For peace and quiet, give flat-water paddling a try

Smooth Waters



By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

This year may be the year to take up a new recreational activity for the Fourth of July — paddling.

Not whitewater rafting, with professional guides, danger and waves tossed up above one's head, but rather paddling on a lake or a pond. Paddling a blue trail on one of the smaller rivers of the Piedmont, not the Blue Ridge.

"Paddling on flat water has become one of the most popular excursions that we offer," said Ben Palmer, who directs paddling events at the Spartanburg County Parks Department. "We have a hard time getting more than a few paddlers for our events on streams, even though we have some of the best and longest blue trail systems anywhere."

Alissa Ritzo Duncan, who produced a YouTube series called Paddling 101 as part of the Thinking Like a River series produced by Wofford College, says the sport is a great stress reliver. "I just love paddling."

The series features Wofford

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Canoes, pad
boards and kay
launch from
non-motoriz
landing on La
Jocassee. CHAR
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professor and outdoorsman John Lane and is available at www.youtube.com by searching WoffordTLAR.

If you want an idea of how popular flat-water paddling has become, stop by the non-motorized landing on Lake Jocassee any summer weekend when the weather is good.

Last weekend the landing was packed by 11 a.m., and there was a line of vehicles waiting for parking spaces.

This is where the kayaks, canoes and paddle boards come to launch. Every age, from toddlers to retirees will be there. The younger paddlers are a surprise; they are riders, actually, decked out with life vests, hats and lots of sunscreen.

Eli Houghton, 3, along with his grandparents Sherrie and Dan Whitten, both in their 60s, were there with Palmer's group from Spartanburg. Their plan was to help lead the group of about six around the Whitewater River arm of the lake and make a day of it — stopping for lunch — before making their way back to the landing for the ride home.

Dan Whitten is a member of the Friends of Jocassee support group and spends a great deal of time exploring the lake along with Sherrie and Eli, when the toddler visits from Brevard, N.C.

A steady stream of canoers, kayakers and paddle boarders made their way to the launching ramp and then picked their way past the scuba divers giving lesson at the floating dock.

Sunrift Adventures in Travelers Rest was there, giving a yoga class a lesson in paddle boarding. The paddle boarders had to slip past the divers one at a time. Their boards, nearly 20 feet long were, by far, the longest watercraft, and the widest, too.

They put their boards in the water and launched kneeling, finally standing up when the water under them was deep enough to prevent injury if they fell. Like a flock of odd-looking birds, the yoga class made its way to the back of a nearby cove to continue the lesson.

Finally Palmer launched his little flotilla. They had a little problem with the wakes of passing motorized craft before getting everyone on the lake. Last to launch were the Whittens, with Eli sitting at the center of their canoe. They passed out onto the lake with Eli grinning back toward shore like the veteran paddler he is quickly becoming.



The non-motorized landing at Jocassee is a busy spot Saturday mornings. Scuba divers bob in the water as kayakers and paddleboarders navigate to open water.



Ben Palmer gets ready to lead a Spartanburg group on a daylong paddle on Lake Jocassee.

HOW TO GET THERE

Take U.S. 276 North from Greenville through Travelers Rest and Marietta. It will join Highway 11 near Cleveland. Bear right on 11 at the base of Caesars Head. Stay on 11 until you cross into Oconee County at Lake Keowee. Turn right at the Devils Fork State Park sign onto Boone Creek Road. Turn right again onto Lake Jocassee Road and follow it all the way past the Devils Fork State Park entrance and take an immediate left onto Devils Fork Road. Stay on Devils Fork, past the fee station and bear right at the non-motorized landing sign.

YOU CAN GO

Paddle Fest 2014 hosted by Spartanburg Water will be held July 16 at Lake Blalock Park in Chesnee. This free event includes guided and self-guided paddle tours, kayak/canoe/SUP races, beginner paddle classes, seminars, safety classes and paddle demonstrations. Visit www.planetreg.com/E31113213178210.

LEARN MORE

For more information on paddling demos, classes and other events:

» www.Spartanburg-Parks.org.
» www.upstatepaddleboard.com
» www.sunrift.com
» www.rei.com/stores/greenville.html

Paddlers make their way toward a cove. PHOTOS BY CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR