

A Catalina Island Trip

by Peter M. Praed

It was a small group that met at the Catalina Express terminal in San Pedro for a three day trip; our Southwind guide, Harold, two guys, two ladies and myself. The weather forecast was a total enigma. Since Monday I'd monitored the National Weather Service and their forecasts had varied from cold, foggy, overcast conditions, to dry Santa Ana's. We all hoped for the latter, but came prepared with warm, stay dry gear. The boat got us to the Isthmus around noon in warm, sunny weather. Shipping your own kayak to Catalina is a total pain, so arrangements were made with an outfit at Twin Harbors that rents Chinooks and Sealions. Since I have paddled a Chinook for the last 6 years I selected one and started packing.

We headed out in perfect conditions for our first campsite at Parson,s Landing. An ocean chop picked up as we rounded Arrow Point – just enough to add interest before we reached our campsite. The landing was through a light surf that we all handled without any problem. The campsite was right on the beach and by late afternoon, tents and gear were all in place. Harold had arranged for a bundle of firewood to be at the site, so before it became too dark we set about trying to light a campfire. Large logs, and no kindling caused a problem, but after about half an hour of lighting, re-lighting and hard blowing on smoldering dry grass, the fire caught. It turned out to be the best campfire I have experienced for a long time. At 8 o'clock three people headed for their tents; I left around 9, and the last two stayed until after 10.

Saturday dawned foggy, but as we launched, the sun came out, the breeze dropped, and that was how the weather remained for the rest of the trip. The ocean swell picked up considerably once we rounded West Point, and with waves bouncing off the cliffs it remained very choppy for the next hour. One of the guys had taken some medication early morning that with the choppy conditions caused him some problems, so he prudently decided to call it quits when we reached Twin Harbor. In true kayaking tradition, his kayaking buddy stayed with him. The remaining four of us had lunch, and then headed down to our next campsite at Little Harbor. Other than the roaming buffalo, the campsite looked like one I had used in Hawaii; a sheltered bay with palm trees, green grass, even running water and showers. It was most welcome after a long day of paddling. When we had stopped earlier at Twin Harbor, we had picked up some wine and a six pack; combined with the traditional pot luck dinner, we had a grand, relaxing evening. Great food, great drinks, great company, as always on a Southwind trip – who could wish for anything better.

Sunday morning was warm and dry – it felt like a lazy type of day, so we decided to make it a relaxing paddle back to Twin Harbor. We stopped and watched a couple of seals that were watching us; stopped on kelp beds and looked through the clear water at myriads of fish. About a mile from our destination we spotted a small sandy cove and decided to make a landing in the moderate surf – not quite as easy an operation as at Parsons Landing. A couple of us got a bit wet, but it was worth it to relax for a while before completing the last leg of our trip. Back at the south side of the Isthmus, the kayaks and our personal gear were picked up by the rental people. We walked the mile across the Isthmus to the harbor to catch the ferry back to the mainland. With an hour to spare, we visited the local restaurant and bar to check out the rumor that they served a great margarita – they do! What a perfect finish to an incredible weekend.

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