

THE VOYAGEUR



www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org

May 2011

THE PRESIDENT'S PUT-IN

The height of the whitewater season is upon us and I've gotten out a few more times this year than last and hope the trend continues. There's been a lot of rain recently and it hurts to look at the high water gauges during the week while one is slaving at work. I've heard some good trip reports from our members and hope to add my own to the collection.

Don't forget to let Mike Martin know if you want to lead a trip anytime and he will announce it to the club. Other club news includes the date for the Moonlight picnic this summer; it will be August 13th this year. Mark Wray will be organizing it again this year.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, May 10, and Ron Knipling has offered to present his boating vacation video to Costa Rica this past winter for our entertainment. I'm looking forward to this to refresh my memories of my own trip in 1994. Come on out and enjoy some tropical whitewater and plan for Memorial Weekend boating.

Rick

Costa Rica Rios, February 24-March 5 by Ron Knipling



During the week of February 26 to March 5, Larry Lempert and I joined eight other U.S., Canadian, and European boaters for a week of Class 2-4 rivers with *Costa Rica Rios*. CRR offers a very affordable (\$1,600 + travel), all-inclusive week of rivers based in Turrialba, CR. That's about 120 km east of San Jose in the Central Highland region. Seven guest paddlers were from the U.S., two from Canada, and one from Sweden. This was "open boat week" at CRR. The boat breakdown was six OC-1s, one OC-2, and two K-1. Larry was the class of the OC-1ers, and the tandem couple, Don and Jo

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Larry Lempert on the Pejibaye River, Costa Rica

COSTA RICA (Continued from page 1)

Beyer of Charleston, WV, were a picture of perfection. They, the reigning U.S. tandem whitewater slalom champions, showed every bit of that skill in six flawless days of paddling, including 14 miles of the lower Pacuare on the last day. If you put the Lower Gauley and the New into one 14-mile section, you might have something like the Lower Pacuare. But, I'm getting ahead of myself. Here is a summary of our eight days, which included six days of paddling:

Day 1 (Saturday): Pick-up in San Jose or at the airport; drive ~3 hours to Turrialba.

Day 2: Pejibaye River: Class 2-3 small river, similar but a little harder than the upper Smokehole or Hopeville.

Day 3 (after a big rain the night before): Travel

Lower" Pacuare in hard boats. This section is like the Yough or Cheat, and was the best all-around run of the week. Overnight at the CRR "Jungle Camp" on the Pacuare.

Day 7: For most, rafting 14 miles of the Class 2-4+ Lower Pacuare. The only hard boaters were Larry, the Beyers, and our Swede, Fredrik Strangert, in a K-1

Day 8: Return to San Jose airport for departure.

I had done the same "Open Boat Week" at CRR four years ago in 2007 with Bob Kimmel. Five of the six paddling days were on the same rivers and sections. The 2007 trip was excellent, but this one was even better! [Bob, it wasn't because you weren't there.]



We had better water this time – only one low water day versus 3-4 in 2007. The guides were fine in 2007, but this year they were outstanding. The leader, Caleb Nelson from Manitoba, was enthusiastic, personable, and extremely helpful and accurate in his route guidance down hard rapids (of which there were many). Picture Errol Flynn in a kayak. Some days we had as many as five other guides on the river, so we were well-shepherded. The guides were safety conscious but without conveying nervousness or lack of confidence in our group. Maybe they should have worried a bit more, though, as we had a few weak boats at the other extreme from hotshots like Larry and the

CRR Jungle Camp on the Pacuare

~100 miles north to the Middle Sarapiqui, like a bigger (~2,500cfs), more turbulent version of Bloomington. Spent night at nearby hotel.

Day 4 (after more rain): Redo of Middle Sarapiqui with even bigger waves.

Day 5: Upper Pejibaye ("Schoolhouse" section), a small Class 3 stream similar to Seneca Creek or perhaps the Savage at ~300-400cfs.

Day 6: Six miles of the Class 2-3+ "Upper-

Beyers. One fellow took about two swims every day, some long and tumultuous. He seemed to relish the experience in spite of the swims. He explained that he could never run such rivers without the perfect, warm Costa Rica conditions, and without a full crew of rescuers always at the ready.

Larry and I flew down two days early to take in the sights of San Jose, some cultural and some seedy. This reflected our personalities (you can decide which is which!). Two days in San Jose is probably one day



Native art at the Hotel Don Carlos, San Jose

too many, but there are interesting things to see there. The historic Hotel Don Carlos is one of the best and most interesting hotels anywhere, and quite reasonable in price. They have renovated and expanded the National Museum so that it is now a major sight worth a 2-3 hour visit.

All week one of the guides took videos at all the top rapids. She put this together as a broadcast-quality promotional highlights video. Larry and I purchased a copy, and will be showing it at the May 10 BRV meeting. You will see our whole gang, mostly making successful runs down various squirrely rapids. There is a carnage section of the film; if you want to see the blood and gore, you'll have to come to the meeting!

I couldn't recommend Costa Rica Rios more highly. The price is right and all aspects were well-organized and generally first-rate. The boats are other equipment were much the same as what we use here. Both the outfitter and hotel management are new since 2007, and they're anxious to please. All meals were provided and they were hearty and nutritious. Lots of good conversation with interesting, worldly people. Costa Rica temperatures are perfect for boating (60s to 80s), and the biodiversity of plants and animals is 100 times that of the U.S. And you come back really tuned up for

spring paddling here.



CARNAGE PREVIEW: Larry swims on Class 4+ Lower Pacuare rapid

“We Whipped our Weight in Wildcats”
Covington River, April 17, 2011
by Rick Koller

Roger Corbett’s immortal words above echoed in my mind as we raced down a swollen Covington River, Sunday April 17. This is a very entertaining stretch of tiny whitewater, a creek that I cut my paddling teeth on many years ago and most likely quite a few BRV members did also. Joining me on the trip was Court Ogilvie, Jim Pruitt and Ned Howenstine. The choice to run this gem was not difficult based on the water levels facing us that Sunday morning. The previous day had been subjected to a deluge and all the creeks and rivers were bank full with many way too high to run. We cross-loaded boats after a mercifully short dither and we were Blue Ridge bound.

It’s worth re-reading Corbett’s description of this stream because it is depicted as a very challenging run, and if paddling a 17ft aluminum Grumman it would have been. The RC gauge at the put-in indicated 1ft of water, but in reality I think it was closer to 2ft in the riverbed that day. This water level makes for a very fun run; there are several good ledges and the gradient keeps the paddling pace high. The day’s previous heavy rains made us wary about strainers on this small creek and we were vigilant. As it turned out, I think the high water actually helped clear out some strainers. There were numerous big logs blown to the sides of the stream clearing the way for us. The small bridges that cross the river were another story however: there were big piles of wood on top and underneath the bridges. We had to carry the bridge that sits about halfway down the run. Someone had chainsawed several logs on top of the span so that cars could pass; it was a mess. The take-out was worse with part of the road actually washed out. Huge piles of logs were down at the confluence with the Thornton.

The play waves were numerous and one could have spent extra hours surfing if desired, but it may have been a little dicey to flip and roll in the muddy torrent that day. There are a few cattle fields along the river and what’s on the field before a heavy rain ends up off the field after. Still, we definitely had some excellent surfing. This little river is one of my favorites and has remained mostly unchanged in the 35-plus years I have been paddling. It flows through beautiful unspoiled woodland and farmland and is just a real pleasure to paddle. I highly recommend the experience. Catch it if you can.

North River Gorge, March 12th
by Frank Fico

I had the opportunity to head out to Canaan Valley this weekend for some late-season skiing, but saw that conditions would be about as good as they get for early-season paddling, so I decided to stay close to home and see what developed. Amid the flurry of emails to the BRV list on Friday, the one from Jim Pruitt looking to paddle the North River definitely piqued my interest. Although I had run it five times before, the most recent was in 1998! A check of the on-line gauges showed that Saturday would be the day to catch it at a good level.

Ron Knipling had a group meeting at Manassas Saturday morning just before us that decided to head to Passage Creek, leaving us with only three heading to the North River. We got to the take-out at the Girl Scout camp just above the confluence with the Little River and confirmed the good water level (checking on-line later, it was 170 cfs at Stokesville), so we left a car and headed up to the dam. Our third boater ended up bailing out of the trip at the put-in, but Jim and I decided to proceed.

Strainers are the biggest danger on this river, so I took the lead in my open boat even though Jim’s single pre-

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Sideling Hill Camper

April 14-15, 2011
by Ron Knipling

My version of a *triathlon* involves a car, a boat, and a bike. If you add all the time spent loading and preparing, plus that spent unloading and cleaning up afterwards, it becomes a *pentathlon*. Add the dithering and you have a *sextathlon*! I dare not call it that, though, as Leslie gets very suspicious!

Anyone who has done a canoe camper knows that the process gets pretty complicated when you consider all the elements involved. It's not efficient but it is engaging and gratifying to plan and execute such a trip, especially the added feature of biking. That's what I did on Thursday-Friday, April 14-15, after good rain in the days before. Sideling Hill Creek was flush at 800cfs on the first day, and still flowing swiftly at 450cfs the next day.

My trip started in Belle Grove, PA where PA Rt. 484 crosses Sideling to connect with PA Rt. 26. It's a lightly traveled bridge and I was able to unload my trusty Bluehole OCA and hide all my gear in the briars on river left below the bridge. Then I drove the 11.5 road miles south on Orleans Road and over on Ziegler Road to the Sideling Hill take-out on the Potomac, about a quarter mile below the confluence with Sideling. This is also a C&O Canal Lock and the western terminus of the Western Maryland Railroad Trail. I dropped the car there and began the bike ride back to the put-in. It was slow going on my old clunker Schwinn, especially with a few big hills I had to walk. But about 80 minutes later I was at the put-in. I locked the bike to a post and started the river run.

Many people have paddled Sideling below I-68 but not so many the miles above the Interstate. Both the rapids and scenery are a bit less exquisite than those below the Interstate, but there are still many lovely spots and much to enjoy. My trip included about seven miles above I-68 (and nearby Scenic Rt. 40) and about 12 miles below. Below I-68 I started looking for campsites, and found an idyllic one on a one-acre island about two miles below I-68. At this water level, the creek split around the island, with ~20% of the water going down the island's right side and ~80% going left between the island and the steep, rugged river left embankment. There were a couple of easy landings at the downstream end of the island. My campsite on the island was directly across from beautiful rock formations and rhododendrons on the embankment. I was intrigued by what appeared to be a cave about 50' up the cliff. My tent was on a small bluff about ten feet from the rushing water. With the ground so moist and soft, I could have slept without a pad. Add a camp fire and a bottle of wine, and you have the makings of a mystical experience.

On Friday I would cover the last ten miles. Much of this was through the Sideling Hill Wildlife Management Area — pristine and lovely. Unfortunately, there are some new, tacky camps along river right in the last few miles just above the Ziegler Road bridge. There were also some strainers presenting a challenge for a solo paddler with a boat full of gear. Overall, the 19-mile trip required just one portage (due to a wrong decision where the river braided), but several other boat walks through and around blockages.

With enough water, Sideling is a near-perfect stream for a camper. There are plenty of rapids, but none above Class 2+, unless you factor in some threatening strainers. Most of the river is undeveloped and there are many potential campsites on creekside flood plains. My little island was among the nicest spots I have found. I won't claim that paddling alone is prudent, especially with a boat full of gear. But it can be a scintillating, self-actualizing experience.

56TH RUNNING OF CCA POTOMAC DOWNRIVER RACE SATURDAY, MAY 14, 2011

by V. Star Mitchell, CCA Downriver Race Chair
& Adam Van Grack, Chair of BCE

What race do you know of that has lasted consecutively for 56 years? The 56th running of the CCA Potomac Downriver Race hosted by Sycamore Island and co-sponsored by BCE will be Saturday, May 14th. **COME AND BE A PART OF ONE OF THE GREATEST AND LONGEST RUNNING WHITEWATER RACES IN THE NATION! JOIN THE FUN!** This year is the 55th Anniversary of the CCA, so there will be a special Anniversary Celebration for racers and volunteers at the end of the race!

The pre-registration fee is only \$20 if received by May 9th! Obtain a registration form at www.sycamoreisland.org or www.canoecruisers.org. Follow the instructions for mailing. On race day the entrance fee will increase to \$25. Tandem teams pay as two individuals *unless* they are a parent and child (under age 18) who are permitted to pay as one individual. Liability forms **must** be signed on race day.

This USA Wildwater Ranked Race begins at Rocky Island on the Potomac River just above Wet Bottom Rapid and continues for 7.5 miles to Sycamore Island. At the end of the race, a free T-shirt and a free lunch will be given to all workers and racers, and there will be a ceremony with awards and prizes for the winners. (If you do not attend the ceremony, do not expect to receive the above! No awards will be mailed!)

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at Great Falls Inn (Maryland) followed by a **mandatory meeting** for all racers. If the river is over 5 feet, the race *may* start at Old Anglers Inn. And if the river is over 6 feet, the race *may* be postponed and held on Saturday, May 28, 2011. Notice regarding any changes will be posted on the CCA, BCE, and Monocacy Canoe Club message boards.

This is a race for any whitewater paddler from the pros to parent/child tandem teams, but this is **NOT A NOVICE RACE**. All participants should have experience in and be comfortable with up to **Class III rapids**. Participants may enter with any type of a boat provided it is properly outfitted with **adequate floatation** (air bags) and all occupants of the boat are wearing a **helmet and a PFD** (life jacket).

If you plan to paddle the race, **PLEASE PRE-REGISTER** to help with registration and planning. Please do not bring two cars to the race — parking will be difficult and a **shuttle will be provided**.

VOLUNTEER helpers are needed for **safety boats** and for helping at the registration at Great Falls and at the finish at Sycamore Island. Volunteers will receive the gratitude of the racers, a sense of participating in an important annual river event, a race T-shirt, and lunch.

Anyone interested in helping out with this year's race should **contact Star Mitchell** at 301-530-3252 or e-mail starmitchell@verizon.net. **DO JOIN THE FUN!!**

NORTH RIVER (Continued from page 4)

vious run had been much more recent. Comments from recent boaters on the AW page had noted a bad strainer at a blind location. We carefully noted the description, and took the left channel as recommended when we reached the spot about a mile below the campground. At the lower level we had, however, there would have been enough time to eddy out before the strainer, so the larger right channel is preferred. Apart from that low-water channel, we only had one other strainer that required a short drag around. There were other places where I was able to get out of my boat and clear a channel for Jim to run without getting out. We got to the ledgy section where the action gets more continuous, and decided to stop for lunch at the "regular"

spot with exposed rocks on river right. It's one of the few places in the gorge that gets direct sun, which made it feel more like late April as we ate. The remainder of the run down to the two big Class 3 rapids at the end was uneventful. We scouted the first, rock-garden rapid to ensure the line was clear. There's no easy way to scout the second, 5-foot ledge, but our "shuttle bunny" was waiting below and helped line us up. With no problems here, we passed beneath the footbridges of the Girl Scout camp and arrived at the take-out in less than a quarter mile. This is a very fine run, and I resolve to not let another 13 years pass before I do it again!

Stonycreek Rendezvous, May 13-15

Greetings! You probably know about the Stony in the Alleghenies of southwestern PA. When it's running, the Stonycreek Canyon offers nonstop action with 13 named rapids within five river miles. Now thanks to a new release valve, just installed on an upriver dam, we'll be able to schedule whitewater! May 13-15, we're celebrating at this year's Stonycreek Rendezvous. The first official releases – double of what's ever been released for the Rendezvous before – will guarantee good water for Rendezvous events, such as the World Kayak Hometown Throwdown Series competitions and FREE playboating clinics. A great bunch of sponsors have donated gear and other prizes worth thousands for the events and a silent auction. Plus, we're having epic rainfall, which means there's a good chance that our other creeks/streams will be running during the Rendezvous weekend! Even if the water is up everywhere, Johnstown has more than a dozen streams from Class II-V within a 20-minute drive of the festival location.

We're hoping you'll help us in two ways:

1. Spread the word about the Rendezvous. People who "Like" our Facebook page will see updates as we get closer to the big weekend.
2. Consider a donation to support scheduled whitewater releases on the Stony. The Benscreek Canoe Club faces costs of \$10,000 a year to keep the spigot on. Any donation will help!

Like our page. Donate to the cause. Then join us May 13-15!
Benscreek Canoe Club, Johnstown, PA, www.benscreekcanoecub.com

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About the Blue Ridge Voyageurs (BRV)

The **BRV** is a voluntary association of experienced paddlers from the Washington, DC area. Club benefits include: trips for all skill levels (most at intermediate and advanced levels); BRV website and hotline for information and pick-up trips; *The Voyageur*, published 6 times a year; club roster, published yearly in March; holiday party; conservation projects; moonlight paddles & picnics; big trips to the Smokies, Canada, Europe, and Western rivers.

Meetings: BRV will hold meetings from 7-9 pm on the following dates in 2011: January 26, March 22, May 10, August 13 (Moonlight Picnic), September TBD, November TBD, December TBD (Holiday Party). Meetings are followed by beer and pizza at a nearby pub. Location: Tysons-Pimmit Regional Library on Leesburg Pike (Rt. 7) in Falls Church, VA. The library is on the east side of Rt. 7 about 0.6 miles south of I-495. Or, from I-66, take the Rt. 7 West exit and go about 0.6 miles west on Rt. 7. It's on the right.

BRV Website: The BRV website (<http://www.BlueRidgeVoyageurs.org>) provides information on trips, meetings, and other club events.

2011 BRV Officers: Rick Koller, President; Mark Wray, VP; Mike Martin & Daryl Hall, Trip Coordinators; Clark Childers, Treasurer; Frank Fico, Newsletter Editor; Kathleen Sengstock, Conservation.

2011 Board of Directors: Gus Anderson, Bill Collier, Ed Grove, Ron Knipling, Rick Koller, Wes Mills

The Voyageur: Newsletter of the Blue Ridge Voyageurs

The Voyageur publishes information on club events, conservation and safety news, the club trip schedule, and other news of interest to BRV'ers. Publishing **trip reports** is a particularly important newsletter function. Trip Coordinators are requested to write up all club trips - particularly trips to unusual or especially interesting rivers. Trip reports and other articles are accepted in any form: via electronic mail (preferred; send to fico1@netzero.net), on disk, typed, handwritten, faxed or over the phone. For trip reports, try to include the following information (if applicable): names of participants, relevant NWS gauge readings of nearby rivers, description of the water level on the river (e.g., minimum, moderate, maximum, or number of inches above or below "zero"), weather conditions, hazards, difficult rapids, info on put-ins or takeouts, distinctive scenery, and overall difficulty in relation to rivers well known to BRV'ers. New information about the river (e.g., new hazards) is particularly important. **Photos** are also published. Send prints to the webmaster or e-mail digital photos to the newsletter editor.

Address changes: contact Frank Fico, 1609 Autumnwood Dr., Reston, VA 20194-1523, (703) 318-7998, fico1@netzero.net. The annual roster will be kept current via updates published in each issue of *The Voyageur*.

Membership applications/renewals: submit to Frank Fico. Must renew by February 15 each year to be listed on club roster and continue receiving *The Voyageur*.



The Voyageur

c/o Frank Fico
1609 Autumnwood Drive
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Deadline for July *Voyageur*:
Friday, July 1st

NEXT MEETING
Tuesday, May 10th