



AMERICAN WHITEWATER

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BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS
March/April 2009

**Conversing With the River:
One Paddler's Big Thoughts
on the Grand**

**A Novelist's Story:
The Purely Non-fiction
Account of Learning
to Kayak**



RECLAIMING THE
ROGUE

A River's Revival



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AMERICAN WHITewater

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

American Whitewater Journal

March/April 2009 - Volume #49 - Issue #2

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By Bill Cross

After 15 years of planning and organizing, the Rogue River National Monument is finally a reality. The monument, which covers 100,000 acres in the heart of the Rogue River watershed, will protect some of the most beautiful and diverse ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. The monument will also provide a framework for the future management of the river and its watershed.

The Rogue River National Monument is a testament to the power of grassroots conservation. It is the result of the tireless efforts of a coalition of conservationists, including the Rogue River National Monument Coalition, the Rogue River National Monument Foundation, and the Rogue River National Monument Advisory Board. The monument will be managed by the U.S. Forest Service, in partnership with the Rogue River National Monument Foundation and the Rogue River National Monument Advisory Board.

The monument will protect a wide variety of ecosystems, including old-growth forests, riparian habitats, and high-altitude alpine environments. It will also provide a framework for the future management of the river and its watershed, ensuring that the river remains a source of inspiration and recreation for generations to come.

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River Voices



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Support American Whitewater through CFC or United Way

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

Dennis Debey just below the put-in for the Mill Creek run of the North Fork Rogue Mill Creek Falls in the background photo by Bill Cross



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Purpose American Whitewater

River Stewardship: An Integrated Approach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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The Journey Ahead

Thanks to your membership support and year-end donations, 2008 was another outstanding year for American Whitewater and our River Stewardship Program. Even in a climate of economic uncertainty, our year was filled with stewardship success stories as well as steady progress on long-term projects.

Looking forward to 2009, we have some significant initiatives lined up:

- We are hitting the ground running with a new administration in Washington, DC. Expect big things this year to potentially include Wild and Scenic River designations, protection of roadless areas, advances in clean water protection, and new funding for federal agencies.
- We are working hard to protect flows in Colorado's Yampa, Dolores, and Upper Colorado rivers, and we are hoping to reach agreements this year that will lock in protections.
- We are in tough negotiations over flows on the McCloud (CA), Yuba (CA), Sultan (WA), Bear (ID), and many others. Also, work continues to protect flows on the Tuckasegee (NC), Lehigh (PA), Feather (CA), and other rivers.
- Our work to bring nationally consistent river management to the Upper Chattooga River is set to heat up when the Forest Service releases their final decision in April and we will be playing a leadership role in river management nationwide.

Your membership and contributions are extremely important to AW and help to support our core river stewardship work. While membership dues are critically necessary, member donations 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, new boaters, old friends, and even from non-paddlers who chose to support our stewardship efforts because they value the aesthetic nature of rivers.

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.

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

American Whitewater has a great story to tell right now. Our stewardship projects are making a real difference to rivers and local communities, while providing flows for boating and habitat. If you are reading this publication and you are not a member, please consider supporting this work. If you are a member, thanks for your support, pass this issue on to a friend and let them know what we are doing. There has never been a better time to support American Whitewater!

See you on the river,



PS - thanks very much to all of you who contributed to make AW's December financial 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.

President's Message

As winter starts to melt into spring it will again be time in much of the country to put up the skis and other winter toys and pull out the boating gear for yet another season. This is a wonderful time of year to be a boater as spring rains and snowmelt fill our rivers and streams. I hope you have a great 2009 boating season.

It is late January as I write this letter and it has been an historical month. We find ourselves in uncertain times and change is in the air. One thing that has not changed unfortunately is the need to remain vigilant in our river stewardship efforts. Some think these efforts will be made easier with the new Administration. I am not so sure. When the reality of hard economic choices forces tough decisions we must work even harder to make sure our cherished rivers and wild places don't get the short end of the economic stimulus stick. Rest assured that AW's stewardship staff and our allies in the Outdoor Alliance

are doing just that.

AW's ability to succeed in our river stewardship efforts is totally dependant on our financial stewardship. The good news is that AW's work over the last several years to shore up our financial position has us on a solid foundation. The even better news is that despite the economic turbulence you all came through for AW financially in a big way in December. Your generosity at the end of 2008 was a pleasant surprise given the glut of gloomy economic news. While many were unable to give quite as much as they have in the past you still gave. On behalf of the Board of Directors and Staff we thank you all for your support.

No doubt we will have many economic challenges ahead and your continued support will be critical to AW's ability to continue our mission to conserve and protect American's Whitewater resources

and enhance the opportunities to enjoy them safely. The good news is that for now we are strong; and these days we all need a little good news.

See You on the River,



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Stewardship Updates

By Kevin Colburn

Bear River Releases Ready for Year Two (ID)

In 2008 paddlers got treated to the first year of recreational releases on Southeastern Idaho's incredible Bear River. This year there will be four scheduled releases (April 12, April 25, May 31, and July 12) and up to 12 additional releases based on inflows at the dam. 2009 marks the second of three years of intense study on the Bear. The releases are being carefully monitored for their effects on water quality, algae, aquatic insects, fish, and waterfowl. American Whitewater staff and volunteers are attending regular full-day meetings to discuss and plan this monitoring and will ultimately work with stakeholders to maximize environmental benefits of the releases and minimize any potential impacts. Have fun and be safe out there!

Finances for Holtwood Expansion Project Evaporate (PA)

Shortly after our last deadline for American Whitewater we received news that the proposed addition of generators to Holtwood Dam, on the Susquehanna River, fell through. The apparent reason for this unexpected turn of events was the widespread financial difficulties impacting our nation. American Whitewater had spent over two years working closely with local paddlers and affiliate clubs to negotiate an agreement with the dam owner that would have protected the rapids below the dam and mitigated the planned loss of flows by constructing two waves below the generators. Now that agreement has been cancelled, and no immediate changes are expected at Holtwood. Very shortly however, the dam must undergo relicensing, and it is possible that the concept of adding generation capacity to the dam will resurface, which could restart negotiations. AW intends to fully participate in the relicensing along with our local partners.

AW in Sullivan Creek Talks (WA)

American Whitewater staff and volunteers are involved in monthly settlement talks with regional stakeholders and the owner of two dams in the Sullivan Creek watershed, located in far northeastern Washington. The FERC license for the dams and their long-defunct powerhouse is being surrendered and AW has an interest in seeing the dam on Sullivan Creek removed and the other dam, which is on the outlet of Sullivan Lake, responsibly managed. We are working with local volunteers and partner organizations to bring a sensible end to these hundred-year-old dams.

AW to Give Chattooga Presentation at River Management Society Conference

AW National Stewardship Director Kevin Colburn is slated to participate in a panel discussion at the 2009 River Management Society Interagency Meeting in the Yosemite Valley this March. The focus of the session will be user capacity issues, and AW will be using the Chattooga River as a case study. Our presentation will be a cautionary tale titled "Creating Competition, Conflict, and Catastrophe with Carrying Capacities. (and hopefully how not to)." The audience will be river managers, mostly at federal agencies, from across the country. We feel that the Chattooga is a great example of how not to manage rivers (and people), and hope to show how specific management errors have caused avoidable conflicts, delays, and excessive expenses.

Boaters Rally for Lehigh Meeting (PA)

In January of this year the Army Corps of Engineers hosted a meeting regarding the management of the Lehigh River. The meeting was very well attended by paddlers, which sent a strong message that paddlers care about the Lehigh. At issue is how much of the water in the reservoir should be used for boating releases, and alternately, how much should be used to increase base flows for stocked trout. AW is working with local clubs and outfitters to support a balanced approach that protects existing boating opportunities. We would like to thank all the paddlers who made it to the meeting!

Colorado Updates

By Nathan Fey

Dolores River

At the close of 2008, American Whitewater and various stakeholders formed a Working Group in the Lower Dolores River Valley to update the 1990 US Bureau of Land Management's Lower Dolores River Management Plan. The Working Group, which is organized by the Dolores River Dialogue (DRD), hopes to develop and evaluate alternatives to Wild and Scenic River designation on the Dolores below McPhee Dam, that can protect existing water rights and contractual obligations, while supporting the "Outstandingly Remarkable Values" that make the lower Dolores River suitable for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

The Dolores River was studied for Wild and Scenic River Suitability in the 1970s and again in 2007 under the San Juan Public Lands Management Plan Revisions. The river provides outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, historical, cultural, geological, and fish and wildlife values throughout its length. Below McPhee Dam, the Dolores River meets eligibility criteria as a Recreational or Scenic river under the Act. This includes a portion within the citizen-proposed Snaggletooth Wilderness, and includes the most dramatic whitewater recreation segment. Further downstream, within the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area, the Dolores meets eligibility criteria as a wild river. The river above McPhee Reservoir is free-flowing with the exception of several minor irrigation diversions. The outstandingly remarkable scenic values of the river have been recognized through the designation of the San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway, which parallels the river for most of its length.

Following the Stakeholder Process, there will be a formal Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice for adoption of the update of the 1990 Corridor Management Plan. This additional effort will be



DRD General Study Area

organized by the DRD in cooperation with the Dolores Public Lands Office of the San Juan Public Lands Center which manages land and recreation for BLM and National Forest Lands along the Dolores River from its headwaters on Lizard Head Pass to McPhee Reservoir, and from McPhee Reservoir to eight miles below the confluence of the San Miguel and Dolores Rivers.

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Stewardship Updates

Yampa River

More gloomy news for Colorado's Yampa River. Early this year, Shell Oil Company announced it has filed on the right to divert 8% of peak spring flows out of the mighty Yampa River, and then using it to extract fossil fuels from Western Colorado Oil Shale. This 375 cfs water right becomes one of the more substantial water rights Shell has accumulated across Western Colorado. Shell plans to remove 750 acre-feet of water each day from the river system and store it in a new reservoir near Maybell, with the potential for additional future withdrawals.

The Yampa flow between April and June averages 4,740 cfs at the town of Maybell, which is just above the proposed Shell intake, according to U.S. Geological Survey data. The average flow drops to 368 cfs by July.

Shell's move on the Yampa stems from the need to amass enough water rights to support future development of the oil shale industry. Shell's water rights, if granted, are likely to be conditional — any decision to develop a reservoir on a tributary of the Yampa, for example, is

at least a decade away. And the day when firm water supplies would actually be pumped out of the river is several more years out.

Shell's pursuit of Yampa water rights underscores the growing competition in the state for water, particularly in the water-wealthy Yampa River Basin. Two years ago, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District proposed building a \$4 billion pipeline to siphon water from the Yampa River hundreds of miles east and across the Continental Divide, to Colorado's Front Range.

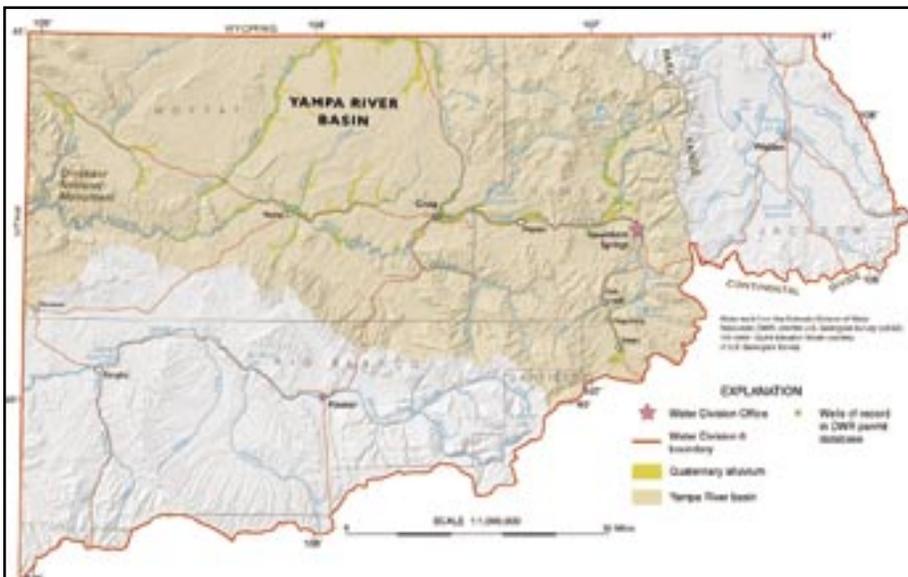
Green River

Downstream of the Flaming Gorge Dam and Reservoir in southwestern Wyoming, the Green River flows through Ladore Canyons and Dinosaur National Monument where it joins the iconic Yampa River. Just above Flaming Gorge, the Green is being studied as a potential source of new water supplies for Colorado's Front Range. And the proposal continues to move forward despite objections from state agencies, private landowners, and conservation and public interest groups.

The Army Corps of Engineers announced last month that it is preparing to conduct an environmental impact statement

(EIS) for the Regional Watershed Supply Project, a.k.a. Flaming Gorge Pumpback, proposed by Aaron Million. A notice of intent to prepare the EIS is expected to appear in the Federal Register in early January, according to the agency's Omaha District. Million's company, the Million Conservation Resource Group, will be responsible for paying for the studies needed for the EIS, which is expected to be completed in 2011. The Flaming Gorge Pumpback is being proposed as a regional opportunity to use water from a major tributary of Colorado River to mitigate the affects from, and issues around, growth along Colorado's Front Range. Cities are buying up and drying up agricultural lands, and instream flows are threatened as rivers up and down the Rocky Mountains are dammed and diverted. Proponents of the Flaming Gorge Pumpback have promised a regional solution by moving water out of Wyoming's Green River at

The Yampa River



Flaming Gorge Dam, and sending it along the Interstate-80 corridor to Fort Collins, CO and south to the Denver Metro Area.

Proponents of the project filed on the right to divert water in Wyoming, out of the Upper Colorado Basin in December 2007. In addition, Million has entered into negotiations for a supply contract with the US Bureau of Reclamation to buy water directly out of Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The proposed pipeline could supply Colorado with 165,000-250,000 acre-feet of water annually, equal to the annual flow of the Arkansas River as it leaves Colorado.

AW and its conservation partners in Colorado are working to outline a reasonable alternative to this type of project, one that would apply to the Yampa Pumpback or other large transbasin diversions too.



Above: The Yampa River

Below: The Lower Dolores

Photos by Nathan Fey



Stewardship Updates

Learning to Love the Pit

By Laura Wisland

For years I have explored California by tracing the blue lines on the map to rocky beaches and sandy flats that are perfectly suited for a day of swimming, wading, or peacefully floating down the river. While seeking out these tranquil river refuges, I have discovered places I will always treasure. But on river trips with friends, while I happily bumped down the channel in my inflatable kayak, I secretly longed to join my friends who were weaving in and out of the rapids in their hardshells, looking like human ducks using the river for transportation as naturally as anyone else would use a road or trail.

At first, the thought of learning to how to kayak intimidated me. How was I ever to fit my legs into that small boat? What would I do with all that weird and uncomfortable looking gear? Kayaking is not the sort of sport you just pick up on a whim, and I owe everything to a small group of enthusiastic and very supportive group of friends who consistently asked me on weekend boating trips and were extremely generous with their gear. Once I committed to a weekend camping on the Pit River upstream of a Class II/III section that is perfect for beginner boaters, I knew I would have to face the last obstacle that stood before me and afternoons playing on the water—the Eskimo roll.

In my opinion, there is no good way for someone to explain, while sitting on land, how to roll a kayak—you just have to get in the water and try it for yourself. Although the roll is not the most intuitive move, I was gradually able to train my muscles to tuck and snap my way up out of the water, though I knew the clear, warm water of the pool in which I learned would be very different from the real experience on the river.

No pool session would prepare me for the exhilaration I felt that first afternoon on the water. I met a group of friends who had gathered on a July weekend to take advantage of the whitewater flow releases that now happen once a month throughout the summer as part of the FERC license. It seemed like everyone there was a member of AW. People were friendly and respectful of their surroundings. As a newcomer to the sport, I was relieved to observe that the campground had attracted a crowd that ranged widely in terms of age, skills, and experience. This allowed me to meet fellow novices who were cutting their teeth on the lower Class II/III section, as well as pick up tips (on the land) from the more seasoned boaters who were looking forward to running the waterfall on the upper Class IV section. At night, the campsite transformed into a jolly congregation of folks sharing food, stories, and an appreciation for rivers around the world.

The most popular reach to boat that weekend was the upper Class IV section. Flows are normally diverted around this reach for hydropower production, but AW's participation in the FERC licensing has yielded a commitment to release water

for one weekend a month throughout the summer. My kayaking skills cannot yet handle Class IV water, but I was able to explore the canyon on a raft. The reach is better suited for a kayak, but with a little courage and some tricky maneuvering, we made it down in one piece. It was a memorable day, not only because of the beautiful surroundings, but because I had found a place to meet and socialize with many welcoming and enthusiastic people who were in love with rivers just as much as I am.

After rafting the upper section I was nervous and excited to get on the water in my kayak. The lower section is perfect for a newbie such as myself and after donning my skirt, pfd, and stylish red helmet, I pushed out into the river with my posse of friends. For the first few rapids, I was focused on nothing besides making sure my boat did not flip. Once I realized that I was surrounded by a supportive group of people who would help me back into my boat if I did happen to swim, I relaxed into the experience and began to look around. The first thing I noticed about being in a hardshell was how much more intimate I was with my surroundings. Instead of paddling on the water, I was



Laura Wisland and Lindsey Fransen the Upper Pit

photos by Dave Steindorf

paddling through it and experiencing its channels, banks, and inhabitants eye to eye in a way that I have never experienced. The rhythm of paddling and soft sound of rushing water checked my adrenaline and helped me tune into how the currents were making my boat behave. Instead of fighting the water, I was working with it. I was still scared of what would happen when I did flip, but when I was finally baptized on the second day of that Pit River weekend, I realized that as long as I did not panic and kept focus on where I was and where my gear was, I would back in my boat in no time.

A couple of trips to the Pit last summer simply whet my appetite and I can't wait for the water to turn a little warmer this year. If impatience gets the best of me, I may just have to buck up and invest in a decent drytop. I've been back in the pool a few times and it's hilarious how happy the smell of wet neoprene makes me. The best part of learning to kayak is how much

more open the world seems. Granted, I need to stick to mellow water for the time being, but I feel like a whole new network of watery trails have appeared and I am eager to explore new areas that are only accessible by water. Perhaps most of all, I am proud of myself for pushing aside the mystery and intimidation I used to feel when I looked at a bunch of kayak gear and thought about learning to roll. When I finally took my friend's advice and took a roll clinic, I realized that I am not so different than most of the other folks who love the sport. The kayakers who I have spent time with are not endowed with super-human amounts of athleticism or courage and they are not daredevils. They have common sense and like being dry and warm just as the next human. But like me, they can simply think of no better way to spend the day than watching the world go by, eye to eye with your surroundings, as you float downstream.

The Pit River has recreational releases one weekend a month June July and August. The run from Fall River Mills to the Pit 1 Powerhouse is a great Class III /IV section that includes the Pit River Falls. The run from the Pit 1 Powerhouse to Highway 299 is a Class II run that is great for beginners and it flows every day. Check out the AW website release calendar for release dates and flows.

Laura Wisland is the former Director of the California Hydropower Reform Coalition and currently works for the Union of Concerned Scientist as an energy policy analyst.

Laura Wisland, Victoria Steindorf, and Amanda Petrack-Zunich enjoying the lower Pit 1 reach

photos by Lance Petrack-Zunich



Stewardship Updates

Paddlers Play Major Role in New River Protections

As this issue goes to press, we are still pushing hard to get the Omnibus Public Land Bill to the finish line. This bill includes dozens of local and regional proposals for protecting vital lands and rivers, and behind a number of those proposals are paddlers. From West Virginia to Washington, paddlers fought hard for river protections both behind the scenes and out in front. Two of these paddlers have been (and remain) vital parts of the American Whitewater community. We reached out to these guys to ask them a few questions about their role in the two largest Wild and Scenic River packages in the Omnibus Lands Bill. Bill Sedivy, Executive Director of Idaho Rivers United, and past AW board member, shared his thoughts on protecting the stunning canyons of Southwestern Idaho. Aaron Pruzan, AW board member and owner of Rendezvous River Sports filled us in on protecting the Headwaters of the Snake River in Wyoming. We would like to thank

Bill, Aaron, and the countless others who made these landmark river conservation achievements possible!

Aaron Pruzan on Protecting the Headwaters of the Snake River

1. Why did you work so hard to protect these rivers? What do you feel is most valuable about them?

“The Snake River and its tributaries in Wyoming are the best of the best of river systems left in the lower 48. The water quality, health of the native fishery, health of the riparian habitat for moose, bear, elk, deer, otters, beaver, eagles, osprey, pelicans and more is unequalled outside of Alaska. These rivers are some of the main arteries of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and have some great whitewater as well. I work and recreate on these rivers on an almost daily basis every summer. It was only natural that, when first approached about the possibility of Wild & Scenic designation, I would become involved.”

2. How long have you been working on the initiative, and what was your role?

“The underground start of the campaign began in 2003. I was at the first organizational meeting and because of my literal immersion in the river, river issues and being a local business owner, was asked to be a spokesman for the campaign. I was flattered to help announce the kick-off of the public campaign in 2005, alongside Derek Craighead, whose father & uncle wrote most of the Wild & Scenic Act and Frank Ewing one of the early Snake River outfitters. As the campaign moved forward I presented it to the local and regional community on a few occasions, helped organize board meetings and hire a campaign director. Later, I took members of the congressional staff down the Snake to show them how special the Snake is and also how important it is to the economy of the area. Following the tragic

Paddlers enjoying the Snake River

Photo by Aaron Pruzan





Kayaker Ty Bequette of Boise, on the Bruneau

Photo by Skip Armstrong

Stewardship Updates

loss of Senator Craig Thomas, I spoke with Senator Barrasso on a few occasions to make sure that he didn't let the bill die. He didn't, and now we are looking forward to the realization of the Craig Thomas Snake River Legacy Act – which protects nearly 400 miles of rivers and streams in Northwest Wyoming.”

3. Is there a river or place that is protected through this legislation that is especially important to you?

“There are so many amazing places. The Gros Ventre—an outstanding Class IV run that is just north of town, the wilderness of the Upper South Fork of the Buffalo, and of course the Snake itself which has

everything from Class I to IV, dozens of play spots, great access and a season that only ends because the skiing is too good.”

4. Anything else you would like to share?

“I'm really happy this campaign was a success and it was incredibly enjoyable to work on. Before we ever went public with our efforts we had a broad coalition of outfitters, fisherman, rafters, hunters, kayakers and local business people. Republican, Democrat, Libertarian or Independent—it didn't matter—everyone could agree that they like clean water, lots of fish and that a healthy river perpetuates a strong local economy. I'm looking forward to the completion of the campaign, a little celebration and to helping create a management plan for the new Wild & Scenic rivers that brings together all the people and entities

involved to help preserve this resource long into the future.”

For more info visit: <http://snakeheadwaters.org/>

Bill Sedivy in Costa Rica



Bill Sedivy on Protecting the Owyhee, Bruneau and Jarbidge Watersheds

1. Why did you work so hard to protect these rivers? What do you feel is most valuable about them?

“The rivers of the Owyhee Canyonlands are incredibly wild and unique among the rivers of America. They include the largest concentrations of sheer-walled rhyolite/basalt canyon systems in the U.S. They are also home to diverse fish and wildlife, including the world’s largest population of California bighorn sheep, sage grouse, and red band trout. They deserve to be protected for future generations.”

2. How long have you been working on the initiative, and what was your role?

“I’ve been working on this initiative for eight years now. At first, Idaho Rivers United was one of few voices seeking consideration of river protections through the process. Eventually, they gave me a seat on the collaborative work group that hammered out a final, local agreement and the bill.

At the end of the day a lot of great people worked to make this happen—other conservationists, ranchers, county officials and folks like the people at American Rivers and the American Whitewater staff. I guess I was the main river rat on the ground.”

3. Is there a river or place that is protected through this legislation that is especially important to you?

The Bruneau River is incredible...high cliffs, not many people because it’s tough to get to, and at higher flows it’s got some great whitewater.

The East Fork of the Owyhee is also spectacular, incredible scenery, but with a lot of flat water and a couple of Class V portages, at least for an old guy. I did an 8-day canoe trip out there a couple of years ago and didn’t see another soul.”

4. Anything else you would like to share?

“This is one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever worked on in my life. I’ve made some great friends through this process from groups and backgrounds I never would have thought I’d mix with.

I really appreciate the work of Senator Mike Crapo and his staff, and, all the ranchers and community leaders from Owyhee County who wanted to get this bill done as much as I did.”

For more info visit: <http://www.idahorivers.org/>

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River Voices

Conversing With the River

By Don Lago

One of the best things about kayaking the Colorado River is that when your fellow voyagers prove unable to disengage themselves from their normal lives, when they insist upon ignoring the canyon and chatting for hours about sports, Wall Street, computers, or movies, you can drift out of earshot and listen to the river speaking of deeper things.

A kayak offers a wonderful intimacy with the river. You sit inside the river, becoming a river centaur, human from the waist up and a river from there down. Only by thus melding with the river can you fully experience its strength and its beauty.

In my kayak I can easily reach my hands into the river and feel its pulse. I can watch the subtlest swirls on the surface, and see pebble shadows below. I can smell the river's various scents, especially when the river splashes into my face. Yet my keenest sense for experiencing the river is the boat itself. Since whitewater kayaks are designed to spin easily, my kayak reacts to currents I never even noticed and begins to spin, sometimes just a bit, sometimes until I am pointing back upstream, and then, slowly, with many starts and hesitations, the river spins me to face downstream again, spins me like a compass needle aligning itself with vast invisible forces.

The river is constantly forming swirls large and small, and in these lines of water wiggling like handwriting, the river is telling many stories, if only humans could read the river's language.

This swirl is saying that the sandbar four feet down has just shifted, opening a momentary vortex in the river, which the river quickly erases, except that now the flow pattern above the sandbar is different than before. And an hour from now, it will be different again. This swirl is part of the

vast flowing of sand by which the hourglass canyon counts off the ages. This sand was once part of a thousand mountains and mesas, but they had yielded to the greater strength of water, which was carrying them helplessly away and building small sand mountains in practice for laying in the ocean the sandstone ribs of future mountain ranges. As this swirl tugs very gently on my boat, it is sand, it is melting mountains and mesas, it is the law of entropy and the massive creativity of the earth that is turning me, returning me to the readily forgotten recognition that if mountains cannot withstand the flow of time, then humans are an even briefer swirl upon its surface.

Another swirl is saying that for a thousand years a boulder has lain in the river and carved up the current. Right now the river is high enough that the boulder only bulges the surface, yet when the river drops, the current crashes into the boulder and sprays over it or pushes around it, leaving a long comet tail of swirls. These swirls say that, however ultimately strong the river may be, for now the river will have to obey the will of rock, not just of boulders but of the canyon walls that steer the river's every turn. And so must I. Much of my route is a mapping out of the matrix of fault lines and of sedimentary strengths and weaknesses of eons ago.

Just within my view there are hundreds of swirls, sparkling as they move, and over the length of the river there are many millions, some of them too feeble to spin a leaf, others strong enough to trap a raft, all of them subtly linked like interconnected gears, like an Escher puzzle. The swirl in front of me is distinctly different because the swirl upstream spun one way and not another; it's a molecule different because a mile upstream a big horn sheep filled her thirst, or because a hundred miles upstream a waterfall broke out and added volume to the river. If only I could read the river's language, I could read of thousands of events small and large, near and distant.

I could see last winter's snow falling in the Rockies, and last century's floods altering the river channel. I could see all the events that went into the carving of the canyon. I could see the twists of evolution that created one form of marine fossils and not another, one form of limestone and not a softer or harder form. And to this dialogue on fate I add my own voice, my own tongue in the form of a kayak blade, gulping words the river never heard until recently, words that will linger inscrutably for miles, or days, or more.

When the river spins my boat to face back upstream, sometimes the boat will re-lock itself into the current and stay pointed upstream for awhile. Floating down the river backwards can be disconcerting when your boat suddenly wobbles on a riffle or an eddy line you didn't notice. Yet it is also quite appropriate for the Colorado River to point you towards where you came from, for this is the vision that no other river can offer so well, a vision of the geological and biological past out of which humans came. The canyon walls give manifest form to the enormity of time. They display the patient gathering of sand grains and silt and calcium shells over hundreds of millions of years. They display the massive pushing of tectonic plates, which lifted the land high, and the quiet falling of raindrops, which carved the land away. They display the steady flowing of life through the eons. The black schist at the canyon bottom, nearly two billion years old, remembers life's long infancy, and the layers above record how life's primitive metabolism strengthened into the steadfast heartbeat that became my own. The fossil shells in the rock would go on to become the shell of my kayak, a shell sculpted for its own ecological role, its bringing to this canyon of unread memory a tongue which could finally proclaim life's recognition of its long wondrous journey.

It's no wonder that my kayak loves to spin and drift, for drifting is anciently rooted in its essence. The Greek word for drifting

is planktos, from which comes the word plankton, for the marine plants that drift freely with the currents and the wind. My kayak was made out of plankton that lived and died 100 million years ago, but which had not forgotten how to drift. This plankton had piled up on continental shelves and was buried so far from the light that it turned the color of darkness. Then one day it was resurrected to make cars drift down highways, and it was also molded into plastic shapes like kayaks. In the carbon of its hydrocarbons, my kayak still remembers the biochemical promise it had made 100 million years ago, the promise to defend life against the formless chaos of the sea, and thus it is defending me now against the river's chaos. After eons of drifting through underground strata, my kayak belonged here in the depths of the earth.

My kayak also makes it easier for me to meet the life of the present, for wildlife seems less intimidated by a lone quiet kayaker, his hands safely preoccupied, than by a raft full of people and noise and strange objects. I can sneak through eddies and get close to a big horn sheep, a heron, or a beaver before they notice me, yet even when they see me coming, they seem less concerned, and perhaps they are even curious about this creature who, between boat, helmet, and paddling clothes, is not so obviously human. I've had more than one friendly staring contest with a big horn sheep, who would never allow me to come so close on land. Sometimes fish swim alongside me as if I'm a fellow fish.

Feeling my fellowship with the desert sun, I unseal my boat and reach for my water bottle, and just as I raise the bottle in front of me, the boat wobbles slightly. The water inside the bottle feels this wobble, but mostly it shows its loyalty to the river, trying to match the river's equilibrium. This water should be loyal to the river, for it is Colorado River water filtered from the river. I hold the Colorado River to my lips and pour it into me, and the river washes

away my thirst and flows throughout me. Only on a river trip as long as the Grand Canyon do you spend enough time on a river that, as you drink from nowhere but the river day after day, the portion of river water in your body grows larger every day until a majority of your weight is the river itself. Now it's the Colorado River itself that is sweating from my pores, seeking to return to its real self. Now it's the power of the Colorado River that is powering my arms and my boat. Now it's the rapids that are running the rapids. The red river is flowing even redder through my veins. The clear river is forming in my eyes a reflection far clearer than any it ever mirrored on its surface. And in my brain, in the canyons of human lobes, a river that had flowed obliviously for millions of years can now recognize itself, its primordial power and beauty, its massive sculptural work.

The same power that sculpted the canyon walls is now sculpting me. Every time I reach my paddle into the water and sculpt it into a bulge and a wave, the river reaches into my body and sculpts my muscles, implanting its strength in me, at least in the long run. In the course of a day, the river drains my strength. With every stroke I feel the river resisting my paddle, even in calm water, and in stronger currents the river grips my paddle and wrestles me for control. I wrestle with the power that had carved away a mile of rock. I feel

the tectonic power that had lifted up the Rocky Mountains and created the Gulf of California. I weigh the tectonic clouds that lifted billions of tons of seawater to the mountaintops, and I feel all the cascades and waterfalls pouring off the mountains. At the end of the trip when I lifted my kayak out of the river, perhaps I would notice that my arms were stronger than at the start. My kayak was being lifted now by the very waves that had lifted it in Hermit Rapid and Lava Falls, waves still flexing in my arms and not soon to be flattened. The Colorado River would propel my boat even on a calm lake weeks hence. The Colorado River would lift grocery bags containing California lettuce containing curls of the very water that had curled in Horn Creek. The Colorado River would propel my pen down this whitewater page.

My wooden paddle also bears the marks of flowing water. My paddle had been trees in some Appalachian hollow, soaking up water that was trying to become creek water and river water but which instead was summoned into a river flowing into the sky, into a delta of green leaves. My paddle still shows the annual growth rings of the trees, a strata of time and deposition just like the canyon's. Through this wood had flowed a river not just of water but of sunlight and earth, and life had transformed those elements into the strongest of cells, cells that could support tons of weight, and which supported

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The advertisement features a background image of two kayakers in a turbulent river. In the foreground, there are several pieces of gear, including a kayak and several dry bags. The text is overlaid on the image in various fonts and sizes, providing contact information and product details.

River Voices

me now. Thus my intercessor with the Colorado is wood that understands and loves both water and life. Limbs that had flexed through a hurricane now felt the storm surges of the Colorado River and flexed but would not break. The tree limbs become my own limbs, and I feel a strength that is not my own and not the river's, a strength I might mistake, when at the bottom of a rapid I glanced at the sensuous golden wood grain gleaming with river water, for mere beauty, the way you might see in a golden Redwall sunset only beauty and not the deep strength of fossil shells.

At each rapid, my conversation with the river changes tone. The river speaks to me more forcefully, tells me that it is breaking my centaur unity with the river, tells me to obey its hydrological authority. With my paddle I now speak more forcefully to the river. We are no longer speaking the same language. The river is speaking of chaos, but I am speaking of order, of the deep, layer-upon-layer biological order of cells and organs and muscles and consciousness, all of which demand the breath the river is ready to deny.

I feel the current accelerating and drop into the long turbulence. The river yells at me that it doesn't care about my life. It yells hard statistics about gravity and volume and the chaotic arrangement of boulders. It yells, if I am hearing correctly, about the people who have drowned in this river. I yell back that I understand the river. I understand the push of this current; I understand the strength of the wave that is about to hit me; I understand the true nature of what appears to be a wave. I yell that there's a pattern in the chaotic arrangement of boulders. I tell the river about human biology, about the acuity of human vision and judgment, the quick reflexes of human balance, the accurate workings of torso and shoulders and arms and wrists to constantly reshape my body and efforts to the shapes of the waves. I am loyally repeating the river's

every word about gravity and volume and boulders, yet I am translating them into the biological rosary that proclaims a greater loyalty. I teach the river of all that has happened on land since the raw waters of oceans and rivers shaped themselves into amphibians and sent wave after biological wave onto shore. Then the waves grow smaller, the current less frantic, and the currents in my own veins calm down also. The river turns back into a mirror in which I can see myself paddling along, framed by the canyon walls.

There is a deep beauty to boating down the Colorado River. This is not just the aesthetic beauty of great cliffs and glorious sunsets, which you could also see in photographs. This is the sensual beauty of being wrapped in cliffs radiating heat, of feeling the strong fresh waves in your shoulders and face, of feeling a wind a hundred miles old and loaded with desert scents, of holding the sunset in your hand. Yet there is even more to this beauty. This is the beauty not just of the senses but of presence, of actually being here is so glorious a place, here in the grip of so powerful a river, a river making an epic journey that had always been your own, an implacably real river and canyon that force you into awareness of being a body fully real.

This river mirror portrays humans more truly than do the bathroom mirrors in which we daily disguise ourselves in our work or social identities. The river beaches acknowledge only the identity of the universal human footprint. The river reveals in me the same depths of time and work that it has unearthed in the canyon rock. The river is willing for me to take some of its depth and beauty and intensity with me when I leave the river and let them flow through my life for a long time. In spite of our apparent differences, in spite of our occasional arguments about hydrology vs. biology, the river and I understand each other fairly well, for we both were summoned out of formlessness

to briefly have a shape and a journey, a journey back to the inarticulate sea.



Why I Missed the Cheat Race and How My Cousin Came Alive

by Carl William Schneider

Cousin Jenni's whitewater birth happened on a Friday in early May of 2008, the weekend of the Cheat Fest, West Virginia's finest river festival. Though smaller than the Gauley Fest, it far surpasses its larger brother, for the music that starts at three and flows on and on until midnight, ending in a massive bluegrass jam that is the culmination, in my mind, of the greatest the Mountaineer State has to offer in the way of the arts. It is also home to the largest race (in terms of participants) in the whitewater world, a race so large that when over 150 racers break the starting line en masse, a wake large enough to flip those in the back of the pack is created. Yes, the Cheat Race was the reason that I'd made sure to be in the Albright, WV vicinity early that weekend. It was this race that I was supposed to enter that was to start at five, I think. I think, because

I never made it to the start of the race, therefore the memory of the exact start time is rather vague in my mind.

For the purpose of Cousin Jenni's story, all that needs to be known is that we were at Cheatfest early and that I missed the start of the race, but arrived at the finish early, via another river. You could say I won the Big Sandy leg of the Cheat Race (albeit, as the only racer) and received for my efforts, the privilege of viewing one of the greatest feats in my small family's history and so this story is about rivers and wildness and family and how they all come together, if one is lucky and fortune prevails.

This story happened because at 1:30 I put on the Big Sandy in my little yellow and orange playboat. And as I prepared to do so, Cousin Jenni (my shuttle bunny) and I encountered paddling powerhouse Sambino of the should-be-famous Baltimore crew. He and said crew offered Cousin Jenni a spot in their raft. Now the Big Sandy flows into the Cheat, and at that point where the two rivers converge, boaters of both rivers take out there. Like

most take outs it has a name, Jenkinsburg, which is not what its name suggests. It is not a burg, or town, or even a hamlet, or anything of the sort. It may have been at one time; I would guess that most likely it was an old logging or mining camp. Today, however, it is a gravel parking lot with a steep narrow treacherous dirt road leading into it from the east and an old iron bridge with a metal grate for a floor leading out of it, over the Cheat River toward the west.

So why did I miss the Cheat Race? Well that's because Cousin Jenni was rafting the Big Sandy! For the first time! She sure did. First of all, at the time I didn't know anyone who'd rafted the Big Sandy before; it is not as if it is done all the time. So Cousin Jenni stood really tall that day in May. She was seemed stronger than usual. I enjoy thinking of how she held her head, titled back so that her chin was thrust forward towards the sky. Her thin neck poured its beautiful long length into an ever stronger, though always thin pair of shoulders, which she now held back with a proud rigidity, which nevertheless allowed for a fluidity due to her strengthened muscles—muscles that had been strengthened and honed from three weekends of raft guide training on the Class III Lower Youghiogheny.

Although I had noticed the physical change previously, the transformation of her spirit became evident to me when I realized that Sambino intended to run his yellow raft over 20-foot Wonder Falls. My heart surged with joy and hope and a tad bit of anxiety for his passenger, Cousin Jenni. When they got out to scout it, my heart pleaded that she would not fade and walk around it, but rise to the occasion. At first, she surely looked a bit hesitant, but with some encouragement, they were



Cousin Jenny dropping Wonder Falls in a big yellow raft

Photo by Mark Cooper

River Voices

back in that wonderful piece of galvanized rubber and charging the flume.

This 5'6" wonder at Wonder Falls who three weeks previously had never been in a boat was charging courageously into a rapid I have since seen other rafters and kayakers with much more experience portage. I loved seeing her sparkling silver helmet skim along the surface of the whitewater, while the rest of her was submerged in the foam wash out of the rapid created by thousands of gallons of water pouring over an abrupt ledge.

We continued on to Zoom Flume without incident. The sun would occasionally poke out from behind the chilled overcast sky, warming my face. They ran the rapid right to left, just as it should be done. To flip off the thin flume of concentrated hydraulic power to the right would send any paddler scraping over a rough shallow, jagged rock bed known as the Cheese Grater, which has served up some scraped knuckles and gouged helmets over the years.

The raft negotiated Little Splat, a slalom course of a rapid with several pinning points where broached boats are not uncommon. Sambino guided the raft like a pro, his crew, including Cousin Jenni, poured their energies into their paddles and arrived at the bottom smoothly. They then worked the raft river right for the major portage of the day, Big Splat.

As its name suggests, Big Splat is a big deal—probably one of the hardest rapids in the region that is run with regularity. Most will portage it. I used to run it regularly, not always with grace. Fortune, with a tad of skill, often carried me through it, but as paddling can be a game of percentages, I have of late started to portage it more often than not. On this particular day I elected to get out and scout the rapid, then choose to portage it from the left side, while my paddling partners took the river right path. As I waited the twenty minutes for them to carry the raft over boulder and through brush and then safely lower it

over the fifteen foot cliff, my mind began to turn to the Cheat race. I knew that I was now competing against the clock in an attempt to meet my racing companions, Matt and Chrissy. At this point I took off solo, knowing that Cousin Jenni was in good hands and that most likely I would not meet my ride to the start of the race.

When I arrived at the take-out alone, I found that I had indeed missed my ride. I hung about Jenkinsburg waiting for both Cousin Jenni as well as racers Matt and Chrissy, who I had failed to meet by five minutes, according to others who were hanging out at the take-out. I walked over the steel bridge and looked sixty feet down into the Cheat's calming waters in a state of vertigo. Disappointed in myself for letting Matt and Chrissy down, I was nevertheless still thrilled and grateful to have seen Cousin Jenni rush over Wonder Falls. And then she arrived with the biggest grin and a hug for me. How fantastic it had been. I could see in her demeanor that a new river rat had been born. She carried herself with a new pride, as she strode about Jenkinsburg with her thin shoulders thrust back, pride, mixed with the humility of having done something immensely special. In her was a new desire for adventure, birthed in this classic West Virginia river. Her slouch was gone, dissipated into the past, left upon the now abandoned couch on which she had once sat with a television in front of her. She glowed in a wetsuit and lifejacket, both of which stank of that beautiful stench that only rain and mountain river water will bring, the stench that must be experienced in its native milieu to be appreciated fully. A primordial desire and appetite for adventure and survival had erupted completely within her. This was my cousin and I was proud.

Corrections

In our January/February issue, the photo on page 12 was incorrectly labeled and attributed. It should actually read: "Sherars Falls, Deschutes River, Oregon. Photo by Thomas O'Keefe." Thanks to reader Bob Woodward for bringing this to our attention.

Also in our January/February issue, our review (page 59) of John Mattson's book *Dancing on the Edge of an Endangered Planet*, neglected to note that American Whitewater members get free shipping on the book, and that 10% of all sales to AW members goes directly to American Whitewater. Thanks John!

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Stewardship Updates

Amy Brown taking the boof line down river left on Powerhouse Rapid, Rouge River, OR

Photo by Thomas O'Keefe



Reclaiming the Rogue: Success Beyond Our Wildest Dreams

by Bill Cross

In 30 years of river running I've done some pretty strange things on the river. I've used an 8-foot square plywood highway sign as a boat, paddling down the San Juan River on a fluorescent orange board that bore the remarkably appropriate message: "DANGER!" I've rescued an injured duck that had a fishhook stuck in its throat, paddling the very smelly, agitated bird eight miles downriver in a sack to take it to a vet before releasing it back into the wild (the duck, whom we dubbed "Daffy,"

expressed his thanks by crapping copiously on me). But few firsts can compare with my recent experience on Oregon's Elk Creek: I paddled through a dam. No, I didn't take a Class VI line through the turbines, nor did I make the big boof move over the spillway. It was an extremely mellow Class I run right down the center, thanks to a new channel provided by the Army Corps of Engineers.

That's right, the Army Corps.

They put a hole in their own dam.

Sound bizarre? It does to me, too. As someone who harks back to the dark ages of river conservation, when dams were being built faster than we could write

letters of protest, it's a head-spinner: one of America's premier dam-building agencies decides that it should unbuild one of its creations. It feels like something out of Alice in Wonderland. Or like when you were in fifth grade and one morning all your friends were acting in completely freaky and inexplicable ways, and then somebody let you in on the secret: it's Opposite Day.

Except this time it's for real. It's not April Fools, and the Army Corps is not playing an elaborate prank. On Elk Creek and throughout Oregon's Rogue River basin, conservation dreams that would have seemed like pure fantasy a decade ago are coming true. In an unprecedented flurry of victories for fish and river runners

alike, the Rogue is undergoing a literal transformation. Dams are toppling like dominos and rapids are being reborn in what may be the biggest cluster of river conservation victories ever seen.

The Rogue is the Pacific Northwest's premier whitewater and sport-fishing river, world-renowned for nearly a century for superb angling, outstanding rapids, and pristine canyons. The roots of whitewater run deep here, dating back to pioneering boaters like Glen Wooldridge and Zane Grey. In 1968 Congress chose the lush canyon of the Lower Rogue as one of only eight charter members of the Wild and Scenic River system.

But despite its fame, the Rogue has suffered terribly from dams and hydro projects. True, 84 miles of the lower river have been stringently protected for 40 years, while another 40 miles near the headwaters earned similar protection in 1988. But the Rogue is over 200 miles long, which leaves a gaping hole in protection for the river's vulnerable midsection. On the "middle Rogue" a string of obsolete dams has long blocked both migrating salmon and recreational boaters, while a major hydro project has dewatered one of the river's most stunning whitewater runs.

Thankfully, all that is suddenly changing.

Demolition Derby for Dams

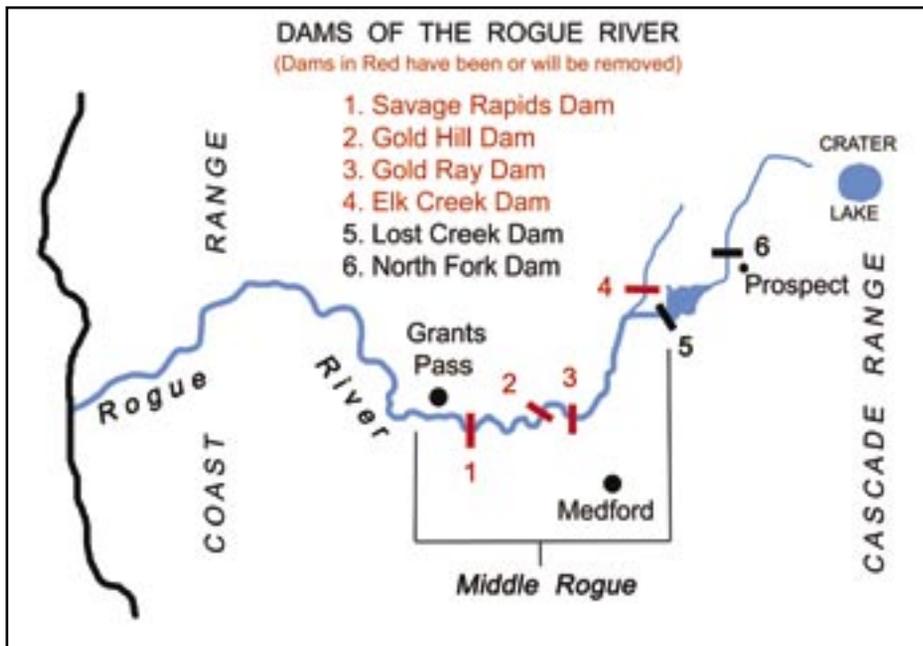
Over the last couple of decades river conservationists have labored patiently to restore the Rogue's salmon runs to their former glory, but until now most of the work has been on smaller tributaries where diversion weirs and other obstacles have been removed to allow fish passage. But patient progress gave way to heady celebration this past July when the first mainstem dam fell to the wrecker's ball. In the heart of a popular one-day whitewater run on the middle Rogue, an eight-foot-high dam that had spanned the Rogue for 60 years vanished in just a couple of weeks. The city of Gold Hill, which had relied on the concrete diversion for its water supply, replaced the outmoded barrier with a new \$2 million pumping facility. A joint local, state and federal effort secured another \$1.2 million to tear out the dam, and today the Rogue runs wild and free past Gold Hill. The half-mile of slackwater above the dam now has steady current, to the delight of rafters, canoeists, and kayakers making the day trip through Class III Nugget Falls and Class IV Powerhouse Rapid.

The same week that Gold Hill Dam came down, the Army Corps of Engineers took a sledgehammer to one of its own projects 30 miles upstream. On Elk Creek, a major Rogue tributary, the Corps blasted a hole in one of the West's most controversial dams. The Corps had started construction at the site 1.5 miles above the mouth of Elk Creek in 1986, as part of a major three-dam flood control project on the Rogue. But two years later, with the dam only a third finished, lawsuits over endangered coho salmon halted the project. Since then, Elk Creek has been the focus of a 20-year seesaw battle as groups like Oregon Wild and WaterWatch fought to stop the damming of this vital spawning stream.

In 2007 the Corps offered a novel solution to restore the fishery: cut a giant 200-foot wide notch through the heart of the dam. With a blast of explosives on July 15, the Corps launched a \$7.9 million effort to remove 75,000 cubic yards of concrete, excavate down to bedrock and restore a natural channel through the dam. On September 12 Elk Creek flowed freely through the damsite for the first time in 21 years. The notching is historic, for had the dam been completed it would have been a behemoth: 249 feet high—and half a mile wide at the crest.

For paddlers the notching reconnects two boatable sections of Elk Creek into one continuous eight-mile Class III run. American Whitewater worked with the Corps to ensure that the notch would be passable to whitewater craft. For more on the restored Elk Creek run, see the sidebar.

Next to go will be the notorious Savage Rapids Dam on the mainstem Rogue near Grants Pass. Built in 1921 by the Grants Pass Irrigation District, this 39-foot-high, 500-foot wide diversion dam is considered the biggest fish-killer on the river. After



Dam of the Rogue River - General area map from Crater Lake to Pacific Ocean

Map by Bill Cross

Stewardship Updates

decades of controversy and Herculean efforts by WaterWatch and other environmental groups, Savage is slated for removal in summer of 2009. Electric pumps will replace the dam, allowing salmon to migrate freely. Canoeists, rafters and other boaters will watch four miles of stagnant water morph into free-flowing river in this easygoing Class II section of the Rogue.

When Savage Rapids comes down in 2009, only one dam will remain on the mainstem between the Army Corps' huge Lost Creek Dam and the Pacific Ocean 157 miles downstream. That final domino is Gold Ray Dam, a defunct hydro project that hasn't generated electricity since 1972. Gold Ray is now in the spotlight as the final barrier to a totally free-flowing middle Rogue, and almost everyone would like to see this 35-foot-high concrete dinosaur demolished. Studies are now underway to evaluate the decades' worth of sediment accumulated behind the dam, and American Whitewater is ensuring that whitewater recreation is represented in the removal process. Intriguingly, maps of the original riverbed

show a steep gradient in the mile above the dam, raising the prospect that removal might uncover rapids that have been buried for over a century. The reclaimed whitewater may be similar in difficulty to exciting Class III and IV drops just a few miles downstream.

A New Prospect for Paddlers

Although river runners will benefit enormously from removal or notching of these four dams, they are not the driving force behind the demolitions: the big hammer bringing down concrete is salmon, not boaters. But in one spectacular exception near the top of the basin something very different and exciting is happening. Up here it is whitewater boaters alone who are helping restore the Rogue.

To understand this unusual success story you need to know a little geography. The Rogue's upper watershed drains the lush west slope of the Cascades near Crater Lake, where a massive volcanic eruption 8,000 years ago blanketed the region in ash and pumice. Abundant rain and snowmelt percolates deep into this porous soil before emerging as steady-flowing springs. This groundwater gives the river's biggest tributary, the North Fork of the Rogue, a remarkably steady year-round flow that never drops too low for boating even in the summer dry season. For miles the North Fork runs across a high, forested plateau, alternating between glassy pools, technical rapids and a couple of short unrunnable gorges. Paddlers enjoy a variety of Class II to V day trips on more than 20 miles of the North Fork.

But near the end of its journey, just four miles above the confluence with the South Fork, near the small town of Prospect, something remarkable happens: the North Fork literally falls off a cliff. When it reaches the edge of the volcanic plateau the North Fork careens down the steepest gauntlet in the entire Rogue basin. In the first half-mile, known as Avenue of the Giant Boulders, the North Fork plunges an astonishing 300 vertical feet through a jumble of massive basalt blocks that

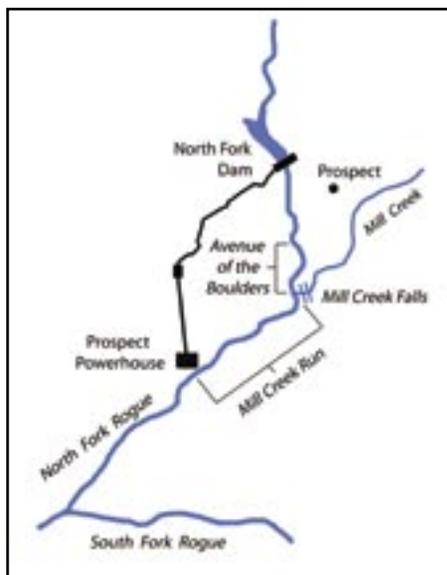
churn the water into jaw-dropping Class V and VI cataracts. By the time it reaches the foot of the Avenue, the North Fork has cut deep into a stunning vertical walled gorge where tributary streams like Mill Creek and Barr Creek vault into the river as spectacular waterfalls over 170 feet high. A rough, mist-soaked trail reaches the river at the base of Mill Creek Falls, marking the river's transition from the extreme whitewater of the Avenue to a 1.5-mile stretch of Class IV+ known as the Mill Creek run. Here, in one of the region's most spectacular whitewater runs, the North Fork cascades at 170 feet per mile through a stunning slot canyon. Finally, as the Mill Creek run ends, the canyon opens and the North Fork tapers to Class III for a final two-mile sprint to the South Fork confluence—a site which is usually covered by the fluctuating backwaters of Lost Creek Reservoir.

Clearly this stretch of the North Fork has all the makings of a whitewater mecca: summer-long flows, steep gradient, crystal-clear water and awesome scenery. True, most paddlers don't have the skills—or nerve—to tackle Avenue of the Boulders. But surely the Class IV+ run that begins at Mill Creek Falls would draw advanced and expert paddlers from throughout the region, especially in mid- and late summer when flows drop too low on other challenging runs in the area.

Well, you'd think so. But there's one big problem: steady flows and high gradient are good for more than just boating. They're also perfect for generating hydropower. Nearly a century ago engineers recognized that they could dam the river just before it hurtles over the edge of the plateau, divert water around the Avenue and Mill Creek reaches, then return it to the river via turbines. Today PacifiCorp operates the Prospect Hydro Project, which blocks the river at North Fork Dam less than one mile above the Avenue, diverts up to 1,050 cfs into penstocks for three miles, then drops the water back into the river at the foot of the Mill Creek reach. The result is that, except for occasional times of high runoff in winter and spring when water spills unpredictably over the dam,

*North Fork Rogue, Prospect Hydro Relicensing
Local map for Prospect / Mill Creek reach*

Map by Bill Cross



Eric Larsen and Chris Johnson running the first technical drops below the put-in for the Mill Creek run of the North Fork Rogue. Mill Creek Falls thunders into the Rogue in the background.

Photo by Nathan Barnard



Stewardship Updates

there isn't enough water in the Mill Creek stretch for paddling. During the prime summer boating season the North Fork below the dam is reduced to an unboatable trickle of "fish flow."

Until now.

The Prospect Hydro Project just came due for a new 30-year operating license from FERC, the agency that oversees hydroelectric generation. And American Whitewater was there to demand that some water be restored to the channel for whitewater recreation. After more than five years of intense lobbying and grassroots effort, American Whitewater prevailed when FERC issued a new license

requiring whitewater releases for eight days every summer beginning in 2009. This July PacifiCorp, in cooperation with American Whitewater and local and regional paddlers, will begin a three-year flow study to determine the best releases for boating. PacifiCorp is also required to provide boater access at the Prospect powerhouse on release days, as well as real-time flow information.

The North Fork relicensing is noteworthy because river runners stood alone in requesting increased releases, without help from fisheries advocates or other environmental groups. Because Lost Creek Dam just downstream blocks salmon from reaching the North Fork, there were no endangered species arguments in

Right: Peering into the gauntlet: view from the canyon rim down into Avenue of the Giant Boulders on the North Fork Rogue

Photo by Bill Cross

Below: Gold Ray Dam on the Rogue River, OR is a former hydropower project on the Rogue River (river mile 125.9) just upstream of the town of Gold Hill. Construction of the first dam began in 1902 and started producing power in 1904. When powerplant was decommissioned in 1972 the generation capacity was 1250 kw. While the dam no longer produces hydropower it continues to negatively impact fish and represents a barrier to river navigation. It has a fish ladder but it is not maintained and flows on the river are typically higher than the design flow for the ladder.

Photo by Thomas O'Keefe





Stewardship Updates

this relicensing. Remarkably, whitewater boaters on their own generated enough comments and applied enough pressure to get concessions from a major utility.

Navigating to the Future

With all these victories for river runners, it's ironic that American Whitewater and other groups recently had to help prove that the middle Rogue is a navigable waterway. The State of Oregon set out to determine whether the 89-mile reach from Lost Creek Dam down to Grave Creek—the jumping-off point for the Wild and Scenic Lower Rogue—qualifies as “navigable” under state law. The designation is critical for boaters: a finding of “navigable” affirms the public's right to use the river, as well as public ownership of the riverbed and banks. American Whitewater submitted extensive comments, and in June the State agreed that the middle Rogue is, indeed,

navigable.

Hmm ... didn't we already know that?

Dreams Become Reality

For those who love the Rogue it all seems too good to be true. Surely we'll wake up from this lovely dream. Surely the Army Corps will slap us on the back and say, “Nah, just kiddin'.” Surely our boating friends will tell us it was just a happy hallucination induced by too much icy water being rammed up our noses, ears and other orifices.

But it's for real. On the Pacific Northwest's most famous whitewater river, fish and boaters are enjoying an unprecedented conservation winning streak. In five years, after all the concrete dust settles, it will be easier to count the dams remaining on the Rogue than the dams that have been taken

out. And just a few months from now, under a brilliant mid-summer sun, the roar of whitewater will once again fill the Mill Creek gorge.

Go ahead, pinch yourself.

First run of the notch at Elk Creek Dam. Much of the dam is outside of the frame to the left

Photo by Bill Cross



Notching a First Descent on Elk Creek

By Bill Cross

On a bitterly cold January 4, with icicles dangling from the trees and our beards, four of us set out to make the first descent of “The Notch” at Elk Creek Dam. It was one of those bone-chilling days when sensible people cozy up to their woodstoves to read whitewater war stories—like maybe a nice toasty tale about Major Powell and his men enduring the mind-numbing heat of August in the Grand Canyon. But not us. Obsessive paddling fools that we are, we launched on a day when the water was warmer than the air. A day when our 10-foot SOTAR, inflated with air that the day before had been swirling around a herd of frostbitten caribou in the Yukon, actually expanded when we put it in the creek.

For six miles we paddled with aching fingers through Class II and III rapids, dodging the frequent logs and brush that make this run much trickier than its moderate rating suggests. Ignoring piteous pleas from our frozen toes, we admired the winter wonderland of glittering icicles and snowy slopes. And then suddenly we rounded a bend and came face-to-face with a forbidding wall of gray: Elk Creek Dam, one of Oregon’s biggest. The last time I was here I portaged, but today a startling new 200-foot wide gap greeted us, offering easy passage right through the heart of the giant. We cruised through the notch with hardly a stroke, drifting over a gentle cobbled riverbed and through a short but imposing concrete canyon. To our left an 80-foot cliff of aggregate rose straight out of the water, its surface striped by bore holes that engineers had used to pack in dynamite for precision blasting. Had the dam ever been finished as originally planned, these manmade ramparts would have towered almost 250 feet above us.

We all agreed that the Army Corps did a very nice job on the notch, removing concrete all the way down to bedrock and then refilling the channel with

natural rounded cobbles. As promised, they left no man-made debris in the restored channel: no ugly chunks of aggregate, not a single spike of rebar, no hazards to navigation at all. In fact, ironically, the quarter-mile above and below the notch was by far the cleanest piece of channel in our entire 8-mile run down this very brushy creek. Of course in a few years that will change as alders and willows—including many saplings planted by the Corps itself—take root in the new channel. Eventually the dam will resemble something from the set of *I Am Legend*—a moss-covered, post-apocalyptic remnant of a lost civilization.

Of course we were well aware that the primary reason for the notch is to let salmon swim upstream, not to let paddlers frolic more freely downriver. But hey, we didn’t mind: we were only too happy to play second fiddle to the fish in this wonderful win-win outcome. We didn’t see any coho running up through the notch on our trip, but the creek was turbid after recent rains so there might have been dozens and we wouldn’t have seen them. Personally I think there were a whole lot of very happy fish down in that swirling, gray-green water, peering up at us and wondering to themselves, “Who are those idiots and why are they going the wrong way?”

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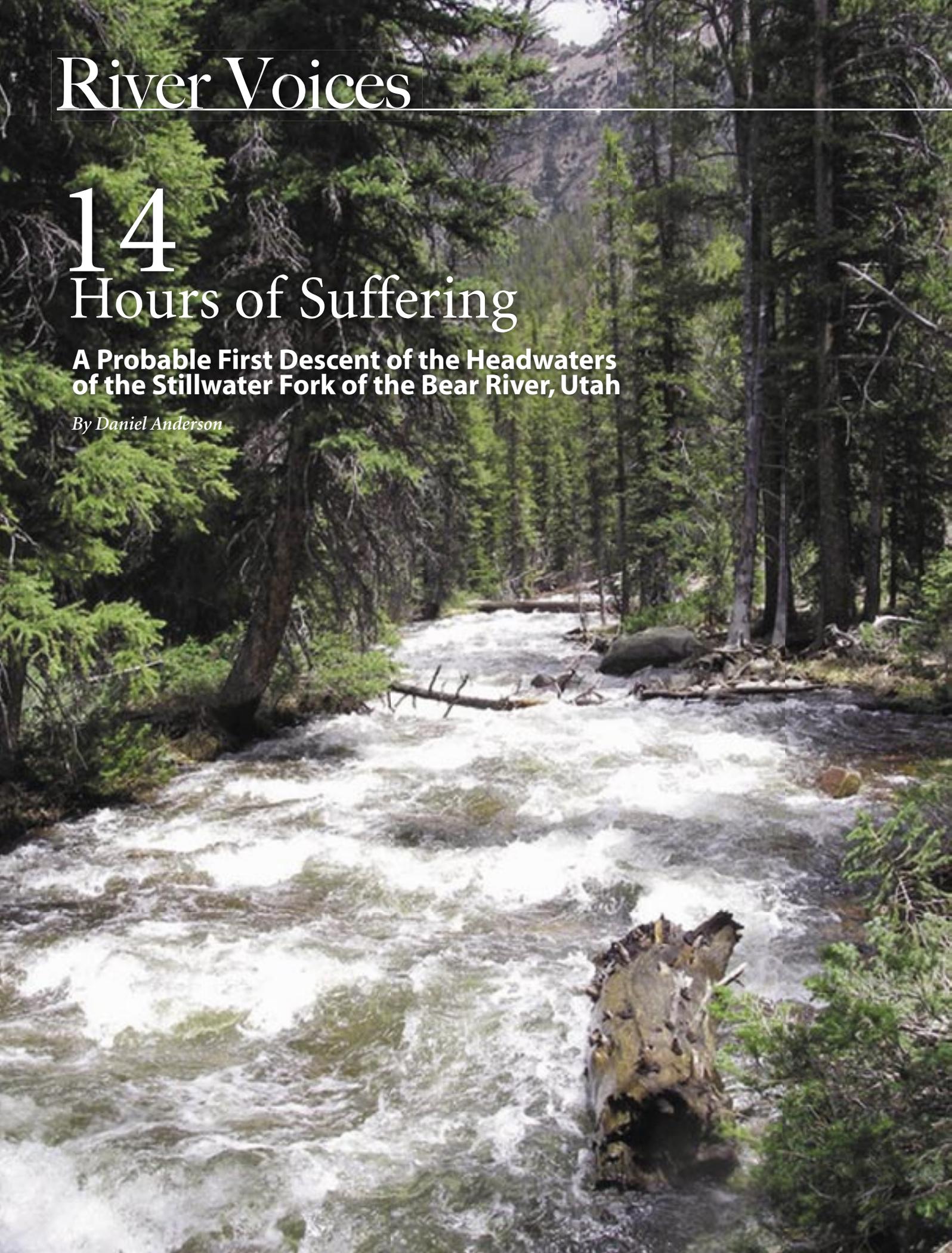
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14 Hours of Suffering

**A Probable First Descent of the Headwaters
of the Stillwater Fork of the Bear River, Utah**

By Daniel Anderson

Editor's Note: *It's not often (in fact I can't remember another instance) that we've run three stories by the same author in the same issue. What follows, however, is exactly that. It just goes to show what a motivated American Whitewater member can accomplish if he or she puts a mind to it. Mr. Anderson's stories span over a decade of recent history, but we hope it won't be another 12 years before he decides to write something for us again.* "Epic probable first descent, anyone??"

Left: Good whitewater, bad wood

Below: Tom climbing the never ending talus field

Photos by Daniel Anderson

This is a wilderness run that is very committing, very steep, and will require a lot of portaging for wood and unrunnable sections.

Requirements: Off-trail hike over high pass, low flow Class V skills, improvised eddy catching skills and stamina.

A small, slightly damaged brain is highly recommended.

It is extremely unlikely that this section has ever been run and it is also doubtful anyone will ever run it again (if it gets done). This is a descent for the sake of adventure.

I'm looking at Monday or Tuesday of next week. It will require a full day with 4am start.

Sore muscles guaranteed, fame unlikely. Any takers?????"

I had a mission and needed a partner. My usual partner in suffering and adventure, my brother Josh Anderson, had been unavailable, so I had placed the above advertisement on the Utah Whitewater Club message board.

Many had inquired, but no one had committed. I would not give the location, or the name of the run or river, and I guess the description that I gave for the run sounded a bit high on the suffering scale and a good bit low on the fun scale. I figured I would have to fly solo and I wasn't too psyched with that prospect. Then Tom called.

I had talked to Tom a few times on the phone and he committed to the trip without knowing the destination. He said he understood the potential for pain was pretty high, and the likelihood of suffering even higher. He said he understood the run would require ELF (extreme low flow) boating skills and a lot of portaging for wood, with poor eddy service. He sounded like the kind of guy I would enjoy boating with.

I met Tom Diegel for the first time at 4 am in Salt Lake City when I picked him up for the trip. Tom's first words that morning were, "So what are we doing?" I had kept



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the destination a secret up until that point, but stressed the trip would involve a lot adventure, maybe a little boating, and no glory whatsoever. I explained the project and off we went in the dark of early morning.

Beginning at 11,000 ft in Middle Basin in the High Uinta Wilderness Area in Northeast Utah, the Stillwater Fork of the Bear River runs about 12 miles total from start to finish. The river is born from snowmelt running down the slopes of 12,000-plus-foot peaks—the likes of Hayden Peak, Mt Agassiz, Spread Eagle Peak, and Ostler Peaks. Additional tributary waters that feed the river originate from A-1, Kletting and Lamotte Peaks. The river runs generally south as it drops steeply and gains volume on its route to Christmas Meadows, where it mellows to a scenic Class I meander for a few miles.

Three miles below Christmas Meadows, in Stillwater Canyon, the Stillwater River picks up speed again, though not to the extent displayed upstream. About 2 miles into Stillwater Canyon, the Main Fork of the Bear River (draining Hell Hole) joins up with the Stillwater Fork. One mile farther downstream, the combined two forks confluence with the Hayden Fork of the Bear River. The resulting river is the Bear River proper, which flows into the Great Salt Lake approximately 350 river miles later.

I had run all of the Bear River in Utah that was in guidebooks, and some of the Hayden Fork that was not documented. I enjoy exploring headwaters runs, and the Stillwater Fork looked like it would be a good candidate for providing an arduous, wild, and beautiful adventure. I had my eye on this section of river for about a decade, and had even hike scouted it years before

Daniel at 11,700-foot Hayden Pass

Photo by Tom Diegel

at low September flows, and thought it was doable. The time to find out was now. On June 23, 2008, at morning's first light, Tom and I arrived at the Highline Trailhead at 10,400 ft in the Uinta Mountains of Utah. We were surprised that we were unable to pull off the Mirror Lake Highway and into the parking area due to the lingering winter snow pack. 2008 had been a big winter, and the evidence was still visible everywhere in the high country.

We geared up, dressing in our kayaking clothes, and finished our lukewarm coffee while we packed our boats. At 6:30 AM, we shouldered our loads, mine a German made Topolino, and Tom's, a New Zealand made "Sally" inflatable whitewater kayak

(with rigid cockpit rim and spray deck) and headed into the trees

There is no maintained or official trail to Hayden Pass, which was our first goal. We bushwhacked through snowdrifts sheltered by fragrant pines, scrambled up small broken cliffs of Uinta Group Quartzite, and then trudged in the thin air up seemingly endless talus fields. The views were as breathtaking as the hiking, and I was forced to linger in spots, taking photographs as well as deep breaths. I had hiked up to the pass probably 15 times in my life en route to various summits, but this time my load was heavier than any time before...and the pass was just the starting point.

I was surprised to feel as energized as I felt, which I attributed to the excitement of the adventure ahead, as well as the silly novelty of carrying a kayak up the mountainside

to the pass.

A final snow couloir leading to the pass spiced up the end of the off-trail climb, requiring us to kick steps into the solid spring snow to gain purchase. After two hours of sweating up the steep slopes, we climbed out of the dark shadows and into the bright sunshine on Hayden Pass (11,700 ft). At the pass, we were both shocked to see Middle Basin a white snow filled valley, more resembling a scene in an Alaskan winter that a late June Utah morning.

I had expected snow in the trees and shadows, but this was a little bit ridiculous! I was somewhat concerned that there would not be sufficient snow melting into the streambed to supply boat-able water since the entire valley was reminiscent of the Pleistocene. We would soon learn that there was more than enough flow despite

the polar appearance.

After a snack and a short rest, the breeze began to chill our sweaty bodies and urged us onward. We put our packs back on our damp backs and forged a route down the pass. I had never hiked down into Middle Basin, so we had to route find through Krummholz shrubs, death scree, short blocky sections of bedrock, and thaw-freeze solid snow. We slipped and slid our way down the steep slope (with a good fall from me for comedy, and Tom leading the descent via an interesting glissade) and reached the frozen valley floor.

An hour of snow-hiking across the pseudo-glacial flat with the occasional mid-thigh "post-hole" got us to tree line, and the birth of the river spilling out of the still mostly frozen Ryder Lake.

At around 10,400 ft, I began to seriously



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tire of carrying the boat and my shoulders ached from the strain of my kayak pack. I found a small half frozen unnamed lake with a descent out-flow feeding the Stillwater and got in my boat. Tom elected to continue hiking down canyon for a more suitable place to start since his Sally was a bit more vulnerable to sharp rock and was more difficult and awkward to portage while inflated.

I paddled around the lake for a minute busting through the slush and soft ice trying to stretch my knotted shoulders and back muscles while enjoying the silliness of the adventure. I did a ceremonial roll, just because I had never rolled in an ice covered lake before, and paddled into the shallow outflow. After about 50 yards of scraping along wet rocks, using my frozen hands to propel the bottomed out kayak, I decided to rejoin Tom in the trees and continue the portage until I could find a

deep enough streambed to actually paddle.

I put on again a half mile down canyon at about 10,200 ft in a meadow with two forks joining about midway between Mt Agassiz and Spread Eagle Peak. I was able to paddle a quick flat meadow meander, then 1/10th mile steep shallow Class II+ in the timber, then 1/5th mile through another meandering meadow.

At the end of the second meadow, the river entered the trees again and steepened considerably. This was the start of the 300 fpm section.

I saw Tom here looking intently at the river, and getting out to scout. We found a great 100-yard long low angle bedrock slide that I ended up naming "Flight Deck." I had seen this drop years before on a hike-scout, and knew the end of the rapid would be the biggest problem. At the end

Above: Tom at the start of the boulder hoping

Right: Tom descending from Hayden Pass

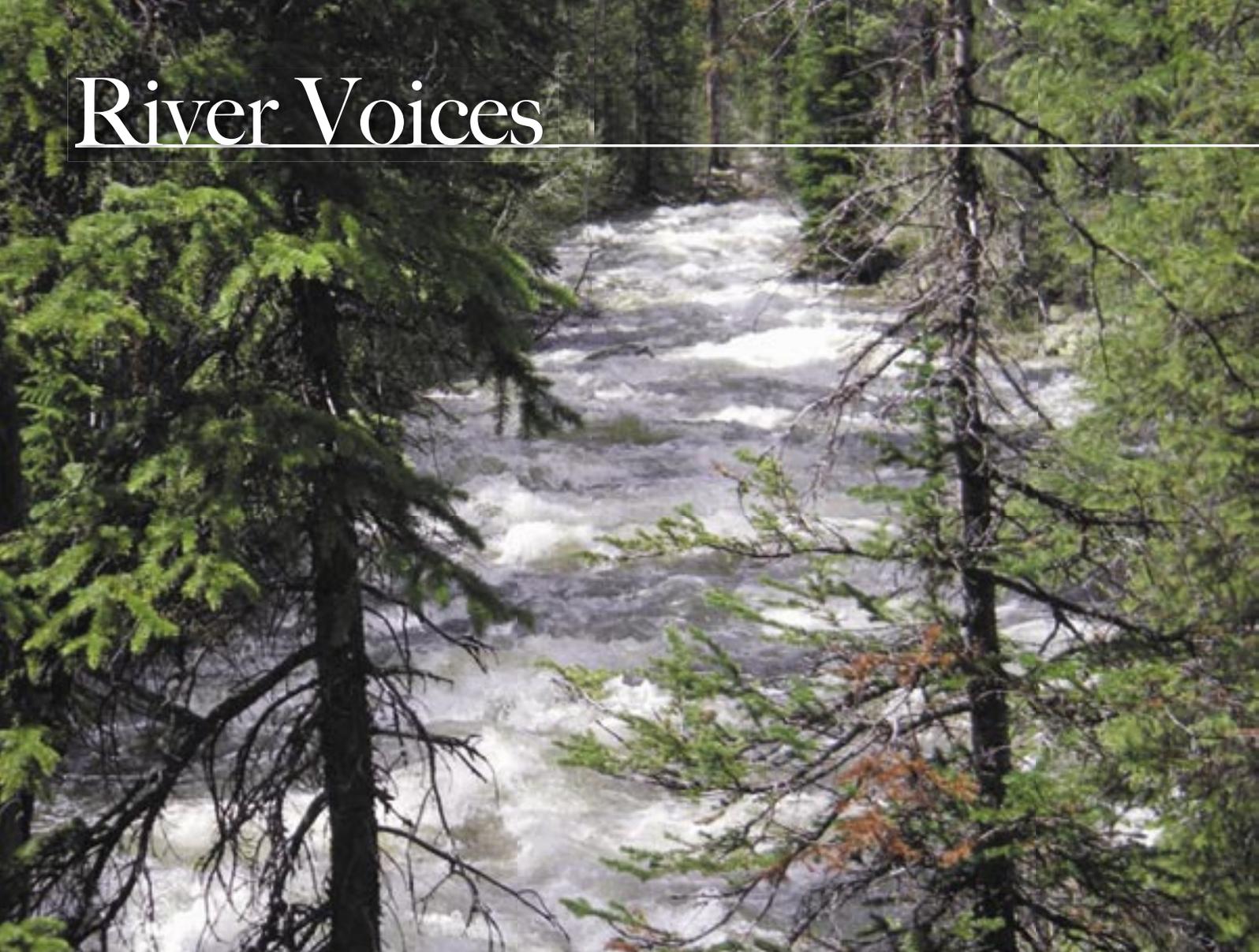
Photos by Daniel Anderson

of the slide, the river dropped in a shallow ridiculously steep boulder filled riverbed mess, with river wide trees thrown in for good measure. The only way to be able to run Flight Deck and avoid serious injury was to paddle hard river right at the bottom of the drop across shallow bedrock, then brace/surf a pillow rock with a log wrapped on it, and then crash land river right off a two-foot lip into a shallow pool above the boulder jumble. I later named the end part of Flight Deck the Crash Landing for obvious reasons.

Fortunately, there was also a log midway in the Flight Deck to add some additional



River Voices



spice, but figured I could easily avoid it.

Tom saw the line as well, but decided it was too shallow for Sally and agreed to provide safety for me. I got in my boat and, little did I know it then, ran the only 'real' whitewater of the entire trip.

Below Flight Deck, the river gained volume, gradient and wood. There were numerous semi-continuous 300 fpm bedrock slides and rapids, which caused us to salivate with anticipation of an awesome first descent. Unfortunately, there was always at least one unavoidable tree or log somewhere in each rapid that would put a big hurt on our day if we attempted to run the drops.

The day was beginning to get quite warm, and we began to notice a significant increase in the river volume. Tiny tributaries emptied into the Stillwater

around every bend, causing us frozen feet as we waded over the small streams and through the soggy riverbank.

We scouted frequently through deadfall trees and thick woods, hoping for a timber free section, or at the very least, a well placed eddy above the hazards. It seemed not to be for us though, and we came up empty handed at each rapid and ended up only with a prolonged grueling portage.

The numerous well featured rapids and drops were a huge tease, and, despite the hazard wood, there were a few drops where I seriously considered "going for it" anyway. Fortunately, the remoteness of the area kept me on shore, since my common sense was slightly dulled by the desire to run some of the virgin goods.

I started feeling bad for Tom, who didn't even get his boat inflated until well into the afternoon. I figured he would be

*Bankful and pushy, just above
Ostler Fork Confluence*

Photo by Daniel Anderson

cussin' me the whole time, but I was pleasantly surprised that he appeared to be enjoying himself and the adventure.

Around mile 6 or 7 of our hike (river mile 4), we found a log free section of water. We excitedly put on and figured we'd be able to read and run for a bit since the gradient had eased to under 200 feet per mile. We were able to run about 200 yards of fast pushy big Class III, when, with little time and notice to react, we had to improvise eddy out to avoid a bad log just above a pseudo-gorge. Below the log, the river dropped into a maelstrom of white froth reminiscent of a stout looking Upper

Provo River Falls...but with bad wood, and lots of it.

We headed back to the trail with boats on our shoulders and our hopes of paddling some whitewater crushed. Fortunately, the trail paralleled the run, never straying far from the water, so we were able to scout the river relatively easily as we hiked down trail looking for some more run-able whitewater.

We soon found the riverbed steepen back into the 200+ fpm range with no less wood in the river. We elected to forgo further scouting and resigned ourselves to the long portage. We plodded wearily along the muddy trail with painfully sore muscles, screaming feet and aching backs, clumsy with fatigue until we came across the trail crossing with the Ostler Fork. Usually you can cross the Ostler Fork by rock hopping and not even get your feet

wet, but today the creek was cranking high and white, and even making the ford along the trail was Class V.

After making the nearly waist deep ford, we hiked and stumbled another 1/2 mile or so and met back with the Stillwater. I had kayaked from here down a few years before and knew the river would be relatively mellow and the gradient was significantly less than upstream. We happily put in, saving the abuse another 2 trail miles would incur on our bodies and paddled the two or so meandering swift Class II+ miles to Christmas Meadows. We did have a few wet portages for beaver dam jumps and river wide logs, so there was at least a little excitement despite the lack of whitewater. And the post card perfect views of Ostler Peak and the Stillwater Valley provided some reward to aid in compensating for the lack of rapids. Below Christmas Meadows, we continued

down through Stillwater Canyon for the final 3.5 miles or so. Unfortunately, the only really good rapid in this section had a river wide tree disguised as a wave/hole that nearly caught me by surprise. After another improvised eddy-out and portage, we continued downstream.

We ran some scenic Class II water, had a few more log portages, and unceremoniously arrived at the take-out. Tom offered to make the ultimate sacrifice and ride his mountain bike (previously stashed) the five odd miles uphill to the Highline Trailhead to my truck in the waning light of evening.

I stood along the road with my thumb in the air, dripping wet and shivering in the alpine cold, trying to catch a ride (so Tom wouldn't have to ride all the way to my truck) while grandparents and respectable people drove past eying me nervously.

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Fortunately, Tom caught a ride shortly after starting his ride (he was riding with his thumb in the air) and got to my truck and back to the take-out within an hour.

At the take out, we munched cold damp snacks, loaded gear, counted ourselves lucky to have been able to get ourselves and our gear safely out of the mountains that day. During the drive back to the big city, we decided a good adventure without any paddling is better than no adventure at all. We agreed it was a day well spent, and agreed to try and team up again at some point in the future and hopefully paddle some whitewater together sometime. I was tired and sore, so after stocking up on beer in Evanston, Wyoming, I drove fast and

got Tom to Salt Lake by 10:00 pm, and got myself to my new Utah County home by 11:00.

Here are the stats for the section:

Elevations and gradient per mile:

1st mile 10,200-9900 ft, 300 fpm
2nd mile 9900-9570 ft, 330 fpm
3rd mile 9570-9350 ft, 220 fpm
4th mile 9350- 9185 ft, 165 fpm
5th mile 9185-8955 ft, 230 fpm
6th mile 8955-8850 ft, 105 fpm
7th mile 8850-8810 ft, 40 fpm
8th mile 8810-8775 ft, 35 fpm
9th-12th mile, 8775-8495 ft, 66 fpm
average

Total elevation loss: 1425 ft over 8 miles (with Stillwater Canyon 1690 ft & 12 miles)

Average gradient: 178 fpm (not counting Stillwater Canyon)

Number of logs without upstream eddy service in the middle of, or near the end of, awesome looking Class V slides, falls and drops: 500+

Number of times Tom and I said, "Dude, sick fun looking rapid...with a log and no eddy": too damn many to count.



*Ostler Peak (left) Spread Eagle Peak (right)
from Christmas Meadows*

Photo by Daniel Anderson



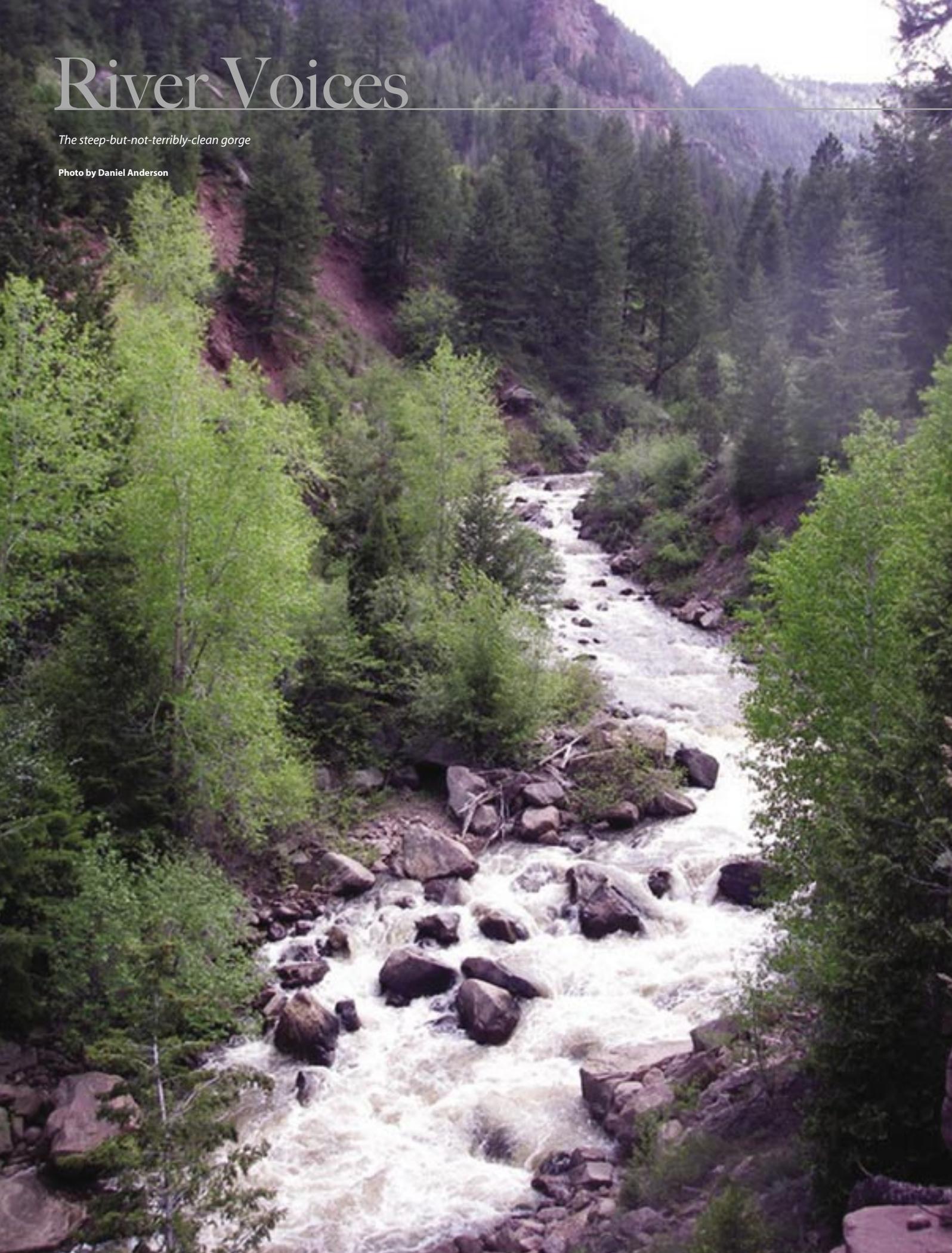
Un-named lake at 10,400 feet where Daniel put on

Photo by Daniel Anderson

River Voices

The steep-but-not-terribly-clean gorge

Photo by Daniel Anderson



Carter Creek Canyon The Story of Two Brothers, Two Small Boats, and a Two-day First Descent into the Unknown

By Daniel Anderson

Each bend of the Creek brings a smile to my face. There are rapids, and lots of them. Mostly they are of the Class III to IV variety, fairly continuous in nature, but punctuated by a few stretches in the Class IV+ range, slightly more pool drop than before. The scenery is breathtaking with vertical red Quartzite cliffs alternating with Quaking Aspen and Ponderosa Pine covered sloping canyon walls. The sun is shining on and warming my face and hands, which are continually cooled by the icy snowmelt water. The creek is on the rise, and the water is a translucent silty brown. There's not a soul to be seen and there is very little evidence of past visitors other than a faint angler's trail and the occasional campfire ring along the river left shore. We're in the wilderness, far from any roads or reasonable egress route short of a moderate epic. We're self-contained for an overnigher with minimal gear and food, and I'm kayaking blind with my favorite kayaking partner, my brother Josh Anderson. We're on an unknown Creek in an unknown canyon in the wilds of Northeast Utah, and we are quite likely making a first descent. I couldn't ask for a better way to spend two days of my life.

The story of Carter Creek for Josh and I begins about a decade earlier. We were early in our kayaking careers, and eager for exploration. Every river and creek we saw had potential for kayaking. We "discovered" Carter Creek on our drives over the Uinta Mountains while en route from our Evanston, Wyoming home to run like the Green and Yampa Rivers. Highway 44, our route to these other rivers, lay just west of Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and crosses

over the creek at a hairpin bend about 15 miles south of Manila, Utah. Each time we drove over Carter Creek, we would crane our necks and look into the canyon as we ascended the steep north slope of the mountains.

The creek itself is not much to look at from the road. It's really just an average Uinta Mountain low volume shallow rocky creek. What caught our eyes was the canyon that it disappeared down into: Narrow red rock cliffs, thick green forest, and an ever-deepening canyon leading into the unknown. We knew the creek had to empty into the Green River, impounded since 1964 and since transformed into Flaming Gorge Reservoir. But for some reason we "heard" (from what source besides our imaginations I don't know) that the creek ended in a tall waterfall coming from a narrow canyon dropping into the lake. Surely the waterfall was unrunnable. Not to mention we "heard" the confluence of the creek and the lake was located in an inaccessible vertical walled canyon, thus un-portageable, and far from any boat ramps or other access points.

Even with this in mind, one day my curiosity got the better of me while driving over the mountains. I stopped to stretch my legs and have a "look-see." I didn't have much time, so I jogged down a faint angler's trail just a short ways. It was late summer, and there was little water flowing in the creek bed. I came across three or four trees that had fallen completely across the creek at different point in the first half mile. Looking downstream, the canyon appeared to continue to be heavily forested, and I assumed there would be more river-wide wood. I figured there would be at least as much wood per mile downstream, or maybe more, and that, along with the steep gradient and shallow nature of the creek bed, convinced me for the time being that Carter Creek was a lost cause.

Since that time back in 1998 or so, Josh and I had run many varied rivers in the West and elsewhere gaining experience and skills in big water, technical water, steep creeks, and E.L.F (extreme low

flow) boating. We were also fortunate to get in a few "exploratories" in Utah and elsewhere. We were pushing the limits of what we considered "boat able" and prided ourselves on running creeks that we described by our own classification system as "Steep, shallow, fast, wooded and near-eddyless." We had run our "home" river, the Bear River, in its entirety—as described in guidebooks. We also found ourselves on some sections of the Bear not described anywhere and likely previously un-run. We grew to understand the creeks and rivers of the Uinta's, and began to think about Carter Creek again. We felt we were prepared to deal with the possible must make eddys, un-runnable rapids, limbo logs, improvised eddy catching above river-wide trees, and the potential for never ending portages through log infested forests.

The winter of 2007-2008 proved to be a heavy snow pack year in northern Utah and surrounding states. I knew there would be water in the creeks and river for sure this year beyond spring thaw, so I began searching for any information about Carter Creek. Not surprising, I was unable to locate any documented descents of the creek, and could find almost nothing else about it on the Internet or otherwise. I began spending a lot of time pouring over maps and looking on Google Earth by way of scouting the run.

Carter Creek is a wilderness creek that drains the northeast slope of the Uinta Mountains in northeast Utah near the southwestern Wyoming border. The creek begins at the toe of the ridgeline that spans Eccentric/Chepeta Peak (el. 12276/12267) and Leidy Peak (el. 12028). The West Fork, Middle Fork and East Fork of Carter Creek meet Beaver Creek at Browne (pronounced "Brownie") Lake, actually a reservoir, at an elevation of 8289 feet.

Carter Creek runs out from Browne Lake for 15.5 miles through pine forest as it down-cuts through metamorphic Uinta Group Quartzite at an average gradient of 143 feet per mile, and eventually ends at Hideout Canyon on Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The first 8.3 miles average 120

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foot per mile, and do have road access in a few spots

Our proposed put-in would be at the Highway 44 bridge at an elevation of 7260 feet. The run was just over seven miles in length to Flaming Gorge Reservoir, with an ending elevation of 6060 feet. That meant an average gradient of 171 feet per mile. The mile by mile gradient would be: 125, 135, 175, 183, 172, 160, and 190, with the final 0.2 miles at 300 feet per mile! The images on Google Earth provided general information about the nature of the run and it appeared there would be no shortage of whitewater. The individual rapids were blurry and indistinct, but it gave us an idea of what to expect. Also, the images were able to provide an answer to the one big deciding factor in the trip: it was obvious that the waterfall at the confluence with the lake was in fact a product of our imagination...though at 300 fpm with a 60 foot loss, the final 1/5th mile would be steep!

Probably my favorite part of the proposed adventure was that the confluence with the lake was not the end of the journey. We would have a seven-mile paddle off the lake to the Sheep Creek boat ramp.

I liked the idea, for some strange reason, of paddling off the lake. I thought it would add a level of commitment and hint of "epic" to the trip.

May 31, 2008, found us driving to the put-in. I had just finished with organizing and directing the 2nd Annual Bear River RiverFest Kayak Races in Evanston, WY. The race had been a success, but I was somewhat drained and tired from all the stress of running an event. I needed a fun adventure for sure.

We had no idea what the water level would be like (there is no gauge) or if the creek was even running. Water had been high elsewhere until recently, but then the unsettled high country weather turned things 180 degrees and brought snow to the mountains four days before hand, stalling out the spring melt. Fortunately, warm weather had returned since, and the local rivers and creeks were on the rise, so we were hopeful.

Our hopes began to fade a little as we drove over the Henry's Fork of the Green River near Lonetree, WY, and saw very little water in the river. We began to get even more concerned thirty minutes later

as we crossed Sheep Creek, a mere 8 miles north of Carter Creek and saw a virtually dry creek bed. We only had 2 days to kayak together, and we began to come up with Plan B

We arrived at the proposed Carter Creek put-in just before darkness fell, and made a hasty scout downstream. We walked about 1/2 mile downstream and were a little disappointed at the flow we saw. Initially we thought there would not be enough water to run the creek, but not looking forward to driving into the night to our Plan B run, we let the spirit of adventure take over. We both decided Carter Creek needed run and we'd do it if we had to drag boats the whole way. We were in it for the adventure anyway, and whitewater would just have to be an added bonus if we found any. June 1, with our usual alpine start at the crack of noon (11 am), we pushed into the current. We had packed our Eskimo Topolinos with lightweight overnight gear

Below: Our shuttle rig at the put-in

Photos by Daniel Anderson



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(down jacket, bivy sack, dry socks), some noodles and tuna, a few Snickers Bars and about a fifth of whisky. Our boats were heavy (Topos are not designed for self-support) and this was the first time either of us had done a self-support trip. Luckily, it was a sunny warm day, the creek had risen about an inch overnight, and we expected it would continue to rise during the day.

Josh and I agreed to alternate taking the lead. After each “out of boat experience”—preferably just a scout or portage rather than swim—we

would swap being on the sharp end. We planned on boat scouting as much as possible also, figuring we have to spend a lot of time portaging because of wood.

The first half-mile of the run was the mental crux. Escape was still a reasonable possibility, and the creek was annoyingly shallow with a few islands splitting the already meager flow and three river-wide logs to portage. Fortunately, the scenery was spectacular, though the whitewater was not. The run at this point was basically fast continuous Class II with sharp bends, steep gradient and limited

visibility. Elk Creek came in at about mile 0.5 and added some substantial flow, which saved on the kidney and boat abuse. The canyon at this point was about 400 feet deep and 1000 feet across. A few very low limbo logs in this section that could have easily been portaged caused me some trouble when I dropped my paddle and had to chase it down... twice. The theme to this trip was me losing my paddle (four times total), which was especially concerning because we didn't have a spare small enough to fit in our boats.

Josh Anderson at the first rapid

Photo by Daniel Anderson



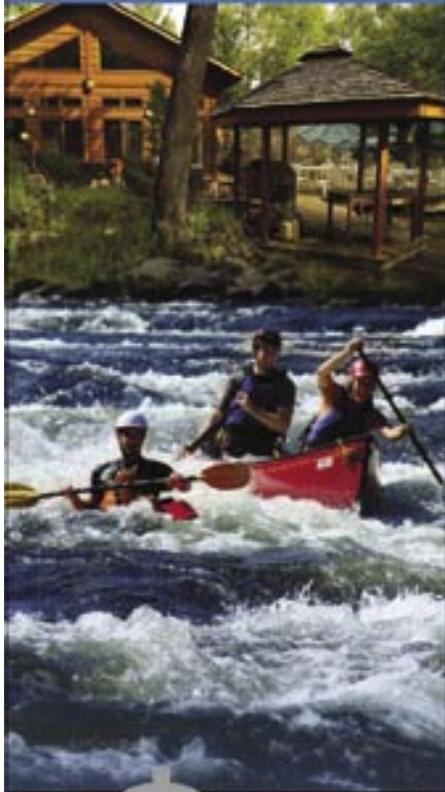
We began to get into the groove and remarked often on how cool this trip was and how beautiful the canyon and creek were. We were getting used to the nuances of paddling heavy boats and getting psyched up for more of the unknown. We passed the bright angular rubble of a recent rock fall coming from the north wall, which I remembered seeing on Google Earth, and then came upon a fun easy rapid with a few well-sized boulders. From here down, the riverbed constricted as bit, the current picked up speed and the creek became deeper. This first drop acted as an appetizer for the feast ahead.

Burnt Creek came in from the south at about mile 2 and our spirits soared as the flow increased substantially. Now we were boating! We came across and scouted another relatively fresh rock fall rapid just downstream of Burnt Creek (also visible on Google Earth), which prompted a wet portage due to the pin and entrapment hazard of the angular jumble.

Not too far below Second Slide we began to encounter larger boulders along the side of the creek, which further constricted the channel creating some easy Class III rapids. We began to really enjoy the creek



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and our optimism increased. We were entering the zone of the “goods” and we were psyched and ready. The scenery also continued to amaze us, as vertical cliffs punctuated the canyon sides, bright green Quaking Aspen leaves flashed on the hills and pines colored the shores. Each bend brought a new perspective into view and we feasted with our eyes.

I had a fun misadventure in this section that provided Josh with a little anxiety. Josh had been probing in the lead and I was following and snapping photographs with my waterproof camera from midstream. In one washboard rapid, I had to snap just one more photograph. I was slowly spinning around backwards (due to being slightly stern heavy) as I was tucking the camera back into my PFD when I smacked a rock broadside. I flipped upstream and only had time to thrust my paddle into the water as if setting up for a roll. The creek was shallow enough here that I was able to push off the bottom, but unfortunately my paddle stuck to the creek bed and I had to let go as I surfaced. I looked for my paddle

to surface, and did not see it. While keeping my eye on the spot I flipped, I quickly hand paddled into an eddy. I jumped out of my boat and waded to the approximate area. After a few anxious minutes being waist deep in the icy water dredging the creek bottom with my hands, I found the paddle stuck against some rocks. I hadn't noticed until then, but Josh had rounded a bend and was now out of sight. I jumped back in my boat and found Josh a short ways downstream exiting his kayak to come find me. He scolded me for loosing my paddle yet again (this was the third time), but was glad there had been nothing more serious.

The first real rapids started around mile 3. We rounded a bend, heard the music of whitewater, and saw rocks and splashes downstream. A quick scout showed the drops continue out of sight around a bend, but to not be too difficult. So off we went, one at a time, catching eddys, running small ledges, and threading between small boulders. I dubbed the series Tarnation Alley (Class III-IV), because it reminded me of the Encampment

River's Damnation Alley, though they were nowhere near as difficult or large.

After Tarnation Alley, the rapids continued to be steep, ledgy, and dotted with boulders. One note of concern we had was that we could not fail to notice that many of the creek's side boulders at waterline were pretty undercut, and figured some of the mid stream ones would be as well.

Good fun continued for miles as the gradient steadily increased and the difficulty of the drops began to reflect this. We agreed to get out and scout any blind bends, mostly for safety, but also to provide an opportunity to linger and appreciate the incredible wonder we had found, and to provide chances to photo document the creek. We were continually amazed that almost every rapid was runnable and fun! The riverbed was fairly full and we guessed the flow to be medium to medium-high. Any less water would have been not enough, but a bit more would have really brought out the punch in the drops. As they were, the rapids were



fairly technical affairs with the occasional ledge drop and sizeable wave or hole.

A blind bend prompted the scout of a class S-turn to a three-ledge drop rapid with a sketchy log filed run-out, which we named Three Sheets to the Wind (Class IV+). The entry was a blind and quick S-turn hidden by a large boulder. Below the boulder, the creek immediately straightened, accelerated and dropped over three ledges with horseshoe holes in quick succession. The final ledge was the tallest, at around five feet. The run-out was log filled, so we had to catch an eddy in the fast pool below the final ledge. We guessed the total elevation drop of the rapid to be around 10 feet. This was the most serious looking drop we had encountered yet, and the holes below each ledge looked a little sticky—especially the final hole.

After a thorough scout, we ruminated about whether we should run or walk. We were pretty deep into the run, we were starting to tire some and an accident here would be bad, a rescue even worse. We were completely enjoying our day and trip, and didn't want that to change with a bad run or a swim.

After a snack, I proposed we portage our gear around the drop and run it with empty boats. Josh agreed. We portage our bags to the bottom of the drop and took one last look. I offered to probe the drop, but Josh stepped up to the challenge and asked to go first. I turned on the video cameras, which were placed on boulders, readied my throw bag and waited for Josh to signal he was ready.

Josh waved his paddle and off he went. He ran the drop with no problems in what seemed like mere seconds, and was able to catch the eddy at the bottom with relative ease. A big smile shone on his face, having replaced the look of concentration and apprehension that was visible during his run.

Josh Anderson below Tarnation Rapid

Photo by Daniel Anderson

Josh said the drop was a lot faster than it looked, and the speed generated helped him punch each hole without effort.

I walked upstream, got in my boat, and punched out of the eddy. Josh was right. The rapid was very fast, and I was able to boof each hole cleanly and easily caught the eddy at the bottom.

We congratulated ourselves, loaded up our boats, and continued downstream.

Cub Creek came in around mile 5.5 from the south, adding even more flow. We were now on a full-on river. The whitewater eased up for a while and we were able to spend more time looking skyward. The Canyon was now about 1000 feet deep and the cliffs were more vertical.

The creek began to steepen again, and the drops became more abrupt and bouldery, creating additional broach hazards. We were beginning to tire after many hours of being on the move. We ran a few pretty technical drops, and came to one Josh didn't like. This drop was a little more congested than the ones we had previously run. I was tired, but feeling really good and decided to run it. Josh portaged because there were, "Too many broach rocks."

I got in my boat while Josh set up safety a readied the video camera. I gave him the nod, and I was off into the rapid. My entry was good, but towards the bottom, while trying to avoid a rock, I was knocked sideways and abruptly broached. I flipped upstream, and while propping myself up to prevent a full-on wrap, my paddle became lodged in the rocks. I was able to get free, but the paddle was tightly wedged and stayed in place. I finished the drop sans paddle, and caught an eddy below the drop on the shore opposite Josh. I gave Josh the "I'm ok" signal, and went upstream to carefully crawl out into the rapid and free my paddle. I got it loose and returned to my boat and ferried across the creek to Josh. I apologized for getting stuck and losing my paddle again and told him I failed to see the broach rock. He looked at me incredulously and asked, "Which one???" We decided to call the drop The Broach



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Josh Anderson running Three Sheets to the Wind

Photo by Daniel Anderson



Hotel (Class IV) in honor of the incident.

Below the Broach Hotel, the creek began to cut through a conglomerate layer of rock. The gradient picked up big time and the creek cut a gravelly gorge containing numerous continuous Class V+/VI-drops, which we named The Steep and Not-Terribly Clean Gorge.

Due to the late hour and our level of fatigue, we thought it prudent to portage the entire gorge. Each rapid seemed to either have sieve issues, or some other feature which a two-man team at the end of the day would be foolish to attempt. We were unable to portage at creek level, and were forced to hike uphill through alternating sagebrush opens, grassy parks and deadfall filled timber. We contoured around the gorge crossing several gullies to a flat grassy area near the creek.

We had no idea where we were in relation to the lake, and we were unsure of the time of day other than it was late afternoon or early evening. Neither of us had brought a

watch and we hadn't brought along a map or any fancy GPS gadgetry. We left our boats and decided to hike downstream and see what lay ahead. We got separated in the timber, and I ended up climbing high up a cliff, but could only see a fierce looking rapid a little ways downstream.

We met up at the kayaks about 30 minutes later. Josh had been unable to get too far downstream at river level because of thick vegetation and had gained little knowledge more than I. We were beat, hungry and thirsty, and decided to call it a day.

The grassy open we were in had a creek front view, was ringed in by trees on two sides, had ample deadfall wood, and awesome scenery in 360 degrees. We decided this was the spot to call home for the night.

We decided a toast was in order, so we opened our one remaining beer (we threw one beer each into our kayaks at the put-

in, but Josh's had exploded at some point in the day) and made a toast to the canyon and the creek

We took off our wet and now sweaty kayak clothes, hung everything up to dry, unloaded our boats and set camp. Josh set out making an environmentally sound spot for the fire (so as to not leave a permanent scar) while I filled water bottles from the creek.

A dinner of noodles and tuna filled our bellies and water from the creek rehydrated our parched bodies.

A clear cold night fell upon us, so we fed the campfire deadfall and sipped on whiskey.

We enjoyed the clear star filled skies and talked late into the night. We finished all the whisky, and despite having minimal sleeping gear (I used a bivy sac and down jacket, Josh had a lightweight bicycle touring sleeping bag and tarp), slept warmly beneath the stars.

*Idyllic camp, with Josh
Anderson demonstrating
proper enjoyment*

Photo by Daniel Anderson



River Voices

Morning brought sunshine and another clear day. The creek had risen overnight and we felt surprisingly good. Somehow we failed to pack breakfast food, so we ended up eating our emergency food, which was a repeat of dinner. We did have coffee though, so after a few cups drunk from water bottles, we packed our boats, returned our campsite to the condition we found it in, donned paddling clothing and got into our boats.

The first 1/2-mile of the run below camp was punchy, fun Class IV. There was one rapid with a bad log at a bend which prompted a portage. A hundred yards below the portage, a large boulder obscured the downstream view. A scout prompted another portage of what we named Death Boulder Rapid (Class VI-). Here, the creek pinched down, accelerated, dropped onto a car sized boulder, poured over the boulder, dropped into a slot and then two thirds of the flow went into an undercut house sized boulder.

From atop the boulder, we could see Carter Creek Bay on Flaming Gorge Reservoir. It was about two hundred yards down canyon, below a steep, but easy looking Class III rapid. It hit us there, atop the boulder, that we had done it. We felt relieved and saddened at the same time. We had hoped for more rapids like the ones we had just run, but were glad to know we could now relax.

We ran the final drop, which we named Last Hurrah or the Last Rapid Before Stagnation (Class III) to the lake. On shore, we stripped of our whitewater clothes and began the paddle out.

Fortune was on our side because the air was calm and the day sunny. We were pleasantly surprised by the beauty of the lake, though saddened by the knowledge that we would never see the Flaming Gorge as a pristine river canyon like early the explorers William Ashley or John Wesley Powell had.

As it was, the lake was more like a flooded river canyon (which it was) than a bulbous expanse of water. Three relatively easy and surprisingly scenic hours of paddling, and 7 miles later, we pulled our Topos onto the concrete of Sheep Canyon Boat Ramp. Only the final mile of paddling from Kingfisher Island to the boat ramp gave us any trouble where we had a strong headwind blowing cold spray onto our bodies. We thought it a small price to pay.

All we had left to do was to load the truck, pick up my motorcycle from the put-in, and make our way home. We drove home with a feeling a great accomplishment on a personal level, since we knew our achievement was not a significant kayaking achievement. But that wasn't our goal anyway. We wanted an adventure, and we got one. We were safe, explored the unknown, and had a good time. I couldn't have asked for anything more.



Daniel Anderson scouting the last rapid before Stagnation

Photo by Josh Anderson

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Beginners Luck: A Guide's First Raft Trip Down High Water Cataract Canyon

By Daniel Anderson

My 11-foot oars are bent nearly in half on either side of my water logged 18-foot raft. Each oar resembles a frown, not unlike the one on my face. I'm midstream just below Dig Drop 1 on the Colorado River in Cataract Canyon, and ahead, coming up fast, is the awesome sight of Big Drop 2. The 30-foot tall Red Wall wave directly in my path is massive and crashing like an ocean wave landing upon a coral reef, the huge compression waves of Big Drop 2 below the Red Wall are exploding fiercely, sending brown mist skyward, and the massive Little Niagara Hole is anything but little.

I'm pulling frantically towards the safety of the river left eddy above the hardest drop in

At high water, at least, heed this warning!

Photo by Daniel Anderson

Top: A raft in the midst of Big Drop 2 at about 35,000 cfs. Little Niagra visible in the background

Middle: The confluence of the Green River (top) and the Colorado River (bottom) as seen from the air

Bottom: A raft being dwarfed by Big Drop 2 at high flows

Photos by Daniel Anderson

the canyon, but I only seem to be moving closer to the certain doom and possible destruction that is lurking downstream. Sweat pours off my brow like sheets of rain from a Wyoming thunderstorm, and veins are popping out of my arms like a steroid using body builder's dream, but my strength is going fast. My hands begin to slip from the smooth worn sweaty oar grips as my forearms begin to transform into bloodless wood-hard muscle.

The raft that had been behind me now speeds past me out of control in the main current aimed directly for Little Niagara. I can only watch for a second as I am preoccupied with my own fate. I pull and pull on the oars, fighting against the powerful forces of the down stream vacuum, and slowly, reluctantly the eddy accepts my raft. For now, I am safe. The other raft is not as fortunate; it is slammed by thousands of pounds of muddy, frothy water and instantly overturned in the chomping maw of the Little Niagara Hole. I watch from the edge of the shore feeling thankful for my good fortune, but somewhat nauseated, fearful, and helpless as the raft occupants separated from their broken raft are spat from Little Niagara and drift downstream below the rapid looking alive, but beaten. This is my welcome to Cataract Canyon at high water.

I have always been fortunate in my rafting and kayaking endeavors. I have yet to flip a raft, and I am infrequently forced to exit my kayak in the river. And this is not for lack of trying. I have run plenty of Class V rapids on Class V rivers in rafts and in kayaks. This is not bragging, so please don't misinterpret. I know there is a big thrashing waiting for me down a river somewhere, but I've snuck by so far. I know my time will come, but I hope to put it off as long as possible. But I have come very close a number of times. I know for sure I was especially lucky my first raft trip down Cataract Canyon. It was spring, towards the end of May 1998, and the rivers on the Colorado Plateau were rising daily from the spring thaw. I was really strong that spring, having completed a two month season in West Texas guiding on the Rio Grande, and then guiding for three weeks

on the Salt River in SE Arizona. I'd been boating for three months when I showed up in Moab, UT, while most guides here were still shaking off the cold of a good snow pack winter with the memories of fat powder ski days still fresh on their minds. I had a distinct advantage to help compensate for my lack of big water experience and skills that I would soon gain during the high water of 1998.

I had just started guiding with for a different company that year, Sheri Griffith Expeditions. I had been hired because I had 3 years of guiding and kayaking experience running various difficult rivers for hire and for fun. Expectations of me were high, and I wanted to make a good impression and show them that I was a solid boatman and guide.

My first commercial trip with SGE was an Upper Dolores river trip, in Colorado near the Four Corners area. The river flow was medium-high at 3500 cfs and the rapids were good Class III+/IV with a long scary Class IV+/V- called Snaggletooth. Dave Focardi, a long time very experienced SGE guide was the trip leader and he was to report on my performance to the river manager Jose.

The trip went well, with no raft flips, no unintentional guest swims, nor burned or ruined meals. I guess I did well enough, because back in the office after the trip, I was asked if I want to train on a high water Cataract Canyon trip. My stomach immediately sank to my feet and my knee's became weak. "High water Cat! Why that's certain death," I thought to myself. After a few moments of silence waiting for a response, Jose said, "Well you gotta do it sometime, and high water may not come again for a few years." So I tried to sound confident, even with all the blood having run out of my face and my voice unsteady and slightly squeaky with pre-pubescent uncertainty, and replied, "Sure, I'm ready." Of course, in my brain I thought to myself, "I'd really rather be buried up to my neck in Ernie's Country in the middle of summer next to an red ant hill with honey poured on my head."

Cataract Canyon has been known as the 'Graveyard of the Colorado' since the late 1800s. More people have met with disaster and deaths in the 36 miles of Cataract than the whole 300 miles of the Grand Canyon. It had a reputation to not be taken lightly, then and in modern river running times.

Canyonlands National Park put together a commemorative video of footage of the 1997 High Water season when the river flows were between 50-70,000+ cfs, which showed numerous crash and burn sequences of river craft from kayaks to 44-foot motorized J-Rigs. Some of the sequences made your stomach knot up and caused you to involuntarily hold your breath. Any guide in Moab had a copy of the video, and it would inevitably get put into the VCR (Pre-DVD era) during beer drinking gatherings, and all the guides would "Ooh" and "Ah" like NASCAR fans do during car crash sequences. I had a copy of the video and had watched it somewhere around 30 times ... and now wished that I hadn't.

For two days before the trip, I would dream the sequences of the rafts getting pummeled in the Red Wall, Little Niagara, or Satan's Gut in Big Drops 2 and 3. Sometimes I was at the oars; sometimes I was swimming next to the upside down raft, but always I was scared.

Day 1. We Launch at Potash Boat Ramp at 8 AM under sunny calm skies, float down the placid Class I river and enjoy the beauty of the red rock canyonlands scenery. There are no rapids until below Spanish Bottom at mile 55, which is below the confluence of the Colorado River and Green River on, which will be day three of the trip. We are relaxed, and take a few hikes along the river to see some petrified trees, Native American rock art sites and some cool canyons. We camp at Little Bridges Canyon on the first night of the five-day oar raft trip. Dave Focardi is my trip leader again, directing a crew consisting of Rob Ho, the guide extraordinaire, Nancy Redfern, my highsider/bailer/tube-puncher/balast, myself, and 8 guests.

After setting up camp, I lead a hike up the

River Voices

Little Bridges Canyon with Nancy and a few guests. Even though the first two and a half days of rafting is smooth, tranquil water, I am feeling the stress of the days looming ahead. The hike helps to burn off some of the anxiety I am feeling and gives me some time to take in the red rocks, Rabbitbrush and Canyon Wrens. After the hike, I fulfill my guiding duties by helping with dinner and kitchen clean up and then socializing with the guests until dark.

It looks like it might rain when I decided to turn in for the night, but being the macho boatman that I am, I elect to sleep on my boat exposed to the unsettled spring desert weather, rather than set up my new tent.

I pull out my sleeping pad and bag onto the cargo deck of my raft, pull out my full sized pillow (I don't mess around with puny 'backpack-pillows') and watch what stars there are until I am overtaken with slumber. About 1 a.m. I am rudely awoken by light rain. Thinking the rain cloud might pass, I pull out my old worn tarp and covered my sleeping bag and go back to sleep. I next awake an hour later to harder rain. Water is seeping through my ancient frayed tarp and my sleeping bag is getting wet, but I am still defiant. I rearrange the tarp and close my eyes. A half hour later, the rain is falling harder yet, my hair is soaked, and my sleeping bag sopping. I decide to get up and do what I should have done when in the first place: Set up my new tent.

I crawl out of my soggy bed, slip and slide across my raft and climb onto the muddy shore. As I walk past the kitchen area, I spy Rob under a roll-a-table with a table cloth over him as a shelter. It turns out he had forgotten to pack his tent. He pops his head out from under the spring flower print tablecloth and asked if I am putting up a tent. I gruffly say, "Yes." Then he asks, "Do you need any help setting it up," which in 'Guide Talk' means, "Can I share the dryness of your tent if I help you set it up?" I say "Thanks, but I can get it on my own," and I set it up. I start feeling guilty 'cause it is raining even harder now, so as I walk back to get my bag and pillow, I

invited him to share it, "...although it's not very big," hopefully a discouraging remark. I get my bed, return to my tent, crawl in and zip up the door. A few minutes pass, and no signs of Rob. I begin to feel relieved that I won't have to share my tent, but then I hear the zipper opening and Rob oozes in. He is as soaked as I am. Both our sleeping bags are equally saturated as well, so we push our water laden bags aside and use rain jackets as blankets.

Morning comes bright and sunny, and we emerge tired and with bloodshot eyes. He thanks me for my hospitality as we pack up the muddy wet mess that was once my brand new tent. I am glad I shared the tent with him. It had rained for two more hours that night, and even though I had just met him, I knew we'd be good friends and he would be a valuable ally in the canyon.

After a hearty breakfast, we load gear onto rafts and launch on the muddy river. We stop to visit Anasazi ruins, and hike at Lathrop Canyon and Indian Creek Canyon on the way. Early afternoon we camp under clear skies at The Loop. The Colorado River has risen about a foot during the day, and all the guides take notice.

We launch early the next morning and emerge at lunchtime at the confluence of the mighty Green River from Wyoming and our Colorado River, originating in Colorado. The river instantly doubles in size as the two branches intermingle. The Colorado is now about 100 yards across, swollen brown and swirling with cold snowmelt water that has traveled hundreds of miles.

It is the largest river I have ever been on. The current is swift as we approached Spanish bottom, where we pull over for lunch and a lengthy safety orientation. After lunch, Dave goes into a 30 minute safety talk on what to do if we flip a raft (which we have a good chance of doing), how to swim a Class V rapid, how to self-rescue to a raft or shore, and essentially how to survive your \$1000 vacation.

Life jackets are securely tightened, cargo is double strapped, silent prayers are mumbled by the guides, and we push off from shore.

We enter the canyon with soured stomachs and heightened anxiety as our scenic float is transformed into an adrenaline filled adventure. Rapid One, or Brown Betty is the first of 34 rapids. Brown Betty is a relatively straightforward rapid at low water, but now it is an elevator ride consisting of 10- to 12-foot-tall waves for a hundred yards.

Immediately after is Rapid two with unpredictable building and exploding 15-foot-tall waves that lead into an extremely powerful eddy complete with crevasse-like folds and seemingly bottomless suck holes. My raft is bucked and slammed by cold froth, and Nancy and I are baptized by the Colorado. These are the biggest waves I have ever seen, but I am feeling confident and strong and make the safety of the eddy with a little grace.

Rapid Three, the next in the series, is easy and insignificant, and passes without event.

Rapid Four has big waves, but is pretty non-threatening. There are some large tail waves at the bottom of the drop, but they are mellow. The biggest challenge of the rapid is catching the eddy for camp directly after Rapid Four in order to camp at Upper Rapid Five beach. Here the eddy is small and the eddy fence is tall and powerful. We start our approach early, pull with strong well timed strokes, and make it into the upper camp eddy. I stow my oars, tie up the raft to a Tamarisk shrub, crack a beer, and the world is warm and peaceful again.

Upper Five Beach is one of my favorite places to camp in Cataract Canyon. Even in high water, there is a half a football field sized area of soft tan sand beach to walk barefoot on and some Tamarisk trees for shade seeking. The canyon here is about 1400 feet deep with tan/grey/coral colored cliffs that rise up to The Maze District of Canyonlands National Park directly

behind camp. The rapid is our front yard and provides hours of viewing pleasure for those into watching the Colorado Plateau travel downstream in the form of silt laden water.

We unload rafts, set up camp, and replace dry tops, splash pants and neoprene booties with loud Hawaiian shirts, baggy shorts and river sandals. The crew, minus Rob, leads a hike up the steep canyon slopes to Surprise Valley and The Dolls House. I turn back early, before reaching the canyon rim and return to camp to help Rob with dinner. Rob greets me at the beach with a cold beer, a requirement in the dry heat of the canyon before starting a guiding task such as cooking.

After acquiring the necessary buzz and sharing the required exaggerated river stories, we commence dinner preparation.

The hikers appear after a few hours, almost on cue as the steaks are finishing and the spread is laid out on the table. Everyone is hungry after the arduous hike and they dig into steaks and bakes (potatoes), corn on the cob, salad, and then finish off dinner with a slice of Dutch Oven chocolate cake ... all washed down with plentiful Sangria wine and cold beer.

After the river feast, everyone retires to the soothing comfort of a driftwood campfire to tell jokes and stories. I and the other guides tell river lore and share past river experiences and form bonds with the people who trust their lives and well being to us for these five days in the desert wilderness.

Eventually Dave brings out his banjo and we are treated to some fine bluegrass picking. The inevitable request for 'Dueling Banjos' is brought up and Dave obliges. Since I have been indulging freely in the wine, I assemble a drum kit of wash buckets and cook pots and play the part of the second banjo with spoons for drumsticks. As far as I can tell we sound great; of course the alcohol has dulled my musical ear and we could sound like a 20 car pile-up for all I can tell. Nevertheless, we receive a roaring ovation for our

efforts, and my wine glass if filled up again in appreciation by one of our guests. I gladly accept.

I have been thinking about the next day of rapids to come, and devised a plan of action. I will get really drunk this night. My theory here is that I will do better in the hard rapids if I am hung-over ... or it could just be that I am nervous and figure putting on a good drunk will distract my mind from the perceived terror that is lurking down in the canyon below. Regardless, I get hammered. I go to sleep on a merry-go-round beach and subsequently, I am severely hung-over when I regain consciousness in the morning. When I open my eyes and try to get up, the movement makes my head feel like a dozen kangaroos are jumping on a trampoline in medieval armor in my skull. I open my eyes and the sun sends machete slashes of pain into my skull. I don't want to move, but I have to get up and help the other guides with morning chores. So I gather my strength and climb out of my sleeping bag. I emerge from my tent like early life emerging from the primordial sea: slowly and reluctant. I, like early life, know it is a bad move, but I don't really have much choice in the matter. I try to help prepare breakfast, but the smell of sizzling bacon sends waves of nausea over me. I slowly, carefully help pack up fire pan and camp chairs, being mindful to not move my head too suddenly for fear of further damaging my already injured brain any further. I am not the best condition

for running the biggest whitewater in the United States.

I somehow manage to help post-breakfast kitchen clean-up, pack up my sleeping gear and rig my boat. While I am dunking my throbbing head in the icy river, Dave does a refresher safety talk, reinforcing the major rapid survival points discussed the day before. All that is left to do is re-tighten life jackets and climb on board the rafts. I sit at the oars while Nancy coils the bowline, pushes the raft into the current, and then climbs into her position in the front of the raft. She is in a similar condition as I, since I convinced her last night to be a test subject in proving my hangover-theory. I think that there's more to her condition than just headache and sick stomach though. She is especially nervous and edgy this morning, but she has a right to be. She knows what we are getting into. She has seen Cataract at high water as a passenger. She knows what awaits us downstream. I, on the other hand, am oblivious and nursing a hangover that would confuse an Alaskan Moose. I have only seen Cataract two times previously. Both times were at low flows, where the river is more like a kitten than the beast I find it to be later that day. Adding to our apprehension is the knowledge that the river has risen another foot or so during the night. Nobody knows what the river flow is. Dave and Rob guess at the volume, but after the trip, we learn that their flow estimates were low by about 15,000 cfs.

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River Voices

Into the swollen river we go, the swift current tugs us on towards destiny. While rowing the raft, I have to continually dunk my head in the frigid water to cool my throbbing head. My senses are slightly dulled, but I feel the currents accelerate as we are swallowed by the rising canyon walls. Around the first bend we encounter the North Seas, Rapids 6 & 7 combined. From 200 yards the waves look colossal. I grip the oars tighter and tells Nancy, "Get ready!" as we begin to slide down the smooth tongue. As we drop down the quickening water into the rapid, my huge 18 foot raft is met by waves at 15 foot tall, and some at 20 foot. We are buffeted by walls of water from all sides as waves form, explode, and dissipate unpredictably. It is a wonderful sensation, like being on a sea going vessel in heavy surf! I dryly and sarcastically ask Nancy over the roar of the water, "Why do you think they call this the North Seas?" I catch a quick annoyed glare from her as yet another wall of water drenches us and the raft. Nancy seems to have lost her sense of humor all at once. We ride out the last few tail waves and Nancy begins the never-ending task of bailing out gallon after gallon of water from the floor of the raft. Despite the force and power of the rapid, we have emerged wet, but upright and intact. "Not bad," I think to myself, "only 19 more rapids to go." Rapid 9 & 10 appear at the next bend, but they are washed out and consist of relatively tiny wave of only four to five feet high. We relax for a bit after passing them as we enter 'Lake Cataract,' which at these high flows is a two-and-a-half mile section of swift flat water. In low water, there are two more small rapids in this section, Rapids 11 & 12, but with the high water they are almost nonexistent. This gives us time for more head dunking and a chance to catch our breath.

We meet up with another SGE trip in the middle of 'Lake Cataract'. They are a four-day trip that launched a day after us, but will be finishing the same day we are. Their trip also has a training boat along. Sarah Klinger, a seasoned SGE guide, has graduated to Cat, and will be rowing the big gnarr for the first time as well. We combine our trips into one big group for

safety through the remaining rapids.

'Lake Cataract' ends and we approach the head of Mile Long Rapids. Here is where the real action begins! For the next four miles, the river is a series of huge rapids connected by huge waves, giant holes, and strong currents, with few realistic options for a place to rest. The first two miles contain eight distinct rapids in lower flow, but at today's flows, they all blur into a non-stop adrenaline-filled action-adventure. Most rafters scout the first three rapids before running them, but we decide to not scout for some reason unknown to me, and elect to, "Read and run baby!"

The current picks up speed as we round the bend and enter Rapid 13. I line up the raft in the tongue and push on the oars. We are committed now—for better or for worse. There is no stopping while in a rapid. You take what the river gives you and deal with it as best as you possibly can. I am in position in the main current and aim for the center of the rapid. Up and over and through 10-foot waves, all the while I maneuver the raft to keep it square to the obstacles in my path. The river here makes an S-curve and I cannot see far downstream. I stay clear of huge shoreline boulders and try to glimpse what lies ahead through the spray. We enter Rapid 14 and follow the path of least resistance down the sinuous river of waves to Rapid 15 (aka Capsize or Hell-To-Pay, named by early river runners who had misadventures here).

Rapids 13 & 14 are really big waves mostly, but Capsize has a few surprises waiting for us.

Before this trip, I had only seen Cataract Canyon in a kayak at low end-of-summer-flows; at the peak flow we were experiencing, there was really no resemblance. Today, at five times that volume, all the van sized boulders I had seen before were under water and replaced with huge waves and holes. The sand bars and beaches of late August were now under water and washing downstream.

Coming into Capsize, I scan the approaching chaos and tell Nancy, "I think I see a big hole in the center. Do you feel lucky?" She glares coldly at me and quickly and sternly replies, "Don't go anywhere near it!" So I pull hard on the oars and with some effort go to the right of the huge hole and ride the standing waves to the bottom of the rapid.

Sarah's raft was right behind me at the start of the drop, but she was unable to make the 'sneak' move to the right and takes the big ride through the most violent part of the rapid. Her raft is hit by thousands of pounds of water, stalls out in the current, stands up on end almost to the point of flipping, but then washes out of the hole. She loses a passenger out of her boat in the process, but pulls her back in the raft in an instant. Her raft is full of water and her crew full of adrenaline, but overall is no worse for the wear.

Still fighting the hangover, I feel quite calm and continue on in ignorant bliss into the next challenge, Rapid 16 (The South Seas). More huge waves here to ride and all goes smoothly. Another curve and then Rapid 17 called The Button. All I had been told about The Button was, "Don't go center because there is a huge boat-eating hole there called The Button Hole. It's called that because it will flip your raft like the push of a button!" All I see at the entrance of the drop is muddy brown froth. I drop into the torrent and I pull with all my might through and across 15-foot tall wave towards the left. I'm almost where I think I need to be in the rapid, when my raft is slammed by a crashing wave that surfs the raft for what seems like minutes, but is really only a few seconds, and denies us access to the left line. We are forcefully pushed center into the maelstrom of waves and white froth where I believe a spankin' is a waitin'. All I can see are brown walls of water, and don't know the water level is too high for the hole, so I fight my way towards the left side of the rapid like a cat clawing his way out of a bath tub. Finally, we exit the rapid with thumping hearts and a water-filled raft, upright and intact.

Nancy tries to bail some of the river

out of the raft, but has to stop and hold on as we quickly approach Rapid 18 or Marty's Hole. Marty's turns out to be mild compared to 17, and we pass through easily on the left.

The next rapid is Been Hurt Rapid (Rapid 20), which fortunately is fast water and small waves at this flow.

At the bottom of the Been Hurt, I follow Dave's lead and row with anxiety and much effort across the strong current into the eddy above Big Drop 1 (Rapid 21) at Big Drop Beach.

All the remaining rafts labor into the eddy to regroup and take a moment's rest, bail out rafts, and catch our breath. We all look pained with fatigue and fear. Our expressions are those of those who have looked death in the face. Sarah looks at me with fear in her eyes as she tells me of her experience in Capsize.

We bail boats free of water and talk about the rapids ahead. Normal protocol is to walk a quarter mile from here to an overlook 150 feet above the river called 'Poop Rock' to scout the next 1 mile of rapids. But for reasons I never found out, we elected to try to eddy out after the next rapid to scout the two biggest rapids in the whole canyon: Big Drops 2 & 3 (Rapids 22 & 23).

We push rafts into the current and down the tongue of Big Drop 1. I once again am buffeted by monstrous brown waves and savage currents of confused water. I see Dave's raft pull into the scout eddy river left above Big Drop 2 and pull with all my might towards the slack water, and make the safety of the eddy by luck and determination alone. Sarah's raft misses the eddy and enters Big Drop 2 in the wrong spot, heading towards Little Niagra (a hole literally the size of a Greyhound Bus!) and is instantly overturned like a leaf

in the wind. She and her crew disappear into the cataclysm below.

Rob speeds past the eddy in his raft, enters Big Drop 2 in the correct place, misses Little Niagra and negotiates the remaining whitewater in pursuit of Sarah and her crew. After a few nervous seconds of not seeing them, I begin to see Sarah and her crew climbing on top of their over-turned raft at the bottom of the rapids. Rob is rowing towards them trying to get into position to rescue them. After seeing that Sarah and crew are safe, I want to scout. I don't want to follow in her footsteps and be rescued as well. But Dave has high water jitters, and the fortunate knowledge of the run and wants to go. I convince him to wait a few seconds while I hop on shore for a quick look. I can only see whitewater and spray being thrust skyward from the rivers edge, and just shrug my shoulders and trust my safety to destiny and good karma.

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River Voices

I jump back in my raft and Nancy pushes us off. She asks “What’s it look like?”

I smartly reply, “Pretty much what you can see from here, only worse.”

“Well, what’s the run?” she wants to know.

I say, “The only knowledge passed on to me is ‘Hit the marker hole high and pull right. Any idea what or where the ‘Marker Hole’ is?’” Nancy looks at me with fear, says nothing and then looks downstream.

We watch Dave’s approach. His boat is at a 45-degree angle to the current and he is facing upstream towards us...but he’s not looking at us. He’s looking over his left shoulder into the bowels of Hell! He is almost into the rapid and then begins to pull powerfully to the river right. His raft pivots as he hits a hidden river feature, the elusive ‘Marker Hole’ and now he is facing downstream and pulling to the river right side. He tops a large wave and disappears from sight over the mountains of water.

I think I see the route, so I enter the current in the same spot as Dave with a dry mouth and my heart thumping in my chest like a rabbit on speed. I set up my raft like Dave did, pull towards the right and hit the marker hole. The raft pivots bow first downstream and I think to myself, “This is just like the move at Skull Rapid in Westwater Canyon (A rapid I’ve run 50+ times successfully), only left-to-right instead of right-to-left.” Little did I know that after hitting the ‘Marker Hole’ I was supposed to pull like Hell to the right. After the pivot, I smile and begin to push calmly on the oars, thinking I was in the right spot. I look downstream and see a 30-foot wall of water, named the ‘Red Wall’ right in my path and I stop smiling. Oddly enough, as my raft climbs the three-story wave, all I can think is, “Man, I wish I was in my kayak right now!”

The Red Wall causes most carnage in Big Drop 2 at flows of 50,000 cfs and above. It has an unpredictable cycle where the wave will crash like an ocean wave hitting the shore, turn smooth as glass and than crash again. The River Gods are smiling on me

though, because the wall isn’t breaking as I go up and over the top of the biggest wave I have ever seen. Then chaos! My raft begin to get hit from all sides by compression waves. Nancy is tube-punching and high siding her full 120 lbs, trying to counteract the force of the waves crashing on our boat. We get knocked sideways by a large wave, so rather than attempt in vain to straighten out the raft, I drop the oars and begin to high side on the right side as a wave hits us, then I switch to the left side as a wave hits that side, and then back to the right side again.

The next wave tilts the raft completely on its left side and we stall-out, hanging in limbo, moments from flipping and an immensely unpleasant and potentially life threatening swim. As a last ditch effort, I climb up the side of the raft with my legs running in place like Fred Flintstone driving his car and lay my entire 180 lbs on the tube. For some reason the river gods are smiling down on us and we don’t flip, but instead flop back down flat.

I notice the waves are beginning to get smaller now and I almost begin to feel relieved, until I realize we’re on the far left side of the river on the edge of The Purgatory Eddy directly above Satan’s Gut.

Satan’s Gut is a bad place to be. The name says it all. Nobody goes into ‘The Gut’ on purpose. It is essentially a small waterfall that churns like a meat grinder at its base, trapping anything that enters in a vacuum of recycling currents. Rafts have been completely destroyed in its backwash, and drownings have occurred and major injuries inflicted here. I know people who swore they were going to die in its grasp, and who have since given up rafting in Cataract Canyon as a result—and I’m heading right into its maw!

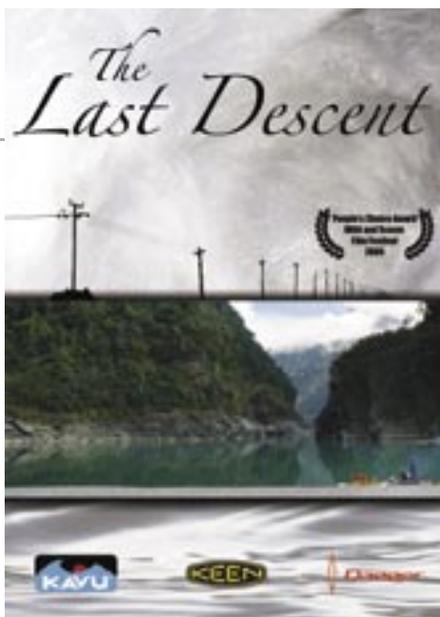
I regain my oars and begin to pull with all my might towards the right, away from death and destruction. But the raft is filled with water to the tube tops and must weigh 2 tons or better. Nancy begins bailing frantically. She throws 5 gallon buckets of water overboard as quickly

as she can, but the water level in the raft doesn’t change. My oars bend almost to the point of breaking without moving the water-laden raft. “Forget in Nancy! There’s no time for that,” I tell her in between grunts. “Just hold on!” Visions of carnage scenes from The High Water Episode 97 video footage race through my head as I look downstream. I look at Nancy and tell her as calmly as possible, “We’re screwed.” She gives me a blank unbelieving look, and I say, “Well, Nancy, it was nice knowing you.”

She shrills at me in a panicked voice, “Don’t stop pulling! Don’t give up!! Never give up!!” The fear in her voice snaps me back to reality and I pull harder and harder, though my grip on the oars begins to slip as fatigue takes over. We’re losing the battle and The Gut is looming just feet from us. All we see is a spot where the river disappears and a mist is rising. All we can hear is a lion roaring below. We can’t possible avoid The Gut so I square up, yell for Nancy to hold on. As we start over the edge of the drop, all is silent except for the begging I hear from myself and Nancy. “Please God, Please God, Please God!!!” we whimper in unison. The raft drops off the top of The Gut and falls eight feet into the froth. As we hit bottom I dig in the oars and pull with the adrenalized strength of a man looking death in the eye. The raft stall out and I look directly into Lucifer’s intestines. I don’t like what I see so I pull harder, almost frantically, fighting the currents trying to suck us back into the raft shredder. Slowly, reluctantly, the raft slips from the clutches of The Gut, and we flush downstream through the remainder of Big Drop 3. As we emerge from the tail waves of the rapid, we do a high five, and yell victory cheers till our throats are sore.

I look Nancy square in the eyes, and calmly say, “Well Nancy, this would be a good time to bail.” She just rolls her eyes at me, and collapses onto the floor of the raft.

That was my first raft trip down High Water Cataract Canyon...but not my last!



Movie Review The Last Descent

by Mamie Flinn

Perhaps the love of travel, and the hunger for extreme paddling were the birth seeds for the idea. A journey to India, Nepal, Africa, and California to take on some of the most remote rivers might spark the fire in many a kayaker.

But for Katie Scott, Charlie Center, and Scott Ligare, their inspiration paved the way to action: to paddle and document—possibly for the last time—some of the most at-risk rivers on the planet. Thus, The Last Descent Film Project was born. Reaching out to extreme sport enthusiasts, the three made it a mission to raise awareness of the vulnerability of some of the world's most breathtaking and endangered rivers and to question the damming of rivers in amazing places around the globe.

Travel they did. With whitewater kayaks, film equipment, and camping apparatus in tow, the three adventurers immersed themselves in local culture and came to learn the experience of the people in the communities they visited. They grew intimately familiar with the water that makes up some of the most ecologically significant rivers in the world. They documented the fragile beauty of those waterways currently threatened or permanently altered by large-scale hydropower projects.

Their journey began last fall in Nepal. There, Scott Ligare and Katie Scott traversed the natural waterways where they were enchanted by the rivers, mountains and Nepalese people. Erick Conklin met Katie and Scott in Nepal for the expedition of the Marsyangdi. Although the Marsyangdi River was their primary focus, they came to know more remote rivers and places as well: the Madi Khola, Bhode Khosi, the Modi Khossi and the Karnali.

In India, they were joined by the third

member of their team, Charlie Center. The stage here was also made more robust by fellow kayakers, Seth Warren, Lizzy English, Ben Stookesbury, and Erick Conklin. The group spent three weeks in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh where they paddled the Lohit River, the Siang (Tsang Po) and the Dibang River, all tributaries that originate with perhaps the most well known Brahmaputra.

In January, once again a duo, Katie and Scott crossed India and made their way to Africa, spending a month on the White Nile in Uganda. The final leg to the project found itself nearer to home, with Katie, Scott and Charlie in California on the upper stretch of the Touleumne in Yosemite National Park, known as the Grand Canyon of the Touleumne.

The common ambition weaving through the group's intercontinental expedition was to offer voice to the rivers and people affected by damming, and to call attention to the dire environmental consequences and socio-economic implications that result from both foreign and governmental interests that find their energy sources in these sacred places.

The Last Decent Film Project is important. It combines a unified love of whitewater with cinematography and narrative that ultimately ignites and reminds us all of our inherent connection to rivers. Reaching out to both extreme kayakers and naturalists, this documentary invites the viewer to accompany Katie, Scott, and Charlie on their extraordinary adventure. It challenges diverse audiences to witness the lives affected, and to question the

invasive practices of damming and the long-term destruction our global appetite for energy creates.

An adventure was certainly had. The group experienced and documented stunning rivers, wonderful people, irreplaceable richness of culture, and incredible paddling—all of which have been affected by the invasive processes involved with obtaining hydroelectricity, for or better or worse. A deeper knowledge of the complexities that surround damming practices was, according to the Last Descent members, definitely gleaned. Perhaps for Katie Scott, Scott Ligare and Charlie Center what was most deeply melded was their own need to remain connected with the natural ways of the river as they continue to educate, speak to influence policy, and work toward conservation.

Richard Hugo wrote: "I forget the names of the towns without rivers. A town needs a river to forgive the town. Whatever river, whatever town...it is much the same. The cruel things I did, I took to the river. I begged the current: make me better."

The Last Descent won peoples choice award at the Wild and Scenic Environmental Festival in Nevada City California on January 11, 2008.

All profits from the film project will be donated to American Whitewater and other organizations dedicated to river advocacy.

Find out more about *The Last Descent* at www.thelastdescent.com

Whitewater Evolution: A Novelist's Route from Phobia to Obsession

By Gwen Hunter

Growing up on Lake Wylie in South Carolina and near mountains with streams and rivers, I was heavily involved in water-sports: waterskiing, whitewater rafting, boating, swimming, diving, canoeing, and fishing. I thought I'd never fear water, and have used water settings for novels and scenes numerous times over my twenty-year writing career. Setting a book on whitewater seemed a simple progression for me, moving from one water-sport to another. I mean, the boats have skirts and some are called duckies...how scary could it be?

While I was researching my 19th novel, veteran paddler Mike Kohlenberger guided my husband, Rod, and me on several rivers before suggesting that I schedule a whitewater kayak lesson with an instructor he recommended. I intended it to be my usual, active, hands-on research, giving me authentic knowledge to share with my readers. Over the years, I've researched ER medicine, jewelry making, horse breeding, professional horse stables, veterinary surgery, herbs, nursing, belly-dancing (yeah, I took lessons), bread-baking, snakes, guns (I have a dandy little 1940s 9mm Beretta), film photography, Vampire legends, the Atchafalaya River Basin, Cherokee legends, prop-driven airboats, Cajun foods, wine, beer, lots of history, witches, politics, comparative religions, and now paddling. Of them all, I have come to love whitewater paddling best, and researching rivers in a whitewater kayak as a setting for books is part of that evolution. But it didn't start out all that well. It was, in fact, a phobic disaster.

Dave Crawford of Rapid Expeditions in Hartford, Tennessee is a great instructor, offering, among many other lessons, a beginner's day-long paddling class, which Rod and I signed up for. It sounded innocuous enough, with morning

classroom instruction, followed by a couple hours in a river pool, and ending with a paddle down the Lower Pigeon River. While Dave and I have since become good friends, I'm sure he despaired of me the first time I actually got into a boat. That simple, easy, wet-exit sent me over the edge. Totally. Why? An upside-down, hooked-to-a-boat, vertigo-inducing, low-oxygen-environment experience was different, very different, from anything a lake, pool, pond, or even the ocean can offer. I went into full-blown panic mode that resulted in rapid heart rate, hyperventilation, and tension I simply could not lose.

Dave worked to help me relax, talking me down, demonstrating calming breathing techniques. But nothing helped, and with my history in water-sports, this was a shocker. I always got right back up from water-ski crashes; I got right back in the saddle after being thrown from a horse. I never experienced a lingering fear from any sport. I was as much stunned with my own reaction as I was panicked by fear. Worse yet, that night, I had the first of many drowning dreams that woke me for weeks afterwards. I was really, truly afraid. Dave figured he had seen the last of me.

However, because I had a contract for a novel about a whitewater kayaker, I had to get over my new phobia and learn how to paddle. With Rod's assistance, I forced myself to wet-exit over and over again in the unthreatening waters of a friend's swimming pool. There, I worked on my paddle strokes and started learning Eskimo roll basics. Yet, all this didn't defeat my fear. I was still having the awful drowning dreams, and nothing I tried in my waking life to combat them worked.

Fairly desperate, I remembered meditation and lucid dreaming techniques I had researched for a previous book. I went to bed each night thinking about sunlight sparkling on water, and envisioning leaves bobbing on a placid river, and visualizing popping a skirt, exiting smoothly, and swimming to the surface. Over the course of several weeks, I began to get a hand on the night terrors, dreaming my way



Gwen Hunter

Photo by Renaissance

through nightmares that had previously trapped me. It took two months of emotional effort and swimming pool time, but the panic attacks began to dissipate. I was learning to deal with my new fear.

My second kayak lesson with Dave was a success—once he got over the surprise of seeing me again. I proved I could do a wet-exit, stayed calm, and demonstrated proper paddling strokes, hip-snaps, and eddy maneuvers. Satisfied that I could handle the basics, Dave once again took Rod and me down the Lower Pigeon. The Lower is mostly open, slow-moving water but with some easy Class II ledges, some easy eddies and plenty of forgiving ripples. My earlier fear was gone. Even I was surprised when I got stuck on a rock and did a successful back dismount. My first twelve-inch-drop was such a woo-woo moment that all my former fears dissipated like mist under a summer sun. I found my river-rhythm, fell in love with the sport, and began to see how my fictional characters could love paddling whitewater rivers and creeks.



Gwen Hunter paddling Nantahala Falls

Photo by NOC Photos

For some books, one such successful lesson is all I need, and once a book is done, I don't continue with the sport or activity. Not so with rivers! Living in the Southeast, Rod and I are surrounded by paddling opportunity, and managed to find a lot of them over the next two months as I dealt with the last vestiges of fear. During this time, I also visited with Dave several times and eventually took the Upper Pigeon (Class IIs, IIIs, and IVs), helping me move from a petrified rank beginner into a solid intermediate paddler.

We live close to a Class II play spot on the Catawba River called the Staircase, perfect for an afternoon of play when the river is running post-storm mid-level, say 2,000 to 3000 cfs. The miles above that are great for a lazy floating or fishing day. The US National Whitewater Center is not far away in North Carolina. We are within leisurely driving distance of the Chattooga in South Carolina, the Nantahala and Green River in North Carolina, and the Pigeon River and the South Fork of the Cumberland in Tennessee. The latter two rivers are the setting for my novel, *Rapid Descent* (Murder, mayhem, and rapids, what more can you ask for?). But my river explorations didn't cease with the completion of the novel.

Rod and I took a trip north and west, and paddled the St. Francis in Missouri—a read-and-run I recommend for any intermediate level paddler, as long as the water isn't storm-heavy. The gorge section is breathtaking! And we paddled Clear

Creek in Colorado. Oh my... nothing like putting on a river in the early light of a summer morning, and ending up surrounded by the wonderful smells of the Coors Plant and the beauty of Golden, Colorado.

But by far, my favorite river experience was a three-day camping trip in the fall of '08 on the Nantahala, with Rod, Dave Crawford, and some new paddling friends. Although I didn't do the seal launch off the six-foot-high rock ledge like my paddling companions, I could still feel my skill—and comfort-level—increasing each day, culminating with the final day on the water. The weather was fifty degrees, a slow rain was falling, and the trees were turning that first glorious scarlet. Nonstop raindrops splashed my face, from softly pattering to a hard pelt, cold and brisk and energizing. The steady rhythm of raindrops dimpled the surface of the river. A heavy, slow mist slid down the gorge and over the water. And the river transported me on its life-force like mother-earth carrying her young.

It was mystical, spiritual, and elevated me to a new level of paddling that transcended everything before.

I still don't have sufficient words for that experience, except to say it was like God dropped down a bit of heaven, changing my appreciation of paddling into a raging obsession, strengthening my belief that we have to care for and protect the earth, its water, its wild places, and its creatures.

We have to marshal our own resources to protect the Earth's, because if we don't, we will lose them forever.

Oh, and did I mention? At the end, I ran the Nantahala Falls without doing a fish count! I ran the meat! Whoowhoo!

My fear is resolved, a new skill, new lingo, and new lifestyle are firmly in place. My novel, *Rapid Descent* is finished and in bookstores, and I now have another novel planned, set on the Green River in North Carolina. Sarah Bell of Green River Adventures has offered to be my fount of wisdom on that project. I can now see my career following the path of my life: more outdoor novels set on rivers I have paddled...or someday will.

Have I gone overboard for paddling? Oh yeah, I'm addicted. I now have four kayaks—a LiquidLogic ReMix 59, an old Pyrahna 230 MicroBat creekboat, an Airhead IK, and a brand spankin' new, 12 foot Perception Carolina for slow rivers, flat water, or ocean paddling. Yeah. I have gone stark raving bonkers for paddling. Rod has four boats too, eight boats between us, and a basement full of gear, clothes, racks, and tie downs for the RV and the toad we use to transport us and the gear from take-out to put-in. We are ready for almost anything to come! How sweet is that, brah?

For more info on Gwen Hunter's newest novel, Rapid Descent, or any of her other work, visit www.gwenhunter.com, or www.faithhunter.net.

Accident Summary

Whitewater Accident Summary: July Through December 2008

By Charlie Walbridge

The number of whitewater accidents declined in the second half of 2008. Between July and December, American Whitewater received reports of 6 kayak, 5 canoe, and 9 rafting fatalities. The number of whitewater kayaking deaths this year, 16, is somewhat higher than in recent years. This is probably due to the increased presence of recreational kayakers on whitewater. This year's 8 canoeing deaths are about average, but the total of 29 rafting fatalities is the second highest number on record. The rafting number is always pushed upwards during Western big-water years. Strainers, dams, and high water flushes continued to be major issues for both experienced and inexperienced paddlers.

Kayaking Accidents

In late August the remnants of a hurricane fell on The Smokey Mountains and by August 26th many small streams were up for the first time in months. Isaac Ludwig, 26, joined a group of elite paddlers for a trip down the West Prong of the Little Pigeon near Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Because of high water levels, they planned to run the lower part of the Road Prong, which is very small and steep, taking out above the main West Prong run, which is even steeper. A report in The Three Rivers Paddling Club Newsletter gives a sobering account of what followed. Once on the water, the group quickly realized that water levels, already high, were rising quickly. Two paddlers decided to take out early while Mr. Ludwig and another paddler continued on. Mr. Ludwig missed an eddy at the planned take-out, just below the Chimney Tops Trail Footbridge. His friend tried to follow, but pulled back when he realized that water levels

were unmanageable. After searching for Mr. Ludwig along the bank, his friends called 911. The next day, after water levels dropped considerably, Mr. Ludwig's body was found by another group of river runners. He had hung up in a tree, well above the surface of the water.

Three weeks later, on September 13th, a malfunction at Hebgen Dam caused Montana's Madison River to run at 3000 cfs. According to the Bozeman Daily Chronicle the high level worried organizers of a scheduled downriver race. Robert Kindle, 36, agreed to make a trial run of the river with friends. Although he was a very capable kayaker, he had a bad line entering S-Turn Rapid. He flipped, failed to roll, and flushed downstream for 15 minutes. He washed past several throw ropes before hitting a downed tree and disappearing underwater. Friends moved in quickly to free him, but they were too late.

Local paddlers flock to North Chickamauga Creek whenever rain hits the mountains around Chattanooga, Tennessee. Normal flows on this Class IV+ creek are around 400-1200 cfs; according to Boatertalk posts, the flow on December 11th was over 8,000 cfs. On that day Russell Burrow, an experienced paddler, attempted a solo run despite the high water. No one knows what happened next, only that his car was left at a parking lot and his body was found miles downstream. Knowledgeable locals are not sure why there was such a terrible lapse in judgment, but he's not the first to let his enthusiasm get the better of him.

Most kayaking accidents involve experienced boaters, but some do not. An example of the latter was a September 4th accident on the South Fork of the Snake River in Southeast Idaho. Patrick Smith, 71, was running the river with a friend. According to the Idaho Statesman their kayaks "swamped" in a rapid near Twin Bridges. The term "swamped" suggests that they were not equipped with spray

skirts. It doesn't take much of a wave to fill an open kayak cockpit—a real handicap in whitewater. His friend was able to swim ashore, but Mr. Smith did not. Several hours later a fisherman found his body snagged in a tree.

Canoeing Accidents

Sometimes paddlers are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Case in point is a July 22nd incident in which a falling tree hit an unidentified canoeist on Southeast Pennsylvania's Brandywine Creek. I actually have reports of three similar accidents in my files! By comparison, I have no reports of lightning strikes involving river runners.

On November 11th a 17 year-old canoeist was pinned in a culvert-like structure on the Blackstone River in Cumberland, Rhode Island. The incident occurred where the river flows under an old railroad trestle. The drop under the trestle is runnable, and there are several possible chutes that the pair had paddled before. The father paddled through one chute easily, but his son was pinned in debris at the bottom of another sluice. He did not survive the incident. To avoid similar tragedies, always scout blind drops before running them.

Strainers continue to be among the deadliest obstacles encountered by paddlers. On August 31st Connor Guy swam into a strainer at Pringle Falls on Oregon's Deschutes River while paddling tandem with a friend. News footage of the accident shows a long Class III+ rapid culminating in a spot where a logjam blocked 3/4 of the river. A flip upstream of this puts swimmers at grave risk. In another incident, a 20-year-old man swam into a strainer after his canoe capsized on Massachusetts's Nissitissit River. His three companions, aided by an alert bystander struggled desperately to free him without success. Strainers are always present

on natural rivers and it's a paddler's responsibility to recognize these hazards and avoid them. When your paddling skills aren't sufficient, a portage is the best option.

Rafting Accidents

Flush-drowning, one of the most common killers of whitewater rafters, occurs when a person wearing a PFD drowns during a long swim in whitewater. One of these drownings occurred on June 6th when Kevin Bryant, an outstanding college basketball player, died after a bad swim on the Poudre River near Fort Collins, Colorado. His friends performed CPR and he was airlifted to a hospital where he was placed on life support. He died a week later. On July 31st Lisa Braughton, 48, drowned on the Deschutes River after her small raft capsized. She was last seen floating helplessly around a bend. Back east, Thomas McDermott was taking a commercial raft trip on August 21st when his boat flipped on Maine's Kennebec River. McDermott, 58, swam through the Three Sisters and Big Mama all the way to Cathedral Eddy. This brutal two-mile swim was made more strenuous by high (7500 cfs) flows. In Alaska, 75-year-old Ronnie Zoffler died after a commercial raft flipped on Glacier Creek on October 1st. The advanced age of the swimmer and low water temperatures were a deadly combination. On December 26th a commercial guide and a rafting guest were killed on the flooded Reventazon River in Costa Rica. John Lane, a former NOC guide, reported the accident in his blog, "Kudzu Express." In Upper and Lower Bamboo Rapid, a long Class IV, one raft rode up on a huge rock and flipped. Guide Jeremy Garcia got his raft safely ashore, commandeered a kayak, and took off after the swimmers. His kayak flipped as he tried to pull two guests ashore. The guests got out safety, but Mr. Garcia floated out of sight. Later everyone was accounted for except Mr. Garcia and Jose Santos Mora, a guest.

July was a terrible month for pinning accidents. On July 2nd Connor Guy was canoeing the Deschutes River when his canoe flipped in Class IV Pringle Falls. Mr. Guy, 48, washed into an underwater log near the bottom of the rapid. This was the second death at Pringle Falls this year, and it prompted authorities to remove the logjam. On July 14th an unidentified 50 year-old woman drowned after her raft pinned on a bridge pier on Montana's Stillwater River. Three other rafters were thrown free, but she was held underwater for five minutes before washing out. On July 22nd an unidentified 17-year-old Woman drowned on British Columbia's Chilliwack River after her small (nine-foot) raft washed into a strainer. Two brothers who were tubing the river risked their lives in a rescue attempt. On July 26th Kathleen Mills fell from a raft in Blossom Bar Rapid on Oregon's Wild and Scenic Rogue River. She was pinned on a rock sieve in the same "Picket Fence" area that another boater washed into this past spring. Finally, on July 27th, a double kayak paddled by a father-son team overturned in Upper Disaster Falls on Colorado's Green River. The son, 8-year-old Owen Gerson, was pinned underwater against a rock. Guides found him after a 90-minute search and performed CPR for over three hours before giving up.

In the miscellaneous category, two fishermen paddling a drift boat on Oregon's Rogue River on July 31st got a bigger catch than they expected. Sheryl Barker, 49, was thrown from her raft after it hit a rock. She was not wearing a life vest. As she floated into view the two fishermen asked if she was OK. When she shook her head they pulled her from the water and got her ashore. She was coughing, choking, and altogether helpless. One of the men ran to a nearby house and called for help. She was taken to a hospital where she died five days later. Doctors explained that near drowning victims often deteriorate later because of damage to their lungs, brain, and kidneys.

Second Island Rapid was the scene of a drowning on West Virginia's Big Sandy River. On August 1st a group camped overnight with the river running at around 5 feet on the Rockville gauge. It rained all night and the river rose to over 9 feet the following morning. This amounted to a tenfold flow increase—from 300 to 3000 cfs! When the group tried to get back across the river the next morning one of their members was swept away. Rescue squads searched for days before finding the body. By August 3 the level was back around 5 feet again. If the group had waited, everyone would have been fine.

On October 2nd a woman riding a commercial raft died after being thrown into the water at the bottom of Pillow Rock Rapid on West Virginia's Gauley

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Accident Summary

River. Guides pulled her back in the boat quickly, but she was in extreme distress and died soon after. An autopsy found that she had suffered a heart attack.

Low Head Dam Drownings

Low head dams continue to account for just under 10% of moving water fatalities nationwide. The hydraulics that form at the base of these structures are capricious, killing some people and releasing others for no apparent reason. Kent Hess, 43, drowned on July 27th after washing over a diversion dam on Idaho's Snake River. His daughter escaped the hydraulic; he did not. On August 3rd Vladyslav Mitrenko, 19, died after running the "fabridam," an inflatable dam on Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River. Three other people in the canoe with him survived and called for help. Lastly, on September 18th Charles Orgovan was killed after kayaking the Heritage Park Dam on the Shiawassee River near Corunna, Michigan. Rescuers wisely waited until the 38-year-old man body flushed out of the hydraulic before making a recovery.

Dam rescues are always dangerous, even when proven techniques are used. The events of September 13th show the danger of improvised strategies. It started when a raft carrying five people hung up partway over the dam at Argonia River Park on the Chikaskia River in Kansas. A rescue boat flipped, leaving three rescuers clinging to the raft as well. Dennis Rhodes, a 47-year-old emergency responder, had a plan. He tied a rope to his waist and swam down to the raft from upstream. He thought that the rope would keep him from going over the dam, but it did not. He washed over the dam and was caught in the backwash. His rope handlers pulled him out on the downstream side and attempted to revive him. He was taken to a hospital where he later died. Later a much larger rescue boat approached from downstream and recovered the stranded paddlers.

Near Misses and Rescue News

CPR works! This past June, a 73-year-old woman was revived after nearly drowning on Oregon's North Umpqua River. Donna Bryan, who was not wearing a life jacket, fell out of a raft and immediately floundered. Her son-in-law grabbed her and pulled her ashore, where he and a nurse who was camping nearby began CPR. Ms. Bryan was transported to a local hospital and a week later she came out of a coma, none the worse for wear. Later, on July 4th, a woman was pulled from the river after her raft collided with a logjam. She was thrown into the river and trapped. Rescuers pulled her from the water and began CPR. She also made a full recovery.

Wayne Scott, father of two boys in Esprit's three-month WILD training program, reports that his son was saved by a new piece of first aid gear. Joel Scott was in Mexico when he flipped in easy whitewater and made no move to roll or exit. His brother pulled Joel from his kayak and started CPR. A raft accompanying the trip carried an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) that was used to restart Joel's heart. He was evacuated to a local hospital and later to his home in Canada, where he was found to have a rare heart defect. He was treated and released eight days later. The size and price of portable defibrillators has dropped significantly, to around \$1500 each, and I expect to see more of them on the river.

On Saturday, July 26th two paddlers helped control a tricky situation in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Bob and Jean Pierce were sightseeing along the Middle Prong of the Pigeon in Tennessee with kayaks on top of their car when they noticed that the color of the water had changed quickly from clear to chocolate. Then a man ran up and told them that his pregnant wife was stranded in the middle of the creek! They put on their

paddling gear, grabbed throw ropes, and responded. A woman named Brandy was sitting on a small rock in the midst of the rushing water. The roar of the river made communication difficult. Jean Pierce took off her life vest and helmet and her husband tied them to his throw rope and heaved them both to Brandy. She put the gear on and held onto the throw rope. The pair didn't think that they should make the rescue alone, so Jean climbed up to the road and asked a bystander to call 911. The water continued to rise and the situation was becoming precarious. Forty minutes later the Gatlinburg Fire Department's Swiftwater Rescue Team arrived. They sent a tethered swimmer in a rescue vest out to grab Brandy and pull her ashore.

A group of Grand Canyon rafters were almost carried away by a flash flood! On the morning of August 23rd they'd tied up their rafts at the mouth of Havasu Creek and began hiking upstream. In the afternoon powerful thunderstorms hit the area. Water rose rapidly, sending everyone scrambling uphill. They spent several hours on narrow ledges, hoping that the water would stop rising. Afterwards they found that the flood had torn their rafts loose and sent them downstream, along with their food, clothing, and camping gear. They spent a cold, hungry night punctuated by a second flood caused by a broken dam far upstream. But other river runners had spotted the loose rafts and noticed the flood of dirty water. The Park Service was notified, and early the next morning helicopters found the group and flew them to safety.

Unfortunately, not all rescue stories end so innocently. In late July, retired Idaho State Police Director Dan Charboneau suffered a serious back injury on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. According to his son's interview with KTVB.com, a recent landslide has created a new rapid on the run. Mr. Charboneau's oar caught him and threw him from his boat. His group, which included two EMTs and a paramedic, were

able to rescue Mr. Charboneau. He was transported to a hospital by helicopter where he was treated for paralysis and breathing difficulties.

This past fall the Chicago Whitewater Association and American Whitewater tried to deal with a clumsy piece of dam safety legislation in Illinois. Paddlers were not consulted and the resulting bill is very bad for our sport. Existing portages around the listed dams are inside legally defined "exclusion zones," making them illegal. Most land around these dams is private, so longer portages would constitute trespass. Moreover, several dams are runnable step/slide dams that do not create strong hydraulics at normal water levels. Two of the "Dams" listed, such as the popular Dead Carp Drop on the Sangamon River, are natural river features. Batavia Dam has a runnable Class IV slide, as well as several Class II breaches and play spots that have been used by paddlers for decades. Midwestern paddlers will clearly have their work cut out for them in the coming year, and AW will support them in their efforts.

Recently the California Supreme Court ruled that the Good Samaritan Law did not cover a young woman who pulled a co-worker from a crashed automobile. In fact, they ruled that the law only covers those providing emergency medical treatment! This means that a person can be sued for injuries a person sustains when being pulled from the river, but not for first aid provided afterwards. Needless to say, the emergency response community is very upset and there will be efforts to close this loophole by the state legislature next year.

This report, and others like it, depends on paddlers like you. We seek information on whitewater fatalities, near misses, and rescues. I'd like to thank Slim Ray, Dane Patterson, Margaret Weise, Chris Aidnan, Lisa Egan and others who took the time to correspond with me. Many accident

reports were found in SwiftH2O News, a Yahoo group. Another source was the West Virginia Wildwater Association newsletter, which does an excellent job reporting accidents in the region. It's now easier than ever to contribute a report. Go to www.americanwhitewater.org, click safety, and use the on-line report form. You can cut and paste newspaper stories and Internet postings or write your own account. The material you send is available on-line and will be forwarded to the AW Safety Committee for review. Feel free correspond directly with the safety editor, Charlie Walbridge, at ccwalbridge@cs.com.

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

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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



The company now known as Kokatat was started in 1971 by a college student named Steve O'Meara with an eye towards making innovative outdoor gear, such as the world's first GORE-TEX® bivy sack. With Steve still at the helm, Kokatat continues to dedicate itself to his original intent: offering the industry's most extensive line of watersports wear and enjoying a well deserved reputation for innovation and product quality.

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 supports the ongoing stewardship of North American rivers.



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



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

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

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

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

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

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Affiliate Clubs

AW's Original Purpose

by Carla Miner

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

American Whitewater is pleased to introduce a new position in 2009. Barry Adams from the Three Rivers Paddling Club has taken on the responsibilities of AW's Affiliate Club Liaison. Barry will be working with Affiliate Clubs to distribute information and promote AW membership. You may recognize Barry's name as the Ohio Pyle Over the Falls Festival Coordinator. We are pleased to have Barry working with our Affiliate Clubs this year.

AFFILIATE CLUBS, we want to know what you are doing. Send your events to us at carla@americanwhitewater.org and we will include them in the Journal. Deadline for submissions to the bi-monthly Journal are the 1st of February, April, June, August, October, December.

The AW Journal Club Affiliates by state:

Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks

Alabama

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

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River Touring Section, Angeles Chapter
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Ch., San Jose
Sierra Club SF Chapter, Livermore

Colorado

Avid4Adventure Inc., Boulder
Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride
University of Colorado Kayak Club, Boulder

Delaware

Wilmington Trail Club Paddlers, Wilmington

Georgia

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

Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Assoc., Boise

Illinois

Chicago Whitewater Assoc., Chicago
Team SICK, Carbondale

Indiana

Ohio Valley Paddlers, Evansville

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Des Moines

Kentucky

Bardstown Boaters, Frankfort
Bluegrass Wildwater Association, Lexington
Elkhorn Paddlers, Lexington
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville

Maine

Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society, Topsham

Maryland

Blue Ridge Voyageurs, Silver Spring
Greater Baltimore Canoe Club, Baltimore

Massachusetts

AMC - New Hampshire Paddlers, Honover

Minnesota

SCSU Outdoor Endeavors, Saint Cloud

Mississippi

Mississippi Outdoor Club, Clinton

Missouri

Ozark Mountain Paddlers, Springfield
Ozark Wilderness Waterways, Kansas City

Montana

Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

New Hampshire

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

New Jersey

KCCNY, Flauders

New Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

New York

ADK Schenectady, Schenectady
AMC NY-NJ Chapter, New York
Colgate University, Hamilton
Flow Paddlers' Club, Ontario
Hamilton College, Clinton
Housatonic Canoe & Kayak Squad, Ossining
KCCNY, New York
St Lawrence University, Canton
Town Tinker Tube Rentals, Phoenicia

N. Carolina

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

Ohio

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

Oregon

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

Pennsylvania

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

S. Carolina

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

Tennessee

East Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge
Tennessee Scenic River Assoc., Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga
University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville

Texas

Houston Canoe Club, Houston

Utah

Utah Whitewater Club, Salt Lake City

Vermont

Vermont Paddlers Club, Essex Junction

Virginia

Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynch Station
Coastal Canoeists, Blacksburg
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Richmond

Washington

Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle
The Mountaineers, Seattle
Venturing Crew 360, Snohomish
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Recreational River Runners, Renton
Whitman College Whiteater Club, Walla Walla

West Virginia

West VA Wildwater Association, S. Charleston

Wisconsin

NE Wisconsin Paddlers Inc. Appleton
Sierra Club / John Muir Chapter, Madison

Canada, British Columbia

Vancouver Kayak Club, Vancouver

Discounted AW Membership for Affiliate Club Members

By Carla Miner, Membership Manager

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

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

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

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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.

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



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

Px MY PADDLE PRESCRIPTION

PADDLER: JOHN GRACE

I'M A: WERNER SHO-GUN

TYPE: STRAIGHT

DIAMETER: STANDARD

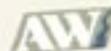
LENGTH: 200 cm

HEIGHT: 5'11"

OCCUPATION: VIDEO GURU

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First descent Petite Mecatina, North Quebec

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