

The Anacapa / Santa Cruz Trip

by Peter M. Praed

Twelve paddlers met at the usual hour, and usual spot – 6:00 am, Channel Island Harbor beach – for the start of a weekend adventure that was more than just a trip to Anacapa. This was the first Southwind trip to two islands; a forerunner of what hopefully will be a kayak trail covering all four of the Channel Islands from Anacapa to San Miguel. An assessment has been conducted by the National Park Service with Doug and Joanne from Southwind leading a circumnavigation, regarding beach camping on Santa Rosa. That was successfully completed and camping is now allowed on that island's beaches (with some very important restrictions). Now paddlers are hoping for permission from the California Nature Conservancy to establish a couple of campsites on the western end of Santa Cruz. Then a kayak trail could commence on San Miguel, and allow kayakers to paddle the chain of four islands, finishing at Anacapa. Southwind's owner, Doug Schwartz, was our guide. We started paddling at 8:00 am with our thoughts on getting to Anacapa, rather than the long range trail possibility. Even though there were storm warnings for the area between Point Conception and San Miguel, the ocean was calm with a light breeze.

The paddle over was one of the smoothest and fastest I've made. By noon we were getting ready for the lengthy procedure of hoisting the kayaks up on to the dock, and then making the exhausting climb with all our gear to the campsite. Once there, tents were soon up and after relaxing for a while we all explored the various trails. As is customary after dinner, we watched the sunset from the eastern point.

Saturday dawned in typical Anacapa fashion, cool and cloudy. After breakfast we had the long trek with our gear back to the dock to re load and launch for the paddle to Santa Cruz. We proceeded along the north side of the island, exploring a few caves along the way. We stopped at Frenchy's Cove for an early lunch. As we left the cove the sun broke through and stayed with us for most of the trip across Anacapa Passage to Santa Cruz. Our heading was just about due west, with the island in sight most of the time. At the mid point a brief weather system blew through engulfing us in low cloud and choppy seas. This lasted about 40 minutes and then it was back to calm, sunny weather. Our destination was Smugglers Cove located on the Southeast side of the section of the island. Our landing was through dumping surf, but with Doug's help we all made it dry. The only problem was when I had to make a quick reverse maneuver to avoid getting dumped by a large wave. Even though it broke over me, I was able to follow it in and land wet, but safe.

The campsite at Smugglers Cove was heaven in comparison to Anacapa – no steps to lug gear up, just a soft sandy beach with a distance of 50 yards to where we could pitch our tents. This end of the island was once part of a well-established community and there remain several buildings, fruit trees, olive orchards and miscellaneous animals that now roam wild. Near the outdoor shower by the old house we encountered about a dozen wild piglets who delighted themselves splashing around in the mud that our shower water created. The adult pigs stayed further away, grunting in annoyance at having their environment disturbed. Wild peacocks were a little more sociable and enjoyed being hand fed as we had our pot luck dinner. And what a dinner it was; salads of every variety, an excellent chili, some incredibly spicy hot sauce provided by our visiting New York paddler, plus the usual compliment of goodies found only at Trader Joe's. There was a stone fire pit, where we built a large fire with plenty of available firewood. There we sat, well into the night, eating, drinking and enjoying the good company.

The following morning we started later than planned and enjoyed a relaxing paddle around San Padre Point passed Scorpion ranch and Cavern Point exploring various caves along the way. The final cave was one that I had experienced on a previous trip. I enjoy caves, especially when they cut through headland. This cave however was not a cave, but a long narrow tunnel extending well into the island. Remembering my earlier claustrophobic experience, I decided to let the others try it. I enjoyed a relaxing paddle to the Point just to the west. By now the time was getting close to 1:30 when we had to meet the Island Packers boat at Scorpion Anchorage for the trip back to Ventura. We arrived a little early, when, suddenly hordes of people appeared on the beach, some from spending a weekend at the ranch; some campers; some from an arranged kayak day trip. By the time everyone and their gear were loaded it was well after 4:00 p.m. The highlight of the boat trip back was seeing a pod of between 800 and 1,000 dolphins racing alongside the boat, entertaining us with their leaps and splashes.

We arrived at Ventura Harbor at 6:30, collected our gear and headed for home. Several of us are ready to accompany Doug and Southwind on another trip starting at the other end of the island chain, from San Miguel to Santa Rosa.

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