

The Route

Where to point the boat, and when

The plan in one line. Go to the far cove first while everyone is fresh, then work steadily back toward the dock. Every leg after the first brings you closer to home, so if the day runs long you are already most of the way back.

Distances below are measured along the water, not straight lines — traced through the actual channel, because the lake is a drowned canyon and nothing here is a straight shot. A loaded rental pontoon cruises around **9 mph**.

The day

Time	Where	What
11:00	Cast off	Idle out through the no-wake zone by the ramp. Kids in jackets before the engine goes on.
11:00– 11:25	<i>Under way</i> — 3.5 mi	South out of the marina, then west into the Warm Springs arm. Twenty-four minutes.
11:25	Buck Pasture	Anchor 1 — lunch and the first swim. No-wake, thirteen sites at the water plus grass behind. The quiet end of the lake.
1:00	Pull anchor	Ninety-five minutes there. If Buck Pasture is taken, Black Mountain is a two-minute hop further in.
1:00– 1:15	<i>Under way</i> — 2.1 mi	Back east down the arm. Fourteen minutes.
1:15	Island View	Anchor 2 — the big swim. The largest shoreline landing on the lake; it holds 32. Room for ten people and three dogs without anyone treading water to make space.
2:30	Pull anchor	Seventy-five minutes there. Start <i>Going Back to Land</i> now, not at 2:55.
2:30– 2:45	<i>Under way</i> — 2.2 mi	North to the dam and the marina. Fourteen minutes.
2:45– 2:55	Dock	Approach, tie off, fuel settle-up. Boat is due at 3:00.

The time budget

Leg	On water	At 9 mph
Marina → Buck Pasture	3.54 mi	24 min
Buck Pasture → Black Mountain (optional)	0.23 mi	2 min
Black Mountain → Island View	2.10 mi	14 min
Island View → Marina	2.17 mi	14 min
Total	8.05 mi	54 min

Fifty-four minutes under way out of two hundred and forty. **That leaves 186 minutes at anchor** — a bit over three hours in the water. That ratio is the whole argument for this route: two long stops rather than four short ones, and no cove further out than you can comfortably get back from.

Why not the good coves up north

Thumb and **Skunk Creek** are the best water on the lake — full shade, gentle slopes, genuinely secluded. They are also 5.9 and 6.1 miles out. At pontoon speed that is roughly forty minutes each way, so eighty minutes of your four hours spent looking at the shoreline go past. On a full day, go. On a four-hour rental, do not.

If something changes

- **Buck Pasture is occupied** — Black Mountain, two minutes further west, no-wake, and the Corps describes it as the spot where boat noise is kept to a minimum.
- **The wind gets up** — the Warm Springs arm is narrow and sheltered. Stay west rather than heading for open water near the dam.
- **You are running late** — cut Island View and go straight back from Buck Pasture. That is 3.5 miles, twenty-four minutes, and you can leave as late as 2:30 and still make it.
- **Somebody has had enough** — Quicksilver and Island View are both under fifteen minutes from the dock. From Buck Pasture you are twenty-four minutes out. Factor that with two kids aboard.

Two rules that shape the route. Nothing may be towed behind a rental pontoon — no tubes, no wakeboards, no skis. And every child under 13 must be wearing a life jacket any time the boat is moving, which covers Beck and Casper on every leg above. The requirement lifts once you are anchored.

Get the current no-wake boundaries at check-in. The Corps does not publish them online. They determine where you can anchor without ski boats going past, and they are worth thirty seconds at the counter. Ask about visible algae in the same conversation.

Sources

- [USACE — Lake Sonoma boating](#)
- [USACE — primitive boat-in camps](#)
- [Lake Sonoma Marina — policies & rules](#)
- [Shoreline geometry — OpenStreetMap \(ODbL\)](#)