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July/August 2005

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summertime

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American Whitewater Journal

Volume XLVI, No.4

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Cover Shot:
Clay Wright boofin'
on S. Silver Creek
in California
Photo by Jed Weingarten



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Purpose American Whitewater

River Stewardship, an Integrated Approach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Dear Editor,

I was upset to read Tanya Shuman's article about paddling in Uganda [March/April issue, pages 13-14]. First of all, Africa is not a country as Shuman states. It is a continent; Uganda is the country. I felt that Shuman was over-generalizing the people of this continent when she referred to "the African people" by stating that the children she met were "always beaming with joy and excitement." I find it hard to believe they are always happy—especially in a country with a history of genocide, and a large AIDS problem where only 2.2% of the population lives beyond age 65. I urge kayakers and travelers to look harder, learn the local names of those "mud huts," and become a beneficial link between the rivers we travel to, and the stewards of these special places. I think the facial expressions of the child in the photograph sums up my feelings on this article: "What the heck!?"

David Stentiford
Walla Walla, WA

Dear Mr. Stentiford,

Your first criticism is correct: Africa is not a country. I must add that, as editor, I share in the blame for allowing this factual error to reach print. While I respect your right to interpret the tone of Ms. Shuman's article in whatever way you see fit, I would challenge the assumption that she intends to label all African children as perpetually happy. Surely one should understand that she is speaking only of the children she saw during her time in Uganda and does not mean to guess at their morale beyond the times she was in contact with them. I would argue that all she can and does say is that the children she saw were "always" happy when she was around them.

Finally, I join you in urging whitewater enthusiasts to travel with the utmost awareness of their surroundings. No matter how absorbing a river may be, sooner or later we must return to its shores. To neglect the environment or the people of these shores, regardless of the country or continent, is to miss an opportunity to make the rivers of the world healthier and more open to those who love their waters.

Ambrose Tuscano
Editor, American Whitewater



Editor's Note: In our last issue, we printed series of e-mails written between Sergeant Jason Campbell, a paddler deployed with the US Army in Iraq and Carla Miner, AW's Membership Coordinator. Here is the finale in that series:

Dear Carla,

Things have been nuts here lately, but I finally got the chance to take a few pics while reading my last issue of AW. Things are moving along quickly here and we are keeping as safe as we can. Hope all is well in your neck of the woods.

Yours truly,
Sgt. Jason D. Campbell

Big Smiles, Big Waves and (uuuugh!) Tiny Insects: An off-season in Uganda

I watched intently, my eyes glued as he began removing the tiny infusing organism from his foot. He explained in detail that this "figger" was a female flea that had burrowed into a tiny crack in his foot. She had been looking for a safe place with a good source of moisture to lay her eggs. Bob's toe was ideal as she had made herself comfortable and was now sucking his blood. He had been responsible for several others, having ignored the problem. The creature had grown and was now 10 times its normal size and filled with eggs about the size of a pea.

I took a closer examination and only saw a black dot. "Over on his toe back!" I said. "Over there, on the heel of his foot!" I said. "Yeah, not too bad, she hasn't burrow yet... crawling all the eggs. It just makes the back," he explained.

This was utterly disgusting, but I kept on watching in amazement. He had already washed his foot for 15 minutes and with a sharp knife was beginning to dig a circle around the black dot. Bob described to me that this was imperative in order to capture all her laid eggs. "See, take a look at this," he said as he took me to the white rubber gloves on his knife. "These are the eggs."

"Holy smokes," I thought, "this is getting grosser by the moment." However, I continued to stare intently at his foot. Within a few minutes he had gotten to the base of his nail and, to my surprise, he removed the creature from his foot. In the process, Bob left a perfectly round crater in his foot.

"All done," he exclaimed with a smile as he wrapped the wound for protection.

This is one of the many unexpected and surreal moments captured forever in my memory about my trip to Africa for the month of December. I spent three weeks on the Nile River in Uganda. For most of the time I found me at an island called the Fairy-Lemon, which in the Webster Kayaker's

The island is based between two world-class rivers, the Nile Special and Malaria. The biggest decision of the day was choosing between these two amazing rivers. Sometimes it came down to deciding if my body could even make it through another day of all-out paddling. Almost always I embraced the call of the waves and dragged my aching body out to be rejuvenated by the sheer joy of this experience. When I chose the Nile Special as the morning woke up all and Malaria as the evening sunset paddled. The river levels were ideal!

I came to Uganda with no expectations except to focus on training for the World Championships in 2005. What I got in

Corrections

We sincerely apologize for the omission of photographer credit for the stunning two-page photo of Upper Cherry Creek on pages 50-51 of our May/June issue. Our caption should have included the words: "Photo by Jess Brown."

In our Accident Summary in the January/February 2005 issue (pg. 24), the name of the paddler who helped Atlanta firefighters rescue the two women on the Chattahoochee River was Will Van De Berg, not Will Sutton. AW regrets the error.

Sue Taft's Column from our May/June issue was regrettably run with incorrect credits for both photos. The photo from the Ocoee Whitewater Center (pg. 8) is by Brandon Knapp, while the picture of Wick Walker (pg. 9) is by Bart Hawthaway.

Executive Director

The Journey Ahead



by Mark Singleton

AW's Stewardship Program

In this issue of the *American Whitewater Journal* we introduce the Annual Top 10 List of issues facing whitewater boaters and the rivers we care for. In many ways, this list defines the themes of who we are and what our scope of work will be for the foreseeable future. This work encompasses AW's new focus on River Stewardship. Stewardship is the unifying principle that explains our core mission of conservation, access and safety.

- Stewardship is an umbrella that covers the major project areas of AW.
- Stewardship is the process for an integrated approach to AW mission work.
- Stewardship includes an educational approach and tools for turning recreational users into conservation advocates.
- Stewardship is fundable.
- Stewardship builds partnerships with land management agencies.
- Stewardship enhances the public perception of boaters.
- Stewardship is the integrated language we use to explain what we do.

The forging of formerly separate areas of AW's mission work into a unified vision is directed by the newly minted AW River Stewardship Team:

Jason Robertson, Managing Director Robertson is a familiar voice and face for American Whitewater. He has spent eight years crossing the country working on high profile access issues for you. Robertson's years of experience working for the government on controversial environmental issues have provided him with unique skills for working with government agencies, companies, and individuals for AW. "Our strength is our ability to take a project that appears to be an immovable rock and to poke, prod and shape it—as though it were little more

than clay—to suit a variety of interests and responsible uses," notes Robertson.

Kevin Colburn, National Stewardship Director Colburn has worked for AW for four years and has been opening rivers across the southeast by providing strategic advice to volunteers and building coalitions with partner organizations. Kevin is taking on a new leadership role and expanding the scope of his work to encompass the entire country. As AW's National Stewardship Director, Colburn is working to empower volunteers and provide them with the necessary skills for appropriate activism. In addition to his new duties, Kevin continues his involvement in ongoing projects in the southeast. In a rare quiet moment Colburn observed, "I'm excited for the southeast. We've accomplished so much for whitewater rivers in the past couple years and in the process we've changed the face of boating."


Dave Steindorf, California Stewardship Director Steindorf moves out of his volunteer role and into a staff position. He will be working exclusively in California. In addition to representing AW on the North Fork Feather relicensings and helping to secure whitewater releases in northern California, Steindorf has worked as a kayak instructor and retailer, as a consultant on hydropower relicensings for the power companies, and is a unifying voice amongst diverse groups. Steindorf notes, "There is no shortage of work for us in California. The dam owners are hungry and AW is making sure paddlers get a fair share of what is on the table."

Thomas O'Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director O'Keefe, like Steindorf, volunteered extensively with AW for years. He was recognized in 2004 at AW's 50th Anniversary Gala with the first-ever AW Rising Star Award. Now Tom, as AW's Pacific Northwest Stewardship

Director and a Biologist with a Ph.D. in aquatic ecology, brings credibility to AW's already solid reputation. Colburn notes, "Northwest paddlers are really lucky to have Tom working in their region."

Much of the hard work on these Stewardship issues is unheralded and is done by highly engaged local volunteers. All of AW's historic success stories include support from local clubs and individuals that represented the interests of boaters. The AW River Stewardship Team is in place to lead, train and support community based activism representing the interests of boaters and the rivers we care for.

Our River Stewardship Team remains focused on our mission "to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely." Staying true to our mission, we will continue to integrate our most valuable asset, AW member volunteers, with the issues at hand. This team will direct, educate and empower volunteer community activists across the country.

Remember that this work is made possible through AW membership and donations. There has never been a more focused approach to our mission or a better time to support the work of American Whitewater. Read more about AW's Top 10 River Issues in this *Journal*. 

See You On The River,

Mark Singleton
American Whitewater
Executive Director

AW News & Notes



AW Taps Advertising Agency Fort Franklin

Boston -- American Whitewater is the latest outdoor brand to join Boston-based advertising agency Fort Franklin's client roster that includes brands such as ESPN, the National Hockey League, Eastpak, Cider Jack Hard Cider and Dunkin Donuts. An agency known for its creativity and innovation, Fort Franklin's recent campaign for ESPN's Bassmaster Classic has garnered a number of awards within the advertising industry and was honored as a Kelly finalist this Spring among other well-known agencies such as Crispin Porter + Bogusky and Fallon.


In partnering with American Whitewater, Fort Franklin has been charged with



developing a brand campaign to drive membership, which will potentially include corporate identity development (logo, etc.) design, print advertising and web development.

"As an agency in New England, just about every one of our employees loves to fish, hike, sail, climb, kayak and bike, and a natural complement to these interests is commitment to conservation and the environment," said Marc Gallucci, CEO and Creative Director of Fort Franklin. "We are lucky enough to be able to choose the

clients that complement our passions and interests and look forward to creating great work for American Whitewater."

"Fort Franklin is an agency with a reputation for understanding the outdoor industry, and their passion is demonstrated in their work," said Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater. "With Fort Franklin's creativity and experience, we hope to increase our association's member base through innovative and unexpected methods of communication." 

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History

by **Matthew Selby**

Communications Director, *The Trustees of Reservations*

Early Whitewater Boating Images Make a Splash

I work for The Trustees of Reservations, a Massachusetts-based non-profit conservation organization that has worked to preserve landscapes and landmarks across the state since 1891.

As the oldest regional land trust in the country, my organization has helped protect more than 53,000 acres, and there are canoe and kayak launches on several of our 95 properties.

While packing for a recent office move, I made an interesting discovery: hidden in the nook of an attic office were four boxes of glass stereo slides dating back to 1914. While old photos are commonplace at The Trustees of Reservations, I knew these slides were distinctly different the moment I opened the box.

The slides depict a series of whitewater trips on the Westfield River in western Massachusetts in the springs of 1914 and 1915. As a whitewater boater I knew I had stumbled upon something rare, but it took some digging to determine exactly what I had found.

After extensive research I learned that these images may be the oldest photographic record of recreational whitewater boating in the Northeast.

"I'm absolutely positive they depict an early river trip by the Appalachian Mountain



Putting in at Cummington. Westfield River, April 19, 1914

Photo by Alexander Forbes

Club," said Sue Taft, author of *The River Chasers*, a history of whitewater boating in the US. "I think they are a significant find."

I described the images to Taft over the phone but told her little else. Imagine my surprise when in a follow up email Taft wrote, "Regarding the kayak you mentioned, my information indicates that Alexander Forbes used his kayak for the first time on the Westfield in 1915, after running the Westfield in 1914 in a canoe and deciding that a kayak would be better suited for the rough water."

Through further research I learned that Dr. Alexander Forbes was a member of both the Appalachian Mountain Club and The Trustees of Reservations. Dr. Forbes and his paddling buddies were still running the Westfield in 1929, when the beauty of Chesterfield Gorge was in imminent peril.

Forbes wrote of the run in the June 1937

edition of the AMC journal *Appalachia*, "to our horror, we saw a lumber gang at work in the woods hard by the head of the Gorge, constructing a bridge across it on the site of the old Boston to Albany post-road bridge. Inquiry revealed that they were planning to strip the entire east side of the Gorge where pines and hemlock, nearly 100 feet high, standing on the very edge of the cliff, rendered it the most striking bit of natural scenery in Massachusetts."

Upon the paddling group's return to Boston, Forbes got in touch with The Trustees of Reservations. TTOR halted the timber cut one day before the slope was to be stripped, and negotiated the immediate purchase of 17.5 acres of woodland along the Gorge to protect the natural beauty of the area.


The reservation has since grown to 166 acres, and attracts thousands of visitors every year. Chesterfield Gorge is adjacent

The paddlers in these slides were on a popular run on the Westfield River in Massachusetts affectionately known by local boaters as the "Pork Barrel" section. The Trustees of Reservations owns Chesterfield Gorge, one of the takeouts for this section of river. TTOR has canoe and kayak launches on many of its properties. You can search for put-ins on our properties by visiting www.thetrustees.org and clicking on "Search".



Knightsville Gorge - Westfield R. - April 18, 1915

Photo by Alexander Forbes

to the newly created East Branch Trail that runs seven miles south along the old River Road through Gilbert Bliss State Forest to the Knightsville Dam area. Chesterfield Gorge is also adjacent to the General Marquis de Lafayette Trail, which runs east to west through the Massachusetts hilltowns. 


Stereoslides of the Westfield River Whitewater Trips

The scanned images provided were taken from four sets of glass stereoslides that were shot in 1914 and 1915. The scans were taken of the better of two images exposed on the plates.

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Battle of Bull Sluice

by Robert Martin

Gary Gurkin at the Battle of Bull Sluice

Prior to 1969, the Chattooga River region of North Georgia was an isolated community that few people, outside relatives of the families who lived there, knew much about. Then came the movie *Deliverance* and the area was changed forever. It became a wild, lawless place; thrill seekers from all over the world rushed to this river to experience its excitement and beauty. As long as your vehicle didn't pose a traffic hazard, you could camp anywhere you wanted—free. The free camping and absence of law enforcement officials lasted much longer than it should have, but eventually the “outlaw days” came to an end. The Battle of Bull Sluice was one of the pivotal events that halted the lawlessness and free camping once and for all.

The battle was fought between the paddlers camping on the South Carolina side of the river and a gang of heavily armed and severely intoxicated men on the Georgia side. The paddlers were unarmed and only loosely affiliated. Only through the brave and decisive actions of Gary Gurkin did they stand a chance ...

The blazing bonfire and the frequent sound of empty beer cans hitting the rocks meant the party was still going strong on the Georgia side of the river as the paddlers began to turn in for the night. The shooting started at around 10 pm with sporadic rifle and pistol fire. By 11 pm the paddlers could hear rounds clicking through the trees, ricocheting off the rocks and thumping into the dirt around the tents. The boaters were hunkered down, hoping the Georgians ran out of ammo or started passing out. Then, during one of the brief silences, when they were reloading, Gary heard the unmistakable sound of an empty whiskey bottle being smashed against the rocks. “That's it,” Gary raged. “This river is dangerous enough without having to worry about cutting your feet open on some idiot's whiskey bottle!” With that, Gary crawled out of his tent and into the night.


He started working his way down toward the river, using rocks and trees as cover.

Gary's plan was simple: you see, Gary speaks Redneck and was quite sure that a little communication would resolve the problem. All he needed to do was alert them to the presence of people on the other side of the Chattooga; if he pointed this out to them, surely they would stop.

When Gary was within hailing distance of the enemy camp he yelled “Hey ya'll”. The enemy camp went silent. “There must be a dozen campsites over on this side of the river. Ya'll need to stop shooting over here!” There was continued silence as the Georgians considered Gary's proposal. Then Gary heard the unmistakable sound of six spent cartridges bouncing off the rocks. “They're reloading,” Gary told himself as he scrambled back to the relative safety of a boulder. As soon as he threw himself behind the rock a fuselage erupted from the enemy camp. They were shooting into the treetops with everything they had.

It was then that Gary went for reinforcements. He drove around for two hours before he found a payphone. He called the Rabun County Sheriff's Department and told them his story. “We're bringing those guys in right now,” the deputy said. “Another camper called us about an hour ago. He said someone asked them to stop and got shot at.” “That would be me,” Gary replied. “I don't think they were trying to hit me, though.”

The deputy asked if Gary would mind coming down to the jail to identify the men they had arrested. Gary agreed and continued on to the Rabun County Jail, where he met the sheriff. “These boys are from Atlanta,” the sheriff said. “We don't have any trouble with the local boys. They all know better.” He brought Gary to a jail cell that held the perpetrators. “These are the guys we picked up, do you recognize any of them?” Gary took one look in the cell and said “What the hell happened to 'em?” “They resisted arrest,” was all the sheriff said. They were so badly beaten that even if Gary had gotten a good look at them, he wouldn't have recognized a single one. Gary told the sheriff that he was sorry but it was too dark to see them across the river. He quickly left the Rabun County Jail, hoping to never return.

Thus the Battle of Bull Sluice marked the end of an era ... but a legend was born. 

Footnotes:

1. The Battle actually took place at Sandy Ford but Bull Sluice has a better ring to it.
2. Gary Gurkin is a wilderness/whitewater canoeist who has trekked extensively throughout the US and Canada. It is said that you can still see his claw marks on the rocks in Right Crack (Section IV of the Chattooga). He also has a good sense of humor. His only comment after reading this story was, “That's the battle of B.S. alright.”



Field Reports

Why Class V?

by Clay Wright

If you have read a kayak magazine lately, you've probably noticed a huge focus on "running the gnar," "serious Class V" and "dare-devil boating"—so much so, that you might actually be convinced that expert kayakers are gambling addicts, reduced to risking their lives (since they have no money).

This paints an inaccurate picture of why boaters continue to seek out difficult rapids. Sure, tons of Ocoee / South Fork American boaters look to run Class V just like skiers from Texas seek out their first Black Diamond in Vail. But, until they paddle it, it's just that next notch in their belts. It is a shame paddlers often confuse the grade of kayaking with the quality of their experience.

By definition, Class V involves a level of risk, which is unfortunate, but this danger can come in many forms. A section of river with Class II rapids but frequent strainers is Class V; the junky five-foot ledge with a nasty pin spot is Class V; the sneak line to a terminal hydraulic is Class V—but where's the pay-off? The Class V rapids I love are the ones that would be rated Class III or IV except for the enormous speed or technical challenge involved, which compounds the danger of any rocky encounters. The river experiences Class V boaters seek out repeatedly are those testing our abilities to find a line and execute it with precision, time and time again—all with an element



of speed and vertical drop that is addicting. Hairboaters aren't seeking RISK; they want the acceleration, speed, technical challenge, and necessary focus these rapids provide!

This issue of American Whitewater is dedicated to classic summer Class V runs, which is absolutely NOT an invitation or challenge to intermediate paddlers to push their level of risk in order to join the cool kids. Instead, consider these articles a resource for boaters who already possess the skills necessary to complete these runs with style, or an explanation for those wanting to know what all the fuss it about on these far away gems. "The Class V experience" for experts is the same as the "Class III experience" for another group: an incredibly fun, exciting, challenging, and memorable trip into the wild. Finding these steeper runs with a favorable fun/risk ratio just seems a lot harder. That said, let's rejoice in the liquid zip-line descent of the North Fork of the Payette, the maw below Cherry Creek's Mushroom, the underwater-navigational thrill of the White Salmon's Double Drop and BZ Falls, the perfect plunge of the Little White's Spirit Falls, and, of course, the bullet-like acceleration of the flume below the Green's Gorilla.

See you on the highway. 

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Intro to Whitewater

My 1st Summers Kayaking

by Nikki Kelly

Background

In 1995, a 19-year-old Kiwi lass flies the coop for her big OE (overseas experience). Famous last words: "I'll be home in two years." (I was home in 7 months). Her destination is America, first stop a place called Colorado where a rafting job awaits. The job turns out to be more part time baby sitter. After less than exciting times, she buys a beat up Subaru, loads her new acquaintance—the Hurricane—and heads west.

My First Summer

I come from an island where in three hours you can make it from one side to the other, so the drive to California was a monumental road trip (first of many to come). I distinctly recall a feeling of freedom yet to be surpassed.

Sunny days rafting on the South Fork of the American in Coloma, California drew me in and I have never looked back. My


homesickness quickly disappeared when I found that Coloma was home to many expatriot Kiwis. It was a great time cruising, basking in the heyday of rafting, making fat tips and plenty of fun all season.

This was a turning point for Nikki Kelly: rafter to kayaker. Every day I rafted and every day I kayaked, so I made a handful of money and developed skills in a kayak—skills that I later drew on whilst amongst the Cost Rica madness.

Month four of my big OE found me posing as photo boater on the Reventazon River, Costa Rica. Day in, day out, constant class IV rapids; this is when I became a kayaker. Hot tip: boat every day and you will excel. Another hot tip: warm water helps. I became addicted while in Costa Rica—a totally one-track mind, absolutely pure enthusiasm. It was my first summer kayaking and my best.

My Second Summer... In One Year

It was followed quickly by a southern hemisphere summer, where I racked up 17 personal new rivers in the New Zealand summer of '96. Two consecutive summers and you are in for life.

Nothing nasty happened to me my first summer to teach me the ways of the river. I was, however, humbled in New Zealand during my first helicopter trip on the Perth River, playing with the big boys. I did not know when it was time to take the dry route, even after strong recommendations to do so. Careening off line, I took the hit and the swim. It was a necessary step to show that young Nikki Kelly was not immortal. Still, it took me many more years of hard knocks to understand what the river is doing and what it will do to me! I am 29 now, going on 30, still loving every day on the river. 



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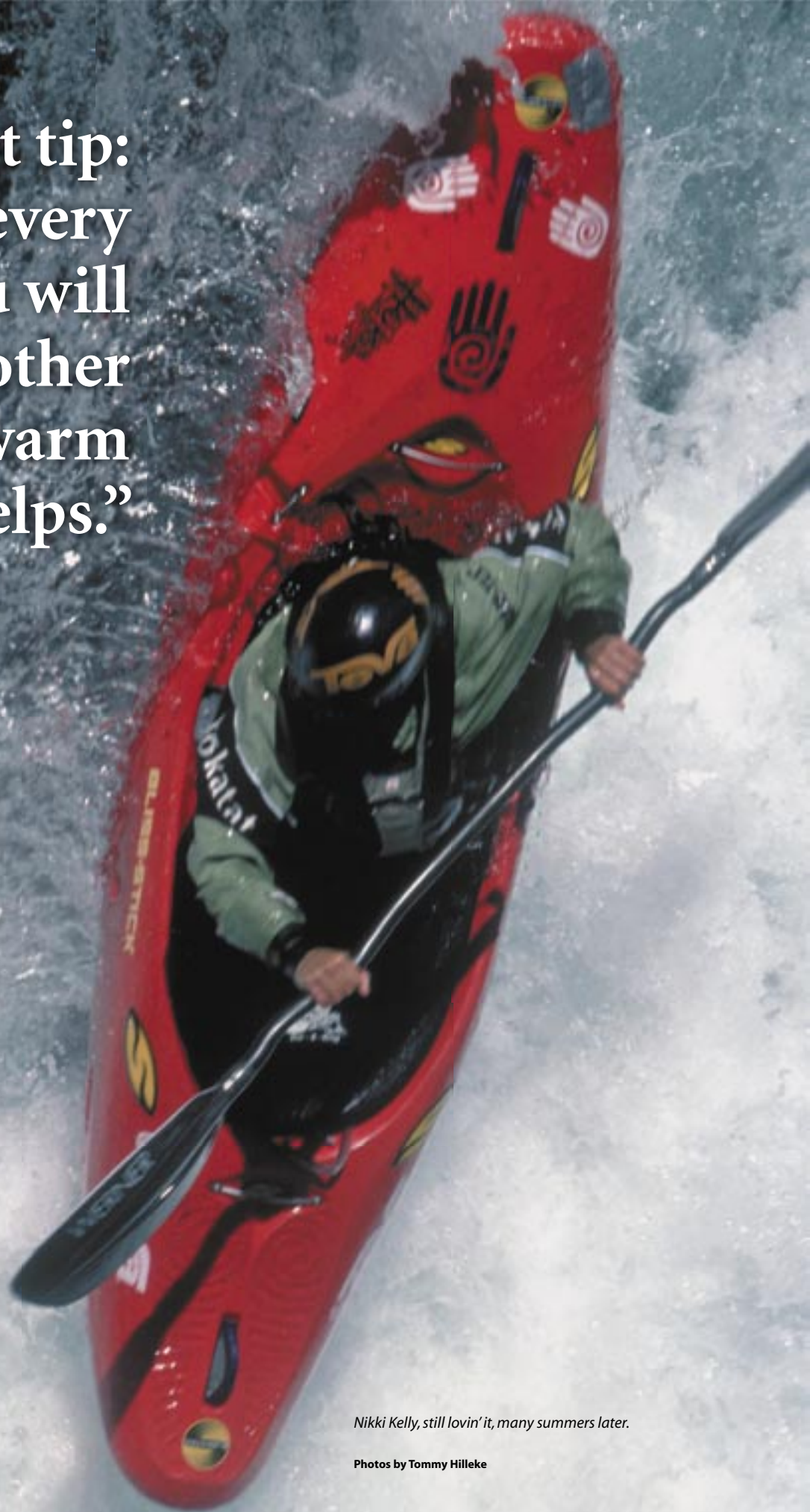
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boat every
day and you will
excel. Another
hot tip: warm
water helps.”



Nikki Kelly, still lovin' it, many summers later.

Photos by Tommy Hilleke

Intro to Whitewater

Becoming A Newbie

One Adult's Development as a First-Year Kayaker

Humble Beginnings

I am fortunate that I've always been comfortable around water. From the time my sisters first threw me into the city pool as a child, I have had a fascination with the liquid realm. I was always on the swim team, and yearly fishing trips with my family to cottage country in Ontario gave me an opportunity to appreciate water. As a lifeguard in high school and college, I taught children how to swim and be safe in the water, and I've also taught adults to feel comfortable in the water. For me, whitewater kayaking is just a natural extension of my love of water; still, I didn't find my way into it until my early thirties.

My husband, a former raft guide on the New River Gorge and a one-time kayaker, was ecstatic when I told him that I would like to check out some whitewater rafting trips. Whitewater just looked like fun, and my husband's pictures of the New and Gauley gave me a glimpse of the natural beauty of the river environment. Within a year we were taking guided trips on the Upper Yough, the Upper and Lower Gauley, and some sections of the Tygart. We even rafted the Big Sandy and the Russell Fork! Being in a raft gave me the opportunity to experience some fascinating places and to meet some interesting people. Although I didn't realize it at the time, rafting also helped me build some paddling and safety skills. I learned how to read water, catch a throwbag, swim in whitewater, and lean into downstream rocks. My rafting experiences were a lot of fun but I must say that I was scared to death when I fell out of the raft at Pillow Rock on the Upper Gauley. Up until that point I just thought of rafting as good fun, but from that moment on I had a healthy respect for the immense power of the river. Thank goodness my guide was the legendary Josh Hubbard, who pulled me out of the water with one hand while steering the raft with the other.

Rafting also gave me the opportunity to watch kayakers catch eddies, dodge rocks, and occasionally find their way under the



Jeanne Catalano, practicing her surfs.

Photo by Tim Catalano

raft. While kayakers fascinated me, I also wondered what it must be like to be upside down, underwater, in an enclosed boat. One of the first times we rafted the Lower Gauley we passed by a rescue effort at Koontz's Flume, which I later learned was a fatality. I also remember being spooked as we passed by "Chris's Rock" on the Russell Fork, which had the feel of a small roadside memorial.

Fortunately, these experiences were overshadowed by the friendliness of the boating community. I started to recognize and talk to kayakers from different river trips. Paddlers we met at the put-in or take-out often shared their knowledge of a particular rapid or recommended other places we should see. I realized that this was truly a unique community. I'll never forget losing one of my Teva's on the Upper Yough and having it returned by a friendly kayaker. I was hooked and decided that I would try being in a boat by myself.

Going Solo

After a few seasons of rafting trips our outfitters started providing us with inflatable kayaks (IKs) to use on certain sections of river. I got a chance to take an IK down the Middle Gauley and the Arden section of the Tygart, and even hucked my first waterfall in one on the Valley Falls section of the Tygart. I enjoyed being in a more maneuverable craft, and the IK was a perfect compromise for someone who didn't like the idea of being enclosed in a boat that tended to turn upside down. Before I knew it I had my own IK.

I started to paddle my IK on our local Class II-III stream, Elkhorn Creek (KY), at every opportunity. My husband and I also paddled other Class II-III rivers such as the North Branch of the Potomac (Barnum to Bloomington) and the Nantahala. We even started working on the Lower Yough and the Arden section of the Tygart (taking out before Undercut). The IK gave me a stable

by Jeanne Catalano



Jeanne Catalano navigating McCoy's Rapid on the Ottawa River.

Photo by Tim Catalano

platform to perfect some of my paddling skills: reading water, catching eddies, going in for surfs, and pulling myself back into the boat after a swim. At the same time it provided me with a sense of safety and I loved the fact that I could tan my legs, easily reach my drybag, and even stretch out for a nap in flatwater.

While paddling my inflatable kayak I never thought that I'd get in a hardshell. The IK was comfortable, it busted through holes and waves like a dream and I could maneuver it on a dime. I remember a couple of occasions where I was hassled by kayakers while putting on the river with my IK. Comments like, "Why don't you get a real boat," and "Look at the girl in the banana boat," did not curb my enthusiasm.

When my husband and I both finished graduate school and moved from Kentucky to West Virginia, my paddling time increased exponentially. For the past three summers I had rafted and paddled my IK, and it was apparent that a mild curiosity had developed into a passion. My husband and most of our paddling friends had since moved into hardboats, and we found ourselves boating nearly every weekend during "the season."

Easy Times in a Hard Boat

At this point in my whitewater career, I was beginning to see some of the drawbacks of the IK. It took a lot of effort to maneuver

the boat, and I was becoming more envious of the ease and style with which my paddling partners were darting around the river. Despite three years of being around whitewater, and my own comfort level with water, I was still apprehensive, but I was ready to give it a try.

I was fortunate to experience my first week in a kayak at the Madawaska Kanu Centre (MKC) in Barry's Bay, Ontario. My goals in taking this week of classes were simply to get a feel for the water in a kayak and to experience attempting a roll in a kayak. The week at the MKC provided basic river instruction focused on boating safety and paddling. During this week I was able to try out different boats, see some sections of beautiful river (the Middle and Lower Madawaska, and the Middle Channel of the Ottawa), and work with skilled instructors. It was comforting to have an instructor to talk to after my first time upside down. I also found that learning the basics from experienced instructors instilled confidence in my kayaking skills and provided me the tools I needed on the river. I still hear my instructor coaching me as I enter and leave eddies ("bust through that eddy line," "hit it high," and "don't stop paddling until your entire boat crosses that eddy line!"). The drills that I learned at the MKC come in handy for warm ups on rivers as well as for practicing skills.

I immediately noticed that I was a lot closer to the water in the kayak and the

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Intro to Whitewater Becoming A Newbie

maneuverability was incredible. If I could stop my IK on a dime, I could maneuver this boat on a hair. The kayak was more stable than I anticipated and I became enthralled with being able to lean and use my knees and hips to control the boat. I also had a lot more energy after a day in a kayak than a day in an IK.

Perhaps the most gratifying aspect of paddling instruction is meeting boaters from all over the world. During the week at the MKC I was immersed in a paddling community made up of paddlers from different countries, age ranges, and paddling skills. I walked away with a warm fuzzy feeling about boaters and the boating community and I knew that I wanted to be a part of it. This experience is something that I will never forget and it further whet my appetite for kayaking.

Armed with three years of rafting and IK-ing, and a week of formal instruction, I was now ready for my first season of kayaking. My goals for the opening season were to get a roll down and to learn how to surf. I also wanted to practice and reinforce the techniques and skills that I learned at the MKC. I bought a hardshell kayak and got out on Class II-III rivers as often as I could. I also hit the lake by our house during the week to work on strokes and rolls.

During this first season as a whitewater kayaker, I absorbed as much information as I could. I picked up books, videos, and DVDs that to this day I still review and learn from. I also picked up advice on the water. I'll never forget this kid who assisted me on the Lower Yough when I was learning how to surf. I don't know his name, but I still remember what he taught me about leaning back and forward to help catch a wave. I even learned by eavesdropping on complete strangers giving each other advice.

I am also very fortunate that I paddle with a group of skilled boaters who have provided instruction, encouragement and tough love. I can count on each of them

to help with a T-rescue, give advice on my roll or scout a rapid with me. These are paddlers who don't measure themselves by what rivers they've run, but rather with making sure that we each have a good time on the river. We're careful to research new runs, but we also push each other when it's appropriate. We started the season together by focusing on skill development on Class II-III water, and we continued to work on these skills as we slowly increased the difficulty of rivers we tried. By the end of my first season I had a (mostly) solid roll and had learned how to front surf. Our group had started to dip its toes into some Class IV runs like the Ottawa, the Lower Gauley, and the New River Gorge. On a few rare occasions we got in over our heads (I'll save my Middle Fork of the Tygart story for another time), but our group trusted each other enough to make it through.

Lessons From My First Summer

What can a first-year boater, an aspiring beginner, or someone who is looking to bring a significant other into the paddling community take away from my experiences? First, know what you're getting into. Even though I was immensely comfortable around water, nothing could really prepare me for whitewater kayaking. I believe that my time in a raft and an IK really helped me to be more comfortable around whitewater (and develop a healthy respect for it).


Despite some of the negative comments that float around the paddling community about rafting and IKs, these experiences were immensely important for me. Without them I might not have been drawn into the sport. The next time you make a derogatory comment about a rafter or someone in an IK, just remember that you're dogging someone who loves the river. Who knows, the person riding in that raft might be the one who someday works on your behalf to negotiate river releases or works on access issues. I don't believe that I could have simply jumped into a kayak and appreciated this environment as much as I do without those early whitewater experiences. If you're looking to bring

a significant other into the paddling community, book a few rafting trips and think about checking out some IKs, at least for the first season or two.

Second, find some formal instruction, either through a club or a paddling school. Even though my husband was kayaking at the time, it was simply easier on our relationship for a professional to observe, analyze, and critique my basic paddling skills. I would add that you never stop learning. I watch and listen to other boaters on the water, and occasionally invest in DVDs and books that pertain to instruction or safety.

Third, surround yourself with good people who focus on skill development rather than simply crossing the names of rivers off a list. I've come across boaters who measure their skills by the rivers they survive, and have also met boaters who don't seem to have much fun unless they're running a challenging river. Our group still has loads of fun on some beautiful stretches of Class II-III water; there are always things to work on, even if the section is below our skill level. Most importantly, the people I choose to paddle with are willing to scout, provide a T, and set up safety. They give me the confidence to occasionally push my limits.

Most importantly, I paddle as much as I can. One of my instructors at the MKC encouraged me to boat at least 30 days each year; this was the "magic number" where skills really start to show progress. We get out most weekends from March to November, and each year we try to get in some destination paddling (last year was the Ottawa, and this summer we're heading to Colorado).

Finally, don't get discouraged. It can seem limiting to be a first-year kayaker, especially when you are confined to a handful of novice runs. By the end of my first season I was getting a taste of what it might be like to be an intermediate kayaker, and the number of rivers and the number of people I met on the water grew exponentially. 

Involving a Significant Other in the Sport


by Tim Catalano

As Jeanne mentions in her article, I was a former raft guide and one-time kayaker before we met. With marriage, graduate school, and impending poverty on the horizon line, I sold my Dancer XT and looked to the future. We did some canoeing and camping trips together, but I never really thought that one day Jeanne would be a whitewater kayaker.

The rafting trips and the IK were great ways to help her get involved in the sport. Despite my inclination to avoid being in a raft again, I found myself having an excellent time (avoid the 8-person barges and book with companies that run 4-person boats). These experiences gave both of us an opportunity to really appreciate our surroundings and experience some whitewater that otherwise would have been completely beyond our reach.

When she determined that she was ready for a kayak, I knew that formal instruction was important. I was mostly self-taught, and surely had developed some sloppy habits. I also enrolled in a class at the MKC and learned a great deal. We were in different classes and often paddled different sections of river, but during our down time we compared notes and scouted different sections of river together. In a sense, we were both learning together, which, I believe, made the sport more enticing for her.

When we returned from the MKC and Jeanne bought her first kayak, I knew that we would be spending significant time on Class II-III water. While I would occasionally grumble about being on the Barnum section of the North Branch of the Potomac when the Arden section of the Tygart was at a sweet level, I channeled my energy into learning new skills, like developing an off-side roll, anticipating T-rescues, and actually using my throwbag. I also used this time to really work on my play on the river.

While this route may have taken some extra time, I now have a partner who is my paddling equal, and who is equally excited every Friday about getting away for the weekend. 

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Into to Whitewater Nineteen Seventy-Six

by Sue Taft

My First Year of Whitewater

We all probably remember similar things about our first year paddling: the anxiety and the excitement, the swims, and the combat rolls. We may also remember the on and off-river camaraderie, the relaxed dinners, and the campfire story-telling. For me, it has always been about more than just being on a river; it was that larger experience that kept me coming back.

I was twenty years old and still into flatwater marathons when Dolf, my racing partner, gave me my first taste of whitewater, paddling an OC-2. It was exciting and thrilling, and while I did not immediately abandon flatwater, I wanted more than it could offer. Whitewater, and all that came with it, seemed to provide that.

During the 1970s, it was no easy matter getting involved in whitewater in Ohio. There were no paddlesport stores to go to for boats or gear, no paddling schools for classes, and no Internet with which to arrange shuttles or paddling partners. Only paddling clubs could provide that, and fortunately for me, there were two in the area where I lived.

In January 1976, I joined one of the clubs and took my downriver kayak to a pool session to learn to roll. It was an unsuccessful first session until Loren, one of the C-1 paddlers, made a few suggestions, including putting me in his son's slalom kayak. After a few tries, I had it down. In the ensuing roll sessions, I mastered the C-1 roll, both on- and off-side, and even "partnered-up" to roll C-2.

I already had a hockey helmet, an adjustable nylon spray skirt, and a wet suit (1/4 inch, not for paddling, but for diving), so the next step was to get a kayak, which meant building one. My kayak was one of seven we laid-up in a marathon two-weekend session in early spring. It was a Bronco, designed by Tom Johnson (the basis for the River Chaser, the first plastic whitewater kayak). Instead of the traditional colored deck

with white hull, I used a blue and green cotton madras plaid as the outside layer to customize the kayak. It really stuck-out among the red- and blue-decked kayaks.

My first whitewater trip was on the Slippery Rock gorge in Pennsylvania. Having trained for marathons in high water conditions, I was at least familiar with eddies and reading currents; nevertheless, I played follow-the-leader down the river. Although feeling wobbly and awkwardly catching eddies, my first run was a success (no swims). I was one of two women on the gorge that day, although a few other women, wives of paddlers, joined us for the easier section below the gorge. This became the norm during my early years paddling.

My next river trip was over Memorial Day weekend for a club trip on the Youghiogheny (PA). I planned to paddle with the club on the lower section all three days but before that, I joined the sons of some marathon friends for a Friday early evening Loop run. I was a little intimidated by what I saw from the road but was not worried because I could roll. I made it down Entrance but swam at Cucumber—didn't even try to roll. I swam at Dartmouth and again at River's End, again, not even attempting to roll. At River's End, one of my rescuers asked why I hadn't tried to roll. I had no explanation; I had just immediately bailed. That really bothered me. I practiced my roll at the Loop take-out that evening again and again and could hit it every time, and yet I hadn't even tried when I needed it in whitewater.

I didn't sleep well that night at the campground. I wondered whether this was really the sport for me; I even wondered about selling my new kayak. As I wobbled down Entrance the next morning, something seemed to click—the same sense of determination that took over when my strength would ebb during a race. I pushed myself to control the boat in the water, not letting the water control me, but

again, I dumped in Cucumber. This time, however, I hung in there until I could set up for my roll. I hit it coming up to cheers from the other boaters. That was it: I had my combat roll.

The paddling atmosphere of the 1970s was not particularly conducive to women paddling whitewater, however, neither was my chosen profession as a chemist. Both occasionally presented the locker-room environments associated with male-dominated traditions. Fortunately, a few of the guys, Hank and Loren, Bill and Jim, took me under their wing. They encouraged me to try new things, although, thankfully, usually not too soon for my developing skills and confidence. On my third trip down the Lower Yough, Bill encouraged me to punch Double

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Sue Taft on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, 1978.

Photo by Jim Botamer

Hydraulic. Unfortunately at that lower level, I hit hard and cracked the hull of my boat. Thus began the tradition of spending the weeknights between paddling weekends repairing my kayak.


I paddled the Yough on the rest of the club's summer and fall trips, learning to surf, working on hitting my eddy turns high and tight, even learning to paddle backwards down drops to increase my confidence. I was told if I didn't have to roll, I wasn't playing hard enough, not challenging myself. I took that to heart and soon decided that my Stearns life jacket (not yet called PFDs) did not provide sufficient flotation, that my nylon spray skirt didn't keep enough water out, and that my hockey helmet was just plain hokey. I was also using a flatwater, left-hand control paddle (predominantly used by flatwater paddlers at the time), which meant I could not readily borrow from whitewater paddlers using predominantly right-hand control paddles.

While I made my own neoprene sprayskirt, vest, and shorties that summer, other gear was a problem for me because of my small size. Although Wildwater Designs provided a Hi-Float kit in a small size, its

body length was too long which required modification of the shoulders for proper fit. The small-sized Seda helmet required considerable padding to make it fit, and although the shaft of my new right-hand control Norse paddle was standard, it was too large, making the grip uncomfortable for my hands. Nevertheless, it somehow worked, and my confidence and passion for whitewater grew.

The memories now often blur from one year to the next, but I still vividly remember some moments from that first year. I remember camping at Rose Point, sleeping in the back of my Jeep Cherokee, putting on a frozen wetsuit on Sunday morning, going to the "Eat" Diner on Saturday night outside of Portersville to warm up and get their hot, fresh cinnamon rolls. I remember camping in the open ball field full of poison ivy along the Cheat at Albright, the long shuttles going in through Masontown down the steep descent to Jenkinsburg, and the packed vans with wet, smelly, happy paddlers coming out. I remember riding to the New on Friday night and arriving in the wee-hours of Saturday night, pulling off along the road in Thurmond to sleep for the rest of the night in a van, and waking in the morning surrounded by other

vans. And, I remember following Loren down the Gauley, watching in horror as a paddler ahead of us was trashed in Mash, yet wondering how they messed up so bad after running it cleanly myself.

It was a good beginning for a paddling career that has lasted almost thirty years and although I sometimes wonder what else I might have done with that time, I can't imagine what could have replaced it. 

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Sue Taft is the author of *The River Chasers*, the history of American Whitewater Paddling.

If you have a topic or question you would like answered, e-mail it to editor@amwhitewater.org and look for its answer in an upcoming issue.



Stewardship Top 10 River Issues for 2005

American Whitewater takes on a variety of issues impacting rivers across the United States. Our Top 10 River Stewardship Issues of 2005 reflect the diversity of the challenges the paddling community faces, and the tenacity with which American Whitewater pursues them. Here are our priorities for the year (in no particular order); in every case you, the paddler, are the first priority.

1

Developing a Stewardship Vision on the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River

River: Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River

Class: II-IV

States: Washington

Staff: Thomas O'Keefe

Volunteers: Chuck Bagley, Jennie Goldberg, Eric and Tina Myren, Fran and Diane Troje

AW Involvement: 2 to 10 Years



The Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie is a great resource for paddlers of all skill levels. 20 miles of beginner to intermediate paddling a mere 30 miles outside Seattle means a great opportunity for many boaters.

For many years the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie had a "Wild West" reputation and was known as a haven for illegal activity. River access points became garbage pits or mud holes for off-road vehicles. Drug labs and even a chop shop continued to churn out a seemingly endless supply of garbage. Volunteers made a commitment to take back the valley, and the tide has turned but additional coordination among user groups and resource agencies is required.

In partnership with the NPS Rivers and Trails program and with a grant from Tom's of Maine to kick off the effort, AW is currently providing leadership in the development of a river access plan as part of the overall stewardship vision for the river. With dozens of spur roads that access the river designated for closure and restoration, AW worked with other groups to formally identify river access points where roads could be converted to trail. Work on implementing these plans will continue through the year. More broadly, the stewardship plan will provide a template for future stewardship work where whitewater paddlers play an ongoing role in river management, rather than responding to decisions imposed by resource agencies.

With the groundwork in place, we are well on our way to success but continued paddler involvement will be important as future projects are implemented or considered. Federal Highways, for example, is currently working on a plan to pave the road in this river valley. AW and local paddlers will continue to work with other groups to make sure both recreational and conservation needs are addressed as future management decisions are considered.

Chris Totten, Fran Troje, Tom O'Keefe, and Steve Exehard at work on the Middle Snoqualmie project.

2 Catawba River Dam Licensing Nearing Settlement

River: Catawba River
Class: II & III

States: North Carolina and South Carolina
Staff: Kevin Colburn
Volunteer: Andrew Lazenby
AW Involvement: 3 Years

The Catawba features a Class II reach in NC that runs often, the dewatered Class III Great Falls in SC, and several scenic flatwater reaches. At Great Falls, paddlers may notice eagles, egrets, gar, and Spanish moss (between rides on big, well-shaped waves).

The Catawba Relicensing is headed to settlement this fall—and there is a lot of ground to cover between now and then. We have wrapped up recreational flow studies of the entire river and recently presented a detailed conservation and access proposal focused on the Great Falls. The next few months contain critical negotiation meetings during which AW will have to continue our efforts to see the river managed in a way that restores both ecological and recreational values. We are actively seeking flow restoration, land protection, trail construction, and improved flow information. This is the final big relicensing in the Southeast for a while, and we hope to use it to bring paddling and life back to a long dry and forgotten stretch of river in the backyard of paddlers in Charlotte and Columbia.

3 Colorado Navigability Legislation

Rivers: Many!
Class: I-V
State: Colorado
Staff: Jason Robertson
Volunteers: Many
AW Involvement: 20+ Years

Colorado whitewater is threatened—not by drought, but by laws and lawsuits.

Americans know Colorado for its great snow-capped mountains; paddlers also know the state for its great whitewater. Unfortunately, Colorado is also the scene of a great battle over river use and access. American Whitewater is working with the Colorado White Water Association and many other organizations to protect the public's right to float and to make sure there will be water to float on. Threats to Colorado's waters range from draft legislation limiting recreational water rights to disputes over access on the Elk and Gunnison Rivers.

The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River

Photo by Julie Keller



4 Continue to Capitalize on the North Fork of the Feather River

River: North Fork Feather
Class: III-V
State: California
Staff: Dave Steindorf
Volunteers: Dedicated but overworked few
AW Involvement: 10 Years

Imagine classic California Whitewater that runs all summer. Something for everybody: Class III, IV and V. Granite Domes, sculpted rock and a complimentary AW shuttle to boot.

The North Fork Feather River continues to be one of AW's greatest successes. This will be the fourth year of releases on the Rock Creek and Cresta reaches. Thousands of paddlers from all over the country have already come to experience this California Whitewater gem that, thanks to AW's efforts, runs all summer. AW reached settlement, after a four-year negotiation, on the Upper North Fork of the Feather River. This settlement will add an 8 mile class V reach in the spring and a 9 mile class III+ reach that will run one weekend per month all summer. Settlement negotiations are underway for the Poe reach, which includes a classic 4 mile Class V reach and a 4 mile Class III+ reach. Wrap all of these up and you have the best Whitewater resource in the west!

Unfortunately, these victories take an incredible amount of time and energy. At least one and often two AW representatives attend monthly meetings on just the Rock Creek and Cresta reaches. Biological studies from the releases here will determine the fate of virtually all of the negotiated release throughout the West. Thus far, we are very pleased with the results of the 1.5 million dollars worth of studies that have been done. However, without AW's continued involvement in the review of these studies, interest opposed to recreational releases could persuade agencies to end releases here and on all of our other hard fought victories on the Feather and elsewhere.

Stewardship Top 10 River Issues for 2005

5 Gauley River Access

River: Gauley
Class: III-V
State: West Virginia
Staff: Jason Robertson
Volunteers: Liz Garland
and Charlie Walbridge
AW Involvement: 20+ Years

The Gauley is one of the best rivers in the country, but help is needed to make sure it stays easily accessible to current and future generations of paddlers.

The only public river access in the Gauley River Recreational Area is at the put in for the Upper Gauley. AW provides access at the take-out for the Upper in cooperation with two rafting companies. Access on the Lower has been negotiated with these same rafting companies. The Park is required by law to purchase a public access point on the Middle Gauley and at Woods Ferry. Unfortunately the Park has offered too low a price and the owners have developed the site for their own use over the past several years. AW is working with the Park and the landowners to resolve the acquisition of Woods Ferry and are also working with local boaters on an alternate access point just upstream of Woods Ferry. The problem is that access to the field at Mason Branch (AKA Panther Mountain), which is the traditional take-out for the Upper, is at risk since the current landowners AW works with along the trail and at the field to provide access are considering alternative uses for the site. AW is trying to identify a solution before this fall's release season.



6 Increased Volunteer Support needed in California and the Southeast

Rivers: NF Feather, Tallulah, WF Tuckasegee, Cheoah, Nantahala, Etc.
Class: I-V
Region: California and the Southeast
Staff: Kevin Colburn
Volunteers: Needed!
AW Involvement: 5+ Years

You love these rivers! The new and upcoming whitewater releases are on true classics. But American Whitewater needs your help to keep the water flowing.

Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? We sure hope not, because AW's dam relicensing program just keeps bringing more rivers back to life and back under the boats of our members and supporters. With the recent successes in California and the Southeast, however, we are faced with increasing management obligations that take a heavy toll on our organizational resources. Lucky for us, paddlers have been happy to volunteer at the NF Feather, Tallulah, WF Tuck, and on other rivers to help make recreational releases possible. In the coming months and years, California and the Southeast will see a surge of new places to play and we'll need paddlers to step up to help make new and existing recreational releases successful. If every paddler that enjoys recreational releases maintains their AW membership, visits new areas responsibly, and offers to volunteer for a few hours—even just one day each year—we'll all be in great shape.

Dave Garringer in the 'Room of Doom' Pillow Rock Rapid

Photo by Katie Johnson

7 Spokane River Relicensing Nearing an End

River: Spokane
Class: II & III
State: Idaho and Washington
Staff: Kevin Colburn
Volunteers: John Patrouch, Paul Delaney, Robbi and Vic Castleberry, Mick French
AW Involvement: 3 Years

The Spokane River provides a playground for many paddlers in the Upper Intermountain West. Boaters enjoy numerous park and play spots scattered between Post Falls and Spokane during a virtually year-round season, and the river is surprisingly scenic given its proximity to population centers. The Spokane River also provides Class II-III paddling on the 2-3 mile long Upper Spokane and the 4-5



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Paddlers enjoying the Spokane's year-round flows.

Photo by Mike Holehog

mile long Lower Spokane.

The Spokane Relicensing has a summer deadline for settlement that is coming fast—some would say too fast. Through the FERC dam re-licensing, many city, tribal and state agencies, in addition to a number of local groups representing land owners, fisheries, paddlers, and environmentalists have come together to discuss how best to balance river use with the interests of Coeur D'Alene Lake, located upstream. In addition to the FERC licensing, issues including metals contamination, wastewater treatment, and water withdrawals are being considered. Comments and negotiations over the next few months (up to the next two years if settlement does not occur) will be especially critical in acquiring badly needed river access and riparian conservation, along with some relatively minor flow enhancements.

The Spokane River is finally being recognized for its value to the communities along its shores, and paddlers are taking a leading role in this recognition. The local

paddling community has been meeting with housing developers to maintain access, and are collaborating with many stakeholders on a proposed whitewater park to be located in the Great Gorge Area just downstream of Spokane's City center.

Esopus River Releases Threatened

8

River: Esopus River
 Class: II & III
 State: New York
 Staff: Kevin Colburn
 Volunteers: Pete Skinner,
 Lauren Cook

AW Involvement: 3 Months or 40 Years

The Esopus River is the first taste of Class II-III whitewater for many New York paddlers, and has been a competition site for many decades. The dam releases and high quality mellow whitewater make this river a treasured paddling resource.

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Stewardship Top 10 River Issues for 2005



Discussion: The releases that paddlers have enjoyed on the Esopus for decades are the result of water being transferred through a large tunnel into the Esopus to deliver drinking water to New York City. A redesigned intake system is needed for the tunnel in order to reduce the amount of sediment in the releases, yet some wish to see the releases lowered to unboatable levels. AW has been working with the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York to advocate for a solution that is good for everyone involved and that protects the water quality of the Esopus River.

a boater (only the second in 20 years), and the remainder were fishermen and rock hoppers. AW is working with the Park to develop a standard safety message and has helped with the strategy to post cautionary signs in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

10

9 Potomac Stream Gauge and Safety Issues

River: Potomac

Class: II-V

State: Washington, DC

Staff: Jason Robertson

Volunteer: None

AW Involvement: 10+ Years

Providing a National Voice for Rivers and Paddlers

Rivers: All

Class: I-VI

States: All

Staff: All of AW

Volunteers: Thousands

AW Involvement: 51 Years and Counting

Paddlers across the country rely on telephone and Internet gauges to help make good recreational decisions. Let's keep those gauges reporting.

National policy affects every river you have ever paddled in the United States—every river!

Since AW picked stream gauging on the Potomac as a top river issue, we have received verbal assurances from the USGS that we have successfully helped to secure funding for the gage. We have kept this issue on our top river issue list since it is symptomatic of a larger national issue threatening river gauges around the nation. The problem is that the USGS often has funding for half of the cost of maintaining a stream gauge, which has to be matched by state or local partners. The match funding from the USGS's partners is what is at risk, and is what AW will be working to support in 2005.

In 2005 the American Whitewater River Stewardship Team will continue to fight against rollbacks of federal laws that protect the rivers we cherish and our ability to enjoy them. Current challenges are threatening the National Environmental Policy Act, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, the Federal Power Act, and other critical environmental laws and regulations. American Whitewater has the ability to speak for whitewater paddlers and enthusiasts in the halls of congress, in the national media, and through letters and comments written by our many dedicated members. We can, and do make a difference on the National level, and feel that the paddling community plays a critical role in protecting the laws that protect rivers. **AW**

AW is also working with the National Park Service on the Potomac below Great Falls to publicize safety issues for boaters and rock hoppers. The Park counted five drownings in 2004 on the Potomac within the 10-mile stretch upstream of the Washington Monument. One of these was

SUMMER IS HERE..



Paddler: Allan Ellard // Shooter: Liz Bell // Location: Uganda 2005



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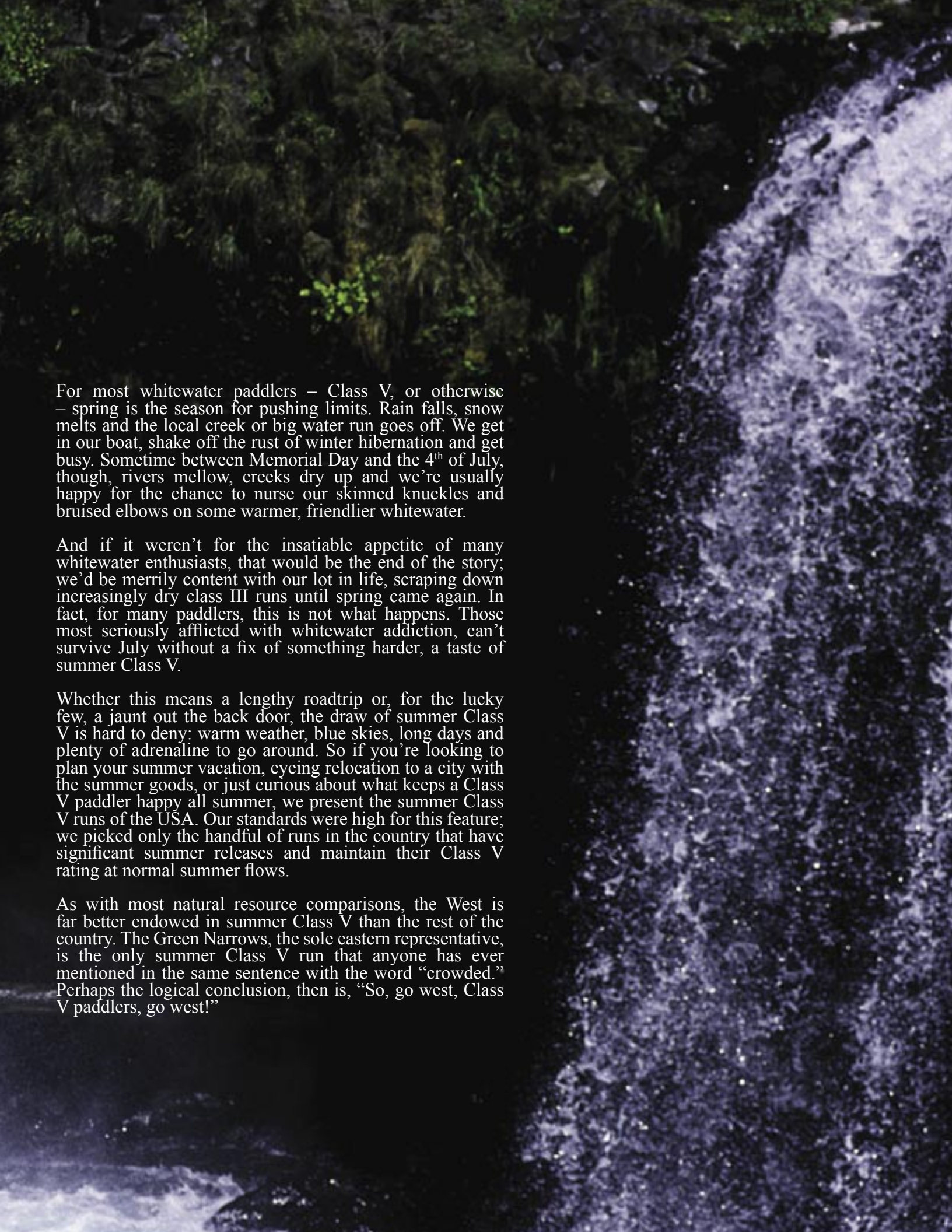
A high-angle photograph of a kayaker in a bright yellow kayak navigating a waterfall. The kayaker is wearing a dark wetsuit and a red helmet, and is holding a black paddle. The waterfall is a wide, powerful cascade of white water falling over a dark, rocky ledge. The surrounding area is lush with green vegetation. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

classic
summertime

Class Five
Runs

*Tommy Hilleke huckin' off Spirit Falls
Little White Salmon River*

Photo by Charlie Munsey



For most whitewater paddlers – Class V, or otherwise – spring is the season for pushing limits. Rain falls, snow melts and the local creek or big water run goes off. We get in our boat, shake off the rust of winter hibernation and get busy. Sometime between Memorial Day and the 4th of July, though, rivers mellow, creeks dry up and we’re usually happy for the chance to nurse our skinned knuckles and bruised elbows on some warmer, friendlier whitewater.

And if it weren’t for the insatiable appetite of many whitewater enthusiasts, that would be the end of the story; we’d be merrily content with our lot in life, scraping down increasingly dry class III runs until spring came again. In fact, for many paddlers, this is not what happens. Those most seriously afflicted with whitewater addiction, can’t survive July without a fix of something harder, a taste of summer Class V.

Whether this means a lengthy roadtrip or, for the lucky few, a jaunt out the back door, the draw of summer Class V is hard to deny: warm weather, blue skies, long days and plenty of adrenaline to go around. So if you’re looking to plan your summer vacation, eyeing relocation to a city with the summer goods, or just curious about what keeps a Class V paddler happy all summer, we present the summer Class V runs of the USA. Our standards were high for this feature; we picked only the handful of runs in the country that have significant summer releases and maintain their Class V rating at normal summer flows.

As with most natural resource comparisons, the West is far better endowed in summer Class V than the rest of the country. The Green Narrows, the sole eastern representative, is the only summer Class V run that anyone has ever mentioned in the same sentence with the word “crowded.” Perhaps the logical conclusion, then is, “So, go west, Class V paddlers, go west!”

The Little White Salmon

by Trip Jennings

It's a warm summer day, and the Little White Salmon is running 3.4 feet. You get off work early, ditch school, or shake your hangover and head to the river. Just an hour's drive outside Portland, Oregon, you run the shuttle, hike 30 yards from the car to the put-in and you've got a steep creeker's dream between you and the take out. Despite the cold water all summer long, it's not hard to see why the Little White is at the top of so many boaters' list of favorites.

For many kayakers, the Little White is a testing ground, for others it's a back yard run, and still others it's a far off goal, but, few would disagree that it should be on every Class V boater's hot summer list. Each year kayakers flock from all over the country and the world to test their skills on what is far and away my favorite classic Class V run. The Little White is just over three miles long, and has a gradient of more than 230 feet per mile with virtually no flatwater, no hiking, few or no portages, a 20-foot waterfall, 30-foot waterfall,

countless boofs, lots of quality boulder gardens, an easy shuttle, and a community of great people to paddle with. In other words, the Little White is hard to beat.

Below three feet, the intro is pretty benign, but with the put in gauge reading in the mid-threes, the long and complex warm-up, dubbed "Gettin' Busy," will get the attention of even the best creek boaters. After a half-mile of tight turns, a few holes, and a final 6-foot boof named Boulder Sluice, you come to the first commonly scouted rapid, Island Drop. It's a bit of a manky boulder pile with two fun boofs at low water, which turn into stomping holes at high water. In the first 5 months of 2005, I have heard of one boater hiking out, one boater getting pinned, one boater swimming, and one boater spraining both ankles between the put in and the bottom of Island Drop.

Below Island Drop, the creek changes character a bit, from pushy boulder gardens to classic northwest lava flow ledges.

Springs spout from cracks in the rocks on either side, lush green Oregon moss clings to the trees, and the glacier-carved canyon walls become even more pronounced.

This next section holds a series of ledge drops between two and 15 feet, most with pretty big holes and all with great boofs. After working hard at staying hairy side up and not swimming in front of your friends, the 15-foot simple, and fun, S-Turn is a welcome sight. Run it on the right and, if you're feeling fired up, a freewheel is always an option.

Next up is a hole called, Bowey's Hotel. Avoid checking into this one at all costs because just after Bowey's is one of the marquee drops of the run, Wishbone. Here, the river is split into a wishbone shape by a large lava rock creating a perfect slide into freefall on the far left, or a hero's plunge in the center of the left channel. Whichever line you choose, it will be hard to outdo Andy Maser's accidental edge catch at the lip of the freefall, which he turned into a

perfect aerial barrel roll, landing flat on his hull.

Up next is the Horseshoe/Stove Pipe combo—probably the most frightening on the river. It's the narrowest canyon and has three burly holes leading into a ten-foot plunge. The last of the three holes, Horseshoe, seems to change yearly, and packs a punch only a few yards above the next drop. This is an easy place to swim, but if you do, you'd better hope your friends like you, because it's difficult to get out before swimming over Stove Pipe. Until recently, Stove Pipe was always portaged due to an enormous old growth log balanced on the rocks that create the drop. Now that the log's been cut out, it is possible to run the entire river without leaving your boat.

Make it through Stove Pipe smiling, and you're ready for the main attraction. Spirit Falls has probably been in more kayaking videos than any rapid other than Gorilla on North Carolina's Green Narrows. Standing at just over 30 feet, Spirit pours into a beautiful caldron room with only one exit. Nearly eighty percent of the water flowing downstream from the Spiritual pool goes over the menacing Chaos.

There are two types of kayakers in this world, the ones who are in-between swims, and the ones who are swimming. Hang out in Chaos for long, and you won't be in-between swims any longer. The 5-foot tall pour over, backed up by a rock, and sucking most of the water in the river into its murky depths, has claimed the pride of many experienced kayakers. Setting safety here is crucial in making sure that pride is all it claims.

One day, you'll run her perfectly; you'll paddle off the lip, hold that last stroke and land at the coveted 50-degree angle. You'll paddle out of the Spirit caldron, make the ferry to the left side of Chaos and run the 5-foot slide as easily as stealing candy from a baby. The next day you'll run Spirit, break your paddle in the landing, hand roll, paddle to the side, have a spare paddle lowered to you from above, break that one in the entrance to Chaos, run it backwards

with half a paddle, make it through the hole only to have a throw rope tangle around your neck, making it impossible to roll, and finally swim above the next two foot ledge (all of which happened to me earlier this year).

From the bottom of Spirit it's a mellow paddle out interrupted by one class IV rapid called Master Blaster. It's not a challenging rapid under normal conditions, but it can be if you've just snapped your paddle and your buddy's break-down! If you still feel like you haven't had enough, or you're training for California, it's possible to get two or even three runs down the river in a day, but to do that it has to be a no-eddy, no-screw-up day. Few things are more fun than paddling over the lip of Spirit without scouting (maybe not for a first timer!).

After that, it's off to White Salmon, Bingen or the trendy and fun Hood River to refill your tank. I don't think that I've ever been closer to Nirvana than eating a Burrito at Rinconcito in Hood River (on West Cascade, just west of downtown) after a run down the Little White. Don't let the fact that it's in a trailer, or that they only charge \$4 for a monster burrito scare you; it's the biggest, cheapest and best food in Hood River. Pretty much all of the other restaurants in downtown Hood River are great, though more expensive. The Sixth Street Bistro (at the corner of Cascade and 6th) is good for pool, beers, and food if you're don't mind the \$12/meal price tag. For lunch or breakfast, head to the Hood River Bagel Company for food that's great, quick and healthy. While you're getting bagels, stop in and say hi at the Kayak Shed (right across Oak Street in the eastern side of downtown); it's a great shop with tons of gear and a cool, knowledgeable staff. If all of this doesn't have you itching to visit the area, you should probably pay a visit to your doctor—you might be coming down with something.



classic
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V
Class Five
Runs



The Green River Narrows

by Daniel DeLaVergne

Southern Training Ground

“Monday May the 30th: Tuxedo Hydro Station will be running one unit at one hundred percent capacity from seven a.m. until five p.m.. Operating schedules are determined daily. This schedule is subject to change without notice due to electrical demand and changing weather conditions. Thank you.”

-Duke Power's Tuxedo Hydro Station daily phone recording announcing the release of water through the Green River Narrows.

If there is one Class V run kayakers the world over can identify with, it's the Green Narrows in Western North Carolina. The three-mile long Narrows section forms a quintessential steep, technical whitewater run as it flows off the escarpment toward South Carolina. Featured in no fewer than 30 paddling films and gracing the pages of every paddling publication dozens of times over, the Green Narrows has come to define Class V kayaking—the Benchmark, if you will.

The Narrows flows through Henderson and Polk counties, near the retirement-cum-adventure-sports burg of Hendersonville, NC. The main tributaries of the Green collect and back up into Lake Summit, a small resort lake high on the Blue Ridge

escarpment. On the leeward end of the lake, Duke Power maintains the level of Lake Summit with the micro-hydro project dubbed, Tuxedo Hydro Station.

Tuxedo Hydro has been in operation for decades, and produces small amounts of energy during periods of peak power demand. The resulting power is sold through the grid at a higher-than-usual rate. Aside from providing high-dollar power, Tuxedo Hydro also maintains Lake Summit at the ideal level for homeowners, boat operators and other users. The end product of all this power generation and lake leveling flows out of Tuxedo Hydro in one of four flow options, roughly translated as 130, 215, 260 or 430 cfs and is expressed in percentage of units released (see above phone message).

The Station has the capability to produce electricity through two hydropower units with a maximum output of 430 cfs. Several downstream tributaries, namely Big Hungry Creek, and the main dry channel of the Green, can supplement this flow to varying degrees. The dry channel flows only when the river is very high and the dam on the lake is spilling. This

Johnnie Kern launching Gorilla on the Green River Narrows

Photo by John Grace

dry channel comprises the first runnable section of the Green River. This brief section, known as the Dries, includes several Class V rapids, including a 12-foot falls. Less than one mile below the Lake Summit Dam, the river reaches the power station. Here paddlers can put in for the Upper Green, a pleasant, and oft-flowing three-mile long wilderness run. Comprised of mostly Class III rapids, the section does boast two Class IV+ falls. As the river nears the edge of the escarpment, paddlers are faced with a defining decision: walk out the quarter-mile up the Big Hungry access road, or continue into the fabled Green River Narrows.

Kayakers first explored this extremely steep section during the summer of 1989 and word spread quickly of the new southern jewel, boasting damn-controlled flows, and rapids just this side of insanity. The bar had been officially raised. During the summer of 1991 the documentary film, Green Summer was released, sharing with the world the serious nature and paradigm-shifting potential of the Narrows.

Highlights included Corran Addison's descent of Gorilla and Sunshine Falls at full flow (200%) using only hand paddles.

Not only did the paddlers of Green Summer show the world what was possible in a kayak, they proved you could run rapids that were unarguably Class V+ in a clean and consistent manner, time and again. The rapids of the Narrows are generally Class IV+ boulder drops requiring technical maneuvering around definite hazards. The heart of the run can be defined by three falls/cataracts, all Class V+ and rarely rivaled anywhere in the world. In fact, it has been said many times by many a world-weary hairboater, that the "Big Three" on the Narrows at full flow present the most consistent chance of scaring the all living crap out of yourself anywhere ever.

Located within a 300 mile radius of three of the largest metropolitan areas in the South and boasting over 250 days a year of boatable flows, the Narrows have become the modern day training grounds for many of today's top river runners. On any given Sunday, more paddlers will drop through the guts of "Go Left," Gorilla" and

"Sunshine," than all the other Class V+ rapids the world combined. One can only imagine the effect this constant mental and physical training has on the local boating community. Boaters from the Southeast have a reputation for showing up at international paddling destinations and running the area's hardest rivers. The Green Narrows plays a large role in the confidence and skill that these ambassadors from the South exhibit while exploring the world's whitewater.

While the highlight of the Narrows is certainly the "Big Three," the section boasts over fifty Class IV-V rapids, served up in a variety of styles, all accessible to the everyday river runner. The overall layout of the Narrows allows Class IV river runners with a comprehensive set of river safety skills to regularly paddle technical boulder drops and slides. Over the years many Chattooga and Ocoee paddlers have utilized the easy availability of this summer Class V classic as incentive to advance their skills into the Class V arena. And what does one do after they have mastered the lines and run Gorilla and Go Left without batting an eye? They Race the Narrows, that's what.

Just as the Narrows has come to define Class V creeking, the annual Green Race stands out as the core Class V race in the country. While training for the race occurs all year long, most athletes begin to gather at the Narrows in mid October, while others just show up November 1st, hoping all their summer runs will give them the skills and knowledge to be the fastest man through the Narrows. For all the effort out of town professionals have put in to winning the Green Race, Tommy Hilleke, a Hendersonville local, has won the Green Narrows race four years running and hopes to defend his title again in 2005.

For some readers, like Tommy, the Green is already home; for many the river is a goal on the list, for others the Narrows will always be above their level of comfort. Truth be told, the first trip down the Narrows of the Green has or will be the defining moment of many a river runner's career. So for all you guys and gals just now earning your fins on the Upper Yough, Chattooga, Wilson's Creek or Watauga, keep the Narrows on the list and show up with a full set of safety skills and a good head on your shoulders and the world of the truly steep will be yours for the taking.

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Push Sturges going big at the Nile Special, Uganda. Photos by Malow Long

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Class Five Runs

North Fork of the Payette

by Ambrose Tuscano

Ben Brown enters Disneyland Rapid

Photo by Charlie Munsey

The North Fork of the Payette River is the most obvious contradiction of the common whitewater truism, “Steeper is harder.” In the east, where I grew up, it was self evident that the hardest runs were creeks, with more feet per mile (fpm) than cubic feet per second (cfs). This notion was further reinforced by whitewater videos that routinely featured paddlers tackling improbably steep terrain covered only by a thin coat of water. All of this changed for me in the summer of 2002, when I first experienced Idaho’s most famous Class V run. The North Fork left me humbled, scared, amped, addicted and, perhaps most of all, confused. For days afterwards, I wondered how a river so big had been so hard. After all, I was a grizzled veteran of runs like the Upper Blackwater and the Green Narrows.

The truth is the North Fork is different from anything I’ve ever seen. It is a full-on freight train. It lacks certain elements that I had come to think were universal to rivers everywhere (eddies!!) and possessed some that I never knew existed (huge breaking holes).

From the side of Highway 55, you can see the river’s character. Then again, seeing is not always believing. Perhaps the best spot to gauge the power and speed of the North Fork is at Jacob’s Ladder, the marquee rapid

of the run. Down at river’s edge looking up into the incredible violence, one gets a sense of what a paddler feels in Jake’s midst: “This much water should not fall so fast!” From river’s edge, many other details appear, including the jagged boulders haphazardly rolled into the river by the construction of the highway on one side and the railroad on the other. The extra rock creates areas of unnatural shallowness in the river; this makes flipping an extremely undesirable option (as if a North Fork paddler doesn’t have enough to worry about!).

This brings up an exceptionally important point about the North Payette. Do not attempt it if you have less than a zealot’s faith in your roll and fair confidence that you won’t need it. In the 10 miles between the put-in and Hound’s Tooth, where the river mellows to class IV-V, there are only a handful of pools. Even the whitewater between the named rapids makes rescuing a swimmer challenging. Qualified North Fork paddlers understand that they cannot rely on their boating partners for rescue—instead, they count on their roll.

But enough of the scary stuff. Once you’ve experienced the North Fork, you will want more—count on it. The addiction is largely adrenaline rush, but it is also the satisfaction of having something special in common with paddling legends like

Rob Lesser and Scott Lindgren, and with a couple of hundred other heroes who have survived the North Fork.

The contribution of those who have gone before is especially crucial on the North Fork. Without a qualified guide, your first run will be miserable. No matter how long you scout from the road (which parallels the entire run), you’ll never be able to find your lines. Not only is the river moving faster than your brain, but there is also a scarcity of landmarks in the water. Without boulders to key off of, it is far too easy to become lost in the North Fork’s long, powerful rapids. Of course, good local guides are often hard to find. On a typical weekend there will usually be only one or two small groups attempting what is known as the “Upper 10”—referring to the first 10 miles of the run. The last five miles—known as the “Bottom Five”—will often see a handful of groups per day. Note: before you tackle the upper stuff, it is extremely wise to try the Bottom Five. This will give you a taste for the character of the run, without getting you into too much trouble.

Once you've decided you're up for the North Fork and you've found yourself a guide, go ahead and get wet (remember, scouting won't really help). The warm-up rapids leading to Steepness (the first drop) give you a good sense of the order of the day: big, big waves that you can only see over as you're cresting. Occasionally you will crest a wave to find that it is followed by a huge breaking hole instead of another wave. Try not to panic (it won't work); try to paddle around it (that won't work either); then prepare to blast right through (surprisingly, this usually will work). The one feature of the North Fork that is actually easier than it looks is the holes. At levels above 1500 cfs (typical summer flows these past few years) most of the holes will not hold you. Due to the great speed of the water and the irregular shape of the rock, hydraulics on the North Fork are often more bark than bite. The vast majority of the exceptions to this rule lie in Golf Course, the North Fork's longest rapid (it's got 18 holes!). To make things a little more interesting, Golf Course is directly connected to the bottom of Jacob's Ladder, forming one of the most intense miles of whitewater anywhere.

Long time AW member, Rob Lesser at home on the North Fork of the Payette

Photo by Charlie Munsey

Other characteristics of the North Fork that make for a complete experience include water temperatures in the 70s and 80s (usually all of July and August); constant releases 24/7 (depending on water levels in Lake Cascade, water flows will increase or decrease every week or so to satisfy the needs of farmers downstream—luckily their fields are usually thirsty); ample class II-IV whitewater within minutes of Banks (the takeout) all summer long (so you can take a day off to soothe your nerves, or have viable alternatives for the sane folks in your group); clear consistent weather (high temperatures in the 90s and 100s most of the summer, with only occasional cloudiness); daylight past 10 pm most of the summer (on the western border of Mountain Time); and beautiful, rugged mountain-desert scenery.

While Banks and Smith's Ferry (the towns at the take-out and put-in, respectively) have two general stores, two restaurants and fewer than 200 residents between them, the North Fork is well within striking distance of a small city. Boise, Idaho is a good sized metropolis by western standards. It boasts its own ski resort, a university and a couple of high-tech companies. If you can find work in Boise, I highly recommend moving

there; what it lacks in diversity, the town makes up for in its proximity to excellent whitewater (only about 45 minutes from Banks).

So if you're intrigued by the North Fork of the Payette, hop a flight to Boise this summer. Just keep your eye on the Bureau of Reclamation's water flow website (look for outflow from Lake Cascade); once it starts spilling, you'll usually have at least two months of solid boatable flows. There are places in Boise and between the city and Banks that "demo" boats for the usual fees. Tip: don't expect anyone to rent you a boat if you tell them you're headed for the North Fork.

Standard procedure is to allow yourself a couple of days on the Bottom Five to warm up and gauge your mettle. If you still want to proceed upstream, try to track down the North Fork regulars (on weekends they usually meet in the Banks café around 9 or 10 am; on weekdays don't count on finding anyone). If you can convince them that you won't be a liability on the river (try telling them you've run the Stikine), you'll be on your way to an unforgettable experience. And even if it's unforgettable for all the wrong reasons, you'll still have a great time on the other fantastic sections of whitewater in the area and, more importantly, a reason to return to Idaho next year.





Cherry Creek of the Tuolumne

by Joe Bousquin

If there's a better place to be a Class V kayak bum in the summer than California's Cherry Creek, I haven't found it.

Not only is the whitewater on the Cherry Creek run of the Upper Tuolumne the perfect mix of continuous Class V and IV+ rapids, but its regular summertime releases—Monday through Saturday in normal water years—make it the Golden State's ace-in-the-hole at a time when hard-water boaters would otherwise be left high and dry.

It is here that you'll find the epicenter of summertime kayaking in California, the place we all return to after running the Class V+ gnar higher up in the Sierras. Once runs like Upper Cherry Creek, Fantasy Falls and the Royal Gorge of the American have shrunk to mere trickles, the consistent, six-day-a-week release from Holm Powerhouse on the regular Cherry Creek section, also known as the Upper Tuolumne, ensure that we've got a Class V home through August, and sometimes longer.

This year, boaters can expect bonus releases on Sunday, too, with the season starting at the end of June or beginning of July, and running through Aug. 21, according to Marty McDonnell, owner of Sierra Mac, which has been running raft trips on Cherry Creek since 1972 (hands down the hardest commercially rafted run in the country!). This year's releases should be around 900 cfs, slightly lower than recent years, because of maintenance needs at the dam, McDonnell said. Optimum levels are in the 1000 to 1200 cfs range.

While rapids such as Mushroom, Sky King and Lewis's Leap—not to mention V+ Lumsden Falls—make 8.6-mile Cherry Creek a Class V boater's wet dream, the lure of the 110-foot-per-mile run goes far beyond the river itself. The summertime scene at Cherry Creek is akin to a traveling paddlers' circus, as boaters from all over the state, and indeed, all over the country, stop in for a day or week to set up semi-permanent residence on "The Road."

This section of dead-end pavement under

the pines at a place called Casa Loma takes on a woodsy carnival atmosphere on many summer nights; when times are good and the water's right, the very idea of the California summer seeps out from underneath the asphalt there. Impromptu, pot-luck suppers congeal, beers clink and stories unfold as each new boat-laden vehicle arrives.

You'll find The Road where the eastern end of Ferretti Road meets Rt. 120 about 7.5 miles east of Groveland and three to four hours east of San Francisco (Don't confuse this with the western end of Ferretti Road, which intersects Rt. 120 in the town of Groveland itself, though, or you'll be on a long drive in the woods.). Also, please don't block passage on The Road when you camp there, as this has been known to irk local hunters and, more importantly, Caltrans workers trying to access the gravel pile at its terminus.

Once on The Road, you'll wake up early—releases during most years start around 8:00 a.m., and only last three or four

Photo by Ben Zupo

hours—to hook up with an array of boaters, and wait for shuttle to arrange itself. This is one of the greatest aspects of Cherry Creek: if you play your cards right, you almost never have to run shuttle. Because the take-out for Cherry Creek is the same as the put-in for the Lower Tuolumne, most days you can find other kayakers or rafters who are already driving down Lumsden Road to run the Lower T. Given the atrocious condition of Lumsden Road, though, few people want to make this drive twice in the same day.

That means many rafters and/or Class IV kayakers running the Lower T will be more than willing to let you drive their vehicles back to Casa Loma from your take-out/their put-in. Chances are you'll find plenty of boaters looking to do just that hanging out on the porch of the Casa Loma store, where gourmet coffee and breakfast burritos are as indigenous to the scene as the humming birds that sip sugar water from feeders under the eaves. Just be gentle on your shuttle partners' vehicles—don't overload them and refrain from drinking (all) their beer. We want to keep this very casual shuttle system going for many years to come.

Stop by the Groveland Ranger Station to get a free permit on your way to the put-in at Holm Powerhouse. Here, you'll find the water sufficiently chilly—dry tops are the norm, even in the 90+ degree heat of summer—as it comes from the bottom of the dam. The water warms where Cherry Creek joins the main stem of the Tuolumne, less than a mile downstream.

The run consists of fairly continuous whitewater separated by the occasional pool, and has a great pace to it. Good drops at the beginning such as Corkscrew, Jawbone, and Mushroom lead into even better action in the middle at Unknown Soldier, Blind Faith and the always-unpredictable Sky King. The run accelerates, and then ends with three big bangs at Christmas Tree, Lewis's Leap and, finally, Lumsden Falls. (Flat Rock Falls, which is sandwiched between Lewis's and Lumsden, is usually carried on the left; the slot on river right has become increasingly sieved and dangerous in recent years.)

Of all the rapids on the run, I find Mushroom, Sky King and Lumsden to be the most challenging. Lumsden is by far the biggest drop on the river, and as such, provides the best photo opportunities. It's also easily carried on the left.

One required stop in the midst of the run comes at the Lunch Spot, below Eulogy and Coffin Rock (avoid the pinning rock in the middle of the river here, which gives the drop its name) but above Christmas Tree Hole. At the Lunch Spot, tucked into an eddy next to an expansive piece of granite, boaters take time to shed gear and laze in the California sun, chomping on Clif Bars and bagels before the end of the release forces them downstream. Due to the nudist tendencies of some boaters here, though, paddler discretion is advised.

Boaters who know "The Creek" can usually finish the run in two to three hours, and getting back to Casa Loma by one or two o'clock isn't unusual, especially if your shuttle lines up. But you won't want to spend the rest of the hot afternoon on The Road; a better plan is to stop by Rainbow Pool, a picturesque, teardrop waterfall on the South Fork of the Tuolumne that just happens to be on the way back to the put in.

Once you retrieve your put-in car, you can spend the rest of the afternoon jumping off the rocks at Rainbow Pool—local high school kids will give you plenty of company—or just lazing in the relatively warm water there. Fishing is also an option. Other alternatives in the area include the Groveland Library, which has good Internet access and a surprising depth to its stacks, or, about 40 minutes to the east, Yosemite National Park.

After the afternoon heat wears off, and the sun starts setting, get your six pack and your camp stove and drive back to The Road, where you'll find your counterparts from that day, and start meeting the new arrivals of that night. Sip your beer, eat your grub and fall asleep under the stars, waiting for the next day's shuttle to work itself out all over again.

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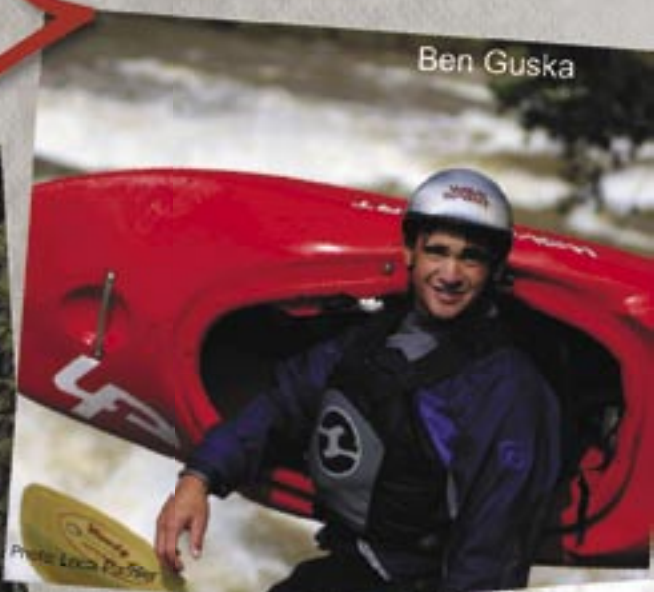


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The Green Truss Section of the White Salmon

by Jason Rackley

A paddler on the critical boof flake at Big Brother, the White Salmon's marquee drop.

Photo by Jason Rackley

The Green Truss section of the White Salmon runs year-round and has long been a proving ground for northwestern paddlers. This run is always Class V, except in the fall when the levels drop to around two feet and it eases to IV+. The Green Truss is a great summer run because when just about everything else is dusty, this section is still roaring down through a deep canyon with great rapids that draw adventurous paddlers from all across the region and the country. Dan Coyle once told me, "Green Truss has holes that just won't let you go if you get into them; that's my definition of class V."

Well, lets just say nobody waits for action on this run! The put in is pretty sketchy and it just keeps getting worse as erosion takes it's toll on the thirty-foot cliff face. Luckily, a fixed rope has been installed here to help promote safe descents to the river. This put-in is not for the timid and is guaranteed to get your blood pumping before you even get in your boat!

Like the put-in, the river does not keep you waiting for excitement either. Just around the corner is a clean horizon line which leads to the first in a long series of fun class III-IV drops, each with calm pools between allowing for easy boat scouting. Somewhere in the middle of this barrage of easier drops is the Meatball, a two part rapid that requires a leap of faith through the right side slot around a huge boulder blocking most of the flow. And that's just getting you warmed up!

The Green Truss section of the White Salmon is the most consistent of the summer Class V runs. With water supplied by snowmelt from glacial Mt. Adams and an enormous underground aquifer, the White Salmon is almost always running (though drought winters like '04-'05 do shorten the season). The location is stellar, with easy access from nearby Portland, Oregon and a simple shuttle road that parallels the river.

Despite the easy logistics, the run is never crowded. The combination of burly drops, bitterly cold water (especially in winter), sparsely populated surroundings and dilution of Class V paddlers between the Green Truss and the nearby Little White Salmon make the White Salmon an under-utilized resource. Typically there are no more than

one or two groups on the run each day, so visitors should try to arrange for a local guide in advance or count on self scouting their way down the run—regardless, shore scouting will be necessary.

Three fourths of a mile into the run, paddlers will find themselves at Big Brother, a 25-foot marginally runnable waterfall. This drop is featured prominently on page one in the Oregon whitewater guidebook, *Soggy Sneakers* with the caption, "Kayaking a class VI drop." Big Brother is extremely hazardous. It has a cave on the right just below the falls that has temporarily trapped paddlers and probably played a role in the death of Rich Weiss, a very experienced kayaker who died at Big Brother. As if that weren't enough, the pool below also has shallow spots that have broken at least one back and several boats. The lead in to this drop is very tricky as the current flows strongly parallel to the lip of the falls. This makes hitting the crucial three-foot wide boof flake very difficult. On one recent trip, nine boaters ran Big Brother. Of the nine, five ended up in the cave and two hit rock at the bottom... good luck on this one!

A short distance below Big Brother is Double Drop, an 18-foot two-part falls with a huge hole at the bottom. Just downstream from

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A paddler on the critical boof flake at Big Brother, the White Salmon's marquee drop.

Photo by Jason Rackley



The aptly named Double Drop

Photo by Jason Rackley

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this drop paddlers experience a phenomenon unique to this run: numerous springs start to cascade into the river, significantly increasing the flow in a very short distance. On your first time down this section, you won't believe your eyes as you float past cascades of water bursting forth from cracks in the rock walls—it's an incredible sight! The downside is that the water temperature drops at least 10 degrees in this section, so bring extra warm stuff.

Below here, the most notable drops are Upper and Lower Zig Zag and BZ Falls. Upper Zig Zag begins with a wild ride between vertical rock walls through a large S-turn that ends with two closely spaced river wide holes. Precise boat handling is essential here. Just below Upper Zig Zag is a large pool, which allows you to get out and scout Lower Zig Zag. This drop is long and complex and must be scouted on the left, as it contains dangerous undercuts and a cave in the bottom left wall. This rapid changed dramatically in the flood of 1996 when a boulder shifted, creating a feature known as "The Move." The rapid changed again in the floods of 2003, when one of the boulders forming "The Move" washed away, greatly reducing the difficulty of the rapid.

The burliest drop on the Green Truss section, BZ Falls, comes near the end of the run. This 16-foot falls features a hard-to-find, must-catch eddy above and a dangerous undercut/hydraulic below. BZ falls has a serious personality disorder. It has shallow spots in addition to the nasty undercut/hole combo. In the past, people have gotten hurt pitoning the shelf. The lack of a clean line and the history of drownings here (three, though none were hardshell boaters) lead many to portage this drop. After BZ Falls, the river eases to a Class III float to the take out in BZ Corners.

And whether you have had an easy couple of hours following a knowledgeable White Salmon local or spent all day scouting your way down the run, you will find a much-deserved meal just downstream in Hood River. While you sit in your eatery of choice, soaking in the unique beauty of the Columbia River Gorge, remember to think of paddlers in every other part of the country—the luckiest of whom have just one reliable summer Class V run within striking distance, let alone the Green Truss and the Little White in the same watershed. 

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Escape from the Mekong

by John Mattson

The sky is dark with the threat of an afternoon storm and a strong wind helps to create a somewhat eerie mood as we paddle under the last bridge, which is filled with colorful, cheering locals who have been waiting up to three days for our arrival.

Our team consists of twelve men and one woman, who vary in age from 20 to 58, speak three different languages and were mostly strangers before this trip. We represent China, Japan, Australia, and the U.S. and have come to attempt the first descent of one of the last great canyons in the world, with three catarafts and four kayaks. The Chinese government had a huge send-off party for us and a diverse and curious crowd has been watching and following us along the road for the last four days. This crowd includes a variety of local Tibetans including many of the legendary Ghompa warriors who drive motorcycles now and cheer us on as we paddle through a beautiful canyon with some big wave trains and intermittent Class III to IV-rapids. These last four days have been great for evaluation and team building, but now the practice is over. The road will soon be gone, and the rapids are getting more difficult as the river becomes bigger and steeper!

The main reason that this river has never been run is because the politics of Tibet and China make it extremely difficult to get a permit. Our trip has the support of the Sichuan Scientific Exploration Society and includes four Chinese members, without whom we would not be here, because the Chinese are very proud and patriotic and do not wish to give the glory of their first

descents to foreigners. The Japanese have been chosen because of their previous expeditions on other portions of the Mekong, and also because of their financial support. The other members, including myself, are old friends or a friend of friends, but financial support seems to have taken precedence over skill. The second reason that this section has not been descended is because it is very remote and probably very difficult and dangerous! It took five long days to get here in a mini-bus over terrible dirt roads. Scouting the canyon is virtually impossible.

I feel that the great rivers of the world are a lot like the great mountains. These special places are a very sacred territory where only the strongest of men and women get to spend a few moments, if the gods bless them. A strong team will probably be pushed to its limit and maybe beyond. In 20 years of paddling Class V rivers I have had many experiences that were so incredibly good that they seemed beyond what a mortal could comprehend, and a few that were equally bad. Two of my best friends have died, and I have had some very close calls myself, so I have a great respect for rivers. But I also have a very strong love for these canyons, and that is why I am here with this team. Together we will do the best we can to stay alive and maybe run this river. I thought that I had retired from serious kayaking, but the chance of a first descent on a major river in Tibet was impossible for an old whitewater addict to turn down.

Left: A pristine view from the Mekong River in Tibet.
Below: Chalashan, surrounded by a backdrop of snowcapped mountains.

Photo by John Mattson



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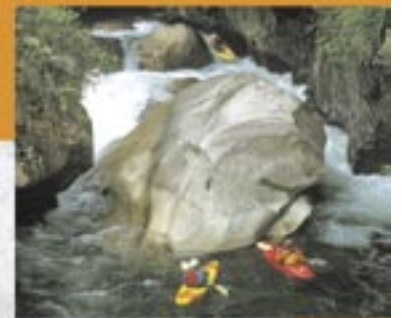
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Feature Escape from the Mekong

Left: The truck was left due to unforeseen road conditions.

Photo by John Mattson

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Soon after we leave the road we arrive at our first portage, where a very recent rockslide has caused a weir type of rapid that even the Class V boaters are afraid of. It is a short drop, but the portage is under a very active rockslide. There are many huge boulders just waiting to tumble down, so we assign one of the members of the party to watch for rock fall and blow his whistle if there is any movement. The rest of the group starts lining the rafts to the brink of the falls, where they are unloaded and then muscled over the boulder field and back into the river. The portage is completed in about three hours with a great show of teamwork and energy, and we have a quick lunch and head on downstream.

We camp on a sloped beach with great views next to a trail that has replaced the busy road. A few Gompas stop by to say hello, and are amazed by our tents and other equipment. The canyon is becoming deeper and more pristine, and the noise of civilization disappears. We are leaving the modern world and entering a very primitive one, where we have only the serenity of the canyon to accompany us, and only ourselves to depend on. The Chinese team cooks a big feast, and we enjoy a great evening until some very strong gusts of wind and rain send us scurrying to our tents.

I lay in my tent listening to the storm and think about the team and our great adventure. The Japanese are young and fearless with incredible energy, but they have very little experience with rowing rigs. Their previous expeditions have been with paddle rafts, which require a very different technique, but at least they understand big water and will probably be able to survive a swim. Son Ye Pin owns a raft company and Fen Chun was on one of the Chinese teams to attempt the Yangtze in 1986, but the other members of the Chinese team do not have very much experience. Liu Li is the translator and trip organizer and Ilene Mu is the producer of China's version

of the Today Show, and also a very good translator. Communication is usually one of the biggest problems on any adventure, and having three languages more than quadruples the problems. The American team varies from Class III to Class V, but

most of us are past our prime. Travis Wynn is a strong 20-year old probe who has been paddling most of his life. He speaks some Chinese, and is young and fearless. His father, Pete Wynn, a solid 55-year-old

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Feature Escape from the Mekong

Left: The first difficult portage on the Mekong River under an active rockslide area.

Photo by John Mattson

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oarsman who has also been paddling or rowing most of his life, is a veteran of many Grand Canyon trips and has spent a lot of time boating in China. Steve Van Beek is a healthy 58, and I am 53. Ralph is a very fit and gregarious 50-year-old professor from Australia who paddles very well, and is a veteran of many expeditions. With this team we would probably have an exciting experience in the Grand Canyon, but this is not the Grand Canyon! We have just entered one of the last great gorges of the world that has not been run! Our maps are not very good, and it is impossible to scout from the air because this region of Tibet is basically occupied territory, and any kind of travel by tourists is strictly regulated.

The canyon that we are entering is very remote with steep walls on both sides and sections of 25 to 40 feet per mile gradient, which could be very significant for a river of this volume. We are guessing about 5,000 cubic feet per second at the beginning and probably about 10,000 by now. This is similar to the Grand Canyon at low water, but the gradient is much greater, and the rapids that we have seen have been caused by rockslides from the sheer walls and are constantly changing. These rockslides can dam the river and cause huge rapids, and if there is a big one in a box canyon, we are in deep trouble. This river resembles the Great Colca Canyon in Peru in many ways, but the Colca had about 1200 cfs when I paddled it, and I was four years younger then. The team has very good energy and there is a trail next to the river, so if we proceed cautiously there is still an escape route. We have about eight more days worth of food, and there is an endless supply of Tsampa¹ in the villages.

Footnotes

1) A Tibetan staple, tsampa is ground barley that has been roasted. When it is mixed with butter tea it makes a paste that tastes a lot like the first power bars.

We awaken to a beautiful clear morning with more fresh snow on the high peaks and a light frost on our tents. The canyon walls form a nearly perfect 90-degree angle with each other and go from river level to about 18,000 feet, where the snow-capped

summits glimmer in the bright sun.

We pass a small terraced village on the right side of the river, and just below it is the biggest rapid that we have seen so far

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Feature Escape from the Mekong

continued from page 47

with some large breaking waves and a strong current pushing into a vertical wall on the left. It is pretty easy for the kayakers, but the strong current pushing into the wall will make it very challenging for the rafts. Some of the rafts brush the wall, but they all manage to stay upright, and a very happy team whoops it up at the bottom as the local villagers come out to watch.

Another afternoon storm is moving in with gusty winds and light drizzle as we arrive at the next big drop. This rapid is a long technical Class IV with a couple of big holes and a bad wrap rock at the end. While we are scouting the weather deteriorates so Pete and Travis decide to look downstream for rapids and possible camps while the rest of the group explores a beautiful side canyon that has been carved out of a green rock called serpentine. It has been six days since we have had a bath, and the cold, clear river feels very refreshing. Their scout reveals no camps downstream, so we set ours up in the abandoned yak herder's structures. We christen the camp "Yak Dung Hotel" and call the rapid "Green Snake" because of the serpentine and its long winding nature.

The Japanese team cooks up a huge pot of chocolate curry, and we celebrate Ralph's 50th birthday with some kind of rice alcohol as the sky clears and the stars become brilliant in the narrow

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canyon. Our GPS tells us that we have gone about 9 miles today, and we are now about 4 days behind schedule as the canyon gets steeper and narrower.

April 14, River Day 7: I awake at seven when a strong gust of wind blows my paddle against my tent. This gust is followed by a torrent of hard rain so I hide in my tent in the comfort of my warm sleeping bag. At 7:30 I stick my head out the door and see misting rain with ominous clouds as the temperature hovers above freezing and the snow line lingers just above our camp. The river is winding its way through a range of nearly 18,000-foot mountains and the storm seems to be clinging to these peaks. I put on all my warm gear and head to the kitchen, where the serious caffeine addicts have the water nearly boiling and the low clouds and fresh snow provide yet another incredible vista.

Everybody has a clean run in Green

Snake, and the jubilant group moves on downstream, flying high on the coffee, cold water and adrenaline. The sun shows its face again, but the air stays crisp as we float through some fun Class III wave trains. We are moving fast and having fun when we arrive at a sharp right turn where two tributaries from opposite sides of the river have created a long Class IV with a Class V drop at the end. It is a very difficult and dangerous run for the rafts, and they decide to portage.

This portage is about a quarter of a mile, so the rafts need to be derigged and disassembled so that the tubes and frames can be carried separately. There is a good camp about halfway through the rapid, so we decide to portage in two sections. We hire the local villagers to carry everything to the camp and return tomorrow to finish. While we are portaging we see a fresh rockslide about a mile downstream, and Ralph and I go to scout while Pete and the

rest of the group help the porters carry everything up to our camp.

The next rapid is easier, but also very significant. There is a clean line for the kayakers, but the breaking waves are huge and there is an almost river-wide surging wave-hole in the middle, which will be difficult for the rafts to miss. A very large rock at the bottom of the rapid threatens to wrap a raft if it flips in the big wave. There is a possibility of lining the rafts through the first part of the drop, but that will be up to the rafters to decide.

The air feels a bit warmer when the villagers arrive at 8:00 a.m. to finish the portage, but there is a thin mist that turns to cold rain

continued on page 50

Tibetan porters carrying gear.

Photo by John Mattson



Feature Escape from the Mekong

as we finish loading the rafts and head downstream. By the time we reach the rapid it is raining pretty hard, and the air seems to be getting colder. We spend about an hour scouting, but Pete doesn't like any of the lines, and lining the rafts through the first part of the rapid looks very difficult and dangerous.

In a somewhat impulsive mood, Pete decides to try rowing one of the rafts without passengers through the thin kayak line. Two of the kayakers will paddle with him as safety boaters to help him out if he swims. It will be a difficult and dangerous run, but we are tired of portaging and are anxious to move forward!

While we are walking back to our boats to attempt the run the rain gets even

stronger, so we decide to take a lunch break and warm up in an abandoned village that probably belongs to some migrant herdsmen. The houses are very small, but they have a great view, are somewhat dry, and are stocked with firewood. The wood is dry, and in a few moments we are sitting by a raging fire and drinking hot tea while we wait out the storm.

During our lunch break a series of rockslides sprays the left third of the river with rock-fall. This is exactly where we would have been if we had tried to line the rafts, and if we were there now someone probably would have been killed or severely injured. By the time we are warmed up and finish lunch it is 2:30, and the rock-fall has sent a strong message to everyone who is paying attention about how serious this

river really is. We have gone less than a mile today, but we decide to camp and spend the afternoon scouting.

The scout reveals three more big rapids in the next two miles! I stop and talk to Pete and Travis as they contemplate one of the big drops, but Pete has already made up his mind. The river is too difficult and dangerous for the rafts to continue further, and the trip is over! I am very disappointed, but I agree with his decision. There is a chance that maybe the kayakers can go on alone, but it will have to be discussed with the group.

I walk on downstream, alone with this incredible river and my thoughts. At 53 I am definitely past my prime, but I am feeling pretty good. My neck was really

A black and white advertisement for Star inflatable rafts. The background is a photograph of several people in inflatable rafts navigating a turbulent white-water rapid. The text is overlaid on the image. At the top left, it says "Toll Free: 877-900-2628". At the top right, it says "www.starinflatables.com" with a white star icon above it. In the middle left, the quote "'Where Price Meets Pleasure...'" is written in a bold, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the "star" logo is displayed, featuring the word "star" in a bold, lowercase font with a large black star to its right and wavy lines below. At the bottom center, it says "Choose from 35 innovative designs." in a bold, sans-serif font.

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sore after five days of horrible roads at the beginning of the trip, but I am feeling better now and the old spirit is coming back. I know that if I don't do it now, I will probably never come back, because the politics are too difficult, and I will only be older. I keep thinking about one of my favorite lyrics by Tom Waits: "Opportunity don't knock. It has no tongue and it cannot talk," and I try to think rationally while the adrenaline is pushing me onward. Ahead lies about 80 miles of a big volume river in a very deep canyon, and the action is probably just starting. The trail is disappearing, but the maps show other villages and the many side canyons will probably have trails. I have spent enough time in the Himalayas to know that there are people almost everywhere. There will probably be some very hard rapids that cannot be portaged, and there could be an unrunable rapid in a box canyon, but my

gut feelings and instincts tell me that it is a reasonable risk, and I want to try.

I have a good supply of power bars and jerky that I have brought along just in case, and I have my expedition kayak complete with dry bags. Travis and Ralph are not as well equipped, but the group has enough dry bags and extra equipment to suffice, and we decide that we want to give it a go. We have managed to convince ourselves, so now all we have to do is convince the Chinese.

The camp erupts into a big argument! The Japanese team is also very disappointed, and they do not want to stop because they feel that they can portage rapidly and want to continue with the kayakers. They are young and very fit, and have worked very hard on this expedition, but the Chinese are in charge and they will not let the group split up.


I cannot understand most of the arguments so I head back to a great little cabin that I found under a big boulder and lie awake thinking about the great canyon that we are about to leave. I think about sneaking off by myself, but I have never been much of a soloist when it comes to boating. I enjoy the company of friends, and I know that they can definitely help you out in many situations. I dream about my close friends, John Foss and Paul Zerkelbach, who died paddling. I always seem to find their spirits in these remote places, and I know that they would probably be busy packing their boats. I can almost hear their laughter as they taunt me and urge me to press onward. It is fun to dream about, but I fall asleep deciding to go with the flow, and feeling quite sad about abandoning the expedition.

In the morning we have a new plan, and some of us go trekking to a remote village, which is truly incredible. We hurry back to catch the group that has already hired the local villagers, and we join a big parade of Yaks, burrows, and local Tibetans that carry three rafts, four kayaks and lots of gear out

of the deep Canyon.

Three days of walking brings us to Chalashan (a very busy village that resembles a trading post in the Wild West). There is a road from here, but it is very bad, and the two 16,000-foot passes have not been crossed since the last storm, but we manage to find a local truck driver who is willing to try, and with the help of some of the locals we push him through the mud and snow for two more days. We camp in a pristine and uninhabited valley and share our dwindling food supply as we watch an incredible sunset. We were hoping for a hard frost to harden the mud, but the night is not very cold and our truck sinks up to its axles on a steep slope about half a mile from the top of the last pass. Our situation is looking pretty grim when we see two hikers coming down the muddy road to meet us. The Yunnan TV crew has found us and have hired another truck which is waiting at the top of the pass, so all we have to do is drag a few thousand pounds of gear up to the top. In a few hours the truck is loaded and we are on our way to a hot spring resort in Yanjing, which was our intended takeout.

After a lengthy debate, our Chinese guardians decide to let the kayakers paddle a ten-mile stretch from Yanjing to the Yunnan border. This is an incredible Class V- big water day run that passes through the middle of an ancient salt mine. Our shuttle driver is none other than the Chinese-appointed governor of the district. He doesn't speak English, but he talks very rapidly in Chinese as he broad-slides the 90-degree turns on the narrow road that is carved into a cliff above the Mekong. I think that he says that he doesn't like Americans and he is obviously trying to scare us. It is the worst ride that I have ever had, and makes everything else that happened on the expedition seem trivial.

I will always see the Mekong in my dreams. 



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Safety.

Accident Summary

by Charlie Walbridge

July through December, 2004

Although the number of river deaths last year was slightly below average, the last six months of 2004 were difficult for American Whitewater. We lost three long-time members during this time—two during a single week in October. Canoeing and rafting fatalities were both well below average during this period. A number of novices and one expert would still be alive today if they'd chosen to wear a life vest. High water, strainers, and novice paddling ability made for a deadly combination several times this year as a number of casual floaters drowned in post-hurricane excursions.

Accident reports are never easy reading. They're not intended to be comforting, like eulogies, but to serve as real-life lessons. Since most paddlers will never encounter a serious accident, this is a real learning opportunity. The comfort comes from knowing that each write-up helps inform other paddlers, which in turn encourages everyone to take the necessary precautions.

Kayaking Accidents

July started out with two incidents involving unskilled kayakers. On July 10th Layton Ledgister, 52, rented a kayak to use on New York's upper Delaware River. He was paddling with his son when he capsized in Butler's Rift, a straightforward Class II rapid. His son was able to swim ashore, but Mr. Ledgister struggled in the swift current and was "pulled under." This was the second death in this rapid this year. The National Park Service Morning Report said that the pair was wearing life vests; the Times Herald-Record of Middletown, NY said that State Police investigators were not sure. If the man was wearing a PFD, it must have come off. Bystanders recovered the man's body downstream and attempted CPR.

A kayaker disappeared after running a low-head dam on the Guadalupe River in Texas on July 11th. According to the Kerrville Daily Times, Kenneth Schmidt

was paddling with two friends when he ran the drop. He apparently didn't recognize the danger despite 14 years of paddling. He flipped in the backwash and disappeared. Local residents spotted his body several days later and notified authorities.

Bill Bowey's pickup truck was found parked along Stevens Creek, a small tributary of the Muddy Fork of the Cowlitz in Mount Rainier National Park. Mr. Bowey, at 48, was a paddling legend. He'd been exploring northwest rivers and creeks for decades, making first descents of many now-classic runs. According to a report from Jeff Bennett, Mr. Bowey's friends joined the search and found him washed up on a sand bar below Sylvia Falls. The falls is a 30 foot drop into a very shallow pool. The stream had never been run, and the falls themselves come on suddenly, with none of the usual geologic warning features. Since Mr. Bowey was paddling alone, no one knows what really happened. He didn't like to run big drops and was very cautious on his solo runs. Friends believe that he washed over the falls by accident, probably on Saturday, July 24th.

The Neversink River near Port Jervis, New York was running high and fast after heavy rains on August 15th. An article in the Middletown, NY Times Herald-Record said that Fred Stewart, 24, was paddling with a friend when he bailed out of his kayak near the Old Falls Scenic Overlook. Here he was "pinned between two rocks that form a V-shape in the middle of the river." His friend paddled up to him, but was unable to help. A visitor to the overlook saw what happened and used his cell phone to call police. Two uniformed officers from Fallsburg, NY were able to wade out to Mr. Stewart, but he was dead by the time they reached him.

On September 13th the Russian River north of San Francisco claimed the life of a 40 year-old woman. The Ukiah, CA Daily Journal said that Corinne Casey was paddling with a friend when trouble struck. The man's kiwi-style kayak broached and pinned on a log in strong current. Ms. Casey, who was following close behind in a similar boat, also hit the jam. She broached, flipped, and went underneath both boats.

Her friend had hold of her hand briefly before she was pulled underwater. After several minutes she washed free. Her friend chased her along the riverbank, then swam out to grab her in a calm stretch and pulled her ashore. He attempted CPR before climbing to a nearby road and flagging down a car.

We received word from Canada that John Helmsley, an experienced local kayaker, died while soloing the Mine Run on British Columbia's Ashlu Creek. A posting to the BC Paddler's Message Board said that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were alerted when Mr. Helmsley did not return on the evening of September 26th. The next day his body was spotted from the air, wedged between midstream boulders. Because he was paddling by himself no one knows how he got there. A rescue team was airlifted into the canyon and made the recovery.

Great Falls of the Potomac near Washington, DC are a magnet for top kayakers from all over the country. This fall we had a grim reminder of what can happen in a Class V+ drop. Paul Schelp said in an email that the Little Falls gauge was reading 3.35 feet on October 24th, which is an ideal level for these drops. Todd Andrew, accompanied by a very experienced local falls runner, made three successful runs down the "center lines" that day. But the 35 year-old South Dakota native got in trouble on his next attempt. He flipped below the first big ledge, Grace Under Pressure and struggled through several roll attempts as he washed through the rocks and boils below. He bailed out and was carried into "Subway," a nasty, unrunnable 18-foot drop ending in an ugly rock jumble. Although his body was still missing several days later, a wetsuit bootie was eventually found below. The incident is a terrible reminder of the consequences of making mistakes in difficult whitewater.

John Heffernan, 66, found kayaking late in life and became an expert. On October 10th his life ended on the Russell Fork River, which forms the KY-VA state line. This stretch, known for its scenic Class V rapids and unforgiving undercut geology, was running at 1100 cfs. This is a standard

release for the 4th weekend of the season and about 20% more than the three previous weekends. The flow created a hole in the far left sneak at Triple Drop where none exists at lower flows. Mr. Heffernan was trying that sneak when he spun out and surfed into the worst part of the hole. He flipped and made several roll attempts as he washed over the second and third drops. He was not moving as he emerged floating in the pool below. Two boaters chased him down, pulled him ashore, then performed CPR for 45 minutes without success.

Rescuers noticed a large gash on Mr. Heffernan's chin. Lee Belknap believes that he hit his head or snapped his neck as he floated over the last ledge and that the impact probably caused him to lose consciousness. It's well known that age makes us more vulnerable to concussions (something that any paddler over 40 should consider) and that oxygen deprivation combined with a blow can cause blackouts at any age. AW Safety Chair, Tim Kelley, has these thoughts for the rest of us: "As paddlers, our first means of self-rescue is the Eskimo roll. But attempting to roll until you're exhausted is not always the best strategy. Remember you are most exposed when attempting to roll, and that you can reduce your chances of hitting your head by staying tucked. Timing, especially in Class V rapids, makes a huge difference. The bottom line: have a bomber roll, make a couple of good attempts, but be sure to bail out before you are too exhausted to swim safely or help with your own rescue."

This past fall was uncommonly wet, and the Green River Narrows in North Carolina ran much higher than usual. On November 24th the level was 300%. This means that both turbines were running at 100% and the flow from tributaries like Big Hungry Creek equaled a third turbine running at 100%. That much water makes the run rather pushy. Brian Rueff, 20, had chosen to attend a nearby college to be near this Class V run. He'd run it "hundreds of times" and knew it extremely well. He was paddling with three very experienced friends.

Emails from Chris Gragtmans and Lee Belknap explained what happened next. At Zwick's, Mr. Rueff flipped part-way

down and rolled near the entry to the next rapid, Chief. He ran Chief successfully and was spotted sitting in a small eddy below the drop. His group then turned their attention upstream. Everyone got through Zwick's, then ran Chief. Mr. Rueff was nowhere to be seen. Initially they thought he had portaged Gorilla, which lies just downstream. When they found his boat floating loose below Gorilla, they knew that something had gone wrong. Although no one saw what happened, it's likely that Mr. Rueff washed into Gorilla. There, he might have flipped and hit his head. According to AW Safety Chair Tim Kelley, this was "a clear demonstration of how high flows magnify the effects of missed lines." A momentary loss of control in Zwick's led to very serious problems some distance downstream.

The group searched the river until dark, and then hiked out to get help. They returned with emergency responders, searched the river unsuccessfully until 11 pm, then came back to keep looking early the next day. The water had been shut off at the dam, dropping the water level substantially. They found Mr. Rueff's body caught in a side chute of Nutcracker, a short distance below Gorilla. Later the chief of the local rescue squad told the Asheville Citizen-Times that kayakers should stay off the river because it is too dangerous. He claimed that his unit recovered several dead kayakers each year. Woody Calloway and Chris Bell challenged this statement, noting these facts: First, thousands of kayakers successfully run the Green Narrows each year; second, there have been only two kayaking fatalities and one other injury requiring evacuation in the last decade. Their comments generated a good follow-up article about the actual dangers of paddling the Green Narrows. Since body recovery is a difficult and emotional job, rescuers say these things when they're tired, frustrated, or lead there by reporters. Knowledgeable local river runners should respectfully counter their remarks. Contact the reporter who covered the accident, or write a letter to the editor.

Canoeing Accidents

On August 8th Kevin Wade, 42, was

canoeing with a friend on the Allegheny River near Emlenton, PA. Although this stretch is not known for its whitewater, there are some occasional Class I riffles. According to the Butler, PA Eagle, the pair flipped their boat in a small rapid near Dotterer's Eddy. Wade, who was not wearing a life vest, did not make it to shore. His friend searched the area before notifying authorities. Firefighters, a Fish Commission waterways patrolman, and a medevac helicopter all joined the search but could not locate Mr. Wade. The next day the effort continued. Search dogs in rescue boats located his body under eight feet of water, allowing divers to make the recovery.

According to an email from Susan Weum, the Cannon River in Minnesota was running high from recent rains on October 9th. She noted that although the river is not difficult, its strong currents can be tough for novices to manage. These were the conditions when a couple went canoeing with their two-year-old daughter. They broached on a submerged log and pinned. Their daughter, Jassikay Cohen-Bruggerman, fell out of the canoe and pinned beneath the boat and the log. By the time the couple recovered the girl, who was wearing a life vest, it was too late. Very young children are completely helpless in these emergencies, and this is something that even experienced paddlers need to remember when introducing them to paddling.

Saucon Creek near Bethlehem, PA was pretty high on November 29th. Terri Cressman, 46, was paddling a canoe with her husband on this fast moving little stream when the pair hit a strainer and capsized. Mrs. Cressman washed underneath the canoe and pinned; her husband was thrown clear. He returned to the pinned boat but was unable to free his wife. Nearby residents heard his screams and dialed 911. Firefighters were able to pull Mrs. Cressman free; she was transported to a local hospital where she was pronounced dead.

Safety. Accident Summary continued

Rafting Accidents

The Kennebec River Gorge is one of Maine's most popular tourist attractions. According to MorningSentinel.com, a commercial raft flipped here on September 11th, tossing seven guests and their guide into the water. Victor Fernandez, 46, was found unconscious in his life vest some distance downstream. He had a history of heart problems and the Maine Warden Service felt that this was the probable cause of death. Everyone else was picked up pretty quickly; however it was not the first fatality in this fast-moving, big-water wave train!

A group of students from the University of Georgia got more than they bargained for when they tried to float the Middle Oconee River in a raft. River levels on September 17th were unusually high following a visit from Hurricane Ivan. The raft was jammed against a pile of debris and flipped. Alicia Stramiello, 20, was last seen alive by her boyfriend just before she washed under the strainer. The other students washed free, made it to shore, and called 911. Firefighters searched for three days before they found her body.

The Shenandoah River at Harpers Ferry is usually a gentle Class II float. But rains from Hurricane Jeanne pushed the river level past 13 feet at Millville on September 29th. According to posts on Boatertalk.com, at these near-flood levels the Shenandoah Staircase becomes a wide, rolling, big water Class IV rapid full of giant waves and monster holes. Such was the scene when a commercial raft trip entered the rapid. The lead raft dropped into a nasty pourover called Heaven's Gate and four other rafts followed closely behind. At least one raft carrying six people flipped. One man got away from the group and flush-drowned in the long stretch of fast water below. Other guests were rescued from precarious perches along the rugged shores by firefighters, some of whom rappelled down the steep cliffs on the river right shore to reach them.

A 62 year-old man from Phoenix died on a private rafting trip down the Grand Canyon

of the Colorado. According to a post on Boatertalk.com, the accident occurred on November 23rd during a rare 41,000 cfs release from Glen Canyon Dam. Veteran Grand Canyon boaters say that the river is no more difficult at these high flows, but note that the chaotic nature of the water takes some getting used to. A raft flipped part way down Hance Rapid and the victim was carried a long way before being recovered. After trying CPR, the group sent radio messages to overhead aircraft which were relayed to the National Park Service. The NPS helicopter could not land at the accident site, so they advised the group to continue down to Phantom Ranch. There, a search and rescue crew received the body and flew it to the medical examiner's office in Flagstaff.

The final accident occurred on Oregon's Rogue River during a commercially guided trip. On October 7th a boat guided by Ken Robinson, 51, flipped in The Coffee Pot, one of the toughest rapids in Mule Creek Canyon. The guide, who was not wearing a life vest, slipped beneath the surface and disappeared. His two elderly clients, who were wearing PFDs, were picked up unharmed. Mr. Robinson's body was found a week later, four miles below the accident site. The outfitter observed that this was the first fatality in his 49 years of operation, and said that his guides "wear life vests when they need them." Private boaters on the Northwest Paddler's Message Board commented that they often see guides on this stretch without PFDs. One post said that most guides are "independent contractors," and companies feel that they can't order them to "buckle up." Hopefully this attitude will change before someone else makes the same mistake.

Near Misses and Rescues

On July 18th Robert Martin, a whitewater kayaker vacationing in Atlantic Beach, NC, was surfing when he saw several swimmers being swept out into the ocean by a rip tide. Braving a strong current and large breaking waves he pulled a man and his son to shore. By now the beach patrol had arrived. Martin found the incident commander and volunteered to help rescue the two

remaining swimmers. Afterwards, he paddled out and made the save.

In California, there was another scary incident at the big undercut on the North Fork of the Feather's Cresta run. According to a post on the Carolina Canoe Club web page by Bruce Grove, a raft washed into the undercut on July 24th. After it flipped, paddlers saw one person wash under the rock. They quickly attached ropes to the raft and pulled it free, but one man was still unaccounted for. It turned out that he'd found a large air pocket and was sitting underneath the rock in waist-deep water. Someone heard his cries for help, and after some searching they were able to move some large rocks aside and pull him up through a crack.

Quick action by two off-duty guides saved a woman's life on the Youghiogheny River below Ohiopyle, PA. On August 17th her commercial raft flipped at Dimple Rock. She swam the tough part of the rapid below Dimple without difficulty, then caught her leg just above Swimmer's Hole and disappeared underwater. Glenn Shearers and Charlie Morrison saw what happened and reacted quickly. They waded out to her and lifted her body up and this apparently set her free. After she was pulled ashore guides began what one ranger described as "excellent CPR—the best I've ever seen." Working together, they continued CPR while carrying her to the bike path on river left where oxygen and a defibrillator were brought to them. She was hooked to the defibrillator, but the machine indicated that she had a pulse, and no shock was required. The guides continued rescue breathing using supplementary oxygen. She was transported by helicopter to West Virginia University Hospital where her family says she got truly outstanding medical care. Although her ankle still remains sore, she's made a full recovery in every other way.

North Carolina's Haw River has seen many mishaps over the years. On August 30th two men were stranded on a small island after a set of two-foot waves swamped their kiwi-style kayaks. They had life vests, but no helmets or sprayskirts. Local firefighters have trained with the Carolina Canoe Club

and a Rescue 3 and are very well prepared. They deployed a powerboat to make the save.


Later in the year, on September 28th, noted canoeing author Paul Ferguson was injured while attempting to take out above a 15 foot-high dam in Altamahaw, NC. Water levels were pretty high that day, and as he started to get out of his canoe the bow swung out into the current and he was pushed over the structure. Mr. Ferguson broke his back in the fall. His friend pulled him from the river, sent for help, then stayed with him until rescue squads arrived.

After a hurricane rolled through West Virginia on September 5th, Summersville Dam on the Gauley River shut down to hold back the floodwaters. As a result, many paddlers ran the nearby New River Gorge. One of them, John Markiel, flipped in Lower Keeney and hit his head hard. He was spotted, unconscious and still in his boat, floating through the Halls of Karma. Paddlers moved in quickly. A young kayaker named Sam used a "hand of god" rescue to right Mr. Markiel's kayak. Then a group of rafters and squirt boaters hustled him ashore. CPR brought him sputtering back to life. Meanwhile, the outfitters radioed emergency services. Rescue squads were on the scene quickly, coming down the narrow road that runs along Keeney Creek. They placed Mr. Markiel on a backboard and administered oxygen. Then emergency responders and paddlers joined forces to carry the litter up a steep incline to the railroad grade and a waiting ambulance. Thanks to their fast action Mr. Markiel is expected to recover fully, with no pulmonary or neurological problems.

Chris Morrison, a participant in the Ohiopyle Falls Race, landed hard and flat on his last trip over the falls. The impact crushed one of his thoracic vertebrae. This serious injury was managed professionally by everyone. First, he was kept in the water and floated down to the regular lower Yough put-in by Jeff Snyder. There he was met by a local rescue squad, back-boarded, and carried to a waiting ambulance. He faces a lengthy recovery and a long time in

a back brace, and we all wish him well.

Eric Schertzl, a friend of Ben Manfridi, sent us this update. Mr. Manfridi was found unconscious below a drop in the Grand Canyon of the Elwha in Washington State last year without an apparent injury. Eric has been in touch with his friend's mother and she told him that Mr. Manfridi had been diagnosed with pericarditis a few weeks before the trip. This is an inflammation of the sac surrounding the heart. Considerable fluid was found in Mr. Manfridi's pericardium during the autopsy, indicating that the infection was more serious than they thought. She believes that this condition, and not the rapid, was what killed him. Doctors had advised rest, and in retrospect this would have been a good idea.

As usual, I am indebted to my regular correspondents: Slim Ray, Tim Bromelkamp, Aida Parkinson, Ken Dubel, and Joe Greiner. Without their help there would be considerably less information available to publish. American Whitewater asks its members and friends to forward similar accounts in the coming year. A good write-up cuts down on the inevitable gossip and speculation that follows a serious accident. Please forward any accident descriptions, newspaper articles, personal accounts, and other material to ccwalbridge@cs.com (Rt. 1, Box A43B, Bruceton Mills, WV 26525). American Whitewater is currently developing a new accident database and an on-line reporting system made possible by the Andy Banach Memorial Fund. This will include expanded search features and access to accident reports as soon as they are complete. The Banach Fund is nearly exhausted, so if you would like to help with Phase 2 of the project, please send contribution to AW Safety or the Banach Memorial Fund. The Safety Committee is also looking for a few volunteers to help input and update reports in the new database. Please email Tim Kelley at tmkelley@Clarkson.edu if you're interested. 



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River Voices

A Learning Experience Turned Upside Down

by Chris Conlin

Every paddler is
between swims.

Should I have thought of that before I hopped into my boat? Within five short minutes it would be as clear as an eviction notice... "You're outta here!"

I had not paddled in months. Deprived of transportation and a boat, I was reduced to a few overplayed kayak videos and the melancholy thrill of a daily rush-hour bike ride through San Francisco's financial district... until a week of freedom arrived.

My girlfriend and I hopped a greyhound from San Francisco, arriving a day later in Southern Oregon at an obscure gas station drop-off. Six hours later and a few entertaining stories by some locals living in the woods somewhere between our picnic table and the river, my friend Eddie drove up in his dark green Astro van, loaded with camping equipment and my familiar old Neckey Gliss. It was the beginning of a much-needed camping and kayaking trip in Northern California and Oregon.

The next day we started off with the Rogue River, a simple Class III warm-up where we found a very helpful local paddler who provided us with a wealth of knowledge. He suggested we paddle the Applegate River, crystal clear water and miles of continuous Class III in a beautiful wilderness setting. He gave us the beta.

"Put in right below the ugly Class V looking thing and portage the section with the ugly undercut on the left about a mile downstream," he said.

We did not know much about the area, but it sounded like another good warm-up run and an opportunity to check out some beautiful scenery.

The next day we found ourselves at the Applegate, did some road scouting, and made note of the undercut section. The run looked very easygoing, even a little disappointing despite the sheer beauty of the area. There were a few small granite slides and a good water level, flowing around 500 CFS.

The put-in was obvious, just as he had described it, right below the "ugly class V looking thing." Naturally, Eddie and I were immediately drawn to the drop. It was about a ten-foot falls divided by a large rock in the middle of the river. The left chute looked very ugly and was beyond consideration after only a few seconds of observation. A majority of the flow dropped into this slot formed by overhanging rock walls on either side. The water appeared to disperse downward to the riverbed, outward to the walls and back upstream to be recirculated. The only place it didn't seem to be moving was downstream.

The right slot, on the other hand, dropped over the edge about 30 feet beyond the left slot, but still landed in a pretty dicey area that appeared only a little bit wider than my boat was long. The walls were either vertical or slightly overhung at this point, but the water seemed to be sluggishly boiling its way out of the slot and downstream.

We stared at it for a while, threw some sticks in, half of which took their sweet time to resurface or decided to hang out on the bottom until we lost interest. If there were ever a time to apply the word "retrospect" I suppose this would be it, as the value of such a word relies solely on one's willingness to learn from observation.

This is where other factors made their way into my head. I was a little too excited to get back on the river; it was a new location; the warm sun and clear skies made everything look very friendly; I had just spent more hours than it takes to fly across the country in a lethargic, fuming bus; and I was finally out of my cage. Not to say I was an ecstatic lunatic ready to hop into anything in my path; I was very serious about my decision, but I felt good about the rapid. I would run it first.

Eddie set up safety right below the drop. He perched his boat on the cliff where he could drop in right after me if needed. I carried my boat about fifty feet above the drop and snapped my dry sprayskirt over the cockpit.

One move, two moves, aim right, set-up, boof.

The right slot was narrower than I had expected, and forced my boat on its rail as I went over, corkscrewing into the tight landing zone. I was upside down, immediately realizing the water was much colder than I had expected. The friendly sun had deceived me.

No problem, it was time to roll. Setup, sweep, no purchase; still upside down. Setup, wall, no room. No problem, try the other side. Once again, no purchase. My bow hit a rock, then my stern, then my paddle, then my hand: I didn't need all that extra skin on my knuckles anyway. I was going nowhere.

The account from shore revealed I was spinning like a top. My lungs were starting to get angry with me.

"Roll you idiot!" they suggested.

"I'm trying damnit!"

Another failed attempt.

"Inhale you idiot!" Couldn't argue with that one.

I reached down in defeat and pulled my spray deck for the first time in five years and was instantaneously reminded of how poorly Hawaiian surf shorts and spring runoff mix.

It was time to get a little air, but to my horror I did not surface. I kicked aimlessly and thought, "There is no reason why this should let me go; this sure as hell ain't Hollywood, no guarantees of a happy ending here."

Was I even swimming in the right direction? I thought about the left-hand slot just slightly upstream, "I hope I'm not getting sucked into that!"

I opened my eyes, pure white, then dark. I was going under an undercut. I kicked off a wall, more darkness.

From shore Eddie watched my boat float downstream minus a paddler. He saw a hand jut up from the boil and just as quickly disappear. He launched the throw rope into the boil where he last saw my hand. I was oblivious to his efforts.

He reeled it in to throw again, but as he was about to re-throw, I popped up somewhere downstream. The darkness I was seeing right before I resurfaced was actually green water, decidedly better than my perceptions had suggested.

My lungs were utterly disappointed with me at this point, and I was anxious to redeem myself with a heavy dose of oxygen. But the frigid temperature of the water had other plans. My breathing came in a rapid staccato rhythm, fulfilling only a fraction of the demand. I had been under water for more than half a minute (or an eternity depending on which account you listen to), and my reflexes were very inconsiderate.

I pulled myself onto the left bank and concentrated on getting my head back on my shoulders. I signaled to let Eddie know I was OK, and motioned for him to get my boat. He dropped off the cliff and was off. I grinned at him as he paddled by.

The sun was pretty low in the sky as I started climbing down to look for my paddle. I made it no more than a few hundred feet before I found it pinned vertically against a rock, within reach of shore. What a beautiful sight. I plucked it off the rock just as if it were still hanging on the rack at the shop.

The left wall restricted below me, and I was forced to climb a few hundred vertical feet above the canyon and hike along a game trail where I spotted my boat around a corner about a quarter mile downstream, pinned in the middle of the river. Luckily I was able to get back down to water level, where I met Eddie.

I took one end of the throw rope and Eddie grabbed the other, ferrying out above my boat. The plan was for Eddie to hook a carabineer to the bow as he passed by, allowing me to pull it onto shore. But as

he grabbed for my boat, Eddie caught a rail and had to brace, dropping the rope. Fortunately, Eddie tugged on my boat as he was being swept downstream and it came loose. My throw rope wedged between some rocks in the middle of the river, and I had no choice but to sacrifice it.

The sun had set at this point, and I was still on the wrong side of the river. The one rope we had was gone, and Eddie had secured my boat on the opposite bank. My legs were beyond numb from having to stand in the frigid water up to my bare knees during the failed boat retrieval, and each step sent a painful shock into my feet.

I traveled down stream until I found an area wide and shallow enough to wade across. Most of the traverse was above my waist. It was the slowest, most painful ferry I have ever done.

Eddie pulled my boat onto shore. Having no way of knowing that my drain plug was not attached to the inside of my boat, he unscrewed it and promptly lost it to the river. I made my way back upstream, pausing to get some circulation back into my legs. I crammed a stick into the drain hole and broke it off. We continued downstream, portaging the undercut, and setting up camp where my girlfriend was waiting with the van.

Every paddler is between swims. It is a common phrase, but becomes easier to forget with each successful descent.

Five years of solid rolls, wise decisions, routine portages and no swims lead me to believe I was a smart boater, but Eddie and I still had only one throw rope between us;


I was wearing the same gear in March that I would have in August on the Colorado River; and we started out on a new run at dusk.

We were relatively experienced boaters, but had overlooked a few basic rules. I lost a drain plug, a throw rope and a little bit of skin, but I gained a wealth of valuable experience and a friendly reminder to stay humble and respect the river. Our trip was just beginning and I had cold beer, a warm fire, good company, and five new rivers to boat in the next few days. All things considered, we were off to a great start.

Later in the week, on the Cal Salmon, we talked one night with some boys from an Indian reservation on the Klamath. They still depend on the river to provide their food and net their fish above a falls that, according to the boys, have taken almost every life that has attempted to paddle it.

“The river decides weather you stay or go,” they said.

I’d like to believe that the river teaches those who are willing to learn, and provides immeasurable rewards for those who know her well; but she always has a temper and won’t hesitate to separate boat from paddler every now and then as a gentle reminder:

Respect is optional, just like that little plastic tub you are floating in. 

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River Voices

Perfect Run by The Dogg

The Middle Branch Oswegatchie

Occasionally while kayaking, one comes across a run that seems practically perfect in every way. Depending on your point of view, this “perfect” stream would feature different highlights. My perfect stream would have big drops, beautiful scenery, many miles of whitewater, and a group of friends to make the experience all the more enjoyable. Either way, the prospect of finding the perfect run leaves a kayaker feeling like a champion, much like a quarterback when he throws a touchdown pass, a basketball player when they make the game winning shot, or a rapper when he gets a new gold tooth. I digress.

During my trip to the Moose Festival this past October, I found the perfect stream. Because of the high water in the area, we decided to go explore some of the nearby runs. One of the runs that had always intrigued me was the Middle Branch of the Oswegatchie River. I had run the lower section, which features several big drops but had heard that the upper section had more large drops and consistent rapids through a beautiful gorge. The prospect of combining the two runs for 12 miles, packed with big drops through stunning Adirondack scenery seemed like a spectacular situation. Yessir, this run had serious potential to exceed the maximum level of SIKness as allowed by law!

The original group included Yours Truly, the Dogg, of course, along with Bob Devine, Jeff Smith, John Pramik, Kevin Williams, Jen Paisner, James Tabor, Mike Ornyas and Andy Bowman. The shuttle was set so that the whole group would do the first section down to Bryants Bridge then those that still had the energy for more big drops would continue to Fish Creek.

Once up at the put-in, the cool air reminded me that winter comes early in the Adirondacks. Yep, it was time to put away that Mickey Mouse T-shirt and Redskins Starter jacket and put on a drysuit, lest I be chastised on the Internet for being unprepared. Luckily, I was prepared, being very experienced with extreme situations. Back to the run: the Middle Branch started

out slowly, instead almost a mile of Class I-II rapids through a beautiful setting. Soon, we came upon a vertical walled gorge and a horizon line indicating that this was where the toilet paper hit the double red stripe!

The first rapid narrows and goes over a few small drops before a beefy eight-foot horseshoe ledge with a menacing hydraulic at the bottom. I told Bob that this rapid was the Diet Coke of SIKness, just one calorie, not SIK enough and that there would be bigger things downstream. Bob took one look at this rapid, coupled with the next substantial horizon line just downstream, and decided that he'd seen enough. His bad case of the gout was starting to act up anyway so he took off through the woods, hobbling like a wounded duck back to the truck. The rest of us got in our boats and one by one laid the smackdown on this drop. That is, until Jeff Smith tried it. He came off the boof and turned a little sideways as he landed. Before he knew it, he was sucked back into this ledge for an extended park n' play session. I hadn't seen someone get trashed like that since the family cat took a spin in the dryer! That was good fun! Finally, Jeff conceded defeat and exited his boat. It took awhile for his boat to come out but, once it did, Jeff decided that he would call it a day as well. The next boater over the drop was James and he received a beatdown equal to Jeff's and also decided that a walk out was in order. So, after one rapid, our group was nearly cut in half, with three members opting to run like scalded dogs back to the car.

The next rapid was similar to the first and ended in a sloping 10-foot ledge into a major hole. We all ran left of center and were able to punch or clear the hole without incident. The next mile or so presented us with more spectacular scenery and small rapids until we came to another major drop off. We hopped out to scout, which revealed a six-foot ledge into a boiling hole followed by a 12-foot cascade with a major rock waiting at the bottom right. While scouting, we were passed by a group of locals who showed us the line down the far left. The plan was to boof the first ledge and muscle your way up hill through a feeder eddy and run the cascade on the left. The problem was that no one had an easy time

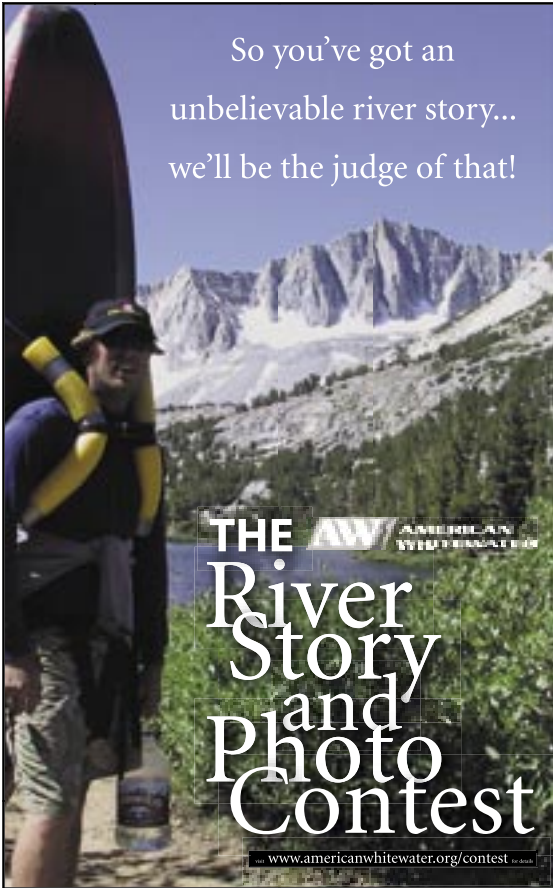
with the boiling feeder eddy and it looked like it had major potential to mess you up. Kevin was the first in our group to run it and also had a tough struggle against the feeder eddy. I decided that I didn't like the looks of the rapid but, being all about equal opportunity smackdown, I couldn't deny it the opportunity to go one on one with the GREAT ONE! I altered my line slightly from the others so that I would stay a little more centered off the top drop. I landed off the drop and let the boil lead me cleanly to the right where I cascaded down, landing just next to heinous boulder. Oh Yesh! It was NICHE! It is always sweet when a rapid works out just how you had wanted it to!

Below here, the run really settled into a nice gorge with constant rapids and slides. Most of them were not real major but they were delightful to run. One slide dropped about 8-10 feet into a cliff on the left. It had a funky approach and Jen got flipped at the top. She was drug down the slide upside down and through the rocky runout before finally deciding to exit her boat. She is one tough lady! Unfazed, she hopped back in her boat and pressed on. Soon, we came to a very major horizon line and it appeared as though the river was dropping off the edge of the earth! The river plummeted about 70 feet in the space of 100 yards. That kind of gradient is more eye-catching than a Super Bowl halftime show!

This steep section featured a very runnable 10-foot falls followed by a 12-foot cascade. After a short pool, the river then cascaded over a 35-40 foot broken rock face into a vertical walled gorge! I had heard that this rapid was descended for the first time a day prior and, after a scout, I knew that I was definitely down with the SIKness! The group that had passed us was scouting the lower falls heavily and it looked like several of them were going to fire it up. One by one they ran it, some with some great runs, others not so great but all emerging at the bottom just fine.

The whole group ran the approach falls and cascade fine, which turned out to be a really sweet rapid. Kevin and I were the only ones who decided that we wanted to run the big falls. In order to figure out who was going to run it first, we used a system of complex

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Contest Categories



River Story

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Tell us a story about something extraordinary that happened on a river. Send us a story – preferably with pictures – that makes us smile, gasp or nod our heads in appreciation. Stories need not be about difficult or previously un-run rivers, as long as they keep us interested.

Prize: Winner's choice of any whitewater kayak from Jackson Kayak



River Humor

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Make us laugh! If you (and, more importantly, other people) think you're funny, send us something that shows it. Humorous stories need not include photos, though authors may include illustrations. Stories must involve whitewater rivers, at least peripherally.

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River Photo

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Make us look twice! Send us your best photo. It should be awe-inspiring, thought provoking, or humorous. If a picture is worth 1000 words, the winner of this category will be worth at least 10,000.

Prize: Winner's choice of any whitewater kayak from Wavesport



River Conservation and Access

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Educate us! Tell or show us how river conservation and/or access has affected or might affect a whitewater river. This is a great opportunity to share the secrets to and the rewards of a conservation or access victory or to inform AW members of a river that needs protection or restoration. Photos encouraged.

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River Voices

Perfect Run

algorithms and funny playing cards known to the layman as “Go Fish.” Kevin emerged victorious and took the Nestea plunge, acing the big cascade. I followed, tip-toeing into the rapid to make sure that I was lined up perfect. I head down the flume and over the drop, falling cleanly into the pool at the bottom. Oh Yesh! It was a perfect run! Perfectly SCHWEEEEEET! I had a grin from ear with a feeling of euphoria rivaled only by the satisfaction of leaving a silent fart in an elevator!

The rest of the group lowered their boats down into the gorge and met us at the bottom. Several nice slides and rapids carried us to Bryants Bridge, where Bob, James, and Jeff were waiting for us. Everyone in the group decided that they wanted more drops so we all continued on. The drivers agreed to pick us up at Fish Creek. I knew that the lower section had some high impact drops, so I strapped on a pair of brass knuckles and prepared to do battle!

The Lower Middle Branch flows along a little slower than the Upper section but the big drops pack plenty of punch! One of the first rapids we came to had a narrow 10-foot sloping ledge with a burly hydraulic at the bottom that boils up from a long way out. The key to acing it is to get right, keep your speed, and keep your bow up, which most of us did. Jen wasn't far enough right and went deep into a crease that sucked her off the surface for some submersion research! She reappeared after a second or two, still in the grips of the hole and rode it for a while before exiting her boat. Some of the holes on this run were meaty!

After a long slide and some slower water, we came to my favorite drop on the Lower section, a 35-40 foot cascade with a shallow run out. There isn't much complexity to this drop, just make sure you're in the center at the top to avoid an angled deflector wave on the left at the bottom. This time, I beat Kevin at Go Fish so I got to run the drop first. I nearly lost this privilege by doing a long-winded and not particularly good celebration dance after my victory. I know what you're thinking, “Winning a game of Go Fish isn't exactly hard to do and certainly is not worth celebrating.”


Well, it was tough for me so BACK OFF! I laid the smackdown on this drop and was so pleased that I decided to carry up and run it a second time. The rest of the group made up their minds with a few carrying the drop and others having pretty nice runs. John was a little too far left on his run and got flipped by the deflector wave at the bottom. He didn't roll quick enough and started getting beat over the sharp rocks in the run out. Each time he would be close to attempting a roll, the boat would bounce up in the air as his body was dragged over another rock. Finally, the abuse became too much for him and he swam. It is always tough to pull the skirt after acing big rapids all day. John's beating reminded me of the time I shoved my grandmother into the mosh pit at Ozzfest. It was brutal!

The sun was beginning to sink a little low but I assured the group that we should have enough daylight to finish the run. We still had one more major gorge to contend with before we were in the clear. The first drop in this gorge is caused by a MAJOR constriction where the entire river narrows to potentially thinner than a boat width and goes down a 20-foot drop into a massive hydraulic. I'm sure that this drop is probably runnable but I have never felt the desire to fire it up because just downstream, after a short and boily pool, the river narrows again and goes off a 15 foot falls into another major boil. The gorge then continues into a severe log strainer that could spell major problems for a swimmer. The group decided to walk to whole shooting match and then get down to set safety and video for me on the bottom falls. I did a boof at the top right in the approach and landed on a rock that kicked me left. A flip could have been disastrous but I saved myself with my lightning fast reflexes like an animal that has very fast reflexes. I stayed left down the flume that carried me over the 15 footer and softly through the boil for yet another SCHWEEEEEET run to finish the day.

The Middle Oswegatchie continues for another mile of easier water before Fish Creek dumps in on the right. It is about a half-mile walk upstream along the creek to get to the road. In the hours since we had last seen him, Bob had changed from

a conservative kayaker to a beer-swilling madman. While we were carrying our boats up Fish Creek, he hid in the woods and shouted profanity at us, pretending to be an irate landowner. Thinking that the landowner might get the police involved, several of us took off quickly through the woods trying to get to the cars as quickly as possible. If the Dukes of Hazard have taught me anything, it is that when you're in trouble with the law, it's best to get in your car and run! However, it wasn't long until Bob emerged from his hiding place with a smug grin on his face knowing that he'd fooled us. Yeah, that was real funny. Sure, have a good laugh at our expense! He's a real jokester, that Bob. Well, I quickly wiped that smile from that jokester's mug when I stabbed him in the face with a soldering iron! Get the best of the Dogg will ya!

It had been a spectacular day on a perfect river. We had descended many big drops through beautiful scenery with a group of good friends. It was now getting dark and everyone still wanted to get to Moose Fest. Unfortunately, the Middle Branch is about a two-hour drive from the Moose. Bob mashed his foot to the pedal, using every bit of power that his hemi-Dodge Ram had to give, trying to make it back for the festival. I feared for my life, so I reminded him of that wonderfully educational and insightful video known as “The Decapitation of Larry Leadfoot.” Still smarting from the sodering iron blow I had delivered earlier, Bob sent a mean glance my way and we continued on at our break-neck pace.

The next morning, we awoke to about an inch of fresh hero powder (snow in layman's terms) on the ground and very cold temperatures. Bob and Jeff decided it was too cold for them but John and I made a quick, high water run of the Bottom Moose. In order to complete the weekend in spectacular fashion, we decided to head over to Lyons Falls and I fired it up at the highest level I'd ever attempted it. But that is another story. 

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River Voices

Riding James Clinton's Flood

by Jason Robertson

An American Legend

“Here was built a dam the summer of 1779 by the Soldiers under Gen. Clinton to enable them to join the forces of Gen. Sullivan at Tioga.”

—Historic marker on the Susquehanna at Cooperstown on Lake Ostego.

Night was falling in Syracuse and we were just finishing our Christmas dinner, which had started hours at noon.

I was deep in winter sloth, and my thoughts were far away from the river and deep into the question of whether I had room in my belly for just one more homemade pierogi. As I started to reach across the table with my fork, Mike, my father-in-law's girlfriend's father, showed me a book.

“My daughter tells me you canoe?”

I put the fork back down, and picked up my glass of Gewurtzraminer instead, “Yes, I do a lot of canoeing; but I do a lot more kayaking and have also worked as a raft guide. Basically I work on whitewater river recreation and stewardship.”

Mike gave me an odd look, clearly the only word that sank in was “whitewater,” but he was determined to have a conversation and tell a story. Mike pushed my plate away, set the book in front of me and tapped the cover with his pointer finger, “I bet you've never heard this story; it's about the Revolution, a dam, and a fleet of canoes.”

I struggled to come fully alert. This was a challenge after eating so much over such a long day of feasting. I was recently married and new to the family. In fact, this was only the third time I'd ever met Mike and many of the other family members. My in-laws are recent arrivals to America and my

wife is a third generation combination of Polish and Irish ancestry; thus far everyone I'd ever met in Syracuse was of Polish descent. Acceptable conversations were limited to beer, wine, food, sports, Iraq, and the weather. Mike was not related by blood to my wife, but he shared the same Polish roots with my father-in-law. This was the first interesting conversation of the weekend, and the first pause in the family's feeding frenzy.

My wife turned from her own conversation and said, “Jason's family fought in the Revolution,” before getting up to clear her plate and go in the next room with her grandmother.

“That was in the Carolinas. My ancestors fought in the Battle of Kings Mountain; they hiked to and from the battlefield so there weren't any canoes involved. I'll tell my story some other time. What's your tale?”

There was a pause; Mike liked building drama.

“You know this part of New York played an important part in the Revolution?”

Patience, I thought, patience—he'll get to the point.

“The area was just starting to get settled as the war started. There were only 300 residents in the area known as Cherry Valley by the start of the Revolution. It was surveyed and settled in the 1760's but after two decades, the Indians had decided they didn't like having the white men there, so they attacked the settlement in November 1776 and slaughtered a sixth of them. A couple years later, the Indians attacked again and drove the last of the settlers back East. Of course the Indians wouldn't have attacked on their own; they were actually sponsored and armed by the British.”

I poured myself some more wine; this was going to be a long story.

“Washington and the Continental

Congress weren't going to stand for this, so Washington sent Sullivan out with Clinton on a punitive expedition in '79. General James Clinton was the Governor's brother. He was sent to meet Sullivan with 1800 men to quell the Iroquois threat,” Mike paused and looked up towards the light over the table, “some say he only had 1500 men, but I believe he had 1800.”

“Sullivan would head up the Susquehanna River from the Chesapeake Bay and Clinton would go up the Mohawk from Schenectady to Canajoharie, crossing to Otsego Lake and down the Susquehanna to meet Sullivan at Tioga. Of course there was no road at that time from the Mohawk to Otsego, so Clinton's men had to build one and portage their boats and baggage. Once they were on the lake, the troops could paddle across and camp on the far shore at what is now known as Cooperstown.”

I was lost. I work on rivers, but I only had the faintest idea that the Susquehanna in Maryland went up through Pennsylvania to New York. I had certainly never given it any thought as an “invasion route”, partially because I'd never considered going so far upstream, and partially because I know that there are so many dams on the river.

“Clinton arrived on Otsego Lake with as many as 220 bateaux, which were basically large flat-bottomed canoes, and reported to Washington on May 28, 1779 that he was prepared for the offensive. However, Clinton had a problem, the Susquehanna, which flows from the lake, was too shallow for his boats, he had no horse, and the area was still a wilderness with no roads. What do you think he did?”

I was still feeling overcome by food, wine, and warmth, so it took me a second to realize that Mike was addressing the question to me. However, my wife's uncle Jimmy saved me when he pulled up a chair and quipped, “He built a dam.”

Mike responded, “That's right; he built a dam. You see, with the river so low, Clinton knew he needed more water. He

dammed the lake, which is pretty narrow at the mouth, and celebrated the 4th of July with gunfire and rum,” to which Mike lifted a glass with a knowing wink and took a drink, “and he raised the water about three feet, lined his boats up, and at 6 PM on August 8th tore out the dam so his fleet could sail on the flood waters into Indian country.”

“Wait.” I was trying to picture this, “You’re saying Clinton and his men rode this flood at night?”

“No, they actually waited until the following morning and at first light started floating out three men to a bateaux.”

I was still feeling skeptical, “Three men per boat in 220 boats? That only adds up to 660 men. Where were the others?”

“They ran through the night and came on the Indian villages just as the boats arrived. But that’s a different story from the one I’m telling you.” Mike inhaled.

“Clinton’s men rode the flood 30 miles, dodging drowned trees and strainers, which they called ‘flood wood’. Can you imagine what it was like? Who knows if it was orderly or chaotic. Some of the boats must’ve been snagged, others must’ve tipped. History doesn’t tell us about the individual mis-adventures. But we know Clinton rode the flood.” Mike took a breath and draft from his rum and coke.

“The floodwaters traveled over 100 miles. Indians up and down the Susquehanna were astonished; first they were alarmed by the lowering of the river and the poor fishing harvest over the middle of the summer, and later they were frightened by the flood and the sudden appearance of the white man’s fleet on the crest of the bubble. In fact, according to a report in the *Gazetteer of New York*, many Indians thought the Great Spirit had deserted them, and gone to aid the white man. Regardless, the Indians fled to the British fort at Niagara, and Clinton destroyed three Indian villages belonging to the Tuscarora as well as the Iroquois and Tory settlement at Newtown, while Sullivan destroyed villages belonging to the Seneca and Cayuga.”

Mike sighed, “Of course this was war, and no war is ever won so easily, even by the abandonment of the Great Spirit. By October, after Sullivan and Clinton had returned East, the Indians brought their own retribution back to the settlers and the slaughter continued for many more years even after the British left.” Mike looked introspective, yet Uncle Jimmy looked strangely expectant.

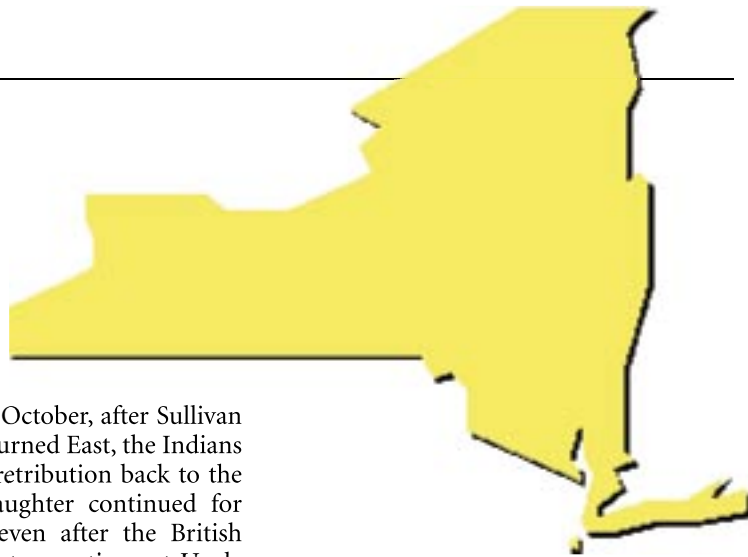
Jimmy clearly couldn’t wait any longer to be part of the conversation, “You know what ‘Otsego’ means? It’s Indian for meeting place. When you get home, go to the library and check out James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, especially *The Deerslayer*; he was from this area and wrote about Clinton’s dam.”

In the pause that followed, Mike’s daughter came in and took him out to say goodbye to a relative, Jimmy refilled his Rum and Coke, and before I knew it the evening was over, and I never did get to see the title of Mike’s navy blue book.

However, I did just as Jimmy suggested, and went to my bookshelf where I pulled my copy of the *The Deerslayer* and read Cooper’s description with fresh eyes: “[Beyond] the fringe of bushes immediately on the shore of the lake . . . [was] a narrow stream, of sufficient depth of limpid water, with a strong current, and a canopy of leaves, upheld by arches composed of the limbs of hoary trees. Bushes lined the shores, as usual, but they left sufficient space between them to admit the passage of any thing that did not exceed twenty feet in width, and to allow of a perspective ahead of eight or ten times that distance.”


I also went to the library and found that Cooper had written a description of Clinton’s exploit in the introduction to *THE PIONEERS: Or, The Sources of the Susquehanna*, which was the story of Natty Bumppo.

Then I found a book *Down the Susquehanna to the Chesapeake* by Jack Brubaker and learned that around 1870 the residents of



Cooperstown blew up the last of Clinton’s dam works in a 4th of July celebration. Later, in 1905, another dam was built several hundred feet downstream of the outlet. First the dam was used to secure drinking water for the town, and now it is used regulate the flow of the Susquehanna to flush Cooperstown’s treated sewage. Despite the presence of the treatment facility the water is relatively clean.

Finally, I learned that canoe recreation occurs on the river and that there is a large Memorial Day race at the General Clinton Canoe Regatta (<http://www.canoeregatta.org/>), titled in memory of Clinton’s expedition, in which competitors race 70 miles on the largely flatwater river from Cooperstown to Bainbridge.

Mike was right; I’d never heard his story, but it was a good one and I feel richer for the sharing of it. I think I’ll make an effort to visit this summer, canoe the river, enjoy the scenery and see if I can catch a shad firsthand. 

This part of the Susquehanna is about as wide as a living room and it meanders like the course of a parcheesi game. Trees broken by spring floods had toppled into or across the river. We hacked our way through or lifted our craft over.

– Ralph Gray on canoeing the first miles of the Susquehanna, *National Geographic Magazine*, July 1950.

Book Review

Hell or High Water

by Alden Bird

Henry James advised a writer to be “one on whom nothing is lost.” Peter Heller, author of the new book about Tibet’s Tsangpo River, is such a person. An Outside Magazine writer assigned to write a book, Heller joined the 2002 second descent on shore, quietly studying the explorers and paddling gods until they became human, all-too-human at the hands of his understated pencil. His new book about the trip, *Hell or High Water* (Rodale, 2004), does not soar as high as the previous two books about the Tsangpo, but nor does it fall as low.

Wick Walker’s 2000 book about the first Tsangpo trip, *Courting the Diamond Sow*, was meant to be extracted, enjoyed at leisure. Reading the book was like listening to a professor: some were mesmerized by the ancient voice, yet others were put off by the mismanagement and the weekend pace. Todd Balf’s 2000 book, *The Last River*, was all beginnings and endings, with no middle. The introduction and final chapters of the book were countless, and shouted like anthems through the empty inner pages. The whole book made grand incantations and sweeping flourishes in hyped-up, outdoor magazine writing. It was too much spice on too little meat.

Where both books were shaggy, *Hell or High Water* is cropped, revealing the beautiful shape of its head. As Peter Heller shades in each passing day with etchings here and there, all of the team – Steve Fisher, Dustin Knapp, the Kerns, Dustin Lindgren, and all the others – come off as memorable – thought provoking, actually – despite the brief, understated writing. Heller is a master sketch artist – light, hinting, deceptively intricate. He always plucks the perfect, tangy quote, and lets it reverberate like a Fender in a beer hall. Consider a typical Heller sketch:

“Willie was never in a hurry. He was deliberate, respectful, serious, and competent. He had a generous laugh and a smoldering humor that broke out in dry asides . . . I pointed to a Liquid Lifestyles

poster of a kayak midway down monstrous 80-foot falls and asked if the paddler was Willie. ‘That’s Johnnie, dang him,’ he said. ‘My stunt double. I’ll be using him a lot on the Tsangpo.’”

This is the kind of writing you can take home and introduce to your mother. There is no drinking involved. There is none of Todd Balf’s middle age shoresman fascination (might even try running those rapids later, and end up on the news) type of thing. Heller avoids the temptation to hype up the trip the same way Dustin Knapp avoids a giant hole: gracefully, and with just enough to get the job done.

There is one inexcusable fault: *Hell or High Water* has no pictures. Anyone who dropped his jaw at David Allardice’s trip photos in the recent Paddler Magazine knows that a picture of the Tsangpo is worth a thousand anythings. I understand there might have been contractual battles. But Charlie Munsey is the best photographer, in my opinion, of our time – and he was there with a camera! Not a single picture, Mr. Heller?

The kayaking scenes in *Hell or High Water* are right out of a Ken Burns movie – informative, but dull. When you acknowledge (as Heller obviously does) that you cannot even see the kayakers from the trail and must interview them to hear what happened, you cannot expect to hold us close to the flame. Peter Heller spends his whole trip dry and safe. Consequently, so do we.

The real drama is not on the river, but on shore in a curious cancer that spreads through the second half of the book: the feud between Peter Heller and the trip leader, “barroom badass” kayaker Scott Lindgren. Lindgren dominates the trip like a lead sled dog, barking at his teammates (most memorably Steve Fisher for running an insane rapid) over every spilled milk. Most of Lindgren’s lambasting is done face to face with Peter Heller, whom he openly resents. At one point Lindgren pulls him aside:

“You come in here, bro, at the last fucking minute. These guys don’t even own a car. They have nothing, dude. They’re broke most of the time. Mikey can’t even afford a drysuit. And you’re gonna get fucking rich. You should fucking think about that.”

But later, in the middle of the gorge, Lindgren forgives the writer, briefly, memorably:

“Then he grabbed me and hugged me. ‘I don’t resent you. I want your hip to be okay. I want you to make it. No hard feelings, okay? Okay?’”

Lindgren is a rough guy who is yet gripped by what Heller hints are the strange and wondrous ideals of an explorer. Heller tells us that Lindgren became fascinated by the Tsangpo after he stole a book about it from the public library. *Hell or High Water* is a very human book (though there are no women in the story). From time to time



the anger flares up like the rank smell of too many men living in close quarters, yet always the cool breeze of forgiveness blows through these white pages. In one of the best passages, Heller sympathizes with a young squirt boater (Willie Kern) whose father has just died. Heller writes:

“I could imagine young Willie down there, sitting his kayak as if it were a beloved horse, attached to the river bottom and enthralled with the patterns of light and water, letting them wash his grief and cool his anger.”

At the end, one of the kayakers, “. . . didn’t want it to end. He said he wanted to cross the bridge and keep going. Just keep going into more canyon, forever.” Just as these fellows leave Tibet with thankfully different feelings than the McEwans and Walkers before them, so too does *Hell or High Water* pass out of our memories more quickly, more peacefully than the previous books, with the assurance of more adventures to come, and many more dawns, as they say, that have not broken. **AWW**



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From the Editor

The Last Word

by Ambrose Tuscano

Working Together: A Path to River Stewardship

One of the great appeals of whitewater paddlesports is the sense of self-reliance and individuality that comes with the ability to safely navigate a stretch of river. For many paddlers, achieving competent river running skills has given them the confidence to excel in other areas of their lives. After all, what problems at work, in our social lives, or in other sports seem daunting compared to the difficulty and occasional danger of paddling a whitewater river?

When I was 13, I began to understand the appeal of whitewater kayaking. For the longest time, I had lived in fear of moving water—especially being upside down in a moving kayak. So when I began to make use of a whitewater roll, I suddenly realized that I could do what I had previously considered unthinkable: navigate whitewater calmly and with relative precision. After that, other problems and duties in life didn't necessarily seem easier, but I began facing them with greater confidence. If I could paddle whitewater, I could do anything.


The problem with so many self-reliant individuals sharing a common interest, is that it's hard to get them to work together. With the exception of strict paddleboat rafters, the concept of teamwork is largely missing from the whitewater experience of most enthusiasts. While it can be difficult for paddlers to invest in the notion of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, American Whitewater embodies that concept. Many of the difficulties facing paddlers today (see our Top 10 River Issues for 2005 in this issue) are beyond the scope of individual river vigilantes. But with the technical guidance and leverage of a national organization, paddlers are winning victories all across the country. While American Whitewater has been, by all accounts, an incredibly successful organization, gaining favorable outcomes for paddlers in virtually every conflict, re-licensing effort and land acquisition it has ever undertaken, the organization is poised to enter an even more productive

and successful era. The River Stewardship model that AW is embracing will allow its busy staff members to take on even more projects by empowering volunteer members to help in all aspects of river conservation, access, safety and education.

By the age of 15, I was a full-fledged class IV paddler. I knew how to roll, steer my boat, read water, help in minor rescues and make important decisions on the river. However, like many teens, my sense of responsibility was very limited. I didn't think about the source of the water in the rivers I paddled any more than I thought about the source of the gas in the shuttle vehicles: it wasn't my problem. By the time I was nearing the end of high school, I had learned about American Whitewater, and was beginning to realize that their actions and objectives were very much in my self-interest as a paddler. Not coincidentally, by this time I had developed an appreciation for the cost of filling up my battered blue pickup for paddling road trips: if I wanted something, I realized, it was going to come at a cost. Longtime AW Journal editor, Bob Gedekoh, humored my interest in writing and editing and allowed me to lend a hand with the Journal. The experience made me understand that even though I wasn't going out to protect rivers single-handedly, my efforts were contributing to the cause.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to building an even more impressive and powerful whitewater advocacy organization is the persistent individualism of paddlers. It's not that whitewater boaters lack the will or interest to keep rivers clean, safe and flowing, but rather, many paddlers prefer individual decision-making and action to teamwork. The time has come for whitewater enthusiasts to make a clear distinction between the individuality that their sport fosters and the collective effort that is required to protect and enhance the resources that make the sport possible. American Whitewater is the only organization that represents the interests of paddlers across the United States. With such a vast area to oversee and so many

thousands of river miles to protect, AW will need your help. That may mean doing more than crying foul when you see your local river threatened. Next time you call AW to report a river issue, don't be surprised if you're asked to be part of the effort. With the expert guidance of the River Stewardship Team, you can become the most effective resource that the organization has at its disposal: a grassroots, motivated expert, devoted to protecting or improving whitewater recreation opportunities regionally. The paddling community is too small to protect the nation's rivers adequately without the help of every member.

Many years later, I find myself editing the AW Journal. I like to think that my team-oriented efforts in coordinating and producing this publication balance out my self-satisfying interest in whitewater kayaking. Seemingly, the Journal has served a similar function for hundreds of AW members over the years. The members who contribute material to this magazine get the satisfaction of seeing their work in print, while helping provide other AW members with an entertaining and informative publication to enjoy—a great example of the River Stewardship model in action. Likewise, when you become an active AW volunteer, you can get the satisfaction of mitigating river issues in your backyard, while, at the same time, giving paddlers across the country an improved recreational resource to enjoy. So, look around and see where you can lend a hand. You can start by becoming a member of American Whitewater and maintaining that membership for at least as long as you are a part of the paddling community. Remember, membership costs less than a new piece of polypropylene (besides, a few days on the river and it smells just like the old stuff), and it allows AW to preserve and enhance recreational opportunities for generations of paddlers to come. 

Stewardship

Donor Profile

by Drew Refshauge


My name is Drew Refshauge. Let me say right off the bat that kayaking is amazing and I can't imagine life without it! I live in Spartanburg, SC and work with Little River Roasting Company. This is a family owned and operated business in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. We import coffee beans directly from small farms all over the world. We are producing world-class coffee right here in the southeast (fortunately for me, world-class whitewater is not far away either!).

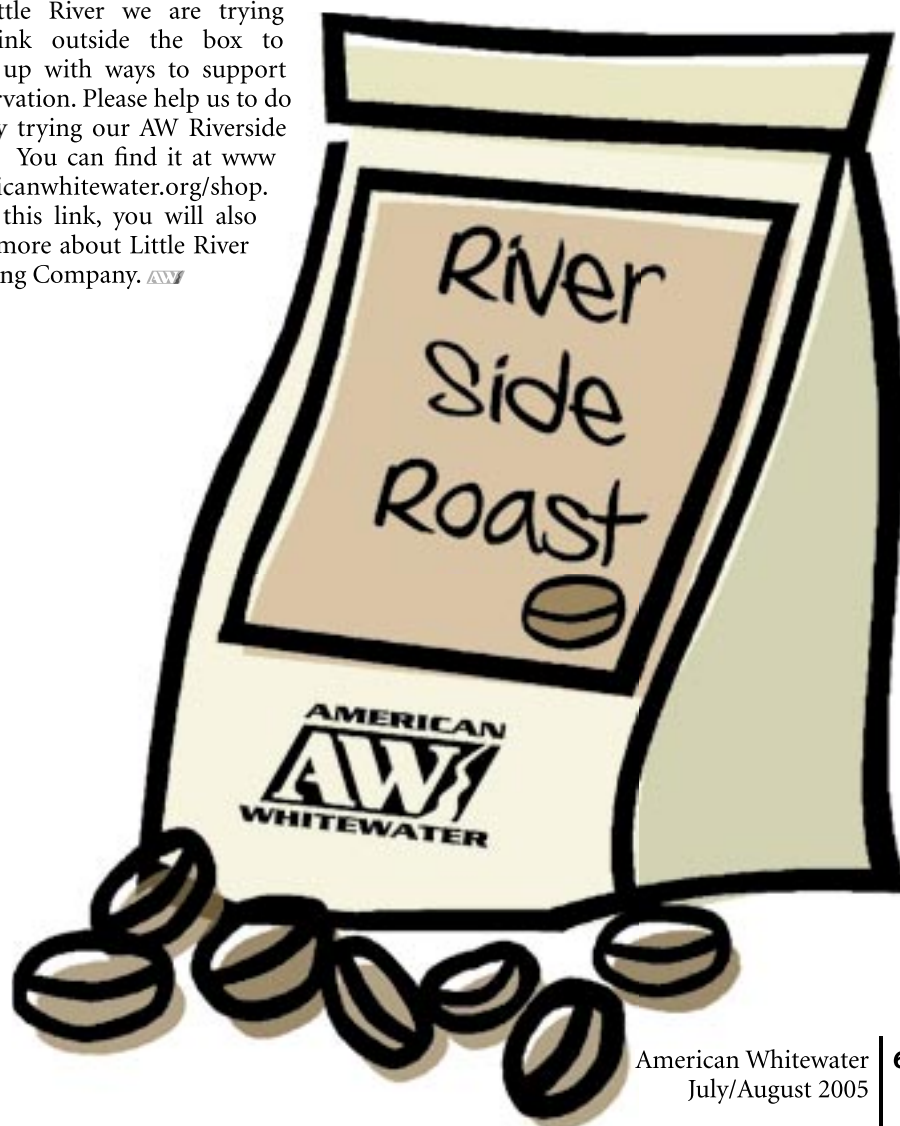
This has turned out to be an ideal situation for me to introduce my company to my passion for whitewater, and to American Whitewater.

I started kayaking with the Clemson Whitewater Club while in college. After graduation, I started kayaking so often that it became hard to find time to paddle over 200 days in a year and still work. I had heard about American Whitewater early on, but didn't really "see" their work until I paddled the Tallulah Gorge in north Georgia. AW's success on the Tallulah is why I joined the organization a few years back. They have gone above and beyond to allow for releases on this exceptional river and many hundreds of miles of whitewater on other rivers across the country.

After joining AW, I became more aware of the extent of their work. Their environmental conservation and river restoration efforts are most important to me. These projects include dam removals, clean water acts, protection of forests, putting water back into dewatered rivers, and scheduled river releases that benefit the recreational user and the needs of what is most often a rural economic development plan. It is important for an organization to be able to identify problems and unite a variety of interested parties to solve them; the AW River Stewardship Team does just that.

Eventually, I of course had to find time to work. I recently started helping Little River Roasting with on-line coffee sales. A core value of our business is to emphasize our organic and fair trade coffees. By supporting these coffees, we are promoting sustainable agriculture. I recognized that there could be opportunities for our company's philosophy to have a local impact. I came up with the idea to promote a special coffee blend that would bring together the sustainability practices of my company, and the stewardship values of American Whitewater. Little River donates \$1 to American Whitewater for every pound of "AW's Riverside Roast" that we sell. If you are a retailer, it would be great to speak with you about how you can become involved. This is turning out to be another great way for Little River Roasting to give back to the environment.

At Little River we are trying to think outside the box to come up with ways to support conservation. Please help us to do this by trying our AW Riverside Roast. You can find it at www.americanwhitewater.org/shop. From this link, you will also learn more about Little River Roasting Company. 

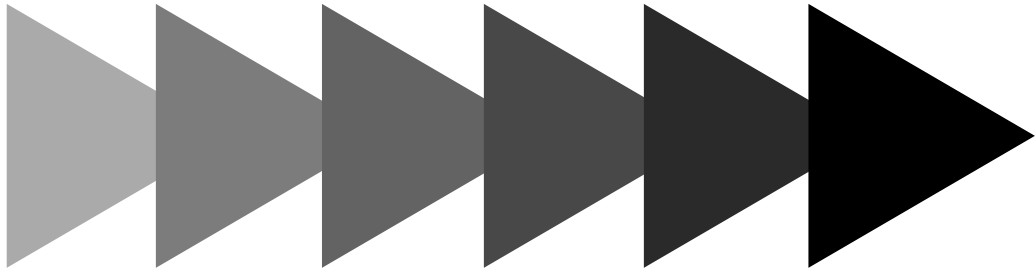


Join



AMERICAN WHITEWATER Today!

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



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

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

you, as an AW member, value that work.

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

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

Membership
P.O. Box 1540
Cullowhee, NC 28723



204 B Philadelphia Ave. Takoma Park, MD 20912-4213 • 866-BOAT-4AW

Membership Application

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

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Club Affiliation _____

Individual Membership Levels

- _____ \$25.00 Junior/Senior (under the age of 18 and over the age of 65)
- _____ \$25.00 Individual for Affiliate Club Members (SAVE \$10 if you are also a member of an AW Affiliante Club)
- _____ \$35.00 Individual One Year
- _____ \$45.00 Family (immediate family members excluding children over the age of 18)
- _____ \$65.00 (2) Year Membershiop
- _____ \$100.00 Ender Club* (Received AW's annual Ender Club T-shirt FREE)
- _____ \$150.00 (5) Year MEMbership
- _____ \$250.00 Platinum Paddler* (Received AW's exclusive Patagonia Platinum Paddler Polo Shirt FREE)
- _____ \$750.00 Lifetime Membership (Received AW's Lifetime Membership Stained Glass FREE)
- _____ \$1,000.00 Legacy Membershiop (Receive AW's exclusive Paddling Wet/Dry Gear Bag FREE)

*A portion of your contribution may be tax deductible. If you would like information about the tax deductibility of your contribution please speak with an AW Staff Member

Organizationl Membership Types

- _____ \$75.00 Affiliate Club (Join our growing network of paddling organziations across North American)

Additional Donation

- _____ \$5.00 _____ \$10.00 _____ \$25.00 \$_____ Other
- _____ \$24.99 Kayak Session Subscription (Add Kayak Sesssion to your membership at a 40% discount)

Amount

Membership subtotal \$ _____ Do NOT mail me the AW Journal I will read it on-line.

Donation subtotal \$ _____ Do NOT share my name with like-minded groups

Total \$ _____

Indicate Ender Club or Platinum Paddler shirt size (S M L XL XXL)

Transaction Type

_____ Cash _____ Charge _____ Check# (payable to American Whitewater)

Card Type: MC Visa Discover AMEX

Card Number _____ Exp. Date ____/____/____

Name as it appears on card _____

Signature _____ Date ____/____/____

Affiliate Clubs

AW's Original Purpose

by Carla Miner

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

For 2005, AW is excited to announce several programs for AW Affiliate Clubs.

2nd River Stewardship Institute: A week-long conservation and access training program designed to prepare river activists with the tools necessary to successfully save their rivers.

2nd Flowing Rivers Grant Program, sponsored by Clif Bar

BRAND NEW Affiliate Club section of the AW Journal dedicated to promoting your club and its events with the whitewater community at large. If your Affiliate Club would like to be one of the first to begin listing your club's major events in the Journal, please email ben@amwhitewater.org for more details.

The AW Journal Club Affiliates by State:

Alaska

Fairbanks Paddlers, Fairbanks

Alabama

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

Arkansas

Arkansas Canoe Club, Little Rock

Arizona

Grand Canyon Private Boaters Assoc, Flagstaff

California

Chico Paddleheads, Chico
Durham Troop 16, Durham
Gold Country Paddlers, Lotus
River Skills Center, Mt. Shasta
River Touring Section, Angeles Chapter
Sierra Club, Los Angeles
Sequoia Paddling Club, Windsor
Shasta Paddlers, Redding

Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter, San Jose
Sierra Club Angeles Chapter, Granada Hills

Colorado

Avid4Adventure Inc., Boulder
Colorado White Water Association, Englewood
FiBark Boat Races, Englewood
Gunnison Valley Paddle Club, Almont
Pikes Peak Whitewater Club, Colorado Springs
Pueblo Paddlers, Pueblo West
Rocky Mountain Canoe Club, Englewood
University of Colorado Kayak Club, Boulder
WATER, Grand Junction

Florida

Project Challenge Inc., Miami

Georgia

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

Idaho

Idaho Whitewater Association, Boise

Illinois

Chicago Whitewater Assoc., Evergreen Park

Indiana

Hoosier Canoe Club, Indianapolis
Ohio Valley Whitewater Club, Evansville

Iowa

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Des Moines

Kansas

Kansas Whitewater Association, Mission

Kentucky

Bluegrass Whitewater Association, Lexington
El Rio Loco Paddling Club, Barbourville
Viking Canoe Club, Louisville

Maine

AMC Maine Chapter, Hallowell

Maryland

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

Massachusetts

AMC Boston Chapter, Lunenburg

Minnesota

Boat Busters Anonymous, Stillwater

Missouri

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

Montana

Beartooth Paddlers Society, Billings

Nevada

Sierra Nevada Whitewater Club, Reno

New Hampshire

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

New Jersey

Hunterdon Canoe Club, Flemington
The Paddling Bares, Milltown

New Mexico

Adobe Whitewater Club, Albuquerque

New York

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

N. Carolina

Camp Carolina, Brevard
Carolina Canoe Club, Raleigh
Dixie Division of ACA, Tuxedo
Nantahala Racing Club, Gastonia
Triad River Runners, Winston Salem
Western Carolina Paddlers, Asheville

Ohio

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

Oregon

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

Pennsylvania

AMC Delaware Valley Chapter, Sugarloaf
Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown
Canoe Club of Greater Harrisburg, Mechanicsburg
Holtwood Hooligans, Lititz
KCCNY, Philadelphia
Lehigh Valley Canoe Club, Lehigh Valley
Three Rivers Paddling Club, Pittsburgh

S. Carolina

Foothills Paddling Club, Greenville
Palmetto Paddlers, Columbia

Tennessee

Appalachian Paddling Enthusiasts, Elizabethton
Chota Canoe Club, Knoxville
Eastman Hiking and Canoeing, Kingsport
E. Tennessee Whitewater Club, Oak Ridge
McCallie School Outdoor Program, Chattanooga
Memphis Whitewater, Memphis
Tennessee Scenic River Association, Nashville
Tennessee Valley Canoe Club, Chattanooga
University of Tennessee Knoxville, Knoxville

Texas

Bayou Whitewater Club, Houston

Utah

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

Vermont

Vermont Paddlers Club, Jericho

Virginia

Blue Ridge River Runners, Lynch Station
Blue Ridge Voyageurs, McLean
Canoe Cruisers Association, Arlington
Coastal Canoeists, Richmond
Float Fishermen of Virginia, Roanoke

Washington

The Mountaineers, Seattle
Paddle Trails Canoe Club, Seattle
University Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Kayak Club, Seattle
Washington Recreation River Runners, Renton
Whitman College Whitewater Club, Walla Walla

West Virginia

West VA Wildwater Assoc., S. Charleston

Wisconsin

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

Wyoming

Jackson Hole Kayak Club, Jackson Hole

Canada, British Columbia

Vancouver Kayak Club, Vancouver

Canada, Ontario

Madawaska Kanu Camp Inc., Ottawa

Discounted AW Memberships for Affiliate Club Members

by Carla Miner
Membership Coordinator

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

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

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

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

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

Join American Whitewater as a Club Affiliate!

"10" Reasons to Join AW as an Affiliate Club

1. Receive the *American Whitewater Journal*, the oldest continually published whitewater magazine.
2. Join the list of Affiliate Clubs noted in each bi-monthly *AW Journal*.
3. List club events in the *AW Journal*.
4. Your Club's members can become AW members for \$25. A \$10 savings!
5. Have technical expertise for your Club conservation and access committees 'on tap.'
6. Have access to technical and onsite assistance for your Club's event planning.
7. Enjoy VIP benefits for "Joint Members" at AW events.
8. Participate in exclusive AW Affiliate Club promotions.
9. Post Club information on the AW Website to help paddlers find you.
10. Eligible to apply for a spot in the AW 2005 River Stewardship Institute.

For more information,
contact Carla Miner at
membership@amwhitewater.org
or sign-up on-line at:
www.americanwhitewater.org/membership

Guidelines for Contributors



Please read this carefully before sending us your articles and photos! This is a volunteer publication, please cooperate and help us out. Do not send us your material without a release – signed by all authors and photographers (attached).

If possible, articles should be submitted on a 3-1/2-inch computer disk. (Microsoft Word if possible – others accepted.) Please do not alter the margins or spacing parameters; use the standard default settings. Send a printed copy of the article as well.

Those without access to a word processor may submit their articles typed. Please double space.

Photos may be submitted as slides, black or white prints, or color prints or electronic, digital photos, 300 dpi tiffs, Photoshop or high res jpegs minimum 3”x5.” Keep your originals and send us duplicates if possible; we cannot guarantee the safe return of your pictures. If you want us to return your pictures, include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your submission. The better the photos the better the reproduction. American Whitewater feature articles should

relate to some aspect of whitewater boating. Please do not submit articles pertaining to sea kayaking or flat water.

If you are writing about a commonly paddled river, your story should be told from a unique perspective. Articles about difficult, infrequently paddled, or exotic rivers are given special consideration. But we are also interested in well written, unusual articles pertaining to Class II, III & IV rivers as well. Feature stories do not have to be about a specific river. Articles about paddling techniques, the river environment and river personalities are also accepted. Pieces that incorporate humor are especially welcome. Open boating and rafting stories are welcome.

Profanity should be used only when it is absolutely necessary to effectively tell a story; it is not our intent to offend our more sensitive members and readers.

Please check all facts carefully, particularly those regarding individuals, government agencies, and corporations involved in river access and environmental matters. You are legally responsible for the accuracy of such material. Make sure names

are spelled correctly and river gradients and distances are correctly calculated.

Articles will be edited at the discretion of the editors to fit our format, length, and style. Expect to see changes in your article. If you don't want us to edit your article, please don't send it in! Because of our deadlines you will not be able to review the editorial changes made prior to publication.

American Whitewater is a nonprofit; the editors and contributors to American Whitewater are not reimbursed. On rare occasions, by pre-arrangement, professional writers receive a small honorarium when they submit stories at our request. Generally, our contributors do not expect payment, since most are members of AW, which is a volunteer conservation and safety organization.

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

American Whitewater River Festivals

DEERFIELD RIVER FESTIVAL

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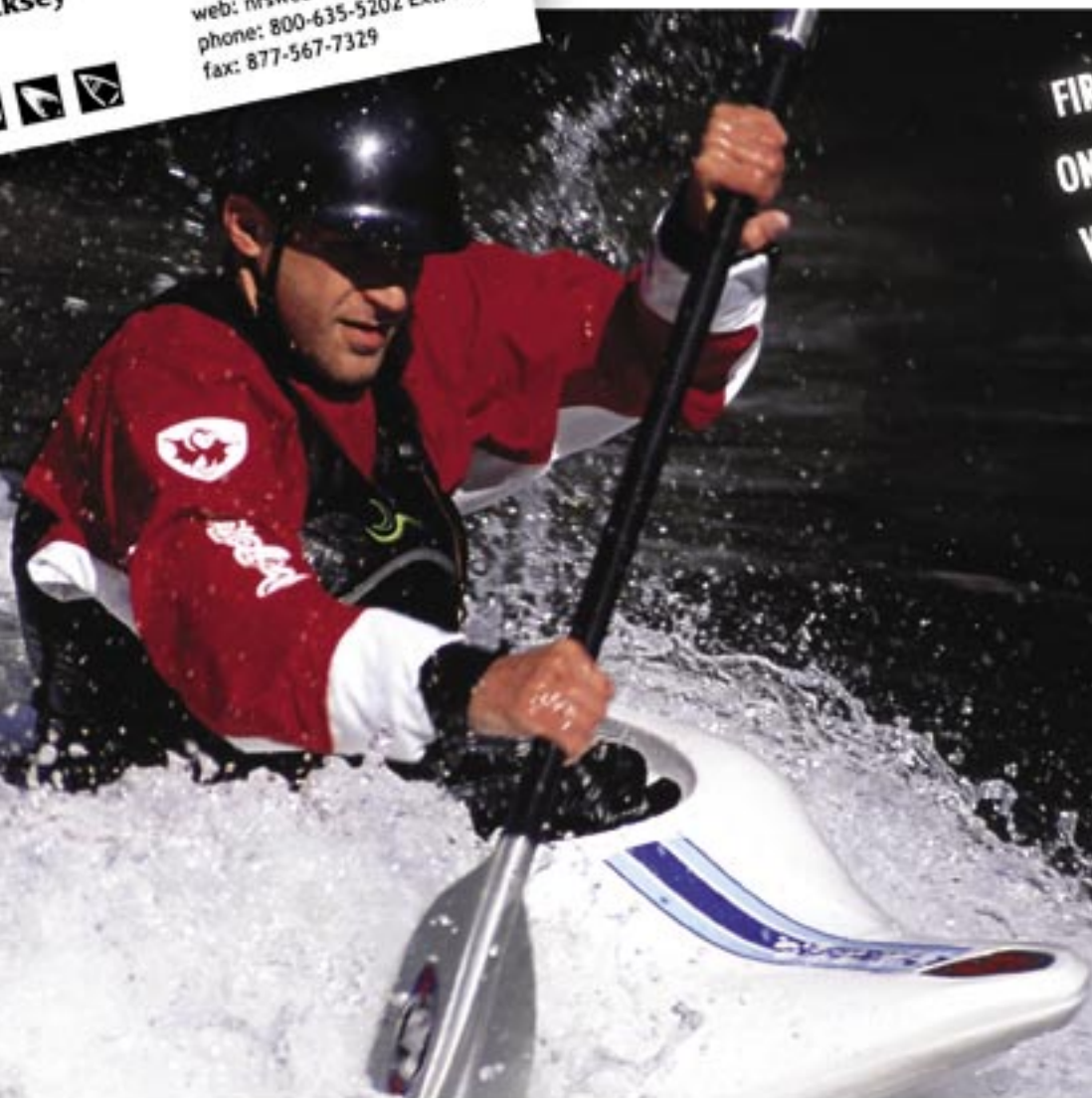
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