

THE CLARION

www.brevard.edu/clarion

Volume 76, Issue 4

SERVING BREVARD COLLEGE SINCE 1935

Sept. 24, 2010



To learn more about where your energy comes from, see page 4

BC students brave the rapids at Gauley Fest

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Contributor

Last weekend, Jay Wolfe, Graham Jones, Jeff Franz and I joined 5000 other boaters to celebrate the official start of fall paddling on the beautiful Gauley River in West Virginia. Gauley Fest is the biggest paddling festival in the world and draws boaters from all over the globe for a weekend of fun, warm paddling.

Our caravan left the Go Grocery at 3:30 on Thursday afternoon stocked with hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, and enough peanut butter and jelly to last for three days of hard paddling.

After dealing with a little transmission trouble as we neared the festival, we finally arrived on the festival grounds with the threat of a thunderstorm flashing overhead. Tired, we crawled into bed with the expectation that we would wake up early and head out for our first and hardest day of paddling.

The Gauley River is typically divided into three sections. The Upper Gauley is the hardest

of the three and is rated IV – V on the scale that runs from I – VI. The Middle Gauley is the easiest with several class III rapids and two rapids that approach class IV. The Lower is final part and is rated class III – IV. In total, the Gauley’s whitewater sections stretch for 26 miles, making it one of the premier places to paddle in the nation and also tempting paddlers to run all 26 miles in one day, a feat known as The Marathon.

The Marathon was the ambitious plan for Wolfe, Jones and me for Friday. Of course despite our careful planning, we managed to leave the dry bag with our lunch in it sitting on the picnic table at the festival grounds, so we had to survive on peanut butter crackers and potato chips that we scavenged out of Jones’ SUV when we reached the start of the Lower Gauley section.

At this point, we added Wolfe’s girlfriend, Eryn Jacobson, and senior Jeff Franz to our group. The entire run went extremely well; good lines and times were had by everyone. When we got off of the river we still had to retrieve one of the vehicles from the lower boat put-in, so Wolfe, Jacobson, Jones, and I had to wait in a soon abandoned parking lot with encroaching darkness and decreasing temperatures.

While Jacobson and Wolfe snuggled together for warmth, Jones found a garbage dog, a little

stray mutt that wandered up, to hang out with. The cars finally arrived and we drove back to the festival.

Unfortunately though, Jones’ car ran out of gas about 15 minutes away from the grounds, which made it take an extra half hour to get back. When we finally found our way back to the festival it was all we could do to stay awake and be social. Most of us ended up heading back to the tent pretty early.

On Saturday we decided to wake up and mosey over to the Upper Gauley and run just that section. Franz accompanied us down for his first run of the Upper section. Even though he spent his time counting the Gauley’s numerous fish, he never left his boat and is now an Upper veteran. Our shuttle plans worked out much better on this day and Jeff and I were able to leave at a reasonable hour to drive back to Brevard for prior engagements.

Sunday’s trip went well for the rest of the Brevard crew with both Wolfe and Jones taking rafts down the Upper and then driving back.

The Gauley River is one of the most amazing places on the East Coast and I highly recommend that everyone visit it at least once in their life. Even if you have never boated, there are plenty of raft trips available. Additionally, the festival and accompanying events are world class as well.

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Photo courtesy of Daniel Kreykes; (Left to right) Jay Wolfe, Eryn Jacobson, Daniel Kreykes, Graham Jones and Jeff Franz relaxing at their campsite during Gauley Fest