

POND PADDLING

BY ALICE LESCH KELLY

FOR A UNIQUE PADDLING EXPERIENCE, SKIP THE OCEAN AND LAUNCH YOUR KAYAK IN ONE OF THE MANY PONDS ON CAPE COD AND THE ISLANDS.

When you think about kayaking through Cape Cod and the islands, you might imagine slicing through ocean waves or gliding along bayside shorelines. But the area offers paddlers so much more than saltwater adventures. Point your kayak inland towards the more than one thousand ponds that are carved into the landscape of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, and you'll enjoy an entirely different outdoor experience.

"Ocean paddling is wonderful, but one does need to be mindful of tides, waves, wind, quick weather changes, and large boats, which can all make it a bit more challenging," says Marty Burke, a board member on **Brewster Ponds Coalition**, a nonprofit that protects and promotes close to 80 ponds in Brewster. Pond paddling, he says, offers calmer waters and easier conditions.

Michael Morrison, owner of **RideAway Adventures**, a kayak rental and tour company with locations in Sandwich and Mashpee, agrees that ponds can be a good starting point for beginners. "The thing people love about kayaking ponds is that it is less intimidating than ocean kayaking," he says. "And you usually see quite a bit of wildlife due to the smaller area and the pond perimeters being mostly woodland."

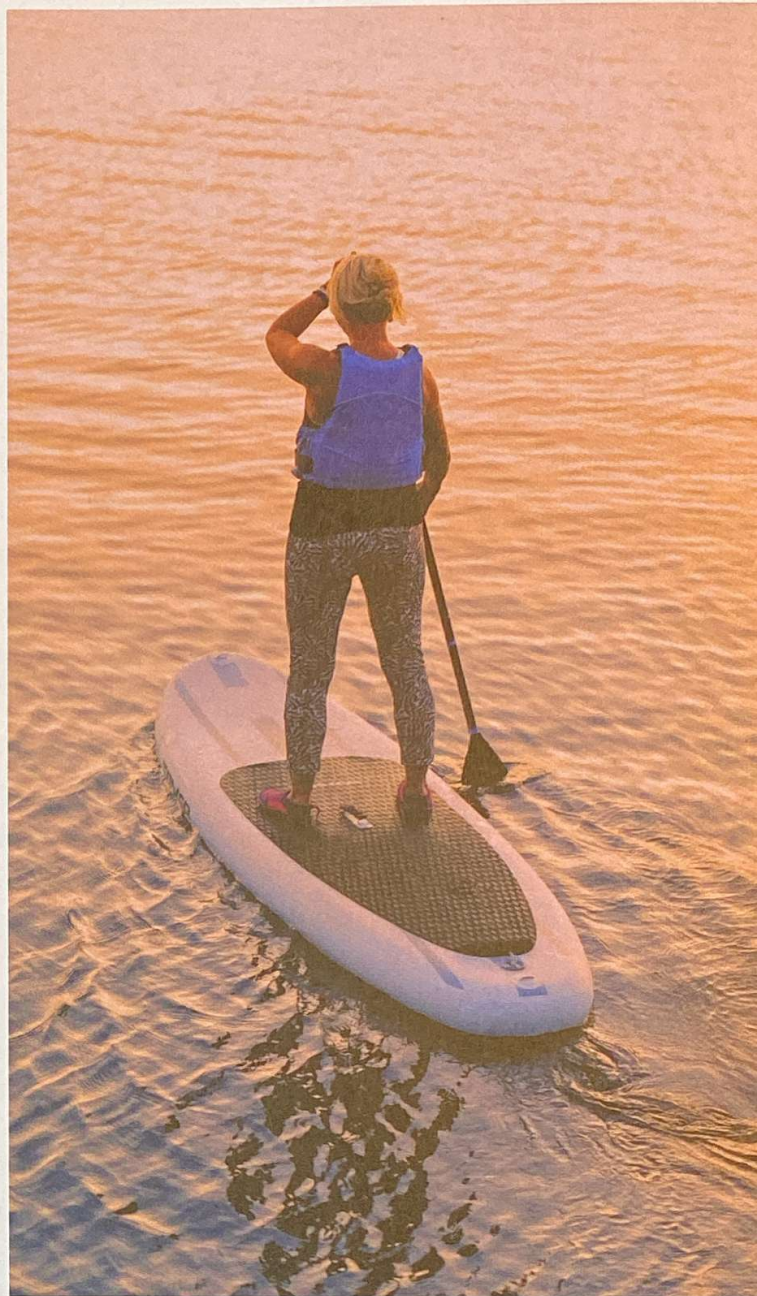
Paddling on a pond gives you a unique opportunity to view nature up close: painted turtles basking on sunny rocks, kingfishers darting from branch to branch, trout leaping from the water, bullfrogs hopping from shoreline to pond. You may even see otter, muskrat, nesting bald eagles, or osprey diving for fish. "It's a wonderful way to get out into nature, see what's in and around the pond, and experience a different ecosystem," says Burke.

Many of the region's ponds are kettle ponds that were carved by receding glaciers thousands of years ago. There are over one thousand across the Cape and islands, and many are a perfect place for younger kayakers.

"Ponds are especially nice for vacation paddlers, who are most often with kids or like a slower pace," says Chick Stapleton, owner of **Island Spirit Kayak** in Oak Bluffs, which provides kayak tours and rentals on Martha's Vineyard. Children can usually handle their own kayaks beginning at around age 10, and until then, younger children can ride in tandem kayaks with older paddlers.

Kayaking quickly takes you beyond busy beaches and crowded summer swimming areas. As you paddle away from shore, the water, trees, sky, and clouds take on a different perspective than what you see on land. Be sure to apply sunscreen, wear a hat, and bring along snacks and water, because you'll be tempted to stay on the pond all day.

If you like to fish, tuck some rods and reels into your kayak. "Most of the fish are out in deeper water, and being in a kayak makes a pond more accessible for fishing," says Ian McPartland, a fishing pro staffer at **Goose Hummock Shops**, an outdoor outfitter in Orleans that sells and rents kayaks. Some of the best ponds for fishing are stocked with fish or fed by herring runs, McPartland says. (For information on stocking programs and fishing regulations, check out mass.gov/trout.)



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Favorite Paddling Ponds

Every pond paddler has a list of preferred ponds. Both McPartland and Burke are big fans of **Sheep Pond** in Brewster. "It has good boat access on Fisherman's Landing Road, and it has lots of little bays along the shoreline," Burke says. Thanks to a 10 horsepower limit on outboard motors on Sheep Pond, kayakers don't have to worry about dodging speedboats or having birdsong drowned out by noisy motors. And its crystal clear waters beg you to jump in for a post-paddle swim.

On Martha's Vineyard, Stapleton loves that some of the island's 27 ponds are connected to each other through tiny canals. For example, kayakers can paddle from **Chilmark Great Pond to Oyster Pond**, or from **Menemsha Pond to Stonewall Pond, Nashaquitsa Pond, Quitsa Pond, and Squibnocket Pond**.

One of Morrison's favorites is **Shawme Pond**, which is located right in the center of Sandwich. "It's absolutely breathtaking to see Historic Sandwich and then this array of landscape and wildlife in every direction," says Morrison. "Also, it's a fantastic fishing spot." Another of his favorites is **Mashpee Wakeby Pond** in Mashpee, because it has a few little islands to explore. "It really makes it a fun adventure to do some island hopping on a kayak," he says.



Chris Nashville of the Goose Hummock Shop, fishing at Slough Pond in Brewster.

Where to Launch Your Canoe or Kayak

LOVELLS POND, Barnstable

MIDDLE POND and **MYSTIC LAKE**, Barnstable (the two are connected by a shallow channel)

UPPER MILL POND, Brewster

FLAX POND, Nickerson State Park, Brewster

HERRING POND, Eastham

ASHUMET POND, Falmouth/Mashpee

JOHN'S POND, Mashpee

MASHPEE WAKEBY POND, Mashpee

PILGRIM LAKE, Orleans

PETER'S POND, Sandwich

LAWRENCE POND, Sandwich

GULL POND, Wellfleet

If you'd like to try kayaking but don't feel comfortable doing it on your own, outfitters and tour companies can lend a hand. "We have a fully certified staff that loves teaching and giving tips," Morrison says. "Or just join one of our tours to feel comfortable with a trained instructor before going out on your own."

Whether you stick with pond kayaking or mix it up with sea kayaking, paddling is a wonderful way to enjoy the Cape and the islands. "It's one of the most relaxing experiences you'll ever have," Morrison says. 🌀



Shawme Pond in Sandwich.

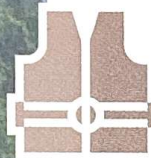
What to Know Before You Go



Access: Most kayaks weigh 50 pounds or more, so look for ponds with convenient boat launches where you can back your car up to the water. Make sure there is a public launch spot that you can get to without trespassing on someone's land.



Permits: Adhere to all parking regulations, and be aware that some boat launch areas require town parking permits or beach stickers.



Safety: Ponds may be safer than the open ocean, but you still have to take precautions. "Use the buddy system, have a phone with you, use a waterproof case for your phone and car keys, let people know where you'll be going, keep an eye on the weather, and wear a life jacket," McPartland says.



Rentals: You have several options for renting kayaks for pond paddling: Renting pondside (for example, at **Flax Pond in Nickerson State Park** in Brewster), transporting a rented kayak to a pond on your vehicle, or renting from an outfitter that delivers kayaks to the pond of your choice.

Brewster Ponds Coalition; 508-258-9801
brewsterponds.org

RideAway Adventures; 508-247 - 0827
rideawaykayak.com

Island Spirit Kayak; 508-693-9727
islandspiritkayak.com

Goose Hummock Shops; 508-255-0455
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