

CAMARADERIE & CANOES



PHOTOS BY LAKESHIA KNARR/THE EXPRESS

Sojourners relax after a day's paddle. Pictured, from left, are Steve Everason of Lewisburg; Rosemarie Shover of Tyrone; Denny Pretasser of Indiana, Pa.; Chip Marth of Carlisle; Barb Biser of Hagerstown, Md. and John Sherk of Mechanicsburg.

Sojourn paddlers travel Susquehanna River from Renovo to Jersey Shore

By **LAKESHIA KNARR**
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LOCKPORT — Dozens of kayakers and canoeists have taken to the river this week to enjoy perhaps the best asset our community has to offer — the river and the great outdoors.

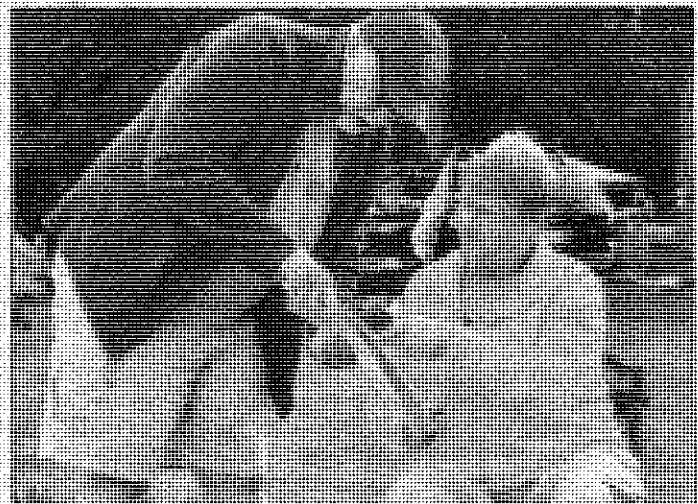
Surrounded by the beauty of wilderness, yet nestled along our town, the river has become a water trail for

sojourners traveling from Renovo to Jersey Shore this week.

The trip, organized by the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (SGP), began Thursday morning and will continue through Sunday morning.

These group-oriented journeys emphasize cultural

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Sojourner Brian Swisher of Reading shows fellow sojourner Barb Biser of Hagerstown, Md. the map and plans for today's journey to Jersey Shore.

Sojourn paddlers travel West Branch

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and environmental education, while enabling paddlers to share experiences and build camaraderie while enjoying the river and all it has to offer.

"We are recreational paddlers, here to enjoy the scenery and learning along the way," said SGP Program Coordinator Erin Pierce, who has been working with the program for the past three years. "It's a very inclusive group and it's easy for people to join in."

With over 70 people participating in different parts of the sojourn, and some traveling hours to join the event, it becomes evident just how lucky we are to live in such a pristine area surrounded by unfolding green hills.

Coordinators began planning the trip in December, Pierce said. She emphasized the importance of partnerships with organizations like DCNR, Trout Unlimited and the communities they pass through.

The paddlers camp out in host communities along their journey.

"It's nice when towns really just open their arms to us and realize this is really something special," said Pierce. "We try to incorporate as many local, family businesses as we can along the way."

Paddlers left Renovo around 10 a.m. Thursday, stopped off near Hyner for lunch and an educational presentation by a geologist, before they made their way to the new Baker Run Canoe access for their first night of camping.

The Baker Run river access is the newest access on the West Branch, explained Pierce, and it was perfect for the event.

After setting off yesterday morning, the paddlers made their way down to the Bald Eagle Boy's Camp for lunch and saw another presentation about water quality by representatives of Trout Unlimited.

Yesterday afternoon they docked at Riverview Park for the night.

Woodward Township Supervisor Marie Selfe greeted the sojourners as they docked at



LAKESHIA KNARR/THE EXPRESS
Sojourners, from left, Brian Swisher of Reading; Jim Wellington of Corning, N.Y.; Chip Marth of Carlisle; Denny Preisser of Indiana, Pa.; John Shenk of Mechanicsburg and David Biser of Hagerstown, Md. hold up Susquehanna Greenway Partnership Program Coordinator Erin Pierce at the group's campsite at Riverview Park.

Riverview Park.

The campers ate dinner at the Dunnstown Fire Hall with participants of the US Canoe Association National Canoe and Kayak Championships, who are also taking advantage of the river this week.

"Lock Haven, in my opinion, is a really really good river-town," Pierce said.

The Rivertown program of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership emphasizes the connection between the community and the river.

"The water has been amazing this year," she said.

"The epitome of the unspoiled beauty was this (Friday) morning waking up at Baker Run and you felt cocooned in the beautiful low clouds and you just see a great blue heron fly overhead," Pierce said of the valley. "That was, to me, an amazing, unspoiled moment of beauty."

"It's been great to see the changes... We came from Renovo — you feel like you're very remote — and you're tucking and turning along the way... Then we heard church bells and it was such a nice welcome into town."

Although the trip is not yet

over, Pierce had one definitive statement about her travels through our valley.

"This has been my favorite sojourn to date," she said. "First off, the weather has been unbeatable. All of our host communities have been amazing and our paddlers have had a lot of fun."

And other paddlers agreed. "It's been really impressive seeing the river and the valley," said sojourner Denny Preisser of Indiana, Pa. "I grew up north of here, and I never knew the Pa. wilds was so nice."

"I have gone on a couple of other sojourns, but this has been my favorite," he added.

"It's very quiet and peaceful. It's the whole world when you're out there," said Sandy Rinker of Springville, Pa. "The mountains just seem so big here compared to northeastern Pennsylvania."

"A lot of scars that were left from mining, lumbering and other excavations are now healing," Chairman of the SGP board Jerry Walls said of the landscape. "This area is just spectacular... really beautiful. It's unbroken forested landscape, so green and so lush."

Even those who have never

experienced a sojourn spoke highly of the event.

"You couldn't ask for a better trip," said first-time sojourner Steve Everson of Lewisburg. "It was beautiful coming down the river and seeing all the trees alongside of you."

Tiffany Cragle of Sunbury, also a first-time sojourner, bought her own kayak just one week ago. She saw a sojourn video online and was so intrigued that she did some research to find one in Pennsylvania.

"I loved the whole thing," Cragle said. "Kayaking, socializing, trying new things and learning. It's been amazing."

This morning they will be finishing off their paddling experience, by continuing down the Susquehanna toward their final destination.

They plan to tour the Woolrich Inc. facilities this afternoon and tonight they will camp at the Jersey Shore Pool.

"We've done something we've never done before," she said. "We're doing a bike portion."

Sunday, after all the camping, kayaking and canoeing is finished, participants will travel up

through Pine Creek to ride the Rails to Trails back down into Jersey Shore.

"We're really excited about the Rails to Trails part," Pierce said. "We're capitalizing on the river ... and connecting bike paths and towns to the river."

Along the way, they will stop for lunch at the Waterville Tavern.

When all is said and done, the participants will have paddled 43 miles of the river together and biked 20 miles on Rails to Trails.

To help ease possible complications along the way, the program includes river guides who help with safety issues, navigation and keeping the group together. Canoe Susquehanna, a private outfitter, provides a bus and trailers so that camping equipment travels by road to the sojourners' next destination, making the ride along the river easier for paddlers.

Canoe Susquehanna also provides a shuttle bus to take the large group to other destinations during their overnight stops.

Sojourns along the Susquehanna occur each year, Pierce said. "We work down in sections, but we've done the whole river in the last 10 years."

Support and sponsors for the sojourn include Bonner Sports & RV, Canoe Susquehanna, Clinton County CleanScapes, Renovo and its Pennsylvania State Flaming Foliage Park, Go Get Outdoors PA, Jersey Shore Borough, the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, National Get Outdoors Day, the Pennsylvania Association of Canoeing & Kayaking, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, state Department of Environmental Protection, state Bureau of Forestry, Trail Blazer Adventures, Trout Unlimited, Woodward Township and Woolrich Inc. Lock Haven and Jersey Shore YMCAs offered showering facilities to the group.

More information about the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership and sojourn programs can be found at <http://www.susquehannagreenway.org/>.