

Reedy River gets redemption

PaddleFest gives kayaker a fresh look at river

By GARY HYNDMAN

staff writer

Once was all it took for James Clinkscales.

He climbed out of his kayak after paddling a portion of the Reedy River in the early 1990s disgusted with the condition of the local river.

"I swore I would never paddle it again

just because it was so dirty," he said.

Clinkscases would live to eat his words in time to win the title at last year's inaugural Reedy River PaddleFest by five seconds.

The three-mile paddle boat race between Log Shoals and West Georgia roads near Simpsonville will be held again on March 25, co-sponsored by Friends of the Reedy River and the Greenville County Recreation District. Organizers are hoping to improve on the 75 boats that participated last year.

Clinkscases will be on hand to defend his title.

The single father is a press operator

with a local printing company and avid outdoorsman. He loves fishing, hunting,

camping and paddling, participates in Revolutionary War re-enactments, teaches primitive skills and makes arrowheads out of flint. And he rarely travels without his trusty teepee made for him by his mother 35 years ago.

Thirty years ago, Clinkscases' father, an educator, took a summer job making fiberglass kayaks. He presented one as a gift to his teenaged son.

Clinkscases still uses the boat in which he learned to navigate river rapids.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Reedy River PaddleFest

When: March 25, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Where: Registration at Greenville Tech's Brasher Campus on W. Georgia Road

Cost: \$20 for solo paddlers, \$30 for tandem paddlers

Note: Participants should be comfortable boating class II-III rapids

For information: Call 255-8946

> His favorite kayak trip was a five-day excursion down ruggedly scenic Desolation Canyon in Utah. He's also won the past three Tame the Tyger river races in Spartanburg County.

But until recently, the Reedy River wasn't on his list of kayaking destinations. The local waterway that once powered the mills that drove Greenville's economy has a history of neglect and abuse.

The Clean Water Act was rewritten by Congress in 1972, sparking mandated clean up efforts and renewed interest in it as a natural resource.

Kevin Miller, a Michelin engineer, conceived the idea for the race and worked with Friends of the Reedy and the recreation district to realize it. He first paddled the river four years ago after picking up a flier about kayaking opportunities in a local store.

"I didn't believe there were class II and III rapids that close to my house," he said. "I thought they were wrong. So, I decided to check it out."

Instead, Miller discovered he was wrong.

He envisioned the race as a way to introduce the Reedy to other residents as a local attraction.

Motivated by thoughts of winning the kayak offered as the grand prize, his friend Clinkscales registered to compete in last year's PaddleFest.

Unloading that winning Dagger kayak, along with two others, from the roof of his Nissan Pathfinder on an unusually warm late winter day, Clinkscales admits to his surprise with the Reedy's improved condi-



Julie Turner/Staff

WHITewater MAN: James Clinkscales navigates a stretch of Reedy River rapids in the Dagger kayak he won in last year's inaugural PaddleFest.

tion. The river looked cleaner and didn't smell bad or make him sick as it did years ago.

He now paddles it with his 15-year-old son James and periodically picks up litter from a section of the river near his Ware Shoals home.

It isn't advisable to eat fish out of the Reedy or to drink its water. But it's one of the few urban waterways that continues to see its water quality improve, said Miller.

The chief threats today aren't from industry but from riverfront development

that accelerates storm water run off, increasing silting and diminishing water quality downstream.

Miller believes the best way to care for the river's future is to encourage people to use it.

Those who don't wish to race are invited to bring their whitewater approved kayaks and canoes and float instead. Shuttle service will be provided between the finish and starting lines.

Contact Gary Hyndman at 679-1226 or ghyndman@greenvillejournal.com.