

The Lower Tomol Trail

Point Mugu to Santa Monica Pier

by Peter M. Praed

On Saturday, October 12th, 1996 18 kayakers met at Point Mugu Beach Park for the official opening of the Tomol Trail. Tomols were the plank boats the Chumash Indians used years ago for hunting, transportation and to cover their trade routes. With respect to the Chumash, one of their chiefs, Charlie Cook, was invited to officially bless and open the first coastal kayak trail in Southern California. The chief placed some white sage in a ceremonial abalone bowl, lit the sage and blessed all present by encircling each person with the fragrant white smoke it produced. After a few words from Doug Kirk of the Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council, Joanne Turner, the founder of the California Kayak Friends and owner of Southwind Kayak Center, officials of the State Parks, U.S. Coast Guard and County Lifeguards, we launched and headed towards Santa Monica. The Chumash chief told us dolphins were brothers to the Chumash and would protect us on our journey. Within a few minutes after the launch, a pod of dolphins swam between our kayaks. The ocean was smooth, and the morning fog started to dissipate, but after we rounded Sycamore Point the wind picked up and it became quite choppy. The first stop was the new camp site designated for kayakers at north Leo Carrillo State beach. Several participants camped for the night. Three of us landed a mile south at Sequit Point where I called home and arranged the car shuttle.

Early Sunday morning we joined Joanne, Dexter and Doug at their campsite and six of us set out towards Santa Monica. Like the previous day, the ocean was calm for the first couple of hours, then a light chop picked up and stayed with us until we rounded Point Dume. From there it was smooth paddling as we approached Paradise Cove. At this point, Joanne and Doug called it a day and Dexter paddled off into the distance. Three of us, Sigrid and Ed Benes and I, paddled leisurely towards our planned take out point at Malibu Pier. We caught up with Dexter at the pier, and gave him some of our spare water for his paddle to Topanga Beach where he left his car. Three of us landed at the pier through gentle waves that are usual for that spot. It was a long two day paddle – 25 miles for the three of us who landed at Malibu Pier, and 32 for the sole member who made it to Topanga.

A week after completing the first section of the trail, three of us launched at Malibu Pier for the 11 mile paddle to the end of the trail at Santa Monica Pier. As we launched, the sun was just showing above the clear horizon. Santa Ana winds had been blowing through Saturday evening into early Sunday morning, but now it was a calm, very clear, beautiful morning. The offshore winds picked up within thirty minutes and we were concerned that instead of cutting directly across the bay for Santa Monica, we would be forced to hug the coastline for protection from the winds. We paddled for about an hour with four foot swells from directly behind, and wind waves hitting us on the port side. They were the kind of conditions that force you to concentrate on your paddling technique, but it did add some interest to the trip. As we passed Topanga Beach conditions changed. The offshore winds ceased, the ocean breezes had not yet arrived and it was a perfect, calm, paddling day. We reached the end of the trail in less than three hours. We felt that an 11 mile trip in that time was worth celebrating, so we raised our water bottles and toasted ourselves on the achievement. After a couple of photos with Santa Monica pier in the background we set out for Marina del Rey as planned to complete the car shuttle arrangements. The four foot swells were still with us, and we took good advantage of surfing down their face whenever we could. The winds were still hovering between offshore and ocean as we pulled into the channel at Marina del Rey. We landed exactly five hours after our launch, feeling well satisfied with our 18 mile achievement.

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