

A BEGINNER'S TALE (or "How I Survived My First Wet Exit")

by Karen Dyrenforth

With the apprehension and excitement of a beginner paddler, I set out toward Evans, Colorado for the RMSKC Saturday trip on the South Platte River. This was to be my first river (day) trip and I was glad it was with the RMSKC group. I have heard the expression, that a good place to begin is right where you are. Armed with courage and determination to have fun, I met with Brian Curtiss, our trip leader, and the other participants, on what turned out to be a beautiful Saturday. Brian and a couple of the others had scouted out where we were going to launch our boats when I arrived. There was a bit of a steep slope to get the boats down to the river's edge and it was a team effort to make sure both the boats and people were able to safely negotiate the terrain. Once we were in the water, most of my anxiousness about this experience dissolved. I felt that it would be an enjoyable tour in the company of others who loved to paddle.

I have to say, that I did not realize the intricacies of navigating a river in a kayak, however, Brian was very helpful in pointing out some of the important "river signs" so that one could paddle effectively, safely and still have fun. I felt like a little duckling following the mother

duck as we were all paddling down the river. There were a number of fallen trees and large branches along the shoreline and at one point, I was introduced (not by choice) to my first wet exit. I was not paying close enough attention to a particular branch in the water and found my kayak heading directly towards it. I was leaning so far to the right to avoid getting clobbered by the branch that I went right into the water. Instinctively, I got out of the kayak, stood up and grabbed the kayak

on the upstream side of it. I was amazed at how strong the current was so close to shore as I was trying to figure out what I needed to do next. Brian and two other paddlers, who were close by, beached their boats on a little sandbar and waited



Karen on the Platte (photo by John Heleniak)

for me to wade across to them. They picked up my boat, turned it over to get most of the water out, while I was wringing out my shorts and checking to make sure my lunch was not soggy. As it turned out, my lunch was fine and based on that, I felt the rest of the day was going to be fine. I got back in my boat and we continued paddling. Needless to say, the lesson I learned from that experience is to pay attention and try to navigate a little better when there are obstacles in the water. There was one other moment, when I got caught in a current where the river split to flow around a little island at which point, I knew it would be better to "go with the flow" rather than fight it. Now I know the true meaning of that phrase. Five hours and fourteen miles later, we were taking our boats out of the water, none the worse for wear. I felt a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment from this trip, thanks to Brian and fellow RMSKC kayakers.



Lunch on the Platte (photo by Terry Smith)