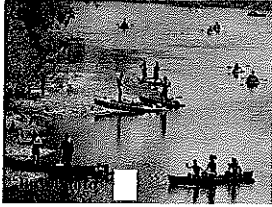


Canoeing and kayaking makes splash on Harpeth River

Mary Hance, mscheap@tennessean.com 5:49 p.m. CDT May 18, 2016



(Photo: Mark Zaleski / For The Tennessean)

Pick any warm, sunny weekend day, and you are sure to suffer through snarled traffic along Highway 70 where three longstanding canoe and kayak outfitters are located. [Fullscreen](#)

Once you get to the Harpeth River, you may find the access to Harpeth River State Park water fun a float down this winding, slow-moving, rocky-bottomed river.

The popularity of this Class 1 river comes with good reason — a trip down the Harpeth is a beautiful, affordable and relaxing way to spend a day with family or friends.

They don't call it a "scenic river" for nothing!

"It fills up," said Gary Patterson, head ranger for the Harpeth River State Park, who manages 12 satellite parks along 40 miles of the Harpeth River.

Patterson believes a day on the river is a very manageable outing for almost anyone (experienced or otherwise), which leads to the crowds.

Plus, he said, there is "the availability of cheap kayaks — you can buy a kayak at Wal-Mart for \$150 these days, the kayak industry has really changed, and there are a lot of good places to rent boats. Outfitters have more and better boats," he said.

The recession's "staycation" craze has also fueled the popularity of local river recreation, Patterson said. Many locals opted for day adventures and hometown vacations, like river trips, in lieu of more expensive overnight vacations such as beach trips.

"They saw that they could come out here and spend the day and have a really good time and then go home and sleep in their own bed," the ranger said.



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Price is reasonable

Renting a canoe runs \$36-\$40 for a few hours, all day or even overnight. An outing with a friend could be split to make it a good value for each of you. (One-person kayaks are more expensive at around \$25 or \$30 each.)

Either way, you can pack a nice picnic or snacks, and you are all set for a fun day trip. Almost any of the excursions can take as long as you want, if you stop to wade, picnic, skip rocks, take pictures or just enjoy the meandering river.

Access is better than ever

Patterson said the 2010 flood wreaked havoc on all of his park's river access points. Since then, the state parks department has repaired the damage and made "the existing sites more user-friendly" by adding steps, parking lots and better roadways and, in some cases, picnic tables and grills.

"The flood washed us off the map," Patterson said. "We had to rebuild almost everything."

Now as the spring boating season cranks up, there is more and better access for outfitters and private boaters.

The three outfitters who make the Harpeth their home base have all been in business for decades, and they say the river traffic (as well as the automobile traffic on Highway 70) is growing every year.

Pat Hutcherson, owner of Foggy Bottom Canoe and Kayak Rentals, started her family company with six canoes in 1987 and now has 150 canoes and 120 kayaks — which are almost always booked on a pretty weekend.

"We used to haul people back and forth in a pickup truck. And now, of course, we have vans," she said. "I think a lot of (the increase in business) is that Nashville is growing and the Harpeth River is so close to Nashville. People want to get out and try it. It is a madhouse on the weekends."

Even more of a pioneer for Harpeth canoeing is Danny Spear, who founded Tip-A-Canoe and started making canoes in 1972. He got into rentals only when people asked if they could rent his products. Spear attributed the early popularity to the movie "Deliverance," with the movie's rollicking river canoe scenes, saying "that's what started canoeing!"

These days, Tip-A-Canoe, now owned and operated by Spear's son David, has more than 300 boats (canoes and kayaks).

"You ought to come out there and see," Danny Spear said. "The traffic is unbelievable."

"If you are coming on the weekend, you need a reservation," said James Edwards at Music City Canoe. "Weekdays, walk-ins are fine, but weekends between Memorial Day and back to school, a reservation absolutely."

We are so fortunate to have the easily accessible Harpeth River in our backyard. Get out and see how it can float your boat. Stay cheap!

Reach Ms. Cheap at 615-259-8282. Follow her on Facebook at facebook.com/mscheap (<http://facebook.com/mscheap>), at [Tennessean.com/mscheap](http://tennessean.com/mscheap) (<http://tennessean.com/mscheap>) and on Twitter @Ms_Cheap, and catch her every Thursday at 11 a.m. on WTVF-Channel 5's "Talk of the Town."

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Harpeth River State Park ranger Gary Patterson says the river is busier than ever with canoers and kayakers. (Photo: Mary Hance / The Tennessean)

About Harpeth River State Park

Harpeth River State Park is what is known as a "linear park" and consists of 12 satellite parks perched along bits and pieces of land along 40 miles of the Harpeth River in Davidson and Cheatham counties. The Harpeth is a Class 1 river and nine of the 12 parks have river access. In a sense, the river is the park, with scattered bits of satellite park land that range in size from 1 acre to more than 100 acres.

In the early days, this park was managed out of Montgomery Bell State Park in Dickson County, but for the past 10 years or so, it has been its own park. Its most well-known satellite is The Narrows of the Harpeth, a popular destination for hikers as well as boaters. The Narrows is particularly attractive for kayakers and canoers since it makes a loop and they can put in and take out their boats from the same parking lot. The steep Bluff Overlook Trail hike to the top, with a panoramic view of the river and valley, is among the most spectacularly beautiful hikes in Middle Tennessee.

"Most people come to kayak and for the recreation," Patterson said. "But this is a very historically significant park, too. There are three sites on the National Historic Register," he said, including the tunnel at the Narrows, which was hand-blasted by Montgomery Bell's slaves in 1818 and is one of the oldest man-made tunnels, the 1862 Newsom's Mill (grist mill) riverfront ruins and Mound Bottom, a large Mississippian Period Indian Mound complex along the river.

There is also Hidden Lake, off McCrory Lane, which is a "naturalist's paradise" with five trails, majestic bluffs, wildflowers and lots of wildlife.

Annual attendance at Harpeth River State Park is more than 500,000. In addition to more than five miles of trails, the river recreation and view, there is great fishing for smallmouth bass, catfish, bream and crappie.

There are no restrooms or drinking water in this state park.

Where to rent

The Outfitters on Highway 70 in Kingston Springs: There are three Harpeth River outfitters on Highway 70, less than 30 minutes from downtown Nashville. Customers park at the outfitters' lots and get transported with their boat(s) to a jumping-off point. Then at the end of their river run, depending on their route, they either get picked up or make a short walk back to the base. All of the outfitters provide paddles and life vests.

Foggy Bottom canoe and kayak rentals, www.foggybottomcanoe.com (<http://www.foggybottomcanoe.com>), 615-952-4062. Canoe rentals are \$36-\$40 and trips range from a 1½-mile "kid" trip to an 11-mile all-day river trip. Kayak rentals are \$29 plus tax per boat.

Tip-A-Canoe canoe and kayak rentals, www.tip-a-canoe.com (<http://www.tip-a-canoe.com>) or 1-800-550-5810. Canoe rentals are \$39.99, for any length trip, from a one-hour kids float to an all-day and overnight canoe trip. Kayaks rent for \$25 for any length trip.

Canoe Music City kayak and canoe rentals, www.canoemusiccity.com (<http://www.canoemusiccity.com>), 615-952-4211. Canoe rentals range from \$36-\$40 plus tax, depending on the length of the trip. There is a two-mile kiddie trip all the way to a 9.6-mile day trip on the river. Kayaks rent for \$29 plus tax. This outfitter, (aka Pizza Shack) owned by Sherry and James Edwards, has been in business for 21 years. They have 110 canoes and 60 kayaks, and plans to purchase 60 more kayaks in the next few weeks.

If you go

If you want to go on the weekend, or if you are taking a group, make a reservation for a boat.

If you are not an experienced paddler, ask the outfitter to give you some pointers on paddling, turning, etc.

Wear shoes that you can get wet in the river and apply sunscreen and insect spray. If you have items that you want to keep dry, secure them in water-tight containers, such as Zipper bags.

Wear your life vest!

Watch the time, so that you are sure to get back to your destination before dark.

Beware of poison ivy and snakes.

If you want to take children, they should be at least 3 years old. Ask the Outfitters about the kids canoe trips, which are a mile-and-a-half or two miles and easy outings for young families.

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