



Central Iowa Paddlers

Volume 10 Issue 3

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This newsletter is a publication of the Central Iowa Paddlers, an informal group of paddlesport enthusiasts. The mission of the club is to share information, promote recreation opportunities and paddlesport safety, and encourage care of our aquatic resources. The group includes new and experienced paddlers with canoes and kayaks of all kinds. Visit us on www.paddleiowa.org and pass the word!

MEANDERINGS

Unfortunately the topic for this issue's "MEANDERINGS" is deadly serious. This summer I've been around more recreational safety issues than I can ever recall. I thought having two friends seriously injured in bicycle accidents was enough. But then to learn that a young ISU grad was drowned tubing on the Des Moines River, and all because of a low head dam ... well, that's a lot to absorb. I've spent my fair share of time in Emergency Rooms from injuries I've incurred while having fun, and that's the risk I accept. I don't advocate the *elimination* of risk, but I do think the *awareness* of risk is something we all deserve. This issue has two articles, authored by experienced Des Moines based paddlers and advocates. Both articles deal with the dam near Boone, the sight of the fatal accident [**note: because of size, John Wenck's article is separately printed and included at the end**]. Please reflect on these articles and consider how you can both be personally alert and help the community to make sure others are aware of the risks of recreation.

Let us hear from you: [Paper](#) or [Electric](#)?

One of the services you receive as a Central Iowa Paddler subscriber is this Newsletter. Do you want to receive it electronically or in the mail? If you wish to receive the Newsletter by mail, please let Lynn Aldridge know. She can be reached electronically via laldridg@uhl.uiowa.edu or by paper via

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If we don't hear from you, we'll continue to send the first Newsletter of the year by mail and the remaining issues electronically

"Never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn." -- Harriet Beecher Stow

REPORTS

Reflections on a Trip Down the Des Moines River by Robin Fortney

[editor's note: because of the recent drowning of Megan Pavelick at a dam near Boone, we have included this article about an encounter Robin had with this dam on a previous trip. Our hope is that this article is a practical look at how safety can be exercised when planning a paddling trip]

When I last planned to paddle the Des Moines River from the Highway 30 boat ramp west of Boone to the County Road E57 boat ramp west of Luther, I checked my paddling books and maps to determine the mileage and check for dams and bridges. I would have to deal with a dam

near Boone. Prior to the paddling trip, I scouted the area and found a low head dam at the Boone Water Works (this dam provides sufficient head for the city's water supply pumps). This is a popular fishing spot, and the shoreline above the dam was accessible. I could get out on river left, portage my boat and equipment around the dam, and then put in at a boat ramp below the dam.

On the day we paddled the river, my partner and I approached the dam. I was a bit nervous. I have great respect for dams, and have felt the power of even low rock ledges to pull me in and hold me. There were no warning signs posted above the Water Works dam, but we could see the edge of the drop and hear the roaring water. We paddled to the shoreline on river left and took out about 25 yards upstream from the dam. Then we hauled our boats and gear around the dam to the boat ramp below.

The portage was easy and safely done because I had visited the area beforehand and knew what to look for, I paid attention to my surroundings, and I had a paddling partner for assistance. My favorite memory from that November day is standing at the Water Works boat ramp with my paddling partner, eating a sandwich before we continue on our way, a cold rain is falling on us, but smiling a big smile and saying, "I'm so glad to have paddling friends willing to have adventures with me."

Project Aware Update by Rick Dietz

On Day 1 of the 4th annual Project AWARE volunteers removed over 3 ½ tons of metal from a 17 mile stretch of the Iowa River below Iowa City. That's more metal, and more trash, than was collected during the entire week last year on the Little Sioux. Even as the last canoes were being launched from the Sturgis Ferry boat ramp, others were returning with loads too large or heavy to safely paddle to the half-way point near Hills (a scene repeated several times over the next few days). Later in the day a handful of local fishermen joined the effort, digging out tires and appliances or offering to transport loads for canoeists. Jim and I stopped to help load a water heater and other junk onto the bow deck of an airboat. An hour or so later word came down the river that the boat had sunk! I admit to having mixed feelings about that at first - we had all seen (mostly HEARD) this boat running up and down the river at camp Saturday night. But we were pleased to see these guys helping and we couldn't have removed nearly the amount of junk we did without their help. But we didn't get it all; at the end of the day most had commented that we could spend another day there, maybe two, and collect the same amount of trash.

On Monday and Tuesday AWARE took to the English River, a small tributary stream comparable in size to Squaw Creek. Volunteers worked together to remove junk from the banks and streambed, and push-pulled-and paddled strings of canoes across shallows and through a series of downed trees known locally as "the lumberyard." If you weren't careful where you left your canoe you might return to find it loaded with a dishwasher, tires, or an assortment of car parts and unidentifiable scrap!

Along a stretch of eroding riverbank near Kalona we removed a 12 foot by 18 inch steel pipe from the river bottom. Two catfish were evicted from a smaller pipe as it was picked up. This was possibly the longest stretch of junk-stabilized river bank I have ever seen. Most of it had been placed there decades ago, but it is now being slowly eroded away as new material appears to be piled and pushed to the edge at the top of the bank. In several places on the English we waded over and around junk cars, appliances, implements and other scrap, removing whatever we could pull out or break loose.

Over 24 tons of tires, appliances, cans, bottles, automotive and implement parts, bicycles, discarded clothing, a moped, bowling ball and other items were collected during the week, and over 85% of the total is being recycled. The Johnson County Recycling Center and the Louisa County Transfer Station must be commended for their cooperation and assistance. As with the past two Projects, artist David Williamson of Ogden, with the help of State Fair-going AWARE

participants, will be creating a sculpture with materials we removed from the river. And Paul Berge from the IPTV program Living in Iowa joined us one morning to film a segment to be aired during the Fair.

While the effort produced a great sense of accomplishment among participants, a feeling that we've done something to help this river, the result is mostly cosmetic. Both the English and Iowa suffer the same ailments common to most Iowa streams, and trash is merely one of the obvious. Both rivers ran brown with silt even though there had been little precipitation in weeks. The Iowa River below Iowa City is on the 2004 list of Impaired Waters, failing to meet bacteria standards for primary contact recreation and biological standards for aquatic life. Bacteria levels measured below Iowa City on the first day of AWARE were near 5000 colony forming units/100ml (the standard is 235), and studies dating to 1984 indicate up to a 50 percent decline in the river's freshwater mussel population. The highest levels of bacteria measured anywhere in the state are found on the English River (which has no standard for bacteria) during periods of high flows.

The trash gets the headlines, but the real value of Project AWARE lies in education. Our streams are indicators of the health of our land, and the fact that we use them as dumping grounds and storm sewers says a lot about how we value them. Participants benefit from a variety of informational evening programs, but the attention that AWARE gets locally and around the state will hopefully serve to increase awareness about water quality issues and to promote advocacy toward protecting Iowa's water resources.

Paddling Library continues as a valuable resource

The Paddling Library is a great success. We all appreciate what John Wenck has done to give us instant access to resources that are sometimes hard to find or downright unavailable. Here's how to access the library:

Go to www.paddlelibrary.org and click "enter library," read the rules and click "go to library". Once you find a resource you want to borrow, click on "borrow from library" and it will bring up an email format to John's email address. The subject reads "I want to borrow an item from the library". Type in what you want to borrow and then John will get back to you with the cost for shipping, usually around \$1.50 media rate.

Jill Watrous and Greg Beisker are Wed

On July 15 many Central Iowa Paddlers experienced a special wedding ceremony. Jill and Greg asked any and all nature lovers to join them for their wedding at the Garst Farm Resort "River House" near Coon Rapids. Following a brief wedding ceremony, the guests were asked to participate in a Middle Raccoon River cleanup. Reports Rick Dietz:



"There was a large turnout of family and friends at Greg and Jill's wedding, river clean-up, and celebration. It was HOT though, and with the low water, the "2.5" miles (I measured 3.25) seemed like much more. We hauled out several very large tires; I even caught a catfish in one of them!"
[Greg and Jill and flower girl Sarah arrive at the wedding via canoe. Picture by Robin Fortney]

The Iowa Games by Steve Parrish

On the same day as Jill and Gregg's wedding, the paddling events of the Iowa Games were held at Grays Lake. Every kind of canoe and kayak was represented and the event was a great mixture of competition and fun. From marathons to sprints; rolling competition to relays, a variety of skills and talent were displayed.



1. Canoe vs Kayak at Gray's Lake; 2. John Craun demonstrates his latest handbuilt kayak after completing the Marathon. Pictures by Steve Parrish

Paddle the Wapsi

The registration forms for the Grove to Grove Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup Project, August 25-27, are now available to download and print from the website, along with maps, an event schedule, a list of items to bring, and other information. The address is:

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/kjr/cleanup.html>

Hard copies sent by mail are available upon request. Please e-mail KJ at rebar@netins.net, or call Melisa Petersen at 309-737-9016 if you have any questions.

A New Kind of Fun While Paddling ... Geocaching by Steve Parrish

Geocaching is a sport only in existence since 2000, and it can be a fun activity to include during a day's paddle. A central website provides GPS coordinates for caches (boxes containing a written log and trinkets) buried all over the world. People bury these treasures in challenging spots, post the coordinates and hints on the website, and the geocacher goes out to find the prize. If found, the protocol is to take something fun from the cache and replace it with something from your own stash ... and record it on the log and the web.

What's this have to do with paddling? Plenty! In the short time since I've been geocaching, I can cite two places I've included it with my water activities. First, when taking a day off to drive to Lake Rathbun, I downloaded cache coordinates and used geocaching both as a diversion from paddling AND as a way to get to know the lake area better. I found caches both near the dam and near Honey Creek State Park. Second, I'm finding that some caches are hidden in locations more accessible by water than by hiking. For example, in an area of the Raccoon River just a few miles from its confluence with the Des Moines River, there is cache hidden a few feet up the banks of a feeder stream. It's a great place to take a break before continuing down the river.

To learn more about the sport, go to the central website: www.geocaching.com

TRIP REPORTS

“In the Middle of the Night” A Isle Royale Crossing by John Craun

I woke up in the middle of the night with a full bladder that needed draining. My cold nose told me that the below freezing temperatures they forecasted were probably correct. After extricating myself from my mummy bag, I stepped out of the shelter on Grace Island to take care of my biological need. The gale force winds of the day before were gone and everything was perfectly still. The sky was clear, the air cold, and the moonless sky lit up by millions of brilliant stars.

Then I said to myself, “Let’s go now”. I had planned to wait for morning and hopefully clear calm weather to attempt the 20 mile paddle from Grace Island on Isle Royale across Lake Superior to Little Trout Bay in Ontario. However, the conditions were calm now and I felt good, except for the cold temperature. I shined my flashlight over at my kayak that glistened with a coating of frost – definitely below freezing!

As quickly as possible I packed up and put on my cold weather paddling gear, not because I was in a big hurry but because it was so cold. I knew I wouldn’t get warm again until I was in my kayak and paddling at a vigorous pace. After doing a thorough double check to make sure I didn’t forget to pack everything in my kayak, I launched at about 1:30 AM. Ten minutes of brisk paddling took me from Grace Island across Washington Harbor, and there I stopped over the wreck of the America at the North Gap. For a moment a wave of fear swept over me as I thought of the shipwreck below me and looked at the largest lake in the world.

Now I felt warm and comfortable in my kayak as I looked out over the lake toward the Ontario shoreline. The kayak gently rocked to the rhythm of the lake still moving from the gale force winds and twelve foot waves of the previous day. The stars were radiant and distinct due to the clear cold air and the lack of interference by man made lights. I watched in awe as a bright meteorite streaked through the sky in front of me.

The only navigational light to be seen from there was the Rock of Ages lighthouse, located off the West end of Isle Royale, but I was heading away from it. There were no lights to be seen on the Canadian shoreline to paddle towards and I was too far away in the dark to see any land forms to guide me. I turned on my headlamp to see the deck compass and start paddling the necessary 325 degree heading. Looking up I noticed a bright star right in line with my destination. Then I turned off the light and followed that star.

After another fifteen minutes of paddling I had settled into a pace that I could comfortably sustain, and began to relax and enjoy the beautiful paddling experience by starlight across Lake Superior. Watching numerous meteorites, the stars, planets and satellites in their orbits made the miles fly by.

About half way through the crossing I looked back toward Isle Royale and watched as a bright silver sliver of the moon began to rise out of the lake. I could clearly see how the sliver of the moon pointed toward where the sun was and indicated how soon it too would rise. As I paddled on the Eastern sky slowly began getting lighter, the dark colors began changing to lighter shades of reds and then yellows as sunrise approached.

When I got to McKellar Point on the Canadian shoreline I stopped to watch the sun rise magically out of Lake Superior, and thanked God for the beautiful crossing I had experienced. Rounding McKellar Point I turned southwest into Little Trout Bay toward my landing point. As I paddled next to the rugged basalt rock shoreline I noticed something moving in the water, it was an otter. For a few minutes I watched the playful otter as it checked me out and then went on its way. Then I proceeded across Little Trout Bay to finish the crossing that began in the middle of the night.

Who in their right mind would do a solo crossing of Lake Superior in the middle of the night? Just a crazy kayaker like me. Just a person that believes that some of what he wants to see and experience is out there in the middle of the night.

[Editors note: the crossing took John 4 hours and 45 minutes]

ROBIN'S REPORTS

Perfect Summer Evening by Robin Fortney

I ran into friends at the Des Moines Art Festival on Friday night. We talked about paddling the next evening. Rain continued to fall throughout the day, so my friends bailed and I agreed to join them for a movie that night. But, by 4 p.m. the rain had stopped and I bailed out of the movie plan. By 5 p.m. there was a hint of blue sky and another friend called offering to run the shuttle. "Just call me when you're at the takeout." So, I put gear in the car and headed over to the Walnut Woods State Park boat ramp.

The place was empty and the Raccoon River appeared to be all mine. The evening was perfect: clear blue sky, low humidity and just-right temperature. I placed my blade in the water and saw the first of two dozen great blue herons. The water level was low and the river was its usual murky self, but it was enough for me: a river close to home and wildlife moving about. The great blue herons didn't pay much attention to me – they were busy stalking supper. A green heron passed by as did numerous raucous belted kingfishers. Turkey hens pecked at bugs on a gravel bar while a tom turkey flew across the river in front of me. A big beaver sat watching me pass by as I watched him watching me. There was a wood chuck and raccoon gathering supper. A bald eagle soared high above while great horned owls silently flew into the woods. I saw one owl make a strike, one diner and one dinner. Several deer made an appearance on the sand bars as I moved into Water Works Park.

Snags were plentiful and gave me reason to slow down as I paddled the last couple of miles, savoring the evening and the feeling of wildness along the city greenbelt. At the pedestrian bridge, I called my friend and said, "I'll be at the ramp in about 10 minutes." I pulled up to the Water Works boat ramp and had just gathered gear into a pile when she arrived. How fortunate am I to live near a friendly river and have great friends?

Racing on the Boone by Robin Fortney

The week before the Boone Bash River Dash in Webster City, I call Brian Stroner to volunteer at this first-in-many-years event. Webster City is hosting the event and Brian has planned a great day. Over there is Jim Dodd with his beautiful wooden strip canoes and here is John and Sandy Wenck showing the Iowa Whitewater Coalition's dam model, called a drowning machine. Brian has volunteers to greet us at the city park put-in, at the sign-up table, at the put-in and take-out. There are boats and vehicles parked all over the place. There is a free barbecue dinner for all participants. But, the sky is overcast and participant count lower than expected, so I am free to paddle.

For \$10, I pen my name on a waiver and sign up for the women's single recreational canoe race, my first ever paddle race. I am free to start any time. So, after readying my boat, taking my sandals off and chugging a bottle of water, I put my paddle in the water. My start time is noted and off I go. There are volunteers at the rocky riffles, waiting to assist if necessary. However, the water and danger level are low. I need to keep my eye on the current since the opportunities to run aground are many, but I notice the condition of the river. I haven't paddled this stretch between Webster City's Riverside Park and Briggs Woods Park for years. This stretch is beautiful, but could stand a little TLC. There are tires here and there. At one bend, a landowner has dumped a huge pile of cars and demolition debris on his land and they are falling into the river. Apparently, the landowner doesn't appreciate the value of his land or the river that flows through it.

I see a kayaker ahead and my natural competitiveness kicks in. I find my racing stride: With feet on the thwart ahead, I set the single blade paddle vertically at my knee and then pull it back to my hip, pushing against the thwart with my feet. I paddle four strokes on one side and four strokes on the other side. I think of an old boyfriend and silently thank him for the canoe racing lesson he gave me a couple of years ago. I get stuck on a rocky riffle and have to get out. Finally, I catch up with the kayaker and then pass him when the river opens up to allow room to move by. It's raining lightly, but it feels refreshing because I'm heating up with the constant effort. I see a second kayaker ahead. I follow his lead through the faster current and am closing the gap. We each fight the low water, digging into the sand and rocks. I wind up in shallow water and have to get out again. The sand feels good under my feet and I jog for fifteen yards, pulling my Mad River Liberty across the sand. Back in the boat, I take a different path through the next riffle and gain the advantage. Enjoying the lead, I keep the brisk pace and then see another kayaker. The river widens and remains shallow, and I work to catch up when I see the Highway 17 Bridge. We're almost there when I see the timers. I call out my name. Woohoo!! It feels good to be done. We paddlers relax at the boat ramp and a volunteer offers donuts while we get acquainted.

A shuttle vehicle takes us back to Riverside Park where we enjoy a picnic lunch sponsored by *All Cultures Equal* and watch young Laotian men play a game called *kickatha* that looks like a cross



between volleyball and soccer. When all of the racers are back, Brian announces the winners and the prizes: t-shirts and gear from the DNR nature store and IOWATER, camping and cabin vouchers from Hamilton County Conservation, and one free week on Project Aware from the Iowa DNR. How about this: I have the fastest time overall and am awarded the all-expenses-paid Project AWARE trip in 2007!! Is that cool, or what?! Wait a minute...that means I have to work...pulling trash out of an Iowa river...for a whole week! Brian, let's talk!

[the winner accepts her prize]

July 4th Picnic Float by Robin Fortney

We planned the trip in January. We got lucky. July 4th turned out to be clear and sunny and warm. I arrived early at the Minburn boat ramp on the North Raccoon River with burgers and brats to feed the two dozen paddlers who had called to say they were coming. By 11 a.m., nearly 50 people had arrived at the ramp and many were new faces! After everyone had unloaded boats and gear, we announced shuttle plans. Several folks kindly offered to shuttle drivers back to the top. Then the group made a brisk and orderly parade down to the Adel City Park boat ramp where we dropped cars. Back at the put-in, we introduced Mike Delaney of the North Raccoon River Association and Don Probst who is leading a major river cleanup on the North Raccoon this



summer. We designated lead and sweep canoes and discussed lunch plans. Then the huge navy launched and reconvened a mile or so downstream at the big sandbar on Mike's property. Mike offered tours of his prairie restoration effort while Robin announced lunch. Everyone pitched in setting up tables for the buffet and laying out the potluck picnic. Dick set up a couple of propane grills and several guys offered to help grill meat. Kids and dogs played in the river, enjoying the low water level and happily climbing over the snags, while adults set up chairs and umbrellas. It was a fishes and loaves kind of meal. All were well fed and we had burgers left over. Bob, Chuck and Robin each brought watermelons, so we took a couple of watermelon breaks through the afternoon. The day was so relaxing. We enjoyed a light tail wind and got acquainted with new friends. There were no

fireworks to celebrate America's birthday, but we enjoyed the camaraderie that river rats typically share as we floated down the 'Coon.



A few friends attending the Picnic Float. Pictures posted by wailin01@yahoo.com

COMING NEXT NEWSLETTER ...

A wrap up of the summer's activities! Please be sure to share your adventures and activities with us. And, if we've missed a story or picture you submitted, let us know.

Central Iowa Paddlers Membership

DUES: \$10 per year

Includes emails, Newsletters ...

And Fellowship!

Membership, Dues, Emails for CIP list

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(all lower case)

For more information, visit our website at:

www.paddleiowa.org

*Participants are responsible for their own preparedness and safety.
Bring rain gear, extra clothes, drinking water and snacks, hat, sunscreen, PFD, extra paddle, and
anything else you may need to be comfortable in unexpected weather conditions.*

For more information and paddling events, see <http://www.paddleiowa.org>