

# TRAVEL

The Miami Herald



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SUMMER USA ISSUE

# kids gone wild

## Rafting the Snake River with family and friends

BY ANNE Z. COOKE  
Special to The Miami Herald

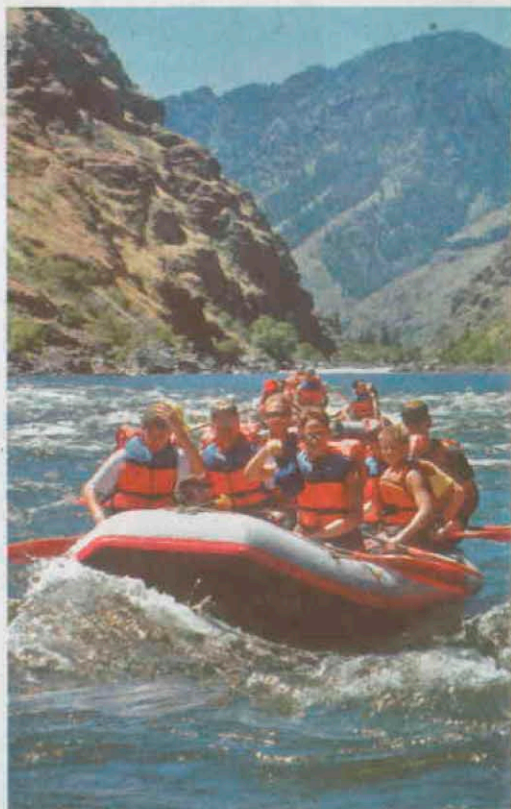
LEWISTON, Idaho — It looked like *Survivor*, the family version. But the sunburned stragglers stranded on the beach beside Idaho's Snake River were only waiting for lunch.

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Two days and five meals into our six-day raft trip down the mighty Snake River, the grade-schooler from Atlanta was still turning up her nose at most of the menus. So far, Michelle hadn't liked much of anything. Now she rolled her eyes as 5-year-old Diane helped herself to an olive, dropped it in the sand, then stuck it in her mouth and chewed it, grit and all.

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**WET AND WILD:** Paddlers stow their oars and let the current do the work through the rapids on Snake River.

**GOT KIDS?  
HERE'S HELP!**

More inside:

- Summer happenings, **5J**
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## IDAHO

## Rafting the Snake River with family and friends

\*RAFTING, FROM 1J

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The legendary Snake River, sweeping northward in broad loops toward the Columbia River, figures large in the history of the American West. For the pioneers, it was a dangerous obstacle on the journey westward. Today, the upper river's roaring rapids are a favorite with white-water enthusiasts.

But for families, the lower Snake's moderate Class II and III rapids, stretches of glassy pools, sandy beaches and sunny days add just the right mix of paddling, nature-gazing and camaraderie. Just right, in fact, for a customized "family-and-friends" adventure, with parents, daughters, sons, nephews and assorted friends.

When our son Steve announced that he was organizing a summer river rafting trip, the response was immediate. The trip's purpose, a reunion with far-flung family and friends in the heart of the still-wild west, offered lots to do and see. The preparations were minimal, he said, because ROW provides everything: guides, all meals, wine and beer, quality paddle and oar boats, spacious two-man tents, dry bags for cameras and sleeping bags. Within two weeks Steve had filled all 18 slots.

ROW, which leads a variety of guided rafting trips on Western rivers, often customizes outings for families and groups. These may include shorter or longer days on the water, extra time in camp, meals that kids will eat, and enough games and activities to keep all ages happy. So far, so good. But when I saw Steve's sign-up list, a flicker of doubt crossed my mind.

## WHAT A CROWD

The 18 of us, ages 6 to 60, seemed as different as any group could be. And when we met for the first time in Lewiston, Idaho, at ROW's kickoff barbecue dinner, it was obvious that for many of us, Steve was the only common denominator.

What would his college roommate John, a California surfer, have to say to Caroline, a vice president at a Washington, D.C. investment bank? Would my sister Mary, a high school teacher and mother of four, have anything in common with Gordon, an international marketing manager, or with Steve's college friend, Dixie, a writer and single mother? And what



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**ON THE SNAKE RIVER:** Clockwise from upper left: The group packs up and gets ready to leave its campsite; a girl on another Snake River trip holds up her catch; rafters' tents pitched on the riverbank.

if the six kids were pests?

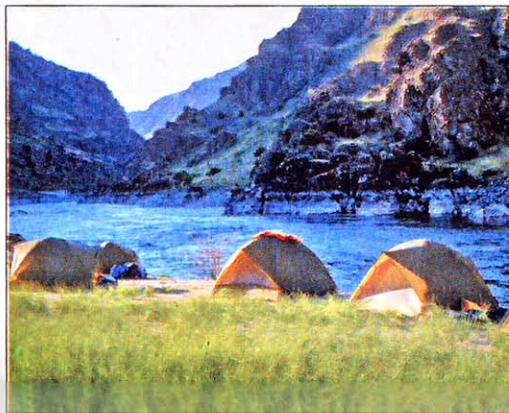
Who was most likely to survive after the city dwellers in the bunch had slept in tents, washed their hair in river water, been limited to three-minute showers and stood in line for the pit toilet? Six days in the wilderness would bond us together — or bring on a cat fight.

But Deurbrouck, our lead guide, had been in this situation before. Gathering everyone in a circle for an orientation, she succeeded in smoothing the waters.

"Since some of you have just met," she said, "we'll do things a little differently. If you're the macho type, you'll find plenty of challenges. Meanwhile, the rest of us can take it easy and enjoy life. On that note, I've brought a large supply of chocolate bars." Smiles all around.

Then she continued, to more laughter, "A word about sanitation. The rule on the river is, 'dilution is the solution.' Solid waste goes in the chemical toilet — which we set up every night — but liquid waste goes in the river." (We grimaced.) "That's right, just wade in behind one of the boats whenever we stop. If all the rafters that camped in the pull-outs used the bushes, the river banks would be polluted in a single summer."

After a day on the river, spent eating, paddling and



ROW ADVENTURES

talking about everything from dating services and the corporate glass ceiling, to child-rearing issues and baseball scores, we were ready to run the first set of moderately challenging rapids.

After the first couple of paddle boats had navigated the waves, it was time for the kayakers to follow. Michelle and her cousin Sammy, also 11, each paddling a "Duckie" kayak, hung back in an eddy, hesitating until they saw Jo waving them on.

"All right, Duckies, now it's your turn," she yelled. "Paddle hard and steer toward the far side and wait. And don't get ahead of us."

Sammy pushed into the rapids, paddled hard, sailed into fast flow and flew down to the waiting boats. And then it Michelle's turn. All eyes watched as her paddle flashed in the sun, dipping down on one side, then down on the other. Suddenly her kayak rose up on the crest of

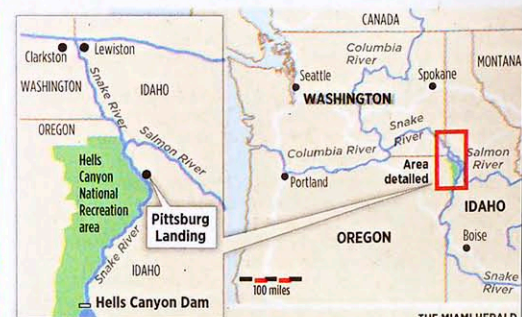
a wave, then vanished in a trough.

## FLIPPING OUT

"Oh-oh, she's flipped," somebody shouted. Then the kayak popped up into view, and shot over the top. "Go, girl!" called Jo, as Michelle sailed up, wearing a big grin. It was the first time we'd seen her smile. "Did you see me? Did you take a picture?" she squealed.

Our days on the river began at dawn and ended with starlight. We awoke leisurely, with pancakes, fruit and coffee. Then it was hurry, hurry, pack the duffels, buckle on life jackets, climb aboard and take turns riding, paddling, or when the water was calm, jumping in to float alongside.

We stopped often, stretching our legs to hike through wildflowers, ponder the bare places where pioneer wagons had crossed, climb the riverbanks to abandoned mine



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sites and investigate Native American pictographs scratched on boulders.

Meanwhile, "YEE-hahhh," was our high sign, shouted after running the rapids, breaking the hula-hoop twirl record or eating the most pancakes. Carmel and Caroline talked about relationships, Steve and Gordon compared restaurants in Madrid, and Mary and Dixie discovered a mutual love of poetry.

Sandra pulled a showstopper when she climbed up on the seat of the oar boat and belted out *Me and Bobby McGee* in a throaty voice that made my hair stand on end. And Michelle, who eventually learned how to stuff her sleeping bag, confided that it was a pain to have parents who were divorced and made you live in two places.

Each afternoon when we pulled into camp, the kids dug holes in the sand, swam in the river and twirled hula-hoops on the beach. Fourteen-year-old Jacey helped Shanna, 7, string beads for a bracelet. Sammy and Jason tossed a ball until the twilight faded and it was too dark to

see. When the sky turned purple, we lay on the sand and looked for shooting stars.

The trip's six guides, Jo, Sandra and Lynn, and Harvey, Dave and Wiley, pulled it together, steering through the rapids, unloading the rafts, pitching tents, lugging water up to the solar shower, chopping vegetables and serving dinner. At least once a day, the kids dunked Harvey, voted the Snake River's finest human sponge.

On our last day we stopped for a final lunch on a quiet beach, conscious that a once-in-a-lifetime experience was ending, and — as time and distance intervened — we would return to other worlds and other lives. As the last of the fresh food disappeared, Jo opened a can of smoked oysters and a box of crackers.

"C'mon Michelle," I coaxed, as a frown furrowed her brow. "Try one. Just to prove you can do it." Cautiously sticking her fork into an oyster, she nibbled the edge. "Yech, it's horrible!" she screeched, spitting it out. Then she smiled. "At least I tried it."

## RAFTING WITH ROW

ROW Adventures leads guided float trips for all skill levels on a half-dozen western rivers. Prices vary depending on the river and the date, ranging from about \$78 to \$400 per day for adults and from \$76 to \$325 for children. On the Salmon River, ROW offers the Family Magic trip, where a "River Jester" leads activities designed for children. (Four days: \$1,150 adults, \$970 kids.)

All trips include guides, snacks, meals, beer and wine, rafts, tents, sleeping bags, fishing gear and shuttles to and from the launch site on the river. Guests bring only their clothes and personal gear.

Scheduled trips fill early but occasional cancellations create openings.

On this trip, some of our group put in a day early in upper Hells Canyon, hoping to catch big rapids. The majority of the group put in just above Pittsburg Landing. We followed the Snake River north along the Idaho-Oregon border, ending our trip just over the Washington state line. Info: 800-451-6034 or www.rowadventures.com.

## ORGANIZING A GROUP TRIP

Steve Cooke planned a year ahead, writing to friends, reserving a date, collecting deposits, checking airfares, reserving hotel rooms for the first and last nights and mailing final itineraries. ROW sent complete information packs to each participant with guidelines and a packing list.

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## Idaho: Rafting the Snake with family and friends

Posted on Sun, Apr. 13, 2008

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STEVE HAGGERTY / COLORWORLD

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