

August 2004

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# North Texas River Runners



## Commodore's Column

By Diana McCown

Greetings! I'll be keeping the column short this month since I know that Ronnie has submitted a lengthy, yet entertaining, trip report for the newsletter. The good news is that we will be having elections this month! Tired of seeing the same faces standing at the front of the room? Now is your chance to bring in some new faces! Seriously, several of the officers will not be running for office again this year, and the club needs some more good people to keep the momentum going. Also, we need some more trip reports for the newsletter! If you've been wanting a creative outlet, send in a report. One of the highlights of the newsletter is getting to read about other people's adventures, whether local or distant. See you at the meeting!  
Diana

Tuesday night (Aug 3) for paddlers to start talking about an event to raise funds to get the white water channel in Gateway Park on the road.

Anyway, the meeting is at Tarrant Regional Water District, 800 E Northside Drive, 7pm, Aug 3rd. Please help me get the word out to your members. Hope to see you there.

Adelaide Leavens  
Executive Director  
Streams & Valleys  
817-926-0006

### **Paddle, Train and Learn with the BEST Olympians, US Team Members Professional Teachers and Paddlers Fabulous Friday Night Flips**

**Just like last year, indoor heated pool time to work on your roll and paddling strokes. New for this year, kayak rentals for those without a boat and private lessons from US Team Members. This event is appropriate for all skill levels, beginners to experts.**

**The Colony Aquatic Park Pool  
5580 North Colony Blvd.**

**Friday nights, beginning November 5, 2004**

**7:30 pm to 9:30 pm**

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A few miles on downriver, we passed a group of rafters camped on the bank. As we floated by them, I remarked to one, "Wow, there were some mighty big waves in that riffle!" "Oh," he chuckled, "they'll get bigger!" At that point I had to initiate anxiety management mode, and attempt to concentrate on paddling what I could see before me rather than worrying about rapids yet to come! Fortunately, I could divert myself by practicing eddy turns and paddle strokes with Jenelle. ("Now what would you do if the boat suddenly tipped THIS WAY!?) (School's never out in Uncle Ronnie's boat!!)

By the time we made camp late in the afternoon of day 1, the wildlife watch had spotted pronghorn antelopes, a pair of bighorn sheep, diving ducks catching fish, and a group of heroic horses calmly grazing on the face of a seemingly vertical canyon wall. How those horses got there, short of teleportation, I'll never know!

With dinner preparations underway, the extent and brilliance of Linda's menu planning and preparation were obvious to all. Throughout the entire trip, Linda's efforts and organization were a wonder to behold, and partaking in the results thereof was a gastronomic pleasure! Numbered meals were precisely packaged with neatly typed instructions included therein. Her role models, Yolanda Deatherage and Cathy Curtis, would have been proud!

After dinner, the paranoid amongst us (that might include me!) dunked ourselves in the river to rinse any lingering food odors from our clothing and render ourselves invisible to the keen senses and ravenous appetites of Brother Black Bear. With the descent of darkness, I crawled into my tent, set my eardrum rupturing Freon horn and my comforting canister of bear repellent spray close at hand, and counted our adventure well begun.

Throughout day 2 the canyon walls rose higher. The afternoon brought with it an extreme example of what would become a recurrent and dreaded adversary, HEADWINDS, headwinds of staggering strength and violence, an elemental nemesis, headwinds that created 12 to 18 inch waves marching up river, headwinds fit to make your ears flutter, headwinds sufficient to make the strong weep and the weak go upstream. (Do you get the picture, or should I elaborate?)

At our lunch stop the ever observant Jenelle discovered bear tracks on the beach. Curious, I went for a look, and, as I trailed along behind Jenelle, following the tracks upstream, what should leap out of the bushes right before me, with barred fangs and blood shot eyes, but *Ursus Horribilicus Amphibiata*, the terrifying Grizzly Toad! What could I do but leap into the air and shriek? Inexplicably, my cohorts seemed to find this threat upon my life humorous!

At the bottom of Rock House Rapid we discovered an amusing phenomenon, dozens of catfish congregated along an eddy line. We attempted a petroglyph hike up Rock House Canyon, but were thwarted by a dense tamarisk jungle, in spite of Curtis' entertaining imitation of an That afternoon we established camp below Jack Creek Rapid (class 3 on the Grand Canyon scale). According to the guide book, and attested to by Ranger Skip, beyond Jack Creek the gradient increases and the rapids become more frequent and more difficult. We'd be trading sun hats for helmets tomorrow.

After unloading the boats I strolled up the river bank to, ah, see a man about a pony. When I returned Diana was standing by her canoe grinning. "You saw a snake didn't you? I recognized your snake dance!" (Can't hide any thing from her!) The reluctant naturalist strikes again!

We received a real treat when we noticed 3 adult female and 4 baby big horn sheep gamboling about the canyon wall across the river from us and dropping down to the water for a drink. It defies the laws of physics the way they can maneuver on those cliff faces.

As we were setting up camp a shout from Jenelle called our attention to a long and handsomely patterned snake retreating from the area of her tent site. (Jeez, there weren't this many reptiles in Raiders of the Lost Ark!)

After dinner, Ted succeeded in establishing a hoped for contact with another adventurous outdoor radio operator, N7XR. Later in the evening, long after our more sensible team mates had gone to bed, I surprised myself by making sense of an 18 word per minute Morse code conversation between Ted and another Ham. Last year on the San Juan trip I was but a hopeful want to be; this year I'm KD5ZKU, the timid radiotelegraphist!

On the morning of day 3, while helping with breakfast preparations, I reached into the galley gear bag for something and (Holy Hopping Rodents!) a Kangaroo Rat jumped out of it. (My vocal cords were aching from all the involuntary squealing this trip was causing me!)

Shortly after getting underway, Jenelle and I saw a curious weasel like creature stealing down the river bank, and Diana pointed out several birds of an almost unbearably brilliant blue hue flitting about in the bushes.

That day we made two successful excursions in search of petroglyphs, one to a hoodoo with a nice collection of drawings protected under its mushroom like cap, and another, at our lunch stop, to a large wall extensively adorned with ancient symbols.

By the time we reached Lower Wild Horse Rapid, we had already enjoyed a goodly number of classic canyon style rapids with a big downstream V at the top, followed by an energetic Hopalong Cassidy wave train. (As the Grand Canyon guides often say, "Big waves, go right down the middle, keep on paddling!") Jenelle and I had adopted the habit of driving right down the center of these for the maximum "Whee!" factor. In Lower Wild Horse the "Whee!" turned into a "Whoa, Heck!" when we discovered (way too late to avoid it) a rather deep Hole hiding in that wave train. (The BLM was right about one thing – open canoes will swamp!) Down below the rapid, all the open boats stopped to bail!

Later in the afternoon, we eddied out on river left to scout Steer Ridge Rapid, first of the big time Bad Boys, class 5 on the GC scale. (The knowledge that we'd be seeing Steer Ridge today did interfere somewhat with my peaceful slumber last night!) The raft and the Sotar took the glory route on river left, punching through a big hole at the top and crashing through a series of confused and mountainous waves. That Sotar seemed to impart superpowers to Bob. His boldness and skill in that Alladin's lamp shaped inflatable were extra-mortal. The canoeists opted for a technically challenging but manageable sneak on river right.

Just downstream from Steer Ridge, in the aptly named Surprise Rapid, our paddle stroke practice paid off when Jenelle executed a perfectly performed bow draw that saved the Blue Hole (and her grateful stern partner!) from a sharply pointed and evil rock intent upon our destruction.

Satisfied with the day's progress, we established camp immediately below Surprise Rapid, above a rocky beach with a large amount of driftwood liberally strewn about, and some grand cottonwood trees for shade. Our activities seemed not to disturb a large male deer with a magnificent set of antlers that grazed unconcernedly not 40 feet away while we set up camp. The morrow, we knew, would really test our mettle with an intense and rapid fire succession of class III and IV rapids.

On the morning of day 4, we watched an acrobatic mouse tight rope walk along Ted's painter to Diana's boat whereupon he jumped into Diana's helmet! Shortly after getting underway, we stopped at Rock Creek, site of an old and mighty lonely ranch, now abandoned. The more ambitious amongst us set off on a petroglyph hike, while the less energetic were content to sit in the shade, cool our heels in the ice cold water of Rock creek, and compose ourselves prior to facing the storm of rapids soon to come.

One by one, the rapids fell astern of us. These were proper canyonesque rapids now, mostly formed by the debris outflows of side canyons entering the main canyon. In the run outs below the rapids we struggled to hold our courses in extremely squirrely water with boils and whirlpools and incomprehensible eddy lines. Concentrating keenly, we soldiered on.

George demonstrated considerable style when he made a cool spin and slide backwards move to avoid an ugly hole in the GC class 4 Belknap Falls. He declared that to be his favorite rapid of the day!

At Chandler Falls Jenelle and I were bringing up the rear, and everyone else had already run the rapid by the time we turned the corner above it. There it was, stretched out before us. (I can see it now, indelibly imprinted in my mind's eye, like a hole burned in one's retina from looking at the sun.) A huge V at the top, its edges defined by Ocoee like diagonal breaking waves, an alarming hole guarding the upper right side, and a seemingly endless train of chaotic and gargantuan waves hiding who knows what horrifying dangers. Quickly I determined to punch through the left side of the V and skirt down the left edge of the wave train. We set to it, urgently aiming for the left border of that V, when I noticed Curtis and Diana parked in an eddy way downstream, giving us a "run right" signal! "Oh Dear," I said to myself (or words to that effect!) "Maybe they know something I don't..."

Way too late in the game we changed our plan and came about. Predictably, we failed to reach the right side. Instead, we went for a walk on the wild side, right down the middle of the monster. At the point of that V we fell through the looking glass and into the realm of liquid psychosis. The last thing that I remember clearly was looking up at a diagonal wave that towered above our heads and recalling what the cook said in that song, "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," "Fellas, it's been nice to know you!" Beyond that we were punched, battered, spun, disoriented, and pummeled by forces second only to the Big Bang itself.

Jenelle must have been doing something right, (I was saying a prayer to the God of Low Braces!) for it spit us out at the bottom upright, awestruck, supersaturated with adrenalin, and carrying a considerable load of river water. Later that day, Diana gleefully described the contrast between Linda, who went through the rapid with a big grin, thinking this was the best ride on the whole river, and myself, who went through the rapid looking like a victim of traumatic stress syndrome, saying, "HOLY S--T!!!"

Six miles and a dozen dicey rapids later, as we negotiated Joe Hutch Canyon Rapid before the watchful eyes of a group of Outward Bound instructors observing us from the bank, Jenelle most surely saved my life when she drew us away from a rock that I hadn't even noticed amidst the concentrated confusion of the rapid. I would certainly have died of embarrassment had those Outward Bounders seen me ricochet off a rock!

After a challenging but eminently satisfying day we made camp that evening across the river from the failed Indian enterprise of the McPherson Ranch lodge. Day 5 would be a whopper, with 2 GC class 6's to disrupt our equanimity!

The action commenced quickly after boarding the boats on Day 5. At Wire Fence Rapid the pneumatic types went for the meat eater's route right down the middle, while Diana and Curtis pioneered a more intellectual course which required blasting through a vicious diagonal wave on the right edge of the upper tongue and tiptoeing through a high speed rock garden on river right. The rest of the open boats were only too happy to follow suit! It's almost metaphysical, the way Diana and Curtis can waltz through a class IV rapid with such graceful ease. We were tickled to note a very handsome dory pulled up on the beach at the campsite just below Wire Fence.

Immediately around the next corner, heart rates hit the red line as Three Fords Rapid (GC class 6) hove into view. There was a monstrous hole at the top that scared even the Sotar pilot. Below that, the wave train looked more like a mountain range than a river! Bob and George were able to skirt the hole and enjoy the big ride; Ted intelligently managed to line his boat around the hole then paddle the edge of the lower part, while the tandem canoeists laboriously walked, lined, and manhandled their boats through the shallow rocky margins on river left. It took a while, but no one died!

Three Fords marked our exit from Desolation Canyon and our entrance into Gray Canyon. If I've got this straight, Desolation was cut through strata laid down by an ancient fresh water lake and by alluvial (river) deposits, whereas the rock of Gray Canyon was the product of a prehistoric salt water ocean. To look at it, Gray Canyon is even more desolate than Desolation!

*The rest of Ronnie's entertaining story will be published in next month's newsletter!!!*



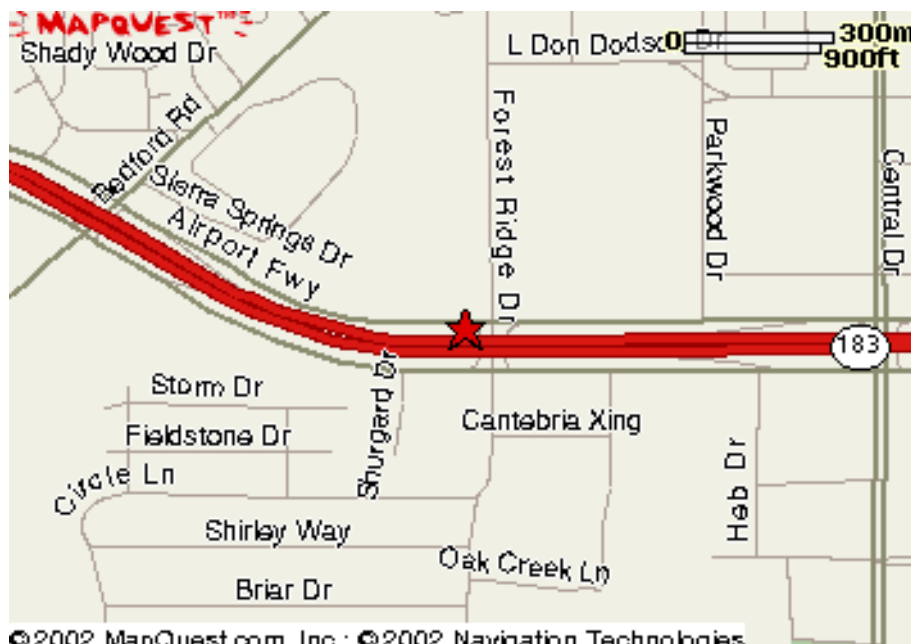
**The North Texas River Runners**  
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Home of the Prairie Dog Surfing Society  
"If we're not in the hole, we're sitting right beside it."



**If you would like to receive the Newsletter by email, please contact: Tyler Bennett @ WildPaddler82@hotmail.com**



**Club meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month at Spring Creek Barbecue from 7:00—9:00 PM**

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