



~MAY 2020 NEWSLETTER~

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To view useful information related to all things kayaking, re. calendar for trips and events, trip planning, photo gallery, WAKE trading post and library.

REMINDER

Due to the Covid-19 epidemic, all WAKE events are cancelled or postponed per Governor Inslee's proclamation. WAKE cannot have events and should not be announcing any group paddles. People contacting friends to paddle are not a WAKE activity, nor WAKE sanctioned. Access is closed at some parks and boat ramps, so please plan accordingly. Stay safe and happy paddling.

WAKE has cancelled all formal club activities until further notice. We are being consistent with Washington State and Health Department precautions for the Covid-19 virus. We wish everyone the best for staying healthy and sane.

A very key point in the ACA recommendations is: if you choose to paddle then paddle only in very small groups and in situations that are well below your "highest ability level". This leaves a lot of room for "gray area interpretation" i.e, what is small group and what is my highest ability level. We each have to make those interpretations on our own.

Amy Hammer's photo contribution



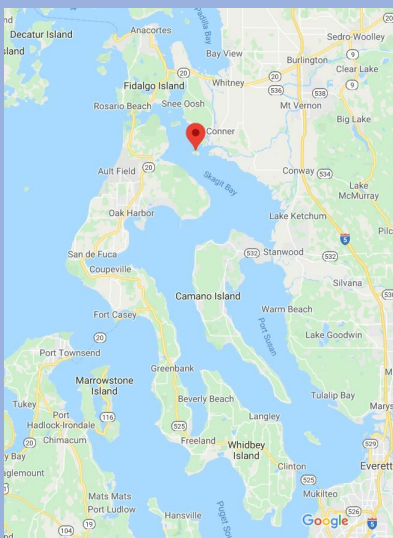
Amy and Sharon's big smiles

There will be no newsletters from June-August. If/when you are out paddling this summer, please, write up a trip report including your photos for September and future newsletters. Email to cheryl@wakekayak.org. Thank you.

Lessons learned kayaking Skagit Bay: multiple changing currents and tidal flats at ebb tide

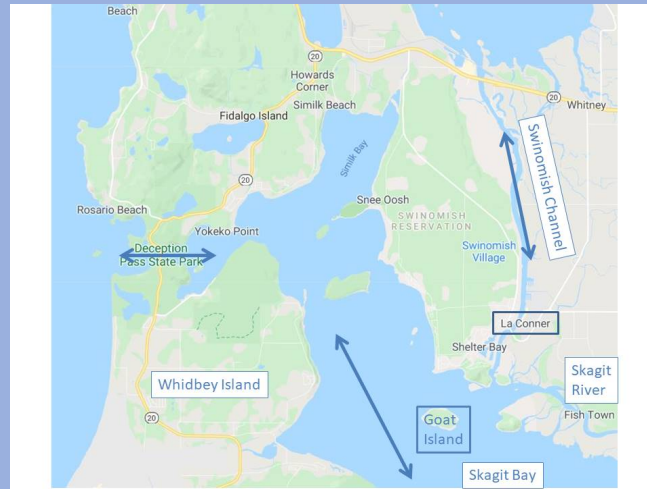
Well-protected Skagit Bay might seem like a simple paddle. But it is more complex than I anticipated, as we observed when paddling with a couple of friends on April 28.

36-mile long Whidbey Island has the intense Deception Pass currents to the north, and the south point juts into Puget Sound. The tides and currents pass through channels and around islands, which makes local prediction important for our specific path.

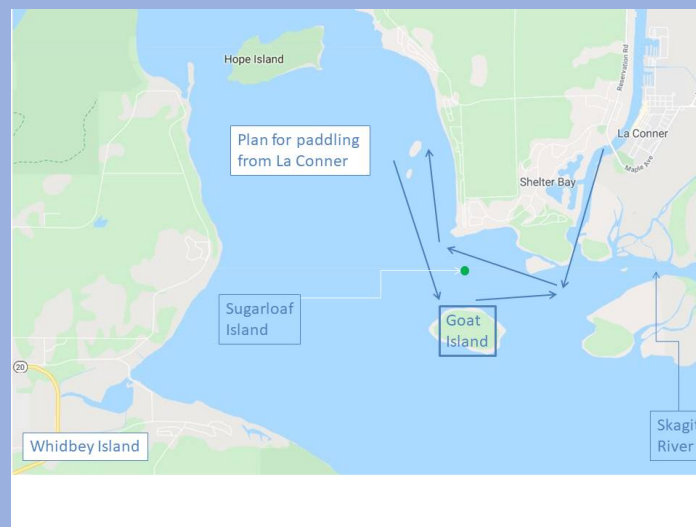


I'd never launched from the east side of Skagit Bay before. Our

intention was to put in near Snee Oosh and paddle to Hope Island. But access was closed due to Covid-19. Instead we launched at the La Conner Rainbow Bridge on the Swinomish Channel and headed for Skagit Bay. The Swinomish Channel currents flow between Skagit Bay to the south and Padilla bay to the north. This added an extra challenge, since we started out paddling against this current.



We paddled out of Swinomish Channel, past the mouth of Skagit River, and into Skagit Bay. We headed west towards little Sugarloaf Island and planned to go north to circle around a couple of small islands.



We passed over a row of shallowly submerged rock. It was like Pinocchio passing over the teeth of the whale and into its mouth. These rocks make up a berm (or levee or dike) which borders the navigational channel at low tide. I didn't realize that, but fortunately, I was paddling with people who had paddled here before.

Our paddles told us we were above a shallow mudflat. It was an ebb tide. We could see deeper channels by differences in surface waves and subsurface color. We made our way around north and west around Sugarloaf Island.



The water's surface helped identify shallow mudflats versus deeper channels

We circled the two northern small islands and headed south to Goat Island. Sugarloaf Island was growing as we passed west of it. The tidal flats rose relative to our kayaks. We curved to the west to deeper water.

We reached the navigable channel west of Goat Island and investigated the length of the rock berm and an opening in the middle of it. South of the berm was becoming shallow mudflats.



We checked this opening in the rock berm (or levee or dike) west of Goat Island.

Red and green buoys marked the navigable channel. Red on Right Returning! That not only directs boat traffic at the buoys, but the buoys identify the navigable channel when everything was submerged at high tide.

We paddled up the current of the navigable channel. We stopped at Goat Island for lunch, a walk, and to view the area we had paddled. And for a healthy skin mud treatment.

From Goat Island. We paddled from right to left across the mudflats in the back of photo before the tide went out.



From Goat Island. We paddled from right to left across the mudflats in the back of photo before the tide went out.



At Goat Island. Mudflats in the background. Kayak with mud footprints

The kayak and footprints in the deep mud displays the hazard that getting stuck on the mudflat would be. It would simply be a several-hour wait for the tide to come back up, provided we were smart enough to not try to walk on it. At the beach, I placed rocks in the mud to walk on when launching my kayak. One rock I put back because a dozen little crabs under it said “WTF?! We LIVE here, go get your own rock!”



The maps show how different the area is at high versus low tide.

On Goat Island, the Fort Whitman WWII defensive military ruins added a completely different element to a unique and fascinating kayaking day.



Fort Whitman WWII gunmount on Goat Island

We paddled against the current of the navigable channel and Swinomish channel back to our cars under the eyes of an eagle and some cormorant lifeguards.



Eagle and cormorant lifeguards alongside channel watching as we paddled back to La Conner



Conclusions

We all know it is crucial to know conditions before going kayaking. I personally did not know all I needed, and had to rely on the knowledge of my colleagues for this trip because our location changed. Just a short list includes:

Tide chart and currents specific to the paddle route and time
Hazardous conditions at different tidal levels and currents, e.g. mudflats, shoals, shallow rocks, whirlpools, tide rips, and many more.
Weather and marine weather forecast

Have the appropriate skills and gear. We're happy we brought our usual extra equipment and safety equipment, including charts, phones with apps and backup battery, GPS, extra food, water, marine radio, space blankets, flares, etc.

Paddling against current both down and up Swinomish Channel and the navigable channel reminded me of walking to school as a child; uphill both ways! It was a good workout, within our skills and energy. We initially aspired to paddle further north, but shortened it as a precaution as conditions changed.

A WAKE speaker several years ago showed us the increased sediment deposited in the bays by the Skagit and Nooksack River. Thank you to the US Forest Service Geologist for that talk. As I recall, it is the result because humans have diked, filled in, and developed the river floodplains. Perhaps these shallow, low-angle slope shelves (mudflats) are a result or at least impacted by that. We kayakers certainly need to be careful of many hazards, including being caught in the shallows at ebb tide at the Skagit, Nooksack, and other rivers and locations.

Perhaps by sharing this story I'll receive criticism for my judgement on that paddle. However, my safety training obligates me to share a reality check of risk so others will plan for "what could possibly go wrong?" Our situation was not particularly dangerous, this is more about observing what COULD have gone wrong. We weren't that close to getting stuck or stranded, didn't run out of food or water, we had proper equipment, made it back intact, and had quite a good

workout. We'll call that a fun and successful paddle.

Happy Paddling,
Sheila Kluck