

Hot Southern Trip - 1995

By John Kobak

Our biggest trip ever. **HOT** weather but very low water. For the past 30 days little or no rain fell in the Smokey Mountains. It caused a few people to cancel out and head to cold & wet West Va. However 27 Keel-Haulers made their way down for the summer like weather.

Jim Maruna, Tom Taylor, Peggy & I met on the Virginia Creeper Trail, just North of Bristol, TN. Jim & Tom hiked about 10 miles on the section that parallels the AT. Peggy & I biked the 29 mile round trip from Green Cove to Damascus. This is really a scenic trail for those who like to bike, it's a must-do trail.

Every year Peggy continues on to Atlanta to visit her sister over Easter while I paddle with the club. This year we really had a complicated itinerary. Bob Boyce who was recently transferred to Bogota, Columbia wanted to join the trip so he flew to the Tri-Cities Airport near the Nolichucky River via NY & Atlanta. I brought his boat and gear with me on my RV. We picked him up on Thursday night and camped at Noli. Exp. Campground where we met up with the rest of the group. Syd Reames drove up from Valdosta, GA and as soon as he pulled in on Friday morning. Peggy & Syd traded vehicles and she drove his van back to Atlanta while Syd and Bob enjoyed the luxury of motor home camping.

The weather was warm and the river was 950 cfs. One contingent of 9 paddlers led by Art Vaughn decided to run the French Broad since it was running 2500 cfs. Scott Debalski, Steve DiCicco, Susan Vetrone, Jim Maruna, Tom Taylor, Bob Weible, Colin Drozdowski, and Dan Lichty filled out the group. The only thing that I heard was that Bob wore out Frank Bell's Ender hole until it wore him down & out.

Our big group of 16 paddlers broke into 2 groups on the Nolichucky. Good thing Chuck Singer missed the freeway exit on the shuttle. Paul Hay & Bob McGinley were running late and jumped in line as we circled back to Exit 19. Sorry Chuck, I thought it was Exit 20.

The low level was still lots of fun. Lots of maneuvering and Quarter Mile rapid required a lot of boat scouting to find the best route. Kathy Chapman started out on the aptly named "On the Rocks". Four roll attempts over the shallow rocks, and then an easy swim to shore. Cathy, Shilling did great until the easier part of the river where she had to do a few compulsory novice swims. Barry Adams was sent down by the TRPC to determine how in the world we manage to organize such a big group over such a wide range of rivers and skill levels. The secret is that Chuck Singer and I have been leading this trip for over 20 years and the same core group comes down and really leads their own way to the rivers of their choice.

Fred Lemke usually paddles with TSRA the week before our trip on the Obed-Emory system. Things were so low this year that I'm not sure where he paddled. All I know is that he tried to paddle the Tellico at 200 cfs and Frank Scarci broke his boat so he went back to Florida instead of joining our trip.

Barry, Syd, Bob and I left for the Ocoee as soon as we got off the river, in order to try to catch up with the French Broad group. The rest of the group decided to drive down in the morning and do a late afternoon run since we weren't sure what the camping situation would be on an Easter weekend at Power House campground, the only campground open. It turned out that the place was empty.

The Ocoee was a zoo. I've never seen that many paddlers in all my years of paddling. Perception Marketing was at the put-in and were loaning out their latest model boats as demos. They set up a Pirouette Super

Sport for me to paddle. The boat carried my 175 lbs without any problem and was very predictable. I only wished that I had the squirting skills that I witnessed others paddling the same model accomplish.

Woody Callaway (Perception's Rep) really went out of his way to assist Bob Boyce. Bob had put lots of padding in his Dancer to help him stay in the boat, but he still could not hold on tight enough to roll. On Monday, Woody drove back to the factory to pick up their new long knee braces and drove to our campground at the Chattooga. He removed Bob's old braces and installed the new ones. He did this essentially for gratis. Bob found that these unpadded braces were more comfortable and kept him in the boat. Way to go Perception.

The only thing I remember on the Ocoee other than watching all those hot dog boaters hog all the good play spots was our five boat hole attempt. Bob, Tom, Jim, Scott and I held our boats together and hand paddled into Hell Hole. Our 5 boat raft turned and dropped me deep into the hole but the other 4 boats pulled me through to sounds of laughter or blank stares from the other boaters. One note, if you try this, don't forget to split up for the last two large hydraulics that follow. We didn't split soon enough and I had to paddle my SS at full speed into the holes and did my only back ender of the day. Our group was then took off to Chau-Ram campground near the Chattooga.

Chuck led a group of 10 paddlers on Saturday afternoon and then again on Easter Sunday after the Easter Bunny left off his usual surprises at each campsite. A word of warning about Chau-Ram, it is now run by a State Trooper wan-ta-be, who locks you in at dark and will fine you if he sees any alcohol (Key word is see, you can pour your drink in a glass and he doesn't see it). The camp is great, especially the view of the Chauga falls from the campsite but don't put more than 2 cars or tents to a site.

The Chattooga was only running 1.6'. This is a great level for first timers on Section IV. We had a bunch; Barry, Bob, Scott, Colin, Dan, Ted Moore and Luke Thompson along with second timers Susan & Steve and five experienced boaters.

Paul Hay, Leo Glass, Bob McGinley and Cathy Shilling decided to run Section III down to Sandy Ford. Leo & Cathy then headed over to run the Nantahala River on Tue before heading back home.

Everyone did well on Section IV. Jim took a short swim at 7' falls and Bob Boyce swam at Raven's Rock. After lunch, I carried his boat back up and he ran it again cleanly. Almost everyone ran all of the five falls, including Crack-in-the-rock and Sock-em-dog. Our probe, Tom, ran Sock-em-dog first and surfed the hole. I waited with my throw rope and much to my surprise and Tom's too, he slowly eased out of the hole and into the eddy without even taking a stroke. No one else had a problem, but they also had a lot more forward speed after watching Tom. The air temperature hit 85°F and the water was fairly warm. No one bothered to race Lake Tugaloo, which was probably why I finished first.

Colin, Dan, Luke, Steve and Susan left but Kathy Chapman, John Fralick, Ron & Cathy Tomallo arrived, significantly increasing the experience level of the group. In our 13 boat group we now had only 1 first timer, Kathy. She did great. Seven foot falls was her only short swim. Steve Foster from Columbus and two of his friends joined us for our run. Steve thought our group ran such a good trip here joined the club. Steve started to paddle across the lake first, again starting our non-race. A lot of drafting was going on and Ron & Bob Boyce led the parade.

We got off the river fairly late and we had to get Bob to Atlanta to catch a plane back to NY for a meeting. We had to go to Peggy's sister first to get Syd's van and Syd then took Bob to the airport with 5 minutes to spare. Nice driving Syd. Bob is probably back in Columbia by now, still trying to figure out how BP dissolves the Cocaine into their gasoline.

When I was retrieving Peggy in Atlanta, Bob Weible led another trip of 7 paddlers down Section IV again on Tue. Kathy took the seven foot falls sneak route. After calling river gages, we determined that it hadn't rained anywhere down south but some rain was coming in on Thursday. Since the Nolichucky was still around 900 cfs and is on the way home seven of us decided to give it another try. It was still fun and with a smaller group we were off the river by 2 PM.

I wanted to head over to The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River even though the level was only 700 CFS since rain was on its way. I knew that the AYH club from Columbus had a scheduled trip so even though no one else came along Peggy & I headed West.

I've never been in this area. It is a beautiful National Recreation Area. The Bandy Creek Campground was class A with paved roads and large sites. The area abounds with trails (Hiking, Biking and Horse). Peg and I started out biking on Thur morning in a light rain. The rain increased, we took a few wrong turns and by the time we got back I was covered with mud, but it was a great single track trail.

We found the AYH group who acknowledged that they would paddle on Friday as soon as their trip leader arrived. I went to visit with Bob Wheely who owns Cumberland Rapid Transit Raft Outfitters (He was one of our raft oarsman on Steve Ingalls' Grand Canyon trip in 1993). Bob says hello to all his Keel-Hauler friends.

Thursday night we had a heavy rain. O boy the river's rising. Tom Hendrickson the trip leader arrived on Friday morning and informed the group that we would paddle the Narrows section of the river in the afternoon. This is a much easier shuttle and only a 4 mile trip with some of the easier rapids. Rollo Marchant another Keel-Hauler was also on the trip. By the time we got on the river it had come up to 2000 cfs. It was a fun couple of miles though a beautiful gorge with towering vertical cliffs, many of which rise straight up from river level for hundreds of feet.

That night the rest of their group arrived and they had one of the raft companies shuttle our large group to the put-in. The \$5/person was well worth it as the shuttle and the river is similar to the Cheat.

The trip starts out on the Clear Fork River and when it confluences with the New river (Not WV New) the flow had increased to 5000 cfs which was listed as an advanced boater level. There were a few intermediate paddlers and they had a couple of swims, but most of the group had no problem at all. You really could boat scout all the rapids. There were a few easily avoidable large holes and lots of good surfing waves. My evaluation of the river is about a 26.

After I rescued the trip leader's wife, Tom & Sandy decided to join our club. I hope we see them on some of our trips. It was a fun group and I really appreciated the opportunity to paddle a new river with a nice bunch of friends. They made me feel very welcome.

I hope we can add this river along with the Obed-Emory system to our next year's Easter trip or possibly run them this Memorial Day weekend if the rivers come up. It's only an 8 hour drive from Cleveland.