

Eco activists brave waterways

PADDLING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

KAREN WATKINS

A group of environmental activists and outdoor adventurers completed an epic 10-hour journey from False Bay to Table Bay on World Environment Day, Sunday June 5.

This is the second Peninsula Paddle, the brain child of Trevor Johnston and Thomas Cousins. Their aim is to raise awareness and to draw attention to the condition of the waterways. Last year they were joined by Kevin Winter and Alastair Lee but this year the paddle was an open event.

About 25 river kayakers and stand up paddlers (SUP) set off in the dark and drizzle from Muizenberg beach.

After crossing Zandvlei, the paddlers entered the canal at Marina da Gama where they dragged the kayaks through Coniston Park, Steenberg, Lavender Hill and Retreat. Some of the debris included a shopping trolley, tyres, condoms, sanitary pads, a dead rat, chicken, an iron, two kettles, CDs, dolls and a surf board. This despite a resident, Loretta Lewis, saying the City had cleaned the canal the previous week.

At one point the gunge was as thick as stew. "These are the urban gutters of the city. You can judge the health of a city by the state of its waterways," said Rondebosch resident Mr Winter who took samples of the water along the route.

Ian Tilley of Scarborough, said the waterways of his home-country, England, used to be the same and no-one used them. It was Margaret Thatcher's government who cleaned them up. Now the canals have a thriving riverside social life and are popular for barge holidays.

In Retreat the kayakers rescued a dog that had fallen into the canal. They then portaged the

kayaks to Princessvlei where the "Paddle for Peace" youth morning was under way, co-ordinated by Educo Africa.

From here the paddlers once again dragged their kayaks through the canals of Southfield to Plumstead. Reaching the watershed, they cycled to once again enter the canals at Access Park. Crossing beneath Kromboom Parkway they passed through Claremont and Rondebosch East before entering the Black River Canal at Sybrand Park.

A number of participants chose not to do the final stretch from the Black River to Woodstock. Sybrand Park resident, SUP and environmental consultant, Sonja Pithey, had warned the organisers that most of the consultants working on a contract in the Black River had contracted hepatitis. She said the Faecal Coli counts in the Black River are considered extremely high and indicate the presence of faecal matter.

Those who chose to brave the hazardous, putrid, decomposing matter, donned face masks and rubber gloves. Floating litter and debris and flying golf balls were not the only obstacle along this stretch. Water hyacinth chokes the river between the Black River Parkway and Liesbeek Parkway.

As the river spewed the kayakers into the sea a pile of plastic made a sad backdrop to the iconic Table Mountain.

After the short paddle along Table Bay, members of the Friends of the Liesbeek and others gathered on Woodbridge Island in Milnerton to welcome the paddlers as they ended their journey at Rietvlei Nature Area.

● Visit www.zandvleitrust.org.za/art-peninsula to find out more about the trip documented by Gavin Lawson of Zandvlei Trust.



■ Above: Kayakers donned face masks and rubber gloves to brave the hazardous, putrid, decomposing matter in the Black River.



■ Left: Ian Tilley of Scarborough, left, Rondebosch resident Kevin Winter and Sam Braid of Kenilworth.

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