



AMERICAN WHITEWATER

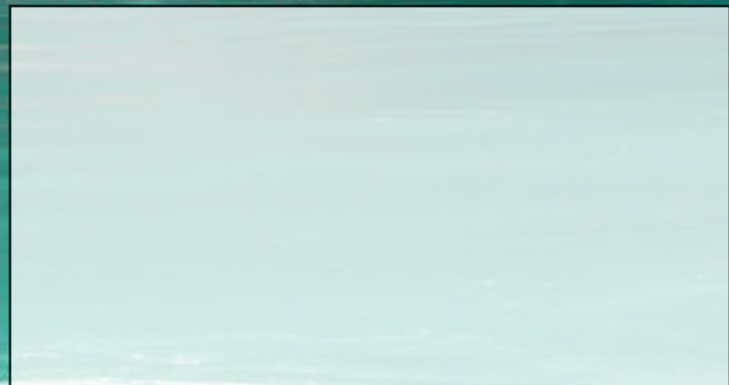
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BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS
Sept/Oct 2010

WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

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ALASKA, AND ALL OVER THE WORLD

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Going Deep on the Talkeetna





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AMERICAN WHITEWATER

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

American Whitewater Journal Sept/Oct 2010 – Volume 50 – Issue 5

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 *Kayaker Graham Helsby paddles into a cave on the Siang and marvels at the power and beauty of the big volume Brahmaputra.*
photo by Stephen Cunliffe



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PURPOSE

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 bimonthly *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.

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THE JOURNEY AHEAD

BACK IN APRIL, American Whitewater participated in the White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors. President Obama addressed conference attendees calling for vision to craft a conservation and recreation agenda. The President spoke of the need to "Reconnect Americans" to our lands and waters and tasked the audience with development of a "conservation agenda worthy of the 21st Century." President Obama signed a memorandum outlining policy goals that the administration prioritizes over the next few years: forming coalitions with state and local governments as well as the private sector, encouraging outdoor recreation by Americans and connecting wildlife migration corridors. The memorandum identifies recreation as one of the primary vectors to achieve this reconnection to our lands and waters.

Fast-forward to summer, and "Listening Sessions" for America's Great Outdoors Initiative have been taking place across the country. These sessions are an opportunity for the public to join a national dialogue about conservation in America and for the Administration to learn about some of the smart, creative ways communities are conserving outdoor spaces. Ideas and comments from these sessions are

being archived and will be delivered to the America's Great Outdoors team for inclusion in the report to the President that is due out in November.

As a whitewater paddler and member of American Whitewater, you know that conservation, stewardship and outdoor recreation are all mutually dependent. Time spent experiencing and interacting with nature forms the basis of the American conservation ethic. Because the paddling community experiences so many special places through our use of public lands, we are in a unique position to take a leadership role in providing critical input to public land managers. Paddling gives us all a deeper understanding of what makes rivers special and instills appreciation for the wildness inherent in moving water.

Whitewater paddlers and other outdoor recreationists need natural landscapes, and those landscapes very much need outdoor recreationists to act as their stewards. All too often public land managers alienate visitors in meeting other resource management goals. Recreation is often viewed by agencies as just one more impact to manage, something to be tolerated rather than encouraged. Rules are often inequitably applied in a manner that discourages recreational use. As a result,

whitewater paddlers are occasionally denied access to our nation's streams and rivers. Administrative direction in support of agencies encouraging human-powered outdoor recreation could improve this problem and build on the connection between conservation, stewardship, and recreation.

Our partners in this effort include other human-powered recreation interests in the Outdoor Alliance (a coalition of organizations including: Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association and Winter Wildlands Alliance). The six membership groups of Outdoor Alliance have a long tradition of stewardship of America's special outdoor spaces. Regardless of the discipline each organization promotes, we are each fully vested in making sure the current Administration understands the unique connection between outdoor recreation, stewardship, and conservation.

Paddlers know public lands and waters first hand, and care deeply about passing on a legacy of outdoor recreation and appreciation to future generations. The American Whitewater Stewardship Team is taking a leadership role in making sure that the Administration understands the boating community's interest in managing and protecting rivers. When the report to the President is released this fall you can expect to read more about it here in the pages of *American Whitewater*.

See you on the river,



Mark Singleton
Executive Director



President Obama announces the American Great Outdoors Initiative in April as his Cabinet stands by.
Photo by Mark Singleton

STEWARDSHIP

STEWARDSHIP UPDATES

BY KEVIN COLBURN

AUSABLE ACCESS ACHIEVED, BUT STILL CHALLENGING

PADDLERS CELEBRATED the first legal access to the Ausable Chasm on June 18, 2010. The descents marked a successful milestone in AW's ten years of hard work to secure public access at the powerhouse located at the beginning of the chasm. Unfortunately a downstream landowner (the Ausable Chasm Company) called police, and harassed and intimidated paddlers. Ausable Chasm Company claimed paddlers were trespassing when they clearly were not. American Whitewater is actively working to support paddlers and push back against the Ausable Chasm Company's irresponsible challenges to public access.

AW AT THE RIVER MANAGEMENT SOCIETY CONFERENCE

AMERICAN WHITewater HAD a big presence at the 2010 River Management Society Conference. Our staff hosted a dam removal field trip, moderated a session, organized media night, and presented on our flow restoration work. RMS is the professional organization for several hundred people who manage our nation's rivers. Most RMS members are staff from the Forest Service, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. The 2010 conference, held in Portland, Oregon, marked a great opportunity for AW staff to reconnect with many of our agency partners. Sessions ranged from Wild and Scenic River management, to dealing with litigation, to dam removal. AW staff were able to attend in part thanks to a generous scholarship.

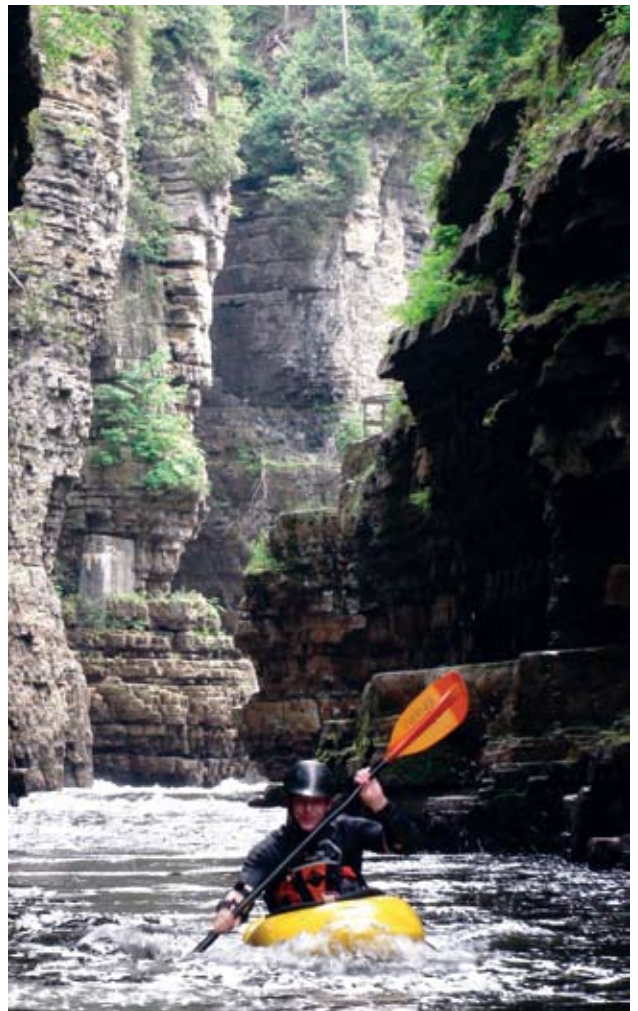
NO NEWS IS NO NEWS ON THE CHATTOOGA

THE UPPER CHATTOOGA remains the only whitewater river in the US Forest Service system banned to paddling for

social reasons. It has been eight months since we filed charges against the Forest Service in Federal Court, and over three years since the agency was ordered to reach a new decision. As of press time neither process has resulted in a decision or an indication of a potential outcome. American Whitewater is continuing to actively seek nationally consistent management on the Chattooga, and expects a court hearing in the near future.

LITTLE POTLATCH CREEK (ID) THREATENED BY DAM

AMERICAN WHITewater RECENTLY learned of a proposal to build a 230 foot tall dam on Little Potlatch Creek. The dam would flood the majority of a spectacular Class IV/V granite and basalt canyon just a stone's throw from Moscow, Idaho. The threatened reach features basalt spires, a unique slot canyon, several small waterfalls, and extremely rare remnants of Palouse prairie. The reservoir formed by the dam would be connected to another proposed reservoir on the plateau high above by a pipe. Known as a "pump storage project" the project would pump water up during times of low power cost and allow it to flow back through the generators during times of high power cost. Thus, the project would actually use more energy than it generates but would make money for its owner. The project would fill the reservoirs with water from the Clearwater River, and thus the project is proposed in the Little Potlatch Canyon purely for the gorge itself – not the water. The project could just as easily – and more



The Ausable Chasm features great white-water and incredible scenery.

Photo by Wayne Gman

appropriately – be sited elsewhere in a dry canyon lacking the unique values of the Little Potlatch. Alternately, this project may not make sense anywhere. American Whitewater is strongly opposing this project with filings to the FERC and through outreach to the local community.

Opposite: Alzar School students paddling on the Rio Claro, Chile.

**Photo by Cailin O'Brien-Feeney
(Alzar School Instructor)**

WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

A BROAD VIEW OF WILDERNESS

BY SEAN BIERLE

MOST OF THE time, beginner kayakers, canoeists, and rafters learn our sport on runs that are not widely considered “wilderness,” often because of the ease of teaching on roadside runs. With the rise of whitewater parks around the country, some of their first experiences might not even be a result of the beautiful combination of rain, snowmelt, gravity, and unique geologic features, but rather attributed to giant pumps, filters and conveyor belts.

As an experienced boater or an instructor, it’s easy to forget the amazing sensation these beginners encounter in this introductory period—namely the realization of the untamed power of a river. I would argue that even on “town runs” or at whitewater parks, these fledgling students to whitewater sports feel as though they are in the wilderness. I believe it is the

feeling of being slightly out of control, with elements that are foreign and unforgiving (like those darn eddy lines!).

I’ve been paddling for a decade now, and am not sure what my first true “wilderness” run was. Perhaps it was the Jarbridge-Bruneau, done as a kayak self-support trip. Or, a float down Desolation Canyon in Utah. Maybe it was quick pre-permit season trip down the Middle Fork of the Salmon. I know there were a lot of runs down the roadside Payette and the interstate-parallel Pigeon, and laps at the whitewater park in Charlotte first, and mixed in between. Every experience has reminded me that I need something wild in my life to be content. Maybe the new-to-whitewater students we teach are looking for something wild too.

Whatever the reason, I propose that experienced mentors, be they professional instructors or just friends sharing their passion, have an opportunity to really hook these beginners into the sport, and through instruction, to further foster a love of wilderness. Maybe these newly introduced paddlers will join the chorus

of us advocating for the protection of rivers that deserve it. As we expose more and more people to whitewater sports as parks move into more and more urban areas (like the US National Whitewater Center in Charlotte), we are harnessing a new generation of paddlers who could step up to protect the classic wilderness rivers we enjoy. They will likely get their start someplace that an elitist might not say is “wilderness,” but it is a start, and mentors fill the gap between the introduction to whitewater and the lifelong passion for enjoying and protecting rivers.

There is, I believe, a unique opportunity to capture the imaginations of young people through whitewater sports. As a high school teacher, I see how much stimuli the upcoming teens are exposed to daily. Given the chance, the majority of teens would have at least one earphone in at all times, preferably texting while watching streaming video on the internet. Whitewater sports are alternative experiences that also deeply engage their senses, get their hearts pumping and muscles moving.



WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

So, let's get these teens into whitewater in whatever fashion possible. Let's replace their normal stimulus fix with ours, which is like baiting the hook. And then, when they are ready, let's move them onto more remote rivers in a responsible way, with education and training. Let's teach them about the Wild & Scenic Act and what it does to protect rivers. Let's teach them Leave No Trace principles as they apply to river corridors. Let's partner these students with experts from the agencies that manage the rivers so they can learn more about them.

I am writing this article while in the middle of an expedition with the Alzar School (www.AlzarSchool.com), the nonprofit school of which I am the Head Teacher. Our group of students is currently learning and honing their whitewater kayaking and rafting skills on the Klamath, Cal Salmon, and Payette Rivers, all not terribly remote. But, they've been away from showers and cell phones and Internet for a week now, and we've yet to hear anyone is bored. They've camped and been bitten by mosquitoes; they're sunburned and tired; they're excited and happy.

Earlier this week, we floated down Indian Creek in Happy Camp, California. During our trip, we removed trash with the help of the USFS River Ranger, Dave Payne. Students got to see a fun, small, Class II creek and remove several hundred pounds of trash and abandoned metal. The next day, we floated into a riverside campsite on the Klamath River and, again under Dave's guidance, restored a heavily overgrown beach to camping perfection.

In a couple of weeks, we will take a group of graduates and alumni on the Lower Salmon River with Barker River Trips hosting our school. For this special program, we are partnering with Idaho Rivers United to produce a campaign to raise awareness for that river's bid to become Wild & Scenic. I know the students (and teachers) are chomping at the bit to get to this wilderness run.

This project is the synthesis of elements the Alzar School holds imperative to our

organization. It will provide adventure as students kayak and row the big water of the Salmon. It will engage them in service-learning as they spend hours of their summer vacation working on this campaign. Academically, they will be challenged to write professionally-crafted blog entries, to produce high quality videos, to design an engaging website, and lastly, they will become true environmental stewards as they spread awareness for a section of river that could join its tributaries to protect an impressively long section of river that for future generations of paddlers and wildlife.

This project will be made possible by first introducing the teens to the sport, then honing their skills to get them ready for such a trip, and then giving them a structured, well-supported chance to get out there. I am confident that these teen leaders will fall in love with wilderness rivers the way I have. And this model of introduction, then instruction, and then opportunity to serve should also work with beginners of all ages.

While I am sure that this issue of *American Whitewater* will feature incredible stories of daring paddlers charging on wilderness rivers around the globe, I encourage us all to remember that feeling of wildness that we got as beginners, and how that planted a seed in us. Our first experiences have led us to become lifelong river lovers, and lovers of rivers will be the ones who speak up with their actions and votes to protect the rivers.

The next time you are on the "town run" or surfing at the park-and-play spot and you see newbies out there, encourage them. Tell them about the overnight trip you finished on the Chattooga, or the week you spent last summer on the Colorado. Whet their appetites with river tales and maybe the next time this magazine runs an issue dedicated to "wilderness," they will be the ones submitting articles about their adventures and efforts to save wilderness rivers.

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Scott Ligare, Kokatat Whitewater Ambassador: South Fork Yuba.
Photo: ©Darin McQuoid, Kokatat Whitewater Ambassador



TALKEETNA 2005

BY MATTHEW CORNELL

“To immerse oneself in the power, velocity, vastness, and madness [of water] affords one of the noblest lessons of nature”

— John Ruskin

IT WAS THE darkness that I first noticed. Not the cold or the lack of air. Darkness. Unexpected darkness. Unsettling darkness. Yet, since I had been in this situation many times before, I knew it was best to stay calm. Struggling expends energy. Eventually I'd emerge, and when I did I would need to act fast. But the darkness held me longer than it should have. I actually had time to think about the peculiar lack of light, to guess where I might be, and to anticipate where I might come up. Then, just as the lack of light started to scare me, I came up underneath the boat. A quick push off the bottom (actually the top of a capsized raft) brought me out, right next to Kevin.

It was just after noon on another hot and sunny day. “The new Alaska,” Kevin called it. “But, shhhh, don't tell anyone,” he warned—a typically selfish Alaskan. Moments before only life jackets and sunscreen covered our torsos. I've gone without a shirt in Alaska on a handful of days, but this was the second in a row since our plane landed at Yellowjacket airstrip: the put-in for our three day raft trip down the Talkeetna River. We learned later that the temperatures on these two days reached over 80 degrees. Not unheard of, but highly unusual for the middle of August.

Several glaciers feed the Talkeetna, including one that shares its name. Hot weather melts those glaciers, which, raises the river level. On this day the river ran at about 9,500 cfs—not huge for the Talkeetna. In mid June its flow peaked at 22,500 and stayed above 10,000 cfs through mid July. But the last and only other time I was here, nine years ago, also in mid August, the river flowed at about 7,500 cfs. Then the water was aqua marine; on this trip, it was silty, brown and opaque. In other words: dark.

We camped the first night at Prairie Creek, because I remembered the first rapid, Entrance Exam, being just downstream of its confluence. Entrance Exam reveals itself with an unmistakable river-wide horizon line. The forested banks suddenly press together into two vertical walls and the drone of the flowing water pitches to a loud roar. The horizon line appears suddenly behind a tight left bend in the river. A scouting trail on the right bank comes down to a small eddy just above the drop. There is time to catch it, but you have to be paying attention and get over quickly. Missing the eddy could put you into a steep hole off the right bank. After that, stopping is unlikely until after the next rapid, a big Class IV called Toilet Bowl.

I thought Entrance Exam was only a short float from camp and I began to anticipate its approach from the first S-turn we hit after shoving off. I told both Kevin, who rode in the front of my 13 foot self bailer, and Cameron, who followed behind in his cataraft, what I remembered, but I reminded them I had only been here once before, several years ago. Turns out I was wrong in my estimation. Bend after bend turned into another Class I section of water. As we stretched our gaze around each corner, careful to stay in the slow inside current, our anxiety seemed to multiply in intensity. The anticipation weighed on us like the humidity that blankets a mid-west city on a hot summer day. I even pulled over before one blind corner when the sound of the river grew noticeably louder. A quick look showed a Class III wave train that I didn't remember from the last trip. I apologized to Kevin and Cam for the false start. They were nice about it. I think their own nervousness tempered their ridicule.

As we tried to commit that first rapid with the fun waves to memory, a couple more turns brought us to where deep shadows reached out from the left bank and the river pinched over a distinct horizon line.

Nine years ago Entrance Exam was a relatively tame ledge drop with a grabby hole on the right and a defined tongue on the left that flowed into a pillow wave.



Unloading the shuttle rig at the put-in.
Photo by Cameron Reitmier

I ran it then in a small cat-a-raft with no difficulty. This day the tongue dropped into a wave-hole that stretched the width of the current and encompassed the right side hole. Just behind the drop a wall juts out from the left bank, but the river calms down and flows through a tight canyon with a hard right turn before opening up onto Toilet Bowl. Kevin caught me on video telling Cameron that I planned to drive over the right side of the “V” formed by the tongue with a slight angle. The idea being to split the wall on the left and the steep hole on the right. He also got me explaining to Cameron where I would try to eddy out in case he flipped. Oh the irony!

After a quick scout we made sure every thing was lashed down, donned drysuits and hydroskin, and shoved off with Kevin and me in the lead. Hitting the line I hoped for required boat speed faster than the current. Relatively easy in a kayak or paddle raft but an oar rig is much like a tractor trailer. They can move with speed and power, it just takes a little while for them to get there. Pulling out of that eddy with a back ferry to get to the left side of the river was not the way to gain speed. I had the line and I had the angle, but without the speed I just set myself up for submission to the will of the river. That wave-hole rolled us up tighter than a fine Cuban Cigar.

I knew as we dropped over the edge of the tongue we didn't have enough speed. I also knew well two of the basic rules of running whitewater: when hitting river features (waves, holes, eddylines, even rocks sometimes) hit them straight on; and always be ready to alter your plan. Instead

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Black bear print a long way from camp.
Photo by Matt Cornell

of adapting to the situation, by straightening out, I held on to my intentions, hoping for the best. As a result Kevin and I were swimming glacial melt above a Class IV rapid almost 40 miles from our take-out.

When I finally surfaced from the darkness, Kevin asked me if I was alright. Adrenalin, cold, and urgency ripped through me, but I wasn't hurt. I had to be quick to get the boat flipped back over before Toilet Bowl. I grabbed the floor stitching, pulled myself up, and attached my flip line just as we came through the corner of the short canyon. My eye caught sight of Cameron behind me, thankfully, upright and in control. Never having flipped an oar boat before, I worried my 138 pounds wouldn't be enough to get one righted again. I pulled the boat to about 45 degrees to the water when I slipped, and fell back in the water. I climbed back up just as the boat started into Toilet Bowl.

The main current in Toilet Bowl flows right into a large hole backed by a comparatively large table top pourover rock. The line we planned through this mess of pourovers, holes, and exposed rocks, skimmed the right of the center hole and cut back to the middle of the river just downstream of the table top rock. The cut back is required to miss a jumble of rocks jutting out from the right bank. The current lined up my upside down boat perfectly for a flushing down the big hole. Not wanting to be back under the boat for the impending swirly, I put off another attempt at flipping it over and readied myself for a quick abandon ship jump. For reasons I'll not even try to understand, the raft changed course at the

last moment and followed our intended line through the rest of the rapid.

With adrenalin revving down and a clear stretch of Class I water in front of me I flipped the boat back over easily. As I expected, my oars were gone. I left the oar tethers back home in the garage, a mistake not likely to be repeated. But as I looked back up stream for Kevin and Cameron, both of whom I last saw as I readied myself for Toilet Bowl, I could see, about ten yards behind me, both oars bobbing up and down, heading right to me like puppies running to their master. At this point the river is probably 50 yards across and still moving fast. For those oars to be right behind me after the whitewater we just came through is another gift of the river I will not understand. In amazement I pulled out my spare oar and started sculling and calling like an idiot, "hold on boys, I'm coming. I'll get you, that's it, over here..."

Kevin, Cameron, and I got all our gear dried out and tried to recuperate on a sun soaked sand bar with a few beers and bagel sandwiches. Kevin ended up making a huge swim across the current above Toilet Bowl and crawled out just before going through it. Cameron ran a clean line and picked him up at the bottom. Despite the beer and gratitude for coming out injury free with no loss of gear, Kevin and I couldn't relax. As its name implies, Entrance Exam is just the beginning of a 12-plus-mile long canyon of continuous Class III and IV whitewater. This section is so continuous it is considered to be one rapid: Sluice Box. Our unabated anxiety made itself evident when a black bear stepped out of the woods downstream from us, apparently looking for a spot to cross. Kevin and I didn't give him a chance to even test the water temperature. We jumped all over him, "Hey bear. Ha. Get out of here." The bear ran off as if a monster jumped out of a closet to spook him. Apparently a couple of wet, wild-eyed boaters can be intimidating.

Still a full day and a half from the take-out we didn't have much choice but to get right back in the saddle. The run through Sluice Box consisted of a lot of active gut-

gripping rowing, dodging, and purposeful straightening out. The river is narrow and active through here with uncountable standing wave trains, several large holes, a few glassy tongues, and some very tight blind curves: really fun whitewater. Fun, of course, if you aren't too gripped in fear of flipping over again and losing your oars.

"You did seem to be all over the river," Cameron told us, laughing over a few more beers at the end. For his part Cameron styled the whole run, with no problems. One big gaping mid-river hole I worked my arms to noodles to avoid, Cameron, behind me, charged it, stalled for moment, and gracefully popped out the backside. We were through the Pearly Gates, the name given to the spot where the steep sided canyon, and the whitewater, abruptly ends and opens up to a broad river valley. Only a leisurely sunny float, another night by the river, and a few more beers awaited us. These beers, unlike first few, accompanied relaxation and the warm happy feeling of success.

As we got back on the water for the stress free float to our next campsite, I took special note of the bright warm sun washing over my face. I whipped the water spots off my sunglasses and looked around, slowly. The sunlight danced on the water, shined on the trees, and illuminated the mountains all around us. I breathed it in deeply and swore I could feel it glow in my lungs. In sharp contrast to my thoughts and feelings of a few hours before I knew that my swim got me to this point of appreciation. Light is a wonderful thing, but then, so is darkness.

Kevin and Matt scouting Toilet Bowl.
Photo by Cameron Reitmier



WET AND WILD IN THE HIMALAYAS: INDIA'S BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEPHEN CUNLIFFE



The stunning Alubadi Beach proved to be the perfect place to take a rest day midway through the week long Siang descent.

I AWOKE AT 6 am to a grey morning. It had rained continuously through the night and everything was drenched. As I struggled into a freezing cold wetsuit and pulled on a sopping wet spray jacket, I yearned for the sunny weather we had taken for granted at the start of our adventure. The wet weather inevitably dampened the spirits of our intrepid team of whitewater enthusiasts and everyone was uncharacteristically quiet as we broke camp and packed away soaking tents and equipment. Swirling mist and light rain added an inescapably ominous note to proceedings. Forewarned by our guides that today's big rapids and intense river action would undoubtedly pose the greatest challenge of our trip, everyone mulled over the same question: would today's massive whitewater prove entertaining or downright terrifying?

We were five days into an adrenalin-fueled descent of what is reputedly India's wildest river, the 160-kilometer Siang section of the mighty Brahmaputra River between Tuting and Pasighat in the remote northeast of India. The Siang, effectively a continuation of the infamous Tsangpo River from Tibet, offers rafting and kayaking enthusiasts a chance to embrace the challenges of one of the Himalaya's premier whitewater journeys.

We tightened our life jackets, strapped on our helmets and pushed the heavily laden rafts off the beach. The relentless drizzle refused to abate as we paddled out into the current and bade farewell to our sodden campsite at Ramsing. When I shifted my gaze downstream, I couldn't help but notice that the river disappeared into a thick wall of threatening gray clouds; I had

a premonition that serious action lurked just around the corner.

The rain intensified as we approached the big Class IV whitewater of a notorious rapid known as 'Mowing Madness'. Large raindrops thumped into the river and exploded on impact all around us. In the midst of this torrential downpour we stopped just above the rapid to scout the best route through the furious whitewater. After surveying the wild river for ten minutes, head guide Dhruv Naresh Rana returned to our anxious crew and, with a cheeky grin, said, "Are you ready to have some fun?"

We pulled hard on our paddles to get the raft onto the right line before we dropped into the whitewater mêlée. Raindrops pelted into the boat and drummed noisily against our helmets. Rana had to shout to be heard above the roar of the river and

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the deafening noise of the heavy rain. “All together now; hard forward,” he yelled. The roar grew steadily louder as gigantic waves emerged from the mist ahead. My heart thumped wildly and excitement mounted as we descended into the boiling mayhem of the rapid. Everyone was pumped up: high on adrenalin. Rana bellowed, “Come on team hard forward; a little harder; harder than that; come on, paddle!” A loud clap of thunder drowned out his next instruction as lightning streaked across the angry sky. However, when he screamed, “F – ing paddle!” the urgency in his voice demanded we paddle as if our lives depended upon it: there was no disputing the seriousness of our situation.

We were in the midst of some genuinely big whitewater. Waves crashed over the raft from all sides. It felt like an eternity that we were buried in the midst of the ferocious

rapid before the Siang spat us out the other side. As we emerged from the final wave train, everyone was cheering and throwing high fives.

The storm could no longer dampen our mood: one of the raft crews spontaneously broke out in song, while our team danced on top of the raft. We had signed on for a rare adventure on India’s wildest and remotest river and we were truly getting our money’s worth! Before we had a chance to relax too much, however, we were confronted by another monster rapid. Up ahead the gurgling growls of Karko Killer grew ominously louder. The singing and dancing stopped abruptly. Our adrenalin-fuelled merriment gave way to a steely determination to make sure our raft did not flip. Nobody wanted to swim in these conditions!

Rana barked instructions; we obeyed. After five days paddling together, we had finally become a cohesive team capable of responding to his commands in unison. Rana chose the perfect line, threading us through the meatiest part of the rapid. We slipped past a massive pour-over, dodged a huge hole and dominated a wild wave train. India’s fiercest river was throwing everything at us, but, under the guidance of our capable captain, we were more than up to the challenge.

As the day wore on, the clouds emptied themselves and a watery sun eventually broke through. Everyone cheered. In the early afternoon we pulled the boats onto a beautiful sandy beach, pitched the tents and spread out our wet gear to dry. The cooks had a delicious hot lunch on the go and soon the laughter and banter returned to our adventurous group of whitewater

Captain Rana coaxes the best from his crew of whitewater enthusiasts as they drop into the gaping jaws of infamous Ponging Rapid.



TRIVIA BOX: INDIA'S GREAT HOLY FATHER RIVER

Under the shadow of Mount Kailash, water from the glacial-fed Manasarowar Lake spills through the Horse's Mouth and begins its course towards the Great Holy Father River of Asia, the Brahmaputra. Along its journey, from Tibet through India and into Bangladesh, the river is known by no less than ten different names. Initially, as the river flows gently eastwards across the Tibetan plateau, it is known as the Yarlung Zangbo. Upon entering the folds of the eastern Himalayas it transforms into the infamous and inhospitable Tsangpo. Steep vertical drops, inaccessible gorges and large waterfalls make the Tsangpo arguably the world's most inaccessible river. Upon leaving Tibet and entering northern Arunachal, the river becomes the Chiang. Local tribes refer to the section of the river featured here as the Siang before it changes to Dihang near the city of Pasighat. Next, where the Lohit feeds into the great holy river, it becomes known as Lali. By this stage the rapids have abated and the river has swollen dramatically. The breadth of the river is measured in miles as it traverses Assam as the mighty Brahmaputra. It changes its name three more times to Luit, Jamuna and Padma before finally emptying into the Bay of Bengal.



Spectacular scenery dominates a descent of the Brahmaputra with jungle-clad hills giving way to snow-capped Himalayan peaks.

enthusiasts. As we relaxed on the sand around a blazing fire, a bottle of rum came out and we drank a toast to the successful completion of another exciting day of wet and wild Himalayan adventure.

While the kayakers animatedly discussed their tumultuous descent through the powerful whitewater, the beauty of the wilderness surrounding our Geku Twins Campsite overcame me. We had

emerged from the steep-sided Ninguing and Marmong gorges into a wide valley where the olive green Siang was offset against dark green rainforest, snowy Himalayan peaks and a pale blue sky – a spectacular wilderness setting for a riverside campsite.

As I lay on the beach enjoying the warmth of the fire and late afternoon sun, I marveled at the sheer rock walls that climbed from

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A Buddhist monk journeyed from his monastery in Tuting to perform a riverside ritual and blessing that would ensure our safe passage down the mighty Brahmaputra in northeast India.

the water's edge towards an impenetrable-looking rainforest. Huge tree trunks were wedged on top of rocks at least thirty meters above the water level. I was awed by the thought of the huge volumes of water and forces of nature that were capable of dumping massive trees up there; inevitably Rana's tale of the Great Flood came drifting back to me...

In June 2000, a mud dam that had been created by an enormous landslide in Tibet gave way. This unleashed a gigantic wall of water 52 meters high that swept down the valley scouring out the river, uprooting the forest and destroying everything in its path. All the bridges were swept away and the river backed up 12 kilometers into its side valleys and tributaries! By all accounts it was Mother Nature at her most ferocious.

After a welcome rest day, we set off on the penultimate day of our expedition. By this stage the river had become lazier and there were long flat sections where we could sit back and appreciate the scenery. The Siang, however, was not quite done with

us. A final test lay in store for our crew at Ponging: the last Class V rapid of the trip. After our stormy experiences a few days earlier we felt like hardened professionals and, under a blue sky and blazing sunshine, we aced it!

Reluctantly, we bade farewell to the Siang after ten exhilarating days of high adventure. Sitting on the ferry and chugging homeward across the languid Brahmaputra, everyone started to reminisce about the wild whitewater and our successful descent of the Siang. This was, after all, only the ninth commercial descent of the river in history! I felt very privileged to have been a part of an extraordinary expedition into the seldom-visited region of Arunachal.

I turned to our captain with one final question, "So Rana, all I want to know is: where do I sign up for next year's expedition?"

LOGISTICS BOX:

Flights and Visas: Most major airlines connect US cities to Delhi via European hubs. Continental Airlines offer direct flights between New York and Delhi. Visas are required by US passport holders and must be obtained in advance. The standard visa is a six-month tourist visa; allow up to two weeks for processing. Consult the Trivisa website (www.trivisa.com) for application directions.

Getting there: From Delhi a spectacular flight (www.jetlite.com) takes you past snowy Himalayan peaks via Guwahati and on to Dibrugarh. Outfitters take care of all permits and transportation for the 3-day boat and road transfer to the put-in at Tuting.

What to do: Huge whitewater, remote wilderness, spectacular scenery and beach campsites are the premier attractions on a descent of the Siang. However, cultural interactions with Adi tribals add another fascinating dimension to this expedition through remote Arunachal.

Season: The best months to paddle the mighty Siang are November and December.

DEVIL'S CANYON OF THE SUSITNA

BY DARCY GAECHTER

I 'VE NEVER FELT so utterly "out there" as I did the moment the airplane flew away leaving Don and me standing on a little patch of sand alongside the silty, churning Susitna River. We were about to face 18,000 cfs of raging river, Don's finger was gushing blood from the tail rudder of the airplane swiping him, it was just the two of us about to face the biggest whitewater challenge of my paddling life to date. I was thinking to myself, *what the hell have we done?* It was not just that the river was going to be extremely challenging, but, if anything went wrong, we knew we wouldn't get any outside help. We had, admittedly, come to the Susitna seeking a daring wilderness adventure, but the moment the plane flew away, I regretted it.

The idea of wilderness is an interesting quandary for most of us Americans. The term wilderness means many different things to many different people; but if any wilderness could be considered quintessential, it would have to be the Alaska wilderness—it is, after all, the "Last Frontier." It's got all the necessary characteristics that we've come to recognize as wild—vast expanses of land inaccessible by road, bad weather, predators, tundra, forests, underbrush, formidable mountains, and big, powerful rivers. It's also got the most redeeming of all wilderness qualities—one can truly expose oneself in the Alaskan wilderness.

prove to ourselves that we haven't fully lost touch with those skills, and with that part of our history. I doubt very many of us would choose to live in the wild; but many of us crave to visit both the physical and emotional place that is wilderness for short periods of time. For a variety of reasons, much of the contiguous United States' wilderness has lost a certain element of wildness. But, in the minds of many, Alaska still holds the indispensable ingredients for a modern-day wilderness experience. As cliché as it is, Don and I were craving just this sort of encounter when we headed to the Susitna.

It was August of 2003 and we'd been working as raft guides and safety kayakers in Girdwood, Alaska running trips down 6 Mile Creek on the south end of Turnagain Arm. As the summer was coming to a close, we sat wondering what we could do to *really* make our Alaska experience memorable. We'd had a pretty pedestrian summer considering that we'd come to Alaska seeking something different, something exciting—an adventure. We had mainly just been working and doing a few day trips kayaking or skiing here or there. But we felt we hadn't really experienced Alaska. Then the idea of Devil's Canyon came up and the ball started rolling. Unable to convince anyone else to join us on our journey, Don and I found ourselves alone at the airstrip weighing our kayaks and gear and loading them into a floatplane. Our boats were completely overloaded with warm gear, tents, sleeping bags and food for three days (we ended up paddling the

I DOUBT VERY MANY OF US WOULD CHOOSE TO LIVE IN THE WILD; BUT MANY OF US CRAVE TO VISIT BOTH THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL PLACE THAT IS WILDERNESS FOR SHORT PERIODS OF TIME.

For most of us, the suggestion of wilderness idealizes a time in our history when people were less "civilized," and true survival skills were infinitely more essential than they are now. To go into the wilderness today is to

river in 1.5 days, but we didn't know what to expect as we were packing, and wanted to be prepared for the worst). Each kayak weighed in at 100 pounds—just barely under the weight limit for our plane.

Most people who paddle the Susitna get

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dropped at a nearby lake and have to hike (bushwhack) into the river. Before the trip, I had talked to Susitna veteran Gerry Moffatt who said they'd been flown all the way down to the river, and we just had to find a pilot who was willing to try to land on the river itself. Our pilot had never done it before but he was game to try. It was a pretty nerve wracking flight as we came in to land facing upstream on the river. Even though it's "flatwater" where we landed, there were 2-3 foot rollers on our approach and our pilot was concerned about catching a pontoon on one of them. But he pulled it off and set us down right on river saving us a bear-infested hike through the thick Alaskan flora. The pilot wanted to take off heading downriver and asked Don to hold his tail so the plane wouldn't get swept away in the current while he prepared for take off. Don obliged, but as the pilot applied the rudder, it swiped his finger. Don kept the plane straight but at the cost of a good chunk of his finger. With no other options, we wrapped some gauze around his wound and launched our kayaks into the river.

Armed with photo-copied pages from Andrew Embick's *Fast and Cold: A Guide to Alaska Whitewater*, I was hopeful that I could use rationale, thinking, and planning to combat the huge rapids of Devil's

Canyon. I now realize that this approach was somewhat foolish, but at the time it seemed to me the most reasonable line of attack. (*Don't get me wrong; thinking and planning are crucial elements to any successful expedition. I still bring topo maps on new runs so I will know where access points may be, and where the gradient and constrictions will be. But the rapid by rapid description I was hoping to rely on for Devil's Canyon was a little over the top.*) Prior to this trip, the only big water I'd paddled was the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, and I really hadn't done much "expedition boating." It didn't help that the guidebook calls 18,000 cfs (our flow at put-in) medium water, and consequently the "hardest" level to run the canyon. At higher water the holes flush more, at lower water things are less pushy; but at medium water the holes are "hugely ferocious" and "increasingly difficult to miss." All things considered, I was nervous as hell, and to try to calm myself down, I'd photo-copied all (or so I thought) the pages of the Devil's Canyon write up and stuck them in a zip lock bag in my pfd.

The first 10 miles of Class II flew by and before I was ready we were at the first rapid—Devil Creek Rapid that runs right into The Nozzle. We had hoped to scout the river during our plane ride up the canyon,

but our scout was completely shut down by thick smoke from a nearby forest fire. We had to divert our flight path and didn't end up seeing a single mile of the river. So, when we arrived at Devil Creek, we had to scout from river left about 200 feet above the river. Following what we can only assume were bear trails, we'd scramble to the edge and try to part the alders to get a decent view. It was the biggest, most formidable thing I'd ever seen. I gave a quick look around hoping for some inviting looking portage route or trail to get me out of that hell, but all I saw were alders intertwined with Devil's Club. In situations like this, I'll admit that I much too often take the easy route (portage) when it's readily available, but I also have an invaluable ability to force myself into the zone when I know that there is no other option. And on the Susitna, that's what you have to do. So we walked back to our boats and jumped into the incredibly powerful current to battle with huge breaking waves and to give all we had to miss holes bigger than the floatplane that had brought us to this place.

Don led through Devil Creek rapid and then eddied out. I came through pretty discombobulated and missed his eddy, so led down through the Nozzle. At the Nozzle, the river squeezes down to a tiny fraction of the width at Devil Creek rapid creating some impressively large waves and powerful water pushing through the bed-rock constricted pinch. Waiting for Don in the turbulent whirlpool of an eddy below, I truly felt alone. It took him what seemed like forever to come through the huge breaking waves and back into my view. The next rapid was Hotel Rock, and after a quick scout and consultation with my photo-copied pages, I decided to lead this one. Picking my way through holes and exploding waves, I managed to have a clean line through this rapid, but got caught up in the boils in the constriction at the bottom. After a few impressive tail pirouettes, I broke free and made it into the eddy. After



The author on the Royal Gorge of the NF American River, CA.

Photo by Don Beveridge



Don on Middle Cherry Creek, CA.
Photo by Darcy Gaechter

Hotel Rock we enjoyed a few quick miles of “boogie water.” Even though it was easy, probably Class III or IV, the waves were still huge and Don and I would lose sight of each other as we bobbed in opposite cadence through the deep troughs and high peaks of the massive wave trains. Even though I knew he was still on the river somewhere, it was an eerie feeling not to be able to see him for thirty seconds at a time. Around one in the afternoon we reached a section that, according to my pages, would be three or so miles of true flatwater. We stopped to have lunch (soggy Subway sandwiches we’d picked up in town the day before—that’s appetizing let me tell you) figuring we could digest in the flatwater and then get ready for the last set of rapids.

Right after lunch is when I realized that if you want adventure, if you want to go into the wilderness and face challenging whitewater that you really need to be prepared to go figure it on your own—without the crutch of play by play rapid descriptions on photocopied guidebook pages. We finished lunch and launched into the river ready to enjoy a few miles of flatwater, when we rounded the corner to perhaps the most difficult rapid of the day, Screaming Left Hand Turn. In the mindset of relaxation and digestion, a massive rapid was an unwelcome shock. I had missed one entire page of the guidebook in my photo-copying frenzy and had lulled us into thinking we could relax when really

we needed to be on our game! But, we were able to read the line, avoid the two monster holes and make the S-turn through the mammoth rapid. Screaming Left Hand Turn taught me an important lesson in my river running career. It **was** surprisingly liberating to give up on experiencing the river through my guidebook pages and to start actually living it. To read the water for myself and to see the landscape as it was rather than how Andrew Embick had remembered it gave me a deeper personal connection with the place. I still love the thinking and planning involved in river trips, but I now realize that once you actually get to the river, it’s the physical and mental skills that will get you through, not reading “directions” out of a guidebook.

We paddled the eleven miles of whitewater in one day, and I must admit, I was pretty damn relieved when we both successfully paddled through the last rapids making up Devils’ Gorge—Lesser’s Hole, Pearly Gates, and Bus Stop. The paddling was incredibly intimidating, but in hindsight, rewarding. A few miles after the whitewater ends, a small, crystal clear tributary comes into the Susitna. The stream’s clear waters offered us, and a few hundred spawning salmon, a nice reprieve from the thick, glacial-silt-infested waters of the Susitna. Watching the salmon hang out in the clear water cleaning their gills before continuing up the river was an awesome bonus after paddling the canyon. We briefly thought about

camping here until we noticed a highway of bear tracks and realized we were sitting alongside the best grizzly buffet in Alaska. So we pushed off again in search of camp.

While looking for camp, we found more grizzly tracks than good beaches. Pushed on by our no-grizzly-having-state-of-Colorado-inspired naiveté, we kept looking for a camp spot with no bear tracks. We quickly learned that there are no bear-free riverside beaches on the Susitna. Running out of daylight and options, we settled on a little island as home for the night. Motivated by the fact that we put up our tent right on top of some of the biggest grizzly tracks I’ve ever seen, and the frequent sightings of big bears on both sides of the river near our camp, we built a big fire out of driftwood. We took turns getting up every hour to put more wood on the fire hoping the flames and smoke would deter the bears from being too curious about us. In the morning we paddled off only to find to another bear drinking from the river *right on our island*. Happy he didn’t come to visit in the night, we paddled on by and out to the train stop that marks the end of the Devil’s Canyon river trip.

The Susitna provided us with just the classic Alaska experience we were seeking. Despite being armed with the guidebook pages, we felt completely lonely and exposed. We did, however, successfully overcome a tremendous river, the persistent threat of bears, torrential downpours, and all the stress associated with being a team of two on a hard river in a remote place. In short, we found personal challenge in a landscape that no truly sane person would want to stay in very long. It was a trip that we both emerged from with that satisfying feeling of accomplishment that attracts us all to the sport of kayaking. Whatever personal conceptions (or misconceptions) we have about the thing we call wilderness, none of us can deny that trips into the wild and unknown nourish the adventure-seeking soul.

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FINDING WILDERNESS ADVENTURE ON THE ALATNA RIVER

BY MARK MCKINSTRY

"A venturesome minority will always be eager to get off on their own...let them take risks, for Godsake, let them get lost, sunburnt, stranded, drowned, eaten by bears, buried alive under avalanches—that is the right and privilege of any free American."

THESE WORDS FROM Ed Abbey bounced around in my head as awe turned to panic when the grizzly bear stopped running away from us at 25 yards, turned, and ran straight toward us along the alder-choked bank. James and I were in a small raft pinballing off the large rocks in the narrow and shallow headwaters of the Alatna River, with the current pushing us toward the bear and no place to stop. James quickly loosened the shotgun that was strapped to our gear on the front of the raft, racked a load of buckshot into the chamber, and prepared for the possibility of the bear joining us in our 9.5-foot raft. Meanwhile I did all I could with the small oars in an attempt to ferry the boat to the other side of the channel. We both knew if the bear jumped into the water that James

would have only one or two chances to try and stop him before he joined us in our little boat. Later, we both agreed that the experience left us as amped up as we had ever been in our lives—we were completely focused on everything going on around us and time seemed to slow to a crawl.

Just two days earlier I had remarked to the other four members of our group that I had likely seen the best sight of the trip when Lanny Goyn, a great friend from Laramie, WY and I waded through a herd of several thousand caribou, like the proverbial "parting of the Red Sea." This incredible encounter came during a six mile-hike up the river valley from our second camp to

JAMES QUICKLY LOOSEMED THE SHOTGUN THAT WAS STRAPPED TO OUR GEAR ON THE FRONT OF THE RAFT, RACKED A LOAD OF BUCKSHOT INTO THE CHAMBER, AND PREPARED FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF THE BEAR JOINING US IN OUR 9.5-FOOT RAFT.

retrieve gear I had left near the put-in at Gaedeke Lake, a glacial remnant that marks the hydrologic divide between the Yukon River and the North Slope. I didn't think that experience would be bested during the trip—little did I know what lay in store.

We were in the heart of the Gates of the Arctic National Park (GANP) in the

Central Brooks Range of Alaska. Our group included Tim Patton, a Biology Professor at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, James Morel a graduate student working on his M.S. in Biology at New Mexico State University, Mike Bonnet, a Physician's Assistant from Salida, Colorado, Lanny, a water quality scientist who works for the state of Wyoming, and myself, a riparian ecologist working for the federal government in Salt Lake City, Utah. We all had extensive experience running whitewater throughout North America and had decided to do this trip on the Alatna as a change from our more normal routine of western river trips.

We picked the Alatna River based on the recommendation from a mutual friend, and for its promise of remote wilderness and adventure. We had planned to take 13 days for the approximately 100 mile float, including a four-day side trip with backpacks into the heart of the Arrigetch Peaks, a range of granite spire mountains nestled in a secluded valley just off of the Alatna River approximately half way through the trip. These spires tower over 3,000 feet and only get a few visitors every year, mostly climbers looking to challenge their big-wall skills in a remote and stunningly beautiful location. We had been eagerly planning the trip for the last year and had shipped all of our gear and small boats to Brooks Range Aviation in Bettles, Alaska eight weeks prior to our planned launch date in late July.

Upon our arrival in Bettles we learned from the National Park Service Rangers, stationed at the headquarters for GANP, that we were only the third group to float the Alatna that year and that the water-

Working our way through the upper Alatna River Valley.

Photo by Lanny Goyn



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Dragging the small raft in the upper portion of the Alatna River near Gaedeke Lake.

Photo by Lanny Goyn

time to running difficult whitewater runs throughout North America. I saw many beautiful places and learned to channel my energy into running whitewater instead of more destructive behaviors. My love of wild water and wild places eventually led to my pursuit of several degrees in Biology and Ecology, with an eventual career in river management working for the Bureau of Reclamation in the Colorado River Basin. Along the way I worked as a River Ranger for the State of Colorado and a researcher for the University of Wyoming, where I introduced many students to river recreation through field trips and personal float trips.

While I still pursue whitewater in kayaks I have also learned to enjoy floating in large rafts, especially since I can accommodate my son, wife, dogs, and all of the gear it takes to do comfortable multi-day river trips in the western US. Rafts also allow other folks to join the trips and it wasn't long before we had a reliable group of friends and families that also shared our enjoyment of wilderness adventure. However, even as I got older the "small boat" desire stuck with me, although I had learned to love the full size sleeping pad, change of clothes, refrigerated meals, and plentiful alcoholic beverages that inflatables provide. As a compromise several of us had started using small rafts or inflatable canoes to carry certain luxuries, while still allowing us to run the more difficult rivers and small creeks that larger rafts could never navigate. This strategy had worked well for many trips in the last few years, and it proved to be perfect on the Alatna. An added bonus to the small inflatables is that if they weigh less than 70 pounds they can be shipped anywhere in the US using Book Rate postage from the US Postal Service. Or

Opposite: Typical small rapid in upper Alatna River. It was near here where the bear charged Mark and James.

Photo by Mike Bonnet

level in the river might be less than ideal due to a lack of rain during the preceding month. However, the day before we arrived it had rained in the upper valley and the float plane pilot thought there might be enough to get us down the river, although he thought we might have to carry some of our gear in the upper river until side streams added enough flows to float out loaded boats.

In the hanger we quickly repacked the gear into dry bags, with the food going into bear-proof drums and containers. Sitting in the comfort of the hanger it looked like we had plenty of food so we made a decision to leave some behind in order to safely make the weight limitations of the Beaver float plane that would ferry us in two trips to

the put-in lake. "No worries" we thought, "this is Alaska" we can easily supplement our meals with fish.

Flying up the Alatna River from Bettles we were struck by the depth of the canyon, the vastness of the wilderness, and the stunning beauty of the surrounding mountains and the Arrigetch Peaks, tucked away several miles up a small valley. Once the float plane delivered us to Lake Gaedeke, we donned rain jackets and head nets to ward off the rain and bugs and got to work assembling the mound of gear that would be our transportation and supplies for the next 13 days.

My personal river odyssey has gone through several stages. In the 1980s, while in my 20s, I dedicated the majority of my free

they can be checked as baggage on airlines without incurring oversize baggage rates. For this trip we had one small 9.5' raft, one 14' IC, and one solo IK. The boats held up remarkably to the extended abuse that we delivered, even enduring the almost continuous dragging in the upper sections of the river. We managed the entire trip without a single boat repair.

The Alatna challenged our equipment and skills at running a low volume river with plenty of hazards. Starting with 10cfs at the put-in we had to push, pull, and carry our small boats six miles from the put-in lake to the first significant side creek, which only added enough water to let us jump in the boats periodically. Even then it was another day and six more miles before we added enough flows from tributaries to reliably float the boats. The first 25 miles dropped at an average of 100 ft/mi before moderating to an average 30 ft/mi for the last 70 miles. It was in such a place where we encountered the charging bear. Luckily for both him and us he decided to stop at the water's edge, where he stood up over

us not 15 yards away, then turned and ran up and around a hill, where he startled the three other guys in our group, who had unknowingly passed within five yards of him while they floated down the channel several hundred yards in front of us. In total we saw nine bears on the trip, seven more than the "average of two" that the Park Service Ranger said we were likely to see. While that experience was one that James and I will share for a lifetime, and never forget, we both agreed that it would be just fine if we never repeated it. While running tough whitewater often presents very unique and unpredictable situations, an 800 pound brown bear at 15 yards presents a set of challenges just as harrowing.

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is about the size of Switzerland and is the second largest and northernmost national park in the US—only Wrangell St. Elias is larger. But, unlike Switzerland, it boasts no established roads, trails, visitor facilities, or campground and, combined with the Noatak Wilderness Area to the north, is the largest contiguous wilderness

in the US. GANP was designated a National Monument in 1978 and became a National Park in 1980, the same year the Alatna was designated a Wild and Scenic River.

While the gradient seemed impressive it was like riding a gently descending escalator. No major rapids ever appeared, although several tight drops presented challenges to the wider raft with the bulk of the gear. The relatively tame whitewater was just as well since the scenery rivaled what we had seen on any river. The Alatna has been described as possibly the most scenic river in the US, and while this opinion is subjective, and I may not even agree with it, it certainly did not disappoint. Around every bend huge mountains dominated the skyline with seemingly never-ending peaks rising ever further in the distance. Many of the mountains were unnamed and likely unclimbed in the last few thousand years by anyone other than native Inuits





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WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

searching for game. In one area near the end of the trip a significant portion of an entire mountain had recently collapsed and slid down into a side valley, thus changing the chemical composition, muddying the river, and ending the salmon run that used to come up this drainage from the Yukon.

In the land-of-the-midnight-sun we quickly fell into a strange pattern of sleep and activity. Often we wouldn't shove off from camp until 3 in the afternoon, then spend the time from 9 or 10 pm until 2 or 3 am setting up camp, hiking, preparing dinner, and just generally enjoying the vast wilderness that we were so privileged to travel through. Toward the end of the trip, when we were losing almost 15 minutes of daylight every day, the sun would briefly dip below the horizon, leaving us in a post-sunset, pre-dawn light that delivered amazingly colorful landscapes, but never seemed to bring on any deep sleep.

The challenges of low water in the upper river quickly gave way to sweeping vistas and a broader river valley with significantly more water. Camping sites were unlimited and the only reliable criteria we used when choosing one was avoidance of those with bears present. Since salmon no longer migrated in great numbers up this river

the bears were roaming widely looking for berry patches and carrion in the form of dead caribou or moose. We carried a shotgun with us anytime we ventured away from camp and we all carried bear spray, although both James and I later remarked after our bear charge, that we both felt much better with a firearm than the bear spray. Although we had guns and spray, our best protection against bruins was careful placement of our campsites, making enough noise to forewarn bears of our arrival, and the use of bear-proof food canisters that the Park Service loans for free to parties entering the GANP. We were also adamant about creating a triangle with our camp—the tents upwind of the food and cooking area that formed the base of a triangle, with several hundred feet between the three posts. This technique, along with selection of sites that allowed extensive sight-distances, assured no surprises for us, or to any bears looking for an easy meal. To keep the bears from destroying our equipment during the hike into Arrigetch Peaks we hung all of our boats, gear, and food in spruce trees using a pulley system rigged by our expert rope man, Mike. Getting 600 pounds of boats and gear to hang 15 feet above the ground

was no easy feat, but Mike attacked it with a climber's enthusiasm.

The hike up Arrigetch Creek proved to be the most demanding day of the trip, if not for the last several years, for a few of us. The rangers had reported that the "trail is high on the south ridge," but after 1500 feet of climbing the ridge and several miles of ripping our clothes and bodies on alders, we wisely headed down and found a game trail that had obviously been used by other parties for hiking up the creek. Walking up the trail we saw numerous fresh signs of grizzlies and wolves, even up on the alpine slopes of the Arrigetch Peaks, but luckily we never encountered any during our hike. The hike took over 12 hours and tested our group dynamics since each member thought he had the "right" path for getting up the valley.

The Arrigetch Peaks is a surreal landscape, rivaling the granite spires of Yosemite or Patagonia but without the crowds. We camped at the base of the Elephants Ear, the mammoth sentinel that stands guard at the base of the valley and hiked up several side valleys to the bases of granite faces that rose over 2,000 vertical feet. Snow and rain fell intermittently almost the entire time we were in the valley and as a climber I quickly appreciated the level of commitment it would take to not only get into this valley, but to commit to climbing the massive spires. Mike, the most devoted climber in the group, kept scheming about how he could come back and climb some of the few routes that had been established over the last few decades. Lanny, Tim and James headed back down after three days of mountain gazing to fish for pike in an oxbow wetland they had spied from the hillside during the hike in, but Mike and I decided to stay one more night in what we felt was the Throne Room of the Gods.

Our return to the river was marked by the only encounter with other people we had during the entire trip. We watched as a



Tim (l) and James (r) approaching the Arrigetch Peaks area.

Photo by Mark McKinstry

skilled bush pilot landed a fat-tired Cessna on a seemingly impossible gravel bar, unloading a small group that were to begin their float downstream from this point. We told them of our trip from the upper valley and they seemed a bit slighted that they weren't going to have the adventures we had experienced.

The take-out point, Lake Takahula, lay a couple of long days' float from Arrigetch Creek so we opted to portage our gear from the river to the lake across a small divide. Here we divided the remainder of our food between us: half a box of prunes, two granola bars, and a few inches of somewhat green summer sausage. Afterwards, as we paddled along the shoreline of the lake to the pick-up point for the float plane, we encountered Steve and Kay Grubis, a couple that had homesteaded the area along the lake shore some 35 years previously. After years of year-round residency, they now spent only summers on the lake, leading birding and wildlife trips for the few folks who flew in to stay with them. We learned from them that fires to the south had closed the airport in Fairbanks to commercial air traffic, and that our pick-up might be delayed until the smoke cleared from Bettles Airfield long enough to allow Brooks Range Aviation to get their float planes in the air. We made camp along the lake hoping that the plane would be able to land as planned the next day, but accepting the fact that it could be days.

After a marginally successful fishing trip the next morning we ravenously attacked the four pike we caught and finished off every spare calorie that we had. We spent the afternoon cleaning and organizing our gear for the pick-up, but when the plane didn't show we jumped in the boats and headed across the lake to pay another, more cordial, visit to our neighbors. Their story was quite fascinating, as is to be expected from those who settle in the outback of Alaska. They regaled us with lusty adventures of marauding grizzly bears, negative 70-degree temperatures, fires, landslides, and brushes with death. Their most amazing story of all, however, was told in the changes they had seen to the

area in their 35-year stay. Unequivocally they explained how climate change was already impacting this area of the world with changes in animal migrations, insect numbers and seasons, snowfall, glaciers, temperature extremes, and fires like the one that was currently threatening our departure. As with most people who lived in the extreme portions of the planet, especially in the areas beyond the Arctic Circle, they were witnessing rapid changes that could only be explained by a warming planet. Some folks might argue that a little warming couldn't hurt an area that regularly sees temperatures of minus 50, the truth is that the large areas of ice and permafrost at the ends of the planet serve to moderate the climate in the other more temperate regions and provide unique habitat for a broad range of species that have adapted to these harsh conditions. While there are those in the lower 48 who argue about the reality of climate change, folks above the Arctic Circle are already seeing its effects.

Our visit was cut short when a quick call by our new friends via satellite phone to Brooks Range Aviation informed us that the smoke had cleared and our pilot was on his way with a large Otter float plane to pick us up in one trip. We said our quick good byes and furiously oared across the lake to the pick-up point on the far bank, getting to the bank just as the Otter splashed down on the lake. A quick scramble ensued to break our gear down and get it ready for loading in the plane. We hastily threw our gear in the plane and jumped into our seats for the hour long trip back to Bettles.

As we flew across the great Alaska wilderness I was struck by the power of wilderness to renew our passions and strengthen our friendships. Aldo Leopold said it best when he noted, "Of what avail are 40 freedoms without a blank spot on the map." The freedom to explore large wilderness areas like GANP is a privilege that few get to experience, but we need these places, if for no other reason than to know they are there, waiting for us, should we decide to venture forth and experience them.

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WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SACRED SECRET

BY KAREN TAM WU

I LOOKED FORWARD TO exploring America's great wilderness rivers after reading descriptions of Idaho's Selway and Middle Fork of the Salmon in my World Whitewater guidebook. It promised "exotic wilderness runs," where rescue is difficult because of the remoteness of these rivers. The exhilarating whitewater sections, my first ever wolf sighting on the banks of the Selway, and the luxurious hot springs on the Middle Fork were special.

I must admit, however, the "wilderness" value felt greatly diminished by the fact that America's largest roadless wilderness areas have airstrips, roads, cabins, and lodges grandfathered in. While I enjoyed Idaho's crown jewels, paddling them made me appreciate the fact that at home in British Columbia, paddlers have their pick of whitewater experiences, guaranteed to be free of all signs of modern civilization. The Skeena, Nass, and Stikine Rivers, in northwestern British Columbia are three of the province's wildest and most remote rivers. By a phenomenon of nature, all three rivers are born within walking distance of each other in a spectacular alpine basin known as the Sacred Headwaters, British Columbia's best kept wilderness secret.

The Skeena, Nass, and Stikine Rivers traverse the territories of several First Nations and are significant for salmon spawning. All three rivers feature multi-day big water trips through stunning landscapes, side trips to hot springs, guaranteed wildlife sightings, and masses of mosquitoes. These rivers are important ecologically, culturally, and economically for the local communities that exist within their watersheds.

The closest towns to these rivers, where paddlers can replace forgotten gear and grab a last hit of latté, are Smithers and Terrace, 15- and 17-hours drive, respectively, from Vancouver. The Headwaters region is another six hours drive north. During the summer in northern British Columbia, the sun doesn't set until 11pm, and sunset is a two-hour technicolour event. Each river offers its own unique experience. If you've made the long journey just to get there, take in a bit of each if you have the time and the requisite supply of bug dope.

The Stikine

The Stikine is best known for its Class V "Everest of kayaking" section through the Grand Canyon of the Stikine. This run is considered a jewel in any Class V+ boater's crown. A team of kayakers led by Rob Lesser made the first successful descent of the Grand Canyon in 1981. In 1992, Doug Ammons, who called this run one of the hardest runs on the planet, completed the second descent solo. Once in the canyon,

paddlers are committed. Self-support and self-rescue are mandatory, and after the first few miles walking out is pretty much impossible, due to the steep canyon walls. Taylor Jackson recalls scaling the cliffs 10 miles into the canyon after a thwarted Stikine attempt in 1993. After escaping the canyon he still faced a two-day slog through dense forest back to his vehicle. Imagine paddling a fully loaded creek boat, and bracing yourself for waves that are large and powerful enough to fold you over as easily as a chef folds beaten egg whites in a soufflé—that's the Grand Canyon experience. My favorite name for a rapid in the Grand Canyon is the hole that ate Chicago—probably not too much of an exaggeration. Then there's the Hole that Ate the Hole. Kayakers cannot afford to break focus to admire the mountain goats, clinging to the sides of the cliffs like 5.13 rock climbers, seeking protection from all types of predators. The red dust from the rocks on their fur gives rise to the name of the Spatsizi Wilderness, through which the Stikine passes. Spatsizi means "land of the red goat" in the local Tahltan language.

For mere mortals like me, the upper and lower Stikine offer spectacular wilderness kayaking that doesn't require packing a defibrillator. Canoes are the most common vessel of choice for the 155-mile (250 kilometers) trip down glacial-silted waters with Class II rapids, through a valley of subalpine forest blend of spruce and pine, where sightings of moose, bears, and caribou are probable. The big bridge where Highway 37 crosses the Stikine clearly identifies the take-out for the Upper Stikine. This is also the put in for the Grand Canyon run, where the infamous sign forebodes "Extremely dangerous rapids downstream. Unnavigable by all craft."

To by-pass the canyon run, continue northward on Highway 37 to Dease Lake. Then hang a right down the unpaved road

Rafting, kayaking, or swimming – all possible modes of whitewater transport on the upper Skeena shown here during the Skeena Swim.

Photo by Brian Huntington



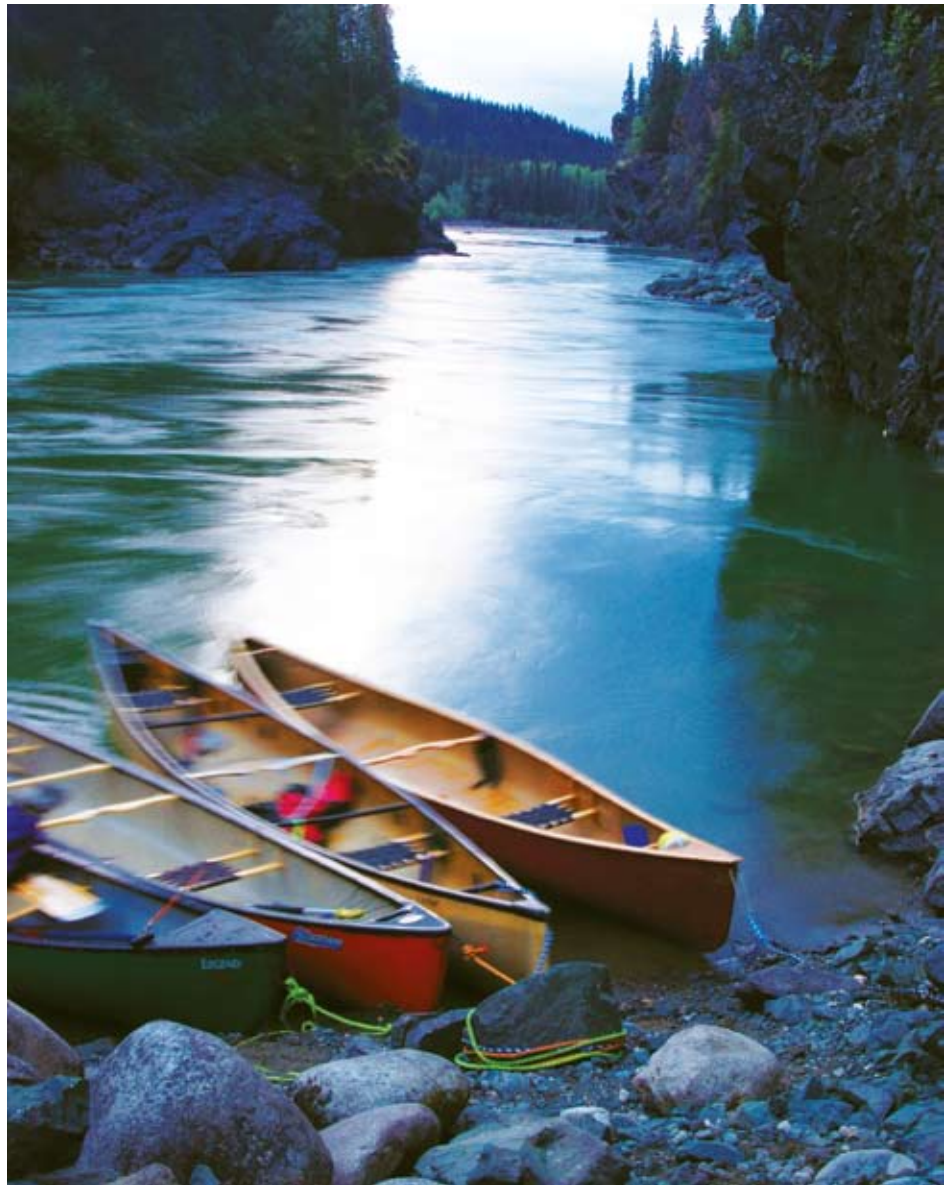
A moment of stillness on the Stikine.
Photo by Tyler Bachrach

towards Telegraph Creek. The 75-mile (120 kilometres) drive, legendary in British Columbia backroads lore, takes two hours to negotiate. The narrow road, at times steeply graded with a sheer drop off, demands as much attention as technical rapid. Basalt columns balanced on the cliffsides, testament to the igneous origins of the region, glimpses of the turquoise waters below, and jagged, snow-covered mountains are dangerous diversions for the drivers trying to keep their vehicles on the road. The confluence of the Tahltan and Stikine Rivers, just upstream from Telegraph Creek is a fishing site for the Tahltan and was the site of trading between the Tahltan and the Tlingit from the coast. Eulachon, herring eggs, and copper were some of the goods traded between the two First Nations.

The lower Stikine from Telegraph Creek to its mouth at Wrangell, AK is a 155-mile (250 kilometres) trip, and a stark contrast to upper portion of the river. The lower section is a flatwater trip, which can be done in canoe or sea kayak through lush coastal temperate rainforest, and offers opportunities to paddle up close and personal to glaciers and ice floes. A worthwhile portage over a glacial moraine through towering forest to Great Glacier Lake will be rewarded with a rare opportunity to paddle among awe-inspiring icebergs calved from the Great Glacier. A visit to Shakes Hot Springs is a must.

The Nass

The Nass River valley lies within the territory of the Nisga'a First Nation. Its volcanic history is beautifully obvious. The drive up the Nass Valley is a spectacular scene of lava beds, lightly dusted with lichen, interrupted only by the road that bisects the old lava flow. The most recent eruption occurred just over 200 years ago. The resulting lava flows smothered two Nisga'a villages, and poisonous volcanic gases killed 2000 people. Today, the Nisga'a live along the Nass River in four communities.



The Nass River is also known as the “River of Abundance” because of its bountiful fish. First Nations depend on the river and the ocean for staples such as salmon, cod, halibut, mussels, clams, and seaweed. Eulachon (also oolichan and ooligan) is one fish for which the Nass is renowned. Eulachon, also known as *Thaleichthys pacificus*, a Pacific smelt, is the first fish to return to the river after the winter, just as the last of its winter ice is melting. Upon returning from the ocean, 15 percent of an eulachon’s body weight is fat. A wick can be stuck in the mouth of a dried eulachon and lit due to its high fat content, hence its nickname

“candlefish.” The “Grease Trail” refers to the trade routes along which eulachon was traded into the interior from the coast. Eulachon remains an important fish in the diets of First Nations from both the coast and interior regions.

Accessing the Nass via two of its tributaries, the Boswer and Bell-Irving Rivers, and paddling to the First Nation town of Gitlakdamix (New Ayainsh) is a 100-mile trip (160 kilometres), and is four straight days of big water rapids up to Class IV. Sheer black rock canyon walls surround the river during the first part of the run, topped



Whitewater of the Class II kind on the Upper Stikine.

Photo by Tyler Bachrach

with northern forest, and backed by rolling mountains. Bears and moose are sure to be spotted. Near the conclusion of this trip, majestic coastal temperate rainforest, dominated by cedars, welcomes paddlers to the Lower Nass Valley. A nice post-kayaking treat is a stop at the Aiyansh Hotsprings, just a short walk from the road.

The Skeena

Nearly 380 miles (610 kilometres) long, the Skeena, called "River of Mists" in Tsimshian language, is British Columbia's second longest river (that is, wholly within BC, as opposed to the Stikine, which is similar in length, but flows into Alaska). The Skeena runs through the lands of the Tahltan, Gitxan, and Tsimshian First Nations. All five species of Pacific salmon return to the Skeena at various times of the year. The lure of catching a colossal steelhead or Chinook, makes the Skeena and its tributaries world-class destinations for fishermen. It was spring the first time I crossed the Skeena, moving to our new home in Terrace. The sight of fishermen lined up all along the Skeena, trying to land a Chinook, impressed my husband and me.

Of the three rivers that originate from the Sacred Headwaters, the Skeena is the most populated. Steamboats were used travel along the Skeena from the coast to Hazelton between 1864 and 1912 to ship goods and supplies. A trip beginning from one of the Skeena's tributaries, either the Mosque

or Sustut Rivers and ending at Kuldo is a 140-mile (230 kilometres) journey through the uninhabited and wild sections of the Skeena. The tributaries meander gently through boulder gardens, surrounded by a carpet of lush alpine meadows, with the Skeena and Slamgeesh Mountains as the backdrop. At the confluence with the Skeena, the signature big water rapids up to Class IV+ begin, rock through canyon sections, and end at the remnants of the village of Kuldo.

Exploring the sections along the lower Skeena is worthwhile. Along the more developed sections, the river widens significantly, and is approximately two miles (three kilometers) across at its widest. Closer to the mouth, the influence of tides creates strong currents. There are several stops of interest: the historic Gitxan village of K'san; petroglyphs at Kitselas Canyon National Historic Site; whirlpools under the bridge in Terrace, large enough to suck down an old school kayak; Frizzell Hotsprings, a 1-1/2 mile ferry across tidal currents; and the site of the old cannery at Port Edward.

In August 2009, to raise awareness about the threats the Skeena watershed faces, Ali Howard became the first person to swim the entire length of the river. With the support of a crew in kayaks and rafts, Howard voluntarily swam every inch of the Skeena, including the big water Class IV

sections, and the ferry across to the Frizzell Hotsprings. Knowing how exhausting swimming Class IV can be (through my own involuntary experiences), I take my neoprene skullcap off to this woman for persevering through 28 days, swimming the equivalent distance between San Francisco and LA, through frigid water, big rapids, and strong currents.

The Threat

While remoteness of these rivers is part of their charm, remoteness is also their vulnerability. Because access is highly limited, and a relatively small population of people calls these watersheds home, corporations believe they can sneak in undetected, and uncontested. Residents of the region, however, do not take lightly to developers coming into their communities unannounced and uninvited. In the 1980s, regional opposition successfully shut down a proposal to dam the Grand Canyon of the Stikine.

Currently, another development proposal threatens the watersheds of the Nass, the Skeena and the Stikine. Royal Dutch Shell plans to drill for coalbed methane in the Sacred Headwaters. In 2004, Shell quietly established three test wells and intended to put in another 14 by the end of 2008.

In order to extract methane gas trapped in coal seams 30 to 300 feet (100-1000 metres) below ground, Shell would have to pump out groundwater. Between 10,000 to 20,000 gallons of wastewater, high in arsenic, ammonia, and salts would be produced. To further fracture the coal seams, it is common practice to inject an industry trade-secret recipe of sand and hydrocarbons, such as diesel, benzene, and MTBE into the ground. It is unknown where this toxic mix flows underground. At commercial scale production, between 1,500 and 10,000 wells would be drilled. Pads the size of a baseball field with three-metre wide roads connecting them, compressor stations, and pipelines would

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have to be built. This untouched landscape would be transformed into an industrial checkerboard. Resulting pollution and sediment-laden water would poison salmon, clog their gills and suffocate their eggs.

Opposition to Shell's proposed project in the Sacred Headwaters united the residents of the three watersheds. First Nations, ranchers, and environmentalists alike blockaded, protested in the streets, and held community summits. In 2008, all downstream communities passed resolutions opposing development of coalbed methane in the Sacred Headwaters. The British Columbia government heeded the widespread opposition to Shell's proposed CBM development, and placed a two- to four-year temporary ban on Shell's activities in December 2008. In March this year, the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia declared the Sacred Headwaters BC's most endangered rivers.

The devastating impacts of such large-scale development seem completely incongruous with the pristine beauty of the Sacred Headwaters. This is a place where one of British Columbia's ecological and cultural treasures has been hidden from most of the world for millennia. This is where, prior to the threat of coalbed methane development, no one knew whether salmon swam all the way back to the Sacred Headwaters. But in the summer of 2008, salmon were discovered spawning in the headwaters of the Skeena. This is where Canada's iconic wildlife—moose, caribou, mountain goats, wolves, sheep, and black and grizzly bears—can all be found. The Sacred Headwaters is known as the "Serengeti of the North," but you'd likely be the only one on safari here. The Sacred Headwaters is the source of all creation for coastal First Nations, and where the Tahltan continue to practice cultural activities.

I've paddled many salmon rivers. The flicker of red or silver beneath my kayak, a fish arcing over my boat as I surf a wave,

Sacred Headwaters, the birthplace of the Skeena, Nass and Stikine Rivers.

Photo by Brian Huntington

grizzlies lumbering through river beds, deftly scooping up salmon are reminders that salmon rivers like the Skeena, Nass, and Stikine, are rich with life. Salmon feed some 200 species, from amphibians to birds to marine and terrestrial mammals. Next time you smell the distinct odour of rotting salmon, think of the vital nutrients the salmon is delivering to the forest. Salmon are the red blood cells of the ecosystems: the rivers are the Earth's arteries. First Nations' fishing sites perched on the cliffs above rivers, fish wheels that scoop salmon out of the water, the many lines of fishermen crossing the river, and salmon caught for dinner during a trip on the river are reminders that salmon nourish people, too.

For First Nations, whose culture and way of life has revolved around salmon for millennia, salmon serve critical food, ceremonial, and social purposes. Salmon's significance to First Nations is apparent in their art, stories, songs and dances. Fish are the foundation for the traditions and identities for communities along the Skeena, Nass, and Stikine Rivers. Skeena salmon bring \$110 million to the local economy. Ecologically and culturally, salmon are invaluable. The destruction of the Sacred Headwaters from coalbed methane development and resulting loss of salmon is unimaginable.

As wilderness boaters, we purposely seek out places where interactions between man, animals, and plants proceed—

unimpeded and uninterrupted—as they have for thousands of years. I'm willing to share the secret of the Sacred Headwaters if it helps protect this wild and remote place. I'm asking you to take a simple action and write the British Columbia government, and ask the government to permanently safeguard the Sacred Headwaters from coalbed methane development. This would be a huge gesture of support to those who depend on the wild rivers that support the salmon.

If your heart needs healing go down to
the river

Quietly sit on the shores
You'll feel her run through you
To mend and renew you
You'll feel life like never before

Sitting on rocks down by the river
Feeling the powers that be
You can howl at the moon, wade the
deep water

There's no place that I'd rather be
just the river, Mother Nature, and me

- from Jenny Lester's song *The River,
Mother Nature, and Me*

Karen Tam Wu is a kayaker and an Energy Campaigner with ForestEthics in Vancouver, Canada. For more information on the Sacred Headwaters, please visit: www.forestethics.org and www.skeenawatershed.com.



GETTING AN EDUCATION IN THE BACK WOODS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY KATE WAGNER AND

CHRISTIE GLISSMEYER

AFTER MANY DISCUSSIONS about the desire to start doing more self support and multi-day trips, we decided the Clendenning River would be the perfect start. The Clendenning River is known as a two-day Class IV-V read and run trip through the Clendenning Provincial Park, British Columbia. With clear skies and a 40 percent chance of rain we rallied the troops and headed to Squamish, BC. Once we arrived we were a little uncertain about river levels, as the gauge seemed to be broken. Checking the forecast, we discovered that a storm system was predicted to roll through on Sunday so we decided to pull the trigger, set shuttle, and beat the rain.

Day One: We woke up to sunshine Friday morning, all smiles and giggles, and made our way to Whistler Air to catch our float plane. The views from the plane were spectacular, leaving us all giddy with excitement. As the plane flew off we were dealing with the psychology of feeling completely on our own, miles away from the nearest road. It didn't take us long to realize that the level was on the high side of good. After our first swim, we realized how important it was going to be to work together as a team. By swim two, we realized how quickly small mistakes and simple decisions can turn into big, serious situations. Poor communication led to a very long swim with only one person around to help. In the backwoods of British Columbia it can take a very long time to reunite a swimmer with his or her group, boat, or paddle. It becomes even more serious knowing that a person's food, dry

clothes, and sleeping supplies are all packed away in the boat. We were relieved to come across the pinned boat after paddling a bit longer, only to find out that we had been separated from two members of the crew while searching different channels of the river. We reunited the boater and gear and continued downstream in search of our friends. At this point the river kept braiding in and out of channels, some choked with wood, others that were hardly visible. When

it started getting dark we felt helpless, with nothing else to do than set up camp and hope for the best for our comrades.

Day Two: We were awakened by the early arrival of the storm, adding to our already high anxiety. The river was rising fast. By noon it was flooded chocolate brown and we still hadn't caught up to our friends. After waiting two hours for them at the beginning of one of the crux sections, we



Finishing up Day 2.
Photo by Ethan Smith

WILDERNESS WHITEWATER



Trying to Find a Line.

Photo by Ethan Smith

located and reunited with the group and their gear. Never before have we been so excited to see Class II as we were when we reached the paddle out. We finally made it to the take out around 4:00pm on day three.

We got quite an education about wilderness boating on this trip. We learned the importance of teamwork and group dynamics, which should be taken into account from the beginning. We learned about smart decision making and considering all members of the team when making important choices. We learned about the power of positive thinking and staying cool in stressful situations, and in the end we walked away with a great first time expedition experience.

made the call that we needed to keep moving downstream. We both carry SPOT trackers with us (just in case) and at this point we decided it would be best if we would send the "OK" message to our families in case we needed gps coordinates to later identify a location near where we had last seen our friends. After sending the messages, we were back on, careful to make sure we were sticking close to each other. It's hard to explain the excitement felt several miles downstream when we paddled around the corner to see them camped out, waiting for us. At this point new waterfalls were appearing off both sides of the canyon walls and the side creeks were more like rivers. This is when Class IV-V turned into class FULL ON. Pretty soon the entire canyon was raging and looked like the North Fork of the Payette at high water, complete with mine fields of bus-sized holes and scary ferries. We found ourselves creeking down the boulders on the shoulder and trying not to get sucked into the main flow. We all had a scary side surf or beatdown at some point

in the day. We definitely got way more than we bargained for on this trip. In the middle of a long portage we realized we weren't going to make it out that night and hunkered down somewhere near the end of the walk. Thank goodness the rain let up for a few hours while one of our teammates cooked us a delicious dehydrated meal and another built a fire out of the soaked landscape to dry our gear.

Day Three: We had an exciting morning, finding fresh snow on the peaks and actual rocks in the river! While finishing up the steep section, we encountered swim number three. This swim came complete with a log broach and crazy solo hike through the woods with bears. The remaining members of the group now had to deal with the separation from the paddler as well as another member of the team who took off after the runaway boat. After a few miles, the group was again relieved to see that boater and the boat around a corner on a beach. The hiking paddler was then

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SALMON AND BEARS IN THE TASEKO-CHILKO WILDERNESS

BY ROCKY CONTOS

AS I SIT back and digest the tasty salmon meal I just consumed, I begin to wonder if the bony carcass and blood remains might attract a bear. An attack in the night could be quite problematic for me, with equipment loss/damage and possibly injury. The fallout would be exacerbated because I am alone, and might force me to abandon my intended wilderness journey from Taseko Lakes down to Hope. I therefore take the precautions of tossing all remains into the river, rinsing the rocks where I butchered the fish, and cleaning my pot well. I know I can't remove the entire odor, so the threat will remain through the night. I sleep restlessly.

This is my second night on an intended eight-day, 330-mile trip down the Taseko-Chilcotin-Fraser Rivers in British Columbia. The area here is known for its wilderness. Already I have seen several black and brown bears along the banks. One was so absorbed in picking and eating berries that it failed to notice me approach within 20 feet. Finally it heard me, spun around, then jumped up and ran off like a bat out-of-hell. The other bears I saw also ran away when they saw me. Perhaps they weren't used to encountering boaters. I have not seen any other paddlers on the river so far, and I wonder why, given that this seems to be a Class III-IV trip at least as nice as the Middle Fork and Main Salmon Rivers. Perhaps I will see some downstream.

The salmon on this river are actually one of the wilderness aspects that I am anxious to witness and experience. Today, the Fraser basin is the greatest salmon spawning stream in the world, with millions of fish making their way upstream each summer. The spring (also known as "king" or "chinook") and sockeye salmon are the kings

of migration, sometimes swimming up to 800 miles to reach pristine safer creekbeds. Of the sockeye runs, approximately half of those entering the Fraser make their way up the Chilcotin to the Chilko river and spawn in a 6-mile section just below the glacial Chilko Lake. This amounts to several million fish in the better years, which must be an absolutely amazing sight. Over a century ago, the Columbia River basin was the greatest salmon stream in the world, and of the sockeye making their way up, nearly half were thought to have gone up the Snake, Main Salmon, and then the South Fork Salmon to spawn. This also amounted to several million fish in the better years. But dams built starting mid-century caused that sockeye run to become nearly extinct. These years, you're lucky to find a few hundred fish spawning on the South Fork Salmon. The Fraser-Chilcotin-Chilko have no dams, so the salmon runs have remained largely intact.

The Chilko River is known for its "White Mile" of continuous Class IV rapids in Lava Canyon, many miles downstream of the sockeye spawning grounds. Its waters flow clean and clear, allowing easy sightings of fish. I made the decision to start on the smaller sister Taseko River mainly based on a shorter shuttle, but also to avert the possibility that Fish and Game guys would kick me off the Chilko in the spawning

grounds. I hoped there would still be a good sockeye population spawning on the Taseko that I could witness. Actually, when my shuttle driver (a Kiwi who was guiding on the Thompson) and I arrived at Taseko Lakes, we witnessed sockeye and king salmon jumping out of the water numerous times, as if thrilled to have made it the 450 miles upstream from Vancouver. The 3000 cfs flowing out of the final lake into the river was gray from glacial silt and fairly warm in August (~60 degrees), coming directly off the top of the lake. However, the opacity of the water precluded any views of spawning salmon.

The Taseko was still a respectable whitewater option to float, with many rapids in its 55 miles from Taseko Lake down to the confluence with the Chilko. Roads along the banks soon disappear making for more of a true "wilderness." The initial 20 miles of river down to my first camp had many Class II rapids. Downstream, I encountered several more gorge sections where the river churned Class III for miles with several Class IV rapids interspersed. In three separate spots approximately equivalently spaced down the wilderness stretch, each of these Class IV rapids was signaled by a horizon line on the river after a calmer stretch just above. The second one was the largest, and I stopped to side scout it for several minutes from the left bank. The water poured over



The father took a picture of me on the Chilko River just below the "Gap."

WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

The father asked if I wanted to fish for a while he took a break, so he handed me the dipnet and showed me how to catch salmon as they scurried up the eddy.

a five-foot falls into a center stopper that extended to the right bank, with other holes and huge crashing waves waiting to torque paddlers just downstream. The far left route was complicated by a just-submerged rock forming a pour-over, and the far right by downed trees. I figured this must be "Taseko Falls," the only named rapid on the Taseko that I had heard of before embarking on the trip. After lengthy contemplation, I decided on a route just left of center, hoping to avoid the huge center-right hole. Although I entered where planned, the powerful twisting wave got the better of me and I flipped. A swim on such a solo trip might lead to my boat getting away from me downstream, perhaps forcing me to spend a night out without camping gear. Fortunately, I quickly rolled up unscathed, and paddled through the remaining obstacles of the rapid. I found it to be just the right amount of whitewater excitement for the day.

I hadn't brought a fishing pole to catch salmon on this trip so didn't know if I would get to enjoy any salmon meals.



This all changed at a spot about 12 miles downstream of the Chilko confluence, where the river narrows to about 30 feet wide in a gap. A bridge spans the gap and a rapid is marked on the topo map there. Members of the Chilcotin Native American ("First Nation") tribe were mulling about on the bridge and just below on the banks

fishing. I boat-scouted the fast Class II-III currents from an eddy above and passed through surprisingly squirrely water that stopped, spun, and nearly flipped me. I pulled into an eddy by some of the fishers and they invited me to come up and chat.

A friendly Chilcotin family was fishing there with an Anglo friend, using dipnets in the traditional manner. In such fishing, the net is attached to an approximately two-foot diameter circle and held by a six-foot wooden pole, which allows the fisher to dip the net into the rushing upstream eddy waters along the steep bank. When the sockeye salmon swim close to the bank and surface in the eddy on their mad dash to get above the rapid, they unsuspectingly swim right into the net. It's easy to feel and see the two-foot-long salmon hitting the net, at which time they can be pulled up and plopped into a holding area from which they cannot flop out of. In most cases the fish are clobbered on the head, their blood drained and fillets exposed to dry. In this



I saw several bears along the banks of the rivers. They are common inhabitants in the wilderness.

Photo by Rocky Contos



I met a Chilcotin family and friend fishing for salmon at the "Gap" about 12 miles downstream of the Chilko confluence.

Photo by Rocky Contos

case the fish were simply set there to die, I suspected to be frozen soon for subsequent consumption.

The family had been there only a few hours and had already collected 30 salmon. They asked if I'd like to try. I gave it a shot. Although I wasn't as skilled as they were, I still landed three sockeye in 30 minutes (another three slipped past me). It does take strength to stand there and hold the net in the water, moving it downstream against the eddy current periodically, and with large fish, such as the spring salmon, it can be a challenging experience. With such massive fish and swift waters pulling on the net, most fishers secure themselves to the shore with a lariat tied into a bolt in the rock. After doing a few Eskimo rolls to entertain the kids, I bade them all farewell and continued on. I kept one of the smallest fish they had caught and an hour later, at my camp a few kilometers downstream, I filleted, cooked, and ate it as part of a savory meal! It was then that I began worrying about the bear threat.

Fortunately, bears did not disturb me the night I ate the salmon. I learned after my trip that only First Nation people are legally allowed to fish in this manner, and only

for self-sustaining purposes. Salmon were their staple food for millennia, and the runs determined whether the populace would thrive or starve. After numerous fights between the natives and the white man over the past 130 years, in the past decade the government has acknowledged the central role that river salmon fishing has played in native cultures and now permits First Nation people to continue in their traditions. Others must purchase a fishing license and use angling techniques to catch salmon, a more difficult prospect.

The next day, I continued downstream on the 10,000 cfs soon to be called the Chilcotin River. The rest of my journey was filled with memorable river experiences, including negotiating a major landslide that blocked the river, encountering more First Nation people catching and drying salmon on the Fraser at Bridge Canyon Rapids, and facing the ominous threat of paddling through Hell's Gate at 90,000 cfs. Tales of those experiences will be saved for other articles. For now, what you should know is that paddling those 330 miles is one of the best long whitewater adventure trips available in North America, and one of the best kept secrets too.



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WILDERNESS IMMERSION ON B.C.'S TU YA RIVER

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA SCHWAB

SOMETIME LATE IN May 2003 an email popped up on my computer: "Anybody interested in the Tuya?" Ray, a paddling friend, had been eyeing this river in northern B.C. for a few years and was looking for buddies for a trip. His plan was to paddle the river from its source at Tuya Lake to its end at the confluence with the Stikine, through more than one hundred kilometers of untouched wilderness. Ray had heard that the river is best at its highest volume, during spring run-off, but the run-off is short and could happen anytime from May to early July. Several phone calls later Ray found someone who had just driven across the river: it was still running brown, but was on its way down. Ray wanted to leave in one week.

I had done a few multi-day trips on whitewater rivers and loved them. I enjoyed traveling in untouched wild places, exploring new rivers and liked the rush of running rapids. But the rivers I had under my belt were popular trips with the difficult spots well known and handy river maps



available to locate them with. I was not too eager to paddle a remote unknown river in flood and (conveniently) couldn't drop work with just one week's notice. So we ended up paddling three weeks later at more moderate water levels.

Although I have been living in BC for ten years, and kayaking for much of this time, it was the first time I had heard of the Tuya. Dease Lake, the starting point of our trip, is about 1100 kilometers north of Vancouver

(as the crow flies), and is not even on the BCAA road map. Since there are only two major roads in all of northern BC, the Alaska Highway and the Steward Cassiar Highway, the cartographers must have thought that nobody would get lost there, and so put only the southern two thirds of BC on the map.

Vancouver, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Hope, Lytton, 70 Mile House, (and 90, 100, 150 Mile House – the names come from the Gold Rush era), Williams Lake, Quesnel, Prince George. Hours and towns flew by and melted into a blur. We turned westward: Burns Lake, Houston, Smithers. After Hazelton we followed the Cassiar Highway north again and towns were increasingly rare, replaced by slender trees and views of snow-covered mountains. Nineteen hours after leaving Vancouver we stopped at the Stikine for a few hours sleep. It was almost 11 o'clock and still light. Despite the long drive, sleep didn't come easy. All rivers and creeks we had crossed were gushing with brown floodwater. The fourth bear we saw was a grizzly and didn't take much notice of our approaching car. High ridges and peaks were covered with fresh snow. The next day we would be dropped off in

Portage Rapid in the first canyon.



Opposite: Entrance of Portage Canyon.

an alpine lake to paddle down a river we knew little about. Before us were more than one hundred kilometers of wild country, seldom traveled and without human inhabitants. If all went according to our plans, it would take six days to get back to civilization. We would not carry any means of communication with the outside world. We would be on our own. Even in case of an emergency, the river would be the fastest way to help. All this didn't seem to trouble Peter, my partner of many years. He was sound asleep.

Next morning we drove across the continental divide that splits the waters and sends them either north to Dease Lake and into the Arctic Ocean or west to the Stikine and the Pacific. The gentle rise was not obvious to our eyes but it determined the fate of every snowflake and raindrop in the area. Soon we arrived at Dease Lake and the town on its shore. The lake was magnificent, but the town seemed asleep. In the only souvenir store on the highway I picked *The Trail to the Interior* by Patterson as reading material for the river, a book about earlier travelers in the area. During the Gold Rush, Dease Lake must have been much busier. Most modern travelers choose the Alaska Highway as route to the north for their RVs.

Just when we were checking out the floatplane at the BC Yukon Air dock, Ray and Lloyd drove up in their VW van and our 'Tuya Team' was complete. The plane, a Beaver, could only carry two kayakers, and Lloyd and Ray got the first flight up to Tuya Lake. After an hour and a half, it was our turn. This was my first flight in a bush plane and its thin skin was not very confidence inspiring. Any old car is sturdier! But soon I got used to the bumps and jumps in the air, and enjoyed the bird's eye view of the world below. We climbed up a side valley, flying below snow-covered peaks. The weather turned and snowflakes splattered

Drying by the fire.

on the windshield. We landed on Tuya Lake, surrounded by volcanic peaks and tundra meadows. Bruce, our not very talkative pilot, explained how to get through the labyrinth of lakes, and then took off, buzzing low over our heads.

I found the silence after the plane was gone almost breathtaking. It felt as if the last link to civilization had left with the plane. I savored the peace of the lake. Once on the river there would be continuous white noise, the murmur of the moving water and the roaring of rapids. We would always feel its presence just like that of a big muscular animal, even when calm and asleep its body rising with each breath. The peace ended faster than expected. The wind drove hail and rain in our faces as we paddled across an endless chain of lakes. The gusts seemed stronger on each lake, and the boats more loaded down. When the wind calmed, we saw swans, terns, loons, snowy owls, uncountable kinds of ducks, and moose or caribou on the distant bank. Finally we reached the outlet and were released into the river.

River paddling is a pleasant and effortless mode of self-propelled travel: the river does most of the work. It carries the load the hiker has to haul; it moves you towards your destination whereas an ocean kayaker

has to struggle against wind and currents; and it even throws in a few rocks and rapids for fun.

We made our first camp at an oxbow in the river, sheltered by a cliff. There were no trees, just bushes, willow and birch, flowers and grass, and on the horizon odd shaped table mountains—the Tuyas—formed when volcanoes erupted underneath glacial ice eons ago. It was almost summer solstice and the light seemed to last all night. It was so cold that I put on every piece of clothing I had packed. In the morning there was ice in the cooking pots. But soon the sun was high and warmed us up before breakfast was ready.

The river meandered calmly through treeless hills and meadows. Ray fretted about having missed the flood stage. The banks grew gradually higher and patches of trees appeared. A pair of bald eagles gave us a lunchtime concert. We could hear the wings of the big birds as they landed on a tree nearby and listened to their chirping conversation. Later we saw a moose climbing up the steep bank. After scrutinizing several gravel bars, we found the perfect campsite: bushes for drying racks, firewood and the elusive pea gravel. Ray explained the concept: if the pebbles are too large they make for a bumpy surface



WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

to sleep on, too small and they will stick to everything like sand. Pea gravel is just the right size. Moose and bear prints were all over the camp.

We knew that we would eventually reach several Class III rapids, but we were not sure how our progress related to the description

Each time the river disappeared around a rock wall or into a small canyon, we craned our necks for a glimpse of what came below. The puzzle was solved as we approached the first of the rapids, named 'The Gate,' unmistakably a Class III drop. One after another we picked our line, avoided a few

bushes on the left. Later we heard branches break and fall from a cottonwood tree. A black bear was high in the tree, bending twigs and feeding on the young shoots. In nearby trees we discovered two other, smaller bears, one brown and one black, maybe the yearling cubs of the adult. The

RIVER PADDLING IS A PLEASANT AND EFFORTLESS MODE OF SELF-PROPELLED TRAVEL: THE RIVER DOES MOST OF THE WORK. IT CARRIES THE LOAD; IT MOVES YOU TOWARDS YOUR DESTINATION; AND IT EVEN THROWS IN A FEW ROCKS AND RAPIDS FOR FUN.

we had. The rapids may not even exist at lower water levels. Or had we run them already? The uncertainty added to the feeling of remoteness. On prior multi-day trips in Arizona and Idaho we had detailed river maps with all the rapids marked by grade and mile. On the Babine near Smithers, we had talked to people who paddled the river regularly. All the information we had for the Tuya was a one-page description from someone who had run the river ten years ago. The topo map showed several spots where the elevation lines were close together, indicating the potential for rapids, but there was no indication of how difficult the drops were. The aerial photographs I studied were even less informative, as cliff shadows and reflection of the glistening sun hid the rapids.

holes, rose up big waves and dropped into the troughs. The water splashing in our faces released the tension. We were on whitewater after all.

I was becoming disappointed that we had seen big animals only in the distance. Suddenly there was loud thumping and splashing from the right shore. A moose ran into the shallow river, heading for our friends about thirty meters ahead of us. The animal was long-legged and the water shallow; it looked as if a kayaker could float easily under its belly. Our friends paddled hard for the left shore until they realized that the moose was headed the same way. It was a cow, waiting mid stream for her two small calves to lead them to the open ground on the left. In unison we changed course to the right, and cow and calves reached safety and disappeared in the

next the morning, I watched a moose and calf walking downriver; they disappeared, unaware of our presence.

Day four on the river. Igneous rock walls closed in as we entered a canyon. The water squeezed between red cliffs. We ran several drops with boiling eddy lines, whirlpools and big pour-overs. Soon there would be no way up the steep canyon walls. We stopped to scout where we saw a route up the canyon wall. After all the flat water, we hoped it would be possible to run the canyon, although it had been described as Class V. But what we saw made the decision easy. Portage. An S-bend section in the canyon had two serious and complex rapids. The first one was created by a huge boulder that blocked two thirds of the river. Water boiled around it creating big holes on either side. Although we only got a glimpse of the second drop, it looked even more forbidding. It started with a vertical falls of maybe 3 or 4 meters, followed by several pour-overs that appeared to be river-wide. The canyon walls rose directly from the river so we could not portage on shore. We struggled to drag the loaded boats over a 100-meter high ridge through undergrowth and over fallen trees. On the way down gravity helped, sliding the boat over birch and alder. But there were other obstacles: as if to guard the river, beavers had left pointy foot-long sticks ready to impale the careless. It rained on and off all day.

As I was floating close to shore, a deep growl emerged from the bushes. Automatically,

Fun rapids!





The scenic canyon.

exists except you and the moving water. All senses are focused for quick decisions and muscles respond immediately. Everything unimportant falls away. But now I went straight into a rapid without knowing what was ahead. I came over a wave, braced in a hole and narrowly missed a pour-over. But then things kept coming even faster. I dropped into the next hole, it stopped and flipped me and I was upside down. Thankfully the hole was not too sticky and I soon floated out of it and rolled up quickly.

The cliffs were now sandstone and conglomerate and we saw an inserted coal seam. The BC Ministry of Energy and Mines reported on their web site "A potential of surface mineable coal to a depth of 500 metres" on the Tuya, and for a moment I could see bulldozers tearing through soft beds of moss, mining trucks crawling on dusty roads, leaving behind a hollowed-out moonscape. But for now the Tuya is still flowing freely through a land unchanged by humans. The last night on the river we sat by the campfire for a long time. The light faded slowly and stars emerged. I felt delighted being able to travel through this unspoiled wild country, thinking that it was possible that no human had ever stood on this beach before and that all traces of our presence would be gone soon too.

The sixth day the rapids eased. Through a gate of towering cliffs we entered the second canyon. Altering layers of volcanic

ashes and lava flows formed the tall walls. Through this canyon the river kept its breadth and ran calmly. Only at the exit were there a couple of holes and waves in an s-bend, but we managed them without problems. After the canyon we took turns surfing on a big glassy wave. When we floated on a bear ran towards us to stop only at the edge of the bank, stood up and watched us closely. The bold approach of the predator made me feel rather uneasy, and somewhat like prey. Two bear cubs stared at us from up in a tree, the reason for their mother's protective behavior.

In the afternoon we reached the take-out at the only bridge across the Tuya. Boats were unpacked and loaded. In six days, under our own power, we had covered a distance that can be traced on a large-scale map. We connected two dots and now have in us the memories of what we found between: late sunsets, volcanic peaks, roaring rapids, close encounters with moose and bears. From a viewpoint on the road to Telegraph Creek we saw the Stikine emerging from its canyon. The river was high with spring melt and formed enormous whirlpools and boils below us. On the north side of the thin wedge of land the Tahltan ran through high cliffs until its green and clear water mixed with the brown turbulent flow of the Stikine.

It looked like another interesting river trip!

I went into high paddling gear to get to the middle of the river. A bear? Over my shoulder I noticed a moose cow. She was calling her calf with a voice not unlike your regular farm cow, but about two octaves deeper.

Again we made camp on a gravel beach. Thick blankets of moss were draped over the cut banks. When I walked into the forest, I sank ankle deep into the soft vegetation. At night sitting around the fire, we were puzzled by splashes in the water. Everybody denied throwing rocks, which left all suspicious that the others played a trick. Later we discovered a beaver slapping his tail on the water, causing all the racket.

It was our fifth day on the Tuya. The river was still restless from the wild ride through the canyon. Forgotten was the calm alpine stream we floated only two days before. We ran long, boulder-studded rapids that became increasingly more difficult. This pattern must have escaped me. When everyone else pulled to shore to stop and scout, I was still in the middle of the river, heading into the next rapid. I like running rapids. Once you choose your line and commit, there is no stopping and nothing

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WILDERNESS WHITEWATER

CINCO DE MAYO WEST BRANCH OF THE PEABODY MISSION

BY JAKE RISCH

ON MAY 5TH 2010 Adam Herzog, Nate Harvey and I completed a one-day descent of the West Branch of the Peabody River in the Great Gulf Wilderness on Mount Washington, NH.

The source of the Peabody River is Spaulding Lake at the Bottom of the Great Gulf, a large glacial cirque on the north-west flank of Mt Washington. When spring snowmelt renders the Peabody River runnable, it presents New England paddlers with a world-class whitewater challenge. From the put-in at the confluence of Chandler Brook, the West Branch of the Peabody drops 1430 feet to the confluence with the East Branch 4.4 miles downstream.

If the gradient isn't enough, the river is also remote. It is located in the middle of the 5000 acre Great Gulf Wilderness. Access to the put-in is by hiking up the Great Gulf Trail 4.4 miles from the take-out or down the Chandler Brook Trail .9 miles and 1325 feet from the Mount Washington Auto Road. Once committed to the hike in, the only way out is the trail along the river to the take-out.

Access to the river is limited. Early in the spring when the river is most likely to have good water the Mount Washington Auto Road is closed and the Great Gulf Trail is buried under deep snow. Consequently, there are only a few days each year when whitewater paddlers have the opportunity to run this river.

The river was first run in 1997 by Scott Murray, Tom Deigel, and John Gurrier. It has only been run a handful of times since. Most of those who go in come out with tales of portages, broken and lost gear,

epic carnage and forced overnights. It is the test piece for hard charging creekers in the North East and rates among the hardest, most challenging runs in the country.

As Mount Washington Valley locals, Nate and I have had the West Branch on our radar for a while. When Adam moved to the Northeast, the Peabody was on the top of his list as well. Nate runs the paddling program at the Great Glen Trails Outdoor Center in Pinkham Notch, NH and has a daily visual of the Peabody River. On Monday the 3rd of May 2010 he called to let me know that the Peabody was cranking and to see if I wanted to run the last mile. After running the last (easiest, 220 fpm) mile we decided that the level was high but that it probably would be perfect for an attempt at the entire mission in a couple of days. We immediately started formulating plans and trying to round up a third paddler. Tuesday we ran the Upper Ellis with Adam and talked him into joining us. We then made another scouting lap on the last mile of the Peabody to check the level.

We all linked up at the take-out at 7:00 am on Cinco de Mayo, changed into our paddling gear and loaded into Nate's car for the ride up the Mount Washington Auto Road. The Great Glen Trails Outdoor Center is collocated with the Auto Road so Nate was

able to convince one of his co workers to drop us off at the Chandler Brook Trailhead four miles up the road. When we stepped out of the car at 8:00 am we were blasted by the 40 mph winds raging off the summit of Mount Washington. We hurriedly packed up our boats, took a picture and started the long slog 1300 feet down the trail to the river, over large granite boulders and slabs, through snow and dense spruce thickets, post-holing for the better part of 2.5 hours.

At the put-in we finally got a look at the river and were able to judge the water level in the appropriate context. With relief we realized that the river was low but runnable, the perfect level for our first time down. Adam would remark at the take-out, "Another two inches of water would have been nice; another six inches would have been terrifying."

Shortly after 10:30 am, we put on and started what would become an endless routine of eddy hopping, blasting through slots, scouting, and portaging. We would hop from eddy to eddy until we could no longer see downstream. Then one team member would get out, perform a quick scout, make the paddle or portage decision, and relay the beta to the team.



Nate Harvey boofs into yet another boulder slot midway down the run.

Photo by Jake Risch



The West Branch of the Peabody drains the 5000 Acre Great Gulf Wilderness on the north west flank of Mount Washington in New Hampshire.

Photo by Adam Herzog

A quarter mile or so into the run we all got out to scout a particularly trashy rapid. All of the water converged into a five- to six-foot wide channel that dropped over four or five boulder shelves before ending in a tight slot. In this flume of whitewater were numerous shallow rocks waiting to knock a boat off line and several nasty pin spots. Adam ran first and had a clean run. Nate paddled second and was pushed slightly left off of one river center boof over a boulder. I was third to go and set up further right for the center boulder. I ended up too far right and my bow stuffed into a tight slot between the boulder in the center and the boulders on shore. As my boat slowly started to inch into the slot I realized that there wasn't enough room for my boat and me. I decided it would be best to get out of the boat while I still could. I popped the skirt, grabbed my rope and scrambled out of the boat onto shore. I was able to clip one of the rescue points before the boat slid down into the slot. Adam ferried over and the two of us were able to muscle the boat out.

After that scare and 45 minutes spent scouting and extracting the boat we decided to be a bit more conservative with our decisions to run rapids. Numerous rock

slots, portages and rapids followed until we reached another long rapid. This rapid had three big moves, two clean boofs finishing in a boulder choked slot. Nate decided he had the line and ran first. He styled the entry drops but ended up vertically pinned in the final slot. Adam was quick to the rescue getting to Nate with a sling and getting him out of his pinned boat. However, they could not pull the boat out from the left bank. I swam across in the small pool at the bottom of the rapid. Again the two of us were able to extract the boat from the pin without mechanical aid. Adam and I decided to portage.

While we were portaging around the rapid I noticed a campground on the river right bank that I recognized from a scouting trip a few years ago. This camp signaled we were roughly one third of the way down the river. It was roughly 1:30 and we were making good time.

More steep, technical whitewater led us to the footbridge where the Great Gulf Trail crosses the river. From hiking the trail we figured that this was a little more than halfway down the run. Looking at the map, after the run, we realized that it was closer to a third of the way. We crossed under the bridge at around 3 pm. Things were looking

good for making it out in a day. Around any bend we expected to run into the spot that Nate and I had put in on our scouting trips the two days prior.

After the bridge things started to slow down; boulder choked rapids led into more boulder choked rapids. Some were run, lots were walked. At one point Adam got out to scout and at first signaled to walk, then changed his mind and gave the signal for us to scout. Another clean entrance led to three exit slots all of which were potential pins. Adam chose one to test. After running the entrance cleanly he hit his chosen slot and promptly pinned. After a bit of wiggling and weight shifting he freed himself from the pin and ran the exit rapid. I chose a different slot and made it though. Adam went to set safety for Nate while I continued on to scout the next set.

A section of Class IV eddy hopping led us into another portage and more manky rapids. The old bridge abutments that marked the put-in for the lower stretch of the run were nowhere in sight. At the next horizon I got out to scout and after miles on miles of boulder piles there was a three-tiered bedrock drop. The hole in the second drop, the crux, looked juicy as I approached from above. Excitement turned to disappointment back to excitement as we inspected a bit closer. All three of us ran what turned out to be the best single rapid of the day. It was getting close to 5:00 pm by this point and we hadn't found the landmark for the bottom section of the run.

A few more bends and we finally found the bridge abutments that told us we were home free. We bombed down the last mile and a half of the run and made it back to the trailhead parking lot at 6:00 pm on the dot, 11 hours after we left that morning. Our Cinco de Mayo West Branch of the Peabody Mission was complete.

WHITEWATER ACCIDENTS: JANUARY – JUNE 2010

BY CHARLIE WALBRIDGE

DURING THE FIRST six months of 2010, American Whitewater received reports of 39 deaths in 36 whitewater accidents. While this year's 11 canoeing and 14 kayaking fatalities are more than usual, only five of the kayaking accidents involved members of the mainstream U.S. whitewater community. Increasingly, the kayakers getting in trouble are newcomers in recreational boats. Failure to wear a PFD was the cause of death in 10 cases; low head dams played a role in eight. Both types of accident are connected with inexperience. The rafting fatality count, by contrast, was lower than normal. There were five commercial and eight private rafting deaths, most of them linked to high water in the East and West. Surprisingly, guide trainees and other company employees lost their lives in three of these incidents. Almost half (19) of these accidents involved men over the age of 40. This is a change from a 10 years ago when most victims were likely to be much younger.

Kayaking Fatalities

The New England whitewater community was shocked by the death of Jimmy O'Brien on Class IV-V Hubbard Brook in western Massachusetts. Mr. O'Brien, 47, was one of the strongest paddlers in New England and a friend and mentor to many. It happened on March 16th; Hubbard Brook was flowing at a medium level. The accident occurred when Mr. O'Brien and two of his peers made their second run of the day. This was a very strong group that knew this small, fast moving creek quite well. They all knew about the bad hole on river left below Michaud Falls, a powerful reversal that's easy to miss, but hard to get out of. No one is quite sure how Mr. O'Brien, who was in the lead, ended up here. He surfed the hole for a short time before he bailed

out, only to be recirculated in the icy water. He was in serious trouble.

When his friends arrived they tried to paddle into the hole and pull him out, a difficult and courageous effort. One paddler flipped, rolled, and was somehow pushed out of the hole. By the time the second paddler got to Mr. O'Brien he was exhausted. His face was blue and he was too weak to hold on to the man's bow. After Mr. O'Brien lost consciousness he went limp and washed out of the hole. One of his friends bailed out and grabbed him while the second pushed the two men ashore. They performed CPR for over 30 minutes before going for help.

Two accidents in the Mid-Atlantic states show how sudden health emergencies can be fatal to older whitewater paddlers. On April 1st George Lockey, 62, collapsed while competing in the Red Moshannon Whitewater Race north of State College, PA. After a thrown rope drew no response, veteran competitor Dave Guss jumped into his canoe to chase Mr. Lockey down. He was able to push him into the hands of a bystander who waded out to grab him. Together they carried him ashore where a woman who identified herself as a nurse began CPR. EMTs present at the race arrived moments later with full life support gear. Mr. Lockey was later life-flighted to a trauma center where doctors discovered that he'd been stricken by a massive fatal stroke. He did not survive.

Six weeks later, on May 15th, Tom Bonafini collapsed while running Pennsylvania's Stonycreek Gorge during the annual Rendezvous. According to friends, Mr. Bonafini, 59, flipped below "Third Ugly Sister" and did not roll or bail out. When nearby paddlers pulled his head above the water he was unconscious and gasping for air. On shore a paddling doctor began CPR; others called 911 via cell phone. The site was inaccessible, so the group commandeered a raft and took Mr. Bonafini downstream. First responders broke down two gates to get their four-wheel drive vehicle down to the river. Their efforts were in vain. Doctors

determined that the cause of his death was a heart attack.

California had late snow and a delayed melt this year, and on June 14th many of its rivers were unusually high. A group was running the Middle Fork of the Cosumnes River when Dr. Leon Westcombe, a visiting Australian kayaker, flipped in a steep drop. Dr. Westcombe, 29, rolled back upright, but the current pushed him into the next rapid and he was never seen alive again. It's not clear exactly what happened. Rescuers spotted his kayak under several feet of water and thought he might be trapped inside. After the water level dropped they recovered the kayak, but he wasn't there. Three weeks later a fisherman spotted his body floating in the river just below where the kayak had been pinned.

A father and son cross country road trip turned tragic on June 14th when Timothy "Bo" James, 53, drowned on California's Class IV+ Brush Creek. The pair had kayaked rivers in Colorado and New Mexico before arriving in the Southern Sierras. According to an account posted on Boatertalk by his son, Logan, the two men were having a great day on this classic creek. At "Drop Zero" Logan ran first, then eddied out below Triple Drop. When his father's paddle floated past him, Logan got ashore and moved quickly upstream. From atop a low cliff he saw his father recirculating in a strong eddy. He scrambled down the slope and threw him a rope. When there was no response Logan waded out into the eddy and grabbed his father. Finding him unconscious, Logan pulled him ashore and performed CPR until he was exhausted. Footage from his helmet cam shows that the rescue took only 12 minutes.

In a shocking and perverse incident, Chad Stoner, 36, drowned on a guided paddling trip down the Class III River Anzu in Ecuador on January 14th. According to the outfitter's website, Stoner washed up against a large rock, flipped, rolled, flipped again, then bailed out. When his boat washed around the rock Mr. Stoner did not reappear, and guides moved in quickly. When they freed Mr. Stoner 15 minutes later they found that

his sprayskirt grab loop had hooked on a forked stick. Ken Kastorff, the company owner, recommends cutting grab loops open at the end to minimize the risk.

Strainers are always dangerous and this past spring they were responsible for the deaths of three inexperienced kayakers. Although none of the accidents occurred on “real whitewater,” fast-flowing current has surprising power. On March 20th Edward Lynde, 53, was rounding a bend on the Green River in western Massachusetts when he spotted a log jam blocking the flow. Turning to warn his daughter, he flipped and was last seen just above the blockage. There was an eerily similar event on June 22nd when Adam Stapleton, 32, flipped after turning to warn his party about a debris pile on Illinois’s Salt Creek below Polecat Bridge. His kayak was pinned so securely that rescue squads took hours to free it. Finally, on May 5th, Robert Archer disappeared after hitting a downed tree during a high water run on Kentucky’s Green River. His partner also hit the strainer, but was able to work free and get help.

On April 6th and 7th, after a period of unusually heavy rain, Great Britain experienced an unusual cluster of 4 kayaking deaths. Simon Fletcher, 19, was pinned underwater in his kayak at the famed Grandtully racecourse on Scotland’s River Tay. This is a straightforward Class III rapid; news videos show that water levels were high but not flooding. Rescuers struggled for almost 7 hours to free the pinned kayak. On Ireland’s River Clodagh Philip Kelly, 31, and Connie Smith, 34, were training for a downriver race in a K-2 when they were caught in the backwash of a low-head dam and drowned. Many dams in Great Britain are routinely run at low flows, but with high water a dangerous reversal had formed. Lastly, Emily Parker, 20, flipped, bailed out, and disappeared while paddling with friends on the River Coe near Glencoe, Scotland. STV News video showed a fast, pushy Class IV creek running through the treeless moors. Efforts to help her were in vain. They located her boat the following day washed up on an island. A few days later her body was found nearby.

Canoeing Fatalities

South Dakota’s Belle Fourche River was the scene of the worst river accident I’ve encountered in years. On June 27th three people were killed when their canoe was drawn into a narrow slot in a diversion dam. The canoe fell about 36 feet into a terrible hole and was torn to pieces. Three people: Jeremy Rogers, 38 Sierra Rogers, 11, and Andrew Korth, 26, had their PFDs torn off and did not survive. The lone survivor, 8 year-old Isabella Rogers, walked two hours to U.S. Highway 212 and flagged down a passing motorist. This section of river was formally closed by the county sheriff following this tragedy.

Three other canoeing deaths occurred after paddlers found themselves in very cold water unexpectedly. On February 26th a canoe carrying two men and a woman capsized on the Exeter River in Raymond, NH after hitting an ice shelf. Cassandra Ray, 21, washed under the ice and drowned. On March 7th an unidentified man perished on the Willamette River near Springfield, Oregon after the canoe he and his partner were paddling flipped in an easy rapid. There were life jackets on board but neither man was wearing one. Finally, on March 21st, Robert Baldwin, 58, died after his canoe tipped over in Lambertville Rapid on Pennsylvania’s Delaware River. This is a very long Class II+ rapid on a very wide river! In each case the victim’s partners were able to swim to safety. These tragedies make a strong case for having other paddlers along to provide backup in the case of emergencies.

Rafting Fatalities

Flush drowning occurs when a paddler who is wearing a PFD drowns during a long swim through violent rapids. The Dowd Chutes of Colorado’s Eagle River has been the scene of many such accidents. On June 6th William Spang, 58, died after his raft flipped. Additional safety boats might have made a difference in this case, but it’s not a sure thing. On June 23rd Patrick Bush, 66, suffered a similar fate after he was thrown from his raft on a commercial trip. A safety boater got to him moments afterwards, but

found him unresponsive. This leaves us to wonder if underlying health issues were to blame. In a similar event on June 12th a 47 year-old man died after falling out of his raft on the Colorado River near Moab. His partner was able to swim ashore and get help.

On June 4th heavy rains caused Idaho’s Middle Fork of the Salmon River to rise over two feet in a single day. A raft carrying 59 year-old Michael Fitzpatrick capsized in a big wave. His party used throw bags to recover the two other people in his raft but Mr. Fitzpatrick was unresponsive. Eventually they were able to grab hold of him, bring him ashore, and attempt CPR.

Although guided rafting fatalities are down this year, three of the five outfitter deaths occurred during guide training. The first took place on West Virginia’s Cheat River, which was running high (five feet) and cold on March 22nd. Allan Stewart, a well-liked diver and ground crewman, had decided to make the trip. Pitched out of his raft in Big Nasty rapid, Mr. Stewart, 53, was picked up quickly by a safety kayaker but soon lost strength and let go. The likely cause of his death was a heart attack. On May 30th two guide trainees in Colorado were killed after separate encounters with downed trees. Nikki Innes, a long time company office worker, died on the Arkansas River after she got snagged by a tree branch during a swim drill. Robert Reiter, 20, was killed in the Second Box Canyon of the Piedra River after his raft pinned on a downed tree. In both cases aggressive rescue efforts were unsuccessful.

Later, on June 21st rafting guest Grady L. Singletary took a beating after his raft flipped in Powerhouse Rapid on California’s Kaweah River. Mr. Singletary, 47, was wearing a PFD and wetsuit when he washed on downstream through Cyanotic Rapid. Local paddler Paul Martzen says that the river is steep, shallow and rocky and notes that both rapids have a reputation for beating up swimmers. The coroner ruled that blunt force trauma was the cause of Mr. Singletary’s death.

SAFETY

Low-Head Dams – A Nationwide Problem

Although the dangers of low head dams have been widely publicized, many recreational paddlers are not getting the message. Since these modest impoundments are found all over the country they pose a national safety problem. In Neosho, Missouri two teens who were canoeing the river on March 22nd were trying to recover a dropped paddle and got too close to a dam on Shoal Creek. They were swept over the drop and Wesley Wood, 17, was killed. In Tulsa, Oklahoma Derek Richardson, 31, died on May 5th after kayaking over the Zink Lake Dam on the Arkansas River. He was not wearing a PFD and was boating alone when the accident occurred. On June 19th Fred DiGenova died after running a dam on the Eel River near Roann, Indiana. Fortunately four other paddlers in his group safely portaged their kayaks.

Virginia experienced two low-head dam fatalities this year. The first occurred on April 4th at the Riverton Dam on the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. Mark Grand, 51, was caught in the reversal after he took a short recreational kayak over the five-foot high drop. The dam, which has been involved in a number of other accidents, is scheduled for removal this fall. On April 12 our attention turned to a dam on the Dan River near Danville, VA. Kolton Brin Karnes, 5, was fishing this big, wide river with his father when their john boat started to drift too close to the lip of the dam. Efforts to start their outboard motor were in vain; the boat drifted over the three-foot drop, filled with water, and capsized. The force of the current tore the boy's life vest off and his body wasn't found for several days.

When Life Jackets Are Not Worn . . .

Experienced paddlers know that life jackets are essential for survival when swimming whitewater. But today, almost forty years after the National Safe Boating Act of

1971, this message is not connecting with many casual paddlers. Allen Benjamin, 65, disappeared during a solo outing on the fast flowing Connecticut River near Hanover, NH on March 25th. The absence of a PFD made self-rescue in the fast flowing icy water almost impossible. On June 12th a 40 year-old canoeist on North Dakota's Kettle River disappeared after his boat capsized. Later, on June 24th Michael Blankartz, 28, slipped away after his canoe flipped in Class II rapids on Washington's Spokane River. Life vests could have saved all three of these paddlers.

On April 24th two men attempted to raft through the sheer-walled Zion Narrows on the North Fork of the Virgin River (UT). Although this is a committing Class IV run in a sheer walled gorge, the men did not carry life vests or cold water gear. Predictably, neither one survived. On June 9th James Dewhurst, 55, lost his life on a guided fishing trip on Montana's Rock Creek. He was wearing waders, but no PFD, so when his raft flipped he never had a chance. Finally, on June 25th, Milton Crosby and Lon Mills died after their raft turned over in the Arkansas River below Salida. The men, both in their 70s, were not wearing PFDs. Their wives, who were wearing life vests, survived.

Near Misses

A late afternoon paddle on March 16th turned into a wild ride on a huge, high

water river. Scott Butts is a 46 year old veteran kayaker who often paddles solo on the Potomac River near Harper's Ferry. That day the Potomac was running at 13.8 feet at Point of Rocks, MD. This translates into 68,000 cfs, and the Shenandoah was kicking in 14,000 cfs more! Air and water temperatures were both around 50 degrees at 6:45 pm when Mr. Butts capsized after breaking his paddle just upstream of the US 340 bridge. He bailed out and washed down the Potomac for miles. Although the rapids wash out at that level, water is being pulled relentlessly into the center of the river by the swift current. It was nearly impossible to swim to shore!

This lengthy swim was recorded by Mr. Butts's helmet cam and posted at vimeo.com/10290133. Eventually he was able to grab the top of a submerged tree close to the Maryland shore. A Sandy Hook resident heard him calling for help and blowing his whistle around 7:30 pm. Rescue Squads responded, but they were unwilling to launch a boat into the fast current. Two State Police helicopters found him using night vision gear and pulled him out of the water around 8:00 pm.

Waterfalls are run pretty often nowadays, but no matter how good a paddler you are there's always risk of back injuries. On December 4th of last year, Rush Sturges, a well known professional kayaker, compressed his L-2 vertebrae after his



A different high water day on the Potomac (MD).

Photo by Thomas O'Keefe

approach to Argentina's 80 foot Bonita Falls was thrown off by a protruding rock flake. For a description of the run and the evacuation that followed, go to <http://theadrenalinerush.blogspot.com/2009/12/breaking-my-back-on-bonita-falls.html>. Closer to home, an unidentified Ohio woman cracked a vertebrae running 12-foot Hooker Falls on the Little River in North Carolina's Dupont Forest State Park. She was in a back brace and walking about very carefully the next day.

Nantahala Outdoor Center kayak instructor Shane Day was safety boating for a clinic

a missing rafting guest on Clear Creek who washed past the take-out into Class V rapids. There was no cooperation and a whole lot of screaming at the scene by both groups. When the dust settled the local Sheriff's department, in a controversial action, arrested two of the guides. I plan to write about this incident and the ongoing challenge of EMS/paddler interactions in the very near future.

The information in this article was found primarily in newspaper articles sent in by individual correspondents or posted in chat rooms like Boatertalk, Mountainbuzz, or

BECAUSE MOST OF US WILL NEVER ENCOUNTER A FATAL ACCIDENT IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE FACTS FROM THESE TRAGEDIES SO WE CAN ALL LEARN FROM THEM. BY STUDYING ACCIDENTS WE LEARN TO AVOID TROUBLE AND REACT EFFECTIVELY TO EMERGENCIES.

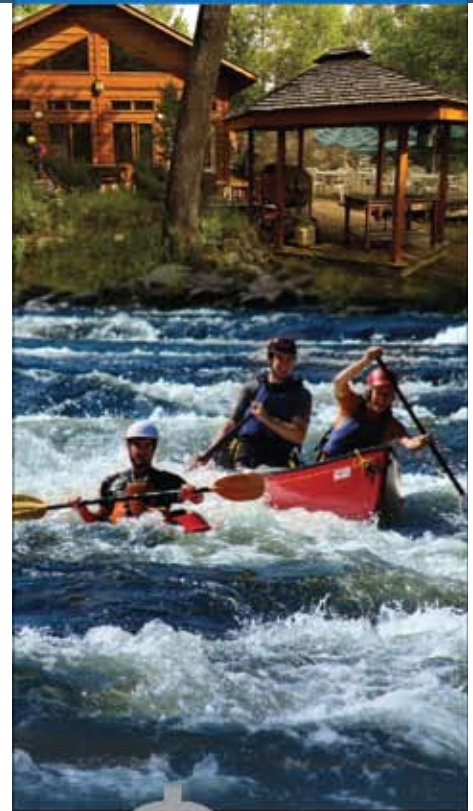
on North Carolina's Cheoah River on May 22nd when a serious emergency developed. After running "Python" the left-hand drop below Bear Creek Falls, he looked upstream to see a man on a rock pull another unconscious rafter out of the river. Mr. Day paddled quickly to the rock, climbed out of his boat, and helped the other man begin CPR. His report, posted in the AW Accident Database, describes the successful resuscitation in some detail. The man, whose name was Dave, had fallen out of his raft and was caught in a hole until he passed out. He revived slowly, drifting in and out of consciousness. Other NOC guides brought a small raft out to the rock, and Dave was taken ashore to a waiting ambulance. He apparently made a full recovery.

This year, as always, there are many accounts of paddlers being rescued by professional first responders. Most of these "rescues" offer the kinds of help that skilled whitewater paddlers do for one another every day. For inexperienced paddlers, it can make a difference between life and death. There was also a widely reported clash between professional guides and members of a Colorado swiftwater rescue team. Both groups were trying to locate

Boof.com. Other sources included Yahoo's SwiftH2O chat room and regular emailed incident reports from the U.S. Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety. Several eyewitnesses to the death of experienced kayakers wrote comprehensive reports. These help set the record straight and quash the malicious rumors and gossip that often follow a river tragedy.

American Whitewater needs your help in collecting these accounts, which create the foundation of our safety program. Because most of us will never encounter a fatal accident it's important to share facts from these tragedies so we can all learn from them. By studying accidents we learn to avoid trouble and react effectively to emergencies. Our techniques, procedures, and gear may be modified based on what happens in the field. Please help us out! To report a whitewater accident, near miss, or serious injury, go to the Safety page on the American Whitewater site, click "report an accident", and enter your information. You can also forward newspaper articles, chat room posts, and first person accounts to the safety editor at ccwalbridge@cs.com.

Thanks!



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NEWS AND NOTES

FEATHER RIVER FESTIVAL AND NORTH FEATHER RELEASES

THE 20TH ANNUAL Feather River Festival (CA) will be held September 24, 25, and 26, 2010. The Festival will coincide with the Rock Creek/Tobin scheduled releases on Saturday and Sunday, September 25 and 26, 2010. The fund-raiser event for American Whitewater is hosted by local paddling club, the Chico Paddleheads. The benefit event will be held at "Indian Jim School" campground located

two miles upstream from the small town of Tobin and one mile upstream from Tobin Vista. Free camping and ample parking are available.

FRIDAY

New this year! Chico Paddleheads will host a river clean-up on Friday, September 24 in conjunction with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Our fun river clean-up will be in the style of a "trash bingo" game with prizes for different items of garbage collected. This is a great event for the whole family!

New this year! Also on Friday, the Chico Paddleheads will host a film festival at the Indian Jim School to benefit

American Whitewater. The offerings will include paddling, environmental, and educational films.

SATURDAY

Saturday's events will include a free Class II slalom course appropriate for all skill levels, all ages and for kayaks, whitewater canoes, IKs, and stand-up paddleboards.

New this year! There will be a stand-up paddleboard race on a short section of the Class II slalom course.

The slalom race will be located at the Indian Jim School campground and will be held from noon to 3:00 pm. There will also be a free Class V downriver race on the Tobin stretch beginning at Tobin Vista sometime on Saturday afternoon. For both races, inquire at the campground benefit headquarters for information and signup.

There will be a great benefit river party Saturday night featuring live music with the Taylor Robertson Blues Band. The food, music and beverages will begin at 6:00 pm. Raffle prizes, race prizes and silent auction items will be given at the party Saturday night. Details about raffles, prizes, and race results will be available at the event headquarters.

THE RELEASES:

The Rock Creek/Tobin releases will occur beginning Saturday morning through noon on Sunday. The Rock Creek reach is a Class III run appropriate for rafts, IKs, and kayaks and the Indian Jim campground is the perfect take-out. Below the campground is the Class V Tobin reach followed by the Class IV "Lowbin" reach. There will also be flatwater and Class I/II sections available all weekend.

Bring the whole family to enjoy, celebrate, and support the work American Whitewater has done to ensure regular, recreational whitewater releases on this amazing, classic California river!!

For more information see: www.chicopaddleheads.org, <http://americanwhitewater.org/>, and <http://sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov/> or contact Lisa Williams at (530)-892-8923.



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Come show your support for American Whitewater and the restoration of North Fork Feather releases!

Friday, September 24, 2010

- Film Festival - NEW! - at Indian Jim School, 6 - 11 pm
- River Clean-up (With Sierra Nevada Conservancy)

Saturday, September 25, 2010

- Releases at Rock Creek / Tobin
- Class II Slalom Races / Tobin Downriver Race
- Party (Band, Beer, Dinner, Raffle, Silent Auction)

Sunday, September 26, 2010

- Releases at Rock Creek/Tobin
- Rescue and Safety Demos

20th Annual
Chico Paddleheads
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Feather River Festival



North Fork Feather River, CA - Hwy. 70 - Free camping at Indian Jim School/Campground,
1 mile upstream of Tobin Resort. More information at: www.chicopaddleheads.org

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ONE: COMMUNITY. ENVIRONMENT. CONSCIENCE.

American Whitewater is supported by members, donors, foundations, and partners in the whitewater and outdoor industries. In each edition of the *Journal*, we highlight one such partner in this space. American Whitewater urges you not to make purchase decisions blindly. We hope you'll consider a company's commitment to river stewardship when making your next purchase.

KEEN Inc., manufacturer of footwear, socks and bags, is a 7-year-old outdoor brand that brings its Hybridlife philosophy of "Create, Play, Care" to life through its innovative hybrid products, encouraging inclusivity and a fun and active lifestyle. Like most 7-year-olds, KEEN is all about having fun (with product), getting outside often and caring for the world around them. They consistently look for new approaches to creating the best products along the way. First recognized for the now-infamous, black bumper toe-protecting Newport sandal, KEEN has a full range of products and styles to take you from the beaches, to the mountains, to city streets and everywhere in between.

From the beginning, KEEN has demonstrated integrity and leadership, especially on social and environmental fronts, while promoting an inclusive outdoors community. Through its giving program, Hybrid.Care, KEEN gives back to a variety of social and environmental organizations around the globe that embody the ideas of HybridLife.

Based in Portland, Oregon, KEEN has sold more 15 million pairs of shoes in the last 6 years. The company's products are available in over 5,000 retail locations in over 50

countries around the world. To learn more, visit www.keenfootwear.com.

About Hybrid.Care

KEEN is about living the Hybridlife and its passion for outdoor pursuits has propelled the company to give back to a greater community. Through Hybrid.Care, 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. In response to the 2005 Tsunami disaster, Hybrid.Care was established and since then KEEN has contributed monetary donations, products and volunteer hours to non-profit organizations around the globe.

KEEN's footprint is starting to make a difference. Since 2004, the company has distributed more than \$4.5 million to non-profit organizations. With limited resources and widely different goals, our Hybrid.Care partners have paved the way for change through the outdoors, 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."

Recently, at the Summer 2010 Outdoor Retailer show, KEEN was able to raise over \$4,200 from shoe sale proceeds through The Conservation Alliance Keep It Wild Day, where CA grantees invited people to help take action for conservation on their behalf. All proceeds benefitted both the CA and AW.

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



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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 US, AW currently has 5,500 active members. When you consider 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 AW! 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 (\$25 if you are a member of an AW Affiliate Club). 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.

It's easy to join or renew an AW membership: Join or renew online today at <http://americanwhitewater.org/content/Membership/join-aw/>; call 1-866-BOAT4AW (866-262-8429); or complete the membership form provided in this Journal and mail it to:

Membership
American Whitewater
PO Box 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Contact Info

New Member Renewing Member

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

*Note: American Whitewater will never share your information with others

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 \$48 Lunch Video Magazine (LVM) - 4 DVDs per year (LVM donates \$8 to AW!)

Journal Options

- Do NOT mail me the AW Journal, email it to me <- Saves AW money, and trees! :)


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NEWS AND NOTES

THE 2010 WHITEWATER SYMPOSIUM: “THE NEXT RAPID EVOLUTION”

BY BOB CAMPBELL

THE 2010 WHITEWATER Symposium is coming to the Nantahala Outdoor Center in Bryson City, NC October 8-10. Like past Symposia, this 7th iteration of the event seeks to advance the sport of whitewater paddling by bringing together key players from all aspects of the whitewater spectrum including clubs, instruction, recreation, manufacturing, competition, retail, adventure travel, and stewardship.

It's a truly unique opportunity for paddlers and industry leaders alike to exchange ideas about trends in programs, promotion, equipment, and technique. For the benefit of the paddling public and club members in particular, the 2010 Symposium will provide an all-inclusive package of on-water instruction, dry-land seminars, film

presentations, and roundtable discussions targeting many of the “in-demand” topics most noted by past participants.

We've listened to attendee feedback over the years, from which we've created a fresh new series of topics addressing some of the more common themes of interest to our audiences. New to the Symposium this year is a dedicated three-track session schedule that aims to emphasize specific topics in the areas of whitewater oriented business, program development, and paddler enthusiasm.

The *Business Track* will include presentations by astute market leaders like Andy Zimmerman from *Legacy*, and Darren Bush, whose company *Rutabaga* is the largest paddle sports retailer in North America. Discussions will incorporate perspectives on topics like “How to boost sales”, “Effective Marketing”, and “Connecting with Customers.” If you make your living in the paddlesports industry, you won't want to miss the broad range of forward thinking discussions in the house.

The *Development Track* is geared towards educational programs, instruction, and club

activities. These sessions will center around the most innovative thinking being applied to everything from equipment design to program building and approaches to teaching, training and paddling technique. Key Speaker Chris Fanning, along with a plethora of acclaimed instructors like Anna LeVesque and swiftwater rescue guru Mike Mather, bring their years of experience to interactive presentations on important topics. This is an unparalleled opportunity to be part of the conversation, as many of today's top ambassadors of paddlesports weigh in on a whitewater vision for the future.

The *Paddler Track* will be a chance to connect with some of the hottest personalities in paddlesports and learn about the most cutting edge whitewater pursuits happening around the world. Participate in on-water clinics with the likes of freestyle champion Eric Jackson and Olympic gold medalist Joe Jacobi. Get up to speed on specifics like paddling performance, running creeks, improving your mental game, river safety, whitewater film making, and playboating skills ... and find out how many of today's most successful paddlers are striving to make a difference through programs you might find yourself wanting to explore further.

Whether you're looking to improve your on-water skills, boat with world class paddlers, connect with other whitewater enthusiasts and business leaders, grow your business, market your product, or learn about service project opportunities, this year's Whitewater Symposium offers something for everyone through a dynamically diverse program held over a single weekend at one of the world's premier whitewater destinations Hope to see you there! For more program, schedule, and registration information, check out <http://WWSymposium.com>

Eric Jackson has something up his sleeve at last years Symposium with his group at Zoar Gap on the Deerfield River, MA.
Photo by Adam DuComb



WHITEWATER POETRY

THE SELWAY

BY CHRISTOPHER STEC

From a place like Paradise,
 flowing glassy through the Bitterroots,
 a constant continuation of grandeur
emerges
 through Idaho's remote country.
Beauty is experienced,
 at each riverside camp,
with the timbers tall
 and rocks so smooth
the osprey above
 and cutthroat below
serenity is in,
 this rivers flow.
And when the Moose
 enters in,
the excitement
 really begins.
Yet from a distant ridgeline,
 to the whitewaters roar,
with the utmost respect,
 one realizes more.
And as the campfire embers,
 come to an end,
thoughts of returning,
 begin again.

The author and two fellow open boaters recently completed a self-supported canoe trip down the Selway River. Even though it was low water, the scenery was spectacular, the fly-fishing great, the rapids technically challenging, and the camaraderie unequalled.

It's Easy to Support AW!

American Whitewater is proud of the work we have accomplished in our stewardship program but we need your help to sustain our success. Your support through membership and donations enables our staff to be active and engaged in the process of river stewardship. Donations don't have to be large; each person doing a small part makes a noticeable difference. Many donors fail to take full advantage of federal tax incentives specifically intended to encourage charitable contributions. Such incentives often enable a donor to make a larger gift to AW at little or no additional cost. For more information about maximizing your gift visit the IRS website dedicated to charitable organizations.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, EIN# 23-7083760. To learn more about the Giving Options below, contact us at 1-866-262-8429 or visit the "Donate" link under "Support AW" on our website at www.americanwhitewater.org

- Donate online today!
- Monthly Giving: Contribute a minimum of \$10 via credit card or electronic transfer from your bank account.
- Bequests: Include AW in your will or living trust. Bequests to AW are generally exempt from federal or state inheritance taxes, and subject to an unlimited deduction.
- Combined Federal Campaign: Federal employees including federal civilians, military personnel and U.S. Postal Workers can donate to AW through the CFC a once a year charitable fund raising program. Look for AW (Agency #11351) in the official CFC listing of eligible donors.
- Charitable Remainder Trusts: Convert a highly appreciated asset (such as real estate or stocks) into a lifetime income while minimizing income and estate taxes.
- Employer Matching: Many employers will match your donations to non-profit organizations. This includes membership payments, as well as additional contributions. Check to see if your employer has a matching program.
- MissionFish: Sell your items through the MissionFish program on eBay and the proceeds come directly to AW.
- Other Assets: A gift of real estate to AW qualifies you for a tax deduction based on the property's fair market value. If it is not a river access point, AW will sell the property and use the proceeds to protect access and restore rivers. Acceptance of property is subject to certain conditions. You may also be eligible to receive tax benefits for gifts of real property. Art and jewelry are examples of personal property items that may be eligible. Interested donors should check with your financial and tax advisors and AW on the feasibility and tax considerations of such gifts.
- Securities: Donating appreciated stock to AW benefits both the donor and whitewater rivers. The donor receives two tax-related benefits. First, the gain on the stock is not subject to capital gains taxes. Second, the donor can deduct the value of the stock as a charitable contribution.
- United Way: All federal campaigns, and a few of the local campaigns will allow you to donate to AW. AW's UNITED WAY member # is 2302.
- Vehicle Donations: Turn that extra car, truck, or RV into a tax deductible donation benefiting AW.

AFFILIATE CLUBS

AW'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE

BY CARLA MINER

The Affiliate Club Program lies at the very heart of AW's existence. AW's original purpose since 1954 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. We have over 100 current AW Club Affiliates and they are all doing great work on your behalf. If you don't belong to a club, consider joining one.

Our Affiliate Club Spotlight this issue is on the Washington Kayak Club an outstanding Affiliate Club and long time supporter of our mission to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

The Washington Kayak Club, based in Washington State, is a volunteer organization dedicated to all forms of paddle craft in the Pacific Northwest. The WKC is run by it's members for it's members, and provides coordination and facilitates activities amongst it's membership.

The club offers both whitewater and sea kayaking classes and skill building clinics, as well as opportunities to refine your skills on the slalom course. Pool sessions are held Wednesday evenings, Saturday and Sunday mornings from October through early April, at four pools in the Puget Sound area. They are great opportunities to practice self-rescues, assisted rescues, or kayak rolls. The club also offers kayak polo for all WKC members. Never played kayak polo before? No problem! It's one of the best ways to build boat control skills that allow you to be much more dynamic when you hit the river (or the sea!).

Membership in the Washington Kayak Club is open to the public. Annual dues are \$35 per year for an individual and \$40 per year for a household. To learn more about the WKC or to join, check out their website at <http://www.washingtonkayakclub.org/>. And remember, current members of the Washington Kayak Club receive a \$10 discount off their AW membership.

Thanks WKC for your continued support of American Whitewater!

The AW Journal Club Affiliates by state:

Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks
Nova Riverrunners Inc., Chickaloon

Alabama

Birmingham Canoe Club, Birmingham
Huntsville Canoe Club, Huntsville

Arizona

Outdoors Unlimited, Flagstaff

Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

California

California Floaters Society, Cameron Park
Chico Paddleheads, Chico
Gold Country Paddlers, Lotus
River Touring Section, Angeles Chapter,
Sierra Club, Sherman Oaks
Sequoia Paddlers, Forestville
Sierra Club SF Chapter, Livermore

Colorado

Avid4 Adventure Inc., Boulder
Colorado Whitewater Assn, Englewood
Grand Canyon Priv. Boat. Asso., Colorado Springs
Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
Rocky Mountain Canoe/Kayak Club,
Broomfield
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride
University of Colorado Kayak Club,
Boulder

Connecticut

AMC - Connecticut Chapter, Colchester

Delaware

Wilmington Trail Club Paddlers, Wilmington

Georgia

Atlanta Whitewater Club, Atlanta
Georgia Canoeing Assoc, Atlanta
Georgia Tech Outdoor Recreation, Atlanta
Paddlers4Christ, Ellijay

Idaho

RSO Univ of Idaho, Moscow

Illinois

Team SICK, Carbondale

Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Indianapolis
Ohio Valley Paddlers, Evansville

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, W Des Moines

Kentucky

Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington
Elkhorn Paddlers, Lexington
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville

Maine

Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society, Topsham

Massachusetts

AMC - New Hampshire Paddlers, Hanover

Maryland

Greater Baltimore Canoe Club, Cockeysville
Mason Dixon Canoe Cruisers, Smithsburg

Michigan

RSC Kayak Club at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Minnesota

SCSU Outdoor Endeavors, Saint Cloud
Minnesota Canoe Asso, Minneapolis

Mississippi

Mississippi Outdoor Club, Clinton

Missouri

Ozark Mountain Paddlers, Springfield
Ozark Wilderness Waterways, Kansas City

Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

New Hampshire

Ledyard Canoe Club, Hanover
Mt. Washington Valley Paddlers, Intervale
Merrimack Valley Paddlers, Merrimack

New Jersey

KCCNY, Flanders

New Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

New York

Colgate University, Hamilton
Flow Paddlers' Club, Ontario
Genesee Waterways Center Inc., Rochester
Hamilton College, Clinton
Housatonic Canoe & Kayak Squad, Ossining
KCCNY, New York
St Lawrence University, Canton
Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia
Zoar Valley Paddling Club, Buffalo

N. Carolina

Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh
Dixie Division, Tuxedo
Mecklenburg Regional Paddlers, Charlotte
NCSU Outing Club, Raleigh
Triad River Runners, Winston-Salem

Ohio

Columbus Outdoor Pursuits, Columbus
Keel Haulers Canoe Club, Westlake
Outdoor Adventure Club, Dayton
Toledo River Gang, Waterville

Oregon

Eugene Kayaker, Eugene
Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland
Northwest Rafters Assoc, Portland
Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland
Oregon Whitewater Association, Beaverton
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, Harrisburg
Conewago Canoe Club, York
Holtwood Hooligans, Lancaster
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley,
Lehigh Valley Whitewater Inc., Lehigh Valley
Philadelphia Canoe Club, Philadelphia
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Pittsburgh

S. Carolina

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

Tennessee

Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts,
Limestone
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville
East Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge
Memphis Whitewater, Memphis
Tennessee Eastman Hiking and Canoeing
Club, Kingsport
Tennessee Scenic River Assoc., Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga

Texas

Houston Canoe Club Inc, Houston

Utah

Utah Whitewater Club, Salt Lake City

Vermont

Vermont Paddlers Club, Essex Junction

Virginia

Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynchburg
Canoe Cruisers Assoc, Arlington
Coastal Canoeists, Blacksburg
Creek Freak Paddlers of Franklin County,
Rocky Mount
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Richmond
Hollins Outdoor Program, Roanoke
James River Float Co, Madison Heights
Paddlers for Conservation, Vienna

Washington

BEWET- Boeing Employees Whitewater &
Touring Club, Bellevue
EPIC Adventures, Cheney
Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle
RPP Kayak Club, Bellingham
Spokane Canoe & Kayak Club, Spokane
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Recreational River Runners, Renton
Whitman College Whitewater Club, Walla
Walla

West Virginia

Dbl Z! Whitewater Club, Fayetteville
West VA Wildwater Assn, S. Charleston

Wisconsin

Sierra Club / John Muir Chapter, Madison

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 <http://americanwhitewater.org/content/Membership/join-AW/> 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 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.

JOIN AMERICAN WHITewater AS AN AFFILIATE CLUB!

AFFILIATE CLUB BENEFITS

- Club members can join AW for just \$25 - a \$10 savings!
- Have your club listed in each AW Journal delivered to all AW members
- Post Club information on the AW website to help paddlers find you
- Participate in exclusive AW Affiliate Club promotions and grants
- Most importantly, your financial support helps us save rivers!

Sign-up on-line at:
[www.americanwhitewater.org/
content/Membership/join-aw](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Membership/join-aw)

For more information contact Carla Miner at
membership@americanwhitewater.org
or at 1-866-262-8429



Entrance Fee Changes

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday: **\$25**

Friday and Saturday: **\$20**

Saturday only: **\$15**

Why: To simplify the pricing for attendees and volunteers, minimize the number of people who were trying to underpay, and to avoid some sort of system where you have to go around checking people's wristbands or have non-campers leave after a certain time. If you're paying a little more this year than last, we hope you'll remember all the money goes to funding AW's river stewardship work. Note: these are the exact same prices for attendance and camping that have been in place, unchanged for over a decade (really!). However, what is no longer available are non-camping, entrance-only passes. More info: <http://gauleyfest.americanwhitewater.org>

Parking Changes

Friday **8 pm**: No vehicle access to the inner festival area

Saturday **2 pm**: No vehicle access to the inner festival area

Why: Safety. As Gauley Fest grows, the ability to safely have car parking and traffic in the same area as camping and pedestrians becomes extremely difficult. After the cutoff times, folks will have to park in the parking lots just outside the inner festival area. This means you will have to walk in about 50-100 yards. This park and walk-in system is the exact same that you would see at any other festival of Gauley Fest's size. More info: <http://gauleyfest.americanwhitewater.org>

GAULEY

FEST

AW'S
Biggest Fundraiser

THE WORLD'S LARGEST
PADDLING FESTIVAL



Sept 17-19

Summersville, WV

More info: <http://gauleyfest.americanwhitewater.org>



Px MY PADDLE PRESCRIPTION

PADDLER: John Grace

HEIGHT: 5'11"

OCCUPATION: Video Guru



I choose to support American Whitewater through the HealthyWaters Program.

Paddling forces me to focus, and the confusion of life subsides for a bit. My perfect fit ▶

— John Grace

SHO-GUN

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WHAT'S YOUR PADDLE PRESCRIPTION?

Discover your custom fit paddle

- < increase your performance
- < reduce your fatigue
- < and have more fun on the water



Werner offers advanced design features with a variety of fit options to help you choose a truly custom fit paddle. Your custom fit paddle is waiting for you.

Our web site has more for you.



Fit Guide: Answer a few questions and discover your custom fit Werner paddle.



HealthyWaters:

Buy a Werner paddle and you choose which of our non-profit partners you would like to support. We'll make a donation in your name.



WERNERTV: Hear what real people are saying about their love for Werner paddles.



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