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November/December 2002

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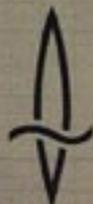
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AMERICAN WHITEWATER

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

Forum	4
Corner Charc	8
Letters.....	10
Conservation	
■ Elements of a Flow Study	31
■ Tribal Water Protection - Penobscot, ME	31
Access	
■ Permit Please!	12
■ Leave No Trace	12
■ Western Rivers with Tights Permit Limits	15
■ 15 Ways to Leap on a Permit	15
Events	
■ Membership Through Events	6
■ End of an Era	50
River Voices	
■ Restoring the Bear, ID - Ricahrd Hoffman.....	30
■ Gauley Fest 2002 - Clay Wright.....	48
Safety	
■ Search and Rescue	17
■ RiverShare™ Guidelines	52

Cover photo by Jed Weingarten of Johnny Kern high in the Stanislaus Drainage, California

American Whitewater Journal

Volume XLIII, No.6

F E A T U R E S

**Conservation
Program Makes
a Difference 28**

**Boating with
Bears, Alaska 57**

**North Fork
Blackwater 61**

**2003 Permit
Schedule 13**

**Gauley River
Festival™ 45**

**Annual Board
Elections 53**

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Purpose

American Whitewater

Our mission is to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

The American Whitewater (AW) is a national organization with a membership consisting of thousands of individual whitewater boating enthusiasts, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates.

CONSERVATION: AW maintains a complete national inventory of whitewater rivers, monitors threats to those rivers, publishes information on river conservation, provides technical advice to local groups, works with government agencies and other river users, and-- when necessary-- takes legal action to prevent river abuse.

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, resists unjustified restrictions on government managed whitewater rivers and works with government agencies and other river users to achieve these goals.

EDUCATION: Through publication of the bimonthly magazine, and by other means, American Whitewater, (AW) provides information and education about whitewater rivers, boating safety, technique and equipment.

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 AW Whitewater Safety Code.

EVENTS: AW organizes sporting events, contests and festivals to raise funds for river conservation, including the Ocoee Whitewater Rodeo in Tennessee, the Gauley River Festival in West Virginia (the largest gathering of whitewater boaters in the nation), and the Deerfield Festival in Massachusetts.

AW was incorporated under Missouri nonprofit corporation laws in 1961 and maintains its principal mailing address at 1424 Fenwick Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301) 589-9453. AW is tax exempt under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.



American Whitewater Journal Staff

Editor

Risa Shimoda

Co-Editor

Ambrose Tuscano

Art Direction/Graphic Design/Production

Scott Collins

Contributing Writers

Dunbar Hardy, Sam Drevo, Lee Belknap, Bobby Miller, W. Scott Morris, Joe Greiner, Barry Grimes, Charlie Walbridge, Andrew Zimet, Bill Hay, Donnie Hudspeth, Whit Deschner, Tim Kelley, Rip Harwood, Dale-Marie Herring, Ambrose Tuscano, Barry Tuscano, Jimmy Blakeny, David J. Regela, Clay Wright, Carolyn Nichols

Photo Contributors

Jed Weingarten, Tanya Shuman, Kevin Lewis, Barry Grimes, Mark Moore

Advertising Director

A.J. McIntyre

1424 Fenwick Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910
phone 301-589-9453 e-mail:
aj@amwhitewater.org

Safety Editor

Charlie Walbridge, Route 1, Box 329F,
Bruceon Mills, WV 26525, e-mail:
CWAL@compuserve.com

Conservation and Access Editors

Jason Robertson, John Gangemi
jason@amwhitewater.org;
jgangemi@digisys.net

American Whitewater Magazine Task Force

Jeff Espy, Dunbar Hardy, Dale-Marie Herring,
John Mason, Tanya Shuman, Ambrose Tuscano

Missing Copies and Address Changes

jessie@amwhitewater.org

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On occasion **American Whitewater** publishes official organizational policy statements drafted and approved by the Board of Directors. These policy statements will be clearly identified.

Board of Directors & Staff

Lee Belknap
rivergypsy@sprintmail.com
Hendersonville, NC

Dave Cernicek
dave@losalamos.com
Jackson, WY

Tom Christopher
tchris@tiac.net
Lancaster, MA

Adam Eichberg
adam.eichberg@tpl.org
Denver, CO

Chuck Estes
estesoak@worldnet.att.net
Oak Ridge, TN

Pam Fitz
pamfitz99@yahoo.com
Denver, CO

Jennie Goldberg
jennie@nwwhitewater.org
Seattle, WA

Joe Greiner
joekayak@worldnet.att.net
Raleigh, NC

Barry Grimes
bagrim1@pop.uky.edu
Richmond, KY

Dunbar Hardy
dunbarhardy@hotmail.com
Durango, CO

Chris Kelly
ckelly1022@aol.com
Columbia, MO

Tim Kelley
tmkelley@clarkson.edu
Potsdam, NY

Jay P. K. Kenney
jay@smallworldadventures.com
Denver, CO

TOLL FREE NUMBER 866-BOAT4AW

Jeff Leighton
jeffleighton@prodigy.net
LaFayette, CA

Kevin Lewis
klewis@snowcrest.net
Anderson, CA

Aaron Pruzan
jacksonholekayak@wyoming.com
Jackson Hole, WY

Norwood Scott
wns111@aol.com
San Francisco, CA

Dave Steindorf
dsteind@telis.org
Paradise, CA

Sarah Stephenson
sarahs@gsdl.com
Asheville, NC

Barry Tuscano
barry@greensburg.com
Bolivar, PA

Charlie Walbridge
ccwalbridge@cs.com
Bruceon Mills, WV

Kara Weld
kara@immersionresearch.com
Confluence, PA

BOARD OFFICERS

President: Barry Tuscano
Vice President: Kevin Lewis
Secretary: Jay P. K. Kenney
Treasurer: Jeff Leighton

AW STAFF

Risa Shimoda
Executive Director
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Michael Phelan
Events Director
20 Battery Park Ave., suite 302
Asheville, NC 28801

Kevin Colburn
Eastern Conservation and Access
Associate
20 Battery Park Ave., suite 302
Asheville, NC 28801

John Gangemi
Conservation Director
482 Electric Avenue
Bigfork, MT 59911

Jason Robertson
Access Director
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Scott Collins
Technology Director
1300 NE 49th Avenue
Portland, OR 97213

A.J. McIntyre
Corporate Relations Director
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Jessie Rice
Membership Coordinator
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Bob Taylor
Events Coordinator
20 Battery Park Ave., suite 302
Asheville, NC 28801

Nick Lipkowski
Office Manager
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910

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There's something different about this issue of American Whitewater. For the first time in ten years Bob Gedekoh is not listed as editor. Bob is one of my closest friends, and I hope that, as a member of this organization, you will make a point of thanking him for the great job he has done all these years. Our Journal is a volunteer publication that under Bob's leadership has come very close to professional standards. While we are trying to adjust to his absence, you may find little reminders of his devotion and skill sprinkled through these pages. His are going to be very big shoes to fill.

I've been hanging out with Bob for more than fifteen years. He led me down many of my first runs. He led me to American Whitewater. He led me to a deep appreciation for the rivers that make our passion possible. And in his position as editor of this magazine, Bob has led this organization. His leadership has been subtle, but incredibly powerful. He has used the Journal to ask the important questions and to force the board and staff to come up with answers. It's like following his line through a big drop. After a thorough trashing, he pulls me to shore and I wonder, "How did he do that. He made it look so easy."

Although getting fresh young blood involved should be good for any organization, there aren't too many people on this earth, young or old, that can keep up with Bob Gedekoh. My son, Ambrose, has agreed to be an interim editor until we can find another super-volunteer to do the job. If you, or someone you know, is interested let us know. And let Bob know that we all appreciate the incredible work he has given us for the last ten years.



Thank-you Bob.

Barry Tuscano

A Tribute to AW Editor, Bob Gedekoh

By Ambrose Tuscano

In case you haven't been paying attention for the past ten years or so . . .

The person editing the publication you hold in your hands has been doing a heck of a good job. So good in fact, that you may have never even realized it. Most people who pick up the American Whitewater Journal probably figure that the organization is just blessed with well-educated members—people who know better than to write in run-on sentences, and include boring details in their stories, like why they were too hung over to run Ankle Annihilator Falls.

In reality, Bob Gedekoh has kept the magazine a well-oiled machine for the past sixty issues—and that's saying a whole lot. Magazines of this sort are never assembled without a certain amount of blood, sweat and tears. Just when it begins to look like an issue is going smoothly, something will come up last-minute. Sometimes just a day before deadline Bob will get a phone call like this: "Uhhh . . . we've got a couple of problems here."

"Go ahead."

"First, we're missing a couple of our feature stories."

"There's more?"

"Yeah, one of those knucklehead assistants of yours sent us a disk with nothing on it."

"Oh, that must be Tuscano—does this about once a year."

The next day, at his real job, everyone wonders why Bob looks so exhausted.

Bob has spent hundreds of hours slaving away over the stories you've read in this magazine for the past decade. But you may not know that he has also spent well over a thousand days on the river in that same period. His love of whitewater and his wealth of experience on rivers all over the country have helped him keep up the enthusiasm to edit the Journal.

And somewhere between the hours he spends editing, working (as a MD), and kayaking he finds time to write some of the best and funniest stuff in this magazine. Many of you are familiar with Bob's comments that have appeared in the Forum section. These covered topics like miserly

crones who took their fortunes with them to the grave, nostalgic farewells to faithful shuttle vehicles, and reasons to get your kids into whitewater. What most readers don't realize is that Bob also wrote under a variety of pen names, including Lee Roberts and the infamous Carla Garrison. If you're looking for a laugh—or maybe just a good story—rifle through that stack of past AW Journal issues out in the garage, and treat yourself to the work of a master storyteller.

Recently, I have asked a handful of Bob's friends and acquaintances if they had anything they wanted me to write about him—and everyone did. Probably the greatest testament I heard to Bob's work as an editor and writer came from Bill Sedivy, a former executive editor of an Ohio newspaper. He told me that if he were starting a commercial whitewater magazine today, he would want Bob Gedekoh editing for him.

Since I have been working on the Journal alongside Bob, I've come to appreciate just how much energy goes into each issue. Even though I've only ever had to deal with a fraction of the material that Bob

has, I've felt that at times (especially around deadline) the Journal was taking over my life. But after the deadline has passed, and I have time to get back out on the water, I realize why it was all worth it, and why Bob has always been willing to donate so much of his time and energy to the Journal. It is just one more way for him to support American Whitewater—the organization that keeps our rivers wild, clean and open to us.

In all my time working with him, Bob has consistently finished each e-mail with the phrase "See You On The River." Coming from a man who spends between one and two hundred days a year on the water, this statement is, at one level, just a very safe prediction. But I've always felt like it was more—like it was Bob's own blessing. I feel that it's his way of saying: "There's no better place to run into a friend." And so, Bob, I'd like to close by offering it back to you. On behalf of the entire organization: Thanks, and SYOTR.

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MEMBERSHIP THROUGH EVENTS

By Bob Taylor

American Whitewater has recently experienced a large decline in the number of people becoming new members or renewing old memberships. An organization is only as strong as its foundation, which is made up through membership. As a result, the staff has had to reevaluate its method for attracting the public to join.

One of the methods is through the Events Program, which is comprised of two individuals, Mike Phelan (Director) and myself (Coordinator). Our sole responsibilities are the planning and the physical labor needed to bring a successful festival to fruition. Hosting events in local communities where different boat manufacturers and gear vendors are present and offering food, music and entertainment plus various competitions, creates a venue that attracts a large number of boaters and in addition to the general public. This generates a positive atmosphere for American Whitewater to showcase its conservation/access issues, and so allowing people to become aware

of what AW does and how AW's mission directly relates to them.

At the events, some members donate their time at a booth assembled with tents and tables and supplied with literature and information and sponsored by American Whitewater which is. These volunteers, and some of the AW staff, present the opportunity for the public to interact directly with the organization. This, in turn, makes one more apt to join when they are personally informed about the effect their membership has on the organization and its goals. Their contributions are used to secure flows in rivers that have been previously dewatered and to gain access to rivers that were illegal to run.

Some examples of festivals held in the past by AW are the Deerfield Fest in Charlemont, MA and the Gauley Fest in Summersville, WV. After being asked to bring and set up lights, Barry Tuscano, the current president of American Whitewater,

became involved with the organization at the 1988 Gauley Fest. In 1992, he became a board member of AW and up to present day continually volunteers his time at the Fest. Through the events, he learned how much AW was accomplishing and how important the work was.

As members of American Whitewater we should each realize the importance of volunteer work and the continued support of the organization by getting others involved.

Bob Taylor, American Whitewater's Events Coordinator, provides the nuts and bolts, 'get it done' energy in our events program. Just as he makes events happen 'on time and as planned,' Bob is upfront about the AW Mission and programs, managing to charm most boaters he meets into becoming members!



CONFESSION

I must shamefully admit this is the first time I have been a member of your fine organization. I was enlightened by Bob Taylor, your newest, and I might add best-looking employee...

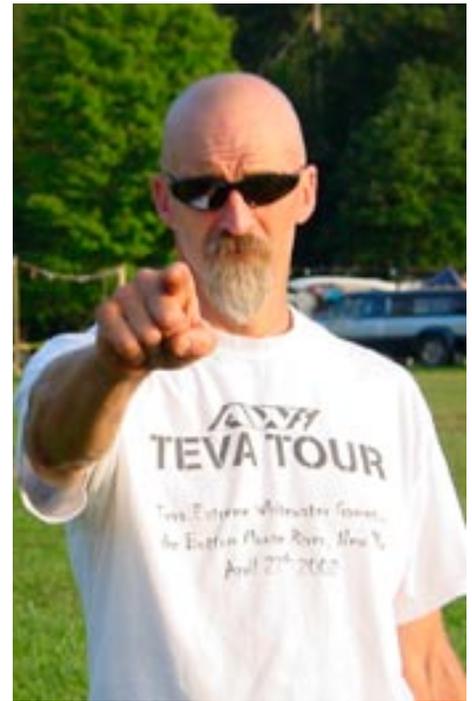
During a meeting at the Outdoor Retailer Show Bob talked to me about the new face of AW and the goals during the coming year. I was very impressed and look forward to working with Mike, Bob and the rest of the crew in any capacity I can. When the conversation focused on Bob's goal of increasing membership, I was forced to hang my head and admit I was a non-member. Bob was outraged, and immediately began to read the riot act. Scared for my safety, I took this application and promised I would join up as soon as possible. Standing at once, Bob looked down at me and assured me he would not forget this conversation.

As he left the room he assured me it would be my membership or my ass.

I made it home from Salt Lake as soon as I could to fulfill my obligation. There is nothing like a little Yankee work ethic to bring a company to new levels. I can assure you I will now be a member for life. Good luck, and I will see you guys at Gauley Fest.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Mongno
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Charc

This year closes with a great deal of transition – and as we change, we are continuing to learn how to be more resilient, focused and able to avoid taking ourselves too seriously.

Economic impacts of the year are pervasive: so, what else is new. We've had to face the reality of the vulnerability of foundation giving (i.e., when foundation portfolio investments head south, grantees can become very disappointed, very quickly). You've read in our pages and on the website about organizational challenges of growing membership and individual gifts. We're working on these, so they remain visible but don't choke our conservation message, yet reinforce and thank those members who donate truly significant volumes of time and funds.

Change that involves people in the organization: this is a different story. Departures set up voids, which can be turned into windows of opportunity. This year, we end an era of the organization that has been shepherded by Phyllis Horowitz, our Administrative Director, and Bob Gedekoh, our Journal editor. Their awesome dedication and unrelenting work ethic has provided benefits to thousands of boaters around the country. In addition, we will miss the expertise of our layout meister of nine years, John Victor. Our loss, however, is the gain of the families and friends of these incredible professionals.

Phyllis worked for American Whitewater for sixteen years, so she has been an integral part our lives, as we have been in hers. Moving our administrative function to Maryland has created periodic heartburn for us all *and* has been critically important for our growing organization to centralize our processes.

Dr. Bob has been volunteering as Journal contributor for as long, and editing our Journal for ten years- a diehard whose efforts simply cannot be matched. He has been our beacon, our champion and also our internal voice of

reason and pragmatic challenge. Ambrose Tuscano will be stepping up to help with the editing of the magazine for an interim period, as we look for someone to step up and fill Bob's large shoes.

If you have loved reading the Journal cover-to-cover, thank Bob and your fellow AW members. If you've regretted seeing too few stories about a specific topic or about a particular region of your state or the country, you can help the situation by seeking out authors and photographers who will offer their own enthusiasm with the written word!



Risa Shimoda
Executive Director - American Whitewater

Note: 'Charc' is a term coined by Jim Snyder, short for 'charging arc.' Having a good charc combines correct boat attitude, angle, speed and intent when heading into or out of an eddy, onto a wave, etc. It alludes to the dynamic complexity of an approach, and a reference when addressing the complexity of protecting our rivers for recreation.

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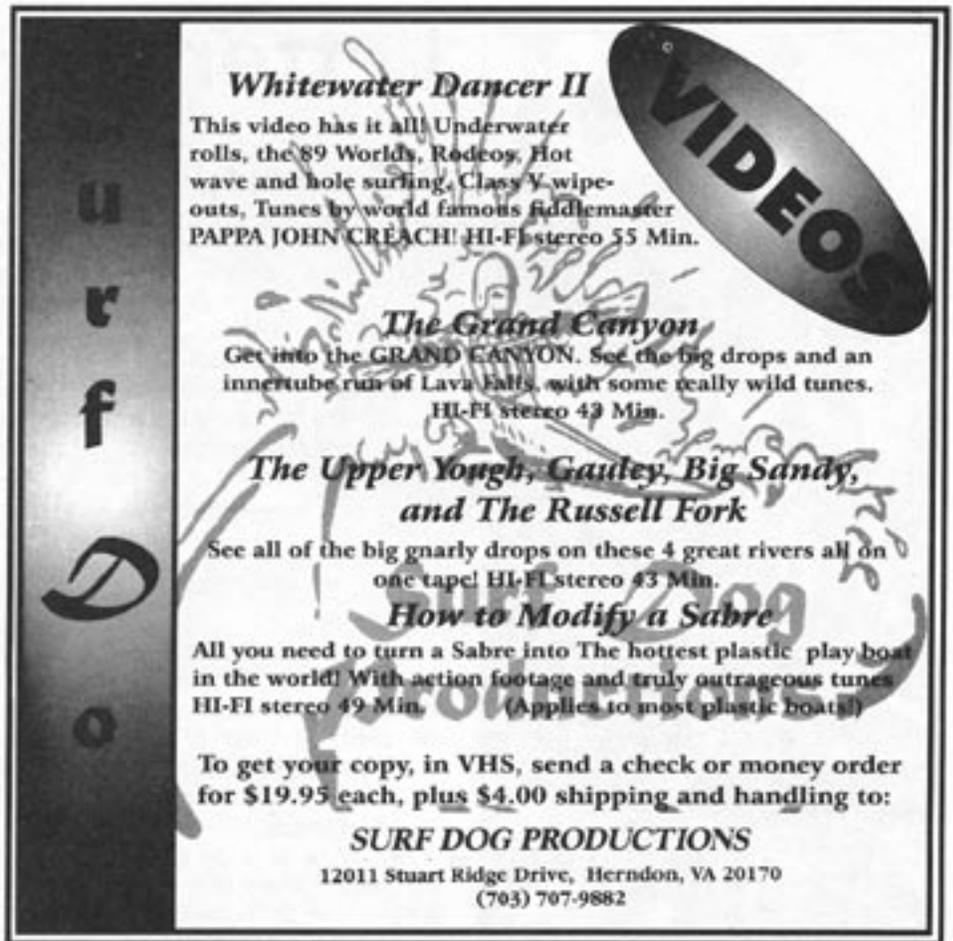
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Volunteer Salute

to Laura Scott and Tom Windham

Laura Scott and Tom Windham, two extraordinary designers, each put huge amounts of effort into the design of the new AW logo. Last summer, Laura (whose husband Norwood is member of our Board of Directors) eeked out time from her incredibly busy schedule designing corporate identities to work on a logo that would suit our audience(s) for years. After several drafts and reviews we developed a logo that seemed to work really well and ... it did not pass muster with the board. Aaugh! Laura, we so appreciate the time and care you took for the project and...we think the work was not wasted!

Round Two: Tom Windham of the Windham Design Group (Louisville, KY) took a crack at the challenge of designing a new logo for us and ... again after several drafts and discussions (with the cool design sensibilities of Kara Weld, AW Board Member and owner of Immersion Research with husband John)...a final meeting on New Year's Day landed a logo that the staff, board and members agreed would meet the design criteria. We know the process is tough and we appreciate the work of both these great professionals. May the logo be with us ... for a good, long while!



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Letters to the Editor

A Pro Perspective

In American Whitewater's July/August 2002 'forum' section titled "A Tough Act to Follow", Bob does a good job of making Dave Hammond seem like a nice guy and great paddler. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the real focus of his article. Instead, he uses Dave as a platform from which to attack professional kayakers and others who make a living through the sport they love.

This is the first time I've responded to an AW article, though my wife and I have both written for the magazine. The reason is, this type of language is not only offensive to me personally but is also divisive to us as a paddling community. As someone who recently spent six weeks on the World Outside Festival tour 'doing Tricky Wuus in a parking lot', I find it interesting that Bob refers to this as 'no way to make a living.' Well, I guess Bob failed to realize the fact that after doing freestyle demonstrations in the artificial hole, we would spend the rest of our day putting people in kayaks for their first time: putting smiles on their faces, introducing them to what may become a lifelong pursuit of kayaking, thus increasing the number of paddlers out there so we have a bigger, stronger voice to help save our rivers. Paddling in an artificial hole for six weeks wasn't my idea of the perfect kayak trip, but the money I made doing so will help me pursue 'real' kayaking full time for months to come.

Instead of seeing this side, Bob chooses to focus on the negative. He makes 'going on tour' and being a 'star' in a kayak video seem like the lowest and foulest thing you could possibly do. He fails to realize that these people ENJOY what they do just as much as Dave Hammond enjoys what he does, not to mention that the professional kayakers are able to paddle MORE as a result of it! On top of this, the high profile professional paddlers Bob seems to

find repulsive are some of the BEST ambassadors for our sport, helping uncounted numbers of paddlers and non-paddlers alike have more fun and become more aware of how incredible and valuable our river resources are.

It amazes me that being in the position he's in Bob chooses to divide the paddling community instead of bringing it together. He stoops to the level of those few uneducated paddlers who talk shit about 'old school,' only he chooses to talk shit about 'new school.' I think I speak for the majority of paddlers when I say this, "I don't give a shit what you paddle, what you wear, what type of water you choose to paddle, what the temperature is when you choose to paddle, or what style of boating makes you happy, from freestyle to slalom to wildwater, I still consider you a paddler and a positive part of something special and good." Lastly, I'd like to applaud the paddlers out there who choose to stay 'underground' like Dave Hammond. He's off doing his thing, and that's great. I'd also like to applaud those paddlers out there who love kayaking so much that they have decided to pursue it as a profession, despite the fact that they could probably be making better money and be much more secure doing something else, or, if we're using Bob's perspective, could be much bigger 'stars' and 'pose' in much bigger magazines than those in the paddling world.

We're all out kayaking for the same reasons, whether it's those who only pursue it for a short time, a few days a month, or year round. As for whether or not I'd be kayaking if all the 'HOOPLA and LA DE DA were stripped away from the sport', of course I would, though I might not be able to do it for a living. Kayak for the love of it, and don't fall into the unfortunate mindset where you look at those who are different from you as inferior, unworthy, or incapable of being 'real' paddlers.

Jimmy Blakeney

No "Gucci" Here!

I greatly appreciate the recognition of Patagonia's Tools Conference for Activist in the most recent issue of AW (Corner Charc, AW July/Aug 2002). I attended this conference as a representative of Patagonia and had a wonderful three days working with Risa and other environmental activists from around the country. The description of Patagonia's deep commitment to American Whitewater, outdoor pursuits and our environment helped remind me how proud I am to be a part of Patagonia and American Whitewater.

However, just after the paragraph celebrating Yvon Chouinard's "simplicity and pragmatism in design and message", Patagonia is referred to as "Patagucci". This is very contradictory. I am well aware that this is a somewhat common nickname for our company that has been thrown around for years, but I must take exception to this trite and somewhat derogatory term's use in the Executive Director's article celebrating Patagonia's commitment to grassroots environmental activism.

I, along with every other employee in Patagonia, take an immense amount of pride in our environmental work at Patagonia, and the use of the term "Patagucci" by a group we have supported throughout the years tends to cheapen that pride by implying that we are just chasing fads and money. Thank you for your time.

Jason Barringer
Patagonia Atlanta

AW Acres and Elkhorn Creek

I just recently got out to the Elkhorn after many years of paddling. I live in Louisville, but I work in West Virginia on the weekends for ACE whitewater, so my paddling around KY is very limited. Well, I missed out on the weekend warrior deal this past weekend at ACE, and I decided to try the Elkhorn for a nice scenic paddle. Unfortunately, I missed out on the section that is stated in AW's web page due to low water levels, but I did get to paddle another section of just class I's. I put in at the AW Acres and took out at KY Canoe's facility.

This was my first chance to see the AW acres and just reading the story of events that lead up to the purchase of the property, made me grin in satisfaction knowing that AW and most boaters alike grouped together for a common cause.

I will be joining the AWA here in the next week or so, and change my charitable donations to this just cause for the next upcoming year. I know this is late in coming, but just wanted to thank everyone involved in obtaining this property.

Don Simmon

Hey Jason,

I take responsibility for the reference. I saw Patagonia's Environmental Grants Director, John Sterling, last week and know it is a sore topic. I hope your sentiment does not trivialize the intent of the entire page or diminish the respect and appreciation that both AW and I personally have for the company, its employees or the brand. As you know, I have worked for Patagonia and from a marketing perspective, am fully aware of the implications of using the offensive term; it is the reason I added the parenthetical disclaimer to indicate to Patagonia readership, specifically, that I understand the syntax that has accumulated around it.

I hope you'll share this with those who may feel I was being offhandedly disrespectful. I was borrowing some imagery to engage those who may not otherwise fully appreciate the power I saw, and the terrific education I received at the Tools Conference.

Sincerely,

Risa



Madawaska Kanu Centre

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Permit Please!

By Jason Robertson & Dale-Marie Herring

“Permit please,” says the park ranger before you can put on Utah’s Green River. “Two-fifty,” says the park attendant on Pennsylvania’s lower Youghiogheny River.

Restrictive private boater permit systems are used on about 30 rivers nationwide. These systems are managed by many different state and federal agencies, and serve a multitude of purposes. The permits are typically designed to accomplish economic, ecologic, or social objectives.

River managers often cite an economic argument for permits. Their premise is that while demands for recreational resources are increasing, administrative budgets are diminishing. Thus river managers are placed in a position of managing increased visitor service demands, while striving to minimize visitor impacts through policies such as “Leave No Trace”. The purported success of Fee Demo is directly tied to the effectiveness of permits at generating revenue on public lands. The hidden problem with this permit objective is that the permit management requires increased staffing, enforcement, and administrative processing costs, which often exceed the amount of revenue generated.

“Visitor Capacity: A prescribed number and type of visitors that will be accommodated in and area.”

- Interagency Task Force on Visitor Capacity

Both the ecologic and social accomplishments of visitor permits are driven by placing limits on the number of people infiltrating remote wilderness locations. These limits preserve “opportunities for solitude” first and the riparian or riverside ecology second. These protections are secured under a “visitor carrying capacity.”

The carrying capacity is a number that the river manager has decided is the maximum number of people that the river can handle before certain impacts are observed. According to a 2002 draft report of the Federal Interagency Task Force on Visitor Capacity on Public Lands, “the decision is made within the context of a rationale public planning process and sound professional judgment, and is framed by the desired future conditions for an area’s resources, visitor experiences, and management program.”

Once the capacity decision has been reached, then the river manager has a variety of tools to select from in managing visitor use to either stay below the capacity threshold or otherwise meet the management objectives.

In American Whitewater’s experience, well meaning river managers and politicians often view visitor use permits as a panacea for addressing social crowding, riparian impacts, landowner concerns, river safety, funding, or other river management objectives. However, like so many get-well-quick fixes, they are generally no more effective than the remedies sold by snake oil salesmen in the 1800’s. This realization explains the proliferation of new permits in the 1970’s, the pause in the 1980’s, and the retreat in the 1990’s from river permits. Now, the new Millennium and the post-9/11 restrictions on river access are bringing forth a second wave of permits from America’s river management agencies as new river managers are experimenting with old ways to manage visitors for their purposes.

American Whitewater generally opposes the implementation of river permits as a first step in river management. In nearly 50 years of observation, review, and experience we have learned that most management objectives related to visitor use can be achieved through either passive or more active means, both of which tend to be more effective, cheaper, and less personnel intensive than permit management.

American Whitewater believes that the primary utility of recreational permits is to ensure the integrity of the natural resource and to maintain quality outdoor recreation experiences. Permits should not unreasonably restrict access. However, they should be designed to protect a world class niche that is unique to the river, and they should be designed to accomplish that objective as easily and unobtrusively as possible.

American Whitewater addresses permitting issues by advocating for fair allocation, counting of people rather than boats, and reallocation of unused slots. We also work toward alternatives to permits altogether unless justified by credible studies. The best way to get on a regulated river is to support American Whitewater. Then, call the permit party together—here are the facts you need.



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Leave No Trace

Your actions on and off the river affect how much impact you have on the ecosystem. Practicing these simple actions will protect the resource and experience for the next group of paddlers on the river, and may even prevent river managers from initiating new permits on rivers in the future.

**Dispose of waste properly
(trash and human
waste)**

**Use existing trails
Remain on bedrock when
portaging or scouting**

**Use firepans to prevent
ground scars**

**Park in designated areas
Protect natural quiet
Pack it in – pack it out**

2003 Permit Schedule

RIVER	SECTION	STATE	PEAK SEASON	PERMIT REQUIREMENTS BEGIN	PERMIT REQUIREMENTS END	PERMIT DUE DATE	MAX GROUP SIZE
STATEWIDE REGISTRATIONS							
Illinois, Statewide	All	IL					N/A
Ohio, Statewide	All	OH					
Pennsylvania, Statewide	State Parks	PA					None
SIMPLE REGISTRATION							
Nisqually	La Grande Canyon	WA	Nov - Dec	15-Nov	15-Dec	Wednesday before releases	minimum 2 people
Colorado	Cataract Canyon	UT	May - June	15-Apr	15-Oct	31-Dec	16 people
Tuolumne	Cherry Creek - Meral's Pool	CA	May - Sep	1-Oct	30-Apr	N/A	26 people (6 rafts)
Tuolumne	Meral's Pool- Ward's Ferry	CA	May - Sep	1-Jan	31-Dec	N/A	26 people (6 rafts)
HIGH WATER PERMIT FOR FLOOD CONDITIONS							
James	Richmond	VA	Flood	1-Jan	31-Dec	Prior to launch	minimum 3 people or boats
ON-SITE REGISTRATION							
Rio Grande	Taos Box	NM	May -Jun	1-May	30-Jun	31-Dec	30 p / day; 20 in W & S
Kennebec	Harris Gorge	ME	May - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
LOTTERY PERMITS							
Alsek/Tatshenshini	All	AK	Jul - Aug	8-Jun	18-Sep	10-Nov	15 people
Boundary Waters	All	MN	Jun - Oct	1-May	30-Sep	15-Jan	9 people / 4 boats
Colorado	Westwater Canyon	UT	Apr - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	1-Apr	25
Flathead	Main (North)	ID	Jun - Sep	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Jan	30 people
Green	Desolation Canyon - Gray Canyon	UT	Apr - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Jan	25 people
Green	Gates of Lodore	CO	May - Sep	8-May	8-Sep	1-Feb	25
Kern	Forks	CA	Apr - May	15-May	15-Sep	15-Mar	15
Rio Chama	El Vado Ranch - Big Eddy	NM	May - Aug	1-May	30-Aug	31-Jan	16 private
Rogue	Grave Creek	OR	Jun - Sep	15-May	15-Oct	31-Jan	20 people
Salmon	Main	ID	Jun - Sep	20-Jun	7-Sep	31-Jan	30
Salmon	Middle Fork	ID	Jun - Sep	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Jan	24
San Juan	Bluff - Clay	UT	Apr - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Jan	25 people
Selway	Paradise Launch	ID	June	15-May	31-Jul	31-Jan	16 people
Smith	Camp Baker	MT	May - Jul	1-Apr	31-Oct	15-Feb	15 people
Snake	Hells Canyon	ID -OR	Jun - Aug	22-May	10-Sep	31-Jan	24 people / 8 boats
Yampa	Dinosaur National Monument	CO	May - Jun	8-May	14-Jul	1-Feb	25
Tallulah	Tallulah Gorge	GA	Apr & Nov				



RIVER	SECTION	STATE	PEAK SEASON	PERMIT REQUIREMENTS BEGIN	PERMIT REQUIREMENTS END	PERMIT DUE DATE	MAX GROUP SIZE
ON-SITE REGISTRATION, UNLIMITED LAUNCHES DAILY							
American, South Fork	Chili Bar	CA	May - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
Bruneau	Indian Hot Springs	ID	Apr - Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	12 people
Carson, East Fork	Wilderness Run	NV	Spring	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	30 people
Chattooga	Section III (Earls Ford - Highway 64)	SC	Spring - Summer	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Chattooga	Section IV (Hwy 64- Lake Tugaloo)	SC	Spring - Summer	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Deschutes, Lower	Warm Springs- Sherar's Falls	OR	Spring - Fall	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	16 -24 people
Flathead	Main Stem	MT	Spring - Summer	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	20 people/site for overnight camping
Illinois River	Miami Bar - Lower Oak Flat	OR	Mar - May	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	12 people
John Day	Service Creek-Cottonwood Bridge	OR	May - Jul	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	16 people
John Day, North Fork	Dale - Monument	OR	May -Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	16 people
Merced	Lower Canyon	CA	Mar - Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Missouri	Fort Benton	MT	All year	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Moose	Bottom	NY	Apr - Oct	N/A	N/A	31-Dec	None
Owyhee	Lower	OR	Mar - Apr	15-Mar	15-Jun	31-Dec	20 people
Owyhee, Middle Fork	Three Forks- Rome	OR	Mar - Apr	15-Mar	15-Jun	31-Dec	20 people
Potomac	Great Falls	MD	All year	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
Rio Grande	Big Bend	TX	Spring, Fall	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
Salmon	Lower	ID	Summer	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	30 people
Snake	Grand Teton National Park	WY	Jun - Jul	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
Tygart	Valley Falls	WV	Spring	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Wolf	Within the Menominee reservation	WI	All year	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED							
Everglades National Park	All sections	FL	Dec - Apr	1-Jan	31-Dec	Up to 24 hrs before trip	30
Okefenokee	National Wildlife Refuge	GA	Mar - Apr	1-Jan	31-Dec	2 months before 1st day of trip	20 people
Salt	Fort Apache	AZ	Mar - May	1-Mar	15-May	31-Jan	15
Salt	Upper	AZ	Mar - May	1-Mar	15-May	31-Jan	15 people
Yough, Lower	Ohiopyle	PA	Apr - Oct	1-Jan	31-Dec	Prior to launch	None
Dolores	Gateway-Dewey	UT	Mar - May	1-Mar	31-Oct	31-Dec	25
Genesee	Lees Landing- St. Helena	NY	Apr - Nov	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Genesee	St. Helena - Mt. Morris Dam	NY	Apr - Nov	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	None
Jarbridge	Jarbridge Forks- Hot Creek	ID	Apr -Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	12 people
Owyhee, Upper	East Fork	ID	Apr -Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	15 people
Owyhee, Upper	North Fork	ID	Apr -Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	
Owyhee, Upper	South Fork	ID	Apr -Jun	1-Jan	31-Dec	31-Dec	15 people
Colorado	Grand Canyon	AZ	May - Oct	1-Feb	28-Feb	28-Feb	16 private



Western Rivers with Tight Permit Limits

By Jason Robertson

When most boaters talk about obtaining launch permits on rivers, they're referring to one of the great Western rivers; rivers like the Colorado through Grand Canyon. These rivers are often managed for a different type of experience with refined opportunities for solitude as a result of strict visitor limits. Though you may not get on your favorite river as frequently as you desire, when you do, the argument goes, that it will be an experience to remember for a lifetime.



- Alsek-Tatshenshini Rivers, British Columbia/Alaska
- Colorado River (Grand Canyon), Arizona
- Colorado River (Westwater), Utah
- Forks of the Kern, California
- Green River (Desolation/Gray Canyons), Utah
- Green River (Lodore Canyon), Colorado
- Rio Chama, New Mexico
- Rogue River, Oregon
- Salmon River (Main), Idaho
- Salmon River (Middle Fork), Idaho
- Salt River (Upper), Arizona
- San Juan River, Utah
- Selway River, Idaho
- Smith River, Montana
- Snake River (Hells Canyon), Idaho/Oregon
- Tatshenshini River, British Columbia/Alaska
- Tuolumne River, California
- Yampa River, Colorado

15 Ways to Leap on a Permit

By Jason Robertson

Tom gets a Grand Canyon permit every year. Jo's invited down the Selway at least once a summer. Ricardo spends a week rafting on a Western river for every week he spends at home. Kevin ran the Middle Fork three times this spring on back-to-back trips. They follow the rules. They won't take your money. They just want to be on your trip. What are their secrets to getting on permitted rivers? Here are my observations:

1. Apply en masse. Throw a permit party. Invite your boating buddies over to the house, bring your calendars, print the permit applications, pick a launch day (or period) and start practicing your penmanship.
2. Promote your culinary skills. Develop a reputation for cooking 5 star meals on the river and invitations will seek you out. Even if you're not a great cook, offer to plan and pack the meals.
3. Promote your gearheadedness. Gather all the gear that a group will need for a successful multi-day trip. Offer to share your gear for a spot on a trip. Fireboxes, toilet systems, hot shower setups, fast and efficient water filters, and standing kitchens make good investments.
4. Offer to safety boat a raft trip, or raft support a kayak trip.
5. Join the local river club and become an active member.
6. Call the local outfitters or paddling stores and ask for the inside scoop on how to get around the permit system.
7. Be flexible. Go before or after the permit season.
8. Learn how to get a launch permit cancellation.
9. Become an expert. Learn all about the lore of a river or the history of a place. Learn how to run each rapid. Keep notes on where the great and not-so-great camping spots are, and how to find them. Also learn where the hot springs are.
10. Promote your willingness for team play. Offer to run shuttle in advance, especially really long shuttles.
11. Hang out. Make your wonderful personality and interest in a trip known at the put-in or take-out, introduce yourself to groups that are going out and ask to go with.
12. Promote your being a cute and/or super fun-to-travel with paddler.
13. Get yourself around. Spend lots of time with lots of people in the boating community.
14. Work for a rafting company on the river.
15. Obtain Wilderness EMT training.



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Search and Rescue: Privilege for the Saved, or Burden for Society?

*"Stretch forth thy hand from above;
Rescue me, and deliver me out of great
waters"*

-Book of Psalms

By Jason Robertson for *American Whitewater*. Artwork used with permission and is available via williamneally.com

Based in part on a letter from Lloyd Athearn at the American Alpine Club to Mike Gauthier, Denali National Park 3.9.2001

Introduction

Federal, State, and other government agencies have a moral and legal responsibility to conduct and bear the cost of search and rescue efforts for everyone in need of their assistance. This is both a privilege and a right, and is protected by international treaties, which effectively ensure your rescue regardless of your ability to pay for the service.

The issues surrounding equity, legal liability, and financial responsibility must be explored so that policy makers appreciate what actions are likely to help and harm the public's interests. Our examination begins with a story from the Haw River, from which we move into an analysis of the 1999 National Search and Rescue Plan, and a discussion of the suitability of recovering costs for rescues as well as the propriety of requiring boaters to provide proof of rescue insurance prior to receiving a launch permit.

A Story from North Carolina's Haw River

"When they were yelling at us to hurry up and rescue them, I was thinking, 'Well, ding-dong, I wasn't the one who put you out in the river.'"

- Amy Isley, Burlington police officer and volunteer rescue squad member

I grew up near the Haw River in North Carolina and was witness to the near annual media circus surrounding the dramatic helicopter rescues of canoers. Inevitably, the stories demonstrated an individual exercising poor judgment, which was exacerbated by high waters.

By 1995 rescues of boaters on the Haw had become so common that the Chatham County Manager reported to the County Commissioners "there was recently another incident where a canoeist used the Haw River for recreational purposes when the river was above its normal elevation." The Commissioners listened to concerns that rescue and emergency response teams might themselves be placed in danger when stranded boaters needed assistance in the river, which quickly led to a discussion of whether there should be a prohibition on entering the river at certain flood stages or a penalty for people whose actions were particularly irresponsible.

Tony Tucker, Emergency Operations Director, then described how each river rescue on the Haw cost approximately \$3,500. Most of that expense was for the Army's helicopter at Fort Bragg, but a lot of the remainder was in salaries. His position was that if a fine was imposed, it would be unlikely to help recoup costs but "to make a person think twice about entering the river." Ultimately, the Commissioners voted to have the Chatham County Attorney investigate an ordinance, though no regulations were changed in Chatham.

One county upstream, and six years later in February 2001, Charlie Frago, a staff writer for Burlington's *News & Record*, reported that three canoers were pulled off a beaver lodge on the Haw River in North Carolina. The three chose to canoe the flooded river without lifejackets in rainy, wintry conditions. One reportedly said, "We just thought, the water's real high, it's going to be fun." However, Frago clarified that Alamance County taxpayers would not bear the burden of the rescue costs since the volunteer squad was funded largely through private donations and added that the three canoers were not billed. While the circumstances leading to this rescue were particularly grievous, the event ultimately served as one more opportunity for the regulators and media mavens to discuss whether the river should be closed during high water and who should bear the cost of rescues.

The tales of woe on the Haw are not unique to North Carolina, and the issue of who should bear search and rescue costs has been debated in every state in the Union. Whenever dramatic rescue images appear

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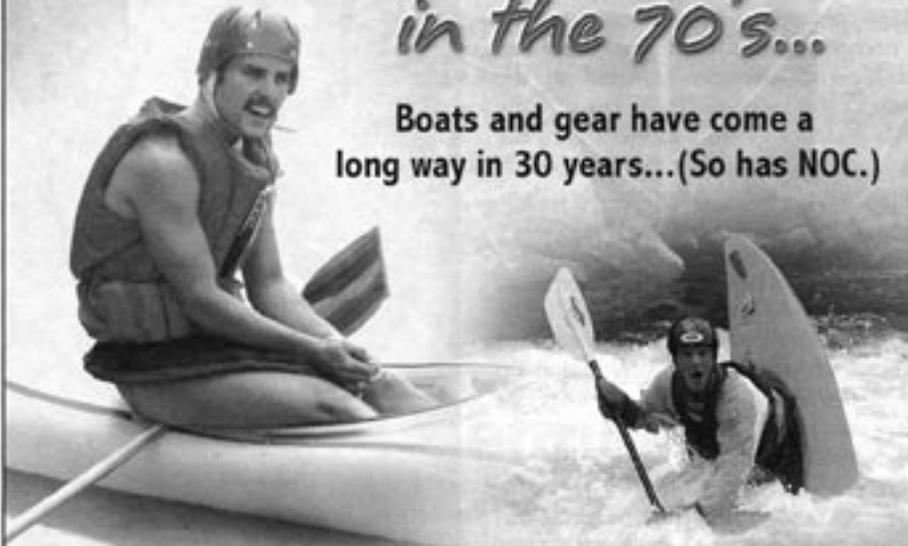
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on the nightly news of boaters being lifted from a flooded river by helicopter or challenged by law enforcement, we find ourselves and our actions under the spotlight. This is true whether the victim is an inexperienced yahoo or even an Olympian like Davey Hearne.

The 1999 National Search and Rescue Plan

“The Participants agree that SAR services that they provide to persons in danger or distress will be without subsequent cost-recovery from the person(s) assisted.”
– 1999 NSAR

In 1999 the United States Coast Guard issued the *United States National Search and Rescue Plan* (NSAR). The NSAR Plan, which was amended in 2000, establishes the national protocol “for coordinating civil search and rescue (SAR) services to meet domestic needs and international commitments.”

The Plan affirms that the United States has met SAR responsibilities agreed to by international treaty including the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, and other appropriate international instruments to which the U.S. is a Party.

Civil search and rescue operations on white-water and flatwater are explicitly covered under the “maritime” and “land” operations directives. Maritime operations are defined as rescue from a water environment; and land operations are defined as rescue operations associated with environments such as wilderness areas, swift water, caves, and mountains.

The signing federal agencies include the Interior and Coast Guard, as well as the Departments of Defense, Transportation, and Commerce, and Federal Communications Commission and National Air and Space Association. Each agency assumes varying degrees of responsibility for preventative measures to protect the visiting public. Ultimately though, NSAR promises “the effective use of all available facilities in all types of SAR missions”, and affirms that the rescued person(s) shall not be responsible for payment associated with their rescue. This component applies equally on land and water to all federal signatories including the Department of the Interior (DOI) and adjacent jurisdictions, including the National Parks and Forest Services.

Determine the suitability and feasibility of recovering the costs of river rescues.

He did not create the fall, but rather the capacity for the fall... And in creating the capacity to fall, He created the possibility to both stand and to be picked up. And that is very good. -Anon.

Despite its recognition of international treaties, NSAR does not compel state or local agencies to conform or participate. Instead, it encourages cooperative agreements that allow these entities to direct and control their own responses within their boundaries. It is this loophole that some politicians and agency personnel, particularly at the state level, point to as they revive arguments to seek cost recovery payments from rescued victims.

American Whitewater is opposed to charging boaters for these rescues and recoveries. It is our long established policy position that charging for river rescues, whether after the fact or beforehand in the form of a rescue fee or rescue bond, is bad public policy. We offer this as a truth for several reasons.

Lo, would you add despair unto despair?

-Ridgely Torrence, *The Lesser Children*

Fees can create delays that can increase risks. From a practical level, charging for rescues often delays the initial request for help, which increases the risks for rescuers and subjects alike.



By the time a lost, capsized, or injured boater (or good Samaritan or witness) calls for a rescue, that boater may be in worse condition or in a less accessible location, and the weather or daylight may have deteriorated. All of these factors can increase the complexity and cost of performing rescue services. Because of these concerns, Ameri-

can Whitewater agrees with the Mountain Rescue Association, an organization representing 80 volunteer rescue teams from throughout the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, which is on record opposing charges for rescues because "no one should ever be made to feel they must delay in notifying the proper authorities of a search or rescue incident out of fear of possible charges." NSAR recognizes this and affirms that the agencies "will not allow a matter of reimbursement of cost among themselves to delay response to any person in danger or distress."

Fees proposals tend to be discriminatory: Charging one highly visible and readily identifiable user group – in this case, boaters – for rescue services that are provided free of charge to all other National Park visitors is blatantly discriminatory.

According to 2000 NPS data, 35.3 percent of all National Park search and rescue missions were for "other" causes, which generally are not recreation related and cannot easily be categorized. Hikers, boaters, swimmers, and climbers accounted for 24.4%, 10.3%, 9.8%, and 3.6% of rescues respectively; 9% of rescues were for "mutual aid" in which NPS officials responded

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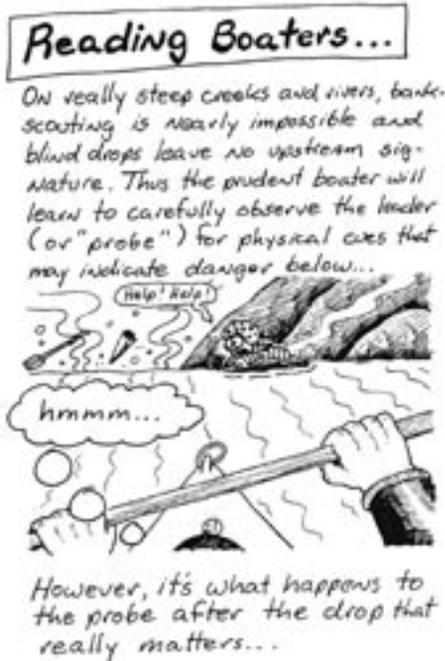
No correlation to cost: There is no direct correlation between the type of visitor activity and the cost of a rescue. Searches for lost hikers and downed aircraft can be exponentially more expensive than locating and transporting an injured boater from a known location in a river valley.

Cumulative rescue costs are relatively low: In 1999, the total cost per visitor of performing all search and rescue activities was a mere 1.2 cents – a small fraction of the total cost of \$6.90 per visitor for all NPS functions.

Though most of the search and rescue money in Alaska is spent on looking for missing planes, lost hikers and hunters, and disabled boats, that's not what stirs the debate. It's the rescues – often highly publicized rescues – of climbers on Mount McKinley.
- Anchorage Daily News, August 1998

Debate driven by prejudice of risk rather than reality: Neither boaters nor climbers should be singled out to pay for services

that are free to other Park visitors simply because they are highly visible, participants are few in number, or their recreational pursuit is perceived as dangerous by some.



A rescue! A rescue!
Good people, bring a rescue or two!
-Shakespeare, King Henry the IV, pt II

Rescues are an inherent management duty: Search and rescue is one of many public safety functions performed by land managers nationwide, as are attending to fires, motor vehicle accidents, and responding to criminal acts. All park visitors may at some point get lost or hurt while in our National Parks, whether it be a climber involved in a mountaineering accident, a rafter who is stranded in a rapid, or a tourist who succumbs to a heart attack while strolling on a paved nature trail. Similarly, all visitors may at some point be the victim of a crime or be involved in an automobile accident, and would customarily expect to have rescue services provided free of charge.

Fees increase liability risks: While charging for rescues may solve an immediate budgetary problem, it may create a bigger fiscal headache by reducing or removing the discretionary shield (see below) that protects the National Park Service from liability regarding if, when, and how the agency performs rescue services.

In 1991 the American Alpine Club (AAC) helped the NPS prevail in *Johnson vs. Department of the Interior* before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit

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[949 F.2d 332; 1991 U.S. App. LEXIS 26805]. This case established rescues as a discretionary function:

...the rangers' decision if, when or how to rescue inherently involves the balancing of safety objectives against such practical considerations as staffing, funding and minimizing government intrusion. As such, these decisions are grounded in social and economic policy, and thus are shielded from liability under the FTCA discretionary function exception.

The Park Service retains the ability to recover costs from individuals if they believe an individual's actions rose to the level of creating a hazard. However, charging for all rescues limits the agency's flexibility and may open the agency to multi-million dollar lawsuits based on a person's injury and ability to pay.

Fees increase "standard of care" expectations: Beyond removing the discretionary shield regarding when a rescue is launched, charging for rescues may force rescue agencies to provide a certain standard of care. One large legal settlement would wipe out many years of revenue brought in from charging boaters for rescues on a remote river such as the Grand Canyon in Arizona or even a more accessible river such as the Nantahala in North Carolina.

Fees violate the legally binding 1999 US National Search and Rescue Plan: As described earlier, charging for rescues is inconsistent with the National Search and Rescue Plan, a document that establishes policies and responsibilities for all U.S. government agencies providing rescue services to fulfill domestic and international obligations, which then-Secretary Bruce Babbitt signed on May 3, 1999 on behalf of the Department of the Interior. Based on NSAR, charging climbers or boaters for mountaineering or swiftwater rescues would violate national policies the Department of the Interior has pledged to uphold.

If fees are charged, fees should be limited: Rather than look only to recoup existing rescue costs, the agencies must evaluate more fully what costs legitimately should and should not be assigned to mountaineering and boating rescues.

As in the earlier case described on the Haw River, given costs often include the hourly rate for rescue or military personnel and helicopter flight hours, which can be substantial. For example, in 1992, the year with the highest mountaineering rescue costs on Denali, all search and rescue expenses totaled \$431,245. Of this total, the military incurred \$225,345,

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while the NPS incurred \$206,000. However, recall that military rescue units must train constantly for various rescue scenarios – including mountain environments – so that they are prepared when called on to rescue downed military aircraft, damaged ships, etc. These training costs are billed to their training budget regardless of whether time is spent on training exercises or real-life rescues. It would be totally inappropriate to ask mountaineers to pay for military training exercises that are otherwise accounted for in military training budgets.

If actions must be taken to pay for search and rescue costs, we recommend that the National Park Service establish a national search and rescue fund. A small surcharge on *all* Park visitors would be the most equitable and defensible solution given that climbers and boaters account for such a small proportion of search and rescue operations system wide, and the potential need for search and rescue services exists for all Park visitors regardless of activity. As described later in this article, a mere two-cent surcharge on all NPS visitors for a national search and rescue fund would cover search and rescue activities system wide and would not discriminate against any specific user group

Rescue costs can be driven by new technologies: American Whitewater has learned anecdotally from the Park Service of an increase in the search and rescue costs along the Potomac River outside Washington, DC where the Park's low-rotor-noise *Eagle* helicopter is being used increasingly to rescue swimmers, hikers, climbers, and the occasional whitewater boater.

Likewise, according to an American Alpine Club analysis of NPS data, the largest single factor in escalating search and rescue costs in Denali National Park between 1980 and 2000 was the introduction of the Lama helicopter, a specialized high-altitude rescue tool. In the 12 years prior to introduction of the Lama helicopter, rescue costs for Denali National Park averaged \$56,807 per year, the most expensive season cost \$114,770, and only one of the 12 years saw rescue costs above \$100,000. In the nine years from 1992 to 2000 with the Lama helicopter in use, average annual rescue costs doubled to \$112,045, the most expensive year cost \$206,000, and five of nine years had rescue costs above \$100,000. The Club contends that the Lama has allowed some rescues to be conducted that otherwise would not have been possible, and recognizes that some people who survived may

have died without it. However, elimination of the Lama helicopter contract would be the most significant action the NPS could take to contain the costs associated with mountain rescues in the Alaska Range.

Rescue costs can be driven by new infrastructure and use of trained volunteers: Trained volunteer rescue groups perform most search and rescue activities on public lands nationwide. The agencies should seriously consider scaling back their rescue service infrastructure and explore how volunteer rescue groups could be better utilized to reduce rescue costs on both whitewater and flatwater rivers.

The last that dare to struggle with the
Foe.
'Tis well! from this day forward we
shall know
That in ourselves our safety must be
sought;
That by our own right hands it must
be wrought;
That we must stand unpropped, or be
laid low.
-Wordsworth, *November 1806*

Returning the backcountry to a more natural condition typical of American wilderness, will emphasize greater self-reliance: Beyond saving money, reducing the rescue infrastructure in the National Parks sends a powerful message to boaters and other visitors, that rescue services are no longer near at hand.

American Whitewater is somewhat concerned that the advent of new rescue technologies leads to new psychological crutches, which can in some ways have the opposite effect of improving safety. We caution the whitewater community to be wary of the purchase of excessive safety equipment by rangers for use on the rivers they paddle.

The mountaineers' experience in Denali serves as a warning to us. In Denali the rangers point out in their educational materials that:

Rescue of injured or ill climbers, if possible at all, may be exceedingly slow and uncertain if weather conditions are not ideal. You should be prepared and equipped to perform self-rescue. Each party must rely on its own resources and cannot count on the aid of other climbers or rescue personnel.

Nevertheless, the highly visible ranger pres-

ence on Mount McKinley at the 14,000-foot camp and through the contracted Lama helicopter seems to have given many climbers a misleading sense of security that the NPS will launch a rescue if anything goes wrong. According to the American Alpine Club (AAC), there exists a belief among many climbers that rescues can and will be launched when needed by hurt or tired climbers. The AAC points to an accident report sent by Denali rangers for inclusion in the 2001 edition of *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* as illustrating the problem:

The D2K party was adamant that Lev Sarkisov be flown off from the 17,200-foot high camp without delay, regardless of the weather conditions. They learned very quickly that the Park Service doesn't provide a European-style helicopter rescue service and that Denali's weather dictates everything.

Reducing the rescue infrastructure in backcountry areas of our national parks is controversial; but it would send a clear message that the government intends to return these lands to a more natural condition typical of American wilderness, and that this change will require greater self-reliance by all visi-

tors. Identification and removal of many psychological crutches, including cell phones, would encourage people to take greater responsibility for their actions, and to avoid pushing on when they should turn back. The removal of psychological crutches could lead to a decrease in emergency responses for frivolous purposes.

INSURANCE COVERAGE REQUIREMENTS

Some river managers have suggested requiring boaters provide proof of insurance before receiving a launch permit. The climbing community has addressed this issue in recent years, and American Whitewater holds that their arguments also hold true for the boating community.

This issue came to a head in 1999 when Sen. Murkowski suggested that injured climbers were causing financial problems for local medical care providers by not paying bills following treatment. When he introduced a bill authorizing a study into this field, Sen. Murkowski said,

I want the Secretary to evaluate requiring climbers to show proof of medical



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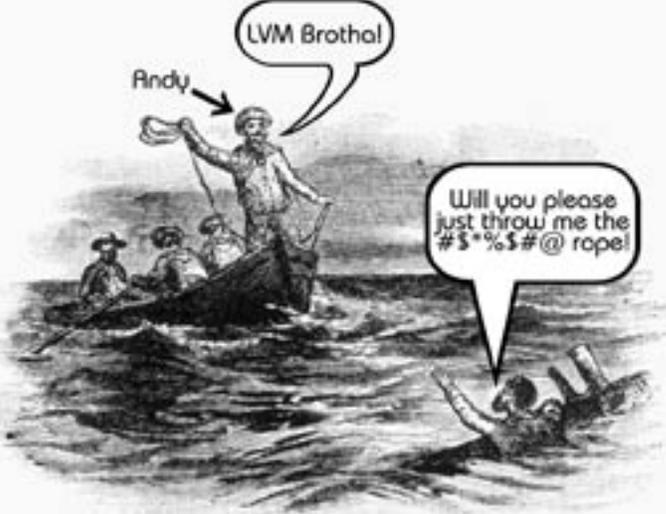


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insurance so that hospitals in Alaska and elsewhere are not left holding the bag as they sometimes are under present circumstances. It is a good neighbor policy that should be put into effect at the earliest opportunity.

Substitute the word "boaters" for "climbers" and the threat is apparent to our community. While the lack of health insurance is a widespread, serious, and longstanding problem facing many Americans, we question whether there is any information available showing boaters or climbers to be less insured than the population as a whole. We also assert that having health insurance coverage has no bearing upon whether a person should be allowed to visit our public lands and that a requirement that recreationists demonstrate proof of health insurance coverage before being issued a visitor permit would be discriminatory. Absent any compelling information from the Park Service or hospitals, this is an issue based more upon groundless speculation than fact.

More fundamental is the question of whether it is relevant or appropriate for the Park Service to ask any Park visitor about health insurance coverage. We think not and the Park Service appears to agree. The National Park Service's Organic Act established National Parks:

...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The Act makes no mention of limiting access due to lack of health insurance, ability to pay, or any other factor. Given that the agencies incur little to no expense for direct health care of injured visitors, we believe there is no legitimate reason for the government to force anyone to divulge whether they have health insurance coverage.

The working poor of this country, such as many raft guides, are the most likely segment of our society to lack health insurance, yet they pay taxes that support our public lands. They already face significant obstacles in paying entrance fees to enjoy their public lands without forcing them to show proof of medical insurance, which most simply cannot afford.

Significantly, the Department of the Interior is on record opposing requirements that climbers show proof of medical insurance before being issued a climbing permit. On May 13, 1999, when S. 698 was being heard before the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation, Department of the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary Stephen C. Saunders testified against this aspect of the bill saying it would not be in the public interest. Again, substituting the word "boater" for "climber" makes the relevance of Saunders's statement to American Whitewater's members apparent:

With regard to considering the question of whether to require climbers to have medical insurance, we do not believe a study is warranted. We believe the issue of payment for medical treatment at a hospital or other medical facility should remain beyond the authority of the National Park Service or Department of the Interior. This is an issue between the private citizen, his family and his doctors. The National Park Service is responsible for the care of patients during a rescue and for their transportation to an appropriate medical facility, but should not be involved in assessing the adequacy of medical insurance for care that can extend for years beyond a person's initial injury.

This is a fundamental question of fairness regarding access to public lands and discrimination of one highly visible user group. Unless all visitors are required to show proof of medical insurance (and by logical extension force all motorists entering the Parks to show proof of automobile insurance), we believe this is a blatantly discriminatory and unlawful requirement. Requiring proof of rescue insurance coverage (and billing policies after rescues have been completed) involves many of the same legal and practical pitfalls as charging subjects for rescues.

Another factor that must be addressed when considering the requirement of carrying rescue insurance is the impact claims will have on current rescue insurance policies. Former South District Ranger J.D. Swed, quoted in a *Boulder Daily Camera* news story, highlighted a major problem.

When someone pays for a service in advance, they expect to get it. If someone pays for an insurance policy and they get to the 14,000-foot mark and

decide they need to come down, who is to say they don't have to be taken down.

Consider the case of a boater on day 12 of a Grand Canyon trip instead of a climber at 14,000 feet, and again the relevance of this problem is apparent.

Up until the mid-nineties, Europeans could readily get rescue insurance for climbing and other activities; however, the abuse of this system led to the collapse of the underwriter's market in this field and the insurance has become much more difficult to obtain. The experience in Europe shows conclusively that when people have rescue insurance they can and will call for rescues in situations the NPS today would not view as worthy of launching a rescue. If boaters can call for a rescue whenever they feel like it, the increased utilization of rescue services could have a disastrous impact on the number and cost of river rescues and evacuations, as well as drying up what market there is for rescue insurance underwriters.

Total destruction of the probe indicates a mandatory portage!



American Whitewater is opposed to singling out boaters to provide rescue insurance coverage when other Park visitors are not asked to be financially responsible for their rescues. If rescue insurance proves to be a viable concept, it should be applied broadly among all visitors. Alternately, a mere two-cent surcharge on all Park Service visitors for a national search and rescue fund would cover search and rescue activities system wide and would not discriminate against any specific user group. Such a fund would rectify the current situation in which individual Park units must pay for rescue costs under \$500 and regional NPS offices must pay for rescues

above \$500, both of which require diverting money from existing projects since there is no dedicated rescue fund.

CONCLUSION

Boaters want to be responsible, largely self-reliant visitors to America's public lands. Our community does not desire to create a financial burden on the system as a whole. The issue of how the Park and Forest Services pay for and execute search and rescue services is a thorny one that cannot be addressed with simplistic responses. American Whitewater believes there are significant legal and discrimination issues surrounding charging boaters for rescue services, requiring medical and/or rescue insurance before being granted a boating permit, and determining how much visitors should pay directly for management services through user fees.

The misunderstandings that separate boaters from the rest of society are wide but not insurmountable; through education and political action we can bridge the gap. Write an opinion article for your local newspaper about a boating-related topic in your area. Write to local, state, or national elected officials about local boating access or policy issues. Organize a clean up effort at a local river. Then publicize your actions, share them with American Whitewater and your local governments.

The more you do at an individual or group level to show that boaters are a positive force in your community, the harder it will be for policy-makers to treat us as jokers.

Jason Robertson is Access Director for American Whitewater. He has been working with individuals in the National Park Service and Congress over the past 5 years to clarify the roles and responsibilities of rescuers and victims alike. The work has included the development of new standards for communication with helicopter rescue pilots and establishment of the privilege of free rescue for people in need. For more information, contact jason@amwhitewater.org.

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American Whitewater's Conservation Program Makes a Difference in 2002

2002 has been a banner year for American Whitewater's Conservation Program. Twelve whitewater flow studies have been conducted in hydropower proceedings across the country. Whitewater flow studies are a critical step towards restoring whitewater recreation to rivers dewatered by hydro dams. American Whitewater staff reviews the more than 1600 private hydro projects across the country to identify those dams that impact whitewater recreation opportunities. For those projects with whitewater resources, American Whitewater staff pushes for whitewater flow studies. The studies are designed to identify minimum acceptable and optimum flows for whitewater recreation. Upon completion of the flow study, American Whitewater staff negotiates with the hydro operators and resource agencies to develop an annual schedule of whitewater releases. The volume and timing of the whitewater releases are designed in a fashion that will enhance aquatic habitat and ecological processes in addition to providing recreational opportunities. Without American Whitewater staff at the relicensing table none of these flow studies would take place let alone establishment of an annual schedule of whitewater releases for 30 years.

"Hydro relicensing provides a tremendous opportunity for American Whitewater to provide direct benefits to paddlers and the paddle sports industry," notes John Gangemi, American Whitewater Conservation Director. "Paddlers are able to once again enjoy challenging whitewater runs on rivers that were taken away by dams."

In California this year we've witnessed hundreds of boaters flocking to the whitewater releases on the North Fork Feather River. This formerly dry riverbed was brought back to life by the hard work of American Whitewater staff fighting against significant resistance to put whitewater flows back into this stellar Class III-V fourteen-mile run. The Feather whitewater releases are scheduled June through October annually mimicking natural flows present in the river prior to dam construction.

In California alone American Whitewater is working on 14 hydropower proceedings currently with multiple river reaches and whitewater difficulty equating to well over 100 miles of new river miles. This flow restoration effort reaches far beyond California to rivers throughout the



country including the Pacific Northwest, Rockies, Midwest, Southeast, mid-Atlantic and Northeast. The list below provides a sampling of the river restoration work completed by American Whitewater in 2002. For information about American Whitewater's conservation efforts on a river in your area, contact John Gangemi, email jgangemi@digisys.net or Kevin Colburn Kevin@americanwhitewater.org

Whitewater Flow Studies

South and West Branch Penobscot River, Maine: In May, American Whitewater staff organized a whitewater flow study for the three-mile Class IV Canada Falls section on the South Branch of the Penobscot and the two-mile Class III Seboomook section on the West Branch Penobscot. Flows in these two reaches are regulated by Great Northern Paper's reservoir storage projects. Despite the snow and rain a team of boaters paddled seven different flows collectively on the two reaches. American Whitewater staff is currently negotiating an annual whitewater flow schedule based on the participants flow preferences balanced with natural resource needs in the upper basin.

Middle Fork Stanislaus River, California: In June a team of boaters volunteered to participate in a series of whitewater flow studies on the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River. One of the sections, Hell's Half Acre, proved to be a spectacular Class V first de-



scent on polished Sierra granite. Further downstream another team paddled the six-mile Class V Sand Bar Flat run again on polished Sierra granite. This group was joined at mile six by another group of paddlers to complete the remaining eight-mile Class V Mt. Knight run. American Whitewater is currently negotiating an annual schedule of releases for the respective reaches based on the flow preferences identified in the studies.

Pit River, California: In August, American Whitewater conducted whitewater flow studies on two reaches of the Pit River dewatered by Pacific Gas & Electric powerhouses. The Pit 4 hydropower facilities dewater a seven-mile Class IV reach of the Pit. During a 3-day study period (August 9,10 & 11) American Whitewater members in kayaks and rafts paddled flows of 800, 1400 and 1800 cfs. The 800 cfs flow was unacceptable for both kayaks and rafts. The 1400 cfs flow provided a combination of technical boating and powerful hydraulics. The 1800 cfs flow increased the power of the hydraulics making it even more appealing to rafters and kayakers.

Another team of nine kayakers and six rafters returned to study whitewater opportunities on the Pit 5 reach (August 23, 24 & 25). The Pit 5 bypass reach contains a six-mile Class IV+ run and a four-mile Class III run. Over the three day period, the team paddled 800, 1300 and 1800 cfs. The rafters preferred flows between 1500 to 1800 while the kayakers identified a broader range from 1000 to 1800 with the latter being the optimum.

Why go? The Pit 4 reach contains nine distinct Class IV rapids and several Class III drops. The Class IV rapids present big horizon lines leading into long boulder gardens (up to 0.5 miles long) with slalom lines to dissect the rapid. One rapid in particular, named "Heart of the Pit" really brings your Class IV skills forward.

The Pit 5 reach contains two distinct whitewater runs: The upper Pit 5 reach is a six-mile Class IV+ run with ten solid Class IV+ drops and a great riverwide play spot. labeled "Spin City". The lower Pit 5 reach is a four-mile Class III reach with several play features.



Paddle raft crew chuckling about their shuttle rig
Pit 4 flow study, California

Opposite, lower left: Jared Noceti running one of the many slots on Hell's Half-Acre
Middle Fork Stanislaus, California

Opposite, upper right: Forrest Hubler launching off superboof during a July 2000 flow study
Chelan Gorge, Washington

Below: Flow study participants running Bridge Rapid
Pit 5, California

Continued ▶



The Pit River offers excellent dispersed camping, mountain biking and fishing. The river reaches are removed from the road for the most part.

Next steps: Whitewater releases on the Pit River are extremely controversial due in part to angling recreation and natural resource issues. American Whitewater is working closely with other stakeholders and resource agencies in this hydro relicense proceeding to develop an annual flow regime that balances resource uses and restores ecological processes to the Pit River. Achieving this objective will require considerable effort by American Whitewater staff. The Pit River flow studies were extremely successful due in part to PG&E's assistance with logistics, lodging and food, as well as the expertise of PG&E's consultants and focus by the boaters.

Mono Creek Whitewater Feasibility Study, California: Southern California Edison operates a series of power plants on the San Joaquin starting high up in the headwaters and culminating nearly at the floor of the central valley some 8000' lower in elevation. SCE has successfully engineered a water transport system that diverts flows from the Upper San Joaquin and the majority of its tributaries into six

storage reservoirs, multiple powerhouses and too many tributary diversions to count. This complex system of water diversions and powerhouses has greatly altered the natural flow of water on Mono Creek, a headwater tributary of the San Joaquin River. On August 26, 2002, John Gangemi and Paul Martzen, American Whitewater Regional Coordinator, participated in a Single Flow Whitewater Feasibility Study on Mono Creek to determine a) if Mono Creek was a viable whitewater resource in the basin and b) if further study was necessary to identify whitewater flows for this reach.

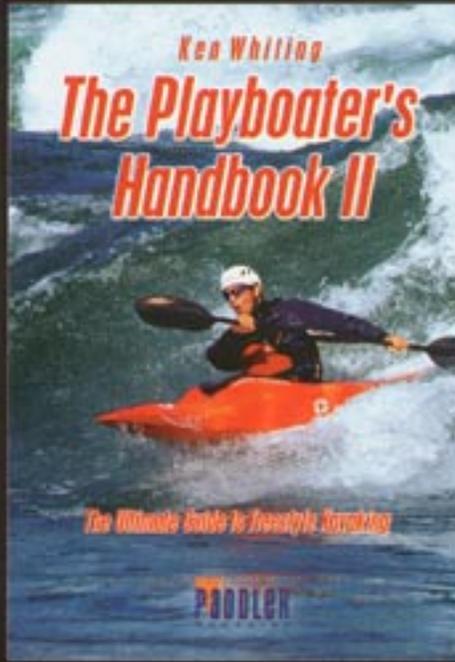
Mono Creek proved to be a four-mile continuous Class III creek run with one Class V rapid directly below the dam. Mono Creek below the Class V rapid offers solid Class III paddlers the opportunity to improve their creaking skills. The camping is superb with tremendous opportunities to also hike, mountain bike, climb, fish and soak in hot springs in the area. The drive from Fresno to Mono Creek is an adventure in itself as the single lane paved road winds it's way through granite outcrops. In addition to Mono Creek, American Whitewater will be conducting whitewater flow studies on six additional de-watered



Study Participant below giant penstocks delivering water to JC Boyle powerhouse downstream Klamath River, Oregon

Opposite: Chuck Lees, flow study participant Pit 4, California

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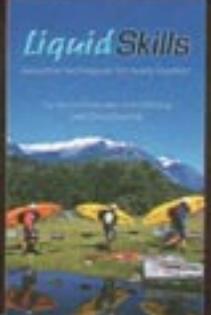
The Playboater's Handbook II follows up on the best-selling success of the original Handbook with a completely updated look at freestyle kayaking technique. It covers almost 3 times as many moves as the first edition with the help of other elite freestyle paddlers, including Corran Addison, Tyler Curtis and Steve Fisher. From the fundamental skill sets and 'catching your first wave', to the latest moves like the tricky whu and aerial loop, *the Playboater's Handbook II* will be a must have for both those who did and did not take advantage of the first.

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Elements of a Recreation Controlled Flow Study

What is a Recreation Controlled Flow Study? Recreation Controlled Flow Studies are designed to identify minimum acceptable and optimum water volumes for flow dependent recreation. The dam operator releases a pre-determined range of flows selected by whitewater experts with site-specific knowledge. A team of boaters paddles each flow in a variety of watercraft, to represent the breadth of potential users. The test paddle group is limited in size for logistical and safety reasons.

After each test flow, participants respond to a series of survey questions designed to record the quality of the experience at that flow. Upon completion of all the flow releases, participants complete a comparative survey form that measures the whitewater attributes of one flow against another. The data generated from participant responses helps develop a 'flow preference curve' that identifies a minimum acceptable and optimum flow for each watercraft type.

Why are Controlled Flow Studies Needed? The Controlled Flow Study is a critical component in a hydropower relicensing proceeding for boaters. This study sets the stage for future whitewater flows by enabling the paddling community to identify specific volumes needed for whitewater recreation. Scheduled whitewater releases typically require a utility to release water into the natural river channel foregoing power generation, thereby incurring financial losses to the utility. Consequently, where whitewater releases are inevitable, the utility will favor low-water volumes to reduce lost revenue. Flow studies eliminate the hydro operators bias by clearly defining the water levels necessary for optimal whitewater recreation using scientific methodology to obtain the supporting preference data. Furthermore, pinpointing the optimum flows helps maximize potential whitewater use, thus helping justify a whitewater release schedule while simultaneously foregoing power generation.

When do Whitewater Flow Studies Occur in the Hydro License Process? Whitewater flow studies typically occur between years one and three in the five-year relicensing process. This time period, referred to as the second stage in relicensing, is the field study phase for a variety of resource disciplines. Study results are used in the third and final stage when the new license is drafted.

Who Develops/Organizes the Whitewater Flow Study? American Whitewater works closely with the utility and/or their consultant responsible for carrying out the study. American Whitewater staff's expertise is relied upon heavily in the development of the study plan and survey questions. American Whitewater staff organizes the team of boaters and selects the range of flows based on local boater knowledge, site visits and dam outlet constraints.

Why Does a Utility Conduct a Whitewater Flow Study? In 1986 Congress passed the Electric Consumers Protection Act (ECPA). ECPA requires the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to balance power and non-power uses of a waterway when issuing new hydro licenses. American Whitewater participates in these proceedings advocating for whitewater flows, a non-power use. Without American Whitewater's presence at the table, there would be no whitewater flow studies or annual schedules for whitewater releases.

Who Participates? American Whitewater selects participants from the local and regional area representative of the paddling community. This includes river runners, play paddlers, rodeo boaters, weekend warriors, males, females, rafters, kayakers, C1, OC1, etc. We filter the list for folks that are American Whitewater members, have a previous history working on conservation and access issues and lastly, will work hard as a team player during the flow study.

How Can I Participate? Join American Whitewater. Get active in river issues in your local area. Contact John Gangemi jgangemi@digisys.net or Kevin Colburn kevin@amwhitewater.org

reaches in the San Joaquin drainage next year. If you would like to assist with one or more of these studies, contact John Gangemi jgangemi@digisys.net.

Clackamas River, Oregon: In June, American Whitewater carried out a flow study on the two-mile Cazadero section of the Clackamas River below Faraday reservoir. This Class III-IV section is downstream of Bob's Hole past the dam. Few boaters know it exists because it is typically dewatered and out of sight from the road. A team of volunteers paddled four flows over a two-day period. American Whitewater will work with Portland General Electric, the hydropower operator, to develop an annual schedule for whitewater opportunities.

Klamath, Oregon: American Whitewater staff is conducting two flow studies on the Klamath River; J C Boyle bypass reach and the Hell's Corner reach. These flow studies are scheduled for September 13-17, 2002. Hells' Corner is a sixteen-mile Class IV reach. J.C. Boyle is a five-mile Class IV+ to V- reach. We'll let you know the outcome in early 2003.

Hoosic, New York: Just north of Albany, NY sits a little whitewater gem that few boaters know about in the area because hydropower dams dewater the reach. American Whitewater has already reached a settlement agreement with Reliant Power, the new owner/operator, for five whitewater releases annually scheduled between April 15-June 15. The flow volume will be determined in a whitewater flow study to be conducted later this fall. This is a four-mile Class IV+ to V- reach. I suspect the local boaters will be doing laps on release days.

Continued on Page 31



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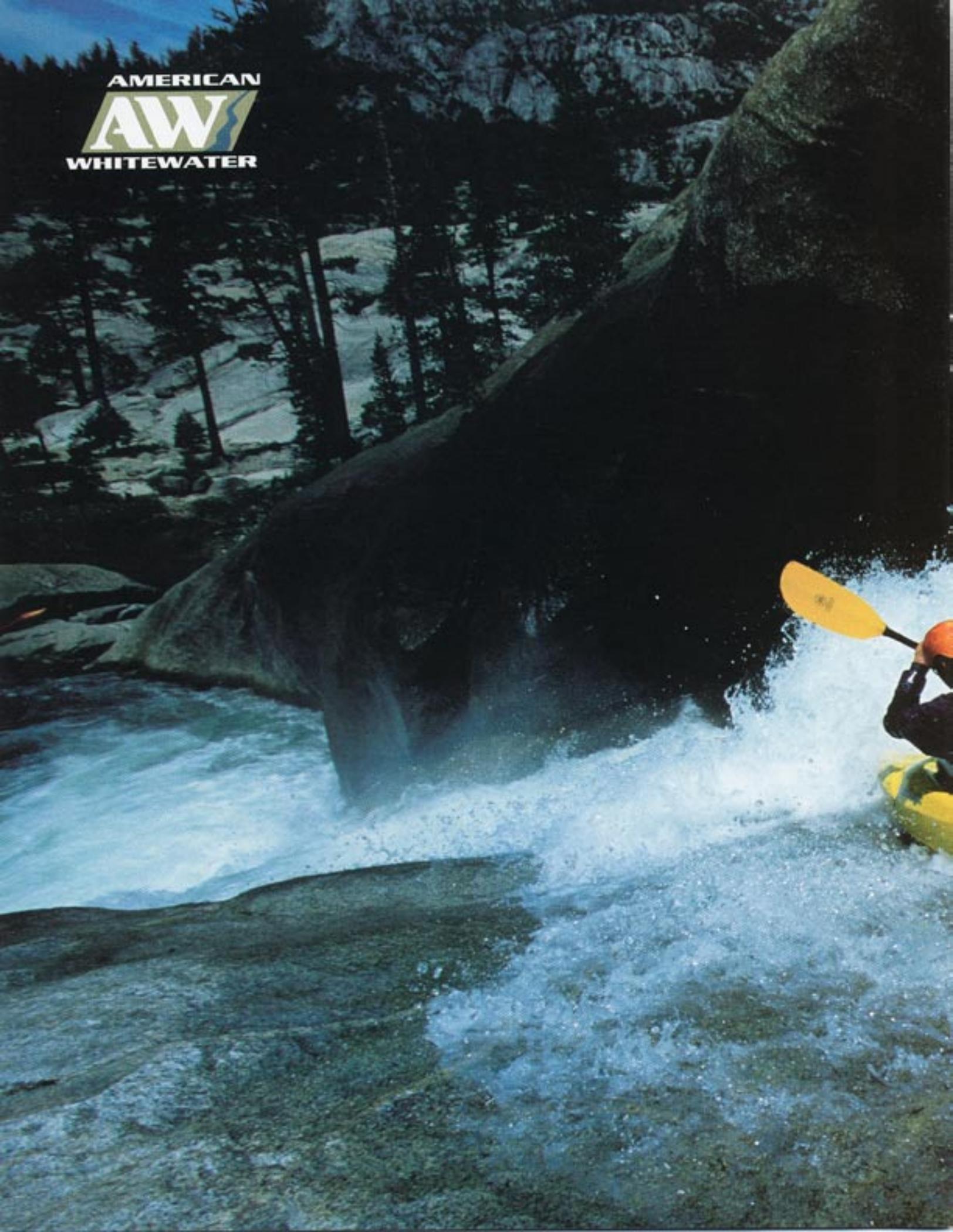
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Tuolumne River, CA

Tommy Hilleke

photo by Charis Murray

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Final Falls
John Grace, Salmon River Gorge, OR



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Bear River Settlement, Idaho: On August 28, 2002, Rob Lesser representing American Whitewater marched down to the Governor's office at the Idaho State Capital building to sign the Settlement Agreement for the Bear River hydropower relicensing proceeding. Rob's signature on that document brought to a close one of the toughest relicensing battles yet faced by American Whitewater staff.

The Bear River, located in southeast Idaho contains several whitewater reaches the most notable of which is the six-mile Class IV+ Black Canyon of the Bear. The relicensing process for the Bear started in the mid-nineties. The battle lines were quickly drawn pitting anglers and state resource agencies against restoration of whitewater flows. PacifiCorp, the utility operating the projects, in a battle of its own with just about every stakeholder, opted to work on a settlement agreement in late 2001. The Settlement Agreement option allowed PacifiCorp to maintain some control over the allocation of water resources rather than letting FERC determine those distributions back in Washington, DC. American Whitewater expended considerable staff time at negotiations in Pocatello, Idaho and legal expense before reaching an acceptable settlement. The Settlement Agreement calls for 16 whitewater releases annually between April 1 and July 15. PacifiCorp will provide real-time flow information accessible by the internet and phone as well as improve public access. In addition, PacifiCorp has committed \$16 million for restoration of Bonneville cut-throat trout in the Bear River.

Swan River, Montana: American Whitewater reached agreement in the summer of 2002 with PacifiCorp for recreational improvements to the Swan River at their Bigfork Hydroelectric



Noah Hughes on the Mt. Knight section
Middle Fork Stanislaus, California

Jim Michaud making it look easy in an OC-1
Canada Falls, Maine

project. PacifiCorp will provide access to the south side of the Swan River below the dam including relocation of chain link fencing, parking and a pedestrian bridge across the project canal. Existing fencing and project structures obstructed public access to the river. In addition, the Settlement Agreement calls for Wednesday evening whitewater releases July 1 to August 31 annually. PacifiCorp will place a conservation easement on non-project lands allowing public access to the river and reservoir as well as giving the community of Bigfork the option to purchase 400 acres to preserve open space.

San Joaquin River, California: American Whitewater reached agreement with Southern California Edison (SCE) and the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) for whitewater releases at the Big Creek No. 4 powerhouse. The annual whitewater schedule in the agreement calls for six

Continued ▶



days in wet water years, three days in above normal water years and nine days for below normal water years. In addition, SCE will shape spill flows over the dam during run-off events to provide whitewater opportunities. SCE's Big Creek No. 4 hydropower project dewater a six-mile Class IV reach of the San Joaquin below Redinger dam.

Kern River, California: American Whitewater reached agreement on an annual schedule for whitewater flows with Southern California Edison (SCE) for the Kern River No. 3 hydropower project. American Whitewater and Friends of the River submitted a successful legal challenge in 1997 opposing the U. S. Forest Services proposed whitewater flow schedule. The U. S. Forest Service flow schedule violated the Forests' own legal requirements for protection of stream flows. Previous attempts to reach settlement met in failure. This successful settlement will provide an average of 38 days of whitewater annually from April 1st through August 15th. This settlement affects a 17-mile reach of the Kern River below Fairview Dam containing Class III-V whitewater opportunities. Hydropower operations divert water from this 17-mile reach upstream from Kernville.

Hoosic River, New York: This summer of 2002 American Whitewater wrapped up negotiations with Reliant Energy (formerly Niagara Mohawk) for a new license for the Hoosic River hydroelectric project just north of Albany, New York. The Settlement Agreement calls for five whitewater releases between April 15th and June 15th annually. Releases will be triggered by inflow. The flow volume will be determined in a whitewater flow study in the fall of 2002. This is a four-mile Class IV+ to V- reach.

Little River, Vermont: American Whitewater reached an Agreement in Principle with Green Mountain Power on flows and release dates for the three-mile Class II (III) section of the Little River below Waterbury reservoir. This agreement in principle awaits further negotiations with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

John Gangemi works to restore rivers as the nation's expert in hydropower relicensing. His background as a conservation biologist insures that AW stands tall for the health of rivers in its campaign for recreational water releases.

Restoring Whitewater to the Bear River

By Richard Hoffman

Bryan Seeholzer was instrumental in the discovery of the Black Canyon of the Bear, probably because he grew up in Logan, Utah, which is not far away. He also grew up on skis; his family owned the local ski resort, and he went on to race for the University of Utah Ski Team. Most paddlers that I know live here because of the Wasatch Mountains and the high quality of snow that falls on them. Why else would you be a paddler in the second driest state in the nation?

In the late winter of 1983, Bryan and his wife, Mary Dern, were returning from a cross-country ski race in Yellowstone when he decided to check out the run. I don't think he saw much from the farm fields overlooking the basalt canyon, for it wasn't until September of that same year when he and some friends made the first known descent of the run. They found a fantastic Class IV run with interesting rapids, and great play water. This time in history was absolutely phenomenal around here for the successive huge water years we had. Salt Lake City had water flowing down its streets and the Great Salt Lake was flooding, requiring installation of huge pumps to pump water out to the west desert. The Bear River is so dammed and diverted that flows through this reach are normally 10 cfs, but in 1983 it was running in excess of 2500 cfs!

Bryan was a true boating addict, paddling all over the west. He traveled east to experience the boating there as well, and on to Chile, Central America, and even to the former Soviet Union. As a carpenter and log home builder, to support himself he also became a professional photographer. Some of his work can be found in, "Idaho Whitewater" by Greg Moore & Don McClaren. It's fitting that he took the photo of Bear Falls and helped record the history of paddling at that time.

Bryan was the nicest person you could ever meet, always a smile and a true love for life. He had this peculiar jaw movement when he would get excited on the river. You could always tell when he was bending the needle on the fun meter. Life is not always fair however, and he lost his battle with a brain tumor nearly ten years ago now. Some of his ashes are in Idaho next to the moving water he loved most. His memory lives on with those of us who



Water spilling from Grace Dam
Bear River, Idaho

knew him and has kept me going through the countless years of the relicensing process to return boating flows to the Black Canyon of the Bear.

I would like to personally thank the members of American Whitewater for supporting the fine work John Gangemi has been doing for restoring boating flows, not only on the Bear, but also on all the rivers going through relicensing. This is something worth working for, and just the sight and sound of moving water in these reaches that have been dry for so long brings pure joy to every paddler's experience.

Editors note: *Fighting to restore water to a dry riverbed in a hydropower relicensing process can be a long and less than glamorous process. There are lots of reasons to walk away from the bureaucratic process that moves at a snail's pace. For some paddlers that hang in there, putting in the countless hours of meetings and adversarial exchanges with other stakeholders is motivated by a vision for a restored river. Still other paddlers, like Rick Hoffmann in Salt Lake City, are motivated by deeper emotions. . . fighting to maintain the memory and legacy of a close paddling friend. Rick took up the challenge to restore whitewater flows below the PacifiCorp Dams on the Bear River as a way to create a legacy for his fellow paddler, Bryan Seeholzer. Rick's commitment to restore whitewater flows on the Bear never faltered. Thanks to Rick's tireless efforts over a six-year battle, there are now 16 annual whitewater releases in this six-mile Class IV run. So when you get a chance to run Grace Falls consider Rick's efforts and then also think about Bryan Seeholzer doing the first descent 20 years ago in a 13-foot boat at 2500 cfs. If you notice your jaw twitching at the lip, that's probably Bryan possessing your body for one more jaunt over Grace Falls.*

FLOW STUDY

SOUTH BRANCH AND WEST BRANCH PENOBSCOT RIVER AT CANADA FALLS AND SEBOOMOOK: THE MARCH FOR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND WATER PROTECTION

Some folks view the world as random disconnected events, but I adopt a different view, one of complex interactions where every action has a distinct reaction both in the natural world, spiritual world and, yes, the bureaucratic world full of regulations and politics.

Take the Penobscot River as a case in point. The seemingly random events and dates scribbled below may appear completely unrelated at first glance. But on closer examination, a thread appears weaving these proceedings, dates and people into one issue. That thread is the Penobscot River. This mighty River, known as “place of the descending rocks” by the Penobscot tribe, flows from the flanks of Katahdin eastward bringing forward cold clean water that is the very essence of the people and land it passes through. This clean water is a public trust resource belonging to you and the people of the First Nations.

January 23, 1998: FERC rules that eight storage reservoirs in W. Branch Penobscot owned and operated by Great Northern Power do not need FERC licenses.

March 11, 1998: American Whitewater, Appalachian Mountain Club, New England Flow and American Rivers legally challenge FERC's decision not to license.

July 6, 1999: FERC upon reviewing comments submitted by American Whitewater et al, reverses their January 28, 1998 order determining instead that six of the eight storage reservoirs in the West Branch Pe-

nobscot must in fact be licensed. GNP is ordered to amend previous license application for downstream projects and include the six storage reservoirs.

July 12, 2001: FERC meets with stakeholders including American Whitewater, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Penobscot Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Great Northern Energy and others to resolve agency differences concerning recommendations for the renewal of dam licenses upstream from the Ripogenous Project on the West Branch, Penobscot River, Maine. The stakeholder group eventually agrees that a Controlled Flow Study is necessary to identify whitewater flows for the Seboomook and Canada Falls reaches regulated by project dams.

September 1, 2001: The Penobscot Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe officially announce their resistance to a new ruling that the state of Maine is to take over water quality regulations from the Federal EPA.

The Tribes argue that EPA has stricter environmental standards than the state because large corporations (like paper companies) tend to dominate a state's political and environmental landscape in such a way that water quality is often compromised.

State regulation facilitates “pollution dilution” so paper companies can bring their products to market for less cost. The Indians point out that paper products come at the cost of clean water for all Maine people.



Penobscot tribal Elders in spiritual preparation for march on State Capital, Maine

Bottom Left: Study participants below Canada Falls

The Penobscot reservation sits on an island in the middle of the main branch of the Penobscot River near Old Town. Turtles there are polluted with dioxin, a chemical used in papermaking.

April 25, 2002: American Whitewater asks me to compile a team of 10+ paddlers that can commit to 3 full days of volunteer data collection to develop recommendations for whitewater release schedules at Seboomook and Canada Falls. American Whitewater and FLOW bring another 10 volunteers for geographic representation around the New England region. Orientation meetings start at Pittston Farm on the South Branch, just below Canada Falls at 7 AM, May 19th.

May 11, 2002: An agreement drawn up by the Governor of Maine to end the dispute between the state and the Indians falls apart. Fueling the fire further, paper companies ask for Internal Tribal documents that pertain to water quality research and communication. A Maine Supreme Court judge sentences three tribal governors to jail for withholding these documents. To avoid going to jail, the Indians agree that by May 24, they will deliver the documents as requested, but they will do so under protest.

May 15, 2002: Barry Dana, Chief of the Penobscots asks me to help organize a civil rights march of 33 miles, to protest the delivery of the Internal Tribal documents and to protest the continued pollution of our state's rivers. I agree to help Indians and non-Indians join together in this historic event. The bottom line goal of the march is to highlight the connection between environmental protection and social justice.

May 17, 2002: After work, after dark, a Perception rep crashes the Flow study at the very last minute. He hears what we're



up to from bros at the Bangor Ski Rack. A few years ago this guy worked with Gangemi on another Flow Study, so hell, he's in. We head out with the usual Maine convoy of trucks and vans only to find that the frost is just leaving the dirt roads up north. The Perception trailer gets left behind. Crash, bang, tires throwin' mud, we arrive well after dark. We sit up half the night tellin' war stories in my van before passing out. We can hear the river flowing, that constant flow of water that excites your spirit. I can only hope that all of American Whitewater's Flow Studies start with this kind of excellence.

May 18, 2002: Over an awesome breakfast put together by the fine staff at Pittston Farms, we meet the other members of our team along with Great Northern Energy (GNE) officials and an independent hydrological engineer. [Note: Shortly after our Flow Study, GNE changes its name to Great Lakes Hydro America. Regardless, these are the very same folks who are putting pressure on the Indians to turn over Internal Tribal documents.] After breakfast, we get briefed on how a Flow Study is supposed to be conducted. Outside, a cold drizzle deters our enthusiasm to replace fleece with rubber, but the show must go on. The first release at Canada Falls is set for 600. We have a blast at 600 cfs. The next release is scheduled for 900 cfs, which is also very fun. We find waves, holes and challenging rapids. We immerse ourselves in the water; drinking its cold clean power.

Because of the cold and wet conditions, we only get two runs today. Dinner is served; we fill out forms and discuss advantages and disadvantages of today's flows. Someone overhears a GNE guy say something about the damn Indians making such a fuss...we call it a day and go to bed. But, the river keeps flowing.

May 19, 2002: Our team decides to try Canada Falls at 450 cfs to pinpoint the minimum acceptable flow for whitewater. It's on the low end of fun, barely acceptable by closed boat standards, but okay for open boats. Afterwards we travel to Seboomook for a run at 1500 and 2000 cfs. We drive back to Pittston Farms for more food, more

forms and more discussion. The GNE guys go home. They've had enough.

May 20, 2002: We do two runs at Seboomook at 1000 and 500 cfs, fill out more forms and have more discussion over deer and moose steak cooked in a fire pit by the river (a Maine thang). The sun came out for the first time during the entire study, just in time for everyone to go home (also a Maine thang). The river keeps flowing close by.

May 24, 2002: At 5 AM a group of 50 Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians and supporters thank their creator for life, family, health, animals, insects, trees and especially for rivers, streams and waterways.

An ominous mist hangs over the river a few yards away as if warning us of the deadly poisons it has picked up since I paddled that same water 50 miles upstream only days earlier.

The documents will be marched 33 miles to Augusta, the state capital. Above all else, Maine's First People want the river to be clean.

May 25, 2002: 120 people, some Indian, some non-Indian, gather 3 miles from the state capital building. Supporters hold signs reading "It's About Clean Water" and "Water=Life". Five of the Canada Falls/Seboomook Flow Study volunteers are instrumental in this march. The documents are delivered, jail sentences are narrowly escaped, and Chief Dana's speech includes this statement:

"We were the first people in Maine and now industry on our rivers is suing us. They attack us at the core of who we are."

July 2002: The results of our Flow Study are published by Great Lakes Hydro America. In all there were 21 boater volunteers who donated 553 hours of work. The colation of data shows that 1) optimal flows at Canada Falls, for a variety of boaters, is between 600 and 900 cfs, 2) controlled releases should be provided during sum-



Tom Lajoie nailing a boof on the Canada Falls reach, Maine

Bottom Left: Demonstration banner for tribal sovereignty and water protection

mer months (preferably July and August), 3) a high challenge flow of over 1000 cfs should be offered at least once a year, 4) the optimal flows at Seboomook, for a variety of boaters, is between 1000 and 1500 cfs and, 5) a high challenge flow over 2500 cfs should be offered at least once a year. 6) at least two weekends of 1750 cfs should be offered on Seboomook for rodeo competition at Double Hydraulic. These recommendations will be included when American Whitewater negotiates terms for the next 30-year license,

The incredible, pristine beauty of Canada Falls and Seboomook struck all the Flow Study participants. The air there is pure and the water is clean. Why isn't it clean down river on the main branch of the Penobscot, a place that Indians and non-Indians call home?

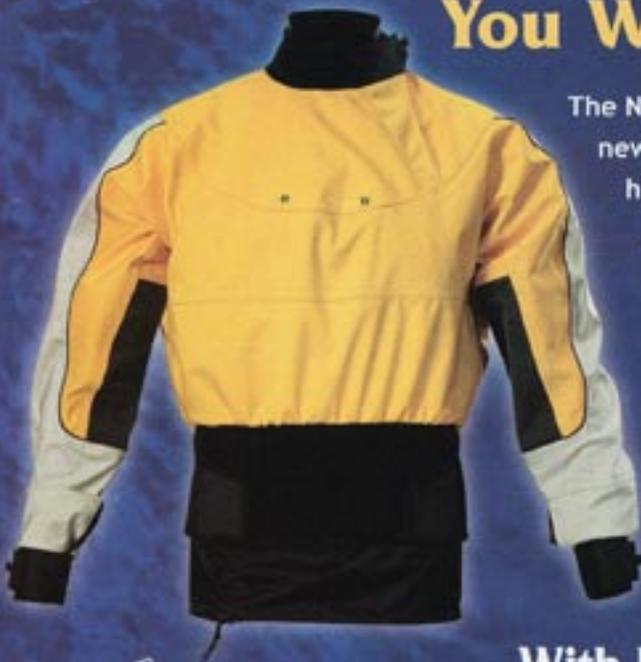
If you're not a member of American Whitewater, please join. Your money goes to great causes like those of this Flow Study and to a conservation program that supports clean river water. If you care about Native American sovereignty and/or a clean Penobscot River from Canada Falls to Old Town, please join the Maine Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty (call or write John Frachella, 79 Old County Rd., Hudson, ME 04449, 207-884-7407).



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AND TIME BUT
NOT STANDING
STILL**



**2002 American Whitewater
Gauley River Festival™**

On September 21, the skies gently threatened the Nicholas County Veterans Memorial Park in Summersville, WV. Feeling guilty about hoping the rain would hold, we uttered not-so-silent prayers. They were answered with a deluge that waited patiently until Sunday afternoon: the seventeenth AW Gauley River Festival curtain went up and went off, resoundingly.

While in some respects it was 'just another Gauley Fest,' this icon of an event is evolving, as is every other aspect paddling.

So: what *hasn't* changed?

The Point. We are there to celebrate paddling the Gauley each autumn during the Army Corps of Engineers drawdown of Summersville Reservoir, with the cooperation of the West Virginia River Outfitters and New and Gauley Rivers' National Recreation Area managers. The Upper Gauley, from the Summersville Dam to Pillow Rock was saved from being flooded (to feed a hydroelectric dam project) by 'Citizens for the Gauley River,' the rafting community and AW drove the National Recreation Area designation for the New and Gauley in the mid-eighties; and conservation/access issues have surfaced and been addressed since. We are psyched to be able to meet, re-greet and offer a hug of thanks to both paddlers who supported AW years ago, and those who are entering the sport today.

So: what *has* changed?

Event attendance hit a new record: 4,604 through the gate during festival hours! This does not include the vendors (increased slightly over 2001) and the 200+ volunteers who were on site and worked under the superb leadership of Joe Greiner (board member) and Nancy Gilbert.



Junior Volunteer Clean-up Crew - Steve Zekany, Bob Smith, Adam Pikulski and Bob Geier
Venture Scouts from Troop 8 - Ann Arbor, Michigan

...Speaking of *volunteers*: aside from fielding more volunteers offers than ever, we saw new folks joining the true blue to help us pound posts, hang cable, park cars and sell raffle tickets. According to Michael Phelan, AW Events Director, at one point

on Friday, EVERY volunteer on the field was under the age of thirty - maybe twenty-five! Thank you all, whether your first boat was a Dancer, Demon, or Disco!

Continued ▶

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What Are You Doing This Winter?



NPFF at Pillow Rock: The National Paddling Film Festival crew had cameras rolling at Pillow Rock, and video to view at the festival a few hours later. Paddlers who joined AW at the festival were eligible to receive a CD of the day's action, too!

...Speaking of **membership:** AW signed up over one hundred new and renewing

members, thanks to the terrific effort of our Membership Coordinator Jessie Rice, board members and additional volunteers.

Full on Entertainment Agenda – Serious music arrived: Thanks to the talent and enthusiasm of Bumper Crop on Friday and 'Strut' from Asheville Saturday, we got the full on sound that played to happily danc-

ing feet until the wee hours; the DJ efforts 'tween Strut sets were solid. The debut of the **Big Gun Show** drew a crowd of multiple thousands. *On the fringe:* Spam® was being eaten and otherwise abused at both the Dagger and Extrasport booths, and Perception was employing a somewhat shy 40 lb. greased pig to promote their brand...

...Speaking of **alternative entertainment:** For the first time, AW sought sponsorship for the portable potties around the festival site. A skilled team of judges presented painstakingly crafted trophies to those best decorated in terms of 1) visual impact, 2) entertainment from a seated position and 3) successful support of AW's conservation, access or safety programs. The First Place winner was Teva: Second and Third Place prizes were awarded to Liquid Logic! Next year, get your club (or non-club!) to sponsor a port-a-potty!

Gifts: A huge round of thanks goes to P.S. Composites and Rock Hedz for donating part or all sales of selected helmets to AW, to Wave Sport for passing on the proceeds from their Dunk Tank, and to Teva for the sale of 2002 Teva Tour t-shirts. Thanks also to those who presented special gifts to AW at the festival: the organizers of the French



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Thanks to our guests, vendors and volunteers, all. We look forward to seeing you again, next September!



Above: One of the many new members that signed-up at the festival

Left: Teva's winning port-a-potty decoration

Opposite: Paddlers watching their runs at Pillow Rock at the NPPF booth

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Gauley Fest 2002

Wake to the patter of rain on tarps and a view of strung lines and soggy gear dripping onto a gravel parking lot packed full of steamed up Tacomas and soggy tents: Gauley Fest is finally upon us!

The 'early bird' shuffle brings the rest of us into a long morning of French-press coffee and 'meet and greet' with all our buddies from near and far who've gathered to pay homage to American Whitewater's crown jewel access success: the Gauley River. This year's edition was an impressive upgrade – the water warm, the rain stopped, and the party atmosphere bumped up for late-night revelers.

OK – the river is still totally playboat infested, and some of the world's best boaters are endurance training in the hole while we wait.

Boats of all sorts are either peeling out in front or dropping in behind you at every eddy.

Just when you think it is your turn, a line of rafts appears above, the guides considering whether or not the splash they get as they pass through this hole may affect the quality of their tip. Then there's Panther Creek trail . . .

I don't know how or when the Festival starts each year, cause I'm in the pack that lost the flow around Sweets and missed the keg-beer at the top of the hill while hitting big-boat mysteries above the takeout. So around dark the Fest is in full swing

– a massive circle of boats, gear, tents, and people swirling amongst the whole thing.

The newest toys in the industry are on display and last year's are on sale a couple booths down. Beverages provide much-needed relief from the throb of sore ab, hip, and shoulder muscles while the stories of the day's events swap and swell. You can

dunk pro-kayakers, bob for Spam™, dodge stilted-clowns and unicyclists, and even hear yourself talk.

About halfway through my first round of the circle, a commotion towards the center is broken up when beamingly-proud new gear-owners swing the fresh booty high as they strut out to the parking lot. Checks are flying, and silent auction winners stash their loot. Soon, the parking lot becomes a

viable party to itself as groups reacquaint and the big-rigs in the shadows draw crowds into their holds.

But hey – the drone of generators and muffled video soundtracks have given way to real music – a band started up earlier, but now the groove is going and the booth-working revelers are unleashed. The lights drop a notch sometime around midnight and people are actually watching and dancing to live music performed at a Gauley Fest! Amazing. Having a progressive band playing after the video screens have gone blue and the bulk of the crowd gone home shifts the campground-core into gear to start the 'after-hours' party.

What kind of party actually makes money on this sort of thing? The kind American Whitewater throws fall after fall in the mountains of Southern West Virginia.

Clay Wright



The American Whitewater hospitality tent

Opposite: Spectators enjoying the awesome ir Big Gun Show





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Events

End of an Era

By Michael Phelan, Events Director

The conclusion of the 2002 Teva Tour brings to mind fond memories of some very dedicated volunteers working very hard to host some of the best events in the United States and Canada. Through the hard work of these memorable volunteers and the professionalism of the American Whitewater team, many events sparkled. The 2002 Teva Tour will be remembered as one of the most influential competitive series in the history of whitewater paddling. But, what many people do not understand, unless they visited or participated in the Tour, was that the Teva Tour was more than a series of competitions, it was series of events selected to raise the paddling communities' awareness of the incredible far-reaching work of American Whitewater.

For those of you not familiar with the Teva Tour, the Tour was a series of fourteen events taking place in four geographic regions, spread out across the United States. Each region included three events all building toward the National Champi-

onship. The Championship took place on the Ocoee River in Ducktown, Tennessee at what was the 1996 Olympic Whitewater Center. It was no accident that the Ocoee River was selected as the site for Nationals. Besides the Whitewater Center being the only whitewater venue in the United States designed for large competitive events, the Ocoee River was one of AW's top conservation issue in the United States in 2002. Despite ever increasing pressure from AW and the paddling community, at press time, TVA still refuses to release the public's water into the Ocoee River from its elaborate stranglehold of flumes and dams.

The Tour was designed by American Whitewater in an effort to do two things. First off, the Tour was created so that AW could provide opportunities to promote its conservation and access successes in a way that would heighten paddlers' awareness of what AW does in their backyard. It was hoped that through that awareness more paddlers would become members of AW. Well over 200 paddlers have joined AW at one of the fourteen events on the Teva Tour. The second goal was to create a competitive framework encouraging athletes to participate in kayaking as an organized sport. Attention was paid to



ensure that the Tour would provide both incentives and encouragement for amateur and professional athletes. Amateurs were given bonus incentives to compete near home, and 'pro' athletes were encouraged to participate by making qualification for Nationals a requirement to maintain 'pro'

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West Virginia

status. I am very happy that at virtually all of the events on the Tour both the Sport and Expert classes experienced significant surges in participation. At most events the Expert class represented close to half of the overall competitive field.

The completion of the 2002 Teva Tour represented both the culmination and conclusion of AW's fifteen years of shepherding the sport of freestyle kayaking in the United States. Starting in 2003, AW will continue to be intimately involved with events and competitions, but only when and where a significant conservation or access issue burns. After fifteen years, AW holds to the belief that events are an incredible resource for communicating with the public in a fun and engaging atmosphere. In 2003, AW will host four events. One event will take place in each of the four geographic regions established in 2002. Each event will include live music, paddling films, vendors, and competitions. Competitions will include events for both kayaking and rafting, for amateurs and pros, for freestyle and extreme racing. The focus of next year's event schedule will be on gathering the entire paddling community to celebrate whitewater rivers, the diversity of the whitewater community, and the need to protect and



restore the country's whitewater resources for the betterment of the environment and responsible use. I hope that you will choose to support this refocusing of AW's energies through attendance at one or all of the American Whitewater Riverfest™ Events planned for next year.

TEVA Black River Rodeo
Watertown, New York

Opposite: TEVA Wausau Double-Up Challenge
Wausau, Wisconsin

Thank you, to all of the sponsors, volunteers, spectators, and athletes who supported AW through out the 2002 season. Best wishes and safe travels.

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America Outdoors and American Whitewater recommend this set of guidelines to those who paddle our nation's whitewater rivers - common sense river etiquette tips that seem to make plain sense. We hope our members and friends will embrace them and that their reference will help all as river traffic increases, to keep attitudes remaining 'flatwater' calm and collected.



RiverShare™ Guidelines

Positive, cooperative relationships between river users are important to the future of paddlesports and to the future of rivers themselves. Please follow the guidelines below in an effort to establish or maintain positive relationships with other river users. Unnecessary conflicts may result in unwanted regulations and enforcement actions that may limit opportunities and enjoyment of the river.

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- At put-ins and take-outs behave in a friendly, positive manner toward others and be helpful to those who might need assistance. Be mindful of the time that you are spending occupying the launch or take-out area so that you do not unfairly restrict opportunities for others.
- Allow for spacing up and downstream of others, particularly in a rapid, and seek to avoid collisions. Colliding boaters should not leave the scene without checking with the other paddlers and making sure that they are unhurt. Do not take any action that escalates conflict.
- When entering a rapid, the upstream craft has the right of way. Those entering the current should yield to those already in it. Never cut in front of an oncoming boat.
- When exiting the current, avoid eddies that are full, if possible, and take care when entering occupied eddies. Exit an eddy when you see approaching boats, to facilitate your safe exit and entry, respectively.
- When playing, avoid blocking navigation by yielding to oncoming, upstream craft. Exit a play spot after a reasonable time to allow someone else to use it.

- Always provide assistance to others who are in trouble or who are injured. Provide whatever assistance you are qualified to give or help them in obtaining assistance.
- When traveling on rivers and camping overnight, consult with other groups on the water about their stopping and camping intentions, and strive to cooperate by spreading out among desirable locations. Do not invade another party's campsite: If darkness, emergency or other factors require you to set a camp close to others, always explain the situation and attempt to gain their understanding while respecting their privacy.

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Vote for the American Whitewater Board of Directors

Sutton Bacon
Atlanta, Georgia

Greetings all! My name is Sutton Bacon, and I am sincerely honored to be a candidate for the American Whitewater Board of Directors. I greatly look forward to this opportunity, one where I can take a hands-on approach in helping American Whitewater fully maximize its potential and continue to move itself into the great arena of possibility.

I learned how to paddle at Camp Carolina in Brevard, North Carolina, where as a 10 year-old, I began exploring the whitewater rivers and creeks of the Southeast. Since those days in a Dancer XS, I have kayaked in 17 states, and thanks to American Whitewater, my choices increase every year. My core area of volunteerism for AW is on Southeastern Conservation and Access issues, where I

am currently the Tallulah release coordinator. In addition to my work at the Tallulah, I am heavily involved in the ongoing conservation efforts on the Upper Ocoee and serve as an active StreamKeeper. I have also had the great fortune of running the famed Cheoah River at release levels and higher, and I am often heard reciting tales from what will become the South's best whitewater run.

When not on the water, I am an entrepreneur, recently leaving my position as head of a successful Internet consulting firm to lead another company developing a chain of retail-based personal web design studios. I bring to American Whitewater executive business experience in both the bricks-and-mortar and the digital realms, with a strong competency in intelligent and compelling marketing solutions. I also have over eight years of experience in graphic design with



a portfolio of advertising placements in regional and national publications.

I live in Atlanta and am a graduate of Emory University.



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Annual American Whitewater Board Elections

The following individuals have been nominated for three-year terms to the Board of Directors of American Whitewater. American Whitewater members may vote to approve as many of these candidates as they choose. Mail the completed ballot to Elections/American Whitewater, 1424 Fenwick Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910 and we will forward them to our vote tallying agency in Pensacola, Florida.

- Sutton Bacon**
- Rich Bowers**
- Chris Kelly**
- Don Kinser**
- Charlie Walbridge**

Member's Name _____

Signature _____

Vote for the American Whitewater Board of Directors

Rich Bowers
Bellingham, Washington

My passion for rivers began 20 years ago, and throughout that time I've immersed myself fully in whitewater, often by enthusiastically swimming some of the best rapids in the nation!

For many of these years, I found myself in even deeper water through the efforts and activities of American Whitewater, first as Conservation Director, and then as Executive Director. I bring to the board of directors more than twelve years of experience and leadership in river conservation, public access, human-powered outdoor recreation, non-profit management, fundraising, and membership. I am a co-author of American Whitewater's Access Policy, and a principle author of two AW Strategic Plans (1995, 2000).

Since moving to the Pacific Northwest, and between extended paddling and skiing trips, I have been a consultant in non-profit fundraising and management -- including developing fundraising strategies for American Whitewater.

Throughout my time with American Whitewater, I always believed that the highest honor would be to serve as a volunteer board member for this organization. American Whitewater is a great organization, and I understand that this is due in great part to the quality of its staff, volunteers, and members. I am pleased to be a candidate for American Whitewater's Board of Directors, but I am even more honored by the opportunity to continue my relationship with paddlers and the fantastic work they have done -- and will do -- for whitewater rivers.



Rich and his daughter Dana

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Chris Kelly
Columbia, Missouri

Prior to my service on the AW board I had no idea how important the organization is to our sport. AW's contributions in the areas of safety, access, and conservation over the past forty-eight years are immense.

We are currently in the midst of a vital transition from an organization that has been primarily volunteer in nature to one, which must employ professional skills while continuing to make effective use of our large and dedicated volunteer members. For example, volunteer Don Kinser is effectively leading the campaign for access to the Chattooga headwaters, while staffer John Gangemi's technical expertise was crucial to the re-opening of the Feather River to paddling.



The key to continuing a vibrant volunteer pool as well as maintaining a competent technical staff is membership. AW must increase its member base. If you are kind enough to allow me to serve a second term on the Board of Directors, I will continue my work as access chair and seek ways to increase our membership.

AW also faces a massive cultural challenge. Being the token flat-lander and open boater on the Board, I am often, and unfairly, the target of base kayak humor. If reelected, I plan to rectify this crass discrimination by making clear that open boating is the very pinnacle of our sport.

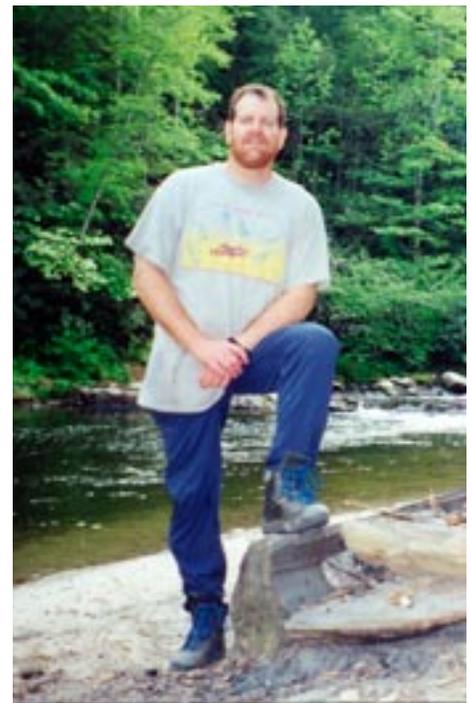
It has been an honor to meet, paddle and work with so many of AW's dedicated members. See you on the river.

Don Kinser
Atlanta, Georgia

My interest in whitewater boating started in the early 1970's as a teenager growing up in the Washington, DC area. However it was not until my wife, Nanci, gave me a whitewater canoe for Christmas in 1991 (I figured this was a green light to spend more time on the river) that my whitewater addiction became serious. Since early 1994, I have spent an average of almost 60 days a year canoeing the rivers and streams in the southeastern US. Nanci, Kelsey (age 12), Alison (age 10), Max (age 8) and I spend a great deal of time at our second home near the Chattooga River. We all enjoy spending time on the river.

During a trip to West Virginia Joe Greiner convinced me to joined American Whitewater in 1995, and I have been an active AW supporter ever since. My volunteer efforts with AW began during the first Tallulah Gorge releases in 1997, and I have been working on Chattooga River management issues since 1999. In early 2001, Risa asked me to serve as a regional coordinator focused on the Chattooga watershed. Since then, I have worked closely with AW staff members Jason Robertson and Kevin Colburn on the issues surrounding the Chattooga river management. I believe we will gain boating access to the Chattooga headwaters as a result of AW's efforts.

I am the president of EDI, Ltd. Consulting Engineers, a firm I founded in 1986. EDI is a technology, security and audio-visual consulting and engineering firm located in Atlanta. I have a great deal of association experience, having served in many capaci-



ties over the last 10 years with the American Council of Engineering Companies of Georgia. I was president of the organization from 1998 - 2000, and I currently serve as ACEC's national director, representing Georgia at the national level. In these different roles with ACEC I have spent a lot of time in legislative advocacy work at both the state and federal level. I have a mechanical engineering degree from Georgia Tech and a MBA from Georgia State University.

I am committed to AW's mission. I would be honored to have the opportunity to serve AW as a director, and I promise to be an active and energetic director should I get the chance to serve.

Charlie Walbridge
Bruceston Mills, West Virginia

I first started paddling rivers over thirty years ago and joined American Whitewater very early in my career. I find the ongoing changes in the sport fascinating and believe that adapting to them is AW's greatest challenge. I bring a background in river safety, some knowledge of the business end of our sport, and a continued active participation and love of whitewater rivers.





OF BOATERS AND BEARS

By David J. Regela

Tatshenshini, Alsek and Chilkoot Rivers

Entering the food chain, voluntarily, puts a humbling perspective on the next 11 days. Rafting the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers and hiking along part of the lower Chilkoot during a late run of sockeye and pink salmon, delivers us into the heart of some of the best remaining brown bear habitat on earth.

Hanging glaciers, calving icebergs, and the Aurora Borealis are all components of a wilderness experience where the natural rhythms remain essentially undisturbed.

Thirteen of us embark on a river trip through the largest protected area (World Heritage Site) in North America. Four national parks, in the Canadian Yukon, British Columbia, and Alaska, comprise the core of the only river system to breach the jagged Saint Elias Range. And despite the outsized grandeur, the freedom, thoughts return inevitably, to Lord Griz.

Stan Boor is a pioneering, globe-trotting river guide who has founded Alaska River Outfitters in Haines, Alaska. His company has rented us all the relevant equipment, bought and packed the food for our journey and provided transport to our launch site. Almost too easy.

Moments before we kick into the snappy glacial melt, one of our number poses the pregnant question. "What about bears?" Stan smiles slowly. He's a low-key kind of fellow.

"If you hit a particular beach and find a half-eaten, half-buried moose carcass," he says with arched eyebrow, "look for another camp."

Thanks, Stan. Damned good advice.

Actually, I've noted an unusual mindset within our group. These folks are river veterans of expeditionary-style jaunts to South America, Costa Rica, Mexico and Montana. And most places in between. Yet I sense an underlying 'bearanoia.' Ken has packed a .12 gauge shotgun at the request of several participants. We've got bear spray. Everyone has camped in bear country before... Still, something's askew.

Perhaps it began at the Juneau airport – with more stuffed bears than a toy factory. Or maybe on one of our warm-up hikes in the Haines hinterlands. Each hiker, every fisherman that we met, was armed to the teeth. Do they know something about Alaska bears that we don't? Brenda's not taking any chances. She's had a can of bear spray surgically attached to her right hand.

Cindy has numbered and prioritized her concerns: 1 – eaten by a grizzly; 2 – crushed by a calving iceberg; 3 – crashed



on our charter flight out of Dry Bay as a result of a collision with a goose (or geese). The girl's put in some quality time on this. I empathize. Sort of.

Amid the surging white-water chaos that follows, I miss the riverbank sighting of a lone wolf. In the interest of preservation, I direct my focus to the living puzzle that flashes quicksilver in the waning light.

We camp at the mouth of a crystal side creek. Bear tracks on the bar. Both brownies and blacks. Our tents form a tight, circumspect little line.

This river is growing faster than a coastal bear at a free seafood buffet. Each drainage from the looming, jumbled crags yields another freshet of silty water. Despite the relatively low gradient, the Tatshenshini has a raw, liquid power. Eagles become too numerous to merit individual notice.

A long, brisk, overcast day advances us as far as Sediment Creek, a huge outwash plain garnished with wildflowers. It's a lay-over camp, and the sky clears by sundown, so a few of us mount a vigil to herald the northern lights. We drink a fair amount of

bourbon, burn a mountain of firewood, but the lights don't show. A low mournful dialogue between two wolves is the eloquent validation of our noble effort.

Fresh bear scat, really fresh, punctuates the next day's hike above timberline. Only four of us press higher. To the ridge crest and distant herds of mountain goats. The elevation miniaturizes everything below us. Our tent city, even the river. But the view comes at a price. Dense alder thickets that extend for miles must be renegotiated to complete the return leg. Nervous, goosey work. Barb talks more than I thought was humanly possible. The banal details of each of our lives are exposed and marveled at, in excruciating detail. Her interest knows no bounds. We feel like rock stars beset by a groupie. The gambit does succeed, however, as all of us return unmolested to camp where Barb's smug satisfaction is intentionally transparent.

As the river continues to swell, it begins to braid into intricate, convoluted channels. Moose and wolf tracks scroll the sandbars, looping and twining like errant strands of DNA.

Of course, the tracks betray bear as well. Invisible it would seem.

Continued ▶

Towagh Creek camp at last. The place is lousy with bear sign. Mike and Thelma find the most outrageous, deepest prints yet – just outside their tent. “Bigger than my head,” Thelma insists. No sense moving, I tell her, and point out the long, coarse grizzly hair rubbed into the bark of the alder that shelters my own tent.

Since we’ve brought the beast, I suggest that Ken address the proper handling of the shotgun with all hands. Shortly after dinner, he does his demo. Ken explains the mechanics while Cindy handles the weapon. I watch everyone else watch Ken and Cindy. Ken’s voice is even, reassuring, beguiling. And Cindy has all the right moves. Just like Hugo the huckster magician and Ramona his smiling, beautiful and mute assistant. For me, the scene plays more surreal than bizarre. But the others are paying rapt attention. Probably a good thing. Except I think I’d rather face Old Ephraim with a can of pepper spray – unless it was a nighttime tent visit.

No moon. I remember just before bed that I haven’t shut down our toilet system for the night. The facility is set up especially far from camp this time. With everyone



else asleep, and without a flashlight, I take a really lonely, spooky walk. I know that bears are attracted to strong smells. They might balk at venturing into camp, but what about this place, out on the extreme perimeter? For the first time in decades I recall how it felt as a small child to be afraid of the dark.

I swim; I flail up out of a deep sleep. Someone’s shouting, panicked. “Go away, bear! Go away, bear!” Grabbing my bear spray, I’m out of the tent in a heartbeat, sprinting naked toward the distress call. “Where is it?” I yell. “Where’s the problem?”

“No problem, David,” comes big John’s disembodied voice. Strangely calm. “Look up,” he suggests.

I’m stunned. The Aurora Borealis has filled the night sky. From every quadrant, the pulsing, shifting, luminous energy is invoking its magic. Most of the camp is already awake, spellbound at the heavenly benediction.

I am....still naked, still clutching a can of bear spray. How in the world did I process “northern lights,” into “go away bear”? I’m ingesting too much caffeine. Or something.

My toes are bruised, my image is shattered, it’s cold out here. Head down, I slink like a limping, beaten weasel back to my tent. The Great Bear has a longer reach than I would have believed. And to think that I ridiculed Cindy’s list of fears. How humiliating.

The confluence of the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers is a place of timeless power. Indigenous peoples thought it to be the center of the universe. Everything else has been prelude. Even the black bear just below Towagh Creek. It is our first bear, but not ‘real’ bear.

Fresh snow on the mountains, stark, virginal in bright sunlight. The valley has widened. Our views of spires, pinnacles, glaciers, extends to 360 degrees. A grizzly, a big one, is fishing a side channel. I realize, with the aid of binoculars, that this is the biggest bear I have ever seen.

A formidable hulk, toklat colored, the bear splashes after salmon, moving with absolute authority. In this context, in this place, this animal is indeed Lord Griz. Top of the food chain. It just doesn’t get any better than this, for the bear, or for me.



We watch the monarch for a long time. Getting our wind, finally, it eases away, eclipsed by the broken treeline and by sheer distance. Camp is but a mile beyond.

The northern lights visit early at the confluence. More color, more electric movement than the night before. Shooting stars compete with the undulating green ghost fire, with the rock solid outline of *Ursus Major* – the Big Dipper, sky bear.

Walker Glacier rewards our pilgrimage with more rousing opportunities to see *ursus arctos*. A grizzly sow with a large, dark cub haunts the riverbank above our camp. The youngster has more energy than that bunny of civilized, mechanized fame. Two huge solitary grizzlies sequentially cross the glacier itself, while another griz investigates the melt-lake and moraine debris at the glacier's foot.

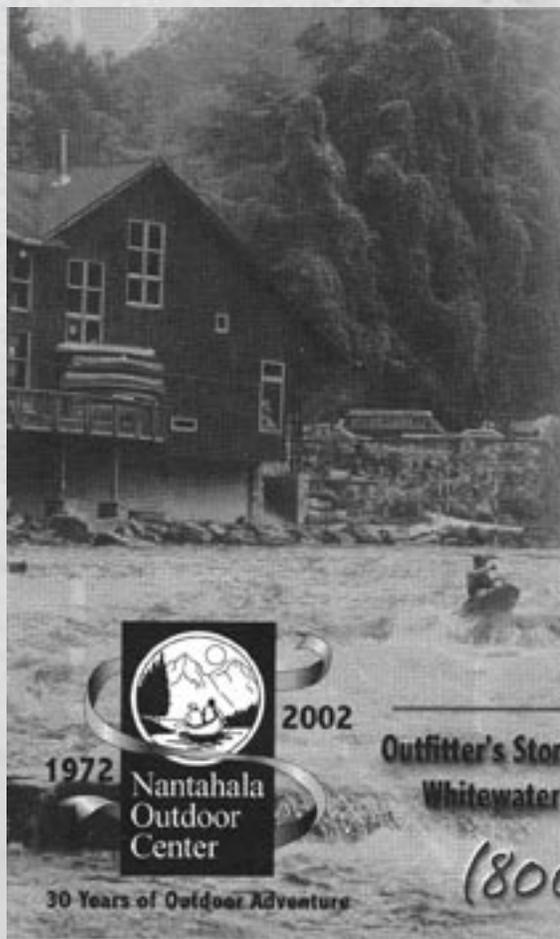
Nobody hikes alone, here, at Bear Central. Our trip photographer suffers an honor guard whenever he trundles out to consider the changing tapestry of light and shadow. It is not until the next day, when we mob the glacier surface on foot, that we can really appreciate the awesome scale of the big blue ice cube. A quick recalculation



of the size of yesterdays bears results in general disbelief. Recovering our composure, a small bit of the glacier disappears into various cocktail cups.

Fifteen thousand three hundred foot Mount Fairweather dominates the hori-

zon, and icebergs abound at Alsek Lake. In the channels into and out of the lake itself, we river runners learn a sober new game. Berg dodging in a gusting, gale force windstorm. Several glaciers regularly birth these sapphire navigational obstructions. Combined with a freight-train current of 8



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to 10 mph, it's better sport than any video game ever invented. The bergs can break up, roll, or snag on the river's bottom. We do the first scouting of the trip and emerge intact.

The only nighttime camp intrusion victimizes my wife, Karen. A bug insinuates itself into her ear, prompting the hasty preparation of a hot water ear-enema. Mike shines a flashlight into Karen's ear canal before we can load the syringe with water, and the bug heeds that universal summons to 'go toward the light.' Good job, Mike. The pepper spray was next.

An impending storm persuades the Dry Bay ranger to radio our air charter 12 hours earlier than planned. A quick vote determines that Pablo is the most expendable, so he gets to baby-sit the gear at the take-out, while the rest of us escape to Haines.

During a group dinner, a local informant relates that the sockeye are still spawning on the nearby Chilkoot River, and the bears are not uninformed. Since the storm is lagging off the coast – Pablo made it back – we repair to the mountain environs of Chilkoot State Park.

A female grizzly with a beautiful golden cub is meandering near the river's mouth, monitored by a trio of harbor seals. Almost immediately, a group of hikers, jousting for photo ops, blocks the pair from the security of the trees. The sow displays acute distress. Her movements quicken, become

erratic. She intimidates, forcing their passage through the human gauntlet.

Near the outflow of the lake, a man-made weir has been constructed to count the number of returning salmon. A clever bear has learned to cull the fish that become trapped against the obstacle. The Chilkoot River has a substantial gradient at this point, and if the bear loses its purchase it will surely drown against the barrier. The potential makes me tense, uncomfortable.

An ebony bear puts in a cameo appearance on the far side of the river, prompting all of the other bears to remember prior commitments. During the lull in the action, we speak to a couple of shotgun-toting fishermen who tell us about being chased back to their vehicle, hours earlier, by a pugnacious grizzly.

Dave, our photographer, and I content ourselves with distant camera shots of a chunky, subadult bear that has begun prospecting a small channel on the opposite shore. The bear elects to swim. In less than 30 seconds we are much too close.

“Too close,” Dave echoes. We both realize we need to hold our position. Too late to leave. And the bear is pressing forward.



Subadult bears are often referred to as 'hooligans' because of their variable dispositions. Still young, still learning, a hooligan may push into situations where a mature bear would not. This might well be the griz that chased the two local lads. Being 'one with the bear' is this context would not be a good thing.

“And me with Halibut breath,” I croak to Dave, referring to our recent repast. If he hears me, he offers no response. So much for diffusing tension with humor. The bear pauses at about 40 feet. A dying or deceased salmon proves to be our temporary salvation.

The buffer continues to hold. Another salmon. A last, lingering, baleful look of disdain, and the young outlaw stalks down-river. Dismisses us without a backward glance.

Despite the excitement that our little drama generates, the behavior of these habituated bears distresses me. The uncontrolled proximity of people at the Chilkoot disturbs me as well. If the confused balance is disrupted, the consequences are obvious. A 300-pound subadult bear can do a lot of damage. Very quickly. Retribution would be swift and ugly.

This Chilkoot fling seems in rude contrast to the pure, elemental order of the Tatshenshini watershed. To live with the bear, to immerse oneself totally in the wild, remains the ultimate privilege. Perhaps the wisdom of the Old Ones, the native people, is literal – that the confluence of the Alsek and Tatshenshini is the center of the universe. It is certainly the spiritual core in the domain of the great bear.



At the Creek Without a Skirt

The Best of West Virginia: North Fork of the Blackwater

By Jimmy Blakeney. Photos contributed by Mike Moore from a separate trip on the North Fork of the Blackwater.

This past spring my good friend, Steve Fisher, was in town for the *Liquid Lifestyles Aerated Tour*, which went from town to town showing Scott Lindgren's latest kayak flick, *Aerated*. As many of you already know, Steve is an amazing kayaker, best known for his exploits on the heavy waters of the Zambezi river in Africa and as part of the historic first descent team through the Tsang Po gorge. Luckily for Steve, he was visiting Fayetteville, West Virginia in the spring, the best time of year to sample the incredible whitewater West Virginia has to offer. Again, luckily for Steve, there had been a lot of rain, and it was still coming down.

After the premier of *Aerated* at the Class VI rafting company, we returned to my house in Fayetteville, and along with my wife, rodeo boater Erica Mitchell, began scouring the internet to determine exactly how much rain had fallen and where. The best resource for paddlers after a big rain is a detailed radar loop and a Gazetteer topo map. With these tools you can determine exactly where the rain has fallen, county by county, watershed by watershed. Our research indicated that *everything* in West Virginia would be going off the next day!

Good and bad news. Good because of all the options, and bad because, well, there were so many options. There have been times when too many options have resulted in wavering, delaying and second guessing... to the point where all the options are suddenly gone. Not this time. I was determined to show Steve how good the paddling in West Virginia was and this was surely an ideal time.

The next morning I woke to rain falling on the stack of boats just outside my bedroom window. There is no sound as sweet as rain falling on plastic.

Our first stop was the Cathedral Café in downtown Fayetteville. Great breakfast, coffee, and free internet access on *fast* computers. Now that the rain had subsided, it was time to check levels. Wow! They were very high all across the state. The Gauley above the dam was 8,000cfs, the New registered six feet in the Gorge with *tons* of water upstream, the Tygart was running 5,600cfs, and the Blackwater was at 1,500 cfs. And every graph indicated that the rivers were still going *up*!

After a quick breakfast we went to check a few local creeks and found things to be what we call 'blown.' Yep, locally we had too much rain; everything was way too high to run!

This is exactly the kind of scenario that can lead to wavering, delaying and second guessing... until everyone has lost their motivation, or it is just too late to launch.

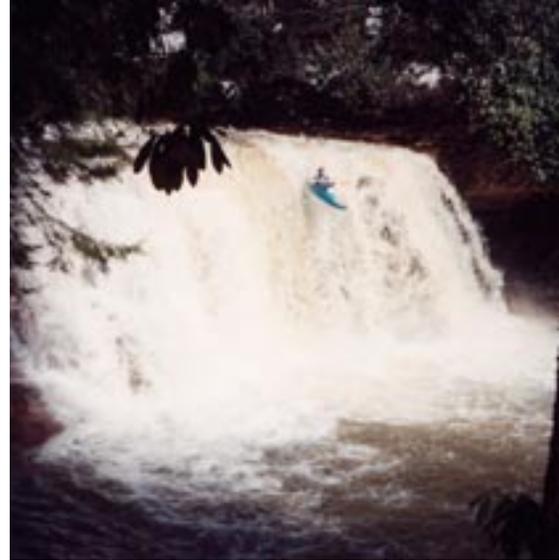
But I was determined this wouldn't happen, and I had just the plan to ensure that it wouldn't, or so I thought.

The preceding night I had talked to my friend, Todd Richendollar, about the North Fork of the Blackwater, a run I had done once before at a great level. I really wanted to go back. Could this be the opportunity?

Todd was doubtful, "No way man, I lived in Morgantown (an hour from the creek) for four years and never caught that run at the level you did, much less higher!"

I pleaded for some glimmer of encouragement, prying at him for even a maybe.

"But Todd, were getting slammed! This is a lot of rain," I said.



Mike Moore at Glutial Mash
Photo by Gary Berti

"I'm not going up there, I'll just paddle something around here," Todd replied. "Why drive three hours when everything will be running in Fayetteville?!" He had a point, the very point that kept many a local Fayetteville paddler from venturing very far from home on rainy days. But after seeing the set-up for a total stall in Fayetteville, and knowing how much rain had fallen up in northern West Virginia, I decided to take the chance. At least I'd go down in flames instead of sittin' around waiting.

Steve was supportive of my decision, and with good reason...he's never paddled around here. Erica on the other hand was doubtful, "Jimmy, we're going to drive *three* hours and don't even know if it's running or flooded out?! Why not just wait here for something to come in?"

"NO! I will not become another victim of the 'wait and see' policy! I'm taking proactive measures to see that Steve gets to paddle something with good water and big drops." There was no stopping me at this point. I knew what must be done, and so we headed north.

The North Fork of the Blackwater is a one-mile run dropping around 400 feet. After paddling it twice in one day at a level of 1.8 feet, considered an 'optimal' level, I knew I wanted to go back with substantially more water.

Continued ▶

I wanted to film that run as well. So I hoped the level would be very high, but not *too* high. Erica and I drove our Chevy Avalanche while Steve was in his Land Rover Freelander, both vehicles provided by our sponsors. The three-hour drive went quickly, and we arrived with high hopes because all the indicator creeks were swollen. Indicators, as you know, are an important part of the kayak experience when traveling to a river. I don't know a single paddler who can cross even the smallest rivulet without craning his or her neck to see if there is any water, rocks or gradient, and each time secretly hoping to discover some new, uncharted first descent.

What happened next was a terrible moment that most of us have experienced at one time or another. As you all know kayaking is a gear intensive sport where you must keep track of lots of pieces that are constantly being moved back and forth between vehicles.

"Oh, shit!" Erica said with a glazed look on her face.

"What?!" I demanded, knowing the answer would somehow bear negatively on our ability to paddle.



"Remember how I lent Clay (Wright) my skirt for your trip to New Hampshire? Well, he never gave it back."

Dave Bruton at Boof Left, Piton Right
Photo by Mike Moore

"Ohhhh, sh*#", I added, to complete the emotional anguish engulfing our minds.

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So there we were, fifteen minutes from the put-in, and Erica with no skirt.

"Dammit, dammit!" I cursed over and over, "it's always something".

Here we were, right at the river, the level was perfect, but about to drop out (every kayaker's nightmare) and now, of all things, we have to deal with missing gear! Knowing time was of the essence, I quickly switched from my whining mode to my firm course of action mode.

Davis is a small town ten minutes from the put-in of the North Fork. It's known in the paddling community mostly for a really good pizza joint, but I knew there had to be boaters around. Davis is the kinda' town located near lots of good rivers where you know lots of boaters must live, but you just never seem to see them around. It's almost like they know the tourist boaters are coming and do their best to hide until they're gone. Well, I was determined to find one of those boaters if it was the last thing I did. The only other option was to drive 45 minutes to Deep Creek Lake in Maryland, where the closest whitewater shop was located. No way, we could find a stupid *sprayskirt* here!

We started at the pizza place, no luck. Next, we drove past a small apartment complex and saw a boat in the back of a truck. Knocking on every door in the place yielded not a single answer. If there had been a sprayskirt in the truck, I would have been tempted to leave a note and take it, but if that paddler ended up at the put-in to some river later that day and discovered a note in place of his or her skirt, I would surely have had some serious negative karma coming my way. Desperation began to set in, but we persevered.

Next stop was a bike shop. The clerk/owner

was nice enough to call around, but still had no luck. It seemed all the boaters he knew were *open* boaters.... Lots of good that does us! Then he remembered someone who actually paddled a *decked* boat. "Yeah, Dr. Rader paddles a kayak, and so does his wife. His office is just down the street." Now this sounded promising. I ran down the street checking my watch...still early, but the river could be dropping. This frightened me more than the thought of not finding a skirt.

I entered a small office building with Dr. Rader's name on it. Inside was a waiting room with several patients and a receptionist. "May I help you?" asked the receptionist, smiling politely.

"Hi! How are you? I was wondering if Dr. Rader was in?" I asked, trying my best to get the lady on my good side.

"Yes he is", she replied.

"Would he have a second to speak with me?" as nicely as I could muster without being presumptuous.

"What is your name?", she asked. I could tell she was beginning to wonder who the hell I was, and I was trying to sell.

"I'm Jimmy Blakeney, a kayaker". There, the trap had been laid. Now we would see if Doctor Rader was really a paddler or not. A few moments later the receptionist came back, "He'll be out to see you in a moment."

Continued ▶



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I waited anxiously, wondering if this was going to end up wasting precious time or actually accomplishing our goal. The door to the back offices opened, "Hi, are you Jimmy?"

"Yes. Dr Rader, I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm kinda' in a tight spot." I proceeded to explain our predicament and told him who we were. I did my best to drop the names of local paddlers that I knew, hoping we'd find some common friend, so he would feel comfortable in loaning me gear. Hearing that I paddled with Mike Moore, a well-respected 'local' paddler, seemed to give him some reassurance.

After listening to my vain attempt to explain our situation while not sounding like a moron, Dr. Rader thought for a second and said, "I think I can help. Let me finish with this patient, and I'll be back." Holy crap, this guy was going to interrupt his day to help us out!

A few minutes later, Dr. Rader came out wearing a jacket and carrying car keys. "Why don't you just ride with me, we'll go to my house. I know I've got a skirt for Erica to use, and my wife might even have

one that will fit Erica perfectly." Jeez, this was incredible!

We drove out of town past Erica and Steve, who were waiting in their vehicles. I waved and tried to signal that things would soon be OK, but they didn't seem to notice me in the foreign vehicle. Oh well, they can wait, we're about to have our problem solved.

Dr. Rader lives about five minutes out of town in a nice secluded house. "I think all of our gear is in the basement," he said, as we walked down a flight of stairs. "Here's my skirt, a medium tunnel, large keyhole Mountain Surf". Erica's exact skirt, except a medium instead of small.

"This will be perfect", I said.

"OK, but here, take this one too just in case. It's my wife's, an old skirt, but much smaller." I think with these two skirts we'd have it covered and even have a backup in case we lost one! The doc dropped me off by Erica and Steve, who upon seeing me step out of a strange car with two skirts, immediately began laughing. "If nothing else Jimmy Blakeney, you've got perseverance".

Finally, on with our intended mission! I hate nothing more than backtracking, sidetracking or otherwise being forced to sidestep away from a river trip. But when it does happen, there's nothing like the feeling of getting back on task. So, back to the anxiety that goes along with approaching a river gauge when you've driven a long distance, and you still don't know for sure if the level will be right. As we approached the put-in gauge, it was apparent that we had plenty of water. At the NF Blackwater, boaters park on top of the first drop, a 38-foot waterfall. The take-out is at the confluence of the main fork of the Blackwater. From there boaters must hike 400 feet straight up to an old railroad bed that runs back to the put-in.

The gauge is located just upstream of the first waterfall, but I was unable to locate it. It seemed logical, therefore, to assume we had plenty of water.

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After scouting the first few drops the adrenaline began to pump. Water was *NOT* going to be an issue. The North Fork of the Blackwater could drop 200cfs and still not be scary. And more so, at this level even the first waterfall looked runnable, and *fun* (a key factor when determining whether or not a difficult rapid is going to be run or not...but then again I guess fun is relative).

The three of us geared up excitedly while our dog Hailey, happy to be out of the car at last, scampered up and down the road and along the creek. After suiting up, it was determined that I would run the falls first, with Steve setting safety and filming from river left below the falls. Erica would be positioned on river right. We felt it was important to set safety on both sides of the river, even though this meant that Steve would have to carry down to the base of the falls and make a difficult ferry across the river.

The whole waterfall landed directly in front of a bus-sized rock that protruded from the left bank and was badly undercut. At this level, water was feeding swiftly into and under it. Obviously, we couldn't run the falls anywhere but right, but there was a catch to that, too. A long triangle shaped guard rock, coming up from the back of the pool, meant that I would have only a tiny window in which to land if I wanted to flush right and not left into the undercut. To make matters even more complex, the rock angled into the landing zone... where it was only four or five feet under water. Hence, penciling in would result in an unpleasantly abrupt impact. My idea was to boof the lip angled right at about 45 degrees and to drop the nose around 30 degrees or so, avoiding a totally flat landing (flat off a 30+ footer is not advisable). Just as I was putting on, a car pulled up with two boaters. Seeing that I was about to run the falls, they asked if they could film. "Sure, and would you mind signaling to the two paddlers downstream when I'm about to go?"

I got in my boat and warmed up, waiting for the signal that Steve and Erica were ready. The water and rocks were an orange brown color, due to the high water and the fact that this stream is laced with acid mine runoff. Not too many years ago, very few people would paddle this stream because of the pollution, but the quality of the water has improved due to a government funded mine reclamation project. I ferried back and forth in the eddy just above the slightly sloping ledge that led to the falls. The water

picked up speed as it approached the lip of the drop. I checked and re-checked the currents to make sure the approach line I chose would put me on the lip where I wanted to be. This is a crucial step in running any drop where precision is required. It doesn't matter how clean a drop looks if you can't get to the spot where you must be to make the crux move. Reading the lead-in to a rapid is analogous to reading the green on a golf course. But in whitewater the green is flowing, and you are the golf ball. And of course you don't want to end up in the hole!

I got a thumbs-up from one of the paddlers, who showed up at just the right moment for some whitewater entertainment. He looked at me curiously, probably wondering if I was some yahoo or if I actually *knew* what I was doing.

Spectating while someone runs a big "iffy" rapid is a unique experience; a blend of displaced adrenaline peppered with the knowledge that you are not the one taking the risk.

Focus set in as I peeled out of the eddy and onto the thread of water that lead to the exact point on the lip I wanted to be. The sense of focus required to paddle difficult whitewater is one of the more enjoyable feelings I get from kayaking. Slow motion sets in, boat and being merge with the currents, flowing towards the result that I have envisioned, and I am confident is predetermined. This is how you should feel above a class V+ drop. A feeling of confidence, tempered by the knowledge that it's impossible to fully meld with the river exactly as planned *every* time. The river holds secrets hidden in the complicated physics of grav-

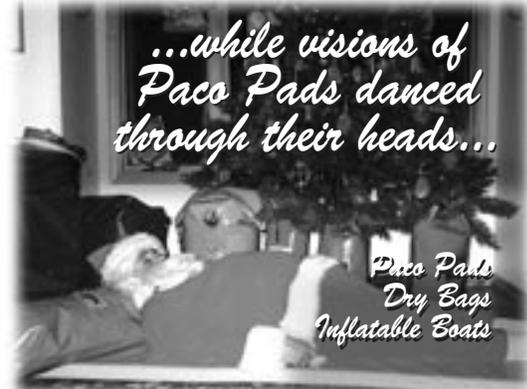


Mike Moore at the first drop just below the impressive Douglas Falls
Photo by Carolyn Dick

ity, air, water and time. Those who paddle best understand them, but we also know that it's not something with a precise formula that will guarantee the desired result.

Liftoff. Time rushed into fast forward as freefall sets in. Plans for this moment are usually made in a slow motion mind dance, but once the moment comes, reflex reaction is all that's left. Boof stroke, not too hard, just enough to keep the nose from falling off. Body levered forward to drop

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the bow at just the right angle. Hips tilted slightly to compensate for the fact that the rock in the base of the drop is also angled. If I hit it I wanted to take it directly under the seat of the boat, not on my side.

The future rushed towards me and caught my momentum in the shallow aerated landing zone.

I continued to fall into the water as my hull compressed the liquid and loaded the volume of the boat in the temporary crater I'd created. As if in reverse, the boat leapt up and out of the water, my body weight centered directly over it so that no bracing was required. Immediately, I was on a right stroke and heading towards the rapid just below the falls. I heard several excited, almost amazed exclamations. Everything was clear now; the crux had been made. The rest felt like a dream, as every relaxed stroke was placed in just the right spot at just the right moment.

I caught the first eddy available, two drops below the falls. Reality rushed back as I looked up at Erica, Steve and the two other onlookers who smiled along with me. For me, running a big drop successfully is nothing more than the confirmation of my understanding, at least a little bit, of what the hell is going on.

I got out and exchanged hand signals with Erica and Steve, telling them the run went well and that I was not injured. From my perspective, the falls was a go. Steve signaled he was going back up to put in. I carried back to the base of the falls, took the safety kit that Steve left for me and ferried across the river to set safety by the undercut. Steve ran the drop successfully, though with a bit of a hard landing... due to a slightly overzealous boof stroke. Erica decided to put in just below the falls, and we continued downstream.

One of our goals with this trip was to film the entire North Fork, top to bottom, without any gaps. We wanted to create a virtual tour down the North Fork, so the viewer would be able to see every rapid from the top and bottom as it leads into the next drop. I hate it when videos don't put rapids into context. My attempt was to do so in the most thorough way I could. The North Fork is the perfect foil for this type of mission, since each drop leads directly into the next with very little down time in pools or boogie water.

The next drop was a 25-foot tall slide. I ran it first while Steve filmed. Once at the bottom, I set up and filmed Erica, then Steve. I filmed the next drop from the top as Steve leapfrogs downstream to shoot Erica and I from below. And so it continued for the next mile, filming and paddling what I consider the best mile of whitewater in West Virginia. Not the longest run or the hardest run, but a run that offers it all: a 38 foot waterfall (run four times now), difficult but clean boulder rapids, a 25 foot slide, a 30 foot waterfall, a slide into a 15 foot waterfall, seasoned with numerous enjoyable boofs and slides.

We would have liked to hike back to the put in for a second run, but thanks to the missing skirt episode and our extensive filming, we ran out of light. So we loaded up and headed straight for the pizza place in Davis.

Back in town, I called Dr. Rader and asked him to join us for pizza and beer. We sat and talked of common friends, rivers, gear, food, how we got into boating...all the other things that make hanging out with paddlers feel like you're part of a big extended family.

Finally we thanked Dr. Rader for the skirt(s) and headed out the door. It was sleeting now after an overcast day in the 40s, a typical West Virginia spring weather.

Steve's original plan was to head north after paddling, but after our epic North Fork Blackwater run and listening to me hype other runs near Fayetteville that would surely be running the next day, he caved in and decided to head back south with us. The three-hour drive went by quickly as I reminisced on the day we'd just had. But this wasn't to be the last epic day associated with this rainstorm. Tomorrow would be just as exciting....

The Best of West Virginia continues in the next issue: the New River Dries at 16 feet, 'The un-shuttle.'

Jimmy Blakeney and Erica Mitchell are married and live in Fayetteville, West Virginia when not traveling the world kayaking. Erica is the current World Champion of freestyle kayaking. Jimmy is one of the world's finest freestyle and creek boaters. You can see footage of the North Fork Blackwater and other runs at Jimmy and Erica's website, www.prokayaker.tv. Prokayaker.tv documents their travels through writing, photos and video. You can also visit Steve Fisher's personal website at www.stevefisher.net for more of his exploits, including photos of his trip to West Virginia.



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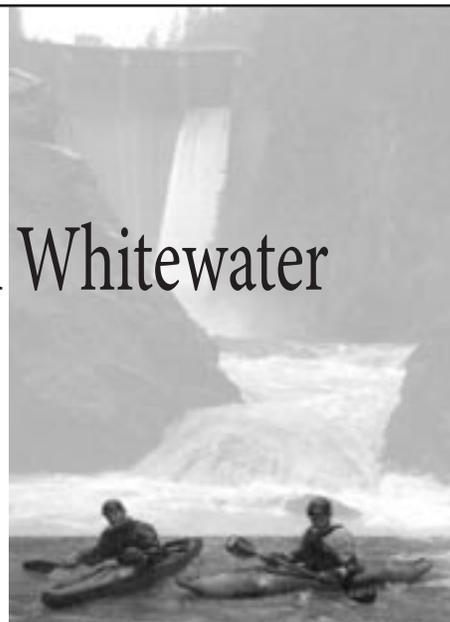
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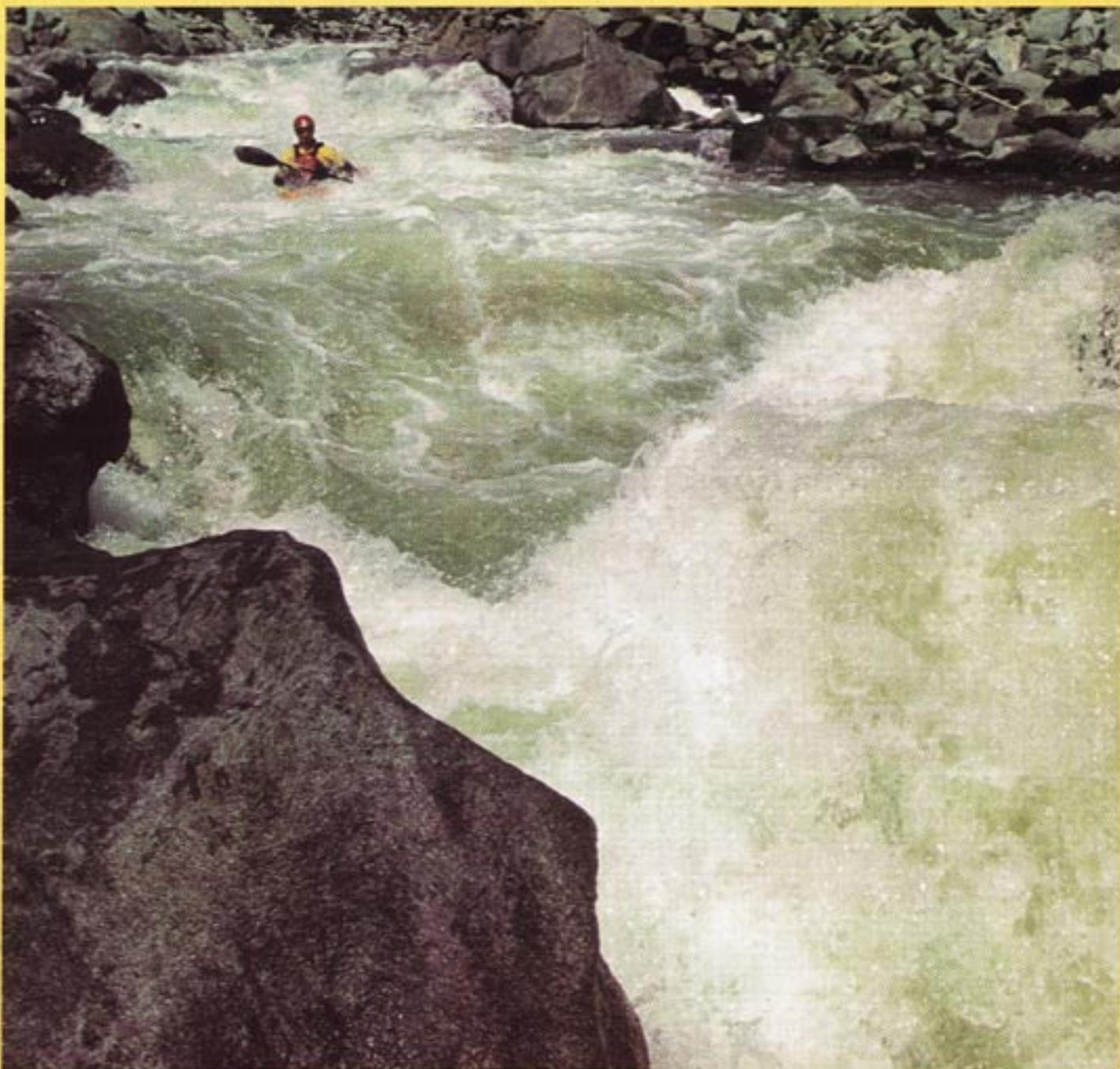
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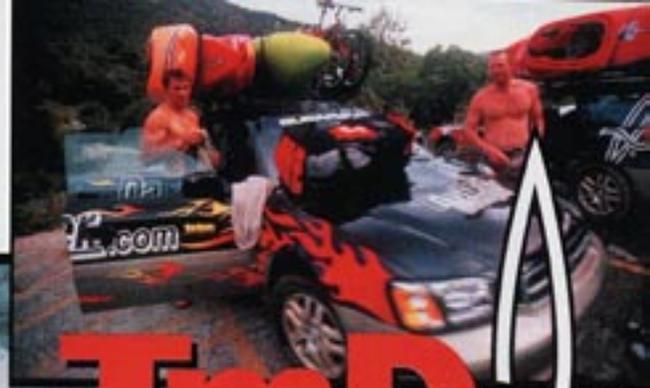
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