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Hundreds venture to North Shore for outdoors festival Activities included wall-climbing, canoeing, fishing

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By Len Barcoucky, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The way Passion Sibley remembered it, the fish she caught yesterday afternoon in the Allegheny River looked about six feet long.

It probably was closer to 24 inches, her mother, Jovanna, gently suggested.

No matter what the fish's measured length, the 11-year-old girl from Penn Hills couldn't have been happier at the way the 7th annual Venture Outdoors Festival was turning out for her.

"I love catching fish," she said. Her secret: using corn as bait to tempt the catfish, carp and bigmouth buffalo that lurk near Pittsburgh's Point.

Passion was one of at least 5,000 people who wet fishing lines, paddled kayaks or dragon boats and learned about dozens of hiking, cycling and orienteering opportunities throughout southwestern Pennsylvania.

The daylong outdoor event drew more than 100 exhibitors to Pittsburgh's North Shore. Admission to the event was free, and visitors had opportunities to try activities ranging from wall-climbing to canoeing.

"Mother Nature is smiling on outdoor recreation today," said Sean Brady, assistant executive director of Venture Outdoors, the organizer of the event. Venture Outdoors is a Pittsburgh-based nonprofit agency that seeks to increase participation in outdoor recreational activities. UPMC Health Plan was the main sponsor for the event, which drew on the help of about 100 volunteers.

Donald Tedrow and his daughter Samantha, 10, donned life jackets and pedaled out into the Allegheny River on a pair of hydrobikes. "It really is like riding a bicycle," Mr. Tedrow, of Cranberry, said when he returned to shore on the uniquely shaped watercraft.

"Except that you can't fall over and skin your knees," said Larry Beighey, known as "Hydrobike Larry." The New Brighton man has been renting the combination of a bicycle and a pontoon boat each summer at Bradys Run Park in Beaver County.

"One of the best things about living in southwestern Pennsylvania is having a chance to do all kinds of outdoor stuff as a family," Mr. Tedrow said.

Fishing is one of the things Uwe Calloway, of Penn Hills, enjoys doing with his daughter, Perri Porter, 9. "I've gotten a few nibbles, but we haven't pulled anything in yet," Mr. Calloway said as he and his daughter cast lines into the Allegheny.

Perri didn't seem disappointed. "I like being outdoors and feeling the warm breezes," she said.

Supported by membership dues and volunteer assistance, Venture Outdoors coordinates a year-round series of recreational programs.

More information about its programs is available at its Web site, www.ventureoutdoors.org or call 412-255-0564.