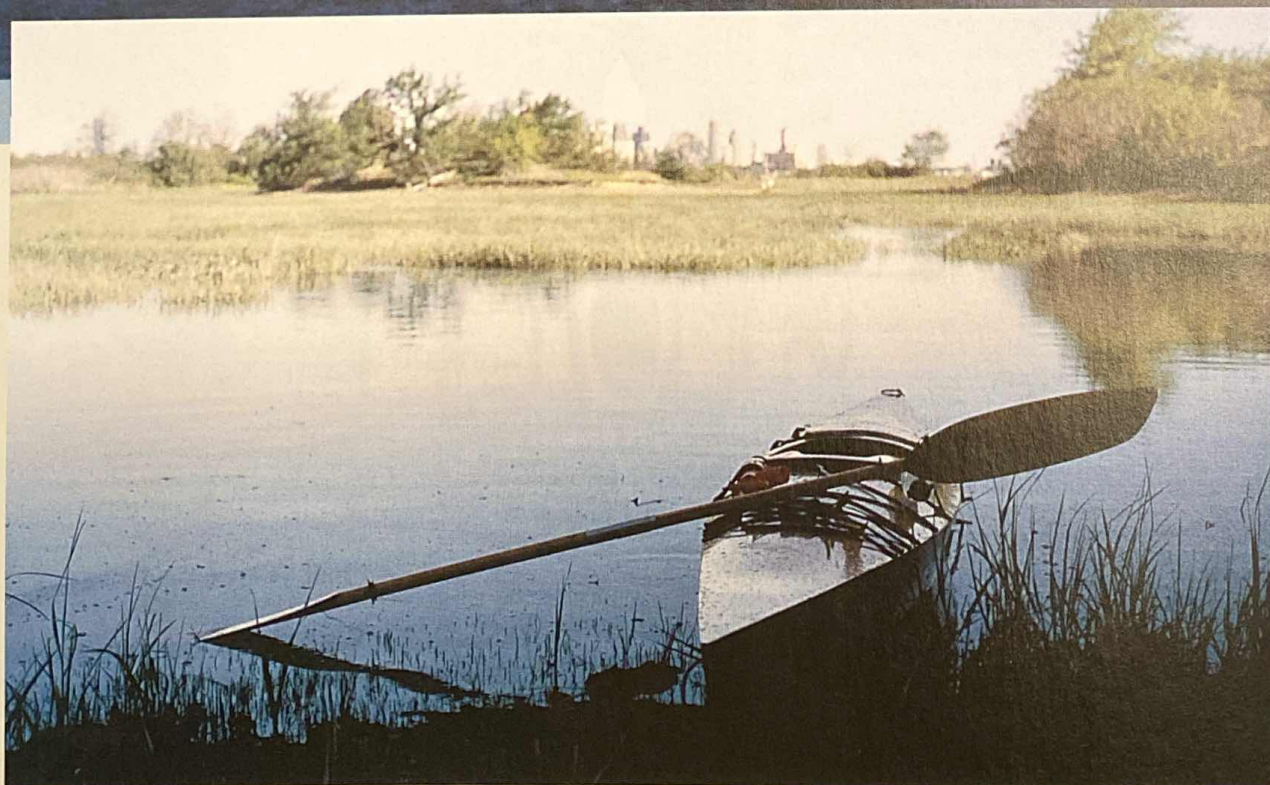
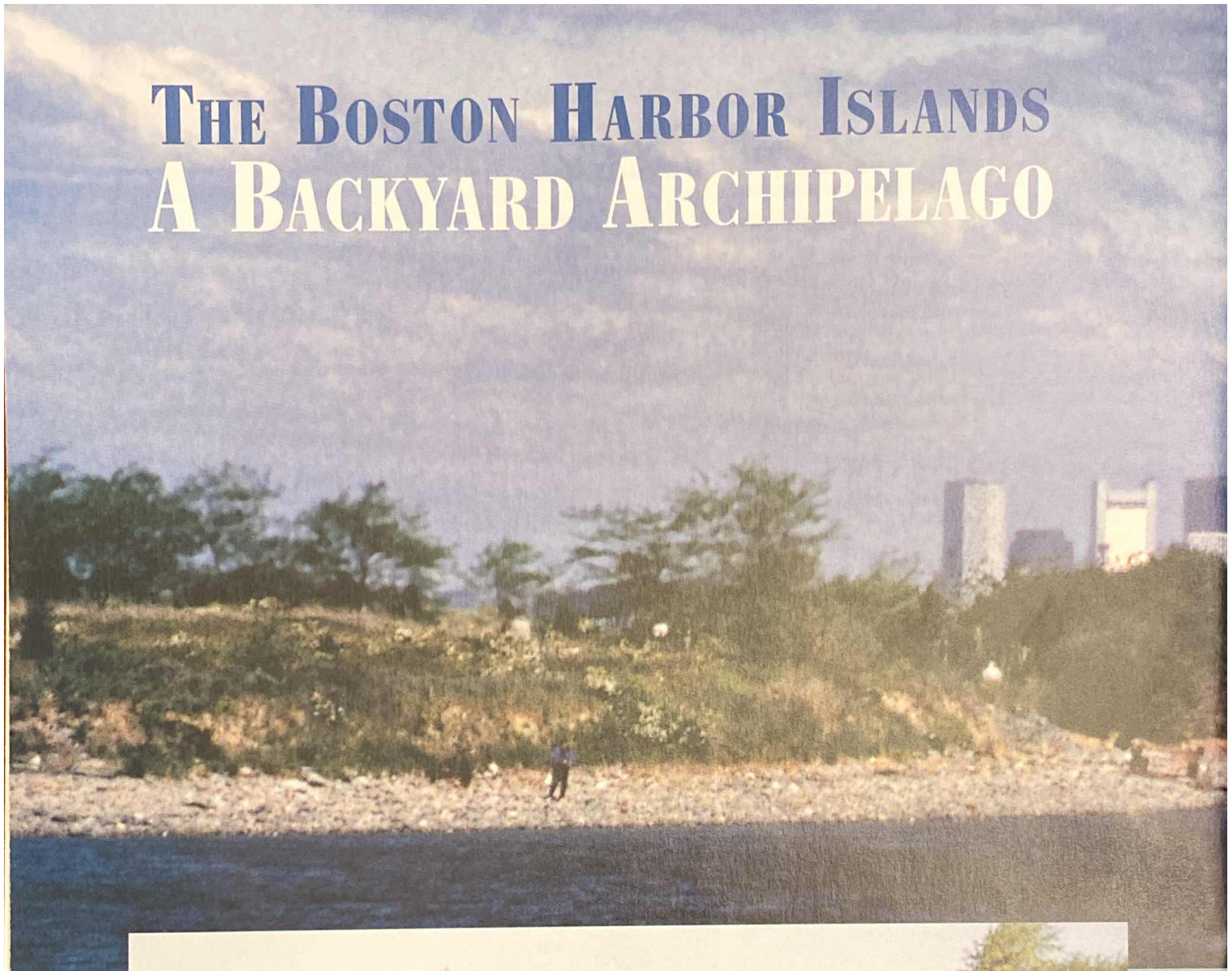
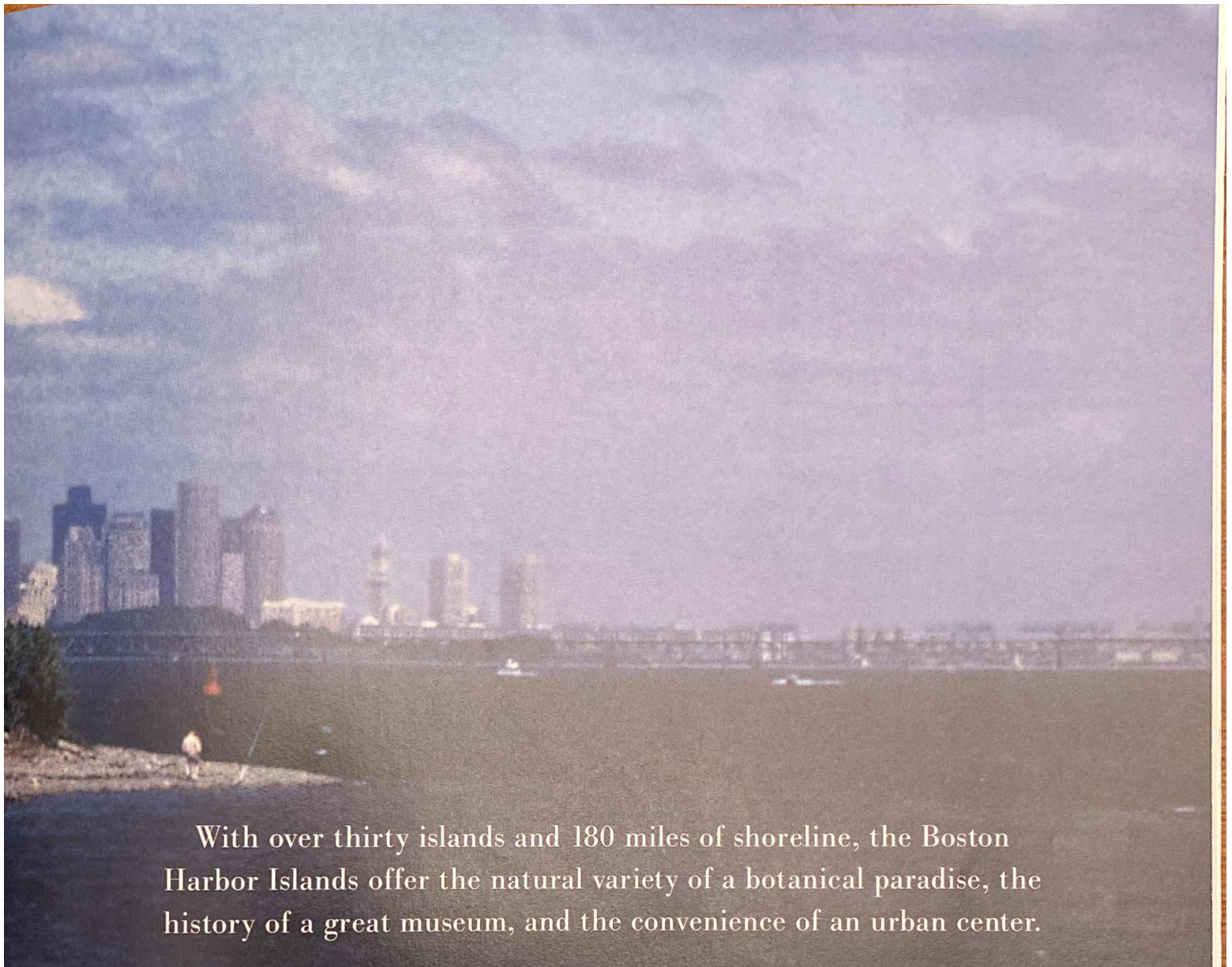


THE BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS A BACKYARD ARCHIPELAGO



*Top: The city peeking out from behind one of the harbor's many islands.
Above: A placid lagoon within sight of the city's skyscrapers.*



With over thirty islands and 180 miles of shoreline, the Boston Harbor Islands offer the natural variety of a botanical paradise, the history of a great museum, and the convenience of an urban center.

With the sun still rising, I paddled slowly through Dorchester Bay. Traffic was minimal, and the few boaters I passed sent me friendly salutes, as if to welcome me into their club of early risers.

Far off to my left a cormorant was diving for breakfast. Jets were beginning to trickle over the low sun and into Logan Airport. The world was waking up, and although the noise from the planes periodically overtook that of the crying gulls, I felt happy and relaxed because in a city of three million people I had finally discovered solitude.

With over thirty islands and 180 miles of shoreline, the Boston Harbor Islands offer the natural variety of a botanical paradise, the history of a great museum, and the convenience of an urban center. Hideaways from the incessant pace of urban life are abundant, and launching sites are numerous.

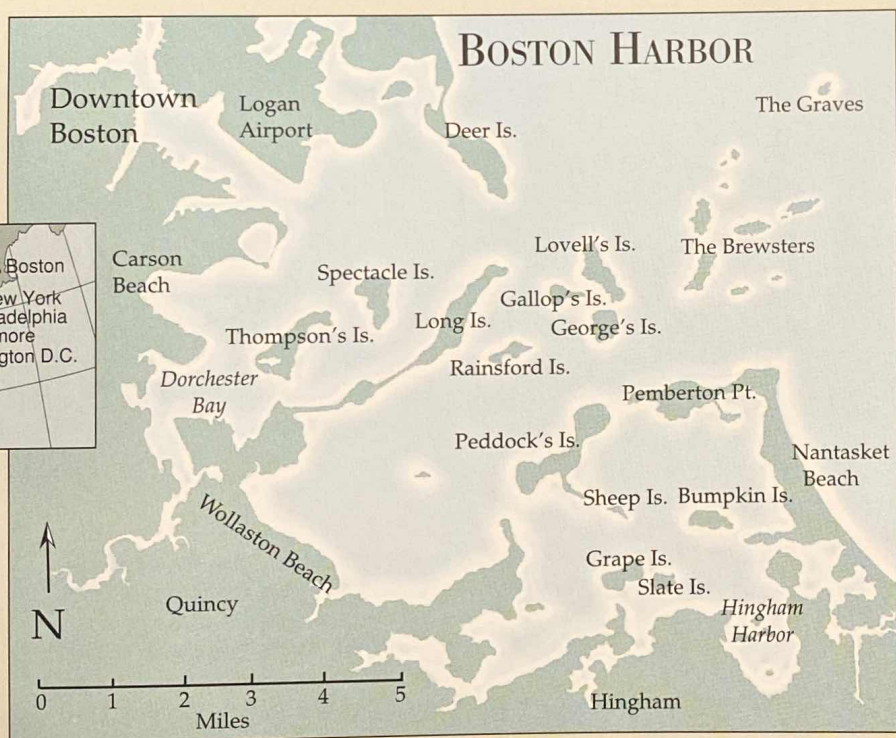
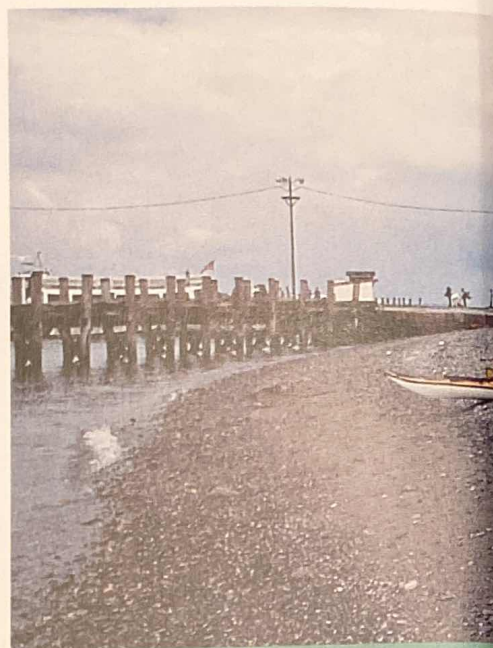
My route would take me through the inner harbor,

past historic forts and shipping lanes, near sandy hummocks and rocky coves, to a camping rendezvous with my wife, Bethany. I couldn't imagine a more perfect weekend: a day alone on the water followed by an evening campfire accompanied by my loved one. I was planning to stop at only four of the islands—a significant number for a full day.

I have the privilege of living on Boston's south shore within walking distance of a sheltered beach, and these islands provide me with hours of freedom and exploration. Only minutes from downtown Boston, I never run out of new places to explore, and my kayak rarely ventures anywhere other than these waters. I find it a thrill to paddle among sandy coastline and marsh, all within sight of the city's towering skyscrapers.

Recently legislated as a National Recreation Area, the Boston Harbor Islands are a new addition to the National Park Service (NPS). Because this "park" offers no fresh drinking water or other "modern con-

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVID WHITEMYER



veniences," it has retained a peacefulness that is difficult to find within a thriving metropolis. Condensed into an area of approximately fifty square miles, these islands are owned and operated by an array of public and private organizations—a new concept in NPS management.

The morning air was calm and dry as I paddled farther from home. Bethany was still on the beach, watching my figure grow smaller in the distance. She was unable to join me for a full day of

paddling. Her belly was expanding with our first child, so it seemed safer for her to arrive using modern transportation. She would meet me later in the day by way of a small passenger ferry.

The water was shallow enough in areas that I could see clam beds zipping by underneath me. I picked up speed for a short sprint and listened as bubbles formed below my kayak's bow. My heart rate quickened. Breathing heavily, I aimed dead east toward a small

dinghy, still only a white speck in my vision, moored off Thompson's Island.

Hidden away on many of the islands are the remnants of farms, forts, hospitals and hotels. In previous explorations, I have frequently found ivy-covered foundations and piles of crumbled brick. Traces of earlier civilization are now blanketed with maple and poplar. Generations of shipwrecks and ghost stories add to the unique blend of nature and civilization on the islands, including one tale of marooned lovers found frozen to death in each others' arms.

The first stop on this beach-hopping adventure was Thompson's Island, located a mere two miles east of my launching spot. This island, known to many area "kelp heads" as the location for the 1998 Boston Harbor Sea Kayak Symposium, is rich in natural and native history. Its 160 acres are covered in forest, flowers and open fields. It also serves as the campus for the Outward Bound Education Center.

As I neared the beach on Thompson's southwestern edge, the current pulled my kayak gently toward the interior salt marsh. A large portion of the island's lower tip is covered with a tidal pond. The water was mirror smooth as I glided through pathways of eel grass and orphaned sea weed. Out of the reeds, day-old ducklings swam squawking from my boat while egrets and herons stared from the shore.

A plateau of soft vegetation made the perfect spot to sit down and have some coffee and granola. I nestled my tush snugly into a pile of broken clam shells



Left: An old foundation—evidence of past inhabitants on Grape Island. Above: A group of sea kayaks parked near the ranger station on George's Island.

and had breakfast while watching the rising sun beat down upon Boston's financial district. A horseshoe crab was struggling over some rocks near my thermos. Just a forty-minute paddle from my front porch, and for a fleeting moment I felt like Robinson Crusoe.

I was navigating through ancient Indian country. Some of northern Europe's earliest contacts with Native Americans—the Neponsets, the Moswetusetts and the Massachusetts—were made in this area. Named for David Thompson, the island's first European settler, this island became a trading post in 1626. Here, Neponset Indians swapped beaver furs for European goods. It's hard to imagine, but at one time almost all overseas imports sailed through these waters. My home-built kayak was traversing the same paths the original inhabitants had rowed in their home-made dugout canoes.

No one is certain exactly when European explorers first laid eyes on Boston Harbor. Historic records indicate that its discovery was probably made near the beginning of the seventeenth century by English or French voyagers, either by Bartholomew Gosnold or the Sieur De Monts. Oral legend, however, suggests that this area may

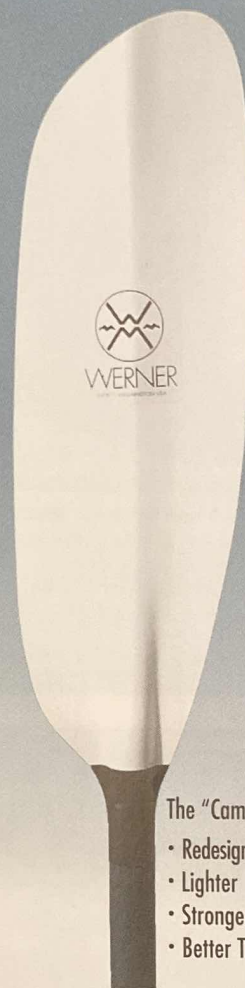
have been visited as far back as 1003 AD by the Norseman Leif Ericson. Whatever the answer, Boston and its harbor have had a long and vibrant past.

I scanned the horizon and tried to imagine what these waters must have looked like so long ago. Scientists have found evidence that humans visited these islands as far back as 10,000 years ago. Although I didn't find any archeological wonders, the southern side of Thompson's Island is littered with china fragments and odd-looking glass bottles. My imagination turned to savage storms and ravaged galleons. I grabbed a slender, sea-worn bottle to use as a vase near my kitchen window. This glass vessel had a story to tell.

Thompson's is one of the few privately owned islands, and I didn't want to overstay my welcome. After re-packing the thermos and storing my camera, I pushed off again.

Heading northeast, I skimmed the coast of Spectacle Island, named because early mariners thought that it looked like a pair of eyeglasses. Today, covered in fresh topsoil, Spectacle Island looks as if a giant child has bulldozed the contents of his sandbox. Of all the Boston Harbor Islands, this one has probably received the most abuse. In the early eighteenth cen-

The Number One Premium Touring Paddle Just Got Better



The "Camano"

- Redesigned for '98
- Lighter
- Stronger
- Better Than Ever

Anyone can build lightweight kayak paddles. But WERNER builds paddles that provide you with the right balance of light weight *and* high durability, combined with superior paddling performance. Contact us for a catalog & more information.

the ones you see on the water



WERNER

1-800-275-3311

www.wernerpaddles.com

P.O. Box 1139 · Sultan, WA 98294

DESIGNS for DESTINATIONS



PLUMBER ISLANDS, B.C. CANADA © STEVEN KIRSCHNER

OCEAN TOURING SPRAY SKIRTS
WHITE WATER SPRAY SKIRTS
COCKPIT COVERS
PADDLE MITTS
BACK BANDS

SNAP DRAGON DESIGN
425-957-3575 PHONE FAX 425-957-4547



Swift
Lighter Brighter

Now Graphite Shaft on ALL Swift Paddles

15466 Ashten Road Burlington, WA 98233
PH: (360) 757-2300 • FAX: 360-757-2302

E-Mail: eddyline@halcyon.com WEB: http://eddyline.com

tury it was a quarantine site for Irish immigrants carrying smallpox. A hundred years later this island became a popular gambling hangout. In the late part of the last century it was used as a disposal site for Boston's horse carcasses. And from the early 1920s until the late 1960s, it was a city dump and salvage repository where grease was squeezed from trash and sold to soap manufacturers.

Things have improved significantly since then. All fears aside, I felt comfortable having water drip down my arm or splash upon my lip. Through extensive environmental lobbying, Boston Harbor has been cleaned up. What President Bush once called the "filthiest harbor in America" is now enjoyed by recreational fishermen and swimmers, and is home to striped bass and cod. Porpoises and harbor seals have even been seen returning to the area. According to the local volunteer group, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, New England's harbor seal population has tripled since the early 1980s. In April 1998, a small colony of these whiskered creatures was spotted on one of the rocky outer harbor islands.

Future plans for Spectacle Island

SEAWARD
KAYAKS

Featuring

srs

safeHATCH™

smartRUDDER™

Innovative design
for optimum
comfort & safety

Turning Art
Into A Craft

Call today for a free catalogue

Toll Free 800-595-9755

www.SeawardKayaks.com

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation. Required by U.S.C. 3685

Title of Publication: Sea Kayaker. Publication Number: 0829-3279. Date of filing: 10/26/98. Frequency of Issue: Bimonthly. Mailing Address: P.O. Box 17170, Seattle, WA 98107-0870. Mailing Address of the Headquarters of Business Offices of the Publisher: P.O. Box 17170, Seattle, WA 98107-0870. Publisher, J. Michael Collins; Editor, Christopher Cunningham; Executive Editor, Leslie Forsberg; P.O. Box 17170, Seattle, WA 98107-0870. Owners: J. Michael Collins, Charles Streach, P.O. Box 17170, Seattle, WA 98107-0870, David Smith, 1832 Cumberland Crescent, Vancouver, B.C. V70 1Y4 Canada.

Extent and Nature of Circulation: February '98-December '98. Avg. No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months (X), actual copies of single issue nearest filing date (Y). A. Total No. copies (Net Press Run): 25,008(X) 25,288(Y). B. Paid or Requested Circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: 12,318(X) 13,508(Y). 2. Mail Subscriptions (Paid and/or Requested): 10,991(X) 10,815(Y). C. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 23,309(X) 24,323(Y). D. Free Distribution by Mail: Samples, Complimentary and other Free Copies: 89(X) 65(Y). E. Free Distribution Outside the Mail: 755(X) 0(Y). F. Total Free Distribution: 844(X) 65(Y). G. Total Distribution: 24,153(X) 24,388(Y). H. Copies Not Distributed: 1. Office Use, Leftover (for sale as Back Issues), Unaccounted, Spoiled: 1,071(X) 1,135(Y). 2. Return from News Agents: 1,273(X) 0(Y). I. TOTAL: 23,951(X) 25,288(Y). Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 97% (X) 100%(Y).

include the development of a Boston Harbor Islands museum and nature center. The "Big Dig," North America's most expensive public works project to date, is displacing barge-loads of earth from underneath Boston's streets to improve traffic flow on the city's arterials. Some of this excavated fill is being used to cover Spectacle Island, providing a substrate for the museum and its grounds. At the moment though, with dump trucks lining the shore, I wasn't enticed to stop and check it out.

Leaving Spectacle Island behind, I rounded the northern tip of Long Island, where a chronic disease hospital once flourished, and set my sights straight east to Lovell's Island. Being a bit farther out in the harbor gave me choppy seas to contend with. The wind had grown stronger. Without a rudder or skeg, I had to pause frequently and adjust my heading. From this vantage point I could gaze out past the Graves lighthouse toward the broad horizon of the Atlantic Ocean. Behind me, an overlapping of island panoramas hid the cityscape. The hint of a skyscraper far off in the distance poked out from behind a tree.

As the first morning passenger ferry sailed near me, its wake caused the waves to surge and swell. The bow of my kayak dug into a small breaker. Water rushed onto the deck and splashed lightly against my chest. The day-trippers onboard took pictures while I reoriented myself.

Nearing lunch time, the recreational boating traffic had increased and I increased my vigilance. Not far in front of me I could read the letters on the side of a bright orange tanker: RACHEL. The deck hands were hardly noticeable along the top edge of its enormous starboard wall.

As beautiful and serene as the harbor islands are, these waters are not for the timid. Boston is still a major shipping destination and the waterways can be crowded, especially in the middle of the day. This busy port is a scary place to be in a sixteen-foot kayak, running alongside mighty container ships, cruise ships, tug boats and military vessels. Traffic safety measures must be practiced: Wear bright clothing and carry noise makers (whistles or air horns). The rule my father once pointed out while teaching me to ride a motorcycle applies here as well: "Assume that you are invisible." The traffic, combined with my picturesque view, filled me with both terror and joy.

VALLEY

SKERRAY^{RM}

THE ULTIMATE IN PLASTIC SEA KAYAKS.

- Length 17" ; Width 23" ; Volume 82 gal. ; Weight 56 lbs.
- Watertight Bulkheads and Hatches (VCP) & Retractable Skeg
- Two Cockpit Sizes (28 x 15.5" & 21 x 15.5")
- Recessed Deck Fittings



- Comfortable Foam Seat with Hull Reinforcement Plate
- Optional Compass & Electric Bilge Pump
- Colors: Deep Turquoise, Granite, Red, Turquoise & Yellow
- Lifetime Warranty for Hatches, Bulkheads & Skeg Box

IMPORTED by GREAT RIVER OUTFITTERS

4180 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford, MI 48328

Phone (248) 683-4770; Fax (248) 644-4960

www.erols.com/rapids/GRO

Please send \$ 1.00 for Catalog & List of Dealers.

**From backpack to
adventure in minutes**

Feathercraft
YOUR ADVENTURE UNFOLDS™

For our brochure and the location of your nearest dealer, contact: Feathercraft Folding Kayaks
4-1244 Cartwright Street Vancouver B.C. Canada V6H 3R8 Phone 604-681-8437
Fax 604-681-7282 <http://www.Feathercraft.com> or info@feathercraft.com

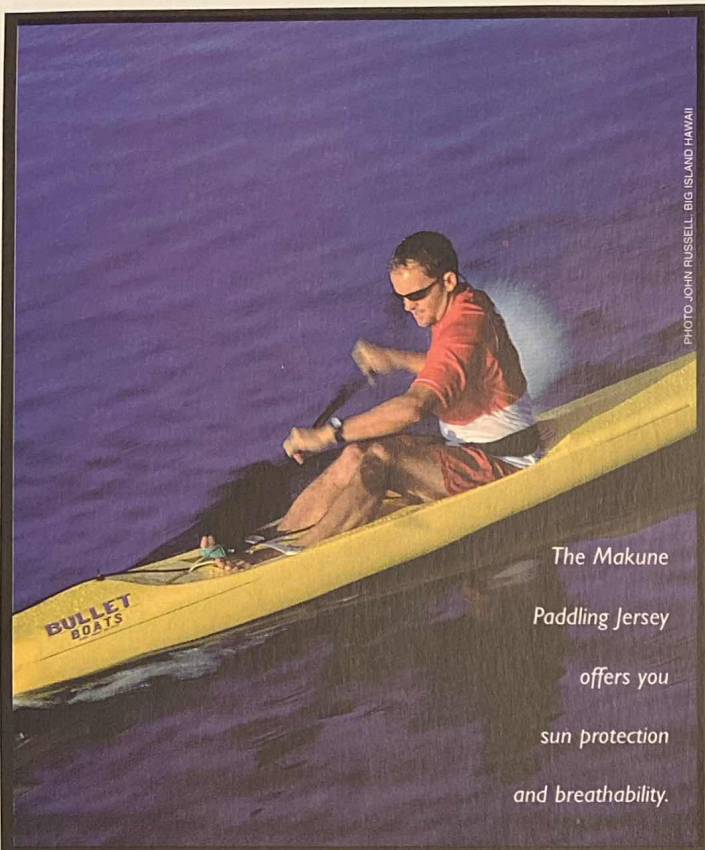


PHOTO JOHN RUSSELL, BIG ISLAND HAWAII

The Makune
Paddling Jersey
offers you
sun protection
and breathability.

Toll Free 1-888-526-3466
or www.makune.com



SEA KAYAK GEORGIA

When paddling the Georgia coast, you are likely to be amazed by two things: its wild beauty and the surprising absence of other human beings. Ten of Georgia's 13 barrier islands are protected wilderness, separated from the mainland by miles of tidal marsh, rivers, creeks and lesser islands. The paddling opportunities are nearly infinite. And because Georgia's winters are so mild, its wonders can be explored year round. Let our staff of coastal naturalists, ACA & BCU instructors take you on an adventure that is closer than you may have imagined.

*Ask about our coast of Scotland,
coast of Maine, and Everglades trips.*

SEA KAYAK GEORGIA 1-888-KAYAKGA
seakayakga@aol.com www.seakayakgeorgia.com

Lovell's Island is popular for its vast, open beaches—a comfortable place to land and give my arms a rest. As I pulled my kayak onto shore, I saw a dozen Boy Scouts scurrying to make camp near the island's eastern edge. For one night of camping, these Scouts were loaded down with enough gear to impress even John Wesley Powell. Many of the backpacks appeared larger than the boys. One of them showed me the spear he had constructed for hunting rabbits.

"This island is covered with rabbits," he said with excitement. "I almost caught one. There's gotta be about 12,000 of 'em!"

Although I question his estimate, his exaggeration was understandable. Lovell's is home to hundreds of rabbits. Standing at any point on the island, I could easily spot four or five within my peripheral vision.

Lovell's is steeped in military history. Scattered throughout the dense foliage are ruined forts dating from the Civil War through World War II. Centrally located on the island's solitary hill are a number of enormous concrete gun emplacements. The cannons now gone, thick weed-pierced walls still loom 30 feet overhead. The Boy Scouts were setting up their tents within the weathered masonry walls of Fort Standish, constructed in 1900. With my kayak resting securely on the beach, I perched myself on a sandy mound and ate several peanut butter sandwiches.

Leaving the serene shores of Lovell's Island behind me, I made a quick jaunt over to George's Island, the "capital" of this harbor archipelago. As I advanced eastward into the open ocean, a number of gleaming white yachts with full sails glided past me. I watched the horizon bounce up and down as the energetic waves played catch with my kayak.

On the western edge of George's Island I was met by a long timber pier and a large, red brick building. The smell of ferry fuel was strong. This building and boat landing act as the transportation hub for the rest of the harbor islands. Public ferries make their stops here, and smaller "water taxis" carry visitors to other islands. Rangers, in their familiar green-and-tan uniforms, welcome the arrivals and assist the boats in docking.

I sidled up to the dock with a brisk draw stroke. With the help of a nearby boat owner, I lugged the kayak over the quay's planks and into an open grassy yard. Grabbing my water bottle, I headed uphill for a tour of the island's imposing bastion.

The peak attraction on George's Island is Fort Warren. As I stood on top of its granite walls looking out toward the ocean, I understood this island's strategic importance. It's the perfect spot for protection, located at the "throat of Boston Harbor," as one book put it. Although there has been a fortification on this island since the Revolutionary War, construction began on Fort Warren in 1833, and it was used primarily as a military base until World War II. Between wars it was used as a prison. Now, visitors may tour the fort or picnic on its grounds.

I had a long stretch of paddling ahead of me—at least four miles to Grape Island. Launching again, I paddled toward Pemberton Point, a popular kayak launching site. Pemberton Point sits at the tip of a long peninsula that juts far out into the harbor. This elongated, L-shaped land mass creates Hingham Bay, a pocket of fairly calm

water. Concerned about the heavy ferry traffic, I hugged the coast of neighboring Peddock's Island and Sheep Island as closely as possible. Still, I had a lot of open sea to cover.

I arrived at Grape Island late in the afternoon in calm seas and a tender breeze. Bethany was sitting patiently by the pier, reading and relaxing in a white Adirondack chair near some blooming shrubs. A ferry from Hingham had dropped her off on the island earlier that afternoon.

After setting up camp, we decided to take a hike along the beach before dinner. Near the tide line, we came to a sharp outcropping of dark, copper-colored rocks, still shiny from the receding water. We were able to shear off tiny slabs as thin as one quarter of an inch. According to a guide book Bethany brought along, this outcropping is the type of slate that makes up the harbor's bedrock, called Cambridge argillite. One finds this stone jutting up sporadically among the islands. It stands as evidence to the geological forces that formed this area.

Millions of years ago as the earth heaved and rumbled, a chunk of its crust broke off and settled. This formed the lowland plain known as the Boston Basin. Eventually, glaciers traveled through the area, grinding and ripping the land apart, leaving small, smooth hills of glacial till called "drumlins." The glaciers then melted and sea levels rose. Water surrounded these drumlins, creating the Boston Harbor Islands.

A thicket of rugosa rose had taken root in the coarse sand. Its purplish-red blossoms stood out in contrast to the pale blue line where the sky met the sea. A cluster of tiny, bright yellow birds with a hint of black on their bellies fluttered around some tropical-looking staghorn sumacs. According to the ranger, the

Resources

Island Information: The islands are open from 9 a.m. until sunset. Lovell's, George's, Grape and Gallop's Islands are staffed seasonally and open for day use. Peddock's, Bumpkin and many of the other islands are accessible, but unstaffed. Thompson's Island is owned by the Outward Bound Education Center [(617)-328-3900] and requires permission to visit. Long Island and Deer Island also require permission to visit. Because of extreme conditions, paddlers visiting the rocky outer Harbor islands—Graves, Brewster and Green—should be limited to the very experienced.

Camping Information: Campsites are available on Grape, Lovell's, Peddock's and Bumpkin islands. Permits are required, but they are free. To obtain a permit, call (617)-727-7676.

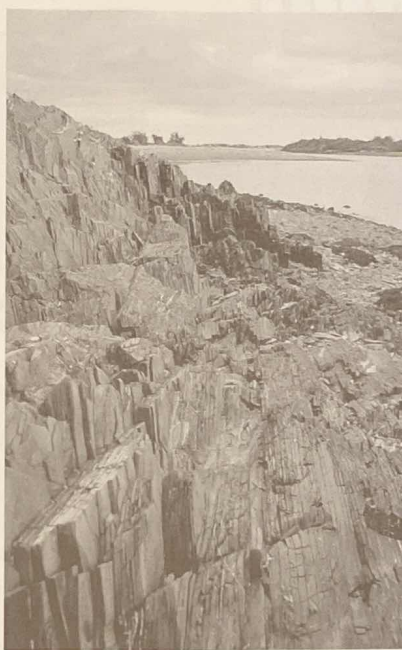
Facilities: Only George's Island has water. Pit toilets are available on only a few of the islands.

Park Information: Contact the National Park Service for up-to-date information about the Boston Harbor National Recreation Area. Call (617)-223-8666 or (617)-727-7676. Website: www.nps.gov/boha

Kayak Launching: The greater Boston area is surrounded with public beaches and boat launches. Popular launch sites include Pemberton Point in Hull, Wollaston Beach in Quincy, and Carson Beach in South Boston. Obtain a current map to locate the most convenient spot.

Kayak Rentals and Trips: Charles River Canoe and Kayak, (617) 965-5110; Appalachian Mountain Club, (617) 523-0636; Zoar Outdoor, (800) 532-7483; Boston Sea Kayak Club e-mail: al.goldberg@channel1.com

Climate: New England weather is variable and ever-changing. Clear, crisp days can turn cloudy and cold very quickly. Obtain an accurate weather forecast before leaving shore. For local weather and harbor conditions call (617) 936-1234.



An outcropping of Cambridge argillite on Grape Island's southern edge.

birds were either yellowthroat warblers or American goldfinch.

Following dinner at our campsite, a group of young adults invited us back down to the beach to share their driftwood fire. An eclectic and friendly group, they had met each other by scanning personals on the Internet and had formed a small hiking club. I couldn't help but laugh at the irony. This club had been introduced using the most modern form of communication, and there we all were, poking sticks into a hot flame.

As the sun sank lower on the horizon, I could see the glow of a campfire on the shore of a nearby island. The roar of overhead planes was becoming less frequent and the day-trippers in their boats were heading back to port. The water was calm and the glow of reflected moonlight gently lit our eyes.

I thought of the following day and the paddling to come. We would wake up and have breakfast, then I would push off on the long stretch home, trailing the coastline along the way. Projects were waiting for me back at the house: a lawn to be mowed, a doorknob to repair. I had hoped to visit a few more of the islands on this trip, but they would have to wait until the following weekend when I could get out here again.

For now though, I relaxed in the arms of my wife. In the fire's warm glow a German fellow named Martin embraced his guitar and treated us to a version of "Don't Pay the Ferryman." It seemed appropriate. SK

David Whitemyer is a museum exhibit designer living in Boston, Massachusetts. He spends most of his kayaking time near home, exploring the Boston Harbor Islands and the neighboring river basins.