

# The DDRC Current News

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*The Official Newsletter of the Dallas Downriver Club*

September 1999

## The saga of the great wilderness canoe camping adventure.

by Mike O'Neill

I planned to go on this remote camping/canoeing trip with the Dallas Down River Club (DDRC). I found them on the web one night while looking at canoe stuff. There were only seven people going from DDRC so they/we hooked up with the Big Thicket Voyagers (BTV)canoe club out of Beaumont which had fifteen or twenty going on the same trip at the same time. I took Friday off to plan and pack for my first canoe camping trip since boy scout days. Never mind that I have been making piles of stuff to take for the last four weeks! I needed the day off before the trip to get it all organized and loaded. I am a great state park camper where I can load my truck to the gills and drive right to the camp site but this was going to be something altogether different. We were going down the river with all we needed to stay alive, and hopefully comfortable, for the next three days and two nights.

Thursday evening my friend Mark came by and informed me that he was going to have to work Saturday and would not be joining us on this trip. Mark started a new job just a few weeks back and they were behind in production so there was just no way he and his daughter could get away. He dropped of a couple of 'head lights' that he picked up for KT and me. Mark has made trips like this one before and knows what he is going to miss. He is not happy. Next time Mark! These are neat lights, much like a sweatband with a light in the front. KT put hers' in her stuff sack and used it both nights we were camped out. I packed mine away and never saw it again.. Until we got back

home when I found it and used it to unload the canoe and gear.

Friday morning I had a plan (panic attack) for how to avert loosing equipment in the unlikely event of an upset canoe. KT and I showed up at the local livery at opening time (10 AM) and I bought six d-ring tie downs to attach to the bottom and sides of the canoe. With these, I figure we can lash everything in and go up side down over the waterfalls and not loose anything. Back at the house I spent two hours sanding and gluing these little insurance policies in place. Security was thick in the air!

Next it was time to dry load the boat. This is the practice of putting your stuff in the boat while it's still on land just to see if it all fits. So I carried everything out in the back yard, flipped the canoe right side up and started cramming our camping gear in it. Our dog, CB (Charlie Brown), thought this was great fun and managed to put his mark on several bags before I caught him in the act. He spent the rest of the afternoon in his little doggy carrier back in the air-conditioned house. While the bags were washing, I just mentally marked their space as occupied and continued loading, unloading, and rearranging the cargo.

First I loaded the boat too high to allow the back paddler to see forward when kneeling. Then there was too much stuff under the front seat to allow the front paddler to kneel down. Know ye that there are basically two positions to for a paddler to be in, both revolve

around the canoe seats. One is simply to sit on the seat with feet out front. The other is kneeling down on the bottom of the boat in front of the seat, with feet under the seat and bum rested against the front of (you guessed it) the seat. So I learned that the area underneath and directly in front of the canoe seats is taboo for gear storage. We also found out that, as in most forms of transportation, legroom is a large part of the comfort effect; the more the better.

Finally, I was satisfied with the gear storage and just on a whim I grabbed the back of the boat and lifted up. Nothing. I got directly behind the canoe, put two hands on the handle, bent my legs, straightened my back and gave a mighty heave. I think I moved it. Now when I was shopping for a canoe I did a lot of reading up on different designs for different purposes. White water, flat water, speed, stability,carrying capacity; all of these design characteristic exist in varying proportions in all but the most specialized boats. A canoe that excels at one will be lacking in another. Since I love to camp and am not (yet) inclined to want to push the envelope on class IV white water rapids I opted for a canoe weighted more towards stability and carrying capacity. Was I worried? Naw, I went in the house, found the brochure for my canoe and read where it said its carrying capacity was over a thousand pounds. Great that's almost the capacity of my pick-up truck isn't it?No problem.

I unloaded the canoe directly into the back of the truck. Darn near filled it up. Looked like we were headed out to the State Park for a week. Not to worry, my boat could carry a thousand pounds down the river. I took the empty ice

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# 1999

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chest in side, ready to load up with ice, food and drink when we get up at 2:30 the next morning to leave. Set the alarm, go to bed, get up, put a couple of things beside the front door so I won't forget to bring them along. Go back to bed. Get up two more times to add to this new pile of stuff. Now it's eleven PM and I'm starting to nod off. . . BUZZZZZ time to get up!

I hit the snooze but I am up before it goes off because I remembered

**Get Connected on the Internet**

DDRC's website is provided by Inturnet, inc., a local ISP based in Richardson. In addition to providing our club with FREE web space, inturnet also offers access to DDRC members at a 10% discount off the regular monthly rate of \$19.95 per month for unlimited, 24 hours per day access.

To top it off, DDRC receives a 10% bonus for each member signing up, so it's a double win-win for you and the club. If you want your own web pages, inturnet provides 10MB FREE space, enough space to create about 900 pages (more or less)! You will also receive an e-mail address so you can communicate easier.

Call Tod E. Weber at (972)783-0066 for an account and be sure to tell him you are a DDRC member so both you and the club get the bonuses, or contact Rich Grayson.

something else I needed to bring. Shower, load the ice chest, load the truck and we're away at three fifteen AM. Not bad. Oops we're almost out of gas. Found an all night station, tanked up and we are on the highway. Made good time to Huntsville, despite a little fog, and headed east on hwy 190 towards our rendezvous at the Sabine River on the Louisiana border. The terrain was becoming hilly and the roads narrower but at six or seven on a Saturday morning there was little traffic and we were still making good time. Nice to see the sunrise after the clouds break up a little and the canoe hanging over the hood was just right to keep the sun out of Katie's eyes. We replenished the gas tank and had a nice sit down breakfast in Jasper, Texas then on to the put in under the bridge where hwy 63 crosses the Sabine.

We are the fourth group to arrive. It's 9:10 AM and we are greeted by Sam, the coordinator of this float for the DDRC. Sam came down the night before and camped out where we are putting in. He has his canoe loaded and is ready to get on down the river. The Sabine River authority has recently graded the little access road under the bridge so we are a comfortable hundred yards or so from the river, just back from the edge of a 40-foot sand dune that leads down to the river. While KT and I haul all one thousand pounds of our gear down to the river, other groups of canoes arrive, are loaded and the paddlers are waiting to run the shuttle. This is where everybody jumps in their vehicles and caravans the 20 miles to the take out,

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**Newsletter:** The DDRC newsletter, Current News, is a monthly publication distributed to club members and affiliated paddling organizations nationwide. The deadline for submissions is the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month. Information may be submitted via e-mail, at [schleter@dallas.net](mailto:schleter@dallas.net), or fax/phone to Steve Schleter, at (972) 329-0729. Articles about and of direct interest to DDRC members will receive first priority, paid advertising will be given second priority, and other materials will be included on a space-available basis. Unless otherwise specified, all information about river trips will be added to the DDRC Internet website trip calendar.

**Change of Address:** Please contact Chris Cockrell, Treasurer, if you need to report a change of mailing address. If you fail to get a newsletter, it will be because we do not have a current address or your membership has expired. Chris will be happy to correct wrong addresses, and take your dues if you are in arrears.

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piles back in one vehicle, Jerry's pickup, and comes back to the put in. On the ride back I visited with a girl named Peggy from Houston, Montrose area (cute girl) and with a guy from Houston named John who had his fiancée on the trip with him. When get back I still have some arranging and lashing of gear to do. So we bid our fellows bon voyage and vow to see them down the river at the lunch stop. While we pack and lash down our gear about 12 kayaks unload, pack and set off. I think someone asked how many weeks we planned to be on the river. I think I ignored them.

Float! Yes! The canoe not only floats but has almost eight inches of freeboard. It must be noon now. We are high and dry, going down the river! What a feeling. We can just see a canoe or kayak up ahead rounding the bend. The river is wide, clear, cool and constantly turning. On the inside shores are ever larger white sandy beaches rising gently to a dense pine forests. The outside banks are more cliff like but still sandy and wooded all the way to the water and beyond. Lots of erosion on this side and lots of trees and stumps in the water. Some recently fallen but most looked like they had been there a long time. The current was moving best on this side so KT and I quickly learned how to go in and out and around these trees and only occasionally over submerged stumps. I was fearless, for I knew somewhere in the bottom of one of my packs I had a brand new roll of duck tape and I knew I could repair any hole some ole' stump could poke in my canoe.

We paddled in solitude for a couple of hours. Only a few times did kayaks come zipping past. What peace. Once, a couple of canoes passed us while KT and I paused to snack and swim. I was compelled to ask them that question Jerimah Johnson asked the old mountain man when they met towards the end of the movie: "What month do you recon it is back out there in civilization?" This was so quite and isolated that not until the end of our third day on the river did I hear a car or truck. Saturday afternoon several hours before dark the clouds

blew up, thunder and lightening and a huge headwind. We were paddling within eyesight of two other members from our group so we all pulled up on a sand bar together, put on ponchos and enjoyed the cooling shower. In about 20 minutes the lightening storm passed and we paddled on.

I was told we did twelve miles the first day so when KT and I rounded the bend where our bunch was all spread out we had a good hour and a half before dark and we were ready to get out of the boat. There is a line on the sandbars called the generation line. Above this line the sand is dry, below it is wet and under water when they are releasing water to generate electricity at Toledo Bend reservoir's dam. We heard stories of people waking up in the middle of the night with the river surrounding their tents because someone somewhere needed electricity and the dams were opened to make it for them. They were not generating so far today and were not scheduled to again until Monday but tents should be well above this dry line and all canoes should be tied securely to something solid, just in case. KT and I hauled all one thousand pounds of our gear about one hundred and fifty yards up the sand bar, spread it out, set up tents and tarps, tables, broke out the two-burner Coleman stove, the twelve inch cast iron skillet, set up our lawn chairs and just about passed out. Winston & his bride and Paul & 'Muffin' both brought nice big light weight Kelty sun shade shelters which served as the central meeting place. KT and I walked down and visited for a little while with some of the old timers. Winston, Tommy and Paul had done the 'Lower Grand Canyon' trip several times and loved to tell the stories. John was drinking scotch whisky, with his Labrador retriever sitting on the sand next to him on one side and his intended on the other, telling all the bad jokes he could think of. We visited and looked at some of their light-weight gear. We had a head count of 21 at the first camp site. Five from DDRC and 16 from the BTV. KT and I were beat and turned in before the camp fire

even got good and going.

Up with the birds the next day. Could see all up and down the line of 10 or 12 campsites; most were sippin' coffee and eating a little breakfast. KT and I had milk and sausage and pancakes cooked on our two-burner Coleman stove in our 12-inch cast iron skillet some one hundred and fifty yards from the canoe. We all started breaking camp about the same time, but before I had my sleeping bag rolled up and stove stored away, some of our group started stopping by to check out our "base camp" and say "see ya' on the river" (syotr). They were packed and out of there. These guys all packed like backpackers. Small, light and few frills. It took KT and me another hour and a half to break camp and haul our one thousand pounds of gear the one hundred and fifty yards back down to the canoe and lash it in. This was, without a doubt, the low point on our trip. We were exhausted from moving the camp back down to the river with the prospect of doing the same that evening and the next morning. I was not a happy camper at this point in the trip. I was ready to paddle all the way to the take out and get on home! I took a quick swim to cool down, apologized to KT for being so grumpy and off we went. KT is a real trooper!

Today was to be a shorter trip. Six or eight miles. So we floated, fished, paddled and just enjoyed the river. An occasional kayak or canoe would come by, we'd pass someone from our group or another group and then they would pass us back a ways on down. We'd go for long times without seeing anybody else on the river. We were in no hurry and had our minds right by now. We stopped to eat, to swim or just sit, float and relax. The storm clouds kept it cool, which was much appreciated as KT and I were both nursing various parts of our bodies that were pretty well roasted. We only had about a half a gallon of sun screen between the two of us but just didn't get it on all the right places. It's amazing how good a cool wet hand

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towel feels when draped over a sunburned knee! We arrived at our second and final camp site well before dark and crowded under a couple of sun-shade shelters with the other 20 or so people in our group while the rain cooled off our campsite.

This time the only thing we carried up the sandbar hill was a tent and our sleeping bags. I had my big ole' base camp size, free standing tent almost up when another little thunder storm came past us, dumped a little rain on us and blew my tent right out of my hands. It gets very windy on these sandbars. I called for KT to come help me as I chase it down the beach. We caught it, drug it back to where we wanted it and while KT held it in place I double staked the thing down. We also put sleeping bags, our clothes and some tarps inside to help weight it down. KT headed back to help with the community camp fire and I went down to secure the boat. Just as I finished securing the tarp on the boat, up came another thunder storm. They seem to move quickly on the river. I looked up and my eight foot dome tent was being blown into an elongated pancake shape about two feet tall. I made a dash for it and threw myself prone on the upwind side of the tent to hold it in place. About 40 yards away from my position were several people and KT standing around the camp fire greatly enjoying my predicament. After just a few minutes the storm blew on by and I was able to stand up and regain a bit of dignity. I had a good laugh as did several others.

That evening I set up the table and cooked on the stove in the skillet right beside the canoe. We used the ice chest right out of the canoe. We helped gather firewood for the camp fire and sat up and enjoyed the company of good people until way after dark. The kids made smores and hot dogs, in that order I think! KT and her new friend Brandon ran and rolled down the steepest part of the dunes and laughed and played until long after dark. What a nice trip this was turning out to be. Good people, nice cool weather, a warm campfire and a warm cup of Irish coffee. Life is good. I

don't want to ever leave.

The next morning came and found us sipping coffee and lingering around the central meeting place. After a while, I wandered off, pushed my canoe out and paddled up river a little ways then drifted and fished back to camp. Had a few bites and caught one small mouth bass about eight inches long and just shook him off. Just an idyllic setting. I cooked some breakfast down at the canoe and we took our time getting the tent down and loaded back up. After a quick swim it was time to head on down the river to the take out. More beautiful river. The sand bars are getting bigger as we head towards the Gulf of Mexico. Maybe we'll just keep on going and call someone to come get us when we get to Port Arthur. KT and I practiced our draws and pries. These are special strokes that spin the canoe around or slip it sideways in the water. We are getting to be a pretty good team.

We arrived at the take out around noon with several other's in our group. Every one helped each other carry canoes and gear the 250 yards across a mostly flat sandbar, affectionately named the little Sahara Desert. There was talk about the big groups of 200 to 300 people that do this trip every year over labor day weekend. Who knows? Maybe we'll join them. We took Jerry back up river to the put in and his truck, said good by and left. KT and I stopped in Livingston at the DQ and got a blizzard and drove on home grinning at each other all the way. We are still grinning at the good time we had and the anticipation of doing it again soon! (with less and lighter gear)

## Trinity River Trips

### Fall 1999

October 9 - Elm Fork, Belt Line Road to California Crossing, 8 miles, meet at 8:30 a.m.

November 13 - West Fork, Belt Line Road to Sylvan, 13 miles, meet at 8:30 a.m.

December 11 - Trinity Mainstem, Sylvan to South Loop 12, 10 miles, meet at 8:30 a.m.

Call Charles Allen at  
**214-941-1757**  
for more information.

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## September 25 and 26 Illinois River Canoe Trip

Contact Bonnie Haskins at 972/254-9672 or Jerry Johnson at 817/267-5375 or email: [jjohnsn@airmail.net](mailto:jjohnsn@airmail.net)

Beginner whitewater kayak, Sept 18/19 Reservation and information: Alan Tittle, (days) 972-344-3925, (evenings) 972-727-3586, or email: [a-tittle@raytheon.com](mailto:a-tittle@raytheon.com)  
Beginner orientation to whitewater kayak safety and skills on flat water and class I whitewater. Leaders are volunteer members of DDRC. Membership in DDRC required.

## Life Jackets

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A Public Safety Message from the National Safe Boating Campaign

### DDRC Roll, Paddle, and Rescue

Sessions are every Wednesday from 5:00 pm to dark at Lake Grapevine, Rockledge Park.

Everyone of all skill levels is welcome to come practice strokes and rolls or get in a boat for the first time.

The Park is located at the northwest side of the dam (off the other side of the road from the spillway). If there is a dam release, then go to the spillway. No park fees. If you'd like to come out and need a boat call Keith Smith ahead of time at **(940) 566-4869** and he may be able to supply a kayak and gear.

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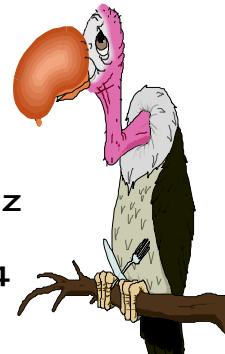
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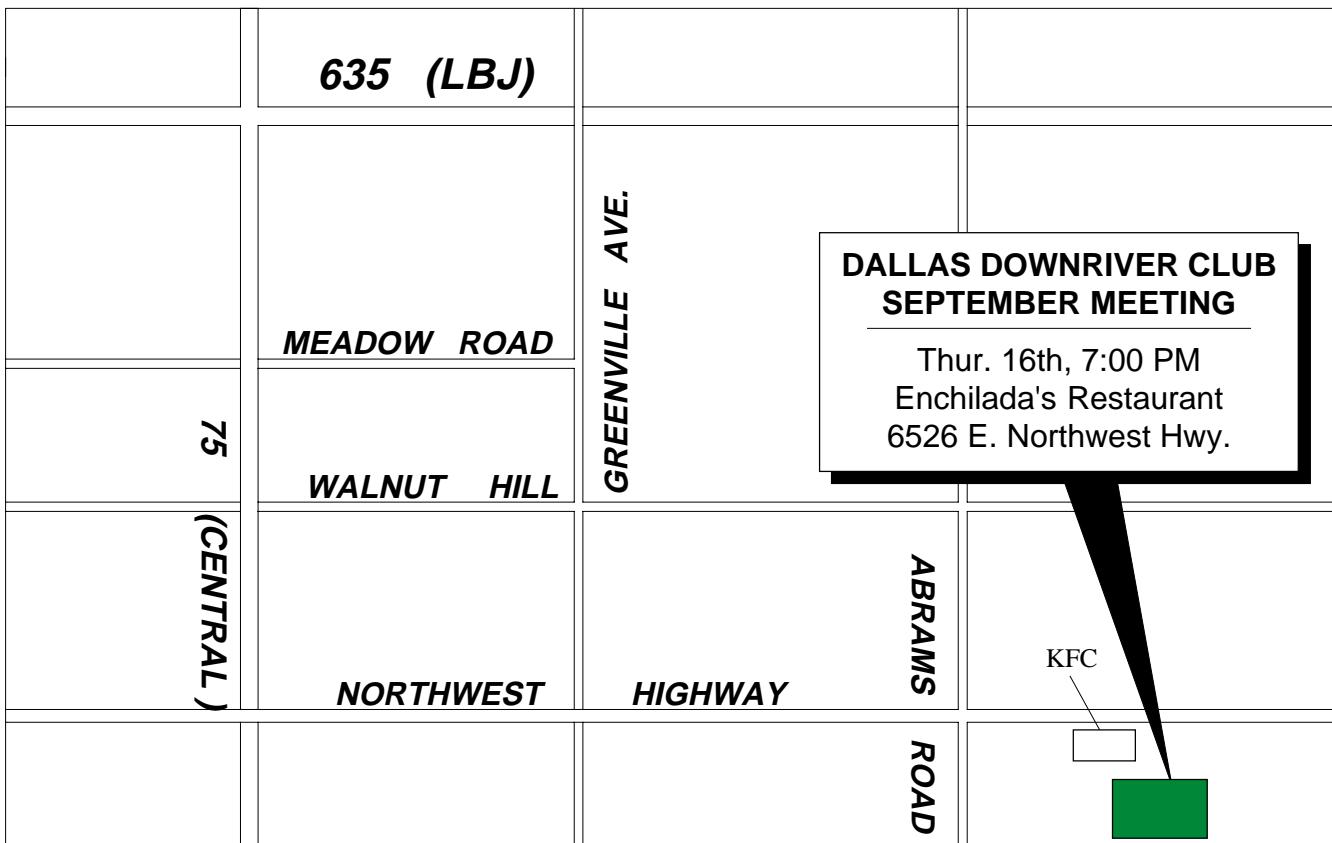
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