

Winter Boating in Washington

I had an opportunity to float the Skykomish and Green Rivers near Seattle the weekend of December 11 & 12 with local expert Boater Hans Chambers. We hit the crest of a wave on both rivers as they were quickly climbing to flood stage. The Sky was a fun river at 8,000 cfs with a gnarly class IV+ rapid in Bolder Drop. The cat in front of me did a spectacular straight up launch and back flip in the ledge hole at the bottom of Bolder Drop. It was a very impressive, sticky hole.

When we hit the Green it had climbed to 4460 cfs and had been raining all morning which had inflows on the tributaries at large volumes. The Green was chocolate brown, with very few and quite small eddies. The water was big, powerful and flowing through the brush and trees. The quarter mile section between Mercury, Nozzle and Lets Make a Deal earned a respectable Class V at those flows. Two trip reports are available by Hans chambers and Chuck Morgan. What an exceptional adventure!

Vince

SF Payette-Canyon

I ran the "Canyon" at 1450cfs on 8-15-99. It is a wonderful run through that canyon. The put in at Deadwood campground was quite congested and I would suggest that class IV kayakers and Catarafters put in 3 miles up the Deadwood river when flows are above 700 cfs. The 'bottom 3' of the Deadwood is a continuous class III+ to VI warm up. Big Falls was congested as well. We dropped the cats in above the last drop to watch the carnage as we lined them through. My 12.5' Sotar did a 5 second, perfectly vertical tail stand. Man would that have been a ride. The 14' cat went over the drop and just disappeared for about 10 seconds. I caught some great air surfing a small hole below Blackadar rapid. Little Falls and Surprise were great fun too!

Vince

Deadwood River

Jerry Kiser, the Boicatr and I did an overnighter on the Deadwood River at 900 cfs on August 21 & 22. This is a truly wilderness run through roadless, trailless, primitive country. The Deadwood used to be considered two runs, the Upper and the Lower, but the road closure to the Julie Creek campground requires that the entire 23 miles be run as one. The upper 14 miles drops 83' per mile while the lower 9 miles drops 67 feet per mile. The Deadwood gets its name from the vast amounts of logs which can and will congest the river. The flood of January 1997 had a very clearing effect on the river removing many logs. We noticed several new logs jammed up over our previous run and you should expect more on future runs. Stay very alert and be prepared to portage. (We had four).

We got on the water at about 2pm after the long shuttle over 7,800' Deadwood Pass. Paddler Magazine called this one of the 10 worst shuttles in the country. Although I think their info was outdated 2 years ago when they printed that. The road is ok but it's quite a climb and caused the tailpipe to brake off the back of my muffler. The put in is at the road bridge below Deadwood Dam. The road follows the river on the left for about a mile. The next road is 19 miles downstream. The river starts off with 3-4 miles of class II-III water which is quite fast.

Logjam Rapid

One was just right, one was too big and one was too small...

At mile 4, the class V Logjam Rapid looms below the horizon line. Eddy right to scout. We took a good look at the rapid from below the entire right side of the rapid is clogged with logs and all the water flows left. Boicatr decided he could squeeze his 14' cat between the huge boulder and the nasty protruding log in the middle of the flow. I set up safety on a midstream boulder below. He

hugged the rock, narrowly missed the log with his tube and dropped the 10-12' down the pour over for a clean run. Jerry decided to try his luck in his 15.5' cat. Same entry but the bigger boat didn't have as much room to maneuver the tight squeeze and he caught his left tube tip on the log. The right tube of the boat dropped straight down and Jerry was dumped from the vertical, sideways cat in an instant. The boat dropped down and somehow managed to stay upright. I was 20 yards downstream ready with the rope. Jerry quickly grabbed the boat by the outside safety line, then grabbed the oar stand and in a move that would have made spider man proud, climbed the tube and mounted the seat before the boat traveled the 20 yards to my station. The water is quite swift here and after the midstream boulder I was on is another class IV rapid. Not a good place to swim.
more to come...

What Have I been up to:

7-12-99

I've had a chance to do some awesome Big water paddling this year along with some great technical rivers in beautiful parts of Idaho. Last weekend we made a first descent (?) in cataracts down the **Goat Creek run of the SF Salmon**. An Awesome class IV river with the class V double drop to contend with. There was one portage across a river wide log about a mile below Double Drop. Next we ran the class V upper East Fork South Fork Salmon- Fright Stimulator run. It was double awesome and included a 1/2 mile long class V rapid. The lower EFSF is 6 miles of continuous class IV+ water and 6 miles of III-IV water. Surf city. We followed that with a quick run down the lower 5 miles of the Secesh river. 4 miles of II-III (boney at 4.2' Krassel) followed by a mile and a half of class III+ water with 1 class IV ledge.

The week before I was on the **Selway** between 4.2 and 5'. Also got in runs on the SF Payette at 8,000 and Main at 13,200 cfs that week. The SF Payette had the whale rock under water and some huge waves in Staircase and Slalom. The Big hole in Slalom was washed out at that flow. AMF rapid on the main about ate my lunch. A raft bumped me from behind so I moved over and let them pass and hit the hole on the left. I was looking straight up, climbing up my frame before the Sotar eased forward again. Then we hit a day on the Lochsa at 6'. Lochsa Falls was a huge wall of water at that flow but managed to get through it ok after watching my fellow cater Hans get thoroughly trashed in the hole for about a minute.

Lets see, hit the Murtaugh between 12,300 and 17,000. Actually it was more fun at 12k then 17k. But you got to love the wall of water behind door number 3 at 17,000 cfs. The boicatr got loosened from his seat a bit going through which got my adrenaline pumping enough to push through ok.

Launched on Marsh creek May 22rd for 5 days on the **Middle Fork**. Flow was 5.2' at put in and 7.4' when we took off. See the photo above of my run through Dagger Falls. It was not the usual pristine MF Salmon most folks recognize. It was a chocolate torrent full of lumber and with few places to stop and rest. Pistol Creek was my nemesis but a quick move and backwards exit kept me off the wall. We made the last 7-8 miles from lower cliff side to the confluence in 40 minutes. Both Haystack and House rock were under water. Most people agree that the new gauge is reading about a half a foot lower then the old gauge.

North Fork Payette

7-24-99

by Vince Thompson

It was my 8th new run of '99, just two months before my 46th birthday when I made my 1st AND second runs down the North Fork Payette. The North Fork "Lower 7" was the only real goal I had for '99. I'd done a lot to mentally and physically prepare myself for rapids the likes of "Screaming

Left, Jaws, Hounds Tooth, Juicer and Crunch". I'd recently run the South Fork Salmon, Dagger Falls on the Middle Fork, the Upper EFSF Salmon "Fright Stimulator" and a cataraft first descent down the Goat Creek run of the South Salmon. I joined Jerry Kiser and the Boicatr who have over 140 North Fork runs (various stretches) between them in catarafts. Good company to be in, yet I was nervous as a cat about the North Fork. It's one heart pounding, thumping river.

The flow was 1550 cfs (7' on the Otter Gauge), the lower end of the fun scale by expert standards. Just right for a first run by my standards. We scouted on the way up to the put in 7 miles north of Banks. Within a few hundred yards you enter "Screaming Left". The trick is to enter center right and continue to drift to the outside before cutting left of the rock on river right at the turn. Just avoiding this rock will hopefully put you right and out of harms way of the log that crosses the left side of the river, and just to the left of the ugly fan rock

Up next was Jaws.

I came over Jaws 1 a little sideways and had to do a quick highside as the boat rocketed up and out of the hole. The river continued its constant pounding through Jaws 2 & 3. Two miles downstream from the put in you encounter Hounds Tooth (or Bunny ears as Ryan Hoek calls it). Two big bicuspid divide the river into thirds. The move is to enter center close to the right rock with your boat at about eleven o'clock hitting the lateral below square. But alas, I was at about ten o'clock... again a quick highside as the boat rocketed upward and out of the hole. Dang, I was making a habit out of that move. The boat was still upright and I was settled back in the seat. My right oar had suffered a North Fork shark attack and had a piece of the blade missing.

Next is 2 miles of class IV water with a few good surf holes, then a pause as the river bends right under the road. There you will see the otter gauge on river right. Otters Slide follows with more fun class IV water. A mile or less down river is Juicer. The line is right of center but not too far right. The river is quite narrow here and it is easy to get into the right bank. I had a great run through the long wave train and avoided the large center left hole at the bottom. Sweet!

I was feeling more comfortable about my run now! Just Crunch to go and I was home free. Again, the entry was right of center at top, then right between the two tight boulders 20 yards below. OK I had it, then shoot! another rock 20 yards below. Pull as I might I couldn't get left fast enough. The right tube caught the rock and spun me. Over the drop sideways again. Bang, thump! I slid sideways out of the seat, hurriedly climbed up the other side and top of the cat for a highside and I was through. I quickly grabbed the oars for more hard pulls to avoid the next series of rocks and crunch, crunch! Both oars were loose from the pins (pushed inward) and my knuckles were crunching against each other and the oar handles. I got the oars back in place and completed the run out to the nearest eddy for a rest. There are some outstanding surfing holes below Crunch. Although, I was in no mood to surf at the time not knowing where the next rock lingered awaiting my swift passage. We got to the take out, contemplated our next move, and decided on another North Fork run but the "Lower 5" this time.

We put in right above Hounds Tooth. Three or four strokes to the bicuspid. I was much more comfortable this time and had a good entry. Exactly 11 O'Clock! A Slide up the lateral then an airplane move around the rock and I was sitting pretty for the next drop. Nice! I was more familiar with the river now and much more comfortable surfing. I pulled back in a couple holes and could have surfed in each all day. I had another good run through Juicer avoiding the hole at the bottom. Again, some more really awesome surfing.

This time I was ready for my nemesis, "Crunch". Knowing where those rocks were and how rapidly they approach was a huge advantage. I got through clean, er, better. Below crunch is more great surfing. Could have been there all day too!

As we were preparing to leave the Banks parking a raft on a trailer came loose from the van that was towing it on the SF road, crossed the highway without the van and crashed down the bank toward the river just north of the bridge. The trailer came to rest against an evergreen tree with

the rear of the boat sticking skyward along the edge of the road. The two guides in the van were so shook up they just drove into the parking lot, turned around and headed down the highway to get the boss without getting out of the van. So that's how the outfitters launch and avoid the user fee. Hmmm...

Bruneau River 1,700-1,500 cfs

by Vince Thompson

6-5 & 6-99

The Bruneau canyon proved to be a beautiful place to spend the weekend. Thursday rains slicked up the roads and made a Friday shuttle impossible so we drove in Saturday morning. 3 other groups had the same idea. Flows for the trip were around 1,700 Saturday afternoon dropping to 1500 by late Sunday. Put on around 1pm and floated 12 miles to Sheep Creek. Cave rapid a couple miles down was getting boney. The left shoot was the place to go but rocks hung up the SB raft. A cat went left and barely made it under the log, just touching the oar stands. After a great dinner we settled in for a clear starry night. Five mile rapid caused some carnage on Sunday. Near the bottom of the first rapid 2 rocks created 3 "doors" to choose. I took the tight left shoot but the SB raft choose the middle which had a couple of hidden rocks slowing him down and causing the other cat to go right over a rock pour-over.... stick the tubes and flip. The water was extremely fast and with very small eddies. Once the crew was rescued from a top the upside down boat it took a few hundred yards to get the boat under control. The rest of Five mile was fun, tight and technical. The trip was capped off with a soak in the hot tub one mile up from the take out on river left. Great trip, wonderful group, and a beautiful piece of Idaho.