

Attachment F

Zoar Valley Whitewater Newspaper Article

W H I T E W A T E R R U S H

ESCAPE



with
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GOWANDA — We have “Zoar weather”: temperatures barely above freezing and overcast skies. But things will soon heat up on Cattaraugus Creek along the border of Cattaraugus and Erie counties.

“This is an adrenaline trip,” promises Kevin Kretschmer, co-owner of Adventure Calls Outfitters Inc., a whitewater rafting company out of Le Roy, Genesee County, that paddles through the Zoar Valley.

It’ll take some time to get the buzz.

We descend the Cattaraugus’ South Branch, which is more rock than roll. Colliding with a sharp rock, it punctures one of the four air cylinders in one of our two rafts. We will limp the rest of the way at three-quarter power, making the trip through the Grand Finale Rapid on Cattaraugus’ Main Branch a bit of a whiteknucker.

That stretch promises to swamp us — guide Scott MacLeod, photographer Shawn Dowd and me. None of us wants to go swimming in the icy water. It’s been enough having the waves lap against our wetsuits, keeping us properly chilled over the course of this three-hour tour.

“Zoar Valley’s not for everybody,” says Kretschmer, 40, who is guiding a raft with Inge Poulsen, 20, and Laila Kruger, 20, both from Denmark. “The river can be intimidating and the weather can be bad. But if you’re looking for a thrilling ride and don’t mind the cold, this is the place.”

Zoar Valley is a little-known state forest preserve offering a sense of remoteness that is hard to find in western New York.

Ten years ago, MacLeod saw a want ad that read: “Whitewater raft guides needed. Will train.” He’d been going to Canada for whitewater for a decade.

“That was it for me,” he says about the advertisement that introduced him to the Cattaraugus. “Why pay for something I could get paid to do?”

The Cattaraugus “is one of the best-kept



SHAWN DOWD staff photographer

Scott MacLeod gives instructions to Inge Poulsen and Laila Kruger of Denmark before their first whitewater adventure. Above, Poulsen keeps her face above the crashing water while rafting through the Grand Finale on Cattaraugus Creek.

secrets” around, says MacLeod, 47, of Buffalo. But serious paddlers have located this area. “When the water is high, kayakers come from all over,” MacLeod says.

The water gets high — 4 to 6 feet is optimal — when it rains.

“This is one of the best rides in the Northeast when it’s four (feet) or above,” Kretschmer says. “When this water gets high, it’ll scare the life out of you.”

Six feet and above is impassible in a raft. The gauge measuring the creek’s depth (and posted on the Internet) is in Gowanda, Erie County, where boaters are spit out of the Grand Finale Rapid.

“A couple months ago, the river got up to 8.5,” Kretschmer says, explaining how the high water rearranged the bed of the creek, which Adventure Calls has run for 20 years. “Some of my staff says it’s the best it’s ever been.”

The day we ride the Cattaraugus, the creek level is 2.79 feet — an average day. But a cloudburst or a thunderstorm can change the complexion of the creek.

It can be deep today, shallow tomorrow. Or vice versa. Or do all of the above on the same day.

Guides have found themselves on a

different creek between the time they put in and when they take out 9/10 miles downstream.

The second half of the rafting trip along the Main Branch of the Cattaraugus is where most of the rapids are found, from

Curly, Larry & Moe to Cruncher (a stretch that used to have a reputation as a guide ejector) to the Tannery to Slot to the Grand Finale (a true Class III: high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open boat).

By the time we reach the Grand Finale, the cold water has taken the joy out of the ride for some. But this stretch of water gets everyone’s attention and gives a reason to smile.

“When the water’s high, they (all the rapids) are like that,” MacLeod says after we take the first raft through Grand Finale.

MacLeod, Dowd and I walk back along the shore to our crippled craft. I get to make a second run through the best section of the creek.

The wind here is often blowing in your face. Zoar weather.

“We’ve had trips where the people come off the river and we never see them again,” Kretschmer says.

It’s over their heads.

The thrill of sinking down into a wave, of having numbingly cold water splash on your face and the wind freeze your cheeks immediately, is a refreshing blast for us. We get wet in our wounded boat, but we don’t go swimming. In the end, Kretschmer is right about the adrenaline flowing. □

Adventure Calls

In whitewater-speak, the Genesee River in Letchworth State Park offers rapids that are Class I (moving water with small waves) and II (waves up to three feet). It’s a nice entry-level paddle that’s good for families. Cattaraugus Creek is Class II and III (high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open boat). The Salmon River in Oswego County is also II and III.

Whiter water

To find out more about the whitewater in New York state, visit the American Whitewater Association’s Web site at:

www.americanwhitewater.org/river/state/NY

Rafting trips

Adventure Calls trips include:

Genesee River: Sunday through Nov. 11 on weekends and holidays, water permitting. (Also, Tuesdays through Fridays, June 26 to Aug. 31.) Cost is \$27.50.

Cattaraugus Creek: Began last weekend and continues Saturdays and Sundays through May 20, water permitting. \$35, includes hot soup on the river and pizza after rafting.

Salmon River: The spring season runs through April 22 on Saturdays and Sundays. Cost is \$35. Summer dam releases are scheduled for June 23-24, July 7-8 and 21-22, Aug. 4-5, and Sept. 1-2. \$40.

For more information, call (585) 343-4710 or visit:

www.adventure-calls.com

What you need

Before Memorial Day, rafters need to dress warmly. Synthetic and wool clothing — not cotton — is suggested. A ski hat and wool gloves are necessary. Wetsuits (\$5), a wet top to wear over the full-body suit (\$5), wet socks (\$2.50) and wet mitts to wear over your gloves (\$2.50) can be rented. □