BREAKING (

Thrills on the water

Chattooga River rafting excursion is still the ultimate fun adventure for families

By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

In the grand scheme of outdoor adventure, nothing gives the whole family the experience that rafting provides, particularly on the Chattooga River.

The Chattooga has changed during the past few decades. Protected as a Wild and Scenic River since 1974, the Chattooga has become a popular destination for outdoorsmen, rafters and kayakers, as well as hikers. It is a crowded place today, so much so that the forest service has considered usage restrictions.

Yet since James Dickey wrote his landmark novel about rafting the river in 1970, the Chattooga has been known as a rafter's river. A place to challenge one's self against a force of nature.

Increasingly, it is a place for family fun, said Dave Perrin, Chattooga River manager for the Nantahala Outdoor Center. Perrin has seen 40 seasons pass on the river and, without much argument, is the grand old man of the stream.

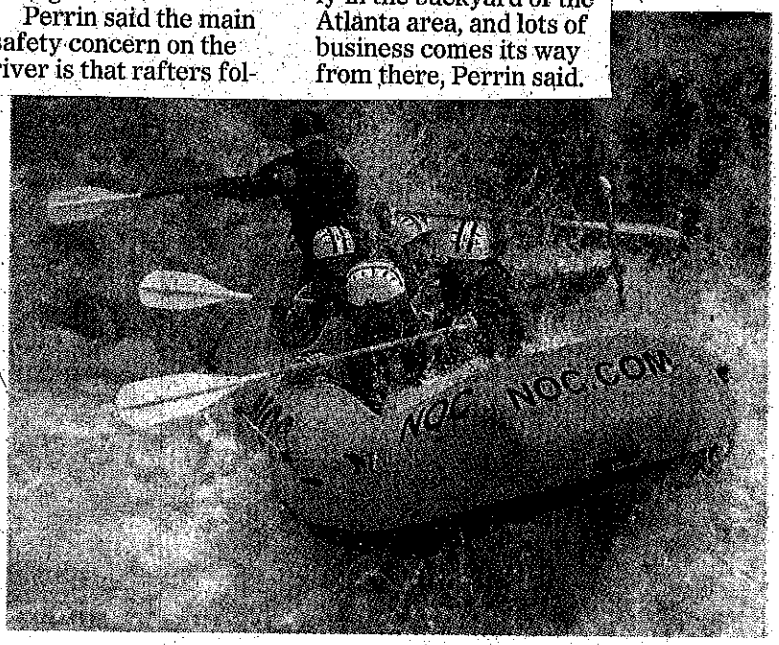
"We're extremely family-friendly here," Perrin said. "There are sections of the river that are appropriate for younger children where we do a lot of swimming and wading, and there are sections where the rapids are much more challenging, and we recommend those for older kids and adults."

Originally from Augusta, Perrin attended Wofford College and started working on the river while in school. "I'm sort of like a salmon; I migrated upstream, but I never left.

"My kids were raised on the river. There is a pool just upstream from the U.S. 76 bridge on the lower end of Section 3 where we used to take the kids to play," he said. "It is a wonderful spot with lots of calm water. These are the kinds of places we like to take the younger kids."

Perrin said the main safety concern on the river is that rafters follow guides' instructions. The outdoors company's website notes Chattooga guides receive industry-leading training.

The river is practically in the backyard of the Atlanta area, and lots of business comes its way from there, Perrin said.



Sections of the river where the rapids are more challenging are recommended for older children and adults.
NANTAHALA OUTDOOR CENTER/PROVIDED

From Greenville too, as outdoor adventure really starts to take hold in the area.

The heyday of rafting the Chattooga was in the 1990s, he said. That was when it saw the largest numbers of rafters. Today the business is steady, and folks who love the stream come back year after year.

Church groups, like a Catholic group from Georgia, are among returning customers, Perrin said. "That group comes year after year to enjoy the river."