

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact

Diane Hutsell
Special Projects Coordinator
(423) 263-7232
dhutsell@tennesseeverhill.com

Raft America's Olympic River: Ocoee River Opens March 19th

Etowah, TN - Feb 28, 2005

Cool off this summer on the Ocoee River when temperatures begin to rise in southeast Tennessee as whitewater season begins March 19. Each year more than 200,000 rafters brave the rapids on this Olympic River in the Cherokee National Forest located in southeast Tennessee making it one of the favorite whitewater rivers in the world and earning it a place on Canoe and Kayak magazines "Top Ten Whitewater Rivers in America" list.

Site of the 1996 Olympic whitewater slalom events, the upper Ocoee River is known around the world as the premier place for whitewater competition, but both the Upper and Middle sections of the river are great playgrounds for a growing number of paddlers. With guaranteed water release days available on this Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) dam-controlled river, commercial outfitters offer guided trips on the middle section of the river March thru October. All types of people come to experience the thrill of the Ocoee. The only requirement to raft is that you must be twelve years or older. With water temperatures typically 15 degrees cooler than the air temperature and a relatively long whitewater season, the variety of rapids and play spots make the Ocoee River the perfect location to hone different paddling skills.

Since the late 1970s when river enthusiasts began showing up with army surplus rafts, the middle section of the Ocoee River has offered five miles of big Class III and IV waves with names like "Double Suck" and "Torpedo," and "Hell's Hole." Rafters put in below a 30-foot tall spillway that is essentially a river wide waterfall and find themselves immediately in the thick of it making this section one of the most talked about whitewater runs in the United States. Today, the Ocoee River is home to 24 whitewater outfitters owning licenses to operate commercial rafting on the Ocoee. The Upper Ocoee, site of the 1996 Olympic Slalom course is now open on selective days of the summer. While this part of the Ocoee River looks like a public recreation area complete with hiking and biking trails along with a visitors center that blends in with the surrounding rocky river gorge, what lies beneath are thousands of tons of concrete boulders, steel reinforcements and artificial rock. More remote than the Middle Ocoee, the real draw is the almost continuous action with constant Class IV rapids that are steeper and carry such names as "Humongous" and "Edge of the World." The Olympic course is a relatively short run-only three miles- but the drops come quickly with little time to recover in between.

Many come to raft both sections of the Ocoee River with no whitewater experience whatsoever and take advantage of the trained river guides provided by the whitewater companies, while others, known as "play boaters," bring their own equipment and years of experience to the Ocoee River. Play boating runs the gamut from relatively easy river maneuvers to demanding, gymnastic freestyle stunts and is a type of river running

that can be done in any type of whitewater boat. With the numerous shallow holes, great 360 holes, killer cartwheel holes and shredder waves of all sizes the Ocoee is the premier place for kayakers all over the world to come and practice the moves needed to paddle nearly any river.

For more information on whitewater rafting on the Ocoee River;
Contact the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association at 423-263-7232
or online at www.tennesseeoverhill.com

Photos available on request.