

50 YEARS OF THE KEEL-HAULERS

In March 1967 a small group of outdoor people along with Reece Fabro of Ohio Canoe Adventures (Backpackers Shop) got together to found and name the club. This was the club's first logo.

The club's first president, Bill Conrad, was elected in October 1967. Meetings were held at the Elyria Red Cross building until 1976 when it was moved to Middleburg Hts which was a more central location for club members. [Past Club Officers](#).

In 1968 the club published its first yearbook similar to our present one but all of 12 pages. Flatwater canoe trips on the Cuyahoga, Mohican, Vermilion, Kokosing, Clarion, French Creek and even the Youghiogheny Rivers. A 25 mi long race was held on Sandusky Bay. Many families with young kids joined and we had events at local lakes.



Randy Morgan – Middle Yough

The club quickly became proficient paddlers and some were getting into the new craze of decked



Hank Annable – Cucumber L. Yough

canoes and even kayaks when a small group from the East side of Cleveland including Jimi Snyder & Elliott Drysdale's fathers joined the club with their new kayaks.

Peggy & I joined in 1968 with our new Grumman canoe and introduced our two kids Jeff 4 & Pam 1 to the sport of paddling on the French Creek in PA.

We were hooked and looked forward to all the club had to offer. Peggy and I went to a whitewater school in PA and learned the techniques necessary to paddle a decked canoe.



Each year the club offered more & more advanced trips. In 1969 the club organized our first Annual Canoe race on the Vermilion River. We went up to the Pine River in MI where we met new members Chuck & Diane Singer and their two kids. In 1970 we got up to the Cattaraugus Creek in NY; See the pictures below with Hank and his daughter Reenie and a young Jimi Snyder in his new kayak. The Yough became the club's favorite river and in 1971 we did our first wilderness trip on the Spanish River in Canada taking a train to the put-in for a one week 100 mi paddle back to near Sudbury, ON.



Here is Chuck & I on the Spanish River and in 1971 I bought a kayak from England and learned to surf on the West Branch of the Rocky River. Paddling became a big part of my life. It was the first sport I was able to excel at.

There were very few kayaks to be had so Dick Priem & I decided to make kayaks from molds that we fabricated from a German kayak called the Lettman and a kids kayak which was an Old Town kayak scaled down in all dimensions for kids up to 100 lbs. I built this one for Jeff when he was 8 years old.



There were so many kids in the club that wanted kayaks that we ended up building 15 kid's kayaks. In the meantime club members started cranking kayaks out of our molds building 20 in a month's time in my garage. The picture above shows the club's first trip in 1973 on the Chattooga River in SC/GA, made famous by the movie Deliverance.

We started to make our own paddles, spray shirts, wet suits, helmets and even PFD's. But paddlers wanted more and better gear so I started to buy/sell from companies like Seda, Perception, Extrasport, Cannon paddles and Body Glove wetsuits. It wasn't even a business, since I worked full time for NASA, but it kept growing as well as my family. I ran the business until 1985 when my son Jeff took it over full time.



The pictures are of Peggy and our kids paddling in the 70's and Jeff and me on the Spanish River in 1978.

The club started to have trips all over the USA, every spring a southern trip and each summer out to Colorado, to paddle and even backpack as shown in the last picture from 1980 near Buena Vista, CO.

I propose that each month under this same 50 year title, [Old time Club Members](#) or anyone else, post a story from the old days. Please send Kelly a story each month and keep this going until next spring.



**PADDLING WITH THE KEELHAULERS
IN THE 1970s
by Dean Norman**

I joined the Keelhaulers Canoe Club in the fall of 1971 when I moved more or less permanently to Cleveland. My kids, David and Susan, kayaked with me on many club trips from 1972 thru 1975. In those years the Vermilion River was always high enough to run from Birmingham to Mill Hollow on race day. On one clean-up day the week before the race, the river was extremely high. Hank Annable stood on the bank smiling and shaking his head. He knew the river better than anyone, and was not going to paddle. We should have taken his advice. There was no way we could do any clean up, so it was just a fun paddle. The kayakers had a fun day, but open canoes swamped in the waves. Some canoes not only swamped but went to the bottom and were held there by the current until days later. Fortunately no paddlers were hurt.

I lived for two years in Los Angeles (1969-71) and joined the Valley Canoe Club. It was then my kids and I got into kayaks and C-1s, and paddled on the Kern River and Kings River. I brought a Tom Johnson designed Bronco kayak with me when I moved to Cleveland, and Chuck Tummonds got permission from Tom Johnson to make Bronco kayaks for himself and several Keelhaulers members. Many years later my beat up and roughly patched Bronco kayak was purchased by Andy Gross at a Keelhaulers auction. He used it to teach kayaking in a swimming pool at Cleveland State.

Tom Johnson designed the first widely manufactured poly kayak, the River Chaser, in 1974 or 1975. These indestructible boats (which sometimes destructed from plastic fatigue) led to the new techniques of bouncing off of rocks rather than avoiding them. Perception soon made a much better plastic kayak, and Keelhaulers quit making their own kayaks from fiberglass. By 1976 most Yough river guides began using River Chasers which could take more frequent rock beating without repairs.

Chuck Tummonds was very interested in kayak slalom racing for his daughter Cathy. Chuck designed a slalom practice race course on his property on the Upper Cuyahoga River. He took Cathy and my daughter Susan to many slalom races. Cathy became so skilled she probably would have won a national championship and been on the U.S. Team for international races. But she dislocated a shoulder while paddling in Colorado one summer, and had to give up kayaking completely as the shoulder continued to hurt for a year or more.

Susan qualified once for the U.S. Team and paddled at a World's championship in Wales. One year she failed to qualify for the U.S. Team, but got lucky and won the national championship. The U. S. women's team members decided to skip the national race, because they thought Linda Harrison would just beat them all again as she had for about five years in a row. But Linda had stopped practicing that summer, and Susan with one good run managed to make the best score.

Donna Bergland, a chemistry professor at Wooster College, presented a slide show of her Grand Canyon trip at a club meeting. In the fall of 1975 Donna led a Keelhaulers trip on the Gauley River. Most of us had not paddled the Gauley before, so she led us through every rapids. I tried to get near the head of the line each time to be sure to follow the route she was selecting. Everyone except Donna carried around Iron Ring Rapids. It didn't look difficult, but there were said to be iron rods below the surface that could hurt you if you capsized.

At Pillow Rock rapids we all watched Donna show the route. She punched through two hydraulic waves at the start, and then stroked hard to center and right to finish the run rather easily. Then I watched our best paddlers fail to punch through the hydraulic waves. They got caught, surfed a while before tipping over, then rolled up and were washed to the left against the pillow rock. Some leaned toward the rock, some braced away from the rock...all of them tipped over. Then

they rolled up again and got washed against a second pillow rock and capsized and went down the final chute upside down. Then they rolled up again and paddled into the eddy to watch the rest of us take our medicine. Chuck Singer carried his kayak up along the left bank to try it again, and tipped and rolled three times again in his second run.

It was too hard to carry around this rapids, so I was resigned to taking my bath and hoped I could roll up three times and avoid a swim. Then I saw a C-1 paddler, Loren Schafer, take a route in the center through a maze of rocks in shallow water. When he came out of the maze he was downstream of the two hydraulic waves that caused the trouble, so he could easily paddle hard to the right as Donna had done and make the run look easy. I took that route and had the same success. I would rather survive than be brave. Donna was a very strong paddler to be able to punch through the waves that stopped everyone else.

I met Donna again at a restaurant in Salmon, Idaho, in 1976. I had gone there to paddle the Middle Fork and Main Salmon rivers with Dr. Walt Blackadar and his son and daughter. Donna often spent summers in the West paddling whitewater with people she had met there. The next year I read a sad story that Donna died in a western river. She took a practice run prior to a downriver race...alone...and got pinned in a rapids. The racing paddlers found her the next day. Donna was usually a cautious paddler, but apparently she was overconfident that day to paddle the river alone in the late afternoon.

Dr. Walt Blackadar died the same year by getting pinned under a downed tree on the North Fork of the Payette River in Idaho. He was paddling with a group, but the river was too turbulent for other paddlers to help him where he was pinned. Walt was a fearless paddler, because he hardly ever missed a roll. He would drift sideways into big hydraulic waves that he knew would capsize him, and calmly roll up after he washed out of the wave. But he admitted that he was not good at negotiating tight technical routes in narrow rivers, and didn't paddle much in that kind of river. Two legends of our sport lost their lives in mistakes they didn't usually take. Something for all of us to think about when we paddle whitewater.

But before the Keelhaulers there was the Madhatters Canoe club which I joined in 1966. I only paddled one trip with them on the Upper Cuyahoga and met George and Helen Hazelett at that time. Don Roper may have been on the trip also. I did attend part of a 2 or 3 day New Year's party held by the club, which was feasting and drinking and telling tall tales.

From 1968 to 1971 I was gone from Cleveland, so I missed the birth of the Keelhaulers club. Hank Annable should tell us about this. A story I heard was that on canoe camping trips the Madhatters members (some of them) would stay up late at the campsite, drinking and singing and beating on the bottoms of overturned canoes to sound like Indian tom toms. Some people on those trips wanted to go to sleep when it got dark, and have energy to paddle rapids the next day. Cattaraugus

Creek in New York was a favorite canoe camping river, and at high water the rapids can be challenging for open canoes.

There was a club meeting with arguments and a vote on whether or not it should be lights out and quiet when it got dark, and a majority voted for lights out and quiet.

Then the trustees of the club said it was in the club constitution that the trustees could overrule any vote of members, and the singing and drinking and canoe beating was an indispensable tradition of the club. So several members who wanted quiet time after dark, quit the Madhatters and formed the Keelhaulers Canoe Club.

I was told that the first kayak in NE Ohio was paddled by Father Patrick McGuckin. When he entered the Madhatters Grand River Race, they made him use a single bladed paddle. His double bladed paddle was thought to be an unfair advantage over all the others who were paddling canoes. There were no separate categories in that race so everyone was competing against everyone else no matter what kind of boat you paddled.

Don Roper told me how the first Keelhaulers kayakers learned the Eskimo roll. No one knew how to do it, so they went to a swimming pool and read a book. Then everyone got into their boats and thrashed around unsuccessfully. Eventually one person shouted "I did it!" They all stopped to watch him do it again, and then imitated his stroke.

When I first paddled Slippery Rock Creek, Don Roper told me how to run one rapids. "Go left, and then go right, and then down the middle. Or maybe it's the other way around. Well, just watch me." So I watched Don go left and go right...or maybe it was the other way around...and then he went over the last drop and I couldn't see him. But I saw him wave his paddle in the air three times. I wondered what that signal meant? When I met Don below the rapids, he explained his paddle signal. "I turned over in the last drop. So I rolled up, and rolled up so strong I went over on the other side. I use an extended paddle roll, and couldn't get my paddle adjusted to brace after a strong roll. Tipped and rolled three times."

In spring of 1967 I took photographs at the start of the Madhatters Grand River Race, and met Ralph McCarty. He and his son were paddling a wood canoe that leaked a lot. He said the beautiful canoe had been on a famous expedition filmed by Lowell Thomas, so he wanted to paddle it even though they had to stop and tip it up to drain it several times during the race. It was a big snow storm that day. Driving on the shuttle was treacherous, and lots of paddlers got wet on the river. It made good photos, and I wrote a photo article that the Plain Dealer Magazine printed the following year. The Madhatters said it snowed every time they held this race in the first few years

In spring of 1967 Ralph McCarty and Father McGuckin took me and my daughter and our new Labrador puppy on a white water adventure on the Cheat River

Narrows. My canoe half filled with water in each rapids, and the puppy would be swimming in the canoe before we bailed it out. We carried around Calamity Rock. Then I finally told Ralph I was going to quit before the next rapids and haul my boat up to the road. My daughter and I were exhausted, and if we tipped we would not be able to help ourselves. It turned out we had just come thru the last rapids, so we didn't have to quit. Ralph McCarty is famous for his enthusiasm which often exceeded his judgment and skill. He never should have let me and my daughter paddle that day without wet suits.

Bob Marietta told how Ralph led trips on the Yough when he founded Mountain Streams and Trails with rubber ducky kayaks instead of rafts. Ralph told a group of first time paddlers how to run Entrance Rapids...which is sort of complicated. Finally he stopped describing how to run the rapids, and said, "Just follow me!" Then Ralph capsized in the first wave and swam the rapids, while everyone in the group came through without tipping over. Someone should tell some more McCarty stories.



Cartoon by Dean Norman

THE BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS OF THE KEEL-HAULERS CANOE CLUB

By Tom Annable as recalled by Hank, Tom & Reeny Annable

John Kobak proposed in a recent Keel-Haulers newsletter that "old time club members" post a story in a future newsletter about the early days of the canoe club. Hank Annable, being the only remaining active charter member of the club, is worthy of posting many stories about the club, but his most interesting collection of stories may be about the "birth" of the Keel-Haulers and his memories of its initial years. So, Hank's recollections as told to his son, Tom, and daughter, Reeny, over several family dinners (and a few beers), as well as information gleaned from early club catalogues, presents the following account of the first years of the club. It must be understood that many of the "facts" presented in this article are from the sometimes imperfect memories of Hank (age 86), Tom (61), and Reeny (60).

In the spring of 1967 Reece Fabbro, owner of Ohio Canoe Adventures in Sheffield Lake, Ohio and Bill Conrad, local canoeing enthusiast, also of Sheffield Lake, got together with the idea of forming a club for canoeists. They submitted an article to the local newspapers asking anyone who was interested in joining such a club to meet at the local chapter of the Elyria Red Cross. In addition to Bill and Reece, attendees at the first meeting included: Hank Annable of Oberlin, John and Sharon Maroney, and Michael Rubin of Elyria, Jerry Vencel of N. Ridgeville, John and Doris Hutton of Westlake, Randy Morgan of W. Richfield, and a few others.

Because no minutes of these first planning meetings are available, it's not remembered exactly how the Keel-Haulers club name or logo was determined, though much discussion and debate assuredly took place. It is believed that a flag and wood panel depicting "Mr. Keel-Hauler" were created, but their whereabouts today is unknown, though, this writer believes they may be stored away somewhere in Hank's garage among his many boats, paddles, and assorted camping and paddling gear. Several club members always thought that Mr. Keel-Hauler bore a strong resemblance to club member Jim Botamer ("Boats").

The first elected Club officers in 1967 were: Bill Conrad- President, Jerry Vencel-V. President, Doris Hutton- Secretary, and John Hutton-Treasurer. According to the 1968 catalog, Bill and Jerry again served in their respective positions while Audrey & Paul Snahnican served as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Standing Committee Chairmen in 1968 were: Randy Morgan-Conservation, Hank Annable-Recreation, Sharon Maroney- Information, and Michael Rubin- Safety. It is interesting to note that the first membership roster that was located (1968)

included 54 individual/family memberships. The Club's first "Aims and Bylaws", printed in the 1970 catalog, listed the annual membership fee as \$5.00.

The Club's initial goals/purpose, as printed in 1968, was:
"The purposes of our club are recreation, safety, information, and conservation. The four preceding purposes run together in all of our activities. We do not value any one of these purposes higher than the other.

Our present membership consists of people interested in: canoe cruising, white water shooting, racing and sailing. We do not in any way consider ourselves as professional. Our club wants to form a membership group who are basically interested in having a good time pursuing canoeing interests.

Our 1968 events will consist of canoe cruising of various rivers with overnight camping stops, white water shooting in season, endurance races covering various distances, and canoe sailing. The club sponsors two monthly events. Members, of course, can get together at any time to pursue any canoeing interest.

Our meetings and events allow for complete exchange of information and experiences among our members. Any members of our club will gladly answer any questions that any interested person may have.

Persons interested in becoming members are urged to attend any monthly club meeting at the Elyria Red Cross building located on West River Road. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m."

The 1968 schedule of activities ran from March to November and included trips to the: Mohican River, Vermilion River, Sandusky River, Killbuck Creek, Kokosing River, Findley Lake, Clarion River, PA, French Creek, PA, Mohican River, Youghiogheny River, PA, Piedmont Reservoir, Kinzua Reservoir, PA, the initial Sandusky Race, Lake Erie, Walhonding River, Youghiogheny River, PA, and the Cuyahoga River.

Additional canoeing events presented to the membership in 1968 included: the Mad Hatters Canoe Race, the National Whitewater Canoe Championships in PA, a Boy Scout canoe race, Little Miami Canoe Race in Cincinnati, Cleveland Lakefront Canoe Race, and whitewater schools in Brinkhaven, OH and Pennsylvania.

Official Trip Rules/Guidelines were printed as: 1. Always be careful..., 2. Courtesy is essential..., 3. In Camp, the family is the controlling unit..., 4. Practice conservation..., 5. Obey all state boating regulations..., 6. Rules established by campground operators must be observed..., and 7. The trip captain is authorized to exercise judgement in interpreting these rules....

Suggestions made for comfort, health, and safety were also printed as: life jackets are recommended..., for cold weather use a wet suit or bring a change of clothes in a

waterproof bag..., bring rain gear, first aid kit, and sun protection..., for overnight trips bring camping & cooking gear..., bring enough food & water for the trip's duration..., bring a spare paddle, bailing bucket & sponge..., advise the trip leader of any physical limitations you may have..., the trip is more fun if you are in good physical condition..., and have your gear packed so you can get on the water promptly....

Everything considered, the initial Club organizers put together a very extensive list of trips, safety guidelines and recommendations for enjoying the rivers and lakes that the group was planning to enjoy. Hank Annable has always been very involved in the progress of the Keel-Haulers.

He served as Club President in 1970 and was "gung-ho" those first years as evidenced by his active participation in nearly all of the trips the Club planned. This was undoubtedly caused by his undying lifelong love of the outdoors and search for adventure. One needs to understand that Hank, as a 15 year old living in Oberlin, drove a Ford Model A jalopy across the country to Seattle, WA with buddies Dick Gilbert and Jim Watson. He also took his new bride, Suzie, to the territory of Alaska in the early 1950's to begin their married lives together. So, he never had any trouble taking his young children to all of the outings he attended in the early Club years. Tom and Reeny learned very early (and young Chucky several years later) how to paddle the canoe and eventually the kayak. The open Grumman evolved to fiberglass whitewater boats, which became the family norm.

One of Hank's earliest whitewater paddling memories was when he and Tom paddled the Youghiogheny River for the first time in the summer of 1967. They joined up with members of the CCA (Canoe Cruisers Association) and were initiated into the world of whitewater canoeing. Hank and Tom's canvas covered Grumman was quite a contrast to the CCA members' sleek whitewater boats. Hank remembers swimming twice on the run from Ohiopyle to Stewarton. He also remembers camping right next to the falls in Ohiopyle.

Another of Hank's favorite memories includes the start of the Club's sponsorship of the annual canoe race. The first race was in August of 1968 across Sandusky Bay, a grueling 25 mile, 4 hour test of paddling endurance. The positive result of that race was an anticipated afternoon of fun on the Cedar Point midway. Unfortunately, everyone was too tired after the completion of the race to truly enjoy Cedar Point. That race evolved into the first annual Vermilion River Canoe Race in March, 1969. It is believed that this race is one of the longest, continually running canoe races in the United States. This is a tribute to the strong leadership of the Club.

Another event that Hank fondly remembers was the CCA sponsored whitewater weekend on the S. Fork of the N. Branch of the Potomac River in Petersburg, WV in 1970. Keel-Haulers were well represented in several race classes and a few medals were brought home by the Annables, Don Roper, Chuck Singer, and the Linns.

Some may remember when Hurricane Agnes flooded most of the eastern U.S. in early July, 1972. Hank certainly remembers it because he and several club members paddled the New River at flood stage. Hank & Tom Annable, Chuck Singer, Greg Green, Don Roper, and Alan Tummonds all battled the "Big" water. Hank remembers that Tom was the only person who didn't swim that day.

In September, 1973 the Club took over the CCA sponsored Youghiogheny slalom and down river whitewater racing event in Ohio, PA. This responsibility continued for several years. Hank remembers this event as being very difficult to coordinate and run because the Club had never experienced setting up a slalom course or judging such a competition.

Hank's best Club memories may be when he reminisces about the many wilderness canoeing trips he enjoyed over the decades. His participation in these trips started in 1974 with travels down the Little Abitibi and Missinaibi Rivers in Ontario, Canada. These trips were taken with sons Tom and Chuck, and old paddling buddies Loren Schafer, Marty Kopp, Don Roper, Rita Tessman, and Sasha Chudnovski, as well as a few newcomers to the wilderness paddling scene. Hank chuckles as he remembers his old friend, Chuck Tummonds, once telling him, "Hank, you don't take bush country trips with people you don't know."



Marty Kopp, Tom Annable, Hank Annable, Loren Schafer & Sasha Chudnovski ~ 1986
Little Abitibi Wilderness Trip

Perhaps, Hank should have heeded this advice when he took his most memorable trip to the De Pas River wilderness area in Quebec, Canada in the summer of 1983. The trip covered approximately 300 miles and took five weeks to complete. Hank remembers losing about 15 lbs. of his body weight during the trip. Hank and Chuck

Annable paddled a Grumman canoe while Rita Tessman, Sasha Chudnovski, and Sasha's cousin, Mark Kechinal [sic], fabricated a raft made of 8 truck tire innertubes, and a PVC pipe frame with wood sapling cross members. According to Hank this was a challenging and difficult trip because of the inexperience of Sasha's cousin and the very harsh weather and paddling conditions.



Sasha Chudnovski, Rita Tessman & Mark Kechinal [sic] ~ 1983
De Pas Wilderness Trip

After hearing Hank recall the early years of the Club, this writer believes the Keel-Haulers would not have continued to exist without his active participation and guidance. He certainly enjoyed the many trips he took and he relishes the many friendships he made over the last fifty years.

It all started with "Deliverance." By Carl Homberg

I have been involved with water basically my whole life - swimming, fishing, boating, paddled a canoe maybe a few times on lakes. When I saw the movie Deliverance a whole world opened up and I thought paddling a canoe on moving water like that would be something I would love to try. Shortly after that I was driving west on the Ohio turnpike and on either the Vermilion or Huron river I saw canoes and realized that people did this locally here. Perhaps it was the Vermilion race.

I spoke of this with my cousin Ken Rubsam who said that he and his family had paddled the Grand River and there was a race there every year. Our family purchased our first canoe at Ohio Canoe and started doing some local rivers with the Rubsams and a canoe camping trip to Michigan. Ken and I decided we would enter the Grand River race and from there the Vermillion river race where Brian and I paddled and we were introduced to the Keelhaulers.

We joined the club in about 1977 and started to attend meetings. We were introduced to many great people and the sport of whitewater kayaking which looked to be exciting, dangerous and very appealing. Donna, Brian and I bought used kayaks from club members to get started. Through John Kobak we bought paddling gear, made much of it using his kits and expert advice and were ready to start. Brians and my first whitewater trip was on a warm New Years day in I think 1978 on Rocky River with John Kobak, Bob Halsey, Denny Celinsik, Robby Schaffer and maybe others I can't remember. We had no idea how to roll but in Kobak's usual fashion of encouragement he said no problem you will do fine. I couldn't have imagined

the "huge" whitewater and I had one swim but we survived and were hooked.



Carl Homberg, Kuntz Flume Rapid on the Gauley

We attended roll sessions that winter and eventually all learned to roll. Since I had a C1 Bob Halsey was my instructor and my roll was about 20 per cent by the last session. Loren Schaffer was there with a cast on his foot and I talked to him and he said try the roll that I do. He explained it while standing on the side of the pool. I tried it and came right up and used it forever after. I have never seen another C1 paddler use it but it served me well through countless flips in all kinds of white water.

That spring and summer we went on club trips to Rocky River, Slippery

Rock training session, the Yough-thought I was going to die- had great times and were introduced to many wonderful helpful people who were very patient with us, pulled us, boats, gear out of the river when we had problems. We camped with them-we had never camped before.



Chuck Singer, Rio Quijos, Ecuador



Donna & Carl, Rio Quijos, Ecuador



**Brian Homberg, Mezzana, Italy, 1993
Kayak World Championships**

The next year we graduated to the Cheat, many Yough trips and very good times. Gayle, Eileen and Craig became proficient rafters & paddled with us.

We eventually got on to the Gauley, Upper Yough, Big Sandy and many other great rivers. This was in a very large part due to the great people of the Keelhaulers and the paddling community in general.

Brian and Gayle became river guides for Mountain Streams and Trails and through them we were introduced to many more very good boaters including the Friendsville guys who at that time were almost the only ones who paddled the Upper Yough. This was prior to John Kobak introducing, leading and instructing aprox 500 people down the Upper Yough. Now it's so over crowded that we have to find a small nitch amongst the hordes.

We had many fun times with these guys and were introduced to some very unique characters- John Regan, Phil Coleman, Roger and Nancy Zbel, Jesse Whitmore a most spectacular boater and boat builder, Keith Backlund- best wooden paddle crafter, and others. We had great times boating with these guys. When we would see how these guys paddled, I think it improved us also because they pushed the limits and were very inspiring.

Brian got into slalom racing and became very good at it. He made the US team several times and went to the World Championships several times.

The whole family is still paddling now down to 5 of our grand children. The grandchildren got so good so fast and are now paddling stuff that I never dreamed could be paddled or that I would ever think of paddling.

I have been paddling since 1979. We have gone on some spectacular paddling trips. John Kobak organized trips to Ecuador and Honduras - very exotic. We paddled the Grand Canyon with a group of people that I think was put together from Heaven. This sport has taken us to places that unless you see from the river you have no idea of how spectacular they are.



Brian Homberg, Savage River, Md. Team Trials



Craig Homberg, Big Splat Rapid - Big Sandy River

The people in the paddling community are in my opinion a very special group. We share a sport where everyone even perfect strangers look out for everyone else. There is danger involved. I have had close calls but fortunately there was someone there who would step up and even if they put themselves in danger came through and I am still here to tell about it.

We share this responsibility and I hope it always continues

to be the same. I hope I am able to continue in this sport for a long time to come.

Our Annual Southern River Trips

By John Kobak

Over the years this has become one of our most popular trips. **Dave Hoelter and Bill Ridgway**, who liked to race, had heard about an open canoe race on the Nantahala called the SE Championships each June. So in 1972 they went down there to race and surprised the southern open boaters by their skill and technique, taking home race medals.



Nantahala Slalom & DR Race

They told the club about it, so that in 1973 **Hank Annable** organized the first southern club trip. At that time there were lots of kids in the club so everyone headed down for the race and a one week trip with their families. There were 48 people in all that came down and we stayed at Lost Mine Campground. Some of the attendees were **Loren Schafer, Marty Kopp, Dick Priem, Jim Botamer, Chuck Singer, Dean Norman** and me. We raced in the slalom as well as the downriver race.

As **Carl Homberg** mentioned last month "It all started with Deliverance". **Hank** pointed out to us that the Chattooga, where Deliverance was filmed, was not that far away, so most of our group headed there and started on Section 2. **Dean Norman** took a group up to Section 0, which has been off limits to run for years since then. We next tackled Section 3 and 18 paddlers even tried Section 4. **Al Eland** was the only paddler who had paddled this section before so we were in for lots of adventure. **Chuck Singer** got caught in the killer hydraulic in Woodall Shoals, but swam out, leaving his fiberglass kayak in there for 10 minutes until 3' of the bow broke off, ending Chuck's run for that day, and it was 5 years before he tried Section 4 again.

It took us 9 hours to run the river as we got caught up rescuing some rafters who swam the first two drops of 5 falls and then one ended up almost drowning in "Crack in the Rock" hydraulic, **Jim Botamer** pulled him out and revived him. The 4 rafters all walked to the lake. The club was hooked on coming south to paddle each year.



Priem and Kobak Families

In 1974 we had 51 people on the trip. **Peggy** and I paddled a decked C-2 on section 3. **Dick & Kathy Priem** and their 5 kids, all kayaked in their new home built fiberglass boats. In 1977 it was still a June trip and I led another big group. This was the first year that there was water in the Ocoee, as the wooden bypass flume had broken. This started the whole rafting and paddling the Ocoee. We didn't know the lines and didn't play and the water was not that high so we were unimpressed but 3 years later we put this river back on our annual schedule. This was the year that **Don Manson's** wife **Nancy** rolled their van over, on the road driving up to the top Nantahala. Luckily no one was hurt. This also was the first year we paddled the Nolichucky on our way home.



Dick Priem, Bob Halsey & Brian Sammon



Jeff Kobak 14 years old at Bull Sluice photo by Sammon

I paddled the Chattooga a few times while picking up boats at Perception's factory and they asked; "Why are you coming down in June, the best whitewater is in April". So in 1980 we moved what was to become our annual trip to Easter week. **Fred Robinson** decided to take a group down Five Falls in his large raft that year and got it stuck in the big hydraulic below "Crack in the Rock", it took a lot of ropes & people to get them out. **Elliott Drysdale** tried to paddle his kayak through and swam out ok but his kayak surfed for 10 minutes. The river was 2.6', what we didn't know is that most of the locals didn't paddle it over 2'.

I can't remember what year that I had the worse swim of my life at Woodall Shoals. The 1.7' level encouraged our group to paddle right next to the big center hole. Each person must have moved a few inches to the left. I was last and way off course. I got stuck sideways in the hole and could not surf out in either direction. All my friends had cameras and throw ropes but didn't want to throw until I was out of my kayak. When I came out of the boat I got recycled twice until I dove to the bottom of the river and swam downstream as long as I could. I came up below the hole and grabbed onto a rope and was quickly rescued. I will never try that again.

In the 80's we alternated trip leaders from **Ron Montgomery** to **Chuck Singer** and back to me. We averaged about 20-30 paddlers on each of these trips. We honed a schedule that seemed to work well, especially for the intermediate paddlers. We started on The Nolichucky or French Broad depending on level, got to the Ocoee for an Easter Sunday run. We would start with an Easter egg hunt and a big pancake breakfast. We would then head to Section 3 & 4 of the Chattooga and back to rivers in TN like the Tellico or Little River.



Ron Montgomery

Our trip in 1991 was very exciting on the French Broad. The heavy rain had brought the level above 50,000 CFS. We had a group of intermediate paddlers. There were some easily avoidable huge hydraulics recirculating 55 gal drums and trees, deer were swimming by. Part way down, **Natasha Galvez** swam and wanted out and thought that the friendly guys on shore would give her a ride back to her car. They did, but every few miles they would stop and shoot up the trees with automatic weapons. She was scared to death but it worked out OK. Frank Bell's rapid was gone and the river at the takeout had come up almost to our car doors.

In 1995 we headed over to the Cumberland Plateau after the normal Chattooga trip and I got to paddle the Big South Fork with some paddlers from the Columbus AYH. In 1997 we added Daddy's Creek and Clear Creek and Emory to the BSF.



Dave Becker at Corkscrew

In 1998 our strong group ran the Watauga Gorge and we had groups on both Sat & Sun running the Tallulah Gorge. The 58' slopping falls called Oceana scared me to death but I made it. I decided this was the last time I would do this run.

In 1999 **Sue Whitney** lost her kayak running Five Falls. It must have stuck in "Crack in the Rock" and finally washed out 4 days later to be retrieved by a paddler from Atlanta.



Lunch on the Ocoee - 2000

On 2000's trip, or next time don't believe Kobak, when he says Daddy's Creek is open today. Everybody got tickets, except me, I hid in **Santo's** van, for trespassing in the Catoosa Turkey Hunt area.



In 2001-02 Elliott Drysdale led the trips



Brent Laubaugh on Wilson Creek



Dave Broer - Baby Falls of Tellico



John Kobak and Bob Nicholson on the Little River in 2003.

Lee Owen dislocated his shoulder on this run.



In 2004-05 **Michael Duvall** became the trip organizer. The 2004 trip got snowed out on the Little River and the 2005 trip had the most excitement we ever had on a trip. We had a communication problem when I signaled **Bob Nicholson** to wait before attempting to run Jaw Bone, so I could set up a throw line above Sock-em-Dog. He came before I could get set, flipped and swam all the way down to Sock-em-Dog where he went over the drop and shattered his leg on a rock. **Eric Roush** was an EMT who splinted Bob's leg while I raced out with **Joe Yilek** to get a cell signal and call 911. They sent in a rescue team by boat to get Bob to the local hospital.

Lots of new friendships have been formed on these long trips and paddler's skills have increased by paddling each day with a group of safe advanced paddlers.

If you want more pictures and trip details, since 1992 the newsletter has had good articles posted, here are the links to each of those trip reports.

[Southern Paddling Trip Reports from 1992 to 2004](#)

[Southern Paddling Trip Reports from 2005 to 2013](#)

For the last few years there has been more than one southern trip on our schedule because of people having different spring breaks and some people's tolerance to cold weather. There are also trips for different paddling skills.

So I hope that more people follow the tradition and get out on future trips now that gas prices are so cheap.

Two Articles By Don and Cher Manson

Woodall Shoals and J K

Well what can I say about John that hasn't already been said or at least thought about. John 'Mr. Kayak' Kobak wanted to test our adrenaline one day on a Southern Rivers trip in the early 80's? We were paddling Section IV on the Chattooga. When we got to Woodall Shoals, a rapid with a history of swimmer, rafter and kayaker injuries and deaths through the years, we witnessed a harrowing swim thinking we might see our first fatality on a river trip!

Paddling down the river with no problems we scouted Woodall before running it, deciding where, exactly to run, to have the best chance of making it without being stuck or dumping in the hydraulic. There is a sneak route on river right but most of us were going to run the more difficult middle left marking the small wave we wanted to be on to just miss the major part of the hole. After running the rapid with no problem, I got out on river left to say hi to Cher and Scotty, my wife and son, who had hiked in with several others from the nearest road. I grabbed my throw rope - just in case anyone got in to trouble. Several other boaters came through with no problems. Then John approached, but a bit too close to the hole. We knew it was too far to the left and tried yelling to him but he had committed himself. He came over the hump and slipped solidly into the hole. He surfed for a bit - back and forth - dumped over and rolled, then a 2nd and maybe a 3rd or 4th time. Boaters were getting their throw bags - just in case he needed saved when he came far enough out of the hole. When he came out of his boat - both he and boat were circulating and recirculating...his boat finally came out. John wasn't ready to come out yet, and decided to stay in for a little more swimming and breathing exercise ...recirculating every 10-20 seconds. Woodall is a long hole and John would get to the point of being spit out and then was swept back into the keeper depths.

The distance to John in the hole was just too far for us to reach with the throw bags, so we had to wait until he came out of the hole. He played in there waayyy too long and we thought he was in serious trouble. After a few throw bags had been tossed - he wasn't watching for them - having too much fun swimming, breathing when he could and being swept back into the hole; this time he didn't surface for a much longer time. Finally, when he came back to the surface, he was at the bottom end of the hydraulic and coming out. But John, being John, thought he would test our mettle and see what we would think about him extending his swim in Woodall. When he surfaced he immediately began swimming **upstream** - right back toward *and into* the hole...**HE MADE IT !!!** ... recirculating a few more times.

Afterwards he claimed he was disoriented and didn't know which way was downstream. I know better. When he came up - I saw him look toward us... smile, and head right back into the hole. He finally washed to where someone laid a throw rope in front of him - he grabbed it and we hauled him in. I know he was in Woodall swimming for a number of minutes because after throwing my bag the 1st time I had enough time to re-stuff and throw it again.

I think our crew on shore was a lot more scared than Mr. Kayak - I know I had to go find a place to clean my shorts!!!

I just wish we had this swim on film (where were the Go Pros ?)



Don Manson - Bull Sluice

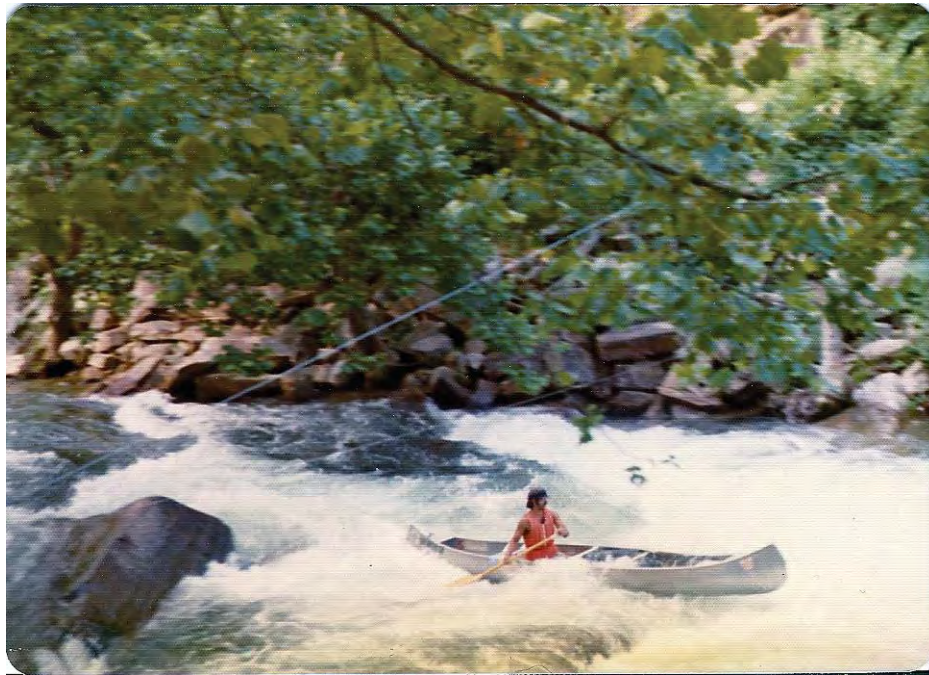


Lester Stumpe - Bull Sluice

Chattooga River - 1980 Southern Trip Crack in the Rock

Running the Chattooga Section IV - Five Falls area in the early 80's the river was on the high side. A number of kayaks and one raft with Fred Robinson, raft guide and raft owner, Cheryl Manson, my wife, Lester Stumpe, Marcia Mauter - Lester's girlfriend, Thury O'Conner and 2 others - a total of 7 in the 18' paddle raft. We were moseying down the river scouting some rapids; Fred took a long time - toooo much time scouting many of the rapids, most of which he was not going to have any trouble with in the raft. I think Fred was much more comfortable with a rowing frame on the raft - having more control with oars. We got down to the Crack and the hard boater's decided to scout since a boater had died in the rapid a week before. I jumped in my boat and ran 1st. Steep little drop between a single, big vertical log and rock. No problem. Elliot Drysdale followed, went vertical and upside down in the hole. He came out of his boat pretty quickly and his boat stayed in the keeper for a while, getting thrashed and spilling it's contents into river. Being the only one downstream, I began collecting the pieces and parts from his boat. Paddle, helmet, foodbag, airbags, sponge, etc. were scattering and floating downstream in the pool. Elliot was swimming to the starboard bank - so, I was throwing the stuff up on that shore. I was going for Elliot's boat when people began yelling to forget that, the raft was coming! Holy #*@& here comes Fred, [et.al](#). Why were they running without waiting for an all clear - "it's OK!" Over they came... and stuck they got. The raft was at least upright with ? people in it ??? As they were surfing back and forth across the wide face at bottom of the drop I was

trying to count heads in the raft as they were bouncing around... several times I could only come up with **6 not seven !** Was someone caught in the hydraulic under the raft ? ***This was not good !***



Don Manson - Lesser Wesser - Nantahala

1980

Other boaters came down the left channel, beached their boats and throw lines came out from both shorelines. But, the distance was too far to effectively get them to the raft even when it surfed to their side of the hole. I got out on the starboard bank (river right) and realized the distance was too great to effectively throw. There were probably 3 paddlers on either side of river ready to throw lines, but to no avail. I got back into my boat and was really scared about the missing? 7th person. I think the only person in the raft that was being effective was Cheryl. She was always scrambling to the downstream side of raft with her paddle deep in the water - attempting to pull the raft downstream and out of the hole ! Others are bobbing around in the raft. You don't want to mess with this mama when she is mad - especially ***scared and mad !!!*** I have heard a few times that she screamed at Kobak, [et.al.](#) on the port bank to throw that @^#*&~\$% throw line and make it to them !!! At least a couple lines got to them - but the raft surfed back into the hole and people, both in the raft and/or on shore, were not able to hold on to their ends of the lines. Finally, one got to them from river left and was able to pull them to the edge of the hole. I got the nose of my boat up to the raft and Cher got my grab loop. I began back paddling as hard as I ever have... Partly because Cher was threatening, pleading, screaming at me to get them the hell out of there!!! We made it - whheeww !!! I'm not sure if I was more scared that I would be sucked into the hole or what Cher would do to me if we didn't get them out of Crack in the Rock...***NOW !!!***



Cheryl Chimera (Manson) - Paddling Nantahala 1980

After counting - there were only 6 heads in the raft. Where's the 7th ??? Evidently Lester and Marcia made a good judgment call and she decided to walk the rapid rather than be the 7th paddler... There she was on shore ! I was really proud of Cheryl for having the presence of mind ? (that is scared sh-tless) to always be on the downstream side of the raft, with her paddle deep - reaching for the current trying to get them out of the hole. She does have a good survival instinct.

Running this rapid made for good stories around the table at the Clayton Hotel Restaurant (great buffet for hungry paddlers) and later around the campfire.

(For those who may have known Fred - he passed away 5 or 6 years ago near Trout Lake, Washington where he lived and Lester passed away 5 or 6 years ago in the Cleveland area.)



Savage R. - It's really hard paddling up a Sluice, eh ?



Don Manson - Tracy ? C-2 , Rich Huhn , Tom Braun - Lesser Wesser - 1980

Racing through the 70's - 80's By John Kobak



The early years of WW boating in our club involved lots of slalom racing. We found the best way to teach boat control was to paddle accurately between slalom poles while navigating through Class II-III rapids. All the well-known paddlers in the world were involved in racing and the USA was just getting into the sport.



John Kobak in 1973 in his 1st home-built Lettman kayak

Charlie Walbridge wrote this long article about [Racing through the 70's](#) He explains how WW paddling evolved through racing and the early names in the sport. He explains how we all learned to paddle in the 70's and then with the advent of plastic boats, paddlers became river runners and had much more interest in tackling harder rivers with new techniques rather than racing.



Rich Priem & Terry Moore - KHCC Teens at Petersburg 1974

There were many young paddlers in our club who were interested in competing and several older paddlers like Chuck Singer and I in our late 30's, that were willing to give slalom racing a try.

The Canoe Cruisers Club from DC was sponsoring a Slalom race on the Lower Yough at Dartmouth Rapid. They asked if our active club could take over the race starting in 1973. In our first year we had over 200 racers register.

In 1974 we traveled to races in Petersburg, WV, the Savage River in MD and the Southeast Championships on the Nantahala River in NC. We wanted to see how the other clubs ran their races and see how good or bad we could do.



Rich Priem & John Kobak at the Savage Slalom in 1974



Jeff Kobak (11 yrs.) at Nantahala Slalom in 1976

We improved the Yough Slalom by having our club members to do all the gate judging which freed up the competitors to concentrate on racing. It was a very popular Slalom race through the 70's, with even some international paddlers competing.



John Kobak in his home-built slalom kayak in 1976

But in the 1980's the number of participants kept declining until in 1987, when we found that we had more race workers than participants. Only 57 paddlers competed



that year and that was the last year we sponsored the race.

We gave all our slalom poles to Bob Ruple to use for his races and training in his River Sport School on the Yough.

My last slalom race in a Mirage in CO 1980

50 YEARS OF THE KEEL-HAULERS

Cheat Narrows at High Water

By Dean Norman

I enjoyed Jim Hunt's story about the Cheat River Race on the Narrows at high water. I was guiding for White Water Adventures in 1977, and one weekend the Cheat was extremely high, so their raft trips were run on the narrows. Calamity Rock looked just as Jim described it recently. I was in a paddle raft with three customers, and as we approached the wave train in Calamity we saw some rafts climb a wave and roll over backwards dumping all the customers. I knew there were people with rafts and throw ropes to make rescues, but was not anxious to take a swim. I asked the three guys whether they wanted to go down the middle and risk a dumping? They had paid for the thrills so were entitled to whichever they chose. I was glad they opted to go to the right and run smaller waves.

One of the rafting companies ran the canyon that day with some big rafts. At Decision Rapids some customers chose to walk out, and the company always sent a guide with anyone walking out to be sure they didn't get lost. A customer still in a boat freaked, "Look! Even a guide is walking out!" Then another guide knelt down on the beach and began praying for God to deliver them safely through the rapids ahead. He did it to be funny, but not all the customers took it as a joke. However, they had no serious problems on the trip. The Cheat is a wonderful river.

Most of the summer of 1977 the Cheat was very low. I learned where all of the rocks were in the rapids, and could just position my kayak and let the current push me through...High Falls, Coliseum, etc. I haven't paddled the Cheat since the big flood that changed the rapids. So my memory wouldn't be useful if I went there again.



An Eventful KH Trip to the New and Wherever!

By Don Manson

In the mid 80's - a bunch of us white waterin' KHers traveled south to the New River for a 4 day 4th of July WW weekend. There were probably 15-20 paddlers including - Denny Cilensek, Bill Bachtel, Loren and Robby Schafer, Dan and Jeff Winters, Jerry Zeman, Bob Spetich and probably Kayak Kobak, among others. We paddled the New for the 1st day or 2; the New was running a summer level ~2.5 foot level. We had pretty regular runs with a lot of playing and surfing. Nothing very outstanding happened during those runs that I remember. But, while in my kayak, I found a pretty little waterfall coming off a cliff, straight into the river. I got underneath it, sitting in my kayak, took a shower and cooled off in the cold water on a hot day...and, had a drink of some very cold, deliciously sparkly, clean water coming from about 20 feet above me. It tasted great! I figured it's clear, cold and probably coming out of a spring?!? (Not the best idea for an epidemiologist who deals with people who become sick from water and food borne diseases.)

One of the evenings we were in camp, we were looking for a bit of excitement and decided to go roller skating in a roller rink in Hico ? It was sort of an indoor/outdoor pavilion type rink - 1st and only one I've ever seen. Denny remembers at least one side being open to the outside. It had developed waves in the floor (warped) with flat sections and wavy

sections. We had a blast - I had a little too much of a blast...I've skated in the past and have usually done OK - but just to be sure I took my helmet and as a joke had a pillow strapped to my butt. I'm glad I wore my helmet to skate but after once or twice around the rink I decided to nix the pillow. During my time on the skates - I fell hard 3 times, flailing backwards - twice hitting my head on the floor (glad I wore my helmet) and all 3 times I landed on my right gluteus. That hurt a bunch ! The next day, after running the river, I was changing clothes in my van and Bill Bachtel saw my butt and he yells - "Wow, Manson - that's a helluva bruise you got! I guess you did need a pillow for your butt." I twisted around and sure enough I saw why my right hip hurt so much - I was able to see a distinct, radiating black, purple and blue bruise the size of a softball. I must have landed on the exact same spot each time and each time added a new color ! Somewhere I'm sure I've got a picture of it, butt I'm not sure you want to see it ?

At some point on the trip some wanted to dry their paddling gear? We stopped in to do laundry, huh ?!? Not me !!! ... standing around outside I noticed a gawdawful big bug above the wood doorway. It had tremendously long pincers, about 2 inches long... longer than any flying bug I'd ever seen, and the flying menace was around a total 5+ inches long. I reached up, grabbed it behind the head and pincers, making sure it couldn't bite me, and was taking it down to look at it...as it spread its wings, arched its back and showed long, pointy stinger like things on its tail as well...Yeeooooowwww !!! These were now aimed at the palm of my right hand. I immediately screamed and let the thing go - it flew toward a bunch of our tough paddlers, right straight toward the crotch of either Robby Schafer or Jerry Zeman. He, seeing this bug with all that nasty equipment aimed straight at his equipment - shot straight up - elevated and the bug went between his legs. Turned out it was a male Dobson Fly...harmless but very menacing looking. First one I had ever seen.

We went to dinner at a nearby restaurant and got in after some had already ordered and were beginning to eat their dinners. I sat down across from Jimmy Botamer and asked him what was good. He had just begun on his chicken dinner and told me to get the fried chicken. It had the biggest breasts he had ever seen ! When the waitress came to take my order - I said I would like the "Dolly Parton Special !" She looked at me funny as I was being sprayed with bits of chicken and mashed potatoes after Jim busted out laughing. I wasn't expecting that ! It really was a great dinner, and they were big breasts.

While in the restaurant we heard the Cheat had some water in it so, we packed gear and headed north as fast as we could. On the way I was getting pretty sick and really just wanted to get to the Albright Bridge and the campground - I was becoming too sick to drive. I think Bill Bachtel took over for me and I just went and laid on the bed in back of my van getting more and more queasy on the way north.

We got to the Albright Bridge and the level of the Cheat at the bridge was pushing 14', just under the bridge itself !!! Whoaaa... Now, that is some "water in the Cheat" excitement we weren't expecting. While the others looked at the bridge and checked the level, I had to get behind a closed gas station and let things come out both ends. Before that I was much too sick to enjoy anything that looked like liquid. After letting go I felt much better and joined the others looking at the amazing amount of water flowing under the bridge.

We spent the night in the little roadside rest/picnic spot north of Albright. Bill and I had found a couple cherry bombs somewhere on the trip and since I was up early, decided this was an appropriate time to use them. Jimmy Botamer was sleeping with his side van doors wide open... hmmm - now that's inviting - good for a little early morning entertainment and excitement, eh ? I stuck one of the cherry bombs on the step inside his van, lit the fuse and ran, covering my ears. Waiting, waiting...what? it began spewing out a large volume of smoke. A smoke bomb - Not a cherry bomb! Bummer - Jimmy slept through the whole thing.

We went and checked the river level again - Still way too much water for the canyon...maybe the Narrows would be reasonable? We scouted that and decided it was too dangerous also. Denny Cilensek had a raft with him and some of us considered running the Narrows in it. The river was wide, extremely big, fast moving flat water with some giant waves and huge pour-over-keeper holes. With the waves in the river, you really couldn't see the holes from upstream until you were just above them, and probably not able to avoid. A slow moving raft would not be a good choice either. We decided not to attempt the run and elected to run the Big Sandy instead. It was running low and boney, so Denny and Bob Spetich ran down to Wonder Falls and the rest of us hiked in to the falls to run their two boats over the falls. There were lots of pics taken of paddlers going over the falls - but they were all in either a red or blue fiberglass boat!

On the shuttle back we still had a "cherry bomb" that needed to be used. Jerry Zeman was asleep in the back of my van and we decided to use it now ! Bill put it in the ash tray on the dash and lit it...(is it a smoke bomb or a cherry bomb - I guess we'll find out !) We each took a big breath of air, rolled up the windows and waited for either the big bang, covering our ears and waiting for my dashboard to take some damage, or smoke to fill the van. Smoke began filling the van...whew ! The air was so thick

with smoke we couldn't see Zeman in the back - but we heard him as he woke up thinking he was in Hell or a helluva fire ! He starts screaming what is it, what's happening !?!? as Bill and I are quickly opening the windows so we could breath. Laughing our asses off while Zeman, mad as Hell, was treasuring life!

On the way home we wanted to stop at a restaurant in the town of Cheat Lake. I was driving about # 2 in caravan of 8-9 vans with Bill Bachtel, Robby Schafer, and Jeff Winters. Bill was sitting shotgun when we were heading west down the long hill on Rt 68 heading toward Cheat Lake. A large truck runaway ramp was coming up - I look at Bill - he looks back, trying to figure what I've got in mind...Yeah - Let's do it - he says!?! (Neither of us are the brightest when on these trips.) I head to the right for the approach and at ~60 mph we are headed into the ramp.

I didn't know until it was too late that there was about a foot - straight drop off from the pavement into gravel at the beginning of the ramp. When I saw that - approaching at that speed I hit the brakes about 20' before we were off the pavement and into the gravel. With 4 kayaks on top of the van, we came very close to doing an ender when the front wheels dug into the gravel. Luckily we didn't ender and I was able to maintain enough speed to get to the harder packed dirt on the right side of the gravel. We came to a stop as all the others went sailing by wondering what the hell we just did ??? I backed the van down the ramp and back onto the highway. We found all the others pulled over at the next exit waiting for us out of their vans. Everyone asked "What DID you do ?" Jimmy Botamer was driving behind me and said that when I went off the end of the pavement and hit the gravel my back wheels went at least a couple feet in the air...Luckily, no ender just a pop up, eh !?!

At a very well deserved dinner we had a whole bunch of things to mull over during a most eventful WW weekend! At least we all came back ALIVE and with many stories to tell!!!!



50 YEARS OF THE KEEL-HAULERS

Memory Lane By Judi Fordyce

As I sell my whitewater gear after 40 some memorable years of kayaking, I guess it is only fitting that I think back on those times. Volumes of fond memories, interspersed with a few moments of terror - such as recirculating in a hole, or worst yet, seeing one of your friends recirculate in a hole, or shatter their leg during a swim, in a remote location. But on to the fond memories....

Back in the day, when I first started kayaking in the late 1970's, we would make our own gear. Some people made their own kayaks from molds provided by various club members. Those were back in the days when fiberglass ruled and you would not be caught dead in a "plastic" boat. My, have times changed! And for the better. On more than one occasion I returned from a river trip and had to make a fiberglass repair in the bow of my boat. Yes, strips of fiberglass and layers of resin, all while trying to lie on your back and reach up into the bow of your boat, and breathe in those vapors - what a challenge!

We also made our own neoprene river wear. John Kobak provided the material and "glue" which we applied to butted seams. To get the "perfect" fit, you would use masking tape and newspaper to fashion a pattern. Then have a friend cut the pattern off of you. The end result fit great! Very customized. During the early days, John Kobak was our source for everything "whitewater" and for a couple of years he was the top selling "Perception" dealer in the US.

Of the most memorable times on the river, I recollect the following. My top ten (though there were many more), in more or less chronological order...

1. My first trip down the **Lower Yough** the weekend after spending the week at Nantahala learning how to whitewater kayak. Several Keelhaulers guided us down. It could have been disastrous without them, but with them, it was a hoot! Who would have thought it would take me more than 30 years to learn to roll. On one Yough trip recently, and in a testament to my husband's ability to teach someone to roll, I became "one" with the kayak roll. I was paddling with two other people just above Railroad, and they instructed me to go first and be safety boat. I ran the normal line (when those who know me, know I always run frog's back) and of course, flipped. I could feel my right knee releasing from the knee brace and thought "I'm gonna swim". But then thought, hey wait, "I can't swim! I am the safety boat." So I let go of my paddle with one hand, re-seated the knee, then re-grabbed the paddle and rolled up. I was certainly smiling in the eddy when they came down. And, they, did not need any "saving"; unlike me, they did just fine.



Judi in KH Yough Slalom in early fiberglass boat

2. Rafting the **Cheat**. It was the first time I had been on the river. It was probably within the first few years of my paddling, and I did not feel comfortable kayaking it, so I went in a raft with other Keelhaulers. Part way down the river, one of the women kayaker's (who was just coming back from an injury) decided she really couldn't make it any further in her kayak, so I was volunteered to trade spots with her, and kayak the second half - yikes! It was just above high falls, I recall. I survived, and actually it was fun, but I sure was scared. This was pre-flood days and I remember running Pete Morgan on river right at the top, before sneaking through a gap in the extended rock divider, to end on river left.

3. Rafting section 4 of the **Chattooga River**, again in the early days (with Fred Robinson). My first time on the river which was a thrill to paddle. And the thrills began while waiting in an eddy at the put-in, holding on to a tree branch, while the group got ready. A large snake fell out of the tree right into our raft! Before anyone (like me!) could panic, Dennis, using the blade of his paddle, adeptly scooped up the snake and flipped it out of the raft. Phew! In later years when my daughter, Kristen and I would shred the same section, we would have to dodge snakes when we carried around Woodall Shoals on river left. We were quite the sight with the shredder on our heads, dancing through the bed of boulders, doing our best to stay away from all the hissing sounds.



4. Shredding the **Lower Gauley** with my daughter Kristen. For a number of years Kristen and I became quite the shredder duo on rivers such as the Cheat, the Gauley, and more. Our minds would think as one and with very few words said, we blissfully navigated the river. After a while, we would find other shredders following us down the river, especially at Lower Mash.



Lower Mash on Lower Gauley, with other shredders following

5. Shredding the **Upper Yough**. I was only on the Upper Yough once. With Chuck Singer, in the shredder. It was an absolute hoot, and certainly had my heart pounding.
6. Sea kayaking in **Glacier Bay**, Alaska, my first date with Larry, my then future husband. We kayaked tidal races, where my white water experience came in very handy. Who knew you could eddy behind an iceberg? But watch out, unlike rocks, they can move!
7. The **Big South Fork**. The river where I "earned" my roll. After a full winter season of hitting the pool weekly and performing an uncountable number of successful rolls in the pool, I was ready for the river. It was a Southern Rivers trip, and we were going to run the Big South Fork, which I had never been on. John Kobak told us, "there are just three major rapids and we will scout them all first. So with a contingent of very strong paddlers, as escort (John Kobak, Wayne Carey, Michael Duvall, Bill Miller, Elliott Drysdale, and Larry), I signed on. The river turned out to be very exciting (perhaps it was the higher level?) with several blind drops, and you guessed it - zero scouting. On one "horizon line" rapid I remember seeing multiple people run with what all looked like less than satisfactory results, so no clue as to what a good line might be. Hah... I got lots of roll practice on this river, but I never swam - yay! Another funny/scary moment was when Wayne Carey and I were the last two boats left in the eddy above a rapid. Wayne, who knew the river somewhat, recommended I run the rapid on the left. OK, I'm ready for this, I have my roll, right? Then as Wayne pulls out of the eddy, he looks over at me, as I wait my turn, and says "but not too far left!" OK, so now what is that supposed to mean? Really? As I left the eddy and rapid came into view there was a significantly mean looking crease on the left hand of the river. I suppose there was a line there, but not

anything I was willing to mess with, so instead I went right down the middle.... and into the hole and flipped... but I had my roll!

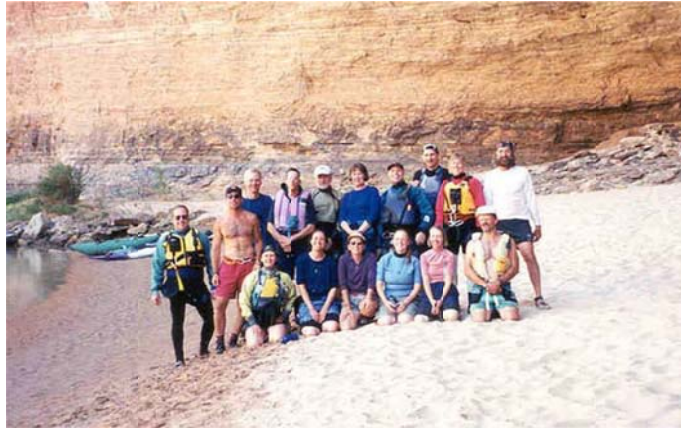
8. Kayaking the glacial melt rivers in/near **Futaleufu, Chile**. Also sea kayaking from the Andes to the Ocean. Wendy, Larry and I started out on the lower Futaleufu and ended up in a small village on the coast that is situated below a volcanic site that had just erupted the year before and deposited ash everywhere. What looked like white sand beaches were really all ashes.
9. Sea kayaking with icebergs among the glaciers near **Svalbard**, an island north of Norway. We were at 80° latitude. Larry and I camped out in polar bear country. The guide had his gun, which fortunately, he never had to use. He had a dry bag for it which he fastened to the bow of his kayak.
10. Drumroll please! The **Colorado River** through the Grand Canyon - simply spectacular. A magical place. And getting to experience it with friends (twice) was nothing short of priceless!



Steve Ingalls, GC guide extraordinaire, at Crystal



Anne Kmieck at Horn Creek



2001 GC Crew, note shredder in background

I want to express a HUGE amount of appreciation to all of you Keelhaulers, who have taught me the sport, mentored me, rescued me on multiple occasions, and became my close friends both on and off the river! Bravo Zulu!

So if there is someone out there who teaches you how to execute a river roll, or gives you that last missing piece you needed to do so, do express your gratefulness. And what the heck, you might even marry them. That's what I did!

While I no longer have my white water kayaking gear, I DO still have my shredder and gear. So you just might see me again sometime on the river... re-living those glory days!



50 YEARS OF THE KEEL-HAULERS

Still looking for some good club stories from some of the old
time club members!