



Central Iowa Paddlers

Volume 11 Issue 4

October 2007

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

When I look back at my friendship with Steve [Fossett], I realize we were very different people, but there were many things that we had in common. Steve put it best when he told me, "People often assume I am a thrill seeker, but I am not. I do not enjoy roller coasters, and you won't find me bungee jumping ... It is a disadvantage that my pursuits are inherently dangerous. A large part of my effort is to reduce the risk." Richard Branson's tribute to Steve Fossett in the October 22, 2007 TIME Magazine

What a long, spectacular summer so many of us had. Despite record rainfalls, the rivers and lakes were full of paddlers, and non-motorized boats could be seen plying the waters both day and night. Paddlers worked to make our sport safer, they cleaned the shores we paddle near, and they demonstrated joy in embracing the ways of the waters. But paddlers were active beyond the waterways. Some provided training for prospective paddlers in the classroom; others worked with the DNR to forge proposed new rules for night paddling; still others were, through the popular media, the source of hope and motivation inspiration for all. The paddling theme of this summer seemed to be more about sharing, communication and involvement than risk, thrills and competition. In my travels, I've had the privilege of seeing how other communities organize their paddling culture. Iowa's paddling community holds a special position as a vibrant, engaged group of committed and giving individuals. We should take pride in being Central Iowa Paddlers!
—Steve Parrish, editor—

Come to the **Central Iowa Paddlers Fall Picnic and Bonfire!**

DATE: Sunday November 4, 2007

TIME: 3:00 p.m. Grill going at 4:00

PLACE: Lynn Aldridge's Country Estate in Mingo

Hamburgers will be provided. Please bring a side dish or dessert and any paddling photos that you want to share.

Directions:

From Des Moines, go East on I-80 to Mitchellville exit.

Turn Left (north) on S-27 and go 3.5 miles and turn east (right) onto F-34. Go 2 miles to Valeria. Go through Valeria to top of hill and turn north (left) onto a gravel road and go 1 mile, then turn Right and go 1 mile. Turn left onto 126th Street and go 0.5 mile to Lynn's place. Her house is the first on the left. It's white and sits back from the road.

Please drive slowly up driveway.

RSVP email at: laldrigd@uhl.uiowa.edu

For questions call: 641-363-4451

REPORTS

CIP Board

Your CIP Board has been very active in meeting, organizing and advocating. Below are some of the items they discussed and acted on in recent Board meetings:

- Paddle Fest
- Statewide Paddling Organization
- 2007 River Run Garbage Grab, including a \$500 CIP contribution towards the very successful event.
- Governance, including the Board approving Bill Graham as the new treasurer
- Having Nate Hoogeveen address water trails issues, including the Boone River Canoe School, IDNR Water Trail programs, reports of river abuses, and information of the Water Trails Advisory Committee

Our thanks to the volunteer CIP Board for their dedication of time and talent!

Padding Library continues as a valuable resource

The Padding 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.

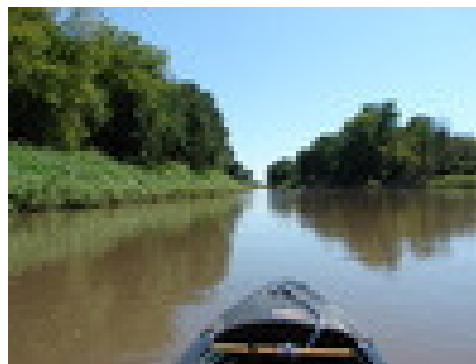
PaddingIowa.com by Todd "gutwrencher" Robertson

Don't forget about PaddingIowa.com and the forums. It's a great way to stay in touch with local paddlers from across the state. See the "Trip Reports" section for awesome reports that sometimes come in daily. *CIP and PI.com go together hand-in-hand!*

See my newest report with pictures from the North Raccoon in Carroll County, and my brief rundowns on both Nishnabotna rivers.

<http://www.paddingiowa.com/phpBB/viewforum.php?f=3>

Picture of East Nishnabotna by Todd Robertson



Padding makes the Big Time in the Des Moines Register by Steve Parrish

The paddling community has a new and unexpected advocate ... The Des Moines Register. This summer there have been numerous articles and features (all flattering) on paddling in central Iowa. From May 13 with an article entitled "Paddlers' safety around dams gets attention" to June 19 when the front page headline was "Iowa kayaker unearths very big, very old tooth" to the week long articles beginning August 5, themed around "Riverkeepers." Our own Robin Fortney was featured in an article on August 6th. Other paddling icons like Rick Dietz and Nate Hoogeveen were also featured in the series on paddling that ran the entire week. In the October 17 IOWALife section of the Register, there appeared a stirring article on Adam Brooks, detailing how paddling helped focus his life. Discussing his solo trips down both the Mississippi and the Missouri, the article discussed how, through paddling, Adam "lost weight and found his soul." See Adam's website at: <http://www.myriverquest.com/>

Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup Project by KJ Rebarcak

The second annual Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup Project, which took place the last weekend of August, was a huge success again this year! In spite of our having to relocate the event due to the flooding on the Wapsi, we removed four tons of garbage from the backwaters near the confluence of the Wapsipinicon and Mississippi Rivers.

“Mother Nature was flexing her muscles for weeks prior to our cleanup,” said coordinator Melisa Petersen. “We watched helplessly as the Wapsipinicon continued to swell from the long stint of rain that accumulated in the area of its massive watershed. The ironic thing is that we do this cleanup in late August because water levels are low and garbage visibility is high.”

Because the Wapsi was flooded, Petersen worked closely with Clinton County Conservation Board naturalists Mark Roberts and Chuck Jacobsen on a new plan focusing on a water area that is rarely accessible. “The high water kept us out of the Wapsi, but afforded us an opportunity to get into the beautiful backwaters maze of the Mississippi where much refuse gets trapped in the early spring floods. I knew the volunteers we had signed up would be happy to clean any watershed they could get their canoes onto, and the last thing we wanted to do was cancel the whole event.”



Happy they were – despite a questionable forecast, losing their targeted river to flooding, their base camp at Rock Creek Marina and Campground slowly being encroached upon by the swollen backwaters, and working conditions that included waist-deep mud and standing in waters chock full of hidden poison ivy and stinging nettles (both of which still function well underwater).

The program provided free canoes, free camping, low-cost catered meals including a fish boil on Saturday night,

an evening GPS class by Jacobsen, and a complimentary Blue Heron Eco-Cruise on the Mississippi led by Roberts.

Act like a Steward contributed by John Wenck
I came across this when I searched "iowa river stewards" on Google

ACT LIKE A STEWARD

Paddlers have everything to gain by being stewards of the waterways on which we travel. We like to keep ourselves in good shape. Do your part to keep our waterways in good shape:

- **Take trash out with you (yours and others).**
- **Keep fires small and put them out before you leave.**
- **Respect fishermen and personal property.**
- **Select toilet sites at least 100 feet away from the water's edge.**
- **Same with disposal of wash water.**
- **Leave wildlife alone.**

We paddle for lots of reasons: solitude, beauty, watching wildlife, listening to sounds of nature, exercise, time with family and friends, thrill of accomplishment, and learning new skills. Whatever your reason for being on the water, be a good steward!

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul--John Muir

TRIP REPORTS

Paddling Vermont-July 30-August 3, 2007

By Robin Fortney

Vermont is a great place for a tourist. It's got narrow winding roads, endless tree-covered mountains, charming villages, rocky fast-moving streams, and lakes are surrounded by forest. My sister, Wendy, and her husband, Herb, have lived near White River Junction on the eastern side of the state for 15 years. They bought a big voyageur canoe about 10 years ago, but then found that they wanted different experiences. Herb wanted quiet pools for fly fishing and Wendy wanted fast water for a more heart pounding experience. Subsequently, they bought a lighter tandem canoe and Wendy bought a small recreational kayak. They had a couple of places they'd wanted to check out, so my recent week-long visit allowed us to do some exploring. I had invited Iowa paddling friends to join me. None did, and you missed a great week of wonderful paddling, good company, perfect weather, and delicious cooking!

On Monday, Wendy and I toured the Enfield Shaker village in New Hampshire and then checked out nearby Grafton Pond (it's what we'd call a lake). We paddled the perimeter, watched a loon, ate lunch on a granite boulder and swam in the warm sunshine. The water is clear and dark from tannins. It was blueberry season, so we looked for blueberry bushes and found plenty of ripe berries. At one point, Wendy found sun dew plants at the water's edge. Small insects, such as gnats, are attracted by a dew-like substance on the leaves of this plant. Once the insect comes in contact with this sticky substance, however, it cannot escape. After a short time the leaf slowly folds, completely encloses the insect and digests its body. With digital camera in hand, I waded toward Wendy to shoot a photo of the sun dew, but tripped on an underwater boulder and shredded my shin trying to save the camera from a dunking. We arrived home tired and hungry. Wendy made two blueberry pies that night and all pain was forgotten.

The following day, I decided to remain on land to let my leg heal. In the nearby village of Quechee, we toured the Simon Pierce glassblowing factory, visited a raptor rehabilitation center and hiked down to Ottauquechee Gorge where we played on the rocks and wished we had our swimsuits. On Wednesday, Wendy, Herb and I explored Hartland Reservoir where a huge dam

impounds the Ottauquechee River. As we paddled across the reservoir and upriver, we saw a bald eagle, kingfisher, great blue herons, beaver activity, painted and snapping turtles, small and large mouth bass, and rainbow and brown trout. After an hour and a half paddling, we arrived at the gorge where Wendy and I spent hours swimming in the fast moving water and around the boulders while Herb fly fished. Both nights we arrived home tired and hungry. Wendy fed us well and we polished off the last of the blueberry pies.

On Thursday, we breakfasted at a local shop that caters to hikers on the nearby Appalachian Trail and then we drove north, past Stowe to Green Mountain Reservoir. Vermont's lakes are very similar to the Boundary Water Canoe Area lakes. Big with wide crossings and narrow inlets, clear dark water, rocky shores, islands, occasional camp sites, fir and hemlock trees, and loons. We paddled along the shores looking at flowers and into inlets and found loons, herons and a family of red headed ducks. At one point, we saw a swimmer tied to a flotation device that created friction while he swam across the lake. Wow! We passed the Mad River on the way home. My canoe, a Mad River Liberty solo boat, was built nearby and I was glad that I had brought it with me. Once again, we arrived home tired and hungry. I made a fresh peach pie and we had it for dinner and breakfast the next morning!

We saved the best for last. On Friday, we paddled the White River. The White drains central Vermont and enters the Connecticut River at White River Junction. It is about the size of the Des Moines River, but the water is clear, flows over bedrock and has boulders and ledges along its course near where Wendy and Herb live. The water level was high enough that I could find my way through tight spots and rapids and over ledges and not scrape too badly. There were many WOO-HOO moments! At one point, we saw a guy running rapids in his canoe while standing upside down with his hands on the gunwales. Incredible! We got out occasionally to swim in the pools and play on the rocks while Herb fly fished. While he didn't catch anything during the week, one night we did enjoy trout that he had caught earlier. We finally arrived home, tired and hungry of course (these active vacations are hard on an office worker!). However, we had planned a night out. After getting cleaned up, we visited a quilt exhibit at the Billings Farm Museum where Wendy works during the summer. There I met a couple from Iowa who had worked at Living History Farms and now was working at Billings. We enjoyed chatting about Iowa and folks we knew in common. The evening ended with a fancy dinner at Simon Pierce Studio.

You can't beat a paddling vacation that includes great food and a real bed! At the end, there was the long drive home to Iowa, but it gave me time to remember an excellent vacation. Wish you were there!

Apostle Islands by Steve Parrish

In early August, Brian Lange organized a trip to the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior. It included Apostle veterans Rick Dietz, Jerry Kemperman, John Craun, Scott Evans, and Steve Parrish. John Pearson, a Lake Superior frequenter, was on his first Apostles trip, and we had Lake Superior newbies Diane Lowry and Teresa Newcomb along as well. The group camped on Sand Island two nights and then the southern tip of Oak Island Thursday night. Half of the group stayed and camped on the mainland the next night. During the trip, three of our intrepid group made a 26 mile paddle from Sand to Devils Island and back in one day; the rest of us normal types circumnavigated Sand, admiring the incredible sea caves.



Picture montage by Diane Lowry

We were treated to warm air and waters (so much so that we could actually swim in Lake Superior), and we were able to experience a Superior thunderstorm while safely parked on Raspberry Island. Memorable experiences included spotting a Bear on the west side of Sand Island, seeing a fog bank roll in and

swallow islands and roll our just as quickly, and experiencing a lively game of croquet while waiting out the thunderstorm. Memorable, but less pleasant, was the new hatch of black flies that terrorized us from the moment we approached Sand Island until the day we left Oak. With pleasant weather and seas that never exceeded two footers, this would have to go down as a successful and, frankly, easy Lake Superior trip.

Reflections (excerpted from [Ames Tribune](#)) by Dave Kraemer

Over the last couple of years, I've hit the gym regularly. I run a bit. I bike to work. I imagine I'm in pretty good shape for an old guy. I've never been exceptionally successful at athletics. No one would have guessed that I'd turn out to be a jock, especially at this stage. But I am active enough, and I've lost enough self respect, that I've been entering a few races lately. They give me a goal to work toward.

Earlier this year, I ran the Dam to Dam half marathon in Des Moines. I trained with a group at the city recreation center. It was farther than I had run at one time since high school.

A few days later, I ran the Great Ames Adventure Race, paddling the kayak, biking and finishing up with a run.

The cap on the summer came June 30. I entered the "Gritty Fitty," a 50-mile canoe and kayak race on the Kansas River from Lawrence to Kansas City. I went down with Rick Dietz, also from Ames, at the invitation of Travis Konda, a former doctoral student at Iowa State University now working at a big engineering firm in Kansas City.

Travis had issued this challenge several months ago. I bit. Fifty miles is further than I'd ever paddled in a day. But I was still in denial. I figured it would take eight to 10 hours. It's basically a good day on the water.

The race was billed as "Fifty miles of sun, sand and sorrow." The Kansas River can be shallow, with shifting sand bars, and there might be plenty of dragging along with the paddling.

As it was, it became 50 miles of wind, rain and woe. We checked in through a downpour and it stayed with us the whole day. Worse was the wind. When the current slowed, the wind pushed me backward. It made me never want to put down the paddle, even to drink, eat or relieve myself.

The first 20 miles went well enough. But as the day wore on, the leaden skies, the constant wind, the constant paddling took their toll. It became painful to lift the paddle.

Somewhere before the 35 mile checkpoint, the husk of denial peeled away to reveal a bloom of despair.

Here's what it looked like in my head: "I'm just a pipsqueak. Why do I do this? Why can't I catch that guy ahead of me? I'll never win. I'll never even place. That 'just finishing is success' stuff is crap. I'm dead last. Why don't my arms work? I'm going to sell my boats."

At about mile 45, a guy caught me while I was resting. He was as beat as I was, paddling only because there was nothing left to do. Hope flickered in our conversation.

"How long have you been kayaking," he asked.

"About seven or eight years. You?"

"Since yesterday."

Hope died. All that work, and for what? To be caught by a guy who started yesterday. It ticked me off so bad I dug in to leave him behind.

In truth, I've never been fast. I've lived most of my life riding a desk chair. Even when I was a kid I was the slowest guy on the cross country team. Now that I'm exercising, I tell myself that I'll eventually work myself into an age class where I can compete. That's even more crap. The field might be narrower, but the people still in it will be only the really good ones, the ones I couldn't touch before.

And then it was over. Rick was at the landing, still in his paddling gear. "Wasn't that the hardest thing you've ever done?" he laughed.

I finished in 9 hours, 24 minutes, 17th overall out of 50 entries. Rick was 13th and Travis was a beefy 7th.

Painful, yes. But I'm back to denial. At my age, it's all I have left.

Reflections on Lake Rathbun, Part 2 by Steve Parrish

As a follow up to my earlier article concerning Lake Rathbun, I'm pleased to report that the fun continues. Because of the significant rains that pounded southern Iowa this summer, the lake has had many days significantly over normal pool level. My project has been to circumnavigate the lake and, because of the Corps' controlled flooding, I have a lot more lake to traverse. Recently, on one of the legs of my circumnavigation, I was in a flood area littered with deadfall from trees, and, as I was about to reverse my way out of a mudflat, I looked up to find myself facing a bobcat. Following a quick photo of the beautiful but frightening cat in the tree, I paddled home flabbergasted that I've never seen a bobcat while hiking, yet here I had sat face-to-face with one viewed from a kayak!



Vic Senter and I have organized some opportunities for paddlers to visit Rathbun. On a beautiful September Saturday, a group of 8 paddlers got together for a moonlight float. Following a welcome and introduction to Rathbun by the DNR, we paddled into the sunset and enjoyed 8 miles of calm water in the moonlight. A month later James Keyes from Omaha and Diane Lowry from Ames came down to paddle this southern Iowa jewel.

With the change of the seasons, the wildlife viewings change as well. I've gone from bobcat and

beaver sightings to watching migratory birds. The pelican fly through this year was amazing. These magnificent white and black beasts seemed to want to stay at the lake. They only left recently and reluctantly with the cold October winds.

Woody and the Old Guy on the Raccoon River by Jim Riggs

Sunday, May 27, 2007

My name is Woody. I'm a wood duck who has been trained to follow an old guy's blue kayak. Today, I swam thirty miles down the Raccoon River. It was a long hard day for me and I think the old guy was terribly tired before we got to Richey Access Area on the edge of Carroll and Greene Counties.

He kept looking for the access and almost missed it. We had nearly passed it and were almost under the County Highway N58 Bridge when I quacked a warning. He looked over to the south and saw Larry Wilson's big motor home that he was staying in during our week on the Raccoon River. He puts me in a crate in the back of the pickup truck at night. If that girl in the bikini who was floating down the river on an inner tube knew how he treated me, she wouldn't have respected him much.

This was our third day of paddling on the Raccoon River. Steve Soelberg, a friend of my old guy joined us on the first two days. Kenny Bentsen from Sac City and Rene Stroud, Sac County Conservation naturalist paddled with us the second day.

We started at Vogel Access Area up north of Sac City. I liked the river up there in Sac County. It seemed to be more of a prairie stream and wound through the countryside in an easy, gentle meander. Toward Sac City, it changed to more of a timber habitat that made me, as a wood duck, feel more at home.

Today was a strange one. We started at Grant Park in Sac County. He paddled and I swam through a corner of Calhoun County, past Rainbow Bridge, a beautiful old, retired concrete piece of architecture with three arches like lower versions of McDonald's. Then he paddled through a big corner of Carroll County. We were supposed to stop after about twenty miles, but somehow, the old guy forgot that Hyde Park was our destination for the day.

He was tired enough to quit then, but he and the other two guys got their signals crossed. Mike Delaney and Don Probst were the other two paddlers and they met Mark Rivers, who is head of the Carroll County Conservation Board, and another guy from Maryland at Rainbow Bridge. They paddled with us for a while. Don and Mike told my old guy that Richey Access Area was another twelve miles, so he just stayed in his little blue kayak and kept paddling. It didn't bother me none. I was still swimming strong.

The other two guys went for a walk with Mark and checked out the trail over an awesome abandoned railroad bridge. My old guy hates to push toward a destination when he is floating on a river. He loves to get his kayak in the middle of the stream and drift along with the current, just paddling enough to keep him out of trouble. I think he just likes to watch the river and the wildlife and the wilderness-like scenery of an Iowa River.

"I'll go slow," he told them. "You can catch me." We went slow. He hardly paddled and nobody ever did catch us. I think he got a little lonely. He spent a lot of time paddling by himself. I was there every bit of the way and sometimes he'd talk to me, but I ain't much for speaking his language unless he is really concentrating on what I'm saying. I think he'd rather have been paddling with someone else as well as me.

The old guy took me through some wild and boiling water that looked like a pot of chili turned on high. I could tell that the water had a passel of power but I kept floating and he and little blue kayak just kept going down the Raccoon River. We went over two rock dams that day that were kind of scary at first, but when we got to them, they were pretty much a level shot with a lot of

swirling going on the bottom side. It kind of reminded me of the old fashion Maytag ringer washers.

Actually, the rock dams up in Sac County on the first two days of our trip were scarier. The first one was below the cemetery in Sac City. It looked nasty and had about a four foot drop. Who knew what dangerous rocks laid under it? The old guys talked about four people who had died at Iowa dams this spring, so they played it safe and carried their three boats around it.

Then, the next day a farmer, Neil Johnson, who lives up by Nemaha, showed up at our campsite. When he found out we had portaged around the rock dam, Neil said, "You portaged? I can't believe you portaged. My wife always runs that dam in her kayak."

I think Neil's comment about his wife running the rock dams was an affront to the manhood of the old guys. We never portaged around another rock dam on the whole trip. There were a couple more just below Sac City that my old guy thought were really exiting. He said, "What a rush! That was wonderful." I thought maybe he was going to portage back up the river and do it again.

He never asked me what I thought. He just left me tied to the back of his kayak and expected me to swim behind his boat. It was alright and really kind of fun, but at least he could have asked me if I wanted to go over such a scary dam. People have died from those things. That moving water is pretty powerful.

There are a lot of Canada geese on this river. They are cousins to us ducks, but they aren't really too bright and they don't fly too well.

When we came upon them, most of those big birds would swim down the river a ways, then they started honking and making a terrible racket. Finally, they'd take off and fly on down the river a mile or two, only to repeat the whole process again.

Occasionally, we would approach a family – mom, dad, and several kids, i.e. goslings. Since the little ones couldn't fly and couldn't out-swim the kayak, these families had a smarter strategy. First, they tried to outrun us. When that failed the goose and the gander led the goslings up the shore line where they hid in the weeds until we drifted past. It seemed strange that my goose cousins would lose intelligence between their baby time and adulthood. In a day of my old guy paddling down the river the adults, who should be smarter, fly downstream a half mile a dozen times.

We saw a lot of great-blue herons and they aren't too smart either. They do the same thing. We passed several heron rookeries on the river. It seems so strange to see those long-legged cousins to a carnival stilt walker, standing on a limb or a nest way up in the top of a cottonwood tree. A baby heron must feel fear at learning to walk around a nest and branches a hundred feet above the river.

It's bad enough for us wood ducks to jump out of a nest in the forest and then follow our mom down a trail to a pond. Foxes, coyotes, and mink just love to catch baby ducks in the forest. I think its terrorism.

You would think, with all their practice, those Canada geese would be great flyers. They aren't. I watched a bunch take off from a sandbar today. First they were quiet and just craned their necks and looked upstream to see what kind of a creature was drifting toward them. Then they honked really loud for a minute or two to tell everyone in the world who was coming down the river. Then they ran down the sandbar and spread their huge wings to fly. Most of them jumped off the high bank and almost hit the water before they managed to catch enough air to fly on down the river. We wood ducks just make one quick leap off the water and we are flying. I really hate to say it, but I think those Canada geese are a little on the fat side.

The old guys got a bit excited the first day at paddling past a short cottonwood tree up in Sac County. There was a bald eagle sitting on a limb and there was a nest with baby eagles beside her in the tree. They were pretty excited about the deal, but they didn't notice that eagle watching me. She was thinking about what joy she would have tearing my flesh into tiny pieces and feeding it to those babies. I know she was thinking evil thoughts about this little wood duck.

We saw several bald eagles along the river. I remember one near Auburn in Calhoun County and another that was sitting in a tree overhanging the river. It was spectacular as it spread its huge wings and flew away. I'm sure I would have been as thrilled as the old guys if I could have stopped thinking about it eating little ducks.

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

I was a little scared this morning about an hour after we left Henderson Park. A beaver was sitting along the left bank. I'd never seen a beaver before. It was a light chocolate brown in color and almost as big as a chubby cocker spaniel. He had really big teeth and a triangular head with cute little round ears like a grizzly bear.

The old guy could tell I was frightened. "Don't worry," he said. "Beavers eat wood, not ducks."

Wait a minute," I told him. "I'm a decoy. I'm made of wood. That beaver will eat me as fast you eat an ice cream cone. Save me, Old Guy!"

"Don't worry so much, Woody," the old guy said. "You are nothing but a hollow plastic shell. Old fashion decoys were made of wood. You are just plastic stuffed with air."

That made me relax, a little, but I was glad when the beaver dove for the water and made a huge splash with his tail and we drifted on down the near bank-full river.

This river held a lot of water within its banks. It wouldn't have been bad if we had been riding in a big boat with an outboard motor, but that river water was pretty riled up. Sometimes when a big boil of water would come to the surface right beside his little blue kayak, I think it scared my old guy just a little. You can imagine how I felt. I'm just a little duck. At times I felt pretty lucky to be tied to his boat. Some of those boils of water and whirl pools might have sucked me in and spit me out in pieces. I was almost glad to have that tether jerk me out of some of that nasty water.

Today, after what seemed a long time of paddling the sky got dark and a few drops of rain speckled the river. My old guy stuffed his camera in his dry bag like he did every time we heard the roar of one of those rock dams. A huge roar of thunder echoed up the river and he pulled out his rain coat, removed his life jacket, and got himself ready for wet weather.

He was just in time too. Another big clap of thunder opened up the sky. The river filled with millions of miniature volcanoes. My old guy pulled his hood over his hat and tied it tight around his neck. The rain rolled off me like water off a duck's back.

He paddled hard for a while and then pulled under an overhanging tree where the water was just dripping instead of driving like a hurricane. We sat until the size of the volcanoes on the water surface got tiny and then we were paddling. I think he was a little worried about lightning which is something that usually doesn't trouble us ducks much since we sit so low to the water.

The next clap of thunder almost lifted me from the water and set me on the back deck of the kayak. My old guy ducked real low, like that was going to save him after the lightning flashed and the thunder roared from someplace between him and me.

After that we kept close to the trees on either side of the river. I think my old guy didn't want to be the highest thing around.

Soon the rain slowed to a heavy drizzle and I had my most frightening experience of the trip. Like a portrait, on the left bank of the river a coyote appeared. He stood watching us drift past on the swift current. His body was a little wet from the last shower but his thick fur almost shined in the mid-day light. Again, I was a little scared. He looked like an animal who would savor a little duck for lunch.

The situation would have been tolerable for me except for what happened next. We moved downstream out of his sight, and the coyote walked on down the river bank, paralleling our progress. He was staring. He was staring at me. And he was moving his tongue over his lips. The coyote was staring at me and licking his chops. He was coveting my body. The carnivore was trying to figure out a way to eat me for lunch.

If I had been able to fly, I'd have flown away to another part of the river right then. Luckily the coyote thought through the possibilities and gave up. He watched my old guy and me drift on down the river. I think he decided I was not worth the danger the old guy would cause him.

We took a break from paddling on Wednesday.

The next day was short, sunny, and pleasant. We ended at a huge, dangerous-looking dam at Adel. I was glad when he pulled over safely to a ramp on the left side of the river. Going over that dam would have been easy and deadly for my old guy and his kayak.

Our last day was rainy, so after my old guy paddled his little blue kayak all morning in the rain, we decided to finish the trip a day early. The sun came out and we dried out. He was glad for his nylon shorts that dried pretty fast. The old guys were plenty pleased to see live clams along several of the sandbars here and on other beaches on up the river. They say clams are an indicator species and can give a hint about the health of a river.

After a pleasant afternoon with lots of deep blue sky and beautiful puffy white clouds we finished another thirty miles of paddling which meant we had covered about one hundred seventy-five miles of the Raccoon River in seven days on the water.

My old guy held up pretty well. He was glad to be done and felt some accomplishment at paddling the length of the Raccoon River for the second time. The first time took him about five years.

I ended up with a pint of water inside me. I hope he gets me fixed soon. I'd hate it if he decided to retire me and take that Mallard from the shelf in the garage and leave me home the next time he floats a river.

Woody, the Wood Duck

Assisted by Jim Riggs

Central Iowa Paddlers DUES: \$10 per year

Includes emails, Newsletters ...

And Fellowship!

Membership, Dues, Emails for CIP list

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