

River Rafting Adventure

I am sitting on a plane looking out the window at the beautiful natural terrain that is the Sawtooth mountain range of Idaho. I can't wait for the adventure that is about to unfold right in front of my eyes.

Today is a Wednesday. Out of the approximately 52 Wednesdays in a year, what makes this one so special? Well, I am on a trip, rafting on the Salmon River in Idaho with Boy Scouts Troop 223. There are over forty Scouts on this trip.

River rafting isn't as dangerous as many think. Well, it can be if you don't know what you're doing, but luckily, my crew's guides are pros, and they've taught us quite a few things about safety. The two paddle boats, which carry seven people each (six rafters and one guide) are the smaller counterparts of the giant gearboats. They, unsurprisingly, carry one thing: gear. There are also two IKs (Inflatable Kayaks) that I love using, especially when we go into rapids that have big waves. Some of the rapids I enjoyed kayaking were Big Mallard and Elk Horn, though there were many, many more. When our guides first showed us the IKs, I wasn't interested because my experience paddle boating had led me to believe that there could not possibly be anything more fun. So at first, I stayed in the paddle boat. But when my guide urged me to at least try kayaking, I decided to do it. I was stunned at how much fun it was. In the kayak, I felt independent and at one with the massive rapids, a feeling I could only dream of experiencing in a paddle boat.

When you kayak, it isn't that different from rafting when it comes to safety. You wear your life jacket, Crocs (In my case), and follow your guide's lines exactly. Lines are the paths that rafters take through rapids to avoid holes and rocks so that they can make it out safely.

So today, as I sit in my kayak, I try to visualize what this day will look like. Some good rapids, and some slower ones. A stop for lunch mid-day on a beach, continue until we reach our campsite, then stop and set up camp for the night. At the campfire, my friends and I will sing, play games, and wrestle.

As I head into my first rapid of the day, the guide in the paddle boat I'm following tells me that this rapid is pretty calm, but there is a decent-sized hole (a small whirlpool) that I need to avoid. As we head into the rapid, I feel pretty confident. In the last three days that I have been kayaking, I have not capsized. Additionally, I have been through two class four rapids, the second most intense type of rapid, and made it out without any scary incidents. I snap back to reality as a decent-sized wave comes toward me. I quickly tee up to the wave and go over it. Oh, shoot. I'm about to go over a rock.

Rocks are dangerous, but not in the way you think. Rocks themselves are harmless, but the endless whitewater they create in their wake isn't. And there is no way to tell a rock wave apart from a normal one until you're right in front of it, at which point it's too late.

I brace to capsize, as I know it is about to happen.

It's slow and suspenseful. As I capsize, I hold onto my kayak and paddle. When I'm in the water, I suddenly realize one of my Crocs is missing. I pray that it's still buoyant in whitewater. A few moments later I see it surface a short distance away from

me. I board my kayak and pick up my Croc. Wow. For my first time capsizing, that wasn't too bad. It was actually kind of fun.

The day continues, and the rest of the rapids are great. I don't capsize again that day. When we stop for lunch, I realize that I am happy that I capsized. The reason is that I am no longer scared. I now recognize that capsizing is a part of kayaking, and it's part of the experience. Even though it's scary at first, it's also exciting. After lunch, I reapply sunscreen, get in my kayak, and paddle on.

As I near the first wave of the next rapid, I make sure to stay behind the paddle boats. My day is going really smoothly, I think. I go over two huge waves in class three rapids with the exhilarating feeling of adrenaline rushing through my veins. I tee up to a wave, but it's too late. The wave is cresting and about to crash on me. I think I'm about to capsize again.

But magically, I go through the wave. Not over, not around it, but *through* it. I get completely soaked but the feeling is what counts, right? After a few more rapids, we finally stop to make camp for the night.

After dinner, we set up our sleeping bags outside and get comfortable in them. *This trip is truly amazing*, I think. Today, I overcame my fears of capsizing in rapids. I formed closer friendships with my peers on this trip, an essential thing to do, especially for the upcoming five-day backpacking trek. As I stare up at the star-filled sky, I think, *This is the best day.*