

Pikes Peak River Runners

Making the Turn

June 2002

Middle Fork of the Salmon and Main Salmon rivers



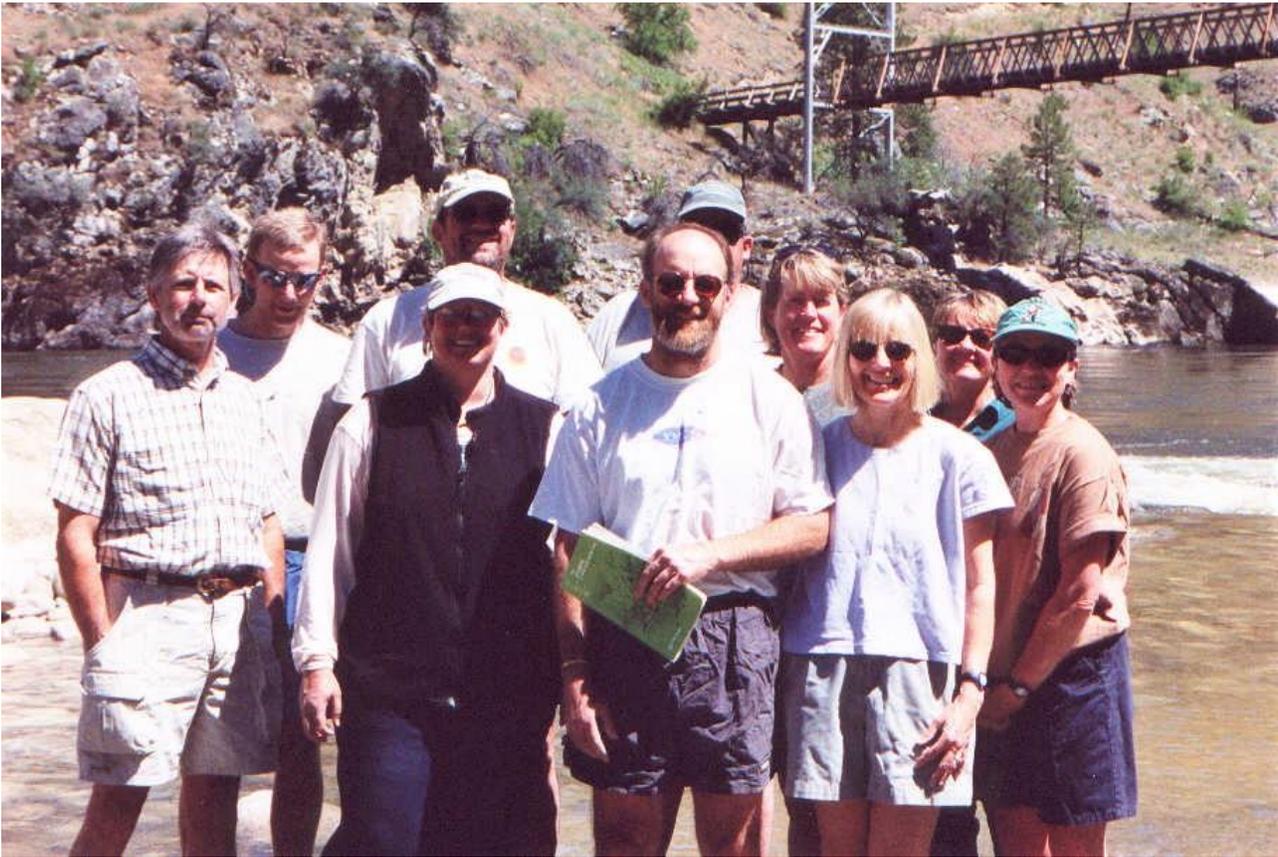
By Christina King

June 9, 2002, Sunday, Prelaunch SNOW!



It is snowing, a lot! Slush is accumulating on the highways, with snowdrifts at the top of Galena Pass. The weather forecasts do not look good. It snowed 4-6 inches last night in Stanley, our final town-stop for last minute supplies before we drive into Boundary Creek for our Middle Fork of the Salmon river trip. The snow is melted by the time we arrive in Stanley, Idaho but it is still very cloudy, and we never see the jagged Sawtooth mountains. We eat lunch, take care of our car shuttle paperwork (River Shuttles), browse the [Riverwear](#) store and fill up our gas tanks. As we follow the 23-mile dirt road into Boundary Creek launch area, we are shocked to see a low flying plane coming up the ridge, even though the local small planes in Stanley were grounded today. I would not fly for a million dollars today. It is too risky. Then it starts snowing (big flakes) as we unload the boats and rig, and it keeps snowing. If the snow gets above our sandals, would we reconsider the trip? No way.... getting a permit for the Middle Fork is like winning the lottery. Finally, the snow stops, and it begins to warm slightly.

Our group consists of Colorado boating friends from Winter Park, Colorado Springs and Woodland Park; Bill/Irene Cooke, Dave/Cheryl Conley, Jeff/Karen Hodge (permit holders-yeah), Keith Fuqua, Laurie Baker, Beth (Buller) Roren, Steve Allard, Jack Schneider and Wendy Rombold (and Chigger too- yellow lab retriever) and Pete and I (Christina) King.



When we had arrived around mid-afternoon, that day's permit holder had still not rigged and launched. It was frustrating waiting around in the snow with other groups waiting for them to rig and get going. They ended up leaving around 4 PM with a little help from those of us waiting. Our group rigged quickly and worked well with Les Bechtel's Canyons Inc company to share the ramp. Les is a good example of an outfitter that shares the river with private boaters. We took turns running the boats down the ramp and I even wrote a letter to the USFS and Les thanking Les for their attitude. Les is the author of a great "River Rescue" book and we appreciated his patience and help. Not all the outfitters had a good day. One of the outfitters, accidentally lost(slipped) a fully loaded raft down the ramp and it was not caught until the next day. I will not name the outfitter (it was not Canyon, Inc) but it could have happened to any of us...yes, they had a rope on it but the rope broke. We heard it ran all the big rapids such as Powerhouse, Velvet, etc..... just fine. Go figure. We put in our camp request to the river ranger and got most of our requested campsites. The ranger gift of a dancing/singing gopher helped solidify our campsite deal plus it made the ranger laugh. The Flying J special gopher sang the Caddyshack movie theme song of "I'm all right, don't you worry 'bout me..." and will be perfect to play on the days when boaters get testy about requesting campsites.

We finished rigging the boats around 6 PM and feasted on a grilled salmon dinner with mango salsa and brownies for dessert, expertly prepared by Irene. Bill was busy fussing with the raft cooler to be much help to Irene before dinner. Bill...just loosen the strap next time and the cooler will be exactly right. Pete...do not let

Bill sucker you into adjusting his entire load, just tell him to loosen a strap first. We tested our new walkie-talkies before going to bed. We crawled into our SUV and crashed for the night. It got down to 28°F that night and we turned on the car heater several times.

June 10, 2002, Monday, Day 1, Flow 4.2 feet:

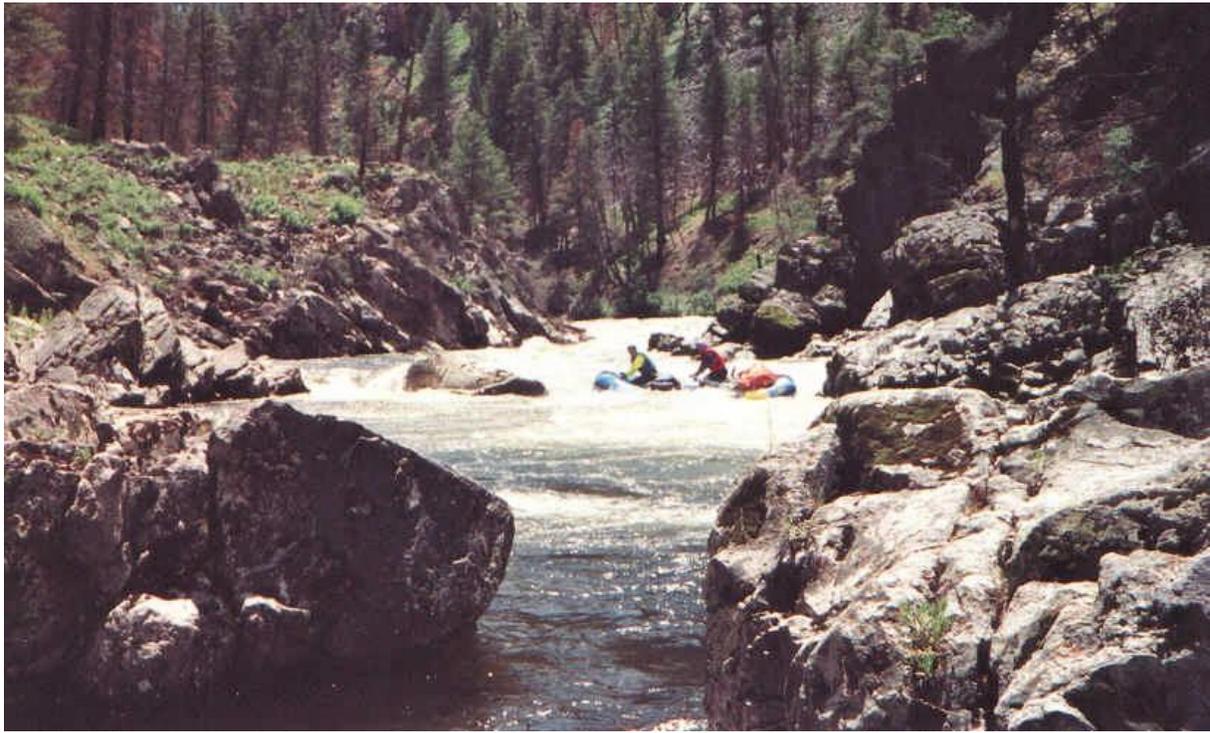
Pete is rowing our 16-foot cataraft and I am rowing the 16-foot Avon Pro self-bailer raft. Neither of us has passengers, just gear. I started rowing with the Clavey 10-foot wood oars, but the clips were too loose around the pins and they kept slipping out of the oarlocks. I felt very awkward and I am not used to the bigger boat and frame since I usually row my 14-foot Avon Adventurer self-bailer. The Pro is usually Pete's raft, and the frame is set up for a 6'4" person, not me. I switch quickly to the 11-foot Gull wood oars and I am rowing much better. It is still a stretch to the foot bar but at least the oars are set better for a stronger pull. The weather is

cold, cloudy, sunny, warm, hailing and wet all in the same day. Jack described it as 4-seasons in one day. Pete is running lead and Beth sweep (they have the walkie-talkies in case of trouble) and the rest of us fit in-between. Our group of 14 people and one dog have 8 boats. Chigger the dog is even wearing a doggie wetsuit (camouflage style) to stay warm. I struggle through First Bend and Sulfur Slide before finally changing my



oars. Murphy's hole is insignificant at this water level. There was talk of a log blocking the way at Murphy's hole, but I think Les cut the log out for us.

As we approach the major rapid, Velvet Falls, I ran left and so did Pete. I got closer to the center hole than usual but then I had 2 more feet of boat more than usual. Pete caught the small eddy below the rapid on the right and signaled for me to find a bigger eddy down river for the others to catch. I have run this rapid about 20 times and it still sneaks up on me. Jeff slid down the left side of the rapid also and we floated down to catch an eddy. It is a good thing that Pete waited because disaster soon struck.



Keith also ran down the left side of the rapid but stalled and got sucked into the hole. Instead of punching through the rapid, his raft was sucked into the hole, surfed, and did a U-turn. For a moment it appeared that they might flush out of the hole upright but then fate turned against them. Over the boat went, taking Keith and his mom (Cheryl) into the frigid river. Keith and Cheryl popped out together and Keith towed Cheryl to the shore. They hiked down river to the Conley's raft while Pete and Beth waited to rescue the boat. Keith's upside-down raft caught and pinned on a rock. Pete and Steve rowed to the eddy below the rock and fastened a rope on the overturned raft. Then they went to shore and proceeded to flip it over. After a lot of help from others, including a passing USFS river ranger, the raft was pulled upright. What a mess! At least nothing was lost but the oar stand was severely damaged, and we did not have a spare of that type. The oar stand was bent 90 degrees. They bent it back with a mini z drag and fine-tuned the angle with a sledgehammer. All this activity took 2 hours. In the meantime, the rest of us were quite a way down river, having heard no word, waiting on standby for a raft to come floating by upside down. This is the time when every boat should have had walkie-talkies so we could have kept in touch. As it turns out, Beth and Pete who had the walkie-talkies were both helping with the rescue. During these 2 hours, Cheryl got on dry clothes, we jogged around in the hail trying to keep warm but stayed worried.

Finally, they floated down, and we heard the entire story. Passing boaters had told us about the flip, pinning and rescue. We knew Keith and Cheryl were okay but that was all. We ate lunch during a moment of sunshine and set off for camp. The Chutes and Powerhouse were our last rapids before our Fire Island camp. We set up camp quickly because of the threat of rain, ate dinner early and had fun with Krispy Kreme hats during dinner. Of course, our BBQ chicken was served with KC Chiefs Gates BBQ sauce. Cheesecake, the first of about 6 cheesecake desserts on this trip, was delicious for dessert.

June 11, 2002, Tuesday, Day 2, Flow 4.0 feet, "What's a Pungo?":

We woke up to a frosty camp. Ice was on my dry bags outside the tent, but we stayed warm in our sleeping bags. The skies are still overcast and cloudy. Several of our group hiked up to the Sheepeater hot springs for an early morning soak. We left camp at a leisurely 11 am start after a breakfast burrito. Pete and I traded boats today and I rowed the cat. What a fun boat! It sure is a play boat. I think I will try to talk Pete into letting me run this boat more often. The sun is finally shining, and we enjoy the rapids. Artillery rapid is a long one and in the middle of it, Beth pulled to the side and signaled that she had trouble with a cracked oar stand. Keith's oar stand is still barely bolted on but none of us has his style. Fortunately, Pete has a spare oar stand like the style that Beth uses. We replace hers and tease her about accepting cash, credit, or check. Jack later bails her out by matching her stand exactly and we decide that an hourly rate is more appropriate. So far, oar stands are not holding up well on this trip. Last year it was the pressure relief valves that were failing. It just goes to show that spare equipment is always necessary on a wilderness trip.

We run Cannon Creek and newly formed Lake Creek rapids with no problem. Lake Creek formed last winter after a severe winter rain event blew out lots of debris from a side canyon into the river. A large debris fan with logs and boulders choke the river and funnel it into a narrow channel with a hole to avoid. Pistol Creek is easy but looks serious as most of us swing against a cliff and scoot away. Most of the rafts scraped the cliff. I noticed that they have rebuilt many of the cabins (burned in 2000) on our way to Indian Creek.

We stopped at Indian Creek and were surprised when the USFS ranger Annabel told us that she had a gift for us. Low and behold, the river rangers who had helped us with Keith's flipped boat "found" a spare oar stand that worked perfectly for Keith's boat. They had left it with Ranger Annabel to give to Keith. I have no idea where they "found" it. I wonder if we can find out the rest of the story.

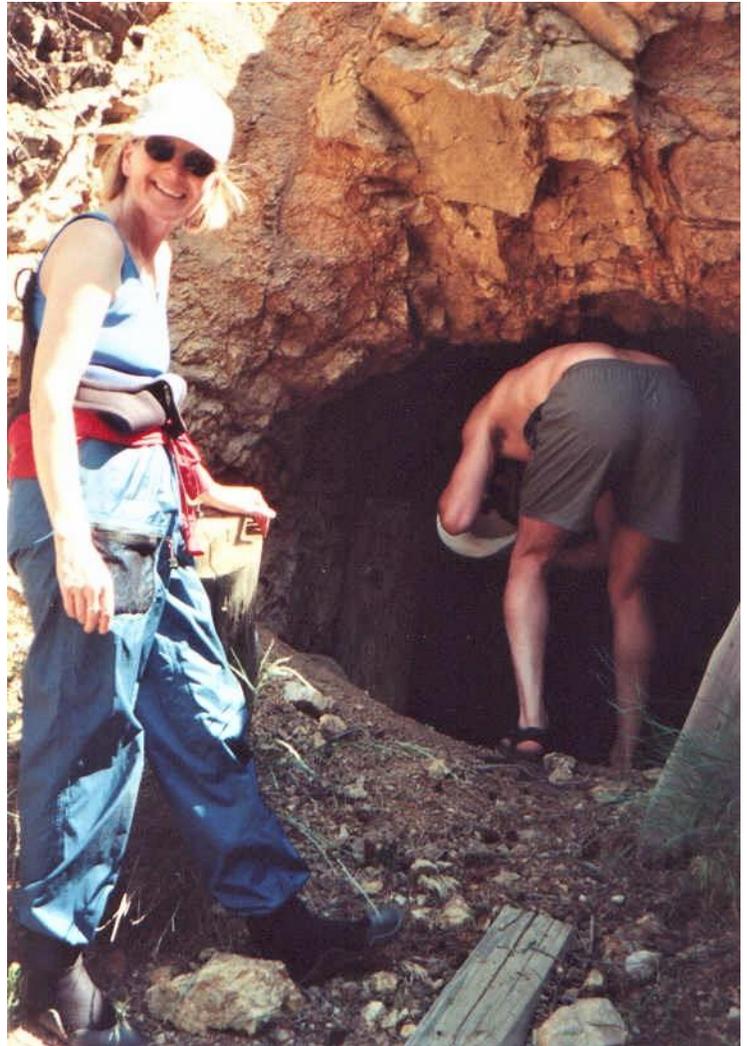
Pungo camp was our campsite for the night where we relaxed with a tasty steak dinner and you guessed it, MORE CHEESECAKE! What is a pungo? A Native American term for pet.



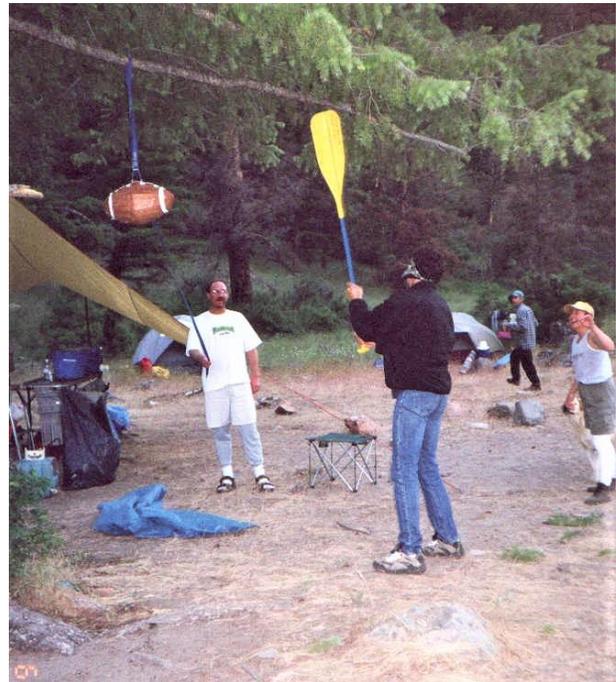
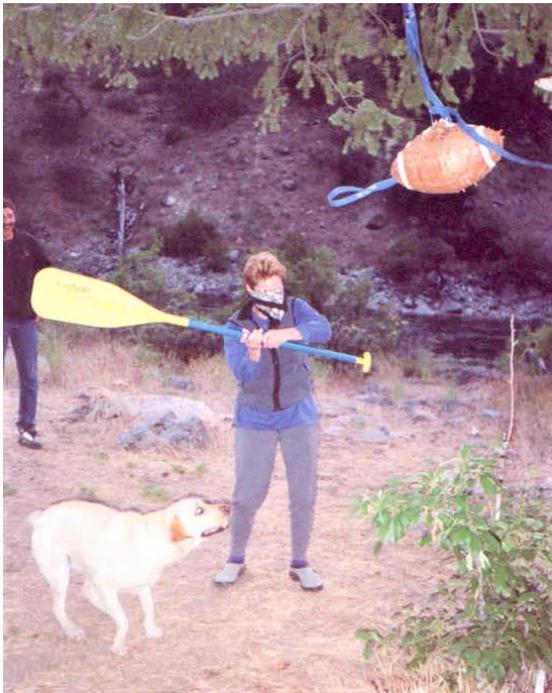
June 12, 2002, Wednesday, Day 3, Flow 3.8 feet, Sunflower Soak:

We awoke to lots of small airplanes buzzing our camp on their way to and from the dirt airstrip at Indian Creek. We left camp around 11:00 am after looking at the Native American pit house depressions and the old fluorspar mine. I ran Marble Canyon rapids with no problem and watched Bill and Jack run the hole. I slipped through the hole at Ski Jump rapid above the Sunflower hot springs. The day is sunny and very warm, and the hot springs seem especially hot. We enjoyed a long soak until we came out looking like prunes. After running Jackass Rapids, we stopped for lunch below. The leftovers and cheesecake are making another appearance. We have lots of food so far. Jack complained that he had to put more food back in his cooler after lunch than he had taken out. I think some of us used this as an opportunity to clean out our coolers but of course we do not admit that to Jack.

Since our schedule has us launching late in the morning our mealtimes have shifted to; breakfast- 9 AM, lunch 2 PM, dinner 7-8 PM and it does not get dark until 10:30 PM because we are so far north. We take advantage of the long days by launching later in the day and enjoying floating on the river during the warmest part of the day. There is no reason to launch early on a cold river. We arrived in camp about 4 PM today after about 10 miles on the river, which included lots of stops. Some of us even stopped to look at the pictographs at Cameron Creek. Our camp is Pine Creek Flat, a new one for us. It is a nice camp but an ankle buster to climb up to the flat camping bench. Flat does not mean flat. We have nicknamed it Cougar Buffet camp because Jack and Pete swear they saw a cougar running away when they first pulled into camp. I think it was just Chigger running around. But there might be some truth to their story, since there are elk bones, bloody hooves, etc.... scattered everywhere in this camp.



Wendy tried out the new margarita vortex blender and we played Piñata Football with a paddle.



June 13, 2002, Thursday, Day 4, Flow 3.6 feet, Big Loon:

Today our group split up. We only had 6 miles to our next camp, so Cheryl, Wendy, Laurie, Irene, and Chigger hiked with the walkie-talkies along the Middle Fork trail. Pete called it the Chic Walk. The rest of us rowed the boats down river and were able to talk with them on the walkie-talkies for quite a ways. The walkie-talkies have about a 2-mile range, but the range really depends on the mountains and ridges blocking the signal along the way. We had them fooled for a short time by telling them that our camp was 2 miles further than expected. The trail was difficult and they saw a few rattlesnakes along the way. They were hot and tired when they arrived at camp. In fact, it was too hot for all of us to go visit the Big Loon hot springs until well after 4 PM. It finally cooled down around 8 PM. There were lots of bug hatches going on today and I really had to concentrate on keeping them out of my mouth, nose, and eyes. Many ticks in camp. Jeff and Steve caught (and released) several large trout today. The weather could not be better. It was quite a difference from our first few days on the river. We spotted several kayakers paddling down the 22-mile length of Big Loon Creek. They met their pilots at the Loon Creek airstrip who would fly them to another airstrip at the top of Big Creek for their next run.

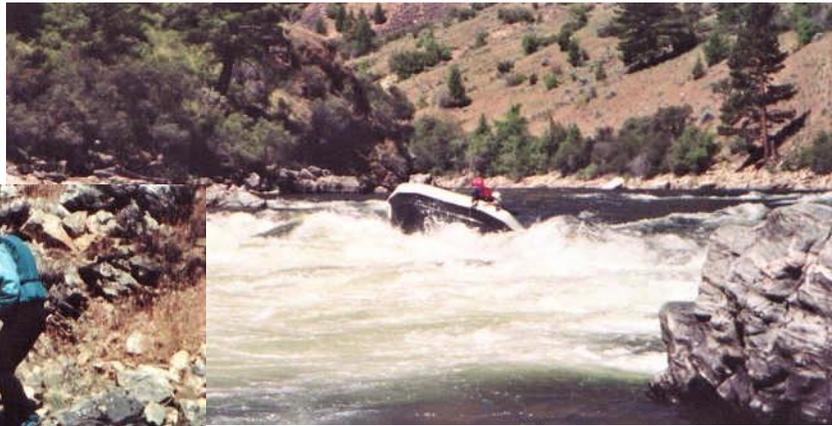


June 14, 2002, Friday, Day 5, Flow 3.7 feet, Tappan Rodeo Tipover:

We woke up to a dewy, sunny, blue-sky morning. Bill visited the hot springs for an early morning private soak. We got an early start today (10 am) because we have 25 miles to travel today. We stopped at Grouse Creek to don wetsuits and continued to Tappan Falls for our first big rapid of the day. All of us ran Tappan Falls fine (except Steve) with Bill and Jack running further left than the rest of us.



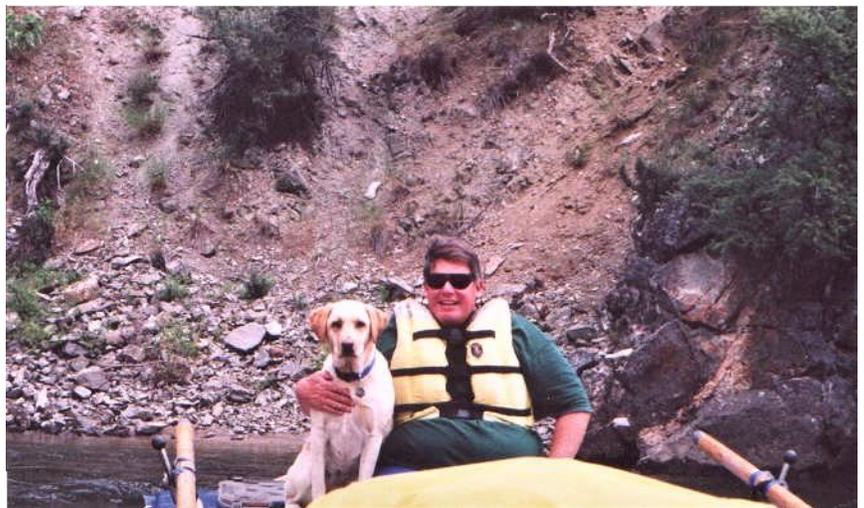
Then the rodeo began. Steve was rowing Beth's boat and dropped far left. The boat stalled and bucked like a bronco. Steve and Beth high-sided continuously with Beth even falling out once but



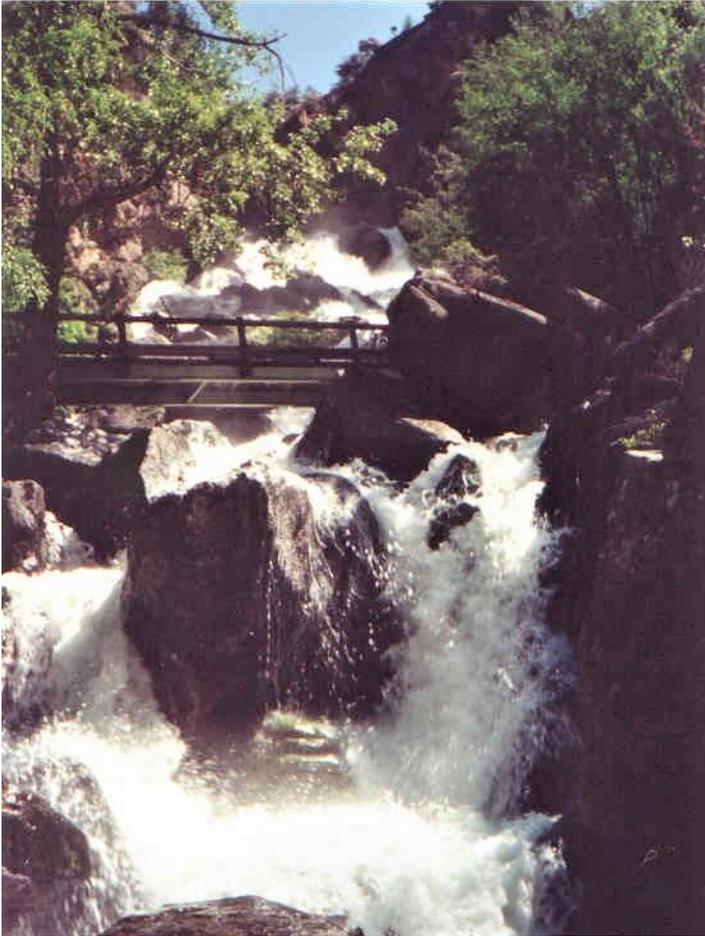
Steve pulled her back in the boat. After about 2 long minutes of surfing, the boat finally flipped. Beth's red helmeted head popped up quickly, but I held my breath until I finally saw Steve pop up. The boat stayed in the hole upside down with the frame getting very loose. After a few more minutes the boat came out. Pete picked up Steve and Dave got Beth. Jeff, Keith, and Jack got the flipped boat and I stayed to make sure Beth

was okay. Beth had a cut to her eyebrow and was bleeding profusely. Laurie cleaned her up and put a butterfly bandage on her eyebrow while the rest of us flipped her boat right side up. Beth lost some gear, oars, and paddle but we found all the missing gear downstream except one oar. Beth's rigging did the job and held. We found a place to stop for lunch and regrouped.

We stopped at the Flying B ranch (no Jack, not a Flying J) and ran Haystack rapid with no problems. I thoroughly enjoyed the rollercoaster waves in Jack Creek rapids. We saw lots of bighorn sheep with lambs visiting natural mineral licks along the way. Some of us stopped to see the pictographs at Rattlesnake Cave and saw a rattlesnake on the path. The late afternoon sun washed out the colors of the pictographs and we were ready to pull into Wollard camp after a long 25-mile day. Skies threatened but no rain. Steve and Beth took some Advil's and muscle relaxants and went to bed for a well-deserved rest. Beth has a nice shiner where her sunglasses hit her eye.



June 15, 2002, Saturday, Day 6, Flow 3.8 feet, Redside Romp:



We floated to Waterfall Creek and admired the power of water. Big Creek was running well, and I wondered how the kayakers running it did. We enjoyed an early lunch at Elk Bar. Several of our group hiked up to Veil Falls. Porcupine rapids are not significant at this level and there was much discussion about stopping to scout Redside rapid. I pulled out in the eddy and peaked at the drop then proceeded to run the rapid on the far left then angled to the right of a big rock pour over. There were lots of private boaters today and we all seemed to group up at Redside and Weber rapids. It looked like a busy day on our home river the Arkansas in Colorado. We even got to see a sweep boat run Redside and Weber. Weber was an easy sneak on the right. After a stop near Papoose Creek (Rainbow Rock) to admire more pictographs, we arrived for a fast landing at our camp Ship Island. After dinner, Wendy led us in a game of Jeopardy with topics to choose from that include Idaho, 1970's and Chigger. Bill and Irene end up clinching the 1970's

category and winning the semi-valuable prize of a Flying J singing/dancing Kung Fu Hamster. Everyone admired the prize and we voted it into the "Valuable" category of prizes.

Jack, Wendy, Beth, and Steve decide to leave early the next morning to begin their drive home to Colorado. The rest of our group is running the Main Salmon, so we are in no hurry and still have 3 days and 90 miles to go on our river adventure.



June 16, 2002, Sunday, Day 7, Flow 3.9 feet (3.5 feet on the Main Salmon), Lantz Bar on the Main Salmon:

Jack, Wendy, Chigger, Beth, and Steve were gone by the time we got up this morning. We wished them good runs in the remaining rapids and hoped they were safe. They ran the rapids fine and were back in Colorado Springs at 11:30 PM that night. Wendy said that they had to wear their helmets in the car while Jack was driving. Yes...their SUV hit speeds of 100 mph with the frame on top.

In the meantime, we had a great day. We floated 30 miles, enjoyed sunny hot weather, ran Lower Cliffside and Rubber rapids with no problems. The Main Salmon was running 3.5 feet and falling when we checked in with

the river ranger to get our permit at Corn Creek. When she found out that we were from Colorado she asked if we lived near the fires. Since she did not know where the fires were in Colorado, we could not answer. Later we would find out that the fires were close to our home (within 4 miles)! We filled our drinking water supplies and ate lunch at Corn Creek and then floated to the Legend Creek



pictographs. It was too early and hot to camp, so we floated to Lantz Bar and camped there. The abandoned orchard at Lantz Bar had ripe cherries, which we ate with gusto thanks to Jeff and Keith's fruit picking gymnastics. A resident marmot had vandalized the cabins at Lantz and the old museum building had been torn down since the last time I had visited. Today and this evening have been hot. We set up our tent near the river and I read quietly in the shade. The rest of the group played Battle of the Sexes with the boys winning. We have never been able to camp here before because this is an extremely popular campsite and I feel lucky to be staying at this beautiful camp.

June 17, 2002, Monday, Day 8, Barth hot springs:

We woke up to a delicious breakfast of French Toast with bacon. It finally cooled off last night and we slept with the tent doors open for a cool breeze. Salmon Falls rapid is just beginning to

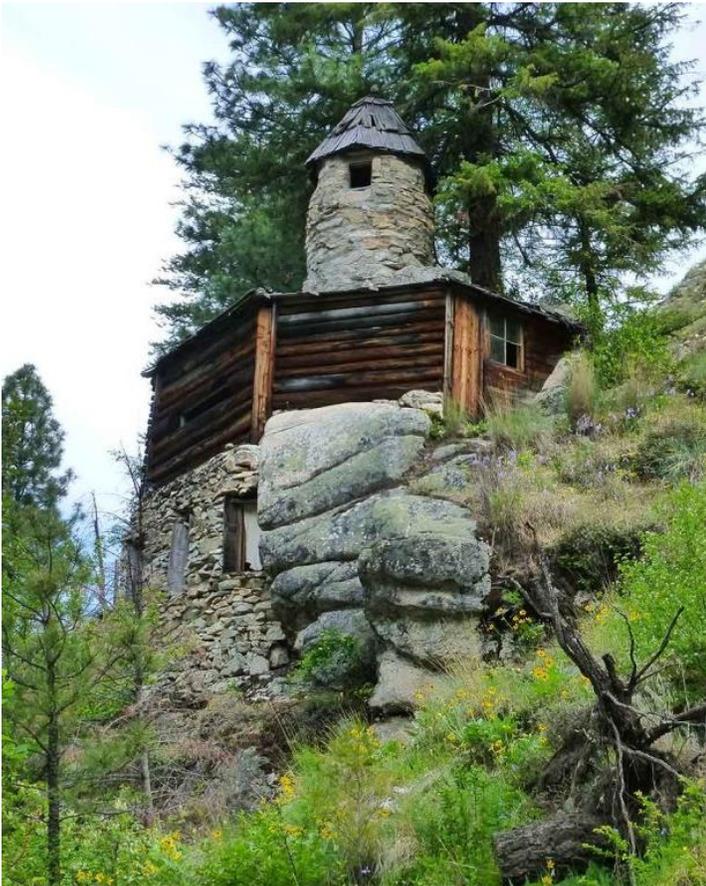
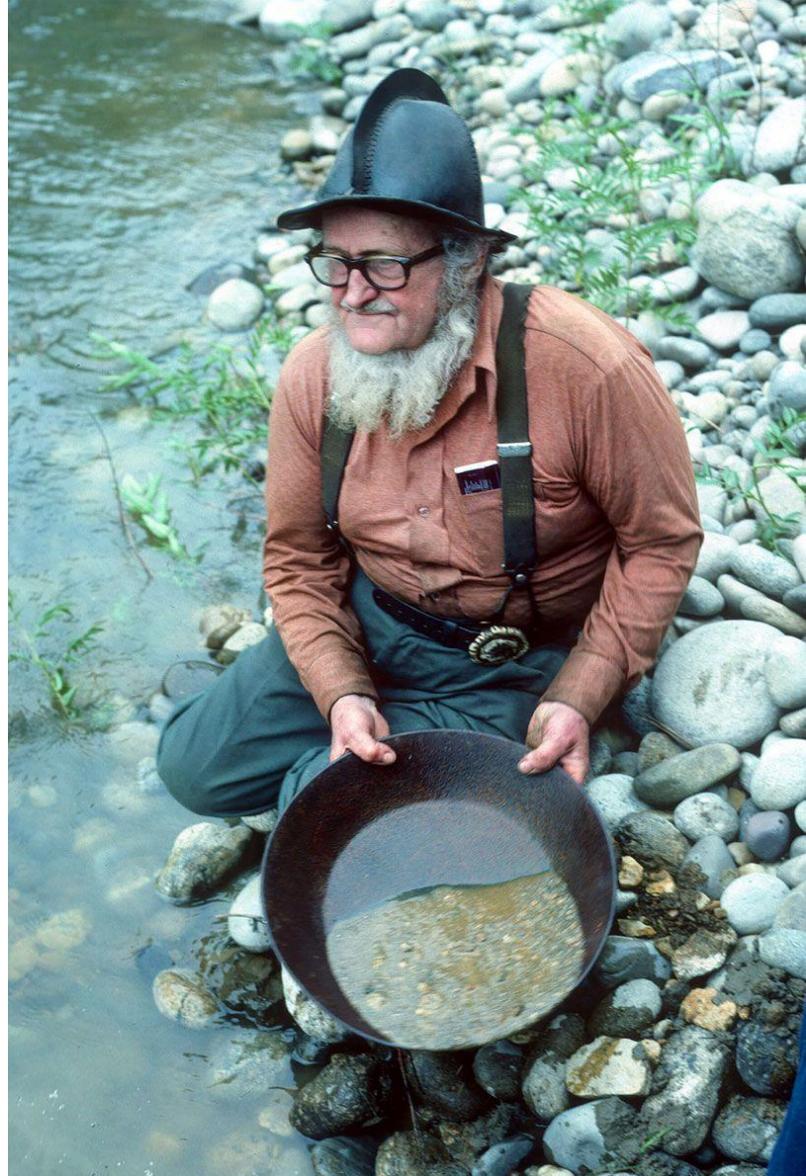
show at this water level. I did not see the usual bighorn sheep in the area but did see plenty of river otters. We enjoyed a long hot soak in the Barth bathtub hot springs. We scrubbed and drained the tub to leave it nice and clean for the next group. Three river otter pups followed me for about ¼ mile above Bargamin creek. They are so curious



and fun to watch. Bailey rapids were a challenge with big holes and waves. I had to make a strong left to right ferry across a big lateral wave and then rode out the smaller waves. We ran Split Rock Rapid and pulled in for camp at Yellow Pine. I think this is the first night without cheesecake, we are all going through withdrawal. It rained all night.

June 18, 2002, Tuesday, Day 9, Buckskin Bill's:

Today dawned very cold and rainy. We rowed 33 long miles in this weather and had a hard time keeping warm. We had a warm start with Dutch Oven Eggs Idaho for breakfast. We stopped at Buckskin Bill's (real name is Sylvan Hart) homestead to warm up and put on every warm piece of clothing we owned. Jeff was digging deep in his dry bag to pull out the fleece goods. Buckskin Bill was an odd self-sufficient man who made guns of all sizes, built turrets and cabins, made tools, planted gardens, hunted bighorn, lions, and bears. You really must see the place to believe the stories. Buckskin Bill died in the early 1980's but is quite a legend in this area. A caretaker/owner lives there year-round now and will show you the cabins, etc....





After a long cold day, we pushed to find a camp that had some trees so we could set up our tarps. We stopped at Lower Bull Creek, set up tents/tarps and the sun promptly came out. The group tried to finish 3 boxes of wine (they failed) and enjoyed a tasty chicken cacciatore dinner. Pete and I could have easily been persuaded to keep on rowing and pull off the river today but are glad we did not.

June 19, 2002, Wednesday, Day 10, Cheat'em at Chittam:

We launched by 9 am (our earliest morning yet). We are ready to get off the river. Skies were clear and sunny. We ran Dried Meat rapid with no problems and lined up for Chittam rapid. Chittam was a hard pull to the right. I broke through the weakest part of the lateral on the top right and avoided the monster waves and holes along the cliff on the left. Jeff did not get as far right and hit some of the big waves crooked. Karen said he was knocked halfway out of the boat but managed to stay in the raft. This was a difficult rapid. Bill ran it right down the left side into the biggest part of the rapid. Irene said later it was fun, but I thought it looked way too scary for me. We floated to our takeout at Carey Creek and drove into Riggins to dump our toilets and trash. After a picnic lunch in a Riggins riverside park, we split up and went our different ways. Despite the snow at the put-in and rain towards the end of our trip, the weather was unbelievably nice. The river flows were perfect and the company funny. I am pleased when I tally up our adventures in 190 miles of river miles in 10 days. We only had two flips with no serious injuries and only one lost oar. We saw numerous river otters and bighorn sheep maybe a cougar (probably a yellow lab). The rapids were fun and challenging. This is a river trip that all boaters covet, and we were able to run both the Middle Fork of the Salmon and the Main Salmon with great friends. Maybe next year, Pete and I will be back with two catarafts. All we will need is friends to carry all the rest of the gear.

Post trip:

Pete and I enjoyed a quiet night in McCall and drove into Boise for a visit to Cascade Outfitters, Maravia and Aire the next day. We enjoyed lunch at a restaurant called, Whitewater Pizza and Pasta and recommend a visit if you are in Meridian (suburb of Boise). We discovered that the biggest Colorado wildfire in history had come within 4 miles of our home in Woodland Park. Friends would have rescued items from our house (for which we are grateful) but the fire changed directions and it was not necessary. We have heard through the grapevine that the Kung Fu Hamster has been kidnapped and was last seen with our dog Canyon. Our return to work and regular life is always an adjustment after finding the rhythm of the river. At least we have a habit of visiting western rivers on a regular basis to keep that balance.

