

## VIPS. VISIT THE RIVER

A large and very special trip put in on the Stanislaus River July 17th. It may have been the first time a single trip pooled equipment from six different companies. The mutual effort was to ensure that Congressmen Don Edwards (author of HR 4223) and "Pete" Stark, State Resources Secretary Huey Johnson, Department of Rehabilitation Director Ed Roberts, newspaper and television people and others would have an enjoyable and memorable time on their trip down the Stanislaus.

Outfitters Bob Ferguson, Marty McDonnell, George Wendt, Dick Lindford, and Ken Brunges along with Fred Dennis, Mark Dubois, Don Briggs, Patricia Chambers and members of E.T.C. (Environmental Traveling Companions) captained rafts. One of the rafts was guided by the team of Travis Gibb and Bob Metts. Travis, who is 14 and blind, rowed the boat in response to instructions shouted by Bob, who is 29 and disabled by polio. Many disabled people were on the trip, some enjoying the river for the first time.

Put in had more than its usual confusion as people decided which rafts to go in. Don Briggs definitely won the most popular boatman award as nine eager paddlers, including the two congressmen, climbed into his raft. Enthusiasm ran high as the twelve boat party made their way downstream. One outfitter, who shall remain anonymous, even showed some of his crew the bottomside of Widowmaker rock. Stops were made at Rose Creek, and then at Otter Bar for a delicious lunch. Later in the day Mark gave a talk at the Miwok grinding holes near Abbey's Ferry. During the day, the canyon revealed its beauty and its secrets as the river carried the group along.

Abruptly, they came upon the dead waters of the reservoir that had snuffed out Chicken Falls, Fred's Rapid, and others. Silence hung over the group as the rafts floated slowly on the little current that remained. Ahead lay Parrotts Ferry Bridge lined with people to welcome the river party. They were holding banners that thanked Congressmen Edwards and Stark and Huey Johnson for their support of the river. Suddenly, floating upriver in the still evening air, came the strains of the Stanislaus River song. The heartfelt blending of voices visibly touched many of those who were on the river that day. As the two congressmen waved and thanked those on the bridge, Stark unceremoniously dumped Edwards and himself into the drink. Still smiling, they floated next to their raft, deeply affected by their experience on the Stanislaus.

As the rafts pulled onto the shore, dozens of people gathered on the hillside to warmly welcome the river supporters. Then, quietly at first but gathering strength, everyone joined in the singing of the Stanislaus River song. At the end of the song came cheers and shouts of "thank you."

Ten to twenty members of Friends of New Melones were also present during the afternoon. They had come to Parrotts Ferry that day with statements, banners, and a generator operated microphone. River opponents and supporters argued positions. Some exchanges got a little heated, but all ended peacefully - or at least uneventfully.

While dam proponents watched from the roadway, river supporters gathered around a blocked off area near the stagnant waters edge. Led by Michael Harami and Jim and Salli Kendrick, a new tree had been planted and the ground made ready for the planting of seeds.

Congressman Edwards and Huey Johnson spoke briefly and then all joined in again in singing the Stanislaus River song as several people including Mark, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Stark, and some children scattered seeds and sprinkled them with water. This ceremony celebrated the beginning of the reclamation of Parrotts Ferry and the new life which will grow in place of that destroyed by the reservoir of New Melones.

After the ceremony people mingled and talked optimistically of possibilities, people, and plans for saving the river. Mr Edwards was shivering from the cold but was wide-eyed and smiling. He had just been on his first whitewater trip and was ready to go back to Washington to work harder than ever to save the Stanislaus River and Canyon.

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