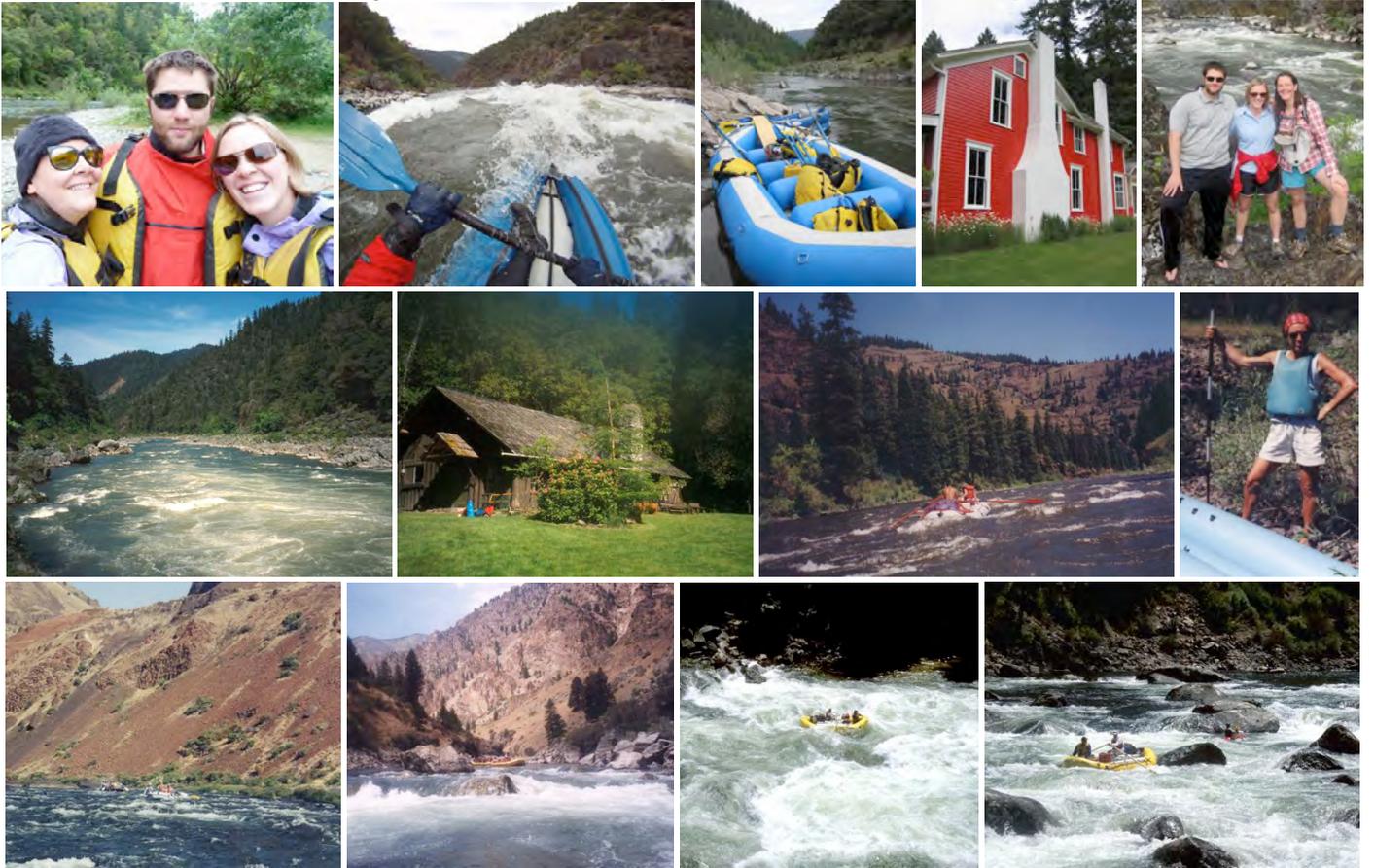


## Rafting Great Rivers in Oregon and Idaho, 1998-2012

Rogue, Grand Ronde, John Day, Middle Fork Salmon, and Selway



Left to Right: (top) Rogue 2012 – the team at the put-in, Marshall hitting a wave, tied up at Black Bar, Rogue River Ranch, the team above Blossom Bar; (middle) high-water boils on Rogue, Black Bar main lodge in mist, Grand Ronde, Irja and kayak; (bottom) entering lower John Day canyon, Middle Fork Salmon, Texans in Selway's No Slouch Rapid... then Ladle

### Introduction

Prior to moving to Oregon in 1997, I'd never done any rafting. But Oregon is home to a lot of great rivers. Former colleague Irja (and Corvallis company) took me down my first rivers in 1998-9: Willowa's Grand Ronde, lower John Day, and lower Rogue. Much as I loved those early backyard private trips, I came to crave bigger water – and thus spent the next 10 years rafting rivers beyond Oregon (all with professional guides, and often with my sister Allison) – including Idaho's legendary Middle Fork of the Salmon (1999 and 2003), and Selway (2007). In 2012, I returned to Oregon's lower Rogue and was pleased to see that a good old Oregon river could still satisfy and impress. This report covers, in order: Rogue (2012, 1999), John Day, Grand Ronde, Middle Fork Salmon, Selway.



Left to Right: Merlin-area cabins – bedroom, kitchen-living room, Galice Store - bathroom door stall with river map

### SW Oregon: Rogue River - Argo to Foster Bar, Memorial Day Weekend 2012

Allison invited me on this trip 2 months before. At the time, I felt indifferent – half because I thought the river was going to be too tame, and half because Memorial Day weekend in Oregon does not always mean good weather. In the end, I committed because Allison took care of all logistics, because this was a lodge-based trip (not camping), and because my knee was in recovery mode after too much running (see Eastern Sierra/Ansel Adams report for that explanation). In contrast with my first time down the Rogue (technically private – but organized and rowed by a professional guide), this trip was guided by Momentum (Allison/Marshall did the Upper Klamath with them in 2011). Given ongoing state funding issues, Allison planned a furlough day Friday May 25, enabling us to head down the night before. First, we drove to Ashland for dinner with friends (and to stock up on food/beer at the co-op, as our cabins for the night offered no breakfast) – and then we backtracked to Merlin's Double Tree Ranch, located down a LONG creek of roads in quiet woods.

I'm not sure what the cowboy-attired Swedish-American owner thought of our threesome, but he was excited we were rafting the river. Having arrived just 30 minutes before sundown, we enjoyed a quick walk (mostly to stretch our legs) down to the river's edge. After that, it was snacking, drinking, and relaxing time – before a good night of sleep (at least in my case).

Come morning, we were up at 7:30. Although it wasn't sunny, it became so by lunch. Following breakfast, we drove 20 minutes to Galice, our group meeting site at the all-purpose Galice Store & Resort (where I made the error of staying in 1999... which was why Allison picked last night's different location). After using the above-decorated bathroom and signing our lives away, we moved our car to the designated area and loaded into the Momentum van. The rest of our party was made up of 4 (2 couples) delightful retired high school teachers from northern California. We drove ~10 minutes down the road to the put-in at Argo. There, NO ONE else around, we suited up. As noted in the self-portrait below, I was not well-prepared for this trip (usually the case when I try to do anything mid-term): I learned that morning I did not pack any long-sleeved quick-dry shirts (I borrowed Allison's) and, as discovered later in the day, I put on my wet-suit inside-out (very embarrassing... speaks to too many years of NOT rafting!); by the end of the day, I would also drown my beloved Panasonic Lumix camera because I SWORE it was waterproof (it wasn't!). And speaking of cameras, Marshall purchased a Go-Pro that arrived in the mail, like, the day before we left (and he was, like, assembling pieces during yesterday's long drive!); needless to say, this was a photography learning expedition for him – although most whitewater stills were totally awesome!



Left to Right: Allison & Marshall getting ready (note HUGE yawn in first shot), self-portrait (note my wet suit is inside-out), Rainee Falls

Our guides were excellent and extremely personable: leader Mara looked like a beach volleyball star, and gear-boat assistant Simon looked like the embodiment of Yellowstone Chris from 1999. After the usual safety presentation, we selected places in the small fleet: 1 gear/oar boat, 1 passenger/paddle-assist oar boat, and 4 inflatable kayaks (that's REALLY generous!). Between Argo (mile 25 – using the official Rogue River Float Guide) and Grave Creek (mile 27, our put-in in 1999) - with its big bridge, incoming side-creek, HUGE put-in area, and Rogue River trailhead - the water was quiet, offering a couple class II riffles. Although the river looked fairly full, it was not as high as it was during the heat-wave flood of 1999; indeed, more rocky banks were visible much of the way along this trip. Following Grave Creek (the beginning of the designated "Wild and Scenic" section), we started seeing more groups – both rafters and hikers (the latter more numerous than in 1999!). Just before Class V Rainie Falls (which passengers walked around in 1999), the guides pulled Allison and Marshall out of their kayaks – and we all loaded into the big paddle-assist oar raft (crowds of onlookers watching from the side). As in 1999, the guides avoided Rainie Falls proper by rowing the "fish ladder" – an unmarked side-stream that sneaks around the main waterfall. I remember watching Ric run the fish ladder in 1999 and it seemed straightforward, tame, and slow; being a paddling passenger in the raft, though, was more exciting – as you precisely aimed for this one super-narrow rocky channel that seemed to appear from nowhere amongst the marshy side-area of the river. Once you hit it, it's like you got sucked down this steep, choppy chute – and dumped below the falls. Fortunately, I had the sense to put away my camera – although it would have been cool to get a couple shots in the ladder. The fish ladder is rated class IV in terms of access skill (i.e. correct aim), but only class III in terms of the actual run. After kicking Allison and Marshall off the boat, we continued on to Whisky Creek (mile 30) for a short hike and lunch. Indeed, we noted MANY alcohol features on this river this time: Rum Creek, Whisky Creek, Booze Creek... all named by prospectors.



Left to Right: Whisky Creek - yellow iris, cool bark, cabin, rusty pan

After lunch, the water became bigger and more exciting – which Marshall and my camera will both attest to. Unfortunately, given that 9 months have passed since this trip, neither I nor Allison/Marshall can recall exactly where all the drama happened – although I am fairly confident that Tyee Rapid (a bona fide class IV, 1.5 miles past lunch) was the first spot of excitement. I do recall the guides discussing the situation well with Allison and Marshall – but both elected to run it, and the guides clearly let them. If I haven't mentioned it, this was Marshall's first time in an inflatable kayak on whitewater. Although he managed Tyee, I'm pretty sure he flipped/fell out on Wildcat (half a mile downstream, class III); having said that, though, he also self-rescued quickly. Fortunately, it was quiet (3 class II's) for almost 2 miles – but then we hit Slim Pickins Rapid (class III) and I don't think that went well. I cannot say for sure where my camera was fully-drowned – but it was one (or more) of these. Having watched (and remembering well) Allison's first inflatable kayak adventure down the Middle Fork of the Salmon back in 2003 – which was notably dominated by rampant flipping in multiple class III-IV's – I wasn't THAT worried about Marshall. But unlike Allison (who seemed to laugh her ass off over every fiasco on the Middle Fork), Marshall was

not as enthusiastic after multiple dunks – to the point he had enough and joined the paddlers. Although I appreciate Allison’s much-improved skills and always-positive outlook (frankly, with respect to almost everything!), I understand and empathize more with Marshall’s response to flipping... THAT is me, THAT is how I would feel, and THAT is why I avoid inflatable kayaks (because I fear getting SO spooked that I’ll never do whitewater trips again!). With just 2 miles to go before Black Bar Lodge (our home for the night), we sustained a couple more minor class II’s plus Upper and Lower Black Far Falls (both class III).



Left to Right: lunch, sunny skies heading out calm before the storm, probably Tye or Wildcat (shot by Marshall and his Go-Pro)

Black Bar (mile 36), one of 3-4 riverside lodges along this section of the Rogue, was a very memorable place (for me) from 1999. This time, however, we were not staying at (or eating in) the main lodge proper; rather, we were a quarter mile down the trail – in the semi-autonomous cabins and self-service kitchen area (i.e. our guides carried food and cooked it there). Although the guide-prepared meal was very good, I did have extremely fond memories of the 1999 “turkey dinner with all the fixin’s” from the main lodge... and so I had been looking forward to that meal again. But I am getting ahead of myself. We pulled the rafts in just downstream from the main lodge area and helped hauled gear an eighth of a mile to the self-serving kitchen. Of course, my cabin was the farthest from this point – so I had another haul (including the biggest climb) to travel. Compared with my 1999 impressions, the cabins seemed more ghetto this time around (even though they probably weren’t – as I suspect the turkey dinner and/or Ric are tinting my memory!). Having said that, they did have hot water and functional toilets/sinks, and the bedding seemed clean. After changing, Allison/Marshall and I strolled a quarter mile in the upriver direction to the main lodge, admiring all its manicured lawns and pretty flowers – not to mention the delicious-smelling dining area. We then returned to our dorm-like self-serving kitchen – which had a fine, high deck - and devoured WAY too many appetizers (crackers and 2 local/Rogue River Valley soft cheese rounds flavored with either curry or sundried tomatoes) – all the while visited by a couple habituated deer who seemed to beg for hand-outs. Dinner, salad, curry, and something fruity/chocolatey for dessert – was, like I said, very good. By this point, though, I had discovered that my camera was wet/shot – and so Marshall asked if the guides would store it in the rice bag overnight (hoping that would dry it out/revive it); although it eventually regained some functionality (as in – a week after drying out), it is highly unreliable! After gabbing and playing cards for a couple hours, we headed to bed around 10 – as this was the time the generators were turned off. Once the lights went out, there was no light (which was why you needed your headlamp) and no heat – BUT there were LOTS of scurrying animals (squirrels, I assume) much of the night – both on the roof and under the cabin. At times, they were so loud, I was CONVINCED they’d chewed through the walls and were physically running around the perimeter of the cabin. Allison reported the same issues in her cabin. Of course, all this nocturnal running around (both by the animals and me) likely explained why I managed to lose/forget my headlamp come morning/pack-up.



Left to Right: (top) Black Bar cabin, walking to main lodge under cabins, manicured gardens at main lodge, Marshall chilling next day; (bottom) Allison kayaking, Rogue River Ranch - statue, farm house, Allison simulating cooking, my brush with fame – PCT Erin!

The next morning, we enjoyed a great breakfast and a leisurely start. Weather-wise, the day began as yesterday – but seemed to clear earlier. Although today didn’t offer a lot of whitewater until the final thrilling hour, Marshall joined us in the passenger/paddle-assist boat. I greatly respected that Allison did her thing in the kayak all day (never once flipping/swimming, for the record – and, yes, she asked me to state that!) – and that Marshall was not only comfortable with that but also that he truly appreciated Allison’s commanding

abilities. For the first 10 miles of the day, there were LOTS of class II's – but only one Class III (Horseshoe Bend), which was mostly a rocky curve. Although we skipped historic Zane Grey's cabin (mile 42), we made a big lunch/visit stop at the impressive Rogue River Ranch (on the national register of historic places). Indeed, in 1999, I had NO idea there were so many historical sites along this river! Pulling in on river right (mile 47), we enjoyed lunch on some lower sandy benches. As lunch wound down, a very wet bird dropping landed on some of the remaining cheese. Although the top slices were tossed, Marshall finished some adjacent pieces that didn't look hit. In retrospect, this event seems the most likely source for what became Marshall's epic bout of food-borne illness on the way home – infectionately dubbed "The Rogue-Bird Salmonella Incident" by yours truly. While it was never ID'd as Salmonella (the hospital ruling out many other agents), the timecourse from this ingestion point does match this microbe, which is also well-associated with animals. After lunch, we hiked up the hill and through a grassy field to the Rogue River Ranch proper, complete with a historic barn, a 1960's style home where on-site residents lived, a working garden and power-house, and the original/historic farm house museum. After touring the museum/farm house, we were sitting on the porch when I noticed a familiar woman across the deck: Portlander PCT/Wired Erin who Allison and I followed last summer when we were trying to gauge the snow situation for our Ansel Adams trip. I introduced myself and told her how much we enjoyed her blog; this weekend, she was solo-hiking the Rogue River Trail. Amusingly, she couldn't fathom whitewater rafting... this from a woman who survived – by far – the MOST harrowing Sierra snowpack in recent history!

After lunch, Allison returned to the passenger/paddle-assist oar boat – given that Momentum does not allow kayakers to run Mule Creek Canyon, Blossom Bar, or the Devils Stairs (Class IV, IV, and III – respectively... and pretty much all one after another). Marshall and I took front positions – with Allison paddling from the middle position. Unfortunately, I don't have many pictures from this section because we were paddling. The few I have of Blossom were shot from the overlook that we hiked to later. Mile-long Mule Creek Canyon was one of the most memorable areas along this river in 1999 – and, with the even lower water this year, it was even MORE spectacular: both the high rocky walls, AND the more deep swirls of boiling river. It also seemed to last longer this time around. Although Blossom Bar looked more threatening – its many toothy rocks jutting up throughout the rapid (most underwater in 1999) – it didn't feel as threatening (particularly by comparison to our MAJOR thrills here in 1999!). This year, it felt more like running Ladle on the Selway (which – yes – is a HUGE rapid that scares the shit out of lots of people): this sort of slow but controlled pin-balling between features and pools. And then, within 2 miles, we were at Paradise Lodge – a new location for me (one I don't remember even seeing in 1999... which is weird because it seems hard to miss!). Paradise Lodge was a sprawling facility that served ~50 guests per night. The rustic main lodge/dining area was a classic: a great old bar, a wrap-around deck overlooking the river, historic pictures hung everywhere, and a skinny longhaired Siamese cat. Out back, beyond a cow-strewn grassy field, were guest rooms – in a modern 2-story building with a lovely deck and comfortable indoor sitting area (presumably for when it is raining).



Left to Right: (top) into Mule Creek Canyon, Marshall ready to paddle & film, looking down on upper Blossom Bar, Paradise Lodge; (bottom) Paradise Lodge luggage lift, hiking to overlook above Blossom Bar, saying goodbye to the Siamese cat

Eventually, Allison, Marshall, and I headed 1 mile up-river (on the Rogue River Trail) to the spectacular Blossom Bar overlook. Given that it was sunny and warm, we were glad the trail was often shady and not very up-and-down strenuous. For the best views of the rapid, we left the official trail and scrambled across a rocky bench above the river. There, we waited about 10 minutes, correctly predicting we'd be able to watch at least one party rafting the whitewater. And then it was back for some more relaxing – given that Paradise Lodge was especially amenable to this activity. Dinner that night was a big buffet; the food was good (albeit not memorable) and – given Marshall's brewing food-borne illness – not microbiologically questionable (IMO).

The next morning, it was more overcast – and remained as such most of the day. We enjoyed a decent breakfast and then hit the river for our final few hours. Of course, right around the bend was Half Moon Lodge, which I would have NEVER recognized had someone not pointed it out – odd because that place seemed SOOOO memorable in 1999. Apparently, Paradise owners have now purchased Half Moon to avoid competition. Given that the last 10 miles to Foster Bar take-out were easy (i.e. half a dozen class II rapids), I took to my own kayak within the first hour – along with Allison. Much of the way was moderately scenic and fun to kayak, the rocky walls (similar to those in Mule Creek Canyon) providing lots of nooks and crannies to explore – not to mention an occasional waterfall or stream inlet. Around noon, we pulled over at – I believe – Flora Dell (mile 58) for lunch. As with much of the Rogue, the rocks along the side of the river at this spot were a funky mix of wild conglomerate blobs and smooth granite-y looking boulders. Our lunch stop

was especially rocky, made up of lumpy conglomerate rock benches – over which a stream pooled and flowed, notably emanating from the woods via a short but scenic waterfall. While waiting for lunch, we explored the waterfall area and adjacent pool – notably filled with salamanders (I assume the poisonous ones Oregon is famous for?). Using Allison’s waterproof camera, we attempted to take underwater shots; this was not very successful, albeit mostly because the minute you put the camera in the water, it scared the amphibians away! We also found an odd ball of salamanders, which – it was agreed – probably represented a bunch of males trying to mate with a female; that sight and notion slightly scared and offended Allison, I think. Within an hour following lunch, we arrived at Foster Bar. Take-out went quickly, particularly given that we didn’t have to deflate or disassemble the rafts.



Left to Right: sisters in kayaks, pulling up to Flora Dell – exploring funky benches, underwater salamander photography

The drive back to Galice is a major affair that should not be taken lightly; the roughest part (Bear Camp Road, after the pavement ends near Agness) requires ~90 minutes of interesting driving on narrow, curvy, rough and/or one-lane roads... all in the heart of the Siskiyou. At the highpoint, there were still winter-fallen snowbanks on the ground – and unfortunately it was foggy and viewless. Somewhere on the other side was the area where a family from San Francisco got lost and then stuck in the snow a few Thanksgiving’s ago, the father freezing to death in his attempt to hike for help. Nearby, there were also a few interesting views over the legendary Kalmiopsis Wilderness (site of the HUGE Biscuit Fire). Back at Galice, we bought ice cream and said our good-byes... and then it was a LONG drive back home – made challenging because Marshall, as stated, developed an epic bout of food-borne illness, heralded and then repeated (over and over again) by SHOCKING levels of vomiting pretty much every 20-30 minutes all the way back to Salem. And unfortunately, things did not let up once we were no longer moving; indeed, Marshall wound up in the emergency room late that night – his hydration level dangerously low. Although Marshall was ultimately treated with antibiotics, they never identified the culprit – only ruling out things like Campylobacter and the scary/enterohemorrhagic E. coli strains. Even so, it took him several weeks to get back up to speed – and he lost well over 10 lbs. Having vomited my way across Thailand and Nepal in 1998 and – more recently - suffered through a high-fever/diarrheal pathogen in Patagonia (losing comparable weight both times), I can definitely empathize! In the end, though, we all loved this trip for what it was – and even Marshall appreciated his Salmonella weight-loss!



Left to Right: put-in at Grave Creek, somewhere drifting down the Rogue, gorgeous iris, even more gorgeous lunch!

### SW Oregon: Rogue River - Grave Creek to Foster Bar, Memorial Day Weekend 1999

Perhaps 6 weeks before, Irja invited me on this 20-person raft trip. Our leader was Ric, a professional guide who had run the Rogue many times. Despite being a private trip (using a hard-to-come-by lottery-acquired permit), Ric organized lunches like a professional - extravagant venues of fresh produce, chips, cookies, smoked meat/fish, cheese, and bread. During our 2 nights on the river, we stayed at boat-accessible lodges that provided family-style breakfasts and dinners. The Rogue, in southwest Oregon, dumps into the Pacific (our take-out was within 25 miles of the ocean). The northern California-like terrain is dominated by forest (both madronas and conifers) AND poison oak (which I managed to avoid). When we went, beautiful irises were in full bloom - alongside mock orange that lined major sections of the river, sending an intoxicating aroma into the heavy, warm air. I chose to be a "hood ornament" on Ric's gear barge - which meant I did very little except bail and hold on. We each paid \$200 for the whole thing; I paid an additional \$50 for pre-trip lodging because I went down a day early. I also paid \$90 for car shuttling - although this fee would have been cheaper had a key coast range pass not been snowed in (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2013 – Bear Pass Road). Just prior to setting out, the weather forecast were foul. Ric sent out dire emails recommending we prepare for snow by bringing dry suits. Fortunately, I was too wrapped up with spring term to think much about these facts. As it turned out, the weather shifted dramatically and we wound up with the first heat wave of the season. The drive to Galice was gorgeous: rolling green hills, moderately high passes, and distant peaks. Galice, a tiny town along the Rogue, was dominated by sportsmen/fishing tourism. Consequently, the inn was more than rustic than I hoped (i.e. I had visions of light, clean cabins by the river - and they were neither). From the front desk (which also served as a grill-style restaurant and store), a steep walk up uneven stairs lead to several thin-walled, poorly lit and dank, smelly cabins with too-soft double beds, bunk beds, and barely functional bathrooms. Notions of relaxing in bed all afternoon - reading and writing lectures - vanished given several broken lights in my room. So I went to dinner and had an over-cooked steak. Fortunately, Irja showed up, providing company, comic relief, and enthusiasm about the days to come. Following some wine-induced debauchery, I was so sleepy that I missed some pre-trip

activities in the group cabin with the hot tub (i.e. where Ric et al. were staying). Thankfully, I had been alert enough to leave a handwritten "I'm here/do not disturb" sign on my door and went to bed.

The next morning, I enjoyed an excellent, leisurely breakfast. Unfortunately, things were chaotic during the next few hours: the gear barge (a HUGE raft) and 2 passengers had yet to show up. Nevertheless, we moved to the put-in at Grave Creek, 15 minutes away, and began packing what we could. Here, the temperature was already 70°. Our boat count ultimately included: 1 paddle raft (6 people), 2 small oar-boats (3-4 people each), and the giant gear barge (4 people). Paddlers donned wet suits and splash jackets, sweltering during the subsequent hour-long wait. I rode on the lead barge with Ric, Ric's cousin, and her friend. Most boats, including the barge, were not self-bailers and thus filled with substantial water given that the river was running over 6000 cfs (1000 OVER the usual volume this time of year). A minute after put-in, we hit our first riffle and the long boat undulated down a dragon's back of waves. Given the high water, even normally FLAT-water sections were all class I-II. Consequently, most of Ric's rowing involved repositioning the boat with what looked like minor swings of or taps to the oars. As I discovered, though, what looked effortless for Ric was impossible for me; the moment I sunk the oars (barely able to lift them in the first place) I was nearly launched out of the boat. Our major obstacle today: Rainie Falls - the main chute of which is class V. After tying the rafts upstream from Rainie, we hiked the riverside trail to view the rapid. Its roar seemed mightier than its appearance - although I'm certain it would have been frightening to raft. Next to the falls is a side-channel called the fish ladder, which most boaters run. By itself, the ladder is class III - but getting to it requires enough skill to rate it class IV. All passengers hiked around Rainie/fish ladder, waiting on the shore while the boats went down the ladder. Watching each oarsman delicately make his way toward and down the ladder seemed to take an eternity. Shortly thereafter, we stopped for lunch and, after many exciting class III's, we arrived at tonight's inn: Black Bar Lodge - which consisted of a dining hall and 8 cabins (ALL with better features than the place in Galice). The surroundings were extremely landscaped: a mowed lawn, ornamental plants, a fish pond, an old swing strung with wisteria, the ever-present scent and sight of mock orange. Based on pre-trip conversations with Irja, I thought each person was going to have his/her own room. However, most lodges accepted all walk-in's - and thus expected parties to double up as needed. And so I wound up sharing a 2-bed cabin with Ric, which was fine (although I didn't know him at all before the trip). Being a gentlemanly oarsman, Ric took me on a short hike down to this sylvan side-creek before dinner, showed me the wild grapes along the forest path, and picked a bouquet of intoxicating mock orange for our room.



Left to Right: Rainie Falls - scout, rapid, and fish ladder, jumping rock (can't recall exactly where after Rainie)

The Black Bar Lodge dinner was also exquisite: salad, turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes/gravy, cranberries, and ice cream. I had 2 seconds - surprising given that I hadn't done much all day. In addition to our party, there were about 15 other guests. Lodge generators were turned off at 10:00 p.m. and we had been warned to bring headlamps and/or retire early. After conversing with Irja, with whom I'd barely talked all day, I chatted late into the night with Ric. Irja and Ric became friends as a result of both dealing with breast cancer. I had long known Irja's situation and she took care of me when I dealt with a questionable lump in 1998. But I had never met a man with breast cancer; in fact, I had never met any man in the prime of his life who had faced any form of life-threatening cancer. Thus, it was somewhat overwhelming to share a cabin with this man who was really intense, and still very involved with a near-death experience. Ric also enjoyed playing blues right before going to bed - not only because he found solace in the music but also because it physically dulled the ongoing buzzing in his ears, a complication of chemotherapy. Sitting there listening to Jonny Lang at some dark hour in the otherwise silent mountains, it was hard not to feel sorrow, pity, attraction, and confusion for/about Ric. There were times we were both swimmingly touched by one another to the point of mutual attraction... and yet there was this part of me that kept saying: don't go there. I could analyze those 3 days with Ric for years, though, and I would never be able to verbalize a complete explanation for any of my feelings. Sufficed to say, Ric is an intensely sacred man to me.

The next day, we rose for eggs, pancakes, and ham. I also slipped in a shower before our 10:00 a.m. departure. Today's itinerary consisted of riffles and class II's before lunch. Then we would hit serious water: Mule Creek Canyon, Coffeepot Rapid, and Blossom Bar (my first class IV). Before lunch, we visited Zane Grey's cabin, owned by the family who founded Levi-Strauss. This oasis featured manicured lawns, a landing strip, an extensive vegetable patch surrounded by high fences, and a giant longhaired orange cat - all cared for by this aloof groundskeeper who evoked images from Lady Chatterley's Lover. We lunched on this hot sandy beach, enjoying the same lunch fare as yesterday. Tales of the pending rapids were regaled. Despite light-hearted joking, everyone who'd done them before became serious as they grew near. Although this made me nervous, I trusted Ric with my life (in the same way I trusted Jon on the Grand Ronde). It's interesting to me that I had never met either of these men before and yet I felt so safe in both their care. A mile before Mule Creek, Ric relocated a few people according to experience levels - our boat gaining 1 paddler. The other women on the barge were handed paddles to assist Ric with the major whitewater. I was told to secure my life jacket, sit in the middle of the seat, hold on at all times, and NOT to fall out of the boat. For me, Mule Creek inspired an intense array of emotions. Mule represents the point when the 100-200 foot wide river funnels into an unworldly canyon that is 40-60 feet across. The waterscape changes from one that has been mostly orderly (except while jostled during momentary cataracts) into a massive churning dynamic: the center is swollen, the edges bear a downward pull of whirlpools that, if frozen, would resemble ripping teeth of glacial ice torn against stone. Most surprisingly: it is dead quiet. A novice might look upon the scene and think there was no danger - because the current seems to flow in gentle-looking spirals. Compared with all the blatantly obvious class III's, Mule is deceptively dangerous - disquietingly so. Coffeepot, a

rapid in the middle of this canyon, was - by Ric's assessment - easier given high water because the big waves were drowned out. Shortly after Coffeepot, the mile-long canyon opens abruptly - with about 2 minutes of calm before Blossom Bar. That means you have to quickly shore the boat if you want to scout. We climbed atop massive lava formations and surveyed Blossom: nothing but churning whitewater as far as the eye could see (plus HUGE toothy rocks and a big, obvious S-curve that continued around the bend). Even to me, though, the route was clear: cut to the left, then sharp right, then back again and around the bend. Ric believed the rapids were probably easier given the high water. Had there been less water, there would have been dozens more exposed rocks to negotiate.



Left to Right: entering Mule Creek Canyon, Blossom Bar, Half Moon tie-up and lodging

Before I could think, we were in the boat - the rest of the team watching our every move as we floated away. The deafening roar came first. Before I knew it, we tossed between the main rocks and then began cutting right. That's when we noticed Ric standing up and calmly shifting things around. Hmm. The back end of the boat had hit a rock just below the surface, tossing gear onto the oars (1 dry bag was also thrown out of the boat). Mind you, we were still very much in the class IV section. The women manned their paddles and Ric (who had ordered me not to move) told me (and told me firmly) to climb to the back of the boat because we were going to try and grab the floating bag. Mid-sentence, he heaved the obstructing gear off his oars and was now muscling the boat toward the colorful vinyl bobbing between the endless waves. At this point, we were rounding the bend - a high class III section about 60 seconds away. I stood and immediately lost my balance. With Ric ferociously back-paddling, I was at a loss to step over his massive oars as he moved them. Again, he ordered me to move. I finally made my way over the oars, crawling across gear, to the back of the barge... but the bag floated just out of reach. At a much quicker pace (because we were about to hit the high class III section), I chased the bag as it floated to the front of the barge. There, I stretched WAY out just as we began to toss in the bigger water. The women physically pulled me back and we all cheered as Ric hauled us through the giant waves without a scratch. Of course, the downside to all this was that the rest of the team saw all our bumbling and we earned the carcass award (not making this up: someone found a big dead fish and bestowed it upon us when we all regrouped at the terminus of Blossom Bar). Shortly thereafter, we arrived at Half Moon Lodge - which featured a precarious wooden dock buoyantly affixed to a seeming cliff. Several wooden pilings and walkways bounced with the current, as did all rafts after we tied them to the planks. From here, a bolted staircase ascended the 150-foot rock wall, accessing the meadow-like oxbow of land above. A mechanized lift was used to carry bags up from river. Up on the meadow plateau, Half Moon also featured a functional airstrip of mowed grass. All around, soaring rocky peaks created an alpine amphitheatre. That night, the starry sky and - yes - the half moon appeared stunning against the silhouette of rocks and trees. Looking up, it was hard to believe a giant river curved around the peninsular land. Despite the beauty of the main lodge, my sleeping situation grew worse (despite Irja's aforementioned promise!): Ric, another male passenger, and I wound up in the shabby guides' cabin (made for 8-10). Of course, Ric was thrilled with this rustic space. I would not have been such a snob if I hadn't caught a glimpse of the "real" cabins: brand new with honey-colored wood interiors, lots of floral prints, and light airy appearances. Dinner that night was too heavy on meat: GIANT barbecued beef ribs. Believe it or not, I could not stomach the things. Fortunately, it was balanced with excellent beans, and the greenest spinach salad with the reddest tomatoes. For most of the day, though, I'd been looking forward to enjoying a sauna with Irja (given, again, her promises). By 10 p.m., though, it was just me, Ric, and Ric's cousins building fires and pouring water on the rocks. But it was heavenly and served, in Ric's adept words, to sweat away all sins. Despite my questionable accommodations - I did sleep well.

Breakfast the next day was heavy on potatoes, eggs, and cheese - but thankfully lighter on meat. Given the long drive home, the final day's float was short. Given that motorized craft are allowed up this section (all the way to Blossom), we were passed by a jet-boat tour plowing up the river and spewing fuel. We made only 1 stop before take out: lunch and a hike up a side-creek to the "sliding rock." In fact, the path should have been called the "sliding trail" (although even "trail" is too generous). The way consisted of 1 mile of dense vegetation on steep, wet, and muddy rock. I was not into any stress so I hung back with another woman, having given up after a quarter mile of sliding. The last few miles to Foster Bar were on slack water that Ric had to actively rowed. We took out in unbearably sticky heat (97°). Originally, I thought I'd drive by myself back up the coast (something I'd never done at the time). After reviewing the map, though, I decided that that plan would take forever. The most straightforward route back involved scary forest service roads; given that Ric knew the route (and didn't have his car, having carpooled with someone else from Corvallis), I handed him my keys. Indeed, Ric negotiated over 50 miles of hairy, edgy dirt roads through fabulous low mountains - leading our caravan of now-dusty vehicles. We stopped for ice cream in the first small town we came upon and then resorted to Eric Clapton and John Hiatt to bring us home. After partaking in 1 of my more memorable kisses, I could not - for the next 12 hours - escape feeling like I was on the river, undulating with the motion of the current and the waves. The heavy skies turned to dramatic thundershowers that night - which probably explains why I had to sit down and write poetry.

Down here, the river meets the sea  
and in the sticky heat I feel you open up to me

- John Hiatt, Feels Like Rain

*Epilogue - Ric passed away from breast cancer complications in the spring of 2005.*



### NE Oregon: Grand Ronde – Minan to Troy, July 1998

In July 1998, I embarked on my first rafting trip ever. Our private party of 8 (plus 1 dog) consisted of a colorful group of Irja's friends

from Corvallis. We executed a 3-day trip down 50 miles of the Grand Ronde, near the Wallowas in NE Oregon. Although there had been concerns about high water a week before we left, things settled down, leaving our toughest runs in the low class III's. We rented 2 self-bailing rafts (with coolers and frames) from an outfitter in Minan. Several team members also brought personal kayaks. Irja and others organized food and cooking gear; indeed, we ate well on this trip (e.g. steak, spaghetti, and breakfasts with eggs, potatoes, and pancakes). Each person was allowed to bring 1 large dry bag. As I discovered, you can fit A LOT of stuff into a drybag: tent, sleeping bag, Thermarest, small pack, and 2 stuff sacks of clothes. To my surprise, though, only half the team brought personal tents.



Left to Right: crazy mess at car-camp by put-in, battening things down, the team at put-in, Jon (my first oarsman) relaxing at put-in,

We set out Thursday around 5 p.m. in 2 vehicles, the drive to put-in taking 6 LONG hours. Somehow, Irja stuck me in the men's van - discussing everything under the sun with people I hadn't met before. In retrospect, I think Irja was trying to match-make me with any number of men in her large circle of friends. Little does she understand, she only managed to facilitate my life-long commitment to rivers (and convince me that rivers are more interesting than long-term relationships with men - despite how fascinating most oarsmen are). Anyway, traffic getting out of the Willamette Valley and up the Columbia was dreadfully slow. By the time we reached Pendleton, the sky was alighting with flashes of unearthly greenish yellow against massive thunderheads. We climbed the windy highway into the Blue Mountains, debating about whether we should bed down for the night at a nearby state park. But we pressed on, arriving at the Minan-area campsite near the put-in around 12:30 a.m. We noisily put down our tents or sleeping bag, agitating several sleeping parties and their dogs. The next morning involved a long exercise in unpacking and repacking. As we sorted MASSIVE gear, 2 teammates facilitated delivery of the rental rafts. By the time we arrived at the put-in, more than 50 people (6-8 separate parties) were clogging the amazingly small beach, all loading coolers, boxes, lawn chairs, etc. into watercraft. Did I mention that this river has no permit system? Well, it should. The river looked WAY faster and larger than I was expecting - especially from a stationary position on the shore. Being in the boat, though, said sense of swiftness vanished. Nevertheless, I donned my climbing helmet (and, consequently, looked like a goon). Irja and I were passengers on Jon's raft day 1. Jon, a calm, humble, and highly skilled oarsman, manned the raft face-forward (typical but something I discovered was REALLY hard to do). Without a word, he ran the first hard sections of high class II rapids and navigated a bad hole behind House Rock. After the first set of rapids, I could not only tell that I was TOTALLY hooked but also that I wanted BIGGER water. This, believe it or not, surprised me. I didn't grow up doing things like roller coasters. I don't like downhill skiing. Flying scares the crap out of me. And yet here I was LOVING white-water. I can only surmise that what made me feel confident was: (1) I trusted Jon immediately; and (2) I could hold on to things, something I excel at.



Left to Right: Irja and son (Michael), camp kitchen, Irja (no doubt) messing up the punchline of a dirty joke around the fire, pancakes

Day 1 weather featured more thundershowers - the air warm and the skies overcast and rainy through lunch (which we ate under some trees). Afterward, the skies cleared. When we set out, we had only loose plans: we knew after 7 miles we would enter Grand Ronde proper: steep hillsides, canyons, sparing campsites. We hoped to camp close to the beginning of this area on some grassy plateau above the river. Upon finding said area, though, we found too many cows (and shit) and moved on. Thereafter, we found nothing but crowds - EVERY site occupied. Before we knew it, we floated under the final bridge that signaled the beginning of the canyon. Being that it was 4:00, we started SERIOUSLY looking for campsites - Jon's new target some obvious oxbow. Within 30 minutes, we came to a sharp bend in the river where Jon navigated us to the shore and, indeed, an excellent empty site. The first night, we pan-fried steaks and potatoes, serving them with a salad prepared by me and just my Swiss Army knife. We relished our site even more as some 6 nervous parties drifted past. As it grew dark, massive clouds accumulated in gigantic proportions. Within 30 minutes, the encroaching thunder grew into the largest display of sound and light I have ever witnessed (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT - Island Lake/Wind Rivers has since unseated this record). Most of us sat in the dark and stared at the sky, the joke being that we could walk around the otherwise pitch black because of the strobe lighting. Seriously, though, I went off to use a tree and my headlamp battery went out; even so, I had no problems making my way back to camp given ample flashes. Of course, within an hour, the deluge erupted from the sky. Everyone who didn't bring a tent - except Greg, who slept under a tarp - made their way into the abode of someone who did. I wound up with Jon. Thankfully, there was no snoring (although I don't think I would have heard it given the rain).

The next morning was gloriously clear as we set out for the most legendary section of the canyon. While never sheer, the remote inner section was gorgeous: cirques of eroding rocks, winding river, frequent rapids. Even so, Jon decided I should try rowing. Like I said, I found it difficult to row facing forward given that it was backwards from my limited rowboat experience. We went down a couple class II rapids, Jon covering my hands and taking the oars when I messed or gave up. And yes, I parked us at least once. After lunch, Phil encouraged Jon to switch places with him - although Phil was more interested in fishing. While it was flattering that Phil thought I was remotely competent after an hour with Jon, I was not comfortable with the boat or Phil's more aggressive style. Phil would row smooth water backwards and, just before hitting rapids, swing the boat 180° (i.e. face forward). In addition to making my head spin, this method confused me after Jon's lessons. After a few beaching incidents (and briefly losing Phil's fly rod), we pulled into camp. Nestled beneath a steep slope of grass and rock outcrops, the beautiful site surveyed mountain goats grazing. We built a roaring fire and dined on spaghetti and salad. Although most people enjoyed an after dinner hike, I chose to hang back in camp and read. The night was calm and warm, although we could hear thunder in the distance.



Left to Right: Irja holding the rope, Sarah takes the oars for the first time ever (ha ha), day 2 whitewater

Our final day was short (6 miles) because of the LONG drive home. Jon and I were passengers, Greg rowing a la Phil. Where Greg and Phil are high-powered scientists, Jon is a social worker and mountain rescue team volunteer (just gonna let those facts speak for themselves). The final rapids were frequent, large, and rocky. Nevertheless, I had grown so comfortable that I followed Irja's lead by bow-riding... fun until we bounced off a lava rock that hit my foot, dragging it painfully against the raft. My wounds consisted of 2 deep quarter-sized gouges (ankle and bunion) where the lava dug almost to the bone (I have scars to this day). Needless to say, Jon had me on the floor, foot in his lap. Within a minute, he had applied topical painkillers and poured sugar and ibuprofen down my throat. In the middle of this, Jon had to physically shove us away from a rock wall; as we were pulled back into the whitewater, he fell on me, apologizing. My greatest concern, though: that the team dog - running all over our boat - was going to lick my open wounds. Ahead of us, the rest of the party (completely unaware), had selected a lunch spot high above the river. Phil carried me up fireman style and then everyone relived tales of river gore. After lunch, Jon took over, Greg returned to his kayak, and Irja mothered me. She had joked before setting out that nothing could go wrong or I'd never raft again. Sitting there, she teased: "Sarah, Sarah, Sarah - an hour from take-out and you have an injury???" I assured her I would raft again! Right before take-out was a wicked rapid swelling against a bending rock wall. Jon seemed pleased to get a final run in - despite all the other excitement! Packing up took a long time. Irja and Jon sent me to sit (foot elevated) in the shade by the cars. Getting rental gear from Troy back to Minan involved a LONG but scenic drive. In between milkshakes and dinner, Jon re-banded my foot and Irja made fun of my "simple wounds." We arrived home by 9 p.m. that night, vowing to do the John Day next summer.



Left to Right: the team at put-in, Jon approaching the Clarno Bridge, Clarno Rapid, Jon tired of slack water

### Central Oregon: John Day – Clarno to Cottonwood, July 1999

The John Day, which flows north into the Columbia, is in central Oregon near the John Day Fossil beds... and LOTS of cows (nose wrinkled). The canyon cuts an average depth of 1000 feet into the mostly basalt terrain - which gives the landscape an amazing range of red to brown coloration. Jon, my favorite oarsman from the Grand Ronde, was our trip leader. In May, mountain snows seemed unending and no one was concerned about the water. But this situation would reverse dramatically - most of us scratching our heads about why we didn't go earlier. We spent 4 days on the river, rafting 70 miles to Cottonwood. Our party consisted of 11 people (including 3 kids): 8 from Corvallis, 3 from Montana, and 1 visiting Kiwi. We were not concerned about rapids because the biggest whitewater was only class II. Our outfitters in Clarno provided 3 rafts (1 paddle and 2 oar-boats with ice chests), life vests, dry bags - AND shuttled 1 of our cars 70 miles between put-in and take-out. Food was mine to buy and organize: breakfasts would be cold, but with 1 heated entree; lunches were intended to be sandwich-building ventures; and dinners included jambalaya, spaghetti, and burritos with tortilla soup. Final cost - \$110 per person (booze was \$10 extra). Over the 4th of July weekend, the water level dropped 40% (1200 cfs - Jon's words: "bare ass minimum"). Jon asked if I felt we should pull the plug and I asked whether we'd have to drag the boats. He said, no - but there would be a fair bit of slack water (so - for 24 hours, I had "Oh SLACK Water" going through my head). I wish I'd taken pictures of my car loaded up: 3 ice chests, Jon and my camping gear, AND 7 bins of food. Jon and I left Corvallis at 4 p.m. Given sunny weather, the scenery was fantastic. We stopped at Sisters at 6:00 for gas, chocolate malts, and cheeseburgers. En

route to Clarno, Jon, a native Oregonian, educated me in this area's cult history: the Antelope-based Rajneeshees who launched the largest act of bioterrorism on US soil. With his dry sense of humor, Jon wittily noted that Christians now occupied the compound. At some point above Clarno, we crossed this marvelous pass that overlooked part of the John Day canyon - the sunset colors of the sky and rocks fantastic. We dropped to Clarno and began searching for the unmarked put-in and camp. The Montana contingent was the only group there (ironic given that the other folks from Corvallis had left before Jon and I). The river appeared, much to our satisfaction, large and flowing. Everyone had been instructed to eat en route and so the only task at hand was to bed down for the night.



Left to Right: paddlers, heat-exhaustion (which resulted in banning pop), various camp views - reflection and sunset

At 6 a.m., 4 drivers (including myself) awoke (to mooing in the distance) and drove 4 cars to the take-out (we returned in the 1 car the outfitters transferred). We arrived back in camp 10 minutes before the outfitters. Despite great timing, though, the amount of gear was overwhelming. Even so, we could have used another cooler and WAY more paddles. Owing to good team dynamics, we were on the water by 10:30. Not gonna lie - the first 3 miles were godawful slow and set a crummy morale - exacerbated by the ugly pastures. At several points, we spied swallow holes above the high-water mark on the banks - with tiny faces of baby birds (all around, bat-like birds flew in swarms). Jon and I, rowing the major gear boat, began in the lead but were overtaken by the paddle raft. After 90 minutes, we pow-wow'd near Clarno Bridge and expressed concerns. We agreed that this was not going to be some passive float trip; it was going to be a hell of a lot of work. The swiftness of the river improved slightly after the bridge, although Jon and I took a wrong turn around an island and had to push the raft through a gravel bar (demoralizing but funny). In contrast with the Grand Ronde trip, my guard was completely down and I joked with Jon about how, knowing me, I would fall out of the raft on this trip. He laughed, "If you do, I have 2 words of advice: stand up." Having said this, though, I now have to describe Clarno Rapid (class III at high water - barely II today). During our run, the only thing that made this long rapid interesting was the big rockery (at least 1 was 10 feet wide). We crashed here and there but were never hung up on things. The river then began a pattern that would repeat until the end: a long slack section followed by a minor riffle of current. Each set corresponded to the twisting shape the river assumed as it headed into the canyon - oxbow after oxbow. Unfortunately, at around 2 p.m., a worse pattern began: UP-river winds from the Columbia that blew you backwards during slack water and created net zero movement on riffles. Despite fatigue, people were polite. I resigned to enjoy the experience as a challenge and source of pathetic amusement. By 3:00, we had another pow-wow to discuss the value of stopping sooner vs. later to avoid the wind. The trade - getting a VERY early start tomorrow and rowing 25 miles before the next wind began. We consulted the maps and decided to aim for a site 1 hour away (12 miles from put-in). Upon making this decision, we ripped open potato chips, cookies, smoked clams, packets of meat, and pickles. Given that the oar boats were the slowest, Jon redistributed paddlers (i.e. we were joined Kiwi Peter and Corvallis Stacy, both avid singers of 1940's ballads and Maori folk). Although the location of camp 1 did not jive with information in our 1970s-era guidebook (few things did), it was extremely welcome. While everyone emptied the boats, I began kitchen duty: jambalaya. After a little singing, tangoing, tongue twisters, and bad jokes, a beautiful night's sleep was had - a full sky of galaxies. Our only serious problem: the youngest boy was throwing up: swallowing fecal-contaminated water, heatstroke, and/or too much pop (not water). Consequently, we banned the drinking of anything but water during the day/on the boats.



Left to Right: heading out, high canyon sections, petroglyphs, Jon searching for our canyon campsite

The next morning, we were on the river by 8:00, falling into the pattern established yesterday (slack, riffle, oxbow - WIND). Given our 25-mile goal, we planned to have lunch on the rafts - with me preparing made-to-order sandwiches. The scenery in the canyon was stunning: soaring red rock walls and terraces of columnar basalt. This was the first raft trip where I truly felt I was IN a canyon; I remarked to Jon that this must be sort of like the Grand Canyon (which I hadn't seen at the time). He laughed and then shared many stories of the Colorado (including a private trip that involved much nude rapid-running). Despite temperatures soaring over 100°, wildlife was abundant: bighorn sheep, coyotes, birds (wrens, swallows, kingfisher, sandpipers, killdeer, Canada geese, flickers, golden eagles), bass, HUGE suckers, amazingly diverse dragonflies, and giant stink beetles. Fortunately, we observed no snakes or lizards, and the number of flying insect vermin was low. An hour before camp, we stopped at a side canyon where Jon had read there were some petroglyphs. Despite seeing a lot of Native American rock art in Idaho and Utah, I thought the images along the John Day were impressive. Much debate went into the second night's campsite. We had rounded this obvious oxbow where there was supposed to be an "excellent site" - but there wasn't. Just downstream was a sandy beach - albeit with a fence. According to the map, there would not be

a campsite for another 8 miles. In the end, we settled for the beach with the fence. Said site turned out to be pleasant - particularly after finding a gate. An excellent swimming hole was enjoyed by many. Meanwhile, I worked on spaghetti and salad. After dinner, we built a huge fire, roasted marshmallows, and drank Milo (a hot malted cocoa drink from New Zealand). Unfortunately, I consumed so much that I was high as a kite all night - wired and peeing 4 times... but enjoying each time because the stars were SO bright!

We rose early the next day and made our planned 18 miles in good time. We hoped to camp at a site that purportedly offered hiking trails. However (and once again), the guidebook was off and we almost missed the "last site before take-out" (as stated by a man who'd been fishing the John Day for years). Given that it was 2:30 p.m., 107°F, and the campsite offered only 1 shade tree, the last thing people wanted to do was hike (particularly given that there were no obvious trails). After unloading gear, everyone laid down sleeping pads in the sparing shade and took a siesta. At 4, some brave souls (not me) did venture off-trail. Peter scrambled this impressive butte behind our site and said it offered amazing views of the curving river canyon. The rest of us proceeded into the river - even me. Our swimming hole was fairly safe but there was current down its center. Across the river were columnar basalt ledges off which some people jumped (NOT me). For dinner, my original plan was warm bean burritos and chicken tortilla soup. Owing to the heat, I revised the plan to cold chicken and bean burritos. After dinner, I was so exhausted that I skipped campfire festivities and slept 12 hours straight. We were also told by the aforementioned fisherman that the last 12 miles would take 6 hours to row - and so we headed out REALLY early (after our chorus-line tan-line photo, proving we'd been in the sun). I traveled with Stacy and Peter and we switched off throughout the day - Peter rowing singly and then Stacy and I rowing double. By 11:00, roads, power lines, and more cows came into view. Alas, the outfitters were not scheduled to arrive until 2:30 and Irja's cell phone had no reception. The Montanans left immediately, given their long commute. Then Irja's sub-team left, intending to call the outfitters from the first town. And then a miracle occurred: the outfitters arrived at 12:30, having decided to come early. Jon and I, the only folks left, helped load a few things and then were on our way, arriving home by 6:00 p.m.



Left to Right: relaxing in camp, Stacy and I co-rowing, tan-line shot at last camp, team at take-out (Cottonwood)

Despite all the hard labor, most reactions to this trip were overall positive. I enjoyed the challenge and the labor - it made me feel like I actually did something. In spite of much trip talk about doing more Oregon Rivers (e.g. the Owyhee), the Irja-nucleated Corvallis team has not regrouped for anymore river trips (still accurate as of 2007). By the end of the summer, I would become hooked on guided river trips with bigger water and more sexy locations out of state. Maybe it's a product of finally having a career with some money. Or maybe I have just come to value sitting back and not worrying about leadership things and details when I'm on vacation. Nonetheless, I completely respect all the work it takes to run rivers from my early trips in Oregon.



Left to Right: my car and the Sawtooths near Stanley, hiking to Sawtooth Lake, at Sawtooth Lake, me and wetsuit (first time!)

### Central Idaho: Middle Fork Salmon (MFS), Low Water August 1999

In January, I booked this 6-day rafting trip with OARS. As a graduate student, I'd heard amazing stories about the MFS from Cara and Dennis, which they'd rafted twice. The MFS put-in date was August 3 but I had made plans to leave 2 days early, hoping to poke around Stanley. A few weeks before, I hit a concrete post while backing out of a gas station in Washington - requiring a MASSIVE emergency car repair. At the time, I did not think things couldn't get worse but then they did. The day before the trip, I set out to whack down a patch of thistles - for some reason wearing wear sandals. I set my open pointy clippers on a fencepost and started stuffing debris into a bag. The next thing I remember was watching the the clippers falling. Initially, the impact seemed like only a surface bruise - but then the blood started gushing. It would be 6 hours before the bleeding fully stopped. The half-inch puncture wound was through the big toenail, half an inch IN the toe. At some point, I called the emergency care line for advice but was told there was nothing much they could do. And, of course, all the while I am, like: great, I'm going to be standing in water 6 days straight. Fortunately, I had emergency antibiotics. The next day, I set out for Stanley - my longest spell driving alone (I left a trail of phone-call breadcrumbs with friends). It was 4 when I hit Boise; I consumed nothing but bananas, Coke, yogurt, chips, and cookies - never stopping except for bathroom breaks and gasoline. Tired and craving bacon, I turned up highway 21, convinced I was not going to make the last 125 miles without several more caffeine hits. But the scenery blew my mind, providing an intense second wind. I fell in love with Idaho and highway 21 - despite slow curves and painstaking passes. The opalescent river along which the road traveled, the magnificent

ponderosa pines, and the high granite walls were stunning. After the second high pass, which offered fantastic views over the southern Sawtooth Range, the road straightened out, making for easier and faster driving. And then the northern Sawtooth came into view - rising like the Tetons. Stanley was, like, right under the range - full views from everywhere in the town. The first night, I wound up walking all over town until nearly dark. After spending too much money on outdoor gear I didn't really need, I felt I couldn't splurge on dinner - so I ate bagels, cream cheese, and applesauce from my driving stash.

The next morning, I satisfied my craving for pork products, wrote several oil-spotted postcards, and was encouraged to hike Sawtooth Lake by the woman at the front desk. After hauling the car up the rough Iron Creek road, I found the trailhead with 20+ cars - and one unloading 6 women all wearing bright spandex. This reassured me greatly as I pawed through the car for what little hiking gear I could muster: fanny pack, warm pop, and half a bottle of water. And then I headed out into what looked to be a fantastic day. About a mile up, it occurred to me that I was in bear country and so I got a little wigged. Prior to this point, I had been keeping people close enough so that I didn't feel in danger. But then team spandex then turned onto another trail. My goal was 5 miles and 2700 feet up - final elevation 8400. I waffled a bit until this older couple passed, apparently going my way. I kept slightly distant from them for a mile but then the wife pooped out so I stopped to chat, explaining myself. As it turned out, Charlie (a trail runner from Arizona) would go on with me, his wife turning back. I was stunned I could keep up with Charlie as we passed a dozen people before Alpine lake, a turquoise gem set in this pocket of rock - a fantastic ripsaw ridge across the valley. Unfortunately, I discovered I was low on film (3 shots left, no extra rolls) - so I took Charlie's advice: don't take any more pictures until you are heading down. I stumbled up the slabs of granite, Charlie talking breathlessly while I gasped with the growing heat. The trail climbed to this bench and I told Charlie to go on because I needed a breather. After downing my pop, I continued - the trail winding through rocks (some pocketed with snow) and by a braided creek for another quarter mile before arriving at Sawtooth Lake proper. The trail continued to the right, crossed the outlet stream, and ascended a gap. Gaining just this much elevation revealed a secluded lobe of the lake - massive peaks in the distance. By 2, the high clouds seemed to be getting thicker. Concerned about thunder, I made my way down fast - passing 30-50 people still coming up. I saw Charlie WAY ahead of me at some point but I would never catch up to him and say thanks. Thanks Charlie! I was back at the hotel around 3:30. After completing car shuttle paperwork, I drove to Redfish Lake - which, relative to glorious Sawtooth Lake, sucked - and then treated myself to a HUGE ribeye steak. The next day, I slept in and lazed around until the rafting meeting. Leader Niki walked us through the trip and some safety issues. This would be the last trip of the season to use the higher put-in at Boundary Creek (future parties would fly downstream to Indian Creek). As expected, the water was low (2 feet at put-in). Although I was impressed by Niki and her organization, I was disappointed by the HUGE number of passengers (19, half kids). After the meeting, I told Niki about my toe and, as recommended, spent time cleaning the wound each day given that no amount of cover could keep my feet dry.

We had been warned there would be no time for a sit-down breakfast (restaurants opened at 7 a.m. and the bus left at 6:30). Thus, I distastefully purchased a heat-lamp-warmed egg/sausage sandwich at the gas station across the street. Traveling in a rattling old school bus (that didn't start without a jump), we headed back up the highway for 10 miles. Then we turned onto an unpaved logging road and drove for an hour. We passed a few meadow airstrips and an amazing number of silver snag forests, the ground blooming with fireweed - the majority of fires in 1988 and 1989, coinciding with the historic Yellowstone burn. We also passed a few cow pastures that caused me to flashback to John Day. But then we climbed into thin subalpine forest, traversing a tight-cornered pass and dropping to the put-in at Boundary Creek (5600 feet, near tree-line). The river seemed low, thin, and narrow. It was amazing how utterly HUGE the river would grow by the end of the trip. Of course, the put-in was a zoo. At least 4 HUGE parties were present (2 commercial's and 2 privates). The parking and staging areas were above the river, an impressive wooden boat-loading ramp descending steeply to the water. We met all the other guides, round-tableing in the thin woods behind the parking area. Each person - guide or guest - introduced him/herself and we were fitted with lifejackets. In total, our fleet had 9 boats. The gigantic sweep boat carried most of the gear and was operated by Kyle, who worked with my John Day oarsman during the off-season, and Jesse, the obligatory blond waif. Jesse and Kyle left early every day, setting up the kitchen and dining area so things were organized when we arrived in camp each afternoon. Niki's oar raft occupied the lead position among the small craft - followed by Willow's oar raft, Jim's paddleboat, and DL's oar raft. While oar rafts seated 4 passengers max, the paddleboat (MOST popular) seat 8 plus leader Jim. During the first 3 days (low water and plentiful rocks), helmets were required on the paddleboat. Interspersed between Willow and DL were several inflatable kayaks, 1 of which was "general use." On the first day, general use kayaks were not available because of the technical nature of the upper section. On this trip, 3 guests paid extra to rent their own kayaks (father/son John/Nick and couple Art/Gretchen).



Left to Right: put-in ramp, safety talk, rock-parking seconds from put-in, campsite night 1

After a long wait, we boarded the rafts. I wound up in DL's boat with Gretchen, who was still second-guessing whether she should join Art (she'd recently flipped on the Snake and was still shaken). I barely stepped into the boat when DL asked me what I did. After my answer, his response caught me completely off guard: so you can tell me all about telomeres. Somehow, I wasn't expecting the term telomere to be uttered in backwoods Idaho. Given DL's biology background and that he was a 6th grade teacher in California, he and I had plenty to talk about. I am constantly impressed with the intellect and dignity of teachers - not to mention their apparent prevalence in the rafting community. I trusted DL instantly as he fit perfectly into that genre of calm, adept, smart, and effortless oarsman. Within 30 seconds, we hit a riffle and passed the paddle raft, which had parked on the first of many boat-stopping rocks. Unfortunately, I

remember little more from that first day - mostly because it was overcast, drizzly and chilly (my teeth were chattering a couple times, in fact). A few other memories: gazing at the bottom of the glass-like river - the patterns and colors of the stones passing by like an animated watercolor of earth-tones; the amazing alpine wildflowers hanging over the edges of the magnificently clear river; the variable scent of smoke. Indeed, DL said there were numerous fires burning, all set by lightening. He pointed to the mountainsides, noting all the scars of past burns. At one eerie point, we passed directly by a blackened and still-burning tree, smoke trailing off the flaming torch in blue-gray spirals. In terms of rapids, I remember only Class IV Velvet Falls well: looking downriver and seeing this clear break in the topography, and then we were nosing over this 10-foot drop (it was symmetrical, no weird holes, no funky rocks). Of the other major rapids, I vaguely remember Powerhouse because there were historic buildings covered in fire-retardant foil near the shore. Somewhere near camp - cold, wet, shivering and despondent - we pulled over for a muddy slog to Sheepeater Hot Springs. Despite their miniscule depth, we all climbed in (more accurately: flattened down in the muck). No one responded positively to Niki's suggestion that we get OUT. But we did - and, shortly thereafter, we arrived at our camp by Greyhound Creek, a high bench in thin woods (16 miles from put-in). Folks who borrowed OARS equipment were given a tent set-up demonstration while folks like me set up things on our own. Every campsite we used was HUGE and I selected a lovely sight overlooking the river. As I set up my tent, the sun came out and I removed all my wet clothes, hastily climbed into my sleeping bag, and took a nap - the sound of the river lulling me into a heavenly sleep. Eventually, I put on long pants and fleece and joined the dinner circle, enjoying appetizers and dinner (steak, rice, and bean/tomato salad with feta). The skies were now blue, the sun low and gold. Given luxuriously comfortable wooden chairs, I worked on genetics lectures for about an hour. Wielding an actual college textbook, I was asked by half a dozen people: Which university do you go to? What year/major are you? What do you want to be when you grow up? The looks I received when I explained I was the professor were amusing, to say the least. I was also the first adult to retire for bed every night. It was just so peaceful - the sound of the river, the security of people nearby. It's seldom I truly enjoy sleeping outside... but, for all 5 nights, I loved the peace and the music of the water.



Left to Right: sunny morning , Pistol Rapid (you zig-zag through those rocks!), Sunflower Flats hot spring, petroglyphs

On day 2, I wound up in Willow's boat with Flynn, 1 of 3 under-11 redhead boys (Flynn means "son of the redhaired man"). As should be evident, I am not into kids. Flynn, who listened intently as Willow and I discussed relationships, concluded that I was 40 and Willow was 35 (I was 31 and Willow was 26) and so she and I enjoyed a good laugh (which I don't think he understood) about children's perceptions of age and time. I would have similar discussions with Niki on day 4. It struck me that, here we were: 3 strangely similar, strong, gorgeous, single women... all with this cowboyish intensity. And all we could do was keep going down the river (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: Niki quit guiding a year after this trip to marry and have kids; Willow did the same in 2006). The most memorable rapid of the day was Pistol - because Willow accurately said it was the most beautiful: a narrow rock chute with a cascade of blue-green and white flowing perfectly into this deep central pool, and then curving again through a tight second curve. Shortly thereafter, we arrived at Indian Creek and the airstrip where later-season parties landed/put-in. With the exception of said structures, the MFS was the wildest and most pristine river I've seen to date (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: Alaskan rivers unseated this assertion). We lunched at the airstrip, enjoying veggie-filled pitas. After lunch, I got into the double kayak with Gretchen and floated a couple easy miles to camp (i.e. nothing over class I). Our camp for the night was on the left bank at Marble Creek Camp. In contrast with the first night - where the site had a pit toilet - we had to set up a groover. Despite a large discussion about groover rules, minor rules were broken: toilet paper in the groover, pee on the seat, lid left up. This OARS crew provided extra free tampons (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: the male-dominated Colorado OARS crew did not). Prior to dinner, half the group hiked a steep and eroding path to an old mine shaft HIGH above the river - where 2 guides explained some local history. All around was gorgeous quartz, the temptation to illegally collect overwhelming. Being that my mind was on food (and sparkly rocks), I was restless to return for dinner: teriyaki chicken, rice, cabbage/noodle salad, and bread pudding with chocolate and bananas. Incidentally, OARS did an excellent job with drinks: during the day, ONLY water-based hydration mixes were allowed (NO POP). There was a water filter system set up each morning and you filled your bottles then and at lunch. At night, there was a ration of 2 pops and/or beers per person and there were always 1-2 bottles of wine. There were also hot water jugs/taps for cocoa, tea, or coffee after dinner. If you wanted more, you had to bring it yourself (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: neither the MFS nor the Colorado provides alcohol anymore for liability reasons; guests must bring their own). I slept like a rock, following a tremendous display of thunder and lightening - with no accompanying rain.

The next day, it was just me on DL's boat, talking science and education. We made a lovely morning stop at magnificent Sunflower Flats hot spring, which originates on a hillside and spreads out into several soaking pools among the upper ledges. Someone was clever enough to fix a wide board that jutted out over the beach, converting the drainway into a hot water shower. After lunch, we passed another airstrip/ranch and then hiked up to some petroglyphs, painted in ochres and oranges (colors rivaled only by the adjacent lichens). We had a lengthy discussion about Native American history in the area. Most of the day, though, was tame in terms of whitewater and landscape. Our camp, Pine Creek Flat (mile 43), was gorgeous - although the skies above threatened rain the whole time. The winds were also extreme and everyone was advised to put a big rock in their tent during dinner. I managed to squeeze my tent onto this precarious bluff overlooking the river. That night's dinner was my favorite on the trip - shrimp curry, fruit salad, rice, and huckleberry buckle. Most retired early, owing to tomorrow's VERY early wake-up and 29-mile itinerary. Many people were daunted by this but I chuckled, recalling rowing that many on the John Day (half the time with wind blowing UP-river).

On day four, we traveled to Driftwood Flat (mile 72). Owing to my positive experience in the kayak, I joined Tom (Alaska outfitter and father of the red-haired boys) for the first 12 miles of class I-II whitewater. In contrast with yesterday, we wore embarrassing wetsuits (mine was a LARGE, having put on 15 lbs since moving to Oregon). Tom put me in the front - NOT my first choice, but I knew the back person had to steer. We definitely hit big-feeling waves and I still remember that first sensation of plowing into a swirling hole, being RIGHT on the water, having icy water in my lap. Mid-morning, Niki decided we were making such good timing that we deserved a soak in Hospital Bar, a couple of hot pools RIGHT at the water's edge. Given that I had been icily soaked all morning, I was more than happy to climb into what others voted as SCALDING. After lunch were several class IV's and I fretted about whether or not to go for it in the kayak (Tom was goading me to join him). But I feared that if I fell out on something bad, I may never do this stuff again. So I chickened out and we handed the boat to Mandy and Andrea, 2 novices. I was surprised, frankly, OARS let them (or me) do class IV's. Lunch, by the way, was the BEST: extra teriyaki chicken grilled the other night was chopped and mixed with herbs, split red grapes, and some mustard/mayo concoction. During lunch, we also spied bighorn sheep and our 10-year old fly fisherwoman, Lauren, caught/released a trout. I joined Niki for the rest of the day, enjoying girl-chat while running gorgeous rapids. The first series were named for the 4 Tappan children, raised on a nearby homestead (then killed or maimed by diseases or accidents). We parked the boat after "Tappan Falls" (the second rapid) to await the descent of Mandy and Andrea. They made it down the first Tappan screaming but upright. Unlike Velvet Falls, Tappan Falls were complex - a rock in the mid-section (that you didn't see until you were over the lip) and more rocks and rapids beyond the plunging drop. Mandy and Andrea's run of Tappan started good. But then Andrea (in front) stopped rowing (you could see her expression freeze with fear). Mandy was still rowing and so the boat turned 90° as they went over the falls. They hung up on the central rock, the kayak filling with water, and then they were dumped fully over into the raging swirls. We scooped them up like burnt French fries in a deep fat fryer. Still screaming, they ran every rapid until the end of the trip (except Haystack, which Niki declared off-limits for beginners). Later, we hit Jack Creek, an extended and winding series of rapids; here, Nick, 19-year old son of engineer John would get tossed from his single kayak. Nick recovered quickly - although he lost a shoe (which was found a day later by another party). At Haystack, the terrain changed from low sage-covered hills to a steep-walled alpine canyons. At the guest ranch above Haystack, Niki phoned her boss to let him know we were ok - and then we all congregated to scout Haystack. The private group behind us didn't even stop, and we watched them all (young teens in kayaks included) maneuver through the complex rocks as though in slow motion. Indeed, when we finally hit the water, it proceeded likewise. With 5 more easy miles to camp, we made excellent time. The beautiful campsite was vast and gorgeous, and I found a secluded spot against a house-size boulder. This was the first night I made headway with some light reading - the new Pam Houston collection. While I found "Cowboys are My Weakness" to be genius, I just could not get into this one. I barely finished the second story when dinner was called: herbed red potatoes, green salad, and grilled pork.



Left to Right: Haystack Rapid, Impassable Canyon, Veil Falls, looking out from Veil Falls amphitheatre, the GIGANTIC team

Days 5-6 were short, evenly splitting the final 30 miles. On day 5, I briefly joined the paddleboat - initially riding as a camera-wielding passenger. Jim, the paddle leader, completed a chemistry degree at Carlton College where he knew a post-doctoral fellow from my old lab. Nowadays, Jim was a carpenter in Portland, guiding with OARS during the summer. Jim must be reincarnated from a kindergarten teacher because his knack for dealing with little kids was admirable. Between reading gross-out selections from Idaho history books to having this unending arsenal of active games, Jim was every parents' dream babysitter. Within 15 minutes on the paddle-boat, the boys were pooping out and I took over paddling. Jim grinned immediately: geez, Sarah, you didn't tell us you knew what you were doing... we would have had you over here the first day. I just smiled: that's why I didn't tell you (actually, I was shocked - because I had never team-paddled in my life). At some point, we stopped at Waterfall Creek - the beginning of the Impassable Canyon. A cascade of whitewater crashed down a steep slope on river left. On the right - this amazing canyon carved by Big Creek (an popular class V kayaking trip in early season). Jim said there was a stunning trail up Big Creek to some high meadows with a field station and landing strip. Beyond this point, the MFS assumed a much more severe and vertical feel. At mile 81, we stopped for a major haul UP to Veil Falls. At first glance, that there was anything high on the canyon wall was hard to believe - but perspectives are deceiving. We started by scrambling furniture-sized talus. I got the impression that a few parents were not thrilled. After the rocks, we clawed up loose dirt before finally entering this MASSIVE amphitheatre. The views onto the MFS were the best on the entire trip. A thin spray of water - Veil Falls - fell from the high lip of this 100-200 foot high cavern. Meanwhile, DL pulled out his recorder and played soft music that reverberated off the walls. Bored with the paddleboat (specifically - whining kids who weren't pulling their weight), I returned to DL's boat with Tom's wife. For lunch, Niki had planned a raft slip-and-slide into a swimming hole, all from an expansive sandy beach. Lunch featured crab-mango-veggie fillings for pita sandwiches and leftover chopped pork from the previous night's dinner. After lunch, we rafted 2 really big rapids before landing at Parrot Placer camp (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: most likely Rubber and Hancock, our adversaries from the high-water trip). All day, we'd been warned that this camp was going to be small and cramped. Actually, it was pleasant - save a black widow near my campsite and an impressive snake in the foliage-enshrouded bathroom. Dinner that final night was the most impressive: Dutch oven veggie lasagna, garlic bread, and green salad. Alright, let's finish this up: the thing that made the final day's rapids so exciting was the fact that the river had obviously grown SO HUGE. You could feel the massiveness of the standing waves and the river was clearly deep to the point you could not see the bottom. Mandy and Andrea were still kayaking every rapid, and the day was punctuated with excitement as we watched them nail each one. Part of me regretted not going for it but, sitting on the bow and feeling the rise and fall of the boat as it leapt and crashed 8-10 foot waves and holes, I had plenty of excitement where I was. The only spill of the day involved the paddleboat: they were maneuvering this S-curve rapid in front of us. In what seemed like

trick photography, we saw - in one second - Jim in the boat... and then he was gone. I recall DL (not believing it himself) quietly asking: did Jim just fall out of the boat? I was, like, I think so. By then, the paddlers - under Tom's direction - had guided the boat into a side pool and pulled Jim out. We took a quick and tense-feeling lunch in the huge shade of a cliff face that was 10 minutes from the take-out. Niki seemed overcome with stress about the pending take-out, in combination with the fact that she had to be guiding the Main Salmon the next day. The boys were individually withdrawn and, amongst themselves, agitatedly bickering. The adults were debating, as best as we could behind the backs of the guides, how everyone was handling tipping. Because I was driving straight to Missoula, I had to deal with things at the indeed-rushed take-out (in contrast with everyone else, regrouping for dinner in Salmon, Idaho). I felt bad leaving the group - albeit with big hugs from DL, Niki, and Willow... an honor because I could easily call each of them friends.



Left to Right: Allison and Stanley/Sawtooths, hiking down from Bench Lake, Sawtooths from Redfish Lake area, campsite, the team at the last camp

*Given that Allison and I did, in fact, paddle the whole time - these are all the pictures from the trip.*

### Central Idaho: Middle Fork Salmon (MFS), High Water June 2003

When I booked my first 1999 MFS trip (and this is something I will NEVER forget) the OARS receptionist remarked that I would love the MFS more than the Colorado because it had more rapids per mile. After running the Colorado in 2000, I agree with this assertion because, indeed, the Colorado has an awful lot of LONG downtime. Indeed, an oarsman I know (who will remain nameless) rates rivers using a beer scale (# beers you could drink between rapids) and he gave the Colorado a 3-5, the MFS <1. A novice rafting friend who ran the Colorado accurately described it as 1-2 hours of sitting in between 30 seconds of sheer terror. Although terror is not quite a word I would use (except on Horn Creek and Lava Falls), I admit that there is something safe and sterile about sitting in the front of an oar-driven craft - even through momentary bouts of whitewater. And so was born this trip: paddle-rafting the entire MFS at high water. At this moment (48 hours after take-out), I am still taking Dramamine for motion sensation, muscle relaxants for a twisted line of muscles running head to shoulder, and nursing any number of bruises of unknown origins. And the disturbing thing: I LOVED it, absolutely thrilling... hands down - better than the Colorado. Allison and I arrived in Stanley on June 12 and made few successful trips into the snow-packed Sawtooth range: Yellow-Belly Lake (not impressive), Fishhook Creek (easy, short, nice views), and Bench Lakes (ridge views awesome, lake not impressive). For unknown reasons, we thought it would be interesting to visit the Sun Valley area; honestly, we found this area to be crowded and in-your-face affluent. We spent less than 20 minutes walking the downtown area before returning to the austere humility of Stanley. The night before put-in, we attended the pre-trip meeting and received our dry bags and ammo cans. Much to my surprise, our party was just 20 in number (including guides): the guides were Eric, Willow (same Willow as in 1999), Barry, Mark, Mike, and John; the passengers included a family of 4 (Julie, John, Matt, and Katy), 2 couples (Alice and Randy, Edlynn and Tom), 2 sub-family couples (Kaylie and Bob, Allison and I), and 1 single (61-year-old Willem, down for his fourth time in a kayak). Lastly, OARS decided to send a professional photographer (Dave) down this trip to generate new images for their upcoming catalog. At the pre-trip meeting, however, only leader Eric showed up (in addition to the passengers). Thankfully, and in contrast with other river trips - only Eric caught my eyes from time to time... in large part because he was a younger, fitter, and less cynical version of Jay (he also had this full head of wild strawberry blond hair). Allison didn't find Eric as interesting as I did; while she agreed he had fun hair, she found him terribly geeky (that he was a teacher during the off-season explained this). Eric's introduction to the MFS was standard, although he initially offered up only 1 ammo can per pair (being girly-girls on the rag, Allison and I corrected vehemently). To our surprise, many people on this trip had requested Dories, something that costs extra on Colorado trips. In contrast, high water MFS runs can be done in Dories - at no extra charge. Also, 2 people (Willem and Matt) brought their own kayaks and OARS provided 1 full-time kayak guide (John) - in the water at all times with that group. In contrast with low water MFS trips (that used sweep boats for gear), gear would be rowed down the river by Mike, a 21-year old student from LaGrande - our only true Oregonad; incidentally, Matt had recently relocated to Hood River and was, like me, an honorary Oregonad. Aforementioned Dave would be rowed in his own raft by Mark. Lastly, Willow commanded the 6-man (plus guide) paddleboat. In sum, our flotilla consisted of 3 rafts, 2 Dories, 3 kayaks, and 1 inflatable kayak - the latter taken out day 2.

Eric managed to instill the fear of god in all of us regarding the water temperature and level (8000-9000 cfs - HIGH WATER!) - to the point that all of us were buying more gear after the meeting. I bought nice Neoprene socks and most others bought similar items plus more long underwear. Wetsuits were provided by OARS to anyone paddling and so I affirmed, upon hear this, that I intended to paddle the entire river... if only because then I would be wearing professional gear all the way down. Although Eric indicated that many passengers had expressed interest in the paddle raft, few people spoke up during the meeting about following through at put-in. Initially, even I wanted to hold back a day to see just how bad the water looked... but it was clear by the end of the preliminary meeting that Allison (who required MUCH arm-twisting) and I needed to be right there in the thick of the rapids from the moment that boat hit the river. Indeed, before Allison arrived at my house, I was worried that she had this invincible air about her experience following our disappointingly tame trip down Cataract Canyon. Much to my relief, however, she was sufficiently scared of the MFS - and she maintained a fairly healthy level of fear while on the river. Allison and I were both equally put off by Eric's news that this would be OARS' first MFS trip of the season with passengers; only news that the guides had done a practice run the week prior calmed her down. One FANTASTIC thing about this trip, though: Eric never got us up really early. While I think this had a lot to do with the river being huge and moving fast, I had the impression that Eric was fundamentally not a morning person. For put-in, he asked that we be

out in front of the hotel at an astonishing 8:30 a.m. River mornings were similar. Allison and I sat up packing to Star Wars/Attack of the Clones (making fun of those stupid love scenes), and enjoyed a good night of sleep. The drive to Boundary Creek seemed shorter and more pleasant - not to mention more interesting (probably because of snow RIGHT along the dirt road, and the fact that the actual MFS headwaters were pointed out to us). We also saw elk and fields of lupine among the emerald meadows. Most things about this trip were in sharp contrast with the low water 1999 trip, including the mellow and nearly empty put-in. Making up for the lack of people, though, the river filled its entire bed... and then some. As always, we went through a big safety talk that - in combination with the big water - did not help Allison's uncertainty with regards to paddling. Willow was begging for people to go that first day and, in the end, we went down with only 5 paddlers. The paddle crew made an embarrassing show of putting on our wetsuits, all of us (probably correctly) insisting we'd gained a lot of recent weight. We also wore splash jackets and helmets, the latter the ENTIRE way down. Dave seemed to enjoy taking pictures of all of us making lewd gestures as we tried to pull up the neoprene. Indeed, we woefully shook our heads at all the loose crotch space where we simply could not pull any more over those thundering thighs - and I won't even discuss the ass issues. After gearing up, the last thing we thought we could do was actually move... and, of course, we were then expected to hoist the paddle raft, carry her to the wooden slide ramp, ease her down, and then climb back up again - only to descend for at least the fourth time to the launching area. In what was a pleasant surprise, the paddle raft (at least the first day) involved little work because the current was so strong. Willow went through all the basic commands and everything proceeded smoothly. In contrast with the Dories, the paddle raft was a self-bailer. The upper MFS - as I well knew - was small as compared with the lower (indeed, the waves grew to 10 feet tall by the end). But the rapids were fast in coming... or so it felt that first day. Allison took to paddling instantly, feeling comfortable with the water and enjoying the team nature of the activity. The first class IV was Sulphur Slide - very easy. The second class IV - Velvet Falls - was scouted. Velvet was a surprise to me because, during low water, it had been so straightforward: a perfect and even 10-foot drop. Not interested in hiking to the scout in the awkwardly tight wetsuit, I hung out in the boats (as did most paddlers). Most of the boats went over Velvet before us and Dave was apparently waiting with his camera when we did it. To my surprise, the falls were this raging, asymmetrical hole of HUGE swirling waves. Indeed, I was the only one in the boat who evidently did not notice we came close to flipping the raft; I recall the boat lurching up the wave a little off-center... and maybe slipping back a little... but then we just seemed to plow right through. Folks on the shore, Willow, and the rest of the paddlers insisted we almost went over. Perhaps, being in the back of the boat and naïve, I was clueless. Oh well. We proceeded through the Chutes and Powerhouse Rapids before claiming our camp at Sheepeater Hot Springs. We pulled into camp around 3, typical for most days. It was hot and the skies were blue. Allison and I, for reasons of mutual sanity and different sleeping patterns, erected separate tents. Even so, we always set them up next to one another. Dinner was salmon for everyone but me. I enjoyed a well-done Portobello, skillfully poached in wine by John. In contrast with 1999 impressions, the hot springs were unappealing - surrounded by a weird moat of mud, rocks, and algae. Nevertheless, neighboring groups to either side of us did pass through camp to use the springs during the late afternoon.

The next morning, we rose late to blue skies and increasing temperatures. Given ongoing paddle-apathy, Allison and I decided to summon our balls and take the front/bow positions. This meant not only staring into maw after maw of whitewater but also setting the pace for others. I don't know which was more difficult but I was told I did a reasonable job. The front end of the boat, we discovered, is a really up and down ride because it is elevated. We were having to totally reach out and down to dig into the waves. This will, no doubt, make some people extremely nervous and I truly cannot recommend paddling class IV's to a lot of people. Day 2 on the water was also more difficult for me because you could really feel the river getting bigger. Simply moving through even calm-looking water took a lot more work because, in fact, there was a hell of a lot of water to be muscled through. Major rapids included Artillery, Cannon Creek, and Pistol. Only the latter gave us trouble as we pin-balled through the tight S-curve of rock. As with Velvet, Pistil looked completely different to me at high water. In August, you can hardly see beyond the tight walls of rock that define the enclosed rapid. This time, we could see almost over the rocks... nevertheless hitting at least one wall extensively. After Pistil, the kayak was finally taken out for guests to use. For reasons that I still don't understand, the paddle raft was responsible for all kayak rescues. After 30-60 minutes, the kayak folks - Alice and Randy - capsized. Alice was coming straight for me and I moved to pull her out after making affirmative eye contact with Willow. Alice's rescue yielded many problems: first, performing rescues from the front is difficult because the boat raises up and so you have to lift that much farther. Second, all the confusion quickly lead to others in the boat not paddling and the whole vessel turning round and round - with me trying to hold onto Alice the whole time. By the time I was trying to haul her up again, we were facing upstream, something not advised because the current drags people under the boat and against the direction of the haul. Third, I just suck at pulling people out of the water. It took both Katy and I to yank Alice out of the water - the boat turning every which way and no one paddling (except Willow, likely frustrated). Meanwhile, someone in the back of the boat had hauled Randy out of the water. Alice was physically shaking from cold and seemed distrustful of me. Alice and Randy's only prior rafting experiences was on a Colorado Dory trip. While Randy did revisit the kayak once, Alice refused to go near it again. For me, I felt overwhelmed with the responsibility of paddling and performing rescues... and there would more. Despite lots of swimming and pulling out on the Cataract trip, hauling people onto boats is not something I ever mastered... and certainly not in the context of a real situation. I think we camped at Little Soldier that night. Before dinner, several of us took a short hike with John to some Native American pit-house ruins about a half a mile downstream, hiking the up-and-down trail that runs alongside the river until the Impassable Canyon. Thereafter, we enjoyed a fine dinner of vegetarian lasagna. The only thing that marred our complete enjoyment of this camp was the toilet location: HIGH on a shelf above the beach. The steep trail of rocks and dirt was downright dangerous to descend - particularly in the dark.

The next day would be one of two back-to-back "half-overs" - days in which we rafted half the day and hiked or lounged the other half. Both involved about 11-14 miles of rafting. The first took us to Shelf Camp, a mile above Loon Creek. Very little whitewater was encountered (Class III/IV stuff included Marble and Jackass). Edlynn and Tom were in the kayak and I did successfully rescue Edlynn. In contrast with the previous MFS trip, we completely skipped Sunflower Flats hot springs (partly because there was another party there and partly because it was just too damn hot). We arrived in camp around 1 p.m. and enjoyed an excellent lunch (cold burritos with lots of avocados and beans). All morning, Eric had been building up this fabulous hike down the MFS trail up Loon Creek and this granite narrows section. At 2 o'clock, he and Barry presented 2 alternative hikes people could go on (Eric/Loon and Barry to some grove of old growth forest up White Creek). I told Eric I was interested in his trip but wanted to get a head start because of the heat (which he ok'd). I had no idea what Allison was planning to do; I just left without her. Armed with a river-dipped shirt and sarong, and 1 Nalgene of water, I headed up the frighteningly dry, hot, and dusty trail. A USFS trail crew on horseback passed me as I headed out of sight of the camp. It was 1 mile down to Loon Creek proper. Although it was nasty-ass hot, there were plenty of shady spots and I rested and

drank frequently. Eric promised he'd be carrying a giant container of extra water for folks who needed it and so I wasn't afraid of running out. At Loon Creek camp, I proceeded right/up Loon Creek - but stopped after 5 minutes because I thought maybe I should wait for Eric and company. After 10 minutes in the shade, I was greeted by only Eric - who said everyone else went with Barry. Thus, I felt guilty for having him traipse all the way out here for me and, explaining this, asked if he just wanted to go back. He said no and so we hiked on up the trail. I think Eric and I were pleasantly surprised with one another in the sense that we likely both thought the other was going to yammer all the way up... and neither of us did. Loon Creek hosts a hot spring that was disturbingly adjacent to the sprawling Simplot Ranch (Simplot, I learned on this trip, is the major Idaho potato farming family). The spring was also heavily impacted - a man-made wooden box trapping the hot water before it cascaded into raging Loon Creek (which, frankly, looked like the size of the MFS at Boundary Creek). We didn't stay more than a minute at the springs before continuing up - perhaps another 1.5 miles. Indeed, the trail climbed above this narrow section of granite where - 100 feet below - Loon Creek raged through a maze of gigantic granite rocks. The way was completely in the sun and my vertigo began to come on a bit. Within 20 minutes, the trail leveled and we met the river via a bridge crossing. We decided to stop here and rest before turning around. Bushwhacking to the creek's edge, I dipped my shirt into the water while Eric watched for fish battling the upstream current. After 40 minutes of lazing around, we headed back - discussing education nearly all the way down. Shortly after we returned to camp, Barry's party arrived - looking tired and hot. Evidently, Barry took them on some open, straight-up route that wasn't a trail. I had the distinct impression that people thought Barry (who was much older than Eric) was going to do some leisurely thing; thus, they were avoiding Eric because they thought he was going to kill them on something macho. Of course, when Allison (who gave up on Barry's hike part-way up) found out I'd been out all afternoon with only Eric, I received a lot of teasing. Oh well - I think she was just jealous. Nevertheless, even I would be lying if I said I didn't swoon a bit up and over the Loon. Watching redhead legs climbing up the trail in front of me, I could not help but flashback to all those dizzying miles of hiking behind Jay. Oh well - unlike other men I have known - Jay remains a pleasant memory. Dinner that night - grilled chicken. Unfortunately, Allison and I cleared the dining area by engaging in a heated debate about capitol punishment, abortion, and religion. Eventually, we took our discussion to the scenic bathroom so as to avoid offending what seemed a conservative group. Here, we regressed to our childhood abilities to use the bathroom in front of one another while carrying on an extensive conversation. Unfortunately, I had been feeling ill with motion sickness and/or heat, and nearly puked during a simultaneous bout of GI distress. After settling down (at all levels), we enjoyed an exciting evening of thunder and even a few raindrops. But then the skies cleared above, leaving a spectacular sunset under distant clouds.

The second half-over day took us to Camas Creek. Before setting out, Eric lead another hike back to Loon Creek given that many folks seemed disappointed by yesterday's hike there. The boats met us at Loon Creek camp and we proceeded from there. After rafting a bit and hiking up this nasty slope to view some unimpressive pictographs, we ran the Tappan series. I forget who was in the kayak but I know there were a number of flips and rescues. Owing to the morning hike, we didn't arrive at Camas Creek until around 3 p.m. All the campsites were along incoming Camas Creek and Allison and I selected a spot that was on this scenic shelf 4 feet above the water. After setting up the tents, Allison and I decided to hang out in camp (skipping an optional hike). Given that it was blazing hot, Allison and I got halfway into Camas Creek, played cards, and enjoyed a raunchy discussion of men, sex, and relationships. And I decided to drink my 8 oz. of Jagermeister. The next thing I remember was waking up around 7, the tent ceiling spinning and my entire body chilled to the bone (I was laying on top of my sleeping bag). Fortunately, I was cognizant enough to get inside, zip up, and fall asleep again. Allison eventually visited me with a plate of dinner, having explained that I was sick to everyone else. Apparently, Matt had been throwing up from heatstroke, which supported Allison's lie. After Allison left, I caught one whiff of the food and promptly threw up 3 times over the next 30 minutes. For the record, I have only been that shit-faced once before (Jenn, Olga, and the Mai-Tai incident). While I don't condone stupid levels of drinking, my only regret about the Camas Creek incident remains that I will never be able to enjoy Jagermeister again because it will be forever tinged with the acrid memory of vomit. I promptly began to madly hydrate. At 10:30, the last light vanishing, I headed down to use the bathroom in a big way. At the pre-bathroom hand-washing station, however, there was no toilet paper and so I had to go down to the guides' boats to beg. Here, as you can imagine, I had to face a concerned Eric and, unable to lie, told him that Allison had been too kind in her description of my status. In retrospect, I'm surprised he gave me toilet paper - although he did threaten not to talk to me anymore because I didn't share my liquor (clearly unnecessary given the large number of empty Jack Daniels bottles around the guide quarters). I'm sure the guides enjoyed my feeble attempts to locate the well-hidden toilet amidst the brush on the hill above the shore - my wrong turns highly visible owing to my headlamp in the dark.

The next day would be a big day - 20 miles to Elk Bar camp (mile 80). Allison and Katy decided that they were going to do the kayak - despite my serious concerns about pending huge rapids. Exacerbating my nerves, Eric announced that he would be commanding the paddleboat for a change of pace. I decided NOT to bring up the Jagermeister incident with him, fearing he was just on the boat to mess with my head and/or make sure I was not hung over (which I was not - amazingly). Thankfully, he didn't tease me and I partly gained back his respect by correctly identifying Neil Diamond's "Crunchy Granola Suite" (when he started singing it) and unabashedly identifying myself as a Diamond fan. Eric's style as the paddle captain was COMPLETELY different than Willow's. Despite or in line with Neil Diamond (depends on your opinion of Neil), Eric definitely displayed his testosterone: plowed us into the biggest holes on everything, more aggressive and last-minute commands accompanied by a more wildly bumpy ride, and had us working less while he single-handedly paddled sections of slow water. Alas, I have to confess that I really enjoyed Eric's loud thrill-seeking tendencies. Of course, we did hit one unexpected hole and Eric flew forward across the boat, surprisingly even himself. The most illustrating event of the day, though, was that all of us - used to Willow's "dry-run" philosophy - had opted to skip the wetsuits. At lunch, we decided to put them back on because Eric had us all soaked and seriously concerned that we might flip. As with the 1999 trip, lunch took place right before Haystack Rapid. In 1999, Niki refused to let folks kayak Haystack and thus I was shocked when Eric said it was fine for Allison and Katy - both complete novices - to run it. In high water, Haystack truly looked wicked: a LONG rock garden and then this narrow right-hand chute with this HUGE boulder and massive wave... around which we couldn't see anymore. From our perspective in the paddleboat, the narrow chute was completely raging - the wave that climbed the sentinel boulder was 6-8 feet up the rock and the hole on the other side was absolutely massive. Immediately after running it, we waited as close to this mess as possible while Allison/Katy came down. We watched the kayak ride the wave way too high (even Allison knew it at the time) but then manage to steer away from the hole. Allison thought everything would be easy after Haystack but then we hit the Jack Creek series, 3-4 continuous rapids that lie along this very winding portion of the river. I honestly don't remember how many times Allison and Katy flipped. I do know that the major flip involved Katy getting swept downriver (we pulled her out) while Allison managed to stay with the kayak and eddied out in this

momentarily calm section right before another big rapid. Allison stood on the shore dumbfounded by the prospect that she was going to have to get back in the boat and make her way alone. Meanwhile, all the boats passed her, yelling to get back in and paddle (and then vanishing around the bend). In so doing, Allison earned a full set of balls that day. I'm not sure when the rest of the flips happened (they all just blurred together) but Allison and Katy managed to flip and self-rescue 3-4 more times that day. Eventually, Allison gave up and Barry took her on board his Dory - which she described as frightening to the point she debated about going back in the kayak. Shortly before camp, we took a short hike up Waterfall Creek to view MASSIVE falls crashing down this boulder chute. Instead of forming a single route up the nasty rock/dirt bank, many folks tried to make their own way up. Tom happened upon a rattlesnake in between some rocks; I watched him throw himself backwards from the rocks, almost fully losing his footing. Elk Bar camp was about 3 miles down from the falls and you could smell the rain in the air. While most people camped high in the woods (where there was a lot of poison oak), Allison and I camped down by the river in the sand. As dinner was being prepared, the rain began to fall and - for the first time on any of these trips - I watched the crew erect a huge tarp system over the cooking/eating area. Dinner featured grilled steak, mashed potatoes, and vegetables... followed by cake. We were all gluttonous. The rain was brief but intense. Throughout the night, a few small showers fell but we all hoped the good weather would return the next day - our last on the river. During dinner, everyone agreed that if tomorrow brought good weather, we would get up early and hike to the Veil Falls amphitheatre.

But alas it was shitty and so we used that time to pack, wishfully waiting for sun. Those of us paddling were advised to wear everything - and so I put on wool socks under my Neoprene booties, long underwear and fleece under the still damp wetsuit and splash jacket. Only Katy took on the kayak... although she would opt out of this decision halfway through the day. In retrospect, Allison and I were lucky it rained because one of the couples had been eyeing our spots on the paddleboat, grumbling to the guides that we'd been hogging the boat. Allison and I, though, were prepared to argue vehemently - given that we had been committed since day 1, when most people bailed. Fortunately, said couple was not into getting doubly wet and no fights broke out. As we set out, the river seemed dramatically more swollen. The standing waves were massive even in non-rapids sections. Willow was thrilled to be back, concerned we were all falling too much for Eric. Even so, she seemed even more cautious than before... more prone to telling us when we were out of line because it REALLY mattered. Indeed, the HUGE rapids - Redside, Weber, Cliffside - were massive and long, to the point we barely managed them. At no point on any prior trip have I actually believed we could flip... but you could feel it today. And then came Rubber. From a distance, Rubber didn't look any bigger than anything else. I remember correctly going into the massive tongue and then there was just this undulating sea of white teeth everywhere. We seemed to be moving through this mess in a general manner when suddenly there appeared this massive hole, a 45° angle wave (relative to the boat) curling upward and forming a distinct wall. We were supposed to be way right to avoid this wave... and if we weren't, we should have been perpendicular to the wall. But we weren't - and so we got sucked to the side and I can still picture the boat going upward against the wall of white, the floor of the boat rising and tipping. The raft then assumed a position that was not only parallel to the wall but actively flipping over. I was slipping out of the boat, my feet completely out of the jams. I can still see this moment as clear as day because everything became simply consumed with white - EVERYWHERE. And then, miraculously, we punched through. I don't know what did it but we avoided catastrophic flipping at the last second. After punching through the wall, we were in another soup of white teeth but there were no big structured waves or holes and so we mostly bounced through it. Willow was blown away and all I remember was her repeating: What was that? A couple people had lost their paddles and we were all shaken. Behind us, 2 kayakers went down, including Katy - who was so shaken she retreated to the Dory. Willem came fully out of his hard-shell kayak, hit rocks, and sustained a long bleeding injury to his lower calf. In a tenth of a mile, we had to tackle another HUGE rapid, Hancock... and then 3 more class III-IV's. Folks, including myself, were not looking forward to anymore situations like this. There now accumulated a weirdly silent somber on our boat. But nothing approached the magnitude or power of Rubber and we survived... unfortunately, not with the same eagerness or satisfaction of earlier runs. Somewhere in there, we pulled off for lunch. Sensing our cold, fearful, and unenthusiastic moods, the guides boiled hot water for cocoa and soup - in addition to steak sandwich components from dinner leftovers. For 20 minutes during lunch, the sun actually broke through the clouds and we lay out in the sand, our soaked wetsuits mottled with debris.

Shortly thereafter, we came to a familiar straightaway that provided a direct line of sight to the Main Fork and the road. As usual, I got a little weepy given the end of this momentous trip. After the confluence, we floated a minute to Cache Bar, a concrete ramp where we did our best to move quickly, another group 20 minutes behind and our bus waiting. Allison and I were the only passengers who were not staying in Salmon that night, meaning we had to separate our belongings because we would literally be dumping the contents of our dry bags into my shuttled car in an hour. Eric also needed to get Mark to a clinic - as he was terrifically ill with GI something. Back in Salmon, Allison and I hit the highway and my immediate sense of undulating motion was half-distressing, half-reassuring. Indeed, driving on that curving mountain road in the high winds felt like buoyantly making our way down the river. Of course, now that we were off the river, Allison and I had a lengthy discussion about the crew and the passengers. Willow and Eric, we agreed, were some of the best leaders we'd worked with. And the paddleboat experience was simply the best. Our only mild observation (and potential criticism) was that it was interesting how the different kinds of boats divided the team. Having so many small boats split the group, the kayakers definitely forming their own clique - although the kayak guide was generous and socially outgoing everywhere. We also decided that people who prefer Dories are a different breed. Of course, Allison and I also came in with goals to paddle all the way and thereby contributed to lack of team-building because we stuck like glue to that boat. Our only real regret was not getting to spend a day talking with every oarsman - like we usually did. Unfortunately, I think this trip will fundamentally change the way I look at and enjoy every future raft trip I take. I'm not sure I will ever be truly satisfied just sitting in the front of an oar-raft doing nothing. After doing laundry and sleeping a full day in Missoula, I dropped Allison off at the airport (as she had work obligations) and backtracked south before heading west into the Bitterroots. My boys would be meeting me in Missoula 5 days later for our annual research trip to Yellowstone. In the mean time, I spent 4 days at this secluded ranch, pampered by the nicest ranch owners, the best cook, the prettiest appaloosa, and the hottest (and very single) cowboy I've had the pleasure of riding with. Oh dear... the things you find in Montanny. My poor boys didn't know what to do with me I was so wound up.

### **Central Idaho: Selway, High Water June 2006**

Had anyone told me even 5 years ago that I would be paddling the Selway, I would have told them they were nuts. The Selway, in the Bitterroot Mountains of Idaho, is legendary. It is considered by many to be the wildest river in the lower 48, offering one of the most pristine wilderness experiences (in large part because it is so highly regulated). Indeed, during its short running season (mid-May

through mid-July) only one party (maximum size 16) puts in per day. And only 4 commercial rafting groups have permits, with remaining private slots given via lottery (chance of getting a permit = around 1/100,000). Demonstrated rafting experience is required as the Selway maintains one of the higher death rates: 1/2000-4000 killed, virtually all swept out of boats in a monster rapid called Ladle. To quote the official Forest Service Selway map and guide, "If you have had little experience in running whitewater rivers as technically difficult as this, think twice before floating the Selway." The average drop per mile on the Selway is also an astounding 28 feet, with sections around Ladle being 50. Like a fair number of women I know, I first heard about the Selway in the mid-1990's via Pam Houston's *Cowboys Are My Weakness*. The semi-true short story called "Selway" follows a dysfunctional couple down said river the first week of June. On the second day, they are approached by 3 guides on a training trip and shepherded down Ladle, convinced to play it safe after hearing that a woman was just killed in Ladle (then seeing her body flown out). Of course, the boyfriend gets cocky after making it through Ladle and decides to proceed beyond without the guides. The next day, they flip in Wolf Creek (hydraulically the largest on the Selway) and wind up metaphorically on different banks of the river. You can read the short story to see how it ends. I hadn't thought about the Selway much since first reading Houston, assuming I had to be insane to try the river. But then in early spring 2006, PBS' Oregon Field Guide aired a program about rafting the Illinois, a short but serious river just south of the Rogue in SW Oregon. I got on-line the next day to search for the "small handful of commercial operators" that had been reported to guide it. Well, the first group I hit was ARTA (American River Touring Association) but before I could even open the Illinois section, I saw the magic word: Selway. Allison received an email within minutes of this discovery: "Selway in June?" Her notable reply was immediate: "THAT IS CRAZY!" In an effort to calm both of us down, I made a few calls and wrote a couple long emails to ARTA about their safety record (mostly after Allison compiled the aforementioned death statistics, readily available thanks to state agencies in Idaho). I was instantly impressed with the responses to my blunt questions - not to mention the fact that they had maintained a clean record on the Selway for 30 years... AND they required Selway participants have river experience (not the case on OARS' trips - or any previous rafting trip I've done). Even so, both Allison and I were edgy about the trip in a way we had never been prior to anything else. When river-savvy friends heard what we were doing, most thought we had lost our minds (one honestly said: I hope you have your wills in order). Exacerbating our nervousness, the only date we could do was ARTA's first launch of the season - June 21. Allison and my last rafting trip together - OARS' first season MFS in 2003 - had taken us both by surprise, the water massive to the point the paddle raft nearly flipped on the last day. For a month prior to this trip, Allison and I checked the USGS Selway flow website daily. In early June, the river swelled to nearly 40,000 CFS and 20 feet deep - a near record (the highest in 10 years), the result of a major heat wave. But in a matter of days, a cold spell set in and the gauge was down to around 12,000 CFS/10 feet again; thus, I feared that major snow was still high - waiting to melt in the middle of our trip. As a small alpine river, the Selway is - perhaps more than any other navigable river in the lower 48 - subject to truly extreme flow changes that can happen over a matter of hours. The Selway is considered dangerous when the river at put-in is 6 feet or higher. On the day of our departure, we entered another heat wave and the Lowell gauge was down to about 12,000 CFS and 8 feet. Needless to say, this information did not sit well with us.



Left to Right: hotel and Salmon River, the team (taken last morning), Ken and the original metrosexual/Larry, Paradise put-in

Allison and I set out at 9:30 a.m. on June 19, bound for Ontario, Oregon (7 hours away). We had no desire to push farther because it had been a challenging year for both of us: in my case, a hellish fall term battling pneumonia, and then a divisive strike attempt that destroyed spring term for the campus; in Allison's case, senioritis, a career setback, followed by a successful but last minute admission to law school. Happily, the latter is in Oregon - meaning Allison has moved in with me while searching for her own apartment, and meaning we will be able to do more local outdoor activities for at least the next 3 years. But for today, it was Ontario, a mid-range hotel, and a funky dinner at a 50's style chicken-focused restaurant. Given previous trips to Idaho, I assumed we'd be able to enjoy a leisurely drive to our meeting place in Salmon (115 miles north of Stanley) including a lunch and hiking stop in the Sawtooths. But we didn't hit the road until 10 and the driving was slow, particularly after we left I-84 near Boise. Although the 3-hour drive to Stanley was as beautiful as ever, Stanley was more disappointing - mostly because we didn't arrive there until after 2 p.m., famished and sugar-low bitchy. Realizing we were not going to have any time for a hike, we headed for Redfish Lake Lodge - which, on our previous trip, featured a good, fresh menu with lots of salads. Well - not today. After bad to mediocre lunches, we continued on to Salmon - still 2.5 hours away via windy, slow roads. Although the first hour was scenic (beautiful whitewater sections along the Salmon River), things became more monotonously dry after Challis - diminishing hopes that Salmon was going to be as quaint, homey, and alpine as Stanley. Indeed, Salmon is larger, more flatly spread out, and definitely farming-oriented. Walking 8 blocks around the main street/downtown area, we found nothing in the way of any inviting stores - although the grocery was better than that in Stanley. And thus we opted to buy our dinner there. Stupidly, neither we nor the Stagecoach Inn staff knew where/when the pre-trip meeting was. In general, we were disappointed with this hotel because the whole place smelled like a big cigarette, the rooms were dark/dank, and the staff seemed uninterested in dealing with typical issues/questions that other rafting base hotels knew about (e.g. car shuttle information, meeting places...). Fortunately, our room had an open deck that overlooked both the Salmon and the greenway where rafting groups held their meetings (indeed, OARS had just dropped off a MFS party). At around 7:45, we noticed a familiar face outside setting up for a different meeting: Bram (OARS guide on Cataract Canyon trip, Allison and my first rafting trip together), now matured to the status of trip leader. To Allison's embarrassment (read the Cataract report for insight), I yelled down to him. Although Allison was not convinced he remembered us, I caught him in the lobby later and we had a lengthier conversation that suggested otherwise. Although Bram teased me for cheating on OARS, he didn't blame me because the Selway was a forgivable affair that was not to be missed. As with Bram's

pending meeting (for the next MFS trip), ours took place at 8 p.m. and 30 feet down the riverside greenway. My first impression of our group was: shit man, everyone is so old. Indeed, the mean passenger age was 55. My second impression: where is everyone? Two weeks before, ARTA indicated this would be a full trip (i.e. 12 passengers plus 4 guides). But only 6 passengers were present: a late 60's couple from Minnesota (retired botany professor, Bill, and his former librarian wife, Mary), 30-something Bill from Maryland, and late 60's Ken from California. Another pair of single 50-something travelers (Joan, a lawyer from Chicago, and Allen, a former lawyer now involved in southern Oregon vineyard development) were running late from Boise. A family of 4 had bailed a week before. Leader Jon, who sported a white cowboy hat (at all times) and ran the electron microscopy facilities for the U. of Oregon's neuroscience group the rest of the year, was awesome but more quiet and reserved. Allison will kill me if I don't point out that I thought Jon was in his late-30's when, in fact, he was only 33. Of course, she was the one who developed a little crush on him. Allison and I retired with our giant dry bags (1 LARGE single bag per person as done on the Hulahula) and spent an hour packing. In contrast with Allison's hopes and predictions (i.e. that the swift river would mean a later start), Jon's called wake-up time was severe: out by the van and ready to go at 7 a.m. But I sort of knew the drive to the put-in was going to be long: a full 3 hours.

The next morning, Jon and the rest of the crew left for the put-in at 5 a.m. Consequently, another ARTA guide (Lisa, not on this trip) served as our chaperone. After an uninspiring continental breakfast at the Stagecoach (a hostess stood guard over the entire operation, checking breakfast tickets and serving only sticky sweet donuts, packaged oatmeal, canned peaches, and hot drinks), we waited by the van for 10 minutes before it was determined that our 2 late arrivals were under the impression we were meeting at 8. Remarkably, they still managed to make it down by 7:30. One thing I haven't mentioned about this trip was the fantastic weather. Although the guides attempted to instill doubt a few times early on, it is safe to say that all of us knew we were entering (and would receive) a 10-day forecast of clear, sunny skies. And we knew we were lucky: I found a web report by a mid-June Selway group featuring pictures of honest-to-god FROZEN eggs being fried for breakfast. Indeed, this and other stories prompted me to spend \$200 on 3 mm wetsuits for Allison and I. Given that I didn't own any high resolution maps of this area, I wasn't 100% sure what our route was; I suspected, given experience with a Bitterroot ranch out of Darby, Montana a few years ago, that we were going to approach from Montana - and that's what we did: drove to Conner, Montana and then headed over Nez Perce pass into Idaho again. Although many snow-capped Bitterroot summits were visible from Montana, we saw no snow once we hit Idaho. Thus, concerns I had about some big pack of snow melting and coming down to flood our trip retreated. Lisa also reported that the river at put-in was only about 3 feet, HALF the danger level. During the final 15-20 miles, we drove along the Selway. Initially, I swore the thing looked maybe 15 feet across and less than a foot deep. But the number and sizes of the side-creeks that feed the Selway are the key to why this river is so exciting and responsive. Over 10 miles, several major creeks dumped into the Selway, exponentially increasing the river volume. Given the aforementioned STIFF permit regulations, the put-in at Paradise was extremely peaceful. The river looked a little smaller than the MFS had in 2003. We traveled in 3 rafts: Jon rowed the front passenger oar boat, Ken was the paddle captain for the second paddle raft (clearly the most popular), and Steve rowed the all-gear boat, accompanied by Valerie (Ken's wife, also a river guide who joined the team after the aforementioned family bailed). Given that we had 2 sets of Bills and 2 sets of Ken's, I will - from here on out - refer to each as Botany Bill vs. Maryland Bill, and Ken (paddle raft captain) vs. Larry (passenger Ken reminded me of balls-rag-burning Larry from the John Muir Trail). We arrived at put-in around 11:30. While the rest of the crew set up lunch, Jon gave us a standard safety speech. Although I used to state that I didn't want to start comparing rafting companies, I have to say that ARTA was a cut above OARS for their meals - and competitive with the Alsek crew. There simply was more fresh produce and they seasoned more and differently. Assuming I'd eaten it all in terms of rafting meal fare, ARTA also managed to surprise me with a few fascinating food ideas (e.g. adding Frito's to the cold veggie burrito mix). Despite fears, Allison and I had long been committed to paddling day one - albeit because we knew it was a lighter day and might allow us to make better decisions about paddling Ladle. Fortunately, Larry decided to sit this day out and Mary had no intention of paddling whitewater. In what I can assume was shocking to the guides (and passengers), Allison and I donned wetsuits the whole time (most others were in shorts or raingear, depending on the size of the whitewater). Where OARS supplies wetsuits, ARTA does NOT (although they did recommend bringing 3 mm neoprene wetsuits if you owned them). Had the weather been rainy or cold, I would NOT have wanted to be wearing hiking raingear and fleece down this river - and certainly not while paddling. Remarkably, neither Allison nor I found wearing the wetsuits overbearingly hot. Lastly, only paddlers were all required to wear helmets; best friend Jenn (the lawyer) hoped we'd be wearing helmets no matter what kind of boat we were on given the excessive numbers of massive rocks in this river.

After lunch, we hit the river. I took the middle left paddle position, which I kept at all times while in this boat. The first day seemed awkward. Botany Bill, our pace setter (in front of me), was the slowest paddler I've worked with. Strangely, though, I grew to like his steady pace. Botany Bill, though, liked to sit back... where Allen (behind me) liked to sit forward. The combination of these tall men left me too tightly sandwiched between them - and often saber-rattling in whitewater. Allen, over time, moved all over the boat trying to find his niche. Smaller stature Larry, who had paddled all kinds of crazy big water in California, eventually moved in behind me and we jived WAY better - although I felt like I was prone to falling back into his lap whenever we hit any huge holes, which complemented and/or exacerbated our relentless flirting. Indeed, Larry - who was charming and insanely happy ALL the time - was just fun to flirt with (despite being married and constantly delivering the craziest nonsequiturs). Ken remains the best paddle captain I've had, a likely combination of a more experienced team, his louder and clearer commands, and his acute awareness of when to throttle back between rapids. I can't say the first day rapids were any bigger or more frequent than on the MFS: in theory, we did 3 class III's and a few class II's. Goat Creek (a III) was the most memorable because it was a snaking mess of rocks that had to be carefully navigated. Perhaps to my surprise, our team managed to execute all the tight moves remarkably well. The other comment: we passed a surprising number of airstrips and/or ranch/lodge establishments (5-6 total as we went down the Selway - many used for access later in the season after the Paradise level drops below a foot). Given its reputation for being SOOOO pristine, I wasn't expecting to pass anything in the way of serious development - and was somewhat disappointed to find so much. Our camp for the night was at Little Goat Creek (12 miles downstream). For some reason, I wasn't expecting sandy beaches on this river - but there they were, every night. Although most of the team set up tents in close proximity within the sandy cirque along the shore, Maryland Bill and Allison/I set up in the forest slightly higher up. The ground was flatter, the shade more inviting. The only sad thing was that 2 sandpiper nests, each with 3-4 eggs, were located along the trail between the kitchen area and most tent sites; one was definitely abandoned, the other was being maintained by a frantic mother. Eventually, everyone learned how to cut wide around her so she wasn't disrupted. All camp issues and facilities were standard, as compared with other trips - although the bathroom ticket was the toilet paper (as opposed to bear spray or some amusing

object). Given that Jon was not into watches, I decided not to wear mine - and thus have no idea when we arrived or the time between this event and dinner. I know that wine and cheese/cracker/veggie appetizers were put out at some point, an hour before the grilled chicken dinner (with pasta and more vegetables). Despite all that food (every night), a major Dutch oven dessert was baked every night: tonight, white cake with strawberries and cream. Although the days were hot and sunny, a few nights were cold (presumably owing to the clear skies). Thus, I was pretty much wearing all my fleece etc. by the time dinner was served. Allison and I retired each night between 10 and 11, this time sharing my Meteorlite tent and renting ARTA sleep kits.

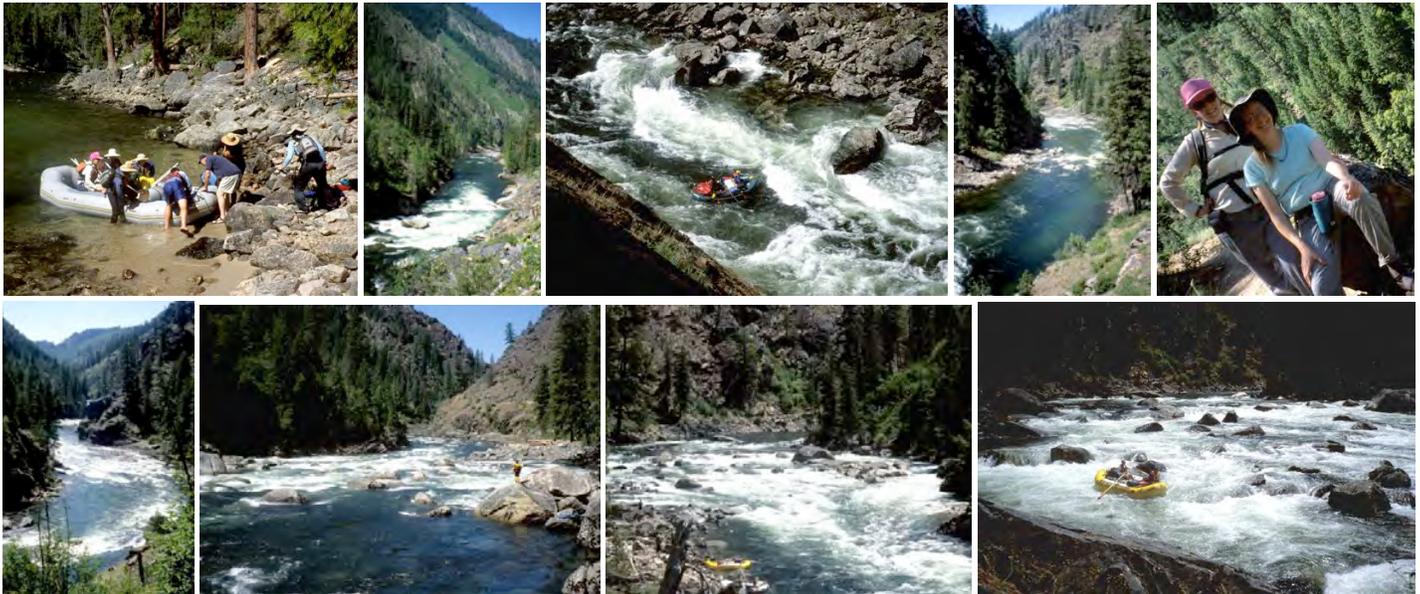


Left to Right: Allison readies herself for monster whitewater, campsite (thank god for shade!), hiking along Bear Creek (no, that is not the Selway), Tony Point Camp kitchen - note lovely sand!

Today was the only day we were allowed a leisurely start. Given ARTA's food generosity, I did my best to tone down the breakfasts. Although I can't say I fully avoided pork products, I did limit my French toast intake, substituting with yogurt sides. Meanwhile, Allison consumed 2-3 entire melons over 5 days. We were on the river around 10, our plan to camp at 1 of the 3 sites just after Moose Creek. Although put-in permits are limited to 1 party per day, the campsites are not assigned. Where most commercial groups take 5 days to do the Selway, most privates use all 8 of the maximum days allowed. This means that there are often camping logjams around the popular Moose Creek area (with its 3 defined sites). Around Moose Creek, the campsites are defined and rafters can only use those places (notably, some only accommodate 8, others 15+). Below Cupboard Creek (mile 41), the camping appears to be less defined. A stern warning in the Forest Service literature states that rafters should expect to share their camp if necessary at any of the Moose sites. In terms of rapids, today was easy: 3 class III's, a bunch of II's - and our first IV (albeit later in the day). Larry, who was definitely louder and more talkative, joined the paddleboat. At first, I thought he might drive me nuts but, over time, I enjoyed that he screamed, whooped, and hollered more than me in the rapids. Within 30 minutes of leaving camp, we stopped for a hike up Bear Creek. Bear looked 80% as big as the Selway and consequently almost doubled the river volume. In contrast with MFS trails (which seems brushier, less used, and dead-end in the canyon), a good hiking trail parallels the entire Selway. After a minor bushwhack to said trail, we proceeded 15 minutes up the Bear to a beach with archaeologically-relevant obsidian remnants. People not wishing to go on could stay here and wait; Allison took this option as, unbeknownst to me at the time, Steve had come upon a snake on the trail. The rest of us proceeded 45 minutes up the hot and sunny trail, the turnaround point more defined by the time than reaching anything spectacular. For most of the way, I enjoyed quite a discussion about contemporary medical training and ethics with Allen and Larry. After returning to the rafts, we continued for a long and quiet spell interrupted only by lunch (featuring bacon cooked the night before). The real lunch highlight, though, were giant pineapple wedges cut in some fancy pattern that unfortunately left a substantial hunk of fruit on the rind. Only a few of us (Allison, Mary, and I) had the nerve to put our faces into the fruit and make a big mess trying to consume every last fiber of the edible portion. Although this act did elicit laughter, the team was reserved enough not to provide any raunchy interpretations (which most other teams I've worked with would have done - particularly given initial interpretations regarding Allison and my relationship). An hour after lunch, we ran the infamous Green Eggs rapid (a class III) and were now scouting Ham (our first bona fide class IV). My understanding is that Ham was seriously named for some historic event or person. Green Eggs, however, was named more recently by ARTA. Shortly thereafter, we passed Upper Tony Point Bridge (the first of the Moose camps) where some 16 boats were on the shore: the Texans. Thus, we pulled up to Lower Tony Point camp (the second camp) and Ken/Jon vanished to check out the situation. Apparently, however, a newlywed couple among the Texans had drifted to occupy this area. Consequently, Ken crossed the bridge to check out the final camp (Tony Point) while we waited - Jon not wanting to be the guy who kicked out the illegally camped newlyweds (although he would have if Tony Point had been occupied). Given that camp three was empty, we rounded the corner - and most of us noted "naked man" sunbathing on this thin strip of rocky/sandy peninsula (we're talking lying on the ground, hands behind the head, slight gut and major bush - all 100% visible). After navigating an unnamed class II, we pulled sharply into camp on river left. This was the most awkward of the camps to access, several car-sized boulders flanking the main beach. Fortunately, the oar boats pulled directly onto a 10-foot section of sandy beach, from which we fire-lined gear. Our home for the next 2 nights was an awesome camp - its only weaknesses being the fact that all hikes for tomorrow's layover day were across the river (meaning we had to ferry people in rafts), and the fact that most beach sites were sloping. Said feature likely explained why most of us camped in the woods. Given extensive burrito fillings, the guides requested help chopping in the kitchen tonight. I personally enjoyed the fact that we had been invited from the start to help in the kitchen. ARTA, unlike all other rafting groups I've done trips with, is a non-profit organization - with 10% of all trip revenue going back to river conservation projects. At some point - and despite Allison's insistence that I not make a fool of myself - I asked Jon how many passengers do this river as a direct result of reading Houston. He said there were a couple every year and then explained that it was ARTA guides, in fact, who shepherded Houston and her man through Ladle during a training session. ARTA even kept a first-edition hardback of Cowboys in their Selway library ammo. can - signed by Harvey (the lead guide with Houston) himself. So - I was not THAT foolish to ask. Although I admit that I wouldn't have come up with this trip on my own without Houston, I also would not have done it had I not gotten so heavily involved with rafting other things first.

Today's layover day was whatever you wanted to do. While Steve stayed in camp, the rest of us proceeded across the river for various levels of hiking. The "featured" hike (i.e. that the guides were doing) was 3000 feet up to some fire tower with commanding views (including to the MFS drainage). Although I'd considered this hike, I was not convinced - given the heat and my lungs - I was up for it. So Allison and I decided to hike 3-4 miles down the trail, to the Ladle core group. Larry and Joan decided they liked our idea as well.

Although our hike looked simple on paper, a careful reading of the map will demonstrate that it is not flat. I estimate we gained/lost 1000-1500 feet over the 3.5 miles we hiked to Halfway Creek - most (in contrast with the fire tower hike) in full, open sun. But the trail was splendid and the views were superb. In contrast with expectations, the Selway runs through surprisingly open forest much of the time (similar to Oregon's Grand Ronde) - with north-facing slopes thick with trees and south-facing slopes more grassy and open. In the area we were hiking were exceptional numbers of high rocky ramparts and steep open gullies. The key thing that made our day, however, was that we got to watch the Texans raft 4 major rapids, including Ladle - which provided lots of photo opportunities. Allison, though, was terrified of snakes during nearly the whole hike. Although we had enough food, we all agreed that we should have each carried 2-4 times the water. After ferrying across the river, we separated into respective groups. The worst of the up and down was in the first mile, with a MAJOR climb up and around/above Double Drop, where we caught our first glimpses of the Texans. We figured we better start booking to Ladle if we wanted to get good pictures. The Ladle area represents 1 of 2 times the trail goes almost down to the level of the river. When we arrived, the Texans had just pulled up to scout. This group was an interesting mix of people: hard-core and hard-body women manned virtually all of the kayaks (which ultimately went down first, taking key spots along the maze-like mess of rocks and holding their paddles up for rafters to see as they proceeded thereafter), some fascinating oarsmen wearing wetsuits unzipped down to their crotches (giant guts hanging out of their suits, bent cigarettes hanging out of their mouths), and a few men who looked like classic gorgeous leader types. Ladle is a TRULY spectacular rapid in terms of being long, wide, and rocky. The river comes around a bend and seems to widen suddenly across this almost circular valley bed (covered with car-sized rocks), before pinching tightly again and going around a peninsula of rocky land. Where the upper 75% was a series of rocky pools and holes (all churning whitewater), the lower 25% was hydraulically larger and faster. The kayaks easily went down the thing, able to stop almost anywhere they wanted - thus forming a signaling chain down the route. In the end, the Texans chose and used a line that began river right, continued even farther right, and then turned back toward the center down the major line of big waves. While the leader was flawless, some other boats hung up on rocks in the maze. Jon told us later there is a one particular rock called "coffee break" where most people get stuck, their only hope being to jiggle and man-handle themselves off. Famished, I ate my sandwich while watching Ladle. In contrast with expectations, there is actually a semi-reasonable eddy immediately after Ladle where all boats we watched pulled over. I say semi-reasonable, however, as our team (tomorrow) did not catch it for reasons that will become evident.

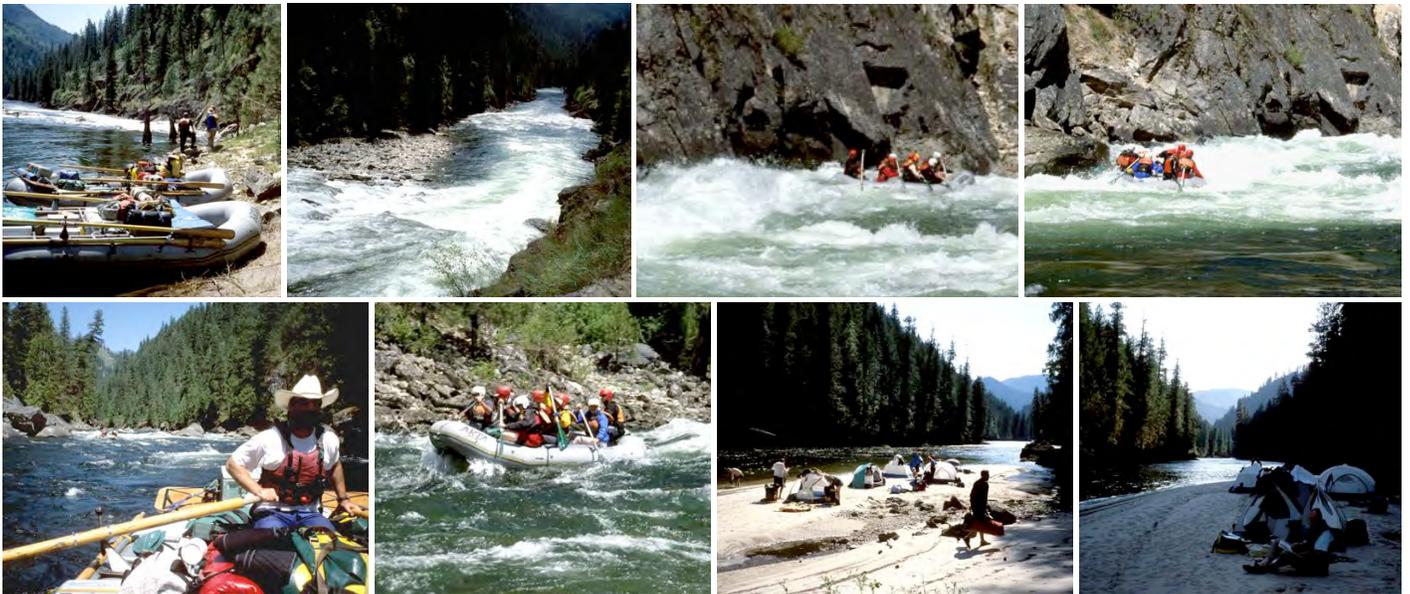


Left to Right: (top) ferrying to hike; views of Double Drop, more views, don't know why we're at an angle; (bottom) more river views, Ladle from - above scout, below scout, crazy Texans running

Afterward scouting Ladle, we climbed again. Little Niagara (a class IV), around the bend, was difficult to see and photograph. From above, Little Niagara looked like this insane 10-foot spillover channel. After re-reading Houston's "Selway" on the last night of this trip, I am fairly certain Houston erroneously stated that Little Niagara was before Ladle. As more of Little Niagara came into view, it was clear that there was a second channel that was larger and less insane. Within 10 minutes, we were above Puzzle Creek and its namesake rapid (a class III) - a beautiful section of fairly straightforward whitewater. Shortly thereafter, No Slouch (a class IV) seemed like a hydraulically larger version of Puzzle - albeit with more asymmetrical waves. I insisted we proceed 10 minutes more to Halfway Creek for. Alas, it felt longer and more strenuous - the trail dry, dusty, completely in the open, and meandering in an up/down manner (albeit in only 10 foot increments). But Halfway was totally worth it. We sat there - most of us in the creek - for 90 minutes. We agreed to start heading back around 2:30 (the target time to arrive back at the ferry raft being 4:30). Although it took less time to hike back, it felt as strenuous and we were still stopping at every shady spot for some relief. Based on retrospectively reviewing forecast data, it was 88-90°F (we were at only 2000 feet). Being the first ones back at the rafts, we enjoyed some major soaking time again - our only problem being that we were all out of drinking water. Within 30 minutes, everyone else returned looking beat. The guides, Maryland Bill, and Allen made it all the way to the tower/summit. Mary and Botany Bill made it up 2000 feet. Back in camp, the women set up the day spa bath down at the paddle raft landing beach. Although I briefly got naked for cleaning purposes, Allison was the one who attempted to recreate "naked guy on the beach" from yesterday - ultimately getting kicked out by some of our men who decided to engage their metrosexuality. Dinner - spaghetti with spinach/apple salad, lots of bread, and more cake - was enjoyed tremendously.

Today was all about rafting large whitewater. Given that the number of paddle-interested people exceeded the number of positions in said boat, I wasn't sure how things were going to work out (particularly as Jon was not into making decisions for us). In my thinking,

Larry and Joan both had sat out at least a day and, as such, earned their seats today. Botany Bill deserved his ongoing seat because his wife was not paddling. And so it came down to Allison, Maryland Bill, and me. Although I never envisioned paddling Ladle before the trip, I was - having seen it - totally determined to do it... more than Allison. But Ladle was the only thing that really interested me because it was so technically appealing. Thus, I privately discussed with Jon the notion of my doing Double Drop and Ladle, stopping in the eddy, and then switching with Allison so she could do everything below (Little Niagara, No Slouch, and Wolf Creek being the class IV's). Although Jon approved of this plan, Maryland Bill and Larry tried to argue with me, insisting they wanted to give up their seat so Allison and I could be together. We insisted no. Where Double Drop (a class IV) was a fast piece of cake, Wa-Poots (class III) seemed massive and startling. Within minutes, we pulled up to shore and waited while the guides briefly scouted Ladle. Ladle went well during for the first couple moves but then we hit a large sneaker hole. Facing downstream, I remember briefly turning upriver to better secure myself when I watched Allen briefly bounce and then vanish - as though the waterline raised to him and he floated away like a rag doll. We were in the middle pool area and time seemed to stand still, Allen drifting 10 feet from us before we were back with him. While Joan and Botany Bill hauled him on board, Ken reminded everyone to keep paddling. By this point, we were a little askew as we hit the big waves toward the end of the rapid but fared fine - except for sailing past Jon's boat with Allison and Mary (who were waiting in the eddy for the exchange). Clearly, however, the river intended for me to keep paddling and I yelled back to them that we'd switch out during lunch. Amusingly, Allison and Mary never noticed we had a swimmer because they were too busy yacking. Little Niagara, Puzzle, No Slouch, and Miranda Jane seemed like just a big, long stretch of whitewater - nothing scary, particularly with Larry and I whooping and hollering. We continued on to Tango for lunch (cold burritos with more pineapples) on this big sand island with dozens of sandpipers and a snake. Lunch turned into a long nap, after which there were few major whitewater sections until Wolf Creek. Having not read Houston in awhile, I had forgotten that Wolf Creek was the rapid that flipped her party. Although I knew it was hydraulically the largest rapid, my impression was that held less inherent danger in terms of bad stuff downstream. We pulled over on river right to the scout, bushwhacking 50 feet uphill to the trail - which became a ledge blasted into the solid rock wall along/above the river's raging, raging, raging whitewater. Said heights - in conjunction with the moving water - freaked me out. Wolf reminded me of a smaller version of Colorado's monster Lava Falls. It had this crazy upper wave area that surged against this huge rock that jutted out from the right; this meant you were initially carried toward the rock but then had to pull back to catch another surge of recoiling waves. Allison had stayed in the boat during the scout (because of snakes) - which was probably good because I don't think she would have stayed in the paddle boat had she seen Wolf from above. Stupidly, however, I returned to the rafts and my first words were: man, that thing is going to kick some ass. I then spent 5 minutes trying to talk Allison from bowing out - although, as I said at the time, I don't have any problems going in your place and, regardless, I think you will be fine.



Top Left to Right: (top) scouting Wolf Creek rapid, paddlers' ass-backwards run down Wolf Creek; (bottom) Jon relaxing after Wolf, paddlers get it together, Renshaw Creek camp last night

Jon admitted (for better or worse) that this was the only rapid on the Selway that scared him - and which had caused him a freaky run on one occasion. But Jon's boat (and I) stayed drier through that run than on a few class III's higher up (and lower down). Pulling over on river left as the curving waves diminished, we watched Steve's clean run (the paddlers going last this time). The paddleboat seemed to take forever. Nonetheless, I remember this odd pause just as they came into the rocky area and were trying to maneuver away. Allison's report of the run is amusing: evidently, they came down the first big wave and everyone was thrown because there was so much water. Allison, seated middle left, had Allen in front. Evidently, Allen STOPPED paddling (literally was holding his paddle out of the water by 1 hand) to hold on to the middle of the boat. Allison panicked, poking him in the shoulders and yelling: PUT THAT PADDLE IN THE WATER NOW!! What amuses me so greatly about this story is the fact that she actually had the time and focus give such a precise order. Later, I reminded her that Allen had just fallen out on Ladle and so he probably was more nervous than usual. Nevertheless, he did respond by paddling and they subsequently did get out of the crazy pool/wave area - albeit ass-backwards. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to tell Jon this story en route to camp (i.e. not in front of most of the group) and he laughed and laughed: well, she's definitely going to be a guide someday. Indeed. Within 15 minutes of Wolf, we hit Tee Kem Falls (class III) - and a wall of whitewater. At the time, poor Mary had her mouth open and spent the next 20 minutes coughing. Meanwhile, my sinuses were extremely well cleaned out... although all I kept thinking about was amebic encephalitis, a rare waterborne microbial agent enters the brain through the nose and causes death within 24 hours. Although most cases involve stagnant water (e.g. Florida swamps), the agent has been detected in Wyoming. Shortly after Tee Kem, we did Cupboard Creek (class III), notable because there are, in fact,

cupboards nailed to several trees, leftovers from an old Selway trail crew. Our final camp was below Renshaw Creek and rapid (class III). A lovely spit of sand provided tent sites for most of our team. The main cirque, however, had a profusion of insects - conspicuously concentrated in a 3-foot swath that stretched across the entire beach 25 feet from the waterline. Allison and I declined a repeat of the ladies' day spa, in favor of reading and writing (in my case: Houston's "Selway" again and recording Larry's most classic nonsequiturs). Dinner featured the best steaks I've had on any river trip, a giant salad, potatoes, and a pineapple upside-down cake. After dinner (given that there was no more serious whitewater), I got into an interesting conversation with several team members about safety - the high fatality rate on this river as well as some recent deaths on the Klikitat and Snake. Although most people seemed torn between wanting to know these things and ignorant bliss, I was surprised how little folks knew about this and other rivers along these lines. Afterwards, Allison, Maryland Bill, and I sat up intent on seeing some stars, which weren't really even visible until 10:30.

Some time around breakfast, the Texan flotilla came around the bend and Jon elected to plan an impromptu morning hike - the motive being to give them time to take-out. We walked upriver 40 minutes, most of us making it to this shady beach. Having just re-read Houston, I gathered a film canister of the Selway's famous black sand (which Harvey threw at his wife's feet during their wedding - a true story). After regrouping, we took the obligatory team photo (shown earlier). Given no rapids (and no helmets), Mary finally joined our crew - with Allison and Maryland Bill in the oar boat. I decided to forgo the wetsuit and wear only shorts and a T-shirt. Once on the river, the conversational topic became Larry's metrosexuality - in the middle of which, our single class II (unnamed) launched me onto Larry. I apologized, explaining it was because I wasn't wearing my wetsuit with its rough raft-gripping ass treads. Needless to say, this amused Larry to no end. For most of the time, though, the river was calm - with many deep green pools. Although Jon said to keep our eyes open for freshwater mussel beds (actual natives, not nasty invasive species in urban areas), we saw none against the mosaic of stones and pebbles. We arrived at take-out around noon, the Texans off the beach but still jamming the parking area. Our vehicles (bus/passengers and truck/gear) were mostly there, their drivers jockeying for space. Within the hour, we had all the gear off the boats and carried up to the truck. When things became too heavy for me, Mary and I helped Valerie with lunch (the famous Frito burritos). The other thing ARTA gets major kudos for are free T-shirts (bright orange) with the best picture logo I've seen for a rafting company: the famous Japanese woodcut of the wave with a paddle boat coming into the mouth. Totally awesome whoever designed that. Given a number of folks with 3 p.m. charter flights out of Kamiah (an hour away), we did not dally. Also, the guides were returning to Salmon for another Selway trip (i.e. no farewell team dinner). Our only mild indulgence was a brief stop to see and photograph Selway Falls (a 5 minute drive from take-out), the infamous class VI said to be the inspiration for the Gauntlet in the River Wild. Allison and I rode the bus down to Lowell, where the Selway merges with the Lochsa, producing the Clearwater. Here, we said goodbyes, our destination for the night being the Three River Resort - the BEST hotel on this trip (we had a riverside cabin with a full-on porch). Given that my favorite now-retired colleague (and indirect soul mate) is named Lowell, I HAD to stay in an actual town called Lowell. Once here, we had to search for awhile to find my car (which I'd paid nearly \$300 to have shuttled from Salmon). To this day, I'm not sure which route was driven; the car looked like it had gone muddin' down some serious dirt roads in a rainstorm. In contrast with my MFS shuttle experience, the interior did not smell like a big cigarette this time. Having arrived around 3, we took 2 hours to hang out all our wet gear and take showers. Eventually, we enjoyed a fine meal in the lodge and a brief drive up the Lochsa. Although we had thought about driving all the way to Lolo Pass, this notion dimmed a bit once we saw that the Lochsa wasn't very impressive given the now-low flow.



Left to Right: still Selway and take-out, Selway Falls, Lowell, ID; Wallows above Enterprise, OR

The next day, we left around 9, bound ultimately for Enterprise/Joseph, OR. The drive through Lewiston was scenic, although drier than I had been expecting. Although the line on the roadmap between Lewiston and Joseph looked straight, the section over Rattlesnake Ridge/Pass (just over 4000 feet) was a terror - something like 50 hairpin turns, only half of which had guardrails. Contrary to popular belief, that valley is NOT cut out by the Snake... that's the Grand Ronde (downstream of where we took out many years ago). For the record, Allison was driving - albeit only 15 mph much of the way. Needless to say, we arrived WAY later than expected. Originally, I'd hoped to do at least 2 of the following things either that afternoon or the next morning: drive to Hat Point via Imnaha to look over Hells Canyon (including a 25 mile dirt road section), venture briefly into the Wallowa's, and/or spend some time shopping in Joseph. In the end, it felt like we did nothing to any satisfaction. Probably the closest was touring Joseph, enjoying a FABULOUS late lunch at this bistro-y pub and then walking/shopping the main street. The contrast of liberal artists with conservative Christians in this town, however, was notable. By 5, I was restless and decided we should make a run for Hells. About 8 miles from Imnaha, this tempting sign appeared - stating there was a paved access road to some other Hells Canyon overlook 35 miles away. I decided to play it safe. In the end, said viewpoint didn't feel anywhere near Hells (i.e. you couldn't even see the Snake). The only new terrain seen was Idaho's Seven Devils. Although the Wallows were pretty from Joseph/Enterprise and many points along the drive to Hells, I have never been a gushing fan of them (in contrast with many of my Oregonad friends) - probably because I've seen so many larger mountains. The next morning, we hit the road early (i.e. 9 a.m.) to be home at a decent hour; unfortunately, this plan was foiled by tremendous rush hour traffic that began at 205 and lasted at least 10 miles south down I-5.