

Pikes Peak River Runners

Paddle Captain, Oh No!!! Aug 2000



By Jeff Henry

Preface: Jeff shared this story with me via email and I thought it was so funny I asked for permission to reprint it for everyone's enjoyment.

The beginning of the end....

I think I forgot to mention the reason this day came about was because my friends from Oklahoma asked me to take them boating because they could not afford to go commercially. It is not my habit to boat like this. Honestly!

So I took the Okies whitewater rafting. We ended up doing Brown's Canyon on the Arkansas River in Colorado. I borrowed my father's old Achilles raft, some paddles, other gear and headed out. The Okies were an hour and a half late. They all had paper routes and the papers were late. They are great people, but "Okies" is appropriate.

We went to Ruby to put in because I had hoped to link up with any private boaters for security. None showed. I set one of the adults to pump up the boat with the car battery while I suited everyone in PFDs and helmets. When I came back to check on the raft, I noticed it had no thwarts. (No, they did not pop the raft or thwarts.) My father cut the thwarts out long ago because we always used the raft as an oar rig and would never use it as a paddle raft. Oops. I decided to risk the run because I could not think of any other stretch with enough water and did not want to drive home without having done some whitewater. The raft does not have foot cups either.

We did the shuttle, and it was only when we got back to the boat that we discovered the leak. The rear tube had an appreciable leak that AAA was supposed to have patched some weeks before but must have missed. Well, I pressed on. We are privates from Oklahoma, what do you expect? We launched and I practiced hitting every rock in the river. I discovered that without thwarts or footcups, when a raft hits something, the crew all fall over; either into or out of the boat. The crew quickly learned to fall into the boat. Whenever the boat hit a rock with the bow, everyone would fall into the front of the boat. I was desperate for some other boat.

We met Alan Kearney, who lives next door to you, and he graciously consented to saving our lives. He was running an oar rig Aire Puma with his son. We followed them the rest of the way down. They were polite enough not to laugh too loud or be rude to us Okies in the Kmart blue light Special. We made it with various success to Zoom Flume rapid and scouted. I had looked over all the rafts that we passed for a pump, including Alan's to no success. Floating a raft without a back tube is so common there is technical term for it. I forget what it is but "stupid" works. As we watched rafts go down every line in Zoom, even sideways, I knew that the river would be merciful. I also remembered that some people like to hide pumps in coolers. I asked Alan if, per chance, he had a pump. Certainly. What a day!

We made it through Zoom and everything, more or less. The crew kept begging me to let them swim and I kept demurring because I was certain they would swim soon enough, and it looked a little like rain. Most of them had all cotton clothing, it was the best they could do. We got to the Jump Rock and watch a young commercial paddle captain and his love do a back flip off the rock holding hands. The other captains kept yelling that if they cannot do that, they will not last together as married. They jumped and I am certain they will live happily ever after. My crew was inspired. They started swimming in every direction. Mostly, they ended up at the Jump Rock. It must be magnetic. They got to the top and asked if they could jump. I told them yes but not to hit some reported submerged rock; land where the lovers did. They told me the rock was clearly visible and they all pointed where the lovers landed. I quietly asked the river for mercy. So, they started jumping. Some did it several times. Again, the river was merciful. We paddled on. We made it to Hecla where we took out. I had decided against pressing our luck any further.

Okies have interesting ideas of a light lunch picnic. I told them to pack one and be certain it was crushable so we could put it in our dry bag. They decided to have lunch after the run. We all had 2 inch thick steaks that the shuttle driver cooked for us.

I will not paddle captain again. Too much work. Give me oars or a ducky and I am fine but paddle captaining is too much work.