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# Santa Rosa Island '04

*Wet, Wild, and Wonderful!*

*October 8-10, 2004*

*by Jerry King*

## Friday

In the early morning, a group of eleven guests met our lead guides from Southwind Kayaks, Harold and Rose and two that would assist, George and Lee, at the Island Packers offices in the Ventura Marina. Kayaks and gear were loaded onto the Islander in a fairly manic operation for the three-hour voyage to Santa Rosa Island. After unloading passengers at Scorpion Bay on Santa Cruz Island, the ship headed next for Santa Rosa, an hour and a half away. Thick fog reduced visibility to a few hundred feet for most of the trip across...giving way to brilliant sunshine only a couple of miles from the shores of Santa Rosa Island.

Our landing site was at the end of a long pier that jutted from a barren shore. With a moderate swell rolling through, the process of off loading the kayaks, gear and passengers from the bow of the Islander, required careful timing so as not to be crunched by a heaving boat. Once all the gear was atop the pier, the Islander departed to drop the remaining passengers off on San Miguel Island.

While the guides were devising a plan for the day's activities, several guests commenced to heft their gear to the campsite a mile and a half away. When it was finally decided to launch the kayaks prior to setting up camp, those headed for the campsite dropped their gear along side the road and headed back to the pier. Because the shore break represented a pretty dicey proposition, it was decided to lower the kayaks off the end of the pier to the water some 30' below. One by one, the party descended on a ladder and stepped into their kayaks that were being steadied by Harold, who had entered the water first.

After a sun-drenched and fairly windless paddle along the coastline, it was time to land. A stretch of beach was selected that was purported to be "nearest" our evening's lodging. While this location appeared to represent the best chance for a clean landing, the prospect of going ashore in surf that was considered too challenging to launch in, tended to ratchet up the anxiety factor a might. All made it ashore with varying degrees of success . . . save one. The author proceeded toward the sand, bringing to play all his alleged paddling and surfing experience . . . only to actually catch a wave, broach and capsize . . . badly bruising his ego. As the last person came ashore, a rather brisk wind began to blow. At it turned out, this was a harbinger of things to come

After securing the kayaks above the high tide line and behind some sand dunes, the crew headed back to retrieve camping gear that been left back at the pier and along side the road. Surprise!!! Ranger Claire had loaded her NPS van with our stuff and transported it to the foot of the trail leading to the campsite. Given the sheer quantity of equipment she had to heft into the vehicle, this was truly a Herculean effort. There were spontaneous proposals of marriage and adoption!

Each of the thirteen campsites was protected by a very sturdy open-faced wood structure, complete with a roof and metal locker for storing food. The reason for these shelters became immediately evident as the wind continued to pick up velocity. As dusk approached, no item left unattended seemed safe from being blown back to the mainland. Dinners were prepared with cooks and diners tucked as deeply into the shelters as possible. Most crawled into their tents shortly after nightfall. As the wind howled through the night, sleep became intermittent, disturbed by the relentless sound of flapping tents. Was this weekend pleasure trip shaping up to be an episode of Survivor?

## Saturday

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As the day dawned, it became immediately evident that the wind was definitely at the "small craft warning" level with gusts perhaps up to 35 knots. An early morning visit to the water's edge confirmed what was already obvious . . . no kayaking today. The seas were already heavily textured with wind waves and white caps as far as the eye could see.

Breakfast was prepared and consumed under the same "battlefield" conditions as the previous evening. With plans in flux, our Guardian Ranger Claire came by and offered to shuttle a small party to Lobo Canyon for a 3.5-mile hike to the ocean. Others opted to proceed up Water Canyon to explore the inner parts of the island.

The passage down Lobo Canyon revealed sandstone walls that had been beautifully sculpted by ages of wind and water. Claire accompanied the lucky group of guests, imparting an impressive wealth of information about the setting. Her knowledge of the island's history, flora, fauna and geological features seemed boundless. Along the way, we spied a small herd of Elk heading up one side of the canyon. Once reaching the shore, we were greeted by the vista of a sea whipped into a frenzy of wind and waves. Large swells were smashing into the sheer rock cliffs of the shore, sending spray 50 feet into the air. After locating a sheltered spot among the rocks and consuming lunch, the group headed back up the canyon for the return trip to our campsite.

Continuing to display her unbelievably generous nature, Claire next offered to drive us to the Torrey Pine forest later in the afternoon. This grove, and the one located near La Jolla, are believed to be the only ones of their kind in the world. Several of us spent an hour just lounging on a deep bed of pine needles beneath these magnificent trees, gazing out over the wind whipped ocean. A truly fantastic sight! It was a shared feeling that we must have been transported thousands of miles from civilization.

Upon returning to camp, we proceeded to further secure tents in anticipation of an even bigger blow forecast for that night. Some chose to relocate their tents, electing to move them within the protection of the shelters as much as possible. An unoccupied shelter was selected to serve as the kitchen and dining hall for the evening's potluck dinner. The three picnic tables relocated to the spot, soon became the site for a close order drill in cooking and eating . . . with plates of appetizers, salads, entrees and desserts being ravenously grazed by our band of hungry adventurers.

Again, nightfall signaled the end of a fine day of trekking and exploring.

## Sunday

All anticipated another fitful night's sleep . . . but unexpectedly, the wind slowly subsided over the course of the night and completely stopped by the time breakfast was being prepared. Surprisingly, in spite of the fierce winds the day before, the ocean had calmed down sufficiently to permit a morning paddle. This was extra good news as the prospect of having to carry the kayaks back to the pier was not a pleasant thought.

Camp was quickly broken down and gear transported down to the trailhead. From there, the group headed for the kayaks . . . to find them covered with a thick layer of sand and in some cases, partially buried by the shifting dunes that had sheltered the crafts. The kayaks were launched through the surf without incident . . . save one. No . . . not the author this time, but an accomplished and seasoned veteran . . . who will go unnamed to protect the guilty.

On relatively calm seas, the group paddled back across Bechers Bay in the direction of the pier. Once reaching our original launching point, it was decided the conditions were still suitable to continue on toward Carrington Point. As the group approached the Point, all could see that there were very large waves breaking at multiple angles out over a reef some distance from shore. With the wind picking up again, a decision was made to return to the pier to begin preparing for departure.

Now it was time to reverse the launch process. Harold and Rose positioned themselves at the ladder that led to the deck above. Each of us held our position against the wind and a fair size swell that were rolling through, waiting for our

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turn to approach the pier. Once in position, each paddler had to grab a rung of the ladder, lift themselves to a standing position in their kayak, and then quickly ascend to the deck above. As it turned out, this little maneuver was a bit trickier than it first appeared, what with the rise and fall of the swell and the push of the wind. Timing became fairly important so as not to smash into the pier pilings on approach or be heading up the ladder with a boat rising and falling perhaps as much as six feet.

Once each paddler safely reached the deck above, Harold and Rose affixed lines to the bow and stern of the kayak and George and others already on the pier, guided the boats away from the ladder and hauled them up and over onto the deck of the pier. Once this demanding process was completed, all headed back down the road perhaps a mile or so to retrieve their gear that had been left at the trailhead.

Yet another vexing problem presented itself . . . trying to figure out how many trips it would take to get all of one's camping stuff back to the pier. In some cases, it took two and even three trips to accomplish this feat. That figured to be as many as six miles for a few individuals to corral perhaps as much as 50 pounds of equipment that seemed to have multiplied and expanded during our brief stay. Once all the gear had been centralized, there was time for most to sit down and grab a bite to eat before the Islander was scheduled to arrive at 3:00PM.

Once again, the seas and wind presented a considerable challenge for transferring gear and people back on board the Islander. The captain did a masterful job of positioning his craft to allow all to come aboard without incident. It was even more unsettling to watch the crew move gear from the pier to a pitching and yawing boat, all the while standing precariously close to the edge without any protective barrier to keep them from an unexpected tumble into the water...or worse. Tough and dangerous work under those conditions!

Once underway, the captain headed out across Santa Cruz Channel and around the west end of Santa Cruz Island, passing West Point and heading along a dramatic shoreline laced with blow holes, sea caves, arches and towering rock cliffs. Prior to picking up passengers at Prisoners Harbor, the captain made a stunning visit to Painted Cave. With passengers gasping, then scrambling to get a primo view, he maneuvered the Islander into the mouth of the cave and then proceeded to motor back far enough to where the boat was almost in total darkness. Wow!

Once all of the Santa Cruz Island passengers were on board, the Islander headed for homeport on relatively calm seas with a bright sun slowly setting on the horizon. A fitting end to a wet, wild and wonderful weekend adventure.

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