

Rafting in the Smokies

Whitewaters offer fun, treachery to paddlers who want challenge

By CLIFTON METCALF

Autumn in the mountains traditionally means rest and relaxation in the midst of colorful scenery. But for adventuresome souls seeking excitement and challenge, whitewater rafting in the Great Smokies is hard to beat.

Some mountain rivers are slow and lazy, suitable for floating down on an inner tube. But others like the Nantahala, Ocoee, Nolichucky, Chattooga and French Broad are swifter and wilder. These rivers are sprinkled with rapids which range from boiling cauldrons of foam to roller-coaster waves.

These stretches of boulder-strewn current draw hundreds of whitewater enthusiasts each year to the Smokies. Some are canoeists, some kayakers and some are rafters. A relative handful are professionals; most are amateurs or novices. But they are all drawn to the rivers by their love of the excitement and thrill of running the whitewater.

Most people get their first taste of whitewater by taking one of the many guided raft trips offered by area outfitting shops, which also rent canoes and kayaks.

Three of the larger outfitting shops are the Nantahala Outdoor Center located near Bryson City, the Eastern River Trippers in Sylva and Smoky Mountain River Expeditions in Hot Springs.

Guided trips usually include transportation to and from the river, professional guides and all the safety equipment needed. Lunch is also included on longer trips. Most outfitters offer group discounts as well as lower weekday rates.

Since rafting is safer than whitewater canoeing or kayaking, it is probably the best way for a novice to challenge the river. Any rapid has an element of danger, but large ones like Accelerator, Double Trouble, Table Saw and Hell Hole are especially treacherous for the unwary.

Not only is rafting relatively safe, but it's also very exciting. Your rubber craft bounces from wave to wave as you strain to keep headed in the right direction. Don't plan on staying dry; you'll be soaking wet from the spray in the first 15 minutes.

There are a few things to remember while rafting. The first is that you have to keep the raft moving faster than

the current. If you don't the river may sweep the raft into a boulder or pull it into a hydrolic, vertical whirlpool. To accomplish this, there are two speeds of paddling you may be called upon to perform: regular paddling and "paddle-for-your-life." If your guide calls for the second speed, paddle fast.

The other thing to remember is that if you should find yourself floating down the river without the aid of your raft, be sure to stay upstream of the raft. If you don't, you could be caught between it and a rock and come out looking like the middle of an Oreo cookie. Don't worry about catching up with your raft. You can climb back in when you both reach the calmer water past the rapid.

You may find the water slightly cool this time of year. But the thrill and challenge of the river and the colorful foliage of the surrounding hills should more than make up for it.

If you like amusement park roller coasters or log flumes or just outdoor excitement, you'll love whitewater rafting. It's the ultimate in rapid transit.

Clifton Metcalf is a contributor to Spotlight.

If you are going...

Rafters battle against whitewater, nature down the Ocoee River. Outfitters run the rivers through October or year-round for those who want to brave the cold winter waters. Photo courtesy of *The Mountaineer*, Waynesville, N.C.



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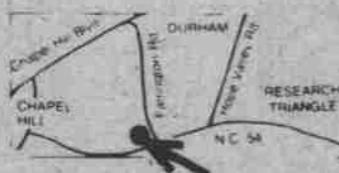
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CLEMSON OVER VIRGINIA BY 17

In our upset of the week, the Blue Devils make it 3 in a row.

DUKE OVER VA. TECH BY 3

The Jackets take another tough loss on the chin.
TENNESSEE OVER GA. TECH BY 6

The Porthole Picks the ACC

A Weekly Feature Predicting The Outcome
Of The Week's ACC Football Games.

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The Jeckyl and Hyde Terps take their horror show to Gainesville

FLORIDA OVER MARYLAND BY 9

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UNC OVER WAKE FOREST BY 13

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