

A canoeist's haven

Cedar River offers stunning setting

By Carol Bryant

The Independent

SPALDING -- Keith Mueller's paradise on the Cedar River is within 30 minutes of his Spalding home.

He canoes on the winding, calm, narrow river weekly and likes to hike along the river's bluffs and valleys when he's not in the water.

The Cedar River is a canoeist's haven within an hour's drive north of Grand Island.

"I like being out on the river. It's peaceful," Mueller said.

People can enjoy canoe trips on the river ranging from a few hours to a day. The river is less taxing than the swift Dismal River, where canoeists must dodge fallen trees and avoid fences and cables that cross the river.

Cedar River canoeists don't have to worry about finding enough water to keep their vessels afloat, a challenge on the flat, broad Platte River in Central Nebraska.

Mueller and five Spalding youths ages 9 through 11 experienced a three-hour canoe trip near Spalding on June 10. The other canoeists were Justin Mueller, 9; Tanner Krajnik, 8; Kevin Socha, 10; Quintin Mueller, 9; and Cassie Mueller, 11.

They encountered the only two obstacles on their jaunt within a half-mile of their start. Two trees completely blocked the river, causing the group to exit their three canoes and portage around the trees. A barbed-wire fence spanned the river nearby. Keith Mueller held up the wire as others passed underneath.

Midway in the outing, bluffs appeared right next to the river. Mueller pointed out what he calls "swallow condominiums," homes for the birds carved in the bluffs.

The canoeists stopped at one of the bluffs so the five children could climb partway up the slope, then glide back to the river on natural mud slides. Meanwhile, Mueller climbed the 80-foot-high bluff for a spectacular view of the Cedar River, which curved like the letter "S" in front of him.

T&T Canoe Service of Spalding provided canoes, paddles and life jackets for the group. Francis and Annette Murphy of Spalding and their twin sons, Tony and Tommy, 22, operate the business. T&T stands for the twins' first names.

"We got our first canoe in 1969," Murphy said. The family ended up buying 10 canoes for trips with their seven children.

As demand for canoes in the area increased, the family decided to start their business. They now have 35 canoes and six kayaks available.

"It's gotten a lot bigger. We've been kind of busy. It's more of a service," Mrs. Murphy said.

"We get a lot of family reunions," Murphy said. "Some people book the same weekend every year. It's all good canoeing."

Murphy is a farmer. Mrs. Murphy works at Friendship Villa in Spalding and is also head cook at Spalding Academy.

Canoeing on the Cedar River peaks over Labor Day weekend each year, when several towns host River Rat/Appreciation Days. Canoeing from Spalding to Primrose to Cedar Rapids will be offered for this year's event on Sept. 5 and 6, as well as camping, golfing and a Sept. 7 road rally.

Interested people may contact Bob Esch of Spalding at (308) 497-2326.