



Dataw Island Yacht Club

Kayaking Around Dataw

The waters around Dataw are a paddler's paradise, changing daily with the tide and the season. As the tide rises, periwinkle snails inch up spartina grass to escape predators washing into the marsh. As the tide drops, dolphins team up to trap fish washing out. At low tide, oysters pop shut and snowy egrets stalk the mud flats for small fish and crabs. As the seasons change, the spartina grass celebrates each with beautiful displays of color. And every kayak trip promises a surprise: a mother dolphin playing with her baby, a mink swimming across your bow, an eagle or osprey soaring overhead, a new view of our beautiful Island.

The Dataw Island Yacht Club (DIYC) has a large and active contingent of kayakers. Before moving to Dataw Island, many kayaked on rivers and lakes, waters that flowed one direction or not at all. The prospect of paddling through a tidal marsh was often intimidating at first. Nobody wants to make the front page of the Beaufort Gazette stuck in pluff mud! Or, worse yet, swept out to the Atlantic! But, with preparation, paddling our waters can be just as easy and safe as paddling a river or lake.

Key to preparation is checking tides. Jenkins Creek and Morgan River are extensions of Saint Helena Sound, flowing in and out twice daily with the tides. A smartphone tide app like "Tides Near Me" can help you plan a safe and easy trip. Tides differ along our sinuous shoreline: Check for the tide at "Jenkins Creek – Polawana Island" for the Jenkins Creek launch and at "Morgan River – Lucy Point Creek Entrance" for the Marina launch.

Generally, it is best to kayak the hour before and after high tide when there is less current and a reduced risk of stranding. If possible, plan your trip to ride a rising tide to your destination then return on the falling tide. If exploring a new part of the marsh, go on a rising tide; it will lift your kayak out of pluff mud rather than leaving you stranded until the next high tide. Tide height is also important: It affects whether you can paddle under the causeway, how far you can venture up a small creek, and what you can see beyond the spartina grass.

Safety is another key to preparation. The Coast Guard requires kayakers to wear a personal floatation device and a whistle. Inflatable life jackets that automatically inflate in the water are less constricting and cooler in our hot summers. Paddle with a buddy or group and ensure that one of you has a coil of tow line and a mobile phone in a waterproof pouch. Phoning 911 is the best way to get help in an emergency. If you paddle on your own, make sure someone knows your itinerary. Don't paddle in wind greater than a gentle breeze – most kayakers draw the line at 12-15 mph -- or if there is any risk of lightning. Bring water and apply sunscreen. A list of kayaking safety tips can be found below.



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Dataw has two excellent kayak launches at the Marina and at the Jenkins Creek community dock on Dataw Drive near Oak Island Road. These “EZ Launches” are indeed easy to use; you won’t even get your feet wet.

The Jenkins Creek launch is suitable for kayakers of all skills, though novices or weaker paddlers should still kayak with more experienced or stronger paddlers. Popular trips from Jenkins Creek include:

- Half an hour before high tide, paddle with the rising tide “up” to the causeway then paddle with the falling tide back (Route A on the map below). Depending on the height of the tide, you might be able to paddle under the causeway, but be careful that a rising tide does not trap you on the wrong side!
- An hour before high tide, cross Jenkins Creek and explore behind Polawana Island (Route B). Since you will be crossing water less sheltered from the wind, this is best done on a calm day.
- An hour before high tide, paddle “down” by the Clubhouse to Pee Dee Point then circle back (Route C). This will require you to paddle against the tide both ways but should not be a problem for most kayakers. Wave “hello” to the golfers on Cotton Dike!

Morgan River can be more challenging than Jenkins Creek, so the launch at the Marina is best suited for stronger and more experienced paddlers. It is imperative to check the tide and wind, both available on the DIYC website. At mid tide, the outgoing and incoming currents can be strong (1-2 knots), and wind and tide in opposite directions can create swells or even whitecaps. In general, it is safest to paddle on a calm day during the 90 minutes before and after high tide. Avoid returning on an outgoing tide 90 minutes before and after mid tide when the current pushing you toward the launch is strongest.

Popular trips from the Marina (see map below) include:

- Head “up” Morgan River an hour before high tide and explore the Sparrow Nest Marsh. This allows you to paddle through the narrow, winding paths on a rising tide, important because you are bound to make a wrong turn or two! Come back on Morgan River with the tide after it changes direction.
- Cross Morgan River an hour before high tide to explore the Coosaw Marsh. There, if you know the route and use your smartphone’s GPS map, you can explore the prehistoric Indian shell rings on the far shore.
- Head “down” Morgan River 1 ½-2 hours before low tide to get out at the sandbar across from Morgan (aka “Monkey”) Island. Come back with the rising tide. This is a longer trip into more open water so best done on a calm day by the strongest, most experienced kayakers. Even so, you’ll get good exercise!



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When using the Marina launch, be safe and courteous to other Marina users by staying away from power and sail boats, not paddling into the bull pen, and not blocking walkways with kayaks and gear. If you are hauling your kayak down the pier used by the boat lift, the Harbormaster asks that you first stop in his office to give a head's up.

Want to circle the Island? Kayaking the full circuit around Dataaw gives new appreciation for the size of the salt marshes to our east and west. Stronger, more experienced paddlers can circumnavigate the Island in 3 to 4 hours depending on tide and wind. Circling the island in two days, leaving from the Jenkins Creek launch and "overnighting" your kayak at the Marina (see map), is less exhausting and can take better advantage of the tides. The trip is best undertaken by experienced kayakers in a group, particularly since there are few places to take out.

Worried about pluff mud? If you get stuck in sticky, smelly, dark-brown pluff mud, do not get out of your kayak because you will sink and get stuck in this quick sand of the salt marsh. Paddle backwards to the deeper water from which you came, assisted if necessary and possible by another kayaker with a tow line. Or, on a rising tide, wait for it to lift you up. If the tide is falling, the 911 dispatcher can send an airboat from the Beaufort Water Search and Rescue. Expect to make the front page of the Beaufort Gazette!

Worried about alligators? Dataaw's alligators prefer the freshwater of the Island's golf course lagoons. They occasionally venture into the saltwater of Jenkins Creek and Morgan River when they want to rid their scales of insects or when big males drive young males out of the lagoons during mating season. Fortunately, mothers aggressively protecting their babies are unlikely to be found in the saltwater. Stay away from them, and they will stay away from you.

Thinking of buying a kayak? A 12- to 14-foot sit-in kayak offers good maneuverability and decent tracking for our salt marshes. Lighter is better for carrying on land, though ultralight composites are easily scratched by oyster shells and boat ramps. If you fish or have restricted mobility, a sit-on-top kayak may be preferable, though they are usually heavier and more easily blown off course by the wind. Invest in a lightweight carbon-fiber paddle so your arms won't be as tired after a long paddle. Before buying, borrow or rent one or two models to try them out.

Considering a tandem? Couples new to kayaking often consider tandem (two-seat) kayaks. Having two paddlers can increase power but does not always lead to harmony. Single-seaters are lighter, more maneuverable, and more fun in the experience of most kayakers. Again, try out a tandem and compare it to a single before buying, if you can.

Want to kayak with others? The DIYC organizes guided, off-Island kayak trips with a local outfitter that offers kayaks for rent. (This is a good way to try out one or two models and a single versus a tandem.) The DIYC also organizes free kayak cruises from the two kayak



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launches. Upcoming kayaking activities are shown on the DIYC calendar. Also watch the DIYC Listserve and DatawNet for upcoming events.

Want to borrow a kayak? The DIYC has a kayak loaner program for members, accessible on the club website by signing in as a member with the password on your membership card.

Want to store your kayak near either launch? Contact the terrific Jackie Karasch at DIOA Accounting at 838-8435 or jkarasch@islc.net. There is an annual fee.

For more information, please feel free to contact Nancy Schulte, the DIYC Kayaking Captain, at nschulte10@gmail.com. See you on the water!

Safety Tips

Kayaking Safely

- Wear life jacket and whistle, per Coast Guard requirement
- Hang cell phone in waterproof pouch around neck
- Bring a tow rope to help another kayaker who is tired or stuck
- Paddle with a buddy or give your paddle plan to one
- Check tide and paddle with it when possible
- Don't kayak if more than a gentle breeze or risk of lightning
- Phone 911 in an emergency

Using the Marina Launch Safely

- Use only if you are a stronger, more experienced kayaker
- Launch and recover 90 minutes before and after high tide*
- Avoid recovering with the current in the middle of an outgoing tide

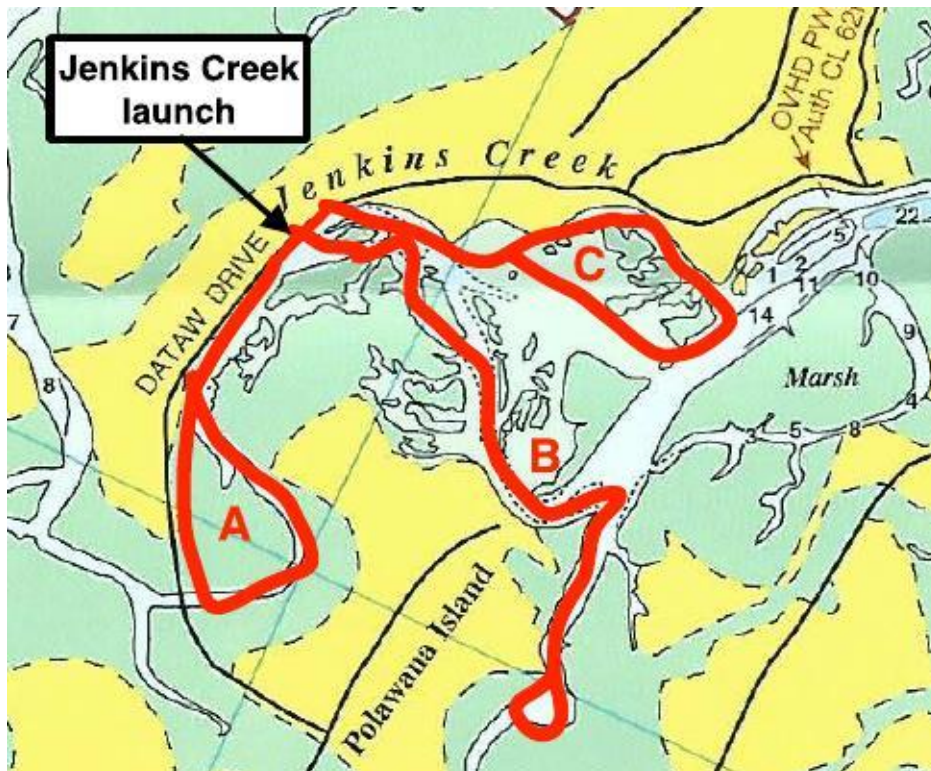


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- Notify Harbormaster if hauling kayak on pier used by boat lift
- Don't leave kayaks or gear blocking pier or docks
- Don't paddle into bullpen
- Stay away from power and sailboats arriving or departing
- Watch for powerboat traffic and cross wakes at right angle

* An exception for strong, experienced kayakers is going to the Morgan River sandbar at low tide.

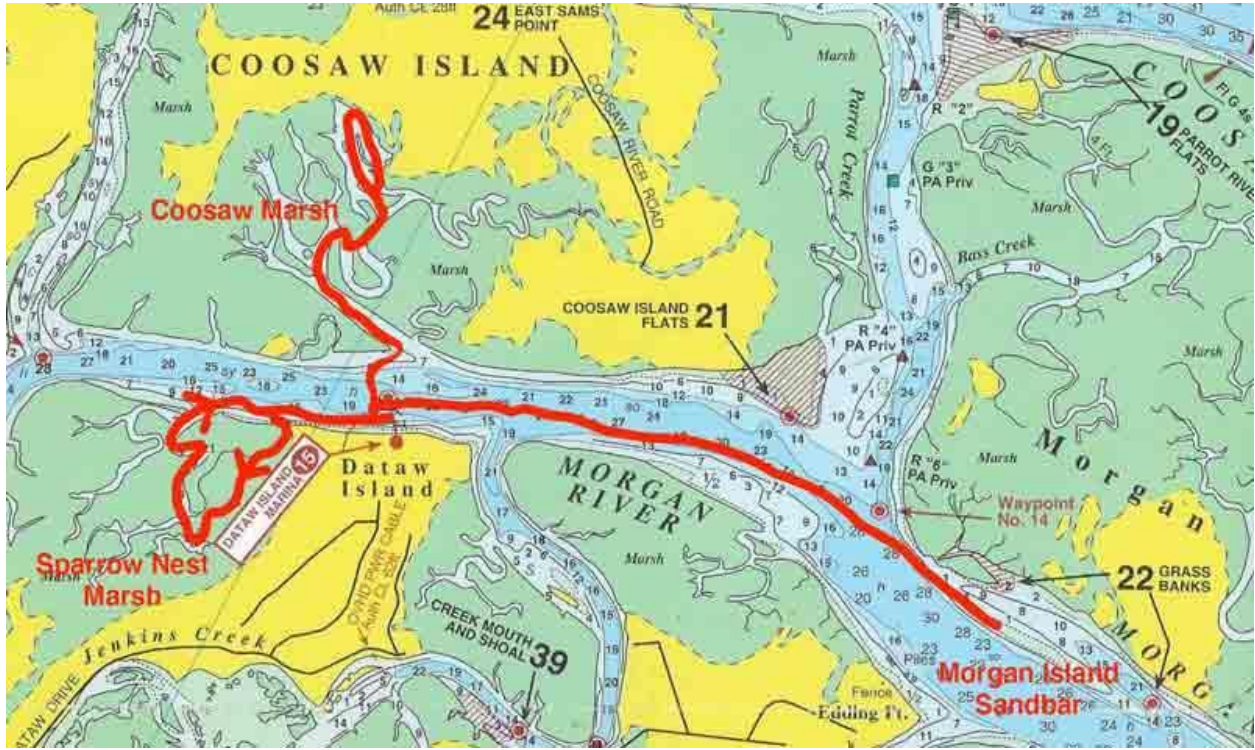
Kayak Trips from the Jenkins Creek Launch





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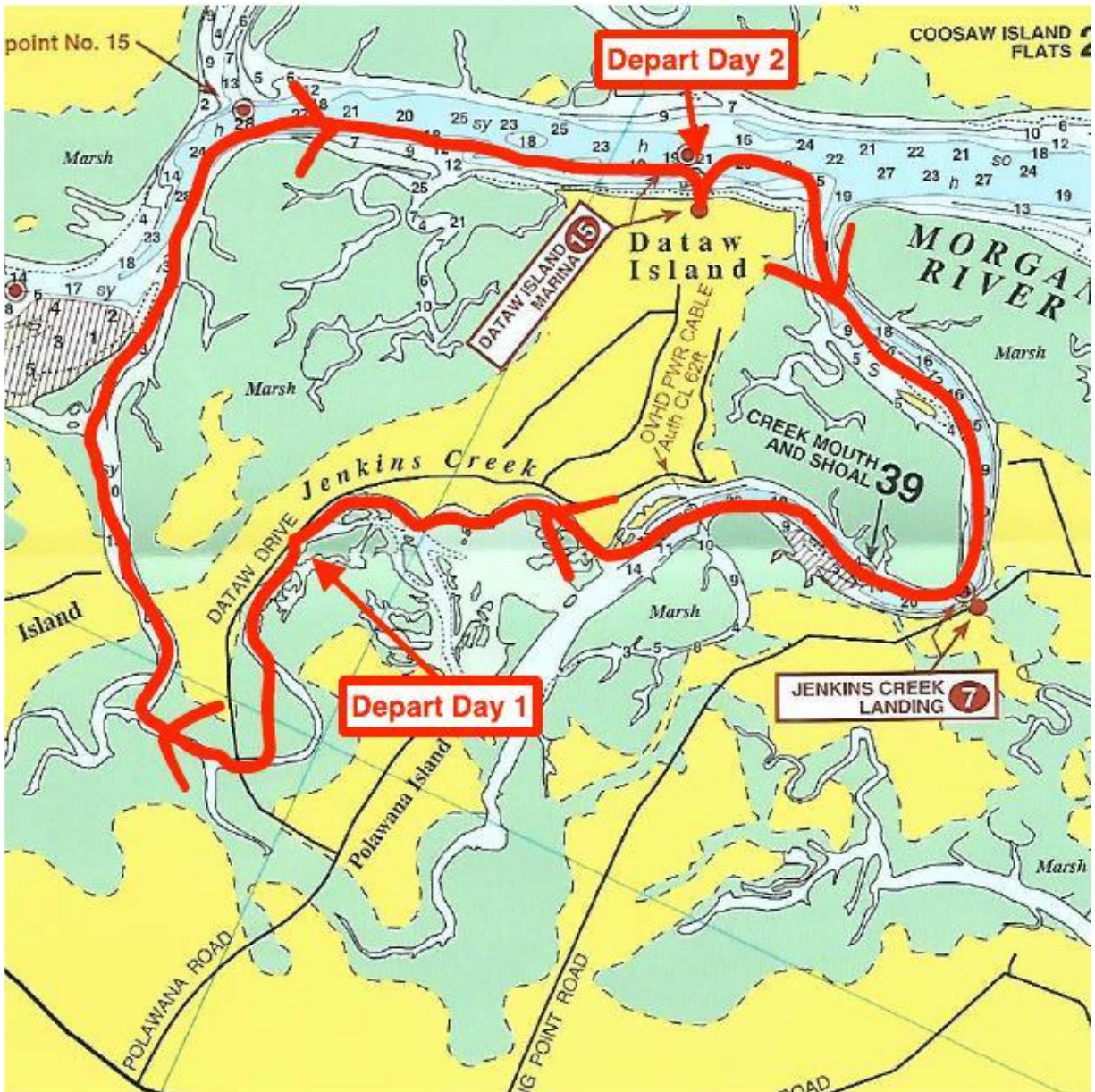
Kayak Trips from the Marina Launch





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Circling Dataw in Two Days



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