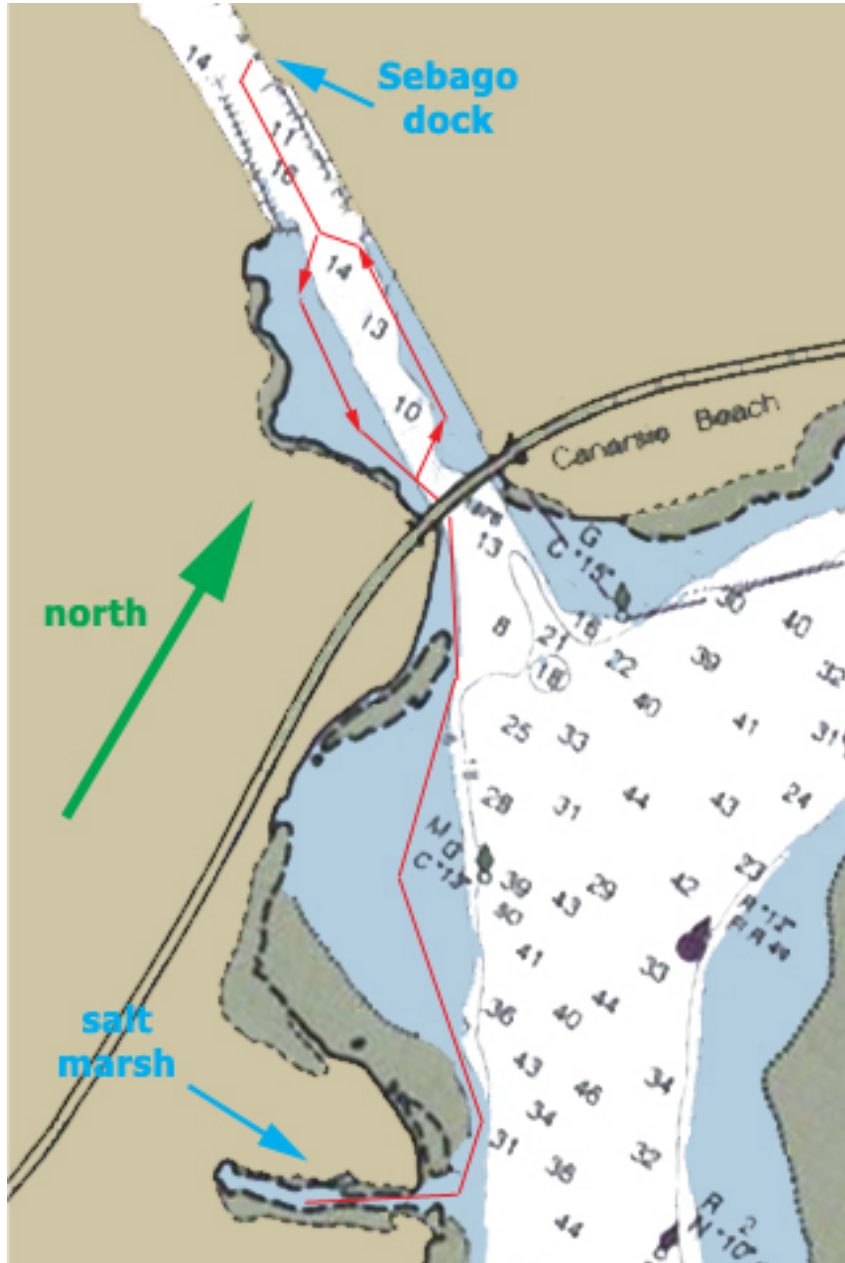


Typical Trip – Salt Marsh



BEGINNING KAYAKING

Sebago Canoe Club's Open Paddle Program

2006 Season

Beginning Kayaking (4th rev)
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Welcome

Welcome to the Sebago Canoe Club! For the past few years the Sebago Canoe Club has been offering free Saturday morning and Wednesday evening kayak paddles as part of our Open Paddle Program. We found this to be one of the best ways to introduce the public to what we believe is one of the best water activities around – sea kayaking.

This brochure will introduce you to our Open Paddle Program and provide some basic information. Keep in mind that this is only a guide. Kayaking comes with its own risks and dangers, and we recommend getting proper instruction from a certified instructor. During the actual paddle you should always use good common sense and follow the instructions of your trip leaders.

What to Bring

The Sebago Canoe Club will provide you with a kayak, paddle and personal flotation device, or PFD, free of charge.

To make your time on the water safe and enjoyable, there are a few items you should bring, Dress appropriately for the day. Wear clothes that can get wet and that dry quickly; synthetics work well. Cotton is not recommended. If you have water shoes, bring them. If not, sneakers are fine. Since the water is still cold in June, you'll probably be more comfortable wearing long pants and a long sleeved top. You may want to bring a set of dry clothes to change into after the paddle.

Bring a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, a bottle of water and an energy snack. We have drinking water available in the clubhouse as well as a refrigerator to store any snack you don't want to bring on the paddle – just bring these in a bag with your name on it.

Eat something and drink at least eight ounces of water before you arrive so you'll be fueled for the paddle.

The club doesn't have showers but it does have lockers. If you want to use these, bring a small locker sized lock. Keep in mind that the club will not be responsible for your valuables. If in doubt, leave them at home or keep them on your person.

Where and When to Meet

Our Open Paddle program runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Saturday morning paddles start at 9:30. Wednesday evening paddles start at 5:30. Paddles run approximately two to two and a half hours and begin with a half hour on-land introduction.

Space is limited to fifteen participants and is on a first come, first served basis. If you want to increase your chances of going out, arrive at least fifteen minutes early.

If you're driving to the club, please park on the street. The club's on-site parking is limited and reserved for trip leaders and club members.

Line up at the front gate by the Open Paddle sign. You know the rules of courtesy, so please follow them: no pushing, shoving, cutting in front of others or trying to hold a space for someone who isn't there.

Please note that during our June 3rd Open House we'll follow a different schedule and paddles run throughout the day. It's a great time to visit the club and see what we offer.

Paperwork

Shortly before the scheduled start of the paddle, our Officer of the Day will greet you and ask you to sign two forms.

One is the American Canoe Association's standard waiver of liability and insurance form. The second is a group sign in sheet; we use it to keep track of who participates in the Open Paddle Program. Only those who have signed both forms are allowed on the Open Paddle.

After the paddle we will ask you to fill out a brief questionnaire. It's voluntary, anonymous and takes about three minutes. We use this form to improve the paddles and to support future funding requests.

You and the Trip Leaders

All of our trip leaders are volunteers who have taken externally accredited courses in kayaking, rescue procedures and leadership. They

will do everything they can to make your paddle safe and enjoyable, so please support them.

Most of our trips finish without mishap. But occasionally the weather does make a turn for the worst, the wind may pick up making kayak control difficult, or someone might capsize or become ill. Our trip leaders know the best way to manage these situations. They carry VHF radios in case of emergency. You can most help by simply following directions.

Trip leaders have complete authority over all aspects of the trip. They may exclude any individual as they see fit. This is usually done when someone is creating an unsafe or unfriendly environment, for example, by refusing to follow the rules.

Before the paddle our trip leaders will want to know something about you, especially your expectations for the paddle and any prior paddling experience. If you have any medical conditions or health concerns, tell the trip leader ***before*** you get on the water. Feel free to discuss any anxieties or fears you might have about kayaking. If there is anything you would prefer to discuss privately, just let them know and they will take you aside to talk.

Trip leaders will introduce you to kayaking, instruct you on how to fit the equipment and give some basic instruction on paddling skills. On many Open Paddles the trip leader will assign paddling partners so that you'll have someone to paddle with.

Always let the trip Leaders know if you are having any problems. If you're getting tired or feeling sick, or having trouble with the equipment, let the trip leaders know. Many times only a small adjustment is needed to change a cramped position into a comfortable one.

Finally, always let the trip leaders know if someone else in the group is experiencing any problem. On the water we take care of each other.

Being Part of the Group

Cooperation, communication and the proper attitude will go a long way towards making for a safe and fun paddle. Everyone is expected to help gather the equipment, carry the kayaks to the docks for launching, wash down the equipment afterwards, and help put everything away.

Be responsible for yourself. Ask yourself whether you have the physical conditioning to paddle for two hours and whether you're comfortable in the water. If either answer is no the Open Paddle Program may not be for you.

Take care of yourself without being reminded. Keep your PFD on whenever you're on the dock or on the water. Drink water before you become dehydrated. And please, if something is not right, let us know.

Take care of each other. If anyone looks sick or cold or seems to be having problems, let the trip leaders know. If you see someone capsize, yell, "capsize!"

Stay with the group during the paddle. For safety reasons, we always paddle as a group and we always paddle as fast as the slowest paddler.

Getting the Gear: Kayaks, Paddles, PFDs

At the beginning of each trip, kayaks, paddles and PFDs are brought to a staging area where the equipment is assigned and fitted. Paddles are kept in the club container and the PFDs are kept in the clubhouse. Kayaks are selected from those stored in the containers and on outside racks. The trip leaders will show you where.

The kayaks can be quite heavy. Please follow your trip leaders' instructions and use proper lifting techniques. We use two acronyms as reminders, **SAFE** and **LITE**. **SAFE** is a reminder to first **S**top, **A**ssess the situation, **F**ormulate a plan of how to safely lift the equipment, and then **E**xecute the plan.

LITE reminds us to first look at the **L**oad, assess whether an **I**ndividual can safely lift the load, determine whether the **T**ask is reasonable and whether the **E**nvironment is safe.

Here are some other helpful reminders:

- Size up the load before lifting. If it feels too heavy or too clumsy, get help. Don't lift any load you can't safely manage.
- Make sure you have a clear path to carry the load.
- Bend your knees and not your back.

- Place your feet close to the object and center yourself over the load. Keep your legs spread wide enough to give you a good base of support.
- Get a good handhold. Grip with your palm instead of your fingers.
- Keep the arms close to the body. Don't twist or turn your body once you've started to lift the load.

Kayak Anatomy 101

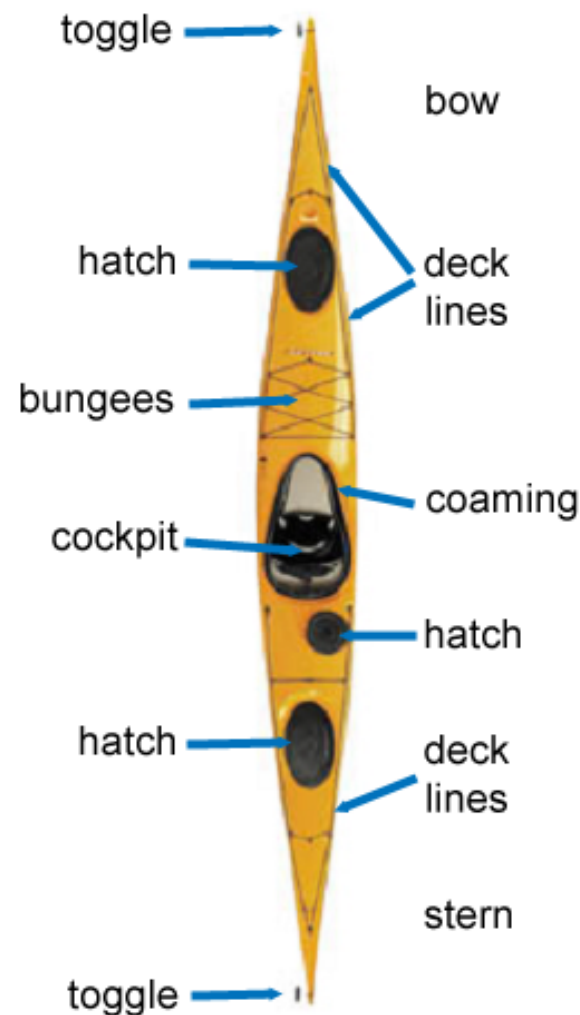
Since you'll be spending a few hours in the kayak, it might be helpful to know a few basic terms.

The front of the kayak is called the bow; the rear is called the stern. The bottom is called the hull while the top half is called the deck.

You will be sitting in a hole called the cockpit. The thick rim around the cockpit is called the cockpit coaming. On many kayaks you'll find a wall called a bulkhead directly behind the seat. If you look inside the cockpit you'll see a second one in front of the foot pegs. These provide waterproof compartments for flotation and storage. Access to these compartments is through a hatch that is kept watertight with a hatch cover.

Some of our boats rely on flotation bags rather than bulkheads. These are vinyl bags that are manually inflated to provide flotation. If your kayak has these bags, please check to see that these are properly inflated before you get into the kayak.

Most of our kayaks have two types of lines on them, deck lines and bungees. Deck lines run around the perimeter of all or part of the deck. Deck lines do not stretch. They are a safety feature and give the kayaker something to hold onto.



Bungees are flexible lines used for storing items like water bottles. They're usually found directly in front of the cockpit.

You probably moved the kayak by grabbing a grab handle or toggle. The toggle is a piece of plastic attached to the kayak by a loop of line. The proper way to lift a kayak with a toggle is to have both lines pass between the ring and middle finger. Never put your finger between the toggle lines.

Fitting Out the Kayak and PFD

Kayak control depends on good contact between your lower body and the kayak, so proper fit is essential. Sit up straight with your lower back against the backrest.

Adjust the foot pegs so that you feel gentle pressure against the sole of your foot when it's in a natural position. You want to avoid over extending or over flexing your foot. Many kayaks have a locking mechanism behind the foot peg that you press to release the foot peg for adjustment. Others have a locking mechanism closer to the cockpit. The trip leaders will show you how to adjust your boat's mechanism.

Fit the PFD so that you have a snug but comfortable fit. You might try some paddling motions to make sure the PFD doesn't chafe or impair your range of motion. Testing the fit is easy. Kneel or sit and ask someone to lift the PFD by the shoulder straps as you raise your arms

over your head. If it pulls off too easily, the PFD is too large; try a smaller one.

Remember: Always wear your PFD while you are on the water.

Stretching

If you've never kayaked before, you'll probably be using your muscles and joints in a new way. Prepare them by stretching. Your trip leaders will guide you through a basic stretching routine before you take the kayaks down to the dock for launching. If you find yourself with a few minutes free time, stretch on your own. You'll only increase your paddling enjoyment.

Some people like working in a particular direction, say from head to toes or toes to head. Either is fine as long as you cover all the basic body groups. Since many strokes rely on torso rotation, be sure to do some stretches that gently twist your spine.

Most stretching manuals provide the same guidelines so we won't be offering anything new.

- Stretch muscles on both sides of your body evenly.
- Avoid over-stretching. Never stretch to the point of pain or discomfort. A mild tension at the peak of the stretch should be enough.
- Stretch slowly and evenly. Hold the stretch for about fifteen seconds then slowly release. Avoid bouncing.
- Breathe naturally; don't hold your breath.

Getting In and Out Of the Kayak

Getting in and out of a kayak is all about weight transfer. Your trip leaders will show you how to do this safely.

One method that we commonly use at the club consists of the following steps.

- Sit on the edge of dock parallel to your kayak. Your legs should be straight and facing the same direction as the front or bow of the kayak.
- Place your paddle behind your back so that part of the shaft is directly behind the rear kayak coaming and the rest is resting on the dock.
- Reach back and grab the shaft and coaming with the hand closest to the water. Place your other hand over the shaft and against the dock.
- Swing your legs into the cockpit and move them towards the foot pegs. At this point the only thing remaining on the dock is your buttocks and the one hand resting on the paddle.
- In one smooth, quick movement, shift your buttocks from the dock to the kayak seat.
- Move the paddle to a forward position so that it is laying flat above your lap.
- Put your feet against the foot pegs. Move around so that you're sitting securely. Hold the paddle in the paddling position and paddle away from the dock.

To get out of the kayak, you simply reverse the steps.

Now this may sound formidable, but after you do it once or twice you'll wonder what the big deal was all about. Until you're comfortable with this maneuver, a qualified kayaker will help you get in and out of the boat.

Handling the Paddle

The paddle has four parts, a shaft, blades, collar and drip rings. The shaft is the long pole between the blades. The blades and shaft join at the throat or collar. Many paddles have moveable rubber rings on the shaft near the blades, called drip rings. When paddling the drips rings are placed a few inches from the throat. The drip rings serve to keep some of the water off the paddler as the blade is lifted out of the water.

Blades have two sides called the drive or power face and the back of the blade. The power face is the concave side. This is usually where the manufacturer prints its name or logo. If you've cupped your hand while swimming, the palm of your hand would be the power face and the back of your hand would be just that, the back.

Most blades are asymmetrical. That is, one edge is longer than the other, as if someone cut off a triangle of blade near the tip. This shape provides for greater efficiency during the forward stroke.

Now for grip: hold the paddle out in front of you with both hands and center it. The power face should be facing you and the longest edge of

the blade should be on top. Remember that missing triangle of paddle? Well that's the space that should be at the bottom.

Your grip should be fairly wide. One easy way to do this is to hold the paddle with two hands and lift it so that the shaft is resting on your head. Your elbows should be bent at right angles. An inch or two either way doesn't matter. The important thing is to maintain this wide grip.

Many beginners find that their grip wanders as they paddle, It's good to check your grip from time to time to make sure it's centered and that the wide spacing is maintained. If you're having trouble maintaining a proper grip, let your trip leaders know. Some trip leaders will wrap a piece of electrical tape around the shaft so that you have a tactile reminder of where your hands should be.

One last point on grip: avoid holding the paddle with a death grip. This will only tire your hands. A relaxed grip minimizes tension and fatigue.

Forward Stroke

The stroke most often used is called the forward stroke, so named because it moves the kayak in a straight line forwards. Your trip leaders will show you how to do this stroke during the on-land introduction.

Beginners often think that the forward stroke depends primarily on the arms, but a properly done forward stroke is a whole body exercise involving the trunk, legs, shoulders and arms. The power for this stroke

comes from twisting the trunk. As you twist to one side, you plant the blade in the water and unwind.

There are three basic parts to the forward stroke, the catch, the pull (or power phase) and the exit (or recovery).

The Catch: Put the blade in near your toes. Submerge the whole blade as quickly as possible. You want the entire blade to be under water before applying pressure. If you find your paddle splashing, it's probably not fully submerged.

The pull or power phase: Once the blade is fully submerged, unwind your torso. Your arms should be fairly straight but don't lock your elbows. Push with the top arm at the same time you pull with the bottom arm.

You should keep the shaft away from you. Imagine that you have a big beach ball wedged between the paddle shaft and your chest forcing you to keep the paddle well in front of you.

During the pull or power phase, your legs transfer the rotational energy to the kayak. Try to feel yourself pushing against the peg that is on the side of the stroke. For example, if you're paddling on the right side, push against the right foot peg during the power phase.

The exit or recovery: As you pull back on the blade, your hand will approach your hip. When it does, slice the blade out of the water. While it might seem that continuing the stroke would help you go faster,

once the blade passes your hip it's actually lifting water rather than driving the kayak forward. It may be a good workout but it doesn't move you.

Where you initially place the blade will depend on the type of paddle you are using. Some shorter paddles are designed to be used in a more upright position, and the catch phase of the paddle is as close to the kayak as possible. With this "high angle" style of paddling, the tip of the blade enters the water first. The rationale for a high angle style of paddling is that a shorter paddle allows the paddle to stay closer to the kayak during the power phase, providing more forward force. If the paddle is off to the side, it tends to turn the kayak. Racers and those wishing to maximize forward efficiency use a high angle forward stroke.

Some longer paddles are designed to use a "low angle" of paddling, sometimes called a touring stroke. The catch is not quite next to the toes, but a little off to the side. The blade goes in more along its edge than at the tip. The rationale for the low angle style is that any turning force applied on one side is canceled by the next stroke on the opposite side. Many paddlers find this stroke to be a bit easier and more balanced since the low angle, longer paddle acts as a stabilizer. In addition, since the blade doesn't pass over you, you don't have as much water dripping on your head.

It really comes down to preference. One advantage of joining the club is that you'll get to try out the different types of kayaks and paddles so that you can make your own informed choice. You'll also have plenty of time to perfect your forward stroke.

Turning Using the Forward Sweep

Sometimes we want to turn our kayaks, other times our kayaks seem to be turning under their own will and we want to get them back on a straight course. In either event, a forward sweep often helps. Again, your trip leaders will instruct you on how to do this during the on-land introduction.

There are a few reasons the kayak goes off course. The wind may be blowing the kayak off course. You may not be sitting in the center of the kayak or you may be holding the paddle off center. A common reason is handedness; we tend to pull harder with our stronger hand.

A few tips might help here. First, look up and let your peripheral vision tell you when you start to move off course. If you're looking at the kayak or at the paddle you probably won't notice that the kayak is going off course until it is well underway. The earlier you correct an unwanted change in course, the easier the effort required.

The forward sweep also has a few components. First, rotate your torso, then place the blade in the water near your feet. The blade's power phase should be facing away from the kayak. In other words, the back of the blade should be against the kayak. With the blade fully immersed, move the blade in a semi-circle from the bow of the kayak to the stern. You do this by unwinding. If you don't have the flexibility to bring the blade all the way back to the stern, just go as far as you can. The paddle should stay fairly horizontal. Try to maintain the arm position you used at the catch. In other words, the arm closest to the

submerged blade remains fairly straight and away from the body. The other arm should be near the abdomen. Remember to push with the foot closest to the submerged blade.

Stopping

At some point you will want to stop the kayak. To do this, you paddle backwards using several reverse strokes. Your trips leaders will show you how.

Rotate and place the back of the blade on the water behind the cockpit. Do a quick, short stroke and follow it with a similar stroke on the other side. Reverse sides and make a third stroke; this can be a little deeper and stronger. Follow with a similar stroke on the other side.

At first this may feel a bit unstable but with a little practice you'll be stopping with ease. Keep in mind that there is no need to swivel the paddle. It is both simpler and quicker to use the back of the blade.

Signals

Since it is not always possible to communicate by voice, trip leaders use their paddles and whistles to communicate with the group.

When the paddle is held straight up in a vertical position, it means that the group should raft up to that trip leader. To raft up, simply paddle

over to the trip leader and hold onto his or her kayak. The next kayaker paddles over and holds onto the kayaks already in rafting position until everyone is together. This is a very stable position for everyone in the group.

The whistle is used when an intention has to be communicated quickly. One whistle means to pay attention to the trip leader blowing the whistle. He or she may need to call the group's attention to a potential hazard or alert a paddler who is paddling to far from the group. Three whistles are the international signal for distress. You're most likely to hear it when someone capsizes. Whenever you hear three whistles, immediately attend to the trip leaders for further directions.

Courtesy and Right Of Way

We share the waterway with others so knowing the rules of engagement will make for a more comfortable and safe trip. The basic principles behind all of the rules are courtesy, safety and stewardship.

As you paddle you may see people fishing from the beaches, piers or boats. Be friendly but stay clear. It is almost impossible to see fishing line so stay clear to avoid entanglements.

You may see people riding horses along the beach. Again, be friendly but stay clear to avoid spooking the horses.

Enjoy the wildlife but remember that it's their home. We're the guests, so give them space. Don't spook the birds. If the group decides to beach, stay near the waterline and out of the grassy area. Much of Jamaica Bay is a preserve and part of our stewardship is to protect it by keeping our impact to a minimum.

Boat traffic poses special problems because they're bigger and faster than kayakers. Many times boaters simply don't see kayakers. The unwritten rule of the road is that kayakers give way to every other boat.

When kayaking up or down the Paerdegat Basin, follow your trip leader and stay to the center until you pass the marinas. The marina slips are on the side so any boat leaving the slip has a better chance of seeing you if you're paddling in the center. Of course if a powerboat is coming down the center, give way. You don't want to be a speed bump. Once pass the marinas, the group will angle over to the right. When crossing under the bridge, stay out of the center span; it's marked in red. The bigger boats use this. We're much safer using the sides. Once in the bay stay out of the boat channel. Again, follow your trip leader.

End the Trip: Cleanup and Storage

The trip doesn't end until all the equipment is cleaned and stored.

Since the dock easily becomes crowded, help move the equipment promptly off the dock and over to the wash area. It's on the left as you leave the ramp. Remember to use proper lifting practices.

Everything gets rinsed with fresh water before it is put away. This includes all kayaks, paddles and PFDs. If you're not sure where something goes, ask the trip leaders.

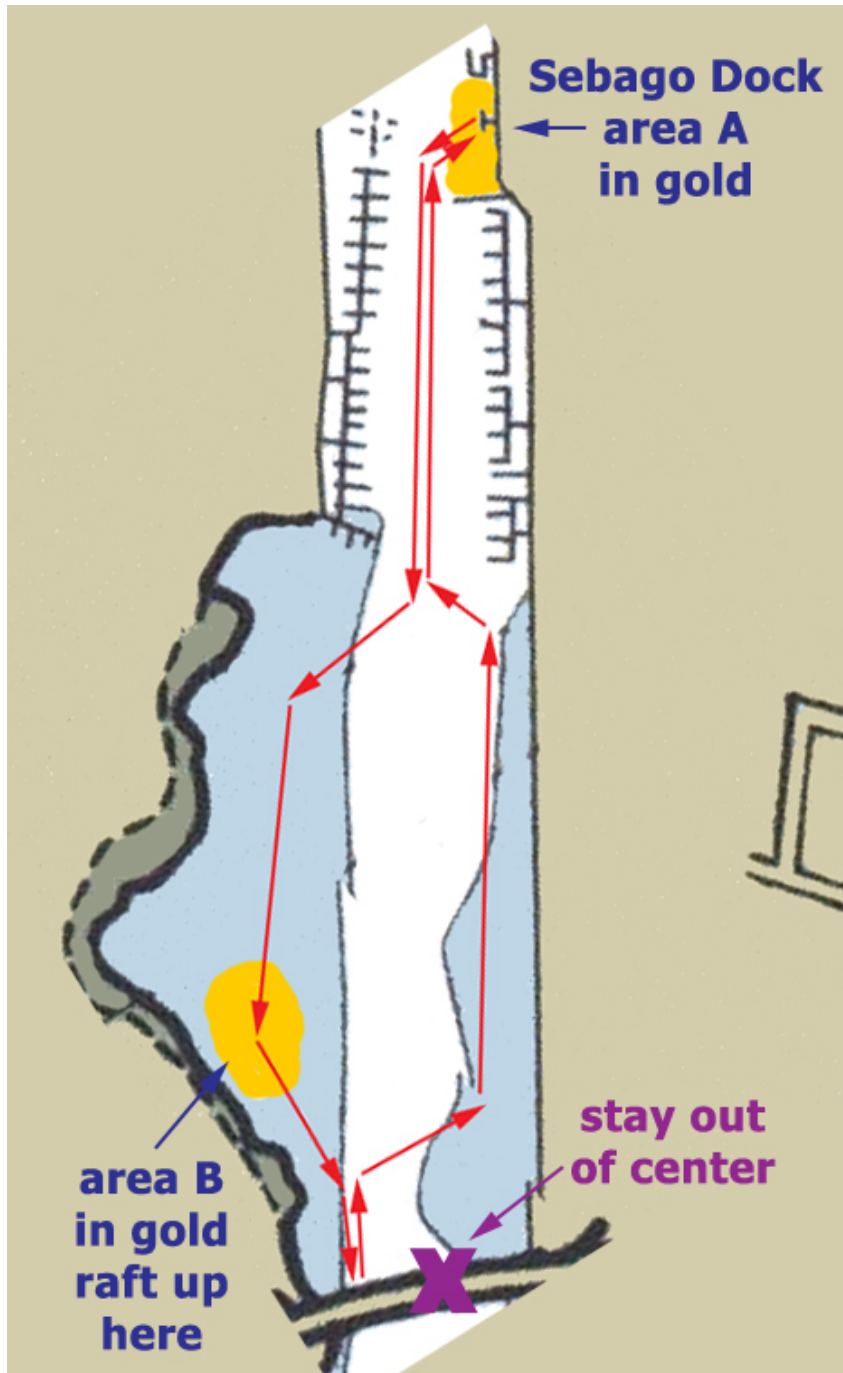
Paddling Paerdegat Basin

A typical Open Paddle takes us out of the basin and along the west shore of Jamaica Bay to the Salt Marsh. The map is on the back cover.

Paddling Paerdegat Basin requires safely sharing the water with other craft in a relatively tight area. For safety, one of the trip leaders will be the first person on the water. He or she will stay in the area around the dock. Once your in your kayak, try paddling a bit but stay in the area around the dock and out of the channel. This is area A on the map.

Trip leaders will designate who leads the group and who acts as "sweep." The "sweep" brings up the rear. Everyone is expected to stay between the lead and the sweep.

After everyone is on the water, the leader will guide the group down the center of the channel until the marinas are passed, then angle right, over to area B. The group will raft up here. It's a good place to make any adjustments, handle questions and resolve any difficulties that may have presented. Be sure to drink some water. You've now paddled close to a mile – congratulations!



The group will take the right side channel when passing under the bridge, then continue right towards the salt marsh. Since we want to avoid the main boat channel, we'll paddle parallel to the beach. Depending on the tide and the paddle, the group may either beach for a break or head directly over to the salt marsh. Along the way you'll have plenty of opportunity to practice your strokes.

The group reverses everything to return with one exception. After passing under the bridge, we will paddle parallel to the right bank until we reach the marinas (see the map). At that point, the group again paddles up the center of the channel and back to the dock. Cleanup and storage follows.

Capsizes

The primary worry for most beginners is capsizing. In truth there is very little to worry about, so try to relax.

If you capsize simply exit the kayak. There's a good chance you'll simply fall out of the kayak since there is little holding you in. Some exit the kayak by placing their hands on the cockpit coaming near their waists and gently pushing. It's a bit like pulling off a pair of pants.

Once you're out, hold onto the kayak. (Remember the deck lines?) The kayak provides great flotation. Try holding onto your paddle but if you let go and it starts drifting away, stay with the kayak. One of the trip leaders will retrieve the paddle.

Follow the trip leader's instruction for getting back into the kayak. They've practiced this dozens of times and can usually get a capsized paddler up and paddling within two or three minutes.

If someone else capsizes follow the trip leaders' instructions. If you're the first one to see someone capsize, yell "capsize" and point. One trip leader will go to assist the capsized kayaker. The remaining trip leader(s) will ask everyone to raft up so that they are safe and out of the way.

Do I Really Need A Tow?

Sometimes a kayaker needs to be towed. This simply means that a trip leader will fasten a rope to the kayak so that he or she can pull the other person's kayak.

There are a number of reasons why you might be offered a tow. Some paddlers find it difficult to control the kayak, especially if it is windy or the current is tricky. Some paddlers find it difficult to keep up with the group. Others become tired or sick or need to get to shore quickly.

If a trip leader asks to tow you, try to accept this graciously. You can help during a tow by continuing to paddle as best you can. Sit upright and keep your balance. Don't drag your paddle in the water.

Joining the Sebago Canoe Club

If you want to know more about the club, talk to our membership committee chair, Tony Pignatello. He'll be happy to answer any questions and give you a tour. You can e-mail Tony at picksix929@yahoo.com or give him a call at 718 353-8018.

FAQ

Is there a fee for the Open Paddler Program trips? No, everything is provided free of charge.

Can I paddle more than once? Yes, but only up to three times. Due to the many people interested in our Open Paddle Program we have to limit any one person's participation to three paddles. If you are still interested in kayaking with us after that, why not join the club? Not only will you get to develop your kayaking skills, you'll get to meet a great group of people.

Do I have to know how to swim? No, but you should be comfortable in the water.

Can I bring my own equipment? Certainly. As long as the equipment meets the club's standards, you're welcome to bring your own paddle or PFD.

Can I bring my child? Due to insurance regulations, no one under sixteen is permitted on the Open Paddle Program. A parent must accompany sixteen to eighteen year olds.

Can I bring an alcoholic beverage? No. For safety concerns no alcoholic beverages are permitted on any paddle.

Does the club have bathrooms? The club has restrooms consisting of Porta-Sans.

Can I bring my dog (cat)? Unfortunately, no.

Are trips ever cancelled? Trips are cancelled when the weather doesn't permit. If you have any reservations about the weather, listen to the weather forecast before coming to the club. You can also call the club's Trip and Weather Hotline. Simply dial 718 241-3683. After the greeting and instructions, push 1 for the Trip and Weather Hotline. Cancelled trips are listed at least thirty minutes before the trip is scheduled to start.

What if I have a complaint? First, determine whether the problem is due to a simple misunderstanding that can be resolved by talking to the trip leaders. If speaking to the leader fails to solve the problem or if it is impossible to speak to the leader, then please e-mail or write Jennifer Feil, the kayak committee chairperson or John Wright, the commodore. Jennifer Feil can be reached at feil_jennifer@yahoo.com; John Wright can be reached at john.wright731@verizon.net.

Resources and Comments

- www.acanet.org (American Canoe Association)
- www.atlantickayaktours.com (check out their expert center)
- www.bcuna.com (British Canoe Union's North American site)

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If you have any comments concerning [Beginning Kayaking](#), please e-mail Arthur "Chris" Russo at Arthur_Russo@yahoo.com.