

# JUST YOU & THE RIVER



Kayakers use so-called playboat-style design boat to carve their way in the rapids, whether heading into big water on the Main Payette or maneuvering a steep drop.

Photo by Ken Levy

## *Kayakers find white water thrills on Payette, Salmon forks*

**By Ken Levy**  
*Special to the IBR*

Idaho's warmer waters and outstanding river opportunities convinced kayaker Jeff Shelton to move to Boise from Alaska.

Kayaking in The Last Frontier is a thoroughly chilly experience, where water temperatures can top off at 35 degrees, he said.

"That makes it a little bit miserable, but I finally got addicted to it," said Shelton.

Nearby kayaking opportunities make living in Boise ideal for him.

"Right here near Boise there's the North Fork of the Payette, the South Fork of the Payette – just a lot of really good kayaking just out of town," Shelton said. "It's a really good kayaking community, too, and it's been good to get in with everybody and have a lot of people to go boating with."

And he can do it after school. A Boise State University student, Shelton heads out to run the North Fork after school whenever possible.

"It's pretty much 15 miles of Class V, and you can push yourself as hard as you want," Shelton said.

Loosely translated, that means getting plenty of practice rolling your boat right side up after a flip. Anyone wanting to practice their rolls and kayaking maneuvers can come out to the pool at Boise State University's Kinesiology Annex during scheduled Wednesday evening Open Roll sessions.

"It gives (kayakers) a chance to get out pre-season to tune up their skills and get used to the boat again before they go out on the rivers," said Matt Jost, who is the operations student manager for the BSU Outdoor Program.

Jost added kayaking to his river-boating repertoire about two years ago.

"Going from rafting to kayaking brings back some of the thrills and adrenaline," he said. "The potential for just playing is opened

### **KAYAKING LESSONS:**

To find out more information about BSU's drop-in kayak roll sessions, visit the university's Outdoor Program page at <http://rec.boise.state.edu/outdoor/adventure> and hit the "Water" button or call 208-426-1946.

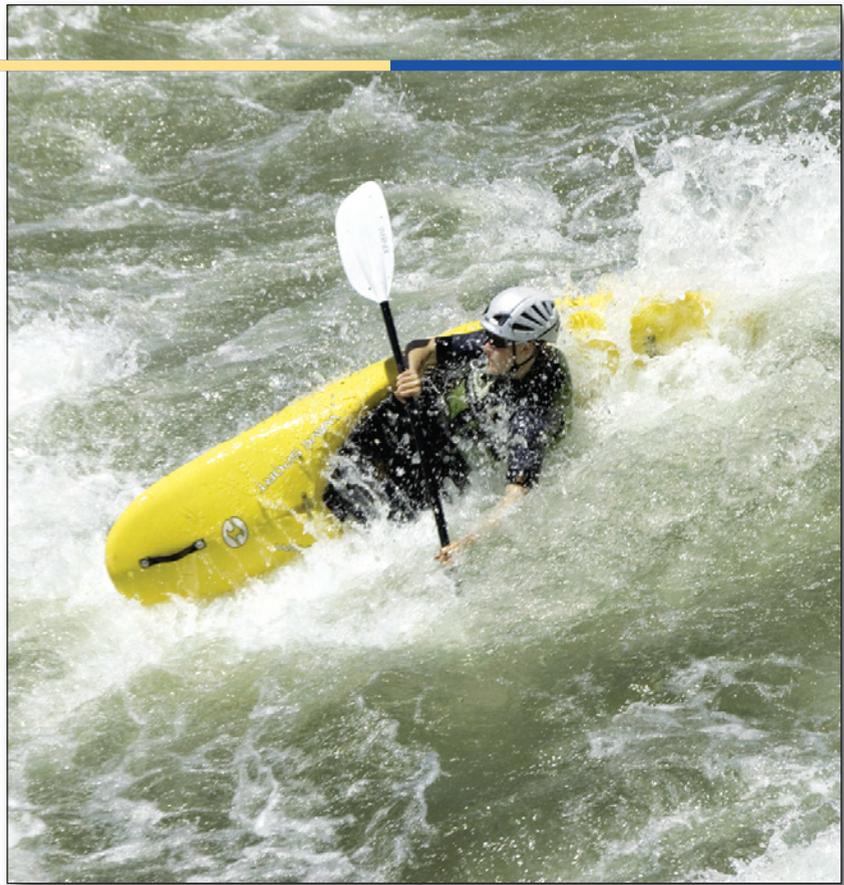
up. With kayaking, you're in control, you're in charge and if you mess up it's your fault. When you get in that big hole, or drop the waterfall, it's all you. It's a feeling like, whatever accomplishment, it's yours. It's being one-on-one with the river."

Jost leads three-to-six-day trips, depending on the river, for Hughes River Expeditions, Cambridge. The Middle Fork of the Salmon is a six-day, 100-mile trip from Boundary Creek to Salmon.

"I grew up working on the (Big Wood) river, and did my first river trip when I was 10," said Jost. "I spend a lot of time in Stanley on the Salmon River and spend most of my summers on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, and the Snake River in Hells Canyon."

**A lone kayaker challenges Class III rapids on the Main Payette River during an early season run.**

Photo by Ken Levy



**Nap time? No, these kayakers are practicing the hip snap maneuver prior to flipping their boats upside down in the water. The hip snap is the maneuver used to right a flipped kayak.**

Photo by Ken Levy



## *Lessons recommended for beginning kayakers*

Jost said his first “really long” kayaking trip was a journey on the Owyhee River.

“We put in on the South Fork. It’s a huge, incredible canyon, and it was so remote out there,” he said. “We did 100 miles in five days of the South Fork of the Owyhee, all the way to Rome (Ore.). We saw mountain lions, bighorn sheep, but no people until the last 10 miles of the trip. It’s one of the most beautiful places in Idaho to experience it all.”

It’s also one of the most thrilling, Jost said he hit a rapid named Cabin, a roughly mile-long class IV with a 10-foot drop at the beginning of it.

“I went through a big hole and my skirt imploded and filled my boat with water,” he said. “I had to get to shore, empty it out and get back into the rapid.”

The last 25 miles of the trip were filled with Class IV and V rapids, Jost said, which are extremely fast and potentially deadly. He and his companions portaged around

Widowmaker, the biggest Class V, “and the rest of it was just big water, a couple of miles long. It has some of the biggest white water in the state.”

Jost recommends beginners start with creek boats, because they are longer and have rounded edges that make rolling, or flipping upright, easier. Play boats – shorter with more square edges – are harder to roll back up.

He recommends the Main Payette for practicing newfound skills, which can be learned, in part, through BSU’s Kayaking 101 and 102 classes offered annually.

“We take people into the pool for two weeks and then go to the Main Payette or another creek for beginners,” Jost said. “There are other classes out there. I definitely recommend having someone teach you, rather than trying to learn by yourself.”

*Ken Levy is a Treasure Valley-based freelance writer and photographer.*

**Matt Jost, operations student manager for the BSU Outdoor Program, watches as Jeff Shelton flips his kayak during a recent lesson. Jost said the playboat-designed kayak, with its square edges, is more difficult to flip up than a smooth-edged, longer creek boat.**

Photo by Ken Levy