

A PEACEFUL

Keep an eye out for wildlife at these enchanting N.H. canoe and kayak destinations

BY JOHN HAYES AND ALEX WILSON



Caught up in the kayak craze? Looking for somewhere new to launch your lovingly banged-up Day Tripper canoe? Paddlers of all stripes will find dozens of great destinations in New Hampshire – some whitewater for the adrenaline-rush crowd, some glassy expanses for the stereotypical Sunday driver, and lots in between. Here are four peaceful paddling spots to check out (if you haven't already!), courtesy of the authors of *Quiet Water: New Hampshire and Vermont*. Bring your binoculars, because each of these four locations is part of a N.H. Fish and Game-owned Wildlife Management Area. Depending on the season and time of day, you may find more than just a nice place to launch your people-powered craft. Check www.wildnh.com for 150+ more Fish and Game boating and fishing access sites around the state.

PADDLE

EAST INLET, PITTSBURG

A moose grazed belly-deep on the far shore of East Inlet when we drove in on one trip; on another trip, a young bull moose cavorted in the shallows about a half-mile up on the left. In neither case did the moose seem overly concerned by our presence. Tree swallows skimmed the surface, and families of black and wood ducks scurried for protective cover among the reeds at the water's edge. Several great blue herons fished the shallows, and trout dimpled the surface all around. Paddling next to the shore, we could study the remarkable pitcher plants in full bloom, their odd reddish flowers on straight stems bowing over as if looking at the sphagnum beneath.

East Inlet is within the Connecticut Lakes Nature Preserve, a 15,000-acre parcel owned and managed by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department under a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy. Located in the northern tip of the state near the better-known Connecticut Lakes, East Inlet has to be one of the most beautiful bodies of water we have paddled. It is small – just 60 acres of shallow (5 feet deep) open water in a long, sinewy channel set within several hundred acres of marsh – but truly wild and pristine. Water celery dominates the surface. Ancient, rotting stumps peer out from the still water, and huge fields of reed and sedge sway in the breeze. Farther away from the water on solid ground, deep green spires of spruce and fir make up the northern boreal forest. Paddling this extraordinary place sure beats fighting the waves on the larger lakes in this area; in addition, gasoline motors are prohibited.

Paddling northeast from the dam, the wide channel continues for a mile or so, eventually turning to marsh as the inlet stream winds a serpentine pathway through a thick alder swamp. Tamarack joins the spruce and

fir along the shores at this end. For more paddling room, go left through this marshy section, called Moose Pasture, where separating the real channel from an isolated oxbow is quite a challenge. With some diligence, and if you ignore the bugs, you can paddle quite a distance up the inlet stream.

Paddling here has an air of excitement to it, since you never know what might be around the next bend: beaver, a family of ducks, moose. The farther up this inlet you paddle, the smaller the channel becomes, with the ever-present alders reaching out into the creek from both sides. Eventually the alders completely block your passage.

Getting there:

Three miles north of Second Connecticut Lake on Route 3 in Pittsburg, make a right onto Pint Road, a gravel road. At the fork, go left, and travel about 1½ miles, until you reach the East Inlet access point at the dam. There is a gravel parking area and a put-in suitable for canoes, kayaks and other cartop crafts.

Also in the Great North Woods: First, Second and Third Connecticut lakes; Lake Francis; Connecticut River; Lake Umbagog; Androscoggin River.

Marshy expanses add color and mystery to your East Inlet adventure. A life vest adds security – don't forget yours!

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FISHING FROM YOUR CANOE OR KAYAK

Canoe and kayak-fishing devotees are passionate about their sport – nothing brings you closer to the fish than a quiet self-propelled watercraft.

You can get started as a paddling angler by tossing some fishing gear in the hull of your canoe or lashing it to the front of the kayak with some rope; the key is to start simple and add accessories or make modifications that work for you. For comfort during hours of serious fishing, a lot of paddlers will get a seat cushion and/or a seat with a back. You can use bungee cords and carabiners to hold your tackle box, fishing rod and other gear. A rod-holder is a convenient extra; a fish-finder, a fun luxury.

Don't forget a water bottle. A small dry-bag is good to keep your camera and extra clothes safe; you might even consider "leashes" for your best gear...just in case! The latest Personal Floatation Devices – yes, please wear one – come with dozens of pockets, perfect for your lures, nippers, flies, tippet, sunscreen and the rest. If you prefer to fish without drifting with the wind or current, include a small pair of anchors.



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MERRYMEETING RIVER, NEW DURHAM

The Merrymeeting State Wildlife Management Area on the Merrymeeting River offers superb quietwater paddling. Busy Route 11 bisects the U-shaped section described here. We enjoyed paddling both sections, though the western part feels wilder – if you can ignore the Route 11 road noise. One could spend hours paddling this waterway, absorbed in the marsh's biologically rich wonders.

On the eastern side, deciduous trees and some scattered white pine form a backdrop, while narrow-leaved cattail, bulrush, pickerelweed, waterlily, sweet gale, sheep laurel, and many other shrubs populate the shoreline. Aquatic plants choke the water with vegetation. Watch for the

typical marsh denizens, including beaver, muskrat, bullfrogs, wood and black ducks, great blue herons, red-winged blackbirds, song sparrows, yellow warblers, and eastern kingbirds.

Development increases as you approach the southern end; we would not paddle past the small access bridge across the narrows. On the north side of Merrymeeting Lake Road, only a couple of houses impinge on the wild character of Marsh Pond; we prefer paddling here to paddling on the south side of the road. This extensive marsh boasts tons of aquatic vegetation and islands thick with tamarack.

Paddling affords exceptional wildlife viewing opportunities, but keep your distance – disturbance can affect wildlife health and breeding success.



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The section to the west of Route 11 wends its way through seas of aquatic vegetation for more than five sinuous miles, by far the best section to paddle, though it suffers from some Route 11 road noise. Pickerelweed guards the narrow channel through the wide expanse of marsh. The shoreline, off in the distance, begins with low brush followed by white pine. All of the usual pond vegetation occurs here in profusion, along with the usual marsh birds, including loads of ducks.

As we paddled back to the access with the sun setting over the marsh, a beaver slapped the water with its broad tail, as if to send us on our way so the nighttime creatures could hold sway.

Getting there:

A N.H. Fish and Game access site is about 2½ miles east of the Rte 28 traffic circle in Alton, on the south side of Route 11. The parking lot holds about 10 vehicles. Canoes, kayaks and small boats only; 6HP/6MPH restriction on motorized craft.

Nearby: Manning Lake in Gilmanton (N.H. Fish and Game access site); Dan Hole Pond in Ossipee.

POWDER MILL POND - BENNINGTON, GREENFIELD, HANCOCK

A dam on the Contoocook River in Bennington, New Hampshire, holds back the unspoiled Powder Mill Pond. A few unobtrusive old farms front the western shore. The main drawback: road noise from Route 202, which runs quite close to the pond at the northern end. The water at Powder Mill is exceptionally clean, as evidenced by the shells of freshwater mussels along the shore – probably left by raccoons or otters. You will find lots of deep inlets and marshy eddies to explore along the nearly three-mile stretch from the covered bridge on Forest Road at the southern end of the pond to the dam at the northern end.

You can also paddle south (upstream) under the covered bridge and up the Contoocook River. This

section of the river twists and folds tightly, leaving many islands and oxbow curves to explore. Red maple lines the shore, along with oak, hemlock and other trees. Red maple always has red on it: red buds in the winter, red flowers in the spring, red stems on the leaves in summer, and red leaves in fall. Look for beaver activity in the swamps. We watched a muskrat harvest grass and saw several kingfishers. When you get to the point where the current picks up, lots of barely submerged boulders – hard to see and hard to avoid – will impede your progress.

Getting there:

From Peterborough, take Route 202 north; just .1 mile past the junction with Route 123, make a right onto Forest Road. Go 1.2 miles and cross the covered bridge; access site and parking lot are on the right. Ramp suitable for trailered boats.

Also check out: The Fish and Game ramps at Willard Pond and MacDowell Lake.

HOIT ROAD MARSH, CONCORD

Though Hoit Road borders part of the southern edge of the marsh, as you leave the boat access and paddle around to the left, civilization all but disappears. A few cars pass by at regular intervals, but they really don't intrude on the solitude once you have paddled off into one of the many arms of this wonderful and productive marsh.

Wood ducks and Canada geese, and possibly other ducks, nest in this shallow marsh maintained by the N.H. Fish and Game Department. The wetland also provides habitat for myriad other marsh birds, insects, mammals and plants. Water shield, fragrant waterlily, pickerelweed and other aquatic plants cover most of the surface. As these plants die back each fall, the decaying vegetation stains the water a yellow-brown. The many small islands harbor loads of sweet gale, purple iris, sheep laurel and many other small shrubs. One large island on the northern end has a nice stand of white pine, and at the foot of the island we found a large beaver lodge.

Besides numerous wood ducks, we saw a pair of Canada geese beginning to nest when we paddled here in spring. An adult bald eagle soared overhead, while numerous damselflies and dragonflies patrolled the surface. As we listened to the chorus of several frog species, we reveled in how special this place is – all the more remarkable because of its location in New Hampshire's capital city. Its many nooks and crannies, wooded shoreline and shrubby islands offer hours of exploration. Paddle here in the early morn-



Rare pitcher plants at East Inlet...Flashy damselflies at Hoit Marsh...A great blue heron on the Merrymeeting River...Muskrats at Powder Mill Pond. Just a few of the wild wonders you might see during your next paddling adventure.



ing or late evening when wildlife is active. You will be free from motorboats here – and their noise, which so dominates New Hampshire's larger lakes.

Getting there:

From I-93, take Exit 17. Go east on Hoit Road for 2.4 miles. Parking pullouts on either side of the road. Cartop craft only. **W**

More after-work paddles for those near Concord: Turtletown Pond, Turee Pond, Hothole Pond – access courtesy of New Hampshire Fish and Game.

The descriptions of the four waterbodies are excerpted with permission from *Quiet Water: New Hampshire and Vermont*, 2nd edition, by John Hayes and Alex Wilson, a publication of Appalachian Mountain Club Books ©2001. This book and others in the *Quiet Water* series are available for purchase from www.outdoors.org and at retailers throughout the Northeast. Additional material on access points and fishing provided by Fish and Game staff. For more N.H. boating and fishing destinations, visit www.wildnh.com.

