



Conservation • Access • Events • Adventure • Safety

AMERICAN WHITEWATER

BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS
March/April 2006



Inflatables & Canoes

Pocket-Sized Rafts
Make Wilderness Adventure a Breeze

Father, Son Canoe Trip
Turns Wet and Cold

Call Clay Wright a . . . Rafter!

Paddling as Therapy: Kayaking Instruction Helps Injured Vets' Rehab page 18
Kayak Camp for Kids with Cancer page 30



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AMERICAN WHITEWATER

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

American Whitewater Journal

March/April 2006

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Support American Whitewater through CFC or United Way

All the federal campaigns, and a few of the local United Way campaigns will allow you to donate through them to AW. Check to see if yours in one of them.

Also, check to see if your employer will match your charitable contribution - double your money, double your fun!



Granite Rapid on the Grand
Canyon of the Colorado.

Photo by Bell Canoe



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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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Executive Director The Journey Ahead

Giving Back

By Mark Singleton

You may have noticed last fall's appeal for donations was a bit different than others you've received in the past. Instead of the one-size-fits-all approach, we chose to divide the country up by our traditional work regions and send out our year-end appeals based on the projects that were taking place in backyards of members around the country. This was a new approach for us, yet it mirrors what we have been doing with regional stewardship projects across the country and the shift in our mission work to be more regionally relevant and focused at the community level.

I'm happy to report that our new stewardship approach seems to have resonated with our membership during year-end giving. It is very encouraging to see the level of support members provided American Whitewater at the end of 2005, a very important time of the year for non-profit fundraising. Any notion that paddlers are cheap was blown away by this show of generosity.

These contributions are extremely important to AW and help to support our core river stewardship work. While membership dues are critically necessary, member donations (along with grant funding) enable our staff to be active and engaged in the process of stewardship. These donations don't have to be large; each person doing a small part makes a noticeable difference. And that's exactly what I observed as I went through the AW mail late in the year. Sure, there were some nice checks from foundations and major donors, but there were also donations from students (some as young as 11), new participants in the Platinum Paddler / Ender Clubs and even from non-paddlers who chose to support our stewardship efforts because they enjoy the aesthetic value of whitewater.

This giving demonstrates confidence in the mission of AW and our ability to achieve successful outcomes on projects

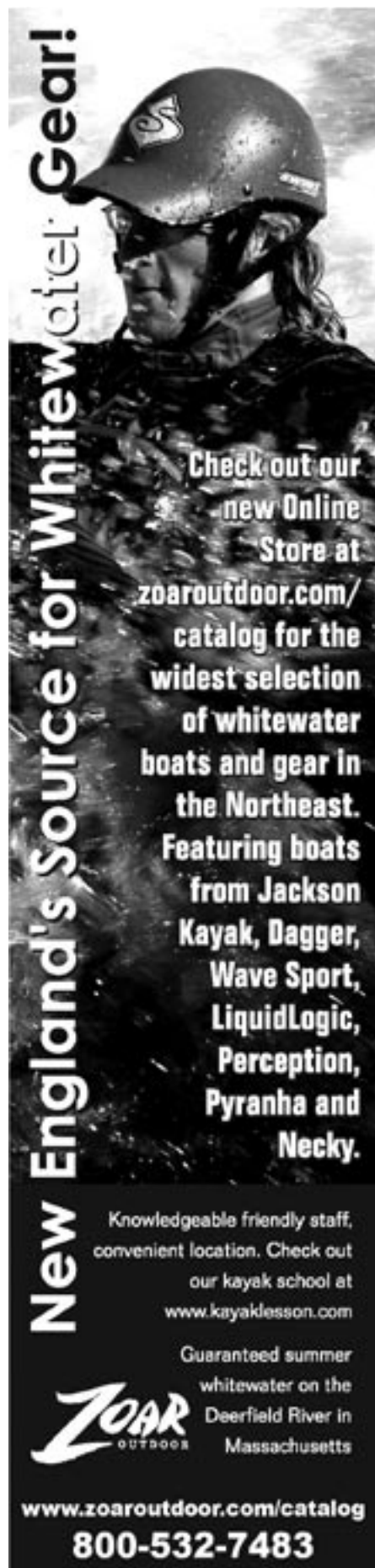
that are near and dear to the hearts of boaters and friends of wild rivers. It also places some additional responsibility on AW to demonstrate leadership in the coming year on key stewardship issues and to adequately report on developments in those areas and how funds are being used.

As we move forward, we will continue to refine our approach to member appeals and communication. Due to feedback we received from a number of members, we are reducing the membership renewal and donation appeals, mailing schedule in 2006. We will reach out to you more via targeted e-mails with membership renewal information, news and appeals. Be sure to read our monthly e-newsletter, AW Beta, and open your AW e-mails for exciting news in river stewardship and opportunities to save paper and postage via on-line renewals and donations.

You should have recently received a spring appeal from us with information on upcoming challenges to the Energy Policy Act and Clean Water Act. The success of the Grand Canyon Management Plan is also a key piece of the spring appeal and demonstrates the success we achieved through partnership and compromise with other organizations. These achievements are made possible by your support.

Again, thanks very much to all of you who contributed to make AW's December surprise very pleasant. Remember that donations don't have to wait for the end of the year; we are happy to accept them anytime. The demands of our stewardship program are ongoing year-round. **AW**

Enjoy the spring water!



New England's Source for Whitewater Gear!

Check out our new Online Store at zoaroutdoor.com/catalog for the widest selection of whitewater boats and gear in the Northeast. Featuring boats from Jackson Kayak, Dagger, Wave Sport, LiquidLogic, Perception, Pyranha and Necky.

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Guaranteed summer whitewater on the Deerfield River in Massachusetts

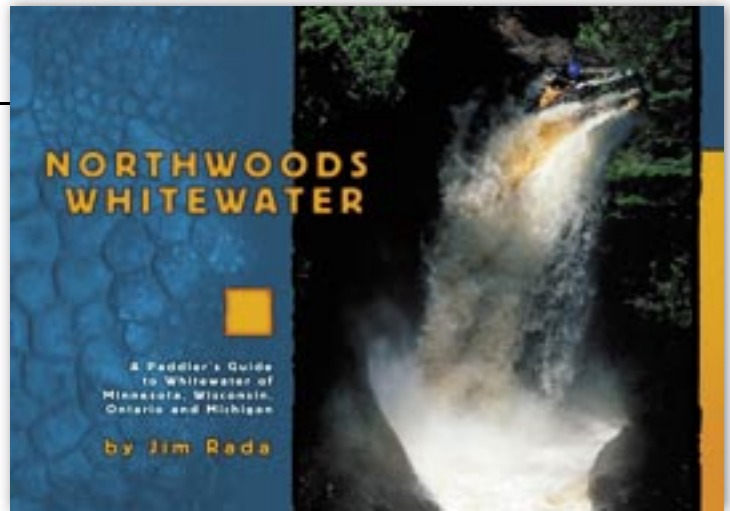
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Book Review

Northwoods Whitewater: A Paddlers Guide to Whitewater of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ontario and Michigan by Jim Rada

Review by Steve Corsi




The news of a new book on whitewater in the upper Midwest has been flying around boater's e-mail lists for months now. A book called *Northwoods Whitewater* will be the first to cover the primest of the prime whitewater on Lake Superior's North Shore (Minnesota and Canada), on Lake Superior's South Shore (Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Wisconsin), along with a few other classic rivers of the Mississippi River drainage, Lake Michigan watershed, and Minnesota's pristine boundary waters. Well, in reality, a number of us Midwest paddlers who have been explorers of the frigid spring frothy water of these areas for years now have had this book in its original form since the mid 90s.

I remember that fateful day at the Silver River Falls picnic area (i.e., the boaters' "campground") near L'anse Michigan in spring of 1995 when I spied a fellow boater reading through the pages of what looked to be a guidebook. This was perplexing since I had always been told by my first paddling mentor and noted old timer from the U. of Wisconsin Hoofers, Harry House, that the only comprehensive database of information on the whitewater rivers draining to Lake Superior was inside his head. I had always suspected that he told us this only for his own safety—we would always give first priority to saving Harry on the river so he would graciously agree to reveal directions to the put-in for the next run. Well, now it appeared that there was another source (and don't think that Harry didn't look threatened). I sauntered over to this fellow paddler wielding the magic book and expressed casual interest trying not to look too fascinated for fear that he would not let me have a gander. I paged through this manuscript with amazement; it did look

more like an unpublished, hand-typed manuscript than a book. Here was a volume of information on all of the rivers I had seen in this area, plus the North Shore and much more. My fellow boater gave me the telephone number of the author, Jim Rada, who lived in Minnesota. When I returned home, I promptly called Jim to order the guide book. For \$20 he sent me a xeroxed copy of *Northwoods Whitewater* complete with a hand-drawn picture of a curious boater peaking through the trees at a river filled with rapids. I took the 150 pages of loose-leaf paper and secured them in a blue binder I had leftover from one of my college physics courses and that book came to be known in my paddling circle as "The Blue Bible".

I devoured this book from cover to cover with great interest and a spirit of adventure. Jim did such a great job with this book that I could not put it down. It's filled with loads of information on every significant run in the area, from spring paddling classics like the Silver and Presque Isle Rivers on the South Shore to the Baptism and the Devils Track on the North Shore, and summer strongholds like the Wolf, the Peshtigo, and the St. Louis Rivers; in all it has over 60 river descriptions. This book is a comprehensive compilation of the intermediate to advanced-level rivers of the Upper Midwest. It will get you to the put-in and the take-out of all of the included runs with general descriptions of most of the rivers, and elaborate descriptions of the most popular runs. The only place that I found lacking in this book was water level information. For most of the runs, the reader is left to find runnable water levels (which, of course, is

easily done on the AW River Tools' web page). Not only does this book provide information on whitewater, there are a number of wildly entertaining stories of local paddling folklore. That was really the main reason that I could not put the book down. Jim included his experiences on many of the rivers as well as river guide information.

One unique aspect to the book, as it will be published, is that boaters from all over the Midwest and beyond submitted photos and provided editorial assistance to make it happen. A heart attack in spring of 2003 while paddling the Presque Isle River brought Jim an untimely death. His friends and paddling partners, especially Steve Stratman, banded together to get this book into print with Jim's unique writing style as the base, photos from countless boaters as the accent, and a whole lot of persistence from Steve Stratman and Jim's brotherhood of paddlers. What was once a xerox manuscript is now a beautiful work of art with full color and dramatic photos on every page. Jim may not be around to see it officially in print, but his spirit lives on with this book and the extensive cooperative effort that it took to get it published. 


The book is scheduled for an April 1 release; ask for Northwoods Whitewater in your favorite book store or paddling supply retailer, or contact the publisher at www.sangfroidpress.com/northwoods.htm or 952-474-6220.

AW News & Notes

AW's Accident Database and Safety Code Now Online!

Cullowhee, NC – Safety has been at the core of American Whitewater's mission since 1954. "We've been reporting and analyzing accidents since our earliest days and today we are leaders in whitewater safety education based on that research. Our Accident Database is the most comprehensive collection and analysis of whitewater accidents and close calls anywhere," explains Charlie Walbridge, American Whitewater's Safety Editor. Now, after a tremendous effort by the volunteers of the AW safety committee, the Accident Database is online, available for your viewing; you can find it at: <http://www.americanwhitewater.org/accidents/>.

Accident analysis is the foundation for the AW Safety Code, which outlines whitewater safety guidelines applicable to all skill levels. First written in 1957 and regularly updated, it is the most complete set of guidelines in existence for whitewater paddlers. It also contains the International Scale of River Difficulty, which is used throughout North America and the world. AW's listing of Standard Rated Rapids helps make river classification more consistent across the country. The Standard Rated Rapids List was developed by former AW Safety Chair Lee Belknap, who scientifically analyzed questionnaires submitted by hundreds of paddlers across the country. Paddlers across the nation can now know what to expect when traveling to an unfamiliar river.

Safety is a commonly raised issue in river stewardship work, AW's key programmatic focus. The challenge is often explaining whitewater paddling to the non-paddling public. Frequently asked questions are: "How safe is whitewater paddling? Where does AW stand on riverbed modification or boat registration? What are the most important issues for legislators, river managers, and emergency responders?" All of these questions and more are answered online, in the Safety Section of AW's Stewardship Toolkit. 

To Report an Accident:

Accident reporting is vital to American Whitewater's mission. But more importantly, it's a sure antidote to the rumor, gossip, and innuendo that always follows a serious accident. AW's Accident Database works with individuals who were on the scene and is thus able to provide an authoritative record.

The Accident Database contains reports of fatal accidents, serious injuries, and near-misses. A serious injury is one requiring hospitalization; a near miss is an event that easily could have been fatal. The Safety Committee examines all submissions prior to the final posting and decides which incidents will be added to the database.

There are several ways to report an accident:


- 1) Each witness can post her or his own account to the AW web site and the Safety Committee will create a report.
- 2) Groups or individuals can create their own report and post it. If you would like help in crafting your report, contact Charlie Walbridge, AW Safety Editor,

at ccwalbridge@cs.com or by phone at 304-379-9002.

3) You can post e-mails, message board and chat room postings, and newspaper articles here. In addition to providing a link, please cut and paste the text from the article. The links may be dead by the time a Safety Committee member follows it up. Always be sure that the SOURCE and DATE are clearly indicated.

4) If you want to pass on information that you DON'T want the public to see, please specify on the report form that the material is private. If so designated, it will not be released without your consent.

If you have corrections, questions or comments about any accident please e-mail Charlie Walbridge at ccwalbridge@cs.com.

The recent improvements and updates of the AW Accident Database were made possible by the Andy Banach Memorial Safety Fund. AW thanks the family and friends of Andy Banach for this support. 



AW News & Notes

Partnership Between BLM and AW Bears Fruit


By Sera Janson, Bureau of Land Management

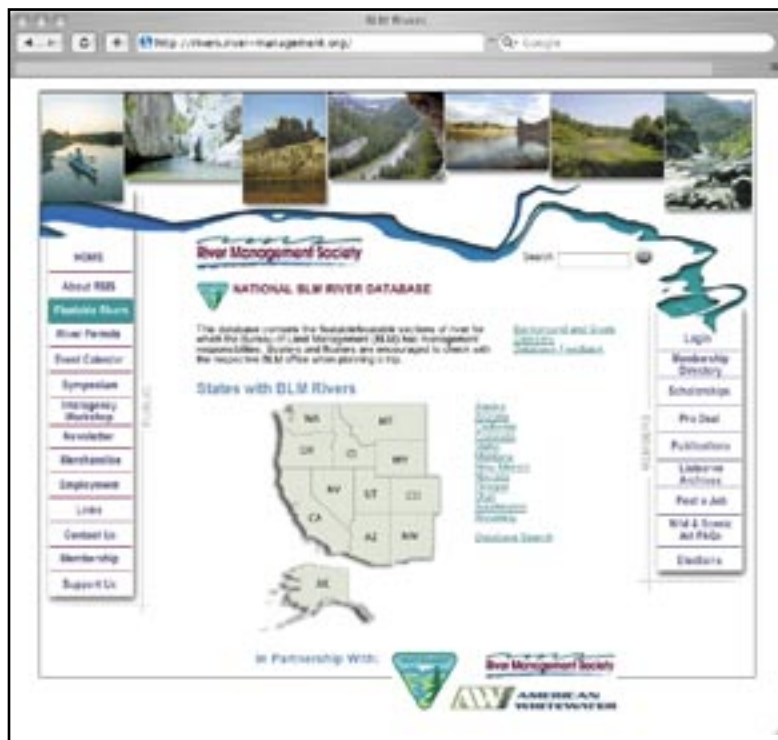
The Bureau of Land Management, Washington Office (BLM) and American Whitewater (AW) have partnered to make more river data readily accessible via a web-enabled National BLM River Database. This database houses information about the Bureau's floatable/boatable sections of rivers, supplementing AW's existing data.

The new National BLM River Database can be viewed at:
<http://rivers.river-management.org>

In 2004, the BLM entered into a formal partnership with AW. Through a five-year national assistance agreement, this partnership allows for coordination on mutual goals and leveraging of funds. The

BLM/AW partnership serves to facilitate specific national river management projects and provides an example of cooperative conservation working on a national scale.

The database is hosted on the River Management Society (RMS) website. To reduce time and costs associated with printing an up-to-date publication, RSM began hosting relevant river information on their website in partnership with the BLM. The BLM partnered with AW during recent updates, utilizing the database design skills of AW's IT contractor, to create a cost-effective and user-friendly interface for BLM's river data. This database streamlines efforts to disseminate river data and creates opportunities for other agencies to incorporate their data. Each BLM river section is linked to AW's comprehensive web database of boatable river sections in the US. 



Sue Taft to Head Whitewater Hall of Fame

The Adventure Sports Center International (ASCI) has announced the appointment of Susan Taft as the Executive Director of the International Whitewater Hall of Fame (IWHoF). Susan is the author of *The River Chasers, A History of American Whitewater Canoeing and Kayaking*, and brings 20 years of business development experience to the position. "This is a great opportunity to not only help with the on-going development of the Hall of Fame, but also the strategic development of the museum itself, a subject I have been interested in since its earliest inception," says Taft.

IWHoF inducted its first class of Honorees into the Hall of Fame in October 2005. The nomination process for the 2006 Class of Inductees has begun with final nominations expected from the 15 affiliate organizations in early May. The paddling public is encouraged to contact their affiliates to participate in the nomination process. A listing of the affiliates can be found on the IWHoF website through a link on www.adventuresportscenter.com along with the nomination criteria for the inductee categories: pioneer, explorer, champion, and advocate.



History

Whitewater Canoes: Twists and Turns

By Sue Taft

Although whitewater canoes can be traced to native North American designs originating many hundreds of years ago, modern whitewater canoes in the U.S. can be traced through a circuitous route from France in the 1950s from their origins in New France 300 years before. It began with the French trappers and traders in the late 1600s who readily adopted the birch bark canoe for exploration and trade in the watersheds of the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay. As trade grew, so did the need for increasing numbers of canoes, and manufacturing centers—canoe production yards—were established along the St. Lawrence from Montreal to Quebec City to meet this need. Ultimately, though, these canoe production yards were destined for extinction as trade shifted further west, canoes were replaced by other means of transportation and New France was eventually lost to the British.

However, a Frenchman familiar with birch bark canoes took materials for building canoes back to France. Although his interest and passion for canoes may have been partially due to an appreciation for the practicality and craftsmanship of the boat itself, it may also have been due to the lasting memory of and nostalgia for New France in North America. For whatever reason, canoeing became a part of the French psyche. The French domination of canoeing events, particularly in the early years of slalom competition, was due to their long-standing association with canoes and canoeing. It was this domination and competitiveness that brought French racers back to North America to the Fi-BARK races on the Arkansas River at Salida in the early 1950s.

In 1953, two racers from France brought with them a canoe specifically designed for whitewater. No American had seen anything like it. The hull was flat-bottomed with considerably more rocker than any canoe built in America at that time. It was built of cedar strips and covered with fiberglass inside and out with a


removable canvas deck held tight around the gunwales with elastic. The canoe also had knee straps for better control—a simple idea, yet one that had not occurred to American paddlers.

Two years later, another revolutionary canoe was brought to the races. The canoe was an all-fiberglass decked canoe with one long middle cockpit designed with an integral deck. It was the first closed canoe seen in North America. Described as an oval-shaped tube pinched together at the ends, the canoe had very little upsweep at the sheer from the midsection to the bow and stern, which made it very different from traditional open canoe shapes.

These innovations in design clearly demonstrated advancements in whitewater canoeing far beyond what American paddlers had even contemplated. This helped to catalyze American thinking to new possibilities in design and materials which ultimately led to two significant innovations for whitewater canoeing over 20 years later. The first was the use of thermoplastic (Royalex/ABS) for whitewater canoes in the early 1970s (although its first use for canoes was an aborted attempt in 1959). The second was the revolution in design and technique brought about by the Jon Lugbill/Davey Hearn reign in slalom closed canoes (C-1) of the 1980s. The domain of whitewater canoeing was now firmly established back on the North American continent.

Although considerably smaller than the growing whitewater kayaking market, open whitewater canoeing was probably as popular as it had ever been in the east-

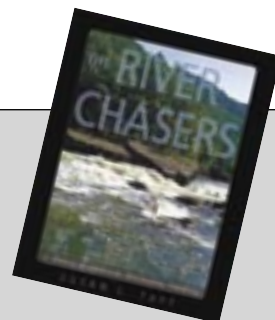
ern United States and Canada in the early 1990s with Dagger, Mad River, and Mohawk dominating the market with shorter canoe designs. However, the planing hull revolution for kayaks that began in the mid-1990s helped to erode the popularity of whitewater canoes to the point that within the last few years, Mohawk and Mad River stopped listing whitewater canoes in annual buyer's guides. Other factors (including sea and rec kayaking) further contributed to Dagger's decision to cease production of canoes altogether, let alone whitewater canoes. It seemed that, like the canoe production yards of old, whitewater canoe manufacturing was destined for extinction.

But maybe not. A relative newcomer has come to the forefront of the whitewater canoe market introducing new designs for a full line of OC-1s—including a planing hull OC 16 feet in length with blunt ends that more closely resembles a kayak. This newcomer is Esquif, a French-Canadian, Quebec-based (New France) manufacturer. And so, it seems that whitewater canoes may live on through yet another twist and turn. 

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Sue Taft is the author of *The River Chasers*, *The History of American Whitewater Canoeing and Kayaking*. If you have a topic or question you would like answered, e-mail it to editor@amwhitewater.org and look for its answer in an upcoming issue.



Field Notes

Call me a Rafter ...

By Clay Wright

American Whitewater is the premier organization representing kayaking in the US, right? Not exactly. Who ever said whitewater was limited to just kayaks? No matter how many kayaks you've got on the roof—or even when you've got a plastic boat in one hand and a two-bladed paddle in the other—the question is always: “You going rafting?” While some kayakers take this as an insult, it's not meant to be. While some may think of whitewater kayaks as the superior river-running craft, the participation numbers (and sometimes even the daring) of open canoes, duckies and rafts greatly overshadows our own. Thus, to Joe Public, that waterfall guy (Tao Berman) is just as much a rafter as the Wheaties man (Jon Lugbill). Rather than scoff at their ignorance, we should remember that any craft that allows people to enjoy whitewater pursuits is an asset to our own quest for recognition, access, and recreational uses of this nation's great waterways. If calling me a rafter allows Joetta Citizen to identify with what I do more easily, then “Yes Maam, I'm going rafting on the Horsepasture today,” is my answer.

Rafting

Rafting is the link between what I do to what my co-workers, inlaws, and neighbors have experienced. That, in and of itself, is a valuable connection. But there is much more to rafting than a church group outing on the Ocoee or South American ... some rafters get hooked, just like me, and move on to the Gauley or Cherry Creek, while some travel the globe in search of wilder waters and limited liability laws.

Out West, especially, many of these enthusiasts purchase their own equipment and become whitewater addicts in their own right. Rafting allows a multi-day experience to include good eating, cold beer, and camping equipment. It also allows almost limitless potential for

tackling difficult whitewater as the skills and equipment have developed: from the “into the meat” style of commercial outfitters on the Zambezi and White Nile to the recent video-proven successes of rafts on California's South Silver, Chile's Rio Gol-gol, and even North Carolina's Narrows of the Green. Next time someone calls you a rafter, remember how much rafting contributes to the efforts of AW—and also that rafters can style 40-foot waterfalls—before you answer.

Canoes

Here in Tennessee, open canoeing was the choice whitewater craft for years. While there were skilled deck boaters, for sure, all my early paddling trips were with canoes and the sport itself—no matter what your craft looked like—was called “canoeing.” The clubs formed by these open boating whitewater pioneers helped protect many of our waterways through their support of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Canoeing provides an easy transition for people who paddled about on lakes to make the switch to moving water. The sport took giant leaps with the innovation of Royale hulls, thigh straps, and flotation and it was often said, “anything that can be run in a kayak can be run in an open canoe.” Folks like Nolan Whitesell, Dave “Psycho” Simpson, and Jeff Richards showed up in videos proving that point. Today, Eli Helbert continues as torchbearer for the hair-boating openers, styling the hardest rapids in the sport with amazing regularity. Though the visibility of this sport has decreased, it remains a great, natural transition for people brought up canoeing on lakes but longing to tackle the thrills of rivers. In much of Tennessee and Canada, rafters are called canoers even when they ride in teams of eight. Go figure.

Duckies

While aficionados may prefer the term “IK” (for inflatable kayak), the Duckie is most often seen going sideways over entry-level whitewater, usually with comical

results. This natural albatross of the whitewater boating world actually strikes me as the one with the most potential. Duckies are that next step for people who like rafting but want a more personal involvement in whitewater, and thus are another important part of introducing people to whitewater rivers. Sure, some of those swimming Nantahala Falls may never come back, but I also see duckies being used to tackle more challenging whitewater and also in learning environments that involve water-reading, training, and progressing skills. On the Ocoee, Ace Funyaks starts its entry-level kayakers out in ducks—allowing them to experience Class II and III whitewater on their very first day.

“To me, Funyaks are the best way to introduce folks to kayaking,” says Ace Funyaks owner Jeff West. “The most discouraging aspects of learning [edge control and rolling] are eliminated so paddlers can focus on the reason we all do this: river running and surfing.”

In West Virginia, Ace Whitewater offers Summer Gauley trips in which experienced rafters can paddle a duckie down the Gauley at low flows. The crucial combination of experienced staff, skills training, and lots of safety allows novices to tackle Lost Paddle, Iron Ring, and even Sweets Falls! Ducks are great for learning because not only do you get to skip the roll, but you also get to climb back in instead of chasing equipment. But IKs are more than just entry-level kayaks. Classic creeks such as Washington's Little White Salmon and West Virginia's Deckers Creek were pioneered in IKs and there are plenty of skilled IKers regularly boating Class IV and V whitewater with style. With kayak-like outfitting, numerous levels of performance and many models to choose from, perhaps duckies are becoming more and more like (inflatable) kayaks.


And then there is the next use for duckies—allowing older boaters to continue to enjoy the whitewater rivers they love long after they can roll 100% or empty a boat full of water on a steep riverbank. On a recent trip down the

Selway with 70-year-old Frank Hensley of Knoxville, I was impressed by how much work the inflatable took out of a day on the river. With no skirt to fool with, he could scout and re-launch from anywhere—even just by standing up. I don't think he got his head wet the whole trip. Jeff West summarizes:

“Funiyaks are great for both ends of the kayaking spectrum. Beginners can learn river running with confidence and older paddlers can continue to paddle without concern of missing a roll”

Etc.

There are more modes of whitewater transportation on rivers all over the world than I will ever see. From Tom Love's Shredders sliding down Tallulah and Russel Fork each year to the Russian pontoon-boats that just tackled Itunda on the White Nile, to Dorries and J-rigs on the Grand Canyon, to ... who knows what.

Let people distinguish themselves and their crafts as they will. Just remember, for the purposes of American Whitewater, there are only three classes of river enthusiasts: participants, members and everyone else. 



In 2006 American Whitewater launched its volunteer based Athlete Ambassador Team, a core of professional whitewater paddlers who will publicly represent American Whitewater and reinforce its mission of preserving and restoring America's whitewater resources. Look for our Athlete Ambassadors on the rivers, at the putins and takeouts, and on the banks promoting the effective work of American Whitewater.

www.americanwhitewater.org



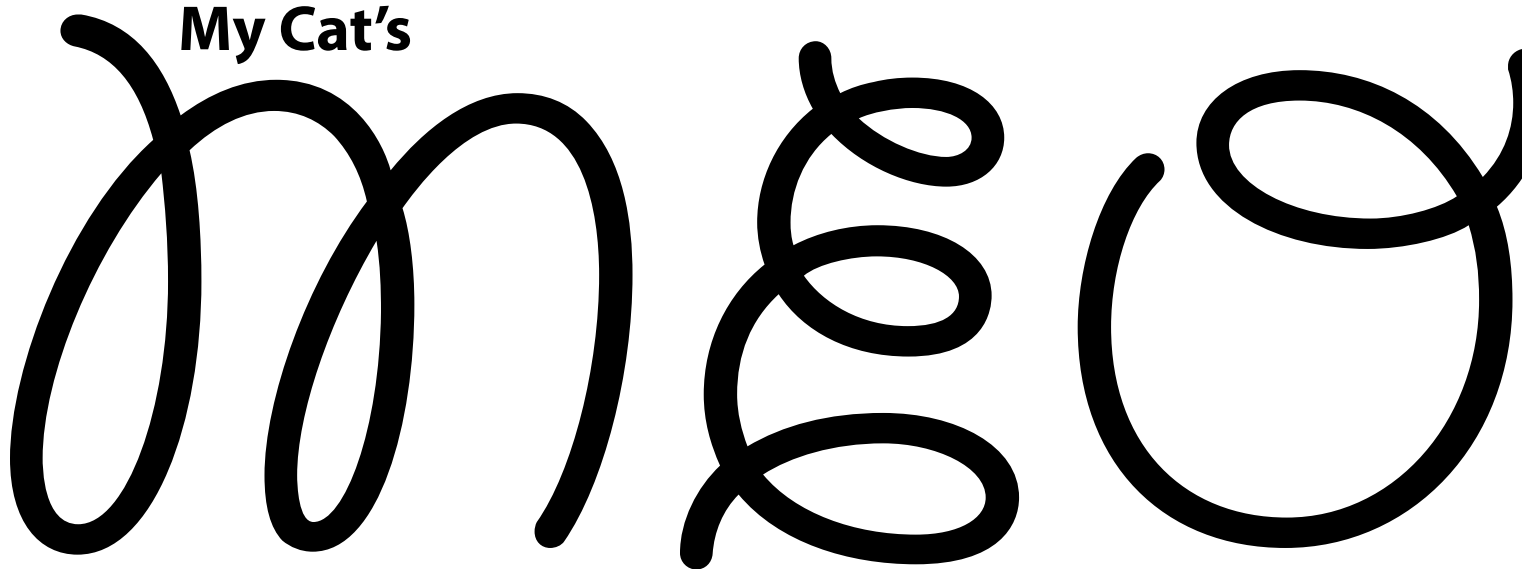
“Are ya going rafting?”

Nope, not here. Clay Wright droppin' in on Rock Island, his home base and local turf.

Photo by Eric Jackson

Inflatables & Canoes

My Cat's



By George Brown

As the summer of 2003 approached without any western river trips on my agenda, I decided to tempt fate on some eastern rivers. Having heard about record rainfall in the East, this was an appealing idea. I was not disappointed! After boating six different rivers in three states, however, it was memories of West Virginia's New River, through the New River Gorge in particular, that I brought home with me. Confronted with the enormous size and steepness of the waves, many of which I had real difficulty cresting, I realized that I was boating on the edge. Compounding this problem was the realization that a flip—a distinct possibility on waves and holes of this magnitude—would have put me in serious trouble—especially since there were no other private boaters on the river with me. There were commercial boats, though, and their whistles were sounding with unnerving frequency.

I came back home to Texas believing that I needed to make changes in both my equipment and self-rescue skills. After considerable thought, I called Ted Day, a well-known Class V boater in Boise, Idaho who, in partnership with Ron McLay, also a Class V boater, runs Payette River Equipment in Boise.

Preliminary dialogue with Ted indicated that, in conjunction with Sotar, he had

discovered a tube design that maximized the performance characteristics of his cataraft. Ted had made more than 25 runs from the top on the notorious North Fork of the Payette to test this design. I was intrigued to say the least. However, when he e-mailed me a picture of Ron McLay's frame design, it was a done deal! Ron's frames clearly demonstrate that sound engineering principles can create a frame that is both light and strong.

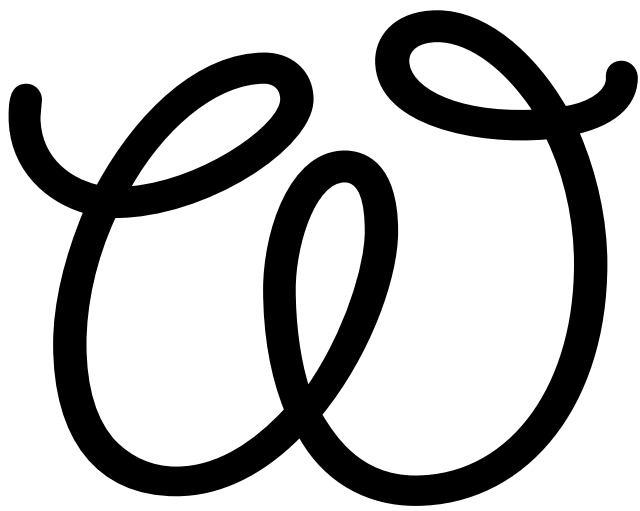
An offhand comment by Ted made me decide to pick up this package personally rather than have it shipped. He said, "I have learned how to transform rodeo skills into improved navigational ability." With at least one first descent to his credit, I had no reason to doubt him. Inspired by the opportunity to learn something new, I left for Idaho in mid July.

The tubes and frame were exactly what I wanted. It was the cat's meow for my cataraft! What made this tube and frame purchase particularly exciting was the opportunity to influence the tube and frame configuration instead of having to accept someone else's prepackaged ideas. Starting with a standard 14-foot cataraft design, I requested an additional six inches in main tube length and an extra inch in tube diameter to compensate for the loss of waterline created by the aggressive

bow and stern rise. And that's exactly what I got. The question that I couldn't wait to answer, of course, was how would it perform?

That answer came the next day on the Staircase section of the South Fork of the Payette, just a short drive outside of Boise. While the technical features of the South Fork in mid July did not resemble the high volume whitewater of the New River Gorge the previous summer, it did provide a delightful opportunity to dance through a Class IV minefield of boulders and holes on one of its major rapids, which was several hundred yards long.

Beginning with my first run, I felt completely in control. So much so that I found myself almost teasing the edges of some of the holes I wanted to avoid while plunging with abandon into others. In the midst of all this, I saw something I had never seen before. Ted was "staying and playing," backing into holes and then becoming increasingly vertical before he spun out and continued downstream. When I attempted to do the same, I imagine I looked like a chipmunk on an out-of-control seesaw: a humbling experience indeed. What I didn't really realize or fully appreciate at the time is that Ted was giving me a glimpse of how he has learned to survive high intensity Class V



on the Payette River in Idaho

whitewater by elevating playboating skills to an art form.

The following day, Ron McLay and I headed for the South Fork. Much like Ted, Ron also “stayed and played” in many of the holes, except he went in face forward. One of the more amusing episodes of this run occurred after Ron demonstrated how he re-flips an overturned cat. We had no sooner flipped my cat over when he pushed it over the eddy line, into the current and said, “It’s all yours!” I watched in silent horror as my new baby floated downstream upside down and without me! I scrambled and, with more tenacity than technique, got it flipped back over and under control. Throughout the rest of the run I watched Ron executing maneuvers, at times within tightly constricted boulder fields, I couldn’t begin to adequately describe, nor was I willing to imitate. Suffice it to say, that he is a consummate boatman with far more to teach than I had the time to learn; another humbling experience.

The following day was a fun float down the Main Payette with Ted, his wife Debby and their friends. My introduction to Debby came as I was off-loading my cat and an authoritative female voice behind me asked “Need some help?” I was so shocked and amused at an unfamiliar

woman volunteering to help me that all I could say was “Who are you?”

“I’m Ted’s wife, let’s get this thing unloaded,” was her straightforward response.


As the day wore on it became clear that Debby probably had as many years of boating experience as Ted—a well-matched pair. The mellow quality of the Main Payette allowed for personal dialogue that made the float particularly enjoyable.

That trip created an invitation to join several people on the Cabarton section of the North Payette the following day. From Smith’s Ferry to the Cabarton put-in is, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful areas of Idaho and the river canyon we traversed was equally stunning.

The following day I arrived in Banks intending to do some solo runs on the Staircase Section of the South Fork Payette. While I had driven past this section on numerous other trips to Idaho, I never stopped to realize what an absolutely exquisite stretch of whitewater this really is.

My first opportunity to launch came when a commercial boatman invited me to join

him on a private run before his workday began. I ran out well ahead of him in order to enjoy the sense of solitude that being the only boater on the river can give you. My next opportunity occurred almost immediately after finishing that run when Jerry, a Discovery Network photojournalist, volunteered to be my shuttle driver for a second run. He said he had just completed the North Fork and was headed home to Sun Valley. After telling me that he had over 200 runs on the North Fork—from top to bottom—I silently wished he had been able to join me, if only to hear the stories he could tell.

I awoke Monday morning and walked outside my motel room in an introspective mood with coffee in hand. As I looked at my new cat and reflected on the accumulated experiences of the previous five days, I realized that I really had gotten more than I bargained for. With more than a little nostalgia, I de-rigged a boat that only months earlier had been a vision in my head and called Ted and Ron to thank them for their contribution to a great trip. Back home to Texas, whitewater capital of the world (in my dreams)! 

River Stories

Correction

We regret to announce that in our January/February 2006 issue, we made a last minute decision to hold a story, then neglected to remove a reference to it from the cover. Anyone who's been wondering where they might find a story about "A 330-mile Solo Descent in Mexico" can now satisfy their curiosity by reading the following story from James Contos. We received this story as part of last year's AW River Story Contest and regret that it's taken this long to reach print. Thanks for your patience!

Ineluctable Defiles on Rio Sirupa

By James "Rocky" Contos

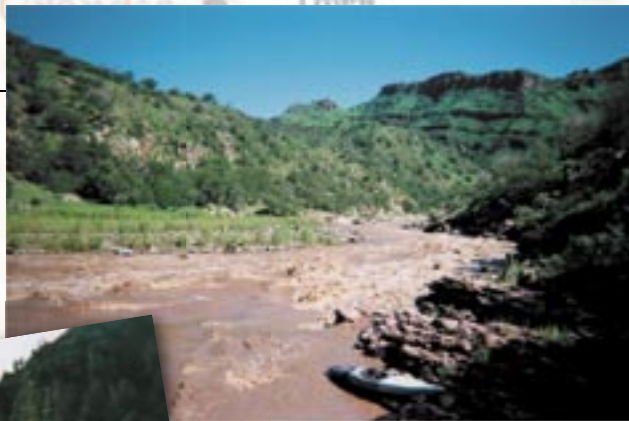
Steep walls rose vertically from the river. About 3000 cfs of muddy water was gliding slowly through the canyon. A deep Class II-III rapid made it a spot from which return upstream would be impossible. I had just passed through a similar section upstream containing a Class V rapid that was nearly unportageable. I climbed up the side and tried to scout the gorge around the bend but it was impossible to see into. This was the fourth day of my planned 10-day, 337-mile trip down the headwaters of Rio Yaqui. If I made it through this section, the remaining 227 miles were bound to be much easier. Racing through my mind was the question, "shall I continue?" Hiking out was a possibility, but not with a kayak.

The setting was Northwest Mexico, in one of the largest river systems in the country. Most of the 10-40 inches of annual rainfall in this region come in the summertime, and I suspected its 20,000 square miles of drainage area in the states of Sonora and Chihuahua would make this river voluminous. Rio Yaqui is at the northern end of the Sierra Madre Occidental (SMO), the mountain range extending from Arizona to Guadalajara. I suspected the Upper Yaqui would be one of the crown jewel rivers in the range, since it had contiguous river trip lengths up to 350 miles, nearly no human habitation, close proximity to the US, and moderate gradients (or so the topo maps showed). In fact, the Upper Yaqui in the Guaynopa Canyon, with a maximum depth of more than 4000 ft, is on par with the deepest canyons in North America—including the Grand Canyon, Hell's Canyon, and the Copper and Sinforosa Canyons. Unfortunately, the Yaqui cannot be followed all the way to the Sea of Cortez,

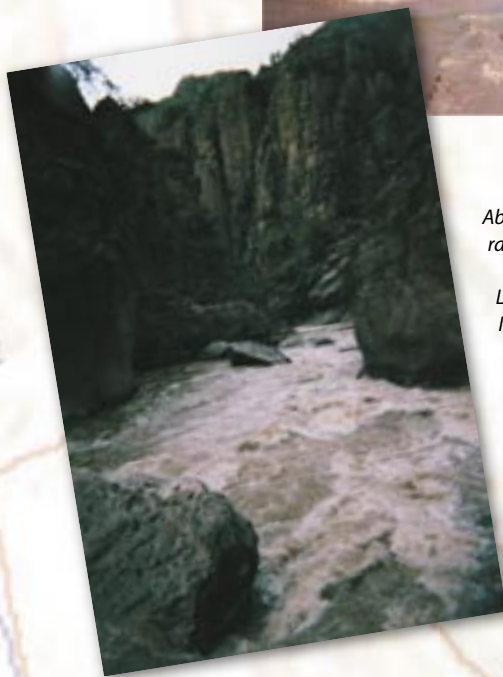
since two 100 meter high dams block the flows in its lower 350 kilometers.

Only minimal information was available about floating this river system. A 112 mile stretch between the two reservoirs was described by Tom Robey in his guidebook *A Gringo's Guide to Mexican Whitewater*. Also, an intriguing raft picture and laconic description of a Rio Aros trip in the 1980s was present in one of Richard Fisher's books on the region.

My intent was to float through the upper canyons on the longest journey possible, starting at Tomochic and taking out at Presa Novillo (337 river miles with a drop of 5400 ft). Looking for more information, I called Richard Fisher and asked him if he knew anything about the upper canyons. He said the canyons of Rio Aros contained fine Class III-IV whitewater. Additionally, in a solicitous tone, he warned me against boating through the main gorges of Rio Sirupa, saying they were not passable



Above: A easy Class III rapid on Rio Sirupa I dubbed "Brownie"



Left: The Tomochic Gorge was filled with Class III rapids (the final "c" in these names not pronounced, thus this is pronounced "toe-moe-chee")

All photos for this story by James Contos

and extremely dangerous, even for expert kayakers at low flows. Although I respected him greatly for his first descents in the region, I took his admonition with a grain of salt, realizing from my maps that the maximum average gradient in those sections (and indeed, on the whole trip) was 45 fpm. At the time of our conversation, I had already paddled a dozen other rivers in the SMO, some with gradients up to 150 fpm. On the other hand, the maps I was using only had 100 meter contour intervals, so more steeply sloped sections between such contours were possible. Also, the drainage area of the Rio Sirupa section in question (3500 square miles) suggested it would have an average flow of about 3000 cfs in summer—pretty high for tight gorges, even if they only dropped at a rate of 45 fpm. I contemplated waiting for a partner to join me, but the few competent and willing to come were unavailable for at

least a month. Alas, exploratory temerity overwhelmed me, and I resolved to undertake the journey alone.

I found the gorges of Rio Tomochic to be spectacular, and all the rapids runnable and fun. I noted three Class IVs and over a dozen Class IIIs. At such high elevations, even in Mexico, the nights were very cool (about 60 degrees) and the days only warm (about 75 degrees). Coniferous trees abounded along the banks and up on the hills imparting a redolence of Sierra Nevada or Pacific Northwest canyons. Vertical and overhanging walls rose directly from the river in places, and large caves in cliffs slightly removed from the river invited exploration. An undeveloped warm spring in the gorge watered verdant growth, and just downstream, fluted granite at the “Tomochic Constricción” squeezed the entire 1200 cfs of the river into a gap six feet wide. The gorges ended,

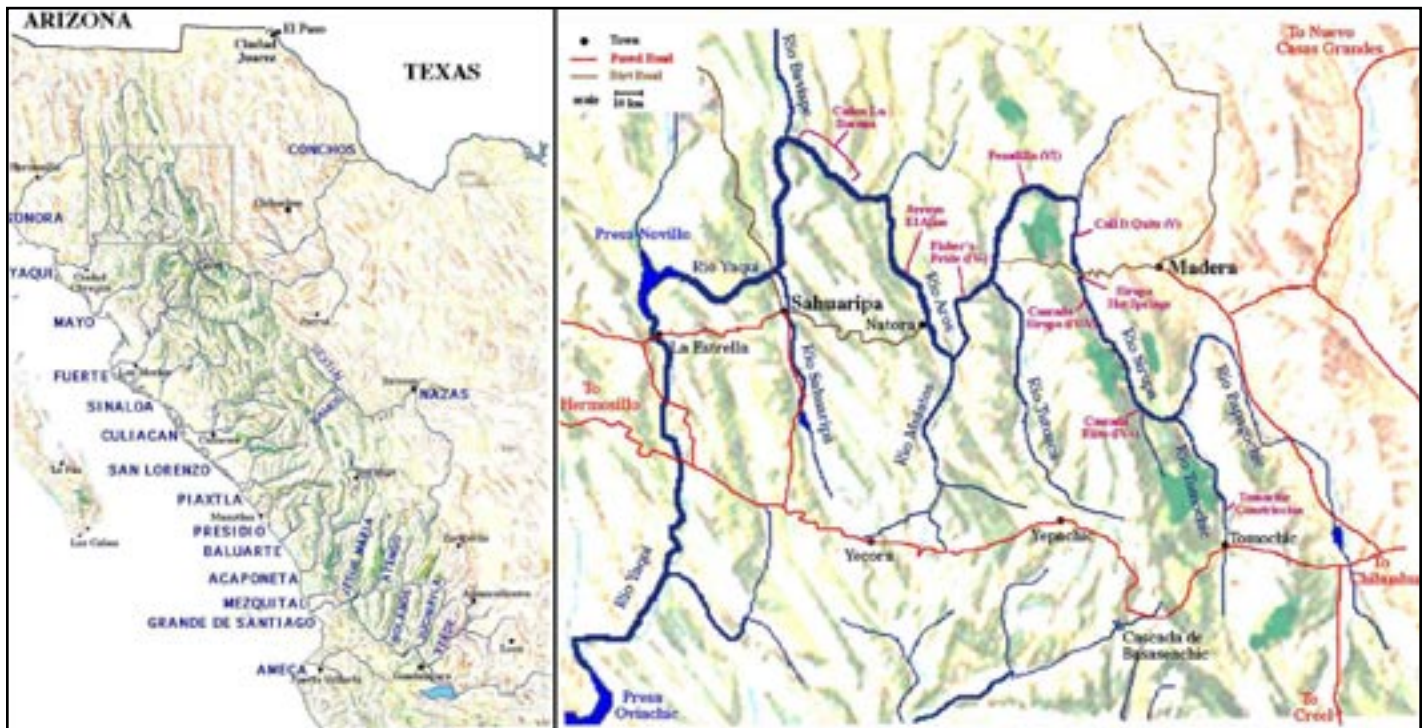
and I camped in open ranchlands 40 km into the trip.

On my second day, I passed the confluence with Rio Papagochic, thus starting Rio Sirupa (pronounced: Seer-oo-pah). The next 91 kilometers to Puente Huapoca had a big river feel, with numerous Class III-IV rapids and one V (the Cascada Sirupa, near Sirupa village). The canyons in this first section of Rio Sirupa were not of the same ilk as the vertiginous gorges found both upstream and down. Instead, slopes rose more gradually from the water. The hillsides still supported a few conifers, but were primarily dominated by scrub-oak. Summer rains a month earlier had imbued the canyon with a particularly enchanting

A Lone Spire is prominent on Rio Sirupa about 19 km below the confluence with Rio Papagochic.



River Stories



Map of rivers in the Sierra Madre Occidental (left) and higher detail of the Rio Yaqui system (right). Like most rivers in Mexico, Rio Yaqui is named differently at different points from its headwaters—the two main branches at the headwaters are Rio Papagochic and Tomochic, which join to form Rio Sirupa. After the confluence of Rio Tutuaca, it is called Rio Aros, and then after the confluence with Rio Bavispe, it is called Rio Yaqui.

pale emerald iridescence, in the form of thick stands of nopales (prickly-pear cacti). Red poppies along the banks contrasted with the tawny water. Piles of driftwood accumulated 15 feet above the river. Large sand beaches provided fine campspots. Clear blue skies in the morning gave way to cumulus clouds at noon and then crepuscular nimbus thunderheads on this and nearly every day of the trip. Rolling thunder crackled and refulgent lightning scintillated the evening sky for hours after dusk. Heavy rain fell that night. Although my tent leaked profusely through the seams, dampening my bedsheets, a complete internal flood was prevented by the circumscribed trenches I had excavated. The river level rose more than three feet by the morning, and I strolled up the canyon for glorious

vistas of the surrounds before continuing through the Class III-IV brownwater.

After running the glissading Cascada Sirupa, I soon arrived at Sirupa Hot Springs, where two large concrete pools were built to hold the thermal water streaming out of the rock. I relished soaking in the warm (about 95 degree) water and was rejuvenated enough to face the intimidating gorges downstream. A long Class III rapid led to the gorge entrance, where I floated under the scenic Huapoca Suspension Bridge.

Here began the most trying part of the journey. Downstream were the gorges of which Richard Fisher spoke. Rapids came in quick succession. I passed through three Class III-IV rapids before the gorge opened up briefly for a Class IV-V six-foot drop. I dropped back into the gorge and passed five more Class IV-V rapids, portaging the second (which I refer to as Terror Wave) and part of the fourth in the next four kilometers before stopping to camp.

By morning, the water had risen six inches and I guessed the river to be running at

nearly 3000 cfs. After nine kilometers of enjoyable Class III whitewater, the canyon walls started closing in. In the next one and a half kilometers I paddled through five more Class IV-V rapids. Just past the last one, Reconnoiter Rapid, I stopped and tried to scout the downstream vertical-walled gorge. I saw that after running the next Class II Committing Rapid there would be no way to get back upstream nor stop and climb out. Fearful of mandatory Class V and/or VI rapids around the bend, I made an attempt to climb up on river right to glimpse the gorge, but soon was walled out in a shallow cave. I returned to my kayak and ferried across to the left side of the river to again attempt a reconnaissance. Here I had more luck, finding ranchers' trails about 300 meters up. As I passed through the thorny scrub, though, I realized I wasn't able to see down into the gorge. However, the only audible rapid sounded like it was just downstream of the gorge. I could see that the opening lasted about half of a kilometer before the river seemed to pass into an even more foreboding chasm. I returned to my kayak and decided to enter the first gorge.

I easily passed through Committing Rapid



"Committing Rapid #1" prompted me to make a serious attempt at scouting out the gorge below

Above: "Shall I Continue?" was the question on my mind looking into the second unscoutable gorge and the Committing Rapid #2

#1 and was treated to the vertical-walled grandeur for nearly a kilometer. As I predicted, there was only one minor rapid around the bend until a spot downstream where I could see the gorge opened up. Unfortunately, the audible rapid I had heard from above was located 50 meters before the end of the vertical walls! From my vantage in the kayak, it did not appear to be portageable, and possibly not even scoutable! All the worse, I was alone with nobody to help (or even know!) if something went afoul. It seemed I might be forced to run this drop blind. Luckily, 100 meters upstream of the rapid on river right there was a place where I could stop and maybe get a glimpse. I climbed up but could only tell that the river apparently dropped four meters in the falls, and there were some nasty rocks in places that could easily pin or broach me. It did not look good on either far side in the rapid—a sneak would not be possible....

There was some hope. On the far left side, just after the first waves, there was an eddy where it looked like it might be possible to stop and portage. It didn't look promising

The "Terror Wave", a Class V rapid below Sirupa Hot Springs that I portaged

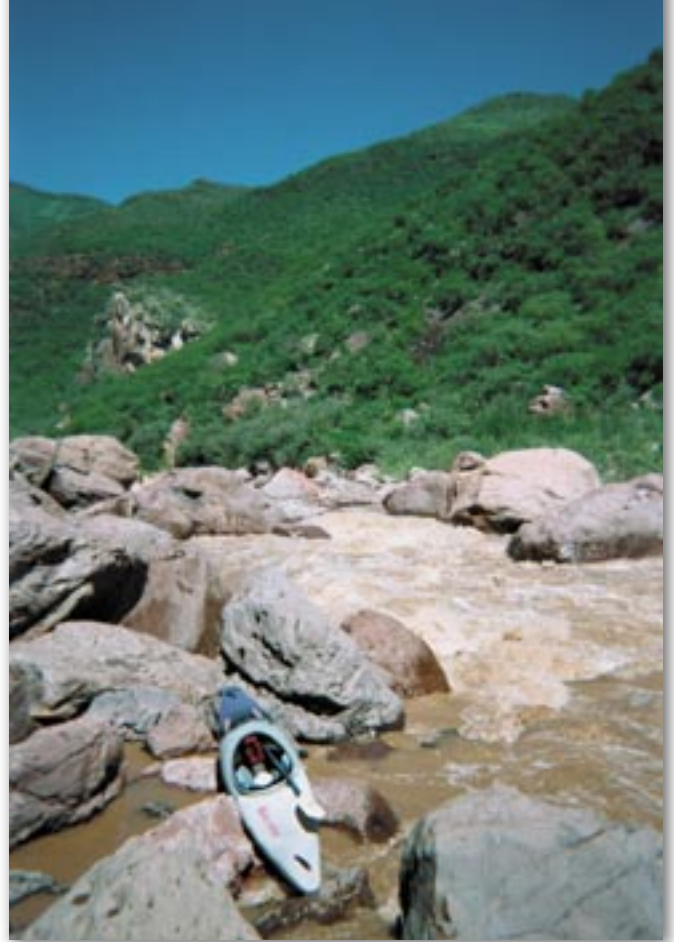


River Stories

since the water was swirling and surging and moving over the drop quickly. Also, the dropoff just past the sloping granite might be too slippery to get back down on the other side. After a pensive 15 minute review of all the options, I decided to go for the eddy. I was pleasantly surprised to find the stopping there fairly easy. Although the bedrock was slippery, I found that I could portage the kayak with rope support down into the water below. The rapid, a solid Class V, was not something I would have wanted to undertake solo (even if I could have scouted). With higher water, the portage would be more perilous. I was having doubts about continuing in such gorges, so I dubbed this rapid Call It Quits.

Relieved to have made it though the first gorge and into the short Shangri-La open area, I passed through another IV-V rapid and looked for a place to stop and camp, but found nothing ideal. The best spot was a flat rock about one meter above the river level, just before the river entered an even more imposing gorge. Even though it was early in the day, I was so psychologically exhausted that I decided to stop for the night. Passing through the next gorge might take a long time, and there weren't likely to be camping spots within it. This gorge also had a Committing Rapid (#2), beyond which retreat upstream was out of the question. While I had gotten lucky with Call It Quits in the upstream gorge, this one might not be so accommodating; I needed to reconsider continuing. I spent the rest of the day poking around the area, perusing the book or two I had brought, and scrutinizing my maps for signs of other tight gorges downstream. I decided that if the water rose by the morning, I would either wait longer or abandon the expedition. If the water dropped, I would attempt passage. I knew from my previous reconnaissance that this gorge could not be scouted from above. Although still present, the customary thunderstorms did not build as strongly that day, and it looked like only a minor rain was falling in the distance. However, before dusk the water rose several inches—nearly to my tent—causing me to abandon the Flat Rock Camp for a less commodious but higher spot in some bamboo. I spent

*A Class V+ rapid
(Pesadilla) in the
Guaynopa Canyon that
I portaged.*



a restless night wondering what would happen the following day.

A bright morning dawned on the fifth day of my trip. Checking the water level, I was elated to find that it had dropped slightly below the level of the previous day. Since “the gods were willing,” I packed up and floated through Committing Rapid #2, finding it more challenging than the view upstream suggested. The water then placidly flowed down and around a bend to the left into the heretofore-inscrutable abyss. Around the bend I encountered a stout Class IV+ rapid, Chasm Falls, which, fortunately, was both scoutable and portageable. Had the river been one meter higher, this would have been complicated or impossible. It seemed to justify my former stipulations for progress. As I passed through the narrows, I was awed by the marvelous splendor of the place. Continuing with both trepidation and euphoria, I could see the opening of the gorge downstream, where behemoth boulders clogged the riverbed. There, the river dropped betwixt house-sized boulders in Class V-VI water. I did find it odd, but not unlike other SMO gorges, that the hearts of the gorges didn't thump

from water running over mountainside chunks. But it was plausible; floodwaters rising high in the narrows could lift and move such boulders downstream to irenic places where they might lie in peace.

Downstream, in the next 6 km, I encountered one more Class VI and five more Class Vs, two of which I ran. One of these rapids, Warp 3, was very similar in nature to the Warp 2 rapid in California's Kings Canyon, with a steep, smooth three-meter sloping falls. In the following Class V-VI rapid (portaged), High Log, there were amazing diluvial logs wedged 15 meters above the river level. What a flood it must have been to jam logs up so high! It was hard and a bit scary to imagine such narrow gorges channelling flows of 50,000 cfs.

The previous section had been slow going. I had covered less than eight kilometers in about six hours. As if to make up for it, the next 21 km of river were one of the finest stretches of felicitous whitewater I could have imagined. Running four Class V-, 15 Class IV, and nearly as many Class III rapids, I was so ecstatic that I wanted to scream for joy. The geology was

also fascinating, as I watched the gorge metamorphose from gray to red and then to black.

After passing through an unmistakable knife-cut in a 50-meter high black-stained narrows with a sloping Class V falls, I caught views of an El Capitan-like massif on river-left downstream. There I expected more tight gorges as the river went through the Guaynopa Canyon. When I arrived, it appeared it would take a long time to traverse this section, so I camped at the first suitable sandspot just after the rapids began. The following three kilometers were intense. With the Magnificente Massif rising on the left, the river plunged down and down, through numerous Class IV-VI rapids, including one I called Pesadilla. Portaging many and running a few, I spent nearly three hours traversing this canyon. Near the end of this section, I ran what I correctly thought would be the last Class V on the trip, Just When You Thought It Was Getting Easy. This was a fitting conclusion to an amazing stretch of whitewater-filled canyons.

Over the next several days I passed through several more canyons with fun rapids, though nothing harder than Class IV. The trip continued to be full of stimulating places. At one coppice of fan palms that I stopped to explore I also found abundant cultivated mota (marijuana), prompting me to leave immediately. The ensconced Arroyo Los Alisos was a paradisiacal side canyon, rife with hanging plants, five-striped sparrows, and deep pellucid water—a perfect spot for lunch, a swim, and water purification. A small village, Nátorá, with a dwindling population of 50 provided some conversation, but few provisions from their understocked store. The Paso Nacori Chico Gauging Station in Cañon La Bocana was an interesting stop, where I spoke with the attendant, and learned that the flow was actually 11000 cfs (I was estimating it at 15000 cfs), and fairly typical for this time of year. The cajon (box canyon) after this gauging station provided a long series of extremely fun roller coaster-type Class III waves.

I arrived at Puente Sahuaripa, the most logical take-out, but continued on, down the last free-flowing stretch of Rio Yaqui. Fifteen kilometers downstream of the bridge I found a Class III silt-moiled rapid, resurrected by the below-capacity reservoir downstream. The low reservoir level also gave me swift water for another 30 kilometers before the river hit the warm lake. I imagined what whitewater might lie drowned under this reservoir in the tight canyons of Rio Yaqui. I suppose I will never know. I hope, at least, that the majestic beauty of the upstream free-flowing Yaqui system will eventually be appreciated by kayakers, rafters, fishermen, and eventually, the Mexican government. Only then might it be preserved for future generations to enjoy. 🇲🇽

One of the fun Class IV rapids I called Oh Mama! in the fun stretch after the terrifying gorges.



Paddling as Therapy

Yellow Ribbons & White Water

By Phil Sayre and Adam Campbell

Regardless of your political stripe or views on the war, support for the troops who come from our own neighborhoods and who serve in Iraq and Afghanistan runs high. People indicate their feelings by displaying the classic yellow ribbon stickers that proclaim their support for our troops. Many people also provide funds, volunteer to help out troops, and/or support those who have returned from the conflicts, and for very good reasons. Many service men and women have sacrificed in Afghanistan and Iraq: since the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, over 2,000 US troops have died, and over 15,477 have been wounded.

As boaters, our thoughts naturally try to find some crossover between boating and the troops. How can we connect the feelings we have for supporting these individuals who have sacrificed and our love of the sport of whitewater boating? Is there a way to connect injured troops with the river? Would such an effort help casualties of the war find meaning and challenge in life? Questions like these brought about the beginnings of Team River Runner (TRR), a Washington D.C. area all-volunteer apolitical nonprofit founded by two local boaters (Joe Mornini and Mike McCormick). While the beginnings of TRR were briefly explained in the September/October issue of *American Whitewater*, we would like to take this opportunity to tell you a bit more about the nonprofit group and about some of the troops who have been involved in it.

Step 1: Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC), Washington, DC near the D.C./MD border, Pool Session: The troops at Walter Reed get their first experience with boating by coming a short distance, often from the Malone House on campus to the main hospital building at Walter Reed. It's a bit of an odd site as TRR volunteers pull up in front of the massive hospital building with roof racks full of whitewater kayaks. Boats—seeming somewhat

out of place—are walked through the hospital and stuffed into elevators to reach the 2nd floor where they flow to the physical therapy pool each Tuesday night between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. This evening we have one or two new soldiers who come to check out the scene. Boats, TRR volunteers, and troops perfecting their rolls and strokes surround and fill the tiny pool. Walter Reed physical therapists and lifeguards keep a watchful eye on participants. Tonight, Christopher Bain comes to the pool. I talk to Chris a while. He served as a chemical reconnaissance specialist in the Army, and has wounds in both arms that do not allow him to close his hands well, as he demonstrates poolside (it appears he has partial use of three fingers on one hand, and maybe two on the other): Chris got hit with a mortar round and small arms fire. He used to skateboard and board surf (getting up at 4 a.m. to surf before classes), and several years ago he started boating—gaining the beginnings of a roll and boating a section of the Colorado on a dare from friends. He has experienced and appreciates the similarities and reinforcements between the sports, the way you shift your weight on a skateboard to carve a turn or on a surfboard to carve a wave is like carving in a whitewater boat. However, we worry that his handgrip strength might pose some insurmountable problems.

Chris hopped into borrowed swim trunks and then into the pool under the watchful eye of Tracey Bowman (“Bo”), a TRR paddler who mainly instructs sea kayaking in Virginia. Bo had him rolling within the hour. Chris was more than motivated to realize that paddling was within his grasp. Even with the broad range of injuries found among Walter Reed veterans, most learn to roll within one or two pool sessions.

Step 2: Angler's Inn on the Potomac River, near Potomac, MD: Often the first taste of river experience for those who

are reasonably comfortable at the pool sessions is on the Potomac River near Angler's Inn. It's a sunny day and the Potomac is at a typical low summer water level. Things start with the set-up just before lunch: kayaks, some inflatables (for troops' family members), lots of cookies, watermelon, PB&Js, homemade treats, and blocks of foam are arrayed over the rocks and tables at the end of the Angler's Inn parking lot. Shortly after set-up, the WRAMC boaters arrive in a bus. After lunch there is the foam-cutting ritual (some soldiers need lots of outfitting to adapt for missing limbs). Afterwards there is a stampede of about 10 soldiers and the same number of TRR volunteers that pushes down the 1/8-mile path from the parking lot to the put-in. Soon crutches, prosthetics, shoes, and wheelchairs litter the put-in area, and we're off—only we don't go very far. Everyone with a roll practices a few times close to shore, while wet exit pointers and practice ensues for those without a roll. Then we spend some time practicing strokes, angles, and leans as we progress—often in less-than-straight lines—up-river 1/4-mile toward the Maryland Chute. The current gains a bit more strength as we paddle upstream. Brandon Huff from the Tahoe area has his first serious whitewater kayak run through the Class III Maryland Chute, with the *NBC Today Show* cameras recording his successful descent. He smiles, climbs up over the rocks, and does it again. Karim Salaman, another TRR veteran, gets more comfortable with her skills in moving water. This has been a good day.

Step 3: Lower Youghiogheny River, Ohiopyle, PA: The Lower Yough constitutes the graduation ceremony for a few of the more accomplished TRR vets. Sergeant Antonio Hamm has a combat-grade look of intense concentration in his eyes as he runs Cucumber Rapid. He regularly bench-presses 410 pounds at Walter Reed after arriving there from Iraq with injuries, and is a bit big for the Wave



Derrick Harden and Dan Gade at the Potomac River

Photo by Jim Hubshman

Sport Y he's in. He has also previously tried an RPM Max, but he is too heavy for it and he winds up tail squirting in anything resembling bigger water. He comes through Cucumber in great shape, and is incident-free all the way through Dimple, the marquee rapid of the run, then has issues in a nothing spot just below.

Antonio's experiences on the Lower Yough were definitely different than his time in Iraq. Antonio trained as a stinger missile operator, but was sent to Camp Carwell, Iraq where he did security work, often accompanying convoys transporting troops and weapons between Kuwait and Iraq. Generally troops are flown into or out of Kuwait, and then driven back and forth from Kuwait to Iraq. The first two weeks were the most unsettling, as Antonio had to get used to waking up to nearby explosions, gunfire, and shaking ground. "You know all that stuff you see in

the movies—blood, bullets, violence—it's real." Antonio worked closely with Iraqis who were training to take over the job of protecting their country once US troops begin their pullout. He wrestled with a lot of them on the base during off-hours ("They respect strength," he says).

I asked how the Iraqi soldiers-in-training were doing and how much they could be trusted. He said some were good, but others were questionable. There was a lot of sniper fire coming into the base at night, often from unusually close locations. Antonio and some other troops found out that some of the trainees during the day morphed into snipers at night. "You have to be almost paranoid the whole time you are over there. If you relax, you may be dead." He came to Walter Reed to recover from injuries last summer, and wound up pool boating. Antonio described his first river experiences as having spiritual healing properties. He went home from

Walter Reed in late October to grow his hair, be with his wife and son, and resume his job at O'Reilly's Auto Parts. Each evening he follows up the workday with a grueling 4-hour workout at the gym. His favorite cartoon character: the Incredible Hulk. Look for him next in an NFL game in 2006 or 2007, if all goes well.

Occasionally we get TRR graduates who matriculate early. Both Derrick Harden and Sarah Werner had kayaked Class II-III sections of the Potomac. The main goal of any outing with Derrick is to try to (a) find as many wild blackberries as possible and (b) soak or lose his smokes which he guards nicely until he flips (then, all bets are off, since he doesn't have a roll just yet). Sarah is a TRR volunteer who is learning to boat (along with her sister Julie) in spite of a very limited ability to see (she is technically blind). Both Sarah and Derrick have gotten pretty gutsy on the Potomac in their kayaks; they have

Paddling as Therapy



Above: Antonia Hamm about to engage the Maryland Chute Hole on the Potomac River

Photos by Jim Hubshman

Below: Casey Owens accepts the Grand Prize for winning Blood, Sweat, Toil and Triumph Biathlon

even danced close to the flame of the Maryland Chute a number of times, and have very quick and effective wet exit techniques. Even though Sarah has some challenging vision problems and Derrick has a number of war-related injuries, they both show great capacity for whitewater boating. Derrick had no prior boating experience except an occasional canoe trip on the Great Lakes, and he is not in the same bench-press class as Antonio. Yet he can move a kayak at a very fast clip—sometimes leaving other paddlers wondering where he's gone. He used this paddling ability nicely in a two-person duckie with Sarah on the Lower Yough, running Entrance Rapid, Cucumber, and a few others without a hitch. Next up was Dimple Rock, a spot where a good portion of the river piles up on a rock on the left shore. The object is to avoid running up on the Dimple pillow, because this often leads straight into a pretty spectacular flip and swim down toward the aptly-named Swimmer's Rapid. However, there is a sneak route that avoids the whole Dimple move. The sneak line requires some quick maneuvering of a two-person duckie to be successful. Now, Derrick is not unfamiliar with pressure situations such as this, particularly given his recent experiences.

Derrick left his Michigan job as a stone worker on January 5, 2005, trained for five months to be a designated marksman, and then joined the Army's Charlie Company in the 1st-503rd Second Infantry Division. He arrived in the combat outpost near Ramadi, Iraq, and served for five months. On January 17 Derrick and his squad leader stepped out of their covered position to investigate a taxi that pulled off the road near their outpost. As they approached the car two Iraqis emerged and tried to run. The sergeant spun, after being hit by one of the Iraqis, and as he went down his finger was still on the trigger, spraying bullets. One of the bullets hit Derrick, which in an indirect way saved his life. The impacts caused Derrick to shift his position, which allowed him to

avoid the full frontal impact of the ensuing explosion caused by the detonation of the bomb inside the taxi. The sergeant did not survive the blast, but Derrick was more fortunate. He spat out most of the five teeth that were dislodged by one of the shrapnel fragments and yelled for help. He had lost his right leg and sustained numerous additional shrapnel wounds from the explosion (some of which also reduced his hand and arm functions). His left leg also had a piece of bone missing as a result of the gunshot wound.

As we hovered above Dimple Rock, Bob Alexander (another TRR volunteer boater) and I talked them through the line that would avoid the foam pile on Dimple Rock. Then Bob ran the rapid to show them the line. I ran it next, with Derrick and Sarah following closely behind me. All went fine until the need arose to maneuver the two-person boat just above the rapid. The large duckie proved to be a difficult vessel to maneuver; the turns were not quite tight enough, and the duckie went off course just above Dimple. The foam pile was avoided, but right downriver of that the boat flipped and tossed Sarah and Derrick out into the rapids. Sarah floated past a rock in the middle of the river and climbed up on it. Derrick swam for the left-hand shore where he climbed out in fine shape. Unfortunately, the duckie was now well below Swimmer's Rapid, a good distance downstream. Joe, Derrick and I were on the shore debating how to proceed: it would be difficult for Derrick to walk the boulder-strewn shore all the way past Swimmer's without his prosthetic leg and crutches. While Swimmer's is a nice long and shallow hole, it is easy to punch at low summertime levels, and the approach rapids above the hole are straightforward. So we decided that Derrick should boat the stretch in Joe's kayak. Derrick and I went down through the rapids, successfully punching the hole, without incident. As is typical with Derrick, he went so fast it was hard to keep up with him. Derrick had run his first major rapid. He swiped Joe's boat

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several more times that day en route to the Bruner's Run take-out.

Additional Steps on Land (Beyond Boof) -- Veterans Day Weekend, the Washington Canoe Club, Washington D.C. The Washington Canoe Club, founded in 1904, has placed athletes on almost every canoe/kayak Olympic team since 1924, when flat-water sprint canoeing was introduced as a demonstration sport. So it seemed a fitting venue for the first Blood, Sweat, Toil and Triumph biathlon—a Veteran's day event focused on injured US veterans. The fall colors lined the Potomac, as WRAMC / TRR veterans, other veterans, and athletes from the D.C. area gathered for an enjoyable event that recognized the contributions of all US veterans. The biathlon consisted of a one-mile kayak course on the Potomac and a four-mile run/wheelchair event on the paved Crescent Trail that parallels the C&O canal's towpath. Forty competitors showed for the event, including 17 troops from WRAMC and some of their family members, and a number of able-bodied Vietnam War veterans who came to honor those from the recent wars. All participants received t-shirts, personalized dogtags, and an excellent lunch following the morning event. Lee Ann Doerflinger ran in her son's honor, wearing a dogtag with the name of her son Thomas, who was killed in combat in Iraq. The four-mile run was tough for her, but she finished. Sarah Werner kayaked the course in a K-1, led by Monique Hubshman. Bill Johnston from the Pittsburgh area won 3rd prize for adaptive team, and came in right in front of Kirk Bauer from Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA). Bill is the only Vietnam War veteran in TRR, and has been at WRAMC on and off to be fitted with prosthetics for his two missing legs. Bill has often remarked about how different things are from when he came home from Vietnam: his generation of soldiers never had the opportunities available to current WRAMC veterans such as basketball, skiing, and now whitewater kayaking. He

had a nice day kayaking the course, and remarked that he was particularly happy not to have swum. Fittingly, the second finisher, Kirk Bauer, a disabled Vietnam War veteran and Executive Director of DSUSA, paddled across the finish line right behind Bill, smiled, flipped and swam out of his boat—just for fun. The grand prize of the race, a new Diesel donated by Wave Sport, went to Marine Corporal Casey Owens from WRAMC, who took overall first place in the both the running/wheelchair and boating events in the adaptive athlete class. Numerous adaptive and non-adaptive winners got cash and drytops. Many, such as “Team Springriver” (Joe Stumpf and Peter Gracyalny) gave their cash and prizes back to TRR for its use. Peter overcame a number of injuries in the run, and honored his cousin involved in Iraq and his dad who served in the Korean War. Later that night, long after all had gone home, TRR was still at work: Joe Mornini was attaining one-way streets in downtown DC in a large truck to return event tents. Other cornerstone volunteers, without whom many of TRR's activities would be impossible, include Bob Alexander, Risa Shimoda, and Sarah Anderson.

The entire TRR experience, described by our most senior TRR veteran, in his own words: One of our veteran kayakers is Sergeant Adam Campbell, a Green Beret whose experiences have spanned the whole program:

On the October Lower Youghiogheny trip, I got rolled right into a whirlpool behind a rock toward the bottom of Entrance Rapid. Since these are sometimes pretty hard to get out of, three TRR volunteers suddenly surrounded me to help. However, I hit my roll and was up and ready to go. Eric Moss (one of the TRR volunteers) says “Wow, we don't need to worry about you,” and I reply very quickly, with a sharp tongue, “no, please worry about me—I swear it was just luck.” It had been a long journey from my home in Lakewood New Jersey, to Iraq, to

this point on the Lower Yough.

In Iraq I was a 3rd group weapons sergeant attached to the 1st infantry division 26th brigade Headquarters Company. I trained basic infantry to do CQC (Close Quarters Combat) efficiently and safely. While in Iraq, I also participated in missions ranging from basic shows of force to night clearing operations, in which we look for insurgents and supplies of possible harmful ordnance, like rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), rockets, or improvised explosive-making material. During these clearing operations, I was in charge of 14 men. This takes away any shyness and puts reality right in front of your eyes. I can't count how many times I thought to myself, “hold it together—if you break, so do your men.”

It is one thing to lose a leg; it is another to have both of them still attached and not be able to feel or move them no matter how hard you sweat from just concentrating. We were tasked with checking and clearing a house in the town of Sammarra (southeast of Baghdad); intelligence reports indicated it was a likely insurgent base of operations. We approached the house by walking up the middle of a dirt road, accompanied by several Humvees. Unknown to us, an improvised explosive device (IED), which is often a mortar round buried in a container like a garbage can, was also in the road with us. The Humvee between me and the blast sheltered me from the shower of shrapnel that was produced. However, I saw a wave of pressurized air (similar to what you see with an intense fire) come toward me—quickly. It knocked me about 25 feet through the air into a wall. After about a minute I came to, and couldn't feel anything below my belly button. I got my people together and into shooting position. Then, a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) was shot from the rooftop behind me, landing 15 feet away and hitting me with shrapnel. The upshot of this was two fractured disks, two shattered disks, a dislocated disk, and three major shrapnel wounds. I also had an injured spinal cord, and some circulatory dysfunctions. Both of

these last two injuries can easily result in death if not diagnosed and treated.

I was in good shape, having been through rigorous Special Forces training. But, that was before my injury. I just wasn't sure of what I was capable of when I got back to the US. In April, I went to the WRAMC pool for the first time, not quite sure of what to expect. I rolled into the pool area in my wheelchair hoping for a challenge and something or someone to put a smile on my face—I got that and so much more. With Joe Mornini's and others' instruction, I hit my first roll that night.

Kayaking with TRR did something for me that I could never repay. The amount of injury to my spinal cord resulted in a lot of muscles atrophying to a point where they weren't much use. If it weren't for the army keeping me in such good shape I would not have survived the whole experience. The

kayaking motions help to build not only the core muscles of the spinal column, but also all the muscles in the midframe of the body. I had to rebuild all the muscles in my back and relearn how to use them. In a kayak, I look like everyone else and, even though I may not yet have the skills, I have the drive. I found kayaking to be a great workout, and, like the best workouts, it is fun. A kayaker doesn't realize how many muscles he or she is using on the river while having fun, relaxing or training. I walk today with no crutches, no cane, and no limp. I know I would never have gotten to this point without kayaking. But kayaking helped with more than just the muscles. The river, the air, the people, the conversations, the trips, the falls, the mess-ups, the fear, the excitement, and the skill create an atmosphere that is similar to no other. I will be kayaking until the day after I die—with a smile on my face.

Adam now rolls better than me—he

even has a no-paddle/no-hands roll. He went through his last round of surgery on November 29, and completed his tour of duty on December 6. He has taught a number of other WRAMC veterans kayaking, both in the pool and on the river over the past six months.

The Future: D.C. Area ... and Beyond? As of Christmas, TRR has taken 53 amputees, and about 100 total WRAMC veterans and their family members to the water. Our website (www.teamriverrunner.org) has lots of TRR information and photos thanks to the support of boaters Jim and Monique Hubshman, who run

Karim Salaman, one of the Walter Reed lady soldiers, saddles up for a run on the Lower Yougheny River in Pennsylvania

Photo by Jim Hubshman




Paddling as Therapy

www.potomacpaddlers.com. We have formed a Board of Directors with 17 boating members—including Adam and Derrick. By the time this article is published, TRR should also be a bona fide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that offers tax-deductible status for all contributions. TRR is still supported by Liquid Adventures, Springriver, and others locally, and by Wilderness Voyagers on the Lower Yough. Another organization that has been very helpful to TRR in accommodating the soldiers on Lower Yough trips is the Ohiopyle State Park, represented by Ranger Matt Green and others. Wave Sport has also recently begun to sponsor TRR by providing boats for the program, and is considering creating specialized outfitting for amputee boaters.

During the winter, we transitioned off the river to the Navy's David Taylor model basin in Potomac, Maryland. The model basin provides the vets a chance to work out in a huge, somewhat spooky pool, enclosed in a giant quonset hut-style building. The pool is usually used to test out large models of new navy ships, but also works well for kayakers who want to practice strokes, boat control, and other skills in something larger than the PT pool. We hope to get enough funding over the winter to purchase transportation (a used van), a trailer (which is currently on loan from Tom McEwan's Liquid Adventures), and some cold-weather paddling gear. This winter we would like to continue the program we have described, broadening

participation to all those in WRAMC who are waiting to enter the program (currently, we can't quite handle the demand). In 2006, TRR may start a similar program at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. This hospital is home to many service men and women returning from the war with injuries that are similar to those of the vets at WRAMC. Any San Antonio-area boaters interested?

Support your paddling troops! 



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Thomas Rogenmoser, Verzasca River, Italy Photo: Tanya Shuman

Inflatables & Canoes

packrafts

Simple Adventure

About 71 percent of Earth is covered with water, so there are plenty great paddling destinations out there. Unfortunately, many of the coolest ones are tucked away in remote or hard-to-reach places, so that getting to and from your dream river can turn into more of an adventure than the actual paddling. And the cost of shipping a boat for a remote river trip can easily exceed the boat's value.

Craig Medred works his way through a river-wide wave train on ANWR's Hulahula River

Photo by Jim Jager

New Generation of Packrafts Make Paddle Trips Practical and Affordable

By Jim Jager

Fortunately, these problems are fading as adventure paddlers discover that they can eliminate the logistical and financial problems of getting their traditional kayaks and rafts to put-ins by slipping a packraft into their backpacks.

Packrafts are single person inflatable boats that can weigh less than five pounds and roll down to the size of a lightweight tent. Most packrafts are intended for use on moving water with double-bladed kayak-style paddles; everything from lazy Class I floats to technical Class IV drops and wave trains. The best packrafts are dependable and versatile enough that they are being used for everything from hour-long whitewater play sessions to weeks-long trips through remote wilderness areas.

The sport of packrafting can be traced back to small life rafts first used by military pilots and commandos around the time of the Korean conflict. During the late 1960s a few intrepid Alaskans picked these boats up at Army surplus stores and started experimenting with using them to cross

frigid glacial-melt rivers and to rendezvous with floatplanes. By 1983 the sport had evolved to the point that Sevylor, Sherpa and other companies were manufacturing specialized packrafts that racers were using as their "secret weapons" to skip miles of trekking and bushwhacking in the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Classic, one of the world's original adventure races. The race (still) features few rules beyond a designated mass start, finish line and the requirement that competitors be completely self sufficient.

Recent design, material and construction innovations have drastically improved packraft capabilities so the boats are being used all around the world. Paddlers are using them to hike into remote rivers that would be too difficult or expensive to reach with traditional kayaks or rafts. Trekkers are using them to open up exciting new routes by enabling them to

cross impossible-to-ford rivers and float through miles of trackless wilderness. And anglers, hunters and mountain bikers are using packrafts to access secluded, alpine fishing holes, float game out from remote hunting areas and stitch together unconnected road and trail networks.

Simplicity and versatility are the key attributes of a good packraft. The boats should be extremely light and portable so they can easily be carried in a backpack or duffle bag, along with a paddle, PFD and other necessary gear. They should be durable enough to be relied upon during remote wilderness trips. They should be easy to repair in the field, because any inflatable boat can be cut, punctured or torn, either on or on the way to the river.

Packrafts should also be relatively easy to inflate without a heavy pump. They should handle a variety of flat and moving river conditions. They should be capable of carrying all sorts of cargo, from daypacks to expedition duffels and mountain bikes. And they should double as ground pads or shelters for alpine-style paddlers and trekkers who want to travel with as little gear as possible.

Top-of-the-line packrafts are made from specially designed polyurethane-coated nylon fabrics and are welded or glued, so that the boats are a lot tougher than their



Jim Renkert and other packrafters prepare to start another day of paddling on ANWR's Hulahula River

Photo by Jim Jager



Craig Medred, Richard Murphy & co. get ready to paddle the upper reaches of the Hulahula River

Photo by Jim Jager

Inflatables & Canoes

weight would indicate. These packrafts perform surprisingly well in relatively big water. Paddlers sit lower in their boats than kayakers so rapids often appear more difficult than their rating. However, once a packraft enters a hydraulic, it feels very stable and tends to plane over heavily aerated water and bumper car off of obstacles. Consequently, the learning curve for paddling a packraft in whitewater or surf is relatively easy.

Experienced boaters say packrafts don't carve like kayaks. But they can surf waves, especially if a sleeping pad is used to stiffen the floor. Packrafting in whitewater without the spray deck is a lot like using an open canoe. Paddlers will stay significantly drier if they match the wave speed when negotiating haystacks and other hydraulics. The boats tend to ride very high in the water because of their tube size. Consequently, they don't cut through hydraulics, but rather plane over them. And they won't punch through holes or eddy fences; they just ride up and over their faces.

Wildwater packrafters must read rivers just like kayakers, but they must refine their boat handling to account for packraft characteristics. The most important thing to remember is that most of a packrafter's weight sits in the stern of the boat. Packrafts

don't have several feet of boat extending behind the cockpit to help center the paddler's weight in the boat. Consequently, if paddlers lean back into a haystack or hole, their boat will immediately start to tip over backward. The only way to prevent a full flip is for the paddler to immediately move their body weight forward by doing a quick sit-up, thus bringing the bow back down. Paddlers who have learned to keep their weight forward say packrafts are more stable and forgiving than kayaks. Also, boat handling improves significantly if packs and other "freight" are kept in the front of the boat.

Packrafts will perform better if they are sized to fit the paddler. High-end packrafts have relatively large air chambers that provide plenty of flotation for almost any paddler who can physically fit into them. Most people find that the boats handle best when they fit snugly, especially in whitewater. Shorter boats are easier to maneuver around obstacles and they hold their shapes better and stay more rigid so that they better plane over the tops of waves and hydraulics. Longer boats are more susceptible to getting pushed and pulled into places where paddlers typically don't want to go. Snug-fitting boats also tend to perform better on flatwater.

All packrafts track best when their paddler and cargo weight is evenly distributed from bow to stern. Loading a packraft that is too long can cause it to undulate or snake through the water so that it is slower and harder to handle. Smaller boats also weigh less, pack down smaller and inflate faster. Consequently, unless paddlers plan to carry a lot of gear or haul out game from a hunt, they should select a boat that fits them tightly.

Packrafters who paddle in moving, splashy, technical or cold water find that spray decks improve boat performance and comfort by keeping most of the water out of the boat. Experienced boaters carry their gear strapped to the bow of the boat, on top of the spray deck. This technique leaves room for their feet, helps keep the bow down and significantly reduces the danger of getting tangled in gear in event of a swim.

Most technical and cold-water paddlers also use an inflatable 3/4-length sleeping pad on their packraft floors to improve boat handling and comfort. Sleeping pads stiffen floors to improve responsiveness in moving water. They also provide insulation to keep paddlers warmer in cold water. And they provide extra padding when boats go over rocks or other obstacles just below the surface.




Richard Murphy and other packrafters prepare to start a blue-sky day of paddling on ANWR's Hulahula River

Photo by Jim Jager

Packrafters need several other pieces of equipment to round out their kit. First they need some sort of kayak paddle. Four-piece carbon fiber paddles are a favorite because they are durable, light and break down into small enough pieces to fit inside of a backpack or duffle. Some trekkers opt to use aluminum or titanium paddle shafts that can be fitted with rubber end plugs and used as walking sticks during hikes. Most paddlers find that high-angle paddle strokes work best with packrafts and paddles generally vary in length between about 205 cm and 215 cm. Most people find that shorter paddles are hard to use over the large tubes of a packraft, and longer paddles don't pack well and hinder boat control.

Paddlers are also advised to carry patch kits, inflation bags for blowing up the boat and safety equipment including PFDs, throw bags and helmets. Inflatable and hybrid PFDs are popular for packrafting because they are lighter than traditional whitewater vests and they are easier to pack.

Paddle clothing varies from shorts and sandals to dry suits, gloves and hats, depending upon the climate and the river conditions. As with the boats and other gear, versatile clothing is preferable, so that it can be used for both hiking and paddling. Lightweight dry bags and tie-down straps or ropes round out most paddling kits. 

The Hulahula: An Endangered River

by Tom O'Keefe

Efforts to preserve arctic lands for their wilderness value date back to the 1920s and 1930s when Olaus and Mardy Murie conducted the first surveys of the flora and fauna in the Brooks Range. In 1960, President Eisenhower protected the Arctic Range through executive proclamation, then in 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act formally designated the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, protecting most of the area as wilderness. In a compromise with the Senate, however, the area now known as the 1002, which comprises the coastal plain, was reserved for further study of its oil potential. The Hulahula flows right through the center of the 1002.

In 1987 the Reagan Administration recommended full leasing of the coastal plain, an idea that was reintroduced by the first President Bush in 1991. In 1995, Congress passed budget legislation with an Arctic drilling provision but the bill was vetoed by President Clinton. Upon

taking office, George W. Bush made development of ANWR a cornerstone of national energy policy. In 2005, Alaska's Congressional delegation first attempted to attach a drilling provision to a budget bill but this effort failed in the House. Then, at the 11th hour, as Congress prepared to pack up and head home, an attempt was made to place a drilling provision in a "must-pass" defense bill. This effort worked in the House but Senator Cantwell (WA) led a successful fight to keep it out of the Senate version of the bill.

The debate continues over both the amount of oil contained within the refuge and the potential impacts of drilling on wildlife, but there is no question that development of the coastal plain would have a dramatic impact on the opportunity to experience one of the most remote wilderness rivers in the nation. Few free-flowing rivers that pass through undeveloped landscapes remain in the US, and the Hulahula is a precious resource worth preserving for future generations.

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Paddling as Therapy



First Descents: Kayaking Camp for Cancer Survivors

By Brock Royer

What do you think about when you hear the words “first descent?” Paddling into uncharted territory, hucking yourself into or off of something that has never been done in a hard-shell kayak? Yup, me too! At least I used to, up until a few years ago when I learned about this great little camp with not so ordinary campers: First Descents, a kayak camp for young adults with cancer.

It has always amazed me to see how people react when they first try kayaking. I'll bet paddlers—from the average Ocoee boater to those seeking out and running first descents—will tell you they feel the most alive and furthest from their daily worries when they're out on the river. Whether it is the Nantahala, Youghiogheny, American, or some other river, it doesn't matter; we use paddling as an escape, as something to look forward to. Reading river descriptions on the American Whitewater webpage, chatting on Boatertalk, constantly researching and figuring out what gear we want to try; some days you wonder what you did with your time before you got into paddling! Now imagine taking that same

intense focus and ability to forget some of the headaches of day-to-day life and giving it to someone with all too many pains and struggles: that is exactly what First Descents Kayak Camp does.

Three years ago I saw Brad Ludden, First Descents' founder, talking about the camp. It sounded like a great idea. Cancer has affected my life ever since I was young. My grandmother and brother had both had battles with cancer before I was even in high school. So, once I learned what the camp was all about, I was hooked! After writing a few articles about First Descents and doing some fundraising for the camp, I set up a trip to Vail, Colorado to check it out for myself. It didn't take long for me to see the effects whitewater kayaking had on the campers. I am constantly amazed and impressed at how jumping in a kayak can change someone's outlook on life—even if it's just for one week. Water is powerful not only in the flood altering, rock eroding, landscaping changing kind of way, but also in the way it affects human experience. We had a terminally ill camper this year. She was in constant pain and always tired. But she never said she was hurting when she was on the water. The concentration, the view and the heartbeat of the river somehow set her free. Her illness stayed on dry land, at the put-in, while she paddled away downstream.

It was a very powerful moment when I realized what was happening.

Paddling was definitely my personal cure for cancer (read my story on page 56). Even when I couldn't be on the water, the memories, videos, magazines and Internet whitewater community helped the hard times pass by easier. Below are some of the things that campers and their families have to say about First Descents and how it helped them deal with cancer.

First Person Perspectives on First Descents

By Elizabeth “2-Tall” Brooks

I was very excited to meet and talk to the other campers at First Descents because I had never had much contact with cancer survivors that are close to my age. There is an instant bonding between the campers because we can all understand exactly what it is like to go through treatment for cancer. That is something that even our closest friends and family members cannot completely comprehend, no matter how hard they try.

The atmosphere at First Descents is very laid back. The counselors aren't there

Photo by Katey Royer

to enforce rules; they're just there to have fun with the campers and help us accomplish our goals. The campers and staff are one big, happy family. Everyone supports and encourages each other, and no one is allowed to give up. This support system extends beyond the week of camp. When I relapsed after camp last year, every e-mail and phone call I received from my First Descents family helped me get through the tough days of chemotherapy and radiation.

As cancer survivors, campers at First Descents bear the mental and physical scars of battle. Some of us may not be able to run or even walk without assistance, but in our kayaks we can experience the same mobility as anybody else. Kayaking allows us to take responsibility for ourselves and make our own decisions, and it raises our self-confidence. We learn to face our fears and focus on our goals by "taking it one paddle at a time." By the last day on the river, we know that we can do anything we set our minds to.

The new mind-set and perspective that I took away from First Descents helped me face the fear that had been in the back of my mind since I was first diagnosed: What if it won't go away and keeps coming back? It would have been much harder for me to get through treatment again without my new experiences. Step by step I made it through more chemotherapy, radiation, and a bone marrow transplant. I beat cancer again. With that mission accomplished, I could plan for the summer days ahead, when I would be back on the river, at First Descents, where everything feels right.

By: The McKenna Family (Judy, Matthew, Shannon, Cullen, Darien & Bryan)

Bryan was 18 years old when he had the privilege of going to First Descents. At the time he was new to all of this cancer stuff. The camp gave Bryan a chance to hang out with young adults with whom he had things in common. Bryan was not fond of the water, but learned to kayak and appreciate the beauty in the river. He

learned, through the force of the river, that you can't control everything.

The First Descents staff and the experience of the camp (especially the kayaking) gave Bryan and our family a chance to step back from the cancer. We came away with wonderful friendships and a longing to give back. Bryan's dream was to become a volunteer for First Descents—to work side by side with the people who had helped him and to guide new campers on the river.

Bryan's journey on earth ended before he could fulfill his dream. As a family we have tried to carry on Bryan's dream. For the past couple of years we have raised money and volunteered our time for First Descents so others could experience the river as Bryan did.

First Descents has become a part of our family. We love and support them as they loved and supported Bryan.

As Bryan would say, "Rock On."

By Thatcher "Thachamo" Bean

One of the First Descents campers was once asked whether camp was Christian-based. The somewhat flustered camper thought for a second and then answered, "Camp isn't based on Catholicism, Buddhism or Judaism—it's more about Camp-ism." The camper's nickname was Checkers because of her checkered prosthetic leg. She was one of the first campers I met when I attended First Descents for the first time, two years ago. Like Checkers and all of the other campers at First Descents, I am a cancer survivor.

When my mom told me about a kayak camp for young adults with cancer, I pictured leisurely paddling around a lake or pond, talking and fishing. Once I arrived at First Descents, I quickly realized that I was in for an extraordinary week. As soon as I stepped out of the car, I heard Brad Ludden, the founder of First Descents, yell, "CAAMMPPPERRSSS!!!" That was followed with a big enthusiastic high five.



Anna Levesque

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Paddling as Therapy

Brad and Corey started First Descents and are both insanely talented kayakers who carry aspects of their extreme sport into most parts of their daily lives. "Camp wouldn't be camp without campers!!" was one of Brad and Corey's many mottoes that the campers would join in yelling at random times.

After the other 15 campers and I got fitted into our kayaks and received our gear, we spent the rest of the day playing volleyball and kicking around a soccer ball to get to know each other. That night we had our first campfire. This was a time to outline the coming day, but more importantly it was a time to joke around and have some laughs. The next day we learned various paddling strokes but most importantly how to wet exit, a skill that I mastered from tons of experience. This was when I first started to notice the extreme tenacity, bravery, and positive attitude that all of the

other campers possessed when challenged with a physically trying experience.

We had a blast playing water polo in our boats the next day. This not only improved our paddling skills, but also strengthened the bond that was forming between the campers. The third day of camp was our first river day. Encouraged by all of the counselors and confident in our skills, we embarked on our first descent. This was one of the scariest most intense experiences of my life. After exiting the first rapid my heart sank into my stomach and forced a howl out of my mouth. It was INCREDIBLE! The other campers and I were blown away. The only things you could hear around the campfire that night was, "You whooped that rapid!" or "Soup-a-Loop, you paddled so well you make Brad look like a little girl in a ducky!" (or, in my case, "Thatchmo, you swim like a champ!!").

In between all of the boating, the campers and I would swap stories and pour our hearts out about our disease. The best support you can receive when going through a disease like cancer comes from someone who has gone through the same thing. When a friend would say, "I am really scared about a surgery I have to have in a month," a wave of encouragement would flood out from other kids who could relate to the exact feelings this friend was having. One of the most comforting things said was, "If you could take on that river yesterday you can take on whatever cancer throws your way."

Before the last river day Brad and Corey both shared their own stories that not only gave all of us courage but also pumped us up for the river ahead of us. The river was not only intense but was therapeutic. The feeling you get after navigating a rapid gives you a positive rush. It was a reminder



to all of us that we can beat anything; we felt on top of the world.

One of the most unique and incredible things that First Descents does is leave behind the permanent legacy of every camper that fought bravely, but did not win their fight with cancer. That night, after our final campfire, we all shared a ceremony that is very close to my heart that I can't describe in words. It reminds us of those who fought against cancer, and conquered a week of kayaking, so bravely.

After camp was over, I realized that I had just experienced one of the most extremely challenging, fun, and emotional adventures of my entire life. Camp showed me that there are so many parallels that can be drawn between cancer and kayaking. Both can be scary, trying, and challenging, while at the same time they both can bring out incredible things in a person that they

may have not known were there.

I will never be able to show my appreciation to the kids and counselors of First Descents' and I can only hope that everyone may be able to experience some part of the First Descents experience. Whether it's through volunteering, donations or attending camp, everyone should try to get their hands on some "Camp-ism."

By: Lindsay Harwell ("Ms. Ippi")

My experience at First Descents was unlike any other. I made some amazing friendships, learned how to kayak, got to experience white-water rafting, and rock climbing and, above all, I made memories that I will cherish forever. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine how one week could change my life.

Upon arrival at First Descents, everyone was given a nickname. I was famously called Ms. Ippi, because of my strong southern accent. We called each other by nicknames throughout the week at camp. When we finally got to camp after being picked up at the Denver airport, I could not believe how beautiful it was. It just completely took my breath away. The camp itself is at an elevation of 9,000 ft., so you can see the Rocky Mountains for miles. To me, Vail Colorado is one of the most beautiful places on earth. The camp director described the place as the epitome of peace and serenity; I think he was right.

To me, the best thing about First Descents is just meeting other teens who can relate to you. It's very comforting to have someone know where you're coming from, and what you have been through, because they have been in the same boat. Although

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Paddling as Therapy

the majority of campers are in remission, including myself, it's amazing to see how strong and positive the people are who are still battling the horrible disease. Having cancer gives you a whole new outlook on life.

Independence is key at First Descents. They don't baby you, or tell you what to do. They let you decide your own limits, and encourage you along the way. This is one thing that was different about First Descents than any other camp I have been to. They treat you like adults, which is very important to me.


On the first day, everyone got fitted for their kayaking gear and got to pick out their own kayak. I picked a purple one,

because it fit my girly personality. I have to admit, that first time on the water I was a little bit scared of my kayak. "If it flips over, will I be able to get out," I wondered. Brad Ludden, professional kayaker and founder of First Descents, reassured me that I would be underwater for no more than 10 seconds. With that said, I sucked in my fears and successfully completed my first wet exit. Each day on the water I got more confident. As we went out on the Colorado River, I remember wanting bigger rapids and longer routes.

Every night there was a huge campfire. This was also a favorite time of mine. We had people playing guitar, singing, and even dancing. Everyone just hung out and talked about their experiences that day, and the plans for tomorrow.

The third day at camp we got to go whitewater rafting. This was such an

awesome experience for me. We did a pretty gnarly run called Shoshone. It had Class III rapids, which are really big for first timers like me. I can still remember the names of the rapids like Man-eater, Tombstone, and The Wall. My heart would start pounding in my chest when I would see an upcoming rapid, but as soon as we dropped in, the anxiety left and adrenaline kicked in. I completely loved it! It was unlike anything I have ever done before.

We also got to experience rock climbing. I never knew this sport required so much teamwork. Belay on! We learned all of the commands, and strapped on our climbing gear. Of course, I took the hardest route because I like a challenge. I never thought I would make it to the top, but when I finally got there it was all worth it: the view was amazing! I was so proud of myself because I had accomplished something great. 

A First Descents group water shot

Photo by Katey Royer





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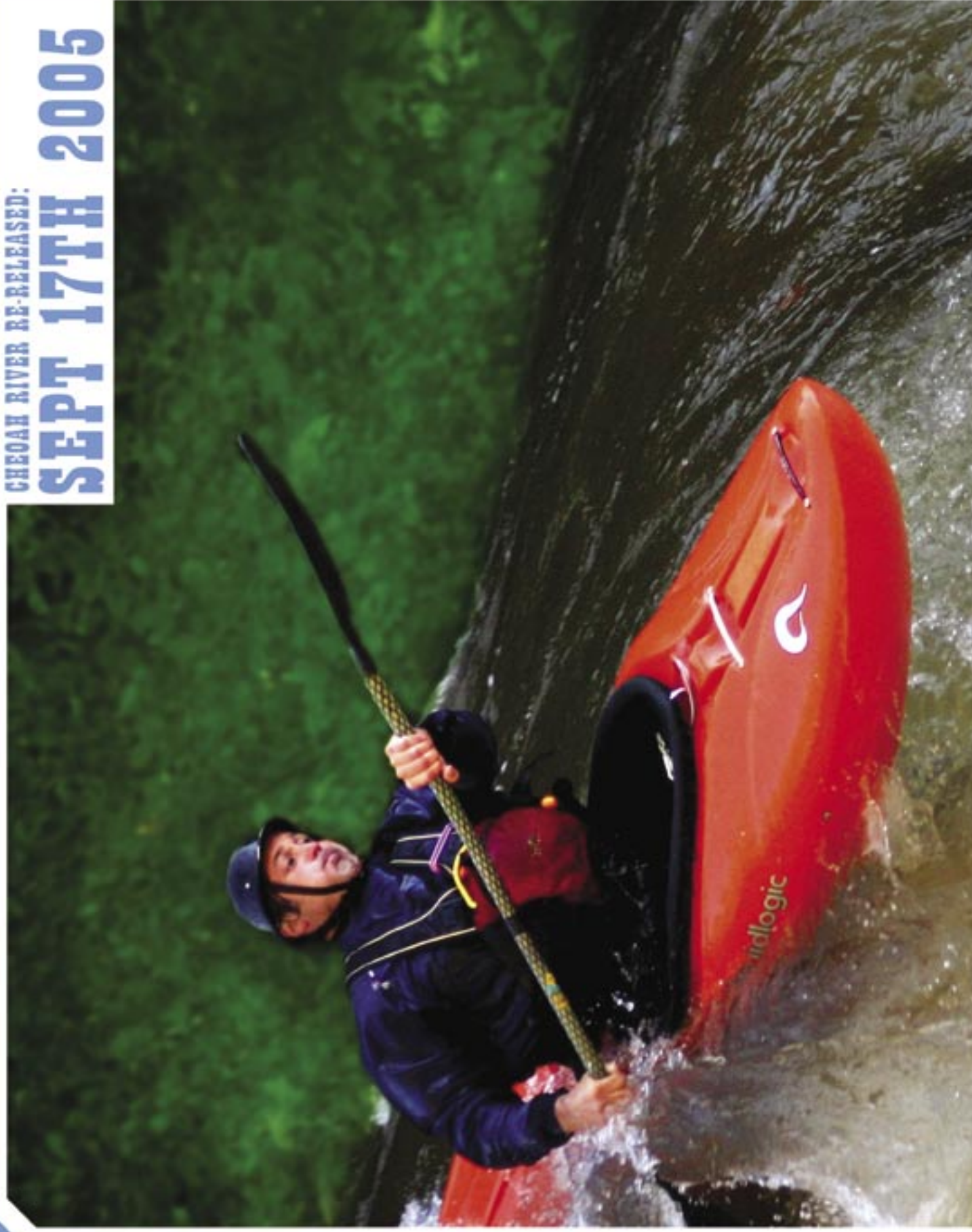
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Events

Cheoah River Celebration

By Kevin Colburn

In the fall of 2005, paddlers from around the Southeast converged on the small North Carolina mountain town of Robbinsville to paddle the very first releases on the Cheoah River. American Whitewater began its work on the Cheoah in 2000 and now, six years later, we will have a full release schedule of 18 days for the river.

American Whitewater invites you to come celebrate the rebirth of a future southeastern whitewater classic, the Cheoah River. To celebrate the revival of this Class III-IV big water run, AW is hosting a fundraising dinner and party at Tapoco Lodge on the banks of the Cheoah on April 8th, 2006. The event will celebrate AW's work on the Cheoah and help raise funds for the other projects

that American Whitewater is currently working on in the Southeast and beyond. The dinner will feature Leland Davis, southeastern boating legend and author of *North Carolina Rivers & Creeks*, as the key note speaker.

Somebody once said, "Freedom is never free!" and for the Cheoah River this certainly holds true. American Whitewater has invested over \$28,000 on Cheoah Project in staff time alone; this doesn't even take into account the work of Canoe Clubs, AW volunteers or support from outfitters. The goal of the Cheoah River Revival Fundraising Dinner is to repay AW some of this \$28,000 so we can continue our work on projects throughout the country including these southeastern projects:

- Guaranteed Releases on the Tuckaseegee and Nantahala, and improved access
- AW has negotiated guaranteed releases

on these rivers that before were only guaranteed on "a good word." As well, recreational releases on the West Fork of the Tuck and Upper Nantahala are slated to begin in 2007.


- Appealing the Chattooga Headwaters Boating Ban - After reviewing the boating ban on the Headwaters of the Chattooga, the National Chief of the USFS determined the ban was unwarranted. While the river remains temporarily closed, AW is working hard to open the river to boating based on the Chief's decision.

- Releases on the Catawba River - Thanks to extensive negotiations with Duke Power and a number of flow studies, paddlers will hopefully soon have recreational releases in the Great Falls section of the Catawba River.

- Wilson Creek Wild and Scenic Designation - AW has worked with the



USFS to protect and manage the newest Wild and Scenic River in the South, Wilson Creek. As a result, Wilson Creek will always be a paddling destination of the highest quality.

Cheoah River Revival Fundraising Dinner
The event will be held at Tapoco Lodge on April 8th, 2006, cocktail hour will begin at 6:00 and dinner will be served at 7:00. Tapoco Lodge is limited to approx. 80 people so please RSVP early to ensure that you and your friends are part of this memorable night. Tickets for this fundraising event are \$100 and can be purchased by calling AW's office in Cullowhee, NC at (828) 293-9791. All reservations must be made by March 20th; no tickets will be sold the day of the event. The evening includes a full dinner and dessert and admission to the after-dinner party. 



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Stewardship


Who is Leland Davis?

When choosing a speaker for this event, it didn't take us long to think of the best person for the job. Leland Davis is southeastern boating—in fact, he wrote the book on it. We are very excited to have Leland honor us with his presence.

Leland Davis first paddled in a tandem canoe on North Carolina's Lower Green River at Camp Arrowhead in 1982. He got into canoeing, kayaking, backpacking, rock climbing, and skiing more through the Outdoor Education Program at his high school, traveling to paddle and play on weekends and school holidays. After a short stint as a rock climber in Colorado, he moved to Asheville in 1993 and enrolled in UNC-Asheville, where he co-founded the paddling club with AW's Kevin Colburn. After graduating from UNCA in 1997 with a degree in environmental science, Leland hit the rivers full time for a couple

of years, except for summer breaks which he still spent running the high adventure and paddling programs back at Camp Arrowhead. In 1999 he found work in the paddling industry, working as a graphic designer, computer nerd, warranty guy, tech rep, or anything else that was needed by a variety of companies over the next few years. Most recently, Leland and his girlfriend Andria Baldwin have started their own publishing company, Brushy Mountain Publishing, which makes and distributes their products, including Andria's Yoga for Paddlers DVDs and Leland's new paddling guidebook, *North Carolina Rivers & Creeks*. This spring, they are continuing their love for teaching and paddling by offering their second series of creek boating clinics. Check out Leland's website at www.nccreeks.com!

Cheoah River Revival Party

Following the fundraising dinner, an after party will take place at Tapoco Lodge featuring live music from Big City Sunrise. Tickets can be purchased for this at the event for \$5 per person. Stay tuned for more information about the Revival Party. 

Leland Davis running Sunshine on the Green River, NC

Photo by Ben Edson / downstreamphoto.com




Dam Owner Goes After the Clean Water Act

By Thomas O'Keefe

In most states a utility must obtain state water quality certification to operate a hydro project. This state authority is recognized through section 401 of the Clean Water Act. State certification through section 401 has obviously had a significant benefit for AW's successful hydro program by formally recognizing the legal basis for restoring rivers and necessary flows for the benefit of fish and recreational users. A previous case from the Dosewallips River, a great whitewater run in Washington State, was heard before the Supreme Court in 1994, which set this important precedent.

In that case, known as the Tacoma Decision, Justice O'Connor wrote in the majority opinion: "In many cases, water quantity is closely related to water quality; a sufficient lowering of the water quantity in a body of water could destroy all of its designated uses, be it for drinking water, recreation, navigation or, as here, as a fishery. In any event, there is recognition in the Clean Water Act itself that reduced stream flow, i.e., diminishment of water quantity, can constitute water pollution."

This spring, however, the Supreme Court will hear a new challenge to the rights of states to impose conditions on hydro projects that impact rivers. The case was brought before the Court by SD Warren, a South African Paper Company that owns five dams on Maine's Presumpscot River. A state derives its authority to regulate water quality at hydro projects because courts have widely interpreted water released from a project to be a "discharge" under the Clean Water Act. This specific question—"Is water released from a dam a discharge?"—has not been ruled on by the US Supreme Court. American Whitewater took a leadership role in developing the NGO brief with members of the Hydropower Reform Coalition that clearly describes the impacts of dams on water quality and the benefits that can be gained by modernizing hydro operations to restore elements of a natural flow regime. Additional briefs in support of our position were filed by the Bush Administration, state attorney generals from 35 states, scientists, tribes, fish conservation and sport fishing organizations, and others. Oral arguments took place on February 21st and we expect a ruling later this year. 



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Stewardship

A group of kayakers are navigating a river through a winter forest. The river is dark and flows between snow-covered banks. The trees are bare and covered in a thick layer of snow. In the foreground, a yellow kayak is partially visible, with a person wearing a blue helmet and a yellow jacket. Further upstream, four other kayakers in red and purple gear are visible. The scene is serene and captures a moment of outdoor recreation in a cold environment.

Sultan River
Releases for
Three Days in
December

By Thomas O'Keefe

Paddlers have had their eyes on relicensing the hydro project on the Sultan River, a major tributary of the Skykomish, for more than a decade. Just an hour from downtown Seattle, the project bypass reach runs through a dozen miles of scenic gorge with majestic old-growth forest and a great mix of Class III and IV whitewater. Shortly after American Whitewater launched a national hydro program in the early 1990s Rich Bowers paid a visit to the project to discuss opportunities for whitewater recreation. While the project received its original license in 1961 it was not constructed until 1982. The Sultan thus represents one of those rare projects with documented usage prior to project construction by whitewater paddlers who pioneered the run in the 1970s. Rich's request for an evaluation of whitewater resources at the project was denied as the utility embarked on an ambitious effort to promote recreation on the project reservoir and chose to ignore the opportunities that once existed in the remote wilderness gorge downstream.

In December of 2005, the Snohomish PUD filed their Notice of Intent to relicense the Jackson Hydro Project, and with it comes a new opportunity to formally evaluate whitewater recreation. While formal studies of whitewater resources and all other aspects of the project will take place over the next couple years, AW was informed of an opportunity for boating the river the week of December 12th as part of equipment testing that was scheduled. While the testing took place, the PUD initiated a rare release from Culmback Dam restoring 650 cfs to the bypass reach, which proved to be a level adequate for navigation (optimal flows remain to be determined). Paddlers had to hike in over a washed-out road and down an informal miner's trail into the gorge and faced the challenge of safely navigating the 12 miles of whitewater on a short winter day. Despite these challenges and the fact that the release was scheduled on short notice over the work week, there were 38 recorded runs of the gorge.

A big thanks to Andy Bridge and Werner Paddlers for their commitment to this project, and also to the PUD for notifying paddlers of the opportunity to get out on the water.



Stewardship

Colorado Water Rights Battle

By Kevin Natapow

Since the late 1990s, several Colorado towns have developed whitewater kayak parks along their stretches of local rivers for recreational purposes. The success of these parks has contributed greatly to the state's fast-growing tourism industry and the economic prosperity of many communities. With out-of-state tourism now a \$7 billion-a-year economic pillar of Colorado's economy, whitewater parks continue to contribute significantly to Colorado's economy and quality of life. For example, the city of Golden estimates that its recreational water park brings in \$1.4 million to \$2 million annually, and according to Jerry Mallett, Chaffee County Commissioner, the Arkansas River contributes over \$80 million annually to

the County's economy from commercial rafting and fishing, private boaters and kayakers. To keep these whitewater parks alive, the majority of these towns sought court decreed water rights for their parks. These water rights, known as Recreational In-channel Diversions (RICD's), act to guarantee adequate flows in the river and many of these towns have won subsequent court cases demonstrating that their water rights were within the bounds of Colorado water law and that the water was being put to "beneficial" use as required under state law.

Although these parks have been hugely successful and within the bounds of Colorado water law, the Colorado General Assembly in 2001 passed Senate Bill 216 in an attempt to clarify the laws and processes as to who could apply for the rights and for how much water could be appropriated for an RICD water right. Senate Bill 216

recognizes the legitimacy of RICD water rights but places limitations on who can apply for an RICD and how much water can be allocated for a given park.

Even though Senate Bill 216 sought to clarify the law regarding recreational water rights, legislators, ranchers, environmentalists, recreationists, farmers, and many others are still fighting over how to appropriate Colorado's precious water resources for recreational purposes. The underlying fear is that in-stream diversions are going to stop future growth and development as rivers flow out of state and that these recreational water rights could hurt existing users. The reality is that there is little threat of Colorado losing its irrigation and drinking water because of recreational water use. Furthermore, during times of drought, recreational water decrees would be among the last to get water, because their water rights are

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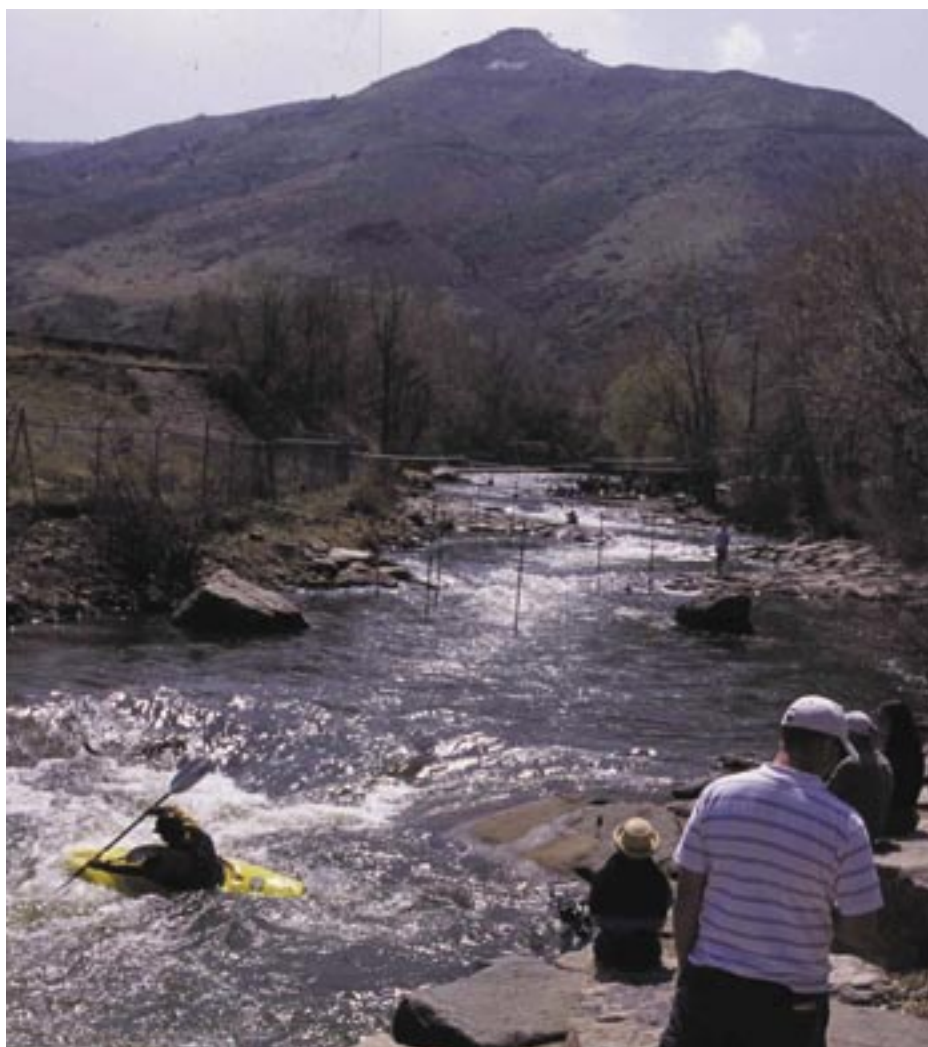
Last year, Colorado legislators tried to pass an even more restrictive bill than Senate Bill 216, but a coalition of over 75 local governments, businesses, and recreational and conservation organizations opposed the bill. Senate Bill 62 sought to put severe and unnecessary limitations on recreational water rights and would have had serious implications for whitewater recreation throughout Colorado. The restrictions that were proposed in the bill would have eliminated local jobs dependent on the river, and rural communities and Colorado's tourism would have suffered the consequences. Fortunately, the broad coalition was able to defeat Senate Bill 62 but that victory only set the stage for another legislative battle in 2006.

This year Senator Jim Isgar (D-Hesperus) and Representative Kathleen Curry (D-Gunnison) have co-sponsored Senate Bill 37. The new bill is an improvement over last year's version but still has some major issues that need to be worked out if the broader community is to endorse it. The conservation community and its many allies from the senate Bill 62 fight are gearing up for another statewide campaign to get the necessary amendments into this bill that will allow for the continued development of whitewater parks and the necessary water rights to make them viable.

Stay tuned for updates and information on how you can get involved in the campaign to protect recreational water rights and the future of Colorado's whitewater parks. www.americanwhitewater.org

The Golden Park in Colorado

Photo by Dunbar Hardy



Stewardship Updates

AW Works to Secure Access On Bald Rock Canyon

By Dave Steindorf

As part of the Lake Oroville Project relicensing, American Whitewater is working to secure access for the Bald Rock Canyon run of the Middle Fork of the Feather River, and the Big Bend run of the North Fork of the Feather. Bald Rock Canyon is a world-class run that has been visited by paddlers from all over the world. Over the past two decades most paddlers on Bald Rock have taken out on a friendly landowner's property, known as Wayne's Place. A potential sale of this property would likely eliminate this access; the other take-out option requires a 13-mile paddle out on Lake Oroville. The Big Bend run is a dry-year classic that is uncovered when Lake Oroville drops below 730 feet. The major drawback to this Class III+ run is the two-hour paddle out at the end of the day. AW is in the process of negotiating a shuttle service on the lake that would provide access to both of these runs. Maintaining access to classic runs such as these has been a critical part of AW's work here. We are also continuing to work toward the development of a whitewater park on the Oroville Project. A feasibility study will be conducted after reaching settlement early in 2006. AW needs your help to make our negotiating goals a reality on the Oroville Project.

New Pearl in the Lost Sierra

By Dave Steindorf

AW staff and volunteers participated in three whitewater flow studies on the South Fork Feather River, the newest gem of California whitewater. The Little Grass Valley reach flow study was conducted in September 2005. This reach is eight miles long and is a spectacular Class IV/V run. Best of all, this reach runs every fall from September through November. Two other reaches, including the Class III Golden Trout run and the Class V Forbes Town run, had flow studies conducted in

October 2005. Participants of the study stated that the Golden Trout run was considered to be one of the prettiest Class III runs in the state. The Forbes Town reach was a challenging Class V run which culminates in several bedrock rapids, including a 20-footer dubbed "Pineapple Train Wreck" by the participants of this first ascent. AW volunteer Eric Petlock will be leading the charge on the South Fork Feather. Look for an upcoming article in the *AW Journal*. Your support can help make this great run a reality.

Access on Piru Creek

By Dave Steindorf

AW volunteer Kris Schmidt, along with AW staff, filed comments with FERC to provide access to this Class II/III reach. Less than two hours from Los Angeles, Piru Creek can provide a significant opportunity for Southern California paddlers.

Supporting Fish and Flows on the San Joaquin

By Dave Steindorf

AW continues to work with state and federal agencies to restore a more natural flow regime on the San Joaquin River. It is our goal on the San Joaquin to create new flow conditions for these projects that will benefit both the aquatic ecosystem and paddlers. AW staff and key volunteer Paul Martzen continue to push Southern California Edison to accept a flow regime that will balance the needs of hydro power, ecosystem protection, as well as whitewater recreation.

FERC Attempts to Delay Flows on the Upper North Fork Feather

By Dave Steindorf

AW reached settlement on a whitewater

flow schedule for the Upper North Fork Feather River in 2004 after three years of intense negotiation. This flow schedule included releases one weekend per month from July through October on the Class III Belden Reach and one release per year on the Class V Seneca reach. In November, FERC issued their final environmental impact statement for the Upper North Fork Feather; unfortunately, this document delays the schedule for six years. Signatories to the agreement, including AW, Plumas County, the US Forest Service and PG&E, all responded to FERC that the flow schedule should be implemented as per the settlement agreement. FERC should take notice of this impressive show of unity. The settlement process is where the sides work out differences and come up with an agreement that everyone can all live with; it is detrimental to this process for FERC to substantially change these agreements after the fact. We would like to thank the many AW members who filed comments along with AW to let FERC know that they have made a huge mistake.

Merrimack (NH) and NF Feather (CA) Could Set National River Policy

By Kevin Colburn

The new Energy Policy Act limits the ability of resource agencies like the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service to require dam owners to restore flows and fish passage at their dams. The agencies have decided to let the first few cases decide how the Act will be implemented, and AW is formally involved in over half of these test cases. Working closely with the Natural Heritage Institute, American Rivers, and other members of the Hydropower Reform Coalition, we used our formal status to participate in several of these important cases. We focused our efforts on two projects: California's North Fork Feather and New Hampshire's Merrimack River. We expect that these projects will set the national policy for how the Energy Policy Act will be

implemented. Hopefully our participation will ensure that the Act is implemented in a responsible manner that maintains agency authority to protect rivers.

Nanty and Tuck Dam Licenses Delayed

By Kevin Colburn

In the fall of 2003, AW signed a settlement agreement with Duke Power and dozens of other stakeholders regarding multiple dams on the Nantahala and Tuckasegee Rivers (NC). Typically, FERC accepts such agreements, with minor changes when justified, and issues new 30-50 year licenses for the dams. We expected these licenses by February, but it now appears the licenses will be delayed for an undetermined amount of time. The culprits behind the delay are several local counties, municipalities, and land owners who have sought to torpedo the settlement agreement with legal threats and outlandish requests for cash, land, and even a dam. While their requests have no merit whatsoever, FERC has apparently decided to analyze their proposal. Unfortunately, this means that releases on the West Fork of the Tuckasegee and the Upper Nantahala will be delayed until 2007, or possibly even longer. We remain committed to our settlement agreement, and along with our many friends in the region will be advocating for its full acceptance by FERC throughout 2006.

Catawba Grand Finale on the Way

By Kevin Colburn

There are two people that should never have to run their own shuttle on the Catawba River: Andrew Lazenby and Maurice Blackburn. Andrew (AW volunteer) and Maurice (Carolina Canoe Club) have been working tirelessly for more than three years to work out an agreement with Duke Power and other

stakeholders regarding the operation of several dams on the Catawba River. Sometime this summer we hope to sign a settlement agreement on the Catawba. Preliminary drafts offer significant new recreational opportunities on over 50 miles of the Catawba River ranging from flatwater floats to low country Class III+. Flowing near major metropolitan areas in North Carolina and South Carolina, the Catawba has the chance to become a protected and accessible paddling resource for many people. AW staff will continue to assist Andrew and Maurice, and together we hope to close the deal this year!

Whitewater Rivers Need More Cleanup Crews


By Kevin Colburn

River cleanups are the perfect way for boaters to give something back to the rivers they paddle. AW has a goal of significantly increasing the number of whitewater rivers that are the target of formal river cleanups in 2006. River cleanups are a great way to show local communities that we are willing to work hard to protect rivers and can make a huge difference in the scenic and ecological values of a whitewater run. Please consider making 2006 the year you organize or participate in a river cleanup! AW is working the National River Cleanup Week® to track the role of paddlers in cleanups this year, and to extend the offer of great prizes and perks to paddlers

willing to spend a day cleaning up one of their favorite runs. Check the AW website for more information.

Upper Yough Negotiations Look Promising

By Kevin Colburn

Maryland's Upper Yough is a classic by any standard. A diverse group of local and regional paddlers have been working to improve the operation of the dam that provides releases on the Upper Yough. As part of a state dam relicensing process, the team has been advocating for enhanced whitewater opportunities through additional releases and better flow information. At the same time, we are working with other stakeholders to improve fishing access, water temperature, and even power generation revenues. AW has been working closely with this team and we are excited about the potential for improved river management that benefits everyone involved. 



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My Lapland Adventure

By Michael Moran

From the time I was a boy, I have listened to my dad recount his youthful exploits of fishing and canoeing in the Yukon Territory of Canada, and I have always wanted to experience the same. My dad agreed that this year, after completion of my 1st year of university, we would go on a wilderness adventure. As we are now living in Greece, the Yukon was too far, so we decided on northern Sweden instead. After doing our homework, we decided that the Lainio River, 300 km north of the Arctic Circle, would be our destination.

We arrived in Stockholm and spent the night in town with friends. We departed early the next morning for Kiruna, a mining town an hour and a half flight north of the capital. Allen, our guide from Camp Tystnaden, was there to take us to the camp some 150 km northeast. "Steve and Michael," he called out in his friendly manner, "are you ready to begin your Lapland adventure?" We were.

During the trip to Camp Tystnaden, which means "silence" in Swedish, we passed through low mountain country surrounding the town of Kiruna. The trip went through spruce and birch taiga forests punctuated by streams and lakes. While driving, Allen told us about the wildlife, fishing and the river. The area was teeming with reindeer and moose and bears were not uncommon sights. At Vittangi we crossed the wide and slow-moving Torne River; our appetite to be on the river grew!

A short time later we arrived at the camp. We were the first visitors of the summer season and we had a small log cabin to ourselves on the bank of the swollen Lainio River. The fishing was normally superb at this time of year; pike, perch, trout, salmon, arctic char and grayling

abounded. However, due to the high water levels, the fishing would not be tops during our visit. As for the river itself, only several weeks earlier it had been choked with ice flows. The fine weather we now enjoyed hastened the snow melt in the highland areas to the north. The river was now high and fast! We spent the remainder of the day preparing for our week on the river.

The following morning we tested the canoes. We decided that the best choice would be a 17' fiberglass canoe that was strong and stable. Later in the day we headed for the Taanikurkkio Canyon, a Class IV rapid where the river ran through a narrow defile. As we approached the canyon on foot we heard a roar which became louder and louder. The reason was soon clear. There was whitewater up and downstream as far as the eye could see. The water boiled furiously where rocks on the riverbed blocked its progress. We stopped and stared from the safety of the high river bank. Huge, churning waves and deep holes in the water made the section look impossible to pass in a canoe. I wondered if we would encounter anything similar upstream!

Around noon the next day, Allen, my dad and I set off for the starting point of our canoe journey, 150 km northwest of the camp. On the way there, Allen answered our remaining questions about the river. As we drove north, the conifer forest gave way to tundra—a barren, treeless land occasionally interspersed with scrub birch and punctuated by ancient, weathered hills.

After about half an hour on a dirt road that seemed to run across the top of the world, we crossed the Lainio River at Jarkaståkka Bridge, where the water seemed a lot livelier than it had at the camp! It was narrow, but navigable. A good place to start, I thought. We loaded our gear into the canoe, tied everything down with a

nylon tarp and bid Allen farewell. As we paddled into the middle of the river the current carried us quickly downstream. Allen's words spoken earlier in the day echoed in my head: "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger!"

Our first challenge was to pass the Kurakallinka Rapids, which lay about four kilometers downstream. Normally it was rated Class III, but due to the high water level it was now given a higher rating. We first heard it as we paddled along a deceptively calm and flat section of river where waterfowl fished in the quiet, swift current. It was about a quarter of an hour later when we caught our first glimpse of the rapids. As they came into view we pulled over to the shore to check the map. My dad called out the rapid classes following the Kurakallinka; a Class II rapid, then a Class I, II, I, II and a Class III rapid all in quick succession. We decided that the left bank of the river would be the best side to pull ourselves to shore should an upset occur. The next village, Soppero, was located 40 km downstream on that side. Before setting off, we surveyed the river and agreed that the path down the middle of the river looked the most favorable with whitewater churning all around for more than 200 meters ahead.

Without further hesitation we paddled into the middle of the river, feeling the force of the current take us like a charging locomotive. Here, even the strongest paddling caused only a slight change in direction. I was enjoying the excitement of the rolling river. About 50 meters into the rapids I looked ahead and noticed a bulge in the water. "Dad," I yelled, "Look out! A huge boulder!" Before I could finish speaking we were pushed over the boulder and then descended down a steep slope of water into a deep churning sink hole, previously blocked from our sight by the bulge created by the submerged boulder. A wall of freezing whitewater hit me with its

full force straight on, swamping the front of the canoe and stopping its forward motion. The stern of the canoe, however, kept moving ahead and we were now perpendicular to the current, traveling sideways down the river. The next massive wave struck the canoe broadside, capsizing it and sending us flying into the ice-cold torrent!

I grabbed onto the canoe, still clutching my paddle in one hand. I looked downstream and saw my dad bobbing like a cork through the rapids. He turned, waving an arm to indicate that he was uninjured. As I charged ahead, still attached to the racing canoe and trying to catch up with my dad, a submerged rock slammed against my lower body. I adjusted my position so that my feet and legs could buffet my body from boulders sitting just below the water level. Doing this, however, meant temporarily letting go of the canoe, and it was soon out of reach, rushing downstream. "Dad," I screamed as loud as I could, trying to be heard above the roar of the thundering waves, "get to the canoe!"

My dad inched his way through the unrelenting current to intercept the canoe. With not a moment to spare he lunged and reached the stern of our now-flooded craft. Driven by the current, I somehow managed to meet up with him and the canoe. By this time we had been in the water for at least 5 minutes. The cold was starting to numb my legs and arms. We held on to the canoe for a few moments, exhausted by our exertions and relieved that we were able to retrieve it and be supported by its buoyancy. I realized, however, that we would not survive much longer in the freezing water. The river was turning to the left, propelling us closer to the right shore. "We have to get to the right bank!" I shouted. As we kicked and pulled desperately to bring the canoe to shore, the river straightened, bringing us once again to the middle. The river was changing course again, this time turning



Taanikurkkio Canyon, high water makes this a very challenging rapid to navigate in a canoe

Photos by Steve Moran



The best part about canoeing the Laminio River is the fishing, which is absolutely superb. We had fish for breakfast every day.



Relieved to be back in civilization after our river adventure, we relaxed by fishing on the banks of the Lainio about 3 km downstream of the camp.



This photo was taken around midnight. At this time of year, the sun never goes below the horizon.

to the right. The current showed no signs of abating and waves of ice cold water crashed over me and down my throat. The canoe was now nearly completely flooded and very heavy. The left shore was approaching and I knew that this was our last chance to reach safety before the river straightened and turned again. "To the left! To the left shore!" I shouted. My dad was showing little sign of movement, numbed by the near-freezing river. It would take our combined effort, however, to reach shore. "Kick!" I howled, "KICK!!!" Suddenly revived, my dad started to focus every last bit of his energy on reaching the shore and kicked anew. Soon we were touching the river bed, but the water was still too deep and fast for solid footing. Eventually we pushed and pulled our battered bodies and inundated canoe closer to shore. Finally we could stand up. We had reached safety at last.

Relieved, we pulled into a back eddy. We safely secured the canoe to a scrub willow growing on the river bank and immediately set about our work, for the ordeal wasn't over yet. With the exception of the tent and sleeping bags, which had been packed in a watertight barrel, everything we had in the canoe had been completely soaked. There were, however, a number of things to feel grateful for: the sun was shining brightly, none of our belongings had been washed away and most importantly, we had come to shore next to an ideal campsite—a sunny, low bluff overlooking the river. While I unloaded the grounded canoe, my dad quickly started a fire from the ample scrub birch surrounding our camp. We pitched our tent, stretched the lines to dry our gear and prepared supper: reindeer steaks and tortellini with tomato sauce. I think it was the best meal of my life!

That evening around the campfire my dad and I discussed the day's events. We planned how we would continue without

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the maps that were torn from inside my dad's shirt during our ordeal in the river. We agreed that it was better to walk along the shore, even in waist-deep water and roping the canoe past difficult rapids, than to risk another upset in which we might not be so lucky.

It was well after midnight when we hit the sleeping bags and the sun was still shining brightly. In northern Lapland, the sun doesn't set between the end of May and the end of July. Instead it circles around the sky and dips down around the northern horizon at midnight where it hovers for several hours before beginning its ascent again. In full daylight we fell into a deep sleep. When we awoke we dug into a hearty breakfast of fried potatoes and onions with salt pork and hefty portions of Swedish pancakes smothered in lingon berry jam, all prepared over the campfire. We broke camp, packed our dry gear and paddled downstream to the village of Soppero. The country changed abruptly from only scrub birch to spruce and fir interspersed with much taller birch trees. We started to see a few unoccupied primitive cabins along the river, built by the local Sami people for hunting, reindeer herding and fishing.

As we continued downstream the weather remained fine, clear and warm. We avoided the worst of the rapids by roping the canoe through the water, along the riverbank, where my dad led while I held the line secure to the back of the canoe. We passed safely in this manner although one incident did give us a scare. In fast-flowing sections of the river just before the beginning of rapids it is best to approach the riverbank parallel to the shore so that we could both secure the canoe as it approaches land. However, on one occasion we came into shore at a bad angle just ahead of the rapid. Before I could get

out to secure the canoe, the current took the stern, carrying it out toward the middle of the river. The canoe was now going downstream backward toward the next set of rapids! "Paddle right, paddle right!" my dad shouted as he furiously back paddled on the left. Slowly, the canoe turned sideways before eventually straightening out, allowing us to pull successfully into shore only moments before entering the next set of rapids.


That afternoon we arrived in Soppero. There, we telephoned the camp and requested that the maps for the remainder of the river be faxed to us. We examined them closely. Of the remaining 40km to camp, 20km of Class III, II and even IV rapids remained to be navigated.

My dad and I decided to end our trip at Nedre Soppero, 8 km downstream, just before the next set of violent rapids. We left town in the early evening, and after a short paddle found an excellent campsite on a high sandy bluff overlooking a fine river panorama to the north and south. After setting up camp, my dad and I tried our hand at fishing. My dad caught a pike and I hooked a perch, which did nicely for breakfast the next morning!

The following afternoon we met Allen

again. We loaded the gear into his jeep and returned to camp. When we had requested that the river maps be faxed to us, he suspected that we had upset on the river. He was relieved that everything had turned out as well as it had.

For the remainder of our time in Lapland we chose a lake-stream-river course that was mainly devoid of turbulent whitewater, allowing us to navigate quietly through unspoiled wilderness for several days. We sighted a moose and its calf grazing at the water's edge. We observed reindeer and waterfowl and had ample time to catch all the pike and perch needed for breakfast, lunch and dinner! The rest of the trip was spent in near perfect weather. We were sad to say goodbye to the friendly people, beautiful landscape and ruggedly peaceful way of life that we had experienced over the week that we spent there.

I learned a lot about canoeing and mastered my fishing technique. Most importantly I had experienced a wilderness adventure that few people have the chance to experience. And I now understand why my dad so fondly recalls his youthful days in the Yukon. 

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Kayaking: My Cure For Cancer

by Brock Royer

I laughed when I got the call. But there I was, the day after I felt the lump last March, and I was sitting in the radiologist's office.

I am 25 years old. At the time, I weighed around 185 pounds and was in the best shape of my life, thanks to my trainer, Ray, at the local gym. The water was just about ready to break free from winter's ice hold in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and I was geared up for adventure.

Before I had a chance to leave, the radiologist's phone rang. Dr. Kay, my fiancé Katey's boss, an oncologist, was on the other end. All I really needed to hear was him sigh before he began talking. That sigh told me everything and started me laughing.

What was it that prompted this reaction? Did my body somehow already know the answer? Was it that my brother had already been diagnosed with the same type of non-genetic cancer? Maybe I saw humor in the fact that I had been raising money and volunteering for First Descents, a kayak camp for young adults with cancer.

But I think what got me laughing at that particular moment was the sigh itself. It told me that a man I knew and respected had to give me news he really would rather not. It was just too much for me to sanely grasp all at once.

The author Robert A. Heinlein wrote, "The supreme irony of life is that nobody gets out alive." My life was now in the hands of God and my doctor. But it was on the river that I found my quest to live

"So, are you going to run it?" Montana Mark asked me as I took a drink of water.

I had a sudden case of cottonmouth as I looked at what lay ahead.

Mark is one of my best paddling buddies on the planet and we were on the first trip of the season. Dubbed the 12 Circles Expedition (a spoof of the TDUB's Seven Rivers Expedition), the trip would be my attempt to run a dozen first descents in a single weekend. On three topographical maps I had circled each of the runs I intended to do, and had attached pictures and penciled in GPS coordinates. I was determined, but in retrospect the idea was more than a little foolish.

We were standing at the lip of 75-foot Superior Falls on the Montreal River. It was running somewhere around 3,000 cfs which is way beyond flood stage for that run (sane levels are between 500-800 cfs). The falls are the end of the Montreal

River's journey to empty itself into Lake Superior.

Each time Mark and I successfully run a creek that dumps directly into the lake, we do a roll in our kayaks to pay our respect to the lake. It is a tradition that was taught to me by Mike Dziobak after a sobering paddle down the mighty Presque Isle River, just a day before we lost Midwest paddling legend Jim Rada to the river just a few miles upstream (Rada, 52, died of an apparent heart attack after getting caught in a Class V hole). I have passed the tradition on to new paddlers of these creeks and I hope it continues.

Top Cabin section on the Upper Silver River.

Photo by Brock Royer





The north and south shores of Lake Superior are unique in that there are countless creeks, rivers and waterfalls that dump into the lake, which were carved out by glaciers so many years ago. If you want to hit untapped whitewater in the Lower-48, believe it or not, this is the area to do it.

The problem with paddling in the Superior region is the short window of time you have to catch these rivers in between suicidal and low water levels. In a good year we have maybe five weeks, which amounts to only 10 days or so for the committed weekend warrior. We usually start with the smaller creeks, since they lose their water first, and work our way to the bigger rivers.

The Montreal is a middle-sized creek swollen to the flows of a decent-sized river.

The pucker factor of this drop was just a little too big for either of us on this day. No matter, though, because I was just happy to be there, breathing, living and boating.

Two weeks had passed since my first surgery on March 7th. I now had odd shapes drawn on my belly with a purple marker showing where the laser pointer lines up to blast me with huge amounts of radiation. It was Friday morning and I was to start the first of my treatments on Monday.

Some people breeze right through treatments without too many problems, I was told. But I was also informed I could expect to get pretty sick.

So, as I looked upon Superior Falls, I felt fortunate and cherished the moment. For the next four weeks or more, doctors

Brock Royer running Gorge Falls on the Black River in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

Photo by Brandon Royer

would be standing behind 4-foot steel doors as they zapped me with rays and poked me with needles every day. I wouldn't likely feel as good as I did on the bank of that river for quite some time. I promised myself to keep smiling through it all as I replayed trips like this one in my mind.

I thanked God before we shouldered our boats and walked around the goliath waterfall. We pledged to come back another day to be the first to run it. But I suddenly asked myself, "Where is God in all of this?"

Boaters in general tend not to be a very

Paddling as Therapy

religious bunch. Maybe it's because we deem our river trips to be soulful, even religious experiences, in and of themselves. I know I do. I have always had my own relationship with God that I've felt good about. And throughout my cancer experiences, at a time when many other people turn to religion, I kept my same faith. Paddling seemed to be my cure when I was feeling down. I believe kayaking was God's gift to help me through my trials.

Whether I was kayaking on flat water, play boating or steep creeking—it didn't matter—the pain just seemed to subside and I could somehow mentally prepare myself for whatever lay ahead. When you are running a Class V drop, your head

becomes totally clear; even the sound of the whitewater ceases to exist. You are calm, collected and focused on your line. If you cannot mentally prepare yourself for running rapids of this magnitude then you shouldn't be there.

It is tough to explain to people how much kayaking spills over into my day-to-day life; it was never as evident as when I was fighting cancer. Each doctor's appointment, each surgical procedure, every checkup, I tapped into the same calmness and focus as when I faced a serious rapid.

I had more than one doctor and multiple nurses, including Katey, ask me how I could handle everything so well. People react to situations in different ways. Some people fight their fate and get depressed and out of sorts while other people get angry and ask, "why me?" Others just accept the hand they're dealt and get on with their lives.

For whatever reason, I embraced my misfortune. I didn't welcome going through it all, but I figured the pain of this life-threatening experience would make all the other times in life just that much sweeter.

Lance Armstrong said, "Surviving cancer teaches you the magnitude that you depend on other people, not for just self definition, but for mere existence. Cancer robs you of your independence and makes you rely on friends, family, complete strangers, doctors and nurses."

In some ways, kayaking gave me back that sense of independence. Difficult whitewater is unrelenting and unforgiving. It punishes and pushes people to their limits. It is also beautiful, awe inspiring, spiritual and alive. When choosing to run

this type of water, you need to accept the consequences of a missed line or a badly timed surge of water. In most cases, you are the only one that can help yourself. The choices you make are yours alone and the wrong choice can mean the difference between life and death.

My first week of treatment left me sick as a dog. For three days I couldn't keep any food down and my weight had dropped to 170. I would lose another 15 pounds before rebounding.

That week we ran the entire upper section of Silver Creek just outside of L'Anse, Michigan. It had been a great weekend spent on creeks and rivers such as the Black, Presque Isle, and what turned out to be the only run of the year on the Slate. My muscles were sore, I hadn't showered for a couple of days, but I felt great.

What an amazing run we had on the Silver. The water was running at a juicy flow with a constant gradient producing Class Vs, multiple Class IVs and some of the best scenery in the Midwest. At the crux of the run and the end of the upper section, another piece of irony hit me. Jim Rada was with the group that first ran the Upper Silver. They did it accidentally, thinking it was the Lower Silver. They disbelieved rumors that every rapid had been run because they walked around two particularly dangerous looking drops. They weren't about to try the section we found ourselves standing before.

This part of the river is called The Cabin Section, after the beautiful log cabin perched just above the first big drop. The creek drops a hefty 300-plus feet per mile here, not leaving much time to think between drops.

"I'm going to have to pass on this one,"






Superior Falls on the Montreal River

Photo by Brock Royer

Brian, another great paddling friend of mine, yelled over the roar of the water. Turning, he asked “What about you, Mark?”

“Nope. I’m just not feelin’ her today.”

I knew I was ready, though, because my mind was clear. I had gone over all the lines in my head. My incision no longer hurt, nor did I feel the pain from the radiation blasts. This is why I love kayaking; why I needed kayaking at that point in my life. The river doesn’t care if I have cancer. It doesn’t care if you are large or small, if you are black, white, blue or green.

For the next few minutes I was cured of all worries, all the doctor visits and the pain that came with it all. I snapped on my spray skirt and sat alone at the top of the rapid and looked down. The sound of the whitewater disappeared. Calm, and focused once again, I felt alive. 

Brock Royer, 25, of Hinckley, Illinois, taught himself how to kayak nine years ago with friends Brett Wiskur and Matt Winckler. He was diagnosed with testicular seminoma on March 5, completed his first round of treatment April 27 and underwent another surgery May 11. As of August 23rd 2005 he is officially in remission. Throughout all of his treatment ... he never stopped kayaking.

Corporate Sponsors

Each day American Whitewater faces new challenges that threaten our whitewater rivers. To aid us in this fight, we rely on support from members, donors, foundations, and partners in the industry.

Companies throughout the whitewater and outdoor industries are stepping forward to support AW's River Stewardship work.

American Whitewater urges you not to make purchase decisions blindly. When you buy your next piece of outdoor gear there are many factors to consider: quality, dependability, comfort, safety, and fashion. American Whitewater hopes you will add one more consideration to this list: corporate responsibility.

Support companies that support your rivers!



WAVE SPORT

For the past three years, Wave Sport has been the largest philanthropic industry supporter of American Whitewater. What does that mean? It means we help them pay the bills, allowing them to focus on doing their invaluable work protecting our whitewater resources. Some people see Wave Sport as a 'corporate' kayaking company. While we are part of a much bigger company these days, the reality is that real kayakers who care about the sport and its future are the ones making important decisions about the brand and where its resources go. Our support of American Whitewater is a great example of how a larger company can help fuel

a grassroots organization and have a significant, positive impact on the future of paddlesports.

Our hope is that more and more companies will see the importance of supporting American Whitewater and its mission. We're very proud of our support for AW. They offer all of us a voice that, when amplified by the support of thousands of whitewater enthusiasts, is hard to ignore. If you are a member, thank you. If not, we hope you join on as a member and add to the growing collective voice that is American Whitewater.

www.doubleyouess.com



Tanya Shuman testing the new Wavesport playboat the PROJECT

Photo by Marlow Long



Kokatat remains one of AW's strongest allies by continuing support of AW's membership and river stewardship programs. By providing American Whitewater with valuable membership and donation incentives, Kokatat will create the support we need to continue our stewardship of North American rivers.



Kayak Session helps American Whitewater increase membership, fund river stewardship work, and get our message out to readers here and abroad. KS is proud to provide AW members a discounted subscription rate and allows AW to use the high quality international magazine to tell the AW story world wide.



Coming on board with AW's river stewardship program in 2005, Stahlsac helps AW make sure our lifetime members are satisfied. Stahlsac provides all of our lifetime members with their paddler duffle complete with both wet and dry compartments.



In 2004 Teva named American Whitewater as their river stewardship partner and has been one of our strongest partners since. Teva has partner with AW on numerous efforts including hosting AW's 50th anniversary in 2004.



NRS is excited to come on board as a partner of American Whitewater. In 2005, and again in 2006, NRS will show their commitment to river stewardship through encouraging AW membership at river festivals nationwide.



As part of Jackson Kayak's focus on environmental responsibility, the Jackson's have long supported AW through promotional efforts. In 2006 as part of their commitment to 1% for the planet, Jackson Kayaks will be supporting AW's river stewardship work financially as well.



Fortress International watches is new to the scene and new to supporting American Whitewater. Through creative fundraising strategies Fortress will help AW seek the funds needed to advocate for all whitewater rivers.



Throughout the history of the natural world, water sources have been the centers of life, providing habitat and sustenance for animals and plants alike. Patagonia is proud to support groups like American Whitewater that work to reverse the destructive effects of damming, development and pollution.



In 2006, Smith Optics continues its support of American Whitewater's river stewardship work and membership. By providing membership incentives Smith ensures we have the resources needed to fight for whitewater rivers.



Immersion Research led the whitewater industry in corporate responsibility. IR was American Whitewater's first industry supporter of river stewardship and remains a friend and ally today. Through their cobranded equipment and prodeal donations, they help river stewardship happen.



Clif Bar's annual Flowing Rivers' campaign, that provides funding to AW's affiliate clubs for river stewardship projects, is now in its fourth year, Clif Bar's funding of the Flowing Rivers campaign has made a direct impact on rivers nationwide.



Chaco helps set the standard for industry responsibility by supporting causes near to their hearts with 3% of after-tax profits. Chaco has been one of AW's strong but silent partners for 5 years.



We love donating to river conservation organizations like AW. Being partners with American Whitewater allows each of us to do what we do best; AW is a leader in river conservation and Werner Paddles can focus on being the leading kayak paddle manufacturer.



In 2006 Keen's contributions will aid American Whitewater in its quest to restore ecological health and recreational opportunities to the Catawba River watershed in North and South Carolina.



Outdoorplay is proud to support American Whitewater's river stewardship work and has done so for three years now. Outdoorplay.com, along with many other retailers nationwide, provides discounts for American Whitewater members on their website.

Local's Favorite

Dan Rubado doing an air loop at Spencer's last July

Photo by Andy and Rebecca Graham

Spencer's Hole, North Santiam River (OR)

By Dan Rubado

I just realized about ten minutes ago that it was fall when a cold breeze blew in and caught me unawares in my Chacos and t-shirt. The end of summer in Oregon is typically a tragic low-point in the life of a kayaker. By this time, nearly every drop of moisture has been pulled out of the mountains, washed down the rivers and deposited in the Pacific Ocean. Thanks to the water cycle, we'll be getting it all back come mid-November, but for now it's pretty much a wasteland of trickling streams ... with a few important exceptions.

The North Santiam River, located inland from Salem, has reliable recreational flows all year. An upstream dam releases water from a reservoir throughout the dry season, bringing to life One of Oregon's best low-water play spots.

In Sleepy Gates, Oregon, just 1/8 of a mile off Highway 22, awaits Spencer's Hole. Spencer's is a fast, dynamic hole that spans most of the constricted riverbed. It features a narrow and powerful pocket, which is plenty retentive at most levels. The surfer's right shoulder is less retentive and friendlier for casual surfing. A long pool with eddies on both sides lies downstream to soften any blows dealt by the hole. The eddy access is easier at low levels and becomes increasingly difficult

as the river rises. At lower flows this involves an aerobic attainment from the bottom eddy to a large mid-stream boulder, then a micro ferry across a small jet of water into the top eddy. At levels above 1200 cfs it becomes necessary to set up a throw line along the river left bank to haul yourself up the short distance from the bottom eddy to the top.

So what's to love? It's a high quality play spot that is often overlooked and sadly underrated. Spencer's is one of the most accessible and consistent play spots in Oregon. Even so, a crowd here is rare and quite often there are no other boaters at all. If empty play spots aren't your thing, on many a hot summer's day you can expect to witness some good carnage as tubers and duckies occasionally bob through the hole.

If you have to be a naysayer, here are a few



reasons to stay away. You have to catch the top eddy very quickly or you will be forced to attain back up behind the big boulder or use a rope. The good news is that the mid-stream boulder creates a reaction wave that you can surf back into the top eddy. The bad news is that the boulder is strategically located directly behind the hole. It has never caused any problems for me (and I've had plenty of encounters); simply be aware of its presence.

As mentioned before, the eddy service deteriorates at higher levels until you are finally forced to hike-'n-play. Spencer's might not be overrun by kayakers, but it is a popular spot for fishermen, who often congregate around the pool below the rapid. So don't tick them off by swallowing one of their lures as you roll up. In general, you may want to keep an eye on all non-boaters who come down to Spencer's. Unwatched belongings have been known to disappear from the river-right shore.

It is a good idea to avoid the river-right wall after you flush out of the hole, because water exiting the hole shoots between the center boulder and right bank. Although not dangerous, it is possible to unwittingly slam your head against it while attempting a roll. Using a rope to attain up the eddy is not recommended for boaters who haven't practiced this skill. I have watched many kayakers entangle themselves in the rope, roll over, then get pushed into the river left wall, which is slightly undercut. Needless to say, wrapping a rope around your neck in an already low-oxygen environment can be unpleasant.

While you're surfing in the hole, don't be afraid to try something new. All of the hole moves, from old-school rippin' to lunar orbitals are possible at Spencer's. The best moves to go for are right-handed cartwheels and loops. In fact, Spencer's is one of the most consistent looping holes around and, when levels are on the high side, huge aerials are a common sight. If you want to work on technique, gaining control of your moves in a fast spot like this is great practice.

For the beginning freestyle boater, the retentive pocket can be an intimidating sight, but it is a good place to practice side-surfing and work on flat spins. A couple of quick window shades will get you edging properly in no time.

If you're an intermediate freestyle paddler this is one of the best spots in the

Northwest to learn how to loop or dial in your cartwheels.

For advanced play boaters Spencer's is a no-holds-barred rodeo machine. There is plenty of power and depth to loft spud boats into the sky. The amount of air you get underneath your loops and space godzillas will be the chief concern of your session. But don't limit yourself; it's a challenging spot to work on more advanced moves like the clean cartwheel, tricky-wu, back loop, and McNasty. All of the new school hole moves can be done at Spencer's. And the potential for big air makes it all the more exciting.

This is certainly one of my favorite play spots, especially for the low-water season. It's fun and challenging, which makes it a great training ground and an excellent spot to teach your kayak to fly.

If you're more interested in a fun play run, you can drive up the road to Packsaddle County Park and paddle down to Spencer's, or continue on to the take-out in Mill City. This run is mellow Class II and III with lots of little surf spots and some fun holes, depending on the level. The higher the water, the more exciting and playful the run becomes. It is awesome for beginners and intermediates developing their freestyle skills. There are tons of eddy lines for stern squirts and big mossy rocks for splatting. Spencer's Hole is the most challenging rapid on the run. It can be very popular on hot summer weekends.


If you want some more challenging water, head upstream to the Big Cliff Dam put-in. From here you can paddle down to Packsaddle County Park. This is a more eventful Class III and IV run. Look out for the Narrows and Niagra as you may need to scout and/or portage. There is also a mandatory portage around the Packsaddle Dam (just above the park) which creates a very dangerous hydraulic. Although the portage route is fenced, there's no need to bring your bolt cutters along. Dam employees allow polite paddlers to hop over the fence.

Vitals:

The premium levels for Spencer's Hole are 950-1350 cfs on the N. Santiam at Niagra gauge (realtime flow information available at www.americanwhitewater.org). It's good from around 800-1500 cfs; the lower extreme creates a shallow, retentive hole

while the upper extreme generates a very fast hole and challenging eddy. Above 1200 cfs, a rope is required to attain along the river-left bank. Much above 1500 and you are forced to make the short river-right hike back to a boily feeder eddy.

Directions:

Go to Gates, Oregon, near Mill City. From Salem, head east on Highway 22 for about 40 miles. Once you pass through Mill City, Gates is just a couple miles down the road. Directly after the sign for the city of Gates, take a right onto the small side street. At the stop sign, take an immediate left onto Central Street. Drive about 1/8 of a mile until you see some narrow pullouts on the right and a telephone pole. If you start to go up a small hill, you've gone too far. A small trail leads down to the river behind a jumble of large rocks. There are several trails, so you might find yourself somewhere below the rapid. Just follow the sounds of whitewater to locate the hole. The rapid is characterized by large rock outcrops that form a narrow channel, so you will need to walk along the bank and out onto the outcrop in order to see Spencer's Hole. 



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Accident Summary

Whitewater Kayaking Fatalities Decline Sharply

By Charlie Walbridge, AW Safety Editor

The last four months of 2005 were remarkably quiet on the river safety front. Only four fatal whitewater accidents were reported during this time—five if you count one occurring back in June that we were only recently alerted to. The total for the year is 39, which is about average. That number breaks down as 10 kayak, six canoe, and 20 raft fatalities. For kayakers, this is the lowest number reported in a decade and the second consecutive year of reduced fatalities. The average number of kayaking deaths during the past ten years is 16.5, reaching a peak of 21 in 1998

The other numbers were not as positive. Canoeing deaths were roughly average, and it was very rough year for rafts. There were 20 rafting fatalities, eight in commercial boats (including two river guides) and 12 involving non-commercial paddlers. This spike is linked to unusually high water in Colorado and California, states with lots of whitewater and a significant urban population. We also logged in three “miscellaneous” accidents. It’s worth noting that none of the victims in this category (a drift boater, an inner tuber, and an air mattress rider) were wearing PFDs. In fact, failing to wear a life vest was the primary cause of river fatalities this year, with nine instances; this was followed by flush-drowning with seven, pinning on strainers with five, and recirculating in holes with four.

Chau-Ram Park is a beautiful county-owned facility near Westminster, SC. There are some nice Class II-III rapids on a section of the Chauga River that flows through it. According to the Seneca, SC *Daily Sentinel* Aaron Roche, 30, had run this section with friends several times during the season. On June 29th, he arrived after a hard day of construction work to paddle this stretch with some friends. Right above a rapid called Can Opener, he jumped out of his raft to recover a tube perched on a mid-stream

rock. His feet got caught in a pothole and the current quickly pushed his body under. Park rangers, who had successfully rescued a 13-year-old Florida boy from the same site a few hours earlier, tried to help but were not successful. Swiftwater Rescue teams recovered the body 16 hours later.

The Chauga’s geology clearly lends itself to foot entrapment; rescuing foot entrapment victims is not easy. A Google search revealed several similar deaths and a number of near misses at Chau-Ram Park over the past few years, but these involved swimmers and waders rather than paddlers. The scenario is always the same: an attempt to stand in fast-moving water is followed by a foot or leg getting stuck in a pothole or in a crack. This is one accident that’s easier to prevent than rectify, and I strongly recommend using a well-designed poster to publicize this danger to park visitors.

On August 20th an unidentified teenaged boy drowned while tubing on the Class III Little River near Townsend, TN. A story on the AP newswire said that he suffered some serious head injuries, which were the ultimate cause of death. Tubing whitewater rivers is serious business and the people who really know how to do it wear a life vest and helmet. Those who don’t have the proper safety gear should stick to the mildest sort of rapids.

There were two commercial rafting accidents this past fall. The first occurred on September 26th during Gauley Fest Weekend and was covered in *Splashes*, the newsletter of the West Virginia Wildwater Association. Glen Rogers, 50, fell out of his raft during a run through Class V Iron Ring Falls on West Virginia’s Upper Gauley. Although he was pulled from the water promptly, he soon became unresponsive. Guides started CPR, radioed for help, then rafted him downriver one mile to an access road where an ambulance waited. Mr. Rogers was taken to Summersville Hospital where he died that evening. The medical examiner found that the cause of his death was “blunt force trauma to the head,” an unusual scenario for rafters, even on a slam-bang run like the Upper

Gauley. Events like this remind us that a few extra bucks for a quality helmet is a good investment.

Gauley Fest weekend also saw a number of serious injuries involving kayakers. On Friday a competitor in the Wave Sport Open broke his back after launching himself down a wooden ramp into the meat of Pillow Rock Rapid. I think I have always been too old for that much excitement! Park Service personnel also evacuated injured people from Pillow Rock (injured neck), Mash (head laceration), Diagonal Ledges (possible concussion), and Pure Screaming Hell (concussion). Their work kept bad situations from getting worse. In addition, shuttle drivers at Mason’s Branch assisted several paddlers with broken ankles and saw at least one person with a shoulder separation.

The above “injured neck” incident deserves further explanation. According to the National Park Service Morning Report, it occurred on Saturday, September 26th. Penny Kephart, 41, flipped and hit her head extremely hard in the upper part of Pillow Rock Rapid. According to extensive posts on the Viking Canoe Club Message Board, Ms. Kephart found that she was unable to use her arms to exit her boat. She floated the rest of the rapid upside-down and was extracted from her kayak by fellow paddlers in the run-out. Ms. Kephart complained of serious neck pain, burning sensations in her arms, and weakness in her legs, all signs of a spinal injury. A rescuer, attempting to help, flipped and swam. He ended up protecting her neck and floating her gently into a downstream eddy

As her friends stabilized her in the water, Park Service Rangers who witnessed the accident located a backboard stashed for just these emergencies and brought it to her. Rangers quickly realized the seriousness of her injuries and summoned a Medevac helicopter. The chopper arrived, but the pilot was reluctant to land until all river traffic was stopped. This is no easy task on Gauley Fest Saturday! Finally, after her friends managed to stop the crowds, the craft landed on a mid-river boulder.

Ms. Kephart was rafted to the rock, loaded aboard, and taken to Charlestown General Hospital where she was diagnosed with two dislocated vertebrae. She faced surgery and three months recovery in a neck brace but it could have been much, much worse. Both her group and the Park Service deserve a commendation for their prompt and intelligent response to this emergency.

The first weekend in October brings stunning fall colors and booming 6500 cfs releases to Maine's Dead River. At this level, the 13.5 miles to West Forks is big, continuous Class III-IV whitewater with big waves and deep holes. According to the *Kennebec Journal Online* Ralph Jolin, 27, a commercial rafting guest, was running the river when his boat flipped in a large hole in Long Rapids. The other people in the raft were thrown free, but Mr. Jolin was recirculated in the hole several times before washing out. He was not breathing when he was recovered downstream. Rescuers tried CPR without success.

In mid-October, southern New Hampshire saw one of the heaviest rain events in recent memory. Towns were devastated by flash flooding and rescue squads worked overtime to pluck people from the rushing water. Tom Mangieri, a respected local businessman, lived on Liberty Farm Road near Antrim. The Class IV+ North Branch of the Contoocook River runs along that road. On Oct 9th Mr. Mangieri, 67, was inspecting his flooded home in an open-hole poke boat. Strong currents in the backwater grabbed him and pulled him into the rapids. According to the *Contoocook Valley Villager* Mr. Mangieri flipped and swam. He managed to grab a tree limb and although partly submerged he held on for some time. Firefighters from nearby Hillsboro, NH arrived at the scene and attempted to reach him without success. Eventually he was overcome by the relentless current and let go. He passed under a road bridge and was never seen alive again.

This perilous situation is often encountered when operating a boat in flood backwaters. Even when the water


looks flat, powerful currents may be at work. Although a trained whitewater paddler might not have problems sensing this, those unfamiliar with moving water might not. The site of the rescue attempt was a flooded Class IV creek, more than many paddlers, much less non-paddling firefighters, can manage. The incident was originally reported statewide as "a whitewater kayaker who got himself into trouble." The truth is more complicated and, in this case, a lot more tragic.

On November 3, the Cheat River Canyon in Albright, WV was running at moderate levels following recent rains. Robert Forney, 42, was making his sixth trip down the river with five other boaters from the Washington D.C. area. The Albright Bridge gauge was at a perfect 3-foot level and the group had a great day until they arrived at Pete Morgan Rapid, the last Class IV on the river. According to Lee Thonus, who remained for the entire rescue and wrote an excellent accident report, the first three boaters ran the drop without incident. Mr. Forney, paddling a sporty OC-1 playboat, entered the rapid too far right and flipped on a deep brace in a small hydraulic. He was not in his boat when it washed out at the bottom of the drop. The group searched the area until dusk without finding any sign of him. They noted that a large tree was lodged in the far right side of the drop. They suspected that Mr. Forney might be trapped there, but a local rafter paddled out, examined it closely, and saw no sign of him. They finished the run and contacted authorities early that evening.

The next day the river had dropped 6 inches when Mr. Thonus and Masontown Volunteer Firefighters returned to search the rapid. They spotted Mr. Forney's body pinned against the tree, but despite help from a few local paddlers who were on the river that day they were unable to retrieve him. That night a group of area boaters consulted with rescue teams and mobilized for a larger effort. The next day the water dropped another 6 inches. JB Seay, Eric Hendricson, and Bob Spangler found Mr. Forney pinned between the log and an underwater rock. They managed to move the log and release Mr. Forney's

body so that it could be picked up by local rafters and carried to the takeout.

Most of the material in these accounts came from the Internet bulletin boards and chat rooms serving the whitewater community. These postings often include links to articles in local newspapers. Various other people sent this material to me directly. Since I can't check all of these resources regularly I depend on individual AW members to forward useful material as they see it. Without their help there would be much less information available to publish. Once again I ask my readers to forward these accounts in the coming year. If you're involved in an accident or near-miss, remember that a good write-up has many positive effects. In addition to the potential for learning, a solid narrative from those who were there reduces the gossip and speculation from those who were not.

Please forward any accident descriptions, newspaper articles, personal accounts, and other material to ccwalbridge@cs.com (Rt. 1, Box A43B, Bruceton Mills, WV 26525). Please cut and paste write-ups rather than providing links, as these may become outdated by the time I try to follow them up. American Whitewater's new accident database and on-line reporting system, made possible by the Andy Banach Memorial Fund, is now complete (see story on page 5 of this issue). You can also report accidents on line or check to see what information AW has received on a specific incident. This info will be forwarded to all other members of the Safety Committee and made available on line. You can also forward confidential information to the Safety Committee that will not be made public without your approval. 

The Last Word

The author's paddle staying high and dry.

Photo by Cathy Howard

My Paddle Gets Around

By Ambrose Tuscano

I have this paddle. It's not the fanciest on the market and certainly not the lightest, but I depend upon it all the same. It's been there for thousands of strokes, hundreds of rolls and dozens of portages. Yet, there was a time, not too long ago, when I took this particular paddle for granted. Mind you, I wasn't intentionally cruel, but occasionally it would be hurt by my carelessness. A lazy pry off some shallow rocks to save my hands from the cold water; a brutal toss onto a granite slab before exiting the boat; an ill conceived lean against the car, becoming a slow motion freefall onto pavement the moment my back was turned.

It pains me now to think how little I noticed these slings and arrows before this summer, before I learned to appreciate my paddle as a thing of beauty. I remember the exact moment that I made this realization. I was standing, doubled over on the shores of the Tuolumne, one hand clutching my sinking boat and the other arm around a sun-baked boulder. I was trying not to think too hard about the beating I had been taking in the hole at the bottom of Mushroom moments earlier, trying not to second-guess my decision to bail out after a short but violent ride. With a heave, I managed to pull my kayak completely out of the water, prop it up against my body and remove the drain

plug. As the water spouted from my boat, so too the adrenaline started to drain from my bloodstream and oxygen began to return to my brain. As a matter of habit, I took stock of my situation. My boat was there, leaning against me, none the worse for the drubbing. A quick pad down of my body reassured me that all of my clothes and gear were still attached. That's when I realized: my paddle was nowhere to be seen.

I quickly leaned my boat against a larger rock to finish draining and jogged downstream a few feet to gain a better view. Unfortunately, I didn't find my paddle floating expectantly in a nearby eddy. Worse yet, I realized that there was virtually no chance of an errant paddle being held up anywhere before the entrance to Toadstool, the rapid immediately downstream. I was already impatiently see-sawing my boat back and forth on my thigh, emptying the last of the water, when Andrew, my paddling partner, eddied out beside me. He was a bit confused at first (Why were you swimming at Mushroom, his face asked). After a quick explanation, Andrew took off downstream to see if my paddle was still floating in the pool below. Meanwhile, I hurriedly assembled my breakdown paddle and tried to get my head straight for what lay below. There are few things in kayaking more daunting

than jumping back into the river minutes after it's viciously separated you from your boat—especially when you're using a flimsy breakdown paddle with a different blade angle than you're used to.

Sadly, when I got to where Andrew was patrolling the eddy below Toadstool, I knew it was probably hopeless. I had diligently checked each eddy I could catch on my way through the rapid and the paddle was nowhere to be seen. The odds of me finding the paddle downstream were exceedingly small. In all likelihood, it was pinned beneath the surface within spitting distance of where I swam. I knew that if I was ever going to get my paddle back again, it would require a lot of luck and a tremendous amount of altruism on the part of some kindly boaters. The only thing working in my favor was the timing of my swim. It happened to be the day of the annual Cherry Creek Race, an extreme downriver race on par with the Animal Upper Gauley Race in length, and with the Green Narrows Race in difficulty. There would be more paddlers on Cherry Creek that day than any other all year.

I was kicking myself all the rest of the way down the run. Why had I been so stupid to let go of my paddle? Why didn't I look for it sooner when I swam to shore? How did I end up in the hole in the first place? To make matters worse, I knew I was in for further humiliation.

When we got to the bottom of Lewis' Leap, one of the last rapids of the day, we stopped to wait for the crowds of racers. One by one, they appeared in long plastic boats, straight out of the 1980s. As racers and spectators climbed the left shore to congregate, I approached like a door-to-door salesman and made my pitch: "You didn't happen to see a paddle floating in the river upstream, did you? I, uh... lost it at Mushroom."

Each time, I watched their faces turn to suppressed amusement, like kids trying

not to laugh out loud in church. No one had seen it. When all the racers had finished, I admitted defeat and headed for the take-out. On the way, I ran into Cherry Creek regular, Tim Hagan. I told him my predicament and asked him, with little optimism, to post something to the local online whitewater message board if the paddle was recovered by anyone later that day or the next. With what I took to be a feigned sense of hope, he assured me he would ask around for it at the after-race party and take care of it if it turned up.

And so I left the river one paddle poorer than when I had arrived. I think it was at this time that I first began to really appreciate my paddle. I reflected on all the good times we'd been through together and all the cool places I still wanted us to go. Plus I realized that a good paddle is hard to replace (especially when you're unemployed). So imagine my amazement, several days later, when I read a posting from Tim saying he had my paddle. Moreover, he had brought it safely to South Lake Tahoe, a 45-minute drive from my home in Truckee, California.

I was so excited to discover that my paddle had re-emerged from the depths, that I didn't really feel any urgency to go retrieve it. It was late August and most of the water in the region had dried up. I didn't really need the paddle right away, so I decided to see if Tim could hand it off to me somewhere convenient for us both. We exchanged a couple of e-mails, and he told me he would take it to the North Fork Feather release that coming weekend. The North Feather is a few hours from Truckee, but I was considering going. At the last minute, I bailed on the trip but my friends, Cathy and Andrew (the last person to have seen me and my paddle together) were planning to go. I asked them to try to make the handoff with Tim.

As it turned out, I was away all weekend, but at one point I got a voice mail from Cathy explaining that they hadn't see Tim

on Saturday and that they couldn't wait around because they needed to check on their kids who were vacationing at her brother's in the Bay Area—a three hour drive to the coast. On my way back home, I started to get the idea that I'd dropped the ball again. I began to visualize the irony of losing a paddle in a boulder-jumble of a rapid, having it miraculously found (by someone who doesn't believe in "finders keepers"), only to lose it by laziness and poor planning.

Again, I berated myself: Why hadn't I driven down to South Lake when I first heard it was found? Heck, why hadn't I picked it up and then thanked Tim on my knees instead of asking him to drag it hundreds of miles away? At this point, could I blame him if he chose to auction it off to the highest bidder on the banks of the North Feather?

So imagine my further amazement when I got home and logged onto boof.com to find the following post directed to me by my friend, c1-er stud and American Whitewater board member, Norwood Scott:

Hey Ambrose,

Your paddle is well traveled; Cherry Creek to SL Tahoe to NF Feather to SF. Your friend, Cathy, should be picking it up on Wednesday. I wonder where it will go next.


- Norwood

P.S. I watered it for you.

It turned out that when they were looking for Tim at the Feather, Cathy and Andrew had met Norwood, told him why they were looking for Tim, and also realized that Norwood lives right down the street from Cathy's brother in San Francisco. So on Sunday, Norwood ran into Tim, took possession of the paddle, brought it back home to San Francisco with him,

where Cathy collected it. Sure enough, the following weekend, Cathy and Andrew returned to Truckee with my paddle in tow. They live right down the street, but even if they had lived 100 miles away I would have met them at their door. I was so happy to see my paddle again, I almost cried.

My paddle wasn't so emotional. And after all it had been through, who could blame it? Frankly it was more than a little ticked at having been abandoned in the first place, let alone the stress of traveling more than 800 miles to get back home. Yes, it was a long, convoluted road to reconciliation, but I think we're both better off for the experience. My paddle realizes that if it had provided a better boof stroke, we may never have ended up surfing Mushroom in the first place, and this whole saga could have been avoided. And I've also spent my share of time saying "I'm sorry." These days I don't use my paddle to pry off the bottom of a shallow riverbed—unless I'm really in trouble—and I'm much more careful about where I set it.

More importantly, though, I'm amazed by the altruism of paddlers everywhere, who go out of their way (sometimes WAY out of the way) to help paddlers they've never met before. In my case, I still don't know who I have to thank for finding my paddle and carrying it off the river in the first place, but that kind of selflessness and integrity deserves my whole-hearted gratitude and makes the paddling community that much stronger. Maybe someday I'll be able to pull that person to shore after a swim, or stop them before they pull out of the parking lot without tying their boat on the car. At the very least I hope to sit down with them over a few drinks (I'm buying) so we can re-create the whole tale, beginning with: "So there I was, surfing for dear life" 

Donor Profile



Cucumber Falls on the Lower Yough in 2000

By Nancy Gilbert

As I stood proudly at the entrance gate to the 2005 Gauley Festival in my official American Whitewater Volunteer T-shirt and ticket apron, I peered over the approaching and seemingly endless line of boating enthusiasts, wondering how I came to find myself there.

Later on, when time allowed, I reminisced about what brought me to West Virginia each year for the Gauley Festival.

It all began in the early '90s, as I walked past a co-worker's office one day. A crowd had gathered and I thought there might be chocolate involved; I stopped to see. My co-worker was showing the group a number of boating photos taken of her from her weekend river trip. There she was, in a kayak on a sparkling stream with a huge smile.

First jealousy reared its head: I couldn't imagine a better way to spend my time. Then realistic thinking set in. I was already in my early 50s and not a prime candidate for such a sport. I firmly explained this to her as she encouraged me to give it a try. My life, up until that time, had never included a sport or pastime that involved any real physical challenge. When I wasn't working, I was either hiking or singing with a female choral group.

She paid absolutely no attention to my protests and somehow I found myself

on a lake the following weekend getting my introduction to the sport (and art) of kayaking. I might add that winter was coming on, but the folks involved seemed to have no concept of what I considered to be appropriate weather. So there I was running my very first river trip on New Year's Day in 1993 in the rain and cold. I asked several people a question I thought was fairly intelligent: Why didn't everyone wait for nicer weather to run the rivers? I guess the question wasn't as intelligent as I thought judging by the looks I got. What I was told was that there usually wasn't enough water in the rivers in summer. My next question: Where did the water go? That began my lessons on 1) trees drinking in nicer weather and 2) dam controlled rivers. My education continued at indoor roll sessions, which eventually made up a large part of my social life.

I met my current husband at one of these roll sessions and he introduced me to the Gauley Festival in West Virginia that fall. He was a member of American Whitewater and a major volunteer at the festival. So, of course, I offered to volunteer right along with him. By this time, I felt that people who boated were some of the luckiest people alive. To be able to use rivers as my hiking path into places where most non-boaters probably would never set foot was incredible. To be able to see remarkable scenery, marvelous creatures, eye-catching plants and flowers and all this while paddling with a group of friends who very shortly seemed like family was an unbelievable pleasure. And the challenge and success of running a rapid while paddling my own boat built my confidence both on and off the river.

Due to a fortunate coincidence, my husband had an incredible need to share his knowledge, both on and off the river. So I got on-the-river tutoring on the elements of river running (sometimes whether I

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wanted it or not) and in-house tutoring on the role that American Whitewater played in the sport I was now hooked on. One of the topics my husband would talk about was the leading role that American Whitewater played in negotiating hydropower re-licensing contracts. I was stunned to find out that many of the contracts could be up to 40 years long. I was impressed that AW was (and of course still is) leading efforts across the country to re-water rivers previously dewatered by hydropower projects; not just for recreation but for the environment and the critters that live there.

I soon started taking a more active role in supporting American Whitewater. When I found out how many volunteers were needed to run the Gauley Festival, I began to increase the amount of volunteer time and effort I put into it. I was more than a little surprised when I realized what an "age challenged" female like me could accomplish. I began using e-mail to solicit other volunteers to help out at the event. This turned out to be rewarding in several ways. It was much easier for the staff to run the festival with a full complement of volunteers, I got to meet over a hundred great people every year and, from what they told me, the volunteers really enjoyed what they were doing. My husband and I soon ended up as the Volunteer

Coordinators for Gauley Fest ... AW's biggest event!

I still look forward to the Gauley Fest each fall, but have recently handed the volunteer coordination on to the next generation. However, I found other ways to support what is a very important organization to me. I had, from the beginning, been an American Whitewater member and after a few years I joined at the Ender Club level. Now I've made American Whitewater an even bigger part of my charitable giving. And still, I spend some time calling American Whitewater members and volunteers to thank them for donations of time and/or money and attend local paddling events to represent the organization. Staying in touch with AW members is very rewarding to me.

When I "run into" fellow boaters in an eddy somewhere, I challenge them to extend themselves as far as American Whitewater is concerned. No matter your age, the time you have to spend or your financial circumstances, you can find a way to increase your support and be an effective part of the mission of American Whitewater. You and I can help leave the world—and especially its whitewater rivers—better than we found them. It is always easy to trumpet the work of AW when taking a rest in an eddy on a river whose water is flowing due to the work AW does with incredible support from its members, volunteers, local paddling clubs and other organizations.

So I challenge you to increase your support of American Whitewater. If you are unsure how, you can contact me through AW and I'll be happy to explain. 

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.

This is the fourth year that Clif Bar makes possible the AW / Clif Bar Flowing Rivers grants. Paddling clubs must be current AW Affiliate Clubs to be eligible for these \$500 grants. Clubs across the country have embarked on many wonderful programs as a result of this program (See Nov/Dec 2005 AW Journal). Make sure your club is an AW Affiliate Club and encourage them to apply for this grant for a local project important to paddlers in your area.

AFFILIATE CLUBS, we want to know what you are doing. Send your events to us at craig@amwhitewater.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

Central CA Canoe Club (C4), Nevada City
Chico Paddle Heads, Chico
Gold Country Paddlers, Lotus
River Touring Section, Angeles Chapter
Sequoia Paddling Club, Windsor
Shasta Paddlers, Redding
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, San Jose

Colorado

Avid4Adventure Inc., Boulder
Colorado White Water Association, Englewood
Grand Canyon Priv. Boat. Assn, Englewood

FiBark Boat Races, Englewood
Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
Pueblo Paddlers, Pueblo West
Rocky Mountain Canoe Club, Englewood
University of Colorado Kayak Club, Boulder

Florida

Project Challenge Inc., Miami
North Florida Whitewater Assoc., Ocala

Georgia

Atlanta Whitewater Club, Atlanta
Georgia Canoeing Association, Atlanta
Georgia Tech Outdoor Recreation, Atlanta
Paddlers4Christ, Ellijay
Peachtree City Paddlers, Peachtree City

Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Assoc., Boise

Indiana

Ohio Valley Whitewater Club, Evansville

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Des Moines

Kansas

Kansas Whitewater Association, Mission

Kentucky

Bluegrass Whitewater Association, Lexington
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville
Bardstown Boaters, Frankfort

Maine

AMC/Maine Chapter, Portland

Maryland

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

Massachusetts

AMC Boston Chapter, Lunenburg

Minnesota

Boat Busters Anonymous, Stillwater

Missouri

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

Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

New Hampshire

Mitchell Paddles, Canaan
Ledyard Canoe Club, Hanover

New Jersey

The Paddling Bares, Milltown

New Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

New York

FLOW Paddlers Club, Rochester
Housatonic Canoe & Kayak Squad, Ossining
Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia
Whitewater Challengers, Old Forge
Zoar Valley Paddling Club, Dunkirk
KCCNY, New York

N. Carolina

Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh
Dixie Division of ACA, Tuxedo
Mecklenburg Regional Paddlers, Indian Trail
Warren Wilson College, Asheville
Western Carolina Paddlers, Asheville

Ohio

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

Oregon

Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland
Oregon Whitewater Association, Beaverton
Pacific Outback, Forest Grove
Willamette Kayak and Canoe Club, Corvallis
Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland

Pennsylvania

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Sugarloaf
Bens Creek Canoe Club, Johnstown
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Mechanicsburg
Conewago Canoe Club, York
Holtwood Hooligans, Lititz
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley
Philadelphia Canoe Club, Philadelphia
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Pittsburgh
Pine Creek Valley Whitewater Association, Jersey Shore

S. Carolina

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

Tennessee

Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts, Gray
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville

Eastman Hiking and Canoeing, Kingsport
E. Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge
Memphis Whitewater, Memphis
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga
University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville

Texas

Bayou Whitewater Club, Houston
paddletexas.com, San Antonio

Utah

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

Vermont

Vermont Paddlers Club, Jericho

Virginia

Blue Ridge Voyageurs, Reston
Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynch Station
Canoe Cruisers Association, Arlington
Coastal Canoeists, Richmond
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Roanoke
FORVA, Roanoke
Richmond Whitewater Club, Mechanicsville

Washington

Outdoor Adventure Club, Redmond
Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle
Spokane Canoe & Kayak Club, Spokane
University Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Recreation River Runners, Renton
Whitman College Whitewater Club, Walla Walla

West Virginia

West VA Wildwater Assoc., S. Charleston
Friends of the Cheat, Kingwood

Wisconsin

Badger State Boating Society, Waukesha
Hoofers Outing Club, Madison
Pure Water Paddlers, Eau Claire
River Alliance of Wisconsin, Madison
Sierra Club / John Muir Chapter, LaCrosse

Wyoming

Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson Hole

Canada, British Columbia

Vancouver Kayak Club, Vancouver

Canada, Ontario

Madawaska Kanu Camp Inc., Ottawa

Discounted AW Memberships for Affiliate Club Members

*by Carla Miner
Membership Coordinator*

In the recent past, AW has been offering discounted AW memberships to whitewater enthusiasts who are also members of one of AW's Affiliate Clubs.

We now have the ability to offer this discounted membership online! For each club, AW will create a unique URL that will automatically offer the discounted membership and/or we will provide a coupon code that is specific to your club that will allow individuals to receive the discount on the normal AW Membership Page.

Both options work equally well and help make life easier for members of your club.

Several clubs have already set up the program and their members are enjoying the benefits of joining AW for only \$25!

If you are interested in learning more about this program, please contact me and I would be happy to help your club set up this program. I can be reached at: 866-BOAT-4AW or membership@amwhitewater.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 a spot in the AW 2005 River Stewardship Institute.

For more information,
contact Carla Miner at
membership@amwhitewater.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.

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Trip Jennings, Team NRS, on the Tule near Paines, Ohio. ©Alex Hertz



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