

North Point State Park – The Best-Kept Secret in Baltimore County

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Chesapeake Conservancy/National Park Service (NPS)

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Figure 1: Paddleboarding near the concrete barges

The first time I kayaked out to [North Point State Park](#), I launched from [Rocky Point Park](#) and paddled 3.2 miles to the end of the collapsed [Ferry Point Pier](#) in the Chesapeake Bay. Since I had been paddling in fairly deep water, I was surprised when my paddle hit something hard just a foot below the surface. After I got home, I read about the area and discovered that I had had a close encounter with three concrete barges!



Figure 2: Concrete barge U.S. 108

You'll probably never see a concrete boat in use today, but back in World Wars I and II, they were built to haul goods when steel was in shortage. After they became obsolete, many were intentionally sunk to serve as breakwaters, such as the ones at [Kiptopeke State Park](#) and North Point State Park. There is also an approximately 145-foot-long concrete boat in the [Curtis Creek Ship Graveyard](#).

The concrete barges at North Point State Park were used to transport munitions in World War I. Previously residing on Bear Creek in Baltimore, they were deemed an eyesore by folks at the Sparrows Point Country Club which overlooks Bear Creek, and were relocated in the early 1950s to their present location. At that time, the land which later became the park was owned by Bethlehem Steel, whose executives were also members of the country club.



*Figure 3: Concrete barges with the Craighill Channel Lower Rear Lighthouse in the background*

A few years after my initial encounter, I returned to the concrete barges via stand up paddleboard (SUP) at low tide with my drone (and remote pilot certification) so I could get an overhead view and clearly see the shape of the 149-foot-long boats.



*Figure 4: Drone view of the concrete barges with me on my SUP*

The starboard side of the barges are stamped with their names. I paddled up to the northernmost one and saw that it was “U.S. 115” while the southernmost was “U.S. 108.” The one in the middle was too low in the water for me to see its name, but after reading a historical document, I am quite certain it is either “U.S. 101” or “U.S. 118.”



Figure 5: Concrete barge, U.S. 115

Other paddling opportunities at North Point State Park include launching onto the Chesapeake Bay from the park beach and exploring [Black Marsh Natural Area](#), which I describe in [Paddleboarding Through Nature in the Baltimore Area](#). More advanced paddlers can test their skills and endurance by seeing if they can get to all the Craighill Channel lighthouses, something I call the “Craighill Challenge.” Distances shown below are from the beach near the Takos Visitor Center at the park.

- [Craighill Channel Lower Rear Lighthouse](#): To the northeast, 2.3 miles away, on the southwest side of [Pleasure Island](#).
- [Craighill Channel Lower Front Lighthouse](#): To the southeast, in the Chesapeake Bay, 2.1 miles away.
- [Craighill Channel Upper Front Lighthouse](#): To the southwest, 1.9 miles away.
- [Craighill Channel Upper Rear Lighthouse](#): Northwest of Craighill Channel Upper Front Lighthouse, about 3.5 miles away, in Old Road Bay.



*Figure 6: Craighill Channel Lower Rear Lighthouse*

Paddling out on the bay, I saw numerous people enjoying North Point State Park's beach and fishing piers. They are indeed quite nice, but I much prefer to explore the 2.4 miles of hiking trails which are rich in history and full of wildlife.

Over the years, I've gotten to know these trails well, but on June 14, 2022, I got to see things from a different vantage point during a park naturalist-led Strawberry Full Moon Hike.

The June full moon is commonly known as the strawberry moon, a name that comes from the Algonquin Native American tribe and refers to the region's strawberry harvesting season. That day, it was also a supermoon, meaning it was at a distance of at least 90% of perigee (which is the point at which the Moon is closest to the Earth). This made for a spectacular hike because our moon was 17% bigger and 30% brighter than the faintest moon of the year.



*Figure 7: 2022 Strawberry supermoon at North Point State Park*

Naturalists Emily Lillie and Alyssa Hottle led about 30 people on this two-hour circuit hike which commenced at the Takos Visitor Center, named after Steve Takos, a volunteer who spearheaded renovation efforts in the park and was named an Honorary Ranger.

Emily spoke about the park's history as the Bay Shore Amusement Park from 1906 to 1947, prior to its purchase by Bethlehem Steel. She also showed us the former trolley station, now serving as a pavilion, that once brought guests from Baltimore to enjoy a day at the park, beach, hotel, and restaurant that once stood on the property.

Walking along paths shown on the [trail map](#), Emily identified various plants such as sassafras, sweet gum, mockberry, and spicebush. We passed by the park's Re-grow project where dozens of native trees have been planted.



*Figure 8: Park naturalist Emily Lillie leads hikers on a Strawberry Moon hike*

Bats flew overhead at twilight as we walked on Old Bay Shore Road, and various frogs/toads croaked loudly on the Black Marsh Trail. The latter is one of my favorite places to go when I want to see wildlife.





*Figure 9: Bullfrog just off the Black Marsh Trail*

Emily led us into the [old power house](#) that used to provide electricity to the amusement park. It now stands abandoned and empty with walls covered in colorful graffiti.



*Figure 10: Daphne in the abandoned power house*

Near the end of our hike, we walked to the southeast end of the Ferry Grove Trail where we had a beautiful view of the strawberry supermoon over the concrete barges.



*Figure 11: Strawberry supermoon over U.S. 108, photo courtesy of Scott Marder*

During an interview with Steve Takos around 1999, it was mentioned that North Point State Park has been called “the best-kept secret in Baltimore County.” I don’t know if that still holds true today, but there are indeed certain aspects of the park that relatively few people know about which I find fascinating: the concrete barges, its close proximity to the Craighill Lighthouses, its rich history, the old power house, and the organized night hikes. Regarding the latter, I think it is great that naturalists are educating the public about what the park has to offer. It is much too great a place to be kept secret.

For more information see

[Shipwreck Map No. 6 – Concrete Ships & Barges](#)

[Historical Collections of the Great Lakes – U.S. 108](#)

[Development of Transportation Facilities on Inland Waterways](#)

[Lighthouse Friends](#)

[Maryland Department of Natural Resources – North Point State Park](#)

[Maryland Hikes – North Point State Park](#)

[Alaska Public Media – A Strawberry Supermoon will Rise on Tuesday](#)

[Concrete Barge UK](#)