

Pikes Peak River Runners

Middle Fork of the Salmon Idaho Snow & Sun June 2008



By Christina King

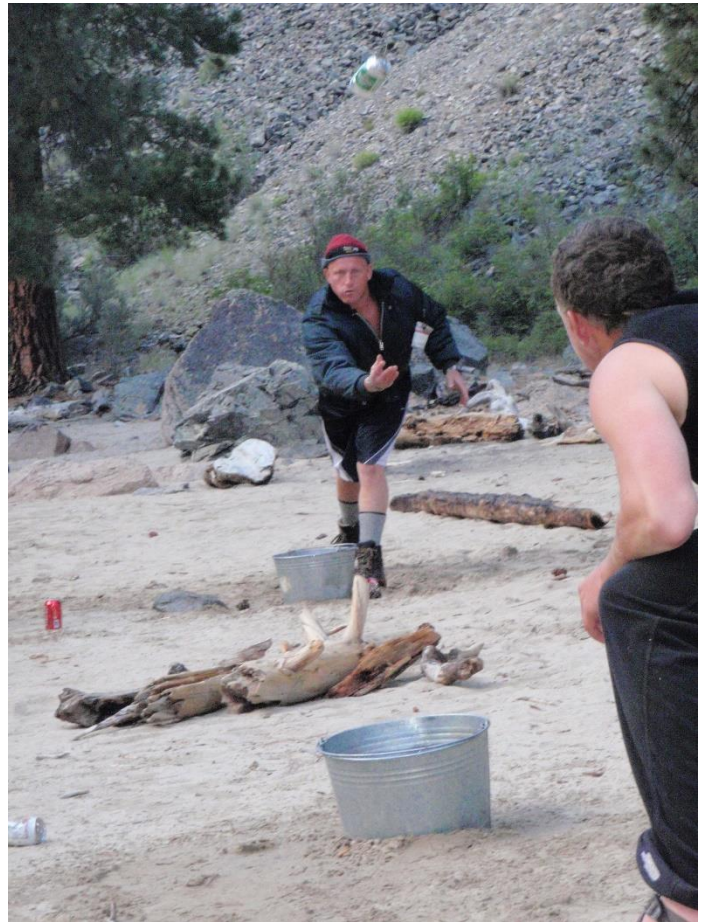
Photo Credits: Christina King, Patti Meyer & Bruce Walker

Trip Participants: Pete & Christina King, Dave Wimmer, Patti Meyer, Mike & Adler Langello, Rick Wilton, Pat Phillips, Mark & Laura Chamberlin, Shelby & Sean Erickson, and Bruce Walker.



As I start this year's Middle Fork of the Salmon river trip journal, I listen contentedly to the river rushing by our camp, small wavelets gently washing the sand beach and the jeers/taunting of the winning river horseshoes team at our delightful Driftwood camp. This game has become incredibly competitive!

But I have jumped ahead, the three previous days have been very cold, snowy, and rainy. So, I will back up and start at the beginning. Over the past few months, our group size reached a high of more than 20 people to a low of about seven boaters. The high flows, snow blocked road and distractions of running rivers all over the west changed our group size on a daily basis. We finally settled down to a group of thirteen which worked out great. The river is down significantly from the extremely high flow of 8.5 feet about 2 weeks ago. The rugged Sawtooth Mountains have a lot of snow remaining, but I doubt it can push up that high again this year. Before driving into Boundary Creek, we spent the night at the Mountain Village Resort in Stanley, rigged the boats up on our trailer in the parking lot and enjoyed a long soak in the hotel's natural hot springs.



Joe Bump Camp, Day 1, June 9, 2008, Monday (Flow 4.8 feet):

The typical early season rumors about the road being closed, etc... turned out to be groundless. The Boundary Creek road was open and dry more than a week before our launch. I was surprised that the rangers were absent from the put-in and it was a free-for-all camp assignment until we got to Indian Creek. Without Sherri Hughes giving direction this year, I should not be surprised that Boundary was not manned by Forest Service rangers after the road had been open for more than a week (before our launch date). We were able to negotiate with the other groups launching and enjoyed seeing Matt Leidecker launch his sweep boat with Adventure Guides company. Matt has written some great river books, including a new Rogue guide.

We checked out Dagger Falls the night before launching and were treated to a river otter (spotted by Adler) swimming in the pool below the falls. The Boundary Creek Forest Service camp was full so we car-camped up the road at the quiet transfer camp that night. We delayed launching until noon to take advantage of the warmest part of the day. The initial rapids are splashy, but we dressed to stay warm. Pete ran lead and both of us had to pull hard to make the left cut at Velvet Falls rapid. At one point, the eddy surged me back out into the current, right above the lip of the Velvet Falls hole. I yanked myself back to safety to slide down the left crease of the falls (the safest run). The rest of our group ran Velvet Falls rapid with varying degrees of success and no flipping. We spotted one of the other private groups pulled over on the left side shore below Velvet - they had flipped one boat but already had it back upright and they signaled that they were okay. Later in the trip, we found out that two of this group had hiked back upriver six miles to the put-in - deciding to leave the trip for good. It was cold today and I did not want to flip.

Trail Flat hot springs was barely above the cold river water with a bit of the river slithering through the left side of the channel. The Powerhouse structure is gone (burned up) and I was astonished by the sight of the debris covered avalanche that dropped all the way into the river. I had seen pictures on the internet but seeing it in person was quite dramatic.

I had a sloppy run in Powerhouse (popped my oar twice) but got back on track by the bottom portion of the rapid. We set up the parawing as soon as we got into Joe Bump camp and the group hustled down to Sheepeater hot



springs. The rain caught them on the way back to camp which somewhat negated their lingering enjoyment of the hot springs. Pete and I served up a hot spaghetti dinner and off to bed we went. Ticks abound in camp (and throughout our trip). I flick out a tick from our tent before bundling up in my warm sleeping bag.

Pungo Camp, Day 2, June 10, Tuesday (Flow 4.8 feet):

Our first rapid of the day is Lake Creek. Wow, what a change this rapid has experienced as compared to last year's run. This is truly a dynamic rapid. We watched a commercial training group run the rapid; easy sneak in

the right (only open) channel- left of the big hole. The vertical tree snags from last year are "gone" or certainly re-arranged to other areas of the river corridor. We all run the sneak successfully with Mike scratching along the left shore (below the rapid) due to an oar issue.





Pistol rapid was an easy s-bend run and then we floated on down to Indian Creek to check in the ranger (get campsite assignments and drinking water). FYI: drinking water is a slow trickle from their system. Fill up before you drive into Boundary Creek. We got all our requested campsites- still very cold and getting colder

by the hour. From Boundary Creek to Indian Creek there are many new areas burned by the recent 2007 fires.

Big Loon camp, Day 3, June 11, Wednesday (Flow 4.7 feet):

Today is the pinnacle of bad weather. I woke up to 2 inches of snow. I managed a groan, rolled over hoping it was a bad dream. Not to be, snow was scattered all over camp/tent and it was extremely cold overnight. Fortunately, the snow melted several hours later but the weather was simply abysmal.

We soaked in Sunflower Flat hot springs and then pushed down to our Big Loon hot springs camp- bypassing stops at Cameron pictographs and Whitey Cox "lukewarm-mite filled" hot springs. Adler rode on the back of my cat and was very cold by the time we reached camp. Shelby fixed us a hot roast beef au jus sandwiches for lunch, but we could not get warm. Many of us scurried up to soak in the Big Loon hot springs while Adler nuzzled up to the Simplot Ranch horses. After a great dinner, we crept into the tents while others in our group "hotspringed" in the dark. Rain pelted down in the middle of the night and I was relieved to be dry and cozy in our tent.



Driftwood camp, Day 4, June 12, Thursday (Flow 4.3 feet):

After a rainy night, we woke to a clear (but cold) morning. Today is our weather transition day and for the rest of the trip, the weather improves quite a bit every day. A good sign is that planes and helicopters appear to be doing "touch and go's" at the Simplot ranch. If the weather were worsening, they would not be flying. Hospital Bar hot springs are under water. I spied an elk along the river about a mile above Tappan Falls. Tappan Falls is straightforward drop on the right. We enjoyed a nice lunch at Funston camp and then floated to the Flying B ranch for a tourist stop.





Haystack rapid is returning to more of the "old" rapid setup and Jack Creek rapids had fun wave trains. We arrive at Driftwood camp to a brilliant sun described at the beginning of my journal. Mike cooks up a summer BBQ of burgers and brats, we enjoy a lovely evening in camp. Adler fixed tasty s'mores for all of us after dinner.

Ship Island camp, Day 5, June 13, Friday (Flow 4.4 feet):



I saw quite a few big-horn sheep at the natural salt licks along the river, including a nice herd of three rams. We viewed the pictographs at Rattlesnake cave and made another stop at Waterfall Creek to gawk at its thundering whitewater. The group clambered up to the gentle mist at Veil Falls where we suddenly heard the abrupt sharp crack of a rock fall. I saw the rock fall on the opposite side of the river, but the reverberations scared our group into thinking that the rocks were falling over the rock cliff above them. They scrambled for cover while ducking quickly just in case. Redside and Weber rapids were straightforward

runs with some of our group taking the far-right sneak at Redside rapid. We camped at Ship Island tonight.

Cache Bar Takeout, Day 6, June 14, Saturday (Flow 4.4 feet):

We took our time leaving the canyon but experienced a flip above Rubber rapid. Mike Langelo flipped above Rubber rapid (Son of rubber = vinyl?) but Adler and him successfully swam to shore and got out of the river above Rubber rapid. Dave picked up Laura in the water above Rubber rapid. Mike's boat ran through Rubber upside down and almost flipped back upright but failed in righting itself. I had an awfully clumsy run of Rubber- managing to hit both lateral waves cockeyed. All turned out fine, but I am sure my run did not win any prizes for technical form. The group chased Mike's upside-down boat while Rick and I pulled over to pick up the now walking Mike and Adler. By the time Mike and Adler crept along the riverside rockfall to Rick's boat the rest of our group had Mike's boat back upright with only a few items missing. Mike's thole pin/oarlock system was bent (Mike had no spare) but fortunately Shelby had a spare that worked on Mike's system.



We ran the remaining Middle Fork rapids including Cramer Creek rapid (on the Main Salmon) that sported the biggest waves of our trip. I spotted an animal carcass on the left shore below Cramer- it looks too small to be a deer or sheep but too big to be a coyote. Earlier in the trip I saw two separate Western Tanagers dead (floating in the river) and there were a bunch of dead swallows? in Veil Cave. It has been a tough winter for the local wildlife.

The flip made for a long afternoon and we reached Cache Bar takeout in late afternoon. We de-rigged very quickly and efficiently along with two other groups (one private, one commercial). Everyone scattered quickly for home. Pete and I enjoyed a quiet night at North Fork and drove home the next day.



Camp recommendations:

1. Day 1: Joe Bump, Big Bend (short day only), Sheepeater (counts as your hot spring), Scout (also counts as a hot spring), (Fire Island- not great anymore- blocked by log & burned)
2. Day 2: Pungo, Marble Creek #2 right, Lower Jackass
3. Day 3: Big Loon (hot spring), Shelf (hot spring), Cow Creek (hot spring), Funston, Camas Creek
4. Day 4: Driftwood, Survey, Wollard
5. Day 5: Otter (below 4.5 feet), Ship Island, Elk Bar (makes for a long last day)

