

Southern Rivers 2013

By Michael Duvall

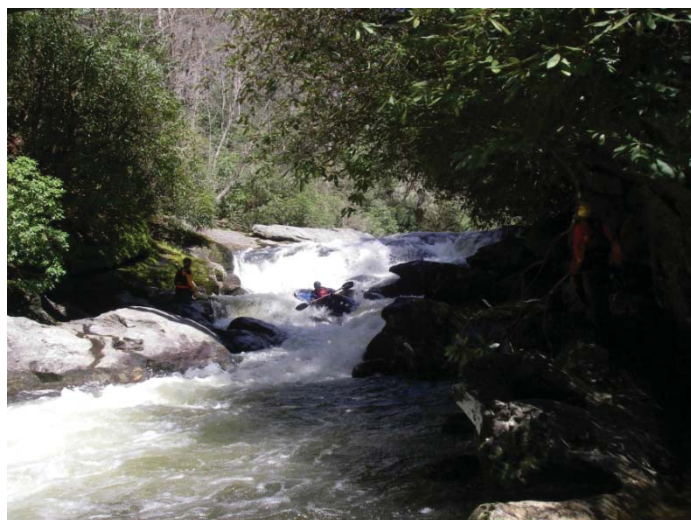
“One of the best!” “Hit some real gems of Southern Appalachia”

This year’s trip started with a bang – of thunder and a huge downpour. The plan was to meet Jeff Cramer and Joe Marks at the campground at the Nolichucky Friday morning but a huge storm moved in overnight and caused the Noli to go from around 2000 cfs to near 10,000 cfs. The campground manager who is often a pain warned us that if we didn’t leave the camp in a hurry we might be stuck there because the water level was nearing the access road.

High water eliminated two of the standards of previous Southern trips, the Nolichucky and section 4 of the Chattooga. However when one door closes another one opens. Friday Hugh Barrow was going to join us on the Nolichucky but suggested the Big Laurel into Section 9 of the French Broad. We met at the take out in Hot Springs NC. When we got there Hugh was talking to some of the local raft guides that had just run a local little stream, Spring Creek. It was a lot of fun and a good warm up for me because I had not paddled much this spring. After that we went on to paddle the Big Laurel and French Broad as planned.



Big Laurel



Joe Marks- first drop of Section Zero

That night we hooked up with Bill Warble at the Tallulah Fest and camped next to Jeff Prycl, Seth Burdett and the TRPC crew. Saturday morning we joined them on Section Zero of the Chattooga. This section has been closed to kayaking for 30 years so this was a chance of a lifetime. The level was minimum but started off with some big drops then flattened out towards the end. In the flat section a ranger pulled us over and asked for our permits. He was kind enough to let us fill out permits on the spot with a warning instead of a \$50 ticket each.

Sunday we went to the Tallulah Gorge with 825 cfs which is higher than the 500 on Saturdays and the 700 for Sundays. After descending the 500+ steps you launch into the first rapid, Tanner, which calls for a wave boof to avoid a hole. Next is the largest rapid in the gorge, Oceania. I walked that one and waited for the others at the bottom. When I got there I met Joe swimming out of the eddy hole. When he got back in his boat he noticed that his paddle was broken so he was provided a breakdown to finish the run. I had a bad day myself with two swims when I got trashed in holes. I thought this was harder than the Upper Gauley at this level.

Monday it was just Bill, Jeff, and myself. Joe left because he needed to save himself for his upcoming Grand Canyon trip. We were determined to hit as many of the best runs before they got too low so we headed to the Little near Gatlinburg Tn. from the Sinks to Elbow in the morning. We had some incidents at the ledges leading to the Sinks that concluded with Bill breaking his wood paddle. Later that afternoon we ran the Tellico, Ledges to Jared’s knee. Tuesday we did two laps on the Doe.

Wednesday we got some rain and called Hugh for guidance. He said he could join us on Wilson Creek in NC. It was coming up so our first lap was at -.2 and our second lap was zero. We said thanks and good bye to Hugh and headed to Teeters in West Virginia looking for something to paddle on the way home.



Jeff at Elbow on the Doe



Bill at Body Snatcher on the Doe



Michael on Wilson

Thursday Bill dropped off his broken paddle with Jim Snyder and picked up a new one he had on order. Then it was off to the Lower Big Sandy for a quick run at 5.6 ft. There Jeff got his first run of Big Splat and it was perfect. After that, we all headed for home with fond memories of a great Southern Rivers trip.