

Valley Angler Deliverance by Bill Thompson

It's hard to believe that it was thirty-five years ago that the movie Deliverance was released. For those of you too young to remember the movie it was based on a novel by James Dickey and some of you may have read it in high school. If per-chance you have read it and seen the movie as well then you know that the endings are not the same. The story is about four city fellows who decide to take a canoe trip down a remote river in the mountains of Georgia. The tag line for the movie was, "This is the weekend they didn't play golf". The movie stars Jon Voight, Ned Beatty, Ronnie Cox and of course Burt Reynolds. The film is credited with launching Burt Reynolds career and many would argue the one and only good film he ever made.

Burt Reynolds plays a character by the name of Lewis who is a macho type of fellow who thinks of himself as the great outdoors man. A recent essay in Newsweek by James Dickey's son compares the character Lewis to Vice President Dick Cheney.

There are several memorable scenes in the movie beginning with the one involving a rousing musical rendition of Dueling Banjos. I still have a copy of the album in the original 33 RPM format. In order not to spoil the movie for you I will not mention here the other most memorable scene; if you have seen the movie then you know what I am talking about. Bow hunting and white water canoeing played important parts in the movie and left a lasting impression on the American movie going public. So much so that both sports had a sudden surge in popularity. Fly fishing experienced a similar surge after the release of A River Runs Through It.

The sport of white water canoeing enjoyed such a spurt that canoe traffic on the Chattooga River, the river where Deliverance was filmed, went from 800 boaters in 1971 to 21,000 in just two years. Previous to the increase in boating traffic on the Chattooga the river had been a popular destination for fishermen. By 1974 the conflicts between anglers and boaters had become so common that the USFS was forced to declare the first 21 miles of the river open to foot traffic only. Recently the organization American Whitewater has filed a suit to open up the upper river to floaters saying that the current law is discriminatory. Needless to say many fishermen feel that they will be squeezed out and are opposed to any change in the regulations.

Now it may be unlikely that many "Valley" fishermen will make the effort to fish the Chattooga in the next year, but we do share a common bond with the fishermen of the Chattooga. Those of us who call the Saco our home river are all too familiar with the "aluminum hatch". Any fishermen south of First Bridge on a summer day know that almost precisely at 9:30 A. M. the first flotilla of canoes and kayaks will be coming through the glade pool.

The problem is not limited to the Saco. In recent years the boat traffic on the Androscoggin River has increased dramatically. Not that long ago canoe traffic on the Androscoggin was limited to the occasional summer camp trip. Last September I happened to be on the river on a day that must have been designated as "College Day", three different college outdoor clubs had

gathered at one of my favorite pools which also happens to be a popular launching site for canoe trips. Now don't get me wrong I love to see young people outdoors enjoying themselves and these were a great bunch of kids. I am positive that if one of their leaders had mentioned to them that the polite thing to do is to go behind a fisherman they would have done so. The guy that chose to practice his Eskimo roll in front of me probably had no idea that he was annoying me to no end.

Today's surge in the popularity of paddling is not driven by a movie released thirty-five years ago. More likely the increase is due to the proliferation of cheaper and easier to use boats and in our "Valley" more rental companies catering to tourists. The Burt Reynolds motive is still a factor only now we call it "extreme sport". The sport has become so popular that the noble Appalachian Mountain Club has embraced it and used its extensive lobbying power, in the case of the Androscoggin River, to dictate water flows. Several rafting and canoe rental companies have joined forces with the AMC to get preferential treatment in the way of flow releases below the Pontook Dam. If anyone should be given preference when it comes to water flow it should be the trout.

When it comes to adding boat traffic to any waterway fishermen are not without sin, and I speak for myself as well. In recent years inflatable one man pontoon boats have become very popular with anglers. These small craft were once regulated by design to flat water, however recent improvements in material and design have enabled these crafts to run rivers; even those with sizeable rapids. With the increase in popularity and the fact that they are now being made offshore the price has come way down. It is now possible to own one of these craft for only a few hundred dollars. They have only recently become popular in our neck of the woods, however in the west they have become somewhat of a plague. Rivers, like the Missouri, were once home to only a few drift boats, but because of the influx of these crafts almost anyone can float the river. On some weekends the rivers become so crowded that conflicts between boaters and waders have become common place.

The answer to the problem is complex at best and is not going to go away. Certainly the paddling community needs to begin to address the problem by better educating their members. We can start right here in our "Valley" with the canoe rental companies explaining to their customers that wading fishermen should be approached slowly and to go behind them when ever possible. Anglers should also have the common curtsy to allow the right of way especially if the water they are fishing is the only way to navigate the channel. For a great many of the people who rent a canoe or kayak to float the Saco this is, "the weekend they didn't golf". Like the characters in Deliverance it is the first time that they have ever done anything like this and they don't have a clue.

It will be interesting to see what happens in the case of "anglers verses boaters" on the Chattooga. My guess is that the boaters may have the momentum and carry the day in which case it would be a sad day for fishermen. Lets hope that we never have to face that kind of thing in New Hampshire. We all need to remember that we all share a limited resource and it behooves us to all get along.

See you on the river