



THE EDDY LINE

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Different Strokes

More from Knocks College

by Allen Hedden

Again, learning from the mistakes of others is far better for your wellbeing than making them all yourself. This tale from Knocks College (AKA the School of Hard Knocks) is from an adventure I had years ago, presenting you with the opportunity to learn about several lessons learned in a single adventure.

Turn the clock back to February 1987, during my early years with the GCA. Five of us, all GCA members but not on an official GCA trip, decided to run Big Laurel Creek, a tributary of the French Broad in North Carolina. Since this is about learning from mistakes, the adventurers on this trip, other than me, will be identified by first names only. We were Brad, Wayne, Susan, Mark and myself. Two open boats, two kayaks and one C-1. If you are a long-time GCA member you prob-

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ably know who these folks are and have heard this tale in great detail around more than one campfire.

Most misadventures on white water occur as a result of more than one thing going wrong and the fateful events start to stack up, often resulting in dire consequences. Considering everything that went wrong on this trip, we were very fortunate that things turned out as well as they did. The fates actually smiled on us, although we didn't realize it at the time.

Our group was comprised of pretty competent boaters, perhaps with more confidence than competence ;-). We did some research on Big Laurel ahead of time. None of us had ever run Big Laurel, but from the guide book description it sounded like we were quite up to doing the run at an optimal level. There was no on-line gauge for the creek, but according to the guide books it was generally runnable when the French Broad was above a certain level. It was rated as a class 3-4 and had a hand painted gauge on a bridge abutment at the Hwy 25 put-in. Optimal level was about 1.7 feet on that gauge. It has a trail along a good portion of the river left side, providing good scouting opportunities. The total length is about 5.8 miles, including
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the 2 mile section of the French Broad from the confluence to Hot Springs. We even had a fallback -- if the level was too low we would opt for the French Broad Section 9.

The drive from Atlanta being about 4-1/2 to 5 hours, we arrived at the put-in a little before 1:00 p.m. At that time the gauge read 1.7 feet -- an absolutely optimal level according the guide book. We were delighted! It was a cold day with heavy overcast but no rain. We unloaded, rigged the boats and set shuttle. It was probably a little past 2:00 when we put on, so we were on the hurry-up to avoid dark catching up with us. Late February is not known for its long daylight hours, and it was overcast with no moon.

We started to get a bit edgy when we all noticed that the smallest of the rapids we were encountering we would rate as a class 4 or more. The day became filled with mishaps. In all the years I had paddled with Wayne (K-1), I had never even seen him have to roll. He swam at the second significant rapid after narrowly avoiding a vertical pin and injuring his leg. This did nothing to bolster our confidence since Wayne was by far the best boater on the trip.

Mark (C-1) seriously pinned his boat on a strainer and it took us about 1-1/2 hours to retrieve it. By this time we were getting very concerned about the time remaining before darkness caught up with us. We hastily threw all the rescue gear into the biggest boat, my Whitesell, and struck out down the river. The consensus was that if we could get to the

French Broad confluence before dark, we could easily finish the last two miles to Hot Springs in twilight, or at worst walk out on the railroad tracks.

The next significant event was me pinning my boat on rocks while running sweep, so I pretty much had to up-pin it by myself. It sustained some damage that I failed to notice at the time, and which I didn't find out about until months later, but that's a story for the Epilogue.

Soon we came upon a bend in the river to the left with what appeared to be a horizon line. We eddied out and talked things over. The river thus far had not remotely resembled the description in the guide book and we had no idea how much farther the confluence was or how many rapids remained to be negotiated. We sent our most skilled and experienced boater, Wayne, up to the trail on river left to try to get an idea what the next drop looked like. His report was, "It was too dark to see very much, but it looks like the line is down the left side."

One by one we peeled out into the current for the run. Each of us lost sight of the boat (s) ahead of us because of the curve in the river and the horizon line, so we were unable to maintain an orderly one-by-one descent and had to guess whether the boat ahead was through the run. Wayne was lead, followed by Brad, then Susan. Mark & I were the last two left, so I told mark I was going left and he said he would be right behind me.

At this point things started happening very *(continued, page 3)*

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quickly. I'm putting it together from our account at the bottom of the rapid. Susan swam at the bottom of this drop (there was a humongous hole there) and Wayne and Brad went after her and her boat. In the middle of this minor chaos, I came down and hit the bottom hole, flipping and missing my roll. It felt like there was something amiss with my saddle and foot pegs. Wayne and Brad were occupied with the rescue of Susan and her boat, so when I punched out and swam, I tried to tow my boat over to river right to do a self rescue. There were a lot of trees and bushes out in the water so I was unable to make shore with my boat. I managed to grab a small tree, but upon looking around I saw that there was no way to get me and my boat to shore through the trees. I let the boat go and managed to get myself to shore swinging from tree to tree,

After the four of us were safely ashore we realized we were missing Mark. After a few moments, Mark's boat with his skirt still on the cockpit came floating out of the rapid on the right side where we were able to pull it in. But no Mark. There was a sheer rock cliff protruding out on our side of the river that kept us from seeing very far upstream and it was getting dark very fast. Brad managed to wade almost up to the point where the cliff protruded and began calling for Mark. Pretty quickly they established voice contact and discovered that Mark was stuck boatless in an eddy just upstream of the outcropping. By both of them wading out as far as they dared into the current, Brad managed to grab Mark's hand and get him down to

where the rest of us were.

So here we were, five boaters and four boats, on a 45 degree slope on river right with the trail on river left, with mountain laurel so thick you could barely squeeze between them, almost dark, cold, and it was starting to rain. We had no idea how much farther the confluence was or how many rapids remained to be negotiated. We started discussing our options. Brad suggested he and I could double up in his Mad River ME that was outfitted solo and we all could try to ferry across to the left where the trail was supposed to be and walk to the confluence. This suggestion was greeted by one of my more infamous quotes: "I ain't paddling another f_____g stroke!"

After the laughter subsided, we decided that we could stay on river right and bushwhack our way down to the confluence, however far it turned out to be. The lead person had a flashlight, and each of us maintained contact with the person ahead and we were able to bush whack our way downstream. By that time it was so dark that other than the light of the lead person's flashlight, you couldn't tell if your eyes were open or closed. As it turned out, the confluence and the railroad tracks were only about 200-300 yards downstream. With Wayne using a makeshift crutch we started the hike downstream toward Hot Springs. We soon noticed a light on the tracks in the distance and figured that it was a train. We got off the tracks and waited for the train to pass, and it turned out to be a track tender, which we flagged down.

After we told the engineer what was going on,
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he offered to give us a ride back down to Hot Springs. On the way down he told us he was assigned to riding the tracks to look for washouts because the river was running about 30,000 cfs. Probably a really good thing we lost a boat and were not able to try to paddle down to Hot Springs in the twilight / dark!

Epilogue:

We were supposed to meet the significant others of our party after the trip at Susan's parents' cabin to the north. Meanwhile it was after 9:00 p.m. and we had consumed our meager rations at the put-in before we put on. We were ravenous. We inventoried our resources and discovered that we had a little over \$6 between the five of us (My wallet was in the saddle of my boat, probably somewhere on the French Broad). We ended up making only two stops on the way to meet the rest of our party at the cabin. We found a burger joint that had a special on burgers for \$1, so we bought five burgers and an order of fries. Turned some heads in our weird paddling gear ;-). We also stopped by the bridge at the put-in to recheck the gauge. It was under water. By our memory, we thought the gauge went up to about 3-1/2 or 4 feet, so we marked where the water level was on the bridge abutment and took another look the next day when recovering boats -- it had been at about 4-1/2 feet at 9:00 that evening, and who knows what it had been during our trip. There had been a horrendous rain upstream, raising levels to unbelievable heights.

Next day we went to Stackhouse and walked down and retrieved the four boats left there the night before. I packed up my paddling gear and was going to walk the tracks down to Hot Springs to see if I could spot my boat. Almost everyone on the trip had a vested interest in finding my boat. After rescuing Mark's boat we had just haphazardly stuffed all the rescue gear and someone's breakdown paddle in my boat, so there was a little something of everyone's in the boat, including my wallet, money, credit cards, drivers' license and spare paddle. The French Broad was still running about 29,000 cfs. I asked the other folks to meet me and possibly my boat in Hot Springs. Then I struck out hiking down the tracks.

The most notable thing about the river was that there were very few holes. It was mostly washed out. But there were also no eddies. The tracks crossed the river at a very long railroad trestle. I had timed how long it took me to cross the trestle at the confluence and knew that I needed a good deal more time to get across this trestle if a train came along. It was a very high trestle, the wind was blowing fiercely, and it was very cold. The river looked horrendous. There were no places on the trestle so step out of the way if a train came. So naturally I did the foolish thing and started my walk across the trestle. Before too long I stepped on a rotting crumbling spot on a cross tie and one leg slipped down between the cross ties. I needed no more convincing. I decided to turn back and try to meet up with the others at Stackhouse.

By the time I got to Stackhouse it was getting
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late (funny how that fact seemed to keep coming up) and there was no one there. I figured that they would have gone to Hot Springs to wait on me and when I didn't show up they would come back to Stackhouse. After waiting a short while I realized that there was only one way to get from Hot Springs to Stackhouse, so I started walking that way, figuring I would meet my friends somewhere along the way.

If you've never done it, it's a long walk from Stackhouse to the highway. Then it's an even longer walk down the highway to Hot Springs. It was almost dark already. There was no traffic at all on the Stackhouse road. By the time I started down the highway toward Hot Springs there was very little traffic there. I kept my thumb out hoping for a ride or hoping my friends would come back to check on me. Finally on the way down the big hill just outside Hot Springs a police car stopped and asked me what was going on and if I needed a ride.

He took me the last half mile or so to the police station in Hot Springs where my friends were waiting. Turns out that they had actually already been back to Stackhouse and waited a while and when I didn't show up they went back to Hot Springs to wait. They had reported me missing and a huge search was about to be launched. Thank goodness they were able to call that off when the officer who picked me up radioed that I was found safe and sound.

Some Lessons Learned:

The most important lesson I learned that day, and I've practiced it faithfully since, is to check the relevant gauge when arriving at the put-in and checking it again just before putting on. This practice has saved me a lot of grief since that fateful trip. In three cases that I can think of, it has kept me out of some trouble that some others got into because they didn't follow the practice. If you don't have access to a gauge, put a stick or rock at the edge of the water when you get there and look at it again when you are ready to put on. If there's a significant difference, reconsider your plans.

Next, be very aware of the weather forecast around the area where you are boating. Levels can rise due to rain upstream in a watershed that you may not even be aware of. I can even recall one trip in winter in North Carolina when the day started out almost balmy, and by trip's end it had turned to almost blizzard conditions.

Be sure you are leaving enough time to complete your run before dark. Enough time includes unforeseen difficulties such as complicated rescues, medical problems, emergency boat and gear repair, etc. Hardly ever does a trip end on time, so allow for that. Make certain that everyone has the proper equipment and supplies to spend the night on the river if your trip goes into overtime. Emergency food, water, warm clothing, fire starting equipment and flashlights are a great idea.

Try your best to have someone on your trip who has first-hand knowledge of the run and

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who can safely guide the group down the river. If that isn't possible, at least make sure everyone on the trip is aware of what the run consists of, its difficulty level, and whether their abilities match up with the expected conditions.

Make sure someone besides the trip participants know the itinerary and who to notify if you don't show up at the take-out by a specified time.

Some Follow Up:

Four of us returned to Big Laurel and the French Broad the following weekend and paddled the part of Section 9 below the confluence and all of Section 10. We stopped and checked with people in every house we could see from the river to see if anyone had seen the boat. No one had. The only sign of lost boats we saw was the remains of several boats at the top of an island about half way through Section 10. We stopped by the local outfitter outposts and left my information and the details of the lost boat and gear. We spoke to a raft guide who had been on the French Broad in his red Sunburst when the river came up. He had pulled off the river and tied his boat to a tree with a painter line and walked out. When he went back for his boat all that was there was a broken painter.

I ordered a new Whitesell and got my credit cards and drivers' license replaced. I wrote it off to experience. Four and a half months later I got a phone call at work from the raft guide who said he knew where my boat was.

He had heard through the grapevine in Hot Springs that a certain farmer who had a house in town and land on the river had a red boat stashed under his house. He persistently kept after the farmer who insisted he didn't have the guy's boat.

After a few months he was able to get the farmer to at least show him the boat by telling him that if it wasn't his boat, he might know who it belonged to. When the farmer agreed and opened the access door to his crawl space, the guide immediately saw that it wasn't his boat, but he still had my contact info. He called; I took the afternoon off and met him in Hot Springs. As soon as I identified myself to the farmer, he agreed that it was my boat. It had the typical Whitesell deck plate with the owner's name on it. He told us that he had found the boat about 15 feet up in a tree on his land by the river. He knew that it was not the guide's boat from my name being on the deck plate and wasn't going to give it to anyone else.

The boat still had all the rescue gear and my spare paddle and the breakdown paddle stuffed under the air bag lashings. The only damage I could see -- remember the damage I mentioned in the pinning? The rear of the saddle had become disengaged with the rear thwart, which made me feel better about missing that roll. I opened the hatch to the Perception saddle and pulled out my wallet with even more ID, counted out a \$50 tip for the guide and a \$50 reward for the farmer from the money in the wallet. Farmer was flabbergasted. He wasn't even
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aware that the hatch opened. The guy was so honest that if he had opened the saddle and found my wallet, I believe he would have called me. The only reason he hadn't called me was that the boat had no phone number on it, and the number on the spare paddle was face down. Lessons learned: Make sure your boat and all your gear has your name AND phone number on it. If you take your wallet on the river, keep it on your person, not your boat --boats get lost. So I was \$150 and an extra boat and spare paddle to the good. And ever since that trip I carry my wallet in a dry pouch around my waist.

All's well that ends well!!

Send us your own Tales from Knocks College. As you can see, it really doesn't matter if it's a bit long ;-)- EL

Cartecay Hemlock Treatment By Dan MacIntyre

We will do another paddle on March 12 to take care of the hemlocks that we did not take care of on our treatment paddle two years ago. The hemlocks need you. If we do not treat them, they will die and fall in the river as strainers.

If you would like to participate and have not checked in with me yet, please do so now. We need to have a pretty precise count of paddlers so we can have the right amount of

treatment materials and equipment.

As we did two years ago, we will go down the river in groups of three. One will be a strong paddler to lead and look out for the group. One will be in charge of treatment. This can be the strong paddler but does not need to be. The third will be an able assistant.

If you would like to be a treatment leader, and did not attend the treatment class at Young Harris two years ago, you need to attend a training session on February 26 at 2:00 at the Ellijay Library. All are invited to this class, even if you are not sure you want to be a leader. It will make you a much more able assistant to really understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. If you were trained two years ago and would like a refresher, you will be most welcome.

In addition, we will have a treatment briefing at 9:00 at the Blackberry put in for everyone before we launch. The hemlocks and all future Cartecay paddlers thank you.

For more information, or to RSVP, contact Dan MacIntyre - dmacintyre4@gmail.com —EL

Each month numerous "copies" of the pdf version of *The Eddy Line* bounce back due to bad or outdated email addresses. If an email to you bounces back, you will be deleted from the recipient list until we get an updated email address.

TRIP AND CLINIC SCHEDULE

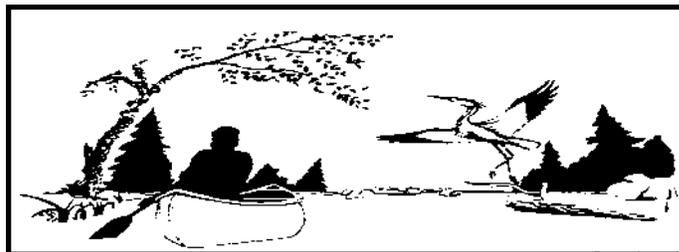
Sunday, March 6th - Peachtree City Roll Practice

Saturday, March 12th - Save the Hemlocks on the Cartecay ***

Saturday & Sunday, March 19th-20th - Great Smoky Mountain National Park and Cherokee Reservation Trip / Oconaluftee and Raven's Fork

Saturday March 26th - Wildcard / Class II

Please see the GCA Calendar for details, updates, and to sign up at www.gapaddle.com. For any questions or class suggestions, e-mail eddylineeditor@gmail.com.



To Volunteer To Coordinate Trips email Cruisemaster Terri Abbott: abbott.terri@gmail.com.

As usual, we need trip coordinators for all types of trips, from flatwater to Class 5 white-water. Our excellent trip schedule depends on the efforts of volunteers, so get involved and sign up to coordinate a trip on your favorite river today! The GCA needs YOU!

KEY TO GCA SKILL LEVELS

Flat Water - no current will be encountered; safe for new paddlers.

Beginner - mild current, occasional Class I riffles; new paddlers can learn basic river techniques.

Trained Beginner - moving water with Class 1-2 rapids; basic strokes and bracing skills needed.

Intermediate - rapids up to Class 3; eddying and ferrying skills needed; kayakers need solid roll.

Advanced - rapids up to Class 4; excellent boat control and self-rescue skills required.

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Keeping In Touch

To contact the GCA, write Georgia Canoeing Association, Inc., P.O. Box 611, Winston, GA 30187.

Groupmail: GCA maintains a group email list to help members share information of general interest. To sign up, send an e-mail to gcalist-subscribe@groups.io.

Website: Information about GCA, forms (including membership application and GCA waiver form), a link to the GCA Store and links to *Eddy Line* advertisers are all at <http://www.gapaddle.com>.

Facebook: Visit the GCA Facebook page for photos, video, trip reports, or to join an upcoming impromptu trip.

ALL ABOUT THE EDDY LINE

The Eddy Line, the official GCA newsletter, is available in pdf format. To subscribe, contact Vincent Payne at 678-343-5292 or vincent.payne9354@gmail.com, or mail your request to P.O. Box 611, Winston, GA 30187.

Submissions/Advertising: All submissions and advertising should be sent to *The Eddy Line*, at: EddyLineEditor@gmail.com.



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[WE'RE ON THE WEB:]
www.gapaddle.com

The purpose of the GCA is to have fun and promote safety while paddling.

GCA is a member-operated paddling club with over 500 family and corporate memberships comprising more than 1500 Individuals. Canoeists and Kayakers of all ages and paddling abilities are equally welcome. Some of our mutual interests include whitewater river running, creeking and playboating, river and lake touring, sea kayaking, paddle camp outs and competition and racing activities. We espouse conservation, environmental and river access issues as well as boating safety and skills development. Group paddling, training and social activities of all kinds are conducted throughout the year thanks to the volunteer efforts of our many members and friends. Membership is NOT limited to Georgia residents.