

MEMORIES OF THE FIRST RIVER TRIPS WITH THE NATIONAL YOUTH SCIENCE CAMP

By Barney Lilly

I developed an interest in kayaking in about 1970. I first built a 2 person kayak called a Folbot from a kit. It had a wooden frame that was covered with a heavy vinyl material. With that I began my paddling and met other people involved in whitewater. I then connected with a group that was knowledgeable about constructing kayaks from fiberglass. The group had access to a mold and we built one kayak for each in the group. That was a great learning experience for me and with that boat I was able to begin paddling more difficult whitewater. In 1973 I was interested in building another kayak and found a small group with a like interest. We set up in my garage and stole a mold from an existing boat. We then built fiberglass boats for each of us.

In early 1975 I was contacted by Joe (I don't remember his last name) who was in charge of or at least very involved with the NYSC. He had heard that I had been involved in building kayaks and had a mold for a boat. He was interested in borrowing the mold to use in a project with the NYSC delegates to build a kayak. In talking with him he suggested that it would be nice if the delegates could experience a river trip. That suggestion got me to thinking about how that might be accomplished. I had been involved in quite a few trips with first timers and thought that a river trip with some of the NYSC delegates was doable. I discussed it with several paddlers and their comments were favorable. I contacted Joe and described what I thought I could put together and he was enthusiastic. Joe did borrow my mold and instruction I had on the subject of boat building.

The plan I developed was to paddle the McCreery to Stonecliff section of the New river getting experienced paddlers to participate as guides on a one on one basis where one delegate would be assigned to one experienced boater. I began making phone calls (this was prior to E-mail, texting and message boards) to all of the WVWA boaters I knew and some I only knew of by reputation asking them to participate by serving as guides and/or loaning spare boats and equipment. I don't remember how many guides I actually recruited but I think it was a few over 20.

On the selected Saturday I arrived early and began welcoming the guides and going through my check list to be sure we had guides and equipment for each delegate. When the NYSC bus arrived I boarded the bus and presented an overview of how I expected the day to proceed. When I asked if there were any questions I was asked "what is the water temperature". I replied probably 75 degrees to which there was overwhelming applause. I learned that they had constructed a boat from my mold and that they had used the boat in a spring fed (extremely cold) pool at the camp to practice wet exits and feared that the river might be cold.

The group exited the bus and I made assignments of each delegate to a guide. The guide was responsible for giving their delegate safety instruction and a wet exit from their boat. Those needing to shuttle drove their cars to the take out with the bus following and returning them to the put-in. During the shuttle those guides remaining at McCreery supervised the delegates with instruction and practice.

The trip then got under way. To be honest the trip itself has become blurred with the many trips that have taken place since. I do remember that there were quite a few flips in the first few rapids but then things settled down and the trip proceeded well. I don't remember who it was but an open canoe transported the delegate's lunch material on the river. We stopped at about half way down at sandy beach for lunch which I believe consisted of peanut butter and jelly for the campers. The guides carried their own lunches. We then proceeded down the river. At Silo rapid I was surprised at how few flips there were. We completed the trip and found the camp bus waiting. There had been no injuries or close calls so I breathed a sigh of relief and patted myself on the shoulder for pulling it off. The campers seemed very appreciative of the experience and there was talk about doing it again the next year. Neither I nor anyone else wrote a trip report at the time so consider this the trip report 37 years late.

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The next year I again organized the trip which was almost the same as the first trip. At that time my personal life had changed significantly and I declined to organize a third trip. David Hunt stepped up and handled the next few years and it became an annual tradition.

(I asked Barney if he would write this as the starting point for a history of the WVWA/NYSC kayak trips. If you have been the coordinator for this event, please send me a report of your memories. If you know of someone who was a coordinator but is no longer active in the club, please send me any contact information that you have so I can ask him/her to contribute. Thanks, Chuck Brabec)