

# Rapid Rising

Whether it's twisting and falling along the Bhote Kosi in Nepal or being constantly surprised by the deceptive calm of the Ganga, white water-rafting lets you experience the ultimate high. **By Shonar Joshi**

■ There is something so alluring to me about water: clean, cool, salty, sweet—but especially white. And so it was not chance that propelled me toward this realm of rapids and adrenaline highs in Nepal; it was a deliberate move on my part to feel drenched by, immersed in, and quite at ease with the white water world. When I arrived in Kathmandu, I learnt that more than 90 rafting operators there were combating the forces of more than half-a-dozen rivers of varying grades and distances. It was a hard choice to make, but in the end it all worked out well—with Exodus and its two-day expedition on the Bhote Kosi.

We left by the Exodus bus, cruising past Bhaktapur, Dhulikel and other places that I slept through, lulled by the serpentine motion of the vehicle. When I woke up, there was Eddie, an amateur junior guide, drooling at the sight below. The Bhote Kosi rumbled past, twisting and falling, ready for a tackle. Looking at the cascading water, I remembered I couldn't swim, a thought that made me cling to Eddie's euphoria for support. We camped at the 'put-in' post on a vast outcrop, some 12 miles from the Tibetan border, dining on pasta, brown bread with yak cheese, bourbon biscuits, mayonnaise salad and orange squash.

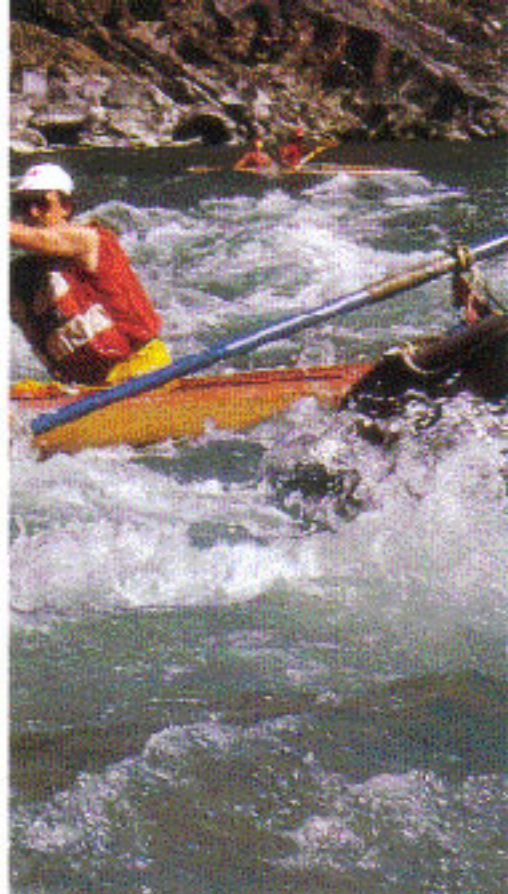
Quite convinced that the chores for the day were over, I hunted for a spot to sleep some more, an idea which was short-lived

for I was yanked up by Sanjay, our senior-most guide, and goaded into carrying the raft down to the river.

We received our instructions, safety rules, guidelines, equipment, worst case scenarios—the works, and after a short drill, began the 26-kilometre stretch which would take us the next two days. There were two rafts, one handled by the long-haired Chitra, who always broke into song the minute a rapid was conquered, the other by the fearless Sanjay, whose intrepid personality was enough to make me forget my own quivering fear. And of course, we had our very own personal safety kayaker, Kul, who came to be known as 'Cool'.

## What's In A Name?

After the first few smaller rapids, it was obvious to all that this river needed orchestrated concentration. The first big rapid for the day was 'Ram Jaane'. Nobody seemed to know how these curious names came to be. However, it was before the gruesomely nicknamed 'Frog in the Blender' that we were made to stop, scout, and proceed with our hearts in our mouths, toes stuck deep within their castings of rubber, muscles and lungs tight with anticipation, eyes wary of the oncoming vision...oooooooooof. We were the frogs and into the blender we went. For a brief moment, I thought it would never spew us forth into safer waters again but just as suddenly, it was all over—we



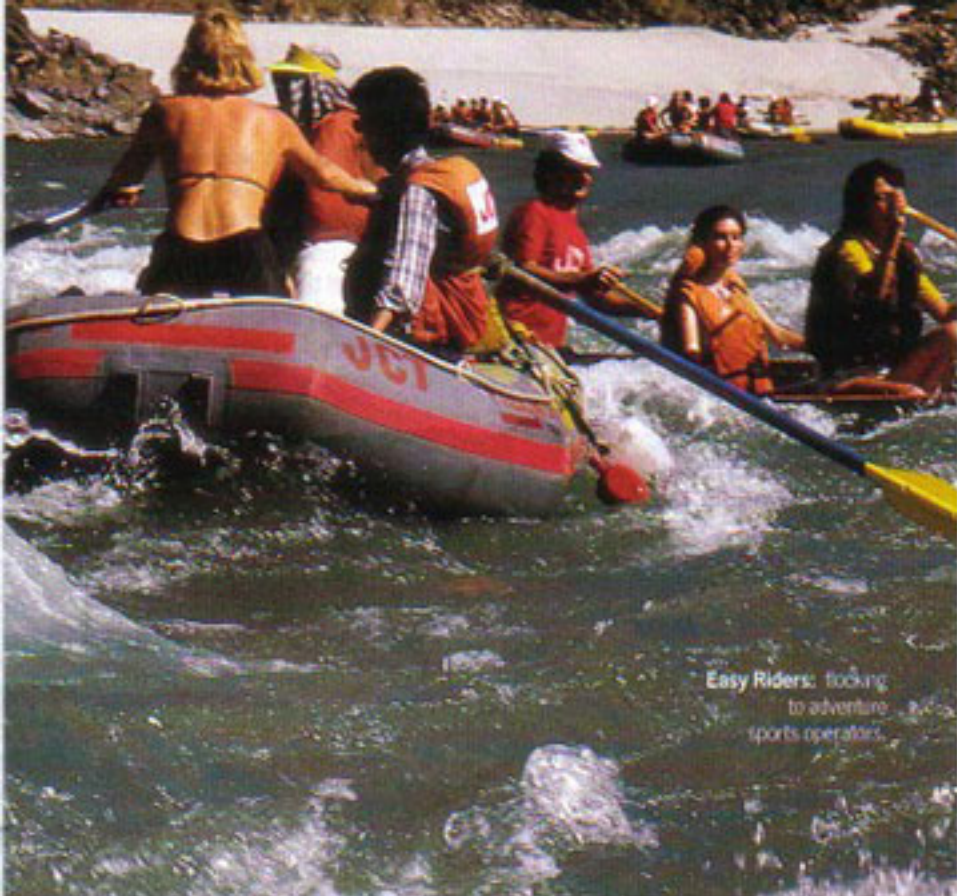
croaked with joy, sang songs of freedom, gave high fives with our paddles slamming the water...wow

Rivers are graded from I to VI—the lowest being a stretch of placid water, the last a suicide mission. The Bhote Kosi comes between IV and V, which implies that riding its rapids involves following innumerable commands to the 'T', or you are likely to flip. Most of these commands are simple to follow—hard forward, left back, right jump—but the most frequent command on this river is a high-pitched "Hold on!" with all bass and tenors joining in to get the message across. The last rapid, the 'Wall', left me feeling like each of my cells was sloshing with volumes of water, excitement enough to make me squeal, "Let's do it again...!" A quiet night followed, complete with a camp fire at the site at which it had all started: *daal bhaat* and chicken, rum punch—and the guides recounting their life on the river.

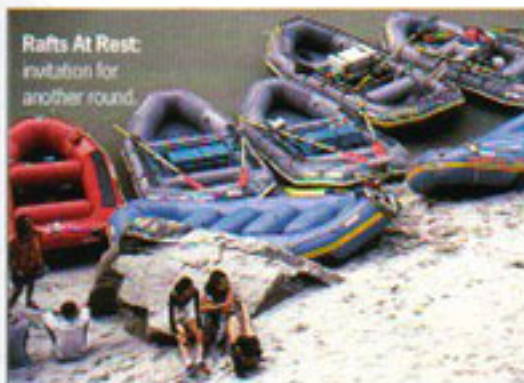
## More To Come At Home

I was too enthralled by this experience to let it come to such a sudden finish. My restlessness took me back to India, and straight to the holy river—the Ganga. Except, it wasn't with piety that I approached





Easy Riders: looking to adventure sports operators.



Rafts At Rest: invitation for another round.



A Camping Site: time to catch one's breath.

it. Instead, I made a headway to the white water-rafting camps that ran the length above Rishikesh. Here again, the choices were plenty—each camp boasting its nonexistent mortality rates, exceptional gear, first-rate guides and most importantly, 'A' class food. Well, word of mouth got me to Aqua-Terra Adventures and its Silver Sands camping site.

The Ganga is broader, calmer and deeper than the Bhote Kosi. It comes in the Grade III category—so you, dear reader, can well comprehend my feelings of superiority toward the lesser mortals who came for their first splash. Rafting on the Ganga is a sort of a surreal experience for it looks deceptively calm but as the rapid approaches, it sweeps one away, with waves that rear 20 feet above the raft.

The rafts are no longer paddle rafts; instead, the guide handles the oars while the team paddles furiously at the commands of "Go, go, gooooo...". We had the ever smiling Anvesh on one raft and the stoic Vubhav Kala, also the proprietor of this outfit, on the second raft. As for the safety kayaker, there was JD, the muscled man from Darjeeling. I decided to attempt everything. I sat behind kayaks, shifted mid-stream between them, strad-

dled and rode two at the same time, until suddenly the two fiends conspired to drift apart while I did the most amazing ballerina split on raging water—saved in the nick of time by JD who glided strategically in to net me in his kayak, then, carrying me in the wobbling contraption, with my arms and legs hugging it tight, shot right through a rapid. It is the closest I have come to feeling like a fish.

### Daniel's Deception

The commercial section on the Ganga is broken into two parts—the first is about 11 km long while the second is a longer stretch of 25 km. It starts with 'Daniel's Dip', a deceptive rapid which, although it looks small and insignificant, has a strong hydraulic right at the centre and is likely to flip the raft. Next, there is the Wall, a huge mountain of water which rushes to meet one face to face, crushing and squeezing with all its might. During the second stretch, after 'Three Blind Mice', comes the longest rapid. This one, the 'Roller Coaster', is a personal favourite. The waves run really high and seem to play with one's fears and apprehension with good-natured jocularity. As an ultimate test of my own daring, I

## Wanna Join Up?

**Call (in Nepal):** Exodus Outdoor Enthusiasts (phone: 977-1-251753, fax: 977-1-259244).  
**Or e-mail:** [exodus@visitnepal.com](mailto:exodus@visitnepal.com)  
**Webpage:** [www.visitnepal.com/exodus](http://www.visitnepal.com/exodus)  
**Expeditions:** Trisuli, Karnali, Sunkosi, Kali-Gandaki, Bhote Kosi, Marsyangdi.

**Call (in India):** Aqua Terra Adventures (phone and fax: 011-6518625).  
**Or e-mail:** [aquatera@ndb.vsnl.net.in](mailto:aquatera@ndb.vsnl.net.in)  
**Expeditions:** Ganga, Alaknanda, Bhagirathi, Kali.

jumped into a gentler rapid called 'Body Surfing'. I did take in a few gallons of Ganga jal, but it was a novel way of purging my soul of all its sins—this was the holy river, wasn't it?

Finally, the expedition ended with 'Golf Course', considered the biggest and one of the most exciting rapids on the Ganga. And then, with all the resultant 'aahs' and 'oohs' ringing in our heads, we relived, over yet another blazing campfire, all our conquests. With a last call of 'Ganga Maa ki jal', we hit the comfort of a bed within a tent on the quieter side of the beach. ■