

Logs Suck

(How To Drain The Testosterone out of 10 men in 3 seconds)

Marsh Creek – May 2005

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Bed-lam (n) – chaos; a state of extreme confusion and disorder

Standing atop this green, rolling hill on the outskirts of Garden Valley, Idaho, I couldn't help but recall the events that had unfolded two days previous while running down Marsh Creek on what was to be day one of an eight day rafting trip. My friend, whitewater stallion Steve White, and I were on our way home to our families. We were a little light on gear, but grateful to be alive.

For several years Steve has rafted with a great group of very experienced whitewater boatmen from around the West. The de facto leader of this group was Mike Holstrom, a northern California boater with an impressive rafting resume. This year Steve tossed my name in the ring and Mike had invited me to join the group on an early season Middle Fork trip.

I had never met Mike. In fact, the only person in the group that I knew going in was Steve. As the trip was organized and things gelled, I'd come to realize that Mike was most likely the single most organized trip leader I had met to date. Mike had a firm and impressive grip on the people, the skills, the gear allocations and the trip itself. Things came together smoothly as we moved toward our launch date of May 20.

Now, standing on this peaceful hilltop, looking across the green valley toward the steep canyon of the South Fork Payette, we were struck with the irony that lying at our feet was the final resting place of Dr. Walter Blackadar. During the 1970's Walt, as he was known to most folks, became a whitewater legend when, in his mid 40's he took up the sport of kayaking and, at the ripe old age of 49, made a solo kayak descent through infamous Turnback Canyon on the Alsek River in SE Alaska. As a doctor based in Salmon, Idaho, Walt traveled around serving his patients and used the opportunity to run all that Idaho had to offer and then some.

Walt's life ended in May of 1978 when he and some friends kayaked the canyon section of the South Fork Payette. About 1/2 mile below "Big Falls", a mandatory portage even today, he rounded a bend and encountered a log strainer where he was snagged and drowned. Today the rapid is called "Blackadar" or "Walt's Drop" and is marked by a brass plaque attached to a rock just above the drop. The man now rests in the Garden Valley Pioneer Cemetery beneath a beautiful river rock headstone, facing toward the river that claimed him. The ashes of his wife Shirley are scattered beside him,

Standing there I had a hard time reconciling the fact that just three days had passed since Steve and I, along with Mike Howell, another boater on the trip, had passed through this same valley heading to the Middle Fork. Then as we drove along the Payette canyon, Steve, having recently read the book "Never Turn Back, The Life of Whitewater Pioneer Walt Blackadar" by Ron Watters, recounted some of the stories of the man. We made several stops and looked down on the river, reconstructing the chain of events that ended so tragically. Little did we know that we would soon have our own story to tell.

Leaving the Payette behind we soon arrived at Marsh Creek, a small, meandering stream that winds peacefully through the valley alongside Highway 21 about 19 miles west of Stanley. The tranquility of the put-in is disarming but every boater who chooses to launch at this location should be well aware of what lies ahead.

Marsh Creek serves as an early season put-in when road conditions do not allow access to Boundary Creek, the normal put-in. Many boaters prefer to launch on Marsh Creek if the water levels are present just because it adds another order of magnitude to the already spectacular Middle Fork. Putting on at Marsh Creek also offers one the unique chance to run a river from beginning to end. A little more than seven miles downstream, this little meandering creek, barely wide enough to float a boat, becomes the Middle Fork of the Salmon which, on its journey to the Main Salmon River, becomes the crown jewel of whitewater rivers.

In the days leading up to our launch, trip leader Mike Holstrom had monitored the river and road conditions closely, updating us daily. The Boundary Creek road reports were pretty grim as our date approached. The snow just melting off, thick mud blocked access to all but 4 wheel drive vehicles. Towing a trailer to the put-in was reported as impossible. Since our group had at least one 2 wheel drive rig and several trailers we opted to go for the launch on Marsh and agreed to meet there the day before to rig.

At the put-in, I met some of the team and we quickly turned to rigging boats. I was happily rigging my newly acquired 14' Sotar cat and was shuffling the gear around on the aluminum Predator frame working toward that perfect arrangement. Looking around I was pleased to see that everyone was taking the run seriously which was a really good sign. Marsh Creek is not to be taken lightly. Despite the disarming put-in the creek is fast, steep, technical and prone to wood. Everyone was carrying 2 spare oars, highly recommended for a normal Middle Fork trip, absolutely required for a Marsh Creek launch. Mike had divided up the group gear among the boats and things looked equitable. With the boats soon rigged and ready, most of us headed into Stanley looking for a warm room, cold beer and a hot shower. Mike stayed behind and camped with the gear.

Among the group were several boaters with multiple Marsh Creek launches under their belts. This trip would be Mike Holstrom's seventh launch. Another guy had 4, another 3, so there was no shortage of experience. It was my first and I was looking forward to it.

From the put-in Marsh Creek runs approximately 7.5 miles to where it is joined by Bear Valley Creek entering from the left. The confluence of these streams forms the Middle Fork of the Salmon. Depending on what book you read, 10 exciting river miles lay between the confluence and Boundary Creek.

In the morning Mike drove into town where we all met for breakfast and a mandatory pre-launch meeting. High on Mike's agenda were the safety aspects of running Marsh. His concern was well founded because two years before, almost to the day, two men from different groups had died on Marsh Creek when they failed to negotiate a log spanning the stream. This fact had personal meaning to me since I had been invited to launch on a combined Marsh/Middle Fork/Selway trip that launched the same day as the two men who died. I had opted out as the launch approached due to high river levels. So group safety was a big topic and we all took it seriously. Just before we left for the river Mike called the ranger station and received the current conditions. The flow on the Middle Fork was around 6' and there were no hazards reported. We were a go!

We drove out to the Marsh Creek put-in; set up our trucks for the shuttle and hit the river around 9:30 AM. We passed the Marsh Creek gauge about 1/2 hour later and noted that the creek was running at 4.55'. Weather conditions were good – dry, cold and overcast. There were patches of snow along the banks and the icy water was running fast and technical. It was definitely creekin' - tight, twisty and steep. Trees and brush grew right down to the bank and many were leaning out over the stream.

Marsh Creek quickly picks up steam as it pounds its way down. At the flows we were looking at the run is considered class 3-4 with the well known class 5 Dagger Falls thrown in as a bonus near the end, just above Boundary Creek. The first 7.5 miles, the true Marsh Creek, is almost continuous class 2-3. Our plan was to run down to camp at Gardell's Hole at river mile 2.4, measured from the Boundary put-in. Our only planned scout was at Dagger Falls

Mike was in the lead and he had designated Steve as sweep. Steve, running his 14' Achilles round boat, was making too much speed to maintain the sweep spot and he quickly moved up through the line until he was pretty close behind the leader. I ended up assuming the sweep spot when it became obvious that Steve would have to back row the entire trip in order to maintain his position.

At our morning meeting we had planned to maintain spacing to always keep two boats in sight. It was a good plan and we tried hard to follow it but sometimes the creek was so tight it was all you could do to keep one boat in view. We had a

system of whistle and visual signals worked out in case anyone ran into difficulty. Things were going smoothly. I was feeling pretty comfortable, even warm, in my new Palm Stikine drysuit. I was glad Riley at Andy & Bax had talked me into it.

Somewhere around 3 miles in Richard Terry, rowing a 16' cat, caught a crab and broke an oar. It was good to see the safety plan come into play. Everyone stopped almost immediately. Eddies were slim pickings but there was no shortage of brush to grab onto. Five minutes of messing around and we back under way. Around the next bend Mike and Steve were patiently waiting, alerted to the stop by the whistle signals. It was a good drill.

Around 11 o'clock and about 6 miles down river, we came into an area that Mike later described as "lake-like". Thinking back on it I recall the creek widening into a sort of pool, not really slow, with a pretty nice eddy and what appeared to be a camp on river right. As I came around the bend into this section I could see all of the boats in our group stretched out in front of me. I was in sweep position with the exception of Rick Hill who was behind me in his hard shell kayak.

I watched as the trip leader at the far end of the "lake" was carefully looking down river around a right hand turn. The word spread boat to boat that this was the location of the fatal log encounter 2 years previous. Even from my sweep perspective I could see that both Mike and Steve were eyeballing the exit from the "lake" pretty closely. I watched as Mike settled back in his seat and pushed forward around the bend. Steve held back a few seconds and followed him around the bend in his red Achilles.

As I drifted closer I watched as each boat rounded the corner. As I made my approach I could see that the exit from the "lake" was a steep, narrow chute that soon, within 100 yards perhaps, made a right hand bend. It was about 30-35' wide and wall to wall whitewater all the way down. Everything looked OK and I made the move and was on my way.

I was running straight down the middle enjoying the clean, fast run. I came to the bend in the channel and suddenly spotted two blue cat tubes sticking up into the air hard on the left bank below me! A second later, as I was trying to figure out what I was seeing, I spotted Steve's red Achilles bouncing around in the middle of the river with no one in it! Within a split second I saw a flipped cataraft further downstream! HOLY CRAP! I was in some of the fastest water we had seen all day with no where to go but down river.

THEN I saw the log.....

From the time I saw the beast I estimate I had 3 seconds to react. It was an old log - solid, heavy girth, maybe 3' in diameter on the left side, 12 -15" on the right, no bark – just solid looking, shiny brown wood, sharp broken branch stubs all along the length. It was about half in and out of the water and stretched perfectly

perpendicular to the river with each end resting firmly on shore. Waves surged against it and there was NOWHERE to go! What happened next happened very quickly...

I recall pulling hard on the oars in a left ferry attempt. But I was just too close and going too fast. I remember dropping the oars and pushing up from my seat to jump forward over my cooler and dry box. I would try to jump over the log and take the swim. In my 20 years of boating this was my first encounter with a strainer and I knew that, given a choice, always go over the top! I probably made it one step when I hit the log. I never had a chance.

I believe the boat impacted the log pretty much head on, maybe cocked a bit to the right due to my ferry attempt. My left tube went high and on top of the log. My right tube dove under the log. The boat instantly twisted to the right and the stern was immediately submerged. I was thrown into the river head first. I can recall very clearly what happened next. I entered the water head downstream and on my back. I was instantly swept under the log, passing under it the broken branches flew past inches above my face. The brown log was clearly in view less than 2' above me. Very quickly I saw the sky above me through the water and knew that I had made it under the log clean. Within seconds I started to hit boulders with my shoulders and back. I rolled over and assumed the classic swim position with my feet at the water line facing down stream (nod to my Swiftwater instructor Jeff Kronser).

I was in a real pickle. Below the log the river widened out, the whitewater grew shallower and seemed to pick up speed. I was taking a pretty good drubbing from the rocks. Looking downstream it didn't get any better as the river made a hard right and disappeared with no visible let up in speed. I needed to get to shore. A log jam quickly loomed in front of me. It looked like I would miss it to the right so I made for the brushy bar behind the logs. Clawing and scraping I scrambled to shore and crawled out into a pile of logs in the middle of the river.

I looked back upstream and I just knew that there had to be people seriously injured, or worse. There HAD to be! Suddenly Steve's red Achilles screamed by upside down.... where was Steve? What is happening? Where is everyone?

Looking around I saw a guy climbing up through some brush on river right. There was a guy, no... two guys.. on a stump in the middle of the river upstream of me. There were some guys at the log on river left.

Do a head count...One, two, three...

BAM! My boat slammed into the log jam right in front of me! **MY BOAT!**

Count heads.... One, two, three, four, five...my boat was coming loose from the logs. I jumped forward, grabbed one of my throw bags and quickly tied it off. Oh

crap... it only has one tube. The entire left tube was missing. The left oar was snapped off clean. The frame, a stoutly built Sotar Predator, was snapped along the entire left side. It looked like all of my gear was still there! Yahoo for taking the time to rig it right! There's my other tube... under the log! YOW! The tube, clearly visible in the water under the log, was getting seriously worked. The broken branches had snagged the rescue rope along the tube!

One, two, three,...eight, nine – Only one man missing. Holy crap! Then I spotted trip leader Mike hoofing quickly up the right bank with a rescue rope in hand. 10 people (thank God!)

Looking around we started to exchange hand signals. It was good to see a whole lotta' helmet tapping going on! I came to realize that one fellow on the right bank had a badly injured foot. There were 3 men midstream, 4 on the right bank and 3 on the left.

Looking at my own situation I realized I was in pretty good shape. I had 2 good throw bags and a complete set of rescue gear. I was warm and dry (thanks again Riley!) and had all of my personal gear, food and water.

The carnage over, my first train of thought was... "I'm camping here and waiting for help!" That was quickly squelched when I spotted Steve on the left bank climbing through the brush working his way down river obviously intent on doing some rescue work.

Steve stopped abreast the 2 men trapped on the midstream stump. They were directly upstream of my location about 20-25 feet away. While watching Steve set up a rope between the stump and shore I started unloading my gear. The boat, with only one tube, was underwater for the most part but I was able to get my drybags and some smaller things off safely.

The rope established, one at a time the men on the stump carefully walked to shore through swift water. One lost his footing but managed to hang on to the rope and hand over hand himself to shore. With the guys safely ashore Steve turned his attention toward me.

The roar of the river eliminated any hope of verbal communication. Steve came down through the brush immediately to the left of my location and raised his hands in a questioning way. "What do you want to do?" Is how I read it. I readied a throw bag and tossed it to him. He caught the toss and I motioned him to move down river. He quickly understood my plan and we soon had a zip line established.

Working with Steve I soon had as much of my gear as possible on the beach. Still on the boat was my cooler, dry box and Big Top outfitter tarp. Since these items were under swift moving water, and rather than lose them to the current, I

opted to leave them and my 3 remaining oars on the boat and hope to recover them later if the opportunity arose.

During this exercise kayaker Rick Hill suddenly appeared on my island! "Hey! Nice zip line!" he said, followed by the obvious "What do you have in mind for getting off of here?" That was a good question! After sending several drybags to shore and watching the beating they took I wasn't in any mood to use the same method to get myself ashore.

Rick had an idea. He would kayak to shore, hike back upstream and kayak back to the stump where the rope to the left bank was still attached. There, he would throw me a rope and I would walk upstream to him, staying in the "eddy" created by the stump while he belayed me. The immediate danger in this plan was that if I lost my footing I would be directly upstream of a log sieve. Once at the stump I could cross to the left bank using the same rope as the original guys had. Weighing the options (and not seeing any helicopters hovering) it sounded good to me.

Shortly after Rick left in his boat I heard a whistle. Mike Holstrom was on the right bank with a rope. Using hand signals he indicated that he wanted me to tie the rope off to the remains of my boat. His plan was to swing the boat to shore using the rescue rope attached to a tree. It was worth a try but I wasn't too sure how it would go in the shallow water with just the one tube, and the frame dragging.

I tied the boat off to the line from shore and untied my throw rope which was holding the boat to the logs. The guys on the beach started to work on getting the boat moving and I started securing my zip line gear in preparation for my departure.

I heard another whistle and Mike was signaling that they wanted me to move the rope to a downstream position on the frame. I climbed out onto the frame, untied the line and barely had time to jump off as the wrecked boat sailed off down river with no line attached! Oh well...it was worth a try!

About this time Rick appeared on the stump above me, tossed me a line and we made our move. It seems like just a couple of minutes passed and I walked ashore through the brush where Steve was waiting. As I climbed through the brush I realized I was suffering from a serious case of post-traumatic, post-mega-adrenaline rush fatigue and was feeling pretty wiped out. We all were. When I looked back at the stump, Rick had repacked the ropes was getting back in his kayak. Rick is a keeper!

While Rick, Steve and I were dealing with getting me and my gear off the island, some of the guys had unloaded Mike Howell's 17' Aire cat which had been pinned against the log on the left bank, his left tube in the rocks and his

right under the log. These were the first tubes I had seen as I rounded the corner a lifetime ago. After unloading the boat the men had pulled it out of harms way, humped it over the log and reloaded it! Not only that, they had also recovered my tube from under the log! There it was, neatly deflated and folded on the boat! Mike's boat now sat bouncing in the current just downstream of the log, hard on the left bank.

The guys brought me up to date on the situation:

Mike Holstrom, being in front, had come across the log in complete surprise. He tried to warn the other boatmen but there simply wasn't time. He tried for the right bank but only made it to midstream before he impacted. Somehow his boat surged over the log and landed unscathed on the other side. He eddied out on river right at the first opportunity which was several hundred feet down river and around a bend. He watched anxiously with a throw bag in hand as 5 boats floated past. Seeing no swimmers he quickly hiked back up with rescue gear.

Just seconds behind Mike, Steve crashed into the log and managed to jump out of his boat and onto the log. As he scrambled toward the left bank he kept a tight hold as the log shuddered under the impact of 5 cat boats slamming in, each and every one instantly crushing under the log. He had just made it to the bank and was on the rocks immediately downstream of the log when it suddenly shifted hard, nearly rolling over onto him. Later we figured that it was most likely my boat hitting and my tube getting ripped off that had caused the dramatic movement.

Mike Howell in the 17' Aire had been running left of center and was against the bank when he impacted the log. Being so close to shore prevented the boat from smashing completely under and his boat suffered minor damage. He was able to quickly scramble for shore

Chris Hewitt, our other kayaker, was trying for the left bank but impacted the log sideways. He just managed to grab onto the frame of the pinned Aire and, pulling with what must have been extraordinary strength, he was able to pull himself and his kayak free and to safety.

In his 14' cat Jim Rolf hit the log and somehow managed to scramble off his boat and onto the log. He was crawling toward the right bank when another boat hit, impacting and breaking his foot. Running on adrenaline Jim made it to shore safely. Even though he was largely out of commission, he still managed to help out with ropes and would play a large role later as we moved downriver.

Jim's son Hamilton, rowing a 14' cat, Richard Terry and Ken Peters, each rowing 16' cats, impacted and swam. All were swept under the log. Hamilton and Richard ended up on the stump in the middle of the river and Ken scrambled to shore through the brush on river right.

Only kayaker Rick Hill, running behind me, managed to grab a small eddy and stop himself short of impact with the log.

As we loaded the Aire with my gear, the fellows on the right bank were busy setting up a rescue line to our boat. The plan was to swing over to the right bank using the rope as a pendulum. When the time came for this maneuver we had 6 guys and almost 2 boats worth of gear piled on a 17' cat! We disconnected from shore and, using a rope brake, swung quickly and cleanly over to the opposite shore. Finally, we were all united once again.

I have to say that I was more than impressed with the way things had progressed to this point. Within minutes of the accident everyone was moving forward with the goal of getting people to safety. No one flipped out; no one made any moves that exacerbated the situation. Everyone moved forward competently and calmly. It was a testament to the value of swiftwater rescue training and the expertise of the boatmen in the group.

We still had major obstacles in front of us and we wasted no time in getting moving. We had 2 boats, 2 kayaks and 10 people. We needed to get moving downstream. The weather was deteriorating and cooling off. We were all suffering from the shock of the situation but we were still 11 miles from help and the safety of Boundary Creek. Steve, Mike Howell and I piled onto the already overloaded 17' cat and took off while Mike Holstrom and the others started to hike downstream to Mike's boat. Immediately around the corner we passed Mike's cat tied to the right bank. Just downriver we spotted the carcass of my cat stranded midstream with all of the remaining gear still intact. We had no chance of making it to the boat and we blew by it. Maybe Mike would be able to get to it.

Just ahead was a tight left hand turn. There, stuck in a log jam, was Jim's 14' cat, right side up. Mike maneuvered in close to it and I jumped aboard as we passed by. They eddied out below me on river right. I looked at the situation and it was pretty grim. Both oars were gone. Both spares were still attached but one was bent. Both oar locks were bent over flat, one inboard, the other outboard. The rower's seat was smashed flat. I was exhausted and needed a nap but I knew that Steve and Mike would take exception to that!

So I set to work straightening the boat enough to get the oars in and row it. About then I heard a yell, looked up and saw my boat come sailing around the bend followed by Mike Holstrom and the rest of the gang on his boat. They had managed to ram my boat knocking it loose in the process.

The cooler had come free and was floating away from the boat and directly toward me. The cooler came past within reach and I grabbed for the handle which immediately broke away, the cooler screaming away downstream. The boat floated by and stopped on river left. Steve and Mike Howell ferried over,

tied up and scrambled through the brush to get to the boat. Holstrom and the others on his boat continued on down river in search of more gear.

I turned to making repairs. I needed something to act as a fulcrum so I could pry the bent oar locks back into shape. Fortunately the frame was an NRS modular style with set screws so the oar locks had rotated on the pipes rather than being actually bent or broken. I spotted a perfect rock lying ON TOP of a log right next to the boat. It was the only rock within reach and I had to wonder how it came to be there on the outside of a log jam. I used it and one of the oar shafts to pry the oar locks up, grabbed the tractor seat and bent it back into something close to a seat shape. Now I thought I could row the boat but before that was possible I had to get it out of the log jam.

The log jam was mostly smaller logs and branches. Being on the outside of a tight turn the water was rushing through the logs. Falling into the river from here would be a very bad thing. To get the boat free I would need to get off the boat and balance on the logs to lift and push the boat clear.

This was a pretty nerve wracking experience. I looked at Steve and Mike for help but they were on the wrong side of the river and, standing in waist deep water, were busy stripping the remains of my boat. Soon enough I had the boat free and was able to get it to shore on the left bank just below Mikes boat. I joined Mike and Steve in hauling gear back to the boats where we loaded up both with even more gear.

Suddenly we had company. 3 men in hard shell kayaks came bombing in to the beach. They were professional guides who had been waiting for people at Boundary Creek and decided to make a day run down Marsh Creek while they waited. They had narrowly avoided the log and managed to stop above it. Now they were rushing to Boundary to get the word out to stop launches at Marsh Creek. We told them the situation with our group and, seeing that we had things well in hand, they moved on down river to catch up with the guys and help out as they could.

Mike's 17' was at capacity carrying his gear and most of the gear from my boat. We left my torn and twisted frame in the brush alongside the creek and set off down stream. Steve was rowing Jim's 14' that I had recovered and Mike and I were riding on his boat. Rowing the overloaded boat was a real chore and Mike was beginning to show the wear and tear.

It was not long before we passed Bear Valley Creek where the river doubled in size and volume. We soon spotted some of the guys, as well as the new kayakers, on river left working to right a capsized cat. Steve pulled in to help out. Mike and I continued downstream looking for more boats and gear.

We spotted Mike Holstrom's cat and another boat on shore on river right. People were waving and Mike reached deep and began pulling hard for shore. It didn't take long to figure out that they were actually waving us off due to some really shallow surface rocks. While trying to maneuver back into deeper water Mike Howell snagged a rock and broke his oar. Somehow he managed to get us into an eddy where we swapped the broken oar for our only option - an oar with no handle. The handle had been broken off in the impact with the log.

Holding the slippery, plastic coated oar shaft with gloved hands was not easy. Mike runs with open oarlocks and no Oar Rites to keep the oar in a vertical position. In the heavy water we were running, and with the heavy boat, the oar spun in his hand at almost every stroke. I watched as Mike struggled with it as we moved down river through some pretty heavy, class 4 drops, Mike working hard to stay out of holes and avoid waves.

Suddenly, in the middle of it all, he hit the wall of exhaustion. He jumped forward and I jumped on the oars. The broken handle was really a problem. Holding the fat, slippery plastic shaft with my gloves was next to impossible. I peeled off the glove and it was still a problem. Looking down stream I saw a giant hole directly in front of us. Since fighting to avoid the danger wasn't working for either of us I pointed us into it and started pushing forward. The big, over loaded cat smashed through the holes and waves like a snow plow.

The weather had turned. It was getting colder and to make things worse it had started to sleet and rain. Even in my new drysuit and fleece I was seriously feeling the chill. Mike and I swapped off rowing just to stay warm. We pulled to shore and waited for our guys to catch up. The guide kayakers came by first and gave us the news that everyone was OK and that they would be along shortly. We waited getting colder by the minute. Soon the boats came into view and we pulled out into the stream. All of the boats were accounted for with the exception of Steve's Achilles. We now were aimed for camp and help.

Moving downstream we approached a braided area. Mike and I followed Mike Holstrom down a tight right side channel only to watch in disbelief as he encountered another log completely spanning the channel! We watched helplessly as he slammed to a stop atop the log with us close behind him! We could do nothing save to avoid hitting his boat as we also swept onto the log. This situation was a lot less dire than our previous encounter, not life threatening anyway. Both boats were stuck but the weight of our boat and the current worked in our favor and we soon slipped free and were on our way. Mike was still stuck but the situation looked manageable as we pulled away. Sure enough he was free and was on his way behind us. This was getting old!

Soon the Dagger Falls scout beach came into view and we all pulled into shore - cold, sore and VERY tired. As the boats came in I did a double take when I spotted my cooler strapped on top of Mike Holstroms gear. Somewhere along

the way Mike and Jim had recovered it. Even though it was not secured by any strap it was still full of food and ice, even a bottle of tequila nestled safely in the ice!

Several of us walked up into the Dagger campground where we were extremely lucky to find a fellow there on the prowl for firewood. He was packing a fifth of peppermint schnapps which he willingly (lucky for him!) shared. He was camped at Boundary and had driven to Dagger in a big diesel pickup. We loaded the truck with gear and he drove Mike and the injured Jim to Boundary to find help and grab a camp. While they were gone the rest of us started to hump gear up to the trail head in preparation of moving to Boundary.

Several of the boats would not be going any further. My boat was in pieces. Two other cats had severe frame damage and simply could go no further. Jim's broken foot put him out of commission and his boat was seriously damaged in any case. And we had not found Steve's Achilles, or any of his gear.

Before long a pickup truck quickly approached. As it pulled up I saw the Utah license plate "SOITGOS". I had to chuckle when I introduced myself to Steve Christensen, the web master for Utah Whitewater. Being the web master for the NWRA, Steve and I had exchanged many emails and I serve as a moderator on his Utah based email list server. We had never met in person until now.

Steve and his son Bo, a friend named Ed Blankman and another young fellow named Kellen Spillman jumped in and started hauling gear up the steep trail from the beach. Steve White used a satellite telephone to call his wife Regina. Steve asked her to immediately post the news of the log to the Idaho Whitewater email list server which is monitored by the Middle Fork rangers and a lot of whitewater boaters. We learned later that another group had intended to launch on Marsh the following morning. Only a last minute email check alerted them to the danger.

During our move to Boundary Steve White asked if anyone had seen a red Achilles raft sail past. Amazingly Steve Christensen said... "It's tied up in the eddy below the Boundary put-in!" He told us that the boat had come floating by the Boundary ramp upside down. Someone on the beach rigging a boat jumped in and caught up with it just before it dropped through the first rapid below the put-in. They pulled the boat upstream into an eddy, reflipped the boat and tied it off to the bank! "But", Steve warned, "there's not much left in it."

Once we had unloaded our gear at camp, Steve and I, still in drysuits and PFD's, walked down to survey the damage to his boat. From the top of the ramp it looked pretty grim. The only gear visible was my River Bank toilet and the spare tank. Everything else was gone - drybags, cooler, kitchen box, ammo cans, rescue gear, oars - gone.

We walked down the trail a hundred yards to get above the boat. Imagine our surprise when we spotted a big pile of gear piled up on the trail. Our saviors had not only recovered the boat, they had humped the heavy gear up an extremely steep and slippery, log strewn slope! There, neatly stacked on the trail, were Steve's kitchen box, his not so-drybags, his cooler and ammo cans,

There were a lot of things missing - oars, rescue gear and some other things. His frame had taken a serious beating. Some of the gear has since been collected up on Marsh Creek. We joke with Steve now about being the only guy we know to flip a boat and recover gear from 4 separate zip codes.

At camp we all shared our experiences over warm drinks and a camp fire. It was a strange night, we were a pretty happy but sober bunch. Not a man among us was unaware that he had just had an extremely close call. I think that there was also a measure of pride in the way the situation had played out. We could all be proud of our actions and abilities as we dealt with the aftermath.

...Now, two days later, as Steve and I stood on top of the hill in the Garden Valley Pioneer Cemetery with Walt Blackadar, the quiet moments of reflection were not just spent admiring the view.