

Who are these Paddle Folk?



There are the pedal folk.

And here, in and around the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area – and Brainerd lakes area as a whole – there’s the Paddle Folk. And for very much the same reason that biking has taken off in the area, paddling continues to grow in popularity as well – thanks in large part to groups like Paddle Folk.

“It’s bringing in more people interested in silent sports and human-powered activities,” David Jeremiason, Paddle Folk founder, said of the growth of kayaking and the club. “There’s been a return to that. People are starting to gravitate back to human-powered activities.”

Indeed. According to the National Sporting Goods Association, kayak participation has grown from 5.9 million in 2007 to 9.6 million in 2016. Kayak retail sales were at \$335 million for 2016, compared to \$312 million in 2013.

Still, an activity such as kayaking can flounder without some sort of effort to bring like-minded individuals together.



Enter Paddle Folk. The club started in the mid-2000s and now has about 140 people on its email list, Jeremiason said. During the summer, club paddles are held each Thursday at 6 p.m. on a variety of Brainerd area waterways – the mine pit lakes that intertwine with the world-class mountain bike trails at Cuyuna are a favorite, Jeremiason said.

“During a typical summer, about 80 people paddle with the club throughout the summer,” Jeremiason told *Minnesota Traditions*, which celebrates passionate Minnesota pastimes like kayaking, embracing the resources that make these

Minnesota traditions great. (For more, go to www.minnesotatraditions.com.)

“In the average week we’ll have 12 to 25 paddlers, and the biggest (outing) was a little over 30. It (club participation) was a little bigger last year (over previous years).”



There are several kayaking clubs in the region, but the low-keyed vibe associated with Paddle Folk has helped draw paddlers to the club and area waters.

“Joining Paddle Folk opened an entirely new community to me,” said club member Renee Richardson of Brainerd. “They are all quick to be helpful and welcome beginners and to help load and unload the kayaks and launch boats.

“The great thing about the group is getting out on lakes and streams across the region that I never would have explored on my own. The weekly paddles are an opportunity for fellowship and quiet individual time while still having the comfort of the

group. I have a pushpin collection now and a map so I can keep track of all the lakes or streams I've kayaked, and each time I go out with the group I think I've found a new favorite."

For fellow club paddler Tim Terrill, Paddle Folk – and kayaking – offers the best of all worlds.



"There's not much commitment. It's not like a boat that you have to store. It's low maintenance," said Terrill, also executive director of the Mississippi Headwaters Board. "And there's the adventure of it all. You can just take it off the top of your vehicle and go. It's like mountain biking. You feel like you're in the great outdoors, exploring like Lewis and Clark – and still be just five minutes from the closest Starbucks."

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