

Kayaking

By David Allen

Water LIFE Kayaking

In every club and organization there are a few members who are always ready to help whenever their special talents are needed for the benefit of all. Regardless of the project or event, they bring a cheerful willingness to whatever task is requested of them. The Port Charlotte Kayakers are lucky to have a number of these special people among our members.

For example, several weeks ago, our kayak club was invited to Sunday brunch at the Isles Yacht Club in Punta Gorda, followed by a paddle through the mangroves east of Ponce DeLeon Park.

Sunday Brunch at the Isles Yacht Club is a very special event; breakfast is prepared exactly as you order it by a host of accommodating chefs, the food is excellent, and the view of the boats and surroundings adds to the enjoyment.

The Sunday Brunch was arranged by Jim McKenzie, a member of the Isles Yacht club and a member of the Port Charlotte Kayakers for many



Jim McKenzie

years, who generously decided to treat the club to this special breakfast. But he has done much more than invite our group to Sunday Brunch. Over the years he has always helped our efforts to "Keep Charlotte Beautiful" by providing a powerboat to assist in the trash collection. And he has provided a lead and safety boat for the Kayak Races at the Kayak Festivals and Senior Games since 2006. Jim also organizes and leads some of the Monday Paddles that cover about 15 to 20 miles of open water. He does all this in a quiet, self-effacing way, usually making light of whatever he does. We all have a great deal of respect for Jim and truly value his friendship.

So this particular Sunday, we started our kayaking day with a delicious break-

Paddling the Punta Gorda Mangroves After Breakfast



Kayakers gather outside one of the Punta Gorda mangrove channels.

fast to power our efforts along the waterway. It was a perfect day for kayaking; bright sun, bright blue water, and a gentle wind out of the southwest to speed us along.

After the hardy breakfast, we drove a short distance to Ponce DeLeon Park at the west end of Marion Avenue. The ramp was very busy with boats coming and going, so some of our group elected to launch from the small beach to the west of the parking lot and the rest from the concrete boat ramp. By shortly after 10 a.m. all our boats were in the water and we were paddling up the channel toward the mangroves.

As we paddled along, fish in the channel were very active, jumping well out of the water on both side of our boats, while egrets and anhinga soared overhead. Beautiful! We left the channel after about a half-mile from the launch site and entered a small pond, which formed the entrance to the mangrove tunnel. The Punta Gorda mangroves are somewhat unique for this area in that they are reasonably wide, fairly deep with gentle turns, so negotiating the twisting water-path is relatively easy and very pleasant.

After about an hour of paddling single-file through the tunnels, we emerged

about a half-mile north of Alligator Creek and the marked boat channel. This is the point at which our group decides who will paddle back to Ponce Park via the boat channel, and who will paddle up the Bay to the same destination. About half our group selected the outside route as it was such a beautiful day, and the gentle southwest wind helped our progress.

As we finished the paddle, loaded our kayaks on our cars, and headed for home,

many of us were thankful for such a fine day of paddling and thankful for the generosity of our friend, Jim McKenzie.

The Port Charlotte Kayakers meet each Wednesday evening at Port Charlotte Beach Park at 5:30 PM. All are welcome. For more information, contact me at 941-235-2588 or email to: dlaa@comcast.net. You can check out our upcoming paddles and events at: pckayakers.org Then come join us!

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