the nation's premier kayaking parks.

Glacier Bay

Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska offers some of the most breathtaking scenery and exciting sea kayaking in the park system. Thousand-foot fjords and glaciers—that calve chunks of ice

the size of buildings into the bay—mark the coastline. Secluded beach campsites provide paddlers with spectacular mountain views as well as access to day hikes.

Wildlife viewing in Glacier Bay is incredible. In the summer months, kayakers can see humpback whales, orcas, sea lions, and dozens of sea birds feeding in the plankton-rich waters. Paddlers often spot wolves, grizzlies, and black bears on shore as they feed on carrion, beach grass, and wild strawberries.

Kayakers should be prepared for changing weather and fluctuating tides. Rain can be falling or the sun

shining at any time, and beach scenes can change from mud flats to open water in a matter of hours, as 20-foot tides ebb and flow.

Access to the bay's wildest areas is provided by tour boats that leave from Juneau or the dock at Bartlett Cove, the location of the park's headquarters. Traveling up the bay, a visitor will notice the vegetation change from rainforest to barren landscape. It is as though the boat is going back in time by following the retreat of the glaciers and the subsequent advance of plant and animal communities.

Making early reservations is recommended for kayak rentals or tours.



A lone kayaker in Glacier Bay National Park is dwarfed by the backdrop of mountains and chunks of ice.

DAVID N. B. LEE specializes in environmental and travel writing and last wrote for NATIONAL PARKS about oil and gas drilling in the parks.



ERWIN & PEGGY BAUER

White pelicans are a common sight for kayakers at Yellowstone Lake, which outfitter Steve Lentz calls a true wilderness.

Boats and trips in July and August are usually booked months in advance. Campsites are available at Bartlett Cove, and the park allows backcountry camping in several places. Food is available in Gustavus, but it is best to bring supplies or ship them in advance. For more information, contact Glacier Bay National Park, Gustavus, AK 99826 or call 907-697-2230.

Yellowstone

The popularity of kayaking on Yellowstone Lake at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming has increased dramatically over the past few years, but it is still possible to find seclusion in one of the remote arms of the lake, closed to most motor boat traffic. Bald eagles, osprey, and white pelicans are common sights, and the lucky paddler may even spot a grizzly sauntering along the shore. Cutthroat and lake trout fishing is usually excellent.

Beyond the beach, open woods and sunny meadows provide excellent opportunities to stretch and watch elk and bison graze. Everywhere charred trees and new undergrowth are reminders of how the 1988 wildfires have helped to revitalize the Yellowstone ecosystem.

Yellowstone paddlers should pay attention to the weather, which can change in seconds. Unless a visitor has a kayak, it is best to sign on with one

of the outfitters operating on Yellowstone Lake. Some companies even offer "backcountry luxury" and gourmet meals. Access to the lake varies with the tour. On some trips, paddlers will leave from the busy west side and kayak to the wild southeastern arms of the lake. Other tours include a power boat ride from west-side marinas. Tour operators drop paddlers off in prime kayaking areas. A recent boom in kayaking has led to heavy use in some areas, so check and be sure the chosen outfitter practices minimum-impact camping. Call the park for more information on outfitters.

Groceries, hotels, and gas can be found at the park entrance at West Yellowstone. The Bridge Bay Marina also has most amenities as well as fishing licenses. The lake lies at 7,000 feet above sea level, and kayaking is best from mid-June to mid-September. For more information on paddling in Yellowstone, call the park at 307-344-7381, or write to P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone Park, WY 82190.

Channel Islands

Composed of five islands just 90 minutes from urban southern California, Channel Islands National Park is a sharp contrast to the bustling mainland. Encompassing more than 250,000 acres, the park preserves in a semi-natural state many of the ecosystems lost in

KAYAKING GLACIER BAY

Glacier Bay is meant to be seen from the seal's-eye view of a kayak. We recommend a fully guided and outfitted tour for the following reasons:

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EXCURSIONS *continued*

the mainland's more populated areas.

In the islands, kayakers can paddle into sea caves, explore tide pools, and hike trails to inland valleys. Dubbed "California's Galapagos," the park protects several endemic animal and plant species, including the island fox and Santa Cruz Island ironwood. The foxes are notoriously friendly, and at Scorpion Ranch on Santa Cruz Island, a pair regularly dens under the bunkhouse, feeding their young with tidbits stolen from unsuspecting visitors. (Ninety percent of Santa Cruz Island is owned by The Nature Conservancy. The remainder is owned by the Park Service and a private individual.)

Paddlers who want to explore the islands' caves should do so with caution. Ocean swells, tides, and sharp rocks can make sea caving dangerous, even for experienced paddlers. Helmets and wet suits are a must.

All of the islands offer campsites, and visitors usually get to the park on Island Packers, the boat concessioner, although some airlines offer flights to the islands. If you will be camping, buy groceries and water on the mainland in Ventura, Oxnard, or Santa Barbara. Bed and breakfasts are available at both Smugglers and Scorpion Ranch on Santa Cruz, and both offer a "meals provided" option. For more information, contact Channel Islands National Park, 1901 Spinnaker Dr., Ventura, CA 93001 805-658-5730.

Acadia

Acadia National Park in Maine protects some of the last wildlands on the Atlantic Coast. Here kayakers can paddle along rocky shores, watch harbor seals, and search for porpoises and whales.

More than 300 species of birds can be found at Acadia; 122 of them nest in the park. Acadia offers mountains, islands, and magnificent coastline for the kayaker, including the spectacular cliffs of Isle au Haut, more remote than Mount Desert Island and accessed by ferry boat. On shore, park trails carpeted with spruce needles lead to fantastic views of surrounding islands and the open ocean. Access to the moun-



DAVID MUENCH

Kayakers can explore sea caves and tide pools at Channel Islands National Park in California

tains is made easy by 57 miles of carriage roads, a network of woodland pathways free of motor vehicles.

Kayakers should be aware of rapidly changing weather, which over the course of any three-day trip may in-

clude sun, fog, and strong wind. The fog and hidden underwater ledges can make the Maine coast treacherous going for ships, so much so that today the U.S. Coast Guard maintains five lighthouses in the area. Paddlers should be aware of the tides, which vary from nine to 14 feet.

At Duck Harbor, the National Park Service maintains a campground complete with shelters and grills. Private campsites and those operated by the Park Service are also available in the Bar Harbor area. Groceries and other supplies are available in Bar Harbor, Northeast Harbor, Southwest Harbor, and Ellsworth. For more information, write to Acadia National Park, P.O. Box 177, Bar Harbor, ME 04609 or call 207-288-3338.

Virgin Islands

If paddling cool waters does not appeal to you, try the calm, clear waters of the Caribbean. In Virgin Islands National Park on St. John, V.I., opportunities for warm water kayaking are nearly endless. Sunny skies, crystalline

water, and teeming coral reefs make this an ideal winter destination.

Kayakers can paddle around St. John Island, landing on one of its sandy beaches to swim, snorkel among tropical fish, and watch the island's colorful birds in the rainforest. At Trunk Bay, the park has an underwater trail that follows the coral reef that juts out from the beach. Here, snorkelers can see the vibrant colors of the parrot, lookdown, and trigger fish, as well as the proud yellow and white stripes of the curious sergeant major fish. In the Virgin Islands, snorkelers may see spectacular creatures, such as porcupine fish, rays, and angelfish along with many types of coral, such as brain, fan, and staghorn. Kayakers paddling at dawn or dusk may be lucky enough to spot sea turtles in the island's inlets.

Paddling in the park is good year-round, although kayakers should check the weather daily, especially during the fall. Hurricanes occasionally buffet the islands, and technically hurricane season runs from mid-June to mid-December. Last year, hurricanes Luis and Marilyn tore through the island, dam-



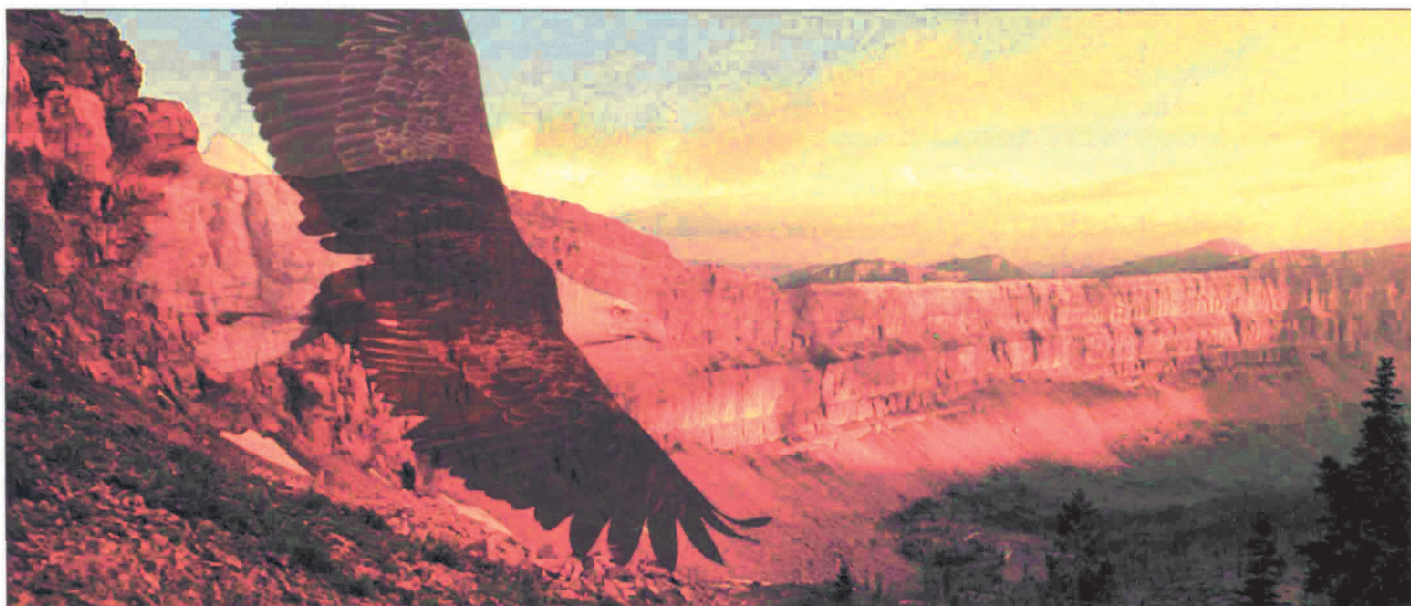
O'NEILL & O'NEILL

Trunk Bay on St. John offers sandy beaches and fantastic snorkeling.

aging buildings and trees. Cinnamon Bay was heavily damaged in the storm, and crews still were working on the site in early 1996. The park is open to visitors, and places such as Maho Bay are up and running, but visitors should call well in advance to make reserva-

tions for cottages and tent sites.

Groceries and other supplies are available on both St. John and St. Thomas. For more information, contact Virgin Islands National Park, P.O. Box 7789, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, VI 00801 or call 809-775-6238.



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