

SANDPOINT

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Visitor Guide

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CONTENTIOUS COMEBACK

SANDPOINT ON THE SALMON

A river odyssey



Interview with filmmaker Ted Parvin, History of Sandpoint in 10 Objects, Ultimate Frisbee, Cedar Street Bridge at 30, Entrepreneurs of Sandpoint, Camping Our Lake, A Carpe Diem Photo Essay, Calendars, Dining, Real Estate ... and a whole pack more



SANDPOINT ON THE SALMON

In which our adventurers discover,
yes, *you can take it with you*

Story by Billie Jean Gerke
Photos by Doug Marshall



We were nearing the last rapid on our last day on the Salmon River, and Vinegar looked ominous. Mason Kiebert had warned us we would go out with a bang, that Vinegar Creek was the biggest rapid of our five-day trip. He wasn't kidding. So far, not a single boat had flipped nor had a rafter been ejected. But Vinegar changed all that.

Rick and Randy Evans, of Evans Brothers Coffee fame, had gone from whitewater neophytes at the beginning of the trip to the cool dudes with the nerve to ride rapids on a stand-up paddleboard or in the inflatable kayak, known as a duckie.

Vinegar – a roiling corkscrew wave flanked by huge boulders – presented a great thrill for those of us with guides in the paddle raft and oar boats. With the Class III-IV behind us and the take-out just ahead, we turned to see how the Evans brothers in the duckie would fare. As they entered the rapid, a lateral wave hit them like a ton of bricks and flipped them in a split second. Rick grabbed the boat and held on, but Randy disappeared. We watched for long, anxious seconds until, thankfully, he popped to the surface. He had taken on water and didn't look so good.

The experience was humbling to the brothers, who admittedly had gotten a little cocky from their beginners' luck on the mighty Salmon.

"We were feeling pretty overconfident," Randy said. "We had just aced all the whitewater the whole trip – and then got hammered on the last rapid."

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We were 22 of the more than 8,000 boaters who raft Idaho's famous Salmon River each year, but no others do it the Sandpoint way. This was the inaugural "Sandpoint on the Salmon," the brainchild of Mason Kiebert and wife Heather Johnston of K-Bear River Adventures, along with photographer Doug Marshall of El Photo Grande. The idea was to combine a group of Sandpoint people with some of our town's signature purveyors of food and drink. We're talking gourmet meals by Trinity at City Beach, award-winning Evans Brothers coffee, microbrews from Laughing Dog Brewing and wine from Pend d'Oreille Winery.

All this for five nights ensconced within a micro-Sandpoint community floating through the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area, three times the size of Rhode Island, and the Gospel Hump Wilderness Area. The canyon's depth surpasses the Grand Canyon, and its network of trails could

Mason Kiebert, on the oars, guides his paddle rafters through the rapid known as Black Velvet. Sandpoint on the Salmon guests were treated to local food and beverages, right, including coffee prepared pour-over style by the Evans brothers themselves





BAD COMPANY WITH PAUL RODGERS JULY 7 / **POISON** JULY 12
PETER FRAMPTON'S GUITAR CIRCUS WITH KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD JULY 26
ALAN JACKSON & GLORIANA AUG 8
SAMMY HAGAR AUG 17 / **MARTINA MCBRIDE** AUG 31
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stretch from San Francisco to Detroit. It supports wildlife like bighorn sheep, of which we saw plenty.

Sandpoint folks do love to have a good time, and nowhere was that more evident than last July on the Salmon River. By day it was rapid after rapid through that gorgeous canyon, and by night it was playing in camp, getting spoiled by the ever-gracious crew and enjoying each other's company, which was easy since we were an upbeat bunch.

The adventure started July 6 with a meeting at Laughing Dog Brewing, our first chance to see those we would travel with: John Phillips, a retired astronaut, and his wife, Laura; Alan Barber and wife Heather Hellier, retired proprietors of Church Street Bed & Breakfast; John and Mary McPherson, engineers from San Jose, Calif., who own a second home in Sandpoint; John Akins Jr., owner of The Little Olive, and his father John Sr., who owns Akins Harvest Foods; the Evans brothers and their father Dick Evans, of Charleston, S.C., a retired Air Force colonel who flew F-4 and F-111 fighter jets; winemaker Steve Meyer of Pend d'Oreille Winery; and Dave Kosiba, head brewer at Laughing Dog. Doug and I rounded out the list as the dirt-bag photographer and writer.

Over the next six days we would create a bond that only happens on the river. "The river brings out the best in people. It takes a couple days to slough off and then the genuine person comes out," said Kiebert, a fourth-generation Sandpoint native.

Kiebert, 41, his teenage daughters Nan and Kaylee, wife Heather, 39, and one of their guides, Zach Westfall, 23, handed out dry bags and explained how they were used: The small ones would be our day packs, the large were like our suitcases. Then we were sent home to pack.

Early the next day, K-Bear's van escorted us the 280 miles south to the put-in 26 miles upriver of Riggins. There we boarded a jet boat that carried us upriver 90 miles in less than three hours, providing a preview of the rapids we would encounter on the way back down. The jet boat roared into Corn Creek Campground at dinner time, where we found the K-Bear guides with camp set up, appetizers ready and cold beer on tap. "It was like stepping into a moving resort in the middle of nature," said Meyer.

Dinner – barbecued pork ribs accompanied by potato salad, fruit salad and Cabernet Sauvignon – was the first of five delicious spreads served



From the top: Guests, guides and swamper at California Beach; and K-Bear River Adventure's Mason Kiebert and wife Heather Johnston, the dynamic duo behind Sandpoint on the Salmon
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Guide Iris Frye and her dog, Rio, escort the author through the narrow slot in Big Mallard, a rapid with a formidable reputation

The next morning, anticipation was high and so was anxiety for those like me with little whitewater experience. We broke camp and watched the crew meticulously pack the boats for the trip. Most everything found a spot on the gear boats, which would always depart before us rafters so that by the time we arrived, camp would be set up with refreshments and appetizers awaiting.

That morning, the water was at 64 degrees, running at 8,241 cfs, with a forecast high of 98 and a low of 57. Guide Aaron Gordon, a band teacher at Sandpoint High School, presented the safety talk. Kiebert warned us about dehydration and told us to force ourselves to drink water all day. Then he addressed snakes and bees; this is rattlesnake country after all. We were told to keep our tents zipped up at all times. We were reassured that a registered nurse, wife Heather, was on board and so was a satellite phone, as no cell service exists in the canyon. By 11 a.m. we hit the water.

The first rapid was Killum, a class II that sounds like "kill 'em" but was actually named for homesteader Jack Killum, who came to the Salmon River with his wife and five children in 1935. We nailed Killum with ease.

Our first lunch stop was the first of many historic sites we would encounter, a homestead settled by pioneer Frank Lantz on property he occupied from 1925 until his death in 1971, when he donated it to his employer, the U.S. Forest Service. Guide Iris Frye led us to Lantz's

third and final home there. She related how Lantz came from West Virginia to settle on the Salmon. He married in 1935 but never had children. The fruit trees he planted still bear fruit; in fact, we enjoyed fresh cherries off his trees.

Frye, 23, has been rowing since her mid-teens and started guiding at 18 in Colorado. She teaches in Moab, Utah, during the school year and guides the Salmon in summer when she goes by her river name, "I-Frye." The pretty blonde with a Livestrong tattoo on her wrist was born with cancer and diagnosed at age 12. At the time of our trip, she had been cancer-free for 14 months. Every year, I-Frye volunteers for River Discovery, a rafting trip for Idaho children aged 12 to 17 who are battling cancer. No parents are allowed; instead, a nurse, oncologist and counselor are on board. They cover the kids' ports so they can swim by day and open them to administer chemo treatments at night.

"I'm very lucky to guide those trips because of my history," said Frye. She truly relates to the children, who can take their wigs off and just be happy for their five or six days on the Salmon.

By 5 p.m. we pulled off the river for our second camp. Libations began with Laughing Dog IPA and Rocket Dog Rye IPA. The crew served marinated chicken and veggie skewers for appetizers, followed by cedar plank salmon with lemon basil cream sauce, grilled

asparagus and pasta salad. Meyer pulled out his Bistro Blanc, Chardonnay and Merlot. Dessert was New York cheesecake with raspberry sauce.

We were loosening up – enough to give each other a little grief. Dick Evans, 65, was relegated to a tent as far away from other campers as possible. Everyone had heard him snoring up a storm at Corn Creek, so from then on he was put in the “boom boom” room. He was characteristically good natured, despite being outcast at bedtime. Dick had gone through serious cancer four years earlier.

“I decided if opportunities come up, I’m going to do them,” he said. He had thought the trip might be too hard, but the chance to bond with his sons on a grand adventure won out.

“I’ve always felt close to my boys but never as close as when this trip was over,” Dick said. In fact, Dick and his sons are returning this summer for the second annual Sandpoint on the Salmon. He talked his 70-year-old brother into joining them this year, and his brother, in turn, talked his son and his partner into coming, too. (Warning to this year’s participants: Dick claims his brother snores louder than he does.)

Breakfast on day two was French toast stuffed with huckleberries, blueberries and yogurt, along with fresh fruit and sausage links.

Later, while breaking camp, Zach yelled out “Last call for the groover!” Soon he returned and announced sternly: “No urinating in the groover!” Apparently, that first night, we campers were not good about following the rules.

To lessen the impact of all the river travelers in dry river corridors, the Forest Service requires that visitors urinate in the river and not on land. All solid waste must be deposited in portable toilets, known affectionately as “groovers,” which are carried out. K-Bear added a classy touch to our groover – a side table decorated with an electric candle and a vase of silk flowers.

Kiebert gathered the troops for that day’s briefing and informed us this was his favorite whitewater day of the trip. The rapids we would encounter were big but not crazy dangerous. Today the river would make a big bend northwest,

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From left: Campsite No. 3 at Lower Yellow Pine; Dick Evans and son Randy conquer Big Mallard in the duckie; and retired astronaut John Phillips paddles hard

and the rock formations would change as we entered the Idaho Batholith.

This immense granite formation covers much of central Idaho. Some 50 million years ago, magma formed underground and pushed upward, creating many of the state's mountains. The formation appears black because of lichen and moss on its

surface; hence, the name Black Canyon is given to this section of the Salmon. The Idaho Batholith creates a travel barrier that is only breached by the Salmon River suture zone. Except for U.S. Highway 95, which follows this zone from Riggins to McCall, no paved road crosses the Idaho Batholith from north to south.

Our anticipation for the day was heightened by Mason's description of Barth Hot Springs, with its infinity pool perched on a cliff. Day two would cover 19 river miles, versus 17 the day before.

We made the hot springs and soaked in the pool before lunchtime. Named after 1920s homesteader Jim Barth, the site features historical inscriptions on rocks at the river's edge, visible only at low water, including those dated from 1872 to 1911 by John McKay, a legendary Scotsman who spent more than 48 years in the canyon.

Rapids aside, the most exciting part of the day came when an afternoon thunderstorm forced us off the water.

We huddled on shore and watched the wind whip across the river and lightning flash all around. Once again, some of us failed to follow directions – like me, who neglected to pack rain gear in my day bag. The storm chilled me to the bone, but Kiebert kindly offered us some Fireball Cinnamon Whisky to warm us up and calm our nerves.

We pulled off the river for night three at Lower Yellow Pine Campground set amongst enormous ponderosa pines. Kosiba pulled out a Laughing Dog specialty, the Anubis coffee porter – a high-calorie, dark beer that did the trick to warm us up.

Fresh fruit kabob appetizers were followed by tortellini primavera with creamy pesto sauce, topped off by caramel apple pie. Soon, a drinking game pitting Dick and the younger Akins against the winemaker and Randy began; the goal was to use a Frisbee to knock a cup off an oar set in sand. Dick's team won. More teams were drawn into the game throughout the evening. Meantime, the younger set

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played beach golf.

We were letting go even more. Our stiff, formal personalities were sloughing off and revealing the people inside, just as Kiebert said they would.


At his briefing the next morning, our fearless leader read a guidebook's description of Big Mallard, a class III to IV rapid we would hit right out of camp. Dick and Randy were set to be the first pair in the duckie that morning. As words like "formidable," "tricky" and "chaotic" rolled off Mason's tongue, Dick grimaced at each menacing adjective. "Dad thought he was going to die," Randy confided later. They survived Big Mallard just fine.

Night four was spent at Mackay Bar, where we experienced the only civilization of the trip. A hunting lodge with electricity and hot showers, the ranch is served by a private airstrip and primitive road. Civilization proved too enticing for John Sr., who disappeared at dinnertime. Junior found him up on the bench trying to find reception on his iPhone. His son joked about Dad wanting to tweet about the trip, but actually Dad was trying to tend to business.

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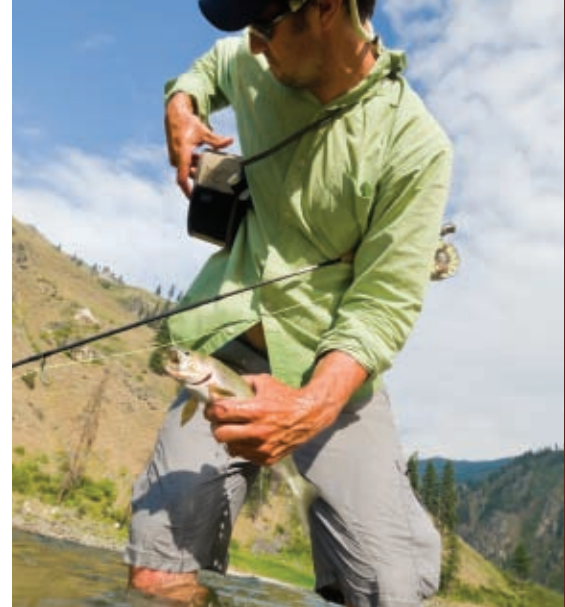
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Left: Heather Johnston and Dick Evans cliff-jump together as others look on. Above: Guide Aaron Gordon fly fishes near California Beach

over a snake coiled on the trail. “Who knew you could jump straight up in the air?” Mary said, laughing. “Quite honestly, it didn’t bother me much. It wasn’t the first time I’ve seen a rattlesnake on the trail, but it definitely got my adrenaline going.”

We pulled into California Beach for our last night, a magical evening on a beautiful, white sand beach. Several of us played dice and observed a spirited game of bocce ball ensue, with high river-trip stakes: Losers had to get naked. The first one caught me off guard, but I carefully averted my eyes away as other players lost and disrobed. (I won’t name names, but one of them roasts coffee, one runs a restaurant, one teaches in Moab and another spent time at the International Space Station.) Our last dinner was a dandy – New York strip steaks with sautéed mushrooms and onions served with Meyer Reserve.

On the final morning, Kiebert praised us for keeping the river clean and for sharing in his dream. In his 12 seasons on the river, he declared the inaugural Sandpoint on the Salmon to be his best trip ever. Others echoed the thought. We had bonded and experienced the ultimate summer camp for grown-ups, leaving the outside world and technology behind – but taking Sandpoint with us, on the Salmon River. **SM**

The second annual Sandpoint on the Salmon happens July 15-20. Information: www.raftthesalmon.com, 208-290-3737

Mackay Bar faces west and was plenty hot on our arrival. The crew rose to the occasion, serving grilled portobello mushrooms with goat cheese, Roma tomatoes and basil as an appetizer. Dinner was grilled chicken breast stuffed with artichoke hearts, sun-dried tomatoes, mushrooms, Fontina and herbs; on the side were dragon wheels (potatoes, onions and bell peppers wrapped in foil and grilled) and marinated, grilled squash. We had a delicious Kahlúa chocolate toffee mousse cake for dessert. The guys played horseshoes and a badminton game got under way as night fell.

The next morning, I-Frye and her dog Rio were snuggled together in their sleeping bag when I snuck past for a trail run. On my way, I passed the astronaut and friends hiking back and Aaron out fly fishing on the South Fork. Back at the lodge, I took the world’s longest

shower and emerged late for breakfast. Later Kiebert indicated it would be an easy whitewater day with class II rapids.

I took this opportunity to try out the duckie in mellow water with Laura Phillips but was soon back in the paddle raft. After a stop for some cliff-jumping, the group undertook a hike to what Kiebert described as the southern-most grove of Pacific yew trees – reached via an overgrown trail. At the grove, Kiebert related how the trees had been saved during a wildfire, a common occurrence in the canyon. The Evans brothers wanted to hike farther, so Kiebert and Johnston accompanied them and a few others on an extended hike while the rest of us turned back. Reunited later back at the beach, the hikers excitedly told how, beyond the yew grove, they had spotted one rattlesnake after another. When they hurriedly retreated, Mary McPherson literally had to jump



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