

SOUTHERN RIVERS TRIP 2006

By Debbie Avallone and Pat Guzowski

This accounting of facts & tales recalls ten rivers in ten days, 2,178 road miles, new friends, adventures and a great time! Pat G. and I car pool for our first Southern River adventures.

Initial packing of two people into my CRV is not too bad really. There's even room for firewood. Pat reminds me that there are grocery stores in the south. No need to take chances. Pack plenty of food. South or bust!

First day's run is the Upper Meadow (800cfs). Group meets at Mabel's Diner. Part of the group is lost on the shuttle. The discovery is not made until we reach the takeout. John goes back. The poor crew got left behind in the parking lot. It's our 1st introduction to Kobak Boot Camp (at all times be ready to run).

The road to the takeout is a logging road by definition but it's really more a goat path than a road. The night's rain ensures there is plenty of mud tossed up onto the roofs. To ensure the full rearrangement of car contents...proceed slowly in low gear while dodging rocks & holes then....fly like the wind though the curves of hills & hollers when one reaches a cinder covered road. The roadside collection of rusty truck parts and old cars would indicate this is where old cars & trucks go to die. Rain stops just as we put on. A fun, creekly, river - perfect for the first day. Pat demonstrates a really cool prolonged (unintentional) stern squirt. Just for extra style points, he throws this squirt in the middle of a rapid. The bow stays in the air for a full 6 seconds before he throws it down (upside down) onto a boulder and proceeds several yards in the bottom-up position before demonstrating a hardy roll. 10 points for style!



John Kobak on the Meadow

Day 2 - the Nolichucky (1075cfs). Our mighty leader, invites the wrath of the River Gods by saying 'he does not swim'. Inevitably he is swimming the first rapid. Later at Quarter Mile Rapid, Rescue Weekend skills come in handy as Michael Duvall, Pat & Bob Nicholson extract me from a large boulder. It's a perfect scenario for this year's Rescue Rodeo.

Easter Sunday we have the Ocoee (1250cfs) all to ourselves. Not only aren't any rafts around this morning (normally it's a sea of rubber beasts) there are only a handful of kayakers. We all run Hell Hole, a large, intimidating hole by the power plant. Usually this hole is nearly inaccessible to all but the big-dogs. It's friendly enough once in there but, the line to play is usually so long, the players so good and the crowd of kayak groupies so thick that mere mortal boaters rarely play long. Today, there are only a few and they are friendly. It's so fun to actually get a few seconds of surf time.

A note from Pat G. inserted here. On one rapid on the Ocoee, Deb used her woman's prerogative to send me off to the left side "where the line was" and then she proceeded to scurry to the right. Hmmm.....What's wrong with this picture? I head halfway down the left side before getting back to the right, I still do not know what diabolical plan she had for me there!

On the way back up river to the Olympic Center visitor area we notice that there isn't any water in the riverbed. Rafts and kayakers are high & dry. A foul up in communication had lead to the water being temporarily turned off. As we walk around the Olympic Center I speculate about which rock removed the skin from my backside last year.



Santo on Cheoa



Marina - Steve - Doug in Tallulah Gorge

That evening our trip organizers are proud to see we've arrived at the destination with daylight to spare—Not getting lost, not even once! There's time to time to hike Tallulah Gorge - a steep rock valley with huge waterfalls. Rumor has it that there are 700 steps down to the suspension bridge and 700 back. The view proves to be worth every step. We make it back to camp just as the daylight runs out.

The Chattooga has a reputation for being an attention getting class IV run with fatal holes and undercuts. This is the river that broke Bob Nicholson's leg last year and where the movie Deliverance was filmed. The experienced paddlers say that 1.45 ft is perfect for a virgin run.

Early in the day our mighty leader jumps out on the rocks to point out a path through a relatively benign looking rapid. Our group is big. Can't quite hear what was said. No worries, everybody is making it though. Kris, just in front of me, gets tossed a bit so... I sit forward prepared to work, follow the path directed by the paddle and head over the drop. BIG MISTAKE. I've fallen into Woodall Shoals hole. No amount of forward paddling can overcome the backdraw of this hole. Flip, Flip, Flip, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, Stubby & his rider are window shaded with great vigor. No problem, I'm a practiced swimmer. Calmly, I pull the skirt. The boat is not willing to leave this enthusiastic hole. The paddle is removed from my hands and I am returning to the froth. Bye Stubby, see you later! I get a ride to the rocks. Eventually Santos & Marina retrieve Stubby. The paddle reappears. They all seem so worried. What's the big deal? Sure swimming is inconvenient and embarrassing but certainly not unheard of. John says "She missed the line by eight feet!" Apparently, the paddle was pointing to the EXACT spot to place ones boat, not a general direction. It's another two days before it is revealed that this hole kills people. Guess that explains the worried looks.

Another note from Pat inserted here. I purposely kept this little bit of info from Deb so as not to upset her fine flowing river Karma.



Mike at Seven Foot Falls



Bob at Seven Foot Falls

The next few hours are intense. Instructions at Cork Screw/Crack in the Rock are "You must roll. If it doesn't work in 2 rolls, pull the skirt and look for a rope". Ropes are set up. The rocks below are deadly undercuts. Geez, too bad there isn't anything exciting on this river. No swimmers here. We all walk Sock 'em Dog, the rapid that broke Bob's leg last year (just too boney). Bob surveys and takes pictures. We listen intently to the story of the swim, broken leg, masterful team rescue and trip to the hospital. Around one corner on the long flat paddle out, our team is piling kayaks up on the shore to gain access to a rope swing. YEA!!! Weeeeeee. SPLASH! Just what my poor tortured nerves need!!



Steve at Raven's Rock



Pat at Corkscrew



Doug at Corkscrew



Marina at Jaw Bone

Some of the group heads to the Pigeon others to the Cranberry & Williams. A senior member of our little group runs a creek section of the Williams upside down, then sideways, then upside down again. Oh, ouch, yikes. SWIM. Bump, bump bump. A few strategically applied steri-strips put him back together again. Proof exists in photo form and may be had for just the right price.

Day 8 the plan is to meet Doug, Steve, Marina, Tom & Lee in the afternoon for a 2nd run on the Middle Fork (4.0') & Tygart (5.6'). When they return with bruises, bloody knuckles, harrowing stories of 5 swims and a lost paddle (with pogies). I graciously volunteer Pat & I to scout the upper area of the Middle Fork while our battered comrades rest & recover. The poor gentlemen in our group just hate having to see the Spring Break teens warming themselves in the sun & working their bikini tans.

The river above Audra State Park is a nice Class II-III run, something along the lines of the Casselman or Cheat Narrows. Plenty of CFS to keep us moving on the flat stretches. The river even has a few areas to stop & surf. That evening we meet Bill Michaud & his friend Paul. Bill is an experienced open boater with more than 350 days on the Grand Canyon. We make plans to paddle together the next day. Not only are they experienced Tygart runners, they have a key to a private takeout which eliminates the dreaded railroad track walk out.

The Tygart is down (3.7', 4.8), the shuttle short, the experienced group is strong and we have a key to the secret takeout. Happy day! Two hours after the intrepid shuttle crew left for the 20min shuttle we conclude something is amiss. A drive to the secret shuttle finds three very muddy, hot, tired shuttlers emerging from the road. ALL THREE 4WD vehicles are stuck To The HUBS in the mud. A farmer with a tractor & tire chains pulls the team from the slimy mud. Mud covers every body and every thing. By the end of the day our swim count is 4 without any, blood, bruises or lost items.

We head to Teeters in hopes of catching Steve Ingalls' trip in the morning. Pulled in after dark in the rain glad to find a few hardy souls huddled under Rick Collins' new rain cover. A special thanks to Mr. Collins for putting up with whiny, bitchy, tired Pat G's plea to use Rick's vehicle to string a tarp only to change his mind and just set up his cot under Rick's canopy. The group of about 12-15 includes people not seen for a year or more. Catherine Curly is there with her new husband. The Dry Fork of the Cheat is at a perfect level both days (2500? CFS). Play, play, play all day for two days it's a surf fest.

We head home dirty, smelly and happy as kids at Christmas. What an excellent week! 10 rivers in 10 days. Met nice people. Paddled great rivers. Thanks to all who showed us the lines and paddled at the back with the nubies.

Pictures by Jeff Macklin