

on the edge of Chincoteague Bay

a paddle north, along the west edge of Chincoteague Island,
and exploration of an oyster shoal





From the mainland, the road snakes through NASA's Wallops Flight Facility, across Wallops Neck (a "neck" in Bay country or on the Eastern Shore of Delmarva is a peninsula), across Queen's Sound Channel, then over the marshes (grass just barely poking above water at high tide): Wire Narrows Marsh and Black Narrows Marsh. Here a wider channel opens, like a good sized city street made of water, moving water, ripping south or north with the tide. We luck out (hah hah) and paddle against ripping current both ways, north and south. By the time we return the tide has changed and we are paddling against it again. *Makenuk's Fin* does well against the current; it's a blue Perception Sea Lion, 17.5 ft. long, 22" wide, it cutlass-blades through the water. *Finrod*, the broad, short, user-friendly sit-on kayak has the stability of a tank, and paddles like a bathtub, I put my novice buddy in the fast boat and struggle mightily through the current both ways. Advice: check your tide charts, get up early if necessary, and take real boats. Or an engine.

Sometimes, off Wildcat Marsh, on the west side of Chincoteague, I have seen underwater visibility of twenty feet, amazing for Chesapeake Bay and east coast waters. Today the vis is "inside the mask" and it's a Braille dive. (We actually can see a couple of feet, but the idea of reaching out and grabbing an unsuspecting stingray soon sends me surfaceward. We check out the lifeforms in shallower environments: on a shoal formed by oysters.

Below: the iconic drawbridge is doomed. A new bridge is under construction: it will route traffic straight to Maddox Blvd and straight on to the beach.





Small crabs appear from the cracks in oyster shells. Left and below: I think this is an oyster shell overcome by a boring sponge! I had seen the pattern of holes they left in beach shells, but never a live one before. We put the live things back, of course.





Quahog clam with boring sponge holes. Below: gull down. Next page: sea pork and sponges.







find the crab...







Moon Jelly

Previous page: Moon Jelly stranded on oyster shell shoal.
Weak swimmers, jellies are at the mercy of wind and tide.





Ok, call me weird, but I love sea nettles. An inconvenience to bikini-clad swimmers, the Chesapeake Bay, as well as Chincoteague's waters, fills with them in summer, though not in their former numbers. They have a relationship with a favorite human delicacy: the oyster. Sea nettles eat comb jellies which prey on oyster spat. More sea nettles = more oysters. Diveskins (available at dive shops) are sea nettle proof, mostly.



















