

It was my ears that informed me of the upcoming rapids. They came into view as we navigated a bend in the river. Two words neatly summed up my thoughts: Holy shit! Our boat's self-appointed commander began to review the paddle commands once more, since I had been getting them mixed-up. But my attention was focused on the river. I had had no idea that it would be like this! The adrenal glands went into overdrive, pumping adrenaline through my body. I realized why these guys always went river running. They were addicted to the adrenalin hits, addicted as sure as any heroin addict was to heroin.

The river was fierce but we fought. We could see that the raft in front had completed the rapids. Our raft got turned around (probably because of my paddling) and slammed into a rock. We didn't get upturned but the rock left its *wrong word choice* warning in the form of a gaping hole in the floor. Luckily the rapids were almost over and we finished them with no further problems. The others were waiting for us, having anchored their raft to the bank. We paddled over and did the same. I let the others patch the raft while I sat to eat and gather my thoughts. I was still high as hell on adrenalin. Some fear existed in my mind, but was shoved aside by the high. I could tell the others were getting an equal buzz. Besides, I thought, they've done this many

times. It must be safe. Later I found that they were thinking of pulling out right there and hiking back. But the adrenalin overruled their fear and common sense as well. We found out later that the river was well over six feet deep (and rising), a depth considered unrunable in our sized raft.

But these were facts unavailable at the time. I changed into dry clothes to avoid a possible case of hypothermia. In the water, hypothermia would set in after about ten minutes, less without a wetsuit. I had been told to bring a wetsuit, but since I didn't own one, I brushed it aside as too much work to procure one. Experience might very well be the best teacher.

We put back in. The current grabbed us and flung us ^{nice verbs} downstream. The roar coming from ahead was deafening. I had a feeling of déjà vu, but I located it. Running this untamed river reminded me of the movie Deliverance. They didn't know what they were getting into either.

Two words were quietly repeated by the others like some communal mantra: Velvet Falls. My mind conjured up a high waterfall. What did I let myself get into? Just like in the cliché-ridden old movie, my only hope would be that ever-present low branch to grab at the last second. It was too

much for me to remain silent. "A waterfall?", I screamed. "A waterfall?" The commander-in-chief informed me that Velvet Falls was a ten foot drop followed by some of the worst rapids on the river. Arguments were brought up to portage around it, but the quest for a greater high circumvented any thinking processes.

*not accurate
by the way.*

We hit the drop, landing with a crash, but still afloat. Ahead of us I could see that the other raft had already overturned. Nothing we could do to help them now. We ran the rapids skillfully. But near their end we missed a chute between two large rocks and bananaed on one of them. Suddenly I was airborne but the law of gravity held firm. I landed feet first into the water and was off. The current was stronger than I had imagined. I had no real fear yet, as earlier I was told to ride out the rapids if I fell in, and to swim out when I reached calm water. I even grabbed my paddle as it floated by, for there was a fifteen dollar charge if I lost it. The others disappeared from my sight. Thank God for my life preserver! I couldn't believe the power of the current. Trying to swim did no good. And I was wearing a heavy coat, which increased its mass dramatically when wet.

Panic set in when the rapids ended and I still couldn't

swim free. And this was the calm water! I let go of the paddle in order to swim better. It didn't help much. I remembered hypothermia and realized I was very cold and was getting weaker. Ahead what was left of our raft came into view, still afloat, upside down, with the boat commander collapsed on top. I swam towards it, an easy feat with the current. Catching it, I tried to pull myself up. But the raft spun around, leaving me in front of it. I had to let go because I was being pushed underwater. I was sure my only hope was floating away when I watched it disappear downstream.

But ahead, I could see that the current ran close to the bank, which consisted of a sharp incline of ten feet or so. There was no hope to grab the bank, but there it was-- a single thin branch from a tree that was growing above the incline. It hung a couple of feet above the water. Perhaps this was a movie. It shouldn't have ~~ever~~ held, but it did. My muscles wouldn't respond at first, but mind ruled over matter, and I was out. Using the branch like a rope, I climbed over the incline and collapsed.

I lay there for a few moments and realized hypothermia was still a big danger. The sun was covered by thick clouds, and rain was still coming down. And no matches! I never was that good of a Boy Scout.

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The others (except for the one on the raft) had got out upstream and they soon found me. A huge fire was built. We dried ourselves; then the hike began for our missing comrade. We feared for his life, for more rapids were downstream. But he was safe, rescued by some kayakers. They had saved the raft as well, so we had food and some equipment. We camped that night, and hiked out the next day. Although it had seemed like much more, we had only traveled twelve miles down the river.

Back home, a week or so later, we found out that two people from other parties had lost their lives on the river that day.

THEME
DEVOTED
KAYAKERS
GUMMERS/MECHANICS
A A B B / A