



Rhode Island Blueways Alliance
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Trio Attempting to be First to Canoe Across Rhode Island

[Rhode Island] – This June, a trio of experienced canoeists will become the first to canoe across the State of Rhode Island, north to south, using a primarily inland route. Their adventure will start in the Town of Burrillville, and they will paddle and portage their way on a meandering route that will take them through seventeen of the state’s thirty-nine cities and towns, eventually ending in Westerly. Their chosen route will take them along ten different rivers, as well as a portion of upper Narragansett Bay.

The idea for the trip was hatched three years ago by Chuck Horbert, 45, of North Scituate, RI. Says Horbert, “While paddling down the Blackstone River, I jokingly asked a bystander how far I had to go to reach Westerly. It was a crazy question intended only to get a laugh, but I then thought to myself: Was it possible?” So he pulled out maps, and consulted Google Earth photos, and found that it was. Since then, he has been researching the details, such as identifying portage routes around obstacles such as dams, and scouting out potential campsites.

Early on in the planning, he started pitching the trip to other friends, hoping to find at least one or two other canoeists skilled and crazy enough to accompany him on this historic expedition. Fortunately it didn’t take too much bribery skills to entice Jim Cole, 66, of Charlestown, RI, and Tom Taylor, 54, of Wilmington, MA to sign on for the duration. Cole is an American Canoe Association certified canoe instructor, and author of “Paddling Connecticut and Rhode Island”, a paddling guidebook published in 2009. Taylor has over 20 years of canoeing experience, visiting rivers and lakes all over New England and Canada. Over the last six years the trio, with other canoeists, has been paddling sections of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, a 740-mile long water trail stretching from Old Forge, NY to Fort Kent, ME. “It was this experience that gave me the confidence to make this attempt to paddle across Rhode Island”, said Horbert.

Having realized the potential to use the trip to advocate for improved river access, he brought a proposal before his fellow board members at the Rhode Island Blueways Alliance to develop and

coordinate a number of events along the route to highlight the many new paddler access projects that various municipalities and watershed groups had accomplished. The original short list of events has since morphed into multiple programs ranging from simple educational presentations with youth groups to a major event intended to celebrate National Rivers Month.

Keith Gonsalves, President of the Rhode Island Blueways Alliance, said that “this canoe trip, and the planned interaction with so many cities, towns and watershed groups, seemed a perfect way to promote our goals to develop water trails throughout the state and to promote recreation and economic development by reconnecting communities with the rivers that flow through them.”

The trio, with one or two other canoeists who will accompany them for a short segment of the trip, will meet in Harrisville Village in Burrillville on June 8th and, after a brief launch event, will head down the Clear River. They hope to reach the Blackstone River in North Smithfield by the end of that day. They will camp each night of the trip at pre-selected campsites for which they have obtained landowner permission to use. They will practice leave-no-trace camping principles, leaving all campsites in as good or better condition than when they arrived. All but one planned campsites are on publicly owned land.

Likely the toughest segment of the trip will be an upstream paddle up the Pawtuxet River watershed over two days from Pawtuxet Cove to the Big River Management Area. Says Cole, who grew up along the Pawtuxet River, “this will present a significant challenge, especially if the water levels are high, but I think we’re up to it.” One segment of the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River, which contains 7 different dams in a short stretch of river, will be bypassed by walking along the Washington Secondary Bike Path.

The longest portage, 9.5 miles, will bring the canoeists out of the Pawtuxet River Watershed into the Wood-Pawcatuck River Watershed, mostly via state highway. Folding canoe carts will be used to assist in this and other portages.

And on Saturday, June 15th, if all goes well, a happy and tired group of canoeists will be pulling onto a public boat ramp in Downtown Westerly.

Updates on the planning for the trip, and during the trip itself, can be viewed by going to and liking a facebook page created for the trip: www.facebook.com/PaddleAcrossRhodeIsland. Information on the trip is also available on the Rhode Island Blueways Alliance web site: www.ExploreRI.org.

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