

ADVENTURES ON THE ROGUE

A first-timer floats the Wild and Scenic Rogue River. Along the way she encounters rapids, spots wildlife and learns a new definition for the word 'bar'.

BY KIMBERLY GADETTE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT HARDING



The first of three days floating the Rogue with Rogue River Outfitters, a local guide company.

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Studying up on my upcoming whitewater rafting journey with Craig and Tina Hughson's Rogue River Outfitters, I read, "Your trip begins at Grave Creek and ends 3 days, 2 nights and 43 miles later ... at Foster Bar."

Hmmm—though I figured that my river-rafting companions would be pleasant, even delightful, after 54 hours and 40 miles downriver in each other's company, did we really need to share brews-kys at some pub called Foster Bar? After all that time together, what would be left to say?

Ohhhh...correction. "Bar" as in a ridge of sand or gravel formed by the action of currents. We were ending up at a beachhead, not a tavern. Proving that I am, indeed, an utter novice in the river rafting game—literally wet behind the ears.

Upon further study, I realized that the Rogue River isn't just your average 215-mile river starting at Crater Lake in Southern Oregon and ending at the Pacific Ocean—it was one of the first eight rivers to receive the Congressional designation of "Wild and Scenic" when that law was first enacted in 1968, entitling it to strict environmental protections. Even more exciting, my particular rafting trip would journey through the 33.8-mile area that was deemed "Wild." Was I up for a date with a Wild Rogue? You bet.

GIRL MEETS BUOY-ANT

We arrive at the designated put-in spot at 9:30 on a sunny summer morning in Galice. Immediately following warm hellos, my worldly goods are transferred into dry bags. River guides Bryan and Chris

patiently ace-bandage me into a life jacket, though I protest that the vest's particular shade of orange is not my best color. Perhaps they have something in a form-fitting navy? Tall, teddy-bearish Chris chuckles, as if he's heard it before.

We then clamber into the paddleboats (hey! how did I get the front seat?). The sun warms my skin, the sky is a robin's egg blue, and the water is like a mirror, reflecting the surrounding hills of fir, aspen and wild dogwood. Other than the sound of the paddles, it's extraordinarily quiet. With only a limited number of people allowed on this Wild and Scenic River on any given day between May and October, the sound of silence overwhelms.

I take to the art of paddling very well, or so I think, until my seatmate informs me that I've hit her with my oar. Twice. I try to blame the bulkiness (and color) of the vest, but she's not buying. I concentrate harder, especially with the first Grave Creek Rapids approaching. "All forward paddle!" Bryan commands. But between making futile attempts to dodge the wall of spray, and Homer Simpsonian howls of "Whoa-Hoo!" ripping from my diaphragm...my rowing takes a back seat. Which is where Bryan sits, still commanding that we paddle.

So much for the river's overwhelming silence.

After the first shock, dripping and giggling, we regain composure as Bryan describes Old Man Rainie, a man who made his living gaffing salmon in the early 1900s, spearing the fish as they leapt upstream in the steepest of falls. This 12-foot drop,



Rafters float through the 33.8-mile section designated Wild and Scenic.

Rafting Rivers

Oregon is chock-full of guided, whitewater adventure. Below is a sampling of the state's many navigable and scenic rivers.

CLACKAMAS RIVER Licensed operators guide a variety of excursions on this popular river, which is an easy day-trip from Portland or Salem.

DESCHUTES RIVER This Central Oregon river offers a variety of whitewater; natural beauty and wildlife viewing.

GRANDE RONDE This Eastern Oregon river offers Class III rapids, and plenty of wildlife viewing.

JOHN DAY RIVER The longest undammed river in the Pacific Northwest, this central-eastern waterway is remote and spectacular with dramatic rock formations and desertscape.

McKENZIE RIVER Flowing through the Willamette National Forest, this river has stretches of relatively calm whitewater.

NORTH UMPQUA RIVER This river traverses some of southern Oregon's most pristine wilderness. Popular with rafters and anglers.

OWYHEE The rafting window on this Eastern Oregon river is a short one because of water level. If you time your trip right, this is one spectacular float.

UPPER KLAMATH Located in Southern Oregon, this exciting river promises a challenging run and abundant bird life.

For more information on these rivers and to find a licensed rafting guide visit www.TravelOregon.com

Call or Click

Southern Oregon
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800.448.4856
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For more information, turn to "Planning Your Trip," page 78.



Dinner at Half Moon Bar Lodge, where rafters spend a warm and cozy night.

"Rainie Falls," is too treacherous for river-rafting guests to ride, and we find ourselves on shore watching Bryan, River Guide Extraordinaire, steering effortlessly through the swirling, rocky whitewater.

ROGUES' GALLERY

Other than impressing us time and again with his skill maneuvering the rapids, rowing within a hair's breadth of high rock walls, then expertly deflecting the craft, our guide is a modern day Will Rogers, an anecdote-spoutin' Southern Oregonian with a sharp brain and a sly humor. We are plied with wonderful stories about his hero, Glen Woolldridge, first successful navigator of the Rogue in 1915, who altered the river's geography with liberal usage of dynamite, who improved the technical capabilities of riverboats, and who was the celebrity guide for the likes of Ginger Rogers, Clark Gable, Herbert Hoover, Betty Grable and Zane Grey.

History lessons abound, both off shore and on. We visit Whiskey Creek Cabin (a placer miner's home in the 1880s, complete with a solar-powered shower and a water wheel used to generate electricity). We explore the Billings' 1903 Rogue River Ranch, now a museum, standing as testament to the Rogue's quasi-civilization, with post office, trading post and tabernacle. It's also a good shelter for us, caught in a surprise summer downpour. Upstairs above the tabernacle, looking straight down at the rain splashing into the Mule Creek valley far below, it's eerie to think that we're standing in what was once the dance hall. The Billings' grandson Ivin is quoted as saying, "For years we held dances upstairs. When father opened up Sunday morning services, we didn't have dances there any more. He preached a very good sermon."

Other reasons to land onshore are the earthly delights of food and shelter. Lunchtime is a treat with a buffet-style picnic, sandwich deli meats and

cheeses, and Tina Hughson's veritable boatload of fresh salads (fruit, vegetable, pasta), cookies and buttermilk chocolate cake/brownies. With our rafts and inflatable kayaks parked on the bank, all of us loll on comfy beach chairs gazing out, while blue herons, ospreys and turtles gaze in. Lunches are absolute paradise.

LODGING NO COMPLAINTS

After a day on the river, the lodges throw out the welcome mat. First night, it's Black Bar Lodge with stand-alone pine cabins, the dining room manned by the Rogue River Outfitters staff, Craig Hughson hosting. Thick steaks, pastas and salads, the princely dinner feast is followed early next morning with omelets, hash browns and thermoses of steaming hot coffee right outside each cabin door.

Second night, it's five steep flights up to the 83-acre Half Moon Bar Lodge. Mia, a miniature pinscher mix, trots out to give us all a heartfelt hello. The deer dotting the front lawn aren't as effusive—they munch fallen apples while they stare, as if to wonder why I'm there and what I'm planning to do to their apples.

With Half Moon's expansive, high-ceiling living room, huge river rock fireplace and dining hall, this is luxe for the river. Heck, it's luxe for anyone.

The memories linger: the ouzel's haunting "come-play-with-me!" call, echoing off the deeply resonant rock walls of Mule Creek Canyon; the thrilling drop pool rapids; the sight of a black bear cub strolling the lower pasture at Half Moon Bar Lodge; the company; and above all, the ever-changing, magnificent Rogue.

Per Craig Hughson: "No matter how you do it—hiking, rafting, fishing—you owe it to yourself to float down the Rogue at least once in your lifetime."

I agree. So when are we all going to meet for beers at Foster Bar? 🍷