

New in Town: Up a Creek, Down a River

By Shannon Romtvedt

Every week since moving to Vernonia, my husband Brady has brought up canoeing Rock Creek. The first time, it was January and I told him the obvious: it was freezing, he was crazy. By the time May rolled around, I was more agreeable to the idea. We were gifted a scratched up green “Pelican” canoe, rescued from submersion by my uncle who saw the tip sticking up in the Santiam. Most people would take this as a portent, Brady and I took it as *free*. So on a sunny, Sunday afternoon, we prepared to voyage.

Before setting out, Brady and I dropped our vehicle at the destination point, Hawkins Park, and pedaled the five miles home. Neighbors warned of log jams and shallow spots in the creek, so I checked navigability as best I could from the road. At this point, I was sold on the adventure, so I think I was inspecting to build confidence and keep up appearances.

Once at home, Brady and I stashed our bikes and grabbed paddles and lifejackets. We hefted the canoe with a grunt and carted it ‘round the house, over the deck, and down the bank, dropping a curse word or two and, finally, the boat in the water. As bowman, I stumbled quickly into position and Brady cast off, vaulting into the stern. Finally, logistics conquered and heavy lifting hauled, we busted out in smiles and settled into the Pelican for a lazy float and a fantastic view.

Drifting the neighborhood for the very first time, I enjoyed a premium

backyard tour, no invite required. Three or four lots down, we joined a family barbecue for brief introductions and best wishes before the Pelican pushed past respectable speaking range. I waved and paddled on, rounding the bend to take in the lush, wild landscape so close to my home.

I think it was about this time I called into question the term “creek.” My mother-in-law and the dictionary confirmed that I do not live by a river, something to do with size and tributaries. However, sitting in the bow of the Pelican, navigating a swift current with volumes of water on either side, I was struck by doubt. With a rapid here, fallen tree there and a “holy frickin’ waterfall,” I had more and more reasons to deem the waterway, for the day at least, Rock River.

At some point on our journey, Brady suggested that we would avoid portage at all reasonable cost. I was game for the challenge, adrenalized by my surroundings. The *river* presented many obstacles and a tight spot every other bend, but with my Brady calling out directions and a bit of emergency back paddling, we were building confidence with the Pelican and our chances looked pretty darn good.

Our first harrowing escape was in fact pretty tame, though it required a loophole in the portage clause. Missing a slim opportunity to pull ashore, the Pelican’s bow butted against a log jam that, upon assessment, ranged the entire width of the channel. Since it was obviously impassable, Brady and I had a quick strategy session, bouncing ideas

from stern to bow.

Technically speaking, dragging the canoe over a log didn’t fall under the definition of portage. So I stepped out starboard, and perched a few feet from the Pelican. Brady carefully copied my footing and balanced himself while towing the length of the canoe across the downed tree. Retracing my steps, I lowered myself back into the vessel and we shoved-off, feeling proud of our inventive tactics.

Pride, in this case, came quite literally before the fall. Still beaming from the last victory, I spied a fallen limb blocking our passage ahead. The branch was situated just after a bend and was a little too big and low to push safely out of the way. We beached temporarily and stared at the branch, weighing our options. With a few thoughtful strokes of his beard, Brady rummaged around in the brush. He emerged with a sturdy, Y-shaped branch and jury-rigged a prop, lifting the limb high enough to squeak under (if we hit it just right).

We both agreed the wiser option was to portage, but we hopped into the Pelican and stroked into position. After rounding the corner successfully, hugging tightly to the left, I zigged when I should have zagged and Brady leaned when he should have ducked. We plunged in with a shock. I half swam, half scurried clear of the boat. Brady thought to grab the canoe and his paddle, though it cost him a few bumps and bruises. The Pelican filled with water, working its way, once again, to the bottom.

With effort, I helped pull the ca-



noe and Brady back up the bank. Watching my paddle float by, I immediately made ready to flip the boat, release the water, and chase down the oar. Brady aptly pointed out that it would be difficult to catch up to an object floating at the same speed and blessed with a head start. So, after reflecting a bit and letting out a few long sighs, Brady shook off and sat in the middle with the remaining oar and I climbed in the back with a really long stick. Only a little worse for wear, we kept our eyes peeled for the lost paddle, stroking and poking our way along.

Thankfully, an eddy snagged the oar less than a mile from our plunge. I grabbed a tree root, hooking out from the bank, to steady the canoe as Brady plucked the bobbing handle from the water. Brightened by our luck, we carefully shifted around and returned to full operation. Paddle in hand and seat in bow, I was happy as a slightly soggy clam.

To say the remainder of the trip was smooth canoeing would be an easy way to wrap things up but an injustice to the water. More rapids, fallen branches, shallow waters, and log jams tested our skill. One bushy branch caught me by surprise, adding some slapstick to the afternoon. I pushed to lift it higher and it pushed back twice as hard. My rear, then back, hit the belly of the canoe with a thump and a smack. Brady followed with a reflexive duck-and-cover. We were shaken into a pile of hysterical laughter as the Pelican passed under our leafy foe. I would have loved to snap a picture and capture the moment but my camera was waterlogged by the previous dunking.

Once the sun rolled behind the clouds, Hawkins Park was a welcome sight. Wet as I was, I felt fortunate to see the rain hit the windshield on the way home rather than my bare arms and knees. It was an afternoon well spent, to say the least, and a mission accomplished. I mentioned in my first column that I was excited to hike, bike, drive, and possibly canoe every bit of Vernonia and the surrounding region. Well, I’ve got a ways to go, but I have every mode of travel checked off, right down to the tippy canoe.



Left to right: Dan Floyd, Safeway; Willis Van Dusen, Astoria Mayor; Claude Weaver, Wauna FCU Board Chair; Chuck Middleton, Astoria Safeway Manager; Skip Hauke, Astoria/Warrenton Chamber of Commerce; Mac Erickson, Financial Supermarkets, Inc.; Jeff Parker, Wauna FCU Astoria and Astoria Safeway Branch Manager; Robert Blumberg, Wauna FCU President/CEO.

Wauna Federal Credit Union Begins Construction of new Astoria Safeway Branch

Community and business officials joined Wauna Federal Credit Union during its recent groundbreaking ceremony for its new Astoria Safeway Branch.

Construction begins in early June and the new Astoria Safeway Branch is scheduled to open in early July.

“We appreciate our board of directors and all of our other guests for attending and helping us launch the start of our new branch,” reported Robert Blumberg, Wauna FCU President/CEO. “Our new partnership with Safeway will enable residents of Clatsop or Columbia

Counties to enjoy the convenience of shopping and credit union business at the east side of Astoria.”

The Astoria Safeway Branch will offer a full range of financial services with extended hours of service, including 10:00 a.m. — 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturdays 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. An ATM and Night Drop are also available during Safeway store hours.

A Grand Opening celebration is scheduled for early August to welcome everyone to the new Branch.



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