

River News

Salmon River Rafting Company

Winter 2021

The 2021 season initially appeared to be a banner year for the Salmon River Rafting Company. At one point there were only six vacant spots in the schedule. The wildfires in the canyon and exceptionally low water adversely affected the latter part of the season, but the first half of the season was quite busy.

We began the season with a spring wildlife trip in April. That departure was booked by a contingent of Texas ladies, some of whom have floated with me as many as six times. The weather was cool, but the wildflowers were in bloom and the canyon was green. The first trip of the summer was booked by Jeanette Rayles. Jeanette has floated with me on four previous occasions. This year she brought her family to experience the Salmon River Canyon. It was a “Swan Song” trip for her. Sadly, she passed several months later from pancreatic cancer. Our July 4th trip was another familial gathering. Janice and Mike Burnam brought a group of thirteen— their children and grandchildren— for a wilderness adventure on the Salmon River. The other July departures were also fully booked.

Other repeat clients (and friends) were Bonnie Siddons, Debbie Chapman, McKenzie Hammond, Debbie Sibley, Hope Benedict, Linda Heffner, Don and Sandra Higginson, Deb Wheeler, and Kevin and Ryan McLoughlin. Deb Wheeler and Kevin McLoughlin filled their respective departures with friends.

The dry conditions required we abbreviate several of our trips by one day. The spring that supplied water for our fourth night’s lodge reduced its flow to the point that our hosts could not accommodate our overnight stays. They had to cancel our reservations for the remainder of the season. Thus, the late July and August guests spent three nights in the canyon rather than four. Additionally, fires in the wilderness produced sufficient smoke to prohibit airplanes from landing at the canyon’s backcountry airstrips. Therefore, we arranged for a jet boat to transport river trip guests on the fourth day downstream to the end of the road and then ground transportation by bus to McCall, Idaho, where the airplanes could return everyone to Salmon. It appeared that would be the logistical



The Burnam Family and their river guides.

scenario for the remainder of the summer. However, as the river continued to drop, we encountered additional problems. Our first and third night's lodges are staffed and supplied by jet boats. When the river flow dropped to a critical level, those lodges also canceled our reservations. In fact, we had to supply some of the food for our China Bar stay on the last two trips. Thus I had to cancel the last three trips of the season. When you elect to try to make a living in the out-of-doors, you have to accept that Mother Nature has the last word.

I have floated the Salmon River at flows considerably lower than we experienced this summer. I have never been embarrassed to promote and sell those low water trips. They are fun and sometimes a bit more challenging than moderate water levels. But, those trips were camping trips, and we were not dependent on the lodges for food and accommodations. I will give a special thank you to Jess and Brenda Baugh of Salmon River Tours. The required convoluted logistics, sometimes arranged on short notice, would not have been possible without their assistance. They adapted to my logistical needs as much as possible and provided contacts for ground transportation services at the end of the trips. The excursions we ran in the latter part of the season were possible because of their flexibility and friendship.



Jeanette Rayles

Changes For The Future

This newsletter is coming out later than usual due to some major changes in the company and its operations. I've been waiting for definitive commitments from some of my service providers. It appears I will not be able to offer lodge accommodation trips in 2022 because some of the necessary lodges are not available. Shepp Ranch, as mentioned in last year's newsletter, has new owners. I have not been able to reserve overnight stays there for the past two seasons due to their construction and remodeling projects. They previously indicated I could book reservations for 2022, but they have elected to delay that opening for at least another year. Thus, one of our last river night lodge options is not possible, yet. There are facilities at Mackay Bar Lodge, but their scheduling, and other operational policies, also eliminate them as an option, except for special circumstances and with a substantial increase in prices.

We have been utilizing the Ram House near Mackay Bar for our fourth river night. That facility was available to us only because the other two options were not, and the owners made an exception for us out of friendship. Their home is not really designed to accommodate large groups of people at one time, and I'm not comfortable imposing on them for a third season.

In addition to not having a fourth night lodge facility for 2022, our second night's lodge has just been placed on the market for sale. The Shotwells do not wish to encumber the property with obligations for future public access. As the situation stands, we do not have a second or a fourth night lodge facility. This effectively eliminates the ability to offer the lodge-to-lodge trips that have been the main-stay of my business since 2011.

Another major change for the future is that I have sold my river outfitting business to a friendly competitor, Mackay Wilderness River Trips. The owner of that company, Brent Estep, wanted to continue offering the lodge accommodation trips, but because of the situation described above, will be offering camping trips on the same departure schedule that was assigned to my company. He may offer lodge trips in the future if the situation changes. I have agreed to work for him on the Salmon River for the 2022 season. Possibly longer. If you are considering a camping trip on the Salmon River next summer, I'll be glad to have you join me.

This was my forty-first year as an outfitter on the Salmon, and my fifty-fifth season as a river guide. I'm seventy-six years old. I'm not tired of the river, and I can still run the boats and the rapids. I'm still having fun. The Salmon River Canyon is a special place for me, and I'm not ready to leave the river and my friends who reside on its shores. But, time will eventually mandate a slower pace. The timing of Brent's offer to purchase the business seemed appropriate. I'm retiring from the paperwork, the maze of bureaucratic regulatory reporting requirements, and most of the other non-river responsibilities that are inherent to managing a river outfitting business. I am not yet retiring from the river.

Memories from the Salmon River - 2021



The Texas Ladies dressed for cool and wet weather in April.



Enjoying the campfire in late afternoon at the Ram House.



A black bear paces our downstream progress.



Paddling hard in Alder Creek Rapid.



Fishing at Lemhi Creek



Soaking in the hot springs.



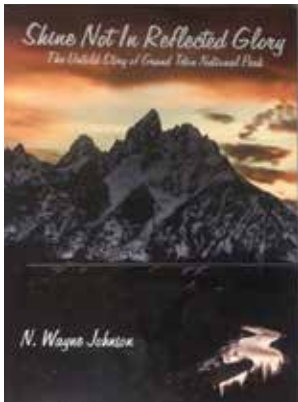
A boat full of happy rafters.



The July 20th rafting crew.

Books Available

I am currently working on another book. This time I'm writing about the women who settled and/or lived in the Salmon River Canyon. I have completed rough drafts of chapters for thirteen of the thirty-five women I've identified as having a significant presence along the Main Salmon River. Perhaps shedding the administrative responsibilities related to running a business will allow more time for this project. I suspect this book will not be available until 2023, but my two previous "literary" efforts are still available.

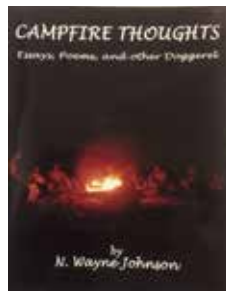


Shine Not In Reflected Glory: The Untold Story of Grand Teton National Park is available in hardcover and paperback editions. It can be ordered from www.inthebookstand.com (the publisher's portal to Amazon), or directly from amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, or your local independent book retailer. It is also available on Kindle, Nook, and Epub formats.

Signed copies can be ordered at the address below.

My small poetry book, *Campfire Thoughts*, is also available at this address.

Wayne Johnson
PO Box 780
Jackson, WY 83001
307-734-6099
wjohnson@blissnet.com



MACKAY
wilderness river trips
Idaho

Mackay Wilderness River Trips, Inc.
PO Box 6192
Ketchum, ID 83340
1-800-635-5336
Website: mackayriver.com



Holden Maughan, a guide for Mackay Wilderness River Trips receives a few tips on sweep boat navigation.

The staff at Mackay Wilderness River Trips will be happy to arrange a Salmon River trip for next season. In addition to excursions on the Main Salmon, they also offer trips on the Middle Fork of the Salmon.

SUMMER DEPARTURES

June 26
July 4
July 12
July 20
July 28
August 5
August 13
August 21
August 29
September 6

Salmon River Rafting Company



PO Box 1887
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Telephone: 307-734-6099
Cell: 208-351-2433
Email: info@salmonrafting.com
Web Site: www.salmonrafting.com