

## Don Wegeng's Detailed Report

From: Donald\_Wegeng@mc.xerox.com  
Subject: 1988 New Trip Report

### A Trip Report: The 8th Annual GSP Raft Trip

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1988 will go down in history as a year of changes. This year's raft trip was no exception, and I think that it's fair to say that all of the changes were for the better!

The first difference of the year was that we camped in a different campground. After last year's trip the management of our old campground had, uh, suggested that we seek a different campground. While we've always enjoyed the visits from their security personnel, they seemed serious so this year we moved to the campground operated by our outfitter, Mountain River Tours (MRT). This proved to be a very good decision, for by almost any measure the MRT campground is superior. Located just across Route 19 from the MRT headquarters, it was much closer to the areas where we hike and swim, and being only a couple minute drive from MRT everyone got an additional half hour of sleep the morning of the river trip. There's also a 24 hour grocery store just 10 minutes away. We also got the impression that the campground manager liked us (you know you're in trouble when the GSPs are complemented for being a well behaved group). The location also allowed for several visits from the MRT staff.

Can you say "Drought"? I thought so... and we experienced the effects firsthand when we learned that the New River was running at an all time low. The good news, though, was that the Corps of Engineers was releasing water into the Gauley River from the Summersville Dam to help keep water levels up on the Kanawha River. Normal summer flows on the Gauley average around 600 CFS, but this year they were releasing 1000 CFS (during the fall Gauley whitewater season releases are increased to half days at 2400 CFS). Now, if you let your imagination run wild for a minute you may think of some interesting possibilities that this situations might present...

After last year's successful duckie (inflatable kayak) trip on the Upper New, there had been talk of running duckies down the Lower Gauley. While this could have been done at normal summer levels, the additional water made this sound like a very interesting trip. On Thursday it became reality, when a handful of GSPs braved the cold water and rocky rapids for what proved to be the first of many highlights of the week. Witnesses report that the group enjoyed the thrill of dodging rocks, surfing holes, and swimming through the rapids. One of the swimmers was Eileen Gelblat. "I fell out in the first rapid by hitting a hole sideways, and in another one where I made the mistake of following the duckie in front of me instead of going the way [the guide] had intended us to. I also flipped when I tried to get out of surfing; I was balanced by leaning downstream, and when I sat up to put my paddle in the water I flipped." Everyone, including Eileen, seemed to have a great time!

While the duckie trip was going on a few of us went on our annual hike down to Lost Paddle on the Upper Gauley. We didn't find any Copperheads this year (sorry Rsk). It also seemed like the river was higher than I expected, which was kind of interesting (though I wasn't sure why). Little did I know...

On Friday many of us went on our annual pilgrimage to Babcock State Park. About half of the group rock-hopped up to the grist mill, while the rest of us either ferried cars or hiked up the trail that runs

parallel to the stream. At the restrant near the mill we ate ice cream and enjoyed the sun. A few of us then watched as a conservation-type person played with some snakes (though for some reason he didn't seem to want to handle the rattlesnakes).

Friday evening proved to be interesting, for me at least. There I was, getting ready to cook some chicken, minding my own business, when Steve Crawford (one of the MRT guides) walked up and asked me if I was planning to run the Upper Gauley with them on Saturday. "Huh?" I said, and he explained that Kirk Smith was organizing a trip for experienced people. The river was running at 1000 CFS, which he said was it's most difficult level. We'd run it in small 12 foot long paddle boats, probably R4s (four person rafts). I quickly found Paul Carlile and Ken Long, and told them "Do I have a deal for you..."

The next morning we loaded three crews of paddlers (we ended up with four to five customers plus one guide per raft) onto a MRT bus and headed to the put-in below the Summersville Dam. We even brought a river virgin along! When we got there we ignored the funny looks that all of the tourists were giving us, and proceeded to start heading down the river. The water was **\*\*COLD\*\***! The trip itself was most exciting, with lot's of rocks to try to avoid (it seemed like we hit most of them) and at least a couple surprises. The raft I was in managed to hit Pillow Rock head-on, and somehow we managed to take the fourth and fifth drops of Lost Paddle backwards (we had planned to run the third drop backwards and then use a rock to turn the raft around, but we missed the rock). When we got to Iron Ring, the guides took a quick look and decided that this really wasn't a good day to die. The guides ran the rafts through this rapid while the customers walked (and their runs didn't look like much fun to me).

Eileen proved to be in fine form on this trip, managing to fall out of the raft not once, but **\*twice\***. In her own words:

"Falling out on the upper Gauley was much more exciting. I fell out the first time in Insignificant. The raft hit a rock and I was in the water. I came up right next to the raft, grabbed on and worked my way around the raft to where Steve [the guide] could help me in. The look on Steve's face was enough to convince me that I didn't want to swim this one. Since I was sitting in the back, the others on the raft didn't even know I had fallen out. I think some of the bruises are from the force with which Steve threw me back in the boat. The hardest part of that one was to catch my breathe and start paddling again. [At this point I should add some background. About one third of the way down the left side of Sweets Falls is a rock that's known as 'Ejector Rock'. Why is it called that? Well, if a raft lands on this rock it tends to, uh, eject some of the passengers from the raft. Guess what happened to Eileen's raft... -DW]

"Swimming Sweet's Falls was much more exciting. I will point out at this time that sitting in the back of the boat has its disadvantages: no one sees you to catch you if you begin to fall. The back of the boat hit a rock going into the long drop which made me lose my balance. Terry had the same problem I did--we were both teetering for a few seconds (foot in the air kind of stuff) but Malcolm saw Terry and grabbed his foot, while no one came to my aid and I landed in the water; fortunately I landed on my back with my feet down stream and was soon able to breathe. I have no idea how long it took, but by the time it registered that I was in the water, I realized that my face was close enough to the surface to breathe. I tried to find the boat but all I could see was white water. By the time I did see the raft, they were eddying right and I was on my own journey to the left. Steve waved me on, so I figured I was OK and I got my feet up against a big boulder on river left and waited. By the way, I kept my paddle. Another boat tried to get me, but they missed. The water was slowly pushing me to the shore, but I didn't know if I could stand so I just waited. One of the guides came on shore and walked around to help me up. Here is

where I think I bruised myself as I wacked myself with the paddle that the water had twisted around and below me. But I got up OK and my rescuers took me across the river to get some lunch.

"I have no idea if I hit any rocks, and the truth is that the idea of swimming Sweets Falls is more exciting than how I felt at the moment. I never felt in great danger because I was too busy figuring out what to do next to think about that stuff. I decided to spend the rest of the day in the raft, but that ended up to be a pretty good time as well."

It was at lunch that we learned that our trip was probably the first commercial trip down the Upper Gauley at such a low water level. That evening we had lot's of good stories to tell around the campfire.

Speaking of Saturday evening, it was then that we performed the annual sacrifice to the river gods and initiated this year's group of river virgins! I'm happy to report that this year's group was more willing than ever to perform the sacred rituals (a couple of them almost grabbed the Wild Turkey bottle out of my hand) and repeat the holy chant (GSP! GSP!). It was only then that we were certain that Sunday would be "a good day to die".

With Sunday came the Big Trip! The day started out bad, for me at least. I woke up with a nasty stomach ache. Maybe I'd enjoyed a bit too much Wild Turkey the night before (\*somebody\* had to finish the bottle). I dunno, but I ended up spending most of the day asleep in my tent. I'm happy to report, though, that the trip went very well for everyone else!

For the final day MRT assembled a large variety of water craft for the enjoyment of the GSPs, including duckies, Ranger rafts, and two misguided, uh, I mean self-guided R4 rafts! What would the GSPs do with such things? Why, run the Lower Gauley! And thanks to modern technology, the trip would be preserved on video tape!

At this point it should be noted that most of the guides had never run the Lower Gauley at 1000 CFS. This put the self-guided R4's in the same league as the professionally guided rafts, and maybe in better shape since many of the passengers had run the river in duckies on Thursday. Kirk Smith describes the scene, from an self-guided R4 perspective:

"These rafts were originally called 'unguided', but MRT disliked the implications of that title, and adopted 'selfguided'. After some negotiation, however, everyone decided that \*misguided\* was perhaps the best description, and it stuck. The rafts were Misguided-1 with Paul Carlile (co-guide), Malcolm Slaney (co-guide), Sue Strange, and Lee Moore, and Misguided-2 with Kirk Smith (guide), Joe Cychosz, Tom Tengdin, and Deb Stakes.

"These rafts actually did quite well, overall, to the amazement of the professional guides on the trip. The worst screwup was when Misguided-2 managed to stand the raft up on end by running up on a rock in Rocky Top. Kirk and Tom went swimming on that one. Misguided-2 was also caught on film riding through Lower M.A.S.H. backwards (oops).

"When asked how these rafts compared to other self-guided rafts in the past, the trip leader replied, 'This is the first time we've tried this, but you're doing better than most of the guided rafts'. The ride was excellent in those small R-4's, the sense of adventure (and imminent death) was enhanced, and it worked!"

Maria Thompson spent the day in a Ranger raft, and had this to say:

"Our raft spent most of the day ahead of the rest, easily cruising between rocks and obstacles, and then turning around, laying our feet up, and watching the carnage that followed. It was good for a laugh. The R4 teams always seemed to do better than the guided rafts. We got lots of chances to practice our rescue and scouting techniques.

"Tengdon's swim of lower staircase looked interesting, but not fun. Too many rocks!! I thought the funniest part of the trip was the video shot of Roger Carlile stuck on a rock with Bronson "attempting" to rescue him and getting himself in trouble. I thought I was going to wet my pants watching the part where it looks like Ed just threw his paddle into the water like he didn't need it anymore.

"The left side of our raft had problems. We almost let one of the crew float away (Debbie Kimminau) when she started giggling uncontrollably in the water while we were attempting to get her back in the boat in the middle of a rapid. This was a serious crew!

"Since then, Eileen and I have been watching the bruises materialize, since we tend to put our entire bodies into every whitewater experience we have."

Personally, I thought that the funniest video scene was in (I think) Upper M.A.S.H., when one of the duckies got stuck surfing a hole. No real problem, but then another duckie comes along and rams it! And then just as things seemed to be under control along comes a Ranger raft that rams them both. Pretty funny stuff (but I have a sick sense of humor).

After a long day on the river everyone gathered at MRT headquarters to watch the video and drink some of the huge supply of GSP beer. Such a way to end the day!

Speaking of beer, we had quite a bit this year. The list is included at the end of this message.

It's difficult to sum up the entire week in just a few words, but personally I think that this years raft trip was the most enjoyable one that I've been on (and I've been part of this silliness for quite a while). All of the changes seemed to be for the better, and it was nice to do something different this year. It's funny, but I don't remember even looking at the New River! It was great seeing all of the raft trip veterans again, and I enjoyed meeting all of the new folks. Hope we see you all again next year!

Speaking of next year, Ken Long, Debbie Herman, and Cole the Wonder Dog will be organizing the trip. It's going to be tough to top this years event, but I'm sure that they'll come up with something.

Awards Ceremony: Several people deserve credit for their efforts at making this year's raft trip a big success. First of all, a big thanks goes to the people at MRT for allowing us to do such silly and crazy things. Secondly, Kirk Smith deserves a round of applause for organizing the Duckie and Upper Gauley trips. Third, I really appreciate the help that Eileen Gelblat, Kirk Smith, Maria Thompson, and Rsk gave me in putting together this report and distributing it.

Last but not least, Paul and Sue deserve everyone's thanks for doing such an excellent job at organizing the trip and keeping things running so smoothly!

Mountain River Tours Thank You Note

July 4, 1988

The Honorable Gravy Sucking Pigs  
c/o Paul Carlile  
11332 Bent Creek Terrace  
Germantown, MD 20874

Dear GSPs:

It's the Fourth of July and most of you are driving, driving, driving... us crazy! What an exciting week we had thanks to the GSPs! The guides, office staff, bus drivers, Larry, Clif and I really enjoyed your visit to Mountain River Tours. You were just what we needed to get through the 'low water blues.' As a matter of fact, we enjoyed your stay so much that most of the staff is out today shooting each other in the woods.

What a great group of people you are! You certainly made us feel a part of your group and becoming an honorary GSP is something I know I'll always be proud of.

I'm glad you had a good time on the 'everything but New River' trip. I look forward to sitting down tonight and watching the video of your experimental trip. Of course I'll do this with a good cold beer in hand.

We look forward to seeing you in the fall or next summer as it may be. We'll put our heads together and see what we can offer for the first time, on an experimental and untested basis, for the Gravy Sucking (guinea) Pigs.

Have a great summer!

[original signed by Margaret]

Margaret Kuhn  
Honorary Gravy Sucking Pig

Bob Safranek's Information

From: rjs@shetland (Bob Safranek)  
Date: Fri, 22 Jul 88 15:34:32 EDT  
Subject: More raft trip information

I didn't get a chance to send this to DW (great report!) in time...

First, a correction. The duckie pile up (several duckies getting caught in a hole, and then being cleaned out by a raft) was in lower stairstep.

This year was definitely one of the most unusual trips... Our run of Pure Screaming Hell made the misguided and duckies look like pros...

We started when the raft ahead was partway through... mistake #1... They got pinned and blocked the channel left. So we went right, hit a hole and alot of rocks. Our guide lost his paddle, but grabbed a

spare and on we went. This escapade sent us even farther right, (sluice and undercuts right? NO PROBLEM!) and we were immediately pinned. Another raft came by and kindly returned our guides paddle. After unpinning, we tried to get back left, but ran into another problem. The raft that gave back the paddle has pinned, again blocking the channel left... So its off to the right just above the Hell Hole. In this manuaver, our guide lost his paddle again! By the time he got the spare, we were sideways heading for the hole. The only reason we didn't run it that way was we were to far right.. There is a large pillow/undercut/sluice on the right bank with a small pinner to its left at the top of the hole. The front hit the pillow, and the back the pinner giving our guide and me an intimate view of the hole.. backwards and upside down! Not feeling like doing a back dive into the center of the hole, we pulled ouselves back in. Thank god for a good brace and the toe line!

During all of this Melora lost her paddle. We pulled in behind the pillow and figured out what to do. While there we retrieved the guides paddle from the sluice. Eventually, the raft was pulled back upstream a little (had to get around yet another rock) and we paddled upstream in an eddy as far as possible, then made a perfect run thought the hole (about time!)

Definitely a run to remember...

Bob