

Merchants Millpond Paddle and Camping

Friday, Saturday and Sunday, April 7 - April 9, 2017

WHEN: Friday, April 7, 2017 at 11:00am **or** Saturday, April 8, 2017 at 10:00am.

WHERE: The canoe and kayak launch ramp in Merchants Millpond State Park in Gates County near Gatesville. (See Driving Direction Below) This **trip is flexible** do it as a **1** or **2** overnighter or a Saturday Daytrip.

PADDLE DISTANCE: Less than 2 miles to group campsite. (Depends on how much you want to paddle once camp is setup).

FEES: There will be a small fee for this trip to cover the cost of the campsite and firewood. It usually runs around **5 to 10 dollars** for each person depending on how many people show up.

SKILL REQUIREMENTS: This trip is appropriate for beginners and up.

TRIP DETAILS: We will meet at the canoe and kayak launch ramp in Merchants Millpond State Park (See Driving Directions below). Paddling and camping on this pond takes you back in time to when it provided the power for a gristmill and sawmill. Along with the mills, a farm supply store and other enterprises made the area the center of trade in Gates County at the turn of the 19th century and later. Thus, the pond became known as Merchants Millpond.

At the pond you get the eerie feel of a true swamp. Don't go there alone at night. The millpond is a complex and mature ecosystem with towering bald cypress and tupelo gum trees, displaying growths of Spanish moss and resurrection ferns that shade the pond's dark acidic waters, a beautiful site to see.

PROVISIONS NEEDED: ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST WEAR THEIR PFD AT ALL TIMES WHILE IN THEIR VESSEL AND AFLOAT. Each person will be responsible for their own food, water and camping gear.

LAUNCH: by 11:00 a.m. on Friday and 10:00 a.m. on Saturday

DRIVING DIRECTIONS: (1) From New Bern go north on **Hwy 17** to Williamston. (2) From Williamston take **Hwy 13** north through Ahoskie to Winton where **Hwy 158** runs into Hwy 13. (3) From Winton stay on Hwys 158 east and 13 north for Approx. 6 miles. (4) HWY158 turns slightly to the right, stay on it for approx. 5.9 Miles until you go past Gatesville (Hwy **158 & 37** junctions) (5) Proceed from there east on Hwy 158 to **Easons Crossroads** Approx. 3.6 miles. (6). At the crossroads turn right on to **Millpond Road SR 1403** (there will be a small sign with arrow indicating the direction of the park). (7) At approx. 1.4 miles the kayak and canoe launch parking lot will be on the left. (8) From the parking lot we will paddle in to the group campsite where we will be camping. Allow 2.5 hours driving time.

Note: The main entrance to the park where the drive-in campground and the main office are .3 miles past Eason Crossroad. There is no need for you to go there unless you want to check it out or unless you want to car camp there.

TRIP COORDINATOR: Bill Sadler at 2billsadler@gmail.com

RSVP, Bill not later than April 5th. if you are camping, so he will can have a total number of campers per night so he can pay the camping fees at check-in.

Additional Information on Merchant's Millpond

The settlers who dammed Merchants Millpond before the Civil War could not have predicted that one day their efforts would result in a significant natural area. Since beavers were extirpated in North Carolina by 1900 and have only recently made a comeback, there are few old beaver ponds in the state. Merchants Millpond fills this niche, as over time it has developed into a mature wetland habitat supporting abundant wildlife and an old-growth forest.

The park is home to owls, woodpeckers, and waterfowl, and breeding neotropical migrants such as northern parula, prothonotary, and yellow-throated warblers. Turtles, frogs, alligators and snakes can be seen basking on logs and stumps. In all, over 160 species of birds have been observed at the park. Some of the park's more elusive inhabitants include river otter, gray fox, black bear, and bobcat.

Lassiter Swamp, located in the upper end of the millpond, contains a large grove of 800-year-old cypress and the state's **largest tupelo tree**. The pond is bordered by a swamp forest, an old-growth beech slope, and mature mixed oak and pine stands on the uplands. Over 165 plant species have been recorded at the pond and surrounding swamp, including the rare featherfoil or water violet (one of the odder-looking plants in the world), yellow water crowfoot, pale mannagrass, conferva pondweed, and least trillium. Green mats of waterlilies and collections of knobby cypress kness break the smooth surface of black water.

This watery wilderness is best explored by canoe or kayak. You can either **rent a canoe at the park** or bring your own. A primitive campsite on an island in the pond offers spaces for canoe-camping and there is also a campground on the uplands around the pond. Hiking trails are located near the entrance to the park.

CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS:

In 1973 A. B. Coleman of Moyock donated 919 acres, including the historic millpond, to the state. The Nature Conservancy then helped protect an additional 1,131 acres.