



Fall 2006

The River's Voice

www.flfr.org

DINOSAURS' WATER

"This is the same water that dinosaurs drank!" one exclaimed when it became clear there is only a given amount of water – ever – on planet Earth.

It was the 8th Annual Day on the River, FLFR's day for kids to enjoy the river, paddle in it, and learn about its wonders. They were in small groups looking at a map of the Locust Fork and its *watershed*, learning that every drop of rain falling at King's Bend, and close around, flows to the Locust Fork and finally to Mobile Bay.

And they learned about the long-standing cycling of that water into vapor, clouds, rain, and into pools where dinosaurs had drunk.

INSTANT WATERSHEDS

Then the handmade watersheds (aluminum pan, rocks, sticks, foil to cover all), then spray bottles. Presto! "I've got a river flowing here," one observed as water flowed down his aluminum watershed. They added "pollution" and watched it flow, too.

Kids aged 7 to 16, 45 in all, with 14 parents and grandparents, and six group leaders. Seven willing volunteers, generous experts from Birmingham Canoe Club and Cahaba River Society, and FLFR members -- the adults had as much fun as anybody. *Everybody* learned something.

PADDLES & CRITTERS & DOGS

In addition to the watershed activity, kids got in canoes and kayaks and paddled on their own, under watchful expertise, and went to "Critter Camp" where wildlore master Gene Gonsoulin exhibited spiders, snakes, salamanders and other creepy crawlies that kids (and their parents) find fascinating. Marty Schulman from Ruffner Mtn. Nature Center brought another batch of critters, including a "glass snake" (aka legless lizard), a very personable grey rat snake for petting "with two fingers and toward the tail", and a tiny screech owl. Terrific!

Our chefs served up hot dogs w/ trimmin's, and a rescue dive captain demonstrated scuba gear and techniques.

COMMENTS

We deemed it another success and so did many others. Day on the River evaluation comments included:

"Wonderful...we hated to leave early."

"My child loved the watershed activity so much that 5 times I had to ask him to stop asking questions." (No! Don't stop.)

My son really liked Mr. Gene's critter camp and his way of answering questions."

"Teaching the kids about this vital way of seeing things is crucial to keeping our water clean and protected...thanks...Keep up the great work"

"My child really enjoyed the opportunity to catch critters-he does this at home."

"It was great that the kids were exposed to such a wide variety of critters."

"The kids saw how much fun it is to be a paddler, not just their experience here." (This refers to a DVD we showed on X-treme paddling in Tallulah Gorge, GA.)

RESERVE YOUR SPOT FOR NEXT YEAR, SEPT. 8, '07

FLFR Special Outings:

- Oct 10 "BIG DIG" see article page 3
- October 28th, The Friends of the Locust Fork River will lead our annual hike from Swann Covered Bridge to Powell Falls and back.
- Feb 3rd, 2007 Locust Fork Invitational
- Mulberry Race and Festival TBA
- March 24th, 2007 Locust Fork WhiteWater Classic

BIG THANKS TO:

BIRMINGHAM CANOE CLUB
CAHABA RIVER SOCIETY
RUFFNER MTN. NATURE CENTER
BLACK WARRIOR RIVER KEEPERS
STORM WATER MGT. AUTHORITY
PARDUE'S BBQ
CLEVELAND PIGGLY WIGGLY
PAT KING
GREAT VOLUNTEERS
FLFR MEMBERS

Everyone who all pulled together to make
**THE 8TH ANNUAL DAY ON THE RIVER
a big success.**

See pix page 3

FLFR 15 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

15....
and counting

It's still our 15th birthyear! If you missed our April party and the great powerpoint that Susie Mixon Wilkerson prepared, here's our story, *without* the graphics:

“Water Works buys land on the quiet for new reservoir” headlines in the Birmingham News Jan. 20, 1991. Surprise! Quickly seven concerned river people met and became Friends of the Locust Fork River. The Friends publicly opposed the dam proposal, and gathered a coalition of like minds/spirits: Cahaba River Society, Sierra Club, UAB Students for Better Environment, and the Alabama Environmental Council.

Later that year Dr. Doug Phillips spoke at FLFR's first public meeting; a FLFR attorney filed for information from the Army Corps of Engineers; the Friends started its annual cleanup; and Friends launched recreation and education outreach programs.

In 1992 FLFR requested environmental studies from the Birmingham Water Works, and learned of its private meetings. The river cleanup joined the national organization.

Gaining momentum, FLFR helped to form the Alabama Water Watch Association and the coalition that is today's Alabama Rivers Alliance (ARA). FLFR Water Watch volunteers have continued to regularly collect data on the river's water quality, and FLFR members to clean up monthly at an Adopt-A-Stream site at the highway 79/231 bridge. Public meetings continued, and FLFR took a stand to advocate and educate for water conservation, while sharply questioning Water Works studies of projected needs for public water.

By 1994 FLFR members were urging media to investigate BWWB's large expenditures, and the BWWB chairman of the board was indicted for corruption and stepped down. By 1995 the media had exposed BWWB's questionable public relations and large expenditures by an outside attorney.

Meanwhile, FLFR's 1st Annual River Festival '94 celebrated the river at the Friday's riverside site, outings and programs continued to grow, and www.flfr.org was born.

FLFR hired its first executive director in 1996, who worked with the director of ARA to expose a BWWB private meeting, alleging violation of the Sunshine Law, and Fox 6 followed with an expose of BWWB's activities.

Without public announcement BWWB put the Locust Fork dam project on hold in 1996. FLFR launched its successful public awareness campaign, which continues today.

Part of that public awareness effort was getting kids out on/in the river, first as Camp Locust Fork, and now since 1999, Day on the River. Kids have fun while learning to canoe, gather and appreciate river critters, understand watershed dynamics, river ecology and more. The 8th Annual was a success (see story).

Recreation, education and water quality watchdog programs have continued year 'round year after year. 2005 saw FLFR's participation in the 14th annual National River Cleanup. Now FLFR has partnered with the Southern Company for an annual 2-day crossings and river cleanup.

The 7th and last River Festival was in 2000, and FLFR took on sponsoring the Locust Fork White Water Classic and Locust Fork Invitational annual canoe and kayak races.

The first River's Voice newsletter was born in the fall of 1991. And here we are, keepin' on keepin' on.

Thanks for your interest,
and your support of the
beautiful, incomparable
Locust Fork of the Black
Warrior River.

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PUBLIC MEETING ABOUT BRIDGE PROJECT

BIG DIG

Wondering what all the digging is about? Please join us at **Cleveland Town Hall, Tuesday, October 10** to hear details about the bridge project on Hwy 231/79.

Many of you may have seen it, and many have asked about it. It's the bridge at the entrance to King's Bend.

Representatives from **AL DOT and contractor AL Bridge Builders** will present the design of the new bridge project, the fate of the existing bridge, erosion mitigation measures, other impact concerns, ultimate access designs, maybe even how much this will cost and how long it will take.

It's a huge project and challenging, as one can easily see. To render the new bridge safer than its predecessor, and accommodate future four-laning, the new design reduces the curve and the hill, with much rock and earth to be moved in the process.

Bridges are engineering marvels, and now, in 2006, engineers also get to figure out how to build them without devastating a site. Sedimentation is a primary threat to the Locust Fork River, and is our deep concern during this project. *

Come to this meeting with your interest, questions and concerns. (Cleveland Town Hall is located on US 231 between intersections with AL 160 and AL 79.)

7 pm, Cleveland Town Hall, 62732 Hwy 231, Tuesday, October 10

OR

Come learn about the BIG DIG bridge project on Hwy 231/79. Representatives from AL DOT and the contractor, AL Bridge Builders, will present details, and there'll be a Q & A to follow.

We'll learn about the engineering of the bridge, time frame, maybe the \$\$\$, and we'll certainly discuss erosion control and other impact issues, as well as final access possibilities.

*FLFR and Alabama Water Watch will introduce a precise technique for volunteers to monitor the river's sediment load at the bridge project and elsewhere. Learn how you can help.

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FLFR Wish List

79.)

- All-purpose plastic canoes or kayaks with life left in them (any brand)
- Paddles
- PFD's.
- Digital Camera
- Slide projector
- Projector screen
- An Intern who specializes in Organizational Development



Gene's Critter Camp, Day on the River, 2006

Zen and the Art of Kayak Touring

- Sam Howell



TEN-YEAR IDEA

In 1992 I got the idea to paddle a kayak from my house on the Locust Fork River in Blount County to Fort Morgan on the Gulf of Mexico. It remained an idea for the next 10 years until I was able to get my life's responsibilities in order. During that time, people often asked why I would want to paddle a kayak 500 miles all by myself. I wasn't even sure myself, unless it was just a child-like wish for a "Huck Finn" adventure. I think adventure had a good bit to do with it, but I also knew that being alone for 27 days in a kayak might lead to some self-discovery -- and it did.

THE REAL THING

Most days after paddling the river and eating my supper, I'd sit on the bow of my boat and stare up stream and down stream at the serenity of river. It was surreal at times to think I didn't know what was happening in any part of the world except the 'present' one. I often became mesmerized by my camp fire as I listened to the symphony of the river. In the midst of the evenings' usual setting and the ever-present sounds of nature, it was only natural that I discovered what I would come to realize as the greatest reward of my trip, the experience of "inner peace". I'm speaking of that sense of peace, joy, and contentedness that overtakes you in a tranquil way. Most of my adult years, I wondered if I'd ever experience it or if it was even possible in this day and time. Lo and behold! I found it while kayaking alone on Alabama's rivers. The nature, the solitude, and even the sense of pure freedom - knowing I could crawl out of my sleeping bag or not, paddle or not, speak or not - were what led to my unintentional search inward and that is why I chose this

mantra for the trip: *Ain't got nothing to do but today!*

MORE TO COME

I'm now hooked on distance and over-night kayaking. There are so many exciting adventures out there to be taken. How would it feel to watch a Blue Whale or sea turtle surface next to your sea kayak, to paddle next to a living glacier or a family of river otters, or to paddle 20 miles out in the ocean, out of sight of the land, being directed only by a compass, and finally see your island destination? Closer to home, I imagine the peacefulness at the end of a 25 mile solo paddle down the Black Warrior River after you set up camp on a sand bar, build a fire, kick back and listen to coyotes carry on a conversation in the distance. Finding one's inner peace may not sound exciting to everyone, but it sure settles the clutter in one's head. Or is it vice versa?

FINER POINTS

So, have I piqued your interest in kayaking? Last month I took an intro class in kayak touring. Even though I've logged hundreds of miles in my kayak, it was my first formal training. A very knowledgeable Gavin Rains of Alabama Small Boats taught me a lot of skills I had not learned on my own. I highly recommend his class for anyone wanting to get into the distance kayaking or sea kayaking. He can also prepare you for the excitement of whitewater kayaking!

If you would like to learn more about long-distance river paddling or are interested in taking a trip, contact Sam Howell with the Friends of the Locust Fork River.

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ROCK 'n ANYWAY

On Aug. 10 it was clear The Rock 'n Float planned for Aug. 12 wasn't going to be a "float" because the water in the river was too low. So we decided on a trip to Swann Bridge with Jim Lacefield, which is not a bad second choice.

At meeting time it was pouring rain - good news for the river - but what to do with the outing?

The few hardy souls who gathered at Pardue's BBQ discovered Jim and Faye Lacefield are game for most anything, so

we decided to go to Swann Bridge in that warm summer downpour - then maybe on to Cornelius Falls. It all turned out great. Jim read the rocks at the gorgeous bluff above the covered bridge, artfully filling in with background geology for newcomers to our old, old, river. Over the 300 million years our river has been in this area it has moved a bit, of course, but the Locust has been grinding right at that site straight down for a long time to create that sheer bluff.

As the rain was slacking off we car

pooled to a friend's home and walked to the edge of the flow.

The weather cleared and some played in the now-fuller falls, while others ate our bag lunches.

It was a rockin' day anyway.

2007 RACE DATES

Locust Fork Invitational
02/03/07

Mulberry Race and Festival
TBA

Locust Fork Whitewater
Classic 03/24/07



The Covered Bridge River Walk

On Saturday morning, October 28th, The Friends of the Locust Fork River will lead our annual hike from Swann Covered Bridge to Powell Falls and back. The fall foliage is usually glorious and you can look forward to some informed commentary from FLFR's trip leaders. The hike is of moderate difficulty and takes about 3 hours round trip. Be prepared for the weather and bring a snack as well as fluids. Meet at Pardue's Restaurant in Cleveland at 9 am (come early for breakfast) or at Swann Bridge at 9:30. For more information call Stephen at 205-919-6231.

Many THANKS to Susie Mixon-Wilkerson for all her help with this newsletter.

Yes, I want to help the Friends of the Locust Fork River preserve our local treasure

New member Renewing member (check expiration date on label)

Enclosed is my check for

- ◇ Individual-\$20
- ◇ Family-\$30
- ◇ Friend-\$50
- ◇ Patron-\$100
- ◇ Donor-\$250

Name _____

(if label is correct just enter name)

Street/Box: _____

City/St/Zip _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

◇ Please include me in the FLFR email network for outings and LF river alerts

◇ Call me to help with FLFR activities

As Friends of the Locust Fork River, we join together to actively preserve the natural integrity of the river in its free flowing state, and to that end, the lifestyle of the community which surrounds it.

BIG DIG! SEE ARTICLE INSIDE ABOUT PUBLIC MEETING
TO DISCUSS HIGHWAY 231 BRIDGE PROJECT

WE'RE ON THE WEB!
WWW.FLFR.ORG



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