

Songs of the Rogue

On the Wild Side

by G.I. Wilson

Three rugged, rubber rafts shoot into the jaws of the Class IV rapids. This is not your "average run of the river rapids," but the Rogue River's notorious Blossom Bar, known to avid rafters 'round the world.

On board are five Sweet Adeline ladies that have competed for regional and national titles. They cinch up their life jackets and brace for the white water thrill of their lives.

When they enter Blossom Bar, there are three baritones and two leads on board.

After weaving through and dodging numerous boat-eating boulders the size of Hum-Vees, hitting curls of white water several feet high, five tenors exit the other side, speechless, soaked to the core, with pounding hearts that seem to drown out the sounds of the current.

By now the ladies are beginning to feel like seasoned rafters. They have experienced the excitement of Mule Creek Canyon; its deadly Coffee Pot (that has claimed more than its share of boats and rafts), Jaws and The Narrows (a passage where this powerful river funnels through a gap so narrow that raft oars can touch both sides of the rock cliffs towering above), Slim Pickens Rapids, (named for the actor), and of course, the original Zane Grey cabin.

Planning this trip begins with Jo Wilson of Keizer. She had made the float two times with family and friends.

After getting the other four ladies excited about the trip, she

contacts Jon Beilstein of Oregon River Outfitters in Shaw, Oregon.

Beilstein has been floating the Rogue for 30 years. He has three permits a year, July, August and September. Jo is lucky enough to get the August trip.

The float begins at Graves Creek, near the small community of Galice. Temperature is hot and smoky due to a monster forest fire some 60 miles away.

Greys Creek empties into the Rogue in a semiarid setting, rolling hills, dotted with black oak and fir. As they float downriver, flora will slowly transition. Oak and fir will be joined by the unique barkless Madrone. As the river carves its path through the heart of the Coast Range, mountains become steep and rugged. Old growth Douglas fir becomes the predominant species.

Marty Moretty and Kathy Jensen, of Canby, will be in the raft with Jon B.

Jean Hillman, of Tualatin, and Joyce Peters, of Canby, will be in the raft with John Hortsch.

Jo Wilson, of Keizer, will be in the raft with Steve Beilstein, Jon's son. Steve has grown up running the Rogue.

The Rogue Wilderness is home to numerous wildlife species. Rafters may see black-tail deer, black bear, turkeys, bald eagles, water fowl, the elusive river otter, and for the little guys, pond turtles and salamanders. This is wilderness country. These animals have never been hunted by man.

Excitement is high. Four of the ladies have never been on

a wilderness float before. This will be four days on the river, and three nights with tents and cots. Some of those nights will be in bear country.

First camp is a learning experience for the ladies. Lawn chairs are set up for the ladies first. After boats are unloaded, Jon says, "Okay, girls, time for me to a potty train you." They follow him a distance from camp and he introduces them to the "Honey Bucket" and riverside etiquette.

Actual travel time on the river is relatively short each day. Breakfast has to be cooked, dishes washed, tents taken down and everything packed.

Jon likes to be off the river by 3 p.m. at the latest. Although the number of river permits is limited, popular camp sites fill up quickly.

River travel is 'tough' for the ladies. The guys cook and serve meals, wash dishes, take down and pack tents and cots.

Riverside lunches are kept simple. The guys set up a table and the ladies actually have to make their own sandwiches.

Evenings are even tougher. Campsites selected, the guys set up a table for hors d'oeuvres, and ice for adult beverages.

While the guys set up camp, tents and Honey Bucket, the ladies relax with the substantial cache of wines, beer and tequila they have packed.

Jon is a meat and potato kind of outfitter. Eggs, potatoes, ham, bacon or sausage and fruit cup for breakfast. (Usually serves the ladies blueberry muffins with their coffee and tea before breakfast.)

Dinners are tri-tip, chicken and pork, with potatoes and veggies, and fresh salad. Jensen is a vegetarian. Jon has planned an excellent menu for her.

After dinner dishes are washed and put away and ev-



Submitted
Jo Wilson, Marty Moretty, Kathy Jensen, Jean Hillman and Joyce Peters rafted the Rogue River's Blossom Bar.

everyone can relax.

Jon brings out his "special" treat; a shot of Firehouse Apple Crisp (white lightning) complemented each evening with a different flavor of Oreo cookie: peanut butter, chocolate mint and red velvet. Needless to say, a first for the singers.

Day two, the ladies wake up to clear skies. No smoke. They can fully appreciate the river and wilderness. They see their first bald eagle and black-tail deer. Clear, cloudless skies mean evenings without city lights and time to explore the wonders of the sky we rarely see.

After watching the moon set, the group has fun identifying the planet Venus, the Milky Way, Big Dipper and Vega, rudely interrupted frequently by planes and satellites.

Day three, Jon warns the ladies that around midday their peace and tranquility will be interrupted by the roar of jet boats and passengers, reaching the turnaround point of their 104-mile round trip.

"It's plenty hot to bring out

the water cannons," Jon urges, with a chuckle. "Challenge the boats to a water fight."

"River etiquette is, ask them if they want to get wet," Jon explains. He conveniently fails to add that the jet boats have a surprise waiting.

Give them a water gun and 90-degree weather, and women become little girls and the water fight begins.

When the first jet boat approaches they politely ask, "Would you like to get wet?" They decline. Next boat gleefully agrees, and promptly gets squirted.

Skippers wait for this moment. He spins the stern toward the rafts and hits full throttle. The rafts disappear in a rooster tail of water, drenching the ladies.

Camp three will be the evening the ladies sing for the guys. It will also be in bear country.

A bear is spotted before reaching camp. It is casually wading along the river and ignores the shutter snapping frenzy. Another bear is spotted across the river from camp.

It is somewhat reassuring to the ladies that the bears are across the river, but, next to camp is a solar powered bear fence to protect their food from bears for the night.

An extra ration of drinks in order? Maybe a double shot of white lightning?

All of a sudden we have five tenors again.

Day four, is an easy float for guys on the oars. There is enough current to push the rafts along at a good pace. Wildlife seems to be limited to the occasional blue heron, stalking small fish and frogs along shore.

Unfortunately, the smoke has returned. Foster Bar, the take-out, is reached before noon. This means work for the guys, deflating rafts, packing supplies and disposing of four days of trash.

For the ladies; back to the real world. No more being waited on "hand and foot," a ten-mile drive to the motel and most important, hot showers.

Nothing is quite as peaceful and fulfilling as floating down one of the most pristine rivers in the world. Mother Nature dressed in her finest. The "stuff" wilderness dreams are made of.

Our singers have spent four days floating through towering cliffs, rugged mountains draped in old growth timber, seen deer, bald eagles and black bear in their native habitat, unafraid of man, and experienced the thrills of countless Class III and IV rapids.

These are the many songs of the wild and scenic Rogue.

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