

Kayaking works different muscles

When it comes to mountain biking, cyclocross or being the captain on a tandem, having upper-body strength comes in handy. I found a great way to cross train – kayak “the loneliest river” in the United States.

Prior to departure on the Owyhee River in Oregon, river guide Paul Spence of YD Adventures (www.yd.org) briefed us for the seven-day, 50-mile trip in inflatable kayaks. I find hands-on learning works best for me. I realized just how “hands on” this would be. “It’s really easy to lose equipment in this type of environment,” Spence cautioned. “Hang onto your paddle.” We had one spare paddle. With numerous rapids per mile, I used my arms/shoulders like never before. Learning the “straight arm” technique did lessen fatigue.



The incredible beauty and solitude made the miles melt away. No humans were sighted until the end of our sixth day, four miles from the takeout. Instead, our companions were owls, golden eagles, chukars, swallows, scorpions, rattlesnakes, big horn sheep, countless fish etc.



I also learned the difference between backpacking, where one urinates a significant distance from water and buries human waste versus kayaking in an environment that is extremely dry. When one travels through the Owyhee River area, one is expected to pack out human waste in a “poop tube” and pee in the river to avoid long-term damage to soil.

By afternoon on Day 1, it was time to put lessons into practice - after everyone’s life jacket was checked. We honed our skills in tranquil water in preparation for Day 2. We were reminded of the “river position” – which is to float on one’s back if the kayak flips to avoid feet getting stuck under a boulder. Spence also stressed that it’s “against human nature” but one should breathe “at the bottom of the wave,” not at the top.

Day 2 presented an unusual sight – raining tumbleweeds. A massive dust devil had lifted pieces of tumbleweed 300-400 feet above the river near the canyon rim walls. A short time later, each participant was required to purposely capsize their kayak to get used to righting the craft and crawling back in. Spence also stressed that one wants to avoid “V’s” in the water – a sign of a boulder just underneath the surface and shoot for the “tongues” – where water is going between obstacles.

I would put the training to good use on Day 4 when I found myself thrust behind a boulder after capsizing, snapping my paddle.