

The Outer Banks of Virginia

By Bruce Julian

Yes, the Outer Banks of Virginia, I thought I would title the story this way to get your attention. Virginia does have an Outer Banks and Sandbridge, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and False Cape State Parks makes it up. It runs a little over 14 miles between the Atlantic Ocean and the waters of what most people call Back Bay. This water is made up of 7 Bays with Back Bay being the largest along with North Bay, Shipps Bay, Buck Island Bay, Redhead Bay, Sand Bay and Half Moon Bay. In between the Bays there are many Islands with Long Island being the largest and with Big Island being the smallest, so much for a name right? In the waters off of False Cape State Park on the Bay side there are 7 Islands belonging to the Park. Horse Island and Big Ball Island being the 2 largest with Cedar Island coming in third in size but is losing land each year because of its location. This island is in the middle of Back Bay and it gets strong winds from all 3 sides which in the last 20 years has reduced the size about half. What we call Little Cedar Island today once was part of Cedar Island and now we have what I named Tinnée Cedar, which broke away from Little Cedar about 5 years ago. The other 3 island are small but are protected by landmass on two or three sides. Their names are Buckie Island, Little Ball Island and as I said earlier Big Island. The tides in this area are not Lunar Tides because it is so far from Oregon Inlet (about 70 miles) where the tides come in from the Atlantic Ocean that they do not affect these waters. The depths of the bays are between 2 and 6 feet with a few places being 7 feet deep. The winds do affect the rise and fall of the waters in a way that you can have as much as 2 foot of water on and around the roads on the bay side and again have dry land reaching out from the shore 50 to 200 feet, it all depends on how hard the wind is blowing and which direction.

On the lower end of the Outer Banks between Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and the Virginia and North Carolina Border is False Cape state Park. Here is where 9 of us volunteers spent the week there helping the park get ready to start a new Season for 2020. This is something I have been doing for over 16 years with as many as 17 volunteers on a single trip and with 2 trips each year. False Cape with 6 miles of beach on the Atlantic Ocean and about the same on the Bay side is one of the largest State Parks that Virginia has. This is only in land mass (3983 acres) and not in attendants of visitors that visit the parks each year. We try and help each year in the spring and fall of the year to fill in where the state doesn't provide enough employees for our beautiful park.

The week of March 8, 2020 we had one of these trips with 9 volunteers with some staying all week and others came in for 2 or 3 days. They were Frank & Christine Morgan, Gayle Owens, John Murray, Jennifer Cowham, Dave Plum Jody Cooper, Mike McCarthy and me, Bruce Julian. We came in on Sunday morning meeting at 10:00A.M., I drove the park's bus with 6 of the volunteers down to the Environmental Education Center which we call the EEC Building; this is about 6 miles off of the pave highway. This is one of the reason we love volunteering there in the park, no traffic. We all helped unload the bus and each person picked out their bunk and put away their gear and any food that needed refrigeration. We talked about the different jobs that were waiting for us to complete and some ate a sandwich before leaving the EEC building.

After a long winter some of the building needed to be pressure washed and the Visitor Center and the EEC building was 2 of them. I asked Frank and John if they would do the washing of the Visitor Center and I would start on the EEC building. Dave and Jennifer started raking the yard of Pine Nettles and Pine Combs with a few limbs that had fallen. Christine and Gayle said they would start cleaning the inside of the EEC building. We all worked till 5:00P.M., and then call it a day. We always divide up our evening meals with the ones that will stay over for that night. Dave was the lucky one for Sunday night and he had Chilly and White Rice, something new to me but was very good. After we clean-up the

dishes and the kitchen we went for a short hike of about 2 miles out to a platform our group built in 2004 there at Wash Woods area of the park.

We like to change our jobs each day so no one would have to stay inside the whole time. On Monday with the 7 of us that came in on Sunday we got 2 more volunteers to join us, Mike and Jody. Frank & John wanted to continue their job at the V. C. pressure washing and I drove the others to the camp ground where we were raking, cutting and picking up limbs in all 25 campsites. For our group we finished right at 12:30 and headed to the EEC for lunch where Frank & John were waiting for us. Some had leftover from the night before but most ate the Ham, Turkey and Cheese that I brought to make sandwiches. After lunch we loaded all of the Pine Nettles (7 loads) into the trailer and haul those to the burn pile. It was about 4:00 P.M. and John who works at the park had to leave and we had to say good bye to him and Dave, who had to go home after working with us for 2 days. Mike who had come in that morning had told us he had to go home also. After supper and cleaning up the EEC kitchen 6 of us went for a ride in the 4 wheeler down to the state line. Two in our group had never been there to see the monument that was placed there back in the 1800's after the Border was finely finished being surveyed. On the way back I drove to the beach and started north and we saw Whelk shells all over the beach and there were hundreds of them. In my 28 years there at the park I had never seen this before and maybe never will again. We said we would come back the next day and pick them up.

On Tuesday, Frank still had some more to finish at the V. C. so he, Christine and Gayle drove up and he began pressure washing and Christine worked on the picnic area out back of the Visitors Center, raking and cutting small limbs while Gayle cleaned inside the V.C. I took the other 3 to the boat house where we pressure washed the kayaks and put them back on the racks. After this we started cleaning the boat house and loaded a trailer full of junk and a few things we wanted to keep but to move to another location. We then headed back to Wash Woods to unload the trailer and then we drove out to the beach and Jody, Jennifer and John started picking up Whelk Shell and I drove the van and kept up with them so they would have a place to unload their buckets, it was a hard job for me but someone had to do it. They must have picked up almost 200 shells in about 40 minutes and it was almost 12:00 noon so we headed back to the EEC and met the others for lunch. All but 3 of the volunteers were going home that evening so Gayle instead of the evening meal cooked her food for lunch. While we were waiting for her to finish cooking Jennifer, John and I took the shells down to the cemetery where they would be placed over the graves as they had done back in the early 1900's. After a late lunch I drove to the shop and clean and put away some of the tools we had used that day while the others packed their gear and placed it in the bus and cleaned the kitchen. It was now time to head out with the 4 volunteers that were leaving to go home. I drove the bus and Gayle drove the 4 wheeler and Frank drove the van because we wouldn't need all three for the rest of the week. We were down to 3 volunteers for Wednesday but Mike was coming back that morning so we would still have 4 volunteers plus Jon Walton who was coming back to work that day to help.

On Wednesday I got up and cooked the same breakfast for the 3 of us that I had cooked on the 2 days before, scramble eggs, sausages and toast. After breakfast Jody and Jennifer walked to the cemetery and placed all the shells on the graves and I started pressure washing where I had left off two days earlier. It wasn't long before Jon and Mike arrived and I had to stop once again. That morning I was using the cook stove and one of the burners started smoking and would not heat up so I asked Mike to look at it and he found about 8 ants and 2 or 3 had been cooked when I had turn on the burner that morning, it worked find after that. Mike is a good Handyman so when he put the stove back together I asked him to replace 2 of the hinges on the door of one of the outside shower that had broken. We worked until lunch and took a break till 1:00 P.M. and then drove up to the boathouse and took the vacuum with us to clean the inside and to keep down the dust. We washed the life jackets and the paddles and clean the 2 bathrooms and picked up lumber and some old signs lying around the building, after everything was dry we placed it back into the boat house. Jon, Mike and Jody headed out of the park for the day and Jennifer and I drove back to the EEC and I packed all my gear and she got all of hers out, I took my gear to the trailer to stay the next 2 nights and Jennifer wanted to camp at Barbour Hill till Sunday. I once again started pressure washing the building and Jennifer began the last of the cleaning inside so the EEC would be ready for a group on Saturday morning. We worked till 6:00 P.M. and I drove her to the campsite and then headed back to Wash Woods.

On Thursday Cameron, the acting Park Manager (until we get a Manager) asked Jennifer and me to bring some rakes with us to the camp ground at Barbour hill on the bay side to rake the pine nettles off of the pad to keep down the tick population for the campers in that area. We were going to put gravel on the roads but Cameron change her mine and said to forget that at this time, which didn't break our hearts at all. I drop Jennifer off at her campsite so she could relax after a long and hard week and I drove to the EEC Building to finish the last of the pressure washing and put away all the gear we had used that week. The Building inside and out looked very good after all the hard work the volunteers did that week.

On Friday we didn't do any gravel either, Cameron asked me to bring 4 picnic tables, 4 lanterns poles and one posthole digger up to Barbour Hill so we could set up 4 more campsites. I could only get 2 tables on the trailer at one time so I had to make 2 trips for this. We worked on this and finish at noon and call it a short day. Took Jennifer back to her campsite and I drove to wash Woods and packed up my gear and headed home after a great week with a great group of volunteers. Jennifer stayed till Saturday and Cameron helped her get out of the park so to head home back to Washington D. C. I would like to thank all the volunteers that help Spruce up False Cape State park for another season of camping and FUN!

By the way, we are always looking for new volunteers. Sign up it's a lot of fun.