

Pikes Peak River Runners

Meltdown on the Middle Fork of the Salmon June 2000



By Christina King

Photo Credits: Christina King

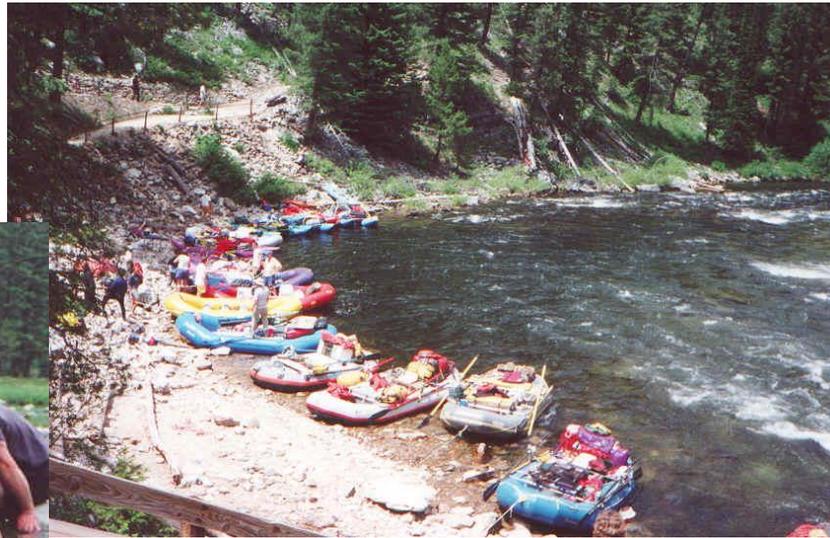
Our trip really began last February 2000 when we found out we got a June 19, 2000 Middle Fork of the Salmon River permit. We gathered rafting friends and organized this trip with the promise of reasonable water levels. What we did not anticipate is a low water year. Fortunately, we had adequate flow to run the river. After driving from Woodland Park, Colorado via Green River, Utah to Stanley, Idaho, we picked up Chris and Dana our New Hampshire friends (formerly from Colorado). They had flown to Boise, jumped on a puddle jumper (or should I say Sawtooth Mountain hopper) and landed in Stanley. After checking in with BZ at River Rat Express (our vehicle shuttle company) we drove into the Boundary Creek (Middle Fork) put-in to begin our weeklong river journey down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. The rest of the Colorado contingent arrived during the afternoon and evening hours of Sunday. **Trip Participants: Pete & Christina King, Chris Canady, Dana Eriksen, Ralph Hoffman, Mel Lips, Rich Barrington, Brian Mullin, Jack and Wendy Schneider and the lone holdout from Nebraska (Brett Utech)** rounded our group out to 11 people. Pete and I were the trip organizers and could not wait to get on the river. During the night we had a rainstorm but by morning it was clear and warm again. This warm weather and quick melting of the snowpack has been unusual in our experiences and begins our *Meltdown on the Middle Fork* river trip.

Launch at Boundary Creek, Camped at Fire Island Monday, June 19, 2000 (Flow 3.47 feet)

Our morning started slowly, and we checked in to finalize our launching plans with the river ranger. The ramp at the ranger station is hard to believe unless you see it. Everyone rigs their boat on the top of the ramp and sends it down the steep ramp fully loaded, directly into the river. Quite a sight to see. The ranger gave us a pre-launch talk about river etiquette and regulations but first our group was treated to a talk by Vincent a Shoshone/Bannock Native American. Vincent explains and shows us how the Native Americans used paint for pictographs and why they respected the river, earth, animals, and plants. Vincent explains that the Native



Americans used the river corridor and side canyons as a travel corridor and communication network. Vincent is an excellent new addition to the ranger orientation program. We noticed he was building a teepee made of deer/elk hides in his camp.



We stopped at Trail Flat and Sheepeater hot springs after running Sulfur Slide, The Chutes, Ramshorn, Velvet Falls and Powerhouse rapids. Everyone had great runs in Velvet Falls. Velvet has a blind corner drop that needs to be carefully run or otherwise it can dump your raft into one huge scary hole. First time boaters can have a tough time running Velvet, but our rookies did great. Murphy's Hole is gone at



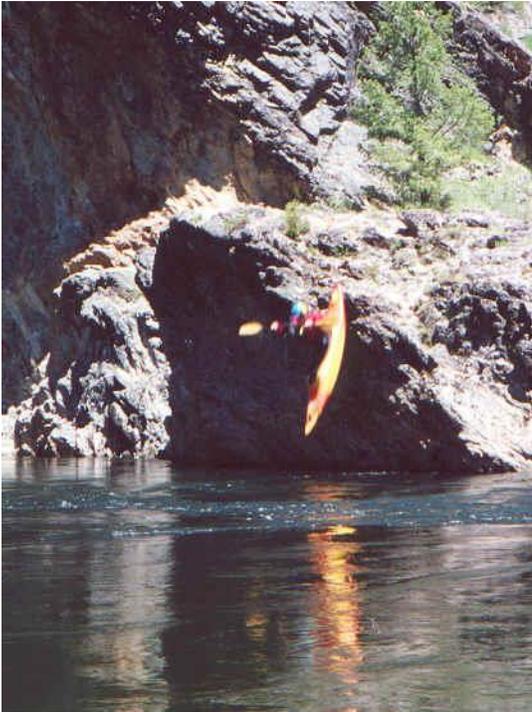
this water level but at high water it is difficult to avoid. Powerhouse rapid was a series of holes and maneuvering around rocks and bends in the river. The weather was unbelievably warm and sunny during the day. We camped at Fire Island and enjoyed the Mule deer that wandered around camp all afternoon and evening. No moose in camp like last year.

Chris found some elk bones and moss and made a ghostly-looking head perched above our firepan. After dinner we began the process of eating our daily ration of Peppermint Patty's. We bought a Sam's Club container of 240 mints. According to calculations, each of us must eat 6 mints per evening until the trip is over. Mmmm...The evening temperature dropped quickly.



Pistol Creek , Tuesday, June 20

We sleep late (turns out we do this every morning) and let the day warm up before launching. Some people went for a 2nd soak in Sheepeater hot springs. We did not leave camp until noon. Passed a group that had some trouble up near Velvet. They had ripped their boat floor and were working on repairing it when we talked to them.



We stopped at Dolly Lake (Dolly Lake is named for Dolly Varden trout that like to swim in this pooled up quiet section of river) for Brian to launch his kayak off the cliff to the river below. Jack and Brett jumped off the cliff. Artillery rapids has fun waves and requires a lot of rowing (as did the first day). We run Pistol Creek rapid and pull out in the beautiful campsite below. The chipmunks are incredibly bold and steal whatever food they can get their paws on. After dinner we were all sitting around camp and Mel noticed what looked like a bear coming from the bushes. All of us got up and started backing away, until someone said it is not a bear, it is just Chris coming back from the groover. Chris gave us a strange look and asked, "What's up"? We told him that he was lucky it was not bear hunting season and he had better leave that dark fleece jacket at home next time. We had a good laugh at spooking ourselves.

Upper Jackass, Wed, June 21 (Flow 3.18 feet)

We only have two rapids today, Marble Creek and Upper Jackass. I kind of got sucked back in Marble Creek but popped back out after a second. We stopped at one of our favorite hot springs called Sunflower.

The day is so warm that we cannot even get in the hot pools at Sunflower. We must soak in the wimpy medium-hot pools instead. While soaking and standing under the hot waterfall at Sunflower we noticed some people attempting to swim across the river without lifejackets. We were told that they were "professional river guides and knew what they were doing". Right...They did not make it and asked us to float down river and rescue one of their swimmers. We proposed that



the swimmer hike back up to us (*so we could soak in the hot springs*) and we would give them a ride across river. Turns out they were a bunch of young river guides from California on a private river trip who just did not know any better. The inflatable kayak (ducky) made its first appearance today and did fine. We are still working on those pesky mints, but consumption (*average 6/day*) has decreased dramatically.

Big Loon, Thursday, June 22

Our first stop of the day is at Cameron Creek pictographs. These Native American drawings are at the top of a bluff along a cliff and depict buffalo and elk. Most of the pictographs are in red ochre paint. Vincent showed us white and yellow paint colors, but we do not see any drawings using these colors. Maybe those colors do not last as long. We stopped for lunch and warm our feet in the tepid Whitey Cox hot springs. Brett and Brian try to scare Dana and I out of the hot springs by claiming that there are biting red bugs in the water. We ignore them as they run panicked down the trail to rinse off in the cold river. Brian impressed us by putting his camera in a bed of poison ivy. We were not bitten.



We pull into camp at Big Loon with one of the best hot springs on the river about 10 minutes up the trail along Big Loon Creek. We cross the private Simplot Ranch (*Potato King in Idaho*) and visit with the caretaker. (Old Mr. Simplot [*not the caretaker*] is in his 90's and still comes out hunting and fishing once a year). The caretaker gets flown out of the ranch twice a year. What a job in a beautiful setting! In the meantime, he irrigates the fields and takes care of the ranch, horses, mules, and hunting hounds.

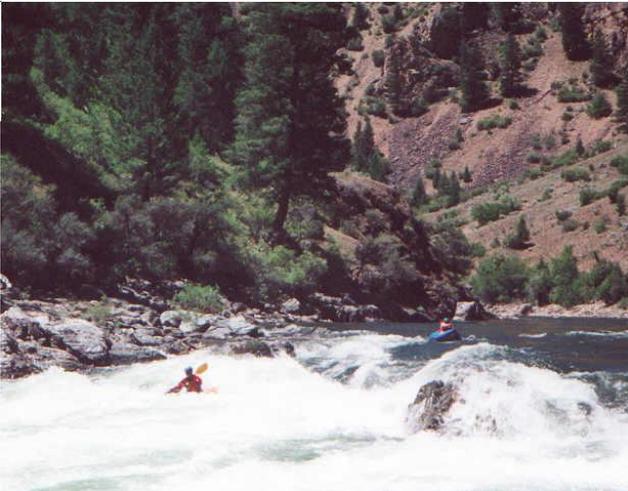
Driftwood, Friday, June 23 (Flow 3.08 feet)

The river is decreasing in flow daily. The Middle Fork is a river controlled by snowmelt only. No dams and reservoirs upstream. In fact, we run the entire river start to finish on our trip (99 miles). We have a big day planned (21 miles) today. Up to this point we have been slowly making our way down river with relatively short days. We continue this trend and do not make it out of camp before 11:30 am. I love vacation. We are lucky in that we are far enough north that it does not get dark until 10 PM. So, we can afford to enjoy late starts in the morning. Our last hot spring on the river is Hospital Bar.

We run Tappan Falls with a sweep boat right in front of us. Sweepboats are the biggest boats on the river (22 feet) and use sweep oars at the bow and stern. Interesting and historical. Sweepboats used to be made from wood and carried supplies to the homesteaders along the river corridor. We were impressed by Mel's ducky run of the deep hole at Tappan Falls. I saw half of his ducky out of the water!

Brett thought it looked like so much fun that he convinced Jack to help him carry the ducky back up and he ran it also.

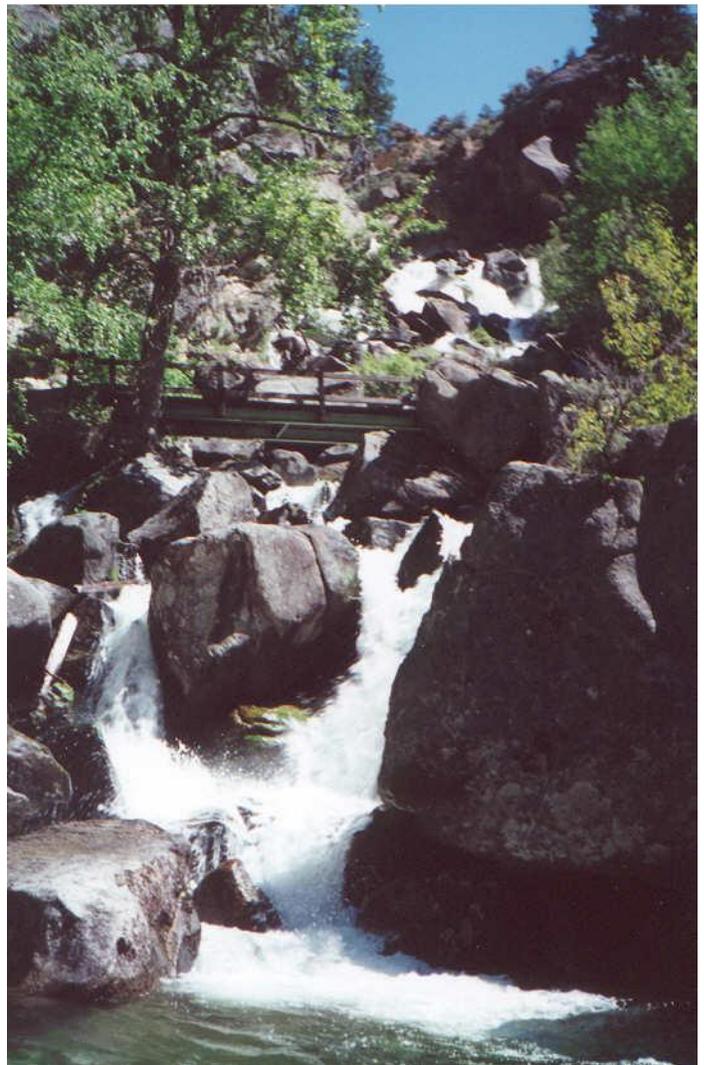
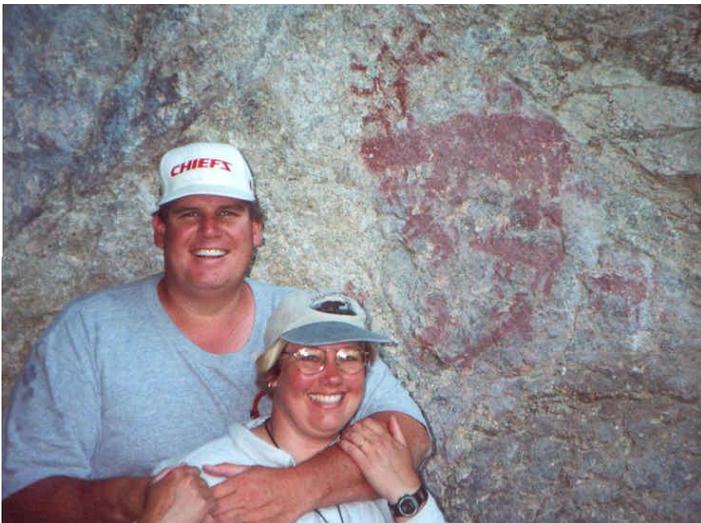
Brett made it through the Tappan Falls fine. Apparently, a group ahead of us had problems and surfed in the hole for quite a while. They lost a tarp, table, and other misc. items. *(More about the tarp later).*



We stopped at the Flying B dude ranch for beer, soda, and ice re-supplying. The unusually hot weather has everyone drinking a lot. The Flying B charges \$95/person per night for a room plus 3 meals. Not a bad deal. The only way in is by small plane or river. Haystack rapid is just downstream and it is where I had flipped last year (poor judgement). All I can think of is getting safely downstream of this rapid. Midway through the rapid I spot what looks like a blue tarp hung up on a large midstream boulder. I thought to myself "that tarp sure did get downriver quick". Afterwards Pete asked me if I saw the submerged and pinned raft with frame at the same spot. There could have been a bear dancing the hula on the shore and I would not have noticed. That is how focused on the run I was. Jack Creek rapids below Haystack were fun roller coaster waves for a long time. We pulled into Driftwood to camp for the night among huge ponderosa pines and sandy tent site.

Otter Bar, Saturday, June 24

Today is jam-packed with lots of stops and sights to see. Rattlesnake Cave, Veil Falls, Tombstone (Rainbow Rock above Papoose Creek) and Stoddard Creek provided four pictograph stops plus a waterfall.



Redside, Weber and Lower Cliffside rapids were straightforward and easy to run. As always, we hugged the left side at Cliffside. A commercial outfitter, Aggipah, said that the raft in Haystack was not there a week ago, so it is a recent accident. The submerged raft frame appeared broken and pointing upstream...hope it will not be a hazard at lower water levels. Aggipah thinks it will be a "scratchy" summer for their aluminum driftboat

Page 6 of 7

(dories) due to low water conditions so early in the season. We camped at Otter Bar and saw an otter making his evening patrol. Also saw bighorn sheep and grouse. Tonight, was hamburger night with Brian winning the "most eaten" award (3). Eleven of us ate 36 hamburgers. You do the math. I think Brian ate more than his official 3 burgers. The trip joke has been that we eat and sleep so much it is like being on a cruise. All we need to have is a midnight buffet and we are on the "King Cruise Lines" tour. Our camp has a wonderful sand beach, and we start up an NFL football game with the handy Nerf football. Receivers can make diving catches into the river because of the deep calm pool at the edge of our sandy beach. We have approximately 100 mints left. No one will eat anymore. Guess it is a peppermint patty mutiny. The mints will make an appearance on our next river trip.

Takeout at Cache Bar, Sunday, June 25 (Flow 2.93 feet)

The ducky was deflated. I think Mel and Rich were too tired to run it. Also, Mel has not used the groover in 3 days and his stomach is growing by the day (could be a mint problem). He did not want any accidents. I think he is just burning off the food, but he is so slim I really have noticed that his stomach is getting bigger. No reason to take chances. In case you do not know what a groover is; it is a toilet for solid human waste. Years ago; we used to use a rocket box that left grooves on your butt. We now have toilet seats but still like calling it a groover.

Rubber, Hancock, Devil's Tooth and House Rock rapids finish off our last day on the Middle Fork. Dana stops to take pictures of all of us at Rubber Rapid. We float the final miles to Cache Bar, which is on the Main Salmon River. We have rafted the entire 99 miles of the Middle Fork and our trip has ended. Good food, good friends, lots of laughs, leftover mints and plenty of warm sunshine melting the snow to make our river trip a fun time had be all. We could not ask for a better trip.