

Thoughts on the Delaware River Sojourn

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I have talked up the Delaware River Sojourn among my friends before, but I'd like to describe and articulate why it's so wonderful and what it means to me. I'm not doing this for any material gain, but simply because I love the Delaware River.

I first canoed on the Delaware in the summer of 1965. I was 11 years old at the time and at summer camp. In the summer of 1968, at the age of 14, I participated in a Boy Scout-sponsored canoe trip on the Delaware. Our group paddled 200 miles in 10 days on the Delaware, all the way from Hancock, NY to Trenton, NJ. It has been "my river" ever since. I'm 55 now, I've been paddling the Delaware for over 40 years, and I never get tired of it. And the worst injuries I've had on the river are some scrapes and cuts--and most years not even that.

The Delaware is beautiful, scenic and relaxing. And it is even cleaner today than it was 40 years ago. There are few rivers in America as well-suited to canoeing, and there are more canoes rented on the Delaware than on any river in the United States. Despite its relative popularity, you can still find peace and solitude on the river. Besides the serenity of the river, the mountains, the rock cliffs, and the trees, there is the wildlife--various fish, numerous birds, large turtles--, but we've also spotted deer on its shores and once we spotted a few grazing lambs! People who have moved out west from the eastern U.S. tell me that there is nothing like the Delaware.

The Delaware River Sojourn is a celebration of all that the Delaware River is: recreationally, scenically, historically, geologically, economically, and environmentally. On the Sojourn, we become identified as stewards of the river, with all of the credit and responsibility that that title entails. Through the various talks, lectures, and tours, we learned how to recognize trees by their bark, birds by their wings, and rocks by their color. We learned about Native Americans and their historic role in Delaware River life: what they made, how they lived, the weapons they used, how they lived in harmony with the river, and who they are today. We visited and camped at Revolutionary War battlefields on the river: the Battle of Minisink and Washington's Crossing. We canoed under bridges that were built more than a century ago, including a few that were designed by John Roebling, who also designed the Brooklyn Bridge. We learned about the disputes in the U.S. Supreme Court between neighboring states over water rights. We learned that there are millions of freshwater mussels in the river quietly filtering and cleansing the water every day. We learned about the problem of the invasive Japanese knotweed, and how to recognize it. We canoe past wooden eel weirs, which trap eels, mostly for the overseas market. We see the shad fisheries returning to the Delaware--the shad easily identified by their unmistakable silvery white scales. We see majestic eagles in flight, we delight in spotting eagles' nests, and we learn how to distinguish young eagles from old, yearlings from newborns. This is only a sampling of what I've learned on the Delaware River Sojourn.

There are some other wonderful things about the Sojourn. First, it is very affordable. You could do the same trip yourself, but it would cost you about twice as much. Much of the food (and it's quite good and we eat well!) is donated by restaurants, caterers, and organizations. Boats and campsites are furnished to the Sojourn at little or no cost by

outfitters and others. Second, it is safe. Each day, we have members of the National Canoe Safety Patrol accompanying us and looking after our safety. All of them are skilled paddlers and trained in river rescue. Everyone wears life jackets, we have a safety talk each morning, and we get special instructions before each rapid. The rapids on the Delaware are fun and exciting, but never severe. Third, we have great camaraderie. We have many paddlers returning year after year. We know each other and we've become friends. But we always meet and make new friends each year and we are very welcoming to newcomers. And we help each other and always lend a hand on the river and in camp to someone in need--whether it's helping to pitch a tent at nightfall or helping an elderly or handicapped person ashore. Fourth, we invariably have good weather. Late June is an ideal time to paddle the Delaware--the water is already warm for swimming, the days are long, the nights not too cool, and the water levels usually quite favorable. The sun shines most of the time, and we don't let an occasional shower dampen our spirits--or hamper our river progress. Fifth, we cover a reasonable distance on the river each day, and the current does a lot of the work, so you don't have to be in Olympic shape to paddle on the Delaware River Sojourn!

I love the Delaware River, and once you know it, I am confident that you will love it too. Please join us on the Sojourn.

-Dan Okrent
Delaware River Sojourn participant 2004-2008