

*First Community Paddle A Success*

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by: John Mann

By pedal, paddle, and oar, participants in the inaugural Echo Hill Outdoor School Community Paddle explored the Chester River last Saturday morning. Their craft were as varied as the people themselves. Doug & Mikki Smith of Worton, MD brought a pair of water bikes (vessels powered by bicycles floating on top of a pair of pontoons), which they generously shared with other curious paddlers. Matt Gerstung, a New Orleans' transplant now living in Chestertown, rowed the wooden dory he built and salvaged from the waters of Hurricane Katrina. For those looking to take advantage of the day's steady breeze, Sassafra Sailing Excursions' Wendy Costa offered lessons on her sailing kayaks. More traditional craft were available for rental including Echo Hill Outdoor School's canoes and a number of kayaks provided by Bill Mylett of Chester River Outfitters.

Outdoor School naturalists led two nature tours for beginner and advanced paddlers. The beginners explored the marshes of Hambleton Creek, seined in the shallow waters, and tried to spot fossils embedded in sheer bluffs. The advanced group journeyed down to Broad Creek where they watched a startled deer emerge from a clump of phragmites and sprint along the beach for several hundred yards before eventually disappearing into a cornfield. Both groups returned to Rolph's Wharf Marina to cheer on competitors in the Great Water Race, which was won by the Outdoor School's own Nathan Ferster.

After working up an appetite on the River, paddlers enjoyed a dinner served in typical Echo Hill Outdoor School fashion; with a discussion about S.L.O.P. (stuff left on plate) and a sing-along to wrap things up.

Kim Righi, Business Manager for the Outdoor School and coordinator for the Community Paddle deemed the event a success. "We were thrilled to have over 40 members of the community join us for a gorgeous day on the river. Thanks to their enthusiasm and the generous support of PNC Bank, Chesapeake Benefits Services, and LaMotte Company we were able to raise funds that will directly contribute to Maryland Public School students' continued education at Echo Hill Outdoor School. We're already discussing plans for next year's Community Paddle to be held around the same time next year."

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