

Practice, Practice, Practice

Last year was my sixth year to participate in the Explorer/Venturer White River Canoe Race. Many things have changed over those years, from the people participating in the race to the race course itself. At the same time, some things have never changed; competition has always been fierce, participation has steadily increased, and the water has always been freezing cold. Born and raised in Louisiana, my perspective of the race is much different than that of say a person from Arkansas; differences in geology, climate, and culture make this event a pleasant change from Louisiana for the week of the race. Over my six years, this race has given me many great memories that will never be forgotten.

Looking back to my first year as an Explorer, there is one thing that really sticks out: the anticipation of a trip the older members referred to as “Arkansas.” Being from Louisiana, we have never called the event the “White River Canoe Race,” instead, we have always referred to the race as just “Arkansas.” I’d hear story after story about how the water was so cold and clear, to stories about how we’d be camping for eight days straight and even something about a talent show. In retrospect, none of these stories did the race its justice.

As we have attended numerous different races, I’ve heard paddlers say things like, “My favorite part of the race is the beginning and the end.” I agree, that is, if I’m referring to my experiences at other canoe races. The White River Canoe Race is unique in that the conditions are ideal for canoeing; the current is swift (at least on the first day of the race), the air is cool, and the sights are amazing. Growing up in Louisiana, these paddling conditions are unheard of. In Louisiana, the water is moving...that is moving slowly, the air is definitely not cool, and the sights are nowhere near as spectacular as the Ozark Mountains. Besides the great paddling conditions, the race has always brought in great competition.

Each year, my team has a motivational quote. One year, our quote was “He is best who trains under the severest conditions.” Even before that year, our universally understood quote was “Practice, practice, practice.” Rain or shine, we have always practiced five days a week. All of this hard work is done in preparation for the trip to Arkansas. Although we have other races throughout the summer and even have our own 110-mile marathon race in Louisiana, nothing has ever tested our skills learned in practice better than the White River Canoe Race. Paddlers from around the country, who have also been training all summer, come to the race to give you a run for your money. While registering canoes the evening before the race, teams scope each other out, trying to figure out the winner before the race even starts. The reality is that the winner is undecided until the race is over. Penalties, damaged canoes, and flipped canoes all affect the outcome of the race and can even determine the winner of the race. After the race is over, and the trophies are handed out, it’s back to Louisiana to show our home towns what we have accomplished. Year after year, I have competed in this marathon and it has never grown old; every year has its ups and downs that make it unique from any other year. As I grow older, I have come to realize how much this race means to me.

As a college student in the field of Engineering, there is much pressure to get a summer internship to better the chances of getting a desirable job later. This past summer, I had an offer to work a summer internship in Austin, Texas. This decision was one of the hardest I’ve made in my life; I could either give up my canoeing team and take the internship, or stay at home and paddle another summer. After talking with family and friends, I came to my final verdict; I was going to paddle and make the trip to Arkansas again. I could just have easily taken the internship and worked all summer to improve my resume, but something told me that being there for my team was more important to my life at the time. We have our whole lives to work; experiences such as the White River Canoe Race are once in a lifetime chances to compete and have a

tremendous amount of fun at the same time. In my six years as a member of Bogalusa Explorer Post 313, "Arkansas" has never failed to be a great event with many people to meet, sights to see, and paddlers to race. I choose to live it while it lasts.