

Tuolumne River

A C C E S S

GETTING THERE

The American River Touring Association (ARTA) meets rafters at La Casa Loma General Store, on California Highway 120, seven miles east of Groveland, and transports them to and from the river.

PLANNING

If you're a real daredevil, raft the Tuolumne in early May, when the water is high and flowing swiftly. White-water wimps should wait until the end of the summer.

ARTA sends rafters a list of camping equipment and clothes to pack, and rents sleeping bags and tents. Contact ARTA for reservations and information at Star Rt. 73, Groveland, CA 95321, 800-323-2782.

SLEEP CHEAP

For accommodations before and after the rafting trip, try Yosemite National Park. The park has cabins for \$38.75 to \$51.25 a night at the Yosemite Lodge, and tent cabins in the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge for \$29 a night. For reservations and information on park lodging, call 209-252-4848.

FEAST FOR THE LEAST

The Evergreen Lodge, an old log building in Groveland's woods, may be secluded, but most everyone finds his or her way there in the summer for burgers (\$5.95), pasta, steak (about \$10), and other specialties (Highway 120, off Evergreen Road, 209-379-2606). The Iron Door Grill, on Highway 120 in Groveland, has \$4 to \$5 burgers and an old-fashioned soda fountain that serves \$3.50 shakes (209-962-6244).

AFTER HOURS

Groveland is rather desolate, so the Historic Iron Door Saloon downtown is your best bet. The bar, decorated with stuffed foxes, bison heads, and other



creatures, claims to be the oldest saloon in California (est. 1852). The live music on weekends draws a rowdy crowd of locals and tourists.

Other Rivers

Spring is usually the best time for white-water rafting: rivers aren't crowded and the water is high. If you plan to go in the summer, though, make reservations at least two months in advance. And look for a dam-controlled river if the summer's been dry.

To find outfitters, write to these associations for free regional directories: **The Eastern Professional River Outfitters Association**, 531 S. Gay St., Suite 600, Knoxville, TN 37902, 615-524-1045; and **The Western River Guides Association**, 360 S. Monroe, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80209, 303-377-4811.

Also, the **River Travel Center** is a clearinghouse for more than 100 operators. Contact 15 Riverside Dr., P.O.

Box 6, Point Arena, CA 95468, 800-882-7238. For cheap student trips on California rivers—\$44 a day—call **Outdoor Adventures** at the University of California at Davis at 916-752-1995.

The five rivers below are some of the best in the country, and you can raft each of them in three days or less in the spring and summer.

Ocoee River, Tennessee (Class III-IV)

River Runner magazine called the Ocoee, which flows through the rugged Cherokee National Forest of

East Tennessee, one of the 10 best white-water stretches in the United States. The river is four and a half miles long, but the rapids are almost continuous. And since the Tennessee Valley Authority regulates the Ocoee's flow, you can count on wild rapids like the Class IV Hell Hole all summer. Trips average \$20 to \$32 a day.

Rogue River, Oregon (Class III)

This national wild-and-scenic river, known for its salmon fishing and wildlife, flows for 33 miles through the Siskiyou Mountains of southwest Oregon. Although rapids like Blossom Bar make many a stomach lurch, calmer stretches and warm swimming sidepools allow rafters a chance to catch their breath. At camp, rafters may see deer grazing nearby or hear black bears crashing through the forest. Trips average \$100 to \$150 a day.

Penobscot River, Maine (Class III-V)

The west branch of this river in north-

central Maine tears through Ripogenus Gorge and offers spectacular views of Mount Katahdin, the state's highest point. This river has twice the volume of water and half the crowds of the Ocoee, and sometimes it seems as if there's no letup between rapids. For instance, right after the Class V Cribworks rapid, rafters have to paddle fiercely to maneuver through the rocks and tunnels of the Class V Exterminator. No one stays dry. A one-day autumn trip is a great way to see fall colors. Trips average \$75 a day.

The Cataract Canyon Section of the Colorado River, Utah (Class V)

This stretch of the famous Colorado River squeezes through the sandstone spires and cliffs of Utah's deepest canyon in Canyonlands National Park. Run this river in the spring, when high flows result in the biggest white-water in the United States. Big Drop II, the largest rapid on the run, plunges down a steep staircase of water between 5,000-foot-high canyon walls. After navigating it, rafters must avoid Satan's Gut—one of the most treacherous holes on the river. Trips average \$100 a day.

Klamath River, California (Class III)

This section of the Klamath (the river actually begins in Oregon) runs through the forested canyon of the Siskiyou Mountains in Northern California. It's protected from overuse under the state's wild-and-scenic-river act. The Klamath has the reputation as the most reliable summer river in the state, even in a drought; Class III rapids like Hamburg Falls and Rattlesnake Creek rarely dry up. And beware: this is Bigfoot territory. Trips average \$70 to \$100 a day.

—Elizabeth Robbins

California at Davis. But my relaxation was short-lived. Randy soon announced that Clavey Falls was next. My heart started racing. Since it was late summer and the water wasn't flowing high, I hoped that the falls wouldn't be so treacherous. But no. "They're always nasty," Randy said.

In white-water rafting, rapids are classified according to difficulty from I to VI, easy to unrunnable. Clavey Falls is a Class V rapid—the only one on our trip—because no matter what the water level, the chances of someone going for a swim are high, and the swim dangerous.

Shannon's boat would go first, then ours. Good. I was glad for the chance to get it over with. And I was glad I was in the oarboat. Because it had an interior frame, it was heavier than the paddleboat and had a greater chance of pushing through the hole—our

main worry. You see, when you go over the falls, you have no control of the raft. You just hang on and hope you come out straight and avoid the hole altogether. Actually, the hole didn't look all that ferocious. But then if I had understood—as the guides did—all of the forces that were playing beneath the surface, I wouldn't have run it at all.

Shannon shot through first. No problem. Now it was our turn. I checked my right foot, making sure it was secured in the strap on the bottom of the boat. My hands clenched the paddle tightly as we began to move forward. Just when we were poised at the edge of the falls, Randy yelled, "Get down." Hayne and I sank to our knees, crouching in the bottom of the boat and hanging on. As we sailed over the falls, water splashed onto our faces. As soon as we were over, we were back up paddling. Randy's commands were