

27th Annual Southern Trip - 2002

By Elliott Drysdale

As perennial as the spring flowers, John Kobak's Southern River Trip is taken to awaken dormant paddling skills. The promise of warm weather and different rivers calls us from our winter slumbers. This year, because John was vacationing in his RV down south, I agreed to handle the telephone calls and coordination before the trip. People come and go during this trip due to work schedules. The people who did show during this trip were Bill and Jonathan Bachtel, Dave Becker, Judi Cleary and Kristen Haase, Scott Debalski, Elliott Drysdale, Michael Duvall, Boris Glick, Rob Hammond, Scott Jaynes, John Kobak, Stu Koster, John Legg, Dan Lichty, Terry Markoff, Joe Okoniewski, Chuck Singer, John Smoltz, Cecil Tickamyer and Bob Weible.

Nolichucky

We meet at the campground Thursday night located in Erwin, TN at the take out. While the location is perfect with hot showers, the cost of \$8.00 plus tax per person was high. For the first time since I can remember, the weather was warm and the water level perfect for a class III run. When we finished, we stayed a second night, despite the high cost, to enjoy the warm evening, showers and let any late comers catch up. The water level was good at 1250 cfs and for a change the temperature was over 70.

Group did well and Jaws was at a great play level.

Tellico

Early Saturday morning we loosely caravaned to the Tellico River, allowing people to tank up with fuel and ice on the way. Scott Jaynes had a cell phone web browser to update all the river levels as we went. We got a lot of rain south of us which brought the Tellico up to 1100cfs, a high level for our group. Only spoiled by the dark and drizzly weather. The hot dog boaters ran the ledges, Baby Falls, Jerod's Knee and the lower while the others ran only the lower. There was enough water to make several drops on the lower interesting. We all meet at the lower take out and drove to the customary Mexican restaurant in Copper Hill. After a warm and filling dinner we all drove to the Ocoee river Thunder Rock campground.

Ocoee River

On Sunday morning, Dave Becker treated us to the traditional pancake breakfast along with his own maple syrup. It had rained all night so that the dam had to be turned down rather than up for the weekend paddling levels. It still was 50% above normal release levels. It is nice, however to have the river levels adjusted for paddlers. We had 18 people paddling, and for safety we broke up into buddy teams of 3 and 4. Scott Debalski, Dan Lichty and I went first and kept moving to stay warm. As it turned out, we finished at noon well ahead of everybody else. I wanted to paddle a new kayak (Super EZ) and now knew the condition of the water, so Scott and I ran it again and caught up with the original groups. From there we drove as the clouds broke up to the Talulah Gorge Campground.



Chattooga River, Section IV

Chuck Singer runs Bull Sluice

Sunday night was warm with the promise of warm, sunny paddling the next day. John Kobak had driven ahead and negotiated 3 sites with unlimited number of cars for our group. Monday morning was sunny and warm and the Chattooga just below 2 feet. This is the best level we have had in years due to previous drought conditions. Scott, Boris, Stu, Bob Weible, Bill and Jonathan Bachtel and I tried to find the Chauga but gave up after we found some local paddlers who told us that it

was still to low. We caught up with John Kobak, Mike Duvall and Dave Becker who were running Section 4. Singer led a group down the Section 3. We all took the sneak route down Woodall Shoals. Everybody ran perfectly at Seven Foot Falls, except Mike Duvall. He pointed over the drop and pirouetted the bottom hole right into the wall but got out without a scratch. At Five Falls everybody ran the first drop without incidence. Cork Screw was juicy, as always. Mike Duvall hiked the right side to be a safety while Dave Becker volunteered to run it first without safety to set up the first throw rope. John Kobak got into his boat and waited in case Dave got into trouble. Dave got cork screwed in the top hole and flipped in the bottom hole. To our surprise, he lost his paddle and had to swim. John, who was calmly waiting above was whistled into action. He could not see what happened to Dave nor why, but charged ahead and ran the best line of the day. By the time he got to Dave, he had self-rescued and all was well. For the first time Jonathan Bachtel, who shows signs of greatness, showed signs of concern when he asked his Dad if it was all right to go then. He ran it perfectly. After asking several local paddlers several times, we ran the center crack of Crack in the Rock. This used to be a bad place but time and water level now make it the preferred route. Everyone ran Jawbone perfectly. We all got out to scout Sock'em Dog. Scott, Jonathan and I ran the Puppy Chute while Bob Weible and Boris ran the launch pad. I should state that Boris ran right of the launch pad and did a beautiful mystery move while Bob boofed the bottom hole. All the rest walked. The 2-mile paddle across the lake was led by the racing trio of Bill Bachtel, Rob Hammond and John Kobak. We spent a second warm dry night at the Talulah Campground. Dave Becker was leaving the trip for business but unfortunately was a little brain dead when he got off the river. His boat with his car keys got loaded on to my van and he got to put-in with his car, sans boat or car keys. Made for a little longer shuttle.



Kristen Haase at Second Ledge

Chattooga River, Section III

(From Judi Cleary) The group who paddled had a very enjoyable, if not long, day. Was section III always that long? The group consisted of Joe Okoniewski, Terry Markoff, Scott Jaynes, RJ, Chuck Singer, Judi Cleary, and Kristen Haase. Kristen's first real white water river found her going over the blind drop at Second Ledge with ease. We had lunch right after that drop and Joe took that opportunity to try out his new hand paddle gloves. Chuck was the only one to run Bull Sluice. The only other boat we saw that day was one raft that was out for an overnigher.



Joe Okoniewski at Dick's Creek



Little River

Stu Koster running the Sinks on the Little River

The next morning John Kobak and Mike Duvall left for home while the remaining group drove to the Little River in the Smoky Mountains. The level was at 1600 c.f.s vs. 2000 c.f.s., 2 years ago. Again a perfect level. There is several Class IV drops before the Sinks. Directly above the Sinks, there are 2 pour-over holes. The second hole looks nasty making the top hole more challenging. Having seen this before I ran the sneak drops over the ledges on river right. Some ran the top hole and sneaked the second. The Sinks is a 15' rock slide on the right and a falls on the left. Everybody ran the rock slide but when 2 locals, Randy and Josh, ran the falls, Boris and Jonathan carried back up and ran it. The bottom 2 miles of the river are Class III and IV. At the Elbow the locals decided to skip it but Boris studied until he knew he could do it. He flipped before the undercut and flushed partially under it but came out smiling. We all went to the local BBQ spot the Randy recommended. There after we drove to the Daddy's Creek.

Daddy's Creek

Frozen Head Campground is closed due to TN budget constraints. We went to the Nemo campground instead, located at Nemo Bridge in the park itself. This cuts off about 20 miles on the morning shuttle. Having taken the trip leadership form John, I managed to fit 6 vans into one \$7.00 camp spot. You can not believe how many time we asked if Daddy's Creek was out of hunting season. We were more concerned about that than the water level. Wednesday morning it was in the 40's and drizzling. The locals, Randy and Josh, we had met yesterday agreed to meet us at the put in. Daddy's Creek was running again, at a perfect 2 feet. Joe had some trouble at the beginning due mostly to previous problems on Daddy's Creek, but continued on and dramatically improved with each rapid. We were back at Nemo campground by 1:30 p.m. Scott and I decided to return home while the rest of the group continued on the Big South Fork.

Big South Fork

(from Rob Hammond) The next night we camped at the Big Fork Campground, the site was very nice with great hot showers. That night the temperature dropped down into the 30s. After days in the 70s this was a little tough to get used to. So the next morning the thought of getting into our wet and very cold boating gear kinda slowed us down. The 8:00 shuttle time went and gone, at 9:00 we still weren't motivated to jump into the wet gear. Fortunately the sun came out and we did get our show on the road. The river was great and the sun warmed everything to make for a great day of paddling. The Big South Fork is scenic class III river with rapids that go by the names of: The Ell, Washing Machine Double Falls, Jake's Hole and a few others.