

## Harnessing the power of a river

### Dozens of whitewater paddlers brave freezing temperatures to compete on the Deschutes

By Hillary Borrud / *The Bulletin*

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Snow was falling steadily in Bend on Sunday morning, and the temperature was near freezing. Yet the slalom race that drew dozens of competitors from across Oregon and even Canada took place on the Deschutes River, not the slopes of Mount Bachelor.

Kayakers and canoeists braved the cold water for the third annual Riverhouse Rendezvous Slalom, organized by the League of Northwest Whitewater Racers.

"The whole goal is fun and whitewater participation," said Jennie Goldberg, the league's director. Sunday's race was the second of nine events the league will hold this year, and racers earn points each time they participate.

Jim Bollermann, a 70-year-old from Bull Run, has been competing in the whitewater races for a decade, along with his wife, Jan Bollermann, 72. The Bollermanns compete in an open canoe, which put them in a category of their own on Sunday, as they were the only open canoe racers. They built the boat in which they raced.

"It's addictive, and we're addicted to it," Jim Bollermann said. "It's a sport we can share."

Bollermann called the sport fun and challenging, without much danger, since someone is always standing by to pull overturned competitors out of the water.

Bert Hinkley, of Bend, the organizer and announcer for the Riverhouse Rendezvous Slalom, said participants were "crazy people who put up gates and paddle through really cold water."

The gates hung from wires strung across the river. Competitors had to go through the green gates while paddling downstream, then circle back quickly each time



Jure Poberja fights his way upriver to clear a gate while competing in the Riverhouse Rendezvous Slalom on Sunday. Competitors had to pass through green gates while paddling downstream, and red gates going upstream.



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they came to a red gate, because they had to paddle upstream through those.

In the junior division, there were just two competitors. Sam Fletcher, of Chilliwack, British Columbia, and Chip Campbell, of Portland, both 15, discussed the sport as they waited for their race to start.

For Sam, the stretch of the Deschutes River by The Riverhouse was an attractive course that was not too easy, but also not too wild.

“They had some good eddies, and it was a good course,” Fletcher said.

Participants spent Saturday practicing the course, something that is typically not allowed in professional races, Hinkley said.

Chip said he got into whitewater kayak racing because it’s an intellectual as well as a physical challenge.

“It makes you really understand the river on a deeper level,” Chip said. “You have to use the waves, the current, the rocks. You have to use the river’s power instead of fighting it.”

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Photos by Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin

Chip Campbell, 15, of Portland, clears a set of gates Sunday on the Deschutes River. Chip was one of two competitors in the junior division.



Photos by Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin

Jim and Jan Bollermann paddle toward the next gate in an open canoe during Sunday’s Riverhouse Rendezvous Slalom on the Deschutes River in Bend. The Bollermanns built the boat in which they raced.

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Spectators gather on a bridge over the Deschutes River in Bend to watch paddlers race on Sunday. Dozens braved near-freezing temperatures for the whitewater competition. Gates were hung from wires suspended across the river.



Joel Martin competes in the Riverhouse Rendezvous Slalom, organized by the League of Northwest Whitewater Racers.