

# River Run

Rafting tales and culinary treats on the Salmon, Idaho's legendary "River of No Return." By Judy DiEdwardo

**T**he funny thing about "adventures of a lifetime" is that they never start out that way. I think about this as I board an early flight to Boise for a weeklong rafting expedition down 80 miles of Idaho's legendary Salmon River. But this time I have reason to expect an adventure: The Salmon, a one-way ticket through 2.2 million acres of pristine wilderness, is known as the "River of No Return."

My main concern right now is whether I packed enough warm clothes. But the owner of Salmon River Outfitters, 20-plus-year river veteran Steven Shephard, assured me that the prep list included in my guest packet was thorough and quite adequate, and he should know.

Shephard founded Salmon River Outfitters as a deluxe river-rafting company more than a decade ago, after working for other Northwest outfitters. The river is an unforgiving place, and Shephard has learned the importance of customer service—and the dangers of poor planning, mismanagement and false promises. He is a stickler for detail and vigilant about everything from passenger comfort to maintaining gourmet standards for every meal—a signature of Shephard's trips.

AT 8 A.M. ON Friday, outside the Stagecoach Inn in Salmon, Idaho, a transition depot to the put-in point two hours away, the parking lot is flooded with groups of rafters, all nervous with anticipation. I can't help feeling that we're characters in an *Outward Bound* documentary. We include an anesthesiologist from Bellevue, Washington, with two teenage daughters; a couple from Carmichael, California, with *their* two teenage daughters; two lawyers, from San Francisco and Lake Tahoe; a couple from Oakland; the New Zealand father of one of the guides; a photographer; and me, the writer.

We board the River Rat Express, a converted school bus, and follow the swift river along its north bank to the Salmon River Lodge (800-635-4717), where we will spend the night.

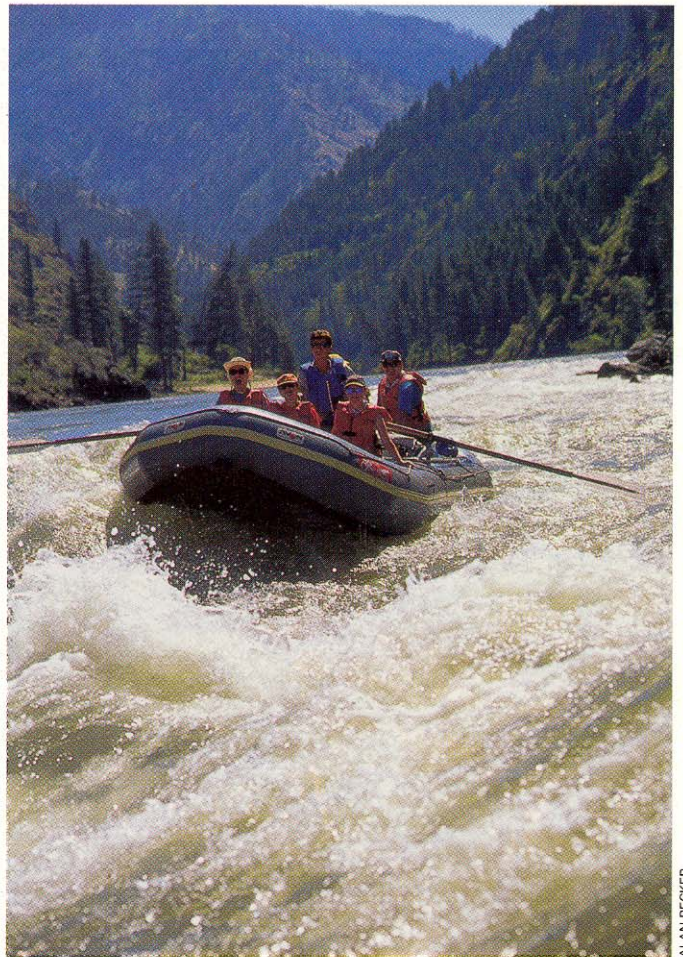
THE LODGE'S CARETAKERS, Lavon and Colleen James, treat us to a generous breakfast the next morning before saying goodbye at the river's edge. Four Avon oar boats neatly loaded with supplies are divided among six guides and 14 guests. The bow and stern of each boat belong to the passengers, while the midsection carries equipment and the helmsperson.

Giddy from anticipation, we don our life vests, climb inside the bobbing vessels and wave farewell. We belong to the Salmon now. And for a moment, the raucous laughter ceases and mouths

grow dry as we feel the power of the frigid water beneath us.

The air temperature is about 60 degrees, and the sun can't climb over the steep walls of the canyon fast enough. I hope I'm not splashed by the churning water ahead. Too late: The fast-approaching Killum Rapid dishes out a spray of icy water and I am initiated, exhilarated—and thankful it's summer.

Although the excitement lasts less than a minute, in the lead raft we are still talking about it when we arrive at the next mogul of churning water. This time we know how to brace ourselves, and we greet this gentle roller coaster with a little more bravado. The warm sun quickly dries us, but the sheer canyon walls leave us speechless.

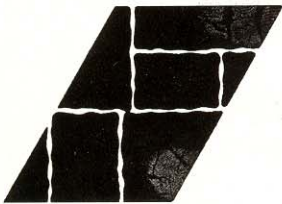


ALAN BECKER

# slate™

*Slate, Roofing Slate,  
Flooring Slate Tiles, Showrooms,  
Brochures, Large Inventory.*

## AMERICAN SLATE COMPANY



*The Experts in Slate*

532 1st Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98104  
206/938-3718

• CIRCLE 41 ON READER INFORMATION CARD.

While the Salmon's white water has claimed its share of inattentive boaters, it is actually quite tame, punctuated by just enough Class III and IV rapids along the way to make it interesting, our guides tell us. The South, Middle and East forks flow north. The river's most daring branch is the Middle Fork, but its 100 miles—some of them blistering white water—aren't appropriate for neophytes.

We travel instead along the river's main channel. Suitable for all levels of experience, it has its share of turbulent rapids as well as long, lazy stretches that allow for conversation and sightings of bighorn sheep, moose and bears.

The Salmon River still has salmon, but nowhere near the number it once had. A combination of factors has contributed to their near extinction: Dams on the lower rivers have interfered with migration patterns, and sediment from deforestation and pollution have made it hard for salmon eggs to survive.

The river was first encountered by Lewis and Clark in 1804, but had been home to the Nez Perce and Shoshone Indians for 8,000 years. The search for gold in the late 19th century opened the Salmon River Canyon to white settlement—and boats that were capable of running its rapids.

As mines proliferated, the need to transport equipment and people grew. Flat-bottomed boats, 32 feet long and powered by 28-foot oars, or sweeps, were navigated down the river. But the powerful current ensured it would be a one-way trip. Once they reached their destination, the boats were disassembled and the wood sold. The boatmen returned by foot or horseback to Salmon, where they built new boats and started again—thus giving the river its reputation as having "no return."

Almost 400 miles of this official Wild and Scenic River bisect Idaho from east to west, before dumping into the Snake River. Along its journey, it flows through the River of No Return Wilderness Area, the largest regulated wilderness in the continental United States. True wilderness it is. Except for deserted miners' cabins and a few ranches and rustic guest lodges—claims for which predate U.S. Forest Service protection—rafts and kayaks on the river are the only signs of 20th-century technology.

OFF-RIVER DIVERSIONS along the way include short hikes to explore deserted

**LEATHER...**  
*Experience the comfort and quality.*

**LEATHER Interiors**  
*Elegance in Leather Furnishings*  
16935 Southcenter Parkway • Tukwila, WA 98188  
(206) 575-3504

Whitmore Sherrill  
LIMITED

• CIRCLE 42 ON READER INFORMATION CARD.

homesteads, gold mines, Native American pictographs or hot springs. We travel 20 river miles the first day and stop for the night on a sprawling beach.

The guides systematically unpack the rafts, and within 20 minutes the tents are up. From the coolers on each raft come assorted fresh meats, vegetables and fruits. (It isn't surprising on the first day, but by the fifth day, anything crisp and green can feel like a miracle.)

Our first meal is, appropriately, salmon (marinated in vermouth, lemon juice, olive oil and herbs), preceded by creamy spinach dip along with a selection of California wines. Years of experience have made Shephard and his crew adept in the "kitchen." They are especially good with campfire-warmed Dutch ovens, used for everything from Gruyere soufflé to peach cobbler. Breakfasts on the river include banana-walnut buttermilk pancakes; yogurt topped with dates and coconut; bacon; honeydew melon; and good coffee. The blowing of the conch shell to announce each meal is more ceremony than necessity, as we are rarely far away.

After dinner, we gather around the fire

beneath a canopy of stars. In the background is the constant sound of the river, running its way west to Oregon.

OUR NEXT DAY'S float is lazy and allows plenty of time to scan the dense forest for wildlife. We take a land excursion to visit the remains of a miner's settlement known as Jim Moore's Place, protected by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Nine hand-hewn log structures stand where Moore once sold supplies to the gold prospectors who passed through in the 1900s. Rumor has it that Moore's savings, which he stashed in a jar, may still be buried here.

As we resume our transit down the river, the air is thick with the scent of pine. The only sounds are the whooshing of oars slicing through the water and cries from birds passing overhead.

We cover our distance for the day, and no sooner has the last tent been erected than the rain begins. It falls through the night and into the next morning. We take turns asking Shephard for his forecast, as if his word will dissipate the black clouds.

Some seek refuge beneath our huge

communal tent and while away the afternoon with steaming mugs of hot chocolate and light conversation. Six of us, however, hike off along the steep embankment into the yesterdays of the Salmon. The cool afternoon air, fragrant with wildflowers and pine, the gentle rain misting against our skin, the soft crunching of our collective footsteps, take me back to my childhood. We spend the afternoon in a splendid circus of nature and philosophy.

The following day, rain greets us again, but now it offers the promise of sun. By lunch, the sun is shining, the air is warm and spirits are noticeably lighter.

OUR LAST DAY is bittersweet: We are eager to go home, yet reluctant to bid farewell to this stunning landscape that has been ours for the past week. Call the river what you will. I know I will return. ■

*Salmon River Outfitters (209-795-4041 or 800-346-6204) runs trips from June to September. Though most guests prefer to camp, for those who can't part with beds and running water, the same trip is available with sleepovers at private lodges along the river.*

## C O E U R D ' A L E N E I D A H O

### Summer Playground of the Pacific Northwest!

Discover world-renowned lakes  60 golf courses--one with a Floating Green  Horseback riding  
Silverwood's Victorian Village & Country Carnival  Trophy fishing  Lake cruises  Festivals, summer  
theatre and shopping  With accommodations for any lifestyle or budget  Come for fun.  
Come for excitement. Come discover Coeur d'Alene--summer playground of the Pacific Northwest.

# Coeur d'Alene

For Your Free Guide to the Coeur d'Alenes, Contact the  
Coeur d'Alene Area Chamber of Commerce  
Post Office Box 850, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83816-0850  
or Call 208/664-3194 or Fax 208/667-9338

▪ CIRCLE 43 ON READER INFORMATION CARD.