



# Houston Canoe Club *WaterLine*



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The Waterline is the monthly newsletter of the Houston Canoe Club, Inc. The Waterline is made possible by your dues and critically depends on member contributions. Please submit items to HCC's Newsletter Editor, Linda Gorski at [LindaGorski@cs.com](mailto:LindaGorski@cs.com).

The Waterline is prepared by an on-line newsletter editor written by Fraser Baker, HCC's Webmaster.

## Next Meeting Announcement

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**When:** July 08, 2009  
**Where:** Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, Houston, Texas  
**Directions:** First driveway, North side of Bissonnet, just East of Hillcroft.  
**Speaker:** Louis Aulbach & Linda Gorski  
**Speaker Bio:** Meeting time is 7:00 pm.

Louis Aulbach is a long time member of the HCC and is the author of several guides to the rivers of Texas including the Devils River, The Pecos River, the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande, the Great Unknown of the Rio Grande and the Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande (co-authored by Linda Gorski). They are currently working on a book about the history of Houston as it developed along Buffalo Bayou. Linda has recently returned to the Houston Canoe Club after eight years abroad and currently edits the club's newsletter.



**Louis & Linda**

**Description:** ***"Things change -- enjoy the outdoors when you have the opportunity; take care of the outdoors when you can."***

Louis Aulbach and Linda Gorski will present the program at the July 8th meeting of the Houston Canoe Club. The presentation will include two topics.

The first part of the presentation will feature a slide show of a recent trip to west Texas including their first visit to the rugged and primitive interior of the Big Bend Ranch State Park. They will also take you on their road trip along the Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande where storms last fall have significantly changed the river in that area especially the popular put-in at Colorado Canyon. The entire campground has been washed away along with the toilet facilities and the put-in itself has been rearranged. If you're planning a trip on the Colorado Canyon section of the Rio Grande anytime soon, this presentation is a must-see.

The second part of the presentation will highlight river stewardship and will include lessons learned over years of paddling, hiking and exploring the rivers of Texas. This presentation was prompted by recent conversations with Tom Goynes at the San Marcos River Retreat about his experiences running his popular campground and also with rangers at the Big Bend National Park where new rules have been implemented that will affect all paddlers. Most of the rules of the river they will discuss are just common sense but they hope to impart a few new points that will make everyone's paddling and camping experiences more meaningful.

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Be sure to set this date aside on your calendar, then come out to support our

speaker and club.

## Last Meeting Minutes

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**Date:** June 10, 2009

**Recorder:** John Ohrt

**Minutes:** Commodore Bill Grimes called the meeting to order.

Joe Coker described the club library. Donated books, DVD's and videos are welcome. There is an easy check out procedure.

Officers were introduced and new members and guests were greeted.

Harmon Everett gave a safety minute talk on the "cat food can" stove which can be made easily and cheaply. It is very light and runs on alcohol. Harmon says it works as well as commercial expensive backpacking stoves.

The program was a presentation by club members Christy Long and Billy Welborn about the upcoming Week of Rivers in the Smoky Mountain area and Billy's fall trip to the Ocoee River in Tennessee. Lots of good white water pictures.

Jim Barton stood in for the Fleet Captain's trip report. Past trips included Buffalo Bayou, Lake Charlotte, Burnham Ferry (Bob found it), the Columbus Loop on Memorial Day, the Brazos, the Goliad River, the Sabine three day trip, and the Neches River Rendezvous. Upcoming trips included the Texas Water Safari, Oyster Creek, Pelican Island, and Week of Rivers. It's hot and the club is a little thin on July and August trips.

Several officer vacancies have come up. Per the club constitution Commodore Bill Grimes appointed Linda Gorski Newsletter Editor, Paul Woodcock Boatswain, and Harmon Everett Purser. Additional nominations were asked for, but none were forthcoming. The club will vote to finalize these appointments at the July general meeting. Nominations from the floor will be accepted at the July meeting prior to the election.

The minutes of the May general meeting were approved as printed in the club newsletter.

Carl Gilson gave a financial report.

The club has 132 members which shows the success of the campaign to raise membership. However, members are reminded that they are supposed to fill out an ACA waiver along with their new or renewal application.

The meeting was adjourned.

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Please contact HCC's recorder, John Ohrt, if there are any omissions or corrections.

## New Members

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**Member Name:** Michael Sony  
**Membership Type:** individual  
**Member's Family:**

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**Member Name:** Rika Muhl  
**Membership Type:** individual  
**Member's Family:**

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**Member Name:** Theodore Andrews  
**Membership Type:** individual  
**Member's Family:**

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**Member Name:** Russell Edwards  
**Membership Type:** family  
**Member's Family:** Wife: Diana Edwards, Child: Joshua Stevens

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The HCC cordially welcomes new members to our club. New members are the life blood of the HCC, so be sure to provide opportunities for all our new members to paddle by coordinating more trips.

## Market Place

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### Items For Sale

**Item:** Coleman 15'11" two-man canoe  
**Description:**  
**Asking Price:** \$350.00  
**Contact Name:** Mark Marmon  
**Contact Phone:** 713-906-0421  
**Contact Email:** mcubed@usa.net  
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### Items Wanted

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Please contact the Newsletter Editor to post any items that you may have for sale or desperately need.

# Frayed Ropes

by  
John Rich

I'm sure that everyone who has been around canoes for a while has been annoyed by the handling of frayed ropes.

All that loose fiber on the end of a rope makes it difficult to thread them through tie-down loops, and makes it hard to tie knots. And the fraying only gets worse with time. Besides, it just doesn't look right for equipment that you want to be in ship-shape order. It looks sloppy, and someone could get the idea that you're negligent in your upkeep.

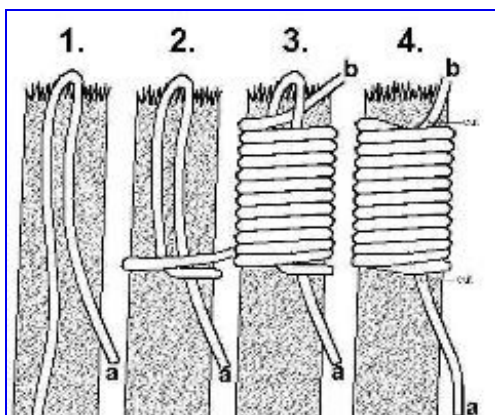


*(Click once on the thumbnail images to display a larger version in a separate window)*

So what are you going to do about it? Are you just going to put up with the unsightly and inconvenient mess, or are you going to whip your gear into proper shape?

The quickest solution is to just put an overhand knot on the end of the rope. That prevents the fraying from spreading beyond the knot. That's a good temporary field repair. However, the lump of that knot can make it difficult to thread the rope through loops and holes in normal usage, for tying down gear in the boat, or the boat on top of the truck.

So, I'll offer three other techniques here as an alternative, all of which are cleaner in appearance and handling characteristics.



The first technique is one used by seafarers for thousands of years, called "whipping". I first learned it as a Boy Scout decades ago. This method wraps cord around the end of the rope to bind it together, so that strands don't come loose. This is fun to apply, and looks cool, but it's time consuming, and it can sometimes be pulled off during handling of the rope, like when pulling your heavy boat out of the water by the end of the rope.

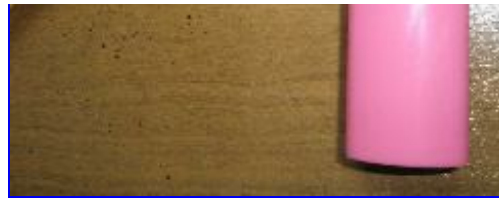
So from here, I'll offer two other techniques as alternatives to whipping. Both are quicker, and more durable, in my opinion.

For ropes made of some man-made fibers such as nylon or polypropylene, there is a very quick and easy technique. Simply hold a flame to the end of the rope, and the fibers will melt into a solid blob, fusing the end together as a solid lump. No more unraveling! It only takes seconds, and it lasts forever. Just don't





touch the melted plastic while it's hot, or it will stick to your skin like napalm, and burn. If you want to try and shape it while it's in hot liquid form, roll it against a board or a rock, or wear heavy gloves and use your fingers.



The third technique is for natural fibers, which don't melt like nylon. This method involves using something from the electrical trade, and applying it to a nautical item. The product is heat shrink tubing – it's a black tube that is used to slip over electrical wires, and then shrinks with heat to cover up exposed wire at splices. It's a fancy way to replace old-fashioned black electrical tape. The tubes come in various diameters, so you'll want to

pick some that are larger than the diameter of your rope. For example, for three-eighths inch diameter rope, get half-inch heat shrink tubes. The shrinkage ability is amazing - about half of the original diameter, so you don't need to start with too tight of a fit, and besides, that could make it difficult to slip the tubing over the loose end of the rope. You can find this product in the electrical department of any hardware store, or at Radio Shack, and they're cheap. The packages come in certain diameters, or with a mixture of different diameters.

To apply, first prepare the end of the rope by cutting off the frayed end, leaving a clean edge. Then cut about an inch of length of the heat shrink tubing with scissors, and slip it over the end of the rope.



Finally, apply heat to the tubing and watch as it shrinks like magic to mold itself around the weave of the rope. It only takes 125-degrees of heat, so an ordinary hair-dryer will do the trick. Or you can pass a flame close to it – just don't apply the flame directly to the rubber or it will burn. Rotate the rope so that the entire circumference of the tubing is shrunk into the rope. The end result will be a neat, clean end, that won't fray, won't pull off, is waterproof, and is easy to handle for whatever you need

to do with it. As an added bonus, the contrasting color will make it easy to detect where the end of the rope is, when it's piled or coiled in a bundle. This stuff even works for frayed shoelaces!

Go ahead, make all your canoe friends envious of your ship-shape ropes.

**The End**



## New Member Highlight - Donna and Bob Zapatka

by  
**Linda Gorski**

Donna and Bob Zapatka are former Rhode Islanders who now call Houston home. They recently joined the Houston Canoe Club to meet other paddlers with similar interests. They paddle a beautiful Merrimack Osprey.

*"We bought our Merrimack Osprey in December 2008," said Donna. "We chose the Merrimack because we had previously owned one prior to being transferred from Rhode Island to the Houston area 27 years ago. Sadly we had to leave it behind. After settling in Atascocita we became too busy raising our family and working to think about canoeing. Now that the kids are grown and I am retired and Bob will be retiring (ExxonMobil) in a few years, we at last have some time to get back into canoeing. Here is a picture of us on the bank of the San Jacinto river at Lake Houston when we put the canoe in for her maiden voyage."*

Donna and Bob hope to be at the July meeting and we look forward to welcoming them.



**Donna and Bob Zapatka with their  
Merrimack Osprey**

(Click on the thumbnail image above to display a full-screen version in a separate window.)

**Welcome!**

# HCC Library

by  
**John Rich**

The Houston Canoe Club maintains a library of books and videos that can be borrowed by the membership, for education and entertainment. Joe Coker is the official librarian, and he has recently completed the task of making an inventory listing of the items available for check-out. Here they are.

## Books

1. Basic Canoeing....skills and tools
2. Canoeing....A trailside series guide
3. Eskimo Rolling
4. Kayaking....A trailside series guide
5. Paddle America....Guide to trips and outfitters in all 50 states
6. Paddling Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks
7. Performance Kayaking....Play paddling
8. Playboating....Moves and training
9. River Rescue....Standard ref. on river safety and rescue
10. Sea Kayaking....Long-distance touring (J. Dowd)
11. Sea Kayaking....Basic essentials (M. Wyatt)
12. Sea Kayaking....Essentials....equipment, strokes, etc. (J. Hanson)
13. Sea Kayaker's Pocket Guide
14. Sea Kayaking....Nigel Foster's Secrets from the Pro
15. Shooting the Boh....Borneo whitewater rafting
16. The Bombproof Roll and Beyond....balance and boat control
17. The Complete Wilderness Paddler
18. The Essential Whitewater Kayaker....a complete course
19. Thrill of the Paddle....Whitewater canoeing
20. Whitewater Handbook....Canoe and kayak
21. Whitewater Handbook....AMC Third Edition....Canoe and Kayak



## Videos

### Canoe Videos

1. DVD---Pivot Point (Basic strokes—30 min.)  
Whitewater Bound (Comprehensive skills—All Levels—2 Hrs.)  
Quick Start (Basic info and skills—20 min.)
2. DVD---L.L. Bean---Guide to Canoeing (Info/skills, Solo/Tandem—All Levels---1:41) Copy # 1, Copy # 2
3. VHS---Pivot Point (Basics—30 min.)
4. VHS---Quick Start Your Canoe (Basic info and skills—20 min.)
5. VHS---Rollin With Nolan (Solo canoe. Advanced. Great whitewater footage)
6. VHS---Whitewater Bound (Basic canoe strokes)



### Kayak Videos

1. DVD---Decide to Return (Sea kayaking safety---11min.)
2. DVD---Kayak Handling (Basics)  
Quick Start Your Kayak (Basics)  
Kayak Basics
3. DVD---Quick Start Your Kayak (Basics)  
Kayak Handling (Basics)  
Kayak Basics
4. DVD---Slalom Technique (Advanced)  
Citizens Racers Workshop (Advanced)
5. DVD---Texas Whitewater (Adv. Whitewater footage--#1)
6. DVD---Texas Whitewater (Adv. Whitewater footage--#2)
7. VHS---Kayak Handling (Basics)
8. VHS---Quick Start Your Kayak (Basics) Copy #1
9. VHS---Quick Start Your Kayak (Basics) Copy #2
10. VHS---Citizens Racer Workshop (Advanced. Whitewater)
11. VHS---Slalom Technique (Advanced. Stroke Drills)
12. VHS---World Cup '89
13. DVD---Go Paddle (Fundamentals—Beginner/Intermediate---33 min.)

#### Misc./Mixed Vids

1. DVD--- Rollin Nolan (Advance Canoe. Whitewater)  
Kayak Basics (Rolls and Strokes)  
Quick Start Your Kayak (Good Basic)
2. DVD---Smart Start For Paddlers—ACA (Canoe and Kayak Basics)  
Quick Start (Basics)
3. DVD---Whitewater Primer (Advanced Kayak)  
Rollin With Nolan (Advanced Solo Canoe. Whitewater)

The current procedure if you want to borrow a library item, according to Joe, is this:

All books and videos are checked out and returned at the monthly HCC meetings. The check-out period is limited to the time between each meeting. Renewal for another 30-day period would be allowed only if nobody else wants to check out the particular item at that time (still trying to get more video copies made). Sign-out sheets (copies of the actual book and video lists) bearing the actual meeting date will be available on the front table along with the near-by display of books and videos. Members (the library is for members only) will write their name and email address on the sheets opposite the item(s) they check out. Joe Coker will be on hand to supervise (or Paul Woodcock in my absence). The check-out/return process will be limited to 15-20 minutes prior to the start of the meeting and just a few minutes afterwards... we have to clear out of the room. I will email a "Library Item Due" reminder to borrowers a couple days prior to each meeting.

**The End**

## Upcoming River Trips

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### HCC Trips:

**Date:** Sunday, July 05, 2009

**Title:** Oak Bayou Trail near Galveston State Park

**Inclusive Dates:** 7/05

**Description:** This 4.8 mile course trail follows an inlet of Galveston Bay. The trail meanders through shallow water out to the geotextile breakwater and over to the marsh restoration terraces where planted vegetation provides new habitat for small fish and shorebirds. The trail then enters another inlet and proceeds southeast, then turns at marker 16 and makes a loop back to the put-in.

Afterwards, we can have a picnic lunch at the park.

Currently, there is no entry charge at Galveston State Park due to Ike.

**Skill Level:** **Novice:** Confidently execute basic strokes plus ability to manage high wind and high waves typically experienced on Lake Charlotte or Sheldon reservoir, can maneuver the boat on moving water plus familiarity with eddy turns, ferrying and surfing in Class 2 rapids typically found on the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers. Able to read the river and identify the eddy line.

**Contact:** Contact Kelly Motter by phone 979 415 6268, or by email [kellylee28@aol.com](mailto:kellylee28@aol.com).

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### Other Club Trips:

# Colorado River - Burnham's Ferry

May 24th  
by  
John Rich

On May 24th, trip leader Bob Arthur and six other paddlers showed up in Ellinger, Texas, to paddle 14 miles on the Colorado River.

This is not *“the”* Colorado River, famous for running through the Grand Canyon, but rather the one by that same name within Texas. The story I've heard is that a Spanish map-maker a long time ago mistook the Texas river for the downstream end of *“the”* Colorado River, and so-labeled it. By the time the mistake was discovered in his handiwork, the name had already stuck. So Texas now has its own Colorado River.

The location of this section of river is half-way between Columbus and LaGrange, in the small town of Ellinger, about one and a half hours west of Houston. Just head west on I-10, then turn north on Highway 71. The meeting place is a country store on that highway called Hruska's – you'll smell the delicious fresh-baked pastries inside as soon as you pull in.



**Map of river location**

*(Click once on the thumbnail images to display a larger version.)*



**Close-up map**

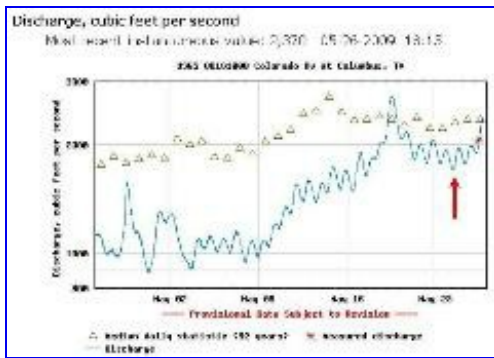
The start and end points of this trip were both on private property, courtesy of local folks that Bob Arthur's family knows. In the middle of this stretch of river is Burnham's Crossing – a historic pioneer homestead site and ferry crossing. Note that the marked put-in and take-out locations on this map are only approximate.

An aerial view of the countryside around the river.



**Aerial view**





**Water flow chart**

This stream gauge data can be viewed here:

[http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/tx/nwis/uv/?site\\_no=08161000](http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/tx/nwis/uv/?site_no=08161000)

The river bottom is quite wide and subject to flooding, and is mostly used only for pasture, as you can see from the aerial photo. We drove up to a mile for both the put-in and take-out across private dirt roads and grassy fields to get to the riverbank. Bob's son, Matt, served as the field guide, and shuttle driver.



**Driving to the put-in**



**Boats lined up on the riverbank**

The boats are lined up on the shoreline ready to begin the trip. The participants were: Bob Arthur, Sereniah Breland, Joe Coker, Dana Enos, Janis Kmiec, Mike Pollard and John Rich. Three canoes and four kayaks.

The paddlers prepare themselves to push off into the water: Mike Pollard (blue), Joe Coker (yellow) & Bob Arthur (white). Mike had a brand new boat and this was its maiden voyage. And he hoped to get some fishing in too, while he was here.



**Readying for the water**



Now for some on-the-water photos of each of the participants.





**Bob Arthur**



**Dana Enos**



**Janis Kmiec**



**Joe Coker**



**Mike Pollard**



**Sereniah Breland**



**John Rich**

Photo by Joe Coker

The trip was proceeding along nicely, until about half way through a dark thunderstorm approached, with pelting rain, flashes of lightening, and booming thunderclaps.



**"Calm before the storm"**

Photo by Joe Coker

Everyone broke out their raincoats or ponchos to wait out the thunderstorm on the riverbank, where the Burnham's Ferry





crossing used to be. Here you see Bob weathering the storm, looking like Sasquatch. The worst of it for him was, it was too wet to get his pipe lit. Discussion ensued as to whether it is more unsafe in a lightening storm when in a canoe on open water, or on shore on open land. The cows were all huddled under a big tree, but that didn't seem too bright either.



**Bob gets wet**



**Joe the rock hound**

Photo by Sereniah Breland

Some of us used the down time to walk the gravel bar in the rain looking for interesting discoveries. Chunks of petrified wood were found, old bricks, perhaps from pioneer days, as well as one piece of petrified bone, which looks like it might be a fragment from something large enough to be a dinosaur, judging from the arc of the "tree rings".



**Rainwater**

The rain was so heavy that it was filling the boats with water, which had to be bailed out before we could proceed on our trip. Looking downstream on the river, we could see blue sky ahead, so we decided to paddle our way out of the danger zone.

In no time at all we reached the take-out point; a nice grass and gravel bar, suitable for both camping overnight, as well as driving your vehicle right up to the edge of the water for ease of loading your boat. The water was moving so nicely that we covered the entire 14 miles in about four and a half hours, including a long halt for the rainstorm.



**The take-out**



Janis loads up her boat on her jeep, and readies it to head home for the day. The remainder of the group stayed behind to



**Janis loads her boat**

Bob takes the smiling grandkids for a spin in his canoe.



**Bob & grandkids**



The campground gravel bar was occupied by hordes of what must be the world's tiniest frogs – smaller than most tadpoles.

As well as some of the prettiest grasshoppers, if you can imagine a bug as being "pretty".



The gravel bar also had a plentiful variety of beautiful Texas flowers, of which just two are shown here.







**Camp shade**

One of the first orders of business for camping was creating some shade in which to spend the afternoon. The only shade trees were on a sloped hillside riverbank, so we created our own shade where we wanted it, in soft grass and on flat ground, by stretching a tarp across two vehicles. It became a comfortable spot for chat and snacks.

Everyone did different things for dinner – ranging from cold fried chicken, MRE heated lasagna, BBQ brisket and potato salad, to grilled steaks. Here, Bob cooks up a cane syrup cake for dessert using a Dutch oven and hot coals from the campfire. Delicious!



**Bob prepares dessert**



**Joe grills steaks**

After dinner, the marshmallows came out and were toasted over the campfire. Joe prefers them slow roasted over red coals to a golden brown color, while Caleb mostly just goes through the motions, sticks them in fire, and eats them slightly warmed, with a double-ended super ninja marshmallow stick.



**Marshmallows**



After night settled, and several satellites and shooting stars were sighted (*"Was that a shooting star or a lightening bug?"*), Joe entertained the kids, big and small, with stories involving things like seven sailors, eight elephants, and nine nymphs.

As exhaustion overtook us, we drifted off to our

tents for a good night's sleep under clear starry skies and in perfect temperatures. In the morning we awoke to dew-soaked tents and tendrils of fog rising up from the river water.



After breakfast, some campers packed up to head for home, while others packed up to join the Colorado River, Columbus Loop paddle trip, which would be starting shortly just 20 miles away. All in all it was an excellent time on the water and in camp, and a good time was enjoyed by all. The one-hour thunderstorm couldn't dampen the overall mood, and such things build character and make for good stories.

**The End**

# Colorado River - Columbus Loop

May 25th  
by  
John Rich

On May 25th, trip leader Fraser Baker and 22 other paddlers showed up in Columbus, Texas, to paddle 6 miles on the Colorado River.

The participants were: John & Cindy Bartos, Janice & Fraser Baker, David Kitson, Micheal Portman, Ryan Johnson, Ken and Susan Anderson, Joy and Joe Sacerettie, Liz Dennis, Robert Killian, Don Morris, Bob Naeger, Billy Welborn, Sereniah Breland, Joe Coker, John Rich, Robert Killian, Kelly Motter, Cassidy Johnson and Michael Pollard.

The location of this section of river is in Columbus, Texas, just off of Interstate-10, about one hour west of Houston, as indicated by the red star on the map. To get there, you just head west on I-10, then turn north on Highway 71 Business.

*(Click once on the thumbnail images to display a larger version in a separate window)*



**Map of river location**



**The put-in bridge**

The start and end points of this trip are only one mile apart, as you can see on this map, making the shuttle quick and easy.



**Close-up street map**





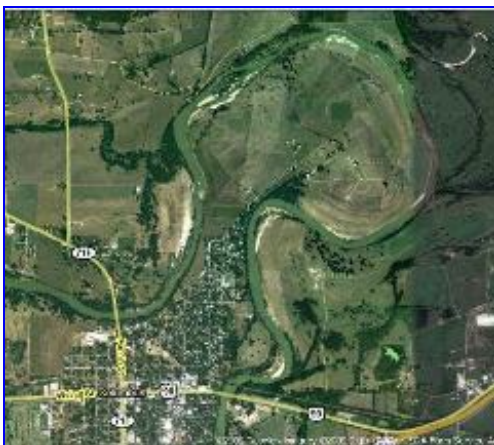
**The put-in**

Everyone unloaded their boats and gear at the put-in, and lined them up on the boat ramp in preparation for entering the water.

With that chore done, vehicles were driven to the take-out point at Beason's Park, on the southeast corner of the Highway 90 bridge. There we piled into just a few vehicles for the ride back to the put-in, where we would finally be ready to get on the water and have some fun.



**Shuttle**



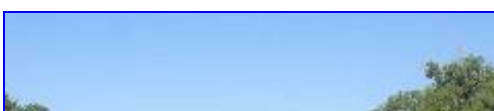
**Aerial view**

An aerial view of the countryside around this river section, aptly named "the Columbus loop". You get six miles of river paddling, with only 1 mile of shuttle driving.

With the positioning of cars done, Fraser gathered everyone together for a safety speech. He pointed out that 90% of injuries are from simply getting into or out of the water, pointing out the muddy, slippery boat ramp. A few signals were reviewed, a request was made that people not get too spread out, and a discussion of the river hazards was conducted, consisting mostly of strainers and logs. It was a timely and excellent reminder to the several dozen participants, that while we're there to have fun, there are dangers, and we need to work together.



**Fraser's safety briefing**



The flotilla hits the water and paddles away from the put-in bridge crossing.

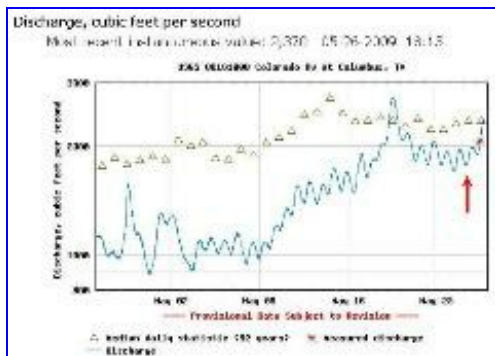


**On the water**

Fraser & Janice Baker led off in their tandem canoe outfitted with U.S. and Canadian flags.



**Fraser & Janice Baker**



**Water flow chart**

The water level was high compared to recent days, and there was generally some moving water that pushed us along at a slow pace. However, the river is fairly wide here, so the volume of water didn't add up to a lot of speed. But there were several narrows where the water sped over some riffles providing some measure of excitement.

This stream gauge data can be viewed here:

[http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/tx/nwis/uv/?site\\_no=08161000](http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/tx/nwis/uv/?site_no=08161000)

There were a wide variety of boats, from sit-atop kayaks, to sit-inside kayaks, short and fat, long and slender, tandem and solo canoes, a whitewater canoe with air bags, a flat-water canoe with a keel, plastic boats, aluminum boats, you name it - it was there.



**Cassidy Johnson**

And then there was this strange beast (and I mean that in a good way). It was a regular





canoe, but Bob didn't sit down inside it, he stood up. And instead of a paddle, he used a long aluminum pole. If the water was too deep to push off the bottom, he paddled the water with the pole. And he could really make that boat move fast with nothing but the pole. Bob was the official "sweeper", bringing up the rear and watching for stragglers or people in trouble. Near the end of the trip I dropped back with him, and I had to paddle hard just to keep up with him. That didn't make sense to me at first, but when you consider the surface area of that pole dipped deep in the water, and the huge sweeping arc of each stroke, it's actually still an efficient way of moving.



**Bob Naeger**



**Cummins Creek**

We searched for a good lunch spot, but due to the high water, the normal shady sand bars were underwater. So about two-thirds of the way through the loop we pulled off the river into Cummins Creek for some shady respite. This side creek curves back around opposite the way the Colorado River flows, and might be fun to explore some time. Looking at the map, it goes quite a ways, and could be used to turn the 6-mile loop paddle into an 8 or 10-mile trip.

After resting up in Cummins Creek, we re-emerged into the river, determined to find a good lunch spot. And not far away was just the kind of sand bar with shade we were looking for. The boats were pulled up, and everyone broke out their picnic lunches.



**Lunch break**



The best part of lunch was when Fraser & Janice pulled out a watermelon and a cake, and served up dessert spread out on a table. That was quite a surprise treat! Thanks!



**Fraser's treat**



**Social chat**

One of the fun things about paddling is the ability to slide up next to others and engage in conversations while you casually float along in nature's wonderment.

John Rich climbs up on a rock sticking out of the middle of the river, and takes photos of the boaters as they drift by.

I tried to capture pictures of every single boat on the water, somewhere along the way. If you would like a photo of yourself, go to the web site album below, and you should be able to find something you like:



**King of the Hill**

Photo by John Bartos

<http://picasaweb.google.com/JohnRich3rd/ColoradoRiver>

You can download copies of any photos you like from that site.



**Kite**

Photo by John Bartos

For the bird-watchers, there was the usual assortment of Texas river birds. And a couple of unusual ones, like a green heron, and a pair of Mississippi kites, one of whom is shown in this photo.

Another unusual site was this slab of boardwork, a kind of which I've seen along several of Texas' meandering rivers. It seems to serve the purpose of an erosion shield, trying to deflect water away from the riverbank, so it doesn't erode, thereby protecting the land owner's property from vanishing. Here you see Ken and Susan Anderson paddling up to it in their new kevlar canoe.



**Erosion shield**

Photo by John Bartos



**The take-out is near**

As you approach the take-out point, you pass under a pair of parallel bridges, the first is a railroad bridge, and the second a road bridge, both of the same steel girder design as seen on Highway 71.



**Train**

After passing underneath the bridges, we were at the boat ramp in Beason's Park, and a flurry of activity began as paddlers pulled their boats out of the water, retrieved their vehicles from the parking area, and loaded the boats on top for the drive home.

There were a lot of smiles all around, and I'm sure everyone enjoyed the day. The weather was a little warm, but a dip in the river was cool. And there were no thunderstorms and no biting bugs. Many thanks go to Fraser and Janice Baker for organizing this trip, shepherding along 20 boats, and hosting watermelon and cake.

**The End**



# Rio Grande River - The Great Unknown

February 23 - 28

by

**Chuck Leinweber**

Introduction by John Rich.

Chuck Leinweber, from Harper, Texas, was one of the participants in the club's February trip on the Rio Grande River, in Big Bend National Park, in southwest Texas. An 80-mile section of river was paddled over 7 days, from the west end of the park to the east end.

Linda Gorski and Louis Aulbach wrote a trip report for the April issue of this magazine.

Now Chuck has also written a magnificent story, called "A (Rio) Grande Sojourn", about that adventure, for "*Duckworks Magazine*", an online magazine he publishes for home boat builders. It's too good not to share with the rest of the club members, and Chuck has granted permission to publish a link to his story.

It begins thusly:

*"Last week Skip Johnson told about the boat he build for the Rio Grande trip so I guess I should share a little about the trip itself. After all, it was something we both had wanted to do for many years. When you live in the western US and you travel around a bit, sooner or later you get to Big Bend National Park, the gem in the desert. It is named for the bend in the Rio Grande River. The Rio Grande forms the border between Mexico and Texas. Mexico once owned most of the present day state of Texas - but that is another story.*

*"We were invited to paddle the "GURG" or Great Unknown Rio Grande, by Louis Aulbach, a paddler, historian and writer who happens to be responsible for THE guidebook for this and other area rivers. There were to be ten paddlers and the trip would begin at Castolon, Texas (in the park) and end 80 some odd miles later at Rio Grande Village. Here is the story in pictures..."*

For Chuck's complete story, with pictures, click on this web site reference:

<http://www.duckworksmagazine.com/09/gatherings/riogrande/index.htm>



**Chuck relaxes in camp**



**Chuck in his homemade boat**

*(Click on the thumbnail images to see a full-screen version in a separate window)*

**The End**

# Neches River Rendezvous

Lufkin, Texas June 6, 2009

by  
John Rich

On June 6th, three members of the Houston Canoe Club participated in the Neches River Rendezvous event in Lufkin, Texas. This was the 12th annual edition of this event, designed to promote outdoor wilderness adventure in east Texas. The three Houstonians present were HCC trip organizer Ken McDowell, along with Joe Coker and John Rich.

The location of the river section is about a 2½ hour drive northeast of Houston, on Highway 7, between Crockett and Lufkin. Either Highway 59 or Interstate 45 can be used to make this drive pass pleasantly.

*(Click on the thumbnail images to see a full-screen version in a separate window)*

The event brought 312 people out to canoe a scenic 10-mile section of the Neches River, which winds its way through the Davy Crockett National Forest. There was an entry fee of \$30 per canoe, and that money bought you and your boat; a shuttle ride to and from the river, two T-shirts, and lunch after coming off the river.



**Location map**

Starting times were staggered in half-hour increments for groups of paddlers, so that the entire mob wouldn't be dumped onto the river all at once. The starting times ranged from 7:00 am to 10:00 am. After showing up at the Highway 7 rendezvous spot, we found the registration tent and picked up our wrist tags and T-shirts. From there, you bring your boat, gear and yourself to the appropriate tent labeled for your starting time. A steady stream of boat trailers and personnel van shuttles would pull up, load up and head out. The wait was short, and workers loaded the boats for you. All you had to do was climb into a van to be whisked to the put-in site, and your boat would already be there waiting for you.



**Getting started**

The shuttle to the put-in location traveled over dirt Forest Service roads, the numbers of which do not appear in online maps. You need a Forest Service map to follow those roads. And the numbers can change for the same road, depending upon which side of the river you are upon. But, since others were doing the driving for us on this trip, we didn't have to worry about getting lost.



**Close-up road map**



From this aerial photo of the Neches River, you can see that it is surrounded almost entirely by National Forest, with no development on the shoreline other than a few patches of pasture land.



**Aerial view**



**Canoe stack**

Upon arriving at the put-in location, the first thing you notice is this pile of canoes, stacked up like firewood, ready for people to rent. *"I'll take that one on the bottom row in the middle, please!"*

The put-in site is a one-lane Forest Service bridge, with a dirt boat ramp alongside. Some green mesh had been placed on the riverside ground, to provide firm footing and to keep down the mud on your shoes. The waterline contained a row of boys, which I dubbed "boat wranglers". They would snag the boats as they came down the ramp, pass them down to the riverside level bank next door, and help hold them steady while the occupants climbed aboard. A lady with a clipboard checked your registration number. In this photo, you see Joe Coker ready to push off and head downstream.



**The put-in site**

And with that out of the way, the Houston contingent of Ken, Joe & John, pushed away from the shore and the hordes of people, and began to enjoy some quiet river time.



**Ken McDowell**

Ken heads off in his brand new honey-yellow kevlar canoe.



**On the river**

Joe and Ken pass through a giant strainer.

The water level was low, and the flow rate was only 100 CFS, but the river is fairly narrow and there was some current to push you along. There were a large number of trees down in the river, and quite a few of them did require some maneuvering to zig-zag around them.







**Ken**



**Joe Coker**

I was surprised that with this huge number of boaters on the river, that someone hadn't gone through here with a chainsaw doing some preparatory work to reduce the hazards. And it was obvious that a great many of the people on the river were only novice canoeists.

The source of all the trees in the river was the usual - simple riverbank erosion undercutting the root system, to the point that the tree falls in.



**River logs**



**Exposed tree roots**

And since this section flows through a National Forest, there are plenty of trees along the riverbank to fall victim.

Not only was there a wide variety of boats, there was also a wide variety of people inside the boats: kids by themselves, fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, with their kids and grandkids, couples, young and old.



**Woof!**



**Four-in-one**

They were all friendly, pleasant, cooperative and having a good time. One of the unusual match-ups was this family of four, all riding on a single small kayak. In some boats, even the family dog got in on the act!

The river route was also well-organized, with mile-marker signs along the way, so you could track your progress. There were several people camped out on riverbank overlooks with mobile radio set-ups and portable radio antennae, that served as checkpoints to call for help if anyone encountered any trouble. And there were also several men in motorboats along the way, also ready to jump into action to assist anyone in need.

Gosh, these east Texas youngsters learn



some great outdoor skills while growing up out here. These boys know how to walk on water!

Well, okay, actually, there was a log about one-inch underneath the surface of the water, and the boys were standing up on top of it, which just made it *look* like they were walking on water.



**Walking on water?**

Here you see Ken getting an assist over the log from the boys, who readily jumped out of their own boats to volunteer to help a string of others get across.



**Ken**

The next bridge you see on the river is the Highway 7 take-out point, where there is a paved boat ramp.



**Take-out ahead**



**The take-out**

The boats piled-up at the take-out, as they arrived faster than they could be removed. Young boat-wranglers were present here too. The delay was that everyone seemed to want

to pull their boat in sideways, so they could step out without getting their feet wet. And that took up all the available non-muddy space, so that no one else could get in nose-first. And then on top of that, instead of immediately carrying the boats away to the grass next, they would proceed to untie everything and unload them right there too. A little more efficiency could have been conducted here, but what the heck, who's in a hurry? Another lady with a clipboard stands vigilant here to check you off the river, so they can keep track and make sure nobody's missing.

Once off the river, you head back to the original registration site, where a free lunch is waiting for you of hamburgers, baked beans and... peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream! A prize drawing was held based upon your meal ticket number, but I didn't get to see what was awarded.

In the parking area, I got a laugh out of this creative use of beach balls in a boat tie-down technique.

In summary, I had a good time seeing a stretch of river that is rarely traveled. But this



was my first experience with a large organized event. The mob of humanity was definitely different, and I think I prefer to share the outdoors with a smaller group.



### **Beach balls**

And as well-organized as things were, being the old grump that I am, I still had a few complaints: A large number of the people helping out, probably volunteers, apparently do not have familiarity with canoes and kayaks. On one shuttle, my boat was not secured properly on the trailer rack with the rubber bungee cords, and I stepped in to tighten things up and do it properly. The kid boat-wranglers actually got in my way, and prevented me from maneuvering the way I wanted to. Some helpers were dragging boats up on the rough asphalt boat ramp, abrading the bottoms. And others would pick up the front end of sit-atop kayaks by the handle, threatening to tip-over the occupant still aboard. Although there were plenty of eager helpers, you had to be assertive if the kind of help they were providing wasn't what you wanted. But then, I'm an independent old cuss who likes doing everything myself, except for when it comes to lifting my 80-lb. battleship up on top of a vehicle. "*Help!*" And there were plenty of people on hand willing to help me do that too.

All in all, it was a pleasant experience and a great day on the water.

**The End**



# Ratcliff Lake

June 5th

by

John Rich

On the Friday afternoon of June 5th, Ken McDowell, Joe Coker and John Rich met at the Ratcliff Lake campground, as a staging area for the Neches River Rendezvous the following morning. (See the separate report for that event.)

This is a National Forest Service park in the Davy Crockett National Forest of east Texas, between the towns of Crockett and Lufkin. It takes about a 2½ hour drive to reach this spot.

*(Click once on the thumbnail photos to display a full-screen version in a separate window)*



**Park entrance**



**Location map**

Here is how the Forest Service web site describes the park:

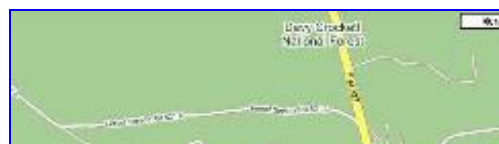
*"The Ratcliff Lake Recreation Area, built in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, surrounds a 45-acre lake. The lake was once a log pond and source of water for the Central Coal and Coke Company Sawmill which logged the area from 1902 to 1920. The area offers recreation visitors camping, picnicking, a swimming beach and bathhouse, concession stand, an amphitheater, an interpretive forest trail, showers, boating and fishing in a beautiful forest setting featured in regional magazines."*

The Park's web site is here:

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/davy\\_crockett/ratcliff.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/davy_crockett/ratcliff.shtml)

I believe most people tend to think of State and National Parks as the most premier options for outdoor recreation. But lately I've been visiting a few of these lesser known Forest Service parks, and they are true gems. Keep them in mind and seek them out when planning your trips. They're as good as any of the other more well-known parks, and less crowded.

As you can see from the map, the Forest Service road surrounds the circumference of the lake, which is dotted with campsites. For some reason it's called Lee Lake in online



maps. The sites are several hundred feet apart from each other, so you're not crowded. And each site has direct lake-front access and view, as well as a picnic table, campfire ring, lantern pole, and nearby bathrooms and showers.



**Close-up map**



**Aerial view**

Here's the aerial view of the lake. It's not very big, and from paddling it, I envisioned it in my head as being shaped like a giant footprint from a three-toed dinosaur. But from this aerial view, it looks more like bunny ears. Although the aerial photo doesn't quite match my ground-level image, I'm going to stick with the dinosaur toes description anyway, just because I like it.

At the south end of the lake, the straight line you see is an earthen dam, which seems to have been built at the confluence of three water drainages, to form the lake. Hence, the three toes of the dinosaur. At the west end of the dam is a concrete spillway, to maintain the water level.

The headless canoeist of Sleepy Hollow carries his boat through the trees down to the waterline.



**Headless Canoeist**

Photo by Joe Coker



**Campside boat launch**

After setting up camp, we still had hours of daylight remaining, so we decided to get our boats and go explore the lake. It was only a few feet from the campsite parking to the edge of the water. The lake is only 45 acres in size, and can be explored in about two hours, which is what we did. It was fun to follow the shoreline, poking into nooks and crannies, and watching birds and fish.

The bottom of the lake was filled with that fuzzy plant that you often see in home aquariums, which Joe identifies as elodea. Some states consider it an undesirable weed, but it also provides many healthy benefits to a lake.





Once on the water from our campsite, this was the view looking down one dinosaur toe towards the dam.



**Lake view**

Joe Coker in his sit-atop kayak.



**Ken McDowell**

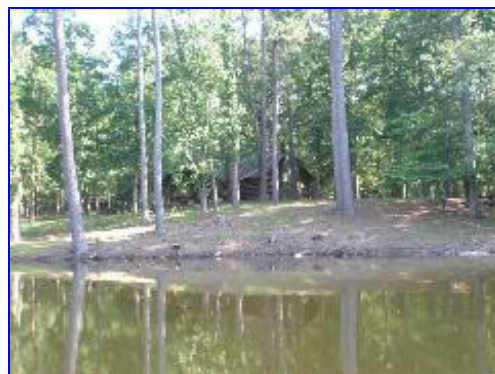


**Joe Coker**

Ken McDowell made the maiden voyage of his brand spanking new honey-yellow kevlar canoe. That's always a great feeling. Well, at least I think it would be - I've never had a brand new one. In this very cool and unusual photo, you see the sun shining through his canoe, making it look opaque and revealing the foam reinforcing ribs and other thicker layers. His boat is 16' 6" long, and weighed only 34 lbs. Wow. Color me honey-yellow with envy. There was no prohibition in the Commandments about coveting thy neighbor's boat, was there?

There is a public swimming area, roped off from the remainder of the lake, along with boat rentals, and a concession stand. All in a bucolic setting with a log cabin in the woods.

I've run across the work of the depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps in many of the parks I've visited, and their handiwork never ceases to amaze me.



**Log cabin in the woods**

After exploring the lake and putting the boats back on top our vehicles, we settled in for the evening. Everyone brought a snack to share with others, so we had shrimp cocktail, roasted peanuts in the shell, and a whole pineapple. What luxury! For dinner each of us brought a potato which was baked on the campfire, and steaks grilled on Ken's small grill. Heck, I don't eat this good at home, with all my modern conveniences.



**Dinner**



**Setting sun**

The sun settles toward the horizon through the tall trees. You can see two more tents off in the distance, showing how far apart the campsites are. There is no overcrowding here.

Ken cuts firewood to keep the comfy campfire going. The only dead wood we found was identified by Ken as ironwood, and I decided that it was aptly named, because when you try to saw through it, it's as hard as iron.

I don't know what all those specks are in the photo - could my camera lens actually be that dirty? (gasp!) Upon reflection, I'm wondering if maybe it's just the camera flash reflecting off of specks of sawdust floating in the air from Ken's furious sawing. Hmmm.



**Cutting firewood**



**Campfire**

We stored up enough firewood to keep a small fire going while we sat and chatted into the evening, with the sound of a chorus of frogs in the background, who were also chatting with each other. Unfortunately, we also had a chorus of country music from one group of campers hundreds of yards away - they were the type of folks that like to use parks for noisy weekend parties, rather than quiet communion with nature. I much prefer the frogs.

I understand why they put a large, deep fire ring here, to contain ashes and embers. But that deep ring also spoils the pleasure of sitting nearby and watching the red hot coals. As it was, sitting off to the side away from the heat, we could see only the flickering tips of flames above the top edge of the ring.

Eventually we drifted off to our tents to sleep, as we would be getting up early to break camp and head for the Neches River Rendezvous, 12 miles away. I took the time to wander down to the water and take a photo of the wispy morning "steam" rising off the water, as a singing frog bid me goodbye, and jumped in the water leaving only ripples behind.



**Morning fog**

Ratcliff Lake - a great place to spend some time in the woods and get away from the big city!



**The End**

# **Buffalo Bayou Revisted**

## **Memorial Mews to Beltway 8 Saturday, June 6th**

by  
**Donna Grimes**

As you may remember, at the end of April Houston had a tremendous rain storm that resulted in the cancellation of the Buffalo River Trails Dedication on April 28. The bayou had risen to over 5000 cfs. By May 14th, it had dropped to 1300 cfs and Christy Long, Harmon Everett and I ran it from Memorial Mews to Beltway 8, a mere six miles that took us just a couple of hours.

Yes, it was high and you had to be on your toes and KNOW how to react to fast moving water, out of the banks and into the trees.

We only had to portage around one downed tree and it was quite easy.



**Harmon walking around the only tree encountered at 1300 cfs**



**Picture of the Confluence of Langham Creek and Buffalo Bayou at 1300 cfs**

*(Click once on the thumbnail photos to view a full-screen version in a separate window)*

Knowing the bayou in that 6 mile stretch and having only one portage, Christy scheduled a Novice level trip for Saturday, June 6th. She had over 20 people on her list – many new to paddling, so she asked Bill and me to come help her. It was a good thing as this NOVICE trip became a trip through many strainers and many portages across logs.

The total of 21 paddlers and 18 boats took off by 10 AM, dry, clean and ready to face this new adventure.

We had divided into two groups – with Christy leading 9 boats and Bill leading the other 9. However, people were having trouble getting into their boats and Harmon jumped into the water and stabilized boats as each person got into his/hers.



**Picture of 21 paddlers ready to head down Buffalo Bayou**

We encountered the typical wildlife of the Houston area: turtles, gar, water snakes, blue herons, lesser green herons, and even the dreaded river monster that Carol Bell swore she saw.



**Harmon Everett helping others**



**A beautiful beginning to the paddle on Buffalo Bayou**

**Harmon Everett helping other paddlers.**

However, soon the debris became difficult to negotiate, and the climbs, scrambles, and near tip-overs began.



**Paddling through the logs.**



**Harmon Everett guides Alex and Honey around a strainer.**

Often, we could not go through but had to go over.

Since we were divided into two groups, going up a bank and through mud meant the second group could see where the first had added more water to the mud, and our second group sunk deeper as we took boats around. Melody Saueressig got stuck so deep she couldn't move until Bill and her husband Joe pulled her out.



**Bill helps Joe over the logs.**



**Kelly Motter pulls boat through the mud trying hard not to sink.**

The quick, little run that we experienced in May, was turning into a long, hard run in June. Less water, but harder to negotiate around.



Then... I saw the tree that Christy and I and Harmon had walked around back in May... There it was... a good ten feet above us.



**Same log as above but on May 13 trip.**



**The log was a good 10 feet above our heads, or maybe more.**

Our intrepid group arrived at the take-out dirty and tired... and asking when we were going again. That's the kind of group I like!

**The End**