

SOUTHERN RIVERS TRIP - 2005

By Michael Duvall (Liberally edited by John Kobak)

NOLICHUCKY

The Southern Rivers trip always starts on the Nolichucky. This year's cast included John Kobak and Elliott Drysdale, Judi Cleary, Bob Weible, Bob Nicholson, Shawn Reese, Eric Olle, Joe Yilek and Lee Owen and Kay. We all met at Warrior Path State Park, which has a great group camping area with showers. The St Louis group, Santo and Kris Albright and Eric Roush joined us on the 16th after doing a low run on Little River on the 15th.

We chose to schedule the trip in mid April in hopes that we would have milder weather. It turned out not to make much difference. The weather on Easter weekend was just as warm and more rivers had good water levels. This weekend we had plenty of water on the Noli and the Chattooga, however every place else was dry. So we skipped the Tellico and took advantage of the higher levels on the Noli. by running it both Fri & Sat at 3000 & 2700 CFS.



The Noli is basically class 3 and not much harder than the Lower Yough so it is a good place to wash off the cobwebs from a long winter. The weather was cool but sunny. Judi brought both a kayak and the shredder (2 person cataraft) but really wanted to shred so she was trying to round up a partner. Bob W stepped up and took the single blade paddle challenge on both days. Traditionally someone always has to swim at "On the Rocks" and this year was no exception. However the "prank" of the second day was when Eric O. played in "Jaws" then baited Joe to try it with less than perfect results.

Michael on Nolichucky

OCOEE

Sunday on the Southern rivers trip means we must be at the Ocoee River. The nite before, Judi and I somehow became the lead car from the Noli heading toward Cleveland, TN. Because we were coming from I-75 and not the back way we would miss the Mexican restaurant in Copper Hill. Kobak was surfing, the web not a wave, looking for a Mexican place to eat in Cleveland. As the lead car it was our job to find his elusive restaurant with vague directions. As luck would have it we found a different Mexican place, "Tres Hermanos" (3 brothers) right on the bypass at Ocoee St. We pulled into the parking lot and asked people leaving if they liked the food and they were very positive. That was it, Judi called Kobak and gave him the location. Everyone liked the place but a word to the wise; do not get the Grande Margarita (\$11) unless you plan to spend the whole day there. Even their Medium is huge.

Sunday always starts with a pancake breakfast with Kobak's secret recipe of adding bananas to the batter. John and Elliott worked at one grill and Shawn fired up his stove with a cast iron grill. Judi fried up the bacon. After everyone enjoyed breakfast we started to get ready to shuttle. Some of the play boaters went looking for boats to demo. The initial plan was for the remaining boaters was to drive to the put-in to unload and then we would take all but one or two cars to the takeout.

As we drove over the bridge from the campground to the main highway we noticed water coming from up stream. This could only mean one thing, the Olympic course had water. This was not a scheduled release weekend so we had

no way of knowing what the flow was or how long it would last. Nonetheless, we continued to the put-in to get organized. Judi, who had convinced John to shred, and Lee were the only ones to wait at the put-in. Elliott, Bob W., Joe, Bob N. and I rearranged the shuttle to do the Upper and Lower. When we tried to get to the put-in for the Upper we found that the gate was locked so we went to the Visitors Center and carried up to just above Mike's hole missing some boogie water and one named rapid. We saw people in slalom boats practicing although there were no gates. They were catching every eddy. Someone said that the course was class II but it was more like class IV. The current was very pushy and the holes very trashy. We were told "When in doubt go left" and that is certainly the case at "Humongous". I remember seeing more than a couple Olympians swam there during the '96 Games. We dodged the holes and caught a few eddies and thought we were finished with the course. That is when we almost blundered into a big pour-over hole named "Pumphouse", I think. Then it was fun boogie water to the lake and only about a third of a mile of flat water to the dam and the lower section.

When we got to the dam we joined up with John, Judi and Lee who patiently waited for us as well as the rest of the crew that went for demo boats. After putting on the Lower we went with the usual scenario, half the group broke off and cruised down with little play. I went with the much slower group that had a "play till you puke" attitude. When we finally got to "Hell Hole" I took two quick attempts at surfing then left the group to paddle out. At the take out I was grateful to find that Judi my co-pilot had retrieved my dry clothes from Bob's car and my car from the Visitors Center. All right, now we head to the Chattooga.

CHATTOOGA - Section IV

Elliott and Judi thought it would be a good day to hike instead of paddling so they helped with the shuttle and watched us put-on at "Bull Sluice." "Bull Sluice" provides the paddler with 3 choices; door number one, put-in below the drop, door number two, run the easy single boof in the middle, and the third door is the "hero" route. Those taking door three were both Erics and Santo, with only Eric Roush being successful. Bob W had an excellent line between door two and three. The remainder took door two with a simple boof or slide. We checked the gauges at the bridge, 2.05 and 1.95 (USGS & Bridge). Joe and Shawn were the only two that had never run this section, so John took the lead and only needed to provide minimal explanation. Woodall Shoals, Ravens Rock, and Seven Foot Falls all went smoothly.

It wasn't until the Five Falls area that we needed to take extra precautions. The problem with this section is that there is very little recovery time between rapids. Starting with Entrance John set up at the top and directed us one at a time through the drop. At Corkscrew we all got out and scouted. Someone would have to walk this one and set up a throw line above Crack in the Rock. Having been the recipient of the rope a few times I figured it was my turn to be on the throwing end. After walking around river right and setting up on the downstream rock we were ready to start. Bob W ran first followed by John who ran it smooth without a bobble or splash. I will just say that not everyone was that smooth, but no one needed the rope. Then, we all ran the center crack without any problems.



The next rapid is Jawbone. With the water being a little high we could take the easier left line into the "Parking Lot" above Jaw Bone. Bob W. and John eddied in and John got out with his throw line to set safety above Sock-Em-Dog. This is where we had **the "Incident."**

John signaled the group to hold up but most did not see the signal. The group entered the crowded eddy one by one. When Bob Nicholson started along the left sneak into the eddy he flipped. He attempted a few rolls but then went into the crease of Jawbone. Erik O and

Santo started down after him. Bob swam in Jawbone and bumped into Hydro Rock. He swept around the left side and drifted toward Sock-Em-Dog rapid. John, still running down to his set-up position, was shouting for Bob to swim right to avoid the serious pothole entrapments in the center of the drop. Eric & Santo followed in hot pursuit, Santo wisely went to river right and got out with his rescue rope. Bob swam over the drop falling onto a rock and self rescued. Erik got too close to Sock-em-Dog and ended up dropping sideways into the big hole and could not get out. He finally wet exited and was pulled out of the hole by Santo who just got there with his throw line.

The rest of us, not able to see what happened, ran Jawbone and went to see what we would do at Sock-Em-Dog. John and Joe then walked down and paddled across the pool to see how Bob was doing. We could see that Santo was with him just out of the water on river right. John came back to tell us that Bob's leg was broken and we needed to get help. I suggested that Joe accompany John because his truck was at the takeout and I knew that he had a cell phone. The rest of us walked the Puppy Chute and paddled across to help Bob.

When I got to the other side, the Erics were working on splinting Bob's leg with rope and sticks. Bob was in good spirits and had good color showing no signs of shock. It became obvious that no one had a good emergency kit. If we at least had a roll of Duct tape we could have almost made Bob a cast. I could see that Bob was being well taken care of, so I turned to help Santo who had started making 3 kayaks into a raft with long sticks and rope. To evacuate Bob, we still had Shoulder Bone and some class II rapids to run before the lake, then 2 miles of flat water to the take-out. The raft, like many other ideas was re-evaluated and modified to better fit the situation. If the raft went over a rapid and broke apart, the resulting tangle of boats, sticks and rope would be a dangerous. The decision was to put Bob in his boat with his splinted leg out and a boater on each side, Santo and Eric R, holding his boat steady. Eric Olle towed them across the pool to the other side of the river, which looked like a possible sneak. Erik R said to find a stick for a crutch and I said Bob should not walk. I was then told that Eric had rescue experience and was in charge. I don't know when that decision had been made but it is the first rule of both rescue and first aid, someone needs to take charge. The statement had a unifying effect on the whole group. We seemed to work together even better after that. The six of us working together carried Bob over the big boulders around Shoulder Bone then alternately walking and wading Bob in his boat, backwards with both legs out, along the shore and carrying him in the boat over smaller rocks until the river was calmer.

In the meantime, Joe and John raced ahead and reached a fisherman who had a cell phone that surprisingly enough could reach a 911 operator. They then paddled to the boat ramp to wait for the rescue people. Two ambulances, 5 cars and a motorboat eventually responded to the emergency call. The first two paramedics arriving, commandeered a fisherman who took them up the lake in his fishing boat.

Once again we returned to the method of steadying the boat with Eric Olle towing until reaching the lake. We proceeded down the narrow lake a short way until a fishing boat arrived with paramedics. We met at the shore where the paramedics took over and replaced our sticks with an inflatable splint. They started an IV, and administered some morphine for the pain. While evaluating Bob, one of the paramedics said he grew up in the Toledo area very near where Bob lived, what a small world. After a while, the Sheriff's boat with another rescue worker in a wet suit appeared. All the rescue workers transferred Bob to a body board and into the boat and took off. Nothing left for us to do but continue across the lake with Eric Olle still towing Bob's boat.

Rumor has it that the sheriff was going to fly Bob out with a helicopter but Kobak couldn't find Bob's credit card so he negotiated down to borrowing a fishing boat!! Actually, the waiting ambulance took Bob to Oconee hospital in Seneca, SC which was 30 miles away. We gave Bob his cell phone so that he could call Dawn with the bad news. Bob Weible drove to the hospital to see how Bob was doing and called us to inform us that Dawn was flying down and would bring Bob home after his operation. They didn't operate until Wednesday where they fastened a steel rod for faster and better healing.

The next morning John dropped Bob's car off at the hospital and found Bob still in good spirits. He loved that Morphine I guess. Elliott shuttled John back to the section IV put-in where John, Joe, Eric O and Shawn would attempt to successfully run the river. The rest of the group headed back home as planned.

The day was uneventful, with a smaller group, communication was better and John set-up a throw rope at the two dangerous rapids but it remained dry.

It was only Tuesday and the trip still had three days to go, but where was the water. The weather had warmed to the 70's but everything in the South except for the Noli and Ocoee was dry. The group decided that since the Noli was on the way home they would head there. They all got together in Ashville for a nice dinner and camped at the picnic area at Rock Creek Campground. Lee & Kay had arrived earlier and were given permission to camp there, since the campground itself was still under repair with a delayed opening.

John took a rest day and worked out the shuttle so that all the cars would end up at the take-out. This would have been great except that Lee had his third out-of-boat experience attempting to run "On the Rocks" and then decided to walk back to the put-in. He hoped to be able to hitch a ride back but was unsuccessful. He ended up relaxing in the sun until the group finished and Joe drove back to pick him up.

Lee, John & Elliott decided that they would head home but the die-hards, Eric O, Shawn and Joe drove up to WV. They took a rest day on Thursday but then headed for an Upper Yough release on Friday. Ted Pablo and Jason Miller met them and showed Shawn down for his first Upper Yough run. All did well so the group headed up to the Stonycreek Riverfest.

Safety Lessons Learned

Throw lines are mandatory on dangerous rapids. Communication with the entire group is very important. If a throw line had been set up before people started into the staging eddy, the waterfall swim may have been prevented. We all carry throw lines, some carry spare paddles but few carry good medical kits, duct tape can be used for lots of emergency situations and is as valuable as a spare paddle.

Update on Bob's condition.

Both the doctors in SC and OH said that the fast action of splinting the break helped prevent the break from coming through the skin. Dawn got him home on Saturday but by the following Thursday they realized that Bob had a blood clot that needed to be treated, so back to the ER for injections of a clot dissolver. Dawn needed to give Bob two injections daily for the blood clot. The clot finally dissolved and he is now starting physical therapy. The doctor and Bob are hopeful that he will be kayaking in August, while Dawn is figuring out a way to destroy that "Bad Mojo" kayak.