

# Celebrating on sandbar as moon rises

By Scott Turner

Some outdoor moments leave you breathless.

Such was the case on July 31, as Karen and I, plus 70 other paddlers, kayaked at dusk into the mouth of the Narrow River in Narragansett.

Just about all of the other folks had reached the trip's midpoint, which was a sandbar, where they stood watching the moon emerge over the eastern horizon and the sun drop in the west.

I was still huffing and puffing my way along. A slow kayaker by nature, I'd paused to take notes, or just observe the surroundings. Plus, I was paddling into an incoming tide.

About 100 yards from the sand, I received an escort in the form of four common terns. The vocal birds flapped powerfully before tucking in wings and taking turns plunging into the water to catch fish.

Each bird-water impact produced a loud and lovely sounding splash, dispersing salt water in all directions. I felt a thrill, and a sense of intimacy in sharing space with these elegant creatures.

It wasn't hard to tell why the terns were there. Small silver fish were jumping out of and back into the water. In the dying light, they looked like shiny dimes, their plops like little drops of rain.

Also, shad were in the river, and I saw two fishermen reel in large and silvery shad, in the one- to two-pound range.

That river mouth was wacky with wildlife. An osprey cried



In this 2012 photo, Ron Wofford of Narrow River Kayaks launches Michael Napolitano of Lincoln, exploring the river with his wife Leanne and son Michael in the rear.

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incessantly from a dead limb, as a series of great blue herons, making croaking calls, crossed in front of my path.

Multiple "chur-ee" calls overhead told me that we'd disrupted foraging semipalmated plovers. That was probably the case for three whimbrels, which produced twitter calls, as the big shorebirds, with their long, down-curved bills rose overhead and away.

In addition, I heard the "tew, tew, tew," of a yellowlegs, a mid-sized shorebird, and counted three great egrets, silent, but huge, flying across the river to the south shore, where several folks sat silently, crabbing.

Just ahead, and beyond the spit, an immense orange orb rose from the sea, as if the Atlantic had just given birth. This was a blue moon,

being the second full moon in one month.

Meanwhile, behind me, the sun was settling into a western sky cloaked in gold, purple and green.

We'd departed 90 minutes earlier, a mile and a half back, from Narrow River Kayaks (NRK), outfitters on Middlebridge Road in Narragansett. This adventure was called the Pettaquamscutt Paddle. It was an annual fundraiser for the Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA), a 45-year-old advocacy, awareness, and education group for the 14-acre watershed. NRK helped host and staff the adventure.

In fact, as a slowpoke, I was thrilled that one of the NRK staffers, a friendly 19-year-old named Tyler, shadowed me like a guardian angel.

The route was classic Rhode Island — forests, coves, sandbars, islands, osprey nests, rock outcrops and more.

At one point after our departure, we stopped in the river, and positioned ourselves around NRK owner Jason Considine, who shared ecological, geological, historical and stewardship information.

I floated beside my wife, Karen, and two friendly and gracious NRPA hosts, David and Rosemary Smith. We looked at the wooded granite of Gooseberry Island, the waters and marshes of Pettaquamscutt Cove and the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge, and the forests of Canonchet Farm, and summed up the spot in one word: "sacred."

The river has grown cleaner because of the NRPA's pollution monitoring, watershed protection and other work, in concert with local agencies, municipalities, residents and businesses such as NRK.

When I finally reached the sandbar, folks were leaving for the return paddle. I rested in the kayak for a minute, and then joined Karen and the other returnees. Oh, the joy of riding a rising tide! Going back was silky smooth. Plus, NRPA and NRK had food and drinks waiting for everyone.

On land, I caught my breath, toasting both the phrase that good things come to those who wait and the belief that the best way to celebrate a cleaner river is to paddle it.

— Scott Turner's ([scottturnerster@gmail.com](mailto:scottturnerster@gmail.com)) nature column appears here most Saturdays.