

Yellow Island Trip Report

By Ed Alm

Over the years I have several times enjoyed participating in the spring paddling trip sponsored by WAKE to visit Yellow Island. This year I determined that if the trip was going to happen I would have to lead it. Yellow Island is a Nature Conservation Area owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy. In the spring Yellow Island puts on a display of natural native wild flowers that is spectacular. Yellow Island is located between Shaw, Orcas and San Juan Islands. It is about a mile south of Jones Island which is a State Park with camping facilities.

I started planning the trip in January. Some of the planning challenges were finding a place to launch as well as park cars for a group. Also arranging with the Nature Conservancy for permission for the group to visit Yellow Island. The NC is careful about limiting large groups on Yellow Island. Also synchronizing with Ferry times and the currents in Wasp and Spring passages added a little complexity to the plan.

By a week prior to the trip we had 18 persons signed up to attend. Unfortunately the weather forecast was looking a little cool and rainy. That along with the fact that the whole spring had been very cool and the flowers were very likely delayed caused many of us to have second thoughts. Ultimately I decided that the weather forecast, although not what I would like to see, was not bad enough to warrant canceling the trip. Friday morning eight of us showed up at the Anacortes Ferry Terminal at 7:00 AM. The brave souls that made the trip were, Ed and Bonnie Alm, Helene and Steve Irving, Gary Henderson, Jill Rizk, Larry Lewis, and George Biehl. It was cool and cloudy. By the time we were launching on Orcas at 9:00 the sun had come out and it was a glorious but cool day. We even needed our sunglasses. No wind, the water was calm and the currents were with us. Instead of paddling directly to Jones Island from our launch site near the Orcas Ferry landing, the group decided to take a more circuitous route touring around West Sound. Ultimately this turned a planned 5 mile paddle into 11 miles but added a lot of interesting shoreline, wildlife and waterfalls to the trip. We ended up stopping for lunch at Deer Harbor where we could buy some treats including cold milk as well as make use of their flush toilets. After a late lunch we headed over to Jones Island to set up camp. Once we got to camp most of us had had enough paddling for the day and were content to sit by the fire and enjoy the view. The campfire was very welcome because the predicted cool temperatures stayed with us all day.

Saturday morning dawned bright and sunny. After a leisurely breakfast we left for Yellow Island. Our group was scheduled to tour the island at 10:00. We arrived on time and the caretaker met us and gave a nice orientation talk. After that we were free to roam the trails on the island at our leisure. We were surprised to find lots of flowers in bloom although, according to the caretaker the flowers blooming were much later this year. The bright sun really helped the experience. After about an hour of wandering all over the island we were ready to get back in the boats and wander around in the water. We spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon paddling around the wasp islands, exploring nooks and crannies. We found an acceptable beach for lunch although it was north facing so we couldn't get the full benefit of the sun. After lunch we decided to jump into the pretty healthy current running in

Wasp Passage between Crane and Shaw Island. This gave us a fun but short lived ride toward camp. As we headed back to camp the wind was rising and made for a choppy ride across Spring Passage. When we arrived back at Jones there was a group of six paddlers sitting on the beach soaking up the sun. Dan Harris and Pat Peacock were among them, so we had a nice visit. Sitting in the sun became just too addictive and most of us (all but one). Spent the rest of the afternoon sitting in camp enjoying the sunshine and pleasant weather. That evening we were treated to a very nice moonrise over the water that we watched as we sat around the campfire.

Sunday morning we were up early to get the boats packed and get on our way, we had a ferry to catch. The whole group was very efficient and we left on or before our planned time. As we headed back to the Orcas Ferry Landing the current gave us a boost. We ended up with an extra 45 minutes so the group decided to add in a visit to Blind Island which was only a slight detour. The low tide made for a pretty rough landing situation at Blind Is. But we had a nice rest stop there. After that it was back to our original launch site and then in line for the ferry. We all had time while waiting for the ferry to peruse the little shops and buy some treats at the bakery.

We said our good-byes on the ferry and when we landed in Anacortes we all headed our separate ways. A very pleasant group, a very pleasant trip.





