



Paddlers follow guide John Schlosser of Kayak Country on the gentle Blackwater River in Andover. Imagine this scene in foliage season with all those maples aflame!

Photo: Tim Jones



The Phelps/Pellegrino family proudly show off their blue ribbons at last year's bed race.

Sit Back And Relax On A Blackwater Paddle

By Tim Jones

EasternSlopes.com

It was supposed to be an absolutely beautiful day – low humidity, not too hot, light wind, the kind of day that almost makes summer seem okay. So we didn't want to miss getting outdoors and enjoying it. But, we had family coming to visit: my sweetheart Marilyn's cousin Selena and her husband Rick. Of course we wanted to have time for them, but we also wanted to get outside and have fun. Could we do both? Of course!

We first asked them if they'd be interested in doing something together and suggested a short hike up a small mountain, a rail-trail bike ride, easy kayaking, or Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP) as options. They jumped on the kayaking idea. Okay! But I own only three kayaks. (I know, pathetic, isn't it?)

Fortunately, there are two businesses that offer kayak rentals and tours within a few miles of my home. I'll bet there's one near you. Kate Goodin, a writer for EasternSlopes.com, had often told me about the tours she guided on the Blackwater River in Andover for Kayak Country (KayakCountry.com). Kate's now too busy with 3-year old Max (who just got his very own Jackson Fun 1 kayak) to guide any more. But the tour is still offered on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays – three hours including boat, paddles, PFDs, and instruction for \$49 per person. Sign us up!

We met Kayak Country owner John Schlosser in Andover and followed him to the river. He had five kayaks and a couple of paddleboards on his truck in case we wanted to try SUP. Once we were on the water, John made sure we all knew the basics of how to propel and guide our boats.

To begin our adventure, the five of us paddled upstream to a spot John calls "The Riviera," which provides a deep hole for a swim and sandy beach for a picnic lunch. We were on a tight schedule and elected to just head out

paddling, though it would have been a perfect day for a swim in the cool, clear waters of the mis-named Blackwater.

From the Riviera, we paddled down the gently flowing river through twists and turns, past fallen logs and high, tree-covered banks. Most of the trees were maples, and all had their roots in the river so drought wouldn't affect them. There are going to be some spectacular colors here come foliage season (starting later this month when the first swamp maples catch fire)!

John paddled alongside and pointed out natural features, plants, and wildlife, including herons and kingfishers, as we went. But mostly we just paddled along in silence or in quiet conversation under blue skies dotted with fluffy white clouds.

The water was about as low as it ever gets, and some beavers were taking advantage, trying to lay the foundation for a dam that would hold against higher water (not likely, but they can

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