



# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

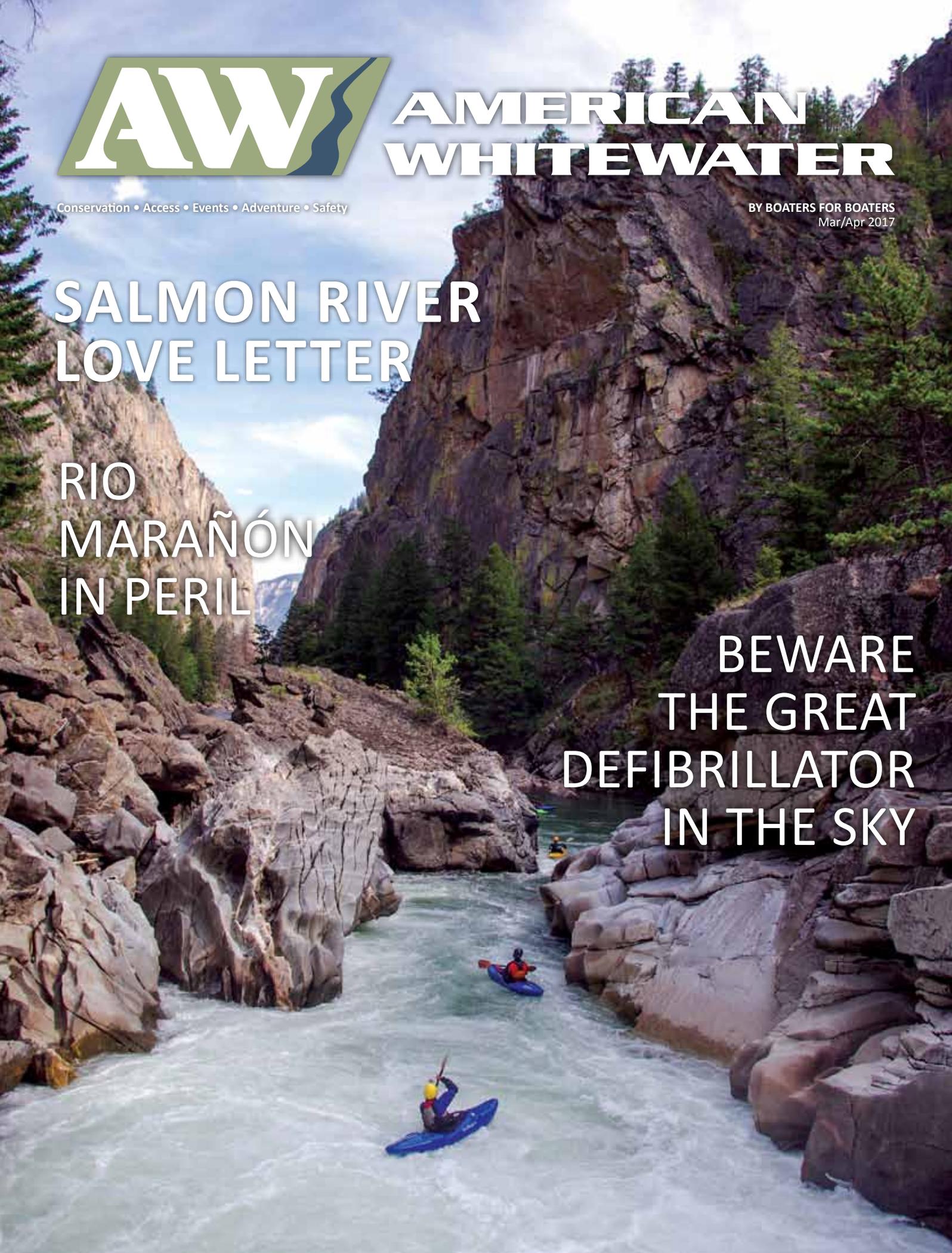
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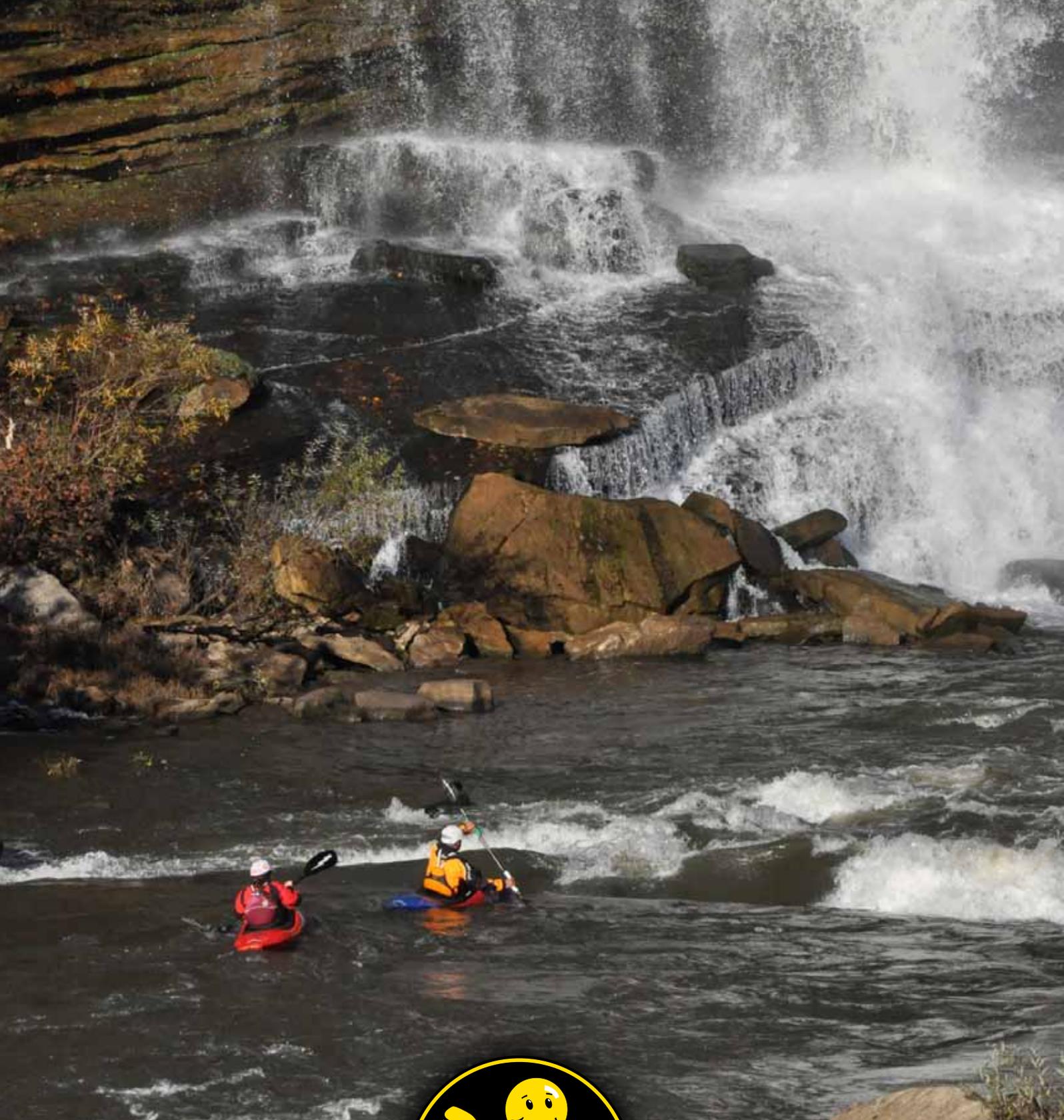
BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS  
Mar/Apr 2017

## SALMON RIVER LOVE LETTER

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MARAÑÓN  
IN PERIL

BEWARE  
THE GREAT  
DEFIBRILLATOR  
IN THE SKY





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# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

A VOLUNTEER PUBLICATION PROMOTING RIVER CONSERVATION, ACCESS AND SAFETY

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People travel from all around the globe to experience the wilderness of public lands in the United States. These lands offer anyone—rich or poor—a chance for solitude, rejuvenation, and exploration. However, increasingly, these national treasures face threats from groups attempting to legislatively dispose of our lands to states and private interests.

Paddlers enjoy the Clarks Fork (WY) as it carves through the infamous Box section in the Shoshone National Forest.

Photo by Evan Stafford

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# PURPOSE

## RIVER STEWARDSHIP: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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

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

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

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

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

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

**EDUCATION:** AW shares information with the general public and the paddling community regarding

whitewater rivers, as well as river recreation, conservation, access, and safety. This is accomplished through our bi-monthly AW Journal, a monthly e-news, [americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org), paddling events, educational events, and through direct communication with the press.

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

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



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Founded in 1954, American Whitewater is a national non-profit organization (Non-profit # 23-7083760) with a mission "to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely." American Whitewater is a membership organization representing a broad diversity of individual whitewater enthusiasts, river conservationists, and more than 100 local paddling club affiliates across America. The organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. All rights to information contained in this publication are reserved.

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The opinions expressed in the features and editorials of American Whitewater are those of the individual authors. They do not necessarily represent those of the Directors of American Whitewater or the editors of this publication. On occasion, American Whitewater publishes official organizational policy statements drafted and approved by the Board of Directors. These policy statements will be clearly identified.

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# THE JOURNEY AHEAD



**A**T THE CORE of American Whitewater is membership. Truth is, we would be unable to effectively advocate for whitewater rivers if it weren't for the support we receive from our members. Members form the core of our community; membership support allows the American Whitewater's River Stewardship Team to work on important projects in their respective regions; and while our River Stewardship Team consists of professional staff, it is supported by members and volunteers from communities across the country.

We have a long history of engaging in public lands and river management. Protecting the wilderness character of waterways through river conservation was one of the main tenets behind the inception of our organization back in the 1950s. In the 1970s, whitewater paddlers provided critical input and grassroots support for Wild and Scenic River designations across the country (and we remain an effective voice in this conversation today). In the '80s and '90s, American Whitewater cut its teeth on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) dam relicensing process with many successes restoring flows to rivers that have become beloved destinations for the paddling community.

In the last decade our regional approach to river stewardship work has gained major traction. This approach allows us to leverage our grassroots membership base for good ideas and solutions at the local level. The best of those ideas percolate upward to inform dialog and shape policy at the national level. This model works well to achieve results that enhance access and preserve unique whitewater resources. Moving forward, our grassroots base is critical to successful protection and advocacy of whitewater rivers.

Membership in American Whitewater is dues-based; our standard membership dues level has not increased in over a decade, and there are currently no plans to increase the cost of our standard membership (standard membership is \$35 and if you are a member of an *Affiliate Club*, membership is just \$25). Not many membership organizations can make the claim that they have been able to hold the line on membership dues for 10-plus years. We can do this through a lean operating model and by stretching membership dollars with grants, outdoor industry support, and event earnings.

An important corollary to membership is our affiliate club network. In any given year there are approximately 130 kayak and canoe clubs that participate in our affiliate network. These affiliate clubs are an important legacy in the history of American Whitewater (remember that for the first 50 years of the organization we were called American Whitewater Affiliation, only changing our name to American Whitewater in the early 2000s). The term "Affiliation" was a significant nod to the importance of kayak and canoe clubs in river stewardship and introducing new participants to whitewater rivers. Our affiliate network is as important today as it was when the organization was formed in the 1950s.

New for this year, we have developed an additional level of affiliate club membership. Called the *Supporting Affiliate Club* level, this \$400 membership level is

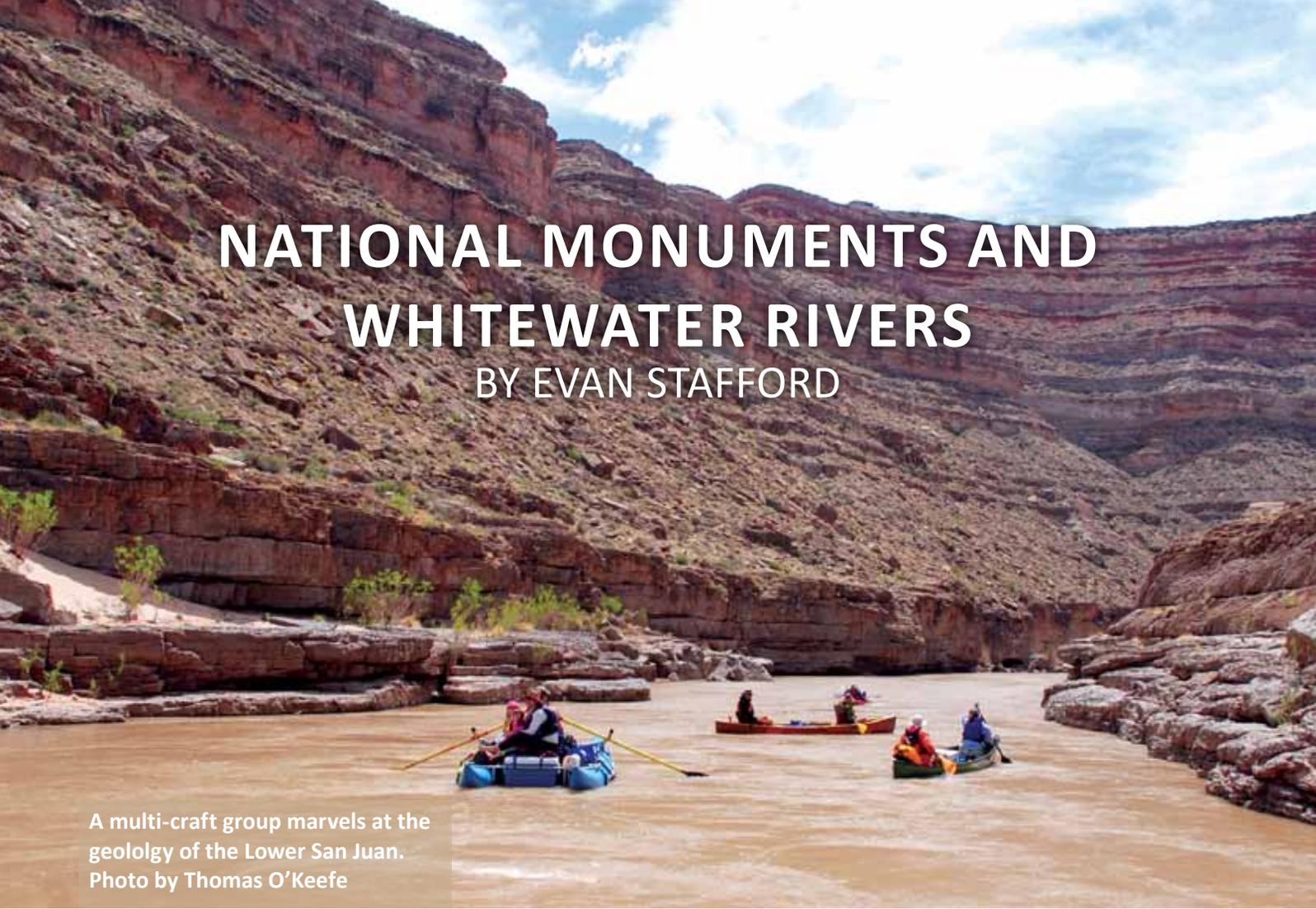
for clubs that want to play a larger role in our stewardship program and sponsor two national stewardship presentations that will be available online to members and non-members. These biannual presentations will inform the paddling community of important stewardship initiatives and issues that affect rivers we all care deeply about. Also, these presentations will highlight ways individuals can engage with and provide comments to elected officials and agency staff in support of river stewardship. Our traditional *Affiliate Club* level is still an important part of our membership mix at \$100 per club (as a reminder, an *Affiliate Club* of American Whitewater enables individuals in their club to a standard membership of \$25).

One of the encouraging membership trends we've seen in the last few years is many of our individual members stepping up to higher membership levels; those are the *Ender Club*, *Platinum Paddler*, and *Explorer* levels. Starting this year, the *Ender Club* membership level is \$125; this provides even stair steps in these levels progressing from \$125, to \$250, to \$500 respectively. If you value the stewardship efforts of American Whitewater and want to further support this program, these additional levels of membership are a great way to say that you care about wild rivers and the importance these special places have in your life.

Executive Director, American Whitewater

# NATIONAL MONUMENTS AND WHITEWATER RIVERS

BY EVAN STAFFORD



A multi-craft group marvels at the geology of the Lower San Juan.  
Photo by Thomas O'Keefe

## Bears Ears and the Lower San Juan River

**T**HE SAN JUAN River in southeastern Utah offers a perfect case study in the relationship between National Monument designations and the rivers that can fall under the protection of these acts. President Barack Obama issued a proclamation on December 28th, 2016 designating 1,351,849 acres Bears Ears National Monument. In addition to the scenic and historical value of this new monument, the acreage includes significant portions of the Lower San Juan River, a world class multi-day river trip enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year.

National Monument designations can be divisive and the Bears Ears proclamation is proving to be one of the most contentious in recent history. American Whitewater has been engaged in efforts to protect the Bears Ears region for a number of years and has

consistently advocated that under any plan whitewater boating be recognized as an appropriate and valued recreation activity. National Monuments are the most diverse and flexible federal land designations, and also the least understood. Deciphering who will manage a new monument, how it will affect current uses, and the process that led to designation can be a challenge. Below we track the events that led to Bears Ears' designation and the monument's implications for the San Juan River.

### What type of public process took place before Bears Ears was designated?

The sheer amount of archeological sites residing in the Bears Ears landscape has led to numerous protection efforts over the past century and most recently an Inter-Tribal Coalition formed with the goal of achieving protection of their sacred lands under a monument designation. Around the same time, Utah legislators, responding to public support for permanently

protecting public lands through more than 1,200 stakeholder meetings with energy companies, ranchers, environmentalists, and recreationalists developed their own protection plan, as part of the Public Lands Initiative (PLI). This plan offered less, but still significant, acreage to protect the Bears Ears landscape through legislative action, and also put forward multi-use plans for much of the rest of Utah's public lands.

In the two years leading up to the designation, government officials met with stakeholders in southeastern Utah on multiple occasions. Senior representatives from the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) attended an Inter-Tribal Coalition Council meeting in 2015 at the Bears Ears Buttes to discuss protection options. In July of 2016, then DOI Secretary Sally Jewell, many other federal public lands management representatives, and Utah legislators attended a public meeting in Bluff, Utah, with over 1,500 citizens. The majority of

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speakers and over 600 written comments expressed support for permanent protection of this iconic landscape. Senior administration officials also met with various local stakeholder groups on that same trip.

One thing that separates monument designations is that they begin with local input and culminate in the public asking the President to use the Antiquities Act to permanently protect places with significant natural, cultural, or scientific features. Both through public input on legislative action and from multiple stakeholder groups supporting monument designation, Utahans and the general public made clear that protection for Bears Ears was a significant priority. Many of the stakeholders and public participants spoke of the San Juan River and its significance to the river-running community. Comments focused not only on it as an amazing recreation resource but also on its historical significance and educational opportunities. As the hours ticked away before congress would adjourn for 2016—and for the last time under President Obama—the PLI bill failed to get to the floor for a vote. Without congressional action, monument designation became the only route for the federal government to meet the public’s demand for the area’s permanent protection.

When details about the new monument boundary were released, they stated that, it covered 1.35 million acres, somewhat less than the 1.9 million acres that the tribal coalition had requested. It also did not ignore the stakeholders’ compromise represented in the PLI, with the boundary very nearly matching the area identified

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*The Butler Wash Petroglyphs, Collard Lizard and Marine Bivalves (ancient sea fossils), all part of the Lower San Juan experience.*

**Photos by Thomas O’Keefe and Evan Stafford**



# STEWARDSHIP

for permanent protection under the bills' two new proposed National Conservation Areas and Wilderness area. As an example of the proclamation closely following the PLI's recommendations, a big segment of the San Juan River upstream of Mexican Hat was left out of the monument due to multi-use requests, despite that area's recreational and cultural value as part of a continuous multi-day river trip from Sand Island to Mexican Hat. At the watershed level, the Lower San Juan is now almost entirely protected by the new monument and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area—except for this missing segment above Mexican Hat.

## How will Bears Ears be managed in the future?

National Monument designations must comprise exclusively existing Federal Lands and their management is always a continuation of the federal agency that has historically managed them. In this case, Bears Ears consists of both USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. These two agencies will engage in a new collaborative planning process, with numerous opportunities for public input. Local advisory committees will be formed from stakeholder groups, including state and local governments, tribes, recreational users, local business owners, and private landowners. Lands within the monument generally may not be disposed of and are closed to new mining, oil and gas development, and other extractive uses. The monument, however, is still subject to valid existing rights. Current land uses will be preserved, including recreational uses such as paddling, mountain biking, hunting and fishing, as well as grazing, military operations, and traditional collection of medicinal plants and firewood. The scoping process for the monument management plan began in January 2017.

*Fun whitewater on the Lower San Juan, especially for a grandpa and grandkids!*

**Photo by Evan Stafford**

## Will river runners lose or have less access to the San Juan River inside the monument?

The Lower San Juan is a popular multi-day river trip with two segments that can be combined for up to 84 incredible river miles. With mild rapids, sunny beaches, and so many varied sites containing evidence of ancient indigenous cultures, it is one of, if not the, premier multi-day family river trip in the country. Due to this popularity it has had a private permit system in place since the early 1980s. With around 1,200 private trips per year made up of nearly 9,000 private boaters. Commercial trips account for an additional 300 trips annually and 2500-3000 visitors each year.

Under the Antiquities Act the agencies responsible are directed to manage these areas for the care of the landscapes and objects of scientific and historic interest identified by the proclamations while preserving the current land uses, including river recreation. The San Juan public permit system and the commercial river trip system are unlikely to change under the new monument status; however, more educational components are likely to be

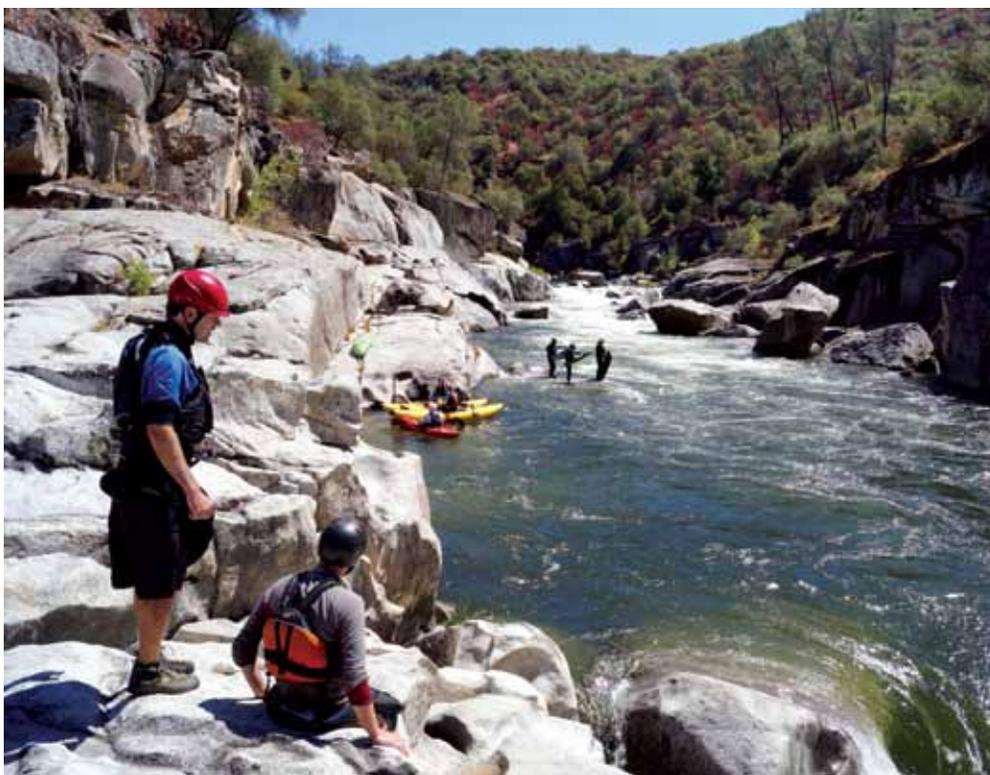
added to help protect the archeological artifacts and to help paddlers understand the landscape more completely.

Whenever a whitewater river will be affected by a National Monument designation you can expect American Whitewater to be a part of the process. We sometimes take for granted the protection afforded by our National Monuments and the conservation process they put in motion. Some of our most cherished National Parks, including Arches in Utah and the Grand Canyon in Arizona, started out as monument designations. AW was heavily involved in the 2015 designation of Browns Canyon National Monument in Colorado and its story for river runners is much the same as Bears Ears, with landscape level protection achieved alongside improved and continued access for boaters. Our mission is to protect the river places and experiences we've woven into the fabric of who we are, and monument designation can be a useful way to make sure our most cherished rivers receive the permanent protection they deserve.



# SPILL CESSATION ON PREVIOUSLY LICENSED CALIFORNIA HYDROPOWER PROJECTS

BY THERESA SIMSIMAN



*Paddlers enjoy Horseshoe Bend on the San Joaquin River  
Photo by Dave Steindorf*

**S**PILL CESSATION IS a familiar concept to paddlers in California that describes the gradual reduction of river flow between peak and base flows. The key to this concept in a regulated hydropower system is implementing a biota-friendly spring ramp-down rate once a peak flow is reached that does not exceed one foot in a period of three weeks. Dovetailing recreational flows within the recommended spill cessation as described allows for simultaneous protection of species of concern, native aquatic species, riparian health, and river geomorphology. There has been an overall shift toward this idea in recent relicensing processes on the Yuba-Bear, the McCloud, and the Middle Fork American River projects. American Whitewater is also working to

bring elements of this concept to previously licensed hydropower projects like the Big Creek 4 and the Mokelumne River project.

Since the hydropower license for Southern California Edison's (SCE) Big Creek 4 project on the San Joaquin was issued in 2003, there have only been four test days of scheduled whitewater releases on the Class IV Horseshoe Bend reach. Conditions of the license tied regular scheduled recreational flows on this reach to an adaptive management plan that would first study the effects of out-of-season whitewater flows on Western Pond Turtle, Hardhead Fish, and Western Pearlshell Mussels. One of the challenges of this adaptive management approach was waiting for the right conditions, like a wet

water year, to complete the studies. Now one-third of the way through the term of the hydropower license, the studies remain incomplete and it is increasingly apparent that the agencies remain uncomfortable with the idea of out-of-season recreational flows on this section of the San Joaquin. Thus, American Whitewater has advocated for the pivot towards the idea of spring spill cessation in wet years coupled with in-season pulse flows in drier years. This would provide for the opportunity to get predictable boatable flows on Horseshoe Bend, alleviate the native species concerns of the agencies, and remove the costly burden of ongoing studies for SCE.

On the Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) Mokelumne River Project, scheduled flows

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on the Class V Devil's Nose reach below Salt Springs Reservoir has been a moving target since the license was issued in 2001. License conditions on this project have been modified to protect foothill yellow legged frog (FYLF) populations in dry and critically dry years. This leaves scheduled whitewater flows on this reach for wetter water years. For planning purposes, each year tentative whitewater release dates are agreed upon in March and finalized in April. However, trying to pinpoint a scheduled recreational flow day months in advance has proven problematic. The whitewater recreational flow period outlined in the license condition, mid-May to mid-June, is too short a window and in a wetter water year PG&E cannot control spill over Salt Springs Dam to stay within the boatable range of 1200 cfs to 2000 cfs. They must wait for spills to

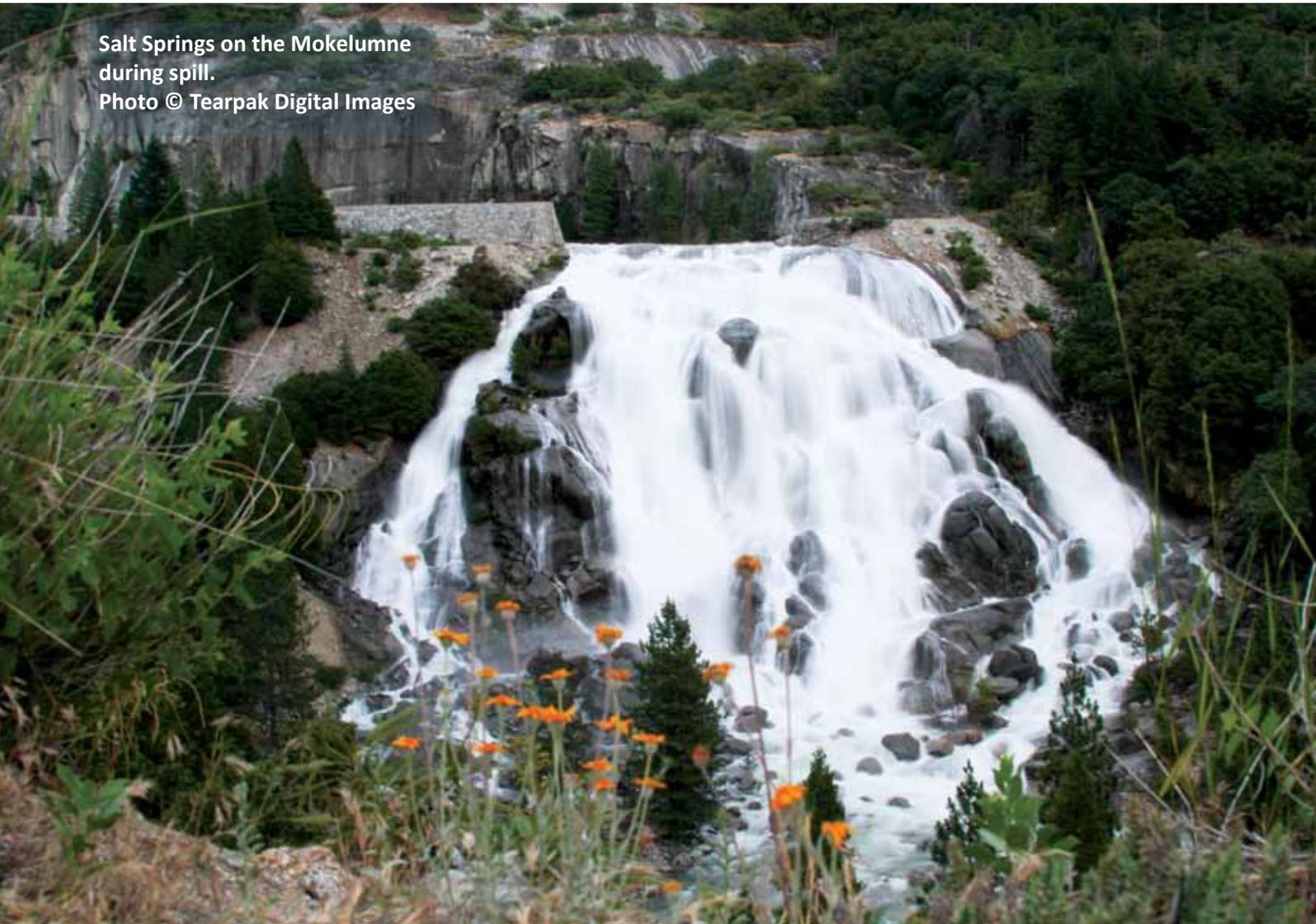
cease, which often takes them beyond mid-June. Thankfully, PG&E, the USFS, and the Ecological Resource Committee have initiated talks to address this issue. Since protection of sensitive species like FYLF is a priority on any river reach, it makes sense to explore the recreational opportunities of a slower ramp-down rate during spill cessation.

To move the conversation on spill cessation it is important to examine project specific information. On both projects, American Whitewater requested 15-minute gaging information and corresponding daily flow data formatted using US Army Corps of Engineers DSSVue software. This allows the adaptive management group to see the detrimental spikes of flows through the system and determine what can be done to get smoother spill cessation. It

is also important to understand how any downstream water rights agreements will affect releases. And finally, it is vital to understand the physical capabilities of existing infrastructure to control spills.

Needless to say, the process to move toward spill cessation on both the Big Creek 4 and Mokelumne River project will take time. Before an amendment or modification to either hydropower license can be made, the licensee, agencies, and stakeholders must come to a consensus on how to implement such a change on each project. American Whitewater will continue to advocate for whitewater flows on these reaches and the concept of spill cessation will give us the tools to do it responsibly.

**Salt Springs on the Mokelumne during spill.**  
Photo © Tearpak Digital Images



# NEW REPORT ON IMPACT TO SAN MIGUEL RIVER (CO) FROM PROPOSED RESERVOIRS

BY EVAN STAFFORD



*Paddlers on the San Miguel near the Dolores River confluence.*  
**Photo by Cody Perry, Rig to Flip**

**A**ERICAN WHITEWATER HAS released a new study *Assessing Instream Flows that Support Whitewater Recreation in the San Miguel River Basin*. Montrose County acquired conditional water rights to the San Miguel River in hopes of building multiple new reservoirs in southwest Colorado on BLM land. As a product of our dedicated work defining recreational flows and representing whitewater recreation interests for the Colorado Water Plan, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) requested that Montrose County consult with American Whitewater on recreational needs and future impacts for the San Miguel River. American Whitewater worked with Montrose County's agents to assess the impact its conditional storage proposals would have on existing recreational opportunities.

Using flow ranges American Whitewater defined through a study in 2016 and historic

hydrologic data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS), AW defined the number of boatable days (days throughout the year when flows are above minimum and below maximum acceptable levels) in four different year types: dry, dry average, wet average, and wet for the San Miguel River. This Boatable Days analysis allows for assessing the effect that future reductions in flow, attributed to new projects, will have on boatable days available for whitewater users. Montrose county supplied simulated daily depletions (cfs) for historic water years associated with three project alternatives and American Whitewater used these simulated depletions to recalculate the number of days when boatable flows would have been available with these reduced flows.

American Whitewater found no reduction in boatable days due to the simulated depletions in historic flows for any of the alternatives provided for the San Miguel

River. This was not surprising considering the three alternatives only resulted in average annual changes in flow of about one percent and average daily depletions of under 4 cfs. This study sets a new precedent for American Whitewater's involvement in assessing the future impacts new water projects will have on recreation opportunities in Colorado, and possibly across the country. Developing the Boatable Days metric provides the best quantification of river-related recreation opportunities and enables decision-makers to assess and address the impacts to whitewater boating attributes in future water rights development and water demand scenarios. We are proud to have put this assessment to use for the first time in a state-sponsored consulting role and are excited to use this method in the analysis of impacts to recreation from proposed future water projects.

# SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR SALLY JEWELL ON THE GRAND CANYON

BY TYLER WILLIAMS

**T**HE CREEK GURGLED softly, reflecting a trembling light on an overhanging roof of limestone. Here we sat, backs resting on shelves of the polished gray rock while contemplating Ed Abbey's words, the river, the cliffs that soared beyond our view, the whole river trip experience. Fifteen high school youth, a few scientists, and several boatmen who liked to call themselves "sub-adults" called on a scientific terminology heard regularly throughout the course of a day, as we classified endangered humpback chub. And if we boatmen were sub-adults, there was one super-adult among us: mother, executive, and United States cabinet member. Some would have called her Secretary Jewell.

Former Interior Secretary Sally  
Jewell floats above Upset Rapid on  
the Grand Canyon of the Colorado.  
Photo by Tyler Williams

# STEWARDSHIP

A woman of considerable outdoor experience, she surprised me by saying this was her first multi-day river trip. Quite the one to pick—the Grand Canyon’s lower half—where the first day saw three boatmen swept from their seats in the surging peaks of Hermit Rapid. The Secretary picked this trip, a Grand Canyon Youth / USGS joint venture, because her own journey had been profoundly shaped decades ago by an adventure youth program, and because science, education, and the natural exuberance of youth filled the evenings, rather than five-star meals and cocktail hour featured in a more typical commercial trip through the Grand Canyon.

At times she presented as a politician, holding court on policy, offering vignettes of life in Washington D.C., but mostly she was simply one of the crew, eager to help in the dish line, willing to learn the secrets of Dutch oven cooking, ready to hold a bow line. When the indefatigable youth engaged in an evening abdominal workout, Sally was all-in, showing the teens that one can still hold plank position at 60 years young.

The earnest and sometimes naive inquisitiveness of teenagers must have been a refreshing change from the entrenched attitudes of D.C. When else does the Secretary of Interior get asked, without judgment, “What makes you qualified for this job?” Those of us who overheard the 15-year-old’s query got a chuckle. The curious teenager got some insight into the makings of a cabinet member; Sally, maybe, got a fresh perspective on the honorable responsibility of her position.

Answering questions is a normal day’s work for Sally, as is making speeches and listening to a hundred different agendas, so when she slipped away early from our contemplative limestone overhang, I gave her a few bends of the canyon before following, at some distance. Every ten minutes or so I would see her far ahead, a diminutive figure beneath inconceivable millions-of-years-old canyon walls. I supposed she was thinking about her

## STEWARDSHIP SIDEBAR: THANKS TO SALLY JEWELL FOR HER SERVICE IN MANAGING OUR PUBLIC LANDS

Over the past four years, Sally Jewell led the Department of Interior. In this position she has been a great friend of rivers, continuing the legacy of her predecessor, Ken Salazar.

The Department of Interior is one of the most important agencies for whitewater paddlers as the steward for 20 percent of our nation’s lands and hundreds of rivers that flow through them. Interior has jurisdiction over the National Park Service (including rivers like the Colorado through Grand Canyon, Gauley River, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison), Bureau of Land Management (including rivers like the Deschutes, Klamath, and Rogue), and the United States Geological Survey, which provides much of our real-time river flow information.

Under Sally’s direction, Interior provided important protections for the Grand Canyon in Arizona and Kalmiopsis region of Oregon (headwaters of the Smith, Illinois, and Rogue rivers) through administrative orders that will prevent new mining claims that threatened the water quality of these spectacular rivers.

A number of new National Monuments have been designated along river corridors that are important to our community including Rio Grande del Norte in New Mexico, Cascade-Siskiyou in the Klamath River Watershed, Brown’s Canyon in Colorado, and Bears Ears along the San Juan River in Utah. All of these new National Monuments include lands managed by Interior.

In her time at Interior, Sally was a tireless champion for permanent authorization and full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Utilizing a small amount of revenue generated from offshore oil and gas resources, this effective conservation tool has protected lands and secured public access to rivers like the White Salmon, Gauley, Youghiogheny, Chattooga, Green, Rio Grande, Salmon, and many others.

Water conservation has been another priority for Sally, and the WaterSMART program has increased the West’s available water supply by one million acre-feet annually (enough to provide the water needs for a city the size of Los Angeles).

More rivers are now free-flowing. The Fish and Wildlife Service has removed nearly 500 dams since 2009 and Interior led partner efforts to restore rivers like the Penobscot and Elwha. In a blog post on dam removal last year, Sally reflected that “the measure of our progress isn’t always the size of the structures we build to control nature. It’s often manifested in those we remove—allowing nature to take its course.”

Thanks to Sally’s leadership, many rivers have been restored and protected and we take inspiration from the proverb she credits with guiding her approach to managing our public lands and rivers: “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

# STEWARDSHIP



*Above: Sally Jewell enjoying the ethos of the Grand Canyon*

**Photo by Tyler Williams**

*Below: Sally Jewell at the podium speaks to the importance of the Land and Water Conservation Fund for outdoor recreation as Dan Nordstrom (CEO of Outdoor Research), Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Congressman Dave Reichert (R-WA8), and Jim Whittaker (first America to summit Mt. Everest) join her.*

ensuing presentation at the South Rim, but I hoped she was simply experiencing the awesomeness of it all, taking a break from thought, feeling that spiritual connection to nature that is more powerful than any policy speech.

It seems Sally was doing a little of both, because a day later she finished her talk at the park with a haiku that she penned during a period of quiet among high school kids and sub-adults, under a dancing limestone roof. Who knows if this moment of reflection will influence national policy before Secretary Jewell's term expires. Either way, our world must be a better place for it.

## STEWARDSHIP SIDEBAR: INTERIOR SECRETARY RYAN ZINKE POISED TO TAKE THE HELM

With a new Administration, Ryan Zinke from Montana will now take the helm as Secretary of Interior. In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Secretary Zinke promised to continue the work to fully and permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund. He committed to oppose the transfer or sale of our public lands and he promised to advocate for increased investment in infrastructure needs that support outdoor recreation on our public lands. He also spoke to the importance of the scientific data collected by USGS which we are hopeful will translate to a continued commitment to the USGS stream gaging network. His perspectives on National Monuments designated by President Obama are less clear, as he identified the Bears Ears National Monument in southeast Utah as his first "five-meter target." We will be working to educate him on the importance of protected landscapes for the whitewater paddling community. During his time as a Congressman in Montana Secretary Zinke sponsored our bill to protect East Rosebud Creek from hydropower development by designating it as Wild and Scenic. We look forward to continuing to work with Mr. Zinke on issues that are important to paddlers as he transitions into his new role.

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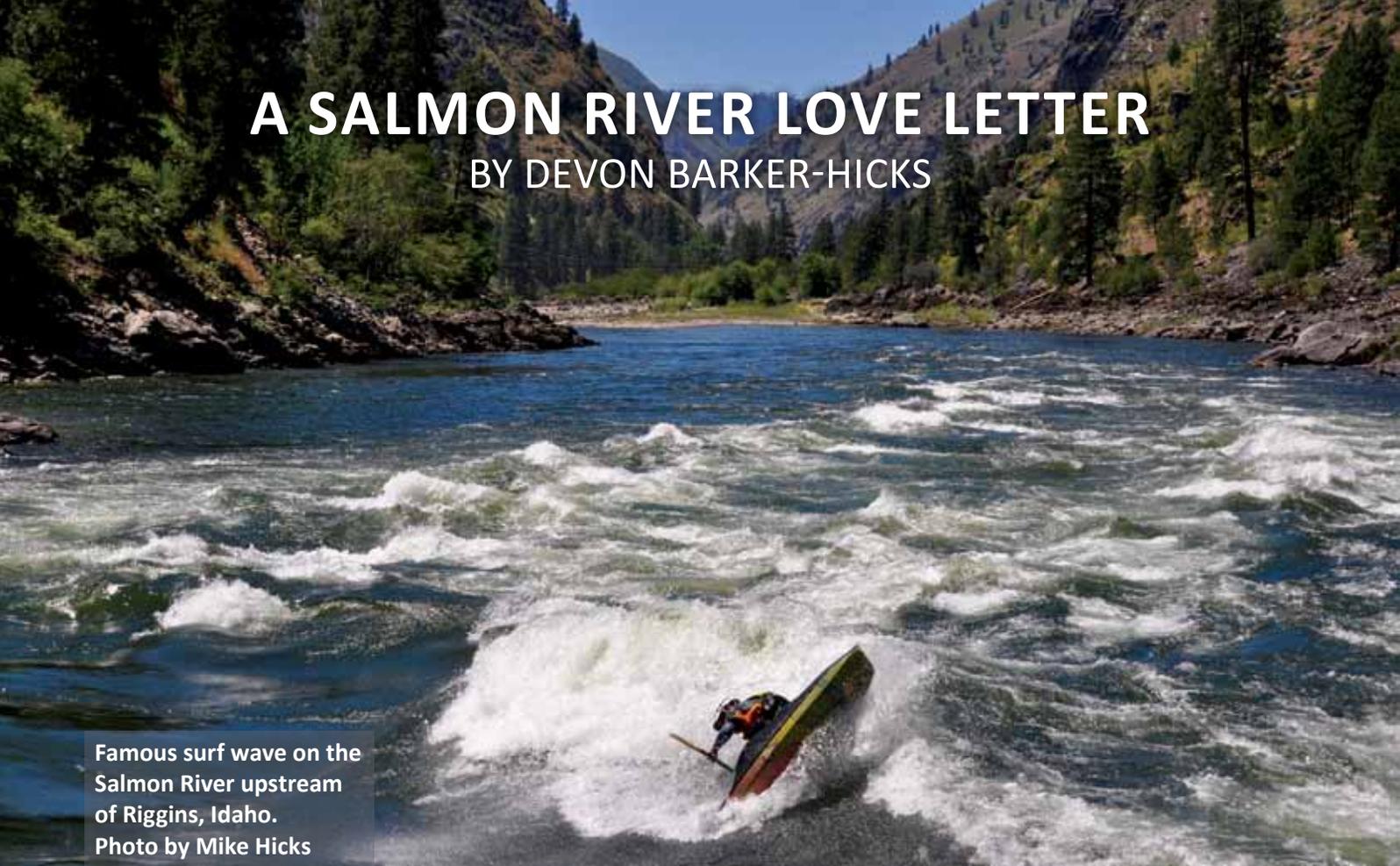
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# A SALMON RIVER LOVE LETTER

BY DEVON BARKER-HICKS



Famous surf wave on the Salmon River upstream of Riggins, Idaho.  
Photo by Mike Hicks

**D**EAR RIVER,

This year marks the forty-second year since we first met. I remember most vividly your warm sandy beaches and your cool running water. Your beaches were home to my naps and sand castles. I was in heaven as a three-year-old. As I grew, I learned how much I enjoyed floating in my life jacket in your eddies. I played by bobbing, splashing, and jumping off the raft into your deep, calm pool, although sometimes I would see a school of fish that frightened me a little. My parents soon realized it was easier to have me take a friend on each raft trip. We would hang over the front of the raft or convince my brothers, who were already guiding trips, to let us ride the bull through your Bodacious Bounce and Sluice Box rapids. We longed to be closer to the water and soon we were trusted to paddle a two-person inflatable kayak together on your waters.

This marks the beginning of the love and slight fear I learned from you. I had been down your waters so many times that I knew the lines, but now I was calling the

shots. You taught us well. My friends and I swam all your rapids at least once, but on occasion, we soared over your tallest waves to arrive in your eddies with huge smiles of confidence on our faces. With lots of love and a little bit of fear I became a raft guide and a kayaker, always learning from you. You were with me in triumph and in sorrow. Your waters washed away tears and urged me to continue during the hardest times of my life. When I became a little too cocky, you would toss me off my seat, or when I was pushing my limits you would flip me upside down. When I lined up just right, I would thread your holes and top your waves perfectly, which deepened my love for you, while your strong currents and eddy lines deepened my respect.

I ventured to many other rivers, taking my skills to new waters, but there was always something that was pulling me back to you. I know now that it is your nature. You are free-flowing from your start in the Idaho mountains until you empty into the Snake River and then into the ocean. Running free, you call to so many of us. You called to our parents who made sure to protect

you from dams, and you still call us today to have you designated the Wild and Scenic River that you are.

I discovered your waves in my kayak: Gold Hole, Couch, Cat's Paw, Peace, Mill, Rodeo, and Chair. My love for you deepened as I spent countless hours surfing your waters. Any season, surfing you brought a peace into my life that I can only find within your canyon walls. I am in heaven; I am with whom I belong. A few years ago I married my love on your beach, Hippie Beach next to Peace Wave. As my friends and family gathered to celebrate my marriage to Mike Hicks, you stood beside me. Always there, always rolling through my life.

Today, I live beside you with the sound of your rapids soothing me to sleep at night. I love you with all my might. Perhaps no one can capture the way I feel about you better than Robert G. Bailey, who said,

"...Roll on, roll on, mighty Salmon,  
Mystic "River of No Return;"  
Through these mighty hills, eternal,  
Let your ways be ever stern.

# RIVER VOICES



Top: Devon and her husband, Mike Hicks double surfing on their home wave, Mill Wave, in Riggins, Idaho.

Photo by Matt Rusher

Bottom: Devon raft guiding on one of the many rapids on the Lower Salmon.

Photo by Jessica Marsan

Buried in the deepest canyons,  
Gliding on with no concern—  
Ever Idaho's greatest treasure  
"River of No Return."

Paddle in Peace my love,  
Devon

Devon Barker-Hicks will begin her 29th  
season guiding on the Salmon River and her  
42nd season floating on the Lower Salmon  
River this summer.

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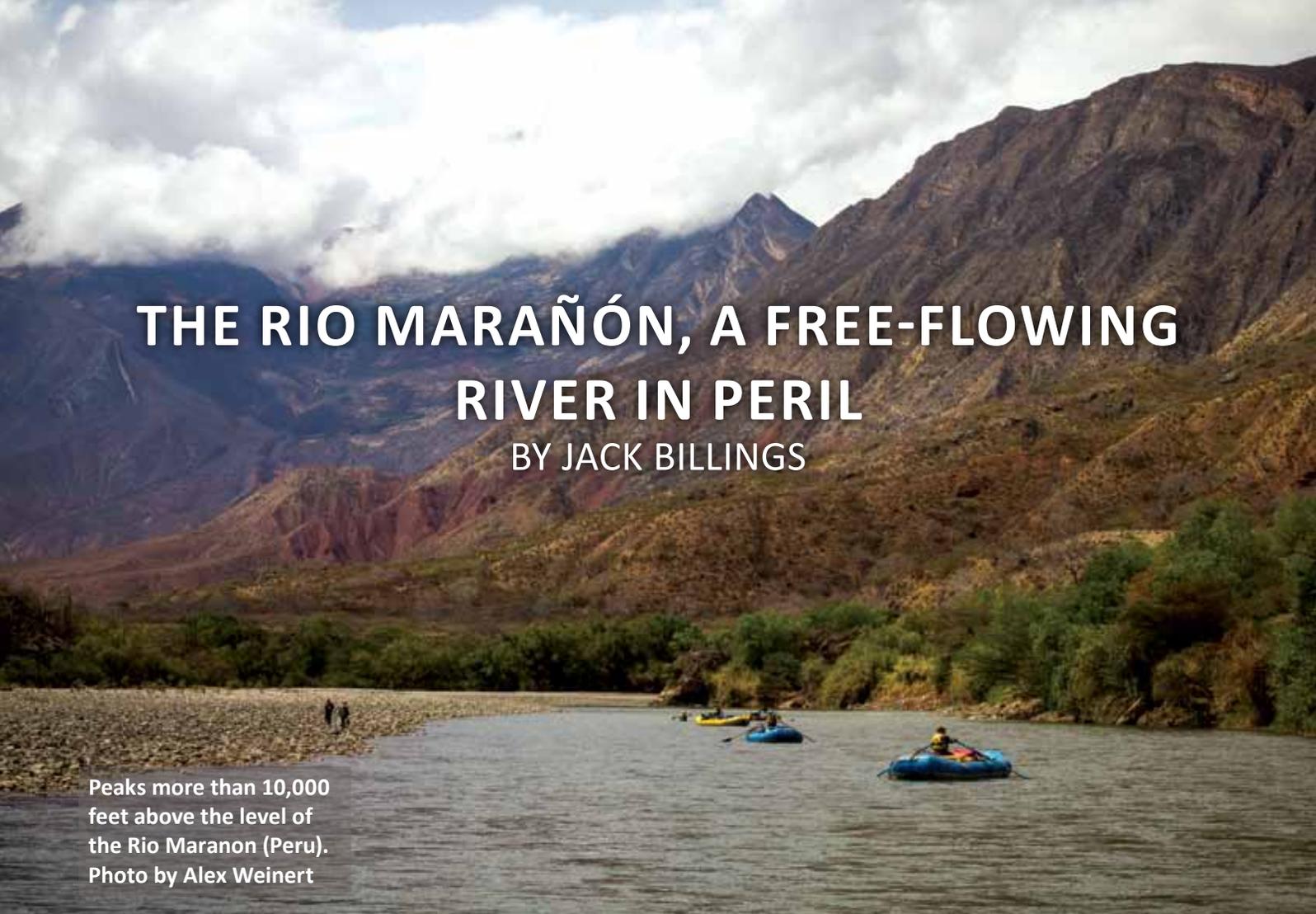
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# THE RIO MARAÑÓN, A FREE-FLOWING RIVER IN PERIL

BY JACK BILLINGS

Peaks more than 10,000 feet above the level of the Rio Marañón (Peru).  
Photo by Alex Weinert

*As I was preparing to launch that first morning, an emerging dread crept up the back of my neck. ... Although I had run rivers for 42 years, including nine trips down the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, I had never faced a challenge like this one: a gradient equal to the Middle Fork of the Salmon, four-foot wave trains, big pour-overs, surging eddies, seemingly endless rock gardens. I was to carry the two large kitchen boxes. Throughout this adventure my greatest fear was putting the entire trip in jeopardy. One mistake in navigating 310 miles of hurtling, surging, relentless whitewater and all our cooking gear would be at the bottom of the river.*

**S**OMETIMES FOR VETERAN river runners, simply the general description of a free-flowing river in a far-off place is enough to capture and hold the imagination. The Rio Marañón

was that place for me. Add world-class whitewater, the peril to the entire river and to all the people who live along its banks from future dam development, and the chance to contribute my voice to preservation, and a mission was born. I seized the moment and launched on the trip of a lifetime.

I first heard of the Rio Marañón through a message posted on a site devoted to the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. It described the beauty and difficulty of running this river and the destruction that it faces from numerous proposed hydroelectric dam projects. The message mentioned Rocky Contos, outfitter and guide. I contacted Rocky at his website, [www.SierraRios.org](http://www.SierraRios.org), to learn more and began research about the river.

I learned that the Rio Marañón forms on the eastern side of the Peruvian Andes, rising from glacial runoff and snowmelt.

It plunges north at a gradient averaging 15 to 30 feet per mile, two to four times that of the Colorado. Hundreds of miles downstream, the Marañón begins a broad turn toward Brazil where it enters the jungle, receives water from many other rivers, and is considered the mainstream headwaters of the Amazon.

The Canyon of the Rio Marañón is among the deepest in the world. In many places the peaks overlooking the river are 10,000 feet above its level, twice as high as the South rim of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. In its upper stretches the Marañón Canyon is quite narrow with steep sides and limited beaches. Because the

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*Opposite: Antontio and his mother would become homeless, and the entire village at Tupe'n Grande destroyed if the Chadi'n II dam is constructed.*

**Photo by Emer Chavez**

# WILDERNESS PADDLING

canyon receives only about 10 to 20 inches of rain per year, it is essentially a desert.

Since the 1970s, foreign developers have studied dam feasibility all along the Marañón. In 2010, then-President Alan García declared that energy-producing hydroelectric dam construction on the Marañón was in the “national interest.” As many as 20 dams have been proposed and many are under active study and consideration. These projects, called Chadin II, Veracruz, and Manseriche would each be at least 600 feet tall and would flood areas ranging in size from 45 to 125 miles. Any one of them would inundate and permanently destroy the ecosystem of the river upstream, submerge the villagers who live along and depend on the free-flowing river, and change forever the way of life along its banks.

## Rocky Contos

Rocky Contos is 44, tall, angular, and quite fit with a wry demeanor. He began kayaking in 1991 but also learned to raft in the mid-1990s to introduce more people to the wonders of river travel. He is a Class V kayaker with many first descents in the

United States, Mexico, Central America, Peru, Bolivia, and Southeast Asia. He first ran the entire Marañón from its headwaters to Iquitos in 2012, having discovered it from a scan of rivers around the world. He led his first three large group Sierra Rios expeditions in 2013-14.

In just three and a half years Rocky has developed a first-class outfitting operation in a remote, rugged environment on an extremely challenging river. His guides and clients come from all over the world for this intense whitewater challenge. In addition to providing clients with an incredible wilderness whitewater experience, he wants to demonstrate to the Peruvian government that eco-tourism is a viable economic alternative to dam construction.

As I learned from Rocky, and other sources, some of the dam projects have documented momentum and approvals for construction. Like the Bio-Bio in Chile, there may be only so much time remaining before dams are constructed and this river is lost forever. And, as I turned 70 in July, 2016, I engaged in some back-and-forth debate about whether I was up for the challenge.

But I always knew how the argument would end: I had to go.

## Our Group to the Put-in

While shorter trips are more popular due to time constraints for participants, our plan was to run all 310 miles through the entire section of the Marañón known as the “Grand Canyon of the Amazon.” Our rendezvous hub was the city of Huaraz, situated at about 10,000 feet elevation on the west side of the Peruvian Andes.

Our launch group was an eclectic mix of ages and origins. We ranged from 23 to 70 years old and came from Italy, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, the United States, and Denmark. The six rafts were outfitted like any longer, commercial raft expedition. Although we had local guides with us, we were fortunate



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# WILDERNESS PADDLING

that Rocky Contos led the expedition, his ninth time down this section of the river.

We enjoyed magnificent views of deep blue lakes and towering snowcapped mountains as our bus passed over the Andes at 14,500 feet. Proceeding down the Rio Puchka drainage, we came to the ruins left by the Chavi'n people. The Chavi'n preceded the Inca by at least 1000 years and occupied this area between 1400 and 400 BC. The mostly excavated Temple has a precise east-west orientation and fine stone construction.

After a seven-hour serpentine ride, we arrived at the put-in at an elevation of 7000 feet. Our trip came at the end of a dry season that followed one of the driest El Nino years on record. So, we were not surprised that the river was running only about 2000 cfs, the lowest level Rocky had ever seen it. Though this meant the river

had smaller holes, additional exposed rocks made for more technical maneuvering.

Like typical raft-supported trips in the US, all rafts carried group equipment. I rowed a 16-foot self-bailer with nine-foot oars. Cargo included the two kitchen boxes, some food and camp needs, a personal duffel, and water. Other boats had additional food supplies, including two coffin-sized ice coolers on the cataraft.

As we prepared to launch that first morning, a voice in my head muttered, "You must be out of your mind. What do you think you're doing?" But it was too late to turn back; I had come too far and everyone else had their own crafts to navigate.

## From the Put-in to Chagual

From the put-in at about 7000 feet we rowed over the next 12 days to our re-supply point of Chagual, at about 3300

feet. The canyon walls are very steep in this section, constricting the river, and creating countless Class II and IIIs, roughly a dozen Class IVs, and two Class Vs. I became more closely acquainted with some hazards than I would have preferred. On our second day we rowed through Yesojirca Narrows, where the river is constricted to barely raft-width.

Even when the water seemed somewhat flat, it would surge along a rock wall and suddenly a huge eddy would appear behind a nearly covered boulder that was enough to spin a raft completely around. Other times we chose to "read and run" rapids where the distance or terrain made it infeasible to scout. We would generally follow one of the guides through the major rapids and hope we could make the same moves.

The author below the first rapid.  
Photo by Alex Weinert



One of the Class V rapids in this section is known as Wasson's Landslide. It was first mentioned by John Wasson, a member of a 1977 trip that described the obstacle in some detail. Rocky took charge of rowing each of the rafts through the upper part of Wasson's but turned the oars back over to us for the last stretch.

The major impediment in this last run of the rapid is an eight-foot drop into a great surging boil. Unfortunately, I missed a couple of strokes and the current pulled me toward the hole. I knew that going in sideways would be a complete disaster. Given my angle, the best option was rowing backward as hard as I could. I shot over the top and the boat landed upright in the surge. Within a nano-second, I was launched out of the boat and into the water as though I was teed up on the golf course. At first, I was pulled down and back into the churning water, but eventually my lifejacket brought me up for a welcome gasp of air and I got to shore. The boat stayed upright and we lost no gear. However, my dignity was in serious disarray.

The steep canyon walls here seem ideal for dam construction. Three dams in this section alone are under active study: Yaku at mile 58, Cajas at mile 87, and San Miguel at mile 124. Each would rise hundreds of feet above the river and completely submerge the area upstream for a distance of at least 30 miles. These three dams would create stair step reservoirs, with no semblance of a river between.

As we worked our way downstream I visualized the impact on this beautiful canyon if it were submerged under hundreds of feet of water. Though the area seemed empty, it was not. Many side streams (*quebradas*) and smaller rivers joined the Marañón. At nearly every convergence with the river a small oasis of green signaled where a farmer had diverted the *quebrada* to create a planting area (*chacra*) for growing coca, bananas, mangoes, papayas, oranges, and peppers. These *chacras* exist because the river and



*Anti-dam sentiment on display in Tupe'n Grande.*

**Photo by Jack Billings**

its side streams have formed a riparian bank with a flourishing ecosystem.

Several days into the trip, we camped just upstream of Sanachgan rapid and a well-established *chacra*. As we prepared to leave, a young couple came with their infant daughter and dog to see us off. It was difficult to learn from them firsthand that if the Yaku dam is constructed, their farm and way of life will be destroyed.

### Flora and Fauna

The Marañón drainage is home to a unique variety of plants and animals that could not survive the dams. Countless centuries of erosion from the steep canyon walls have formed river banks that flourish with trees, shrubs, and wildlife. This is where the people live and their sustainable agriculture has developed over many generations. Submerge the canyon under hundreds of feet of water, and the fertile riverbank is gone forever.

Along this upper canyon and inner gorge, there are currently no roads from the put-in until the site of the proposed Yaku Dam. Nevertheless, many people live along this 58-mile stretch of river. They rely on trails beside the river and those that lead up and over the mountains to sell their products and to obtain the materials they require, yet cannot produce.

From the beginning of our journey, we were serenaded during the day by cicadas. These large, fat bodied, leaf-eating insects, related to crickets and grasshoppers, live in the trees along the river. Fish, lizards, birds, and other animals depend on the cicadas for their survival.

We were entertained often by a chattering chorus of loros, small green parrots that flock in the riverside trees. We also saw white and blue herons and Andean terns migrating from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Various waterfowl were present, such as the torrent ducks that like to swim down rapids. Other smaller birds in the trees were frequently heard but seldom seen. All of these birds would be displaced by the dams, especially those dependent on the small fish and insects in the flowing river.

Along the river bank ceiba, acacia, jacaranda, willow, and reeds compete for growing room. If a dam raises the water level several hundred feet, these trees would drown. Only the ubiquitous cacti that resemble the saguaro in Arizona would remain.

The Marañón is full of fish. The upper sections of the river flow with cool water suitable for Andean trout. Farther downstream, the sediment load of the river is home to several unique fish such as

# WILDERNESS PADDLING



*The Marañón in Peru*  
Map courtesy of Rocky Contos

catfish and carachama (prehistoric-looking creatures). Dams settle silt and release unnaturally clear, cold water, which would doom most of the native species.

Even the traces of ancient peoples, who eons past lived along this river, would be forever lost. Important cultural sites exist in many locations, including granaries like those seen on the Colorado at Nankoweap, and tombs that still host bones. Built into the mountainsides near the river, these remaining structures and artifacts would be permanently submerged. These sites should be protected, not destroyed.

## The Central and Lower Grand Canyon sections: Chagal to Puerto Malleta

In Chagal we re-supplied our food and ice. The river changed character dramatically from the constricted Inner Gorge into a much wider riverbed, sometimes with braided channels. The gradient moderated

but was still almost twice that of the Colorado. Though still challenging, the rapids were mostly class IIIs. The few Class IVs often had easier lines through them. Some of the longer, calmer sections of Class II water gave us the chance to enjoy more of the magnificent scenery, with clear views up to the rims on both sides.

Four mega-dams are planned for this section of the Marañón: Rio Grande I and II, Chadin II, and Veracruz. If all are constructed, the entire 188 miles of this river section would become one reservoir after another, just like the upper Grand Canyon area.

## Tupén Grande

While the river, rapids, and Canyon side hikes were quite enjoyable, the most profound impacts for me were the villages, especially Tupén Grande. When we arrived on day 21 of our trip (mile 255), where “welcome” was spelled out with rocks, in English, a reception party met us. We immediately knew we had come to a friendly place. It was here that I came to understand most directly how a downstream dam called Chadin II would wipe out generations of a self-sustaining, self-governing community that would have nowhere to go.

We met Cesar Chavez, who is head of the Ronda, or town militia. He has been a leader and spokesperson for opposition to the Chadin II dam project, at mile 266, that would flood and destroy the village, and displace the hundreds of people who live in and around the area. As they did with Rocky, development operatives have



*Lorenzo with Mardi (red helmet) at Shapolmonte Rapid.*  
Photo by Alex Weinert

attempted to intimidate Cesar to silence his opposition leadership.

Their village is accessible only via the river or by a six-to-eight-hour hike to the rim. There are no roads, no cars, and almost no lights. The only lightbulb in the community is powered by solar cells. The school, the village bodega filled with coca, communal buildings, homes, and other structures are somewhat randomly located wherever someone decided to build. There is an extensive, communal irrigation system that supplies many produce gardens. The community focuses on the children who are outside often. Games are emphasized: volleyball for the girls and soccer for the boys.

I brought a donation bag with 50 items to share, mostly children's clothes, and some

shirts I no longer needed. Mardi Maack, another member of the group, brought four bags that included clothing, shoes, eyeglasses, and medical supplies. At the access point of Balsas we also met one of the villagers and brought him along with three 100-foot spools of two-inch irrigation pipe for the village.

Among those who came to investigate the gifts was a little fellow named Antonio. He and his mother were among the first to arrive. My bag included a camouflage print shirt that was just his size. With his mother's encouragement, he put it on and left to chase some of the other boys.

To show their appreciation for the supplies and donations we brought, eight of the village children performed some dances for us and the rest of the community. There

was a large turnout and everyone enjoyed the show.

Like us, the people of Tupén Grande are in opposition to the Chadin II dam project that would flood their village. In speaking with the villagers and just being there, I could sense that the resistance to the dam is palpable. Protests against the construction are everywhere. Online articles and videos of the opposition abound. This is a community working to preserve its way of life against the threat of an ill-conceived dam.

Though we enjoyed Tupén Grande immensely, we still had more than 50 miles to complete our journey. We made our last camp on a large island in the middle of the river about three quarters of a mile from the take-out point at Puerto Malleta. The

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# WILDERNESS PADDLING



*Rocky Contos with Anh at Yasojirca Narrows.*  
**Photo by Alex Weinert**

next and final morning, I was the last to leave. As I eased my way into the converging channels of the main river, I looked back at our last camp and again rejoiced that I had come this far, seen so much, and learned more than I could have imagined.

## Concluding thoughts

The social impacts of these mega-dams would be enormous, provoking major disruptions in flooding cycles, fish migrations, and sediment deposits throughout the Amazon Basin with potentially disastrous, ecological consequences. The thousands of people living along the Marañón would be uprooted to some unknown, undesirable location, and the flora and fauna living within the river corridor would be lost forever.

Any government is vulnerable to the boatloads of cash available from giant contractors and developers for whom

*A weather system darkens the upstream horizon.*

**Photo by Jack Billings**

bribery and payoffs are simply another cost of acquiring massive contracts. Peru is no exception. Three of the dams proposed for the Marañón are projects of Odebrecht, an international, Brazilian mega-development construction company. In December, 2016, Odebrecht agreed to pay a fine exceeding \$2 billion for its corruption payments to

governments throughout Central and South America, including \$28 million to Peru. Its president was sentenced that same week to 19 years in prison for his role in the scandal.

To the outside world, it is generally unknown whether any of the bribery payments made in Peru were associated with dam projects. Unless uncovered by investigation, these payoffs will be known only to the government officials who received them and the developer minions who paid them. Nevertheless, the entire scandal highlights the enormous difficulty faced by the ordinary Peruvians living along and dependent upon the river as they battle the other devastating costs to the ecosystem and their way of life.

The argument for these dams is strong: the river is a Peruvian resource. The people of Peru, through its government, should determine how this resource shall benefit the whole country. The river represents much potential energy production that can either be sold to other countries or used internally for the betterment of the Peruvian people.

But there is another argument which is more holistic and existential. The people



of Peru can save this jewel, leave the lives of thousands of people intact, preserve an eco-system that is a vital part of the Amazon drainage, and promote ecotourism, multicultural experiences, and exchanges. The tourist monies spent along the river go directly to those who live there.

Building these dams would be a tremendous undertaking, with exponential costs. Some of the sites are located in very remote areas without roads, bridges, or other infrastructure required to create a multibillion dollar, 500- to 600-foot tall dam. In addition, a massive high-voltage transmission grid would have to be constructed over some of the most rugged mountains in the world. This cannot be a wise use of resources.

Further media exposure of the true cost of these projects, including all the corruption involved, offers hope that political action can achieve results. Additional dams on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon were prevented only by international publicity and public outcry that resulted in political compromise in Congress.

We need to take more action. For those who wish to add their voices to the call to save the Marañón, Sierra Rios offers several avenues. Following more than 1000 others, support can be added to the petition to the Peruvian government, opposing dam construction. Donations can be made to enhance efforts to support and encourage the people living along the Marañón. Finally, trips are available for novices and river veterans alike who are adventurous

enough to experience this incredible river for themselves.

Although the Marañón and its Canyon on the east side of the Andes may seem a remote, harsh and arid place, it is teeming with life and nature in balance. The Peruvian people are best served by an undammed Marañón.

I certainly feel blessed to have run and experienced this mighty river and to have met some of the people who live along its banks. Its volume is modest but its course is true. Compelling, inscrutable, restless and indifferent, so far, this free-flowing river rolls on.

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# WILDERNESS PADDLING

## NO PLACE FOR SISSIES: PADDLING THE LOWER PETAWAWA RIVER

BY GARY STORR



Geoff finds the sweet spot on the upper Natch Rapid, Petawawa River, Ontario, Canada.  
Photo by Gary Storr

**G**ROWING OLD IS not for the faint-hearted. Neither is launching a ham-handed relic in an open canoe down a raging rapid. Unfortunately, when both events came into play, I found myself at the center of the storm. There was no one else to blame—our paddling group, the Canoeing Legends, had been planning this trip for a long time.

Dan Bell, Graham Bryan, Geoff Ching and I stood above the Rollway Rapid and stared into a boiling cauldron of thunder. A ledge spanned the river and the current surged over it with murderous intent. A memorial to Blair Fraser, the *Maclean's* editor who died trying to avoid this rapid in 1968, was a portent, a sober reminder of the consequence of miscalculation. George Drought's *Petawawa River Whitewater*

*Guide* instructed us to find the Class II route through Class III and IV rapids. I studied the river but couldn't see the route. None of us could. Even Geoff, who works magic with a paddle, seemed perplexed.

"Screw it," said Graham, finally. "I've got a helmet. I'm going."

\*\*\*

The summer of 2016 had been the hottest on record, as air conditioners had spun the dials off electric meters. We fully expected to drag the canoes 50 kilometers down a dried-up riverbed. Three years earlier we'd been thwarted by a flash snowmelt that, combined with heavy rains, had washed out Lake Travers Road. Repairs hadn't been made in time for our intended arrival. With

heavy hearts we'd canceled the trip. Now, as we swung our packs into the boats, the Poplar Rapids cascaded into Lake Travers from the west. Our anxiety was laid to rest: after a fortuitous two-day-long deluge the Petawawa River was alive, coursing between its banks at robust levels.

As we paddled across Lake Travers our life jackets came off and the sun warmed our backs. We were eager for a glimpse of the chutes downriver—the Big Thompson and Little Thompson rapids. George Drought suggested the Big Thompson was merely a warmup for the wild and woolly stuff farther down. I took this to mean it was a novice run: it could be accomplished easily if I affixed training wheels to my canoe and my partner held the back of my canoe seat. Of course, I misunderstood. But personal

ratings don't exist on a fixed scale: they are relative to our abilities.

As we approached the practice run our jaws dropped. The Big Thompson Rapid was huge. Boulders studded the river like a minefield, setting off small-scale explosions of froth everywhere. Partway down was a ledge. It would have to be avoided at all cost: below it was a rock garden that had the potential to abruptly and horribly terminate our run.

Geoff and I began our descent by sliding over the remains of an old logging dam on river right. Catching the dam at an angle, we dropped awkwardly into the rapid. It wasn't pretty but we were still afloat. Our strategy from this point was simple: don't hit rocks. We should have given it further consideration because from the get-go, there wasn't a rock we didn't hit. Turning broadside to the current we slammed into yet another boulder and instinctively I grabbed the gunwales. I knew it was the wrong thing to do and I was instantly admonished by Geoff who instructed me to brace with my paddle. I muttered an oath under my breath.

Straightening out we fared better but while we executed a zigzag pattern to dodge flare-ups, I lost sight of the ledge. Moving water never looks the same from a canoe as it does from the riverbank. Suddenly the shelf was at our bow! Jabbing at the river with my paddle I pulled us sideways and we missed the drop by a hair. We finished the exercise somewhat shell-shocked but none the worse for wear.

The Little Thompson Rapid was shorter but no less daunting. There was a roller coaster ride down the right bank but the entrance looked dicey—we weren't eager for a swim here. The left side was a technical run. A long sloping slab of granite formed the riverbed and shallow water washed over its surface. It didn't appear deep enough to float a boat. At its base were two boulders, a canoe's beam apart, and beyond that, a rock face. Graham and Dan elected to take

the left route. Geoff and I watched from the riverbank as they slid over the watery embankment and split the boulders, bouncing wonkily off one. Quickly regaining their balance they cut to the right and then pulled in behind the wall at the end of the portage. Geoff and I decided to go right. Scraping past the rocks at the top of the chute, we jockeyed through the sprays and then eddied out beside our comrades.

Our confidence was growing. We'd pinballed through the amateur stuff and were ready to take it to the next level. We pulled ashore and set up camp on a positive note, but I had reservations about the long day ahead.

The next morning we packed up our gear and pushed out onto the river. We lily-dipped and let the current carry us briskly along. Then we enjoyed a tune-up on the Grillade Rapid. Despite having had whitewater training, I was the least accomplished paddler of the group. I couldn't help noticing that Dan, who freely admitted to feeling fear at the sound of rapids, now sported a grin at the end of each run. Conversely, I experienced a growing sense of apprehension.

In an article for the *Globe and Mail* dated August 27, 2016, Roy MacGregor described former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's final trip down the Petawawa River. At the age of 77, Mr. Trudeau was joined by friends and his paddling partner, Wally Schaber. Negotiating the challenging Crooked Chute Rapids, they'd encountered difficulty. Attempting to land above the chute they flipped their canoe. Mr. Schaber rescued the prime minister and then went downriver to retrieve their gear.

Had I seen this story a week earlier, I might have had second thoughts about shooting Crooked Chute. Reading the article after the trip, I had a clear mental image of the place the mishap occurred. There was an outcrop on the right bank blocking the take-out. It was crucial to make this landing—pinwheeling past it would send a



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# WILDERNESS PADDLING



*Graham and Dan shooting the Little Thompson Rapid.*  
**Photo by Gary Storr**

paddler down a gnarly set of Class IIIs that funneled into a narrow cataract. Only a select few had bragging rights to this feat. Smashed canoes attested to the skill set of the majority.

The Crooked Chute Rapids were long—a kilometer and a half in extent—and there were three take-outs above the chute. We landed at the first take-out and carried our packs to the second, a tiny beach and the perfect spot from which to scrutinize the boulder-strewn expanse above the cataract. There we decided, “What the hell,” and portaged our gear to the last take-out. It was here that a rock face obstructed the landing. We’d have to kiss the rock and quickly tuck in behind it to avoid catastrophe. Fortunately, we were triumphant...and with only a few new anecdotes gouged into our hulls.

*Lunch break on the Five Mile Rapids.*  
**Photo by Gary Storr**



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A connoisseur of whitewater is rarely intimidated by the look of a rapid—it’s the sound that plants the seed of doubt. For the paddler, the trickle of glistening water over the smooth stones of a Class I is the song of the siren—it triggers a Homeric longing for the pleasure the rapid has to offer. The splash of a Class II heightens the senses—a challenge lies ahead. The turbulence of a Class III ushers in a tangible threat: the roar of the cascade crescendos and with it, the call of calamity—the sirens beckon; the paddler risks dashing his boat on the rocks. For the whitewater aficionado, this is his odyssey.

We landed our canoes above the Rollway Rapid and scouted the waterway from the riverbank. The upper stretch comprised a lengthy chain of standing waves, thrashing and undulating like a watery serpent. We would have to eddy out at its base to determine what lay around the bend. The next half-kilometer was problematic, a chaotic no man’s land of crashing sprays that would require split-second decision making. Then came the ledge: the route over it was either to the left or right...but

how to get there? Below the ledge lay the icing on the cake—300 meters of Class II whitewater that emptied into the pool at the base of the rapid.

Only one of us would make it.

In the business of canoeing, Geoff and I were silent partners: we didn't talk much, but rather, sensed each other's moves by intuition...some of the time. The Legends' annual spring paddle down the Credit River in Ontario was often preceded by an early April run, an occasion marked by only Geoff and I. Last year, as we approached Erindale Park in Mississauga, we tackled a set of Class IIs that, unknown to me in the bow, had compromised our canoe—we had taken on too much water. At the base of the rapid was a cluster of haystacks. With no time to empty the boat, but knowing

my penchant for a wet ride, Geoff gave me just that: he steered us directly into the upheaval. I was unable to see the water in the boat but I felt its effect. As I came down off the last wave, the water in the hull surged forward around me and at that moment, I knew we weren't coming up. The canoe drove into the river and we were in to the gunwales.

Those rapids on the Credit paled in comparison to what lay before us now.

Graham and Dan pushed off first. Geoff and I backpaddled where the water swirled lazily, coalescing before it began to pick up momentum. It was here that Blair Fraser and his partner had attempted to escape the grasp of the current. They were seen paddling upriver at the head of the rapid. Digging in against the flow, they lost their

bid and were swallowed by the haystacks. Mr. Fraser's partner had survived.

Graham and Dan crashed through the waves, heading toward a precipice that jutted from the left bank 100 meters downriver. They bounced along the left side shipping water as they went, sinking lower and lower until, in front of the wall, they appeared to hit a rock. On the opposite side of the river from the portage, they had no choice but to line their canoe around the obstacle. At the campfire that night I commented that Geoff and I could have watched Deliverance in the time it took them to self-rescue. Graham and Dan seemed surprised.

After they disappeared behind the outcrop it was our turn. Geoff and I steeled our nerve and let the current pull us into the

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# WILDERNESS PADDLING

haystacks. We paddled to the right to avoid the same fate as our compadres but the water was too high and near the bottom, we swamped...almost. With a few inches of freeboard we were able to eddy out to the right, near the portage. We climbed onto the rocks and dumped the water from the canoe. From our vantage point we could see the fury of the rapid and assess our situation. I knew at a glance the run was beyond my ability and, not wanting to jeopardize either of us, I opted out.

Geoff chose to stay the course.

I held the canoe while Geoff prepared for the run. He kneeled nervously behind the yoke and fiddled with his rescue gear. His stony countenance told me that his resolve was not yet in lockstep with his physical readiness. When he was set he waved me off and I let go. I waited a moment and then climbed up to the path and hurried along it in case he needed assistance downriver. He was obviously doing well because I didn't catch sight of him again until I neared the end of the portage.

"Hello," he chirped from beside the trail, startling me. He had successfully weathered the maelstrom! I admired the savvy that made shooting rapids second nature to him. We watched Graham and Dan labor along the far bank to a spot below the ledge. There, they climbed into the canoe and rode out the remainder of the rapid. At the bottom of the portage they celebrated their accomplishment with satisfied grins and a spirited high-five.

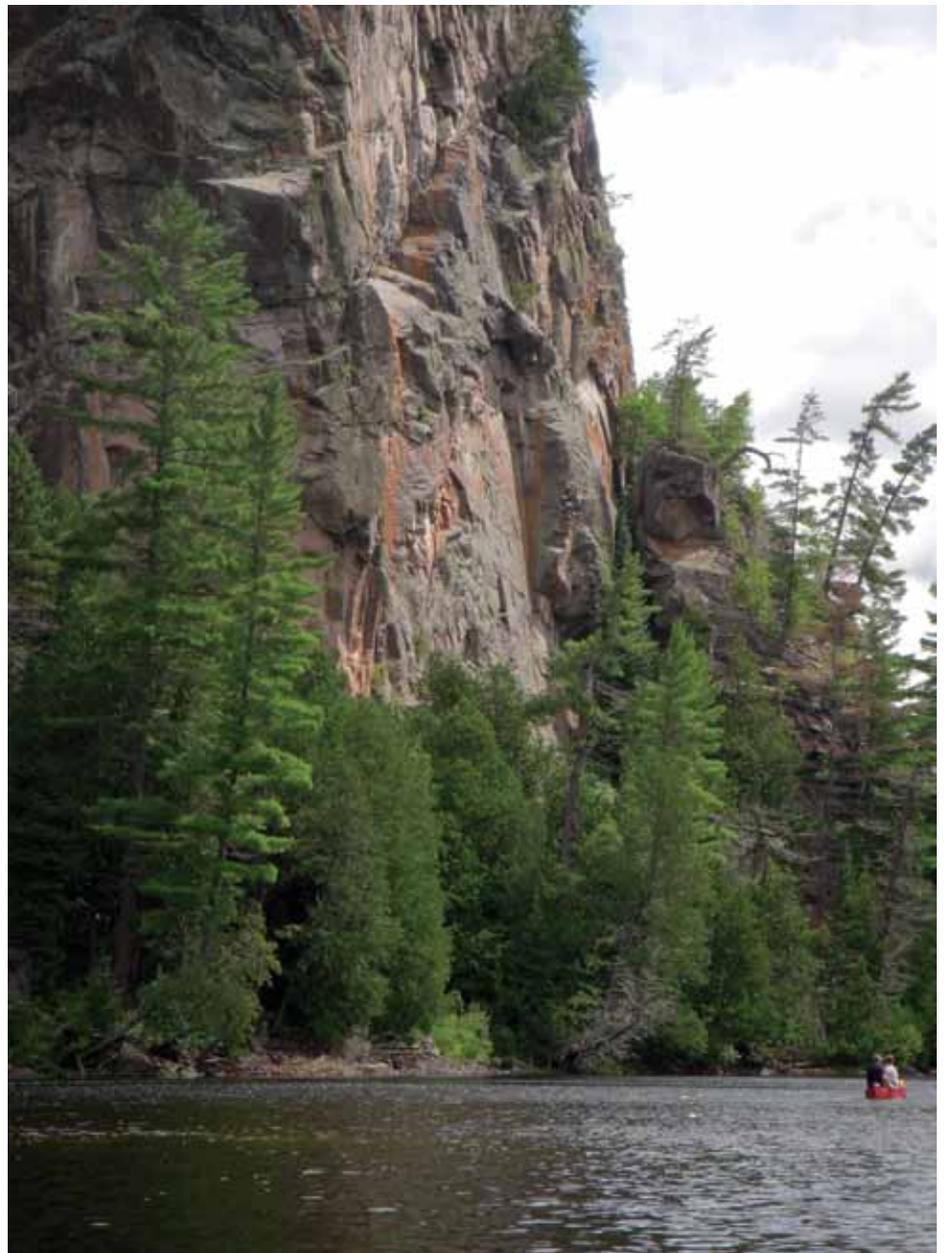
With barely time to exhale, our next challenge came into view—the Natch Rapids. We lugged the packs across a rocky portage that, in the words of George Drought, "You have to be a mountain goat to do..." Then Geoff and Graham guided the canoes over the first drop in

solo efforts. Dan and I watched from the sidelines, Dan wielding a throw-rope and I, a camera. We'd learned from the school of hard knocks that bow paddlers are dead weight in an upsurge: we cause canoes to torpedo through waves, taking on water, rather than to ride up and over them.

Geoff stood in his canoe above the drop and surveyed the lip for the sweet spot. Finding it, he dropped to his knees and gracefully slipped into the chute that carried him out

to the left. Graham's performance was less than photogenic but he prevailed by employing his unique seat-of-the-pants technique.

Geoff paddled to the riverbank to collect me into the boat for the second section of the Natch. Two ledges, a couple of canoe-lengths apart, spanned the river. Each had to be cleared on opposite sides of the rapid. The first opening, near the left bank, would butt us up against a rock



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*Drifting through the canyon below the Natch Rapids.*

**Photo by Graham Bryan**

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# WILDERNESS PADDLING



Striking a pose, the Canoeing Legends l-r: Dan Bell, Gary Storr, Geoff Ching and Graham Bryan.

Photo by Gary Storr

wall if we didn't immediately jam on the brakes. Then we'd have to backferry across the river to the right bank without moving downstream. We almost made it. We hit an opening a paddle-length shy of our target and bumped through. Less than perfect, but no harm done.

Bill Mason relates, in his book *Path of the Paddle*, that while camping on the Petawawa River he went down to the shore to fill a pail with water. He noticed an orange backpack floating in the pool below the rapid. Paddling over to retrieve it, Mr. Mason discovered that the pack was actually a life jacket—still worn by a man who had perished in the rapid.

While Mr. Mason unsuccessfully tried to revive him, the man's partner found his way to the campsite. He explained that they had not intended to run the rapid. They had landed at the take-out bow first and the current had swept the stern away from the riverbank. The man toppled into the river and drowned in the rapid.

This begs the question: why do we do it? What makes people leap from perfectly

good airplanes to dangle by strings from giant swatches of cloth? Why do others drive the flimsiest of automobiles around racetracks at breakneck speed when they know that clipping the wall will send them cartwheeling down the track, wheels flying in all directions? Why do we shoot rapids in open canoes?

I can only answer for myself. It's fun; it's challenging and, as long as I'm wearing a PFD and a helmet, what could possibly go wrong? I've dumped in rapids often enough that I consider myself, like a youth who wantonly engages in reckless behaviour, to be invincible—at least, I hope I am.

With the upper Natch Rapids behind us we dragged our canoes out of the river and set up camp. We ate supper in a light rain, too tired to raise a tarp. After sipping a dram of the Captain beside a faltering campfire, we retired to our tents. It had been an exhilarating day and we'd earned our rest.

In the morning we shot through the bottom of the Natch and then paddled past granite cliffs that towered 100 meters above us. The sun reflected off the water, blinding

us with its glare. We bobbed in our canoes at the base of the canyon and basked in its grandeur. An osprey circled overhead. After a while we heard the Schooner Rapids calling so we reluctantly applied paddles to water and left the canyon behind.

Before long we entered the first Schooner Rapid and began an extended, hell-bent for leather joyride through Class I and II whitewater. We darted past jagged rocks and lunged through downstream Vs; we sidestepped ledges and cheated hungry boulders. We reveled in our tiny glories and shook off the sprays of success. We were as jubilant as hounds in a fox hunt. Reaching the final stretch of moving water above the transmission corridor, we slowed, collecting ourselves.

Below us, near the bottom of the rapid, a bull moose thrashed in the river. We backpaddled patiently in our canoes and enjoyed the spectacle. Colliding with a moose wouldn't be in anyone's best interest. Eventually the bull swam to the left bank. We waited until he stumbled out of the rapid and then we began our descent. Suddenly a cow moose emerged from the forest and entered the river. It was an unexpected development and I prayed that they would let us pass. At this point the moose were unaware of our approach. Then their heads came up and they saw us. The cow was directly in our path and there was no stopping the canoes. Instantly a puzzling thought struck me.

Humorist and travel writer Bill Bryson cheekily wrote that a moose was a cow drawn by a three-year-old. On closer inspection, the creatures in front of us were something altogether different. If indeed they were moose, they'd been drawn by a primate on jello shots. They clambered up the riverbank as we passed by and their white rumps gave them away. Elk! Granted, their presence was the result of a relocation program but still, we were thrilled. They were the first elk we'd ever seen in the Ontario wilderness.

We relaxed under the transmission towers at the mouth of Moosehaunt Creek, then tackled the second, shorter stretch of the Schooner Rapids. Re-energized, we crossed Coveo Lake. The final measure of our paddling prowess began at the Coveo Lake outflow. The Five Mile Rapids were, in reality, three and a half kilometers of sparkling Class IIs and we ran them with

exuberance and a newly heightened proficiency. Invigorated and restored, we made our last camp on Whitson Lake. Geoff declared this to be the most enjoyable day of the three. The rest of us raised our mugs in agreement.

\*\*\*

On the drive home from McManus Lake I reflected on my earlier misgivings about paddling the Petawawa River. Although my concerns were justified (given that I remained a clumsy graybeard), I was no longer afraid. If I were to return, I'm confident that I would slip into many of the rapids like I might an old pair of loafers. Except for the Rollway. When I recall the unrestrained fury that swept between its banks and think of the lonely cross next to the trail, I shudder. But I also know that if the sirens beckoned, I would be powerless to resist.

"Screw it," I'd have to say. "I'm going."

## HOW NOT TO RUN THE ROLLWAY RAPID: DOUBLE TAKE FROM A SINGLE CANOE

"I remember dodging rocks (boulders!) and barely glancing off one only to find another right in our path and no chance to avoid it. The canoe leaned upstream and caught on the rock and the bow started filling with water. Graham was yelling to jump clear so I did. The canoe was full and wedged between two rocks but Graham was able to keep it from going sideways. Together we managed to haul it upstream out of the current and from a rocky shore, we bailed and tipped out the water. From there we simply lined the canoe down the rapid—treacherous work climbing over boulders and wading chest deep in the river. But we enjoyed it immensely and were both shocked to find it took us an hour and a half to do."

—Dan Bell, bowman

"I watched Dan bail out and scoped the riverbank he was heading to while I disengaged from the canoe. Or it disengaged from me. I was floating—it was actually pretty deep. I turned my attention back from Dan to: "Where is the canoe?!"—only to look down and see it float downstream underneath me. I knew it wasn't jammed on rocks yet and I reached down to see if I could stop it. It was surprisingly easy to grab and pull underwater upstream. At this point Dan was grabbing debris—we ended up only losing one paddle. Anyway, it seemed safe to rescue the canoe—I got it over to the rocks. I have no idea how we breached a canoe full of water atop a boulder but we did. The helmet made a great bailer.

"I don't recall the wedging between two rocks but I think more than anything, Dan's exit from the canoe and weird river physics freed it. I don't recall hitting a rock before we sank so much as just watching water leap in the canoe from everywhere. Mind you, Dan in the bow had a front row seat to disaster.

"And yes, I agree with Dan: it was actually fun. Even capsizing has its adrenalin-infused charm. The last bit we paddled was no more than Class II. We couldn't get back in the current from where we bailed the canoe and by the time we lined to any place with a passage into the big water, well, we were just too damned spent.

"Yup, it was a very good afternoon."

—Graham Bryan



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# CREEKING

## EXPLORING MCWHORTER GULF

BY ADAM GOSHORN



*The lone open boater on the trip, Ben Trister was the only paddler to run this drop, which he named T-Rex.  
Photo by Adam Goshorn*

**T**HE FOG WAS thick as we made the final right turn onto the dead-end gravel road that would lead us to Sawmill Lake, the beginning of the hike to the put-in. Somehow the stars had aligned and the perfect rain event had come at the perfect time and we were finally going to get to explore McWhorter Gulf, a mission that had been on my wish-list for a decade. Jesse Carter, Pat Smith, Ben Trister, and I were talking excitedly about the upcoming run when suddenly another vehicle was coming towards us out of the fog, a Georgia Department of Game Management truck.

Regular readers of the AW Journal might be wondering whether this article is a continuation of my occasional series Unknown Alabama, which seeks to share newly discovered and rarely paddled creeks in Alabama. In most ways, it is. However, this creek is squarely across the Georgia state line. McWhorter Gulf and its watershed are contained entirely

within the boundaries of Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area and speaking in terms of geographic place-names, it flows southeast off of Pigeon Mountain in Walker County Georgia. However, geologically speaking, Pigeon Mountain is really just a lobe off the side of Lookout Mountain. Its geology is identical and as a whole, along with Sand Mountain to the west, both are dissected remnants of the southernmost extension of the Appalachian Plateau. Putting all those semantics aside, the important thing for paddlers is that this area, whatever name you want to call it, has the same characteristics that have created so many high quality, runnable waterways all over Lookout Mountain and Sand Mountain, Alabama.

Just a few miles south of McWhorter Gulf is the somewhat better known Allen Creek, which also flows east off of the mountain. On the opposite side of the mountain is the ultra-classic Bear Creek (a.k.a. Hairy

Bear), which descends west through Cloudland Canyon State Park into Lookout Valley. Like both of those nearby classics, the first half of McWhorter is composed primarily of bedrock slides. However, the bedrock section of McWhorter is not as steep as the comparable sections of its neighbors; instead, once the streambed changes character and becomes entirely composed of boulders, the bottom drops out! The steepest section of McWhorter drops around 150 feet in about a quarter of a mile, through a maze of boulders, with no single drop over 15 feet tall.

McWhorter Gulf had been marked on my topo map for many years and I had even scouted a possible put-in and take-out years earlier, but it wasn't until the summer of 2013 that I had a chance to see the length of the streambed. In the heat and humidity of summer Matt Jones and I set shuttle and hiked it from top to bottom, removing the strainers that we could and doing our best

to scout the dry streambed and guess what it would look like with water. The farther we hiked the more excited we got! The size of the drainage and the gradient looked promising on the map, but our summer hike proved that the majority of the creek was going to be runnable and perhaps even better than we initially thought. By the time we got to our vehicle at what would be the take-out, McWhorter Gulf had risen to the top of my wish list for the upcoming creeking season.

\*\*\*

As his truck got closer, the Georgia DNR Officer waved us down and asked the obvious question, "Do you guys have your Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass to be in the Wildlife Management Area?" We did not. We pled out-of-state ignorance and,

after a bit of tongue lashing, his demeanor softened somewhat when we explained why we were there. The more we talked about it the more he started to seem almost excited about our mission. "I'll tell you what, if you follow me back to where we can get cell service, I'll let you call and pay for a recreation pass by phone and let you off with a warning this time." He went on to explain that fines for not having the pass can be \$400 per person... \$1,600 for our group of four! Luckily we would not be getting a ticket and the \$12 recreation pass and the loss of an hour of our day would be our only penalties.

Soon we were parked near Sawmill Lake and after a short hike over the shoulder of a hill and down the other side we reached the small, no-name creek that drained the lake. After following it downstream on foot for a

while, we reached the first runnable slide sequence. There were a few more slides above this point, but the streambed was so small and hopelessly choked with wood that Matt and I hadn't bothered to try to clear any of it. In fact, on our scouting hike we both thought the small creek coming out of the lake might not be runnable at all and we might have to walk to its confluence with the next sizable tributary and put-in there, on what was really the beginning of McWhorter proper. Nevertheless, we did clear the wood out of part of the small creek, in the hopes of shortening the hike and I was glad we did. When we reached the first slides we had cleared, there was enough water to stop bushwhacking and put in.

After negotiating the extremely low volume slides and rapids of the creek that drains

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# CREEKING

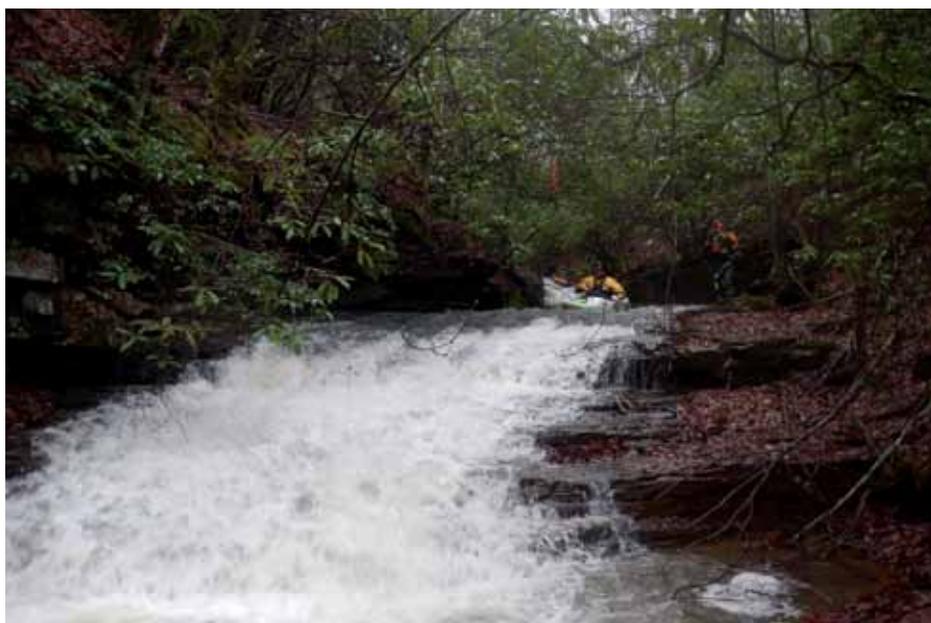
Sawmill Lake, we reached the confluence with another no-name creek entering on the left, doubling the flow and marking the true beginning of McWhorter. The extra water certainly helped navigability. The many slide sequences started to feel less like rock sledding and more like kayaking, and with rivulets of water entering frequently from each side, and the farther we progressed the more volume we gained. After a quick portage of a downed tree and an especially fun slide sequence, we eddied out on the left to scout another slide that I recognized from our scouting hike. This slide, which we would later dub Edge of the World, marked the end of the bedrock and the beginning of the steeper section of the run.



Scouting downstream we found that just below a small rapid after the final slide the river split into two channels, neither of which looked runnable at the current water level. To make the portage, we ran the slide one by one, eddying out on the left and then ferrying to another eddy on the right. Jesse went first and then caught each person's boat as we made the ferry to ensure no one accidentally washed downstream. We portaged a couple of hundred yards down to where the two channels came back together. Upon closer

*Adam Goshorn running the final slide of the bedrock section that was dubbed Edge of the World because it marked the beginning of the steep section*

**Photo by Ben Trister**



inspection, Ben decided to run a drop at the confluence that he decided to call T-Rex, because it reminded him of a rapid named Dinosaur on the West Prong in Tennessee. With the rest of us strategically placed for safety, he made a smooth run and eddied out for more scouting. We were able to pick off a few more drops in the next portion

of the run before rounding a bend into the heart of the steepest section.

Our crew all agreed that with more wood removal and a slightly higher water level, more of the next section could be run, but we ended up walking the steepest quarter-mile section. I'm sure when we return, and as others start to check out this creek, more of them will be picked off, especially at higher water. However, for our exploratory run, we were quite pleased with the moderate water level as it allowed us to stop easily, scout when needed, and avoid washing unintentionally downstream into possibly serious hazards. As the gradient eased a little, we were able to put back in and start making downstream progress, portaging occasionally for wood, but running most of the rapids, many of which were surprisingly fun for such a small streambed. Ben laced his way between logs to run a couple rapids the rest of us

*Pat Smith at the top of the second, low-volume slide on the no-name creek that drains Sawmill Lake, before reaching McWhorter proper.*

**Photo by Ben Trister**

walked and I walked a tight sequence that everyone else ran. Each of us made our own choices and downstream progress continued fairly quickly. The farther we went the more the gradient eased, and as we reached the take-out our smiles were irrepressible!

The stars really aligned for this descent to happen. We were just lucky to have the perfect rain event happen in the early morning hours of a day when we could all be there. We were able to get an early start, so there was no time crunch, and at the rate this creek drops out, had we put on several hours later, we might have run out of water. One of the unique things about McWhorter Gulf is that part way into the run it begins to lose water into an underlying cave system. The result is that despite the creek gaining tributaries throughout the run, the flow will suddenly decrease and it starts to feel low...then a few more tributaries increase the volume again, only to have it disappear again later. The cave system is probably largely responsible for the creek remaining unrun for so long. A visual inspection of the take-out is almost always going to look too low. I had been there twice before when we had looked at it, decided it was too low, and then continued on to Allen Creek instead.

I think on one of these occasions it might have been runnable; we just didn't know that upstream there would be more water.

Sometimes we explore a new run just because we want to see what is there. Sometimes we do so simply because we think no one has ever done it before us and it feels good to think that we might be the first. Most of the "first known descents" that I have been involved in have been runs that I have not returned to repeat. I was glad to do them once and to know first-hand what is contained in their hidden gorges, but they were not runs that I ever expected to be frequented by myself or others. However, I do believe we have found something worth repeating in McWhorter Gulf. It is now at the top of my list of places to go when everything else in the area is too high. A few piles of debris high on the bank in a few places tell me that McWhorter can get too high, but the rate at which the water level drops means that it is never too high for more than a couple of hours, making it runnable on days on which paddlers often get skunked by high-water everywhere else.

I have been involved in a number of runs that were probably first descents, creeks

that I honestly believe our group was the first to descend in boats. However, I always prefer to add some qualifiers, such as "possible" first descent or first "known" descent because the reality is, there is no way to know with absolute certainty. Perhaps we were actually the first or perhaps just the first to document anything about our descent; after all, there have been many generations of boaters who all had the same itch to explore. As of this writing, we have asked a lot of the usual suspects and have yet to find anyone who ran McWhorter Gulf before us or knows anything about anyone else running it earlier. However, maybe the pictures and video from our run will bring someone out of the woodwork who has knowledge of a previous run. For now, I will say that April 7, 2014 was possibly the first descent of McWhorter Gulf...and I can't wait to go back!

*Adam Goshorn is a long-time supporter of American Whitewater and a life-long paddler currently residing in Mentone, Alabama. You can keep up with his adventures online at: [www.granolapaddler.blogspot.com](http://www.granolapaddler.blogspot.com)*



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# LIGHTNING: THE GREAT DEFIBRILLATOR IN THE SKY

BY TERESA GRyder

For paddlers, deciding when a lightning storm presents threat and what to do to mitigate the risk requires good information. Photo by Andy Giordano/@summitphotog, [www.andygiordano.photoshelter.com](http://www.andygiordano.photoshelter.com)

**W**HAT DO YOU do when an intensive lightning storm comes over you while you are on the river? Are you safe in a boat? Should you climb out onto shore? If you go ashore what should you do? One thing is clear: the last thing any of us wants is to get defibrillated by lightning when our hearts are working just fine.

Each region has distinct weather patterns. In the desert southwest intense lightning comes with summer afternoon storms that dissipate at night. Lightning can develop anywhere when a strong cold front moves through. Unstable warm air that moves upward carrying moisture is the root cause. A storm cloud reaching into the upper atmosphere with an anvil-shaped cumulonimbus cloud (thunderhead) will often generate violent rain or hail and high winds. Other weather events

that can trigger lightning include heavy snowstorms, hurricanes, forest fires, and volcanic eruptions. It helps to anticipate local weather, but most people simply respond when they hear the thunder.

When I was a kid, my parents tried to protect me by teaching me to get out of the water quickly when a storm was coming. This is all I was taught about lightning safety. Much later I started seeing headlines about how many people get struck by lightning with comparisons to threats like terrorism. Residents of the US have about a one in 3000 lifetime chance of being struck by lightning, which isn't high, but people who recreate outdoors get struck the most. Fishing, camping and boating are the top three activities resulting in getting struck (golf is #12). Of course, the kind of boating referenced in this statistic includes floating in power boats and every

kind of recreational craft—whitewater paddling makes up a tiny fraction of this broad category.

The advice to get out of the water when you hear thunder in the distance applies completely when you are on the ocean or a big lake in open country. In this situation you might be the tallest thing around for a long distance, and hence a target. Water is a fine conductor, so being in the water could be bad. If you're on a wide open river you might decide to climb ashore during a lightning storm, whereas if you're deep in a gorge or canyon, you might decide to keep floating downstream. In mountainous terrain lightning generally strikes high points, like mountaintops, ridges, and tall trees. On whitewater rivers your risk of being hit is low because you are at the bottom of the topography.

# SAFETY

If you do get out, it's best not to take shelter under a big tree, even though it may offer protection from rain. Lightning often hits big trees, and the charge travels down the tree to the ground, dissipating along the roots. If you happen to be standing or sitting on a root, you're cooked. But if you are sitting in a plastic or rubber boat in the river, you are unlikely to take a direct or secondary (conducted) hit. No one really knows how big of a risk we are taking when we remain on the river in our boats during a storm. A metal or fiberglass boat, or water in the bottom of your boat, could be a reason to climb ashore.

Back when I was a raft guide, we'd float downstream during all manner of storms. I would tell my customers about the dangers of sheltering under a tree, and explain that we were at the bottom of a deep gorge

and lightning was more likely to strike the ridges than us. I experienced many violent storms this way and nobody was injured by lightning. Wind blew trees over onto rafts, but that is another story.

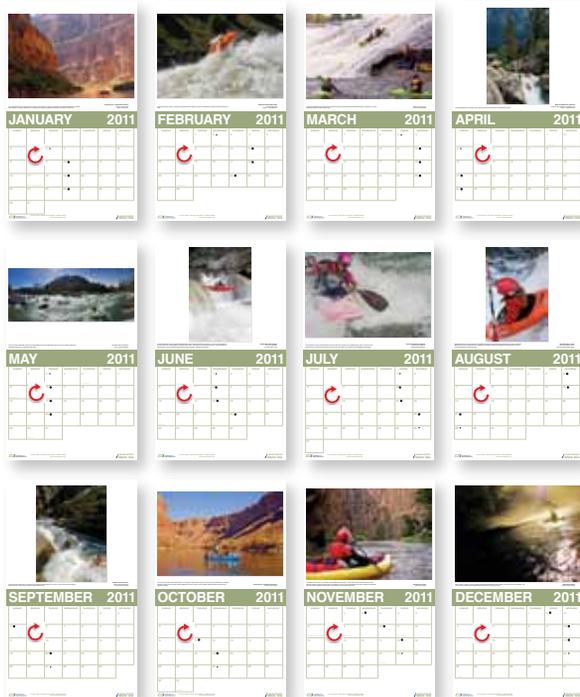
During electric storms I have felt a jolt of electricity through my paddle. It felt like when you touch a blade of grass to a live electric fence: a buzzing jolt but not painful or paralyzing. I have paddled at night with my way lit by lightning strikes. I have tested the "bottom of the valley is safer" theory thoroughly and I almost believe it. There is something extremely unnerving about close lightning no matter where you are. It is Mama Nature at her most drastic.

Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, which is so fast that you see the lightning flash at almost the same moment that it

happens. Sound travels relatively slowly. A thunderclap goes about a mile in five seconds. Over distance the sound turns to a rumble. When you see the flash, count the seconds to guesstimate how far away the strike was. When lightning strikes really close it happens so fast that you don't have time to count. If the sound takes five or 10 seconds to get to you, that's a mile or two away. You might still hear a rumble when lightning strikes as many as 10 miles away—the sound would get to you almost a minute after the flash. While calculating the distance might be reassuring, it does not tell you which way the storm is moving, or if the next strike will be closer.

Lightning that strikes within three miles (15 seconds) is an urgent warning if you are in vulnerable terrain like a mountaintop or ridgetop. You should immediately go

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down and avoid high places. Successive strikes are often two or three miles apart. It is possible to be struck when the storm is still 10 miles away. These are sometimes called “dry strikes” because there’s no rain around, and they can start forest fires.

A popular guideline for deciding when to take cover is the 30-30 rule. If the time from flash to boom is 30 seconds or less, the storm is within six miles, and you should move to safety. After the storm passes, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunderclap before heading into vulnerable terrain.

When someone is struck by lightning, injuries to the nervous system can stop the heart or breathing. Immediate CPR can often be lifesaving; don’t wait for an ambulance. Serious burns are possible but not common. Lots of other symptoms can occur, and immediate medical attention is indicated any time someone takes a bad shock.

Not every lightning strike is the same. Wikipedia says that an “average” bolt of lightning carries a current of 30,000 amperes. Large bolts can carry up to 120,000 amps of current. Only 10% of people who are struck by lightning die. Of the 90% who survive, however, many have permanent injuries.

There is no way to eliminate risk and be out in the world, but we can minimize it. If you are Catholic, you can pray to Saint Agrippina of Mineo and have a devotional feast on June 23 every year. If you don’t expect saintly protections, here are a few other options that could save your life if caught by a lightning storm. We’ve covered the theory about when to climb on shore, and when to stay in your boat and continue downstream. The following set of survival tips apply when you are on shore.

## LIGHTNING SURVIVAL TIPS

1. If you have access to a vehicle, get in it. Vehicles are the best shelters because the metal shell works like a faraday cage, conducting the charge through the metal and around you instead of through you. Driving to the Salt River take-out in an Arizona monsoon storm, I watched the sky drizzle electric sauce over the vehicle in front of me on the road. The sound was so loud that I could not hear it. The struck driver pulled over, and I pulled up next to him to check on him. He was stunned but OK. He couldn’t hear for a minute or so. If he hadn’t been in his vehicle he’d have been toast. Cars, trucks and busses are great shelter from lightning because of the metal shell. Don’t touch metal inside a vehicle during an electrical storm.
2. Avoid taking shelter under a large tree. Oaks are particularly bad because they have a high moisture content, and conduct electricity well. The tallest tree or the one with the biggest trunk and canopy may be most likely one to take a direct strike, conducting the electricity down to the ground and out along its roots. Stay at least 30 feet away from the trunk of any large tree. Avoid roots.
3. Stay away from cliff walls, and gullies where water runs with a rain. Water is a conductor and electrical charges can sheet down rock surfaces even when they look dry. Lightning prefers to travel along paths where there is moisture.
4. Beware when your hair stands on end, or you have tingling sensations. These are signs that a close strike is imminent. Lightning can strike without warning signs but if you feel this, instantly assume the lightning crouch.
5. The lightning crouch keeps your vital organs away from the ground using a squatting position with your heels

together. Crouch on the balls of your feet, stay as low as possible and cover your ears with your hands. This position encourages ground charges to move only through your feet and increases your chance of survival. Don’t lie down.

6. Insulate yourself. Get away from metal fences, guard rails, and tent poles. Get on top of something that does not conduct electricity. You could crouch on top of a life jacket, a camping pad, or a drybag to insulate yourself from the ground. Take off jewelry, especially rings and bracelets. Small pieces of jewelry can cause burns to concentrate in bad places.
7. If you go indoors during a lightning storm, stay away from wiring and plumbing. Unplug your computer then get away from the wiring. Avoid showers and dish or hand washing. Avoid telephone calls if there’s a wire to your phone. Land lines are the number one cause of indoor lightning injuries. Buildings are safest when they are equipped with a lightning rod. Metal, wood, or vinyl sheds or picnic shelters are no better than being outdoors.

*The phrase, “The Great Defibrillator in the Sky” comes from our friend Dennis Kerrigan, who taught generations of southeastern river guides CPR, emergency medicine, and applied river rescue.*

# Deerfield Festival Weekend

Charlemont, MA June 24-26, 2017



## Deerfield Fest, Saturday, June 24

Celebrate the Deerfield with American Whitewater's Annual Deerfield Fest. The festival site will be bustling with activity including a whitewater marketplace, live entertainment, beer, and a silent auction with awesome outdoor gear. All proceeds from the festival support American Whitewater's conservation and access work throughout the Northeast.

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[www.americanwhitewater.org/deerfieldfest](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/deerfieldfest)

## WHITewater ACCIDENT SUMMARY: JULY-DECEMBER 2016

BY CHARLIE WALBRIDGE

**I**N 2016 THE trend towards fewer whitewater fatalities continued. There were five kayak, one canoe, and seven rafting fatalities from July to December. The annual total, 31, is the second lowest in over a decade. Many of the accidents had familiar causes, including six flush drownings, two strainer pins, and two missing PFDs. The victims were over 40 in nine of the 13 deaths, reflecting the overall “graying” of outdoor enthusiasts, generally. We received several well written reports from paddlers which were extremely valuable. You can read them in full in the American Whitewater Accident Database, found on the AW web site under “Safety.”

### Kayak Accidents

Recent kayaking accidents involved several experienced paddlers; the first two illustrating the need for multiple backup boaters who can assist a swimmer. Tennessee’s Pigeon River is one of the region’s most popular roadside intermediate runs. It’s not to be taken lightly, however! On July 23rd Richard “Ghost” Arceneaux, 43, died after a long swim just below the put-in. He seemed to be doing well at first, so his partner elected to chase down his kayak. Then the trouble started. Mr. Arseneaux was picked up by another group of paddlers in desperate shape. They reported that he’d swum 3/4 of a mile and was turning blue. On shore, his condition deteriorated rapidly. When his irregular breathing stopped, rescuers began CPR and called for help. When the ambulance arrived, guides, paddlers, and EMS personnel worked together to get him up the steep bank. Despite everyone’s best efforts, he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

A second accident occurred in Colorado’s Gore Canyon on August 11th. Jamie Page, 25, worked as a safety boater and video kayaker in Royal Gorge. This was his first run down Gore Canyon, which contains many hard Class V drops. According to an

email from Nathan Miller, the pair scouted Gore Rapid, and Mr. Page ran the main line. He missed the crux move and was caught and beaten down in powerful Ginger Hole. After a hard struggle he bailed out. His partner, who was paddling a small raft by himself (R-1), was waiting at the bottom. He tossed a rope, but Mr. Paige didn’t catch it. Below was long stretch of continuous Class IV and V rapids. Mr. Page was conscious and in a defensive swimming position when he flushed downstream and out of sight. His partner climbed up the steep bank to the train tracks and ran downstream with a rope, but never saw him again. Even though Mr. Page was in excellent physical condition and quite skilled, he did not swim to safety. A fisherman found his body floating in the river miles downstream and pulled him out.

On October 27th seven expert kayakers were on a self-supported Class IV-V kayak trip down the remote Umngi River in northeast India. The rapids were complex, winding between giant boulders in a deep jungle canyon. Sieves were everywhere, but very little wood was present, thanks to annual monsoon mega-floods. According to a report written by Erik Johnson, a member of the team, they came to a series of five to six-foot ledges early on the third day. Two paddlers ran the center line successfully. Will Hartman, 33, an experienced expedition paddler, ran third. After he landed the first ledge he was pushed into the far right slot on the second. There was a large old growth log hidden at the bottom, just below the water level.

His group saw him enter the slot but didn’t see him exit. They reacted fast, landing on river right and arriving on the scene in seconds. Mr. Hartman’s body and boat were almost completely submerged; the log was directly over his cockpit, trapping him. A dry bag between his legs complicated matters. The group threw ropes; Mr. Hartman grabbed one, but couldn’t hold on. Others grabbed his

PFD and his wrist, but could not pull him free. A live bait rescuer tried to clip into his life jacket, but soon Mr. Hartman’s PFD and helmet were pulled off by the rushing water. A second live bait rescuer clipped into the stern of the kayak, but even with a full Z-drag setup they couldn’t pull the boat free. Finally they used a rope slung around Mr. Hartman’s body to extract him from the kayak. He was unconscious; the group began CPR, but it was too late. They called for help with a spot transmitter and the next day local villagers helped them evacuate the canyon.

Eric Johnson noted that two paddlers ran the same slot Mr. Hartman did on the first decent. It’s likely that variations in boat design or water levels made the log less dangerous then. The situation was desperate, and the group’s response would be hard to improve on. They had the right gear and skills and responded quickly, taking substantial risks to effect a rescue.

Three other kayak fatalities involved inexperienced paddlers on mild rivers. One was on the Arkansas River in Wichita, Kansas. On July 9th, a group of five kayakers ran a low-head dam underneath the 21st Street Bridge. None of the paddlers were wearing life vests. When one of the group members got into trouble, Brian Bergcamp, 25, attempted to help her. His kayak flipped, and he was pulled into the backwash. His body was recovered several days later.

On July 31st Richard Girard, 59, drowned after washing through China Rapids, a Class II drop on California’s lower Sacramento River. Mr. Girard, who was wearing a life vest, was unconscious when pulled ashore by family members. It’s not clear why he died after a mild swim through an easy rapid. Then, on August 19th, Natural Resources Police found an unidentified kayaker on the Potomac River near Williamsport, MD. The man was paddling alone, the search started after the family reported him missing. Not

much else is known about this accident, which occurred on an section with much flat water and a few Class I rapids.

## Canoe Accidents

There was only one whitewater canoeing accident in the second half of this year. The Grant County Sheriff's Office reported that Edward J. Williams was leading a Boy Scout troop down the Winchester Wasteway, a mostly flat waterway near Ephrata, WA. At a low dam there was a discussion on how to deal with it and Mr. Williams, 74, elected to run. He flipped in the drop and washed free, but the canoe was caught in the hydraulic. When Williams tried to retrieve it, he lost his life jacket and was pulled under water. The Boy Scouts pulled him ashore and began CPR, but they were not successful.

## Rafting Accidents

Accidents occur on one-boat trips because there is no safety backup after a flip. Lorne Speakerworth, 47, drowned after his raft flipped on Montana's Yellowstone River on July 17th. He was not wearing a life vest when he disappeared underwater. Fast moving, cold water proved fatal to Joseph Cantler, 14, on Alaska's Eagle River. A raft carrying him and his older brother flipped on August 7th. His brother said that Mr. Cantler seemed OK right after the flip, but he never made it to shore. In both cases the victims' bodies were found some distance downstream.

Elementary School Principal Mike Olson, 46, was rafting Middle Fork of the Salmon on July 19 when his raft struck a rock in Cutthroat Cove Rapid, a mile below the Big Creek confluence. According to the Challis, Idaho *Messenger* Olson, along with several others, was thrown into the water as the raft spun around and pinned against a boulder. His ankle got caught in a loose rope and the current held him underwater. No one was carrying a knife, and eventually the current tore Mr. Olson's life vest off. Minutes later he worked free of the entanglement and washed downstream. His body wasn't spotted until four days later.

Two commercial rafting deaths that were reported in Alpine Canyon of the Snake River in Wyoming were probably caused by pre-existing health problems. River Ranger Dave Cernek reported that on July 22nd Bourke Tarbet, 45, was thrown into the water on this Class III run. He was conscious when pulled aboard another raft after a short swim, but then he slowly slipped away. Vigorous CPR followed by a defibrillator couldn't save him. On August 18th Pamela Solomon was rafting with a quasi-commercial Mormon Church group when her raft flipped and she inhaled a lot of water. Although Ms. Solomon, 54, was picked up quickly, she was unconscious and could not be revived. Her son said she was suffering from sarcoidosis, a rare lung disease, and that this was probably behind her death.

There was a report that a man drowned trying to retrieve a raft on the Narrows section of Colorado's Poudre River. Sketchy postings to Mountainbuzz suggest that the boat washed into this Class V section from upstream. Someone drove down to get it and washed away during a recovery attempt. Anyone with further information about this incident is urged to contact the Safety Committee.

The Numbers section of Colorado's Arkansas River was the scene of a double drowning on July 5th. Ranger Stu Pappenfort at the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area said that the accident occurred on a two-boat guided raft trip. Water levels were moderate. The first raft dumped after hitting a rock, throwing everyone into the water. The second raft moved in to grab Bea Kovich, 52, and flipped, putting Lynn Marks, 52, into the river. Both women were recovered after a 1000-yard swim by another rafting company and non-paddlers on shore. Sadly, they were both unconscious and could not be revived.

The last commercial fatality occurred on Oregon's Wild and Scenic Rogue River on July 17th. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Mark Templeton, a prominent Silicon Valley venture capitalist, was paddling an inflatable kayak when

he flipped in Class III Wildcat Rapids. Mr. Templeton, 57, never resurfaced. Search parties found him pinned underwater against a rock later that day, but it took several days to recover his body.

## Near Misses

There were a number of well-executed rescues that kept this year's death toll down; several were the subject of excellent reports filed with American Whitewater. On June 26th a kayaker in her 30s was injured after she bailed out above a dam sluice on New Hampshire's Winnepesaukee River. According to the Manchester, NH *Union Leader* a local firefighter trained in swiftwater rescue was kayaking nearby and spotted the woman clinging to a tree branch along the shore. Thankfully she was wearing a life vest and helmet! As he moved in to help she lost her grip and washed through the dam sluice. He followed, flipped, and both of them were beaten up. He was able to bail out and help her reach shore.

July 31st saw local firefighters rescue a stranded tuber on Pennsylvania's Lehigh River near Glen Onoko. She was clinging to a log without a life vest in a Class II rapid and was scared to let go. After Jim Thorpe firefighters couldn't reach her with ropes, a rescue boat brought in from Lehighton picked her up.

Jones Falls is an inner city whitewater run through Baltimore, Maryland. One of its drops, "Round Falls," is actually a horseshoe-shaped dam. Although run frequently, the hole causes occasional problems. A report from the paddlers who were there on October 16th said that the first paddler had no problem with the drop, but Seth Burkholder running second, landed sideways. He flipped and was caught in the hydraulic. His group reacted immediately. Ropes were thrown, but he was unable to grab hold. Finally, a rope wrapped around Mr. Burkholder's leg. He was unconscious and not breathing when they pulled him from the water. CPR began immediately, and emergency responders arrived and continued to care for him. He arrived at the hospital in critical condition,

# SAFETY

unconscious but breathing on his own. He recovered quickly, and was speaking and walking a few days later.

On that same day there was complex and lengthy rescue at Knife Edge Rapid on New York's Bottom Moose River. A report prepared by the group involved stated that six paddlers were waiting downstream and a seventh boater was on shore with a throw bag when the Mariah Mahaney made her run. She missed her line and pinned on a large midstream rock. Her boat was completely under water, facing upstream with one end submerged under the rock. Fortunately she could push against the rock and keep her head above water.

Members of the group got on that rock very quickly, holding Ms. Mahaney's head above water and working to get her free. Her spray skirt was caught between the rock and the kayak and that had to be dealt with. Shortly thereafter Ms. Mahaney said that she was losing feeling in her lower extremities because of pressure from the pin. A paddler was sent downstream to get help. He notified authorities, sent a group of paddlers upstream to assist, then waited on the nearest access road to direct first responders to the site.

Thirty minutes later, NY State Forest ranger Luke Evans arrived. Long rescues that bring diverse groups together are notoriously volatile. Emotions run high; shouting matches and scuffles have occurred, and paddlers involved in rescues have been ordered off the river or even arrested by first responders. Ranger Evans, an experienced kayaker with swiftwater rescue training, brought new ideas to the situation and did an exceptional job managing a large crew of kayakers and first responders. The paddlers had an organized rescue in progress and Ranger Evans respected that. They did most of the in-water work while the first responders provided outstanding backup, first aid, and evacuation support. Internationally known paddler Pat Keller, who arrived on the scene towards the end, said "Job well done to all involved. Great cohesiveness

between river crew, paramedics, and police was a key component in this one working out."

A rope loop was set around Ms. Mahaney's torso underneath her armpits. After trying to pull her out from upstream, teams of rescuers set up two separate throw ropes from downstream. One was looped around the boater's torso; the other was connected to her grab loop. After a few adjustments, they pulled together as a team. Ms. Mahaney was released on the second hard pull; she floated downstream and was retrieved by a pre-set live-bait rescuer. She'd been in the water about an hour and was responsive, but injured; Paramedics were waiting. They carried her to a waiting ambulance and took her to a hospital where she was treated for hypothermia and crush injuries. She was released four days later.

An alert group of kayakers prevented a tragedy at Rockport Ledge on Arkansas' Ouachita River on October 19th. A large woman who was not wearing a life jacket rode an inner tube into a nasty hydraulic in the middle of the river. This feature, known as the "Suck Hole" to knowledgeable locals, has an evil reputation. She was caught and recirculated 10+ times. A nearby group of kayakers (who later filed this report) saw what happened, recognized the danger, and ferried over. A kayaker and an open-boater attempted to surf across the hydraulic and pick her up, but they couldn't make contact. Finally, after the tuber lost consciousness, the OC1 paddler timed the recirculations perfectly and pushed her free of the backwash. Other paddlers rallied and managed to get her ashore, giving rescue breaths along the way. Since she had no pulse, they began CPR and that quickly brought her back. She was then turned over to first responders.

Woodall Shoals was the scene of a vertical pinning on Section IV of South Carolina's Chatooga River. For a description of what happened, let's turn to a first-person account from the trapped paddler, Clay Nash:

"I caught the tiny micro eddy on river left right above Woodall hole. As I peeled out my boat caught a rock, killed speed and I slurped out backwards/sideways left of the hole. I felt the boat pin . . . . My head was just under the surface and I could push on my paddle and watch the water surge and catch a breath in the foam for 3-4 breaths. As the boat settled again I guess my head was about 6" below the surface. I remember feeling for the grab loop and finding rock so I made the decision to push my hand to the surface to give a point of contact. I remember keeping it in the cold air until someone grabbed it. About that time I blacked out and don't remember anything until people were asking me questions."

The pin occurred close to the shore on river left. There was good access and footing. Two paddlers got out quickly; one held a throw rope while the second one, holding the rope with one hand, entered the water. He worked his way out over to Mr. Nash, grabbed him, and pulled him to safety. You can watch the rescue on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqCQHLenrM> (or search YouTube for "Incident on the Chatooga").

American Whitewater needs *your* help collecting accident information so we can share these accounts and learn from them. Serious incidents involving skilled whitewater paddlers are quite rare, but they can teach the rest of us how to avoid trouble and manage emergencies. Over the past decades we have modified techniques, procedures, and river gear based on these shared experiences. To report a whitewater accident, near miss, or serious injury, please go to the "Safety" page on the American Whitewater site, click "report an accident", and enter your information. You can also pass on links to newspaper articles, chat room posts, and even rumors to the Safety Editor at [ccwalbridge@cs.com](mailto:ccwalbridge@cs.com) or message "Charlie Walbridge" on Facebook. I'm not an "investigator," but I can often run down leads and find out what happened. I'll also help someone prepare a first person report if needed.

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# SPOTLIGHT

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

**K**OKATAT HAS BEEN manufacturing paddling gear in Arcata, California for more than 45 years. At a time when many technical apparel brands were moving manufacturing offshore, Kokatat continued to invest in infrastructure in the United States. Kokatat founder Steve O'Meara was committed to the development of the finest and driest paddling apparel in the world and recognized the need to control and continually evolve the development of our dry wear. In the early days, Kokatat worked closely with W.L. Gore & Associates, makers of GORE-TEX®, to refine the sewing and sealing techniques required for full immersion suits and tops. Today, our hands-on approach to manufacturing continues to set the standard in paddling apparel. Into the water with Kokatat! Please visit [www.kokatat.com](http://www.kokatat.com) and follow Kokatat on Facebook, Twitter (@kokatat) and Instagram (@kokatatusa).



# Join



# AMERICAN WHITEWATER Today!

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

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

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

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

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

Membership  
P.O. Box 1540  
Cullowhee, NC 28723

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# WHITEWATER POETRY

## HOW DID I GET HERE?

BY MICHAEL MEYERS

How did I get here?  
Answered a phone call,  
an unexpected journey  
through a river's soul.

Hopefully prepared,  
we put on, seeking...something,  
adventure, answers,  
challenges, peace.

The canyon closes.  
Sun stays high, we stay shadowed,  
nights clear and cold.

River's pulse runs deep,  
ancient power even now  
new. Feel it inside.

Eddies grasp, boils bounce,  
progress ever elusive.  
Stay in the current.

Look around, and up.  
The walls glow pink, then orange,  
high snow racing stripes.

Grandeur overwhelms  
our boats, so tiny beneath  
cliffs filled with frozen

shores, bright seas now dry.  
Oscillating pulses washed  
clear sand, now blood red,

delivered by streams.  
Hear the river now, and then.  
Is it the same song?

Within the canyon,  
there is no name for the more  
that's always present.

Perhaps an echo  
reverberating through gaps,  
momentary sun,

do the rapids call?  
Can we feel the earth's own pain  
recorded in stone?

Unrelenting force  
shattered strong islands, aligned  
blades of stronger schist.

Long will the river  
polish her fluted back jets,  
tempered through hell's fire.

So what attracts us,  
primal poetry, wet dance,  
elemental joy?

We pause to explore  
some deep, unhealed wounds, slices,  
dark and narrow, cold,

in the moonlight, blue.  
Dawn, Zoroaster rose quartz  
twists through Vishnu Schist,

so quiet, wet, close.  
Listen. Walk softly along  
a slippery ledge,

dusky ebony  
above Suessian stream chasms.  
Welcome to the slot.

Climb out up old steps  
to sunshine, sage and sandstone.  
Breathe. The river roars

behind you. Big waves  
chuckle "Tomorrow, swimmer."  
Quiet laugh, let's go.

Where's the trail? Up. Sun  
feels good. Peel, stretch and amble.  
Look at where you are.

Wheel around. It's the  
Grand Canyon, baby! Yeee-hahhh!!!!  
Vibrant emptiness,

silence filled with light.  
Listen. Breathe. Smile. Climb, alone  
in a full throne room,

over warm boulders.  
Sentinel raven perches,  
watches you stumble.

Days develop rhythms,  
moments of flurried focus,  
easy silences,

a knowing smile, peace.  
Conversations drift across  
the boats like a breeze.

Stillness in motion,  
could be centuries ago.  
The waves look the same.

Now read the currents,  
find the tongue, keep the boat straight  
watch for pourovers

Hang on Bull Rider  
Yes Sir! Nailed it! F---in'A!  
Here comes the duckie,

popping like a pro  
behind the badass kayak,  
six rafts, all in line.

Superglue, onesies,  
cactus shadow dance, beer pong,  
moonlight cherry s'mores,

everybody brings something to the table,  
experience, firewood, stony fables.

Where's the trail? Scramble  
up a sheer wall from the boats,  
drop into a pool.

Drysuit balloons. Float  
across an aquamarine  
wet jewel. Slick flumes

await. Slither up.  
Follow a faint pastel trail,  
pink limestone aglow.

Forever blue sky,  
happy stream sings pool drop song,  
dances, swirls, tumbles

in turquoise glory  
over rocks, covered in clouds  
of reflected light.

Stroll through cool glades, long  
green grass. Canyon Wren's sweet song  
invites us to stay.

How perfect it seems.  
Do we really have to go?  
Yes. Where is the trail?

Back out in the sun,  
dusty prints on hot bare rock  
pass through cactus stands

and thorny thickets  
chilly in the shady breeze.  
Happy pool drop song

filters through the air.  
Catch otherworldly glimpses  
of silky currents,

travertine mosses,  
life frozen in liquid stone,  
smoothed over, aglow.

Now cross through the stream's  
strong flow, slippery steps unsure  
of this final stage

and behold the falls,  
aquamarine majesty.  
Slide off the hard ledge,

sink down and float up.  
Electricity tingles,  
clean, cold, oh baby...

Follow the faint trail.  
Head through pastel fantasies,  
seen through sacred eyes.

In a darkened tent,  
the river sings within me.  
Gentle rollers soothe.

Eddies, waves, boil lines,  
energy most visible,  
dance across closed eyes.

Tomorrow's rapid,  
Hance, or maybe it's Granite,  
whispers "I'm still here."

Dreams, or memories,  
replay, until nature calls.  
Outside the tent, stars,

constellations lost  
among too many to tell,  
alight ghostly walls.

The river still sings.  
Glimpses of tomorrow's drop  
beckon "Bring it on."

Rhythms rock in sweet  
reverie. Heaven faintly  
glistens. What will be?

Stir before the sun.  
Last night's laughter bubbles up  
and awakens breath.

Stretch and dab lotion.  
Above, cliffs collect soft light  
before the stars fade.

Big water today.  
We all know, but no one says  
"What happens if...?"

Rigged to flip, we scout.  
Even from this cliff, those holes  
still look freaking huge.

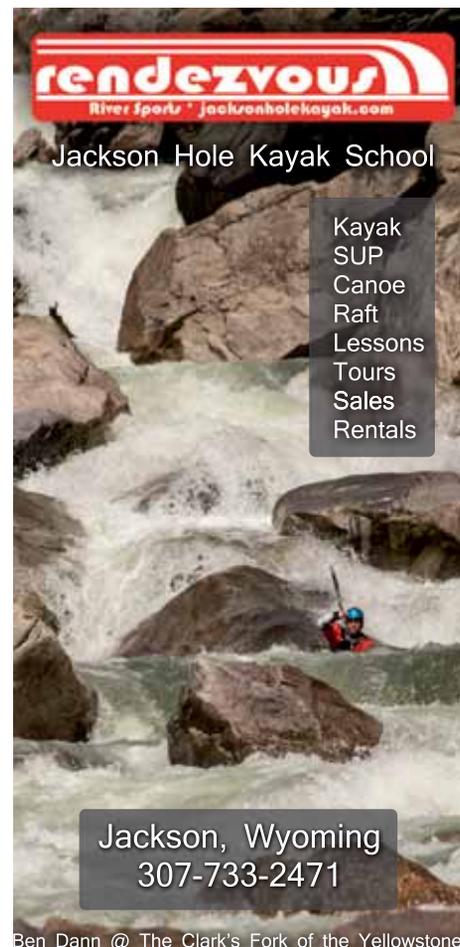
Got your line, Boat Man?  
Let's go. Here comes the sun, sure  
sign, a piece of cake.

Push off, kiss the ledge,  
currents grab us. Five monster  
waves await. Here's one.

Punch the water wall  
spin left deep trough uh-oh Splash!  
Brown nasal douche blue

sky hang on highside  
then cough out Colorado.  
This is why I came,

to feel pure power,  
to learn Her true name.



# AFFILIATE CLUBS

## AW'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE

BY CARLA MINER

American Whitewater is introducing a new Affiliate Club contributor level "Supporting Affiliate Club". Beginning in 2017 Affiliate Clubs can now join or renew their membership at the annual giving level of \$100 or at the newly created Supporting Affiliate Club level for an annual contribution of \$400.

Affiliate Clubs that choose AW's \$100 annual level will be recognized in the AW Journal, on our website club page, and in our annually published Honor Roll. In order to be recognized at this level, a Club needs to maintain their annual \$100 contribution.

Affiliate Clubs that choose AW's \$400 "Supporting Affiliate Club" annual level will be recognized in the AW Journal, on our website club page, and in our annually published Honor Roll as well as being listed as sponsors of two AW stewardship presentations each year. A "Supporting Affiliate Club" can revert to the \$100 Affiliate Club level at any time.

An Affiliate Club that is already being recognized as an AW Lifetime member will continue to be recognized in the annual Honor Roll as a Lifetime member. They will, however, need to contribute either at the \$100 or the \$400 level annually in order to be recognized as an Affiliate Club in the AW Journal and under the Affiliate Club heading of the published Honor Roll.

We are excited about this newly created Supporting Affiliate Club as a way of recognizing those Club's that contribute at a higher level both through their monetary support as well as their considerable volunteer efforts in behalf of AW and our nation's whitewater rivers.

## Supporting Affiliate Clubs

### Kentucky

Bluegrass Wildwater Asso, Lexington

### Ohio

Keelhaulers, Cleveland

## Affiliate Club by State

### Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks  
Nova River Runners Inc., Chickaloon

### Alabama

Coosa River Paddling Club, Wetumpka  
Huntsville Canoe Club, Huntsville

### Arizona

Outdoors Unlimited, Flagstaff  
Southern Arizona Paddlers Club, Tucson  
Thunderbird Outdoor Restoration Organization, Glendale

### Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

### California

Chico Paddleheads, Chico  
Gold Country Paddlers, Lotus  
Shasta Paddlers, Redding  
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Paddlers, San Jose

### Colorado

Blue River Watershed Group  
Friends of the Yampa, Steamboat Springs  
High Country River Rafters, Wheatridge  
San Miguel Whitewater Asso, Telluride  
Team Colorado Whitewater Racing Club, Longmont  
Upper Colorado Private Boaters Asso, Glenwood Springs

### Delaware

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks  
Wilmington Trail Club, Newark

### Georgia

Atlanta Whitewater Club  
Georgia Canoeing Asso, Atlanta

### Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Association, Boise

### Illinois

Chicago Whitewater Assn, Chicago

### Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Brownsburg  
Ohio Valley Paddlers, Evansville

### Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, W. Des Moines

### Kentucky

Elkhorn Paddlers, Lexington  
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville

### Maryland

Baltimore Canoe & Kayak Club, Baltimore  
Blue Ridge Voyageurs, Silver Spring  
Mason Dixon Canoe Cruisers, Hagerstown  
Monocacy Canoe Club, Frederick

### Massachusetts

AMC Boston Chapter, Boston  
Zoar Outdoor, Charlemont

### Minnesota

Rapids Riders, Eagan

### Missouri

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

### Montana

Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

### Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

### New Hampshire

AMC New Hampshire Paddlers, Raymond  
Ledyard Canoe Club, Hanover  
Merrimack Valley Paddlers, Merrimack

### New Jersey

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oaks  
KCCNY, Flanders

### New York

ADK Schenectady, Schenectady  
FLOW Paddlers' Club, Rochester  
Housatonic Area Canoe & Kayak Sq., Ossining  
KCCNY, Flanders  
Zoar Valley Paddling Club, Buffalo

### North Carolina

Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh  
Landmark Learning, Cullowhee

### Ohio

Columbus Outdoor Pursuits, Columbus  
Friends of the Crooked River, Akron  
Outdoor Adventure Club, Dayton

### Oregon

Eugene Kayaker, Eugene  
Lower Columbia Canoe Club, Portland  
Next Adventure, Portland  
Northwest Rafters Association, Roseburg  
Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club, Portland  
Oregon Whitewater Association, Portland  
Willamette Kayak & Canoe Club, Corvallis

### Pennsylvania

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Oak  
Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown  
Bradford County Canoe and Kayak Club, Sayre  
Canoe Club of Centre County, Lemont  
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Harrisburg  
Conewago Canoe Club, York  
Holtwood Hooligans, Paradise  
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley

Mach One Slalom Team, State College  
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Pittsburgh  
Wilderness Voyageurs Outfitters, Ohio

#### **S. Carolina**

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville  
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

#### **Tennessee**

Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts, Limestone  
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville  
Clean Water Expected in East TN, Sevierville  
East Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge  
Eastman Recreation Club, Kingsport  
Ocoee River Council, Knoxville  
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga

#### **Texas**

Houston Canoe Club, Houston

#### **Utah**

High Jim and the A.S.K., Salt Lake City

#### **Vermont**

Vermont Paddlers Club, Montpelier

#### **Virginia**

Canoe Cruisers Association, Herndon  
Coastal Canoeists Inc, Richmond  
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Roanoke

#### **Washington**

BEWET- Boeing Employees Whitewater &  
Touring Club, Bellevue  
EPIC Adventures, Cheney  
Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle  
The Mountaineers, Seattle  
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle  
Washington Recreational River Runners, Renton

#### **West Virginia**

Dbl Z! Whitewater Club, Fayetteville  
Redneck Kayak Club, Beckley  
WV Wildwater Assn, S. Charleston

#### **Wisconsin**

North East Wisconsin Paddlers, Inc., Neenah  
Sierra Club/John Muir Chapter, Madison

#### **Wyoming**

American Packrafting Association, Wilson

#### **Ontario**

Guelph Kayak Club, Elora  
Kawartha Whitewater Paddlers, The Kawarthas

#### **Quebec**

Montreal Kayak Club, Montreal

## **DISCOUNTED AW MEMBERSHIP FOR AFFILIATE CLUB MEMBERS**

*By Carla Miner, Membership Manager*

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

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

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

## **JOIN AMERICAN WHITEWATER AS A CLUB AFFILIATE!**

### **10 REASONS TO JOIN AW AS AN AFFILIATE CLUB**

1. Support river access and restoration through the AW River Stewardship Team.
2. Be part of a national voice for the protection of the whitewater rivers your club values.
3. Tap into the professional expertise of AW staff for river issues that come up in your backyard.
4. Your club's members can become AW members for \$25. A \$10 savings!
5. Receive the American Whitewater Journal, the oldest continually published whitewater magazine.
6. Your club is recognized in the list of Affiliate Clubs posted to the AW website.
7. Recognize your club in the list of Affiliate Clubs noted in each bi-monthly AW Journal.
8. Post Club information on the AW Website to help paddlers find you.
9. Gain Club satisfaction from lending support to AW's stewardship efforts.
10. Improve your club members river karma.

For more information, contact Carla Miner at [membership@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:membership@americanwhitewater.org) or sign-up on line at [www.americanwhitewater.org/membership](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/membership).

# **AW** AMERICAN WHITewater

## Contribute your text and photos to *American Whitewater*

*American Whitewater* is a member-driven publication. If you enjoy reading it, please consider letting its pages tell your story. We are looking for articles about whitewater rivers of any variety, so let your imagination flow free!

We're always accepting submissions and we hope you'll consider contributing. For complete submission details, story topics, deadlines, and guidelines, go to:

**[americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org) > Library > AW Journal**





# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

Saving Rivers Since 1954

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