

# Raging Beauty

*Far and Away Adventures brings rafters up close with Idaho's wild Bruneau River.*

MY RAFTING ADVENTURE last May on Idaho's Bruneau River began well before our group reached the white water. Two hours into a drive across empty sage-strewn desert, our caravan of Suburbans transitioned from a gravel road to what appeared to be a cow trail. We halted abruptly in front of a hazardous crag, where our drivers were charged with teeter-tottering over a flattened portion of the boulders, free-falling a couple feet off the rocks' backside, and then breaking forcefully enough to avert barreling down a steep, unpaved slope.

Steve Lentz, our group's leader and the founder of Idaho's Far and Away Adventures, was, much to my relief, behind the wheel of our Suburban. The 55-year-old adventurer coaxed the vehicle over the rocks and successfully down the incline. "The Bruneau is all about remoteness," he said. "All of the trips Far and Away offers take place in remote settings, but here, where you enter into something you can't easily get out of, it's a real awakening for people."

Lentz founded Far and Away 30 years ago, when he obtained a coveted permit for rafting the Middle Fork of Idaho's Salmon River (only 26 commercial permits are available per season). He now spends each year from late June to September overseeing his company's trips down the Middle Fork (priced from \$2,950 per adult for six days), a stretch of river that accommodates about 10,000 rafters annually. In comparison, fewer than 200 people raft the Bruneau every year because of the scarcity of commercial permits—Far and Away has one of only four—and because the season is so short, from mid-May to mid-June.

Far and Away's clients on the Bruneau—which Congress last year designated as protected area, along with 517,000 acres of surrounding wilderness, under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act—generally consist of experienced rafters who

have taken trips down the Salmon. Unlike the Salmon, which runs through a wide, V-shaped canyon, the Bruneau shoots through a narrow, volcanic gorge where the rock walls rise hundreds of feet from shore. The white water builds as the river unfolds and finally crescendos toward the end at Five Mile Rapid.

On day one of our trip—after leaving the bumpy road behind us—we floated past a good stretch of the towering canyon to our first camp, where our guides uncorked bottles

of wine and set Snake River Farms steaks on the grill. After dinner, we retired to surprisingly comfortable tents. "We've found that when people don't have to sleep on the ground, and when their tents are carpeted and tall enough for them to stand in, they will get a good night's rest," said Lentz. "A shower and a massage help, too."

Each morning of the trip, the guides woke us at our tents with hot towels and fresh coffee. By day three, the terrain around us began to change, from canyon walls to a series of plateaus that tapered over each other. As I sat in the paddleboat taking in the scenery, an unexpected lurch launched us into the throws of Five Mile. "Synchronize!" commanded Sparky, our head guide. "All left! *No lily dipping!*"

We paddled forward and successfully passed Crowbar Canyon Rapid. Wild Burrow, the last large section of white water

before a dangerous right-hand turn, came next.

Then a great boom shook the canyon. Someone screamed, but Sparky remained unfazed. "Just an F-18 training overhead," he said in his slow country drawl. But the sonic boom was a sobering reminder that we were nearing civilization and, alas, the end of our trip. —JENNIFER RYAN

*Far and Away Adventures, 208.726.8888, [www.far-away.com](http://www.far-away.com)*



*Far and Away rafters enjoy a moment of calm on the Bruneau River, which Congress designated for protection last year.*

STEPHEN K HALL