

Trip Report
White Salmon River below Condit Dam
Saturday 24 October 1992

Prepared by: Bo Shelby

Rafters: Roppe, Groznic, Haas in 8 foot Sevylor paddle raft.

Kayaker: Shelby in 11 foot Corsica.

Flow: ¹⁰⁰~~120~~ cfs within the affected area

River segment length: Approximately 3 miles from Condit dam to Columbia River.

Vertical drop: 169 feet total, gradient 30 feet per mile, excluding flat water at end of run.

Access: Put-in is off the dead-end project road that leads to the dam from Highway 141. Climb down ladder off dam, walk about 100 yards along top of wooden penstock, climb down off penstock and scramble several hundred feet down steep basalt rocks. Put-in is the small lake at the base of falls formed by water from the spillway.

Take-out is at the end of the approximately 1/2-mile lake formed by the confluence with the Columbia River. A privately owned boat launch on river right is used by motor boats. Floaters can scramble up a trail on river left just upstream from the bridge where Highway 14 crosses the White Salmon River.

Description: A short run with approximately 6 - 8 class II-III rapids, which generally are small riffle-type drops which do not require complex maneuvering. In addition, there is one ledge drop of approximately 6 vertical feet about mid way through the run (near Steel Bend). This drop has a vertical waterfall chute on river right and a 45-degree sloping chute on river left, with the entire drop confined in a vertical-walled canyon. The drop can be scouted and/or portaged on either side of the river, perhaps more easily on river left.

The rafters got hung up in the first rapid, requiring them to get out and push the boat off the rocks. This became the format for rafting most of the drops until we reached the 6 foot falls, where the attempt to land the raft above the falls resulted in a foot-long tear in the (admittedly low quality) raft. Rafters walked out from here.

Kayak hit bottom on several rapids, but none actually stopped the boat or required getting out to drag the boat. Kayak ran the 6 foot falls on river right, and continued solo after the rafters started hiking. There were several more small rapids before reaching the powerhouse. There was increased flow below the powerhouse, with several additional class II-III drops made more interesting by the added water (flow from the powerhouse brought total to

approximately 450 cfs). Moving water ends in a lake formed by confluence with the Columbia, Paddled across lake to take-out, arriving about 10 minutes before the rafters (now driving a Pacific Power truck).

Evaluation

Positive points: Beautiful scenery in a narrow basalt gorge. The lake where you put-in below the dam is a spectacular spot, with water from the spillway free-falling over a vertical basalt cliff about 35 feet into a clear pool. Water quality appears to be high. Whitewater is relatively easy and straight-forward, with the exception of the 6 foot falls.

Negative points: Access is currently across private (PPL) land and requires climbing on the dam and penstock and scrambling down steep rocks to put-in. Take-out is easier, along a short anglers' trail to a pull-out along Highway 141.

Probably the greatest negative is the short length of the run. Although this might be a more prominent attraction in other locations, the presence of the standard run (BZ Corners to Northwestern Lake) and more advanced runs (Green Truss Bridge to BZ Corners, and Sunnyside Road to Green Truss Bridge) just upstream make this a relatively lower-profile run. Access at the put-in is inconvenient, although the scramble down is comparable to what is done currently by kayakers at the BZ Corners and Green Truss Bridge put-ins (a bit harder than the former, but easier than the latter). Access for large rafts that are not easily carried would require considerable effort.

Water level on this trip (100 cfs) was low for even a small raft, requiring rafters to get out in several of the rapids to push. For kayaking, the level was generally too low to provide much challenge, even though there was no place where it was necessary to get out of the boat. The six foot falls was an exception which provided an interesting challenge even at this flow.

I would guess that flows of 200 - 300 cfs would make it possible to kayak this stretch without hitting bottom. Flows in the 500 - 1,000 range would probably give the water enough power to make the rapids more interesting. I don't see any unusual hazards in this stretch (i.e., none that are not commonly found along similar stretches, such as the BZ Corners to Northwestern Lake stretch). The 6 foot falls is worth scouting, and some might choose the portage.