

River rafting venture

Only the bold survive

By PAM BELDING
DTH Contributor

For four hours I had prepared myself for the re-enactment of a slightly tamer version of the waterfall scene in "Deliverance." Our six-man raft was approaching the waterfall, the climax of our eight-mile river trip. As I braced myself for the fall, the rain, which had accompanied most of our trip, suddenly plummeted down in a blinding rage. And with a few screams and exciting jolts, it was over in a matter of seconds, our lives and paddles intact.

Shortly after returning to Chapel Hill this fall, 15 friends and I set off for Franklin to spend a day rafting down the Nantahala River.

The end of the first waterfall marks the eight-mile stopping point for the more cautious among us. The river does continue on to what are called "Class 6" rapids, but after looking at them, I decided only Evel Knievel's disciples would care to attempt them. Few people do. The outdoor center which rents the rafts advises only those willing to risk loss of life to undertake them.

The Nantahala runs parallel to Highway 19; the Bryson City Outdoor Center occupies a garage just below the first waterfall and rents sturdy rubber rafts by the day, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The center provides each raftsman with a life jacket and a paddle; the price of the raft varies with its size. My 16-person party rented one six-man raft for \$30, one four-man raft for \$20 and two three-man rafts for \$15 each.

Every morning at 8:30, a dam, which restricts much of the Nantahala's water flow, is opened to generate electricity for the area. Parts of the river are quite rough and obstacle-laden while other parts are calm and relaxing. Still, paddling is never really needed to keep a raft moving. The current sees to that.

Most people launch their rafts off a rock bank which juts into the water near the river's beginning. There's, however, no set rule; anywhere is fine. After my group's first run down the Nantahala, we swapped rafts and reran the second half, mainly for the excitement of the waterfall.

My crew took along four six-packs of beer. We tried to drink during the calm spells, but invariably some white water would catch us unaware. Then we would press our beer cans between our knees and paddle rantically to avoid hitting a dead tree

or a large rock or running aground on a bed of rocks. After I retrieved my beer from the raft's floor, it seemed to be more water than suds.

Some of my crewmates complained when the beer ran out, but 24 beer cans were plenty when it came time to rid the raft of its excess water. We would have to pull over to the river bank and dump out the water and beer cans. We didn't want to litter the river area, so we had to track down all the beer cans and throw them back into the raft.

To liven up the trip during the calmer moments, we had water fights. Boarding our friends' raft we took turns throwing mates into the bitterly cold water. Four months of North Carolina's hot summer sun hadn't seemed to have warmed the water at all.

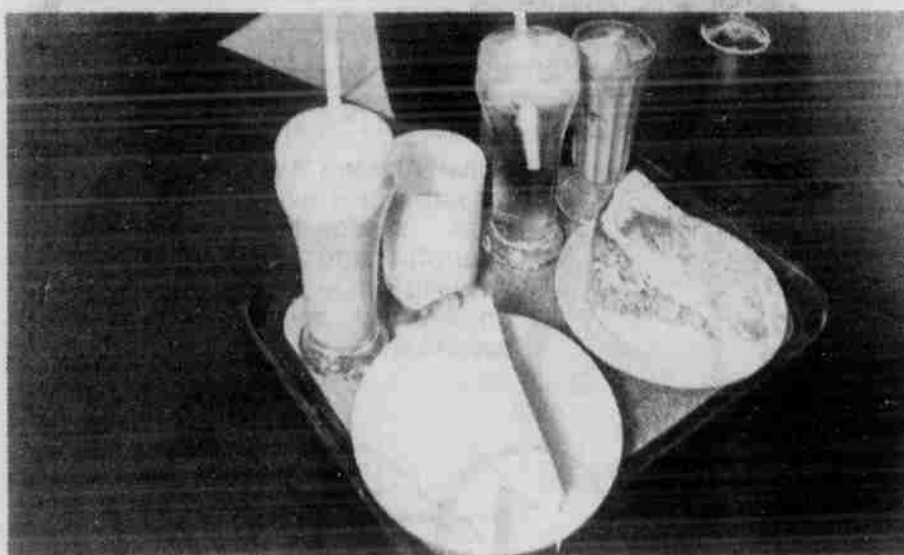
Rafting clothing is flexible, but shoes of some sort are necessary, preferably old sneakers or top-siders. Most raftsmen were wearing bathing suits, T-shirts and shorts. There were some exceptions, of course, like the man who was wearing a "cut-off" wet suit.

Canoes and kayaks on the river were as numerous as rafts. A kayak's lines are sleek and slender, and the ones I saw that day were all bright shades of purple, orange, red or green fiberglass, a far cry from the original eskimo kayaks whose frames are covered with skins. A kayak has a small opening in the center where the pilot sits with his legs thrust forward under the bow. It's like sitting in a very narrow Jaguar with a two-ended paddle in hand instead of a steering wheel. All the kayakers wore close-fitting crash helmets; many wore wet suits. The total effect was reminiscent of a scene from a James Bond movie.

Throughout our trip, people were scattered along both sides of the river picnicking, watching friends and children or getting their thrills vicariously. Most of them stayed to watch, even after the rain began.

The waterfall itself was not what I had anticipated. I expected to fly over a 10-foot drop and land in the frothing water below, at which point my life preserver would take over. Not so. The waterfall is maybe 15 feet in length, as the rafting veterans in my party had warned me. But, it is not a 15-foot drop. The waterfall slopes downward at about a 30-degree angle. It's fairly easy to fall out of a raft, but many people never do. The waterfall is just exciting enough so that you

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A roaring '20s decor blends with classic jazz and gourmet food to create a unique Chapel Hill dining experience at Aurora.

Gourmet treats and art deco atmosphere featured at Aurora

By MACK RAY
DTH Contributor

Listening to the sound of classic jazz while sipping a cup of wine, customers at Aurora on West Franklin Street dine at glossy black tables among lush vegetation and art-deco artifacts.

Tastebuds are appeased with such cosmopolitan delights as shrimp scampi, chicken marsala, sweet and sour trout and eggplant parmigiana.

dining

AURORA

5:30-10 p.m. Sun.-Thurs.

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454 W. Franklin St.

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The restaurant seems transplanted from New York or San Francisco. Down here in the fried chicken and honey biscuit belt, Aurora is pure serendipity at reasonable cost.

Entrees are priced between \$4 and \$6, and salads cost extra. The soup of the day is always good, and Aurora features a complete beer and wine list.

Aurora is popular, and, on weekend nights, reservations are advisable. People waiting to be seated at Aurora are lulled by the music and a complimentary cup of wine

to sweeten the delay. Diners may peruse the amusing collection of antique chocolate-soda ads, photographs of Groucho Marx and Abbott and Costello or the giant cactus in the corner. The decor is stark and clean. Bare wood floors and tables without tablecloths are integral effects in the motif cultivated at Aurora.

Beyond the nostalgic facade lies good food. The recipes are uncommon, the desserts varied and exotic (such as Aurora Borealis). Service is very prompt.

Even the house plants are healthy and vigorous, emblematic of the meticulous attention to detail that makes for fine dining at Aurora.

The Aurora, on Franklin Street across from McDonald's, serves dinner from 5:30 to 10 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays. Their new menu features smoked fish and chopped liver pate for appetizers, and specialties include vichyssoise, minestrone, Cagan black bean soup, scallops provencale, hazel nut torte, Russian bialka, chocolate mousse and black bottom pie.

Savor a carefully prepared, distinctive meal and listen to the music. After the repast, you can sip an esperanto or cappuchino, or even regular coffee. When you step out on Franklin Street, you may be surprised to find yourself still in Chapel Hill.

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