

Annual Southern Trip

By John Kobak

Right after the movie *Deliverance*, a group of Keel-Haulers decided to head down to the Smoky Mountains in the summer of 1973 to see what these rivers were really like. We all met up at the Nantahala to get started, the Ocoee was not paddlable in those days because of the power dams.

We drove over to the Chattooga River which we heard had 4 sections ending in Lake Tugaloo. Dean Norman, still in the club, started on Section 1 with a small group. This section has lots of waterfalls and is now closed to all paddlers.

Our large group tried Section 2 which was mostly flat water. The next day we gave Section 3 a shot, led by a park ranger who saw us safely down the class III section culminating at the class IV Bull Sluice. Peggy & I paddled both sections in our decked C-2.

The next day a more daring group decided to paddle section 4 at about a 2' level. Paddlers like Hank Annable, Jim Botamer, Chuck Singer and me prayed that we wouldn't meet any mountain men like in the movie. It was a very tough section considering our experience level and boat designs at that time. In fact Chuck broke his kayak in half at Woodall Shoals and had to walk out. The rest of our group made it to the takeout after saving a rafter from drowning at Crack-In-the-Rock in the Five Falls area.

We were hooked, over the next 38 years we probably only missed doing this trip 5 times. There are some of our recent trip reports on our website. <http://www.keelhauler.org/khcc/Oldsouthtrips.htm> Many of these trips had 20-30 paddlers of all skill levels.

For the past 3 years this trip had sort of petered out. Weather, gas prices, and other reasons have all entered into the equation. This year the club had two Southern trips, the March trip led by Jim Murtha had a great time and camped at Tim Gill's cabin, near the Chattooga. I think they had 6 paddlers.



We had 8 paddlers in 4 cars for our warm Easter trip; **Bob Weible & Jim Hunt; Michael Duvall & me; Jeff Macklin & Carolyn DeVenney; Carl & Donna Homberg.** The Hombergs, Hunt and DeVenney were new to these Southern trips.

Our original plan was to start on the Upper Meadow River near the Gauley in WV. We all met at the campground below Summersville Dam, several other groups of paddlers had rolled in overnight and

were also looking to paddle in the area. We checked the river gauges and weather. The Meadow was now too low and a very heavy rain would make paddling not a lot of fun on the Lower Gauley.



Carl Homberg

So we hit the road for Erwin, TN. We decided to get a campsite at the Nolichucky take-out and then immediately head up to the put-in over the mountain in NC.



Lunch Stop

The weather had warmed to the high 70's and it was sunny. Even better the river was running at 2000cfs which is a nice medium level covering all the small rocks, yet not making the hydraulics too large. This was a nice warm-up, with everyone having great runs for their first outing of the season. We found a nice family restaurant North of Erwin at the Unicoi exit called Maple Grove.

A check of the river gauges check showed that the Tellico River was about 380 CFS and the air temperatures were going to be in the 80's. We got on the road about 8 AM for the 3-½ Hr. drive to this little trout stream just north of the Ocoee.

Carl and Donna said they would feel more comfortable on the lower river below Jared's Knee, so I paddled with them while our other 5 tackled the ledges section. I believe they all had good runs at Baby Falls after portaging past a large tree just above the falls. The Eric Jackson family paddled with them on this section.



Jim Hunt - Tellico Ledges

We then hit the road for the Ocoee with a traditional stop at El Rio restaurant in Copper Hill. The NF Thunder Rock campground had plenty of room for the night.



Bob Weible on the Ocoee

Easter morning has always been a good time to paddle the Ocoee. All the good Southern Christians are at church and we had the river to ourselves with a 10 AM put-in. The flume has been broken so they have been releasing daily, the flow today was about 1600 cfs, and as usual one paddler had some trouble getting stuck in the hydraulic at Broken Nose. We quickly got on our way and were off the river heading to Tim Gill's cabin near Clayton, GA by 1 PM. We did some grocery shopping along the way and finally decided to have a little cook-out for a change.



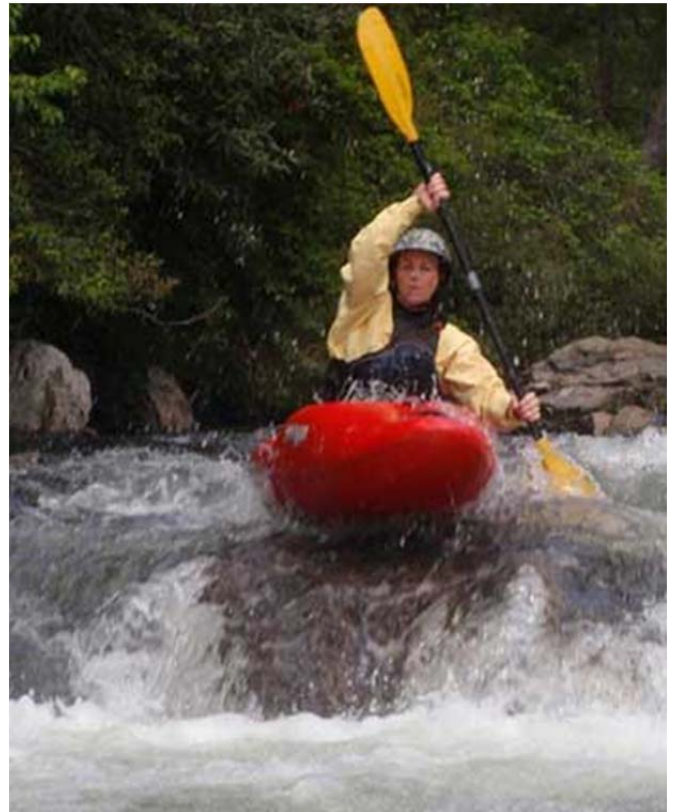
Tim's Cabin (Warwoman Waldorf) near Clayton, GA

Tim had left the cabin open for us, so we made ourselves at home. The Chattooga has been running a little over 2' so everyone thought that it might be a good idea to try Section 3 first. It has been 12 years since I paddled Section 3. We decided to cut 3 miles off the run and start at Sandy Ford on the GA side of the river. It was an easy shuttle aided by Tim. You can drive right down to the water and with the higher water level it only took us 3 hrs. to get to Bull Sluice, the last rapid on Section 3. There were a bunch of rafts and duckies scouting when we got there. The extra water allowed for a SC sneak line or a double boof over decapitation rock. Paddlers tried both routes.



John Shoots the Bull

We got a localized hard rain overnight but were surprised that the Chattooga water level had stayed about the same. Donna came down with an illness and they decided to call it a week and started for home. Tim had to work but his 21 yr. old daughter Tiffany and her friend Nate joined us for our paddle on Section 4.



Carolyn



Everything was going great until just before our lunch stop at Raven's Rock. When we passed Stekoa Creek that flows out of Clayton, it was roaring, adding about 300 CFS to the Chattooga. The level was noticeable higher at Raven's.

When I pulled into the eddy above the first drop of Five Falls I couldn't even see the rock that is on the left side of the straight forward drop. Nate ran the drop staying close to right side and then set safety for the rest, Bob tries a slightly different line and almost back ended into the hole. Michael was the only other one to try. The rest of us walked the drop. I knew right away that I wasn't even going to look at Corkscrew so I took the right hand sneak and set up a throw line for anyone running it. Nate runs OK but flips next to the wall but rolls OK. Everyone else then decides to sneak as well..

At Crack-in-the-Rock we all take the far right sneak. I set up a throw line below Jaw Bone but when everybody saw the fast water flowing right into Hydroelectric Rock they all walked down from the left side staging eddy. Almost all ran the Puppy Chute on the left side of the Dog. I walked that one also.



Michael runs the Puppy

The rest of the rapids to the lake were almost uneventful. It turns out that Tugaloo Lake is 4' below normal, so we got one extra rapid to run. Of course I got stuck in the last hydraulic but quickly ended out. The 40 min paddle across the shallow lake was

interesting; we saw lots of big sand beaches, turtles and sand bars that would make it impassable for power boats to make it up the lake.

We ate out at Mama G's in Clayton which has great Italian food. We watched the TV weather report about the severe storms heading our way. We decided that our best option was to either head back to the Nolichucky or go all the way to the Tygart in WV. The morning reports predicted storms across TN so Jim & Bob decided to head all the way home. The remaining four of us decided to head up to Audra State Park on the Middle Fork in WV. Little did we know that a few hours after we passed near Dillard, GA and Johnson City, TN that a few tornados would pass by our route? These were the same storms that killed hundreds of people in Mississippi and Alabama.

The gauges on the Tygart looked OK for a Thursday paddle if we didn't get a lot of rain. I put out a rain gauge and marked the water level in the river. It rained hard that night and we got almost an inch of rain. The Middle Fork was on its way up and with that kind of rain we were concerned what the main Tygart level would be when we reached the confluence with the MF. After a short discussion we decide the safe decision would be to paddle the 5 mi stretch upstream and take out where we camped. None of us had run this stretch before but even with the MF running close to 5' it was an easy Class III run. It was scenic and worth the paddle. It would be a good training section like the lower Slippery Rock.

We all packed up and headed home since everything in Northern WV that we were familiar with was already too high and still rising. It was a great trip and we finally got to paddle in warm sunny weather wearing short sleeve paddling jackets. We had no problems and it was a really fun week with really good friends.

Jeff Macklin took most of the photos that are posted here. If you want to view hundreds more that he took on the trip go to his SmugMug photo page for April 2011.

<http://jeffmacklin.smugmug.com/Whitewater/2011>

