

# *Transformation Through the Viewfinder*

by Keith Doherty



The Middle Fork of the Salmon encompasses every aspect that river runners love. It's natural flowing: no dams, no water being diverted. At any moment in the journey, there is a very good chance you will see wildlife in its most natural setting. The water is clean, the rapids are fun, and the pools are tranquil. And did I mention the hot springs?

Once you have floated for forty miles, the closest road is truly forty miles away. The only way out is by foot, horse, aircraft, or to stay on your present course downstream. It's an extraordinary environment. Nestled deep inside the Frank Church Wilderness of Idaho, the Middle Fork leaves an impact on all of its travelers.

O.A.R.S. has long specialized in taking clients deep into the backcountry for a blend of adventure and relaxation. Guests come from all over, motivated by a multitude of reasons. Whether they need to immerse themselves in a pristine environment, unplug from cell phones, laptops, traffic jams and daily meetings, or give their children an experience that can't be found in their local neighborhood or school system, these guests show up at the put-in on the verge of a transformation within themselves. It's simply what happens on extended river trips.

And as a videographer on these trips, you can literally watch the transformation take place through the viewfinder. Focusing on faces and smiles, the camera and lens record reactions of delight, anxious anticipation, and pure relaxation. By the time each of these adventurers reach the confluence of the Main Salmon River, 60 or 100 miles downstream depending on their launch point, their appreciation for life will have been enriched, one way or another.

Even folks that have been on many of these trips will experience it again. It's the same feeling that keeps the guides coming back year after year. Our film crew certainly wasn't immune to it. You are floating through a region that demands your attention and focus. The beauty of the landscape inspires; its vastness makes you feel small. The rapids are filled with adrenaline and the evening's campfire provides the perfect place to reflect on daily revelations.

Each morning when we stroll to the coffee table with messy hair and sleep in our eyes, any traces of social awkwardness that might have existed at the beginning of the trip have long since disappeared. It's the result of a shared experience in such a majestic place.



(And I didn't even mention the evening wine tastings or the gourmet chef.)