

Canoe trip along the Cuyahoga opens eyes to hidden treasure

The Cuyahoga River is like a hidden world. It snakes along in back pastures and woodlands, silently working its way south to Kent. In the section that the river travels through Portage County, it is a true gem. I love the chance to get outside and do a little canoeing on the river. Let me share with you what it's like out there.

The sun's first rays were peeking through the thick forest canopy. There were a thousand shafts of light gobbling the smoky fog drifting about on the surface of the river like an old feather comforter. I slid my boat into the water at Winchell Road in Hiram Rapids and let myself drift silently into the channel. I felt guilty for any noise that I made to disturb this early morning sanctuary. I dipped my paddle into the water and gave the canoe a gentle correction and quickly lined up with the lazy current.

The birds were singing their squawks and choruses reminding me of Sunday morning when everyone does their best to sing the hymns — some like angels, some like bullfrogs. Occasionally a kingfisher, with his crest and characteristic bobbing flight, would swoop over head on its way to a new vantage point from which to observe the water.

Great blue herons would sometimes take flight in front of me, their gawky appendages making it look impossible for them to become airborne. Just as often they would stand next to the bank and quietly regard me with a regal stare. I would just try to slip silently past.

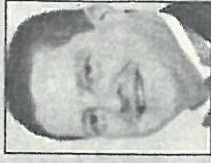
Around me, game trails came down to the water. In some places they were crossing points while at others they were meant for access to the water. Holes and burrows along the banks indicated there were other residents with waterfront views here, too.

Thinking back through time, I recognized that the Cuyahoga was once the highway into the region. I could have put hundreds of pounds in my canoe, and more quickly than I could ever hope to walk it, be on my way down the stream.

GREEN

PORTAGE

Kurt Ruehr



I paddled for over an hour before I saw houses, my paddle strokes beating out a slow but steady rhythm to the world around me. It is incredible how remote it feels to be on the river here. Once, when on the river with my two oldest sons, a bald eagle swooped down just feet over our heads as he went cruising downstream. It was a thrill I will never forget.

I am excited that the Portage Park District is putting in a new access to the river just above Lake Rockwell that will allow a paddler to put in in Geauga County and travel almost the full distance to Kent. I encourage you to get out there and paddle the river. There are two lively services in the county that rent equipment if you lack your own.

To maintain these kinds of opportunities to enjoy nature that many of us value, the Portage Park District Foundation is launching its second annual Friends Campaign. I hope you will join me in support of this effort. Together we can protect and enjoy our natural resources for generations to come.

To contribute to the Friends of the Park Campaign, mail your check to the Portage Park District Foundation (PPDF), 705 Oakwood St., #G4, Ravenna, OH 44266, or go to the website at www.portageparkdistrict.org.

Kurt Ruehr is a father of four, works as a financial adviser for MetLife Resources, and is president of the Portage Park District Foundation. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.

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