

# My journey down the Grand River



**NATALIE CLEWLEY**  
Taking It Down River

golden nuggets, hoping I would meet some pirates.

Parts of the river paddling to York were very peaceful, just drifting down the river with the current moving the canoe along; other parts were a bit rocky and for the more avid canoeist.

After traveling approximately three kilometres down the river it was great to line up at the Tim Hortons paddle-through and order a coffee.

The two other canoeist I was with and I were glad to arrive at the shore of York Park after our journey from Caledonia but were disappointed to discover there was only one washroom with a long line up.

As I set out on my 18-kilometre journey down the Grand River sitting in the bottom of a canoe, I wasn't too sure how this journey would end.

I have to admit, I haven't been canoeing for approximately 10 years and this adventure really opened my eyes as to why Haldimand County is called a "Grand Experience."

It was great to see at the launch on June 25 of A Day of A Thousand Canoes, the world's largest canoe festival, the amount of canoes that were lined up at the Caledonia Fairgrounds and the enthusiasm from everyone who was ready to get out on the water.

Mayor Ken Hewitt was present at the event, taking photos with every participant, including myself.

It was announced by the organizers that participants came from Caledonia, Cayuga, Mississauga and even Richmond Hill to experience the event.

Before I got in my canoe, I picked a tree from the Haldimand Horticulture Society to plant along the river and purchased some



(l-r) Blaine Nicholls and Shane Carmichael, organizers of A Day of A Thousand Canoes; the world's largest canoe festival greeted approximately 600 people to the event on June 25.

make our way to Cayuga.

This time I would experience sitting on the back of the canoe hopefully steering us in the right direction. I was still a little nervous if the canoe would tip or if I would make it to Cayuga.

From York Park, I met some other kayakers and canoeists, sitting in the canoe I took out my Canon Rebel and attempted to take their picture for *The Sachem*.

My experience of steering the canoe for the first time wasn't too great as we twisted and turned down the river and actually got stuck once.

Along the way I saw signs telling how many kilometres our canoe had traveled. The experience of paddling under the bridges on our way to Cayuga was quite magnificent.

As I was paddling down the river, I met up with a canoe that had two pirates and a

mermaid floating along the river. I continued paddling down the river, with Cayuga in mind, not really sure how much further there was to go. As I paddled under the bridge and arrived in Cayuga I saw volunteers in the river pulling canoes out of the water onto the shore; I knew I had made it to the shore without tipping over.

After getting out of the canoe I was told to register by one of the volunteers so the organizers knew we had arrived safely. The volunteers seemed to be very busy trying to make hotdogs on the barbecue for the hungry participants.

I have to say; the food that was provided was excellent after a long day of paddling down the river, with a variety of samples from local restaurants offered.

After enjoying some time of socializing and signing the large canoe that was on display, I felt it was time to wait for the shuttle bus and head back to Caledonia.

In Cayuga I spoke with Blaine Nicholls and Shane Carmichael, organizers of the event. I told to them how great I felt the event was and my experience of canoeing down the river.

Nicholls said to me, "Can you believe we had 600 people come out?"

I left a Day of A Thousand Canoes with my very own paddle in hand and was given a different perspective of what Haldimand County has to offer.

Nicholls and Carmichael expressed to me that they are considering a canoeing event in the fall, which I am definitely looking forward to.

The second annual A Day of A Thousand Canoes has already been planned for June 23, 2012.



At that very moment I was very thankful to live in York and went for a short walk to my house to use the washroom.

I was glad to see there were other people at the park enjoying the dunk tank, entertainment and local artists displaying their work. From what I saw it seemed everyone was having a great time enjoying a snack courtesy of Zehrs Markets in Caledonia.

The time had come again, after a short break to try and get back in the canoe and



Sachem photo by Natalie Clewley

Paid actors from The Pyrates Image played as, (l-r) mermaid Ataris, Captain John Swallow, and Seika Hellbound were seen coasting along the Grand River as part of A Day of A Thousand Canoes held on June 25.

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