

Manatee Madness

By Barb Smith

Ernie Frank, our RMSKC member who now lives in Florida, invited the club to join him, and members of the Florida Sport's Paddlers Club, on their yearly Valentine's Day paddle. It is called Manatee Madness and it occurs in the waters of King's Bay in Crystal River, Florida. What a great Valentine's day! Patty Lee, Tom Barnhart, and Terry and I jumped on the web and found a way to make the trip work. Terry and I flew to Tampa Bay, rented a mini van (with a rack) at the airport and drove to Homosassa Springs, about an hour and a half north. We all had rented a house from Riversport Adventures that was located on a canal leading to Halls River.

The owner also had the local kayak shop, so kayak rental came with the house. We picked out our kayaks, tied them onto the rack, and drove to the various put in destinations. Patty and Barn had some transport problems since their rental car had no rack. Nevertheless, we enjoyed seven glorious days paddling many of the rivers and bays around Crystal River. Below is Ernie's rendition of the Valentine's Day paddle and the next page is Patty Lee's article on several of our other paddle excursions.

If you are interested in more info, contact any of us and we will be glad to share our knowledge.

Manatee Madness 2003 Take-out

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. At the west end a manatee disturbed by our passages roiled the surface and took off with a splash of its tail. 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



The large, lovable sea cow—the manatee
(photo by Terry Smith)

Crab boat in Kings Bay bombarded by begging Pelicans
(photo by Barb Smith)



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. 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, the kayakers had some of the pod swimming alongside them. What a surprise to end a perfect day