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Middle Fork of the Salmon River

Not much has changed along the Middle Fork of the Salmon since the days the Tukudeka, or Sheepeater Indians, lived here. Flowing through the heart of the largest wilderness area in the contiguous United States, the Middle Fork is a river of superlative beauty. It has shaped its course through a land so rugged that any attempts at settlement have failed. There are no roads leading to its banks, and little remains of man's brief presence other than prehistoric cave paintings and dilapidated log cabins.

Our put-in point at Boundary Creek is 6000 feet above sea level, not far from the melting snows that through the ages have carved this splendid canyon waterway. Surrounded by a verdant conifer forest scenting the high mountain air, on waters that sparkle like a diamond, we begin our journey.

Whitewater: The river drops rapidly, descending some 28 feet per mile. The first miles are narrow and challenging. As we travel, tributary creeks bring more and more water to the river, which grows wider and deeper. The Middle Fork quadruples in water volume from the start of our trip to the end. Throughout the 100-mile course of our trip, we encounter over 100 rapids while dropping a total of 3000 feet in elevation. Many of the rapids remain unnamed and pose little difficulty, while others have earned names that boatmen speak with reverence. Sulphur Slide, Velvet Falls, Powerhouse, Tappan Falls, Haystack, Redside and Rubber rapids are just a few. Overall, the Middle Fork is a frolicking whitewater classic providing plenty of splash and lots of laughter.

Natural and Cultural History: Complementing the whitewater that punctuates the trip is the sheer immensity and opulence of nature. In this unspoiled land, we may see wildlife along our way, for this is the home of big horn sheep, deer, elk, mountain goats, river otter, eagles, hawks and falcons. We'll also see numerous songbirds and waterfowl.

During the day, we stop and take short hikes to view rock paintings left by the native peoples that once lived here. Archaeologists have identified over 120 archaeological sites, many with rock art. As our guides offer thoughts about these sites, it's not hard to imagine the oneness with the earth these people must have known. The river is also rich in pioneer history as many homesteaders, miners and ranchers made their way into this remote country in the late 1800s and early 1900s after the better, more fertile land on the prairies had already been taken. Today you can wander through their cabins and marvel at their hard work and imaginative resources.

As late afternoon approaches on each day on the river, we make camp. In the day's remaining light, there's plenty of time to walk, climb a mountain, throw out a fishing line, read a book, take a dip, watch for birds or soak in the rays of the sun. You are free to share with others or find a time of solitude. Along the river on the upper half of your trip there are several **natural hot springs**. We'll stop at a couple of these during the day and usually make camp near one so that everyone can enjoy soaking under a star-filled sky.

Continuing on, in the middle portion of our adventure, the canyon opens into huge valleys and granitic mountains rise to a sky of magnificent dimension. In places, the river becomes wide and shallow, and we enjoy transparent views to a golden-pebbled bottom. In others, it narrows to form deep pools of blue. Native cutthroat and rainbow trout swim beneath us. In order to preserve this fishery, only catch-and-release fishing is allowed using single barbless hooks. Typically the fishing is very good, especially at lower water flows. (Ask about our special September fishing trips.)

During the last two days of our adventure, we enter Impassable Canyon. For 27 miles, we are in a narrow, granite-walled gorge of spectacular dimension. The constriction of the river coupled with the large volume of water makes for the biggest rapids of our journey. After lunch on the last day of our trip, we arrive at the confluence with the Main Salmon River. A few more miles find us at our take-out, with memories that will last forever and experiences worth more than any treasure.

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Setting the High Watermark for Outdoor Adventure

When to Go? Because the Middle Fork has no dams the water is highest when early-summer warmth melts the snow from the high peaks. The winter's snowpack affects each season's water levels. Therefore June to early July, in general, is the time to come if you have previous rafting experience and are seeking high water thrills. Mid-July brings somewhat lower flows as the bulk of the snowmelt has already run-off and we welcome novice rafters. The river gradually gets lower as the summer passes, bringing incredible clarity and magic to the crystal waters. Latter August and September are wonderful times to be on the river as few other people are around, the colors of the hills become more radiant, and fishing is at its best.

Why Choose ROW? Every river company takes a little different approach to running the Middle Fork. Our philosophy is to provide you with the kind of trip you want, so let us know if you have any special interests or requests. If you like to hike a lot, we'll make extra stops and provide that opportunity. If you're keen on fishing, you can do so from an oar-powered raft, or hire a special 2-person fishing raft or drift boat (for an extra charge). If you have something special you want to bring - a cello? A case of your favorite wine? Whatever - we'll make room. Our aim is to please, and we do our best, while maintaining a lively, fun atmosphere in camp and on the river.

ROW Guides: There is no question that on any trip, the guides are the most important factor in terms of your safety, enjoyment, and ultimately, the success of the trip. For this reason each of our guides is an exceptional person, willing and eager to share, teach, listen, learn, laugh, play, discuss, and above all, work hard to provide you with an informative, relaxed, spontaneous adventure. With one guide per three-four guests, you're sure to get the attention you deserve. In order to provide you with the richest experience possible, we divide ourselves into meal crews, meaning that while two or three guides are preparing dinner the other two or three guides are free to spend time with you whether its to show you the way to a nearby hot spring, give a fly-fishing lesson, or just to sit and visit. They are the main reason many of our guests return to ROW time and time again and wouldn't even think of traveling with another rafting company. (References gladly provided.)

Beyond the River: One of the reasons that the Middle Fork is such a fabulous trip is the incredible variety of things to do and see along the way. ROW makes a point of stopping and taking advantage of as many of these things as possible. As we float we tell you about the early pioneers who lived here and we stop to hike to at least one of their old homestead cabins. We talk about the Indians and take you to at least three of their rock art sites. If you want more, please ask, as we know at least a couple dozen different places. We stop to soak in hot springs and always try to make camp at one of them. We plan our trip so that on the fifth day we don't have many river miles. This is the day we stop and explore Waterfall Creek and maybe lead some folks under the falls. After lunch we hike up to see the magical Veil Falls. And, there are a few other 'secret' surprises we have for you.

Not only do we show you these places, we help you understand them better. If you're interested, we'll tell you about the geology and plants and animals. We believe strongly that deepening understanding builds greater appreciation. And we're hoping our love of this canyon will be contagious.

Luxury Camping: In order to make your trip run as smoothly and comfortably as possible, we use a large 22 foot 'sweep boat' (a pontoon raft custom built for ROW in 1990 in Pennsylvania) to carry the bulk of the camping gear, food, etc. This allows our smaller oar-powered rafts to be lighter and more maneuverable which makes for a safer ride with more bounce and splash. The sweep boat arrives early to camp and gets the kitchen set up as well as the spacious 4-person tents (one for every two people) that ROW provides. When we arrive in camp all you have to do is carry your personal gear (stored in a ROW-provided easy-to-use waterproof bag) to the tent of your choice and roll out your sleeping bag, flannel liner and thick, self-inflating foam sleeping pad (also provided by ROW). This gives you an extra half-hour of time for doing something you'd enjoy rather than setting up a tent. (Note: In rare circumstances we may have a trip on the Middle Fork with less than 13 guests. In this case, due to economic and logistical reasons, we may not run our 'sweep boat.' On these smaller trips guests and gear travel together down river. Our guides are still happy to set up your tent if you like, or you may enjoy doing it yourself.)

Camp Time: To give you the opportunity to explore on your own, we generally arrive in camp no later than 4:00 each day so you have time to go hiking, fishing, read a book, visit a nearby hot spring, or whatever you might want. Then, around 5:30, we serve a lavish hors d'oeuvres spread as dinner preparation continues.

Meals: The quality of our food reflects the quality of the wilderness environment in the Middle Fork canyon. We hand-select the freshest fruits and vegetables we can find and pack them carefully in huge ice-coolers. Likewise, these coolers

carry fresh dairy products and meats. From these ingredients we prepare bountiful, healthy meals. Sustainably harvested wild Alaskan Salmon served with a fresh garden salad; Prime Rib combined with a fresh Chilean salad and Idaho mashed potatoes or made-on-the-river lasagna is a few possible entrees. Big salads of vegetables and fruit add color and variety to every meal. Desserts are made each evening in our Dutch ovens and range from authentic cobbler and pineapple upside-down cake. We serve juice each morning and moderate amounts of bottled wine with dinner. We also provide two beers and two sodas or juices per person per day. There's always plenty of cold water, lemonade mix, tea, coffee and cocoa. You're welcome to bring your own beverages or alcohol as well. We always have plenty of ice to keep your drinks cold.

Your Choice of Craft: In addition to the sweep boat that carries all the camping gear, we use two other kinds of river craft. The traditional raft is a self-bailing oar-powered raft, which we row, using two oars. These are 16 feet long. (Many companies use 18-22 foot rafts, which take a good deal of the ride out of the rapids.) We also offer a smaller, self-bailing 14-foot paddle raft, where 4 to 6 people paddle along with our guide. Many people enjoy trying both during the course of the trip. Due to the nature of a river trip we have a limited number of boats available on each trip; therefore, we encourage all guests to share the available crafts. (Note: On the few trips we operate with less than 13 guests, we may not have enough people interested in paddling to have a paddle raft along. This decision is based on exactly how many guests want to paddle, what percentage of time they want to paddle, and possible logistical constraints based on water levels and other factors. We will still have duckies on smaller trips, if requested.)

ROW provides wetsuits and wetsuit booties for all trips departing June through July 6th at no extra charge. While you may not need to wear these if the weather is hot and sunny, they can make all the difference on a cool day. We encourage you to bring a camera, which will be easily accessible on the oar-rafts from the waterproof camera boxes we provide.

The Last Supper: Another small touch ROW adds is the inclusion of a farewell dinner on our last evening in Salmon with ROW guests and guides. This dinner brings a nice "closure" to the week of adventure everyone has shared. (All-inclusive except for alcoholic beverages.)

Signing Up: Call our office first. We're happy to tell you who else is on the trip. Then, complete our trip application form and send it along with a \$500.00 per person non-refundable deposit.

Logistics: Our trips are designed to begin in Stanley and end in Salmon. While this may seem a little inconvenient, we do it for a reason. If a trip includes transportation back to Stanley at the end of the trip, you must be off the river no later than noon (and many companies are off by 10am!) as it is a two-hour drive to Salmon, plus another three hours to Stanley. ROW doesn't believe that you should pay for a day on the river, but end up on a bus for most of it. Thus, we enjoy lunch on the river our last day, arriving at the take-out about 2-3pm and to the town of Salmon by around 5pm.

Meeting Time: ROW will make your pre- and post-trip hotel reservations for you and this will be reflected on your invoice. The evening before the trip we stay in Stanley, Idaho at the Mountain Village Resort. At **7pm Mtn Time** ROW's Team Leader will meet you for a one-hour orientation, to answer last minute questions and give you your waterproof bags to pack. This is an important meeting, so please be on time. The next morning, we meet at the designated time set by your Team Leader and transport you by bus about two hours to the put-in point at Boundary Creek. Please have breakfast on your own before we meet.

At the end of the trip, we return you to the Stagecoach Inn in the town of Salmon by 5pm where we encourage you to spend the night and enjoy our hosted, relaxed "farewell dinner" with other trip members and the ROW crew. The Stagecoach Inn will be happy to provide transportation to the airport the morning after your stay.

*Note: On a typical year, the first 23 miles of the Middle Fork become too low to float by late July or early August. In this case, we use a backcountry air taxi service to fly all our guests from Stanley to an alternative put-in point at a place called Indian Creek, where there is no road access. **The additional expense for this flight (about \$150 per person) will be billed to each trip member.** The same situation sometimes occurs on early June trips due to too much water and/or the put-in road being closed due to snow. In any case, we still float for scheduled number of days and none of your off-river travel plans will change.*

If You Drive: Leave your car at the motel in Stanley at the beginning of the trip. River Shuttles will drive your car from Stanley to Salmon. You can either call River Shuttles directly before your trip to prearrange a shuttle at 208-756-4188 or you can arrange the shuttle at our orientation meeting the night before your trip. The cost is about \$115, not including gas, payable by check or cash directly to the shuttle company the evening before the trip. The Mountain Village Lodge charges an additional \$15 per vehicle left for shuttling.

If You Fly: The nearest major airport is Boise and you need to arrive in Boise the day before the launch dates listed, arriving no later than 4-5pm. From Boise you have two options: 1) Take an air taxi from Boise to Stanley and then from

Salmon to Boise at the end of the trip. The cost is roughly \$400 including tax. Please call Sawtooth Flying Service directly at 800-798-6105 to make these reservations. 2) Rent a car and drive about 3 hours to Stanley. Then have it shuttled to Salmon for about \$115, not including gas, payable by check or cash directly to the shuttle company the evening before the trip. The Mountain Village Lodge charges an additional \$15 per vehicle left for shuttling. Then your car will be awaiting you at trip's end. It's about a 6-hour drive back to Boise from Salmon.

You should not book your return flight out of Boise until after 8:30am the day after your trip gets off the water. (Example- On the July 6th trip, you'd fly to Boise on July 5, be on the river July 6-11, spend the night of the 11th in Salmon, then the morning of the 12th take the air taxi flight to Boise, and fly out of Boise sometime after 8:30am.) The air taxi service will take you from Salmon to Boise (1.5 hour flight) whenever you need to leave, based on your commercial flight from Boise and the schedules of any other passengers who might have flights within an hour or two of yours. Exact flight time from Salmon to Boise will not be confirmed until the evening before the flight.

Fly/Drive Option: If you want to visit other places in the region, groups of four or more may find good economy in chartering an air taxi plane at the end of the trip to take them from Salmon to some other location, such as Missoula, Montana (on the way to Glacier National Park) or Jackson Hole (near Yellowstone) where you can pick up a rental car. In this case, you will need an air ticket that takes you from your home to Boise, and allows you to return home from Missoula or Jackson Hole. Spokane, Washington is just 4 hours west of Missoula and is another common airline gateway, so a nice loop is to get a car in Missoula, drive to Glacier and end in Spokane.

Extra Luggage? If you have luggage that you won't need on the trip there are a couple of options. 1) You may place it on the ROW vehicle where it will be awaiting your arrival at the hotel in Salmon. 2) If you are driving to Stanley leave your luggage in your car, as it will be awaiting your arrival in Salmon.

Last Minute Phone Numbers: Please call us if you have any questions or if you need to reach ROW at the last minute, try our office first at (208) 765-0841 or 800-451-6034. If you need to get a message to the Mountain Village Resort in Stanley, the number is (208) 774-3661 or 800-843-5475. The Stagecoach Inn in Salmon, the number is (208) 756-2919.

Suggested Reading: See ROW's complete reading list for the Middle Fork. An excellent book about the river and its human history is called The Middle Fork, which you can order from ROW for \$22 including postage and handling. We'll have a copy in our River Library as well. (No card required).

Gratuities: Here are some helpful guidelines on tipping. Your guide is a paid professional. Tips are appropriate and accepted only if we exceeded your expectations. Whether you tip and how much you tip should depend on your satisfaction with the trip, your feelings about tipping, and your financial means. If you believe your guide deserves a tip, a suggested range is from 7-12% of your trip cost. If you had the time of your life, then the sky is the limit! We also appreciate your comments. We use your feedback to recognize extraordinary guest service and to discover areas where we can make improvements. Our goal is to exceed your expectations! (P.S. Let us know if you found these guidelines appropriate or helpful.) Tips can be given to the "ROW Team Leader", who will distribute equally among the crew.