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River Stewardship: An Integrated Approach

Our mission: “To conserve and restore America’s whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely,” is actively pursued through our conservation, access, safety and education efforts under the umbrella of River Stewardship. The only national organization representing the interest of all whitewater paddlers, American Whitewater is the national voice for thousands of individual whitewater enthusiasts, as well as over 100 local paddling club affiliates.

AW’s River Stewardship program adheres to the four tenets of our mission statement:

CONSERVATION: AW’s professional staff works closely with volunteers and partner organizations to protect the ecological and scenic values of all whitewater rivers. These goals are accomplished through direct participation in public decision-making processes, grassroots advocacy, coalition building, empowerment of volunteers, public outreach and education, and, when necessary, legal action.

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, encourages equitable and responsible management of whitewater rivers on public lands, and works with government agencies and other river users to achieve these goals.

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 American Whitewater Safety Code.

EDUCATION: AW shares information with the general public and the paddling community regarding whitewater rivers, as well as river recreation, conservation, access, and safety. This is accomplished through our bi-monthly AW Journal, a monthly e-news, americanwhitewater.org, paddling events, educational events, and through direct communication with the press.

Together, AW staff, members, volunteers, and affiliate clubs can achieve our goals of conserving, protecting and restoring America’s whitewater resources and enhancing opportunities to safely enjoy these wonderful rivers.

AW was incorporated under Missouri nonprofit corporation laws in 1961 and maintains its principal mailing address at PO Box 1540, Cullowhee, NC 28723; phone 1-866-BOAT-4-AW (1-866-262-8429). AW is tax exempt under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Service.
The Journey Ahead

By Mark Singleton

This issue of American Whitewater marks the passage of summer and the journey into fall. With the changing weather comes Gauley season. Located in the heart of wild and wonderful West Virginia, for many paddlers the Gauley has become synonymous with fall boating. Thanks to the US Corps of Engineers drawdown of Summersville Lake, water in the Gauley is scheduled and predictable. Dropping more than 668 feet through over 26 miles of rugged terrain, the Gauley River's spirited rapids and scenic quality combine to make it a classic eastern whitewater run. The Gauley River National Recreation Area is managed by the New River Gorge National River a unit of the National Park Service.

New for this year, the National Park Service purchased critical public access to the Gauley River. The sites, located at Woods Ferry and Mason’s Branch, are established put-in and take-out sites for private canoeists, kayakers, and rafters. “Providing public access to the Gauley in this area is what I envisioned when sponsoring the federal legislation which established the national recreation area back in 1988,” said U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall (D-WV). “This agreement will enhance tourism and the local economy by making the river more accessible to the general public.”

That’s right, 1988! That’s when the legislation was introduced to create the national recreation area and provide access! Finally, 20 years later, the Park Service has obtained public access at Mason’s Branch and Woods Ferry. Over the last two decades, American Whitewater has worked to provide access to the Gauley and the job is not over. The critical parking field at the top on the Mason's Branch take-out was not part of the National Park purchase. American Whitewater will again be leasing this field from the landowner to provide private boater parking (the leasing of this field is made possible through AW membership dues).

As of the time this article was written, the Park Service had not released a transportation plan for management of the take-outs. West Virginia Rivers Coalition will be providing private boaters shuttles on Gauley Festival weekend and the following weekend. Once the Park Service releases their take-out management plans they will be posted to the American Whitewater website.

With new public access there is much to celebrate. Make sure you put Gauley Festival on your calendar, September 19 – 21. Started in 1983 to observe the derailment of a hydroelectric project that would have disrupted Gauley whitewater flows, the festival has grown to become one of the largest river festivals in the world. Last year, American Whitewater commissioned Michael Crane and his consulting firm Crane Associates of Burlington, Vermont to conduct an Economic Impact Study on Gauley Festival.

Here are highlights of the Economic Impact Study on Gauley Festival. Note that this survey only covers the festival weekend and not other contributions from Gauley season:

• The average Gauley Festival attendee is 36 years old, has completed a 4-year undergraduate education, and is male. Boater households earning $45,000 - $60,000 make up the largest income group at 17.3% of survey respondents. However, over 22% of boater households earn over $100,000 annually.

• Gauley Festival participants are loyal paddlers. They go boating on average 57 times per year. Approximately 11 of those trips involve overnight stays.

• They travel an average of 4 hours for a boating trip; the Gauley Festival drew participants from as far away as the pacific coast states.

• Total direct spending in the local economy generated by the Gauley Festival in 2007 was $1,110,870.

• The Gauley Festival is responsible for generating $858,000 of economic activity, producing $281,000 in wages to local employees and business owners, and supporting 19 jobs.

With the economic impact of Gauley Fest and new public access to the river, the vision of Congressman Rahall is a reality. Come out September 19 – 21 and see for yourself.

Please note that the Summersville police department takes its speed limits seriously. Drive at or below the limit through Summersville and have a great Gauley Fest weekend!
To the US Forest Service:

I am a native Georgian and a frequent whitewater paddler and hiker. For over 35 years, I have hiked, camped and paddled in the Chattooga Wilderness Area.

I have reviewed the current Environmental Assessment regarding recreational management of the Chattooga River. Unfortunately, this “new” plan is just a rehash of the original. It essentially continues the total ban on boating the Upper Chattooga. The small window for boating is so restricted, almost no one will ever get a chance to run the headwaters of the Chattooga legally.

There is no reason to ban boating on ANY section of the Chattooga River. Of course, justifiable restrictions on all user groups to protect the wilderness and wilderness experience are desirable, similar to those in place on lower sections of the river.

Not only are bans illegal according to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, they are unfair and discriminatory to certain groups. Hikers who blaze their own trails, campers who trample an area, and fishermen who deplete the fish and damage the banks do more harm than paddlers. More than 40 years of boating on the lower Chattooga and neighboring Overflow Creek has not harmed the environment.

I don’t know why the Forest Service has not done the right thing all these years, but it is time to do so.

Sincerely,
Hank Klausman

To the Editor—A Single Bladed Story,

Guiding and instructing whitewater has taken me to all parts of the U.S.—the Northeast, the Northwest, and the Interior. All of these places have provided priceless experiences, first descents on the Elwha to running the death slot on the Dryway of the Deerfield. However, none of these open boat experiences could get me ready for the hardest day of open boating in my life: running Tallulah Gorge.

It was time to step it up, put on the jock strap, and push it to the next level. I had a bomber roll, a borrowed boat from Outward Bound, and cheap Carlisle paddle.

I have run the gorge over 30 times in a kayak but this day was my first open boat decent of the Tallulah. A purple Probe 14 that should have been retired two seasons ago was what was going to get me down, so off to descend the 890 steps to the put-in with it on my head. When I arrived at the put-in I was already lactic, both legs were shaking, and my shoulders burned. But there I was. Turning around to walk back up those stairs was as crazy as running Niagara Falls, so after a few stretches and a quick scout of the first rapid it was time to get ‘er done.

The first rapid was sketchy, typewritering me to the right into the mank, but I held my downstream direction and made it through. Next up was the big boof where unfortunately I was thrown to my off side and was ejected from the boat. Knowing that the biggest drop on Tallulah was next I did not hang around waiting for coupons. I did a quick self-rescue, emptied my boat, and got back in.

When I paddled into the eddy above Oceana a bunch of kayakers signaled “Are you going to run it?” I quickly replied, “Hell ya,” so they gave me the, “We want to film you” signal. I patiently waited. This is not the eddy to hang out in for a long time. Pretty soon, you begin to think about what might happen below, so I gave the “dropping in” signal and fired it up. I drove hard left with left hand angle and at “The Thing” I threw down the biggest low brace of my life. Getting deflected off “The Thing” I buttered through the hole at the bottom like a greased up pig in a rodeo.

After acing Oceana I was stoked but not at all done with the gorge. Still to come were the Gauntlet, Bridel Veil, and many more technical drops. I did my best and only swam one other time, self-rescuing quickly without injury. After it was all said and done the old Mohawk had three new holes in it and the Carlisle paddle had a slightly loose T-grip.

I tell this story to represent the single blader legends who pioneered whitewater and to inspire open boaters to be. Open boating is hard. It takes precision, balance, and many years of practice to gain the experience to run hard rivers. But if you put in the time and get professional instruction you can paddle even the hardest rivers in an open canoe. I don’t know if I will ever carry an open boat down those stairs again, but the memories of that warm November weekend will be there forever. So if this story makes it to your magazine, I want to wish all open boaters good luck on Tallulah. Paddle hard and make it look good.

Wesley Gentry
River Specialist, North Carolina Outward Bound School
Re: “How to Overnight” Forgets Leave No Trace Ethics

Dear Editor,

One of my favorite river experiences is pulling into a campsite for the night, feeling confident that even though someone may have been there the previous night, I’ll be hard pressed to find any evidence of their stay other than footprints. While reading the May/June 2008 issue of American Whitewater, I was surprised and dismayed when I turned to page 32 and saw a photo of kayakers camped out on a small beach with a fire directly on the ground and the tip to merely build fires below the high-water mark. I was also surprised that the article made no mention of carrying out human waste on river trips, implying that boaters should leave their feces along river corridors. These types of practices were abandoned years ago by environmentally conscious boaters and use of fire pans/fire blankets and portable toilet systems should be common practice. As the popularity of whitewater boating increases, the river corridors on which we find solace will be under increasing pressure and land managers will face decisions regarding access to our favorite runs. Fire rings with charred embers and cat-holes around the campsite greatly diminish the experience, even on non-wilderness runs, and may trigger permit requirements on our favorite rivers. Please actively support Leave No Trace Ethics in our magazine and our activities.

Thanks,

Andy Horn

Mr. Horn,

Thank you for raising this important point. It’s easy for paddlers who frequent remote, rarely visited rivers to forget that their passage still has an impact on the river corridor. If all paddlers were in the habit of practicing Leave No Trace Ethics our rivers would undoubtedly be more scenic and healthier. For more details on Leave No Trace, please see page 7 of this issue of American Whitewater.

Sincerely,

Ambrose Tuscano
Hello fellow whitewater enthusiast and American Whitewater members, my name is Don Kinser. On May 17, 2008 AW’s Board of Director’s elected me to serve you as AW’s President. I am excited about the next two years serving AW, making new friends, and more importantly continuing AW’s 54-year legacy as THE National Voice for whitewater rivers and those of us that enjoy these wild places so passionately.

My relationship with AW began over 13 years ago while on a paddling trip to West Virginia with my good friend Joe Greiner. Joe’s enthusiasm and passion for AW’s mission struck me. I joined AW at his urging, and I want to thank Joe for introducing me to the organization. My involvement soon grew from a dues paying member to a committed and passionate local volunteer as I started helping with the early Tallulah releases. The more involved I became, the more I learned about the great work that AW has been part of all over the country.

It was here, during those early Tallulah releases in 1997 and 1998, that Risa Shimoda recruited me to help lead AW’s efforts on another project, my home river, the Chattooga. The work on the Chattooga got me more deeply involved with AW’s staff as I learned a whole new language such as NEPA, DEIS, EA, ROD, “Preferred Alternative”, and how agencies such as the USFS work (or don’t as the case may be).

The more involved I became with AW as a volunteer the more awestruck I was at the organization’s accomplishments and the people that made up the organization’s staff. What makes AW accomplishments even more astounding is how much we have accomplished with so little. From my perspective, American Whitewater is truly the “little engine that could.”

I believe strongly in AW’s mission and our river stewardship work across the country. Our staff, led by Executive Director Mark Singleton, is top notch. Our river stewardship team of Kevin Colburn, Dave Steindorf, Tom O’Keefe and Nathan Fey is working hard to help protect the rivers we all enjoy, insure that the public can access these wonderful places and that we enjoy them safely. Carla Miner, Laura Blalock, Ryan Groth and Jeff Paine round out AW’s full time staff and their hard work and efforts allow our Stewardship staff to stay focused on our mission.

My goals for AW are to continue our tremendous river stewardship work and build on the great successes of the past and more importantly work to grow our membership and funding so that we can accomplish even more. A great example of how your membership and financial support helps the organization is AW’s recent initiative in Colorado that began with the hiring of Nathan Fey in 2007.

Best we can tell, well under one in ten of your paddling buddies are AW members.

Today our membership stands at about 5,700 members and about 100 affiliated clubs. If we could double that membership figure we would be able to accomplish so much more. I urge you to take the cue from Joe Greiner and encourage all your paddling buddies and anyone you come in contact with on the river to join and support AW’s important work. You can count on American Whitewater to continue to leverage your support wisely and keep up the good work that we can all be proud of.

See you on the River,

Don Kinser
Leave No Trace
River Practices

By Ben Lawhon, Education Director, Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics

Readers of this magazine already know that floating rivers is a unique way to enjoy the outdoors. From a raft, kayak, or canoe adrift on the water a river traveler can watch a heron silently flying overhead, observe the record of millions of years of geologic time, or experience the thrill of running a turbulent rapid. River corridors have always provided an ideal opportunity for exploring America's wild places. Historically, early river pioneers were searching for furs, precious metals, minerals, and routes to the Pacific Ocean. Modern river runners are searching for beauty, solitude, excitement, and a sense of connection with their surroundings.

More of us are traveling on rivers than ever before, making it imperative that we learn how to preserve these waterways and the habitats adjoining them.

Human impact is more concentrated in river corridors than in many other ecosystems. Although we leave little or no impact on the water when we travel through it, our impacts on the riverbanks can be significant. Steep canyon walls or high mountains define some river corridors while others meander through hills and dense forest. These features often offer majestic scenery, but they also confine travelers to narrow strips of land where we cook, eat, sleep, pack, play games, and produce waste. Since different boating parties use the same stretches of river and the same camps night after night, the effects of these activities are multiplied many times over.

In order to minimize our cumulative impact on the rivers we enjoy, we need to practice Leave No Trace. Leave No Trace is an national and international program designed to assist outdoor enthusiasts with their decisions about how to reduce their impacts when they hike, camp, picnic, snowshoe, run, bike, hunt, paddle, ride horses, fish, ski or climb. The program strives to educate all those who enjoy the outdoors about the nature of their recreational impacts as well as techniques to prevent and minimize such impacts. Leave No Trace is best understood as an educational and ethical program, not as a set of rules and regulations. The Leave No Trace program is managed by the

Next time you're on a wilderness river, remember to observe Leave No Trace Ethics

Photo by Michael Ackerman
News & Notes

Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, an educational, nonprofit organization dedicated to the responsible enjoyment and active stewardship of the outdoors by all people, worldwide.

Something about rivers inspires us to contemplate beauty, creation, and the power of nature. Perhaps it is the unrelenting flow of moving water that encourages thoughtfulness. Or perhaps it is the opportunity to witness the story of past epochs, written in the canyon walls, that tempts us to contemplate our roles in the web of life. For some people, the river provides an ideal setting for enjoying time spent with friends and family. For others, it provides a source of challenge and excitement. Something keeps us floating rivers year after year—the pull of moving water is a powerful and irresistible force. On your next outing, be it a day or several weeks, be mindful of your impact and what you leave behind for those who will come after you.

For more information on Leave No Trace, visit [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org) or call 1.800.332.4100

With the proper precautions, your river trip can leave behind nothing but footprints and take nothing but photos

Photos by Emily Ressler
Leave No Trace Tips for the River

Plan Ahead and Prepare – Learn about river-specific issues, regulations and permits. Know river sills and carry the necessary equipment to enjoy the river safely.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces – Durable surfaces include water, rock, gravel and sand. Focus activity where vegetation is absent. Leave put-ins, take-outs, and campsites clean and natural looking.

Dispose of Waste Properly – Pack it in, pack it out. Learn about regulations pertaining to human waste and dispose of it properly. Generally, the best practice is to pack out human waste.

Leave What You Find – Appreciate ancient structures, artifacts, rock art and other natural objects but leave them undisturbed. Avoid introducing non-native or invasive species by cleaning equipment between trips.

Minimize Campfire Impacts – Carry a fire pan or build a mound fire. Consider using stoves for cooking. Learn about local fire regulations.

Respect Wildlife – Observe wildlife from a distance. Avoid feeding wildlife and always properly store food and trash. Control pets or leave them at home.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors – Respect other visitors and the quality of their experience. Communicate with other river users about your floating and camping plans to avoid conflicts.

Aire and Sawyer to Support AW’s Western Rivers Work

American Whitewater welcomes Aire and Sawyer as new corporate partners supporting our stewardship work on Western Rivers and allowing us to expand our presence in the rafting community. We have had a long history of introducing agency staff, policy makers, and organizational partners to rivers, and gear provided by these two companies will allow us to directly integrate the needs of the rafting community with our stewardship projects.

It was the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York, an AW affiliate, that took Senator Kennedy and Secretary Udall down the Hudson River to promote passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. With gear provided by Aire and Sawyer we will be able to directly integrate rafting needs into our work and engage individuals who make important policy decisions on management of our rivers but who may not be willing or able to climb into a canoe or kayak. We know that it is this direct experience with the resource that can make the critical difference in protecting and restoring our rivers.

Today we are working on dozens of projects across the country including restoring water to rivers impacted by hydropower, protecting headwater areas through Wild and Scenic and Wilderness protection, and protecting rivers from new water development schemes. Our work benefits all those who enjoy rivers including kayakers, rafters, canoeists, river boarders, riverside campers, and fishermen. AW’s new partnership with Aire and Sawyer is another sign of teamwork among the many different groups that enjoy wild rivers and benefit from their protection.
The Dunce’s Cap

By Christian Bates

The river speaks to us in many voices, and teaches many things. By the network of her varied paths, the delicate fabric of our world is woven. By the beating of her pulse, we are carried on journeys that nourish the heart and soul. Clarity and direction grace the spirit of he who follows the river.

But for all of the metaphoric hoo-ha that tends to spill over her banks, many practical lessons are drawn from the river’s currents as well; and for most, they are reinforced by the pillars of simple common sense. For some of us, however, that foundation crumbles from time to time.

The eight-foot kayak had just passed into obsolescence, but news of that variety travels slowly through my home town. So as I arrived at the front step of the San Juan range on a fine spring day in the fall of my twenties, I felt somewhat like a hobo stumbling in on a Hollywood fashion show, slinking about, trying to avoid notice. My relict craft may have been solid, and at one time even trendy; but no amount of function and flare could hide the fact that it was an embarrassing nine feet and change.

I was accompanied by the infamous “Cornville” Jeff, a highly impertinent character who gained brief notoriety in the late eighties by swimming under a log in the company of Slim Ray. Aside from his considerable skills on the water, however, my good friend Cornville (as he is called by those who know and love him) is a master of creative outfitting, with notable talents for salvage and repair: his aptitude with patching materials is remarkable in every respect, and his sense for the full potential of bailing twine is undoubtedly second to none. In fact, many of his techniques would appear to be unmatched in the modern world. No piece of equipment in Cornville’s collection is ever likely to be retired.

Obviously, we were outsiders. The locals greeted us with open arms anyway, though. After all, whitewater boaters are generally open minded in matters of style—unless, of course, you show up wearing a plastic helmet covered with stickers. (The basic limits of good taste must always be observed. We are nothing if not civilized.)

Our adventure was to begin with a short sunset run through town. After a quick stop to refuel, we looked the river over and located a suitable put-in, anxious to shake the rust off and relieve the joints after a long drive. It was then that a critical packing error was discovered: someone had neglected to throw in the duct tape.

This sent Cornville into a frantic state. He dug madly through the back of his beat up old truck, in the frenzied hope that a spare roll had been stashed and forgotten in the tool box, or that an inadvertent scrap had been stuck to the bed, and buried under a flake of hay. He even tore through the innards of the cab, on the fair chance that one of his children had left something sticky behind—which of course they had, but there was nothing of use in this case.

Lesson #1: Always come prepared

After a few minutes of feverish searching, he gave up and sat quietly on the tailgate. His shoulders sank. A sullen expression washed over his face, punctuated by the dangling insult of a makeshift neoprene visor, which clung precariously to the front of his helmet by the remains of a single gummed up strand of thread. Our warm up session was over before it started. Instead, we made a headlong run for the paddle shop. When you don’t look good, you don’t feel good—and both are important on the river.

I had never met the third member of our party before, and in all honesty, I wasn’t sure what to make of him at first. Cornville is a trustworthy reference on the whole, but I began to doubt my friend’s judgment as Dave pulled up to our camp that evening. With an air of mild disdain, I noted that the boat strapped atop his truck was ten feet long if it was an inch. I wondered how anyone could be that out of touch—even in light of my own recent transgressions.

Lesson #2: Choose your friends wisely

After casual introductions and a brief conversation over the fire, however, Dave observed with a keen eye the pitiful stock of beer in my cooler—a meager six pack of the cheapest cans available (the result of a last minute budgetary adjustment, necessitated by yet another packing list blunder involving my dry top). He then strolled off, returning a short time later with three properly chilled bottles of instant camaraderie in his hands; and from that moment forward, he would be welcome in any of my camps. I came to think of Dave as a good and dependable friend.

Lesson #3: Friends don’t let friends drink cheap beer

In the morning, we rose when we rose and we hit the ground running. With twenty something miles of paddling ahead, not to mention the business of setting shuttle, the day began of necessity with a rush. No time for frivolous culinary ritual, or any of the typical marks that distinguish the camp of the gentleman from that of the barbarian—or the average boater. Our tailgate meal was a no-nonsense affair of leftover chips and salsa, a few swigs of some despicable energy drink, and of course, some rock hard granola bars: breakfast of misfits.

As we pulled up our stakes, organizational structure was discussed. Cornville had been down this stretch of water before. Dave and I had not. Nomination, backing, and acceptance: our leader was confirmed. (This, upon later reflection, would be recognized as our first critical mistake. Even among many, the big ones tend to stand out.)

One of Cornville’s most endearing qualities is his ever-positive attitude. He’s never daunted by an honest challenge, and he’s certainly not one to be encumbered by
trivial matters of logistical practicality. He’s a dogged optimist. It came as no surprise, then, as we encountered a roadblock delaying passage by a factor of hours, that our friend would remain confident, even as the clouds of impending doom drifted ominously overhead.

Lesson #4: Expect the unexpected

The waterline was respectable when we finally reached the river, and it appeared to be on the rise. The sun was high, and the hour was late. We were now faced with a choice: embark quickly and attempt to recover from the delay, or abort and return to civilization, where the collective budget of our boater-class group would allow for little more than a prolonged picking of the nose. We weighed our options lightly as Cornville fastened his trusty visor to the plastic helmet that had served him so well over the years, explaining at length (for those who might wonder) that duct tape does not count as a sticker; and then into the water we went.

We had a vague notion of where the first Class V rapid would be, but neither Dave nor I had studied the matter closely. After all, we had faith in our guide, and we all knew how to handle our boats. It was just another day in paradise; so with helmets cinched tight, we played a fast-paced game of follow-the-leader for several pleasurable miles, leap-frogging here and there as the mood struck, until we noticed that Cornville was having difficulty with some of the landmarks. In fact (come to think of it), the last (and only) time that he had made this run, a dense fog had obscured the canyon for most of the day. To get through it, he had simply allowed himself to be led by the rest of his party—in much the same way that Dave and I were doing. The difference, of course, was that Cornville’s former party knew exactly where they were going, and they had a little more time on their hands.

Unsettling visions began to drift through our minds. This was not a hairball endeavor by any stretch of the imagination, but there were numerous threats inherent to the prospect of dropping blindly into something serious that we might otherwise prefer to avoid. A cold, pushy mix of snow melt tumbled along beneath us, bent on gathering steam, and peaking even as we spoke. The river demanded our attention. Accordingly, we remained alert and listened to what she had to say. When we approached a distinctive rumble with a partially obstructed view, we decided to get out and scout.

It was indeed a sizable rapid. Chaotic waves hammered every possible line, as uprooted trees crashed through the main current, aided by the momentum of their own dead weight. Explosions of spray leapt from the depths of dark, menacing holes, and a fine mist hung in the air reflecting the stark light of mid afternoon.

The waning angle of the sun was not lost on any of us, but we concluded that it would be best to recharge before proceeding. We sat on the rocks to have a snack and discuss our options. Though the prevailing mood was upbeat, the nagging reality of our situation was difficult to ignore: two thirds of the run remained yet downstream. There was little that we could do about it, however; we would simply have to paddle hard, and make good time.

Realizing that our pace would limit future photo opportunities, Cornville asked from behind a big mouthful of bologna if I could snap his picture; and I was happy to oblige, as he grinned from ear to ear saying “cheese” with a big dollop of mayonnaise dribbling from his chin to his bib.
Lesson #5: Never bite off more than you can chew

As we prepared for our charge back to the water, another group of boaters arrived. We exchanged brief hellos as they beached and passed us by, anxious to size the rapid up for themselves. They returned a short time later, however, and in a lesser hurry, offering (in observation of good river etiquette, I suppose) to let us run it first.

It was a gesture that we might normally have accepted, but as it happened, we still had some minor packing to do; so in his characteristically familiar manner, Cornville offered his own cheerful assessment of the situation as we waved them on through. One feature in particular seemed worthy of parting comment: a deep, frowning hole that looked like it could hold a boat for a long while, if tempted.

They thanked Cornville for his input, politely ignoring the smudge on his vest and the crooked angle of his visor, and then they peeled off, without ceremony.

The ensuing scene spoke prophetically of things to come, as an unfortunate rut was carved repeatedly down the same troublesome line. Three of five boats were sent careening downstream, emptied of all human cargo. Thankfully, nobody appeared to be hurt. We watched the last of the swimmers crawl up the left bank, and reviewed our own plan. It seemed sound enough. On snapped the skirts, and down we went — assuming with confidence that we would fare better.

Lesson #6: Never assume anything

After what seemed like an hour of being beaten half to death in the gut of the aforementioned hole, I caught a brief glimpse of Cornville cheering me on from the safety of the eddy below, and then I wondered: Where might my new friend Dave be?

Lesson #7: Never ask a stupid question

Dave had followed my line, of course, and the bow of his boat was now aimed squarely at my teeth. With the reaction time of a waterlogged stump, I gave up my brace and buried my head in the pillow. This kept the concussion to a minimum, but the jolt was still not pleasant: both my glasses and my appendix were abruptly rattled loose. The good news, however, was that they somehow stayed connected; as an added bonus, I was knocked free of my turbulent predication. The bad news, as I discovered after rolling up and collecting my wits, was that Dave had joined the unfortunate ranks of the boatless.

Cornville wrangled the stray craft heroically as Dave made a strong swim for shore, and after some awkward slalom moves, I was even able to gather up his paddle; but we were all exhausted. As the afternoon shadows grew long, we were compelled to pull over, hunker down, and warm up in a scarce patch of sunlight. Dave and I were shivering like a couple of wet cats; and we still had a long way to go.

A continuous pounding of Class III and IV chilled us to the bone over the next several miles, and by the that time we reached our next Class V pit stop, we knew some adjustments to the plan would be required. The water was big. The sun had dipped behind the mountains; the mountains were about to get much, much worse. As the sun sank into the rocks, we were about to get much, much worse. The last eddy in the sky tugged at my heartstrings, and I lunged backward. Miraculously, it gave.

We took a good hard look at the crux of the next drop, even watching two boaters from the party ahead run it without serious incident. (The others were now traveling by foot.) After a clear-minded discussion about the consequences of another mishap however, Dave wisely opted to shoulder his boat. Cornville and I did the same; and frankly, I was happy to do so.

Lesson #8: Sometimes enough is enough

The thing about direct snowmelt in the high country is this: it’s cold. Soon after re-entering the water, I began to chatter and shake violently. Purchasing the cheapest dry top on the rack to save a few bucks for beer had come back to bite me; and with the slap of each wave, I was being shrivered to the core. My companions were hardly in better shape. When we reached the next bridge, we would take out and hike. Our schedule had been grossly miscalculated.

Bobbing along at the mercy of a fast current for another couple of miles, we did our best to keep together and stay safe. Finally, we reached our stopgap destination. A minor Class III rapid presented itself above a welcoming beach that extended below a serpentine bend. My spirits lifted on a wave of minor relief. The upper end of the eddy below was obscured from view, but given the nature of the drop, I assumed that all would be clear. I cut a hard line for the pole position.

Refer to Lesson #6

After being dragged under the raft that was tethered in the landing zone, I realized my mistake; and by my third failed roll attempt, it was obvious that I was in trouble. My hands had become too cold to maintain an adequate grasp on the paddle. I had not even the strength to pull over, hunker down, and warm up in a scarce patch of sunlight. Dave and I were shivering like a couple of wet cats; and we still had a long way to go.

A continuous pounding of Class III and IV chilled us to the bone over the next several miles, and by the that time we reached our next Class V pit stop, we knew some adjustments to the plan would be required. The water was big. The sun had dipped behind the mountains; the mountains were about to get much, much worse. As the sun sank into the rocks, we were about to get much, much worse. The last eddy in the sky tugged at my heartstrings, and I lunged backward. Miraculously, it gave.

My friends chased the debris as I hauled my soggy carcass to the shallows. I was completely exhausted, but happy to have my head above water—until I looked up, and saw that things were about to get much, much worse. As I hoisted myself to one knee, a painfully attractive young lady from the camp upstream made her way down the embankment and offered her hand. I was utterly horrified. Struggling to stand and regain my composure,
I declined her assistance politely as a matter of macho principle. But after falling in the mud twice, and with an involuntary whimper on the latter attempt, my hand was forced. Reaching for her shamefully, I averted my eyes and let her drag my humiliated butt ashore.

Lesson #9: Swallow your pride

We were invited to stay, but we didn’t want to be a bother; and sadly, something inside me wanted to preserve the fantasy of my beautiful savior sleeping alone in her tent that night, rather than taking a chance and discovering the more probable truth of the matter.

Any fallback plan that involves a lengthy, impromptu hike with a full load of gear is bound to be less practical in the doing than it is in the telling—either before or after. This was no exception. After a few miles of slogging riverside down greasy narrow gauge tracks, we became too tired, hungry, and generally pissed off to continue. Dave was getting low on fresh water; Cornville’s booties were beginning to fall apart; and the wetsuit that I had chosen to wear for insulation became ripe beyond all tolerable limits, although the idea of peeling it off seemed a bit too ridiculous for serious consideration—given that I had left my shorts behind at the truck.

It was decided that we would simply have to split up. Dave would hike the remaining distance back to his truck, tend to his dogs, and make the required call to Cornville’s wife—letting her know that everything was ok, and that we were having a splendid time. Cornville and I would camp with the boats. In the morning we would catch the train. We should all be back in town by lunch.

The thing about a springtime night in the San Juan Mountains is this: it’s cold. You come to that realization immediately when the best solution you can come up with for your sad, soggy discomfort is to strip down to your naturally thin fur coat and huddle under a space blanket next to a small fire, with another dude—who by his own admission smells even worse than you do.

Refer to Lesson #2

It was a long, miserable night; but when I awoke in the wee hours to the faint glow of dying embers, I was pleased to find my boxers nearly dry. Furthermore, aside from a few charred holes, they were still generally functional. The idea struck to fashion a makeshift hat that would cover my nipped ears; and when it worked out, I became tremendously satisfied. Sacrificing another log, I drifted peacefully back to sleep.

The cheerful toot of an approaching tourist train echoed boldly up the canyon as the morning sun finally peeked from behind its tattered covers of rock and snow. It was a welcome alarm. I scrambled out of the forest to flag down our shuttle, making no attempt to contain my enthusiasm. Our minor ordeal appeared nearly to be over.

But the conductor failed to stop; and the look on his face was memorable, as he strained to shout over the clang and clatter of the rails. The exact message was difficult to make out, but the gist of it was this: the train was full; we would have to catch the next one.

This was more than a little perturbing, but as I prepared to lob a few choice words in his direction, I came to my senses—and took stock of my attire.

Lesson #10: Always wear clean drawers

As the train disappeared around the bend, I threw down my ridiculous hat and tossed aside my silver cape. The pungent scent of coal fire lingered in the air; goose bumps prickled across my exposed pale skin; and as pangs of hunger crept into my despondent consciousness, visions of a fair hand tending to the sizzle of bacon upstream began to haunt my very soul.

Each day is a little life; each waking a little birth; each morning a little youth; but from there it’s always a crap shoot, and who knows where you’ll be sleeping when the next sun gives up the ghost. (With all due apologies to Mr. Shopenhauer.)

The next train broke down, of course; but eventually we did make it back to town, and we found Dave right where we knew he would be. Without a word, he handed us each a properly chilled bottle from the bar. We shared a few laughs and ordered up a nice dinner, comparing notes on what we had learned. Then we made plans for another trip. The river was up, and she was calling to us.

Author’s Note: David Thomas Borrell died on June 2, 2003 while paddling a familiar stretch of the Arkansas River. He is missed by many. Rest in peace, my friend.
West River Groups Meet (VT)
by Kevin Colburn

On the Sunday after this year’s Deerfield River Festival, a group of paddling stakeholders met at Zoar Outdoors to discuss opportunities to improve the flow regime of the West River. Currently the Army Corps of Engineers dam provides an average of 36 boatable releases every year, but only schedules three of those releases. By not scheduling the 33 remaining releases, it has been estimated in a detailed study that the Army Corps is eliminating $7,333,132 of annual economic benefits for the small rural towns in the area surrounding the West. In addition they are drastically reducing the recreational benefits of the Class II and III West River. The stakeholders are going to work with the Nature Conservancy to integrate recreational considerations into an analysis that TNC is conducting on the dam and its flows. American Whitewater will also continue its direct efforts to work with the Army Corps.

Groundhog Day on the Chattooga
by Kevin Colburn

The Forest Service has yet again proposed to ban boating on the Wild and Scenic Upper Chattooga River. American Whitewater staff has learned that the analysis of the issue was politically guided from high levels. One thing is certain, it is not a decision based on science, policy, law, or reason. Like many paddlers, the team of AW staff and volunteers working on the Chattooga is not surprised by the recent decision. The only surprise was just how weak and flawed the Environmental Assessment (EA) that the Forest Service produced is. The EA fails to comply with even the most basic elements of the law governing such studies. Perhaps most importantly, it fails to provide an adequate basis for protecting the river corridor. In the coming months, AW will be working with our volunteer team and our partners to overturn this most recent proposal. The Chattooga has become the top river threatening to negatively redefine how rivers are managed nationwide. Many river managers and users are behind us on this issue, including many within the Forest Service itself. We are working hard to ensure that Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers are protected, and that your ability to enjoy them is likewise protected. While this issue seems to drag on, AW is carefully and strategically allocating resources to win this struggle in the coming years. Support from the paddling community is vital to this effort.

Hydro Proposed on the North Branch Potomac (MD)
by Kevin Colburn

A private hydropower company has proposed to add hydro generators to the Jennings Randolph Dam, which is owned and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers. Many government dams built for flood control lack hydropower generation facilities. If done correctly, the addition of hydropower can have neutral or beneficial effects on the flows below a dam with few negative impacts. One concern in these cases is the impacts that transmission lines will have on the land. American Whitewater generally supports adding hydropower capacity to dams that are not candidates for removal, in cases where the effects are neutral or beneficial. The proposal on the North Branch may very well be one of those cases. We have filed comments on the proposal asking FERC to assure that recreational access is maintained, and that flows are either improved or not changed.

Americans Look North for Hydro
by Kevin Colburn

As the US seeks to increase the percentage of our power that comes from low impact renewable sources, the priorities are wind, solar, and biomass. Seldom is hydro considered a viable option. There are two primary reasons for this: 1) there are few sites suitable for new dams, and 2) our society has recognized that
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Hydropower does not come without heavy environmental and social costs. Recent state-based legislation has recognized these limitations and generally only considers new hydropower sources as low impact and renewable if they 1) do not change volume or timing of flows, 2) do not impact beneficial stream uses, and 3) are below a certain size (which we disagree with, since small dams can have huge impacts). Hydropower that meets these criteria have special economic benefits to power companies. The desire for these energy sources has led the US to look north to the vast rivers and roaring creeks of Canada for some of its hydropower-generated power.

Pacific Gas and Electric, for example, recently investigated opportunities to import hydropower from British Columbia to California. Bringing hydropower to California would require countless new dams on BC rivers and creeks, as well as a brand new high voltage transmission line extending from BC to...
California. The report predicts that the transmission line would have significant impacts in northern California. It also acknowledges that hydropower produced in Canada would not be considered low impact under US law, and notes that the law would have to be weakened for the project to be successful. PG&E is moving ahead with pursuing the project, and we therefore predict attempts to weaken the law will ensue. The government in BC seems extremely receptive and has issued a report predicting the massive need for power and calling for companies to build new dams. Just as California is looking to BC, New England is looking to Quebec.

American Whitewater is working with Canadian based organizations like BC Creek Protection Society to stem the massive dam building push happening in Canada right now. Leaders from the alliance joined AW and our fellow Hydropower Reform Coalition members for a meeting in Washington this July. As US citizens, we have an ethical obligation to prevent the exploitation of rivers and creeks north of our borders to fuel our own energy consumption habits. For paddlers lucky enough to have paddled in BC, it is painfully clear what incredible natural resources are at risk. Not only could this new hydro push weaken US laws—resulting in new dams in our country—but it could also eliminate recreational opportunities for US citizens travelling north. On a deeper level, we should be concerned with our effects on people and places beyond our boundaries. We’ll keep paddlers posted on how to help. For now, conserve energy.

Idaho Boat Registration Dies Again

by Kevin Colburn

Idaho is a special place, one that fosters some of the continent’s best rivers and sometimes some of its worst ideas. One such idea is to require all non-motorized boats to have a fee-based registration. This idea emerges every couple of years, as proponents seek a new source of funds for government agencies. Paddlers in the state have vehemently opposed this program, and after a yearlong assessment ordered by the Governor’s office, the idea has reportedly died yet again. The Kayak Idaho website and the Idaho Whitewater Association played strong roles in defeating the proposed registration program with paddling icons like Rob Lesser and Grant Amaral acting as spokesmen.
The Roar of the Yampa: A proposed diversion that could tame the beast

By Kent Vertrees

In Steamboat Springs, from mid-April through July, step outside at night, when all is still, and you’ll hear it.

The first time I heard the roaring of the Yampa River, I was in awe.

I was a mile and a half from the river, sipping beers on my friend’s deck. It was late May and the sun was just about to set. “Is that the Yampa?” I asked my buddy. “Yea, can you believe it?” he said. “It’s amazing that we can hear it all the way up here.” He kept talking but I wasn’t listening as I was fixed on the roar.

Unlike the controlled, tamed rivers of my Mid-western youth, the Yampa River is an exact opposite, a wild unrestricted drainage.

The second time the roar caught my ear I was standing beside Mammoth Falls, the infamous first rapid also known as Osterizer in Cross Mountain Canyon. Cross Mountain is the Yampa’s most continuous stretch of whitewater. With towering cliffs and bus-sized boulders constricting its flow, the river’s water was re-circulating in and around itself, forming an immense hydraulic that looked as if it would eat a raft.

As an experienced rafting guide, I had seen big water, but nothing like this. At Mammoth Falls, you can stand, perched just feet above the source of the roar, where mist from the spewing water mixes with the cold sweat from your pounding heart.

In full flood, the Yampa becomes a freight train of water and earth. And it all flows freely. Though there are a few small reservoirs along the Yampa’s path, the dams of Stagecoach and Catamount do little to stop the springtime snowmelt as the water spills over the cement in natural flow patterns.

“The Yampa River is widely regarded to be the largest tributary in the entire seven-state Colorado River system that still retains all the characteristics of a free-flowing river,” says Geoff Blakeslee, the Yampa River project director for the Nature Conservancy.

But it all could change. In the next 25 years, Colorado’s population is forecasted to increase by 2.8 million people, the majority of whom will be moving to Front Range cities where water resources are historically thin.

Rick Brown, the director of the State Water Supply Initiative, an expansive review of Colorado’s water resources, is quick to identify that “it’s time for us, the residents of Colorado, to locate our future water supply. With current projections, we have identified a 20 percent gap in the water we will need to provide for our growing municipalities by 2030. If we’re unable to store and use new water supplies, we’ll likely see increased pressure to transfer water from irrigated agriculture on both the east and west slopes.”

As this process unfolds, the Yampa’s plentiful water makes it a prime candidate as Colorado’s future water supply. “The Yampa River carries an abundance of clean and available water that we could use to satisfy our needs,” says Carl Brouwer, a project manager for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. “In the Multi-Basin Water Supply Investigation, we have summarized a project that would pump water from the lower reaches of the Yampa River, east to the communities along the East Slope that are in need of obtaining future water supplies.”

The investigation, also known as the Yampa Diversion Project, outlines a colossal project, the likes of which Colorado has never seen before. At an estimated cost of $4 billion dollars and a 25-year build out, the project entails diverting 20 percent of the Yampa River’s flow near the tiny community of Maybell.

By diverting water to an off-channel reservoir, during only the higher spring runoff months, Brouwer suggests that this project would still allow the Yampa to function as it does today. “We have initially planned to shut off the pumps when the river gets below 1,000 cubic feet per second, allowing for the environmental and recreational qualities of the Yampa to sustain themselves.” More importantly, flushing flows would be allowed to pass by the diversion during a certain time frame at peak flow, providing the same pulse of water that has existed for millions of years.

Northern, which has yet to find a project sponsor, suggests that pump stations would then deliver this water via hundreds of miles of pipeline back up river, under the Continental Divide to its final destination: a reservoir along the Front Range.

The exact location of the pipeline and tunnel has yet to be configured, but additional elements could be added into this system.

“Tying in the Yampa River with the other trans-basin diversions in Colorado would allow us to complete the link between all the other basins in the state,” says Eric Wilkinson, Northern’s manager. “In effect, we could move water from the Yampa River to the Colorado River via exchanges and purchases and lessen our dependence on rivers that have been over-utilized in the past.”

Recreational users, rafters, canoeists, or kayakers for instance, could potentially get longer flow windows lasting into September, extending a season that usually ends in July.

Far away from the Front Range sprawl of suburban homes, laying deep in the heart of Dinosaur National Monument along the Utah border, the Yampa River has carved out a magnificent, towering, slick rock canyon environment. At 2,000 feet deep, the Yampa Canyon is not only one of the most sought after multi-day river rafting locations in the world but also
the resting ground for one of Earth’s last remaining living dinosaurs.

John Hawkins, a fisheries biologist from Colorado State University, has been working on the Yampa River for many years and has developed an intimate relationship with these creatures. “Of the four species of indigenous fish that live in the lower Yampa River,” Hawkins says, “the Colorado pikeminnow is the king. As the natural predator of the river, the pikeminnow can grow up to six feet long and is only found in western U.S. rivers, like the Yampa, that have retained their free-flowing, undiminished, natural hydrographs.”

John has pinpointed the exact location of the pikeminnow’s hallowed spawning grounds, deep in the heart of Dinosaur National Monument. “The flooding of the river coincides with the return migration of the mature pikeminnow to an exact location every year. These fish will travel hundreds of miles up and down, not only the Yampa, but also the Little Snake and the White River. These spawning grounds on the Yampa are the highest quality that we’ve found.”

Silt is key to the pikeminnow’s survival. “As the Yampa peaks and floods its banks in the spring and early summer, the flows move massive amounts of silt and sand down the river channel,” Hawkins says. “This silt not only provides habitats for recently hatched fish, but keeps other non-native predators at bay. The flows of the Yampa are critical as the high peaks of the river clean the spawning beds at the right time for the returning adults to lay their eggs.”

Gigi Richard, a geomorphologist from Mesa State University, has been studying the Yampa River’s unique hydrology and that of the Little Snake River, which flows into the Yampa just above the entrance to Yampa Canyon, where these spawning beds occur.

“The Little Snake River is a major tributary to the Yampa River and it carries a very heavy sediment load,” she says. “Where it provides only 30 percent of the flow to the Yampa below the confluence of these rivers, the Little Snake contributes 70 percent of the sediment. If a water project in the future were to limit the amount of water flowing down the Yampa River, ...
there could be a pile up of sediment all along the Yampa Canyon which would have a profound effect on the aquatic and terrestrial habitats that make the Yampa's environment so unique and special."

Aside from the pikeminnow, native species like the razorback sucker, bonytail and humpback chub could also be threatened by a diversion.

It is a conundrum of epic proportions. On the one hand are human water needs, on the other are the needs of the natural species and the environment at large, not to mention the water requirements of Western Slope farmers, ranchers and miners. For the Yampa River Diversion to occur there would have to be many levels of subordination and compromise. The equation would need to provide for localized, in-basin storage and delivery capacities for both the lower and upper river.

Right now, questions outnumber answers. Could certain reductions in the Yampa's flows allow for the endangered species, the recreational paddling, and the enjoyment of the river canyons to coexist with a pumpback? Can we sustainably allow for growing populations in cities hundreds of miles away to tap into a water source that is necessary for the local agricultural and mining industries? Could we manage this system so that it would put late season flows back into the upper and lower reaches of the Yampa itself?

Agreements and settlements for all other Western Slope rivers in Colorado would also be needed. “This is extremely complicated,” says Dan Birch, director of the Colorado River District, which is responsible for managing all the water flowing in the Colorado River drainage in Colorado. “The decision made in one of the major river basins in Colorado affects every other basin in the state. If water were to be used from the Yampa to help satisfy the need for growth in the Front Range, then the other river basins must also be consulted and allowed to provide their necessary input before anything occurs.”

This debate will be critical as Colorado evolves during this century. Where we will get the next, and possibly last, great water source is a question that may take the state to the edge of its political and philosophical abilities.

On a recent rafting trip down the Yampa Canyon, that roar came screaming back into my head as the water pounded against the canyon wall. I was again reminded how special the Yampa River is, and how important it is to protect her.

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It’s true. Life started for us on a bike. As Jeff pedaled his way through Europe one brewery at a time, he brainstormed a beer where biscuit-like malt flavors would coast in equilibrium with hoppy freshness. He named the beer Fat Tire Amber Ale.

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Single Blades

FIVE DAYS
on the Yampa

Steamboat Rock on the Yampa River

Photos by Dave Steindorf
By Dave Steindorf

As we approached the put-in at Deer Lodge, we could make out the faint images of our group in the distance. We had all converged on this spot from different directions and after several days of travel we could hardly wait to get on the river. The members of our group had all met through our interest in whitewater boating. Many of us had actually learned to kayak together many years ago. Now in our adult years the group is made up of teachers: k-6, college professors, and one recovering teacher turned river advocate. Earlier in our boating careers the discussion on the night before a big river trip would have been about the whitewater that lay ahead. How big were the rapids? The holes? Should this or that rapid be run on the left or right? On this trip most of the talk was centered on the nine children that would be accompanying us down the river—seven girls and two boys, between the age of four and eleven. Our excitement in being able to take them to a special place such as this one was the backdrop of all of our thoughts.

After running shuttle, rigging boats and corralling kids, we push off and begin the trip into the river canyon that seems to jump straight out of the valley. The Yampa River above the Deer Lodge put-in is a wide open valley bounded by distant peaks. The Yampa River Canyon trip encompasses the last of the Yampa River flowing through Dinosaur National Monument before its confluence with the Green. One of the members of another group that shared our launch date stated “This section of the Yampa's Canyon walls may be only second to those of the Grand Canyon.” As a veteran of two trips down the Grand this seemed like a tall order but the statement increased my excitement nonetheless. As we drifted into the canyon and the walls jumped up, the cliffs and canyon colors were instantly breathtaking. I called to my friend David who had guided on the Yampa for many years, “Now tomorrow it starts to get pretty, right?”

“Yea, tomorrow,” he replied.

We pulled over for lunch on a steep sandy beach. The current was moving pretty good so we had to do a little boat catching as our five rafts crowded into the eddy. As we began to pull the lunch off the rafts, the kids wasted no time in diving into the sand. What is it about sand that is such a universal kid attractor? Digging holes, building castles, making sculptures. In looking at the intensity of their play one of the parents remarked on a comment from his mom before the trip. “What will the kids do? Won’t they get bored?” It seemed clear that they would all have been content to play in the sand indefinitely, or at least until their growling tummies sent them looking for the food providers. No TV, nothing plugged in or battery powered and happier than cats covering up @#$&.

Camp that night was at a spot called Anderson Hole. After unloading rafts and setting up camp we began a game of whiffle ball. My daughter Molly and one of the boys on the trip started a little zoo with all of the water bugs they could find; it was quite a collection. It is so refreshing to see how comfortable she was picking up big crawly bugs, and getting covered in sand from head to toe. This was by no means the first river trip most of these kids have ever been on, although in the past the group had been made up entirely of girls. For some inexplicable reason all of the couples in our circle of friends have been unable to produce a boy child. On this trip the brother of one of our friends brought his two sons on the trip. I asked him at the put-in if he had a permit for those “boy children.” It was clear almost immediately that our reality had been skewed because of our gender inequity. Nothing could have made this clearer than a scene at the put-in where the girls decided to play horses. The boys recognized this game immediately but incorrectly as cowboys and Indians, and began to shoot the horses. The tables turned when the entire posse of girls turned on the two boys, back them up against a tree, craning their necks as they yelled, “you can’t shoot the horses!” We have often joked about how hard it will be to impress this peer group of girls. They all

The girls hard at work scrubbing dishes - that’s why we bring them, after all

Photos by Dave Steindorf
paddle solo in IKs, raft the bigger rapids, and have seen some of the most beautiful river canyons in the West. Sabine, one of the moms on the trip, has a fantasy of all of these girls starting a rafting company together someday. Someone quips, “Do you really want your daughters hanging out with raft guides.” Sabine quickly points out that most of the husbands on this trip used to be raft guides and states, “They could do worse.” The boys survived in the end, but not before they got their hair braided and their nails painted. 

Later after the kids were tucked away in their bags the adults got caught up in changes in our lives, talk inevitably turned to changes in our world. High gas prices, low real estate prices, changes in our economy and our climate all hot topics on the list. Of course we solved all of these problems while drinking luke cold beer, watching the Yampa rolling by, sunset changing hues across the water. I tried not to be the wet blanket by adding the dewatering of the river in front of us to the list of topics. Knowing that it is a serious threat, somewhat tainted my joy of being in this great place. Instead I went to the drag bag sloshing in the waves to wrestle out another beer.

The next day the canyon walls became taller and even more vertical. Late in the afternoon we heard a thunderstorm approaching. Soon the claps of thunder gave way to a few errant raindrops and then to a full fledged downpour. We attempted to seek shelter under a small rock overhang but the rain was coming down in sheets. Our $5.99 K-Mart umbrella provided little shelter. And then as quickly as it started the deluge ended leaving only the incredible smells of a fresh rain in the high desert. Off the canyon walls echoes a yell “Ho! Mitakuye Oyasin!” an Indian phrase that means roughly, “we are all related”; nature, man, and I am but a speck. The canyon began to open up into a place known as Harding’s Hole and Wagon Wheel point. Towering cliffs and sandstone amphitheaters filled the landscape in every direction. It is one of those places that is so big it is hard to get perspective of. “Ho! Mitakuye Oyasin!”

The next day the Yampa Canyon hit full stride. The goosenecks in this section make it so that seven river miles equate to two miles as the crow flies. With each gooseneck bend the walls on the outside of the bend get taller and more sheer. Eventually
Grand Overhang comes into view. The word from the former Yampa guides on our trip is that if you drop a rock from the top of the overhang, it will land on the opposite riverbank. I remember looking at goosenecks in the river in the wide open valley above the put-in. I thought about how many millennia it would take for those bends in the river to become a grand overhang. Around a few more bends we came to the Tiger Wall, a 300-foot cliff that drops all the way into the water. Tradition says that you should kiss the Tiger Wall for good luck in the mighty Warm Springs Rapid.

In the mile above Warm Springs the river becomes unnaturally calm. This is due to the debris flow that clogged the river and created the rapid back in 1965. The rapid has been notorious from birth, largely because it claimed the life of the first person to run it. As is often the case with these things, the rafter that perished contributed to his demise by not scouting the rapid and by failing to wear a lifejacket. The rapid consists of a large wave train that leads into several huge holes dead center in the rapid. These holes are generally skirted on the right, but not too far right because there is another hole that juts out from the right bank. We pulled into the eddy above the rapid in order to scout and put most of the kids out to walk around the rapid. None of us had the stomach to even think about flipping a boat with a five or six year old aboard. My daughter, who is eleven and the oldest in the group, threatened to disown me if I didn’t let her run the rapid. After seeing the sneak route at the top of the rapid I relent and let her climb on the raft. We pushed off and in moments we had waves crashing over the bow of our raft. After an uneventful run we pulled into the eddy to the cheers of the crowd that had gathered to watch our run. We picked up several of the little ones and continued downstream.

The next day, shortly below our last camp, we floated into the confluence of the Yampa and the Green. Named Echo Park by John Wesley Powell, this is truly an icon of natural beauty in the west. The centerpiece is Steamboat Rock, 500 feet high, 1200 feet long, and because of the way the river bends back on its self, this ridge of rock is a lasso that’s 100 feet thick. It is Echo Park because a loud hoop or holler will get you no less than eight returns off the canyon walls. This place is also significant because it tells the tale of two rivers, and two different futures. The Yampa, the last free flowing tributary of the Colorado system had about five times the flow of the Green, whose flow is muted by Flaming Gorge Dam upstream. The current threat to the Yampa and Green is by no means the first. Shortly below the confluence is a narrow
tapes sandstone gorge where a dam was proposed in the mid 1960s. The thought of all that I have seen over the last several days being flooded gave me a knot in the pit of my stomach. I said a private thank you to those who fought the fight to keep that mistake from becoming reality, and giving me the chance to share this great place with our children.

After a flat braided section of river known as Island Park we entered the Split Mountain Gorge for the last hoorah of our trip. A series of fun Class III rapids provided an exciting and fitting end to our trip. We began to realize that we needed to milk every rapid and soak up the canyon walls. As we approached the Split Mountain Boat Ramp, the canyon walls ended just as abruptly as they began 70 miles and five days earlier. I looked around to see the long face on my daughter and the other kids, sad to be done. I couldn’t help but wonder if this great place would be here for her to show her kids someday. I thought about reentering the world with rising fuel prices, and global temperatures. I heard Rick yell out one more, “Ho! Mitakuye Oyasin!” and I felt that I now had a clearer understanding of what the Native Americans may have meant by exalting that we are all related. There is only so much oil and water on the planet and the Earth will impose its limits upon us. Conservation will not be an option but a physical reality. The question I ask myself is will we make choices to save the last great places for our kids? Or, will we pump the last barrel off our shores, take the last drop from our rivers, and then begin to conserve not as a choice but as a limitation of what the planet can provide? I think about two possible futures: my daughter bringing her own children down the Yampa and telling them the story of how we helped save this magnificent place, or alternatively, Molly piecing together words and pictures to try to show her kids something that no longer exists from a memory of five days on the Yampa.

The Yampa River: To Dam or Not to Damn

By Nathan Fey

Does a proposal to build a $4 billion dam on the last major free flowing river in the Colorado River basin sound like progress, or make sound water policy? Does taking water from a national park and the iconic western canyons of the Colorado Plateau, across the Continental Divide at an annual cost of millions of dollars in electricity seem justified in the age of global warming? Right or not, there are powerful interests working toward this vision on the Yampa River in northwestern Colorado.

As the Front Range cities of Colorado expand, they continue to search for more water to meet the demands of urban growth. It is estimated that by the year 2030, the South Platte River Basin, home to the largest populated areas of Colorado, will need as much as 400,000 acre-feet of new water. The solution sought after by the Northern Water Conservancy District of Colorado is to dam the last truly natural flowing river in the Colorado River system, and build a 500,000 acre-foot reservoir below Maybell, Colorado. Such a dam would include an initial plan to divert twenty percent of the Yampa’s instream flow, over the continental divide and to the Denver area, with even greater diversions likely to follow in future years.

The Yampa River is widely considered to be the last major tributary in the entire Colorado River basin that still retains the characteristics of a large, free flowing Western river. Unlike other rivers of Colorado and the arid West that have long been dammed, diverted and dewatered, the Yampa River, with only a few smaller water supply reservoirs high up in its headwaters, continues to have a natural hydrograph where annual spring and summer high flows protect ancient habitats and endangered species.

The Yampa is the largest tributary of the Green River, which is a major source of water for the mighty Colorado River. The Yampa’s free flowing nature gives the entire river system much of its dynamic character, including flushing flows, hydro-generating capacity and globally rare riparian habitats. These could be lost or greatly diminished if the Yampa Storage Project is realized.

Perhaps most importantly is the fact that water left in the river is not wasted. There are four species of endangered fish on the Yampa, all of which depend on the natural flow of the river for survival. Many communities rely on the river’s water for the thriving recreation industry, including rafting, kayaking, and fishing. In addition, the water that flows out of Colorado is not lost, but rather is already used. In 90% of the years on record, water from the Colorado River does not reach the Pacific Ocean and its waters are totally consumed downstream.

Proponents of the Yampa River Project, like Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, see the Yampa as a clean and reliable source of water that will stop the drying up of Front Range farms to address Front Range water needs deep into the 21st Century. Other agencies and groups see the Yampa Pumpback as an environmental and economic nightmare from last century having little statewide benefit, and far reaching detrimental impacts.

For a breakdown of the many issues at stake in this critical issue, and the pros and cons of the Yampa Pumpback, visit: http://www.friendsoftheyampa.com/arguments_for_and_against_the_Yampa_Pumpback.php
Making Waves

The fact that something has never been done before is the perfect reason to give it a try. It’s why Jason chose to travel the world on a pedal-powered, zero emissions boat. And it’s why KEEN created the Newport H2—a waterproof sandal that protects your toes. With its EVA footbed, multi-directional traction lugs and an odor-resistant Aegis® Microbe Shield, the Newport H2 is always at home in uncharted waters.

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Single Blades

R2
The High-Life of Rafting

By: Paul Gamache

“Big Brother”, White Salmon, WA
Paddlers Paul Gamache and Scott Waidelich

Photo by Brad Xanthopoulos
Rafting. The word immediately conjures up images in my mind. Those include flips, high-sides, swimming, great customers, horrendously awful customers, beer … whiskey, sun, the Chico Women’s Soccer Team, full moon floats, more beer, floating undercuts, and of course the bikini clad women to make those summers that much more exciting. No matter how you slice it, rafting is more than a sport: it’s a lifestyle. For some the beer, sun, and hotties, just aren’t enough. On days off, after work, or in the cold months of winter these individuals are on the edge of that lifestyle hanging on by their toes, begging for more. This is where the style of rafting known as R2 comes into play.

R2 is the potentially high performance aspect of rafting where two like-minded individuals sit side by side on opposite tubes of a raft. The most critical piece of the R2 equation is single-handily determined by the cohesiveness of the two paddlers. They might be the best of friends and professional Class V rafters, canoeists, or kayakers and not be able to align their two Class-A personalities. The result can be disastrous. Within the first minute or so you can get a feel for how you and your partner are paddling together. Thankfully this is just soon enough to jump ship and run back to the put-in if it looks as though you are in for a miserable day on the river.

Let’s not focus on those days though. When things go right in R2-ing, some amazing things are possible. Using synchronized strokes and styles; paddlers can boof ledges, drop waterfalls, punch holes, and cruise through manky rapids. The advantage is in the boaters’ ability to draw and rotate the boat at the “hip” of the craft. This pivot and go maneuvering allows the paddlers to rotate the boat on a dime and change their angle as fast as the rapids demand. In addition to increased maneuverability; speed and synchronized strokes over ledges can successfully boof the raft over unfriendly river features giving the paddlers even greater control.

So how can one get the most out of a high caliber R2? Let’s look at a few important tips. With increased maneuverability you need a way to secure yourself in the boat so that you can take advantage of the benefits of R2-ing. While there are many successful ways of doing so, one method...
Single Blades
of positioning yourself to stay in the raft is to get your feet solidly secured in the boat, usually one each under a front and back thwart. If you are on the right side of the raft your right foot should be forward under the front thwart and your left should be pressed under the back thwart. Sit so that your butt is on the vertical center of the outside tube. Kick both feet under their respective thwarts and lock them in tight so that you can hang out of the raft up to your stomach in water. To get back into the boat from this position do what's known as a high-brace or somewhat of a C to C roll. The high-brace is standard procedure in kayaking and not used nearly as much as it should in rafting. For those who are not kayakers, get your body in the position mentioned above. While holding on to your paddle as you normally would while paddling, raise your paddle blade so that it's flat against the surface of the water. You should be completely submerged underwater so you will have to reach for the surface. Now in one swift motion do a really big sit-up. Use your paddle as leverage by snapping the blade flat down into the water as your body comes to the surface. Do not aggressively pull the paddle down or rely on the paddle to get you upright, it is simply there to support your sitting-up motion. Pulling up on your front toes under the thwart will also help assist you in coming to the surface. Done correctly this maneuver will be fluid and can keep you in the raft at nearly all times, unless of course the boat flips. Additionally, it will prevent you from letting go of your paddle and holding on to the raft with one hand. Not only does letting go subject you and your partner to getting clobbered by your flailing paddle but it makes it impossible for you to keep paddling. While the natural thing to do is to grab and hold on to something this is only useful when going over drops greater than 15'. In nearly all other situations you are better off with your feet secure, your rear on the outside tube, and your paddle in the water battling to keep the raft on line. Same works for going into a large hole. If you stop paddling to hold on, the raft will be sucked back into the feature and give you one hell of a working. This is why locking your feet in and using your hands to paddle only is so important.

One of the best examples of what a highly skilled and motivated R2 team can do is showcased in Ashland Mine Productions No Big Names II: Amped. The film features multiple large waterfalls being dropped by Eric Seymore and Ben Stookesberry including a 48’ drop in Chile. Ben and Eric stuck the landing and showed the world what was possible with the right crew, a waterfall, and a splash of luck.

The potential of where the sport of R2-ing can go is nearly endless. Whether you're just enjoying a mellow day on the water with a friend, dropping a “park and huck” waterfall, or running the steepest creek you can find, R2-ing is always a great time. So get a compatible partner, a raft, and start practicing your strokes!

R2 races are becoming increasingly popular amongst paddlers. This year’s Canyon Creek Race had 12 R2 crews compete and ranked as one of the most difficult raft races in the Nation. Cruising over “Hammering Spot” Paul Gamache and Scott Waidelich paddle towards the finish line.

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Dan Robichard & Bryan Hlista working together to get through the bottom right side of “The Portage” on Middle Fork Feather’s Devil’s Canyon. Notice Dan’s preemptive high-siding combined with Bryan’s continual paddling. This sort of teamwork and awareness is a must have skill when paddling multi-day Class V runs.

Photo by Sam Hamilton
Sixty Years Later, Havens Family Still Winning Medals:  
A Recap of the 2008 National Downriver Canoe Championships

By Tom Blue, Race Chair,  
2008 WWOC Downriver Nationals

Canoe racing runs deep in the Havens family. In 1948, brothers Frank and Bill Havens were members of the United States Olympic Team, competing in flatwater canoe events. Frank won a silver medal that year. Four years later, Frank brought home gold, covering the 6.2 mile course in 57 minutes, 41 seconds, a new world record.

In 2008, the Havens family continues to set the pace and win medals in canoeing competition. At the Whitewater Open Canoe Downriver National Championships this past July, the next two generations of Havens earned eight golds, four silvers and two bronzes!

This year’s Downriver Nationals were contested on the French Broad River near Hot Springs, North Carolina. The 4.5-mile course started upstream of the bridge at Barnard and ended at the Pisgah National Forest maintained access at Stackhouse. This section of the French Broad is a natural flow, Class II-III run. Because of exceptionally dry conditions, the river ran at record low levels from mid-June until the first official day of practice. Substantial rain upstream then brought the level up, much to the delight of the race organizers. Even later in the week, there was plenty of water for spirited racing.

The Downriver Nationals are always held in the summer (July 8-13 this year). Racers tune up for the Nationals at various regional races throughout the spring. There are popular events each year on the Mulberry Fork in Alabama, the St. Francis River in Missouri, and the Deerfield River in Massachusetts. These are generally one- or two-day affairs, 4 to 8 miles long, held on weekends. Competitors Terry Wescott and Sandra Mitchell, however, arrived at the Downriver Nationals just a few days after completing the 460 mile long Yukon River Quest, the longest canoe race in the world!

Of the four days of racing at a Downriver Nationals, three cover the entire downriver
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course, which permits the competitors to enter different classes on different days (solo, tandem, junior/senior). One day of racing, however, is dedicated to the “sprint” event. The sprint competition is held on a shorter stretch of river with the biggest rapids. On the French Broad, the sprint course consisted of the rapids known as Big Pillow (III-), Sandy Bottom (II+), and The Ledges (III-).

The water level was highest on the first day of competition and Zaak and Zane Havens (grandsons of Bill) took full advantage. Paddling tandem, they posted what turned out to be the fastest time of the entire week for the full downriver course: 36 minutes, 26 seconds. Fortunately for their Uncle Kirk, race classes are subdivided into age groups as well. He finished first in the class for racers age 40 to 54 with his partner Jim Farrington.

The sprint races were held on the second day. Since the sprint course was in the middle of the run, competitors had to paddle from the put-in at Barnard down to the start line, then continue downstream after finishing their heat. This more relaxed time on the water was rewarded in other ways as racers encountered a bald eagle, an egret and countless blue herons.

The sprints produced the closest finish of the entire event. Jim Farrington won his solo class, but was only one second faster than Charlie Brackett and William McDuffie, who finished in a tie! Naturally, Zaak and Zane set the pace again, blitzing down the run in just under ten minutes. This time, their father Keith joined them on the podium, securing a gold in the tandem sprint with his partner Ed Sharp. The Havens in-laws got into the act too: Karla won golds in the women’s solo and tandem events, the latter with her partner Lynne McDuffie.

The race organizers made a special effort to increase participation in the women’s classes this year. When all was said and done, 22 women entered the competition, including 10 who raced solo. On the third day of racing, there were a dozen boats in the tandem mixed class (one male, one female) and three of the five junior/senior teams had a female competitor, including the winning team of Susie Hartzog and Dale Swanson. In addition, the youngest competitor was female. Ten-year-old Kenzie Bell raced with her father, Chris, finishing third in the junior/senior class.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Bob Whaley (age 82) demonstrated that downriver racing is a sport that can be enjoyed throughout life. He completed the course on the final day of competition in 52 minutes, 40 seconds, a very respectable time at the lower water level. The Havens clan “hit for the cycle” that day, picking up one gold, one silver and one bronze. Competitors from as far away as Alabama and New Hampshire also earned medals on the last day of racing.

Throughout the event, Hot Springs was a wonderful host town. After awards ceremonies each day, racers and their
families dined at the sidewalk cafes and soaked in the springs. Adversaries by day met at the Paddlers’ Pub in the evening to share ideas about different routes as the level dropped in the river (and in their mugs . . .). Perhaps the most enjoyable part of downriver racing is the camaraderie that develops between the paddlers.

This fall, a new event comes to the downriver racing scene. The first Collegiate Canoe & Kayak National Downriver Championships will be held on the Rappahannock River on October 11-12. The University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia will host. Any college or university can send a team. A full team consists of 3 male and 3 female students (and a faculty advisor) but teams can have more or fewer members. In addition to the usual race classes, the Collegiate Nationals will have relays. The event will be ideal for first-timers who want to give downriver canoe racing a try.

While there were some first-timers at this year’s Downriver Nationals, many of the competitors attend year after year. They travel around the country to wherever the race is held: the Youghiogheny River in Pennsylvania, the Dead River in Maine, or the Arkansas River in Colorado. 2008 was the first time that the Downriver Nationals were held on the French Broad. It proved to be an excellent venue and will certainly host the event again in the future.

And at some future Downriver Nationals, the next generation of the Havens family will undoubtedly set a blistering pace and win yet more medals.

For more information about the 2008 Collegiate Nationals, see http://www.americancanoe.org/collegiate/collegiate.html. For more information about the 2008 Downriver Nationals on the French Broad, including complete results, see www.fbcanoeracing.org/nationals. For more information about whitewater open canoe downriver canoe racing generally, see www.wwocd.org.

Photo by All Terrain Images
Endangered Canoes

By Harrison Metzger

Whitewater Canoists: Endangered Populations Prove Surprising Hardy Making Comeback

Conservation biologists studying endangered species speak of the danger of populations of rare and threatened plants and animals becoming isolated from each other. Such “island habitats” lead to decreased genetic variability and greater susceptibility to threats posed by habitat loss, development, climate change or encroachment of exotic species.

In the swift-flowing rivers of the Appalachian Mountains, a hardy breed of whitewater paddler developed over the last century. In the dawn of whitewater paddling, the canoeist was a dominant species in the rivers where it occurred. However with the proliferation of kayakers, populations of canoeists have dwindled to the point where the species is considered rare and endangered.

On a bright spring morning I downshift my Tacoma and glide through the turns dropping off the 5,400-foot peak of the Cherohala Skyway along the North Carolina/Tennessee border. Entering the scrubby, cut over pine forest above the Tellico River, it’s hard to believe at the bottom of this gorge lies the clear creek rushing over bedrock ledges and Class III and IV rapids sustaining the full diversity of Southern Appalachian biota.

I’ve driven 2 1/2 hours from Hendersonville, N.C., for an “armada” of whitewater paddlers. Soon I see them up ahead, their cars, vans and trucks stacked with brightly colored boats, some full-length boats like the 12-foot Mad River Outrage hanging out of my truck, others short and round as creek kayaks. But they are not kayaks. They are canoes—dozens of them. On this day their paddlers have traveled from as far north as Ontario and all points between for the second annual Ain’t Louie Fest (ALF).

There’s time as the crowd of more than 40 boaters unload gear to walk around, greet old friends and get acquainted with new ones. Time to admire another boater’s customized saddle and other outfitting tricks.

Unlike kayaks, which come ready to paddle with factory outfitting that can be quickly adjusted, many whitewater canoes arrive to their owners as empty hulls. In a throwback to the early days of whitewater, paddlers install their own saddles, floatation, lashing, foot braces, bulkheads or thigh straps, D-rings, pumps, etc. Even factory outfitted boats like festival host Dooley Tombras running Luminosa on the El Salto in Mexico

Photo by Leland Davis
Mike “Louie” Lewis’ Esquif Taureau, have personalized touches, like the thin wood strips around the cockpit.

“That makes it a real canoe,” he tells me when I ask about the wood trim.

Louie, of nearby Lenoir City, Tenn., works as a nuclear remediation engineer in the United States and other countries, but lives to paddle. A native of West Virginia, he has lived in East Tennessee since he was 2 and has been paddling canoes since the late 1960s. By the late 70s he was running full sized canoes down rocky waterfalls and rapids.

Like many canoeists, Louie appreciates the “open” part of open boating.

“The way I paddle and how I paddle I have to be able to get out of the boat in a heartbeat—I would die in a kayak,” he said. “I ain’t very good but I’m extremely lucky. But still you make your own luck. You come around a blind bend and the kayakers have got all the eddies, I have to be able to stand up and jump over the tree. Plus I like the visibility. I like to be able to see what’s coming. And the most important thing is you can carry beer.”

Like most canoeists of hard whitewater, Louie also enjoys being part of a small crowd of boaters who have the skill to run something like the Green Narrows in a craft that is indisputably challenging.

“That has always been one of my proudest moments, to be at the take-out and have some kayaker come and say, ‘Damn, I admire you guys running that in an open boat,’” he says of running the Green.

But canoeing is mostly a personal challenge. Anyone who takes up the way of the single blade finds themselves part of an iconoclastic community of boaters, direct descendants of whitewater pioneers from the Ottawa to the Chattooga.

The Southern Appalachians, where a number of whitewater canoes were once manufactured, has a viable if generally remnant population of whitewater canoeists. While most males exhibit the characteristic gray beard, the Southern population is notable for a few prominent younger individuals, including the multiple world champion rodeo canoeist, Eli (Elitus Helbertus)

For every 50 kayakers that plunge over Bear Creek Falls on the Cheoah, there may be one or two open boats. The pushy, 8-mile North Carolina run recently restored through the efforts of American Whitewater, ends with a two-mile stretch...
of continuous Class III+ to IV+ rapids culminating in the falls and the aptly named “Yard Sale” rapid. Once when running Yard Sale, I took on some water in the second hole, which shifted to my stern as I hit the bottom one, shooting me skyward in a huge rocket move. Onshore, a couple of young kayaking friends shot me “the horns” in approval. Like the big kayaks in days of yore, big canoes will get some big air coming out of big holes … if they come out.

Paddling this “western” style of whitewater is a challenge in any craft, let alone one with a big hole in its top. But it also allows the open boater to test his or her most important river sense — reading rapids on the fly. With the advantage of superior downstream visibility, the challenge of picking the driest lines is not optional.

Hundreds of kayakers and dozens of rafters challenge the Cheoah on any given day. But the open boater out here may find the only other canoists are ones so outstanding they are known among boaters by their first names. Names like Eli and Dooley.

Steep creek canoeists Dooley Tombras and Eli Helbert, multiple world champion rodeo open boater, are among the throng of single bladers on the Tellico March 12. Both are paddling with their dads who got them into canoeing. Along with some of Canada’s best—folks like Andrew and Carole Westwood—they throw wheels off 12-foot Baby Falls and snag every eddy in Class IV Jerrod’s Knee.

The Westwoods have been making the trip South for years to paddle with Louie on his home rivers and creeks in the Smokies and on the Cumberland Plateau. On their Web
site, westwoodoutdoors.ca, they describe how ALF became official in 1997:

“Louie, aka Mike Lewis, always invites us down March break to get some spring boating under our belts … This year Louie decided to invite everybody who wanted to come down and paddle. A big party of sorts, but, not for a day or two. Let’s do this for a whole 9 days! ’I don’t care what you call it,’ he drawls in his southern best, ‘but it ain’t Louie Fest.’ We took him at his word—literally!”

“Our biologists have documented scattered populations of canoeists along the Appalachian mountain range, including a still thriving northern variety in Canada. We believe this northern population holds hope for restoring the long-term viability of the species because it includes families of canoeists with young canoeist offspring.

We applaud the efforts of ALF to reconnect these disjunct canoeist populations.”

— Dr. O.C. Canoeski of the Center for Paddlelogic Diversity.

At 26, Dooley already has some open boat first descents nailed. He started canoeing with his dad when he was 14 to get into prime fly fishing locations, but they quickly realized the paddling was a lot more exciting than the fishing.

Inspired by the legendary Dave “Pyscho” Simpson’s early runs of Overflow Creek and other steep creeks in the vintage video “Southern Fried Creekin’,” Dooley found his calling: mastering hard whitewater in open canoes.

“I honestly can say I have never considered paddling a kayak or a C-1,” he says. “I like the challenge of paddling an open canoe down Class V rivers and creeks. Being in the canoe forces you to be able to read water and find the dry lines, and I like the added challenge.”

Like Louie, he values being able to quickly jump out if he gets pinned on a log, as has happened more than once on the high elevation creeks of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. His favorite run is the West Prong, the upper section of which he was the first to run in an open canoe.

“It is one of my home rivers and one of the most classic runs in the Southeast,” he says. “Only a handful of canoeers have made the run because it is so steep and continuous. It was really special (at ALF) to take two canoeers down who had never
run it before and be in a group of four canoes with no kayaks.”

There are a couple of kayakers along for this trip, and a few more staring at the throng of canoes boofing Baby Falls. There are lots of hoots of approval, but none louder than for 11-year-old Emily Greve running the falls in a Splash, the first open canoe designed (by her dad, Al) just for kids.

Gail Rich was among those who drove the longest, 15 hours from Ontario, to be at ALF. She came with her husband Steward and kids, Kenzie, 9, paddling a Splash, and Ainslie, 11, one of the few kayakers at ALF.

Like Dooley and lots of open boaters, Gail, 40, got into canoeing first as a family activity then realized the same boats could be paddled in whitewater.

“When we moved to Ontario 12 years ago and discovered you could actually put your camping gear in the canoe and take off for weeks, we were hooked,” she says. “And when it dawned on us that you could get Royalex canoes and throw yourself down a river, well that was the dawning of an obsession.”

Coming to ALF allowed the family to connect with “a whole entire community of people” similarly obsessed.

“It’s amazing to get to the river see the sparkling light dancing on the water and hear the rapids, music to the senses, anticipation of the new, and to look over and see 40 people who just innately get the same things you do,” she says. “It’s pretty special.”
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River Voices

First Descent of Smith Creek

By Doug Ammons

Jim Good rockets off a drop near the end of “Big Locomotive” in his vintage 1986 Mustang

Photo by Grant Amaral
This story is for anyone who dreams of first descents.

There's something special about exploring a new place. I'm not sure why, but maybe it's because it makes you into a little kid again. Maybe setting foot in that newness hints of the fun you felt as a five-year old, going somewhere that's gonna be neat. I think everyone has some little part of the world where they've felt this. It might be a pond on the other side of the neighbor's house, an old field, the woods behind Grampa's. As they get older, most people settle down and forget about that feeling, but a few make a profession and follow it into the wild places left on earth: the jungles, the Himalayas, Antarctica. Taking a middle road, some of us look for it in other ways, finding our own little corners of adventure. We end up farther than Grampa's woods but nearer than the South Pole. For paddlers, a new run serves this purpose. And best of all is finding the perfect run that no one else has ever seen.

The green, state-owned pickup truck wound along the road far up on the north side of Smith Creek canyon. As the truck bounced along, its occupants had a view across to the opposite side where the heavily forested ridges climbed high above them. Peering down through breaks in the trees, now and then some boulders and rock were just visible in the canyon bottom far below. It didn’t look like anything much. Overgrown with brush probably, old rotting cedar logs across it, and pools where small cutthroat trout waved in the current. The truck slowed, then stopped. Jim Good, a lanky, bearded man, stepped out onto the road and slammed the door.

“This looks like as good a place as any,” he said to the driver. “Thanks Bill, I’ll head down here. See you in a few hours.”

Now Jim was a slow talking, precise Kansas Jayhawk type. You could see it in the careful steps he took and the meticulous choice of his words. He was the kind of guy who told a story with painstaking attention to detail. So much detail in fact, that by the time he was halfway through, you’d want to shake him to get the rest out. Forsaking his native wheat-stalked state, Jim headed off to school in the late 1970s, trading his flatlands for the pine forests, mountains, and clear running waters of the Pacific Northwest. In his six years out here he had become an accomplished kayaker, hungry and on the lookout for new runs.

Jim had gradually come to the notion there might be something of interest in this obscure canyon in the Selkirk Mountains. By chance, the state of Idaho had contracted him to do water quality research in the upper tributaries. He didn’t realize there might be something unique right under his nose. But all the signs were there. The old runoff records showed that lots of water rumbled down the canyon every spring. Smith Falls, visible from the narrow frontage road which ran along the front edge of the Selkirks, looked very impressive—at least what you could see of it while squinting through the trees and “No Trespassing” signs. Lastly, the stream dropped a whopping 1700 feet in 5 miles.

Despite all the hints, the road was a long way up the canyonside and the trees were so thick you couldn’t even see the stream. “Still,” he thought, “There must be something in here.” After mulling it over for a week or two, curiosity finally got the best of him. He had to hike down through the forest and see what was at the bottom. His heels skidded and peeled the dirt off wet, mossy slabs of granite as he elbowed through thickets of buckbrush, downclimbing the bluffs between trees and over deadfall. Finally emerging onto the streambed through the trees at the bottom of the canyon, he looked up and down, blinked ... and felt the rush of discovery.

He wandered down the streambed in disbelief, shaking his head at the wonderland of polished granite slabs. Like the ultimate of waterslide fantasies, the bedrock rose and fell, sweeping away steeply in either direction, smooth, banking, going on forever. All of it invisible from above. Stunned, he thought, “What have I found? The world’s greatest whitewater run? Smith Creek. Jesus, Smith Creek!” Several hours later he staggered up
River Voices

Doug running one of the sliding falls in the middle of the stretch of the stretch “One thousand moves per mile”

Photo by Grant Amaral
“Did I really see all that?”

Jim called me that night. Over the phone, his normally composed voice had an edge.

“Doug, I have got to tell you about this stream I found! It’s in a canyon up in the Panhandle. You know, the one I’ve been working for the last few weeks on the upper drainage doing some research.”

His words began to trip over each other.

“I really didn’t have any idea of what was down there, but I went down hiking today to the stream in the bottom of the canyon.”

There was a pause.

What’s going on? I wondered. I could hear him struggling to control himself on the other end of the phone. His sense of order and his excitement grappled … and order was losing. His words accelerated, voice rising— “Climbing down was hard, but …”

And the dam broke.

“IT’S INCREDIBLE!!!” he shouted. “There must have been a huge flood—SMASHED the canyon onto BEDROCK! There ‘s waterslides Everywhere.”

I held the receiver away from my ear as a solid stream of shouting came out of the phone, until he finally took a deep breath and yelled, “It’s a FANTASTIC run!! You’ve GOT to see — I CAN’T — YOU WON’T — NO ONE WILL BELIEVE IT!!!”

I could hear him panting and out of breath, and waited a few seconds more to make sure he’d burned out his vocal cords. Then I got him to slow down enough so that I could get an idea of what he was saying. A long conversation ensued, and we decided to meet and hike the canyon as soon as possible. I hung up the phone smiling and thinking, funny what moving water will do to some people. I was intrigued by the possibilities, amused with Jim, and already caught up in his dream.

Our first October reconnaissance started off happily as I drove up to meet Jim. The highway wound along the Clark Fork and Kootenia Rivers past oceans of autumn yellowed cottonwoods and willows. I rounded corners to find full mountainsides glowing a soft orange with sunlit larch. We met full of enthusiasm, talked until late, then crawled into our sleeping bags anticipating the next morning. But the Indian summer was blasted into oblivion that night. There was a rainstorm and temperatures fell into the low 20s. We woke up to a clear day, but also to a forest, streambed, and a host of steep, polished slabs covered with thick ice. With crampons and ice-axes it might have been fun, but with only our hiking boots the going was scary. We each fell heavily several times just working our way slowly through the forest before the
stream started tilting downhill. Doubts grew as our boots skidded away on the icy boulders. A slip on any of the steeper stretches meant a potentially fatal, rock bashing slide for hundreds of feet. For eleven hours we balanced, tiptoed, slid, scratched our fingernails into the ice, and lunged for handholds, until finally we reached the end of the canyon. Along the way we hooted and danced with excitement at each steeper stretch, trying to envision the way the twisting smooth slabs, sliding falls, and ledges would look beneath spring runoff. Even in our fantasies we could never imagine such a run. The power unleashed each spring was clear; long stretches of bedrock were scrubbed clean and not a single boulder broke the polished sheen.

Legs buckling, knees aching, we were tired but ecstatic as we hiked past the final series of waterfalls in the twilight. A sense of mystery crept into us as we paddled through the pines and cedars along the streambed. We peered over the edge of Smith Creek's last grand gesture—a smooth ceramic-like spout with the late autumn's trickle of water falling far into a dark pool below, the waters cupped in a deep bowl scoured out of solid bedrock. Walking the remaining hundred yards to the truck, the only sounds in the hushed darkness were the bell-like trills of evening thrushes hidden away in the forest, and the gentle splashing of the stream.

We knew we had just witnessed a whitewater gem. The only question now was, when do we come back and at what water level? In a fit of irrationality we swore ourselves to secrecy and labeled it “River X,” promising each other not to tell anybody where it was. There was some peculiar combination of our friendship, the efforts of the day, the obscurity, and the beauty of the place that made Smith Creek seem like the ultimate run. It never occurred to us that other paddlers wouldn't be interested and that secrecy was hardly something we needed. Be that as it may, the myth of River X was born.

As we arrived from our disparate directions the runoff was peaking. Sheets of rain poured on us and the stream raged bankfull, a sluice of solid white sucking downhill at frightening speed. To complete the impression this gave to my companions, I mistakenly led them down through the forest right to a stretch that ended in two hideously unrunnable waterfalls. The stream’s average gradient was over 600 feet per mile here, with an especially dubious combination of rock, gravity, and roaring water. We tromped through the drenched forest. Soaking wet and throwing logs into the huge waterfalls, everyone laughed at the idea of actually being out in the maelstrom in a kayak. Jim and I, still stout believers of the classic nature of the run, became the butt of many jokes about our bad judgment.

Ever the gentleman, Rick could only look bemusedly at me as the torrent blasted by and yell, “I really don’t know about this River X of yours, Dr. Ammons.”

“Rick, Rick, the water’s just too high, we...

First descent: The team about to put in. Bob Duffner to the left, Doug Ammons in middle and Jim Good on the right.

Photo by Grant Amaral
need to come back when it’s a quarter this.
I know it will be great.”

Rick smiled and put his arm around my
shoulders in a fatherly way. “Yep, I’m sure
you’re right Doug. I believe you too, I really
do. But you know, in the meantime let’s
get back in the truck and go to something
we can run.”

For the others, the novelty of watching
big logs disappear in the froth had worn
off. Upon hearing Rick’s comment, they
diplomatically expressed their doubts. So
we got in the truck and drove Highway 2 back into Northern Montana for a fun
high water day on the Yaak River. After
all the planning Jim and I were greatly
disappointed to leave our baby behind,
unrun. The others were happy to be
away from the source of our psychotic
compulsions. Talking to Jim as we headed
east, Rick summed up the consensus of
our friends, “Jimmy Boy, there are places
like this an hour from Seattle. Why should
we drive all the way to Idaho to look at a
totally unrunnable stream?”

As word of our failure got out, the few
people who had heard about the project
lost whatever interest they had. Jim and
I were still certain that it would be an
outstanding run, but no one believed us
anymore. It was frustrating to hear of
more reasonable flows as the runoff played
itself out. The timing was all wrong, and
we never could put together a team to take
on the run. The entire season slipped by
and out of our fingers. In mid-summer
I made three more trips, timing them to
be just after heavy rains, but the drought-
dry soil sucked up all the moisture. I was
left with memories of leaping across the
polished slabs, determined to run the
thing someday.

References to “River X” became no more
than wisecracks on the lips of our friends.
Meanwhile, Jim had heard of a hydro
project due to be started on Smith Creek
in the next year or so. The consequences
seemed remote so we paid it no mind.
The quiet, beautiful canyon had no one to
disturb it, and we thought it would always
be that way.

The next year, Jim was distracted by work
back in Seattle, and I by graduate school
and a growing family. No one else was
interested. But as spring rolled around I
catch the bug again. After pouring over
topos and hydrographs from a dozen prior
years, checking my pictures, imagining
water flows, I felt I knew when to go and
what the optimum water level should be.
The hydro project was due to be started in
June. The road would be closed and who-
knew-what would happen to the stream.
Our only chance for a run was early,
catching the water level on the upswing
before the runoff began in earnest.

In April I roused Jim and he talked his
friend Bob Duffner into coming along,
without any accompanying details of
what Bob would be getting into. As a final
member rounding out a solid crew, I asked
my good friend Grant Amaral to join us.
Since he was in the process of writing
up his Idaho guidebook and was already
sniffing for every whiff of interesting
whitewater in the state, he had the time
and was game for anything new, exciting,
and out of the way. For the long drive
north from Boise to Smith Creek, these
were essential. With a last check on the
water level, we synchronized our watches
and left for a rendezvous at Smith Falls.

We met and camped out that night with
the distant sound of the rapids, hidden by
the trees, echoing in the canyon far below.
The next morning dawned bright and
clear. As we drove up toward the put-in,
we found the road snowed over for the last
mile. We skidded in icy ruts as far as we
could, then left the truck in the middle of
the road. After getting all the gear in order,
we slogged and dragged our boats up to
the bridge. There we found cold, clear
water cutting through the deep snow, with
five-foot high ice walls coming right out
of the stream. It had more than a hint of
danger to it, but undeterred after our long,
frustrating wait, with the sun melting any
doubts, we slid in and started down.

The first half-mile was easy Class II, then
the canyon fell away, bedrock reared
out of the stream bottom and the fun
began. As the stream steepened to Class
III, then Class IV, we began to eddy-hop,
closed-in on either side by the walls of icy
white, gliding our boats between granite
boulders wearing huge turbans of snow. I remember eddying out and looking upstream into the spring sun shining out of an infinitely blue sky, its glare reflecting off the snow and stream, with Jim, Grant, and Bob flitting among the boulders in a dance with the sparkling water ….

At the first big Class V rapid, we found that getting out of our boats to scout, much less getting back into the water, was precarious business. We ripped into eddies, bouncing off the ice, then hung onto anything possible while hacking out steps with a paddle blade as far up as we could reach. Then, we'd carefully balance out of the boat, using the steps to climb up the wall, finally pulling the boat up. Once up, we post-holed unpredictably to our waists and chests, sometimes stalking carefully on a solid crust, then suddenly breaking through snow bridges into the water or between buried boulders, getting soaked with slush and bruising our feet and knees. Scouting and then making our way back to the boats was a slow, freezing struggle. The only thing that was worse was the thought of running the huge drops blind. It soon became clear that we simply couldn't afford to take an hour scouting single rapids; several times it was easier to just resign ourselves to a difficult portage past drops which were hard, but very runnable Class V.

At every horizon line we craned our necks as far as they’d go, eddy-hopping everything remotely possible. The stream was encased in bedrock, snow, and ice. The rapids were first good—great even—and got progressively and outrageously better as we went. There were long sequences of stair-stepping ledges, twisting, undulating waterslides, big ledge holes, holes with weird configurations at all kinds of crazy angles, and clean bedrock chutes.

The intensity heightened as we descended further into the canyon. Bob was quiet and concentrating, handling his boat well, but very tense as we worked our way into and through long, complex sections with gradients well over 500 feet per mile. Grant was solid and cautious in his paddling, with his trademark sense of humor often cracking out in some kinetic way.

“Hey,” he’d say, waving his hands, “have you ever heard the story about the paddlers who started down a canyon blind and all went off a 200 foot waterfall one after the other?”

Jim was absorbed, having that glow that comes on Jayhawk faces when their dearly beloved team has just won the NCAA basketball championship. “I can’t believe this is working out,” he kept saying, “I just can’t believe we’re finally here.” The excitement and rhythm of the rapids wove our actions and decisions together until the first (aborted) attempt. Having driven 12 hour from Garden Valle to look at an unrunnable stream, John Wasson is not a happy camper.

Photo by Doug Ammons
we were unified into a single creature.

We came to a large rapid we dubbed “Big Locomotive.” The canyon narrowed and the stream swept down a surreal granite bobsled run, 40 vertical feet in three distinct leaps. The rapid looked wild, but great. Scouting was impossible. We tried to look at the lead-in and were forced into a hair-raising scramble—slipping and clawing our way to a vantage point just to see the first part of the rapid. Common sense prevailed. We focused on the portage, the rest of which looked weirder and even harder. Icy runnels encased the vertical slabs on either side. Snow banks, frozen moss, and a sheen of melt water covered all the runoff-smoothed granite. We laboriously worked our way down for an hour or so, delicately tip-toeing and grabbing onto anything we could. We fought for every foot, lining the boats past one part, handing them from person to person, carrying a few yards, then clipping them back in, roping them up, lowering again, then lining them a little farther. Slipping would leave one of us pinballing down the sluice—an unnerving thought.

We finally reached a point near the bottom where Jim thought we should go up a big rock outcrop, but the only route was vertical ice with a few rock nubbins showing though. We had forgotten to bring crampons again, and the possibilities for friction were limited. Frustrated with the slow pace and apparently boxed in, a small cleft in the outcrop offered a possible, although very awkward launch into the bottom of the rapid. Bob and Grant were game; Jim cautious and methodical as always. Some careful maneuvering past an ice shelf brought us to a position under the cleft. Hoisting the boats up onto a sloping, overhanging ramp, one-by-one we took our turns wriggling into boats between the overhang and the cockpit, fingers groping for the last bit of sprayskirt. A good push, fingers crossed, airborne and off we went into the white, churning water. Soon we were all in the eddy at the bottom, looking up the crazily steep and beautiful rapid.

Then, we turned our boats downstream, and the great rapids just kept coming in a glorious blur. Dozens of delightful moves linked together through amazingly steep drops, blind corners, horizon lines, more hacking of steps in the ice, post-holing, and launching back into the exquisite chaos. After many hours, evening approached. We left the boats and hiked up to the road, numb with cold, but excited and enthusiastic.

We ate dinner on a secluded bluff, then sat overlooking the canyon as the evening light faded. The others mused and laughed over the events of the day as I played my
guitar—the music melding with the trees, the sound of the stream hidden below, our friendship, and the feeling of spring days in the mountains. The harmonies and melodies would build, then turn and bank to flow like the rapids, like the pull of gravity on water.

The next morning found the sun shining brightly on the crusted, frozen snow. We climbed down though the forest to the boats, knocked the ice and frost off the cockpits, and scouted the first rapid. The water blasted around a big banked turn scoured out of bedrock and fell 15 feet or more, rooster-tailing off a spine of rock into a big hole. Prime stuff, great stuff, fun stuff!

“Hey!” yelled Jim over the noise of the rapid, “What’s the name of that dinosaur with the big fin on his back?”

“I think it’s called a Dimetrodon.”

“That’s what this is - Dimetrodon Drop! See the fin?” He yelled, pointing to the spine and the spray of water shooting off it.

We put in, sliding off the icy boulders into a small eddy. Gripping our paddles, we looked downstream at the water, which raced toward the turn, galloped between boulders, and disappeared. Around the corner, the dinosaur waited.

Precise strokes grip the current as the boat accelerates into the rapid. Around the corner, a feeling of focus, water charging over the bedrock, the current grabbing, pulling, suddenly releasing. The boat launches off the spine, flying over the hole. A quick lean, duffek, and zap, whip into an eddy.

“That’s what steep creeking’s about!”

Wonderful Class IV humped down to another corner, to which we attached the moniker, Big Limbo. The rapid was comprised of an interesting lead-in around a bend. A big ledge with a log just off the water level had to be contended with; nothing but solid rapids below, as far as you could see.

“It’s all yours!”

From a haven in the last eddy, peel out and blast around the corner. Everything coming at you fast. Duck under the log, big sweep on the left. Fly over the ledge...
and whump into the froth. “Yahoooo!” But the water of the ledge grabs the boat and sucks it backward. Sky appears, the back deck goes down, down down... “Back-endoooooo!” with a huge lurch upward you’re airborne. Control the boat into a half pirouette, squirt it back to the left and catch an eddy. Just like that.

On and on we went, rapid after rapid, scouting from our boats and from awkward spots along the stream. There were tightrope walks above the ice on buckbrush and deadfall. We kicked frozen shoes into the packed snow. Ice was broken out of cracks so we could hang on to see a few feet further around a bend. As we dropped elevation, the snow gradually thinned, and our collective mood soared ever higher.

The streambed opened up and we got to a section we named “1000 Moves per Mile,” where the smooth slabs dipped and rippled, exfoliations stepped up and down at all angles forming ledges, holes and ski jumps. The water continuously banked, sluicing around, flying out into space and ever downward.

In the midst of a waterslide fairyland, one rapid stood out, “The Hole that Ate Sheriff Jim.” A section of shallow water raced over an undulating slab for 30 or 40 yards, water rushing and roostertailing in every direction, then ending with the nastiest of flat holes. Jim and I took it on while Grant snapped pictures on his camera as fast as his cold, bony fingers could work the buttons. The line ripped down through weird cross-angled holes and breaking waves. Sharp strokes, quick balance shifts from edge to edge, keep angle and speed, shoot through the bottom hole, lean, duffek, and whip into the eddy on the left.

Then, back up at the top I helped Jim launch off a slab. Pushing hard, I spun him and he hit the water angled wrong for the lead-in. All messed up, he got spun around again by its weird rooster-tailing waves headed for the crux. The stream plunged over the sloping slab, dragging him down as he frantically swept with his paddle, scrabbling the blade across the shallow bottom trying to move the boat cross-current. He swept through the lower part of the rapid and slammed into the bottom hole sideways. Struggling in the flat, sticky backwash, he was locked in.

As soon as he had hit the water I knew my mistake was going to make it hard for him to recover. He disappeared over the edge as I chased him down the streambank, guilt and concern stabbing into my stomach. “It’s my fault!” I shouted to myself. Over boulders, through brush, across slabs—I caught up to him after he hit the hole and was being thrashed. Climbing onto a ledge above him, without thinking I grabbed a long springy branch of buckbrush growing overhead, hung on with one hand and swung like Tarzan out over the hole. Before I could realize how stupid I was being, I’d latched onto the end of Jim’s boat and with the help of the branch’s bungy recoil, hauled him out upside down. It was a scary place to swim, but Jim rolled up in the eddy smiling—instead of cursing me as he should have.

Calm as always he said, “Thanks Doug, saw you out of the corner of my eye and knew you’d get to me.”

Heart pounding and still feeling guilty, I thought, “Damn it, Jim, I wasn’t so sure.”

Next up, Cover shot. A wild one. The water leaped over a sequence of big, off-angled ledges into a sharp right-hand turn. The stream squeezed itself into a twisted nozzle, funneling the water down a chute and into a pile of boulders, then ricocheted around to form a deep,
sucking, whirlpool-like toilet bowl against a vertical slab of granite. Another big drop over a mess of boulders loomed just below. Very interesting hydraulics here.

We hopped over the boulders to a vantage point, and stood side-by-side, viewing the rapid. Grant crowed with a gleeful, impish grin.

“We’ll call this Cover Shot! Anybody who runs this gets their picture on the cover of my guidebook!” We all laughed, then he shook his head and added, “But seriously, guys, forget it.”

With Grant’s mixture of humor and sobriety ringing in our ears, the rest of us offered our assessments.

“I’m not going near that.”

“I’ve never seen anything like it. What would happen if the boat went in there?”

“Look how fast it’s going! And the power! If you made it past the ledges up top, the water would scrape you along the wall over that 15 foot plunge into the rocks and jam you into that bizarre whirlpool.”

“No, wait a second. Looks like it will go, but the lead-in is weird. How do you do the entry and still get the right angle for that ramp?”

“You’d have your hands full up top.”

“No matter how you do the upper part you’ll be trying to spin against the firehose down here. A mistake will shoot the boat right into that thing…”

“… or mash you into the rocks. Is it undercut there?”

“I can’t see how to make a rescue.”

It was an easy consensus. We looked at each other and Grant put our thoughts into words, “Boys, it’s time to take a hike.” Prudence and portaging go together, so, cover shot or no, we put our boats on our shoulders and clambered around the mess.

A bit further down, the snow thinned, and then was nearly gone as we reached a beautiful stretch culminating in a big sliding falls. We scouted and bounced around across the slabs, beaming at the water, the rapids, and the bright sun. A joyful insanity swept over us. Laughing, we pounded each other on the back, waved our arms at the waterslides and yelled, “Don’t you love this!” “Isn’t this incredible?” “Isn’t this great?”

Running the falls required threading tight lines and confronting the feeling of jumping off into space. Careful scouting, weighing angles and speeds, where to take strokes, your mind concentrates on the analysis, the technical moves, the rationality of it all. Then you step away and there is only the sense of joy, the fusing of your movement with the water’s power and hurtling drop. Once committed, all the analyses become intuition and you rush for a few beautiful moments as part of the water.

Questions fly as you prepare.
“Is this Class VI?”

“No, can’t be.”

“But look at the drop, it must be 50 vertical feet!”

“A wild sequence of moves, what a line!”

“It’ll go! It’ll go!!”

So, into the boat it is, the line engraved in memory. Take a deep breath, look at the horizon line which cuts off all views of the future, and look past it—right into the tree tops fifty yards away. What’s in between you and the treetops? Everything! The magic of paddling. The pure music of flowing water. To commit yourself to this, you’ve got to love the feeling of taking that first step into … into what? You think you know what, but the question is only answered by the doing; you’ve got to want to live by doing. All systems are go, your will is the trigger, you’ve only got to put yourself in motion.

Slide in off a slab where the freckled, smooth granite slopes into clear water. Quick sharp strokes and you’re moving, all thoughts focused on the line, surrounded by sparkling water.

Scoot over a slide, then ski-jump off two ledges. The boat arcs into space, skips, then planes. Strong strokes, lean left, cutting through the surging current. Carve fast into a narrow eddy, hold your edge and slice it into the water. Slingshot out into the current on the other side, zip right around a boulder and down a ramp. The earth falls away from beneath you - you’re flying for an instant, stomach left far behind. Mush into a cushion of froth. Keep your angle! Bounce off the edge of a huge hole halfway down, very deep and backed up by a hump of granite. There’s a fleeting feeling of threat looming a few feet away. Death hovers at your shoulder - Bounce around a corner spinning back to the right. Race down the final slide in a rush of sunlit white.

I’m stuffed in a wild hole at the bottom and yanked back in. I roll up, sucked around and in again. I roll up, a violent windowshade and I’m back in the hole. A throw rope appears, from his vantage point on a ledge 30 feet away, Grant has decided enough is enough and takes action. His intuition and toss are right, but the result shocking. The rope flies over the boat, hitting the water rushing down the slide and unravels underneath in the backwash. As I roll up, the loops wrap around me, my paddle, and the boat, while the current drag begins to pull everything like a mess of tangled yarn toward the next drop. The warning label on the throwrope flashes before my eyes:

Flushing into a Class V drop tangled up in a throw rope is not conducive to one’s health.

However, there never seems to be much point in panicking—serenity is the key. So, with one eye on the quickly approaching drop, I carefully untangle the rope from around neck, hands, paddle, and finally the boat — then, PADDLE LIKE A SON-OF-A-GUN around a big hole, cut back behind it windmilling strokes to claw into an eddy in the lead-in of the next big rapid.

Whew.

Jim appears from the other side of a boulder with another pesky throw rope in his hand, looking worried. He breaks into a smile when he sees I’m safe. Grant is still trying to untangle and reel in the throw rope, swearing and apologetic, but there’s really no reason. He did what seemed right at the instant, and looking at each other we both realize there’s nothing more you can ask of a friend. You can second-guess everything, but we do the best we can in the few seconds that matter—and accept the turns things take. We shrug our shoulders, laugh, and shake hands.

Climbing back up on the warm granite all together again, we muse over the run, eating lunch in the sun. There’s a lightness within us while we sit enjoying the beauty of the falls and the clean freshness of the air. Then, time to carry back up and do the drop right. Zing the moves, lean way back to rocket down the ramp and into the hole at the bottom, firing out in a spray of water droplets. Laughing, we turn our boats downstream and paddle toward the next horizon line. And beyond.

And that’s how it went. The hours we lived there reach out without beginning or end. Lives and friendships flow like the currents of a river, growing deeper at each turn. I know this is why we paddle—to drink our fill from the waters of life on spring days in the mountains. To be focused and concentrating, working with our friends, woven together with the rush of a beautiful, unrun stream.

It’s been many years since those early days on Smith Creek, but if I close my eyes now the memories crowd forward. I see the polished granite slabs shining in the afternoon sun as they slope away down the
canyon, Jim and I hoot and hug each other in disbelief and joy. There's the autumn larch and poplars lining the streambed, all their yellows in the chill air among the dark pines. I hear the sound of water again, pouring gently from pool to pool in the evening. I stand disappointed, soaking in the rain with the roar of 1500 cfs crashing over the lip of the unrunnable falls, knowing it's useless to get the boats off the truck. I lay in my sleeping bag after the first descent with an ocean of stars overhead in the night sky, and hear the stream echo far off in the dark canyon below. All the cells in my body sing quietly of these things. And as I remember them, the excitement returns, the beauty, the weighing of decisions about lines in the rapids. The flowing Class V ballet in cascading water. Most of all, the laughter returns—the smiles, concerns, and closeness with my paddling buddies. This is how I'll always remember Smith Creek, regardless of how many years go by. These are the reasons why kayaking is a microcosm of life, with all its richness and camaraderie, all its disappointments and joys distilled into a single weekend in a single beautiful place.

Postscript

The other side of the Smith Creek and North Idaho whitewater story is a grim one and should give pause to any river enthusiast and lover of wilderness. The dubious actions of a Utah hydropower company and the complicity of places like Eugene, Oregon—with a hypocritical green veneer and a thirst for more and more electricity—have made it one battleground in an ongoing war fought all over the west.

We fought a skirmish of that battle and lost on Smith Creek. The problems up there have been part of my life for the last eight years. An unnecessary dam went in, something that is merely a scam for the hydro-developers to generate power that must be bought by the local utilities, but which disappears into the BPA network, supposedly bound for Eugene in a massive shell game that has no end.

The developers trashed the place for several years. At times, we found tons of mud sluicing into the stream. We found boards, plastic sheeting, garbage, and tarpaper strewn everywhere. The pipe corridor was far wider than they proposed, large amounts of timber were cut and disappeared. Miles of bedrock were blasted and a mudfield wasteland alongside the stream was left in the forest at the top. It was an unbelievable mess.

All that first year I alerted every agency I could, sent pictures, pestered, pleaded, and got frustrating responses. Nobody who counted cared. I talked with the puffy-faced hydro-developer who twice, in answer to my point-blank question, told me they had no more plans for the area. Then we discovered by accident that they had already applied months before for a dam permit on Boundary Creek, the next drainage up—a beautiful, fragile canyon with an equally great run on it, which we had explored. After weeks of frantic work, with the help of irate locals who had been misled one too many times and the hardworking people at American Whitewater, we were able to file an intervention a few minutes before the deadline in FERC's Washington offices.

A lowhead dam now spans Smith Creek right where the first little rapid used to be. A pipe sucks water out above the run and carries it around the slabs. The developers actually bought Smith Falls and placed the 30 foot tall, 60 foot long powerhouse right on its brink. It squats there, humming and roaring during the runoff like some misbegotten monster. When the water is high enough, the stream is still runnable, so it is possible to paddle it much like before. But there are other problems. Five years ago the Forest Service Okayed two large timber sales in the drainage, some units down to within a few yards of the stream. It remains to be seen what effects it all will have. The Forest Service administrators charged with stewardship of our lands love it all as a classic showpiece for "multiple use." I can't help but wonder where use ends and abuse begins.

It's not all bad news. I got a letter one day the year before last and a phone call a short time after from Mike Faber, a local dairy farmer in the Kootenia valley who joined with us to fight the dams at much cost to himself. He said that the hydro-developers had backed out of their permit on Boundary Creek. The environmental hassles were too much to deal with and they went elsewhere. With Boundary Creek, we fought and won. That stream would be in a pipe today without the help of a lot of people. Together, we fought those who were willing to sacrifice the beauty of God's earth for their own greed.

Each time I go to Smith and Boundary Creek, I sit quietly for a while at my favorite places, one in each canyon, and think about these things. I'm sad that Smith Creek was invaded, but thankful that Boundary Creek was saved. There are still problems with the logging, but today the area is specially managed as habitat for grizzly bears, mountain caribou, and Harlequin ducks. If you're lucky, you'll see tracks of caribou and griz, but hopefully not the muzzle of a bear sticking into your tent. The caribou step quietly in the forest. The grizzly's presence is felt. Harlequin ducks, among the most beautiful birds, carry on the business of life in the clear waters of both streams. So if you do visit, please, treat them all quietly, with respect and care.

Over the years I've been back to share these places with some of my best friends. I can't ask any better way to express my friendship than doing a difficult run together in a beautiful place that has come to mean so much to me. Despite the dam and the logging, Smith Creek is a fabulous run if you catch it at the right levels. Together with its sister steep creeks, Boundary Creek to the north and the Upper Pack River to the south, it's more than worth the trip to the Panhandle. But for me, even though the whitewater remains, some of the magic is gone, because I remember those early days we had all alone with the canyon, when there was only quiet forest and the wonderfully unbridled stream, before the smell of greed appeared and produced a low-head dam, diversion pipe, a web of high power lines, and the hideous gargoyles of a power house perched on the brink of Smith Falls.
Invasion of the boat snatchers

By Futureboater

It was Friday afternoon, March 16, 2030. Bob was leaving his job at Techcom in the North Atlanta suburb of Clayton, Ga. The Upper Chattooga would be a good choice thanks to the efforts of American Whitewater decades earlier to end a discriminatory ban against boaters there. Bob's coworker Walt stopped him in the hall.

“Hey Bob, you going clonooing this weekend,” Walt asked with a smile. “The wife and kids asked if we would see you on the Green.”

“How many times do I have to tell you—I don't clonoo.” Bob retorted. “I'm a kayaker.”

Bob was chafed because years ago the outfitter store had cut its selection of whitewater kayaks to just three models. Meanwhile, their catalog was chock full of clonoes, more than 40 new models splashed across the pages.

Kayakers were becoming a dying breed since the giant paddlesports conglomerate Aquacorp had swallowed the last few kayaking manufacturers and switched to making clonoes. Sprayskirts, paddles and even PDFs were now becoming relics as throngs of new whitewater enthusiasts strapped themselves into foot-powered, self-rolling, unsinkable, and virtually unpinnable clonoes. The boats' built-in body armor protection system had opened up Class V runs to the masses.

“Chill out, dude,” Walt responded. “You kayakers are so sensitive. And set in your ways. You've just got to do everything the hard way. But hey, you'll come around. And when you do, I can hook you up with a nearly new Clonoo 450. It creeks, plays, and runs big water practically by itself!”

“But, dude, what about the Green?” Walt persisted.

“Too crowded with clonoes,” Bob said as he put on his shades and fired up the starter on his vehicle. “I'm going to Ain't CloneFest to be with my own kind.”
The Rescue Routine

By Bob Wilson

Meat Cleaver, on Maryland’s Upper Youghiogheny, is the type of rapid that older guidebooks single out with a “special warning,” a “genuine Class V.” Its currents pour off a five-foot ledge into a tight chamber, forcing paddlers to work around a room-sized boulder and depart through a pinched chute. At the exit to the chamber, two pointed rocks sit just below water level—the “cleavers” that give the rapid its name—and wait to slice into off-course boats that wander their way.

With the longer designs of years ago, threading the cleavers without a broach (or a double broach) posed the rapid’s most significant challenge. In today’s shorter and slower boats, while flirting with the cleaver twins is always a main attraction, the added threat of being sucked into the ledge’s hole after a failed boof can provide a memorable opening act.

Below the cleavers, the Yough’s wuthering noise drowns out most voices, but above the turmoil the call that the first-timer with us is in trouble carries through the rapid’s clamor.

“Sam’s out of his boat.”

Expecting Sam and his strewn gear to come tumbling out of the chute, I’m waiting in an eddy with our group’s most experienced member, George, a local paddler known for squeezing through the river’s narrowest fissures. We watch the chamber’s exit as a half-minute goes by, but there’s still no sign of Sam.

“Where is he?”

The members of our group who first saw Sam land in trouble have eddied-out downstream, and they motion their arms in a front crawl stroke, indicating that they saw him swimming. With a layer of boulders choking off our view, however, there’s still no sign of why he hasn’t emerged from the rapid.

Even the most routine river rescue dramatically changes the dynamics of a group of paddlers. A loose collection of paddlers, hopping separately from eddy to eddy, must gather around and work in an orchestrated effort to help the distressed boater. And immediately apparent becomes a hierarchy of know-how, the more experienced or the bolder being the first to respond to a situation.

While I’m still looking upstream, George has scrambled out of his boat and begun climbing up the rocks, throw-rope in hand. George has a veteran calm in such situations, the type of confidence exuded from boaters that tend to gather around Class V Appalachian rivers.

As we assesses the situation, a twelve-foot-long Hahn C-1 shoots over the

Charlie teaching class on the Delaware River
Cleaver’s alternate right line, bearing the unmistakable silhouette of AW’s expert on whitewater safety, Charlie Walbridge. Gripping the “I” and shaft of his single-bladed paddle with hands of giant proportions, Charlie powers his boat—perhaps the longest on the river that day—skillfully through the pincer-like rocks. He isn’t with our group, but seeing him pull into an eddy just downstream is a welcome sight.

There’s an element of fate to Charlie showing up in the middle of this rescue: the next day, I’m scheduled to meet him for a swift-water rescue clinic. The lesson has begun a day early, it seems.

Twenty hours and two states later, Charlie has gathered my class around the Lambertville, NJ “Wing Dam.” This spot on the Delaware River is where Charlie began teaching clinics while living in Philadelphia, years before. With the early morning light attenuating our shadows, we pass around the liability waivers so commonly prerequisite for any organized “adventure” sports activity.

“I want you to take time and read this form over carefully,” Charlie instructs. “When you’re done reading it, if you agree with what it says, go ahead and sign it.”

This emphasis on the waiver comes from Charlie’s time giving expert testimony at trials involving whitewater incidents. Too often, he explains, lawyers claim that such a waiver isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on, that whoever’s name is on it didn’t read the details or had his wife sign it while he was in the bathroom.

“Don’t believe the lawyers,” Charlie says, before checking, “Nobody here is a lawyer, are they? Let me assure you, this is binding.”

I’ve never seen a group so carefully scrutinize a legal form.

Experienced whitewater paddlers tend to be self-reliant people, unlikely to look for others to set their shuttle, get them through a rapid, or take responsibility for what happens to them on a river. The world of lawyers and lawsuits would shatter the simplicity of “see the rapid,” “find the line safely through it,” “paddle yourself there.”

Everyone at the clinic is here to gain a better sense of themselves in the water, better able to rescue themselves and more comfortable helping others. Charlie assures us that as the instructor he’ll test the obstacles he sets up and go through them before any student does, and all individuals have the option of not participating in a drill—strainer swimming, mock foot-entrapments, pinned boater scenarios—that they’re unsure of. The waivers are soon signed and passed in.

But if personal responsibility defines the paddler’s culture, a rescue tests how well that same community can work together when the need arises.

When a rescue begins, there’s generally a pause of wonderment in the first minutes. Not necessarily a panic, but rather a moment of waiting to see how the wreck of water and rocks, paddler and gear will unfold. As this wonderment fades, the question becomes, where do I need to be to help?

Robbed of this spectacle of carnage at Meat Cleaver, what’s overwhelming Sam’s rescue is a sense of mystery. If he’s out of his boat, why isn’t he swimming out the rapid? George is still trying to peer into the chamber and catch sight of what’s happened when Dave, another member of our group, joins him on a mid-stream rock. Seeing them together, I decide to wait in the eddy in case Sam or his boat need fetching.

Later, this is a decision that I’ll take grief over—“Well, I didn’t see you out of your boat helping”—but at the moment I’m gauging my options of where to put a swimmer or an empty kayak. A river-right eddy seems easiest to nudge Sam’s boat into should it emerge, but downstream on the left is where Nick, the last of our group, awaits. Either option has to happen quickly, however, or risk a wide and shallow drop behind us.

By now, George has climbed atop the boulder overlooking the cleavers and is pointing and yelling down into the chamber, his voice suffused by the rapid’s noise.

Coming over the ledge, Sam either mistimed or went into his boof without enough speed, landing uncontrolled amidst the ledge’s hole, gallons of channelized water pounding down on his deck and cockpit. In a borrowed boat with mismatched gear, Sam had no choice but to eject once his skirt imploded. Exiting the boat, however, he self-rescued into a tight mid-rapid eddy, waiting for help between the two currents pouring down to the cleavers.

As George tosses his throw-rope, Sam grabs the end, sends his boat over, and is then pulled across himself.

While this is going on, Charlie has been waiting downstream near Nick. With the group standing around, emptying the boat’s water, and talking about what Sam should or could have done, it becomes apparent that everyone is okay, and Charlie continues on to finish out the river.

Not to be bettered by Meat Cleaver, however, Sam decides to carry upstream and give it a second try.

In his clinic, Charlie emphasizes that the goal of the course is meant to instill water confidence. Not only does he strive to teach swiftwater wading, swimming, or unpinning techniques, but he also makes people comfortable moving through a rapid and participating in a rescue.

With our class circled together onshore, a hardware store of rescue gear litters the ground before us: harness rescue vests, bright-orange whistles, oval carabineers, “D” carabineers, screw-locking carabineers, quick-locking carabineers, polypropylene Kernmantle throw ropes, Sterline static throw ropes, Spectra throw ropes, blunt-tipped river knives, folding
river knives, serrated folding saws, neon-green webbing belts, coils of open webbing, coils of prussic cord, micro rescue pulleys. As will become apparent after two days of clawing and swimming around the Wing Dam, however, the most important tools a rescuer can have are his two hands.

“Most situations on the river,” Charlie explains, “are solved by people getting to where the problem is and putting their hands on it. Rescues are fairly routine in this way.”

A rescue clinic sets up visions of zip maneuvers that shoot swimmers diagonally across the current, z-drags prying impossibly lodged boats to freedom, or tag lines extracting swimmers from a punishing hole. In the time it would take to set any of these techniques up, however, most victims are rescued and already paddling their way downstream. A five-to-one mechanical advantage is unnecessary when tossing a rope will do.

Most rescues are fairly simple—a paddler is separated from his boat, friends help pull him and his gear to shore, and the swimmer buys beer as reparation.

In Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why, Laurence Gonzales suggests that it’s people’s mental awareness that enables them to survive extreme situations, the ability to recognize and adapt to threatening conditions often in spite of past experience or previous training. If this adaptability is so valuable under the most extreme circumstances, it’s also true in everyday paddling. The novice who’s told, “Point downstream and don’t stop paddling,” to get through a Class II rapid upright, must unlearn this lesson to pick and choose eddies deliberately down a Class III. The intermediate who’s prioritized getting herself safely through a known rapid, must relearn her role when a friend needs rescuing, perhaps chasing the swimmer while rushing backward down formerly familiar lines.

This is why, when Charlie asks the group what we want to learn from his clinic, I say, “I’d like to know where to place myself when needed for a rescue. In what positions should group members set up to help?”

“I know a guy who always goes to the far side of a river, across from where a rescue is taking place,” Charlie begins. “That way, if a rope’s needed from the other direction, he’s already in place. He’s gotten a lot of people out of trouble that way.”

A leader’s role in a rescue situation is quite different from commonplace notions about leadership in the sense of jumping in, taking command, and ordering team members around. Owing in part to the streak of independence that defines whitewater as a sport, its leaders are best described as coordinators, stepping back from a situation to make certain that jobs needing to be done are taken care of.

When Charlie describes a rescue involving a pinned K-2 with two experienced friends, he asks our class who the leader of the scenario was: one of the K-2 paddlers ordering a rope to pry the boat and his partner off the rock, or Charlie himself, waiting on shore, throwing the rope out, and directing other wayward paddlers from accidentally interfering with the rescue. Most of our group guesses that the K-2 paddler is the leader, the one with his hands on the situation making decisions about what needs to be done. Charlie assures us that it was him, the guy waiting back and taking in the whole situation.

“This is a difficult lesson for paddlers to learn,” he says. “They tend to be take-charge people and want to be where the action is, but it’s important to see where you’re needed and to be there.”

I take a lot away from Charlie’s clinic—his wealth of stories from four decades of paddling, the exhilaration of being lowered down current on a tether rescue, the assurance of being able to dive into a riverbed without breaking my nose.

What lingers most, however, is the frustration and joy of responding to a mock foot-entrapment scenario, of blundering through our few first moments as a rescue team, and finally of recognizing
where each member of the class needs to be. Nobody barked commands, ordering one person left and another right, one person casting out a throw rope another paddling out to the victim. We knew how to do those things instinctively, as a set of individual decisions, from the hours of practice spent over that weekend.

At Meat Cleaver, the day before these lessons are learned formally, Sam has lined up to try the boof again. With our throw rope repacked and our group back in our boats, we see Sam accelerate toward the ledge and disappear from sight again behind the boulders. He emerges, easily clearing the hole this time, with a smile of triumph that quickly turns to panic as his boat slams into, on top of, and over the left cleaver.

Having now caught the best of Cleaver’s both sets, Sam shrugs his shoulders, “Well, that’s over.”

Because of his skirt blowing off, Sam feels his foray outside the boat at Meat Cleaver doesn’t “count” as a swim. On the way home, he pleads his case amidst an unsympathetic banter: “I was getting worked in the hole.” You could have surfed it. “My skirt popped off.” You still could have rolled. “It wasn’t even my boat.” You’re right. And if you had stayed in the boat that wasn’t yours, it wouldn’t have been a swim. “I can’t be blamed for a mechanical failure.” What would have happened if you made the boof? “Well…”

Breaking a capitulating silence, Sam responds, “You have to give me some leeway, guys. I’m competitive. We need to convene an outside committee.”

Sam isn’t just arguing for the sake of his reputation. He’s a good boater, and anyone who makes it down the Upper Yough his first time—in an unfamiliar boat—with only one mishap should consider his run successful. But in this for Sam lies the threat of breaking a vow.

Months earlier on a cold winter day, Sam and a group of friends made a pact along the shore of our local play run. “No swims this year.” I’m a believer in the power of irony over river karma, but here they amounted to the same thing and I refused to join their covenant. An hour later, I was floating alongside my boat, experiencing my first swim in over three years.

We had been playing in Green Monster, a popular hole that serves up an assortment of spins and cartwheels to boaters who have the talent for it. I lingered back for a moment, watching Nick flush out of the churning water after completing a loop. “I’m heading down,” he announced.

“I’ll follow you after one more ride,” I replied.

I’ve never been able to pull off much more than a flatspin in Green Monster before shooting out the side. My attempts to loop or cartwheel here typically tumble my boat into the hole’s trough, flip me upside down, and end with me rolling up in the downstream current.

Nick’s loops, by contrast, are crisp and high. Perched atop the hole’s white foam pile, he drives his boat into the green water, pops up into the air as stern-follows-head-follows-bow in clean summersault motion. Seeing a number of these that day kept me at the Monster for one last try.

Upside down in an early-January Pennsylvania creek, I realize an opportunity in the outfitting market for neoprene facemasks. The sting of cold-water begins at my ears, works across the cheeks, and eventually needles its way up under my head-warmer.

Into my second roll attempt after flushing out of Green Monster, however, I notice that the cold has crept down the outside of my dry-suit, wrapping itself around my right hip and leg. My backband has slipped under me, loosening my skirt and swamping my boat with frigid water. Failing on a third roll, I push out of my kayak.

When I surface, I look about with alarm as I realized that my group has already gone down to the next drop, leaving me as the last person behind at the playspot. The moment’s concern disappears, however, when a friend, Bob, paddles up behind me. “When I saw your second roll go, I figured I ought to wait around.”

At that moment, though, I was playing a role that I had grown unaccustomed to in the routine of rescue: the victim. With my boat and paddle in one hand, should I grab a hold of Bob’s offered stern loop? Do I admit that I too need someone else’s help, that the river has proved me to be not entirely self-sufficient?

Mindful of the bony and brutalizing consequences of swimming over the next drop, not to mention the temperature of the water, I take hold of Bob’s stern and he pulls me quickly into a shore-side eddy.

In the car driving away from the Upper Yough, I remind Sam of this “mechanical failure” of my own months before. “It was still a swim,” I say. “I can blame it on my backband or skirt, but it still counts. Yours counts too, equipment problem or not.”

Considering this, Sam gazes out the car window as the Maryland landscape rolls by.

“I’ll need to consult my lawyer.”
River Voices

River Karma

By Sharon Hailey

Whitewater paddlers living in the Memphis area treasure three-day weekends as a good excuse to hit some rivers that are too far away to visit on a normal weekend. Sometimes, however, the weather and river levels do not cooperate as much as we might like. All we can do is take advantage of whatever we can whenever we can. Memorial Day weekend this year was no different.

It was a beautiful Sunday on the Chattooga River. The weather was nice, the temps were perfect, and the water was cool and so clear you could see every rock in the river. Then again, most of the rocks were above water. The folks at Chattooga Whitewater Outfitters, however, assured us that it is possible to get down the river at a level of 1.0 foot. They did not lie. We made it down, and it was even enjoyable, but it was sure a long day.

We wisely opted to put in at Sandy Ford instead of Earl’s Ford, made the quarter mile hike down to the river and began scraping our way down. I began to wonder why, with the exception of a few dammed rivers, I always manage to catch everything with no more water than minimum levels, or, as I was beginning to suspect in this case, below minimum. Perhaps, I thought, my river karma is bad.

On that note, let me introduce you to some of the only other people we met on the river that day. While arranging a shuttle at CWO, we found a group of seven men, full of energy and excitement and acting like a bunch of college kids, buying cameras and water guns and getting geared up for their day in duckies on Section III of the Chattooga River. But these men weren’t your typical frat brothers heading down the river. In fact, the eldest of the group was seventy-four and the others appeared to be within 10 to 15 of the same age. And since we were on the same shuttle van and put in at the same place, we found ourselves paddling most of the day with these guys.

At first, we took advantage of having the duckies ahead of us so we could gauge how well they did over the rocks and pick out the best routes, but it wasn’t long before there was carnage. The eldest man somehow managed to get his leg pinned in one of the first rapids in The Narrows, but fortunately came out only slightly scraped and a little shaken. Throughout the course of the day, there were many more swims, including one early on in which the keys to a rental car were lost. But the swims were not what made the trip a long one. The low water levels meant lots of scraping, scooting, pushing, and getting out and walking. It seemed like these guys might have a trip nearly as epic as the movie filmed in the same location, and we found ourselves trying to do what we could to help (to make things easier, not more epic). When one of them lost a rental paddle at Painted Rock, we were glad that we had thought to bring an extra canoe paddle, but perhaps not as glad as they were. The men that we eventually started calling “our boys” were in desperate need of some drinks by the time we reached what we all thought (and hoped) was close to the end (too bad we still had about another three or four miles), so we were glad that we’d grabbed some extra drinks as an afterthought, as well.

By the time they FINALLY got to Bull Sluice, one man could barely walk, another had lost his shorts, and one hypoglycemic man had apparently skipped lunch and the river was playing tricks on his mind. We worked hard to help with the portage and carry the duckies over the rocks and provided what few crackers and granola bars we had left to help them make it the last bit to the take-out. In the process, I managed to fall on the rocks twice badly scraping my leg both times . . . not feeling like there’s any good karma here.

At the take-out, one man couldn’t even stand up in the two inches of water at the beach, so we began helping tote boats up the long half mile, winding hill at the 76 Bridge. The whole way up, one of our new friends chanted his new favorite word: “portage.” We eventually got all “our boys” up before returning for our own boats and gear. Another group in sit-on-tops told us they saw some false teeth at the take-out . . . I was a little thankful I missed seeing them, but hoped they didn’t belong to anyone we were helping. We were very glad to see the guys all make it off the river and even more pleased to see that they all fit in the vehicle that they had managed to keep the keys to—a mini van. They offered us money and one of them even proposed marriage, but we graciously turned them down in the hopes that we might be better served with some good river karma. In the following weeks, while my scraped leg was healing, I emailed some pictures and videos that I had taken of the guys to the addresses they had given me at the take-out. In their replies, I learned that the three cameras they had bought never worked properly and they finally got a locksmith to come unlock the other rental car about 10 p.m. and did not get in to their residence until about 11:30.

It was a good run, but it took eight long hours to cover eight miles! Despite it all, the men remained in good spirits and were an inspiration. After all, what paddler doesn’t hope they will still be running rivers at 74? Next time, though, I think I’ll be looking for more than 1.0 foot on the gauge! We ended up being too exhausted to even do anything the next day other than run the Ocoee on the way home. Despite having taken Tuesday off, we headed for home. There is something to be said about having a day to recover before returning to work. Meanwhile, if there is a request box for what form your river karma will take, I am looking for a fun, safe float on a river with more than a minimum flow.
Gauley River Festival
September 19 - 21, 2008 ~ Summersville, WV
www.americanwhitewater.org

Silent Auction Competitions
Music Videos
Food Boat Demos
American Whitewater Accident Survey:
January - June 2008

By Charlie Walbridge

The winter of 2008 saw deep snows fall in New England and throughout the western mountains. The spring runoff that followed was the highest in recent memory. While this provides excellent sport for prepared paddlers, it also caused a number of fatal accidents. From January to June there were 8 kayak, 3 canoe, and 20 rafting deaths in whitewater, for a total of 31. Only two of those kayaking fatalities involved experienced paddlers in Class IV-V whitewater. Canoe fatalities were unusually low. The 20 rafting fatalities break down as follows: 9 private rafters, 8 commercial guests, and 3 inflatable kayakers. There were 13 flush-drownings, which occur when a life-jacketed paddler drowns while swimming whitewater rapids. In seven accidents paddlers did not wear life vests, which are essential equipment in whitewater. Three paddlers were washed into strainers or sieves.

Kayak Accidents

The year saw several accidents involving paddlers with just enough experience to get into real trouble. On March 22nd Marion Cox, 51, drowned while kayaking with his son on Center Creek, near Carl Junction, MO. The Joplin, MO Globe said that the water level was unusually high. Mr. Cox, a retired firefighter, capsized, washed into a tree, and pinned in his boat. His son, who was not injured, called for help. Local firefighters freed the kayak and recovered Mr. Cox’s body. The two men were paddling recreational kayaks.

On April 17th, the water in Vermont’s Class II Wardsboro Brook was fresh from local ski slopes, predictably high, and icy cold. Two men decided to attempt the run in recreational kayaks. Both kayaks capsized; one man made it ashore, but David Holcombe, 24, disappeared. According to the Brattleboro Reformer neither man was wearing a life vest, but both carried PFDs inside their boats. Not a good idea! Mr. Holcombe’s body was found the following day.

A solo paddler on Wisconsin’s Popple River encountered trouble at Little Bull Falls, a Class III ledge. The incident occurred on June 14th. Searchers began looking for him with an airplane when his wife reported him overdue. They found him and his kayak floating in the pool below the drop. No one is sure what happened but the Hoofers listerv reported that the ledge created a deceptively bad hole. Without backup there was little margin for error.

Northwest paddlers were shocked by the May 17th death of Mike Stano, an active Seattle area kayaker. Mike was running Washington’s Green River Gorge at 5,400 cfs, a high flow that turns the most challenging half-mile of the inner gorge into a Class V rapid. After successfully navigating Mercury and the Nozzle, Mike rode up on a large pillowed boulder in Let’s Make a Deal and disappeared. After searching the area, his group paddled out and notified authorities. His companions had a pretty good idea where Mike was, and kept watch on the spot until flows dropped. They found him on May 25th, pinned in his boat in the gap between the pillowed boulder and a large detached flake on the upstream side. This flake was completely hidden at the higher flows. At 3500 cfs the water washed over Mr. Stano and his boat, creating a very intimidating scene. Members of several area swiftwater rescue teams recovered his body on May 31st.

Although flatwater accidents are normally beyond the scope of this column, this one was noteworthy and disturbing. Dale Herrick, 57, was an experienced Class IV kayaker and instructor. On June 28th she was practicing rolls in front of the Philadelphia Canoe Club when she got trapped in her kayak and drowned. Although there were lots of people around she was working alone and nobody knew she was in trouble. Instructors from a returning class spotted her capsized kayak. They raced to the boat, pulled her from the water, and began CPR. By then it was too late to do any good.

According to witnesses Ms. Herrick’s sprayskirt grab loop was tucked inside her boat and the sprayskirt itself was unusually tight and to hard remove. This should serve as a warning for all of us to check the fit of our sprayskirts and to be sure that our grab loops are properly positioned. Many people are paddling new boats with old sprayskirts that don’t fit very well, a perilous choice. I’d also encourage paddlers to try out alternate ways of releasing a sprayskirt, such as pushing your knee through the deck or pinching the sides and pulling outward. Each boat to sprayskirt attachment is different, so you’ll need to experiment with your own until you find a technique that works.

Later in the month there were two additional deaths. Volker Beer, 70, died on the Arkansas River in Buena Vista, CO on June 22nd after his kayak capsized. He was a lifelong outdoor athlete who had run this section of river many times. The river was running over 3,000 cfs and rescue was a real challenge. His partner lost sight of him and notified authorities. They found him floating facedown in the river behind a hotel in town.

On June 27th a Japanese man ran the Riverwood Dam on the White River near Noblesville, IN. Shingo Takura, 30, got caught in the hydraulic and drowned. His partner, who had lagged behind him, came upon the scene and found Mr. Takura floating facedown in the water below. Additional help arrived too late to make a difference.

A well-known teacher, writer, and poet lost his life on the South Fork of the Salmon River near Yellow Pine, ID. The river was running high on July 4th when William Studibaker, 61, flipped and swam in a Class V rapid. According to the Idaho Statesman he was last seen swimming towards shore. A friend who was waiting in an eddy below never saw him go by. Although rescuers located him pinned against a rock they had to wait until the
water dropped to recover his body.

Canoeing Accidents

There were few canoeing accidents this past year and their stories were not unusual. The Spokane River below the falls is a popular Class II run, but it’s a big river that deserves respect. The TV-KLXY Spokane Web Site reported the death of Kiernan Norman, 18. Mr. Norman did not put on a PFD before running the river on April 18th and this proved to be a deadly oversight. When his canoe flipped somewhere below the Devil’s Toenail a witness saw him disappear before reaching shore. The icy 36-degree water temperature was almost certainly a factor. His father found his canoe and life vest, but not his son. A lengthy search did not locate his body.

Arkansas’ Buffalo River, a float trip with a few mild rapids, was the scene of another death on May 4th. According to KY3 news web site, Will Davenport, 7, was paddling a canoe with his mother and a friend when the boat capsized after hitting a rock. The canoe washed into a tree and the boy was trapped underwater. Emergency responders used a chainsaw to cut the tree. They freed the boy, but failed to revive him.

Like the Buffalo River, Oregon’s Lower Clackamas River is a straightforward novice trip alternating Class II rapids with long, flat pools. On June 7th a group of Boy Scouts was doing well until a canoe capsized at the Interstate 205 Bridge near the confluence with the Willamette. According to the Portland Oregonian both paddlers, a man and a boy, were swept downstream. The man made it ashore, but Fin Terry, 11, disappeared. Emergency responders used an underwater camera to locate the boy and made a startling discovery. The boy’s wrist was caught inside the end loop of a throw bag, and the other end was snagged on a log. They believe that he grabbed the throw bag as the canoe flipped in order to help with the rescue.

The boy’s wrist became caught in a trailing rope because of poor rope handling skills. It’s really impossible to make an end loop on throw ropes large enough to be useful, yet small enough to keep small wrists out. Users must be sure that the end loop on throw bags is held with their fingers only; you should never stick your wrist through it. Furthermore, I often see throwbags carelessly stowed. The end loop must be fully secured before placing a bag inside the boat. Had either of these steps been taken the boy would not have died.

Rafting Accidents

High water out west invariably leads to increased rafting fatalities. Taking simple precautions, like wearing a life vest, would have prevented many of them. Two of these deaths occurred on May 28th. Robertson Winters, 22, drowned on Oregon’s Willamette River after his inexpensive vinyl raft capsized. Two other men were rescued; none of them wore a PFD. Also, 27 year-old Kimmo Jackson drowned when his small raft capsized in the Blackfoot River near Missoula, MT. Water levels were extremely high. One passenger made it ashore and notified authorities. Mr. Jackson’s body was spotted floating downstream, but could not be recovered. Another man was rescued from a midstream gravel bar.

Then, on May 31th, Dr. Michael Dennington, 57, died on a high water run of the Gunnison River above Blue Mesa Reservoir. He was not wearing a life vest when a 14-foot cataraft carrying himself, his wife, and three children slammed into a logjam at the top of an island and capsized. His wife and kids, who were wearing life vests, made it ashore. His body was found a mile and a half downstream.

Oregon’s Wild and Scenic Rogue River was the scene of two fatalities this year. On June 1, two men who were rafting together were stranded when their boat drifted away during a lunch break. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, they pair feared being marooned in the wilderness without food or shelter. They decided to swim across the river to a trail so they could get help. One man had a life vest, but Robert Bight, 42, had left his PFD on the raft. Part way across the fast-moving river Mr. Blight slipped away into the icy water. Other rafters spotted his body over seven miles downstream, where it was recovered. A sad note: although the area is quite wild, private and commercial trip regularly travel the river. The pair was very likely to have spotted one within a day.

Blossom Bar Rapid is the biggest drop on the Wild and Scenic Rogue, made even tougher by higher than average flows. On June 27th two women on a commercial trip attempted to run this Class IV drop in inflatable kayaks. Both capsized at the Picket Fence, a line of rocks, and were pulled underwater. One broke free and reached the surface, but the second, 52 year-old Cynthia Lee Vontungein, became stuck in a space between the rocks. Her body, though inaccessible, remained in plain view from shore. Her body worked free on July 6th; it was spotted by rafters who notified authorities.

Strainers are always a danger when rivers run high, undercutting the banks and causing trees to topple. High, fast water also makes strainers more difficult to avoid. On May 24th a two-man raft hit a strainer at the head of an island on Washington’s Cle Elum River just above the lake. One man disappeared beneath the logjam, and it took rescue workers over two hours to free the body of 44-year-old Kenneth Clark. Although the man had been rafting for over 10 years he was not wearing a life vest. In this case, it would have done him no good. A veteran fishing guide died on June 15th after his raft flipped against a strainer on Montana’s Bitterroot River. Dave Dedmon, 53, was scouting the river with his wife when the flip occurred. The pair clung to the raft until it hit a second tree and pulled him under. His wife was unharmed.

Flush drowning is a real danger at high water. A life jacket alone is not complete protection, and getting swimmers out of the water becomes truly urgent. Nowhere is this more important in big water like the Grand Canyon in Arizona, where 45-year-old Randall Johnson died on March 16th.
after his raft capsized in Hance Rapid. As Grand Canyon drops go, this one is long and complex. His companions retrieved him and attempted CPR, without success.

On May 26th a seven-member party from Washington State set off on Montana’s swollen, fast moving Dearborn River in a single raft. According to the Billings Gazette this pleasant Class II-III section was running at over 4000 cfs, a very high level. When their raft hit a rock and flipped, there was no backup. Someone made it ashore and called for help. A large number of searchers mobilized, covering the river on foot, by boat, and in the air. They located several survivors stranded at riverside. Melody Alvestad, 48, was dead when she was pulled from the river. Another man was taken to the hospital and treated for hypothermia. Searchers finally found the body of the last missing man, Jeff Rayman, 44, several days later.

When Richard Banks was driving through Colorado’s Glenwood Canyon with his girlfriend on June 16th he decided that it would a good place to try out his new inflatable kayak. Some time later witnesses on Interstate 70 saw the 45 year-old man fall out of the boat and into the mighty Colorado River near mile marker 111. They called 911 and a deputy sheriff snagged him with a rope and got him to shore seven miles later.

It’s also been a very difficult year for commercial rafting, starting with four guided rafting deaths on eastern whitewater rivers. On May 17th Dr. Vicki Miller-Savard, 42, was running West Virginia’s Cheat Canyon at 6.5 feet, a very high level. Her group had negotiated all major rapids without incident until the last raft flipped below Pete Morgan Rapid. Ms. Miller-Savard’s raft was attempting to pick up swimmers when it, too, flipped. Ms. Miller-Savard was swimming towards shore when her foot caught in a log that was pinned against a rock. The current then pushed her underwater. Guides did a thorough search of the area but could not find her. The following day the water had dropped almost two feet, allowing guides who were making an early-morning search to quickly locate her body.

In the three other instances rafting guests drowned after surprisingly short swims. Charles Brown, 70, fell out of a raft in Middle Keaney Rapid on West Virginia’s New River on May 20th. Then Nicholas Harcun, 32, fell into the water halfway down Big Nasty rapid on the Cheat River on May 25th. The very next day Walter Cruz, 53, had a short swim at Pockwockamus Falls on the Penobscot River in Maine. In each case the guest was not breathing even though they were recovered quickly. Because normal healthy people usually survive a moderate whitewater swim outfitters suspect that health problems were involved.

Commercial outfitters on Colorado’s Arkansas River also experienced four flush-drowning deaths. All occurred in less than a month; three of the four happened during peak flows. The events of several suggest that the guest had underlying health problems. The Canon City Daily Record reported on May 25th that Subhashi Nelakurthi, 26, died after his raft flipped in Wall-Slammer Rapid. A second man in this incident survived after CPR was administered. Flows were modest: around 1500 cfs.

A second death occurred on June 17th, when a raft flipped near Buena Vista at high water. This part of the river, while not difficult, is quite pushy at flows over 2500 cfs. Oscar Stevenson, 67, was rescued by his guides and brought ashore. CPR was tried unsuccessfully; he’d apparently suffered a heart attack.

On June 19th a raft flipped against the F street bridge pier in downtown Salida just seconds after it launched. The river was carrying 3700 cfs, a big flow. According to the Salida Mountain Mail the guide and three others got safely ashore. A fourth guest, 61 year-old James Kennedy, was not breathing when he was recovered. An off-duty firefighter who was kayaking in the area administered CPR, without success.

Lastly, a man died after his raft flipped near the end of Brown’s Canyon. Marcus Martin, 43, began having difficulty breathing after he was pulled aboard a second raft. He was taken ashore where he collapsed. CPR was ineffective.

Near Misses and Rescues

Each year AW hears about a number of well-executed rescues. One of these occurred on January 13th on the “upper two’s” of the Little River Canyon. A detailed post on the AlabamaWhitewater.com forum tells the story. A C-1 paddler, identified only as Steve, ran the sneak chute at Roadblock Rapid. Excellent photos at (http://alabamawhitewater.com/forum/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=2885) show that he broached at the bottom of the drop and flipped. His boat was shoved 2-4 feet underwater and pinned against three separate undercut rocks. His body was stuck between his boat and one of the rocks; because he is a C-Boater he was able to get his head to the surface to get some air. After 3-4 minutes he decided he couldn’t hold on any longer, so he ducked below the surface and bailed out. Witnesses said that a kayaker would probably have drowned. A Z-drag was unsuccessful, so they left the boat where it was and hiked out.

On January 18th an email reported that Scott Loveland flipped over in the Class V Slides rapid of Meadow Run, a tributary of the Youghiogheny in Ohiopyle, PA. He sustained a sharp blow to his head and neck. When rescued below he complained of neck pains and numbness in his right arm. Both are sure signs of a spinal injury. Paramedics were called in and he was life flighted to a trauma hospital in Pittsburgh. He sustained a fracture to one of the vertebrae in his neck but is likely to make a full recovery.

There were two close calls at “the falls” on New Hampshire’s Ashuelot River. The falls is actually a low-head dam. On April 7 Mark Boucher, 33, was hospitalized after running the falls in a kayak. He was violently recirculated several times before being spat out. Two women who were accompanying him swam him to shore.
and applied CPR. On April 21 two Keene State college students narrowly escaped death after running the falls in a kiddie pool! Firefighters responded, and got them out. The mother of one of them told a reporter “He does stupid stuff like this all the time.”

A kayaker was stranded for two days on the Giant Gap Run of the North Fork of the American River in California. This stretch is known for high cliffs and rough terrain. According to the Sacramento Bee he was paddling with two friends. When his empty kayak washed down to them they could not go back upstream because of intervening cliffs. They paddled out and notified authorities. A rescue helicopter spotted him, but it could not land safely. A group of rafters found him unharmed the next day, May 12th. They spent the night with him and rafted him out the following day.

The Arkansas River near Salida, CO was the scene of a desperate rescue on May 28th. Susan Schneider, 51, had rented a two-person inflatable kayak with her husband. When the boat capsized she was washed into a tree. A strap on her PFD snagged and she was trapped. Photos in The Salida Mountain Mail showed veteran RMOC river guide Caden Buckist wading out to her, and wrestling her free. She was in good spirits and hypothermia. She was in good spirits that evening and hoping to get on the river again soon.

Two families are lucky to be alive after their canoe capsized on June 16th. The place was the flooded Milwaukee River near Freedom, WI. The unfortunate paddlers were clinging to trees on a flooded island when the Newburg Fire Department arrived. They used a tethered boat to evacuate everyone. Afterwards, some of the rescuers were angry, saying the families had no business on the river and needlessly endangered rescuers. The Fire Chief talked of pressing criminal child abuse charges and seeking the recovery of thousands of dollars in rescue costs.

These feelings are not uncommon, but they don’t sit well with me. You wouldn’t think of saying the same thing about a family whose sloppy home maintenance caused a house fire, even though rescuers might face similar dangers. Ignorance and stupidity, while unfortunate, are not criminal acts. If they were, we would all be guilty at some time or another. As for paying for rescue, I feel that water rescues and fire rescues should be treated the same way: with no extra fees.

There were an unusually large number of successful rescues by emergency responders this year, demonstrating the benefits of good swiftwater rescue training. Often the victims summoned help from mid-river on their cell phones! Unfortunately, higher authorities have been taking notes. For decades various state and federal agencies have been agitating for mandatory safety training for non-powered boaters. The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) told USA Today that “paddling represents the greatest risk in the recreational boating community,” and that our activities create “a huge drain on rescue teams.” They support legislation to create mandatory water safety courses, especially for kayakers.

Although AW has always been a force in public education, we’re not comfortable with the idea that canoes, kayaks, and rafts need to be registerd or that users should be forcibly trained. One key variable has not been accounted for. The number of kayaks in the U.S. has grown explosively over the last decade and no one has a clear idea how many users are out there. My guess is that number of incidents are up because more people have kayaks to paddle. Furthermore, unlike powerboats, poorly managed paddlecraft only endanger the actual user. Keep an eye out for these unwelcome ideas, and get ready to oppose them if necessary.

This report, and others like it, depends on paddlers like you. We always need information on whitewater fatalities, near misses, and rescues. I’d like to thank Slim Ray, Dane Patterson, Margaret Weise, Chris Aidnan, Lisa Egan and others who took the time to correspond with me. Many accident reports were found in SwiftH2O News, a Yahoo group. Splashes, the newsletter of the West Virginia Wildwater Association, does an excellent job reporting accidents in the region. It’s now easier than ever for you to contribute a report. Go to www.americanwhitewater.org, click “Safety,” and bring up a report form. You can cut and paste newspaper stories and Internet postings or write your own account. The material you send in will be available on-line and gets forwarded to the AW Safety Committee for review. You may also correspond directly with the safety editor, Charlie Walbridge, at ccwalbridge@cs.com.
In 2006, Keen’s contributions will aid American Whitewater’s projects in the Southeast, and the Pacific Northwest. In the Southeast Keen’s support will help American Whitewater’s work restoring the Catawba watershed. Additional funding from Keen will support AW’s projects on the Columbia River Basin and the Cascade range in the Pacific Northwest.
KEEN Inc., manufacturer of hybrid footwear, socks and bags, is an outdoor brand that delivers innovative hybrid products, enabling all outdoor enthusiasts to live an active lifestyle. Founded in 2003, KEEN was first recognized for its Newport sandal, which featured patented toe protection technology.

For the past six years Clif Bar has sponsored the Flowing Rivers grant, a joint initiative between Bar and American Whitewater that puts money in the hands of people who are protecting the rivers that are running through their backyards. The 2008 funding is supporting initiatives from the Atlanta Whitewater Club and the Fairbanks Paddlers. The Atlanta Whitewater Club has received funding for an ambitious project in which members will be participating in river clean-ups on four different rivers in the Atlanta area. The Fairbanks Paddlers’ project tackles the often over-looked question of the disposal of human waste on river trips. To read more about the two projects and affiliate clubs see http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Article_view_articleid_30137_display_full_

The company strives to demonstrate integrity and leadership, especially on social and environmental commitments, while promoting an inclusive outdoors community. Through its giving program Hybrid.Care, the company provides support to a variety of social and environmental organizations around the globe.

Based in Portland, Oregon, KEEN products are available in retail locations in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Central America, South America and Europe. To learn more, visit www.keenfootwear.com.

About Hybrid.Care™
KEEN is more than an outdoor company. Through its Hybrid.Care initiative, KEEN strives to be a company with a conscience and to make a positive difference by supporting and working with social and environmental organizations around the world. Established in early 2005 in response to the 2005 Tsunami disaster, Hybrid.Care has contributed monetary donations, products and volunteer hours to non-profit organizations around the globe.

Since 2004, KEEN has distributed more than $1.5 million to non-profit organizations important to us. With limited resources and widely different goals, our Hybrid.Care partners have paved the way for change through community, education and understanding. What these organizations share is a philosophy of caring, conscience and sustainability. What they’ve already given back is invaluable.

Linda Tom, KEEN Marketing Manager, talks about the partnership this way: “Relationships like the one we have with American Whitewater are very important to KEEN. We feel fortunate to partner with AW, supporting the continued work it does for the environment, for responsible outdoor recreation and in building strong community.”

American Whitewater is proud to be a core Hybrid.Care partner.
Join American Whitewater Today!

American Whitewater has been extraordinarily fortunate in our ability to leverage a strong grassroots base—members and other volunteers—to assist our limited staff with many whitewater river conservation and restoration efforts.

Over the years, American Whitewater volunteers have participated in numerous hydropower meetings as well as instream and recreational flow studies; filed comments and assisted with an uncountable number of filings; appeared as expert witnesses; lobbied; worked to fight new dams, remove existing dams, deny licenses, and improve public access to rivers and streams. In nearly every river stewardship issue AW has been involved with, the outcome has been favorable to paddlers. Not only has AW secured favorable decisions for the paddling community, but we are the only national organization representing paddlers as these decisions are being made.

A growing membership base is crucial to our ability to continue with our work. Some studies show that there are currently over 100,000 whitewater paddlers in the U.S. American Whitewater currently has 6,300 active members. When considering the amount of whitewater river miles that AW has had a direct impact on, this membership number is unimpressive. We need all paddlers to join American Whitewater. If you are a member, please be sure that everyone you paddle with understands the work AW does, and how you, as an AW member, value that work.

Membership support is what will determine our ability to continue our river stewardship work in the years to come. Individual Annual Memberships are only $35. If you are a member of your local paddling club and your club is an Affiliate Club member of AW, join as a Club Affiliate Individual for $25. This is less than a tank of gas or an inexpensive night out. This is certainly not too much to pay to have a national organization representing your paddling interests all across the country.

Join on-line today at [http://www.americanwhitewater.org/membership](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/membership), call 1-866-BOAT4AW (866-262-8429), or fill out the form on the back of this page and mail it to:

Membership
P.O. Box 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723
Membership Application

Contact Information
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City, St, Zip ____________________________________________
Telephone ( )__________________________, AND e-mail ____________________________
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Membership Levels
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☒ $25 Individual for Affiliate Club Members (SAVE $10 if you are also a member of an AW Affiliate Club)
☒ $35 Individual One Year
☒ $50 Family (Immediate family members excluding children over the age of 18)
☒ $65 (2) Year Membership
☒ $75 Affiliate Club Membership
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☒ $500 Explorer Membership (Receive a Dry Bag from Watershed FREE)
☒ $750 Lifetime Membership (Receive AW’s Lifetime Membership NRS Paddlers Duffle FREE)
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☒ $2500 Steward Membership (Thank you items will be arranged on an individual basis)

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☒ $5.00 ☐ $10.00 ☒ $25.00 ☒ Other $________ ☒ $____ monthly ($10 minimum via monthly credit card or checking acct. withdrawal. Send voided check w/check option.)
☒ $30.00 Kayak Session Subscription (Includes a $5 donation to AW)
☒ $40.00 LVM Subscription (includes a $8 donation to AW)

Membership Information
☒ Do NOT share my name with like-minded groups
☒ Do NOT mail me the AW journal, I will read it online (Helps us conserve and, saves AW money too!)

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River Stewardship Since 1954
The Affiliate Club Program lies at the very heart of AW’s existence. AW’s original purpose since 1957 has been to distribute information among its Affiliate Clubs. AW’s relationships with local clubs have provided the backbone for the river conservation and access work it accomplishes. Over 100 clubs are now AW Club Affiliates and they are all doing great work on your behalf. If you don’t belong to a club consider joining one.

For the past five years Clif Bar has sponsored the Flowing Rivers grant, a joint initiative between Clif Bar and American Whitewater that puts money in the hands of people who are protecting the rivers that are running through their backyards. The 2007 funding supported initiatives from the Foothills Paddling Club (SC) and the Willamette Kayak and Canoe Club (OR). The Foothills Paddling Club is using their funding to enhance an access area and purchasing water quality equipment. The Willamette Kayak and Canoe Club is using their funding to organize a safety education weekend. To read more about the two projects see [http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Article/view/articleid/29549/display/full](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Article/view/articleid/29549/display/full).

AFFILIATE CLUBS, we want to know what you are doing. Send your events to us a jeff@americanwhitewater.org and we will include them in the Journal.

The AW Journal Club Affiliates by state:

**Colorado**
- Avid4Adventure Inc., Boulder
- Big Thompson Watershed Forum, Loveland
- Colorado Whitewater Asso, Englewood
- Front Range Paddle Assos, Lafayette
- Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
- San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride
  - University of Colorado Kayak Club, Boulder

**Georgia**
- Atlanta Whitewater Club, Atlanta
- Georgia Canoeing Association, Atlanta

**Idaho**
- Idaho Whitewater Assoc., Boise

**Illinois**
- Chicago Whitewater Assoc., Chicago
- Team SICK, Carbondale

**Indiana**
- Ohio Valley Whitewater Club, Evansville
- Hoosier Canoe Club, Indianapolis

**Iowa**
- Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Des Moines

**Kansas**
- Kansas Whitewater Association, Mission

**Kentucky**
- Bardstown Boaters, Frankfort
- Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington

**Maine**
- Outward Bound, Newry

**Maryland**
- Blue Ridge Voyageurs, Silver Spring
- Greater Baltimore Canoe Club, Baltimore
- Mason Dixon Canoe Cruisers, Smithsburg

**Massachusetts**
- AMC - New Hampshire Paddlers, Honover

**Minnesota**
- SCSU Outdoor Endeavors, Saint Cloud

**Missouri**
- Missouri Whitewater Association, St. Louis
- Ozark Mountain Paddlers, Springfield
- Ozark Wilderness Waterways, Kansas City

**Montana**
- Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

**Nevada**
- Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

**New Hampshire**
- Ledyard Canoe Club, Hanover
- Mt. Washington Valley Paddlers, Franconia
- Merrimack Valley Paddlers, Merrimack

**New Mexico**
- Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

**New York**
- ADK Schenectady, Schenectady
- Colgate University, Hamilton
- FLOW Paddlers Club, Rochester
- Housatonic Canoe & Kayak Squad, Ossining
- KCCNY, New York
- St Lawrence University, Canton
- Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia

**N. Carolina**
- Base Camp Cullowhee, Cullowhee
- Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh
- Dixie Division ACA, Tuxedo
- Mecklenburg Regional Paddlers, Indian Trail
- Triad River Runners, Winston, Salem
- Watauga Paddlers, Boone
- Western Carolina Paddlers

**Ohio**
- Keel Haulers Canoe Club, Westlake
- Outdoor Adventure Club, Dayton
- Toledo River Gang, Waterville

**Oregon**
- Face Level Industries LLC, Portland
- Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland
- Oregon Whitewater Association, Beaverton
- Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland
- Northwest Rafters Assoc, Portland
- Willamette Kayak & Canoe Club, Corvallis

**Pennsylvania**
- AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Sugarloaf
- Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown
- Bradford County Canoe and Kayak Club, Sayre
- Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Mechanicsburg
- Conewago Canoe Club, York
- Holtwood Hoofigans, Lititz
- PA Organization for Watersheds & Rivers, Harrisburg
- Philadelphia Canoe Club, Philadelphia
- Three Rivers Paddling Club, Pittsburgh
- Lehigh Valley White water Club, Lehigh Valley

**Ohio**
- KCCNY, New York
- St Lawrence University, Canton
- Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia

**Tennessee**
- Eastman Hiking and Canoeing, Kingsport
- Memphis Whitewater, Memphis

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10 Reasons to Join AW as an Affiliate Club

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For more information, contact Carla Miner at membership@americanwhitewater.org or sign-up on-line at: www.americanwhitewater.org/membership

Discounted AW Membership for Affiliate Club Members

By Carla Miner, Membership Manager

AW offers a discounted Affiliate Club membership of $25, a $10 savings. If you are renewing your AW membership or joining as a new member, select the Affiliate Club Discounted Personal Membership online at https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Store/?crn=199. Or, if you are renewing or joining by mail or telephone just mention the name of the Affiliate Club you belong to and you can take advantage of the $25 membership.

A list of AW Affiliate Clubs can be found on our website at https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Affiliate_view. If you do not see your Club listed here please encourage them to renew their Club membership or to join AW as a new Affiliate Club. Your Club’s membership and your personal membership enable our staff to be active and engaged in the process of river stewardship. When you join or renew your membership your support is helping to meet the many challenges whitewater rivers face.

If you have any questions about the Affiliate Club membership, please contact me. I can be reached at 866_BOAT-4AW or membership@americanwhitewater.org.

Tennessee Scenic River Assoc., Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga
University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville

Texas
Houston Canoe Club, Houston

Utah
USU Kayak Club, Logan
Utah Whitewater Club, Salt Lake City

Vermont
Vermont Paddlers Club, Essex Junction

Virginia
Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynch Station
Canoe Cruisers Association, Arlington
Coastal Canoeists, Richmond
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Richmond

Washington
EPIC Outdoor Adventures, Cheney
Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle
Spokane Canoe & Kayak Club, Spokane
University Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Recreational River Runners, Renton
Whitman College Whitewater Club, Walla Walla

West Virginia
West VA Wildwater Association, S. Charleston

Wisconsin
Hoofers Outing Club, Madison
NE Wisconsin Paddlers Inc. Appleton

Wyoming
Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson

Canada, British Columbia
Vancouver Kayak Club, Vancouver
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).

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

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

Photos may be submitted as slides, black or white prints, or color prints or electronic, digital photos, 300 dpi tiffs, Photoshop or high res jpegs minimum 3”x5.” 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. The better the photos the better the reproduction.

American Whitewater feature articles should relate to some aspect of whitewater boating. Please do not submit articles pertaining to sea kayaking or flat water.

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 II, III & 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.

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

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

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

American Whitewater is a 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.

Send your material to:
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