

International Whitewater Hall of Fame 2005 Nominee Biography



Candidate: **Payson Kennedy**

Category: Advocate (Living)
Sport: Whitewater Instruction and Canoe
Years Active: 1943 - Present
Home Base: Wesser, North Carolina, USA

Introduction: (quoted from Affiliate Nomination Form)

“Payson Kennedy co- founded the Nantahala Outdoor Center in Wesser, NC in 1972 with Horace Holden, at which time it was a combination motel, restaurant, store and outfitting business. Kennedy played a stunt double in Deliverance, in 1972, and soon thereafter started racing, eventually winning six national championships in C2 between 1974 and 1984. NOC is now a \$15 million a year operation with 600 summertime employees who serve 200,000 outdoor enthusiasts annually. Paddling for over sixty years, Kennedy still gets out on occasion guiding trips.”

Contributions:

“Payson Kennedy began canoeing as a youngster growing up in the Atlanta, GA area, and took his first canoeing trip as a 10-year-old in 1943. Years later he became a camp counselor and canoeing instructor for a local YMCA camp. Kennedy continued his paddling career when he was stationed in Washington State in the 1950s. He bought a folding kayak and began hitting countless waterways in the Northwest. Kennedy moved from Atlanta in 1972 with wife Aurelia and four children to assume duties as Director of the new Nantahala Outdoor Center in Western NC. He served as Director/CEO/President & Chief Philosopher until 1998; came back after 'retiring' to serve again as CEO/President in 2004-2005. He built NOC into a \$15 million per year operation, with 600 summer-time employees who serve 200,000 outdoor enthusiasts annually. NOC now is recognized as the largest Outdoor education/recreation center in the world with the largest kayaking and canoeing instructional program. He with NOC helped create the non-profit Nantahala Racing Club which has produced U.S. Olympic whitewater racers in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004; and NOC continues to be a prime supporter of the Club. Kennedy was always supportive of slalom and wildwater racing, and often involved with conservation and safety. NOC was the first rafting company to hire women racers as guides and instructors. In 2003, Payson Kennedy at age 70 guided paddle rafts three days a week on six Southeast classics, including the Pigeon, Nantahala, Ocoee, French Broad, Nolichucky and Chattooga rivers for NOC. He entered one or two open canoe races per year, and when he's out of the country he likes to sea kayak. He says paddling puts him in the "flow state," but he's not speaking geographically. "The flow state is when you're challenged by something and have such full

concentration that you don't think about anything else," he says. "I often get into that state when I'm paddling." His favorite river is the Chattooga, and he likes guiding for the opportunities it gives him to teach guests about flora, fauna and rivers. And he doesn't even get tired of people asking him about his role in Deliverance. "If you don't enjoy talking to people about rivers and things like that, you'd probably get sick of it," he says. "But I enjoy it."

-Courtesy Chuck Hines and Paddler Magazine

Other Accomplishments:

- 1974 - 1984 U.S. Open Boat National Championships OC1, National Champion 6x