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# AMERICAN WHITEWATER

JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN WHITEWATER AFFILIATION

~~April-June~~ July-August 1987 ~~July/Aug/Sept~~  
Volume XXXII, No. 23

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# editor's forum

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A common theme emerges in several articles appearing in this issue of **American Whitewater**:

Whitewater boating is **not** so much a sport or hobby as it is a lifestyle.

Take the example of AWA Director Pope Barrow, named as Perception Kayak's "1987 Iver Conservationist of the Year." Barrow spends an average of 10 to 20 hours a week working to preserve our whitewater resources just so that he has a place to paddle for four hours on a Saturday afternoon.

Or the situation of Appalachian custom wood paddle makers who sell their handcrafted sticks at a price that doesn't really represent the amount of work required to build them.

Why do the paddle makers persist? Because they prefer to combine their vocation with their avocation.

There are dozens of other examples of whitewater junkies not content with only a weekend fix: raft guides who choose a vagabond existence in order to play on the river seven days a week, whitewater specialty store owners, boat builders and designers, members of paddling and conservation organizations, even editors of whitewater publications.

Name me another part-time activity that encourages such full-time involvement.

I mean, golfers have a reputation as being a particularly dedicated lot...but do you know many executives who have left their businesses to pursue jobs as greenskeepers or caddies, just to stay close to the links? How many scientists who double as duffers donate their research to controlling the cinch-bug, just to improve the quality of the nation's fairways?

A boater once told me: There's two times in my life...when I'm on the river, and when I'm waiting to get on the river." All those extra-curricular activities we do during the week make the waiting go faster.



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# LETTERS TO AWA

Dear Chris,

As a co-founder (with Bob McNair) of the American Whitewater Affiliation, I have a nostalgic attachment to the old format, but it's not God. If 8 1/2x11 draws ads and readers, go for it.

Charlie Walbridge's article was outstanding, a single topic carefully analyzed. Keep up the emphasis on safety and conservation. Perhaps there should be more articles on boat design, technique, etc.

Best of luck.

Sincerely,  
Eliot DuBois  
Monrovia, CA

Dear Chris,

In the most recent issue of American Whitewater there was a brief article referring to my accident during our expedition on Mexico's Rio Mezquital. Because of the great deal of confusion about the facts surrounding the expedition and the accident, news reports at the beginning of January tended to get things a little mixed up. And unfortunately, some of the confusion reappears in the AW article.

As with any endeavor such as this, there are a number of stories that need to be told, and toward that end I am currently working on a book describing everything that went on. But I wanted to clarify a couple of points which might otherwise reflect badly on the expert boaters who participated in this first descent attempt of a very remote and difficult river.

On December 31, 1986, on the second day of what was planned as an eight-day self-support trip, I was pinned in my kayak in a rapid upside down underwater. In the course of trying to get out of the boat, I hyper-extended both of my legs, bending both legs upwards at the knees. The force of the water pulled my upper body in such a way that it

acted as a lever, further crushing arteries and blood vessels supplying blood to my lower legs. One of the members of the trip (Victor Jones) rescued me by prying the boat off the rock obstructions; at that point I fell out of the boat unconscious, but Victor quickly retrieved my body, resuscitating me after a few minutes.

It was then decided that members of the expedition would go for help. However, because of the remote character of the canyon through which the river runs, it took two days for my friends on the trip to climb out to call for helicopter assistance. During those two days on the side of the river the pain in my lower legs was replaced with a numbed feeling. As blood failed to supply nutrients to my lower legs, the tissue died. By the time a helicopter did arrive at midday on January 2, I had very little feeling in my left lower leg and none in my right. I was transported to a clinic, then to a hospital in Durango where an emergency attempt was made to save the lower right leg by means of taking an artery from my upper left thigh and substituting it for the damaged one in my right knee. Less than a day after that surgery, I was transported to Houston's Hermann Hospital on January 4 where, after a number of surgical attempts to save parts of my lower legs, both were amputated above the knee on January 15, 1987.

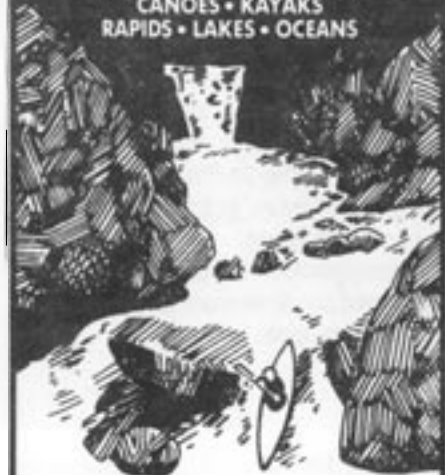
It would be a disservice to my companions to imply, as the AW article does, that they caused the damage to my legs in extracting me from my boat. They knew exactly what to do in the situation; I owe my life to their efforts.

Steve Daniel

(AW's report of Steve's accident was taken directly from a newspaper account of the situation. We regret repeating any inaccuracies reported in the newspaper and wish Steve the best in his recovery..)

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## Letters cont.

Dear Mr. Koll,

Surprise! You are correct. I was taken aback when I pulled American Whitewater from my mailbox. The new format and size are, in my opinion, preferable to the old. You and your staff have put together a very good first issue.

One suggestion--if possible give location and credit to front and back cover photographs.

Sincerely,  
Tom Berg  
Oak Ridge, TN

Chris,

I've been kind of uneasy about the **AWA's** position on running whitewater. The feeling seemed to be, "if it ain't Class V, it ain't worth the effort." The only runs worth attempting are the ones that put your heart in your mouth.

There was never any mention of the first rule for whitewater paddlers: i.e. **Never** take a boat into a rapid or drop you are not willing to swim.

That voice from the wilderness, Dr. Jim Phelps, in pointing out the mindless acceptance of Class V as a paddling community norm needs at least one other person to agree with him.

I'll say it a little differently. If you are paddling to scare yourself, stay off the rivers and go play in the freeway. Rescue is much simplified, and it will help ease congestion on our rivers. The roads are already beyond help.

Walt Hodge  
Dillsboro, Indiana

(To my knowledge, the AWA has no official position on running whitewater except that it should be done as safely as possible, observing the guidelines of the AWA Safety Code. Speaking only for myself, I believe your "first rule" is obsolete. I wouldn't willingly swim a substantial

number of drops on the Gauley, Upper Yough, Top Yough, Big Sandy or Blackwater...does that mean these top-notch West Virginia streams should go unboated?)

Dear Mr. Koll

I'm writing this letter to offer my praise for your magazine's new format and style. It is very attractive. My suggestion, and I'm sure that it is shared by all library workers across the country, is that you make sure to print the magazine's date and its publication number somewhere on the cover or inside the first few pages. I'm assuming the issue we received is **Jan/Feb 1987**, Volume 32, Number 1. Without this information, we will not know if we are receiving all the issues and patrons who use the magazine will have a difficult time keeping track and re-

ferring to old issues.

Good luck at the new job.

Sincerely,  
Brian K. Harpster, Library Clerk  
Rancho Santiago College  
Santa Ana, CA

(Bad news, Brian. Because the publication date of the journal has steadily become more and more delayed (the 1986 **Nov/Dec** issue didn't actually appear until May of **1987**), I arbitrarily declared our initial edition as the 1987 **May/June** issue. I know that reconciles the first two issues of 1987 to some journalistic black hole, but I thought it crucial to catch up our publication schedule with the dates actually appearing on the magazine. The dates and the magazine will jive from now on...I promise.)

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## AWA HOSTS GAULEY FESTIVAL

Welcome to the pages of the Gauley River Festival edition of American Whitewater.

In addition to our normal circulation, we've printed an extra 1,000 copies of the **September/October** issue for distribution at the AWA sponsored festival. Consequently, we've made a special effort to emphasize the West Virginia paddling scene in this edition.

Last year was the AWA's rookie season as the Festival sponsor. Despite our lack of experience, the 1,000 or more river people who attended the festival came away satisfied.

What's more, the AWA realized a **profit** of over \$5,000 to be used toward protecting our whitewater resources. We also gained valuable exposure as an active, viable organization.

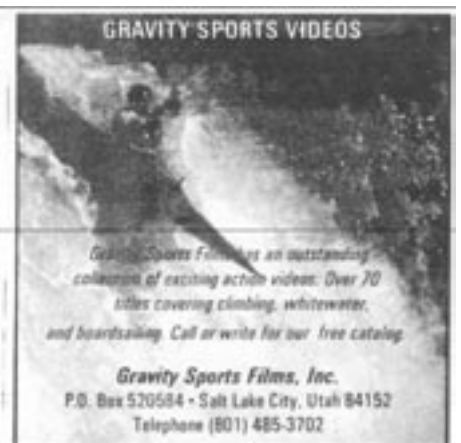
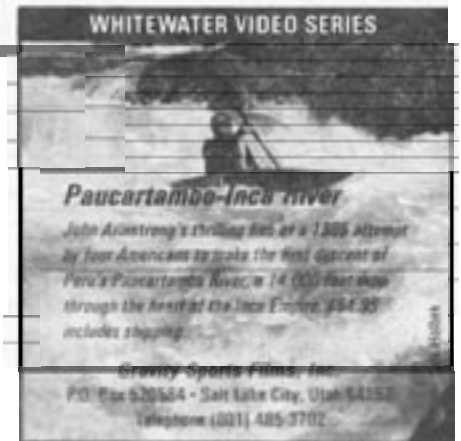
We're looking to put on a better show this season. One of our biggest problems last year was lack of

a local contact to iron out of myriad details required to stage a successful event. We've eliminated that difficulty this year by taking on Fayette County as a partner in sponsoring the festival.

Fayette County, of course, is an old hand at organizing large gatherings. Its Bridge Day and Whitewater Day are already tourist favorites. The AWA welcomes its expert assistance.

Despite the addition of Fayette County as a **co-sponsor**, old Gauley Festival hands shouldn't fear that the familiar festival format will be changed. This year's festival will feature the same popular attractions as previous events.

One new feature of the **1987** festival will be an equipment bazaar. Festival participants will be able to **inspect** the latest whitewater gear on the market offered by twenty exhibitors.



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# safety lines

## Swimming for safety

### Out of Your Boat in Rapids

By Charlie Walbridge  
AWA Safety Chairman

Several years ago I was guiding a low water trip down the Cheat River with Chip Queitzsch, a friend with whom I had paddles many times. My raft hung up on some boulders, and as I was helping the guests free it I heard Chip screaming for help.

Grabbing my rescue bag, I ran upriver, I saw a Kayaker pinned against the "trap rock" in **Colsum Rape**. (Which no longer exists due to the 85 floods) Chip had hopped out of his **C-1** and was standing in an eddy up to his chest, holding the man's head above water.

I handed my rope to a paddler on shore who offered to help, and swam out to the eddy. Our shore man threw us the rope, which we tied to the stern grab loop as a back-up in case we needed it. Chip and I then lifted one end of the **boat**, allowing the rest of it to pivot free. This permitted the victim to bail out; he grabbed hold of his boat and was pulled to shore.

Chip's **C-1** had eddied out in a pool below. Since the victim's legs were too sore to allow him to paddle out, we loaded him and his boat into my raft. Chip hitched a ride on another raft, and was soon reunited with his **C-1**.

Most of what I know about river rescue I learned while working as a river guide on a number of Eastern rivers. As guides we were expected to react quickly to any problem, and customer antics and private boater mishaps gave us plenty of practice. We did not, however, use the complex rope rescues which now have people's attention. We always had ropes but used them primarily as back-ups.

We jumped, waded, or swam to the problem's location, then used muscle power to untangle boats any way we could. It was fast and effective. It **was only** when these tactics failed that other means were brought into play.

#### AGGRESSIVE SELF RESCUE

Most of the guides I worked with were as adept out of their boat as they were in it. On the rare occasions when they failed to roll, they were not passive victims. They would drift the gnarly parts of a rapid on their back in the conventional manner until a deep water eddy came into view. Then they would roll over onto their belly and swim for safety.

Your body can function a lot like your boat; it just maneuvers more slowly. Depending on the situation, head first eddy turns or **upstream fer-**



**Charlie Walbridge**

ries may work best. It's best to practice in easy water beforehand to get a feel for what you can do, but this is a great **passtime** on a late season trip when hot weather and warm water coincide. Active self rescue can shorten your time in the water, thus contributing to your personal safety.

Some caution, however, is necessary during self rescue. When swimming to safety you must remember that your ability to maneuver is extremely restricted compared to your boat.

When the drops are steep and the shores lined with big boulders, it's best to "ride a rapid out" rather than risk getting involved with a shoreline strainer. Bob Taylor's 1975 death in the final drop of Lost Paddle was a result of a botched self-rescue in an area littered with undercut rocks.

On the other hand, it's often possible to swim over far enough to change your "line" in the rapids from a dangerous one to one which is more survivable. This is especially true if you

KNOW that one side or another has a dangerous hole or strainer. While holding onto equipment is convenient in easy rapids, it does hurt your ability to swim. Don't hesitate to let go of gear in difficult water if this will improve your safety.

#### STRAINER DRILLS:

Strainers are places where water can pass through, but bodies cannot. Typically this means tree branches; how a swimmer deals with them is very important. The typical feet-downstream posture is not effective, as feet will go under the trunk and arms over it. Your gut takes the full crushing force of the current. You can often release by pushing off the log, covering your face, and trying to swim underneath it. This is pretty scary. If you see a strainer, switch to a head-first position and use your arms to aggressively climb on top of the log. It works, but it's not for the timid.

Clubs in the Pacific Northwest and rescue groups on California have developed a confidence building "strainer drill". A smooth log about 6' long is suspended on the surface of a narrow, fast moving jet of water with ropes. A person stands in the eddies at each end to act as safety.

Swimmers try to deal with the strainer using feet-first and head first techniques. If a problem arises, the two persons at the end of the log **simply** lift it out of the water, releasing the victim. A less satisfactory setup involves a **belayer** on each end of the log; in case of trouble, they release their belay. Either way, it's a scary but safe way to develop this important survival skill.

#### SAFE WADING RESCUES:

When someone pins, getting someone out to them is of primary importance. And once you've developed some confidence in your ability to handle yourself after a flip, you can begin to learn how to wade safely in rapids. The general rule is that if you attempt to stand in water fast-moving water which is deep enough to swim in you risk a deadly foot entrapment. However, there are ways around this problem.

First eddies seldom qualify as

"fast moving water" and are often shallow enough for wading. You can move from eddy to eddy with short, **diving** swims across fast-moving jets of water. Keep your weight low by staying on all fours. River rocks are extremely slippery; you are going to fall and you might as well shorten the distance between you and the rocks.

Second, you can cross moderately deep, fast moving water on **all** fours with reasonable safety. It's like a rock climb, except you're moving horizontally and the current acts in **place** of gravity.

Place your feet carefully, feeling the rocks for entrapment possibilities. Never forget that this danger exists! If you lose your footing, get your legs to the surface fast and drift or swim to

safety. Don't fight for your footing, as entrapment could result. If you can't breathe, it's too deep and you should be swimming.

#### **SAFE SWIMMING ENTRIES:**

When entering a rapid, conventional deep dives are out. A helmet does not offer protection from these impacts, and broken necks or paralysis can result. The **SAFEST** entry involves letting your self into the water alongside of a rock, then pushing off into the current with your feet.

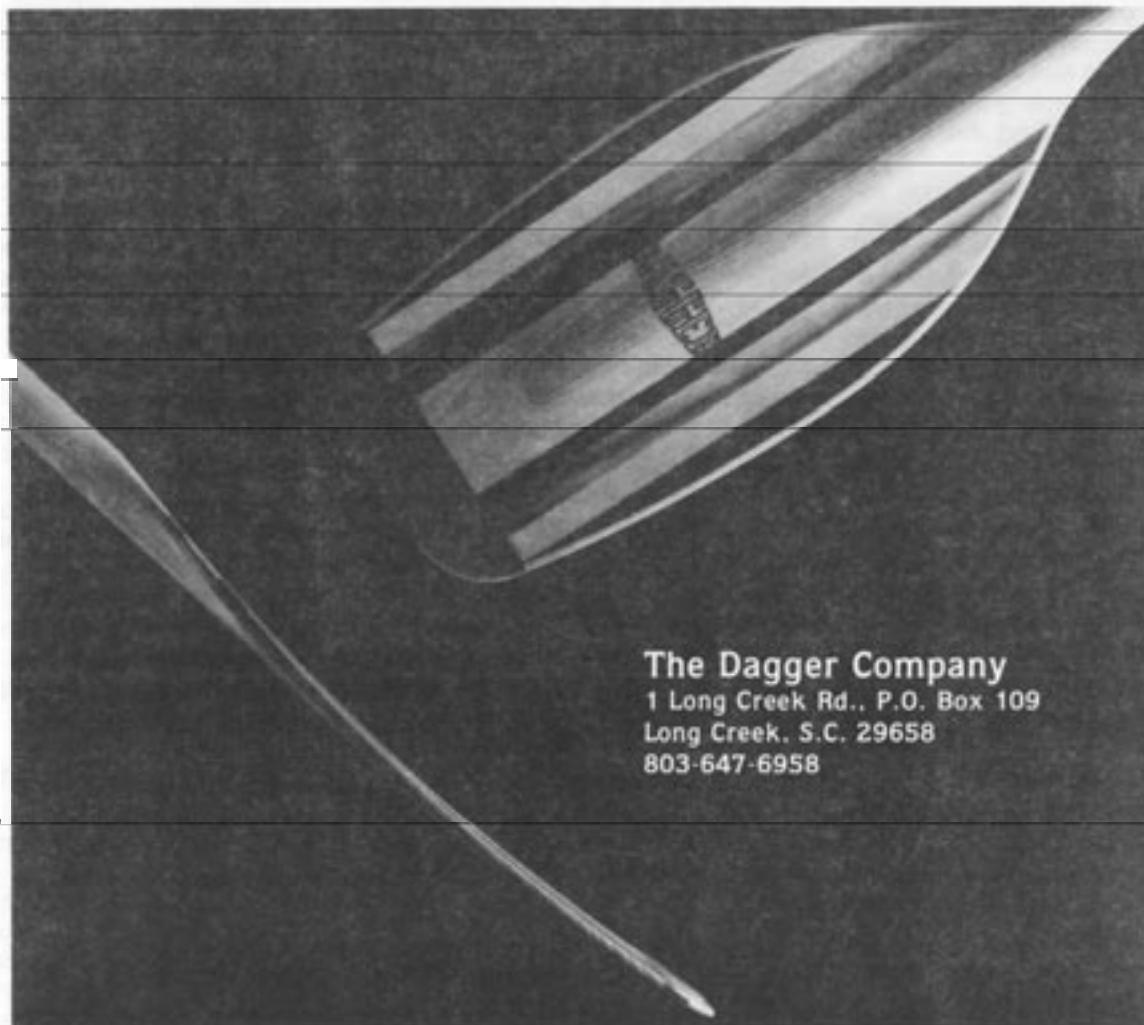
If this is inconvenient, you can use a shallow jumping entry. It **looks** like a surface dive, but it's more like a controlled fall into the water where you skim across the surface in the **direction** you want to go.

This technique requires a **reasonable** depth of water, and perhaps **some** in-water scouting of the point of impact. Time spent swimming in **rapids** will, however, increase your ability to make sound judgements about what difficulties you'll face.

It's important to remember that swimming rapids is a contact sport. **Even people like me** who enjoy it get beat up sometimes, even in "easy" **class II-III** water. Your ability to maneuver is greatly reduced. A good life vest with full back and shoulder coverage is important protection against rocks; a helmet is essential for any head-first maneuvers.

Sometimes an in-boat approach **from** upstream is safer. A rescuer pad-

*cont. page 44*



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מסעלת המלחמה  
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# conservation currents

## HYDROPOWER THREATENS U.S. TEAM RACE COURSE

by Pope Barrow

Its 8:00 a.m. Valves open in the concrete tunnel at the base of the dam. Frigid water from the bottom of the lake quickly fills the almost empty streambed until it is bank full. Suddenly a quiet stream with flows of only 40 cubic feet per second is transformed into a raging whitewater torrent, plunging downhill at 1,000 cubic feet per second. The cold water refrigerates the air and a dense fog which hangs like a cloud of smoke over the river. An air of excitement quickly builds. People crowd the shoreline peering through the mist with cameras ready.

A nervous kayaker tightly jammed in a sleek, state-of-the-art, racing boat waits quietly at the forefront of a group of other equally jittery boaters, all with racing bibs over their chests. They focus their eyes on a 3 foot dam just a few feet away with water pouring down a narrow chute. Further downstream poles hang for several hundred feet on wires across the river. The poles are in sets of two, each with a number on top. These are the slalom gates for a whitewater race. Suddenly the kayaker digs in hard with his paddle and spurts through the chute over the dam at top speed, paddling for all he is worth. If he is fast enough and if he powers through all the slalom gates without banging a single pole, he could be the next world champion.

This is how the 1989 Whitewater World Championships will begin at the Savage River in Western Maryland. Or so we hope. But one ugly piece of graffiti can spoil this pretty picture. As usual, it's a hydroelectric project.

In recent years hydropower development has become a persistent plague to whitewater boaters. Hydropower projects are all ugly. They deface and desecrate the shorelines of our scenic rivers and waterfalls. But they can be much worse than eyesores. They can be ruinous. The best whitewater in the nation has been under siege by power developers. Some rivers, like the Penobscot in Maine, the Tuolumne in California, and Gauley in West Virginia have been saved. Others, like the Black in New York and the Klamath in Oregon, are still in grave danger. A few, like California's



A quick Duffek turns racer out of an eddy on the Savage's world class slalom course.

Stanislaus have been buried below giant ponds stagnating behind huge Federal dams. Some, like of New York's Bottom Moose, have had their beautiful falls blasted to pieces and their whitewater rapids permanently ravaged. Now even the site of the Whitewater World Championships at the Savage faces the threat of Hydroelectric power development.

The Savage River, located in Western Maryland, has long been considered the premier site in this country for whitewater racing. A Tributary of the Potomac, it has controlled flows from Savage River Dam. These reliable flows, plus the river's unique configuration, make it an ideal whitewater race course. A better race course could not be built for love or money. The cost would be astronomical. Even the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (always looking for a new project) found that to duplicate a mile of this quality of whitewater at a site on the Ohio River would cost more than ~10,000,000 in 1973. (See the article elsewhere in the issue on **How Much a Whitewater course is Worth**).

With releases above 1000 cfs from Savage River Dam, 5 miles of Savage River below the Savage River Dam is ideal for slalom and downriver racing. Because of its outstanding suitability for racing, this river has played a major role in the development of whitewater racing in the United States. The Savage has hosted numerous national and international competitions and training events, beginning as early as 1969. In 1972 the Olympic Team Trials were held at the Savage. Last year, it was the site of the Pan American Cup with more than 250 athletes from around the world.

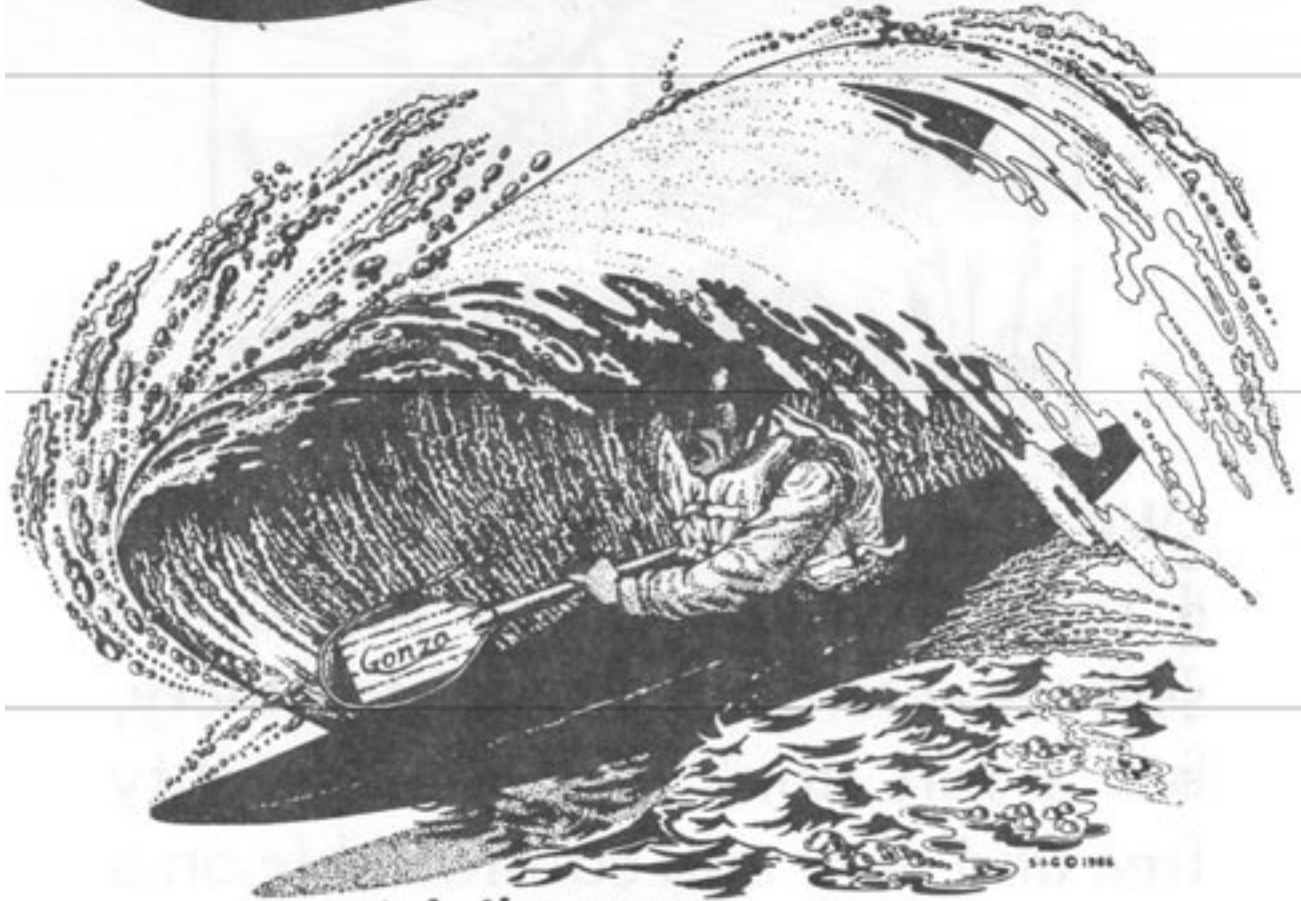
With a strong push from the two awesome giants of whitewater racing in America, Jon Lugbill and Davy Heaqqm, the Savage was selected by the International Canoe Federation as the site of the 1989 World Championship Slalom and Wildwater Races. This event will involve thousands of spectators and international television coverage. Sleepy, rustic Garrett County Maryland will never be the same. Communications facilities and areas to accommodate visitors are already under development. Meanwhile the race organizers are planning national races and training camps for the summer of 1988.

All of these plans, and the continued availability of the Savage for whitewater racing after 1989, depend upon releases from the Savage River Dam of at least 1000 cfs. Everything seemed secure for the World Championships and for generations to come, until a rather nasty kind of insect crawled onto the banquet table. The ugly menace of hydropower development raised its monstrous head at the Savage as it has on so many other popular whitewater runs.

Reed Hydro, Inc., a private hydropower builder, announced plans to install hydroelectric power generation at the Savage River Dam. The company applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to build a 3.2 Megawatt project at the dam. Incredible as it may seem, the application contains no mention of the 1989 races or of any other whitewater usage of the river. Even more incredible is the fact that the developer claims to be totally unaware that there was ever any whitewater use of the river or that any was

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—Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

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## Conservation cont.

planned for the future, apart from occasional rafting! This is after 5 years of studying the river.

Amazing as this may seem to the kayak and canoe community, ignorance of whitewater sports, or even open hostility, is typical of many hydropower developers. Few hydropower developers have any knowledge whatsoever of whitewater sports. Those that do, dismiss the sport as a ridiculously dangerous activity undertaken only by fringe element of brain-damaged daredevils. Some power developers are blind to the fact that thousands of people canoe, kayak, and raft whitewater every year and equally blind to the fact that whitewater rivers are becoming increasingly scarce, largely due to the continuing plague of new hydroelectric power projects.

One hydrodeveloper in New York State even had the unmitigated gall to ask the Federal government prohibit whitewater boaters from using whitewater adjacent to his project at **Kosterville** on the Bottom Moose. The argument was that demented thrill seekers known as recreational whitewater boaters should be prevented by the Federal government from destroying themselves on waters adjacent to power company property. Of course, the

government agreed and quickly complied with the request.

So far as the Savage River is concerned, it remains unclear what effect the proposed power project will have on whitewater racing. Whitewater flows (**1,000cfs**) are much greater than the flows (**300cfs**) needed to generate electricity. The difference represents lost power to the developer. This could spell problems for the U.S. Team since flow levels are never guaranteed. The team has to request flows for races and training and they are sometimes denied. Another problem is the construction schedule. Construction could actually be occurring at the time of the \$989 World Championships. With all the publicity and all the State and local politicians involved, releases for the 1989 races seem a safe bet. But afterwards, who knows?

The situation worried the U.S. Team and its supporters so much that on November 13, 1986, the Team filed a request with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) asking to participate in the case. The developer objected and FERC sided with the developer, denying the Team's request. Fortunately, another opportunity arose later in 1987, and the Team again asked to participate in the

licensing process. This second request is now pending. An expert lawyer has agreed to represent the Team if funds can be raised to cover the costs.

Funds to mount the defense of the Savage are a problem. A fund raising committee has been formed, named the "Savage River Defense Fund". The committee is holding a drawing to raise money. More than \$5,000 in prizes have been donated by many of the major companies involved in whitewater sports, such as Perception, Old Town, Blue Hole, Wildwater Designs, and many others. R.E.I., the giant cooperative outdoor store based in Seattle, Washington, donated \$1,000 in seed money to start the campaign.

If you want to help Save the Savage by participating in the drawing or otherwise, write to the **SAVAGE RIVER DEFENSE PROJECT**, 322 Tenth St., S.E. Washington, D.C. 20003. You may be the winner of a kayak, a canoe, or another fabulous fabulous prize!



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## HOW MUCH IS A WHITEWATER RIVER WORTH?

by Pope Barrow

The typical hydropower developer sees only dollars floating downstream as he watches a whitewater river flowing freely. But there is another way to look at it, even for the hard boiled accountant. But artificial whitewater can be built at least short segments of whitewater can be built. The cost of building a whitewater race course provides a reference point for what a whitewater river is worth in dollars and cents. After all, if mother nature didn't provide whitewater the Corps of Engineers would just have to build it for us.

## The East Race Waterway in South Bend, Indiana.

The only artificial watercourse ever constructed in the United States is the East Race Waterway in South Bend, Indiana. This is a 2,000 foot whitewater course which was constructed in the period 1972-1984 at a cost of \$4,500,000. The cost per foot is \$2250. For purposes of comparison to a natural river, it is necessary to translate the costs of this construction into the costs of constructing a longer course. A 5,280 foot (1-mile) whitewater course is \$11,460,000. Multiply this by the number of miles of enjoyable whitewater on your favorite stretch of the whitewater and you have

### COST OF CONSTRUCTIN 1-MILE SECTION OF ARTIFICIAL WHITEWATER

Artificial Course	Total Cost	Cost/ft	Cost/mile
South Bend Course	\$4,500,000	\$2,250	\$11,460,000 (1984 dollars)
Meldhal Proposal	\$3,944,000	\$1,972	\$10,412,160 (1973 dollars)

Estimates are based on capital cost only. Operation & maintenance costs are not included.

some idea of what it would cost to imitate what mother nature provides for free.

## The Meldhal Locks and Dam Proposal, Ohio River.

Although never constructed, a study was conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of engineers in 1973 regarding a proposed artificial whitewater course at the Captain Anthony Meldhal Locks and Dam on the Ohio River.

This was to be a 2,000 foot course. The cost estimate (in 1973 dollars) was \$3,944,000. The cost per foot is \$1972. Converting this to a 1-mile equivalent, the total cost per mile would be \$10,412,160 in 1973.

Not to denigrate the course at South Bend or the great course at Augsbug in Germany in Germany, no artificial course could ever really be equivalent to a good whitewater run. Whitewater rivers are irreplaceable. Their true value can never be measured in dollars and cents. No artificial whitewater amusement park could ever duplicate the beauty and ambiance of wild natural river.

cont. page 45

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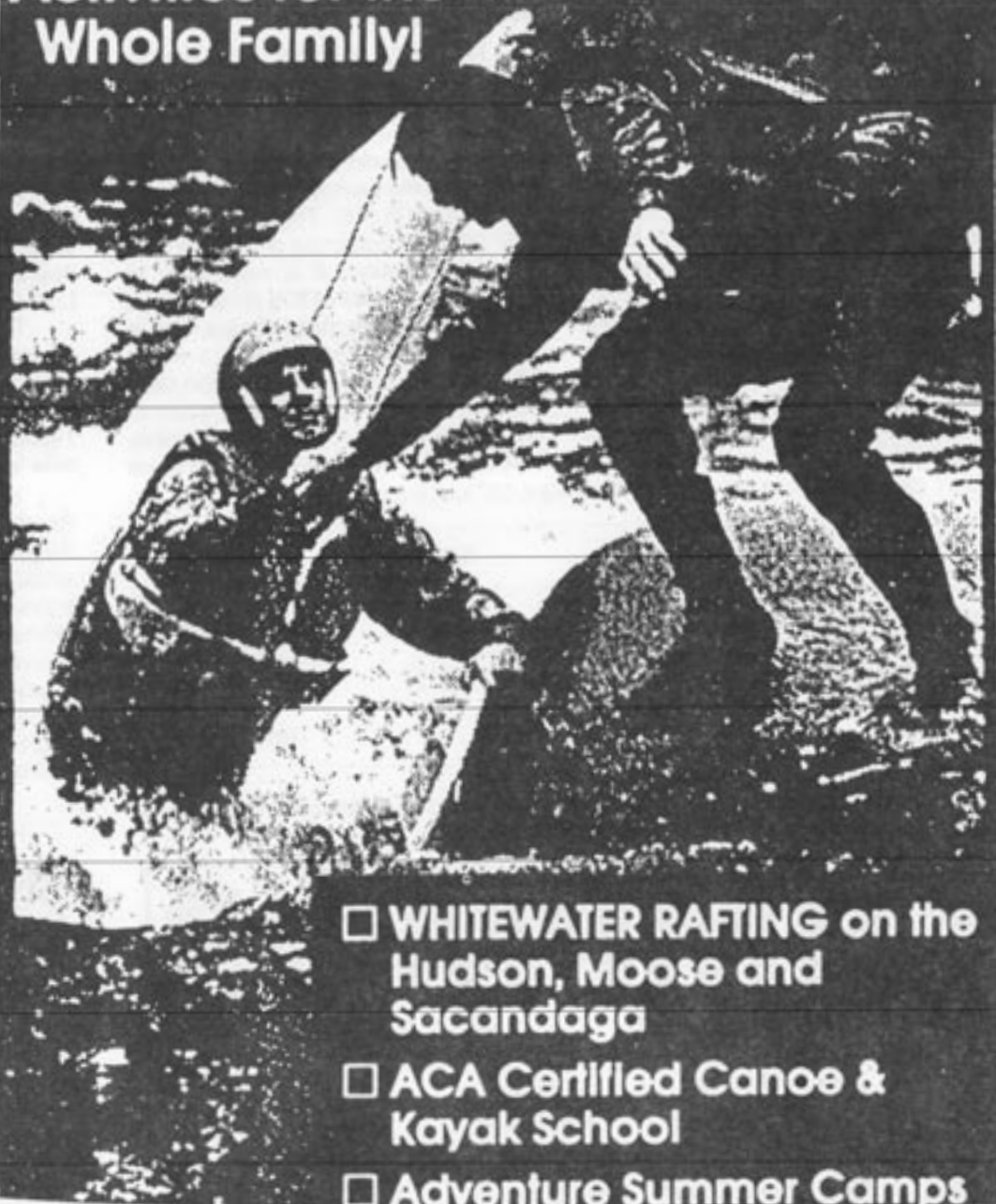
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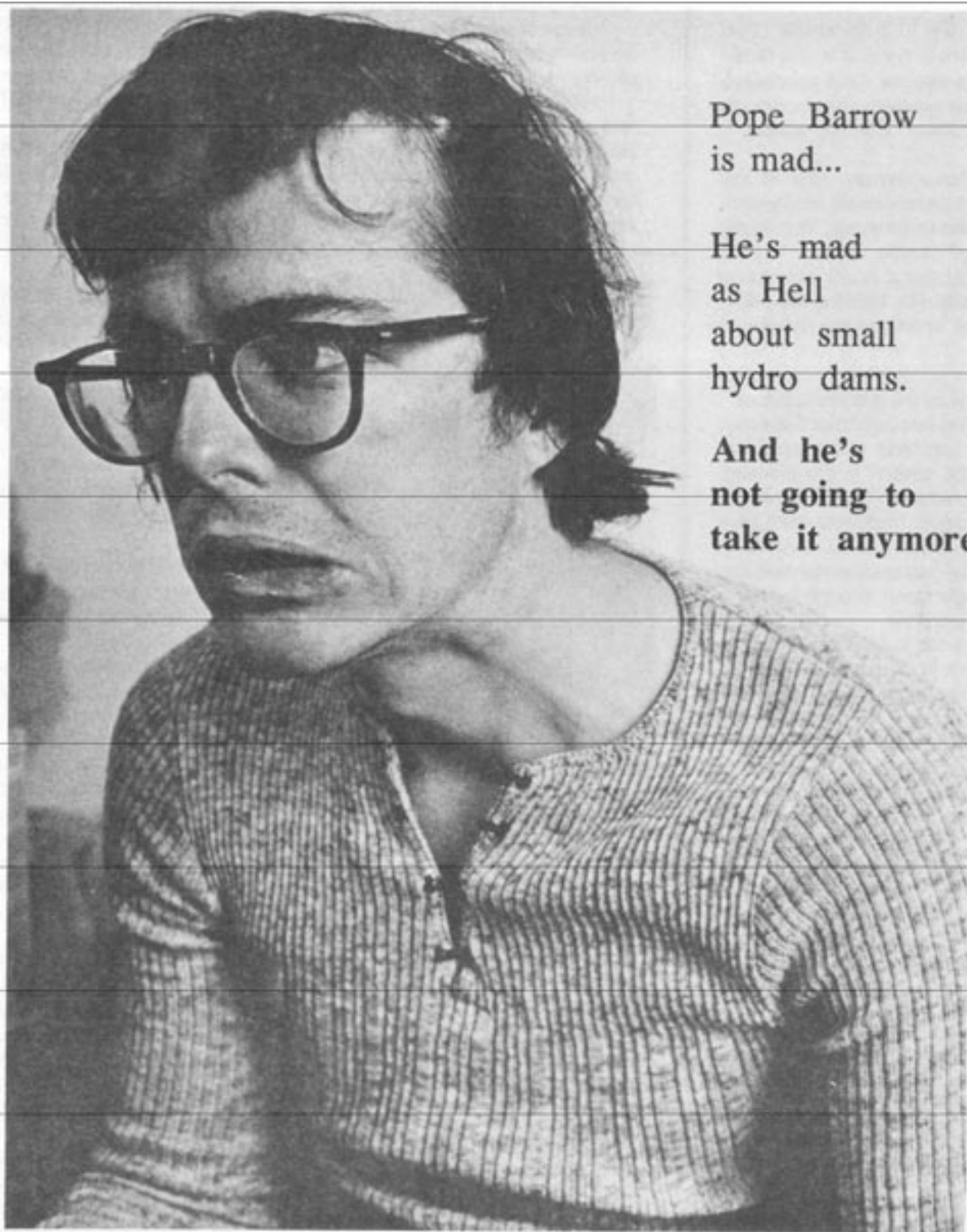


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Pope Barrow  
is mad...

He's mad  
as Hell  
about small  
hydro dams.

And he's  
not going to  
take it anymore

By Chris Koll

**By 11 p.m. at the 1986 Gauley River Festival,** it was finally apparent that the AWA sponsored event was turning out as an unqualified success. But not without a price...

Pope Barrow, one of the festival's prime movers, was practically a shattered wreck. During the past four months, Barrow had labored countless hours scheduling the festival site, booking the entertainment, arranging the delivery of lights, tables, festival tent, dealing with the myriad details necessary to make the evening come together.

And on that particular Saturday, Barrow had been in continual motion since seven in the morning. There had been festival advertisements to post, the tent to erect, beer to cool, food to cook--dozens of tasks that had to be performed and seemingly never enough hands to get the job done.

Once the festival guests began to stream in the gates, the tension only heightened. One crisis followed another: more help needed at the beer booth, for parking cars, for selling shirts.

Who could blame Pope, once the chaos had been masked with a veneer of organization, if he sipped a beer or two to unwind?

But you could tell that the effects of the day's pressures, coupled with a touch of alcohol, had taken their toll when Pope mounted the stage at the festival's awards ceremony.

Pope's normal soft-spoken and reasonable demeanor had been replaced with that of a raving evangelist. His clothes were disheveled from the day's work, as hair plastered flat from the off-and-on rain and a wierd light shown in his eyes as he seized the microphone.

"The hydro people think they can claim any river they want and throw up a dam," he roared to the crowd. "But they can't. We're going to fight them. Fight them on every dam river. We're not going to let them steal our rivers..."

After his diatribe, Barrow was

still on an emotional high as he wandered back through the crowd.

"Screw them," he would say to no one in particular. "Screw them all. We're going to fight every one."

Half an hour later, the bubble had burst and Barrow had crashed. He sat, head in hands, on the front stoop of the campground office mumbling, "Never again...never again."



Pope Barrow-- 1987 Perception River Conservationist of the Year

Barrow's Gauley Festival experience is a way of life for the serious river protectionist. Months of painstaking labor usually culminating in a frenzy of activity before some filing deadline.

Then, momentary exhaltation, followed by the grim realization that you need to go through the same process again and again and again. What the Hell motivates an individual to do it...

Pope Barrow wasn't always married to the peaks and valleys life of a river advocate. In fact, at one time, he seemed destined to join the corporate clique responsible for the rash of lucrative small-hydro projects he now opposes.

"I grew up on a farm near Freder-

ick, Md. and went to high school in Baltimore before I got 'ivy all over,'" Barrow said. What followed was an undergraduate stint at Yale and a degree from the Harvard Law School. Barrow was poised to enter the three-piece world.

"I started to get 'intellectualized,'" Barrow said, "and had started the climb up the corporate ladder with a law firm. But I got turned off right away with the general drudgery of a law practice."

Instead of researching and arguing obscure points of jurisprudence, Barrow found himself working in Washington D.C. as part of a department of legal experts providing nonpartisan assistance in drafting legislation for committees of the House of Representatives. From simply attempting to apply the law of the land, Barrow is now helping write it.

"Working for Congress is a lot more fun," Barrow said. "And besides, Congress has these monumental recesses..."

Barrow needs those breaks in the routine. Living in Washington, he developed a severe case of "Potomac Fever"--not the political disease, but the affliction that comes from residing in a city with a whitewater river within its boundaries. The symptoms are a compelling affection for neoprene and a compulsion for frequent wetting.

"I'd have to say I'm an avid boater," Barrow said. "I started about 12 years ago on the Potomac and later in West Virginia, and if anything, as time goes on, I've become more absorbed in whitewater. I never miss a weekend when there's water, whether it's a trip to West Virginia or just taking a day out on the Potomac."

Which partially explains how Barrow was drawn into the unenviable position of a spokesman for river recreation--he simply spent too much time hanging out in places like rivers with people like paddlers.

Barrow now spends approximately 15 to 20 hours weekly assisting with river conservation projects and sewing on the **AWA's** Board of

Directors...and that's hard time for a man who already has to balance his paddling habit with sharing time with his wife Julie and two children.

Ultimately, the time spent has earned Pope one of river conservation's most prestigious awards as he was named by Perception Kayaks as its "1987 River Conservationist of the Year." Ironically, it was two former award winners, Steve Taylor and Dave Brown, who got Pope involved in the lifestyle in the first place.

"Steve and Dave inveigled me into this," Barrow said. "They were involved with the fight on the Gauley and needed somebody for legal help and to help figure out the national scene. I was a real fan of the Gauley, I never miss a Gauley season, and I was horrified by the Long Tunnel proposal, so I got on board."

"That was the beginning of the end."

It's tough for a common guy to understand or sympathize with the

environmental radical chic. You know who I'm talking about:

--Gentle folks who press for designation of more wilderness areas, but don't care to hike over a mile from their Volvo.

--People who shell out to save the redwoods, but wouldn't dare venture into the forest because their L.L. Bean boots might get muddy.

--Individuals who weep when another animal is added to the endangered species list, but cringe when approached by a dog or cat because hair might be shed on their clothes.

Don't get me wrong. God bless the salon environmentalists. They often provide invaluable financial support. But somehow it's difficult to look upon them as comrades when the battle moves down into the trenches.

That's what you got to love about Pope. He's a selfish bastard. He's out to save rivers because he uses them.

"Our inventory of good whitewa-

ter rivers is so small we can't give any away," Barrow said. "There are just so few left. We stopped them on the Gauley, but that's just where it started. One of these days they're going to go after the Blackwater or the Big Sandy, and those rivers are just too good to let them have."

"I think there is going to be more trouble with the Army Corps in West Virginia, particularly with flood control problems on the Cheat. And on the Blackwater, we've got to watch for revival of the Davis power project."

"We've got to get ready for them."

And Barrow has been doing just that. By taking part in battles to preserve the Penobscot in Maine and New York's Black River--rivers Barrow seldom paddles--he's been "training for the time they come for rivers I like."

You know, if you could strip off Pope's glasses, dress him in buck-

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skin and forget that he was educated in two of America's most prestigious institutions, you'd have the quintessential mountaineer.

He has a definite "don't step on my turf" attitude characteristic of the Appalachians. I guess you can take the boy off the farm, but...

And that individualistic, grass-roots approach spills into his philosophy of river conservation. Along with Taylor, Barrow founded River Research Systems, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing whitewater boaters across the country with the legal and technical information needed to intervene on projects threatening their local rivers. And they would do it free of charge.

"We would furnish the expertise and they would furnish the legwork," Barrow said. "It's been working real good. We've had a lot of participation, and it's growing all the time. There's been a lot of interventions on threatened whitewater resources because of it."

One of the biggest problems in mounting grassroots opposition to

an unwanted water project is that often local organizers don't even learn of a developer's plans until the dam is well along in the licensing

Perception, Inc. is pleased to announce that Pope Barrow of Bethesda, Maryland, has been selected as the 1987 River Conservationist of the Year.

Now in its seventh year, the Perception River Conservationist Award is given annually by Perception to a group or individual who has contributed significantly to the preservation of one or more of our free-flowing rivers.

The award carries a \$1,000 cash contribution to the recipient's work, and will be presented this September at the AWA Gauley River Festival in West Virginia.

process. To eliminate that contingency, Barrow initiated the "River Early Warning System"--a program that monitors applications for dam projects and alerts local paddling groups to their presence.

The importance of the project has been recognized by American Rivers, one of the country's most influential river conservation organizations, who is helping fund its implementation.

In the mean time, Barrow is moving on, writing a how-to book to educate paddlers how to cope with hydro projects that threaten their local whitewater and merging his River Research Systems work into the AWA conservation organization.

"I would like to see the AWA focus its efforts on protection of whitewater rivers with no commercial operations," Barrow said. "They don't have any other constituency. We need an organization like the AWA to provide that constituency or no one else will do it."

"Where you have rafting, fishing or a whitewater race course, the people involved in those activities can be the mainstay of opposition for protecting that particular river. But for recreational rivers that run only three or four weeks in the spring, the only group to prevent them from being turned into stagnant pools is the AWA."



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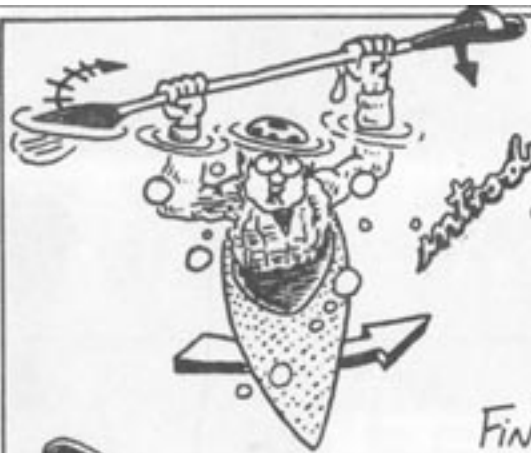
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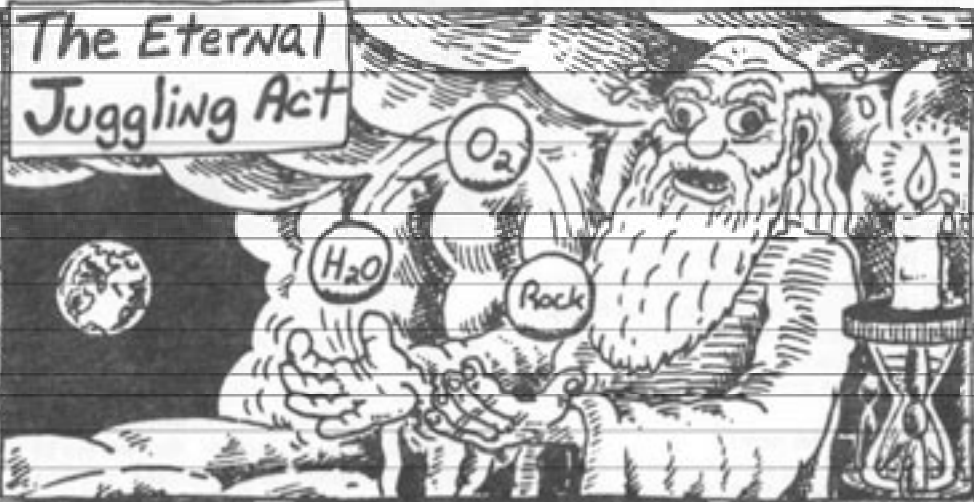
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## The Eternal Juggling Act



# STEEP CREEK SECRETS

By Bob Gedekoh and George Mower

Johnny **Regan** and Matt **Putz** had a secret.

So did we.

Were our secrets the same?

That was the question foremost in our minds.

We were crowded into a booth at Tabor's Restaurant in Friendsville, Maryland, home of the Upper Yough. It was mid-March and we hadn't seen each other since Gauley season.

Time to catch up on what was going on in the rest of the boating world. Who was padding what and where.

And, most importantly, what was on each other's paddling agenda.

"We'll tell you our secret if you'll tell us yours," we volunteer shyly.

"Only if you go first," **Regan** replied warily.

We hesitated, but our curiosity got the best of us.

"We're planning to run Otter Creek. The last three miles have been paddled but the headwaters have never been done." It was a tentative statement. We were afraid that **Regan** would announce that he had run it the day before.

There would have been some justice in that. The previous spring we had beaten **Regan** and company to a first descent of Little Bear Creek by less than an hour. The fact that John lives less than ten minutes from that stream didn't make that easy to swallow.

"Well, our secret isn't Otter Creek," **Regan** announced mischievously, "but it's not far from there. We've been eyeing Upper Red Creek, through the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area."

We smiled with relief. Our goals were not the same.

But why all the fuss?

Because a big part of the thrill of running what we refer to as a steep creek is

getting there first. One step ahead of the competition.

Most of us will never have the time, money or patience to mount an expedition



photo by Bob Gedekoh

George Mower tackles a classic steep creek.

to **Peru** or **New Zealand** or **Timbuktu**. Which is not to say that we don't have a taste for adventure. Fortunately, our tiny, precipitous Appalachian streams allow us to play the role of explorer. And we like to think that these steep creeks provide whitewater challenges every bit as difficult

as those one might find in some more exotic locale. Given the right circumstances, we're convinced that a weekend in West Virginia can be every bit as exciting as a weekend in Nepal.

"Canoe" and "Outside" magazines may turn their noses up at our exploits, but the satisfaction of completing a difficult Appalachian first descent can be just as gratifying as an expedition that cost thousands of dollars. Well...almost as gratifying...it would be nice to have porters to carry our kayaks to the river. Or a team of geographers to point us in the right direction.

## GETTING STARTED

Sometimes just finding a virgin steep creek is a challenge. The large whitewater rivers in our area have all been paddled for years, so our exploratory boating is focused on the tiny tributaries of the Yough, Cheat, Tygart and New. How do we locate these little gems? We keep our eyes open every time we drive through the mountains, pausing at every bridge and culvert, scanning every valley. Gullies and drainage ditches are subject to scrutiny. Scouting for steep creeks is best accomplished when the trees are bare. Access to topographic maps is a necessity.

Generally, a gradient of at least **100 feet/mile** is needed to perk the interest of a steep creeker. Gradients of **150-200 feet/mile** are considered promising. Those with gradients greater than **200 feet/mile** are considered optimal, providing some other fool is willing to try them first.

## ADVENTURES... AND MISADVENTURES

Once a likely candidate has been identified, we face the obstacle of finding an appropriate water level. Most of these

## Creek cont.

streams run only a few days a year, when spring rains **and/or snowmelt** provide adequate flow. **To make** matters worse, various watersheds rise and fall willy-nilly. It takes experience and luck to arrive at the right place at the right time. All too often by the time we get to the put-in the flow is too low, although in certain interesting instances high water has proven to be an even greater problem.

Running a steep creek can be an all day affair. Sometimes it can turn into an all night affair as well. Shuttles are often complex and involve unmarked routes. Cars get stuck in axle-deep mud, boats tumble off roof racks and uneasy locals wield shotguns to discourage trespassing.

Witness the dilemma of poor Jess Gonzales, manufacturer of Gonzo paddles. Jess found himself lost atop Cheat Mountain this spring with a **vanload** of exhausted irritable boaters. It was almost midnight and Gonzales had mistakenly allowed AWA Journal Editor Chris Koll to navigate...an error he recognized when he discovered that he had not been driving on a road for seven miles, but rather on the boundary line between Randolph and Pendleton Counties. Gonzo quietly relieved Koll of the map and forged ahead. The fact that we still have an AWA Editor at all is testimony to Jess's exceptional good nature.

Such misadventures are seldom amusing at the time, though in retrospect, after a respectable period of time has passed, they often come to be regarded as the source of great hilarity.

Of course, not all steep creek runs



photo by George Mower

This flip on Laurel Creek in the Tygart Basin cost Dean Tomko some hide and a severe case of cellulitis that almost required hospitalization.

take long. Our first descent of Cherry Creek, a tributary of Deep Creek which is a tributary of the Upper Yough, took less than fifteen minutes. Cherry Creek drops 180 feet in its half-mile course...a gradient of **360 feet/mile**. Consisting of one rapid, without a single pool or eddy, Cherry Creek provides little time to enjoy the scenery.

A descent of Cherry Creek is anything but controlled.

In spite of the fact that most steep creeks run at relatively low flows (**cfs**), they

are by no means without risks. Obstructions and strainers are common and routes around them may be non-existent. Pinning represents the greatest hazard and has proven fatal in at least one instance.

Assaults on steep creeks are best made by three or four since it is difficult to keep larger groups together. Even with small groups the sweep boater may not be able to see the lead much of the time; it becomes the responsibility of each member of the team to keep track of those immediately ahead and behind. A part of two is inadequate since a single individual may not be able to assist a pinned companion.

Running steep creeks is not for the faint-hearted. But northern West Virginia and western Maryland and Pennsylvania have more than their share of boaters with steep creek expertise. **Regan**, Keith Backlund, Roger **Zbell**, Dean Tomko, Phil Coleman, and Jeff and Jimmy Snyder have been pioneering here for years. More recent newcomers, like ourselves, have joined the ranks of steep **creekers**. Lacking the technical ability and bravado of the "old timers", we are forced to be more cautious, scouting and portaging more frequently and making initial runs at lower water levels.

The "old timers" accuse us of **scraping** down our steep creeks, while we argue that they flush down theirs. The fact is that if you start at the top and finish at the bottom and have a good time in between, the excursion should be considered a success.



photo by George Mower

Bob Gedekoh descends a secret waterfall somewhere in the Appalachians.

## DAUGHERTY CREEK

One of West Virginia's vintage **moun-**

## Creek cont.

tain runs, Daugherty Creek, was pioneered by the "old timers", a.k.a. Team Friendsville, but has since been tackled by a number of others. It is a classic steep creek challenge. Tumbling 240 feet/mile for 3 miles, Daugherty starts near Terra Alta and empties into the Cheat just above Albright, entrance to the Cheat Canyon. It is no surprise that Terra Alta means high ground in Spanish; the residents of the town were isolated by snow for nearly six weeks during a particularly nasty winter just two years ago. Hard to believe...considering Terra Alta is less than 2 hours from Pittsburgh.

Daugherty is exceptionally precipitous, demanding and unrelenting, yet usually can be paddled in its entirety. This is fortuitous since the stream is so continuous and the eddies so miniscule that scouting and portaging are difficult to accomplish.

Rarely wider than twenty feet, Daugherty runs only after heavy rains...probably less than ten days a year. Even then



Tomko squeezes through a tight slot on Otter Creek.

the cfs is probably less than 100. As a rule, the Cheat Gauge at Albright will be greater than eight feet when Daugherty has adequate flow. Most of the time Daugherty runs at a trickle, so that it is hard to convince the uninitiated that it can be traversed at all. As with most steep creeks there is no established gauge, boaters must peer over the bridge and decide for themselves.

The stream assaults the expert boater with rock jumbles, abrupt chutes and, most characteristically, long serpentine slides. Reminiscent of a runaway bobsled ride down a densely wooded slope, one expects to be hurled out of the streambed onto the

banks by the centrifugal force of the current.

Strainers sometimes span the creek in its entirety. Trees fall and are subsequently swept away, their location is unpredictable. It is **nece** to check with someone who has made the run recently before launching. Carabiners, slings and throwropes are essential equipment and the ability to quickly set a Z drag could make the difference between life and death on a stream like Daugherty.

### LAUREL CREEK

Dean Tomko leads the exploratory run of Otter Creek.

Every watershed in the Appalachians seems to have a tributary named Laurel and the Tygart is no exception. But the Laurel Creek of the Tygart basin is something special. Short but sweet, the stuff that dream...and nightmares...are made of.

Dropping 140 feet in 1¼ miles, this teaser features six class five plus rapids. And, unlike most steep runs, Laurel Creek is pool-drop; each rapid is a distinct entity with a character of its own. Several years ago Dean Tomko, Wic Walker and Roger Zbell chanced upon Laurel Creek in what amounted to a flash flood. While they had no way to actually measure the flow, the tiny stream had metamorphosed into a violent river with a volume comparable to the Gauley in the fall.

An abundance of treacherous hydraulics, wiers and undercuts did not discourage the trio, who managed to paddle Laurel Creek in its entirety.

"Actually", Walker confided later, "we more or less goaded one another into running everything. Usually after scouting a drop, two of us would swear that it couldn't be done, while the third would insist there was a way. After that individual successfully negotiated the plunge, the others felt obligated to follow."

Tomko remembers that in the middle of one particularly gnarly rapid they took refuge in an eddy created by a discarded refrigerator.

"It was the first and last time I ever felt grateful for the trash that people dump into whitewater streams."

After that initial auspicious descent Walker, Tomko and Zbell all agreed that Laurel Creek was the most unnerving

## Creek cont.

whitewater experience in their varied and notorious boating careers.

Intrigued by his tales of terror on the Laurel, we accompanied Tomko on his second descent a year after the first.

At a fraction of the flow Laurel was considerably less intimidating, though still a handful. Several rapids featured long slides with oblique hydraulics feeding into undercuts. To make matters worse the water was often too shallow to allow an effective paddle stroke.

One of these nasties, which the rest of us decided to portage, flipped Tomko. By the time he rolled, the streambed had managed to gobble sizeable portions of flesh from the knuckles of his hand. In spite of a thorough cleansing with antiseptic solutions, Dean developed a riproaring **cellulitis** which nearly required hospitalization.

This incident drives home the fact that not all steep creeks are pristine and pure, especially when floods scour the watershed. It comes as no surprise that those dwelling in the shanties in the headwaters of Laurel Creek add more to their environment than local color.

Laurel Creek empties into the Tygart in the middle of the Arden section just above Moat's Falls, but it seems unlikely that boaters will continue downstream. On the day that we paddled Laurel, the Tygart at **Philippi** was running at 18 feet. At that level Moat's Falls would surely be the thrill to end a lifetime.

### OTTERCREEK

Paddling a steep creek is often a study in transition. Our early April exploration of Otter Creek was a study of seasonal change. At the put-in, we trekked a mile and a half through a **foot** of snow to reach the stream. While this might sound unpleasant, the snow worked to our advantage, allowing us the decadent luxury of dragging instead of carrying our boats.

The trees were barren atop the mountain, the only greenery provided by rhododendron and towering hemlocks. It was easy to spot the deer, running for cover as we approached. As we continued our descent, we slowly left winter behind and entered the realm of spring.

First, we noticed the rosey hue of the **redbud** trees and the green snouts of skunk cabbage pushing their way through the frozen mud. Soon the **blooms** of bloodroot and spring beauties nodded to us from the banks.

Ramps, the notoriously odiferous wild onions of the Appalachians that are prized for their medicinal properties, were identified. **Initially** hesitant to try them, the group went into a feeding frenzy after someone mentioned their alleged potency as aphrodisiacs. Awareness of ramps' **poten-**

cy as a laxative came later.

The leaf buds on the deciduous trees began to swell and near the take out trillium, violets and even mayapple carpeted the forest floor.

As we paddled along, the character of Otter Creek itself changed as well. For the first few miles the stream meandered placidly about on the mountain plateau with scarcely a riffle to disturb the silence. The pace began to quicken with the appearance of river wide ledges, the first less than a foot, but soon as much as four.

We rounded a tight bend and, suddenly, Otter Creek virtually dropped out of sight. For the next several miles long, twisting flumes followed one after another. Then rock gardens, punctuated by three to eight foot chutes, made their appearance. A twelve foot falls proved unrunable, the pool at the bottom was less than a foot deep.

Otter Creek became a maze of obstructions; we rarely paddled more than twenty feet in any direction before changing direction. We soon experienced life inside an aquatic pinball machine. The hiking trail that parallels the stream made scouting easy. Most of the time **C1** boater Tomko led the entourage, his higher vantage allowing him to see what those of us in kyaks could only imagine.

The **last three** miles to the Dry Fork of the Cheat were as described in **Burrell** and Davidson's guide, continuous class 3 and 4.

Everyone managed to pin several times in the course of the day, as a group ultimately demonstrating each and every one of what we jokingly refer to as the seven classing **pinning positions**: the vertical bow, the vertical stern, the **upright**

broach, the upside down broach, the upright broadside wrap, the upside down broadside wrap and the ever popular and always spectacular **tree** trunk caress.

Escape maneuvers demonstrated included paddle pole vaulting, paddle jousting, the flailing windmill, knuckle busting-rock-karate and yes, unfortunately, that old standby, the Mark Spitz.

As is often the case, on Steep Creeks, the biggest thrill on Otter Creek was totally unexpected. It was nearly twilight when the bear made his appearance, lumbering across the mountainside, oblivious to our presence, clearly enraptured with the sights and smells of spring. We watched him for nearly ten minutes; it was the kind of magical experience that makes steep creek boating worthwhile.

### MEANWHILE...ON RED CREEK

Coincidentally, **Regan** and Putz explored Upper Red Creek during the same week we paddled Otter. Their adventure, by all accounts, was no less eventful. Nearly two feet of snow blocked their approach to the river on river left, but the intrepid pair continued on undaunted.

After driving twenty odd miles around the valley to another point of access, they hiked seven miles in five hours... Putz says they were lost...**Regan** swears not...to reach a put-in on river right.

All this to paddle three miles of uncharted water, a feat that took less than two hours to accomplish. By the time they finished it was nearly dark.

*cont. page 44*



Barry Toscano slips down a narrow sluice where the potential for entrapment is always present.

photo by George Mower

# river log

## Canada's Ottawa River:

*More than  
just a  
paddling  
trip*

By Ron Berke

**Like perfect tourists, we piled** the back set roof-high with baggage:

There were beach bags stuffed with towels, trunks and bottles of sun screen; luggage bulging with dinner attire, outfits for night-life, lounging duds and the ever-popular aloha shirt for sight-seeing; camera cases laden with lenses and film; a medicine kit filled with aspirin and antacid for those dreaded mornings after; sleeping bags; tent and, of course, a cooler loaded with ice and beverage.

I stepped back, noticing the car already sagging on its springs, and asked, "Gee, have we forgotten anything?"

Oh, yes...we slid the kayaks onto the roof racks.

When you think of a Canadian paddling trip, you visualize an expedition to the Great **White** North to meet **whitewater** in its elemental form: the rivers of Labrador--perilous descents of high-volume class V water characterized by falls, steep ledge drops and terminal hydraulics; **or** the rivers of the Northwest Territory where **survival** hinges upon food caches and equipment as much as whitewater skills;



A pair of surfers plane atop a glassy Ottawa River wave.

or the streams of British Columbia--rivers was passing lane currents and the ever-present threat of log jams adding to the difficulty of the run.

That Canada remains as a fantasy land for the expert paddler. We were headed for the Ottawa, the equivalent of a whitewater Disney World, where the dangers of exposure, starvation and drowning are outweighed by the risks of too much river play, excess merriment and an overabundance of food and drink.

Too often, Americans view Canada as just a **51st** state. But part of the **charm** of paddling the Ottawa or other Canadian rivers is that our northern neighbor is definitely a different country with its own unique characteristics.

Our first exposure to **culture** shock **occurred** immediately after crossing the Thousand Islands Bridge into Ontario and encounter-

ing a road sign setting the speed limit at **100**.

We wondered how many Americans had been pinched for speeding before realizing that Canada is a metric nation and the **100** referred to kilometers per hour--not miles.

Money makes for another area of confusion. **Throughout** Ontario, businesses accept U.S. currency and more-or-less honor the current rate of exchange, but if you need to break a twenty you'll end up with a pocketful of Canadian paper.

**I figure** it's all a conspiracy. Canadian currency is printed in a rainbow of colors with each denomination assigned a separate hue. For American tourists, weaned as children on the game of Monopoly, the money **seems** strangely unreal.

Paddlers are notoriously tight-fisted. But who can feel miserly with a roll of pink **two-dollar** bills? Spend it **like** it's toy money. You **don't** want to bring it home with you, anyhow.

Canada may not be completely

## Ottawa cont.

foreign--there are too many **McDonald's** and Burger Kings for that--but you definitely know you aren't in West Virginia.

Maybe it's just my Calvinistic heritage, but a paddling trip just doesn't feel right without some hardships involved. I've got to carry my boat a mile to the put-in, portage through wet laurel tangles, paddle through continuous rapids until exhaustion, cook dehydrated food over a balky gas stove and toss the night away in a wet sleeping bag to feel like I've spent a legitimate paddling weekend.

When I was younger, my desire

beverage only minutes from the takeout.

Which is why once a summer we load up the car with every recreational device known to man and head up to the Ottawa. It is the perfect "tourist river."

Lest you labor long under the illusion that the label "tourist river" means the Ottawa only simple class III frolic, let me relate the following incident:

It was my initial trip to Canada, although I was paddling with a troop of Ottawa veterans. After a quarter-mile of flat water from the put-in, we arrived at McCoy's Chute, the river's first rapid. Beaching our boats on the right, we hiked down to

"No, no, really. I think you can handle it."

Five minutes later, peering over the brink of Stadler's as my boat slid down sideways, I realized Ed was in for a good laugh at the expense of the Ottawa rookie.

Slam! My boat struck the bottom of the hole like it was a wall of stone. I settled into a low brace. Just as I began to wonder how I could have my meals delivered, the hole grabbed the nose of my boat and began to cartwheel me--one, two, three, four times.

Miraculously, I never flipped, and after the final revolution had settled me down high in the trough, I paddled up the wall of the hole and **out to the right...just in time to drop into Phil's.**

Slam! Back into the low brace, but not for long. The hydraulic's suction blew off my skirt instantly flooding my boat. I flushed straight down and reappeared 10 yards downstream, still upright and leaning on my brace.

In retrospect, I think Ed knew exactly what he was doing when he suckered me into those holes. The normal route through McCoy's follows a broad tongue between the two holes down the the play waves at the run-out. It's an easy line, negotiable by the intermediate, as are all the drops on the Ottawa.

Ed wanted me to learn how powerful the Ottawa can be--just for future reference, when I ran between the holes.

After McCoy's Chute, the Ottawa divides into two branches. The Main Channel hooks right, weaving between a pair of islands while the smaller Middle Channel, navigable only in high water, forges straight ahead.

The Main Channel flows flat as a lake for over a mile after McCoy's, making for a leisurely drift until picking up steam at its four remaining rapids: the Laurens, Butcher Knife, Norman's and Coliseum. At higher flows, the Ottawa rapids **look** imposing but are extremely forgiving. The river runs deep and a swim is



photo by Joe Minskasky

Paddler leans on a brace in one of the Ottawa's deep holes.

to paddle under those conditions lasted throughout the year. After a few seasons, the urge only made it through the spring, and now, well...

Maybe I'm just getting older. Or maybe just a little smarter.

Now I prefer to while away my summers on "tourist rivers,"--streams with immediate access and short shuttles, no portages, warm water with considerable playing and a restaurant with good food and cold

check out Phil's Hole, the Ottawa's most notable hydraulic.

Phil's stretched out 20 yards from the right bank and looked at least five feet deep. Another hydraulic, even steeper than Phil's, lurked in river center.

"The hole in the middle is called Stadler's. I think you should jump in and surf it," deadpanned Ed, the leader of the group.

"Are you serious?"

## Ottawa cont.

more likely to result in a loss of face rather than a layer of skin.

In addition, all of the Ottawa rapids feature wide eddies along their banks to allow paddlers to blitz through the drop and then float back a fluid escalator to jump on the wave or hole of their choice.

Consequently, paddlers are apt to linger for an hour or more at each of the rapids, alternately playing, resting, eating or sun-bathing.

There's a hole that forms at the Lauren's bordered on the left by Whale Rock...you can surf the hole, sneak back up around the rock, and catch the hydraulic again and again. There are whirlpools that swirl at the Bottom of Butcher Knife--deep enough that even a Dancer can squirt. And there are breaking waves through the meat of Coliseum that guarantee a quick Jacuzzi of a surf.

I guess what I'm saying is that the Ottawa is the perfect place to take a vacation from boating. When the adrenaline runs thin and the jaded boater looks for a place to float and goof, it's time to turn north. A tourist river.

The Ottawa also demonstrates a stormier disposition in the spring when high water swells its banks with enormous flows.

During periods of high water, boaters on the Ottawa often opt for the smaller Middle Channel. The Middle Channel offers a similar amount of play opportunities--but not without a price.

The dedicated "tourist" boater may not feel up to the challenge represented by Garvin's Chute--a steep 15-foot slide between a pair of serious hydraulics. But the carry is short and the customary playing on the tail waves below beckons invitingly.

At high water, the most intimidating sight on the river is the final rapid on the Main Channel. Compressed by a rocky shore on the left and a ledge on the right, the river rises into a monumental 15-foot breaking wave, followed by two only slightly-

smaller brothers. It is Grand Canyon-type whitewater.

Not surprisingly, just upstream from "Colie" is a broad eddy with a sandy shore known locally as "Miami Beach." The commercial raft trips pause here to allow their guests to loll in the sun, paddle about in the eddy and watch the boats test their luck below.

You can't escape it--even in high water when the Ottawa grows teeth, it's still a tourist river.

There are days in the Appalachians, say after playing 12 miles of whitewater during the course of an afternoon, that the paddler barely has the strength to lift a single bottle of well-deserved suds to his lips before retiring.

From outward appearances, you'd expect a similar situation on the Ottawa. Northcentral Ontario is largely an agricultural region dominated by well-attended farms dotted over rolling fields--hardly the cosmopolitan area you'd associate with an active night-life.

But that was before the rafting industry took root. Back in the 1970s, Pittsburgher Joe Kowalski established his Wilderness Tours

rafting operation on the Ottawa, and during the intervening years the Beachburg area has become known as "the Whitewater Capitol of Canada."

Now back in the states, rafters and kayakers usually give each other a wide berth, both on and off the river. But on the Ottawa, the raft guides actually seem to enjoy the presence of hardboaters.

And private boaters are definitely welcome at Wilderness Tours' outdoor center, appropriately named Rafters. A specially designed open-air facility with sun decks on three sides, Rafters offers a full-service restaurant just minutes from the take-out and a high-energy atmosphere that lasts long into the evening.

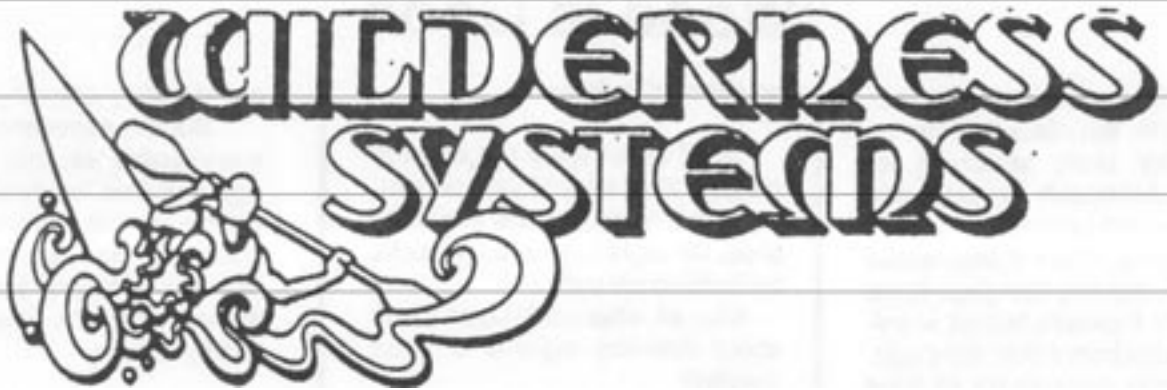
WT literature refers to its combination of the Ottawa with a lively social environment as a whitewater "Club Med" experience. That might sound somewhat decadent to the purist whitewater paddler...

But what the hell, what's so bad about being a tourist?



After a tough day on the river, "Rafters" offers dining, drink and dancing.





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# the cutting edge

## Custom paddle makers agree:

### "Wood is Good"

Moments after a paddler has survived his first class IV drop, he consciously starts searching for ways to distinguish himself from, well, beginning boaters.

He may handcraft individualized headgear, molding fiberglass in the shape of a fireman's helmet or imitate a design from a Star Wars epic.

He may relegate his Hi-Float PFD to the closet, opting for a racing-cut life jacket that promises greater comfort, maximum fashion and barely enough floatation to keep his head above water in case of a swim.

Or he may moth-ball his plastic kayak, choosing to squeeze into a sliver of a squirt boat that behaves more like a submarine than a surface craft.

But whatever the aspiring expert paddler makes to style, his first acquisition is a custom wood paddle.

Picture this:

Five boaters meet in Douglas, WV for a run down the Blackwater. Boats are tied down on a single vehicle for the shuttle to the put-in, gear stashed in the back and five paddles, a Backland, Rainbowave, Gonzo, Dagger and a...**what's** this, a synthetic stick?

One of the boaters averts his eyes.

"My Silver Creek is busted," he hastily explains.

Nothing stands out among a collection of glistening custom hardwood paddles like a chipped and nicked synthetic blade. And regardless of the virtues of wood paddles which will be extolled in the following story, remember: one of the real reasons paddlers buy wood sticks is that they look like the kind of paddle

an expert should use.

I fell under the allure of wood paddles after my first year of boating. And, having access to a wood shop, I thought I'd save a few bucks by building my own.

After all, what could be so tough about throwing together a wood paddle?

Approximately 50 hours of labor later, I had fashioned my first stick. And it looked good. Unfortunately, it also weighed about five pounds. I used it to perform fore-arm curls for a while, then donated it to the local canoe shop. Thought it would look flashy hanging on the wall.

Even that plan didn't pan out. The partitions in the canoe shop didn't have enough blocking to support the weight. That's when I figured out that oak and maple, while strong woods, aren't necessarily the right materials for paddle construction.

My second attempt at paddle fabrication took nearly as long. This time around, I used ash, basswood and cherry. The final product was a tad heavy, but the weight seemed acceptable. After a test cruise on some local flatwater, I figured my stick was ready for the acid test on the Upper Yough.

The paddle worked great for the first five miles until I flipped running a drop called Meatcleaver. While setting to roll, my paddle banged a rock and the shaft separated in two pieces.

I managed to hang on to half the stick and complete the roll. Back on shore, I fashioned an impromptu T-grip by lashing a branch of a convenient sumac tree to **what was** left of the shaft and was able to C-boat

out, avoiding a lengthy hike.

But the experience taught me two valuable lessons: the technology involved in creating a wood paddle is the domain of skilled craftsman and regardless of the expense of buying a custom stick, it's not worth the time required to build your own.

Custom wood paddle production is an Appalachian industry originating in small shops from Pennsylvania down through the Carolinas. The hardwoods used to produce the paddles are milled from forests covering the surrounding mountain sides. And the rivers they're used to paddle are only minutes away.

Mykl Messer, proprietor of Rainbowave paddles, and Jess Gonzalez, creator of Gonzo paddles, are **prime** examples of the industry.

Messer grew up in the Washington D.C. area where he learned to kayak. After graduating from R.P.I. in Albany, NY, Messer returned to the Washington where he worked as a cabinet maker until breaking his back in a car accident.

Following his recovery, Messer relocated in Albright, WV--just a stone's throw from the Cheat Canyon put-in. After 10 years in the paddle business, Messer produces "a couple hundred" sticks a year and supplements his income by guiding private raft trips.

Gonzalez worked as a machinist in the Pittsburgh area until four years ago when he decided to turn his part-time wood-working hobby into a full-time occupation. Jess now produces approximately 200 sticks a year and also builds high-end custom furniture.

Having recently acquired a new 6,000 square foot facility, Gonzalez is **looking** to expand production and grow out of a one-man operation.

"If I could make more paddles, I could sell more," Gonzalez said. "The market seems to be expanding and I'm trying to take in dealerships. But I have to expand production."

Even if Messer and Gonzo both expand production, neither expects to get rich building paddles. In both shops, eight to ten hours are required to create a kayak paddle. And with Rainbowwave kayak paddles priced at \$200 and Gonzo sticks at \$160, the hourly return for labor expended is remarkably low after the cost of materials and overhead is subtracted.

"Most furniture makers would agree that with the kind of work that goes into making a paddle, the price should be up around \$400," Messer said. "But the market just won't bear that kind of pricing."

So why do Messer and Gonzalez, as well as other paddle manufacturers such as Sidewinder, Silver Creek, Dagger and **Backland** continue to build a product that is essentially underpriced? Maybe because most paddle-makers are also paddle-users.

"Paddles are actually hard things to make," Gonzalez said. "Because I use them, I understand what the final shape is supposed to feel like. 'You can show someone else what to do, but they don't understand how to take a little off here or there to make it come out right."

"I love the sport," Gonzalez said. "Making paddles is a way of contributing to it. I'm associated with the sport more than just four hours on Saturday or Sunday."

Paddle production begins with the choice of wood. Messer and Gonzalez use similar species of hardwood **for their** sticks incorporating ash and basswood for most of their shafts and choosing from willow, walnut, cherry, maple and hickory for the blades.

"Wood quality is the #1 consideration," Messer said. "You have to

use wood with a tight grain. I exclusively use hardwoods because softwoods are prone to **compression** cracks."

Gonzalez also places a high priority on wood selection, hand-picking lumber from a mill close to his home.

"**The wood I use is based on a strength to weight ratio,**" Gonzalez said. "You can use all kinds of wood in a paddle, but you need to balance the overall strength of the wood against the weight it adds to the final product."

Once the wood is selected, the paddle shaft is laminated using a basswood core sandwiched between layers of ash. The blades are then glued to the shaft and the paddle face is "**profiled,**" giving the blade its distinctive shape.

Both Messer and Gonzo produce the traditional slalom paddle design as well as the popular "Slasher" style. Sales of the **asymmetrical** Slasher design make up a majority of Messer's orders and a significant percentage of Gonzalez's production.

"Most furniture makers would agree that with the kind of work that goes into making a paddle, the price should be up around **\$400.**"

"The slasher design has been around for a long time," Messer said. "Actually, it's a perversion of an old wildwater racing paddle. It's as old as some of the Prijon designs that appeared 20 years ago."

"The Slasher is a more efficient blade," Messer said. "It has a lower paddle angle. The angled end provides tips on the top edge that gives you nice finesse to a Duffek while the lack of tips on the lower edge keeps the paddle from fluttering when it leaves the water. When paddling, the stroke is closer to you while the blade is in the water and when used as a brace or a rudder, the paddle rises all the time."

After the blade has been configured, hardwood edging is added and the front and back faces are ground to their finished dimensions.

Protective epoxy end tips are attached, the paddle is sanded, and a protective coat of fine fiberglass and epoxy covers the blade.

When a custom paddle finally passes the **last** inspection, it looks almost too good to use. Strips of walnut veneer highlight the **kerf** joints, light and dark woods are used alternately to provide contrast, rich veneers of cherry or maple cover the end caps.

When a boater flashes by stroking with a wood stick, he looks too good to be concerned about the rapid around the next bend.

It would be a disservice to custom wood paddle builders to infer that aesthetics are the main advantage to owning a wood stick. Sure, a wood paddle is beautiful, but according to Messer and Gonzalez, wood paddles are more pleasant to use and actually more durable than synthetic designs.

"A custom paddle has a lot of advantages," Gonzalez said. "Most people prefer the warm feel of wood and you can shape the paddle to individual tastes much more readily than with synthetics."

"Also, the paddle is not as stiff as a synthetic," Gonzo said. "I know that when I use a synthetic paddle, the stiffness is hard on my arms. A wood shaft has more bend... it softens the blow when the paddle enters the water."

"**The flex in wood is distributed evenly through the paddle,**" added Messer. "It softens the entry and then springs back at the end of the stroke"

But in addition to performance, the custom paddle manufacturers also assert that their sticks are stronger than synthetic products.

"Wood has a better flex **cycle--** it's even through the whole paddle," Gonzo said. "In composite materials with uneven flex cycles, the material tends to break down in the area of the greatest stress. That's why you see so many synthetic paddles break off between the shaft and head"

cont. page 45

# CONGESTED RIVERS:

## Special AWA Report



Freighttrained!...Overcrowdedrafts often result in collisionsbetweencommercialrafts and privateboaters.

This is a true story--it came right out of Ripley's Believe It or Not:

In Oklahoma back in 1903, there were only two automobiles in the entire state. Somehow, they managed to have a collision.

Perhaps it shouldn't have come as a surprise that the cars smashed together. After all, whenever vehicles utilize a limited space, such as a road, their chances of colliding increases dramatically.

The same could be said for rivers and the craft that navigate them. Ever since commercial rafters and private boaters put-on at the same

river, it seemed inevitable that some day the divergent interests of the two groups would crash head-on.

Throughout the whitewater rivers of the Appalachians, that day has come. The low-water summer of 1987 has forced private boaters to restrict their activity to rivers with dependable summer flows like the Upper and Lower Youghegny and the New. Meanwhile, the sunny and dry weather coupled with increased public awareness of whitewater recreation, has attracted customers to commercial rafting outfitters in record numbers.

It's simply a case of not enough whitewater resources to handle the demand for recreation. And the subsequent overcrowding has created a rancorous attitude among river users.

Pope Barrow, AWA river advocate who was named as Perception Kayak's 1987 "River Conservationist of the Year" for his whitewater conservation activities, notes that dissention between commercial and private boaters may develop into a future problem rivaling small-hydro construction.

"I see nasty, creeping conflicts

## Crowded rivers: an AWA report

between private boaters and commercial interests," Barrow said. "It's driving a wedge between the two groups."

"Most of the problem is on the New and the Upper Yough, but it's getting out of hand everywhere," Barrow said. "It's kind of like this freeway thing in L.A. where people are getting caught in traffic jams and end up shooting each other."

"As a matter of fact, there was one incident on the Lower Yough where two private boaters were stuck waiting for the shuttle bus at the take-out and ended up pulling their Tekna knives over an argument who was going to get on."

Larry Adams, superintendent of Ohio State Park, acknowledged the incident occurred.

"I don't doubt that it actually happened," Adams said. "It was hearsay, but enough people saw it and reported it that I believe it happened. Unfortunately, we didn't get a radio report in time to make an arrest."

"We let our quota for hardboats go on a holiday weekend last season, and we exceeded our quota by a substantial number. That was the weekend the incident occurred. It was a one-time deal just to see what it would look like. We had complaints from all the outfitters about congestion and when I went down to look at it, it was a real zoo."

Like rats trapped in a box, boaters and rafters are turning against each other, then against themselves.

Ironically, a sleepy town in western Maryland named Friendsville is the possibly the epicenter of acrimony between boaters and rafters. Located at the take-out for the famed Upper Yough run, Friendsville attracted a resident population of expert boaters that staked territorial rights to their home river.

And for years, the Upper Yough seemed to avoid the user pressure that plagued other summer rivers. The river only ran on week-day

hydroreleases, for one thing, and its ferocious reputation seemed to scare away all but the high-end boater.

A big day might see a total of 10 paddlers make the run. Rafting pressure was also practically nonexistent. Four outfitters did book trips, but they were generally small and left little impact.

Besides, the largest of the original outfitters, Precision Rafting, was run by Phil Coleman and Roger Zabel, two of the best kayakers in the world. Most of their guides were also top-notch boaters including an occasional employee named Jon Luginbill.

It was easy for local paddlers to live-and-let-live with Precision. And except for isolated squabbles with landowners at the put-in, the scene at Friendsville was remarkably laid-back.

That was before the summer of '87 when seven additional outfitters elected to take advantage of the Upper's class-five water.

"On the Upper Yough, you have 11 outfitters trying to run trips on a two-hour water release, which gives you an effective bubble of maybe twenty minutes," Barrow said. "And the number of private boaters has also increased, there are days where there might be 60 or more. It's pretty rugged."

"The problem is that you'll get 35 rafts trying to navigate the river. They'll get down to Charlie's Choice and one raft will get jammed in a slot and then the four or five rafts following will start to pile up. Then you'll have a bunch of boaters piling up in the eddy above while they untangle the rafts because there's just no way through."

"It's an incredible battle," Barrow said. "The boaters will fight to get ahead of the rafts and then they get ahead of the water and they're practically banging down the rocks."

"The people from Friendsville are going crazy and boaters who have been paddling the Upper Yough for a long time are real up-

set."

Efforts to limit raft usage organized before the season by Friendsville native Jess Witemore were generally fruitless and as the acrimony between the two groups continues, no solution appears in sight.

But one fact generally ignored in the controversy between the two groups is that the overcrowding is partially due to the increased number of kayakers who now roll into Friendsville with boats on their cars. As boating skills improve and the boat-busting reputation of the Upper diminishes, more paddlers look to get on the river than its technical nature comfortably permits.

Even without the rafts, 60 kayakers during a two-hour release is too much pressure for the resource to absorb.

Down the road in Ohio State Park, Superintendent Adams knows all about the increasing number of hardboats. Kayak user-days increased by more than 4,000 in 1986 and this year promises even greater pressure.

Unlike West Virginia and Maryland rivers, the Lower Yough already had usage quotas in place. In the early 1970's, a survey made by the Pennsylvania State University affixed the river's maximum carrying capacity at 1,920 people a day. That number was split down the middle, generating 960 slots for both commercial and private users.

The private boating number was further divided on a 1:1 ratio, figuring 192 positions for hardboats and 192 slots for private inflatable each carrying four passengers.

Until this year, the kayak quota was never much of a problem. Boaters could plan a trip to the Lower Yough secure in the knowledge they could simply show up and put on.

No more.

"This year is not the first time we've turned hardboaters away," Adams said, "but it's the first time

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we've had to **turn** them away with this kind of consistency. We've been turning them away every week and the past **couple** of weeks there's been some pretty substantial numbers. We've had more capacity days this year than we have had in the past 10 years."

"At first the ratio was loaded in favor of the **hardboaters**," Adams said. "We used to never reach our maximum while we've been turning away inflatables by the thousands. That was because we realized the added safety factor of having hardboaters on the river and because we recognized the boaters as true whitewater enthusiasts--we wanted to give them a growth area."

"But now...I don't know where they're all coming from..."

Where many of them are coming from are homes hundreds of miles away--only to discover they can't get on the river. And Adams does

know where boaters are heading for: increased regulation--at least on the Lower Yough.

"I think there's no option but to go to a full reservation system," Adams said. "It won't be this year, and I have my doubts about next year, but that's the only way we can go."

"In the meantime we've contacted boating clubs, trying to coordinate club **outing**s so they don't fall on the same date. But I don't know if that will make a difference. So many of the people who come here to boat **come** in small groups."

No boater whose been freight-trained by a 15-foot Avon or who has had to wait behind 10 other kayaks to surf a hole is going to disagree there presently exists a severe overcrowding problem on our whitewater rivers.

Where the controversy begins is deciding who is responsible for the

condition...and how to alleviate it.

The dilemma is **compounded** by the fact that our limited whitewater resources are further endangered by dams, diversions and other water projects. Internecine squabbles by river users may only succeed in allowing us to lose **our** rivers altogether.

The following articles present a pair of differing viewpoints of the rafter-kayaker feud that's brewing--and of its potential repercussions.

The Youghiogheny River Advisory Board, a group consisting solely of local landowners and three of the Upper Yough's original commercial outfitters--Precision Rafting, Upper **Yough** Expeditions and Appalachian **Wildwaters**--developed a proposal regarding **commercial** whitewater usage on the Upper Yough.

An abbreviated summary of the proposal with items effecting boaters appears below.

The proposal appears to be an attractive solution to private boaters in the respect that it limits the daily allotment of rafts to a very **manag**-able number. It also sets exceeding high safety requirements in terms of expertise required of guides.

1. Limit total number of customers to 36 per day.
2. Limit total number of commercial rafts to 12 per day.
3. **Limit** total number of commercial outfitters to 3 companies.

Each is allowed no more than 12 customers per day each.

Each is allowed **no** more than 4 rafts on the river.

4. Violation of any of the above regulations should result in revocation of that outfitter's privilege to commercially outfit the river.

5. The limit of **36** customers per day should not be raised in the future.

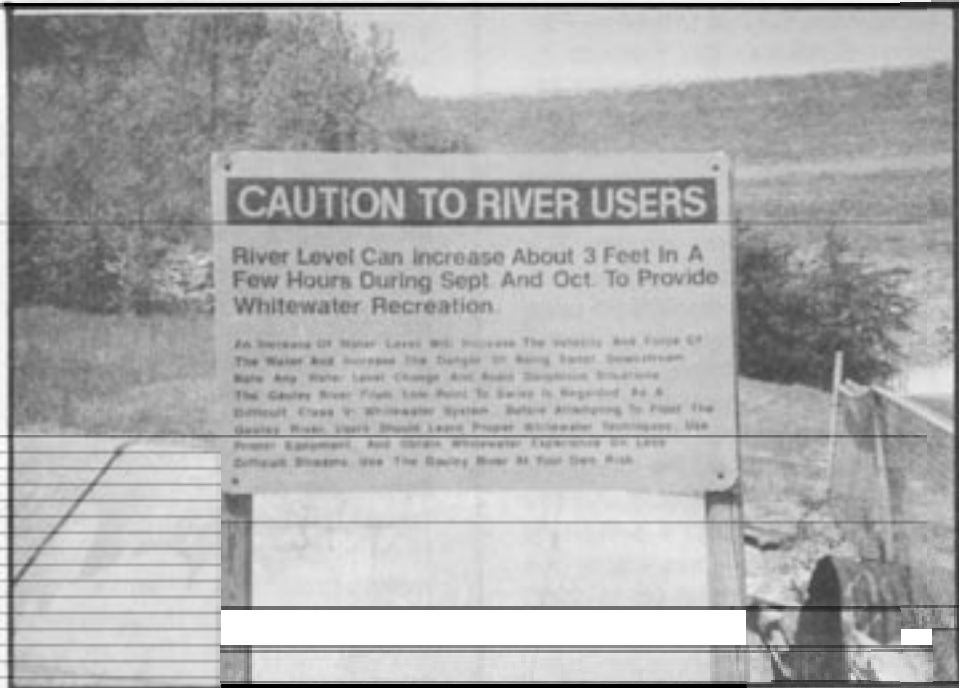


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we were unable to convince DNR officials or a majority of the Advisory Board members that we had a stake in the issue. The vote ended up at a 2200 limit prior to July 15 and a 1800 limit after that time (this date historically represented the split between spring high water and summer low flow periods and water flows directly impact carrying capacity). We were disappointed at the outcome, but relieved that finally an end to the expanding commercial traffic had come. The ceiling was in place.

This wasn't the end, but only the beginning of the ensuing manipulation of the DNR by the outfitters, lawsuits, and political events that destroyed the credibility of the Whitewater Advisory Board. The real bee's nest was disturbed when the Board attempted to allocate these totals among 24 licensed outfitters. The big thrust behind the outfitters' arguments were economic related. The rafting industry had created a boost in state tourism, and this carries with it political clout:

"River levels can increase..." but what about river usage levels? The Gauley suffers from severe congestion during fall release periods.

## Commercial outfitters need regulation

By Kim Casto

On October 10, 1985, the issue of commercial use limits for the New River outfitters finally came to a vote at one of the Department of Natural Resources Whitewater Advisory Board meetings. The West Virginia Wildwater Association (a group of non-commercial paddlers) had launched an effort to see that commercial use limits were kept at a level that would allow a paddler a safe, enjoyable trip down New River unimpeded by commercial traffic. realizing that the days of running the river and not ever seeing a raft trip were long gone, we were primarily concerned about personal safety on the river. For a kayaker, it is a very uneasy feeling to run Middle Keeney with a raft twenty feet in front of and behind you. It gives you

the feeling of riding a 50 cc Honda on a rush hour freeway with a semi truck on your bumper. At any rate

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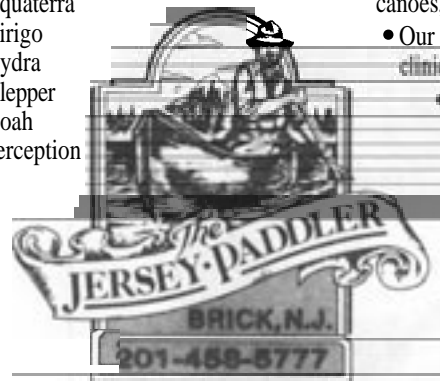
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Many more meetings followed which I did not attend and the ceiling was going up with each little point of contention addressed. I honestly don't know if anything was ever made final. To my knowledge, if there were allocations in effect during the 1986 season, the DNR hadn't communicated them to the outfitters.

The same sort of issue followed on the Gauley except here the overcrowding is much more critical. To begin with, the Gauley runs only when the Corps of Engineers releases water from the dam. This happens on a scheduled basis only 20 days each fall. Depending on reservoir levels, this release may last only 8 hours and sometimes as little as 4 hours. So with the compressed release season and even more compressed release times coupled with the popularity the river has received in recent years, use levels have surpassed what is con-

sidered safe. The DNR contracted with a West Virginia University Forestry professor, Dr. Franklin E. Boetler, to conduct a carrying capacity study on the Gauley in 1984. After compiling his data, Dr. Boetler strongly recommended to the DNR that commercial use limits be regulated at 1600 customers a day. The 1985 season had already seen a commercial peak of 1886 so once again the DNR succumbed to the pleas of the outfitters. The limit would be set at the 1985 peak, but was this enforced? The visitation figures compiled by the Corps for the 1986 season peaked at 2448 people in rafts, and I personally participated in a head count one Saturday that added up to 2296 people running with a commercially licensed outfitter.

The Whitewater Advisory Board was formed by legislation in 1981 for the very reason that overcrowding on the State's whitewater rivers was

becoming a problem. The Board was appointed by the DNR director and they were charged with regulating river usage so that anyone participating in the activity could have a safe and enjoyable experience. The rafting industry has gained such momentum since that time that the whole picture has become one of economics. The DNR and State government are no longer foremostly concerned about safety and enjoyment of those who use the resource, but rather that each out-of-state tourist that comes to take a raft trip will spend \$150 some odd dollars per day. The outfitters, of course, are businessmen and need to do things that will enable them to make a profit. Most of them seem to have little regard for the conditions existing on the river. They are constantly exploring avenues which will improve their own competitive position and are not concerned about how they may impact other user



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## Crowded rivers: an AWA report

groups or the resource itself. They never seem to be content with what they are allowed to do, and the DNR is unable to draw the line.

During the months following that October '85 Advisory Board meeting, my hopes for regulation and resolution of the commercial carrying capacity issue lay with the National Park Service. They had formed a citizen's task force to seek input from the public for the development of their river management plan. I served on the boating committee and attended probably a dozen or so meetings between July and December of 1986. After all those meetings no agreement could be reached on how to regulate river users. The Park Service is mandated to provide each user group the experience they desire on the river; whether it be scenic, social, personal, etc. This can be done by imposing use limits, launch windows, or whatever. The fact is that the commercial outfitters would not agree to anything that might inhibit their future livelihood and actually proposed that the Park Service give them even more opportunity to expand. The draft river management plan is not yet out for comment, but I am fearful now that the NPS may also succumb to the momentum of the commercial rafting industry.

I personally hate to see regulation come to the New River--commercial or noncommercial, but the very first time the New was paddled regulation became inevitable. Its

reliable water flows were suitable for commercial operation. Once it was discovered that a raft could be safely navigated through the canyon, then the doors were opened to any profit motivated outdoorsman with an army surplus raft and a van. Twenty years later you have the conditions that now exist on the New. Regulation becomes necessary to protect the resource and to ensure that something less than chaotic conditions exist on peak use days. The same scenario applies to rivers across the country; the Grand Canyon, the Snake and Selway in Idaho, the **Chatooga**, and the Youghioheny to mention a few. Without regulation, where does the growth in the sport stop? How long are people willing to wait in line to run a rapid? When does it not become fun anymore? By whose standards is there considered to be overcrowding on a river and is this

condition potentially unsafe? What kind of experience do people expect to have on a raft trip? What has to happen before the outfitters, the DNR, or the NPS recognize that an unsafe condition exists due to overcrowding? A few token drownings perhaps.

There are no single answers to any of these questions, but one sure point is that the pristine qualities of the river are lost. And with each passing season or return trip to the canyon the experience becomes a little more devalued. I believe that most people paddling the New or Gautey today, outfitters included, would prefer to have the river as it was ten years ago. But the cows are out of the barn and the next step is to try to pry a fence around them. So, you never step twice into the same river. Conditions change and new water continually flows on.

## Rafters and boaters Share the same riverbed

There exists a particular pecking order among whitewater boaters:

The upper echelon consists of "celebrity boaters" like Lesser, Witmore and Whitesell--names chronicled in episodes of National Geographic Explorer and whose exploits are recorded in four-color magazines like River Runner or Outside.

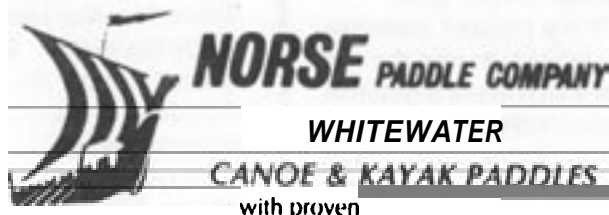
Then there are the weekend die-hards. Boaters whose memories contain the numbers of dozens of gauge phones and who can navigate their way around the Appalachian shuttle routes of class IV runs with the ease of a drive the corner grocery.

And finally, there are the beginners... novices who thrash their way down rivers like the Lower **Yough** and the Nantahela: the white knucklers and sometime-rollers.

Members of each respective group tend to stick to their own kind. Like it or not, there's a good deal of elitism involved with whitewater boating.

To a certain degree, each caste sniffs down its nose at the next. But every group shares a common disdain for another element of the whitewater community--the rafter.

Typically, hardboaters look upon rafters as unskilled buffoons who blunder blindly down the water-



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ways wreaking havoc in their path. And it's hard not to feel a little, well, superior.

In years past, this smugness has presented no problem. Hard-boaters and rafters went their own ways, both on and off the river.

But given the increasing numbers of both commercial rafts and private boaters on popular summer rivers, interaction between the two groups has become unavoidable.



Collisions between rafts and kayaks, congestion at put-in and take-out spots, long waits to utilize play spots and the loss of a sense of solitude has irritated members of both groups.

Generally, the commercial outfitters mask their dissatisfactions. It's simply not good business to raise a public stink and rock the boat. A flawed status quo is more acceptable than a change for the unknown.

Private boaters are another matter. They react to the crowded conditions with howls of self-righteous indignation, railing against the greed-head commercial rafting interests and calling for regulation.

But just for a moment, let's step away from our preconceived prejudices and take an objective look at the situation. And let's also consider where our vociferous attacks

on the rafting industry may lead us.

The nut of the rafter-kayaker controversy is that there just isn't enough river resources available to meet the demand for whitewater recreation. There's no solution to that problem--you can't just make a whitewater river.

But you sure as Hell can take one away. And no one knows that better than Dave Brown, former

executive director of the Ocoee River Council and Citizens for the Gauley River and the current head of the Eastern Professional River Outfitters.

Brown proved instrumental in the fights to save the Ocoee and the Gauley. Despite a momentary respite in the battle with the Army Corps of Engineers and the hydro developers in the Southeast, Brown realizes the war is from over.

He fears the present acrimony will drive a wedge between the two river-groups and prevent a coalition in future conservation efforts.

"During the Ocoee battle, I realized that private boaters were too loosely organized, too diffused to be effective," Brown said. "Only the outfitters really have the time and the money to make a difference. We don't want to diminish that role."

"Some private boaters are very

active, but few of them are really heavily involved. The outfitting industry ends up funding the fight and getting their customers to write letters. And in the end...they never get any appreciation. On the Ocoee, for instance, the outfitters are paying for the water that the boaters use for free."

Brown isn't saying that the rafting industry could go it alone. The outfitters also benefit from maintaining a friendly relationship with the boating element.

"Private boaters and outfitters each bring different elements to the battle," Brown said. "On the Gauley, individuals like Steve Taylor and Pope Barrow were invaluable for the technical assistance they rendered. But the outfitters added a certain credibility within the community. They helped bring the chambers of commerce in the battle along with the support of the local people."

"The alliance between private boaters and the outfitters is a very valuable thing and needs to be nurtured. There are going to be differences of opinion, but they need to be worked out together. We're too valuable to each other."

So what does that mean? That hardboaters should swallow their pride, shut their yaps and ignore continuing problems just to maintain peace in the family?

No. Even Brown admits the the need to maintain a solid front in the face of river usurpers "still doesn't excuse overcrowding or poor management."

But does it make sense to plead our case to state Department of Environmental Resources or Park Commissions? Inviting governmental regulation might open a Pandora's Box of unforeseen circumstances.

Maybe it's that elitist attitude that allows boaters to assume that if restrictions are passed, only the rafters will be effected. That might not be the case.

"The key thing that most private boaters don't realize is that the

## Crowded rivers: an AWA report

people in the rafts are not just an economic value but are individuals with a right to run the river," Brown said. "Most private boaters will run a river multiple times during the year where a person in a raft might be there only once. If you're going to be fair about issuing a permit, how are you going to choose between a boater who wants to run the New 10 times during a season and a rafter who just wants to run the river once?"

"There's going to be conflicts, but the first reasonable question an outside authority limiting river usage is going to ask is, 'How many times have you been on the river?' Basically, up to this point, kayakers have been spoiled."

Boaters frequenting the Lower **Yough** are presently facing just that situation. Quotas restricting the total number of commercial and private rafts as well as hardboats have been established for years, but until recently, the number of boaters looking to **put-oon** the river seldom exceeded the set maximum.

However, Ohio pyle has witnessed an explosion of **hardboat** activity during the past two years and this season, paddlers are being turned back in droves.

Park Superintendent Larry Adams has indicated that he expects a permit system similar to the **one used** to limit private rafters to be in place within a few years. And private rafters are lucky to run the **Yough** twice a year.

The answer, of course, is for commercial outfitters and private boaters to work out differences among themselves. This is easier said than done. The outfitters don't want to limit their **carrying** capacity by accepting arbitrary limitations and indeed, by setting such numbers among themselves, they may be guilty of antitrust regulations.

Similarly, kayakers don't want to hear of limiting their own numbers. But as usage grows, there may

come a time when they must police their own ranks. After all, a single kayak me have a greater impact on river congestion than a raft full of **customers**. Boaters linger on the river longer than rafters, and common activities like surfing and **eddy-hopping** add to the confusion.

One hopeful sign is the recent guidelines for **river** relations developed by commercial outfitters on the New. It's a small step toward improving the situation.

### Guidelines for River Relations

Developed by Outfitters on the New River and Promulgated by Eastern Professional River Outfitters Association

#### Noncommercial Boaters

1. Be friendly.
2. Allow them room to merge into flow where possible and don't barge into an eddy full of kayaks with the excuse that there was no place else to go or the raft is too big to slow down unless you have to make the eddy for safety reasons.
3. If you cannot avoid contact with private craft, shout a warning and apologize **afterward** for the accident. Be sure to ask if they are alright and need any help, especially if they've been separated from their boat.
4. Help a boater in need. Give rides, shuttles, and information willingly to the extent that your company permits. Make a friend whenever possible.
5. Other river users can be rude, too. When that occurs, be patient. For your customer's sake, avoid inflammatory replies.

Three of the original commercial outfitters on the Upper **Yough** have also developed a proposal very acceptable to private boaters which **would** limit their number of customers on that small, technical stream.

And the success of the Ocoee River Council, a combination of private boaters and outfitters who established limits on the Ocoee, shows the problem can be handled internally.

But the first step may be for boaters to lose their condescending attitude toward the rafting element. They're not the bad guys.

"**There** may be one or two **outfitters** with bad attitudes, but most outfitters are not like that," said Pope Barrow, this year's Perception "River Conservationist of the Year." "If anything, it's mostly the private boaters who are unreasonable."

"It all comes back to the problem that there's not enough resources to go around. Summer rivers are always going to have intense pressure."

--chris koll



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cont.

dles down to the victim, eddies out, quickly checks the depth with his paddle, then hops out of the boat to do whatever needs to be done. If you have a short length of rope you can clip into your grab loop so you won't lose your boat.

In an **emergenc**, don't be afraid to let your boat go if others are around to pick it up. Most Kayaks run big rapids better than their owners, and with full flotation they must always emerge unscathed.

#### GETTING OTHERS OUT THERE

Ofentimes a strong swimmer can get to a spot and others cannot. This is where ropes can be extremely helpful. A person on a midstream rock can throw ropes to those on shore and swing them in. In some cases a line can be belayed between two points and helpers can work their way across hand-over hand.

One particularly difficult problem is how to reach a pinned Kayaker who is not near a sizable rock or eddy. Open the gate of a standard carabiner; it can be forced over the coaming of any Perception Kayak. Attached to a rope, this can give a rescuer the hold they need to find their footing and start work. It's also a lot easier to find the coaming than the ends, which are often under water and can be difficult to reach.

Ropes are not without their dangers. Pulled by the force of the current, they become like steel cables and cause serious injury. If you're using ropes, carry a knife. Most outfitters require their guides to do this. Several carabiners make effective substitutes for Knots, and are much easier to untie quickly if needed. Don't be caught trying to make a rescue without the tools you need.

#### RELEASING PINNED BOATS:

The purpose of all these tricks is

to release a pinned canoe, kayak, or raft without running ropes back and forth across the river. On any pin, the water flow is roughly equal at both ends of the boat, holding it firmly against the rock.

You can release the boat by disturbing this balance. Typically one end or the other will offer possibilities. You can lift one end, which allows the water to push on the other end and pivot the boat free. You can roll a canoe or raft so that water spills out, relieving considerable pressure. Or you can just push one end upstream; although this works against the current it is frequently effective.

What takes a lot of rope work on shore is often surprisingly effective when applied at the site. If these ideas fail, you'll have to use a haul line or Z-drag in the conventional manner.

It's important to put a safety line on a boat before releasing it. It's pretty frustrating to free a canoe or raft only to have it disappear around the bend into a worse pinning below.

When a person is trapped in the boat, this precaution is doubly important. If they cannot kick free, they will drift helplessly into the next rapid. Unless the boat is unusually large or filled with water, it can be held with a hip belay, perhaps bent over a rock or tree.

Don't tie the rope off unless you are sure you won't want to release it, and never when there are people inside. Remember that ropes stretch, and can kick back dangerously. Stand clear if the rope is tied off and under tension, and keep a knife handy in case you need to cut it loose.

The purpose of this article is not to say that advanced rope skills are not important; they are. But it does discuss in water skills which have been used effectively for decades. The prudent paddler will learn as many different techniques as possible, since this increases the number of options available in times of trouble.

cont.

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paddles

"And even if a paddle does break, it's usually repairable," Messer added. "You can fix a broken shaft or a blade, or you can even take out a piece and replace it."

In addition, a custom paddle can be built to order taking into consideration the kind of usage it expects to see. Gonzo, for instance, offers three weights of kayak paddle, and the boater who is typically tough on his stick can elect to purchase a heavy-weight model that offers improved strength with increased weight.

Still, that doesn't mean that every novice paddler ought to opt for a wood paddle with his initial kayak package. Beginners are notoriously hard on any paddle—wood or synthetic. And it makes sense that if you're going to bang around a paddle during your first year of boating, you punish a less expensive synthetic blade.


That is, of course, until you run that first class IV drop...

### **AWA Accepting Nominations For 1987 Hydromania Award**

Nominations are now being accepted for the 1987 American Whitewater Affiliation Hydromania Awards. These awards will be given each year to the developer responsible for one or more newly constructed or proposed hydroelectric projects exhibiting the greatest insensitivity to the natural river environment. Government agencies are eligible to receive the award, as are electric utilities and private hydropower developers.

• Eligibility To be eligible a project must be on the drawing boards or under construction. Application for a FERC preliminary permit is acceptable if enough is known about the project to be able to evaluate its possible effects on the natural environment.

Send your nominations together with your name and address, to AWA Hydromania Awards, 6321 Waltham Rd., Bethesda, MD. 20816



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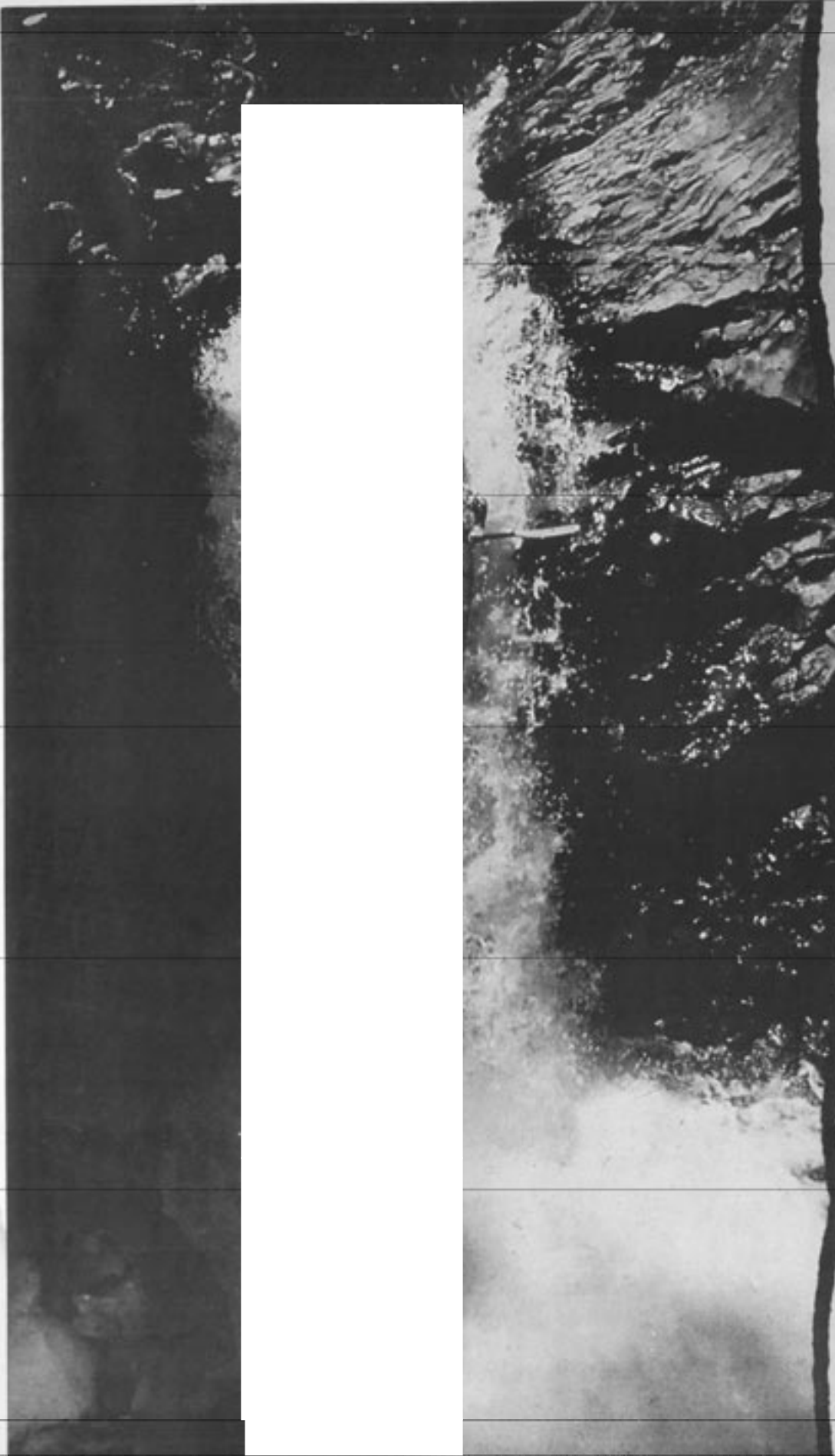
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Phil DeRiemer, Siete  
Tazas, Rio Claro, Chile.  
Photo by Lars Holbek.  
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