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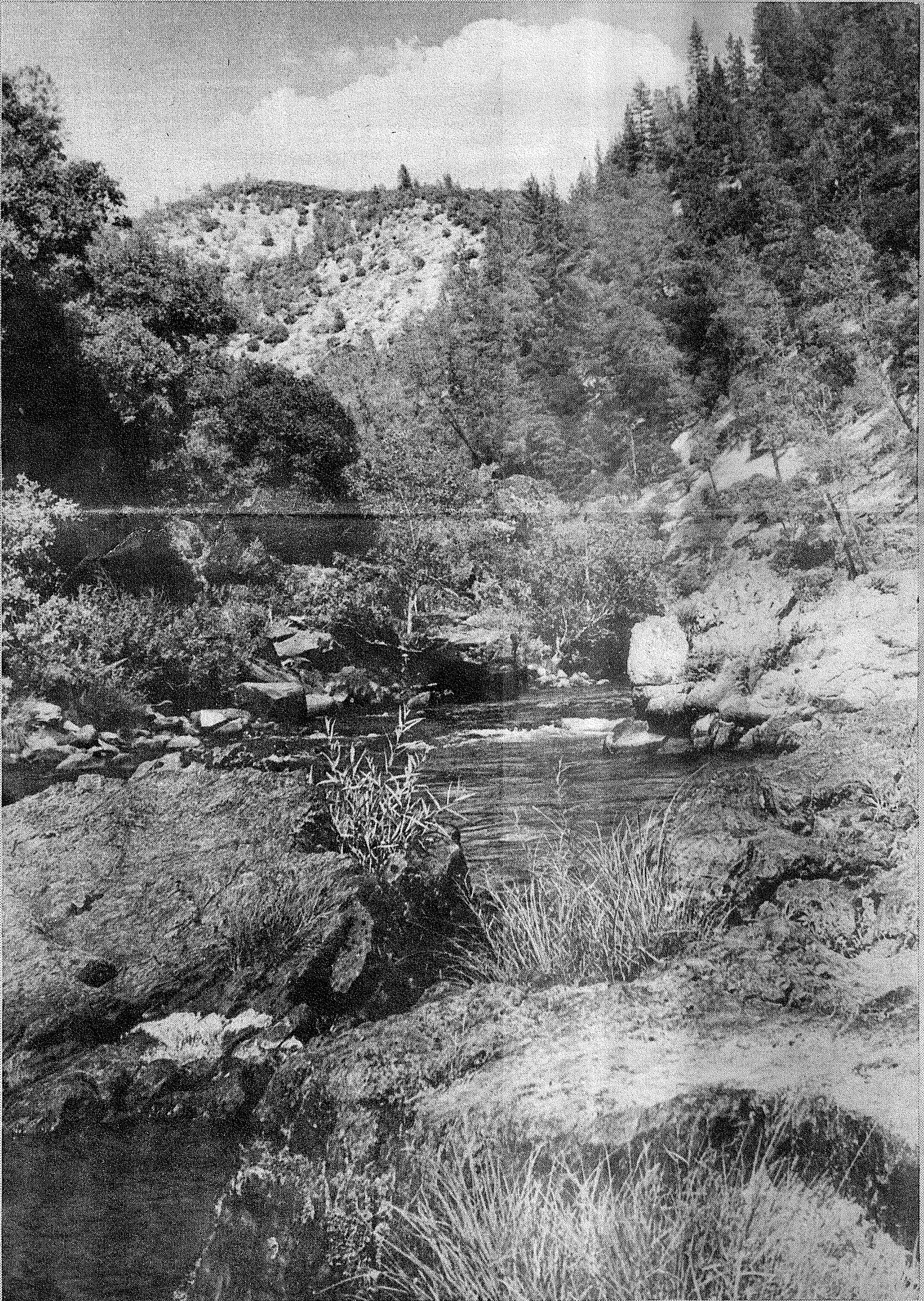
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For that last weekend trip of the summer...try the thrills and splashes of rafting down the Stanislaus River. See page 44 for story and photos.

Thrills and splashes... rafting down the Stanislaus

Widow Maker ... Rock Garden ... Devil's Staircase ... Six Pack ... Chicken Falls ... Death Rock ... Cadillac Charlie ...

These names of rapids along the stretch of the Stanislaus River above the New Melones Dam suggest some of the zest and excitement shared by those who can take a weekend out to float down the wild canyon in a rubber boat.

Two days drifting and plunging with Mark Dubois and the Friends of the River provided in capsule form all the elements of a perfect vacation—clear water, hot sun, excitement, exercise, good food, good company—and poignance.

Mark—it's first names only on the Stanislaus—is the young man who achieved brief national fame last spring when he played David to the Corps of Engineers' Goliath and stopped the filling of the reservoir behind the mammoth new dam by chaining himself to a rock.

Bucking and plunging down a rapid in a rubber boat gives a very special feeling. The boat and its crew are almost part of the river as the boat bends and flexes in the troughs and over the haystacks of water. There is a thrill of uncertainty as one paddles furiously to avoid the next rock—particularly with a new crew of which at least one can always be counted on to paddle forward when he should be paddling backwards, or vice versa.

The thrill was sharpened by great splashes of frigid water in some of the wilder stretches. Then at the bottom, the water level would be almost as high in as out of the boat, and the bailing buckets would go to work before the next rapid came. Another weird feeling—at least for one who is used to boats which travel bow first—is the indifference of rubber rafts to orientation. We would go into the rapids forward, backwards and sideways, often spiraling once or twice as we descended.

Occasionally we bounced off a rock, but the time we wrapped around it and had to haul the boat out while teetering on the slippery slant, gave us a healthy respect for the power of the water.

The only thing lacking on the trip was isolation. The river was crowded with other boats also sharing the immensely popular experience. There must have been fifty other boats carrying two or three hundred people strung out on the river and lined up at the trickier rapids. Sixteen rafting companies ply the river, and last year 35,000 people made the trip, according to one of the guides.

Sunday morning we broke camp early and passed up the cave by the river to get to a special swimming hole before the crowd. For those who have never tried it, there

is no jacuzzi or sauna that can match the massage delivered by a cold waterfall or whirlpool. But when we left, the staircase of pools and cascading waterfalls was as full as an urban swimming pool on the Fourth of July.

Mark, who led the special trip for a clutch of reporters, TV people and their friends, is a very special person. Long, lean, and bearded, he has great warmth, charm and humor. And he enlivened the trip with lore of the Indians and gold miners who had previously used the canyon.

There is not much to observe of the centuries the canyon was inhabited by the Miwok Indians except for conical holes in the rocks where generations of women ground acorns into mash for the diet staple.

The gold miners were not so gentle. The canyon is full of evidence of their craze. Old mills, clearings, acres of rocks, what looks like the world's largest fig tree, mark the dry brushy canyon. And near the end of the run a couple of dredges are running—possibly precursors of a new gold rush.

The food was plentiful and good—assemble-it-yourself vegetarian fare. But the highlight had to be the Dubois special which Mark created for his lunch on Sunday. Starting with a tortilla, he added a cream cheese and shrimp mixture, tomatoes, alfalfa sprouts, and then—

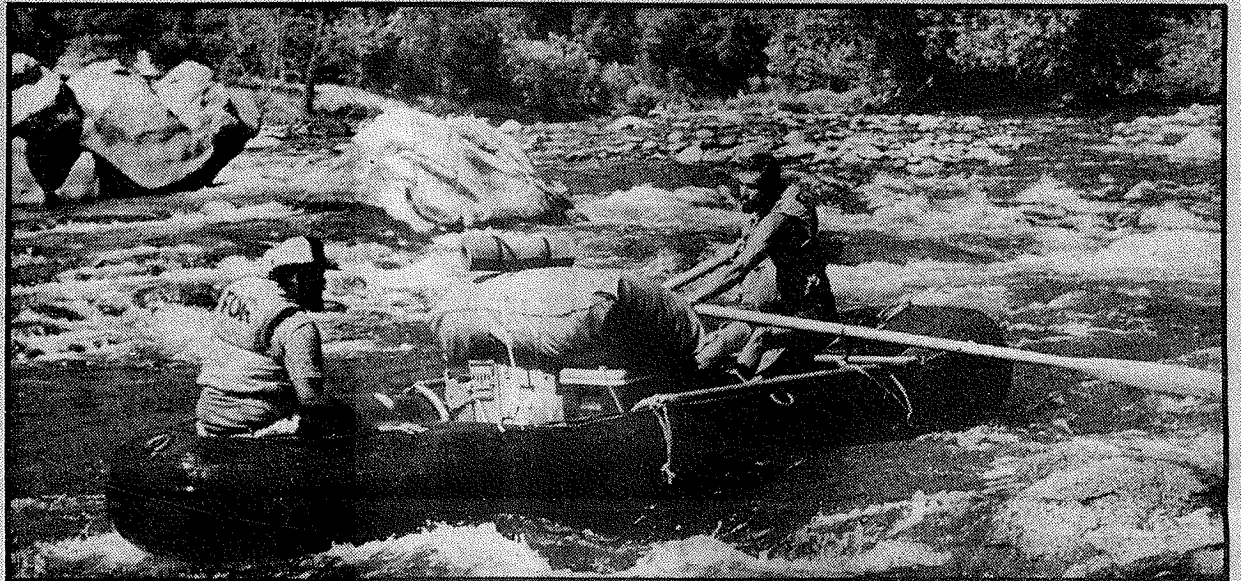
would you believe?—peanut butter!

The poignance of the trip lay in the fact that the living wild river may be destroyed—victim to the never-ending drive for more water and power. According to Susan Brooks of Friends of the River, the filling of the reservoir behind New Melones Dam has been halted this year. But next year, the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, which has taken over the dam, plans to start filling again.

The Friends of the River, who formed during the unsuccessful fight to stop construction of the dam, claim that the water is not needed—that conservation and better water management could provide as much or more water than the reservoir. The group is campaigning to keep the reservoir height below Parrott's Ferry, which is located in the foothills between Sonora and Angel's Camp. It is also campaigning for bill currently in Congress, HR 4223, to give the river between Parrott's Ferry and the start of the river trip Wild and Scenic River status.

Meanwhile, as one pulls out the boat at Parrott's Ferry, one can't help but look up at the single span concrete bridge, soaring hundreds of feet above—just a few feet above the level of the planned lake.

by Marion Softky



Taking a rapid...It looks easy when the boat is rowed by Mark Dubois (right).



Before the crowd...Early birds enjoy a swimming hole on the south fork of the Stanislaus River. Photos by Marion Softky.