

Jarbidge/Bruneau - 1400-1600 cfs

By Tom Swafford

Our group consisted of 10 guys R2ing 5 Spiders. These, and AIRE Puma's, are the BEST boats for the Jarbidge. Nice and narrow but with no oars to get in the way at 'The Maze' and 'The Jollies'. These are III+/IV (depending on flow) rock gardens above Jarbidge Falls and require QUICK maneuvering to avoid pins and wraps. This year the flows (Bruneau gage) when we started were 1400 and came up to 1600 at the takeout. Higher flows are desirable but not necessary.

Anyway, like everyone says, the first few miles are undefined swiftwater with small II-III boulder dodges. Sevy Falls is the first rapid of any consequence. Two routes are available. A relatively easy portage, no unpacking necessary, on the left bank over the logjam, a few boulders and back into the water below the main drop. If the water is below 1500 cfs the bottom of the rapid is rocky. The second choice is to run the rapid which isn't as bad as it looks. River right chute that bends left below the logjam. Do a good scout to verify there are no logs jutting out of the bottom of the logjam into the main current and that the run-out is log free. Following Sevy is Wally's Wallow. Another rapid that is easier than it looks. It starts with some rock dodging prior to the first drop into a slack area above the main drop. Two choices follow. If the center chute between two house rocks is clear of logs you can go that way. I've never seen it clear enough to use. The right chute along the bank and around the right side house rock is always clear and straightforward. Careful of the logs choking the center chute that usually protrude out the bottom. This year the center chute was clear except for on large log sticking up from downstream directly into the middle of the chute. A little disconcerting as you drop of into the slack water but easily avoided (at that level) as you go around the house rock and on down the right chute. The run-out is rocky at this flow.

Next challenge is The Maze followed by The Jollies. These come close together and about a mile above Jarbidge Falls. Having read one report of a group spending the night on the portage trail at Jarbidge Falls I'd like to point out a pretty good campsite on river right on the right bend immediately below The Maze. If it's mid-afternoon or later I suggest using it as it's the last camp before Jarbidge falls. The Maze is 200 yards of bank to bank ferries (not all that bad as the river is pretty narrow), narrow chutes and fast spins. By the time you're done the heart rate is up. I pinned and nearly wrapped on a boulder near the bottom of this rapid. Bad feeling when you're running sweep. The Jollies are more of the same with more room to move around in and a couple of small drops thrown in for fun.

Jarbidge Falls is next and much has been written about it. Make sure you make the left eddy above the rapid. It's easy to see as the river appears to disappear around a HUGE boulder. There is a class III boulder garden immediately above it but the current slows dramatically as it goes around the HUGE boulder to the left. Pretty easy to get into in all but the highest flows. I'd stop on river left above the boulder garden in really high water (above 2500 cfs on the Bruneau gage) and take a look at it. There's room in the eddy for all but the largest parties but float down to it one at a time to prevent a cluster foxtrot from occurring above a REALLY nasty looking rapid. Parts of it are runnable but parts are definitely not. Specifically, one ugly undercut on the right near the top. One pair of crazies on this trip tried to run the lower 2/3 and ended up swimming after a pin/flip at an innocuous looking pillow on the right bank that should've been no problem. This rapid does not do what you'd think it should. We ended up lining the other four boats down the left bank fully loaded. Only attempt a loaded lining if you've got extra hands. We had 6-8 big, hairy studs directly involved in each boat's progress and needed them all. Also, if you're considering lining boats, get your commands and communications down before pushing boats away from the bank. You'll be glad you did. Last year with only two boats and four paddlers we opted for the full-blown portage for safety's sake. The year before I discovered why boats with bottoms have an advantage here. While lining my 14' cat we almost had it ripped out of our hands a couple of

times when pushing it out from the bank, around a boulder and down a chute was required. As the current caught the exposed, angled tubes it tried to pull it out of your hands. That same current tends to exert less force on a raft as it flows under the floor and doesn't see a jutting tube face. Also, 1/2" Pro line (two 75 footers is nice) is recommended as it's easier on the hands. 1/4" or 3/8" throw bags are not quite enough. One boat (mine) on this trip got flipped while lining and wedged between a house rock and log on the right side about halfway down the rapid. It initially looked BAD but a few hard pulls on a lining rope across the current got it out and wedged in another chute. At least this one was on the left bank where my 'buddies' could flip it back over on top of me while I pulled from downstream. My pals. I think I'll shoot 'em. Everybody ran the lower 1/3 of the rapid and we went on down to the Bruneau.

The Bruneau was as it always is. Beautiful and lots of fun. The character of the trip changes at the Bruneau. The swift, eddyless, narrow stream where you're constantly on the lookout for Mr. Log is replaced with a great pool/drop river through a fabulous hoodoo laced canyon. The rapids are fun but risk free. Campsites are harder to come by mainly due to the higher traffic. Take what you can get and avoid the weekend run if you can. Five Mile Rapid is a gas. Low water rock gardens or high water hole avoidance. Either way, it's a blast. It's actually about a mile and a half of fairly continuous whitewater with slightly slacker water between the real rapids. After the canyon there are a couple of widely separated class II-III wave trains followed by the last rapid on this river system, Wild Burro. At higher water the left side is runnable but rocky at the lower flows. The right side chute against a left bending cliff is generally open and fun followed by 200 yards of busy water. Check for logs if the river's been up. Great camp immediately below the busy water on the inside of a right bend in the river.

Don't let the Jarbidge intimidate you because of the mandatory portage/lining or presumed difficulty. If you can do the Middle Fork, have a small, narrow raft and like a challenge it's worth the extra work. I've also had friends with intermediate skills run this system in inflatable kayaks, at this and higher flows, and they had a blast. Do be prepared for equipment failures or injuries. Updated CPR and 1st Aid skills are just plain common sense and nice to have when you don't really need them but might. There's not a lot of traffic on the Jarbidge (I've NEVER seen another raft on it except in pictures) so don't depend on someone else to pull your bacon out of the pan and have FUN.