

BOWLINES

Award Winning Newsletter of The Bluegrass Wildwater Association since 1976.

In our Own Words.....

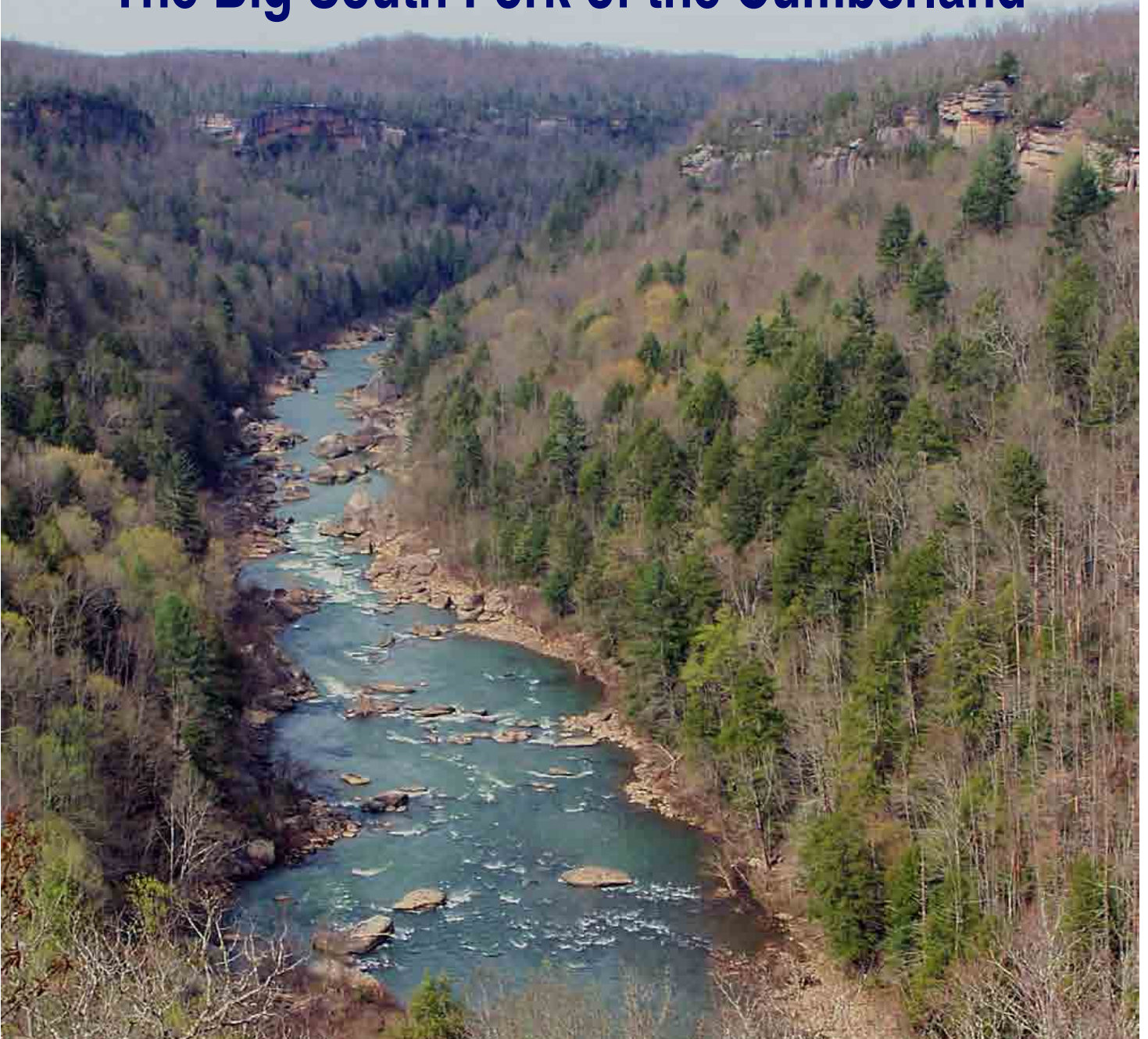
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The Bluegrass Willdwater Association & it's Rivers

The Big South Fork of the Cumberland



Looking Ahead

Second Tuesday of the Month, 7:30 pm

BWA Monthly Meeting

Location can vary

For more information on Club Meetings
& Activities always check the online Calendar.

<http://bwa.shuttlepod.org>

All BWA

Meetings/Activities are on hold, check BWA web site or look for e-mail updates

Roll Sessions

For Dates, info and to register go to Calendar:

<http://bwa.shuttlepod.org>



The BWA wishes to thank Canoe Kentucky for its support.
We urge you to patronize them for your outdoor needs.

Check out Bowlines Online Archive with many great issues going back to 1998!

Issue Archive:

<http://bwa.shuttlepod.org/Newsletter>

A must read for all members, our 30th Anniversary issue:

http://www.bluegrasswildwater.org/bowlines/BL30thAnnv_Aug06.pdf



Bowlines is the Newsletter of the Bluegrass Wildwater Association, POB 4231, Lexington Ky, 40504

For Info on BWA: info@bluegrasswildwater

Club Officers 2022-2023

Join in on the Fun!

President	Robert Watts	859-338-3341
Vice-President	Ben Mudd	859-230-4763
Treasurer	Kyle Koeberlein	502-370-1289
Secretary	Robert Watts	859-554-8489
Safety	Hanley Loller	859-806-9843
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Program	Sandra Broadwill	859-333-0208
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At-Large Member	Damon Rosenbarker	damon_rosenbarker@berea.edu
Membership Coordinator	Terri Covington Brunj	estesterri88@gmail.com
Past President	Sandra Broadwill	859-333-0208

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 forum for member's messages & a parking pass for the Elkhorn.

Meetings are held at 7:30, the second Tuesday of each month at location announced on our website: <http://www.bluegrasswildwater.org>

**BWA members want to read your story!
Short or long. Sad or Funny.
Tell us your paddling related story! Please!!**

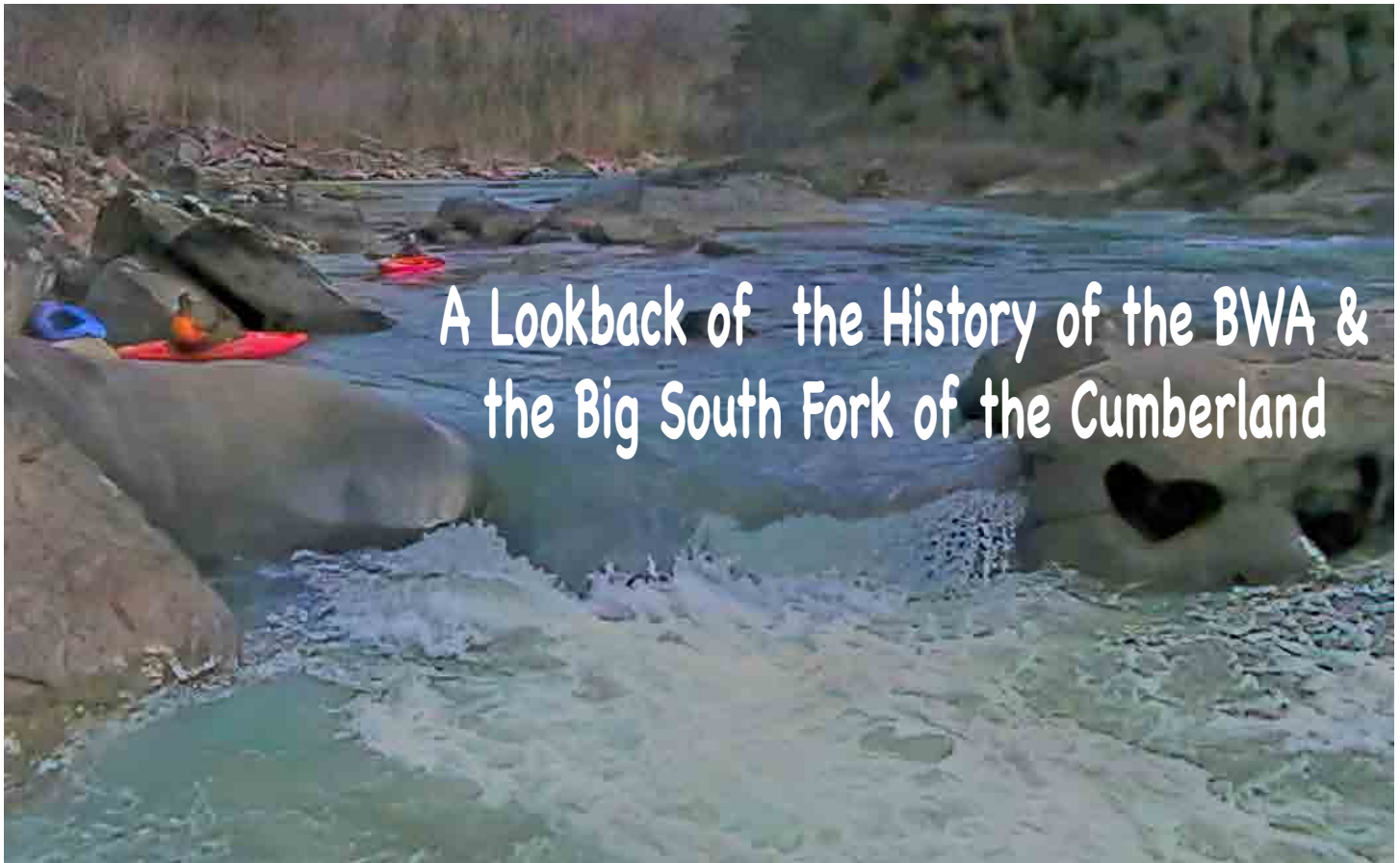
Files can be e-mailed to the Editor: DonSpang@aol.com



About the BWA's Bowlines

The Bowlines has been a unique record of the BWA and its members. Unique in that it has been more than a listing of club activities and general information about paddling and related issues. When you read Bowlines you read about each of us and what we thought and did over the years. Members have contributed articles not only about paddling, conservation, and the club, but also stories crafted with humor, imagination, and the spirit of enthusiasm of life and enjoyment of each other. These are only a small portion of the many articles worth rereading. There have been songs, poems, soap operas, jokes, cartoons, wedding announcements, birth announcements, and unique trip reports among all the issues. Not what you might think you would see in a whitewater club newsletter.

We owe a thank you to all the newsletter editors that spent countless hours preparing each issue. To all you club members a big BWA hand for your contributions. Please keep it up! Now dig in and enjoy old memories or chuckle at the amusing stories, poems and pictures...



A Lookback of the History of the BWA & the Big South Fork of the Cumberland

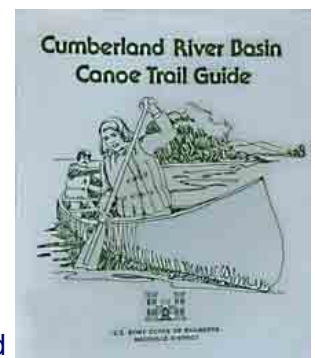
Exploring and running rivers to the south of Lexington was a natural for the early paddlers of the Bluegrass Association. The Cumberland Plateau area offered a wealth of streams for all skill levels and water conditions to choose from. It was one of the most beautiful areas to explore with dozens of streams and runs that were tempting to a group of adventurous early paddlers that had boats that were designed to really run white water.

Canoes were being made with the new "ABS" Royalex that was almost indestructible by the new company in Sunbright Tennessee right in the heart of a great whitewater area. That was the boat you wanted to paddle! Kayak were still stuck in the fiberglass age and while pretty tough, generally meant that most times after a weekend trip you had to perform some repair to get ready for the next weekend. That slowly changed in time with the introduction of new resins and materials like nylon, e-glass, Kevlar and carbon-fiber. It was not uncommon for members to get together and lay up a decked C-1 or Kayak themselves to save money and get a better boat. In fact we laid up so many boats at Sam Moores, his Garage became known as "Sam's Boat Works".

So armed with our "new technology" boats we headed south and the Big South Fork was waiting for us. But it was a lot different area then it is now. This was before the BSF became a "National Recreation Area". River access was by unmaintained old railroad beds or wagon roads, bridges that you had to reposition boards on to support your vehicle on you crossed over it. Or you may have to carry your boat in or out to get to where you wanted to paddle. For us, it was part of our "Paddling Adventure" to find a place to get on or off the river, no river maps or guidebooks to speak of in those days.

One small exception was put out (believe or not) by the Corps of Engineers. A small guide that gave some basic info of the river and major rapids as well as recommended water levels. The Cumberland River Basin Canoe Trail Guide by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. I think it was less than two dollars and It was more info then we had from other sources at the time.

The Big South Fork was were we took decked boaters that had just got their pool roll and did at least one on the Elkhorn. I know, as I was one of those who had just rolled my new decked C-1. It was exciting and got your heart pounding when you encountered



your first a good class III+ or so rapid with a challenging drop where you were likely to flip. We also liked the BSF as it was close and easy to do as a day trip if we liked. The Canyon made a great teaching spot at lower water levels. We also did overnight trips on it at low water levels. We found great places to camp along the river and enjoyed a campfire with our beverages in the evening. It made a good two day river trip.

BWA Paddlers on the Big South Fork in 1978



How did the area end up becoming the Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area?

The Big South Fork Coalition, worked with former Senator Howard Baker, Jr., to introduce legislation in 1972 creating a combination national river and recreation area as part of a water resource bill. Howard Baker used the water resource bill to prevent the river from being dammed in 1972. This gave time for the bill to be rewritten which would turn over management to the National Park Service in the next couple of years.

The Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area was finally established in 1974. The park was named both a National River and a National Recreation Area.

"The National Recreation Area designation was deemed appropriate due to the area's proximity to a large number of metropolitan areas and the potential the area exhibited for outdoor recreational activities. While still managing Big South Fork in such a manner as to protect the area's natural and cultural resources, the park is also managed in a way which will provide visitors with the opportunity to engage in a wide range of healthy outdoor recreational activities."

The park then started buying the land within the boundaries from private individuals and big land companies. When word got out that the park was buying up all the land, the big land companies, such as Stearns Coal & Lumber, began to heavily log and mine their properties. A lot of this logging and mining gave the park the physical identity it has today.

**Draft E.I.S. for the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District.**

This ponderous document, published in September, 1975 is marginally readable, as are most Corps publications. If you are ever suffering from insomnia, this would be a sure cure. Sexously, everyone interested in Kentucky rivers should be, at least, familiar with this project. Undertakings such as this may indicate a Corps trend away from dam building and into so called "recreation area" developments. While I think almost everyone will agree that it is good for the Corps to ease up on dam building, we should~ill look suspiciously at any of their projects involving our rivers.

Following is an except from D.E.I.S. P. 8: Facility Development P. IOA

"According to the latest Corps conceptual development plan (as yet unpublished), the following facilities would be constructed within the gorge: approximately 9 boat and canoe put-in and take-out points (located at such places as Leatherwood Ford, Station Camp East, Peters Bridge, and Blue Heron); hiking and horse trails; primitive camps and trails along the river banks; picnicing and interpretive facilities; 1:e.stora.tion. of the Blue Heron Mine; and a transportation corridor following the abandoned roadbed of the Oneida & Western Railroad along the North Whiteoak Creek, a short segment of the Big South Fork and Pine Creek."

"Vehicular access to the gorge area will be available at 11 sites."

Sounds very interesting and a little disturbing, doesn't it? By the way, Congress gave the Corps \$350,000 for fiscal year 1977 for this project. Most of this will go toward land buying. It's anybody's guess what the total cost will be, but you can bet your wetsuit it will be more than expected.

From Bowlines 1977 February



Long time BWA member and Big South Fork paddler, Steve (Tubbo) Morgan at BSF overlook.



Many of us enjoy the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area for whitewater paddling, mountain biking, fishing, back packing and camping. The pristine gorges, rich biodiversity and fragile arches are only part of its' allure. But like many special things, sometimes they take a little work to keep them that way. If you're interested in the future of the BSF read on...

After being established by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1974, the BSF was transferred to the National Park Service in 1990 for jurisdiction and management. Less than two years ago, the NPS invited comment on the general direction development should take at the BSF and many BWAers responded. A newly crafted Draft General Management Plan is a direct result of that comment period, which notably has eliminated a more intensive development option that was originally proposed.

The Draft General Management Plan includes two Alternatives for guiding future development of the BSF. A no action alternative is "not an alternative that can be selected or implemtented because it soes not include the management unit approach required by NPS policy.". Clarification of this policy was requested from NPS by Jim Daniels (BWA Conservation Chairman). NPS stated that commentaries were free to specify any locations in the BSF area where they did not want to see encroachment from development. General plans are typically updated every 10-15 years and the NPS has no stated preference between the two development alternatives. Before explaining the key difference between these alternatives, a little background is needed.

A little less than one-half of the BSF is considered "gorge", which includes the main gorge enveloping the South Fork of the Cumberland River and a multitude of smaller gorges encasing smaller tributaries. The entire gorge area (including said tributaries) falls under what is classified as a Primitive Recreation Management

Unit and is protected under a myriad of environmental acts. Any proposed development explicitly excludes the gorge.

The Big South Fork stream is designated a "National River", but not a "National Wild and Scenic River". While the latter would afford the BSF even greater protections, Congress has specifically guaranteed the river some of the same protection from federal or federally assisted water development projects. Further, higher water quality and in-streams were clearly defined of paramount importance and guaranteed protection.

Consequently, the main focus of the draft management plan pertains to the plateau surrounding the gorge. Both of the alternatives which have been proposed to further develop the plateau treat the gorge with the same protective status. In general, Alternative A would permit slightly less development of the plateau areas, thus slightly more environmental protection. Conversely, Alternative B is slightly more pro-development and less environmentally benign.

Alternative A

Under Alternative A, a Backwoods Recreation Management Unit would be applied to about 75% of the plateau, with the remainder (20%) designated as an Enhanced Recreation Management Unit. (About 5% of the BSF lies within Scott State Forest.) Six gorge access points would qualify for Enhanced Recreation development including Hwy. 297 (Leatherwood), and another 5 access points would qualify for Backwoods Recreation management (including Burnt Mill Bridge).

Alternative B

Under Alternative B, a Backwoods Recreation Management Unit would be applied to about 65% of the plateau with the remainder (25%) designated as an Enhanced Recreation Management Unit. In terms of gorge access points, the key difference under Alternative B is that Alum Ford and Station Camp would be moved from the Backwoods Recreation category to Enhanced Recreation management.

A Backwoods Recreation Management Unit would emphasize the natural condition and appearance of the plateau, permit trail development and would serve as a transition zone preparing visitors for a more primitive gorge experience. Roads would generally remain unpaved, and would primarily serve visitors with access to trails, and secondarily for driving pleasure. Camping areas would be small and unimproved. Harmony with the natural environment would be emphasized at all points.

Bowlines March/April 2000

Comments on the Big South Fork Management Plan

Dear Superintendent Fischer;

I represent the Bluegrass Wildwater Association, which is an organization of approximately 200 members who are dedicated to the enjoyment, preservation, and exploration of American waterways for self powered craft. We are committed to the protection of the wilderness character of these waterways through the conservation of water, wildlife, forests and parks. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Big South Fork Draft Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement.

Most of us enjoy the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area for whitewater paddling, mountain biking, fishing, back packing and camping. The pristine gorges, rich biodiversity and fragile arches are only part of its allure. Truly, the Big South Fork is the premier recreation area and the "jewel" of the Eastern United States because of its undeveloped nature. We are concerned about any plan that would increase the development and related impacts in this unique area. In keeping with our club objectives, we prefer to preserve this jewel in as undeveloped state as possible.

Therefore, we are preferring Alternate A of the plan, since it is the least disruptive of the two build alternates. We applaud the National Park Service's commitment to exclude the gorge from any development under this plan. We wholeheartedly reject Alternate B, since it permits too much development in the plateau. Actually, we would have preferred the No-Action Alternate, however, we were told that it can not be selected or implemented, because it does not include the management unit approach required by NPS policy. We respectfully disagree with this policy decision.

We recommend caution be exercised by NPS in any development of the plateau, in order to protect the watershed. Congress specifically guaranteed protection of the river's water quality and all development should be planned with this in mind. We certainly request NPS allow us the opportunity to comment on specific plans for development in the plateau region, once they are developed, since these were sketchy in the plan. We believe the specific environmental impacts of plateau development should have been studied and reported in the Draft document.

We also are very concerned about the existing and future ATV use in the Recreation Area. These noisy and destructive machines are not compatible with any of the other uses. In addition, illegal ATV "trails" are already all over the area, causing erosion and noise pollution. We recommend that they be banned from the Recreation Area and that no further trails be made to accommodate them. We do not see how the protected water quality of the gorge can be maintained as long as ATVs are allowed in the area. However, we realize the difficulty of NPS banning ATVs in the area, and therefore, recommend at a minimum ATVs be required to stay on trails that have been specifically designed for them (with the appropriate erosion control measures implemented), and not within earshot of the gorge.

Sincerely,
James Daniel
Conservation Chair
Bluegrass Wildwater Association
PO Box 4231
Lexington, KY 40504

Bowlines May/June 2000

CLEAR FORK (BIG SOUTH FORK OF THE CUMBERLAND)

12/11-12 1976 Dave Moccia *From Bowlines February 1977*

7 am [Thursday and the telephone rings - - Could only be one person " Hello Scotty...Emory Obed? SAGE
12:50, Friday afternoon?"

Weather it was the lure of the "Big Three" of Clear Fork, finals coming up, or just want to get the hell out the house, Thursday night I became a restless 8 year old waiting for Christmas.

Ready to go at SAGE by 1:30 and no sign of Scott, I watched the fever spread. Steve Morgan, who had a cold Thursday evening suddenly cleared up and was the first victim. Before it was over, Gary Klier, Greg Thomas, Scott Meyer Jr., Barb Stansbury, Doug McKenzie, and myself formed the first wave. Bill Bradford, Clint Callahan, Loretta Reiter, Steve Morgan, Jeff Green, Bob Walker and Chuck Horrel the second. (Too cold to paddle? All these people can't be crazy!) Saying good buy in front of Tobe's Motel in Oneida, Tennessee, our groups started and we headed to Juanita & Roy Guinn's for oatmeal cake and hot tea before turning in to the down-home-comfort of their barn. "If you got ta go, you might as well go first class." (Thanks a lot Roy & Juanita.)

We had originally planned to join TSRA (Tennessee River Association) who was paddling Daddy's Creek. Put to a vote we decided to try Clear Fork while it was running around 1,700 cfs.

In an eddy after the first ripple, I decided it was time for a practice roll. If I'm going to get cold and not be able to warm back up, it might as well be here, where the cars are only a few hundred yards away. GD, that water is cold! Before I knew it, Stansbury (who was in the same eddy and had to show me she could also eat nails for breakfast) turned over and slopped back up... onward to battle.

Passed the Little Three without too much flak, the first drop took it's toll...3 boats, 50% of our crew wounded. The Second added a few more (?) and soon we were in the front of the Third. How many times on film did I had seen the curler at the end? How many times did I tell myself I was going up and over it? Not enough, for I had completely forgotten it was there. Insulted, it made sure I didn't forget again. Just warming up for the next good curler at the top of Ass Kicker which sent me washing through upside down. My head took a little while to warm up after that, so I didn't remember who else did and didn't make it through when I didn't.... that was just an excuse.

This is the about the time Scott's luck started going downhill. Scott had a new Savage paddle, etc.. but with two rapids left in the gorge, he kissed his paddle and pogies goodbye. (You got to excuse Scott, it was his second time in a kayak, plus he did some good swimming and was pretty cold.) An hour and half later and still no paddle, it was time to move on. What an excuse for not working Ender Wave. There being no spare paddles in the group, Doug McKenzie, without float bags, in an act of "supreme" consideration for his fellow man, surrendered his paddle to Scott and proceeded to paddle the last two rapids of the gorge and Railroad rapid wit only his bare hands and an ethafoam wall. (What an ego trip!) By the time we were all past Railroad Rapid the sun was almost down and we finished the river in darkness.

I learned a little about what paddling was all about that night watching our humble meal of steaks, green beans and potatoes, apple sauce, salad and potato chips go down. What was this good rush that made me so happy to make my eyes water--the river we had run, the rapids we made and the ones we'd try again? No, it was the company that made the trip ... It's the people that make paddling what it is. Thanks from the bottom of my heart.
-- Gary, Greg, Scott, Barb, and Doug --

Dave Moccia was our first Bowlines editor, Dave was a competitor in major whitewater paddling events including International competition which is one of the reasons he was voted to be our first Lifetime Member. He went on to the NOC where he worked in several capacities over the years. He is now retired and living in North Carolina.

His final paragraph in this article reflects the tradition of the "Association" for long lasting friendships that has lasted for decades made our group more than just a club.



Intentional Open Canoe Fun below Nantahala Falls by Dave Moccia June 1987



Big South Fork At 40.000

**Two Memories
Of Running the BSF
in 1976 At High Water**

BSF 40,000 & Responsible Go / No-Go Leadership for Paddling

Rich Lewis



Photo from BWA paddling trip in 1979 on the Big South Fork of the Cumberland at Devils Jump.

Typical trips on the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River in TN are in the 1,000 to 2500 CFS range. The class of the rapids are generally rated II or III with one or two IVs. The water quality is very good and the cliffs are awe-inspiring. I love this river!

In 1986, I led a group of 7 deck boaters on this river at 39,860 CFS. We arrived at the Burnt Mill put-in to a raging flood only 4-6' below the old truss bridge deck, flowing 15+ mph with a 15' whirlpool behind the bridge pier, having about a 2' eddy fence and an upstream back wash of 5-10 mph. It was probably a swim if you chose to drop into it "for fun". Climbing out of a 2' deep whirlpool seemed unlikely. Along with the huge tree trunks cruising by about every minute or so, we struggled to imagine what this whirlpool portended downstream.

We were pretty much shocked into silence. We had no idea what the river level was and wondered what this level meant for our run. Obvious to all: this was a rare high-flood event.

Whatever the level, none of us had run the BSF anywhere near this high. I had run it once at 22,000 CFS. At that level, the Big Three were big water awesome chaotic IV+ fun (IF you run the correct line and don't swim!). The Canyon was similar, only the lines felt tighter. I didn't remember even noticing Oh Shit! as I ran left of center through the Big Three and stayed left for Oh Shit!. I didn't remember wood being a problem at that level either. BUT today was WAY higher than 22k...

And so, the put-in "milling" began. Folks got out of their cars quickly, walked to the river slowly, and spoke in hushed tones compared to the sound of the river. Everyone became transfixed by the whirlpool below the bridge pier. So little was known about these river conditions that imagining what superlatives lay downstream seemed WAY beyond conjecture. I had an adrenaline pit in my stomach. I suspected I had lots of company.

I believed at the time, and still do, that everyone is solely responsible for their own decision whether to paddle,

who to follow, and to accept the responsibility and consequences for whatever happens. Almost everyone in the group sought to hear others' evaluations of the unknowns that await us downstream. I had been boating 60-80 times a year for 7 years, including doing the Grand Canyon a couple of times with one run at 40,000. But I knew that the difference between the Grand and the BSF was that BSF would NOT have pools like the Grand Canyon where you can collect your wits much less your paddling companions and their gear. A swim today could easily have a flush-drowning consequence.

For about 20 minutes, I kept going back and forth on whether I would paddle. I quietly figured if I had at least two other boaters who I could count on to attempt to rescue me if I got into trouble, then I would go for it. I swam once a year for the first 3 years of boating and hadn't swum in the remaining 4 years, so I felt that I could handle this. But concerns about personal liability held me back from advising people anything more than: "your roll has to be nuclear bomb-proof because swimming isn't an option". I said some form of this multiple times to individuals as well as to the group as a whole. I also said that I had no idea what this level would be like because it was way higher than anything I had done before.

No one asked me directly if I thought they could do this run based on what I knew of their paddling skills. I was glad of that. I was concerned about liability and I didn't want to have to tell them that I was uncomfortable answering that question, far less telling them they should run shuttle rather than the river. Frankly, I didn't even know if I should run the river because I couldn't imagine what the general character, far less the specific rapids, would be like other than "high flood", a term that was about as vague as it gets to people who haven't experienced one.

Then something completely unexpected happened, though I have heard of it happening a few times in similar situations. Two people said they would run and then instantly ALL SEVEN said they were going! Yikes! What just happened? I was very surprised that everyone decided to go instantaneously. I suppose that some were feeling peer pressure or were thinking "if they can do it, I can", especially when they could easily be comparing themselves to someone else who also was possibly unqualified. I kinda felt that at least one person should have opted out because of what I thought was an unreliable roll, and maybe even one or two others because they were less aggressive paddlers with no Class V or big water experience. I had boated with all of these people several times on III-IV rivers and one or two of them had swam within the last year under far less intimidating circumstances.

The run itself was historic:

Lots of wood-dodging on *Clear Fork* but very little after the confluence. A nice surprise!

The *Clear Fork* was pretty straight-forward Class III+ down the middle with big rollers and some breaking waves until the Little Three. There was a long pool just before the Little Three rapids near the confluence. I was a little nervous because the river takes a sharp right turn into the Little Three and I couldn't boat or shore scout it without running them blind. We huddled up in flat current for me to reinforce the message that everyone HAD to keep an eye on the person behind them like their lives depended on it. What I failed to realize was that getting everyone together in fast current would cause a pile-up of boats with people fighting the current to get spaced out again. One paddler went into slower current in the trees along the bank and broached. My fiancé went after her, only to swim and lose her paddle (she regrets that decision to this day). Wisely, she had a spare. That was lucky for me, as we had just gotten engaged 13 hours earlier and a walk-out with a boat from that point would have been epic. I chased her boat almost to the confluence with the *New River* before getting it pinned on the shore an reuniting boat and boater. The *Little Three* were tight, down the middle, big and exciting class IV.

We huddled up again just before the confluence to prepare for main event. I had hoped that the put-in at the confluence might be an exit for anyone getting cold feet. However, the *New River* looked like it was contributing a lot more water than the *Clear Fork*. I didn't think on my best day I could have ferried its current to get to the confluence put-in. So here we all go....!

The *Big Three* were one undefined rapid and were boat scoutable (we had no choice and no access to the

bank). It was HUGE, wildly chaotic, and exhilarating if not terrifying Class V- which resulted in one swim all the way through *Oh Shit!*, a few hundred yards downstream. Aggressive paddling was required due to numerous pyramidal, breaking and diagonal waves and it was VERY long. I was out of breath by the end of it!

The next rapid, *Oh Shit!*, was the biggest natural hole I have ever seen with an 8-10' high uniform pour over, 120-150' wide with a 40-60' backwash right next to the biggest, steepest, intermittent breaking wave I've ever run (pulsating between ~18-25') that looked like a certain backender.

I caught an extremely rare eddy just below the *Big Three* on the left to catch my breath and watched as three of our group decided to hike out river right, nearly straight up the 150' cliff, leaving their boats to be retrieved the following week. Then I watched my fiancé run the huge wave and not get clobbered by the intermittently breaking crest. Finally, I watched a swimmer and his boat from the *Big Three* swim over the *Oh Shit!* ledge as I pleaded out loud with God for him to be flushed out. He surfaced after 20 seconds as the finger of God slowly but consistently pushed him for another 90 seconds through the frothy boiling backwash to downstream current. I peeled out, ran the huge breaking wave (it felt like I was free-falling vertically on the back side of it) and pushed the swimmer's boat to the right bank. The swimmer self-rescued with his paddle to the right bank. Thank God!

The *Canyon* was huge, of course, rating IV to V- continuous for its entire continuous length. The last 3 paddlers boat-scouted everything without issue.

At *Railroad Rapid*, we were flagged down by a Park Ranger on the bridge. We told him about the 3 people who hiked out river right below the *Big Three*. They were found on a road near the county airport walking away from civilization. The person who swam *Oh Shit!* hiked the right bank down to *RR Rapid* successfully. He arrived just before dark and was none the worse for wear. It was a happy reunion.

So the final numbers were: Three out of seven boaters swam once, two of which were from broaching on bankside trees on *Clear Fork*; one from the *Big Three* (the toughest rapid in my opinion). One paddle was lost. No boats or other equipment were lost to my knowledge. Four people hiked out: three up the cliff just above *Oh Shit!* and one dragged his boat down the right bank from *Ryan's Eddy* (a.k.a. *Ass Kicker*) to *Railroad Rapid*. Three people finished boating at *Railroad Rapid* with no swims and one without a flip.

Later, we learned that another group of seven, mostly from Middlesboro, KY ran the river roughly an hour ahead of us. They lost a paddle, some other gear and at least 3 boats but recovered one boat just before *Leatherwood Ford*. They had several epic swims where they lost track of at least one paddler until *Leatherwood*. They carried around some holes. One finished the run at *Leatherwood* and their excellent report is in the Feb/Mar/Apr 1987 (Vol.10, No.2) *Bowlines* with lots of gory details. Their summative conclusion was that they didn't belong on the river. Interestingly, their group also experienced a simultaneous unanimous GO/NO-GO decision at the put-in.

So back at the put-in, did each of us make the right decision, given hindsight?

They say hindsight is 20-20, but if it doesn't inform future decisions and change behavior, it's wasted. So, here's my take on making a GO/NO-GO decision after 31/2 decades of reflection.

What did we know at the put-in? The river was running high flood and large logs were passing Burnt Mill every minute or so with small rafts of wood more frequently than that. We knew that floating wood is unpredictable in rapids and can recirculate in holes which could cause a swim, loss of equipment, injury, or worse.

We individually know the difficulty of the rapids/rivers we've paddled; our previous runs on this river; the reliability of our roll; our comfort, aggressiveness, and composure on rivers that challenge us; our willingness to take risks; and our paddling and self-rescue skills. We know that rescuing swimmers and equipment on a flooded river would be epic at best and highly risky or impossible at worst.

However, what we knew before making the GO/NO-GO decision was being weighed against a large list of highly relevant unknowns. The fear of these unknowns when you are in the midst of the really big stuff can cripple your judgement, your strokes and your roll and make you reach for your spray skirt after only one or two

attempts.

So, what didn't we know?

Q1. What flood-level phenomenon would we encounter that 6 out of 7 of our group had not yet encountered in their paddling careers, e.g., funny water, eddy fences, swirlies, giant holes and huge chaotic breaking waves?

Q2. Will we have the ability to shore scout or effectively boat scout at all (potentially causing us to run major rapids blind)?

Q3. Do all the rapids have reasonable routes that can be run without a high risk of swimming or would we be encountering conditions that would cause multiple people to swim at the same time (yikes!)? We especially had this concern about the Canyon.

Q4. How much will floating wood be an issue and to what extent?

Q5. What else don't we know?

Recognizing these knowns and unknowns at the put-in, important as they are no guarantee of anything on the water. Then, at some point in this effort to rationally consider all the relevant factors in the GO/NO-GO decision process, all rationality goes in the trash can and a peer-pressured group decision is made where, in ten seconds, everyone decides to paddle, even though it is questionable whether everyone is qualified for the likely challenges they will face on the water.

When given a situation like the BSF at 40,000 where life and/or equipment are reasonably expected to be jeopardized by lack of skill, experience, judgement and other variables, I now am convinced that it is the responsibility of the most qualified boater(s) in a group to share their experience with less experienced boaters about the likely conditions to be encountered (with all necessary caveats).

AND... they should offer less experienced boaters their GO/NO-GO recommendation based on what they imagine they would decide for themselves if they had the experience and skills of the less experienced boaters.

In essence, they would say something like, "Because of these factors (the above-mentioned knowns and unknowns), if I were in your shoes at this moment, I would be unsure whether this river exceeds my ability to safely handle what we may encounter today. Of course, it is your decision, but I hope you are not offended by me offering one more data point for your decision."

This advice should be delivered discreetly and with sensitivity. Depending on the relationship to the advised, the advisor may preface this advice with asking if the advised even cares to hear the advisor's point of view before sharing it.

Please note that this is NOT telling individuals that they cannot paddle. That's still their decision.

There are five reasons justifying the offering of this advice:

I care for my fellow paddlers' lives as well as their equipment, and want those who may be unqualified for the likely conditions to make fully informed to decisions based on all the facts given the knowns and unknowns.

I do not ever want to be part of a recreational pursuit where someone loses their life. I know paddlers of a group who have been through this experience and have heard their perspectives. A river trip with my friends is pure recreation to me. Carrying the burden for the rest of my life of witnessing a recreational death of a friend is a scar I feel compelled to avoid even at the cost of the friendship (though I don't imagine that likely to happen).

I believe that peer pressure has no place in the decision-making process when it comes to live or die deci-

sions.

I believe that experienced paddlers should err on the side of protecting the group from risks inherent in chasing swimmers and lost equipment in difficult and continuous rapids where rescue efforts may put the rescuer(s) in jeopardizing situations, e.g., being far down river and boating alone in serious water chasing after swimmers and equipment.

We engage in an unspoken mutually dependent relationships among all members of a group of paddlers when we agree to paddle with that group. It includes that all group members will make every reasonable effort to rescue swimmers and equipment while not taking unreasonable risks that could jeopardize the safety of themselves or others. We should take that responsibility seriously beginning even before the put-in and if we feel uncomfortable with the knowns and unknowns of a river versus the skills and experience of particular paddlers, we have a humanitarian obligation to express that discomfort rather than leave them to falsely assume that obligation will be honored.

As paddlers, we make GO/NO-GO decisions every day that are lacking exact knowledge about the river conditions and possible consequences. When the stakes are low or forgiving, it's usually no big deal. Calculated risk is part of the recreational equation. However, life and death jeopardizing decisions should be made by EACH person with ALL the available data, including the assessment by the most experienced paddler(s) who will be leading a group. If a paddler is unqualified in the group leader's opinion, I believe more experienced paddlers have a moral responsibility to the group and to the less experienced to inform them of their concerns and the reasons for them. The less experienced paddler then gains a VERY important data point to evaluate their GO/NO-GO decision. Whether they use that information or are offended by it is up to them.

If a paddler disagrees with the leader's assessment of their abilities and experience against what is known and unknown about the run and still decides to run, the leader has a difficult choice. In a potential life, death or other severe-consequences-decision, I would hope that I would decide to paddle another river or another day than take a significant risk of paddling with a group that has unqualified members on a dangerous river. Swims not only endanger that person, but also the rescuers and the group as a whole. If the leader's withdrawal scuttles the trip for everyone, that's both a sad thing and a good thing, as everyone lives to paddle another day.

I regretfully admit that I didn't do any of this sharing while standing on the bank at *Burnt Mill*. I only said that rolls needed to be bomb-proof and eventually admitted that I would like to paddle. I decided only for myself.

It was a blessing that no one was injured or lost that day and that we only lost one paddle (and that I'm still married to the love of my life). If someone had died or was seriously injured, it probably could have been avoided by giving certain paddlers one more data point to consider at the put-in: the reasoning and advice of someone with more experience with those unknown conditions and what they would do in their shoes. The possibility of straining the friendship with an unfavorable assessment of their skills is a small price to pay, and really shouldn't even be a factor if there is a real friendship and the approach is with concern and caring.

Rich Lewis
BWA Member 1979-2002
BWA Safety Chairperson for a few years
Chairman of the BWA's 1984 Southeastern
River Safety & Rescue Symposium
Director National Paddling Film Festival



Rich Lewis on BWA Caney Fork Trip 1989

BIG SOUTH FORK AREA of the CUMBERLAND PLATEAU

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From our Past

At the BSF



Big South Fork At 40,000

Jim Bowling
From Bowlines February/March 1987



The old chalkboard at the park headquarters was gone. In its place was one of those black things in a glass case with the little white plastic numbers and letters that slide on and off. Arranged on the board in quiet understatement was the message "30,000 cfs estimate, 8:00 am" No exclamation point, no warning sign, nothing. Just those neatly arranged letters making the matter of fact statement that the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River was at flood stage."

"Yesterday, when my paddling companions and I had planned our first free-flowing run since March the gauge had read only 2,800 cfs. Torrential rains that night had sent the gauge streaking upward."

"Amid frozen grins a deep silence rapidly overtook my group as I announced the river level. Not surprisingly, three of them trooped over to the message board to confirm this bit of news. Before debate could begin, three other boaters pulled up and introduced themselves. "You guys gonna paddle?" one of them asked. "Thinking about it," I said, "the river is running at 30 grand."

"Since they didn't jump in their car and run, I figured we had found three more paddlers to add to our group. Everyone immediately began to tell his all-time big water story. As it turned out six of the seven in the group had experience in running flood stage rivers, and the seventh guy was a very competent paddler. "What the hell, let's paddle," Winston Bacon, the most experienced member of my group said. John Shoffner, shorter on experience than Winston, but long on nerve, quickly acquiesced."

"From there everybody fell in line, and we were on our way to the takeout to set up a shuttle. At the takeout, the old ford bridge was submerged. The water was way, way up and really cooking. The current looked to be moving at close to 20 mph as logs and other debris sprinted by on their way to Lake Cumberland. A ranger stopped and asked if we were going to paddle. When we said yes, his only response was that there sure was a lot of water and to have fun. His demeanor put us slightly at ease. What the heck, if it was really dangerous they wouldn't let us on the river right? Right?"

Winston suggested that we use a double shuttle so we could run the river twice. Judging by the speed of the current, two runs were an easy likelihood, barring trouble. However, his suggestion was unanimously vetoed. We all felt that at 30 thousand the idea of two runs was like giving the "finger" to the river gods.

As we drove to the put-in at Burnt Mill Bridge on the Clear Fork River, we saw huge amounts of run-off. There was no doubt in my mind that the numbers of the gauge were clicking upward like on a taxi cab meter. At Burnt Mill, the water was roaring by about a boat length (a Jeti) below the bridge floor. The eddy behind the concrete bridge support was super depressed, at least 1 1/2 feet below the main flow, and the eddy lines looked like two high speed circular saw blades.

While the rest of us stood on the bridge and mutely stared at the turmoil below, John busied himself with unloading the boats "That was my way of telling the group we're paddling" he told us later.

As the group slowly donned paddling gear, unspoken doubt was etched on the faces of nearly all of us. The shouts and high-fives of the expected big-water run had finally been replaced by some serious, but still unspoken reservations. At that point if any member of the group had verbalized his thoughts, the trip would have ended.

Better judgement, however, was still taking a back east to the season-long drought, macho pride and an irresistible curiosity to see what that big mother was really like.

John and Winston charged out to battle for the lead with myself and Ron a discreet distance behind. Garrett, Phil and Dan formed their own little sub-group and brought up the rear. In the fast current the seven kayaks soon stretched out as Big South Fork At 40,000 everyone tried to loosen up and get into the river's rhythm.

Waves of 5 to 6 feet were continuous and occasionally breaking as they served to camouflage some nasty pour overs. I soon found the best technique for handling the water was to ride sideways on a low brace. By constantly turning the boat from onside to offside, I kept the bow away from the carnivorous eddy lines that frequently pinched down on the main flow. I found this position also enabled me to scoot out of the of hidden holes. Some of the holes we passed could have been surfed, but nobody was in a mood to play. This was purely defensive paddling.

None of the usual rapids on the Clear Fork were recognizable until I we came to the rock formation containing The Funnel. At normal water levels The Funnel is a 4 foot plunge into a violent hole that tries to surf you to the right. On this day the hole was gone, but immediately below where the hole is normally located was a set of the biggest offset waves I had ever seen. Ten feet high and breaking, those babies simply took control when you got into them, reaction time was down to nil. You either made it or you didn't. Miraculously, we all made it upright. Self congratulation was cut short though, by the sudden realization that the confluence was looming in front of us with three times the water and a steeper gradient.

At the confluence we eddied out, and for the first time that day the idea of getting off the river was broached. The thought of seven miles of even bigger stuff was finally starting to activate the brain cells responsible for common sense. But alas, it was too little, too late. Although an old road offered good access on the New River side of the confluence, we collectively decided that since nobody had any serious difficulty on the first leg, we might as well go on. If it came right down to it we could always get off the river and walk out, for it was still early and the weather was not a factor. We had even managed to partially convince ourselves that at this level the river might be a wash out. Somehow, we managed to leave those huge boulders that tower over you at normal water levels, out of the big-water equation.

Thirty seconds later we later we were on a river that was totally out of control. Funny water, exploding waves, braking waves, pour overs, eddy fences and whirlpools. Every high water phenomenon that I had ever seen or heard about was all around us. This river had it all in spades. And then we got to the bad part. The Big Three came roaring up at us out of nowhere. We travelled a mile in three minutes. Ron was the first to eat it. Amidst the cries of "swimmer" I spotted Ron's helmet bobbing among the waves. Under the helmet I caught a glimpse of an expressionless face. Phil was in hot pursuit of Ron. My attention was diverted to Garrett who flipped, rolled, flipped, rolled, flipped and finally rolled again. Then it was my turn!

I was sideways on my on side when I dropped into the outer edge of a sticky hole. This generated about a millisecond of upstream lean which was more than enough time for the river to do its thing. I came up in the backwash of the hole on a shaky roll with a popped spray skirt and a boat full of water. All I could think of was to eddy out as I spotted another swimmer. Phil,

who seconds before had tried to rescue Ron, was now boatless and having his problems. John, Winston, and Dan were out of the picture and as far as I could tell were unable to help. I limped into the eddy end found Garrett behind a rock.

"Somebody needs to help Phil", I said. Garrett's reply was chilling, "... as far as I'm concerned It's him or me." I neither agreed or disagreed, I was too busy counting my blessings for having a boat full of water.

Putting Phi I from my mind, Garrett and I could see that the worst part of the rapids was yet to come, or at least I could see it, for Garrett peeled out into the main flow, climbed the face of a huge ' wave and disappeared - only to reappear a second later as he climbed and dropped through a gigantic series of badly breaking waves. As he would climb each successive wave he would lean forward and duck his head in an effort to avoid being blasted by the breakers. Amazingly, he finished the run upright and flushed into an eddy.

I had already made up my mind to run a sneak. 24 Berrett's run served to confirm my intentions. The sneak was easy, and I soon found myself in the same eddy as Garrett - who was in the process of pulling his boat out of the river. Ron and Dan were also there with Dan's boat on shore . Ron's boat was long gone, but he could have cared less. Moments later we were joined by the rest of the group who had been hidden from view in the eddy below. Phil's boat was gone as well - but you wouldn't have known it by the smile. He was happy as a clam to be right where he was.

Garrett, Phil, Ron and Dan said they were cutting their losses and getting out. I kept my mouth shut in order to see what John and Winston's reaction would be. Despite making noises about group unity I could see right through those two. I knew they wanted to go on. I also knew they wouldn't go unless I did, since they weren't crazy enough to paddle with less than three boaters. So without having opened my mouth the decision to walk or peddle was now mine . Because of job, family and social commitments I had missed the Gauley season. I had also chickened out when the Russell Fork was releasing. I was sensing a widening paddling gap between John, Winston and myself and thought this would be a good chance to narrow it. I said I was in.

The three of us took nearly every item of safety equipment the other guys had as we prepared to paddle on. After some serious good luck, we were on our way. Fortunately the river let up somewhat and everyone had an opportunity to regain their composure. But I

was now paddling with no confidence as my common sense finally came out of It's hiding place and started screaming at the rest of my brain to get the hell off this river. I still thought I had a trump card though, since there was a road that paralleled the river at the beginning of Pine Creek Canyon - a section of river that I thought would be unrunable at this level. I made It crystal clear to John and Winston after the group split that If I decided to get off, we would all get off, and I was prepared to force the Issue If necessary We made It to Pine Creek without mishap, but my trump card Instantly turned Into a joker. The road at Pine Creek is at river right, the same side from which the creek enters the river. The water In Pine Creek was seething through the trees with no eddies In sight. To commit to river right and not find an eddy would put a boater smack into the canyon. We didn't have to scout to know that the risk was totally unacceptable. We exited our boats at river left and began a gruelling hike/climb downstream to see what the canyon was packing.

The first three or four hundred yards were pretty chancy, the same stuff we had encountered at the Big Three only lots more of it. Than we came to a sight that will remain with me for as long as I paddle. A nearly river-wide hole lay before us with a violence that was indescribable. We sat on the bank awe struck as logs and other debris poured into the hole only to be recirculated over end over until they were broken up end spit out. The hole had a backwash of at least fifty feet. As we looked at that monster, the three of us knew that we were staring out at death. Nothing living could have survived a plunge into that watery abyss.

There was a small tongue at the far left side of the hole which led directly into another bad hydraulic. The two holes were like comparing a .44 magnum to a .22. Both could kill - one just made a messier job of it. John and Winston were whispering to each other and making little hand gestures. It was clear to me that they were discussing how this section could be run. I told them that before anyone even thinks about trying to tweeze around those holes, I would knock them out and carry them. Even though I smiled when I said It, both of them knew I was serious. I was serious.

We went back to carry the boats and It took an hour of back-breaking labor to reach the hole. Below the hole, the canyon appeared to settle back into It's pre-hole character. John and Winston couldn't stand the portage any longer and decided they were going to go for it. I'd had about all the boat dragging I could handle too, but elected to carry down to the next eddy. I carried to the eddy, entered my boat end looked out

in time to see John and Winston whiz by. I gritted my teeth and took after them.

I managed to negotiate about 200 yards of the 25 river when the top of the wave I was cresting blew up in my face. I could feel myself being pitched back over my stern as the exploding wave flung me back upstream. The water below the surface tried to rip the paddle from my hands as I struggled to set up for a roll. It felt like hours before the paddle broke free from its watery grasp and cleared the surface. My first roll was unsuccessful, and the underwater battle was on again. The river won three rounds before I threw in the towel and popped my spray skirt. Just before I flipped had a glimpse of some nasty looking action at river left.

I knew I didn't want to be inverted when I hit it. Grabbing my boat and paddle I struck out for shore in an effort to break across the eddy line before hitting the gnarly stuff below. Winston suddenly appeared like an apparition about ten yards in front of me and I screamed for help. He looked at me and shouted something unintelligible, then turned and sprinted downstream. I now had an even better reason to make the eddy. I was going to kill that bastard if I ever caught up with him.

I made it across the eddy line in time to avoid the river's next surprise, but quickly had to change from an offensive to defensive posture as the eddy whipped me with incredible speed feet first toward a thicket of rhododendron and small trees inundated by the water. I should have expected no less since strainers were the only thing we hadn't encountered that day. I assumed a headfirst position and kicked up and into the top of the bushes and slithered through to the bank - boat and paddle in tow.

Catching my breath, I looked downstream for the others but they were out of sight. I was still fuming at Winston and wasted no time getting back into the river to begin my chase. As it turned out the canyon section was nearly over and a quick blast through some big haystacks put me into a huge eddy pool. The river was making a sharp turn to the right end as a result was about 150 yards wide. The water was squirrely, but manageable.

John and Winston were still not in sight as I hugged the left bank in an effort to see what was going on downstream. As I paddled I blew blast after blast on my whistle until I finally heard a short, soft reply. Directly across from me on the right bank was John lying on a flat rock. He weakly waved and I ferried over to

him. "Where's Winston?" I asked. John pointed downstream and croaked, "I lost my boat. Winston took off after it". "My brain had never registered the fact that John's boat was nowhere to be seen. This is the guy that did a perfect screw roll the first time he ever sat in a kayak. I was dumbfounded, then suddenly realized that John was really hurting. After a few minutes he was able to tell me what had happened. He had been paddling on river right, trying to sneak the worst of the rapid when his attention was diverted by some people who had suddenly appeared on the bank. At that instant he was slammed down into a hole on his offside. Although a very good surfer, John couldn't do anything with the hole. It trashed him time after time, until, bruised and battered, he swam for it. The hole recirculated him once before finally disgorging him in deep water. He managed to grab his boat but quickly surrendered it to the river as another bad hole loomed up at him. Without the boat he was able to make the bank and the rock on which he was now sprawled - still coughing and gasping. The entire time he was in the hole he had a throat full of water and found breathing nearly impossible. He felt sure the next rapid would have finished him off. Winston had tried to help but couldn't.

At least I had my answer as to why I had been abandoned. John was in much more serious trouble. My rage at Winston melted away as I realized the tough decision he had to make. He'd seen me swim enough to know that I was in a familiar situation. Nobody could remember the last time John had taken a swim. We sat in silence. I stared at the river and thought about the violence it contained - yet the river was blameless. It wasn't intentionally mean - but simply obeying the natural laws of gravity and fluid hydraulics. We were the lawbreakers. We had gone against all the rules of common sense and safe paddling, and were paying the price.

Our thoughts were finally interrupted by the need to take action. We had no idea where Winston might be or where John's boat was. The trip had begun so early it was now getting into late afternoon. With John's boat gone I was relieved at the prospect of walking out. We soon found the road that leads to the takeout and after making a yoke to drag my boat, we took off. Periodically blowing our whistles in an attempt to locate Winston, we slowly and safely made our way out. At Railroad Rapid we came upon some locals who had seen Winston go through with John's boat. "He shore stayed in one place for a long time", one of them said. At this point I didn't even want to look at the river anymore, but I took a quick peek anyway and then shuttered at

the thought of Winston having to run it alone. It was easy to see why he had stayed in one place for a long time. The wave/hole combo could have peeled the decals off a plastic boat. Assured that Winston had made it out, we took to the trail at a faster clip. After Railroad Rapid, the river turned into a flat, fast flush. Without anyone to kick around anymore, it just gave up.

We were greeted at Leatherwood Ford by the sight of John and Winston's boats lying beside Garrett's van. Garrett and the other three guys had shown up only moments before in the back of a beat-up pickup truck and had thought the worst when my boat was not with the other two. A ranger with a radio rushed up to get our names and became engaged in a frantic conversation with an unknown voice miles away. John and I were causing a lot of confusion, because the ranger kept asking which group we were with. Neither of us knew what the hell she was talking about. As it turned out there was another group of seven that had put in an hour behind us. The other group was, judging from the chatter on the radio, having more trouble than we'd encountered.

The rescue squad had already been called out and a search and rescue mission was gearing up. Winston was at the ranger station being "debriefed" and we were asked to join him. Unknown to us, a ranger had been at Leatherwood Ford in time to see Ron's and Phil's boats go by sans paddlers and had become understandably concerned. The same ranger then proceeded to go apeshit when Winston pulled in an hour later towing a boat and telling a story about seven boaters having put in at Burnt Mill Bridge.

I wasn't sorry that we hadn't needed the Park Service's expertise - but it was very comforting to know they were out there. It also served to heighten my feelings of foolishness for having been on the river in the first place.

The debriefing was short and fairly painless. We took the expected rebuke from the chief ranger in silence. We knew we deserved it - but didn't want to hear it from somebody who had only been on the river in a raft.

Altogether we had only lost one paddle and a knife between the four of us. Out of the fourteen that put in that day, six boats and seven paddles were claimed by the river. Luckily, no one was killed or seriously injured - although the last of the second group wasn't retrieved until after dark.

On the trip home to Middlesboro we were still fired up about the run as we each told our stories about having-run a tougher line than the next guy on this or that rapid. Yes sir, we had really kicked that river's ass. That was a joke, and we all knew it. Nobody had any business on the river that day. We had even compounded an obvious bad decision to paddle by splitting up when the first major problems occurred.

Paddlers shouldn't have to learn these lessons the hard way, but in this sport that's sometimes the only way you do learn. The cost of failure can be very high however, and sometimes the highest possible price is paid.

Several days later I called the USGS gauge to get a peak gage reading for our trip reading for our trip. "Yes sir," the voice said, "the Big South Fork peaked at Leatherwood Ford that day at 39,870 cfs." Thank you. Hmm, forty grand. I bet if it had only been thirty ...

Jim Bowling
Middlesboro, Kentucky



Visitor Center at Bandy Creek

No longer seen by Paddlers put-in on the Clear Fork of the BSF is the over Century Old Burnt Mill Bridge washed out in 2021



What's pictured in this photo isn't as significant as what isn't pictured, after flood waters swept away the eastern half of the historic Burnt Mill Bridge over Clear Fork River near Robbins | Photo: Nancy Chambers

From the Independent Herald, Oneida Tennessee Mar 28, 2021(Edited)— For more than 100 years, the historic Burnt Mill Bridge over the Clear Fork River withstood floods and the tests of time — including the historic flood of 1929 and other major floods, including one in 1973.

That changed Sunday morning, when half of the 110-year-old bridge was swept away by flood waters after numerous thunderstorms combined to dump as much as eight inches of rain over the region.

Adding insult to injury, Honey Creek Road remained closed indefinitely on Sunday evening, as the new Burnt Mill Bridge awaited a visit from state bridge inspectors to determine the extent of damage done when the steel and wood from the old bridge was sent smashing into it by the rushing flood waters.

Built in 1911, Burnt Mill Bridge was used for more than 90 years as a single-lane, steel-structure bridge with wood plank flooring before the state deemed it unsafe for vehicular traffic in the early 2000s. Potter Southeast completed construction on a modern, concrete bridge just downstream in 2006, and earthen berms were placed on either side of the old bridge to prevent vehicles from crossing it. The bridge was built using a Pratt through-truss span on the east side and a half-hip Pratt pony truss on the west side, connected by a concrete abutment in the middle of the river. The section of the bridge that washed away was the Pratt through-truss span on the east side.

Pratt truss bridges became commonplace in the United States in the late 19th century. They were designed by the American engineer Thomas Willis Pratt and his father, Caleb Pratt, and were preferred for their ability to span long distances with simple steel construction. The Pratts revolutionized bridge building when they figured out a design using triangular trusses that allowed the diagonal pieces to feel tension and the vertical pieces to feel suspension. The use of Pratt trusses became less common after World War II.

After the old bridge was condemned for vehicular use by the state in 2003, Scott County reached a deal with the National Park Service allowing the old bridge to remain for pedestrian use, given its historic value and significant interest from the public in saving it.

However, the bridge slowly became an eyesore, and its rotting timbers caused it to become a danger for pedestrians. In 2019, Scott County teamed up with the Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area to re-plank the bridge, making it suitable for pedestrian traffic once more.

The bridge renewal project followed years of contemplation about the bridge's future. Scott County even reached out to a non-profit organization that repurposes old bridges for its rails-to-trails program, but the outfit determined it would be too costly to remove and reuse the bridge because the only way to get the steel beams out of the river gorge intact would be to use helicopters.

In 2017, Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area administrators expressed concern that a flood might cause the old bridge — the concrete base of which was determined to be crumbling — to be swept away. If that happened, they warned, significant damage might be caused to the newer bridge downstream.

The streamflow on Clear Fork at the USGS water gauge just downstream from the bridge peaked at 36,000 cubic feet per second at 1:30 p.m. Sunday afternoon. The norm for this time of year is less than 1,000 cfs.

The Independent Herald, Oneida Tennessee has often had some very good historical articles from the area. Worth getting a copy when you are in Oneida!

A Modest Proposal



American Whitewater, which we have been associated with since 1976 has some a good idea on it's website that the Bluegrass Wildwater should enhance it's website with.



AW has an archive of all it's Journals starting with 1955 to present. These are a great wealth which they share with all about the history of whitewater paddling. It is for those paddlers including the BWA and many other Paddling Groups.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Journal/archive/>

You will find articles written by many paddlers (including the BWA) in the Journals. Stories about expeditions, distant river trips, new or little known streams that were run, safety information, and other information that can be useful and interesting to all of us.

Some in the BWA have been inspired to run rivers and explore distant places that we would have not know about had we not read the AW Journal.

The same is true of our newsletter "Bowlines". In fact, in a nation-wide competition, *Paddler* magazine said this of *Bowlines*:

"Lexington KY's Bluegrass Wildwater Association takes top honors for the design, content, entertainment, and usefulness of its Bowlines publication."

This is due to many editors over the years and to all the members that contributed articles about their lives as a paddler in the BWA.

We should have an archive on the BWA website with all of our issues of *Bowlines* since the first one in October of 1976. To help to do this I have spent a great deal of time collecting all the issues & have converted all of them to PDF format. It would be a important reason for all paddlers to come to our website and learn about the BWA and its history and also learn about our events like the NPFF.

One last thing, we used to print each new issue of *Bowlines* to mail to our members. With the advent of the internet we then started using the PDF format and were able to start using color and photos but still emailed to members. We should do this once more. Issues of our newsletter sent to all members will give us a unity as a group and also reinforce a bond with members stories, news & articles.

Don Spangler current Bowlines editor

