

Winter Kayaking

by david noyes

I HAVE NOTICED in recent years that when the long hot summers in south central Kentucky begin to yield to cool nights and falling leaves, I begin to look forward to December with an almost childlike anticipation.

Not because of the long awaited holiday season or cherished basketball tournaments, but because this is when the first real snowfalls of our short winter blanket the trees in white. Maybe it is because I spent my childhood in the snowy north-

east, but when the temperature dips into the twenties and the snow starts to fly, I pack up my toys and go outside to play. Many of my warm-blooded "adult" friends who grew up in warmer climates just don't seem to appreciate the beauty of a fresh snowfall, or maybe they just prefer to admire their kids' enthusiasm from the warmth of a nearby window.

More often than not, reports of snowfall in this area tend to be disappointing. So when I woke to find a solid four inches of snow on the ground, I loaded my kayak and headed to a spot on the Barren

River just below the man-made class II rapid in Bowling Green. As I pulled my truck down the access road under the College Street bridge, I knew I was in for a wonderful trip. The snow coated the bare trees and a frosty mist was in the air from the small waterfall just up river. The water was still warm, so there was soft, cold fog that enveloped my kayak. As I started paddling I snugged my spray skirt around my body, which gave me the sensation of floating on the calm river in a

warm, comfortable sleeping bag.

I set out to follow a route that I paddle a lot in the summer as a fun cardiovascular work-out. I put in under the bridge and paddled down river about eight miles past the Beech Bend campground and under the Route 185 bridge to the parking lot on Boat Landing Road. Most of the time there are fishermen on the river or sitting on the rocks below the bridge, but this wintry day I was all alone. I paddled up river to the base of the waterfall before turning and heading on my two-hour journey. The water was high, so I didn't have to navigate around downed trees or island beaches, which can be an issue in narrower parts of the river during the dry summer months. I was free to sit back and relax as the gentle current directed my boat down river just miles from the rest of civilization.

About halfway into my solo trip, I came to a turn in the river at Beech Bend and thought of the many times I had stopped for a break with the sounds of campers or engines roaring from the nearby race track. I thought of all the summer vacationers that came here a few months ago to enjoy their own personal thrills at the amusement park, and I noticed the almost perfect quiet that followed me on this day. By the time I reached my destination the sun had come out, the snow was melting from the trees, and my brief winter experience was over. ■

