

Cumberland Head Ferry to Plattsburgh Beach and Back

Date: 10/1/2004

Distance: 10 miles

Another day of "light and variable" winds predicted for this short 10 miles round trip to complete the south and east facing shores of the Cumberland Head peninsula. The trip from the ferry to the beach was relaxing, with a freshening tail wind most of the way and punctuated by the presence of a large flock of Canada geese and snow geese on the beach and swimming in the shallow water. They flew away when we approached, about 500 of them, with the snow geese, about a third of the flock, flying above the Canada geese. Is there a pecking order here or just self imposed segregation?

The wind picked up dramatically from the SE as we headed back 4 miles directly into it. The closer we got to rounding the point of Cumberland Head the stronger the wind became. White caps abounded and most waves were 2 feet or greater - "light and variable" indeed! The wind is a witch! It was clearly time to make us pay for those three days of glorious clear, calm days of fall paddling. Rounding the point placed us before the wind and it was a wild ride the half mile back to the ferry dock. Several times, independently, we both thought we were going to take an unplanned swim. The water temperature is now 61 and we are both wearing old windsurfing wetsuits. I kept looking back at Margy to make sure she was upright. She could more easily see if I was but I am not sure what either of us could have done to help the other, short of meeting on whatever shore we washed up on.

By 2:30 that afternoon Margy reported from her vantage point on the shore of Grand Isle that the wind had subsided and there were no whitecaps in sight. Did we imagine that rough ride? The pile of wet kayaking clothing and gear in the back of my car says "No Way ". Note: I just learned from reading the Cruising Guide to the Hudson River, Lake Champlain & the St. Lawrence River, that "in a southerly blow, the maximum wave height will be encountered near Cumberland Head." I don't think either of us will argue with that statement.