

# *Utah* **SPORTS GUIDE**

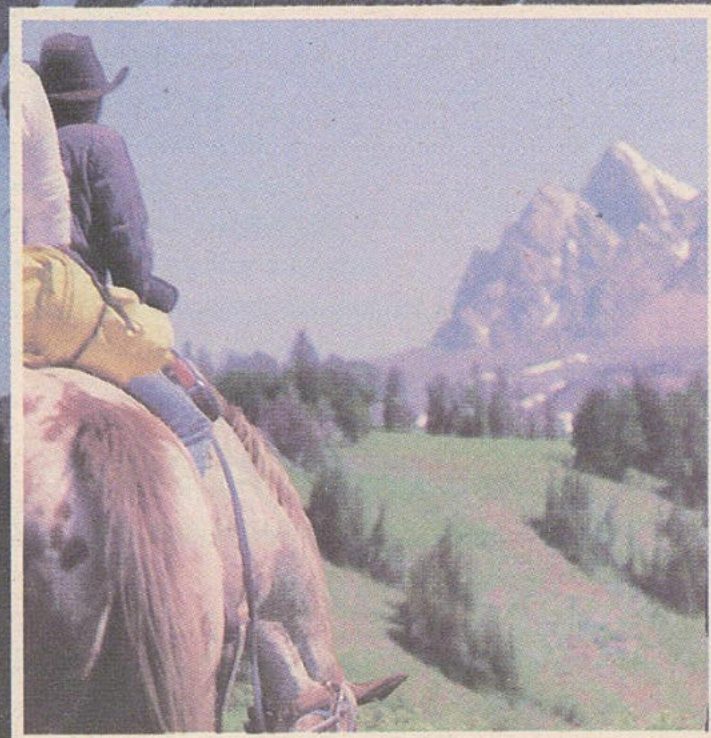
Utah's Sports Magazine®

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Complimentary

## *Autumn Potpourri*

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I was as helpless as a newborn baby. The river hurled me down-stream, slamming me into a boulder. And this was the calm water! Or at least it was supposed to be. I had been told that if I fell in, I should float out the rapids and swim out during the calm water. But this *was* the calm water, and I was unable to swim anywhere except where the river wanted me to — downstream. I could feel hypothermia setting in. Just around the bend were Powerhouse rapids, some of the worst on the river.

Not a typical day. How did I get into this?

It was late spring, quickly maturing into summer. I was between quarters at school. The neighborhood had just been wired for cable, and I was discovering the cornucopia of entertainment available. A nice comfortable combo: summer, no school, HBO, ESPN, and CNN. Get up once in a while to perform some necessary function: buy some beer, mow the lawn, buy some more beer. Life was good. Good and quiet. Good and quiet and boring.

A phone call shattered the peace. Some friends were going whitewater rafting down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River (whose nickname, I found out later, is "The River of No Return").

The Middle Fork is a wilderness area, meaning no roads (or motorized vehicles of any kind), no phones, no medical help, no fast food. Just like the old days before the encroachment of civilization. Serious wilderness for a city dweller. The wilderness holds up even under Edward Abbey's definition: Those things our forefathers killed so we wouldn't meet one on the way to the 7-Eleven at four a.m. when you get the munchies.

River trip? Sure, why not? I knew my friends ran rivers as a hobby. Had for years. Cable would wait.

Something that I didn't realize was that my destiny would be in my own hands, in the form of a paddle. I'd been on river trips before, but the kind with big rafts and a professional river runner who sits in the back and steers, then cooks everybody a big steak dinner with all the trimmings at night. I was not informed that if I got the raft captain's commands confused, I would alter our outcome through the whitewater.

Soon I found myself in a pickup truck, rattling my way from Salt Lake City, where I reside, to Chalis, Idaho, the set-off point. Adventure!

Arriving, we found no rangers on duty, but a sign listing the river's height. It was on a dangerous level, but we assumed it was going down. First mistake.

Our expedition was comprised of eight martyrs in two four-man rafts. We put in within a hundred yards of the first rapid. The first wave that hit washed me into the river. I was quickly pulled back in. "Paddle!" the raft commander ordered. "Paddle?" I screamed over the roar of the river. "How can I paddle and hold on for my life at the same time?"

Safely completing the rapid with no other mishaps, the crew began to congratulate itself. We showed the river who was in control! Our celebration was cut short by the raft commander who ordered us to review the paddling commands. A big rapid was coming up, he said. A big rapid? "What was that we just went through?" I asked innocently.

"A small rapid."

That was a *small* rapid? My ears informed me of the approach of the next rapid. We had time for another quick review of the commands and then we were in the inferno. Whoa! This was real! No log flume. The reviews of the commands were quickly washed from my brain by my adrenal gland kicking into overdrive.

common sense were overridden by the need for a new fix. Later, we also found out the river's height was reaching the unrunable stage. And rising, of course.

We set off again. The current grabbed us and flung us further into the wilderness. The roar from downstream was deafening. Two words were quietly chanted by the others like some communal mantra: "Velvet Falls, Velvet Falls." "Falls?", I exclaimed. "Isn't that like a waterfall?"

"It is a waterfall."

"A waterfall?" I screamed. "A waterfall?" The Commander-in-Chief informed me that it was about a ten-foot drop followed by some of the worst rapids on the river.

We hit the waterfall, landing with a crash, but still afloat. Ahead, I could see the other raft had overturned. Nothing we could do to help. We could only try to help ourselves. We ran the rapid skillfully, as a team. We almost made it through. Almost. Near the end, we missed a chute between two very large rocks and bananaed on one. I found myself airborne, but the law of gravity held firm. Landing feet first in the water, I was off. The current was stronger than I had imagined. I

had no fear for my life, yet. Just ride out the rapid until you reach calm water, I remembered. And if you lose your paddle, it will cost fifteen dollars. I was so ignorant of my predicament that I grabbed it when it came rushing by. I soon lost sight of the others. Some advice for other novice river-runners: always wear your life-preserver. I'd be dead if I hadn't. Still, even with the preserver, the river sucked me under again and again. Trying to swim did no good. To top things off, I was wearing a heavy coat, whose weight increased exponentially when wet.

(continued on page 27)

# DISASTER

by Bradford G. Boyle

## ON SALMON'S MIDDLE FORK

The river was fierce, but we fought. I could see the raft in front had cleared the rapids. But they didn't have me. Our raft got turned around (sorry, captain) and slammed into a gigantic boulder. We didn't upturn, but the rock left its message in the form of a gaping hole in the floor. We were near the end of the rapid, though, and navigated without further mishap. I was beginning to get some confidence in my paddling skills.

The others were waiting, having anchored their raft to the bank. Later I found they were considering pulling out right then and hiking out. But fear and



PHOTO: DENNIS TURVILLE



## Disaster (continued from page 7)

Fear and panic set in when the rapids finally ended and I still couldn't swim to the bank. What calm water? I didn't find any. I let go of the paddle, quickly deciding my life was worth more than fifteen bucks. It didn't help much. The river was in complete control. I was just a rag doll following its commands. Slam into this rock here, get sucked under here, spin around backwards and get slammed into another rock over there. I remembered hypothermia and realized I was very cold and getting weaker.

Ahead, what was left of the other raft came into view, still afloat but upside down. One of my fellow adventurers was collapsed on top. I was able to catch it, and tried to pull myself onto it. The raft spun around, forcing me in front of it. Not good. The raft was pushing me underwater. I let go. I was sure my only hope was floating away as I watched it disappear downstream. Powerhouse rapid was just ahead, and I knew that I had to get out before then.


I could see that the current ran close to the bank, which consisted of a sharp incline. There was no chance to grab the bank, but a thin branch hung down from a tree growing above the incline. I aimed my sights on the ridiculously thin, measly branch. It would have to do. It was the only one within reaching distance, about two feet above the water.

A cliché, really. It was like a bad movie. One chance, one attempt. If I missed, it would be the rapids, and I didn't think I had the strength to survive them. One branch that in all probability would break. I grabbed it as I passed by.

It shouldn't have held, but it was green and it did. The river still pulled me downstream as I held on, but I used all my strength to resist. My muscles wouldn't respond at first, but mind ruled over matter, and I used the branch like a rope and inched my way up the incline. Once on top, I collapsed.

I lay motionless for a few minutes regaining my strength. I realized that the adventure wasn't over. I was soaking wet, the sky was covered with thick clouds, and it was raining. Before this trip, the word hypothermia was just that, a word. A big word, but just a word. Now it was a reality. More advice to novice river-runners: carry matches. I didn't have any. Never was a very good Boy Scout.

I began to hike, more to get warm than to find my way out. We had traveled about 12 miles downstream, so it would be possible to hike out, unless hypothermia set in first. Soon I heard voices. I signaled. It was my fellow river-runners, minus the one on the raft. We feared the worst.





A fire was started, and soon we were dry and warm. We journeyed downstream in search of our lost com-patriot. The bad movie had a happy ending. He had been pulled from the river just above the rapid by a group of fellow river-runners that had also lost their raft but salvaged a kayak. We were all safe. We had lost most of our equipment, but no lives. Later we found out a rafter from another party had lost his life on the river that weekend. It could have been me. 

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19	20	21 @ MILWAUKEE	22	23	24 @ PEORIA	25 @ FORT WAYNE
26 @ SAGINAW	27	28 @ PEORIA	29	30 	31 	

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