

## Big Spring Trip

By John Kobak

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Thirty paddlers participated in this year's big southern trip.



### Big Group

Bill Bachtel, Jonathon Bachtel, Bruce Bradshaw, Dave Broer, Casey Brown, Scott Debalski, Elliott Drysdale, Mike Duvall, John Garcia, Brad Guess, Rob Hammond, Sabine Iben, John Kobak, Stu Koster, Brent Laubaugh, Amy Lear, Terry Markoff, Kelly Miller, Steve McClung, Bob Nicholson, Lee Owen, Ted Pablo, Syd Reames, Shawn Reese, Brian Rueff, Shelley Schmidt, Sue Strumbel, Ron Tomallo, Bob Weible, Ron Whitney, Dan Wojciechowicz.

We had planned to meet the first night at Rock Creek National Forest Campground near the Nolichucky but found that water problems had delayed the park opening. I found Warrior Path State Park campground right off I81 which made for a better late Thursday meeting place. The park manager was very friendly and provided us with our own private campground with individual sites and our own shower facility.. It was their old campground and is now used for overflow camping or can be reserved for private groups. The park has horseback riding, golf, pool, lake and hiking & biking trails. It is further to drive back to camp for the Nolichucky paddlers but is more convenient for the Watauga paddlers with lots of restaurants nearby.



### Bob Nicholson

As it turned out, the heavy rains started on Thursday afternoon and continued

overnight. When we awoke all of our plans had to change. Both the Watauga and Nolichucky were in flood and the weather was cold and rainy after a beautiful day before with temps in the 70's. I got busy on the internet and found out that the Little River in the Smoky Mountain National Park was running at about 1000 cfs which was a good level and the weather there was warm and clear. Most of us got on the road in that direction. Our expert paddlers, led by Brent, started their trek into the mountains to try to find someplace more difficult to paddle. After 8 hrs of random movements they ended up high and dry in a Knoxville Motel. I guess it was more difficult to find than to paddle.



### Trip leader

The rest of the group met at Elkmont Nat'l Park Campground on the Little River. The group split in two and started toward the Sinks.

All the action begins at the Class IV sinks and some of the spills & thrills were spectacular. While walking past the first drop I spotted a local kayaker who had just dislocated his shoulder and was hanging on to a rock above a big hole. I pulled him to shore and was able to put his shoulder back into place. We loaded up his boat and he drove him self to the hospital for further inspection of my work.

A few of us drove down to the Elbow the last Class V rapid. As we got there Lee Owen had just injured his shoulder. We were not able to determine whether it was dislocated or not and after a few fire drills and driving around aimlessly he managed to get to the Gatlinburg hospital. They

determined that it was indeed dislocated and got him fixed up but that ended his trip after one day of paddling. Hopefully, with therapy, he will be back paddling soon.



### Elliott & Scott

The next morning we headed for the Tellico which had come up to about 300 cfs. This was enough to run everything from the Ledges, Baby Falls and the remainder of the whitewater sections. The 21 paddlers split into three river groups. Dawn Nicholson took lots of pictures of everyone running Baby Falls.



### Dawn our Photographer

This year we had an open canoe on the trip paddled by Bruce Bradshaw, a new member from Wisconsin.



### Bruce Bradshaw @ Baby Falls

The weather was great and we had lots of fun except for Rob Hammond who jammed his previously damaged shoulder. He rested it a few days until he was able to run some easier sections. Where was our expert group you ask? Well after a night in Knoxville where they met up with Stu and Rob they decided that the Tellico must not be that good if we were going there, so they went to the Ocoee with the rest of the south. Another bad decision. The Tellico was lots of fun



**Dan**

Our group headed to the Ocoee late Saturday. We were sitting around the glowing Citronella campfire and drinking our illegal beer when the park rangers pulled up. Luckily for us they started at the first campsite and caught John Garcia (Smoltz). The word quickly spread though the campground and we quietly went to bed. I later told Smoltz that he should have pulled a Kobak and high tailed it into the woods and hid until they left. I guess he didn't mind paying the fine for open container in a Nat'l Forest campground.



**Smoltz on Wilson Creek**

On Easter morning we had our traditional big pancake breakfast, I think I must have

fed the entire campground. Pancakes and Dave Becker Syrup was flying off the grills until we ran out of all the ingredients. I found that the Easter Bunny left me a basket in front of my camper. I still don't know who it was, but next year no toys just chocolate.

The Ocoee release starts at 9am and if you start then you can have the river to yourself and 30 other Keel Haulers. This is the only way to paddle this popular river. It turned out that Syd had a minor injury on the Little River and it was bothering him so he pulled out after the first rapid.



**Syd**

The Keelhauler groups crowded the river all morning and by early afternoon everyone was headed to the Tallulah Gorge Campground in order to run the Chattooga River. The Tallulah was not releasing this weekend but allowed some of the paddlers to explore the gorge sans water.

On Monday we split into three groups, two for section 4 and a small group on section 3. The day was cold and rainy. We had a few Chattooga first timers, Kelly Miller followed me down and did quite well. We had a few thrills and swims at the rapid below Woodall Shoals, but the funniest sight was at Seven Foot Falls. I told Casey to head toward Ron who had positioned himself on the rock in the center of the drop. My thought was Ron would point to the exact spot that she should boof with his paddle. Casey just poured on the speed and before Ron knew it she was perched on top on the drop with Ron.

The two groups combined when we reached Corkscrew rapid in the Five Falls area. Recon Ron set up his can't miss throw line on the big rock above Crack-

in-the-Rock. I think Mike was his only catch of the day. The relatively high 2.1' level challenged everyone. Jaw Bone looked like a fire drill. I'll bet I saw half the group execute a roll running it. Everyone walked Sock-em-Dog. The sun came out when the unofficial race across Tugaloo reservoir was won by a wide margin by Casey Brown. She blew Ron Tomallo away as he tried to draft her most of the way. It's the first win by a female paddler and she says she wasn't even trying. Gotta get her in the Cheat Race next year.



**Casey**

The bulk of the group left for our first Keelhauler trip on Wilson Creek near Boone, NC. Shawn liked the area so well he made his decision to go there to college. The run was short but action packed. I'm sure people will be back in future years. Brent, John, Dave, Stu, Shawn headed over to the Watauga which had dropped down to a manageable 350 cfs. They ran it two days in a row before heading North.



**Brent on Wilson Creek**

Elliott, Scott, Peggy and I hiked around Tallulah gorge and headed then North. While on the road we found out that the group wanted to paddle the Upper Meadow River near the Gauley. We met at the Gauley Dam campground but missed Elliott & Scott who headed home. I had read about the new right side shuttle route that put us in the river at the first

rapid. This easy 9 mi shuttle put us next to a little creek that flowed into the river.



### **Bill Bachtel**

Someone's bright idea was to paddle the creek down to the river rather than walk down. Don't try this. It's full of trees and rocks and involved a few portages. It is much faster to walk to the river on the nice trail. The river was flowing about 1000 cfs and was lots of fun. It's been a few years since I've run this one so we had to scout a couple of drops. Everyone agreed that it was a fun run at a good water level and now is an easy shuttle.



### **Bob on Wilson Creek**

On Thursday the group headed for the lower Yough while Peggy and I headed for our cabin. After the run most came over to the cabin and we paddled the Upper Yough on Friday. First timers Steve McClung and Dan Wojciechowicz followed Bill Bachtel and me. They both did quite well, even though I took Dan through the hardest lines. On Saturday some went over to run the Cheat. There were so many people coming and going that I totally lost track of who was paddling where.



### **Dave Broer**

It was a typical southern trip, lots of paddlers, changeable weather conditions, minor mishaps and the best way to start another year of paddling. After a week of this kind of paddling, one cannot help but increase their skill level. Thanks to all the paddlers who put up with Kobak's Boot Camp for another year.