

of the archipelago. If you follow Leslie Street south, the street turns into a hiking and biking trail, providing another way to access the park. The park is home to a very dense and still growing population of cormorants, and several great blue heron were also spotted in the park last year. In the ponds to the east, you can get a glimpse into the land's history in the old buildings and railroads that line parts of the shore. If you enjoy watching birds, there are two rafts set up for nesting terns. You should watch them through binoculars, however. The terns at this location are less familiar with kayakers, and are very curious about the visitors to the area. The nesting platforms should not be disturbed or approached. If the terns feel threatened, they will fly directly at you and dive down. A respectful minimum observation distance of 25 feet (8 meters) will ensure the colony is not disturbed.

### The Islands

If the archipelago is your destination, Hanlan's Point, Wards Island and Center Island are the more active islands; however, some of the smaller islands, such



Landing at Snake Island.

as Snake Island, are much more interesting, and you'll find more intimate places such as the unofficially named "Doughnut Hole" and "Trout Pond" that are only accessible in a kayak. Dense and

colorful water lilies bloom from July to September in the Doughnut Hole, and although the Trout Pond is no longer home to trout, the area is very rich with green trees and offers a space away from motorized boats.

Wards Island is the easternmost island in the archipelago. With a departure from the nautical center, Wards is 1.5 nautical miles, and there are many opportunities for paddling depending on skill level and conditions.

Beginners may want to paddle down into the lagoon opening just west of Wards Island, which offers scenic, protected waters rich in greenery and wildlife. You can paddle for more than five nautical miles in and around most of the islands. You'll travel down to Long Pond lagoon and finish in Blockhouse Bay, the channel beside Mugg's Island. From here, you can reenter the inner harbor and return to the city.

Snake Island has two marked campsites. To camp there, you'll need a permit that you can obtain from the city. The city will deliver firewood, and you can also request a portable toilet if your group is large. There is a source of fresh water, and easy landing sites are available. The view from campsite one provides a new perspective on the city skyline, and campsite two on the south side is quiet and protected. Although you can still see the city, you'll have to protect your food and snacks just like any other camping trip, as this island has two resident beavers. Not all of the islands are isolated,



Great blue heron at the bird sanctuary.

so mainland-dwelling foxes and skunks cross over looking for an easy meal now and again.

Within the lagoons directly south of Mugg's Island is a bird sanctuary, which is a must for anyone wanting to observe some wildlife. Two bark-stripped trees mark the entrance to the peaceful group of islands where black cormorants have taken over the territory. The water is quite shallow and gives kayakers a close look at the resident school of large carp and the occasional large snapping turtle. Painted turtles bask in the sun along the fallen logs while night heron hide in the shade of the trees.

In 2004, we saw the return of great blue herons, birds that are learning to deal with the presence of the cormorants. In the bird sanctuary and throughout the lagoons, you may also encounter orange-beaked mute swans or black-beaked trumpeter swans. When paddling in the spring, it's imperative to keep your distance and not disturb any nesting birds. The swans can be quite aggressive and have been known to chase kayakers or canoes that get too close.

On a nice day when you might want to play on a sandy beach, you can paddle out the eastern gap to the back side of Wards Island where there is a quiet beach, equipped with an emergency solar phone and occasionally supervised by a lifeguard. In the trees on the west side of the beach is a wooden boardwalk, which can lead you to the Rectory Café for that caffeine fix or a Sunday brunch. If you're a more intermediate-level or distance-focused paddler, you can continue past the south side of Wards Island and travel into the outer harbor. You can paddle around the circumference of the islands and enter the inner harbor through the Western Gap. The route is safe with frequent beaches for rest stops or pullouts if required.

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