



The Voyageur's Companion

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Canoe Club
www.rockymountaincanooclub.org

April 2007

RMCC trips are cooperative adventures shared by members and their guests. The entire group is collectively responsible for the trip, and each participant is individually responsible for judging their own qualifications, skill level, and safety on the rivers being run. The trip coordinator may refuse to allow a participant on a trip, but the responsibility for judging one's own qualifications lies solely with each trip member.

Trips are open to RMCC members and their guests. All trip participants must sign the RMCC Waiver and Assignment of Risk agreement prior to each trip. Please sign up well in advance.

Check the RMCC on-line schedule for the latest updates. New trips are added frequently during the boating season: <http://www.rockymountaincanooclub.org/schedule.html>

To add a trip or event to the schedule, please send complete information to Trip Coordinator Ned Banta.



Help out REI and RMCC at the same time:

RMCC again will help out REI with its annual summer event that familiarizes customers with boats, paddle gear and the sports of canoeing and kayaking. This year the event will be Saturday, June 9 from 7:30 a.m. to approximately 1 p.m. at Bear Creek Lake Park, just off Morrison Road and C-470 in Lakewood. We need at least five knowledgeable RMCC members to participate. Volunteers can get into the park for free that day, but you must let REI Outreach Coordinator (and RMCC member) Bob Cook know you are coming at least two days in advance. Your name then will be given to the guard at the entrance gate. You can reach Bob Cook at

REI and its vendors will provide various kinds of boats, PFDs, paddles and other equipment for customers to try. However, RMCC should bring their own PFDs, boats (if outfitted), paddles and other appropriate gear, so customers can see how the gear is actually used. You don't have to let other people use your gear unless you feel comfortable doing so, though. The park has a small concession, but it's still smart to bring water, snacks and layers of clothes to deal with sun, rain and wind.

We also need someone to bring a large card table for our brochures and other information. And we need a large tent for sun shelter, because the one we use for the River Rendezvous is just too big for the event site. If anyone has a large table and sizeable sun tent that they could bring or let us use, please email RMCC president Penelope Purdy at

REI lets RMCC use its meeting room at its Flagship store in downtown Denver for free if RMCC members help with two REI events per year. This event helps meet that requirement. It's a fair bargain: REI normally charges for-profit groups hundreds of dollars per day for use of the meeting room.

Penelope Purdy, President ☺☺

Carson Nature Center/ South Platte Park- Potential VOC/REI service project
October 13, 2007 -- Please help!

REI has asked RMCC to do a service project where REI would get recognition, in exchange for our use of their facility for our meetings. This project is perfect! It is pre-organized by a group I've been working with for 10 seasons, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC). We (VOC) have done all of the legwork for project selection and design, materials and tools, agency coordination, crew leadership, advertising for volunteers, safety, etc. My role will either be as a leader of our RMCC crew or as overall project manager on the ground on the day of the project. All we (you) RMCCers have to do is commit one beautiful fall day to working outdoors on the banks of a river section (C-470 to points downriver) that all of us have -- or will -- run. No experience necessary. If you've never done a VOC project before, you'll be amazed at the level of organization brought to the project, the fun you'll have, and the work we'll do. Check out the web site, (<http://www.voc.org>) for more information about the project and about VOC.

The job is this: The common buckthorn, an aggressive weed that has been introduced to Colorado, is invading riparian habitats and reducing populations of native plants including a rare Front Range native shrub, the American Black Current. Join non-RMCC volunteers to battle this destructive invader and restore the area's native habitats. It would be terrific to have a group of RMCCers working together on this project and if you commit to it, we can keep our part of the bargain with REI.

Please contact me, Jeanne Willson, [redacted] so that we can do that through your help. Don't wait until you "find out what you're doing that day" -- please commit NOW, otherwise we can't set this up as meeting our obligation to REI. 🐼

The RMCC Spring Meeting (May 20, 2007):

The meeting will be just for fun: a potluck dinner, video and slide show. It will be held at the REI Flagship store, 1416 Platte Street in downtown Denver, in the large (east) meeting space on the 3rd level. (Call 303-756-3100 if you need directions). Please bring your videos, photos, slides, Power Point presentations or any other pictures of recent or favorite paddling trips. Also please bring food and beverages but no booze (REI rules). The meeting itself will start promptly at 4:00 pm and run until 5:30 pm, but we have access to the room starting at 3:30. If you have slides or videos to show, please come at 3:30 for set-up. We look forward to seeing pictures of your trips! ---Penelope Purdy, RMCC President 🐼

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Instruction	Jeff Oxenford
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Trip Schedule

by Ned Banta

☼ May 12-13, 2007 River Canoeing Contact: Jeff Oxenford [] Formerly called the Basic Class. This two day class will be at Chatfield Reservoir; the second day on a section of easy moving water (8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.). This class emphasizes beginning strokes, basic river running technique, with discussions about gear, safety, river etiquette, etc. Required equipment: canoe, paddle, life jacket, and helmet. A kneeling setup with glued-down foam pads is strongly recommended. For solo and tandem. Paddlers are divided into groups based on skill level.

☼ May 18 and 19, 2007 Trip Coordinator's Class Contact: Jeff Oxenford [] NEW! May 18 evening and May 19 full day on the river. This class will help trip coordinators better organize and conduct trips. It is highly recommended for both first-time AND experienced trip coordinators. It will be taught by Jeff Oxenford, a certified American Canoe Association instructor and long-time RMCC member and instructor. There may a small fee to cover materials and Jeff's time, but the sum hasn't been determined yet and likely will depend on the size of the class.

☼ May 20, 2007 RMCC Spring meeting Contact: Penelope Purdy [] The spring meeting will be just for fun -- a potluck dinner, video and slide show (no booze--REI rules). REI Denver Flagship, 1416 Platte Street (303-756-3100). Large (East) Meeting Space. Meeting time: 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm, but we have access to the room starting at 3:30. If you have slides or video to show, please come at 3:30 for set-up.

☼ May 22, 2007 Quick Start Class Contact: Jeff Oxenford [] These one evening introductory courses will be offered from 5:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. in Golden, CO. Learn how to keep your canoe in a straight line and perform simple maneuvers on flat water. Includes an introduction to basic equipment and safety. Required equipment: canoe, paddle and life jacket. For registration information and more details, contact Jeff.

☼ June 8 to 10, 2007 North Platte River, Six Mile Gap to Treasure Island Trip coordinator: Ken Bauer [] Class II Wilderness/ranchland, great camping, fishing, kids welcome. 22nd annual trip. Poudre Paddlers/ RMCC trip.

☼ July 6 to approx. July 13, 2007 Green River, Desolation and Gray Canyons Trip coordinators: Richard Ferguson and Will Golson Richard: [] Will: [] Class III Launching July 6th. 84 river miles with over 50 named rapids, predominately II's with a few III's. Large wave trains with few obstacles. Canyons rise over 5000 feet in places. Numerous side hikes. Planning a relaxed schedule of 7 to 8 days, with 1 or 2 layover days. Looking for a medium group size, 6-10 people, 5-7 boats. River info from BLM.

☼ Date negotiable. Churchill River system. Trip coordinator: James Baker-Jarvis [] Class II+ Trip will be about 14-16 days in the wilderness and leave Denver around July 15 +-. The route will be on the Churchill River system that will include large and small lakes, rivers, and running rapids. Relatively strenuous trip approximately 150-200 miles. Must be in good physical condition and able to portage own canoe over poor portages or bushwhacking, tolerate bugs, and survive in remote wilderness. We get on the trail early in the mornings (6 - 8 AM). Number of canoes limited. Jim and Karen and Aquene Baker-Jarvis [] YOU NOW NEED A PASSPORT TO ENTER CANADA (It takes about 8 weeks to get one unless you pay more to expedite it)

☼☼ July 20-22, 2007 RMCC River Rendezvous. Trip options: Classes I-III Summer RMCC get-together. Day trips, cookouts.

Sixth Annual South Platte River Joint Spring Paddle Trip

by Dave Allured

On Sunday March 18, 2007, paddlers from Rocky Mountain Canoe Club and other Colorado boating clubs converged at Riverside Park in Evans, Colorado for an early spring tradition. It was the Sixth Annual South Platte River Joint Spring Paddle Trip, a fairly simple and casual flat water day trip. It was a great day for paddling, with unusually warm spring temperatures and the river at a friendly 700 cubic feet per second.

There were tandem and solo canoes, both whitewater and touring; as well as inflatable canoes, sea kayaks, and long sleek racing kayaks. At least 60 boats paddled; the previous record was in the 40's a few years earlier.

First at 9 am, there was unloading and a quick meeting for logistics and safety. Then everyone was given their choice of two paddling destinations -- nine river miles down to the bridge north of Kersey, or another five miles to the south bridge near Kuner. The car shuttle left in two waves, according to each driver's preferred paddling destination. It was self organizing chaos, and it seemed to all work out fine.

We launched by late morning. Of necessity the 60 boats strung out along the river, with some attention to the few beginner boats toward the back of the regatta.

The riverscape was a natural and agricultural blend. Willows, cottonwoods, and grasses predominated.

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The put-in at Evans. By Eric Nyre

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The river was wide and flat, and bow paddlers had to be vigil for the proper channels amid winding sand bars. Ducks and geese were seen, fewer than we thought should be there at this time of spring. Rust and chrome beckoned from old cars and trucks stacked along the river banks to slow erosion, a museum fascination for the nostalgic among us.

After the first two miles came the Patterson Ditch diversion dam. With low water level and a helpful sand bar on the right, the portage was a very easy lift over a three foot concrete drop.

In another three miles there was Plumb Ditch dam. This was easier done as a land portage on the island on river left. This also served as a pleasant lunch stop among the grasses and cottonwoods.

By mid afternoon, half the group had peeled off at Kersey bridge. The rest of us forged on to Kuner bridge, ending well before dinner time. A fine day was enjoyed by all.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the organizers from the other paddling groups for their help in planning and advertising this fun event. Thanks to Eric Nyre of Canoe Colorado, Diana Preusser of High

Country River Rafters, Debbie Hinde of Poudre Paddlers, and Brian Curtiss of Rocky Mountain Sea Kayak Club. Thanks also to photographers Eric Nyre and Marek Uliasz

Thanks also to Evans Parks and Recreation Department and parks Director Andy McRoberts, for allowing us to park and launch on their property. For future reference, Andy requests a courtesy message from boaters planning to access the river from Riverside Park, just so that he can keep track of the usage. You can reach him at 970-475-1129, AMcRoberts@ci.evans.co.us, www.cityofevans.org 🐾



New canoe. By Marek Uliasz



South Platte River. By Marek Uliasz

Kodiak Island, 2006

by Mary Parrott

It was day 8 of our trip, gale day. The wind had started picking up the previous evening and had been howling and blowing rain for more than twelve hours by now. Our tents were trying to shake free, resisting our efforts to anchor them to driftwood and to each other. Things were getting a bit soggy but Christy, Mary and I cozily played Quiddler in Christy's tent while Phil napped. Occasional runs to the cook tent completed the day's main scope of activities. There would be no paddling today and it appeared, from the weather forecast for this area, that our "plan" to paddle around Raspberry Island would need to be changed. We were rapidly learning that a paddling plan up here was really just a "plan" and that rest days are really weather days. We were also learning to flow with changing conditions and use times like this to chill out and think about our adventures so far.

The day after Mary, Phil and I arrived in Kodiak, Alaska ten days earlier, the skies began to clear. After five weeks of clouds and rain, the town was in a celebratory mood. Pictures of the sun and statements of good cheer dotted store windows, and even the tsunami warning system's weekly plaintive bleep couldn't dampen spirits. Christy Lyle, Mary and Phil Lyle's daughter, lives in Kodiak and had invited us to join her on a kayak trip to explore a bit of the immense Kodiak archipelago. Christy teaches middle school here and runs kayak trips for at-risk teenagers in the summer. She has good, seaworthy Necky kayaks we could use, and a husband who works on a fishing boat in the summer and supplies her with King Salmon. It didn't take me many minutes to accept her invitation.

Christy and Mary organized most of the food for the trip, and a lot had been brought up from "the South", aka "the lower 48", Alaska prices being what they are. Earlier I had a few apprehensive moments thinking of sharing food for possibly two weeks with Mary and Phil, whose email handle is Nuts and Twigs. But, as we packed and loaded the truck with huge bags of raw materials like rice, oats, powdered milk and pasta, these moments passed and were replaced by others. It was clear that we wouldn't starve. There was even the largest jar of peanut butter and the biggest bag of jelly-bellies I'd ever seen. Were there expectations that gourmet meals could be produced from these food sacks? And how could all of this stuff fit in our boats?

Amazingly, we were able to cram it all in. We departed from Anton Larson Bay on the north side of Kodiak

Island about mid-day on July 27 and paddled the clear, protected waters around an island rookery for Tufted and Horned Puffins. Flocks of Black-Legged Kittiwakes and various arctic gulls and terns shared the real estate. A 15 knot headwind while making the four mile crossing over Kizhuyak Bay reminded us that we wouldn't always be in protected waters.

We camped on the NE side of Whale Island, on a small beach with towering cliffs behind us. Fresh water sources were plentiful on the trip; a stream tumbled down the mountains near us here. We heard an occasional whale's blow, and boulders tumbling from a slide



*6th Annual South Platte River Joint Spring Paddle Trip
The lunch stop. By Eric Nyre*

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area down the beach. We were spared the challenge of hanging food bags at this first camp because of the inaccessible location. On two previous kayak trips in Glacier Bay (with Nancy and Keith Wellman and others), we were required by National Park rules to store food in bear-proof containers. This eliminated the chore of hanging food bags, but the cylindrical containers were not a good shape for packing in kayaks. Fortunately, Phil brought along his whitewater z-drag rescue pulley/ropes/carabineers system, and proved amazingly adept at climbing trees and using this system to hang the food bags throughout the trip.

Our plan at this point was to skirt past Little Raspberry Island, then head up the straits along the left shore of Raspberry Island and, if we had a favorable four day forecast, continue out into the Shelikof Straits and around Raspberry. The next day dawned gloriously sunny and calm and we were optimistic about achieving this goal. As we rounded one bend we became part of a huge rafting of sea otters and their babies. Pigeon Guillemots and Marbled Murrelets demonstrated their difficult take-offs when they felt that our boats were too close. After paddling about eight miles we camped on a small island which we named "Two Oceans" since at high tide we were on a narrow ridge with ocean on both sides. The wind came up that night, nearly blowing Christy's tent away and giving us a taste of what was to come.

The forecast in the morning called for westerly winds of 20 knots. We hoped that this would be a maximum and that as our route turned slightly more north when we entered Raspberry Straits, we would get some protection from the wind. Neither thing happened. After about five miles we were paddling directly into the wind, which was probably blowing more than 25 knots at the point where forward progress ceased, conditions became dicey for safety, and we headed to shore. A combination of boat lining and cove hopping got us to a decent place to camp, in a small bay with a stream. This was to be home for three nights.

The wind howled at 30-35 knots most of this period, day and night. We pitched our tents up in the green

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woods on the soft, spongy, moss-covered floor. There was lots of evidence that bears liked these woods also - scat and bear trails; we kept our bear sprays close. There wasn't much rain with this weather system so we had a good time doing beach and woods hikes. Mary seemed at her happiest beachcombing for treasures and we had to remind her to look up sometimes. There were several eagles in the area watching us and an occasional seal or otter poked his head up in the bay. In the woods we learned to dodge the thorns of Devil's Club and avoid the Pushky, a toxic cow-parsnip relative that causes blisters and burns. We grazed for salmon berries and saw Iris, Single Delight, Bog Orchids, Horsetail and Sundew, a carnivorous swamp plant. We made clam chowder and Phil baked biscuits on rocks. We even had company. Three young guys from a cabin up the beach came over to chat the first afternoon. Deer season was starting Aug. 1 and they were getting ready to hike up into the mountains the following day to be up at sunrise for the hunt. These animals are the Sitka Black-Tailed Deer, non-natives introduced in 1924. They are about the size of Bambi and I had a hard time imagining anyone shooting them. The next day an old man and his dog landed down the beach in a small skiff. As the man hobbled toward us on two uneven wooden sticks he used as canes, we thought he might be coming to check our permit. The Afognak Corporation, organized by the Alutiiq native people to manage their vast land holdings in the Kodiak archipelago, requires all campers on their land to obtain a permit prior to trip departure. There is no charge unless one plans to hunt or fish (in which case a hunting/fishing license is also required). But the eighty-six year old was just a local being neighborly and curious; he and his wife were on an annual two month cruising trip in the area and were anchored in nearby Seliek Bay.

With a good forecast, we were up at four on day 6 and paddled thirteen miles with the tide and no wind to a prospective camp between two major streams. We could see salmon jumping near each stream. As we were checking out one stream from our boats, we saw a red fox cavorting and scavenging and an eagle in a nearby tree intently watching the shenanigans. As if on cue, a large brown bear appeared out of the brush and began to interact with the fox in a very surprising way; it looked like they were playing together. The bear finally lumbered down the beach and disappeared in the tall grass. There are over 2700 brown bears living in the Kodiak archipelago. Because of their isolation, these bears have evolved slightly differently than other members of their Alaskan grizzly family. They are larger overall and their heads and collars are proportionately more massive. The largest males can stand more than nine feet tall and weigh more than 1500 pounds. Before setting up camp we saw a second bear in the same area. We were careful to pitch our tents close together and well away from our cooking area, and locate our food hanging area high up on a hill, away from both. A mama raven on a nearby nest objected to our choice of trees but we promised her no harm.

The next day brought classic overcast, misty Kodiak weather but, most importantly, the seas were calm. We saw a pair of whales working the rocky shore about two miles across from our camp. We paddled midway across the strait and sat close together in our boats, quiet except for the taps we made on the boats' sides. The two huge, curious fin whales rewarded our patience by coming close

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*6th Annual South Platte River Joint Spring Paddle Trip
Portaging. By Marek Uliasz*

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enough for us to get a good look. We paddled out into the Shelikof Straits. The seas here, even under relatively calm conditions, had a big ocean feel about them. At this point the Straits are about fifty miles wide and separate Raspberry Island from the Alaskan Peninsula. We watched several fishing boats set their nets for halibut, and paddled to a beautiful bay with a river flowing in. where we picnicked and walked on the beach. Christy caught a Pink Salmon. On the way back to camp she stayed in her boat, with the fish in her hatch, while the rest of us went on shore to get water from a stream. Mary was the look-out while Phil and I pumped. We were alerted to something unusual going on when we saw Mary dancing around and stammering "ba-ba-ba". A small, dark, furry fox revealed himself from behind a rock. Mary thought it was a baby bear and expected mama to be close by; she was trying to warn us! That evening we cooked the salmon, wrapped in various plants, in an "oven" built in the fire. It was delicious. An attempt to roast a piece of kelp on a stick did not, however, provide the mouth-watering hors d'oeuvre we had hoped for.

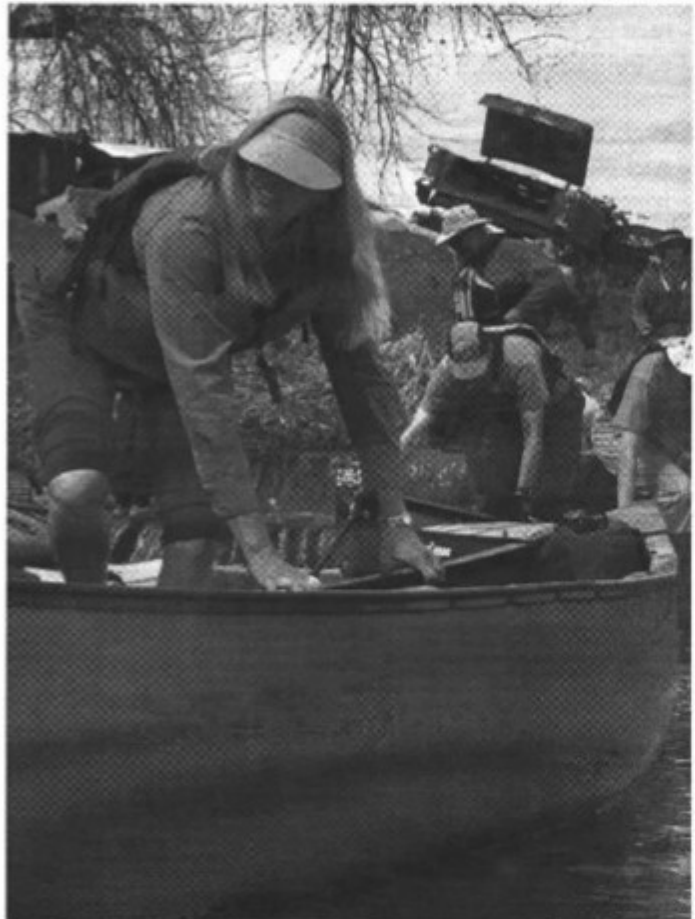
After two gale nights and the gale day, conditions improved mid-day on day 9. We crossed over to the other side of the strait and paddled fourteen miles to a campsite at Shoal Point on Afognak Island. We saw a herd of Roosevelt Elk on the way, and passed an old native settlement that had been abandoned after the 1964 tsunami. It was after 11, just getting dark, by the time we got into our tents.

The next day we paddled another fourteen miles, in beautiful weather, to the Lipnik cove area, a prime habitat for bears along the Afognak River. We learned that the bears weren't hungry this time of year, were picky about their salmon choices, and wished to be left alone.

Though we had no sightings we kept up our guard to avoid startling any of the resting citizens. We played in two gorgeous waterfalls on the way back to our previous night's camp.

Our plan on day 11 was to paddle to a spot at the start of the infamous Whale Passage and just hang out until we got a slack outgoing tide, then paddle through the Passage and if favorable conditions existed, make the four mile crossing back to Kodiak Island. The narrow Whale Passage has a reputation for turbulent whitewater during outgoing or incoming tides, and is respected even by boats far larger than ours. Despite having to paddle around and through several large kelp beds, we made good time and arrived at the top of the Passage at a slack incoming tide. We took a short leg break and decided to go for it since conditions looked good. We were quickly through, and had to hug the side to let a fishing boat hurry past in its effort to make it in the slack tide. A pod of orcas fished on the other side of the channel. We headed for home, changing course only to avoid a large "war tide", the effect of several bays still emptying water at different rates.

We had a couple of wonderful days of R&R back on Kodiak Island, exploring other parts of the Island, grazing for more salmon berries, visiting taverns and coffee shops, drying gear on Christy's deck and, best of all, resting in front of the fire in her wood stove. 🐾



*6th Annual South Platte River Joint Spring Paddle Trip
Portaging. By Marek Uliasz*

Jess Decides to Race

© Mark Zen

Jessica is my middle stepdaughter, out of three girls. After she learned the basics to canoeing, she and her younger sister, Heather, would paddle the front of the canoe, while I paddled from the rear. Heather sat in front, straddling a whitewater, pedestal-style seat, while Jessica sat in the front seat, behind Heather. Jessica was in charge of making sure the two of them paddled in syncopation. They would count, "one, two, one, two..." as they paddled forward or if they were turning the front of the boat one direction or the other. The two girls paddling the front of our canoe were as strong as most adults, so it was my responsibility to keep the bow and stern of the canoe synchronized. If I made a mistake, it could be serious.

Jessica had been on the shore of the finish line, as her mom and I won a canoe race. We had paddled a "Recreational Class" race. It had been a 36 mile, four and a half hour long race on the Colorado River, from Rifle to De Beque, Colorado. That was my third time completing the race, but the first time doing this with my new family.

Our second year as a family, we went on a three day canoe camping trip on the White River, starting in Rangely Colorado, finishing on the "Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation," in Utah. We took a practice run down the South Platte River in Denver, to teach Kevin, Andrea's (our oldest) boyfriend to paddle first, just a couple weeks before the trip. My wife, Melody, was paddling a solo canoe for the first time too.

Two years later, Jessica was paddling in the bow of the canoe by herself. Jessica felt she was ready for the race by her 12th birthday in February. Thirteen year olds could not race in the Junior/Senior Class. We both committed to train all summer, so we would be ready for the race. Jessica kept herself busy all year. She qualified for, and was in the "Miss Pre-teen Colorado" in the later part of spring. Jessica worked hard for everything she got; we could not afford anything extra for the girls for a number of years. At the same time, I was working full time, and going to college half-time, and volunteer work for the college Honor Society. Jessica learned it was hard to juggle everything, but thought she had it under control.

I felt she was not training as hard as she had promised she would. By Mid-summer, Jessica decided she did not want to race after all. Her mom and I talked to her, and explained again about long-term commitment. We stood firmly; Jessica had to complete the race. The winter had been good to the mountains; many rivers were still swollen by the weekend of the race. Jessica did put more effort into her paddling when she went. That was most important to us, that she develop her endurance and skill. The skills she learned would allow her to paddle as efficiently as possible for a long period.

When Jessica realized she was going to paddle thirty-six miles whether she liked it or not, she put lots of effort into her practice sessions. Our Utah trip had been fifty miles, spread over three days, and she co-paddled the front of the canoe with her sister. Now she would be completely in control of the front of the canoe. Jess is very smart and a very fast learner, so she developed into a good paddler by the time we were less than a month away from the race.

A couple of weeks before the race, we were informed the location and distance would be changed due to the high water conditions. Jessica and I got lucky; the race would only be 12 miles. We both knew we could fly [relatively speaking, with our whitewater boat racing against racing boats]. The race was still on the Colorado River, but now would be Dotsero to Hanging Lake. Neither Jess nor I had ever been on this piece of river. It was certainly the most picturesque paddle we had been on. We would be racing straight into Glenwood Canyon.

Our whole family loaded the boat onto the roof of the car, put our gear in the back and off we went to bed. Previously I had camped out before each race, and run the first leg of the race the day before, to see what the river really looked like. This time, money kept us from leaving a day early, and getting a practice run in. Instead, we got up at 3am, and then left for the race.

When we got to Dotsero, the sponsor, "Canoe Colorado," gave us a briefing before the race, letting us know there is only one small rapid, nicknamed "Flashing Light Rapid" due to the construction sign that was on the highway above the river. We had known the sponsors, Jerry and Eric for years, and this was really a "fun race" to get people interested in canoeing and canoe racing. They put "extra" money in the pot, and after the race, they have a prize drawing. Jerry spread out all of the prizes on a blanket at the park at the finish line, and put a

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prize out for everyone that raced. So even the folks that came in dead last, still got a prize, worth as much or more than their entry fee.

After the briefing, we all lined up in our respective classes, and waited anxiously for the start. Jess was nervous, and did what she usually does - talk. By the time our class was due to start, Jess knew everyone and their names. She has always been the most social of three sisters.

Twelve miles is still a ways to paddle on the river, and I promised myself not to holler or yell at Jess. She had made an effort all summer learning the "cross bow draw" and a number of other strokes. Now she would see the fruit of her efforts.

Our plan was to surge ahead as fast as we could and put as much distance as possible between us and our competitors. Then paddle hard enough that they would not pass us.

The fastest boats finished in less than an hour. We were nowhere close. Three quarters of the way through the race and we still had not seen the paddlers behind us. On a long straight stretch, we stopped along side of the river and gulped down our water.

We wanted to win; we trained and planned for it. After ten minutes of waiting, we wondered if something had happened to them. Another five minutes and Jessica was worried about the others. When I asked how worried, the response surprised me. She wanted to paddle back up river and look for them.

"What if they're hurt Mark?"

"They would probably need help."

"How hard would it be to go back?"

"Difficult, we would have to stay near the banks, and hop from eddy to eddy."

"An eddy is the calmer water behind rocks and trees, right?"

"Yes, it is, we are stopped in one now."

"If we go back to help, and they are ok, just slow, would they pass us?"

"Maybe, if they want to win more than anything else, they could pass us. Since we will have used all of our energy to go back up river, we wouldn't stand much chance of catching back up to them, especially since we were so close to the finish."

"But that wouldn't be right would it? Since we were trying to help them?"

"No, it wouldn't be right, but they would still win."

"But we know we would have won, right?"

"Yes Jess, if we just kept on going down river we would have easily beat them."

"Going back is the right thing to do right?"

"In this case, yes."

We spent the next twenty minutes fighting our way back up the Colorado River. Then we came around the bend, and the others were coming down river at the same time. They had gone over at Flashing Light Rapid, and had taken them a while to retrieve all their gear. They thanked us, Jess in particular, for waiting. They also assured us we would cross the finish line first.

Jess was willing to lose the race to help people she had never met before. I am glad the others were also decent people. We had a fun paddle down the river, just talking back and forth between the boats. When we came around a bend, and saw the finish, the other boaters stopped along the shore long enough for Jess and I to cross the finish line first.

Jess learned about commitment that summer and she was repaid with kindness for her selfless act. Most of the prize money went to the gas tank, and a great meal at a nice restaurant. Jessica was also one of the first winners of the raffle, and won herself a brand new "bent blade" paddle. It would have cost all of our prize money to buy one, so she shot up to "7th Heaven" right away.

As far as I am concerned, she took her first steps towards adulthood that weekend. For the next three years, she helped me teach canoeing classes to Girl Scouts in Fort Collins. During that time, she learned to paddle a sea kayak, even paddling it solo, down a swollen Colorado River. She has come a long way from the little girl paddling the bow of our boat with her sister. 🐾



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