A DAY ON THE NIPPERSINK

I wanted to share this real life interesting tale that luckily ended with nearly everyone wet and surprised.

I went paddling on the Nippersink yesterday (7/25/10) afternoon as part of an impromptu paddle with people I have never met before. I checked the USGS water gauge information on line and the figure was 6.25 feet. Unsure of what our usual flow rate is in the spring when we typically paddle I gathered some local knowledge. Typically between 4-5 feet is a good flow for the Nippersink. Anything above 5 feet can be trouble. It was obvious that we were well above that. Before putting in I reviewed our route with the host. Since they had their own boats and were local I was under the impression they may have some knowledge of what they were doing and where we were going. 11 people total in 5 canoes and 1 kayak(me).

First stop was at a package goods store for beer and soda. I passed on the alcohol and hoped this would not become a drunken river flotilla typically seen on the Wisconsin river.Personally I save the alcohol after the paddle! At the put in-Pioneer Park, some women were taking out. I asked them their general impressions of their paddle-high water, fast current. I was paddling solo in my 10ft Necky Manitou. I would be the most maneuverable boat and the lowest on the water.The canoes were the first in the water and not visible from my perspective. No one waited for me which in retrospect I thought was a little rude but that automatically assigned me as the sweep. The women that had taken out earlier observed my preparations(pfd, spare paddle, paddle float, coaming sling) and commented; they asked me if I was the "guide".

I was the only person in the party wearing a pfd.

Last launch-easy. Pioneer park has a lovely hard surface mat making getting in and out easy. Passing under the Pioneer street bridge. No more then 3 minutes into the afternoon paddle and I came across the scene of four canoes of the gracious host and planner in the water, gear floating away in the swift current-no dump bags to contain any of the gear. Luckily no one was in serious trouble-just surprised and soaked. I was on task-my haul: 6 floatation devices of various configuration, 1 large can of bug spray, a shoe, a flip flop, sunblock, and a paddle. The roto-molded canoe with the youngest members of our party managed to get back into the boat but the excess water made it too difficult for them to handle. Dad decided to float/swim in the middle of the river to gather gear caught in strainers and to catch up with his kids. They were reunited a short time later and I was able to unload my haul of rescued gear from my boat into their canoe.

I paddled on hoping to catch up with the one other canoe with an experienced paddler on board. I found an eddy and made some phone calls. Plan B. Our planned destination was a private home on Lake Pistakee. Since this was my first time paddling with this group I had no idea what this residence looked like from the water. I called the party ahead of me and told them to look for me on the water. I pressed on and eventually caught up with them on the river. There were a few gnarly areas to deal with-fast currents requiring good boat control to deal with the combination of swift currents and avoiding/maneuvering through strainers. I got hung up in one bush and have a lot of leaf debris in my cockpit and some scratches on my arms after that

encounter. The barbed wire fencing in two areas along this route were under water so I floated over that.

A couple of gentlemen in kayaks were surfing on a wave about 7 ft in length-I called it the Nipper Zipper. The first time I ever surfed with my shorty boat. The men commented that surfing is a true exercise in good boat control. They gave me a few quick pointers and I tried it out. AWESOME experience! During this somewhat quieter stretch I found a full can of unopened beer- Miller High Life-the beer of champions-or not!

Four hours later our merry 2 boat group eventually completed paddling the stretch of the Nippersink. Due to high power boat traffic to get to Lake Pistakee we opted to take out at a boat dock near the hwy 12 bridge. Our ride arrived and we were returned to our cars. Gear was unloaded and loaded. I said my good-byes and left for home.
In retrospect I was grateful that the inexperienced paddlers dumped as early as they did (they struggled to get their boats back to the put in and called it a day). Paddling a stretch of water during flood is no small matter-I noticed this morning that serval local area rivers are closed due to high water. Luckily no one was seriously hurt and the bulk of the gear was recovered.
I took courses on boat handling, reading the water and took all precautions by wearing and having safety gear on board. Some areas really tested my skills and today I am a stronger paddler albeit a bit of a sore paddler today.

Be cautious. Get good information. Know your abilities. (Don't impair your abilities). Be prepared.
Overall I had a very enjoyable paddle. I rewarded my self with a steak and margarita dinner.

Happy Paddling!

Lara ~~~V~~~