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Canoes trump cars for Carleton professor

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Every morning, Root Gorelick transports his canoe to the river on a special trailer he pulls behind his bicycle. After carefully making his way through the morning traffic, he ties up his bike. Then, he paddles to work.

Gorelick, a biology professor at Carleton, said he used to commute to work on his bike. But a couple years ago, he started canoeing to the university once in a while. Last year, he did so more often and to this day, he still does.

“This year I figured, well, let’s just see how long I can push it,” Gorelick said.

When Gorelick heard about a man in Phoenix, Ariz. who did the same thing, he said the notion of towing a canoe with a bicycle startled him.

He had been putting his canoe on the roof of his car until he met another evolutionary biology professor who was visiting Carleton from Vermont. He told Gorelick about a trailer designed for towing a canoe or kayak behind a bicycle.

Along with his respect for the other professor and his work, Gorelick said he also had a lot of respect for his creative commuting idea.

So, he looked into getting his own trailer.

Towing the canoe is the only thing about canoeing to work that draws much surprise, Gorelick said.

“That’s the one that people don’t know what to make of,” he said. “Everyone expects it out on the river.”

The only real challenge Gorelick has faced while commuting is the foul winter weather, like high winds, which can make canoeing difficult. He can, however, bring more things to work with him

in his canoe than he could while biking. One time, Gorelick said he even transported his clothing for convocation to the university by canoe.

Gorelick said canoeing in the dark isn't a problem for him — he barely notices the loss of daylight because of the extra hour he spends outside commuting each day. He said he's seen a lot of unexpected wildlife, met some interesting people and enjoys the peace of paddling along.

“The river is unexpected, in a good way,” he said.

Though it means an hour lost everyday where he could be doing something else, it also gives him an extra hour outside. It also means he can avoid coming into work stressed, Gorelick said.

Despite the few times he has almost tipped the boat, Gorelick said he has enjoyed a semester of relaxing trips to work and hopes that trend continues — even as winter approaches.

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