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## **EARL'S PEARLS**

### **Red Creek And The Great Flood**

*by Earl Higgins*

For the first time in the history of the world, the annual Sierra Club Red Creek canoe trip on the Memorial Day weekend was cancelled. The trip billed in the Delta Sierran as "The Mother of All Canoe Trips" turned out to be as momentous as "The Mother of All Battles," a phrase coined by that master of fulsome bombast, Saddam Hussein. Canceling a trip as important as this one, steeped as it is in tradition and ritual, is a decision not taken lightly.

Even as the rains fell daily and the television weather-tellers wore white shrimper's boots to work, there was hope that the rains would subside and the sugar-white sandbars would emerge to mark the flow of clear, bronze water again. To make such a decision requires knowledge of the then-current status of the stream.

Braving the inundated roadway of I-10 in New Orleans east and the social anarchy of St. Tammany Parish, I drove to see Red Creek for myself. At least I tried. I became uneasy as I noticed some of the dead creatures along the road in southern Mississippi.

Ordinarily, the dead snakes, possums, nutrias, etc. have been hit or smashed by vehicles. Some of these dead animals showed no sign of trauma. I began to wonder whether they had drowned. At a

rest stop I asked some local folks about this, and they agreed that the animals had drowned. These locals were rather strange-looking, and they kept pursing their lips rhythmically as we spoke. They talked about how the drowned animals had failed to "adapt" to the constant rains and floods. In response to my inquiry as to what they meant by "adapt", they displayed the gill slits in the sides of their necks. I thanked them and drove off as they submerged.

"Adapt" has many manifestations. I was contemplating the challenge of towing a firewood-laden raft behind the canoes, on which to hold a floating bonfire if all the sandbars remained covered by water.

This nifty idea did not, however, solve the more demanding problem of where to pitch tents. As these thoughts swirled around, I noticed with satisfaction a truly creative approach to adapting to the flood. A nimble nutria was crossing the road ahead of me, going from one flooded forest to the other, nattily attired in a wet suit and scuba gear. There's one animal that won't drown.

There were other marvels in the wet woods. I found something so unusual that I picked it up and sent it to the mycologists (fungus freaks) at Tulane University's biology department. The constant

dampness, day after day of 100 percent relative humidity, had provided the conditions in which I found mildew on the mold growing on the fungus covering mushrooms sprouting from a rotting log.

Scientists at The Florida Parishes Institute of Phrenology and Cuisinart Maintenance have already begun to create from this sample the mycological version of a perpetual motion machine, an ecological circle of endless nourishment in which the mushrooms will be nourished not by the rotting log but by the mildew.

As I approached Red Creek there were more bad signs pointing to cancellation of the trip because of high water: the catfish farmers were harvesting the catch using nets being pulled by pickup trucks along the main roads. With my spirits sagging, I brushed the frogs and turtles off the hood of my Jeep and drove on.

Alongside the road, near what was once the bank of Red Creek, was the final piece of evidence. A great wooden ship was beached there, with several ramps leading up to the main deck high above my head. An old guy with a long white beard was loading live animals, in pairs, up the ramps. I drove home, opened my Bible to the Book of Genesis, and began to read. ▲