

## **Canoeing the Kiski**

by

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It was a gorgeous autumn day and the Kiskiminetas River was beckoning. Some friends from work had planned a canoe trip. I was asked if I wanted to go. The game plan was to start at Saltsburg (the beginning of the Kiski River) and canoe down to Roaring Run in Kiski Township. This wasn't exactly a Lewis & Clarke type expedition but it was high adventure for me.

I had never canoed on the Kiski and I must admit I had some apprehension. But my trepidation wasn't fear of the water or the current of the river. My fear was that I would see beer can after beer can and tire after tire littered along the banks throughout our journey. I am happy to report that my fears were largely unfounded. In fact, what I found may surprise you.

First, between Saltsburg and Avonmore, the Kiski River is absolutely breathtaking. In the words of Penguin announcer Mike Lange "you'd have to be here to believe it." The unspoiled beauty of the river and its surroundings is amazing. After passing under the Saltsburg bridge, there is no development on either side of the river. There are no houses, no cars, no anything visible until you hit the Avonmore bridge.

The water was remarkably clear throughout. This astounded me. We could see colorful leaves on the bottom of the river at the deepest depths. Unfortunately, I did not see much algae. No doubt there is still much to be done to clean up the mine acid that continues to leach into this ever-improving river.

My next surprise was the absence of litter. The one and only thing we found until we hit the Avonmore bridge was a solitary beer bottle which we quickly collected.

Throughout the trip I saw minnows and some tadpoles but I didn't see any big fish. This would have been a disappointment if I didn't see my biggest surprise on the trip - an osprey. There he was gliding ahead from side to side just in front of us. I couldn't believe it. I had seen blue herons (which we also saw on our trip) along the banks of Roaring Run before but I had never seen this magnificent bird. What a testament to the resiliency of nature and the hard work of everyone involved with cleaning up the river.

We believe we saw traces of both a dam and a lock. I understand there were a few dams on the Kiski River at one time. In any case, it's not hard to find remnants of the old Pennsylvania canal when you are paddling down the river.

When we came to the Avonmore bridge I saw what I had dreaded - a bunch of old tires in the water. What a drag. But after passing over the tires, the beauty returned. I made a mental note to see if we couldn't get those out of there someday.

Between Avonmore and Edmon, the sights are again breath-taking. There are some deep pools between the two towns. It's a quirky river often with the deepest channels near shore. There are occasional white caps which make things fun but nothing that compares to the rapids on the Colorado River which was just fine by me.

After Edmon, there are a couple unsightly coal mining areas which need a facelift. It would be good if we could somehow find a way to return this area to mother nature.

Finally we neared our destination and the beauty of the Roaring Run trail. It had taken us a good 4.5 hours of steady paddling with a couple beverage breaks on shore. We were hustling, trying to make it back home in time for the Steeler game so if you consider doing it, give yourself a good 5 hours and always take a life vest.

The Kiski River is mother nature waiting to happen all over again. Without too much imagination, it would be easy to see how tourism could become the most important industry to our Kiski Valley towns. Let's revere the river and make good use of this second chance.



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