

# Paddling LONG ISLAND & NEW YORK CITY

— The Best Sea Kayaking from —  
**MONTAUK to MANHASSET BAY to MANHATTAN**



**KEVIN STIEGELMAIER**



**MENASHA RIDGE PRESS**

Your Guide to the Outdoors Since 1982

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## USING THIS GUIDE

This guidebook provides all the essential information you need to plan the paddling routes described. For each route you will learn about the waterway's location, size, history, and typical wildlife. A locator map, trip description, and at-a-glance key information will come in handy from start to finish on each paddling trip. GPS coordinates for put-ins, takeouts, and tide stations; U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangles; trip length; optimal paddling conditions; mean monthly water temperatures (where available); shuttle directions; and tide information are among the many crucial pieces of information included.

## THE MAPS

### ◊ The Trip-Locator Map and Key

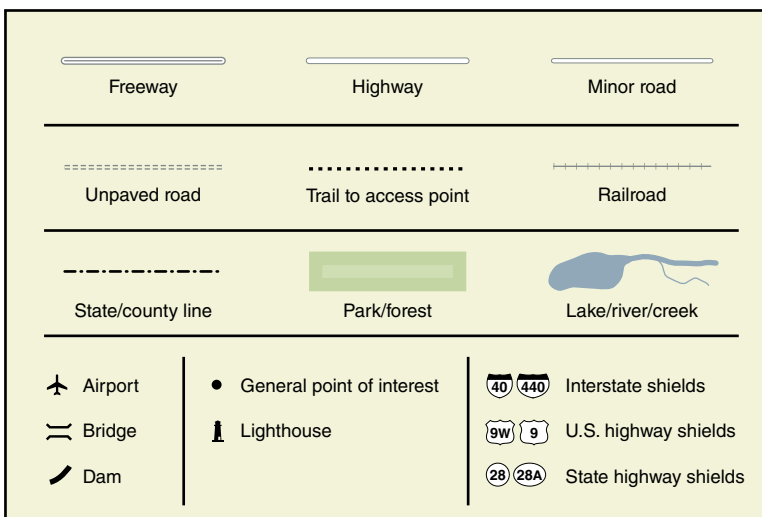
Use the trip-locator map on page viii to find the exact locations of each paddle's put-in/takeout. Each paddle's number appears on this map, on the map key facing it, and in the table of contents.

### ◊ Regional Maps

This book is divided into three regional sections—Suffolk County, Nassau County, and New York City—and prefacing each section is an overview map of that region. The regional maps provide more detail than the trip-locator map, bringing you closer to the paddle.

### ◊ Paddle Maps

Detailed maps show the most common and convenient put-ins/takeouts, and they identify points of interest such as bridges, parks, side channels, islands, and marinas. While these



also be expressed in degrees, minutes, and seconds. To convert from this format to degrees and decimal minutes, divide the seconds by 60. For more on GPS technology, visit [usgs.gov](http://usgs.gov).

### 📍 USGS Quadrangles

Probably the most popular, and useful, USGS maps are their 7.5-minute, or 1:24,000-scale series, known as quadrangles. These “quads” provide a good amount of detail and are quite useful for navigation. For this reason, the quads that include particular sections of the bodies of water being described are listed before each Description.

### 📍 Mean Water Temperatures by Month

The USGS maintains hundreds of gauge stations that collect various water data useful to paddlers. Some of these stations take frequent water-temperature readings that can be accessed at [waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt). Various private organizations, such as fishing clubs, hatcheries, and academic institutions, also measure water temperatures. The mean water temperatures are listed by month whenever this data is available.

### 📍 Description

Here you'll find the play-by-play details of the paddle route for each of the 50 entries in this book. This information is presented so that you can follow it sentence by sentence and have an enjoyable journey. You may want to segue to some of the suggested side trips, and you may want to dally or rush: it's all up to you, but this section will guide you from the put-in to the takeout.

### 📍 Shuttle Directions

Specific shuttle directions to each put-in and takeout spot are given from a major road or highway. Other shuttling options, such as trains, buses, and subway systems, are also listed wherever possible.

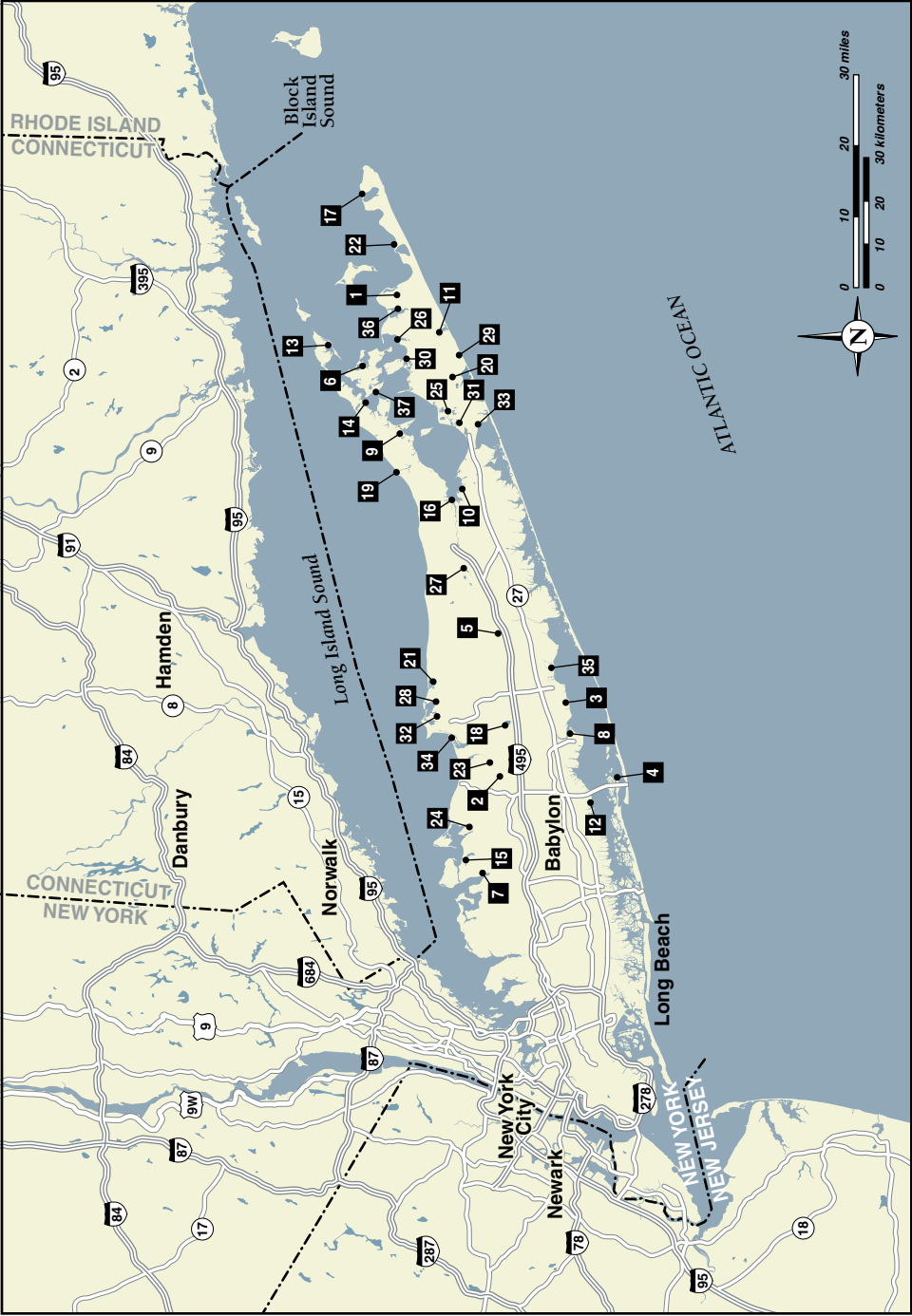
## GENERAL SAFETY

### HAZARDS

As with most outdoor sports, kayaking is a fairly safe activity, although it does have its share of inherent risks. As such, paddlers should be prepared to encounter any number of the following hazards on the water.

**Tidal currents** occur whenever an incoming or outgoing tide squeezes through a narrow opening, creating a restricted flow that speeds up the water's velocity. These currents often occur near the mouths of tidal creeks but can also be found near inlets and wherever an island obstructs the normal flow of water. Anytime kayakers paddle more than a half mile or so from the shore, or on unprotected water, they are on what is considered to be **open water**. This water is easily influenced by wind and waves, and its conditions can change rapidly. Furthermore, because of the distance from shore, rescues are often difficult to accomplish. Many paddling destinations also make excellent powerboating spots and, as such, often see a good deal of **boat traffic**. This movement of boats most often occurs within marked channels but can also take place within mooring fields and near marinas. **Strainers** are any kind of tree, branch, or other vegetation that is at least partially submerged in a river. The term *strainer* refers to the tendency of such obstacles to allow only water to flow through, trapping everything else in their clutches. **Deadfalls** are similar to strainers but usually block a stream completely and are difficult to get by. There may sometimes be **standing waves**, or waves that do not change position on a river as water flows past them. Depending on weather and prevailing conditions, a river may sometimes overflow its banks, creating **flooding** conditions. Rivers can also flow beneath **tunnels and bridges**,

Suffolk County (Paddles 1–37)





# PART ONE

## SUFFOLK COUNTY

### SUFFOLK COUNTY

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# 1

## ACCABONAC HARBOR

🔄 **OVERVIEW** Ask any group of paddlers on Long Island to name their favorite place to paddle, and, if they've ever been there, most of them will say Accabonac Harbor. And rightly so. This small harbor has a lot that makes it such a special place.



First and foremost are its miles of undeveloped shoreline. Though just a short distance from the heart of East Hampton, in a fairly populated part of town known as Springs, Accabonac somehow has managed to evade extensive development. Instead of encountering large waterfront homes replete with Adirondack chairs, barbecues, and boats tied up at docks, visitors to the harbor are greeted by an extensive salt-marsh ecosystem, complete with the usual wild-life species that call such areas home. Accabonac’s serene waters flow along low-lying grassy islands, through strands of smooth cordgrass marsh, and within the mazes of channels in between. The beautiful sandy beaches separating the harbor from the bay are perfect for a short rest, a quick swim, or a long and lazy picnic lunch.

But none of the features that make the harbor so amazing would mean anything if it were inaccessible to paddlers. Thankfully, this is not the case, as two excellent launch sites exist at the end of Landing Lane and Shipyard Lane, respectively. Although neither location boasts more than a safe place to launch a kayak and parking spaces for a handful of cars, both put you on the water—in the southern portion of the harbor—primed and ready to paddle. So while not just anyone can be considered a “Bonacker,” as a local is affectionately known, everyone can—and should—come and experience Accabonac Harbor for themselves.

📍 **MAPS** USGS *Gardiners Island West (NY), Gardiners Island East (NY)*

**Landing Lane to  
Cartwright Island and Back**

<b>Level</b>	1B
<b>Distance</b>	8.7 miles round-trip
<b>Time</b>	4 hours
<b>Navigable months</b>	Year-round
<b>Hazards</b>	Open water
<b>Portages</b>	None
<b>Rescue access</b>	Easy
<b>Tidal conditions</b>	3 hours before or after high tide
<b>Scenery</b>	A+

**1** 📍 **DESCRIPTION** The beauty of Accabonac Harbor is obvious, even if you’re just sitting on the beach at the end of Landing Lane. From here, only a small cluster of homes is visible in the distance, with an amazingly vast salt marsh spreading out everywhere in between. Though breathtaking from the sand, this view should be enough to make you jump into your boat as quickly as possible and hit the water.

Once you’ve launched, paddling out of the small cove and hugging the left (west) shore

will bring you to a secluded stretch of water. Here you’ll see a handful of homes on the southern shore and the Merrill Lake Sanctuary on the northern side. The latter, owned by The Nature Conservancy, houses one of the most beautiful sections of marsh on Long Island. It serves as an important habitat for many juvenile fish and marine invertebrates while also providing a home for ospreys, terns, and many species of waterfowl. Stay alert while paddling along its shores, and you may be lucky enough to spy willets, black-bellied plovers, or even a glossy ibis or two.

Besides observing the conservancy property, you can also check out another remarkable landmark within this small stretch of water.

**GPS COORDINATES**

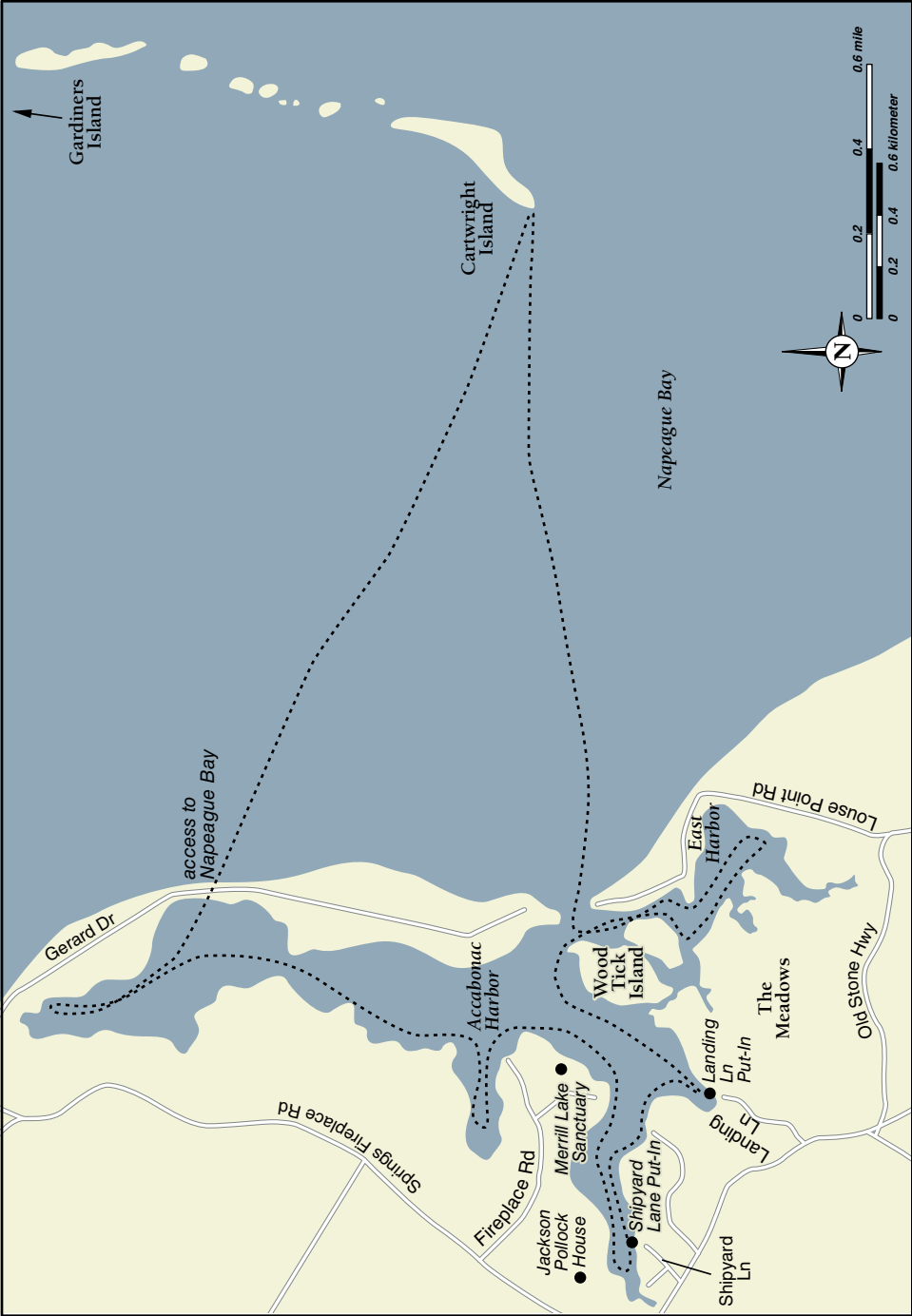
**Put-in/Takeout**

N41° 01.115' W72° 08.738'

**Tide station**

Promised Land, Napeague Bay, NY  
N40° 59.898' W72° 04.902'

Accabonac Harbor: Landing Lane to Cartwright Island and Back





The home of abstract painter Jackson Pollock sits in the northeasternmost corner, albeit a bit far back from the water's edge. Heading up the small creek present there during high tides may allow you to get close enough to get a good view of the modest but historic residence.

Head back out onto the main body of the harbor, and you'll see Wood Tick Island to the east. If you look beyond the island as you pass its northern tip, the harbor's inlet should come into view. Paddling out the inlet will bring you into Napeague Bay, with Gardiners Island and its smaller sibling, Cartwright, off in the distance. On calm days, the crossing to Cartwright can be a pleasant side trip, though it seems a shame to head out onto the bay from here without first exploring Accabonac Harbor's relatively unspoiled northern reaches.

Looking north from the Merrill Lake Sanctuary, the scattering of houses along the narrow causeway to the east will be visible, as will what appears to be a long, unbroken stretch of salt marsh to the west. Study the area using Google Earth, though, and the vast network of mosquito ditches that break up the marsh will also be evident. These ditches were dug,

like those in 90% of the marshes along the East Coast, to promote a greater flow of water into and out of the marsh areas. The thought behind this was that mosquitoes rely on standing water to lay eggs and produce larvae. Thus, if water could be kept from standing, the insects could be kept from laying eggs, effectively stopping the spread of these nuisance critters and the illnesses they carry.

Although the effectiveness of the ditches is arguable, their detrimental effects on ecosystems have become widely known—they've been found to increase the flow of both pollutants into marsh areas and desirable nutrients out of them. For these reasons, many conservation groups, The Nature Conservancy included, have recently begun taking steps to remedy this problem.

Look up the ditches you'll pass while paddling north along Accabonac's western shore, and you'll see one such effort. Small dams made of sandbags and branches have been erected at the ends of many ditches, slowing down the flow of water and allowing it to remain in the marsh during low tide. This may allow more mosquito larvae to survive



TWO OF ACCABONAC'S BIRDS

in the area, but it also gives predatory fish greater access to the juvenile insects. Unfortunately, these makeshift dams require constant upkeep if expected to continue functioning. Witnessing the breakdown of some of the dams makes it obvious that the conservation groups have a long road ahead of them.

You can paddle more than 1.0 mile north along this marsh before you reach the harbor's northern tip. Only a few houses, set back a bit from the water, can be seen along the way, allowing you to focus instead on the large groups of diving terns, swimming cormorants, and wading bitterns and egrets that are quite common here in the spring and summer. Once you've reached the harbor's end, turn around and head south; just 0.5 mile ahead, a narrow bridge provides another access point to Napeague Bay and Gardiners Island, 2.0 miles distant.

All of Gardiners Island is private property and, as such, is off-limits for boaters. That said, it still makes for an excellent paddling destination, especially the last little piece of land along its southward-stretching archipelago known as Cartwright Island. With an isolated location, a lack of predators, and an abundant supply of food, Cartwright has become home to an astonishing assortment of birds, ranging from oystercatchers to terns and black skimmers. Binoculars and cameras are a must for anyone making the crossing. The 2-mile trip should be attempted only during optimal weather conditions, however, as the wind, waves, and tidal currents here can all combine to make the crossing quite dangerous. Remember, too, that landing on the island is prohibited. It is a great spot to observe nature, but not to stop and have a quick bite to eat.

Heading almost due west from Cartwright will bring you back to the mainland

and Accabonac Harbor's inlet. This opening can be quite shallow, especially during low tides, and can be crowded with swimmers during hot summer days. Stick to its right (north) side, though, and you should be able to slip through with little trouble. Once you're back in the harbor, Wood Tick Island will lie directly ahead, with the beach on Landing Lane just beyond that. You may opt to turn left (south) here rather than head back to your car, though, as long as the tide is high enough to allow passage. While nothing more than a mudflat at low tide, this section of the harbor, known as East Harbor, is completely undeveloped and provides another 1.5 miles of shoreline to explore. Just pass around Louse Point, on the inlet's southern shore, head beyond the small flotilla of working boats floating at their moorings, and the area's serenity will be yours.

Just as it will be easy to lose yourself in your surroundings, it may be easy to lose your way back to your put-in. Should this happen, heading back to Wood Tick Island is the best way to find an open route to the beach. Skirt around the island to the left and you should see the beach at Landing Lane a few paddle strokes later.

◆ **SHUTTLE DIRECTIONS** To get to the put-in at the end of Landing Lane, take NY 27 (Montauk Highway) into the town of East Hampton. Continue heading through town on NY 27 until North Main Street branches off just south of the large windmill. Head north on North Main Street 0.3 mile before turning right onto Accabonac Road. Continue north on Accabonac Road 3.6 miles until it ends. Turn left onto Old Stone Highway and take your first right onto Landing Lane. Look for the small beach and parking area at the road's end.



## 20 MECOX BAY

📍 **OVERVIEW** Though not as large as Shinnecock Bay, its neighbor to the west, or as popular among the rich and famous as Georgica Pond, to the east, Mecox Bay has managed to become a favorite spot of the East End paddling crowd. Why? They appreciate its 15-plus miles of shoreline. They jump at the chance to experience its scenic beauty. They enjoy exploring its side creeks and coves. They bird-watch. They people-watch. They dig for clams. They paddle to the ocean beach and picnic. Basically, paddlers love everything about the bay.

Mecox sits in the center of Watermill, south of Montauk Highway and the landmark that the hamlet was named after. Locals are quite proud of this mill and are quick to point out that it is fully functional to this day. They also like to brag about their windmill, and the fact that their hamlet is the only one on the South Fork that has both a water mill and a windmill within its borders. As a visitor to Watermill, you will likely take note of both of these structures as you drive through town, but your main reason for coming here is probably to paddle that beautiful bay.

Luckily, this is easy to do. Almost every road that parallels or leads to the bay has a small beach area at its end that can be used as a put-in. Most even have room to park one or two cars (or more if you're parking at Flying Point Beach or Scott Cameron Beach). You need a permit from Southampton Town to use some of these spots legally, though others are free and open to anyone. The put-in at the end of Bay Avenue is my personal favorite, putting you on the water at the bay's northernmost point, ready to begin an amazing paddle on an even more amazing body of water.

📍 **MAPS** USGS *Sag Harbor (NY)*

### Bay Avenue to "The Gut" and Back

<b>Level</b>	2B
<b>Distance</b>	8.7 miles round-trip
<b>Time</b>	4 hours
<b>Navigable months</b>	March–November
<b>Hazards</b>	Open water
<b>Portages</b>	None
<b>Rescue access</b>	Easy
<b>Tidal conditions</b>	Any
<b>Scenery</b>	A

vantage point, the beauty of the bay is all but hidden from view. While you're probably itching to head south and explore the bay, try putting it off for a few minutes—a small treasure lies waiting just a few paddle strokes to the north.

Head in that direction and you'll notice that the phragmites-filled shoreline appears to be closing in on you. It is, in fact, narrowing, funneling you deeper into a quieter stretch of

**20** 📍 **DESCRIPTION** It's hard to imagine what's in store for you when you launch from the tiny beach at the end of Bay Avenue. The put-in is at the northernmost tip of the northernmost arm of Mecox Bay, surrounded by 10-foot-high reeds of phragmites. From this

### GPS COORDINATES

#### Put-in/Takeout

N40° 55.198' W72° 20.200'

#### Tide station

Shinnecock Inlet, NY

N40° 50.200' W72° 28.800'

## Mecox Bay: Bay Avenue to “The Gut” and Back





water that feels more stream-like than saltwater. Before long the phragmites will be completely gone, replaced with maple and tupelo trees that block out all but the most persistent rays of sunshine and create a feeling of seclusion that is often hard to obtain from the seat of a sea kayak. Unfortunately, this small creek dead-ends just a bit south of Mecox Road, only a few hundred feet after it began. Don't despair, though, as now you're ready to explore the remainder of Mecox's waters.

Once you've retraced your strokes, you'll again be paddling in the northern section of Mecox Bay, known as Hayground Cove. Hug the eastern shore and you'll likely gaze longingly at the sprawling homes that line the cove. Most are built with cedar shingles, a look that is quite common throughout the Hamptons, and they seem to grow bigger and more beautiful as you pass them by. Gaze away as you paddle along for the next mile, and soon your attention will be broken by a break in the

shoreline. Known as Calf Creek, this arm of Hayground Cove stretches to the northeast for 0.5 mile before it ends, again at Mecox Road. Along the way, Calf Creek passes its own collection of exquisite waterfront homes, each with its own private dock and some form of watercraft (motorized, of course).

Once past Calf Creek, you'll finally leave the protected waters of Hayground Cove and enter the expansive bay, but not before you pass through a bottleneck of sorts where both shores pinch in and form a narrow gap. Although it is now little more than a small island and a shoal that is exposed at low tide, this spit of sand is believed to have crossed from one shore to the other at one time, providing locals with a route that drastically shortened the trip around Mecox Bay.

After your boat skims the shallow bottom on either side of the island, you'll finally be able to see the rest of what Mecox has to offer. One thing that becomes obvious is the lack of



AN EGRET ON SAM'S CREEK

houses along the bay's eastern shore. Thankfully, they disappear from view a bit south of the entrance to Hayground Cove. Take note of the last house you see on the eastern shore, then look just right of it and you'll see another excellent put-in spot, with ample parking for a small number of cars. A waterfront farm named Fairview comes into view just beyond that, locally famous for a certain reason. I won't tell you exactly what that reason is—check out the farm on Google Earth and see for yourself. Amazing, to say the least!

In addition to its main call to fame, the farm boasts two protected stretches of water, one on either side, that beg to be explored if you have the time. They are separated from the main body of Mecox Bay by thin sandbars, which hide their respective entrances from view just as easily as they protect their waters from the wind and waves. Keep an eye out for two small cuts in the reeds on either side of the farm, and you should be able to find these “secret” entrances. Great egrets and great blue herons seem to enjoy these conditions as much as paddlers do; they're often seen in these two small creeks in good numbers.

Past the farm, a large house designed to look like a Spanish villa (white with a red-tile roof) seems to rise out of the shoreline grasses in the southeast corner of the bay. Head toward the residence, and the entrance to Sam's Creek should open before you. This small opening in the phragmites is incredibly narrow and can be completely blocked off at low tide, but you can portage easily over the small stretch of sand.

Sam's Creek begins as a fairly wide cove but narrows as expected under the bridge that lies straight ahead. (Incidentally, paddlers with a Southampton Town parking permit may park in the lot south of the bridge and use it as a put-in.) Beyond the bridge, Sam's Creek stretches 0.75 mile to the northeast, with a

shoreline similar to that of the main part of the bay. Beautiful homes with elaborate yards and landscaping line both sides of the creek, making it more of an architecture-watching site than a bird-watching one, though lucky paddlers may observe some avian species roosting in the trees nearby.

As you leave Sam's Creek and head back to the main bay, paddle along the barrier beach that separates Mecox from the Atlantic, and in 0.75 mile you'll reach a spot where a fierce battle has been raging for centuries. This battle, between humans and Mother Nature, began when the native Shinnecock tribe first cut an opening, or seapoose, bisecting the beach and allowing salt water to flood into the bay. Their motivation was food: salt water in the bay would create ideal conditions for growing and harvesting shellfish. Although Mother Nature has repeatedly closed the cut, humans continue to re-dig it by hand, animal power, and machine, though our motivations have changed. Today “the gut,” as it is affectionately known, is periodically cut by bulldozers and backhoes to create conditions ideal for fishing, recreational boating, and estuarine-habitat preservation. Whatever the reason for its existence, the gut is a unique and fun place to spend time in, especially on a hot summer day. Jump in, cool off, and ride the tide a bit before continuing your trip around Mecox Bay. Don't paddle too close to the tidal path, though, or you might get caught up in its current and swept out into the Atlantic.

Whereas the gut is evidence of humankind's fight against Mother Nature, the small pond in Mecox's southwest corner shows what can happen when we leave things alone. Called Channel Pond, it is almost completely devoid of development. Instead, it is rimmed with phragmites, smooth cordgrass, and other common shoreline plants. Terns, swallows, and egrets are incredibly common on the pond's waters,

but people are not. Chances are, you'll have the entirety of its mile-long shoreline to yourself. Pass under the small bridge marking Channel Pond's entrance, and revel in its serenity.

A wooden bulkhead stretches from the entrance to Channel Pond north, leading to yet another extension of Mecox Bay called Burnett Creek. Head west down its waters and you'll gain an additional half mile of shoreline to explore. Then paddle on and you'll come to what will probably be the last stop on your clockwise trip around Mecox Bay. Once there, you should find another stream, called Mill Creek, and a few other points of interest. The first is a relatively unbroken shore to the north. The second is the stunning Villa Maria property, just before Montauk Highway. Built in 1887 as a spiritual retreat, the large estate was recently purchased by a private family who have plans to restore the estate to its prior glory. Finally, Mill Pond lies just beyond Montauk Highway.

Paddle underneath the highway and onto Mill Pond, and you'll likely be amazed at the drastic change in scenery you find. The estuarine environment of Mecox Bay in no way resembles the wooded shore found here. Follow this shore to the right, and you'll come to the mill for which the pond, creek, and town of Watermill are named. You'll also come to the end of the navigable portion of the creek, requiring an about-face.

Once back on the bay, head east along the northern shore until you reach Hayground Cove 1.0 mile later. From this point, your car is only 0.5 mile to the north.

❖ **SHUTTLE DIRECTIONS** To get to the put-in at the end of Bay Avenue, take NY 27 (Montauk Highway) into the town of Watermill. Look for Bay Avenue just 0.3 mile east of Scuttle Hole Road. Turn onto Bay Avenue and head south until you reach the water.



## 21

## MT. SINAI HARBOR

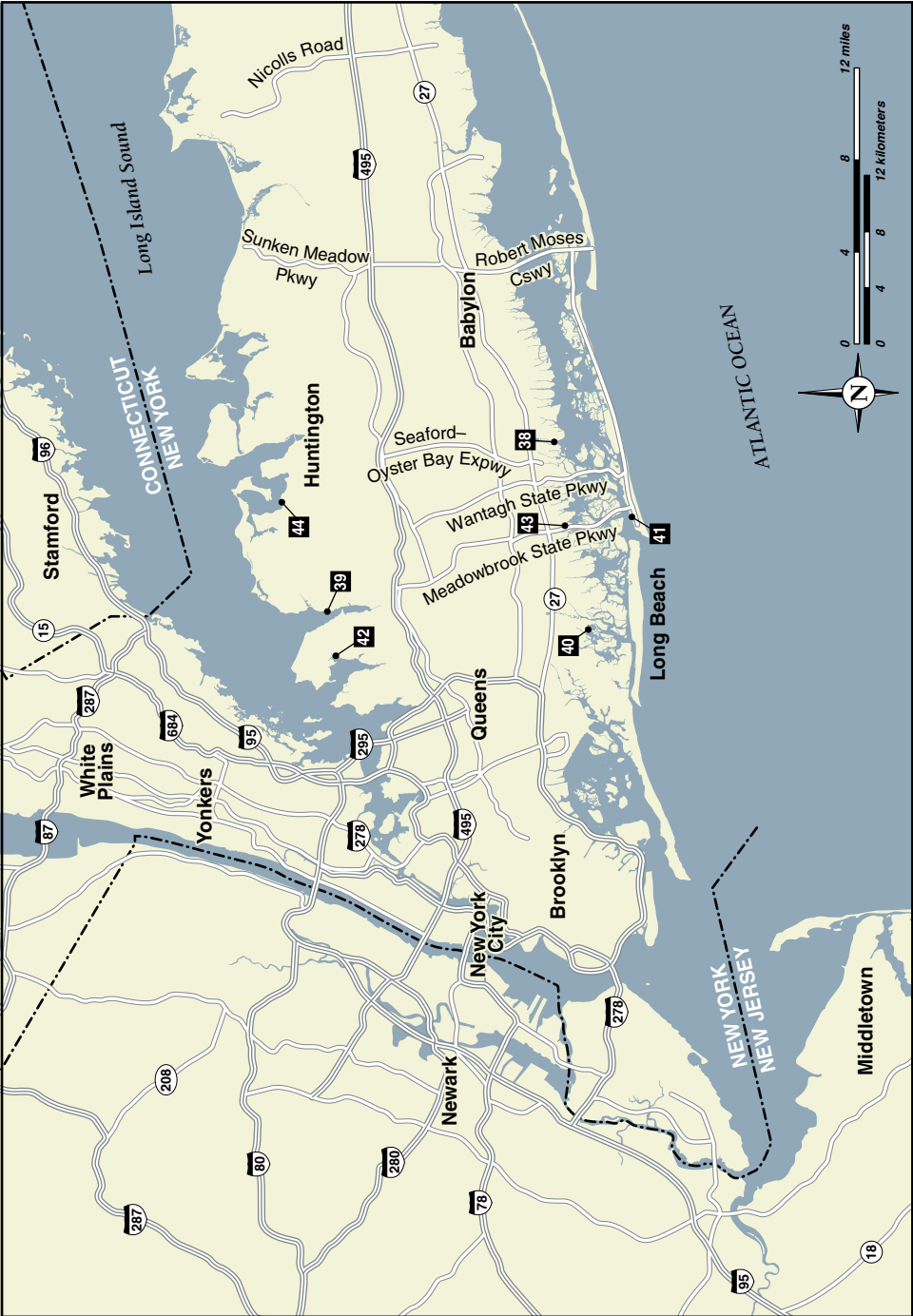
❖ **OVERVIEW** Families looking for a quiet spot to spend a day on the water, novice paddlers seeking a place to hone their skills, and experienced paddlers looking to pass a few hours in protected waters will all enjoy Mt. Sinai Harbor. Just east of Port Jefferson Harbor, it's small, quiet, and great for paddling.

Since it was first settled, the town of Mt. Sinai has had more than its share of place-names. Indigenous Peoples called it Nonowatuck, or "Stream That Dries Up." After the English obtained the land in 1664, they named it Old Mans, after an elderly fellow named Major Gotherson who lived in the area. In 1840 that name was deemed unseemly and changed yet again, this time for good. The story goes that the town postmaster opened his Bible and pointed a knitting needle at a random page. He chose the name closest to the needle.

Regardless of what you call it, Mt. Sinai offers much to see and do. Sunbathe on the town beach, have a go at fishing off the pier, or tie up your boat at Ralph's Fishing Station and get a grilled cheese at the snack bar. Of course, don't forget the main reason you came here—to paddle!



## Nassau County (Paddles 38–44)





## PART TWO

# NASSAU COUNTY

### NASSAU COUNTY

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## 38

### ALHAMBRA BEACH

◆ **OVERVIEW** Ask any group of Long Island kayakers or paddleboarders to give a recommendation on the best South Shore paddling spots and most, if not all, will include Alhambra Beach as one of their choices. And for good reason. It is an easy and convenient put-in. It has a great location. And its surrounding waters are almost always calm and perfect for a paddle.

Alhambra Beach is one of many locations that are part of the South Shore Blueway Trail. Opened in 2016, the trail's function, as stated on its website, is to provide "a safe, legal network of water access points for human-powered boats and beachable sail craft, which allows people to experience the natural, scenic and cultural wonders of Long Island's South Shore, while protecting wildlife and habitat and the safety of trail users and all mariners." This trail runs across both Hempstead and South Oyster Bays and includes an incredible 18 miles of coastline. According to the website ([southshoreblueway.com](http://southshoreblueway.com)), paddlers following it have the potential to observe 49 species of fish and 273 species of birds as they traverse its length. They also have 21 different launches and landing spots to choose from while planning their trips. And, if anyone needs a bit of help deciding which way to go, the Blueway Trail site has recommended routes plotted out as well.

If you look at the Blueway map, you should easily find Alhambra on its right-hand side. You'll also find the preferred paddling route that runs right past it. Indeed, Alhambra is perfectly situated for a paddle on South Oyster Bay. It provides quick and easy access to the bay's many hassocks, secluded sandy beaches, protected bodies of water, as well as many of the

Alhambra Beach: Alhambra Beach to Jones Beach State Park and Back



other 20 Blueway Trail locations. A good number of paddlers even use the beach as a starting point for trips to Jones Beach State Park. Alhambra has an updated boardwalk, renovated park grounds, and plenty of parking for all who are looking to enjoy its waters. It really might just be the perfect paddling spot on the South Shore.

➦ **MAPS** USGS Amityville (NY), West Gilgo Beach (NY)

### Alhambra Beach to Jones Beach State Park and Back

<b>Level</b>	3B
<b>Distance</b>	7.5 miles round-trip
<b>Time</b>	3–4 hours
<b>Navigable months</b>	Year-round
<b>Hazards</b>	Open water, boat traffic
<b>Portages</b>	None
<b>Rescue access</b>	Limited
<b>Tidal conditions</b>	3 hours before or after high tide
<b>Scenery</b>	B+

**38 DESCRIPTION** Alhambra Park sits right on the water's edge, nestled snugly in the back of a small cove lined with tightly packed waterfront homes. While this little body of water may not seem like the best paddling location, the lure of dozens of marsh islands sitting nearby on scenic South Oyster Bay should be enough to get you off the beach and paddling. And once you do this, you'll be out of the cove in 0.5 mile and floating in front of a myriad of directions to head. My usual route is south, toward the Jones Beach State Park Theater visible in the distance. But it is not possible to reach it by simply following your compass 180 degrees. Rather, you must go a bit west before you can go south.

West will lead you right to a pair of islands, named Little Goose and Goose Island. You won't be able to get too close to either if the tide is low, though. Instead, you may find yourself stuck on the bottom, or at the very least dragging your boat through some very shallow water. But, if the tide is high, the larger (and more southern) of the two, Goose Island, has

some fun little waterways running through it that are always a pleasure to paddle through.

Although bigger than its neighbor, Goose Island is still fairly small. Only a few paddle strokes will take you to its western shore, which happens to make up one border of a decently busy boat channel. The other side of the channel is marked by a much larger island known as Seamans Island. It is definitely worth checking out if you happen to be paddling nearby. However, heading that way from Goose Island may not be the best idea since it obliges you to cross the boat channel. Of course, this is a fairly simple thing to do if the weather is good, water is calm, and boat traffic is quiet. Otherwise, skipping Seamans Island to head south from Goose Island is the more prudent option.

As you continue south toward Jones Beach State Park, keep an eye to the right and you'll likely see a few cars cruising down the Wantagh State Parkway. Amazingly, they have been doing so since 1929 when the road, then called the Jones Beach Causeway, was built. Back then, it only went as far north as Merrick Road, although it was extended north to the Southern State Parkway a few years later, and the Northern State Parkway a

#### GPS COORDINATES

##### Put-in/Takeout

N40° 39.430' W73° 28.349'

##### Tide station

Biltmore Shores, South Oyster Bay, NY

N40° 40.000' W73° 28.100'

few more after that. Today, drivers can get to Jones Beach from Alhambra Beach in just 15 minutes, thanks to the Wantagh State Parkway. For comparison, it usually takes paddlers over an hour.

The next island to come up on your route is North Line Island. Like the others in the area, North Line has many passageways running across its area. A bird-watching, photography-crazed friend of mine considers these stretches of water to be his favorite in the area for getting great shots of amazing birdlife. Indeed, I have been here with him in the past and have seen numerous oystercatchers, terns, gulls, sandpipers, plovers, and black skimmers. Of course, my shots are never as good as his. Still, I tend to agree with him on the fact that this is the place to go if you are looking to capture these species on film.

Another mile south will bring you to yet another island, South Line Island. Like its brother to the north, this island can also be paddled through. Should you have enough

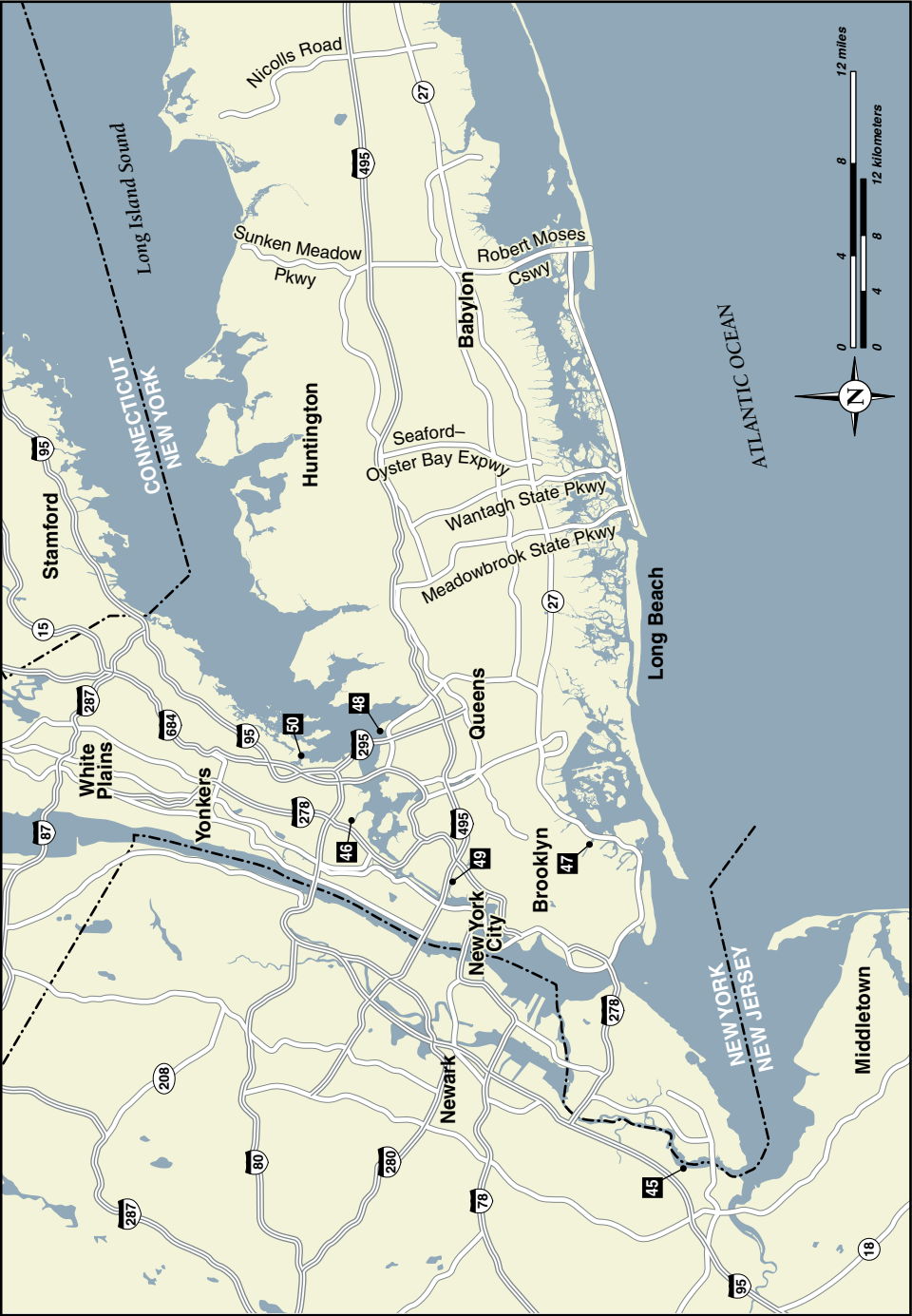
time and energy, the center of South Line can potentially provide you with miles of twists and turns to explore. It is no exaggeration to say that one can spend hours paddling its interior alone. Still, if Jones Beach State Park is your ultimate goal, it may be wise to leave South Line Island's interior for another day.

Once past South Line Island, you'll have to turn your bow a bit to the east so you can continue paddling along the edges of the boat channel and avoid the piece of Jones Beach Island jutting out to the north. Then, stay on the southeastern heading you've taken on and you should reach a protected cove of water called Zach's Bay. This is the spot every boater heads to when there are concerts in the theater, fireworks in the sky, or airshows over the ocean. Zach's Bay provides the perfect vantage point for all of these things. Of course, it also becomes home to large flotillas of boats during such events. Although there is more than enough water there for everyone, caution and common sense should prevail when paddling



BRANTS OVER SOUTH OYSTER BAY

New York City (Paddles 45–50)





## PART THREE

# NEW YORK CITY

### NEW YORK CITY

45 Arthur Kill	p. 195	48 Little Neck Bay	p. 208
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## 45 ARTHUR KILL

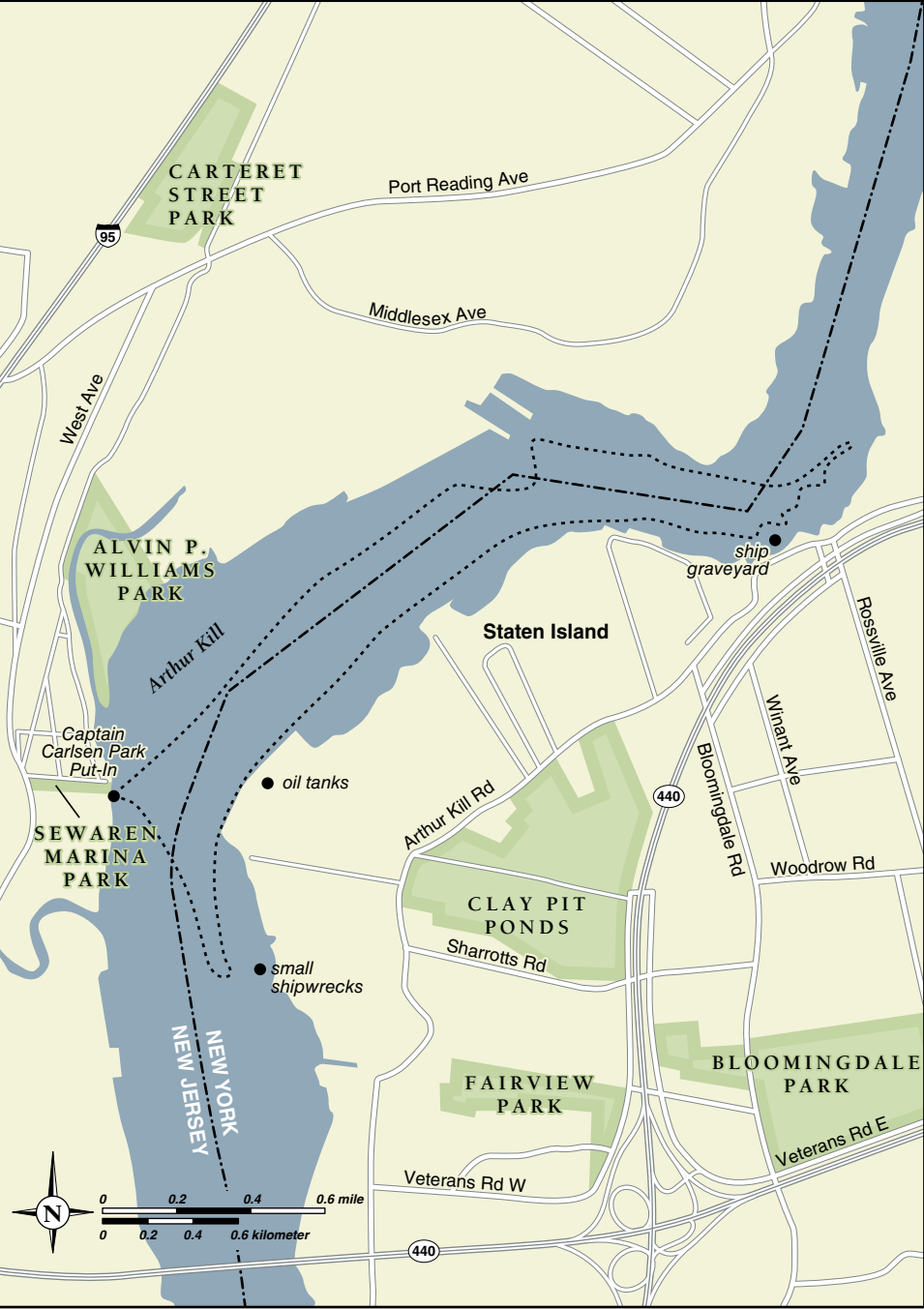
◆ **OVERVIEW** The Arthur Kill is a tidal strait on the western side of Staten Island, running between it and the state of New Jersey. It effectively cuts off Staten Island from the mainland and connects New Jersey's Raritan Bay and Newark Bay. The strait's English name is derived from the Dutch Achter Kill, or "Back Channel"—an appropriate designation, since the strait bypasses New York Upper Bay altogether.

Because of the shortcut it provides between New Jersey's two largest industrial harbors, the Arthur Kill has become one of the most heavily traveled bodies of water in New York Harbor. On any given day it can see dozens of tugs, barges, tankers, freighters, and container ships cruising up and down its length to Port Newark, the Atlantic Ocean, and the many oil and shipping facilities that line its banks. The Arthur Kill is also the main thoroughfare to the now-closed Fresh Kills Landfill. Considering the nature of the waterway and the heavy industry along its length, you can see why some refer to this region of New Jersey as the "Chemical Coast."

If the Arthur Kill is so heavily traveled and the region it flows through is packed with commercial docks, oil tanks, containers, and cranes, what attractions are there for paddlers to enjoy? Truth be told, there are few, if any, on the strait's New Jersey side. On the other hand, the Staten Island side of the Arthur Kill is lined with salt marsh for a good portion of its length. Though small, the marshes provide a scenic place to paddle and sufficient distraction from the industry on the opposite shore. There's also the legendary Staten Island ship graveyard, which is always a draw for anyone paddling near Rossville.



Arthur Kill: Captain Carlsen Park to Ship Graveyard and Back



Since the 1930s, the Witte Marine Equipment Company of Staten Island has been collecting derelict ships and dismantling them for scrap and parts. Because the company's founder, John J. Witte, refused to cut up or get rid of any boats unless there was a buyer for them, the scrap yard eventually accumulated about 400 rotting hulks of ships, most of which were left on the muddy bottom of the Arthur Kill. When Mr. Witte passed away, the company's new management began to remove some of the wrecks, ultimately getting rid of almost 200 rotten hulls. But roughly 200 or so remain for intrepid paddlers to explore.

Truth be told, few people have ever heard of the ship graveyard, and even fewer have seen it. On the Arthur Kill, just south of the Fresh Kills Landfill, it isn't visible from any roads or other public places. The only way to see it, in fact, is from the water. If you want to experience it for yourself, you can launch from a New York City Water Trail site on the Arthur Kill. The launch is at the southern tip of Staten Island in Conference House Park, about 5.5 miles from the graveyard, though some people may find this put-in a bit too distant. Happily, a second, more popular put-in lies on the New Jersey side of the Arthur Kill in Sewaren. Indeed, most visitors to the ship graveyard begin their paddle here, at Captain Carlsen Park. Only 2 miles from the sunken ships, it has restrooms, picnic tables, and a convenient boat ramp.

Whether you start from Captain Carlsen Park or Conference House Park, you should exercise great caution in paddling to and around the ship graveyard. As mentioned before, the Arthur Kill is incredibly busy, with almost continuous boat traffic cruising its length. To have a safe trip, you'll need to be very mindful of your surroundings and any other boats nearby. Likewise, once you've reached the graveyard, pay close attention to where you're paddling—rotten timbers, scraps of metal, and pieces of rope, rubber, glass, and other debris lie strewn about, ready to snag you or your boat as you float by. If you can, paddle here with others, and keep a safe distance from the wrecks.

📍 **MAPS** USGS *Perth Amboy (NJ), Arthur Kill (NY)*

**Captain Carlsen Park to Ship Graveyard and Back**

<b>Level</b>	2B
<b>Distance</b>	6.2 miles round-trip
<b>Time</b>	2–3 hours
<b>Navigable months</b>	Year-round
<b>Hazards</b>	Tidal currents, boat traffic, underwater debris
<b>Portages</b>	None
<b>Rescue access</b>	Limited
<b>Tidal conditions</b>	Any
<b>Scenery</b>	D

across the strait from you. Look to the right of them and you'll also see a large stretch of green where a small salt marsh sits at the water's edge. Follow the marsh and the lush woodland just behind it, a bit farther to the south, and something even more interesting should come into view: a small collection of ships, broken apart and left to rust and rot. Though nowhere near as extensive or exciting as the main ship graveyard farther north, this smaller version is worth an inspection and the 0.6 mile of paddling it will take to get there.

**45** 📍 **DESCRIPTION** As you look out on the Arthur Kill from the ramp at Captain Carlsen Park, the first thing you'll probably see is the collection of large oil tanks directly

Although you can make out the outlines of the ships from the wrecks that sit there, determining their age and original design is a bit harder to do. The only thing that will be completely obvious is the fact that they've

## GPS COORDINATES

**Put-in/Takeout**

N40° 32.709' W74° 15.242'

**Tide station**

Rossville, NY

N40° 33.402' W74° 13.398'

been sitting in the mud for quite some time. Take your time paddling around these pieces of history, and snap as many photos as you wish. But do not stay too long—there's still much more to see on the strait.

Head up the Arthur Kill's eastern shore, and in 0.3 mile you'll reach the oil tanks you viewed earlier from Captain Carlsen Park. The facility that houses them occupies 0.5 mile of waterfront, after which the shore is once again mostly undeveloped. A construction yard juts out into the Kill slightly north of the oil tanks, interrupting the otherwise-unbroken shoreline. But after just a few paddle strokes, the wooded shore returns.

Once you pass the construction yard, you should notice that the shoreline begins to curve a bit to the east. Follow this curve and in a very short time you'll be heading straight for the large hills of the Fresh Kills Landfill. Paddle a bit farther and you'll see the beginning of the ship graveyard. It's hard to make out details at first—just a faint outline of what looks like ships in the distance—but as you draw closer and closer, the scene before you snaps sharply into focus.

The graveyard stretches 0.5 mile along the Arthur Kill, containing the remains of about 200 ships of various designs and ages and in various states of decay. Some can easily be identified as tugboats, ferries, or tankers; others are figureless hulks of wood and metal. Some hatches are open, a few lifeboats sit in their cradles, and a couple of portholes still have glass. All in all, it's an eerie yet mesmerizing sight. The graveyard is also fraught with unseen dangers, namely parts of the ships' structures just beneath the surface. Submerged pieces of



GULLS IN FLIGHT ON THE ARTHUR KILL

**“THE WELCOME NEW SURGE** in paddling could be met with no better gift than this great and newly updated guide to waters that I personally happen to love.”

—Carl Safina, ocean advocate and author

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