

# Rain

*"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven." Will Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, act IV.*

Shakespeare never went camping with the Delta Sierrans.

I can't remember the last time I went camping and it didn't rain. When I write of rain, it is not the sweet, gentle drizzle of which Shylock spoke. Nor do I refer to the nice, early-afternoon shower that cools off summer canoeists and dries off before it's time to make camp and a bonfire.

No, when I speak of rain I mean the kind that makes one think of the downpours that create the hundred-year floods that we seem to get every two or three years. Thunder, lightning, wind, hail. Biblical stuff.

Camping is supposed to be fun, with the challenge of dealing with the elements of nature something to spice up the trip. When the meteorological phenomena start challenging to the point that one strains to remember that one went camping to have a good time, enthusiasm for snuggling up to Mama Nature declines in reverse proportion to the nastiness of the weather.

Anyone who says it is fun camping in cold and wet is lying, mad, sick, or all of the above.

The Memorial Day weekend canoe trip on Red Creek has become an occasion not to remember the war dead, but to remember all the previous, rainy trips. The Red Creek trip has been going on for so long that there are stories about a old guy with a beard on the first trip, who said he'd learned to handle a boat in a rain that lasted 40 days and 40 nights.

People say that he smelled like a zoo and muttered about rainbows and how it wouldn't rain anymore. There haven't been any trips with that much rain, but for the last many years, no Memorial Day weekend on Red Creek has passed without the canoeing Delta Sierrans getting drenched.

*"For the rain, it raineth every day." Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, act V.*

A few years ago we were supposed to meet as usual on Saturday afternoon, put in, go downstream a short distance, and camp. The rain was so hard and steady we were afraid to risk the dirt road to the put-in point, so we spent the night in the only motel in Wiggins, Mississippi.

The next day it was still drizzling, so we decided to give it a try. By 4 o'clock, the skies opened up again, so we just kept going and, with the help of the rain-raised stream, covered in one day what we would have done in two.

I thought that the flexible plastic tent

poles that support a dome tent aren't supposed to break in the wind. They do, if the wind is hard enough. If you're inside when that happens, it adds to the excitement.

The 1994 Memorial Day canoe trip shaped up to be an exception. The weather forecast was excellent for the entire weekend, and Saturday was bright and dry. On Saturday night there wasn't a cloud in the sky, and campers were able to see stars that they hadn't seen in years.

Sunday was a magnificent day with a few clouds and not even an afternoon shower. Sunday night was cloudy, but it looked promising for a dry remainder of the trip. And then at 3 a.m. the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed.

At least we were pretty much awake at 5:30 when the duck-drowning rain and wind struck. As if right on schedule, the tent went down again, but at least this time the rods didn't break; the stakes got pulled up instead. The weather paused at least long enough to let us get our coffee and breakfast and break camp.

A soft Shakespearean drizzle escorted us to the take-out point. When we returned to the put-in point to pick up a parked car, it was as dry as a preacher's pantry. Is Mama Nature after us?

*"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!*

*You cataracts and hurricanes, spout  
Till you have drench'd our steeples,  
drowned the cocks!" Shakespeare, King Lear, act III.*

Now you've got the idea, Will. You can go canoeing with us. △

— Earl Higgins

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