



# Houston Canoe Club *WaterLine*



[www.houstoncanoeclub.org](http://www.houstoncanoeclub.org) :: Volume 2009 :: September

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The Waterline is the monthly newsletter of the Houston Canoe Club, Inc. The Waterline is made possible by your dues and critically depends on member contributions. Please submit items to HCC's Newsletter Editor, Linda Gorski at [LindaGorski@cs.com](mailto:LindaGorski@cs.com).

The Waterline is prepared by an on-line newsletter editor written by Fraser Baker, HCC's Webmaster.

## Next Meeting Announcement

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- When:** September 09, 2009 @ 7:00 PM  
**Where:** Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, Houston, Texas  
**Directions:** First driveway, North side of Bissonnet, just West of Hillcroft.  
**Speaker:** Bill Grimes and Jim Barton  
**Speaker Bio:** Bill Grimes and Jim Barton are long-time members of the Houston Canoe Club. Bill currently serves as the club's Commodore. Both are avid whitewater paddlers.  
**Description:** "Tetons, Big Skies and Potatoes - Paddling Around Yellowstone & Grand Tetons National Parks."

This presentation will introduce paddlers to the diversity of waters in this area, when to go, camping and other activities in this area. Bill Grimes and Jim Barton, along with many other HCC members, have paddled these rivers for several years beginning in 1995.

This area offers paddlers almost any kind of water for day trips from a base campground. There are crystal clear lakes reflecting the surrounding mountains. There are slow moving rivers through plains and valleys with wildlife (including herds of bison, big horn sheep and antelope). Most of our trips focus on fast moving rivers that run from class 2 to 5, through piney forests or limestone canyons and twisty, winding creeks through boulder fields.

Clear mountain air and cool evenings make these trips a refreshing alternative to Houston's hot and steamy summer weather. But, bring a lot of skin moisture and a camera.



**Bill & Donna Grimes**



**Jim Barton**

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Be sure to set this date aside on your calendar, then come out to support our speaker and club.

## Last Meeting Minutes

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**Date:** August 12, 2009

**Recorder:** John Ohrt

**Minutes:** Recorder John Ohrt called the meeting to order.

Officers were introduced, and new members and guests were welcomed.

Louis Aulbach gave a safety talk on how to properly tie down a tent for windy conditions.

HCC member Steve Beach gave a power point presentation on paddling Spring Creek on the northern border of Harris County. Steve included photos of the beauty of the creek as well as its history and current plans for its recreational development by the county.

Past Commodore Jim Barton stood in for Donna to deliver the Fleet Captain's trip report.

The minutes of the July General Meeting were read and approved.

Harmon was not present so there was no financial report.

There was no new business.

John announced that since the HCC is an affiliate member of American Whitewater (AW), HCC members can join AW at a discounted rate.

John also announced the news that past HCC member Joe Butler died in New Mexico. Joe and Betsy Butler were very active members of the club in the early 80's before they moved to New Mexico, and John and Louis Aulbach recalled Joe's many club related activities including some of the first organized club canoe lessons and his annual October trip to the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande. Many of the people who learned from Joe went on to teach and lead other HCC members.

The meeting was adjourned.

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Please contact HCC's recorder, John Ohrt, if there are any omissions or corrections.

## New Members

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**Member Name:** Janet Hess  
**Membership Type:** individual  
**Member's Family:** Edward Hess

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**Member Name:** Bill Cooke  
**Membership Type:** individual  
**Member's Family:**

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The HCC cordially welcomes new members to our club. New members are the life blood of the HCC, so be sure to provide opportunities for all our new members to paddle by coordinating more trips.

## Market Place

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### Items For Sale

**Item:** None  
**Description:** There are no items for sale in this issue.  
**Asking Price:** \$0  
**Contact Name:**  
**Contact Phone:**  
**Contact Email:**

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### Items Wanted

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Please contact the Newsletter Editor to post any items that you may have for sale or desperately need.

**Tales of the North**  
**1905-1925**  
**by**  
**Capt. Thierry Mallet**  
(Introduction by John Rich)

I have on my bookshelf a small old volume with browning pages called "*Plain Tales of the North*", by Capt. Thierry Mallet, published in 1925. I recently pulled it off the shelf for a re-read. It consists of a series of short stories, each only one or two small pages in length.

Mallet worked for a company called Revillon Frères, a fur trading and luxury goods company, which competed with the more famous Hudson Bay Company. Part of his job for 20 years was to inspect trading posts on the outskirts of civilization in northern Canada. This book is a collection of stories from his adventures in those remote places.

The company financed the filming of the 1922 movie "*Nanook of the North*", which was filmed at one of their trading posts. The firm served as the conduit by which furs were brought out of the wilderness, often by canoe, where they would end up worn on the shoulders of the wealthy in places like New York, London and Paris. Revillon Frères has now become the cosmetic company... Revlon.

The following are two stories from this book about those early days of canoing in the far north wilderness.

**A Moose Story**

It never pays to take any liberties with a wild animal when one believes that the latter is at one's mercy.

In 1908 two Indians, when crossing a large lake in Northern Ontario in a small canoe, came across a big bull moose swimming from an island to the mainland. They needed the meat but preferred waiting until the animal was near land before shooting it. They accordingly decided to have some fun! The man at the bow found a rope, lassoed the moose by its antlers, then tied the other end of the rope to the front thwart. After that the two Indians squatted down at the bottom of the canoe, yelling sarcastic remarks to the poor wild-eyed animal which was towing them with the strength of a good sized tug.

When this strange outfit drew near the shore, the man in the bow picked up his rifle. It was an old, single barrel muzzle loader. He aimed carefully and pressed the trigger, but the weapon missed fire. Pulling up the hammer, he repeated the performance with the same result.

Meanwhile, the moose was touching bottom. The Indian, realizing that the cap in his gun was wet, began to search frantically for a new one. In his excitement he forgot to pull out his knife and cut the rope. At that spot, the bottom of the lake sloped up abruptly. Before the man could find a new cap, the moose was halfway up to his shoulders in the water. With an angry shake of the head and a loud snort, the enraged animal bounded forward. In a second the canoe upset, pitching men and freight into six feet of icy cold water.



When the two Indians came up to the surface, the first thing they saw was the stern of their canoe vanishing in the bush. That was also the last they ever saw of either moose or canoe.

Crestfallen, shivering and hungry, they reached the trading station one day later - sadder, wiser and on foot.

### **A Birch Bark Canoe**

A canoe, may she be a 16-foot cruiser, or a 22-foot freighter, is at all times a small craft, especially on a lake when the nearest shore happens to be a very long distance off.

Men who live in the far North pass all their time on the water as soon as the ice disappears in the spring. They are so accustomed to their cranky canoes that it never occurs to them to bother about what they should do if, by any chance, something unusual happens. But in case of emergency they think and act very quickly. I had an example of it a few years ago on Abitibi Lake.

Two Indians were freighting a heavy load of hardware in a birch bark canoe.

They had a head wind and the waves were pretty high. The man at the bow thought the canoe was packed too much by the stern and shouted over his shoulder to the steersman to shift some of the load forward. The latter, from his seat in the stern, seized a 25-pound bag of lead shot at his feet and threw it five feet or so in front of him towards the middle of the canoe. The bag landed in an empty space right at the bottom of the canoe. The craft was old and rotten. The bag of shot simply broke the ribs, tore a gaping hole in the birch bark and disappeared straight down to the bottom of the lake.



Instantly the water started pouring in. One mile from shore, a nasty sea running and a leak larger than a man's head which would fill and sink any canoe in a few minutes.

The steersman gave one yell and then jumped like a huge frog, landing in a sitting position right in the middle of that hole. He stuck there, shivering, with water to his waist, until the bowman, realizing the danger and paddling madly for shore, succeeded at last in beaching the canoe high and dry.

**The End**





**The author, Capt. Thierry Mallet**

# USGS Water Gauges

by  
John Rich

This article will describe how to use the USGS online web site to view information from water gauges, which record data about stream conditions for a wide variety of lakes, rivers and creeks, all over America.

First of all, I guess we should start by defining what "USGS" stands for. "USGS" is the United States Geological Survey. The word "geological" usually refers to the science that deals with the history of the earth and its life, especially as recorded in rocks. But this government agency deals with far more than just rocks. Here's how they describe themselves:

*"An unbiased, multi-disciplinary science organization that focuses on biology, geography, geology, geospatial information, and water, we are dedicated to the timely, relevant, and impartial study of the landscape, our natural resources, and the natural hazards that threaten us."*

As paddlers, we are mostly interested in the water data from that web site. You can begin to access that wealth of information from their home page, starting here: <http://water.usgs.gov> This particular web page focuses on the "water" part of their mission, and contains the information useful to canoeists.

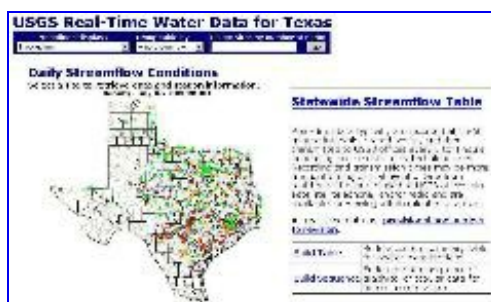
*(You can click on the following thumbnail images to display a full-screen version in a separate window)*

From this "water" home page, click on "Water Data, Real-Time Data" in the upper left, for current stream conditions across America. You'll be presented with a map of the U.S., covered in little dots. The color of the dots represents the water level status, from high to low. These can be interesting. For example: since a red dot represents a low water level, when you see a cluster of red dots, that tells you that this geographic area has had less than normal rainfall. From here, click on a particular state to zoom in on the daily streamflow conditions for all the USGS water gauges in that state.



**USGS National Water Data**

With the state map, you can now click on a dot to see data from a specific stream gauge. But odds are, the dots are too close together to differentiate the one you want. And the only identifying information displayed when you move your cursor over a dot, is the gauge number, which doesn't tell you which stream it represents. So instead of hunting and pecking through a bunch of colored dots trying to find the one you want, click on "Statewide Streamflow Table" in the upper right of the screen, to produce a tabular list of every USGS gauge in Texas - all 486 of them.



**USGS Texas Water Data**

In the future, if you want to skip all those steps you've taken to get to this point, you

can just click this web site: [Statewide Streamflow Table](#), and bookmark it in your web browser as a "favorite" so that you can come back directly to this page as a starting point, any time you wish.

Notice in the dark blue boxes at the top that the standard sorted order of this display is by "Major River Basin". This order is difficult to work with when searching for data on a specific stream, because a "river basin" can include many different streams, all mixed in together in the list. It will include a major river, along with all the smaller tributaries which feed into it.

Real-Time Data for Texas\_ Streamflow -- 486 site(s) found  
PROVISIONAL DATA SUBJECT TO REVISION

Grouped table by River Basin

Station Name	Station Number	Date	Flow (cfs)	Gauge
<b>Brazos River Basin</b>				
Brazos River at Austin	02040000	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at San Antonio	02040001	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Fort Worth	02040002	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Dallas	02040003	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Houston	02040004	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
<b>Colorado River Basin</b>				
Colorado River at Fort Collins	07020001	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Colorado River at Denver	07020002	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Colorado River at Salt Lake City	07020003	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
<b>Red River Basin</b>				
Red River at Fort Worth	05010001	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Red River at Dallas	05010002	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Red River at Houston	05010003	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00

**USGS River Basins**

So, to better isolate the data you want, on the bar at the top, you can change the way the list is ordered, by:

- Major river basin (the default)
- County
- Hydrologic Unit (i.e. stream)

To get around the difficulty of grouping by river basin, change the "Group table by" box to "County", and click "Go".

Here's a sample of the stream list when done by county. The sequence you get here is alphabetic by county, then by numeric station number. Generally, the station numbers are designed to cluster those on the same stream together. So, for example, the stations on Buffalo Bayou are all together, and not scattered amongst other streams. But that's not always true. You can use the search button on your web browser (Ctrl-F) to do a keyword search on this table. This is a great way to see what's happening all over in your county of interest.

Real-Time Data for Texas\_ Streamflow -- 486 site(s) found  
PROVISIONAL DATA SUBJECT TO REVISION

Grouped table by County

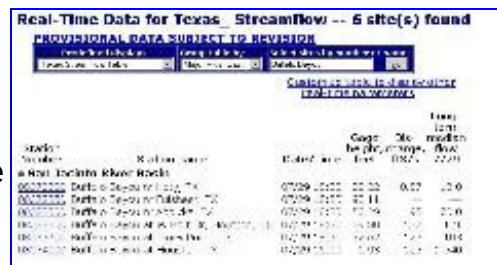
Station Name	Station Number	Date	Flow (cfs)	Gauge
<b>Anderson County</b>				
Anderson River at Anderson	02040001	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
<b>Brazos County</b>				
Brazos River at Austin	02040000	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at San Antonio	02040001	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Fort Worth	02040002	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Dallas	02040003	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Brazos River at Houston	02040004	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
<b>Dallas County</b>				
Dallas River at Dallas	02040005	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Dallas River at Fort Worth	02040006	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00
Dallas River at Houston	02040007	2009-07-07	1,200	0.00

**USGS Texas Counties**

The drawback to this is that a stream can span multiple counties, therefore the data for that stream is fragmented in many places. So if your interest is in a particular multi-county stream, you don't get the whole picture in one place. For example, Houston's Buffalo Bayou has four gauges in Harris County, and two in Fort Bend County. The Neches River has six gauges in five counties. And the Brazos River has 20 gauges in 16 counties.

But there is a solution to this fragmentation! Go back to the box at the top and select a group list by "no grouping", and then under "Select sites by number or name", type in the name of the stream you're looking for. In the previous example we had the Brazos River spread across 16 counties. But by selecting "no grouping" and "Brazos River", we get all 20 Brazos River gauges in one short list. And, best of all, the order is by the numeric "station number", which is designed to arrange them in order from upstream to downstream. Now we've got something really useful for canoeing!

Here is a close-to-home example of this: Buffalo Bayou has six gauges, listed in order from where it starts in the Katy prairie, all the way to downtown Houston. If you're starting at Highway 6 at the Addicks dam, you can see the water conditions there, and at every point downstream through which you will pass. You can then click on individual station numbers to see graphs of the current conditions, as well as the recent trend, for up to the last 60 days. This is good planning information.



**List of Buffalo Bayou gauges**

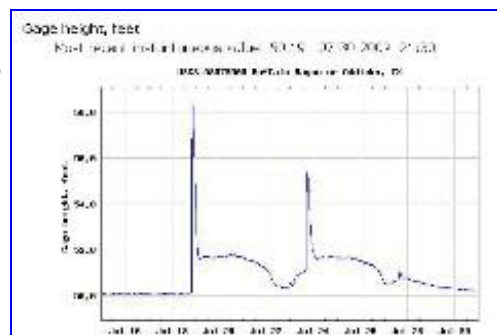
The standard two graphs that are available for viewing at every water gauge station, are "Discharge" and "Gauge Height".

"Discharge" is the flow rate of the water, measured in cubic feet per second, or CFS. This is sometimes designated mathematically as "ft<sup>3</sup>/s" - feet cubed per second. CFS is a common way to indicate the volume of water moving past the station point. Of course, since streams vary in width, a particular number doesn't mean much to you unless you have a frame of reference. 1,000 CFS on a wide river like the Brazos might be fairly tame, because the flow is spread over a large area. But the same 1,000 CFS on the narrow Buffalo Bayou would be terrifying, because it's concentrated in a narrow channel. So the CFS number alone doesn't mean much. You have to know how that relates to actual river conditions. And you get that from watching and observing over time, or from reports from others. Then you can match up the current CFS reading with your knowledge of past readings and conditions, to determine if that's a river condition that you want to enter.



**CFS discharge chart**

"Gauge Height", is the water depth, measured in feet. Things are a little confusing here for me. Sometimes the height seems to be a number that represents height above sea level. In other cases it seems to represent actual water depth at that point. If you look at that last Buffalo Bayou example, the height starts in Katy at 22 feet, then goes to Fulshear at 90 feet, and finally works it's way downhill to downtown Houston at 1.9 feet. Now I'm quite certain that the Buffalo Bayou doesn't flow uphill 68 feet between Katy and Fulshear, that it's not 90-feet deep at one point, and that downtown Houston is more than 1.9 feet above sea level, and also more than 1.9 feet deep.



**Gauge height chart**

Here is what the USGS has to say about this mystery:

*"Gage height (also known as stage) is the height of the water in the stream above a reference point. Gage height refers to the elevation of the water surface in the specific pool at the streamgaging station, not along the entire stream. Gage height also does not refer to the depth of the stream."*

That's clear as mud now, eh? So this gauge height number may not mean much in absolute terms. Use these as reference points for past observed conditions, in order to understand the current conditions in which you are considering paddling.



For example, I know from experience that if the Lake Charlotte gauge says 8 feet, the water level is going to be too low to paddle through the mangrove trees. If it says 11 feet, I'll make it okay. That's a bit of fact that I have in my brain from personally paddling on Lake Charlotte in different conditions. Whether or not the water was actually that many feet deep at the gauge, doesn't really matter. What matters is that it tells me what to expect on the lake, and how navigable the surrounding water is.

Some gauges will also have additional information, like water temperature, precipitation, and specific conductance in microsiemens per centimeter. That last one must be mighty important to someone!

Now that you know how to look at the online water data generated from these magic gauges, let's see what an actual physical water gauge station looks like.

This gauge is mounted on pillars at the south end of Lake Charlotte, which is about an hour east of Houston near the Trinity River. Most of the gauges contain certain common elements:

- A large metal box, about 5-feet square and 8-feet high, containing instruments and batteries. These are mounted above the flood stage level, to protect the instruments.
- Pipes running down to the water to take the readings.
- A solar panel on top to keep the batteries charged.
- A dome receiving antennae, to pick-up control commands from a home office.
- A transmitting antennae, to transmit data to a collection station.



**Joe & Ken observe the Lake Charlotte gauge**

All photos by John Rich

The real-time data is typically recorded at 15-60 minute intervals, stored on site, and then transmitted to USGS offices every 1 to 4 hours, depending on the data relay technique used. Data from the real-time sites are relayed to USGS offices via satellite, telephone, and/or radio and are available for viewing online via the internet within minutes of arrival. Recording and transmission times may be more frequent during critical events, such as hurricanes which may produce flooding.

The location descriptions are sometimes not very exact. This example, just a block from my home, says simply "near Addicks". But Addicks is a large place, and contains a number of creeks, like Langham, Bear and Southmayde Creeks. This may cause you some confusion. I never realized exactly where this gauge was, until one day when I was hiking along Bear Creek, and came up on the USGS box at Clay Road, just west of Barker-Cypress Road. It had all the tell-tale features, and a sign on the door identifying it as a "stream flow measuring station". The antennae and such are mounted on the poles projecting upward from the roof, and are out of frame in this photo. I had driven past this one a thousand times before and never paid it any notice.



**The Bear Creek gauge in Addicks**

Some gauges are more scenic than others. This one is on the top of a cliff over the Rio Grande River, in Big Bend National Park. Located next to the gauge is a steel cage that can be used to ride across the river on a cable. Note that these are fully autonomous units, requiring no power lines. You often find them in the middle of nowhere, far from any kind of infrastructure.



**Skip paddles by the Johnson Ranch gauge on the Rio Grande River**

You might have noticed on that first USA map that the USGS doesn't seem to have any gauges in west Texas. They don't cover some rivers, like the Rio Grande, Pecos or Devil's. The Rio Grande River which comprises the border with Mexico, and other Texas rivers which flow into the Rio Grande, are monitored by the International Boundary and Water Commission, or IBWC. This organization, with participation from both countries, administers international treaties between the U.S. and Mexico on water usage, water quality and flood control for the Rio Grande River, to ensure that there is enough for everyone on both sides of the border. The gauge readings for the IBWC gauges can be found at: <http://www.ibwc.state.gov/wad/flowdata.htm>. Their flow rate numbers are in cubic meters (CMS) rather than cubic feet per second. A handy conversion calculator can be found on Louis Aulbach's web site here: <http://users.hal-pc.org/~lfa/#Convert> For quick rule-of-thumb conversions, just remember that it takes 35 CFS to make 1 CMS.

I will save details of that IBWC system for another story on another day, as this one is already too long...

With these magic boxes sprinkled all over America, we canoeists can sit in the comfort of our homes, on the internet, and monitor water conditions nearly anywhere in America. This is a great planning tool for anticipated trips, and for learning about the behavior of the streams and lakes upon which you paddle.



**Natalie models the Terlingua Creek gauge in Big Bend National Park**

There are warnings and complications about how to use and interpret this data, for sure. You need reference points to understand the stream conditions. Beware of delays. For example, thunderstorms far upstream may take several days to flow down to where you are - watch the gauges at several points upstream to detect what might be coming your way. Sometimes gauges get clogged up with sediment and don't read true conditions, or the stream will change course by meandering away from the gauge thereby giving readings that don't really reflect actual conditions.

On the good side, you can see spikes from rainstorms, and how long it takes those high water levels to subside. You can find out whether the water level is rising or falling, so as to expect things to be growing better or worse. Pay attention to the water level and CFS reports from others, so that you can equate what they've described in their conditions, to what you expect to encounter on your trip. This can allow you to predict if there is too little water for the trip, if the water will be moving nicely for a fun, easy trip, or if the water will be too violent and it's best to stay out of it at your skill level.

There's a lot of useful data here. But back it up with personal observation or eyewitness accounts, such as from people who have paddled the stream in the past, and residents or outfitters in the area. Use the data - you've paid for it with your tax dollars, and it's there to help you have a safe and enjoyable canoe experience.

## The End



**The author, John Rich, about to eat  
a big, juicy blackberry**

Photo by Linda Gorski

# The Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande in Big Bend Ranch State Park

by  
**Linda Gorski and Louis Aulbach**

This is the second in a two part series about the Big Bend Ranch State Park. Last month we highlighted the rugged interior of the park. This month we will take you along the Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande including the river portions of the Big Bend Ranch State Park from just below Presidio to Terlingua Creek near Lajitas and show how the storms of September 2008 have changed the river.

Although the river portions of the Big Bend Ranch State Park begin below Presidio, the Upper Canyons of the Rio Grande are actually navigable at Presidio where the river is rejuvenated by water from the Rio Conchos in Mexico which supplies approximately 70% of the flow volume to the Rio Grande. A float trip on this section of the river, from Presidio through Santa Elena Canyon, is a ride through some of the most scenic and rugged canyons on the Rio Grande. The rapids are challenging. The desert is harsh and beautiful.

Last month we reported on our visit to the interior of Big Bend Ranch State Park. In this article we will highlight our trip down SH 170 along the Rio Grande and show how nature has drastically changed the river within the boundaries of the Big Bend Ranch State Park, from just below Presidio to Terlingua Creek in Lajitas.



*(Click on the thumbnail photos to view the full-screen versions in a separate window)*

A few of you have paddled this upper section of the Rio Grande, including the Hoodoos rapid, and have seen the banks of the river and the gravel bars choked with vegetation and cane. Finding a campsite was often a challenge. A storm in September 2008 changed all of that.

Here's a current shot of the Hoodoos rapid - you can see how the floods scoured the gravel bars on both sides of the river, and the wildness of the Big Eddy seems to be tamed.

Many more of us have paddled the more easily accessible Colorado Canyon section of the Rio Grande, from Rancherías Creek to Lajitas.



**Scouring at Hoodoo rapids**

Photo by Linda Gorski

Not only is it popular with canoeists and kayakers, but outfitters in the Big Bend use this portion of the river as an easy day trip for rafters.





### **Sign to Colorado Canyon Access**

Photo by Linda Gorski

The photo here is the Colorado Canyon access as many of us remember it. Canoes are lined up on a grassy bank waiting to put in.



Photo by Louis Aulbach



A recent photo of the Colorado Canyon access, taken from virtually the same spot as the photo above, shows how the storm surge scoured the put in area. Note the lack of grass, trees and vegetation.

### **Colorado Canyon Access June 2009**

Photo by Louis Aulbach

In the past, the Colorado Canyon access has included a campground, a toilet, a parking area and an easily accessible put in. Now, all you see is a sign indicating no camping and a pile of trash containing the remains of the self-composting toilet.



### **Ruins of composting toilet at Colorado Canyon put in**

Photo by Linda Gorski

Finally, despite the changes that the storm of 2008 caused along the river, the Rio Grande remains one of the most scenic paddling experiences in Texas. Get out there and enjoy!



The Big Bend Ranch State Park offers a wide variety of camping, hiking and paddling experiences. Get on the website at [BBRSP](http://BBRSP) for updated information.

And if you have any questions about our recent visit to the Big Bend Ranch State Park, you can email Linda at [lindagorski@cs.com](mailto:lindagorski@cs.com) or Louis at [lfa@hal-pc.org](mailto:lfa@hal-pc.org).

**The Rio Grande as it snakes between  
Presidio and Lajitas**

Photo by Linda Gorski

**The End**



**The authors, Louis Aulbach & Linda  
Gorski**

Photo by John Rich

# Farewell to a Paddler: Joe Butler

by  
Louis Aulbach

Long time Texas and New Mexico paddler Joe Butler passed away from a heart attack at his soon-to-be retirement dream home in Pagosa Springs, CO, on Monday, July 13, 2009. Joe and his wife Betsy moved to Houston in the early 1980's and soon made an impact on the Houston Canoe Club at a pivotal time in the organization's existence.

Joe enjoyed sharing the experience of paddling with new people, and he pioneered the club's participation in wilderness expedition paddling trips, especially in the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande. His extensive knowledge of the Lower Canyons was the basis for the river guide of which he was the co-author: *"The Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande"*. For the past several years, Joe has donated his royalties from the book to the Houston Canoe Club for the benefit of new paddler instruction and water safety education. Even though he and Betsy moved to the Albuquerque area in the mid-1980's, he continued to support the activities of the HCC.

Those who had the opportunity to paddle with Joe knew him to be a fine gentleman and an unwavering friend. The paddling community has lost a great friend.



**Joe was a meticulous documenter of his river trips. In the evening of each day, he recorded his observations of the river, the people and the trip. Such was the case on this trip through Colorado Canyon in November, 1981, as we made camp on the sandbar near Ledgerrock Rapid.**

Photo by Louis Aulbach

*(Click on the thumbnail photo to view a full-screen version in a separate window)*

## **HCC Board members**

**by  
Linda Gorski**

The Houston Canoe Club Officers posed for this photo at the August 5 board meeting. Back row standing from left Bill Grimes, Commodore; John Ohrt, Recorder; Paul Woodcock, Boatswain; Harmon Everett, Purser; Ken McDowell, Vice Commodore. Front, seated from left: Linda Gorski, Newsletter Editor; Donna Grimes, Fleet Captain. Not shown in photo Fraser Baker, Web Master and John Bartos, Conservation.



Photo by Linda Gorski



# Boat Builders Corner

by  
**Skip Johnson**

I resisted titling this segment of Builders Corner "An Old Strippers Guide to Stripping". Still, stripping's a rewarding experience, there's actually pieces going together that are going to be part of the boat.

Before gluing the first pieces together, a few more words are in order about the multitude of micro-miniature, disposable, biodegradable cost-effective clamps about to be used, AKA rubber bands. Preferred suppliers were touched on in the previous article. The bands work best if they are around three or four inches in from and fairly perpendicular to the strips. It's best to hook the band(s) over the dowel pin first, then stretch out quite tightly then wrap over the edge of the strip and hook the end over the bottom edge of the form or back to a dowel pin depending on how much tension is needed. Now the band is pulling the strip against the form and against the previous strip. The cross section of a stretched #16 rubber band is pretty dang small and I've yet to discern one in the glue joint of a finished or even partially finished boat. Some times at the turn of the bilge a little more force might be required in which case use two (or more) rubber bands, either together or on each side of the form might be needed. One last caveat, it's prudent to stay out of the plane of a stretched band while putting it in place.



**Pegs and rubber bands**

All photos by Skip Johnson

*(Click on the thumbnail photos to view full-screen versions in a separate window)*

First strips are the sheer strips. Clamp one piece in place and pull out your trusty Japanese style pull saw to trim the ends. In the olden days we used a dovetail or a gents saw but there are a lot of good pull saws out there now, use your favorite that has a fairly fine blade pitch and minimum set. Sight along where the next strip will fall and cut off both ends of the first strip. First drops of glue, precoat the cut ends of first strip then add the second strip, letting the ends run wild an inch or two if you want. A spring clamp is handy here to keep the joint tight. Next strip to go on is the one just below the one just glued into place. This order of assembly will be the order of the day for the majority of the boat so there is an alternating side for the joints in stem, stern and keel. You can either clamp this next strip on dry, pencil some witness marks near the center of boat, cut the ends to fit then remove, run a bead of glue down the cove, then reclamp or you can glue the strip in place letting the ends run wild and trim the ends 'wet'.



**Stripping 1**



The first method's probably the more workmanlike and is good practice for later in

## Stripping 2

the boat when it's necessary to fit the ends before gluing. The second is faster. In either case precoat the end grain when gluing. If you are using bead and cove it's probably best to trim bead at the ends where the cove of the next strip crosses over it. If not there's a little bit of a gap in the joints at the ends of the boat.

Repeat in pairs down the side of the boat. You can go as far and as fast as you want but I find its best for me to do three or four pairs at a session unless I'm in a real hurry for some reason. The extra height of the bow of EasyB means that tough fitting pieces at the turn of the stem and stern don't happen at the same time. Stern comes first. After the glue has dried it's time to cut off the wild ends of strips at bow and stern.



**Transition 1**

Once the strips get down to the transition from stern to bottom, the 'zig-zag' cut won't work and it's time to cut a pair or two of strips along the centerline. These require long odd angle cuts but don't despair if the fit isn't perfect. The best way for me to make these cuts is to clamp a strip in place and lay a scrap along the centerline as a guide and cut away, keeping the saw blade as vertical as possible.



A sanding block is handy to get the last little bit of angle trimmed away.

**Transition 2**

Clamping the end of these strips is best done with a piece of nylon mason's twine looped around the strongback and snugged up with a truckers hitch. Sometimes a wedge or two cut from a strip scrap is in order.



**Bow transition**

Once the transition to the bottom is made at the stern all the rest of the strips will need to be fitted at both ends. This requires clamping the strip in place temporarily with a rubber band at perhaps every other station and trimming both ends of strip. It helps to pencil in a witness mark between the current strip and the strip already in place to help position the strip when gluing in place. Once the transition to the bottom is made it's just a matter of filling in the blank.



**Stripping bottom**

A herringbone type pattern fitting the ends together is my favorite though you can just fit the strips to the centerline which for me is a lot of fiddly work. Once again if you're using bead and cove some shaping of the cut ends to fit the bead ends of existing strips is in order. A rat tail file is handy for this.



**Herringbone**



**Somewhere**





**In mahogany**

in the bottom a single rubber band is not going to be long enough, so just slip another band through the end of the one being stretched into place and pull both ends of the second band into place.

As the gap closes down and the strips get shorter it takes more and more force to keep the strips in place against the edge set of bending strips in their widest dimension. At some point some wedges from one side to the other will help keep the glue joints tight.



**Wedges**



**Gravity clamps**

Once the open gap gets down to a space two or three strips wide it's time to glue together a final filler piece and cut and shape it to fill in the gap. Some various weights will probably be handy to hold this last piece in place until the glue has set.

That's it for now. Next time around we'll talk about transforming this diamond in the rough into a thing of exquisite beauty.

## **The End**



**The author, Skip Johnson**

You can contact Skip by e-mail at [skipj@oplink.net](mailto:skipj@oplink.net) if you have any questions, comments or suggestions.





## Upcoming River Trips

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### HCC Trips:

**Date:** Saturday, September 05, 2009

**Title:** Labor Day - Sabine River

**Inclusive Dates:** 9/5-7

**Description:** This is a float trip down the lovely sandy Sabine River. This trip is much bigger than the Memorial Day trip, with many different groups, fireworks and a margarita barge.

Saturday morning we unload our gear, shuttle the vehicles to the take out, then come back to the put in to start the trip down the river. Saturday night we camp on a sandy beach, then Sunday morning we pack up and do it again. Monday morning, we paddle to the take out, pack up and leave.

Some of us will camp out under the Tx Hwy 63 / La Hwy 8 bridge on Friday night, August 31.

Everyone who signs up will get a packet that will include maps, suggested gear and other information.

**Skill Level:** **Beginner:** Familiarity with basic strokes and can make the boat go straight on flat water typically experienced on Armand Bayou, can maneuver the boat on slowly moving water, is aware of basic river safety and can confidently avoid hazards and strainers frequently experienced on Texas' Colorado River or the Buffalo Bayou at a modest flow rate.

**Contact:** Contact Cecelia Gill by email [whitewaterider@yahoo.com](mailto:whitewaterider@yahoo.com)

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**Date:** Monday, September 14, 2009

**Title:** Boundary Waters--Quetico Canada

**Inclusive Dates:** 9/14--9/25

**Description:** Remote wilderness trip 10 to 14 days in Quetico. Extreme remote wilderness trip covering approximately 100 miles + depending on weather conditions at this time of year. Must have transportation, survival skills, boat, gear, food. Difficult portages will be encountered on this trip requiring physical challenges. Remote entry pass, passport required. I have coming permit-4 slots open. This is not a novice trip. Leaving Houston 9/12 entering Quetico on 9/14 at Prairie Portage-Basswood-Agnes Lake to Rose Island. Return route dependent on weather and water conditions. I have contact information for RABC passes.

**Skill Level:** **Intermediate:** Knowledge of basic whitewater safety, self-rescue and rescue such as retrieving a pinned boat. Able to capture small eddies, run Class 2 rapids confidently, but challenged by Class 3 rapids such as Cottonseed on the San Marcos at say 300-400 cfs.

**Contact:** Contact Bob Pearson by phone 281-835-5229, or by email [pearson92472sbcglobal.net](mailto:pearson92472sbcglobal.net).

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**Other Club Trips:**

# Carolina Canoe Club's Week of Rivers

North Carolina June 27 through July 5, 2009

by  
Christy Long

Once again, I had a great time in the east paddling and camping in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina. The members of the Carolina Canoe Club presented their rivers in a safe and fun manner making the 2398 miles I put on my Santa Fe worth every mile.

I paddled four rivers over five days. A new run for me was the Elf run on the Cheoah. It was so much fun I ran it twice on Thursday. The weather gods were good to us with warm days and cool nights.

The river gods gave minimum to fair river levels asking for only one sacrifice from our group, a beautiful boat named Sparkey, but no paddlers were hurt and we can be thankful for that.

River	Miles for the weeks
Hiwasee	8
French Broad	75
Cheoah, Elf Run	13
Upper Pigeon	37.6
Nantahala	84
Lower Pigeon	5
Ocoee	30
Tuckaseegee	4.1
Chattahoochee	5
Nolichucky	8.5
Park and Play	6
Chattooga, Sect 3	24
<b>Total Miles</b>	<b>300.2</b>

The Houston Canoe Club was represented by twelve people that collectively paddled twelve rivers for a combined 300 river miles including me, Donna and Bill Grimes, Marilyn and Cliff Peery, Debbie Snow, Robert, Rob, and Peter Langley, Ken Anderson, David Jacobs and Frank Ohrt.

I hope to see the Great Smokey Mountains and paddle the beautiful rivers that run through them, next year.

Below are photos of a few of the paddlers who enjoyed the Carolina Canoe Club's Week of Rivers this year.

Chart by Christy Long

*(Click on the thumbnail photos to view the full-screen versions in a separate window)*



Debbie Snow on the Ocoee



Christy Long on the Hiwassee



**Cliff Peery on the Choeah**



**David Jacobs on the Nantahala**



**Bill Grimes on the French Broad**

Photo by Ken Anderson

**The End**

# Buffalo Bayou: Allens Landing to Studemont Street

by  
**Linda Gorski**

[This is a short article to whet your appetites for an upcoming trip Louis Aulbach has promised to lead for members of the canoe club along Buffalo Bayou from Allen's Landing. Watch the newsletter and trip announcements for more information.](#)

Buffalo Bayou at Allen's Landing is the historical heart of Houston. This is where the Allen brothers stepped ashore and called Houston their own. At the confluence of Buffalo Bayou and White Oak Bayou, Allen's Landing became Houston's first port and a thriving commercial hub.

*(Click on the thumbnail photos to view the full-screen versions in a separate window)*

Allen's Landing is also a great place for paddlers to put their boats in the water and explore the city from a very unique perspective. The put-in at Allen's Landing is under the Main Street Viaduct and is easily accessible from the lower parking lot at Spaghetti Warehouse (901 Commerce Street). You can actually back your vehicle down almost to the water's edge to unload or load in the parking lot and carry your gear a short distance down to the bayou. Parking in this lower lot has been \$3 on weekdays and \$5 on weekends ... and you can leave your car for just a few hours or all day for that amount. The rates sometimes change for no apparent reason -- when we parked there for our most recent trip the sign said \$5. Go figure. Just bring plenty of \$1 bills or your credit card. A new metered parking system has recently been installed that will accept either bills or credit cards.



**Map showing downtown Houston and Allen's Landing where the trip began.**

Map by Louis Aulbach

On a recent hot summer morning, Louis Aulbach, Linda Gorski, John Rich, Dana Enos and Louis's son Matthew paddled the bayou from Allen's Landing upstream to Studemont Street.

The group has canoed this section many times, especially at normal water levels when you can paddle upstream or downstream from the put-in, thus eliminating the need for a shuttle. On really hot days, we put-in by 8 or 9 a.m. and are normally back at the put-in by noon. Occasionally, we bring our tables and chairs and have a picnic lunch under the shade of the bridge.



**Louis Aulbach, Linda Gorski, Dana Enos, John Rich and Matthew Aulbach at Allen's Landing.**

Photo by Linda Gorski





**Dana Enos paddling under Sabine Promenade Footbridge**

Photo by Louis Aulbach

There's a lot to see along this section of the bayou. Heading upstream you cross under a series of busy bridges with a remarkably beautiful urban landscape along the banks.



**John Rich and Louis wind their way through the abutments of the downtown bridges.**

Photo by Linda Gorski



**Going upstream at the Preston Avenue Bridge, Wortham Center is on your left.**

Photo by Linda Gorski

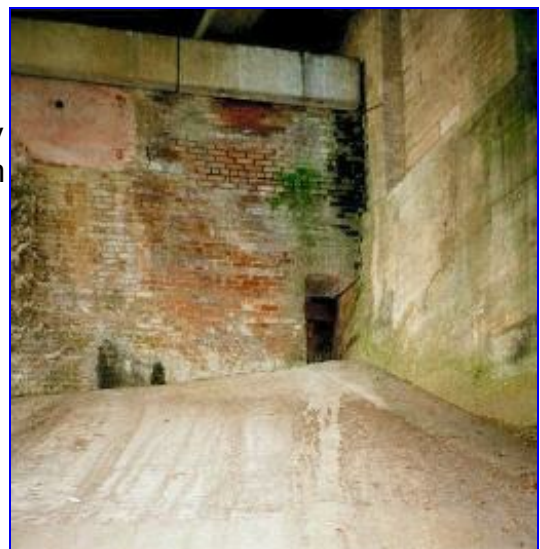
The amazing architecture of Houston that you miss from the street is clearly visible as you paddle along the Bayou.



Photo by Linda Gorski

Louis is writing a book about the history of Houston as it developed along Buffalo Bayou and also conducts historical boat tours of the bayou for the [Buffalo Bayou Partnership](#). He is a good person to have along on these canoe trips. He virtually spouts historical trivia as you paddle along. Here we all gather around to listen to some of his stories

For instance, did you know that there is a burial vault on the banks of the bayou under the Franklin Street Bridge? Here's a photo of the eerie portal to the chamber. The complete story of the Donnellan family and their burial vault can be found at Louis' web site: <http://users.hal-pc.org/~lfa/BB38.html>





### **The Donnellan Vault**

Photo by Louis Aulbach



**Louis Aulbach inspects trash collected in a boom.**

Photo by Linda Gorski

The downtown section of the Bayou is the most densely populated and is also the area in which the Bayou collects the most trash. Fortunately the Buffalo Bayou Partnership works diligently to clean the trash from the Bayou including the use of these booms to contain floating debris. There was an old door in this particular pile that I thought would make a great architectural ornament but no one was willing to carry it in their canoe!!!



**This beautiful night heron is just one of the birds we saw during our trip.**

Photo by Louis Aulbach

Despite the human population and the trash there's still lots of wildlife along this section of the bayou. We frequently see birds, ducks, reptiles -- and lots of fish jumping out of the water.



**Duck with chicks**

Photo by John Rich

Although we didn't paddle downstream on this particular day there's also a lot to see along the bayou as you travel east toward the ship channel. This was the working heart of the city and the remains of old wharves, bulkheads, warehouses and industrial plants can be seen on both banks.

Paddling Buffalo Bayou through the downtown area is not only an easy and enjoyable float, it's also a history lesson in itself. If you're interested in reading more about how Houston developed along the bayou before you paddle, go to Louis Aulbach's website at <http://users.hal-pc.org/~lfa/>, click on "Buffalo Bayou" and read many of the stories that will eventually become part of his book, *"Buffalo Bayou: An Echo of Houston's Wilderness Beginnings"*. Better still, join us for a paddle on this wonderful urban waterway.

**The End**



# Carolina Canoe Club's Week of Rivers 2

June 29 - July 4, 2009

by

David Jacobs

The following is a journal kept by HCC member David Jacobs highlighting the rivers he paddled during the Carolina Canoe Club's Week of Rivers. I reformatted it a bit to include it in the newsletter. (Linda Gorski)

Date: 6-29-2009, Monday

River: French Broad

Brief Description: Took a long time to get there, and got back late. Broad, rocky river, with many paths to explore. Some drops, but not too difficult.



David Jacobs, French Broad River

Date: 6-30-2009, Tuesday

River: Cheoah Creek, low water "elf run"

Flow: ~110 cfs

Brief Description: Introduction to creeking. Very rocky and steep; Next to the road, so we could take out whenever desired. Cliff Perry's open canoe got flooded at the bottom of a blind-entry slide, which required a high speed, abrupt left turn at the bottom. Took an hour to get his boat out, but one side was torn apart in the process.



David Jacobs, far right, Cheoah, intro to creeking, low water "elf run"

Date: 7-1-2009, Wednesday

River: Upper Pidgeon

Put in/Take out: Put in just below the power house, after registering.

Brief Description: High waves in the wave train, near the beginning. Scouted one rapid from the bank.

Date: 7-2-2009, Thursday

River: Ocoee, "middle" section

Put in/ Take out: Put in above "Grumpy's"/ Take out at parking lot below the raft take out.

Brief Description: Need an experienced guide, for the class IV sections.

Supposed to stay left, to miss the two holes at "Double Suck", but I followed the guy in front of me, who went right into them. We punched through the first one; but when I came out of it, the boat in front of me was upside down and broadside, to me, in the second hole, which is a "sticky" one. I cut left, but the front of my boat hit his, and rode up, just behind his cockpit. Then the water caught my stern, and dragged it down, while I stayed angled to the left, in a brace position. Next, my boat and face passed under his boat. I came out the other side, still in my brace and angled to the left. Applying pressure to the brace straightened my boat up into a stern stall, which then flattened out forward, as I escaped the hole. He exited his boat and balled up, raising his head for air, occasionally. He got "recycled" once, but he and his boat finally came out, after a few minutes. The trip leader said I was very lucky, and that he had never heard of anyone getting out of that hole without getting stuck in it, first. FYI, one guy told me there is a way to portage back up, to repeat the run through "Double Trouble". Afterwards, I got separated from my group, while waiting on a chain of rafts to go by. I decided to join a second group of

rafts, in order to catch up with my group. But the raft in front of me stalled, and I was washed under it. On the other side, I rolled up and pulled over to the bank, to rest awhile. But the rafts kept coming, so I joined another group, but stayed beside them, this time, paddling hard, to catch up with my group. Meanwhile, my group had pulled off the river for lunch, but I thought they were still ahead of me. I paddled hard for a long time, then waited for 10 or 15 minutes, but still didn't see anyone in my group. I asked several groups if they had seen my group, but they hadn't seen them since the morning. Terry allowed me to join his group, which included Dennis and Debbie, from Houston, just above "Table Saw". I didn't see any cars from my group at the take-out. Then, a paddler behind us said he saw a group taking out upstream. And, one in Terry's group realized my group leader usually takes out earlier, upstream. One of the guys took me up there, where we found them parked along the side of the road, and exchanged "Where did you go?"s.

Date: July 3, 2009, Friday afternoon

River: Nantahala

Putin/ Take out: Parking lot above Patton's Run/ Nantahala Outdoor Center

Brief Description: I bought a new, 2009, Jackson "Allstar" in the morning, at N.O.C. (\$400 discount) and paddled it on this afternoon trip. The Allstar squirts easier, but is not as fast as the Necky "Jive". Since it is so slow, upstream attainment moves were difficult to impossible. The Allstar surfs deeper holes easier. The Jive surfs shallow holes easier. Spencer showed me various play spots and taught me a new move, "Skin the Cat": When one rock is right behind another, you can go between them, even when the current is swift and there is only enough space for one boat to pass. He said you can go upstream between these rocks, also. The upstream rock forms an eddy and the downstream rock forms a pillow. The Nantahala Falls was smaller at the end of the day, because the dam had already been shut off, upstream. Went down the falls fine, without scouting or eddy-hopping.

Date: 7-4-2009, Saturday

River: Nantahala

Putin/ Take out: Parking lot above Patton's Run/ Nantahala Outdoor Center

Brief Description: Paddled my Jive, so I could make the attainment moves. The Jive did some stern squirts, but not as many as the Allstar. I seal-launched off of the ~7 foot high "Jumping Rock", on river right. John helped me catch the "Truck Stop" eddy, and showed me his preferred path through the Falls. He and I ran the Falls twice. I follow his preferred path the second time: He plants a right-hand stroke as he clips the left-hand corner of the river-right hole, near the top of the Falls. This positions him to ride down the right-hand side of the main tongue. This path results in a smoother exit at the bottom. He said if you stroke on the left, instead, the hole will spin you around and send you down the rest of the way backwards. I remember this happened to me the first time I ran the Falls, years ago.



**David Jacobs, leaving Truck Stop eddy, above Nantahala Falls**



**David Jacobs, same area as above**





**David Jacobs, starting across, at the top of Nantahala Falls**



**David Jacobs, part-way down Nantahala Falls**



**David Jacobs, on the green tongue, farther down Nantahala Falls**



**David Jacobs, breaking through the whitewater at the bottom of Nantahala Falls**

**The End**



# **A Moonlight Paddle at Bay Area Park**

**August 7, 2009**

**by**

**Harmon Everett**

The Friday of the Paddle started out cloudy, and in fact rain fell for an hour during the day at Bay Area Park, but by the time evening rolled around, the sky was clear and sunny. As the Moon was not going to rise until after 9 pm, Harmon had earlier written to the Harris County Board of Commissioners to get permission to stay out later than the typical 10 pm park closing, and that request had been graciously granted. A dozen folks gathered at Bay Area Park and started setting up their boats for paddling after dark.

Paul Woodcock and his two granddaughters brought a canoe and a kayak; Dave Kitson, Mike Pollard, Sondra Fabian brought kayaks. Bob and Donna Zapatka brought their canoe, as did John Rich & Kay Choate, and Natalie Wiest and her daughter. Several new members and a couple of guests brought us up to 13 paddlers in 9 boats - 5 canoes and 4 kayaks. Most hadn't ever done any paddling after dark before, and were excited about the adventure.



**Getting the boats ready to paddle at Bay Area Park**

All photos, unless otherwise noted, were taken by Carol Oeller



**Boats on the water**

Paddling north from the Bay Area Park into the Bayou brought us the typical views of birds, and fish jumping all around. As it got darker, the tree frogs roared into chorus. With the earlier rain, and the evening breeze, it was cooler on the water.



**Bob & Donna Zapatka**



**Harmon Everett paddling on Armand Bayou**

Sondra had been through this area earlier in the year, and was interested in how much had grown back since Ike had torn out most of the vegetation. We saw several paths through the brush on the banks and wondered if they were alligator paths.

This was definitely still water as it got darker, with mirrored reflections of the sky on the water in front of us. The Sun set around 8, and it was pretty much fully dark by 8:40 or so when we decided to turn around and head back. Most of us had flashlights, or head lights. Harmon had a lantern hung from a makeshift stand, but turned it off after a while to be able to see better in the dark. Several people were able to see alligators looking back at us from the water with their beady orange eyes reflecting our flashlights.



**Paddling on the bayou just before sunset.**



**Beautiful sunset.**

We took a wrong turn at one point, and ended up having to retrace our steps (paddles?) and find the right way back. Avoiding (or not) some of the stumps and tree limbs that populate the bayou was quite a trick in the dark, and we often had to swerve abruptly, or just brace for it and accept a collision. At one point the water under the bow of Harmon's boat exploded in a fountain of water, whether from a collision with a big fish or an alligator is debatable.

While the Moon was supposed to rise just after 9 pm, it took it a while to get above the trees, and we were almost back to Bay Area Park before the full Moon came up high in the sky.

We came ashore and counted to make sure we hadn't lost any boats, and packed up from a really memorable evening.



**Moonrise**



**Raccoon bandit**

Photo by John Rich

While we were packing up, several raccoons were raiding the garbage cans, making another encounter with more of the area wildlife.

The Sheriff's Deputy was there waiting for us to leave so he could lock up, and mentioned that he personally wouldn't want to be out on the bayou after dark, but I'm sure all of us will jump at the chance to do it again, and add paddling after dark to our repertoire of paddling skills.

**The End**