Paddling the Green

River adventure tame but still exhilarating

By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

OK, so it isn't as easy to paddle a whitewater river as it is to take on a lake or a pond, but it is a lot of fun and, if you pick the right river, you can take the kids along, too.

The Green River, located just over the border near Saluda, N.C., is just such a stream and is easy enough for all but the smallest kids. Just ask the folks who have floated it, or Tim Bell, the co-owner of Green River Adventures with his wife, Sarah.

"The lower Green gives you just enough action to feel as if you've been on a whitewater stream and get a sense of adventure," said Bell. "These are Class I and II rapids, pretty easy stuff, and we take every precaution. Every trip is under the supervision of one of our experienced guides who herd you down the river and keep you out of trouble."

There are sections of the Green on the upper river that require a great deal of skill and are only used by experienced kayakers, Bell said. "The take-out for this section also requires about a quarter-mile hike up the very steep sides of the Green River Gorge. There is also a section that is rated as Class V, no one should take on that section."

Leaving the outfitters shop in downtown Saluda, you quickly pass beneath Interstate 26 and take a sharp right onto Green Cove Road, and you'll quickly find out why this stretch of river is so popular. The views from this section of Green Cove Road reach out for more than 65 miles. On a clear day the mouth of the Linville Gorge and Grandfather Mountain are visible, as is the Green River Gorge itself.

It is about 1,000 feet down to the river from here. After a few miles of gut-wrenching hairpin turns, you level out at the river just downstream from the Class V section.

How far you have to go from here depends on the "bubble," a great slug of water released from Duke Power's Lake Summit at Tuxedo, N.C., which gives paddlers enough water to pass downstream. The Green River is a tail race and catching the bubble is how outfitters are able to use it.

Our guide for the day was Patrick "Paddy" Brand, a 28-year-old former high school teacher from Christchurch, New Zealand.

Brand quit his teaching post at the first of the year to come to Saluda and work for the Bells. An avid kayaker, he said the best part of the job is "being on the back doorstep to the Green River Narrows."

Brand plans to move on later this year to hike in Africa and Nepal.

A great bear of an Irishman, he is an accomplished paddler. At one part of the trip he actually towed two, two-man kayaks for a couple of miles.

Paddling the river is both easier and more difficult than expected.

I've paddled for years on flat water in lower South Carolina and didn't expect any problems, but those bodies of water were deep, flat, and didn't have a current. The Green is fairly shallow and moves briskly over a boulder-strewn bed. Hanging up periodically is to be expected when the current kicks you this way, or that.

The first third of the trip went well, until we hung on a boulder and the river pinned us there. At this point, I fell back on the old habits of a flat-water paddler and used my paddle to try and free the kayak.

You're supposed to hop up and down and let the current free you.

I quickly exhausted myself, and Brand came to the rescue.

Seeing how tired I'd gotten, Paddy hooked his tiny professional kayak to our rubber novice one. He also hooked up to the two-man boat of a grandmother from Beaufort along with her teen-age granddaughter.

He towed us both for about two miles with great skill and greater strength until he cut us loose to paddle ourselves to the take-out point.



An excursion sets out on the Green River in Saluda, N.C. GREEN RIVER ADVENTURES/PROVIDED

HOW TO GET THERE

Take U.S. 25 north to the intersection with U.S. 176. Get off on U.S. 176 and turn left. Follow 176 through downtown Saluda and stop at Green River Adventures, 111 E. Main St. Phone 1-800-335-1530. More information at greenriveradventures.com.

