



ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
SEA KAYAK CLUB

---

## Manatee Madness 2003

By Ernie Frank

Manatee Madness 2003 was the best yet, made so by the paddlers, though there were manatees, divers, birds, big fish [tarpon?], and a surprise at the take-out. Carl was first on the water and he took several others for a short tour of the mini-bay just east of the small beach where we were still loading our boats. By the time Doug and the rest of us were ready to shove off Carl was back and the group was excited to hear they had seen 4



manatees in the estuary. Together we all headed out towards the Bay. Rounding the corner and turning south at Pete's Pier we ran into the chop, all six inches of it. No one ran aground in the shallows in the cut to Banana Island and once through the lead group came upon a large manatee. The high clouds and breeze made it a bit chilly for swimming even in the 70° spring warmed waters. We stopped to talk to the three manatee watchers at the main spring area and they mentioned more manatees were west of Warden Key, but lunch time was fast approaching and we had yet to decide on where? Also there was a call for a pit stop so we circled Banana Island. At the west end a manatee disturbed by our passage roiled the surface and took off with a splash of its tail. Coming ashore at the volley ball beach mud flats of Parker Island there was a sigh of relief from the coffee drinkers. On the water again we headed north for lunch at Crackers. At the entrance to the north bay an osprey was perching on a TV antenna and it looked like another was sitting in the nest next door. Most folk by-passed Pelican Isle with its vultures and brown pelicans and guano festooned tin shack and went straight to the dock at Crackers. We arrived just before the lunch crowd and being Friday there were only a couple of large boats tied up. Every one found a slip and disembarked without incident, though the 22 foot Libra needed the full length of the outer dock so we both could get out. The

kayaks hauled out of the water added a splash of color to the rather drab weathered wood dock. Luckily we garnered the last two tables on the deck. Topped with a cold draught we were more than full as we dropped back into our boats. Carl helped steady the Libra as Mary and I slipped back in with no trouble, except when he asked, "How much will you pay me, Ernie, to untie the bow line?"



We needed some serious paddling to burn off those lunch calories and headed for 3 Sisters Spring. The springs were haven for SCUBA divers this afternoon and no manatees. All the boats but the Libra made a trip in to see the crystal clear water welling up, but it was a short stop and we turned to go back to Hunter Springs where we had put in four hours earlier. As I beached Carl shouted "Dolphins" and pointed.

Sure enough there they were, four dorsal fins breaking the surface. We backed out and paddled toward their bow waves. The dolphins passed to either side on their way out, blowing just feet from our boat. Barb, Terry and Patty were right behind them and as the dolphins ignored them in their quest for mullet which they were driving before them into the shallows and the kayakers had some of the pod swimming alongside them. What a surprise to end a perfect day paddling King's Bay.