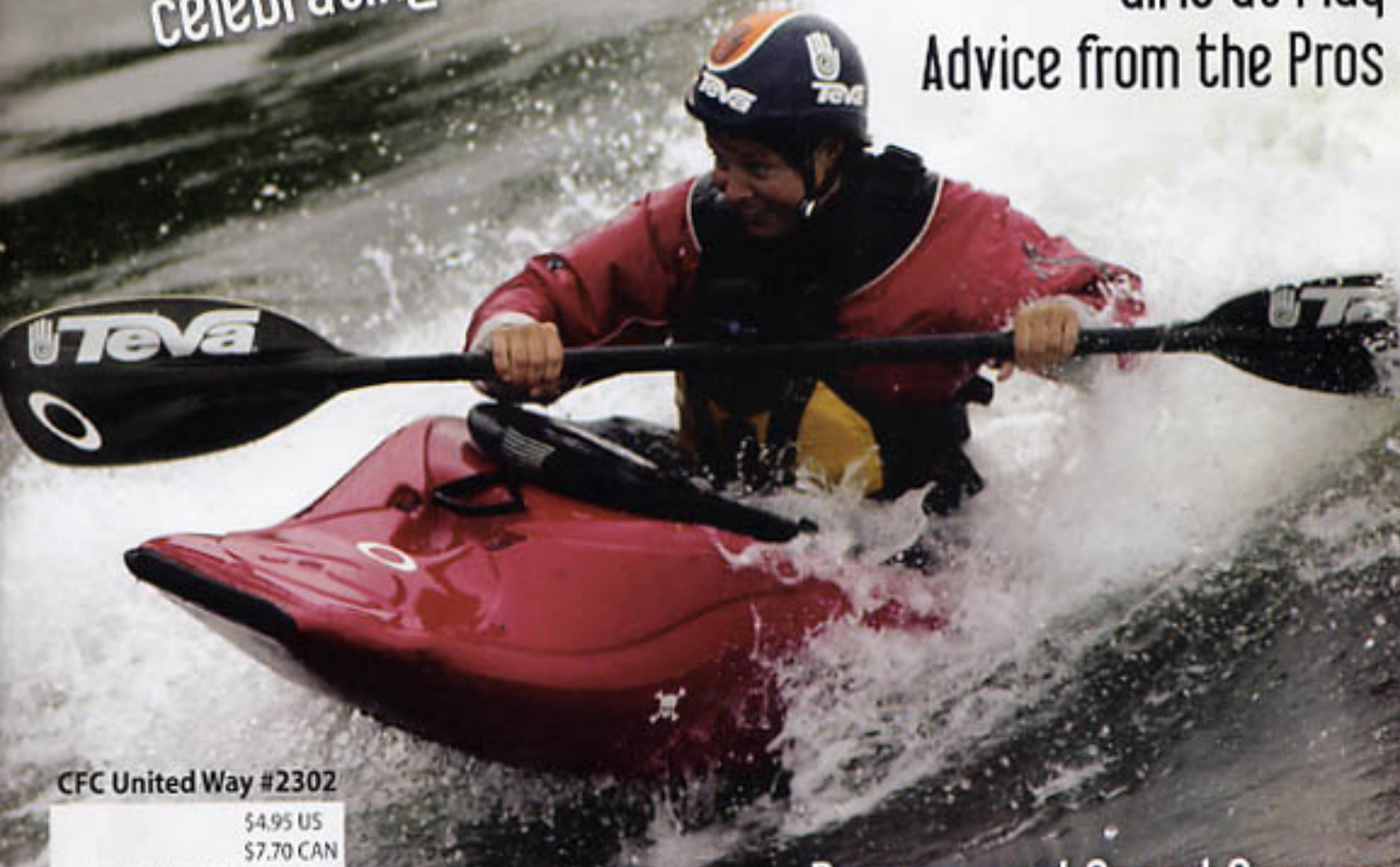


AW AMERICAN WHITEWATER

BY BOATERS FOR BOATERS
January / February 2004

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For this issue's feature I invited several female paddlers to provide answers to some questions about their boating experiences. These women vary in age and experience, but all have made a significant impact and/or contribution to the sport.

Most of the women I talked to were turned on to kayaking through some sort of mentoring process, from a camp that had a paddling program to one or more interested adults who shared their love of the sport. This is significant as I think many adults tend to vastly underestimate the effect they can have on young people in shaping their lives. One need only look to the exploits of young paddlers to see that our sport is still evolving rapidly and the mentoring process is a large part of what drives the sport forward.

In giving advice to young female paddlers, the importance of learning the basics well and practicing was stressed. Many also felt it was important to find a similarly skilled group of female paddlers as this creates a different dynamic than a mixed or mostly male group. They observed that women can be much harder on themselves for their mistakes than men and thus benefit from a supportive environment in which encouragement rather than competition is the rule.

When talking about the attractions of paddling, most mentioned being outside with a group of friends as the single most enjoyable aspect of the sport. The feeling of being in tune with the natural world was important as well.

When asked about difficulties, confidence was a theme and when asked about differences in the female experience vs. the male experience, technique over strength came up repeatedly. Many felt that women

learn the techniques of kayaking more quickly because they are forced to use skill and finesse rather than muscle to make moves and run rapids.

Gear was also a topic when discussing differences between the sexes. Most of these women still feel that the sport does not cater enough to the female segment of its population when it comes to gear, movies, education, and marketing; something for those in the industry to think about and work on.

I asked about what discoveries were made through participation in the sport, and adventure and travel were the unanimous answers. Of course, not all of us get to travel around the world as part of our paddling experience, but we can all relate to the fact that paddling does allow us to discover new places.

My biggest impression from these interviews was simply that we are just beginning to see what women will do in their boats and to the sport. More and more girls are getting into paddling at younger ages and the women who have been in the sport are starting to fill spaces in the industry as they move into careers other than just paddling. I don't know about the rest of you but that only puts a smile on my face.

*The women interviewed were:
Tanya Shuman, Anna Levesque,
Buffy Burge, Bunny Johns,
Susan Wilson, Sue Taft,
Polly Green, Tiffany Manchester,
and Christie Dobson.
Thanks ladies!*



Tanya Shuman



Anna Levesque

ED: How did you get into paddling and how long have you been doing it?

TS: I started in 1995 when I received a kayak as a birthday present from my parents. My instructors were Sam Drevo, John "Tree" Trujillo, and Eric "Wick" Southwick, the former World Freestyle Kayak Champion. They shared with me their passion and love for the sport. From that day on, kayaking has been a part of my life.

AL: I got into kayaking while I was working in the kitchen of a rafting company 10 years ago. I was relentless in asking the guides and kayak instructors to teach me how to paddle!

BB: I got hooked on whitewater at age 12, whitewater canoeing through Camp Greystone in Tuxedo, NC. I couldn't wait to come back for the next five summers to canoe down the local runs in Western North Carolina with my fellow campers. I decided to take up kayaking when I went to college in Richmond, VA; there the James was my town stretch.

BJ: I got into paddling in 1958 when I was a swimming counselor at Camp Merrie Woode near Brevard, NC. The camp had (and still has) an outstanding canoeing program divided into five levels. At the top level, the campers have to teach someone else how to paddle. These kids taught

My biggest impression from these interviews was simply that we are just beginning to see what women will do in their boats and to the sport.

by Tim Nickles / Editor of American Whitewater



Buffy Burge



Bunny Johns



Susan Wilson



Sue Taft



Polly Green



Tiffany Manchester



Christie Dobson

me to paddle an open canoe and I was hooked from the get-go. So, that's (gasp) 45 years ago.

SW: Eighteen years ago, I took an Outward Bound course after I graduated from college and got into canoeing. I went to buy a canoe and the sales lady said she liked kayaking better because you were down in the water. I left the store with a Dancer. My first pay check from a real job out of college paid for that kayak.

ST: I was a flatwater marathon canoe racer during my teens and early 20's but when my race partner took me whitewater paddling (OC-2 on a Class III river), I was hooked. I joined a paddling club in February, learned to roll in a borrowed kayak at pool sessions, built my first kayak in April, and paddled my first whitewater river in May. I paddled C-1, C-2, as well as kayak. About 6 years ago, I started paddling OC-1 (partially because of a shoulder injury that kayaking aggravated) and I enjoy it immensely.

PG: I have been paddling for fourteen years. My first introduction to paddling was watching my brother learn at his boarding school in Colorado (CRMS). It was the first time I had ever even seen it before and actually remember thinking that it looked cold and wet and I didn't think I would like it! Then I went on a rafting trip on Westwater Canyon for spring break, and loved the whole river trip thing; camping

out and playing volleyball. There were safety kayakers on the trip and they let us get in the kayaks in the flat water. I then signed up for a kayak class through my University Outdoor Program, and the rest is history.

ED: *What advice would you give to girls or women entering the sport as really motivated beginners?*

TS: Take the time to learn the basics. Having a sound foundation of the fundamentals is important as you excel and learn. Keep in mind everyone learns at different rates. Most importantly, have fun. It's a sport that you will enjoy for a lifetime.

BB: My advice would be to find a core group of beginner friends you enjoy recreating with. Take a whitewater safety course with your group and get proper kayak instruction. Then, go out and encourage and push each other down the river.

BJ: Keep it fun, learn as much as you can from people or organizations you trust, but remember to learn from yourself to trust your own instincts. In the end it's your body and soul you're putting into that rapid.

SW: Cherish every day and every river. Some of my greatest memories are on the easier rivers that I learned on. Keep a journal of your river trips so you can read back and cherish all the great days you have

had on the river and laugh at and learn from the not so great days.

ST: Be aggressive: play and play, but don't let peer pressure force you into doing something you're not comfortable with. Having come from a competitive background, including slalom racing, I have always emphasized the basics: good clean strokes and strong moves and being able to hit the tightest little eddy in the biggest water. I feel it is more important for women to have good strong strokes and technique since they may not be able to power themselves out of a situation that a man, with lesser technique and skills, can muscle through.

PG: I would say get out as much as possible, and try to paddle with people who are better than you but who don't get you in over your head. There are a lot more women involved now than when I started and it is great if you can find other women to paddle with. Paddling with women can be really fun and has a whole different dynamic than paddling with men. Work on getting a solid foundation on easier water that you feel comfortable in before you start paddling harder. Working on your playboating skills will get you comfortable with being upside down. Working on slalom skills will help you to have good boat placement and stroke technique. Most of all have fun and enjoy the learning process. That's what it's all about!

Feature: Women in Whitewater

by Tim Nickles

ED: *What is your favorite thing about paddling?*

AL: My favorite thing about paddling is that I get to be outside almost every day and get to travel to places very few people get to experience.

BJ: My favorite thing is paddling with a group of friends, whether on whitewater or flat water. I love multi-day trips of all kinds. Last year I did a week long trip in Canada with friends and their families. It was focused on kids, camping, and fishing. This summer I got to do the Grand Canyon. There are few things more enjoyable than focusing a week or two on paddling with friends.

SW: Getting to see amazingly beautiful places, challenging myself, and being with good friends and making new ones.

ST: I enjoy the sights and smells of being on rivers, the exhilaration of hitting my intended moves with crisp and clean technique, and the exhilaration of the whitewater itself. I also really enjoy the camaraderie of other paddlers both on and off the river and the dinners after a long day of paddling.

ED: *What has been THE most difficult aspect or challenge about paddling for you?*

TS: Knowing when to take time off. If I could, I'd paddle every single day of the year. But your body needs to recoup and rebuild strength. Incorporating other sports that complement kayaking like surfing or rock climbing will only make you a better paddler.

AL: The biggest challenge in kayaking for me is to consistently maintain confidence in my skills. On the days that I struggle with self-confidence I don't paddle as well as I could, even though my skill level is the same.

BB: The biggest challenge in paddling for me is to be a consistent paddler. One day I am on my game and the next day I can go down the river feeling like a clown. I strive for consistency.

BJ: Probably hole surfing. I came from an era where holes were meticulously avoided. I got quite good at that and have never developed a love of playing in holes.

SW: Becoming familiar with big holes. I never acclimated to the big ones like the one at Rock Island but I enjoy the small ones like Hell Hole on the Ocoee. That is what I love about the sport; you can always challenge yourself.

PG: In the beginning I had a lot of fear. I was afraid of being upside down, afraid of looking stupid, and afraid of being out of control. It didn't come naturally to me at all. I had expectations that I should be better than I was and was pretty hard on myself. I think the hardest thing was deciding that it was OK to get beat up or to swim and that I didn't totally suck when that happened. I had to learn to be nice to myself no matter what.

ED: *What are some of the things you think are different about a woman's experience in the paddling world versus a man's? Which things are easier because you're a woman? Which things are harder?*

TS: By using the water and proper technique, any and all kayaking moves are possible by a woman or a man. You want to use the water. That's where the power is. Typically starting out, men have a tendency to use their own strength. As a result, women tend to have a faster learning curve than men.

The sport is a lot like rock climbing: finesse over power. The only drawback is there is no boat really made for a woman yet. No size fits perfectly.

AL: Women analyze things a lot more than men do. If a woman messes up her line, she tends to be really hard on herself and has a harder time letting go and moving on. Women like things to be perfect.

I think that it's easier for a woman to learn how to use the water to her advantage because she doesn't always have the strength to muscle her way down the river.

The kayaking industry in general makes

it harder for women to excel and enjoy the sport. All of the boat designers are men, most of the video producers and videographers are men, and most of the magazine editors are men. This means that there are no boats designed for women, very few instructional resources for women, very few videos that feature female paddlers, and very few print articles that focus on women's issues in paddling. It's not that men don't want to encourage women, they just don't think about doing it because they are basing their work on their own experiences.

BB: I think women have a harder time with confidence on the river. If a woman messes up a line, she tends to beat herself up about it, and keep on thinking about it, making her more and more shaky as the day progresses. If a man messes up on the river, he tends to shrug it off and move on. I think it is harder for females to sustain focus on Class V, and I do not know why. It is easier to hitch shuttle if you are a woman.

BJ: While doing a little rock climbing I noticed that short people with short arms and legs could go up the same rock face as people with long arms and legs. They did it using different holds and moves. I think it's the same for paddling. As long as I have the right equipment for the piece of water I'm on, the right group with me, and the right mind set, it's a matter of deciding how to do a rapid or a move, and then deciding that I can do that rapid or move on that day. I don't really think about my experience being different from a man's experience.

SW: A man's center of gravity is higher so it makes some moves easier, but a woman's lower center of gravity makes balance and rolling easier. Women aren't as strong so they have to learn good technique from the start and this really helps in the long run. However, I believe it is all about having a positive attitude on the river and having fun.

ST: It may have not been as hard for me as it is for other women because in my chosen profession as a chemist, I was dealing with a man's world on a daily basis.

Feature: Women in Whitewater cont.

by Tim Nickles

Paddling was no different. I didn't take any grief from men at work, and I didn't take it on rivers, either. I am not sure anything was easier because I am a woman, but certainly, things were harder in the early days because of equipment and gear that was too large. Boat volumes were enormous, paddle lengths were too long, paddle shaft diameters gave me cramps in my hands, and clothing in general was hard to find. As a result, I made a lot of my own neoprene clothing and other gear in the early days.

PG: I think a lot of women tend to internalize everything and want to get things right before they try, whereas men just hurl themselves into things and don't seem to care as much or have as many head issues. I'd say the biggest difference I see is confidence. Often, women have the skills but not the confidence and I think for men it can be the opposite. Women are not used to relying on their strength so they tend to learn technique and skills a lot more quickly, whereas men use their upper body strength and that sometimes gets in the way of their technique. Women tend to really look at the water and see how they can best use it to their advantage because they know they can't muscle their way through.

TM: Women have a more difficult time learning because we paddle in boats that do not fit us. On the other hand, what is different for us is that we incorporate grace and form to make up for our lack of muscle. I think this aspect puts us ahead of the men in certain aspects of paddling. We learn to use the water and anticipate its movement rather than fight the water with muscle. It's a much better way to get down the river. But for playboating, sometimes that muscle comes in handy!

ED: What do you think has been the biggest factor in your success as a paddler?

TS: Athletics has always been a part of my life, thanks to supportive parents. Being involved in sports at such a young age has helped me to be mentally and physically strong.

In kayaking, you have to be focused and poised under extreme conditions as well as during competition. It takes a lot of work

and discipline to perform at the highest level of your potential. I like challenging myself physically and mentally. I enjoy that drive to be the best.

BJ: A focused interest in getting better and being willing to put in the time to do that. Of course, the fact that practicing is fun was always helpful. When I was at NOC in the early years and we were teaching each other how to paddle and how to teach, I had the benefit of being with Ken Kastorff, Jim Holcombe, Chris Spelius, Carrie Ashton, Kathy Bolyn, Eric Nies, and a host of others who were totally dedicated to learning about the sport and helping others learn the sport.

ST: There have been two factors: one is that I have been a competitive paddler and have devoted time to getting my technique right. The other is that I am comfortable paddling kayaks and C-boats. In fact, some of the greatest satisfaction I have had paddling is in paddling C-2. To me there is nothing like being in tune with your C-2 partner, paddling a river, hitting the eddies, and making the moves with few words spoken. With the right partner, you develop body language that each other reads and you develop a natural flow to your technique. You read each other's minds on how to read the river and where you want the boat to go.

PG: I think the biggest factor in my success was taking the pressure off myself and deciding that I paddle for myself and not for external reasons such as recognition or money. For a long time I was externally motivated, and now I feel like I am paddling for the right reasons. I am paddling because I love to paddle, plain and simple, and there is nothing else I would rather be doing. I have a lot of fun paddling, and if I'm not and there is a day when I am not motivated then I know something is wrong and I listen to it. Maybe I am tired that day, so I have learned to listen to those signals and not push myself as hard. I know when to stop a practice session or when to walk a rapid, because my body tells me. I also think that I was born with a lot of determination and dedication and that I put 110% into what I do. Because things have not come easily, I know I have to put more time in, and I do.

Also, practicing yoga and meditation has made a huge difference in my abilities to focus and be present and has really helped me in competition.

ED: What are the best things that the sport of paddling has opened up for you or turned you on to?

TS: The sport of paddling has opened up the world to me. I have been able to travel to the most amazing and exotic places on earth and have created lifelong friendships along the way. Either Deb Pinnegar or Katie Johnson once told me. ...this sport is unique in that paddlers will go that extra mile for another paddler whether they know the person or not and that is a rare thing in today's world.

AL: Kayaking turned me on to yoga and meditation because I wanted to learn how to control and calm my mind for competition. Now I am discovering that kayaking can be a very powerful moving meditation.

BJ: A career for starters. Some of my most intense, fun, and touching experiences have come while helping others learn the sport. Project RAFT (Russians and American for Teamwork) was a raft rally/peace rally which started with a 5-day competition (50 teams from 20 countries) in Siberia in 1989. It was an intense experience for me since I was brought up in the days when the Soviet Union was spoken of as the "evil empire." To experience the generosity of the Soviet people during this trip was moving. Of course, I knew intellectually that it would be that way - but to experience it was something else. Bringing the Project RAFT competition to the Nantahala area in 1990 (Nantahala 90) was an incredible experience, particularly because we had floods just before the competition. The eye-popping water levels for all the events enhanced the competition for everyone.

Other things I have been turned on to are the exquisite pleasure of mind, body and soul when using moving water to make exacting moves on a river and the exquisite pleasure of doing that with a group of like-minded friends. My love of paddling expanded into a desire to conserve our natural resources and finally, paddlers in general!

Feature: Women in Whitewater cont.

by Tim Nickles

SW: The amazing places I have seen and the wonderful friends I have met. But it has also improved my self confidence as a boater and better prepared me to deal with everyday life challenges.

PG: Paddling has turned me on to the world. I have been traveling hard for the past seven years, and have had incredible experiences as a result. These experiences have shaped the person I am today. I have learned through paddling to believe in myself and trust in my abilities. I have also learned to trust my feelings but also to work through fear, and not hold myself back but accurately assess my skills in relation to the task at hand. I have become self-assured enough to travel around the world by myself and know there are no limits to what I can achieve if I set my mind to something, put the time in, and commit. Paddling has taught me to live in the moment, to focus, and be present. Paddling has led me to

explore beautiful countries and given me the opportunities to see amazing places and meet extraordinary people. It has led me to other activities that encourage mindfulness (yoga and meditation) and taught me that I am right where I need to be, that it is OK where I am, and that there is always more to learn.

I've learned it is fun to be a beginner and exhilarating when things click. I know there will be setbacks, but that I should never quit, because the setbacks will bring me to a better place if I move through them.

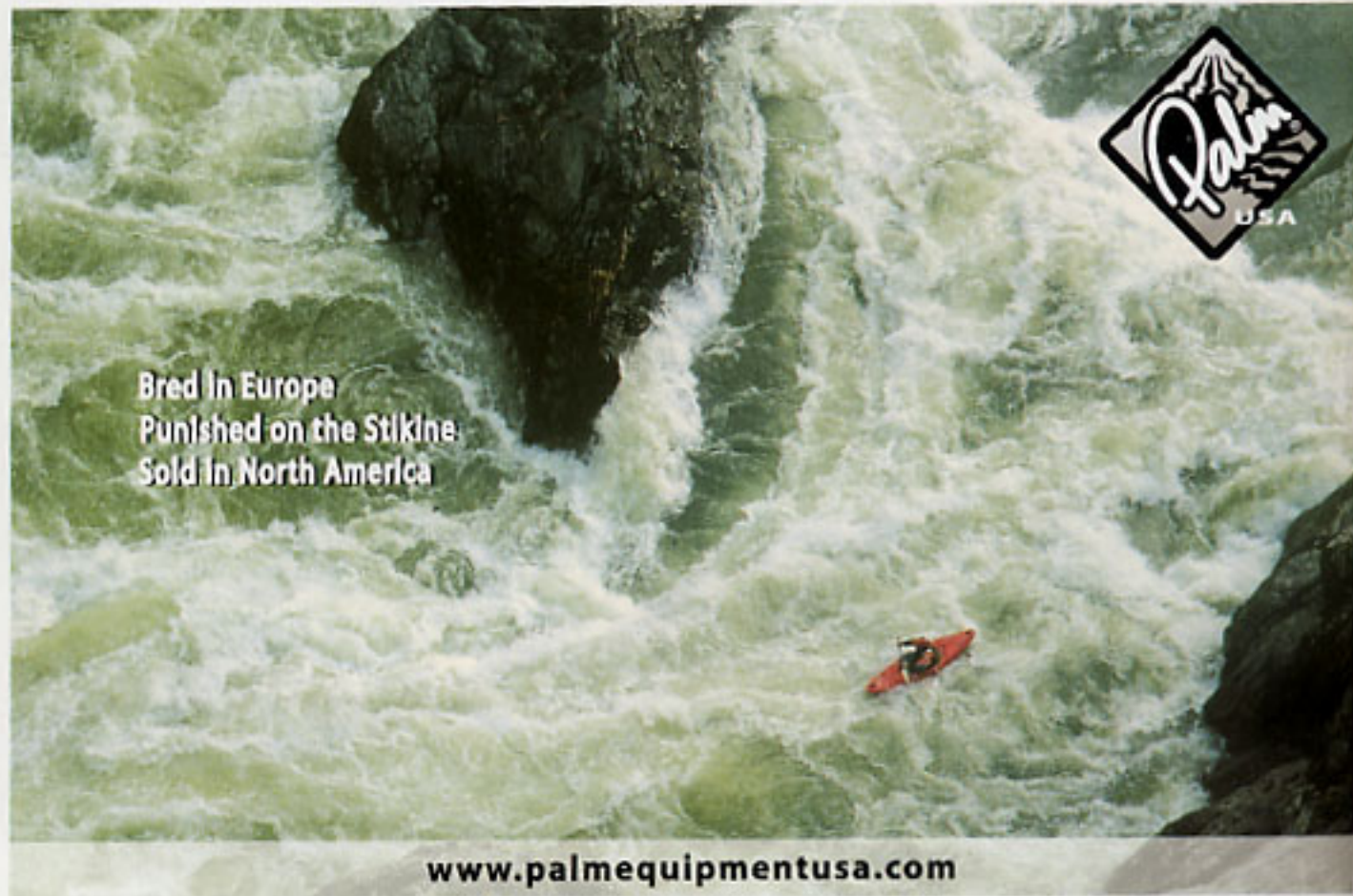
TM: It has opened up my knowledge about myself, my limitations, my comfort zone, my fear, and my ability to compete. Paddling has turned me onto seeing the world and meeting new people wherever I go.

CD: It's made me more aware of my

environment and the need to save our natural resources. The rivers don't hide too much. Dirty water tells a tale and seeing the destruction of logging on shuttles speak loud and clear.


ED: Has American Whitewater's work benefited you indirectly in a way the board or staff would never guess?

TS: As a professional athlete, I owe a huge THANK YOU to AW. They have provided a platform for me to compete and excel in the sport of kayaking. For many years, AW and TEVA have been the body and soul of the professional circuit. They have put countless hours into putting on events and festivals; these are stages where athletes can showcase their skills and abilities. Being a successful competitor has given me the opportunity to make a living out of kayaking. A dream come true to me. Thank you!!!!



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SW: By working and serving as a past board member and volunteer I learned how important all volunteers are to an organization such as AW. Whether it's a board member or someone taking money at the gate at the Gauley Festival, they are all important and should be appreciated because without them an organization like AW could not do the work they do. Thanks to all AW Volunteers and Staff.

ST: I developed a deep appreciation for the founders of AW as I researched materials for my book, *River Chasers*. Before I started my research, I knew very little about AW and my feelings were at best ambivalent. But because of the appreciation I developed, some people have even accused me of having an AW bias in my book. Perhaps I identified with those early scientist/engineer founders and their desire to keep the organization as flexible as water itself.

CD: AW was the event organizer of the Ocoee Rodeo when it was still at Hell Hole. I showed up, swam in front of the crowd, hiked back up for my 2nd ride, and was so hooked on kayaking right then I knew that I was in for a long wild ride. My life did a 180-degree turn; I quit the office-desk-surfing, headed straight to the Grand Canyon, and then into jobless bliss. I found my niche in kayaking and work for the sport that's had my attention for 6 years since that one day on the Ocoee.

Now, I'm fortunate to layout the AW journal in the coolest of places. From the high Sierra to the bear preserves in North Carolina, I'm inspired even in the dry days during layout crunch! I love working for something that hits so close to the heart and could effect my paddling days yet to come.

ED: How have things changed for women in paddling during the time you've been involved in it?

TS: When I first started in 1995, the ratio between men to women was definitely in favor of the boys by about fifty to one. Now the ratio is almost even and at times there seems to be more women than men in the eddy. Look at the US Team Trials this year; there was about the same amount of men competing as women. Plus there is a junior women's class. That was unheard of before.

With more and more women paddling, gear manufacturers have stepped up to the plate, designing apparel specifically for


women by women. There are PFDs tailored just for females and not just a scaled down men's version. Clothing attire is getting sexier and paddling pants and dry suits are getting a smaller waist, a shorter torso, and fuller hips. Companies are listening and responding to the female gender. There are even stores catering just to women.

AL: Things have changed a good deal for women in paddling since I started kayaking. There are now more women kayaking, more women pushing the limits of the sport, more gear designed for women, and an instructional video specifically for women!

BJ: Many more women are involved! When I first started paddling, many more men paddled than women. I think that has been true for most sports. More women participate in sports today than when I was in school.

ST: When I first started paddling in the mid-70's, there were few women who paddled the Class V rivers. I was often one of maybe two or three or even the only woman on river trips. Fortunately, I had a pretty good group of guys to paddle with but I have also dealt with some pretty chauvinistic guys over the years. I still see it time to time, even today. There is also great gear for women and the smaller boats are definitely more user friendly. I am pretty adamant about carrying my own boat in and out of a river and the short OC-1's allow me to do just that.

PG: Things have changed drastically for women since I started and it is so exciting to see the equipment changing and numbers of women participating increase. It makes a huge difference having smaller boats that fit us that we can throw around. Things have completely opened up for women as a result of boat design. It is incredible to see women paddling at a high level and going big. We can do it too! Now it feels like there are no excuses and the only thing holding us back is us, not the equipment.

TM: There were very few women paddling 6 years ago. In the last couple of years more women are out there running rivers, playing, and having a good time. They are becoming more and more aggressive in their skills and playing hard with the boys. It's awesome! This has also created more demand for women specific gear, and people are starting to take more notice of our abilities to excel in both a mentally and physically difficult sport. 



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GiRLS at PLAY

Montreal Trip Report

photos by Robert Faubert

Fifteen women, one videographer, three Canadian rivers, a jet boat, waterslides, and sushi! These may not be the ingredients of a typical paddling trip, but they were the perfect elements to the Girls at Play film trip.





Montreal, Lachine
Girls at Play
photos by Robert Faubert

In my experience, women enjoy a holistic approach to kayaking. Laughing, sharing and bonding off the river is just as important as paddling hard and kicking butt on the river. Our film trip to Montreal had it all!

If you're planning a paddling trip to Montreal, the woman to get to know is the lovely Julie Dion. She is the Montreal connection who can tell you everything you need to know about paddling in the

French Canadian city. Chris Emerick, videographer, and Andrew Holcombe, support crew, were the token men along for the ride. They both demonstrated a lot of patience and understanding, especially when trying to motivate fifteen women to get to the put-in on time!

Our tour began at the 67 Wave. This wave is located beside two of Montreal's most expensive and exclusive apartment buildings. One has an enclosed tropical jungle with palm trees and monkeys. Each apartment has a balcony that looks out onto the city and another that opens into

helix all in one ride!! It's a good thing the Riot guys left when they had the chance!

Next we headed to the Lachine Rapids. The St. Lawrence is a big river and the Lachine Rapids can be intimidating. It's a lot of work to pull yourself back up over the rocks into the starting eddy. Some women found it intimidating and hard, but everyone could enjoy the afternoon sitting on the dock, chatting and cheering others on. Julie demonstrated her local talent with some big aerial blunts.

That evening Gavin, a local friend, was nice enough to let us crash at his house in a Montreal suburb. But first we went downtown for sushi, a great apres-kayak



Montreal, Lachine Wave - Girls at Play / photos by Robert Faubert



the enclosed jungle. Talk about a nice way to spend the Montreal winter! The other apartment, called Habitat 65, was built during the 1967 World Exposition. It looks like Lego® blocks built one on top of the other in an asymmetrical pattern. If you're wealthy you live there; if you're not, you kayak there.

As we were unloading, a couple of guys from Riot drove up. They looked at us, at our vehicles, waved, turned around and drove right out of the parking lot! I think they were discouraged by the crowd. Or, maybe Riot guys aren't so tough. Maybe they were intimidated by a bunch of female paddlers, especially those who drive big orange Land Rovers and black Subarus with flames down the side! 67 was fun, but difficult to throw big moves for most of us with slow boats. Tiffany Manchester showed off the speed of the Chronic by throwing big blunts, a donkey flip and a

social bonding experience. We took an entire room with two long tables to ourselves. Settling onto the cushions, we began to share stories about paddling, boys and other fun topics. Chris and Andrew seemed completely at ease with their minority status. We laughed and ate a lot, drank some sake, and the next thing we knew two hours had passed! Montreal was bustling by the time we left the restaurant.

One of Montreal's greatest features is the number of festivals it holds during the summer. The most famous ones are the International Jazz Festival and the Just for Laughs Festival. The Just for Laughs Festival was in its final days when we were there so there were lots of people roaming the streets looking for a party. We didn't want to stay up too late because, thanks to Lotus and Pyrahna, we had arranged a jet boat for the film crew the next morning at 7 a.m. We decided to forego Montreal

off the river, packed up and immediately headed to the Mont Saint Sauveur Waterslides. You will never experience more fun in your life than at these waterslides north of Montreal, in the Laurentian Mountains. Not even the best river trip can compare. Kayaking can be draining when trying to live up to expectations and meet personal goals. When you go out and do something fun and uncompetitive, everyone can relax and just be silly! It was a well-needed and deserved break from paddling. Our favorite waterslide required a chair lift up the mountain. The slide was made up of about twenty-five 5 to 15 foot slide drops. Some were long and sloping, others were short and vertical-like waterfalls. Each fell into an eddy/pool that fed into the next drop. Our vehicles were big yellow inner tubes, and the deceptively hard objective was to stay in the tube. We spent the whole day laughing, flipping out of our tubes and being silly. Because it was rainy and overcast, we all put on our paddling base layers. We looked funny to all of the bikini-wearing watersliders, but we were much warmer! We were lucky we didn't get kicked out of the park that day. As with kayaking, we were constantly pushing limits to see how big we could go! Unfortunately we don't have any pictures from the day,

but if you watch the credits of *Girls at Play* you'll see what I'm talking about.

The next day we headed to the Rouge River, the home of the Seven Sisters Waterfalls, about an hour west of Montreal. It was a beautiful day! We put on the rafting section of the Seven Sisters, the section above the falls. We caught up to a raft trip and I could see the jaw of the safety boater drop open as all of the women started coming down the rapids. Karen, a local kayak instructor, told him to take a good look because he probably wouldn't see this many female paddlers paddling together in a long time. I think he enjoyed the display of kick butt female paddling!

We got down to the falls and the majority of us felt that it was too high to run in our little playboats. We scouted for a time and watched Andrew run the first two falls.

Katie Johnson, legendary boater and mother of two, felt inspired. She decided to run the drops.

Her line off the first drop was perfect. Unfortunately her stern caught in the curtain when she landed, which flipped her upside down. She tried rolling three times, and managed to succeed right before she dropped into the toilet bowl of the second fall sideways. We all held our breaths. We had a person with a rope on either side of the drop and someone setting safety in a boat at the bottom. Luckily Katie melted the second drop and came up downstream of the backwash. We all breathed a sigh of relief and cheered. It was the first time that she had run a big drop since she had delivered children. Even though her run didn't go smoothly, we were proud of her for making her decision and going for it. We all knew she had the skills, but sometimes things don't work out as planned.

Most of us ran the third drop and did some serious down time. The third falls is straightforward: Follow the current, lean forward and hold your breath. Everyone had good lines and was psyched with their runs. Unfortunately, I went the deepest and actually


Katie Johnson

photo by Tanya Shuman

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Feature: Girls At Play Montreal Trip Report

by Anna Levesque

hit my face on a rock while I was submerged. I was surprised, but came away unscathed. The river likes to remind me that it always has surprises up its sleeve. We all walked the fourth and fifth falls, but ran the last drop with fabulous lines and smiles all around. We finished the day in the sunshine!

The end of the Rouge run was also the end of the trip. Some of us headed back up to the Ottawa to do more filming; others started

the trek down south or out west. We were exhausted and happy. Not only did we do some fantastic paddling, but we also traveled, laughed, shared and had fun on and off the river. The best paddling experiences are not always hardcore, exotic and scary. Some of the best paddling days include good friends, a favorite river, sunshine, and a sushi dinner! So load up your paddle, your friends and your chopsticks and enjoy your favorite run or playspot! *AWW*

Getting to Bhutan: Nuts and Bolts

by Polly Green & Maria Noakes

There are two options for getting to Bhutan: flying from Bangkok on Druk Air, or traveling overland from Kathmandu, Nepal. Two of us decided to travel overland to be sure of getting our boats into the country. I recommend taking a layover in Thailand and purchasing your ticket to Nepal in Bangkok as it is much cheaper. Once in Nepal you will need to obtain a Visa to travel through India. The quickest way to get an Indian Visa in Kathmandu is through a travel agent, this avoids standing in long lines at the embassy. Greenhill Travel in Thamel is a good agency. Allow at least a week for this process or plan ahead and get your visa in the States or at the Indian embassy in Bangkok.

Traveling overland, we took a twelve hour local bus to the border of India. You will need to do a bit of haggling with the driver to transport your boats. At the border jeeps can be hired for approximately \$30.00/day. To paddle in Sikkim you need to secure a separate permit, which can be done in the town of Saligiri or in Rangpo. Make sure you have two passport photos. After paddling in Sikkim carry on to the border of Bhutan. Your Bhutanese Visa needs to be secured in advance and your guide will meet you at the boarder. Flying out of Bhutan is also a mission. Flights book well in advance and have a strict weight allowance. I was lucky and got my boat out for \$75.00 but pack lightly as they will charge \$5.00/kilo over the 20 kilo allowance. For more information on kayaking in Bhutan contact www.excellentadventures.com. *AWW*

