

# Cashiers Outside

## Chicken on the Chattooga



**By David Joy**  
Staff Writer

Standing over top of Bull Sluice, a notorious Class IV rapid on the Chattooga River, I was trembling and it wasn't from the cool mountain stream. I was looking onto a rapid that our raft would soon navigate, a rapid our guide said that he nearly drowned in a few weeks before.

"I got caught in that hydraulic right there and about ran out of air before I got a rope," Joe Sotack, our guide with Southeastern Expeditions (SEE), said as he pointed into the water.

Joe was from Pennsylvania and though my southern ears couldn't quite pick apart his dialect, I got the gist. I could die. Joe walked away.

"I'd rather be in a gunfight," I said to my girlfriend, Sara Hill, and I meant it. I was the shade of a Brevard squirrel, ghost white.

A brother and sister, Robert Sealey and Tammy Zitello, from Atlanta, Ga., joined my girlfriend, Sara, and me in the raft. Older than me, but with more of a childlike enthusiasm toward the adventure, Robert and Tammy were braver than me. They laughed and joked as I climbed, scared to death, back into the raft.

As we headed toward our fate, my jaw was tightened and my knuckles were clenched around the T-bar of my paddle. We'd all make it, or I'd drown, but either way there was no turning back as we paddled closer and closer to the sluice.

We stroked hard in unison to navigate the small rapids and to take the perfect line for the drop, and, as we approached, Joe yelled, "Down!" and I tucked into the front of the boat.

All I remember from that point are a fast drop, complete submersion, and sucking air as we bobbed back to the surface beneath the falls. Only then could I laugh.

I conquered a fear that day and I learned a lesson about the camaraderie of man as total strangers joined hands to take on the rapids of the mighty Chattooga.

The river was dangerous, but equally as beautiful. Summer was taking hold as the thick foliage of hardwoods walled in the river. Jack-in-the-pulpits popped up beneath the shadows of trees. Red-eye bass shot through the rapids effortlessly to snack on giant stoneflies. Appalachia was alive and there was no better place to see it than from a boat on one of the most beautiful rivers in the world.

Despite all of my initial fears, I'd do it again in a minute.

**The river:**

With headwaters starting in Cashiers, the Chattooga River moves for 57 miles through Oconee County, S.C. and eastern Rabun County, Ga. before merging with the Tallulah River at Lake Tugalo.

In 1974, two years after its appearance as the fictional "Cahulawassee River" in the film "Deliverance," the Chattooga was named a Wild and Scenic River by the federal government. There are currently only 166 rivers in the U.S. with this designation.

The uppermost stretches of the river, 21 miles of water, are prohibited from rafting, but starting at the Highway 28 bridge in SC the river is open to rafting, kayaking, and canoeing.

As a free-flowing river, flows are highly dependable on rain. However, the river is generally warm enough to boat from early spring through late fall and offers wonderfully, unobstructed views of the surrounding mountainsides.

**The outfitter:**

Southeastern Expeditions (SEE) is based out of Clayton, Ga., off of Highway 76 E., a drive of a little over an hour from Cashiers.



Photos by Ashley Keigan/Southeastern Expeditions

**Rafting the Chattooga River is a full-body workout even for the most avid outdoorsman, evidenced by the look of pure panic and exhaustion on my face, front left of the boat.**

SEE is the oldest rafting company in the southeast, starting in 1972 with equipment purchased from Warner Brothers following the filming of "Deliverance."

The company offers family oriented trips (Section III) and day trips for enthusiasts (Section IV) along the Chattooga River. There are

also two-day camping/rafting trips, kayaking, and canoeing available.

For information contact SEE toll free at 800-868-7238, or (706) 782-4331 at the outpost. Visit them on the Web for background information, directions, and pricing at [www.southeasternexpeditions.com](http://www.southeasternexpeditions.com).



**Above left, our raft paddles into a rapid and surfs the hydraulic below Bull Sluice. In the front of the boat from left are David Joy and Robert Sealey. In the back of the boat from left are Sara Hill and Tammy Zitello. Guiding the boat from the rear is Southeastern Expedition guide Joe Sotack. Above right, Sotack leads the entire raft in a "paddle high-five" after surviving the most treacherous rapid in Section III.**



**Above and below is the sequence of photos taken while our raft ventured over Bull Sluice on the Chattooga River. Terror can be seen setting into my eyes, I am in the front left of the boat, as the raft disappears into whitewater. My girlfriend Sara Hill on the other hand, in the back left of the boat, paddles through the entire rapid to save all of our hides.**

