

1992 Southern Trip By John Kobak

Spring finally arrives, but we had to drive South to find it. After a late spring up North it was fantastic to watch Spring arrive as we drove further South. By the end of our warm week everything was in full bloom and we then had to reverse the process coming back home to cold weather.

We all met at the Nolichucky campgrounds and were disappointed to find that the water level was only 2' (1030cfs). We had 21 paddlers. We got an early start and we never saw anyone else on the river. We had some old friends show up; Don Manson, Denny Cilensek along with Syd Reames from Georgia. We spent a lot of time playing and still finished early enough for a few of us to take our bikes up the mountain for a good view of the river valley. We prayed for rain to bring up the Tellico but no luck. After much discussion Fred Lemke convinced half the group that there would be low water in the French Broad and no water in the Big Laurel so we went to the Ocoee.

The smart group of 7 paddlers plus some MS&T guides went to Big Laurel anyway and found enough water to make it an interesting trip on a new river. 16 Keel-Haulers and hundreds of local boaters out for Easter weekend paddled the Ocoee. At least the campground at Greasy Creek was nice. The next day the smart group arrived to reinforce our numbers for another run on the Ocoee. I saw a swimmer or two but it was a warm day and every one had a relaxed trip. Air temps high 70's and water temp 68o F.

Off we went to the Chattooga. Again, we had a difference in choices. The river was only running 1.6' so 11 people chose to run section 3 including Elliott Drysdale who flew to Atlanta and had a friend in an open canoe bring him to the river on Easter morning. Ten of us, including first timer John Fralick, decided to run section 4 because we just knew the river would come up the next day. Art Vaughn strained his back paddling at the Ocoee and was gracious enough to assist in both shuttles prior to heading back home. Thanks a lot Art.

Section 4 was a nice easy run at this level. All the rapids including Crack-in-the-Rock and Sock-em-Dog were run by most of the paddlers. John Fralick had a good day until Corkscrew. We watched everyone run successfully to show him how it's done. Then I led him down. As usual I had a sloppy run going too far right at the top and had to do some hard back ferrying to miss the terminal hole at the bottom. John did not. He landed in the hole sideways and had a good surf. However he couldn't get out and had to bail out. Not Good. The fast current quickly took him and his many rescuers to above Crack in the Rock but he finally held on to someone's boat and was pulled to safety. No one had any trouble with crack-in the rock at this level. John didn't hesitate to attempt Shoulder Bone. He followed me closely into each eddy. He had a good run but we both elected to watch the others run the DOG, especially after Syd was sucked back in the hole at the bottom. He did many rolls until he thought he was stuck. As he bailed out the boat gently washed into the safe eddy below.

Everyone agreed not to race across Tugaloo Lake but as usual some bone heads Maruna, Wild and myself set a new record in lake crossings. I was a distant 3rd.

Back at camp Stan (campground owner on his motocross cycle) showed Dave Becker and Ron Tomallo how to wear yourself out on your mountain bikes. I'm glad I didn't try to follow them, Ron looked exhausted.

That night we got 2" of rain and you guessed it the rivers were raising fast. Section 4 was already past 2.5' and still rising. We then figured, why not try the Chauga, Elliott and I had been telling the group, what a nice pretty run it was. The river dropped about 150' per mile over numerous 20' waterfalls, not to mention the hundred fallen trees. Sounds like fun so 10 of us including Peggy Bates in Jane's Shredder raft decided to try it at 1" below zero. At this level we didn't have too many difficulties although there was more flat water at the end then I remembered. We walked the first and the last waterfalls and ran most everything in between. Poor Tom Taylor forgot to lean left into the hydraulic pouring through a 4' wide slot in a 5' drop. His brand new Schlegel paddle blade broke in half.

Most of the paddlers headed back home. After five days of great paddling our shoulders were crying for a rest. I saw a lot of smiling faces and watched some of the newer paddlers really advance their skills. This was our biggest and best trip yet. Thanks to good weather, water and friends it will rate up there with the outstanding vacation trips.