

VENTURING MAGAZINE

High Adventure Kayaking on Catalina Island by Carol Murray September 2013



BSA has wonderful summer camps for Boy Scouts at Catalina - Emerald Bay and Cherry Cove, but for a Venturing Crew, nothing beats taking a high adventure trek kayaking with full gear along the coast.

Last year Crew 131 from Long Beach Area Council had the idea to spend a week snorkeling and fishing in Catalina. Catalina has some of the most beautiful dive spots in the US with the giant kelp home to many species of fish such as brightly colored Garibaldi, kelp bass, kelpfish, rays, and even lobster. The challenge: how do we get to the best dive spots?

We had hiked Catalina in the past, but we knew we would be limited by the distances we could travel. We also considered taking our bikes so that we could cover more distance, but most of the dive spots are inaccessible from the roads. That's when we decided to rent kayaks and travel from Two Harbors down to Avalon, camping along the way at the boat-in beach campsites.

The boat-in beaches along the coast are very primitive - no water, no toilets and little to no shade. The Crew had to be really prepared to make this trek a success. All our gear, including the water and "WAG" bags (waste disposal) had to be stowed below deck in dry bags, and we decided it was best to pack like we were backpacking, since space and weight was a factor.



We worked with [Descanso Beach Ocean Sports](#) to have the rented kayaks dropped off in Two Harbors so that we could return them at the end of our trek in Avalon. These folks were fantastic. Their web site makes some great recommendations for groups like us who wanted to take a several-day trek.



And, any time we had questions, they were available via phone and e-mail.

Our trip started with the Catalina Express boat ride from San Pedro to Two Harbors. We spent our first night camping at Two Harbors. This is where we received our kayaks and picked up water, cooking fuel and some last chance ice cream cones. The next morning, we packed up our kayaks and started our adventure.



Every day was different. Some days we kayaked quite a bit. Other days our kayak trips were very short and we spent the time diving, swimming, hiking and fishing. While we saw

people passing by on their sail boats, yachts and paddle boards, we had the rocky beaches all to ourselves, sometimes waking up to small surf 10 feet from our sleep spots. The trick was to make sure we had pulled the kayaks far enough up on the shore so we didn't wake up to high surf sweeping everything away.



A dead seal smelling up the beach and the fox on Catalina were our only unexpected guests. One clever fox unzipped one of the Crew member's duffle to take out some treats. Lucky for us, the fox didn't have any interest in his wallet, leaving the driver's license, money and cards spread out but easy to pick up on the beach the next morning. The best part - a souvenir, a tooth-marked wallet. After that incident, all was locked down in the kayaks each night.

Some parts of Catalina are open to fishing, and some are designated conservation zones. In a fishing zone, one of the crew members speared a Sheepshead and shared the delicious catch with us that night.



The culmination of our Catalina adventure was a visit to one of the most popular conservation zones, Lovers Cove. The size and abundance of the fish surprised everyone. Some of the kelp bass were over 2 feet - something you'd rarely see, if ever, outside these zones.

After 6 nights of camping, 4 in very private, primitive, remote beaches, everyone was happy to return to fresh-water showers, but nothing will take away the memories of this great adventure.



For crews wanting to experience Catalina, you will need to coordinate the [Catalina Express](#) (very easy to do online or on the phone - AAA discounts available), the kayaking (also very easy to do through [Descanso Beach Ocean Sports](#)), and camping. Reserving [Catalina Camping](#) was the biggest challenge; the on-line system is cumbersome to use and it's nearly impossible to speak with anyone to ask questions. There is a number you can call, but you must pay \$10 to use this service. I highly recommend using the service, but be prepared ahead of time with every single question you can think of because calling back is another \$10. And, over

book by one or two people, as you can get a refund when you check in; adding people later is more difficult. Feel free to contact [Crew 131](#) with questions. It's a great experience, for sure.