

rapid-fire: "hard forward," "right back." We flew straight through the messy stuff into calmer water, screaming in victory. It had gone so smoothly—and so quickly—the entire run seemed to last just a few seconds.

I later found out that our boat was the only one that had actually gone *through* the hole. That hadn't been plan A, B, or C. We had wanted to stay to the right down the falls and go to the right of the hole. But the river can foil even the best-laid plans. The current pushed us to the left, toward the cliff wall, and straight through the hole.

After Clavey, everyone seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. The feet came out of the straps, and the helmets were unstrapped and removed for the remainder of the afternoon.

By the time we pulled up to our campsite, a sandy beach called Indian Creek, we were starved yet energized. The guides whipped up a Mexican feast as the rest of us got settled. Afterward, we started a game of volleyball—the guides had put up a net using the oars as end poles. Midway through the match, I caught some movement on the sand out of the corner of my eye. "Oh my God," I shouted. There, crawling toward the water was a huge, hairy tarantula. The spider was immediately surrounded.

"This is just like that *Brady Bunch* episode," Andy said, "where they go to Hawaii and a tarantula follows them around because they grabbed that sacred statue." We followed the beast to the water and back up the beach.

I, for one, wanted to make sure it didn't hang out where I was going to sleep. Before the sighting, everyone had been excited about sleeping out under the stars. Now, most of the others decided their tents were safer bets. Thanks, guys. As I rolled out my rubber pad and sleeping bag on the sand, I prayed the tarantulas would stay out of my bed. But I still had a hard time sleeping. I kept dreaming fitfully about rattle-snakes (this was high season for them) and bats (they were squeaking above my head all night) and, of course, the damn spiders.

Early the next morning, Shannon, a sometime student at Colorado State, told me she once had a similar problem—only she experienced hers when she went to the city. "I couldn't sleep inside," she said. "I heard cars and someone messing around with sheet metal at four in the morning. Rocks [in comparison] are pretty comfortable."

After breakfast, we had to wait awhile for the water to rise, because the dams were shut off at night. So Andy took us across the river to explore an old 1850s gold mine. By noon the water was back up and we started off. The rapids were a little farther



Along with river guiding, Shannon, our trip leader, vaults (does circus tricks on horses) and travels to exotic locales like Thailand, Nepal, and India.

apart now, so we had more time to goof around, take deliberate swims, and stage water fights. The rapids we did have were still pretty good. At Hell's Kitchen, we maneuvered through lots of narrow passages called chutes, trying to miss all the boulders in our path. We were so busy whooping it up after one particularly hairy part that we didn't hear Andy's commands and nearly collided with a huge boulder. Everyone dug in just in time, though, and we managed to scrape by.

As a matter of fact, we managed to scrape by just about the whole trip. Not once did anyone fall out. Not once did we have a wrap (which is when the raft wraps around a rock, bounces the people out, and then gets stuck). "This is the most flawless trip I've ever had [on this river]," Andy told us as we paddled to the take-out point. On the same trip a week before, the group had had a flip and two wraps, and a raft had gotten stuck in the hole at Clavey for five minutes. It's just luck, he told us. Our good luck this time. We'd gone straight through the hole at Clavey—just what you weren't supposed to do—and emerged unscathed. Someone was looking out for us.

As we bid our guides goodbye and trudged up the hill to the van and *cold* drinks (our first in two days), I thought about the guides' invitation to go down Cherry Creek—a section of the river farther upstream from where we'd put in—the next day. I was considering it until Andy told me there are rapids on Cherry Creek *with no names* that are bigger than Clavey Falls. Then, I chose to pass. I knew I'd come a long way, but not that far. ●

CHEERIE SPINO, an assistant editor of this magazine, doesn't think she'll ever be ready for the no-name rapids of Cherry Creek.



We played a mean game of after-dinner volleyball until a rather large, furry spider broke our concentration.