

# Selway River June 23, 1999

*By Hans Chambers*

Jerry Schwantes from Seattle drew a Selway permit for June 23. Several Seattle area boaters would join Jerry's trip. Bill Smith would help decipher river flows and do the leading once on the river. The other Seattle boaters were Bill Gibson, Eric Landen, Jeff Cline, Mark Gould and myself. Ken Scott from Cashmere and Vince Thompson and Ken Wiesmore from Idaho rounded out the trip.

The melt was late in coming to Idaho this year. The Selway trip was in danger of being cancelled because of high water. Anything over 6' on the Paradise gauge is considered pretty dangerous. The outfitters had just flown a group off the river when it spiked at over 6' so Bill Smith and Jerry were watching the flows closely.

## **Lochsa**

I decided to stick to the original plan and run the Lochsa on the way to the Selway. I arrived at 3 Rivers Resort on Sunday, June 20. I drove up to Selway falls and was really impressed with the volume of water coming through there. It was huge. The gauge at Paradise was running about 6' at the time.

Vince Thompson and Ken Wiesmore joined me at 3 Rivers to run the Lochsa. Vince drives a bright orange Sotar cat and Ken paddles an open canoe. Ken has a reputation in Idaho for running tough water with his canoe and he had run the Selway 3 times before. Vince had run the Selway the year before and was looking for a higher water run this year.

The next day, Monday, the three of us scouted the Lochsa and talked to commercial guides at 3 Rivers that were running the river that day. Vince and I really couldn't spot a line at Lochsa Falls. The gauge at the bridge said 6' and the back-curler at the bottom of Lochsa Falls looked like an automatic flip. The commercials were running a sneak route on the left but Vince and I weren't sure we could pick out landmarks to hit the sneak route.

While scouting we met Scott, a kayaker from Wyoming waiting for some buds to show up to run with him. Scott was taking the Summer off to Kayak the West before starting a PHD program at the University of Washington. He was still waiting when we came back to run so he decided to run with us. Scott was so solid on the river that we invited him to join us on the Selway. He was a great addition.

The four of us started down the Lochsa. We ran the lower section only because the commercials said the upper was too tough at 6'. We didn't have any trouble. After a few minutes of settling in and seeing how the others ran, we ran like we'd been boating together for years. When you have an open canoe in class 4 at high water it needs to be bailed after every rapid. This gave Vince and myself a little practice hitting eddies and was a welcome break.

When we got to Lochsa Falls we eddied out and talked about how to run it. We still hadn't made up our minds and since we'd be in it in 30 seconds, it was probably time to make up our minds. Vince was for running it right down the tongue into the back curler. There was a nice place to re-flip below the rapid so why not. Scott the kayaker said I might get surfed in there. I agreed with him.

I left the eddy with Vince right behind me. Since we had decided to run it down the gut there wasn't much to do except look at the falls coming up. The back curler that had looked like a flipper from the road was HUGE when looked at from the water. I drive a 15-1/2 Sotar cat that has stumbled through some amazing spots but I didn't know if I could get through the wave or not. I pushed like crazy as I slid down the tongue toward it. Just as I started to rise up on the wave it

broke and absolutely douched me. It started to surf and I headed for the footbar. Then the boat turned and side-surfed a bit and then turned again and I was on the footbar, front surfing.

This was not good. Poor Vince was heading right into this on a smaller boat. Quite a gut check. The wave released me and reformed. Vince pushed hard sliding down the tongue and made it over the wave with no problem at all. Why didn't it break on him?

It was time for congratulations and letting the Adrenaline burn itself out. We rehashed that rapid 50 times in the next few days. Mark Gould and Ken Scott joined us at 3 Rivers for dinner. Scott the kayaker decided to join us for the Selway. Now we were a team of 6. The others coming from Seattle would be meeting us at the Selway putin.

### **Selway putin**

We threw my boat and gear in Vince's rig for the 6 or 7 hour drive to the Selway putin. The four of us and our equipment pretty well filled Vince's Suburban and trailer. The weather was miserable with rain off and on and very threatening clouds in all directions. It looked like we would get dumped on for our four days on the Selway.

We stopped at the store in Darby for some last minute shopping and headed for the West Fork Ranger station to add Scott to the permit and drop off some flowers to thank Linda and Nancy for answering our dozens of questions about the flow for past week or two. We got to the putin and set up camp about 4 pm. The weather was starting to look better. The others from Seattle arrived later that night. The next morning we checked the gauge and it said 4.7'. Our shuttle was handled by Marvin Smith from Darby and went off without a hitch. We launched under beautiful sunny skies about noon and headed for our first camp. The river was tight and rocky but pretty comfortable for small river boaters from Washington.

We had two days of easy boating before the Moose Creek section.

### **Moose Creek**

Thursday afternoon we camped at Tony Point at the head of Moose Creek Canyon. We hiked the trail past "Double Drop" and "Ladle" and "Little Niagara". The water level had been steadily dropping since we put on and was probably about 4' now. We went back to camp after seeing a few rattle snakes and with routes through "Ladle" burned into our brains.

Back at camp it started raining and continued to pour all night. Some of the people on the trip were hoping for a higher water run and it looked like they were getting their wish. Remember your mother telling you to be careful what you wished for because you might get it? Mom was right. Friday morning it was still raining and the river was up a foot or so and rising. I was surprised when the group decided to run instead of laying over a day.

### **Moose Juice**

We headed down river with Bill Smith leading and Vince and me trailing the others. Vince had run the river before and I was going to follow his line, unless he flipped of course. At "Double Drop" I saw Mark Gould's cat barrel roll on the lateral wave and we started chasing it. Ken Scott, Vince and myself were chasing down Mark's raft. We came past the rest of the group eddied out above "Ladle" but we were in full chase mode and just blasted on through. After all this still is just class 4 water, right. We headed into "Ladle" and Ken immediately flipped. Now Vince and I were chasing two boats but only one person because Mark had gotten himself to an eddy and climbed out of the river. We kept chasing Ken and his upside down cat. We chased through "Ladle" and "Little Niagara" where Ken went right over the center pour-over and Mark's cat went over the left side and got stuck in the hole at the base of the falls. We finally got Ken's cat into an eddy after running some epic holes and waves. In one hole my cat did a tail stand for about 3 seconds, 3 very long seconds.

As we are sitting in the eddy we notice Eric's raft floating by upside down with Bill Smith chasing it. Vince pulled out to help chase the raft. I stayed with Ken and his cat. Jerry joined us shortly and we re-flipped his cat. We then were joined by Eric Landen who walked up to us from the

hillside. It was Eric's raft that had floated by. After a group discussion, we all headed downstream to join Vince and Bill. None of us knew what had happened to the others but there wasn't anything we were going to do to help them from downstream. We just had to have faith in their abilities and not do anything to split the group further.

### **After the chase**

Bill and Vince caught the raft and tried several times to get it stopped but they couldn't get it to stay put. Finally they gave up. A heavily loaded and upside down raft travels faster than a catboat.

We caught up with Bill and Vince on an island in the river. Now there were 6 of us on the island and 5 guys upstream somewhere. Eric wanted to take off hiking after his raft but we convinced him to stay with us. His raft was traveling a lot faster than Eric could walk. We knew there was a guided group downstream from us but we didn't think they would be likely to even see the raft, let alone pull it over. We expected the raft to do a run of Selway Falls and maybe get all the way to the Clearwater or even the Snake. We had lots of thoughts on what would happen to Eric's raft but Eric wasn't enjoying the discussion. I think the favorite thought was that his raft was going to get caught in a turbine in a dam on the Snake causing a blackout of Oregon, Washington and Idaho. This would result in Eric being sued for a few billion dollars and possibly prosecuted as an eco-terrorist for cleverly destroying the turbine with his boat. Like I said, Eric wasn't enjoying the discussion.

We were getting comfortable on the island, setting up chairs and eating lunch when the rest of our group showed up. We were all really glad to be reunited. Everyone was fine after their adventures at "Ladle".

Ken Wiesmore, the canoeist had recovered Mark's cat from below "Little Niagara", re-flipped it and ferried it across the river. This was Ken's first time rowing. The group then lined 2 boats through the top of "Ladle" and then, to hurry the process up, Ken rowed one of the rafts through the bottom of "Ladle" and delivered it below the tough section. This was Ken's second time rowing. Ken is a handy guy to have on a trip.

Mark had climbed into Eric's raft after his flip at "Double Drop". He was with Eric when they flipped in "Ladle". Mark had an interesting morning. He swam twice in 20 minutes.

### **Last Camp**

We continued downstream and camped for the night. We had just finished a really exciting day on the water and with the exception of the lost raft, everything had worked out fine. We had video cameras going for a lot of the trip and spent Friday night looking at the two flips that we got on video. Eric headed off downstream on the trail to see if he could find his boat or at least call the shuttle people and have his keys locked in another car. Eric's spare keys were on the raft. The next morning we broke camp and headed for the takeout. We had only gone about a mile when we saw Eric with his raft. The outfitters from Three Rivers Resort had corralled his boat. Eric had walked into their camp the night before to find his boat with most of his gear intact. We stopped to scout "Wolf creek" but after Friday, riding the flush through Moose Creek Canyon, the river seemed pretty tame. Vince and I took a run right down the center and actually it was pretty boring.

It was a great trip with a good bunch of boaters. I want to get back to the Selway as often as I can. I'd like to see "The Moose" at a little higher water. Not a lot higher, just a little higher.