

(These two trip reports tell the story of the same great weekend boating Washington whitewater.)

Flood Stage on the Green (Seattle)

Chuck Morgan 12/15/99

Last weekend Vince Thompson my brother in law came to Washington for a weekend of winter rafting. He was boating with Hans Chambers a friend from Vince's Selway trip last summer. I tagged along.

Saturday we floated the Skykomish river from Index to Goldbar. There were 8-10 catboaters and 2 kayakers who collected at the putin. With the river rising we hit it at 8,000 CFS. This is a great level for this river. All the class III rapids were fun. Boulder Drop a class IV was a challenge. About 1/2 of the group took the sneak route down the right hand side. The others followed the Needle route. 1 boat did a back flip and the operator swam to the side. The boat and boater were recovered and the group reassembled for a safe float the rest of the way. Personally my boat seemed very sticky in the big water. I went over the right side of the tongue in the needle and stalled out in the reversal below the drop. A few pushes got me moving toward the lateral wave peeling off of little house rock. I crashed it successfully and went over the edge into ledge drop. I bounced from the seat, high sided and flushed on through to safe water.

Sunday was a personal first descent of the Green River gorge. The river was high at 4,460 CFS. At 4,000 CFS this river is rated a class IV+. The rater's are right.

Hans Chambers and John Meialowski had both ran the river at that level and higher. Vince is a solid class V boater, I am a class IV boater. Kevin Held met us at the putin but opted not to run. No other boaters came to the river.

After a lost shuttle driver and a flat trailer tire we reassembled at the putin. I had some hesitant thoughts like "Accident reports don't happen if you go home". The four of us agreed to run with the option of pulling out before the gorge.

The upper section was tough but all was going well so we proceeded into the canyon with no exit options left. Above the hardest section we stopped in an eddy to discuss the route. Three boaters had a clean run in very big water.

Mine was not as pretty. I was the third boat behind John and Hans. I entered Mercury and followed the main flow down river left. Hans moved to river center to ride the spout through the Nozzle. I followed and as I reached the crest I saw the seam of water between 2 very large holes. I put my boat on line and expected to enjoy the ride. When I hit the bottom the boat stalled and I ejected over the front. My first class V whitewater swim. The river was recirculating me and I had no up, down forward or back movement. I saw Vince above me and considered him a possible rescue. The river pulled me below the surface and Vince could see the top of my helmet at river level for 6 or 7 seconds. I broke loose and swam for my boat. Out of breath I was just happy to grab hold of it. Hans yelled to get on top. With my feet on one tube and my back against the other I bridged out of the water and rolled on to the floor. Jumping into my seat I faced a pour over with a 10 foot drop in Lets Make a Deal rapid. You exit the rapid through Doors 1, 2 or 3. I was headed for the rock between Door 2 and 3. I backed stroked furiously as I rode up the pillow of water on the rock's upstream face. At the last minute I slid off the rock through Door 2 and passed safely down stream into calmer water. The rest of the trip was uneventful as I chose the most conservative route possible.

Hans asked if this was the toughest water I had rafted. After some thought I believe it is. I was pushed to the edge of my skills and am glad I made the trip. Next time I maybe more conservative and not do a new river at the high end of its floatable range.

Winter Rafting Report for the weekend of 12/11 and 12/12

Hans Chambers 12-14-99

Kevin Held and I ran the Skykomish River with several boating buddies from Washington, Oregon and Idaho on Saturday. The flow was about 8000 CFS and the weather was surprisingly pleasant for December. The temperature was about 45 degrees and we didn't get rained on.

The group consisted of Scott Sills and Mandy in their kayaks. I know Scott from the Lochsa and Selway trips last year and he is now living in Seattle attending school. Scott is an expert yakker and Mandy is very solid. Dave Hagmeier came all the way from Portland to boat the Sky Saturday. Dave is an expert rafter and he was on his 13' Wing catboat. Dave is one of those people that you always want around if anything goes wrong.

We had 3 local expert cat boaters, Chuck, Paul and Erik and John Maesaloski running his Puma. John is the best Puma driver in the world. I'm sure of that. We also had another Erik, who was new to boating serious water. He was taking a borrowed Maravia 14' big-tubed catboat for the first time. Vince Thompson from Idaho was in my Sotar 15.5 yellow cat. Kevin Held was running solo in his custom Sotar 12-1/2 raft and I was running my Puma. That was the group, 2 yaks, 2 Pumas, 1 raft and 6 cats. All experienced except for Erik on the big Maravia cat.

I almost flipped on the first little class 3 rapid just below the putin. It had been a while since I had run my Puma and I wasn't bracing with the oars the way I should. I got the kinks worked out on the way down to Boulder Drop.

We stopped to scout Boulder Drop. We pulled over and walked down to the big rocks at the drop. John and Paul would wait for our signal and then run the drop to show us all how to run it. We had several people that had never run it before. We climbed on the rocks and gave John and Paul the signal to run.

Paul took a right-side route in his Maravia cat and did fine until the bottom when he had to high side after getting stuck in a hole. John had a beautiful run through the drop until he came to Ledge Wave at the bottom of the rapid. We were all standing there straining to see John at the lower end of Boulder Drop, about 80 yards from where we were standing. All of a sudden John's Puma shot about 10 feet into the air. Oops, it seems that John had hit Ledge Wave instead of getting to the left of it. John swam to his boat and re-flipped it and climbed in, none the worse for the swim. If you are going to drive a Puma in big water, you'd better be ready and able to swim, often and well.

We all scrambled down off the rocks and walked back to the boats. I pulled out first and ran right, taking the drops and then resting in eddies and looking over the next section of water. I did fine until the bottom where I had to drop down through a narrow slot between rocks and I got stuck in a hole. I high-sided until I was able to work my way out and down to the eddy at the bottom of Boulder Drop.

Now Kevin was coming through in his raft. He had to slow down above the first drop at the entrance so he was not going fast enough to punch through the holes at the top. He got stopped and surfed right at the entrance and then he was thrown out of his boat. Kevin had swum at Boulder Drop only a week or two before so he knew what to do. He grabbed his boat and climbed back in, got his oars squared away and started rowing. He had no more problems the rest of the rapid and eddied out next to me at the bottom.

Dave Hagmeier had no problems except getting surfed at Ledge Wave and he eddied out across the river from Kevin and myself. Next came Erik followed by inexperienced Erik. Erik had no problems but inexperienced Erik got surfed in Ledge Wave and didn't push hard enough. His big Maravia cat bounced up in the front and came back down twice and then it bounced even higher and just kept going right on up to a vertical tail-stand and then over backwards in a perfect back

flip. Dave Hagmeier said it was the most perfect flip he'd ever seen. About half the people chased down Erik's boat while the rest of us waited for the kayakers to come through.

Scott and Mandy came through just fine, sneaking down the right side from eddy to eddy. We all headed out down river to join up with our group. Vince was the last to come downstream. Just after Vince pulled out, he heard Erik shouting from shore where he had climbed out of the river. Vince gave Erik a tube ride down to his cat boat. The guys had corralled it in and re-flipped it for him. Erik was grinning from ear to ear. Dave and I swapped boats so he could try the Puma. We came to Surf Wave and everybody took a shot at surfing. Dave put the Puma on the wave and it immediately bucked him off into the water. We collected Dave and put him back in the Puma. The rest of the trip was uneventful and fast. At 8000 cfs the 8 mile Sky run only takes about an hour and a half of float time plus your time for scouting. We ended the day at a restaurant in Sultan eating Mexican food and talking about rafting different Rivers of the West. Everybody new to the Sky agreed that the Sky is a great whitewater river at 8000 cfs. The next day we would run the Green.

Sunday on the Green

The Green was running pretty high at 4500 cfs. Vince and I had planned to meet Chuck and Kevin from yesterday and also Julie from Tacoma was going to join us for the Green run. Julie and Kevin decided not to run but we were joined by John in his Puma so we had 4 boaters to run the Green. We put my 12' Sotar cat together for Vince to take and I took the 15.5 cat. Chuck had his 14' cat and John was in his Puma.

Kevin ran shuttle for us so we had all the rigs at the take out, quite a luxury to not have to shuttle someone back to the put-in after boating. The river was chocolate brown in color. The Green River is only green below about 3000 cfs. Above that level it turns progressively darker until about 4200 or so it turns completely chocolate in color. There didn't seem to be much wood floating in the river which is always nice.

We took off with John and I leading. The water was super pushy but we all made it down to Ledge Drop 1 with out any problems. We eddied out below the "Dangerous River Conditions Ahead" sign and everyone said they were willing to run so off into the gorge we went. We ran the first part of the 6 mile long gorge with huge waves stacked on top of monstrous waves accompanied by holes that I don't even want to think about. Even floating past some of the monstrous holes was enough to scare me. We all had great runs and everyone made it down to the start of Mercury without flipping. Everybody had to highside or Flintstone but we all made it.

We eddied out above Mercury and went over how to run it and the Nozzle and Let's Make A Deal. All within 400 yards of where we were eddied out. After going over the instructions 4 or 5 times. I told everybody to pull out their "A" game for the next 400 yards. John led off with me right on his tail for support. We ran Mercury without any problems. It wasn't as big as we were expecting. We dropped down through the Nozzle and John and I immediately eddied out to wait for Chuck and Vince. Chuck came through and hit the slot at the Nozzle but he wasn't exactly lined up right.

When he hit the bottom of the drop, he flew over his left tube. John and I were only about 20 yards away and could see Chuck under the water, stuck on the seam of a hole. He worked his way to the surface and started swimming after his boat. We yelled at him to climb back on. He did a great "Bridge" move he remembered from high school wrestling and got back on his boat. Vince came through without mishap. It is hard to describe to people, running the gorge for the first, just how powerful the river is at high water. There were places where we were moving maybe 15 miles an hour. You had to be braced firmly every second during the big rapids.

We floated down towards Lets Make a Deal and all tried for Door #1. None of us made it. The water just would slam you into the rock and hold you there. We all spun off and headed for Door #2. The rock guarding Door #2 was piled high with water actually lapping over the top. I turned

right for the door and was pushed up onto the rock until I was sitting level pointed left and thinking how much it was going to hurt going over the other side of the rock. It would be about a 12' straight drop and I was sideways to it. Ouch! Vince rode up on the pillow on the same rock vertically and we were both on the same rock briefly. My right oar only caught air but my left oar caught something, maybe Vince's cat, definitely not Vince's tooth, and I was able to slide off the left side of the rock into Door #3. I fell and I grabbed the frame as I slammed into another rock. Then I was able to get back in my seat and grab the oars. Another successful run of the Nozzle section.

We had a great lower run. Big waves were surfed and big holes were avoided. We stopped for lunch at Surf Wave and had a great time yelling at each other from 2 feet away because of all the adrenalin going through us.

I recommend the gorge run at 4500 for anyone that finds the Sky at 8000 not tough enough.