



Andy Bridge – C1 USA Wildwater Team Member 1980, 1981, 1987-1993

World Cup Champion 1992
World Cup silver medalist 1990
World Cup bronze medalist 1991
Tour de Corse Champion 1991
Ten time U.S. National Champion 1986-1994 and 1996
5th place 1991 World Championships
U.S. Team member 1980, 1981, 1987-1993

Andy Bridge competed in his first downriver race at the age of 10. Paddling with his grandfather, the two pushed their Grummen aluminum canoe downstream at the Potomac Downriver Race. Five years later in 1978, Andy was in Colorado training with a group of juniors at CCATS (Canoe Cruisers Association training squad). They paddled sections of the Arkansas River over and over again, got to watch an international race and try some true wildwater boats. It was here that Andy decided to partner up with Howard Foer in C2. They went to the 1979 U.S. Team Trials in Quebec on the Metabatchuon River where they promptly finished last both days. By 1992, Andy Bridge would become the Gold Medalist World Cup Champion and be the most decorated and dominant wildwater C1 paddler that the U.S. has known to-date. Today Andy lives in Washington State on the banks of the Sultan River with his wife Lizz and three kids and is the Director of Research and Development for Werner Paddles.

USAWW: WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SUCCESS TO?

Andy: Growing up in the DC area and seeing the success that Jon Lugbill and Davey Hearn were having in slalom I knew that it was possible to beat the Europeans in wildwater with a similar approach. I made training my number one priority and structured my whole lifestyle to support that goal. I realized early in my racing career that my strength was reading and racing well on hard whitewater.

USAWW: DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SUCCESS TO ANYONE IN PARTICULAR AND WHY?

Andy: There are several people who inspired and contributed in key areas. Tom McEwan inspired me to train really hard year round and live the wildwater life. Bill Endicott was a great analyst of my training and made many key suggestions. Once I showed some promising results, a French coach named Jon Luc Ponchon also gave me valuable feedback.

USAWW: DO YOU STILL PADDLE AND/OR COMPETE?

Andy: I regularly paddle year round in all kinds of recreational boats from canoes with my kids, sea kayaks, river kayaks, and some C-1. The past few years I have been doing 200-300 mile long sea kayaking trips in British Columbia. My racing has been limited to the Ski-to-Sea Race where my team placed in the top two, twice in a row. I have also done a little bit of local sea kayak racing.

USAWW: WHAT DID/DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT RACING AND TRAINING FOR WILDWATER?

Andy: Team sports were never my thing and wildwater racing allowed me to combine my love of running rivers with pushing my physical limits. Wildwater racing is a very pure individual sport. I always thought it was a pretty cool thing that even in a World Cup race there would usually be someplace along the river during the race where you are completely alone, just you and the river. Knowing a river so well that you can close your eyes and paddle the course and see every wave and rock is a special experience.

USAWW: WHAT ARE YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES OF RACING?

Andy: Some of most memorable times have been while training. Roger Zbel and I were on the Savage one winter day. The river was rising with every run we did. Our last run the level was over 2,000 cfs and was unbelievably fast. We were the only paddlers on the river that day. We did 6 runs that day just because it was so fun. Paddling two Upper Yough runs back to back and paddling the Upper Gauley in the morning, hiking out and then paddling the entire Upper and Lower Gauley were always favorite days. Some favorite races include the 1990 World Cup #2 on the Lieser River in Austria. I was the last boat in the entire race to leave the starting gate. Due to a miscommunication with the dam the river had already started to drop before I started. My splits with 5 minutes to go had me 5 seconds behind. The last 5 minutes was huge water. I won by 10 seconds. I also loved racing the Tour de Corse series in Corsica. The schedule allowed only a day of training and then you raced. Sometimes you only had half a day, like two runs max. I learn rivers really quickly so I did well with this format. Corsica is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. In 1988 I went to race in Norway on the big water of the Sjoa. Fantastic river.

USAWW: WHY DID YOU STOP RACING WILDWATER?

Andy: In order to compete at the highest level internationally you *must* put the rest of your life on the back burner. Career, house, wife, kids, etc. all has to wait. As long as I continued to improve every year I saw no reason to retire, but after 1993 I really wanted to get on with my life. After 1993 I still raced locally for many years.

USAWW: ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR THOSE READING?

Andy: Over the years I have seen many people try out wildwater racing and either abruptly quit or do it as a part time hobby. Just because you trained as hard as the current World Champion for one season does not mean you will instantly be at that level. It takes years of effort to refine your technique and river running ability. Stick with it. Also, going to Europe for a summer vacation to race wildwater is fine but don't expect anything other than the last few spots of the results page.