

CaROLiNA ON MY BOW

A NEW WAY TO NAVIGATE THE TARHEEL STATE

THE NORTH CAROLINA SHORE peters out into the Atlantic in a lacework of inlets, estuaries, sounds, and tannic rivers. It's a playground for paddlers, with everything from spooky cypress-and-moss tunnels to open water with roiling surf and dive-bombing seabirds. Now a snarl of coastal trails has been linked to form a 1,200-mile network extending the length of the coast. The North Carolina Coastal Plain Paddle Trails, assembled by conservation and paddling organizations with the state's Parks and Recreation Department, have put-in ramps and are mapped, with difficulty ratings. To sample the best of the trails, head to a spur just south of Wilmington for a two-day, 12-mile trip for intermediate paddlers.

On day one, put in at the North Carolina Wildlife Ramp, where orchids and Venus flytraps spring from the marshy forest. Check the tides and launch from Snows Cut, where the Cape Fear River meets the Intracoastal Waterway. It's a one-hour straight shot to Masonboro Island, one of the last pristine barrier islands in the Carolinas (preserved by the National Es-

tuarine Research Reserve). Paddle 30 minutes to a buoy marking the broad beach of Dick Bay. This stretch of Masonboro Island's uninhabited beach is your free campsite. Set up behind the dunes, wait for the sun to set, and watch loggerhead turtles flop to their nests.

On day two, explore the 5,046-acre island. Point the kids to the tidal pools, ringside seats for fiddler crab fights. Hike or paddle to the island's eastern side for body surfing, then set off north into the Intracoastal Waterway—hug the shore to avoid boat traffic—as you near Wrightsville Beach. After a couple hours of paddling alongside yachts and wooden johnboats, a drawbridge marks your takeout: a ramp tucked under

the bridge amid snoozing brown pelicans.

RESOURCES: North Carolina Coastal Plain Paddle Trails, www.ncsu.edu/paddletrails; Masonboro Island, 910-256-5777, www.masonboroisland.com. Kayak Carolina, 910-458-9111, www.kayakcarolina.com, has rentals and offers a two-hour guided paddle of Masonboro Sound

—LOLLY MERRELL



Get in touch with your outer sole.



shown: (left) Men's Sport Clog, Oslo, in black leather; (right) Professional in antique brown.



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