

Paddle Kitsap to blaze water trail between



Courtesy art

This map shows the route of Paddle Kitsap.

By Rebecca Pirtle

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Seattle has its Seafair hydroplane races, Bainbridge has the Chilly Hilly for bicyclists, and now North Kitsap can boast a Paddle Kitsap event that will showcase the shoreline of the peninsula and is expected to attract up to 150 kayakers from all over the Northwest and beyond.

Paddle Kitsap is a two-day, fully supported paddle planned for Aug. 1-2 along 36.5 nautical miles of shoreline beginning in Port Gamble and ending in Poulsbo. It's initially designed to blaze a permanent trail around the peninsula that can be traveled anytime while showcasing the near-offshore waters and communities here.

All types of human-powered craft are invited including kayaks, canoes and rowing dories. Registration opens March 1.

The event is the brainchild and labor of love of John Kuntz, owner of Olympic Outdoor Center in Poulsbo, a kayak rental shop in business at the same location on Front Street for 21 years that also offers classes, camps and equipment.

Kuntz, who's been a kayaker for 30 years, said he had the idea for the semi-circumnavigation of North Kitsap three years ago and had been mulling it in the back of his mind.

When Olympic Property Group proposed the "String of Pearls" trails network to connect the communities of North Kitsap, Kuntz knew it was the right time to make Paddle Kitsap a reality. The "String of Pearls" concept has evolved into the newly formed North Kitsap Trails Association, which Paddle Kitsap is a part of.

The paddle event "is a really good way to coordinate a water trail with a land trail," Kuntz said.

Part of the mission of Paddle Kitsap is to raise funds and awareness for the North Kitsap Trails Association "for the purpose of preserving and protecting water access in North Kitsap and to create the North Kitsap Water Trail for future generations."

"Getting out on the water," Kuntz said, "is one of those things that people who live in Kitsap County don't experience enough."

Hit the water running

Planning for the event requires an on-water survey to document the sights and shoreline. "Now we'll have an inventory of every site that's a possible stopping point," Kuntz explained, pointing out that Paddle Kitsap is the first organized event in the county specifically for paddlers.

Once they hit the water running in Port Gamble, paddlers land to rest and recharge with snack and meal stops at Foulweather Bluff, Norwegian Point Park, Eglon, Kingston, Jefferson Head, Suquamish and Keyport, finishing up in Poulsbo.

Support vans on land will follow participants and provide support in case of mechanical problems, medical injuries, or just to lend guidance and information to assure the safety of all involved. Volunteers will also patrol the route on boats.

The length of the paddle and stops along the way have all been well-thought out: on the open water, paddlers will get the boost of riding the outgoing tides and most likely have the wind at their backs.

At the end of days 1 and 2, shuttle vans will transport paddlers back to their starting points if needed. Day 1 ends in Kingston and Kuntz hopes to provide a camping site at Mike Wallace Park or Kola Kole Park for participants who want to pitch a tent for the night.

Cost of the event, including all snacks, meals, support and shuttles, is \$175. Of course, the cool stuff like an event t-shirt, decal and Paddle Kitsap handbook are also happily thrown in.

Getting sponsors onboard

Kuntz is working to obtain sponsors – from national sports-related companies providing power snacks to community sponsors helping to pay for meals or just pledging cash to cover costs. At major locations on the route such as Port Gamble, Kingston, Suquamish and Poulsbo, tents will be set up so community organizations can lend a festive

atmosphere for landings and offer information booths on amenities and attractions not only for the paddlers but for the family, friends and tourists who'll be watching the parade of watercraft from shore.

Jon Rose, director of Olympic Property Group that first proposed the "String of Pearls" and a major sponsor of the event, is thrilled that Kuntz took the initiative to create an event tying in so perfectly with their idea.

"Beyond the trails (and) open spaces, the underlying premise is that we should be working to make our community a better place by having all the waterfront villages – pearls – work together on a regional vision," Rose said. "What a perfect event Paddle Kitsap is. It includes stops in each pearl. Its focus is on the water – which helps to showcase Kitsap's most distinguishing characteristic – we have more coastline than any other county in Washington state.

"We are hugely grateful to John Kuntz who masterminded and has taken the lead on this effort –wow!"

OPG is supporting the event with a \$2,500 cash donation, by providing space and coordination at the Port Gamble launch point on day 1, and offering assistance on the creation of flyers and marketing, Rose said. He hopes the event provides momentum and motivation for others to push ahead with forging land trails between the mid-section of the North End.

Stringing the pearls

Kuntz is working with entities from each of the "pearls" or communities along the route including the ports and chambers of commerce of Kingston and Poulsbo, the Suquamish and S'Klallam tribes and the Kitsap Peninsula Visitor & Convention Bureau.

Mike Bookey, manager of the Port of Kingston who is also working on the "String of Pearls" project helping to map out a "Port to Port" land trail from the Port of Kingston to Port Gamble, said he's lending full support to Paddle Kayak. The event takes place just about when the port hopes to have its kayak facility complete. Caicos Corporation in Port Gamble will build the structure, but whether or not it's ready by August depends on how fast permitting is approved, he said. Ideally, the port would have a grand opening ceremony for the float when paddlers land there at the end of day 1.

The Kitsap Peninsula Visitors Bureau, based in Port Gamble, will lend its support to Paddle Kitsap as well, not only publicizing it through its Web site and brochures, but also helping to coordinate lodging for participants and a land route to follow the paddlers.

"I think that since the Paddle connects the pearls in the 'String of Pearls,' it ties in very well. There is a water element to the 'String of Pearls' and this brings awareness," noted Jean Boyle, director of tourism development for the visitor bureau. " ...it is a really wonderful event. We need to do so much more with the waterways."

Kuntz hopes that in subsequent years, Paddle Kitsap will get the attention of kayakers all over the country.

"Out on the water, you get to look at two mountain ranges ... we live in one of the premier paddling areas in the world," Kuntz exclaimed. "When people from out of the area see that, they'll want to come here."

Paddle Kitsap Route Summary

Aug. 1-2

Day 1 Port Gamble to Kingston

18 nautical miles

- Port Gamble to Foulweather Bluff, 6 nautical miles, rest stop.
- Foulweather Bluff to Norwegian Point Park, 4 nautical miles, lunch stop.
- Norwegian Point Park to Eglon, 4 nautical miles, rest stop.
- Eglon to Kingston, 4 nautical miles, end of day 1, dinner, camping at a nearby park (location yet to be determined), shuttle back to Port Gamble or paddlers can make other arrangements.

Day 2 Kingston to Poulsbo

15.5 nautical miles

- Kingston to Jefferson Head, 4 nautical miles, rest stop.
- Jefferson Head to Suquamish, 4 nautical miles, lunch stop.
- Suquamish to Keyport, 5 nautical miles, rest stop.
- Keyport to Poulsbo, 2.5 nautical miles, dinner, end of the adventure, shuttle back to Kingston.

Registration for Paddle Kitsap opens March 1. For complete details, go to www.paddlekitsap.com, e-mail kayakooc@silverlink.net or call (360) 697-6095. Kayak rental information is at www.olympicoutdoorcenter.com or www.kayakproshop.com.

To learn more about the North Kitsap Trails Association, go to www.stringofpearls.com.