



# The Alamo City Rivermen

# Babbler

Issue MMCCLIV

May 2004

The monthly newsletter of the Alamo City Rivermen

## Paddling the fine line between geek and Bubba.

### Next Meeting

April 14, 2004, Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near the intersection with Harry Wurzbach. See the [linked map](#). 6:30 to 8:30.

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### Club Officers

President Kathy Cusick  
[kmcusick@juno.com](mailto:kmcusick@juno.com)  
830-885-5324

Vice President David Plylar  
[wavegrazer@lycos.com](mailto:wavegrazer@lycos.com)

Sec./Treas. Marie Searight  
[marie@wireweb.net](mailto:marie@wireweb.net)  
830-625-0604

Editor Kenneth Bennight  
[bennight@alumni.utexas.net](mailto:bennight@alumni.utexas.net)  
210-826-7071

Mailings Kevin Longin  
[kevin\\_longin@baxter.com](mailto:kevin_longin@baxter.com)  
830-885-5324, ext. 5189

### Earth Day

The Earth Day events were a lot of fun. We again had long lines for our canoe rides and also had lines for the races. The cobbler was a big hit. There were 205 people who participated in the races and 236 more who went for canoe rides. The peach cobbler brought in \$177, which will go to the TRPA. On top of all that, there were other events and free trees. Your editor came home with a three foot mountain laurel. Thanks to all those who helped, especially those from the Hyatt Hill Country Resort who Gary Tupa persuaded to help.

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### Armond Bayou (Clear Lake)

By Natalie Wiest

A friend was in town from Minnesota for a job interview with NASA's Johnson Space Center, affording me the perfect opportunity to show off our local paddling opportunities and Armand Bayou Coastal Preserve hardly a stone's throw (in Texas distances) from the space center itself.

We pulled into the parking lot at Bay Area Park at 4:15, first time in a long time I'd seen it so devoid of cars and people. Perfect paddling weather, temps. in the upper 70s and lower 80s, moderate winds, sunshine dappled by the hardwood forest along the shores. The southwest winds of the past few days have piled the water into the bayou. The closest gages at Morgan's Point and Eagle Point (bayou is about halfway between them, but inland and empties into Clear Lake) showed levels almost 2' above the mean. No muddy bottom to be seen, and the water lapped the asphalt next to the parking area.

I predicted good alligator viewing on the bayou, and we were not disappointed. First sighting was a big boy of about 8' fully out of the water. He stood up to launch himself into the bayou with a big splash. Eyes and snouts protruded from the water several times along our route - more abrupt gator launchings too, including one in tandem. I was giving Russ my windup to "Big Bertha" and sure enough, one really big one and two smaller ones where I'd predicted them. The gators seem to be fairly comfortable with person-powered boats in the water, and we were within 50' of several feet of them, keeping a respectful distance and moving slowly.

(Continued next page)

The flowering plant of the day was the coral bean (see the Aggie hort pages if you're curious, <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/erythrinaherace.htm> ). I've never seen this many in bloom, their red flowers were in sight almost everywhere along the bayou and sometimes up 15' or so into the trees and shrubs. False indigo had just started blooming way up the bayou. The trip was incredibly birdy too, at least one brilliant blue grosbeak, reddish egrets of both color phases and immatures, gold-crowned night heron, great blue herons, little blue herons, great (American)egret, and the splashy red of cardinals.

Another lovely paddle on the bayou - hope it's getting warm in your neck of the woods, too.

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## Upcoming Events

May 8, 2004	Medina River Clean-up	
May 12, 2004	Monthly Meeting	Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near Harry Wurzbach, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.
May 15, 2004	Maifest, Anhalt	Randy Hohlaus
May 29-31, 2004	Memorial Day Trip	Colorado River (Freeze Trip segment) Gib Hafernicks, 210-492-7517
June 9, 2004	Monthly Meeting	Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near Harry Wurzbach, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.
July 3, 4, 5, 2004	Junction on the Llano	Gib Hafernicks, 210-492-7517
July 14, 2004	Monthly Meeting	Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near Harry Wurzbach, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.
August 11, 2004	Monthly Meeting	Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near Harry Wurzbach, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.
September 4-6, 2004	Labor Day Trip	????
September 8, 2004	Monthly Meeting	Barbeque Station, 1612 N.E. Loop 410, near Harry Wurzbach, 6:30 to 8:00 P.M.



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## Dues!!!!

### Here We Are Again . . .

We'll try this one more time before resorting to dropping people off the list. If your name on the list below, por favor pay up. Coordinate with Marie Searight, [marie@wireweb.net](mailto:marie@wireweb.net), 830-625-0604. You can send checks to Alamo City Rivermen Canoe Club, P.O. Box 171194, San Antonio, Texas 78217. Thank you. If you have paid, but your name appears on the list, that's because I flubbed the message Marie sent me. Please email both Marie and me, letting is know you are wrongfully included. Even though Marie knows who's paid, your including her saves me exchanging emails with her. On the other hand, if you did not pay but your name is not on the list, please do the right thing.

Barbara Backus	Pari Gilliam	Annette Mascia
Saskia Bartlett	Alton Graham	Don McCann
Billie Bates	Frاند Hawley	Scott Reagan
Ed Bellens	John Hester	David Reichert
Joan Bishop	John McMenamin	Charles Riou
Rachel Boisselle	Kevin McNeil	Dr. Beck Steiner
Joe Brewer	Zoltan Mraz	Kali Tighe
Nancy Burns	Glenn Nelson	Jessica Waig
Larry Burns	Rick O'Brien	Hans Weichsel
Ted Crane	Frank Onion	Fred Wills
Robert Edwards	David Ott	
Larry Elder	David Plylar	
Bill Esparza	David Halbert	
Ken Fries	Randy Hohlaus	



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### Big Bend Experience

This article came to me from the Austin Paddling Club and apparently originally appeared in the April *Big Bend Gazette*:

EDITOR'S NOTE: We received a press release from Big Bend National Park about a successful search and rescue effort that occurred in the park on Saturday, March 20. The press release read, in part:

“A group of five college students from Wisconsin began a two-day river trip through Santa Elena Canyon...with rented canoe equipment. The group had no previous canoeing experience and were first-time visitors to Big Bend National Park” Deborah Calverr of Rio Grande Adventures, an outfitter, was on the electronic mailing list, and responded to all recipients of the release with more information about the trip, including this: “These people encountered a massive wall of water, due to the heavy rains miles away in Mexico. They handled the situation with courage and level-headedness that led to a safe rescue. Under these same conditions, even a guided trip, whether canoes or rafts, could have suffered the same results.”

The BBG contacted Rio Grande Adventures with a request for information on how to con tact directly the canoers involved. Via email we received a version of the story from Jason Lange of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, one of the canoers involved. We found this account of their experience so riveting we decided to let Mr. Lange's story (edited, below) speak for itself.

by Jason Lange

The first night on the river we camped about 1/4 mile outside Santa Elena Canyon. We saw lightning in distance, but never felt a drop of rain. The next morning went for a hike, and it started to sprinkle around noon. We packed our bags and started to load the canoes when all of a sudden we saw a wall of water coming at us from about 80 yards up-river. The wall of water was about 6-8 feet high.

We raced to pull our gear and canoes up to higher ground. We watched the rapids rise and explode within a matter of seconds as the wave hit. The water kept rising incredibly fast, so we decided to head off after packing the canoes. Nick [Gomez] (in the single canoe) lost his boat at the first “T-bone” in the river just as he entered the canyon; he was able to float down to the other two canoes waiting on a rock bar around the corner. We never saw that canoe again till we were out of the canyon.

Now we had Nick, Lisa [Chowdhury] , and I in one canoe, and Eric [Carlson] and Matt [Etmanczyk] in other. We took off again, until we encountered “the Rock Slide” which sounded like a train with the water just raging! (And by this time it was pouring rain.) Matt and Eric flipped once, from a huge drop that they didn’t see, but were able to recover. We stopped again on a rock bar just past the first set of rocks, but in a matter of a few minutes the rock bar beneath our feet was gone.

When we set off again, both canoes were capsized by huge rapids, throwing everyone in different directions. Lisa somehow managed to stay with the canoe, and rode the sunken canoe out of the rapids, amazingly. I was pulled underwater for some time, but resurfaced about 40 feet down river. Matt and Eric were able to catch their canoe down river and held on as they were flown down river. The three of them (Lisa, Matt, Eric) were able to hold on to the sunken canoes. I was able to grab Nick and pull him on land. I still, had a paddle. Moments later, Nick and I jumped back into the river, both holding onto the single paddle, trying to catch the other three. Weren’t able to do so, and couldn’t see them, as they were moving much faster due to the weight of the canoes.

After a few miles, Nick and I gave up. About 30 minutes before dark, I was hypothermic; luckily, Nick found a cigarette lighter in his swim trunks, and was able to start a twig fire in a little cave along the canyon wall. That is where we spent the night — sleeping on dirt, in the cave, with nothing but paddle, a cigarette lighter, and a small twig fire going. Waterfalls from the top of the canyon started and raged all night, creating a huge echo, which was scary since we could not see anything with just a twig fire for light.

There was no clue to how high the river was rising, and it kept pouring rain ‘til about 4 a.m. Matt, Eric, and Lisa ended up losing one canoe, while Lisa was able to hold on to the other canoe the entire way down the river, using it as a barrier for the rocks. There was no chance for any of them to stop the entire way due to the incredible current and continuously rising water. Making it out of the canyon, Eric spotted the single canoe — the one Nick had lost earlier — and swam over to it. Eric ended up passing out under the canoe. A hiker spotted Eric and called to the rangers, which was the only way anyone would have known we were out there.

Around 8 p.m, rangers ended up finding Eric passed-out, and then found Matt and Lisa underneath the other canoe a mile down river on the opposite bank. Lisa had managed to hang on to her canoe for her entire trip down the river. The rangers rescued those two at about 10:30 p.m. Eric and Matt were near hypothermic, but Lisa was able to recover some dry clothes from the canoe that were double-bagged in Ziploc bags.

The next morning, the rangers used a spotting plane to locate me and Nick an hour or so after sunrise. We waved our life jackets in the air. An hour or so later, we heard a roaring sound come up the canyon, the rangers in the jet boat coming to rescue us. After spending the entire night in the cave, we had no idea what happened to the rest of our party, and didn’t know if anyone knew we were out there. We also knew the river kept rising and our cave could have been washed out at anytime.

The outfitter, Rio Grande Adventures, proved amazing. Deborah, Steve, Aaron, and Kendra helped us get most of our gear back, and tried to save what was recovered as all was swamped full of clay. They provided us warm clothes and great food right away. Of course, we are also grateful to the [NPS] rangers for getting us off the river in horrible conditions. Without them, we might still be out there!

We were told later that the river that flashed from Mexico had a flood gauge that read up to 19 feet. The gauge ended up topping out at 19 ft, so it was estimated the flood we saw was 20+ feet. It was absolutely amazing to see a single wall of water just make land disappear directly up river from you, transforming the rapids right before your eyes. Once everyone in our group was reunited, we all agreed that the rush from the power of the river was amazing. It was nature at full force. The trip was awesome.

We all agreed to go on the river again in Big Bend, likely next spring break, on a 5-day Lower Canyons trip. We’ve also planned a canoeing trip to the Boundary Waters in Canada this summer. [This experience] spurred an addiction to the rush of a raging river. We all knew that we were really lucky, though.

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# Alamo City Rivermen

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P.O. Box 171194 • San Antonio • Texas • 78217

ACA Paddle America  
7432 Alban Station Blvd.  
Suite B 232  
Springfield, Virginia 22150

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a member of the Alamo City Rivermen Canoe and Kayak Club and would like to take advantage of the club discount to become a member of ACA Paddle America. I enclose a check for an individual/family membership in the amount of \$20.00 (single) or \$25.00 (family).

Please use this name for your membership role: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send mail to the following address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Happy Paddling. Thank you.

Member, Alamo City Rivermen Canoe and Kayak Club

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Alamo City Rivermen Membership Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

The Alamo City Rivermen try to keep their activities safe, but risk is inherent in water sports. We cannot and do not guarantee safety. The Alamo City Rivermen disclaim liability for accidental injury or death in any sponsored event. As a condition of membership and participation in club sponsored events, I release, acquit, and forever discharge the Alamo City Rivermen and its officers, agents, and members from all liability arising out of or relating to a sponsored event, even if negligence of the club or its officers, agents, or members is a cause, and even if I die or am injured. This release includes not only actual paddle trips but also all other club events and driving or riding to and from club events.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership dues are the same for an individual or a family. As a member of the Alamo City Rivermen, you are automatically entitled to our monthly newsletter, NOC Outfitter store discounts, a \$10 discounted membership in the American Canoe Association through the Paddle America Program, and subscription to our email list. Details on these benefits are available in our newsletter.

I prefer to receive the newsletter: (Please circle the one you choose)

Dues if newsletter sent by email     \$15.00

Dues if newsletter sent USPS     \$20.00

**(Note: Newsletter copying and mailing has been our biggest expense; using email frees up money for other activities, including our website.)**

*Mail this completed form, together with a check, to:*

Alamo City Rivermen Canoe Club  
P.O. Box 171194  
San Antonio, Texas 78217