

In the same boat?

As urban and suburban areas add to their acreage, families have turned an eye to the great outdoors for rewarding vacations and adventures. Technology has made wilderness river camping more convenient and more comfortable. Whitewater boating craft have also experienced major changes which have made floating more accessible to families. Parents that used to send the kids to Grandma's for a week while they took on the rapids are now packing up the whole "kit and caboodle" to share the boating experience and the quality time together—and the "caboodle" may even include the family dog.



Once the safety issues have been weighed, and the decision has been made to include the entire family, the following information should help everyone to have a great trip. Teaching your children to be good stewards of the land will also continue the legacy into the future.

Impacts

With more children and pets showing up in wilderness river corridors, "Leaving No Trace" can be a bit complicated. Camping with kids and dogs requires a little more management to reduce the impacts that come with these bundles of energy. The most obvious (and offensive) are solid waste on the ground, and big holes left behind by enthusiastic excavators.

Handling Waste

Tidying up after your dog should be a fairly simple matter. Although you can't follow Rover every minute, please try to scoop up as much of his solid waste as possible and place it in your porta-potty. (You may want to have a special shovel dedicated to this duty.) Cavalier non-compliance of managing pet waste will eventually lead to permanent restrictions of pets on the Middle Fork and Main Salmon, so do your doody!

For small children in diapers or training pants, bringing a separate five gallon bucket with a gasket to serve as the "diaper pail" keeps this odiferous trash from being mingled with the rest of the camp trash. Plenty of pop-up wipes will help with sanitation, and you may even want to set up a separate hand-washing station for those in your party who will be handling dirty diapers. Please DO NOT put wipes in your porta-potty! They cause problems in the SCAT machines.

For small children who are out of diapers, but don't have a lot of control with bodily functions, it is a good idea to start getting them on a schedule for eliminating waste a few weeks before you launch on your float trip. Try to focus on the early morning and late afternoon/evening; i.e., the times when your camp (and porta-potty) will likely be set up. Pack plenty of plastic bags for the possibility of soiled underpants (sealable bags for those you hope to wash and reuse when you get home, produce-type bags for those you will be putting in the common camp trash). For float-time emergencies, keep paper bags, deodorize, and some toilet paper in a small ammo can. Save the waste in the paper bag with some deodorize, keep it in the can until you can place it in your porta-potty. Waterless hand sanitizer can be kept in your day bag or near the surface of dry boxes.



Avoid "Beach Reconstruction"

Nearly everyone can expound on the merits of digging in the sand. Fortunately, a sandy beach is a renewable resource if you take the time to return it to the state you found it in after a Castle and Canal session. Small buckets and small shovels keep the projects to a manageable scale. Plastic animals and cars/trucks also add to the cast of characters and are easy to clean off. Try to avoid any toys such as plastic boats that children will be tempted to float in the river.



When the activity is over, collect the tools and toys, and use bail buckets full of water to

restore the beach to its natural condition. Be sure to replace any rocks. Please avoid re-routing or damming any creeks that run near the campsites. Do not dig holes inside the tree line, and please leave flowers and leaves on the plants. If you children bring pocket knives, make sure they don't carve on trees or downed wood.

Other low-impact activities include: Frisbees, Hula Hoops, soft foam



balls, squirt gun shooting galleries, and good old fashioned water fights. Older kids will also enjoy supervised swimming and fishing. A couple decks of playing cards are easy to pack, as are small artist kits (small pads of paper and colored pencils). Count wildlife. And never underestimate the power of a good book on a sunny afternoon or reading to your children by camplight.

Trash Management

Float trips are an excellent opportunity to develop good Wilderness Ethics in your children. Educate them on the importance of cleaning up campsites in order to Leave No Trace for the next user. You may want to use incentives such as extra treats for picking up all litter and microtrash. Keep resealable plastic containers close at hand full of non-melting snacks that are not individually wrapped—such as mixed dried fruit, mixed nuts, lemon drops, butter mints, cookies, etc. Along that same line, fill the containers in the mornings with finger-foods such as peeled and cut-up fruits and vegetables, hard cheese slices, or other snacks for the kids to munch on while floating. Re-packaging food reduces the potential for little wrappers to accidentally fall out of the boat and into the Wild and Scenic River.

Safety

Above all, YOUR ability to maintain safe conditions for your children and pets should determine whether you include them on your whitewater trip.

Inquire beforehand whether there are any rapids that cannot be walked around. Adults should set the example by wearing PFD's (personal flotation devices), but children should ALWAYS wear appropriate PFD's properly zipped, snapped, and strapped while floating or playing at the river's edge. Even then, a PFD will not guarantee survival in the event your child falls out of the boat or steps into the current. The same applies to PFD's for pets. You may also want to consider the use of helmets for head protection, for adults as well as children.



Proper dress and sunscreen for all weather conditions will also save a lot of heartache, and contribute to a rewarding experience.

Risk

There are inherent risks associated with backcountry and river recreation. Many natural hazards exist, and conditions can change at any time. It is the responsibility of the boating party to exercise good judgment involving decisions to launch, and decisions regarding daily activities once on the river.



If you make the decision to join the ranks taking family trips on wilderness rivers, please invest the extra energy to plan ahead. Be proactive in making your trip a safe and pleasant memory for not only your family, but for all the other wilderness users who share the river with you.

For more information:

Wild & Scenic Main Salmon River
North Fork Ranger District
PO Box 180, North Fork, ID 83466
Phone: 208-865-2700

Middle Fork of the Salmon River
Middle Fork Ranger District
HC 63 Box 1669, Challis, ID 83226
Phone: 208-879-4101

Handle With Care!



Kids and Dogs on the River

