

Sucia, Patos, & Matia: The Crown Jewels of the San Juans

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After spending two months lining up a group of seven paddlers and one alternate for this trip, I was rather disappointed to have six cancellations in the week before the launch date. But more disappointing still was a weekend weather forecast that called for lots of clouds and rain and wind. Ugh! Prospects for the trip were looking grim. And yet, as the saying goes, everything worked out in the end.

On Saturday*, I met Nancy and Mac on the ferry and we reviewed the current atlas and tide predictions together on our ride over to Orcas, then we drove over to North Beach and launched. The funny thing is, all that worry about paddling conditions was completely wasted energy. The seas were smooth and the wind was calm during our three-mile paddle over to Ewing Cove on the northeast tip of Sucia Island.

We spent the rest of the afternoon setting up camp, making dinner, and enjoying(?) a very smoky fire made by yours truly. From our quiet, little camp, we could see flashes of lightening somewhere in the vicinity of Bellingham, but that was as close as the thunderstorm came to us. It did rain a little during the night, but by Sunday morning the clouds were going... going... gone. Yahoo! Blue skies above.

Around 10 a.m., we launched for a day trip over to Patos Island and arrived an hour later. Just like Sucia, the place was all but deserted. No campers, just a single sail boat. We hiked out to the lighthouse for a few photos, and then returned to Active Cove for lunch and a brief snooze in the sun. After that, we set off to circumnavigate the island and here's where we all had a little fun. While we were at the lighthouse, we observed a nice patch of standing waves just off Alden Point. The waves were still standing when we came back in our boats and each of us had a good, fun ride bouncing and surfing around the corner. From there, we had the current with us all the way back to Sucia.

Back at camp, Mac entertained Nancy with a rolling session while I went out and caught a couple kelp greenlings for dinner. Yum! That night, Mac was in charge of the fire (where did all the smoke go?) and we watched satellites sail overhead and listened to owls hooting in the trees.

On Monday, we packed up camp and paddled over to Matia Island. Once again, we didn't have much wind to contend with, even though we did encounter a rather choppy section of rip along the way. After reaching the completely deserted island, we circumnavigated it then hauled out at a tiny cove on the south side. A heavily laden pear tree marked the cove as a former homestead site. We then hiked a one-mile loop through some beautiful old-growth timber and then sat down for lunch in the sun. And here was the icing on the cake: a lone Minke whale blew directly in front of us and passed right by our little cove. It was a perfect send off to a very enjoyable trip. Thanks Mac and Nancy, for hanging in there until the end!

* With only three people left in our group (including me) we opted to push the start of the trip back one day. As it turned out, this didn't make much difference. We would have had two nice days and one cloudy day either way.