





Adirondack Paddle Party

Canoe Classic Keeps Them Coming Back for More

By Brian McDonnell

Each September, guideboats, kayaks and canoes of every description descend on the tiny hamlet of Old Forge the weekend after Labor Day for a paddle sport extravaganza. The Adirondack Canoe Classic, “The 90-Miler,” attracts a field of 250 boats and nearly 500 people. These paddlers ply the waters and portages of the original highways of the Adirondacks—the chain of lakes, rivers and ponds connecting communities from Old Forge to Inlet to Raquette Lake and Blue Mountain Lake, from Long Lake to Tupper Lake, and from Fish Creek to the finish line in the village of Saranac Lake.

Over three days, paddlers test their competitive spirit, share in the camaraderie of the race, and enjoy the splendor of Adirondack autumn scenery from their vessels. As they churn through the center of the Adirondack Park, they take part in an event like no other.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has played an integral role in the Adirondack Canoe Classic since designating it as an official New York State Forest Preserve Centennial Event in 1985. The men and women of DEC have provided safety and

communications coordination on the water, and offered free camping to participants and their pit crews at the Lake Eaton and Fish Creek campgrounds for years.

Numerous communities are woven into the fabric of what makes the 90-Miler a very special happening and more than just a race. It has become a part of the annual calendar of numerous paddlers, spectators and local business owners.

Every boat has a story. Two people, Ray Morris of Glens Falls and Holly Crouch of Sherburne, have paddled in every single event. Ray has paddled with friends, his children, and now even his grandchildren. Holly has paddled in tandem, solo and voyageur canoes. Boat numbers tell stories. There is boat #50 reserved for Dan and Natalie Tickner, because they celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary while paddling the 90-Miler. There is boat #20 reserved for one of the registrants earning the coveted gold canoe award commemorating completion of 20 years of 90-Miler participation.

All of these participants exemplify the original intent of the organizers of the first Adirondack Canoe



Jim Clayton

Classic in 1983—to provide paddlers an opportunity to enjoy the wonder of the Adirondack Park, to share the adventure with a community of other paddlers, and to provide a positively memorable experience long after the aches, pains and blisters go away.

The Adirondack Canoe Classic has stayed true to its roots. The emphasis is on participation over competition, though friendly rivalries abound. More than 75 of the 250 registered boats now participate in the Open Touring Class (OTC). The OTC was designed for people who wanted to experience the 90-Miler, but were not interested in officially competing for a plaque.

There has been a significant increase in the number of big boats being registered for the event. In 2007 there were 25 four-person teams paddling in 20-23 foot long Kevlar canoes made by Wenonah, and eight voyageur canoes powered by six to eight paddlers. The larger boats generally allow for the physical exertion to be distributed over more team members, reducing time on the water and allowing for greater participation in off-water activities (at least that is the theory expounded by some big boat proponents).

In 2007 the youngest participant was 10 and the elder statesman was in his 80s! Parents paddle with their children, grandparents bond with grandchildren, siblings paddle together and all age groups are welcome. The veterans' classes (for those over 60 years of age) are some of the most competitive groups in the racing categories.

The Adirondack Canoe Classic celebrates a historical mode of transportation: human-powered boats. It celebrates the concept of "community"—the paddlers, volunteers and followers, the people in the towns and villages connected by the waterways, and the businesses supported by the people coming to explore the waterways. It celebrates personal challenge and the accomplishment of a worthy, physically strenuous goal. It celebrates the Forever Wild grandeur of the Adirondacks in full fall foliage.

The celebration begins again in Old Forge, Thursday, Sept. 4, 2008. Consider this your invitation!

Brian McDonnell operates MAC'S Canoe Livery in Lake Clear with his lovely wife Grace. He spends most of his time exploring the outdoors with family and friends.

Connect to Nature

The Adirondack Canoe Classic is organized by the Adirondack Watershed Alliance with the assistance of DEC, The Central Adirondack Association, and numerous sponsors, businesses and volunteers along the way. Registration for the 2008 Canoe Classic closed on July 25. For details about

volunteering opportunities and great spots to watch this year's competition, please visit www.macscanoe.com Registration for next year's 90-Miler begins in June 2009. If you're interested, be sure to register early!