

Southern Rivers Trip Reports

1992 to 2004

Part 2 - 2005 to 2013

1992 Southern Trip By John Kobak

Spring finally arrives, but we had to drive South to find it. After a late spring up North it was fantastic to watch Spring arrive as we drove further South. By the end of our warm week everything was in full bloom and we then had to reverse the process coming back home to cold weather.

We all met at the Nolichucky campgrounds and were disappointed to find that the water level was only 2' (1030cfs). We had 21 paddlers. We got an early start and we never saw anyone else on the river. We had some old friends show up; Don Manson, Denny Cilensek along with Syd Reames from Georgia. We spent a lot of time playing and still finished early enough for a few of us to take our bikes up the mountain for a good view of the river valley. We prayed for rain to bring up the Tellico but no luck. After much discussion Fred Lemke convinced half the group that there would be low water in the French Broad and no water in the Big Laurel so we went to the Ocoee.

The smart group of 7 paddlers plus some MS&T guides went to Big Laurel anyway and found enough water to make it an interesting trip on a new river. 16 Keel-Haulers and hundreds of local boaters out for Easter weekend paddled the Ocoee. At least the campground at Greasy Creek was nice. The next day the smart group arrived to reinforce our numbers for another run on the Ocoee. I saw a swimmer or two but it was a warm day and every one had a relaxed trip. Air temps high 70's and water temp 68o F.

Off we went to the Chattooga. Again, we had a difference in choices. The river was only running 1.6' so 11 people chose to run section 3 including Elliott Drysdale who flew to Atlanta and had a friend in an open canoe bring him to the river on Easter morning. Ten of us, including first timer John Fralick, decided to run section 4 because we just knew the river would come up the next day. Art Vaughn strained his back paddling at the Ocoee and was gracious enough to assist in both shuttles prior to heading back home. Thanks a lot Art.

Section 4 was a nice easy run at this level. All the rapids including Crack-in-the-Rock and Sock-em-Dog were run by most of the paddlers. John Fralick had a good day until Corkscrew. We watched everyone run successfully to show him how it's done. Then I led him down. As usual I had a sloppy run going too far right at the top and had to do some hard back ferrying to miss the terminal hole at the bottom. John did not. He landed in the hole sideways and had a good surf. However he couldn't get out and had to bail out. Not Good. The fast current quickly took him and his many rescuers to above Crack in the Rock but he finally held on to someone's boat and was pulled to safety. No one had any trouble with crack-in the rock at this level. John didn't hesitate to attempt Shoulder Bone. He followed me closely into each eddy. He had a good run but we both elected to watch the others run the DOG, especially after Syd was sucked back in the hole at the bottom. He did many rolls until he thought he was stuck. As he bailed out the boat gently washed into the safe eddy below.

Everyone agreed not to race across Tugaloo Lake but as usual some bone heads Maruna, Wild and myself set a new record in lake crossings. I was a distant 3rd.

Back at camp Stan (campground owner on his motocross cycle) showed Dave Becker and Ron Tomallo how to wear yourself out on your mountain bikes. I'm glad I didn't try to follow them, Ron looked exhausted.

That night we got 2" of rain and you guessed it the rivers were raising fast. Section 4 was already past 2.5' and still rising. We then figured, why not try the Chauga, Elliott and I had been telling the group, what a nice pretty run it was. The river dropped about 150' per mile over numerous 20' waterfalls, not to mention the hundred fallen trees. Sounds like fun so 10 of us including Peggy Bates in Jane's Shredder raft decided to try it at 1" below zero. At this level we didn't have too many difficulties although there was more flat water at the end then I remembered. We walked the first and the last waterfalls and ran most everything in between. Poor Tom Taylor forgot to lean left into the hydraulic pouring through a 4' wide slot in a 5' drop. His brand new Schlegel paddle blade broke in half.

Most of the paddlers headed back home. After five days of great paddling our shoulders were crying for a rest. I saw a lot of smiling faces and watched some of the newer paddlers really advance their skills. This was our biggest and best trip yet. Thanks to good weather, water and friends it will rate up there with the outstanding vacation trips.

Tornados & Floods make way for 21st Annual Easter Trip - 1994

By John Kobak

This was our biggest trip ever. Thirty Paddlers made their way South. Syd Reames came North from his home in Valdosta, GA, in spite of the Tornados that hit the Chattooga area on the previous Sunday and the 7" of rain that hit in Eastern Tennessee. The rain had stopped Tue, the Nolichucky campground reopened and the rivers were falling fast. The trip was on. All we needed now were the clear skies and warm weather that I had promised to make the trip a complete success. Well, at least we got the clear skies. The temperature slipped into the mid 20's on Thur and Fri nites. We had to shake the heavy frost off the tents.

Chuck Singer & I like to lead this trip so we can watch the newer paddlers gain in skills as we try harder & harder rivers throughout the trip. This year because of the heavy rains the Nolichucky was running about 3.3', (4300 cfs). It looks like were going to start with one of the harder sections. Twenty Two paddlers broke into 3 groups to give it a try. It was big water for most of the intermediate paddlers. Things started off with a bang at On-The-Rocks, the first rapid. Two swims in the first group. Things got even more interesting just below Jaws. Three more swims and countless more to come. No one had any really bad swims and the river gets easier as it goes along. By the end of the trip everybody was having a goodtime.

Water Temp was only 48oF and the Air Temp got up to the high 50's. Natasha and her friend were a little late. They flew in from California and drove from Louisville but missed the shuttle and decided to try out their Shredder Raft on the lower river. I think the upper river would not have been a good place to learn. We stayed at the campground again on Fri nite and decided to paddle two different rivers on Saturday. Chuck followed the planned schedule and went to the Tellico south of Knoxville with 12 paddlers. They found that last week's flood had almost made the road impassable. There was evidence that trailers had washed away and that the river was flowing far above the road, washing out most of the soft shoulder. Most of the trees that were down were high above the river and really did not cause any problems. The only excitement I heard about was Natasha and her friend trying to jamb their raft under a fallen tree. They made it out OK.

The other 15 paddlers decided to run the Big Laurel and the lower French Broad rivers. We broke into two groups. It was a first decent for most of us. The water level was 6" which was fine for our first trip. We all agreed it would have been more fun at 1'. This is a very small river, Slippery Rock sized. It has at least 4 drops over 5' high. It moved fast and was a lot of fun. We needed to scout a few of the bigger drops before we ran them. I highly recommend this river, very scenic and busy. There is an excellent hiking trail that parallels the entire river on the left side. It made it easy to scout. The river confluences with the French Broad River a few miles above Hot Springs. The FB was high, about 7000cfs at Newport. There are only 2 major rapids on the FB. The first was Kayak ledge which we ran in the center. Ron Tomallo in second group tried the left side and surfed the hole until he made it to the center. The last rapid, Frank Bell's, was real juicy, several large holes as you approached terminal popup hole. Everybody but Ron made it OK. This time he went right in flipped and missed several roll attempts. It was too cold & high for anyone trying to get enders.

We all headed over to the Tellico which was running about 3' to meet up with Singer's group. On Easter morning Chuck & Jon colored Eggs and put out candy, while Dave Becker cooked a big pancake breakfast for everyone and served them with his homemade Hiram maple syrup. After elaborate shuttle plans, the trip broke into at least 3 different groups running all sections of the Tellico. A few new paddlers attempted the ledges section including Bob Boyce who is visiting the USA for 9 Mos. He works for BP in Cleveland and has kayaked in England for the past 20 years. He had good days on the Nolichucky & Big Laurel but finally met his match on the tough Tellico ledge section where he had a few nasty swims. The rafters did well today but their trip was over and they had to drive back to Louisville to catch their flight to California. Jon Reising & Chuck headed back to Cleveland. A few paddlers stayed at the Tellico for one more day of paddling before heading back to Cleveland. Most of the group then headed to the Chattooga for the last 2 days of paddling. We had to camp at Oconee State park since Chau-Ram campground was making repairs. It was a great deal. I had reserved the group site for .50 per person per night. However a few things went wrong. First they wouldn't let Tomallo's RV camp at the group site since it wasn't a tent. They chased them into the \$11sites. Then, no one else showed up. I knew my maps were not the best but I thought they could at least find a large State Park. Well the next morning the whole group rolled in ready to kill me. It seems that the park locks its gate at 9 PM and they had to drive down the road and camp on a park road worrying that the police would roust them out some time during the night. Turns out the rangers never told me about the combination lock on the gate, nice guys.

The area was really devastated by the Tornados that hit the week before. The restaurant near the park was the only thing that hadn't blown down nearby. Water levels were good. We had 2.1' on Monday and 2' on Tue. Two groups of 7 paddled section 3 on Monday and I led a group of 5 down section 4. It was Cathy Tomallo's first time on section 4. She did great. She claimed she wouldn't have run 7' falls or first drop if she would have scouted first. Shows you, 'What you don't know can't hurt you'. When we reached 5 falls she elected to walk the next 4 drops. The water was at the limit for running Crack-in-the-Rock. Only Paul Wild flipped but was able to roll and paddle away from the deep hole. All walked Sock-Em-Dog which looked terminal. One big hole. No one raced across Tugaloo Lake. I came in Third.

The section 3 groups had a great time as the weather had warmed to the 70's but the water temp was still about 50. Most of the first timers tried to run Bull Sluice. I understand that most had good runs. Our last paddling day was Tue. We had 7 people running including Jane Allinson & Steve Andraka. At the last rapid Shoulder Bone, we were all paddling toward the lake to get a early start home and forgot that Paul Wild hadn't come down yet. Guess what, he got caught in the center hole and took a short swim. Bob Weible was there for the rescue. Just before the lake both sides of the river have been completely stripped of the forest by last week's Tornados.

New paddlers this year were Steve Andraka, Bob Boyce, David Boyd (A boat for all reasons), Jeff Campbell, Scott Debalski, Craig Healy, Casey Kaskey and Susan Vetrone. All had a great time it would have been better if it was warmer but the water levels were close to ideal. Can't have it all. Most headed home to get ready for the West Virginia paddling season.

Hot Southern Trip - 1995

By John Kobak

Our biggest trip ever. **HOT** weather but very low water. For the past 30 days little or no rain fell in the Smokey Mountains. It caused a few people to cancel out and head to cold & wet West Va. However 27 Keel-Haulers made their way down for the summer like weather.

Jim Maruna, Tom Taylor, Peggy & I met on the Virginia Creeper Trail, just North of Bristol, TN. Jim & Tom hiked about 10 miles on the section that parallels the AT. Peggy & I biked the 29 mile round trip from Green Cove to Damascus. This is really a scenic trail for those who like to bike, it's a must-do trail.

Every year Peggy continues on to Atlanta to visit her sister over Easter while I paddle with the club. This year we really had a complicated itinerary. Bob Boyce who was recently transferred to Bogota, Columbia wanted to join the trip so he flew to the Tri-Cities Airport near the Nolichucky River via NY & Atlanta. I brought his boat and gear with me on my RV. We picked him up on Thursday night and camped at Noli. Exp. Campground where we met up with the rest of the group. Syd Reames drove up from Valdosta, GA and as soon as he pulled in on Friday morning. Peggy & Syd traded vehicles and she drove his van back to Atlanta while Syd and Bob enjoyed the luxury of motor home camping.

The weather was warm and the river was 950 cfs. One contingent of 9 paddlers led by Art Vaughn decided to run the French Broad since it was running 2500 cfs. Scott Debalski, Steve DiCicco, Susan Vetrone, Jim Maruna, Tom Taylor, Bob Weible, Colin Drozdowski, and Dan Lichty filled out the group. The only thing that I heard was that Bob wore out Frank Bell's Ender hole until it wore him down & out.

Our big group of 16 paddlers broke into 2 groups on the Nolichucky. Good thing Chuck Singer missed the freeway exit on the shuttle. Paul Hay & Bob McGinley were running late and jumped in line as we circled back to Exit 19. Sorry Chuck, I thought it was Exit 20.

The low level was still lots of fun. Lots of maneuvering and Quarter Mile rapid required a lot of boat scouting to find the best route. Kathy Chapman started out on the aptly named "On the Rocks". Four roll attempts over the shallow rocks, and then an easy swim to shore. Cathy, Shilling did great until the easier part of the river where she had to do a few compulsory novice swims. Barry Adams was sent down by the TRPC to determine how in the world we manage to organizes such a big group over such a wide range of rivers and skill levels. The secret is that Chuck Singer and I have been leading this trip for over 20 years and the same core group comes down and really leads their own way to the rivers of their choice.

Fred Lemke usually paddles with TSRA the week before our trip on the Obed-Emory system. Things were so low this year that I'm not sure where he paddled. All I know is that he tried to paddle the Tellico at 200 cfs and Frank Scarci broke his boat so he went back to Florida instead of joining our trip.

Barry, Syd, Bob and I left for the Ocoee as soon as we got off the river, in order to try to catch up with the French Broad group. The rest of the group decided to drive down in the morning and do a late afternoon run since we weren't sure what the camping situation would be on an Easter weekend at Power House campground, the only campground open. It turned out that the place was empty.

The Ocoee was a zoo. I've never seen that many paddlers in all my years of paddling. Perception Marketing was at the put-in and were loaning out their latest model boats as demos. They set up a Pirouette Super

Sport for me to paddle. The boat carried my 175 lbs without any problem and was very predictable. I only wished that I had the squirting skills that I witnessed others paddling the same model accomplish.

Woody Callaway (Perception's Rep) really went out of his way to assist Bob Boyce. Bob had put lots of padding in his Dancer to help him stay in the boat, but he still could not hold on tight enough to roll. On Monday, Woody drove back to the factory to pick up their new long knee braces and drove to our campground at the Chattooga. He removed Bob's old braces and installed the new ones. He did this essentially for gratis. Bob found that these unpadded braces were more comfortable and kept him in the boat. Way to go Perception.

The only thing I remember on the Ocoee other than watching all those hot dog boaters hog all the good play spots was our five boat hole attempt. Bob, Tom, Jim, Scott and I held our boats together and hand paddled into Hell Hole. Our 5 boat raft turned and dropped me deep into the hole but the other 4 boats pulled me through to sounds of laughter or blank stares from the other boaters. One note, if you try this, don't forget to split up for the last two large hydraulics that follow. We didn't split soon enough and I had to paddle my SS at full speed into the holes and did my only back ender of the day. Our group was then took off to Chau-Ram campground near the Chattooga.

Chuck led a group of 10 paddlers on Saturday afternoon and then again on Easter Sunday after the Easter Bunny left off his usual surprises at each campsite. A word of warning about Chau-Ram, it is now run by a State Trooper wan-ta-be, who locks you in at dark and will fine you if he sees any alcohol (Key word is see, you can pour your drink in a glass and he doesn't see it). The camp is great, especially the view of the Chauga falls from the campsite but don't put more than 2 cars or tents to a site.

The Chattooga was only running 1.6'. This is a great level for first timers on Section IV. We had a bunch; Barry, Bob, Scott, Colin, Dan, Ted Moore and Luke Thompson along with second timers Susan & Steve and five experienced boaters.

Paul Hay, Leo Glass, Bob McGinley and Cathy Shilling decided to run Section III down to Sandy Ford. Leo & Cathy then headed over to run the Nantahala River on Tue before heading back home.

Everyone did well on Section IV. Jim took a short swim at 7' falls and Bob Boyce swam at Raven's Rock. After lunch, I carried his boat back up and he ran it again cleanly. Almost everyone ran all of the five falls, including Crack-in-the-rock and Sock-em-dog. Our probe, Tom, ran Sock-em-dog first and surfed the hole. I waited with my throw rope and much to my surprise and Tom's too, he slowly eased out of the hole and into the eddy without even taking a stroke. No one else had a problem, but they also had a lot more forward speed after watching Tom. The air temperature hit 85°F and the water was fairly warm. No one bothered to race Lake Tugaloo, which was probably why I finished first.

Colin, Dan, Luke, Steve and Susan left but Kathy Chapman, John Fralick, Ron & Cathy Tomallo arrived, significantly increasing the experience level of the group. In our 13 boat group we now had only 1 first timer, Kathy. She did great. Seven foot falls was her only short swim. Steve Foster from Columbus and two of his friends joined us for our run. Steve thought our group ran such a good trip here joined the club. Steve started to paddle across the lake first, again starting our non-race. A lot of drafting was going on and Ron & Bob Boyce led the parade.

We got off the river fairly late and we had to get Bob to Atlanta to catch a plane back to NY for a meeting. We had to go to Peggy's sister first to get Syd's van and Syd then took Bob to the airport with 5 minutes to spare. Nice driving Syd. Bob is probably back in Columbia by now, still trying to figure out how BP dissolves the Cocaine into their gasoline.

When I was retrieving Peggy in Atlanta, Bob Weible led another trip of 7 paddlers down Section IV again on Tue. Kathy took the seven foot falls sneak route. After calling river gages, we determined that it hadn't rained anywhere down south but some rain was coming in on Thursday. Since the Nolichucky was still around 900 cfs and is on the way home seven of us decided to give it another try. It was still fun and with a smaller group we were off the river by 2 PM.

I wanted to head over to The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River even though the level was only 700 CFS since rain was on its way. I knew that the AYH club from Columbus had a scheduled trip so even though no one else came along Peggy & I headed West.

I've never been in this area. It is a beautiful National Recreation Area. The Bandy Creek Campground was class A with paved roads and large sites. The area abounds with trails (Hiking, Biking and Horse). Peg and I started out biking on Thur morning in a light rain. The rain increased, we took a few wrong turns and by the time we got back I was covered with mud, but it was a great single track trail.

We found the AYH group who acknowledged that they would paddle on Friday as soon as their trip leader arrived. I went to visit with Bob Wheely who owns Cumberland Rapid Transit Raft Outfitters (He was one of our raft oarsman on Steve Ingalls' Grand Canyon trip in 1993). Bob says hello to all his Keel-Hauler friends.

Thursday night we had a heavy rain. O boy the river's rising. Tom Hendrickson the trip leader arrived on Friday morning and informed the group that we would paddle the Narrows section of the river in the afternoon. This is a much easier shuttle and only a 4 mile trip with some of the easier rapids. Rollo Marchant another Keel-Hauler was also on the trip. By the time we got on the river it had come up to 2000 cfs. It was a fun couple of miles though a beautiful gorge with towering vertical cliffs, many of which rise straight up from river level for hundreds of feet.

That night the rest of their group arrived and they had one of the raft companies shuttle our large group to the put-in. The \$5/person was well worth it as the shuttle and the river is similar to the Cheat.

The trip starts out on the Clear Fork River and when it confluences with the New river (Not WV New) the flow had increased to 5000 cfs which was listed as an advanced boater level. There were a few intermediate paddlers and they had a couple of swims, but most of the group had no problem at all. You really could boat scout all the rapids. There were a few easily avoidable large holes and lots of good surfing waves. My evaluation of the river is about a 26.

After I rescued the trip leader's wife, Tom & Sandy decided to join our club. I hope we see them on some of our trips. It was a fun group and I really appreciated the opportunity to paddle a new river with a nice bunch of friends. They made me feel very welcome.

I hope we can add this river along with the Obed-Emory system to our next year's Easter trip or possibly run them this Memorial Day weekend if the rivers come up. It's only an 8 hour drive from Cleveland.

Cold Fun down South - 1996

By John Kobak

Our 23rd annual Southern trip was normal. Every year is totally different. Some years like last year are really warm. Some have tons of water, and some are miserably cold. This year it was warm and sunny but each day it got colder. The water levels were normal for this time of year, nothing too high and some of the small creeks were too low.

I thought it was going to be a rather small trip. A lot of people either were waiting to see what the weather or water levels were and a few canceled out at the last minute. We actually ended up with 25 paddlers, however paddlers were coming and going throughout the trip. The most paddlers we ever had paddling on one day were 20 on the Ocoee on Easter Sunday.

Lot of the regulars were there, and some first timers; Keith Gross, Ron Whitney, Kate Koskoris, Larry Winstel and Debra Clayton, Matt McCoy.

Bob Boyce made this his third Easter trip coming all the way from London, England just to enjoy the rivers and the camaraderie. Unfortunately, after a great day on the Nolichucky he slipped coming out of my RV and grabbed the hand rail when he fell and severely strained his right shoulder ligaments. After lots of Motrin and a few days rest, he attempted the Ocoee but decided after the first few rapids to walk back to the put-in. After that he just had to enjoy the cold weather and good friends.

We all met at the Nolichucky campground as usual. Fourteen paddlers broke up into two groups on the river. The water level was 2100 cfs. A great level. We had a few swims, as people were getting used to the river, since it was the first whitewater this season for the majority of the paddlers.

Lots of Cathys were paddling. Chapman, Shilling, Tomallo and Koskoris. Kate did really well, the only swim I saw her have the whole weekend was when she got caught in a sticky hole. She hasn't had that much practice in learning how to get out of deep holes and was presented with a short swim.

The Nolichucky paddlers were Barry Adams, Dave Becker, Bob Boyce, Kathy Chapman, John Fralick, Kate Koskoris, Matt McCoy, Cathy Schilling, Chuck Singer, Cathy & Ron Tomallo, Bob Weible, Larry Winstel and I.

The higher water level made for a fast trip even with the few swims. Cathy Schilling had the most trouble but still seemed to enjoy the trip. We all decided to enjoy the hot showers and make our drive over to the Tellico in the morning.

The Tellico was running 325 cfs, low but lots of fun. We broke up into two groups. Chuck led nine paddlers on the lower river, and I joined the group on the upper river. The last few years I only got to run the lower as I had to lead the intermediate paddlers on the easier section. This year I had a treat, Ledges, Baby Falls and Jerrod's Knee. The low water made most of the moves easy but it was very rocky. Dave Becker gave us a great line on the 14' Baby Falls. We started from the right eddy and boofed the left side of the falls. Some enjoyed the drop so much they ran it again.

A small drop above Jerrod's Knee gave me slight problem. I dropped over a small ledge on to a pile of rocks. Matt quickly lifted my bow off and I fell over into the pool below. Ouch, I scratched my new Pirouette.

After that, we headed down the Lower Tellico and caught the first group just before the takeout. By the way, the nice paved parking lot at the takeout washed away in a flood last year. You just need to find a wide place along the road as far down the river you care to paddle.

Before heading to the Ocoee we had a great meal at the Tellicafe in Tellico Plains. It is run by a guy from New Jersey. We decided he must be in the middle of Nowhere, Tennessee on a witness protection program.

We camped at Thunder Rock campground on the Ocoee River. It is just below the Olympic Slalom Course where a lot of paddlers were training for the upcoming Championship series. Small tip, don't park on the highway to watch them. The park police pounced down upon the Keel-Haulers and handed out 6 warning tickets. Casey Kaskey was not satisfied with that ticket, so as he was heading down the SR64 a little too fast, they stopped him again and gave him a warning speeding ticket. The police are practicing for the Olympics also, when they will have their hands full in traffic control. The course is right on a main State highway.

The Ocoee was the highest I've ever seen it. Water was running down the concrete put-in ramp. The 1800 CFS flow was quite pushy, especially at the first few rapids, until everyone got used to it. Cathy Schilling decided it was too pushy for her and walked back to the put-in. Debra Clayton flipped at Broken Nose and had her only swim of the trip. Steve Foster leaned the wrong way in a diagonal hole in Tablesaw and flipped breaking his paddle in two, losing both halves. Lucky I always carry a spare.

Paul and JoAnn Lang showed up paddling with Eric Link from Michigan. JoAnn is now paddling a Thrill Seeker (sit-on-top) kayak.

Syd Reames was sick and missed the paddling trip this year but he drove up from Valdosta, GA for Dave Becker's famous Easter morning pancake breakfast, served with fresh made Maple syrup from his farm. He brought along a few jugs which we all eagerly purchased. Syd actually came up to give me his Mirage Kayak that he wants me to bring to the Grand Canyon trip this September.

Chuck led the first group of 8 paddlers. I led the second group of 7 paddlers plus a local who paddled along with us. Fralick, Chapman, Adams and McCoy stayed at the Tellico for another run. After Barry and Matt paddled Tellico's Baby Falls section they headed over to the Ocoee to get in a quick afternoon paddle.

Some folks headed home and the rest of us drove to Chau-Ram campground to run the Chattooga on Monday. The weather was finally warming up a bit, sunny skies were predicted. The river was running 1.85' which is normal for this time of year. We ended up with 21 paddlers, counting the couple we met at the Section 4 put-in from Charlotte, SC.

The section 3 seven were Steve Foster, Debra Clayton, Keith Gross, Kate Koskoris, JoAnn Lang, Cathy Schilling and Barry a local friend of Steve's who showed everyone the good lines. Everyone did well and had a great time. A few even ran Bull Sluice successfully.

The Section 4 group quickly broke into two 7 person groups. Most of us started above Bull Sluice to add to the excitement and get the adrenaline flowing early. Bob Weible tried his line three times, flipping between the double drops each time. Little further left, Bob.

Most of us ran the sneak on Woodall Shoals, but someone, Eric?, ran it, getting stuck for a short time but it released him. I'll never attempt the main drop again. I still remember my infamous swim there when I kept getting recycled after I bailed out after a five minute surf. It's a bad one.

We all ate lunch together at Raven's Rock. Ted was the only one to flip there so he carried his boat back up to run it again, this time successfully. No other excitement until Five Falls. Corkscrew flipped Weible and Ted went right of the big hole. First timer, Casey Kaskey did great until the bottom of Jaw Bone. I mentioned that he could run either side of the rock at the bottom of the drop above Sock-Em-Dog. When he got there, he confused Hydro Electric rock with the rock in the left channel that I had mentioned. He hesitated, looking around, washed next to the left side of H.E and quickly flipped He also quickly bailed not wanting to try a roll attempt above SED. With his quick swim stroke and a little help from my grab loop he was quickly on shore sans boat & paddle. The boat, of course, found its way to the eddy below SED, but the paddle disappeared. Spare paddle to the rescue.

While no one was looking I streaked off for our famous non-race across Tugaloo Lake. I beat the group by three minutes; I guess no one was racing as usual.

I had to go to Atlanta to pick up my wife, Peggy. The group started to splinter somewhat. Shilling & Koskoris went to the Nantahala with who? Bob Weible led nine paddlers down section 4 again. I heard three paddlers attempted Woodall (When will they ever learn). A couple got stopped but escaped its grasp.

Paul Lang had a bad swim at first drop and then again in Corkscrew. He was not enjoying his run today.

Part of the group then headed back to the Nolichucky which was still running 1900 cfs. Steve & Debra got there too late and missed the group which was sprinting down the river as it again turned colder and no one was in the mood to play.

I headed up to the Big South Fork of the Cumberland (BSF) and did some trail bike riding with Peggy .Thanks to the KH Hot Line, part of the group then joined me at the BSF.

Scott Debalski, Ted Moore, Ron Whitney and Keith Gross arrive after their Noli. run that evening.

I called Bob Wheely (One of our oarsman on Steve Ingalls Grand Canyon trip) who owns Cumberland Rapid Transit. He was anxious to stay on my good side since he knew I had a GC permit for this fall. If a few people cancel he could again row with us. He shuttled two of our vehicles saving us 1-1/2 hrs of driving.

The BSF was running around 2000 Cfs. I had run it last year at 5000 cfs, so it looked a lot different. For those of you who have never visited this area you're in for a real treat. Anyone with Lower Yough skills should not have a problem here. The water is clean, the canyon is one of the most beautiful in the East and the campground is Class A, with bike & horseback trails, and good backpacking to various points of interest, like some of the biggest natural stone arches in the USA.

The run was uneventful except that we picked up two Michigan paddlers in inflatable sit-on tops. They were inexperienced and relied on us to make several rescues as they tried to learn to lean downstream in large holes. The weather had turned fantastic, Sunny and 70°F. We were over dressed for the first time.

Scott & I did some more Mountain Biking before heading home. I just loved his new bike with the Rock-Shok front suspension. He better keep it locked securely.

I believe Ron & Keith headed back toward the Cheat and Steve & Debra went to the New. As usual there was something for everyone and a great way to start off the new paddling season.

I checked next year's calendar and found that Easter is one week earlier than this year. I sure hope we have an early spring.

Big Southern Trip - 1998

by John Kobak

These trips keep getting better every year. An intensive week of boating sharpens everyone's skills. This year 25 Keel Haulers participated in the trip. We added two new rivers, the Watauga and the Tallulah Gorge. We had typical weather; We were greeted by cold, drizzly weather on the Nolichucky, found blue skies and warm temperatures for most of the trip and were chased away at the end by tornadoes and floods.

People were coming and going all during the trip. **Jeff Cramer** didn't come until after Easter. **Dan Lichty** only paddled one day on the Ocoee. **Josh Kaufman** one day on the Tallulah, **Cliff Wire and Paul Lang** paddled three days. Dave **Becker, Rob & Dave Hammond, Mark & Pam Poljak, and Ron Tomallo** paddled for four days. Others like **Syd Reames & Chuck Singer** planned to stay longer but were done in by the Tallulah. Some like **Ron Whitney, Sue Stumble, Scott Carroll, Chad Weston and Bob Weible** left on the fifth day. This left **Bill Bolton** (now living in MI), **Bob Boyce, Scott Debalski, Mike Duvall, Matt Muir, Jud Roberts** and myself to paddle the rest of the week along with **Jeff Cramer**.

Seventeen paddlers broke up into two groups early Friday morning. Snow was falling in the mountains, a large club from NC decided to stay in camp and leave the river to us. We had a great time on the Nolichucky at 2300 cfs. This med-hi flow provided a good challenge but it only produced two swimmers. The winds blew in late and we got off the river early since we didn't stop for lunch.

Bill Bolton, Dave Hammond, Paul Lang, and Bob Weible found two paddlers from NY to lead them down the Watauga River, a tight class V creek that rates 35 on the KH scale. They came back with smiles on their faces, a great day with only **Paul** swimming. Paul said it combined the best features of the Upper Yough and Big Sandy.

While all of this was going on **Matt Muir, Jud Roberts and Colin Drozdowski** met in WV to do the Middle Meadow River at 1600 cfs. Matt was bummed when he heard he missed the Watauga.

This was the year of the Tallulah Gorge. A scheduled release and lottery produced Ron's winning entry. Ron was gracious enough to share this awesome experience with ten of us. Five people were permitted to run each day. The run includes 58' high Oceana Falls, and 20' high Bridal Veil falls with series of class IV rapids thrown in just to make it interesting. 100 boaters are permitted each day along with 20 last minute walk-ons.

Luckily we were able to get two more permits on Sunday so a total of twelve Keel Haulers were able to enjoy the experience. Saturday had a 40% success rate. Ron, Josh, Paul, Bill and Dave Hammond gave it a try, **Paul & Bill** had swims and Josh got a nice cut below the eye when he went over in the middle of Oceana on his third run. They all headed over to the Ocoee for Sunday's trip.

The main contingent headed over to the Tellico River at 300 cfs on Saturday. Eighteen people split up into two groups to run the whole run from the Ledges, over Baby Falls and Jared's Knee all the way down to the lower takeout. It was a long day at this low level. A few skipped the Falls and a few ran it twice. Lots of photo opportunities.

I believe we had 16 paddlers on the Ocoee at relatively high flow. I hear that **Bob Boyce** got surfed really good at Broken Nose but got out OK and **Cliff** got stuck in Double Suck. I'm not sure how everyone else did since I headed over to the Tallulah.

On Sunday they upped the flow on the Tallulah from 500 to 700 CFS. **Dave Becker, Scott Debalski, Matt, Syd, Bob, Chuck** and myself took the long flight of stairs (>500) to the base of Hurricane Falls. The river starts out with a bang, there is no warmup. We sat there for 30 min before we put our kayaks in the water. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Oceana Falls. Half way down the 58' slide sat a large rock slab shooting a 15' high stream of water into the air. The run was on the far left just missing the slab and ends up by

punching the large hole at the bottom. This hole twisted **Syd**'s back and he was hurting for the rest of the run. He decided to quit paddling for the remainder of the trip. Everyone else came out OK, except Chuck who bumped his elbow. It was here we met acclaimed author **Ken Strickland** (The "Woe" of Blue Ridge Lake) and his buddy, **Hank Zachary**. They were gracious enough to show us the lines through the rest of the Gorge.

The next set of rapids were scary since if you were a swimmer you would go over Bridal Veil Falls. Even though it was a much lower and a smoother run than Oceana, at 700 cfs the bottom hole was a keeper. The only way through was on the far left. **Chuck** got turned sideways part way down and started to scream before hitting the hole. His swimming skills broke him free and he retrieved all his gear OK.

A little further down a rapid called Lynch's Launch spilled 5 out of our group of 7. **Dave** destroyed his beautiful Silver Creek paddle (possibly a victim of the paddle snake). He grabbed his spare and left his broken paddle on the river bank. The last bit of excitement came when **Chuck** missed another roll attempt and swam. A fast rope by a canoeist who was looking for his paddle brought him in but his boat ran down a few more rapids. **Chuck** had a long walk culminating in another swim when he ran out of river bank to walk on, he dove in to get to his boat on the far side of the river, but he washed through another rapid. I grabbed him before he dropped down the next set of rapids.

The river ends in Tugaloo Reservoir and you must paddle to the dam where Perception provides a shuttle back to the put-in. We usually complain when we get to this lake from the Chattooga, but I think today everyone was relieved to finally see some flatwater after this steep run. With unique rapids and huge canyon walls, the Tallulah is one tremendous river. Makes one feel lucky to be there, and grateful to AWA and Georgia Power for making it possible.

Monday and Tuesday are Chattooga days. Everyone chose to skip Section 3 and do two days on 4. We split up into two ten person groups on Monday, **Hank Zachary** joined us. Everything went pretty smooth until Five Falls. The two groups got together at this point to set safety. **Mike Duvall** bailed out after flipping in Corkscrew and missing three roll attempts. **Ron Whitney** quickly pulled him in from the rock in the center. His boat went down the sneak route in "Crack in the Rock". The rest of us followed. At the 2' level the right crack is very grabby.

As usual Jaw Bone provided some excitement for **Pam** (first timer), she missed the eddy move and ran down backward. No problem. On Tue we had ten kayakers, the level went up to 2.1' and we had even more fun. **Bob Boyce** swam three times, but was ok. The non-race across the lake went on as usual.

Next is Matt's account of his trip. *"Then Ron & I drove about half an hour and met **Joey Baranski** and **Jason**. The former led **Ron** down his first time; the latter has won the race. What race? Why, the Green Narrows race, of course, because that's where we were. Was I nervous? Does a dog sniff butts? Hell yes, I was nervous, almost to the point of debilitating. Hadn't slept too well.*

*After a couple of boofs, the nervousness settled into the a relatively comfortable condition of being adrenaline-soaked and on edge. Could be worse. **Joey** was The Man to follow, explaining each drop and letting me know exactly how far behind I should follow. And follow I did.*

*My day wasn't perfect. I hit a couple rocks, and dropped off the ledge at Groove Tube a mite early. And I blew the All-American Boof, getting shoved into a rockjam on the right instead of cleanboofing to the left. But I'm not the only commie in the group, because while I was beginning to shove off the rocks, **Recon Ron** slammed into me, making it way tough to extricate. (i.e., he'd just scrooed up the boof, too.) **Ron**, BTW, spanked the Monkey for the first time. You couldn't hope for a better line at Gorilla than his, and I got it on camera.*

*Of course I walked Gorilla and Sunshine. Gotta show the river some respect, eh? Only **Jason** ran Sunshine; at only about 80-85% (estimated by the locals), he needed an exact line, and that's what he got. I figure I had a good day, but I was happy to finish Hammer Factor (**fun** rapid) and get the hail into my car. "*

Some rain showers entered the TN plateau and brought the Emory water level up. The rest of us met at Frozen Head Campground on Wed morning and decided with the Emory running at 2200 cfs the best run would be to start on Daddy's creek at DBT and paddle down the best part of the Obed and take out at Nemo. Six paddlers had a great time. **Bob** was still in the mood for swimming, but came out OK. He decided to rest on Thursday. We replaced him with **Matt** who had just drove in from running the Green Narrows. He was excited to learn that we had saved the best for him, Upper Daddy's creek.

Thursday morning the ranger drove up and warned us that Tornadoes were heading toward us. We were going to Big South Fork on Friday so we broke camp and I left **Peggy** with the RV at the Nat'l Park Visitor Center in Wartburg, TN. We decided we could get on and off the river before anything got to the area. I listened to reports as we drove to the put-in, a tornado was spotted and was bearing down on Wartburg and would hit in 10 minutes.

Luckily I had told the ranger that **Peggy** was in the RV. She brought **Peggy** inside and the plan was to go into their vault if the storm worsened. Luckily they only got heavy rains. We really lucked out, we drove to the putin and while waiting for the shuttle to return the sun came out and we had a dry day of paddling. However the streams started to flow into the creek providing us with some good views of water falls. The level was 1.5' and rising. It was a scenic run that is reminiscent of the Upper Yough but with easier moves.

We only scouted one rapid this year. I remembered the lines through a couple of others. We got off early and when we crossed the Emory it was going into flood.

Scott, Mike, Bill, Bob and I drove up to the Big South Fork while **Matt, Jud and Jeff Cramer** drove to WV. They had a miserable drive following the rain all the way to the Tygart. The rain hadn't got there so they had a low flow run of Middle Fork and Tygart while we got completely washed out of a BSF run. The river had gone from 1000 to 40,000 cfs. Too much for us as we watched trees, 55 gal drums and debris hurtling down the river.

All in all, it was a great trip and some of the newer paddlers really improved. See you next year.

Black Eye, Broken Ribs, Bruised Elbow and Lost Boat ... another fun Southern Trip

Southern Trip 1999

By John Kobak

Twenty-six paddlers came on this year's trip. Most paddled the four day weekend. Some paddled for the entire 8 day trip. A list of all the participants is at the end of this report. **Elliott Drysdale** came out of retirement and accompanied me and **Syd Reames** in my motor home while Peggy borrowed Syd's car to visit her sister in Atlanta as usual.



This was a year of records; The number of paddlers, Warm weather, injuries and even a lost boat. We started out as always on the **Nolichucky**. It rained the day we got there bringing the river up to about 2000 cfs. We hoped that the Watauga would stay high enough for us to paddle. The weather took a turn for the better, sunny and warm on Good Friday morning. Calls to the Gages revealed that the Watauga was too low and unless we got more rain the Tellico would also be too low. It never rained for the rest of the week and temperature went into the 80's.

Barry Adams in Jaws



Twenty Five paddlers plus a small group of paddling buddies from RBP (rec.boats.paddle -Internet newsgroup) showed up. By the time we launched the river went down to 1700cfs, a perfect intermediate level. We broke up into 3 groups on the river so I didn't get to see the action at quarter mile rapid. **Shelly (Faba) Schmidt** flipped and did a face plant on a rock. Wow, what a shiner. All she needed was a few missing teeth to go with the hockey shoulder pads she wore, to look like a NHL player. I think she was the only swimmer on Friday.

Smile Shelly

Dave Hammond and his friend **Matt Hopkins** had shown up a few days earlier (Spring Break) and were camping downstream of the campground to save a few bucks. I guess this agitated the campground manager. When we arrived they dropped by to say hello, the manager wanted them to pay a visitors fee, which they politely refused to pay and left. On Friday when we got off the river he again spotted them in the campground, now he was serious about being paid. I sent **Rob Hammond** down to see if he would take care of it. Not exactly. After Rob would not pay for

Matt, the manager blew his stack and told us all to leave. Luckily we had decided that since the only good water was at the Chattooga that we should drive down Fri. night to get an early start on the river Saturday..

We decided to try a new campground at the [Chattooga](#). [Craig & Mary Ewing](#) are in the process of building the "Paddle Inn" just off the section four shuttle road. It won't open until this summer but they agreed to allow us to be their first paying customers. No water, toilets or showers as of yet but I had electricity for my motor home. The campground is along Long Creek and is very quiet and secluded. They eventually expect to have a restaurant, cabins and include room(camp) service.

The rain had brought the [Chattooga](#) up to over 3' but it was falling fast. We would have three different groups running on Saturday. Seven persons went to run the [Tallulah Gorge](#) which requires a permit. Luckily [Ron Whitney & Barry Adams](#) both got permits. The [Tallulah](#) is a dewatered section below a huge dam. It has been dry for 70 years and due to AWA's help, the power company has agreed to release enough water for paddlers on four weekends per year. Last year twelve Keel Haulers got to run the gorge which contains a 55' runnable falls (Oceana) and several class V rapids.

This year we had a few accidents at Oceana. [Ron Tomallo](#) flipped and somehow reinjured his ribs which he had broken, motocross racing, last year. He paddled a few more rapids and finally realized his problem. He couldn't paddle anymore and he wanted to walk out. [Ron Whitney, Matt Hopkins and Dave Hammond](#) agreed to get his boat to the takeout by running it though the rapids. Ron T. didn't know about or couldn't get to the foot path that comes in near Bridal Veil Falls, so he waited until they turned off the river later in the day to walk back up the 890 stairs to the put-in. First timers [Erin Bethea, and Wayne Carey](#) had no problems although they did walk Oceana..

Our second group of six paddlers headed for [Section 4](#) of the [Chattooga](#) which was running at 2.2'. [Charlene Thompson](#) (Cheeta -RBP) did a good job of leading them down the river. A little rolling action in Corkscrew, for [Greg Lewis](#). All ran right Crack to the right into the eddy except Matt, Rick & Cheeta, who took the far right creek route. Matt and Rick made it successfully, but Cheeta got pinned, hit her head on a rock, scratched her helmet & got sucked out of her boat. She recovered quickly and went on to an uneventful finish to the day. No race across the lake.



Section 3 Paddlers

The third group of eleven paddlers opted for [Section 3](#) of the [Chattooga](#). I haven't run this section in years and it was at a decent level so I figured we could do the whole run from Earl's Ford to Bull Sluice. We had lots of bad lines at Dick's Creek Falls but only one swimmer. We made good time even with taking some time to run Bull Sluice.

Everyone except Shelly shot the Bull. At this level you can go just to the left of Decap. Rock which is completely covered with

water. It is an easy line. Below 2', most people run to the right of the rock and punching the hydraulic becomes trickier.

On Easter Sunday morning **Dave Becker** prepared a big pancake breakfast for everyone. The time change caused a few late sleepers to almost miss Dave's great homemade maple syrup. We again broke into three groups.

Six headed for the **Tallulah Gorge**. Ron Whitney had to patch his eyebrow after a little tangle with the rock wall in the eddy at the bottom of Oceana. **Rob Hammond** also flipped, he tried a few roll attempts against the unforgiving rock wall in the eddy and bailed. Turns out that he had banged his elbow in Oceana which quickly produced a large bump the size of an orange. He intends to wear elbow pads the next time. The river was VERY pushy at about 825 cfs. Definitely a challenging level that required the group to stay focused on the river.

The remaining 15 paddlers split into two groups to do **Section 4**. It was interesting to watch **Chuck Singer's** group come down through Seven Foot Falls. Chuck came first, misjudging the line and flipping on a rock just left of the right hand sneak route. he slid down the sneak upside down, momentarily pinned on a rock and self rescued into an eddy. Others did variations of his theme, with **Sue Strumbel** coming to rest upside down atop of the pinning rock. A real circus. Of course our group all did perfect boofs down the seven foot drop, NOT.

Mike Duvall did a repeat of last years swim at Corkscrew, complete with a throw line rescue by **Ron Whitney**. The next excitement started at Jaw Bone. Our groups were helping each other out at this point with throw lines. I thought they had already setup a line below Jaw Bone so I headed over to the staging eddy immediately above the drop. To get here, you must punch a good size hole. I didn't explain this move to **Luke Thompson** and didn't expect that he would follow me. He missed the eddy and flipped while dropping into the start of the rapid and swam. As I pulled out to chase him, Cheeta whipped out in front of me and went down to rescue him, however she flipped and also swam, so I had two swimmers heading for Sock-em-Dog and realized that the throw rope had not yet been setup. **Scott Debalski** followed me but the best we could do was to get Cheeta into the eddy. I prayed Luke would be OK as he held on to his boat and went over Sock-em-Dog just right of center. Scott quickly dropped down the Puppy Chute and found out that Luke had made it OK. This was the first time we had anyone swim over the Dog. Cheeta, anxious to redeem herself for the swim jumped back into her boat and attempted to run Sock-em-Dog. Slightly off line she ended up in the bottom hole and took another swim, Oh well it was not her day.

On Monday, the group usually starts to fragment. Six people headed home. Two new paddlers joined the group **Brent Laubaugh**, who was taking an NOC class and **Terry Markoff** paddling an open canoe. This gave us fourteen paddlers which we split into two groups on **Chattooga Section 4**.

The trip went really well until First Falls. **Sue Strumbel** started a little too far left and got surfed in a hole. She rolled and barely had time to get to the right and again flipped as she dropped into the pool above Corkscrew. Safety boaters pulled her and her paddle to shore but her kayak kept going. I told Ron not to bother chasing it as I wanted him to set a safety rope up below Cork Screw before the groups paddled down. I explained that the boats always either stop at the bottom of Crack-in-the-Rock or end up in Dead Man's pool below Sock-em-Dog. Sue started walking.

The rest of the runs went fairly smoothly and I made sure to set up a throw rope below Jaw bone before the group headed down. Cheeta flipped again in Jaw Bone, this time she kept trying to roll. Moral of the story is that you should only try one roll below Jaw Bone. When she bailed out she was already out of range of the throw line so over the Dog she went, it was starting to get to be a long weekend for Cheeta.

Matt Muir (Riviera Ratt) figured that if Cheeta could swim it twice and almost run it once he ought to give the Big Dog a try. Brent and I set up throw lines next to the big hole and anxiously watched. Matt's line was

perfect, right over the Rooster Tail but a little too slow. He didn't get far enough away from the hole and was quickly sucked down into a vertical position. I guess the Dog had the Ratt's tail. He remained in this position for at least 5 seconds and then slipped into the hole sideways. I hoped, could this be the Ratt's first swim in three years? I shouted back paddle, but he was quickly sucked forward into the deep part of the hole and disappeared. He reappeared upside down but free of the hole, a couple of roll attempts and he was on his way.

Now where is Sue's kayak? We searched upstream and downstream, nothing. It was gone. Luckily a raft trip offered her a free ride across the lake to the takeout. She got a call 4 days later that a paddler from Atlanta found her boat in Dead Man's Pool. Where it had spent the last four days was beyond me.

Lang, Becker & Lewis left to run the **Blackwater** in WV at 3.3' on the Davis gage on Monday. Lewis reports "The level was definitely on the high side. It was an awesome run, almost as exciting as the Tallulah (but without as much gradient). It was one long rapid with small downstream flowing eddies. No swims, but a few rolls in critical spots. We all walked Crackatoa, the first main rapid because of a river wide keeper. I walked the falls, but Becker & Lang found enough water to run it (it is rarely runnable). The rapid just after Rock & Roll and just above the Slide was tough. I got spun around in the first drop and ran the 2nd drop backwards. I subsequently flipped. Due to its constant nature, the river seemed to never end, no rest for the weary."

Ron and Matt headed over to do the **Green Narrows** with a few NC friends. I heard they had good runs at 100% dam release.

Later in the week they headed up to the New river and Sue bought a used RPM kayak. They paddled the New at several different water levels.

The rest of the group decided that since there was no water in the Obed-Emory system or the Big South Fork, that we would head up to paddle in WV.

On Tue, **Mike, Brent and Terry** ran the **New River** at 1'. The rest of us took off for a non-paddling day. On Wed. the seven remaining paddlers along with a couple we met from NY (**Steve & Deb O'Keefe**) paddled the New at 2'. It was a fun level. Water levels were now falling fast in WV, we decided to go up to the **Cheat**. Mike went home and eight of us ran the **Cheat** at 2.5'. Big Nasty looked too nasty for anyone to play in. Elliott convinced Steve & Deb to join the club.

On Friday our plans were to do the Upper Yough. I checked with Roger at Precision Rafting who informed me that the Mon/Fri releases do not start until 4/15 and the water was a little too low for a fun run. We decided to paddle the **Lower Yough** which was running at just over 3'. The rain started to fall in buckets by the time we got to the river. We put on early and were off by Lunch time. The river crested at 11' that night. Most of us planned to be home by the weekend so water or not we said goodbye to our fun week of paddling. We all enjoyed the early season warm weather.

Next year Easter will be three weeks later, it should really be nice by then.

Participants

Adams, Barry

Lang, Paul & JoAnn

Becker, Dave

Laubaugh, Brent

Bethea, Erin

Lewis, Greg

Boyce, Bob

Markoff, Terry

Carey, Wayne

Muir, Matt

Debalski, Scott

Reames, Syd

Drysdale, Elliott

Schmidt, Shelly

Duvall, Mike

Singer, Chuck

Gross, Keith

Strumbel, Sue

Hammond, Rob

Tomallo, Ron

Hammond, Dave

Thompson, Luke

Hopkins, Matt

Thompson, Charlene

Kobak, John

Teague, Rick

Whitney, Ron

25th Annual Southern Trip - 2000

80° F and Sunny
Police still searching for renegade kayaker
By John Kobak

80° and sunny was what I promised for this year's Southern Rivers Trip. When we got to Rock Creek Campground, our new place to camp since being run out of the Nolichucky River Campground last year, it was 84°. My promise was short lived, a cold front blew in Thur. evening accompanied by a shower. The good thing was the Watauga would still be in its paddlable range. Chuck Singer agreed to lead the Noli trip on Friday with eleven paddlers while eight of us headed to give the Watauga a go.

Paul Lang and Bob Weible had run the Watauga two years ago, but neither could remember all the lines. Scott Debalski, Elliott Drysdale, Rob Hammond, Brent Laubaugh, Ron Whitney and I were a little apprehensive to say the least. We had been told if you don't know the lines, it could take up to 6 hours to run the 5-mile run. This river is like the Upper Yough but it is much steeper averaging over 100'/mi with two half mile stretches reaching over 200'/mi.

Lots of kayakers were gathering as the level was at an ideal 310 cfs. We met Lee Belknap and Jeff Prycl who would be leading a small group of TRPC paddlers. They agreed to give us some clues as to the best routes if we agreed to stay out of their way. This really helped a lot and we only needed to scout two rapids, Hydro and Stateline Falls. I walked them both, but Paul had nice lines in both. Weible, however, was a little off line at Hydro and swam above the big hydraulic, but he washed right on through. After Ron rescued Jeff Prycl at the bottom of Stateline he sprinted for the takeout. He should have watched out for rocks, he pitoned his Whip-it on a sharp rock and punched a small hole right through the bow.

While we were enjoying our run on the Watauga, Chuck & Judi, paddling her Shredder, led nine kayakers down the Nolichucky. (Bob Boyce, Mike Duvall, Jim Maruna, Kelly Miller, Bob Nicholson, Shelly Schmidt, Sue Stumble, Ron Tomallo and Scott Wake.) Scott tried out Jaws at the 2200 cfs flow but had to swim out. It was cool and windy but everyone had a good time.



Keel Haulers Lunch on the Nolichucky.

The weather Fri night got even colder. Brent Laubaugh, Dave Broer, and Paul Lang decided to try the Doe River Gorge. None had run it before but it was just above its minimum level and they were anxious to bag a new river. The Doe starts out as a junkyard but then enters an isolated canyon which drops over 150'/mi. There were a lot of undercuts but the run was not any more difficult than the Middle Fork of the Tygart or the Upper Tellico.

Bob Boyce, Scott Debalski, Elliott Drysdale, Rob Hammond, Bob Nicholson, Bob Weible and I decided to run the Nolichucky on Saturday. Boy was it cold. The 38° temperature quickened our pace and we did the entire 9 mile run in two hours. The rest of our group headed over to the Ocoee since the Tellico was only running at about 225cfs. However Santo Albright and Kris

Aalbersberg were coming from St Louis and had run the Big South Fork and figured we would be at the Tellico as advertised. So they ran the lower T at the low level and had a good time.



Hot Dog president on the Ocoee

On Easter Sunday morning we had our annual pancake breakfast to get us ready for an early run on the Ocoee. Stu Koster and Boris Glick arrived from MI and Jim Maruna decided to go to FL to find some warmer weather. We broke into several groups and found the river virtually empty. However when you put 22 Keel Haulers on any river it is not empty. The weather had warmed somewhat and people were again smiling. Everyone ran at their own pace

and we headed off after lunch to our next campground, Tallulah Falls State Park.

We had reserved the group campsite and pavilion. This turned out to be a very popular decision. The pavilion had about 8 picnic tables and a large fireplace that we made good use of for our evening campfire. When the rains came, it was a great place to get together and stay warm and dry.

On Monday morning nineteen of us split into two groups to run section IV of the Chattooga. It was running about 1.6', the lowest we have run it in several years so it was much easier. The newer paddlers were not intimidated by the big rapids. That is of course until we got to the Five Falls area. At this point our two groups combined to set up throw lines below Corkscrew and Jaw Bone. No one chose to run Crack-in-the-Rock, since it was posted that a grappling hook was left in the Middle Crack and the Right Crack was full of logs.

This was Kris and Sue's first attempt at both Corkscrew and Jaw Bone. They did great. We had only one swimmer at Corkscrew. The bottom hole gave Bob Nicholson a wild ride before he bailed. Ron Whitney stared him in the eye and said **"YOU MUST GRAB THIS ROPE"**, he got his attention and Bob was quickly pulled to safety. Jaw Bone knocked down a few who got off good rolls part way down. The biggie, Sock-em-Dog is runnable at this level. I set up safety and Ron showed the group how easy it was to boof the roostertail over the hole. No one else made it look that easy, in fact when I ran it, I made it look really hard. I stroked hard at the big wave, spun sideways and dropped into the hole. A quick flip and roll showed the rest that it was just a puppy today. The race across the lake was won by Rob Hammond while I was content to surf Elliott's wake all the way across in my new short boat.

That evening Sabine Iben arrived from Germany along with Terry Markoff via a short paddle in WV. After the heavy evening rains we discovered that the Tellico had come up to about 720 cfs. Fourteen paddlers headed north to give it a try. The rest left for home. Santo Albright, Dave Broer, Scott Debalski, Boris Glick, Rob Hammond, Stu Koster, Brent Laubaugh, Bob Nicholson, and Bob Weible ran both the upper and lower. Kris Aalbersberg, Bob Boyce, Mike Duvall, Sabine Iben and Terry Markoff waited to run the lower Tellico.



Bob Weible on Baby Falls, Tellico.

The high water made Baby Falls anything but. A few walked this one as well.

I visited some friends in the area and met up with my wife, Peggy, who had been visiting her sister in Atlanta. We then drove up to watch the group finish up on the Tellico. As I drove up I saw Sabine and Boyce both get too close to Rob and flip and swim. I made a mental note to keep the group spaced better on the next river.

I checked the water levels and found that the rain had brought the Little River up to 1500 cfs on the Maryville gage. This was to

be our destination for Wednesday.

We chose Elkmont Campground in the Smoky Mt. Nat'l Park, which was also the put-in for the upper run. It's only 2 1/2 hrs away from the Tellico, we got there just before dark. Scott and Rob had to take Bob Boyce to the Tri-Cities Airport since he had to be in Houston the next day. The rest of the group must have got lost a few times and all arrived around midnight.

The Little River was another new river for us. Santo said he had run it before but remembered very little of the run, especially at this high level. I decided that the fifteen paddlers should run single file since it was a narrow fast river without many alternate routes. Some of the less experienced had to be watched closely but everybody did great and had a good spacing all the way down to the Sinks, an 8.5 mile run. A local paddler said that this was about as high as he had run the Sinks and showed everyone the lines to avoid the large hydraulic that is just above the ten foot falls. Lots of people including me decided to walk it and end their trip there. The remaining seven paddlers paddled an additional 3.5 mi. to the Elbow. The local paddler says he always walks the Elbow but Santo and Boris gave it a try. They both made it fine but it is a tough class 5 drop.



Brent runs Sinks Falls of Little River.

The rains had also made it to the Obed and Big South Fork area of TN so off we went to Frozen Head SP Campground about 2 hours west. We were now down to 11 paddlers losing Bob Nicholson, Bob Weible, Mike Duvall and Elliott Drysdale who opted to head home. These were the lucky guys.

The Obed had come up to 2500 cfs, so I knew that Daddy's Creek would have enough water. This is the best run in the Obed Wild and Scenic River system. All

the other years that I have paddled here you needed to paddle Mon. to Thur since the Catoosa Wildlife Area closes some of the access roads to hunters only.

This being a Thursday off we headed to the put-in. When asked, "What do those signs mean, Big Game Hunters Only", I remarked, "Oh they probably just put the signs up early.. look the gates are open." We had a great day on the river. The sun was out, temperatures had finally warmed into the 70's. The 1.4' level was good. Sabine had a good day but Terry had a few short swims. Boris and Stu went off well ahead of the group wanting to get a fast start back to MI. The river starts out easy and then has a steep section full of house size rocks. It reminds me a lot of the Upper Yough, however it is not nearly as hard.

We had a little surprise waiting for us at the takeout (DBT), two wildlife rangers. It turns out that the area was closed for the entire week for turkey hunters only.

Keel Haulers get arrested for trespassing at Daddy's Creek.



They asked everyone to produce their ID. Since I had none, I wandered off and quietly changed clothes and crawled into the back of Santo's Cargo van. Kris also stayed in the van. The rangers proceeded to write trespassing tickets to everyone else to the tune of \$142.50/person.

Not too many smiling faces anymore, especially when Santo drove away with the rangers wondering where those other two paddlers had gone.

I split the fine with Santo who had successfully hid me out of sight. Santo, Kris and I decided to head up to the Big South Fork which had come up to 3000 cfs. Dave & Brent went to WV where they found the Cranberry River running at 4.5'. They also hit the Upper Meadow at 1500 cfs. Lots of first time runs for Brent & Dave although the bitter taste of the big fine just wouldn't go away. Santo & I had a fun run on the BSF on Friday and then Santo ran with Kris on Saturday while Peggy and I headed home.

This year's trip was the biggest and best yet, taking into account water levels and all the new rivers we had run. I really enjoy watching everyone's skill increase with the full week of challenging paddling. The weather wasn't as good as some of our trips, even those that were as much as 4 weeks earlier and the big fine....nobody's perfect.

Southern Rivers Trip Spring 2001 (sans John Kobak?!)

by Judi Cleary (with a little help from Rob Hammond and Elliott Drysdale)

Yes, well actually John was there in spirit, even though his mysterious illness kept him from being there in person. And he was religiously there on the other end of the cellular phone, providing us with river levels and suggestions as to where to paddle next. I must say John did an excellent job on the weather this year, with very warm sunny days, at least for the first four days of paddling.

The trip began at the Nolichucky Campground where people began rolling in during the afternoon of Thursday, April 12. Paddlers this year included: Chuck Singer, Judi Cleary, her 14 year-old daughter Kristen Haase, Elliott Drysdale (stand-in trip leader), Rob Hammond, Mike Duvall, Casey Kaskey, Sue and Ron Whitney, Ron Tomallo, Shelley Schmidt, Bob Weible, Bob Boyce, Steve Bateman, Ann Corey, Chris Von Kiehl, Wayne Carey, Joe Okoniewski, Brad Guess, Bill Waickman, Dick Murr and Syd Reames.



Trip Leader: Elliott Drysdale

Friday we paddled the Nolichucky,. The level was low at about 1500 cfs. Everyone did very well. Sue did an excellent surf at Jaws. The hole was sticky, a fact that Chuck demonstrated. The day started with rain but turned beautiful and sunny before long. For dinner we tried out a new Bar-B-Q place ("River's Edge") that just opened at a local rafting outfitters (Cherokee Adventurers). The new wooden building was very pleasant and the food was very good. The service was very slow, most likely due to their sudden initial growth. Definitely worth giving it a try again next year.

Saturday Ron Whitney and Wayne took off to paddle Tallulah Gorge. The rest of us went to the Tellico which was running somewhere around 350 cfs. One group started upstream to run the ledges, Baby Falls, and Jared's Knee. Ann and Shelley both pitoned in at the Ledges and Shelley's boat is a bit snub nosed now. Both suffered foot injuries but recovered quickly.

When we pulled in at the put-in for the lower section we were greeted with the welcome sight of Syd Reames and his wife Tania. Syd was dressed and ready to paddle and it was wonderful to see him on the river again. This was his first white water trip since his fateful 50+ foot cliff jump in Mexico over a year ago when he broke his back. You would never know it to see him standing there and to see him on the river. He successfully executed a roll with quick precision. Syd paddled the lower section with Casey, Bob Boyce, Chuck and me in my kayak and Kristen in her inflatable. After pinning in the first rapid under the bridge (well, the level was very low with rocks sticking out everywhere), I did well for the rest of the run and really enjoyed this beautiful creek and it's fun chutes. After paddling we headed for the Ocoee and ate at the Mexican restaurant (El Rio) in Copper Hill.



On Easter morning it was pouring down rain, as we prepared to run the Ocoee. Later on though the sun would break through (after all, it was SUNDAY). The Ocoee running at 1200cfs had it's usual Easter morning low number of paddlers. Everyone seemed to have great runs. Kristen enjoyed her first Ocoee descent (in shredder with Mom) and particularly liked clearing out the kayakers at Hell Hole. This was Chuck's idea as he closely followed the shredder leading a line of club kayakers through the hole. He even demonstrated how to back ender to the loud cheers of onlookers.



Meanwhile (still Sunday), at the Tallulah Gorge, three paddlers (Ron Whitney, Wayne and Rob Hammond) descended the too-many-steps-to-count into the gorge. Before this point, Rob Hammond had decided he would not run Oceana. Having run it before, he decided he didn't need to do it again. But as he started to portage around, something went wrong. You'll have to ask Rob for the details, but I will tell you that he did walk away with only a slight limp and boat with a stubbier nose! But there was a lot of talk around the fire that night about whether it is technically a swim if you aren't in your boat to begin with (hmm?).

Farther down the river, Ron Whitney leading the other two boaters, took a left line at a blind drop (but then they all are on the Tallulah), only to find a nasty undercut at the bottom of the drop. He did a rear ender just before the undercut, and went into it upside down! Fortunately after a few moments of being stuck upside down, under water, the undercut decided that it was not really hungry and spit him out, with nothing more than a sore back!

By Monday, we were down to 15 kayakers plus Kristen and I in the shredder as we headed down the Chattooga, Section IV. It was so warm and sunny that every snake in the area was out sunning itself.



It was a great day on the river which was running 1 foot 5 inches on the USGS (internet) gauge (or 1 foot 3 inches on the river gauge). Everyone ran Seven Foot Falls and no one flipped! We lunched at Raven's and soaked in the rays. While running Entrance rapid right above Five Falls, Kristen and I flipped going over a pourover, but both of us performed Olympic swims to make it to shore before the next drop (pshew!). Many excellent runs were made in the Five Falls, including first-timer Brad Guess.



Kristen runs Ravens Rock



At "Sockem Dog", Chuck ran a sneak run on the left, which is a small chute called Puppy slot, soon to be re-named "Breakum Paddle", for self explanatory reasons. Fortunately someone threw him another paddle to complete the rapid, and Bob Boyce had a break-a part that Chuck used for the rest of the trip. The group watching Chuck was just discussing how someone had been trapped in an undercut there and they started yelling to Chuck to move downstream as he suddenly emerged from the rock. (Author's note: Fortunately, I was not watching as this occurred!) WARNING: Do NOT run Puppy slot at low water; it can be dangerous.



Safety was set at every major rapid. This successful and very much appreciated effort was led by Ron Whitney with his usual expertise.

The shredder team gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Joe Okoniewski in portaging the shredder in the five falls area, and Chuck and Casey who provided assistance in pushing and pulling us across the lake.

The weather turned cold Monday night and by Tuesday it was snowing (yuk!). Not surprisingly, the group was dwindling. A small group of paddlers: Elliott Drysdale, Rob Hammond, Joe Okoniewski, Steve Bateman, Casey Kaskey and

Wayne Carey headed for Daddy's Creek. The drive on route 28 across the mountains in a snow storm was a real hoot. The paddlers checked in with the Daddy's Creek ranger to reconfirm that the access was indeed open and also got local maps for the shuttle. Daddy's Creek was at 2800 cfs (Obed) and Joe, who had run it at 1200 decided not to run it that day and start the long drive home. This put a scare into others who had not run it before.

This also left nobody in our group who had run this before and so while we knew every drop was runnable, it is nerve racking to drop into blind drops. Santo Albright, Brendt Laubaugh, David Broer and Bill Waickman joined our group while Kris Aalbersberg took the day off and shuttled for them. This group was shadowing the main Southern Rivers Trip, sometimes only a day and a different river behind the main group. They then decided to run a small feeder creek to avoid the flat starting section. We met them just at the beginning of the "real" rapids.

This river is a 3-4 class river, with a lot of technical boating. It is something like the Upper Yough, but without the attitude! All boaters had a great time, and unlike last year, were not met at the takeout by rangers giving out \$142 tickets to everyone for trespassing during the turkey-hunting season. This year we checked the Internet and the park office before venturing into the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area, without a turkey-hunting license.

The air and water was warm and Daddy's Creek is one of those rivers that is a must to add to the intermediate paddler's repertoire.

That night we got pizza and camped at Frozen Head Campground. Our paddling gear that we set out to dry froze solid but the next day started to warm up again.

Wednesday, the group, sans the shadow people, went to the Big South Fork (running at 2900 cfs), which brags of the largest canyon east of the Grand Canyon. The shuttle is well marked with signs. Again, this was a first run for all of us. We knew that the two big drops were the "Washing Machine" and the "EII". We paddled for two hours and stopped for lunch, assuming that we had already run all the big rapids. When we did come to the "Washing Machine" Elliott ran down a side path and directed the remaining group down the main route over the "Washing Machine". Everybody cleared the entrance hole but Bob Boyce got stalled on the down stream boil and baled. It was an exciting swim with Rob Hammond helping with a throw line.

At the "EII" Steve Bateman swam the entire length and came out like a drown rat. Everybody else ran well.

That night Wayne Carey, Rob Hammond, Bob Boyce and Elliott Drysdale headed off for the Cheat. The good news was that the Cheat was at 3 feet and forecast warmer weather. The bad news was that it was an eight

hour drive. We stopped at a rest stop outside Charleston.

Thursday we met Ron and Sue Whitney at the Cheat take out. They had spent the last two days at a hotel with a heated pool. Ron had to sneak his kayaks into his room through a window at night. (Now where was their new pup, Ely one wonders?)

The Cheat was at 3.2 feet and pushy. While the air was about 50 degrees, the water was cold. Wayne, Ron and Sue decided to go the Upper Yough while the rest of the group went home.

As a follow up, Wayne ran the Lower Yough at 4.2 feet the next day. He also read that a young boy had drowned on the Big South Fork on a family canoe outing on the lower section at Angles Falls while we were on the upper section of the river.

Just to let you know, John, we really did miss you on this trip and definitely look forward to having you along next year. And a special thanks to Elliott for filling some mighty big shoes and making it look so easy!

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 CopperHill. 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.

Big Spring Trip

By John Kobak

[Click pictures for bigger view](#)

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.

2004 SOUTHERN RIVERS TRIP IMAGES

by Michael Duvall

I recently asked John Kobak, who led the Southern Rivers Trip, if anyone was writing a trip report. He said that if he wrote it he would have to report that I swam. To that my reply is "What's new!!" But I must admit that my swim left a lasting image in the mind of everyone who saw it, but I will get to that in good time. There were however some other great images that I can recall. I will try to share these images with everyone as I give the basic day by day description of the trip. We met Friday at Warrior Path State Park to run the Nolichucky. Elliott Drysdale and Rob Hammond rode with John Kobak in the RV. Lee Owens was there with KC, I haven't seen Lee since he dislocated his shoulder on the last Southern trip. Scott and his son Greg were there and Greg was looking to do some big drops. Brad Guess and Sherry came with Brad Guess's car being questionable. Chuck Singer, Judi and Kristin doing kayaking and shredding. Bob Weible came down from Akron. Ed Charlton came along to see if he could handle some new rivers.

The Nolichucky was kind of low, only 1500 cfs, so there was no carnage to report. The low levels meant that "Jaws" was a very friendly surf wave. Everyone did well through "On the Rocks" and the "Quarter Mile." The only negative thing was that the park and play boaters never yielded to the boaters coming down stream. Dam "Hole hogs!!"

After much discussion, the plan for Saturday was for some people to do the French Broad and some to go directly to the Ocoee for two days. I voted for the French Broad because it was the only other river that had water, even if it was at the minimum level, and besides I had never been there. So our group of Ed, Chuck, Judi, Kristin, Rob and Lee set off for the French Broad. Good thing Chuck led the shuttle because I would have never found it. Here is where I got the first of the memorable image. It was the look on the faces of Sherry and Ed when they ran Kayakers Ledge. I had gotten out with a rope and set safety so I could see just how big their eyes got. There were even a few cameras to record the event. I don't know about Sherry but I know it must have been the biggest drop Ed had run at that time.

Easter Sunday the group reunited at the Ocoee. Of course it is tradition to have a pancake breakfast with **Becker's real maple syrup and get on the river before the hordes of rafts. I think everyone ran straight** through "Hell Hole" without incident but very few got in line to play there. Even though we were early there must have been 30 park and play boaters there. If you have never been there before, it is worth it to get in line and watch the locals. They were doing cartwheels and loops and making it look easy.

Monday was the Chattooga; section IV, the river made famous by the movie Deliverance. The level was low, only about 1.5 ft but still fun. "Screaming Left Turn" was just a whisper. We wondered what "Woodall Shoals" would be like at this level but the right Sneak line was there but just a little scrapey. **"Ravens Rock"** is always fun to watch first timers run. The correct line is to drift into the drop very close to the left shore and ride a diagonal wave to the center of the river. Some hit the diagonal wave too hard and punched through and rode over a big rock into the hole at the bottom. Although the drop looks impressive it is easy and **everyone did ok. "Seven Foot Falls" is always a hoot. "Aim for the rock on the right" is the basic instruction** and as I recall everyone did well. Five falls is always challenging even at a low level. Ed had decided ahead of **time that he would walk around this so he ran "Entrance" then walked to below "Sock-Em-Dog".**

"Corkscrew" always has my name and this was no exception, I flipped in the middle but hung in and rolled at the bottom. Sherry ran it fine, it was nothing! Everyone ran it just fine and nobody needed the safety rope. The level was so low that when we got to "Crack in the Rock", none of the cracks were runnable so we all **walked. We all had to walk "Sock-Em-Dog" also. I think Sherry was the winner in the race** across Lake Tugaloo. The take out provided another memorable Image, a '90 Thunderbird was being towed out of the lake. This also provided the quote of the trip, when asked how far the car went into the water an observer answered, "Not too far, I could still see the headlights."

We got some rain so some of the creeks we skipped on way down were now running, but we had already lost a couple of paddlers. Chuck, Judi and Kristin left Sunday afternoon. Lee and KC headed to Florida after the French Broad. And now Brad and Sherry headed back after the Chattooga. The remaining paddlers headed back to the Tellico. When we got to the Tellico I went to the gauge to get a reading, 2.5 which works out to about 500 cfs which is perfect, just enough water but not pushy. This is where I provided an image for

everyone. It was just the first or second ledge of the "Ledges" section. My line was not good and I kinda stalled out going over the ledge. Then, after this drop hit some rocks and flipped. I tried a couple of roll attempts but decided to bail. I wasn't sure where I was when I bailed but I was getting worked after my wet exit. Well it seems that I exited just as I was starting over the next 8 foot ledge. Everyone could see the exit perfectly because I was coming out of my boat through the curtain of the waterfall. I have been told it was very picturesque. After that experience I decided not to provide any more lasting images so I walked Baby Falls.

It was at "Baby Falls" **that I viewed another image, the facial expressions between** Greg Debalski and his father Scott. Greg really wanted to run the falls because running a big drop was the main reason that he came on the trip. However, he saw the concerned look Scott's face so with a sad face of his own he walked "Baby Falls". **After Greg did well on "Jared's Knee" I am sure Scott was confident that Greg would have done** fine going over the falls, but there is always next year.

Tuesday night we went to the Little River near Gatlinburg in the Smokey Mountains. As we drove along side the river to the National park we could see that the Little **was flowing well. We stopped at the "Sinks" to** judge how much water was in the river. All I can say is that it looked pretty juicy. Wednesday we awoke to what turned out to be the final image of the trip, 3 inches of snow covering the ground, our cars, and all the gear hanging on the line. Seeing the snow and below freezing temperatures we all forgot about the Little and decided to go home.

These are the Southern Rivers Trip images.