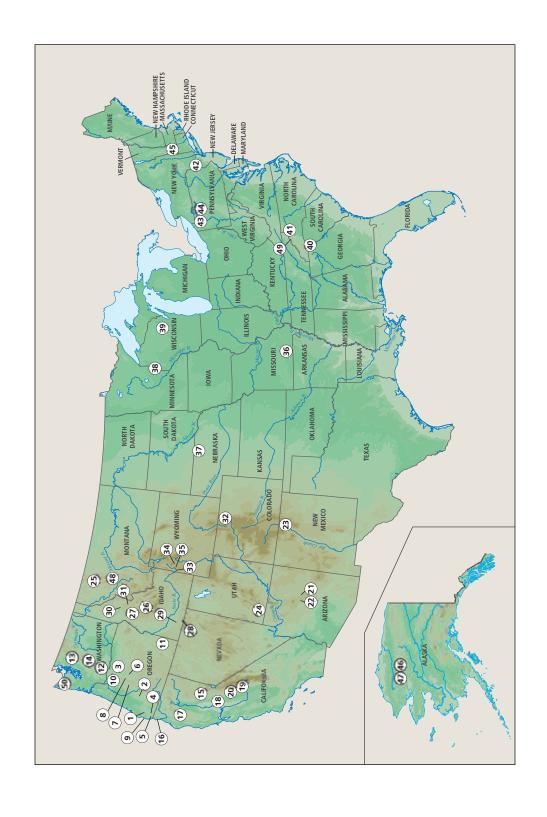
# Paddling **AMERICA**

# Contents

INTRODUCTION		
THE WILD & SCENIC RIVERS ACT  • The Original Eight Rivers and Major Tributaries	xii xiii	
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK MAP LEGEND	xvi xiii	
Pacific Northwest	1	
Oregon	3	
1. Rogue River	3	
2. North Umpqua River	9	
3. Lower Deschutes River	14	
<ul> <li>How to Cook in a Dutch Oven</li> </ul>	18	
4. Chetco River	21	
5. Illinois River	26	
6. Crooked River	31	
7. McKenzie River	37	
8. Metolius River	42	
9. Elk River	48	
10. Clackamas River	53	
11. Owyhee River	58	
Washington	65	
12. White Salmon River	65	
• Freeing the White Salmon River: Removing Condit Dam	69	
13. Skagit River	72	
14. Middle Fork Snoqualmie River	78	
California	83	
15. Middle Fork Feather River	84	
16. North Fork Smith River	89	
17 Trinity River	94	

18. Lower American River	99
19. Merced River	103
<ul> <li>Paddling the Upper Merced River</li> </ul>	109
20. Tuolumne River	110
Southwest	116
Arizona	117
21. Verde River	117
22. Fossil Creek	122
New Mexico	127
23. Rio Grande	127
<ul> <li>5 Tips for Keeping Food Fresh on the River</li> </ul>	134
Utah	135
24. Virgin River	135
Intermountain West	140
Montana	141
25. Middle Fork Flathead River	141
<ul> <li>Bears on Wilderness Rivers</li> </ul>	146
Idaho	149
26. Middle Fork Salmon River	149
27. Main Salmon River	156
<ul> <li>Kids' Activities on the River</li> </ul>	162
28. Jarbidge River	165
29. Bruneau River	170
30. Lochsa River	175
31. Selway River	179
Colorado	185
32. Cache la Poudre River	185
Wyoming	190
33. Snake River	190
34. Granite Creek	196
35. Hoback River	201
<ul> <li>The Science of Free-Flowing Rivers</li> </ul>	204

Midwest	208
Missouri	209
36. Eleven Point River	209
Nebraska	214
37. Niobrara River	214
<ul> <li>Canoe Tripping with Dogs</li> </ul>	218
Minnesota and Wisconsin	220
38. Saint Croix River	220
39. Wolf River	226
East	231
Georgia and South Carolina	232
40. Chattooga River	232
North Carolina	237
41. Wilson Creek	237
Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York	242
42. Delaware River	242
Pennsylvania	250
43. Allegheny River	250
44. Clarion River	255
Massachusetts	260
45. Westfield River	260
Partnership Rivers	265
Far North	266
Alaska	267
46. Alatna River	267
Bald Eagle Facts	271
47. Noatak River	272
Future Wild and Scenic Rivers	276
Montana	277
48. North Fork Blackfoot River	277
North Carolina	283
49. Nolichucky River	283
Washington	289
50. Sol Duc River	289
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	294



# Introduction

Our home-on-wheels, a 24-foot Coachman Catalina RV we call Gilly, rolled up to the Casa Loma store near the Tuolumne River in California. We stopped in the cafe, ordered burritos, and waited for our friends to meet us at the corner. That day, we would cross off the Tuolumne from our list of national Wild and Scenic rivers. We repeated this day over fifty times on our Wild River Life tour, a road trip aimed at paddling fifty of the most beautiful, most wild, most scenic, and most beloved rivers across our country.

We started this tour with very little understanding of what it meant for a river to be designated as Wild and Scenic. With the fiftieth anniversary of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act approaching in 2018, our desire to know more about these rivers grew. We had an itch to live simply while traveling across America, and so we sold everything, moved into an RV, and hit the road as the Wild River Life. In addition to floating these rivers, we also hoped to increase awareness about this form of river protection. This guidebook is part of that effort: to share what we learned along the way and encourage more people to know these spectacular rivers.

Our river exploration aspirations began long before Wild River Life. Adam learned to kayak and raft at a young age on the big, muddy waters of the Southwest. As soon as he could, he began guiding multiday river trips on Utah's San Juan River, then on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. He traveled to China to guide Chinese citizens on their iconic home rivers, manage a rafting company, and slip away for first descents on the edge of the Tibetan plateau when he could. His boat and camera further propelled him around the world, to the Brazilian jungle with National Geographic TV's Monster Fish and to Mexico's waterfalls with River Roots's Chasing Niagara.

Susan jumped in her own boat soon after her first trip as a commercial whitewater rafting guest while in high school in Pennsylvania. As a raft guide, kayak instructor, and traveling high school teacher, she devoted years to exploring rivers from New York to South Carolina, Montana to California, and internationally in Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and China. Today, with a graduate degree in hand, she's on her way to helping repair and enhance river systems as a river restoration engineer and scientist. And as a member of the board of directors for American Whitewater, she is helping this nonprofit organization improve access to, and the health of, rivers nationwide.

As we explored, we increasingly recognized a scarcity of healthy river systems. The Great Bend of the Yangtze, the section of river where we first met, was transformed by massive dams and disappeared under a series of mammoth, stairstep reservoirs. Towns and cities sent their raw sewage and smoldering landfills into rivers, where



The Wild River Life family now totals four! ADAM ELLIOTT

these problems would move downstream. Rampant and unplanned development pushed natural rivers into concrete ditches or underneath growing urban sprawl. With each trip we found ourselves even more grateful to return home to our own nation's healthy ecosystems, pristine watersheds, and protected rivers. We soon came to realize that the United States is the only country in the world with a national protected system of rivers.

And so, with our gear trailer loaded with kayaks, packrafts, stand-up paddleboards, and a complete multiday raft kit, we set out from our home in White Salmon, Washington, to not only paddle America's Wild and Scenic rivers but also to inspire others to do the same.

As the road trip rolled on, we learned that we would give birth to our daughter halfway through the project. We began imagining the rivers through the eyes of a child. We dreamt of her first Wild and Scenic float trip. We wondered what these rivers would look like to a one-year-old, to a five-year-old, to a ten-year-old. Would the river still feel pristine for her? Would more rivers be protected? We realized that our work promoting these rivers may mean our daughter will be able to experience them in their wild states. Perhaps our work would even help protect new Wild and Scenic rivers for her to enjoy. We certainly hope she will learn that none of us can take a protected, free-flowing river for granted. Rather, we must celebrate these rivers frequently, preferably with a paddle in hand.

See you on the river.

# The Wild & Scenic Rivers Act

#### WILD AND SCENIC ORIGINS

Damage to our rivers in the decades leading up to the 1960s became the primary impetus for the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Our nation went dam crazy. Rivers became reservoirs, water quality plummeted, fish stocks disappeared, and both upstream and downstream ecosystems suffered greatly. The Clean Water Act helped the pollution problem, but our nation continued to erase, plug up, and relocate entire rivers to satisfy development and population growth.

It took several specific and fortuitous events to spawn the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Coincidental meetings between wilderness advocates and congressional staff fostered unlikely legislative champions. Scientific literature began to publish research that pointed to the essential role of free-flowing rivers in the health and integrity of broader landscapes. Conservation organizations became empowered to take action.

Of course, without key outspoken proponents, the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act would never have passed. Frank and John Craighead, a pair of candid brothers, zealously committed themselves to preventing the West's pristine rivers from suffering a similar ruin as their favorite childhood streams on the East Coast. Pollution and development had pushed the waterways of their youth to extinction, and the brothers fought hard to stave off such misfortune in other regions.

Most importantly, local advocates everywhere began to speak up for their backyard rivers. In his book Wild and Scenic Rivers: An American Legacy, Tim Palmer reminds us that "every stream in the Wild and Scenic system was added because people were motivated to save their waterway, if not from the explicit threat of a dam that would completely bury their place under a reservoir, then from strip mining, clear-cutting or overdevelopment." It took this collection of figures, moments, and ideas to catalyze the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act.

## NATIONAL RIVER PROTECTION BEGINS

On October 2, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. The original eight designations actually included twelve separate rivers. For instance, the Saint Croix River designation also covered over 100 miles of the Namekagon River, a major tributary, in addition to about 100 miles on the St. Croix.

Today, the official count of designated rivers is at 208, as listed in the sections of the public law identifying the rivers. However, in his extensive research, Wild and Scenic expert Tim Palmer has determined an alternate method of counting that considers

cases where a designated river also includes tributaries over 5 miles in length. He found a total of 289 rivers protected by the act as of 2017. Still, the total number of actual river miles (12,734) is less than half of 1 percent of our nation's total river miles. The system has room for growth to say the least.

Alaska has 3,210 river miles protected, the most of any state. California comes in second with 1,999.6 miles, and Oregon at 1,916.7 miles, a close third. Oregon has the most number of rivers in the system, fifty-nine total, followed by California with forty-one rivers and Alaska with thirty rivers. However, while Alaska ranks high

"AN UNSPOILED RIVER IS A VERY TO BALANCE OUR RIVER DEVELOPMENT

—President Lyndon Johnson's remarks on signing the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968

with these rankings, only 0.8 percent of the state's mileage is protected as Wild and Scenic. California does slightly better with a full 1 percent of miles protected and Oregon a whopping 2 percent. This will explain why we chose to feature so many rivers from both California and Oregon, and two longer trips from Alaska.

## THE ORIGINAL EIGHT RIVERS AND MAJOR TRIBUTARIES

Middle Fork Clearwater River, Idaho (including the Lochsa and Selway Rivers in Idaho)

Middle Fork Feather River, California

Eleven Point River, Missouri

Rio Grande, New Mexico (including the Red River in New Mexico)

Middle Fork Salmon River, Idaho

Saint Croix River, Minnesota and Wisconsin (including Namekagon River, Wisconsin)

Wolf River, Wisconsin

Rogue River, Oregon

#### CLASSIFICATIONS

Each segment of river carries one of three different classifications. We think of these as a spectrum that ranges from highly inaccessible and pristine to easily accessible with evidence of development:

- 1. Recreational: River sections easily accessed by a road, some development visible along shorelines and forms of impoundment (such as diversions or dams) may have existed in the past.
- 2. Scenic: Rivers with road access in a few places and mostly primitive shorelines.
- 3. Wild: Rivers only accessible by trail, flowing through largely intact landscapes that are remnants of America's past.

The classifications also lead to naming convention confusion. Rivers can be classified as just Scenic, or just Wild, or just Recreational, or have a combination of classifications on different segments of river. All of these rivers are referred to as "Wild and Scenic rivers."

#### **OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES**

Each designated river must have one or more Outstandingly Remarkable Values that make the place worth protecting. These could be cultural, recreational, scenic, historic, fisheries, wildlife, water quality, and more. Each river receives a comprehensive river management plan designed to protect and enhance these specific values, as well as to ensure no new dams or development projects be built that could diminish the free-flowing nature of the river or the integrity of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values. Because these values helped the river earn a designation, they are worth knowing before a visit to the river. They make these rivers extraordinary. Familiarity with this list may also lead to a greater sense of joint ownership for our public waterways, and the motivation to stand up and help protect more rivers.

## HOW DOES A RIVER GET INTO THE WILD AND **SCENIC SYSTEM?**

"There is no such thing as an immaculate designation," comments Kevin Colburn, American Whitewater's national stewardship director. "The stork does not deliver Wild and Scenic Rivers. Designation takes action!"

Kevin and his team have helped local advocates protect many rivers. They know the process is far from easy. "Designations take an incredible amount of hard work by people with the vision and persistence to build support in local communities and take it all the way to the halls of Congress," he says. "And then, the political stars have to align in a complex and dynamic way so that Congress prioritizes and passes legislation."



Signage marks the Wild and Scenic Granite Creek in the Snake River Headwaters. ADAM ELLIOTT

To put it simply, in most cases citizens work with a senator or representative to propose one or more rivers for designation within a bill. Eventually it will be voted upon by all of Congress and signed into law by the President.

A second approach occurs when a state governor requests the Secretary of the Interior to designate a river. To take this path, the river must first carry a state-level designation or be administered by a federal agency.

Prior to designation, river management agencies study rivers to determine if they are potential additions to the system based on their free-flowing status and at least one Outstandingly Remarkable Value. The public can get involved in this stage and share what makes specific rivers worthy of protection. These agency-recognized streams are ideal candidates for future designation and are typically afforded some level of interim protection.

## A FUTURE OF RIVER PROTECTION

While the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act protects many iconic river reaches, such as the Middle Fork Salmon, the Flathead, and the Delaware, these make up only a fraction of the free-flowing rivers necessary for healthy ecosystems and economies. "Without more designations, in 100 or even 500 years our nation will have lost many outstanding rivers," comments Colburn. And while rivers may be valuable when harnessed for development, they also provide great value as a wild resource. Free-flowing rivers perform vital ecosystem services for free that would be costly and cumbersome to recreate (see "The Science of Free-Flowing Rivers" on pages 204-205). As a reminder that we must continue to protect more or our rivers, we chose to include three "Future Wild and Scenic Rivers" in our top 50 (see #48 North Fork Blackfoot, #49 Nolichucky, and #50 Sol Duc Rivers). "Rivers belong to all of us," claims Colburn. "They are valuable for recreation-based economies, for the fish and clean water they bring us, and for the magnetic and inspiring solace of wild-flowing water."

# How to Use this Book

We hope that this guidebook inspires you to explore the rivers that others have fought hard to protect. As you flip through the following descriptions keep in mind these few pointers:

- We chose to focus on sections of designated Wild and Scenic rivers with some of the best paddling opportunities. The mileage presented in the descriptions and maps reflects the specific paddling section and not the entire designated reach (total length).
- Always be prepared for changing weather, wear a personal flotation device (PFD), bring other important safety equipment, scout when you are unsure of a line, and employ more basic river-running skills. If you are new to paddling, great! Consider taking a swiftwater rescue course (Rescue3.com) if you want to be planning your own trips.
- Difficulty ratings are given for average flows. Rapids may increase in difficulty due to high or low flows. Additionally, one person's class III is also another person's class IV. Use the flow range provided and other Internet or guidebook resources to determine if the river is flowing low, medium, or high. When the difficulty rating is presented in parenthesis, such as the Jarbidge River's class III-IV (V) rating, the rapid in parenthesis can be portaged. This will help you understand how challenging the rapids may be.
- We generally only illustrate rapids at or above a class III rating and describe those that are most memorable. We avoid detailed descriptions of class V–V+ rapids. You'll need to do your own research there for safety reasons. Also, remember that free-flowing rivers change from year to year, and these descriptions may not include those continual changes.

Paddlers use the terminology "river right" and "river left" to orient themselves on a river. "River right" will always be the right side when facing downstream. Same with river left.

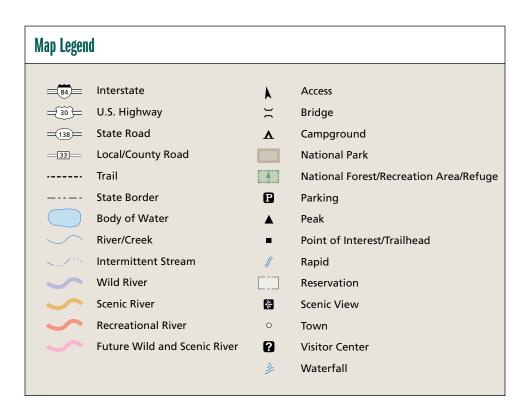


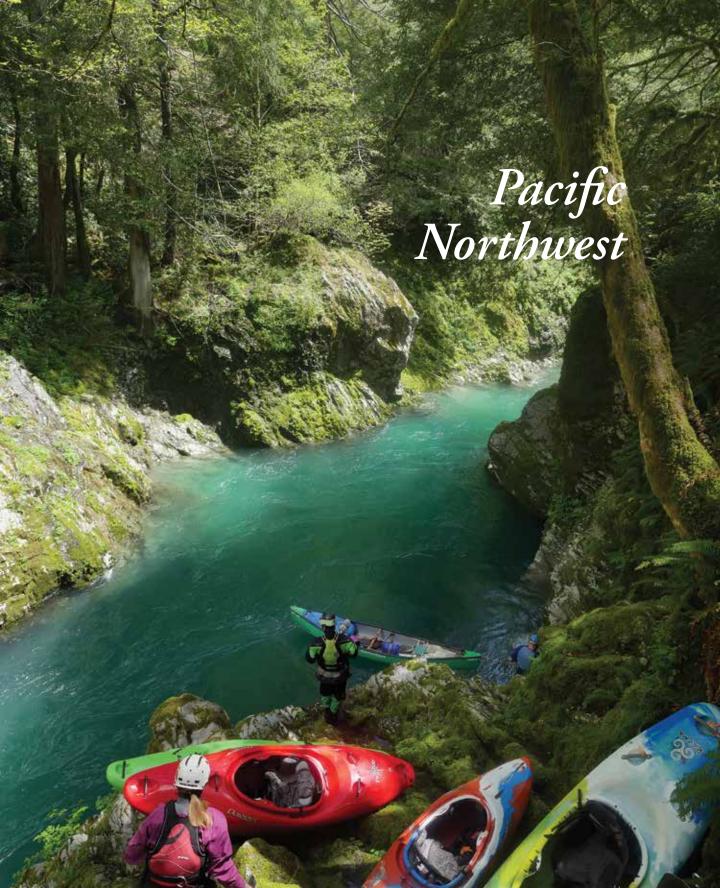
"We live in a van down by the river!" Adam and Susan pack up Gilly, the roadhome, while Wallace supervises. Adam Elliott

• We aim to entice you to plan a few Wild and Scenic trips through stunning images, richly descriptive prose, and basic logistics. In some cases, you'll want more information to prepare for your trip, especially for the multiday river trips. Use a river or state-specific guidebook to see campsite descriptions, read about hazards, understand regulations, and learn more about your Wild and Scenic sojourn. Most paddling trips can also be found in the national river database compiled at AmericanWhitewater.org.



Susan takes a break from her kayak to row the raft on the Illinois River. ADAM ELLIOTT





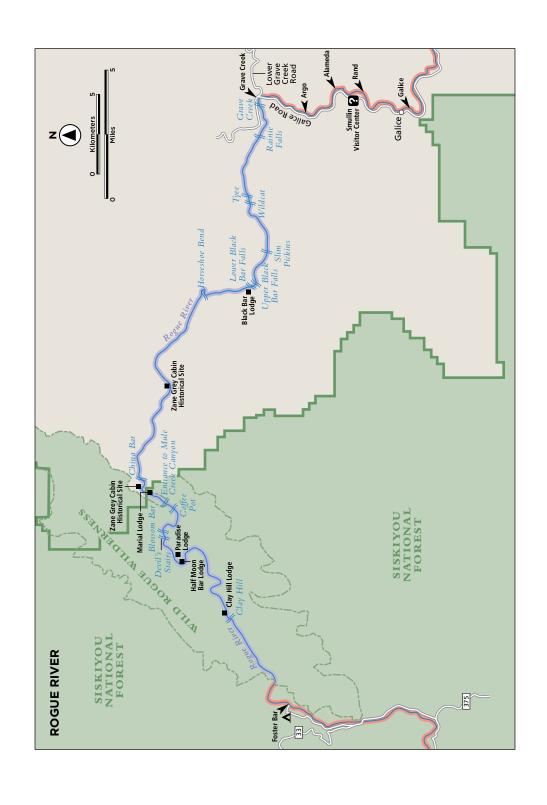


The Rogue River is the quintessential western Wild and Scenic River, having nearly every single Outstandingly Remarkable Value. Adam Elliott

1

# **ROGUE RIVER**

Section name	Grave Creek to Foster Bar
Distance	34 miles
Flow range	1,200-30,000 cfs
Season and source of water	Year-round season; dam release upstream and slow snowmelt
Gauge location	Agness, USGS #14372300
Time required	3-4 days
Classification	Wild
Difficulty	II-IV
Managing agency	Bureau of Land Management, Medford District; Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest
Permit required?	Yes
Shuttle type	Vehicle
Outstandingly Remarkable Values	Fisheries, recreational, scenery
Why paddle this section?	Really fun rapids, superb mountain scenery, protected for over five decades, inevitable bear sightings



#### RIVER DESCRIPTION

Descending from Crater Lake National Park, in the high Cascade Mountains of southwestern Oregon, to the Pacific Ocean, the Rogue River has long captivated American explorers. Native Americans flocked to the river's cold and powerful waters for the abundance of salmon and to the fertile lands alongside. Gold miners discovered riches along the river's banks. Today, every river runner yearns to add the legendary Rogue to his or her list of familiar watersheds.

Craggy but smooth rocks jut from the water that manipulate currents and create rapids that entice both intermediate river runners looking to paddle their own boats and novice adventurers joining a commercial trip. Along the banks of the river, the geologic foundation is covered by a rich and complex Siskiyou forest ecosystem with cascading mountain streams and rugged terrain. The Rogue's rich wildlife and remarkable beauty combine with a storied history of Native Americans and early settlers to make the Rogue many paddlers' favorite yearly river trip. It's no surprise that the Rogue joined the "original eight" rivers signed into the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act in 1968.

Takelma Native Americans lived in the upper Rogue River area until floods of settlers entered the valley in search of gold in the 1850s. Encounters between the groups were not pleasant, and soon the Natives were forced onto reservations far away. Evidence of all former residents can be found along the Rogue and within the valley.

Commercial outfitters have really upped their game on this classic river stretch: Specialty food and wine trips provide a gourmet camping experience; brewer-hosted trips provide guests with an opportunity to sample an impressive array of local craft beers; and classic lodge-to-lodge trips allow river runners to experience a river-accessible lodge each night. Check out Northwest Rafting Company (nwrafting.com) for some of these options.

We must apologize to the Rogue River for shortening this description to only the section between Grave Creek and Foster Bar. Recreational and Scenic designations extend both upstream and downstream of this Wild total length, which is simply the most iconic. Many groups begin their trips at or upstream of Galice, a small outpost and shuttle hub. This upper section also provides a day or two of class II warm-up before descending below Grave Creek. Other trips continue downstream past Foster Bar. You'll just have to plan multiple trips to this watershed to see it all.

## PADDLER'S NOTES

Between May 15 and October 15 all river runners need a lottery-issued permit to float this section of the Rogue. All other times of year there is a self-issued permit system. Apply for a lottery system permit in December and January of each year at Recreation.gov. If you don't win the lottery, you can also call the BLM Smullin

Visitor Center at Rand (541-479-3735) to try to pick up cancellations for the near future or show up at Rand (just upstream from Grave Creek) first thing the morning of your desired launch and pick up same-day cancellation spots. Commercial outfitters will release their user days to the public a few days prior to launch if they have not sold them by then.

Numerous class II rapids fill the gaps in between the class III-IV rapids described here. The first of these comes within earshot of the put-in. Grave Creek Riffle and Falls, a typical Rogue whitewater specimen, will get you wet immediately.

A calmer float carries you to the pool above Rainie Falls. "Old Man Rainie," an early settler, lived in a small cabin at the base of the falls in the early 1900s. Take your time on the scout from river left. Often salmon can be seen jumping up the falls. The left channel will lead you over the actual falls, a class IV drop at most water levels and class V at high water. Most boaters opt to take the far-right line through the fish ladder. This involves a tricky dance of shipping your oars, lining through tight spots, and even using a bow paddler to prevent broaching. Some boats take the middle chute, just as narrow and technical as the fish ladder but with a steeper drop at the end. Above 3,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), guard rocks in the entrance to the middle chute could send you left over Rainie Falls.

The next class III, Tyee, at river mile 4.8, channels boaters to the right, where some zigzagging moves help avoid a pour-over or hole feature. Slim Pickins, at river mile 6.8, received its name from the early days of blasting the riverbed to open up the channel. A double-punch comes just 2 miles downstream at Upper and Lower Blackbar Falls rapids. A long class II straightaway leads to Horseshoe Bend rapid around yes—a tight bend in the river at river mile 10.5.

Enjoy a peaceful stretch before whitewater returns at the China Bar rapid at river mile 21.5, just upstream of Rogue River Ranch. The ranch's historical museum is worth a peak and the big green lawn out front deserves an Ultimate Frisbee match.

Suddenly, just 1 mile downstream, rock walls pinch from both shorelines and force the entire river's powerful flow into the narrow slot between them. This is Mule Creek Canyon, a class IV reach. This one is hard to scout, but it's possible from the Rogue River trail. Geologic shifting has occurred in your favor here, with little gradient change within these walls. However, the boils and speed of the water absolutely keep smaller boats on their toes. The Coffee Pot churns about a quarter mile from the head of the canyon; it's a seething whirlpool boil that can flip a fully loaded raft at certain flows. Set safety just below here to throw a rope to any swimmers who may enter the Pot. Eddy out on the left toward the end of the canyon to enjoy Stair Creek Falls.

Blossom Bar, a class IV rapid, sits just around the bend. Pull over on the right to walk downstream to scout and watch other paddlers' lines. Rafts take the left channel with a quick ferry move back to the center to avoid a jumble of pinning rocks called



The Rogue River can be a quiet and peaceful place in the evenings. NATE WILSON / NORTHWEST RAFTING COMPANY

the Picket Fence that extends from the left bank. There is a good chance you'll even see a deflated and pinned raft on the fence during busy summer months—not a fun way to end your trip.

Shortly after the pool at the base of Blossom Bar, the river enters the Devil's Stairs, where you follow the main tongue down the right, taking care to avoid the wall along river right.

The class III action dwindles after Devil's Stairs and you'll begin to see jet boat tours motoring upstream. Luckily, they aren't permitted above Blossom Bar during the peak whitewater season. Lots of great camping, hiking, swimming, and cliff jumping await you on the rest of the river trip, such as at Clay Hill camp or Flora Dell Falls.

The variety of river campsites along the Rogue River makes each night different. There are too many to include in this description or on the map, but you'll want to grab a copy of the Rogue River float guidebook anyway. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a guide available for download from its website with detailed descriptions and locations of each campsite.

Bears have historically ravaged rafters' food stashes from coolers, dry boxes, and anything nylon. River managers worked hard to educate river runners about bear safety and have even constructed several electric bear enclosures at high-use camps. Thanks to this effort, far fewer incidents of curious and hungry bears are reported today, but bear sightings are still very common.



Warm summer afternoons and fine cliff jumping on the Rogue River. NATE WILSON / NORTHWEST RAFTING COMPANY

#### **DIRECTIONS TO TAKEOUT**

Setting shuttle over Bear Camp Road takes nearly a full day, and for this reason most river runners hire a shuttle service. The Galice Resort, (541) 476-3818, offers shuttles, among others. From Merlin, continue on Galice Road until you arrive in Galice in 11.5 miles. To drop a car at the takeout, turn left (away from the river) on Galice Creek Road. Bring a map to navigate any unmarked junctions. Turn right at the T, when this road hits Agness Road. In 2 miles turn right to reach Foster Bar. Bear Camp Road closes for nearly all of November to May due to snow. Shuttles during these months involve a trip out to the Oregon coast and a dip into northern California.

#### **DIRECTIONS TO PUT-IN**

From Galice, Grave Creek access site is just 7 miles downstream. You'll pass other boat launch options along the way that work great as well.

#### **NEARBY ATTRACTIONS**

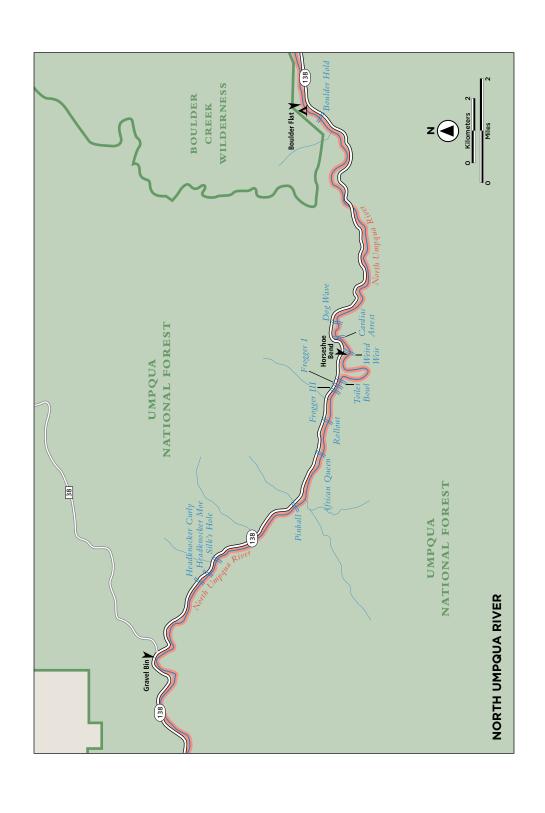
The Illinois Wild and Scenic River flows into the Rogue just downstream of the Foster Bar takeout. The mountains surrounding the Rogue also beckon more days of outdoor play, as well as the rugged southern Oregon coast. Oh, and you are practically a step away from Northern California, so head down toward the Smith River drainage for more excellent excursion options.

## NORTH UMPQUA RIVER

Section name	Boulder Flat to Gravel Bin
Distance	14 miles
Flow range	500-5,000 cfs
Season and source of water	Occasionally all year; fall and winter rain, spring snowmelt into summer
Gauge location	Above Copeland Creek near Toketee Falls, USGS #14316500
Time required	1 day
Classification	Recreational
Difficulty	III (IV)
Managing agency	Umpqua National Forest
Permit required?	No
Shuttle type	Vehicle
Outstandingly Remarkable Values	Culture, fisheries, recreation, scenery, water quality
Why paddle this section?	Great balance of fun class III and spectacular scenery, incredible fisheries, and a vibrant forest ecosystem; a perfect weekend escape

#### **RIVER DESCRIPTION**

The North Umpqua's long season and plentiful class III rapids make the run a favorite of every Northwest paddler. The river flows off the steep volcanoes of Oregon's Cascade Range. Evidence of the molten history can be seen in the towering basalt columns along the upper stretch of river. Many giant old-growth trees throughout the watershed have





Rafters bop down through one of the many class II boulder gardens. ADAM ELLIOTT

been preserved from the voracious logging days. Now surrounded by national forest land, where better long-term logging strategies are practiced, the Umpqua's riparian forest fills the corridor with the fresh, richly pure air of a healthy ecosystem.

Anglers began floating the run long ago. The North Umpqua's fish runs draw international notoriety. Beginning in the 1920s, prospectors, loggers, and explorers established fishing camps along the river to take home the legendary steelhead and salmon that use the river for spawning.

Today, fishing holes around the confluence of Steamboat Creek may offer the most popular angling in the country. For this reason, management plans dictate specific months when boating is restricted so that anglers can have the full right-of-way. These times of year mostly occur when flows are too low to float, or early or late enough in the day that river runners aren't inconvenienced. From July to October, paddlers can enjoy the river section described here from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Anglers get the dawn and dusk hours. Other months of the year, we're free to float anytime. Downstream of the Gravel Bin access site, boaters must stay off the water all day from July 15 to October 31.

For paddlers of any craft, the North Umpqua offers a quality day of whitewater and scenery without any major hazards or portages. Rafts, canoes, kayaks, and more can be seen throughout the season, as well as plenty of riverside relaxers in their camp chairs simply enjoying the river's famous blue pools and riffles.

#### PADDLER'S NOTES

The first class III rapid of the run, Boulder Hole, sits just below the launch site. A jumble of rocks and a ledge have boaters weaving through this rapid. Scouting can be done from eddies or shore. Float through some pools and mellow rapids before arriving at Dog Wave, where a sneaker hole pops up on the left at lower flows. Not far downstream you'll want to stay left of a large island and go over Cardiac Arrest rapid, a longer rapid that continues past the downstream end of the island. Weird Weir rapid will demand you stay right as well, avoiding some ledges on the left.

Horseshoe Bend river access immediately follows Weird Weir on the right. The campground is another quarter mile beyond the access site. To cut the float distance by about half, start or end your trip here.

After floating around the large bend that Horseshoe Bend is named for, you'll arrive at class III Toilet Bowl. Froggers I and III follow (no, Frogger II is not noteworthy). Pick your way through Rollout Rapid just downstream. In another mile you'll want to start right at the African Queen rapid, as the river bends to the left and lands you in some punchy waves or a hole at the bottom.

Float under a bridge in about a mile, signifying that Pinball rapid, class IV, is nearby. Scouting is advisable from river left because the rapid is not easily portaged. Above the scouting spot on the left is an alligator wave that has been known to flip unprepared rafters busy looking for the scout eddy. Be alert even before the rapid to avoid this embarrassing possibility.

The final class III rapids on the run are Silk's Hole, Headknocker Moe, and Headknocker Curly just downstream. Float your way the final few miles to the Gravel Bin takeout site on river right, just before Steamboat Creek enters the main river.

#### **DIRECTIONS TO TAKEOUT**

From OR 99 south outside of Roseburg, turn left on North Bank Road. In a bit less than 17 miles you'll hit OR 138. Turn left here and head up the river on OR 138. Gravel Bin takeout is well marked at mile 40 on OR 138, on the right just past where Steamboat Creek flows into the North Umpqua.

#### **DIRECTIONS TO PUT-IN**

Continue upriver on OR 138 from the Gravel Bin takeout. To reach the takeout (or put-in) at Horseshoe Bend, look for US Forest Service Road 4750 near mile 46. Turn



Susan guides a paddle raft through the first hole in Pinball Rapid, North Fork Umpqua. ADAM ELLIOTT

right here and follow signs to the boat ramp. Parking is limited at the Horseshoe Bend river access site, so shuttle most vehicles to the takeout at Gravel Bin if possible. For the Boulder Flat put-in, look for Boulder Flat Campground around mile 54 on OR 138. The boat ramp and noncamper parking is located to the right.

#### **NEARBY ATTRACTIONS**

The Umpqua National Forest in this area contains more recreation options than you can imagine. Bring your hiking shoes, mountain bikes, fishing rods, and camping gear if you want to truly experience this watershed. An easy option is the North Umpqua Trail, which follows most of the river and can be accessed at twelve different trailheads.

Toketee Falls, upstream of the section described here, epitomizes the epic punchbowl-style waterfall known throughout the Pacific Northwest. The river flows over this two-tiered 113-foot (total) waterfall, with tall, columnar basalt cliffs sandwiching the falls in on either side. A pipeline diverts most of the river's flow around the drop for power generation downstream, but a portion of the river flows over the drop all year nonetheless. During heavy rains, this waterfall swells enough to attract the world's elite kayakers for the plunge.