



AMERICAN WHITEWATER

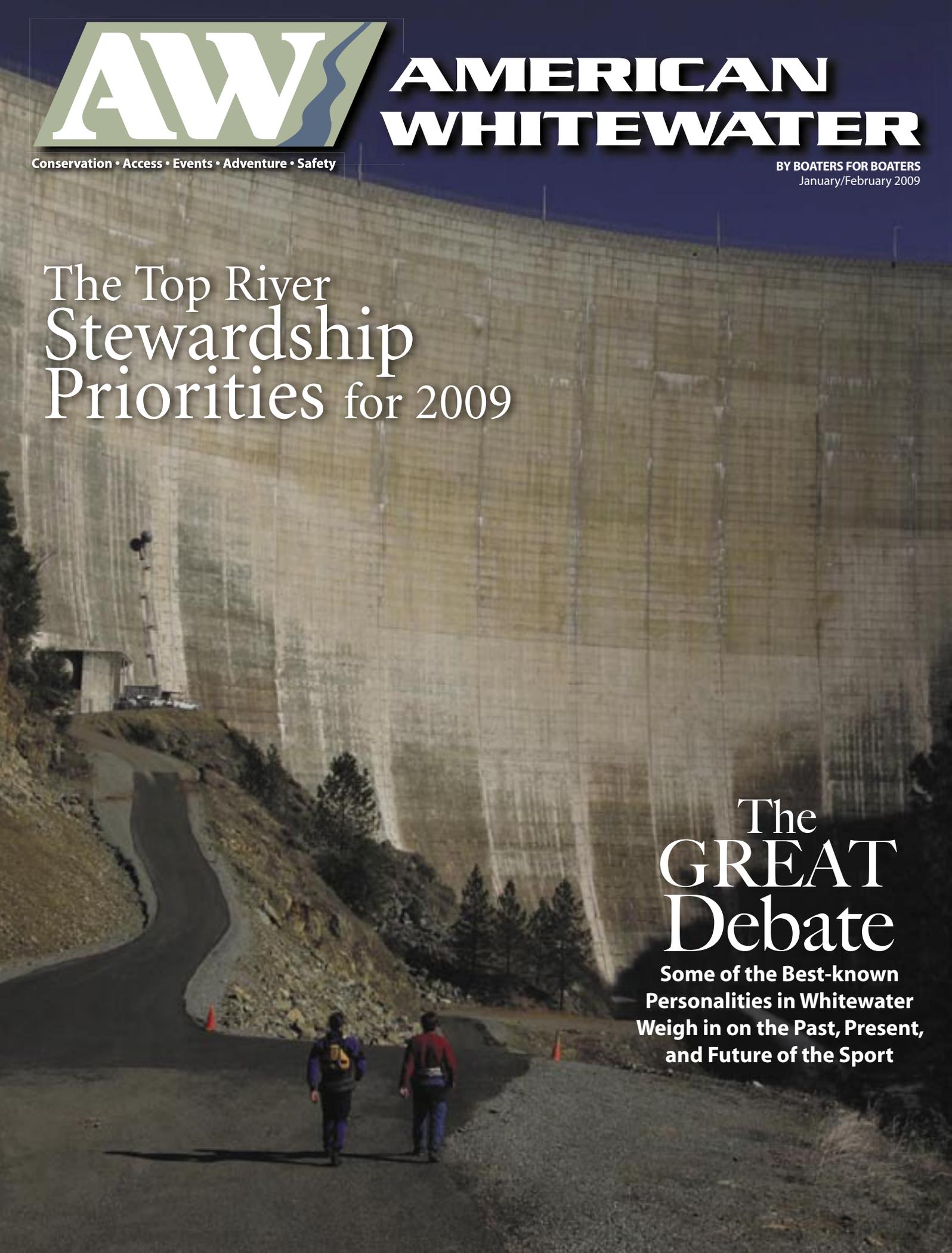
Conservation • Access • Events • Adventure • Safety

BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS
January/February 2009

The Top River Stewardship Priorities for 2009

The GREAT Debate

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Personalities in Whitewater
Weigh in on the Past, Present,
and Future of the Sport





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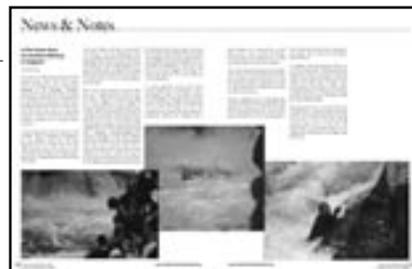
A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

American Whitewater Journal

January/February 2009 - Volume #49 - Issue #1

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All of the Federal CFC campaigns (CFC # 11351) and a few of the local United Way campaigns will allow you to donate through them to AW. Also, check to see if your employer will match your charitable contributions: double your giving ... double your fun!



New Bullard's Bar Dam on the North Fork Yuba River is just the latest California dam to begin the FERC relicensing process. Read about the AW sponsored flow study on page 46 of this issue.

photo by Taylor Robertson



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Purpose American Whitewater

River Stewardship: An Integrated Approach

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

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

CONSERVATION: AW's professional staff works closely with volunteers and partner organizations to protect the ecological and scenic values of all whitewater rivers. These goals are accomplished through direct participation in public decision-making

processes, grassroots advocacy, coalition building, empowerment of volunteers, public outreach and education, and, when necessary, legal action.

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

SAFETY: AW promotes paddling safely, publishes reports on whitewater accidents, maintains a uniform national ranking system for whitewater rivers (the International Scale of Whitewater Difficulty) and publishes and disseminates the internationally-recognized American Whitewater Safety Code.

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

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

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



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The Journey Ahead

At the start of each year the American Whitewater stewardship team looks deep into their crystal balls and reflects on the coming year's opportunities and challenges. For this issue of *American Whitewater*, the outcome of that reflection is the Top River Stewardship Priorities List on page 10. This contains high priority projects that are representative of the nearly 100 active river stewardship projects in staff workplans.

The coming year will likely provide remarkable legislative opportunities to protect rivers for future generations. Those opportunities will be balanced by increasing demands on the energy front. The same high-gradient rivers and streams that paddlers enjoy are also coveted for their potential to produce energy. As we move into 2009, our tasks include the balance of this yin and yang of challenge/opportunity and leveraging our past success to achieve future river restoration achievements.

These future achievements require a partnership between American Whitewater staff and volunteers from the paddling community. As an organization, we do our best work when our professional staff works with volunteers from the local paddling community. This grassroots activism is a key component of successful projects.

Beyond the Stewardship Priorities, it's also important to acknowledge two highly effective coalitions American Whitewater is actively engaged with for national policy work. These coalitions provide an opportunity to work smarter with other like-minded partners at addressing nagging public policy issues.

Outdoor Alliance

The Outdoor Alliance is a three-year-old coalition of conservation oriented human-powered outdoor recreation groups. This coalition directly represents one million people and speaks for activities enjoyed by over 100 million Americans. The mission of OA is the same as American Whitewater's, except that it encompasses

a broader spectrum of recreational users and resources. Outdoor Alliance allows us to have a vastly more powerful, proactive voice in Washington, DC on the many important issues surrounding public land management. Through Outdoor Alliance efforts we build bridges with federal agencies and decision makers and begin to treat the root causes of many river conservation and access issues. For more on the OA, please see page 6 in this issue of *American Whitewater*.

Hydropower Reform Coalition

American Whitewater has been a steering committee member of the Hydropower Reform Coalition for many years. The coalition provides a significant source of expertise, work, political insight, political influence, and funding. Through Hydropower Reform Coalition efforts we are able to shape the procedural and political arena where dam relicensing and management occurs. As concern regarding climate change mounts, new damless hydro technology develops, and water shortages require increasing storage needs, the role of the Hydropower Reform Coalition is highly relevant to our mission and our members.

As in any year's workplan, we have several ongoing projects that have direct ramifications for national policy. The access issue on the Chattooga (SC) will likely influence future management of Wilderness, Wild and Scenic, and Forest Service rivers across the country. The Statewide Water Supply Initiative in Colorado will set the standard for how to protect public recreational values while tapping rivers for water supply. The outcome of adaptive management on the North Fork Feather (CA) will influence Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's treatment of recreational releases across the country. The upcoming removals of dams on the Elwha (WA), White Salmon (WA), Dillsboro (NC), and possibly Klamath (OR/CA) will potentially usher in a new era of dam removal. By working on these issues on the local and regional

level, American Whitewater can shape a future that looks brighter for rivers across the nation.

On each project we work on, we seek land conservation, public river access, stream flow information, and flow releases that benefit the aquatic ecosystem as well as recreation. We have a proven track record of success with each of these goals. These enhancements create a triple bottom line: they result in healthier rivers, they provide local communities a sustainable economic base, and they provide opportunities for healthy, nature-based recreation.

We hope that you'll recognize that these projects benefit you and the rivers you enjoy paddling and they are just a slice of a much larger workplan. Join us in 2009 to reconnect people and communities with their rivers and create an enthusiastic and lasting legacy for river stewardship and conservation.



PS – your membership dues and donations fund American Whitewater stewardship projects. If you are reading this publication and you are not a member, please consider supporting this work. If you are a member, thanks for your support, pass this issue on to a friend and let them know what we are doing. There has never been a better time to support American Whitewater!

President's Message

This issue of *American Whitewater* focuses on what AW is really all about: our core mission "to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely." The Top River Stewardship Priorities highlight this important work and gives you a glimpse of just a few of the important issues across the country that AW works on for you. I believe I speak for many in AW in saying this is what my support for AW is all about.

The key to our collective success, and indeed what makes AW the great force that it is, is you, the passionate, committed, on-the-ground volunteer who makes things happen! AW's stewardship model has been tremendously successful over the last several years and the strategy is simple and incredibly effective: find a local grass-roots volunteer or group of volunteers who are committed to a cause, and then empower and support them with the tools, skills, knowledge, and expertise they need to succeed.

Often, this may be nothing more than directing volunteers to the Stewardship Toolkit on the AW website. Here you can learn, among other things, what it takes to protect a stream gauge, or your legal rights regarding stream access in your state. However many times the issues are more complex, the battle is long, and the consequences have far reaching

national implications. In such cases, AW support extends much further and can include writing and filing legal comments, coordinating access to pro bono legal help, staff attendance, and testimony at public hearings, and commitment of AW funds.

I have seen this new model work first hand as one of those passionate, grass-roots volunteers working on the Chattooga River. It is a powerful thing and one of the reasons why your financial support of AW is such a great investment. No organization leverages their member's support quite so effectively.

AW is not immune to the larger economic turbulence that surrounds us every day and needs your continued financial support. With your support AW can continue to enable passionate volunteers to help protect our rivers for the future and make a difference. I shudder to think what might happen if AW were not there to keep watch.

Best wishes for a wet and wonderful 2009!

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Stewardship

Outdoor Alliance Goes to the Senate for Wild Lands Funding

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of six national, member-based organizations devoted to conservation and stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters through responsible human-powered outdoor recreation. The Outdoor Alliance includes: Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance. Collectively, the Outdoor Alliance has members in all fifty states and a network of almost 1,400 local clubs and advocacy groups across the nation. The coalition represents the millions of Americans who hike, paddle, climb, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands and waters.

The six membership groups of Outdoor Alliance have a long tradition of preserving public access to America's Outdoors - making sure people have trails to hike, waters to paddle, mountains to ski and crags to climb. But preserving access alone is not enough. What good is a trail if the forest is trashed out? What good is access to a river if the water is polluted? So our six groups came together to pool our resources and protect the places we care about.

The Outdoor Alliance submitted the following testimony on our collective perspectives of the Economic Stimulus Package:

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TESTIMONY OF MARK SINGLETON, OUTDOOR ALLIANCE
UNITED STATES SENATE
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING: TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY REGARDING INVESTMENTS IN CLEAN
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS TO CREATE GREEN JOBS AND
TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY (SD-366).
JEFF BINGAMAN, CHAIRMAN
DECEMBER 10, 2008

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY MARK SINGLETON
CHAIRMAN, OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of six national, member-based organizations devoted to conservation and stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters through responsible human-powered outdoor recreation. The Outdoor Alliance includes: Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance. Collectively, the Outdoor Alliance has members in all fifty states and a network of almost 1,400 local clubs and advocacy groups across the nation. Our coalition represents the millions of Americans who hike, paddle, climb, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands and waters.

Our staff and members spend much of their free time exploring public lands via the roads, trails, rivers, and at the campsites. Collectively, we witness firsthand the state of these resources and are among the many people impacted by an aging infrastructure that is mismatched with today's priorities for public land management. We recognize the need for active and immediate efforts to bring our public lands infrastructure and in some cases the lands themselves up to standards. Perhaps most importantly today, we believe that doing so would create an array of economic benefits across multiple sectors of the United States economy immediately and for decades to come.

Specifically, we suggest that the Committee prioritize the following activities in an economic stimulus package:

US Forest Service Road Decommissioning and Restoration: Unmanaged roads can wash out and erode, pollute water, damage wildlife habitat, impact recreation, and speed the spread of weeds. The current 380,000-mile US Forest Service (USFS) road network contains many redundant, obsolete or unnecessary roads that are costly to maintain and do not serve the millions of people who visit national forests. Outdoor Alliance supports a common-sense policy, including retiring unnecessary roads to limit environmental damage and focusing scarce resources on maintaining the roads that best serve the public. Currently, deferred maintenance is over \$8.4 billion nationwide and increases annually as allocated funds fall far short of annual maintenance needs. A number of national forests

have already set sound road maintenance priorities, but lack the funds to reach those goals. An infusion of funding into road management would immediately put people to work and would avert risks to water supplies, wildlife habitats, recreational opportunities, and fire-sensitive communities.

USFS and BLM Recreation Infrastructure Improvements: Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands often provide the closest and best mountain biking, backcountry skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, paddling, and climbing opportunities for millions of Americans. Investing now in the construction and maintenance of trails, river access areas, campsites, parking areas, sanitary facilities, and other visitor amenities – in the tradition of the Civilian Conservation Corps – would immediately create new jobs and benefit our citizens and gateway economies for decades to come.

Federal Agency Recreation Field Staff: The primary federal land management agencies (US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and US Fish and Wildlife Service) each have a significant need for recreation field staff. The National Park Service has proposed 3,000 new rangers as part of their Centennial Initiative, and the other agencies certainly have a similar need. Hiring field staff to interact with the visiting public would directly create thousands of new jobs, encourage recreation-based tourism, reduce planning conflicts and errors, and create new opportunities for volunteerism. We envision these individuals as highly skilled recreationists that share experiences with the public, forming an invaluable personal connection between public land managers and the public.

Each of these priorities would result in both immediate and lasting economic and societal benefits for communities near public lands and the nation as a whole. In addition, each of these priorities is a wise and necessary investment that will protect at-risk public assets. We ask that you consider the following relevant points:

- 1. These priorities offer a wide range of jobs:** From backcountry trail crews requiring physical stamina, to engineers requiring years of higher education, the priorities we are suggesting provide a full range of job opportunities. Thus, these projects offer work for a broad cross section of citizens.
- 2. These priorities offer construction related jobs:** Many of the jobs relating to public lands infrastructure are within the hard-hit construction field. These jobs include heavy equipment operators, engineers, architects, surveyors, landscapers, and general contractors.
- 3. These priorities bolster the recreation economy:** Outdoor recreation is a \$730 billion industry in the US, and the vast majority of outdoor recreation occurs on public lands. These priorities will enhance recreation opportunities and in turn the recreation economy. The economic benefits of these actions are significant in both the manufacturing of outdoor equipment and products, and also in the nature-based tourism economies of countless and often rural communities. It is our belief that high quality infrastructure, landscapes, and management result in

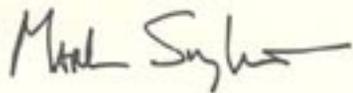
high quality recreational experiences and in turn increased participation in human-powered outdoor recreation.

4. **These priorities avert economic and ecological risks:** Many roads and other infrastructure elements require maintenance to prevent failure – and failure can have massive impacts requiring costly remediation. Getting to work on the sizable backlog of basic maintenance and in some cases decommissioning of public land infrastructure is a good and needed investment. Doing so will protect the landscapes, water, and recreation that define our public lands, and protect our nation from future, much larger management expenses. Taking these actions is analogous to putting a new roof on your house to avoid major water damage – and by all accounts there are already some leaks in the old roof.
5. **These priorities can happen right away:** There is certainly no shortage of work to be done, and it is our understanding that agencies have active lists of projects in need of implementation. Unlike some agency actions, infrastructure maintenance and enhancements are generally noncontroversial and in fact popular with the public. Therefore agencies should be able to complete the planning and implementation of such projects in short order. In the parlance of the day, what we have recommended is “shovel ready.”
6. **These priorities have additional societal value:** Protection and enjoyment of our American landscapes are core values of our nation. In addition to their inherent and iconic value, public lands provide human-powered outdoor recreation opportunities that foster public health, childhood development, an invaluable connection with nature, and other quality of life benefits. We believe that investing in our public lands is money well spent.

In conclusion, we feel that offering federal land management agencies significant economic stimulus funds for the priorities that we have listed above will have an immediate and lasting positive impact to the United States economy. We feel that the funding levels suggested at today’s hearing by the witnesses (Roughly \$2-3.5 billion each for BLM and USFS per year, and roughly \$1.5 billion for the NPS) represent reasonable balances between the agencies’ needs and their capacities.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

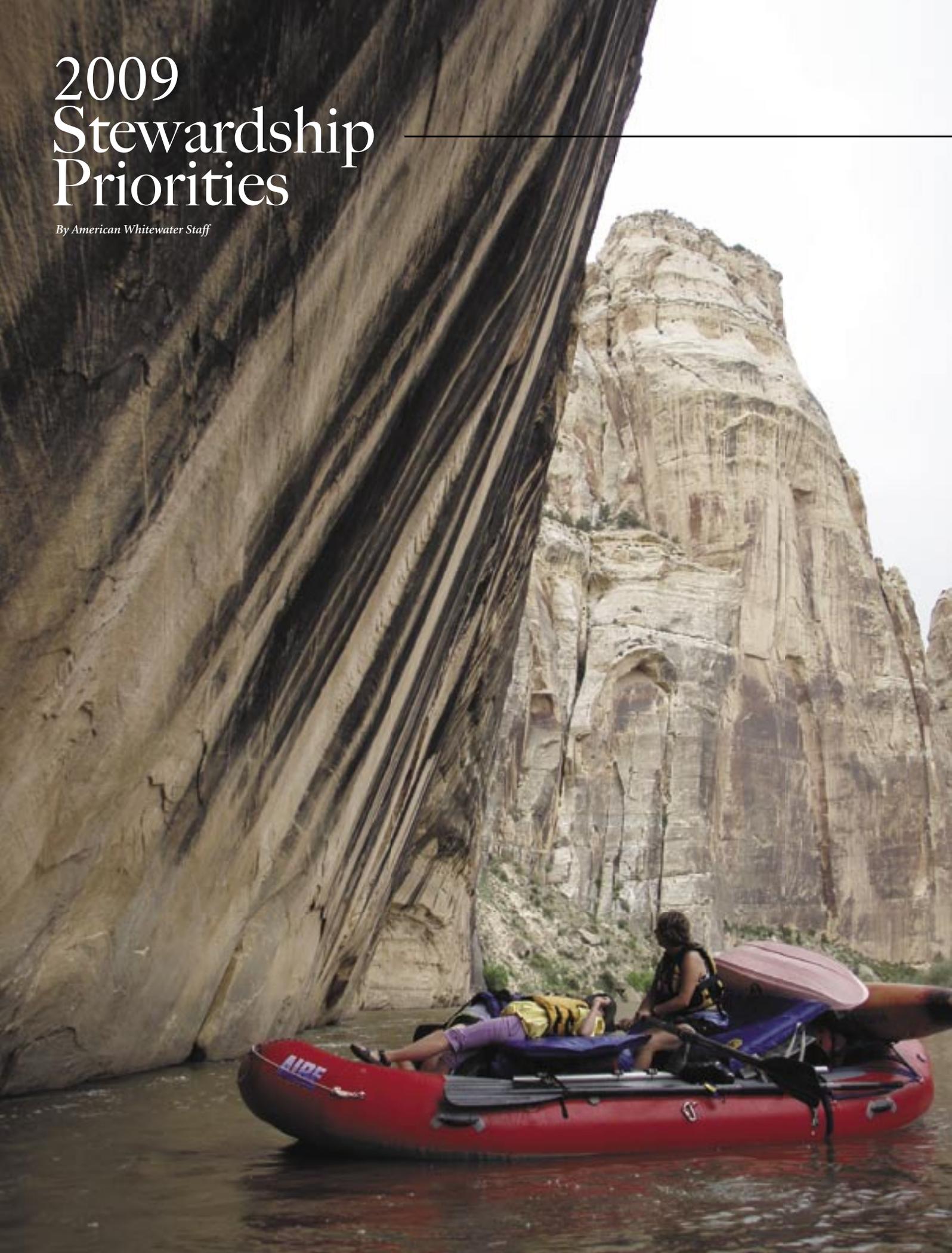
Sincerely,



Mark Singleton: Executive Director, American Whitewater; Chairman, Outdoor Alliance
Brady Robinson: Executive Director, Access Fund
Martin Bartels: Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Greg Miller: Executive Director, American Hiking Society
Mike Van Abel: Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance

2009 Stewardship Priorities

By American Whitewater Staff



American Whitewater's River Stewardship Program is constantly evolving to meet new challenges and to seize new opportunities. The upcoming year is going to be a great one for rivers, and we are excited to play an important role in several major issues affecting rivers across the country and the headwaters we all enjoy. We are writing this article to share with you, our members, what we expect to be the most important themes of 2009. These themes cut across all regions of the country and affect many specific rivers. No matter where you live, these issues will affect the rivers you paddle in 2009.

Supporting ONLY Green Hydropower

Nothing shocks a country into thinking hard about decreasing its dependence on foreign oil like four dollar per gallon gasoline and a foreign war. At the same time, concerns over global climate change continue to increase. No matter what their motivation, our nation's leaders are wisely setting ambitious goals to make sure that 10 percent of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2012, and 25 percent by 2025. To encourage private development of new renewable energy projects, the government is expected to pass "Renewable Portfolio Standards" legislation in 2009 that will offer tax incentives to companies building renewable energy projects. Right now it looks like those new projects will harness wind, solar, geothermal, wave and tidal energy.

So far, our leaders have recognized that building new hydropower dams is not a solution to any of our energy related problems. While hydropower will continue to be an important component of our nation's energy portfolio (currently about 10%), the technology to produce electricity from falling water has been around for over a century and dams have already been constructed on most viable sites. In addition, dams are widely recognized for their significant impacts to

river ecosystems, which makes building new dams highly problematic. Aquatic ecosystems are already facing stresses caused by global climate change and we don't want to further exacerbate those stresses by dewatering more rivers and headwater streams for hydropower development. AW serves on the steering committee for the Hydropower Reform Coalition, which has adopted a policy of excluding new dams from any tax incentive program. There are, however, some opportunities to offer incentives for relatively low impact hydro development. Specifically we generally support adding hydro capacity to existing dams (like Holtwood Dam on the Susquehanna (PA)), installing generators in non-hydro government dams (Russell Fork (KY), Tygart (WV), North Branch Potomac (WV), West River (VT), etc), and improving turbine efficiency, which occurs at many of the dams we work on.

Strongly defending this position will help us nip a potential resurgence of dam building in the bud. We are already seeing a large number of projects being proposed and built in British Columbia under the assumption that tax incentives will create a thriving export market to California. We are seeing a smaller but noteworthy series of dam proposals in the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon. While we will work on these individual proposals at the grassroots level, we will also be engaging lawmakers at the national level to assure that new and/or destructive hydropower projects do not receive tax incentives in legislation. 2009 will be the year that our country embarks on a quest for renewable power, and our involvement will prove vital in securing new renewable energy sources without needlessly sacrificing our rivers.

Protecting the Last Great Places

Since the founding of our organization,

AW has been at the forefront of river protection efforts. Because whitewater paddlers traverse almost every sizeable headwater stream and thanks to our spirit of adventure, we are in a unique position to witness human caused ecological changes at the top of our region's watersheds. Our community is often the first group to speak on the behalf of rivers, in defense of their ecological integrity and societal value. We use a variety of tools to protect free-flowing rivers and we look forward to some new opportunities in 2009. In 1968, Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and we are seeing a resurgence in efforts to protect wild rivers. In 2008, many great river protection bills got bogged down in procedural issues in the Senate. Because they came within a paddlstroke of passing, we anticipate that bills to protect the Headwaters of the Snake (WY), Owyhee (ID), rivers of Mt. Hood (OR), and Headwaters of the Cheat and Gauley (WV) will be back in early 2009. In the House, legislation was introduced to protect the Pratt River (WA) and we expect it to be reintroduced along with another bill that will expand the Skagit Wild and Scenic River system to include Illabot Creek (WA). Another bill was introduced in 2008 to protect the Wild Rogue (OR) and we expect this legislation to move forward in 2009. Although a narrow strip along the river was protected when the Rogue was designated as one of the original Wild and Scenic Rivers in 1968, the tributary streams that provide critical fishery habitat and clear, clean water essential for the health of the river are threatened. The State of Colorado faces special challenges where new water storage proposals could result in major new diversions of the Yampa and Colorado. AW will continue to play a leading role in keeping water in these rivers.

On the national level we will be working closely with the new Administration on protecting backcountry roadless areas in our National Forests. Runs like the South Fork Salmon (ID), Middle Fork

2009 River Stewardship Priorities

Feather (CA), Forks of the Kern (CA), McCoy Creek (WA), Snowbird (NC), Seneca Creek (WV), and Cascade Brook (NH) all provide important opportunities for backcountry paddling in areas that are undeveloped. While approximately half of Forest Service lands have been opened for resource extraction and are criss-crossed by roads that provide access for recreational users, the areas that are not developed represent a significant resource for backcountry recreation, clean drinking water, and wildlife habitat and we would like to keep them that way. We will also be working with Congress to bring permanence to the National Landscape Conservation System, which

includes classic multiday river trips like the John Day, Rogue, Grande Ronde, and Deschutes in Oregon. We will continue our efforts to protect clean water. Paddlers have a compelling story to tell and our Congressional testimony on the benefits of the Clean Water Act has been well received. In 2009 we will continue our efforts to educate policy makers on the need to restore the full protections of the Clean Water Act and reform 19th century hardrock mining laws to protect and restore water quality.

Protecting great places is about more than just a Congressional designation; it requires active involvement from our community to promote stewardship and effective management that protects the resource. We anticipate that 2009 will be another important year for the Chattooga (SC/GA) where we will continue our efforts

to advocate for nationally-consistent river management and development of a plan that tackles existing resource impacts from unmanaged recreation while providing opportunities for whitewater paddlers.

Bringing Rivers Back to Life

Boaters may be unique among outdoor recreationists in their understanding of the dynamic nature of rivers. We stare at flow gauges, making predictions of how fast rivers will rise, fall, or maintain given the full array of climatic conditions. We experience how rivers behave when they are in flood and when they are low. Boaters can tell you just how a rapid can change at a full range of flows as if our lives depended on it, maybe because

Rich Burchfield takes the main line at Fist on the Russell Fork (VA/KY)

Photo by Gerald DeLong



*McCoy Creek runs through the
Dark Divide Roadless Area in Washington*

Photo by Scott Collins

sometimes they do. In short we see rivers as dynamic, complex and changing.

Imagine our surprise in finding out that in most cases the technical tools used to mandate flows below dams view rivers as static and compartmentalized. In meetings where we negotiate the fate of rivers, the discussion of minimum instream flows consumes most of our time. The most common tools tell us what flows provide the best habitat for fish at their different life stages. Invariably these models tell us that the fish are far better off with less water than what was there before the dams. These tools by their nature

*Brian Mattingly on the boof line at El Horendo,
Russell Fork River, VA/KY*

Photo by Dustin Anderson

steer those charged with developing flow regimes into solutions that create rivers that are static, interrupted by the occasional flow that slips over the top of the dam into the river.

At AW we are focused on changing the tools and the rules that have been used to develop flow regimes. Over the past several years AW has been engaging academic researchers to better understand the impacts of altering—and often eliminating—the dynamic flows that healthy rivers are dependent upon. We have developed studies to be used in hydropower relicensing that will help quantify how dams alter flows. We all know that dams typically lower flows in rivers but these studies are showing



2009 River Stewardship Priorities

that dams also make flows more erratic when they spill. We have also conducted our own studies to help quantify how changes in flow can affect the critters that live in rivers. By negotiating whitewater recreation releases that coincide with the natural flow needs of the river, we are able to strengthen the argument for more natural flows that fully consider the dynamic nature of rivers.

We are also working to restore the snowmelt flows on the hydropower rivers of California, like the Yuba and the McCloud. We are also working in Oregon and Colorado, where water

contractors wish to flatline rivers and their ecosystems. We have tackled old-school thinking on rivers like the Saranac (NY), where we have issued a report critiquing the abysmally low flows required by the agencies there. While we are by no means the only ones looking into restoring dynamic flows in rivers, we are using our technical and practical understanding of rivers to change to landscape of river restoration.

While we see 2009 as an important year for advancing our case for improving flow regimes at dam-regulated rivers, some of our most exciting projects are those where we are actually removing the dams. Over the last few years, we have been active participants in efforts to remove a handful of outdated dams and bring rivers

back to life. We have a few more on deck and in 2009 we will be working hard to restore rivers like the White Salmon (WA), Elwha (WA), Rogue (OR) and Tuckasegee (NC). Paddlers will also have important opportunities to weigh in on the future of the Klamath River (CA/OR) where a new agreement was recently unveiled that could lead to one of the largest river restoration efforts in the West.

Power of Participation

The Denver Post headlines recently read “Boatload of letters for forest protections delivered,” after a paddler carried a kayak containing 500 letters to Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, asking him to protect the state’s roadless areas. Also, last fall paddlers sent almost 1,500 letters to the

White Salmon, WA

Photo by Thomas O’Keefe



US Forest Service asking the USFS to allow paddling on the Upper Chattooga River in the Southeastern US and to manage the river responsibly. In 2008, roughly 100 paddlers wrote FERC asking them to prevent a dam owner on New York's Ausable River from blocking public access—and FERC staff agreed.

When paddlers get fired up about an issue, we tend to go big. Your activism and your membership are the backbone of AW's stewardship program. Your membership gives strength to the advocacy work we do, especially in the political arena, where every vote counts. Your activism reinforces the positions we take with local individual support. Without this relationship to the paddling community, we would be far less effective at protecting rivers and your ability to enjoy them. In 2009, reaching out to your political representatives could help protect dozens of great whitewater rivers and our access to them. This year, expect us to come to you with these opportunities and others asking for you to write a letter

White Salmon, WA

Photo by Thomas O'Keefe



or make a call—and expect good things to come of it!

Preserving Opportunities to Enjoy Rivers

It may seem obvious to paddlers that people should have access to rivers; however, dam operators, private landowners, government agencies, and even some conservation groups do not always share this belief. At the core of this philosophical difference is the feeling by others that paddling, or other forms of river recreation somehow take something away from the river. We are battling these perceptions on rivers like the Chattooga, Ausable, Feather, and Tuckasegee.

At AW, we see it differently. Providing opportunities for people to interact with rivers and develop a stewardship ethic through a direct connection to the resource is at the core of our river restoration mission and we fulfill this goal in a number of ways. The most obvious is

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The GREAT Debate

This all started some months back when Doug Ammons wrote a piece in his Mind Over Water column in the July/August edition of American Whitewater entitled “The Cutting Edge: A Beautiful Anarchy.” It was his shot at defining—or rather blurring—the leading front in whitewater. In short, his conclusion was that every type of paddling has not one, but many edges, and that many paddlers—maybe all of them—are constantly pushing their own frontiers in their own ways.

In response to Dr. Ammons’s article, which not surprisingly ruffled a few feathers among some of the leading names in extreme/expedition kayaking, Tyler Bradt wrote a piece entitled “Beyond the Cutting Edge: The Next Whitewater Rampage.” It immediately follows this brief introduction. While Tyler directly answers the original Ammons article, he also branches out into other areas—namely the state of the whitewater kayaking industry, the life of professional athletes, the joy of paddling, and a vision of the future of the sport.

If this were the extent of the discussion, we would simply have an interesting, but brief exchange between two opinionated and qualified individuals. However, thanks to the efforts of Doug Ammons, who pushed this project into being, we now have comments on this debate by many other luminaries of the sport. What follows is the full discourse on where the sport comes from, where it is, and where it’s going from names as well known and diverse as Risa Shimoda, Eric Jackson, and Nick Turner. Each contributor brings a unique and insightful perspective to the debate. Contrary to a typical argument between representatives of two distinct sides focused on

a single issue, this collaboration has become something more all encompassing. While The Great Debate is candid and at times blunt, its conclusions are nothing short of inspiring, underscoring the vibrancy of the sport.





Tyler Bradt
Photo by Aaron Rettig

Beyond the Cutting Edge: The Next Whitewater Rampage

By Tyler Bradt

The honeymoon is over. Kayaking, once the world's fastest growing sport, has been on a roller coaster ride of popularity, innovation, progression and a consumer-driven industry. Now returned from its peak, the sport once again is only shared by the enthusiasts who understand the passions of lifestyle, friendship, and a special connection with the watery world.

The outdoor industry, like any good investor, capitalized on this growth spurt, enjoying the consumers who walked hand-in-hand with the dramatic upwelling of innovative products, athleticism, and the media highlighting it all. The high times peaked, flattened then began a slow descent. The industry started absorbing itself. The once kayaker-owned companies became a part of the corporate world. The corporations watched their investments go from turning profits to barely breaking even, while consumers realized that their boat from three years ago is just as good, if not better, than this year's. Boat manufacturing companies who once stood as pillars of support to the paddling world and its athletes now find that support making less monetary sense. And now that the honeymoon is over, who is left to nourish the future of kayaking?

Kayaking like all sports began with the passionate individuals who defined the sport and its potential. From the American front the Byrd brothers, Snyder brothers, Walt Blackader, Doug Ammons, and Rob Lesser pioneered expeditions, drops, creeks, big water and play. These individuals also

created the first tremor of gear and boats. Lifejackets and sprayskirts from mothers' sewing machines, boats fragily created from fiberglass cloth and resin. Then the Kern brothers, Corran Addison, Scott Lindgren, NRPW crew, Eric Jackson, Steve Fisher, and Tao Berman wrote a chapter of progression throughout the 90s in all aspects of the whitewater world. With new and seemingly indestructible boats and egos, these individuals formed lifestyles out of the sport, discovered the gold mine of California creeking, explored the world's most remote and challenging rivers, established world records and dominated the rodeo circuit. They enjoyed the competition between boat manufactures scrambling to design the next "revolutionary" kayak and all the while, the industry throwing money at these figurehead athletes who legitimized their products and milked mass media for their stunts. The late 90s came about, and almost every kayaker considered him- or herself to be a pro and the pros considered themselves to be gods. They were driving team vehicles, demanding six-figure contracts. Righteous.

Kayaking was peaking and showing a promising future. Athletes spurred the sport, pushing it well above the limitations of even their gear. Excitement hung in the air, stuck to the pages of international publications, and flooded hundreds of thousands of computer screens. With the good times rolling, the century turned and new breed of kayakers took the podium. They were young and reckless with an appetite for kayaking only equaled by their ability to party. Boats for kids, high schools for kayakers, sponsors for young athletes, and with the sport in the grasp of this new generation, a new rampage began. History repeated itself as circles of young friends grew into the new

figureheads of the sport. The Young Guns, the essence of it all. The older paddling generation scoffed at them privately and publicly, holding a high standard of humor, this new crowd loved their critics, or cared nothing about them. Their focus was progression and the world was now theirs. With media induced popularity they rose to the occasion, giving the public a spectacle of note. These paddlers began treating waves more like a trampoline than slip-n-slides, freestyle was redefined and rodeo died. The Big Gun Show was used as the world championships of this new era of kayaking, as paddlers sent film of their best moves and lines from around the globe for a chance to claim fame, but certainly not fortune. Athletic progression was a rushing competition redefining the possible but who was paying for it? The industry companies who once cut single athletes six figure checks were on thin ice. Marketing budgets dwindled, which meant athletes had to turn to more conventional forms of income—jobs. Their focus, progression of the sport, now also had to make room for paying for food and shelter. Why is it that individuals shaping the future of the sport and fueling the industry have no one fueling them?

The year is now 2009, almost a full two decades since the main rush of kayaking innovation began. A sport which went from a hundred thousand dollar industry to a hundred million dollar industry in a decade now struggles to keep its own head above water. Our sport which has now progressed further than ever can't even support the individuals who could take it further still. In a multimillion dollar industry there is only enough money to provide a full livelihood for a handful of kayakers. Many of the paddlers still getting the checks are the same ones who got the checks from the heyday, the majority of

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them over the hill. The best advice to make it as a pro paddler now is to look outside the industry. With many of the dollars gone, what does our future hold?

Progression. The word sounds like a foghorn throughout the industry. Our new young and reckless paddlers are taking kayaking bigger, farther, and higher than ever imagined. Walt Blackadar might have had a heart attack had someone whispered in his ear what the sport's athletes would be doing in the year 2009. Global expeditions have continued to show the possibility of ground shaking exploration. Freestyle has taken to the air and acrobatic maneuvers now preformed in a kayak look more like what you would see in a gymnastics routine. Extreme kayakers have shown the remarkable skill of running hard rapids and the talent and focus it takes to run 100+ foot waterfalls and stick them. All of it resting on the shoulders of the sports current "cutting edge" athletes. Why do they continue to scrape together the money to pull it all off? Lifestyle, and maybe a chance to rejuvenate the sport's zenith. No one pays most of these athletes; some pioneers of the sport would rather cast away their accomplishments, brushing off even world record waterfalls with analogies of inner tubers running waterfalls of equal height with only so much as a glance, or BASE jumpers free-falling farther than anyone in a kayak. It demands the question, why do we do it?

To be a kayaker is to exist within water, around water, and hopefully more times than not, on top of water. It is never kayaker versus river; those folks don't last too long. It is to harmonize with the power of the river and to exist within the moment it creates. To run a 107 foot waterfall is to first have a vision of it, then to have a feeling in your gut like you just swallowed an electrified golf ball. Your mind sharpens and focuses as the decision is made. You begin to buzz with anticipation and adrenaline as every element of the situation is taken into account—from the temperature of the water to the ripple ten feet from the lip. Then you decide. Then you wait.

Finally, safety and cameras are ready and you have only had to suspend your mind in that anticipatory state for two hours. Death? Life altering injury? Yes, potentially yes, but your confidence overrides the questions. You have been training for this moment your whole life and now everything is climaxing at once. You are with your best friends; your mentor, the river, roars beside you and suddenly as you see your kayak at your feet perched on the rocky ledge, paddle in hand and life vest unusually tight you realize what is happening. Sitting in your kayak is almost comforting; this is what you know, who you are.

You snap the back band into place, loop your skirt onto the cockpit thinking to yourself it seems a bit insubstantial compared to thirty thousand CFS falling at close to 100 miles per hour. From your perch you can see the river below you stretching away downstream, it looks small. As focus shifts from the river to your friends at the lip you notice there is no more bustle of activity, everyone is simply standing looking at you. Thumbs up. A surge of energy courses up your spine and leaves your brain tingling. One more visualization and couple words of encouragement from deep down, your head hangs and your eyes close. You have played this game before and know the mind space necessary to pull this off. Calm and collected you open your eyes again, grab your paddle and slide into the water. Your kayak feels light and buoyant as you take your last two strokes away from ever turning back but you already crossed that line in your mind two hours ago; there was never any turning back. Your kayak enters the main flow of the river and like the plastic projectile you are, you shoot downstream, neither thrill nor thoughts register now, this is the moment. The lip rushes to meet you and like the river you begin to plummet downwards, time slows as your world turns 90 degrees, your body and mind reacting with the freefall as to ensure your boat is in sync with the river, you are flying, not falling, flying. Falling is how everyone has always run waterfalls but you are different, not just falling off a waterfall, but running it.

Tyler sticking 107-foot Alexandra Falls on the Hay River

Photo by Pat Camblin

Water droplets suspended in air and time sparkle around you, still trying to decide their shape. Your body is in a natural upright position, your paddling feathering the mix of air and water just behind your hips. Two seconds go by as your body and boat accelerate to 67 miles per hour, but you don't feel acceleration, you don't feel speed, you don't feel anything but the sensation of weightless freefall. Your boat is perfect, you have had time to ensure it and relinquishing control to the forces of nature you tuck forward, hard. Paddle to the side you prepare for landing, BAM! Your world explodes, your moment detonates, your face feels like a sumo wrestler just slapped you with all his might. Your boat transitions perfectly and rockets towards the heavens, and just as quickly as you went over the lip, your boat rests on the turmoil of confused water below. Your vision has nothing to focus on but the wall of white mist around you. Regaining your composure you sprint into it as it clears; adrenaline finally registers, your body and mind electrified. Your eyes take in the huge torrent of water falling out of the sky; it then dawns on you how beautiful your last ten seconds of existence have been. Putting a hand in the water, you feel the river and exchange unspoken words of humble gratitude. You didn't conquer the world record waterfall, you conquered yourself. You proved your ability to exist directly within the moment the waterfall created. If you hadn't, you wouldn't be sitting in your kayak laughing, crying, and shaking with adrenaline. This is what you live for, an existence where it takes holding hands with one of the earth's most powerful creations to stir the life of your soul.

How can you think about money now? It's laughable. Something so artificial, it is a product of the human driven world. Luckily you don't exist in that world you exist in a continuous pursuit of detaching from it with the real world, nature. People speak of the real world as jobs. The joke



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is on them. The joke is on the pioneer who despite his intimate connection with kayaking has his perception of the sport wedged firmly in years past. The only people you can connect with now are the ones who walk in your world—your paddling friends who help each other teeter on the cutting edge. Parents, girlfriends, professors; no, they don't understand your world either.

Innovation has dictated the rise and fall of everything in our sport. You would think innovation and progression would walk hand-in-hand. Not so. Was any of my gear made for running a 107-foot tall waterfall? Certainly not.

Individuals shaped our sport through “user innovations.” They didn't have anyone funding them either; they simply had a desire to make kayaks more playful and apt to run difficult things. In fact our sport is such a great example of individuals inspiring an entire industry that Harvard Business School professor Carliss Baldwin uses freestyle kayaking as a prime example of this upheaval of an industry from the garages of people like Walt Blackader.

“User innovations occur when customers of a product improve on that product with their own designs. In rodeo kayaking, the early participants built specialized kayaks from fiberglass using hand lay-up techniques; these crafts were especially nimble in rough water. In the early 1970s, other kayakers began asking these ‘user innovators’ to create equipment for them—and the rodeo kayaking industry was born. Since then, rodeo kayaks have gone through several major design iterations, and the sport has become a \$100 million business.” Carliss Baldwin also goes on to state, “For user innovation to be a force, the cost of creating a new design must be within the reach of a single user.” If individuals kicked kayaking into its pinnacle before, can they do it again?

After I ran Alexandra Falls and the adrenaline quit pumping I started asking questions. What if equipment failure wasn't an almost certain factor in running big drops? What if we could create a full suspension kayak to help protect against paralysis and broken ankles? Many of us know people injured as a result of a blown sprayskirt, people with life-

altering back injuries because of flat landings, people who despite their desire to kayak, almost cry walking to the river because of an ankle shattering piton three years prior. Is there something here that needs to change? Can we as paddlers demand this change, even create it ourselves?

The car ride from Alexandra Falls to my home in Montana is about 37 hours, longer if you run out of gas twice. My mind was buzzing the entire time; I felt I had the key to unlock the future of the sport. The door was in front of me. I combined a dream of an expedition throughout Africa with my new desire to create product innovations. I started a company, Revolutionary Innovations and spent two weeks in Sandpoint, Idaho with my good friend Tom Brunner. This is the same man who created my Japanese Fire Truck to drive from Alaska to Chile for the Oil and Water Project; he is a design fabricator genius despite how humbly he would deny it. Again, I paid him almost nothing to create my dream, a suspension system. But my mind didn't stop there, what about the paddle and the spray skirt, the two things you can most count on letting you down on a big waterfall. There was no time or money to improve those things at that moment despite the idea train. The Africa Revolutions Tour needed organizing and the trip needed funds.

My kayak still sits next to me, suspension system intact after the abuse of African rivers and waterfalls. My mind still ponders a skirt that won't implode and a paddle that won't break. What if we could once again create a product that every customer of the whitewater industry needed? Could we push kayaking back into another heyday? My mind full but my bank account empty, I write proposals knowing that if I put my mind to it I can still generate income from my accomplishments. I know that although kayaking has never paid me and maybe never will, it is still the driving force of my life. I know that although the honeymoon is over, a party has just begun. It is a party that is not exclusive to pro paddlers or sponsored athletes; it is a party in which dreams serve as the only form of invitation and whose participants will continue to nourish our sport.



Introduction to Commentary

Doug Ammons

My original essay on “The Cutting Edge in Kayaking” (July/August, 2008) was spurred by a claim made by some steep creeking aficionados, who stated their area was the “most cutting edge” in our sport, the place where the hardest things were done. That seemed like a strange, inaccurate claim. After mulling over the idea of “the cutting edge” for a while, I decided to sketch some ways we use it in our sport. Multiple examples and comparisons were offered, as were contrasts between features and types of paddling: waterfalls, creeking, big water, expeditions, and the major branches of the sport. It quickly became obvious that our sport is so rich in edges no essay could ever summarize all of them. So, I made a counter claim: every area in kayaking has its edge, or even multiple edges, because people have always pushed as far as they could in any ways they could. I suggested the “cutting edge” was more like anarchy than simply pushing farther along specific lines, because there are many different kinds of “edges,” with more being added all the time. The difficulty and varieties of kayaking are constantly being pushed in dozens, even hundreds of directions. It was also clear specific runs that we point to as defining the “edge” tended to be the outcome of personal challenges felt by individuals rather than any systematic evolution of the sport. We push all the time in every direction, and create new directions.

As you have just read, Tyler's reply redirected the topic. With Tyler's and the editor's permission, I contacted a broad range of people, including

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company owners like Joe Pulliam and Eric Jackson, retailers and kayak school owners like Aaron Pruzan and Landis Arnold, innovators and designers like Jim Snyder, Corran Addison, and Shane Benedict, competitors like Jamie McEwan, marketing and R&D gurus like Risa Shimoda, and several of Tyler's top "Young Gun" friends. Readers should note that in many cases, the people above have done all the different jobs mentioned – everything from boat designing to teaching kayaking to owning companies. Additionally, all of them have been passionate kayakers for many years, so their statements strongly reflect their long-term love for rivers. In the ensuing exchanges I encouraged, asked questions, cajoled, and prodded people. Their answers offered an amazing wealth of information and thought-provoking ideas. My ensuing conversations with Tyler were likewise interesting and fun. American Whitewater is thankful for Tyler's thoughtful response and his good humor, because it allowed this to become a much bigger project with a fascinating outcome.

Especially, the commentators emphasized perspective and deemphasized difficulty, even if difficulty was the original purpose of discussing the "cutting edge" in the first place. Their reason was that it simply does not drive the sport. Virtually everybody believed the core of kayaking was in personal enjoyment. So, we started discussing the hardest parts of the sport, but ended with the quiet gifts rivers give each of us.

The following comments should provide readers with a host of interesting and provocative ideas, as well as a greater understanding of some of the shifts in the sport. Every reader will learn some things he or she didn't know. It was a pleasure to pull this together.



Nick Turner is the co-author of Montana Surf: Whitewater Guidebook to the State of Montana. He has over 30 first descents to his name in 15 countries including Iceland, Norway, Nepal and Kyrgyzstan. Many of Nick's expeditions and descents were chronicled in a series of Teton Gravity Research films, which have become some of the best-selling whitewater kayaking films of all time. Nick also assists WRSI with product engineering and design. For the last eight years Nick has been facilitating and designing whitewater parks throughout the world. He currently designs whitewater parks and river recreation enhancements for the McLaughlin Whitewater Design Group. Some parks he has helped engineer are Glenwood Springs and Vail, Colorado.

The Person Most in Tune With the River

Nick Turner

The cutting edge of kayaking is an always-moving boundary, and the person pushing that boundary on any given day is the one most in tune with the river. However, the river can always be more powerful than us, and kayaking is so much bigger than us, it can feel odd to take fame and fortune from it.

There's a need for perspective here. As kayakers, we know we are never more powerful than the river and we are never more powerful than nature. We can only work its margins. We can only work in those places that are just right for us. Downstream there can always be a waterfall that is too high to huck or a rapid that is un-runnable.

One can get to know the river well from being on it every day, all day long. Somebody with that experience and knowledge will explore and start putting him or herself into different situations, situations that other kayakers—even those with better skills—won't accept. In that process, a person can become so in tune with the river that he is able to push the always-moving boundary of what is runnable. When Doug Ammons did a solo descent of the Stikine River, he was so in tune with kayaking and with the river that he was able to push the always-moving boundary of runnability. When Tyler Bradt stomped 100+ foot Alexandria Falls he was so used to kayaking every day and running waterfalls (since he was 14 years old) and was so in tune with those skills on that day, he was able to push the boundary in another way. When Eric Jackson wins a World Championship, he knows the feeling of playboating and flipping in his kayak so well, and is so comfortable with playing in waves and holes that he is the most in tune person in the world on that day. Each of these examples shows a different branch of the sport.

The river is much more powerful than us, and it does not hesitate to remind us

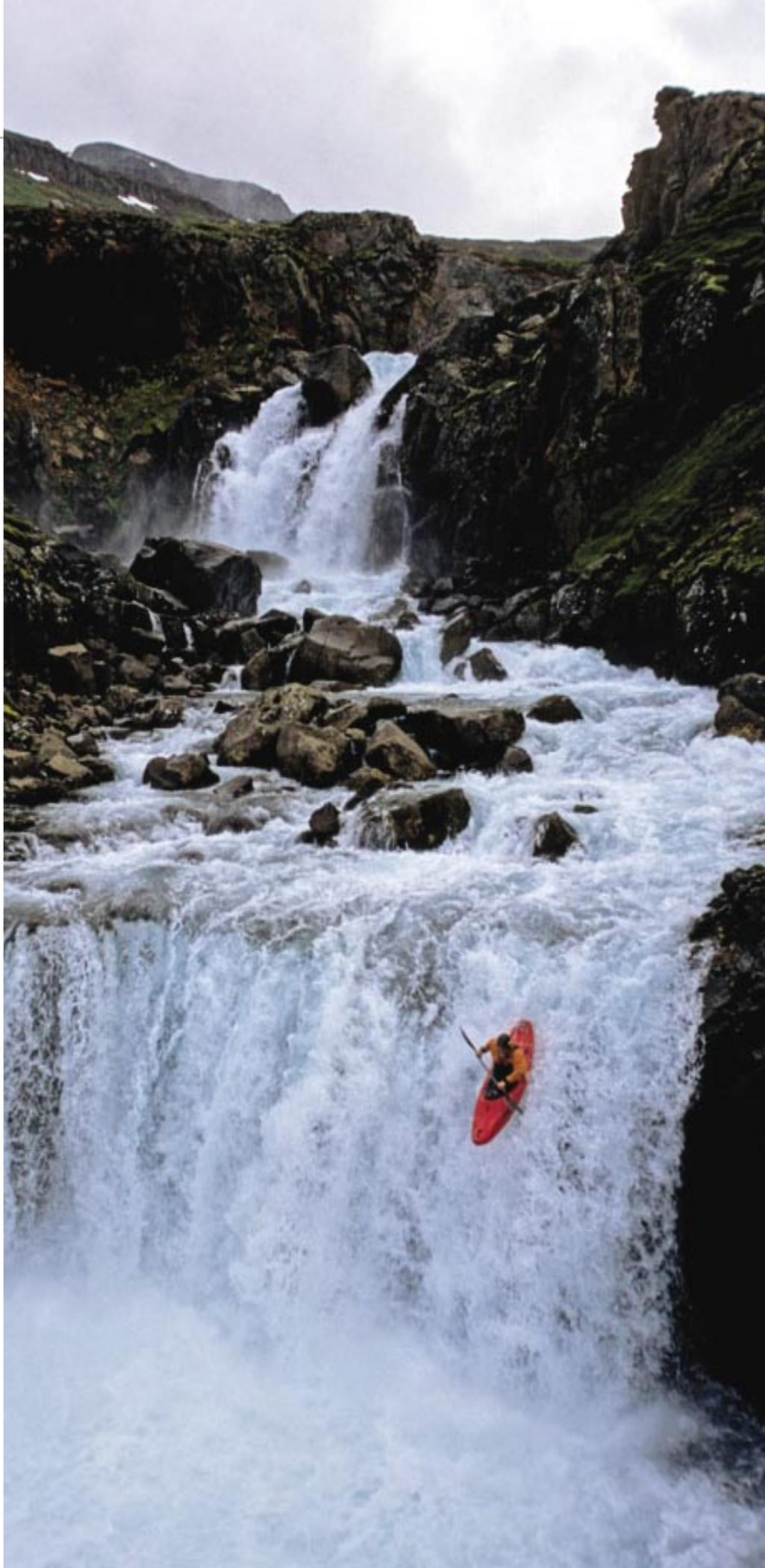
Nick Turner being the most in tune with the river

Photos by Dan Armstrong

of that. It's not necessarily even selective, because it doesn't pick the least in tune person or the one who with the weakest skills. I know of nobody in the world who could have run better the rapid on the Black Canyon of the Gunnison that took Chuck Kern. There was nobody in the world more in tune with Chilean steep creeking than Brennan Guth when he died there. This limitless power of the river makes things like sponsorships, contracts, and competitions seem so small. In an intense atmosphere where one is in tune and pushing as hard as possible, with a real chance of death, those things are just paperwork. How can paperwork be as important as the huge power we flirt with and the fulfilling experiences we have with rivers?

I hope the kayaking industry rebounds from its slump and is able to pay people to paddle once again. However, I do not think that the lack of payment has slowed the pushing of what is runnable. In the cyclical nature of all things in this world I am sure financial solidity will be back and the young generation will be able to make money at it. All of us, whether pro kayakers or weekend warriors, get much fulfillment from the river. The river gives us so much that our lives feel incomplete without it, so it feels out of place to complain about not getting paid to kayak when the river already gives us so much.

Each new generation becomes the old generation, and the older generation will always be left behind in some ways. However, the rewards do not come from wanting to hold onto a record or feel like the best kayaker forever. We get our rewards by being the most in tune person on that day and pushing that boundary on that day when we are the most in tune person—and that is the best feeling in the world. It is a reward for pushing the boundary, not a legacy.



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Shane Benedict has paddled for nearly 30 years. He has been a highly skilled river runner, doing hard runs and expeditions around the world. Particularly in the 1990s and into recent years, he was a highly successful competitor in freestyle, qualifying for the U.S. Freestyle team five times, and consistently placing in the top ten in World Championship competitions. Shane has also coached many of the top paddlers today, Andrew Holcombe, Brad Ludden, Marlow Long, Jesse Murphy, Dustin Urban, and Pat Keller to name a few. He was one of Perception's influential designers. After the major reorganization of the sport and multiple mergers, he and several friends such as Steve Jordan and Woody Callaway founded Liquidlogic Kayaks. It has become one of the larger kayak companies, with many successful designs in freestyle, creeking, and expeditions. Thus, Shane's experience combines a long career of high-level challenge and performance in competition, coaching, designing, creating new moves, and running a company.

"I Can Do This!"

Shane Benedict

I've read both Doug and Tyler's interesting essays. I would like to begin by saying I disagree with the idea and ambition of being cutting edge or consciously trying to push the envelope. That particular attitude strikes me as ridiculous. Doug's essay questions the idea of cutting edge and what are the most difficult parts of our sport. Tyler takes a different track and more directly says that he believes he and his friends are at the cutting edge, such as doing big waterfalls, and this edge and the people on it are what drive the sport.

I don't agree with taking the cutting edge so seriously. The fact that anyone would say, or believe, that they are cutting edge seems silly and self-absorbed. First, the sport is way more than that. Second, trying to be cutting edge takes away from the essence of it all. It belies the true feeling that comes over you when you do something that feels incredible—to you. People would be on more solid ground if they focused on the feeling of personal progression. That is more true to the point. Is somebody doing something to be the first? Are they doing it to be sponsored? Are they doing something to be the "baddest ass" of all? Hmmm. That's not it. The point is to push yourself and see what you can do, to move your own progression forward. It's the only thing you can control and the only part that really means anything. After all, just to take one example, there are paddlers who have logged many first descents full of manky unkind lines, or easy, unappealing runs just to notch up one more first descent. That really can't be the point, can it?

When Mark Lyle, Bob McDonough, Corran Addison, and I were trying to figure out how to do cartwheels we weren't thinking, "we are on the cutting edge." We were just pushing ourselves through fun progressions, trying hard, and having a good time. It was the best of competition and encouragement. I think that Tyler has run 50, 75, and now 100-foot waterfalls because he thought he

could, not because he thought that would make him among the "elite cutting edge envelope pushing paddlers," but because it was a progression and inspiration for himself. I mean I sure hope neither he nor anybody else gets to the top of a huge drop thinking, "Oooh, I will be the baddest if I do this." I would hope that each of us at the top of our progression-pushing rapid is thinking, "I can do this!"

Where have we been? Where are we going? Contrary to what Tyler says or implies, there are no golden parachutes, or executive buyouts, nor \$100k paddling jobs, and there never have been. Our sport won't fall by the wayside because of recession, or corporate take over. Whitewater kayaking is as it has been for the last 30 years and will be in the future, an industry for the kayak bums: a core driven sport.

In the beginning, the paddlers themselves made their own gear, pushed themselves, explored, and dreamed of new ways of kayaking. We have seen the progression from the ender to the combo move, the seven-foot falls to the 100-footer, and from the local creek to the depths of the Tsangpo Gorge. These progressions have been impressive, flawed, beautiful, and not so graceful at times. The choice of line, style, and craft are your own. The outcome in a sport like ours should only be judged by you. Today paddlers still conceive, create, push, and explore the world and kayaking itself just as Mick Hopkinson, Doug Ammons, and Rob Lesser have. As designers we no longer sniff styrene in our basements, we have nicer shops, tools, and materials, but E.J., Corran, Robert, Celiers, Charles, Snowy, Graham, myself, and others still drive as passionately as anyone has in our industry, to make the boats that let us experience water anew. We just have better ventilation.

Like Prijon, Lettman, Johnson, and Stancel before us, we are trying to make boats that we want to paddle, that can go higher, and farther, more safely. These days many more people are focused on making kayak equipment stronger and lighter, so that it can perform at higher levels than ever before. The collective focus

of our industry on a plastic toy floating down a river these days is mind-boggling.

As we go forward I expect Tyler, The Young Guns and others to continue to push their paddling, new designers to create better boats, and the huge majority of paddlers to simply enjoy “messing around in boats,” because that is what nourishes the sport.



Shane Benedict on the job



Jamie McEwan (stern) and his son Devin racing C-2 slalom

Photos by James Subido

Jamie McEwan is an outstanding figure in the canoe-kayak world, initially known for his bronze medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics in C-1 slalom, when whitewater slalom made its Olympic debut. Jamie was a top National and World Cup competitor and a fixture for many years on the US National Slalom team, culminating in his return to the Olympics in 1992, racing with partner Lecky Haller. He has joined his brother, pioneering river-runner Tom McEwan, on many river trips, including a 1998 attempt of the Tsangpo Gorge in Tibet for National Geographic. Articulate and thoughtful, he draws perspective from many facets of whitewater sport—competitive, exploratory, and personal.

The Seventh Grade

Jamie McEwan

This isn't really a piece on where we are and where we're going, because I don't think I can predict that. However, I do have a few thoughts on the cutting edge.

It's hard for the outsider to know what's really cutting-edge. It isn't necessarily what looks good in a video. I'm with the legendary climber Reinhold Messner, who before he became quite so legendary wrote a book called *The Seventh Grade*. In it, he proposed adding an extra grade for the way a climb was done. What matters most is style. Messner felt, for example, that a quick self-supporting "Alpine" climb is more worthy than a massive "Himalayan" assault; I agree, and I think that the same holds true for whitewater expeditions. And the paddler who puts on a suit of armor, flips and bashes down a rapid upside-down, is less worthy of respect than the one who paddles it cleanly and under control. These examples seem pretty obvious, but admittedly, what is and what isn't good style can be awfully subjective. Personally, I'm more interested in the guy who races a wildwater boat down the Upper Yough than the guy who hucks himself off a 100-foot waterfall. I can't really defend that, but I don't have to. Subjectivity has its place. After all, the ultimate value of paddling is subjective. The ultimate value lies in the experience of the paddler. And many of my peak experiences have been far from what anyone ever called "cutting-edge": running a Class III-IV river alone, or training slalom in Class II, after dark, under the lights in the falling snow.

The Great Debate



Eric Jackson (EJ) is the consummate competitor in several areas of kayaking. He was a member of the US national slalom team for ten years straight competing on the World Cup, and was the top US finisher in the 1992 Olympic slalom event. He then had even greater success when he shifted to freestyle, first winning the world Championship in 1993, and four additional times since. He started Jackson Kayaks three years ago, with emphasis on freestyle and creeking designs but more particularly small kayaks for children and women, a niche that had previously been woefully neglected. Jackson Kayaks has been a recent bright light in the industry, becoming one of the top sellers of whitewater boats in the world. This last year, EJ also was named to the Whitewater Hall of Fame in the Competitor category in recognition of his long and multi-faceted competition career. Today, his young daughter and son are top competitors as well. His comments reflect the thoughts of a 25 year world-class competitor in two different disciplines, and the entrepreneurship of a successful businessman.

The Total Picture

Eric Jackson

I am a kayaker, and have been for over 38 years, with 29 of those years being nearly full time. I love paddling, love pushing the envelope, and love the industry, people, and past and future of the sport. Perhaps one of the best ways to describe my point of view and perspective is “total picture.” I just finished reading both Doug Ammons’ and Tyler Bradt’s well written, emotional, and factual essays. They both educated me, as well as put me into the shoes of the authors, as I imagine how they feel and perceive the cutting edge of paddling. I would not dare dispute either essay, because, for them, it is their reality, and they intend to live it. That is what is wonderful about life in this crazy world. You can happily live strongly believing things that are 180 degrees different from what somebody else believes, who is living just as happily and successfully.

The whitewater paddling industry is small, as I can attest to as the President and co-owner of Jackson Kayak. We do well in this market, but yet we are not a large company. Even smaller are the groups of paddlers who are leading in their field, or creating new fields. I have watched the segmentation of the market as paddlers started, for the first time, to “categorize” themselves into creekers, and playboaters, for example. Then it was, “I am a big wave surfer” (a sub-category of a playboater). Then it became, “I am an expedition boater”, or “I am a big waterfall boater.” There are quite a few that haven’t been mentioned, that have fine tuned techniques and are clearly on the cutting edge with greater honed skills in their area than in most other factions. Slalom boaters, downriver racers, freestyle paddlers, squirt boaters, etc. The best slalom boater in the world can operate with unsurpassed skill and precision while pushing the physical limits at top speed. Without that training, you can’t even touch them. The top 20 slalom paddlers in the world can get down a slalom course, putting their boats where they want them, using one blade and laughing all of the way and still beat the top freestyle, creekers, squirt boaters, river

runners, etc. to the finish line. I believe the same slalom boaters can get to the lip of the tallest waterfall ever ran and get to the bottom, if they have the desire to try it. With the quantity of swims in such big waterfall attempts, it can be argued that the skill level of running 100-footers isn’t very high yet. But, given a choice between having a slalom boater on a remote trip with me or a seasoned expedition boater, with waterfall running experience, I’ll take the latter every time. The complexity of safely running the hardest water as a team requires much more than just the ability to paddle your own boat.

A freestyle kayaker is another example of cutting edge. The newest moves being performed in small holes in local whitewater parks are just as cutting edge as getting big air on a big wave on the Nile. Anyone who thinks otherwise isn’t doing both. Flying to Africa to a big wave is a bigger commitment than driving to your local run, but once you get there, and on the feature, in order to be cutting edge you have to push beyond what anyone has done before. At that moment, you are in a situation where the fewer people who have been there before you, the easier to push the envelope. I would argue that breaking new ground in slalom, or freestyle, for example, is harder than breaking new ground in running waterfalls over 100 feet. Why? Because so many people are trying to break new ground, in a competitive environment, that all of the easy stuff has been accomplished, and the new ground requires more than desire, but physical prowess, mental toughness, longevity, and creativity. If you are trying to break new ground doing something that only 5 people have ever tried, you can move the envelope farther and faster with just a little creativity and effort. If it is big waterfall running, then it also requires mental strength and the willingness to put yourself in harm’s way.

What is the future of paddling? Each of us has a vision of what that would look like. I consider the future of boat sales, of what types of boats people will want to paddle, and of course, where I’ll paddle with my kids. Sure, I also consider what freestyle moves I would try to come up with to

win the next world championships. I will also consider which expeditions my team will go on and how I can support them, as well as which ones I will join in on. Being close to, or on, or in front of the edge is something that any paddler can enjoy when they are there. They will certainly reminisce about it after they are no longer close to that edge. I was recently asked if "giant slalom" on Class V was the future of the sport. Yes, it is. So is big waterfall running, and so is freestyle, slalom, down river racing, etc. as long as people do it, and are pushing the limits. The future is what people make it. Sure, the big companies have lost the individuals who created a kayaker's personality and had intimate relationships with all aspects of paddling. That only left a void for new individually run companies to take over that role.

Today, freestyle kayaking is resurging like nobody's business! 63 new events

in Freestyle last year alone, called the Hometown Throwdowns, marked the biggest surge in new events in the history of whitewater. World Kayak was the creator of those events. Why? Because we love them, and people love them. Jackson Kayak will continue to sponsor freestyle boaters, like myself, my kids, and much of my team. Expedition boating is the future, too. Jackson Kayak supports expedition boaters who are off to the most difficult rivers of the world, that have never been run, and successfully ticking them off like a "to do list." Are they out for glory? No, they are doing it for the love, the challenge, and the reward of completing something so difficult that most people couldn't get past square one. We support them because their passion for paddling makes the world a better place. Do any of our boaters have a serious salary? No. Would ANYbody do what Team JK does for the money? No chance! The concept that paddlers are

playboys making six figures is ridiculous. With that said, have paddlers, and do paddlers make six figures? Absolutely, but not from being a paddler at a kayak company. There are a rare few who have combined luck, desire, and hard work to create a great income—at least for a short period of time.

Now for what is serious business, to me. This is my personal challenge. In the USA 30,000 whitewater boats were sold in the year 2000. Only 12,000 were sold in the last rolling year. In the words of John Norton, "EJ, you don't want to be selling America's favorite buggy whip." For self-preservation, it is mandatory that Jackson Kayak does everything it can to assure the health and future of paddling in the USA and abroad. This is why we have created World Kayak, which has, as a primary goal, the rebuilding of the infrastructure of paddling. This infrastructure has been left



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WAVE SPORTS

The Great Debate

in shambles as a byproduct of whitewater companies becoming conglomerates, and abandoning their whitewater focus, leading many of the dealers, schools, etc. to do the same. My vision of the future goes beyond my new move, or the 120-footer being run, etc. It has to do with the total picture, the whitewater community in its entirety. All inclusive club, that is the future I am working towards along with many very capable people. Want to know what mental picture I have??? Here it is:

1. Paddlers have a strong local community to rely on, to paddle with, to learn from, to compete with if they want, and to socialize with.

2. Instead of top paddlers saying, “look at me, I am the future, I am cool, pay me,” they’ll be saying, “Look at me, what I do is fun, and I will share my experiences with you and help you learn to do what I do.” We attempt to create this concept in Team JK; many non-team JK paddlers achieve this too.

3. Instead of the primary suppliers in our sport dissing one discipline or another, or whitewater altogether, we will see those companies who are true supporters of whitewater, not just supplying goods for a profit, but becoming the leaders of the industry and giving the sport the adrenaline shot it needs.

4. Mainstream media can and will go after paddling, but the numbers dictate the quantity of that media. While getting on a one shot show about running a big waterfall, or live coverage of the world championships for freestyle, or Olympic coverage of slalom are all good, the reason there isn’t a more consistent feed of media is that our total number of participants are too small. Cover golfing and you attract millions of interested people who will buy the products advertised. Cover paddling and you are limited to thousands of people who won’t see a paddling ad because the cost is too high and the number of people who will see it too low. It is that simple. Want more media, need more paddlers! The future being mainstream, means paddling being more mainstream. Rafting

is the most mainstream whitewater activity and arguably the most media worthy. With that said, our sport has so many wonderful personalities, worthy of a profile who can pique the general interest of our population.

5. Our beginner and intermediate paddlers will thrive, adding more great people to the sport. Some will be so fired up and motivated, and skilled, that they’ll quit their jobs, become full time kayaking bums, and paddle their way to the top of their discipline. When they’re there, they will share what they know with everyone else in a way that we can all appreciate and learn from. That person will be more marketable and make more money than the person who feels that the world owes them because they did some really cool things paddling.

Meanwhile, this is all opinion from the computer of a guy who left the real world behind in 1984 and committed his life to the pursuit of the paddling dream. That dream is to paddle when and where I want, and be all I can be, in my kayak and out of it. My opinion is just that, an opinion, a waste of breath. My efforts to create the circumstances stated above are real. An opinion of how life should be without the action to back it up is fruitless. My actions are the only thing worth measuring. They do affect the total picture, but only a little bit. It is the thousands of individuals in our sport whose combined actions determine our future. They are the heroes.



Risa Shimoda has been one of the best and most versatile women’s kayakers for nearly 30 years, excelling in river running, freestyle, and squirt kayaking. She represented the US six times at the World Championships in freestyle and squirting events. She was president, long time board officer, and executive director for American Whitewater, filling several different roles in her concern and support for clean rivers and useful whitewater events. She also spent almost ten years as the Director of Marketing, Sales, and R&D for Perception during the boom of the 1990s. Currently she still paddles a great deal, runs her own successful marketing company, consulting for various non-profit organizations and companies in kayaking industry, is the co-producer of the Biennial “Whitewater Courses and Parks” conference and chairs the board of governors for the International Whitewater Hall of Fame and USA Freestyle Kayaking Committee of USACK.



Cutting Edge or Elements of a Continuum?

Risa Shimoda

Tyler offers several sweeping comments about the path taken by small whitewater kayak companies that grew, hit a peak, went corporate and now resemble a “herd of cattle on a burning ship.” Sadly, he focuses on a short period of time and describes the industry as though it is about to expire. If we step back a bit, we can be a bit more hopeful.

The industry will never look like it did in Germany during the 1920s when Klepper created a boom and owned the category; in the fifties when whitewater boomed as one of our nation’s new sports; and in the seventies when kayaking was booming AGAIN for real due to the first use of rotational molding and broad distribution of kayaks and their promotion by the ’72 Olympics, the film *Deliverance* appeared in the US and there was celebration of the first documented descent of the Blue Nile abroad. In the eighties, non-conformist designers broke the rule that boats had to be to the required length of slalom boats (four meters), when they created a Dancer.

During the growth period Tyler refers to, kayaks that were as technical (not) as a john boat were introduced, driving sales to new and previously unimagined heights. This growth obscured the ongoing fragmentation of a healthy but slower-growth whitewater market, flooding it with a half dozen new companies that each offered multiple new models in multiple sizes every year. Material improvements, the collapsing of design times (e.g., that which is required to produce multiple sizes of one model) further facilitated the model proliferation.

One of the greatest contributors to the injurious fallacy of limitless growth was the trade’s inability to report aggregated category sales and inventory, which drove product development and financial planning. News of tremendous growth encouraged sales managers to project

aggressive growth indefinitely, without a thought to the inventory glut that might occur among their retailer base. Unfortunately financial impacts ensued due to: (1) Growth that was decent but far less than anticipated, and (2) marketplace clutter due to the continued proliferation of models available in multiple sizes—a nightmare for retailers who found it increasingly difficult to sell them predictably. If they could have viewed a summary of their company’s projection for 1996, for example, those company owners would have choked on their coffee, because their projections were based solely on recent history, which was terribly unrealistic. In those days, no one had real data or a crystal ball to be able to predict sales accurately by model or category.

Tyler’s view of the funk that now prevails in the sport need not seal its coffin, for such times can create the fertile ground for innovation (e.g., squirt boating during the drought of the mid-1980s in the Southeast). I’m a glass half-full type, I guess. The flow and ebb of whitewater sales simply reflects changes among its customers and the many new opportunities to re-invent and evolve. The sport doesn’t fall to its death so easily, just as each new generation doesn’t believe that all the cutting edge feats have already been accomplished. The sport will always have its edges, and the industry will always evolve.

Displacement – Kayaks have largely displaced canoe sales and continue their conquest into fishing (e.g. flats) boats.

Demographics – Baby boomers, who drove growth when they were in their 30s and 40s, are now paddling less frequently on calmer water.

New Media – Paddling networks that were once limited to the paddling clubs, destination paddler-owned shops, and slalom races or whitewater rodeos, and a couple of magazines, now span many online vehicles, instant messaging, and online stores that can ship a boat to your door the next day.

Innovation is occurring all the time in the boundless nature of our community, in how we communicate, learn, and

inspire others and the related likelihood of immediate imitation. It might be that they are so frequent and continuous that they are a bit more difficult to identify. If someone believes there are easily measurable, quantum-sized actions that floor everyone and convince them to buy certain gear, that person might be disappointed. Instead, it is more likely that he needs to learn to be content with nourishing himself, having faith that others will find their own nourishment, and that they are doing so right now, and they are not waiting for something or someone else to “nourish the sport of kayaking” and show them the way.

A leading edge for the sport includes individual visionaries who are building whitewater courses, which cuts into the mainstream world of parks and recreation. If hundreds of decrepit dams are replaced by in-town, convenient river recreation courses or parks, our sport will benefit. On another side, the magazine *Kayak Session* has returned romance to the high end of the sport. Also, in a reversal of what Tyler is arguing, the sport has actually seen its public reputation and market damaged by thrill seeking. Romance sells better than thrills.

The cutting edge for individual accomplishment? Our hope can only stay strong. There will be 20 pound boats that dial up desired characteristics or that can stay underwater for minutes on end to facilitate new physical feats or exploration. Every such change will keep the sport vibrant as long as a dialog or debate continues, and people like Tyler and Doug challenge others to argue the points. We’re only in trouble the day that no one cares enough to share their thoughts, complain, or celebrate their love for this sport. Personally, I think it is in good hands.

The Great Debate





Patrick Camblin is 26 years old, from Ottawa, Canada, and started boating at age 15. He is one of the superlative younger kayakers of the sport, has paddled in more than 20 countries, and been in many videos. He is a multi-skilled kayaker—from waterfalls, to expeditions, to freestyle—who has won the “Big Gun” champion (the world championship of “big air” freestyle moves), while also winning a number of major competitions. His last trip was just a few months ago, a 400 km self-support trip in Labrador, and he is already packing up for another three months of river exploration in Southeast Asia. He is a fellow “Young Gun” with Tyler and Nick Turner.

Where is Kayaking Going?

By Patrick Camblin

Where is kayaking going? That’s hard to say. As sales falter and the economy takes a downturn some companies in the industry are finding it hard to stay afloat. Sales are incredibly important to the future of the industry, but I don’t think they are the sole indicator of the health of whitewater sports.

When I started boating it immediately enveloped my life. It brought me a sense of purpose, an independence I hadn’t found before. Decisions were important. For the first time it felt like my life was in MY hands. On the river the world worked differently; it allowed me to live in succinct moments, and eventually, for them. Anyone who has paddled whitewater has felt this. It happens every time we are given the opportunity to go outside our comfort zone and successfully push forward, and it’s the same for someone running their first Class III or for someone like Tyler at Alexandra. There is nothing like a quickly approaching horizon line to force our thoughts to the present. These moments overwhelm the senses to the point that everything outside of them disappears.

The first time I experienced this was on an incredibly fast and dynamic river wave in Québec. Water was flying under my boat at speeds that didn’t allow for tangible thoughts. Instinct and reaction were all that was left. I had to be quick, make slight movements, small corrections. The seams and boils flew towards me, challenging my course. An unconscious forward thrust kept me in the pocket, a hard carve avoided the pitch of the wave. Things were happening fast, but somehow, time seemed to slow in a way I had never experienced. The outside world disappeared and I got my first taste of the moment. I was hooked. Repetition builds resistance and the intensity of those first surfs disappeared. I had to keep moving forward. I continued to search out these moments, on bigger waves, harder rapids, taller waterfalls, Class 5 multi-days, and international expeditions on rivers with crocodiles. In whitewater more than

elsewhere, these moments lie in wait. This is what kayaking has to offer. It is what makes people want to go farther, push harder and is what continues to motivate the core of our sport.

There have been very talented kayakers taking the sport forward since its inception, but what is heartening now is the depth of talent in the sport. Never before have there been so many incredible boaters pushing things forward in all facets of whitewater. No longer is it just one person pushing freestyle or one group exploring the world, pioneering first descents. On any given day of the year there is a team of badass boaters, in the thick of it, on an expedition somewhere, and kids everywhere are trying to make their mark on freestyle. This is something to acknowledge and appreciate. Kayaking is gaining an army of skilled youth whose passion for whitewater adventures runs deep.

Each year as more young boaters push themselves to improve, the pool of talent grows deeper, more people search out these moments, and the bar continues to be raised. The hardest runs from years past might remain the hardest runs, but now they are descended en masse. Descents of huge waterfalls are increasingly commonplace, and the level of skill in the freestyle scene is staggering. These are boaters who care deeply about kayaking; it has taken over their lives, shaped their identity. They push forward with little or no support from the companies simply because they love to kayak. The forward movement is slowed because of this lack of support, but these boaters don’t stop just because no one has handed them a free boat or a plane ticket.

With each passionate boater that joins the ranks our sport grows healthier. Yes, we are losing some fat from the edges but our core is strengthening, and that is a litmus test for a sport’s health. With these boaters at the helm, the future of our sport looks bright. They will stoke the fire by continuing to explore, finding new rivers, running bigger drops, pushing freestyle—and most importantly—by inspiring the next generation to continue where they’ve left off.

Pat Camblin dropping a falls in South Africa

Photos by Tyler Bradt

The Great Debate



Jim Snyder is one of the most renowned figures in kayaking. He has paddled for over 43 years, while earning his keep for years as a scruffy raft guide, wood paddle designer, and boat builder in West Virginia. He was an “edge” kayaker for many years in more conventional, difficult whitewater, particularly pioneering steep creeks in and around West Virginia. He is probably best known as one of the pioneers and designers of an entirely new form of kayaking, called squirting. With massive experimentation as well as testing help from his brother Jeff and various close friends, Jim evolved a set of progressively smaller and more wing-like boats that allowed controlled vertical and three dimensional moves like cartwheels, and underwater moves like mystery moves, along with a unique set of “cubic” moves and techniques. His book, The Squirt Book is a classic that redefined what one could do in a kayak. He has designed over 70 different boats, most of them independently, and also has been deeply involved in river conservation for the Cheat River watershed for many years.

Above - Jim Snyder in one of his own early squirt designs, January 1983

Photos by Doris Berns

What does the “Edge” Cut, Anyway?

Jim Snyder

There has always been a “Hey, LOOK AT ME!” aspect to this sport and I’m glad it’s alive and well. It’s usually prefaced with “Hold my beer.” The thing to remember is—at its heart—this sport is a personal evolution and discipline, and amounts to little more. It’s a recreation, no matter what we are trying to prove. It doesn’t compare to being true to your family or actually doing something of worth to others in this world. All the progress in this sport doesn’t amount to a hill of beans compared to the real issues in our lives. Our personal evolution is a spiritual evolution and, as such, has little traction in the “real world” except for that it makes us better people—a bit more humble and awestruck perhaps.

The river has taught me some humility over time—something I sorely lacked as a young buck. The humble comes when you make mistakes and learn to question your judgment. Or when you lose friends. You second-guess yourself, and that’s actually the key to longevity—keep your head in the sky but your feet on the ground. But, maybe the thing is to cling to the real offerings of the river, clues and insights into our own nature and God’s vast Nature. You know, the personal stuff that happens in such brief moments and defies description—just so much magic on display as ordinary events. How puny it makes us feel, what a treat to get an

honest glimpse at our minuscule schemes. Knowledge is always a bit of a face pie.

I can see where it’s tempting to think that Tao ran a big falls, got noticed and is now fat and happy (big assumption). So maybe it follows that someone runs a falls a few feet higher and asks, “where is my reward?” Good question. But really they should be asking themselves some further questions. Maybe the whole reward aspect of it crapped out but there is still this awesome experience to feel good about! Money is a thin incentive for plunging over big hazards. The river has a way of stomping on thin incentives. There’s got to be more to it. “Leading the sport” is sort of like a worthwhile ambition, except that the sport is a lazy octopus that hates to be led.

You know, if it’s really all about the money, then you have to look at things pragmatically. The sport is dendritic; there are many branches to the tree. The branches have many leaves. And they are all “cutting edge” to some degree—cutting the wind on behalf of the sport. But the leaves fall off eventually and are replaced regularly. Entire branches can be overshadowed and wither. And some branches find their way to greater “sunshine” and enjoy “prosperity.” How fortuitous! Still, none of the leaves can actually pull the tree along and make it obey the leaves’ will. It’s a reticent tree and all its branches want to stay where they are.

If one of the leaves wants a lot of sunshine it has to strive to the open space—but really the sustenance comes also from the roots of the tree. This might lead one to assume that only the sedate old schoolers are making the big sap because they are closer to the trunk and power base of the sport. They are more like the branches themselves. So really the trick to making a fortune paddling would be to be closely associated with a main branch but have abundant sunshine available—not an untried concept. EJ is like that. But EJs are rare in this sport.

Still, it seems the “leaves” are always striving to be away from the branches, the rest of the crowd, striving for the warm glow and high visibility. In our

generation we aspired to being “stuntmen” when we grew up and we could make a lot of money doing that! And a precious couple made that scene work. But now it seems like Jackass has that scene all sewn up and there’s not much room for innovation there.

I could babble on and on about what works and doesn’t work, but let me just lend my unique perspective from someone who has not made a fortune innovating and designing and yet continues unashamedly. Sure, it would be great to make a ton of money designing, but I don’t. I’ve learned that about the only way to make a bushel of money in this sport is to make someone else 10 times that much. And yet I keep designing and innovating. Am I particularly stupid (could well be) or is there something else going on here?

To tell you the truth, what I do is selfish. I’m working for my own needs and desires and for those of my friends also. A lot of my designing is problem solving and it’s so hard to stop doing that, especially when you get positive reinforcement from your friends. But what does this mean to the rest of the sport? Very little, I suspect, and in any case, it’s not my bailiwick to sort out. I’m just designing the best stuff I can and taking my good old time about it. It’s fun! So my incentive is small—not money, not revolution, not reward—just problem solving and fun hunting. Maybe that’s why I have had such a robust career—over 70 designs with minimal corporate endorsement. The grandiose goals seem to deflate so easily and legions of followers can turn their backs in a moment if there is a better train wreck happening somewhere else. We are all very alone in this world and we’re here for just a flash and that’s why the big stones of our lives—our family and friends mean so much.

If you REALLY want to be cutting edge in this sport, try being the “Happiest Paddler on the Planet!”—now there’s a worthy challenge. You could start with EJ’s beautiful dream of being “whitewater rich”—paddling whenever the opportunity allows—and then make sure you’re good with your family and friends on how you disappear frequently (and return responsibly). And then proceed to pile up

the excellent times we all want. Let them soak into your soul and make you that much better. And if you are still inspired to stick your head up and say “I am GOOD! I must be the happiest paddler on the planet!” Congratulations, you’re right! But don’t look around too far—there are a lot of us and if you’re still competing, you may still have a long ways to go. But it’s all good. Time well spent.

Going to the cutting edge and returning safely is a proper thing to do and is a time honored tradition, except that historically, in most cases, it has been a real imposed question of survival of someone and their kin—such as in ancient revolutions and plagues. Journeys to the edge are a sign of a life well lived. But to assert that the cutting edge is anything but personal, much less the potentially cutting edge of a sport, or the cutting edge of human athletic achievement, endurance, bravery, or brilliance is probably assuming too much.

This sport is small for good reasons. You have to be a bit bold to go forth into the midst of the frothy waters, and not everybody is cut from that cloth. And it’s just not going to happen—we can’t make everybody like and want to do what we like and want to do.

People like Nature and people like to feel safe. That’s why recreational kayaks are a much more popular product. It’s why touring boats are the main market. You shouldn’t value your hard beating heart at the base of a big falls as better than the hard beating heart of a beginner in a rec boat. God loves both of them. Heaven holds a place for those who play.

If you really want a great job paddling every day, do what so many before us have done: be a raft guide! Live like a gypsy! Hang around the campfire! It’s hard to do much better than that. A lot of great men before us (Alexander the Great, George Washington, Napoleon, and many others) have spent buku hours around the campfire. They all thought it was pretty cool too. Time well spent.

So watch your wake, eat your cake, and sing—very softly.



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The Great Debate



Joe Pulliam Joe Pulliam has paddled and built kayaks for over 35 years. He was the marketing director or Perception kayaks through much of the 1980s while the sport was growing quickly. He split with Perception and cofounded the company Dagger in 1988, the first direct and highly successful competitor to Perception in the US. They were also the first to have a formal, sponsored company team. Joe was in on research and development of multiple boats through this era, has been directly in charge of sales, marketing, planning, and direction of two major companies. His comments reflect his extensive knowledge of the development of the industry over the past 30 years. He also has been an ardent supporter of AW and is a former AW director.

Another View of the Past and Future

Joe Pulliam

Doug Ammons and Tyler Bradt both present interesting reads, and I'll leave it to them to debate the definition of "cutting edge" whitewater, if there is such a thing. It's been decades since I even pretended to be part of that scene. But here's a different perspective on a few items, based on my years of making kayaks, which started not in a garage, but in a back yard, 35 years ago, almost to the day.

I can't help but start with the issue of waterfalls. While I gather that Tyler believes that those who are running higher and higher falls are worthy of significant financial support from the kayak "industry," as one who has spent years attempting (mostly for selfish reasons) to grow participation in whitewater kayaking, I'd much rather see he and his cohorts keep these exploits to themselves. While I understand the appeal of a photo showing a tiny, brightly colored kayak flying over an enormous drop, paddler along for the ride, this very presentation of kayaking scares away more potential paddlers than it will ever attract. At least that's my opinion. I guess I really don't have a problem with waterfall or other Class V/VI images, I just want to see more pictures of folks in Class II or III water, complete with big smiles. I'm a big believer that we need to promote the more attainable side of whitewater, at least alongside the "hair." Those who want to push the limits can and will do so, and that's fine by me, but it's also fine to be a whitewater paddler, and yet never push oneself beyond Class II.

Manufacturers of kayaks and other whitewater gear will financially support those paddlers who influence others to more positively consider their product. Does someone using a product to set the waterfall height record positively influence potential customers? Perhaps. But I very much doubt it.

And just how much money are any kayak "pros" worth? Hard to quantify, but

I'm skeptical that even in the heyday of whitewater kayaking, which I consider to have been at its peak about 1999, there were any kayak companies paying any athletes "six figures." Hell, I was running the biggest whitewater kayak company at the time and I wasn't making six figures! Dagger had a few paid athletes, but I don't know if any were making five figure incomes without having multiple sponsors. Some of the top paddlers of that era, like Eric Jackson, Marc Lyle, and Corran Addison, were on the payroll of one company or another, and were winning freestyle events, but they were earning their salaries largely by designing boats, not just paddling.

The reality is that there wasn't, and still isn't, enough money in whitewater kayaking to support anything close to "highly paid" athletes. Tao Berman, Shawn Baker and a few others found sponsors beyond the kayak and paddle companies, and probably did fairly well financially. More power to them! But despite what Tyler might think or imply, the whitewater kayak industry has always been small and the amount of money available for athletes is very limited. Here are some ballpark numbers to consider. About 1999-2000, participation in whitewater kayaking peaked, and sales of whitewater boats topped out at something like 32,000 kayaks a year. (This includes all whitewater kayaks made and/or sold in North America.) If the average retail sales price of a boat was \$900, that means total revenue of about \$29 million was generated. Of that, the boat manufacturers got about 60% (the remainder being retailer mark up), or a bit over \$17 million in sales. Now split that among six or so companies. From that revenue the boat makers must pay for materials, labor for building the boats, rent, designers, sales and customer service staff, molds, insurance, catalogs, warranties, etc, etc. Despite what some may think, there just wasn't that much money left over! Today, unit sales are down about 40% from this peak, prices are about the same but costs have gone up significantly, so the amount for promotion of any kind is way down.

I agree with Tyler's comments about

needed innovation, and while I recognize his need for gear better suited for 100-foot waterfalls, let me offer a different perspective here as well. I applaud efforts to make skirts stay on better and therefore be “safer,” as I too have taken a couple of nasty swims due to spray skirt implosion. Yet I’ll contend that the biggest innovation waiting to happen with skirts remains one that goes on and off easier and is less intimidating to a new paddler, not one that will survive a record setting drop. Skirts are vastly improved. I got a new skirt this year; it goes on fairly easy and stays on. That’s great, but to someone who has never used a skirt, this remains the most intimidating aspect of kayaking. I don’t have an answer, but I contend that skirts are still a major limiting factor to those considering whitewater kayaking. And boats with a full suspension? Please. Just give me a boat that weighs 25 pounds and won’t break in year one!

Finally, a comment on Tyler’s comments about the corporatization (can’t believe my spellchecker allowed that one!) of the kayak industry. Is it a coincidence that whitewater kayaking peaked just about the time that Dagger, Perception, Wave Sport, and Necky all “sold out”? That’s a subject for debate. But what I think is beyond debate is the fact that corporate ownership has not been good for these brands, nor for whitewater kayaking. On this I believe Tyler and I would agree. And though I won’t apologize for my role in this transformation, I do regret that some things have turned out the way they have. It’s hard to foresee the future, as I think we’ll all agree.

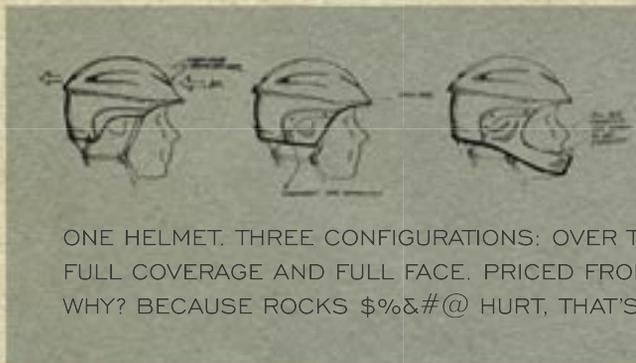


Aaron Pruzan: Aaron Pruzan is the owner of Rendezvous River Sports and Jackson Hole Kayak School and has introduced thousands of people of all ages to the sport of kayaking. He has been involved with numerous whitewater expeditions, exploratory descents and competition in a variety of disciplines. In addition he has worked for river stewardship as a board member of the Snake River Fund and American Whitewater.



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The Great Debate

It's the Center of the Sport That Matters

Aaron Pruzan

Tyler's piece isn't really a rebuttal of Doug's article. While he makes it clear that he feels his crew really is on the cutting edge, this isn't the theme of his story. The main point I was able to glean from Tyler's heartfelt ramblings, is he bemoans the fact that the whitewater heyday of the 90s was short lived and most of the money dried up before the Young Guns were on top of the scene. For those of us who were exploring and running hard whitewater before anyone was really making any money, things have just returned to the way they were. The growth of the 90s was unsustainable and a small market sport got a big head. Pro kayakers making six figures? The couple I can think of that

have had, or still enjoy such financial success are certainly not over the hill.

Doug's "Cutting Edge" piece is a good story about what that edge really means and made some excellent points about whitewater challenges that have been cutting edge for 25+ years and may always be. From my standpoint he could have made his story 100% positive without taking shots at anyone, but he chose to throw in several pointed and negative comments. In return, Tyler could have been 100% positive with his story but clearly he felt slighted and wanted to take a couple digs back at Doug, and others. (Unless you are willing to run Turnback solo, while the Tweedsmuir Glacier is surging, at 20,000+ cfs, with a glass boat, while wearing a 70s wetsuit—never diss Walt Blackadar!) That said, the Young Guns (and a few other groups like them) are definitely running more radical

whitewater and doing bigger freestyle moves than ever before. Why not just let them have their time of glory without trying to lessen or compartmentalize their accomplishments?

I enjoyed my brief time when I was certain that I was among those representing the cutting edge of kayaking. I definitely had more swagger during those years and liked to kayak and party hard enough to show it. The fact that Tyler and his crew are the same way doesn't make them egotistical, it is simply part of the necessary arrogance required to do the things they are doing. Now that the cutting edge has surged past me, I take pleasure in watching others push what is possible.

Concerning Tyler's idea that the cutting edge and the people on it drive a sport's success, the answer is mixed. As Tyler brings up the years I call the "Golden

an exciting thriller set in the world of whitewater

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RAPID DESCENT

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Age of Whitewater,” we should look to the nineties, and since freestyle was the driver of that era, consider playboats. Almost every year of that decade brought a new design that enabled the average paddler to quickly do things they could not do before. While these new designs were being driven by those at the edge, things were happening so fast the edge was not yet that far ahead of average. This encouraged participation because many paddlers could do the latest cool new trick. While some of these innovations were truly exceptional—planing hulls for one—the other most noticeable difference was that the boats were getting smaller. Average boat length was cut by 40% in a mere decade. Shorter, more maneuverable boats were a major factor in driving sales and, anatomically speaking, there was only so far we could go. Another factor of that decade that cannot be over looked was that the rapid growth of the sport, and

the money being poured into it, exactly coincided with the strongest economy in the history of our country, the likes of which we are unlikely to ever see again. When things collapsed in 2001 and boats couldn't really get much smaller, whitewater went down hard and has yet to recover—even though the cutting edge continues to push forward.

Why did our sport not rebound along with other industries? For one we are an incredibly small market. More importantly, as Tyler notes, the design innovations of the last eight years were much less inspiring than in the previous decade. While year-to-year improvements have come, these improvements are mostly discernable only to expert paddlers. Recreational whitewater paddlers are not clamoring for the latest and greatest because for them it doesn't really make that much of a difference and in some cases

offers less speed and performance for what they actually want to do. Furthermore, as freestyle moves have become more incredible, dynamic and gymnastic, the average paddler often feels intimidated, as per the following quote. “It's not quite as much fun surfing anymore because all I can do is front surf and spin and I feel like I should just get off the wave.” While this comment is a bit lame, I've heard this or something like it said many times during the past several years. This situation leads to fewer boat sales, less money for R&D, and only a little change left to sponsor a professional team.

During the past 15 years I was directly involved with putting on 40 different events involving 4 different paddling disciplines. What events were the biggest drivers to increased participation? Was it when the rodeo circuit was at its peak and athletes like Fisher, Ludden, Gavere and



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The Great Debate



Robertson were going off on the Snake? While all their performances and those of many others were impressive and exciting, the event that creates more paddlers every year by far, is the Pole, Pedal, Paddle on a Class II section of the Snake River. This multi-sport relay is an event that is far from cutting edge. Yet every year—before, during, and after—people always ask me about learning to kayak so they can participate.

Is the cutting edge important? Absolutely—it is always enticing to some, it is historically significant, as people will remember those who were considered to be at the edge at defining moments in the progression of a sport, and it does drive innovation. Whether this helps the sport's success depends on how you measure it. At this time, the cutting edge is mostly irrelevant to the financial success of whitewater. Fortunately, money isn't

the biggest thing for those of us involved in the paddle sports industry. Fun is a better measure and the more the edge gets pushed, the more things are possible, and this in turn creates more possible fun—and thus success.

Where is the sport going? Here is a simple fact to consider when contemplating 150 foot waterfalls, air screws, and the next big innovation in the world of whitewater: there is not a single major whitewater boat manufacturer that survives without also making touring boats. For most, the latter is by far the more important part of their business. E.J. grabbed an amazing amount of the whitewater market very quickly by making great boats and being totally focused on whitewater. He even stated that Jackson Kayak would never make a rec boat. Yet a couple of years later they entered the rec market.

Will innovation and those at the cutting edge bring about another “Golden Age of Whitewater?” I certainly hope so, and maybe Tyler and the Young Guns will be the ones to do it. For myself I'm not waiting around, nor does it really need to happen. The success of paddle sports is still moving ahead by the hard work of all those who are passionate about it. While big moves and big drops are super cool, it is coaching kids, preserving rivers, teaching lessons, getting folks out in touring boats and enjoying all the fun disciplines of paddle sports that are continuing to drive our success.

Austin Rathman is 24 years old and hails from Jackson, Wyoming. He has kayaked all over the United States, as well as in Mexico, Canada, Italy, Corsica, and Ecuador. He has done many difficult runs, including the Stikine and appeared in a variety of videos. This fall he attempted the Asek, but found it impossible due to the surging Tweedsmuir Glacier. Two years ago he started his own business making action videos in the Columbia River Gorge, but changed directions to devote himself to teaching in a school for disabled children. He is currently thinking about pursuing a graduate program in psychology and continuing to help the disabled. He says he loves “the way kayaking can give us everything from soothing satisfaction to intense adrenaline filled challenges. I really enjoy the opportunities kayaking provides. I’ve gained some of my best friends and best memories through the sport. As a sport I think we need to focus on protecting our rivers while getting out and enjoying them in the safest and most impact-free ways possible.”

Austin and Pat Keller sitting across from the Tweedsmuir Glacier directly above Turnback Canyon

Photo by Scott Harcke

For the Love of the Sport

By Austin Rathman

I am a youthful paddler but have sought out my own cutting edges over the past seven years. I don’t consider myself technically gifted, and am more a product of desire than talent, but I have pushed myself hard while paddling with many of the best younger kayakers in the country, including Tyler. I know that inside Tyler possesses a love and a respect for the sport that is pure. His description of his big waterfall run shows that feeling. However, in other places I was a little jarred because his article makes it sound—unfortunately—as though he and his friends have a bit of a dual personality—the pure love mixed with a touch of ego, and even personal gain. I realize maybe many of us have that duality and he’s just more honest in stating it. It might also be that he just is so revved by his runs that he stresses them rather than the bigger picture.

I don’t want to focus on negatives, but there are a few things that I feel should be recognized. In my opinion he gives a somewhat less-than-strong attempt to sound respectful of the old boys, while holding up the younger generation as “right.” Maybe that’s because they felt Doug’s original piece was too critical of their waterfalls runs, although I didn’t read it that way.

I don’t want to read into Tyler’s essay more than is there, but one message I got from it was, Tyler does not approve of the kayakers of the 90s and their attempts to main-stream our sport, but he also sounds like he wants what they had. It seems like there is a contradiction there.

My biggest problem is the emphasis on free-fall waterfalls. I understand the passion, but there is way, way more to kayaking than waterfalls, even if they are impressive and fun. I’ll be the first to say that Tyler has found a way to run large waterfalls more successfully than almost anyone before him, including Tao Berman. I will also say Tyler is one of the best kayakers in the world. Period.



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However, the essay didn't quite settle with me because it sounds like those skills aren't enough by themselves, and that he and the younger guns see the skills also as a means to an end, so they are focused on world records, flash, some money, and fame. That's not what I get out of kayaking. I don't think it's what most people get out of the sport either.

Tyler, Rush Sturges and other Young guns recently ran the Stikine. I have not spoken to Tyler yet, but I did speak to Rush and he gave the river great credit and sounded truly humbled by it, calling it, "The best there is." I assume Tyler had a similar reaction. But knowing that, I'm left thinking that he focused on a waterfall while not saying anything about a humbling and rich personal experience on the Stikine.

The thing this piece doesn't say, and that maybe Tyler and the Young Gun crew haven't realized yet, are the simple joys of the river without the addition of ridiculous Class V. Maybe that sentence reflects my own journey and recent experiences, but I know it is possible to have some of your best days on the river without running a single hard rapid. For instance, my favorite kayaking trip ever (even favored over my Stikine run) was on the Alsek this summer with two of my best friends. We ran a total of only two easy rapids in that entire time but yet we spent five days enjoying what is unquestionably the MOST beautiful place I have ever been. We didn't run Turnback Canyon because the glacier was surging and spilling huge chunks of ice into the river. The canyon not only had hard whitewater, but was filled with massive floating icebergs rolling through the rapids and filling the eddies. It was a truly incredible sight that only added to the trip.

This brings me to one more point. Tyler suggests that Walt Blackadar would shake his head in awe at what kayakers are accomplishing today. I can only shake my head and say no. From what I saw of Turnback Canyon during the middle of a glacial surge, Tyler and any other paddler would shake his head in AWE at what

Landis Arnold on Bluegrass Creek

Photo by Bill Bevins

Walt Blackadar accomplished 40 years ago. The four of us who saw that canyon that day with all that ice (three kayakers, one amazing pilot) all knew with absolute certainty that it was too much for us, too much for anybody really. And it would have lasted a lot longer than 2.3 seconds or however long it takes to fall 100 feet.

I feel that Tyler hasn't really put his finger on what is important, and has emphasized some things that aren't valid. I think his heart is in the right place, but that the essay might fuel the clash of New-school vs. Old-, which doesn't help kayaking, and it doesn't really show what we all love about the sport. I do think Tyler's article is interesting and makes some great points. But as it stands, it sounds more like an advertisement for how amazing and above the rest the Young Guns and their waterfalls are, rather than a statement of love for the sport and what we share. I wish he had focused on that more.



Landis Arnold started kayaking in Colorado with his parents in the mid 1970s. He learned early that the beauty of slalom training was its propensity for lessening the weekly chores of boat repair and fiberglass itch.

Landis attended Dartmouth College because, at the time, it was the only school in the country that had both a Ski Jumping and Kayaking program. He became a member of the US Ski Team and competed on the World Cup between 1981 and 1985, mixing in on the side some trips to Rosenheim and Augsburg for kayaking. He was a member of the US Olympic Team at Sarajevo in 1984. In April 1984 of that year he made his way to Corsica and met a group of Frenchmen who happened to have an extra Prijon Taifun. A few weeks later, having gotten back to Austria and then the Prijon factory in Germany, he picked out what seemed the best of the first T-Slalom (his first personal "plastic boat" weighed a mere 32 lbs) and a dozen paddles in his checked baggage and was headed back to Colorado. There he began selling kayaks, becoming the US importer of Prijon boats and gear.



Landis has been an officer for AW. He was an early sponsor of various freestyle competitors and expeditionists. Thus, his perspective runs the gamut of personal experience with difficult runs here and abroad, and sponsorship of some very inspirational expeditions in both whitewater and sea kayaking. Landis has designed a few boats along the way: the Rockit, the Twister, and the Kodiak—boats in different realms. More recently he has been most focused on making the connection to “normal paddlers’ fun.” The whole Arnold family—from grandkids to grandparents—does paddling trips together.

The piece below adds an insightful comparison of high performance in the “ski” arena with what he has seen and been a part of in kayaking.

You Gotta Want to be There

Landis Arnold

I have looked at the different sides of this debate and similar forms of this same discussion in other sports. There often is a tendency for one faction or another to claim that they are on the cutting edge and that the other factions are not. The reality is that in most sports there are multiple frontiers in which to pursue excellence, and the “absolute edge” is mostly a personal definition by one person or another. Absolutely, there are “extremes” to which one can go in various dimension, but no extreme, by nature, is more cutting edge than another.

When I was a youngster I actually started whitewater kayaking as a summer offset to my primary winter sport of interest, which was Nordic ski jumping. Kayaking charged me; it felt a lot like ski jumping in its challenges and the way I felt I needed to approach it. Both sports had very real dangers that I found compelling to take, and through which I could improve and expand my base of experience from one day to the next.

In the time when I transitioned from being focused on ski jumping to being primarily focused on paddling, I drew techniques directly from my ski jumping experience and was driven to run the hardest rapids I felt that I could run. Preparation for these runs involved the same mental techniques that I used in my ski jumping. Forced relaxation and deep imagery coupled with a transition that would bring me into the moment and a mindset where I was both confident and in track to follow the movie I had just rehearsed. This reminds me quite a bit about the preparation described for running a big waterfall and realistically whether it’s a big waterfall or rapid it doesn’t matter, it is simply a very good technique for taking on those things we want to pursue in this way.

Back when we started doing what the Europeans called extreme paddling, and which later germinated under the term

“steep creeking,” a friend penned a short piece about the new sport of “Bashing” that was happening around Boulder. He quoted a simple statement of mine: “You gotta want to be there.” From the point of view of a young business person I was pretty concerned about the liability of recommending what seemed pretty dangerous to me, but at the same time I was really excited about the experience of “being there.”

As opposed to “Sports,” Sport (in the singular) is about “those things we do.” “Sports” rather is about those things we watch and admire in others. I do recognize the place and reality of idolatry in kayaking, but for me the Sport of Paddling is about the experience of doing—on whatever level, or edge a person wants to take themselves to. We find beauty and fulfillment on some edges; sometimes we find pride together with both accomplishments and failures. But in all this, “you gotta want to be there.” If you don’t, it is pretty much imperative that you not be there, otherwise you’ll get hurt or worse.

When I was ski jumping, the part of the sport that most drove me was called ski flying. In ski flying the hills are bigger than in ski jumping. At that time there were 120-meter, versus 70- and 90-meter hills. My progression as a ski flyer found its upward end in two sequential jumps of 161 1/2 meters, which meant tenth place that day at the World Ski Flying Championships. The same day a new world record was set at 181 meters. Today the world record stands at 239 meters. Similar to Doug’s original essay where he talked about the details of waterfall world records and how they are measured, in jumping another fellow did go a little farther—240 meters, but dragged his hands, broke his tail bone, and did not have a “standing jump.” As such, his jump is not counted as “the longest standing jump.” Probably he could have gone 250 meters, but then the hill was getting very flat and that would not have been a good idea that day. (They are working to make the hills bigger every few years to allow some progress here). So when world records come into play, it is important to remember the role that rule setting plays, as it should in any sport. This should assure fair competition,

The Great Debate

and it should also do what it can to assure as safe a competition as possible. I never looked at paddling “hard stuff” as competition—perhaps just the opposite. But vain glory has its magnetism and the quest for exploration—even for me—I do see to have been a form of competition.

But now for parallels with kayaking: When I think about waterfalls, on the one hand I can see a similarity to ski flying, but it’s more metaphorical than literal. On the other hand I’m not sure if one can really compare performances because they have different purposes. It’s usually a big thing in kayaking to be the first to go down a waterfall, but of course, that’s not the point in ski flying. What mattered there in competition was the style (half of our score), the distance we went through the air, and whether we stood up at the end of the jump. I had some falls close to my long jumps. I found personal satisfaction and pride back in that ski flying competition, not only for my jumping and my placement, but also for the fact that I took two falls that week on the hill and didn’t end up in the hospital, as several fellow skiers did.

Kayaking is much less regulated than ski flying. Anyone can go take on a rapid or a waterfall. The extremes to which people have taken the sport in the last 25 years have been phenomenal. I’m actually very glad that I was able to do my explorations at a time when that cutting edge seemed to entail some danger but not the true consequences that it appears to have today. And yet I say this in the context of a friend, Mark Lane, who seemed to go a lot farther out on the edge than many of our friends were willing to step. Mark’s other sport, believe it or not, was Trapeze flying, which he used to do at the Denver YMCA in the winters. One drop that Mark pioneered we named, “Lanes Leap” after his first decent. That drop is now called Double Trouble, on the Big South Fork of the Poudre. We were not vociferous enough in staking Mark’s claim.

Mark was the one guy who just never seemed to get scared. He reminded me of the jumper named Matti Nykannen and likewise seemed absolutely imperturbable. I used to wonder if it wasn’t some genetic

mutation in each of them. It was both beautiful to behold and at the same time somewhat worrisome. I wasn’t afraid really that they would get hurt but I was afraid somehow that their lack of fear could bring them harm and other parts of their lives. For his part Mark ran both the steepest and most dangerous stretches I knew of.

So let’s consider the “cutting edge” issue before us. Whether people are talking about running the North Payette at 7500 cfs, or taking on another of Mark’s firsts, “Eddie’s Flyaway” down in the Toltec Gorge, or whatever other big drop one might be looking at these days, it’s still true that “You gotta want to be there.” I don’t know if these are particularly sane activities, but they can be beautiful activities to do and to behold. They also are fleeting activities remembered, at best, by a few. Since we don’t have stadiums filled with thousands of onlookers, you can’t make comparisons between paddlers and Michael Jordan or Babe Ruth. But athletic endeavor and accomplishment deserves note for what it is, as we look at from the outside. Probably, it is even more important to understand what it feels like on the inside. The risks that are taken are real, but our understanding of them isn’t real until after they take their toll. Younger people can talk about consequences, but until you’ve experienced them you’ll never know the sadness that they bring. There are limits to what the human body can take: the length of fall one can tumble, the time one can go without oxygen, the amount of compression one can take in the spine, leg, or helmet. It’s a beautiful thing to look at the edge of Niagara Falls, but not such a beautiful thing to contemplate actually surfing the waves there on the brink, much less falling into the mist and rocks below. The sheer beauty of big water is magical, but after a mile long swim it has never pulled at me so hard again. I think of my friend Doug Gordon on the Tsangpo and remember our days camped at Rapid #1 (river left) running everything we could. It seemed easy then, but most of all it was just wonderful—that river thing.

Here are some observations about what does or doesn’t make our sport and the business around them “grow”: ski jumping unfortunately doesn’t really sell skis and

running waterfalls doesn’t really sell kayaks. Kayaking is a lot more fun to do than to watch, so films will always be a distant and faint reflection of our experience. Aerial freestyle moves that most people can’t do will not replace the simple moves they can. Just running a rapid, pulling an eddy, and ferrying back into the current truly is the core. If you add a little front surfing to that, it is the most expansive and shareable part of our sport. You can do it your whole life, and it’s a great alternative to fly fishing and golf. And yes, seeing someone “get it done” can be inspirational to some people—mostly those who are already “on the train,” so to speak. A lot of people do want to be like Eric Jackson—at least that part of the time when his head is above water.

As for new gear and changes in the sport: our Bashing was defined as paddling down rocks as much as water. We pushed and waited for the gear to make it possible. Corsicas and Freefalls followed T-Canyons, Gattinos, and Topolinos from Europe in short order. Bulkhead footbraces and keyhole cockpits, the rediscovery of the value of buoyant volume, all contributed to the opening we found in creaking and that thing we called Extreme. New developments will surely always follow, allowing other new explorations. The sport is far from dead and abandoned, but like the closing of the American Frontier we are forced, when we reach the Pacific, to find new ways of thinking, new purposes. Today, that new way of thinking compels us to ask what it will take to sustain our world. Kayaking, I hope, will always be there to show us a way. We will need to work to become more sustainable, that much I know.

One more point of comparison. Extreme kayaking and ski jumping really are sports for young people. It is harder and harder to do them as one gets older. We are left with speaking in the past tense. And this also raises a problem of understanding: we don’t know the challenges that were in front of those folks taking on the goods in the 1950s and hardly even those from the 1960s. People like Ron Mason heading down the Animas in 1967. Eight years later I was lucky enough to have him teach me the intricacies of a proper eddy sequence

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The Great Debate

and how to work a slalom course. Bill Clark and his team heading into Black Canyon in 1977. Every one of them had a 13-foot boat that weighed less than 30 lbs. They had their own frontiers, as every generation does, and I think we would all do well not just to applaud their accomplishments, but also to applaud anyone who is out there pushing their limits. This is really where the wonder comes from in these sports, and our ability to share and smile about it makes us all better, and does a lot to make folks “want to be like us.” Kayaking is 7000 years old right now and it is not going away, nor will its essential core ever really be changed. A kayak (or canoe, or raft) is a vehicle for both exploration, and for life. The more we share that, the better things are for everyone, no matter what the arena.

In this sport one can excel in many different arenas. No one is implicitly better than another. I have as much respect for daring undertakings in sea kayaking and river touring as I do for those in big water, steep runs, slalom, marathon, or downriver racing, freestyle, squirting and all the variations in between. Our sport is the sum of all these. Each is a real and vibrant aspect for some group. Each is a real place to develop and achieve mastery, including personal, internal mastery. And yes, there is also that wild edge “like going to the moon.” The Tsangpo expeditions ended with one group going something like 11 miles farther than the one that preceded it. I’m not sure but it seems that there’s another 20 or more miles yet to go that might never be run. And beyond that, there are side streams, and other rivers, and tributaries behind the ridge, and ridges beyond that. We all are part of a fun and personally rewarding culture, one defined by physical and mental exploration, with each generation finding ways to share and expand this life. It is a beautiful pursuit. But being honest with ourselves, it is probably most beautiful when it is our own pursuit, our own exploration. Luckily, the Inuit made some pretty cool craft for us to go out in the ice flows with. Lets all raise a toast to them for giving us some warm boats and gear to make these awesome adventures possible.



Corran Addison has been one of the world’s most visible, innovative, and well-known kayakers for more than 20 years. He is a multi-talented designer, freestyler, and creeker, a film maker known for outrageous guerilla marketing tactics, and co-founded three different kayak companies during the 1990s and 2000s: Savage, Riot, and Drago Rossi, pouring out new boat designs that were often the most radical on the market. He held the “world record” for falls by running a 31 meter flume in France as a mere 20 year old. He currently is the president (and janitor) of the company Imagine surfboards. In addition to his kayaking, he also has been a professional snowboarder and surfer. Readers will find his essay a thought-provoking synthesis of current kayaking from a perspective that runs across multiple sports.

Is it Cutting Edge, or Has the Edge Simply Been Cut Off?

Corran Addison

There is this quaint little race in South Africa called the Dusi Marathon. In a nutshell, it’s a three-day kayaking marathon whose closest cousin is the Eco Challenge. Even though the kayaking is at best, Class III+, it takes one hell of an athlete to finish a race that includes multiple one-hour running portages over entire mountain ranges, kayak on your back, just to get back into the river and then navigate 30 miles of Class II-III rapids in a 20 lb, 20-foot long fiberglass kayak. Graeme Pope Ellis, who could not even Eskimo roll a kayak when he retired, won it 10 years in a row! Now that’s cutting edge!

This was the world of kayaking I knew as a kid. To win this race was the ultimate expression of having “arrived” at the extreme limits of what could be done in a kayak. But the very nature of this race meant that kayaking was doomed to be nothing more than a fringe sport which would never amount to anything.

Then I met a paddler named Jerome Truran, and one day we went out to a little rapid that is on one of the last sections of the Dusi Marathon, and he pulled out this absurdly small 13-foot kayak called a Perception Quest. It was round, wide, fat, short, plastic, and honestly, quite stupid looking (to my “marathon racing” eye). He pulled out of the eddy, surfed onto a wave, drove the nose in, and the boat exploded vertically into the air before he landed upside down, Eskimo rolled up, and paddled back into the eddy grinning.

In exactly 5 seconds, my entire definition of what constituted cutting edge was overthrown. I had a new definition of what being a cutting edge kayaker entailed. The skill set that was required to surf out from the eddy onto the wave, align the boat perfectly with the oncoming water, plunge the nose, control the lift-off

until the boat was both completely vertical and completely out of the water was light-years beyond anything any winner of the Dusi Marathon would ever know. But (despite Jerome being the reigning world silver medalist in Downriver racing at the time) this display of superior skill pales in comparison to the arduous task of winning the Dusi.

So which really is cutting edge? And more importantly, which of these two would be more likely to help kayaking and make it grow?

For some perspective, let's turn first to skiing. Skiers for decades measured themselves against the clock. Actually, against the next skier, who was racing the same clock. The top skiers' abilities were uncanny, and the industry marketed its wares to the rest of the world based on

what the Tomba's and Ghirardelli of the day were using.

However, skiing still was dying a slow agonizing death, with both retail sales and lift ticket sales moving from a steady decline to an alarming cliff-fall. Then in the early 1990s along came this punk spin-off of skating mixed with surfing and skiing. It was called snowboarding.

Snowboarding (the way most people do it) is notably easier than skiing the way Tomba does it. By 1995, snowboarders made up a paltry 10% of "skiers." Yet this 10% were buying 70% of the retail gear and 90% of the lift tickets. The heroes were doing simple 360 spins off small kickers, or riding backwards, but the very look of snowboarding was appealing. Skiing had found its new "cutting edge" in this simple, relatively easy, yet massively

appealing pastime.

The days of the elite skiers like Tomba being a major player in the direction of skiing (I include snowboarding as part of skiing) was over. However, 10 years later, skiing has made a comeback ... and it looks like snowboarding. And while what the Kellys and Kidwells were doing on snowboards in the early 90s was both fun and impressive, it paled compared to what Tomba, Plake, or Schmidt were doing. It took something as simple and stylish as sliding on snow sideways to rejuvenate a dying sport. This was skiing's new cutting edge.

The application to kayaking is straightforward: despite advances in skills and techniques, by 1988 whitewater

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Stewardship



Little Known Run on the Yuba Gets Tested

By Brad Brewer

The weekend of November 8th and 9th a flow study was conducted below New Bullards Bar Dam made possible with the coordination of several agencies including American Whitewater, Yuba County Water Agency, and their consultants, Devine, Tarbell, and Associates. The purpose of the flow study was to allow a group of paddlers to explore the stretch of the North Yuba below the dam at two different flows: 500 cfs on Saturday and 800 cfs on Sunday. Saturday the group consisted of Dieter King, Josh Hill, Justin Patt, Brent Esmon, Stephen Wright, and myself, while on Sunday the group consisted of Dieter, Josh, Justin, and myself.

New Bullards Bar Dam is located on the

North Yuba River outside of Marysville and Nevada City. The Dam is the second tallest in California and is in the top 50 largest dams and reservoirs in the world. The dam releases into the North Yuba approximately 2.3 miles above the confluence of the North Yuba and Middle Yuba Rivers, from which point it travels another 7.5 miles downstream into Lake Englebright. The dam often spills via the large spillway during large flow events; however, it is rumored that the dam has not released in the last 30 years. The fact that the dam only spills in large events makes the run very difficult to catch, as many times when you have an acceptable flow to paddle putting on the Middle Yuba, you can get to the confluence and

have the flow double or triple ending in an epic hike out or an unintentional overnight portage-fest.

Approaching New Bullards Bar Dam to put on was an impressive sight, as we all felt pretty small standing that the base of one of the largest dams in the world. Based on a previous run on this river, I was very skeptical that the Saturday flow of 500 cfs would provide enough water, but was pleasantly surprised that this lower flow was a perfect minimum flow, and we all agreed that we would come back at the same level. The 500 cfs release felt similar to the neighboring 49 to Bridgeport run on the South Yuba River, which provides manageable but technical Class IV/V

Justin Pat taking part in the flow study on the North Yuba

Photo by Brad Brewer

Willie Kern on the North Yuba

Photo by Taylor Robertson



Stewardship

rapids. A few of us even managed to make it down without flipping. The flow on Sunday of 800 cfs felt like a huge jump as we estimated that from high water lines that there was close to a foot more water in the canyon than there had been the day before. The 800 cfs flow was fast and pushy with everyone flipping at least once; big holes seemed to be a lot more in play at this level. Everyone agreed that this flow felt more like a Class V/V+ run and

was noticeably more difficult than the runs on the South Yuba, including the harder Purdons to Hwy 49 stretch. While a bit more difficult, the 800 cfs flow was a solid Class V paddler's dream with long boulder gardens and very challenging rapids. We concluded that an 'optimum' flow would be around 600-700 cfs, although I know many other paddlers who think the 800 cfs is optimum. Following the study, we were confident that we had tested a very good range of boatable flows and concluded that the low end would be 500 cfs as lower levels would require more portages and much above 800 cfs would be very pushy and dangerous. We estimated the high end to be around 1000 cfs, which would

probably make for an intense run.

The character of the run and whitewater itself is amazing. It is non-stop action from the put-in to the best take-out, which is at Colgate Powerhouse. The rapids on the North Fork immediately below the dam are pretty continuous for the 2.3 miles until the confluence with the Middle Yuba. Most of the study group portaged only one rapid in this stretch and scouted two or three times and on the 2nd day at 800 cfs we probably made it down to the confluence in approximately 30 minutes with no scouting and one portage. After the confluence, the river opens up a bit

A representative stretch of the North Yuba below New Bullard's Bar Dam

Photo by Brad Brewer



and changes character slightly; however, challenging rapids continue the entire 6 miles below the confluence to the take-out. The character of the river below the confluence contains many longer boulder gardens as well as larger drops separated by large pools. The run below the confluence consists of several larger rapids, all of which were ran during the study; however, most of us portaged two rapids below the confluence. The entire run is very tight and technical with many sieves, slots, and large boulders that created a maze of routes and many of these routes are barely wide enough to fit a kayak. The entire stretch is very long and demanding as the

whitewater is consistent for the entire 8.3 miles of the run. Everyone on our trip was pretty tired and sore following the paddle. Our first run on Saturday took 5.5 hours while our second run on Sunday took only 3.25 hours.

The canyon is one of the most beautiful in the state, with thick vegetation and towering canyon walls, which seem to be similar in depth to areas along the Middle Feather River. The wildlife on the run is also spectacular; we saw several buck, a bear, a river otter, and countless bird species. Concluding the study on Sunday, the paddlers left tired and in awe that

such an amazing canyon with world-class whitewater has been basically untouched and unnoticed for so many years and we can only hope that the relicensing in 2013 will bring recreational releases to the now dewatered river and once again restore the mighty North Yuba to its former glory.

Justin Pat running a Class V drop on the North Yuba during this winter's flow study

Photo by Brad Brewer



News & Notes

Is The Green Race An Accident Waiting to Happen?

by Adam Herzog
All photos by Phillip Turner,
Turner Digital Photography

November 1st, 2008 marked the Thirteenth Annual Green River Race. The Green Race is the hallmark event of whitewater paddling in the Southeast. Kayakers scream down the Monster Mile in under five minutes. The first race I attended, in the late nineties, featured 39 racers and a handful of spectators. This year there were over 100 racers and close to a thousand spectators. People come from around the world to compete in the “greatest show in sports.”

As the race grows, so do the chances of an accident. Class V kayaking is dangerous, but the paddlers know the risk. The spectators do not. I always wear my PFD while near the water. The rocks are slick and people cram to the river's edge to get a

good view of world famous creekers firing up Gorilla.

Every year I tell my wife not to come to the race because “It is too dangerous. Some one is going to fall in the river.” This year it happened. The victim survived, but it got me thinking—what would happen if we spent the afternoon crouched over a limp, blue body, performing CPR on the side of the Green River on every local paddler's favorite day?

This is how the incident occurred: After my run, I walked up the trail to enjoy the show. I brought my throw bag with me. I was talking to some friends at Scream Machine, the first big slide below Gorilla, when I heard yelling. I looked for a kayaker in the hole at the bottom of the slide but saw no one. I scanned the rapid and spotted a swimmer in an eddy in the middle of the river. “His helmet got ripped off,” I thought, misunderstanding the situation. He began to sink, and I realized someone had fallen in. As his head dipped below the water someone threw him a rope. But by the time he resurfaced, it had drifted out of reach. I threw my rope. It

landed next to his head, but he only looked at me blankly, shocked by the frigid water. He slid below the surface again, this time for 5 or 10 seconds. It felt like hours passed and suddenly I felt tension on the rope. A man grabbed my back to stabilize me. The swimmer pendulumed to the shore and five or six rescuers tugged on the rope. We pulled him from the river as an oblivious racer whizzed by.

A crowd gathered around the victim and I pushed my way through. “I am a paramedic,” I said. I was scared. “I hope he is breathing,” I thought. The man was supine on the rocks when I reached him. He was cold and dazed, but alive. We



stripped his wet clothes off and volunteers generously offered dry clothing and a space blanket. As I assessed him, an ER doctor and a nurse arrived. Incredibly, the only injury he sustained was a small contusion above his eye. He was lucky.

The swim haunted my dreams that night. The victim was an experienced boater. He knew to grab a rope and hang on for his life. What if a child or an elderly person fell in? The aftermath of a tragedy on race day would be devastating.

Picture a different scene. A spectator falls in above Gorilla. He is wearing a PFD and helmet. He swims over the 15-foot drop,

but is immediately fished out by the rescue team that clips in to save errant kayakers. They reach him because he is floating at the surface. He is scared, but his helmet takes the blow.

As paddlers, the responsibility falls on us to educate spectators. Encourage anyone hiking into the race to bring a PFD and helmet. Even cheap Wal-Mart equipment would be better than nothing. Also, every kayaker should keep a rope nearby throughout the race. This year's swimmer was hit with two ropes. He likely would have died without them.

The gorge, like a bar, is no place for kids. I heard stories of people getting knocked off their feet by hyperactive boys running on the trail. I saw a seven-year-old girl standing alone next to the river. We cannot allow a preventable death on our playground, especially on the biggest day of the year.



2009 River Stewardship Priorities

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by developing agreements with landowners such as our recent agreement on the South Platte in Colorado, or including access requirements in hydropower agreements across the country. Sometimes providing access comes in the form of recreational releases or new flow regimes that provide opportunities for paddlers such as the Chelan River (WA) and North Fork Rogue (OR) where 2009 will witness restored summer flows for the first time in decades. In other cases, we work with partners including our local clubs, land trusts, and agencies to acquire land along the river and develop appropriate facilities that provide opportunities for the public to access the river. As we celebrate our recent success on the Gauley River (WV) we will be gearing up for projects on the Snoqualmie (WA) and Crooked (OR)

ivers in 2009 to address access issues.

American Whitewater also understands that with this access comes a responsibility to ensure that our use does not take anything away or leave anything behind. We have been leaders in developing “Leave no Trace” guidelines for backcountry paddlers. We support regulation and limitations of our use when it is required to protect river resources. We also organize and promote river clean-ups across the country so that all river recreationists have the chance to enjoy these important community resources.

The most important reason for American Whitewater to fight for access to rivers is that people who love rivers are our most important tool in protecting and restoring

ivers. You can't love what you don't know. And it is this love of rivers that have always made paddlers such fierce defenders of rivers. It is this intimate connection to flowing water that has made American Whitewater a force in the river community for over fifty years. Keeping people and rivers together is our top issue because we know that somewhere on some river, paddling, swimming, or just skipping rocks, are the kids who represent the next generation of river activists.



The Great Debate

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kayaking was entering its first phase of decline. The generation that had made it cool in the 1970s had moved on. They had jobs, commitments and neither the time nor the will to go on major expeditions or run insane rapids. Sea kayaking was being “reinvented” and the first “recreational” kayaks made their appearance. The whitewater paddlers of yesteryear were moving over to recreational paddling, and there was nobody to take their place.

I got a job designing with Perception kayaks in 1988. Bill Masters, seeing this change in what his “pals” from the 1970s needed in a kayak, brought me in to create an easier, fatter, safer kayak so the aging demographic could give it one last effort. On my off-time I designed a little boat which looked remarkably like the first flat bottomed playboats of the late 1990s—flat hull, low volume ends, high volume center. Bill walked in one day, looked at the boat and asked, “Who’s going to paddle that?” I responded, “ME!”

In fact what I meant was “people like me.” My generation. There were many players in the overall development of what helped whitewater kayaking make its fantastic explosion of popularity from 1998 to 2002, from the Snyders and Whitmore to Kellner and to a lesser degree, myself, but what is interesting is that despite the massive progress in creeking that had been going on since the late 1980s with the likes of Kullmar and Wiggington, it took simple little fun playboating to create a boom that nobody in kayaking could ever have predicted.

The boom was both from within and outside the industry. We as designers and manufacturers were developing new ideas and technology at such an alarming rate that paddlers were compelled to change designs every 6 to 8 months if they were to keep up. They in turn were doing more and more with these boats, thereby inspiring newer and better designs. This created a massive influx of money into an industry that went from 4 brands in 1989 to over 20 at its peak in 1999.

Creeking never stopped. In fact, the boats

got better and safer, and what the paddlers were doing by 2000 was off the charts (compared to creeking in the previous generations). But as Chan Zwanzig said to me on the release of his latest creekboat sometime in the late 1990s, “We did it because it had to be done, but we’ll never sell one tenth as many as the playboats.” How ironic, when compared with today, where the number of playboats sold is probably one tenth the number of creekboats.

What’s sad about that statement is that creekboat sales have not increased since 1999. Playboating just suddenly died. Not a slow death, but rather a sudden and dramatic end. Industry whitewater sales dropped from somewhere in the 30 000 units annually (all combined) to significantly under 10,000 in less than two years, and this happened right as freestyle kayakers on the cutting edge reached new heights in skill and were doing more than anyone had ever done before.

When you look at sports, there seems to be a direct correlation of growth that’s related to “achievable fun” and a drop once it becomes “elitist.” When surfing looked like it was for everyone in the late 1960s and 1970s, it exploded. By the late 1980s it was an elitist sport with boards so small no one but experts could surf them. It wasn’t until the “new longboard” revolution in the 1990s that surfing took back its place.

The parallels are astounding. Windsurfing looked like something everyone could do, and it exploded in popularity. When it became the “elitist” definition of cutting edge, it crashed. Snowboarding exploded when it looked fun—like anyone could do it—and it stalled when it became elitist (opening doors for freestyle skiing and shaped skis—something everyone could do). Kayaking exploded in popularity when freestyle kayaking and the moves that were done (spins and blunts) looked like something everyone could do (and then aspire to the now simple airblunt, and more importantly, not feel like they had to risk their necks to have fun the way creeking demands). It died when complex multi-axis rotations and a spinal cord

made from silicone became the minimum level to even be noticed.

There seems to be a direct correlation between the success of a sport, and its mediocrity. The more mainstream and “attainable” the “high end” appears, the more popular it is. The greater the distance between what the average person can do and what the top guys are doing, the less popular it becomes. No one wants to suck, and comparing yourself to the Young Guns today, you suck. So you move on to something else. Of the 200+ paddlers I kayaked with on a weekly basis in 2004 (by this I mean the number of paddlers I knew by name who I’d see in a week at my local wave), less than half a dozen still kayak today... right when the sport is at heights that it has never seen before—whether that’s freestyle moves, waterfall runs or expeditions to distant places.

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The Great Debate

Now, how do we fix that? Well, that's an entirely different question I'll leave for the Young Guns to solve. After all, their livelihood depends on it.

Brief Cost-Benefit of sponsoring paddlers

Tyler et co. are great guys, hard core paddlers and are already, in just the 5 years since I've been retired, far beyond what I ever could do. The next generation is always better than the preceding one ... but so much, so soon? WOW! However, that skill does NOT make one entitled to anything.

The hardest thing I had to deal with at Riot was team sponsorship. In particular, it was the question: "I KNOW what I can do for you. What can you do for me?"

To elaborate in a simple way, for the company a sponsorship is like any investment. If I have \$40,000, do I buy two molds or one mold and a sponsorship to promote and sell that model? If I spend \$20,000 on the second new mold, will bring me more or less revenue than an athlete promoting the first one? From experience I know a mold—with little advertising for a new model—will sell perhaps 500 units at a sale price of \$600, of which \$300 is the cost to make it. So it brings a revenue of 300×500 units = \$150,000 "profit" (omitting overhead and everything else). Now if I give Mr Athlete that \$20,000, he's going to have to DOUBLE the sales of that one mold for me to make the same money. And remember, that's not more money, that's just the same money, as well as the possible headaches of dealing somebody who might act like a prima donna. So the question that has to be answered is, can the athlete make me \$150,000 in one year? Unfortunately for the athlete, the answer is always no. Always.

That being said, in reality it's not that clear cut, and the promotion overall of a brand is needed, but the cost/benefit analysis does provide a serious reality check. It's a hard nut for them to swallow, but it's a brute fact the company must consider and base its decisions on, or else it won't exist.

When I approached sponsors

it was always a case of THIS IS WHAT I CAN DO FOR YOU.

Maybe the biggest problem is one of how the athletes perceive their role. There are so many different MTV Pro sports out there that athletes who are young, hot, and rad can believe sponsorship is an entitlement for having arrived at the top of a sport. They do not realize that they are a small piece of a giant game, and only the most useful and non-replaceable pieces get the dough.

Obviously I have been at the other end of the plate—I did once make loads of cash being a sponsored athlete. In fact I was probably the second highest paid kayaker of our times (after Shaun Baker of course). So I've been there.

But it was NEVER about the money. At the end of it all, I had nothing to show for it except some great memories, wonderful friends, and perhaps the fact that I might even "live forever" as a small footnote in the overall history of what kayaking is and was and how it got here. That would be nice, but it was never a goal or ambition of mine any more than it was to make money. That just sorta happened. One day I woke up and realized people were willing to pay me well for endorsements. But a huge difference between myself and many of today's hotshots is that I went into an industry that promised nothing but financial poverty, and riches of novelty. When the money came along I was

more surprised than expecting. I could no more have envisioned money in kayaking any more than Walt Blackadar could have seen the Airblunt.

But the legacy my generation has left the new, is that money can be had and should be expected. Ironically, the generation that never suspected it would be there made it, and the generation that expects it never will. Its' gone, moved on. Forever? Maybe not, but for now anyway.

Money is useful. It pays for tickets and gas and food. It allows you to spend your week exploring and pushing yourself, rather than working to pay rent, and I suspect none of the new guys is hoping to get rich, they just want to kayak every day and payment for kayaking means they can do more of it, like an aspiring Olympic athlete on a state funded training program. The problem is, they chose the wrong sport.

My father said to me on many occasion after I reached a top level, "Why, Oh why, didn't I teach you golf?" If you want money, play golf. If you want to be rich in character, experience and fulfillment, then kayak (and get a job).

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Reprisal, November 21

Tyler Bradt

To be “cutting edge” or to look “beyond the cutting edge” or even to perceive what that is, is of course a personal journey. We all have amazing similarities in the journeys our sport has lead us on. This voyage has directed us deep into jungles, across parched deserts, through thunderous rapids, up and down ice covered mountains and literally to the corners of the earth and then over the edge. No matter how exotic the location, remote or desolate, we find that our journey also leads us into ourselves, the most fascinating place of all. We learn about ourselves alongside the strokes and maneuvers that help us navigate these amazing rivers. We master techniques while attempting to understand the river in all its variations. The more we learn we find, the less we know.

Our incentives for paddling are personal and vast. However, one lesson we all learn from paddling is that an incentive ill conceived or selfishly motivated will quickly leave us humbled at best. My motivation in writing about the industry and sharing my experience with Alexandra Falls parallels the reason for running it in the first place. I didn’t stand at the lip of Alexandra and envision myself a poster boy with sponsors scrambling for their pens and checkbooks. I saw a beautiful and powerful creation of nature that spoke to me. Its untranslatable words registered in my brain as a personal challenge and an opportunity to share, if only for a brief moment, the feeling of the power of nature. To feel life itself. I did it too because I believe you can accomplish whatever you genuinely desire. It still embarrasses me when people praise me as the world record holder putting me on a pedestal above them. I have much to learn and little to teach; I am above no one. The only entitlement I have is to learn and grow, certainly not to be rich and famous (two things which warp the ideals of entire societies).

If my motivation for running the tallest waterfall ever run wasn’t to be rich or

famous or to be a sponsored athlete then why write about it? Much less why publish it in our sport’s most cherished publication?

Kayaking has given me everything I hold dear: lifestyle, friends, character, passion, drive, focus and humility. My words were not directed inward but outward. I have a chance to give back to the sport that has carved my identity. I feel obligated to. We learn from the river but we also learn from each other. This only happens when perspectives are pooled, thoughts are voiced and conversation is opened. These words being read are the very measure of this success. This success is not mine, Doug’s or the incredible folks who took time to contribute to these ideas and share their own; this is the success of a sport. It seems none of us judge success monetarily. Is this our great lesson? Or is our great lesson that we as individuals can inspire others around us and share this wisdom with the world? I don’t know, but maybe someone who reads this—maybe one kid—will be encouraged or a single pair of eyes opened. This is my personal measure of success. To quote Doug’s old Chinese proverb: “he who criticizes me correctly is my teacher.” Our lessons come not only from an inner tuber but also from each other and the sport that will keep us all humble and happy.

The Cutting Edge: Part II

Doug Ammons

As I noted in the opening of this set of pieces, the focus of responses changed drastically from my original essay. Tyler and the commentators ended up discussing things that had very little to do with my topic. I was investigating what the “cutting edge” might be. I said nothing about the financial past and future of the sport, or about sponsorship of young athletes, designing kayaks to do big waterfalls, or about cost-benefit tradeoffs between dollars spent on athletes versus molds for boats, or whether the sport was driven by professionals pursuing the cutting edge, or by everyday paddlers pursuing their own personal enjoyment. I also didn’t talk about family and simple but beautiful experiences on the rivers because I’ve written extensively about them elsewhere. Had those been my themes, I would have written a different essay. In what follows I am joining back up with my original topic, and then joining it with the current topics.

The cutting edge is usually used to refer to the hardest things we do, but it actually is just a slang or buzz word that hides more than it describes. If there is an “edge,” it is not a single edge, but more like a crate of broken bottles—thousands of different edges, some sharp and dangerous, others dull, some spectacular and others less so. It represents all the things we do in the sport that are new, interesting, and different. Contrary to what the words “cutting edge” literally suggest, some of the edges actually don’t cut at all, but seem relatively benign. The edge is incredibly diverse. It evolves in unpredictable ways. It is essentially driven by individuals’ personal challenges and desires, and their own creativity in applying their skills to a challenge that they find unique and personally interesting. It’s an expression of who they are and what they seek. Most people aren’t really interested in doing the same things better or higher or faster, although that sometimes is part of the change. Much more so, the edge is a symbol of freedom. It is anarchy as opposed to some constant,

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predictable expansion along clear dimensions. There aren't any clear limits to it, except that we could be sure people will continue to figure out new cutting edges as experience, equipment, designs, skills, and attitudes continue to change, which they always will.

I described a number of specific examples of what people might consider the edge to be. I deliberately contrasted the different branches of the sport: steep creeks with big water, expeditions, hybrid runs, waterfalls, peak flows, doing multi-day runs in a single day, and so forth. The intent was to show that every branch has its cutting edge aspect that will stretch or even be beyond the edge aficionados of the other branches. If you're great at one, then the tables are turned if you go into another branch. The point was, no part is "better" than the others. Another point was, nobody is so good at one branch that there aren't plenty of others who could do the same things. Some humility is in order.

Additionally, I didn't get into freestyle or competition, because the article was already way too long. I cut out the drafted sections on those, and for the same reason, cut sections on the importance of building on earlier people's experience, and on equipment and designs—even though it is obvious that many of the things we do can't be done without specialized boat designs. The edge is all mixed up with changes and innovations in equipment. The best paddler in the world couldn't flat spin an old *Dancer* or a 13 foot slalom boat.

I took special aim at waterfalls because they seem an exemplar of many peculiar notions and confusions about the "cutting edge." They truly can be difficult and look spectacular, yet, people seem to believe in a simple equation that higher is better and harder. Falls have been a centerpiece for the cutting edge for last ten years or more, and have generated a lot of press, especially claims about "world records." Among other things, I pointed out that an inner tuber had run a falls as high as the current "world record," and asked

what that meant—if anything. It's clear that more skill is involved in running a 100-footer safely in a kayak, and there's no question that a kayak is infinitely more versatile for running rivers in general. But what are we to make of this crazy dude doing our "world record" in a \$10 tube? Do we dismiss him and blithely go on, certain that our sport is so great we don't have to pay attention, or do we ask ourselves with some humility whether we really are doing something special with our "world records"? Do we ask how "cutting" the edge really is if it's not even sharp enough to pop the dude's tube? And who's to say he isn't having as much fun as us, or that it isn't harder than what we do? In a list at the end of the article, I added that a Swiss paddler had already broken the current world record by 30 feet, which again begs the question of what is so important about free-falling in a kayak. It certainly can be an incredible experience, as Tyler's beautiful description shows. It certainly is part of the cutting edge, but just what does that mean? People need to answer that question for themselves. I asked the question, and Tyler gave a personal statement of what is valuable about it.

My larger message was that these questions apply to everything we do. No aspect of kayaking is better than any other. They all have their cutting edges, and it's all great fun. Those edges have evolved with the sport, and they evolve for each of us personally. It's silly to get on a high horse and think we're so special that the tubers don't have something to show us. Simpler can be fun too. Huck Finn didn't have any less an adventure down the Mississippi because he was on a wooden raft instead of paddling a Jackson All Star. Talking about some apocryphal edge hides more than it illuminates.

I also would like to add that waterfalls led to front-page claims of world records, which is a notion that seems completely contrary to what rivers are and what they teach. A primary lesson rivers teach is endless change, and of our inability to hold and grasp flowing water. Our sport is defined by taking part in that ever-

changing flow, and learning to live, at least for a short time, with endless change. We all know a river's character varies drastically from instant to instant, water levels are up and down, eddies surge, waves build and break. It's what makes running rivers so difficult. Our skills don't capture the change, they allow us to meld with and become a part of it. That's a grand and inspiring experience: literally being change and evolving with each paddle stroke and rapid. At the same time, the river has a lesson of timelessness; it flows through the eons and when we join it for a few hours or days, it allows us a glimpse of that timelessness. There is nothing constant, except perhaps the realization that we are much, much smaller and more finite than it is. It has been here millions of years before us, and will continue to flow for millions of years after we're gone. We don't change it. It changes us. So to claim one has captured something valuable in a precise number, and that there can be a "world record" of 98.5 feet or 107 feet, seems ultimately silly and self-centered to me. It seems to contradict the lessons of change, timelessness, and humbleness in the face of the infinite. This is doubly so when the height of the falls is so small. The example of the Hail-Mary tuber, this dude in an absurd floating toy, seemed to call out these things in a humorous way.

While I originally focused on the twist of an inner tuber running a big waterfall, I was informed by a friend that this same guy has run the entire Class V stretch of the Futelafu, and a host of other gnarly rapids. Are the Alsek and Stikine next? Maybe the expedition paddlers will be in the same position as the waterfallers soon. Maybe we're all "misunderestimating" the lessons here. Eric Jackson got it. He wrote me saying that he'd already sponsored a couple of tubers and given them a private jet.

In case you don't know, there is much greater precedence for doing massive and dangerous big water in an inner tube. When rafter Ken Warren was trying to be the first to descend the Yangste, the Chinese had several teams "racing" him. They were made up of workers from

various cities who belonged to athletic clubs; most had no river experience at all. However, Chinese nationalism spoke strongly to them, and they didn't want some foreigner to be the first to run their Great River, a river that symbolized their history and culture. From a polite standpoint, they used what was essentially a big rubber inner tube or capsule, into which they would strap themselves. They ran some incredible rapids this way—including Tiger Leaping Gorge, a massive stretch of whitewater that is stunning in its raw violence and immensity. Let me put it this way: you won't see anybody running it in a kayak anytime soon. They paid for their daring, as at least 6 of the 15 team members died over the course of the several thousand mile journey. The craft would get caught in an apartment-building-sized hole and the river would brutally slam and spike them for minutes at a time, until eventually they were torn out of their harnesses. As the loose bodies flailed around inside the careening capsule, the hatch would be wrenched open by the water, and people would disappear into oblivion.

If any of us, including the Young Guns, had to face so high a chance of dying on a single descent, then we almost assuredly wouldn't do it. That's a good thing as far as I'm concerned. It also is a statement that the cutting edge is something different than what most people think.

The fact is, we carefully choose things that are within our skills, and deliberately do not attempt things that seem impossible. The Chinese tubers were truly on the cutting edge—actually they were way past it—and it turns out not to be a place where you can expect to have a long shelf life. As my good friend Bob McDougall aptly said about such things, "There's no future in it." So in light of this, what we're talking about in kayaking most of the time is a sort of well-mannered cutting edge that we're very careful about selecting, while there are thousands of things much harder and far beyond our skills, strength, and equipment. The full range of Nature's power and beauty is on display out there. Take a look and compare it to what we

do. Personally, that seems inspiring and wondrous at the same time it is humbling. If we could do everything, then we'd probably be looking for another sport. But we can't. In fact, we only do a tiny slice of the possible. The inner Tsangpo gorge is a case in point. The Stikine above 30,000 cfs. Or how about the release flumes on any big dam? Plus, I saw a beautiful 250-foot high punchbowl falls the other day, and then ran through a set of impressive photos of falls from 400 to 1000 feet high. There must be hundreds of thousands of waterfalls in the world that are higher than 100 feet. If we put our heads together, we could make a very long list of such things. An endless list. So we won't be running out of edges for a long, long time. The question is, do we only look at what we can do, or do we also remind ourselves of what else is out there in the real world? Both, I hope. The first is our drive and optimism, the second is our humility and perspective. Together they balance into a sense of inspiration and in the end, into awe.

This leads to my own ideals of the cutting edge. There are two of them, and they are entirely opposite in some ways. The first involves difficulty. It is the desire to pull together the entire repertoire of skills on a single run or even in a single rapid. In retrospect, it's what I did on a number of my favorite runs. For me, an ideal "cutting edge" run is one that requires paddling at the highest level on big steep rivers with every kind of feature—thus demanding from the paddler every kind of technique from big water, slalom to freestyle just to do the rapids. This is a different definition of a "line," when you have to pull all the stops and every skill out of your quiver. Then, it includes portaging and rope work. In a sense, it is combining the entire sport into a single run, or perhaps even a single rapid.

Each individual aspect has a "cutting edge," but the more interesting thing to me is putting all of the different edges together. In this light, the Young Guns are making great strides. Also, I greatly respect what Steve Fisher has been doing, because he shows this aspect of combining skills.

Several of Scott Lindgren's expeditions show this as well. There are many other superb kayakers doing their own versions of it.

Just like Jamie McEwan talks about Reinhold Messner's "Seventh Grade," the above is my seventh grade. When you can take all the skills that we collectively have as kayakers, learn them, excel at them, and then find a run where all of them are needed in order to do it, that's my ideal. Finally, for me personally, the step after that was to do the same thing, the most technically demanding and diverse multi-day runs, but solo.

This leads into my mirror image "cutting edge": which is the purely personal aspect of any run. It is the personal evolution that comes from melding with a river, feeling its change as a part of you. That might be a sense of wonder, beauty, and friendship on an easy float with no whitewater at all. Or, it might be the fun shared with a beginner who goes down his or her first Class II run. I remember learning to kayak: the feeling of personal freedom and sheer joy, of new possibilities unfolding, and it's a wonderful thing to share that with somebody else. It is not an edge that cuts, but one that gives life and shared warmth.

On the serious end of this edge, I'm interested in the personal crucible where I seek something much deeper. As a long-time martial artist, I treat running rivers as a martial art, in the sense of working with nature as the ultimate master, learning to flow with the water from its simplest forms to its most chaotic and powerful. Doing this forces you to find the heart of the river and blend with it. It leads to realizing you're a small and frail human in the face of the grand forces of nature. I believe this fundamental feeling is a part of everybody's experience. I chose to take it off in a particular direction for myself, seeking long, difficult wilderness runs, and doing them solo. It is a test of character, a reflection of who you are or what qualities you seek inside.

Every person, no matter what his or her skill or level, can experience this kind of

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rich challenge, and both mirror images of the edges I describe. A beginning paddler doing his or her first roll in a river finds a cutting edge, where challenge is mixed with pure fun, and success leads to a sense of freedom. A Class I paddler in the first Class II rapid feels this, and so on up the line. As Patrick mentioned, as their skills improve some paddlers require harder and harder runs to find this same feeling. Most of the rest of the commentators remind us that this doesn't need to be the case. It doesn't require big league Class V, it's all about personal balance within oneself. So, the scale can range from fun and freedom to a personal crucible, a fun get-together to a sweat lodge experience, and even to a vision quest.

All these different senses of personal challenge and freedom are the shared across the sport: the hardest-core dude may find them on his cutting edge run or falls, but the fact is, you don't have to go to the ends of the earth or do something hard. They are all around you all the time. Every one of those experiences, whether in Class I or Class VI, is a beautiful and valuable personal milestone. And the lesson isn't that what we do is so special, it's that the river has so many gifts. These are easier to see in the drama of a hard run, but the magic happens all the time disguised in the ordinary moments. All you have to do is look and you'll find them.

That puts us right back where we should be. We started with claims of the hardest and ended with gratitude for the gifts we are given. We are lucky to have a sport so rich in experience.

"Thousand Moves Per Mile" stretch of Smith Creek (ID), a creek that he pioneered

Photo by Grant Amaral



French Broad River Festival donates \$5000 to AW

The 11th Annual French Broad River Festival was held on May 2-4, 2008 in beautiful Hot Springs, NC on the banks of the 3rd oldest river in the world. The festival featured 2 stages with over 20 bands, a whitewater raft race, a mountain bike race, a river clean up, a kids village with a World Champion balloon artist and face painting, a children's parade, a dynamic art gallery, a silent auction, food vendors, arts and crafts, yoga, combustible artistry and many, many more good times. This year's festival was a huge success; it is estimated that between 2000 and 2500 people attended. The folks at the French Broad River Festival have raised many thousands of dollars for AW in the past and have made a \$5000 donation to AW this year. They also donated \$5000 to Homeward Bound in Asheville, whose mission is to help the homeless find and maintain long-term housing in Asheville. The music lineup was headlined by regional favorites Acoustic Syndicate, Larry Keel & Natural Bridge, Blueground Undergrass, and Snake Oil Medicine Show. Planning is already underway for next year's festival, which will be held on May 1-3, 2009. The 2009 FBRF will feature musical acts such as The Reverend Horton Heat from Dallas, TX, The Jeff Sipe Trio, Acoustic Syndicate, Larry Keel, and many more. Make plans to be there and check out their website for additional info, band schedules and tickets: www.FrenchBroadRiverFestival.com

Photo by Karl Gustavsen

Book Review

You Might Only Live Once

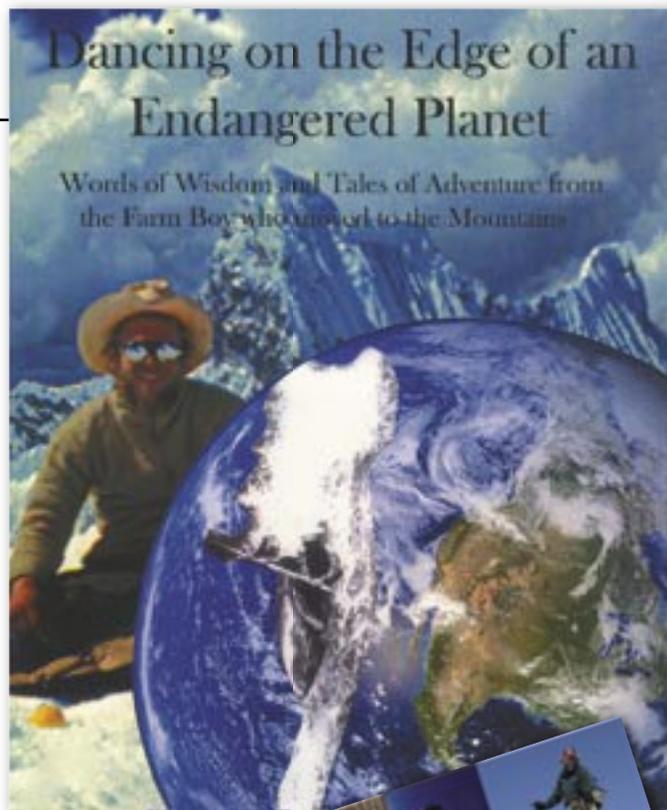
Book review by Ken Ransford

In case he might only live once, John Mattson has spent much of his 57 years climbing and kayaking on three continents, now chronicled in his self-published book, *Dancing on the Edge of an Endangered Planet*. In addition to his worldwide travels, you can share his brief stints on the professional rodeo circuit and in Aspen's downhill ski racing and freestyle aerial jumping competitions. His fresh and disarming prose takes you to the brink of the drop or the crux of the climb, and the photos are astounding.

After growing up on the farm that his grandparents homesteaded in North Dakota, he briefly worked in a Black Hills gold mine before deciding it was too dangerous. He became a carpenter, a trade he "recommends to the young adventurer because of its good pay and flexible schedule." He was one of the first to kayak the Big South, Colorado's true world-class run, and the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone in the 1980s, his "most spectacular run." He logged first descents on the North St. Vrain, North and South Boulder Creek, and The Toltec Gorge in Colorado.

I met John in 1994 at the Colorado River's downriver Gore Race. Two months later we were in Nepal for a month of kayaking. We returned in 1998 for a 17-day self support trip down the Humla Karnali. He's legendary for getting out of the country every six months or so for an extended trip. The book's early chapters describe climbing trips in the 1970s in Peru, Arizona, and Utah's Monument Valley until he traded a pair of skis for a fiberglass kayak, which "ruined my climbing career."

His kayaking journeys begin with a trip down the Grand Canyon in 1983 at 80,000 cfs with a somewhat inexperienced crew and a homemade craft using two tractor inner tubes. From there, he writes of trips



to the Bio Bio in Chile in 1985 before it was dammed, California's Middle and Little North Forks of the Feather River, and rivers in Peru and southern Chile's Patagonia region. With a vague sense that the world was bigger than that, he traveled to Asia in the 1990s for our two trips to Nepal and a first descent on a stretch of China's Mekong River. He doesn't paddle Class V anymore, but he still paddles a bit and has been focusing his time on skiing and salvaging what is left of his abandoned climbing career.

American Whitewater has carried his accounts of many of these trips through the years. The only thing better than reading this book is doing it, but in case you can't get away for 40 years, live large by sending \$25 to John Mattson for *Dancing on the Edge of an Endangered Planet*, P.O. Box 3136, Nederland, CO 80466. Or check out his website at danceonedge.com. 2008, 27 chapters and 260 photo filled pages. The world just doesn't get any more exciting.

Local's Favorite



Deconstructing Great Falls, Potomac River

By Kristen Podolak

A delicate relationship exists between paddlers and the park service at Great Falls National Park. In 1986 the Canoe Cruiser Association (CCA) and Great Falls Park made a voluntary agreement to allow paddlers to run the falls under certain guidelines, which are posted on the American Whitewater website (http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River_detail_id_741). The rules are simple, don't run it before or after park hours, or on weekends in the middle of the day when viewers on the overlooks might be tempted to scramble down steep rocks to get a closer view. Because of this agreement, I happily spent five years living near the nation's capital with a Class V run in a National Park in my backyard. Since I left the Washington, D.C. area to study rivers in California, I can't seem to shake the memories of the falls.

The phrase absence makes the heart grow stronger, definitely applies to my feelings for the Potomac River. The river is unique in its accessibility and year-round flows, which offer paddlers abundant paddling days and an opportunity to become intimately familiar with numerous lines on the falls. I hope sharing a few of my stories will paint a picture of this rich paddling Mecca and express what the park meant for me as a city dweller. Looking back, I doubt I would have been so content living in D.C. without the chance to experience nature and the power of the river.

Even the curves of the road leading to the falls are fresh in my mind. I let my speed increase a little as I drive downhill. Sharp right turn, a quick weave through two potholes as if I am picking a line down a rapid, and through the last long right turn before the entrance to Great

Kurt Braunlich and Christian Berger in Double Drop, between Grace Under Pressure and the Fingers, Great Falls, Potomac River

Photo by Kristen Podolak

Falls National Park. On average it took me about forty minutes to get out my office door downtown and into my boat at the falls. This meant a twenty-minute metro ride and a fifteen-minute drive. My strategy was to draw a straight line from my work to the falls, figure out where the closest metro stop fell on this route, and live there. While this sounds crazy to some people, I found it was the best way to maintain my sanity. For those of you who know DC traffic you understand.

It's past park hours so I slide by the empty guard booth without stopping. Already I see paddlers gearing up in the lot, their kayaks strewn behind their cars and bare arms showing. It's warm water paddling in the summer, and sometimes the water is hotter than the air. I remember one summer the heat was so stifling during the Potomac Festival that competitors

lounded in the potholes of water between events to keep cool.

Paddling friends give a nod to say hello as I pull in toward the series of spots where I tend to park. Already I'm gauging the group to see whom I might paddle with. Most of the falls regulars are here tonight: the older guys who've been running it for years, the slalom posse with their thin lifejackets, lightweight helmets, and no booties, and the local paddlers who dabble in different style boats. We all checked the gauge via our cell phones, and the level dictates which lines we'll be running. Today it's 3 feet on the gauge, meaning the Maryland lines will be in.

All together there are five distinct lines on the falls, although some would probably argue there are more or fewer. Paddlers can access the falls from either side of the park, Virginia or Maryland, but the

Maryland put-in is generally preferred. I stuff my throw rope and med kit in the back of my boat. I've joined a mish mash of slalom and river running friends. We cross the parking lot and Aaron asks me about my day. "Busy," I say, but the stress of work is fading into the back of my mind as I start to mentally prepare to run the falls. We seal launch into the canal to paddle only four short strokes to the other side; most paddlers don't even put their feet in the boat. Nobody wants to walk down the towpath, cross the lock, and walk back up to the put-in.

We make our way down a short path to put-in above the aqueduct dam. I look upriver expecting to see the bald eagle pair that is nesting on an island upstream of the dam. Their nest is visible, but they are not around. The view is serene; upstream it's Class I water as far as you can see. Downstream there is a clean horizon line

from the dam. I go through my normal routine of adjusting my hip pads, shorts, and sprayskirt, paddling a few strokes, and stretching my back and arms. I put my hands in the water and try to see through to the bottom.

The river water goes through shades of color during the year, the most distinctive being the blue-green, clear color in the winter and the orange, tannic color in the fall. I splash my face, brace left and right, and get my balance in the boat. We all paddle to the middle where we will boogie down a channel leading to Pummel, also called Sunshine, the first drop on the Maryland side.

Gil Rocha at the Spout, Great Falls, Potomac River

Photo by Kristen Podolak



Local's Favorite

The eight-foot boof off the dam is a piece of cake, unless there is really low water and you have to push yourself off. The best point of reference is a small rock island you can just see from above. In front of me Louis stops parallel to the dam, rolls over and pushes his boat over his head, and falls off the other side in a cartwheel. I opt for a less fancy approach and go for my standard three-stroke boof. The next little stretch is Class II, and you want to head left after passing a big rock. At this point the river opens up allowing you to break off to the right for the Center and Virginia lines.

Even though I can't see the horizon line yet, the midst and spray from Pummel shoots high above the falls, pulling at my

Kurt Braunlich doing the Hairy Ferry above Horseshoe, Great Falls, Potomac River

Photo by Kristen Podolak

curiosity while at the same time raising my blood pressure. As we round the bend, our group starts to spread out a bit to make sure there is no crowding in the eddy above the drop. We line up in the eddy, no one decides to get out and scout. There are three ways I've seen Pummel run, again depending on the level. At low water the left line is preferred, sliding down a narrow slot and then landing in front of a rock at the bottom. At most levels the line is to boof off the center right using a rock to auto-boof. The far right line is tricky, and most times paddlers don't get a good boof and end up melting.

I'm the last to go today. The others are waiting below or already hiking back up to run it again. I pause in the eddy and look over my shoulder at the waves leading in to the lip. The water next to me is flowing fairly swiftly, and I'm reminded of the time I saw a paddler peel out and then try and make it back to the same eddy.

It didn't work, he realized he was sliding backwards towards the lip and he turned and went for it. This happened my second year of running the falls, and I'll never forget feeling confused by his actions and so unable to help. He made it through fine, although I never saw what his line off the drop looked like. Once you peel into the current it's a commitment, and so the exit from the eddy and first few strokes are crucial. The entrance is not as technical or narrow a line as the last drop on the Virginia side or the first drop on the Center Lines, but it's still significant.

I pick up the tempo to get some speed as I near the lip, stoke on the right, left, pause, then right stroke to boof, shift my left hip down to balance the freefall, spot the landing, and push my heels towards the water to angle in on the entry. The moves happen in a few seconds, and I'm smiling as I eddy out on the river right with two friends. This is the first line I ever



ran on the falls and also where I had my closest call.

Awhile back, I ran the left side at a high level, got caught up against the rock on the left, missed my boof, melted off the drop, and ended up behind the waterfall. Definitely not where you want to be. Unfortunately the only way I saw to get out was to let go of the rock and push myself into the curtain and hope for the best. It worked, but was bumpy. My sole witness, Willy said he was sure I would swim. I tried to explain to him that I spent most of the time in relatively calm water behind the curtain trying to decide what to do next. I've heard someone got rescued in the same spot, but the rescue involved getting out of his boat while behind the curtain and some serious rock climbing.

The hike back up to Pummel is short, slippery, and steep, but it's common for paddlers to hike up and run it three

or more times and then head down through Pencil Sharpener to the last drop, Horseshoe. Charley's Hole is parallel to Pencil Sharpener, but it is considered extremely dangerous, has claimed one paddler's life, and is not commonly run. At high water, Pencil Sharpener becomes Z-Drop, a pinball series of lateral wave holes that can be reached after running the top drop of the Center Lines. At this level, the ferry above Charley's is difficult and there is little room for error.

The last drop on the Maryland side, Horseshoe is best skirted to the right at normal levels, or run on the left at high water. By right, I mean on the rock as far on the right side as possible. Some people prefer to line up with a 'hairy ferry' from river left to right above the drop. I decide to go straight down the right side, not wanting any more of a challenge than the drop already presents. At super low water you can launch off a rock slab in the

center. If you melt Horseshoe hole you can get seriously worked. This is the only place at Great Falls where I've had to throw my rope to someone.

From the bottom of the Maryland lines you can hike up the flake to access the Center and Virginia lines. The flake is also slippery and requires some scrambling. The Virginia side includes U-Hole or Leonard's Leap at the top, S-turn Rapid, and then the tallest drop on the falls, the Spout at about 21 feet. Some paddlers love the Spout, but I've always felt a little off kilter in free fall on this drop. The common line is to eddy out on the right above the drop, aim at the left shore without hitting the rock and boof off the far left side. The

Middy Tilghman, Andrew McEwan, Louis Geltman, Willy Pell, and Aaron Mann in the Kettle below the Spout, Great Falls, Potomac River (yes, it's dark)

Photo by Kristen Podolak



Local's Favorite

boof stroke requires patience as the lip of the drop is slightly below the horizon line. There is usually a lot of debris, floating barrels, wood, and foam waiting for you in the eddy. I once saw this line run center right, but it was sketchy at best.

The Center Lines have the best names for the rapids, with Grace Under Pressure and the Streamers, also called the Fingers. Grade Under Pressure is the drop I consider the most difficult on the falls. The line up is tricky and the landing has pulsing bubbles that can throw you off balance. I've seen many paddlers style this line, and a 2006 falls race was held there. To run Grace you usually go along the right side under an overhanging rock, head right and launch a big left boof stroke off a rock. The hard part is staying right through the top hole, and not getting caught in the eddy directly above the 15-foot drop.

While trying to prepare for a race I once caught this eddy unintentionally and had to boof off Grace backwards, another one of those not-where-you-want-to-be situations. I landed fine, albeight backwards, but my confidence was shaken. When I hiked back up to set safety for friends, Tom McEwan, one of the three paddlers to first descend the falls, made a comment that I'll never forget. He told me something like, "The mark of a strong paddler is being able to recover in a tough situation, because everyone gets off-line."

The middle drop of the Center Lines, Double Drop, seems easy but is technical and risky. You need to boof into an eddy on the right in the second part of the drop in order to avoid running Subway or Twist and Shout, two drops that are never run intentionally. These are part of the streamers, a series of narrow waterfalls with one commonly run line. Going down the correct line is paramount. Although people have survived several of the other Streamer lines, one paddler was lost in Twist and Shout. However, on a positive note, running the streamers is the easiest freefall on the falls. Once you have the correct streamer in sight, you paddle through a narrow slot and wait patiently for the boof with a little angle to the right.

The run out from the Maryland, Center, and Virginia lines is O-Deck, a fun series of waves.

During the 2005 Great Falls Race, in a head-to-head race format, there was a collision on the Streamers and Jason Beaks accidentally hit Eric Jackson (EJ). I was below, having just finished racing, and got a first hand view. I paddled after Eric who didn't finish the race and floated towards O-Deck gripping his side. Jason realized what happened and started to paddle towards EJ to check on him. Meanwhile the third competitor, Andy Maser had run the streamers and was paddling hard for the finish. Jason veered off realizing Andy was still racing, and at this point I lost track of the race and followed EJ who was not speaking or paddling, but floating hunched over. EJ managed to get to the Fisherman's Eddy below O-Deck without paddling, and it was a scary time for everyone, not knowing what injuries he had sustained. The rescue personnel swiftly evacuated him on a zodiac and you can check out his website to see the huge bruise he had on his side (www.jacksonkayak.com). He returned the next year to race the falls again and help sponsor the event.

Last but not least, the Fishladder and Back Channel lines are located along the Maryland side in a separate channel. The Fishladder was originally constructed to aid fish passage, but what exists today is leftover rebar, chunks of rip rap, and a variety of metal fragments. A lot of paddlers feel this rubbish makes it riskier, but it reminds me of the many Colorado creeks that parallel roads and contain sharp dynamite fragmented rocks and an assortment of debris. The first slide is fairly benign and you can get a good launch from the wave in the center. Keep an eye out for wood in this entire section. One winter a logjam at the pedestrian bridge to the falls overlook completely blocked the water flow. The second slide is trickier and leads directly into the third slide. At higher levels, this hole is really retentive. Below the second hole you can go right down the Back Channel or left down the third and fourth slides of the



Fishladder. Both channels flow together above the fifth slide.

When I first looked at the Back Channel I couldn't imagine someone paddling it. At high water levels it's one of the craziest, most intimidating, stretches of whitewater I've seen. But, at lower levels you can carefully sneak down the right or left sides. This section is continuous, long, and dangerously shallow in parts. The third and fourth slides on the fishladder are also very committing and fast. There is a good eddy to rest in below the fourth slide on the left. Again be careful of wood.



Two friends and I peeled out of the eddy to go down the fifth slide and had to duck under a big tree in a pinch. We were lucky it wasn't a foot lower. The fifth slide on the Fishladder is my favorite, but the hole at the bottom of the slide has a reputation for munching paddlers. You can run to the left and boof a ledge or run the slide top to bottom, skirting the hole to the right. I've always thought this drop could be run in a topo-duo, but I was never able to convince anyone to go in the front.

So this is how I deconstructed Great Falls: three main lines on the falls proper, and

two on the Maryland channel and a whole suite of rapid names. Breaking the falls into pieces allowed me to gradually ease into harder lines and link together entire runs top to bottom. When I first peered up at Great Falls I never thought I'd run it, but as time passed I was able to see more and more possibilities. The river gave me relief, challenge, fear, respect, awe, and the grace to recognize that powering through rapids is not a matter of muscle but being able to see a line, know how to work with the water, and recognize that even the best laid plans don't always go according to plan.

*Willy Pell and Aaron Mann at Pummel,
Great Falls, Potomac River*

Photo by Kristen Podolak

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In 2006, Keen's contributions will aid American Whitewater's projects in the Southeast, and the Pacific Northwest. In the Southeast Keen's support will help American Whitewater's work restoring the Catawba watershed. Additional funding from Keen will support AW's projects on the Columbia River Basin and the Cascade range in the Pacific Northwest.

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Who is Immersion Research?

We are a kayaking gear company based in Confluence, PA. Our business was founded in 1997 by two career kayakers, and since that day we have had one focus: to make the best, most innovative kayaking gear on the planet. Our company is also staffed by kayakers who love the sport as much as you do, and every day we work to make sure that you get the best gear and customer service possible.

Immersion Research is proud to be an AW Corporate Partner. As the first such partner in the industry, we realized the value that AW has in all of our lives. If not for the tireless work and contributions of the fine AW employees, members and stewards, we may not even be in business. If we don't have access to the places we love to paddle, then there wouldn't be a necessity for great, innovative gear.

We, as a company, have worked closely with AW to promote the value in membership and active participation in its causes, which are ultimately our common cause. We also work with AW as individuals to promote and ensure proper access and egress to and from our favorite places. Currently, co-owner and co-founder of Immersion Research, John Weld, is volunteering a significant amount of time and effort to reach an agreement concerning the rights of paddlers in the Blackwater Canyon, a world class steep creeking destination in the Canaan Valley of West Virginia.

Our own Head of Dealer Sales, Roger Loughney, has been working locally on increasing boater access to the Ohiopyle Falls, a clean and mostly friendly 18-20 footer at the put in for the Lower Youghiogheny, 10 miles downstream from IR. Currently, access is limited to three weekends per year.



Our corporate and personal contributions are a small part of a much larger whole that we are proud to be a part of. We thank you, the members of the boating community and American Whitewater, for your support of AW and IR.

IR further supports American Whitewater by providing their Creek Bag to every AW member who joins at the \$250 level in 2009.

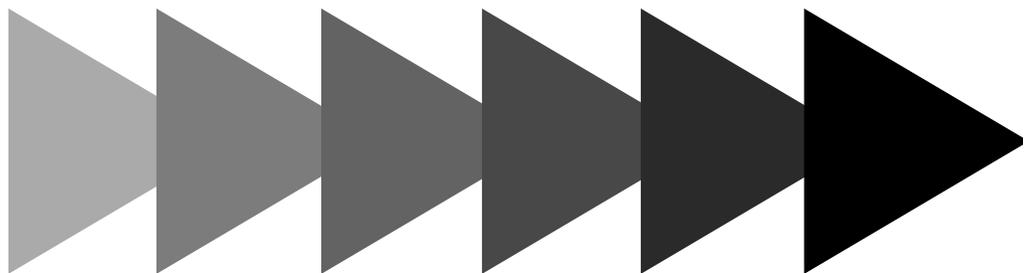


Join



AMERICAN WHITEWATER Today!

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



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

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

be sure that everyone you paddle with understands the work AW does, and how you, as an AW member, value that work.

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

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

Membership
P.O. Box 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

CONTACT INFORMATION

New Member Renewing Member

Name _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
Telephone () _____ e-mail _____
Club Affiliation _____
(if claiming club discount)

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

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- \$25 Junior (*Under the age of 18*)
- \$25 Individual for Affiliate Club Members (*SAVE \$10 if you are also a member of an AW Affiliate Club*)
- \$35 Individual One Year
- \$50 Family (*Immediate family members excluding children over the age of 18*)
- \$65 (2) Year Membership
- \$75 Affiliate Club Membership
- \$100 Ender Club (*Receive AW's annual Ender Club T-Shirt FREE Circle Size: S M L XL XXL*)
- \$250 Platinum Paddler (*Receive Immersion Research's "Creek Bag" FREE*)
- \$500 Explorer Membership (*Receive a Dry Bag from Watershed FREE*)
- \$750 Lifetime Membership (*Receive AW's Lifetime Membership NRS Paddlers Duffle FREE*)
- \$1000 Legacy Membership (*Receive AW's exclusive Kokatat Knappster Shorty Top FREE*)
- \$2500 Steward Membership (*Thank you items will be arranged on an individual basis*)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT OR SUBSCRIPTIONS

- \$5.00 \$10.00 \$25.00 Other \$ _____
- \$30.00 Kayak Session Subscription (*Includes a \$5 donation to AW*)
- \$40.00 LVM Subscription (*includes a \$8 donation to AW*)

JOURNAL OPTIONS

- Yes, mail me the AW Journal
- Do NOT mail me the AW journal, I will read it online (*saves paper and saves AW money!*)

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- Card Number: _____ Exp Date: _____
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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 1957 has been to distribute information among its Affiliate Clubs. AW's relationships with local clubs have provided the backbone for the river conservation and access work it accomplishes. Over 100 clubs are now AW Club Affiliates and they are all doing great work on your behalf. If you don't belong to a club consider joining one.

Back in March, American Whitewater challenged all its Affiliate Clubs to submit proposals for two \$1,250 grants for projects "that promote river stewardship, conservation, access and/or safety education on our nation's rivers." Of the many responses we received, those of the Atlanta Whitewater Club and the Fairbanks Paddlers stood out.

The Atlanta Whitewater Club has received funding for an ambitious project in which members will be participating in river clean-ups on 4 different rivers in the Atlanta area. These rivers include the Tellico, Cartecay, Chattooga, and Sope Creek, with some rivers having more than one cleanup date. A very worthy endeavor to be sure.

The Fairbanks Paddlers' project tackles the often overlooked question of the disposal of human waste on river trips. Over the course of a 3-4 day float trip on the popular Gulkana River in Alaska, all trip participants will be utilizing portable toilets and packing out all human waste generated on the trip. In partnership with local news sources and through education of their own members and fellow river users the Fairbanks Paddlers aim to encourage the use of portable toilets on all multi-day river trips.

American Whitewater and Clif Bar are extremely pleased to help fund these ventures and remind people to check back for project updates in the future.

Congratulations again to the Atlanta Whitewater Club and the Fairbanks Paddlers!

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

include them in the Journal.

The AW Journal Club Affiliates by state:

Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks

Alabama

Birmingham Canoe Club, Birmingham
Coosa Paddling Club, Montgomery
Huntsville Canoe Club, Huntsville

Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

California

Chico Paddleheads, Chico
Otter Bar Lodge Kayak School, Forks of Salmon
River Touring Section, Angeles Chapter
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Ch., San Jose
Sierra Club SF Chapter, Livermore

Colorado

Avid4Adventure Inc., Boulder
Colorado Whitewater Asso, Englewood
Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride

Georgia

Atlanta Whitewater Club, Atlanta
Georgia Canoeing Association, Atlanta
Georgia Tech Outdoor Recreation, Atlanta

Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Assoc., Boise

Illinois

Chicago Whitewater Assoc., Chicago
Team SICK, Carbondale

Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Indianapolis

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Des Moines

Kansas

Kansas Whitewater Association, Mission

Kentucky

Bardstown Boaters, Frankfort
Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington

Maine

Outward Bound, Newry
Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society, Topsham

Maryland

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

Massachusetts

AMC - New Hampshire Paddlers, Honover

Minnesota

SCSU Outdoor Endeavors, Saint Cloud

Missouri

Ozark Mountain Paddlers, Springfield
Ozark Wilderness Waterways, Kansas City

Montana

Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

New Hampshire

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

New Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

New York

ADK Schenectady, Schenectady
Colgate University, Hamilton
Hamilton College, Clinton
Housatonic Canoe & Kayak Squad, Ossining
KCCNY, New York
St Lawrence University, Canton
Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia

N. Carolina

Base Camp Cullowhee, Cullowhee
Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh
Mecklenburg Regional Paddlers, Indian Trail
Outing Club at North Carolina State, Raleigh
Triad River Runners, Winston, Salem
Watauga Paddlers, Boone

Ohio

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

Oregon

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

Pennsylvania

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

S. Carolina

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

Tennessee

Eastman Hiking and Canoeing, Kingsport
Tennessee Scenic River Assoc., Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga
University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville

Texas

Houston Canoe Club, Houston

Utah

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

Vermont

Vermont Paddlers Club, Essex Junction

Virginia

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

Washington

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

West Virginia

West VA Wildwater Association, S. Charleston

Wisconsin

Hoofers Outing Club, Madison
NE Wisconsin Paddlers Inc. Appleton

Wyoming

Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson

Canada, British Columbia

Vancouver Kayak Club, Vancouver

www.americanwhitewater.org

Discounted AW Membership for Affiliate Club Members

By Carla Miner, Membership Manager

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

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

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

Join American Whitewater as a Club Affiliate!

10 Reasons to Join AW as an Affiliate Club

1. Receive the *American Whitewater Journal*, the oldest continually published whitewater magazine.
2. Join the list of Affiliate Clubs noted in each bi-monthly *AW Journal*.
3. List club events in the *AW Journal*.
4. Your Club's members can become AW members for \$25. A \$10 savings!
5. Have technical expertise for your Club conservation and access committees 'on tap.'
6. Have access to technical and onsite assistance for your Club's event planning.
7. Enjoy VIP benefits for "Joint Members" at AW events.
8. Participate in exclusive AW Affiliate Club promotions.
9. Post Club information on the AW Website to help paddlers find you.
10. Eligible to apply for the 2008 Clif Bar Flowing Rivers grant

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

Guidelines for Contributors



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

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

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

Photos may be submitted as slides, black or white prints, or color prints or electronic, digital photos, 300 dpi tiffs, Photoshop or high res jpegs minimum 3"x5." Keep your originals and send us duplicates if possible; we cannot guarantee the safe return of your pictures. If you want us to return your pictures, include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your submission. The better the photos the better the reproduction.

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

If you are writing about a commonly paddled river, your story should be told from a unique perspective. Articles about difficult, infrequently paddled, or exotic rivers are given special consideration. But we are also interested in well written, unusual articles pertaining to Class II, III & IV rivers as well. Feature stories do not have to be about a specific river. Articles about paddling techniques, the river environment and river personalities are also accepted. Pieces that incorporate humor are especially welcome. Open boating and rafting stories are welcome.

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

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

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

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

Send your material to:
Journal Editor
P.O. Box 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723
E-mail: editor@americanwhitewater.org



Release for publication

I hereby release my work (literary, graphic or photographic) for publication in American Whitewater magazine

- I understand that my work may be edited or cropped at the editors' discretion.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my work.
- I accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information included in my submission. I have not libeled or slandered any individual, corporation, or agency in this work.
- I understand that all or some of my work may be reprinted at some future date in an American Whitewater publication
- I promise that this material has not been and will not soon be published by another magazine or publication and the rights to this material are clear and unrestricted.
- I understand that once this material is printed in American Whitewater it may be reprinted or reproduced in other publications if I wish, providing I notify them that it has already appeared in American Whitewater.
- I understand that the contents of American Whitewater Magazine, including my contribution will be archived on the American Whitewater website.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

This release must be signed by the contributing author(s), photographers(s), and graphic artist(s).

Send your material to:

American Whitewater Journal PO Box 1540 Cullowhee, NC 28723 or via email to editor@americanwhitewater.org

Px MY PADDLE PRESCRIPTION

PADDLER: JOHN GRACE

I'M A: WERNER SHO-GUN

TYPE: STRAIGHT

DIAMETER: STANDARD

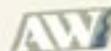
LENGTH: 200 cm

HEIGHT: 5'11"

OCCUPATION: VIDEO GURU

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BECAUSE IT FORCES ME TO FOCUS - AND THE CONFUSION OF LIFE SUBSIDES FOR A BIT.



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First descent Petite Mecatina, North Quebec

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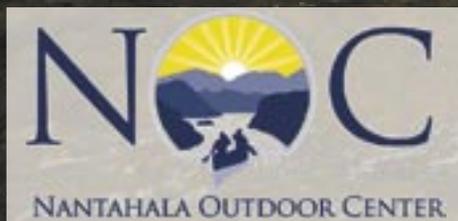


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