

# First-ever River Run - Saturday morning, November 7th, 2015

South Fork of the Snoqualmie,  
Twin Falls State Park to 436 st Bridge



Kayaker: Matt Haverly - Sultan, Washington  
Boat: Pyranha S8 235 play kayak  
Paddle: Werner Powerhouse, bent shaft, 15 degree feather



I have always wanted to kayak all my life, but never knew people who did it and never had access to the gear or instruction. I have always loved water sports and adventure sports of many kinds - windsurfing, waterskiing, snowboarding/skiing, cliff diving, skateboarding, fishing, dirtbike motorcycling, and for most of the last 2 years, really got into the budding sport of Mountain Unicycling (also called "Muni").



I do Muni at an adventurous level - riding a lot of mountainbike trails at parks like Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park. I love the challenge and the adventure of it - doing bigger drops, steeper descents, and riding over challenging structures.

But truthfully, I noticed I was not reaching my fitness goals with just unicycling. It is mostly focused on lower body and back. This made me think I really do need to find another sport that works different muscle groups if I want to reach my fitness goals doing things I enjoy rather than hitting a gym.

I live in Sultan, and started salmon fishing in the area with my kids and it got me thinking about the river, and how fun it would be to explore these rivers via kayak. But I know that whitewater kayaking would be so fun if I could get into it that it would likely become a new adventure sport rather than just a navigational vehicle for the river.

**October 9th, 2015:** I found my kayak for \$150 on craigslist and went and picked it up in Leavenworth - knowing nothing more than that I wanted a kayak that I could at some point do some of the play boating and surfing that looks so extremely fun. I knew it would not be the most stable boat to begin whitewater kayaking with but I had just gone broke getting equipped for Muni, and now I had to be more selective about getting into yet another sport. So I went with a play boat and figured I would work my way into it. That was a month ago.

**October 11th, 2015:** I became a Washington Kayak Club member. I found out about the pool sessions. I found one near me in Marysville Washington at the YMCA that was weekly, and one at Shoreline.

**October 13th, 2015:** showed up at the pool session in Marysville and Paul Brower reached out to me and helped me learn strokes, wet exits, braces, hipsnaps, and even offered me my first spot on a roll. He spent the whole session helping me out and I could not have spent the time better.

**October 14th, 2015:** I then went to the Shoreline pool session and spent much of it practicing all the things he showed me to practice. I met Chad there, and he told me to talk to Sybill about trying to go to one of her roll sessions. I talked with her but her classes were all full. But for the last 15 minutes of the session, she helped me with my roll. She said I was already close and that what Paul was teaching me looked good, and gave me feedback on how I was doing and spots. Came close to a first roll but not quite.

**October 20th, 2015:** The next pool session I went to was back at Marysville and got my first roll right at the end of the session.

**October 27th, 2015:** Came back the next week and did rolls the entire practice with no wet exits. Another kayaker was there - Brett, and he told me it was time for my first actual river run.

**November 7th, 2015:** About 8 of us met for the South Fork Snoqualmie kayak run from Twin Falls State Park to 436 st Bridge which is about 3.7 miles, and is a shallow, rocky class II+ run.

I had never done a combat roll or even a practice roll in an actual river but was about to. I told the group that I wasn't going to do any practice rolls - was going to save my energy for the run, but that if I tipped and ended up doing a roll, that it would be my first combat roll ever. I practiced a couple ferries and eddy turns right at the takeout. I thought I was done with the eddy turn, and relaxed my paddle on the deck but suddenly a current sucked my stern under and dumped me in quick and my brace failed. I got a nice deep breath on the way into the water.

I resisted the urge to wet exit - but it was tempting as it was the first time I had been upside down in the kayak and hitting rocks with my helmet and paddle while moving through the stream. It took quite a while to get my paddle into setup position with the water not being too deep and rocks being somewhat in the way. Surprisingly I stayed relaxed, and had lots of breath, and resisted starting the roll without getting a good setup. I didn't have nose plugs, but was slowly letting air out my nose so that water would not trickle into my nose. But eventually I did reach setup position with the paddle and went for the hipsnap and up I went. As soon as I realized I was in control of my boat again I looked upstream for Brett. He saw me go down and come up, and knew as well as I did that I had just done my first legit combat roll. He gave out a hardy yell and I smiled and raised my paddle over my head - it was a great moment, and was a tremendous morale boost.

Soon after, the group went down the first rapids together. To be completely honest, I was shocked at how shallow and rocky this run was, and how big the rapids were. I would not have guessed that somebody who knew this was my first ever river run would invite me to do this stretch of water!

My boat was a play boat, not a "river runner" type kayak. A bit small, a bit tippy, a bit easy to sink the stern, and floats a bit low in the water. Carves real nice eddy turns on a dime though. But as I realized there were going to be hundreds of instances where I would be hitting rocks - both small rocks just beneath the surface or barely emerging from the surface, to colliding with big boulders one after another, I started to get very nervous about my lack of experience with this. I had heard in a youtube video that when things get rough you want to not go slower than the current, and you just want to lean forward and paddle straight. So I did. But this got me way in front of the group in a big hurry. They wanted me to stay in the middle of the group so they could rescue me if needed - knowing this was my first run on a river. But all but one of the other boaters were in river runner boats. At this point with all the rocks and boulders, I couldn't even imagine going down the stream sideways, or turning around mid stream to paddle up stream, or even paddle backwards as I was afraid my stern would sink going against the current.

With some coaching, I found ways to slow down. I learned it is ok to hit rocks, but was still not used to it. I learned it is ok to paddle backwards on the play boat and it is not gonna do a stern squirt if the stern is pointing up stream. I learned you can do more low braces, and do so with

almost a back paddle stroke for a lot of what I would need to do to brace and also navigate.

I was amazed how far I made it down the river and what I made it through and still stayed up, even though I was hitting all kinds of stuff.

Eventually I did swim. And then I did swim again. The third swim, was after a fairly large hole - the biggest I had hit on the river. I made it through the hole but then tipped as I went to do an eddy turn. This time I swam quite far - the water was really fast, and the obstacles were so numerous that it was hard to concentrate on swimming as the rocks were hitting me hard. Eventually I did get to the shore. But at this point, I was really really tired.

The whole group was so positive and helpful - they had rescued my paddle, my boat - and me, a few times now. I had also had to take a couple breaks as my legs kept going numb in my boat - it is a bit of a tight fitting boat.

But each time I swam, I swam longer, and the river was getting harder and harder technically.

At this point, it was hard to even get back into the boat - my energy was getting so low. That worried me. My boat is also not easy to get out of, when compared to getting out of a river runner like the Jackson Rocker (which I tried for the first time just last night). I looked at the section of river that was next and it was the most challenging looking section I had seen. We were close to the end of the run, but I feared it would just be another instant swim. The group was play boating the holes during the rescues as I emptied my boat and got resituated.

A gal had shown up and joined our group whose name was Kathy Durkee. She was the only other one besides me in a play boat. I could tell she had her stuff together and she had been looking out for me a lot - giving me instructions on how to get through sections, and at times rescuing my gear or me on my swims. She gave me some water and an apple to eat during this last break.

She could see on my face that my energy was low and my worries were starting to increase about how to get through the rest of the run. She said, "Lets just do this - grab my kayak and me - we'll face opposite directions, but stay together, and we'll just float down. You can let me paddle a bit but we'll kinda do this like we are inner-tubing. We don't have far to go - you are pretty tired - this should work." (I'm paraphrasing a bit).

We did. And it did work. And for a moment, I know just how Frodo felt in that scene where him and Sam are rescued by the eagles in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. For any of you who do not know the scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtEOjAx4JKA>

This did seem to be working quite well until both her and I got tipped! HAA HAA. But by this time, we were super close to the take out. There was a foot bridge going over the river and I took my boat up there and Brett met me up there to pick my boat and myself up as he

transported the entire crew and their kayaks from the takeout to the launch, picking me up on the way.



The first combat roll on the river was a great moment. All I needed to do was survive the rest of the run even though it was a bit beyond me, and it was guaranteed to be a glorious day worth celebrating - at the mercy of the crew that supported my resues! Much thanks to them!



It was the first time I had really had a chance to use my dry suit. I had just bought a used Kokatat Meridian drysuit from Kayak Academy a few days prior. It never leaked a single drop. I feel like I got my money's worth out of that and my helmet that day for sure! My helmet is one that I use for Mountain Unicycling and it looks like a big watermelon. It got a lot of laughs from people in the group. :)

In hindsight, I could have really used a good stern draw to improve my navigating and ferrying. I could have been less afraid of the rocks, and probably should have used a River Runner type boat, which I am working on coming up with now. I just had another pool practice session a few days after this run, and my rolls were really consistent to where for the first time, I was not having to do any second attempts to get up in the roll - the entire practice session. Rolls are just now starting to feel easy, and I will not be as worried now about tipping. I also over-used my high brace and could have hung in there with less energy with better low brace. My flexibility in hamstrings was making staying forward in the boat a struggle so I have started to practice stretching my hamstrings every day now. My boat also had a really low deck that straightens legs and is a bit tight so leaning forward as much as I could was hindered just a tad. I am noticing it is much easier to lean forward on the Jackson Rocker that Brett let me try.

I want to do a couple river sessions at Big Eddy and improve my basic eddy turns, ferries, stern draws, and rolls in the actual river. Then I would like to try to borrow a river runner type boat and try that class II+ stretch of the South Fork of the Snoqualmie again - with a few patient buddies.

A month into kayaking now, and I got my first river run down, my first combat roll, and already noticed I have lost an inch off my waist. So far kayaking has been AWESOME and I am completely hooked on the sport.

You only get one first river run - so this was mine. I survived it and more. I will see if I can do that stretch again soon and see if I can conquer it more than it conquers me.

