

August 2005

North Texas River Runners



Commodore's Column
By Curtis Boerner

Ahoy from the helm,

The NTRR ship has been busy this summer with trips to Utah and Idaho among other trips to varying parts of the state and country. Now it is headed for a brief stay at port but only after we stopped off at Laurie Patterson's spread earlier this month. The "Drill Day" there was a big success. Many thanks go to Laurie for hosting such a grand event.

This month the NTRR ship is docking for a short change of crew. Yes, this month is officer elections. All positions are open for a helping hand. So, if you hear the song of the siren calling you to make a difference in the club, do not resist. Your hands and mind are welcome. Many mates are needed to keep NTRR afloat so do not hesitate to volunteer. The more the merrier!

After the elections the ship is off to Dalworthington Gardens (near Arlington) for the Third Annual NTRR Picnic. Please read inside for more information and we will meet you there.

See you at the meeting,
Curtis

August Program A Picture is Worth...

Wanting to escape this Texas heat? Well, imagine yourself in an Idaho heat wave! Curtis Boerner will be giving a slide show presentation of his recent trip to the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho. He'll be showing us lots of scenery, wildlife, and rapids and talking very little (just enough to discuss some basic logistics). It's just like being at the movies (only with barbeque instead of popcorn).

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While we were making our preparations, an obviously inexperienced group of canoeists departed. Their wobbly but uneventful exit was reassuring to those of us who had been eyeballing the blitzkrieg speed of the current uncertainly! (The ranger quoted a flow of 6800 CFS for the day.)

As we were shoving our boats into the eddy and climbing aboard, a vigorous and violent dust devil roared through the put-in area, sending gear from an Outward Bound group spinning and spiraling up into the air and slamming the heavy metal door of their equipment trailer shut with a force that would have been fatal to anyone in its way. Clearly it was time to go!

As planned, we made only a short run of about 1.7 miles, so as to set ourselves up for petroglyph hikes and a tour of the River House, an ancient cliff dwelling, the following day. The canoes sprinted ahead to select the campsite and to be in position to catch the rafts as they rushed by. Small eddies, swift current, and heavily loaded rafts would challenge us at many of our stopping points throughout the trip.

Just upstream from our campsite, George's raft bounced off a rock wall because his perch on an ice chest was too high for him to row effectively. That evening, Ted and I helped him reposition one of the crossbars on his rowing frame so as to rearrange the ice chests and give him a more ergonomic rowing seat. Linda called out, "Don't let the nuts fall overboard!" She claimed that she was referring not to Ted and me, but to the hardware which secured the crossbar to the frame. Sure!

After a sumptuous meal of chicken fajita burritos we were dumbfounded (and delighted!) when Laurie and Jean produced cobbler with ICE CREAM for desert! Satiated and content, we surrendered ourselves to the stars and our sleeping bags. We had made an excellent beginning.

Our first stop on Wednesday was Butler Wash to examine a fine collection of petroglyphs. Allen discovered and directed our attention to something intriguing, a series of grooves in a wall near the petroglyphs where the ancient artists had sharpened their tools. Allen and Jean were both amazingly observant and knowledgeable naturalists, a real asset on any outdoor escapade. I wander around looking at my feet to make sure that I don't step on a rattlesnake, but they actually see stuff, and understand what it means! It's uncanny!

Our next objective was the River House. The location of the best landing spot was not clear from our maps, so we stopped at what appeared to be the closest point of approach and Ted went scouting up a cow trail. Based upon his reconnaissance, we eased on downstream another quarter mile to a better access point.

The River House was fascinating, even if it did require a bit of imagination to ignore the Portland cement with which parts of it had been reconstructed. From our analysis of petroglyphs at the site, it's quite clear that aliens had indeed come visiting, a fact which "establishment" archaeologists are reluctant to admit!

From the put-in through mile 9 the river was wide and braided with many islands and channels. At mile 10 we entered the upper canyon; the river narrowed and became "boisterous!"

Four Foot Rapid, the first named rapid, was long with lots of waves and a few pourovers and holes to avoid, but posed no problem to us TCJC trained paddlers. Beyond that however, things got spooky as the dark and vertical rock walls squeezed the river ever narrower. (Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore!") The constricted current became conflicted, confused, and squirrely, with unpredictable swirls, boils, whirlpools, and maliciously hateful eddy lines.

It was here, in the depths of the upper canyon, where sunlight rarely reaches, that Jean and I inadvertently got out in the lead. I got to feeling awfully vulnerable out there on the sharp end, so we determined to catch an eddy and wait for the group. No sooner did we enter said eddy but we wanted out! It was a false and overtly hostile haven. As we peeled out, a vicious submarine current grabbed Jean's paddle and slammed it against the boat. She immediately released the grip or we'd have been goners! (Even the thought of swimming in that mad race was enough to stop one's heart.)

Not far above Eight Foot Rapid we found a friendlier eddy and stopped to regroup, sending Ted (Dr Danger!) ahead to investigate a potential campsite on river left at the threshold of the drop. It wasn't ideal, but with everyone tired and the hour late, we determined to stay the night there. Eventually, each of us located a reasonable tent site, and it turned out to be a pretty nice camp after all.

It certainly afforded us an excellent overview of Eight Foot Rapid, which was hundreds of yards long and liberally loaded with tumultuous waves. Surprisingly late in the evening, the Outward Bound group, with a couple dozen youthful tadpoles paddling sit-on-tops, arrived and ran the rapid, which reassured us about our assessment of the route. I, for one, slept better that night for having watched the tadpoles successfully negotiate the drop.

After another splendid meal of shrimp and sausage jambalaya and cake freshly slathered with creamy icing for desert, we laid our weary selves to rest. (I will try to restrain myself and refrain from describing every delectable morsel that made me salivate with gustatory ecstasy on this trip, but, God in Heaven, Jean and Laurie planned and produced a menu that Princess Cruise Lines could hardly equal!)

Frequently while floating along, we encountered a phenomenon which I've never before experienced – a sizzling, snap crackle popping noise like bacon frying. Ted informed us that it's caused by rocks being tumbled along the river bottom by the current with the sound being transferred through the water. You could stick your paddle in the water and put the grip to your ear for a "stethoscopic" insight into the river's crackling cacophony, and marvel at the mighty forces involved.

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On the morning of day 3 we fortified ourselves with blueberry pancakes and prepared to plunge into 8 Foot Rapid, the longest and largest rapid that many in our party had ever faced. Although we had some accelerated heart rates and acute cases of cottonmouth, the rapid failed to unseat us; we gathered below it with a grinning sense of exuberant relief, and shared congratulations all around.

Beyond 8 Foot we entered the Narrows, but it proved to be neither as narrow nor as inimical as the section through which we passed yesterday. It did entertain us, however, with the powerful illusion, caused by slightly rising strata in the canyon walls, that the river was sliding downhill at an alarming slope.

We transited Ledge Rapid without undue drama, just big waves against the right cliff wall, and in another mile we were out of the upper canyon. The swiftness of the current, which allowed us to make 5 mph without effort, had one serious disadvantage. The scenery sped by much too quickly for us to properly appreciate or savor it.

At Mexican Hat we made a brief stop to pick up a few more propane bottles and to buy a Navajo Blanket to supplement Ted's meager sleeping sack against the nighttime chill. There we encountered the friendly ranger who had checked us in at Sand Island, and observed a bunch of police and fire/rescue types officiously milling about. The ranger said that there had been an alcohol related drowning (not a paddler) and a search for the body was underway. He asked us to keep an eye out for it and to tie it to something if we should come across it. (Egad!) Fortunately, just before we took off, he informed us that the victim had been found.

Back in the boats we quickly came upon our next challenge, Gypsum Creek Rapid, which promised to be all too frisky at this level. Happily though, the high water had created a wide and welcoming sneak on river right which we followed without shame or embarrassment! Slipping under the Mexican Hat Bridge, we passed the point of no return and entered the Lower Canyon.

Concern for finding a campsite kept us from climbing up to Mendenhall's Cabin at mile 31. After circling the Tabernacle, a giant geological edifice, and rushing through the Second Narrows, we spotted a nice site at mile 37, but we were unable to arrest George's raft as it hurtled past our tiny eddy. Serendipitously however, we located an even nicer site less than half a mile on and managed to get the whole train stopped and safely secured.

Our rafters, I must note, were extremely generous in their willingness to carry gear for us single bladers. As Weldon pointed out, it helps to have rafters who are also canoeists!

After yet another top shelf dinner of sour cream enchiladas, we ran the dishes through our seriocomic 4 bucket dishwashing express and settled down for the evening, fondly anticipating a lazy and luxurious layover day tomorrow. Ted and I strung up an antenna, established the "Ham Shack," and actually heard a couple of Russian stations before retiring to bed.

Day 5 proved to be extremely pleasant, with opportunities for interesting activity and aggressive relaxation. After a breakfast worthy of the Culinary Institute of America, the energetic amongst us (Allen, Jean, Vada, Weldon, and Laurie) went for a long hike, around the next bend and within sight of the Goosenecks Scenic Overlook, while the radio team fired up the rig and had several great Morse code conversations with operators from California to Idaho. Upon their return, the hikers reported the discovery of a very sharply defined lizard fossil, which they had documented by digital photography.

We had cool shade all day long under the overhanging tamarisk on our little beach for the readers, radio operators, and gossipers. We waved at the groups floating by, admired and complimented a fine dory, entertained ourselves with witty remarks, and generally had an exceptional and stressless time.

On Saturday, day 5, we breakfasted and broke camp efficiently, getting off to a brisk start. After an all too rapid passage through the Goosenecks, we beached the boats at mile 44 so that our bold explorers, Alan, Jean, and Laurie, could mount an assault on the precipitous and precarious Honaker Trail.

Ted and I were quietly reading at the river's edge when a large armada of rafters, complete with cases of beer and legions of screaming offspring, landed at our very feet, forcing us to flee.

The trail team ascended to an impressive height up the canyon wall, and, upon their return, we all agreed that Honaker was far too populated a place to camp, so we pressed on downstream. After bouncing through an unruly "riffle" of 4 foot waves, we stopped to evaluate a potential campsite flanked by 2 side canyons at mile 48.

The site met with universal approval, so we unloaded and secured the boats. Reconnaissance revealed lofty (100' +) vertical drops in each of the side canyons, limiting the potential extent of side canyon hikes. Ted and I chose high tent sites with an inspiring view of the horseshoe bend at whose apex we were camped and of the rapids both up and downstream from us.

It was stupefyingly hot while setting up my tent under the blazing sun, so I jumped in the shockingly cold river to cool off (Keeping a firm grip on George's raft to avoid being swept away!). Hardly had I emerged, gasping and shivering, but a thunderstorm appeared over the edge of the canyon wall and it began to rain. The wind blew up and the temperature plummeted. Thunder reverberated about the canyons and many of us retreated to their tents. (Jean is possessed of the com-

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forting delusion that her tent will protect her from lightning!) The rest of us bundled up in extra layers of clothing and rain suits, and huddled near the river bank complaining about the cold. (Cold! On the San Juan in July!!)

It was fascinating to watch the river. A large and very powerful eddy surged upstream just in front of us, its surface depressed below the river level, and whirlpools formed, slid along, and dissipated on the roiled eddy line. Out in the current waves built, broke, and diminished in a fluid and ever changing liquid drama. (Could they have been the mysterious and elusive Sand Waves that our guide book advertised?)

Mindful of the unsettled weather, and concerned for the comfort of our cooks, we rigged a tarp over the kitchen before dinner. Allen was amazed at the rope working and rigging skills of the group. The culinary crew rewarded us with a "Cracker Barrel" quality chicken and dumplings dinner. (It's easy to understand why the zipper on my life jacket broke!)

The rest of this exciting article will be continued in the September newsletter!

Annual Club Picnic!

Don't miss out on this year's annual club picnic! The club provides the meat and fixings for hamburgers and hotdogs, and members bring potluck side dishes for all to enjoy. This is a great opportunity to play some water games, introduce a spouse or child to the sport, or paddle other member's boats.

Where: Pappy Elkins Park in Dalworthington Gardens (near Arlington)

When: Saturday, September 17th
11a.m.— 5 p.m.

Bring: Sunscreen, WATER, side dish, YOUR BOAT

What: Fun & Games. Lots of test drives

Contact: Margaret Thompson, activity chair for more information.

Recipe of the Month

By Lois Michie

Editor's note: There were multiple requests for this particular recipe served at the Drill Day! It was a very popular (and simple) recipe. Thanks to Lois for her contribution.

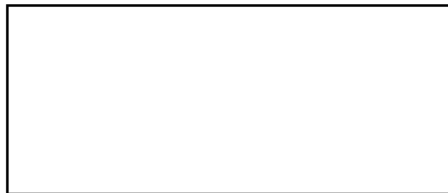
Corn Salad

2 cans of whole corn, drained
1 green pepper, chopped
1 onion, chopped
1 cup of mayonnaise
1 cup of shredded cheese

Mix together and chill overnight.
Before serving add Chili Cheese Fritos.



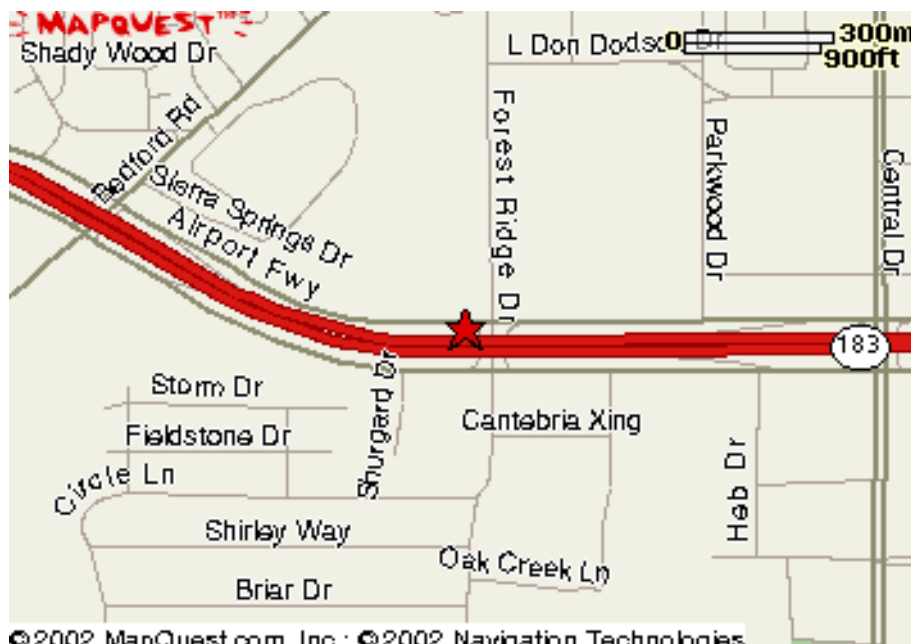
The North Texas River Runners
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Home of the Prairie Dog Surfing Society
"If we're not in the hole, we're sitting right beside it."



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Club meetings
are held on the
last Tuesday of
the month at
Spring Creek
Barbecue from
7:00—9:00 PM
Next Meeting:
August 30th

Spring Creek Barbecue
1509 Airport Freeway
North-West Corner of Forest & 183
817-545-0184