

THE OUTDOORS PAGE



A recreational kayaker paddles the hard-to-reach headwaters of Pymatuning Creek along the Ashtabula County/Trumbull County line in northeast Ohio. PHOTO/MIKE MAINHART



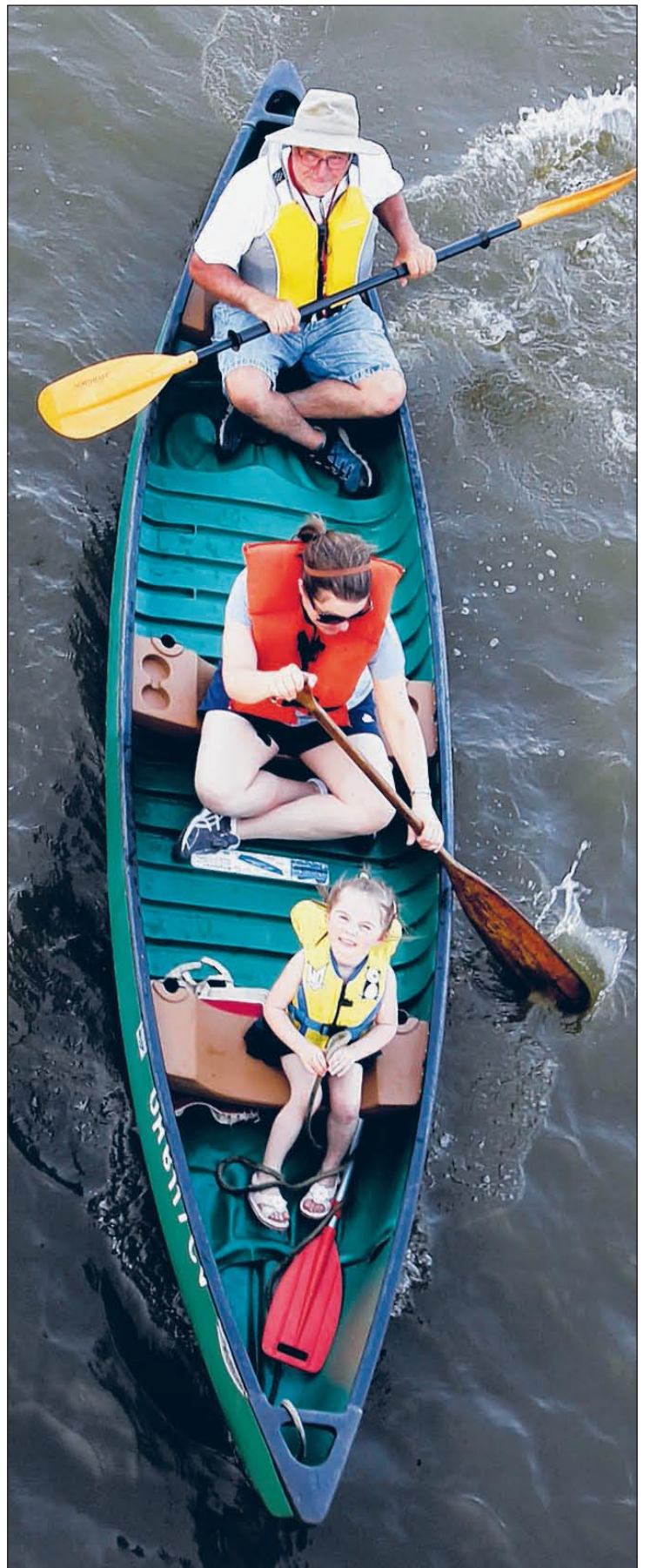
THE BLADE/LORI KING

Scott Kolling totes a lightweight kayak down to Howard Pinkley landing on the Ottawa River.



THE BLADE/LORI KING

Curtis Osmun zips his life vest prior to paddling.



THE BLADE/LORI KING

Dave Zobler, president of Northwest Ohio River Runners, handles the stern of the canoe with his daughter, Andrea Zimmerman, center, and granddaughter, Zoe, 3, in bow.

AFLOAT IN SUMMER FUN

By STEVE POLLICK and JEFF BASTING

Down deep, the growing popularity of hand-powered watercraft such as kayaks and canoes may have something to do with a need to reconnect with the waterside of nature.

On the other hand, it could be nothing more complex than the fact that they are fun to use, relatively inexpensive, durable, and usable on many types of water where powerboats just are not appropriate or able to navigate.

In any case, outdoor recreation has seen a boom in paddlesports in recent years. The registration of privately owned canoes and kayaks in Ohio, for example, has more than doubled since 2000, from 44,198 to 89,859 last year.

"We can say pretty easily that one in five boats registered in Ohio is a canoe or kayak," said John Wisse, a spokesman for the Ohio Division of Watercraft. Commercial liveries account for another 6,416 hand or foot-powered watercraft, which include paddleboats. And certain locales, such as the Maumee River in downtown Toledo, are home to avid rowing-shell clubs.

"Paddlesports offer a very affordable way to get out and enjoy boating recreation at very low cost," said Mr. Wisse. "Canoes and kayaks provide unique boating experiences that are readily identified as 'quiet sports' and join other similar types of human-powered recreation such as walking, hiking, and bicycling."

The molded plastic kayak is the most visible among the new fleets of hand-powered watercraft. Most are about 10 to 14 feet in length for a one-person craft, cost roughly \$200 to \$600, and require next to no maintenance. At roughly 40 to 80 pounds, they are light and easy to handle from cartop to creek, and brightly colored so they stand out playfully; they contrast starkly to the dependable but drab grays of the old standard, a 15-foot or 17-foot aluminum canoe.

Modern plastic canoes of 14 to 16 feet are slightly heavier than one-person kayaks, but carry two or even three persons easily and cost roughly \$400 and up. All these handy craft take up little storage space, and being muscle-powered, fuel costs are not an issue. A three-year registration for a canoe and kayak is just \$20 to \$25.

"Recreational paddling has become a 'gateway' activity, meaning that it readily leads to other related activities such as hiking, walking, geocaching, bird watching and other forms of human-powered recreation," Mr. Wisse said. "Recent research, for example, has shown that paddlesports are attracting greater numbers of participants

among those who are walking and cycling.

"What this means from a local tourism perspective and land use planning focus is that areas collectively featuring walkways, bikeways, and paddling trails in close proximity to one another are fast becoming destinations for growing numbers of silent sports enthusiasts."

In addition to simply paddling for fun, fishermen have been drawn to canoes and kayaks in growing numbers to angle in otherwise hard-to-reach waters.

Watercraft's Mr. Wisse makes another key point: "Novice and beginner level paddlers are strongly encouraged to first complete a paddlesports hands-on skills class before going out on the water to ensure their safe enjoyment of the activity. Properly wearing an approved life jacket or inflatable vest anytime while out on the water also helps ensure boater safety."

Those interested in taking a paddling skills class or a boating safety education class can visit online at the division of watercraft Web site at ohiodnr.com, call the division toll-free (in Ohio only) at 1-877-4BOATER, or speak with a state watercraft officer.

The division of watercraft office serving the greater Toledo area is located at Maumee Bay State Park, 419-836-6003.

A one-stop introduction to canoeing and kayaking in the Toledo area also is available by contacting the Northwest Ohio River Runners, which is based on the Ottawa River in Point Place. River Runners is a family-style canoe, kayak, and rowing-shell organization established to promote hand-powered water sports.

A year old, the club now has 50 members and welcomes more. River Runners meet the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at Friendship Park Community Center on 131st Street in Toledo. Every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. in summer, weather permitting, the group sponsors a paddling night from Howard Pinkley Landing, 2300 Shoreland Ave., in Riviera Park along the Ottawa River, using the broad flat stretch of the restored river between the Suder Avenue and Summit Street bridges.

River Runners also has navigated Swan Creek and Halfway Creek on the Michigan side. Emphasis is on family involvement. The club's Web site, NWORR.org, among other things features a wealth of information on the club, instructions, safety, and links to other clubs and canoe liveries.

Another active club is the Northwest Ohio Canoe and Kayak Club at Defiance. Contact president Vernon Morehead, 419-782-9780, or Herb Delventhal, 419-784-3953.

Contact Steve Pollick at spollick@theblade.com or 419-724-6068.



PHOTO/MIKE MAINHART

Kayaker Dot Mainhart shoots a small rapid of the wild and scenic Little Beaver Creek in eastern Ohio.

Top 10 things to have while paddling:

- 1. Personal flotation device:** An absolute requirement for all paddlers.
- 2. Helmet or hat:** Whitewater: use approved helmet. Other paddlers: a hat with a brim for sun protection in hot weather and to retain heat in cooler weather.
- 3. Proper footwear:** Neoprene socks and booties for cold water and old tennis shoes, water shoes, or closed toed sandals for warm weather conditions.
- 4. Whistle:** Attach a whistle to your flotation device and use in case of trouble.
- 5. Water and snack:** Water will prevent you from dehydrating in the sun, a snack will keep you from becoming light-headed from hunger.
- 6. Dry bag:** A dry bag securely fastened to the boat with identification, maps, first aid kit, cell phone, change of clothes, and towel.
- 7. Rope bag:** A rope can be a rescue device to throw to a swimmer or to tow another boat.
- 8. Knife:** A paddler's knife designed to clip to your flotation device.
- 9. First aid kit:** You can make your own kit or buy one. It should be stored in a dry bag.
- 10. Sun protection:** Sunscreen, lip balm, and sunglasses are a necessity on the water.

SOURCE: PADDLING.ABOUT.COM



Scan this QR code with your smartphone to go to NWORR.org for more detailed information.

The above list does not include clothing one should wear as this varies with weather conditions, type of paddling, and season. Items might include windbreaker, swim suit, wet suit, and gloves.

To view photo gallery of Northwest Ohio River Runners go to:

toledoBlade.com