



Running the Middle Fork may be a wilderness adventure but Aggipah River Trips doesn't skimp on the culinary experience, capped by Idaho wines at every meal.



and — whoosh, splash, bump, sploosh — we sluiced through my first Middle Fork rapid.

Bernt guided the boat into an eddy and Chuck and I stood up to start casting. “These boats are not very forgiving,” he added. “They bend, they break, they can sink.” The advantage of the drift boat is that you can position your passengers for fish, Bernt explained as he moved the boat into the slack water near shore. “Put your fly right in that line of froth. There should be a fish there.” I do. There is. I land my first beautiful cutthroat trout, with its speckled silver-gold body and characteristic red streak in the skin fold below the jaw.

## Padding Through A Postcard


Three hours and at least 20 fish later — Chuck and I lost count, as this is catch-and-release country — we gathered for lunch at Whitie Cox Camp. We were a party of 30, the total allowed under the Aggipah River Trips permit from the U.S. Forest Service, including eight licensed guides, Bernt, and his 26-year-old daughter Stephanie, a licensed river guide for nine years. The 22 passengers ranged in age from 7 to 72.

Over the next two-and-a-half days I sampled the various ways Bernt has perfected to float this river — on the paddleboat, where I discovered how shockingly cold the river can be, and on the oar boats where I got to know some of the professional guides. One morning I rode ahead on the sweep boat, laden with all the camp gear, with Stephanie at the two long fore-and-aft steering oars. She worked the sweeps from a standing position to guide the raft along on the current, and told me she'd been on the river since age 4, and had been running boats herself since she was 15.

That afternoon, our last on the river,

Chuck and I worked to perfect our fast-water fly-fishing technique on the drift boat, making our way down to Cliffside Camp, at Mile 90 in Impassible Canyon. The ominous-sounding name comes from canyon walls so steep that there are no trails leading in or out. We passed through rapids with names like Devil's Tooth, House of Rocks, and Jump Off, then joined the main Salmon, history's real “River of No Return.” We shot through the last Class IV rapid, Cramer Creek, which the guidebook describes as a “Grand Canyon-sized rapid, significantly larger than anything on the Middle Fork.” Nonetheless, the boats shoot through, one after another, in textbook fashion, without mishap. The flo-tilla fetches up at Cache Bar Boat Ramp to meet the bus that will haul us back to Salmon, Idaho, two hours away.

While we sorted our gear, Bernt's crew deflated the rafts, loaded everything that made this expedition work so well on waiting trucks and trailers. They had just two days to get everything ready and back upriver to Boundary Creek to meet the next party — and then, they would do it all again.

I would too, in a heartbeat. 



Ryck Lydecker at the oars.

### MORE INFORMATION

Aggipah River Trips operates on the Main and Lower Salmon Rivers in addition to the Middle Fork, with day trips, overnights and multiple-day floats, depending on season and water flow. Most trips use rafts but drift boat fishing is usually available as an option. For more information, visit: [www.aggipah.com](http://www.aggipah.com) or call 877/708-6037. For info on the wilderness area: [www.fs.fed.us/r4/sc](http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/sc).