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SUMMER 2015

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A DEVASTATED NATION

The Selway River
Journey through Idaho's Wilderness

MIKE MCMILLAN



WILDFIRE: THE BURNING SEASON



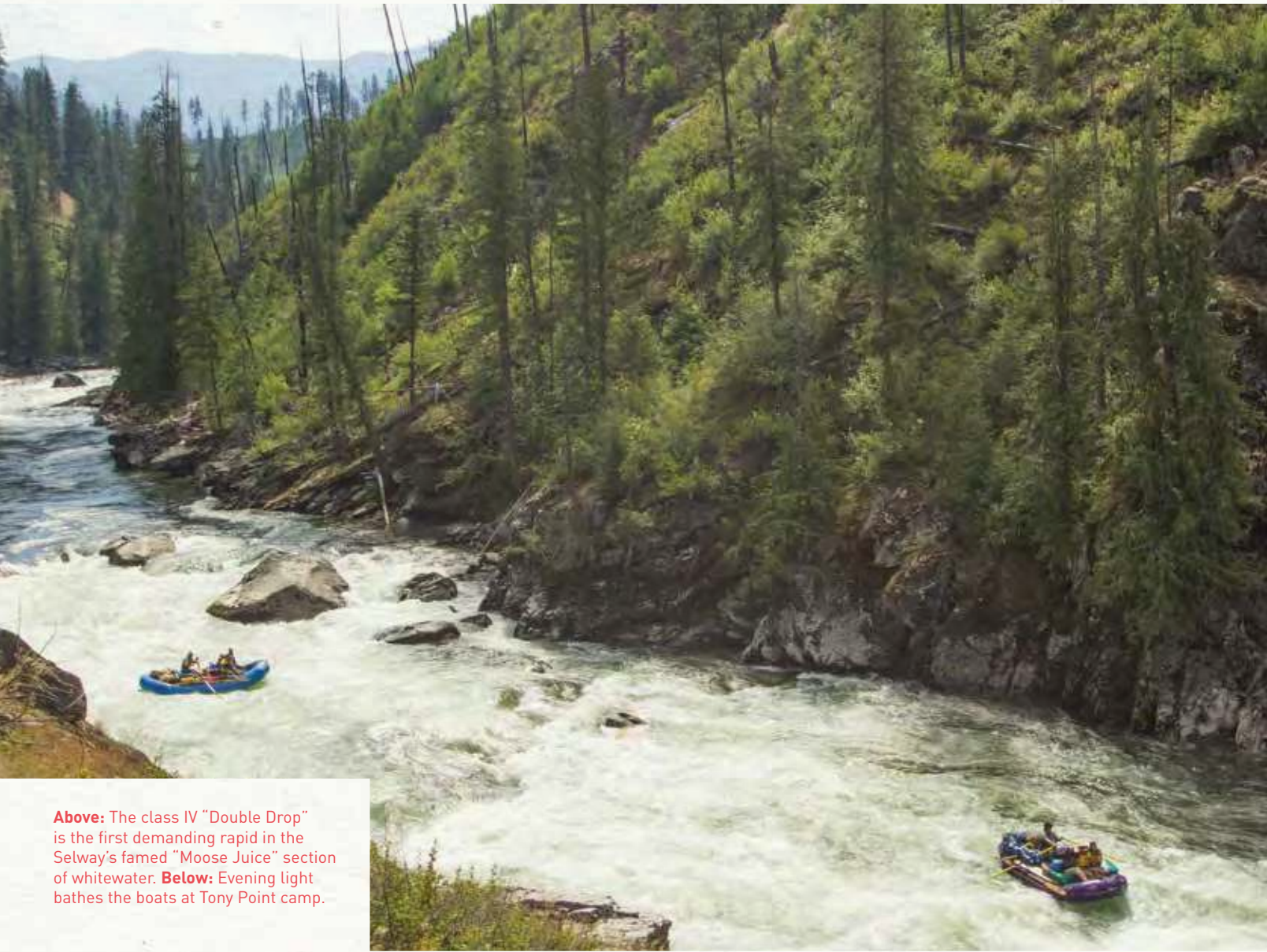
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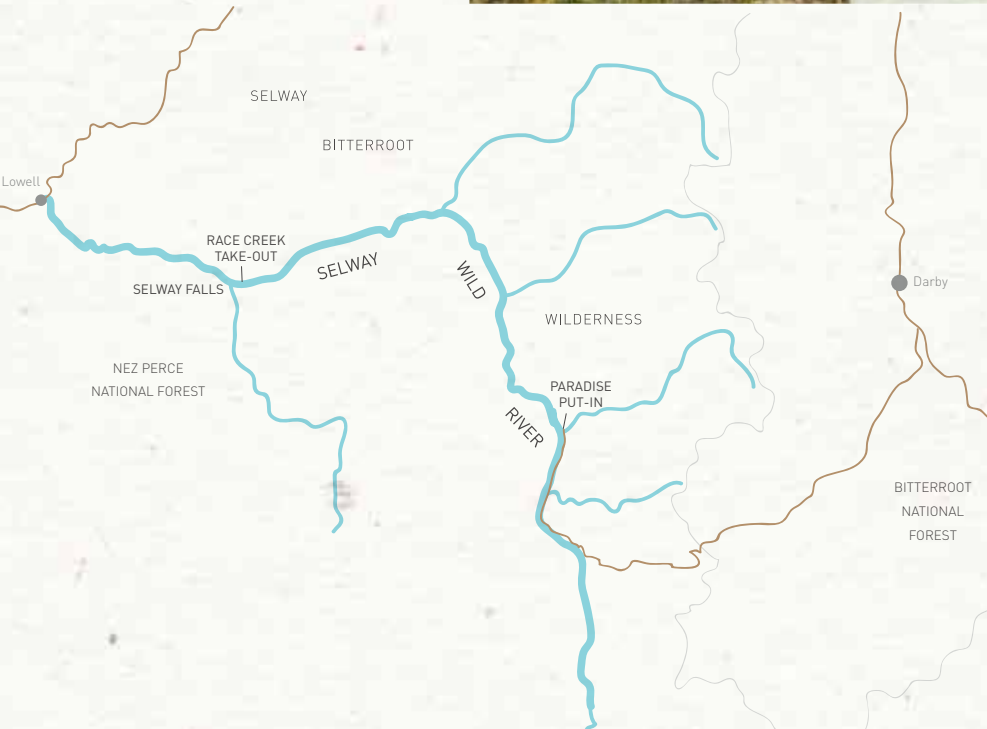
ESCAPE TO
NEW ZEALAND

ECONOMIES
OF TRAIL

THE FATE OF
HONEYBEES



Above: The class IV "Double Drop" is the first demanding rapid in the Selway's famed "Moose Juice" section of whitewater. **Below:** Evening light bathes the boats at Tony Point camp.





THE 'SEL WAY'

Idaho's unrivaled wilderness whitewater

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TYLER ALLEN

THE ASCENDING, FLUTELIKE SONG of a Swainson's thrush fills the air as our boats silently glide between hulking granite boulders. Sunlight filters through the verdant fans of Western red cedar boughs above us as our four rafts drop into "Goat Creek" rapid.

We're deep in the Bitterroot Mountains, on day two of a six-day float down Idaho's Selway River, one of the crown jewels of North American boating. The 47-mile trip is held in similar regard to the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon and Idaho's Middle Fork of the Salmon.

We launched in early July, at a put-in aptly named Paradise where White Cap Creek joins the Selway. One is immediately struck by the water clarity: Nearly every rock passing beneath the boat appears in sharp focus.

The lead guide and owner of SOAR Northwest, 40-year-old Ari Kotler, told us the water is so pure he drinks it straight from the river.

Our group of 16 includes three other guides as well as Kotler's wife Danielia and her friend; two men in their early 60s who originally met on a 2007 NOLS course; and a group of eight longtime friends associated through academic science.

We camp the first night on a grassy bench perched a few feet above the river. Jim Brockman, one of the clients and an ace fisherman, stands statue-still at dusk watching the water flow slowly by. "We're here one night," Brockman says, his gaze locked on the water. "This river's been doing this for millions of years."

Kotler and his three other guides cook a dinner of salmon, salad and Greek yogurt-mashed potatoes. Wilderness river guides work 24-hour days. After they safely navigate the boats to camp each afternoon, they unload the rafts, set up the camp kitchen, cook dinner, wash dishes, and entertain the guests. They're ready to snap to attention should any emergencies occur during the night, and load camp back into the boats each morning.

Kotler has already implored us to embrace the "Sel Way," leaving the trappings of modern life behind and being present in the wilderness. Guide Joe Lindsay echoes that sentiment after dinner, while we're gathered around the fire.

"This is a big day [and] I want to acknowledge it," Lindsay tells us. "This is a day of transition when you leave the planes, cars and travel." >>

IFIRST HEARD ABOUT THE SELWAY as a wilderness river guide in Oregon and Idaho nearly a decade ago in my twenties, and always expected to be on the oars when I first floated this canyon. But having spent little time rowing since my guiding days, I was happy that Kotler and his team were responsible for our safe passage.

The Selway is unique in that it's the only U.S. river that received immediate inclusion in the 1964 Wilderness Act – as part of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness – and instant designation as “wild” under the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

A limited permit season from May 15 to July 31 was designed to protect the isolated nature of the Selway, and allows only one launch per day. In 2015, private boaters submitted 3,600 applications for just 62 permits. Comparatively, 387 permits are available for the Middle Fork of the Salmon season, which runs from May 28 to Sept. 3.

Prior to May 15, the Selway is often swollen from spring runoff requiring expert big-water boating skills. After July 31, the river can be very low and technical, and smaller boats like kayaks and rafts shorter than 14 feet may be necessary to navigate the shallow boulder gardens.



Above: The SOAR Northwest Selway guide crew: Orea Roussis, Joe Lindsay, owner Ari Kotler, and Shane Moser. This summer, SOAR will begin running trips on the Main Salmon River from late July through October. **Below:** Jim Brockman coaxing cut-throat trout to the surface, below the bridge at Selway Lodge.





Guide Joe Lindsay drops his raft into a big trough in "Jim's Creek" rapid.

WE SPEND THE SECOND NIGHT at Tony Point, across the river from where Moose Creek joins the Selway. Kotler tells me there's a lot of energy here above the "Moose Juice," a 5-mile run of class III-IV rapids that lands the river on every serious whitewater enthusiast's tick list. If you can't feel it, you can certainly hear it: Moose Creek nearly doubles the river's volume and tumbles out of sight around the next bend, and the canyon's gradient here increases from an average of 28 feet per mile to 50.

We have two nights to contemplate this rowdy stretch of water, spending a layover day at the Moose Creek confluence. A few of us spend the morning hiking to a fire lookout tower on top of 5,300-foot Shissler Mountain. From this vantage point it seems like we can see the entirety of the 1.25-million acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. I cool off in the afternoon at the sandy point dividing the two streams, casting big flies to hungry cutthroat.

The Moose Juice is where the Selway gained its reputation as a demanding wilderness whitewater trip. In high water, rapids named "Double Drop," "Little Niagara," and "Ladle" – a long

maze of maneuvers, and considered the crux rapid of the trip – become gauntlets of big waves and boiling holes. This time of year, at medium flow, the drops are sheer but lose some of their punishing consequences.

The rapids, though, still have muscular energy. Our guides expertly lace the rafts through steep boulder gardens where the charging water uncoils from static obstacles in big, frothy waves. Kotler says despite the Selway's reputation as a challenging trip, it's feasible for nearly any client once the river drops to this level. He guided the river's first quadriplegic descent in 2012.

We stop for lunch at Tango Bar and crack celebratory cans of beer; the guides are conspicuously relaxed with the meat of the whitewater behind us. Large eddies above and below the beach are teeming with trout. Brockman brings them to the surface with flies and artful casts; I find them with a snorkel and mask, gathered in the deep, green recesses.

The fishing catches fire downstream of Tango where I hook a rose-colored, 15-inch cutthroat on a yellow stimulator, then another equally beautiful fish on a grasshopper fly. >>

We camp at Pinchot Creek that night, at the top of a giant gravel beach beneath towering Ponderosa pines. As the river dropped, it trapped a freshwater pool above the gravel bar, where we find coiled strings of Western toad eggs – some would be 30-foot long stretched end to end. Cutthroat smolt dart around the egg masses and caddis nymphs crawl slowly, dragging their tiny stone casings like hermit crabs.

We spend the layover day fishing off the gravel bar, swimming through the rapid above camp and reading in the shade. For lunch, Kotler and crew cook up hot Reuben sandwiches with homemade coleslaw and grill massive Montana-raised New York strip steaks for dinner.

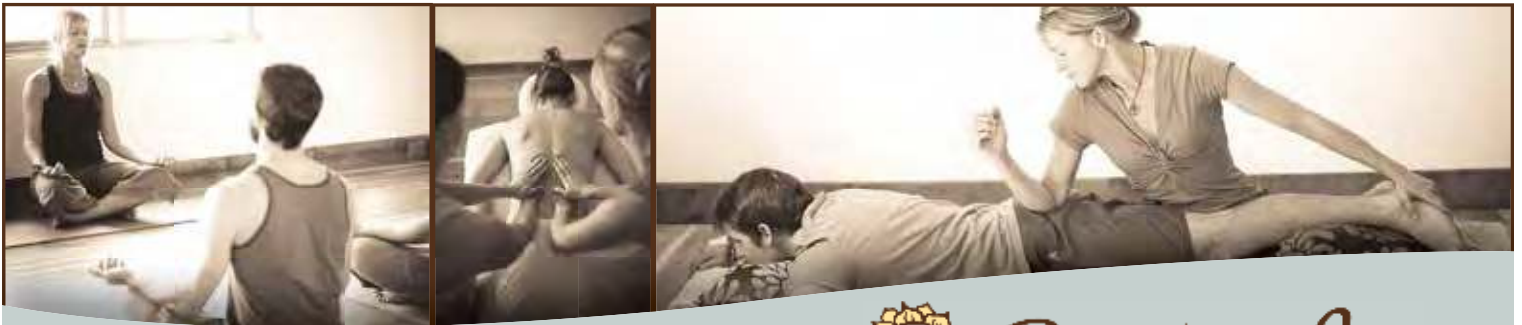
A soft, steady rain begins at dawn on our final day. Damp, heavy air is pierced intermittently by winter wrens singing their frenetic yet musical pleas to find a mate. The sky clears by breakfast, but our group is

subdued knowing that modern life will return downstream.

“The last day is very sad,” Nancy Konopka told me earlier in the week. “After the last big rapid you wonder if takeout is around the next bend.” This is the fourth time since 2005 she and her husband Allan have floated the Selway with SOAR Northwest. I feel the melancholy too, knowing I’ll be driving back to Bozeman, Montana, instead of reloading for the next launch with Kotler and his team.

At the wilderness boundary, the rafts stop at a rocky beach. “Try to stop and reflect on the trip,” Kotler says. “Take a stone with you if you haven’t already. Thank the river for giving us safe travels.”

I pick up a heart-shaped rock to add to my collection from other Western rivers, knowing this memento of the “Sel Way” will be unrivaled. 🐾



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SUMMER SCHEDULE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
10:00-11:00am Adult Ballet (see website for specific dates) 6:00-7:15pm All Levels Yoga	8:00-8:45am Sound Bath Meditation (see website for specific dates) 9-10:15am All Levels Yoga 5:30-7:00pm All Levels Vinyasa Flow Yoga 7:30-9:00pm Therapeutics/Yoga Nidra	7:00-8:00am All Levels Yoga 8:15-9:15am Core Focused Pilates 9:30-10:45am All Levels Yoga 6:30-8:00pm All Levels Yoga	7:30-8:30am All Levels Yoga 9:00-10:15am All Levels Yoga 11:00-12:00 All Levels Yoga Community Class (held outside in Town Center weather permitting)	7:00-8:00am All Levels Yoga 8:15-9:15am Roll it out Pilates 9:30-10:45am All Levels Yoga	8:30-9:30am Level II Yoga 10:00-11:30am All Levels Yoga 5:30-7:30pm The Practice (Level II-III) (on the 1st and 3rd Fridays)	9:00-10:15am Ashtanga Flow Please see website for more details on classes and teachers.