

## Canoeing the Harpeth

### Activity

A Day Spent Canoeing with the family

### Goal

Spend quality time while engaging in an activity that doesn't involve passively sitting in front of some sort of electronic device or standing over your kids while they do chores.

### Secret Objectives

- ☞ Create a "time apart" with your kids
- ☞ Benefit from time spent communing with Nature without all the discomfort of camping or walking
- ☞ Change the pace (and place) of your normal family interactions
- ☞ See each other in a different way
- ☞ Time together but without it being so burdensome that one or another (or all of you) get mad and frustrated
- ☞ Surprise (something memorable will almost certainly happen)

### Total Time Commitment

Travel to the river: Approx. 40 minutes, one way from Williamson County

Canoe time on the water: Anywhere from 2 to 5 hours

## Scenic Harpeth River

The 115 mile long Harpeth River flows from Rutherford County through Williamson County where it joins the Cumberland River in Cheatham County. The south Harpeth is a peaceful, gently flowing 11 mile stretch of scenic river that meanders past tree lined banks, grassy fields and under rocky bluffs. The river twists and turns through occasional Class 1 (the lowest level) rapids and is studded with wide sand bars that are ideal for spontaneous picnics or catching some sun. There are wide, deep, slow moving sections of the river just made for swimming. Wildlife abounds on the Harpeth where deer, beaver, blue herons, ducks and turtles can be spied along the banks while cliff swallows put on amazing aerobatic displays overhead. There are several historic sites along this tract of the river including the Montgomery Bell Tunnel (the first full scale tunnel built in the United States) and Mound Bottom (a prehistoric Native American Indian ceremonial and burial site). This is the quintessential lazy river ride, only it is a real river with all the cool nature stuff thrown in.

## ABOUT CANOEING

See the web sites below to pick a canoe rental company. They provide the canoe, paddles and life jackets. I suggest scheduling at least a 3 hour trip. This is long enough to see some of the river while also having time to stop at the sand bars or to take a quick dip in the deep sections of the river. If you take your time and don't overdo it (this isn't a canoe race) even people in poor shape should be able to enjoy it without injury.

Tip-a-Canoe

(800) 550-5810

[www.tip-a-canoe.com](http://www.tip-a-canoe.com)

Foggy Bottom Canoe Trips on the Harpeth

952-4062

[www.foggybottomcanoe.com](http://www.foggybottomcanoe.com)

Canoe Music City

[www.canoemusiccity.com](http://www.canoemusiccity.com)

## EQUIPMENT(per person)

**Daypack** (school backpacks)

**Food** (put all food in water tight, self-sealing plastic bags)

Trail Mix (enough dried fruit, chocolate morsels, nuts, and/or Chex mix like ingredients to fill a sandwich bag).

Fresh fruit (1 or 2 apples, oranges, or bananas)

Simple meal

Cheese (6 oz.)

Protein (4-5 oz.)

Summer Sausage, slim jims, jerky (lots of flavors and, surprisingly, low fat), deli meat

Vegetarians (insert your preferred portable protein here)

Desert (100 calorie cakes, packaged pastries, etc.); 1 per person

Plastic trash bag (Leave no trace. Take out all trash you bring with you.)

**Water** (about a quart, you're not far from civilization) **NO GLASS**

**CONTAINERS** on the river. Alcohol is also not allowed on the river.

**First Aid**

Hiker first aid kit, if you have one OR

Home-made first aid kit

Bandaids

Triple antibiotic ointment (or, my father's favorite-camphophenique. His philosophy was that if it didn't sting, it wasn't working. That should tell you something about some of what I had to deal with.)

Athletic wrap (in case of a sprained ankle)

Pain medication (that's over the counter pain medication!)

Bug spray and Sunscreen

Appropriate prescription meds

**Clothing**

Comfortable shorts and loose fitting shirt

Swimwear (under your clothes or as canoeing clothes). If swimwear is your canoeing outfit, bring a change of clothes for the ride home.

Towel

Water proof shoes. There are lots of rocks in the river. Tennis shoes work fine as long as you don't mind them getting wet and dirty. Sandals are discouraged because they can slip and slide all over your foot and you can lose them in the water.

Eyewear. Don't forget sunglasses. Contacts can get washed out in the water and eyeglasses can fall off. Plan accordingly.

**Camera** (you've got to get pictures, especially a family photo). Make sure it is waterproof! (The canoe rental places usually have instant water proof cameras for sale.)

## SUGGESTIONS

**NO ELECTRONICS.** No one takes calls on the drive there, during the canoe trip, or on the way home. **NO ONE!**  
Remember, time apart.

**Leave jewelry, watches, rings, wallets, necklaces, etc. at home.** You won't need them on the river. Don't risk something happening to them if you leave them in the car while on the river.

**Spend as little money as possible.** Make due with what's at hand in the house. It's the experience that matters.

**Go during the week.** You'll run into fewer people.

**Make reservations ahead of time.** This will guarantee you a spot.

**Check the water level of the river.** You can call the canoe rental places to check or you can go to this wonderful site ([http://waterdata.usgs.gov/tn/nwis/uv?cb\\_00065=on&format=html&period=1&site\\_no=03434500](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/tn/nwis/uv?cb_00065=on&format=html&period=1&site_no=03434500)) by the United States Geological Survey to see for yourself the average depth of the river.

**Start early.** It allows you to have a fulfilling experience and still get back home in time to have the afternoon and evening to recover.

**No fishing without a license.** If you plan on fishing, get your license ahead of time otherwise you will face stiff fines.

**Take your time.** Float. Don't rush. Remember, time apart.

**Go swimming.** That means YOU. Wear a bathing suit. It's fun and funny.

**Push your boundaries.** Release your inner child. Surprise your kids. Let them encourage YOU. Acknowledge your fear. Loosen up for God's sake.

**Don't overdo the food.** Bring enough food to boost your energy but not enough to stuff your gut.

**Use minimal discipline** (only when REAL safety is at issue). Save corrective parenting for your every day life. If they paddle ahead, see what happens. Call out to make sure they're OK rather than to reel them in.

**Put the kids in a separate canoe.** Maybe you can act like they aren't with you while still having a family togetherness experience.

**Encourage and compliment.** Make positive observations about your kid based on what is happening in the moment on the river. Spontaneously express affection.

**Get mementos.** The canoe rental office has t-shirts and other potential mementos. Get something to remember the trip.

## Directions

The canoe rental places are all in the same area. From I-40 West take exit 192.

Turn right at the bottom of the exit ramp on to McCrory Lane. Continue approximately .5 miles on McCrory Lane to Hwy. 70. Turn left onto Hwy. 70, and go about 4.5 miles. Each canoe rental website above has specific directions.