

President's Message

Spencer Muse

All of them are special...

Lovely. It was my first boating day of 2010, a sunny but chilly January afternoon trip on the class II Nantahala, a river I have literally paddled hundreds of times. My boating gloves were not gripping the shaft of my paddle, so I had taken them off and my hands were freezing. I was discovering that my new drytop wasn't really very dry at all. I was paddling in a group of four: me, two of my regular paddling pals, and some random stranger who we had just met at the put-in. It was shaping up to be a peachy day. My apologies to any readers who are missing the sarcasm gene.

Cue the eerie flashback music. At this time last January I was stuck at home with a blown out knee waiting for a surgery that would keep me out of my boat for months and severely limit my boating for the entire year. Ask any of your paddling friends who have had to give up the sport for any significant length of time, regardless of the reason, how depressing it is to be stuck on the sidelines (or should that be shorelines?) while everyone else is exploring rivers up and down the east coast. And ask them how blissful- yes, blissful- it was to *finally* get back in their boat.

Last year was a big eye-opener for me, making it perfectly clear just how central paddling was in my life. There was the obvious missing piece that I expected: the fifty or so days a year I typically spend on the river had to be filled with something. But there were also social and emotional holes for which I was not really ready. Paddling trips tend to be flanked by a morning and evening of fun times with friends. It took a conscious effort on my part, and on the part of my friends, to make sure we kept in touch. Paddling makes friendships work so much easier! Then there was the mental piece. Paddling is my ultimate outlet, a way to escape from the stresses of every day life and focus on something that challenges me, entertains me, and rejuvenates me. Not only did I find those everyday pressures building, but they were compounded with the physical and mental demands of the rehab process. And to top things off, I found myself stressing about the fact that I wasn't boating! It was definitely not pretty.

So...back to my day on the Nantahala. It was fantastic. The river was beautiful and we were the only group taking advantage of it that afternoon; those of you who have caught the Nanty on an empty day understand what a difference it makes. I got to spend the day with close friends doing something we all love. The random stranger turned out to be a great boater and super-nice guy we hope to paddle with again. It would have been easy to obsess on the negative and mundane aspects of that day. Instead, this simple little trip reminded me how special every day on the river is, and I'm starting off this paddling season with a renewed level of enthusiasm.

Good times, a beautiful setting, with friends old and new. What could possibly be better?

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