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KAYAKING

SACO RIVER\ FRYEBURG, MAINE

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Article Text:

Show me a family outing that has enough adventure to appeal to my 14-year-old son, is enough fun to lure my 12-year-old daughter from the mall, and is safe and easy enough for my 7-year-old, and I'm there. Kayaking on the Saco River in Fryeburg, Maine, fits the bill - beautifully. It's something that our whole family, including my husband, an affirmed couch potato, looks forward to every summer.

From our cabin in New Hampshire, it's a short ride to Fryeburg where **Fred Westerberg** runs Saco River Canoe and Kayak. We pass other rental outfits along the way, but tradition dictates that we rent from Fred. In the past, we've rented four boats for our family of five. This year, I suspect that the 7-year-old will be ready to command his own craft. We've discovered that the entertainment value of individual boats is worth the additional expense. One person per kayak eliminates bickering, and we can have races.

Although the word "kayaking" conjures up images of Meryl Streep in "The River Wild," the Saco River in midsummer is tame, if not downright lazy (sort of like my husband). A seven-mile trip (with shuttle service back to our car) takes about four hours of leisurely paddling, picnicking, and swimming. We always schedule this trip for a weekday when few other boats are in sight.

In July and August, the river is shallow and clear. We can see fish dart over the pebbly brown river bottom and watch bank swallows build nests in the muddy shores. Turtles plop off the sunny rocks and great blue herons flap their enormous wings and fly low over the water as our convoy of kayaks wends its way along the river. The older kids paddle ahead and scout out promising places to pull up the boats.

Around each turn are inviting stretches of sandy beach and tiny islands. Whenever anyone wants to stop and swim, we do. In most spots, the water is no more than three feet deep and slow moving, so that even the 7-year-old feels secure. Occasionally, we find little rapids and lie down to let the water propel us like a natural water slide.

As we paddle from one pristine swimming hole to the next, it's easy to forget that North Conway's strip development is just a few miles away. Once you are on the river, there are no convenient places to stop for lunch or supplies. So we pack ample provisions. Along

with bug spray (!), sunscreen, and plenty of drinking water, we bring lunch and snacks in waterproof containers. The waterproof part is important. Even though the kayaks are fairly stable, they can tip over. Last summer, in a less-than-graceful exit from my boat, I dumped lunch for six children and four adults into the river. Zip-lock bags work!

The possibility of a soggy sandwich is about as risky as it gets on the Saco River in the summer. For our family, it's that little taste of adventure that we savor every year. Kayaking normally begins May 1; this year it is likely to be mid-month or later because of unusually high snow fall.

For food and accommodations: Jockey Cap Country Store and Motel, 16 Bridgton Rd., Fryeburg. Sandwiches to go (in zip-lock bags!) or to eat there. Clean accommodations at the spectacular Jockey Cap Rock \$45-\$65 per night.

SIDEBAR:

WATER LOGS

RIVER RIDES, OCEAN VIEWS, LAKE VACATIONS - NINE WAYS TO GET YOUR FEET WET

WATER AND MOUNTAINS: THE TWO ATTRACTIONS NEW ENGLAND HAS IN ABUNDANCE. FOR THIS YEAR'S NEW ENGLAND SUMMER PREVIEW, WE ASKED CALENDAR WRITERS TO TELL US ABOUT THEIR FAVORITE WATER SPOTS. AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE ACCOMPANYING MAP, THEIR STORIES RANGE FROM CRUISING ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN TO BIKING ALONG NARRAGANSETT BAY; CANOEING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER TO KAYAKING THE SACO. AND FOR THE LANDLUBBERS WE'VE INCLUDED TIPS FOR SHOPPING AND DINING AS WELL.

PLEASE REFER TO MICROFILM FOR CHART DATA.

Caption:

The younger members of the Band family relax on the Saco River: Perry, Nathan, and Lewis. Sharing kayaks can be tricky business. PHOTO

Memo:

WATER LOGS

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