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Tripping the Northern Fandango



Valerie Askren

Beaver Falls on the Missinaibi

*bug hat
bug shirt
bug spray
rain gear
maps tent thermarest sleeping bag pfd*

I carefully made my list and checked it thrice. With 10 days and over 200 km of river time, we couldn't afford to forget a thing. Kevin and I had been talking about paddling the Missinaibi River since last winter, and we knew Ben and Lisa would go along with whatever we dreamed up. After much consideration, Kevin and I decided the Missinaibi Lake to Mattice section would be best for our group - it had the greatest amount of whitewater, the least amount of flat, and we didn't have to rely on the train schedule for our shuttle (since roads are as scarce as bourbon in northern Ontario).

The headwaters of the Missinaibi start just south of Chapleau, Ontario, and form the southern tip of the arctic watershed. Long a water trail for the great

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The Dory Story



Lynn Lewis

A "Glory Moment" at the beginning of the Grand Canyon

Everybody told me I'd do fine. The guy who rented me the dory. The guy who rowed a dory. The guy who owned two dories. The guy who claimed to know rowers of dories. They all said similar things: if you can read whitewater, you can row a dory. Who was I to doubt the prevailing and consensus wisdom of people I hardly knew? I wanted a new experience on my fifth trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. I had kayaked it the first four times. A raft seemed like it would be too much like work: pushing and pulling 2 tons of other peoples' gear through miles of pools with occasional spurts of adrenalin. Now a dory seemed like it might be more of a challenge. You could actually flip it if you weren't paying attention, I thought. Plus it would be a lot easier to maneuver and put it where you wanted it. The ride was supposed to be wild - it launches off of big waves and spins on a dime, they said. And I would carry only as much ballast as I needed to stabilize the boat and refuse other peoples' gear since it wouldn't be a group financed boat - I'd row it as my boat just as if it

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Russell Fork Gorge Trip Report

Dates: 10/01/03 Saturday – 10/12/03
Sunday

Destination: Elkhorn City, KY--Russell Fork Gorge

Participants: Shawn
Lorna
John Schroader
Bill Mandler
Connard
Dave Allnutt
Dan Copeland
Damon (from Corbin KY)
Various other RF regulars

Carnage Raing: Class 5+

Like all good stories, it is necessary sometimes to go back to the beginning. The beginning for me was April of 2002. The beginning of my new career as a boater started with the Bluegrass Wildwater Club's spring clinic down at the Obed. The section we learned on was Class II. After the clinic, I progressively paddled on harder and more difficult rivers. The pinnacle of my paddling that summer was paddling from Double Suck to Goforth on the Occoe. I was ecstatic that I was now a Class III boater. I had a roll (most of the time), I could ferry, and even catch most of the larger eddys.

And then I meet John Schroader....

After moving to Western Kentucky and joining the Ohio Valley Whitewater Club out of Evansville, I met John at the first Club meeting I attended. Not long after, I was standing at the put-in of the Big South Fork in the middle of winter. I had not paddled any Class IV water, but John assured me that I would be fine (he was pretty sure anyway). Well I did it and I was fine.

Through most of 2003 this was the story. "John, do you think I can do it?"

"You will be fine, if you are having a good day."

John lead me down the path of being a competent Class IV boater on runs like the New River Gorge, Big South Fork, and the Tellico. My confidence had



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Join the BWA! BWA Membership \$20/individual; \$25/Family year entitles you to receive the newsletter, 10% discounts at many local and out of state outfitter shops, use of club equipment, discount at pool rolling sessions, a listing in the BWA Handbook, a stream gauge guide, and web site with a listserve for member's messages.

Meetings are held at 7:30, the second Tuesday of each month at Winchell's Resturant, 348 Southland Drive, Lexington, Ky. Check website for updates on location.

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grown to such a degree that I was taking other friends down these rivers as their guide.

Gauley season approached and the same historical Q&A session occurred in relation to me running the Upper Gauley. Same response from the ambassador, "You can do it, I'm pretty sure." I thought to myself that this is a Class V run that I thought I would never do. Last year when I was learning and I met people that ran the Upper Gauley, I would tell them that it was just too dangerous of a river. I was perfectly content to paddle the Hiawasse and the Nantahalla. Anyway, we ran it and I did fine.

John and I had talked quite a lot about me running the RF Gorge. Once again, the mighty ambassador spoke and bequeathed me eligible to run the Gorge. Of course the sanctioning was followed by additional

voyageurs, the Missinaibi flows north carrying pelts, coffee, sugar and liquor, in and out of James Bay. A simple substitution of Gortex for mink, and we were ready to paddle.

Our first stop was the outfitters to pick up canoes and buy a shuttle. Kevin and I researched carefully and had both reserved Evergreen Starbusts. With more rocker, a narrower beam, and an extra two inches in bow and stern height as compared to the reputable Prospector, this boat promised dry runs and unparalleled maneuverability. Apparently what we didn't rent was enough Royalex overlay to get us down the river.

*Quittagene
Cedar
Sun
Barrel
Deadwood
Allan Island
Wavy*

Scanning the names of the rapids, the Missinaibi promised allure and intrigue. All had well-developed portage (rhymes with corsage) trails, as voyageurs paddled upstream and down carrying their goods. Our first day included a short paddle across Missinaibi Lake to an island campsite and our inaugural encounter with leeches. After making camp, I slipped to the backside of the island for a peaceful bath and relaxation on the rocks. It was there I noticed that the small leaves and twigs on the lake bottom were actually moving. *(The last time I had seen inanimate things moving was when my roommate and I bought 300 hits...Oh...but I digress...)* In my mind's eye the leeches quickly grew as thick as a canoeist's arm, and



ordained with the virility of a kayaker. Carefully I pulled the first one off and checked my nekid body parts for more.

The next morning proved a little more challenging for Ben, as a leech had firmly adhered to his foot and another was sucking the inner sole of his Teva. Quickly we paddled back to shore while Kevin and Lisa scrambled for salt and a lighter. Our attempts to penetrate the heat shield of an arctic leech suggested yet another Lexmark patent. It was time to move on.

That day we finished our paddle across the Lake and entered the river properly. A manna from heaven, the skies gushed as we hit our first rapid. Two fishermen on river right frantically began waving. "Rapid ahead! Portage river right!" they screamed. I quickly double-checked the map. Yes - the rapid was rated class 2-3. What's the excitement? We caught an eddy river left and eyed the wave train right of center. A deft peel-out brought us on-line for an excellent run, with Kevin, Lisa and Marj (the flat coat) fast behind. But for all our bailing we could barely keep up with the pouring rain.

We paddled a total of 30 km that day, roughly 19 miles, and most of it in the rain. As dusk approached, we reached the Peterbell campsite on river left, just below the railroad tracks. Filled with tall grasses, mosquitos and trash, we dejectedly paddled on as the light was fading. A few more km, and we reached Peterbell Marsh, where the mosquitos orchestrated a deafening roar, and the river flowed upstream. According to the map there was camping on river right. Leaving the river bed, we followed a trail through the marsh to an island campsite that promised refuge and more of those winged creatures. The rain let up long enough to pitch camp and eat a quick dinner, before we all dove for the protection of no-see-um-netting.

The next morning evoked some serious discussion, as we were half-tempted to abandon ship. The last two weeks of rains had brought up both the water levels and the mosquito bloom. However, despite the extra water, we found that the rapids were way over-rated by at least one full class. And all the flat water flowed uphill. Our choices were to abort the trip and catch a ride out on the Peterbell train. Or paddle on another 170 km, with no chance of another take-out until Mattice. At Lisa's urging we chose the latter, which ultimately proved the wiser choice of the two, but we didn't know it until several days later.

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Tripping the Northren Fandango Continued from pg. 3

The next two days were filled with lots of flat water paddling, soaking rain, and more of those blood-sucking demons from hell. Between the leeches and the mosquitos, nurse Lisa was replacing our IV drips every 4-6 hours. But then we hit Wavy Rapids, the sun came out and pizza was on the menu for dinner that night.

*dehydrated mushrooms, red onion, and peppers
dehydrated garlic and herb tomato sauce
hard Parmesan cheese
pizza dough mix
pepperoni
backpacker ovens*



A sandy beach campsite along the river

Food for ten days was both a challenge and a delight. I had spent the last month experimenting with recipes and dehydrating everything but the cat. Maybe you can live happily on ramen noodles 24-7, but not me. A glass of wine and a hearty meal keep one living well and loving often. The menu included pecan pancakes, blueberry muffins, country ham and biscuits, and lots of strong coffee for breakfast. Lunch typically consisted of various kinds of home-made beef jerky and gorp, a piece of fresh fruit (from our limited stores), and pate for Lisa and Kevin. Dinners were a little more elaborate, including Gado Gado (linguine with a spicy peanut sauce), black bean burritos, chili, and jambalaya. Rehydrated corn, green beans, asparagus and okra served as sides. The one pre-packaged dinner we had (chicken pot pie) was the only thing that made our “never, ever do again” list.

Evening rituals also included the hanging of the bear bag, deemed a necessity by the remoteness of the river and the abundance of wildlife. Using a throw rope, Ben and Kevin would find a strong overhanging

branch, perhaps 20-30' high, carabiner our two food drybags to one end, and hoist up the load. And morning rituals brought us to the...

*Thunderbox
Groover
KYBO*

For those more substantial bathroom breaks, a jack hammer was needed to dig the proverbial hole in the Canadian shield. So to reduce toxic waste run-off, the Ontario Provincial Park system is in the process of building Thunderboxes at some of the larger campsites. These are definitely a step-up from most of the thrones found at the Boundary Waters, or the Groovers brought along on pack-it-in-pack-it-out Grand Canyon trips. We then learned the slang Canadian name for crappers - KYBO (rhymes with Tai-bo) – Keep Your Bowels Open. Cultural innuendos certainly make our world rich. And I thought we were just dropping the kids off at the pool.

*Split Rock Falls
Thunder Falls
Brunswick Portage
Two Portage Falls
Devil Cap Falls
Albany Rapids
Big Beaver Rapids
Sharprock Rapids
Glassy Falls*



Lisa and Kevin at Thunder Falls

Split Rock was our first portage and the 17th recommended according to the guide book. Having cut our teeth on southeastern whitewater, we ran everything we could. But from what we could see, Split Rock was a solid class 5+, and too much for our tripping canoes. After portaging, we paddled on to Thunder

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Falls and camped just below on a beautiful sandy beach for the night. Finally the trip was turning around for us. Fire wood was plentiful, the mosquito hatch had subsided, and the rain had finally cleared.

The next day we decided to make the 1.5 km portage to Brunswick Lake. The guide book described the trail as a "nightmare of a swamp" in the spring, but doable in late summer. The Lake itself drained into the Brunswick River, which rejoined the Missinaibi further downstream. By taking the Brunswick Portage we could cut out about 40 km of flat water and see some new scenery. Ben and I paddled ahead, scanning the river bank for the bright orange portage sign that so clearly marked all others. "Is that it? No. It must be just an animal trail. There's no sign". We paddled another 5 km of monotonous flat water until we convinced ourselves, that yes indeed, we had missed the portage trail. We no choice but to paddle back upstream that same 5 km of monotonous flat water. Ben and I found both the portage sign and the trail overgrown with weeds and two of the largest piles of (fresh) bear scat we had ever seen.

The portage to Brunswick Lake took us through a wooded area, up over a large rock shield and back down to the lake on the other side of the drainage. Here the blueberries were large and abundant - and hopefully sufficient calories for the wooly ones to keep us mere mortals immortal. Kevin and Lisa caught up with us here, just in time to join us in dragging our loaded boats, heavy with gear, through a peat bog that was as deep as it was wide. But the night was spent on an island campsite, with panoramic views doing 360's around our heads. A quick swim with the leeches and a roaring fire made one feel whole again.

A day paddle across the lake and down Brunswick River, brought us to Two Portage Falls and another night with those flying daemons of Satan. The next day we reached Big Beaver Rapids and our first layover day. We had been pushing it hard - averaging about 30 km a day and three days ahead of schedule - and were in need of a rest. Big Beaver rapid was a geological wonder. The entrance rapid was a long (75-100 yards) class 3 boulder garden with center wave train, which abruptly split in half around a sharp rock island. The current then funneled over a large drop on river left and a deep hydraulic on river right.

The chance of not swamping in our tripping boats was small and once again we found the portage trail, only to see our gradient disappear before our eyes.

By now the Royalex on both our boats was beginning to shred. Kevin and Lisa had a large split running cross-wise in the middle of their hull and several spots had begun to delaminate. Ben and I had two large tears in our hull, evidence of the thinness of the overlay and the sharpness of the rocks. We all yearned for our tough plastic white water boats, and prayed to the river gods that we and our gear make it out in one piece. Renting had become a cheap way to convince us to never buy an Evergreen Starburst. Apparently most Canadian tripping canoes are designed to handle class 3-4 water as long as you portage all the rapids class 2 and above - a line we weren't willing to take.



Nearing the end of the trip, Glassy Falls

The last day found us camping at Glassy Falls, only a short half-day paddle to the take-out. It was the only campsite that we shared with other paddlers, which facilitated our assimilation back into society. We took our last layover day as Kevin and Marj played for hours in the water, tossing stick and swimming fearlessly in the strong current, as I finished reading my book and drank the last of the wine. It must be time to go home.

Sharing a meal, feeding the fire, and swapping a story -- Canoe tripping allows me to challenge my creativity, self-sufficiency, and my sense of humor. Everything I need in life fits into two dry bags and one tight space. And with my husband in the stern, we can go anywhere.

Valerie Askren

The Dory Story Continued from pg. 1

was my kayak. Seemed like a win-win-win all the way around.

I only found one outfitter that would rent me a dory for the GC. I put some money down and spent the remainder of 10 months before the put-in date trying to find out if I made a good decision. Everyone I talked to was sure I did. I tried to find someone from which I could try out a dory here back East, but was not successful. I borrowed a second hi-float PFD from Don Spangler just in case and went off to AZ with the requisite pre-trip excitement.

The aluminum dory arrived and was trailered to the put-in. See the photo below. That's me in the dory reading the directions.... The first picture is me at



Rich with some directions in hand?

about mile 5, before any rapids, right at the last sign of civilization for about 220 river miles.

At mile 8, Badger is the first rapid and also was where the group was camping for the evening. We took out below the rapid to camp. When I arrived at the top of Badger, most of the group had run the rapid, while a couple of rafters still were scouting it. I was assured by those who just completed scouting that the rapid was an easy straight shot (Class 6 on a western scale of 10) down the middle – just follow them – no need for me to look at it.

The first raft pulled out from the left bank, took maybe 4 strokes into the middle of the 300' wide river, and dropped out of sight immediately. The next raft took maybe 10 strokes into the middle of the river (I nervously was right on her stern) and then back-stroked like crazy as a 25 knot gust of wind took her too far right. She got back close enough to the center to make the run, albeit, still too far right. The dory got blown even farther right than her boat, being much lighter, and I stroked all I could to get

back left.

I didn't quite make it. Hey – in a kayak, who thinks about the wind? I had no idea how I got that far right! At the last second I tried to straighten up as I dropped over a 4 foot drop, but landed sideways onto a rock that flipped me instantly. I found myself under the boat with a cacophony of metal grating against rock in my ears. I pulled myself along the bottom of the inverted boat in one direction until I realized I was pulling myself to the downstream side. I thought, "the last place I want to be is between this boat and a downstream rock," so I flipped around and pulled myself to the upstream side of the boat. It probably took me 30 seconds to

surface and I never saw the dory for the rest of my 10 minute swim through the 4'-6' waves and tow to the bank.

The dory ended up with a 6" split down the bow, a lost hatch cover, and other minor insults to its former pristine condition. Duck tape and some plywood made it river-worthy again, but I had learned a lesson – consensus among experts about your ability to row a dory isn't worth much on the river when you crash and burn. I gave Badger my best strokes and the dory didn't respond.

A few dozen tougher rapids lay downstream and I played

every one of them through my mind multiple times that night, imagining my demise in multiple holes and under several rocks. It was a tough night...

We had a satellite phone and we used it the next morning. We arranged to leave the dory on a beach two days later to be picked up by some folks who would hike in to row it the rest of the Canyon. That's a whole nuther chapter that ended with the dory being left on two beaches and being picked up multiple times by others before getting out of the Canyon just one day after our group took out.

So I rafted the Canyon after all. I didn't row much; just bummed rides from the boatman/woman. About 4 weeks later, the National Park Service called me to ask me my version of the dory story. At the end of the phone call, the ranger asked me if I learned anything from the experience. I don't think he expected my answer: "Yeah, I did. I think next time I'll rent a bigger dory."

Rich Lewis

statements of caution other than the normal "I'm pretty sure". I thought to myself that I am now a Class V paddler. I ran the Upper Gauley, right?

I am now standing at the put-in for the RF with John and the rest of my safety crew. This was the edge of the world to me. When we had run the upper section last year during the RF Rendezvous, our trip leader had pointed to the take-out as we were finishing our run and instructed us that the gorge section started here. We all peered down the river at the horizon line with fear and terror. Of course we all hugged the right bank to make sure that for some unforeseen reason we did not end up floating down the gorge to our untimely death.

This day, I did put on with the intent of running the Gorge. When I got off the Upper Gauley after running it, I said to myself that it was not nearly as bad as I had thought. I was hoping for the same response from myself at the end of this day. After all I had looked at all the pictures of the rapids on AW's website and felt pretty confident that I could make it through.

The first rapid we came to was Tower. I had seen the pictures and it did not look too bad. John had advised us to take the sneak, which we did. The sneak itself was a good Class V- kinda move. It had my attention. At the bottom I looked in terror at the main line of Tower as John and the others ran it. Something was definitely wrong here. The picture did not look like that!!!! Some cyber-terrorist must have gotten on the AW page and made the pictures of this rapid look a lot easier. What if they did it with all the pictures?? I'm beginning to worry and comb the horizon for potential evacuation points.

Here comes Fist. I was going to walk this one. Was not even considering running the sneak. This is the rapid that the current pushes into a rock with a cave under it. You get near it and poof! you are fish food. I ended up on the wrong side of the river to walk it and just as I was about to request someone to "Help me!" they all tore down the sneak. I followed them because I did not want to be sitting there by myself. I made it. As I gazed back up at Fist, it was truly an impressive sight, but I was beginning to think I would make it down the river.

Tripple Drop was next. John told me he would tell me when it was coming. He is usually pretty good about that. The next thing I know I'm sitting in an eddy after running a 20 foot drop into a terminal hole (I think it was really about 5-6 feet) with John telling me that

was the first drop of tripple drop. I was a little concerned because I generally like to hear about these things before, instead of after. I figured what the hell, we are finally stopping to scout a rapid. We looked at it and it did not look good. That damn cyber-terrorist screwed with this picture too. In addition to scouting the rapid, I was looking for a way to portage the rapid with out anyone seeing me. What the heck, I thought. I had not gotten my head cracked open yet or ended up in one of the millions of under-cut rocks yet so I should be good to go. That last statement was foreshadowing for some of you more literary folks. I jumped in my boat, ran the second drop, missed the eddy that I really didn't want to miss, and ran the third drop not exactly where I was supposed to be but real close.

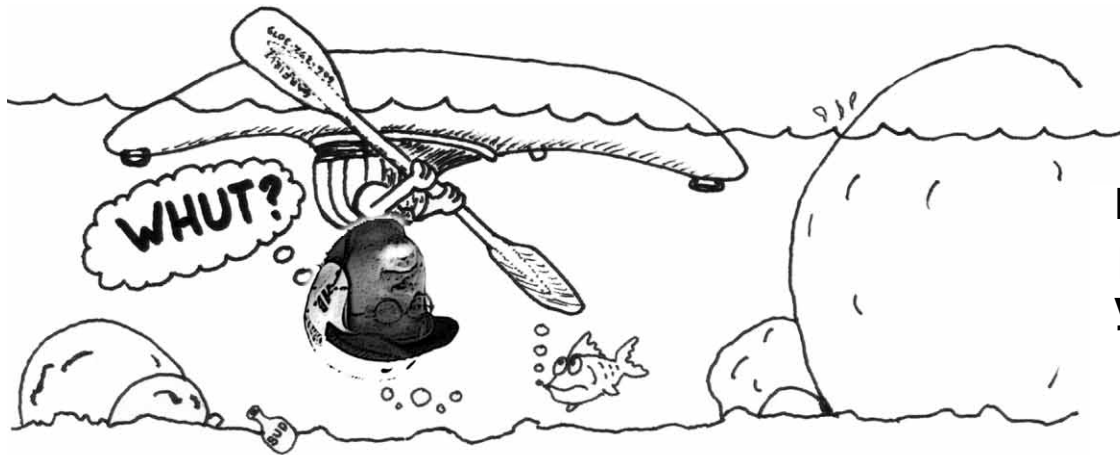
Here comes El Horrendo. It was big and bad. I watched John and Dave Allnut run the drop. They were both having to really work hard to make the ferry over to river right. It was all I needed to see. Boat on shoulder and I was marching around that rapid liked the scared little school-girl that I felt like.

One big rapid to go...Climax. I saw the pictures before this fateful day and I knew I could make the move. Just a simple little 10 footer with some squirrely water below. We are in eddy above the drop and John is giving us instruction. Just as I was getting ready to barrage him with questions ranging from "the angle of my boat to the best way to walk around the rapid" he takes off. Once again, I am alone. So I paddle up to the edge of this blind drop. I had looked at the picture a 100 times the week before. At the lip of this drop, after looking at what I was getting ready to go in, I made a solemn vow to find the little SOB who switched the pictures around on AW's site and kill him. At the bottom, I choose to take a rather inverted approach to the rest of the rapid. I slid over a rock in this position and waited to roll up. The action slowed and I went to roll up and felt rock where my paddle was. I dropped my paddle with one hand and felt higher and higher and it was still rock. Under cut!!!! The freakout meter shot up to 10 and I nearly pulled my grap loop off the skirt getting out of the boat. I was sure this was it for me. When I came out of the water I thought I would see Jesus. As I emerged from the cool water, John is sitting in the eddy pulling me in smiling.

Great weekend, great friends, and a great run down infamous Russell Fork Gorge.

Shawn Howard

Don't forget roll sessions start in December!



Learn or
practice
your roll
this
winter!

Dates:

December 19

January 9,16,23,30

February 6,13,20

Location:

Garden Springs Y

Time: 7:00 - 9:00

Updates on Roll Session will be posted
on the BWA Events Web Page

Volunteers needed to teach or collect money, contact Larry Cable @ 744-5930 or lcable@aol.com



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