

Richard Jones

A Little Piece of Living History

Annie Tueller-Payne

The following article is satire, a slice out of the life of Richard Jones. This article is not intended to document his many professional and political accomplishments. Richard Jones is the founder of World Wide River Expeditions; one of the first outfitters to offer Cataract, Westwater and Desolation canyon trips to the general paying public. World Wide is also the largest outfitter on Idaho's Main Salmon River. He is one of the founders of the Utah Guides and Outfitters association (UGO). Entire essays and novels could be written about these accomplishments and this article is in no way meant to trivialize Richard Jones. This article's intended focus is the personal side of Richard Jones. He is a father, a grandfather and this year, retired!

I had always heard horror stories about the owner of World Wide River Expeditions, Richard Jones. His reputation preceded him. Other guides had told me that he wouldn't hire men shorter than 6 feet, that he only hired BYU students, and that he wouldn't hire women at all. I was terrified of him. I am a non-Mormon, girl, coming in at a big 110 pounds. Nevertheless, some cute boy convinced me that I should work for World Wide River Expeditions. So I did. And thus began my relationship with RJ.

I interviewed with Richard on a snowy February afternoon in his Northern Utah office. He was what I had heard about. He was staunch and serious. I smiled as I shook his hand. He nodded, acknowledging me without speaking. He sat down and fired his first question. He asked me how much I weighed. I took a deep breath, I was wearing three sweaters, as I knew the question was coming and I wanted to look bigger. "130," I said.

Then Richard did something quite unexpected. He laughed at me, right there. He leaned back in his chair, threw back his head, held his sides and laughed until he cried.

"You wouldn't weigh 130, even with all those clothes you're wearing soaking wet," he laughed. This was the Richard that I was expecting. I immediately launched my carefully rehearsed speech. "I know I don't look it, but I can row a boat," I argued. "I've rowed Westwater over 100 times and never flipped" That was my ace in the hole, an irrefutable verbal resume, or so I thought. That's when Richard really got me.

"That's 'cause you've never tried," he joked, still chuckling at my weight comment. Then he told me that I was hired, he shook my hand again, smiling this time, and we have been friends ever since. Turns out they were all wrong about Richard. He's actually a really nice guy. He's been nothing but nice to me and he loves the river more than anyone.

Richard is retiring this year, and I wanted to write a little tribute to him. I guess that I just want people to realize that what he lacks in bar room shop talk, he makes up for in his genuine love for rivers and the people who run them. He is humble and understated. He, ironically, tends to go largely unnoticed in the Moab River community. After Jim Sarten retired, I believe that Richard was the last owner (founded) operated river outfitter in town (Moab). The following are just a couple of the many memories that I have of Richard.

The first time I boated with Richard was on Westwater. He ran Skull the most screwed up way ever. He was sideways, skiwampus and darn near flipped. I, consequently, decided that he clearly was an idiot. It never occurred to me that Richard might have just been messing around in a rubber boat because he could and no one would tell him different.

Richard's skill behind the oars really shined a few years ago on the Selway. We went up for one of the first trips of the year. The road was still snowed in, but somehow we got to Paradise Guard Station. I could write an entire novel on that shuttle and the drivers and rigs that got us to the put in, but not today. We put on at four-feet, but by the time we got to the canyon, it had risen to nine-feet. Ladle was solid Class V, with a 5-mile continuous Class IV run out including Little Niagara, No Slouch, Puzzle Creek and others. I still have no regrets about walking Ladle. It was as hairy as anything that I have ever seen and I truly believe that it could have killed someone that day. Richard, I could tell was apprehensive but opted for rowing anyway. He was in a fully loaded 18-footer, not the ideal boat for a swollen mountain river, but Richard's favorite craft. The Selway, at 9-feet, offers more serious consequences than Westwater in the Utah blazing sun. Reading the river counts on the Selway. I was apprehensive about anyone running it, let alone Richard. Richard not only ran it that day, he humbly greased it, with a perfect run, and it was beautiful.

Although Richard and I have run a couple of rivers together, we've run Cataract Canyon the most together. I remember one Cat trip in particular. I was motoring and as usual he was back in the motor well trying to tell me what to do. Cat was running about 40 thousand and we had a little argument about whether Big Bertha would be a wash in Big Drop Three. I prefer running a little of the gut if I have to, in order to avoid that thing but not Richard. He loves Bertha. He feels that he has paid good money to run the biggest riverboats made and he's going to get his money's worth. So we sat in the back of the motor well arguing, while entering Big Three and well, Richard won. We ran that hole, and at the last minute, straightened up with no downstream momentum. The front frame actually made it through the maw but the back frame did not. So, we just kind of hung on the fence there so to speak...for a while. The straps holding the frames together all burst. Then the outrigger straps started to go. I thought our whole boat

would come apart right there, but somehow she managed through. Richard had time to jump out of the motor well and head for the nose of the boat. I had been washed out and was hugging the motor, feet dangling in the drink when Richard came back. I was doing my best to get my feet underneath me when Richard told me to get back in the boat and do something. I told him that I was working on it. That was the second time that I remember Richard laughing at me.

Richard loves animals. I had been doing back-to-back Cat trips last summer, and had met some random, fairly domesticated goose living at Ten Cent. I started feeding it bread every week. The passengers dug the goose and somebody had even named him Ned. So, Richard came down one week and fell in love with Ned. No kidding, love at first sight. It was the darndest thing. Richard loved that a goose would jump up on his boats for some bread. He asked me if we could take the goose to Dark Canyon to camp with us. I said no. I explained that the goose would make a mess on the boat. I also tried to explain that Ten Cent was the goose's home etc, etc. Well, somewhere along the line Richard pulled rank, which he does on occasion. Next thing I know, I am at Hite, two days later, with the goose, all of the passengers calling it "Goosey". Richard, who was flying back, asked me if I would mind driving Goosey back to Moab. I explained again to Richard the logistics of goose transportation. I told him the truck (his truck) only seats six and we had seven guides, and the last thing we needed was a goose in the truck. Richard didn't care. Again with the rank thing and I agreed to drive this goose half way across the state of Utah. Richard left me with the goose and six guides. The guides later mutinied, and we ended up leaving Goosey at Hite. We returned to Moab that evening to find Richard anxiously awaiting his new pet goose, which we didn't have. No worries though, Richard jumped in his car drove 4 hours to Hite, picked up Goosey then drove back to his office in SLC, arriving at 2:00am. Goosey left Richard the next day. And, you guessed it, I saw Goosey back at Ten Cent two weeks later. This time I was laughing at Richard.

Like so many things in life, you don't realize what you've got until it's gone. I could go on and on with Richard stories. He has truly lively-ed up my guiding career and I love him for it. I have had the pleasure of doing "all ladies trips" with his oldest daughter Susan, in resident office ass kicker. I have spent summers with another daughter, sweet soul Salmon River sister Allison. She too has left commercial outfitting for other challenges and is now mother of twins. And of course I owe my life to his son; workhorse, swamper/shep, pucker consuming, one word survivor, birthday remembering, partner in crime Scooter B! It seems to be an end of an era for the Jones family. Richard has moved on to larger bodies of water. He is currently in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean solo rowing a 30-foot

boat, which he crafted. I, however, cannot move on until I say thank you. So, at the risk of sounding sappy, here it goes. For the fun times, the best equipment and the best Glen and Bessie Hyde storyteller ever. For holding the shade umbrella for Sage and me, for the girl's bug hut, even for the 16-hour rig you made us do last summer and especially for the flowers when I really needed them. Thank you Richard, I will miss you.

Beginners Luck: A Guides First Raft Trip High Water Cataract Canyon

Daniel Anderson

My 11-foot oars are bent nearly in half on either side of my water logged 18-foot raft. Each one resembles a frown, not unlike the one on my face. Ahead, coming up fast, is the awesome sight of Big Drop 2. The ledge wave is massive and crashing, and the waves below are exploding fiercely; there is nothing little about Little Niagra. I'm pulling frantically towards the safety of the river left eddy above the drop, but I seem to be moving closer to the certain doom lurking downstream. Sweat pours off my brow like sheets of rain from a mountain thunderstorm. Veins are popping out of my arms where I never knew I had veins before; my strength is going fast. The raft behind me speeds past in the main current aimed directly for Niagra. I pull and pull, slowly and reluctantly the eddy accepts my raft. For now, I am safe. The other raft was not so fortunate. This is my welcome to Cataract Canyon at high water.

I have always been fortunate rafting and kayaking. I know there is a big thrashing waiting for me down a river somewhere but I've snuck by—so far. I was especially lucky my first raft trip down Cataract Canyon. It was towards the end of May 1998 and the rivers on the Colorado Plateau were rising daily. I was really strong that Spring, having completed a two month season in west Texas guiding on the Rio Grande and working for three weeks as a guide on the Salt River in Arizona. I'd been boating for three months when I showed up in Moab, while most guides here were still shaking off the cold of a good snow pack winter with the memories of fat powder days still fresh on their minds.

So I had just started with Sheri Griffith Expeditions that year and expectations of me were high. I did an upper Dolores river trip at 3,500 cfs with Dave Focardi and I guess I did well. Back in the office, after the trip, I was asked if I wanted to row high water Cat. My stomach immediately sank to my feet and my knee's became weak. "High water Cat—why that's certain death," I thought to myself. After a few moments of silence waiting for a response, Jose said, "Well, you