

PADDLING ON THE COWICHAN RIVER

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This presentation focuses on recreational whitewater paddling on the Cowichan River and was delivered to the Cowichan Watershed Board on the 31st of July, 2017

ABOUT US



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Rick Bryan is a canoeist extraordinaire and long time instructor who represents the island zone in the Recreational Canoeing Association of BC. If it can be done in a canoe, Rick has tried it, or wished he had.

Edmond Duggan is primarily a whitewater kayak instructor who has been known to instruct canoeing and occasionally paddles a sea kayak. He represents the Vancouver Island Whitewater Paddling Society and has held positions in Canoe Kayak BC.

Both Rick and Edmond have trained many paddlers over numerous years with a strong belief in safety and formal training.

THE COMMUNITY



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BRENTWOOD
COLLEGE SCHOOL



Raven Rescue
Training Equipment Services



The paddling community on the island consists of several formal clubs, some school programs, and a couple commercial operators. These paddlers are supported by the two provincial paddling organizations in BC.

Beyond that are several individuals on the island who aren't in a formal organization, but do paddle the Cowichan.

Also, there are other paddlers from around Canada and the world who visit this river for the quality of its paddling.



BOATS

There are four main types of boats that we use on the river: the classic tandem canoe (upper left); solo open canoe (upper right); closed deck canoes, referred to as C1 (lower right); and solo whitewater kayaks (lower left)



The Cowichan River, affectionately called “the Cow” can be paddled year round, but prime season is October to May, due to the higher flows. There are several good access points giving paddlers a wide choice of sections to run. Different flows on these routes allow different purposes - from beginner training to advanced ‘play’ boating.

THE SECTIONS



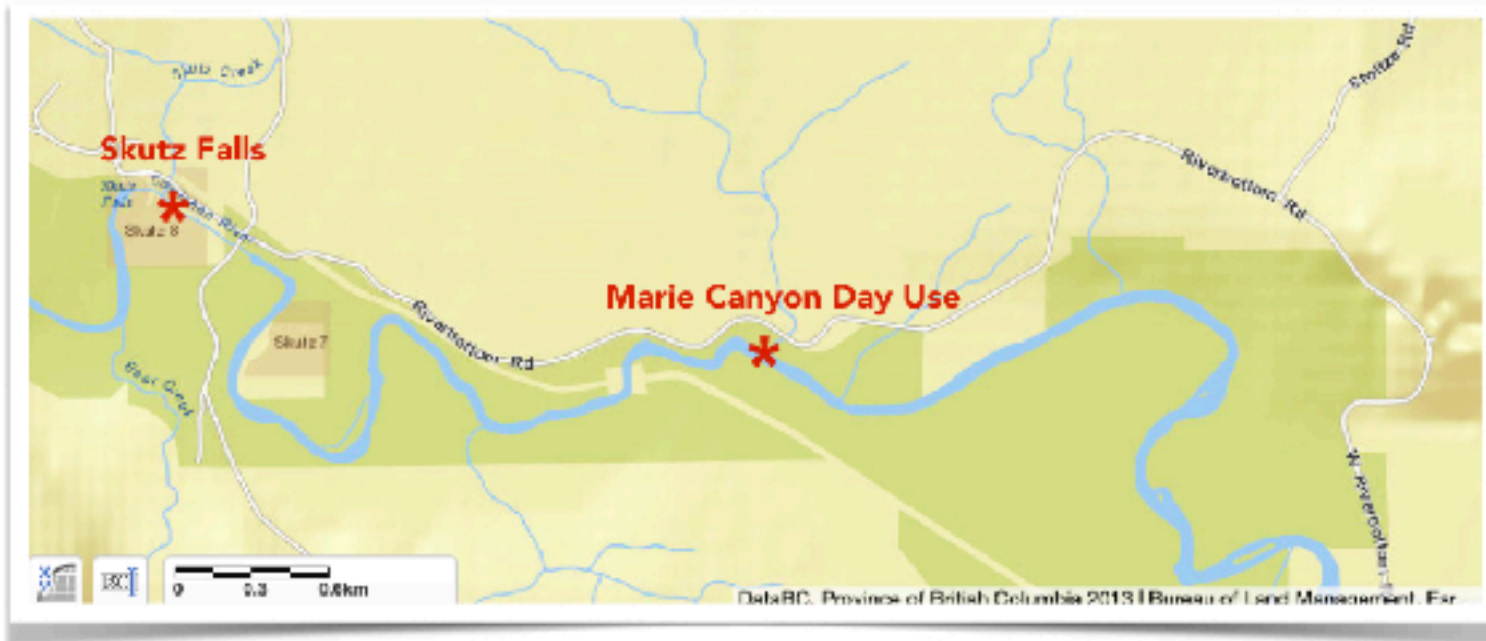
The upper runs provide excellent training for beginner paddlers, such as the classic tubing section of Duck Pond to Little Beach. The next section to Spring Pool provides a logical 'step-up' as the rapids in this section are larger, but still class I-II (easy) on a scale of difficulty from one to five.

THE SECTIONS



The lower runs of Stoltz Bluffs to Sandy Pool to Vimy present great paddling for canoeists. While there are few rapids in this area, the flow is normally swift and the scenery is majestic.

THE SECTIONS



Skutz Falls to Marie Canyon is an intermediate run, and the most popular on island. Known to paddlers as just Marie Canyon. It was named after Marie Adelaide, Viscountess Willingdon, C.I., G.B.E. (wife of the then-Governor-General of Canada), commemorating her canoe trip from Cowichan Lake down the Cowichan River to Duncan on April 7, 1930.

The next couple of slides present a visual tour of the BIG rapids on this run.

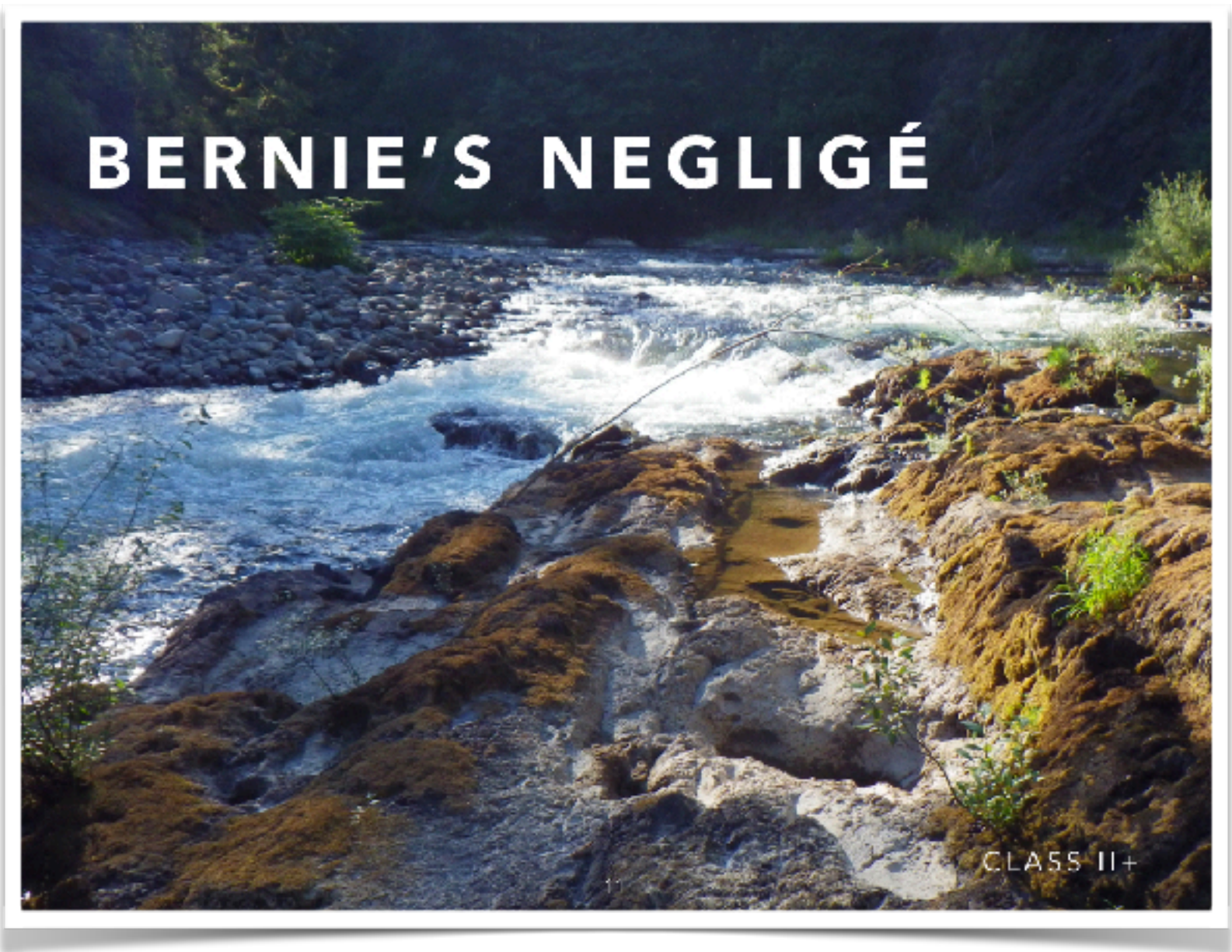


Skutz Falls is a **class IV** rapid for highly experienced kayakers only. In the photo the river is flowing at 60 cubic meters per second (cms). It is not considered runnable in summer months, but has been done at seven cms!

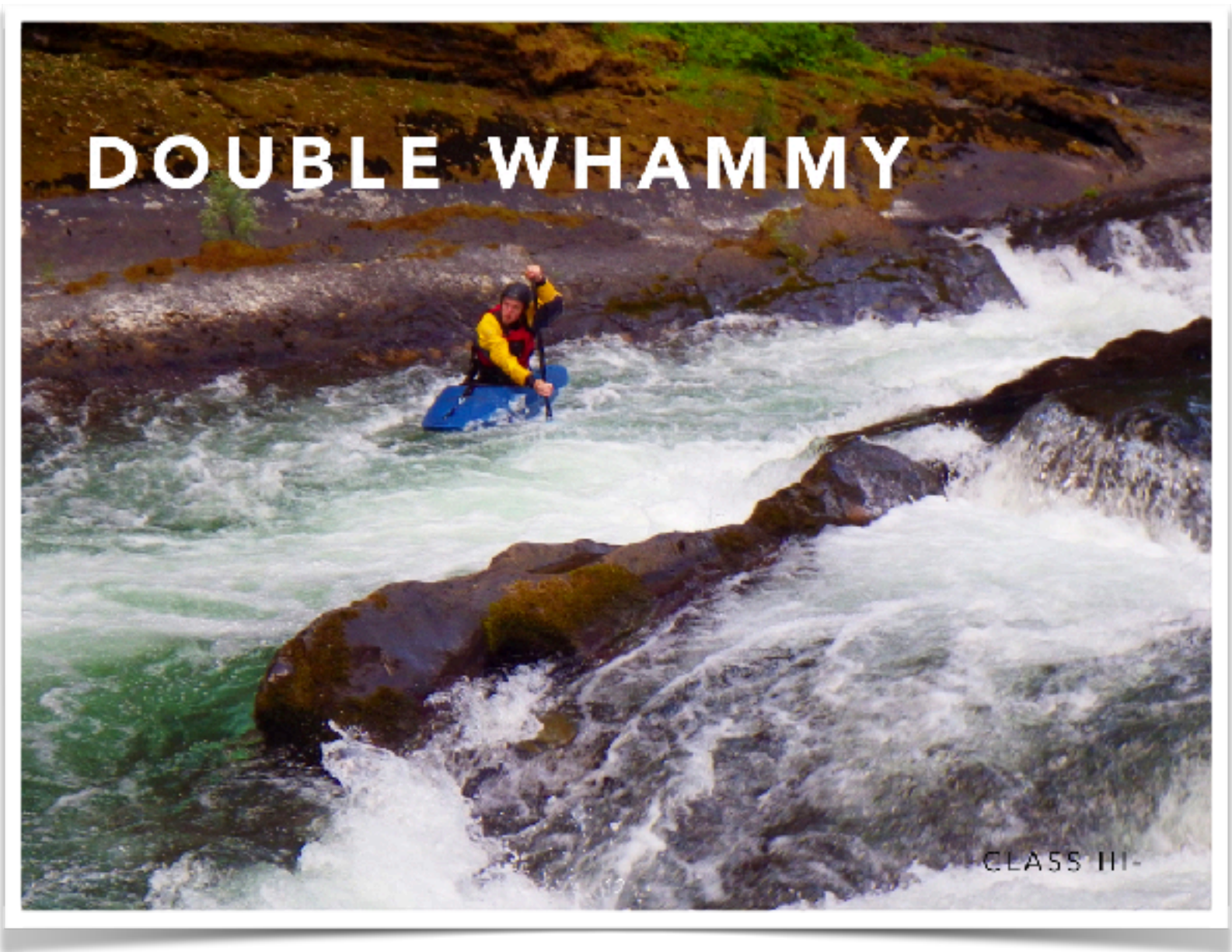
Most paddling trips start just below the falls.



Located at the Horseshoe Bend Group Campsite, this class III rapid requires paddlers be able to maneuver to shoot it. The trails here allow a good view from both sides of the river, so it's a excellent location to watch paddlers. The flow rate in the photo is around 60 cms.



Bernie's Negligé has the most unique name of any rapid on the river, however the history of the name has been lost. It's located at the start of the full canyon portion, thus not very accessible from the trails. This class II+ drop is not hard for a paddler with a few river runs. Flows are about 20 cms in this slide.

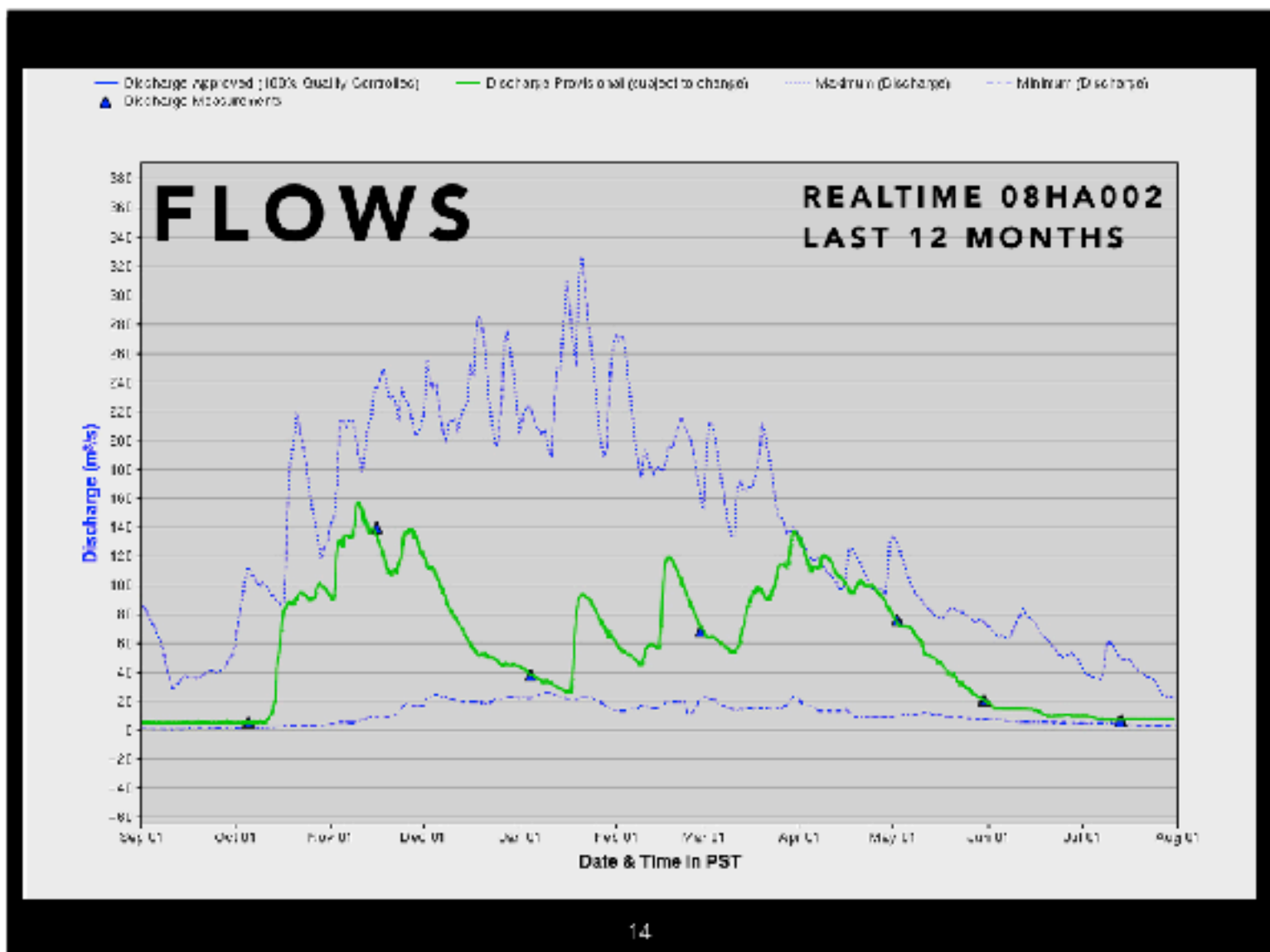


Double Whammy is a class III- rapid; the name comes from the two hydraulic features in the drop, the larger just at the end. While it is runnable at 3.5 CMS, at 80 cms and above it is flooded out and uneventful. Shown at about 20 cms.



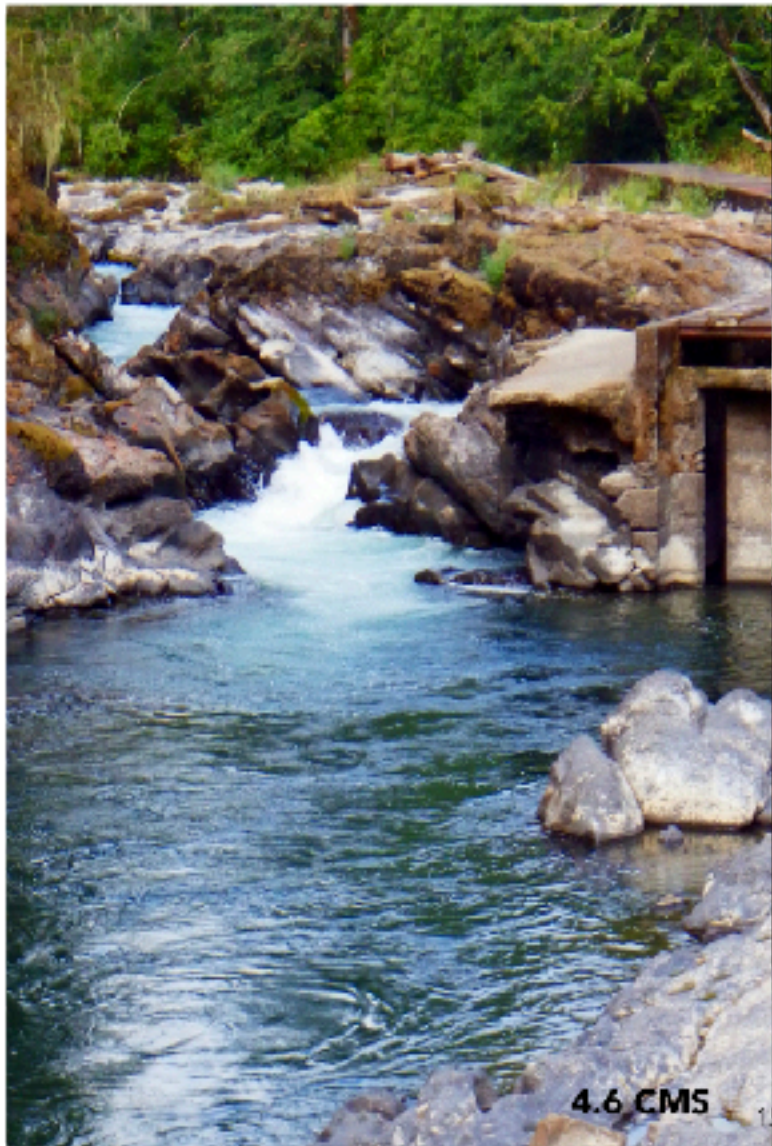
The final rapid is publicly known as Marie Canyon, but paddlers call it 'Last Drop.' It is the final significant rapid on the river, and is the final one of this portion right at the take-out of the day use area.

At flows below 50 CMS it is a small 1.5 meter 'falls' which can easily be run as it's very straight forward. Below 20 cms the right side (looking downstream) is considered un-runnable because of the rock formations.



Prime flow rates for paddling are from 30 to 60 cms, which normally occur between October to May. The river has been paddled as low as 3.5 cms, and as high as 120 cms. Above that level the current is quite strong, the rapids become washed/flooded out, and the banks overflow in to the trees, making paddling less safe or enjoyable. Also a significant hazard are fallen trees that floating down the river and may create jams where there is no option to safely portage these logs.

Regulating water flow for paddling isn't a necessity or a priority, but ideally the paddling community would like to see a minimum 10 CMS in the summer, which would require a raised weir at the end of Lake Cowichan.



The images on this slide show how flows affect levels in a rapid. All of the pictures are of Skutz Falls, which is considered a class IV drop.



There are many other paddling opportunities on the island: Koksilah has two runs of note - Upper, class III; Canyon - Class IV; Chemainus - Copper Canyon Class IV; Lower Class II+; Sooke (below the potholes!) Class I+ Puntledge - while dam controlled, VIWPS runs a festival in May co-ordinating with BC Hydro for water releases and DFO for flushing hatchery fry out to sea.

Surf - Jordan river and of course Tofino

These are just a few of the many wonderful paddling spots on the island.



“Hooray Hooray! The first of May. We’ll paddle the Cow from Lake to Bay” is the cheer for VCKC’s Running of the Cow. This annual event started 2001. Participants paddle the full 57 KM of river in everything from voyageur canoes, tandems, solos & plus whitewater kayaks. While normally this is a two day event with overnight camping, the river has been run completely in just one day.



Another annual event in Spring is the Cowichan Youth Kayak Festival (CRYK) organized by Dan Norman a teacher at Brentwood School. Running since 2013 it is the largest youth focused kayak festival in Canada, if not North America. There are close to 60 youth of all different levels supported by 20 volunteers providing instruction. Based at the Horseshoe Bend campsite, it draws paddlers from many parts of BC.



UVic holds “Cowfest” as an end-of-the-year club event in Spring just before finals. One event is the ball race where teams push a ball downriver from Last Drop to Stotlz Pool campground.



2018 will see the BC Summer Games in the Cowichan Valley, from July 19th to the 22nd . This event will bring 104 paddlers ages 12 -16 including para athletes, 16 coaches and 19 officials from every region in BC.

The competition will follow Olympic formats for sprint paddling on Cowichan Lake for 3 days and one day of slalom racing on the Cowichan just below Skutz Bridge.

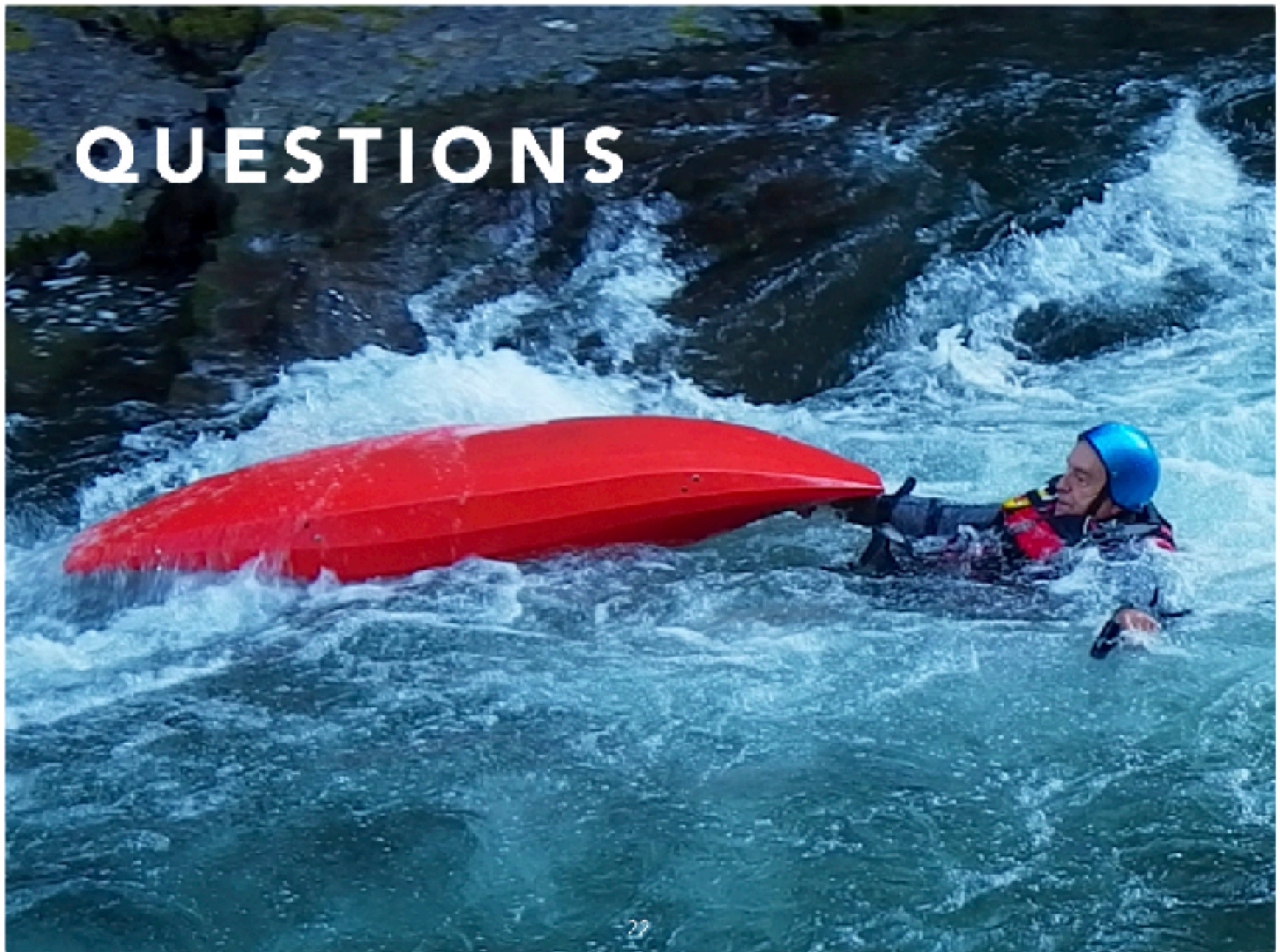


BENEFITS



Paddling connects humans to the river, and this connection leads to stewardship. Many paddlers have participated in the annual organized clean ups of the river, but we also regularly take trash of the river. Our community monitors the river, since we are on it weekly, year-round. We've reported safety, environmental and other issues that we've seen while paddling.

QUESTIONS



We hope you've enjoyed this presentation. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please contact Edmond Duggan - coldkayak@gmail.com