

Adventure ▼ Conservation ▼ Access ▼ Safety ▼ River Stories

# american whitewater

September/October 1998

## Adventure Corsica

...page 48

4


## Nepal's Humla Karnali

...page 70

## 1998 Gauley Festival Issue





A photograph of two kayakers in Perception kayaks navigating a waterfall. The kayaker at the top is in a red kayak, and the kayaker at the bottom is in a pink kayak. Both are wearing helmets and life jackets. The water is white and turbulent as they descend the falls.

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Risa and Woody's version of R&D, rapid descent...  
Baby Falls, Tellico River, East Tennessee. Photo by: Christopher Smith



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# american whitewater

Journal of the American Whitewater

Volume XXXVIII, No. 5

Letters ..... 7

Forum ..... 4

▼ **Gauley** River Memories  
by Bob Gedekoh

Briefs ..... 109

- ▼ Atlanta's Watermark **Aquires** Perception and Dagger
- ▼ Wolf River Access
- ▼ John Foss Remembered

River Voices ..... 88

- ▼ **KIDS KORNER...**Hot Fun in the Summertime
- ▼ We Should Really Do Something About These Names
- ▼ Unified Theory of River Difficulty

Conservation ..... 17

- ▼ Director's Cut
- ▼ Intern Studies **Instream** Flow Methods

Safety ..... 90

- ▼ High Water Rafting, Class V **Kayaking** Cause Many Fatalities  
by Charlie Walbridge

Access ..... 25

- ▼ Access Stream Team
- ▼ **Top** 40 Whitewater **Issues** for 1998

Events ..... 43

- ▼ AWA Events Central
- ▼ Upper Ocoee Rodeo Hole Update
- ▼ Whitewater Events

F e a t u r e s

## Racing to Adventure Corsica



by Chris **Koll** ..... 49

## Vermont Hair A Big Branch Descent

by Peter **Engel** ..... 66

## One Man, One Boat Nepal's Humla Karnali



by Ken Ransford ..... 70

Cover: On the trail from Simikot to the Humla Karnali. Photo by Ethan Greene

Publication Title: American Whitewater  
Issue Date: September/October 1998  
Statement of Frequency: Published bimonthly  
Authorized Organization's Name and Address:  
American Whitewater  
P.O. Box 636  
Margaretville, NY 12455



Printed on Recycled Paper

# Forum

## Gauley River Memories

I remember the first time I ran Iron Ring. This was long ago, back when it was Class VI. To run it you had to be really good or really crazy. 95% of the kayakers on the Gauley portaged Iron Ring and during my first two seasons on the river, I did too. Then one day I drifted into the pool above the *maneater* with the worst hangover of my life. My head felt like Mohammed Ali had been pounding on it. The very thought of climbing out of my boat made me gag. I didn't even stop to scout. "What the hell," I said to myself, "no matter what happens, I can't feel any worse." As luck would have it I had a perfect line and didn't even get my face wet! At that very moment the entire paddling community decided that Iron Ring was just a Class IV rapid.

I remember sleeping one night on a rockledge beside the river just above Koontz's Flume. In the middle of the night a mouse crawled into my sleeping bag. While struggling to escape, I tumbled into the river. I hope the mouse did too!

I remember the first time I surfed Five Boat Hole. Back then it was huge. Bigger than Greyhound Bus Stop at six feet! It was so big it sucked birds right out of the sky!!! Not long after I dropped into it I decided that I'd had enough fun. A minute or two later I was still hanging on my brace and starting to



get concerned. After a couple more minutes, I was desperate. There were at least fifty people watching and I didn't want to swim. But I wanted out of that hole very badly. Suddenly a petite young woman in a flashy fiberglass boat materialized beside me. While I was floundering, she donuted effortlessly. "Do you need help?" she asked pleasantly, after she completed her fourth or fifth spin. I was so mortified that I blew my death brace and over I went. I think I whacked my head; I remember seeing stars. Fortunately, I flushed free of the recycle and miraculously caught my roll. Later I learned that the petite woman was no less than the famous hair boater and AWA activist Risa Shimoda. (Risa wasn't a Callaway yet; this was before Woody.)

I remember being thrown out of the Summersville Pizza Hut three times. Two of those times I didn't deserve it.

### ■ I remember AWA Business Manager

Phyllis Horowitz cheerfully tromping through the mud at the Festival site, clipboard in hand, negotiating with temperamental vendors and coping with frantic volunteers. All the while ignoring the thunder, lightning and torrential downpour. Not just once, mind you, but year after year after year. (Don't forget your rain hat, Phyllis!)

I remember putting eighty sutures into the face of a close friend who had a terrible misadventure in the second drop of Lost Paddle.

■ I remember eating honest-to-god biscuits and gravy at the Stonewall Jackson Restaurant. I never got thrown out of the Stonewall Jackson.

I remember talking with Whitney Shields and Tim Gavin and Dave Mills and Chuck Kern at Gauley Festivals.

I remember getting pummeled at the bottom of Sweet's Falls, time after time after time. This was last year.

I remember the first time I carried my kayak up the mountain from the Panther Creek take out. I thought it was totally stupid and vowed I would never do it again. That was at least one hundred Panther Creek Death Marches ago.

## EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in the features and editorials of **American Whitewater** are those of the individual authors. They do not necessarily represent those of the Directors of the American Whitewater or the editors of this publication.

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

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**Missing Copies and Address Changes:** Contact Phyllis Horowitz

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I remember paddling through Canyon Doors on a Sunday afternoon in October. I was tired, wet and cold; and I was not looking forward to the two-mile carry out, the tracks at Peters Creek, or the four-hour drive home to Pennsylvania. Then something caught my eye, so I peeled into the eddy in the middle of the river. The late afternoon sun sliced through the heavy white clouds that drifted across the cobalt sky, illuminating the technicolor cliffsides. The air was full of the sounds of rushing water and my friends whooping it up on the waves downriver. A stiff, cold autumn breeze carried the pungent smell of leaves that had already fallen and leaves that were soon to fall. I stayed in that eddy for awhile, soaking it all in. Before I peeled back out into the current I said to myself, "you need to remember this moment... really *remember* it... because even though you are wet and cold and tired... *this may be as good as it gets.*"

I think I may have been right.

Hope to see you on the Gauley this season.

Bob Gedekoh

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## A Treatise On Death

Dear Editor,

I've had an epiphany regarding the recent spate of river deaths. As with most profound revelations that come upon boaters, it was initiated by an "interesting" river experience. Grab a cold beverage of your choice and read on.

Nestled in Tennessee's Rock Island State Park is as close to a perfect play spot as one could want. Located about two hours west of Chattanooga, access is easy, parking is plentiful, it is dam controlled and runs with regularity.

Rock Island is a feast for the eyes. The deep, narrow canyon is a lush green ridge on river right, and a massive rock-faced ridge on river left. The rock is draped with a spattering of vine, plants, and dead trees fallen from the edge.

Up stream is the dam's powerhouse, a wonderful squirt spot, and a three-boat surfing wave. The current from the hole brushes the rock face and curls back into the eddy pool. You can circle from the hole back to the top with about three strokes.

The 300 yard wide waterfall that magically spawns from the rock wall is the coup-de-grace. The waterfall exists because the ridge that ends as the rock wall, also forms part of the lake's basin. Over the years, lake water etched an underground path to the face of the rock. The water appears as a steady rain from cracks in the rock about 70 feet above the play hole.

The reality check is that the river left wall is undercut, but not seriously so, and the wall is easy to avoid. There's no need to be near it. Unless, of course, you want to enter the hole from river left. In which case, you paddle carefully through the slightly boily eddies on the left.

Also note the overhanging rock that sticks out from the rock wall. It is underwater when the flow is about 3,500 cfs, and at cockpit level below 3,000 cfs. The overhang is about the diameter of a Vertigo spun in a circle. *Please note the comparison, it is intentional.*

I had an interesting event about 6 months ago while playing Rock Island. The release was well under 3,000 cfs.

I decided that I wanted to play the hole from river left. Of course there is the wall but, yes Mom, I promise to be careful. FYI, the overhang at this level has about two feet of clearance.

On or about the fifth or sixth time coming up river left, I found myself staring at the overhang, from about 6 inches away.

*Oh-by-the-way, can you guess what kind of boat I paddle?*

A weird swirl under the rock flipped me. The boat slid under the overhanging rock and stayed in the same spot because the water forms an ever-so-slight whirlpool at this spot.

*Yes, a Vertigo.*

All hip snaps slammed the boat against the overhang.

Boy, what a dumb-ass. Yank the skirt, pop up, grab the boat and push off the wall. Thank you, eddy current, for taking me gently to shore.

Now words were needed. The gentlesmirks of the other boaters told me what they thought of Pee-Wee's big adventure.

NOTE TO SELF: stay at least four feet away from the overhang.

I have played the hole many times since, including a beautiful Friday in mid-May. The level this day was somewhere around 3,000 cfs. Remember, this is slightly higher than the day that a perfect roll was foiled.

I was entering the hole from left to avoid a large group of fishermen on the right. The fishermen obviously felt they had seniority for the spot. Entering on the left kept me at a good, neighborly distance from our fellow outdoorsmen.

I passed the overhang that caused my comical swim several times. I noticed the water was a little higher this time. The spot had a noticeable, but manageable, miniature boiling swell. The swell was a little too strong to paddle through. So I would sit back a healthy distance, rising with the swell, then paddle forward as the ~~zen~~ eddy allowed.

I experienced one particularly large swell in the eddy. The boat rose two or three feet because my cautiously safe distance from the overhang put me at the center of the swell.

Now being at the top of a three foot hill, my boat acted as any object subject to the laws of gravity. It rolled "down hill." Towards the overhang.

No problem - back paddle.

What kind of boat was I paddling?

Now the swell begins to collapse and recede in the direction of entry - the overhang. The finale of this recession is a toilet bowl whirlpool which prompts me into a beautiful splat.

No, it was not beautiful, because splating undercuts is considered very poor form.

*Oh yeah, I'm paddling a Vertigo.*

I know where I am and what is happening. I have been here before, and I will survive. Pop the skirt, bail and grab the rock above the surface. I will pull myself up and swim to shore. I will survive the jokes.

OOPS. The current is a little stronger today and decides to pull me down into the whirlpool.

Well, hell.

I am now deep enough to be dark. No problem, my jacket buoyancy will lift me in a second.

Well sh@\$. I'm still down here.

Hang loose, the current will swirl and lift you up in a second.

Oh sh@\$, I'm still here.

Plan B - Self Rescue.

The wall is at my back. Yank up on the wall and that will provide the momentum to reach the surface.

One big pull. Wow! Lots of resistance to upward movement. I begin climbing. Two, three, four handfuls, now I see the boat. Grab the cockpit and pull. Now grab the stern and pull. Reach above the surface and grab rock.

Gee, why do I feel like I've been here before? Ya know, it would be REAL nice to have some air about now.

SURFACE! My, this air is nice.

### MY OPINION

Compilation of errors is killing boaters.

Several small mistakes eat away at one's safety margin, until there is no margin left. The best example I know is the crash of a test plane in the late 50s, described in a story titled, *The Last Foot*.

A test plane had about 200 feet of safety margin in the runway length. The safety margin made certain assumptions. The plane was loaded with a specific weight of fuel, the runway was a certain temperature, the air pressure was at a certain point, the tire pressure was correct. Several other "minor" variables were also addressed.

The story describes how each assumption was a "little" wrong. Too much fuel cost 10 feet, low tire pressure cost 10 feet, and so on, until all the errors together made the runway too short. The pilot died.

What are minor errors in boating? Experience, gear condition, physical condition, water and air temperature, etc...

I also believe randomness is a factor. Can you walk a six inch wide plank 100 yards long without falling? What if the plank is 500 feet in the air? What if 1000 people walk the plank 1000 times? What are the odds that one will stumble and fall?

Many Class IV rapids are not outrageously difficult. You just have to be on-line EVERY time.

There are a hell of a lot more boaters today.

There were far less really good boaters when I started over 12 years ago. More good boaters means more good boaters will die.

Rapids have clearly been down rated. I can assure you that a Class IV of my early days is a Class III today.

Boaters today move up in difficulty three times faster than past years. I mean this literally. Boaters took three to four years of development to reach the Gauley when I started. Now I see first-year boaters on the Gauley, Ocoee, Russell Fork. I see second-year boaters on the Green. I see minors and teenagers on the Green.

The game today is to climb the ladder of difficulty as quickly as possible. To hell with



*Sometimes...  
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how you  
paddle,  
but how  
you look.*



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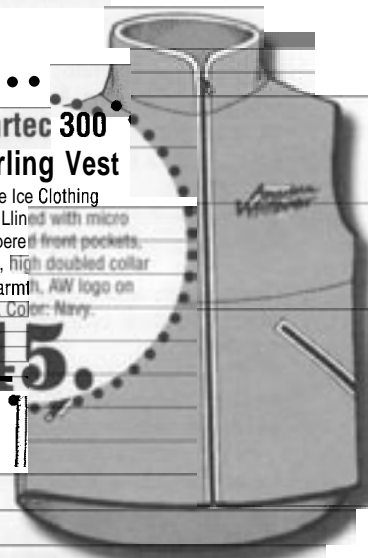
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paddling rivers at equal difficulty just to gain experience.

Disregard for personal responsibility. A recent rec.boat posting talked about rude paddlers who do not help swimmers or pay attention to those in distress. Boaters should always help boaters.

**PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY** - never go to the river expecting a stranger to **SAVE YOUR ASS!!** Set your own safety and expect your group to rescue you. On rivers like the Ocoee, there are too damn many swimmers to try and save them all. Strangers will **GLADLY** help if a group needs **ADDITIONAL** assistance.

There is no one simple explanation for why boaters die. They die because of many small mistakes.

Why now? We were lucky.

I expect the trend in boater deaths to continue unless we pay close attention to all "minor" problems.

Forgive me for my grim outlook.

I do not sign this treatise. Not because I worry about criticism, but to emphasize that this could be anyone. You probably know me, or know someone who knows me. Some will say I'm not as good as I think, some will say I'm careless.

I have paddled for over 12 years. My repertoire includes The Green (yes, I run Sunshine and Gorilla), early runs on the Bear in Tennessee, Nepal, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Corsica, and other countries.

I am better than some, and not as good as others.

I am you.

Signed,

A Boater

## Don't Mess With Perri!

To AWA Journal:

I would like to respond to Anne Daniel Vereen's concerns regarding my article "It All Comes Down To The Xs And The Ys."

First I would like to comment on the punctuation. In the copy I sent to AWA, I used an apostrophe (') or quotation marks (") standard to the **MLA Handbook for English** and Grammar. In the printed article these apostrophes and quotations marks came out as question marks (?). Somewhere in the transfer from my word-processing program (MS Word) and AWA's program (Word-Perfect) the marks were transposed. This I could not help, but I apologize for any confusion it created.

Secondly, I believe in being humble. There is nothing worse than a boastful boater. If I had begun the article with a resume of my paddling ability, I would have lost all credibility from the get go (personal beliefs regarding my views aside). In writing and

editing it is called being a reliable narrator. One that can admit weak points in their character is more believable than one that states "I'm the goddess of kayaking and no one can touch me, pregnant or not." But because you could not pick up on this, I'll throw subtleties out the window and be straight up. I am not a beginner, I can hold my own (and sometimes other people's) on many Class V runs. This including the 'New River at 30,000 cfs' - although at that level I usually hit the Dries. (I like big water).

Thirdly, I would like to comment that Ms. Anne Daniel Vereen played right into my 21 year old hands. Not everything in my article was meant to be taken seriously. (The professional term is called 'overstating to prove a point'). In fact, a lot of the article was written to elicit this exact response (although I was never much for Sea Green or Sienna—I was more a fan of Periwinkle Blue. Go Figure). I wanted to get under the skin of women. This way you become more aware of the tendencies mentioned in my article in their infancy and fix them. I know personally- when I get mad, or competitive- I paddle much better. If this article has helped a woman get 'agro' and paddle hard- Rock On. If not, oh well- just be strong enough to let my opinions slide without getting all in a tizzy over them. C'est la vie. I'm just going to go boating.

Smiles and Chuckles,

Perri Rothemich

Mill Spring, NC

*Editor's Note: Let me be up front about it. I hate computers! They cause me endless aggravation. Everyone keeps telling me that computers should make the production of American Whitewater easy. But I can tell you from experience, working with electronic files, created by hundreds of different people, using countless word processing programs, some on PCs, others on Macs, some sent via e-mail (always a nightmare), is a major pain in the ass. Because many word processing programs use different codes and because there are glitches in the conversion programs, we often run into problems like to one that Perri mentioned. We try to catch and correct them, but unlike commercial magazines, I do not have an army of copy editors and proofreaders at my disposal. My apologies to Perri for any embarrassment we may have caused. As for me, they're dragging me into the "brave new world," but I'm kicking and screaming every inch of the way!*

Bob Gedekoh

## More on Meanders

An Expert Checks In

Dear Editor:

I read April Holladay's article on meanders in *American Whitewater*—great answer.

It is in fact the nature of rivers to meander. However, their location and the degree to which they bunch up and develop spectacular topographic features is influenced by regional structures and differences in resistance of underlying rocks to erosion.

I'm a geologist with 30+ years river-running experience in the western US and have good knowledge of the geologic history of the Colorado River drainage. For the past several years, I have been leading first descents on major rivers in China to field check Chinese geological maps prepared from air photos for the Chinese Academy of Sciences (<http://users.aol.com/pswinn/ese.html>).

If you let water trickle down slightly tilted clean glass or another very smooth surface, it still meanders, even though theoretically there are no obstacles to cause the flow to deflect or any "river banks" to erode and cause changes in flow direction. The meandering in this case is a result of the interaction of turbulent (non-laminar) flow and surface tension.

If you look at a geologic map of the Colorado River drainage, you'll see that the tightly-bunched meanders occur on the upstream side of large upwarps, with significantly fewer meanders on the downstream side. For example, where Colorado and Green rivers approach the Monument Upwarp in southern Utah, there are tight and/or tightly-bunched meanders, but below the confluence, as the river crosses over the axis of the upwarp, the meanders are much more open.

This is true of the San Juan upstream of the Lime Ridge Anticline near Bluff, Utah (there is even an entrenched perched cutoff meander on the north side of the river just after entering the canyon below the Mule Ear). And, as April mentioned, some of the most spectacular, tightly bunched, deeply-entrenched meanders are the Goosenecks of the San Juan. They occur on the upstream side of the Monument Upwarp. Point Hansborough overlooks the tightest meander in the Grand Canyon, where the Colorado River approaches the Kaibab Upwarp.

These upwarps existed before the Colorado drainage was established, though there was a period of regional Colorado Plateau uplift after the drainage was established that resulted in entrenchment of the meanders in deep canyons. Experiments on meander development using troughs filled with sand and clay suggest that as the Colorado drainage developed, the tributaries ponded on the upstream side of major upwarps, eventually filling the basin with their sediment and meandering across it just as April described. An example of this occurs in the Unita basin north of the Monument Upwarp, where the Green River meanders through ancient lake sediments.

Once the basin was full, the lake "overflowed" and the river began to erode a channel in the downstream side of the upwarp, ponding in the next basin. Or, in some

Continued on page 11

# 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 cassette. (**WordPerfect** preferred - 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 flatwater. 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 techniques, 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 intentionally 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.

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Continued from page 9

locations, headward erosion from a small drainage on the downstream side of the upwarp caused the upwarp to be breached ("stream capture"). As erosion progressed, meanders in the soft river sediment tightened and bunched together when they encountered the resistant underlying rocks of the upwarp.

About 9 million years ago, after the Colorado River drainage was largely integrated, the Colorado Plateau began to uplift and tilt northeast. The greatest uplift occurred in the western Grand Canyon area (there are well over 10,000 feet of vertical displacement on the Hurricane Fault). There was less uplift and it occurred later (ending about one or two million years ago) in northwest Colorado, near the headwaters of the Colorado River drainage. The uplift occurred gradually enough for the rivers to carve deep canyons, entrenching the meanders as it carried away the sediment it had deposited in the basins between upwarps.

Of course, it's rare to get geologists to agree on anything, and we can't go back in time to prove this really happened. If you don't make up your own story - maybe Paul Bunyan really did plow the Grand Canyon with his blue ox!

Pete Winn

Grand Junction, Colorado

## Thanks From Ohio

Dear Bob:

We saw you on the Big Sandy yesterday (2/1/98). You passed us twice! Now I know why you write articles about shuttle vehicles.

The article on trespassing in Ohio was great and well written. There is another creek in Ohio called Tinkers Creek, which we consider to be Upper Yawkish.

If only runs during flood and was pioneered by the Snyder brothers. They are from Ohio and were members of our club (the Keal Haulers), until they moved to Graceland.

We regularly run Tinkers Falls (25 ft.) - Class IV by today's standards. But even the Snyders wouldn't run it back then - pointing out "the boats were too long."

Thanks for: a great magazine, upgrading the rating system, and the AWA's help on access to the Cuyahoga Gorge.

The guidelines you sent our state representative seem to be paying off.

Ron Whitney  
Cleveland, Ohio

P.S. You look taller in your picture.

## More Than Just Safety

Hey Bob,

The closest we have come to boating together is doing Gore on the same day, however, I've always enjoyed your editor's take on things. This letter is not directed at you so much as it is AW. I thought you may have a better chance of interpreting my confused thoughts.

I realize AW is striving to increase its circulation and to gain more support and dollars to better serve the paddling community, I do hope that AW does not sacrifice its originality and distinct flavor along the way.

I am most concerned about your recent mailing to raise funds for safety issues. I realize many subscribers can afford to support such an effort. I don't agree that safety deserves more attention than conservation, access, or even humor for that matter.

A lack of safety knowledge was not the cause of the recent spate of expert deaths. They simply point out the ultimate bad day on Class V. I don't mean to seem callous on this issue. I just do not believe that AW can control or exert much, if any, influence over what is essentially boater judgment and odds.

Yes, safety is important, however I do not wish to see safety overplayed. What I fear is the regulation of safety. Safety is becoming a tool for landowners, utilities and public agencies to reduce access through insurance lobbies. In turn, it makes the sport more elitist, expensive and bureaucratic. Everyone should preserve their right to do something stupid. This means if AW wants to fight for paddlers, part of the strategy has to be, if only in an assumed fashion, to preserve this right.

Even if your publication reached every paddler in the country and your budget was correspondingly larger, the problems of river accidents and deaths would still exist. It may wax and wane and certainly the knowledge of the tragedies, including the circumstances, will aid others, but there will never be a solution or resolution.

Numerous other sports such as skiing, climbing, motor racing etc, have their inherent risks. Like paddling, this doesn't seem to stop the sports from growing. Of all sports, I would be hard pressed to name anywhere basic safety practices were as universally adhered to.

Though river deaths may exacerbate the already daunting task to AW and other river oriented organizations of opening rivers and changing law, it is part of the sport like any other. None of our fellow paddlers whom have perished, expected that on that day they would die, but I am sure that they would be among the loudest in affirming their right to paddle on the river of their choice. Though the paddling community is growing, it is still a relatively small one. It may seem we have all

lost someone to the river, but in the grand scheme of things, there are a small number of accidents throughout the country.

Will the new rating scale help? I doubt it. Though rocks are static, water is dynamic. By the time you consider flooding, lumber, irrigation, diversions, incorrect gauges, no gauges, changing levels, what do you have? Though it's obvious that a lot of thought went into the classifications, they are still subjective. These classifications are not going to save lives. Anyone with the competence to boat Class Vis not going to base their decision to run a drop based on the rating scale. That decision will be made on a visual inspection, which, combined with his present physical and mental condition, will determine the outcome.

I have had these discussions with friends for years and I must be missing something because I just don't get it. Let's say you are boating the lower Clavey at 800 cfs in a 007. That means you've just bumped your 5.25\* run up to a 5.45\*\*. Add 0.25 for an additional 500 cfs or 0.1 if you are in a Descente.

\* All classifications are subject to change after spring and summer floods

\*\* This rating is an overall classification and does not reflect individual rapids: See appendix B for individual classifications

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ratings, I recommend that any respective author take a three week boating trip to California guided by the Stanley and Holbeck guidebook. This is the book that set the standard and California is unbeatable for quality whitewater.

The one thing I would like to see is a universal hand signal system. You would have to be able to use this system while holding your paddle and a poison oak bush in one hand in a flushing eddy above a 30-foot drop. The signals must be distinct and individual and open to new signals.

You could discuss what signals you'd like to see at a directors meeting and then ask readers to submit signals, with the winners getting a free massage in Chile. It seems crazy when you're following a hyperactive local down their favorite creek run and you don't even know what they are trying to communicate, because all your concentration is taken by cartwheeling in a hole you didn't see.

I won't digress any further. I would like to finish by saying that what is important is all the families and friends of paddlers past, and the sport that brings us all together.

Sincerely,  
Paul Zirkelbach  
Denver, Colorado

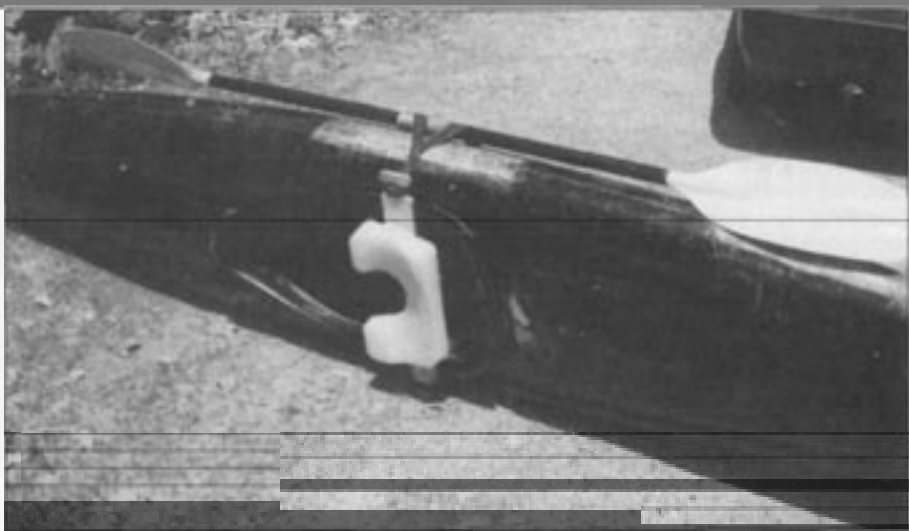
*Editor's reply: Thanks for your comments. Sorry I missed you at Gore - I was probably portaging Tunnel Falls! Actually, there are "official" AWA hand signals, developed by a committee led by Jim Sindelar many years ago. They are reproduced in the AWA Safety Code...but, unfortunately, they are not widely used.*

## Added Thoughts For Alpine Style Kayak Trekkers

Dear Editor:

Multiday, self-support kayak trips have long been my favorite form of kayaking, and I found that my own choices of methods and equipment, formed over that past 30 years, agreed very closely with those given in John Weld's excellent article (May/June '98 AWA). I add here a few thoughts of my own which I hope may be helpful.

Foam support/flotation walls as furnished in most current rotomolded kayaks are a real negative for self supporting. The remaining space in front is really too small to be useful, let alone stow enough weight to balance the boat. And the packing efficiency and ease-of-entry to the rear space is greatly compromised for no reason — the rear can't collapse or sink if it contains a float bag stuffed with gear. For me, that rules out any such boats from which the rear plank can't be removed without compromising the anchoring of seat and bracing, which unfortunately includes most otherwise suitable current designs.



Other thoughts all relate to the least painful way to get a loaded boat past the unbeatable sections which remote rivers usually have. If you choose not to run, a time-honored first choice is lining the loaded boat with a rope. Though often safer than running, lining is not without hazard. Like kayaking, lining is a learned skill, and lined boats have a habit of flipping and filling (or spinning out of control and then flipping and filling) in tricky drops and currents. They then give you the choice of getting jerked in or losing your boat and gear, or perhaps both! Lining requires a stern line — either a permanently attached and properly secured stern painter, or an ever handy rope that can quickly be tied or clipped into the grab loop. Hazards of lining can be greatly reduced if 1) the cockpit is first closed to prevent filling when it flips, and 2) the length of rope extended is limited to no more than 15-20 feet, beyond which one has greatly reduced con-

trol. NEVER attempt lining with an open cockpit! You can tie off your regular sprayskirt and use it for a cover, but a light cockpit cover or a (backup) nylon spray skirt as on John Weld's list of extra stuff, if tied shut, is handier.

Dragging a loaded boat with a webbing leash is a good option if the route is fairly level and open. When the going gets more rugged, carrying quickly becomes preferable — loaded boat if possible, broken down into loads if one must. Carrying a heavily loaded boat on one's shoulder is hell and works only for short carries. Two-man carries of loaded boats are most often employed over boulders and tough terrain, but the load is not symmetrical. It's tough on hand, wrist and arm, the back man can't see his footing, and, in uneven going, one is always getting jerked off balance. A fall could mean a bruise, a dislocation or a broken limb. It was while preparing for the 1975 Apurimac Kayak Expedition (wherein 5 kayakers lived out of



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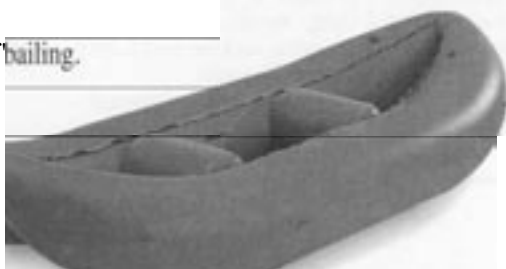
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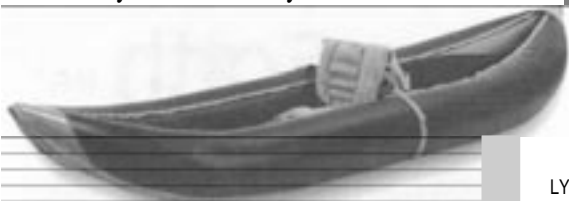
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kayaks for 30 days with but a single resupply, while dropping 7000 vertical feet in a first descent of one of earth's great canyons) that I first started looking for a better way.

I considered rigs I had seen pictured that could carry a kayak either vertically or crossways on a pack frame, but these had little appeal to me since my portage routes always were full of narrow openings and low bridges. This led me to consider the tested and true "open canoe" carry position and a yoke. The first crude carrying yoke I took to Peru has, after considerable refinement, evolved into a good solution, and has been my constant companion on self-support kayak trips ever since.

I find this balanced position allows me to carry my own loaded kayak most anywhere that a loaded boat can be carried with greater control and safety than any other method. The biggest problem is getting it up on your shoulders (prop it on a boulder, tree, or a friend if you can't get it up with a "Grumman flip"). To unload, you can usually find something to lean one end on so you can crawl out from under. In boulders and rough going, using the paddle as a staff (third leg) is very helpful. For big vertical steps where leg strength is insufficient for the lift, I have sometimes gone on my hands and knees in preference to unloading. I have generally

found that I would beat two guys using two man carries on their boats, and they, too, had to unload or rope the boats where I couldn't go.

Space-age materials would doubtless allow further refining, but my present yoke is made of a hardwood slat (old wood ski or toboggan slat is good), an aluminum backing plate, and contoured ethafoam padding. It weighs about a pound and a half. Innertube rubber is cemented on to provide friction and prevent slipping on the cockpit coaming. Abicycle innertube (select size so it is tight—should be a tough stretch to install it) is used to hold it firmly in place on the boat (see picture). This system allows for some adjustment, but for carrying on the yoke as for paddling, the boat should be fairly well balanced. I had one boat that balanced better with stern forward. It is often possible to get additional support by letting your head bear on the kayak seat or padding (tumpline effect). If the paddle is carried strapped to the boat under the innertube (see picture), balance can be fine tuned by shifting it fore or aft, and I have often tied a helmet or lifejacket to one end of the boat to help balance the load. In a pinch, one can pull down on the end with a bow line.

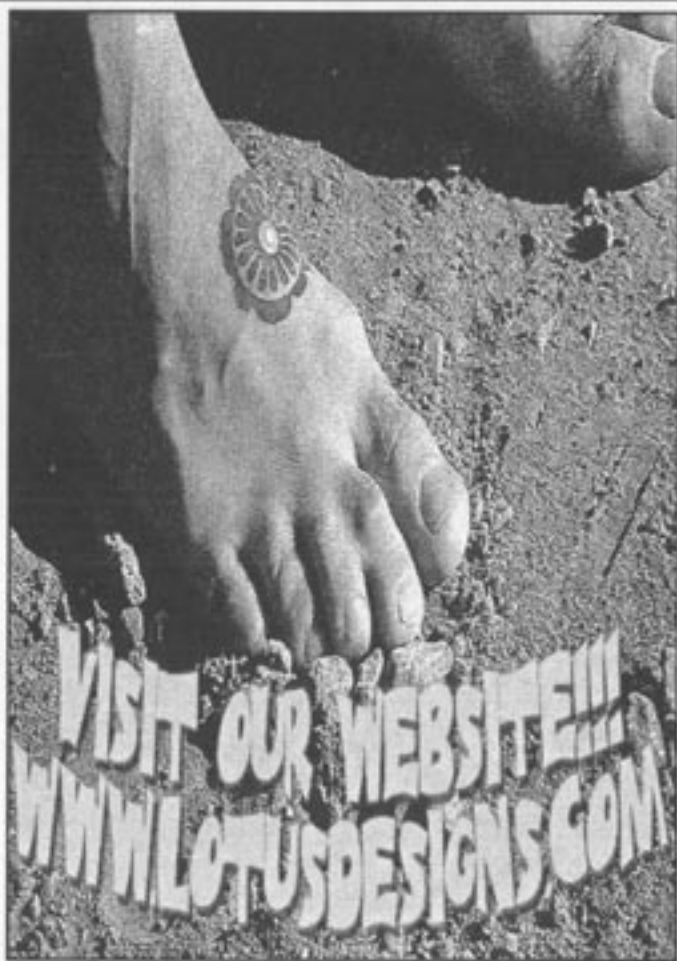
The biggest drawbacks are that since no-body sells them, you will have to make your

own, as I did, and you have to find a place in your boat to stow the yoke. (Well, I admit I DID read a report that a party of white missionaries were caught unawares due to carrying their canoes overhead and wiped out by natives in South America, but outside of that...) In composite boats with hanging seats, my yoke (with innertube wrapped around) stows neatly between seat support and hull beside the paddler. On one rotomolded kayak, I held it on the back deck with some lengths of shockcord, threaded through small holes drilled in the deck and knotted inside the boat. On another, the yoke served as a seatback, and to lock in the rear float bag.

The system as described, works great for me, and the independence and added safety and comfort during portages more than make up for the extra pound and a half. One guy I knew claimed he could do as well using his lifejacket as a pad instead of a yoke, but I can't make that work for me.

My final offering is that portaging a loaded boat, no matter how you do it, is still painful enough to prevent wilderness rivers with long, rough portages from being overcrowded, and for this I am grateful.

Jim Sindelar  
Past Executive Director  
AWA



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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 bimonthly 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 non-profit 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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# Conserve

## Director's Cut

by Rich Bowers

Every so often, something or someone comes along that reminds me that American Whitewater is still just a bunch of boaters. Hanging out, increasing skills, making new friends, and working to protect and improve the rivers we paddle. It's a simple definition, but it works for me.

In our forty-plus years of existence, this is the one constant that hasn't changed. It can't. With a staff of six, and literally hundreds of river issues, we would be pretty lame as an organization without some serious volunteer support and hard work from other paddlers. Grassroots at its best!

While I've often seen how effective boaters can be (Tallulah and this Journal are a few good examples), I've got to admit that I was totally impressed by the July 11<sup>th</sup> work party on the Watauga. The goal was to find boaters to help improve the take-out land we purchased on the Tennessee/North Carolina border, and to make it available before the next surge of high water.

Some thirty friends and members showed up, and, in an incredibly short time, transformed a hay field into a (just short of) swank take out. Signs were put up, a trail was created, and stairs were built. All in a short day. And we're not talking about just beating a path through the bushes, but about stable, permanent and totally awesome improvements. While some work still needs to be completed, the take out is essentially ready to go. A few more tasks and we will be providing directions on how to get there.

American Whitewater would like to thank volunteers who helped out, so we have listed them here. You should thank them also. Maybe by offering to carry their boat the next time you paddle the Watauga?



Special thanks to the members of the Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts (APES) who surveyed the land, talked with our neighbors, and helped us close the deal. And even more thanks for Bob Tonnies, who masterminded the work party and pre-fabed the stairway, and to Ed Oliver with the Tennessee Eastman Hiking Club, who while not a whitewater paddler nevertheless donated his time and expertise to help create the trail. And thanks to all of our members, without whom we could get little accomplished, and without whom it just wouldn't matter if we did.

## Passing On

American Whitewater was saddened to learn of the recent (July) deaths of two of our most ardent volunteers and close friends. John Foss, American Whitewater Regional Coordinator, and someone who truly loved rivers, died while paddling in South America (his second home). And Sherwood Horine, who initially got American Whitewater involved in the Watauga access issue, was killed in a biking accident in North Carolina. Our sympathy to their families. The whitewater community will really miss these friends. Sherwood's family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations should be made to Watauga Medical Center Emergency Department or American Whitewater, Watauga River Fund, 1430 Fenwick Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910



## Watauga Work Party Volunteers

Joe Greiner  
Rob Abbot  
Rich and Danna Bowers  
Ava Carr  
Risa Shimoda-Callaway  
Spencer Cooke  
James Eller  
Chuck and Lola Estes  
Maggie Everett  
Joe Greiner  
Steve Gubser  
John Heffernan  
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Toby MacDermott  
Zed Mansfield  
Mike Mayfield  
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## National Recreation Lakes Study

Passed in 1996, the Recreation Lakes Act ordered the president to appoint an advisory commission to review opportunities for enhancing water-based recreation on the 1,794 federally-managed, man-made lakes in the United States (this does not include privately-owned reservoirs). The first meeting of the National Recreation Lakes Study (NRLS) Commission was held in Washington, DC on July 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. This commission is scheduled to meet four times this year and to complete its report by February 3, 1999.

While the Commissioners have just been picked, the study has been underway for almost a year. American Whitewater became involved because we were concerned that this study, in promoting reservoir recreation, could hurt downstream uses including whitewater. Our primary concern was that stabilizing lake levels could negatively impact needed recreational and environmental flows below dams. Stable lake vs. river flow has been a big issue in restoring flows below hydropower dams. It was a big part of the flow discussion for Tallulah (GA) and on the Rapid and Dead Rivers (ME), it is also the primary reason we do not have releases on the Savage (MD) and an ongoing part of getting more water on the Upper Ocoee (TN).

Our initial fears were realized when we learned that NRLS staff was basing their study on 10-year-old recreation information, and completely on recreation statistics from fishing and hunting agencies. It was determined that doing new studies would be cost prohibitive.

A second, but equally important goal of the NRLS is to find a way to get user groups to pay for increased lake recreation. Like the Fee Demo program, lake users will be targeted for increased fees in the future.

But the Washington, DC meeting was really positive for rivers. It was obvious that, while staff was working away at their version of the NRLS, the Commissioners were not willing to just go along for the ride (the commission is made up of federal, state, and local managers and business people). Within minutes, the Commissioners were well into expanding the scope of the study. This expansion included many of the issues on American Whitewater's list: impacts on downstream recreation; impacts on environmental issues (both lakes and rivers); recognition of impacts on entire watersheds; need for active public participation; potential for restoring rivers dewatered by dams; dam removal; and even jet ski use.

American Whitewater was really encouraged by the commission's understanding of the relationship between rivers and lakes, and between upstream and downstream recreation. We will continue to be involved with the NRLS, and have joined America Outdoors and the ACA in developing a position paper for the study on downstream recreation.

For more information, contact Rich Bowers or check out the NRLS website at: [www.doi.gov/nrls](http://www.doi.gov/nrls)

## Outdoor Recreation Lobbies Congress

Over 600 Outdoor Industry Representatives, media, and non-profits attended the third annual "Taste of the Outdoors" hosted by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association and the Outdoor Retailer Coalition of American (ORCA).

The lobby effort included 60 direct visits with Members of Congress and an exhibition held in the Rayburn House Office Building on June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>.

Three major issues were on the agenda for this year's "Taste of the Outdoors": 1) increased funding for resource agencies, 2) opposition to the "Teaming with Wildlife" recreation tax, and 3) full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (see Top 40 article for more on L&WCF).

Outdoor manufacturers and associations represented at the reception included: the American Fly-Fishing Trade Association, Orvis, Backpacker's Pantry, Planetary Gear, Brewer's Ledge; W.L. Gore & Associates, Leki USA, Specialized and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), American Canoe Association, Mad River Canoe, and Perception. Outdoor Publications represented were Backpacker, Climbing, Fly Fishing Retailer, High Country News, Outdoor Retailer, and Outside. Non-profit organizations included American Whitewater, Americans For Our Heritage and Recreation, American Hiking Society, Appalachian Trail Conference, Continental Divide Trail Alliance, Leave No Trace, NOLS, Outward Bound, and the Student Conservation Association.

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# American Whitewater Intern Studying Instream Flow Methods

I am currently conducting an internship for American Whitewater during the summer of 1998. I am a junior at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, where I am studying Geology and Economics. With only three semesters remaining before my ominous graduation and the terrors of the "real world," or so I'm told, it seemed like as good of time as any to gain some valuable work experience. As far as my career plans go, I have only one specification: to work in or related to the environment. American Whitewater offers such an opportunity. Not only am I working for an organization with a philosophy I believe in, I am doing so in a part of the country that fortifies my convictions about nature and its need to be conserved. Working in Bigfork, Montana for the conservation director, John Gangemi is exposing me to the various ways in which the rights of special interests, such as whitewater rafting and kayaking, can be "equally-considered." American Whitewater uses its influence to better the environment by making such things as hydroelectric operations more efficient. In doing so, boaters can benefit from enhanced aesthetics and more boating days.

My contribution to American Whitewater is through a research project in which I am looking at the different methods used by recreationists and fishery experts to quantify instream flows. Instream flow requests are often subordinate to out of stream needs. Therefore, it becomes important to present a defensible argument for instream needs during flow negotiations. Current methodologies have limitations and are biased toward special users. Each method

prescribes flows in accordance to the shareholders interest, wrongfully proclaiming their sovereignty.

In addition, every method has shortcomings. Some rely on the judgements of only a few people to determine a river's optimal flow that in turn might conflict with another user group. Not only are recreationists and fisheries fighting against dams, but they are also working against each other.

My first task is to create an electronic bibliography on the various methods used with as many useful references as are available. This bibliography will be available to all American Whitewater river activists upon request. In addition, I will write a synopsis of the various instream flow methods in practice.

Ideally, it would be great to develop a holistic method that treats the flow conflict in a more comprehensive fashion. By integrating aspects from different methods, the problems incurred through the use of one method can be overcome, or at least minimized. In addition, if instream flows were prescribed in a manner that meets multiple interest groups needs, then it would be possible to end the jousting matches different user groups have created by their polarized demands. This requires the implementation of a dynamic flow regime. Accommodating the needs of a variety of user groups as well as fulfilling river restoration goals. I hope this study can assist a more interdisciplinary and utilitarian approach in future instream flow requests.

- Zack Guido

## American Whitewater Intern Studying Economics of Whitewater Recreation

As a rising senior at Middlebury College in Vermont, my internship with American Whitewater is exposing me to various river conservation issues and, at the same time, complementing my major in Environmental Economics. I am doing a two-month independent project on recreation economics to assist American Whitewater's Conservation Program.

My goal is to outline the recreation portion of an Economic Impact Analysis for non-economist river activists to use. A Regional Economic Impact Study measures the secondary effects of the actual expenditures by individual consumers and other public and private recreation resource users. My work will enable any conservationist to play an active role in determining recreationist expenditure profiles for certain rivers. A skilled economist or an economic model will then analyze this data to determine the economic impact whitewater boaters and other recreation users have on a local river community.

Currently, as numerous hydropower licenses go up for renewal, river recreationists have a prime opportunity to demand an equitable, if not a majority, share of the river resource. If a river proves more economically valuable with free flowing water as opposed to out of channel use, one would hope that the free flow option prevails. The Economic Impact Analysis can be used to demonstrate the economically self-sustaining activity of river recreation on an unobstructed river.

Unfortunately, paddlers and other river recreationists are often forced to compete with out of channel water users, in particular,

hydroelectric plants. Quantifying the economic impact of whitewater recreation will compel additional interest groups, such as local communities, to fight for whitewater releases. Additionally, this information will be used to increase access to rivers that have been closed, to purchase access points to rivers, and to promote whitewater festivals, rodeos, and races.

Outside the office, northwest Montana has proved to be a prime location for paddling and numerous other outdoor activities. Having

picked up kayaking just last year, I chose to wait until my second week in Montana before venturing down the Wild Mile, home of the annual Bigfork Whitewater Festival. While I suffered a few scrapes and bruises on my first run (swimming the last stretch), I have since successfully paddled the infamous Class IV.

Results of my research will be available electronically for all American Whitewater river activists.

-Bryson Tillinghast

## France: Dam on France's Upper Allier River Dismantled for Salmon

The Saint-Etienne-du-Vigan dam on the Upper Allier River, the main tributary of the Loire River, collapsed on June 24 at 5 P.M. It is the first time in France that a dam operated by Electricité de France (the French state-owned electricity utility) has been destroyed in an effort to restore salmon habitat.

Located near the sources of the Allier River, the Saint-Etienne-du-Vigan Dam produced just 35 mWh per year. In fall 1997, the dam reservoir was emptied when a flood of about 2,800 cubic feet per second (80 cubic meters/sec.) occurred, which washed out the accumulated silt in the reservoir and minimized damage on the ecosystem downstream. Studies found no evidence of sudden pollution downstream, due to the low level of pollution of the reservoir sediments, as the reservoir is located in very little urbanized area and suffers hardly any pollution. The global cost of the demolition is an estimated FF14 million (\$2.3 million), including FF 7.2 million (\$1.2 million) to replace professional taxes formerly paid by EDF.

The decision to remove the dam was taken on January 4, 1994, when the French government launched the "Plan Loire Grandeur Nature." This program, spurred by widespread opposition coordinated by the Loire Vivante network and ERN to a series of projected dams on the Loire river basin, planned several measures to save the remaining salmon population of the Loire basin, including demolition of another dam on the Loire basin, construction of a hatchery on the Upper Allier, suspension of all fishing, and elimination of other obstacles to salmon migration. The other dam to be dismantled is the Maisons-Rouges, on the Vienne River, another tributary of the Loire River. Atlantic salmon has disappeared from all large rivers on the European Atlantic coast: the Rhine, the Thames, the Elbe, and others. For photos and more information see our Website or contact: Roberto A. EPPLE, Executive Director, ERN-European Rivers Network, e-mail: ern@rivernet.org website:

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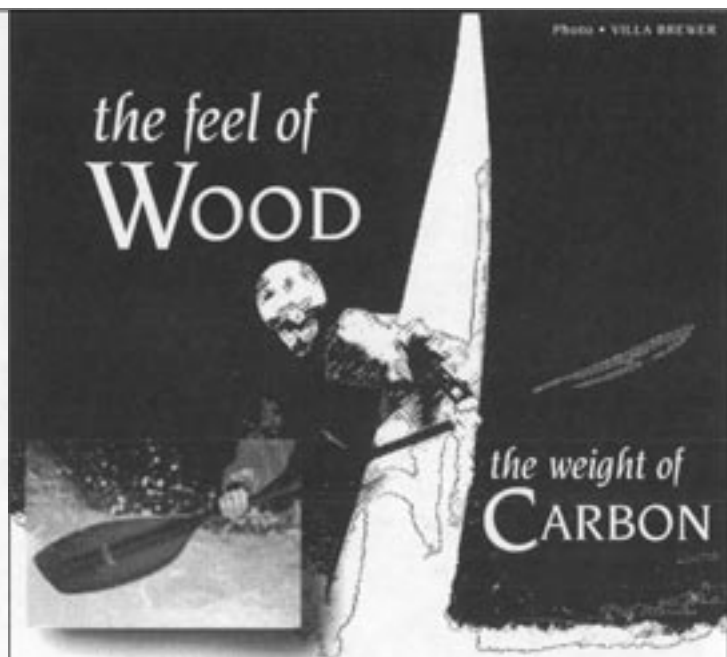


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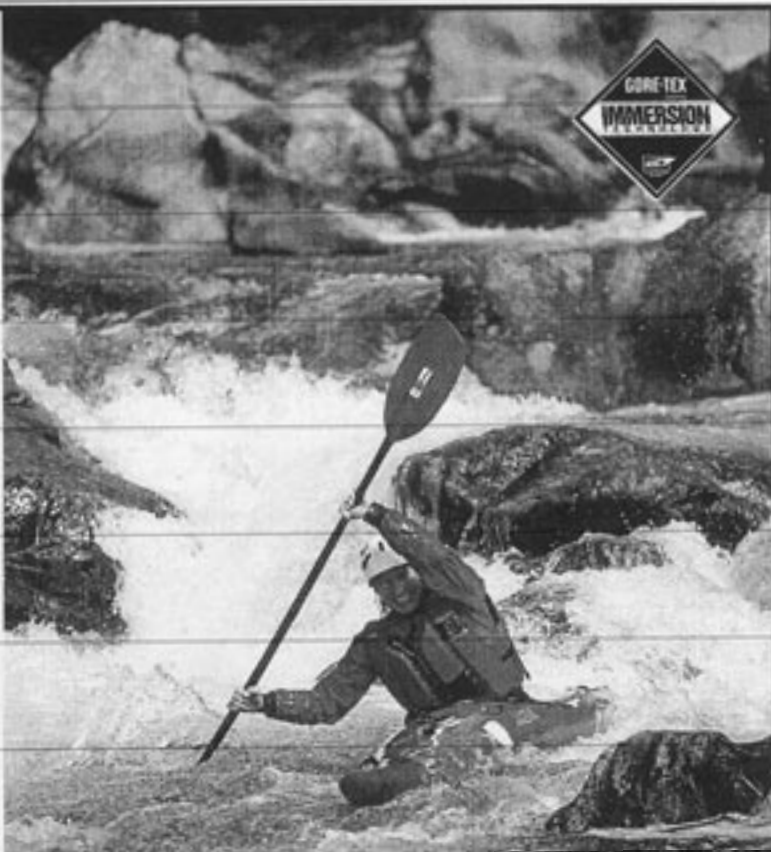
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## Directions to American Whitewater's Take Out on the Watauga

Drive West from the put-in to the take-out on Highway 321. Turn right on Watson Island Road (a.k.a. Stansberry Road). The road is gravel and is the first "true" road after you cross the state line into Tennessee. Wind SLOWLY downhill on the dirt road past some houses/trailers. Please be very respectful of the residents so we don't have the kind of landowner problems that we see on the Green River Narrows. When you get to the gate (there is also an abandoned house there), continue through to your LEFT. There will be a relatively flat field on your right. Drive down and look for small American Whitewater signs that direct you to a narrow rut, this rut is the driveway. If you see an evident driveway, please don't use it: this is our neighbors.

Please be quiet, respectful, and discrete – we want to be good neighbors in this quiet community. PLEASE DO NOT park all over the field. AW only owns 1 acre. The rest of the field is private property. BE DISCRETE ABOUT CHANGING CLOTHES.

Directions from the river:

When you get near the end of the whitewater, you will get to Watson Island. Take the smaller RIVER LEFT channel. Look for the stairs at the bend. Pull to shore near the end of the island, walk up the hill.

## The Access Stream Team

American Whitewater has just created a group of access assistance volunteers that we are calling the Stream Team. This group is working on the legal defense of boaters, establishing a new listserver with weekly access and conservation updates, and researching the navigability laws around the country. American Whitewater is privi-

leged to have so many dedicated volunteers and will be thanking our team at the Gauley Fest. Keep an eye out for future updates describing the things that we are working on. At present, our team is working on high-water closures in California, the legal defense of a deputy in Colorado and a fisherman in New York State, negotiating access to the Green River Narrows in North Carolina. Be sure to thank the members of our team, they're fighting for Truth, Justice, and the American Way... er... Whitewater

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## TOP 40 WHITEWATER ISSUES FOR 1998

By American Whitewater Staff  
(with help from friends, associates, and members)

Jason ROBERTSON at Great Falls, Potomac  
Photo by Eric Starr

Each year, American Whitewater presents the Top 40 Whitewater Issues, a collection of the most pressing problems, questions, decisions, and opportunities affecting whitewater rivers. This national review began in the 1990 Gauley Festival edition and continues as we count down the remaining months of 1998.

The Top 40 listing highlights those issues affecting whitewater rivers as well as the people who paddle them. From local creeks, streams, and entire watersheds, to federal, state and local policies that will most affect rivers, access, and the sport of whitewater, this list describes the most urgent challenges. Chances are the Top 40 report will include the rivers you paddle!

### Downward Trends!

It seems that each year brings new access restrictions, dams, pollution, fees, and management plans affecting whitewater. But our list for 1998 contains a growing number of national trends that do not bode well for whitewater. Included are: a dangerous increase in river-related accidents among expert boaters; a federal fee program that is uncoordinated and often unfair; and a new and alarming trend – a host of ideas on how to profit from the growth of outdoor recreation, mostly from those far removed from human-powered outdoor recreation.

It's no accident that many of these trends have found their way into our "Top 10" (as in previous years, the Top 10 are listed in order of importance — the remaining 30 are not). For example, while specific actions can quickly affect an individual river, the growing involvement of politicians threatens to change recreation overnight. And changes may include the very basics: how we paddle

rivers (climb rocks, hike trails and bike); which rivers we are "allowed" to paddle; and how much we will pay for enjoying public resources in the future. Unlike a single dam or land closure, issues like fee demonstration, navigability, safety, and other Federal legislation have the potential to challenge our values and change our life-style.

### Upward Trends! (The good news]

One emerging trend, dam removal, has the potential to restore miles of whitewater, to unlock rapids drowned by reservoirs, to repair aquatic habitat, to restore salmon, and to change how society looks at rivers.

Several years ago, the thought of removing even one of the more than 75,000 large dams in this country was unthinkable. In the last two years, it became a growing battle cry for a small group of river "fanatics." In 1998, it is a full-fledged national movement. We now have: \$86 million in appropriated funds to remove the Glines Canyon and Elwha Dams in Olympic National Park (WA); a landmark decision to remove Edwards Dam and restore 17 miles of the Kennebec (ME); a new groundswell of enthusiasm for removing Glen Canyon Dam (AZ); ongoing research into removing Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite Dams on the Snake (eastern WA); a summary report on



how to remove Condit Dam on the White Salmon (WA); and ongoing research (by the California Hydropower Reform Coalition) about the possibility of removing several small dams in California.

## Big Issue Trend

There is one more positive trend that is worth noticing—the changing ability of river groups (like American Whitewater and our river partners) to address the big issues facing us. Issues including dam removal, dam relicensing, navigability, the Grand Canyon, the Middle Fork and Main Salmon.

In the past, it was all boaters could do to gather a small group of friends to oppose local threats on our favorite rivers. Many of these battles were lost because the "other side" was bigger, better connected, and better funded.

Today, boaters are more organized (thanks to groups like the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association and North West Rafters Association), are better able to communicate, are taking a proactive rather than reactive stand on issues, and are able to generate the support needed from members and friends of rivers. As a direct result, whitewater supporters are seeing a greater number of river victories.

fully protected access to the Blackwater (WV), the Watauga (at least at the take-out, NC), and defeated a power company that was attempting to sneak out of providing access to the Cispus River (WA). We were able to help keep the Forest Service from closing the Metolius (OR) to paddlers, and to win a seat on the workgroups involved with the Grand Canyon. In addition, American Whitewater was able to bring 160 climbers, hikers, mountain bikers, paddlers and others together to work on recreation issues at the November Recreation and Access Summit (CO).

## Future and Often Never-Ending Trends

River issues are almost never easy to address. Most take years to resolve, and some, like Auburn Dam, threaten never to go away. In 1989, our now retired conservation guru Pope Barrow wrote "Hot Spots," a precursor to the Too 40. This listing named some 20 national issues, including a proposed dam on the North Fork of California's Yuba (still on the list but moved from the North Fork to the main Yuba). We expect the same longevity, or worse, for most of the issues on this year's list.

American Whitewater is working to end

term strategies for those with no visible solutions at this time. In the coming year, we will coordinate anational navigability paper, fight discriminatory fees, and prepare for more dam relicensings in the Southeast and Northwest. For those of us lacking patience, we'll try to fill the gap with better whitewater on rivers such as the Nisqually (WA), Bear (ID), Housatonic (CT), Feather (CA), and others. We hope, with your continued support, to do even more for you and the rivers you paddle!

If you want more information on any of these issues, just call those listed under contacts. Or call American Whitewater staff at the following numbers:

Rich Bowers  
(301) 589-9453  
RichB@amwhitewater.org

Jason Robertson  
(301) 589-9453  
JasonOamwhitewater.org


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## 1. Fee Demonstration

### Issue: Fees, Access, and the Lure of Big Money

American Whitewater believes that new fee systems, and the belief by some that outdoor recreation will provide an unending and untapped revenue source for the future, poses the number one threat to the future of outdoor use.

Obviously, not everyone is looking to make a killing off of recreation. Many simply seek a solution to the question of how to offset growing budget reductions, maintenance backlogs, and an exploding surge in outdoor users. But even in these situations, the lack of coordination, communication, and clear thinking threatens to harm, not improve recreation.

When the fee discussion began several years ago, American Whitewater echoed the thoughts of other outdoor users that fees that are nondiscriminatory, improve the resource, and do not replace agency appropriations for the outdoors are fine. Like many, we believed that we needed to "pay our fair share!"

In February, our faith that fees would follow these guidelines and achieve these goals began to drop. We explained to Congress and to the agencies that our discontent was due to the large number of bad fee systems that were being installed on rivers. Examples:

- On the Nantahala (NC), a simple parking fee was changed into a river "access" fee targeted solely at whitewater boaters.

- While boaters have won concessions on fee demo in the Grand Canyon (AZ), additional improvements must wait while the program runs its course (two more years).

- On the Upper Ocoee (TN), the Tennessee Valley Authority continues to seek a fee demo program to offset recreation flows in the river and cuts in Federal Appropriations.

- On the Kern (CA), boaters have tried in vain to get whitewater improvements through the Forest Service but now face paying for river permits under fee demo (in direct violation to language enacted by Congress).

More recently, American Whitewater has withdrawn all support for fee demo as it became clear that many in Congress see fee demo as merely a prelude to reducing appropriations for outdoor resources and managing agencies.

These fee systems threaten not only whitewater, but also all other outdoor activities. And especially those who take time to develop the skills and pursue a life-style which

allows them to enjoy the outdoors on a regular basis.

Contact: Rich Bowers or Jason Robertson

## 2. River Safety

### Issue: Safety, Education

During the past two years we have seen a significant jump in the number of fatal accidents in whitewater kayaking. According to Safety Chair Lee Belknap, highly-trained paddlers running Class V drops account for the

vidual, rather than a public, responsibility. We will continue to report on accidents as they occur and give people an opportunity to voice opinions about how they might have been prevented. We have completed a program to improve communication among boaters by revising the river classification system. We have an ongoing research project, which will give us an accurate accident rate for whitewater paddling, so we can compare our safety record with others. We're always looking for ways to promote safety in the whitewater community, and hope that paddlers will use the Journal to share their ideas.

Contact: Lee Belknap (804) 266-9060, Charlie Walbridge (304) 379-9002



Kay and Dave, Private boaters on the Grand Canyon  
Photo by Jason Robertson

## 3. The Grand Canyon and Greater Colorado River Basin:

### Issue: Too many people, too precious a resource, and too much management

Oh boy, where do we start on this one? The commercial interests in the Grand Canyon are trying to push legislation through the House and Senate protecting their monopolies, allocations, and concessions in the

Canyon. The National Park Service (NPS) is trying to establish the Grand Canyon as a Wilderness, but they forgot to include the river in their wilderness proposal. Private boaters that have signed up on the waiting list in 1998 may have to wait at least 25 years for the chance to run the river. The Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP) is still under development and has the opportunity of helping everyone if it doesn't get run over by the politicians in their overzealous protection of motors in the Canyon. The Glen Canyon Institute is pushing hard for the removal of the Glen Canyon Dam. The Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association (GCPBA) is working hard for the private boaters and fighting for everyone on the private permit list and deserves everyone's support! And, the list goes on and on. Stay tuned for a special progress report by American Whitewater on the Grand Canyon in the coming months.

These numbers are of concern to American Whitewater for two reasons. First, and most important, the people dying are our friends and members. Second, any death creates political problems for those who enjoy and use rivers. Our membership has varied opinions on how to deal with this issue.

Some paddlers feel that nothing can be done, and would prefer that we only list the number of fatalities that occur each year without commentary. Others feel that American Whitewater is contributing to the problem by publicizing extreme runs and should cut back on this reporting. American Whitewater will plot a careful course between these two extremes. We will fight for each boater's right to run any drop they feel capable of handling.

Furthermore, we will continue to emphasize to river managers that safety is an indi-

The good news is that the NPS has asked the public for their assistance in researching opportunities for managing the Grand Canyon and the boaters have responded. Following a meeting with the NPS in June, Jason Robertson, American Whitewater's Access Director, was asked to co-chair a workgroup that will be responsible for preparing options



for the NPS in changing the private permit system as part of the CRMP.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Tom Martin, President of the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association, at [tomhazel@grand-canyon.az.us](mailto:tomhazel@grand-canyon.az.us)

## 4. California Hydropower Relicensing

### Issue: Hydropower Relicensing

**Current Status:** In California over the next 15 years, 50 hydropower projects encompassing 167 dams are due for relicensing under the Federal Power Act (FPA). All private hydropower dams are licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for periods of 30 to 50 years. Licensees must reapply to FERC for a new license at the time of expiration; a process referred to as relicensing. FERC decides, via input from state and federal agencies and the public, the terms and conditions for a new license. Because most of these projects presently under review were granted licenses 30 to 50 years ago prior to passage of many existing state and federal environmental protection laws, the current relicensing cycle presents a singular opportunity to enhance and restore many of California's rivers.

Hydropower projects alter the natural free-flowing characteristics of rivers thus impacting riverine processes by de-watering the channel, blocking fish passage, altering sediment movement, modifying channel shape, changing water temperature, and degrading water quality. Recreational activities such as kayaking and rafting are extremely limited. The relicensing process offers an opportunity to restore rivers and the public use of these waterways.

In 1997, American Whitewater helped found the California Hydropower Reform Coalition, a group of state and local conservation and recreation organizations working to reform hydropower policies and improve rivers impacted by hydropower projects. American Whitewater is already hard at work in California on rivers such as the Kern, King's, San Joaquin, Mokelumne, Stanislaus, South Fork American, Yuba, North Fork Feather, and Pit.

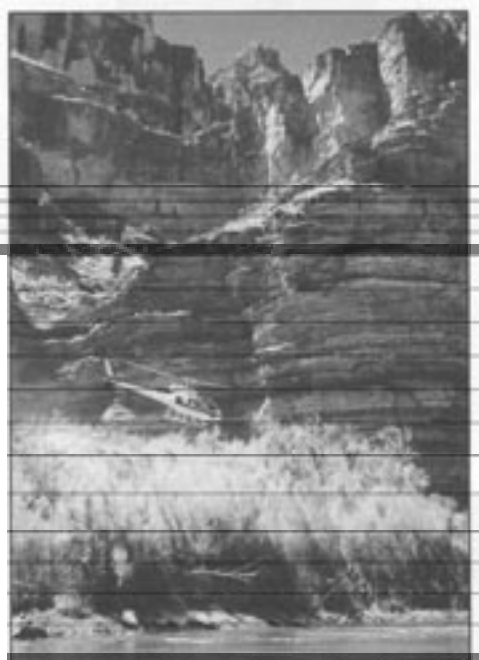
**Regional Precedent:** California is renowned the world over for its classic whitewater. Many more miles of Class III, IV and V whitewater can be added to the California inventory through the relicensing process.

Contact: John Gangemi

## 5. Land and Water Conservation Fund

### Issue: Congressional De-funding

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964.



One more management headache in the Grand Canyon...helicopters  
Photo by Jason Robertson

The program uses royalties from offshore oil and gas wells to pay for expanding federal parks and forests, and maintaining state and local park programs. The royalties are collected annually in the General Fund. However, Congress never seems to deliver them and uses the money to hide their failure at managing the Federal budget instead.

The LWCF has been responsible for the acquisition of nearly seven million acres of parklands and open spaces, as well as the development of more than 37,000 park and recreation projects. LWCF is used to conserve critical wilderness, wetlands, and refuges, as well as recreation areas such as the Meadow River on the Gauley River. If the LWCF were fully funded, it could be used to buy put-ins and take-outs, and protect our Wild and Scenic Rivers. The government could buy land from willing sellers to the put-in on Gore Canyon in Colorado, the White

Salmon in Washington, the Trinity in California, or the Blackwater in West Virginia. The possibilities are virtually limitless.

Write or call your elected representative and tell them to renew their commitment to America parks and allocate funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Heck, send them photos of your favorite river, mountain peak, or climbing rock that you can't use and tell them how great it would be if the states and federal agencies had funding to buy it for the greater public good.

Contact: Jason Robertson, or Americans for our Heritage and Recreation (AHR), 1416 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 1405, Sacramento, CA 95814

## 6. New Dam Construction

### Issue: Hydropower, Flood Control, and Pork

While many proclaim the era of big dams to be over, and progressives look to remove uneconomical and unwanted dams across the country, a few rivers continue to be threatened by proposed new dams.

It is ironic that while many are looking to rip dams out, some legislators and developers (often the same people) still see new dams as a good way to make their fortune. And unfortunately for those living in California, many of these dam supporters seem to have migrated your way. The recent version of the California Water Plan proposes building or enlarging some 57 dams on rivers in the state. Included in this plan is the new 1998 Auburn dam proposal on the American, a new Parks Bar dam and Waldo Reservoir on the main stem of the Yuba, up to three new dams on Cache Creek, and enlarging dams on the McCloud, Mokelumne and others.

On the Russell Fork (VA), the Haysi Dam is still on the books, although nothing has been heard on this project for many months.

Contact: Rich Bowers and John Gangemi, or Friends of the River at (916) 442-3155.

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## 7. Electric Utility Restructuring

**Issues:** Streamlining hydro relicensing process, mitigation funds, divestiture, global warming

**Current Status:** In 1992, Congress passed the Energy Policy Act which restructured the electric utility industry. Up until passage of the act, electric utilities had a regulated monopoly on a designated territory of electric consumers. Public utility commissions within individual states set electric rates with a guaranteed rate of return for the utility. Passage of the act allowed each state to implement a competitive marketplace for electricity. Several states have passed state deregulation legislation. In April of 1998, after some delay, California was the first state to offer a deregulated market to retail customers. The electric utility industry's public relations campaign claims deregulation will lower consumer electric rates. In reality, future electric rates are uncertain in this new market place.

Congress's authorization of electric utility restructuring has substantial ripple effects on hydropower. These effects are ultimately manifested on the river and the river recreationist. Hydro projects are granted licenses for 30 to 50 years. Utilities must apply for a new license prior to expiration of the current license. Many of the existing hydro projects were licensed prior to passage of environmental regulations. In the process of relicensing these projects, state and federal agencies as well as conservation groups such as American Whitewater request specific terms and conditions in the new license in an effort to restore the river and improve recreational opportunities. The electric utility industry has developed a legislative agenda designed to "reform" the licensing process for hydropower projects. In reality this is a streamlined licensing process. The reforms would amend section 401 of the Clean Water Act which currently requires utilities to obtain a water quality certification prior to being granted a license. The reforms would

also eliminate agency prescriptive authority and mandatory conditioning authority in the environmental review process. This legislation would virtually eliminate the resource agencies with professional expertise on the resource. Lastly, the reforms would limit public involvement in the environmental review process. The utility industry claims the reforms are necessary to reduce costs associated with licensing projects and to eliminate duplicate and conflicting requirements. In contrast, the Hydropower Reform Coalition of which American Whitewater is a founding member, sees agency and public involvement as a critical component of the environmental review process. The costs associated with relicensing are minor relative to the profits from hydro generation on the public's rivers.

Increasingly in the relicensing process, utilities are less willing to commit funds for mitigation or forego power generation opportunities due to the uncertainty in electric rates in a deregulated market. River restoration and recreational enhancements come at the expense of hydropower profits either due to lost power generation or direct capital expenditures to mitigate project impacts. The net effect is less water in the river for restoration and fewer dollars for recreation facility improvements.

Deregulation also requires utilities in the transmission business to divest themselves of generating facilities. The new owners of these projects are not always familiar with hydro generation, the regulatory process, or dealing with a public that has a rightful share in the river resource. License transfers may equate to more compliance violations with the terms and conditions of the license. In addition, there may initially be less accessibility to flow information and project lands.

The hydroelectric utility industry is also capitalizing on the United States signing of the global emissions reduction agreement in December. The hydro industry is marketing hydropower as green renewable energy free of emissions. Not all hydropower is green and it is certainly not renewable. Hydro-

power impacts river systems and adjacent communities in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, all dams have a limited life expectancy. Many hydropower project operations can be improved in a fashion that minimizes the environmental and social impacts.

Contact Person: John Gangemi

## 8. North Fork Feather River, California

### Issue: Hydropower Relicensing

**Current Status:** The North Fork Feather River offers six separate Class IV-V whitewater runs encompassing 50 river miles. Surely a paddling Mecca worth placing on your paddling vacation list (See March/April 1997 issue). Or is it? Years ago, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) engineered a series of reservoirs, pipes, and powerhouses diverting water from virtually every mile of this 50 mile long river canyon. You can only count on whitewater flows during extremely wet storms, typically the winter months when runoff exceeds the capacity of PG&E's 12-foot diameter pipes and reservoir storage. As one boater stated in reference to the North Fork Feather, "PG&E giveth and PG&E taketh away."

PG&E operates three FERC licensed hydropower projects in the mainstream of the North Fork Feather River totaling six dams and seven powerhouses. Two of those projects, Poe and Upper North Fork Feather, start the relicensing process in 1998. These two projects contain four reservoirs, four dewatered river channels, and four powerhouses collectively. The license for the third project, Rock Creek-Cresta, expired in 1979 but has dragged out the typical five-year relicensing process for 19 years. The Rock Creek-Cresta project dewateres a nine-mile Class IV-V run and a five mile Class IV reach. American Whitewater, along with agencies and other conservation organizations, would like all three projects rolled into a single relicensing effort in a watershed-based approach.

Cumulatively, these projects degrade a significant length of the North Fork Feather altering riverine processes and curtailing recreational activities. The relicensing process offers a singular opportunity to require new operating conditions that balance power generation with non-power resource uses. American Whitewater is working hard to restore balanced use of the North Fork Feather River for whitewater recreation and other public uses.

Regional and national precedent: The hydropower projects on the Feather offer an excellent opportunity for a watershed-based relicensing approach. Combining these licenses also affords the opportunity to carry out a comparative study examining the economics of power generation verses the economics of water-dependent recreation. For boaters, a restored North Fork Feather River

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Contact: John Gangemi

## 9. Moose River, NY

### Issue: Access

American Whitewater is working on an action in New York State titled Adirondack League Club, Inc. v. Thomas Klingerman, et al. As characterized by the trial court: "The central issue in this lawsuit is whether the [South Branch of the Moose] River as it flows through plaintiffs [the Adirondack League Club, Inc.] property is a navigable waterway which is the criteria that defines the public's right of use." In a recent win, the court decided to adopt the "recreational use" test of navigability in determining the public's right of passage. However this decision is under appeal and it is anticipated that the "property rights" advocates will mobilize private clubs and large landowners to submit amicus briefs in support of the closure of such rivers. It is equally important that those interested in preserving the right to navigate such bodies of water must mobilize and submit amicus briefs in support of the defendants.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Bob Glanville at [rjglanville@phillipslytle.com](mailto:rjglanville@phillipslytle.com)



North Fork of the Blackwater

## 10. Federal Legislation:

### Issue: Overregulation and taxation by Congress

As Congress dives into the 1999 Budget and votes on this year's appropriations, we have observed a surprising interest in recreation. However we have also observed that Congress is passing legislation in an apparent vacuum and rarely consults with the recreationists that they are trying to legislate. As a result, American Whitewater is becoming increasingly active in Washington and we find ourselves lobbying the House and Senate on at least a weekly basis to have language cut, amended, or otherwise tweaked. One of the things that we have discovered is that it only takes 5 or 10 letters to put an issue on a Congressman's radar screen, and 20 to 30 letters or phone calls to influence his position. That is why it will be so important to get our member's assistance in contacting their Senators and Congressmen, and why we are developing a new listserver to update our members of upcoming elections, access

and conservation issues, and other relevant information. As our organization has grown, we have become better educated in the process of developing the laws that regulate us, and this has forced us to become more and more political.

Senate Bill 1693: Senators Thomas (R-WY), Bumpers (D-AR), and Murkowski (R-AK) ganged up and introduced this bill which is subtitled, *Vision 2020: National Park System Restoration Act*, "to renew, reform, reinvigorate, and protect the National Park System." The majority of this bill looks pretty good and should benefit our parks; however the cosmetic fluff hides a giant lemon that extends Fee Demo through September 30, 2005. This bill includes concession reform language that is much better than SB 1489 that American Whitewater helped to kill earlier this summer.

Teaming with Wildlife: This sorry excuse for a tax just won't die. It's been hammered by virtually every serious recreational group in the country, yet it gets so much money from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies that it can afford the best witch doctors in the country. This proposal charges an insidious tax on all "recreational" equipment, and hits everything from school backpacks to flashlights and basketball shoes.

The Murkowski Bill: Senator Murkowski (R-AK) is preparing an omnibus bill that might include funding for "Teaming with Wildlife" from a tax penalty on Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil drilling, this is preferable to the Teaming Tax discussed above. There is speculation that the bill might also include a dedicated fund for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) which has been robbed blind by the Congress as an artificial means of lowering the deficit.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Tom Martin, GCPBA at [tomhazel@grand-canyon.az.us](mailto:tomhazel@grand-canyon.az.us)



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## 11. Blackwater, West Virginia

Issue: Logging, water quality, aesthetic impacts, and access

A logging company, Allegheny Wood Products, purchased a 3,000 acre private inholding of the Monongahela National Forest. This land spans the lower portion and North Fork of the Blackwater Canyon. Timber harvesting has already begun on a portion of this property and there are concerns for future development on the rim. Environmental groups are protesting the purchase and expect to challenge the sale in court in September.

American Whitewater has worked with the landowner and Forest Service to ensure that boaters can continue accessing this Class IV-V run as well as the Class V+ North Fork. However, the owners of the logging company have only granted a temporary public easement through the Spring of 1999 with the hopes of pressuring the Forest Service into quickly completing a land swap for less sensitive forest lands. American Whitewater continues to work on a solution that protects the entire canyon.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Kate Goodrich with the USFS at 304-636-1800.

## 12. Kern River, California

Issue: Hydropower licensing and Access Fees

Current Status: The Kern River offers 85 miles of Class II-V whitewater in the southern Sierra. In total, there are 5 FERC licensed hydropower projects plus an additional multipurpose reservoir regulating flows in the Kern watershed. In the past year, two Hydropower projects have recently received licenses on the Kern River; Kern River No. 1 on the lower river and Kern River No. 3 on the upper river. American Whitewater was an active participant in both relicensings and ultimately appealed the final flow recommendations because the flows failed to meet the needs of the current whitewater use, let alone future growth in the sport over the next 30 years. American Whitewater anticipates a final flow schedule to be issued shortly by the Sequoia National Forest for Kern No. 3. The appeal process for Kern No. 1 is in the initial stages. The relicense process for two other FERC hydro projects begins in late 1999.

Several years ago, the Sequoia National Forest instituted a permit system for the upper and lower Kern. Boaters lacking a permit received a \$175 ticket. American Whitewater recently requested the Sequoia provide the number of user days on the Kern River distinguishing between the upper and lower. The Sequoia was unable to provide the numbers because the permits are not tabulated. What is the purpose of the permits?



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More recently, the Sequoia limited boater access on the popular lower river to a designated put-in and take-out located 14 river miles apart. Both locations require a \$5 parking fee. Accessing the river at any number of other roadside locations within this stretch results in a \$175 ticket. This access requirement greatly limits paddling opportunities. Boaters are required to paddle all 14 miles of the river or not paddle at all. As a result, weekday paddlers with time constraints can't run the popular lower "five" Class IV rapids. On top of that, commercial passengers use a separate put-in and take-out with no \$5 parking fee. Other than the parking area, the Sequoia provides no recognizable services for private whitewater paddlers on the lower Kern.

On the 26 mile Class V wilderness run known as the Forks of the Kern, the Sequoia instituted a permit system limiting private use to 15 boaters daily. Based on a study conducted in 1982, the permit system was put in place to minimize camping impacts to the river corridor associated with multi-day trips. At that time, many boaters took more than one day to run the 26 miles. The majority of private users in the 1990s view the Forks as a day run. Day use of the river has minimal impacts if any on the river corridor. The permit system on the Forks needs revision to reflect current use patterns.

Lastly, the Sequoia is currently considering instituting a fee demonstration program for the Kern River specifically targeting whitewater rafters and kayakers. Anglers, tubers, swimmers and other recreationists will not be subject to the fees. There is plenty in this Top 40 article on fee demo, but American Whitewater believes that before fees can be implemented, the managing agency needs to provide some benefit to those being charged. On the Kern, boaters are the only ones paying these fees, and so far the Forest Service has demonstrated no willingness to work with or benefit whitewater boaters

Contact: John Gangemi

## 13. High Water Closures

### Issue: Access

With El Nino raising water levels in 1998, boaters have butted heads with law enforcement agencies over the issue of high-water closures. Several of these closures have been loosely governed under broad "State of Emergency" declarations. The solution to this problem may need to be addressed on a state-by-state basis as many county authorities reveal little interest in protecting our ability to access our rivers and creeks during periods of high water.

California: In spite of strong laws in California relating to navigability, the Shasta County Sheriff has issued county-wide closure notices three times over the last four years. These closures have been arbitrary and lacked supporting justification. Unfortunately, the Shasta Sheriff holds an elected position and does not answer to the County Board of Supervisors. Based on meetings between American Whitewater, Shasta Paddlers, and the local authorities, our options appear to be limited to negotiating an agreement that would permit inadequate access or pursuing litigation against the Sheriff.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Kevin Lewis  
North Carolina: States of Emergency were declared on the French Broad, Eno, Flat, and Little Rivers. A local official ordered boaters off a river near Durham because of high water. His reasons for declaring an emergency reportedly included the statement that "there's a difference between whitewater and stormwater," and the hypothesis that stormwater is heavier because of an increased sediment load and can create a stronger undertow. This is obviously bogus and American Whitewater and the Carolina Canoe Club is working on educating the local authorities about real and imagined hazards on these rivers. The authorities' primary concern is for yahoos with limited experience.

Contact: Jason Robertson

New York: In June, several boaters were paddling the flooded Cattaraugus Creek when they were stopped by the police who said that

he was closing the river until the water dropped and there was enough room to pass safely under the bridges. The boaters left, but returned later in the afternoon after the river had peaked and begun dropping. As the boaters were taking off the river, a half-mile above one of the bridges, they were surrounded by squad cars. One of the boaters happened to be an attorney, and happened to be intimately familiar with NY State Law regarding navigability and police powers. He explained these powers to the police and was given five minutes to get out of town. However, several of the other boaters were detained as they were leaving the village of Gowanda and charged with disorderly conduct. American Whitewater has arranged to support their legal defense, and has asked that the charges be dropped. A court date is pending.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Bob Glanville at [rglanville@phillipslytle.com](mailto:rglanville@phillipslytle.com)

## 14. Yellowstone, WY

### Issue: Access

Though snow mobiling, motor boating on the lakes, backcountry hiking, hunting, and fishing are permitted, Yellowstone's rivers and creeks are closed to whitewater boaters. American Whitewater is finalizing a proposal for the Park that would open the rivers to boating on a trial basis over a 5-year period.

Contact: Jason Robertson

## 15. Meadow River, West Virginia

### Issues: Transmission Line, Hydropower, Extending NRA Boundaries

In last year's Top 40, we reported that American Whitewater had appealed a FERC decision to allow new hydropower generation on the Summersville Dam to run a transmission line across the Meadow River and up Glade Creek.

In the past several months, our appeal has been denied by the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court in Richmond, and in July FERC issued an Order Approving Final Transmission Line Design Plans. American Whitewater, again with local landowners and outdoor users, continues to fight this transmission line though the courts. The battle goes on!

Contact: Rich Bowers

## 16. Chattooga River, GA

### Issue: Protection from development threats and clearcutting



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**Current Status:** The Chattooga River is a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. As such, it is afforded some protection from development. Recently, the Chattooga watershed has been under siege by land speculators that are holding the forest ransom in the hopes that the USFS will purchase their property for more than fair market value. One of these gentlemen has strung chains across the West Fork of the river and barred folks from floating through his property. The Forest Service has responded with a lawsuit challenging the developer's action closing passage through a wild and scenic waterway.

However, our concerns also extend to poor land use management practices throughout the Southeast. There appears to have been a recent increase in the degree of clearcutting, both on private and public lands, and there are continuing problems with inadequate sewage treatment and water quality. The problem with clearcutting is that it results in significant increases in siltation, turbidity, and flash effects on streams and rivers in these watersheds. American Whitewater is concerned about clearcutting because it leads to increased flash flood phenomena including higher spikes in the water level, faster runoff, and more erosion. This has the effect of reducing the runnable window on these creeks and also leads to an increase of debris in the waterways. In the Southeast, rivers like North Chickamauga Creek, Big Brush Creek, and Rock Creek are examples of those being impacted, as is the Blackwater River in West Virginia. Concerns for sewage are self-explanatory; however sewage poses a significant hazard on Mill, Keyne's, and Wolf Creeks in WV.

**Contact:** Jason Robertson or Ron Stewart at [ron\\_stewart@baylor.chattanooga.net](mailto:ron_stewart@baylor.chattanooga.net)

## 17. Animas River, Colorado

### Issue: Proposed pump-storage Project

**Current Status:** In July, the Clinton administration voiced their opposition to Colorado Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell's proposed legislation for the Animas La Plata (ALP) pumped water storage project. Campbell's recent version of the proposed project, referred to as ALP Lite, would provide water to agricultural lands and municipalities in the Four Corners region as well as the Ute Indian nation. In 1988, Congress agreed to provide water to the Utes in exchange for native claims to water currently in use by farmers and cities in the Four Corners area. Opponents to the project say the proposal primarily benefits Anglo farmers and municipalities with little if any water benefiting the Ute nation. The proposal inefficiently subsidizes farming and promotes additional growth in the arid Four Corners region. Conservation groups have proposed a less expensive Indian only alternative that delivers water to the tribes or allows the



tribes to sell water stored in Lake Powell.

**Precedent:** Many view this as the last remnant of western water projects. Defeating ALP in its present form will send a firm message to the Bureau of Reclamation that the era of fiscally and environmentally irresponsible water projects is laid to rest.

**Contact:** John Gangemi or Kent Ford, [kentford@frontier.net](mailto:kentford@frontier.net)

## 18. White Salmon River, Washington

### Issue: Dam Removal, Access

**Current Status:** The White Salmon River appeared on American Whitewater's Top 40 River Issues for 1997. The issues remain the same although significant progress has brought us one step closer to a free flowing White Salmon River. PacifiCorp, the licensee for the hydropower project, issued a draft feasibility report for dam removal in June 1998. The preferred alternative proposes blasting a tunnel through the dam at its base, emptying the reservoir and allowing river erosion to remove the sediment deposited upstream of the dam primarily in the single flush of reservoir draining. The remainder of the dam would be removed after the reservoir drains.

Removal of the dam will allow upstream fish passage for the river's namesake salmon as well as downstream passage for whitewater recreationists. The run below the dam offers Class III paddling in ascenic canyon with one Class IV rapid. In addition, new rapids will form in the two miles presently inundated by the reservoir.

**National Precedent:** Condit Dam stands 123 feet high and 471 feet wide. This is a significant dam. The steps necessary for removal of a dam of this magnitude remain untested. Condit Dam will lay the legal, economic, environmental, and social groundwork required for dam removal. Furthermore, removal will set a decommissioning precedent for other hydropower projects across the country where the economics of electric power generation are marginal and the environmental and social impacts associated with current project operations are significant.

**Contact:** John Gangemi

## 19. River Modifications

### Issue: Altering river channels for fishery enhancement

**Current Status:** State and federal agencies are increasingly using artificial wood structures to improve degraded fishery habitat. The habitat degradation is the result of poor land use practices in the watershed from activities such as logging, mining, grazing, cultivated lands, roads and suburban sprawl. The large logs placed in the channel pose serious safety hazards for whitewater

recreationists. In other cases, agency personnel are advocating channel modifications for fish passage at naturally impassable barriers.

**National Precedent:** Modifying natural river channels for upstream fish passage introduces nonnative fish species to waters where they did not exist naturally. Natural barriers, like rapids and falls, allow other aquatic and semiaquatic species, normally vulnerable to fish predation, to exist. Furthermore, nonnative fish introductions routinely displace native fish species. For boaters, removal of fish barriers (read rapids) degrades the difficulty and challenge of the river. Many of the more significant rapids in this country are upstream fish passage barriers.

In the case of habitat improvement projects, artificial placement of instream structures creates severe safety hazards for boaters both at the placement site and in downstream locations where failed structures eventually lodge. Research has shown that artificial structures do little for native species and in most cases actually improve habitat for nonnatives, thus giving them a competitive advantage over native fishes.

**Contact:** John Gangemi

## 20. Blackfoot River, Montana

### Issue: Proposed Gold Mine

**Current Status:** The proposed Seven-Up Pete gold mine placed Montana's Blackfoot River on American Whitewater's Top 40 River Issues for 1997. Despite significant opposition including Bonnie Raitt's benefit concerts in Missoula and Helena, the proposed mine continues to progress, threatening the blue ribbon fishery and whitewater boating. The proposed gold mine entails a 1300-foot deep pit located in the river channel. Accidental spills or breaches of mine tailings will contaminate much of the length of the Blackfoot jeopardizing the health of boaters and aquatic organisms.

Last year, Phelps Dodge sold their interest in the mine to the smaller partner, Canyon Resources. Canyon Resources owns one other gold mine in Montana, the Kendall Mine near Lewiston that has been out of operation for two years due to water-quality violations. In July of 1998, Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issued a stop work order on the environmental impact study for the proposed Seven-Up Pete gold mine because Canyon Resources was delinquent on payments to conduct the studies. The delinquency raises questions about the financial future of Canyon Resources, the

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company's ability to operate the mine in an environmentally sound manner, and their ability to reclaim the land upon cessation of mining.

Several other factors have arisen recently that may make permitting this proposed mine more difficult. In June, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) upgraded bull trout from candidate to threatened status. The Service plans to review the status of west slope cutthroat trout in the near future. Both trout are native to the Blackfoot River. The proposed mine will have to ensure adequate protection for both species. Lastly, the Montana Environmental Information Center gathered enough signatures for a ballot initiative. Initiative 137 allows Montanans to vote for prohibition of new cyanide leach mines in the state. The proposed Seven-Up Pete gold mine will rely on cyanide leach technology.

Precedent: Passage of Initiative 137 will clearly protect Montanans from future impacts associated with cyanide leach mines. This initiative may serve as a template for other western states. The next step is legislative revision of the outdated 1872 mining law.

Contact: John Gangemi

## 21. Housatonic River, Connecticut

### Issue: Hydropower Relicensing

Current Status: Two hydropower projects are undergoing relicensing on the Housatonic River, Falls Village and Bulls Bridge. Flows from both projects effect whitewater boating opportunities in downstream reaches. The impact studies proposed in the initial consultation document issued by the licensee did not address the regional significance of the whitewater boating opportunities. American Whitewater, along with other conservation organizations, requested additional studies, particularly recreational studies prior to issuing a draft environmental assessment.

As reported in last year's Top 40, the whitewater release schedule, which coincided with summer power demands, was altered to address summer fish kills. Preliminary studies indicated that warm water released from the upstream reservoirs might be a factor. To date, no study has been conducted identifying the specific cause of the fish kills or linking fish mortality to recreational flows. Nonetheless, a combined river and reservoir temperature model, greatly limiting whitewater flows in the summer, now dictates releases from Falls Village power plant. The model is designed to keep river

temperatures less than or equal to 75 degrees. The Housatonic has historically been a warm-water fishery. The state fisheries agency along with local fishing groups has artificially propagated a cold-water fishery incapable of tolerating historic water temperatures in the Housatonic. The cold-water fishery functions primarily as a put and take fishery for anglers. The end result: river flows unfairly favor cold-water angling precluding whitewater use. American Whitewater, along with local paddling clubs and conservation organizations, will strive for equitable use of the river resource.

Precedent: All relicensing studies that ultimately dictate flow regimes must adhere to the scientific process and use peer reviewed methodologies. In addition, studies must be conducted that evaluate objectively all user groups use of the river resource.

Contact: John Gangemi

## 22. Bear River, Southeast Idaho

### Issue: Hydropower Relicensing

Three hydropower projects encompassing four dams are currently undergoing relicensing on the Bear River: the Soda project, the Grace/Cove project, and the Oneida project. Both the Grace and Oneida hydropower projects affect flows on downstream whitewater runs. The Grace project diverts up to 900 cfs of water from the 6.2 mile Black Canyon section. This Class IV-V run is only 2 hours from Salt Lake City. In most years, little or no water flows in the natural river channel. In May of 1997, American Whitewater conducted a controlled flow study to determine the optimum flows for whitewater (see July/August 1997 issue). As the license process progresses, American Whitewater is fighting hard to get these optimum flows regularly scheduled on an annual basis.

The Oneida project is a peaking hydro-power facility. Flows below Oneida Dam can fluctuate between 250 cfs to 3000 cfs several times in a single day. The Oneida reach is important Class II training ground a short drive from Logan, Utah. The Utah State University (USU) canoe club uses the reach regularly. American Whitewater and the USUCC requested a schedule of stable weekend flows of specific magnitude and duration. These relicensings offer a tremendous opportunity to add significant whitewater stretches in an arid area of the country. The draft license applications for all three projects are due in the fall of 1998.

Contact: John Gangemi

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## 23. Boundary Creek, Idaho

### Issue: New hydropower project

Current Status: Boundary Creek is situated, as the name implies, on the border between Idaho and Canada. This is the quintessential creek run: A ten-mile paddle with gradients fluctuating between 250 to 375 feet per mile. It's described as a single rapid, ten miles long. Besides creek boaters, Boundary Creek is home to a number of charismatic and sensitive fauna: bull trout, west slope cutthroat trout, harlequin ducks, woodland caribou, grizzly bears, and wolves.

Continental Lands Inc., a mining corporation with title to 200 acres in the Boundary Creek drainage, plan to file for a preliminary permit from FERC to construct a hydro-power generating facility on Boundary Creek. The preliminary permit is the first step toward getting a license to construct the project. Continental has already begun lobbying Idaho's congressional delegation to exempt the project from the permitting process. In June of 1998, Continental Lands tried to buy community support by donating 25 percent of gross revenue from the hydro project to the Boundary County School Board. The school board was asked to write a letter to Idaho's congressional delegation supporting the hydro project. Garnering enough bipartisan votes for a congressional exemption is unlikely even for Idaho Senator Larry Craig. Projects generating less than 5 megawatts are exempt from the FERC permitting process, however, state and federal agencies do submit recommendations for the terms and conditions for a project of this size.

This is not the first hydro proposal for Boundary Creek. A preliminary permit was issued to Dominion Hydroelectric in the early 1990s. Dominion gave up on the Boundary Creek project due to strong opposition from kayakers, conservation groups, and local citizens. Prior to the Boundary Creek permit, Dominion did construct a hydro plant on adjacent Smith Creek, also a premier steep creek run. The damage done to Smith Creek from the project helped ignite opposition to Dominion's plans for Boundary Creek from a broad constituency.

The Boundary Creek hydro project would require diverting water from a significant length of the kayak run. This loss of water would greatly impact bull trout, west slope cutthroat trout and harlequin ducks. Project construction and operation would disturb caribou, grizzly bears and wolves. The kayak season would be shortened significantly if not completely eliminated. Furthermore, it's unlikely this project will generate enough revenue in the deregulated energy market to amount to much of a payment to the Boundary County School Board.

Precedent: There is currently a surplus of electricity in the northwest. Boundary Creek, its associated species and recreational opportunities, on the other hand, is an irreplace-

able resource. The damages resulting from hydro projects are long lasting. In addition, exempting the Boundary Creek hydro project from environmental review sends a message to other potential hydro projects to attempt to do the same.

Contact: John Gangemi

## 24. Upper Ocoee, Tennessee

### Issue: River Flow, Economics & Future Improvements

1998 marked the first year of actual scheduled releases on the Upper Ocoee River, site of the 1996 Olympic Slalom event. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) negotiated with the Ocoee River Outfitters Association to provide 16 days of recreational flows on the Upper, with the Outfitters paying for 6 of these days. Considering that the EIS issued in 1997 suggested optimal regularly scheduled flows at 74 days, this agreement puts TVA far from the mark.

This section of river provides a unique opportunity to paddle an historic stretch of Olympic-caliber river. Unfortunately, only those visitors lucky enough to stop by during the 16 days of releases will see the river at its full potential. American Whitewater is exerting pressure on TVA to provide additional releases by lobbying legislators and working

to create a rodeo hole on the Upper to hold the Ocoee Rodeo. Releases on the Upper also help to relieve crowding on the Middle Ocoee.

Contact: Jayne Abbot or Rich Bowers

## 25. South Platte, CO

### Issue: Access

Private property owners and Denver Water Board (DWB) threaten access to the main stem of the South Platte River. Private fishing clubs have erected "fish habitat improvements" on the Cheesman section consisting of rebar, steel cables, and I-beams and also covered culverts with chicken wire creating a killing field for unwary boaters. The property owners have festooned the river with "No Trespassing" signs and harassed boaters with taunts and obscenities. In 1996, members of the Sportsman's Paradise charged two kayakers with trespassing for portaging the dangerous obstructions. Lawyers from American Whitewater's Stream Team successfully convinced the Park County District Attorney that Colorado boaters have a right of passage and portage, and he agreed to dismiss the charges.

In 1998, landowners also hung "No Trespassing" signs and a river-wide cable in the popular Deckers stretch above the confluence with the North Fork of the South Platte. Although the Douglas County Sheriffs De-



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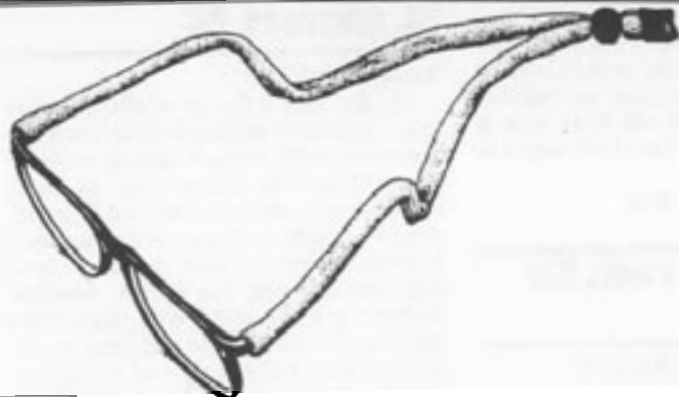


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partment refuses to ticket for floating through the property, the cable recently tripped up a Sheriff's Deputy from neighboring Jefferson County. Wanting to avoid any risk of trespassing, the Deputy took out above the cable, walked down the streamside road until he could no longer see "No Trespassing" signs and thought it was safe to put back in. He unwittingly crossed private property and received a trespassing ticket for his troubles. American Whitewater's Stream Team has offered assistance and will continue to monitor the Deputy's case.

The DWB owns vast amounts of property up and down the South Platte. This land was acquired with the intention of building more dams on this over-dammed river. Boating remains prohibited on most DWB property, thereby making the exit from the Cheesman Gorge problematic. The run below the Cheesman Reservoir requires a mile-plus portage to access the river and a mile-and-a-half slog back upstream with your boat at the Waterton Canyon take-out. Only the potential designation of the South Platte as a Wild and Scenic river has given boaters any reason to hope for the DWB to enter negotiations with river conservation groups and American Whitewater to ensure long-term access to the river.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Jay Kenney at [jaypkk@aol.com](mailto:jaypkk@aol.com)

## 26. Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness & Salmon River, ID

### Issue: Access

The US Forest Service (USFS) recently held a series of public meetings addressing boaters' concerns regarding the USFS Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. During these meetings the USFS admitted that they need to go back to the drawing board and work out a new proposal. In the meantime, the Northwest Whitewater Association (WA) is spearheading the adoption of "Alternative 6" as a compromise to the USFS's five alternatives. The boating community has done a magnificent job organizing and turning out boaters at the public meetings and the Forest Service has clearly heard our concerns. However, we need to follow up on these meetings and encourage the USFS to release a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). The public needs an opportunity to see the Forest Service's new "preferred alternative," and comment on it before it becomes final. The nature of the beast is that a final management plan is virtually unappealable because these are matters vested in the agency's unbridled discretion. So write to the Forest Service and ask them to release SEIS and email the Northwest Whitewater Association and ask them to send you a copy of Alternative 6.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Paul Delaney, Northwest Whitewater Association at [pwd@thefuture.net](mailto:pwd@thefuture.net)

## 27. Watauga, NC

### Issue: Access

Now that American Whitewater has purchased the take-out we find ourselves struggling to maintain boater access to the put-in. The state is widening Guy Ford Road and plans to build a new bridge here as well. This threatens our ability to park at the put-in throughout the two-year construction period. Normally the state is required to ensure that driveways and private parking remain open during construction and remain accessible after the project is completed. However, in this case, the landowner has little interest in whitewater and the state does not intend to provide parking. American Whitewater is working with the NC-DOT to ensure our access. In the meantime, we encourage you to shop at the landowner's gas station by the put-in and make your money count.

Contact: Jason Robertson

## 28. Mokelumne, CA

### Issue: Access

American Whitewater recently discovered that Calaveras County is claiming ownership of the right-of-way to the river at the take-out. This means that boaters may be able to use the bridge as a take-out again in the future. This would add more than 6 miles to this important Class II-III beginner run.

Contact: Jason Robertson

## 29. Auburn and Parks Bar Dams

### Issue: New dam construction

Current Status: Representative John Doolittle (R-CA), in defiance of local California public sentiment, continues to push Auburn Dam construction as the solution to the Sacramento areas flood control problems. Auburn dam would destroy miles of the North and Middle Forks of the American River corridor inundating whitewater rapids and trails. Representative's Matsui (D-CA) and Fazio (D-CA) proposed alternative flood control legislation repairing the existing Folsom Dam and upgrading levees. This latter proposal is widely endorsed by Sacramento residents residing in the American River floodplain as well as the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency and the city of Sacramento. Congress has already rejected the Auburn Dam in 1992 and 1996 because of its high cost and environmental impacts. Doolittle's current draft, which at press time was approved by the House Water and Power

Resources subcommittee, is surprisingly similar to these earlier proposals.

As if one new dam proposal for California isn't enough, the Yuba County Water Agency is proposing construction of Parks Bar Dam on the Yuba River supposedly for flood control although rumor has it additional water storage for southern California consumption.

Two other dams, Englebright and Daguerre Point, already exist on the Yuba River. The Yuba River supports the last self-sustaining population of steelhead trout in California and one of the last wild runs of Chinook salmon. Ironically, while the Yuba County Water Agency is proposing construction of the Parks Bar Dam, a number of conservation groups as well as state and federal agencies are considering removal of Englebright Dam for salmon and steelhead recovery. If constructed, Parks Bar Dam would inundate a 6 mile Class III-IV run on the mainstream Yuba and the last mile of two Class V runs on the Middle Fork and South Fork of the Yuba.

Precedent: Most reasonable conservationists have come to realize that large-scale dams fail to meet flood control objectives, are extremely costly, and cause irreparable environmental and social damage.

Contact: John Gangemi or Traci Sheehan at Friends of the River, (916) 442-3155.

## 30. Arkansas, CO

### Issue: Access

Finally, after a decade of effort, boaters have a temporary public put-in for the Numbers section of the Arkansas River above Buena Vista, Colorado. In order to access this land, boaters have to drive up a dirt road through private property to a narrow site squeezed between the railroad, river and private land; that lacks camping. The CWWA, American Whitewater, U.S. Forest Service, and BLM are committed to working on acquiring the Arkansas Placer, and getting road access reestablished on the east side of the river. One or both of these solutions would allow access and camping at more ideal locations.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Ric Alesch at [ralesch@worldnet.att.net](mailto:ralesch@worldnet.att.net)

## 31. Increased Motorized Use of Rivers

### Issues: Personal Watercraft, Jet Boats, Safety, Environmental Concerns

Last year, the issue was a proposed bill that would open Hells Canyon of the Snake (ID) as a jet boat speedway. While this issue continues, American Whitewater is now addressing the growth of motorized use on other rivers as well. Regardless of your position, motorized use on rivers will impact





paddling in areas such as crowding, environmental health, river safety, and wilderness ethics.

At the same time that motorized use is growing (and manufacturers start to target whitewater rivers like New York's lower Niagara Gorge), so is opposition from a number of diverse sources. Flaming Gorge has eliminated personal watercraft declaring that they are not appropriate with the wilderness designation of the area, and the National Park Service is contemplating a much wider ban in National Parks. As the Grand Canyon gears up for a new management plan, there is a growing desire among many to reduce or eliminate motors from the Canyon (at the same time, we are beginning to see park use of personal watercraft for rescue work).

**Contacts:** Rich Bowers, Ric Bailey at the Hells Canyon Preservation Council (541) 432-8100, and Dave Jenkins, ACA at (703) 451-0141, ext. 20.

### 32. Potomac River, MD and VA near Washington DC

**Issue:** High water access, running Great Falls, and water quality

**Access:** The Potomac was number nine on our list of issues in 1997 based on a series of high-water closures that culminated with the arrest of Olympic canoeist Davey Hearn in the Spring of 1996. Though the Maryland Park Police have not closed the river since Davey Hearn's arrest, they have threatened to do so on a regular basis and have pursued a closure under the US Coast Guard's authority; however the Coast Guard refused to acknowledge an interest in the issue leaving the Park Police looking for another legal basis for closing boating on the Potomac. Therefore, the river is open for boating... for now.

On a more positive note: Following persistent lobbying, boaters Steve Taylor and Mark Moore were invited to a Potomac River Safety meeting. These meetings are sponsored by the local authorities; however they have not previously sought public input from boaters. Taylor and Moore discussed deficiencies in the local preventative safety programs and suggested several solutions. As a consequence, boaters were asked to help draft an inter-agency agreement on drowning prevention on the Potomac. Notably, no experienced boater has ever drowned on the Potomac. Hopefully we can increase understanding among local authorities by convincing them to continue working with us, and incidents like Davey Hearn's arrest will become a thing of the past.

**Contact:** Steve Taylor, 301-299-8426

**Water Quality:** American Rivers and the American Canoe Association are working diligently to protect the water quality of the Potomac River. The river is threatened by tons of animal feces from chicken and pig farms. This pollution is a direct threat to the

millions of people who depend on the Potomac as a water supply, and for those of us who enjoy the recreational aspects of the river from its headwaters in West Virginia to its confluence with the Chesapeake Bay.

**Contact:** American Rivers, 202-547-6900 or American Canoe Association, 703-451-0141

### 33. Upper Youghiogheny River, MD

**Issue:** Reduced releases

Though there were a record number of boaters on the Upper Yough in 1997, and though they benefit the locally depressed economy, the power company scheduled fewer release days in 1998 than in 1997. The hydro-electric plant is up for sale and the company has not scheduled any releases that are not required under their permit in order to increase their peak production numbers and market value. This is in contrast to previous years when the power company has done more for whitewater recreation than required by the permit, even if it cost them money. The state-permitting agency has not been supportive of whitewater recreation and has not helped us in obtaining more releases. In the short term, the local state delegate, George Edwards, has asked the power company for two additional Saturday releases in 1998. Edwards was also helpful last year in getting the power company to announce all scheduled releases on the tape recording. Election time is approaching and Delegate Edwards deserves our support.

**Contact:** Jason Robertson or Steve Taylor, 301-299-8426, [potomacsurf@worldnet.att.net](mailto:potomacsurf@worldnet.att.net).

### 34. Nantahala River, NC

**Issue:** Access Fees and those lame armbands

As more than 20,000 boaters already know, you have to buy a multicolored wristband in order to access the Nantahala River as part of the Congressional Fee Demo program. The fee is only a dollar and the money goes to pay for those great new toilets at Ferebee and Nantahala Village. However this application of Fee Demo in the Nantahala National Forest is discriminatory. Whitewater boaters are subsidizing all other forest users by paying the Federal government for access to a river that is technically owned by the state and is a public resource. American Whitewater, the American Canoe Association, and the Georgia Canoeing Association met with the Forest Supervisor, John Ramey, to discuss our concerns. We proposed that the USFS change the title of the fee to a "Resource Impact Fee" rather than a "River Use or Access Fee," and that the fee be paid by all forest users during the months of April through September. Pay-

ment of the fee would permit you to use the mountain biking and horsepacking trails at Tsali, the bathrooms at Ferebee, the parking at the put-in, and the public take-out above Nantahala Outdoor Center. In the meantime, boaters should take advantage of those great new toilets, cause we bought them.

**Contact:** Jason Robertson

### 35. Upper Colorado, Gore Canvon

**Issue:** Access

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will be acquiring the Blue River Access to the Gore Canyon through a land exchange this fall. This is the second best alternative to access at the Highway 9 Bridge, which necessitates paddling more than three miles of flatwater. Unfortunately the best alternative, using the old put-in, is not an option at this time though American Whitewater is still researching a possibility of acquiring land here. The problem is that you need either permission or a land sale from the railroad Company and one of the private ranchers. We can potentially get one; but we can not guarantee the second.

**Contact:** Jason Robertson

### 36. Oregon River Rights Rule

**Issue:** Navigability

The Oregon River Recreation Rights (RRR) coalition is submitting a bill to the State Senate that would define the public's recreational rights on the State's rivers and streams. American Whitewater has been working with the RRR on drafting the language of the law. Kate Brown, an OR State Senator, supports amending and expanding the recreational rights and access of river users in Oregon.

**Contact:** Jason Robertson or The Association of Northwest

Steelheaders

PO Box 22065

6641 SE Lake Rd

Milwaukie, OR 97269

(503) 653-4176

(503) 653-8769 fax

### 37. Pennsylvania Fishing and Boating Commission:

**Issue:** Failure of State Boating

**Agency to Support Boaters**

The Pennsylvania Fishing and Boating Commission is supposed to represent boaters as well as fishermen; however this state organization has repeatedly neglected half its job and has done an inadequate job of representing flatwater and whitewater boaters. The Commission regularly negotiates for access for fishermen on private property

in the Lehigh Basin, Lackawaxen River, and Stoney Creek without negotiating portage rights, parking, or other comparable access for boaters. American Whitewater and the American Canoe Association are working together to ensure that this public agency performs its job and represents boaters as well as it represents fishermen.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Scott Cuppett, [Cuppett@jst.ctc.com](mailto:Cuppett@jst.ctc.com)

## 38. Horsepasture, NC

### Issue: Development Threats and Access

The Wild and Scenic Horsepasture River plunges an amazing 700 feet per mile for two miles through a dense rhododendron forest. The top drop, which is located 100 yards downstream from the Highway 281 bridge, is a 40-foot slide called Bust-Your-Butt-Falls. The Forest Service had an option for buying this land; instead it decided to a larger chunk on the ridge that the owner had threatened to develop for housing. Bust-Your-Butt-Falls' new "owner" has posted dozens of "No trespassing" signs around the falls, hired a full-time security guard to keep people off the property, had the county post "No Parking" signs, and even wrapped his property like a Halloween cupcake in bright orange snow fencing. American Whitewater and the American Canoe Association met with the Forest Service Supervisor, John Ramey, and discussed our concerns with him. We explained that this river receives regular, albeit limited, use by kayakers and that we expect the Toxaway, Horsepasture, and Thompson creeks to have more and more visitors as steep creeking's popularity rises. Our organizations have joined together and are challenging the landowner's ability to close access to a federally designated Wild and Scenic River. American Whitewater and the ACA feel that this case is extremely important at a national level, because of the fact that this is a Wild and Scenic River and that the designation implies a public easement along the river. Furthermore, the failure of the Forest Service in advocating for public access here is in direct contrast to their position on the West Fork of the Chattooga in Georgia where the USFS has pursued legal action against a developer for blocking access on another Wild and Scenic River.

Contact: Jason Robertson or Dave Jenkins with the American Canoe Association, 703-451-0141.

## 39. Wolf River, Wisconsin

### Issue: Surface Mining

Current Status: A proposed copper and zinc mine in the headwaters of the Wolf River threatens water quality in the Wolf River. The Wolf serves as a municipal water supply for a number of Wisconsin towns. The Wolf is



Bust your butt Falls on the Horsepasture

also Wisconsin's premier whitewater river with 30 miles of Class II-III water runnable nearly year round. Mining pollution would jeopardize municipal water supplies, paddler's health and a significant trout fishery.

The proposed Crandon Mine would extract sulfide ore from an 1800-foot shaft, then separate the copper and zinc as well as other precious metals in a chemical process, leaving the remaining ore as a waste product. The process requires highly-toxic chemicals. The proposal also requires pumping three to four million gallons of water daily from the mine shaft into the Wolf River. This water would be highly acidic, degrading water quality in the Wolf River to the point where it is uninhabitable for aquatic species. Leaks from the settling ponds would further degrade water quality.

An alliance of over 80 conservation organizations and 60 municipalities formed in opposition to the Crandon Mine. This alliance along with state representative Spencer Black and other legislators drafted a Mining Moratorium Bill for Wisconsin. The bill prohibits permitting sulfide mines in the state until the mining industry can identify a similar sulfide mine that has operated and been reclaimed for at least ten years without causing contamination of nearby water supplies. The citizens of Wisconsin pressured their state legislators to pass the bill in the winter

of 1998 and the governor signed it into law in April. The mining industry has yet to identify a sulfide mine operation that has not violated water-quality standards.

Passage of the Mining Moratorium Bill was a tremendous victory for the citizens and conservation groups of Wisconsin. The Wolf is not entirely protected from mining interests with passage of the bill. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), an agency somewhat vulnerable to industry lobbying due to the political appointment of the department's director, continues to devote DNR staff time processing the mining application in defiance of the bill. Some feel the Mining Moratorium Bill is only as good as the administration in the DNR. River activists should heed this warning and pay close attention to the Wolf River.

Precedent: The alliance of conservation groups, municipalities and state legislators were able to strengthen Wisconsin's mining laws despite a substantial public relations war chest mounted by the mining industry to defeat the Mining Moratorium Bill. This ability to influence public policy against great odds is a significant victory. Wisconsin's tough mining laws may serve as a template for western states.

Contact: John Gangemi

## 40. Pit River, California

### Issue: Hydropower Relicensing

Current Status: The Pit River in northern California has a relatively constant flow of 1200 cfs originating from springs in the highly fractured lava beds in the headwaters. Pacific Gas and Electric, recognizing the hydropower potential of the Pit 70 years ago, began constructing a series of projects diverting water from the river channel to powerhouses. In total, there are three FERC licensed hydropower projects on the Pit River encompassing six dams in the mainstem of the Pit and an additional three projects on tributaries encompassing three dams. These projects de-water or inundate under reservoirs 40 miles of Class II-V whitewater. Pit No. 1 is upstream most and first project up for relicense. American Whitewater recently submitted comments on the Pit No. 1 draft environmental assessment requesting regularly scheduled whitewater releases July through September. Pit Nos. 3, 4 and 5 project start the relicensing process this fall. Collectively, these relicensings offer an opportunity to restore 40 miles of the Pit River and provide predictable whitewater flows.

Precedent: The Pit is one of the few rivers in California capable of offering year-round whitewater flows thus being an important resource for late summer boating in this predominantly rain and snowmelt driven Sierra system.

Contact: John Gangemi or Kevin Lewis, [kewis@snowcrest.net](mailto:kewis@snowcrest.net) (530) 221-8722.

by Jayne H. Abbot

## American Whitewater/NOWR Event Manager

The spring and summer NOWR rodeo circuit has pulsed along to a growing heartbeat across American and into Canada as rodeo enthusiasts flourish and bring more and more attention to paddling through their gymnastic-like hole maneuvering. It's been an exciting fast-paced season for rodeo paddling.

### NOWR Events Results

The following are brief event highlights and the results from the top classes at each event through the end of May. Full NOWR competition results are located on the web site at or can be obtained by calling the events office at (828)645-5299.

#### Skyfest / June 13 - 14

This year marked the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Skykomish River Festival in Washington State and first year on the NOWR circuit. The weather held for a beautiful weekend filled with fun competitions and a great party

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Men

1. Dan Campbell
2. Corran Addison
3. Gavin Murdock

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Women and Junior

No class

#### Taylor River Rodeo / June 13 - 14

The Taylor kicked off the Colorado leg of the NOWR circuit. Unfortunately, the snowmelt was not cooperating so that the hole was more of a ledge but the competition was still exciting as the pros on tour showed their stuff.

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Men

1. Eric Jackson
2. Eric Southwick
3. Clay Wright

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Women

1. Jodee Dixon
2. Saskia Van Mourik
3. Brooke Winger

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Junior

1. Ben Coleman
2. Charlie Beavers
3. Sam Perry

##### Expert/Pro C-1

1. Alan Braswell
2. Eric Jackson
3. Shane Benedict

#### Headwaters/FIBARK / June 18 - 21

Again, the sun Gods did not produce enough heat to create a rush of snowmelt so that no rodeo hole materialized for the event. The organizer and competitors decided not to try to hold a rodeo and ran a Freestyle Through a Rapid event as an exhibition for the spectators. No points will be accumulated at this event towards the NOWR Point Series Championship.

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Men

1. Eric Jackson
2. Eric Southwick
3. Andy Bedingfield

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Women

No class

##### K-1 Junior

1. Brandon Lundberg
2. Charlie Beavers
3. Dave Zinn

#### Willow River Paddlefest / June 19 - 21

The hot tub was cranking and a welcome site to soothing tired rodeo bones at this Canadian event known for its good time.

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Men

1. Evan Mounsey
2. Cody Boger
3. Bart Wagner

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Women and Junior

No class

#### Animas River Days / June 27 - 28

The Animas held it's breath during the week before the event as the water flowed up and down, then up, then...while lower on Saturday for prelims than hoped for, Sunday finals were really exciting as the water peaked at an excellent level for the hole.

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Men

1. Rusty Sage
2. Eric Jackson
3. Jason Bates

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Women

1. Erica Mitchell
2. Jamie Simon
3. Saskia Van Mourik

##### Expert/Pro K-1 Junior

1. Nathan McDade
2. Charlie Beavers
3. Ryan Felt

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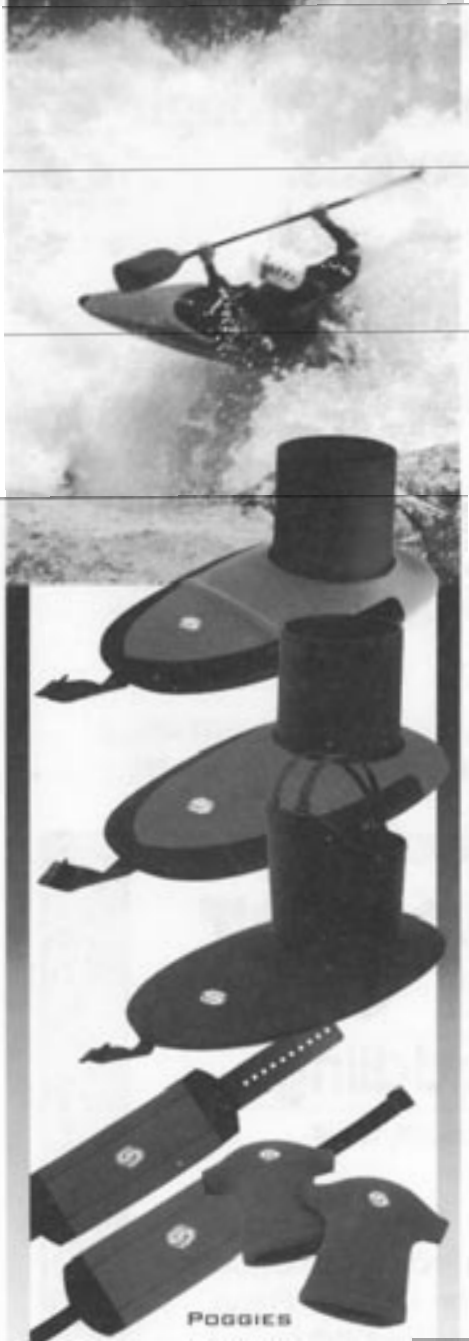
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# Upper Ocoee Rodeo Hole Update



Above volunteers pack, stack, haul and cover sandbags used to create "The Hole."

By Jayne H. Abbot, American  
Whitewater/NQWR Events Manager

As of July 12, 1998: On June 11-13, the hard labor began for the temporary structure to test our hole theory on the Upper Ocoee. Two days were spent filling over 500 sandbags and transferring to the hole site using volunteer labor. An Arkansas youth church choir group found plenty of community service work in this project! The Arkansas group filled about half of the bags then split for a run on the Ocoee leaving us, well, holding the bag. The USDA Forest Service trail crew saved the day by coming in to fill the remaining bags. The trail crew, made up of only six hearty folk, found this job "easy" compared to digging mountain bike trails out of the side of the mountain! Fencing was laid in on Friday to enclose all these bags.

On Saturday, boater volunteers from as far away as Arkansas (the Coosa River Pad-

dling Club/Lonnie Carden and family) came out to help load the bags into the site. Some final bolting and lacing together of the fencing and we were done in time to take a leisurely paddle down the Middle Ocoee that afternoon.

Sunday morning, in drizzling rain, we held our breaths as TVA's promised release came down to test our creation. Alas, what was built did not produce what we had hoped. We are not giving up though! We thought we had built the sandbags up possibly too high but in fact we need to go higher. As of the writing of this article, we hope to open up the fencing and add to the area and test again during TVA's scheduled release in August. More updates will be coming in the next issue of the journal.

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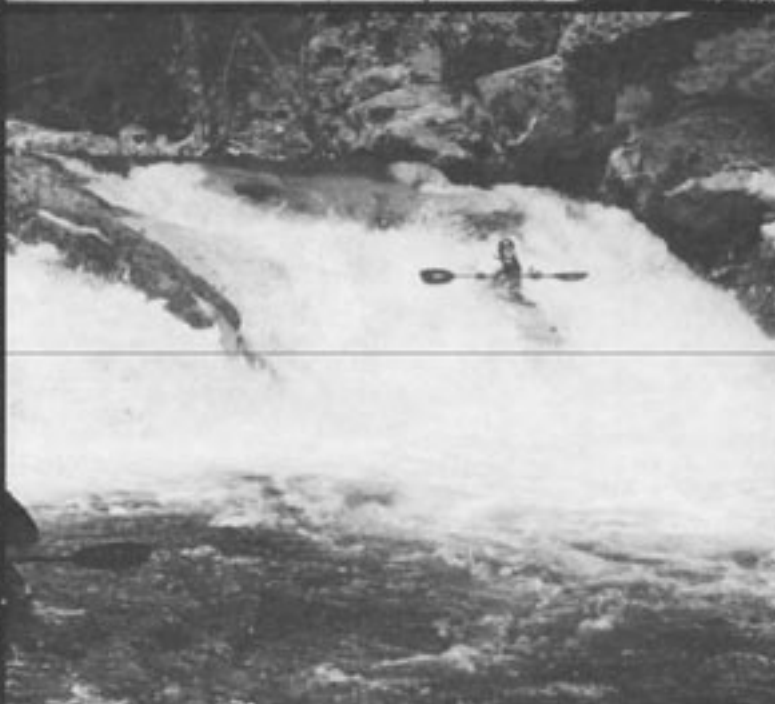


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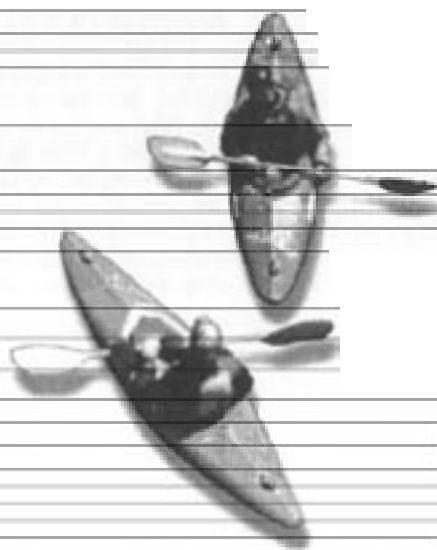
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# RACING TO ADVENTURE

## CORSICA



Rok and Edo argued over the idiosyncrasies of boat control as our ferry circled endlessly through the wind-chopped Mediterranean a mile offshore the Corsican city of Bastia.

No...the two Slovenians weren't debating issues of ferry angle, body lean or other factors relative to paddling a kayak down a whitewater river—a subject in which both men qualified as experts. But rather, the pair deliberated how the captain of the ship could best maneuver the 300-foot car ferry *Moby Magic* past the stone breakwall and into the narrow opening of the harbor.

We were scheduled to arrive in Bastia at 7:30 a.m. in time for a short afternoon run—but a rare southwest wind blowing at gale force had prevented the ferry from entering the harbor. And through the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, the boat retraced its circular path while Rok and

Edo fumed over the captain's lack of skill or nerve.

"The most effective method would be to approach the harbor in reverse..." Rok explained, adopting his best professorial manner, "the propeller is more efficient in that direction and..."

"No, no, no," Edo interrupted, "the captain should instead increase the diameter of his circle with each revolution, closing gradually with the harbor with each revolution..."

To my knowledge, neither Rok nor Edo had ever commanded a vessel larger than a Topo-duo...but no matter. Both men were scientists with PhDs in physics and accustomed in real life to solving esoteric puzzles involving lasers and X-ray tubes. I could imagine that once Rok and Edo had worked out a strategy for docking—they'd track down the captain, explain the proper procedure, and demand the opportunity to take the helm..

As for me—worn down by 36 hours of constant travel—I was content to sink back into my deck chair and watch the yellow hills of Corsica off the bow of the ship. After all, we had seven more days for boating. What did losing one afternoon matter?

A week later I would know. I would realize why Rok and Edo were so exorcised about our delay.

In Corsica—every minute is precious.

BY CHRIS KOLL

Left page, Top to bottom, left: Edo on the Rizzanese, Rok Sribar on the Rizzanese, Barry Tuscano on the Rizzanese • Photos by Chris Koll; Top to bottom, right: Chris Koll on the Rizzanese • Photo by Al Baker, Caron Koll on the Rizzanese • photo by Chris Koll, Ed Kiesa on the Rizzanese • Photo by Chris Koll

It is truly fortunate that Rok Sribar is blessed with a lively sense of humor...a deep streak of sentimentalism...a keen intellect...bounding enthusiasm...a sunny disposition and a caring and generous nature.

Because, otherwise one of his many friends would secretly pull his drain plug at the top of a Class 5.3 drop.

You have to understand—Rok is exceptionally talented in practically all of his endeavors. Consequently, when in a group of people he naturally emerges as a leader.

...Well—actually, he tends to take charge.

...Ahhh, maybe it would be more accurate to describe Rok as a little bossy.

...Hell, let's be honest—Rok just likes to give orders. A lot.

But just when you're ready to throttle the son-of-a-bitch for directing you how to paddle, how to load boats, buy groceries or some other activity you've accomplished in a satisfactory fashion for 20 years—Rok flashes his engaging grin and your irritation melts like a May morning frost.

And you realize—if Mussolini had been as likable a dictator as Rok, Italian trains might still run on time.

I had first met Rok eight summers before on the Black River in Upstate New York. He had just arrived from Yugoslavia to complete his doctorate at Cornell University. During the ensuing years, Rok and I often paddled together and he would regale me with tales of paddling in Europe—boating the rivers of his native Slovenia, the

Alps or in Turkey. But the most memorable stories revolved around exploits in Corsica.

Corsica, Rok explained, is a mountainous island off the west coast of Italy rising precipitously from the Mediterranean Sea. Corsica measures only 125 miles long by 50 miles wide, but despite its compact size, contains some 54 whitewater runs. And since the island's elevation leaps from sea level to a peak of 9,000 feet—every Corsican river features a certain amount of gradient—most of it of the extreme variety.

However, the whitewater season is typically limited to a period of three weeks—usually in April—when rain combines with snowmelt to transform Corsica's rivers from scenic trickles into awesome cascades.

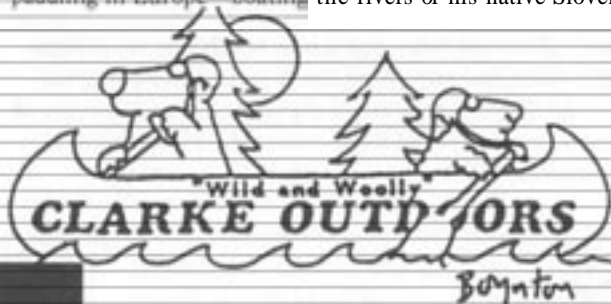
At that time, Rok said, the best boaters in Europe flocked to Corsica to challenge its technical Class 5 runs. And, Rok suggested, I might like to join him and his European paddling buddies during one of his semianual excursions to the island.

But for years I devised a variety of excuses to avoid accepting his invitation. For if truth be known—I was afraid. Because where I might cautiously sneak down a Class V drop (after careful scrutiny and agonizing analysis)—Rok simply would cruise up to the lip, take a quick glimpse downstream, and effortlessly carve up the rapid.

And considering that his erstwhile Euro paddling companions usually included former world champion Toni Prijon Jr., his brother Jurgen Prijon and other world-class boaters, I was concerned about getting—quite literally—into water over my head.



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Now, like I told you—Rok is a man who likes to have his way and so he continued trying to persuade me to go to Corsica. In fact, one year, he almost cornered me by cunningly inviting my wife Caron to come along as well.

But I outmaneuvered Rok again—this time by impregnating Caron with our first child.

Finally, last year, Rok came up with an excursion even I couldn't turn down. He proposed a party that would include his wife Sara—who was fluent in five languages—to serve as translator plus our Pennsylvanian friends Barry and Kitty Tuscano, upstate New Yorkers Ed and Tammy Kiesa, Al Baker and Caron and me.

I figured—Rok wouldn't trash us all, so how could I refuse?

Besides—Caron had the final say on the matter...and to make certain I wouldn't have a reason to back out this time, she withheld sex for six months before the date of the trip.

No one complained when Rok took charge of organizing the trip.

Not that we'd have a choice, of course. But Rok plunged into planning an itinerary—downloading plane schedules, evaluating carrying capacity of rental vans and researching the compatibility of roof racks.

The availability of boats and rental vans were limited in Corsica so we flew into Munich, Germany and drove an hour south to the charming Bavarian city of Rosenheim located where the river Inns flowed free of the Alps—home to the headquarters of Prijon kayaks.

And it was at the Prijon plant that we rendezvoused with the European members of our party—Jurgen Prijon, his friend Klaus, and Edo Govekar.

Jurgen was the younger son of Toni Prijon Sr.—founder of Prijon kayaks. Toni Sr. had emigrated from Slovenia when it was still part of the communist Yugoslavia in order to start his whitewater business. But he still considered Slovenia his native land and so consequently Rok was a compatriot. Rok had boated with the Prijons since his teenage years.

Rok's connection with the Prijons was fortuitous. Moments after introductions, we were loading Rockits from the plant's supply of demo boats (with Rok, naturally, providing technical advice) onto the racks of our rented VW vans.

After a quick lunch, a tour of the Prijon facility and a stop to exchange money, our caravan rolled out of town with Jurgen leading the way in his battered VW conversion van tricked out for camping and transporting kayaks.

According to my wife Caron, the next seven hours that followed was one of the most remarkable shuttle drives of her life. The autobahn followed the river Inns into Austria up a wide green valley flanked by towering mountains. Gradually, the Alps closed in around us as the thruway climbed steadily toward Brenner pass.

"Don't look, Chris, but there's a castle," Caron would say.

"Keep your eyes on the road, Chris, but look—there's a rapid in the river..."

"Look at these mountains!...There's a ski slope..no—not you, Chris."

Caron needn't have worried. Trying the stay on Jurgen's tail required my undivided attention.

With every incline, Jurgen would gun his van up to 100 miles per hour building up momentum to speed up the next hill. Then, apparently without a glance in the mirror, he would pass slower vehicles, pulling out in the left lane in front of an onrushing BMW or Mercedes and I'd gasp as time and again a sports car would come within a whisker of rear-ending the van. The best I could do was

follow at a discrete distance—keeping track of Jurgen by the kayaks on his rack rising above the line of traffic.

By the time we had crossed into Italy and were speeding downhill again through chalk-colored foothills terraced into steps and covered with rows of grape vines—I was numb. All I could do was rub my eyes, push my nose against the windshield and press my right foot to the floor.

Day slipped into evening. Our ferry was scheduled to depart from Milan at 11 p.m. and I began to worry, constantly checking my watch, calculating the remaining distance and pondering the distinct possibility of spending the night on an Italian waterfront.

Seven hours later—at precisely 10:50, we raced across the ferry landing and skidded to a stop before the ticket office. After five minutes of frantic negotiating, we had purchased our passage. Our three vans were the final cars to trundle up the ramp.

As I slumped across the steering column in both relief and exhaustion, I watched Jurgen and Klaus calmly disembark from their van. Carrying sleeping bags in one hand and liter bottles of beer in the other, they waved for us to follow

and headed toward a stair leading to the top aft deck.

And I realized—what seemed to me like a scene from a Mad Max movie was just another shuttle drive for them. The pace was set for our Corsican vacation.

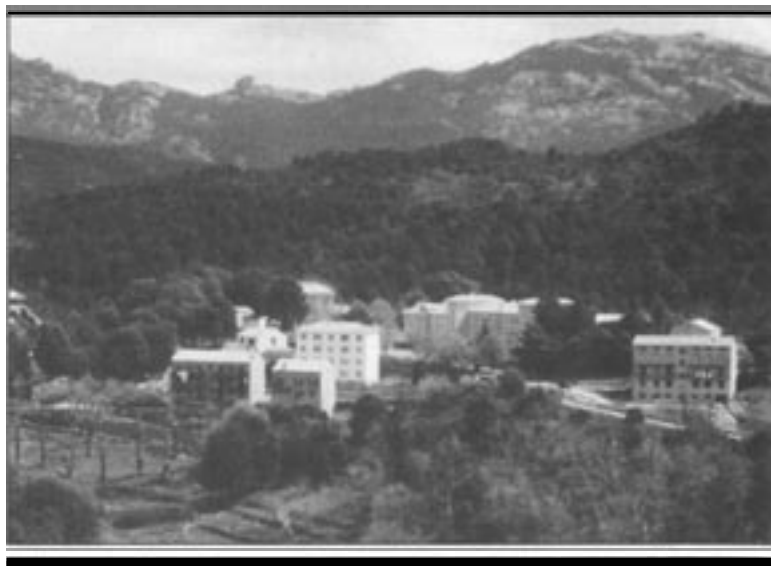
That is, of course, until contrary winds sentenced us to a Kafkaesque day of circling outside Bastia.

We had spent the night sleeping outside on deck chairs, awaking at dawn to witness a line of yellow hills that was Corsica rising from the sea. And as the island grew larger through the early-morning mist, Rok, Edo and the Germans strategized our whitewater tour.

Typically, Rok and Jurgen worked their way around the perimeter of the island in a counterclockwise direction utilizing many of the same campgrounds, shopping for food in the same groceries or buying baguettes in the same bakery season after season.

About the only things that changed each year were the rustic barrooms patronized after a day of boating. For some reason, they elected not to visit the same bistro twice...

Of course, each tour of Corsica was customized to fit weather and



water criteria — conditions even Rok could not control.

Although the Corsican boating season traditionally falls within a three-week period in April, sometimes the good water comes early or late. And like April boating back home in the Adirondacks, the weather can range from balmy shirt-sleeve temperatures to nights so cold—as Rok recalls—that even the wine freezes.

According to Jurgen — we had caught a break. Spring had arrived late in 1998. Just a week prior to our arrival, cold weather had locked up flows almost everywhere on the island. In fact, earlier in the week, a heavy storm had dumped several feet of snow in the higher elevations.

But rain and warm temperatures followed the blizzard and the rivers were on the rise. We could expect moderate water levels with a wide variety of runs to choose from.

"We'll start on the Asco in the afternoon after we dock," Rok promised. "The Asco is a good warm-up run and we can drive there in an hour."

But by two in the afternoon with the ferry still chasing its own wake—even Rok had given up hope of boating that day and we opened the first bottle of Italian wine. Several more followed along with a picnic of cheese, crackers and German sausage in kind of a poor man's version of a Carnival cruise buffet. I was so engrossed in the extraction of the cork from our final bottle that I failed to notice that the ferry was finally sliding between the stone walls of the breakwater.

Al Baker on the Rizzanese  
Photo by Chris Koll



But Rok didn't.

"We're here," he cried, jumping to his feet. Rallying the troops, he led us down through the five levels to the car deck. By the time the ferry was tethered to shore we were in the vans with the motors running.

The standard rule for disembarking from a ferry is first on—last off. But that didn't apply to Rok—and by association, to us. Disregarding the parking attendants, we hastily backed off the boat the moment the ramp came down. Within minutes, we were roaring through Bastia's narrow avenues heading toward the craggy heart of the island.

## Our race to savor Corsica had begun.

I awoke to bright sunshine and a blinding headache at our first night's campsite along the banks of the Golo River upstream from the village of Ponte Leccia. The previous evening was just a blur—I vaguely remembered a frenzied stop at a European version of a supermarket in Bastia. Rok and the Germans finished shopping in five minutes, quickly piling their cart with packaged pork chops, cases of beer and bottles of wine.

The women shopped a little more judiciously—planning balanced meals on the fly—while the Europeans waited impatiently in the parking lot.

"How can we eat all this food?" Rok snorted as we loaded bag after bag of groceries into the vans.

Of course, two hours later at the campground after the last of the cutlets had been consumed, Rok, Edo and the Germans lined up for bowl after bowl of vegetarian chili and a pasta dish while washing down the meal with copious quantities of wine.

"We never eat this much on a Corsica paddling trip," Rok said—but I noticed his comment was an observation...not a complaint.

Rok had warned me that one of the most challenging aspects of boating with Europeans would be keeping pace with their wine consumption. "They love trashing new boaters to Corsica," Rok said, "if not on the river...then around the campfire."

Consequently, Al Baker, Ed Kiesa and I had been practicing hard throughout the early season, concluding our training runs on the Moose River with extensive work-outs with the wine rack at my camp in Old Forge, NY.

So I fearlessly joined the first night's celebration — matching Edo, Jurgen and Klaus bottle for bottle. And I was astonished to awaken feeling like a well-beaten rug.

"It must be just jet-lag," I thought to myself.

We breakfasted on baguettes fresh from a local bakery while outfitting our Rockits and stretching out the kinks. Finally, after two days and 6,000 miles of travel, we were about to hit the river. We dragged the boats across a meadow and slid into the green water of the Golo.

Even though the Golo was one of Corsica's biggest streams — the largest river we would paddle all week—it was still a narrow, intimate creek with a volume no more than 500 cfs. We would paddle 20 miles from our put-in near the center of the island to a takeout within sight of the sea.

"This is just a warm-up river," Rok assured us. "It is nothing like most Corsican rivers..."

In actuality, the Golo started with the feel of a western river—it reminded me of the First Box of the Piedra—a shallow, fast-flowing torrent with plenty of surfwaves but no significant drops. We made quick time covering a third of the run in the first hour.

But then the character of the river changed abruptly as the Golo narrowed, necking down to a deep channel only five feet flowing between enormous granite boulders while flushing over five-foot ledges and down steep, sliding chutes. While the difficulty of the river never exceeded Class III, Al, Ed, Barry and I marveled at the geological splendor of the run.



The miniature gorge ended and the character of the river changed again—this time to a nastier disposition. We carried a dam perched over a sharp drop and then scouted a horrible two-tiered falls where the river tumbled 20 feet over a 50 yard stretch.

Jurgen and Klaus immediately started to portage on the left and that was enough for most of us—we followed their example and shouldered our boats. All of us, that is, except Rok and Edo who lingered behind carefully plotting a route through a daunting approach and past the terminal bottom hydraulic.

Edo pushed off first, perfectly utilizing a flat ski-jump rock to boof the first ledge and then drove left to nail the tongue that barely avoided the hole. Then Rok duplicated Edo's line, making the run look easy—but not so simple as to encourage the rest of us to carry back up and test our luck.

Especially after what transpired next... Charged by his successful run, Rok attempted to ferry across the river using the backwash of the hole. However, Rok ventured a little too close to the hydraulic and was abruptly sucked in.

Rok's boat immediately commenced a sickening ballet, tumbling end over end in the maw of the hole. After a minute of heroic surfing, Rok and his boat inexplicably disappeared beneath the foam pile. We watched in horror for another 30 seconds but saw only empty water.



Barry Tuscano on the Travo  
Photo by Chris Koll


Finally, to our relief, Rok bobbed to the surface 20 yards downstream. Ed paddled out to offer Rok a grab-loop but just as he approached the soggy Slovenian, Rok disappeared under a swirling eddy line that fed into an undercut. Again, we experienced another 30 seconds staring at an empty river before a semiconscious Rok emerged another 20 yards downstream.

After a 10-minute rest, we finished the remainder of the run with a somewhat chastened Rok. And the rest of us learned that while the Golo might not look like a typical Corsican river—it had reminded us of a valuable lesson about boating on the island—or about negotiating whitewater anywhere...that unexpected dangers can emerge around every bend of the river.

Rok's narrow escape inspired another lively celebration 'round the campfire that night. The Europeans prepared their traditional dinner of cutlets and wine—but were open-minded enough to devour the vegetarian fare prepared by the Tuscanos.

I chose to avoid the wine that night. It must have been that damn jet-lag.

We awoke to another glorious, golden morning. By the time Rok arrived back in camp with his bag of breakfast baguettes, the bright sun had burned away the morning frost and promised a warm afternoon.



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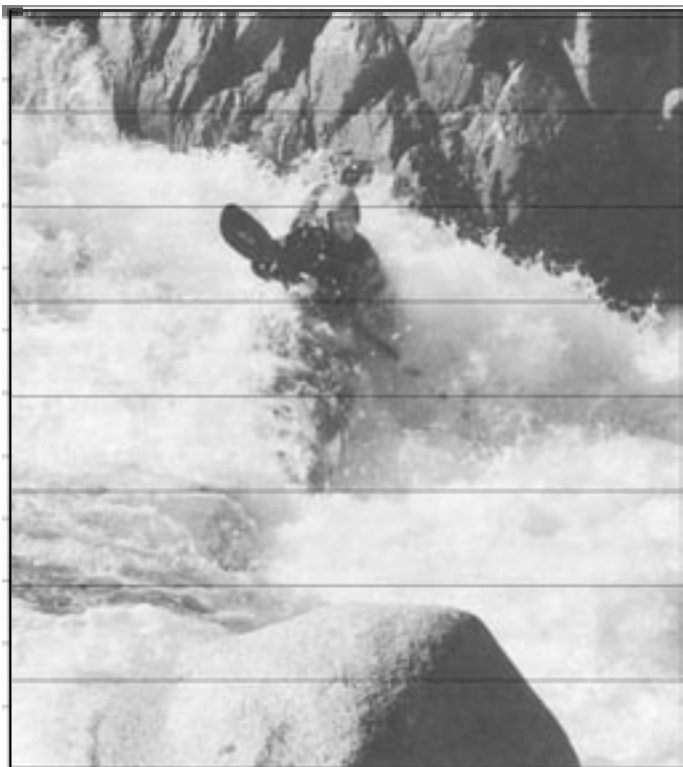
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Al Baker in the Trow  
Photo by Chris Koll

Our plan was to run two rivers that day, so we left camp early, briefly heading north on a primary two-lane highway before turning west on a mountain lane that paralleled the Asco River.

The road narrowed into a single track carved into the flank of a rocky defile. Far below, the Asco was a white sliver frequently disappearing among a maze of boulders. Straight ahead of us, the shoulders of the gorge framed the snowcapped summit of Monte Padru rising up over 7,000 feet and we climbed toward the peak around twisting, hairpin turns.

The further we drove the more the road deteriorated. The only presence of civilization was a single electrical line strung between precast concrete poles and an occasional husk of a wrecked vehicle where the left shoulder of road tumbled away in a 100-foot cliff.

But after 10 miles, we rounded another hairpin curve to find the picturesque village Asco, composed of neat stone houses plastered with white stucco perched on the side of a mountain. The paved road veered away from the river and we turned down a gravel lane that led to a parking area by the river next to an abandoned stone-arched bridge.

"When was this bridge built...and why was it built?" I asked the Europeans. "And why on earth did people build a town here, in the middle of nowhere? How do they live, out here?"

The Europeans just rolled their eyes and their expressions reminded me of my own reaction back home in the Adirondacks when queried by tourists from New Jersey. So I just shut up. After all—this was a paddling trip.

And paddle we did. The Asco was a tiny stream with maybe 200 cfs of emerald green water flowing nonstop over five-foot ledges, funneling through narrow slots and tumbling down shallow slides.

With Jorgen in the lead, we charged down the creek, boofing over countless small drops, rushing from eddy to eddy through a narrow gorge bordered by sheer rock walls. None of the individual rapids exceeded an easy Class IV in difficulty, but the unrelenting gradient

required a seat-of-the-pants style of boating, banging off rocks and scrambling through obstructed passages.

Jorgen was intimately familiar with the run and we paddled without stopping, passing other small groups of boaters scrambling over the rugged shore to scout.

The pace was particularly uncomfortable for my wife—a strong, technical paddler who prefers to carve exact lines through rapids.

"Everything is blind. I can't see the bottom of the drops," she complained, "All I can do is watch where the person in front of me enters the rapid."

"If we scouted every blind drop, we'd be on this river all week," I reasoned. "You've got to trust your companions."

"You want me to follow Rok?"

"I want you to follow Jorgen."

And so we did. Two exhilarating hours later we emerged from the shadow of the gorge back into the warm sun at the takeout.

While we waited for the shuttle vehicles to return, we queried Rok about the Asco: was this a typical Corsican river?

"Oh—no, no. The Asco is just a warm-up. The other rivers will look like the Asco...with larger and more difficult drops."

Just how more difficult we were about to learn.

It was late afternoon before we put on the Vecchui. We were just south of Corte—the capitol city of Corsica—and a highway paralleled the run, but after scrambling down a steep talus slope to the river and into the ominous shadows of the gorge, I felt a sense of foreboding as we slid into the water.

The Vecchui was a larger river—perhaps 500 cfs in volume—with steep, constricted Class V drops reminiscent of West Virginia's Bottom Meadow. And like the Meadow, practically every big drop featured an obvious undercut, pinning rock, siphon or some other hideously dangerous obstacle. Jorgen again took the lead—and his deliberate demeanor in approaching the rapids only added to the menacing atmosphere.

We negotiated several difficult drops—one that resulted in a swim for Klaus—before Jorgen waved over to a tiny eddy on the left shore.

"We walk here," he said. "It is very dangerous here. The water goes under rocks."

Like almost Corsican portages, the going was not easy. The boulders along the river bank were rugged and slick while further ashore the undergrowth was thick and tangled. And every plant in Corsica seemed to sprout thorns.

I shouldered my boat and carefully picked my way over the rocks a few feet above the rushing river. Midway through the carry, my feet slipped out from underneath me and the weight of the boat pulled me backwards. I executed a perfect backflip and plunged into the water.

I surfaced and frantically clawed at a rock, trying to scramble back on shore as my boat floated away. All I accomplished was leaving tracks from my fingernails on the granite. I flushed over a small ledge and there was Al Baker, paddle extended, to fish me to safety.

It took me half an hour to claw through the brambles to a point an eighth mile downstream where Rok and Jorgen had chased down my boat. But I had little time to relax—at the very next drop, Jorgen pitched and immediately exited his boat and hastily swam to shore.

For good reason. Jorgen's boat floated downstream for 20 yards before disappearing into another siphon under a car-sized midstream boulder.

The siphon ate Jorgen's boat like a snake swallowing an oversized mouse. The Rokit was drawn into the siphon a bite at a time until the entire boat vanished beneath the boulder.

Barry and I ran the drop to the left of the boulder and eddied behind the rock. Barry climbed up for a closer view and his jaw dropped in a classic double-take.

"It's like a four-foot wide toilet bowl flushing under the rock," Barry yelled. On shore, Jorgen slammed his hand onto his leg in disgust and headed up the hill to the road.

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But just then, like a Polaris missile rising from the sea, Jurgen's Rockit erupted from underneath the water behind the boulder. It had survived the subterranean experience without a scratch or crease.

Jurgen returned to the river and our sobered group continued downstream. The rapids abated by a degree, but I still struggled for clean lines. I was tiring—as much from nervous energy as paddling two rivers in a day. And even Rok and Edo appeared pleased when the take-out bridge finally appeared.

As we waited for the shuttle, Rok recounted earlier adventures on the more difficult Upper Vecchio.

"It was like what we just did...except the drops were bigger and they were more frequent," Rok said. "I never did finish the run. It got too dark and I had to climb out with my boat. It took me three hours..."

"But what was funny was you were less than a kilometer from the take-out," Edo finished. "We did it the next year and saw where you took out."

"The level might drop a little and we can try again," Rok said.

God—I thought—I hope not.

Of course, I would have preferred to accompany Rok on the Upper Vecchio at flood than ride in a van with Rok behind the wheel. That was the uncomfortable position I

found myself returning from the Vecchio as Rok negotiated the road's hairpin curves like it was his personal Grand Prix course.

While riding with Rok, I was more terrified than at any time on a river.

Rok liked to utilize both lanes to maintain speed while rounding the corners. He'd enter the curve in the middle of the road and then swoop left or right with our tires chattering and centrifugal force tilting the van into a pronounced list.

"Americans really don't know how to drive," Rok pronounced as he gunned the van up to 70 miles an hour.

I would have argued the point, but I was too busy trying not to puke.

We broke camp the next morning driving down from the mountains in the center of the island toward the eastern coast. The road paralleled the Tavignano River—a Class II-III run—and we saw plenty of intermediate boaters and a few rafts running shuttle.

The road was flat and smooth along the coastal plain and I—yes, after the previous evening, I had insisted upon driving—cruised along at 90 mph. We passed by the ancient Roman city of Aleria, acres of olive groves, and sunwashed Mediterranean villages of Italian architecture.

On our left the calm blue waters of the Med stretched out to the horizon while to our right a line of snow-covered peaks rose abruptly to 7,000 feet.



Juraen Priion on the Travo  
"Photo by Chris Koll"

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## RACING TO ADVENTURE

# CORSICA

After a stop for groceries at Ghisonaccia—wine and cutlets for the Germans...three cartloads of provisions for the rest of us—we turned inland toward the Travo.

In the deep, clear eddy below the bridge at the put-in, the water of the Travo shimmered intensely green in the bright April sun. Only small ripples from the current obscured our view of the streambed—10 feet beneath the surface. Just downstream, the river tumbled over a short slide providing a startling contrast where snow white foam erupted from an emerald pool. The vivid hues of our blue and red kayaks only added to a scene of riotous color.

Within sight of the bridge, the Travo commenced its unrelenting descent to the sea. It reminded me of West Virginia's Upper Blackwater—a narrow, technical stream of around 300 cfs with never more than 20 yards between drops. But the guts of the Upper B lasted only two miles—the Travo fell away for more than seven.

The frequency of rapids made scouting from shore impractical—typically Jurgen or Rok or Edo would take the lead, eddy at the top of a horizon line, and choose a route down a series of 20-foot slides or 10-foot waterfalls. I remembered my advice to Caron—trust your companions—and followed their lines.



Rok Sribar on the Travo  
Photo by Chris Koll

Of course, once committed to a drop, a certain amount of scrambling was required, especially when the bottom of the drop was seldom visible from the top. Every rapid demanded decisions made on the fly in order to navigate through a maze of slots and over blind ledges.

Fortunately, the river was seldom pushy and lines through significant drops were obvious. And after the first few miles—even if we weren't growing comfortable with bombing down a gradient nearing 200 fpm—at least we weren't so intimidated.

Even so—the river remained exquisitely technical and some impact on rocks was unavoidable. Ed, Klaus and I all found ourselves momentarily broached or pinned at one time or another during insignificant rapids..

However, midway through the run, a skull and crossbones emblazoned on the rock face of the right shore indicated a rapid that was anything but innocuous.. Jurgen eddied on the left, scrambled out of his boat and led us on an arduous portage climbing over

car-sized boulders.

"There was a death here," Rok explained, pointing to narrow chute spilling 12 feet onto a jumble of rocks.

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The rugged portage path continued for 20 more yards before suddenly ending against a sheer cliff 20 feet above the river. Jurgen handed his boat and paddle to Edo, leaped off the precipice into the pool below, and swam to the opposite shore. One by one, we launched our boats off the edge. They planed across the water to where Jurgen waited to haul them ashore.

The paddlers followed until only Barry and I remained. "The pool is only five feet deep," Barry warned. "Don't go too deep"

I just stared at Barry. At 6'-4" tall and pencil thin, the prospect of jumping into a shallow pool should have agitated Barry more than me. But then, considering we were marooned in the middle of an isolated gorge, neither one of us had any better options. Spreading my arms and reminding myself to trust my companions, I stepped off the edge.

The next day we crossed the rugged spine of the island following a road barely wide enough for a single vehicle. Rounding every blind curve was an act of faith and I frequently leaned on the horn to alert possible oncoming traffic.

Each turn revealed stunning new vistas of obdurate granite pinnacles as the road rose to the Col de Bavella and then dropped down to the village of Zonza. Jurgen led our cavalcade, navigating by memory the backroads leading to the put-in to the Rizzanese.

Either Jurgen's memory had slipped somewhat—or he was just giving us an additional opportunity to savor more of the magnificent countryside—but we spent an hour winding along the crests Corsican foothills, searching for the side road that would lead down to the river.

And every 10 miles or so we'd come across a village perched

precariously on the hillside. The towns were typically arranged in terraces on the slope of the hill and composed of narrow two-story houses, a church, a bakery, a butcher shop and a bar—all constructed of masonry and parged with white stucco. The buildings appeared ageless and the stone structures seemed to blend naturally into the landscape.

"I'm not going to run a 40-foot waterfall," Caron announced. "I can portage it—right?"

Klaus wrinkled his brow and replied, "Is possible."

Reassured, Caron pushed off and joined the rest of us on the Rizzanese.

The Rizzanese was perhaps the most recognized Corsican river because of its often photographed runnable waterfalls. Like the Bottom Moose—our home river in New York—the river features spectacular vertical drops and slides separated by calm pools.

"It is fun to fly, eh?" asked Jurgen.

Well, yes—so long as you launch in the right spot. And scouting the first major drop—hitting the appropriate boof shelf appeared problematic.

The opening two miles of the Rizzanese had consisted of easy warm-up rapids and minor slides with a manageable flow of between 300-400 cfs. But then the gradient increased as we entered a gorge. Before us lay the first of many horizon lines.

The line through the drop required threading down the left through a maze of rocks and then powering right to ski-jump off a flat rock over a 12-foot falls. Failing to make the move right would result in being swept into a folding tongue of water feeding the worst of the hydraulic.

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As usual, Jurgen showed the way, effortlessly cleaning the drop. The rest of us followed with varying degrees of success but Caron ended up riding the tongue down the left straight into the maw of the hole.

Caron's boat disappeared into the foam then reemerged in a powerful backender that completely cleared the water. She paddled to shore amid our appreciative hoots to repair her backband — ripped from the boat by the impact.

Just downstream lay the crux of the run—three consecutive waterfalls where the river dropped 80 feet in an eighth of a mile. We ran the opening 20-footer and reassembled in a broad pool. Before us, the water dropped away over a smooth lip that stretched from cliffs on both sides of the river.

"Where's the portage?" Caron asked anxiously, and Klaus simply pointed to the left bank. Caron stared at the shore as if betrayed. A portage might be possible—but a carry was certainly not probable. There was a likely boulder for scouting or observing the first few probes—but a portage would require an arduous trek to the rim of the gorge and then back down to the river.

"Where can I take pictures?" I asked Jurgen.

"From below," he said. "Follow me."

I had never run a 40-foot falls without scouting. Hell—for that matter, I had never run a 40-foot falls. Suddenly, my admonition to



Ed Kiesa on the Travo  
Photo by Chris Koll

trust your companions seemed somewhat inadequate...

Nevertheless, I trailed Jurgen down the right a few feet from the face of the cliff. And as I neared the lip, I realized I was about to plunge off the equivalent of a four-story building.

The first 12 feet weren't completely vertical but a severely pitched slide that angled my boat perfectly for the remaining free fall. The plunge seemed to last forever before my boat nosed into the foam pile with a surprisingly soft landing.

Jurgen was right. It was indeed fun to fly.

Perched on a rock below, I snapped picture after picture as our friends ran the drop until looking through the view finder—I realized the red Rockit approaching the lip belonged to Caron. With a shrill shriek that penetrated even the roar of the falls, she floated over the precipice emerged at the bottom with a sheepish grin.

"I thought you said you weren't going to run it," I accused her.

"I wasn't. But after watching everyone else... it looked like too much fun."

Ed Kiesa was the final boater remaining at the top. But his approach was too far to the right and his Rockit beached on a shelf with the nose

of his boat sticking out over the edge of the waterfall.

From below, we hooted with laughter as Ed shrugged his shoulders and attempted to push himself free with one hand while hanging on to his paddle with the other.

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Ed Kiesa running a 40' drop on the Rizzanese  
Photo by Chris Koll

"I don't think he likes having to sit there staring at a 40-foot drop," Barry observed.

"But I don't think he's in much of a position to change his mind," Al said.

After we ran the third waterfall—a twisting 15-foot cascade—and at the bottom, Edo informed us that the run was practically over.

"Five more miles—but just little falls, all Class 3," Edo said.

Consequently, we lagged behind the Europeans, bouncing through easy rapids, enjoying another spectacular sunny afternoon.

But then we encountered another horizon line and without the benefit of our guides, we negotiated a juicy 10-foot slide. The drops continued before culminating in a steep, technical sluice dropping 15 feet through a series of narrow slots.

At the bottom, Caron turned to me and asked, "This is all *Class III*?"

"Old stuff, I want to see some old stuff," I told Rok. "I'm in Europe—I want to see some bastions or castles or ruins. You know—old stuff."

We were down to our final two days before catching the ferry back to the mainland and I had yet to mail a postcard, buy a souvenir, sip a leisurely beer at an outdoor cafe or just play the role of Ugly American and offend the natives.

And with Al and the Europeans planning an easy day of boating on the Class 4 Travo River—Ed and I opted to blow off paddling and spend the day with our wives touring Ajaccio—the island's largest city. Besides, the time off would allow us to recharge before tackling the Liamone—the longest and toughest run of our trip—planned for our final day.

We covered most of the city on foot inside of three hours. The main boulevard was a broad, tree-lined thoroughfare filled with tiny sedans and motorscooters weaving in and out of traffic. But the sidestreets were narrow, intimate alleys between two or three-story buildings all constructed of stone or masonry.

We paused outside the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, strolled around the limestone fort that guarded the harbor, quaffed Piedra beer (a hearty beverage of nearly 7% alcohol brewed in Corsica and flavored with chestnuts) at a cafe overlooking the water, chowed on Corsican pizza and several other entries picked blindly from a menu we did not understand, and guffawed at the platform sneakers

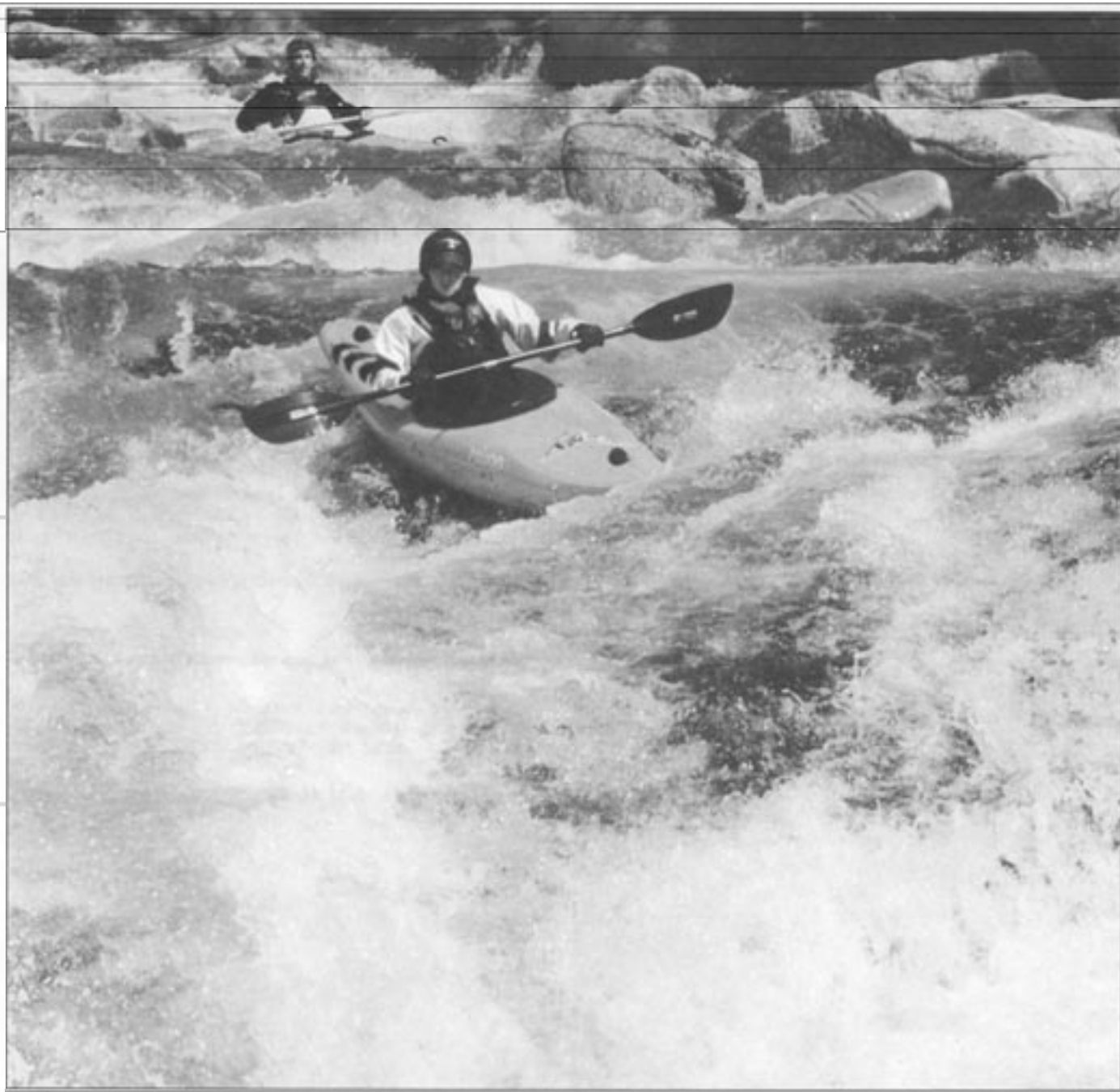
with soles six inches thick worn by practically every Corsican female as they wobbled precariously down the streets.

But by seven in the evening, I had experienced a surfeit of old stuff. In fact, I had come to the conclusion that most things European—with the exception, of course, of Piedra beer and Corsican Rivers—were a tad over-rated. I was ready to return to our paddling trip.

However, upon returning to our campground, our companions were nowhere to be found. We waited for them at the campground's cozy bar—eating our second dinner of the evening and downing even more Piedras. A row of old men sat like gargoyles at the bar—that is, until they discovered we were Americans. Then they sprang to life plying us with shots of a fiery liqueur that brought tears to my eyes.

We seemed like a novelty. Although Corsica was filled with tourists—mostly Germans, mainland French and Italians—we did not encounter other Americans during our entire trip.





Ed Kiesa and Caron Koll on the Rizzanese  
Photo by Chris Koll

It was almost midnight and my head was swimming when a single van loaded high with kayaks pulled into the campground. And we immediately realized something was wrong when all eight members of our party piled out of the single vehicle.

As it turned out, while we were relaxing in Ajaccio, we missed one of the most bizarre adventures of the trip...

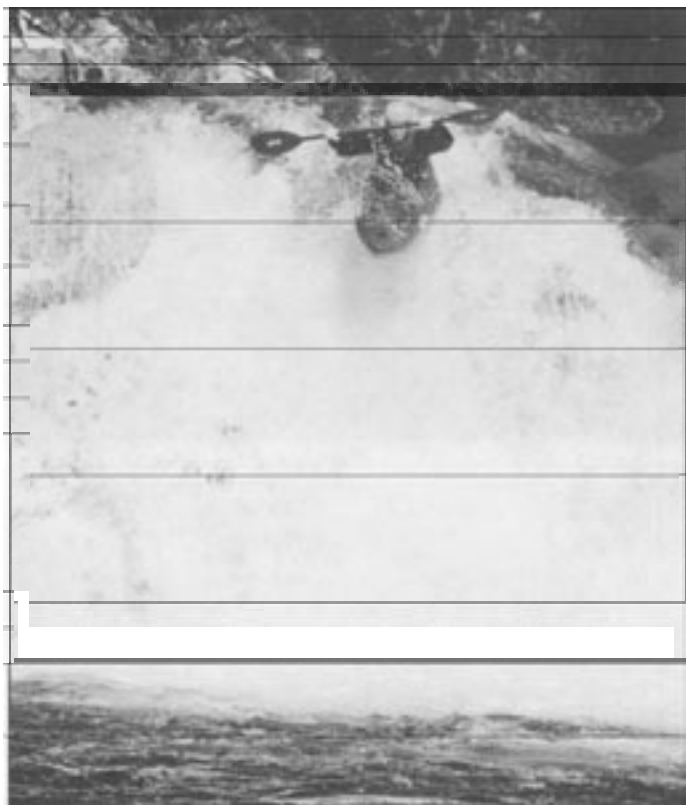
No — nothing went wrong of the river. Al reported that the Travo was an exhilarating two-hour descent from eddy to eddy. The rapids were steep but clean and scoutable from a boat.

But while running the shuttle, the clutch blew on Jurgen's

hardworking van. The group was forced to tow the van (using throw ropes and NRS straps) up and over the mountains on typically steep, winding Corsican roads into Ajaccio. The VW dealer was unsure whether parts were available — and even if they were — whether repairs could be made on the following day.

A sense of gloom descended upon the group. Plans for boating the Liamone were scuttled. We just hoped we'd all be able to make the return trip on the ferry scheduled to depart early Sunday morning.

The next day we repacked gear, cramming all our equipment into



the two vans. Back in Ajaccio, frantic negotiations finally located a mechanic who guaranteed he'd get Jurgen's van back on the road by late afternoon and given the choice of lazing away a second day in Ajaccio or boating at least something — Caron and I joined Barry, Kitty and Al for a quick run down the Prunelli — a small river just outside town.

That is—if we could find a section of the Prunelli that had water. Like many of the rivers in our native upstate New York, much of the Prunelli was dewatered for hydro-electric generation. We slid down a steep streambed and over sheer drops on a trickle of water.

Finally, midway through the run, the river returned from a powerhouse on the right and we worked through two miles of Class III and one final abrupt Class V cascade before the river calmed into a fast-moving trout stream bordered by thick tangles of willows.

We spent our final night sleeping under the stars on a public beach in Bastia. All too soon, we awoke to the sun rising out of the Mediterranean. It was time to go home.

The anticlimactic ending to our trip left me feeling empty. I found myself wishing for one more day...just one more run. And I regretted now that I hadn't insisted that Rok and Edo commandeer the Moby Magic—at gunpoint if necessary — on that first day to get us the Hell in port.

But in retrospect, I realized an extra day would not have mattered. An extra month would not have been enough to be satiated with Corsica. There would always be too many rivers — too many different runs — and never enough time.

Which, of course, is why Rok and Jurgen and Edo return year after year.

And why I hope to as well.



Top down; Jurgen Prijon on the Rizzanese, Photo by Chris Koll  
Al Baker boofing, Photo by Chris Koll.  
Barry Tuscano and Chris Koll portaging on the Travo, Photo by Ed Kiesa



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# Vermont Hair

## A Big Branch Descent

By Peter Engel, MD

"So much for steep-creeking this spring," I thought to myself on February seventeenth; the human resources department at my new job told me my health insurance wouldn't begin until June seventeenth. I had tentative plans to add Maine's Gulf Hags and Moxie Stream to my river resume in 1998, but they would have to wait. Still, you can't keep a deranged boater down for long, and in April, after 2 months of Class III-IV boating, I was yearning for something with more "sport."

My buddy Steve won last year's Deerfield rodeo and this year's Tarrifville rodeo. He also claimed the first descent of Vermont's Big Branch last year and has run it about 25 times. Since Steve's first descent, about 20 people have tried it, two of who aborted their attempt after Big Branch demolished their equipment. Another two exited on stretchers. What possessed an uninsured, sole financial supporter for a family of four (i.e. me) to join Steve this April remains a mystery. But I took my Thrillseeker up to Vermont for the first inflatable descent of Big Branch, attempting to follow Steve down in his Topolino. I had been looking for something in the Class IV-V realm, but was signing up for Class V+.

Driving north on route 7 in Vermont with my Delorme map in hand, we approached the turnoff to Big Branch. I couldn't see the creek, but I could see where it was cutting a steep gorge between two hills, in fact descending 400 feet per mile. When we got to the takeout bridge, which spans the creek, I looked up at one of the less difficult sections of Big Branch, littered with nasty pinning spots and a deathtrap or

two. I wondered, "If this is an easier stretch, what must be lurking upstream?"

Five people with Class V experience suited up at the roadside turnout. By the time we reached the water, one of the five had traded his Rockit for a VHS recorder and a six pack of Busch. I was only about 100 yards into the trip before I



Top: Steve Heanue steep creeking on Vermont's Big Branch. Bottom: A moment of excitement on the Big Branch. Right: Peter Engel tackles the Big Branch in Rubber. Photos by Ken Hill

found myself broached, demoralized, reaching for a throw rope and being filmed by Ken, our boater-turned-cameraman. Five to ten minutes later, my boat and I extracted, the wounds of my narcissistic injury still fresh, Steve asked, "Are you feeling like the meanest S.O.B. of all time?"

I had to think about that one; actually, I was feeling pretty lame. Then, suddenly, a complete willingness to lose all my equipment to this creek came over me, and we proceeded downstream. Maybe four drops later an unmanned Overflow passed me and our Initial group of five was down to three. We hadn't even gotten to the more serious rapids yet.

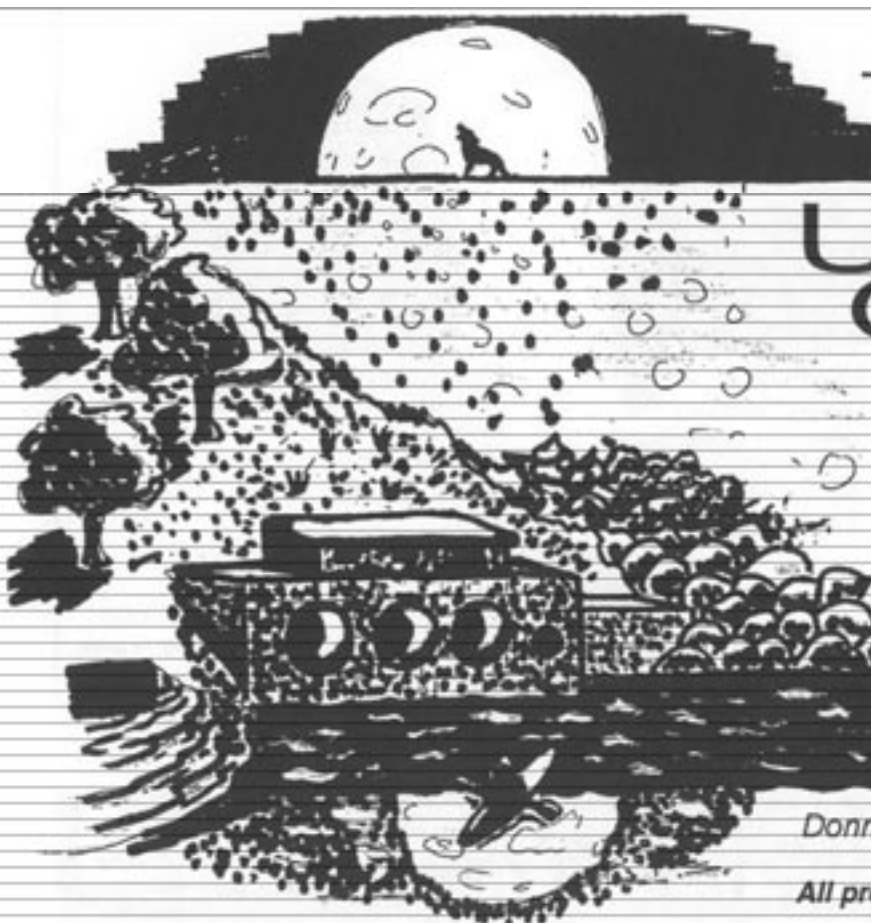
Big Branch's gradient is so relentless that it's hard to call any component a rapid. Nevertheless, certain sections, which are devoid of anything resembling an eddy, have been given names. The first named rapid is Cave. Here a twisting set of chutes leads into an offset three-foot drop immediately



above an eight-foot drop with piton city left and center. A rock wall on the right has a cave "backdoor" exit, just large enough to allow a swimmer to pass through...provided he is desperate enough to remove his PFD.

After smoothing Cave, my rediscovered confidence carried me through the remainder of the run, despite one rapid that capsized me when the current slid over a boulder into an undercut cliff, a drag (literally and figuratively) through a previously unnamed Bowels of Hell.

Viewpoints vary on recreational boater use of Big Branch; one might suppose this is, in part, due to some recent, well-published expert deaths. Although I look back on my Big Branch experience very favorably, if anyone were to ask me to recommend or discourage it, I'd just remind them of the evidence of this steep creek's unforgiving nature; many capable boaters have put-on but few have succeeded in paddling all the way to the take-out with their bodies, boats and paddles intact.



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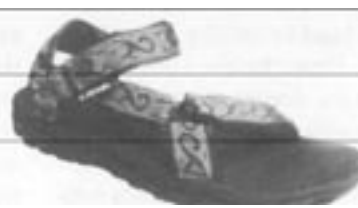
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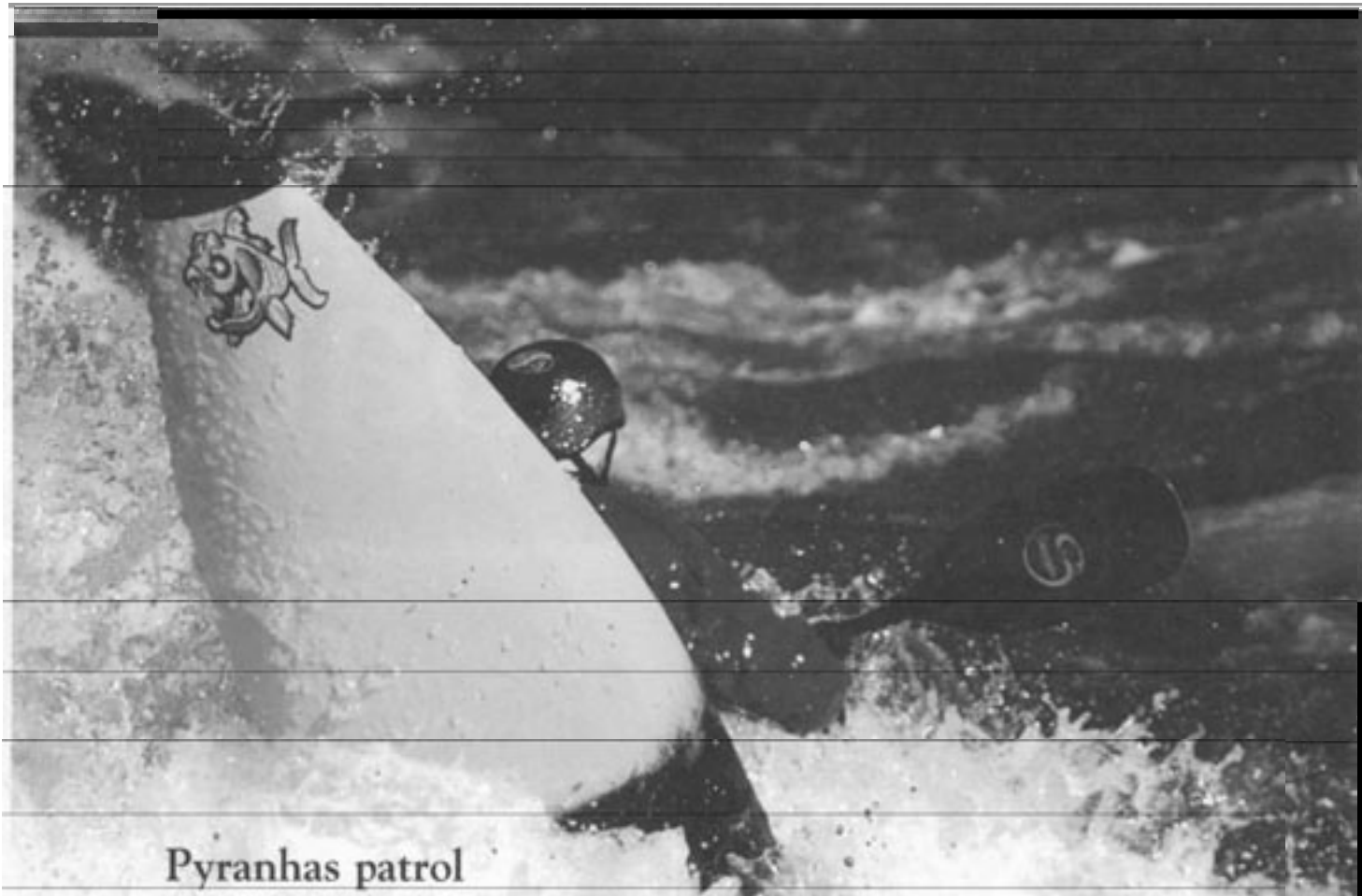
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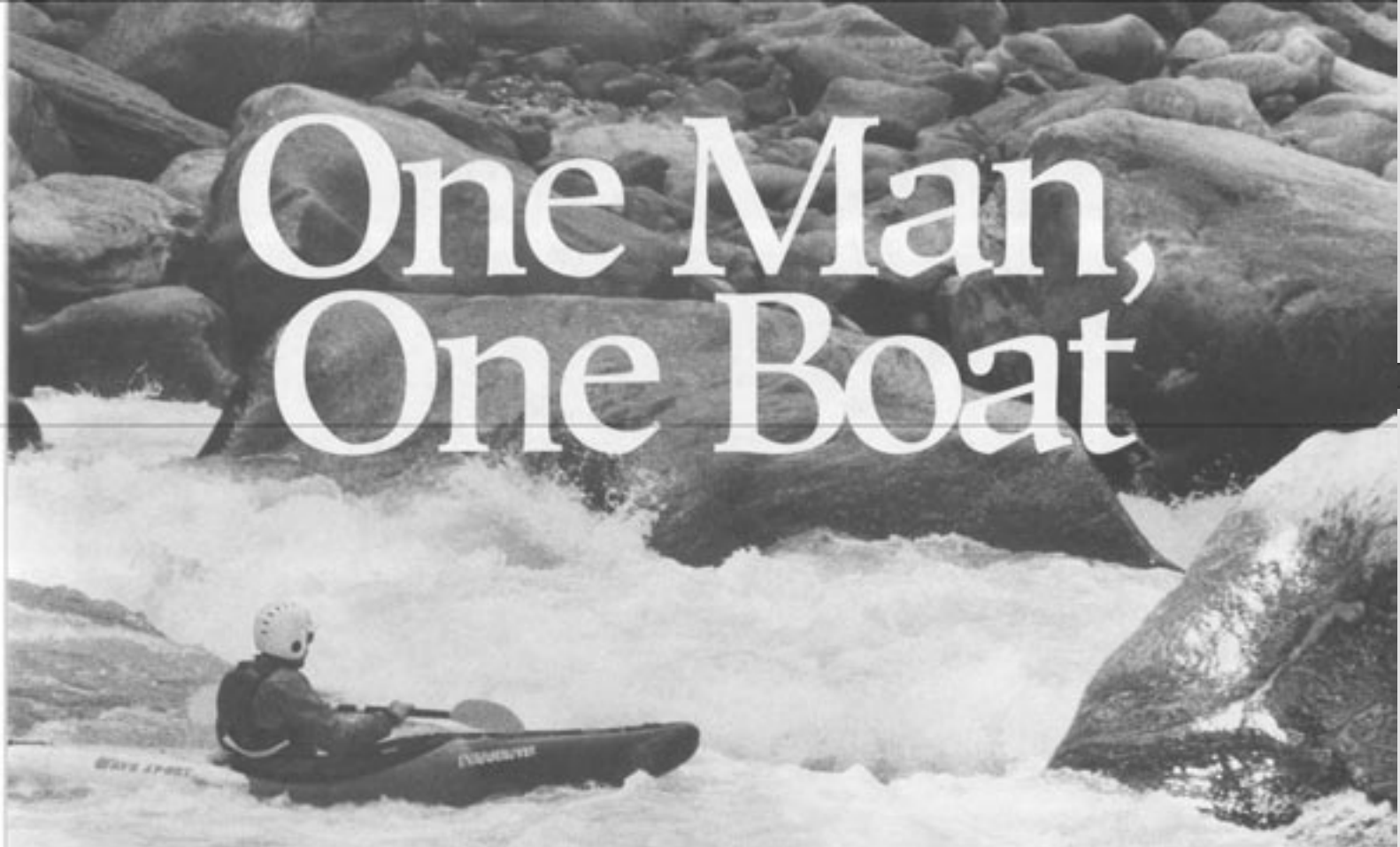


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By Ken Ransford

Member, AWA Board of Directors





"It's going to be wet down there," Paul Zirklebach said as we peered out the plane at the Karnali valley below, shrouded in mist. We were flying at 11,000 feet with the Himalayas gradually coming into view in a cloudless dawn. The Nepali, who rushed the six of us and our boats into the small single engine plane minutes before in Nepalganj, had comically warned us before we took off, "Don't open this door!"



I had heard of the Humla or Upper Karnali years before I ever thought I was capable of running it. Rivers pale in comparison to the Karnali. From the put-in near Simikot, a town at 10,000 feet above sea level, the river drops over 6,000 vertical feet in 250 miles. Sixty of

the first 90 miles drop an average of 55 feet per mile. I had heard of Class V rapids every day including three Class V gorges. The trip, which we expected to take 15 days, was unsuitable for rafts and had to be done self support.

Along with the Indus, Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers, the Karnali's headwaters originate near 22,156 foot Mt. Kailash, a four-sided pyramid peak in one of the last blank spaces on the world map filled in by 19th Century western explorers. Devout Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists believe a walk around Mt. Kailash will wipe away the sins of a lifetime. Pilgrims who get down on their knees and prostrate themselves every step of the 30-mile circuit around Kailash remove the sins of a thousand lifetimes.

One peak dominated the horizon — was that Mt. Kailash, or a peak on the Nepal-Tibet border? We didn't know — none of us had been here before. Five of our group were from Colorado: Paul Zirklebach, a Denver carpenter; John Mattson, a homebuilder from Boulder; Randy Kennedy, a Denver civil engineer; Ethan Greene, a meteorology student at Fort Collins; and myself, an attorney in Carbondale. The sixth, Andy Zimet, was an anesthesiologist from Whitefish, Montana.

"The Karnali is one of the three best river trips in the world," Dave Allardice had said earlier over dinner and whiskeys at his house in Kathmandu. Born in New Zealand, Dave started Ultimate Descents, Nepal's oldest river running company, ten years ago. When we had asked him what the other two were he only smiled and wouldn't say.

Dave Allardice co-wrote the Nepal whitewater guide with Pete Knowles. I had been corresponding with Dave by e-mail for months, and he helped book hotel accommodations, the charter flight to the put-in, and bus travel to the river. In addition to booking raft trips for international tourists, he has over 80 kayaks for hire in his Kathmandu boathouse. I rented a Prijon T-Canyon which saved me the \$225 airfreight fee to lug a boat to Nepal. I'd never boated a T-Canyon before, but I've always liked Prijon boats and the T-Canyon's volume and stability appealed to me.

Left: Paul Zirklebach entering the top of the crux rapid in the third gorge.  
Above: Nepalis at the Simikot airport awaiting the next flight out.  
Photos by Ken Ransford

Dave was telling us about Charlie Munsey's 1994 trip down the Karnali with Nantahala Outdoor Center guide Bob Beazley. "When Charlie did the Karnali, as soon as he would paddle out to the center of the river, he'd get scared witless and paddle right back to shore," Dave said. I had paddled the Class V Tamba Kosi, a river draining Everest, in 1991 with Charlie and he is among the best paddlers I've ever met. At that time he ran the Class V North Fork of the Payette in Idaho daily after work as a safety guide on the South Fork of the Payette. Charlie and Alan had run the Karnali in high post-monsoon water in October and had run out of food. I'd heard they had a rough time.

The Karnali is in western Nepal, four hundred miles from Everest. It sits between 7,817 meter Nanda Devi 125 miles to the west and 8,172 meter Dhaulagiri 135 miles to the east, two of the world's highest peaks, although neither were visible on the plane flight to Simikot. Like most major Himalayan rivers, the Karnali's headwaters are in Tibet. The Karnali pre-dates the Indian plate's collision with the Asian plate; the Himalayas rose around the ancient fault line where the Karnali snakes its course.

The Karnali, which eventually joins the Ganges in India, is the largest river in

Nepal and once registered 760,000 cubic feet per second in Chisapani, the takeout on the hot Indian plains. That was in monsoon, the wet season from May through September located when the jet stream reverses its course from prevailing south-westerly to north-easterlies and allows the colder, moist Indian Ocean air to flow over the Himalaya. Most Himalayan climbing attempts are in May or October when the jet stream shifts direction.

October, the end of the monsoon, is generally the best time to boat in Nepal. Water is high, the skies are clear and rain is so unlikely that

I travel without a tent. Nepal's combination of warm glacial-blue water, jungle terrain, and snowcapped mountain scenery is unbeatable. Like a bowl, the Nepal Himalaya get steeper the higher one goes. The best paddling is between 4000 to 1000 above sea level where orange and banana trees can grow. Nepal rivers typically have successive sections of continuous Class VI, V, IV, III, and II rapids that stretch for miles.

Kayakers can hire porters on most rivers and hike upriver until they've seen enough and decide it's too difficult to go further. The Karnali was different due to its remoteness. Simikot, only a dozen miles south of Tibet, is a 12-day walk from Chisapani through rugged Himalayan terrain. We purposely chose to run the Karnali in March because of the low volume and long days. We estimated the flow to be 800 cfs at the put-in

and about 8,000 cfs at the takeout, only 1% of its maximum recorded flow! Monsoon rains are legendary—the British once recorded 30 feet of rain one month in July 1861 in Punjab India.

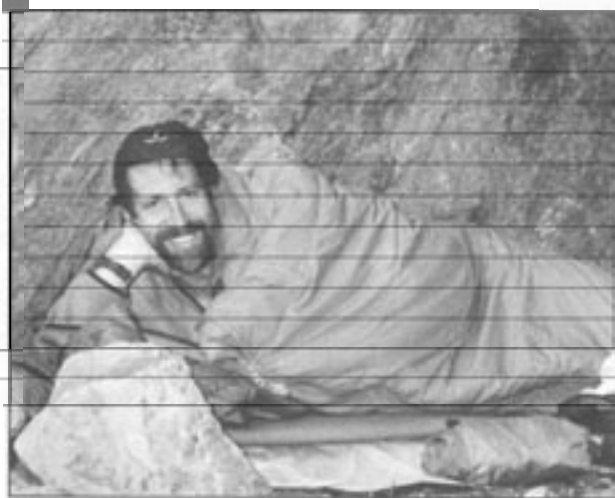
"Which door weren't we supposed to open?" we joked as we flew over what we later determined was the Mugu Karnali River. It was all white, even from a mile above. The first Karnali expedition in 1982 had rafted the Mugu Karnali in an epic that took 40 days just to reach the main Karnali. "It can't be that bad," I thought to myself, recalling a 1991 conversation with guidebook co-author Pete Knowles. Known as Greenslime, Pete has made several Himalayan first descents and now guides trips in Nepal from his base in London. "It's all boatable except for a few portages" Greenslime had said, "which is amazing since the Karnali is the largest river in Nepal and cuts right through the heart of the Himalaya."

We had hoped to make this flight two days earlier but a foot of snow had fallen on Simikot's dirt runway. It took one day for the snow to melt and another for the runway to dry out. Nepalganj, a grueling 24-hour bus ride from Kathmandu, is the largest city in western Nepal. We stayed at the Hotel Sneha, a government tourist cottage in Nepalganj. Upon arriving at the hotel, we ordered food which the waiter relayed to the cook one patron at a time, requiring constant trips between our table and the kitchen. When Ethan took a piece of toast from the wrong plate, the trip motto was born; the waiter admonished him, "One man, one toast."

I should have eaten only at the hotel. I toured the night market in Nepalganj and made it back to my hotel room just in time for one of the worst nights of my life. Something was having a party inside



Above: Paul Zirkelbach boofing in the first Class V gorge, day 5.  
Below: The author in the cave  
Photos by Ken Ransford



me. As a traveler in Thailand once said, 'You don't know if the bottom's falling out of your world, or if the world's falling out of your bottom.' It wasn't a total loss — that night provided a month's worth of entertainment for the rest of the group.

We arrived at Simikot after a 40 minute flight. The town is going through a construction boom, and new hotels with metal roofs and satellite dishes have sprung up along the air strip. Simikot sits on a bench 3,000 feet above the Karnali put-in. The headwaters of the Karnali are 125 miles upstream. The first 75 miles drop 35 feet per mile off the flat Tibetan plateau until reaching the Nepal border. The river then cascades 250 feet per mile for 50 miles to our put-in. This upper section, which has never been run, would likely necessitate helicopter support since trails don't even traverse the river's steep gorges. Across the valley loomed Mt. Saipal, at 23,200 feet the dominant peak in the region. The government of Nepal recently opened this area to tourists, who can hire guides to hike from Simikot to Mt. Kailash for \$80 to \$150 per day. About 200 tourists checked in at the police post in 1997. Before that, fewer than 20 per year had signed the police register.

Our hotel proprietor arranged ten porters, four of them women, to carry our boats and gear down to the river. From experience, I've learned that it's best to have the owner of the largest hotel at the trailhead arrange porters, since the proprietor won't rehire them if they're unreliable. It's usually a mistake to bring in porters from another place because regional animosities develop, outside porters are more expensive, and they have no one to answer to. We planned to keep four porters for the first six days to carry our food so that we could paddle lighter boats.

## The hike down to the put-in.

The hike down to the Karnali went fast, and we hustled to keep up with the porters. We reached the river and put on by noon. Despite the fact that we were boating in March, I stayed warm in neoprene shorts, a medium-weight polypro and goretex dry top, and pogies. The first four miles were delightful continuous Class III rapids. When we rounded a bend to the south near Munya, I feared we'd seen the last of our mountain vistas. In fact, we saw snowcapped peaks from the river for the next ten days.

Jeff Boyd, from British Columbia, had boated here in 1995 with the last Karnali party that we knew of. He told of five must-portages around boulder sieves where the entire river went under rocks. Four of those portages would come in the first couple of days. At the first, about six miles below the put-in, my notes said to portage left, but we discovered that this portage was easier river right where a trail

conveniently took off at river level on the right bank. Paul and Ethan ran part of the first gorge, but the rest of us struggled up the steep bank. We put back in below the sieve to run several Class IV drops. In one of the last of these, a six-foot drop where two boulders split the river into three channels, John Mattson missed the preferred center channel, took the left channel, and got piled into some rocks.

Suddenly Andy was screaming, "Get out of your boats!" John had pinned. He bailed out of his boat before we could come to his aid and was sucked under the rocks he had pinned against. Fortunately he



and his boat surfaced immediately in the pool below—the only casualty was the loss of his cameras. He lost one which was loosely tied around his neck. The other was wrecked when a strap inadvertently wedged in the seal of its waterproof case. Characteristically, John ignored the loss of the cameras and thanked all of us for the rescue.



Top: The boat trek, photo by John Mattson

Above: Like all of Nepal, the Karnali valley is being deforested. These trees are being cut down for firewood, and the author recommends that stoves rather than driftwood be used for cooking by future trips.

This river was studded with undercut rocks, made more dangerous by the low volume. House-size boulders sat in the middle of the river, but their polished edges created leading undercut edges that beckoned disaster. I was reminded of how quickly things can go wrong on a river and we were all a bit spooked.

John Mattson had brought a Prijon Tornado, which he described as a "large volume T-Canyon with rocker." I first paddled with John in Nepal in 1994 and consider him the safest boater I paddle with. I'd never seen him swim before. His friends don't believe he ever works, he's been on so many climbing and kayaking trips to Asia and South America. Only 5'10," John's incredibly strong and known for the copious gear he brings on self supports. We kept expecting him to bring out the lawn chair he took down the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone.

We camped immediately on a small bench of sheep pastures about 30 feet above the river. The four porters we kept were Mutur Lama, Tanba Lama, Tashi Lama, and Urgen Lundup Lama, whom we christened the Lama Brothers. They weren't related—Lama is just a common name. They had purchased two chickens, one of which they had for dinner the first night. They kept the other alive for the next four days. I had purchased a bottle of Johnny Walker Red at the Seoul duty-free shop on the flight from America, planning to ration it among the porters over four nights. It helped bond us, and we spent the first night on the river in good



spirits. I had rolled earlier when trying to avoid John's boat after his swim, and Tanba Lama, the oldest porter, kept grinning and describing with his hands the roll I had made.

The second day we walked more than we paddled. We made two long portages around boulder sieves that took most of the day. The obvious take-out for the two portages were gravel bars on river left where the trail ascended from the river. Paul, characteristically in the lead, made the portages far more interesting by boating one more Class III rapid below the gravel bars until the canyon walls closed in and the escape route from the river was far steeper.

Paul Zirkelbach, a carpenter from Denver, has boated as well as anyone I know in Colorado the past ten years. He brought a Wavesport Descente, and when outfitting our boats in Kathmandu I commented, "I can't believe how much rocker the Descente has." Paul replied dryly, "I like rocker." Rocker, the degree to which a boat's bottom curves upward at the bow and stern, enables a boat to spin easily and change direction. I worried if my T-Canyon had enough. Paul efficiently managed to stow all of his gear into a boat with front and rear beams. He swears by beams after having skirts blow when big holes deflected the boat's shape. He's designed his own

stowfloat gear bags and outfitters contact him for ~~prudent~~ recommendations. Paul shocked me when he pulled a whole vacuum-packed salmon filet out of his boat when it was his turn to cook dinner on day 13.

On one portage, Paul made it about half-way up a 45 degree slope



Top: Paul Zirkelbach just below the first portage, photo by Ethan Greene.

Above: Paul Zirkelbach in the last rapid in the gorge below Sani Gad, photo by Ethan Greene.

when he started sliding back down. He managed to arrest himself by holding his boat on his shoulder with one hand while clinging to a branch with the other hand. John and Randy heard him moaning, and climbed up to tie his boat off to a tree. I passed them on the trail as they were hauling their boats up the hillside with ropes.

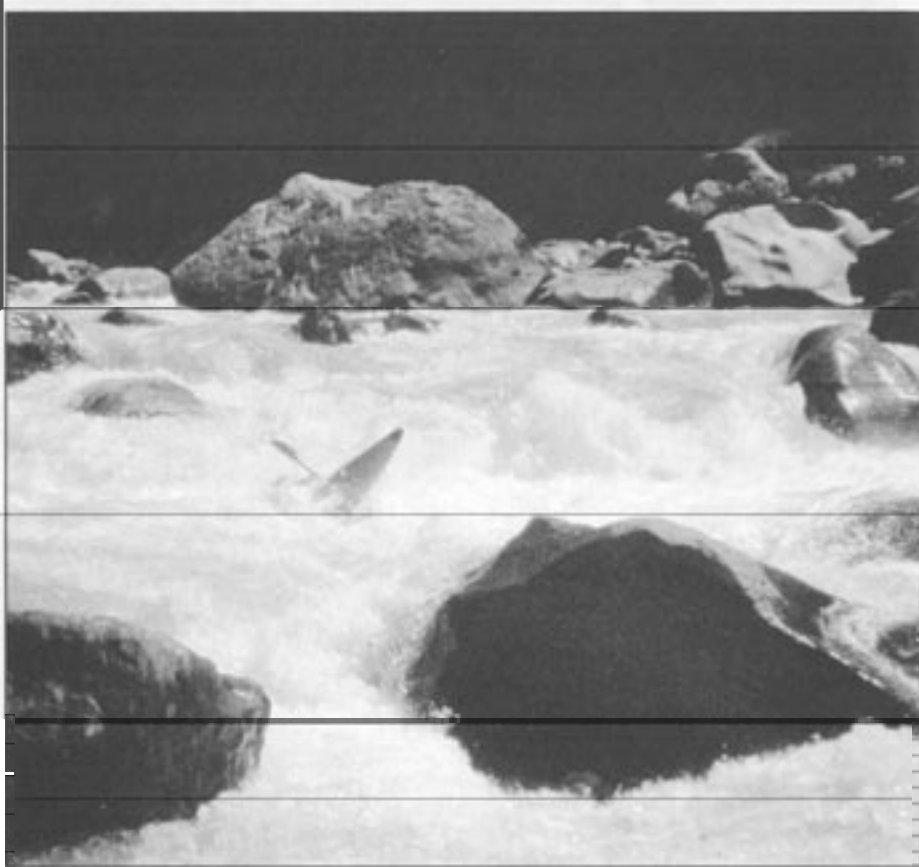
We finished the day at a camp at the base of a landslide which had created a new rapid below the third portage. The debris had constricted the river to about a third of its normal size. What would normally be a Class IV rapid was now serious Class V. Rockfall on the other side of the river had created a steep and sticky ledge hole. There, an upstream hydraulic recirculated against the wall. A swim there would be desperate — even if the swimmer escaped the recycle with enough energy to think. Immediately below stretched a long 250-meter rapid with continuous Class IV and V drops. This was one of the scariest rapids I had ever seen, probably because it was runnable.

That night we had a full moon. I slept out but each time I woke to look around the sky was hazier. At 4:40 AM it started raining. I dragged my sleeping bag into the tent I shared with Randy, feeling guilty about the porters outside as I drifted off to sleep. With only one sleeping bag and no tent, the porters stayed warm by sleeping on a bed of leaves and stoking the fire through the night — until it started raining. We weren't faring too well ourselves. After four hours of hard rain, water was springing out of the ground and puddling in the floor-less Chouinard Megamid shell. Meanwhile, Randy was moaning with agastro-intestinal bug. When I got up at 8:00 to dig trenches to shunt the water, I noticed the new snow line was only 200 feet above us.

We didn't have to worry about the porters at all. They were cooking breakfast in a bone-dry hollow they had spied in the overhanging canyon wall, which we christened "the cave." They were roasting roti, or flat bread, on a thin granite flake and had boiled a soup made out of the stinging nettles that we hated so much on the portages. I marveled that each of us, with 40 pounds of gear, were wet, while they were warm and dry and in good spirits. All they needed was fire and they could be totally self-sufficient in this wilderness. Later that afternoon we met a local who started his pipe with fire from a flint. They **were** totally self-sufficient. Imagine kayaking around a river bend in America and coming upon an Indian village — Asia today is what America was like 100 years ago.

Randy was so sick he made my night in Nepalganj look like a simple hangover. We had all picked up something in Kathmandu, we figured, but some of us had cured it with a dose of Ciprofloxin. I thought I had cured mine with a dose of Tinebah, an anti-flagellant that is the best Giardia cure I know of. It isn't available in America but is throughout Asia. Cipro is today's miracle drug, a wide-spectrum anti-biotic that works so well that symptoms usually disappear completely within 24 hours. Randy had started a course of Cipro a week earlier, but had stopped before completing it: a mistake. When his symptoms reappeared, we put him on Cipro again.

These two drugs, Cipro and Tinebah, are the only drugs I carry for gastrointestinal problems in Asia. If one doesn't work, I try the other. It's wise to follow each with a course of acidophilus to replace gastrointestinal flora because both drugs are very potent. Cipro and Tinebah (but not acidophilus) are available in Kathmandu at corner



Above: Andy Zimet just below the confluence of the Sani Gad, photo by Ethan Greene.

Below: Randy Kennedy scouting from the hemp bridge at the bottom of the long Class V, day 9, photo by Ken Ransford.







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By afternoon, the sun was shining intermittently and our gear had dried. The porters moved a mile downstream to the town of Charia and I moved into their cave. We went to bed at 7:30, expecting an early start. Like clockwork I felt raindrops again at 4:30 AM and retreated further into the hollow. I woke periodically to peer out in the rain, but eventually it grew quiet. The snow line had dropped 200 feet during the night and four inches had accumulated by 8:30. I reluctantly made room for my buddies in the cave when they exited their wet tents.

We built a snowman on Ethan's boat and it didn't melt all day, so we spent a second layover day at the debris flow camp. It had taken us 4 days to travel only 12 miles and we worried about our food supplies. But Randy couldn't have asked for better timing to get well. The scary debris-flow rapid looked even worse with new snow on the riverbank. There was a rockslide off the wall on the other side of the river. I watched a 250-pound boulder drop into the pool above the ledge hole, barely audible over the river roar.

## The First Gorge

The next day dawned crisp and clear. We set up safety throughout the long debris flow rapid. Paul ran the top drop but he missed his line and barely avoided the ledge hole. We all put in below that hole and ran the rest of the drop safely — it is amazing how much better you can boat under blue skies! After several Class IV+ drops, we reached the steel suspension footbridge at the small village of Charia and rejoined the porters. Below the bridge we portaged another rock sieve, this time river right, that marked the entrance to the first Class V gorge. The water was low, about 1,500 cfs, so the drops weren't too pushy.

Both sides of the canyon cliffed out in the gorge, but everything could be portaged. The big limestone blocks and canyon walls were sculpted beautifully.

We moved slowly and reached a rapid that at first glance I was sure I would portage. A Class III entrance led to a boof off a rock that was so close to a nasty undercut, that Ethan and John portaged it. Paul ran it clean. Randy followed and though he was pushed into the wall river-right after his boof move—he avoided a nasty eddy carved out of the wall and safely reached an eddy on the other side of the river. His run got me psyched to run Class V. My run was clean. In retrospect, that rapid, more than any, mirrors my perception of the river.

Randy Kennedy is a civil engineer living in Denver. Originally from Georgia, he moved to California 15 years ago to be a raft guide. He never left the west. Randy would characteristically understate his ability and then be one of the first to run hard Class V. Like so many of us, Randy's bones started making a lot more noise after he reached 40. And he had not boated much the last few seasons because he was recuperating from one ailment after another. Randy brought a new red Prijon Invader from America. It was just small enough so that I had to carry the tent we shared.

The gorge ended not far below this rapid and we boated one more Class V when the river turned east on a left bend after lunch. I was struck by how hard it was to make the left sneak to a portage around a log-studded drop. We enjoyed twelve miles of continuous Class IV boating past the village of Sarkegard and down to the confluence with the Lochi Karnali, which we reached at the end of the next day. The entire section was boat-scoutable except for one bony Class V rock pile that we ran. We passed through forests of ponderosa and blooming rhododendron trees, something I've always missed on my fall trips to Nepal. It was magical. When I told Randy that these were



Cactus marked the entrance to the second gorge, day 7, photo by Ken Ransford.



Paul Zirkelbach at the bottom of the long class 5, photo by Ken Ransford.

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Ethan Greene just below the first portage, photo by John Mattson.

the two best days of boating of my life, he remarked that he'd had better. "Where," I asked? "California's Middle Fork of the Feather," he replied. After commenting that many boaters consider that their favorite stretch in the world, Randy conceded that the boating was pretty good.

Our camp at the confluence with the Lochi Karnali was the most beautiful of the trip. It was on a bench 200 yards long and half as wide, and we slept below huge ponderosa pines on a pine needle bed. The porters arrived with a load of firewood, which was becoming increasingly scarce, and we had an enjoyable night together as the porters finished their whiskey. Just around the bend lurked the second gorge, and, if it went as planned, we would leave the porters behind in two days.

The Lochi Karnali was the biggest tributary that we had passed. It had about 400 cfs of continuous Class IV with each drop leading into the next. If I did this trip again, this is one of two places I would schedule a layover day. The other is the Sani Gad, about 50 miles downstream. Atatopani, or hot springs, was on the river right side of the Lochi just above the confluence. John and I joined the locals for a soak the next morning. But when John stripped—he forgot his shorts—the locals kept chattering until we left. It was a men-only, women-only affair, and the sexes didn't mix in the hot springs.

## The Second Gorge

The terrain changed from ponderosa pine to cactus at the Lochi confluence. When we entered the second gorge, it was, as Greenslime predicted, like entering a new world. Exotic palms grew in the forest. The water, still glacial blue, had grown to about 2,000 cfs. We kept sneaking down the edges of the river. At one rapid, Paul ran the left chute over some big drops and got an unintended hole ride. He handled it smoothly, but the rest of us walked.

On another memorable rapid we successively boofed two eight-foot drops where clear water poured over orange rocks into turquoise pools. Paul was explaining how to boof, a term that describes how kayaks jump small waterfalls. "Get as much speed as possible and then, just before launching off the drop, get in one last solid paddle stroke and try to launch your boat. If you can, try to lean back so your boat stays horizontal and doesn't enter the water vertically, but that's hard to do. Then, and this is really important, take a hard stroke when you land to paddle away from the backwash of the hole." I'd been having trouble with the last part of the sequence, and twice had to roll when I didn't clear the backwash. **Where** you boof is also important, and that is best determined by scouting the rapid beforehand. If a drop is formed by two rocks with water coursing down the center, sometimes you boof at an angle so that you land behind one of the rocks where the water is typically calmer. If enough water

is pouring over a rock, you can boof straight over the rock into the pool below. But if too much water is pouring over the rock, it forms a hole below and that's the last place you want to be.

High above the river I noticed a living room-sized hollow in the wall where small stones had sculpted out a pothole over the eons. I shuddered when thinking of how high the river would have to be to continue carving out that hole. We portaged around a huge pine that spanned the entire river, now at least seventy-five feet wide, before stopping for lunch in a narrow part of the gorge where the highwater mark was at least four stories above the river. "At high water this ground would just shake," Paul commented.

The rapids kept getting longer, many more than two hundred meters. They were intricate and it was satisfying to scout out a complex line, traversing the river back and forth, then have it go as planned. We had to memorize features on the scouts because once in the rapid it was easy to get lost. I'd never been on a river with such long rapids. On one challenging drop, which we couldn't decide how to run and ran three separate ways, I planned to ride up on a pillow and then slide down the left. I hadn't scouted the drop below, but John told me the line. I had trouble maneuvering the T-Canyon—not enough rocker—and ended up momentarily broaching on the pillow rock. When I slid down the pillow I couldn't hold on to a left brace at the bottom and rolled. When I came up I missed the preferred right chute and ran the left chute, which, fortunately, was clean.



Simikot boat trek, photo by John Mattson.

We reached camp at 5:00, our last night together with the Lama Brothers. As usual, the porters had arrived before we did. "Camp here," they said, motioning to the only flat ground in the canyon, a series of terraces covered with animal dung. The sheep and goats arrived at about the same time and a local sheepherder kept giving us nasty stares until we paid him a 100 rupee note—about \$1.60. He invited the Lama Brothers over for roast lamb. We had our usual freeze-dried group dinner but, despite the smelly camp, we were in high spirits. Only one Class V gorge remained and it was several days away. We celebrated with our own Wild Turkey. The sheep and goats perched in the rocks—there was nowhere else for them to go on the steep hillside—and some kept milling about our camp all night long looking for their regular sleeping spot.

The next morning we passed a perfect camp about 400 yards below the dung terraces. It was on a bench on river right

with ponderosa pines that rivaled the Lochi Karnali. At least we know where to stay next time! Jeff Boyd had warned me of a Class V or two in this stretch, but we never found them; perhaps they washed out in a monsoon since he was here. Instead, there were a series of Class IV rapids, almost anti-climactic after the difficult gorge the day before.

We stopped at the next bridge as prearranged and waited to pick up our gear from the Lama Brothers. It was the first time we had gotten ahead of them. We were leaving them now because we expected to paddle much faster on the easier water ahead than they



Paul Zirlbach in the new rapid formed by the landslide. Below the confluence with the Mugu Karnali, photo by Ethan Greene.



Andy, Ethan, and John having a look, photo by Paul Zirkelbach.

could walk. We had purposely brought more food than we thought necessary from Simikot, planning to leave it with the porters. However, since we were now three days behind schedule—it was already day 8 and we had only paddled 40 miles out of the 250 scheduled—we kept all of our food. We paid the porters \$10 per day, a good wage in a country where the per capita income is only \$170 per year, and gave them clothes we no longer wanted. The porters were about our age and I had the feeling that if our roles were reversed and we were carrying their gear that we would have gotten along just as well. We expected them to cover the 40-mile return trip to Simikot within 24 hours.

The rainy weather returned and we boated the next two days under dark skies. A pattern of five clear days followed by two wet ones had developed. But we had entered a rain shadow so although it was dumping up the side canyons, only a few sprinkles fell on us. A trail followed the contours of one steep limestone gorge with rocks stacked vertically together. They reminded us of Anasazi dwellings in the Grand Canyon. The confluence with the Mugu Karnali was at the end of that gorge. In the plane a week earlier the Mugu had left us speechless, but the main Karnali was only Class II as we passed the Mugu confluence.

At one Class V drop, Ethan backendered just as I photographed him, totally disappearing from shot. A backender can be fun when followed by a flatwater pool, but not in the middle of a Class V drop. I walked.

Ethan Greene is a meteorology student at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. Only 27, he was the youngest. The rest of us ranged in age between 41 and 47. I've heard that Ethan swam more times his first day on a river, Montana's Gallatin, than he has in the seven years since. That's such a good story I didn't ask him to verify

it. Ethan brought a Prijon Cyclone but, like me, opted for a larger T-Canyon, which he rented when he arrived in Nepal. In our Simikot hotel room, I had confided to Ethan that I was nervous about the drops and planned to do a lot of walking. Ethan agreed that he too was nervous, but remarked that "tough drops are why I do this sport." I was impressed that he had left a grueling masters program for a month to come to Nepal.

Ethan's maturity showed in his cautious approach to the river. On this trip we weren't jockeying to see who could run the rapids first, and no one charged downstream ahead of the others. In the first 90 miles, we scouted every time that we couldn't see to the bottom of a rapid or, at least, to the next safe eddy. It was very difficult to set up safety because of the river's huge size, but we discussed the routes fully and typically ran rapids two at a time. We usually positioned rescuers with throw bags along the banks and tried to have a safety boat in the water whenever someone ran a Class V rapid.

## The long Class V.

We were looking for a long Class V drop in which Greenslime's 1987 group had gotten thumped after brushing off the locals' offers to help them portage. We thought we had reached it near the end of the ninth day when we encountered a Class V drop with a difficult sneak down the left bank. But that turned out to be a new rapid, formed by another landslide. Shortly afterward we reached a half-mile Class V rapid that was too long to scout at one stop. Paul ran the top down the middle. Andy and I ran it uneventfully from right to left. And John, Randy and Ethan got thumped when they tried to sneak along the left bank, two of them having to roll in the thick of it.

After regrouping at a pool halfway down, we scouted the rest of the



rapid. The locals were reconstructing a bridge in ancient style with cables woven from hemp, which grew wild everywhere in this part of the canyon, and a floor made of willow branches. This is one of the last hemp bridges left. Most bridges are being replaced with steel cables and chain link fence. Although we could only walk out about half way on the unfinished hemp bridge, it afforded us a good view of the bottom half of the rapid. The sneak down the left bank went uneventfully and we soon camped away from inquisitive locals on a bench above the right bank. We had passed out of the rain shadow and the terrain had now turned to jungle.

The next day we boated some chunky Class IV stretches including one rapid that was so long that we were out of breath before reaching the bottom. We hadn't scouted it, and Paul commented afterward that the rapid, a long winding S turn at least a half mile long, was Class V. We camped just upstream of the last Class V gorge at the confluence with the Sani Gad River.

The Sani Gad was a Class V+ creek that entered river right and marked the crux gorge of the trip. It entered the Karnali in the midst of a long, boulder-strewn rapid that we scouted from high above while touring the village of Sani Gad. I wanted to take a day to walk up the Sani Gad gorge—enticing snow capped peaks were visible in its upper reaches—but everyone wanted to get the crux gorge behind us.

We got stuck in a rush-hour traffic of goats on our reconnoiter of the gorge at 7:30 AM—herders moving their goats to upstream pastures were stretched out along the trail for over a mile—so we stopped for tea in Sani Gad. This village, one of the most beautiful I've

seen in Asia, was surrounded by ripening wheat fields. Unlike similar villages on the Annapurna Circuit, the lodge signs here were in Sanskrit rather than English. It was obvious that the Sani Gad lodge proprietors catered to the porters who carried supplies between Simikot and Chisapani, rather than western trekkers. In Sani Gad we were far from the spaghetti and apple pie circuit that Nepal is famous for.

## The Third Gorge

Another long rapid marked the entrance into the third Class V gorge. From the trail a half-mile away, it looked like a Class IV wave train with a move to the right around a boulder at the bottom of the rapid. When we scouted again from river level, the river was huge and complex. I was reminded of Charlie Munsey's concern running down the center of the river. We tried to sneak the entire right side of the rapid, and I was out of breath by the time I was halfway through the rapid. The tongue around the boulder at the bottom was trickier than expected, and I rolled. I was surprised by how far I had drifted before rolling back up, and I had to fight my way out of a second pour-over. "Nice recovery," Paul said when I reached shore. But the hardest rapid of the trip was just around the bend.

I took a picture of Paul as he entered the next rapid and then shouldered my boat to portage. From 100 feet above, the rapid had looked like a bony creek drop. From river level, it was huge, a half-

Randy Kennedy kayaking, photo by John Mattson.



mile long and at least 4,000 cfs. A pool halfway down marked where the Sani Gad poured into the Karnali. Below the pool, the rapid picked up a notch and was solid V+. Paul, Ethan and Andy ran the top half without incident, but Randy tipped over in the top drop and swam when he couldn't get into rolling position. Fortunately, John was waiting in an eddy above the V+ rapid and, with Ethan's help, managed to get Randy to the right bank.

His boat took off down the left shore, which was about 40 yards away, and entered the V+ rapid below. We were all on the right bank, out of our boats, and none of us were about to go after his boat with several miles of unscouted Class V immediately below. I flashed on the nightmare that was unfolding — Randy's boat disappears, and he's faced with a 150-mile walkout with no sleeping bag, food, or clothes, except the paddling gear he's wearing.

But the gods were smiling. Randy's boat shot back to the right bank and floated into an eddy where Paul could reach it. If a hundred boats went down the left side of that rapid, I bet that only two of them would take the course of Randy's boat and end up on the right bank.

As we regrouped, I watched Andy scouting the V+ rapid. To date, Andy had been walking as much as any of us, but he was determined to run this drop. I met Andy on the Skookumchuck River in British Columbia in 1996 and, like clockwork, Andy had called me once a month to inquire about the trip's progress. Andy's last full-time job was during his medical residency. He now fills in for anesthesiologists in northern Montana — there can't be too many of them — when they vacation. Andy climbed in the Himalaya in the 1980s, but like so many climbers, gave up the sport when he started kayaking. He's

only paddled for 7 years, but he has an impressive list of first descents in the northwest. I expected Paul to lead the way down the river, but Ethan had primed me that Andy would be right up there with him.

Andy led, and was upside down shortly after entering the rapid. His first roll attempt failed, and he remained upside down for a long time before rolling up, just in time to drop into a hole which he side surfed and fought his way out of. Paul followed and made it look easy. His Descente managed to ride up and out of the hole that upset Andy. Despite Paul's run, the rest of us walked.

Scouting this Class V gorge was exhausting because huge boulders were slick with river polish. We didn't run a single drop without scouting. At one traverse of the river I came around a boulder and the group screamed at me to paddle harder. I thought I had plenty of time to make the eddy but Andy had missed it and had to run the Class V drop below without scouting it. "We were so nervous that we were afraid to run Class IV," Paul joked afterward. At one drop late in the day the obvious line was down the left wall. But we were on the right bank and were so reluctant to cross over to the left that we spent a long time searching for a sneak river right. Finally someone ran the left uneventfully and we all followed like ducklings.

Camp that night was on a secluded beach with firewood. The few remaining Class V rapids no longer intimidated us. The last of Jeff Boyd's five portages lay around the corner. I hired several kids for about a dollar to carry my boat the next morning. The manly men, Paul, John, and Randy, hoofed their 100 pound boats through the stinging nettles while I took pictures. As if on cue, the river changed its character below this portage the rapids became big water Class IV

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XL 13	13'2"	30"	16.5"	58 LBS	ROYALEX	\$920	\$690.00
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Ethan Greene approaching the hydrolic jump, photo by Randy Kennedy.



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and not very technical. We boated with more freedom, knowing we didn't have to scout every drop.

As we passed the Tila confluence, I was shocked to see a road being constructed on river left. We followed it for 60 miles and I contemplated the changes it would bring: noise, dust, plastic trash, batteries, beer. The younger generation and merchants no doubt looked forward to this link to the plains, but I suspect the older generation knew that the road would change forever their pastoral life. This is the least populated part of Nepal, a country with 20 million people and one of the world's fastest growth rates. The road will speed up change and we were glad to run the river when we did.

Downstream of the confluence with the Lahore Khola the run is known as the Lower Karnali. Chisapani was 113 miles away, which we did in four days of reasonable paddling. Below Sauli we entered a canyon with pool-drop rapids reminiscent of the Grand Canyon, a run which Dave Allardice pioneered and considers one of the best rafting runs in the world. He dared us to run this gorge without leaving our boats: "When else do you get a chance to run Class V without scouting?" We took his bait and, true to form, I swam in one of the last rapids on the trip when I got window-shaded in a river-wide hole just below the horizon line.

We stopped in the riverside village Jungle Ghat to pick up a food cache that Dave Allardice had left for us on one of his raft trips. I watched the boats while the rest of the group went up to the village. We had left three bottles of wine and two days' food in a red bag. When the locals professed ignorance about the cache, Paul came down to watch the boats since I spoke the most Nepali. Uncannily, I opened the phrase book to the very page that had the phrase, "Do you have bag?" I started asking for the bag at every hut, purposely starting in the middle of the village so I could ask a second time on my way back through if necessary. We knew they had it, and they knew we knew. I ended up knocking on every hut at least twice.

The longer we stayed the more uncomfortable it became. The breakthrough finally came when we learned the word for *red* and added that to the query. A sixty-year old woman meekly said, "Paisa?", the Nepali phrase for money that we often heard from begging children. When we agreed on 50 rupees, the bag appeared—it probably would have come out earlier if we'd asked with a 100-rupee note in hand. When we left the village, Paul noticed that a carabineer was missing on his paddle jacket. One of the kids at the riverbank must have taken it. This was very unusual behavior in Nepal, but since the older women had lied to us about the bag, it didn't surprise me that a petty thief was among the younger generation.

The Lower Karnali passes through dense jungle. But except for the early morning fog, it wasn't wet in the river valley. This section of the Himalaya, known as the Terai, has only been inhabited since the 1950s when malaria was controlled with DDT. We saw little wildlife although locals told us that tigers, leopards and bear inhabited the right bank. I marveled at the geology as we passed through the Siwalik hills, where the Indian plate subducts under the Asian plate. At one bend, the river formed a rapid against an eighty-foot wall of conglomerate stones. This



The Group: Front row from left: Ethan Greene, John Mattson, Tashi Lama, Randy Kennedy, Paul Zirkelbach, Ken Ransford  
Back row from left: Tanba Lama, Mutur Lama, Urgen Lundup Lama, Andy Zimet

wall was the ancient Karnali river bed that had been uplifted and now formed the riverbank.

River trips, even long ones, remind me of rapids. As you slowly approach the lip of the rapid, the river picks up speed, and before you know it you're through the whitewater and into the pool below. I knew this trip was coming to an end and the children waving bye-bye on the last few river bends left me choked-up. Suddenly, the single-strut highway bridge marking the takeout came into view and Chisapani and the flat Indian plains stretched before us.

Adam has been planned at Chisapani for several decades but Nepal is too poor to build it. The World Bank won't fund the 1982 \$3.2

billion dam construction cost unless Nepal agrees to sell all of the hydroelectric power to India in order to generate funds to repay the dam cost. India and Nepal can't agree on this for political reasons, so the dam fortunately remains on the drawing board. Adam here could generate sixty times the power now created by all existing hydroelectric projects in Nepal. Future efforts to oppose this dam should focus pressure on the World Bank and seek to exploit the political differences between Nepal and its huge southern neighbor India. The World Bank recently withdrew funding for a dam on the Arun Kosi, which drains the 8,000 meter peaks Everest and Makalu, amidst criticism that displaced villagers wouldn't be properly compensated.

After seventeen days on the river, I wasn't ready for truck exhaust and telephones. In less than an hour, our boats were loaded on a bus, which we hadn't prearranged, and we were on our way back to Kathmandu. This trip of a lifetime was over and as I gazed out the window at the Himalaya I contemplated my next one.

*About the author: Ken Ransford, a member of American Whitewater's board of directors, is an attorney and CPA in Carbondale. He has been paddling since 1983, and this was his third kayaking trip to Nepal.*

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*For further reading: White Water Nepal, A rivers guidebook for rafting and kayaking, Peter Knowles and Dave Allardice, Rivers Publishing U.K., 1992.*

*A Mountain in Tibet, Charles Allen, Futura Publications, U.K. 1982. The exploration of Mt. Kailash.*

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*My Life as an Explorer, Sven Hedin, out of print but available in Kathmandu bookstores. The autobiography of the first westerner to see Mt. Kailash.*



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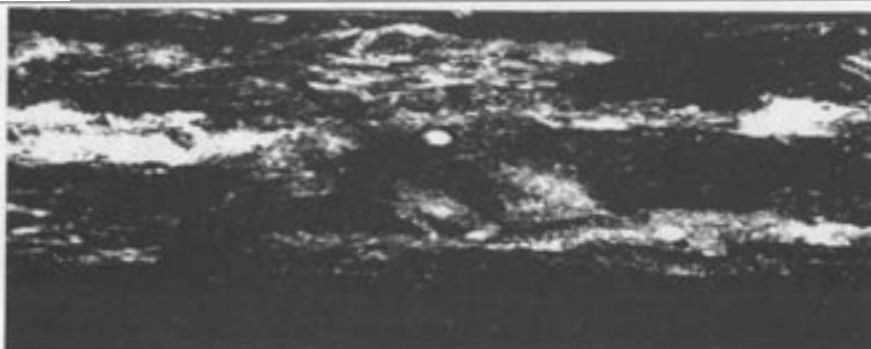
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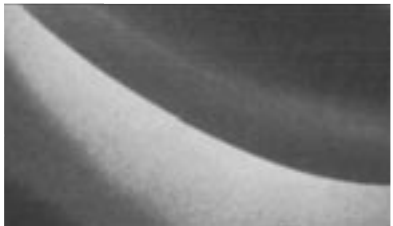


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# Safety

## High Water Rafting, Class V Kayaking Cause Many Fatalities

1998 River Fatality Report

By Charlie Walbridge  
Member, AW Board

1998 is shaping up as another bad year for whitewater paddlers. Accidents reported to *American Whitewater* include 13 kayak, 4 canoe, and 16 rafting fatalities. Kayaking deaths are running at just below last year's levels. Roughly half were advanced or expert paddlers. By AW Safety Chair Lee Belknap's calculations, the number of accidents has not increased since the early 90s if you factor out all drownings in Class V water! Rafting accidents, both commercial and private, are most often linked to unusually high flows. Canoeists who die are generally inexperienced; they encounter trouble on easier rivers.

Most incidents were reported on the Internet via postings to [Rec.Boats.Paddle](#). I am indebted to many people, and especially to Canadian Kevin Sulewski, who logs on regularly and forwards this material. A number of other people sent newspaper clippings or personal accounts. These reports may contain errors, so if you see any, please let me know. Occasionally the individuals in a deceased person's group contact me directly, which is best of all. If you write about an incident involving someone in your group, I will always pass on the facts as you report them.

### Kayaking Accidents

The **Five Falls of the Chatooga**, located along the Georgia/South Carolina border, has maintained a formidable reputation despite the advances in whitewater boating over the past twenty years. On January 11, 1998 the river was running at 2.6, a high level for this section. **Tim McLure**, an experienced paddler who was very familiar with Section IV, started the run with friends that day. Postings forwarded by AW Safety Chair Lee Belknap reported that McLure became caught in a very steep entry hole in the lower part of Jawbone Rapid and exited his boat after three roll attempts. He washed into the Puppy Chute, a high water sneak route through Sock-em-dog, and was pushed under the left side of Allison's Rock. This is a bad undercut that claimed the life of a rafter a few years ago. The runout of this undercut is very narrow and Tim apparently broached on his paddle

there and became pinned. His group was equipped and trained for rescue and reportedly broke two z-drags in their efforts to extricate him. Tim's body was recovered on Wednesday when the water had dropped to 2.2 feet by a team composed of paddlers and local rescue squad members.

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, the **Little River Canyon** in Northern Alabama claimed its second victim in a month. A posting by Dane White reported that kayaker **Dale Adams**, a regular visitor to the Little River Canyon, was running the upper section when he dropped into the hole at the base of Road Block rapid. Here he was caught, thrashed, and forced to swim. The hole recirculated him for several minutes before releasing him unconscious. Despite the efforts of his group, he was washed through the next rapid, Humpty Dumpty. One member of his party exited his boat, grabbed hold of Dale, swam the rapid with him, then pulled him to shore. CPR was performed for an hour until the Fort Payne Rescue Squad arrived; his body was evacuated by helicopter some time later.

Abundant rain and warm winter temperatures lead to an increase in creek boating throughout the Southern Appalachians. On February 18th **Pablo Perez**, an outstanding creeker and rodeo competitor, died on the **Rocky Broad River** (Highway 9 to Old Fort) near Asheville, NC. Water levels were moderate when the group put in at 4:00 in the afternoon. After running the more difficult upper section they arrived at "Guido," a ledge drop with an undercut rock on the left. This the last hard drop on the run. Unknown to the group, there was a log jammed diagonally in the current. It was extremely difficult to spot. Another boater had pinned there a week earlier, escaping after a terrible struggle. The lead boater, paddling a rodeo boat, did a tail squirt and hit the log with his stern. He eddied out below and tried to warn the others.

Pablo, paddling a very-high-volume creek boat, was already committed to the run. His boat hit the log bow first, disappeared, and was apparently held in place by the log and the undercut. His three companions, all very strong paddlers, tried a variety of methods to bring Pablo's head above water including a snag line and a tethered wader in a rescue vest. The accident occurred at 5:00; at 6:00 the group sent for outside help. The Black Mountain Swiftwater Rescue Team and doz-

ens of local paddlers responded to what proved to be a very difficult rescue. Auxiliary lighting was brought in and Pablo's body was removed from his boat at 3:30 the following morning. Friends recovered his boat later that day. Logs in drops can be extremely dangerous and hard to spot. Since smaller creeks are being run regularly, paddlers need to find better ways of spotting these hazards.

Keith Richards-Dinger and his group forwarded a report on the death of **Steve Stone** on the **Rio Hollin** in Ecuador. Stone, a Tennessee kayaker, was traveling independently when he met a group of five Californians and one local guide. In the days leading up to the Rio Hollin trip the group found Stone to be an excellent boater, but noted that he had a tendency to run ahead of the group and often attempted big rapids without scouting or backup. Running blind drops is always a dangerous game and in this case it proved to be a fatal error.

The Rio Hollin, a two-day trip, was running extremely high from recent rains. Late on the first day, January 12th, Stone ran first over a big horizon line. When the group





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realized that the rapid was blind they pulled over in time to see Stone get caught in a large, steep entry hole at the base of an 8-foot drop. After a very rough ride and several rolls, he flipped, washed out, and disappeared around a bend upside down. Two members of the group portaged the drop and gave chase; the others following closely behind. Because of the rough terrain and the fast, pushy, Class III-IV water below, it took over 15 minutes to catch up with Stone's kayak.

As they approached, the kayak rolled slightly in a wave, showing that Stone was still inside before hitting a rock and dumping Stone out. The group got him to shore and began CPR, which they continued for 45 minutes without success. During this time they noticed Stone's helmet, a low profile model, had taken a very serious hit to the temple. The group camped there and, after marking the spot with space blankets, paddled out the next day. They notified authorities at an Air Force base late that afternoon. The body was picked up by helicopter the following morning.

The Upper Blackwater, one of the steepest and most challenging runs in West Virginia, claimed the life of veteran kayaker Tim Gavin on March 29th. Gavin, who had run the river dozens of times and knew it extremely well, was paddling with a close friend at a moderate 300 cfs level. The trouble occurred at Sticky Fingers, a dangerous drop with an undercut center chute. Reports by Bob Gedekoh, Mike Moore, and Paul Shelp describe the accident as follows: Gavin attempted the center slot but was shoved into an undercut. His friend worked his way back upstream and saw only 6 inches of the kayak stern sticking out of the water. He attached a line to the grab loop but could not free the boat. He then boated out and notified authorities and local kayakers. He returned to the scene later that day with a few friends but still could not recover the boat.

The next day, a large crew of area kayakers returned. With Jeff Snyder performing the dangerous in-water part of the rescue they recovered the body after a long struggle. There were anxious moments as Snyder's leg was caught in a loop in the rescue line! Gavin's body was removed from the canyon by helicopter.

Gavin was paddling a very short kayak. Although these designs allow creek boaters to attempt incredibly congested drops, they may stuff more easily under logs and undercuts. Others, paddling longer designs, have broached where Gavin was killed, but their boats bridged the gap. The paddlers were held higher and had more time to escape. The same might have been true of the accident in which Scott Hasson, another well-known expert, died on the Lower Meadow in 1997. Again, a very short boat was shoved deeply

into a sieve. Hasson survived a similar pinning a year earlier at the same spot in what was almost certainly a longer boat.

This is not an attempt to "blame the boat;" because no two pins are exactly alike. The intent is to suggest, as a number of excellent paddlers have, that length, possibly combined with volume, may have been a factor in a few accidents involving sieves. The optimum length for creeking has been the subject of much debate and these accidents will undoubtedly add to it.

Two spring kayaking fatalities in Central Georgia involved inexperienced paddlers who were not wearing life vests. Scott Bristow forwarded an article from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reporting that Kendall Bryant, a volunteer firefighter, drowned on the Etowah River March 1 while teaching his girlfriend to paddle. He flipped his sit on top and disappeared after several attempts to remount it. His girlfriend lost her paddle trying to rescue him, then continued to hand-paddle in an effort to help. She eventually became stranded on the far side of the river and needed rescue herself.

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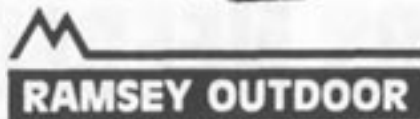
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On April 23, a **K-2** flipped soon after launching on the **Chattahoochee River** near Atlanta. According to the National Park Service morning report forwarded by Ada Parkinson, one man made it to shore, the other, **Charles Huggins**, disappeared. Huggins' body was found by a construction worker at a bridge project on May 6.

The Narrows of the **Ogden River** near Salt Lake City, UT is a small, steep stretch of continuous Class V whitewater. Although the flow was only 620 cfs on April 18, continuously difficult rapids made rescue difficult. Joyce Gronstein, who was boating with a friend, reported meeting a group of three kayakers part way down, just below a large, river-wide hole. One of these, **Mark Anderson, 29**, flipped in the hole and rolled on his third attempt. He was pushed sideways into the next rapid where he flipped again. At some point below he came out of his boat.

Observers on a bridge downstream saw him swim by with a dazed expression on his face. He floated passively, making no attempt at self rescue. One of his friends was nearby, shouting encouragement. As Gronstein and her partner reached the mouth of the canyon, they caught sight of Anderson's boat washed against a log jam. A boater on shore holding a throw bag reported that Anderson was stuck in the strainer. A second paddler was on the

road talking into a cell phone. After scouting, Gronstein was able to eddy out behind the jam. She climbed out onto the log and saw Anderson stuck underwater, with a 12-inch log across his chest. After attempting to lift his head above water without success, Gronstein attached a rope to one shoulder of Anderson's PFD. It took four men to pull him free. A rescue squad arrived as the retrieval was going on. They started CPR, but were not successful.

The **Bruneau River** is a popular Class III-IV overnighter through the remote high desert of Southern Idaho. On May 1, **Kathleen Anderson**, the top lawyer for Esprit Corporation in San Francisco, was paddling the river with a female friend. Both were competent Class IV boaters. Trouble struck at Class III Five Mile Rapid. Her friend led the drop and eddied out below. Anderson was out of sight when she flipped. When she did not appear at the bottom, her friend, a professional firefighter, hiked up and found her floating in an eddy. She pulled Kathleen in and began CPR. These efforts, though vigorous, were unsuccessful.

Whitewater racing is fun and exciting, but there are some real risks. Racing makes any run more strenuous, and it's harder to control your boat at race speeds. On May

24th **Nathan Vernon** was killed at the Jeep Whitewater Festival. This event, which advertised itself extensively with the tag line, "Winners will be rewarded; losers will be resuscitated," was held on the Class IV+ Dowd Chutes of the **Eagle River** near Vail, CO. The race was 1500 meters long, roughly 3/4 of a mile. The river was running at 35 feet, or 1340 cfs, at the gauge at Gypsum. This is a medium low level. The altitude, well over 8,000 feet, made the race unusually tiring.

Reports posted to the internet and forwarded by Colorado Whitewater Association Safety Chair Roger Lynn described the incident as follows: Vernon, a third year kayaker, capsized halfway down the course just above the most turbulent section. After two roll attempts, he slid out of his kayak. Initially conscious, he appeared to lose consciousness and floated facedown for the rest of the rapid. Two throw ropes hit him without response. Several safety boaters grabbed him, flipped him over, and got him to shore with some difficulty. Rescue squads were on hand and CPR began at once. He was taken to Vail Valley Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead. The official cause of death, based on an autopsy, was heart failure.

The Vail Mountain Rescue Team is a well-trained unit. They provided excellent safety coverage and were augmented by chase boats stationed throughout the course. Two com-

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ments were made by observers. First, many safety boaters were paddling very short rodeo boats, great for playing the river, but not ideal for rescue. Second, this is an ideal site to set up a tethered swimmer rescue using a rescue PFD. This is often done in European races and makes it easy to recover an unconscious person in whitewater. Neither change would have made a difference in this case. Given the heart problem, Vernon probably could not have been resuscitated.

On June 8 there was an incident on the Pilar Run of the **Rio Grande** in New Mexico. A young man paddling a sit-on-top kayak flipped at Albert Falls and became tangled in a line. Outfitter Steve Harris of Far Flung Adventures reports that he was dragged over a mile through Herringbone and The Narrows before his partner could get to him. His partner, assisted by a commercial guide, began CPR. In a bizarre twist, the victim had apparently been denied access by a BLM ranger because he did not have a throw bag. He went to his car and returned with some rope stuffed in a mesh bag and was allowed to put on. It's not known if this was the same rope.

The New River in southern West Virginia has been flowing at extremely high levels most of this year. This is a big, wide river with Grand Canyon-sized rapids at these levels.

Self-rescue would be extremely difficult, even at lower flows. On June 13 the river was running at 7 feet (roughly 14,000 cfs). Dave Bassage of Friends of Cheat, a former full-time New River guide, reported that commercial outfitters found **Charles Chandler**, 40, of Annison, Alabama, floating face down in a large eddy below Lower Keaney at 4:15 PM. Aided by a customer who was a nurse, guides pulled Chandler into a raft and immediately attempted resuscitation. The guides radioed for help, and Chandler was evacuated by helicopter to a hospital in Beckley 45 minutes later, where he was pronounced dead.

A follow-up investigation by Park Service rangers reported that Chandler had started the run at Cunard with two other paddlers. Rangers found several guidebooks in Chandler's car. A **Rec.Boats.Paddle** posting by Kyle Chavis reported that he heard this from two of his friends: Chandler told them that he had run the river once before, at 3 feet (5800 cfs). They allowed him to join them. He swam in the warm-up rapids. The group then waited 20 minutes at the bottom of Railroad Rapids before he came through. He swam again at Ender Waves, and was last seen taking out in an eddy above Class IV Upper Keaney. The group waited for over an hour below Class IV+ Lower Keaney, assumed he

was walking out on the railroad grade, and continued downstream. Walking out may have been Chandler's original intention, but apparently he reentered the river later and continued alone.

The New is a poor choice for soloists at high water because of its width, turbulence, and difficulty. Mutual support can be lifesaving. Deciding whether or not to let a stranger accompany your group on a river is never easy, but once you have agreed to take someone on you need to do one of two things; 1) keep track of them and help them if needed or 2) tell them to carry out for their own safety. For the sake of your peace of mind in the event of a mishap this must be communicated clearly. This may require a time-consuming, up-river hike. If a person agrees to leave the river and then reenters the water, they do so without expectation of assistance from others.

In June of 1998 an unrelenting series of thunderstorms lashed the Northeast. This created a number of serious problems. Articles forwarded by rescue expert Slim Ray detailed the damage. Kids were washed from front porches; pedestrians were sucked into culverts and cars were pushed off of bridges and roadways. There was widespread destructive flooding throughout New England, Penn-



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sylvania, West Virginia, and the Midwest. Dozens were killed. During this period, on June 14th, Matthew Miller, 19, was running the Indian Head River alone in a homemade plywood kayak. He was pinned underwater against a strainer and killed. He was found by another paddler, who notified the Weymouth, Massachusetts Fire Department. They began the difficult and dangerous extrication.

Lee Bardin, who along with Ben Bramledge and Derek Fridley forwarded newspaper articles, reports that the Indian Head River runs along the MA/NH border. It is not a whitewater stream, but it was running very high and fast from recent rains. The victim was wearing a PFD and helmet. His feet apparently broke through the kayak hull. Miller's sister told reporters that he was a great all-around outdoorsman, but that he "really liked to paddle alone. In these conditions it was a mistake to do so.

On July 6, an accident many predicted finally happened on the Kern River near Kernville, CA. As a posting from AW director Rich Penny explained, Martha Johnson, a five year veteran kayaker, was struck by a private raft and capsized. Johnson attempted to roll up, but, as her husband watched in horror from shore, she flipped again and washed downstream into a strainer formed by over-

hanging branches. Johnson's body next was seen floating face down in the current. Another kayaker found her body about a half mile downstream and stayed with it until rescuers from the sheriff's department arrived. Kern County Sheriff's Sgt. Craig Porter speculated to the press that she may have hit her head. His boss, with questionable logic, indicated that he'd like to close the river entirely, but couldn't! The private rafters continued downriver, oblivious to the tragedy they had caused. Witnesses believe it was an accident, rather than a malicious act.

More information is now available on the December 22, 1997 drowning of Jonathan Harris on the Little River Canyon in Alabama. AW member Renee Clark talked with rangers. Harris was apparently boating alone and not using a sprayskirt on his kayak. The accident occurred on the Chairlift Section at very low flows. Friends had accompanied him along the bank to take pictures but they had no rescue gear. After he pinned on an undercut rock at Eddy Hop; his friends tried for 30 minutes to save him but were unsuccessful.

## Rafting Accidents

On January 9, the French Broad was flooding and river levels were in excess of 40,000 cfs. Nonetheless, Rusty Watts and Ernie Gosnell attempted the run above Hot Springs, NC. A report forwarded by Slim Ray stated that both men had tied themselves into their boat; Watts by his PFD and Gosnell by his wrist. When the boat flipped, Watts' PFD was pulled off. He swam to a tree where he sat for hours until pulled off by an Air Force helicopter that had other flood-related business in the area. Gosnell and his boat were located the next day, pinned on a strainer. Because of high water the rescue was postponed 24 hours. This incident prompted a proposal to close the river at high flows. Local boaters are working with government officials to prevent this.

From Friday, March 21 to Sunday, March 23rd three inches of warm rains fell on mountain snowpack of the Siskiyou Mountains of Southern Oregon. The Illinois River, a multi-day Class IV-V trip, rose from a low of 1700 to a high of over 17,000 cfs, a rise of over fifteen feet. Since the river is normally run between 900 and 3000 cfs, this sudden rise raised havoc with weekend river runners. Several parties never launched; a single crew made it

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out ahead of the surge. One group hiked back to the put-in after the flow doubled overnight; while another chose to stay put and was pulled out by helicopter on Monday. Two parties had flips in or near the Class V Green Wall rapid that resulted in fatalities. Coast Guard rescue helicopters picked up ten people, six of whom had flipped boats and become stranded in a sheer-walled section of the canyon. The story was picked up by CNN and other mainline media. My thanks to all those who forwarded clippings and reports

Wilbur Byars, 62, a veteran guide, was in one of three rafts. They launched Saturday at 10:30 and reached the Green Wall by Noon on Sunday. Two of the three boats, including one carrying Byars, flipped in a huge 15-foot high wave at the top of the Green Wall. Two boats were washed downstream. The third boat made it through the first wave and rescued Byars. They made sure the others were safe on shore, then left to get help. When they peeled out, they flipped. After checking the boat for signs that Byars was trapped inside, his partner swam for shore. In the distance he could see Byars floating face down. Byars was later spotted by a helicopter washed up on shore, face up, and unresponsive. The body was recovered by a Coast Guard rescue swimmer. Surviving members of the group tried to climb out of

the gorge and were eventually picked up by Coast Guard helicopter.

On Saturday morning at 10 AM, Jeff Alexander, 37, launched in a small raft, paddling tandem with a partner. The group also included three kayakers. They portaged the Green Wall at around 1:00 PM Sunday and planned to do the same at the Little Green Wall downstream. The raft missed the take-out eddy; capsized in a pour-over, and the pair was in the water. Alexander had a drysuit neckgasket repaired with duct tape. When he entered the water the seal blew out. Water poured in, making swimming difficult and increasing his vulnerability to the cold. Party members saw him float underwater for long periods despite his PFD. His partner was carried 5 miles downstream before she reached shore. The group recovered and secured Alexander's body, then two of the three kayakers boated out to get help. One of the kayakers and Alexander's partner were evacuated by helicopter the following day.

New York Conservation Officer Ben Bramledge reports that on April 15, Sgt. Karl Kelly, an Indiana conservation officer with 28 years of experience, died during a training exercise at the Williams Dam on the White River near Bedford, Indiana. Kelly was part of a team practicing a two-boat tether rescue. The lead boat stalled and swamped while attempting to recover the "victim," a floating throw bag, spilling the occupants overboard. Sgt. Kelly was in the downstream, or backup, boat. After attempting to pull the lead boat clear of the hydraulic, Sgt. Kelly moved his

motor-powered raft upstream, between the swamped boat and the dam, to make the rescue. This was a terrible mistake; one that ran contrary to his training. His boat swamped, and he was caught in the backwash. Safety boats managed to rescue everyone else, but Kelly, although given prompt care, died in the hospital two days later. Two other officers were also hospitalized.

California, which has experienced both a heavy snowpack and a cool spring, is in for a prolonged period of extremely-high water. Already eleven rafting fatalities have been reported; two involved a mother and child on an air mattress, but the rest are for real! Three occurred within a few days of each other on the South Fork of the American near Lotus, California. A popular Class III+ summer run at 1200-1600 cfs. At 6,000-8,000 cfs, the river becomes very continuous and turbulent. At this point it should be considered heavy Class IV-IV+. Most of this information was reported by AW Director and Friends of the River conservationist Richard Penny.

On June 8 Greg Malley, a commercial rafting guide running an oar boat, drowned after a flip at the top of Grey's Grindstone on the Tuolumne River. It was his 85th commercial trip. Dan and Adam Diamont reported to Rec.Boats.Paddle that the river was flowing at 9,000 cfs, which is very high. Two guests were pulled in quickly, the guide's body was recovered further downstream. There was blood on his head indicating a possible injury. CPR began at once and a helicopter was called

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On June 17 **Robert Wheat**, 48, drowned when his raft flipped on the **South Fork of the American in Meatgrinder Rapid**. A heavy man, 300+ pounds, he was boating without a wetsuit. Meatgrinder is very nasty at this level: over a mile long, with huge waves and holes. Rescue, which must have been very difficult, was made by professional guides running trips in the area.

Also on June 17, **Branda Snow**, 13, died on the **Kern** below Fairview Dam when her raft hit a submerged log and flipped. She apparently became tangled on the strainer. This is the first drowning on the Kern in 20 years of commercial outfitting. The parents were very supportive of the outfitters actions in this tragedy.

On June 18, a guest on a commercial raft trip drowned after leaping off "Jump Off Rock" on the **Klamath River** near Happy Camp. He was swept downstream, and guides lost sight of him. The body has not been recovered. On the same day there was a drowning on the **Stanislaus**, but I have no further information.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> a woman fell from a raft in Fowler's Rapids on the Folsom Gorge section of the **South Fork of the American** when her boat ran the wrong side of the river and hit a

large hole. This was a one-boat private trip, so there was no backup. Her body was found at the end of the run stripped of its PFD.

Also on June 20, a mother and daughter riding an air mattress drowned on **Big Chico Creek** near Bidwell Park. This is not exactly a rafting accident, but was lumped with the others by the newspapers. More information is needed.

On June 21 **Brenda Cercone**, 27 drowned after the Chili Bar put-in of the **South Fork of the American** after a raft she was in flipped on the eddyline. This was a trip designed to offer outdoor opportunities to inner city youth. She was washed downstream into a strainer. She was recovered quickly (10 minutes) and was found to have a pulse. She was taken to Marshall Hospital in nearby **Placerville**. She died several days later without regaining consciousness.

Also on June 21, three people were killed when their raft flipped going over a pipeline on a flatwater section of the **Cosumnes River** near Rancho Murita. The hydraulic at the base of the dam-like structure trapped and killed the entire group.

California was not the only place to have problems. In Colorado, CWWA Safety Chair

Roger Lynn reports two fatalities. **Allen Ogdon**, 66, drowned in "Seidel's Suckhole" near Salida on the **Arkansas River** June 21<sup>st</sup> after his raft "dump-trucked," standing on its side and spilling everyone into the river. All others swam to safety. The river was running low; roughly 1300 cfs. After recovery, CPR was initiated and Ogdon was boated downstream a half mile to the nearest vehicle access. There was a second death on the **Fractions Section of the Ark** on July 10, at a level of 2600 cfs, after a raft flipped in a large wave. The other boats in the group recovered other passengers, but a 48-year-old man was the last recovered. CPR was given without success.

There was also a fatality in the **Numbers Section of the Ark** in late June. More information on this is needed.

Vince Thompson, who maintains the Idaho Whitewater Page, reported on a fatality in the Whitewater State:

**Dee Martin**, a drift boat paddler, drowned in the aptly-named Upset Rapid of Idaho's **Owyhee** on May 13. He was not wearing a PFD and may have been wearing waders! This run is a Class II-III desert canyon rim at normal flows. Unexpected heavy rains raised the level from 2500 to over 13000 cfs, making the trip much more difficult. Landslides and

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washouts closed some access points, and 6-8 groups were stranded on rivers in the area. Many were not prepared for nature's savage onslaught, and one group had to be evacuated.

On June 12th a rafting guest died on the Taos Box run of New Mexico's **Rio Grande**, which was running low at under 1000 cfs. This is the first commercial fatality on this section. Steve Harris reported the accident as follows: Several boats piled up on a sieve called "the Northwest Passage." Two boats hit each other, partly blocking the main channel. The victim, a 34 year old female, was in the third raft, which broached against the other two and flipped. This impact released the first two boats, but the third was pinned. A forth boat became pinned on another rock. The victim was presumably pulled under the mess. Unpinning the boat and collecting swimmers took over an hour, during which time they determined someone was missing. An extensive search followed, first by guides, then by Taos Search and Rescue. Divers recovered the body on June 16 under 7 feet of water.

## Canoe Accidents

Relatively few canoe accidents are reported to *American Whitewater*, but since 25% of all canoe accidents involve whitewater, the actual total number is probably between 20 and 30 per year. Most involve novices and occur on streams with fast current, easy rapids, strainers, or low-head dams.

On February 8, **Chad Stoval**, 23, drowned when the canoe he was paddling capsized on the **Spoon River** near Macomb, Ill. His partner was able to swim to safety. Mr. Stoval was a young man who overcame many disabilities to become a good student and athlete in high school.

On February 22, **Vivian Sinott**, 35 was pinned against a strainer on New Jersey's **Ramapo River** near Mawah, NJ Newspaper. Articles forwarded by AW's Al Braley reported that Ms. Sinot was paddling tandem with her husband. They were accompanied by another tandem canoe and a kayak. No one was wearing a PFD. Rescue workers were called, but her body was trapped under six feet of water for 30 minutes. The pin was released by firefighters who attached a rope to the log and pulled it loose. Both she and her husband were transported to a local hospital where she was pronounced dead.

Also on February 22 **Jason Radford**, 22, capsized his canoe on the **Catawba River** near Marion, North Carolina, spilling himself and two friends into the river. He apparently was trying to help a friend reach shore when he collapsed and washed away. The other two men made it to shore; they were treated for hypothermia and released.

On March 14 a group of three paddlers was canoeing on the **Susquehanna River** near Dalmatia, PA against a very strong headwind. Materials forwarded by Dave Guss of State College, PA stated that **Darron Edmiston**, 32, paddling solo, capsized his canoe and disappeared. His buddies did not see the flip, but when the victim's gear floated by, they began a search. Darron was reportedly wearing a life vest but no cold weather gear. The body has not been recovered, suggesting that the PFD probably came off.

I have some second hand information about two other canoe accidents that occurred in New England during the June high water. Someone apparently drowned after running a dam on the **Charles River** near Boston, MA. Another death occurred when a canoe anchored at the mouth of the East Outlet of **Moosehead Lake** swamped, throwing the occupants into the river. More information on these incidents is needed.

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## Miscellaneous Craft

Several people floating rivers in unconventional craft met death on the river. AW's Tom Bowen forwarded newspaper reports of an unusual twist to an old problem. On April 26, **Mark Palmisano** was floating the **Chagrin River** near Willoughby, OH with a friend. Both wore cold-water Survival Suits, probably Coast Guard Gumby Suits, and apparently did this often. After taking out, he jumped back into the river to demonstrate the suit's buoyancy and comfort to an onlooker. He was taken by a recirculating side eddy into the backwash of the Daniels Park Dam. The drop is only about 3 feet high, but he was recirculated 4-5 times. Paramedics were called, but he was dead when the hydraulic released him.

On May 18, Bobby Canipewas was offering powerboat rides at a river festival along the **Catawba River** in North Carolina when he saw a kayaker trapped in the backwash of the

dam at the city of Morganton water treatment plant. He approached and attempted to throw a rope to the man, but the victim didn't grab hold. Without taking his riders to safety, he entered the backwash of the dam, swamping, and then capsizing his boat. He, the kayaker, and the one passenger swam to safety; the other passenger drowned.

On June 7, **Idus Roberston**, a probate judge from Manchester, Georgia, drowned after his jonboat swamped in big waves on the **Flint River** near Spirewell Bluff, Georgia. The river was running at 13 feet 10 inches, runnable by kayakers, but 5 feet over the cutoff used by a local canoe livery. The three men sharing the boat did not want to get wet. They argued about whom would sit in front and eventually they all sat in the back. When they hit a set of 3-4 foot waves the boat back-ended, putting everyone into the water. Two men and a dog made it to shore, but Robertson's body was missing for some time. No word about PFD use.

## Doing the Best We Can

Over the past few years I've heard from a few paddlers who strongly disagree with portions of my reports. A few got really angry. Don't forget that these reports are an imperfect effort to learn how to prevent similar occurrences. Let's take time to think hard about what happened to our fellow boaters, each of whom loved rivers and left family and friends behind. Let's honor them by learning what happened so others won't suffer the same fate. If you feel the facts presented here are in error or you disagree with the conclusions, please don't hesitate to write me. You can also send a letter directly to the editor of *American Whitewater*.

With so many new people entering the sport, the need for accident reporting will continue. Send your inf. to Charlie Walbridge, 230 Penlynn Pike, Blue Bell, PA 19422; 215-646-0157  
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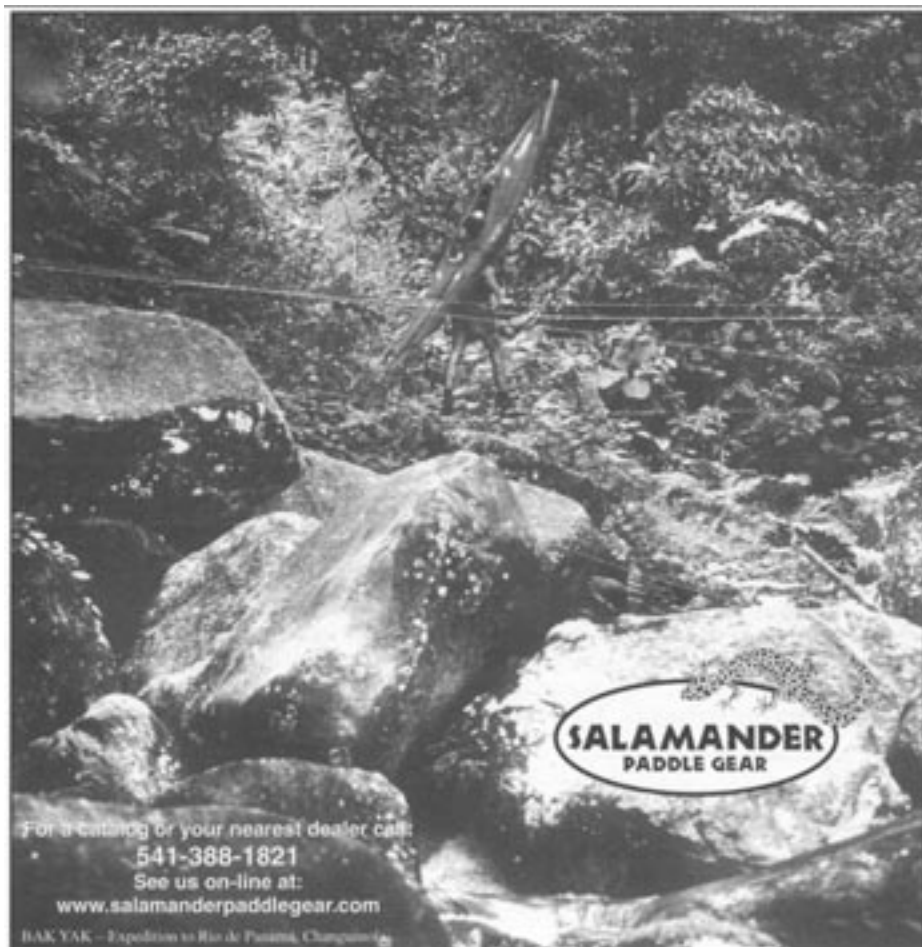
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**Hi!** My name is Sean Brabant and I am 13 years old and live in Clayton N.Y. and I love to paddle white water. Some of my friends have been getting into paddling also. Every summer, friends from Boston and Wisconsin come up and paddle on the Black River in Watertown, New York.

We spend most of our time on three different sections of the river: Hole Brothers, just above on what we call Connection Wave, and at the Route 3 wave. The Route 3 wave is about 5 foot tall and allows us to do many tricks like flat spins. Hole Brothers is a hole with two big eddies on either side. The hole is excellent for cartwheels and spins. Lastly, the Connection Wave is a 1-4 ft. wave on river right and on river left there is a great endo hole or very steep wave. This place is great for squirts and some "OK surfing."

There are many people that come up and go kayaking on the Black. I am only going to mention the people that are my age or a little older. First, there is my cousin Jerome, who is 15. He has been paddling for about four years and he is a cool kid. Then, there are Andy and Billy Davison, who come from Wisconsin. Andy is 14 and has been paddling for four years and can rip it up on the wave. Then there's Billy, Andy's little brother. He is 12. Billy really likes to challenge himself to see what he can do. Billy loves to eat it up in the hole.

## Hot Fun in the Summertime

By Sean Brabant

Carl Larson comes up with his family and stays over on Grindstone like Andy and Billy. Carl may look like a thinker but he is horrendously crazy! He says that he may not do a rapid because no one else is doing it, but then he will just do it anyway. One of my other friends is Travis Miller. He is very good for the short amount of time that he has been paddling. He has been paddling for four years and is ripping it up on the wave and in the holes. He may get a little crazy when he flips, but when he rolls back up he has a smile on his face.

I have been paddling for seven years now and I have a lot of fun paddling with all these people I have mentioned.

Some of my best times are on the Route 3 wave. I have so much fun there because I can share it with the rest of the group. Usually there is only one person in Hole Brothers at a time, but on Rt 3 we have had up to six people surfing the wave at once, and it is only 13 ft wide! Sometimes Carl Larson and I get on the wave together and see how many times we can go over each other. When I'm alone on the wave I do flat spins with my Necky Jive. I'm not the only one who is doing spins; just about everyone can do a flat spin that is out there paddling with us.

When we are at Hole Brothers, Travis and I really try to concentrate because we are practicing our moves. We try to get better at cartwheels and spins. When we aren't being serious we try to develop new moves by accident.

Then we have Billy, who is flipping left and right, but not because he is afraid, but is trying new stuff. He will learn from his mistakes because usually if you flip you are trying something new.

Billy says that he can do more moves in Hole Brothers. Then Andy says "lets go up to Route 3 and we'll see who smokes who." Of course we know who will win that!

Jerome is very subtle in the hole. He is not really sure of what he wants to do. This year Jerome is going to be awesomewith his new 3D. He will rip it up. He likes to ease into moves the 3D allows that. Carl in the hole is something to see. He goes all over the place with spins, cartwheels and a whole bunch of moves. He always comes out with a smile, so we all know that he is having fun.

I feel very lucky to live so close to a great paddling river like the Black, I am also lucky to have a dad who loves to paddle. He has been a great teacher. Dad, Andy, Billy and their dad, Tom, have taught us all to respect each other, as well as the river.

Paddling can be a lot of fun. I have just told you how much fun it can be. Every summer I wait for my buddies to come down my driveway. When I see their car I know for sure that the summer fun has just begun. Look forward to seeing you on the river this summer!



Top down: Sean Brabant surfing the Rt.3 wave on the Black River in Watertown, NY. Billy Davison carves across the Rt. 3 wave on the Black River. Andy Davison raises his paddle as he carves the Rt. 3 wave.



# We Really Should Do Something About These Names

By Ed E. Kett

It hit me on the way to the Ocoee. The politically correct decade of the 90s is fast disappearing and whitewater boaters are not yet even at the starting gate. We're out of the loop. We've been left behind. What were we thinking??

While committees are being led by Chairpersons, we're still surfing Girlie Hole. While old people are "chronologically challenged," we're still getting trashed at Double Suck.

With the rest of the world embracing political correctness faster than Gloria Steinem refusing to shake hands with Hugh Hefner, I am ashamed to discuss my river trips in mixed company. In the old days, when most rapids were named, the sport was mainly a male Neanderthal pastime. As a matter of fact, a popular T-shirt of the times showed a male kayaker as a PRECURSOR to the ape on the evolutionary scale. But times, they are a changin'.

No longer are our wives, mothers, and kids waiting for us at home. Now, they're

sitting beside us in the eddies waiting their turn to run Foreplay on the Watauga.

How does a parent answer a question like "Daddy! What's a dildo?" And how appropriate is it on a first whitewater date to run F—kup Falls? Together?? I think not!! And certainly, never, never in a tandem craft.

I think it's time to change some names.

What is really lost by renaming "Bud's Boner" on the Upper Gauley to "Bud's Mistake?" Subtle and not so subtle references to private parts have no place in the PC world of today. Crack In The Rock would become Breaches In Stone. Dick's Creek Ledge could become the more proper Richard's Creek Ledge. Girlie Hole on the Ocoee, a popular sidesurfing training spot, but a definite naming faux pas, could be renamed It's OK To Play Here.

Remember George Carlin's seven words that you can't, under any circumstances, don't even think about it, say on television. Do we have lower standards than (shudder)

television? And yet, several of those word or forms of them appear in our lexicon.

On the Watauga, there is a spot called Motherf—er Ledge, a disrespectful appellation if ever there was one. A much more respectful name would be "M" Is For The Million Things She Gave Me. F—kup Falls on the Upper Yough could become You Might Get Hurt Here. Double S—k on the Ocoee could become Two Slurps. S—khole on the Top Yough easily becomes Siphon or Vacuum Tube.

In the politically correct 90s, sexual orientation is a very sensitive subject. The coarsely named Backender Rapid on the Upper Yough could simply be called Alternate Routes Available.

As you can see, most of the renamed rapids are actually more accurate and, of course, infinitely more politically correct. In some cases, one might even consider them a vast improvement. Dildo Rock, the currently popular name of a feature in the Upper Gauley's Sweet's Falls, could just as easily be Cucumber Rock. Or we could just reference the new 90s technology and rename the whole rapid Viagra Falls.

## A Unified Field Theory of Rapid Difficulty

By Alison Snow Jones

There has been lively discussion in our canoe club ever since the AWA revised the scale by which rapids are rated. Some of this discussion has been fueled by the virtual disappearance of anything classified above Class IV east of the Rockies. However, an important sub-debate has emerged regarding the inherent subjectivity, or relativity, if you will, of perceptions of rapid difficulty. This debate has led a group of us to attempt a formal exposition of this phenomenon based on fairly well established tenets of quantum physics.

The first element of this new approach is the interaction of the observed rapid and the observing paddler. Like the classic Einsteinian example of the observer to whom an object traveling near the speed of light appears shorter, while events on the object appear to be slower, so the difficulty of rapids must appear different to the pantheon of paddling experts situated on their own elevated plane of the time-space continuum. It is these same experts who often assist in reevaluating rapid difficulty. Moreover, just as Heisenberg demonstrated the inherent uncertainty in knowing both the position and velocity of subatomic particles simultaneously, in paddling we are plagued by a

similar uncertainty. The moves one has to make and one's ability to make them (i.e., our "position" in the rapid) depend on a variety of factors ranging from how much sleep we got last night to our velocity in the rapid. And our velocity will depend on boat control and water level. This introduces some uncertainty regarding our final position (upside down, out-of-boat, pinned-to-rock) even in rapids that we have previously run successfully. And, of course, our perceived probability of an out-of-boat or pinned-to-rock experience (which may fluctuate throughout the course of a rapid or river or during the mere contemplation of a rapid) will ultimately determine our perceptions of river difficulty.

Which measure of rapid difficulty is relevant to the average paddler? Subjective or objective? My colleagues and I at the Paddling Institute of Technology (PIT) believe that for most paddling mortals, subjective river difficulty is the measure that matters. Subjective perceptions of rapid difficulty will play a significant role in the successful navigation of most rapids since it will influence one's body flexibility, mental acuity, and the all-important ability to spit, i.e. oral moisture coefficient. In an effort to "unify" the

subjective and objective components of rapid difficulty, we offer the following theoretical discussion and empirical formulation.

It was Peter Brandriss (C1) who first attempted to present a unified field theory of rapid difficulty. He observed that:

*"current theories of physics allow for the once radical proposition that difficulty of rapids is relative and can change spontaneously. Moreover, it may even vary greatly from one person to another depending on the plane they are transiting in the time-space continuum. [Rapid difficulty] just appears stable to each of us since we cannot break the barrier to other parts of the continuum even by gaining acceleration by slingshotting around large mid-river boulders or running Time Warp on the Upper Yough."*

Brandriss cites the famous Glickenturner experiments of 1996, which he notes "confirmed that difficulty of rapids is susceptible to the pull of both gravitational and magnetic fields." He goes on to postulate that there may be an "anti-difficulty" force "which is slowly driving all ratings back to the singularity from which they originated in a cataclysmic explosion after novice paddler, Bob Filberstein, having heard

from someone who ran the Bloomington section that *'the North Branch is really easy,'* mistakenly put in at the 'Kitzmiller' section his fourth time out." He concludes by suggesting that *"if some* day the relationship of the weak force (one's own judgement) to the strong force (one's judgement *after* all one's friends just ran the rapid) can be determined, then the true unified field theory of rapid difficulty that eluded Einstein and Planck will finally be within reach."

Stimulated by Brandriss' seminal work on this important topic, my colleagues and I have attempted to formulate a simple empirical specification of the determinants of relative rapid difficulty. We hope in this way to provide the average paddler with a method for converting "objective" (i.e., AWA ratings) to "subjective" (i.e., internal spit coefficient) rapid ratings. Our goal in so doing is to avoid equations that require evaluation of multiple integrals and differential equations since most of us have forgotten how to do these. We refer to this formulation as the "Why can't I spit even though this is only a Class III rapid?" model of rapid difficulty. Note that the following should be regarded as extremely preliminary.

Our point of departure is the following functional relationship:

$$D = f \{ (1/(C \cdot R \cdot E)) \cdot G \cdot AWA \}$$

Where

D is relative rapid difficulty

f denotes a functional relationship between D and the expression enclosed in { }. It is used to indicate that D may not be fully determined even when the model is fully parameterized, i.e., D contains a random component..

C is paddler competence, which is monotonically increasing in number of boat hours logged and difficulty of previous rapids run and quadratic concave in number of beers consumed prior to launch. (Higher value = more competent;  $0 < C \leq 1$ )

R is the probability of hitting your roll on the first attempt (higher = better;  $0 < R \leq 1$ )


E is the paddler's perceived distance from and perceived acceleration toward the event horizon of the nearest gaping hydraulic re-scaled to the 0,1 interval where zero means "you're lunch and one means "no problemo, dude!" (Perceived distance should not to be confused with absolute distance from the hydraulic event horizon. In fact, psychometric studies have consistently demonstrated that perceived distance is always less than absolute distance.)

G is the gauge reading re-scaled to equal 1 for the benchmark water level or range of water levels over which the AWA rating holds.




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Note that as C, R, and E increase, D will decline, holding all else constant. Note also that the above equation applies only to solo paddler boats. For tandem boats, C must be modified to reflect both paddlers' Levels of competence. Moreover, an additional variable describing the paddlers' ability to communicate effectively while under stress must be added to the above equation. (We are indebted to Hendrik van Oss for bringing the "tandem boat conundrum" to our attention.)

Note that the random variability for D alluded to above, while centered at zero, has non-constant variance. The variance of this random component, which is referred to as "the river gods" by some and as the "oh, s@#t" factor by paddlers of a less superstitious nature, is also proportional to G and inversely proportional to C, R, and E. This is the component that results in really good paddlers (six in the last 12 months) dying on difficult rivers that they've paddled many times before even though the expected variance of this component for them is quite small. For those of a more theoretical persuasion, this component is sometimes referred to as the "uncertainty principle of paddling." Among those who have actually experienced it, it often figures prominently in their religious conversion.

Clearly the denominator in the first term in D should not take values of zero in order that D not become infinite. We are not as concerned as some by this "zero-divide" problem. For a paddler who is recirculating in a large, ferocious hole (the kind that would start fights in bars) or who is about to plummet involuntarily over a high water fall after missing the micro eddy on river left or who is pinned in a boulder sieve or who is examining the branches of a strainer while submerged or who is broached in a collapsed decked boat in the middle of a Class V rapid, D must indeed seem infinite.

It was Hendrik van Oss (OC1) who first raised the zero-divide issue. In an excellent critique of our work, he argued that "the concept of roll(ing) only applies to decked boaters and some playboaters." Thus, he notes, a shortcoming of the above equation is that R would take the value 0 for open boaters yielding an infinite value of D for all of that persuasion. He also pointed out that D would become infinite for a paddler on flatwater who cannot roll at all ( $R=0$ ). Clearly D should not be infinite or even particularly high for this paddler (assuming that she is appropriately attired for water/air temperatures and not too far from shore).

We disagree that the presence R in the denominator precludes applying the equation to open boaters. We know many open boaters who roll their boats reliably in whitewater (and even more who roll reliably in swimming pools, an unusually benign form of flatwater). Thus, over some yet to be

determined range of R, it correctly belongs in the denominator. To rule out D becoming unbounded, we have currently modified the empirical specification of the model above to include a binary exponent on R, where 0=flatwater; 1=moving water, any class. Thus, R will take the value 1 when the exponent is zero (i.e., flatwater, no difficulty regardless of roll capability) and its measured value for all else.

Van Oss also correctly pointed out several problems with this specification of the relationship. The first is that perceived difficulty is always greater than the AWA rating ( $D > AWA$ ) for all rapids if the paddler is not fully competent ( $C < 1$ ). For low values of C, we're fairly well convinced that, indeed, perceived difficulty does exceed the AWA rating. As a person relatively new to the sport (hence, LOW value of C), I remember running some previously Class II rapids (now Class I according to AWA) on the middle Yough at 3+ feet and some previously Classified IVs (Now III+: Dimple, River's End) on the lower Yough at summer levels and finding their relative Difficulty well in line with their previous classifications. Particularly Dimple, where a swim (i.e.,  $R < 1$  as it often is for most beginners) can be quite long and you miss some nice scenery and good rapids while you're doing it!

Van Oss also pointed out that determina-

tion of competence is a major stumbling block for this model. We agree wholeheartedly with him. It is nearly as difficult as assigning ratings to rapids. However, we are currently working on a scale that uses information on the type of boat paddled; points assigned for various measures such as boat control; aggressiveness; eddy turns and peel outs; number of times paddled Class I, II, III, IV, V, VI (we're still using the old system since no one is sure what they've paddled under the new system!); swimming ability; number of beers consumed; etc. The score is then re-scaled to the 0, 1 interval, where 1 is arbitrarily taken to be the scores of whitewater team members and those Class V hairboaters that are still around to take the test. (As of this writing (early Spring), God seems to be tied up answering the prayers of out-of-shape paddlers who are just getting on the river after a winter off. Despite repeated attempts to contact Him, we have been unable to determine His test score. If we are able to obtain it, this will allow us to re-scale scores based on "absolute" 1 instead of "relative" 1).

Van Oss also pointed out that many other factors, not included in our model, could influence perceptions of rapid difficulty. His list includes: "factors affecting the percentage of entrained air in the water; extent of the aerated water; the compressional moduli of the boats and boaters; the Reynold's number

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of the water (or for the intended line); a foliage factor; and some sort of "miscellaneous" factor to deal with attacking geese and horse flies; scantily clothed riparian female sunbathers; density of partially submerged fly fishermen; sun angle; clogged sinuses; fogged eyeglasses; and displaced or lost contact lenses. Also weight and volume of water already in the boat." In responding

to this excellent suggestion, we chose to ignore his implication either that only males run rapids or that riparian sunbathing males would not distract female boaters. Despite the obvious importance of these factors, we are reluctant to over-parameterize the model in order to take account of them all. Perhaps, given enough data points, these "nuisance" factors could be modeled using a fixed-effects

specification to control for unmeasured factors associated with a given rapid at a given level and for time of day and seasonal variables as well. As an alternative approach, we are currently investigating the feasibility of modeling the variability of the parameters in the model both within and across river trips using a random-effects specification or some sort of hierarchical model in which "contextual factors" such as those van Oss mentioned are allowed to influence model parameters.

Finally, note that "perceived distance from the event horizon of the nearest hydraulic" and water level are the factors that allow the difficulty of a given rapid to vary over time for the same paddler, all else held constant. (We're still wrestling with how to scale this variable to the 0,1 interval. We're thinking perhaps a threshold-crossing model with binary indicator.) This in combination with the two other "boater-dependent" factors, C and R, allow subjective and objective rapid difficulty of converge over time.

Tony Allred (K1) suggested an additional variable for the model: the "ego" of the paddler doing the rating, i.e., the larger the ego, the lower the rating). He postulates that when a critical mass of egos is attained on the river, they may collapse into themselves forming a temporary mid-river singularity (as in: "Now how the hell are we going to get him out of THAT????") Moreover, these singularities, while temporary, are a threat to the safety of all paddlers regardless of their experience and ability. While we suspect that Allred's Postulate is incorrect (based on personal observation and anecdotal evidence), we do not include this factor in our model in order to keep the math simple (i.e., we suspect that incorporating this into the equation will result in the paddler's version of the Schrodinger Wave Equation and none of us remember how to write it, much less solve it).

In conclusion, we hope that this will not be regarded as the final formulation of relative rapid difficulty. Clearly future research is warranted, including the collection and analysis of data from actual paddlers running actual rapids. So if someone approaches you carrying a clipboard just above Dimple Rock or River's End on the Lower Yough this summer, please pull over and fill out the survey! Your value of C will be kept completely confidential. Honest!

*The author wishes to thank Peter Brandriss, Hendrik van Oss, and Tony Allred for providing considerable inspiration for this article. Also, thanks to Mel Neef and the Monocacy Canoe Club Message Board for providing a forum in which to explore these "important" paddling issues. Jim Long also offered thought provoking and helpful comments. Any errors in the application of quantum theory are my own.*

Editor's Note: Alison Snow Jones is a regular contributor to *American Whitewater* who had steadfastly resisted our efforts to convince her to spell her first name with two "l"s.

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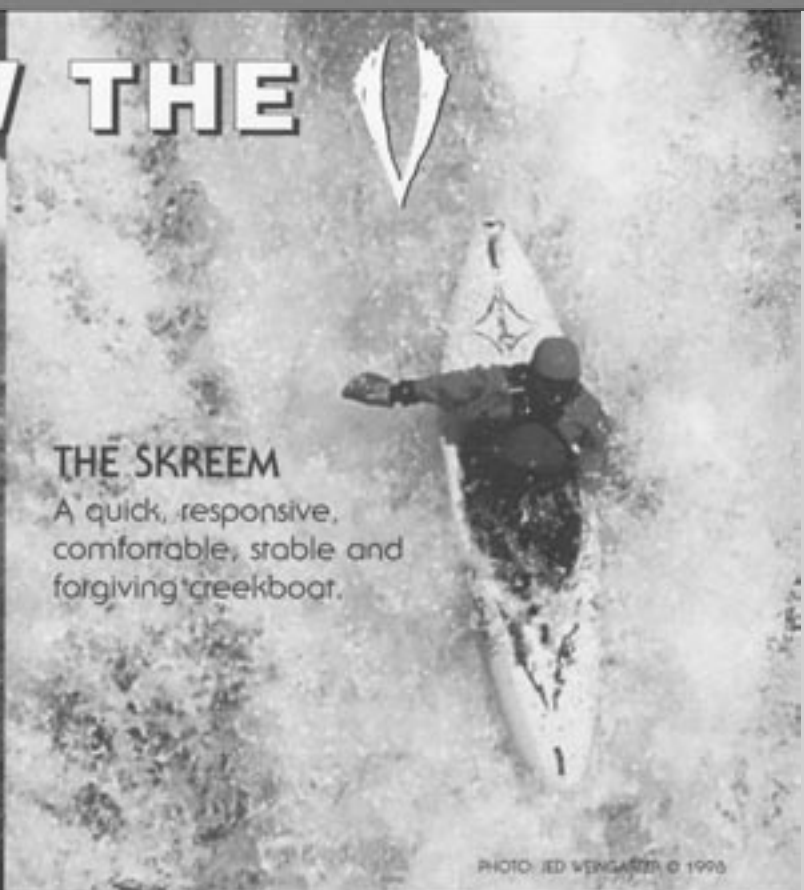


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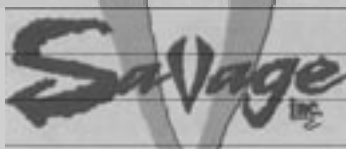
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## Atlanta's WaterMark Acquires Perception, Inc. and Dagger Canoe Co.

Perception, Inc. and Dagger Canoe Co., long-term competitors and category leaders in the paddle sports industry, have been acquired by WaterMark, a newly formed company based in Atlanta.

Purchase of the two companies was completed June 26, and purchase price was not disclosed. Perception, Inc. is located in Easley, S.C., where it manufactures whitewater, recreational and touring kayaks. Dagger Canoe is located in Harriman, Tenn., where it makes whitewater, recreational and touring kayaks as well as a line of high performance canoes.

John Rukavina has been named chief operating officer of WaterMark. Rukavina has

30 years of experience in sporting goods and consumer products industries. Dagger and Perception will operate as separate divisions of the new company. Joe Pulliam will continue as president of Dagger. Jim Clark, a 10-year veteran in the outdoor industry, has been named president of Perception. Perception's founder, Bill Masters, will be involved in the new management team in an advisory capacity.

Pulliam said, "I speak for the entire Dagger team when I say we are excited about working with this new management group. It's dedicated to the long-term growth of the paddle sports industry. We intend to better

communicate the fun of paddle sports recreation to attract new participants."

According to Pulliam, "This bold move in acquiring two rivals and letting them remain competitors with significant new resources is good news for dealers and consumers. It will mean better new products and focus on increased participation. We are setting a new course."

Rukavina said the sales forces will remain unchanged. "There are no plans for any immediate changes in sales representatives or programs. It's our goal to build a stronger, more competitive organization from the strengths of Perception and Dagger. Our focus will be on new products and increasing consumer participation. We are going to take advantage of the considerable talent associated with these companies to reach new levels of customer service, dealer support, point-of-sale merchandising and consumer advertising."

WaterWorks via e-mail: [waterworks@main.nc.us](mailto:waterworks@main.nc.us)

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# Wolf River Access

In recent years, boaters in the Midwest have enjoyed the privilege of kayaking Section IV of the Wolf River where it runs through the Menominee Indian Reservation in central Wisconsin. This river provides some of the best opportunities for midsummer Class III playboating in the Midwest. This river has, however, been closed to kayaking in the past, and maintaining our access is not guaranteed.

There have been several encounters, some of them hostile, between kayakers and the owner of the concession at Sullivan Falls. The owner seems to feel that kayakers block the eddies and prevent rafters from landing to purchase items at his stand. In addition, he objects to kayakers that walk along the bank to scout the drop or play in the hole below the falls. Valid or not, the concession owner's perception of the situation has been inflamed by a few obnoxious paddlers. Discussions or arguments with this individual and even attempts to make a purchase at his stand have only made matters worse. His behavior has been irrational and potentially violent. It is very important for boaters to avoid encounters, both for personal safety and to insure that we maintain our privilege to access the river. Conflicts involving kayakers may lead to excessive access fees or closure of access points to kayakers.

We all hope that this situation will pass, and that the vast majority of paddlers who just want to get along and be allowed to paddle on Section IV will continue to receive the warm welcome we have enjoyed from many other members of the Menominee community.

If kayakers wish to play in this hole below Sullivan Falls, they should consider coming early in the morning, on weekdays, or in the fall or spring when rafters are sparse. Those who do not feel comfortable running the drop without scouting can take the river right channel around the falls. We encourage all boaters to thank Ralph and Margaret Lyons at Big Smokey Rafting for their continued support for kayaking access on Section IV. Please contact them at 715-799-3359 before arriving at the river to arrange for a pass.

Submitted by Thomas O'Keefe  
information provided by  
Mike Giddings (UW Hoofers) and Donna  
Kallner (Whitewater Specialty)

Contact Whitewater Specialty for additional  
information  
(715) 882-5400, white2o@newnorth.net.

Check [www.barbarian.com/Rivers](http://www.barbarian.com/Rivers) for updates



## Tim Gavin Remembered at Harper's Ferry Concert

A memorial concert and gathering was held at the Cliffside Inn near Harper's Ferry, West Virginia on June 27<sup>th</sup> to honor veteran hair boater Tim Gavin. Gavin drowned on the Upper Blackwater River in West Virginia on March 29, 1998.

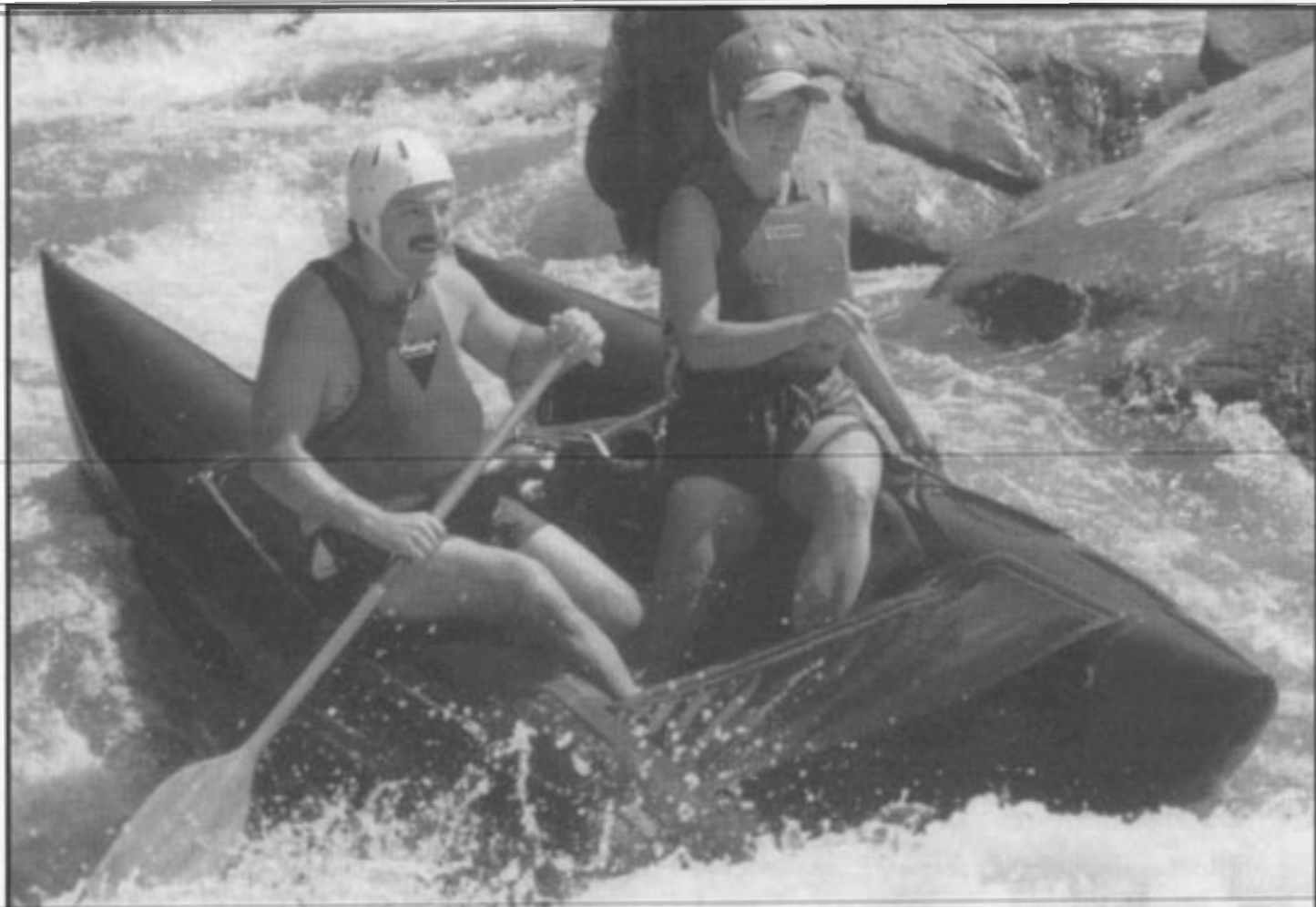
Friends, family and fellow boaters spent the evening reminiscing and sharing photos while listening to live music provided by a reggae band, Jah Works, and a local band from Shepherdstown, We Funk. Ironically, Tim Gavin had scheduled the concert and booked the bands early this year, not long before the accident that claimed his life.

Late in the evening, Gavin's friends enjoyed the fireworks display provided by the Harper's Ferry National Park Service. Tim Gavin's close friend, Mike Moore, speculated that the spectacular thunderstorm that framed the fireworks was Gavin's way of thanking those in attendance.

About \$3000 was raised during the event. \$850 was donated to the AWA to be targeted for efforts to protect the Blackwater Gorge. \$850 was donated to the Davis, West Virginia Volunteer Fire Department, who assisted in recovering Gavin's body. The remainder of the money was placed in an educational trust fund for Tim Gavin's four-year-old son, Eric.







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## AWA Regional Coordinator John Foss Dies in Peru

The paddling community is mourning the loss of veteran kayaker John Foss.

On Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1998 John Foss was killed while kayaking the Rio Huallabamba in Northern Peru. It was the fourth day of a 200 km first descent which began in the town of Omia, a few hours drive from Chacapoyas in North-Central Peru. The mouth of the river was near the town of Juanjui along the banks of the Huallaga in the Amazon basin. John was with Franz Helfenstein and Kurt Casey, longtime kayak buddies from the United States. They had anticipated a twelve-day expedition and were carrying enough food and gear for 14.

The following is a brief account of the ill-fated expedition by Kurt Casey.

It took three days to get to Chacapoyas from Lima. We arrived late in the evening on June 29th and stashed our boats in a hotel. The next day headed for the ruins of Kuelap. We spent the evening at the ruins and the following day returned to Chacapoyas to collect our gear and look for a ride to Mendoza. Early on the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup> we hired a driver to take us 18 km to a point where we could access one of the tributaries of the Huallabamba. By 10:00 AM we were on the water, paddling a steep 1000 CFS river called the Huamanpata. During the second and third days a number of other rivers added their flow, pumping the volume up to about 6000 CFS. On the fourth day the river changed from continuous to pool drop with an estimated gradient of 100 FPM. The rapids were huge, but there were pools



John Foss, Tambopata River in jungles of Peru  
Photo by Dave Black

between them. The river was nestled in a tight limestone canyon, with walls rising up to 2000'.

On the morning of the fourth day we launched at 6:30 AM after getting chased out of camp by a swarm of bees. Around noon we came to a horizon line with a one boat eddy above the drop. John got out to scout while Franz and I waited in our boats. John shouted this description of the rapid, "It is real big water with some monster holes. They all point downstream and may rodeo you, but they will eventually let you go. Start left center and jam right." As Franz entered the rapid I glanced over at John. He had a big smile on his face. This was the last time I ever saw him.

I came over the horizon and braced into an exploding wave and then crashed through some more big white stuff. At the bottom of

the drop Franz was in the eddy. The boats we were in weighed over 90 pounds and mine was even heavier with the water I had just taken on. "I need to dump my boat," I yelled to Franz. He nodded and said he would wait for John. From the eddy below, Franz saw John enter the rapid and then disappear from sight. The walls of the canyon rose over 1000 ft. and were nearly vertical. It took a long time to climb on the cliff walls above the rapid to get a good view of the rapid. There was no sign of John, his boat, or even his paddle.

Tired and distraught, Franz and I pushed on downstream looking for a place to camp. We held the distant hope that John had somehow passed us and was waiting downstream. Those thoughts diminished after arriving at more Class 5-6 drops. It took three more days to paddle the 100 km to the nearest village with access to a road. The local police, the US embassy in Lima and the Peruvian military were all cooperative. The air force did several helicopter scouts of the area but without success.

On Wednesday July 15th funeral services were held for John in his childhood home of Lindenhurst, IL. On Friday July 17<sup>th</sup> a fisherman discovered John's body, 60 km downstream of the spot where he had disappeared.

A small ceremony will be held in the Southern Andes to spread John's ashes into one of his favorite places, the headwaters of a pristine whitewater river.



John Foss on the Rio Maichen, Chile  
All photos by Dave Black

## John Foss Remembered

John Foss celebrated his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday in June of 1998. He was living in Placerville Colorado just outside of Telluride. On Sunday July 5, 1998 John was killed while kayaking on the Huallabamba River in Peru.

John will be remembered as one of the original kayakers. John started boating in the mid seventies in Northern Arizona. He had run the Grand Canyon so many times that, if all the trips were added together, he had spent more than a year of his life in the "big ditch."

Throughout the eighties John boated at levels most of us can only dream of. Two hundred day a year seasons became the norm for the rest of his life. John moved around the western US, living and boating in Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, and Alaska. He was a carpenter, ornithologist, guide, photographer, writer, teacher, and geologist. In the late eighties, John began his migrations to South America, spending on average 6 months a

year South of the equator.

In the early nineties, John received a masters degree in Geology from the University of Idaho. He took on the role of regional coordinator for American Whitewater (AWA) and was an active member of both the South American Explorers Club and the Ancient Forests Network. In Chile he worked with environmental groups and lobbyists to block construction of the Pangue Dam on the Bio Bio and to thwart efforts to inundate the Futelefu. His efforts extended all the way to Washington DC, where he lobbied the World Bank to deny funding to these destructive projects.

John's passion was multi-day trips and first descents. He roamed the Andes and the military mapping agencies of Latin American capitals searching out virgin rivers. He found dozens in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru. Getting to these rivers was not often easy, involving grueling multiday bus



trips, ornery pack mules and unfriendly police. The efforts were worth it. John found many classic rivers that today are legendary. They include the Rio Palguin, Upper Rio Gol Gol, Rio Cochomo, Canyon del Puma of Los Cispresses all of which are in Chile; The Rio Cotahuasi (Deepest Canyon on earth see *AWA July/August 1995*), The Rio Maran, and his final river, The Huallabamba in Peru.

Wherever he went, John left some of his energy and spirit. Today you will find young kayakers in such diverse places such as Durango, Boulder, Santiago, Arequipa, La Paz and Turrialba that were inspired to start kayaking after meeting John. "Adventuras Andes" is John's adventure travel company, founded in 1995. John's brochure sums up the mission of the company.

"We strive to have a positive impact on the places we visit. Our programs are designed to immerse you in a foreign culture that will stretch and challenge your physical abilities and imagination. We hope to enhance your cultural experience, broaden your perspective on peoples of the developing world, and leave you with a more empathetic worldview. We hope you return home invigorated and refreshed, reveling in your new found friends, memorable adventures, and discoveries."

John's most ambitious project was authoring the new guidebook to Chile titled *Chilean Whitewater: A Rafting and Kayaking Guide*. Chronicling over 100 runs, the guidebook will not only be the most complete directory to Chilean whitewater, but one of the best guidebooks ever written for any part of the world. With more than 9 years of research and exploration under his belt, John was putting the finishing touches on his

manuscript just prior to his death. His friends and family have committed to finishing the work and publishing the guidebook in calendar year 1998.

Donations to help with the publication of the book and pre-ordering queries can be sent in care of John's sister to:


Pattie Foss Todd  
1707 E. Grand Ave.  
Lindenhurst, IL. 60046  
Phone 847 265 0521

With correspondence please include your name, address, phone number and e-mail address.

John's huge smile and larger than life personality will be missed by friends the world over.



Left: John Foss sleep creek in Chile, Inset: John Foss on the Rio Palguin, Chile; Middle top: John and friends in the Coca Canyon Peru; Middle Bottom: John Foss and Kurt Casey, Arequipa, Peru 1993; Right topdown: John and friends "Final days of the Bio Bio" in Chile; John Foss dressed as a "Surf Wave" Halloween 1991.; John Foss on a 1st descent in Chile 1992



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