

# american whitewater

May/June 2000

**Ozark Steep  
Creeking:  
Not Just an  
Oxymoron  
Anymore!**

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**Return to  
Canyon Creek**

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# american whitewater

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☐ Cover Photos : Julie Keller© won the Still Image category at the National Paddling Film festival, winning Favorite Web Photo and Best Digital Image for her picture of Rush Peace at Bald River Falls.  
Inset: Johnnie Kern on Canyon Creek by Dieter King



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## Even Old Dogs

Last weekend I found myself sharing a river with an old friend, someone I had not kayaked with in nearly a decade. As we drifted toward the take-out he said, "You've watched me boat today. What would make me a better paddler?"

His question left me speechless. I had never been asked that question before. I was both astonished and flattered. The question implied that I had some level of expertise, that I might be expected to dispense paddling pearls of wisdom. The honest truth is that I am a decent paddler, but not a great one. Just an old schooler who has managed to negotiate countless moderately-difficult rivers and creeks by virtue of persistence, experience, stamina, and luck. If I am famous for anything it is not my form and technique, but rather my lack of them. No one has ever mistaken me for Eric Jackson.

But as I pondered my old friend's query, I realized what he was getting at. He wasn't implying that I had morphed into a great paddler since we last shared a river, he was just acknowledging that I had become a better paddler. And he wanted to know how I did it.

I have been paddling for nearly twenty-five years, but, as I remember, my paddling skills seemed to plateau after the second year. Sure, during the next fifteen years I got better at reading water and, like everyone else, I benefited from new boat designs. But, really, I don't think my technique started to improve

until ten years ago. And most of the progress has probably occurred in the past three years. My paddling style is still not "pretty," but it is better than ever before. It improved enough to impress my old friend, anyway.

I've never taken a formal lesson or read a book on paddling techniques. I'm not even comfortable with the instructional terminology. But I can pinpoint some things that made me a better recreational paddler, and I'm willing to share them. Many of my suggestions will seem laughably obvious, particularly to new school boaters. Nevertheless, I still see plenty of paddlers, young and old, who could benefit from my simple suggestions.

First and foremost, get in shape and stay in shape. About ten years ago I dropped thirty pounds of flab. Did it make a difference in my boating? You bet it did! Try running a river with a thirty pound sack of potatoes in your boat. A little cardiovascular conditioning and cross training helped as well. Twelve years ago carrying my kayak up the mountain at the Panther Creek take-out on the Gauley was a brutal 40-minute ordeal. Now, at 48, I do it in fifteen minutes with energy to spare. But I can't help noticing how many gasping 20 and 30 year olds I pass along the trail. And an surprising number of these breathless wonders are sucking on cigarettes. Get real!

Accept the sad fact that drifting a river does not constitute exercise. It doesn't take much energy to float like a turd down a

familiar Class IV river. And if you celebrate that *accomplishment* by pigging out on beer and pizza.... The bottom line is that a day on the river will only be a real work out if you bike or jog the shuttle. Or paddle aggressively.

Which brings me to my second point. If you want better technique, you have to work at it. Watch Johnny Regan paddle the Upper Yough, or Clay Wright paddle the Gauley, or Charley MacArthur paddle the Roaring Fork. They don't just make the mandatory moves; they are in perpetual motion.... driving through obscure slots into tight eddies, attaining, ferrying, boofing, spinning, surfing and cartwheeling. They paddle thirty miles during a single trip down a ten-mile river. Do you think that they need to do that to get down the creek? Of course not. They are maintaining and honing their technique. That technique serves them well when they tackle less familiar, more difficult rivers.

So, the next time you paddle your home river, follow their example and look for difficult moves that you can add to your repertoire. When I paddle the Upper Yough, I make it a rule to attempt a number of tough maneuvers that push me to the limit... moves that I successfully complete less than half of the time. They aren't dangerous or consequential, just challenging. If you don't practice moves that are really hard for you, you won't get any better.

My third suggestion is to take a good look at your boat and gear. There was a time when the Dancer and the T Slalom and the Crossfire were state-of-the-art boats. That day is gone. Long gone. If you are paddling a tub and you really want to get better, check out the new designs and find one that fits your build, style, and needs. Take advantage of the progress that has been made in boat design. If you want to paddle really big water *and* do some serious creeking *and* compete in rodeos, you will probably need two and possibly three boats. True, Eric Southwick could paddle a tiny rodeo boat down Mann's Creek *and* the North Fork of the Payette in flood. But your name is not Eric Southwick!

Take a look at your paddle as well. Several years ago I sustained a partial rotator cuff tear in a mountain bike accident. Within two weeks I was back in my boat, paddling in spite of the pain. I figured it would soon run its course. But it didn't. After nine months of unrelenting misery, I was ready to consider surgery. Finally, at a friend's insistence, I skeptically set aside my stiff, heavy, and long paddle and tried a short, light model. Within two weeks my shoulder was pain free! And my paddling improved to boot.

My fourth suggestion is to sit up in your boat. Paddle with an aggressive, forward posture and resist the temptation to lean back on

the deck when you run a drop. New school boaters and those who had formal instruction often have good paddling postures, but most old schoolers do not. I think there is a good reason for this. Fifteen years ago most of us were paddling long, pointy boats that were prone to dive. We would have been hard pressed to boof those boats, even if we had known how. So we cultivated the habit of throwing our weight back when we went over falls and ledges, hoping to avoid pitons. This became an instinctive habit, one that is hard to break. Many of us know in our heads that we need to lean forward, but when things get tense, we slip back to our old ways. Fight this tendency. Sit up. A back band or brace may help, but the rest is up to you.

Which brings me to suggestion number five. Take the time to outfit your boat correctly. You will not paddle well if you are rattling around in your kayak like a jumping bean in a tin can. Many of us who learned to boat a long time ago still find it disconcerting to oaddle tightly-fitted boats. This is understandable, our first boats had tiny cockpits and we worried about entrapment. I paddled for 15 years before I even tried a back band or hip pads. That was a mistake. You cannot use your legs, hips, and abdominal muscles effectively if you are not snug in your boat.

Suggestion number six: Don't just paddle with your arms, use your whole body to move your boat. Especially your shoulders, abs and hips. There is a reason why expert boaters like Coleen Laffey and Brian Homberg have washboard abs. They use them. Stretching a bit before you launch and periodically during the day seems to facilitate whole body paddling.

Number seven: Conquer your fear of rocks. Again, this is tough for old timers, especially those of us who spent time in fragile fiberglass boats. Not long ago I showed an extreme video to an old slalom paddler, one who had been on the national team 30 years ago. He had been away from the sport for more than a decade. When he saw the creekers in action he was horrified. "They don't even try to miss the rocks, they just bang into them!" he snorted. Of course, during his hayday creeks were rivers with gradients more than 125 feet per mile. And plastic boats were totally uncool.

Today's creekers often paddle streams that drop 300 feet a mile and more. They don't manage that feat by intentionally slamming headlong into rocks, but they certainly don't dodge them all, either. If you want to creek you need to learn to use the rocks, and the water that pillows up and swirls around them. Expect to lose a little knuckle meat and plastic in the process. It's the price of admission.

Number eight: When facing a difficult

move, look at the precise feature that you need to attain and focus on it. It might be a point on an eddy line, or the launch pad of a ledge. It might be the edge of a hydraulic, or the peak of a wave. Whatever it is, keep looking at it as you go for it.


My ninth suggestion is a simple mechanical observation: the last paddle stroke you take before you launch a vertical move

is the most important. The placement and timing of that stroke will determine whether you land flat or pencil in, whether you boof or goof. The mechanics of that stroke seem to be even more important than your approach speed and angle. Learning to place that final stroke correctly takes practice. This is not one of my strengths, but I am working on it.

Number ten: Visualize a difficult move

# Less Is More???

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before you attempt it. Athletic coaches have been preaching this for years. And with good reason. It works. If you can't even imagine yourself performing a difficult, dangerous move, you probably shouldn't try it. For example, I cannot visualize myself boofing into the crux eddy in Jacob's Ladder on the North Fork of the Payette. Hence, I have not attempted it. Know and respect your limitations. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor!

One final thought, keep paddling in perspective. Set goals for yourself, but don't forget that running whitewater is supposed to be fun. After all, it's only rock and roll!

Bob Gedekoh

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## Please Watch Your Step!

Dear American Whitewater Staff Members,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your great work in all you do for the WW community. From river access to safety standards, I respect your work above all others.

Second of all, I would like to respectfully implore you to be responsible with the type of advertising and trip reports you choose to run in your magazine, based on the effort I read in the last issue to generate article submission and readership of children thru your Kids Korner.

Although I haven't noticed any articles recently that blatantly ignored safety practices, like not scouting unknown difficult rapids, that I've seen in the past, please keep up the good work there. Please give top priority to those articles that detail the safety practices involved in running whitewater along with the excitement. I personally LIKE to scout rapids. I think its part of the fun to pick a line from shore and then hit the line while running the rapid. It helps me determine how well I'm paddling and how much I need to learn. These topics should be emphasized to young paddlers and not agonized over (like, oh, what a drag, we have to get out and scout).

Some of the recent advertising I've seen by Riot and BomberGear in paddling magazines has just been plain inappropriate for young readership in my opinion. Advertising with the sole purpose of being obscene (look up the def in Webster's), such as the Riot ad on page 49 of your Jan/Feb 2000 issue. This just isn't appropriate for a magazine that actively solicits readership and contributions of children. Although I'm not a parent myself and most people who aren't don't understand, I do know paddling parents or those with paddling children who are canceling memberships because of lewd images their children are now seeing in paddling magazines from organizations that tout themselves as family organizations. It's not just about showing some skin, it's when the intent is designed to incite lust.

Please, please don't shirk the responsibility so many other people and media have. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Debbie Meller  
Whitewater Enthusiast  
ACA SWR Instructor

Editor's reply:

Thanks for your thoughtful comments. Because American Whitewater is a volunteer-generated magazine with askeleton staff

and difficult deadlines, we are unable to review the ads that we run. It is hard enough to monitor the editorial content of the magazine, much less the advertising. I first see the ads when the magazine comes out, the same as you. So, we must rely on the good taste and judgement of our advertisers.

In regard to the specific Riot ad that you mentioned, I don't think most folks would consider it obscene. (The ad includes the picture of a statuesque woman in a bikini.) I certainly will grant you that the bikini in question is tiny. In fact, when I first saw the ad, I couldn't help but recall the silly pop song from the sixties, "Itsy Bitsy, Teeny Weenie, Yellow Polka Dot Bikini." But I don't think you fit too many polka dots onto that lady's bikini, even itsy bitsy ones!

Look on the bright side. Maybe as a function of that ad, Riot will sell thousands of kayaks this year and so be able to afford to buy that woman some clothes!

More seriously, we are trying to reach a broad audience. We definitely want to attract young boaters; they are the future of the sport. But many of our readers are adults accustomed to mainstream magazines such as *Men's Journal*, *Outside*, and *Rolling Stone*, whose contents are far more liberal than our own. We have to appeal to them as well. I think that most of our content is appropriate for kids, but once in a while we do publish some stories that are "adult" in nature. So, I would encourage concerned parents to read through American Whitewater first and remove any material they consider inappropriate for children, before passing the magazine on.

## Whoops!

I would like to apologize to the family and friends of Pete Cary for the spelling error in the January/February article. I don't know how that one crept in from my earlier drafts. Perhaps Pete would have been amused.

Sincerely,  
Paul Everson

## A Dark and Stormy Night Remembered

Hey Bob- I don't get to spend as much time on the water or reading *American Whitewater* as I used to, but when I read the replies/commentary about Teresa Gryder's article in the Forum in the March/April issue, well I just had to weigh in. I was one of the paddlers on that trip down Section IV of the Chattooga in the dark and in the rain, and it did not seem like the dang big death defying deed that our friend in San Rafael

would like to make it out to be. I remember it as one of the greatest experiences on the water I have ever had in the 24 years of thrashing, hacking, and swimming that I have graciously endured.

Context is important..., but I am sure she got it right since she is a relentless about getting the story straight. We were all pretty tuned up, paddling or raft guiding at least six days a week. It was in the middle of the summer of medium to high water. I think. All of us had more than 300 runs on Section IV.

I was paddling the river five times a week (alone, I might add) as a photographer for NOC.

Teresa had been paddling the river since who knows when. There is a rock in Woodall Shoals named after her dad. There were three other folks with us who were all very experienced on the Chattooga—Cathy Holcombe, daughter of NOC founder Payson Kennedy and mother of maybe one of the greatest boaters on the scene right now, Andrew Holcombe. Kory Kais was there too, a brute of a boater who ran Soc'em Dog twice under the light of underpowered head lamps. Ed Bowen was the other paddler, a legend in my mind from the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee. At the time, we were all solid paddlers, intimately familiar of where we were, paddling a warm river at a moderate level. In that context, I do not feel what we did was out of control. What I do know is that the experience was really cool.

For me, paddling is the ultimate recreation for the individual. You excel at the sport at your own pace, and you don't have to listen to a bunch of folks yelling foul, throwing flags, or benching you because you underperformed. Its just you, your boat, water, and rocks. You make your own calls, and that night five or six years ago in July, we made our call to put on the river in a driving rain and were rewarded with an incredible experience. With the amount of time I spend on the water and the shape I am in now, I would not be up for it, but at the time I was. I never see the what, where, and how (God forbid) I paddle or what others paddle as a recommendation or endorsement for the general paddling population. Its just what we did, and we had a great time. Make your own call, and if you're going to be dumb, you gotta be tough.

Christopher Smith

PS: To the new school- you will be old school before you know it.

## Correction

In the last issue we misprinted the e-mail address for Robert Farmer who wrote "Lessons," published in our Rivewoices section. His correct e-mail is rsfarmer@starpower.net



## Lower Yough Clarification

According to the American Whitewater Safety Code, US Standard Rated Rapids, Dimple/Swimmers on the Lower Yough is rated Class III at levels between 1.6 and 2 feet. Two fatalities have occurred in the Dimple/Swimmers rapid according to our data base, which spans three decades.

## A Real Riot!!!!

Bob,

As a woman, I find the Riot advertisements more amusing than offensive. I for one would never be seen on the river with only a dental floss sized thong, but hey, to each their own. I do, however, take offense at the disproportionate number of ads featuring nubile women in (or out) of boating gear. As a woman with normal tastes, I would appreciate a few ads with the men on shore and a woman tearing it up in the water. Take that Eric Jackson for instance. I saw him at the Gauley take-out one day, and he was one chiseled hunk! Or how about Corran Addison. I would love to see a Riot ad featuring Isabella in a boat, and Corran in a speedo! I think that would be great. I've heard him brag about womens' interest in him, and I wanna see what the fuss is about! So come on Corran, how about it. Girl in a boat, you in a speedo. Or are you too, um... shy?

Jennifer Brown-Carpenter

**Credits for "The Elkhorn Saga" published in the last issue were accidentally omitted. The article was written by AW Board Member Barry Grimes and the photos were taken by Tom Uhlman.**

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# Sometimes... It's not how you paddle, but how you look.



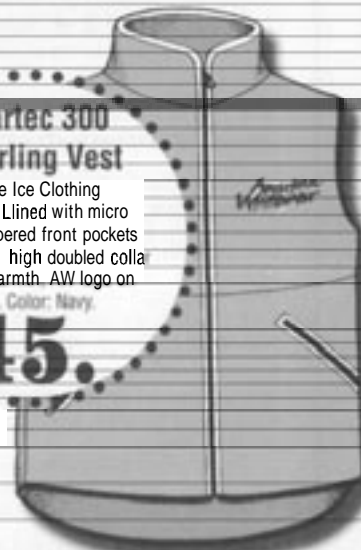
## Polartec 300 Warm-Up Jacket

By Blue Ice Clothing  
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■ Whitewater Design T-shirts: \$15 / L & XL only/ Colors Mocha, Moss, Gray Ash			
■ Logo embroidered Kavu Cap: \$18 (postage \$1) Colors Gold or Black			
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# Guidelines for Contributors

**Please read this carefully before sending us your articles and photos!** This is a volunteer publication, please cooperate and help us out. **Do not send us your material without a release – signed by all authors and photographers (attached)!!!**

The editorial staff of *American Whitewater* carefully reviews all material submitted for publication. We are particularly interested in receiving full-length feature articles, conservation and club news, special event announcements, articles pertaining to whitewater safety and short, humorous pieces.

Articles should fit our established format: that is, they should be stylistically patterned to fit into our Features, AW Briefs, River Voices, Conservation Currents, Safety Lines, Humor or End Notes sections. Exceptional photographs and whitewater cartoons are also welcomed.

If possible, articles should be submitted on a 3-1/2-inch computer disk. (Microsoft Word if possible – others accepted.) Please do not alter the margins or spacing parameters: use the standard default settings. Send a printed copy of the article as well.

Those without access to a word processor may submit their articles typed. Please double space.

Photos may be submitted as slides, black or

white prints, or color prints. **Keep your originals** and send us duplicates if possible; we cannot guarantee the safe return of your pictures. If you want us to return your pictures, include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your submission. Because we publish in black and white, photos with a lot of contrast work best.

*American Whitewater* feature articles should relate to some aspect of whitewater boating. Please do not submit articles pertaining to sea kayaking or flat water. The best features have a definite slant... or theme. They are not merely chronological recountings of river trips.

Open the story with an eye-catching lead, perhaps by telling an interesting anecdote. Dialogue should be used to heighten the reader's interest. Don't just tell us about the river... tell us about the people on the river... develop them as characters. Feature articles should not be written in the style of a local club newsletter.

If you are writing about a commonly paddled river, your story should be told from a unique perspective. Articles about difficult, infrequently paddled, or exotic rivers are given special consideration. But we are also interested in well written, unusual articles pertaining to Class III and IV rivers as well. Feature stories do not have to be about a specific river. Articles about paddling tech-

niques, the river environment and river personalities are also accepted. Pieces that incorporate humor are especially welcome. Open boating and rafting stories are welcome.

Don't be afraid to let your personality shine through and don't be afraid to poke a little fun at yourself... and your paddling partners.

Profanity should be used only when it is absolutely necessary to effectively tell a story; it is not our intent to offend our more sensitive members and readers.

Please check all facts carefully, particularly those regarding individuals, government agencies, and corporations involved in river access and environmental matters. *You are legally responsible for the accuracy of such material.* Make sure names are spelled correctly and river gradients and distances are correctly calculated.

Articles will be edited at the discretion of the editors to fit our format, length, and style. *Expect to see changes in your article. If you don't want us to edit your article, don't send it to us!* Because of our deadlines you will not be able to review the editorial changes we make prior to publication.

*American Whitewater* is nonprofit; the editors and contributors to *American Whitewater* are not reimbursed. On rare occasions, by prearrangement, professional writers receive a small honorarium when they submit stories at our request. Generally, our contributors do not expect payment, since most are members of AW, which is a volunteer conservation and safety organization.

## Release For Publication

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# Purpose

## American Whitewater

Our mission is to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

The American Whitewater (AW) is a national organization with a membership consisting of thousands of individual whitewater boating enthusiasts, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates.

**CONSERVATION:** AW maintains a complete national inventory of whitewater rivers, monitors threats to those rivers, publishes information on river conservation, provides technical advice to local groups, works with government agencies and other river users, and-- when necessary-- takes legal action to prevent river abuse.

**RIVER ACCESS:** To assure public access to whitewater rivers pursuant to the guidelines published in its official Access Policy, AW arranges for river access through private lands by negotiation or purchase, seeks to protect the right of public passage on all rivers and streams navigable by kayak or canoe, resists unjustified restrictions on government managed whitewater rivers and works with government agencies and other river users to achieve these goals.

**EDUCATION:** Through publication of the bi-monthly magazine, and by other means, American Whitewater, (AW) provides information and education about whitewater rivers, boating safety, technique and equipment.

**SAFETY:** AW promotes paddling safely, publishes reports on whitewater accidents, maintains a uniform national ranking system for whitewater

rivers (the International Scale of Whitewater Difficulty) and publishes and disseminates the internationally recognized AW Whitewater Safety Code.

**EVENTS:** AW organizes sporting events, contests and festivals to raise funds for river conservation, including the Ocoee Whitewater Rodeo in Tennessee, the Gauley River Festival in West Virginia (the largest gathering of whitewater boaters in the nation), the Arkansas River Festival in Colorado, the Kennebec Festival in Maine and the Deerfield Festival in Massachusetts.

AW was incorporated under Missouri nonprofit corporation laws in 1961 and maintains its principal mailing address at 1430 Fenwick Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301) 589-9453. AW is tax exempt under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

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On occasion **American Whitewater** publishes official organizational policy statements drafted and approved by the Board of Directors. These policy statements will be clearly identified.

# Director's Cut

by Rich Bowers



## Strategic and Organizational Planning

For anyone who has ever watched a skilled paddler run a difficult drop, you know there is more to it than just paddling over the lip.

Running difficult whitewater successfully comes from good planning and realistic skill assessment. Before you commit to any drop or any new river, you want to know where you are going, what skills and moves you need to do it right, what the options are once you commit, and any hazards in the way.

American Whitewater is beginning to prepare for our next Strategic Plan, a framework for the growth and success of this organization and a guideline for our efforts from now until the year 2005. Since we represent whitewater boaters, we are approaching our planning in the same way that we would prep for a new rapid or river. Right now we are checking with our friends and members, identifying routes and potential problems, and assessing skills and needs. We hope you will help, so that at the end of the next five years we all agree that American Whitewater has done everything within its power to restore rivers, protect access, and improve whitewater.

American Whitewater wrote its first strategic plan in 1995, and revised this in September of 1997. This plan was a bible for our staff and program committees. It was a good plan, and it was instrumental in growing American Whitewater in terms of budget, staff, programs, and vision. More importantly, it was successful; we accomplished each of the goals that we set for ourselves back in 1995.

Once you've completed a drop, you have a better idea of how you want to run it the next time. Maybe you'll choose a totally different route or just reach the bottom with a little more flair? American Whitewater plans to do an even better job with this next strategic plan. Just like planning a trip, we have hired local talent (a consultant) to help guide us through the process and planning. And we are gathering information to see what others think of us, gather new ideas and perspectives, and get through this process safely and *in style!*

Good boaters leave little to chance. They talk to their friends, consult guidebooks, and study topo maps. Often, hard rapids are broken down into smaller and more manageable

portions. Over the next two months, we will be researching the future of this organization. Instead of using guidebooks, we will hold meetings in California, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Washington DC, Idaho, and Colorado to gather information from member and nonmember paddlers, from river agencies, and from other river and recreation groups.

We expect to complete our research in April, and complete a draft of our strategic plan at our upcoming board meeting in Idaho this May. After this, we will be finalizing and distributing the plan to all of those who helped chart the course.

Please help us with this planning. Your input will help to guide our future direction and will provide us with ideas on how best to respond to our members' priorities. Send your ideas to me or to our strategic planning committee (Risa Callaway, Richard Penny; Jeff Leighton, Bill Sedivy, Kevin Lewis, Jay Kenney, Barry Tuscano) via this office at (301) 589-9453 or e-mail at [Richb@amwhitewater.org](mailto:Richb@amwhitewater.org)

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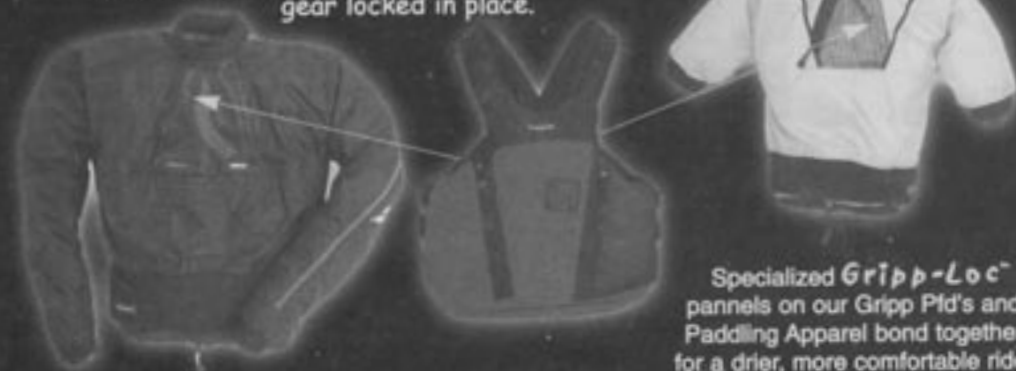
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# Conserve

## Oregon Governor Kitzhaber Takes Stand on Lower Snake River Dams

In a move uncommon to most politicians, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber took a decisive stand on a resource issue critical to the Pacific Northwest. Kitzhaber recently called for the breaching of four lower Snake River dams, shocking fellow western governors who have resisted the idea. Kitzhaber also criticized the delays and inaction on salmon restoration in the Pacific Northwest. Kitzhaber pushed aside the political rhetoric and let the data speak for itself. He ignored the whining of the industries subsidized multiple times by the dams through water, power, and shipping not to mention the agricultural subsidies. We should all applaud Kitzhaber for his clarity and honesty on this issue and courage to stand alone.

The idea of breaching the four lower Snake River dams has been gaining momentum in recent years as other methods for restoring collapsing salmon runs have failed. In the Pacific Northwest, \$4 billion has been spent since 1980 on restoration projects such as building ladders on dams so migrating fish can get upstream, installing screens on diversion pipes and canals so fish don't get pumped out of the river, and even barging fish around dams. Still, salmon populations are faltering. A Draft Lower Snake River Salmon Migration Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a Conservation of Columbia Basin Fish Plan by the Federal Caucus were issued earlier this year. The documents included analysis of seven salmon restoration alternatives. The public comment period closed on March 31, 2000.

## Whitewater Boating Survey on the South Fork American, California

The El Dorado Irrigation District (EID) is surveying boaters on the South Fork American River above Slab Creek reservoir to assess demand for the whitewater resource and boaters flow preferences. American Whitewater Affiliation, Friends of the River, and several local boaters requested that EID better define whitewater boating opportunities on the South Fork and Silver Fork, and identify the effects of Project operations on flow. The paddling community must make every attempt to participate in this survey. The results will be used to determine the degree to which the El Dorado Hydroelectric Project impacts whitewater opportunities on the upper South Fork American.

Surveys will be available electronically at the following web sites: [awa.org](http://awa.org), [resourceinsi8hts.com](http://resourceinsi8hts.com), [EIDhydro.com](http://EIDhydro.com), and, [friendsoftheriver.org](http://friendsoftheriver.org). Surveys will also be distributed at local stores and other key locations. Copies of the survey forms are also available at EID's main offices, which are located at 2890 Mosquito Road in Placerville, California. Complete a survey form for each time you boat the Silver Fork or the South Fork this season. This will enable flow comparisons based on your assessment of the boating quality at various volumes.

EID recently purchased the El Dorado Hydroelectric Project (Project No. 184) from PG&E. The hydropower project affects flows along the Silver Fork of the American River (Silver Fork) and the South Fork of the American River (South Fork) between Strawberry and Slab Creek Reservoir. This project is currently undergoing relicensing.

For more information contact John Gangemi, 406-837-3155; e-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net) or Mike Bean [mike@rivervilla.com](mailto:mike@rivervilla.com).

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# The Future of Roadless Areas

By Kathryn Kessler

The importance of forest cover and roadless areas has increased dramatically as the world continues to watch deforestation occur. While unroaded areas make up only a small percentage of total land cover in the United States, their value is great. Roadless areas are National Forest System lands that have been "unroaded," meaning that they have been closed for one reason or another and allowed to return to their natural state. The inventoried roadless areas have been a topic for public debate for the last 30 years. These areas remain roadless for a variety of reasons including inaccessibility, rugged terrain, or their environmental sensitivity.

Recently, the USFS has responded to public concerns about the use and abuse of National Forest and Grassland resources by setting up the Roadless Areas Initiative. The roadless protection proposal has two primary purposes. The first is to restrict specific activities, such as road construction and reconstruction in specified areas. The second is to determine what activities are appropriate for continual protection of the values associated with roadless areas. These roadless areas serve a number of different ecological purposes. Roadless areas function as reference areas for human research, a buffer against invasive species, and as aquatic protection for purposes of biology, recreation, and commercial value. They also provide and protect sources of drinking water and seasonal habitat for wildlife, as well as providing beauty and serenity in a world where vehicles tend to dominate.

The Roadless Initiative was sparked by the Forest Service's concern for the natural resources and also their budgetary constraints. Currently, the Forest Service is lacking the necessary funds to care for its existing 380,000-mile road system. The agency receives only 20 percent of the annual funds that are needed to maintain the current system. They also have a backlog account of \$8.4 billion needed to bring roads up to par. This leaves many to question the need to build new roads in light of the current situation.

The new proposed rule on roadless areas, as described by Mike Dombeck, the Chief of the United States Forest Service, would hinder any new roads from being built in areas that have been labeled "unroaded." These areas were given the title "unroad" during the second meeting of the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II). At this meeting, areas of land were set aside and prohibited for use as roads. Roughly 45% of the area of land that is set aside by this new proposal is already designated as land that is protected and will not be built upon. However, over 24 million new acres of land will also be added to a protected list under this new proposal.

In hopes of pleasing as many citizens as possible, 180 local meetings were held across the country in order to receive local feedback on the upcoming proposals.

During these meetings, officials stated their proposals and allowed for individuals to make comments on the environmental, social, and economic impacts related to the proposal. The comments were recorded and will be considered in the final drafting of the proposals.

Previous studies, such as those conducted in the Columbia River Basin, Sierra Nevada Ecosystem, and Southern Appalachia, show benefits to unroaded areas. The protection of biodiversity, a decrease in the risk of fire occurrence and tree mortality, and a reduction of hazardous wastes were all benefits that have been seen in areas that have been protected from the building of roads and automotive pollution.

Other positive affects as seen by these case studies show a decrease in sediment build up, erosions, landslides, and slope failure all of which risks increase with the constructions of roads.

As boaters, we are particularly interested in what effects this roadless policy will have on our access to rivers. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the new rule will not affect the recreational uses of National Parks. Our ability to participate in activities such as camping, boating, hunting, and hiking will not be hindered. Foot trails will continue to allow access to the rivers. However, the ability for new roads to be built may have detrimental affects on the quality of water associated with rivers in forested areas. This decline in water quality will also affect an individual's ability to access recreational activities on the rivers. Rivers such as the Chattooga, in SC, NC, and GA, the Selway and Middle Fork Salmon in ID, the Salt in AZ, and the headwater rivers and creeks in the Cheat watershed in WV, may be severely altered in terms of health and recreation if new roads are built on currently-forested land.

If you would like to help in our effort to protect our vanishing forest lands, please send your written comments to USDA Forest Service, Attn: Roadless, PO Box 221090, Salt Lake City, UT 84122. Send e-mails to [roadless/wo-caet-slc@fs.fed.us](mailto:roadless/wo-caet-slc@fs.fed.us) and faxes to (801) 517-1021.



# Cheoah and Little Tennessee Coalition

A number of paddling groups, environmental organizations, and paddle manufacturers recently formed a coalition to work jointly on restoration of the Cheoah and Little Tennessee Rivers in North Carolina and Tennessee impacted by four hydropower facilities operated by the Tapoco Corporation, a subsidiary of Alcoa Aluminum.

Forming a coalition brings together diverse interests capable of working on holistic restoration of the rivers. The coalition offers solidarity on individual issues where the utility might normally attempt to pit one interest group against another. The coalition brings strength to each group at the table. Ultimately it provides the best balancing of resource uses. The following groups have joined the coalition: American Whitewater, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, Western Carolina Paddlers, Chota Canoe Club, East Tennessee Whitewater Club, and the Tennessee Clean Water Network.

The coalition requested Tapoco fund a technical coordinator to

work on behalf of the respective groups participating in the relicensing process. Tapoco elected to use an alternative licensing process. This process requires intensive meetings by all stakeholders in the proceeding to scope out all the issues, develop and conduct studies, and finally synthesize the results into a final application for the new 30-year hydropower license. This three-year effort exhausts the available resources of most paddling clubs and environmental organizations. The technical coordinator acts like an additional employee for each individual group focusing solely on the relicensing. The utility benefits because the stakeholders are able to participate more effectively and efficiently thus avoiding additional delays in the licensing process. The coalition is currently negotiating the details of the technical coordinator with Tapoco.

In other news on the Cheoah relicensing, American Whitewater, Western North Carolina Paddlers, and Chota Canoe Club are developing the protocols for a whitewater controlled flow study with Tapoco's consultant. The flow study will help identify minimum acceptable and optimum flows for scheduled whitewater releases below Santeetlah dam into the nine-mile Class IV Cheoah River. The license for this project expires in February 2005. Our intention is to have an annual schedule of whitewater releases in the next 30-year license in addition to daily instream flows sufficient to restore the Cheoah River.

For more information about this relicensing or to volunteer your expertise contact John Gangemi, 406-837-3155, e-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)



# One Step Closer to a Free-Flowing Sandy River

**In March of this year, Portland General Electric (PGE) released their Draft Application for surrender of the Bull Run Hydropower license. PGE had announced their intention to surrender the project in May of 1999. American Whitewater has been actively engaged in this relicense and surrender process from the outset. Removal of these dams will restore the free-flowing character of each river and increase whitewater recreational opportunities.**

The Bull Run Hydropower project consists of a complex water conveyance system involving two diversion dams on the Sandy and Little Sandy Rivers respectively and a powerhouse on the Bull Run River. Five alternatives are being reviewed in this license surrender, four of which entail various forms of dam removal on both the Sandy and Little Sandy Rivers. American Whitewater supports the complete removal of both dams and restoration of the former river channel inundated by the reservoir.

Ironically, some agencies propose construction of a new dam upon removal of Marmot Dam on the Sandy River. Marmot Dam currently acts as a barrier to upstream salmon migration on the Sandy River. The fishery agencies use this barrier to sort hatchery salmon stock from wild salmon. Maintaining a barrier at this location will enable the agencies to continue stocking hatchery fish for angling. Hatchery programs are controversial in the restoration of the PNW salmon stocks. Hatchery fish introduce "genetic pollution" with wild stocks specially selected for a given watershed. In addition, hatchery fish compete with wild salmon for habitat and food resources. American Whitewater does not support the use of hatchery programs except in extreme cases where a stock has been extirpated from a watershed. In the event that a new barrier is constructed on the Sandy River, American Whitewater insists on it being passable for downstream navigation.

Marmot Dam currently diverts water away from a popular 6.5 mile Class IV whitewater run (see page 190 run #139 in Soggy Sneakers). Removal of the dam would return the Sandy to a free flowing river, increasing the volume and frequency of whitewater flows. The little Sandy River has not been paddled due to the dam diverting 100% of the flow into the flume. Reconnaissance has revealed that this is likely to be a Class IV-Vcreek run approximately 2 miles in length. An additional 2.5 miles on the Class III Bull Run River would complete the run (Soggy Sneakers page 185, #135). Removal of the Little Sandy Dam would restore natural flows capable of flushing out the vegetation that has encroached this run making it passable for paddlers.

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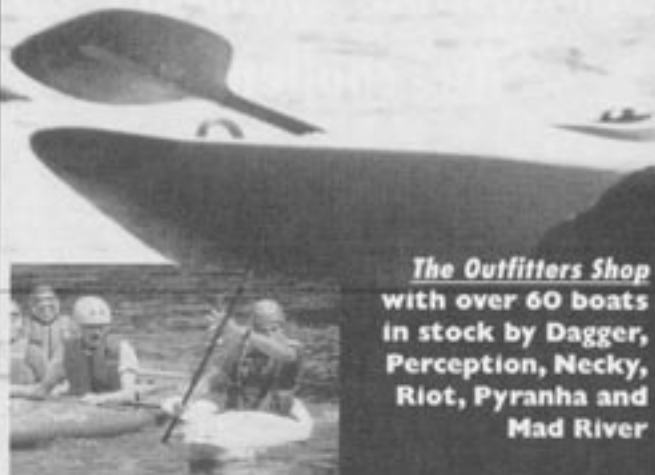
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Comments on the draft surrender are due May 5, 2000. Send comments to: Julie Keil, Portland General Electric Company, Hydro Licensing Dept. (3WTC-BRHL), 121 SW Salmon Street, Portland, OR 97204. Reference the Bull Run Hydroelectric Project Draft Environmental Assessment. Send a courtesy copy of your comments to John Gangemi. To view the DEA visit PGE's relicensing website [www.pge-hl.com](http://www.pge-hl.com)

### Key points to include in your comments:

All alternatives must address ecological and navigational restoration of river channel currently inundated by reservoir.

Long-term river access and temporary river access during deconstruction must be addressed in all alternatives. PGE should discourage future dam or barrier construction at each site. In the event that dam/barrier construction is necessary then the barrier must include safe passage for downstream navigation.

For more information contact John Gangemi at American Whitewater; 406-837-3155, e-mail [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net); or Keith Jensen at Alder Creek Kayak and Canoe, 503-285-0464.

## Chipmill Impacts on Paddling in the Southeast

Since 1985, 100+ high-capacity chipmills (facilities that grind whole logs into chips used for paper products and fiberboard) have been constructed in the southeastern region of the United States. These mills encourage clearcutting and the conversion of native forests to single species pine farms. A major environmental concern facing the Southeastern United States is the declining water quality in our creeks and rivers. Unchecked development and industrial is a major contributing factor.

In the mid-1980s the pulp and paper industry was forced, due to overcutting, to make a geographic shift from the Pacific Northwest to the South where there is a larger prevalence of privately-owned forestland and much fewer logging regulations. Each of these chipmills consumes an average of 8,000 to 10,000 acres of forest a year. The total forest consumption by chipmills in the Southeast is approximately 1.2 million acres per year. In ten years, this will equate to approximately 12 million acres of our forests, an area five times the size of Yellowstone National Park, being cut to supply these mills.

These high-capacity chipmills are owned by multinational corporations. These corporations are engaging in industrial-scale clearcutting to supply their ever-growing appetite for trees. Industry and government studies document that the current level of

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cutting cannot be sustained over the long run. Timber industry analysts and the USFS admit that removal of softwoods in the region exceeds growth. They also predict that if current trends continue, removal of hardwoods will exceed growth within the next 10 years. This is causing the southeast to see a decline in all native forest types while heavily-managed pine farms (the pulp and paper industry's "reforestation and replanting programs") are increasing in their place. These farms are still unable to meet the industry's continually-growing demand. This expanding demand for trees to feed the chipmills is forcing these large corporations and large landowners to use more and more intensive forms of "forest management" to speed the growing cycles of their pine plantations. This "forest management" consists of increasing the use of stronger pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and bio-engineered (genetically altered) trees. Now we are starting to see an increasing use of crop-duster planes, especially in Eastern Tennessee, to spread these chemicals, throwing them even farther and wider into our rivers and remaining forests.

This aggressive timber harvesting directly affects paddlers in two ways. First, we are being exposed to high amounts of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers both on and off our rivers. This is coming directly from the intensely-managed pine farms that are replacing our native forests. Second, there are higher concentrations of sediment and larger amounts of woody debris in our rivers. This happens as a result of the poor management of timber harvests (clearcutting, lack of streamside buffer areas, and road building on steep slopes). Several of our classic southeastern runs, including the Chattooga, Obed-Emory, Big South Fork, North Chick and Piney are being threatened by these chipmills. This list is by no means all-inclusive, in fact, one would be hard pressed to find a creek or river in the southeastern Appalachians that is not threatened by this excessive logging and pine conversion. To make matters worse, these corporations continue to expand their chipping operations and expect our

southeastern forests to supply their growing demand for the next 50-plus years. Our forests and streams cannot survive several more decades of industrial overhawesting.

Paddlers need to speak out on this issue. Demand these multinational corporations be held accountable for the damage they are doing to our rivers and creeks. Currently, southeastern states have few regulations in place to ensure the protection of water quality from logging operations. The regulations that are in place are voluntary. Timber harvests on private land currently do not have to be reported to the state or federal agencies responsible for resource protection. As a result, these agencies have no way of tracking timber harvests and monitoring compliance with these voluntary regulations.

Please take a few moments to call and write Vice President Gore. Ask him to take a leadership role in protecting our forests and the water quality in our creeks and rivers.

While he was a United States Senator from Tennessee in 1992, Vice President Al Gore stated, "I want to take this opportunity to restate and reaffirm in the strongest possible terms my opposition to granting permits for chipmills along the Tennessee River, either in Tennessee or Alabama...I have expressed repeatedly my concern that forest clearcutting, by far the most used harvesting technique for chip mills, could devastate the environment..." With Vice President Gore running for President, we need to ask him to use his leadership to protect the forests of the South from the impacts of chipmills and irresponsible industrial forestry.

Vice President Al Gore  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500  
(202) 456-2326

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Message:

Chipmills in the Southeastern United States are consuming our forests at an unprecedented rate. The harvest practices of these mills and the associated tree farms being planted in place of our native forests are greatly impacting water quality. Our forests and streams cannot sustain this current harvest rate.

I am a citizen who actively enjoys the outdoors and is committed to the conservation of our southeastern forests and rivers. I ask you to use your leadership to protect the forests and rivers of your home state of Tennessee and the South from the impacts of chip mills and irresponsible industrial forestry.

I want to applaud you for your previous opposition to chip mills in

Tennessee. I urge you to call for a moratorium on any new chip mill permits in your home state of Tennessee and the rest of the South.

For more information on this issue, please call or e-mail the Dogwood Alliance in Brevard, NC at 828-883-5826, [info@dogwoodalliance.org](mailto:info@dogwoodalliance.org), or e-mail [jason\\_barringer@patagonia.com](mailto:jason_barringer@patagonia.com), or contact American Whitewater Conservation Director John Gangemi, [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)

*Jason Barringer works as the manager in Patagonia's Atlanta store and is currently working with several people in the southeast paddling community to ensure that paddler's voices are being heard on this issue.*

## Whitewater Boating Survey on Lower Kern River, California Starting April 2000

In early April, 2000, Southern California Edison (SCE) will begin surveying whitewater boaters along the lower Kern River from Democrat Dam to the Kern River No. 1 powerhouse. This section includes the Cataracts of the Kern. This Recreational Monitoring Study is a by-product from the relicensing of the Kern River No. 1 hydropower facility operated by SCE. The hydropower facility diverts 400 cfs out of the Kern River, dewatering a substantial length with whitewater opportunities. In the relicensing proceeding, SCE argued that an annual schedule of whitewater releases was unwarranted due, in part, to the fact that few whitewater boaters used the reach. The U.S. Forest Service supported SCE's argument ignoring the fact that the agency precluded individuals from boating below Democrat for years. American Whitewater, Kern River Alliance, and Friends of the River argued for an annual schedule of releases. The new license required a 5 year recreational use study. American Whitewater, Kern

River Alliance, and Friends of the River have worked with SCE to develop the study methodology.

The objective of the study is to quantify whitewater use and evaluate user satisfaction with access, facilities, and flows. It is imperative that boaters respond objectively to the survey questions. The study will take place over a five year period. The results will be used in part to determine the need for additional mitigation for impacts to the whitewater resource. Please be courteous and cooperative with the surveyors. Most importantly, mark the days you are surveyed in your personal calendars so we can cross reference with the results at a later date.

For further information contact John Gangemi, Conservation Director for American Whitewater, phone 406-837-3155, e-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)

## Chelan PUD Balking on Whitewater Studies

Chelan Public Utility District (PUD) in Chelan County Washington is back-pedaling on their commitment to conduct a whitewater controlled flow study on the Chelan Gorge. Chelan PUD views whitewater boating in the Gorge as an inherently-dangerous activity with liability exposure. "From a liability point of view, Chelan PUD cannot voluntarily agree to participate in providing access or releasing water to facilitate the on-water assessment for kayaking in the Gorge because it would expose ratepayers to potential liability for money damages if a participant or spectator were severely injured or killed" (Chelan PUD letter to the FERC Feb. 2000). Chelan PUD requests that the FERC order them to conduct the whitewater flow study thereby placing the liability responsibility on the FERC. Because this is an alternative licensing procedure where the stakeholders and the utility jointly develop and submit the new license application, the FERC will not order the study. The FERC, however, will order the study if in their review of the final license application there are information gaps making it difficult for the FERC staff to complete their assessment of the application. American Whitewater's preference is to do the study this summer as part of the alternative licensing process. Studies in Colorado have shown that whitewater boating is less dangerous per capita than motor boating or horseback riding both of which are activities permitted by the Chelan PUD

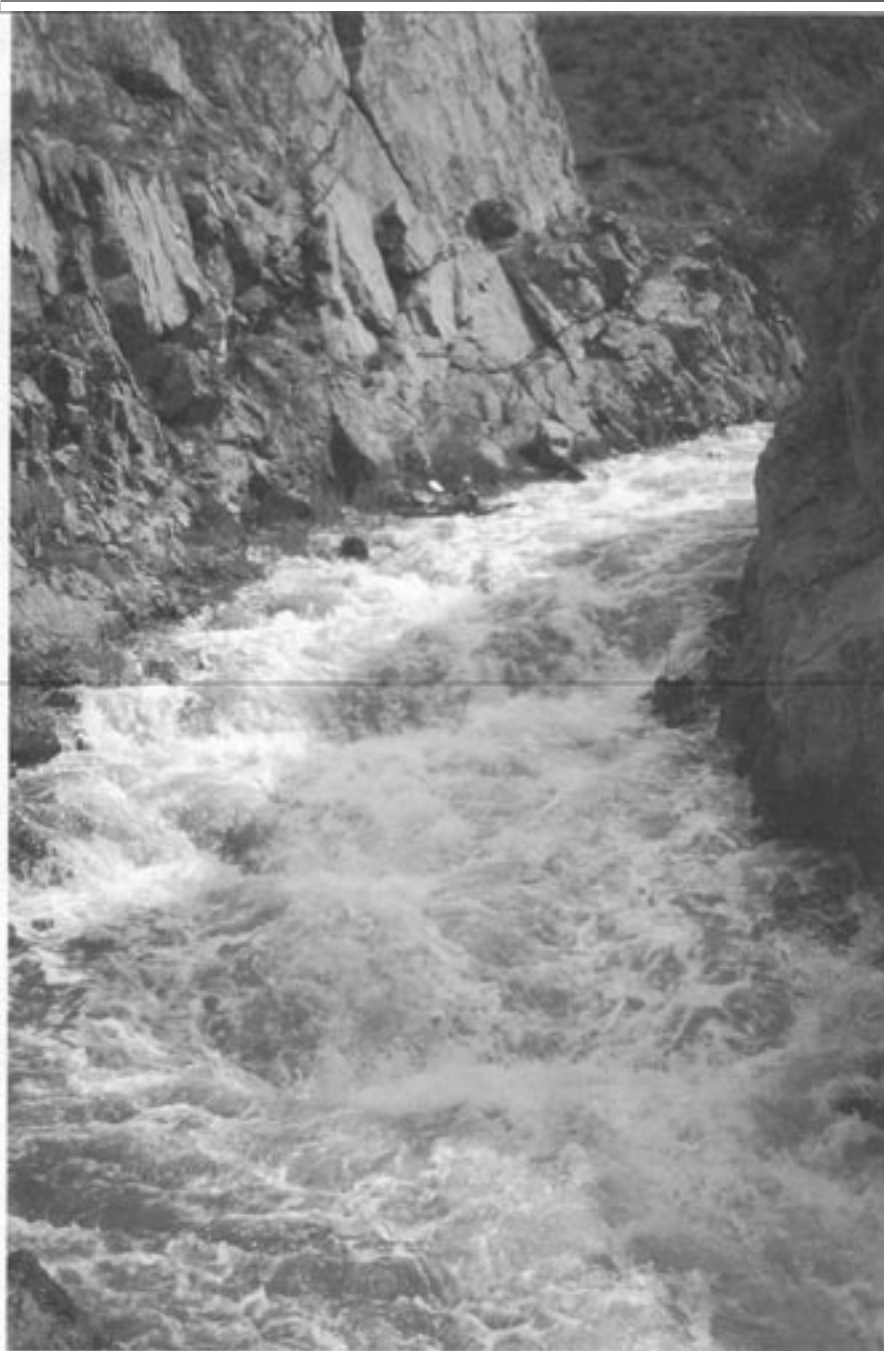
without concern for liability. American Whitewater's legal advisors are working closely with staff to resolve this issue.

Chelan PUD dewateres the Gorge by diverting water from Lake Chelan to a powerhouse four miles downstream. In 1999, John Gangemi traveled to the Chelan Gorge for a preliminary boating study of the Chelan Gorge to determine navigability and identify a range of flows for a more detailed controlled flow study. Chelan PUD canceled the boating component at the last minute. Gangemi did explore the Gorge on foot during that trip. He observed five Class V drops with one potential portage at 375 cfs. All the rapids were portageable. He also described the area as a whitewater cathedral—aquamarine water spilling over steep drops in a deep gorge with the potential for warmwater releases from the top of Lake Chelan.

Show your support for whitewater studies in the Chelan Gorge. Explain to Chelan PUD and the FERC that whitewater boating is not an inherently dangerous activity. Explain the distinction between perceived risk and actual risk. Address your letters to Gregg Carrington, Chelan PUD, PO Box 1231, Wenatchee, WA 98808-1231. Send a courtesy copy to John Gangemi for his files. He will forward them to the FERC. Address: John Gangemi, 482 Electric Ave., Bigfork, MT 59911. E-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)

# Bear River Hydro Relicensing Enters Critical Stage

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) accepted for filing PacifiCorp's application for new licenses on the Bear River for three hydroelectric projects; Soda, Grace-Cove, and Oneida. This filing sets in motion anew and critical stage in this relicensing process. Up until now, American Whitewater, along with Idaho Rivers United and paddling groups in Idaho and Utah, has worked directly with the utility, PacifiCorp, attempting to draft a new license for the Bear River that balances power generation with restoration of riverine processes and whitewater flows. Thus far, PacifiCorp has been unwilling to accept changes in their hydro operations to accommodate whitewater flows or restoration of the river. The FERC will conduct an environmental review process of their own to determine the appropriate allocation of water for respective resource uses such as whitewater. American Whitewater will submit substantive information justifying the flows and number of annual days necessary for whitewater recreation.



continued next page

The current license dewateres three bypass reaches below dams and produces widely fluctuating flows below the Soda and Oneida powerhouses. American Whitewater is particularly interested in establishing an annual schedule of whitewater flows in the 6 mile Black Canyon of the Bear below Grace Dam and weekend whitewater flows below the Oneida powerhouse. PacifiCorp does not release any water into the Black Canyon in the current license. Whitewater opportunities only occur during extremely wet years in southeast Idaho when runoff exceeds storage capacity. On average this occurs once every 10 years, an average unacceptable for the boating community in Idaho and Utah.

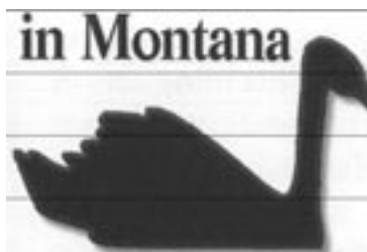
American Whitewater and Idaho Rivers United are jointly

working on a separate, yet closely related issue on the Bear River. Bear Lake sits upstream of PacifiCorp's four hydropower projects on the Bear River. Historically, Bear Lake was a closed basin lake meaning that water flowed into the lake basin but due to topography nothing flowed out. At the turn of the century, industrious folks, recognizing the tremendous storage capacity of Bear Lake, diverted the Bear River into Bear Lake to serve as a storage reservoir. A canal system was constructed to draw water off Bear Lake. Bear Lake in effect acts as a multipurpose upstream storage reservoir serving agricultural irrigation needs, flood control, and power generation.

PacifiCorp owns and operates the canal system to and from Bear Lake. The annual water budget is dictated by a tri-state compact between Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho. Water delivery down the Bear River from Bear Lake is dictated by irrigators needs and pool elevation rule curves at the lake. PacifiCorp's powerhouse facilities were designed specifically to operate within the volumes dictated in the compact. Now the clincher. Bear Lake is not considered to be part of PacifiCorp's hydropower facilities. In fact, the FERC ruled two years ago that Bear Lake was non-jurisdictional meaning that the FERC has no authority to tell PacifiCorp how to operate Bear Lake outflow. American Whitewater and Idaho Rivers United appealed the decision based on a similar case in the northeast where the FERC reversed an initial non-jurisdictional decision determining after more careful examination that upstream storage reservoirs are a necessary part of power generation facilities and as a result fall under the FERC's authority. Linking Bear Lake to the downstream hydropower facilities is critical for mitigation since the water necessary for river restoration and whitewater flows is stored in Bear Lake.

Comments are due to the FERC by May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2000. Visit the American Whitewater website <[awa.org](http://awa.org)> for commenting instructions and key points to include in your letter. For more information on the hydropower relicensing and the Bear Lake jurisdiction issue contact John Gangemi, 406-837-3155, e-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)

## PacifiCorp Releases Draft License Application for the Bigfork Hydropower Project on the Swan River



PacifiCorp released their draft license application for public review for the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project on the Swan River in Montana. True to form, PacifiCorp assumes that since there are no changes proposed to project operations then there is no need to mitigate project impacts since the original project license granted in 1967 by the FERC included all the necessary mitigation. PacifiCorp fails to recognize passage of the Endangered Species Act by Congress [several ESA species are present in the project boundary] and the Clean Water Act for starters. Second, many forms of recreational use on the project and adjacent lands has increased dramatically since Issuance of the previous license. The Swan River's Wild Mile is the site of the annual Bigfork Whitewater Festival in May now entering it's 24<sup>th</sup> year. Furthermore, the county road was abandoned in 1995 changing the public's ability to access project lands. American Whitewater will be filing comments by the May 14, 2000 deadline.

As has been reported, the future of the Bigfork Whitewater Festival and river access in general is threatened as a part of this relicensing proceeding. PacifiCorp is actively marketing the 125 acre hydropower project and adjacent 400 acres of land for sale. The hydropower project produces only 2.5 megawatts of power and is in need of major repairs to the powerhouse and canal. Due to the marginal economics, it is highly unlikely that another utility will want to purchase this hydropower project. The lands offer prime sites for home sites along the river. With those homes comes owners that may not desire to share their front deck with a bunch of boaters in skirts. Furthermore, the Swan River is an important wildlife corridor. Home sites will degrade the habitat for many species not to mention adding aesthetic impacts.

American Whitewater has been working closely with a group of concerned citizens and organizations to retain the Swan River in an undeveloped state. This group known as the Swan River Wild Mile Corridor Committee has created a grassroots campaign with the following goals: Preserve the area in its present undeveloped state and maintain public access. The Committee is raising funds primarily through private donations and fund-raising events such as the Bigfork Whitewater Festival. There will be a silent auction again this year with proceeds benefiting efforts to protect the Swan River Wild Mile Corridor. This year's festival will expand to three days, May 27-29. For more information contact John Gangemi, 406-837-3155, e-mail: [jgangemi@digisys.net](mailto:jgangemi@digisys.net)



# Access Associate Join the American Whitewater Team at the National Office

By Amy Brown

I have been working at American Whitewater's National Office for 2-1/2 months this spring as Access Associate, under the supervision of Jason Robertson. My work has focused on both the American Whitewater River Inventory and access issues concerning the Upper Yough in western Maryland.

My work on the Upper Yough has addressed two concerns: the Sang Run put-in fees and the parking limitations at the take-out in Friendsville, MD. The put-in fees were instated last year in order to pay for the maintenance costs of the parking area. However, there was never any public comment period or examination of alternatives. The fee system does not include a receipt system as evidence that it has been paid and the system is inconsistently enforced. In fact, it has been strictly enforced only on whitewater release days, and other user groups, such as fishermen and hunters, are not targeted to pay. Alternatives have included a partnership with the Upper Yough festival to raise funds via an auction or raffle or placing a contribution box at the put-in for collecting voluntary donations.

At the take-out in Friendsville, the parking situation has become critical as congestion along the highway has increased yearly and many town members have established a negative perception of paddlers. Currently, American Whitewater is working with the Town Council to establish another take-out on a piece of land upstream and opposite the current take-out for parking.

Education and basic riverside etiquette are central features of this issue. If the parking situation is not ameliorated, boaters may see an increase in policing along the highway. This will hopefully reduce instances of public drinking and nudity in order to ease the complaints of town members. For more information on this matter, see Bob Gedekoh's article elsewhere in this issue.

The American Whitewater River Inventory is a compilation of information from four organizations: the Environmental Protection Agency, the US Geological Survey, the National Park Service, and American Whitewater. The inventory will include information on access, conservation, streamflow, important natural and cultural features, difficulty, mileage, hydrographs, water quality, and more. It will significantly revamp the Nationwide River Inventory that was published by American Whitewater in 1990.

The inventory will drastically improve the arduous process of finding access points on many whitewater rivers by providing a direct link to USGS maps with explicit details on the locations of put-ins and take-outs. This information source will also provide a comprehensive national database to be used by government agencies for planning and development purposes. Currently, such a comprehensive system is lacking and decisions are being made without consideration of their effect on whitewater rivers. This will be especially useful for electric utilities, private power developers, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing process. The inventory will be

available on American Whitewater's web site by the end of the year.

My internship at American Whitewater has given me the opportunity to contribute to the effort to improve access to and preserve the river corridors that have influenced my life. Working on issues where my work may actually have an impact has been a wonderful and fulfilling experience. It has also been great to work with and get to know all of the super folks that make up the American Whitewater staff at the National Office in Silver Spring, Maryland.

I have been paddling whitewater for about 15 years and have been involved extensively in slalom and extreme racing and adventure travel programs in Panama and Mexico. After graduating *magna cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa from American University in Washington, DC in May of 1999, I took my Environmental Science degree south to work at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina as a kayak instructor and raft-guide. Upon the completion of my internship and my recovery from shoulder surgery, I will be heading south once again to work at NOC while paddling as much whitewater as I can dip my blades into.



# Attention Upper Yough Boaters

Access to the river is in jeopardy. At a recent Friendsville town council meeting a group of townspeople asked that boaters no longer be allowed to take-out in town, that parking be prohibited along the streets and roads where boaters commonly leave their vehicles, and that the police be asked to patrol the town during all releases. A lot of pressure is being put on our friends at MT Surf to stop private boaters from taking out there. The townspeople's complaints made the local paper and the DNR has become involved.

The bottom line is that every boater in Friendsville needs to be sensitive to the community and behave as if he/she were standing in his or her own neighborhood. We cannot afford to continue to alienate the residents. If we lose our access to the river in town we will have to paddle two additional miles of flatwater to reach the next public take-out, located at the Town Park. This will take almost an hour if you are at the front of the release (as is often the case) and it will not be very pleasant.

Every boater needs to cooperate: those who paddle the river frequently, and those who only paddle the Upper Yough once or twice a year. Please remember that your behavior will have an impact on everyone. Help us by following these guidelines:

Please do not bring your dogs to the Upper Yough. If you insist on doing so, do not let them run loose or venture onto anyone's private property. Do not leave them unattended at the put-in or take-out... i.e., tied to the bumper of your car. The local animal rights people are very concerned about this and have been seen at the put-in investigating vehicles. Please leave Fido at home!

Park considerately. Do not block access to the local stores — their regular customers need those spaces. Make sure you are not blocking the road.

Do not take-off the river on private property. Under no circumstances take-out on the private property just upstream of the take-out

bridge. Take-out at Mt Surf or paddle to the Town Park.

Under no circumstance change in your vehicle or behind towels, etc. Change inside Mt. Surf or at the changing house at the put-in. Some of townspeople do not understand that most boaters wear several layers of clothing, so they interpret any changing of garments as potentially indecent exposure.

Under no circumstances drink alcohol on the street... i.e., at the take-out. Even though the local beer store is right next to the parking area, drinking on the street is illegal and not acceptable to the townspeople.

Do not play loud music or engage in any raucous behavior. Try to be as inconspicuous as you can. The less time you spend congregating on the street after running the river, the better.

Look both ways before crossing the street and do not obstruct traffic. Drive slowly through town and also through Sang Run, the community near the put-in. There are many pets and children in the area and the locals are very concerned about speeding boaters.

Patronize the local businesses as much as possible. Visit the restaurants, gas stations, and stores. Let them know that you are boaters. We need all the allies we can get. Say thanks to John Mason and the crew at MT. Surf. Without them we would be up the proverbial creek without a paddle!

Be pleasant to every local resident that you meet. If they ask you to modify your behavior, try to do so. Don't argue with them. Remember that they deal with boaters nearly every day.

The Upper Yough is a tremendous resource and we would hate to see it devalued by ill will within the community. The bottom line is that if we do not police ourselves, someone else will. The only way this can be avoided is if boaters are on their best behavior. American Whitewater is actively trying to deal with the community's concerns at this time.

## Victory on Bear Creek near Morrison (CO)

By Ric Alesch and Jay Kenney

*Bear Creek above Morrison is a gem in disguise. Most boaters do not even know about it because it only flows high enough to paddle in very wet years, it is generally considered hair boating, and there is a long history of access problems. While we cannot do too much about the first two issues (other than to tell you there is an easier III-IV section called the Lair of the Bear higher upstream), we have done something about the last issue.*

On Tuesday, March 7, Jay Kenney and I attended a Morrison Town Board meeting to help present the case for access to Bear Creek and, thanks to some fine advance work and a good down-home presentation by local residents and boaters Jim and Katie Gill, and a show of support from many other boaters, the Town Board passed a resolution to, in essence, direct the Chief of Police (who was in attendance) to stop harassing and ticketing boaters running Bear Creek. The sheriff has for many many years used an ordinance intended to protect Town water supplies to try to prevent boating on Bear Creek.

In a short but effective presentation to the Morrison Town Board, Jim and Katie (backed up by Ric Alesch and Jay Kenney representing American Whitewater and the Colorado Whitewater Association) persuaded the Board to reaffirm their support for kayakers on Bear Creek. The Council then unanimously voted to make Morrison a boater-friendly place and they directed the Police Department to enforce the trespassing ordinance only to the extent that it could show actual contamination of, or harm to, the town's water supply. Such was the City Attorney's reading of the ordinance. For all practical purposes, this means that you can legally and safely boat Bear Creek again without fear of a confrontation with the Morrison police.

There are two spots to watch for: House Falls where a private landowner notoriously complains about boaters getting out of their boats to scout (but he cannot call the Morrison police anymore, since he's in Jefferson County, not within the town limits) and the Morrison town dam (where the city's diversion structure and water intake is). At the dam, the portage is on river left and you can put-in below about 100-150 feet.

This is a big victory for access on a stream right next to the Denver metro area. Kudos to Katie and Jim for all their good, hard work on this issue. We can take this one off the Colorado hot spot list and you can run the Hair of the Bear now without fear of arrest by the Morrison Police! The Stream Team strikes again!!

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# Access Alert! Roaring River [NC]

By Jason Horton

*Please ~~do not take-out on~~ the lower section of the Roaring River beside the electrical substation.*

The new landowner has threatened to have any group arrested that uses the river. After speaking with the local sheriffs office, they said that the Roaring River is a public waterway and that boater's should not worry about being arrested. However, they requested that we try to stay off the banks since we could be cited for trespassing. The new landowner is ALWAYS driving up and down the road following the river so WATCH OUT! Let's avoid confrontations with this guy that may threaten our ability to enjoy the river.

There are two alternate take-outs. One is 200 yards downstream at the 268 Bridge beside Staley's Restaurant on river-left. This take-out can be difficult to see and use since the bank is blanketed with kudzu. Get permission from the restaurant owners before parking and taking-out here.

The other (and better) option is to stay on the Roaring River to the confluence with the Yadkin River. Stay on the Yadkin to the first bridge and take-out on river right. This adds half a mile of paddling from the substation. Access at this take-out is much easier than the other sites.

Editor's Note: Jason Horton lives in Mount Airy, NC where he is the Whitewater Director at BSA Camp Raven Knob and an instructor at Hanging Rock Outdoor Center. Jason paddles the Roaring River every week during the summer with the Scout Camp.

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## Forest Service User Fees

By Jason Robertson with help from the GCPBA

*Have you felt that you were increasingly paying unfair fees for the thrill of boating on your favorite rivers?*

If so, your gut instinct was probably right. Four of the federal land management agencies, including the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Park Service appear to have been targeting America's rivers with fees under the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program. At least 25% of all Fee Demo sites in 1999 were in areas with significant levels of whitewater recreation.

The list of rivers impacted by Fee Demo includes more than 60 of our favorite rivers including places like the Nantahala, Chattooga, Kern, and Colorado River in the Grand Canyon.

The access fees in our National Parks are likely here to stay; however, fees in the National Forests and other agencies may disappear by September, 2001. Congressional support for the fees is wavering, and there are serious questions about the effectiveness and fairness of the program. Consider the fact that the Park Service collects an average of 94 cents per visitor in Fee Demo areas, the BLM collects 34 cents, and the Forest Service only collects 32 cents. The fact is that boaters are paying a significant portion of the fees in parks and forests with boatable rivers. This means that boaters are funding recreational opportunities for other users, so your \$2-5 fee on a river like the Nantahala could pay for 7-15 other visitors in the forest. Is this fair, or is it simply bogus?

Now is the time to write your senators and congressional leaders to oppose permanent fee collection on public lands. Also urge them to increase budgets for federal land management agencies. A small percentage of the enormous federal budget surplus would easily eliminate the need for fees. Let them know you oppose fees for access to your public lands.

Don't know who your Senators and Congressional Representatives are? Go here: <http://www.vote-smart.org/> Type in your nine-digit zip code and the site will tell you. Don't know your zip code? There's a link there to help you find that, too.

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## Outfitters Policy Act of 1999 (S1969)

By Jason Robertson

*In March, I was asked to testify before the Senate Subcommittee on Forests and Natural Lands Management about the Outfitters Policy Act of 1999 (AKA Senate Bill 1969).*

This bill, which was sponsored by Senators Craig, Murkowski, and Thomas, would regulate outfitters and guides on public lands managed by the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation. The bill would not regulate concessioned outfitters in the National Parks. The guides' organization, America Outdoors, proposed this bill in order to create a consistent regulatory environment for their members with standards for renewing and transferring permits.

American Whitewater initially opposed a draft version of this bill because we questioned; whether Congress should micro-manage access to public lands; whether the bill would effect citizen access to public lands by locking in commercial allocations; and whether the bill would create a management climate favoring commercial concessioned access over private access? Our concern was that this bill could institutionalize commercial/private conflicts such as the nightmarish situation in the Grand Canyon.

However, after further review of the bill, and a careful rereading of specific elements, we have decided to offer American Whitewater's conditional support for the Outfitters Policy Act. Our support is conditioned on the inclusion of the statement in SECTION 5 that, "Nothing in this Act enlarges or

continued ►

diminishes the right or privilege of occupancy and use of Federal land under any applicable law (including planning process rules and any administrative allocation), by a commercial or noncommercial individual or entity that is not an authorized outfitter or outfitted visitor." We have also suggested stronger language clarifying these public rights, "Nothing in this act shall create any rights or preferential treatment of commercial outfitters or outfitted visitors with respect to access (including usage allocation), occupancy, and use of Federal lands of the United States over any other commercial or noncommercial user group. Nothing in this act shall diminish the rights and privileges of the general (non-outfitted) public with respect to access to or occupancy and use of Federal land under any applicable law (including, but not limited to, planning process rules and access (including usage allocation))."

Additionally, we have recommended that Congress return concession fees paid by recreation outfitters and guides to the resource areas from which the fees were collected. At present, the fees are returned to the Treasury and are used to balance the budget rather than benefit America's public lands or manage visitor access.

While we continue to have questions about the necessity and possible unintended consequences of this bill, we have chosen to work with American Outdoors to ensure that the bill is as good for the non-outfitted public as it is for the outfitters.

A complete copy of American Whitewater's testimony is available on our website at [www.awa.org](http://www.awa.org)

## Ohiopyle Falls Access, bower Yough (PA)

By Jason Robertson

*No, we don't have regular access to Ohiopyle Falls... yet.*

However, it looks like we'll get permission from the park and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to schedule another race over the Falls on the weekend of September 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

Nothing is written in stone, but event organizers are tentatively planning on holding practice runs on Saturday, the race and freestyle waterfall rodeo on Sunday, and a small festival throughout. The event will benefit American Whitewater's access program, the local rescue squad, and Volunteer Fire Department. Check out our web site ([www.awa.org](http://www.awa.org)) in early August for more information.

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A C C C S S

.....

In addition, American Whitewater continues working on obtaining regular access to the Falls. But don't hold your breath for resolution of this issue anytime soon, and don't tempt fate or the authorities by running the Falls illegally. The park's law enforcement officers have explained that they will continue enforcing no boating policies on the Falls at all times other than race days.

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## Temporary Access Closure on the Blackwater (WV)

By Jason Robertson

*The Blackwater River had a little water on several Spring-like days in January and February. Unsurprisingly, the local boaters turned out and tried to run the Upper, North Fork, and Lower B.*

Unfortunately, Allegheny Wood Products (AWP) had also chosen this time to start logging the steep northern slope on river right.

As a result, the Forest Service closed the area for several weeks while AWP used helicopters to extract timber from the steepest sections. When AWP completed their most recent round of logging operations, the Forest Service lifted the area closure and boaters were again allowed to access the river from USFS property.

The temporary, unannounced site closure highlighted the need for improved communication between AWP, the USFS, and American Whitewater. In response, Forest Supervisor Chuck Meirs agreed to notify us prior to future closures. Additionally, the Forest Service agreed to reopen negotiations for permanent public access to the old railroad grade and Lower B access trail. AWP's spokesperson, Donna Reckart, stated that AWP had completed their logging operations on this site for the next several years; however she stopped short of stating that public river access is permitted or that AWP will not initiate additional logging operations in the next 5 years.

If you are considering boating on the Blackwater in the next several months, be aware that there are also a handful of reports of new strainers in the river.

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## John's Creek Update (VA)

American Whitewater continues working with local attorney, Jim Joyce, to resolve the question of whether the private landowners on John's Creek have a King's Grant giving them the right to limit boater access. Our research is almost completed; however, we are not yet ready to take the issue to court. We expect to have more information shortly. In the meantime, American Whitewater encourages boaters not to paddle this river so as to avoid unnecessary trespassing charges.

---

## Horsepasture River Update (NC)

The American Canoe Association is still running the show on resolving access to the Horsepasture River. As you may recall, Conservation Director Dave Jenkins and a handful of other boaters were cited for trespassing in 1998. Since that time, the ACA has been working with boat manufacturers, local boaters, and camps to develop their case. At issue is the question of whether Wild & Scenic Rivers Status conveys a public right-of-way.

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## Yellowstone Update (WY)

In November 1998, American Whitewater proposed opening a handful of rivers in Yellowstone on a limited basis for noncommercial canoeing and kayaking. In March 1999, we met with Superintendent Finley and discussed the specific elements of our proposal. The Superintendent indicated that the Park's administrative resources were fully extended and that his staff needed time to resolve other issues that were already on the table, including winter snowmobile use, and Bison migration & brucellosis issues. Our proposal is still on the table, and we have been in regular contact with the park for the past year. We expect to receive a response shortly after the final winter use plan is released, which could happen as soon as June or July.

Access continued ►

# Whatever Happened to Access in the Grand Canyon (AZ)?

*As early as 1979 American Whitewater was working on allocation and permitting issues in the Grand Canyon.*

In recent years, the Park initiated NEPA scoping for a revised Colorado River Management Plan. American Whitewater worked closely with the park for the past four years, and invested resources, time, and energy in improving the private boater experience in the Canyon. However, the Park Service recently terminated work on the Grand Canyon Wilderness and Colorado River management plans.

"The decision to halt this process," states Superintendent Arnberger, "is not a decision to halt progress on the resolution of key issues." American Whitewater disagrees. The key issues are: 1) managing for wilderness; and 2) resolving the access and allocation question. The Park Service's decision does, in fact, halt any significant progress regarding issue resolution. Terminating the planning process contradicts previous Park Service commitments regarding wilderness protection at Grand Canyon. It also shuts out meaningful public involvement in resolving important issues affecting this great National Park.

Shortly after the Park's decision, John Wells, an attorney in Albuquerque, filed suit against the Park Service for its failure to balance private and commercial allocation. The suit has thrown a spanner in the works, and the Park has decided not to comment on allocation issues until the suit is resolved. In the meantime, American Whitewater has offered to continue working with the park to improve other management issues related to permit distribution, trip leader selection, launch scheduling, and cancellations.

# Chattooga River Management Plan Update (SC)

By Michael B. Crane, District Ranger

Editor's Note: In February, American Whitewater representatives including Risa Calloway, Charlene Thompson, Will Van De Berg, and Jason Robertson met with Mike Crane to discuss the Forest Management Plan as it related to water quality on Stekoa Creek, continued future access to Section III and IV, and possible future access to the headwaters of the Chattooga. The meeting was informative, and demonstrated our ability and interest in working with the Forest Service. In turn, the Forest Service



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*"...most visitors - commercial and private - are satisfied with the experiences they've been having on the Chattooga River..." - District Ranger Mike Crane*

planning team indicated a willingness to work with American Whitewater, and clarified their interest in maintaining the public's unrestricted ability to visit and enjoy the Chattooga River. This article by Ranger Crane helps to clarify some of the confusion that boaters had about the management goals.

At our meeting with American Whitewater on February 17, I agreed to write a summary that describes our thought process behind the Rolling Alternative's proposal (Fall, 1999) as it relates to Issue 11, Wild and Scenic Rivers, that addresses commercial and private boating use on the Chattooga River. Here is that summary:

What the Rolling Alternative said was: "Boating use on the Chattooga W&S River remains at current levels. Commercial use levels remain as in the current Sumter Plan. Private use is capped at current use levels."

Most people seem to be understanding that daily commercial use limits would not change under the proposal and this is correct. However, there is considerable misunderstanding about the private boating use levels. Since many private boaters were apparently unaware of any existing private use limits, they consider proposing caps a radical departure from current management. Others are apparently interpreting this proposal as it relates to private boating to mean that the recent—and perhaps relatively low—use levels from 1999 would be established as the upper limit or "cap" in the future. This is not correct.

The 1985 (existing) Plan has daily capacities or "limits" for both private and commercial boating use by season and by River Section. We know that the private use has, at times, exceeded these levels. We recently completed the entry of actual private and commercial use data (through December, 1999) into a new computer database. This will enable us to quantify what kinds of use we are actually getting by year, by month, by day, and even by time of day. Once we know the dynamics of how often and to what extent daily private use has exceeded the 1985 limits in recent years (current use levels), we can develop a new maximum daily capacity.

For example, the total number of private boaters now allowed per day in Section IV between May 1 and September 30 is 80 on a weekend and 50 on a weekday. If actual use has exceeded these levels significantly since 1985, then the new daily maximums would be increased to some extent to allow what kinds of use levels we've been experiencing. This approach is based on our understanding that most visitors—

continued ►



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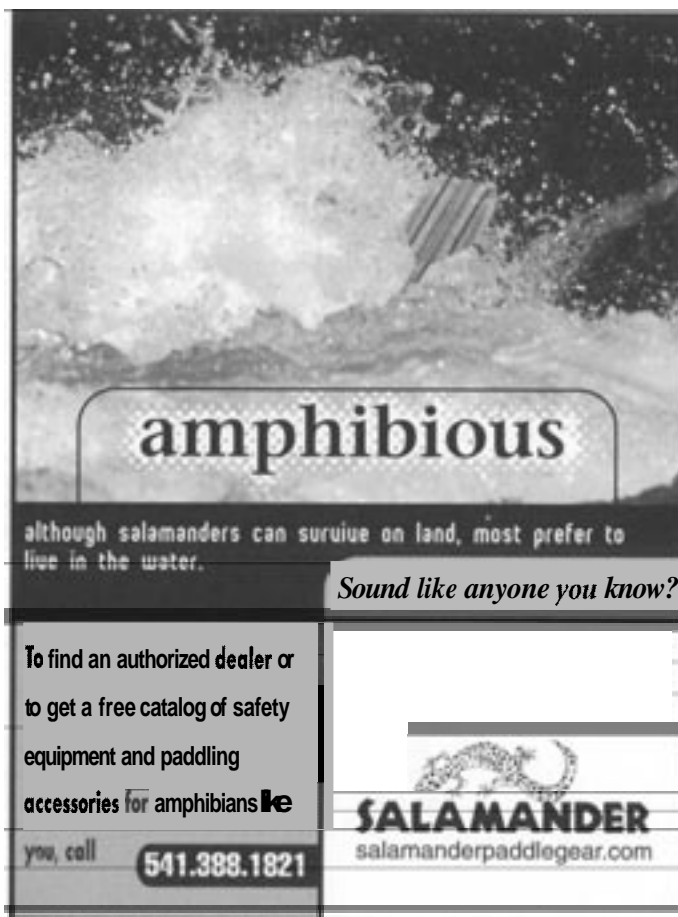
[ perception ]

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commercial and private — are satisfied with the experiences they've been having on the Chattooga River within recent years with respect to the numbers of other boaters encountered on a daily basis.

Another step will be to develop ways to prepare for and manage the growing use over the next 10 to 15 years. This will likely be established and implemented in phases. The first phase could focus on disclosing to the public up-to-date information about when use levels are typically high and low so visitors will have more of what they need to be self-regulating. This information will come through continued monitoring and may or may not have much of an impact on regulating growth. The very last phase, one that we all hope to avoid, would be the direct enforcement of numbers on a daily basis. To avoid this last phase, or to delay it as long as possible, we need to be working together to develop a sequence of other regulatory techniques that will effectively provide the visitor experiences and resource protection that is desired.



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## Trouble on the Waters

If you had trouble getting to the river, let us know. Use this form to report access problems so that AW can convince legislators and government authorities where and when river access is a problem. If you have met an irate landowner, noticed signs forbidding access, or were stopped by a landowner, barbed wire fence or a locked gate, tell us about it on this form. If several boaters are arrested or involved, only 1 form should be filled out per incident naming a boater available for future contact.

River \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Date of incident \_\_\_\_\_

Access code categories: List below or circle the categories, multiple categories are ok.

Brief description of incident:

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Boater contact \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City etc. \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
email \_\_\_\_\_

Landowner/Agency/Sheriff contact (if known)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City etc. \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
email \_\_\_\_\_

1. Trespass. Ticket, warning or arrest for:
  - 1.1.0 Trespass on private property
  - 1.2.0 Trespass on public property
  - 1.3.0 Criminal trespass arrest
  - 1.4.0 Civil trespass lawsuit

2. Public Access Closure
  - 2.1.0 Denied by federal law
  - 2.1.1 Denied by BLM
  - 2.1.2 Denied by Forest Service
  - 2.1.3 Denied by Nat'l Park Service
  - 2.2.0 Denied by state
  - 2.3.0 Denied by local authority

3. Injury from man-made obstacles
  - 3.1.0 Barbed wire or fence
  - 3.2.0 Low head dam

4. Obstacles running river, scouting or portaging
  - 4.1.0 Fence or chain on land blocking access
  - 4.2.0 Fence, wire, or tree on river blocking access
  - 4.3.0 Warning of no trespassing or posted sign
  - 4.4.0 Vehicle towed, ticketed, or vandalized
  - 4.5.0 Threats or acts of violence

5. Closures: Rivers closed that were once open
  - 5.1.0 Closed by private landowner
  - 5.2.0 Closed by government agency
  - 5.2.1 Federal
  - 5.2.2 State
  - 5.2.3 Local
  - 5.3.0 High water closure

6. New access fees
  - 6.1.0 Charged by private landowner
  - 6.2.0 Charged by government agency
  - 6.2.1 Federal
  - 6.2.2 State
  - 6.2.3 Local

7. Dam controlled rivers
  - 7.1.0 Water turned off
  - 7.2.0 Inconsistent flow: too much or too little
  - 7.3.0 No notice of releases

8. Lawsuits and legislation
  - 8.1.1 New legislation to block river access.
  - 8.1.2 Lawsuits to block access.
  - 8.2.1 New legislation to enable river access
  - 8.2.2 Lawsuits to enable access.

Send to Ken Ransford, 475 Sierra Vista, Carbondale, CO 81623, 970-963-6800. FAX 970-963-6700. ransford@csn.net

**Access is a constant struggle. The AW Access Committee needs your help.**



By Jayne H. Abbot, Events Manager

## What's up with Events?

By Jayne Abbot, Events Director

"This is the most pivotal year to ever hit paddling," said the long time industry worker I was talking to on the phone. "I never thought I'd see the day — cash prizes, titled events, it's just amazing to see." I have to agree. Is this really the beginning of something bigger to come? It started with American Whitewater's announcement of our partnership with Outdoorplay.com in producing the Outdoorplay.com Freestyle Championship Series, and snowballed from there with other companies hopping on the bandwagon titling their own cash purse events. It makes one wonder what will happen next year. Can it be far off before companies outside our small industry take notice? Is the "Big Truck Series" around the corner? Will whitewater

competitions be seen on ESPN II every weekend? Will paddling become "mainstream?" I believe all of this will happen and probably more than even I can imagine, and it could be soon. Many paddlers look to this change and worry about even more crowding on their favorite rivers. What will this increased exposure mean to our paddling resources?

That's where American Whitewater's role is so important. American Whitewater's mission is both conservation and promotion of the sport of whitewater paddling, among other things. Our conservation director, John Gangemi is hard at work successfully opening many miles of new whitewater rivers, with many, many more miles to go. Should

American Whitewater become involved in a "Big Truck Series," you can be sure that not only will that series focus on serious competition, but will also fuel our efforts to open up more rivers for paddler use. As the Director of American Whitewater's events program, I believe that conservation of our whitewater resources goes hand-in-hand with the promotion of the sport through top-notch competition. Attend, volunteer, and/or participate in an American Whitewater event near you. You'll not only be having fun, but also helping secure your whitewater paddling future.

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# BLACK RIVER FESTIVAL

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Free rodeo and surfing clinics and guided river trips (if qualified) for American Whitewater members.

Registration for the weekend river trips will be made on a first-come, first-served basis on the day of the Festival at the AWW booth starting at the Adirondack River Outfitters booth.

For a complete schedule of events, visit our website at [www.aww.org](http://www.aww.org) or call 800-451-1111.

## Deerfield July 29, Charlemont, Massachusetts Riverfest

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Sunday - Mass start downriver  
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Sacandaga Fest					
Black River Fe					
Deerfield Festival	July 29	Charlemont, MA	Mike Coleman	781-646-6744	colemanm@beaconarch.com
"Don't Call This a Festival River Rendezvous"	September 2-4	Belfort, NY/Beaver River	Chris Koll	315-652-8397	ckoll1234@aol.com
Gauley Festival	September 16	Summersville, WV	Phyllis Horowitz	914-586-2355	whiteh2o@catskill.net
Russell Fork Rendezvous	October 6-8	Haysi, VA	Brent Austin	606-278-2011	surfin@kymtnnet.org
Moose River Festival	October 14	Old Forge, NY	Chris Koll	315-652-8397	ckoll1234@aol.com

## American Whitewater Cascade Series

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Great Falls Race	June 4	Great Falls, VA	Greg Morrison	301-263-9572	kavuday@aol.com
Black River Race	July 22	Watertown, NY	Chris Koll	315-652-8397	ckoll1234@aol.com
Gore Canyon Race	August 19-20	Kremmling, CO	Paul Tefft	970-923-3955	enviro@rof.net
Russell Fork Race	October 7	Haysi, VA	Brent Austin	606-278-2011	surfin@kymtnnet.org
Gauley River Race	September 25	Summersville, WV	Donnie Hudspeth	304-658-5016	dhud@geoweb.net
Moose River Race	October 15	Old Forge, NY	Chris Koll	315-652-8397	ckoll1234@aol.com

## RiversLiv 2000 NOWR Series- Presented by American Whitewater

Wyoming Whitewater Championship	June 3-4	Jackson Hole, WY	Aaron Pruzan	307-733-2471	jacksonholekayak@wyoming.com
Potomac Whitewater Festival	June 2-4	Great Falls, VA	Greg Morrison	301-263-9572	kavuday@aol.com
Union Chutes Freestyle Festival	June 9-11	Englewood, CO	Shawn Hartje	304-292-6679	whartje@aol.com
Headwaters Championship / FiBARK	June 15-18	Salida, CO	Mike Harvey	719-530-0360	fatface@amigo.net
Animas River Days	June 23-25	Durango, CO	Nancy Wiley	970-259-3893	info@riversports.com
Skyfest	June 24-25	Index, WA	Jim Mates	207-297-9298	custom@isomedia.com
Gorge Games Freestyle Event	July 10-11	Hood River, OR	John Trujillo (Tree)	541-386-8751	info@outdoorplay.com
Black River Festival Rodeo	July 23	Watertown, NY	Nancy Weal	315-788-2538	fishinsp@hotmail.com
Ottawa River Rodeo	September 2-4	Bryson, QB	Paul Sevcik	416-222-2223	paul@equinoxadventures.com
Kootenay Rodeo	September 2-4	Castlegar, BC	Gerry Harmon	250-362-2128	gharmon@bcgas.com

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Wausau Freestyle Kayak Championship design@dwave.net	August 25-27	Wausau, WI	Julie Walraven	715-845-5664

## OTHER EVENTS

Gallatin Whitewater Festival	June 10-11	Bozeman, MT	Danna Heins	406-522-8708	montanapaddlers@yahoo.com
Willow River Paddlefest	June 16-18	Prince George, BC	Rick Brine	250-964-7400	
Pre-World Freestyle Championships	June 28-July 2	Sorte, Spain			www.rocroi.com/wwwcfreestyle
Export A - A Whitewater Rodeo Challenge paul@equinoxadventures.com	October 7-8	Bryson, QB	Paul Sevcik	416-222-2223	
East Coast Rodeo Surf Circuit					
Ocean City Kayak Surf Festival	September TBA	Ocean City, NJ	Jim Caterina	609-728-0171	
Outer Banks Surf Kayak Rodeo	September 9-10	Nags Head, NC	Pam Malec	252-441-6800	pam@khsports.com
Folly Reach Surf Kayak Rodeo	October 21-22	Folly Beach, SC	Carol Townsend	843-762-8106	prch2o@bellsouth.net
North Myrtle Beach Surf Kayak Rodeo	October 28	No. Myrtle Beach, SC			Rick Gardner 843-272-4420

# Any Electricians in the Crowd???

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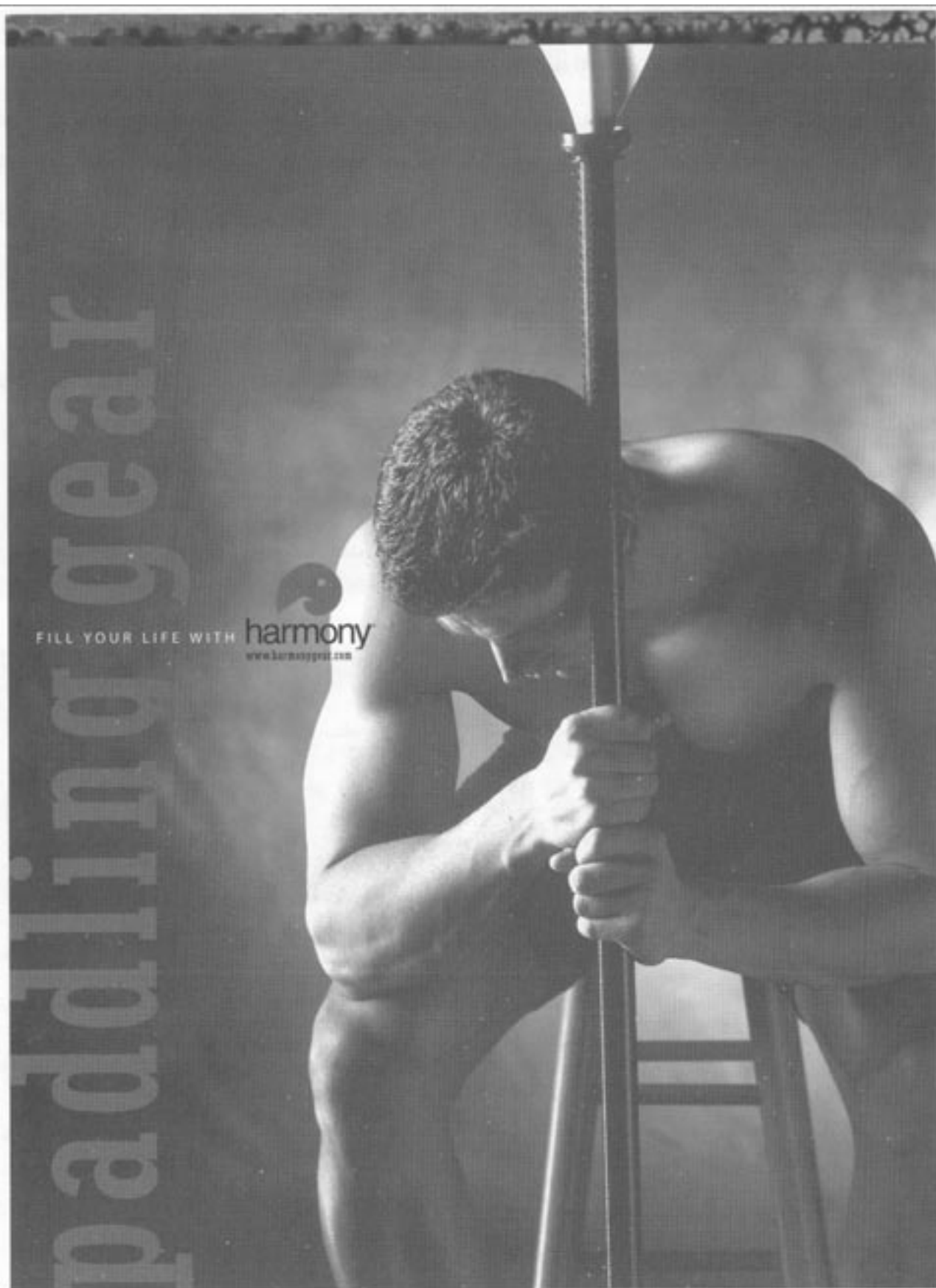
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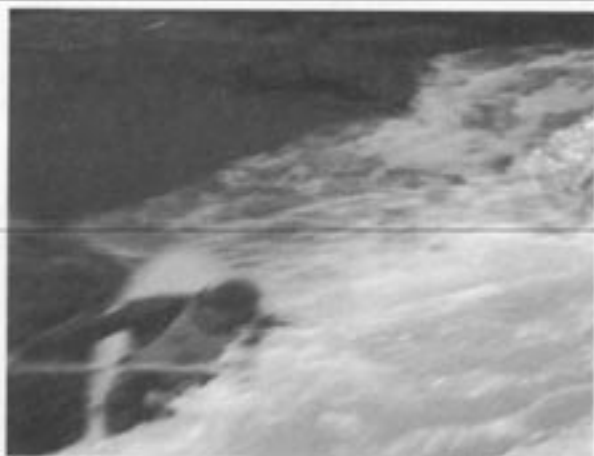
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# A First Descent of Nepal's Langu Khola

By Kurt Casey

## Cold, Hard Questions

Last night was cold. REAL COLD! I opened the tent flap and was hit in the face by a cold blast of snow and wind. I reached down into my sleeping bag for my water bottle. What I found was a frozen block of ice.

We left Kathmandu 8 days ago. A bus took us overland to Western Nepal, then we chartered a flight to the remote airstrip of Juphal. Now we have been hiking with our kayaks for the last week, hoping to attempt the first descent of the Langu Khola, a mysterious river in Northwestern Nepal.

Yesterday we crossed the crux of the trek, the 17,000-foot high (5100 meter) Choi La Pass. Being able to cross the pass had been a major concern of our group for the whole year the trip was being planned. Being mid October, the Himalayan winter is kicking in. We did not know if heavy snows would be blocking the passes.



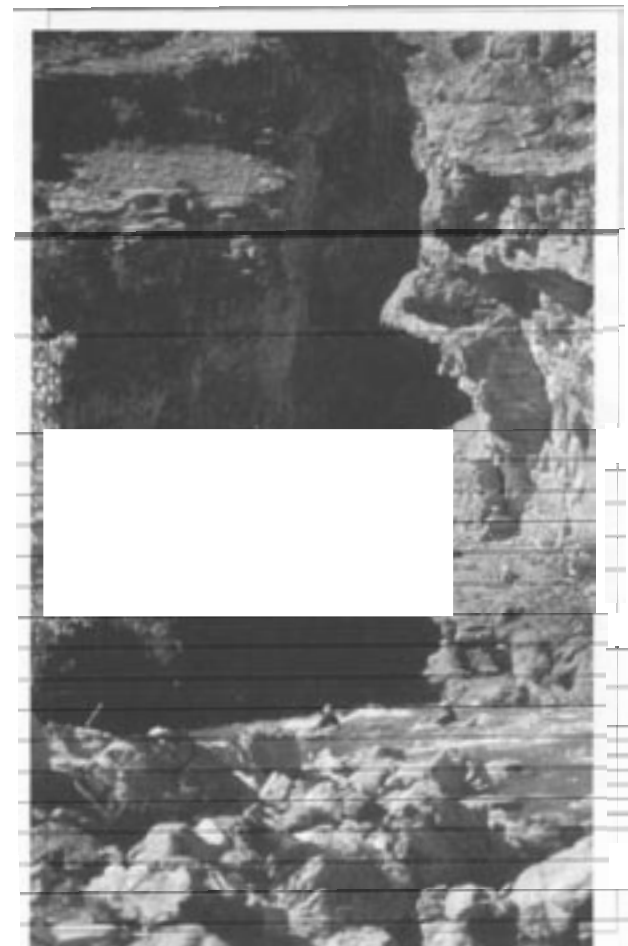


Two day ago in the Tibetan-speaking village of Do Tarap we hired Tsensing Lama to guide us and our porters through the pass. Yesterday we got an early start and struggled with gear and boats. High altitude, extreme cold and exhaustion almost turned us back. But we were lucky enough to encounter some nomads with a Yak caravan. They were crossing the same pass and used their yaks as pack animals to help get our gear to the top.

Meeting Tsensing Lama was a unique experience. At forty years of age, his skin was dark and weathered, making him look like a much older man. He wore his waist-length black hair drawn back and adorned with red yarn. The sight of him wearing turquoise and red corral earrings and riding a white pony reminded me of a North American Indian.

His existence was harsh and had claimed the lives of each of the nine children his wife had borne. Due to the eternally cold temperatures, he and the people of his village had never bathed in their entire lives, leaving them with a unique smell. The night before we left for the pass, we spent the night sleeping on the mud roof of Tsensing Lama's home. He invited us to sit around his dung fire and he sewed us Yak butter tea and potatoes.

We arrived at our camp late yesterday below an unnamed 21,000-foot peak. The camp, at 15,000 feet, is





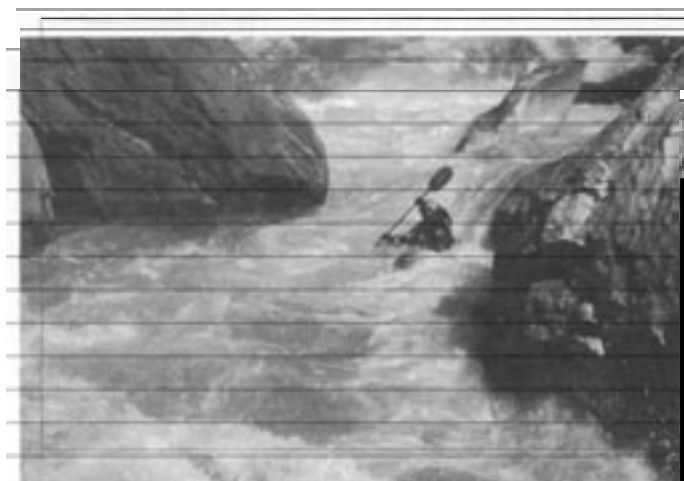
Nepal's

Langu

Khola

well above tree line. The cold winds sweep down from the high peaks making lighting a fire difficult. The meager supply of burnable plants and Yak dung collected on the hike is the fuel source.

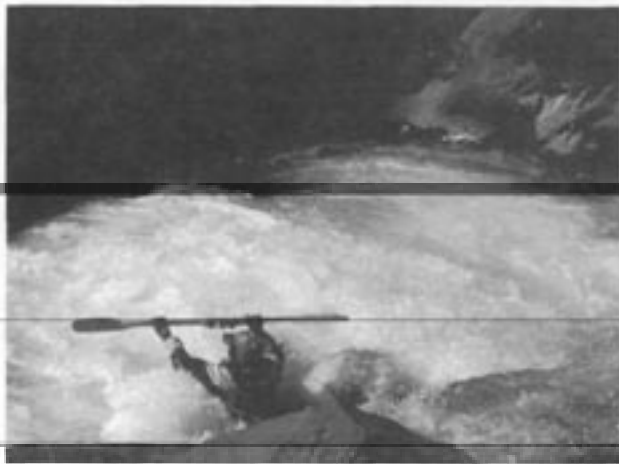
The small stream we are camped beside is called the Sarung Khola and is one of the upper tributaries of the river we had come to run, the Langu Khola. With clearing skies and warming temperatures, some of our party starts paddling, while others decide to continue walking until the river increases in volume. At 4450 meters, or 15,000 feet it is the highest put-in any of us has ever attempted. Within a few kilometers, the Keheng Khola more than doubles the volume to 400 cfs. A Buddhist shrine called a Stuppa marks the confluence. We are definitely in business!



## Into the unknown

The crystal clear cold waters of the Keheng tumbled downstream through the arid peaks of Upper Dolpo, which form the border between Nepal and Tibet. With non-stop boating we reached the village of Ting-khyu by mid afternoon and found the inhabitants busy harvesting barley in preparation for winter. Here, before entering the unexplored canyon below, we spent a lay-over day, packing the boats with 14 days of food and gear.

On the trip were five boaters from the United States. Ethan Green from Fort Collins, Colorado and Andy Zimet of Whitefish, Montana were the strategists. Both had spent over a year studying the limited information available on the region and had successfully obtained sponsorship and financial backing from Dagger Canoe Company and Gore's Shipton Tillman



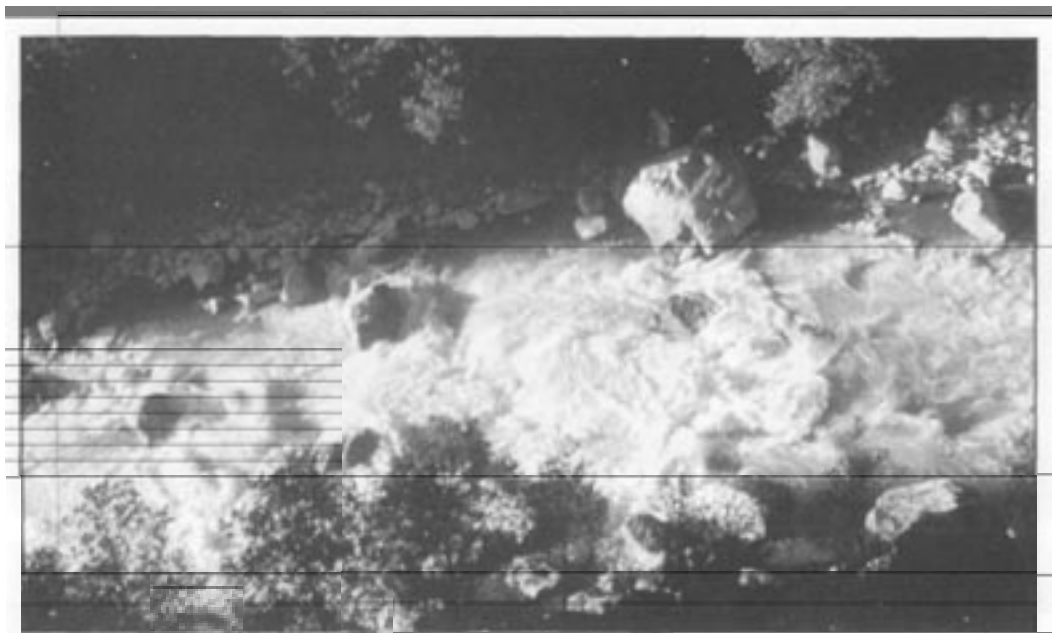
Grant. Others on the trip were Paul Zirkelback, a carpenter from Denver; Dave Friedman, a forester from Libby Montana and myself, a metallurgical sales engineer from Pittsburgh.

The first two days on the river brought us into a deep canyon with continuous low volume whitewater and several Class V drops. On the morning of the third day we camped near the incredible Buddhist temple of Yangtsher Gompa.

From the third through the eighth river day the volume of the river increased dramatically. Vertical walled canyons and Class V whitewater became the norm. Portages were frequent, long, and difficult. The 26,000-foot peaks of the Kanjiroba Himal and Tibetan Plateau bordered the river on both sides. The days were short because the mountain blocked the sun. We saw only one village and very few signs of human activity. The canyon was incredibly deep and inaccessible to foot traffic. Unlike most parts of the Nepalese Himalaya, animals were abundant. On the trip we saw several rare species, including the Bharral (blue) sheep, Musk deer, and the giant bearded vulture called the Lemmegheir. Although we did not have a sighting we were in the land of Yeti and the elusive snow leopard.

On the afternoon of the eighth river day Andy's kayak took a big hit and split down the middle. From topographical maps we knew we were a little more than a thousand vertical meters below the village of Dolphu. And from a description in Darla Hilliard's book, "Vanishing Tracks," we knew there was a trail leading out of this village downstream to our sched-





Nepal's

Langu

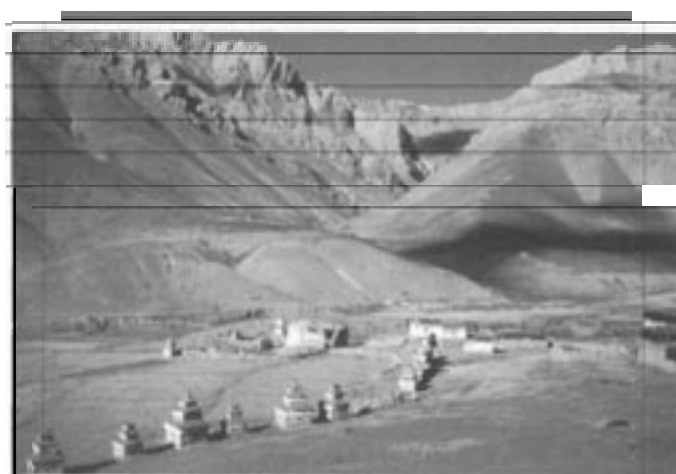
Khola

uled resupply point in Gumghadi. The only option for Andy was to hike out. We spent the night in a cave. In the morning, after dividing up the food, Andy courageously shouldered his gear and headed off into the unknown, hoping to meet us at our prearranged supply point more than 60 km downstream. At this point, most team members were sick and in need of rest, but lack of food made a layover day unfeasible.

The next few days brought more intense whitewater and some spectacular scenery. The tight walled canyon began to open and trails started to parallel the river. They led to villages and terraced hillsides far above the valley floor. On river day ten we reached the confluence with the Mugu, where the river changed names from the Langu Khola to the Mugu Karnali. Our maps indicated only that 40 km remained until Gumgadhi. The volume of the river reached an estimated 3,500 cfs and some sections exceeded 100 fpm. This made for some big excitement!

On the twelfth river day (Halloween, October 31<sup>st</sup>), with food supplies dwindling and behind schedule, we shouldered our boats and hiked to Gumgadhi. We were lucky enough to find our food drop and Andy, who had spent four days hiking since his boat broke.

Now it was now November 1<sup>st</sup>. Due to delays in Kathmandu, our trip was 10 days behind schedule. Our original plan had been to continue to follow the Mugu Karnali River from Gumghadi to its confluence with the Karnali River, then to follow the Karnali an additional 175 km to the take-out at the Chisipani Bridge. The section from Gumgadhi to the Karnali had been done once in 1981 in 18 days by a group of







catarafters. Rather than run the previously-explored section of the Mugu, the group decided to start hiking out to Jumla, a difficult 5-day walk.

On the mountainous trail to Jumla we passed through the National Park of Rara Lake. We eventually reached the banks of the Sinja Khola, a tributary river of the Tila that flows into the Karnali. The Sinja was another unrun river. Rather than continuing to walk to Jumla, some of the group wanted to paddle the Sinja. But only Andy and Ethan had the time and energy, so once again the group split. Andy and Ethan followed the Sinja and reached the Chisipani Bridge 8 days later. Paul, Dave and I continued to hike, then took a plane from Jumla to Nepalgunj on the Indian border. One more flight from Nepalgunj and we were back in Kathmandu on November 8<sup>th</sup>.

Our 3-112 week odyssey down the Langu Khola completed the last great unrun River in Nepal. For years, people have speculated about its source and the hardships one would face in navigating its course. A combination of luck and determination allowed our group the opportunity to have the first taste of the crown jewel of the Himalaya.

Note: Another account of our trip, written by Ethan Green, should be appearing in Dagger's Fluid magazine. It can also be viewed at <http://www.dagger.com/fluidmag/fluid.html>



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# The Russell Fork - Yesterday Today and Tomorrow

By Tom Hansell



Pool point trestle and tunnel. Photo by Tom Hansell

This is a story about how Americans relate to rivers. It is set on the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River; famous among paddlers for a Class V section that drops over 180 feet per mile. The Class III run above the gorge continues to draw many new paddlers each year. The Class II run below the gorge has introduced many locals to the pleasures of whitewater. The Breaks Interstate Park, located on the rim of the gorge, provides breathtaking overlooks where people can watch paddling, birds, or just soak in the view. The interaction of paddlers and locals, and the history of the extraction industry on the Russell Fork, create a classic American story about how our county developed, and what our challenges are for the future.

"This is the Appalachian outback of the United States. It's the best kept secret we've got. But that don't put no beans on the table and feed these little hungry mouths we've got going to school. So we must tap into that in a responsible way to where we can all live comfortably and leave something for the future generations to make a living off of." - Jerry Elkins, Lonesome Pine Soil and Water Conservation District

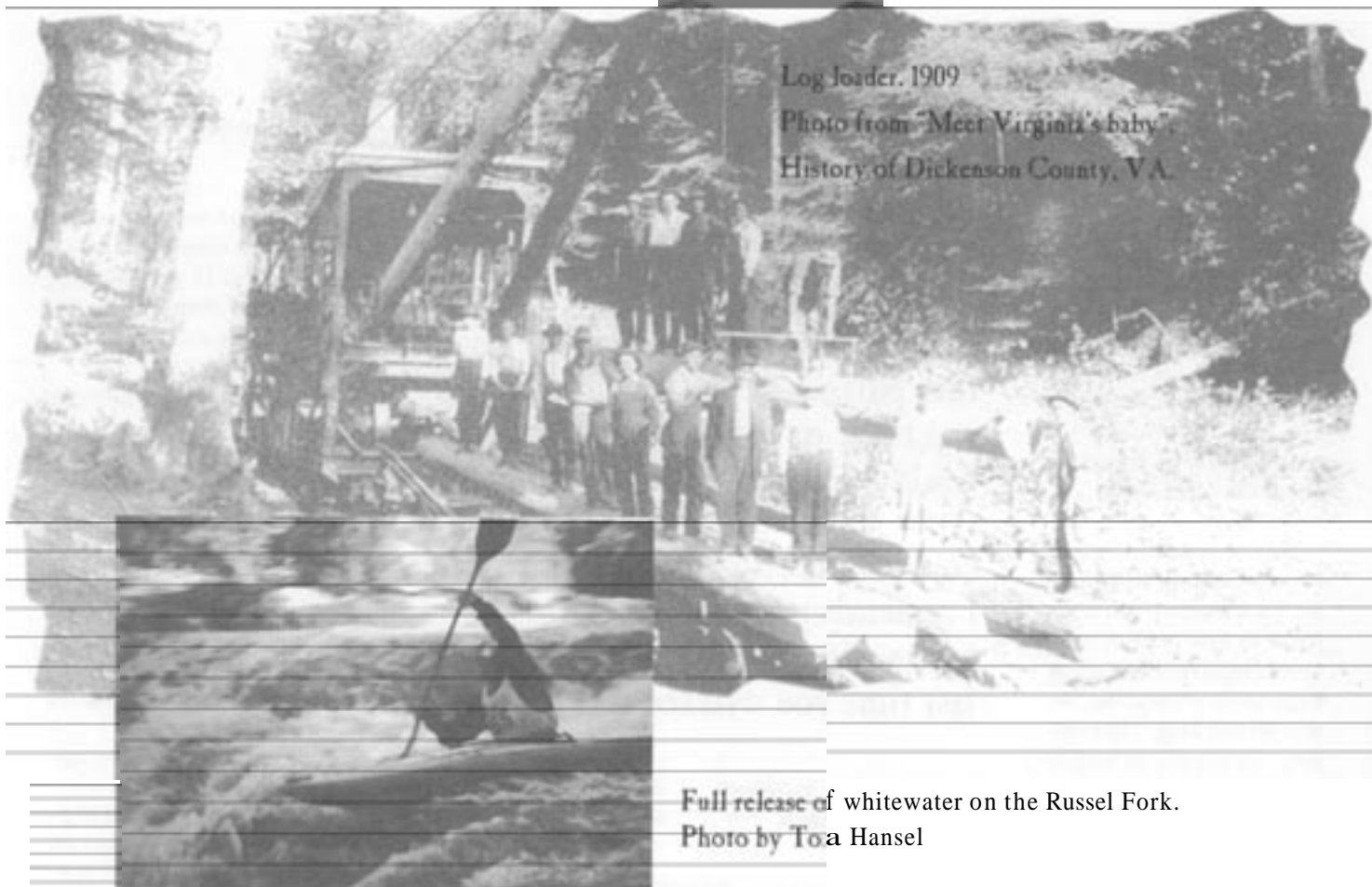
Like most of our great country, the Russell Fork was doing fine until the white man came along. The Shawnee and Cherokee traveled through the Breaks on hunting or war missions, but never settled in the area. The first documented experience of white people in the Gorge was that of Doctor Thomas Walker and his 1750 expedition from Roanoke, Virginia. Walker entered Kentucky through the Cumberland Gap. On his way home, Walker used the Indian trails through The Breaks to get back to Virginia. He recorded the areas rugged beauty.

*June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1750. "We got to Laurel creek early this morning and met with so impudent a Bull Buffalo that we are*

Hauling logs. 1910

Photo from "Meef Virginia's baby."

History of Dickenson County, VA.



Log loader, 1909  
Photo from "Meet Virginia's baby",  
History of Dickenson County, VA.

Full release of whitewater on the Russel Fork.  
Photo by Toa Hansel

*obliged to shoot him, or he would have been amongst us. We then went up the creek six miles, thence up a North Branch to its head, and attempted to cross a mountain. But it proved so high and difficult, that we were obliged to camp on the side of it. This ridge is nigh the eastern edge of the Coal Land."* -  
From the Journal of Doctor Thomas Walker

Walker returned to his home in Castle Hill, Virginia on July 16, 1750. Almost a decade later, Daniel Boone followed Walker's footsteps. In regional history, Boone is credited with opening Kentucky up to settlers by making the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap.

Billy Williams looks across the lower end of the Russell Fork Gorge into Potter Flats, where his family lived until the Park was established. His people were among the first white settlers in the area. He speaks of his deep connection to this place: "Daniel Boone came through here, my ancestors were with him, they settled in

this area before 1810. They considered it a paradise. The land was fertile, the valleys were protective. It's magnificent country. It's just a wonderful part of this world."

The people of the Breaks scraped by on farming, fishing, and hunting for almost a century. The industrialists like J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, the Carnages, and Henry Ford spied the rich resources in the Appalachians. Each of these magnates opened up mines in the Appalachian Coalfields. Coal from their mines fired the booming economy of the roaring '20s. This history of resource extraction is well known locally. And the vast majority of private sector jobs in the region are still Coal, Oil, Gas, or Timber related.

Large scale logging came to the Russell Fork in 1909, when the

Yellow Poplar Lumber Company built the world's largest splashdam at Bartlick, Virginia. The dam was used to hold

*June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1750. "We got to Laurel creek early this mornin and met with so impudent a Bul Buffaloe that we are obliged to shoot him, or he would have been amongst us. We then went up the creek six miles, thence up a North Branch to its head, and attempted to cross a mountain. But it proved so high and difficult, thnt we were obliged to camp on the side of it. This ridge is nigh the eastern edge of the Coal Land"-*  
From the Journal of Doctor Thomas Walker

# The Russell Fork - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

water back to float the virgin poplar down river to market. When the dam was filled, water backed up for over a mile. The lumber company would dynamite the wooden dam holding the water back several times each year, setting a flash flood of timber loose through the Gorge.

Clyde Mullins was a lawyer in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, at the mouth of the Russell Fork Gorge. Clyde witnessed the last release of logs from the splashdam around 1918. He writes about the event in his memoirs:

"I can distinctly remember my father putting me on his shoulders, as I was three or four years of age, and I could see these great logs, some of them 40, 50, and 60 feet long. They covered the river from bank to bank. I remember my fathers words "Son, take a good look, because this is the last time you will see this happen." To this day, I can see those great logs leaping and tumbling and changing ends, as they started their journey through the Breaks and on to calmer waters, where they would be rafted together at Elkhorn City, Kentucky."

Conrad Jones is a lifelong resident. He only left the Russell Fork to join the Navy, sewing in both the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters during WWII. After he moved back to the Russell

Fork, he got a job as a mine foreman. He stood on the tracks of the Clinchfield Railroad near his homeplace at Bartlick, Virginia, and talked about growing up around the railroad and the mines:

"The railroad changed it from a wilderness to what we see today. This railroad was finished in 1914. When they put the railroad in here, they soon started putting these mines in. That's what this railroad was put in for: to tap this coal reserve. And that's how the people made their living here."

All that has changed, however. In 1980, when Conrad retired, there were over 6,000 coal miners working in Pike

County. Today, that number is fewer than 600. Conrad explains:

"When they mechanized, why that knocked a lot of men out of work. Back when I was a boy and as a young man I loaded coal by hand. I was mashed up in a mine right here when I was 16 year old with slate. Back then, all you had to have was a strong back and a weak mind to coal mine. But now it's different."

Most of the water in the region flows along coal seams, so mining has heavily impacted the Russell Fork, and the entire Big Sandy Watershed. Clyde Mullins wrote about the dramatic effects of coal mining to the river he grew up on.

"I went into the service in October 1942. Things were pretty much the way they always have been around here. The river was running and clear. There was fish in

the river and black top roads had been built in Elkhorn City and up Elkhorn Creek. When I returned 37 months later I found an entirely different community. The river was running black at Beaver Creek, Ferrells Creek, and Road Creek. Elkhorn Creek was polluted and running black and there was a big mine on the head of Beaver. It was the Russell Fork Coal Company. Republic Steel was at the head of Road Creek and they

dumped all of their coal and debris into the creek. Sometimes the river would clear up over the weekend, but Monday morning when they started back to work it became black again. Then it wasn't long before the bulldozers came into this country and stripped away the coal, as a corkscrew would work out pieces of cork. The mountains were scarred with slashes and some places had been bulldozed for miles. Being one of the main sources of coal here in Pike County, we bore the brunt of the mining injustices. Consequently, you can still see the scars today."

Over 50 years later, the community of Elkhorn City is

"I can distinctly remember my father putting me on his shoulders, as I was three or four years of age, and I could see these great logs, some of them 40, 50, and 60 feet long. They covered the river from bank to bank. I remember my fathers words "Son, take a good look, because this is the last time you will see this happen."



# The Russell Fork - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

struggling with how to transform this legacy of extraction into a positive vision for the future. Tourism, "eco-tourism," and "heritage tourism" are often touted by politicians as the answer to economic woes. Unfortunately, everyone has a different idea as to what those words mean.

Hoyle Stiles owns a coal truck repair shop in Belcher, Kentucky, just down stream of Elkhorn City. A few years ago, he became half owner of the Gateway Motel, located just outside the Breaks Interstate Park. Hoyle sees a brighter future in tourism than in coal truck repair.

"Tourism is gonna be what it's gonna take, I think, to make this area grow. And we've got everything here that it takes for you know to offer to people. If it's just developed. I lived in Pigeon Forge (Tennessee) back when there was nothing in Pigeon Forge, you know. I moved here in 1969, and the first time I came here I said this was a baby Pigeon Forge."

Many visitors say the lack of development is exactly what draws them to the Breaks in the first place. Elwood and Linda Theaball drive from their home in Illinois to visit every year. At the Towers overlook in the Breaks Park, Elwood enjoys the view of paddlers some 1,500 feet below.

"There's no commercialism here, which is good in one sense. But on the other hand, I know it doesn't get as many people here. Still, it is the one place we've found where you don't have a lot of commercialism and still you can get what you want to see."

This challenge is echoed across the nation as rural communities try to balance desperately-needed economic development with preserving their cultural and natural heritage. This balance is difficult to achieve in a decade that has seen Wal-Mart and Pizza Hut wipe out the general stores and diners that were the centers of so many rural American communities. Somehow, Elkhorn City has missed this phenomena. The nearest superstores are in Pikeville, the county seat, 20 some miles away.

Elkhorn City does not have the zoning laws that other rural communities have used to keep these franchises out. Elkhorn City does have a strong group of people that are committed to preserving the heritage and spirit of their town. They recently organized the nonprofit Elkhorn Area Heritage Council. Rita Moore, the group's secretary spoke about her hopes and fears about development:

"I don't think we're gonna have a population explosion come into this town. Our infrastructure is not that good. And, we don't have a fast food restaurant. There's probably people that want fast food restaurants in town, but many of us say: 'Well, 20 miles to go to a McDonalds, Burger King or whatever, that's their choice - and we like this atmosphere

that we have here. This is a small community. We would like to keep it sort of like the old days, but yet have the atmosphere to where we can have people come into our area and appreciate the beauty that we do have here."

The Rusty Fork Café, located at the stoplight in Elkhorn City, satisfies locals and visitors alike with daily specials such as chicken and dumplings, as well as local delicacies like cornbread salad. It is a good place to catch up on the local news and views. The saying is that elections have been won and lost in the cafe. Kathy Mullins, the proprietor, has decorated her restaurant with historic photographs of Elkhorn City and Pike County, Kentucky. Once she started putting the old photos up, people brought so many that she doesn't have room for any more.

The big question that Elkhorn City and many rural communities are struggling with is: How to use heritage to develop in a way that improves the quality of life for the whole community. There are precious few examples of this type of development. There are plenty of examples of large scale development that degrades local heritage and culture.

If you go to the tourist spots in "developing" countries such as Costa Rica or Mexico, you may discover that people have abandoned their heritage, their connection to the land, their life-style, even their language in order to support tourism development. Closer to home, in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, mountain people have to cater to hillbilly

stereotypes straight out of the Lil'Abner comic strips or the "Beverly Hillbillies" in order to make a living. And consider

the environmental impact that chlorinated waterparks, paved parking lots, and waste disposal have on our wild rivers. You can't get real chicken and dumplings or cornbread salad in any of these places.

SO, how can heritage and development work together to enrich a community and the people that visit there?

Paddlers may be part of the answer. They are tourists that have a stake in preserving the natural heritage of wild rivers. Paddlers are often curious by nature, and seem to take a keen interest in local history.

Brent Austin is active with the Bluegrass Wildwater Association. He organizes the Russell Fork Rendezvous, a festival that benefits the river each year: "This community here is probably the most tolerant and receptive to the paddling community that I've ever seen; and I've paddled all over the country. It sort of has that southern hospitality in the mountains approach to the paddlers. And maybe some of it's economics. Paddlers don't have a lot of money, but they come in here during the fall season and they're spending dollars. The local economy feels it and they appreciate it."



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# The Russell Fork - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

The Russell Fork Rendezvous draws thousands to the Haysi Kiwanias Park, located on an old strip mine high above the Russell Fork. It is billed as a "festival gathering to celebrate the value and beauty of the Russell Fork River, the mountains, and the people that live here." Proceeds from the festival go to local groups and projects working to preserve and promote the river.

The Bluegrass Wildwater Association lists the following issues as critical to the health of the Russell Fork:

- 1) Sediment Pollution from coal bed methane and natural gas development.
- 2) Logging around the park and the headwaters of the river
- 3) Nutrient pollution from human and farm activities
- 4) General river cleanup
- 5) The proposed Haysi Dam upstream of the Park which would eliminate the natural flow that regularly comes into the gorge
- 6) The need for managed releases of water from the John Flannagan Dam (on the Pound River, a tributary) in spring and summer months for recreation.

Since the festival, a proposed bridge across the lower end of the gorge and possible development in the Potter Flats area have also emerged as issues. How these issues will be resolved is anyone's guess. Gurney Norman is a writer who has spent a lot of time paddling and pondering the state of rivers in Kentucky's coalfields. He leaves us these thoughts:

"I think that the people before World War II, and back into the 19th Century, the river was a practical thing. It figured into daily life. People actually wanted to fish. And there were many edible life forms- Frog legs, Fish, even Edible Mussels for people to gather from the river. But, in the last 50 years people have kind of forgotten about the rivers. So there's been this loss of an intimate connection with the river, so that the river has become kind of abstract. And on the downside, I think that we have to admit that the river has been allowed to become just a sewer to carry off the waste of the human beings. This is a loss of any loving attitude of the water, any belief that the water is alive organically, or any belief that flowing water in nature is a sacred thing."

Gurney says that people are beginning to understand that it is practical to care for our rivers.

"I think that as society began to have to pay a price for the exploitation: a price in the water quality and the air quality, and the aesthetic values; that people have wanted to side with the natural world against the forces that would rather mindlessly destroy it. We are evolving from treating the natural world as if it's a dead thing, as if it's a commodity, to seeing it as a living part of one's own life and family."

Jerry Elkins agrees with this back to the future approach to stewardship: "Where there is no environmental revitalization, there'll be no significant economic development of any kind. So the sooner we start taking care of our

world that we live in then the better off we're all gonna be. Our old-timers knew how to manage the land and take from the land just what they needed and then give back to the land and allow the land to rest. And I think that's something that in our hurry up way of life, we've forgotten about. Maybe if we do take our time and think about what we're doing a little bit more that we won't see these significant impacts that's changing for the worst, but instead they'll be changing it for the better for the future generations to enjoy."

With the combined efforts of locals, paddlers, and people interested in sustainable development, the Russell Fork will always be a place where people can gather and celebrate Appalachia's rich cultural and natural heritage.

*Editor's note: Tom Hansell works for Appalshop Films in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Tom directed the documentary film, The Breaks of the Mountain: The Russell Fork Gorge, which is available on video at (606)633-0108, fax (606)633-1009 or at Appalshop, website at [thansell@appalshop.org](mailto:thansell@appalshop.org)*

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# Beaver River

## Rendezvous


### 1999: A Report from the Field

By Erik Miller

So there was Russell at the top of Splatter Platter, the last Class V on the Mosier Section of the Beaver River, about to float off the lip of the drop. He was moving a little too slow. Now maybe you are supposed to float off the lip of the drop into Gorilla on the Narrows of the Green. Dunno really, never been there. Besides, that one is a long way from the western Adirondacks.



John Regan has been quoted as saying he never floated off the lip of a drop in his life. Except maybe for Gorilla.



In any case, this was Splatter Platter, as in there are many ways to make a mess. That's not even including the medical-surgical definitions. Five major ledges, each one requiring a move. I'd rate it as difficult as Lost Paddle on the Gauley, just not as long.

The gradient is probably similar too, just spread out over 250 yards instead of 1/2 a mile.

Things did not look good for Russell. He should have been booking





it, like really moving. It was about to get turbulent.

What he had done was follow some young rad surfing dude in a Mr. Bean or a Geek 230—I'm not sure which—out of the eddy above Splatter Platter. As Russell put it later, "He made this real cool rodeo move under this log—which I made—but then I was right at the lip of the drop."

Duh!

I had chosen a real high but easy flume drop way over on the right. Steep, but easy. Yeah, it may be the sneak line, but it's still about 15 feet vertical. You paddle your boat, I'll paddle mine.

This move gave me a ringside seat for what was about to happen next. The flume drop perfectly leads into the placement eddy above drop number 2.

Russell floated off the lip of drop number 1, flipped, and went over the rock/wave/mushroom thing at the bot-

tom of the drop upside down. Ouch ladies and gentleman, that had to hurt. The Cyphur he was paddling bounced about 6 inches out of the water, upside down. He was leading with his head.

Still, the paddle came up beside the boat for a valiant roll attempt. It was at that moment that I realized something was way major wrong. Kayak paddle shafts do not bend 50 degrees in the middle. His blade was broken. He swam.

Now for the humorous bit, oh ye of true cowboy or cowgirl mentality. Anything in this sport that does not cause serious injury or death, is cause for great amusement. That is a true rodeo attitude. Not the endless cartwheeling type of rode, but true rodeo, as in risking life and limb for *the ride*.

For about three seconds after he came out of his boat, Russell tried to get everything to shore: boat, self, and broken paddle. Then he remembered where he was. I hope I'm not ruining my karma saying this, but the look on his face at that moment was truly priceless. It was that crucial moment when one realizes that no amount of expensive sporting gear is worth getting the crap kicked out of you and not being able to breathe very well in the process.

His freestyle swimming stroke from that point on would surely earn him a birth on the Olympic team. Repeat after me, "I am not swimming, I am cross training."

At *this* point, as a member of the A.W.A. safety committee, I have to make a comment. Why, of all those people—and there must've been at least 60 or so—scouting this rapid, why was I the only one with a throw

bag? Is group safety no longer a concern on these more accessible rivers? Luckily for Russell, somebody extended him a paddle, which he got. Whooo, swimming into drop number 2 would have been heinous. As it was, he almost pulled the guy with the paddle off his rock.

Beaver River Rendezvous 1999 took place during the second year of releases on this Adirondack gem. It is truly a whitewater destination not to be missed. Call it a weekend of waterfalls in upstate New York. The locals are friendly. The scene is mellow. There are primitive camping sights near the put-ins and take-outs.

Even the wildlife gets into the spirit of things. The two loons who were mating out in the middle of the lake at the Taylorsville campground were a dead cool addition to the ambiance. The hung over guys from New Jersey may not agree with this. The loons started at about 4 am and continued to midday. And being loons, they were loud in a way only loons can be, if you catch my drift. From 300 yards away all you could see was a ball of feathers, beaks, and turbulent water. Then, these amphibious waterfowl would chase each other around the lake, running on the water, not quite taking off. They'd take turns chasing each other. Then you'd get another feather, beak, water, and wing explosion. This went on for hours. Definitely not a loon "quickie".

Oops, I almost forgot the Eagle section. The over-the-top, totally full on Class V bit. It's the bit I didn't do. Maybe next year. I'd almost call it a Class VI, but I'm old fashioned. It's not that the drops are not runnable, but if

continued ►

## Beaver River Rendezvous 1999:



in 6 tenths of a mile doesn't elevate your blood pressure, you're already dead.

Labor day weekend. Put the Beaver River on your calendar as a destination. You won't be disappointed. Imagine: whitewater in the Adirondacks, but with the temperature at eighty degrees plus, late enough in the sea-

son that the mosquitoes and black flies aren't bad.

I really shouldn't go on here. Some of my Vermont friends would like to keep this one their own little tasty waterfall surf spot. Can't blame them.

As for my own run through the last 4/5 of Splatter Platter, I cleaned the second drop. Then my run degenerated into a real brawler. Back and forth across the riverbed, over high, high ledges, with the water shoving, shoving. Not clean by any stretch of the imagination, but quite the ride.

Previous page photos from top right to bottom left show sequential shots from Drop #1 to Drop #2. The photo to the left shows the service entrance to Drop #3, The Mystery Hole.

you miss, talk about major spinal compression fracture.

Drop number 2 on this section is definitely the most intimidating, but I thought that drop number 3 was the neatest. Call it the Service Entrance to the Mystery Hole. The line involves going over about an eight foot ledge and aiming for what seems to be very solid chunk of upstate granite that sticks out from river left. You hit the service entrance, pogo back just a bit and get blown right. Just where you want to be.

I think the other end of the pocket in the bedrock you aim for probably surfaces outside of Ansted, West Virginia. No shit man, you have to be there to see the move, to get the connection. Maybe you have to be in 2 places at once, both West Virginia and New York. See the Mystery Hole! Every tourist trap has to have a service entrance.

The Eagle section then, for the true adrenaline addicted. If 475 feet gradient

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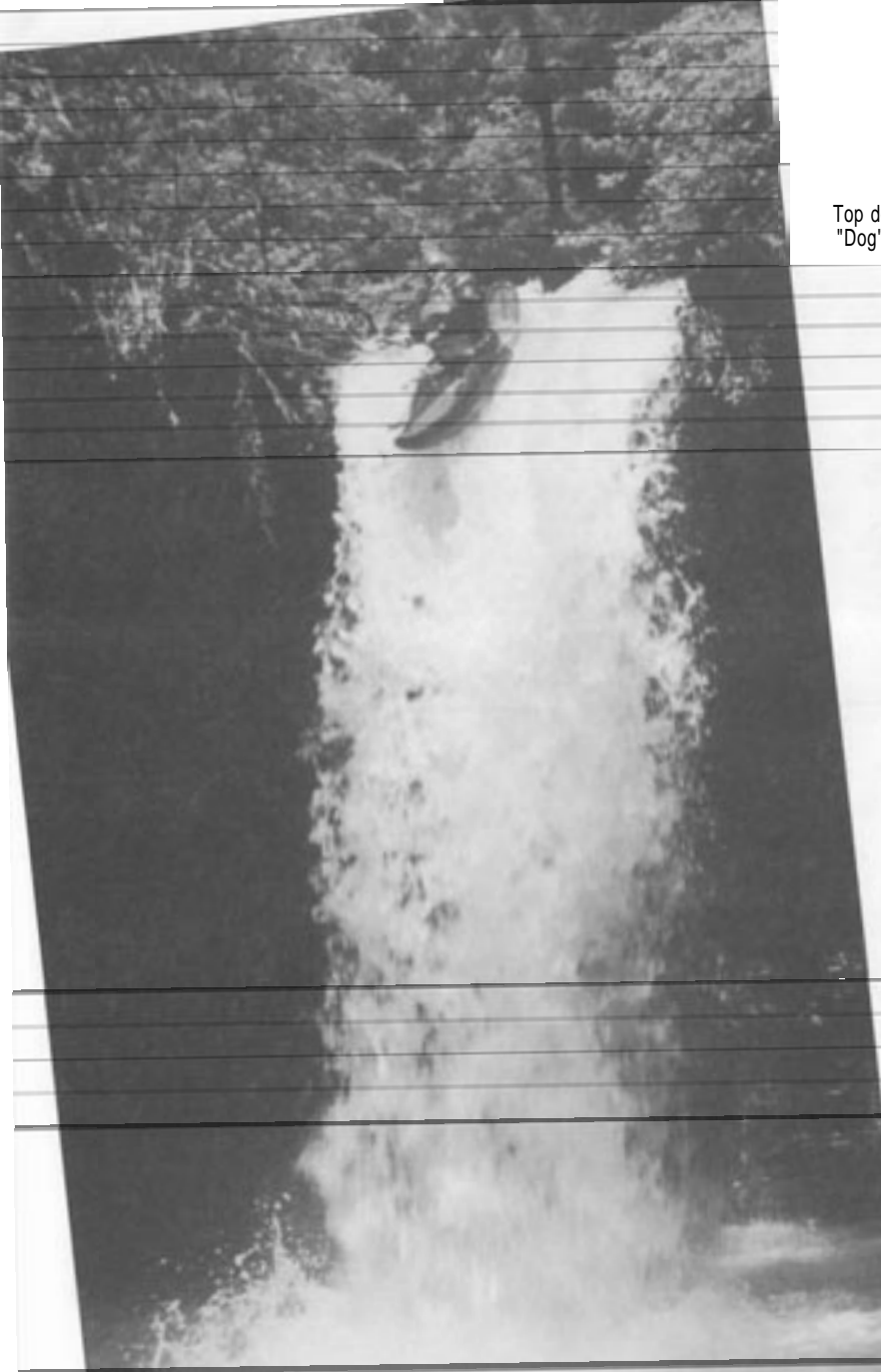
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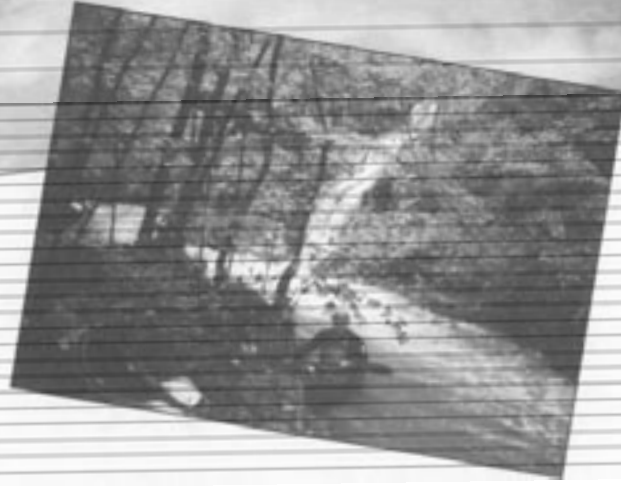




Top down: "Dog" Robertson dropping over Quiet Falls.  
"Dog" aka Steve Robertson near the put-in of Whistlepost Creek.

# Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Just an Oxymoron Anymore!

By Dan Henning



**H**ere I stand inspecting the huge gouge in the bottom of my new creek boat. It's a bright, sunny day in the small Northwest Arkansas town of Chester. Except for the muted roar of Clear Creek echoing off the front porch of the general store and a few oversized puddles in the road there's no trace of the five inches of rain that fell here less than eight hours ago. Joining me in my inspection of the damaged craft is a local kid just shy of driving age, a very grizzled old man, one really lazy old dog, and my old paddling buddy Steve.

After surveying the wreckage, the old guy shakes his

## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Justan Oxymoron Anymore!

head and says, "yep, that crik is a bad one. Can't remember the last time it got up that near the bridge. Damn near came over the tracks it was rainin' so hard! You never saw rain so hard. That crik ain't no place for canoes up above the bridge ya know." He laughs a bit as he says this, and I just nod my head and agree with him. I look over at Steve and see that he's thinking the same thing I am. The old man's "dangerous" creek is really a Class II-III run. These folks have no idea where we had been that morning. Finally the old guy and the kid both walk on up the road, leaving Steve and I to ponder the bottom of my boat by ourselves.

I believe that the most dedicated creek boaters in the world live in the Midwest. I know some folks might take offense at that statement, but before you do, just consider for a moment how dedicated Midwest boaters have to be. We live in a relatively dry part of the country where the highest elevations are no more than 2,500 feet and where good creek boating can only be found following those rare, heavy rains that occur only a few days a year. These factors tend to weed out most would-be steep creekers. Some can't take the frustration and move off to places synonymous with good creek boating like West Virginia, Colorado, or North Carolina. Some just give it up completely and take up a hobby that they can hope to pursue for more than a few hours a year. Those rare individuals who stick with it in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles are surely the most dedicated creek boaters in the country. Either that or we're just plain nuts. It's like deciding to be a member of the Jamaican bobsled team. People may laugh a bit at you and shake their heads, but deep down you know they respect you. Right?

Heck just being any type of whitewater boater in the Midwest takes dedication. Around here the Class II runs only stay up for days or weeks rather than the months are the rule in other parts of the country. The really steep creeks around here run only when all of the heavenly bodies that influence the flow of water come into exactly the proper alignment. And more than half the time, that happens at night! When it does happen during the daylight hours, you have to drop whatever you're doing at a moment's notice, load the boat and gear, and head for the hills. Those who hesitate are lost—or rather their water is lost down the steep hillsides, into the pastoral valleys where the rapids are

more of the "floating" variety. It helps to not have a real job.

Some paddlers, like Steve and I, actually like living in the Arkansas Ozarks. It's really one of the best areas for boating outside of the really good areas for boating. There are several reasons for this. For one, it's centrally located between the boating meccas of the East and West. Runs in both the Colorado Rockies and the Appalachians can all be reached in a day's drive. Almost all Ozark creeks and rivers are free flowing, and you don't need a permit to run them. Most watersheds are free of industrial pollution. All you need is enough water. And it's hardly ever crowded. On a typical day on an average Ozark stream, you can count the number of boaters on the water using only your fingers. Go to the Ocoee or Arkansas rivers on any given weekend and you'll

need a computer to keep up with the headcount. I strongly suspect that more boaters run the Nantahala in a single weekend than run all of the whitewater streams in Arkansas in an average year. And did I mention that we don't have any commercial rafting?

And there are some great creeks in the Ozark hills. A mixture of softer limestones and shales with harder sandstone layers provides the perfect medium for boulder-choked rapids and

ledges. My buddy Steve (who goes by the nick-

name "Dog" when he's boating) is an expert in the geology and geography of the Ozark highlands. He can tell you how some of the roughest creeks were formed when unstable gorge walls collapsed into the creeks or why almost all of the falls are severely backcut. I just know about the obvious stuff, like how boulders the size of houses and gradients in excess of 300 feet per mile combine to make continuous stretches of Class IV+ whitewater. When there is water, that is.

The Fall 98/Spring 99 season was an unusually good one for boaters in the Arkansas Ozarks. Relatively steady rains and unseasonably warm temperatures extended the boating season longer than usual and kept the local play runs pumped up a good deal of the time. I'd had the opportunity to run several great classics like Richland Cr. and the venerable Hailstone. Those alone would have made for a great season in the Ozarks, but on top of that the great cosmic alignment had happened a few times, and I had been lucky enough to be there for it. We made first descents of two great new steep creeks and a pseudo-descent of a third.



Dog negotiates the entrance to Wet Your Whistle.



## Ozark Steep Creekling: Not Justan Oxymoron Anymore!

On that one we arrived a bit late, and the result was a blend of paddling and boat-dragging. I like to think of that type of trip as an opportunity to test the boundary that divides hiking and boating. Most folks would probably refer to it as a really bad overestimation of the water level. But we don't often pass up such chances to explore new creeks at low levels.

This season was great while it lasted, but when July approaches, the rains always stops, and any creek exploration that is undertaken in the next four months must be done on foot. So when I woke up on June 30 to the sound of thunder, I thought I must have been dreaming.

But I wasn't dreaming. Flood warnings were out for most of Oklahoma, a good sign since most of our severe weather originates in that area. A very rare late season storm was training bands of heavy rains about a half-hour south of my house in Fayetteville—right over some great creeks.

I called my good buddy Dog and he said he'd call back after his yard stopped flooding. He was afraid his basement was going to start filling up. That sounded like a sure sign from the river gods to me, so I called a bunch more folks to try to get a few more boaters. But most of the usual suspects were out of town in Colorado or elsewhere, where the water was sure to be in late June. No one had expected such a frog-floater in the Ozarks in the summer.

So it looked like it was just going to be Dog and me, a fact that neither one of us liked much. Two is not the recommend group size for paddling remote creeks. But we couldn't pass up an opportunity like this one, and besides, we knew the creeks by heart. Into just about every creek in the area we had invested hours of exploratory time, negotiating access points, finding hazards, and memorizing where the nasty drops were as well as the eddies above them.

The creeks were still getting rain when we arrived in the small town of Chester, just 20 minutes south of Fayetteville. One of the area's great play runs, Clear Creek, runs right through the middle of town. It is by no means a

big creek, only carrying water for about 48 hours or less after a big rain. That day it was a full-scale river. It had been much higher just an hour or so earlier, but it was still flooded. Huge, muddy waves crisscrossed it everywhere. Dog's voice came over the CB, "Looks like we hit the jackpot!" Indeed we had.

We headed up into the hills, dodging debris that had been swept across the road by torrents of water rushing down the sides of the valley. We were paralleling a tributary of Clear Creek and it was nearly covering the road in places. We passed one spot where a very surprised horse had been stranded on a small hill that usually formed the left bank of the pastoral stream. That day the stream didn't have the patience to go around the knoll, so it tried to swallow it up, running swiftly around both sides. The horse stood there staring at the big waves that pushed through what had been forest, waiting patiently for an escape route to present itself.

"We should go check out Whistlepost," I told Dog as we hurtled down the road. "It's got to have water today, and it's not too hard to get down in there. If it isn't up, we can still come back for one of the other creeks." Whistlepost was a creek that I had hiked a couple of times earlier in the year. No one had ever run it before. It had been a yearlong project just to get permission from the landowners around the creek to access it. Its 1.5 mile-long gorge tumbled more than 500 vertical feet, and it had a larger watershed than many of the other micro-creeks in the area. Dog agreed with my idea, and we turned and headed up toward Whistlepost.

When we got to the creek, the water didn't look huge by



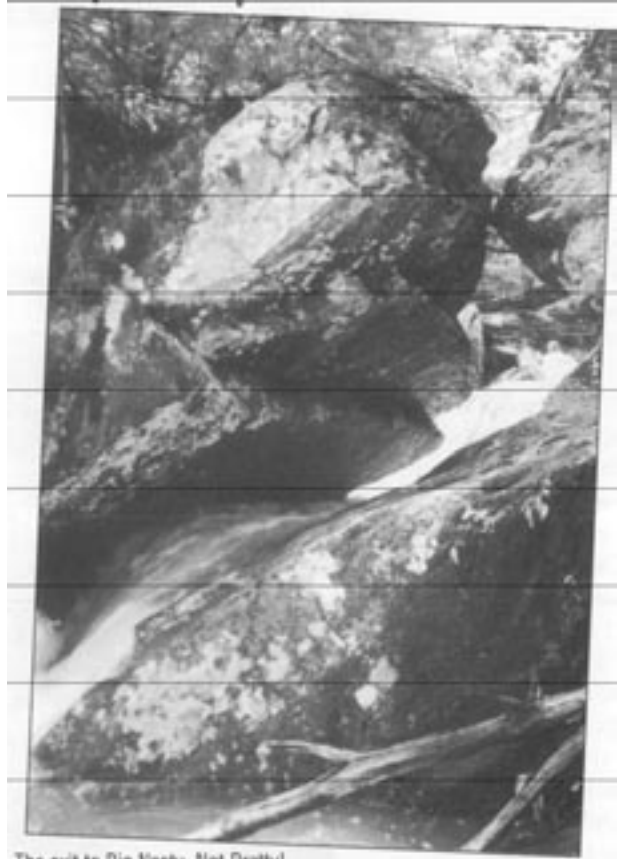
Dog Robertson surveys the slot in The Cathedral.

## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Just an Oxymoron Anymore!

any means. Then I remembered that we were looking at only half of the flow. Two tributaries, each tiny steep creeks in their own right, merge just below the put-in to form a much larger creek. At the same time, the gorge closes in and compresses the flow into a channel that isn't any wider than the two small feeders above. What we saw on one of the small streams was certainly boatable, so we figured that the gorge must have plenty of water.

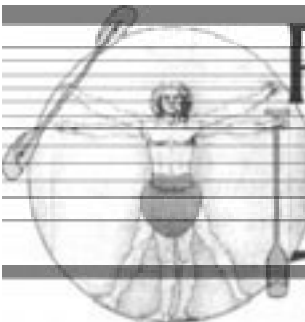
As we got ready to run shuttle, Dog pointed out how high the watermarks were up the bank. The creek had obviously carried literally ten times as much water just a couple of hours earlier. I interpreted this as a clear sign from the river gods that we were not supposed to run the shuttle. In another hour, there might not be much creek left to run, and the shuttle was a half-hour longer than that. Dog did not have my faith, however, and he severely doubted that the river gods would provide us with a way of getting back to our trucks when we got to Chester. Besides, we only had a couple of bucks between us, so bribing a local resident into the hour-long drive up the ridge was not a strong possibility.

Luckily, my cell phone was getting some reception, so I called my wife, Chanoy. She is an accomplished whitewater boater too, so she understood the urgency of our situation better than any non-boater could, and she agreed to meet us



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## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Justan Oxymoron Anymore!

in Chester if we would call her when we got there. When I told him we were good to go, Dog looked rather doubtful. He even questioned whether I had really made the call or not. I think he thought it unlikely that anyone would be that nice. Finally he took my word for it, and we suited up.

It takes me longer to put my gear on these days than it used to. Things like elbow pads that I would have laughed at a few years ago have now become essential paddling gear. As I get older, I worry a lot less about looking cool and a lot more about minimizing potential pain. Eventually, I can see myself wearing a veritable suit of armor, looking like a river-going Don Quixote chasing waterfalls instead of windmills. It makes me think of what a friend of mine once said about the advances in safety gear in adventure sports: maybe we were all safer back when we had gear that didn't make us feel quite so invincible.

Our day started off with a wide, bony five-foot ledge that appeared before the two branches merged. That was the last bony rapid of the day. Once the water came together there was plenty of it—nearly too much in the ultra-narrow stream. We found ourselves being shoved down a chute full of whitewater, trying to hit every eddy over the size of a basketball in an attempt to slow our descent. The water was only Class III, but it

didn't have any pauses. Finally we both hit a larger eddy and I

hollered at Dog to watch for a small cascade coming in on the right. Just past that was a bigger rapid I remembered from my hike.

We peeled out again and hopped several tiny half-eddies until we passed a beautiful fall tumbling down the side of the gorge on our right. "Just what we need, more water!" I hollered at Dog as he grinned back at me. Ahead of us was a small, rocky horizon line, and past that the creek disappeared around a bend. I looked back at Dog and told him I'd

hop out to check it. He decided to wait in his boat to see if this was a false alarm. It wasn't.

The creek dropped over a large boulder jumble that was basically 90% unrunnable. The only way to get down it was to dodge a couple of small boulders at the top, move quickly to the far left, jump the top of a sideways sloping rock, make a 90 degree turn on the way down, and hit a slot drop no

wider than a kayak. There looked to be several ways to get pinned, but luckily most of the water went into the ugly sieve that blocked the right side of the rapid. As long as we could avoid the sieve, a pin would only result in some bruises to our egos.

The real problem was that the rapid didn't stop there. It just kept on sliding and churning around rocks as it dropped away around the corner. I thought I could see something resembling an eddy 50 yards or so downstream, but I couldn't be sure we could hit it in the pushy current. I walked up to where Dog was parked and yelled the situation to him. He decided he'd try it, with me on the bank near the top drop to help him if he

pinned

Dog made the drop without a hitch, running a great line, the only line, through the clog of boulders. He passed me whooping and hollering with a big smile showing from beneath his helmet. I was smiling too until I watched him zigzag his way down the rest of the rapid and flush right past the only eddy I could see. Then he was gone, and I was standing there with a throw rope in my hand and a dumb look on my face. I was just starting to try to scramble down the

bank to get to him, when Dog's red helmet popped up from behind some big boulders on the opposite side of the gorge. I couldn't hear him well, but he signaled to me that there was a small eddy just around the curve on the right. I quickly scrambled back up to my boat and shoved off into the current.

When I got down to the corner I pinballed my way around a few rocks, making good use of my elbow pads. There I saw Steve's boat, but no eddy, and I just managed to



Dog takes the plunge at The Cathedral.



# The need FOR speed . . .

is not for outrunning  
a 20 foot face.

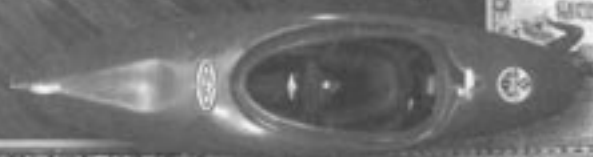
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Bill Herring (aka Fish) in Wet Your Whistle, the entrance to The Cathedral.

get the boat stopped by turning upstream and grabbing a small tree. When I hopped out to join Dog, he was looking off downstream with a weird look on his face. When I turned around, all I could see was a staircase of whitewater, churning along the gorge until it disappeared around another corner. You really couldn't break it up into multiple rapids; there just weren't any reliable eddies to hit. Every small ledge just flowed right into the next one, and, because it was so narrow, there was only one good line through the whole thing.

We walked down a hundred yards or so to find a place to stop, but we still couldn't see a good one. There were some tiny semi-eddies that could possibly be snagged. They would just have to do. It did look clear enough to run all of what we could see, but it unnerved us a bit not knowing for sure when we'd get stopped again. After all, this was the part of the creek that had looked easy when I hiked it, and we knew there could easily be unrunnable drops ahead of us.

To add to our concerns, the sky was darkening again, and the creek definitely didn't need any more water. We could see trees a few feet up the bank that had bark stripped off from the torrent that preceded our arrival that morning. Another deluge like that would send us scurrying up the gorge walls for our lives. We didn't talk much about it though; there was nothing to do but keep heading downstream out of the gorge.

We dropped the boats back into the rapids and shot off around the bend. Our next few minutes were spent spinning

and jumping over ledges, alternately paddling furiously forward to punch hydraulics and back paddling to ferry around rocks. At one point, we came off of a small drop, turned 90 degrees, and ducked a tree that crossed the stream at chin height while plunging off of a four-foot ledge. It was certainly Ozark creeking! When we finally found a big eddy just downstream of where we had scouted to, I looked over at Dog and hollered, "Wow! Can we do that again?" We laughed, a bit nervously. The creek was just getting started, and we couldn't breathe easy just yet.

From the eddy we could see what looked like a cave in the bend just ahead. The water upstream of it was ominously flat. We hopped out on the bank and climbed down to look at one of the most impressive rapids I've ever seen. I had dubbed this area "The Cathedral" on my hikes of the area because the huge rocks in the tiny creek

looked like the towers of some medieval church. The rapid that lies in the shadow of those towers cascades more than twenty feet over four ledges. On its way down, the water flows into and under several of the two-story tall boulders.

The third drop in The Cathedral was the real problem. In it, Whistlepost Creek necked down to a slot only a foot wider than a kayak. The resulting jet of water was funneled into the undercut base of the biggest of the overhanging rocks, twisting back on itself in a furious hydraulic display. Running the rapid would mean dodging undercuts after jumping the first two ledges, hopefully blasting through the slot without pinning, and then staying left over the final eight foot plunge to avoid a nasty rock and small cave on the right side of the drop. The rapid was conceivably runnable, but not without hefty penalties for mistakes.

After a quick discussion we made the decision to portage the upper part of the drop and run the final ledge. We just didn't have the manpower to set up bank support for a paddler in such a large rapid that day, and if one of us were injured, he'd have to wait alone in the gorge while the other walked out. It was obviously the smart decision to make, but I still couldn't help wondering if I was backing down too easily. Maybe it was just the adrenaline talking, but I really felt like I could run the drops.

Looking back on it, it was certainly the adrenaline talking—it was a dangerous rapid. We did the wise thing and carried down the almost sheer gorge walls to drop our boats just below the third drop. I went flying off the ledge first, trying to stay on the far left to avoid the rocks and pothole



## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Just an Oxymoron Anymore!

on the right side of the drop. And Dog came tumbling after.

From below, the huge rapid painted a surreal scene: a tiny creek filled with boulders that belonged on a much larger river and water surging through every possible nook and cranny, trying to find a way through the constricting maze of rock. And we were quite possibly the only people to ever see it like this, certainly the first in boats. Unfortunately, we didn't have much time to stop and take in more of this incredible scene. The next drop was just as big, and the swirling dark clouds above reminded us that we needed to keep moving quickly.

After a 20-minute climb down into a bowl of limestone, we arrived at the base of another big drop. This one was much simpler than the scrambled course of the previous rapid. The water simply accelerated over a gently-sloping rock shelf, arced through the air, and fell 20 feet to a tiny pool below. Most waterfalls have a hole at the bottom, but the base of this one more closely resembled an explosion. The falling torrent simply ricocheted violently off of the bottom, less than five feet below the surface. The whole thing swirled and surged powerfully between the gorge walls.

It was one of the most beautiful falls I'd ever seen, framed by the dark walls of the gorge against a leaden sky. And I was going to run it. "I'll head back up to the boats and try to signal you before I come off," I told Dog as I began the

climb. The landing had to be precise, but the approach looked clean. Besides, running it couldn't be any more dangerous than trying to scramble up the crumbling limestone walls that surrounded it. It was one of those rare cases in which portaging seemed to be the greater of the two evils. At least that's what I kept telling myself on the way back to the top.

After portaging a tree that blocked a four-foot ledge just above the falls, I was looking down from the edge of the drop. As I peered down into the churning grotto below, I had the strangest feeling that something wasn't quite right. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something about the fall seemed out of place. I stood there for a long moment mesmerized by the falling water and tried to puzzle out what was wrong.

Finally it dawned upon me that I could hear birds chirping and leaves rustling. Standing three feet from this torrent of whitewater, all I could hear was a sound like a gently babbling brook. It may have been a trick of the rock walls around the fall, or maybe it was a quirk of the weather that day. I don't know. But the falling water was making hardly any noise. It was a strange sensation that just added to the beauty of this fantastic waterfall.

Just then the sun broke out from behind the wall of clouds and the whole gorge lit up with vivid greens and sparkling white. The arrival of dancing rays of sunshine cutting through the clouds combined with the strange silence

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at the edge of the falls to invoke in me a feeling of complete peace and calm. I know it sounds crazy, but it seemed to me to be a sign from above that I had nothing to fear from this fall or this creek. I got in my boat, put on my skirt, and pushed off without hesitation.

Ah, that old familiar discontinuity in time between staring down into a churning pool far below and plunging into cold water. I've never been able to ascertain what happens to my brain in the moments between takeoff and landing on a big fall, but my senses seem to get lost in the blur of motion. Everything just moves too quickly, and the gray matter never seems to have enough time to catch up before it's over. Rapids I remember vividly; waterfalls are a permanent mystery to me. Maybe this is why I seek out big water-



Steve's Helmet sticking up from the middle of Yellow Submarine.

falls. Perhaps I run them in the hope that someday I will be able to see clearly that compressed moment in time that has eluded me so far. Perhaps.

The spell was broken as I sliced into the boiling water below. My premonition had been correct. I had run a nearly perfect line, boofing the lip of the drop angling right into the deepest part of the pool. I paddled over to Dog in the eddy, and he helped steady my boat in the frothing water as I got out.

"How was it?" he asked as I was taking off my helmet. "I think it may have been the best drop of my life," I replied. For sure he thought I was exaggerating, caught up in the euphoria of having made a first descent of a 20 foot fall, but looking back on it I don't think I was. It was a perfect experience

running a perfect waterfall. It's why I'll keep chasing falls and creeks all of my life, one of those rare moments when I feel that I'm truly living instead of just existing. I carry the cumulative peace and wisdom of those experiences with me every day of my life, and I'm a better person for it.

While I waited for Dog to climb up for his run, I stretched out on the big rocks below the falls and soaked up the green-filtered sunshine. I could feel the big, cold slab of stone vibrating from the force of the water that was pounding the bedrock below. It was so peaceful that I nearly drifted off to sleep. I realized that I better stay awake to take a picture of Dog coming over the falls. So I climbed over rocks and trees

trying to find a good spot above the mist that would lend itself to photography.

Almost 25 minutes had elapsed by the time Dog's helmet popped up beside the bluff at the top of the fall. He studied it for quite a while before giving me a thumbs-up and disappearing again. I clicked the shutter just as he dropped over the edge.

He dove a bit deeper than I had, and the impact knocked his paddle out of his hands. He broke the surface hand paddling in a cauldron of whitewater. When he hit the rocks on the bank I grabbed him and we waited for his paddle to quit recirculating under the falling water. Finally we retrieved it. "Man, it sure was quiet up there," were the first words out of his mouth. I told him that I had had the same experience, and we

agreed to simply name the drop "Quiet Falls." Yet it was hard to regain that serenity as we gazed up at the thundering water.

We still had some tough rapids ahead, but with blue skies above and the two biggest drops behind us, the gorge suddenly didn't seem too intimidating. The rest of the creek was just plain fun.

One of the best things about being the first boaters to run a creek is that you get to name rapids, and we named some of the more memorable rapids as we descended. Just below Quiet Falls was "Wondercut," where the left half of a broken ledge dropped into a cavernous undercut rock. Downstream a little further was an impassable slot under a

## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Just an Oxymoron Anymore!

natural bridge. Only someone the size of a smurf could have run it, and we had a nasty time portaging around it—hence the name: "Big Nasty." Near the end of the big gorge drops, I pinned solidly on a small rock at the lip of a big ledge that dumped into a rock. After Dog helped me get free, we both ran it, ricocheting off the rock before plunging completely underwater in the deep hydraulic at the bottom. That one was dubbed "Yellow Submarine"—for no reason in particular.

The last quarter mile of the creek didn't have any drops that merited a name. The tight gorge finally receded, and the rapids tamed down to the Class II-III variety, but the topographic maps of the area indicated one more potentially serious hazard before we reached the muddy flow of Clear Cr. Between the bigger creek and us was a set of railroad tracks. Whistlepost Cr. had to cross those tracks, and everyone knows that creeks don't generally flow over railroad tracks. Whistlepost is no exception to this rule.

The culvert was about eight feet in diameter and 50 feet long, and at its terminus the creek plunged six feet down into Clear Cr. We scouted it carefully from both ends. It was clear of debris, but the last step was a real doozy. Clear Cr. wasn't just standing still as the smaller creek plunged into it. It was accelerating around the outside of a sharp bend and then slamming into a big boulder just a few feet downstream of the culvert. The resulting hydraulic display was quite impressive. At least the hole below the drop wouldn't be a keeper, since Clear Cr. would probably slam us into the rock wall before the hole could work us over too much.

So I followed Dog into the mouth of the tunnel with my camera drawn to record the first run of the last drop of Whistlepost Cr. As we raced past the dark corrugated walls, I clicked the shutter twice before I retrieved my paddle from my armpit. Then I followed Dog off the drop, paddling like crazy and angling sharply left in an attempt to line up with the flow of Clear Cr. at the bottom. It was a futile effort.

Dog in the big culvert-The Tunnel of Love.



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## Ozark Steep Creeking: Not Justan Oxymoron Anymore!

paddlers have developed their own set of terms to describe what happens to them when they fail to make a drop cleanly. These include terms such as hammered, clobbered, worked, douched, and trashed. All of them could be applied to what happened to me as the nose of my boat intersected Clear Cr. I can't remember any of it very clearly myself, but the play-by-play would have gone something like, "and he's jerked around sideways before the boat can even sink into the water. Just look at that hydraulic try to tear him out of his kayak. And there he goes trying to roll as he slams head first into the big rock!" "Man, Howard, that's gotta hurt! He got hammered!" the colorful commentator would no doubt add cheerfully.

But I eventually spun free, rolled up, and headed for the huge eddy where Dog was sitting. Actually, the eddy wasn't all that big, but any eddy looked big compared to what we had just experienced on Whistlepost. Dog looked as dazed as I felt. Looking at it from below, I couldn't see any way that anyone could run that culvert without loosing control at the bottom, but I'm probably wrong about that. After all, I'm just one the most dedicated whitewater boaters in the country, certainly not one of the best.

One thing was certain though. We had just run one of the steepest, most technical creeks that I had ever been on. We had descended over 500 feet of elevation in two miles with the first mile weighing in at over 350 feet. Sitting there in Clear Creek basking in the glow of this accomplishment felt pretty damn good! A perfect day on a perfect Ozark steep creek! But it wasn't quite over yet.

The five-mile trip down to Chester was relatively uneventful, as we crested wave after wave on a flooded creek dropping 50 feet per mile. Trees whizzed by as we zipped along the endless wave trains in water that looked like frothing chocolate milk. At one point, we paused for pictures at a new freeway bridge where a tributary dropped over 100 feet straight down into Clear Creek "This sure doesn't feel like Arkansas!" I told Dog smiling ear to ear. We bounced over more waves and the occasional hole, stopping to surf some of the friendlier looking ones. Finally the creek calmed down a bit and we came past some junky old shacks and debris that looked like they came straight out of Deliverance.

About that time, Dog dropped over a barely visible six-inch ledge across the creek, but as I tried to follow him my kayak pinned at the top. I tried to wiggle off of whatever had me stuck, but despite my best attempts the boat wouldn't budge. That's when I saw the rebar. The owner of the Y2K-

ready vacation spot we had just passed had poured a home-made concrete slab across the creek. For reasons only a do-it-yourself bridge builder could explain he left a fence of three-inch spikes of rebar poking up on the downstream side. It took me a couple of minutes to dislodge my boat from the metal spike that had speared it.

When we reached our take-out at Chester, I got a chance to inspect the hull of my 6-month-old creek boat. One of the rebar spikes had impaled the boat just forward of the seat, and had stretched the plastic so thin you could see light through it. The gash was at least a half-inch deep and a couple of inches long. After uttering a few words about the guy who had built the concrete slab, I was ready to head for home. We hauled the boats the remaining 150 yards to the general store in downtown Chester where we ran into an old man, a boy, and a very lazy dog.

For reasons only a do-it-yourself  
bridge builder could explain he left  
a fence of three-inch spikes of rebar  
poking up on the downstream side.

So here we sit with our boats and paddling gear piled up on the front porch of the general store. Waiting for Chanoy to arrive, we're sipping sodas and gazing out at the steam rising up off the street and railroad tracks as the afternoon sun evaporates the remainder of the morning's deluge. Time passes lazily in this small Ozark town, and that suits Dog and me just fine.

We've had plenty of excitement for one day.

I look over at the old dog (the real one) lying flat out on the ground. We're fairly sure that we saw him move at some point, but it's hard to be sure. A casual observer might mistake him for roadkill.

I reflect on the fact that this will very likely be the last big run of the season. No doubt the hot, dry summer will soon be upon us with a vengeance, and by mid July even hiking the creeks won't be an option unless 95-degree temperatures, ticks, and poison ivy sound like your idea of fun. "It's like God turns off the big faucet in the sky," an old buddy of mine used to say. For the next three months those boaters who can, will travel to places where the faucet is controlled by the Corps of Engineers or fed by snow. Today the faucet was opened up for a brief moment, and we made the most of it. Tomorrow we'll have to find other pursuits to keep us busy for a while.

I think I'll start my summer by patching my boat.

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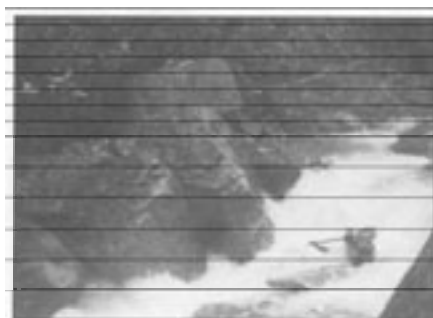
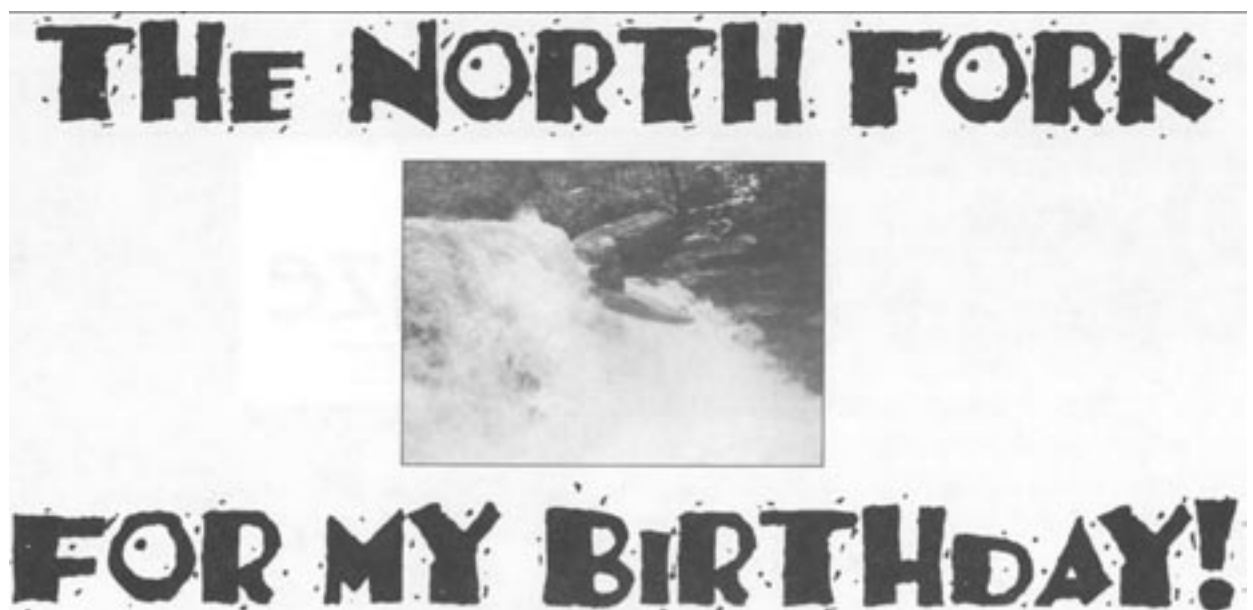


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**(CREEKIN' BLACKWATER STYLE)**

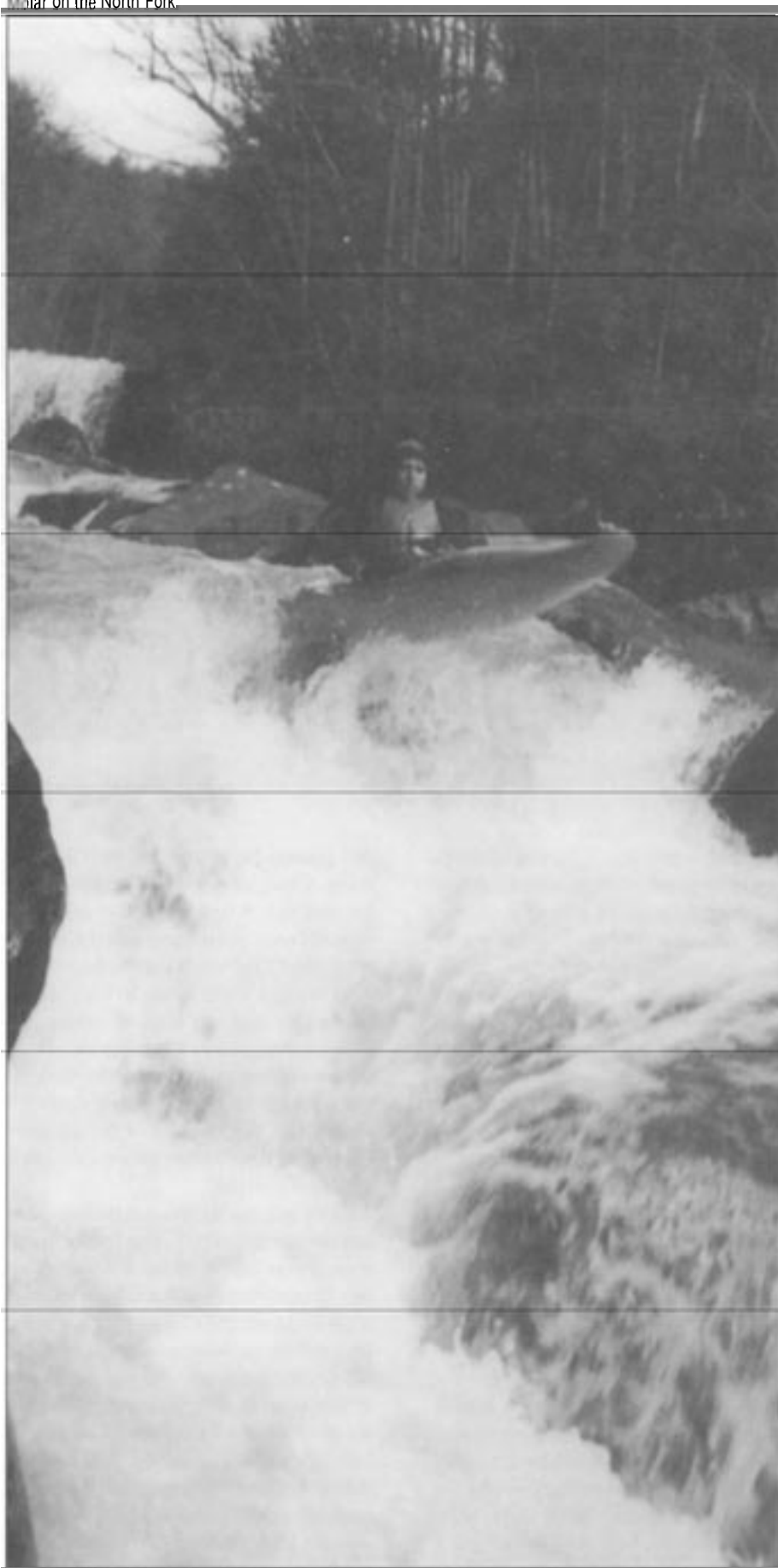


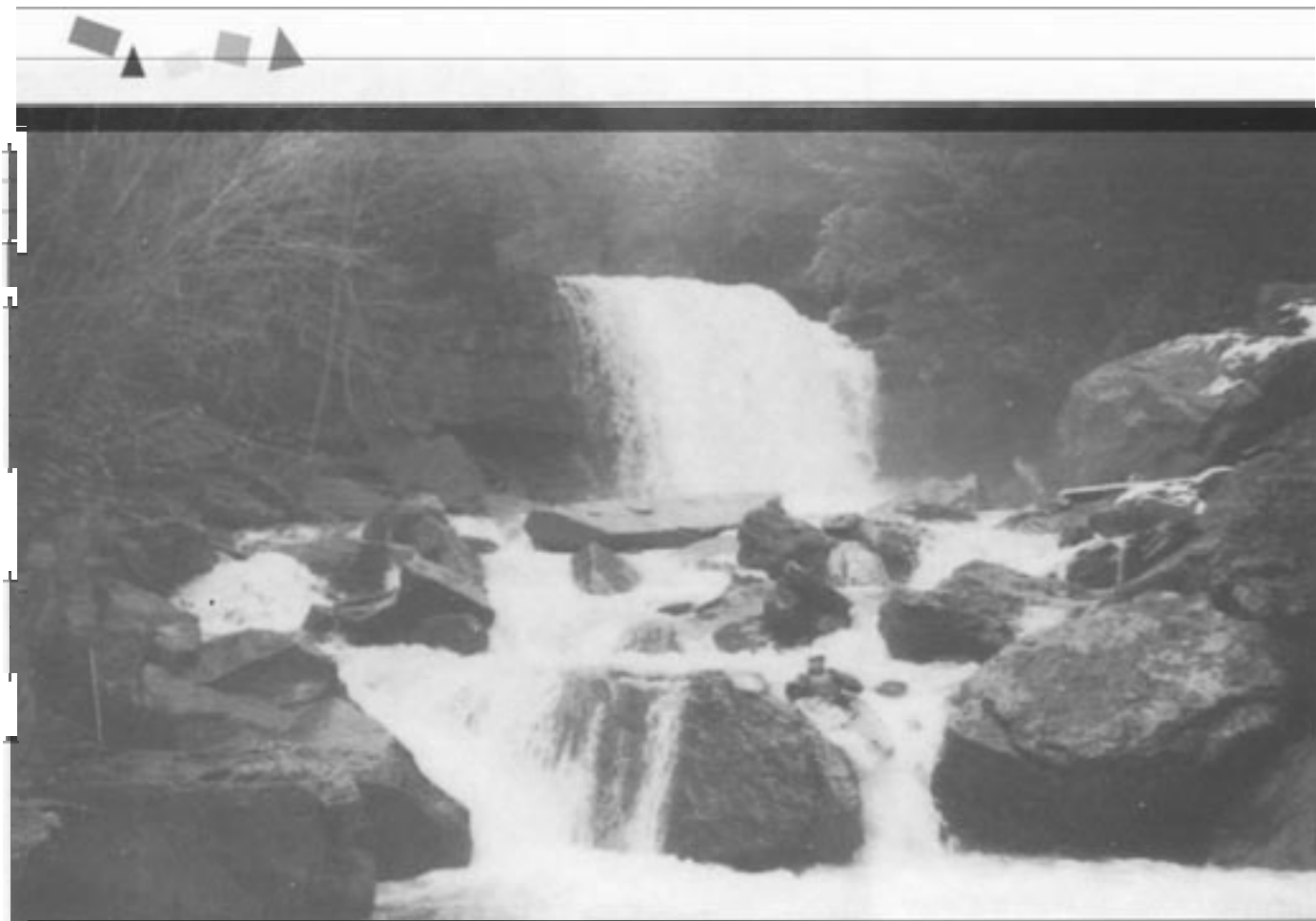
## By Dave Woten

On December 11, 1999, my 31<sup>st</sup> birthday, I was about to unwrap my present. Sitting below a 30 foot waterfall at the put-in for the North Fork of the Blackwater in northern West Virginia, I was hoping that my present wouldn't be too big once I got it out of the box. There to celebrate with me was good friend and paddling partner Craig Wood and our trip leaders Jeff Knechtel and Ty Miller.

**T**he North Fork of the Blackwater is an aquatic bobsled ride, demanding from the moment you put-on. The short run consists of steep, abusive drops, shallow slides, and nonstop action. It requires more boofing than you can imagine, all while dropping 250+ feet per mile. The longest flatwater pools were only 20-30 feet. Often only 10-20 feet separates the drops. All of the rapids are runnable, though Mash, is often carried.

With the air temperature at less than 30 degrees, the mist from the waterfall was freezing on the rocks. This made scouting the first rapid a tricky task, like downhill ice-skating while using trees as brakes. After put-





First Rapid on the North Fork.

ting on below the falls, we immediately entered a steep, technical Class IV drop with offset chutes and cross currents that didn't even merit a name. Looking downstream, the creek fell out of view. Looking upstream the creek disappeared skyward. Ty jumped in and laid down the line in perfect form. After cleaning the chosen line, I turned to watch Craig. One move demanded a boof into cross currents. Craig flipped. After hitting his roll and making it through the right slot, we were back in business.

After a few small (by North Fork standards) ledges and boulder piles, we approached a shallow cascade that demands that you run right of center, or drop 8-10 feet onto a rock slab. Maybe next time I can watch where I'm going rather than where I've been. It appears to be equally abusive forwards as backwards.

We continued flying Blue Angel down the river with Ty as our pilot. He stopped along the right bank and

as I passed he yelled to catch an eddy. Craig and Jeff hopped in right behind me. A few more feet and we would have been committed to running the Class V+ "Gluteal Mash." This 30 foot drop lands in very shallow water and has broken ankles. Blackwater master Chuck Morris, who routinely runs the North Fork three times a day, had run it earlier in the day, but the rest of his group carried it. Our whole group played it safe and carried.

We got out to scout a technical, but unnamed, rapid. The tricky entrance was followed by a 2 foot clapper (a boof landing flat on rock). After sliding off the clapper rock back into the main flow, you must make a 90 degree bank off of a pillow. It was at this time that Craig made the fateful discovery. His beloved Dagger Freefall had acquired a crack under the seat. Carry or continue? One look up at the canyon walls and it was an easy decision. Trying to spare his boat, Craig missed the line,

flipped, hit his head, and swam. He self-rescued. Ty stayed with him near shore. Jeff got his boat. That left me chasing the paddle. A well-executed rescue, I just don't like going over drops without knowing what is waiting below!

Eye of the Needle is one of the next major rapids. Poorly run, it can be like playing whitewater pinball. You slide 8-10 feet down a ledge, then freefall 3 feet. This aims you directly towards a piton. Play the pillow just right and you weave between two tightly-spaced boulders. Play it just a little wrong and flipping is the least of your concerns. We all cleaned the line.

Double Indemnity began with a shallow entrance over an 8 foot slide, then immediately off a 12 foot waterfall. The river left half of this waterfall land on rocks. I spun into an eddy on the left just above the rocky landing. Craig hit an eddy after the first ledge and had a smooth landing off the bottom drop. Jeff and Ty's experience

continued to shine with their smooth runs.

Class V Rainbow Room is less than 20 feet after Double Indemnity. The approach, a 2 foot wide channel split by a rock, left no room for error. Going to the left of the rock in the channel leads to an almost vertical 4 foot drop containing an inconveniently placed pinning rock, followed by an undercut slab. One third of the flow here goes under the rock. This side is runnable, but dangerous, and leaves little margin for error!

The right side line demands an extremely technical series of moves. After passing the rock in the lead-in, you must boof 4 feet, landing perpendicular from your take-off. Next you paddle between two rocks with the water dropping 4 feet onto your left side. Then you go under the spray of the left route's piton rock, in front of the undercut, turn 90 degrees right, and go through a slot. This all happens in a distance of 20 feet.

Ty set up to demonstrate as we observed. But he spun out and was driven backwards through the left side. Jeff ran the dangerous left line. Craig had seen enough and carried. Running almost everything clean and

having birthday karma on my side, I decided to go for it. This was possibly the sweetest line I have ever run.

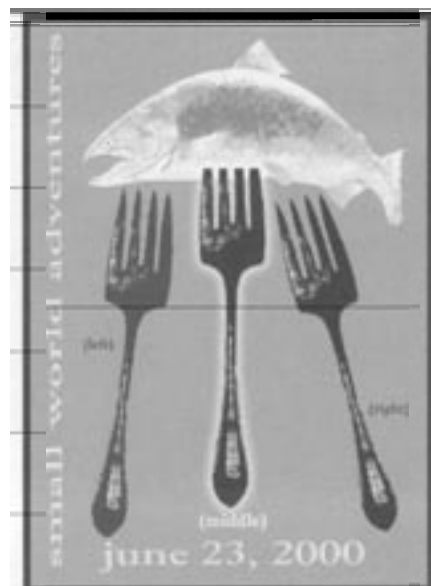
We continued 100 yards down to the junction with the Upper B. The 800+ foot vertical climb out was as hard as any rapid. Mountain goats would pass on this one. I wish it was as easy as the Upper Gauley's Panther Creek take-out. Our climb and the subsequent carry down an old railroad bed took about an hour and almost equaled our paddling time.

After our descent we compiled this list of tips for those attempting the North Fork of the Blackwater:

- 1) Hire a sherpa to meet you at the N.F. and Upper B. junction
- 2) Prearrange an appointment with your chiropractor for spine adjustments
- 3) Sell your boat after 5 trips down the N.F.
- 4) Even good lines can go bad in a hurry...so be prepared to improvise
- 5) Often a single paddle stroke makes all the difference
- 6) Run all the hard lines on the Upper Yough before trying this
- 7) Run them some more!!!



Rainbow Room on the North Fork.



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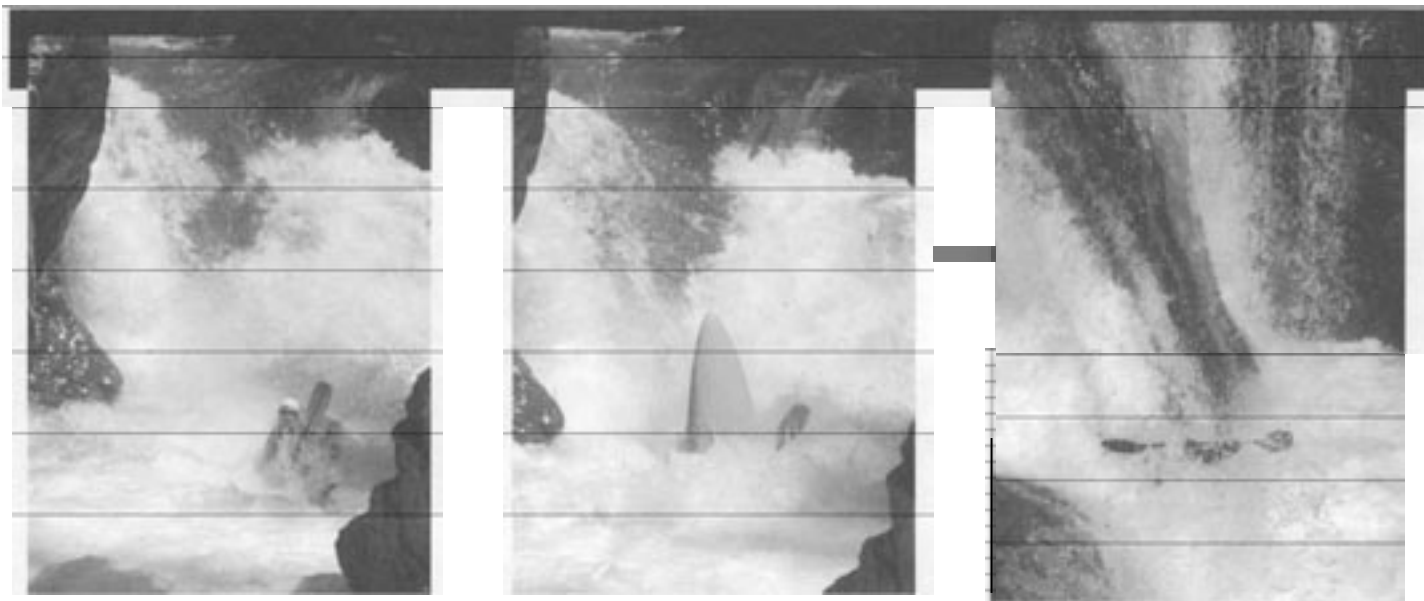
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# Return to Canyon Creek

By Dieter King





"Hey Walt, let me buy you a beer."

"Dieter, there's a whole keg right here."

"Details, details. Did you hear that we went back to Canyon Creek? Did it with only one portage."

"Wow! It's been ten years since we did that first decent and I'm still tired."

"Here Walt, let me buy you a beer. You sit down and take it easy. Don't want you to overdo it now."

"Yeah, that sounds good. Got a pillow?"



Ten years ago, Walt Garms and Mike Fentress made an epic first descent of Canyon Creek (see July/August 1993 AW article). They did about everything wrong that boaters could do on a first descent: they started late, they attempted the run at high water, they had no shuttle and they were paddling Dancers. Oh my God, what Bozos!

In late June of 1998, California's epic water year, I convinced "dude" Scott Lingrin and kayaking Kiwi, Peter Kettering to return to Canyon Creek with me. And we had one hell of a run.

At 300 cfs, about half of the flow Walt and Mike saw, we did only one portage in this ten mile stretch of whitewater. The canyon is remote, with beautiful convoluted limestone walls arching over the river. The water is a clear, deep

blue, but the rapids are continuous, challenging Class V.

We were able to drive to the take-out via a four-wheel drive road. The put-in road was a less challenging dirt road that took us to within 100 yards of the river. The run was serious. With Scott leading the way, we made good time. Even though it was one of the longest days of the year, we still arrived at the take-out near dark.

While Scott and I loaded boats at the take-out (and Peter changed clothes to the delight of 1000 mosquitoes) I told Scott, "I don't understand why those guys hiked all over this canyon when they did this the first time."

"Dude, they were total bozos."

"Such total bozos. They should have taken a plane."



# Sinkholes the ultimate undercut?

• by John Tansil

There you are, cruising down the river, making all the right moves. You stroke right, boof left, and head for the slot your buddies said would be there. Now what was it they warned you about? DAMN....that was it! A squirrely cross-current catches your bow and now you're headed for the tombstone rock with a swift current against it, but no pillow. For a brief instant you panic, but then reflex action kicks in and a powerful sweep corrects your angle. As you brush the rock, you notice a log jammed up underneath. WHEW....that was close! Gotta be more careful! You could've joined that log for eternity!

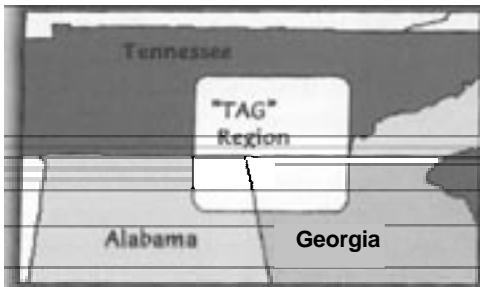
**W**hile this scenario may be fictitious, if someone paddles long enough, a similar situation **will** happen to them. It's inevitable. Just like "death and taxes." After all, whitewater is formed by swiftly-moving water flowing over and around rocks. The only problem is sometimes the water flows under certain rocks that are sticking up out of the current. And when that happens, the so-called undercut rock, or just "undercut" in boater-talk, allows the water to go through, but not the boat.

Undercut! Jeeze.... just the word alone is enough to send shivers up the spine of the most seasoned paddler.

But are undercuts all that bad? I mean most of them are easy to recognize: if the water piles up on the rock, it's not undercut....if it doesn't, it is. What could be simpler? And what the heck, if you can't wiggle out of a tight squeeze, what are you doing crammed in that tiny boat anyway? (*The author assumes here that the reader is intelligent enough to recognize sarcasm and false bravado. He has swum several undercuts in his life and is scared to death of them.*)

Well, suppose that instead of the current momentarily going under a big rock, the entire river disappeared. And not just under a rock, but into a cavern. And not just for a distance of a few feet but maybe for miles. Now that would certainly get your attention! Don't say it can't happen, because it can. Yes indeed, sinkholes, caves where entire rivers can be swallowed up, are for real. In fact, in certain parts of the country they're commonplace (see inset).

I respectfully submit that a sinkhole is the "ultimate undercut." A place where the water takes you from which there is no escape. An underground river, geologically interesting, but no place for a paddler. This story is about two creeks with sinkholes that were paddled....one that totally disappeared underground ....and another one that almost did.



The two rivers described in this article, Big Creek and Rocky River, fall off the Cumberland Plateau in southeastern Tennessee in an area well-known among paddlers for its steep creeks...and just as well-known among spelunkers for its caves. The limestone geology of the region where the states of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia meet has made this area a mecca for spelunkers who refer to their subterranean playground as "TAG." The importance of the area to caving is demonstrated by the fact that the headquarters of the National Speleological Society is located nearby in Huntsville, Alabama. Paddlers searching maps for steep creeks in this area will note names such as Lost Creek, Sinking Cove, Dry Creek, etc., indicative of the fact that not all surface water remains that way for long!

continued ►

End of the line. All of the water in Big Creek flows into a sinkhole about four miles into the run.  
Photo by Tim.

## Undercut!

Jeeze.... just the

word alone is

enough to send

shivers up the spine

of the most seasoned

paddler.



### Big Creek

"Did you find one?"

"Not yet."

"What? I can't hear you."

"NOT YET."

These words keep ringing through my ears as we stumble along the trail in total darkness. It seems like hours since we were forced to abort our run on Big Creek and we most definitely are not happy. The things that we are looking for, and are having a helluva time finding, are white trail blazes on trees. With no flashlight ~~and markers~~ that don't light, they are about the only thing that we can see in the diffuse light from the cloudy night sky. We had worked out a leap-frog system: find a mark and leave one person there while the other two attempt to follow the trail and find the next mark. If it's too far, we have a midpoint person. Once the next mark is found, we follow each other's voices to the lead scout. Talk about three blind mice....

We had made slow, steady progress but now we were stymied. This technique was not going to get us across the tributary creek that the trail seemed to cross. As we stop to rest and ponder the next move, Tim again voices his concern.

"Barb is probably worried sick. We told her we'd be at the take-out hours ago."

"What do you think she'll do?"

"Probably call the sheriff."

I inwardly groan. Not only did we have to scrub our run and attempt to walk out in darkness, now we face the further embarrassment of being "rescued." How could this have happened? I think back to the sequence of events that lead to our predicament.

None of us had done any interesting whitewater in months. Oh sure, Tim and I had paddled our local Missouri whitewater stream, the St. Francis, many times over the winter. But as

Tim likes to point out, "Paddling the Saint dulls your reflexes and makes you slow." At least we had the benefit of doing some paddling. The same couldn't be said for John E, the third member of our group, a former Missouri paddler who'd just taken a new job in West Virginia. He hadn't paddled since the previous fall. Now he was wondering why he had driven five hours to be wandering around in the dark in boating gear when he could have stayed a lot closer to home and been on perfectly good whitewater in



The author at Camera Lady Falls on Big Creek.  
Photo by Tim.

the daylight.

The choice of location was mine (or as my cohorts put it "This was all your fault."). Where we were was in Savage Gulf, the gorge formed by three tributaries of the Collins River, on the Cumberland Plateau in eastern Tennessee. We had chosen to run Big Creek, the tributary with a watershed that wouldn't drain as quickly since the rains had hit two days earlier. It had good highway access at the top of the run and another bridge crossing after the run flattened out and the three forks converged. My topo map

indicated pretty good gradient but it was hard to get specific since the map only had 100 foot contour intervals.

We put-in at the highway 56 bridge close to Altamont after jawing with a local. Yes there were a couple of waterfalls. No he didn't know if they were runnable. The usual paddler/nonpaddler dialogue about a steep creek. Just enough info to remind yourself to always have an eddy to scramble into. The flow at the put-in was just about right, enough to get us over any scrapey spots until the flow ~~doubled~~ about two miles downstream. We didn't have to wait long for the first big drop, an impressive slide with 30-40 feet of vertical. Maybe a Class V+ runnable drop? As we carried around, a woman appeared with a camera. She was the landowner and had seen us put-in at the bridge. She was real disappointed that we weren't running her waterfall. In the pool below, the drop looked more formidable. The slide terminated onto a thinly-padded ledge, guaranteeing compression fractures to a highspeed, airborne paddler.

The gorge kept getting deeper as we paddled downstream. The pool-drop whitewater was sometimes interrupted with wood-choked channels heightening our sense of caution. Even though we were trying to be especially careful, rusty boating skills combined with challenging drops lead to the inevitable and, at one time or another, we were all upside down.

One of the more interesting drops had a fast lead-in over a boof rock down to foam which was cradled on the right by an undercut. A quick recovery was required to line up for the next slot or risk pinning in a rock jumble. John flipped in the foam and rolled up at the top of the slot just in time to broach. As we scrambled to reach him, he recovered and slid through, denying us the chance to practice rescue skills.

My moment of truth came further downstream at the bottom of a steep

drop which Tim had neatly negotiated. It was pretty clear from the microeddy at the top that you'd better have speed built up or risk trashing in the unseen, but clearly present, hole at the bottom. Speed is not my forte and I paid the price with a windowshade before it spit me out.

Tim is ordinarily smooth as silk and makes us all look like klutzes when he carves up a wave, but every once in a while he'll catch a rear edge on his CruiseControl and provide us with some entertainment. Such was the case at the bottom of an innocent drop where he proceeded to flip and jam his paddle into a crack. My initial laughter gave way to concern as his upside down boat was going through contortions as he fought to recover. When he came up, I was biting down hard on my lip to maintain composure but he caught my look anyway.

In the early afternoon, I began to worry about our lack of progress. We'd put-in around 11:00 which meant we had about six or seven hours of daylight for a February day. I was sure we had passed the side creek that was supposed to come in on river left....and when it finally did appear at 2:00, we realized that we'd only gone about two miles and had another ten to go. The obvious plan was to paddle like hell and immediately portage anything that required scouting. This meant we had to skip a lot of the good drops, including the 20 foot waterfall shown in one of the pics. Our paddling mentality had changed from "enjoyable adventure" to "survival race to the take-out."

I was in the lead, stroking down a little riffle, when it happened. Looking downstream, I noticed the current headed straight for a vertical wall. Hmmm, strange...rivers don't normally do this. Just as I paddled to the left away from the wall, my senses opened up and encompassed the total surroundings. *The water wasn't just hitting the rock wall and passing around it, it was literally going into the wall. This realization was further aided by the fact that a cavern opening was barely visible above the surface of the water.* I had eddied out into a

"pool" which was backed up at the downstream end by a low berm in which there was no opening and no downstream current. This was it, I thought. End of the line. A lot of emotions were racking my body... shock, awe, and, yes, delayed fear from the obvious "what if the sinkhole had a steep lead-in with no place to eddy out?"

All these thoughts flashed through my mind in a matter of seconds as I sat in the eddy and motioned for Tim and John to join me there. We got out of our boats and went up to the trail on river-left which we had occasionally been using for the portages. From there we could see that the riverbed continued on, carrying the water when there was too much flow for the sinkhole to handle.

In the past we'd run into a lot of obstacles running rivers... log jams, barbed-wire fences, dams, etc., but this was a first. What we did now when the river disappeared was what we did for the other obstacles...we shouldered our boats and started walking. It soon became apparent that we could make much better use of whatever daylight time remained if we abandoned our boats. However, the inevitable darkness caught us just before we discovered a trail sign with directions engraved in the wooden surface. Having no light to read the directions, we did the next best thing and tried to use our fingers to make out the individual letters.

We had no luck deciphering the trail sign and continued following the trail that paralleled the creek as best we could. Sometime later, I checked my watch and announced the time to my friends. It wasn't until they responded with "How can you read the watch in the dark?" that I realized that the tiny watch light would probably have been enough to read the trail sign. The subsequent verbal abuse was the definite low point of the day for me.

Such were the events that lead us to be stranded in Savage Gulf. By now it was about 11:00 pm and we were stuck...we couldn't go forward and there was no reason to go back. The

obvious choice was to wait for daylight or for any potential rescuers to find us. It didn't take long for the latter to happen. We saw lights and heard voices and were soon greeted warmly by members of the local rescue squad. They got on a walkie-talkie and announced they had found the men that had "fallen into the Gulf." I could see that Tim and John were having trouble understanding some of their language, but not me...I was a native Tennessean...and the southern English sounded natural. After walking a short distance, we were met by more rescuers on ATVs and rode on them to the take-out.

It was becoming increasingly apparent to us that we had done a "bad" thing in the eyes of the local authorities. And I'm not talking about getting stranded and having to be rescued, I'm talking about the legality of being there in the first place. So it was with apprehension that we were introduced to "Ranger Jim" who informed us that Savage Gulf was a Tennessee State Natural Area and State Park with special use restrictions. Any activity, other than day-hiking on the designated hiking trails, required a permit. Whitewater paddling on the streams was not allowed.

Ranger Jim had been in charge of the park for 18 years leading up to the present time of our adventure (February 1995) and had not seen any other kayakers in the park during that time. He had been contacted several years earlier by Chattanooga paddlers requesting permission to paddle and had turned down the request. (Although Ranger Jim had not encountered any whitewater activity during his tenure, he was probably not aware that boaters can be as secretive as deer. Clearly, local paddlers with intimate knowledge of water levels, location of the sinks and access points could paddle in Savage Gulf with a much higher probability of not being detected.)

Throughout our conversation, the ranger was very pleasant and frequently flashed a toothy grin. We had expected to be fined for illegal activity and, possibly, charged for the rescue



operation....neither of these happened. While Ranger Jim and I talked, Tim, Barb, and John were chatting with members of the rescue team. We offered them some money, but they wouldn't take it, requesting instead that we make a donation by check through the mail when we got home. We apologized for the trouble we had caused and thanked them for what they had done.

The next day we hiked the three miles down a side trail to retrieve our boats and came upon the trail sign we had "fingered" the night before. The sign pointed the way up the side trail out of the gorge, however, in hindsight, it was probably good that we hadn't been able to read it since the trail was extremely rugged and wouldn't have been passable without a strong light.

Five years after the fact I still have mixed emotions about this (mis)adventure. There were any number of things that could have stopped us from paddling Big Creek: knowing that the river disappeared underground, or that running the river was illegal, or that we'd get stuck in the dark and have a rescue squad come after us, or that we'd have to carry our boats out 3 miles on a steep trail, etc. However, ignorance of these facts allowed us to paddle some whitewater that few others have experienced...and it's not too often that one gets to do this, especially in an area with a high concentration of paddlers.

My reservations about our epic stem from this episode making legal access to paddling in Savage Gulf potentially more difficult in the future. As a general rule, non-local boaters, most of whom aren't familiar with local-stream issues, shouldn't cause difficulties for local paddlers. **For this reason, I certainly don't recommend paddling the creeks in Savage Gulf.** But, yeah, the good news is there are much better steep creeks in the area that don't have the logistics and legality issues. Now if I can just talk my friends into paddling this other creek I found on the map....

### Post-mortem:

*We actually knew beforehand that most of the water in the Collins River disappeared underground upstream of the take-out since we had left a car there and noted the minimal flow. However, we had assumed that the depletion took place after the Collins tributaries (Big Creek, Collins, Savage Creek) came together in the lowland cove where the geology was vastly different (gravel-bed river). Bad assumption....but then sinkholes on steep creeks were an alien concept to us. We also knew that the water eventually came out of the ground somewhere downstream of the take-out since the TVA gage on the Collins at McMinnville was reading about 4,000 cfs (with at least half that from the Collins and the rest from the Barren Fork tributary.) A hydrologist could probably have told us that something unusual was going on since, after general rainfall in the area, the Collins gage rises slower, peaks later, and stays up longer than the other river gages in the area. This phenomenon is indicative of the natural flow of a river with an upstream reservoir, except in this case the reservoir, rather than being above ground, was subterranean.*

Paddlers should be aware that sinkholes frequently are not shown on topographic maps, even the ones with the most detail, i.e. the USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle maps. The sinkhole we encountered on Big Creek was not unique, the other creeks in Savage Gulf have them also, and none are shown on the USGS maps. They are however shown on the Savage Gulf Trails Map (available from: South Cumberland State Recreation Area, Rt. 1, Box 2196, Monteagle, TN 37356. Or phone (615) 924-2980).

**Hey....let's be careful out there....don't paddle into a sinkhole and "Sail the Lost Sea!"**

(The Lost Sea, a commercialized underground lake, is a popular tourist attraction in east Tennessee and the advertising phrase "Sail the Lost Sea" appears on billboards, barnroofs, and other similar eyesores throughout the southern Appalachians.)

## Rocky River

The signs were there for a strange trip. My calendar from the Missouri Conservation Department had the Friday entry as "Mink begin breeding" and the Sunday entry as "Passage of the Earth through the ring-plane of Saturn from north to south." A portent of things to come?

I'd wanted to go boating all week long and the rivers in east Tennessee seemed to be cooperating. At the start of the week they were fairly high but by Thursday they had dropped like a rock....now what had happened to that foot of snow they got in Crossville last weekend?

I reluctantly called Tim to cancel (reluctant, because I had tentatively committed and I knew he would be disappointed.) But his response was upbeat. "OK. Barb and I are going anyway and Jason's going too. We'll scrape down something." "Well, you guys have fun and call me when you get back with a trip report." After talking to Tim and realizing they were boating and I wasn't, I was really depressed. So much so that I called the gages again on Friday morning. WHOA....things had sure changed overnight! The TVA gage for the Emory at Oakdale, frequently used by paddlers as a general indicator for flows on the Cumberland Plateau, had shot up from 2,000 cfs to over 10,000 cfs....it's amazing what warm weather can do to snow. Now I was interested! A few quick calls to Tim, Jason, and Chuck and we'd set up a trip.

The three of us met Tim and Barb at Old Stone Fort State Park on Saturday morning. Since grease, sugar, and caffeine are basic food groups for kayakers, the first order of the day was the breakfast buffet at Shoney's over which we discussed plans. In the early morning before people are fully awake, it's wise to seize the initiative, so I stepped right out with "Let's do the Rocky River. It's close, it's fairly steep, and it's rarely done." In the past I could get away with this, but after the fiasco the previous year when Tim, John E and I got stuck after dark on

Savage Gulfs Big Creek when it disappeared into a sinkhole, my buddies have started asking embarrassing questions such as: "How long is this run?" "Do you know someone who has done it?," etc. I tell you what, it's a sad day when your best friends don't trust you! But I'll have to admit my response was kind of lame. "Well, I don't personally know anyone who has done it but so-and-so, you know the guy we boated with a few weeks ago who's run almost every creek in the Southeast, knows people who have done it and they said it was a decent run." This must have satisfied them because we agreed to at least check the water level at the take-out.

On the way to the river, we went through a space-warp and Tim disappeared. Actually what happened was that the rearview mirror in Chuck's van had fallen off and Chuck would hold it up periodically to see who was behind him. Unknown to us, during one of the visual dead-times, Tim had eddied out to get gas. We went on to the river hoping he would find us there. After checking the water level at the take-out (minimal) and not finding Tim, we decided to check out the put-in, down a dead-end gravel road to a cemetery and then a quarter mile walk to the river. The water level here looked super (and it was at this point that I **suspected** this river also had sinkholes and I was just hoping that the entire run had sufficient water.)

Driving back to the take-out we met Tim and Barb coming from the opposite direction. With the group together again, we hurriedly got ready, left Barb at the take-out and headed for the put-in. The bright sunny day, combined with the anticipation of paddling new whitewater, put us in that mood that can only be described as "good karma."

There was still a good deal of snow in the gorge and with the runoff coming from snowmelt, the water temp must have been in the 30s. But the air

temperature was about 50 and that's not bad for February. The water level was ideal for a first-time run on a creek we knew nothing about, except for the fact that it dropped 400 feet in the first 2 miles or so.

After a brief warm-up, the whitewater got serious with lots of Class IV. We scouted a ledge drop, ran it and a couple of other drops before eddying out above what appeared to be

they could be boat-scouted and, with minor exception, they were "clean." As we paddled downriver, we all noticed at one time or another that the river was not increasing in flow as it should have been from the side creeks coming in. We also noticed places off to the side out of the main flow that we strongly suspected were sinkholes (although there was no discernible surface current into the sinkholes).

Then we came to the **trees!** The last 2 or 3 miles of the run were like paddling through a forest....truly a unique slalom course. The trees growing in the riverbed were ample proof that the Rocky River normally had no water in this lower stretch because of the sinkholes upstream.

We finished the run with daylight to spare and after shuttle, changing clothes, loading boats, etc., talked about where to go next. The original plan included a run on Alabama's Little River and we were looking for something less intense to do on Sunday. (It seems odd to think of a 12 mile run with the upper part Class IV-V as "less intense," but we knew that river.) However, our immediate need was food and being in a starvation state, and hence easily manipulable, Tim suggested we go to Fall Creek Falls State Park and eat at the lodge. We'd camp there and then run Cane Creek through the park on Sunday. I won't describe the run down Cane Creek, only to say that an unfamiliar run with lots of steep drops, many with wood, and lots of snow along the bank does not equate to a "less intense" river.

My calendar was certainly correct about the weekend being strange, but what it didn't let me know was how great the boating was going to be!

*Thanks to Tim and Barb, Chuck McHenry, Jason Bales, and other good friends for sharing boating adventures with me....even if we don't always know where we're going until we get there.*



John E at Ladder Falls on Big Creek.  
Photo by Tim.

a constriction where the water ran underneath a boulder with a log thrown in for good measure. As we scouted from shore, we could tell this was no ordinary single drop, but a complex undercut cascade that went on for a few hundred feet. As we portaged around this, we walked over where two enormous springs were adding significant volume to the river. It was a totally eerie place. Getting back into the river required ropes and carabiners (and even worse, lots of daylight time, something which we didn't have too much of.) Back in the river, we rounded a corner where an impressive waterfall was coming in, only to come to another portage. This one wasn't as bad and in short order we were back in the river.

The good whitewater continued...the drops were steep but

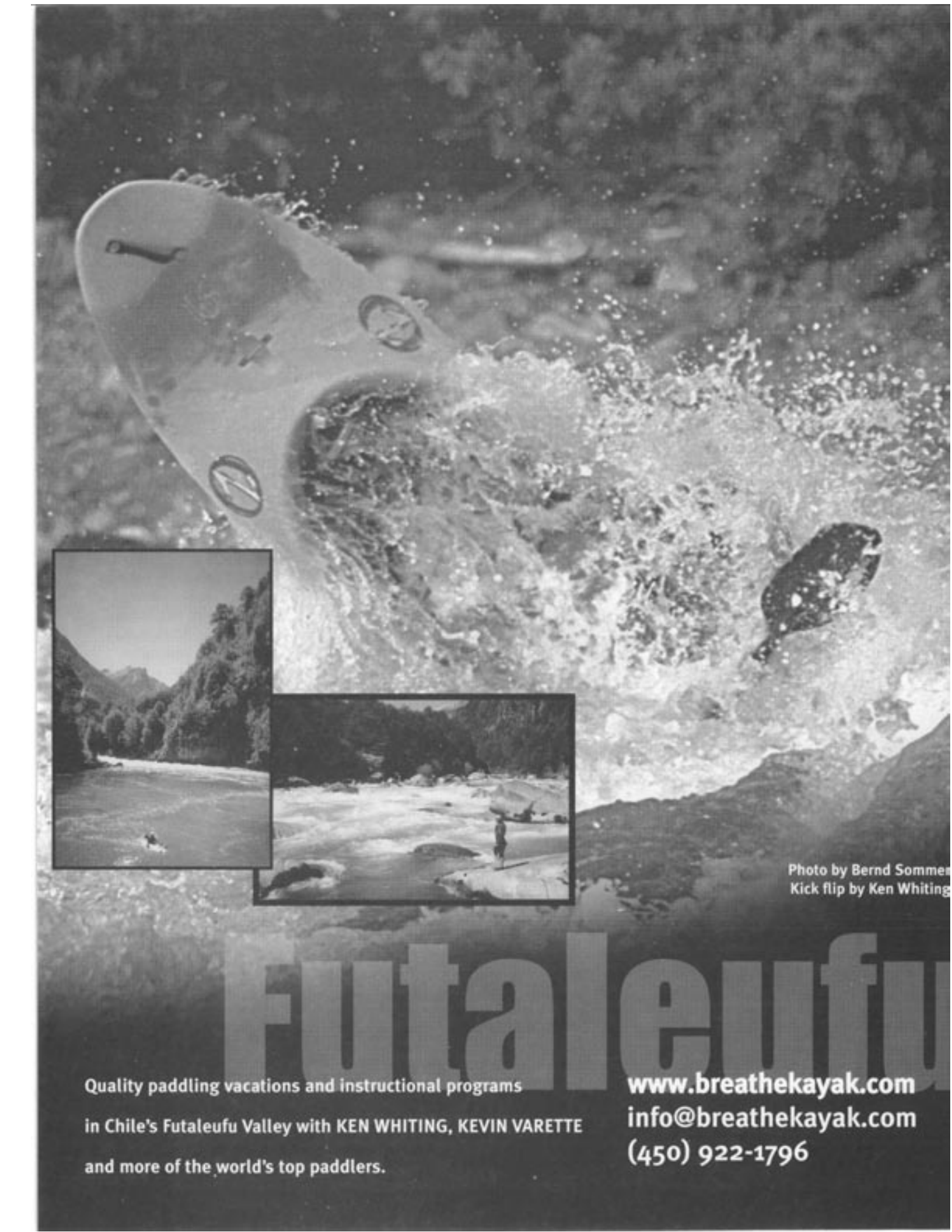


Photo by Bernd Sommer  
Kick flip by Ken Whiting

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# Canoe Blues

## *On Cattaraugus Creek*

By Dax Jacklin

I could tell that they thought we were pretty funny looking from the minute they saw our multicolored kayaks and gear. There was definitely some snickering going on between the two of them. As we geared up, they proceeded to unload their blue, Coleman flatback canoe, fishing gear, and large cooler.

It was a warm, sunny day in late march and we were at the put-in for Cattaraugus Creek in western New York. It was looking like it would turn out to be a great day. The river was at four and a half feet, a good level for a run through the Zoar valley. There were lots of keyed up paddlers at the put-in, including these two good ole' boys who were apparently getting ready to head out fishing.

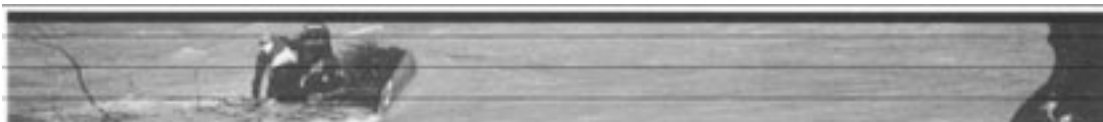
My brother Gary and I discussed whether or not they were likely to run the whole gorge. It didn't seem likely. They didn't exactly have what you'd call a whitewater canoe, though they did have plenty of fishing gear with them. We figured they were probably going to fish the first mile of flat water, paddling back upstream before the gorge.

Now remember, these fellows were dressed like your typical hunting and fishing types: plaid coats, boots and **camo** caps. They would never wear purple paddling tops or red and blue wetsuits. They were definitely sharing a chuckle about our gear: PFDs with knives attached and multicolored ropes, not to mention purple and blue kayaks.

On our way down to the water we saw Andy and Trevor getting ready and said a quick hello. We put-in under the bridge and after some practice ferries and stern squirts we headed off down stream. With



Photo by D. Jacklin.



the promise of several hours of Cattaraugus whitewater ahead of us, the two rednecks in the Coleman were forgotten.

Two miles downstream we were into the gorge, with four hundred foot walls on either side. The whitewater was still a mile off, but we stopped for a stretch and some photos at the cascade. Anytime there's enough water in the creek there is also a beautiful stream of water falling off the side of the gorge wall. While we were on the shale littered bank, the two fisherman paddled by. They were now committed to running the gorge all the way to the take-out. As the canoe floated by, the guy in the bow raised a can of beer in salute. My brother and I exchanged a glance. "Do you think they know what they're doing," I asked. "Probably not," replied Gary. We weren't too worried. Cattaraugus creek isn't a hair run or anything. It does, however, have several long Class II-III rapids, and these guys sure didn't look like typical river runners.

Not long after, we were joined by Trevor and Andy as well as their friend, Tom. Tom paddled an open boat, a Dagger with full air bags and no transom for a motor. We set off again, now a group of five.

As we drifted through the slack water above Pinball, the first Class III rapid, I thought about the fishermen in the blue Coleman. "I wonder how those two are making out," I wondered out loud. "They're probably regretting their decision to paddle the river at this level," replied Tom.

We set off into Pinball, taking the usual line down the right side. We all caught the first eddy and took turns surfing a nice two foot wave. I was the first to tire of it, so I headed down to the next eddy. I ended up getting down to the bottom of the rapid first. At the bottom there is a sizable midstream rock which creates a solid set of eddy lines just begging for stern squirts. After pointing my bow skyward several times I started to paddle downstream again. The rest of the group was not far behind.

As I was paddling, something caught my eye about a hundred yards downstream. It looked blue and it was on the upstream side of a stump. As I approached an uneasy feeling settled into the pit of my stomach.



photo by D. Jacklin.

It was soon obvious that I was seeing the blue Coleman flatback "Scanoe." As I eddied out between the downstream-pointing tree and the bank, I took in the scene. The canoe was wrapped dead center with the bottom of the hull facing into the current. Sitting up on the bank, looking dejected, was one of the former occupants of the Scanoe. My heart started pounding as I yelled, "where's your buddy." He pointed to the opposite shore and I could see his friend standing at the water's edge. "Is he okay," I asked. He nodded yes. As I got out of my boat the rest of my group arrived with worried looks on their faces. I quickly told them that the other canoeist was alive and well on the other side of the creek.

This guy looked like he wished he'd stayed home and watched football. He hadn't dressed with the water temperature in mind. It was a warm day, but it was still March and the water was very cold. His trusty Coleman was a mangled chunk of plastic, and he was separated from his friend by about 150 feet of cold muddy snowmelt.

Andy and Trevor quickly set out into the water, holding each other's shoulders for support as they waded to the wrapped canoe. They reached it without incident and were able to stand in the eddy behind the roots. From there they tried to work the boat loose



Trevor and Andy try to dislodge the canoe, Gary and the wet canoeist watch.  
Photo by D. Jacklin.





Gary and canoeist pull boat from water. Tom ■ coming to help.  
Photo by D. Jacklin.

by brute strength. After awhile, I got my throw rope out and tossed it to Andy and Trevor. They attached a line to the bow and with four of us pulling from the bank we managed to pull the craft free from the stump. The fisherman explained that they were headed for the lake but that they'd lost the car keys along with their beer and fishing gear. He swore that he was familiar with the river, but I suspect he'd previously seen it at a much lower level.

Andy advised him not to attempt to continue even if they managed to straighten the canoe, because the rapids only increased in difficulty farther downstream. We showed him where to cross the river and pointed out the best route out of the valley. We also told him that they could probably catch a ride in one of the rafts that would be along soon.

Then we got in our multicolored boats, with our flashy ropes stashed safely in the sterns and paddled off. I'm pretty sure there wasn't any more snickering or shared chuckles about our colorful gear that day. We finished the run without incident and later, sitting in the warm sunshine sipping a cold beer on the patio, we wondered if our snickering friends had reached their car yet.



Surveying the damage.  
Photo by D. Jacklin.

# Things aren't as they seem — Middle Fork's salmon in trouble

By Bill Sedivy

**M**y trip last July down Idaho's Middle Fork of the Salmon River was filled with all the usual wonders.

Bighorn sheep were everywhere. We saw mule deer and black bear. There were eagles, osprey and canyon wrens. Two river otters floated with us for about a half-mile as we drifted past the Middle Fork Lodge.

In addition, we had clean lines through the rapids, outstanding weather, good food and fine fishing. And the company was great—14 friends from Utah, Ohio and Virginia—a Burned Out Canoe Club reunion in the West.

Still, after eight days on the river, I felt edgy. Something was wrong.

Usually, after two or three days in a place like the Middle Fork canyons, I've forgotten every bothersome bit of detail from my work life, every minor concern back in town. I turn to jelly—floating along the river, watching the birds, soaking up the scenery.

This trip was different. Why?

A couple of months before our launch I went to work as executive director of Idaho Rivers United, a statewide river conservation group based in Boise, Idaho. Immediately, I was thrown into the middle of what I believe is one of the most important conservation battles in the United States today—the fight to save four species of salmon and steelhead from extinction.

The salmon of the Middle Fork drainage, called Snake River spring/summer chinook, are one of the four Snake River runs in trouble. That was my problem. I knew that as beautiful as the Middle Fork country is, it is an



ecosystem in trouble. The river's signature species, the chinook, is disappearing rapidly.

The problem for these spectacular fish lies about 250 miles downstream. Four fish killing dams on the Lower Snake River in eastern Washington block the upstream migration of the chinook, as well as the downstream run to the Pacific Ocean of small, juvenile fish.

Scientists agree: To save Snake River salmon from extinction, the dams must come down.

The great debate over whether to remove the Lower Snake dams has been raging for nearly 10 years now. But finally, the struggle is coming to a head.

Within the next few months, federal agencies are scheduled to release their opinions on how best to save the endangered salmon

and steelhead of the Snake River basin. Those agencies also are scheduled to recommend a course of action to the Clinton-Gore Administration on whether the dams should be removed.

At present, it looks like the Clinton-Gore Administration is prepared to punt on dam removal until after the fall presidential election. Perhaps, administration officials have said, they'll even let the issue wait for the next president to deal with.

But the salmon and steelhead can't wait.

Since the last of the Lower Snake dams was completed in 1975, salmon populations have dropped by 90 percent. One species, Snake River coho has been declared extinct. If drastic action isn't taken soon, scientists say, the salmon of the Middle Fork drainage will be extinct by 2017.

That's not much time.

Why should the members of American Whitewater care about this issue?

**\*Extinction is forever.** Snake River salmon are an important part of America's national and natural heritage—they saved the Lewis and Clark expedition from starvation, they play a significant role in the cultures of Northwest Indian tribes, and, until recently, they were a major source of Northwest jobs.

**\*Dam removal is the salmon's best chance.** According to a vast majority of scientists, removing the dams offers the best and perhaps only chance to bring wild Snake River salmon and steelhead back to Idaho and the Snake's tributaries upstream of the dams. Fisheries groups, including the Idaho and Oregon chapters and the Western Division of the American Fisheries Society, have endorsed dam removal as the best hope for salmon.

**\*We'll save millions of dollars.** Northwest residents will save millions annually by ending wasteful, ineffective salmon recovery programs. These programs, like bargaining and



**To help save endangered Snake River salmon, please find the postcard in this magazine, fill it out and mail it to Vice President Gore. For more information on endangered salmon and steelhead, check out these sites on the web: [www.idahorivers.org](http://www.idahorivers.org) [www.removedams.org](http://www.removedams.org)**

trucking young fish around the dams and reservoirs, have been in place for 25 years. They're costly, they've failed, and Northwesters pay for them.

•**We'll create clean, Northwest jobs.** Increased salmon fishing on the restored river, by sport, commercial and tribal fishers, plus other recreation opportunities like whitewater rafting, will generate up to \$500 million annually. There are *68 named rapids* buried beneath the reservoirs behind the Lower Snake River dams.

•**We'll honor treaties with Columbia basin Indian tribes.** In the 1800s, the American government signed treaties that guaranteed four Columbia basin tribes the right to fish for salmon in all usual and accustomed places for all time. If the salmon are allowed to go extinct, U.S. taxpayers could be forced to pay tens of billions of dollars in reparations for those broken promises.

Of course, the process of removing the dams is politically charged.

Led by Senator Larry Craig of Idaho, Senator Slade Gorton of Washington, anti-salmon forces are working overtime to convince the federal agencies and Administration to spare the four Lower Snake River dams—in exchange for healthy salmon runs.

So, Northwest salmon advocates need the help of all Americans.

By adding your voice to the ever-growing

list of dam removal supporters, you can help show the Clinton Administration that many Americans recognize dam removal as the best way to save the salmon. Together, we can show Vice President Al Gore, who oversees Administration environmental programs, that a few Northwest politicians and their polluting and shortsighted corporate supporters don't represent the majority in this debate.

We need to show Vice President Gore that it's okay for him to do the right thing—remove the dams.

What can you do to help?

Tucked inside this magazine is a postcard addressed to Vice President Gore. Please take a moment to find it, fill it out and send it off to the Vice President. Your voice can make a difference.

And while you're at it, please write your congressman. Share with him or her these three truths about removing the Lower Snake dams:

**#1. Dam removal will work.** Again, a vast majority of scientists who've examined this issue say that removing the dams is clearly the best hope for stabilizing and recovering salmon populations. Serious declines in the four endangered salmon and steelhead species did not start until the last of the four Lower Snake dams was completed. Salmon runs below the four dams are doing much

better than the Snake River runs that migrate to and from Idaho's Salmon River drainage.

**#2. Other attempts have failed.** Past efforts to save salmon and steelhead—like hatchery programs and trucking young fish around the dams—have failed. Clearly. More than *\$3 billion* has been spent in an attempt to bring the fish back. The result of these programs has been a 90 percent reduction in salmon populations. Throwing more money at failed programs will not save the salmon. Taking down the dams will.

**#3. The dams aren't needed.** The Lower Snake River dams provide no flood control, little in the way of irrigation benefits to farmers, and generate only five percent of the Northwest's electric power. Studies show that the power can be replaced by conservation and that irrigation needs can be met without the dams.

The thought of no salmon in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River—or the main Salmon River for that matter—is a chilling one. Please help save these precious fish.

*Bill Sedivy serves on the Board of Directors of American Whitewater, is secretary of the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition and works as executive director of Idaho Rivers United. He can be reached at 208-343-7431 or at [bsedivy@idahorivers.org](mailto:bsedivy@idahorivers.org)*



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# FREE Demos — Trade Ins

# Fowlerville Follies



Crystal on the Moose.  
Photo by Peter Arthur.

By Del Dako

On the first day of a beautiful October Adirondack weekend, four years ago, we ran the Lower section of the Moose. After a satisfying run we decided to paddle a short distance below the regular take-out and look at the first drop of the Bottom Moose: Fowlerville Falls. This infamous drop is a near-vertical slide with about six inches to a foot of water running over the lip, much of it ending in a hydraulic of questionable tenacity. None of us had ever run this—no wonder, since it was forty feet high and looked like a possible Very Bad Time.

While we were scouting it we bumped into Boyce; who was sitting with his girlfriend at the edge of the falls enjoying the scenery. This fellow, who we'd seen paddle a couple of times and was on our short list of "best boaters we've ever seen," assured us that although it looked bad, it was really a piece of cake. And so Peter Kostyan in his kayak and I in my C-1 proceeded to run Fowlerville Falls without incident.

The next morning we decided to run the Bottom Moose. I decided to take my canoe, a purple Mad River ME, instead of the C-1. However, even though I was in a different boat, I felt completely confident at Fowlerville. After all, everything had gone so smoothly the day before. I paddled the canoe across the pool to a small island above the falls, got out and dragged the boat across to the other side and got back in to run the big drop. This detour was made to avoid running a tricky chute above the falls proper.

I pushed off across the eddy and into the current leading towards the appropriate launch spot at the top of the falls. One needed to have just the right angle and amount of speed to hit the right spot. I felt that I was moving very sluggishly (too sluggishly). However, as I crested the slide, I thought I was lined up in the right place. I thought my work was all done and that I just had to wait for the rest of the elevator ride. But when I hit the water at the

bottom, the boat flipped sideways. I kept it from going right over using a low brace. I couldn't right it from this position and wondered if I should let it flip all the way and get myself properly set up to roll.

Suddenly I realized that I'd been sucked back into the hydraulic. This was no place to be lingering in your canoe, so I did the "leap for life" and kicked as hard as possible downstream from the boat.

Instead of flushing away from the falls, I found myself backup against the canoe, which was tilted on its side in the hole, jerking and vibrating as if it was undergoing some kind of electro-shocking. I was in a very serious situation.

I couldn't believe that I was where I was! All of a sudden I was sucked under and found myself in white stasis. In the next instant I was up against the cliff wall underwater. I put my legs against the wall and kicked off downstream, hard. The resistance was incredible. I popped up for air and saw the canoe sitting beside the wall a little to one side of me. Should I grab it? No, it might turn over in the hole with me under it. I was pulled under again and, to my horror, found myself up against the wall in exactly the same position I had been before.

I kicked off again, realizing that I would not escape by doing this.

I was getting panicky; I needed air. I had read once that being held in a hole was like being in a huge cauldron of bubbles which might be said to resemble a great swarm of bees. But it's worse. Bees don't suffocate you, and that's what was happening to me. I was experiencing a feeling of utter helplessness. There was literally nothing for me to do. The thought then crossed my mind.... "Should I just give up?"

Luckily, I obeyed an inner voice which said, "No; hang on and hang in—no further

orders—just do it!" I kept holding my breath and I finally popped up again, sucking air. Now there was a red kayak beside me. The paddler presented his stern grab loop for me to grasp—but I just couldn't reach it. It was a foot from my hand. I realized that I must get to it. Either he moved my way or I kicked over to him, because I managed to get my hand through the loop. Even as I grabbed it, though, I saw the futility of it, because his boat was moving sideways into the hole.

"Let go of the boat!" he yelled, and did. As I released the loop he came very close to flipping.

I went under again. When I surfaced I was facing downstream. I saw a number of concerned faces staring at me from their boats. At that point a yellow boat put its stern towards me and I grabbed for the loop. I managed to just get my pointer finger through the thing. I knew that if I let go that I would be going under for the last time. I held on for dear life.

I thought of pulling myself up on to the deck of the boat to offer less resistance to the water, but found that I didn't have the strength. I was trying to kick, putting every effort I could muster into it, but I was quite ineffective. I couldn't help feeling more concerned about breathing than kicking. I soon realized that we had not budged an inch. So I really started moving my legs. Finally I heard my rescuer say, "We're out of it." The water went slack.

I clung to the kayak fighting for breath. He pulled me to some rocks next to shore and I rolled over onto them still in the water. I looked up at my rescuer, grabbed his hand, and squeezed it hard. He squeezed it back. I couldn't let go. He knew that he'd saved my life.

He asked if I'd swallowed any water and I shook my head to indicate "no." I tried to speak but gave up. All I could do was breathe. I felt like I was going to pass out. My lips and jaw ached from lack of oxygen. I had pressure in my head like a headache. I also felt nauseous and wondered if I would soon be throwing up.

I looked back at the falls and saw my canoe in the hole with boaters trying to figure out how to get it out. As minutes passed I realized that if there had not been some expert—and I mean Expert—boaters in position for an immediate rescue, I'd have been a goner.

No sir, we sure wouldn't have wanted that. Because, if it wasn't for those guys help on that fateful day, my buddies would be holding the Fourth Annual "Del Dako Memorial Barbecue." And without me there to do the barbecuing.... that truly would be a waste of time.



# Waiting for Bill

by Chuck McHenry

It had been one of those perfect, Missouri, June days on the Saint Francois River. Warm water, 76 degree air and a perfect level of 27 inches. We'd been surfing our brains out through the Millstream shut-ins, catching enders here and there, splatting Cat's Paw and feeling that good ol' sun on our shoulders. At Double Drop, the very best ender spot in the universe, there'd been the usual lineup of rodeo moves, linkages and sky-high camera poses. Everybody was in swim shorts and bikinis, and those up on the rocks were sun tanning and catching up on the news from the winter. Tall tales were being swapped while we were swapping ends. We were catching doubles (two kayaks side-by-side catching air), invert (kayak completely out of the water and upside down), and 720 pirouettes, hoping for that one picture that might make the cover of American Whitewater.

I think every kayaker in the state (plus half from every surrounding state) was there. We'd had a rough winter and a cold spring so it was nice to warm the bones. It was a day we didn't want to end so, of course, we stayed late — last ones on the river — and it was dusk before we started for the take-out. Bill had to get back to St. Louis and had gone on ahead. The rest of us were starting to talk about going into Fredtown and getting some pizza and beer, then coming back to do a moonlight run. While it's a little colder and you miss out on a lot of shut-eye, there's something about catching air at night that makes it that much more fun.

We'd just come around the last bend, with the take-out bridge just a hundred yards downriver when it happened. There was this really bright light just to the east and it started getting steadily bigger and brighter. We just planted in an eddy with our jaws flapping, watching this thing. There wasn't one bit of noise, but something was obviously coming toward us. We figured in was one of those secret stealth jets and we kind of hunkered down waiting for what we figured would be one helluva sonic boom. Closer it came, and still no noise.

You know, I think after you've been pumping water through your ears and sinuses over an extended period of time, the brain must get a little waterlogged and go into la-la mode. Information has to slowly slosh through before you understand what's happening. Slowly it dawned on us: this was one of those danged old flying saucers! There it was, all round and lit up with circles of lights

and rays and beams spilling out everywhere; and it was slowing down!

"Ohmigawd," I thought. "This is it! It's coming for me." This was surely my destiny for, after all, hadn't I been voted "most likely to be contacted by aliens" by my high school class? And now here it was, really happening. Wow, I was stoked! I couldn't help but think how lucky I was. I'd just had a few beers before leaving double drop and I hoped that they had a bathroom—I had to go real bad.

Imagine my disappointment when they slowed down and dropped over the parking lot at the take-out. We could hear all the freaked out people hollering and we could see a few running along the bank ducking for cover.

"Hey!" I yelled, "I'm over here guys." They just ignored me.

All of a sudden this door under the saucer opens and a big, super-bright column of light shines down. Then I see Bill rising in the air with that old, wet stogie in his mouth cussing and kicking, and shaking his fists and belching how he's going to kick some major alien butt as soon as he gets inside. To tell you the truth, I was already feeling sorry for those aliens.

Sure enough, Bill went in through that door and into the ship. The beam of light quit, and all those colored lights started spinning around again. Just as silently as it'd come, it went straight up into the sky like a bolt of lightning and disappeared.

We didn't know what to say. It was just one of those moments when everyone is simply stunned into silence. How were we going to explain this one? Especially to Cindy, his fiancée of seven years, who was expecting him at home tonight. Cindy (a seasoned veteran of countless Bill vacations out west—trips that, despite his promises to the contrary, always turned into an extended series of shuttles), had heard it all already—every single excuse known to mortal man. I was already thinking how this would go down with her.

"Cindy, we're calling for Bill. He's been abducted by aliens and we don't know when he'll be back. You need to call work for him tomorrow and tell them he's sick."

"Well, you just tell Mr. Bill, and I know he's right there with you now, that if he doesn't get his \$#!%\*y tired, old %\$#\*%\$\* butt back home tonight in time for dinner with my parents, he can forget about coming home period. And if and when he does show

his sorry excuse for a %&\*#ing "%^\$# behind, you can tell him I won't be there."

Yep, this would be a standard response from Cindy, we'd been through this scene before, and I have to tell you truthful-like that Bill usually WAS standing right beside us, and every time Bill would hear that last part about her being gone, he'd smile this strange little smile.

But this time, he really was gone....

Suddenly we saw that light again. I knew it! He'd lit up that stogie, belched and farted a few times, and started raiding their cooling unit for Stags and High Life. They were bringing him back. Actually, I had to give them credit—they'd managed to stand him about two minutes longer than any of my non-boating friends could. They'd realized they'd made a terrible mistake and gotten the wrong guy. They were coming back for me!

But dang-it-all, that saucer went right back to the parking lot and hovered over Bill's truck. People who were just recovering from the last visitation, started hollering again and jumping into the river, or just running around like they had ants in their dry suits. The saucer bay door opened and that big column of light shot down again. I figured Bill had probably blown it for the whole human race. They were going to dump him as quick as they could and wipe earth off their maps as a place of intelligent life forms, skeedaddling for better planets.

No Bill came down though... instead his boat started floating up, plus his paddle and all his gear. All that stuff went in through the bay, the light blinked off, and away it went. This time for good.

Of course, it wasn't five minutes later that the woods exploded with all these air force guys. They were all over the parking lot, interviewing us and asking questions. I think they took great pleasure in photographing us in our kayak skirts and Hawaiian shorts and tevas. And you know what? I think the fact that we'd had a few beers pleased them. I heard later that even though they'd tracked it on radar, and seen it themselves, it went down as "unreliable sources; sighting cannot be confirmed." And they called us the "lunatic fringe."

Now I've been called a lot of things in my life. Women have complained about my lack of political correctness in ways I won't repeat here. I've been called a river show-off, an adrenaline junkie, an accident waiting to happen... but lunatic fringe? I guess I could get used to it.





It's been five years and I haven't seen or heard from Bill since. But you know, anyday I expect to round some bend in a river and see him, or walk over to some campfire where the BS is especially deep, and there he'll be, lying about some creek and stretching the facts on volume and classification.

We all talk about how that UFO came back and got his boat. Where the blazes are they taking him that he needs his yak? Let your mind wander a bit. . . not too far though. I mean I still shudder when I think they might be using him for breeding purposes and a

whole bunch of little Bills might someday return as part of some advanced colonization group. . . but think about this — what's a 200 foot waterfall like at 1/5th gravity? What's a green wave like at twice gravity? How many worlds have rain all the time? Even in our own solar system we've discovered canyons and mountains that far surpass anything we have on Earth. Just imagine what else might be out there among the stars. In an infinite universe there's a hell of a lot of first descents waiting.

So we're waiting for Bill. I sure do hope he comes back in my lifetime. I don't know why, but I miss seeing him on the river. It's kind of like when you break your arm and they put a cast on. The dang thing irritates you like hell at first. It's smelly, itchy, grubby and inconvenient — but then the first few days they take it off, you miss it.

Bill and I go way back — in fact, he was one of the first people to take me down the river. Maybe he's teaching those aliens how to kayak.

Just waiting for Bill . . .

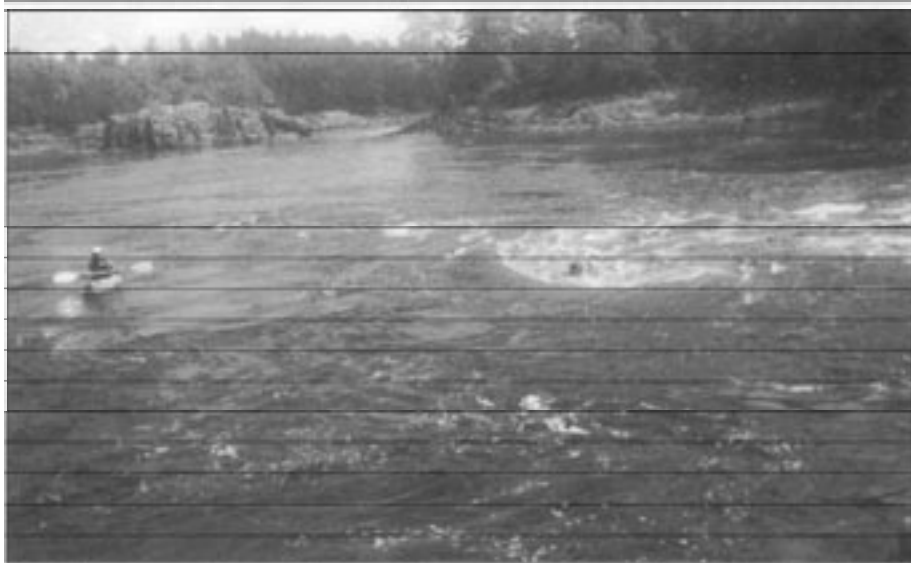
## Whirlpool Follies

By Fred Lally

It was very dark and quiet; I was nearly weightless. A few moments before it had been light, noisy and I had been trying to take a picture. Except for the uncomfortable pressure on my ears, I was sensory deprived. I was having a difficult time grasping exactly what was happening. At the same time I felt that I was on a narcotic: I knew this was not a good place to be, but I wasn't especially alarmed about it.

We were paddling the Ottawa. It was our annual summer pilgrimage from Pennsylvania, a trip I have been making since 1983. What a great cruising river the Ottawa is, with reliable summer flows, good play spots, and lots of warm water. The warm water is an especially nice change from the frigid water we endure to boat during spring runoff or late fall and winter storms. Of course, like most rivers these days, the Ottawa is considerably more populated with kayakers than it was back in the early 80s. Those of you who have paddled it are familiar with the large volume that creates big waves and holes, surging eddy lines, boils, and whirlpools.

Last year, we had stopped to play below Butchers Knife on the Main channel, at a point where some well defined kayak-sized whirlpools are created by the current caroming off a rock on the left bank. As usual we rode and played in these with out boats, gettingspun around and partially submerged, even my larger volume boat. Encouraged by a younger kayaker we got out of our boats, jumped in and swam in the whirlpools. It was avertiginous sensation, like being on a tilt-a-whirl, spun about, sucked down, and eventually being released by the current. Of course, while we were doing this we were treading water, wearing our life jackets, and keeping our arms out helicopter-like to provide some lift for our bodies.



**"Open your eyes, you jerk," I said to myself slowly, at first thinking my eyes were closed and that was why it was so dark. Then I got to thinking... "My eyes are open!!"**

Well, here we were again this year, playing in the whirlpools in our boats and the notion seized our group once again to get more intimate with the water. So be it. I thought I would swim in with my camera held out in front of me to catch a couple of pictures of us being swirled about, so I could show the folks back home what I was talking about.

Three of us jumped in one after another within a few seconds. Soon I felt the surging tug of a whirlpool grabbing me. I started with my elbows sticking out, wing like, but I was

having difficulty stabilizing the camera up at my eye, so I tucked my elbows in close to my body as I was getting buffeted about. Almost immediately, it got very dark and I felt a great deal of pressure on my ears and cognitively realized it was absolutely pitch black.

"Open your eyes, you jerk." I said to myself slowly, at first thinking my eyes were closed and that was why it was so dark. Then I got to thinking... "My eyes *are* open!!" I looked around for the lighter which would show me where the surface of the water was,

but I did not see it... down, up, left, or right. "Where am I???" I thought stupidly. I equalized the pressure in my ears and thought, "Well, I better get swimming in some direction." It did dawn on me that I was eventually going to need to breathe, although at that point I didn't feel a sense of urgency about the situation. But then again, I am comfortable being under water and didn't think I could be *that* far down. So off I went, "up" as related to my head position. I stroked again, though I was beginning to wonder where I was because it wasn't getting any lighter above me.

"Was I going in the right direction, or was I some kind of an underwater cave that was obscuring the light from above?" I began thinking about the metamorphosed granitic gneisses of the Precambrian shield, which produced the rapids on the Ottawa. "Were they prone to radical undercutting like the sandstones in West Virginia?" By the third stroke I was getting to the point where I really wanted to take a breath, but knew I couldn't... I just swallowed. I made myself think about swimming under water at my neighbor's pool, and how many strokes it took me to go back and forth end to end. Just how far was that and how did that compare to where I was, I wondered.

I was also beginning to experience symptoms of oxygen deprivation and I had that creeping desire to just open my mouth and take a breathe. Now *there* was some urgency, and more quickly, I stroked again... and again... Suddenly it was light and I popped straight out of the water like an attack sub doing a crash surfacing and gasped. "Whoaaaaaa!" Hacking and coughing I looked around and immediately saw my paddling buddy Gary looking at me—he was incredulous, "Where were you?" he asked. I could barely get a word out. Still coughing and gasping, I floated in the eddy back to the top and got out on shore. Gary and the other people had been looking around on the surface for me for some time. They knew I had gone in with them, but didn't see me, and by their reckoning had been under for what was approaching an unreasonable period of time!

Being a scientist, I had to analyze my underwater adventure, short as it was. The initial calmness had deteriorated once my oxygen saturation level started decreasing. In contrast to cold, aerated water, the relative warmth and lack of turbulence down deep was serene. Most certainly, tucking my arms in close to my body diminished my lift and contributed to my quick trip down from the surface. I traveled quite a distance underwater horizontally, but because I had no fixed reference points, I did not sense the speed.

I had come to the surface about 10 yards above the next outcropping of rock below the entrance point. This is a hundred

yards from where we jumped in. How deep was I? My guess would be 20 feet, based on how my ears felt and how many strokes it took me to regain the surface.

Studies done on me in the laboratory reveal a time span of about 1 minute and 15-20 seconds before the physiologic drive to breathe kicks in and measured oxygen saturation dips below an acceptable point (~90 SpO2). I will have to call that the best estimation of my time spent under water. Next year maybe I'll bring an oxygen cylinder, stopwatch, flippers and a depth gauge - **not**.

Final thought: the fact that one doesn't see a great deal of people choosing to swim in whirlpools is probably evidence that natural selection is still at work.

*Fred Lally is a long-standing grey-haired boater from Northeastern Pennsylvania, who has published other articles in the AWA journal. Despite all sorts of comments from fellow kayakers, he continues to enjoy paddling a Dancer XT.*

## The Rapid

Admiration,...

Calmness,...

The Sound,...

The Feel,

horizon line,

anticipation

exhilaration

Eddy turn,

Looking back,...

Acknowledgment.

*By Christopher Stec*

## River Magic

We slip eagerly from the shore

Paddle out into the current  
And magic begins.

No longer separate,  
awkward, two-legged,  
We dance on froth capped waves,  
Turn and dart between tall boulders,  
Eddy out, scout, and go.

Ferry, turn and run.  
Drop over ledge, angle right,  
Paddle right, left, right,  
Stern draw, duffek, eddy out.

Peel out, paddle, boof,  
stroke, turn.

The rhythm is in the water,  
It's here, it's here, it's here.  
Touch it, breathe it, feel it,  
It's you. it's me, it's us.  
The rhythm is in our center,  
It's life, it's life, it's life.

*Alison Snow Jones*

# R i v e r v o i c e s

## Warm Hands for Winter Playboaters

### Do It Yourself Project

By Dana Castro

The neoprene mittens described here are the warmest winter paddling option for the hands, and, using the pattern and directions provided, fairly easy to make. Sustained immersion in ice water will not chill the hand. The mitten as described below will be smooth neoprene on the outside and nylon covered neoprene on the inside, against the skin. The smooth neoprene provides a good grip and does not radiate heat well or facilitate for evaporation, helping to keep the hands warm.

The seam between the two pieces is reinforced with a strip of neoprene (which also has the smooth side facing outward), providing a powerful and watertight seal. The fit should not be tight, but should be close fitting to the wrist and hand, leaving minimal dead airspace inside. **BE SURE TO USE A MT. SURFSTYLE TUBE ON THE GRABLOOP OR ATTACH AN EASY TO FIND OBJECT TO IT LIKE THE (OLDSTYLE) WHIFFLE BALL!**

#### DIRECTIONS:

1) Obtain neoprene, neoprene glue, acetone, and very small paintbrushes. A recommended source for the neoprene and glue is John Sweet of Mustoe, Virginia. He may be reached at 540-468-2222. Order one half sheet (50 inches by five feet) of 1/8 inch Nylon One Sided neoprene, one half sheet of 1/16 inch Nylon One Sided neoprene, and two one quart cans of neoprene glue. Acetone and little 1/8 or 1/4 inch paint brushes can be obtained at a hardware store. This will cost over a hundred bucks, but the supplies will make mittens, neoprene head covers and winter gear for you and your buddies for a long time. Don't use the acetone near sparks or open flame.

2) While waiting for the supplies to arrive, expand the templates to full size. For a medium male hand expand so that one inch equals one inch on the scale. For a really big male hand expand it to 1.15

times normal. For a small female hand, try 0.85 normal. You can scale up either by using a copier with Zoom function, or with good graph paper. Do NOT do this by eye; the dimensions have been determined by LOTS of trial and ERROR, and are rather critical. Cut out and trace onto poster board and then cut those out. Label SIDE ONE as noted; SIDE TWO on other side.

3) When the neoprene arrives, lay out the 17 8 inch stuff SMOOTH SIDE UP. Wash a foot or two of it with acetone to get rid of the anti-stick (but invisible) coating that is put on it when it is made. Lay the Side One templates on the smooth neo and trace the outline with fine magic marker and cut. Use good scissors and try not to make a ragged cut.

4) Puncture one of the glue cans on the side of the can near the top, but do NOT open top. (Opening may be sealed with a piece of tape when not in use.) Pour an ounce or so into a paper (not plastic) cup. Paint the edge of both pieces all the way around, EXCEPT for the bottom, where the wrist opening will be. Set aside. Trace, cut out, and paint the edges of the side two pieces. Go back and put a second glue coat on the side ONE pieces, set aside, and then put second coat on side TWO pieces.

5) Pick up the side one pieces and face them so that the NYLON SIDES FACE EACH OTHER and begin to mate them. Start at the top of the finger region and stick the THE EDGES together. The trick is to STRETCH one piece while sticking it to the other, so that the fingers and thumbs and wrists match up. This stretching is what will produce the nice anatomical curve of the mitten. IF this seems diffi-

cult, know that it IS possible and the patterns HAVE BEEN MADE WITH THIS IN MIND. After doing one mitten, very gently turn it inside out. Set it aside and do the same for mitten number two.

6) Lay out the 1/16 inch neoprene so that SMOOTH SIDE IS UP. With a ruler mark out two 22 inch strips, each exactly 3/4 of an inch wide, and then cut them as exactly as possible. Now lay them out on newspaper with the NYLON SIDE UP and paint one layer of glue onto the nylon cloth. Wait 5 minutes and then apply a second layer; another five minutes and then a third layer. (Nylon side soaks up lots of glue.)

7) Pick up mitten number one and paint on a one inch wide strip of glue centered over the seam. Try not to get too much glue on the seam or it may dissolve the joint. (However, you must get SOME glue on the joint itself.) Do the same for mitten number two.

8) Pick up mitten number one and carefully stick one of the strips to the seam all the way around. Stretch the strip slightly relative to the mitten. This is not easy to do accurately, so go slow. Do NOT let the strip accidentally touch the painted area ANYWHERE OTHER THAN WHERE YOU WANT IT TO BOND.

Neoprene glue makes an INSTANT AND PERMANENT bond that cannot be pulled apart without tearing the neoprene itself. It may be possible to dissolve a bond using fresh glue, but the process is messy and not always successful. When done with number one, then do the second mitten. Refine fit for your own hand on the NEXT pair!

*Editor's note: Now I remember why I buy my pogies!*



DORSUM OF HAND  
SIDE ONE

PALM OF HAND  
SIDE ONE

0 1 2 3 4  
| | | | |

inches, at full scale

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## PERCEPTION Announces River Conservationist of the Year

Dr. Kenneth Kimball, Chief Research Scientist for the Appalachian Mountain Club based in Boston, Massachusetts has been chosen as Perception's 1999 River Conservationist of the Year. Dr Kimball has been a moving force throughout New England for the past ten years and has worked with American Whitewater, New England FLOW and others to pioneer collaborative relicensing on many dams in the region.

AW Board Member Tom Christopher states "Ken Kimball has two great strengths. The first is his analytical mind and his ability as a scientist to look at environmental issues both in the abstract and concrete, and then come up with very practical, achievable solutions. His second great talent is his ability to bring together very diverse interest groups to a common resolution and work collectively to achieve goals that would not be won as individual interests." Christopher further comments, "Often I would watch him as he would skillfully engage a particularly difficult interest group, and work them, changing their perception, attenuating their fears, and boosting the importance of their role in whatever process we were engaged in at the time. He has always been fair to all interest groups, not just his own, and sometimes would annoy me because I knew that I would have to compromise on some of my issues, realizing it would be for the greater good for all."

Every major river relicensing in New England has the mark of Ken Kimball on it, including the Deerfield, the Penobscot, the Connecticut, the Rapid and Megalloway, the Androscoggin, and finally the Kennebec. His ability to incorporate a "watershed approach" and develop settlement agreements that included protection of vast acreages along rivers and storage reservoirs provided a measure of environmental protection that would have been lost for another four or five generations without his efforts.

The talent of Ken Kimball has not gone unrecognized on the national scene. He is also on the Steering Committee of the Hydropower Reform Coalition in Washington, D.C. and in recent months has been chosen to participate with EPRI (Electric Producer's Research Institute) to help develop and implement policy changes for additional hydropower reform with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. His vision and hard work continue to lay the cornerstones of equity and protection for rivers across the United States as others come into his sphere of knowledge and common sense.



Dr. Kimball has been an active participant on AW's whitewater suitability studies on the Rapid, Megalloway, and Kennebec Rivers since 1995 and has helped to mediate the conflicting interests of whitewater recreation with other user groups involved in settlement procedures.

Christopher credits Dr. Kimball as a master coalition builder, who has been able to bring together state and federal agencies, commercial interests, different environmen-

tal groups, and individuals to mold them into an effective, well-respected public advocacy. That advocacy has achieved enormous successes in hydropower relicensing in New England. As always his personal role in these very stressful activities has been a humble one, always focusing on the issues, never on himself or what had been achieved through his own effort. Congratulations to Dr. Kimball and our grateful acknowledgment for a job well done.

## North Branch of the Potomac Releases Announced

By Ed Gertler

**The following weekends have been tentatively set for releases from Jennings Randolph Dam (aka Bloomington Dam) on the North Branch Potomac:**

**April 8, 9  
May 22, 23  
May 6, 7  
May 20, 21**

Expect releases of 850-1000 cfs each day from 9 am to 4 pm. A dry spring could result in cutbacks or cancellation and, with the low state of the reservoir from the 1999

drought, conditions this year are particularly uncertain. Always call beforehand at 410-962-7687 or check the Corps website at <http://www.nabwc.usace.army.mil/wc/index.html>

**Once again, remember that the popular parking lot at the take-out, in front of the two-story brick building, is on private property. Please take care not to block the driveway (even just to unload for a minute), change clothes in the open, or do anything else to offend the tolerant owner, or the caretaker who lives out back in the trailer (where we have no business being). Poor behavior by some in 1997 almost cost us the use of the lot. Be on your best behavior and watch over the other guy too.**



# Dave Stacey, Colorado Whitewater Pioneer

## 1918-2000

Dave Stacey, who helped introduce the sport of whitewater kayaking to Colorado, died on Feb 7 at 81 years of age. He was one of the first editors of Whitewater magazine and was known for his innovative fiberglass kayak designs.

In 1961 he helped the Colorado Whitewater Association design the break apart rigid fiberglass slalom kayak that was used by Eric Sidel to win the Nationals in Jamaica, Vermont. The boat was transported in four pieces and had a tongue and groove construction held together with suitcase snaps. It was the first non-folding kayak allowed into the Nationals. Three years later Mr. Stacey made design improvements to the kayak which Ron Bohlender used to win the Nationals in Salida, Colorado.

Dave Stacey was a dedicated outdoorsman whose interest included gliding, mountain climbing, sailing, scuba diving, fishing and camping. He was an avid traveler.

Born in Washington, D.C., he graduated from Harvard in 1940. As a civilian during World War I, he served the United States Navy as an underwater researcher. He was also a glider instructor for the Air Force. Dave Stacey received his Doctorate in Physics after the war and settled in Boulder with his wife Joan, who died in 1988. There he cofounded Ball Brothers; he was the Director of Research.

Mr. Stacey is survived by his second wife, Ann, three children and six grandchildren.

Information for this article was provided by Ron Bohlender.

do a clean 720, a vert end...  
Thru me into a monster hole, to a cartwheel,  
to a splitwheel then let's swap ten ends.  
thrill me little luv boat... turn me around...  
squirt me out... make life fun again...  
luv boat.

HTP  
It's stiff,  
it's durable,  
it rules.

There are at least  
312,457 words  
used to describe  
the really big moves,  
fortunately you only need to know  
one...

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# New Anthology Features World-Wide Whitewater Exploration

**Many Rivers to Cross; by Dave Manby, Coruh River Press, 1999**

**Reviewed by Bob Gedekoh**

During the past several years several anthologies of whitewater stories have been published. One of the best of these is *Many Rivers to Cross*, by legendary British paddler Dave Manby. With more than a quarter century of whitewater adventures that span the globe under his belt, Manby knows what expeditionary kayaking is all about. He also has a unique perspective on the history of the sport.

Manby's first expedition was in the Himalayas on the Dudh Kosi in 1976. In 1978 he was part of a team that attempted to paddle the Braldu. The team included the renowned British kayaker, Mike Jones, who died attempting to rescue a friend. Years later Manby returned to challenge the Braldu again. This particular account is one of the most engaging and dramatic in the anthology.

During his long career Manby has come to know many prominent boaters. His circle of acquaintances reads like a Who's Who of Whitewater Exploration, and he has called upon a number of them to contribute stories to this book. Mick Hopkinson writes about his experiences exploring the Blue Nile, Don Weeden describes his

illegal descent of the Niagara Gorge in 1981, Whit Deschner, no stranger to the pages of this magazine, humorously describes his adventures on the Tamur and Kanarli, and Doug Ammons describes a thrilling high water descent of the North Fork of the Payette.

The book features a diverse perspective on the sport; contributor Donald Bean started boating in 1932 at the age of 12, while Allan Ellard represents the edge of New Wave paddling. All told there are twenty stories by eighteen writers, including an amusing account written by Manby's mother.

*Many Rivers to Cross* contains a number of dramatic color whitewater pictures gleaned from expeditions around the world as maps, which help reveal exactly where these people have been. Armchair adventurers will find more than their share of thrills in this book's 260 pages.

*Many Rivers to Cross* is available in whitewater stores or by sending \$25 to The Eddie Tern Press, 46326 East Eagle Creek Rd., Baker, Oregon 97814.

## New Edition of Classic Guidebook Released Colorado Rivers and Creeks Reviewed

**By Bob Gedekoh**

**Colorado Rivers and Creeks; by Gordon Banks and Dave Eckardt**

Here is some good news for boaters. Banks and Eckardt's classic guide to the whitewater treasures of Colorado is back on bookstore shelves. Here is some really good news! The new edition is even better than the first.

*Colorado Rivers and Creeks* contains information about all of the standard popular Colorado runs, plus descriptions of many creeks that have only recently been attempted or that have been paddled infrequently. Even if you have an old copy of this definitive guide, you will probably want to purchase this new edition, since it includes forty runs that were not included in the first.

This book is an invaluable resource for whitewater boaters headed to Colorado or northern New Mexico. The color photos alone are worth the price of admission. Some are incredibly scenic, others incredibly hairball. Just looking at a couple of the pictures was enough to convince me that I don't belong on the Upper Roaring Fork or Crystal River Gorge. But looking at the photos of the Animas, Piedra, and Gore Canyon left me pining for my next paddling trip to Rockies.

The guide is absolutely user friendly. The runs are organized by watershed. The shuttles are clearly delineated and countless easy to read river and road maps are logistically placed. A "beta box" is provided for each run. These boxes include the gradient, length, elevation, season, and difficulty level in relation to flow for each river.

Instructions are included for accessing the Watertalk system, which allows boaters to retrieve specific river flow information by phone. A concise description is included for each run. Access problems and local conservation issues are explained.

Several amusing essays are distributed throughout the book. The authors, who are well known and respected Colorado boaters, have personally run most of the rivers in the book. Other sections have been contributed by some of Colorado's hottest paddlers.

Readers should be aware that when Banks and Eckardt call a river Class IV or V, they really, really mean it. The rivers listed as Class V in this book contain serious whitewater that will challenge even experts. If you are less than expert, you don't belong on their Class V runs. A number of the creek runs in this book have only been paddled a few times by some of the county's best boaters. There have recently been fatalities on several of these runs: the Meatgrinder Section of the Crystal, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and the Spencer Heights Section of the Poudre. Each of these incidents involved expert boaters. Do not assume that just because these runs are listed in a guidebook, that they are appropriate for you. Pay close attention to what the authors say about difficulties and danger.

If you are headed to Colorado this summer, don't leave home without this book. You will surely find it every bit as useful as your paddle.

# Eric Jackson's Book Reviewed

By Greg Akins

*Despite its title, Eric Jackson's new book was a bit of a surprise. Most of the kayaking books I've read have been written more as encyclopedias of the sport than studies on specific aspects of it. So when *Kayaking with Eric Jackson: Whitewater Paddling Strokes and Concepts* arrived at my doorstep, it was refreshing to find only a succinct, yet thorough, illustration of strokes and cc. Nothing else: no diatribes on safety, no models of boat design, no depictions of rodeo moves. Just straightforward descriptions of strokes and whitewater technique, presented in short sections accompanied by Skip Brown's crystal-clear photography.*

Beginning with basics and progressing toward more complex strokes, this book describes forward strokes, sweep strokes, draw strokes and more esoteric strokes, like an offside C-stroke and reverse compound stroke. Jackson provides exercises to help master these strokes on flatwater, moving water, and whitewater. The last few sections are dedicated to applying these strokes to whitewater moves (peel outs, eddy turns, and ferries) and river running techniques (paddling through holes, moving onto waves). Each section provides drills to help paddlers master the specific technique.

*Whitewater Paddling: Strokes and Concepts* is not well suited for a person first learning the basic kayak strokes. The book assumes some basic knowledge of paddling and paddle placement. It would confuse rather than inform a first time paddler. But for those who have some experience, this book will provide a useful foundation for refining, or relearning, proper paddling technique. Additionally, instructors will benefit from this master view of paddling technique. In fact, this book should be required reading for anybody engaged in kayak instruction.

Consistent with that intent, Eric reminds us that his techniques are part of a transition from 'old school' boating to 'new school'. That might be overstating the impact of this book. But, the point is well taken. Several stroke descriptions differ radically from the status quo. For instance, the duffek traditionally calls for initiation toward the bow of the kayak. Eric modifies this by calling for initiation at the center of the kayak. He also departs from the current trend of teaching playboating simply for the sake of play. The only play-oriented section of the book is the description of the cartwheel initiation sequence. But even this is presented as a method for learning boat lean and body position control. The section on squirting specifically mentions its use as a technique for pivoting a slalom kayak. The section on wave surfing explicitly describes the value of moving onto waves as a method for controlling movement across flowing water.

Armed with the information in this book, a beginning paddler could construct a flat water routine that will reinforce good habit. Advanced and intermediate paddlers can practice these techniques to improve their skill on harder whitewater. An instructor might use this book to develop a kayak class curriculum.

If you're looking for a book to help learn Ollie, Oops and Splitwheels, or if you want to learn more about swiftwater rescue techniques, look elsewhere. However, if you're intent on becoming a better paddler and raising your technique to the next level, contact Stackpole Books, tel: 800-732-3669 or e-mail: [sales@stackpolebooks.com](mailto:sales@stackpolebooks.com), and order this book.

## Greg's Video Corner

### Twitch 2000

Video Review by Greg Akins

*The first Twitch video established Tao Berman and Shannon Carroll at the outer boundaries of extreme paddling. They quickly became known, both within the paddling community and outside of it (thanks to articles in *Outside* and *National Geographic Explorer*) as the latest wonder children of steep-creeking. Twitch 2000 continues that tradition, voyeuristically launching the viewer over steep drops and vertical waterfalls in Canada, the Western US, and the Dominican Republic.*

This newest offering from Eric Link has the same sort of appeal as those Fox TV specials: *Nature's Worst Disasters*, *When Animals Attack*, etc... The footage is pretty disturbing. At the same time, it's impossible to look away. Footage of Tao crashing upside down into a log jam, or Shannon Carroll getting sucked back into a log filled, swirling eddy, or Sam Drevo rolling several times while crashing down a thirty foot cascade is stomach churning; but fascinating.

*Twitch 2000* concentrates on first descents of extreme whitewater. The exceptions are interviews of each featured boater and a short skit called "Throwdown at the Rodeo Hole." This video doesn't include much play footage. Also, it doesn't highlight entire runs, rather it showcases individual rapids.

Included in the 34 minute video is footage of Tao dropping over the appropriately named Log Choke Falls on the Tye River in Washington. There are also first descents of Martin Creek and Dingford Creek and some great footage from Johnston Canyon in Banff National Park, where Tao dropped over the 30 meter Upper Falls and Shannon swam into the Lower Falls.

This video delivers a lot of exciting, gut-wrenching action. If you want a video that highlights the progression of steep-creeking and steep-creeking's pioneers, this is the one to buy. *Twitch 2000* is available by visiting [www.vdolink.com](http://www.vdolink.com), or calling 509.548.9048.

# 2000 Attend 17<sup>th</sup> National Paddling Film Fest

by Zina Merkin

Seventeen is a prime number, and the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual National Paddling Film Festival (NPFF) was a prime event. For the weekend of February 25-27, 2000, paddlers from all over the United States converged on Lexington, Kentucky to watch videos, bid on gear at the silent auction, swap stories, and paddle together in the cause of river conservation. Admittedly we lost a few would-be attendees to the lure of high water and warm weather, but the theatre was still full.

An exceptional collection of films provided a variety of exciting and thought-provoking moments. From the audience one heard lots of oohs and ahhs, occasional expletives, gasps of amazement, frequent laughter, and "I'd like to paddle that someday." The NPFF also continued to break new ground, bringing the competition to a wider audience through two special features new this year. The first is that the Still Images were put up on the web site for several days before the actual competition, to be seen and voted on by anyone with access to the Internet. Then during the festival the films were digitally resampled and streamed live to a special web site where 100



Julie Keller's photo won the Adult category of the Safety Poster contest with a memorial to Scott Bristow.

folks at a time could log in and see a bit of the action. Of course that doesn't begin to capture the effect of a large screen presentation, but perhaps it whet a few appetites to see the videos live. Here are some of the highlights of the competition:

Two films showcased river conservation and access efforts with which American Whitewater is involved. *More than Plumbing: the North Fork Feather* by Dave Steindorf, which won **Best of Festival: Amateur**, is a superb documentary chronicling the degradation of the North Fork of the Feather River, in the Sierra mountains of California, due to damming and diversion for power generation. Footage of a rare occasion when water again flowed in the channel shows the delightful runs which would be available if suits against PG&E prove successful in increasing minimum bypass flows. Increased flows would also help restore the once bountiful fishery in the area. Rick Gusic's *Grin Factor 10: the Ohiopyle Falls Race* is a fun-loving look at the historic day in November 1999 when the Ohiopyle Falls was opened for a one-day event as a result of the efforts of American Whitewater.

From the poker face of "Ranger Rick" to the comments by the local yokel, clever moments alternate with shots of the falls as all manner of paddlers and craft tackle the drop with varying degrees of success. Gusic's film truly captures the sense of fun and celebration of the day.

*Twitch 2000* by Eric Link of Videolink won the audience voted **Paddler's Choice** award, delivering start to finish thrills, spectacular scenery, and even some comic relief. Some judges' comments: "These are the runs I won't do, but I sure like watching other paddlers run them." "Intense, mesmerizing footage of some really hairy descents and huge drops." "The best of its type (extreme) that I've seen since Twitch."

*Rainy Days* by Dan Nicholson of Eugene, Oregon, won everyone's hearts with its introductory sequence paying homage to rain, and also won the **Amateur: Open** category. The winner of the **Amateur: Extreme** category, *Tabaze Tour* by Peter Simpson, was short and sweet, a mere three and a half minutes, leaving the audience craving more. One judge commented, "a wonderful sense of composition

and capturing the moment." This was a pilot for a possible longer project, which we hope he will pursue.

In the Safety/Instructional category there was a neat little series of Public Service Announcements created by the National Park Service to encourage people to wear their life jackets while on the water. For those of us who live in riverside communities, it's something to consider promoting locally. There was also a short snippet from *Paddler's Personal Trainer* by Paul Bonesteel Films/Waterworks Productions, which promises to be a very useful film for helping paddlers get into prime condition and stay there. It offers a variety of stretch and strengthening exercises with special emphasis on conditioning the shoulders. As one of the judges put it, "My shoulders will appreciate this video." Also in this category was Performance Video's *In the Surf*. One of the judges called it "Encyclopedic...I could see viewing this video over and over, each time concentrating on a different section." Another said, "Our club should get this video and show it prior to our next surf outing." But the winner of this category was *Play Daze* by Ken Whiting and Chris Emerick. "Best breaking down of play moves I have seen...Inspiring—I'm buying this SOB." "Really beautiful photography, brilliant colors and good use of slow motion...I could watch the world's best work their juju at the cutting edge of playboating over and over." This film had great photography, good explanations with supporting screen graphics, used music effectively, and kept a lively pace while still imparting a lot of information. We look forward to this duo's next project.

Milt Aitken returned this year with *Deliver Me From the Paddlesnake*, a comprehensive look at the entire Chatoga wa-

The winner of the **Best of Festival: Professional and Professional: Open** categories was the documentary film *The Breaks of the Mountain: the Russell Fork Gorge*, by Tom Hansell of Appalshop. Appalshop is a Kentucky nonprofit organization which advocates for Appalachian causes, often through cultural and artistic activities. This film explores the dilemma of a small

And last but not least, the ever popular Silent Auction had a wide variety of great paddling

Julie Keller photo of Steve Frazier at the Tellico Ledges.

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










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# Who Needs to Study a Foreign Language Anyway: A Review of the Alpes-Dauphine Whitewater Guidebook

By Ambrose Tuscano

A couple of weeks ago I was putzing around on my computer, wasting time, when I came across an e-mail from an airline advertising flights to Europe. Normally this wouldn't have gotten a second glance, but that same morning I had gassed up my car at the local filling station. And as I sat there in front of my computer, I began to do a little calculation in my head. I realized that it would be ten times cheaper to fly to Europe and go boating than it would be to drive to my local river! Then a second later I remembered that I failed all of my high school math classes, so I went back with calculator in hand and tried it again. What I discovered is this: it really isn't so unreasonable to fly to the Alps to go boating. Now, to bring this rambling to its point, I need to report another surprising fact: I found a book written by a Frenchman that I can understand and appreciate. Actually, two Frenchmen wrote it and they didn't really write it in French. But still... pretty neat coincidence, huh?

At a glance, you can tell something important about this whitewater guidebook. The cover photo shows the two authors in the midst of some fine European whitewater—perhaps I should say, "getting worked in fine European whitewater. Also, the cover is littered with little cartoons that look like they're right out of William Nealy's imagination. This second fact is vital to my appreciation of this book, because these little cartoons are the language that the authors use to describe the whitewater in the Alpes-Dauphiné region.

Now, you might be wondering how it is that a guidebook can say anything useful without words. I was curious to answer this very question when Alpes-Dauphine arrived in my mailbox. Turning to one of the first pages I found what looked like a key. A row of four cartoon faces showed an array of expressions ranging from melancholy to eye-popping. Checking the explanations under the fellow with his tongue hanging out, I read, "Le Nirvana"...no. "Extase"...uhh. "Extasis completo"...nope. "The ultimate nirvana, pure ecstasy"—aha! After about ten minutes of studying the key I

was fluent in Kayaking Cartooneese. So I turned a few pages ahead and started checking out the river descriptions.

Of course, I've never been boating in Europe, so I can't comment on the accuracy of the information in the guidebook. However, assuming that all of its facts are good, the book looks like it would be really useful. Each river gets two pages, and you'd be amazed at how much information they can fit into two pages. For example, the first shows general difficulty, the river's environment, the ease of access, the specific dangers of the run, the type of boat suggested, and quality of scenery. It also shows where to find the closest bank, gas station, mechanic, grocery store, restaurant, post office, bar, tourist attraction, campground, pharmacy, doctor, dentist and police station. And that's not all. My favorite part of the book puts each river in relation to the others by suggesting where to go if you found the current river to be to your liking, or if it has too much or too little water.

With everything that's shown on the first page of the river description, the second page is almost a letdown. But then you realize that it has a detailed map (with a large-scale inset), a graph of when the river typically runs, the length of the run, and an approximate time on the water. And, of course, it shows the authors' recommendation for the run (ranging from "Why not?" to "The ultimate nirvana").

With the wealth of boating information provided for each of the runs in the book, I guess I can only complain about the lack of description. While the maps are marked with all mandatory scouts and potentially dangerous drops, there is not any specific information about these. Some boaters will find this "figure it out for yourself" approach much to their liking, but others might find it unsettling. The only thing I can say is that if you're counting on your guidebook to get you through a foreign boating trip, you're probably going to be unpleasantly surprised. Consulting and boating with the locals is almost always a good idea, especially in an area with such a large boating population. That's why I'm going to be booking a transatlantic flight soon—just as soon as I brush up on my Kayaking Cartooneese.

## t e e n f o r u m

### Young Boaters Need Encouragement, Respect

I am a sixteen year-old kayaker of decent skill, if it really matters. I have had my graceful moves, a third place finish in the Loop Sprint Race, a short race in Ohio, PA; and my rather clumsy ones as well, earning the "best crash" steering wheel at the Upper Yough Race and being trashed in large holes in front of a crowd on the Gauley, (without swimming). I have taken my share of swims, though, and expect many more.

I am still young with many years and rivers left to paddle. The list of rivers I have actually paddled is not very long; after all, until recently I was constantly bumming rides from anyone who would take me. Some of those people include Mom and Dad, Chuck Stump, Lindy Shank, The Striebys and Scott Stough. These fine folks have made it possible for me to become what I would call a kayaker.

My parents bought me my first kayak, a Pirouette S, at the age of twelve. From then all I wanted to do was kayak. My father bought a Thrillseeker and even got on the river occasionally. But I passed his level and he had little interest in becoming an avid paddler. That was when those who I have already mentioned came to my aide.

I learn something new every time I paddle. Recently I began throwing freewheels and by the end of my first day I could almost throw fakey to front. This is just the fun I have been having recently. Since I can drive, I paddle everyday I can, sometimes doing two or three runs in a day. I have been rather fortunate growing up in Western Maryland with some of the finest whitewater available within an hour of my front door. My favorite run is only a half hour away, the Top Yough.

It is not all about the sport though, is it not also about the respect you receive from others? Is it not about time that the younger generation

received some acknowledgment from those who are supposed to encourage us? Many a time I have been told, "You're too young, you can't kayak." What is too young? When is it right to start this sport?

If I had put it off until I was considered an adult, I would never have been able to accomplish the many things I want to do, my great passion being the river. I enjoy the sport and the fact that I am not destroying wetlands to create new football stadiums so professional athletes can become wealthier than they already are. Maybe it is time for those people whom have belittled me and many other young paddlers to rethink what they have said or done to try and keep us from "their rivers."

After all, who will continue the heritage of the sport and continue the legacy of the great paddlers of the past if only older people are allowed on our rivers. I am not saying everyone feels this way about young paddlers. In fact there are many people who are incredibly understanding and help the younger paddlers. Whether it is teaching a younger person a new move or something said to them as simple as, "It's good to see some kids out here."

Granted, I am sixteen and have been paddling for several years now and have surpassed the ridicule of many. Araft guide, who will rename nameless, once told me while I was paddling on the Upper Yough, "A fourteen year old kid has no right to be out paddling on this river." This guide could barely roll, and to this day I believe he still hits bottom while attempting his so-called roll. I am not claiming to be the best paddler in the world, I am simply asking for the respect that I deserve and many other younger paddlers deserve as well.

Zach Davis  
Frostburg, Maryland

# How Kayaking Ruined My Life

Katie Herzog

**L**ately I've been trying to figure out exactly how kayaking made the transition from my hobby to my life-style. One day I was floating down a Class II stream, scared, wet, and disgruntled, and the next I was prioritizing my life around paddling.

I started kayaking to oblige my father. He anticipated the far-off time when his paddling buddy (my brother) would leave home. With this disturbing thought in mind, he attempted to mold me into the perfect kayaking companion. My initial experiences did not lead me to whitewater bliss. I hated everything about the sport. I dreaded the days when my dad would wake me and point to my little boat expectantly. But I still went because I knew it made my dad happy, and for an eleven-year old girl, that is reason enough.

I believe that "life-stylesports" (paddling, surfing, and snowboarding among others) attract a certain breed of people. There is a unifying thread that brings us together in our foamy haven. Perhaps it is determination and obstinacy. In a sport in

which the majority of participants have a bad first encounter, it seems odd that kayaking is so popular. My twin sister and I started boating at roughly the same time. My dad bought us a little yellow Dancer XS (we named her Betty) and slowly broke us in. Five years later I am more immersed in the sport than I would have ever imagined, and my sister is at a school for math geniuses in the flat part of the state. The only difference between my first year on the water and hers was that she never swam, whereas I frequently did. She never got over her fear of flipping, and so she grew more apprehensive as time went on. Maybe those of us who never quit have a genetic propensity to defy common sense and subject ourselves to the inevitably unpleasant sides of kayaking.

After certain barriers are passed such as a first roll, ferry, or surf, everything seems to come together. We realize one day that the rapids that once lead to sleepless nights are now actually fun. We push ourselves. We begin to enjoy the little knot of anticipation that grows as we approach a

difficult rapid. We value experiences that provoke grimaces from spectators and provide stories to tell on the next shuttle ride. For instance, my brother once jokingly suggested that I "play" in the hole at Double Suck on the Ocoee, a place that even very good paddlers shy away from. After tumbling through the water for a seemingly endless time, I emerged coughing and shaking, but still in my boat. Although I won't be practicing cartwheels there again soon, I no longer feel the urge to relieve my bladder when running that rapid.

My obsession with kayaking has changed my life in many respects. I have given up other sports, diversions, even friends, just because I must feed the habit. When spring and summer roll around every year, I bid farewell to my land-dwelling companions and disappear into our sublime culture. When the leaves start to fall and school bells sound, I emerge with atypical tan lines and unbelievable stories. My terrestrial friends accept me back into their circle; they envy my passion, but do not fully understand it.

Kayaking has led me to spend many hours with my father and his friends. I have spent more time than desirable overhearing boring conversations about university politics, Irish folk music, and the various aches and pains that strike aging baby boomers. Kayaking has ruined my love of cities and flat lands. My choice in colleges and careers has been limited by my love of whitewater. I evaluate institutes of high learning by their climate and location rather than the majors that they offer. I refuse to live in an area without an acceptable playspot within fifteen miles, an adequate number of diverse rivers and creeks within a few hours drive, and a place to buy minicell and Powerbars.

But there are rewards for our obsession. We discover the need to respect the water rather than fight it, and to appreciate time spent among foul smelling polypro and worst smelling companions. We learn the values of nature and of pure, untainted joy. The river forever changes us, but few would return to a time before we knew it.



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# Safety

## Rivers Change!

By Lee Belknap

Sometimes when paddling certain rivers I think of the student next door to me in college. He was constantly trying to convince me that evolution and geological changes were illusions—that they really didn't happen. If only he could have experienced geology in action the way I have. I look at rivers like the Watauga, Ocoee, Chattoga, and the Cheat and remember the rapids that used to be and the new rapids that have been created or taken their place.

While changing riverbeds are remarkable to witness, change can have serious and subtle repercussions for our safety, too. Changes make rapids easier or harder and more or less dangerous. Sometimes familiarity with the old causes us to run things as if the danger hasn't changed.

Take Knuckles on the Watauga. Knuckles was long considered to be one of the most difficult rapids on the river. Then it changed. A serious pinning rock lodged at the base of the most commonly run slot. It used to be that if you got to the slot you were safe. Now the formerly safe line has a dangerous pinning rock at the bottom.

In spite of several serious pins and countless pitons, Knuckles is still commonly run by many as if nothing has changed. Many of us have learned the trick to running it safely, but there are many who haven't. I've seen many hits on this rock despite instructions on how to avoid it. Almost nobody chooses to walk it, or even look at it on their first run even after hearing about the pins that have occurred.

Unless Knuckles changes again, it's a matter of time before a fatality occurs here.

What should we do? Should we keep running it? What should we tell those paddling the Watauga for the first time? Should we advise some folks to lead it? Nobody wants to be the one to walk a fatal trip, but nobody wants to overreact either.

Two rapids later is Watauga Falls. The degree of danger here has varied with time over the past decade. This is because rocks come and go on the bedrock base of the falls. For most of the time I've known this drop, it has been very unforgiving. Many broken bones and serious vertical pins have occurred there. These days it's a little more forgiving, with missed runs ending flatter than they would have in the past. How long will this last? When will the next rock fall lodge there? Will we be careful enough to find it before anyone gets hurt or worse?

Now consider the Bottom Moose. Every year my e-mail box fills up with reports from

incredulous paddlers who witnessed horrendous pins at Knife Edge, where a fatality has occurred. Year after year reports pile up of hundreds of paddlers during the dangerous route, many pins, and many hairy rescues. Of these, reports include stories about informing paddlers about the danger, sometimes with an ongoing rescue in progress, only to have newcomers run anyway, sometimes with another serious rescue resulting. It's only a matter of time before another fatality happens here if this keeps up. Safe paddling is about making informed choices, not blindly following the 'rat' in front of us.

I received a letter from Matthew Michel the other day. A regular on the Green Narrows in NC, Matt writes about a series of pins he's witnessed there just in the past few weeks. He wrote:

### *Green River, NC... Hazard!*

*There have been numerous pins at "Beyond Vertical Boof" on the Green recently. 1 witnessed (2) pins there this weekend. One was head up and one was head under in which the pinned person had to swim out under the boat. I am aware of 4-5 other pins there in the last 3 weeks. One of these was head under resulting in a swim under the boat, and another required the person to be extracted from the boat.*

*"Beyond Vertical Boof" is located in the Class IV section of the Narrows below "Sunshine" when everyone's guard is down.... "Beyond Vertical Boof" has always been a little nothing rapid with no consequences where everybody tries to out hotdog by getting the most air out of the boof. The rock is shaped such that you can almost land on your stern after boofing.*

I am familiar with the rapids, Matt describes. It features a very small and steep pillow and a micro eddy to land in, with a left exit. If one chooses not to boof, there is a thread-the-needle move to the right where most of the current goes. Lately boaters have been losing momentum on the boof and unintentionally threading the needle sideways. Not a good career move.

Matt who is a seasoned veteran of this river continues:

I believe something subtle has changed about the rapid that makes it more likely that you will flush to the right after boofing.

These pins have suddenly started occurring almost daily now, so I believe something is a little different than before. The reason I think this pin spot is so dangerous is that everybody is so used to amusing themselves on this boof, and it is in the section of the river where everybody is just lollygagging without much concern for hazards. For years we have enjoyed outdoing one another on this boof, but now there is a hazard there.

Matt's letter illustrates how subtle changes can have serious effects. We must always be alert on the river. If bad things start happening, we need to figure out why and how to avoid them. In the case of BVB, a more careful technique (practiced elsewhere first) or the alternative line should fix the problem. At Knuckles, a much more precise line is demanded, plus the recognition that some paddlers might not be able to make that precise a move.

Matt finished his letter with another, broader note:

*Here are the other pin spots I've learned about recently that are non-obvious. The far left (as close to the river left wall as you can go) in "Neeses Pieces" has a little nook you can be pinned in. This is hard to get to, but it does happen occasionally and is very dangerous.*

*If you are running "Little Sunshine" on the Class IV section and miss the right slot and go over the left slot backwards without speed, you can pin with water coming over your chest. I would imagine you can pin forward there too, but I've seen plenty of people make it through there by accident with speed and a boof. (Speed and boofing is hard to accomplish backwards.)*

I took notice of Matt's comments about Little Sunshine. I know that many paddlers are told that this is a perfectly safe way to run it. Hmmm. With speed and a boof it probably is, but perhaps we should learn and tell a little more about this spot in the future. It certainly wouldn't hurt.

Rivers have inherently dangerous features. We recognize this every time we put on a life jacket or a helmet. The danger increases with more technicality, steepness and volume. A river like the Green, has all kinds of places just off the beaten path that could be dangerous. Be aware of this and do your best to avoid them.

Happy paddling, but: Please be careful.

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