

THE DANGER ZONE

Downriver Canoeing
at the Highest Levels

By
William T. Endicott

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Printed by Reese Press, Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Additional copies available from: William T. Endicott
6537 Broad St.
Bethesda, Maryland 20816
U.S.A.

Cover Photos:

*Front: Gilles Zok during his winning run at Merano
in 1983. (Will Summers Photo)*

*Back: Gold medals from the 1979, 1981 and 1983
World Championships. (Abbie Endicott Photo)*

"I push as hard as I can until the thermometer starts going into the danger zone. If I push too hard, too long, too much lactic acid builds up in my arms, they get stiff and I lose control."

— Jean-Pierre Burny

Other Works by the Author

- THE RIVER MASTERS: A History of the World Championships of Whitewater Canoeing, 1979, William T. Endicott (U.S. \$10.26 postpaid)
- TO WIN THE WORLDS: A Textbook for Elite Slalomists and Their Coaches, 1981, William T. Endicott. (Sold out)
- THE ULTIMATE RUN: Canoe Slalom at the Highest Levels, 1983, William T. Endicott. (U.S. \$21.50 postpaid)

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* * * * * W O R L D C H A M P I O N S * * * * *

	K1	K1W	C1	C2	C2M
Treignac 1959	BRD Prijon	BRD Biesinger	DDR Schubert	FRA Dransart- Turlier	FRA Malicet- Malicet
Dresden 1961	CSSR Kostal	DDR Bauer	DDR Schubert	DDR Noack- Lueck	DDR Schneider- Zimmerman
Spittal 1963	F1 AUST Presslmayr	F1 DDR Bauer	SWITZ Grobat	CSSR Valenta- Stach	FRA Lansmanne- Dransart
	R1 AUST Klepp	R1 DDR Glaeser			
Spittal 1965	AUST Presslmayr	DDR Jander	DDR Kleinert	CSSR Valenta- Stach	FRA Lansmanne- Dransart
Spindleruv Mlyn 1967	DDR Lange	BRD Schroeter	CSSR Sodomka	CSSR Dejl- Fifka	DDR Grabo- Franz
Bourg 1969	BEL Burny	CSSR Polesna	FRA Boudehen	FRA Feuillette- Chapuis	AUST Spitz- Ramelov
Merano 1971	BRD Kast	BRD Deppe	CSSR Sodomka	FRA Lefauconnier- Lefauconnier	AUST Spitz- Ramelov
Muotathal 1973	BEL Burny	BRD Grothaus	BRD Heinemann	FRA Lefauconnier- Lefauconnier	AUST Kremslehner- (Spitz) Ramelov
Mavrovo 1975	BEL Burny	BRD Grothaus	FRA Verger	BRD Schindler- Pioch	BRD Rose- Rose
Spittal 1977	AUST Peinhaupt	BRD Grothaus	BRD Libuda	BRD Schindler- Pioch	FRA Mollard- Mollard
Des Biens 1979	BEL Burny	FRA Gardette	FRA Verger	FRA Doux- Bunichon	
Bala 1981	FRA Benezit	FRA Gardette	FRA Zok	FRA Hayne- Jacquet	USA Hipshe- Johns
Merano 1983	ITA Prcvide	BRD Stupp	FRA Zok	FRA Madore- Lieupart	

* * * * *

Introduction

I feel particularly good about this book because writing it was like meeting a long lost friend. I competed in the 1971 and 1973 World Championships in downriver as well as slalom and at that time was interested in both disciplines equally. But for many years and various reasons I specialized in slalom in an attempt to understand it better.

Inevitably I drifted farther and farther away from downriver until in 1983 because of a scheduling conflict I did not even get to see the downriver World Championships at Merano. There it struck me that the time had come to redress the balance and I began to consider doing a book on downriver similar to "The Ultimate Run" which I had written on slalom.

But where to start? Unlike in slalom, in downriver I had no firsthand knowledge of what it takes to be a World Champion. It would be necessary, therefore, to write this book from a somewhat different perspective than what I had used in my writings on slalom: More as a reporter than as a participant.

Shortly after the Merano World Championships I found myself in Verona, Italy, gazing at the statue of Dante Alighieri, the author of "The Divine Comedy". It dawned on me that if I were to make a sortie out of my familiar world of slalom and into the vast unknown of downriver, I, like Dante, would need guides.

Clearly the place to start was France, since in recent years the French had won the World Championships in every class. Andre Beaudou, a professor of physical education at the University of Grenoble, put together for me a list of the recent French World Champions and their addresses. After plotting the places on a map of France, I determined the logical sequence of visits, wrote letters to each athlete and to the French Federation of Canoe-Kayak (FFCK, known also as "the Federation") and departed. In effect, this was blindly reaching out a hand into the void, across thousands of miles to people I didn't even know.

But lo! The French (and later others) grabbed that hand. Each person interviewed gave incredibly freely of his time, answering hundreds of questions. It was an intense experience for me for several reasons. First, all the interviews were considerably longer than those I did for "The Ultimate Run" due to my lack of firsthand knowledge of downriver paddlers' training. I spent from 2-4 days with each of about a dozen people and lesser time with a number of others.

I interviewed each person separately so that no one could prejudice the answers. In some cases -- C2s, for example -- this resulted in inconsistent explanations, but I felt this was preferable to missing out on something because the subject felt embarrassed or intimidated.

The second reason it was an intense experience was because all the interviews had to be conducted in French (and to a lesser extent in German and Italian). While my French was, fortunately, up to the task, it is nonetheless extremely tiring to interrogate someone so long in a foreign language. One has to think hard constantly, not only to choose the right questions, but to render them into acceptable French.

Lastly, it was a moving experience for me because I found that here was another world that had stories comparable to those in slalom; here were great masters of technique and training principles. It was another world all right, but it was still whitewater.

My trip was made immeasurably easier by the extreme generosity of my hosts. In many cases they put me up in their homes and fed me. In other cases they insisted upon paying for all my meals when we went out to eat. I can only hope that they will be pleased with the book and be rewarded that way.

For their assistance in making this book possible, I would like to thank the following athletes and where appropriate, their spouses:

Gisela Grothaus	Georges Turlier
Dominique Gardette	Alain Feuillette
Claude Benezit	Michel Doux
Bernard Morin	Patrick Bunichon
Marco Previde	Herve Madore
Jean-Pierre Burny	Francis Lieupart
Gilles Zok	Luc Verger

The following people read the book or parts of it and offered many valuable comments:

Gordon Bare	David Hearn
Angus Morrison	David Jones
John Butler	Gilles Bernard
Cathy Hearn	Ben Sandiford
Dan Johnson	

The following other people helped me with the chapter on Marco Previde:

Fabio Ceccato	Urbano Ferrazzi
Ettore Ivaldi	Toni Benciolini
Renato De Monti	

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jean-Paul Eclache, a research physician for the French army and also the physician for the French downriver team. He kindly took several hours out of a busy schedule to speak to me about the physiology of downriver training.

The book is being translated into French by the FFCK. On this end of the project I worked with Michel Baudry, the head coach of the French downriver team. He received drafts of my manuscripts and got them translated into French.

Finally, I would like to say a special word of thanks to Herve Madore, now head coach of the French slalom team, but also 1983 World Champion in C2 downriver. Besides being interviewed for the book itself, Herve gave me a great deal of advice and help on the entire project: "Salut mon ami, j'espere que tu sois content avec ce livre!"

Use of the Word Downriver

In the United States we use the words "wildwater" and "downriver" interchangeably. Throughout this book, however, I have stuck to downriver and avoided wildwater for the following reasons:

- * "Downriver" seems more descriptive of the event to me. It evokes "downhill" from skiing.
- * "Wildwater" seems a confusing term to me: You could argue that a slalom race is held on wildwater. This gets even more confusing in Britain where they refer to a downriver race as a "whitewater race".

Training Log Library

I would like to say something about training logs here. For this book and the other two on slalom which preceded it, I relied heavily on the training logs of many World Champions. I feel this was a tremendous resource, yet every athlete I talked to told me that no one had ever before asked to see his training log, which struck me as a tragedy. I think the federations in all countries would do well to keep little libraries of these training logs and encourage future coaches and athletes to study them. In this way they could learn in a few days what it once took years to learn.

Canoeing in France

The bulk of this book is about French downriver athletes. To really understand why France is so good, it is useful to know a little bit about how canoeing is organized there and to see how almost all the top athletes are subsidized through the government, via physical education schools, the military, and/or professional jobs in canoeing. The net result of this system is that it is possible for an athlete to get free schooling in physical education; a free year's training while in the military; and possibly get a paid job teaching canoeing both while he is competing and for the rest of his life, if he chooses. No one will get rich off canoeing in France, but it is possible for a person of modest (or no)

means to finance his training while at the same time creating a career for himself — no small accomplishment for the serious amateur athlete.

CIRs and CTDs

In France, all sports federations fall under the aegis of the government's Minister for Youth and Sport. The Minister is, therefore, in nominal control of the FFCK.

The FFCK has administrative offices in Paris and Lyon. But there are also paid personnel in 22 regions of the country. Each region has a volunteer president and one or more professional (paid by the government, not the FFCK) "Regional Technical Advisors" (CIRs) or "Departmental Technical Advisors" (CTDs). There are 37 CTDs and CIRs for the sport of whitewater canoeing, 11 of whom have been in the slalom or downriver World Championships. There are more CTDs and CIRs for canoeing than for any other sport.

CIRs and CTDs are paid roughly \$10,000 a year, (the exact amount depends upon their level of education) and concern themselves with every aspect of whitewater canoeing. This could be starting a new club in a village, coaching young athletes, helping a club obtain a mold, and generally publicizing canoeing in the area. Needless to say, if an athlete can land such a job, it makes it a lot easier for him to train: He gets paid for canoeing-related activities, has access to a clubhouse and other people to help build molds and boats, and has a career after he stops competing.

The CIR-CTD system was started about a generation ago, allegedly because France had not done well in the 1960 Olympics. Instead of giving more money to the clubs, the government, fearing that such donations might be squandered, set up its own shadow system to advise and guide the clubs in the right direction. Under the government's system, it was reasoned, a professional cadre would always be on hand even if the volunteer officials of the FFCK were not.

There are about 600 clubs and 30,000 members in the FFCK, including slalom, downriver and flatwater racing. But there are probably 500 real competitors in downriver. These racers can look forward to more than 100 races a year, more than are available in either slalom or flatwater. The abundance of races is one reason downriver is so popular in France.

Physical Education Schools

Most of the top French downriver paddlers either are, or have been, students of physical education. This means that they have a good understanding of sports training principles and can make up good training plans for themselves and others. All such education is free in France.

There are two major ways one can obtain a degree of some kind in physical education. The first is by studying it in the university ("UREPS"). Here it is

taught as another university discipline like mathematics or literature, with the emphasis being on theory and not practical application. Graduates of UREPS are allowed to teach physical education in French schools. There are about 400 students in the UREPS system, with 50-80 graduating each year. Some members of the French downriver team are UREPS graduates.

The other system is "INSEP", a special school in Paris at which the top athletes from all sports are invited to study and train. There are about 300 students there each year in various degree programs lasting various years. Here the emphasis is on the practical application of sports training principles and the schedule is arranged so that the students have plenty of time to train. INSEP graduates, however, cannot teach physical education in French schools, but they are qualified to be CTRs or CTDs. A large percentage of the French downriver team is or has been at INSEP.

There are two other havens for athletes in France: The police, and the army's "Bataillon de Joinville". If you are willing to be a professional policeman and are a good athlete, it is possible to train full time and get paid. The number of French athletes doing this is very small. The number allowed to train full time in the Army is much larger.

Under the French draft everyone serves about 18 months. Top athletes are allowed to do their service in the Bataillon de Joinville at Fontainebleau, outside Paris. Very many of the French downriver team members have done a year's training in the Bataillon. While the training usually is not specifically oriented towards downriver, almost all the athletes say that it is good general background training which pays off in later years.

Pros and Cons

The major advantage of the foregoing network for athletes is that income is no barrier to an athlete's success. If he is a good athlete, "the system" will catch him, finance his training and possibly find him a job. The system also makes it possible for a good athlete to avoid working in a factory for the rest of his life. If he is good, he can stay in canoeing forever.

The major disadvantage of the system is that the athletes become mere pawns in a battle to win medals for France. In one story, Herve Madore and his partner, Leo Lieupart, were told that they could not go to the downriver World Championships in 1981 even though they had won the team selection trials and were clearly the best boat. Madore had also qualified in C1 slalom and it was felt that France would win all the C2 medals in downriver even without Madore-Lieupart, but that the C1 slalom team needed Madore if it was to get a medal in the team race. It all turned out as the FFCK wished, but Lieupart didn't get to go to the Worlds at all.

End

One of the first things that strikes you when you do a book like this is how inadequate it is. There are always more people to interview, more methods to study, and more thinking to do. But it has to stop somewhere. So while I do not pretend that this study is the last word, I hope it at least captures the essence of downriver today and is suggestive of many of the themes in the sport. If I haven't captured everything here, I hope I've inspired others to write about what I've missed.

Before I close I want to say a special word about two great ladies without whom this book would have been impossible. The first one is Candi Clark Wozniak, Silver Medalist in KIW downriver team in 1973, who made it possible for me to acquire the Apple computer on which the book was done. This is the first book I've ever written entirely by myself on a word processor and believe me, it's a lot faster that way! For that reason, Candi will get the first copy from the printers.

And last of all there's Abbie, my wife, who since 1979 has helped me through 4 books on whitewater canoeing. After so many times, the words "thank you", lose meaning and it's difficult to say anything adequate.