

Paddling in Iowa – A Chronology

(Updated 2/27/13)

The following chronology of paddling in Iowa was originally produced by Central Iowa Paddlers and Rick Dietz.

If you have information to add or note information that needs to be corrected, please send your comments to Gregg Stark at iowawta@gmail.com.

1977

- Saukenauk Paddlers is established by a couple of competitors in the Maquoketa River Canoe Trail Race. See www.rivers-end.org/saukenuk/.

Late 1970's (?)

- Iowa Conservation Commission produces the 14 page “Iowa Canoe Trips” guide in newsprint – also published in the Waterloo Courier (1977). In the 1990s, the same information took the form of pamphlets and, around 2000, was followed by the 60-page “Iowa Canoe Guide” with Jeff Holmes’ photo on the cover.

1989

- Jeff Holmes publishes the magazine, “*Paddling in Iowa.*” <verify>

1992

- Jeff Holmes opens CanoeSport Outfitters, “Where Paddling Is a Priority,” as the first paddlesport shop in Iowa. CSO began with only 600 square feet, expanded in 1995 and 1998 to nearly 20,000 square feet, and in 1996 acquired the concession business at Lake Ahquabi State Park.

1996

- Gerry (Gigs) Rowland purchases his first kayak and begins his journeys on the Des Moines River. He becomes the father of Iowa Water Trails, thanks to the “Floods of '93!” See www.desmoinesriver.org/visionquest.htm.

Year?

- Jim Colbert, ISU biology professor, initiates the Skunk River Navy to get college students on the water for hands-on river biology lessons and cleanup activities. Friends and fellow paddlers are invited to serve as SRN admirals.

1997

- Robin Fortney founds the Des Moines Canoe Club immediately following a meeting of great minds at the 1997 Paddlesport Expo! Members want information, so Robin publishes a newsletter 4x per year and initiates an email distribution list. The original group includes an enthusiastic contingent of paddlers from Nebraska. After Rob Tull asks, “What about kayaks?” and noting that the membership includes people from beyond Des Moines, the group morphs into Central Iowa Paddlers. CIP quickly gains and has maintained the largest membership of any Iowa paddling organization (166 in

Paddling in Iowa – A Chronology

2007). See www.paddleiowa.org. Activities include leading paddling trips, supporting river stewardship activities and providing skill building opportunities, etc.

1999

- Dave Kraemer, then editor of the Ottumwa Courier, initiates the River Ripple, a paddling event on the Des Moines River in Wapello County. The event, which drew more than 200 paddlers to a single event, ran for three years under Dave's leadership. It continued for a year under YMCA leadership and another year or two under Big Brothers Big Sisters leadership.

2000

- Greg Vitale suggests CIP hold a season planning meeting in January to schedule paddling trips for the year. 40 paddlers converge on Robin's house, an historic event as it's believed to be the largest gathering of paddlers in Iowa history!
- CIP initiates the Armchair Paddlers Series to gather paddlers through the winter months at Canoesport Outfitters for programs about paddling, boats and other issues of interest.
- Des Moines River Water Trail Committee, including "Gigs" and the then unknown "Gritty" Dave Kraemer, "identify access points, develop a universal water trail logo, and promote activities on the river". At Gigs' urging, the state of Iowa establishes the Des Moines River Water Trail.

2001

- Rick Dietz and friends found Skunk River Paddlers as the Ames contingent spin-off from CIP. *They become an active core of paddlers promoting environmental advocacy and community involvement.* Yahoo Group members total 84 in 2008. See www.skunkriverpaddlers.org.
- Prairie Rapids Paddlers is established in Cedar Falls. *Activities include promoting Iowa whitewater instruction and skill-building.* Yahoo Group members total 66 in 2008. See <http://prairierapidspaddlers.org>.

2002

- Nate Hoogeveen forms the Iowa Whitewater Coalition. Activities include promoting Iowa whitewater instruction and skill-building, and the Reconnect the Rivers program to focus on dam safety. In 2006, Don Probst partners with IWC to initiate the Green Rivers Team, a river cleanup program. Yahoo Group members total 198 in 2008.
- Iowa Water Trail Association formed at the 2002 Iowa PaddleSport Expo. More than 150 people signed on to the mailing list!
- CIP begins a partnership with Izaak Walton League to conduct annual cleanup events on the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers in the Des Moines area.
- CIP responds to a request from IDNR to cut dangerous snags out of the Upper Iowa River after a paddler breaks his neck. CIP offers to do a river cleanup if IDNR will challenge local outfitters to handle the chainsaws. IDNR evolves the event into the annual Upper Iowa River cleanup event held each fall and drawing paddlers from around the state.

Paddling in Iowa – A Chronology

2003

- Iowa Paddling and Camping Forum, a small but very popular online community, launches in 2003. Later, when told that the site would be dropped, IPC forum members insisted that it was the greatest discovery since rotomolding, and followed Brian Stroner to www.paddlingiowa.com in January 2005.
- SRP begins an informal partnership with the Iowa Arboretum by turning its 3rd Annual Ice Breaker Paddle into the Pancake Paddle - an example of paddlers helping out other causes.
- 1st Annual Project AWARE! Inspired after hearing Chad Pregracke, IOWATER Director Brian Soenen somehow convinces the IDNR that it would be a good idea to sponsor a week-long river clean-up. It was a good idea.

2004

- Robin hands over the reigns of CIP to a board, but continues to be involved as an executive board member. It now takes 9 people to do what she had been doing almost single-handedly for seven years! Board includes representatives from SRP and IWC.
- Nate Hoogeveen writes *PADDLING IOWA*, aka “the bible” or “the good book!”
- Nate Hoogeveen and Greg Vitale propose a boat registration fee increase that gains the support of the paddling community following a survey of CIP, IWC, PRP [need more detail on these guys], SRP and Iowa Water Trails Association members - about 500 paddlers!

2005

- Nate Hoogeveen and Brian Stroener launch www.paddlingiowa.com, but you still need to buy the book!
- CrawDaddy Outdoors, known since 1985 as Shell Rock Hardware, opens doors in Waverly to paddlers and other outdoor enthusiasts. See www.crawdaddyoutdoors.com.
- New legislation is signed increasing registration fees by \$1/year, providing funds to support a water recreation coordinator and advisory council. Boat registration fees had not increased for more than 20 years and recent efforts to raise them had failed. “*The support of paddlers made a huge difference.*” Nate Hoogeveen takes the job as program coordinator. The new DNR position quickly leads to additional staff and the new Rivers Program.

2006

- IOWATER begins offering C.L.E.A.R. grants to support the growing river cleanup culture or, more specifically, to ensure that trophy trash gets recycled! It leads to events like LWRC, Dragoon River Romp in Boone, River Run Garbage Grab in Des Moines, CREG, etc.)
- Steve Anderson and friends conceive the Iowa PaddleSports Association.
- Nate organizes the 1st Iowa Rivers Revival conference following a joint meeting of the IWC and CIP Boards. Following the conference, a steering committee organizes

Paddling in Iowa – A Chronology

the Iowa Rivers Revival organization to advocate for and promote Iowa rivers and encourage river stewardship and community celebrations.

- Nate Hoogeveen organizes the Iowa Water Trails program. IDNR provides grants to agencies/communities for water trail developments and engages paddlers to serve on a water trail grant advisory committee.
- With John Wenck’s leadership, IWC provides assistance and leadership in establishing a portage trail and dam signage at the Boone Waterworks Dam after an ISU student dies at the dam.
- Cedar Valley Paddlers (*CrawDaddy*) <need more information>

2007

- CIP and IWC join forces with the Izaak Walton League-Des Moines Chapter to expand the annual River Run Garbage Grab to include land trail cleanup. The group partners with riparian land managers including the Corps of Engineers, IDNR, Polk County Conservation and City of Des Moines, as well as Des Moines Rowing Club, to lead the event. 200 people show up including 75 paddlers; 24 tons of trash are removed and 10 tons are recycled!
- John Wenck organizes an adult education course in paddling through the City of Des Moines and engages Jeff Holmes and area paddlers to teach the course.
- IWC, with the support of other groups and legislators like Rep. Donovan Olson, helps establish legislation creating a \$200,000 cost share fund for low head dam mitigation.

2008

- Sticks In the Water paddlers group is organized by Nick Gaeta, Kevin Stalnaker, Pam Stalnaker, Tom Sabotta, and Gregg Stark, and makes its debut at Indian Creek Nature Center’s first Paddle Day in February. SIW is introduced as a network of canoe and kayak paddlers, centered around Johnson, Jones, and Linn Counties, working to provide area paddlers with expanded opportunities to enjoy more time on the water, in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. Monthly newsletter soon exceeds 200 subscribers.
- John Wenck and Rick Dietz initiate IWC’s “eBay for Osprey” program, resulting in \$800 to help fund IDNR’s osprey reintroduction efforts as an outgrowth of CIP’s Armchair Paddling Series.
- IRR hires a part-time program director!

2009

- New Copy

2010

- Inaugural Great Race on Iowa River held at Iowa City.
- Quad Cities host first annual “Floatzilla” event, a Guinness World Record attempt as the largest flotilla of kayaks and canoes. A new record is not set, but the event becomes an annual celebration of paddling, food, and fun.

2011

Padding in Iowa – A Chronology

- Inaugural Treetown Adventure Race held on the Winnebago River in Forest City.

2012

- Dubuque Water Trail, with 11 miles on the Mississippi and 5 miles on Catfish Creek, receives state-designation in June.
- Iowa Water Trails Association Newsletter publishes first email issue in July, grows to over 400 subscribers by the end of the year.
- Lizard Creek Water Trail, running 13 miles through Webster County, celebrates state-designation in July.

2013

- New Copy