

Rubber and Oars and Cats Oh My!

An Epic Descent of Inflatables on the Green Truss

BOATERS:

R2 Teams

Scott Waidelich (Fish)/Michael Franz Horner
George White/Hans Hoomans
Kyle Smith/Montana Dan

Oarboat: Will Volpert (10' Raft)

Catarafts: Dave and Shelly Becker

Kayakers: Cody Howard, Corey Ryan, JP, Nick Hinds, Ryan Akins, Ryan Morgan, Ryan Scott



The Top of Big Brother

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Editor's Note:

On Sunday, March 15, 2009 something truly remarkable happened. A large and diverse group of boaters and boats including kayaks, paddle rafts, an oar raft and catarafts successfully ran the Green Truss section of the White Salmon river. The Green Truss is a steep, tight Class IV-V+ run that was long considered the realm of kayakers due to the vertical walled canyon, extremely tight slots and very large drops including the 28 "Big Brother". This day saw three R2 teams and three oarboats attempt the run with a large group of expert kayakers whose support and assistance was a huge contributing factor to the successful day enjoyed by all.

What follows is a collection of trip reports and thoughts from different members of this group as they lead you down the Truss as it was experienced by them. None of these stories had any prior collaboration and none of the content has been altered by the editor beyond fixing typographic errors.

Michael Franz Horner's Trip Report Boat: Paddle Raft (R2 Team)

Fish emailed me, private messaged me on Professor Paddle, left a voice message and texted me all in a time span of 2 minutes. I knew something was up for sure! When I talked with Fish and knew what the adventure would entail my stomach was filled with butterflies and my adventure itch tickled pink....

Less than 3 years ago I ran the Green Truss of the White Salmon River with Fish in a Super Puma. We ran everything but Big Brother and having run everything downstream I had really wished we'd fired up the big one. When we got there Fish wanted to go but, I was too scared. Having run BZ downstream and Little Brother I told Fish, "Next time we are running Big Brother"....

Checking the banter on Professor Paddle (PP), I learned that there was going to be someone "oaring" the Green Truss (GT). When I learned that, I emailed the Becker's as I had heard Shelly say on numerous occasions that she wanted to do it. Before long I had a ride and a plan to meet Fish on Sunday after he had run the Little White (considerable harder than the Truss) on Saturday. My Saturday plan was to do the Farmlands and the Becker's were going to check it out too. My ride was with some PP kayaking buddies and they were to join on the Farmlands and GT. We realized that the Farmlands was way too low for Cats and the Becker's decided to scout the Truss and run shuttle for the kayakers and I. Seal launching after Sidewinder I got an awkward seat on top of my first aid/wrap kit and my throw bag and subsequently flipped. Now, I never let go of my paddle. I swam from Boulder Drop to Split rock at 23K with that thing and never let go of it. I've had that old Werner Wenatchee 90 degree feather for years. Somehow, here, I

let go and it totally disappeared under water....gone....gone...gone - the price of admission we might say for Sunday's redemption, Sunday's life changing, ever distracting victory for the team of deserving and lucky go getters that were preparing their heads for the next morning....

The put-in for the Green Truss is the take-out for the Farmlands and after catching a ride from some fellow PA Deutsch transplants, I ended up at the Green Truss bridge to wait for Leif and Ryan, my PP buddies. I figured I had quite a wait and I had forgot to get the keys or password combo to get in the truck. Cold and defeated I decided to resign myself to mentally preparing for the morning by pacing back and forth across the Green Truss bridge. I had grown spooked. At the put-in for the Farmlands something told me things weren't right. I discovered a weird looking leak on my Stiletto and after much internal debating and a duck tape patch I decided to go. I take signs and gut feelings like that seriously and now having lost my paddle I feared that the Truss may have it in for me too. I had to get positive and I paced and counted my laps. For every 10 laps back and forth I went all the way out to the road. In this time I changed my mental outlook and remembered some things about stepping up your boating game. First rule for me is to have support. I was surely going to have that. Kayakers, rafters and Shelly and Dave were converging on the scene and Fish and I had run before. But, what about Big Brother?? Next rule is remember what you know is right. I started focusing my mind on my mantras: "Eye of the Tiger" and "Cool like Fonzi" and "see what's happening in front of you, register it, and react as you know is best". In no time (about 2 hours) the Beckers woke me from my meditation having lost count around 40 laps. We went and got my duckie after I warmed and changed since Dave had a key having run shuttle. They were returning

from their scouting mission and were mighty perplexed about Lower Zig Zag. There was a tree that everyone was doubting would go for rafts let alone catarafts! Everyone that is except Fish....

It was raining and cold so we all decided to go in on a hotel room. The stink of rafters, catarafters, and kayakers stank the room to something worse than what most would endure. We met the gang of expert boaters for some dinner and beers and Fish fended off doubts of the amount of room between the wall and the log. I wasn't thinking about that just yet. I was thinking about Big Brother mostly. I suspect Fish's mind was playing out our line off that thing too. His confidence is highly contagious to me. The nice burger and a couple beers readied me to sleep and in no time I was dreaming in a perfectly nice warm bed with blankets and a heater. I tried to cherish it as best I could knowing the next day would test my endurance to cold but what swarmed in my mind was the unknown about the next day. What was going to happen at Big Brother? Would everyone fit through at the Zig Zags? Would we run BZ again and would we make it? Would I freeze my ass off? Would I have the stamina and the reactions to help our group and my boat get down that piece in one piece? The answer was to be a resounding YES to each of these questions but when I woke in the morning I only had about a second before they were being asked again and again.

Breakfast was nice but all I could eat was oatmeal. Nothing would be worse than having some eggs in my belly with those butterflies. Actually, worse would be to throw some bacon grease in with that. The makings of "Put-in Pudding" were tempting but I decided to go with the heavy and easily digested oats. Arriving at the put-in was a relief. Now I could focus on getting ready, pumping up the raft and getting flip lines and spare paddles situated. A great

group was assembling. Everyone had a look of seriousness but also a look of determination and the good will was spread around to all. This is what's it's all about. We are going to do this. There was no doubt now. It's on. Myself, Fish, Shelly and Dave along with 2 other R2 crews and countless kayakers made their way down the mixed mud, rock, ice, and snow vertical down climbing challenge. The rafts were quite a challenge in themselves let alone the down climbing. A team effort was needed and the put-in set the pace for the rest of the day. A great start in team dynamics is essential for a run like this and we all nailed it. We might not remember everyone's name but there was a feel to the snowing air that we were about to embark on something epic and totally amazing...

The first few rapids on the Green Truss would get most Class IV kayakers pretty excited. For us in the 14' raft they weren't much more than keeping the boat straight. There was one rapid that had us pinned up against a sieve. We high-sided and pushed and paddled our way out much to the delight of the on looking paddlers. At the bottom of the first drop we had one upside down raft and an oarsman with a broken oar. After getting the raft righted and the broken oar replaced we had a couple rapids as we approached "Meatball". This was to be another tight slot that possibly "won't go" for rafts and catarafts. To get our raft through, Fish and I had to do a little low-siding and I thought there was no way the cat boats would get through. We hit an eddy and Fish climbed upstream to help if he could. We were just above Bob's Falls and other boaters were scouting that while I stayed with the raft and waited for the Becker's. In no time Will Volpert, the oarsman on a little raft, and the Becker's were safely through Meatball having run it with little trouble from what I could tell.

Bob's and Little Bob's Falls is one beautiful rapid. It is much steeper and tight than the impression I get from photos. Our raft performed like a dream and Fish knew exactly where to put us. Our style is for Fish to say where we are going and we go there. We are each independently paddling as if we have 2 little oars. When we need to take multiple strokes they are in perfect unison. When we turn the boat it is controlled, never over rotating. There are no military like commands although a few times Fish would yell, "turn me around!" After Bob's I was feeling very humble and repeating my mantras for now we were coming to Big Brother.

We pulled over to scout and prepare for Big Brother and all the feelings of anticipation of running a life-changing drop overwhelmed me. Fish talked me through our approach to the lip and I had a very sound understanding of what needed to be done. We walked up to the lip and I was flush with incredible feelings. The feeling you get at Big Brother is that of being in a sacred place. The roar of the falls is equaled only by the peace of the green and the rock. Kayakers were running the drop and Fish was helping the oarsmen line their boats over the falls. I was becoming very focused on running the drop. Hans and George decided to go and a kayaker came up to me and gave me a proposition. He said if I "don't want join in Fish's craziness" that Brad would run the drop with him. I said that was nice of him but I am really leaning towards going. George and Hans crashed big a few seconds later. I watched as one was caught under the boat getting worked against the wall. Hans escaped and got to shore but George was in the cave. Throw bags hit him in seconds and they towed him out. That settled it. I can't not go. There is so much safety! Shelly and Dave were on their cats at the bottom. JP and other kayakers were down there.

Other boaters were perched up high to toss ropes into the cave. "Lets go" said Fish.

We did everything Fish planned for. We charged the drop anticipating the current moving us right to left. When we started moving in that direction I reached for that last piece of water on the lip coming off the right flake and gave my ultimate forward stroke. In one motion I leaned back reaching for the strap we had running behind us for an "Oh shit!" handle. I felt the boat twisting and reached for the higher side while Fish moved forward to avoid me. The impact was actually air soft!!! There was more of an impact when we hit the wall but we both popped up and high-sided. A few paddle strokes had us in the eddy and I could barely contain my excitement. Fish was so stoked and JP's colors and congratulations were so perfect. My life was changed but we still had some serious stuff to run!



Fish and Horner Style Big Brother

We watched the other raft crash and everyone got moving downstream. Our run of Little Brother was a little sloppy. I believe my last stroke was a little weak and at the bottom I ended up falling on Fish's knee. He seemed OK but I felt really bad. Our highside was put to the test again and we were able to get out of the backwash without swimming. Our next big drop was Double Drop and we highsided our way through that piece with aplomb. At the bottom we got to find a good view for the catboat show. Shelly had a great line at the top drop but somehow was a couple of inches off at the bottom. It's a crap-shoot really. She went upside down and was collected in the eddy. Next came Dave and his line was super clean while it was about 3 inches to the left of where Shelly had been. In the meantime there was a group effort going on to help Shelly and her boat. It was a tricky proposition as there is a pretty good ledge just downstream of where she was. The kayakers and the oarsmen got it over and we hurried down some fun little drops to the Zig Zags.

We scouted Upper Zig Zag and ran it for everyone to watch. It was a piece of cake for us at that point because Fish knew the line like the back of his hand. You will never be impressed with anyone on the river as much as you would be if you R2'd the Truss with that man. Precise and fully in control, we styled it and eddied out. I walked down to scout Lower Zig Zag and found what I expected. It looked like there was nearly no room to get between the wall and the log. I didn't want to go down really far and get as close a look as possible because I was scared it would scare me too much! Everyone started joining me for the scout and Fish talked me through the drop. It was to be an exercise in precise timing and stout paddling. We greased the drop and a feeling of great relief overwhelmed me. After we had cleared the log Fish turned around and pointed at Shelly and Dave

telling them that they had this. I knew it too. There was plenty of room for someone with the skills of Shelly and Dave. It didn't seem to take long before, one by one, the oarsmen arrived at the bottom. Everyone was so relieved.

Cold and exhausted I told Fish I thought my luck had been good today and that I didn't want to run BZ. I said quitting while we are ahead is probably a good idea. Reluctantly, Fish agreed and we started charging down the river towards BZ falls. There were a few river-wide logs that were sure to give the oarsmen some problems and we had to wait a few times to let them catch up. Waiting above BZ Fish and I decided to just run BZ. "A no swim, no portage decent would be pretty sweet!" was said by both of us. We decided to run it without scouting and to go right over the middle of it leaning back and hanging on. Our last time over the drop, we charged the left side of the drop and leaned forward going over. We had to highside like crazy to get out of that one and it scared me something serious. This time we charged the middle of the drop and although I got a sinus douche, this run was much cleaner. The day was now done and we were cold and tired and our adrenaline we had left was oozing out of our ears. It was an epic day that will be at the top of my most memorable list to the second I die. The camaraderie, vertical drops, and precision paddling were a whole career in the making for all of us who embarked on that fine piece of whitewater. I will be forever linked to these people and will never forget the satisfying feeling everyone's good will generated in the middle of some insane drops and gorgeous scenery.

To paddle with Fish on the Green Truss is quite an experience. I'm humbled and thankful to have his trust in my skills, cool, and friendship. I'm one of the luckiest people in the world without this

experience, but now, I wake up and have another time to be thankful for. I still scream "Yee Haw" everyday thinking about landing Big Brother.

We are truly blessed!

-- Michael Franz Horner

Will Volpert's Trip Report

Boat: 10' Oar Raft

Fear is exhausting. Fear is exhausting. Fear is exhausting. Today my hands look like they were taken out of a blender. They are huge and purple with nicks and bruises all over. My upper body was pummeled by oars, frame, etc. and is pretty sore too.

The word "epic" is used a lot to describe incredible river trips. Prior to our Truss run, there were a few trips I had been part of that I could have called "epic". Not anymore. Never have I rowed a river like the Truss, been around such a supportive group of boaters nor a more talented group, or had such strong feelings of fear or happiness.

Rowing the Truss, realistically, is a horrible idea. But, once you've lowered your raft, frame, and oars roughly 100 feet down a cliff, you're pretty well committed. And that's where I and about two-dozen other people found ourselves the morning of March 15, 2009. Most of them were kayaking, but we had a few R2 boats, my oar boat, and two catboats. Before yesterday, I had heard that the Truss had been rowed once before and had been written off as a really bad idea.

The put-in was the first sign of how things were going to go. Kayakers, cat boaters, and rafters all helped get the boats down to the river. This was no easy task, especially with the snow and slippery slush that caked the steep banks. Teamwork. It became a theme throughout the trip.

The sense of commitment overcame me as I sat in my boat ready to push off. Glancing from bank to bank was a calm river but I knew what lay ahead downstream. The steep walls on both sides didn't look safe for walking out, and you certainly wouldn't be dragging your boat back up. I was there feeling the moment with about two-dozen others, and once we started I knew we weren't turning back.

I had calmed my nerves after pushing off from the bank for the first time. But, in the very first rapid my left oar caught the bank and shattered mid shaft. Gone. As I struggled to grab the spare, the next drop came closer and closer and closer and was pulling my boat downstream. Thankfully, three kayakers pushed my boat into a little micro eddy above the next drop. Just another example of how everyone had each other's backs. I got the spare out (my only spare) and we continued on our way. This was at mile 0.2.

We ran Meat Ball and Bob's Falls without problems and then got to Big Brother. About an hour later, we had gone 1 mile. We ran Little Brother and then came around the corner to Double Drop. A HUGE drop, it's two-tiered with a massive hole in the first drop. Some kayakers ran through first and then climbed up to say "good to go". I pushed off the lip with the thought... I'll get to the lip and throw the oars forward, reach back and grab my seat, hope to get through the hole and be straight for the second drop. Well, it's exactly what my boat did, but not my body. Pretty much I was going 50 miles an hour over a massive drop, hit the hole, the boat stopped instantly and my body shot off the front of the boat and nearly cleared the bottom drop. I was under water for a micro-second and had traveled pretty far downstream. Lucky I didn't break my neck. The boat came through no problem and I climbed back in.

Next up was Shelly in her cat. She got through the first drop and was just a little cockeyed to the left through the second drop. It was just enough for the tip of her right tube to catch and turn the boat upside down. She was able to flip it back over before going over the next rapid. Dave ran through with a stellar line – the only one running Double Drop who didn't swim!

The most significant rapid (in terms of holy sh** this is scary) is a rapid called Lower Zig Zag. It's scary because of wood. There's a must-make-or-you-will-hate-life move above the scariest piece of wood I've ever seen. You're also walled-in at this point, and portaging a boat other than a kayak would be very difficult.

With this in mind, you can almost imagine my thoughts when, while passing under a log, my left oar jammed and broke at the wrap about half a mile above Zig Zag. I asked Shelly if I could borrow her spare and

without hesitation she handed it over. Could you imagine giving someone who had already broken two oars your spare? I felt like a jackass for having broken two oars but there wasn't much I could do about it now. The oars Shelly uses are 9.5 feet long, about the length of my entire boat, and 1.5 feet longer than my right oar. The new oar also had an oar-right, something I'm not used to rowing with. With no option of hiking out, I looked like a circus going down the river... my left oar sticking way out in contrast to the short stubby thing in my right hand.

We all made the move at Lower Zig Zag and from here out it was a sprint to take out. I ghost boated BZ because I was absolutely beat and it just didn't look like a clean line. After I got to BZ (where most everyone was taking out), Shelly and Dave came around the corner. They said they had run BZ and styled it!



I was so happy to be on solid ground and done with the run, the thought of what we had all accomplished hadn't quite hit me yet. Shelly said "We just rowed the Green Truss..." and that's when it hit me. We rowed the Truss, we'd finished the run successfully. I gave Shelly her spare oar back and thanked her again. I literally could not have done the run without their help and especially without her spare oar! Her and Dave continued downstream to Husum where their truck was. Ryan, Kyle, Dan, and I started huffing our stuff up the tracks. Overall, it was a heinous trip for me. For about five hours I was completely terrified, worried about safety, and afraid that I was going to have to hike out. After I broke my second oar, I really thought that I was done for. Kyle Smith, a friend of mine and guide on California's Kern River, was R2ing on this trip and he and I talked later and decided it was easily the most nervous we've been on any river.

Nevertheless, I'm glad we did it. I will never row a piece of whitewater like I did yesterday. It will be something to remember and something to be proud of, but not something I will ever do again. I discovered that day that I don't like fear. I don't like HAVING to run something stupid to get downstream. I don't like dropping off blindly, breaking oars, and boating defensively. Normally I have confidence when I'm on a river. Yesterday I had none.

I imagine that some will question our judgment in even attempting this trip. Rightfully so, I probably shouldn't have even tried rowing the Truss. I had R2'd it last year and enjoyed the run. Time does strange things to a boater. Memory shrinks the size of waterfalls, the narrowness and speed of a rapid. About a month ago I woke up and thought "I'm going to row the Truss this year." It was stuck in my head and I knew that with the right support of kayakers and boating friends it would be doable. The flow

was right, the group was right, and the day felt good. I'm not sure it could have ended any better anyway. As brutal as it was, no one was seriously hurt and we ran just about everything. I sure would like to have my two oars back, but thankfully Shelly had a spare to lend. It figures that I wait until the Truss to have my first-ever and second-ever broken oar.

I've heard that it's better to be lucky than good. On this day, I was lucky to have been around such competent boaters. With that in mind, THANK YOU to every one of you who were on the Truss March 15, 2009. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

-- Will Volpert

Kyle Smith's Trip Report

Boat: Paddle Raft (R2 Team)

I started out on my 6 hour trip to Portland last Friday to meet up with Will in hopes of running clean lines and styling Big Brother like the last time I found myself on the Truss. Life has a way of throwing a wrench or two into your plans from time to time though. Will and I met with George in Hood River for a bagel and discussed how George and I wanted to paddle throughout the day, who would call commands, etc. The three of us met up with Hans and Dan at Husum only to find that neither of the two liked to paddle on the left side of the boat so George and I said our goodbyes while I said hello to a 245lb 6'5" R2 partner and a very small Aire Puma. I did not see that coming. The weather immediately turned to snow and sleet and the put in was overrun with boaters from all backgrounds and levels of experience. I spent most of my time at the bottom of the cliff face catching 4 rafts, 2 cats, and a number of creek boats. Dan and I spent the day both in and out of the boat. It turns out that having a 165 lb paddler partnered with a 245 lb paddler is not such a good balance. Haha. I would like to expand on how huge of an advantage it was to have so many experienced kayakers

along the trip to help clean up the carnage and prevent me from going over waterfalls and into big ugly holes a number of times. The day was longer than expected but great to be part of at the same time. PBR's at the take out didn't hurt either. Will and I headed home to nurse our bruises with storytelling, beer drinking, and plenty of sleep.

-- *Kyle Smith*

Shelly Becker's Trip Report

Boat: Cataract

Wed night I received an email from Horner that a group of boaters was going to run the Green Truss, I heard there would be some R2 teams and someone was planning to oar a 10' raft. Oars?, Rafts?, Truss? For the last couple of years I had been dreaming about someday taking my cat down the Truss. I was told a lot of times, by a lot of very good boaters with Truss experience that cats on the Truss are most definitely NOT recommended. The river was too narrow, cats were too big, too heavy and having oars in a place like that is an all around bad idea. Still, I dreamed about it. Last year Dave and I hiked in and launched at the Oreletta put-in just below lower Zigzag. The level was 2.25' and indeed there were some very narrow places, we got a little stuck a couple of times but nothing that wasn't manageable. We successfully ran BZ Falls that day and it was a huge rush! I didn't forget my dream. Afterwards, I started doing more serious research, digging up photos and videos and asking lots more questions. More than once I was offered a spot on an R2 team so I could take a look and decide for myself. The thing is, I'm a CAT boater and even though R2ing is great fun I don't do it very often and the Truss didn't seem like a good place to figure stuff out. I had made up my mind that if ever I was to run the Truss, it would be in my own boat.

I told Dave what was in the works for the weekend and asked if he wanted to try and catboat the Truss on Sun. He was totally into it and suddenly, we had a mission! The problem was, I STILL didn't know if it was possible. I sent a lot of email to a lot of people and in the end, it was Fish who helped me make up my mind – he said he and Horner were going to R2 a 14' raft and there would be a couple of very tight places for cats but it was all makeable. Friday was "getting ready" day. I bought a new helmet and pfd (something I had been meaning to do and researching all Winter). I fixed a ton of gear that was starting to need work. I made sure my unpin kit was in order and then, realizing that I had never done flip practice in Catalina using a thwart (it's fairly easy for me to re-flip her without a thwart) I saved the final hour of daylight for a lake session and was pleasantly surprised at how absolutely effortless it was to reflip using the thwart. I could easily and instantly pull the boat over with a 6' inside strap, no muss, no fuss, no messing with flip bags, nothing to deploy or stow afterwards. It had been a while since I did flip practice and I wanted to have things fresh in my mind so I could quickly do a re-flip on autopilot.

Saturday morning found us driving to the White Salmon. The plan was to run the Farmlands, the SUPER narrow run upstream from the Truss if there was enough water and then hike in and scout what we could see on the Truss. When we got to the Farmlands and looked at Sidewinder we realized that clearly there was not water enough for cats. There are long stretches that are so narrow you can practically straddle the river and put a tube on each bank. Everything else, including the Wind was very very low but the main reason for driving down on Sat was to scout. Dave and I ran shuttle for Horner, Leif, and Ryan who were kayaking/IKing the Farmlands and hiked into Big Brother to have a look. We were able to see the bottom of Double



Boats at the Bottom of Big Brother After Portaging

Drop through the trees, way down in the gorge. It looked big, that's all we could tell and that's all we could see. Further upstream we got a good look at Little Brother (The Faucet) – a 14' waterfall where the left side line is completely green and vertical and the right side is more ramped out and a little mankier. The normal line is on the left, which looked fine except there were two rocks in the approach that were less than an inch under water and spaced about the same width as cat tubes. There looked to be a high probability of getting grounded out at the lip of the drop which would result in dropping over with no speed and/or possibly sideways. For that reason, we decided the right side would be better for our cats – there was plenty of room and it looked good to go. We then hiked up and took a close look at Big Brother. Although we were planning to portage this one, it

was fun to scout the takeoff area and imagine what would happen. Well, we were both pretty sure what would happen – most likely it would involve violent impact with metal, oars, possibly some rocks if things went badly, and without a doubt, some time in the notorious cave at the bottom. We also looked at the drop above Big Brother so we would know when it was coming up (although a 28' horizon line is a pretty obvious giveaway).

Next, we drove to Oreletta so we could hike in and scout Lower Zigzag. I had seen a recent online photo of Lower Zigzag from upstream and was very very worried about this one. It looked like there would be positively no room to get a cat around a huge vertical log that you would most certainly hit at about 80mph. In terms of the Oreletta put-in, what had been a

pleasant hike down a dry creek bed last summer was now a rushing torrent of water. After a very wet hike, we arrived at the river and scrambled as far as we could upstream on river right to get a peek at Lower Zigzag. What we saw was disheartening. From downstream it looked like there was probably no way to get a cat between the log and the left bank. I was more optimistic than Dave – I said it looked close and there might be more room than it looks and even, maybe, it would look better from upstream. Further up, we saw there was a stout Class IV lead-in right above the move heading into the log, messing up anywhere would have disastrous consequences. There is no way to set safety at the log and no way to help anyone if they had a problem there. To add to the gloomy proposition, the portage looked horrendous (but we already knew that). Dave was wondering if it was even possible to portage at all and I said I thought we could but would require several ropes.

With a heavy heart I trudged back up the watery Oreletta trail in the pouring rain. We had come all this way, and I was surprisingly OK with everything else that I saw and I knew everything downstream was runnable (or portageable) because we had done it before. Lower Zigzag was looking to be a deal breaker but I wasn't ready to give up, not yet. I got on the phone, I talked to more people trying to get all the beta I could. The one good thing about Lower Zigzag is you CAN hike out if you need to portage. The Oreletta trail is an easy ferry from the bottom of the portage route across moving flatwater. I told Dave that if we had to, we could break down our boats and set up ropes to portage. This would probably use up the rest of our daylight so we would need to ferry across and hike out Oreletta in the dark but that would be doable. Later that night when we met up with Fish, he said the log was deceiving and the wall cuts in and there would be enough

room to get our cats around (barely). I still didn't know if I felt better about what it was that I would need to do with my boat. JP very kindly offered to help us portage (no small undertaking) if we didn't want to run our cats through. After much discussion, still, we didn't know exactly what Lower Zigzag would bring but we did have options and for that reason made the decision to launch in the morning.

We enjoyed a good dinner and spent Sat night warm and dry in a nice hotel room in Hood River that we shared with Horner, Leif and Ryan. I think I mentioned that Horner, Leif and Ryan did boat that day and therefore had lots of wet gear to hang and dry – the full effects of which were not experienced until we stepped out of the room in the morning into the FRESH air and returned to get our stuff. Happy to leave that behind us, we all quickly drove back to the White Salmon Sunday morning where we would be meeting the rest of the Truss crew.

The day before, Dave and I had also hiked down the Class V "trail" into the put-in. We wanted to know how hard it would be to lower our cats to the river. The "trail" consists of a vertical rock face with 2 different ropes set up. On Sat it was muddy and slippery and then overnight it snowed. Sunday morning arrived with a fresh coating of slushy slop with all of the slippery goodness that goes along with that. It took quite a while and a lot of work to get all the rafts and cats lowered and many kayakers helped a LOT with this unenviable task. We had people staging boats, people lowering boats and people on the ground doing catch and release and re-secure. Many ropes were involved and at long last there was a big pile of rubber on the flat bench waiting for the final lower into the river. Before I launched, I told Dave that my personal mission for the day was to do my absolute best and not to become part of a problem.

Finally, all the boats were in the water and Fish gave us some verbal instructions for what to expect in the Class IV rapids leading up to Meatball. Will Volpert shattered a wooden oar in the first rapid but was able to get out his spare. Another one of the rapids was a long tricky, very technical Class IV with a tough move at the bottom to get around a rock. Somehow in the process, Dave's oarlock sheared off completely, his oar leash kept the oar from being lost. Dave normally does carry a spare oarlock and thankfully today it was in the gear bag. I couldn't help but hear the little voice in my head "The Truss is NO place for oars...". I told Will that he was welcome to use my spare if he ever needed it that day but at



On a Line and Doin' Fine, Catalina's Portage at Big Brother

the time neither one of us thought it would be necessary.

After a few more Class IV's, Meatball lurked around a somewhat blind corner. The big deal with Meatball is that everyone was pretty sure the rafts and cats would not fit through the left slot at the bottom

(between the Meatball and the left bank). The kayaks and Fish/Horner went first while we staged ourselves upstream. One whistle meant good to go and three whistles meant portage. I waited and eventually heard one whistle – I waited a little longer and heard a second whistle but Fish had scrambled upstream and was motioning me to come down. Well, there was NO way my cat was going to fit through the Meatball slot but Fish was able climb out on the rocks on the left and grab my left tube and he shoved while I lowsided and the boat went through. The same procedure was repeated for Dave's boat. Right below Meatball is a pretty good ledge so you need to somewhat have your boat under control when you exit. Next up was Bob's Falls which is a very tall ledge that feeds you into the right wall and then into another big ledge. We ran this on verbal instructions from Fish, and knowing to anticipate the push into the right wall helped a lot. Bob's Falls = big fun!

The rapid above Big Brother had some trickier currents than what we anticipated from our scout the day before but everything went fine there and we rowed right up to the lip of Big Brother and took out on river left. I have never seen a horizon line like that from my boat - ever - and it was impressive to say the least. The R2 teams were planning to run and it was pucker time for them. Dave and I and Will were planning to portage. Fish made the "portage" MUCH easier by showing us how to ghost boat the left side. One by one, a line was attached to the cats and raft and they were hucked over the left side. Enough slack was left in the line so the boats could free fall over the drop but not go downstream of the bottom of the portage trail. Catalina did quite well all by herself. The highlight of Big Brother was watching Fish and Horner style the drop and stick the landing, watching the video in slow motion made it even more

unbelievable. We probably set some kind of record that day for the amount of safety that was set up at Big Brother and a couple people did need to be rescued from the cave. At least one kayaker hiked back up to run laps. Dave and I stood at the bottom and watched kayak after kayak come flying over the top and disappearing into the foam at the bottom. I've seen countless video clips of kayaks running Big Brother but it's different when you are there seeing it first hand and was VERY cool.

Little Brother is immediately downstream. Will said that he was planning to portage Little Brother as well and we said we were going to run the right side. The R2's were going to run the normal route on the left. Will ferried across and looked at the right side and decided to line his boat – he also said he would try to get video of the rest of the boats (very cool). Dave and I ferried over next – I rowed up to the lip and stood up for a quick last check then hucked Catalina 14' over the edge yeehaw! It was a fun ride and Dave did the same thing right behind me.

Next up was the formidable Double Drop – an 18' double falls with violent holes at the bottom of each, the bottom hole seeming worse. I was told that at this level Double Drop would be stout and we may want to portage. Naturally, Fish said it was good to go, hit the top hole HARD with very slight left angle and gut the bottom hole. The entrance to Double Drop had a manky tight spot where all the rafts/cats had to do some Flintstone type work. It was a very LARGE horizon line and again, Dave and I were running on verbal instructions only. I lined up, and rowed hard charging the top hole. I've never run any drop with that much vertical – looking down, it looked like I just rowed Catalina out of a 3'rd story window. I hit the first hole, hung on, and was immediately flying toward the second hole pointing a little more left than I would have liked. I hit the bottom hole still pointing a

little more left than I would have liked and as I was grabbing the front of my boat it felt like I had made it. But then, it started getting darker – and wetter – and I realized we were going over. The hole had grabbed part of my back tube and flipped my cat sideways from left to right. I stayed with the boat and quickly climbed back on and was thinking how easy it was going to be for me to re-flip in the pool below using my thwart and quickly realized that the “pool” was moving way too fast toward what looked like another 7'-8' ledge. I changed my plan and decided throwing a line to from me to Kyle and Dan in the eddy on river right was a better idea so they could hold my boat and prevent it from going over the ledge. More importantly, I was concerned about Dave's fate in the bottom hole. Just after we got my boat stabilized I watched Dave come down and keep straighter than I did at the bottom and emerge right side up YAY! After Fish and I got my cat re-flipped (which entailed flipping onto a large boulder so as to stay out of the main current while Kyle and Dan kept hold of the rope I tossed them) I ran the next ledge and was very very happy not to have gone over it on an upside down boat or worse, in the process of re-flipping.

Afterwards, the river “mellows” out for a while to Class III-IV but not too much further downstream are the Zigzags. There were some tricky sections and there was some wood. One of Will's oars succumbed to one of the trickier sections but he was already using his spare. I gave him my spare but worried how well it would work since my frame and setup is radically different from his. He was able to use it quite well but a 9.5' oar is a bit long for a 10' boat.

After the hours spent scouting, analyzing and weighing options concerning Lower Zigzag, the only thing I really knew about Upper Zigzag was that Lower Zigzag was

immediately downstream and don't swim. We scouted Upper Zigzag where the water turned frothy white as it accelerated over a large ledge and careened wildly off first the right and then the left canyon wall. It was big and fast and that's why they call it Zigzag. Everyone did well in Upper Zigzag although it felt bigger than it looked. Now, finally upon me, was the moment I had been dreading. I quietly pulled my boat up on the shore and walked downstream to have a look at Lower Zigzag. The top ledge looked big and sticky, the fan rock above the log was positively wicked and the log, well, it looked worse than that. However, the water was going AROUND and to the

"There's enough room – I'll go first and prove it." I watched as he and Horner aced the move, I could see that there was room but could not tell how much extra. I'm pretty sure my cat is wider than a 14' paddle boat, also, I have oars to deal with and lastly, I'm not Fish. Only a day ago I was the one who was optimistic that when seeing the rapid from the top it might not look so bad and that is exactly what happened. Now, it was Dave's turn..... "The water takes you where you want to go and we know now there is enough room". Even though the portage option was horrible, NOBODY made me feel like I had to run that drop and there was plenty of daylight still



Scouting Lower Zigzag – the line is to the left of the vertical log, between the log and the left wall

LEFT of the log where as from the bottom it looked like it was piling into the log. The fan rock actually would HELP you if you used it correctly. Still, I could not shake that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. Fish said

left. Will was also thinking he might want to portage and at one point he and I discussed how the three of us could help each other, break down boats and take out at Oreletta. I knew that the rapid was

technically possible, I also knew that I had to be perfect (we all had to be perfect) – there was NO room for error, it was a game of less than an inch in a fast moving Class V rapid with a stout Class IV ledge at the lead-in.

We did have the option of easily portaging the top ledge to reduce the risk of messing up upstream. Will decided to take that option and Dave asked me if I wanted to do the same. I looked at the moves (all of them), I knew I could make them and despite getting munched at the bottom of Double Drop, I was having a very good day and was feeling on top of my game. “No” I told Dave, “I don’t want to portage the top – I’m going to go back to my boat and run it”. Dave asked if I wanted him to go first but once I had my mind made up, I just wanted to focus and go. I climbed onto Catalina and ferried out above the first ledge. I have run quite a few very hard Class V rapids and this one felt different, it felt borderline true Class VI for me in the craft that I had. I hit the first ledge and it immediately grabbed my left tube. I quickly knelt forward on the left side of the frame using a combination of my knee and a very

hard forward stroke to keep the tube down and power through the hole. I somehow figured out this move two years ago on the North Fork of the Payette and it has worked well ever since. I exited slightly further right than I wanted but not bad at all and was quickly able to power forward and hit the left slot off the fan rock perfectly. I shipped my oars and cleanly passed between the tree and the wall – downstream, the runout is still Class IV with another log and it’s best if you can get to the far right slot which I was able to do. Usually, I hoot and holler after running something like that and amidst the cheers from the other boaters I simply smiled and said “I lived”. Dave and Will still needed to come down and I was worried. Will’s boat was smaller than our cats but still, oars are oars. Both Dave and Will (using my humongous spare) were perfect and had clean runs and I was MUCH happier then and felt like I had some thanking to do sitting in the bottom eddy.

The Oreletta section above BZ still has some tricky places and there was noticeably more water than the first time Dave and I ran it. By the time we got down to BZ it was getting late in the day. BZ looked big and



Dave Cleans Lower Zigzag

burly and lots of people chose to ghost boat it. Apparently, Fish and Horner ran and did great but we did not see their run. Originally, Dave and I thought that BZ would be a portage at this level and we knew from past stories that it is thoroughly capable of munching a raft. Cody was there with his camera and said how Fish and Horner styled it and asked if we wanted to watch their run on video. We watched Fish and Horner's run and were able to tell that we would still probably get kicked out to the right. At lower water, BZ will eject a boat to the right quickly and violently – when I ran it the Summer before, I flew so far I hit the right wall. Simply put, BZ looked a bit more sluggish in it's ability and/or willingness to eject a boat. I think I was still feeling the effects of Lower Zigzag and really didn't want to end the day with an epic beatdown.

Again, it was Dave who said he was pretty sure it would kick us out like the last time. At some point I told Dave "I'll go if you go" and Cody said he would get video and we had a safety kayaker as well. Dave and I hiked back up to our boats, again, Dave asked if I wanted him to go first and again I said I would probe. I hopped on Catalina much much more nervous about BZ this time than I was the first time. I ran the lead in rapids and it definitely felt a lot bigger. I lined up pointing my bow about 11:00 (exactly like I did last time and exactly like Fish and Horner did this time). I looked into the maw of the drop and said to myself "this is huge". It felt more filled in, the hole was bigger and badder and instead of getting rocketed out to the right I was instantly and violently turned and knocked off my seat but not off my boat, my left hand somehow stayed in contact with the seat/frame and I very quickly climbed back up. I emerged right side up but was not overly impressed with my run. Dave came down behind me and did his share of frame dancing as well but stayed with his boat and right side up.

Everyone in the group was taking out at BZ Corners including the other rafts. There was still about an hour of daylight left so it was a no brainer for Dave and I to ask Leif if he could drive our rig down to Husum when they left. We knew we could sprint down to Husum in under 45 minutes and we would much rather spend 45 minutes rowing our boats than carrying them up a long steep hill. The BZ – Husum run was a relaxing end to the day even though we rowed hard to make time. We did not run Husum Falls as there was a huge tree occupying most of the main route and all of the landing zone and were quite happy to carry our boats up a few easy steps to the road rather than slogging up the entire BZ Corners trail. The Green Truss was a very challenging run in an amazing and beautiful canyon. Dave and I would both like to go back and run it again – I would love to have a second chance at Double Drop. Lower Zigzag will still be as scary as it was this time, even though we know there is room it's still scary and very sketchy in a cat. If I go back again, I will go back thinking a portage at Lower Zigzag is a very real possibility depending on the kind of day we are having. That is just simply the reality of difficult Class V.

Sunday, March 15, 2009 is a day I will remember for the rest of my life with a huge grin on my face. Not only because of the incredible whitewater experience but also for the incredible group of people that pulled together to help make this a memorable and successful day for everyone. It was a great pleasure and a great privilege to have been part of this trip.

-- Shelly Becker

Editor's Note: It is believed that Will Volpert is the first person to oar a raft down the Truss. Dave and Shelly Becker have the 2'nd cataraft descent and Fish and Horner's run of Big Brother places them among a scant few who have R2'ed Big Brother and stuck the landing for a no swim, no portage day.