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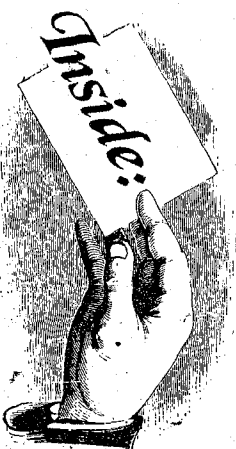
Volume 2 Issue 6

September 1998

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Virginia City

International

Camel Races

There is a different kind of desert storm coming... this one is in the form of dozens of

1008 Rails-To-Trails Festival

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES:

by Frank Goddard

TALES OF THE GROOVER

For those of you who have experienced multi-day white-water adventures, you may find much of this story familiar. For those of you who have not, you may go away with an uncontrollable urge to run out and seek such an excursion for yourself, or...., you may actually choose to avoid such a trip as some people might (unnecessarily, of course) avoid a trip to the dentist. Now why would someone *not* want days of solitude interspersed with occasional bouts of adrenaline-generating excitement? Well read on, because, as you will see, this "ain't" Disneyland, the boats don't run on underwater tracks, the wild animals are just that, and then there's the "groover". (Caution: as to that last item, any readers with a sense of higher culture and sophisticated tastes may not wish to continue with this article as I may be addressing more details regarding personal river hygiene than you wish to be exposed to!)

This particular trip took place last month on the main fork of the mighty Salmon River in Idaho which flows with grace and presence through the *Frank Church-River Of No Return Wilderness* (which thank God did not live up to it's name, at least the no returning part!). Our trek involved 18 people from four states, with 10 water craft, including rafts, kayaks, and inflatable *things*.

Trip planning included what is technically known among river experts as "The Vehicle

Shuttle." This involves the complex concept of having vehicles to get you to where you start the adventure, known distinctly as the Put-In, and having vehicles, often the same, where you will hopefully end up some day, known simply as the Take-Out. Now I know you are saying, "what is so difficult about *this*", but I am sure more time was spent figuring out this part of the trip, than the 10 days we actually were on the river.

So after three days of driving through four states, we finally get all the people, all the water craft, and almost all the gear (don't ask!), at the Put-In. I won't go into great detail about the "Vehicle Shuttle", other than to say it included six vehicles, a private plane, and a hired driver.

How we even fit the huge pile of stuff on the five rafts was a credit to the ingenuity of our resident staff of river experts, that and about twelve miles of line and hundreds of specialized river knots (also sometimes used by card-carrying teamster long-haulers). Now if you take a commercial trip much of this effort is completed efficiently by the expert river guides who just happen to look like barely college-aged youths, with their sun-bleached tans. But on a self-guided, so called private trip, as our group was embarked on, this packing was done by the individuals on the rafts. With the varying amounts of gear on each raft and depending on the years of Boy Scout training, some of the rafts were packed, in what I will diplomatically say,

somewhat longer time periods than the others.

Finally we are underway. We have entered a place with no phones, no newspapers, no faxes, no television, no cell phones, no radio, no E-mail, no planes, trains, or automobiles, so it must either be the Twilight Zone, or a wilderness rafting trip.

The trip involved floating through absolutely spectacular canyons, with abundant wildlife, crystal clear, cool water, bright starlit night skies, gourmet river meals, and a wonderful group of fellow wilderness travelers.

Each of us will remember the details of the adventure somewhat differently. Everyone should remember that evening in camp where all of a sudden the still night air got very not and dry, then out of nowhere a blistering, powerful wind came ripping up the canyon, blowing everything not tied down, with blinding flashes of lightning, followed by booming claps of thunder echoing through the canyon with the intensity of a gun shot.

Many will recall swimming the rapids along one of our camps with the standing waves or hay stacks, as they are called, where you either learn to breath in the trough of the waves as you bob up and down through the rapids, or, using my technique, you take in a gallon or two of cool river water until you reach the downstream eddy. This

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was also the camp we actually got to watch a snake catch a small fish, drag it on to the rocks, then little by little, swallow the fish.

Among other wildlife we saw black bears, big horn sheep, and frolicking river otters.

For the light sleepers, there were the nights of a full moon above the canyon, so bright that reading without flashlight or candle was almost possible. Also during some day-light hours, every now and then we would see other "moons" (yes plural), but for the uninitiated, you will just have to go on your own river trip to discover this usually rare occurrence in non-river settings.

One species on our wildlife viewing list that many of us would have just as soon left off was the numerous rattlesnake sightings, including one evening when one of our previously carefree campers walked up to his camp site to find one charming member of the species coiled up on his wife's sleeping bag! This of course was preferable to finding it coiled up *inside* of the sleeping bag! And for some strange reason, most of the group quickly set up tents for that evening's sleep.

Then there was the evening we spread out a tarp on a flat, open area for an astronomy lesson. It is amazing how many stars you can see without the interference of city lights. By pure luck, or good river karma, we were treated to the peak of the annual summer meteor shower display.

The "cliff" diving into a deep pool along the river will never be forgotten. Various heights of jump-offs allowed everyone to select their level of excitement on the fear-o-meter, from slightly exciting to pure terror.

Those of you who have taken commercial raft trips may have experienced some of the great gourmet cooking which often is included in the cost of admission. Well, I have never been on a camping or river trip with the varied meal fare we enjoyed on this trip. The "brains" behind this part of the trip were our new friends from Montana, from where Trish put together the various menus

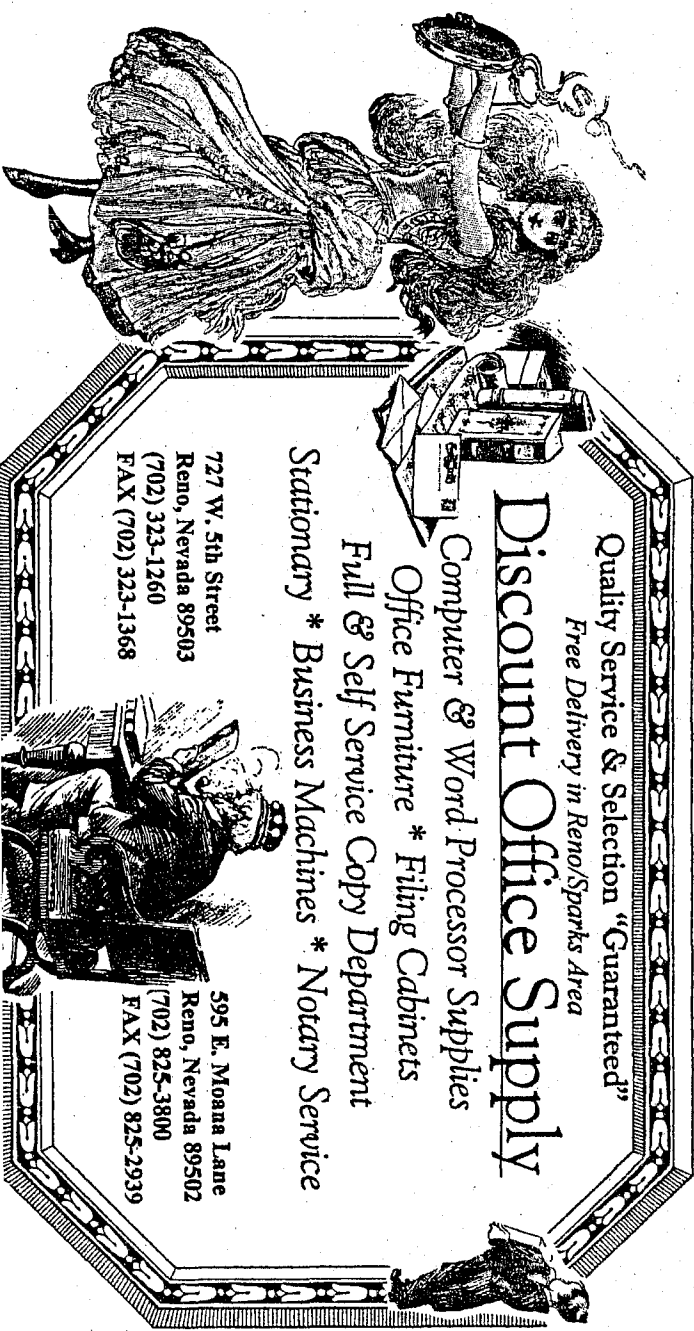
and even provided each raft group specific shopping lists to create the culinary magic.

As the river trip approached it's conclusion, we had to deal with a very hot Take-Out area, lots of gear to unload from our fleet of river crafts, separate into piles based on destination and ownership, and re-loading (into the vehicles which somehow were mostly all there - see "Vehicle Shuttle" above), and face the long, long, drives back home.

But wait...there's more: What, you say, was the comment earlier about overly graphic details of personal hygiene and what is this "groover" in the title of this cautionary tale?

Well, think about a river like the one we were on that hosts thousands of people a year (you really don't have any sense of that when you are floating for days and only seeing a few fellow river travelers) and the fact that there are only a limited number of relatively small camping areas within the confines of the narrow canyon, and if everyone, ahhh...., "relieved" themselves on

those narrow sand bars and small camping areas among the trees, well let's just say, it wouldn't be very enjoyable camping. So the permitting agencies have developed rules which really gives new meaning to the old saying, "pack it in, pack it out". What this means for most rafters is that you go down to the army/navy surplus store and buy old metal ammo boxes so you can...well, pack "it" out. The daily routine is really not that bad, because someone just brings the same seating "attachment" that you have in your home, and so it's just like at home, well...almost like home. As to the commonly known nickname, "the groover", apparently on one trip in the Grand Canyon, someone remembered the ammo box, with it's heavy gauge steel sides, but forgot the seating "attachment", which lead to distinctive markings on the user, hence the nickname "groover". And if you still haven't got it...just go on a river trip, and this will be just another part of your continuing adventure!



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