



## Memories of Texas Gulf Coast Paddles

By Jay Bailey

I have paddled the Texas Gulf Coast on two occasions. The first was to participate in a sea kayak symposium at San Luis Pass State Park on the southwest end of Galveston Island [see the Editor's Note below]. During this symposium I paddled in the surf for the first time with Nigel Dennis as our instructor.



The second trip was to barrier islands farther down the coast. First, we camped on the gulf side of North Padre Island and did a three-day paddle trip along the coast of the Laguna Madre.

Then we paddled north of there, out of Port O'Connor, for three days exploring Matagorda Island Nature Park (on another of the long barrier islands north of Padre Island) searching for alligators. Both were great trips.

Paddling the Texas Gulf Coast and inland waterways is interesting: we saw natural gas and petroleum processing plants that dominated large areas of land and skyline, and we discovered miles of salt flats that create a maze of sloughs to paddle in.

Texas gulf towns have a unique character: we found that all the stores had a "no shirt no shoes no problem" policy, and we caught redfish and learned we could take them to a local restaurant in Port Aransas on North Padre Island and they would cook them for us.



While beach camping on North Padre Island we witnessed coyote packs trotting down the beach after dark looking for things to eat. On our trip out of Port O'Connor we discovered that there were alligators on Matagorda Island but that the racoons on the island were more dangerous than the alligators.



Shallow water means a long surf zone

The character of the Gulf Coast in Texas is salty and flat with miles of salt flats behind barrier islands. All of the waters we paddled on were very shallow. Surf extends out away from shore a very long way because of the shallow sea bottom. The Texas Gulf Coast has a flavor that needs to be experienced to savor what it offers.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** San Luis Pass is about 200 miles off this map north of Port Aransas.

The Texas Gulf Coast Sea Kayak Symposium was first held in 2006; it's no longer an event, and it's unclear when it faded.

While googling that I found an interesting article about the history and future of sea kayak symposiums. Check it out if you've ever been to one, wish you'd gone, or been disappointed after you got there: <https://paddlingmag.com/stories/industry-trends/sea-kayak-symposiums>