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Snake River in Hells Canyon

ROW offers several trips of different lengths on the Snake River through Hells Canyon. Our 5- and 6-day trips that cover the entire length of Hells Canyon are the best trips. However, some people don't have the time to allow for this, so in June we offer 4-day trips and we do have a few 3-day trips scheduled throughout the season. As well, private charters for groups of 19 looking for a 3- or 4-day trip in July, August or September are possible, if the desired date is available.

Our Snake River trips begin at Hells Canyon Dam, 70 miles northwest of Cambridge, Idaho. Once we begin floating through the immense wilderness, which surrounds the river canyon, there are only two places where roads reach the river. The first is Pittsburg Landing; this is the take-out point for our 3-day trips, some 4-day trips and our raft-supported walking trips. This point is 34 miles downstream (north) from the Hells Canyon Dam. The second access point is at Heller Bar, 48 miles further downstream from Pittsburg Landing. This is our take-out point for high-water 4-day trips, as well as 5- and 6-day trips.

The first 34 miles of the river (Hells Canyon Dam to Pittsburg Landing) have numerous rapids, including the two biggest - Wild Sheep and Granite Creek. In terms of sheer water volume and excitement, these two rapids compare to the big rapids on the Colorado in the Grand Canyon. On either side of the river are impressive mountain ranges that are both within designated wilderness areas. On the Idaho side are the Seven Devils and on the Oregon side, the Wallawas. At some locations on the trip, you can look up to points that are 7900 feet in elevation, over a mile above the river.

5- and 6-day trips continue beyond Pittsburg Landing into more fantastic canyon scenery, ***which many people think is the most spectacular of the entire trip.*** The great expanses of the West are apparent, and each day brings a different look and feel. This section also has plenty of fun rapids with big waves and lots of punch. Many of these are especially well suited for those who want to use our inflatable kayaks (Duckies). One of the very special places we pass is the point where the Salmon River joins the Snake. These are the two largest rivers in Idaho, and it's a magical confluence.

Natural and Cultural History: The Snake has more pioneer homesteads, Indian paintings and wonderful hikes than any river we know of. The human history that dates back 10,000 years is very intriguing. On our trips, we always allow time for those who are interested to visit these sites. At camp there's also time to hike up some of the side canyons. Folks not interested in hiking will always enjoy sitting by the river reading a book, fishing, or admiring the sheer magnificence of the canyon and just plain relaxing. In this remote and wild land, our only contacts during the trip are other river parties, including occasional jet boats, which carry both sightseeing groups and fishermen.

Trip Length: From June 30 through our August 25th launch, we offer primarily 5 day trips. In part this is because our Forest Service permit is very restrictive, allowing us to operate only one trip every eight days with a maximum of 19 guests. Thus, it makes sense for us to be on the river at least 5 of the 8 days available to us. As well, as an outfitter since 1979, we sincerely believe that the Snake River offers one of the world's premier rafting experiences and deserves a minimum of 5 or 6 days in order to appreciate its many wonders.

In terms of considering an early-season 3- or 4-day trip, there are a couple of considerations. In June we offer 4-day trips, as the water flow on the Snake is **usually** high (and thus moving more quickly), allowing us to float

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the entire 82 miles in 4 days. Please note that the key word here is “usually” and we cannot guarantee that the river will be high enough to allow us to run the entire 82 miles. In the event of lower flows (below 15,000 cfs) in June, the 4-day trip will float 34 miles to Pittsburg Landing, meaning less time on the water and more time spent exploring the canyon, fishing, etc., as well as getting to camp earlier. While our goal on June 4-day trips is to run the entire 82 miles, it is important to understand that low water conditions could prevent this. Because the river is dam controlled, we have no way of knowing ahead of time what the flows will be.

5 and 6-day trips both cover 82 river miles. Thus, the 5-day trip gives substantially more time for camp activities such as hiking, fishing, bird watching, lounging around and overall a more relaxed pace. In deciding which length you'd prefer, keep in mind that on the first day of the trip we drive two hours to the river, have a safety talk and load your gear on the rafts, so it's usually about 10:30-11:00am before we're actually floating. Likewise, on the last day we're off the river by 2:00-3:00pm. Our experience is that it takes most people a day or two just to unwind. Once you slow down to the river's pace, and your own stresses seem far away, you'll find the trip takes on more meaning.

Weather: Camping conditions on the Snake are ideal, making it very comfortable to stay out several nights. Usually it is between 80-95 degrees during the day, while at night it cools to 65-75. It rarely rains, but when it does it freshens the air and often provides a dramatic thundershower. There are no mosquitoes. Our camps are either on flat benches beneath pine trees or on sandy beaches. The water is about 60 degrees in June and September and 70 degrees in July and August. Since people usually go swimming quite a bit, you always feel clean. May, June and September are excellent times to float the Snake, as dam releases are often high and there are few other people around.

ROW Guides: There is no question that on any trip, the guides are the most important factor in terms of your safety, enjoyment, and ultimately, the success of the trip. For this reason each of our guides is an exceptional person, willing and eager to share, teach, listen, learn, laugh, play, discuss, and above all, work hard to provide you with a safe, relaxed, spontaneous adventure. With one guide per three-four guests, you're sure to get the attention you deserve. In order to provide you with the richest experience possible, we divide ourselves into meal crews, meaning that while two or three guides are preparing dinner; the other two or three guides are free to spend time with you, whether it's to show you the way to a nearby rock art site, give a fishing lesson, or just sit and visit. They are the main reason many of our guests return to ROW time and time again and wouldn't even think of traveling with another rafting company. (References gladly provided.)

Beyond the River: One of the reasons that Hells Canyon is such a fabulous trip is the incredible variety of things to do and see along the way. ROW makes a point of stopping and taking advantage of as many of these things as we can. As we float we tell you about the early pioneers who lived here and we stop to hike to at least one of their old homestead cabins. We talk about the Indians and take you to at least two of their rock art sites. If you want more, we know at least a couple dozen different places.

Not only do we show you these places, we help you understand them better. If you're interested, we'll tell you about the geology and plants and animals. We believe strongly that deepening understanding builds greater appreciation. And we're hoping our love of this canyon will be contagious.

Luxury Camping: In order to make your trip run as smoothly and comfortably as possible, we use a large 22' cargo raft to carry the bulk of the camping gear, food, etc. This allows our smaller oar-powered rafts to be lighter and more maneuverable which makes for a safer ride with more bounce and splash. The cargo raft arrives early to camp and gets the kitchen set up as well as the spacious 2-person tents that ROW provides. When we arrive in camp all you have to do is carry your personal gear (stored in a ROW-provided easy-to-use waterproof bag) to the tent of your choice and roll out your sleeping bag, flannel liner and thick, self-inflating foam sleeping pad (also provided by ROW). This gives you an extra half-hour of time for doing something you'd enjoy rather than setting up a tent. *(Note: In rare circumstances we may have a trip on the Snake with less than 13 guests. In this case, due to economic and logistical reasons, we may not run our 'cargo raft.' On*

these smaller trips guests and gear travel together down river. Our guides are still happy to set up your tent if you like, or you may enjoy doing it yourself.)

Camp Time: To give you the opportunity to explore on your own, we generally arrive in camp no later than 4:00pm each day so you have time to go hiking, fishing, read a book, or whatever you might want. Then, around 5:30, we serve a lavish hors d'oeuvres spread as dinner preparation continues.

Meals: The quality of our food reflects the quality of the wilderness environment in Hells Canyon. We hand-select the freshest fruits and vegetables we can find and pack them carefully in huge ice-coolers. Likewise, these coolers carry fresh dairy products and meats. From these ingredients we prepare bountiful, healthy meals. Sustainably harvested wild Alaskan Salmon served with a fresh garden salad; Prime Rib combined with a fresh Chilean salad and Idaho mashed potatoes or made-on-the-river lasagna is a few possible entrees. Big salads of vegetables and fruit add color and variety to every meal. Desserts are made each evening in our Dutch ovens and range from authentic cobbler to pineapple upside-down cake. We serve juice each morning and moderate amounts of bottled wine with dinner. We also provide two beers and two sodas or juices per person per day. There's always plenty of cold water, lemonade mix, tea, coffee and cocoa. You're welcome to bring your own beverages or alcohol as well. We always have plenty of ice to keep your drinks cold.

Your Choice of Craft: In addition to the cargo raft that carries all the camping gear, we use three other kinds of river craft. The traditional raft is a self-bailing oar-powered raft, about 17' long, which our guides row, using two oars. We also offer a smaller, self-bailing 14-foot paddle raft, where 4 to 6 people paddle along with our guide. And, on some stretches of the river, you may paddle an inflatable kayak, or Daring Duckie, as we call them. You have a choice of riding in any of these river craft, and many people enjoy trying all three during the course of the trip. We encourage you to bring a camera, which will be easily accessible on the oar-rafts from the waterproof camera boxes we provide. *(Note: On the few trips we operate with less than 13 guests, we may not have enough people interested in paddling to have a paddle raft along. This decision is based on exactly how many guests want to paddle, what percentage of time they want to paddle, and possible logistical constraints based on water levels and other factors. We will still have duckies on smaller trips, if requested.)*

The Last Supper: Another small touch ROW adds is the inclusion of a farewell dinner on our last evening in Lewiston with ROW guests and guides on trips that last 4 days or more. This dinner brings a nice "closure" to the week of adventure everyone has shared. (All-inclusive except for alcoholic beverages.)

Signing Up: Call our office first. We're happy to tell you who else is on the trip. Then, complete our trip application form and send it along with a non-refundable deposit.

Trip Logistics: In order to minimize your driving time to and from the river, we start our trip in Cambridge, Idaho (two hours northwest of Boise) and end in Lewiston, Idaho. ROW provides transportation from the Boise airport to Cambridge, Idaho for the start of your trip and then to Lewiston, Idaho after the river trip.

Travel Options:

- **Option A** – Fly into Boise, Idaho the evening prior to your departure date and take the ROW shuttle up to Cambridge. Then after the trip return home via Lewiston, Idaho or Spokane, Washington.
 - **Arrive in Boise no later than 4:00 Pm Mountain Time the day before your trip.**
 - The shuttle van (provided by Harlow's Transportation Service) will meet you outside the baggage claim doors in the "taxi" lane at 4:30pm for an easy two-hour drive to Cambridge.
 - After your trip you can:
 - A) Fly out of the Lewiston Airport (Airport shuttle provided free by the Red Lion Inn) to your home town or back to Boise, Idaho to connect with your roundtrip flight. Lewiston is serviced by Horizon Air or Delta Air only.
 - B) Take a shuttle van / taxi to Spokane, Washington (two hours north) for a better selection of flights as Spokane has a much larger airport. If you choose to shuttle to

Spokane – we recommend you contact DAJ Taxi cab (509) 228-7009 or ABC Taxi (208) 413-1645. Be sure to clarify how many are in your party and how much luggage you may have when reserving a time with them.

- **Option B** – Drive to Cambridge, Idaho and arrange for the Frontier Motel to shuttle your vehicle north while you are on the river.
 - Plan to arrive in Cambridge in time for the **8:00pm Orientation meeting**.
 - **On all 3-day trips and some 4-day trips** your car will go to White Bird or our actual take-out at Pittsburg Landing.
 - **On all 5- or 6-day trips and some 4-day trips**, your car will be shuttled to Lewiston. If you decide to get your car shuttled to the take out at Heller Bar you will need to have a Washington State Discover Pass.

If your flight arrives in Boise early in the day we recommend that you spend extra time exploring Boise (see “What to do in and around Boise”) rather than going to Cambridge, which is a very small town with few amenities.

If your flight arrives later than 4:00pm into Boise, you have two options:

- Rent a car and drive two hours to Cambridge. Then have it shuttled to the ending point of the trip, as per the above paragraph.
- Take an airport shuttle from Boise to Cambridge. Contact either Boise City Taxi at 208-377-3333 or Yellow Cab at 208-345-5555. If your flight is late, Yellow Cab may be your best choice as it does not need to be pre-arranged. Yellow Cab charges a flat rate, which could be for a regular cab or their van that carries up to 7 people (ask about space for luggage and current pricing.). If you are unable to schedule your flight into Boise by 4:00pm or if your flight arrives late and you need to arrange other transportation, the cost for this transportation will be at your expense.

Meeting Time: Once everyone has arrived in Cambridge, **we'll meet you at the Frontier Motel at 8:00pm** to give you your waterproof bags to pack and have an orientation meeting and answer any last-minute questions. **This is an important meeting, so please be on time!** Early the next morning (usually about 7:30am) we leave in a van or bus for a two-hour drive northwest to our starting point at Hells Canyon Dam, arriving there about 10am.

Ending Points: 5- and 6-day trips end at Heller Bar, from here we transport you one-hour to the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, Idaho. If you had your car shuttled north from Cambridge, it will be waiting for you at the Red Lion.

Our 3- and 4-day trips (except June high water 4-day trips) end at Pittsburg Landing. If you had your car shuttled it will either be at our take-out point or it will be waiting in the town of White Bird. If it's in White Bird, we'll take you there in our bus, which takes about one hour. Typically we get you to your car in White Bird around 4:00pm. If you flew to Boise, we'll transport you by van to Lewiston, about 3 hours north. You can figure on arriving in Lewiston around 5:30pm. We recommend that you plan to spend the night in Lewiston at the Red Lion Hotel.

It's best not to plan to fly or drive home that night, as you'll be ready for rest and a hot shower. As well, on trips lasting 4 or more days, we include a fun, farewell dinner. (On 3-day trips this doesn't happen, as a lot of people leave us at White Bird and drive in different directions.)

If your schedule requires that you fly home the same day the trip ends we'll return you to the hotel in Lewiston, from where you can get a taxi to the airport in Lewiston, which is about 15 minutes away. You should not plan on a flight departing any earlier than 7:00pm. ROW will not be responsible if you miss a flight out the same evening a trip ends.

Lodging Accommodations: ROW will make your pre- and post-trip hotel reservations for you and this will be reflected on your invoice. The evening before your trip we stay at the **Frontier Motel in Cambridge, Idaho**. At the end of the trip we transport you to the **Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, Idaho**. The Red Lion offers free airport transfer service from 8:00am to 9:00pm. Otherwise taxi service is available.

Extra Luggage: If you have luggage that you won't need on the trip there are a couple of options. 1) You may place it on the ROW vehicle where it will be awaiting your arrival at the hotel in Lewiston, Idaho. 2) If you are driving to Cambridge leave your luggage in your car, as it will be awaiting your arrival, either in White Bird or Lewiston.

Last Minute Phone Numbers: If you need to reach ROW at the last minute, try our office first at 800-451-6034. If you need to get a message to the Frontier Motel in Cambridge, the number is 208-257-3851. The Red Lion Hotel phone number is 208-799-1000.

Suggested Reading: See ROW's complete reading list for the Snake River. The book Snake River of Hells Canyon by Johnny Carey, Cort Conley and Ace Barton is probably the best book available to deepen one's appreciation of Hells Canyon and the Snake River. You can order one from ROW for \$20 including postage.

Area Attractions: If you're looking for a fun place to spend an extra day or two before or after your rafting trip, consider the **River Dance Lodge – Idaho's Outdoor Adventure Resort**. Located two hours east of Lewiston along U.S. Highway 12, our resort has eight log cabins with private hot tubs and a restaurant. Near the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness area you'll find hiking trails, fishing, swimming and horseback riding (with another local outfitter.) The scenery is very different than the Snake River. This would make a nice loop on the way to or from Spokane or Glacier National Park. Call us for details or visit www.RiverDanceLodge.com.

Gratuities: Here are some helpful guidelines on tipping. Your guide is a paid professional. Tips are appropriate and accepted only if we exceeded your expectations. Whether you tip and how much you tip should depend on your satisfaction with the trip, your feelings about tipping, and your financial means. If you believe your guide deserves a tip, a suggested range is from 7-12% of your trip cost. If you had the time of your life, then the sky is the limit! We also appreciate your comments. We use your feedback to recognize extraordinary guest service and to discover areas where we can make improvements. Our goal is to exceed your expectations! (P.S. Let us know if you found these guidelines appropriate or helpful.) Tips can be given to the ROW "Team Leader," who will distribute it equally among the crew.

We look forward to sharing the splendor of the Snake River with you. Please call if you have any further questions.

ROW Inc. is an Equal Opportunity recreation service provider under permit from the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

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