

Kern Cadillacs/Cataracts Trip Report

-Eric Giddens

This has to be one of the best class V sections within 20 minutes drive of a major city – period. The tragedy is that almost nobody runs it (excluding uninformed descents in inner-tubes and beer coolers). Late summer releases from Lake Isabella and easy roadside access for scouting makes this a real river-runner’s delight. Don’t get me wrong, I like sliding down clean granite slabs into deep pools as much as the next guy, but there is something about darting behind boulders, skipping through narrow slots and having to nail a boof at the bottom of a long, intricate rapid that really gets me going. Throw in a healthy portion of serious holes and a dash of nasty sieves, and this 10+ mile section of river will definitely keep you on your toes.

Rocky Contos has a good description of this run, but since I was craving more information on this Southern Sierra classic, I figured a little more available beta wouldn’t hurt. Recently, I got a chance to do this run a few times with Brett Valle and J. D. Batove at about 1400 cfs - normally there is about 400 cfs diverted from Democrat dam around this section, but due to repairs, this section will retain the full flow until sometime next year! As usual, this is not meant to be a river guide, and there is no substitute for scouting and good judgment. It should also be reiterated that our flow was something like 1800 cfs on a normal year with the standard diversion. Finally, I have tried to refer to rapids with their previously used names in quotes, although many of them I would change given the almighty power. With that out of the way, here’s my take on our trip and the river...

Shuttle: The full Cadillacs/Cataracts run is long day since even the most expert of boaters will spend a bit of time looking from shore. As a result, many people choose to run only a portion of the canyon with the Cataracts section being the most popular choice. The Cadillacs, so-named because of the numerous cars that scatter the banks at the start of the run, begins with the decision of either a long paddle and carry around Democrat dam, or a long walk down a paved road that ends up about a half-mile from the base of the dam; we chose the latter approach. Since the road follows the river the entire time, the takeout is arbitrary, but the full Cataracts run ends at the KR1 powerhouse. Due to time constraints on my part, we ended up taking out at the bottom of “Triple Drop” on the day we ran the Cadillacs, but on a normal day, we probably could have gone down to KR1. As it was, we were on the river from about 11 am to 4 pm.

Cadillacs

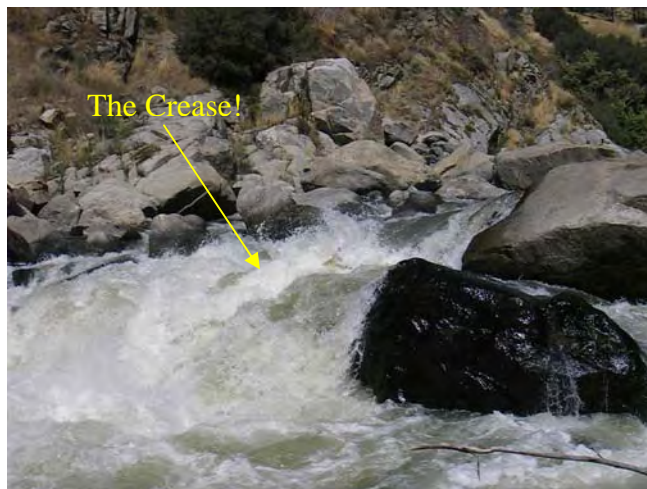
Put-in: The afore mentioned long walk – not too bad though, and a nice warm up pool at the bottom. The first rapid curves around a corner and, although the anticipation of class V gnarl has already built up at this point, there is really nothing in this rapid – eddy out right at the bend and you can see the whole thing.

Saturday Spring (V/V+): One of the harder rapids on the river also has a deceitful name; this one should be scouted during the shuttle using the last pull-out before the road noticeably leaves the river. The top drop, “Entrance”, we ran left to right (all directions

are with respect to the river) using a small eddy just above the drop on the left as a staging point. The main concern is a bit of an undercut just below this drop on the left. Driving to the right at the start and then boofing will keep you well away; we had our first action of the day when J. D. did his first fish count, followed by a quick roll and scramble into the eddy on the left above the next drop.

The second drop, “The Crease”, looks pretty turbulent from the scout on river left. Guess what, it is! This river-wide ledge consists of a pour-over on the left side that is met by a large lateral from the right, forming a downward-pulling seam. While the whole thing is pretty nasty looking, all of the water clearly flushes through, with the only real threat being the hole about 20 yards downstream, known as the “Eatery”. Brett said that he tried to boof the left side a couple of weeks before with a back-end result. We decided to watch as he tried to improve on this by staying more to the center. The new result was highly entertaining as Brett’s bright orange Jefe melted down in the crease and popped-up about 20 yards later, with me fumbling for my camera the whole time. J. D.’s crease adventure, however, was captured with a pretty sick sequence of shots (sorry J. D., when you have shots this good, you’ve got to use them...):

J.D. spends some quality time in “The Crease” on Saturday Spring





Needless to say, I opted for trying the boof high on the left (how much worse could it be?), and was able to stay pretty dry.

Even with the action in “The Crease”, everyone was able to avoid “The Eatery” with little difficulty.

The next rapid down, called “Tricky (IV+)”, is another multi-part drop; something that I realized would be a theme for the rest of the day. It can be scouted on either bank and the first part is a straight-forward right-to-left boof in a slot along the left channel:

It aint that tricky! Brett in the top slot of “Tricky”



The bottom drop is a move on the right side and is harder to see from the bank on river left. Although it is a relatively easy drop, it has some sieve issues on both the left and right sides. Hit the mini-tongue on the right center with a little right angle and most of the water flushes through:

J.D. shooting the chute at the bottom of “Tricky”



The next rapid, “Long One (V-)” is another left bank scout, and, as you may have guessed, is a long one – while you are out of your boat you can go ahead and scout the next one “Pillow Fright”. There are numerous routes on both of these, so choose your own adventure. In “Long One”, I chose to boof right at the top and paddle down a

boiling eddy, followed by a boof left into a midstream eddy. Brett chose to start river left and end up in the same midstream eddy. From here, lining up the right chute is pretty easy and it feeds you left of the hole at the bottom (looks like it could be a nasty surf). There is another middle chute that looks more turbulent, but OK; however, the momentum looks like it carries into the hole and none of our group took this line.

In “Pillow Fright (V)”, I used a similar boof on the right at the top, this time catching the eddy and ferrying over to the far left bank where an easy chute takes you through what is otherwise an ugly drop. At the bottom is a giant pillow reversal; it looks like it could thump you pretty good, but, like my basset hound, its bark is way worse than its bite. I tried to get photos on both of these drops while sitting in my boat – they didn’t turn out very well, but the family in the camper pulled over at the side of the road got plenty of footage...

The rapids just keep coming, and soon after is “Road Wall (V)”, so-named because the scout on the left is at the base of the road wall – Rocky, we have to work on these names... Again, there are many routes, but a clean one is down the far left side, ending in a nice boof.

The last real drop before “Toilet Bowl” is bit of a jumble called “Left-Left-Fall (V-)”. The right side looks sieved out, the middle looks nasty and the left just doesn’t look like much fun. If you are going to run it, stick with the left side where it looks like there are no horrible consequences – it is easy to get out just above the drop on the bank. Once you are out, though, it is even easier to put your boat back in the eddy below the drop, which looks like it makes a lot of contact with rocks on the way down. Rocky has run this at lower flows, Brett has run it at higher flows (taking a good shot to the ribs); this time we chose to drag our boats the 8 feet required to avoid the whole thing. Note: there is still more rapid to go, as J.D. found out by just peeling out of the eddy and going down. Running the left-center of the next drop he found a sizable hole. I missed the whole thing since I was getting in my boat, but Brett said he was demonstrating some serious rodeo moves in his full-size creek boat. The easier line is along the far left, boofing left in the narrow slot to avoid a log.

“Toilet Bowl (V+)” is big and nasty. Definitely can be run, and actually a better run at high water when some of the lines on the right open up. None of us took our chances this day though; portage river left...

This is the end of the Cadillacs run and a good place to put in for the Cataracts run. From here you get a bit of a reprieve as the river eases up for about 3 miles. There are two fun drops worth noting, with both of them coming in the first half mile.

Rich Bar/Cataracts

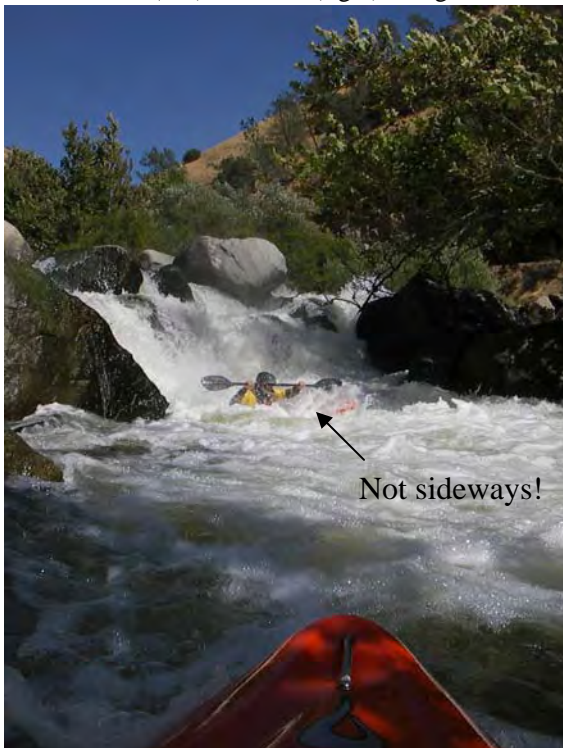
“Fin Rock (IV+)” is unmistakable due to the large fin rock in the entrance (which was barely showing when we ran it). I have run this at a variety of levels and different ways, the safest route is left of the fin at the top, then right at the bottom. At lower water, a bit of a boof is required at the bottom, but at the level we ran it, you can just float through this poofy hole.

Brett droppin' in at “Fin Rock” rapid



“Island Falls (IV)” is a class IV on the left and a class V on the right with a good roadside scout. The only key to the left side is boofing a small feature about half way down to avoid a p-ton rock. The right side has about an 8-foot fall. You can eddy out on the right just above the drop and line it up - at the level we ran it, the more left you get, the drier the landing:

Brett (left) and J. D. (right) doing what I failed to do in running straight through Island falls



On the second day I wanted to get a photo at the bottom of the falls on the right and was not paying enough attention when setting up; dropping over sideways and surfing out of the hole. Although not too much of a thumping, I felt a little sheepish when Brett came to check on me before going on to run the drop with J. D. – bottom line is this drop is a little more forgiving than it looks. No one in our party went too deep, so I can't say for sure that there are no rocks down there.

*Note: A few weeks after this report was written, someone had an incident on Island Falls. In summary, they hit a rock hard and had to be extracted from river right by search and rescue. While no one is exactly sure where this rock is, the farther right you are in the drop, the higher the likelihood of going deep. Will look for this rock when the water drops...

Grainy image from a failed movie attempt – Hmmm, I wonder which line Brett is taking...



Below this is about 2 miles of class II-III+ with class V+ "Lucas Falls". You can recognize Luca falls since the current bends hard right through a class III shoals and then the river goes out of sight. Lucas Falls is really more of a rock-pile than a falls, and can be portaged on river left; just follow the trail of trash and porn along the side of the road and wash your hands before eating if you decide to have lunch here. This drop is very difficult to see from the left side, so if you want to run it, you should scout from river right. The only problem is you must first run the entrance, a little ledge that has a nice slot on the far river right; catch an eddy just below on the right and then hop down one more eddy to get out just above the rapid on the right bank. From here, it would be a sketchy portage up and around the drop, involving a traverse across a rocky slope some 40 feet above river level. If you elect to walk at this point, you might want to portage back upstream, ferry across the river and then portage around the drop on the aforementioned roadside route. There is a dicey little put-in just below the drop on river right, but you end up having to ferry just upstream of the undercut ledge, which would probably be the main reason to portage in the first place.

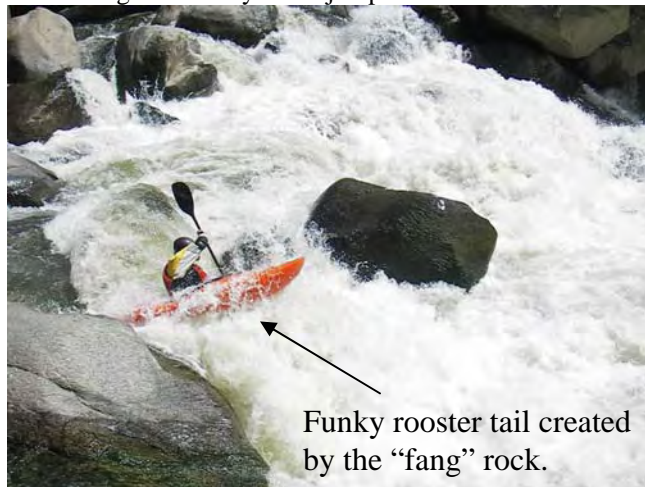
This rapid is pretty much a jumble and is still not really clear in my mind. All I remember is a whole bunch of unfriendly looking rocks and a lot of whitewater. At higher flows, many of these rocks are covered with water, making this one of the rapids that gets harder to run as the water drops. At 1400 cfs, I was sat there for a little while looking at the drop and the portage and trying to figure out why I followed Brett down the right side to begin with. If it helps, here is a picture of the drop from below.

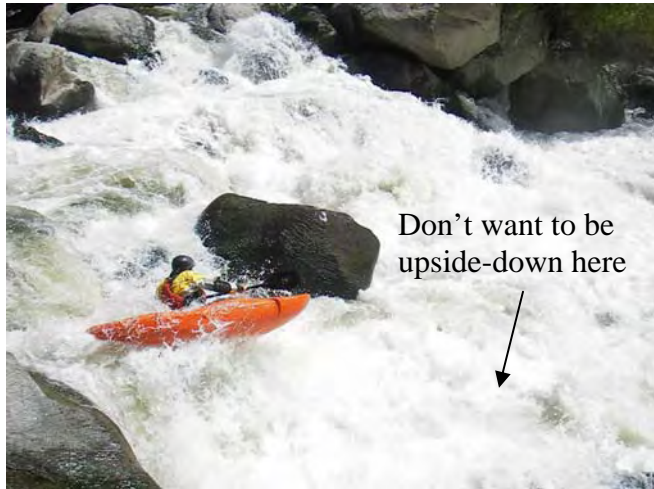
Lucas Creek Falls from below



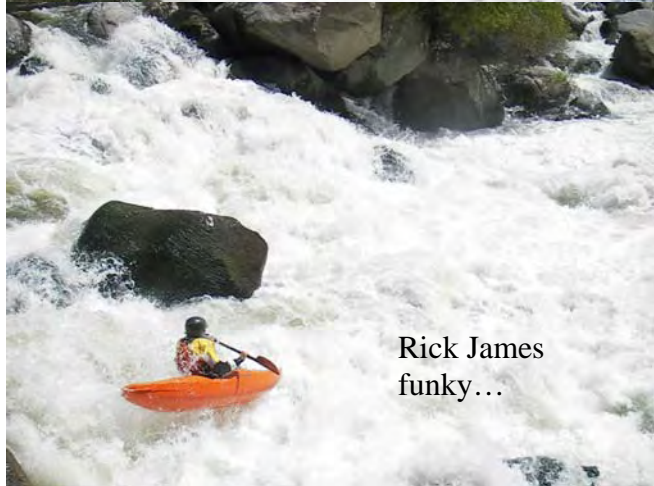
When we ran this, the only “clean” looking line was to take the second slot from the left and jump over a funky rooster tail created by an equally funky “fang” rock. It is pretty easy to see the route from an eddy just above the drop on river left. Line it up, get some speed and pray to the river gods that you are upright on the landing because there are a couple of more jagged ledges to bump over before the water hits the wall at the bottom and pushes left. While this wall is undercut, it looks like the majority of the water is exiting cleanly, so keep left angle or throw in a little back-ferry in front of the wall and everything should be fine - then you can sit at the bottom of the drop and laugh while your friends decide if they want to run or portage...

Brett gettin' funky at the jump at Lucas Creek Falls





Don't want to be upside-down here



Rick James funky...



Hole kicking left, helping you away from the undercut





Picking up again with the run after Nude Beach, there are a couple of boulder gardens to work through before getting into more of the good stuff. The first big drop, “More of the Start (IV)”, really isn’t all that big, just shoot down the left side and angle right to punch through the curling wave at the bottom. Soon after though is one of the more intimidating drops on the run, so head left and get out to take a look.

“Bolt Route (V)” is a double drop that starts as a wide chute and ends up in a boiling mess. The majority of the water slopes off of a flat rock with a couple of identifiable horns that serve as good targets. The hole created by this drop is backed up by a rock shelf, creating a folding hole that feeds a slot on the left where the majority of the water spits out. The goal is to jump on top of this fold, high and dry, then simply paddle over the remainder of the drop while the natural flow of the water brings you back to the slot. What many people actually do is submerge in the first part and succumb to the mercy of the fold with a variety of results (read: flip or back ender). On the first day, I made the unforgivable mistake of asking Brett what stroke he was going to boof with – it’s kind of like asking a golfer if they breathe in or out on their backswing. Needless to say, Brett got to the lip and was thinking about what stroke to take instead of actually taking one. The result was a spin out in the hole and a backwards run of the rest of the rapid. The next day, I shut up and he did just fine...

Not quite high and dry, but Brett's Jefe pulls him through.





Jefe



Sweet...





When running this drop, it is important to remember that the water is falling hard left off the slanted rock, so get speed and drive the boat to the right before straitening up for the boof. By the way, I found the right stroke on the boof to be a better choice...

Soon after this is what Rocky called “Pre-Cleavage (V-)” because he got there and though he was at the next rapid - called “Cleavage” (no offense to Rocky, but this is why I thought this write-up with pictures might be useful). Anyway, the lead in involves a clean boof on river left followed by a ferry over to river right where a staging eddy allows you to line up the drop. At this level, the main rapid has a good boof on the left side, but can be run just about anywhere. The only issue is the hole at the bottom of the drop that kicks hard right into a rock wall. We hung J.D. out to dry a bit on this one and did not scout, the result was an encounter with the previously mentioned rock wall. Getting speed right to left and jumping left off the rock is a really clean line.

J.D. scouting “Pre-Cleavage”



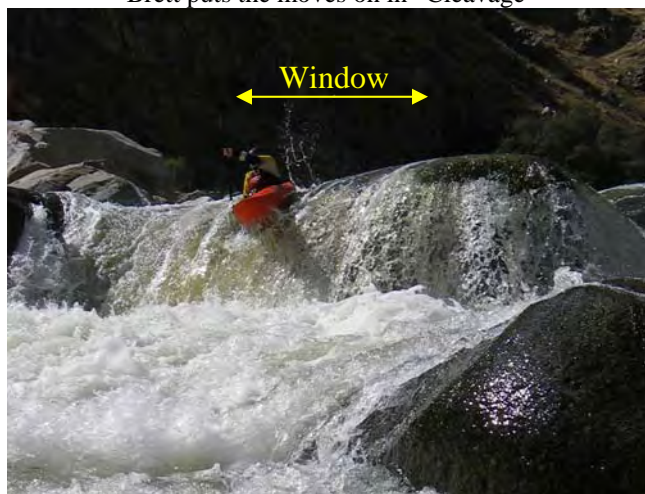
Brett Valle airborne on the clean line



I have run this drop at lower water too (about 600 cfs in the river) and it is completely different. On that run, I stayed right at the top, following a ribbon of current that leads out onto a big, sloping falls. At that level I thought it was a really cool class V, at 1400, I didn't think it was nearly as much fun.

“Cleavage (V)” would be the easiest class V in the books if not for the somewhat intricate lead-in. One route involves meandering through some boulders mid-stream until moving into a big eddy on river right within sight of the main drop – a nice mound of truly So Cal cleavage proportions. Once in the eddy, you line up your shot, exiting high through a tricky ferry between a hole and a pillow and then making your way down to the main drop. Right of the high point is a good line, but be warned of a rock somewhere in the mix. I ran about 6 feet to the river left of Brett in the photo below and landed softly in the foam – anywhere in-between the two lines is probably safe.

Brett puts the moves on in “Cleavage”



Below is a long class IV boulder garden, from memory, we started left, worked right, then left, then left, then right again before staying right. I Hope that helps.

* Note: This rapid is pretty straightforward in a kayak, but still a solid class IV. A few weeks after this report was first written, there was reportedly an ill-fated canoe descent – as of today, the canoe is still wrapped around a rock at the bottom. Apparently, a guy was driving up the canyon and spotted a deer on the other side of the river. Pulling over to the side of the road, the man proceeded to get out of his car and shoot the animal. “Hell yeah!” the man probably exclaimed as he polished off the last beer in his six-pack. Here is when his brain cells really started to fire. “Now how am I gonna git that deer over on this side of the crick?” he probably exclaimed. I can almost picture him scratching his head and then the light bulb blinking on. He drives home, grabs his green Colman canoe, drives back to the river, tries to paddle across, flips and gets pummeled. The story ends when search and rescue extricates him on a stretcher. I now call this rapid “Deer Hunter”.

The river bends a little away from the road, and on its way back splits into two channels. You are now getting close to “Triple Drop”, “Triple Falls” or “Quadruple Whatever”, depending on who you ask. My best piece of advice in this entire write-up is to scout the lead in to “Triple Drop” when running the shuttle. No, I don’t mean scouting Drops 0, 1, 2 or 3, I mean the one above that. It is really hard to scout from the river, it has some undercuts, and you don’t want to be in trouble (read: swim) above Triple Drop.

The river left channel in the lead-in is long and narrow with a sieve part way down on the right and a bit farther down on the left. While only a class IV, bad decisions on where to go in this rapid can lead to problems. At this level, there was a pour-over in the middle followed by a partially exposed rock just downstream and to the right. My line was to boof the pour-over and land to the left of the exposed rock; on the first day, Brett chose to run right of both of these. Regardless, just below the exposed rock on the right is an ugly little sieve that you must avoid by getting to the left. After that, we chose to just continue all the way down the left side and boof a falls that pours back into the main channel to the right. It looks like you could move back into the center sooner, running a wide, angled ledge, but the far left option is a piece of cake and comes highly recommended.

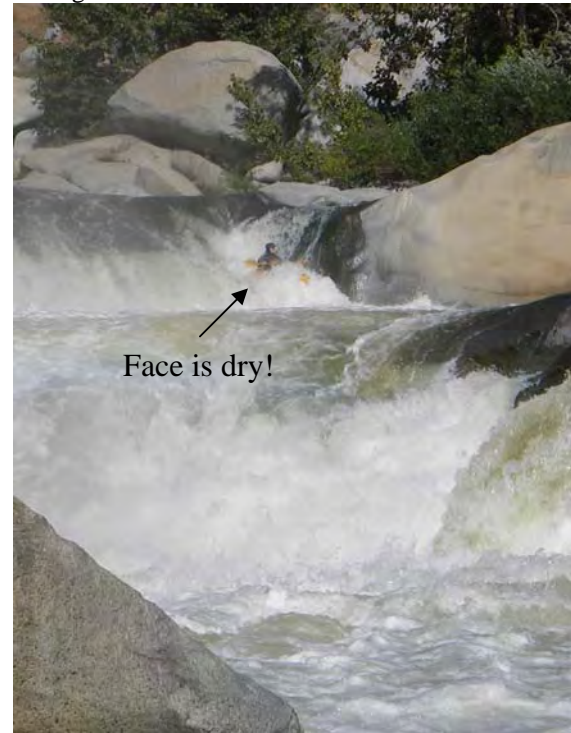
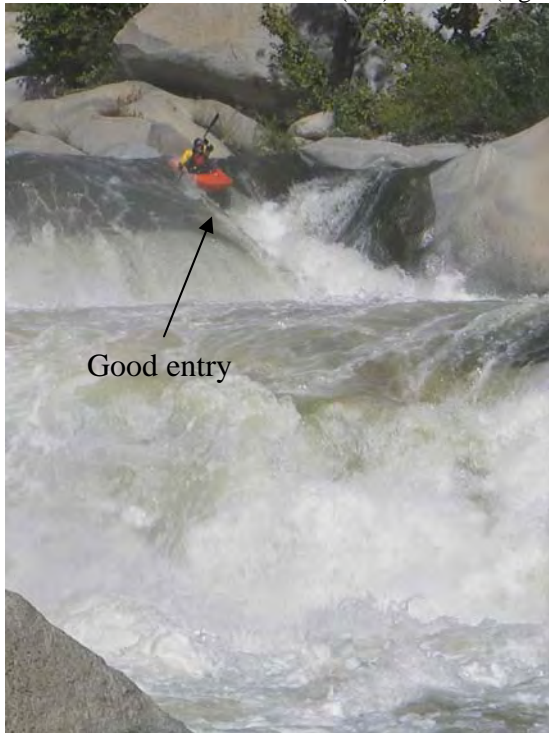
From there, you can get out on either side of the river to scout. At the flows we had, TD0 looked fine, but not much of a chance to get out before TD1 – in fact, Brett ran TD0/1 a couple of weeks before and was unable to catch the planned eddy between the two, so be prepared to run them both if you try to pick off TD0. He gets super class V+ kudos for running through TD1, ‘cause I don’t really want any part of it at the level I saw it. The left side is super sketch, with a good size hole and a cave on the left. The right side is chunky with a rock in the middle at the bottom. Since I didn’t run these two drops, I can’t tell you the lines, but I can tell you that the portage on river right is pleasant enough and you get a good look at the right channel of TD1 that is difficult to see from the road-side. The put in is a seal launch into the eddy on river right – with plenty of room and slack water to line up for TD2.

While the super-hero line staying on the right side in TD2 and TD3 looks like it’s on, we all chose the left-left route. What looks like a funky fold and rooster tail in TD2 is really just a pleasant slide that ends with an auto-boof. From there, the options are to immediately catch the big eddy on the left or head down to just above TD3 to another eddy on the left, which provides a good setup for the last drop.

I must say, that a lot of water flows into the first eddy with a vertical rock wall, and I can’t really see the expected pillow or any water flowing out. Rocky seems to think

there is tunnel somewhere in there – the bottom line is be careful if you catch the first eddy. Also, without a good forward stroke or reasonably fast boat, exiting the top eddy at higher flows may prove tricky.

Brett (left) and J.D. (right) chasing the rooster on TD2.



From the eddy on the left just above TD3, the left to right jump off the left falls is pretty straightforward. From the roadside, it looks like there is a big rock on river left that may get in the way, but from directly downstream, it looks like you would have to run straight over the drop to hit it (which is still possible with a botched peel out).

*Note: At lower flows (~1050), I did hit a rock on the landing, so be sure to drive right. Beware that with less water going over it, the lip of the drop may try to kick you back left towards the rock pile...

The author finally gets his pic on, catching air on TD3.



J. D. going over the middle on TD3



According to Rocky, below Triple/Quadruple whatever the river reportedly slows down to class IV for a couple of miles with the exception of “The Plank”. I’m not sure what river Rocky ran, but the excitement is nowhere near finished at the bottom of TD3. Immediately below is a giant boulder in the river. At 1400 cfs, the left side looked like a hole worthy of class V designation, so don’t just go bombing down. On the right side of the giant boulder is a simple slide/boof, just watch out for a rock on the landing if you try to jump hard right.

After this you can pick your way through some popcorn (you know, that Styrofoam stuff that is used in packing that just gets in the way when you are rooting around for the good stuff) before you get to The Plank. Some people divide this long rapid into the “Plink”, “Plank” and “Plunk” combo. We ran Plink on the far left side where a curl feed you back into the center. There is plenty of space to eddy out before the crux of the rapid, which is “Plank”, which can be scouted on river left. My guess is that you will decide whether or not you are going to run this rapid in the first 10 seconds of the scout. The move is fairly simple (hey, this is a class III move – I’m running it: ~3 seconds), but the consequences are horrendous (hey, look at the size of that hole, and that rock pile is Gnarly!: ~8 seconds – you now have about 2 seconds left to decide which gut instinct you go with). If you decide to portage, it is pretty easy to do this on river right, which also affords a good look at the rest of the rapid, “Plunk”.

If you decide to give it a go, here’s the beta. “The Plank” is a long, flat rock that, if you stay on it, will send you clear of the maw of what is one of the nastier hydraulics on the river. When I say nasty, I don’t just mean big and violent, I mean Nasty with a capital “N”. The whole thing is steep with about a 20 ft backwash. Ending up in here will likely result in two outcomes: 1) you are lucky and get thrashed around in the right

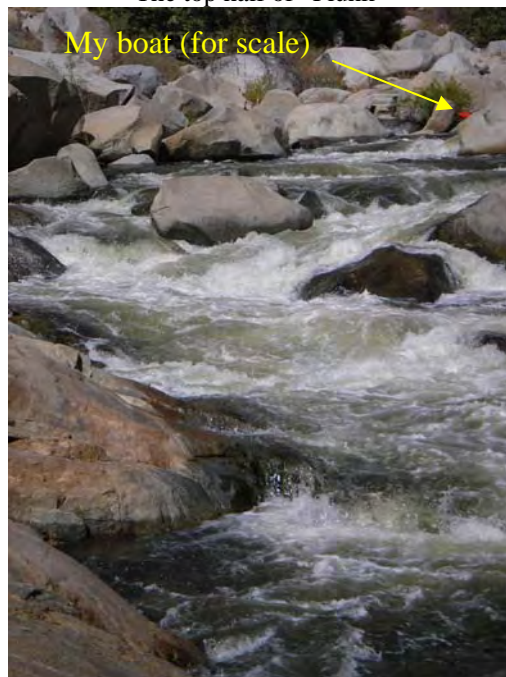
side for a couple of minutes and then spit out, only to swim the rest of the long, boulder choked “Plunk” (see descriptions in Rocky’s write-up), 2) you are unlucky and get sucked over to the left side where a giant boulder sieve (with logs sticking out) backs up the hole - I don’t want to think about what could happen after that. The picture below does not do this rapid much justice, but gives you an idea...

A shot of “The Plank” from below



The Plank itself has a tricky little curl that guards it and feeds into the right side of the hole. By moving left to right on the entry, I was able to pass through the curler uneventfully and slide down the rock, landing just in front of the exposed boulder at the bottom. You can go to either side of this boulder; I chose to cut back to the middle then eddy out right to scout the rest. Like I said before, it is really a class III move, but you really don’t want to blow it.

The top half of “Plunk”



“Plunk” is a long rapid that we ran down the right over a series of ledges. After all the stuff you’ve been through to this point, this rapid should be a piece of cake. Plus, if you made it here, that means you didn’t fall off the plank...

The bottom of “Plunk”



Paddling through a little bit of flatwater, we got the false sense that the run down to the KR1 powerhouse was nearing an end. We couldn’t have been more wrong as one of the longest rapids on the run is just around the corner. There is not much mention of this rapid in previous write-ups; I can only assume that this one was called “Triple Thrills”. The description in the previous guide was that this is a IV+, with “three distinct drops”. I beg to differ. As a slalom paddler, I am perfectly comfortable catching eddies and calling a 20 ft pool “good separation” between drops. This is honestly one long rapid and every bit as difficult as other rapids on this run that are given V or V+ ratings. I have multiple theories explaining why this rapid is not mentioned/underrated in the previous write-up, some of the more plausible ones are as follows:

- 1) Getting to this rapid late in the afternoon, the sun was in their eyes and they just bombed down on a low-brace.
- 2) The FERC crew met them at the bottom of “Quadruple Whatever” with a cooler of beer, the buzz really kicked in just after “The Plank”, and they bombed down on a low-brace.
- 3) They were simply better paddlers than I am and just bombed down on a low-brace.

Regardless of the explanation, it is easy to pick out a line from the roadside (that is, a non-low-brace line), but it is also easy to tell that finding that line from your boat will be a different matter. I highly recommend checking this one from the road before getting too committed to this rapid. I think the scout at river level on the right side would be a bit arduous.

Brett and I chose to enter the rapid on the far right, boofing a little ledge and catching an eddy immediately on the right. From there, we worked our way down and across, stopping at an eddy on river left just above a sizeable hole with a curler feeding

left to right just above it. Although it doesn't look very easy from the scout, getting on the inside of this curl feeds you nicely into the right eddy, where Brett and I were all smiles. From here, you still have the biggest drop to go (pictured below). We decided to shoot a center slot, dropping about 5 feet, and then pick our way through the mess below. The final drop has a pretty powerful reversal that can be missed to either side. All in all a really fun and intricate rapid that we had no idea was going to be there.

Maybe "Triple Thrills", maybe just a "Bonus V", either way this is the bottom section of a long, fun rapid



This signals the end of the hard stuff on the Cataracts run, there is one double drop that looks like it could be trouble, but is actually pretty straightforward if you stay left in both drops. If you left your car at the KR1 station, head left above the dam, if you are in for more, portage the dam on the right-side and get ready for more action...

J. D. somewhere in the bottom of the Cataracts



Below KR1 powerhouse

The author on the 1st rapid below KR1



While portaging the dam, take a quick look at the next rapid – continuing the portage around this drop on river right is probably not an option and I’m not sure if you can ferry over to river left. Most of the rest of the run is of similar difficulty and character, so if you don’t like the looks of this drop, carry back above the dam, ferry over to river left and call it a day.

This first rapid has a pretty good hole at the end of a long, somewhat jumbled ramp. Like many drops near man made obstacles, the rocks here are sharp and scattered. The best looking line is to run down the right side of a top hole that can severely hamper your boofing ability. If you clear this with speed, a late jump on the right of the main hole will send you into the run-out, which is a bit funky; a good boof sends you through to a channel that is split by a bunch of unpleasant looking rocks. If you don’t clear the hole, it kicks you left into a preferable channel that is deeper and cleaner – the problem is that the only way to do this is to flirt with the main hole. In our group, I got a clean jump and had to dodge my way down the rest of the drop on the right, Brett and J. D. got snagged a bit by the hole, but ended up going down the much mellower left side at the bottom.

Below this there are two Class IV+ drops that can be scouted from river left. The first involved working left to right through a boulder field, followed by a straightforward drop on the right side that is partially hidden. The second involved a somewhat trickier double drop that pushes up against a wall on the right at the end. Both ledges are sticky, but, having made it this far, these drops were not a big deal.

Next is another IV+ that can be run down the right side - it is hard to say if we were getting desensitized to the difficulty of the rapids at this point. Anyway, this one is pretty clean and fun with an interesting right-left line that we chose to leave to another day, instead choosing to stay down the right side the entire way. This drop signifies the end of the “easy” stuff on this section. Right around the corner is a messy rapid with two possible channels. The right channel looked pretty gnarly, plus we had gotten out on the left side to scout; the left side we did not have a clear view of. Since it was late in the day, we decided to push on, executing a quick portage. Next time I’m on this section, I

want to try to get a good look at this left channel as it looks like it could be a runnable double-drop.

Brett on the last IV+ on the KR1 section



If you do the drive up the canyon frequently, the next drop has certainly caught your attention. From the road, all you see is the tops of rocks with water spewing out from underneath, indicating some pretty bad rock sieves. At close inspection, I can attest that these sieves actually look even worse at river level. The one exception is a constricted channel on river left that looks navigable, but dicey. Brett had entered the rapid on river right, quickly determining that the entire river disappeared under several house-sized boulders. Having signaled to J.D. and me to try our luck on river left, Brett started to portage around on the right bank. J.D. and I cruised over to a beach near the road, had a quick chat with an old guy fishing on the bank, walked down to look at the afore mentioned channel, and the next rapid... and the next rapid... at this point, we were about 100 yards from my car, which was parked precariously at one of the roadside turnouts. Looking back upstream, we saw Brett was still in the midst of his arduous portage over a huge rock jumble.

J.D. and I looked at each other and the same thought flashed through our minds – “Hey, that was a kick-ass day of class V boating, it’s getting late, we both live here and there is cold beer waiting for us. Let’s just call it a day and come back and bag these drops some other time.” Maybe it was the fatigue of having to be “on” for almost 7 hours, maybe it was the sight of the car a mere 100 yards away, more likely though, it was the thought of cold beer that caused us to cave in. Either way, we decided to end our day there and wait for Brett to finish his portage. Likely, he would decide to get out as well and we could sit around and rehash the days adventures over a couple of cold ones.

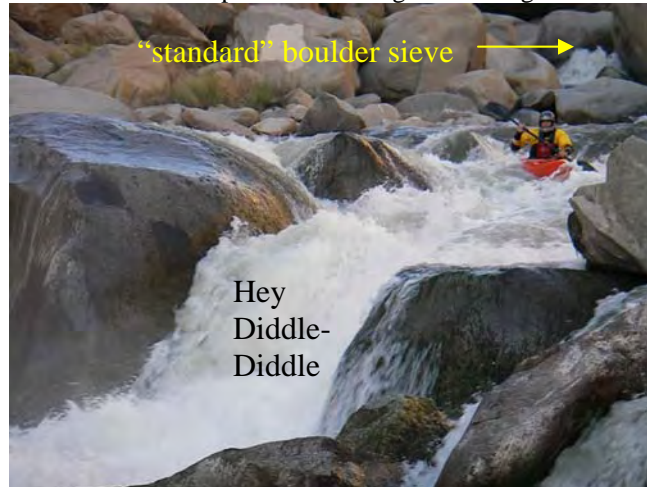
Of course Brett had other ideas. Having made his way all the way down from San Francisco, and having dreamed of paddling all the way to the mouth of the canyon for some time, he was clearly having none of this. As he sat on river right and scouted the rapid below the river-wide sieve, it was clear to us that he was going to keep on going. Having already taken my gear off, I decided the least I could do was get a couple of shots of him running the next quarter mile or so – as it turned out, the river saves some of its best drops for last...

Brett is not ready to throw in the towel...



The first drop below the sieved out section has a narrow lead-in to about an 8 foot drop. With no sweet line evident, Brett went “hey diddle-diddle, right down the middle”. Incidentally, I could see a bit of a rock protruding out part way down this drop, but it seemed to have no effect – a bit of a wet landing and we were running down the road to catch the next drop.

Brett in the drop after the river goes “underground”



Having to run to catch up with Brett, who was now on a mission, I was only able to catch him in the second-half of the next drop (shown below). This drop consisted of a right channel that was obscured of my view, followed by move down the left side with (another) hole at the bottom. Again, Brett took the middle route and continued down to the final drop.

Yet another quality rapid on the KR1 section



As I sat there with my camera on the final drop, I really wished I hadn't gotten out of my boat. This drop is phat/dope/rad/wicked – whatever you want to call it, it's just a quality class V. Brett went for a pretty cool double move that I captured on an MPEG file – some frames of which are shown below. He nailed the top move, a boof over a wet rock on the entry, then fell right into the corner of the main drop. After all the missed shots of his flips over the past 3 days I paddled with him (I have to be honest, there were not that many opportunities), I finally got a shot of the underside of the Jefe. Still, the line was sweet and I was more jealous than anything as he finished off the run in style.

The last rapid in the Canyon is one of the best.







As we shuttled back to the put-in, where we once again left our beer (class V paddlers, rookie mistakes), I couldn't help but reflect on our 3 days of action on the Kern with a Cheshire Cat grin. With 10.5 miles of river, 25 class V rapids, roadside access and late summer flows, this section of the Kern River is definitely a classic. From the raging rapids to the tattooed rednecks shouting from their pick-up trucks, there is hardly a dull moment on this run. The only nagging doubt in my mind remains, "when am I going to find someone willing to run it with me again..."