



On the Tuolumne we usually tried to avoid the rocks. But occasionally we'd "sheboing"—a rafting term for hitting a rock and hoping it bounces you off in the right direction.

the falls. If you hit the hole sideways, you could flip. Or worse, if you fell out of the raft going over the falls and got pushed toward the hole, you could get sucked in and "recycled"—tossed around like a load of laundry in the dryer.

When we stopped a few yards upstream to go ashore and check out the falls, however, I felt a little let down. *This just doesn't look that nasty*, I thought. But then, things aren't always what they appear to be.

Our 18-mile white-water voyage had begun at La Casa Loma, a general store outside Groveland, California, and the headquarters of the American River Touring Association (ARTA). Here, 13 of us, including four ARTA guides, gathered to make the trip. The Leland family from the San Francisco area made up most of the group—Odile (a Harvard senior), Geoffrey (a University of Pennsylvania sophomore), Alexander, 17, Abigail, 14, and Hayne, their father, Alexander's friend Steve Pozadek, and Odile's boyfriend, David Benmahum, a Harvard senior, also came along.

As we bounced along the dirt road that led 1,500 feet into the canyon, we crept through switchback after switchback. If we reached out a hand on the right side, we'd touch rock; on the left, there was nothing—just a sheer drop to the bottom of the canyon. Unfortunately, I sat on the left.

Once we reached the put-in at Meral's Pool, we were introduced to our guides and fitted with life preservers and helmets. Then Shannon gave us a safety talk and outlined the ways we could fall out of

the raft, or "go for a swim" in rafting lingo: we could hit a rock and bounce out, or we could flip. She warned us that at least two people per trip usually go for a swim. I paid close attention when she told us what to do if we got bounced out: "Point your feet downstream and put your arms out to the side"—easy enough—"and if you get sucked into a hole, don't panic." Yeah, sure.

Our flotilla included a paddleboat (for people who wanted to do the paddling themselves) and three oarboats (for those willing to let the guides do most of the work). As we waited on shore for the guides to run a final check on the equipment, David commented, "I hope this is better than Roarin' Rapids at Six Flags."

There would be no comparison. One writer calls the Tuolumne the "champagne" of white-water rivers, an opinion that is widely shared. Beginning just 150 miles east of San Francisco, the Tuolumne winds 37 miles, past three

dams, to the Don Pedro Reservoir in the flatlands. During the summer, regular releases from the dams prevent water in the canyon from slowing to a trickle and drying up. The river was given federal wild-and-scenic status in 1984 and today is overseen by the U.S. Forest Service.

The section of the Tuolumne we were running, considered by veteran river runners to be one of the most scenic in the country, drops 45 feet per mile. Compare that to the Mississippi, which moseys along at about two feet per mile. And unlike that mighty river, the Tuolumne is a technical river, one that requires a lot of maneuvering to navigate: boulders and smaller rocks seem to have been haphazardly strewn across the Tuolumne, forming a bizarre obstacle course.

On the first six miles of our run, the rapids came fast and furious—Rock Garden, Nemesis, Sunderlands, Ramshead, Phil's Folly. Those of us in the paddleboat began to get our paddling down, quickly falling into a rhythm whenever we heard the "forward" command from our guide Andy Mathews, a sophomore at the University of Nevada at Reno and a four-year river veteran. The "left back" and "right back" commands still tripped us up occasionally, though.

By the time we pulled over for lunch midway through the afternoon, I'd begun to wonder why I'd been so anxious about the trip. I was starting to relax now, as Hayne and I switched places with Odile and Abigail. They had been in one of the oarboats with Randy Boyd, a recent graduate of the University of

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