

White-Water Rafting Adventure Strengthens Family Ties

By Megan R. Weeden

"All forward! Go forward! Forward! Left back! Left back!" Professional River Runners' guide Julie Curry is bellowing from the back of the raft as we head toward a Class III rapid on Maine's Kennebec River. "Great job guys! We hit it right in the middle!"

The river is running strong from recent heavy rains, but the sun is out and all 10 of us are smiling from the adrenaline rush we just experienced.

"That was so cool!" cries 11-year-old Tony Petruski.

The first rapid, called Taster, was just the beginning of a heart-stopping several-mile series that intensifies in strength until we are dropped over Magic Falls — a Class IV rapid. We are far from the end of our trip, but have reached



Professional River Runners offers various whitewater rafting trips on the Kennebec River in Maine from April to October.

calmer water and are able to jump out for a quick swim.

It is the second day of our two-day wilderness camping trip with the Professional River Runners, a family-owned whitewater rafting company based in West Forks, Maine.

Ed Beauchamp, who started Professional Rivers Runners in 1990, said rafting gives families a chance to

have fun together. "Time and time again I see how having the chance to be out in the wilderness and having fun really brings families closer together," he said. "They really like the idea of being out in the wilderness and they find out not only how special it is and how you have to take care of it — but that it can be fun too. Plus, they meet other people and sometimes become friends for life."

My husband and I are roughing it with the Petruski family from Minnesota, and the Franko family from Monmouth, Maine. The nine of us arrived at base at 8:30 a.m. the day before. We slipped into full

wetsuits (much needed, as it was still early June and a bit chilly) and put our belongings (sleeping bag, dry clothes, etc.) into dry bags, which would be brought to the island where we would camp. We pile into a shuttle bus for an hour-long trek along an active logging route.

We begin our adventure at East Outlet — a short Class II-III section of whitewater originating out of Moosehead Lake. Half of us are in a small raft with our guide Julie and the other half are in inflatable kayaks. At the middle of this stretch of rapids, we stop and switch boats. The inflatable kayaks fly down the river — hitting wonderful Class III rapids. At the end of this bit of whitewater, we pull off shore for a cold-cut lunch and a dip in Swimmer's Hole.

"That was so much fun!" says Tony, with a huge smile. "I want to do that again!"

Pro's motorboat tows us across the lake to the campsite on a wilderness island. Our tents and sleeping pads are set up, our personal gear has been delivered, and a campfire is roaring. Once on the island, Tony and Zach Franko, who is 15, go off and fish from shore while Lori Petruski and Kourtney Franko, both 13, swim until they are wrinkled.

Later that evening, a full-course lobster dinner is cooked over an open fire and dinner concludes with hand-cranked ice cream and strawberry shortcake.

We spend the night around

the campfire swapping stories and jokes and listening to the loons. Lori and Kourtney stay up late whispering in their tent by flashlight.

Refreshed from a great night's sleep in the outdoors, we wake the following morning to a full, hearty breakfast of blueberry pancakes, home fries, sausage, and hot coffee.


Later, the motorboat tows us across the rest of the lake to the dam on the Kennebec River. Leaving the small boat and kayaks behind, we walk down the hill and embark on a larger raft for a day of large Class III, IV and V whitewater rafting.

"Great job guys!" calls Julie after we're safely on the other side of White Washer. "You all followed my number one rule of staying in my boat!"

We stop along the river underneath a waterfall and enjoy a snack. The lower half of the Kennebec River widens out and is perfect for water fighting and joke telling. Julie points out a bald eagle and the osprey nests along the river. She tells us some stories of the river's logging days.

We arrive back at base camp a few hours later, change into dry clothes, and enjoy a hearty chicken, steak, and salmon BBQ lunch. Our trip ends with a slide show and video of the group rafting the big rapids that morning.

Kourtney and Lori exchange addresses and promise to keep in touch.

"That was so much fun," Tony says again. "I loved everything we did." 

Professional River Runners, a AAA Show Your Card & Save partner, offers family whitewater rafting trips, family camping trips, and canoeing and kayaking on the Kennebec, Penobscot and Dead Rivers from April to October for ages 8 to 80. It also offers whitewater rafting in New York on the Hudson and Moose Rivers. AAA members receive a 10-percent discount by mentioning AAA at the time of their reservation.