

South Salmon, Idaho Carnage story - Saturday, May 12th, 2007.

1<sup>st</sup> run trying out a new Jackson Rocker which replaced my Dagger Nomad due to a hole.

Second day on the South Fork Salmon River. 3rd day of a four day self-support kayak trip that started near the small town of Yellow Pine on the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River and was to end at Vinegar takeout on the Main Salmon River. Gauge at 5.3 or so. High water on a Class IV and V wilderness run.

As we came upon the next long, large, loud rapid Barry Bohrer, Dave Schroeder and Aaron Loft (Lofty) boat-scouted and ran their lines. Lofty went into a hole but after a short time rolled up and made it to an eddy on river left, where they all got out to scout the rest of the rapid while waiting for Keith and me to walk our way down to them as we scouted the first part.

Throughout the Fall and on the way over, I had quietly listened to their stories of a monstrous breaking wave which created a massive, terminal hole – the biggest any of these well-traveled boaters had ever witnessed. They were pretty sure this series of rapids contained what they termed the “Salmbezi Wave” when they ran the river the previous year. They gave it this moniker because, while it’s on the Salmon River, they all thought it looked like something you’d see on the Zambezi River. It was just that big.

Keith and I saw Lofty get flipped and decided to stay away from that spot, so we sort of scouted the top part of the rapid and determined that we could sneak it on the left side and avoid the bad stuff. Our buddies anticipated us taking our time to scout the entire rapid so nobody expected to see us in the water.

Keith peeled out and immediately was shot into the area we wanted to avoid and dropped into the first hole on the top part of what we think was Surprise Rapids. He was able to roll out of

it, into the next, into the next...and the next, but managed to hit his roll (seven times or so times in half as many holes) and exhaustingly make it to the eddy. He was so tired he couldn't lift his arms. I was 30 feet behind him and couldn't see him getting chundered in the first hole because of the massive breaking waves all around me. It was a lot burlier than we thought.

I dropped into my first hole and got ripped up, into a side-surf, churned again, hit two rolls, back into it, got held there for a while and punched. I thought I was stuck and that it was my best course of action. Go figure - I was wrong. I later learned that I had just washed out of it when I pulled my skirt. It still might not have mattered though, as I was on a collision course for every hole in the rapids. Big, powerful water. Full-on burly class V that I should have and would have walked had I known better.

I swam out of my boat and it came up next to me so I grabbed onto it for a couple seconds while trying to catch my breath. I made an attempt to swim to shore and almost made it but, as you can tell by the length of this story, did not. I maybe should have tried harder, but I really didn't think I'd make it and was concerned about running out of energy and then getting pounded by the water. To this day this is a new concept to my some of my friends, but since I'm writing this...well...

I've had some big swims in my day and that's a tough call at times. Keith had made it to shore by this time and he and I actually made eye contact as I was getting swept by. We shared a scary-ass moment of clarity of impending doom as I got swept back into the mayhem. I saw fear in his eyes, and that fear was for me. I've oftentimes seen wonderment and hilarity, even a touch of concern at times in my friends' looks, but never gut-wrenching fear. Damn.

I was chundered through Surprise Rapids and right into Elk Rapids where I got swept over a wave hole and soon after right into the heart of the Salmbezi – the massive scary hole nobody wanted anything to do with. “Terminal” is the term. But that's where I went. I went into it and got washing-machined for an eternity. I was completely at the mercy of the river as I was brutally taken deep into the hole, arms and legs flailing without any control. I could see the light through the water but that didn't matter much while in the spin cycle. I was out of breath and didn't think I could hold it for another second, flailing desperately deep in the maw but unable to even figure which way was up because of the violent thrashing. I had a moment of clarity while getting pummeled that this was probably “it”.

I've been in positions before where I quietly chanted the mantra of “Come on me. Don't be my day. Don't be it. Come on me. Don't be my day...” but this time I realized that it probably was. My body was going to involuntarily take a breath even though I was underwater. Fortunately I broke the surface as my body twitched, much like hiccups do to your chest, from holding my breath. I got a small breath and immediately was swept into the next crashing wave and then the next hole. There was no sense in trying to swim at this point, just hold on and catch a breath when I could.

The true swimmer's position is to have your feet up in front of you. This enables the swimmer to better view what's coming up and to avoid getting a foot or leg entrapped in

an underwater branch or rock sieve. While facing forward I'd take the full brunt of the rapids – exploding water in my face and all around me - and was unable to time a breath, no matter how miniscule it was. I knew I was in bad shape and had to breathe, so I let the river turn me around, put both hands on the faceguard on my helmet and hoped for the best behind me. It was all I could do. I had no control at all and could barely catch a shot of air every few times I'd surface. I was underwater a lot.

It was the longest damned rapid. Fuck me. Seriously. I kept thinking it would have to end and go into some flat water but it seemed like an eternity until that actually happened. I even thought about praying but, being not very religious, felt that would be hypocritical. The toughest rapids are over ¼ mile long and I was swimming all of it. I was resigned to taking big hits, water shots that would spin me, sink me and every-so-often let me catch a quick breath.

After a long while I was able to face forward and I noticed that I was getting thrown into rocks on the bottom by now, but somehow my thighs absorbed the blows (I must have been floating on my stomach with my face forward at this time) and I fortunately did not get a foot entrapment. I was so wiped out that it took a few seconds to realize this. A second does not sound like a long time, and normally it is not, but on a river a few seconds can be related to 40 yards or more.

I was so incredibly exhausted but I got turned around into the correct position once the melee settled down into a more manageable roar. Soon after the river flattened out for a small stretch and I saw a rock island on my right and more rapids up ahead. There was also a large log further downstream on the left side that posed additional issues. My body felt like lead and I actually pondered whether or not I could survive going through any more rapids. I didn't think I could, and I mumbled aloud "I don't think I'll make that" which is a scary thought because I may not have had a choice and may have possibly

gone to my death with this impending knowledge. I gathered all my strength, all of it, and swam as hard as I could to my right.

Thankfully I was able to make it to a channel in the island and onto a rock where I was able to pull myself up on and signal that I was safe by patting my helmet. Nobody was around though.

After a couple minutes I made my way rock-hopping (more like slowly plodding) up the small channel and onto a larger rock at the most upstream point so my friends could see me from a distance and know that I was alive. I was in surprisingly good shape – nothing even hurt. If anything would have really hurt that would have meant I hit an underwater obstacle and truly would not have been on this rock to feel the lack of pain. My tongue was stuck on the roof of my mouth and I couldn't even speak aloud to myself due to exertion. It was literally stuck to the top of my mouth. It felt like it was glued – cotton mouth to the extreme.

I sat on the most upriver rock, looking around thinking “No shit. ... Wow. Whoa. That’s Me! I’m here. Holy Shit...” After a number of minutes I saw Barry paddling like mad and I signaled him that I was OK. He pulled over to me to make sure, shaking his head in disbelief, and then traveled on to catch up with Dave.

That’s when I found out that Dave had somehow, with miraculous speed, gotten back in his boat, skirted the Salmbezi and run the burly Class V rapids blind. He must have passed me during one of the numerous long times I was underwater, or he went screaming past during the short period of time I was out of sight working my way to the bigger rock. Once I got to my rocks I was fairly cognizant of the need to be in a spot to be seen, so I’m fairly positive he was on top of it so quickly he missed me during the rapid. Damn, he was on it. Either way he undoubtedly thought by then he was chasing a goner.

Dave continued on downstream for a number of miles, caught and passed my boat and was in full search for my body. Thankfully he didn't find me

A couple minutes later Lofty came into sight. Sight is a ways up – it still took a minute or two for him to reach me. When he paddled closer I could see he had a very surprised and relieved look on his face. He thought for sure I had flush-drowned. He asked me if I was hurt but I couldn't talk, only shake my head “no”.. He handed me his water bottle so I

could loosen my tongue from the roof of my mouth and answer him back. We shared some smiles, eye contact and head shakes that meant “Fuck man. I don’t get it. Glad you’re alive”.

We determined the best spot to get me from the island to shore and, after I had some more self-administered water, we set off to cross the narrow stretch of water from my rocks to shore. And yes, they had become “my” rocks. Lofty paddling and me holding onto the back and kicking like hell. We made it! He then gave me his water bottle and pointed out a trail up on the hillside and then headed downriver to find the others. There had not been any roads or trails that we could see along the river for most of the trip so this was a relief.

Meanwhile upriver – Keith got back his strength and began the difficult portage of the rest of the rapids with his fully loaded boat. Alone. Certain that his friend had died. Shortly after making eye contact and knowing his buddy’s fate. And being unable to do anything. Grueling hours of second-guessing and “what if’s” to come. Alone.

I made it up to the trail, which turned out to be a dirt road, and walked a few miles to a bridge where I found Lofty and Barry waiting. We then hiked back up the road to search for anybody that may have a cabin but to no avail. As we came back Keith had made it to the bridge. This was at least two hours after my swim began. I will never forget how Keith looked up at us and came to a complete stop, his arms kind of came together around his waist, knees bent a bit and his head shook side to side as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. At least Keith’s gut-wrenching time of dread and loss was over.

Dave’s continued downstream. Alone.

The four of us then set to walking the road in search of a ranger station or a cabin/ranch

since I now had no boat and Dave was well downstream. Keith and I went one way and Barry and Lofty the other. We found a defunct old ranger station not too far from the bridge where we left the boats and gear but it definitely was not in service and there were no signs of recent life. Hanta virus central.

Unfortunately Barry and Lofty had even less luck.

The previous night, while sitting on a rock overlooking this beautiful river and valley, we watched a mountain lion sniffing our tracks from an exploration hike we took above our camp. That morning Lofty encountered a rattle snake near camp and we later paddled past two wolves on shore. This is very deep wilderness country and most of the time the river is “the way”. Once on the river there are many rapids you must run with this flow. At times there is no way off the river and around the rapids. It’s very committing and for a human the river is the trail. So it wasn’t plausible nor possible for me to walk along the side of the river since there was no trail from there along the river, and the road went up and away from the river. And it was a road. And it had tire tracks.

The four of us got together and created a game plan. It was determined that I would hike the road and ask for a ride when I found someone. After all, there were tire tracks. Easy enough. If I got a ride really quickly I’d meet them at our shuttle vehicle at the Vinegar take-out. The plan was for my buddies to paddle hard, get out that night and meet me sometime at the City Park in Riggins (hopeful thinking – we later found out they had another 10 miles or soon the S. Fork and another 20 on the Main Salmon).

While Barry was killing time, waiting for me at the bridge after my swim, he had found my paddle wedged under a rock in the river. He had walked down an animal trail and,



while taking in the view, saw my red paddle blade. How my paddle made it all the way there, to get stuck under a rock in the water in a spot that could be reached from shore and not be seen except from shore, over three miles from the scene of the carnage, to have Barry walk down an overgrown animal trail to the water's edge and see it is a mystery. The prodigal paddle. When I asked him "how the hell did you find it?" he simply replied "I have no idea what made me walk down there...I guess it must have been to get your paddle. You owe me some beer." My paddle does have "Beer Upon Return" written in permanent marker on the blade.

We divvied up supplies for my walk. I got Barry's headlamp, a lighter from Lofty and granola and buffalo sausage from Keith; all of which I put in the foot of my drysuit along with my lightweight paddling fleece. I then wrapped my suit around my paddle, along w/my helmet and PFD and carried it like a hobo's knapsack over my shoulder. Lofty kept pushing his bivy sack on me, but the less I had to carry the better, and I would sleep in my drysuit to stay somewhat warm and dry if it came to that. After all, it was probably 90 degrees.

Keith offered me his bear spray, but that would also have to have been carried in the foot of my drysuit and not readily accessible, so I declined that as well. What the hell was I thinking??? I'm scared of bears. And by the way, did I mention we watched a mountain lion for half an hour the night before, Lofty had nearly stepped on a rattlesnake near camp that morning and we saw two wolves along the river that day.

Oh yeah, I didn't have any money either. I had finally figured out what that non-waterproof pocket on the sleeve of my drysuit was for. The pocket had bothered me all trip – I had even put sunflower seeds in it to see if it was waterproof and, after pulling out the wet seeds had asked my rhetorical question, for the umpteenth time, "what the hell is this pocket for?" Now we all know – a credit card.

It was 3:30 when we parted ways. I set off up the dirt road wearing shorts and a stinky short sleeved shirt, happy to be able to get blistered feet through my river shoes. Happy that I had river shoes instead of booties. It didn't matter where the road went, or that I may have to walk for a couple days and camp in my drysuit. Everything was good with me. After all, I was on a road with tire tracks.

Barry, Keith and Lofty paddled off in search of Schroeder and I took to the dirt road. We all knew that he must be dealing with the fact that I had drowned and we were all anxious to get to him and inform him otherwise. I was also very worried that something had happened to him while risking his life for me.

They caught up to Dave within another 3-4 miles and the first thing he asked, expecting the reply to be that they may have found my body but definitely not alive, was "Any sign of Rodgers?" To unbelieving ears and eyes, they told him I was OK and hiking out. Poor Dave had spent over four hours thinking I had succumbed to the river and was figuring out the awful phone calls he would have to make. Dave is a very good friend and it pains me to this day the pure torture he had endured. Alone.

Dave had caught up with my boat and nearly got it into an eddy numerous times but it's nearly impossible to get an 80 gallon kayak, full of gear, corralled into an eddy on a large river. He had spent two hours watching it stuck on a log in the river and, when it finally broke free, he corralled it and somehow got it to shore. Once the crew was together again they managed to get my boat to some ranch along the river and stash it in the horse barn. It was in amazingly good condition for what it went through. There was nobody at the ranch, and they didn't have any way of leaving a note, so it would just have to be a surprise when the owner came back. Too bad nobody thought to remove the food from the dry bags secreted in the bow of the boat.

Back to me

The road I was on took me past a couple homes, so I ignored the “No Trespassing” signs and knocked on the doors, but no vehicles were in the yards and nobody answered. It was kind of eerie to be on a road by myself, deep in the Idaho wilderness. The homes were set a distance back but along the road and seemed fairly well-kept but definitely empty. The movies “Wrong Turn” and “The Hills Have Eyes” came to mind.

It was nearly 90 degrees and looking promising though as tire tracks mean people, which means a way out. I tried another home with no luck and walked down to where a row of mailboxes were lined up and followed the freshest looking tire tracks. The road forked here and took a long downhill turn toward the river, so I stashed my paddle-knapsack near the mailboxes at the top and walked down. They led to a home with a couple four-wheelers and a truck behind a garage-like building. The sign on the garage said “Trespassers will be shot. Survivors will be shot again”. Go figure.

As I approached the house I could see the upstairs curtain move to the side, so I knew somebody must be there, watching my approach. I had ditched my paddle-knapsack and put my shirt back on to be more presentable. As I got to the walkway I was able to see that the person looking out the window was actually the back of a chair and the curtain was hung up on it. So much for that, but it also meant the window was open and nobody would leave a window open in a house with no residents.

I knocked a couple times and then heard a muffled voice. Trying not to think of the red ball and leather strap I waited while a man approached the door a couple minutes later. His name was Jim Kelly and, luckily for me, he had heard me knock while he was in the shower. If he hadn't I would have tried the other cabins in the area and undoubtedly

headed back up the road to continue my walk. He answered in a towel, invited me in, and went back into the house to get dressed. I stood in the entrance, not wanting to get dirt on his floor. When he returned I kind of explained my predicament (basically just the gloss-over – friends and I were on the river, I had some issues and lost my boat) and asked for a ride to Mackay Bar, Vinegar Campground or the town of Riggins. He looked fairly confused and was very hesitant, but nonetheless invited me into his home.

Jim offered me some water. Damn it was nice to not have to suck through the filter-straw of my water bottle! As I drank his water I realized why he seemed hesitant when I asked for a ride. He told me that the road I had been hiking goes to the town of Warren, 20 miles away, and was still closed due to snow. He and his neighbors had taken their four-wheelers out the previous afternoon to break through the pass and, after numerous hours of getting stuck and digging and getting stuck again, had managed to get back at 2:30am. So the road was really closed and so much for the tracks I saw. He stays at the place all year and is able to get supplies or catch a ride into McCall via the mail plan on Monday and Thursday. So now I'm shit outta luck. But...

I was dirty and smelly so I stayed on the tile and didn't venture onto the carpet while Jim called the other neighbors and ranches in the area and came up with a couple ideas.

Water turned to iced tea as we discussed my options. One was to take me 10 miles to the summit on his four-wheeler and then I could hike the next 10 miles or so to Warren and see what I could do from there. Warren is a very small burg of roughly 12 or so people and the options may not be any better from there. Another was to take the trail from his place down to the river (I came to find out that this is where the trail starts along the river) and make it the 12-15 miles to Mackay Bar. From there maybe I could get a jet-boat ride to the campground.

He kindly offered his home to me for the night but things were working for me and I was

in a hurry to keep moving. The final option was to call the local aviation companies and see what they could do. That sounded pretty cool, so Jim started making calls and we each had a beer. Water to tea to beer – things were getting better all the time. While Jim left messages and made calls I was able to take a long, hot shower ...with a beer;

The first aviation company would not come in that evening as the wind was picking up and that would pose too many possible issues, but would come in the morning, wind permitting. We then called Anderson Aviation and the owner/pilot said he could pick me up at 7:00pm that night and it would be a 35 minute flight to the airfield near the town of Whitebird, about 30 miles north of Riggins. He suggested that it would be cheaper to fly to McCall but that was further away from Riggins and by now I was kind of excited about following the river and seeing if I could see my buds from the plane.

So instead of the most direct course I asked him to follow the river so I could take in the views. This would take longer and cost more, but I didn't really have anywhere to be and didn't have any money with me anyhow, so what the hell. The pilot, who has been flying in the area for over 40 years, made some funny comment when I told him about what I had for plane weight determination and said that "I was really down a river with a paddle." Funny guy. While making our plans on the phone I also had to tell him that I had no money but that I was good for it. Thankfully he took me on my word and we made the arrangements.

So I had really only walked an hour, no snakes, no bears, no wolves, no blisters, didn't have to sleep in the snow, was showered and was sitting on a couch drinking beer talking to Jim and waiting for my plane to arrive. It's funny how things turn out. Jim and I had another couple beers and my plane arrived on the small airstrip in the valley above the river.

The plane was a little one. There was room for the pilot and a passenger in the two front seats (she gets to fly with him sometimes when there's room) and me with an open seat. Four seats total. While I was getting into the plane I discovered that I had stashed my paddle-knapsack in an inopportune spot, judging by the numerous ants I brought in the plane with me. Geez. My paddle blade reached the back of the empty tail of the plane and came up between my seat and the empty one to my left. My paddle's 194 centimeters in length. Small plane.

The runway was basically a fairly flat field that had been mowed and ends in a cliff overlooking the river. We took off, dropped off the cliff and went south long enough to get a look at the rapids of my near demise before turning and heading north. Damn there was a lot of white water for a long ways! We snaked our way down the river, looking down to see my buddies but didn't see their brightly-colored kayaks. What a flight. The geography was incredible and I was alive to see it, had a few beers in my stomach and on my way to meet up with my buddies at the park in Riggins. Sure, I'd land 30 miles away but I looked pathetic and harmless enough with my paddle and gear that I was sure to catch a ride. Looking out the window I realized that I was a lot further away from *everywhere* than I thought. It's hard to describe how far back in the Idaho wilderness we were to anybody that has not been there. Just imagine how much ground a plane can cover in thirty five minutes. We flew over numerous mountain ranges and I did not see any other settlements nor any other roads. What good fortune on my part to knock on Jim Kelly's door. Great guy.

We landed on a fairly unmarked piece of land next to the highway (I never would have pegged it as a landing strip) and as Ray searched for a pen to take down my information and tell me how much I owed him a sheriff truck came up the highway heading my way. Ray said "here comes your ride", waved him over, struck up a conversation and borrowed his pen. Damn.

Sheriff Giddings was the next part of my little journey. I threw my paddle knapsack in the back of his truck and hopped in. He had just come on duty, was a great guy to talk to and gave me a ride to the park. I assured him that I'd be alright and my friends would be there shortly. Now it's 8:30 and I'm already at the predetermined pickup point. Even though I now should have figured my friends would not make it there that night I still held out hope.

In the meantime my buddies had made it quite a few more miles down the river and had run into another group of boaters. There was a tricky rapid full of holes so my friends got out of their boats to watch this other group, which I think consisted of a raft, a couple catarafts and a couple kayaks. They were the only other people we/they had encountered on the river on the whole trip. Pretty impressive crew.

One of the kayakers got stuck in a hole, churned for a while and finally had to swim out. As he geckoed onto a rock in the river Barry ran down the shore w/throwbag in hand to help out. The stranded kayaker looked over, said "Barry, what are you doing here? I thought you were on the Bruneau" (that was the river we planned on running when we left Montana but the flows tanked and our plans changed on the way). It turns out that it was his friend Kevin Billingslea from Missoula. The only other people on the river, all 36 miles of it, and it's Billingslea. Barry yelled over to him "I'll tell you in a minute, do you want this rope or not" to which Billingslea yelled back "No", leapt off the rock, and somehow made it to shore on his own.

They ended up boating together for the rest of the short evening and all camped together. A local boater from Riggins, Doc Stolberg, was along and knew the area fairly well. When they told him the story and where I started my hike, he informed the group that the road I was on was closed and there weren't many settlements on it with people there

during this time of year, and that if I was hiking the road that I had 3-4 extremely long days ahead of me. There were a lot of groans but also a lot of chuckles and various utterances of how “screwed” I was.

Billingslea’s group had beer and real food, none of the freeze-dried stuff we had. So they ate steaks and burgers, drank beer and wine, and played the “What do you think Rodgers is doing right now” game well into the night. At one time Barry had said “he’s probably in a bar right now” but that wasn’t one of the funny ones and it was so improbable that it didn’t get much time. The groups preferred the mountain lion/bear stories, me sleeping in the snow in my drysuit or me knocking on the wrong door and ending up w/a red ball strapped to my mouth. Those play so much better around a campfire after an extremely harrowing day.

While they set up camp along the river I hung around the park for a bit but got bored, so went down the sidewalk into town. Riggins is a fairly small town consisting of all the businesses along one small main street. I looked in a couple windows before finding a saloon called the Seven Devils, named after some nearby mountain peaks. It looked like a place I could hang at for a while so I and went back to the park, tore strips of gorilla tape off my paddle into manageable pieces and left a message on my paddle that said “Im at 7 Devils” so my friends would know I made it and where to find me. Leaving my paddle against the park sign and hoping it would not be taken, I walked into Seven Devils with my helmet and water bottle clipped to my PFD in one hand and my drysuit wadded up in the other. Still thinking my friends would be there that night, I pulled the bartender to the



side (cute thing named Sarah) and explained that I was separated from my friends, had to catch a plane ride to Whitebird, hitch a ride with the sheriff from there, could really use a burger and a beer and had no money until my buddies showed up. Once again I promised that I was good for it. She thought about it for a few seconds and asked what kind of beer I'd like. That's me.

9:40 and in the bar at the destination spot. Not bad. Not bad at all.

I sat at a table off to the side with my gear and ate and drank a couple bud light taps until the loud group of locals quit playing pool and left the bar. I took up residence on a stool and thankfully nobody asked what I did, or how I came to be there. I was able to bum a couple smokes and drink tap beer with the staff, cook and waitress until the waitress Sarah had the liquor cabinets locked up and the stools on the bar ready to close. During my time I found out that the cook was also the owner; the jovial hippy waitress that seemed a little off -was, and that Sarah has 3 kids and a live-in boyfriend. I was told it was a quiet night because everybody had gotten pretty liquored up the night before and weren't out Saturday after a rough Friday night.

It was time to go into the night, so I asked Sarah for the bar's address so I could even up my tab if my friends showed up early the next day and the bar wasn't open yet. She said not to worry about it, that it would be her nice deed for the day. I thanked her but, knowing it would come out of her pay, told her I'd make it right even though the offer was extremely nice and appreciated.

Now its 12:30am, nice buzz and time to go back to the park. Unfortunately it was windy, and with the wind came the chill...so the only place to get away from that was in the park's public bathroom.

Fortunately I had it all to myself and there was a small bench in there. Unfortunately I had to put on my drysuit to help stay warm. I soon learned that if I filled it up with air it was warmer, so I blew air down my neck gasket and filled my suit. I looked like the Michelin Man but was warmer. If I was cold inside a bathroom I would have been unbearably cold in the mountains.

I propped my PFD under my head and tried to go to sleep, but every time I dozed off I'd awaken myself with some crazy sort of snort/snore which I finally figured came from the throat constriction caused by my neck gasket on my drysuit. I also had a crazy fear of someone coming in to use the bathroom and there I'd be, puffed up on the floor. I couldn't sleep so I wandered around the park and tried sleeping in the grass on the far side of a picnic structure, but it was very cold, so back to the warmer climate of the john. The timing was pretty good because shortly afterwards I heard the sprinklers come on.

Sometime during the night, I'm guessing around 4:00 a car pulled into the lot and the guy went down the bank to the river. I hid in the shadow of the bathroom until the car left. Not a clue what he was doing but I'd look for a stash the next morning. Fortunately nobody else showed up until early the next morning and it was only one older gentleman.

I quickly deflated my suit and I was able to truthfully tell him that I was just waiting on my friends. I stood outside and cringed as I heard him take the stall and completely destroy my bedroom. No respect, no respect.

When the sun finally came up I wandered up and down the main street (I ditched my drysuit, helmet and PFD in the bushes) and changed the note on my paddle to say "Im at Café", which seemed like a safe thing to say; plus it killed some time changing the lettering around. It was a dreary day, windy and chilly and I had on my shorts, t-shirt and a lightweight fleece pullover. Fairly chilly but I was tough and it beat the looks I'd get by walking around in the drysuit.

After a few hours of wandering up and down and around the main street I finally stopped by the gas station and asked for a cup of coffee. I explained that I had no money (damn that stupid pocket), spent the night in the bathroom and would pay her back once my buddies arrived. I'm friendly and looked pathetic - what could she say? So I took my coffee back to the park, sat on a bench and watched the road. No friends yet. Damn. Waiting's tough.

After a few more hours of wandering and park-sitting, I went up the road again and stopped into Cattlemen's Café. I sat where I could see the road and shortly thereafter the waitress with a nametag reading "Barb" came by. I asked if I could just sit for a bit and she asked if I'd like a coffee. Once again I had to say that I had no money, it's in my friends' vehicle and they're not around yet. I must have looked cold because she brought me a coffee anyhow. She then asked if she could buy me lunch. I originally thanked her but declined, but I guess after watching me watching others eat for about fifteen minutes she came back and said that she owned the place and that if she wished to buy a person a meal that it was her prerogative. I think the fact that it was Mother's Day worked in my favor too. I decided that was an offer too good to refuse. She brought me the day's

special – meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, succotash, and toasted croissant-thing. Really, really good. I had to smile a bit to myself about the string of good fortune I'd been having. I call it "backhanded luck". I knew I was eating better than my buddies.

The café closed at 2:00 so I walked back to the park after thanking them for the meal and coffee. By now the sun had burned through the clouds and the day had warmed up considerably. It was actually very warm, so I made a pillow out of my pfd and laid back on the grass and was able to take a short nap in the sun.

I woke up after a short while wondering "where are those guys???" I hoped they would have been there the night before, expected them by noon, and now it's late afternoon. My worst fear was that Schroeder got hung up somehow while searching for me. Mind wanderings.

Anyhow, at about 4:30 I was in the park watching the road and I saw our van come by with Barry hanging out the window yelling "Junk". "Junkshow" is a nickname I've picked up over time...and as you can tell by this story it's a bit fitting. They were so happy and surprised to see that I had made it! They had held out hope but reality was against us and had figured I may be walking through the wilderness for days. If I wasn't at the park their plan was to get a plane on Monday and have the pilot traverse where I might be until I was found. I'm glad I was at the park.

I got hugs all around and we exchanged a couple stories. Billingslea and Doc Stahlberg soon showed up in the parking lot and we exchanged phone numbers. Doc lives in Riggins and said he'd help out with wrangling/storing my boat any way he could. I got cash from the ATM, settled my dues, and we headed back to Montana. The looong way back to Montana.

On Wednesday, May 8th while safely back in my office in Helena, Montana I called Carol and Ray at Arnold Aviation (which I now think of as my airline) in order to pay them. In the few days since Ray gave me a lift they had received a call from someone at the South Fork Ranch, formerly known as the Hettinger Ranch, letting them know that they had a kayak in their barn and it was safe. Ray and I spoke and he said he'd pick it up either that Friday or sometime the next week and hold onto it for me in Cascade. So, thanks to everybody's help I am safe and home and my gear was also in a safe place

Ginny, my girlfriend at the time, and I drove to Cascade over Memorial Day, 2007 and retrieved my boat from Ray's hangar. The boat was pretty scraped up but no holes. The drybag containing summer sausage was really rank and I nearly puked getting them out of the front to throw them away. We stayed at a little cabin along the way and woke up to a highway sign saying the cleanup area was sponsored by "Yahweh's 666 Warning Assembly". Fitting.