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Padding the Reedy River better than man-made amusement ride

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As it turns out, the personal flotation device (life vest to you laymen) goes on top the splash jacket.

Your intrepid adventurer -- um, that would be me -- was grateful someone was kind enough to discreetly murmur this piece of news.

Makes more sense to wear the thing that way.

This was Saturday morning, the third annual Reedy River Paddlefest, and only the beginning of what I was about to learn.

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The Paddlefest assembly point was the parking lot of Greenville Tech's Brashier Campus on West Georgia Road.

From there, kayaks and canoes, and kayakers and canoers (generic term: paddlers), were shuttled about 2.6 miles upriver to the start line of the race.

The main purpose of this race is to get people out on the Reedy River so they can see what a treasure it is.

Actually, not everybody

paces at Paddlefest. A good many simply paddle along the same section of river for fun.

That was my speed, having never in my life been in a canoe before.

People who saw me wearing my borrowed gear in the wrong sequential order, looking like there were a bulky two or three others of me under the splash jacket, likely guessed that.

My river guide for the day was Brad Wyche, of Upstate Forever. I'd brought my notebook and pen.

Paddling event coordinator Kevin Miller advised me a canoe could be a bit of "extra challenge because water can come in the boat, and you need to keep water out of the boat."

I wrote that down.

The start line was practically in the shadow of the Log Shoals Road bridge.

The river itself was a revelation, its quiet and serenity, bird calls, trees leaning over the water. It was as if we'd gone a long way into the woods.

Yet the other world -- the one with traffic and noise and pavement and subdivisions --



zoom
Jeanne Brooks participated in the third annual Reedy River Paddlefest on Saturday. The event originated at Greenville Tech's Brashier Campus in Simpsonville. **GWINN DAVIS / Staff**

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was surprisingly close, a stone's toss higher.

Wyche went over the basics of canoe operation and safety. We would reach the first rapid pretty quick after putting in, he said.

He went over terms. Paddle right, paddle left. Draw right, draw left. I should follow his directions promptly. I wrote that down.

Also, he said, "No sudden jerky moves." And we would kneel versus sit in the canoe to run the whitewater. (This seemed ominous.)

I zipped my notepad and pen in the splash jacket's front pouch.

The first rapid, "Big-S Slide," according to American Whitewater (www.americanwhitewater.org), drops about seven feet. It's a Class III. (Intermediate.)

To shoot through it, your canoe or kayak must make a big S.

Sharp left, right, left. Fast.

Afterwards, my experience was, exhilarated, you feel like hollering yippee. Once your heart resumes normal beating.

The rest of the way to West Georgia Road we paddled or glided, carried by the Reedy's current, and sometimes skidded through lesser rapids.

In places the water was clear. In places, not.

In places we saw the river treated well. In places, not. Details about that in another column.

We saw how astoundingly far the river has come in restoration.

But oh my gosh, if protected, its banks left lush and wild here in our urban heart, also what it could be.

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