

INSIDE: AFTERMATH: THE FIRES OF '88 • YELLOWSTONE'S SLOUGH CREEK

# MONTANA

M A G A Z I N E

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eyes at the waves and rocks looming in front of us. What I made them do was work. I was pretty spooked myself. I kept yelling at them to paddle forward or backward or make turns, and screaming at the swamper to bail faster. At one point all eyes turned to me with the same implied directive: "Well, make up your mind."

We approached House Rock, tired and out of control. This was rafting in comic-book style: backwards, sideways, spinning circles, bouncing off rocks, yelling, bailing, and paddling for all we were worth. It was like being in a home video stuck on fast-forward. Fortunately, the swamped boat was so heavy that it was virtually impossible to flip. It had the momentum of a battleship.

The raft refused to respond to our efforts, but took good care of us nevertheless. All we had to do was hang on and go along for the ride, which is exactly what we finally did.

When we landed on solid ground at our take-out point the clients were so excited they could hardly contain themselves. Except for a few who couldn't seem to form any words at all, they were laughing maniacally and babbling in incomplete sentences, sounding like a flock of startled geese. A bystander unaware of the desperation of our adventure remarked to me on how people have such intense energy when they just get off a river.

Right.

RICHARD FERRIES  
*Newport, Oregon*

### RAFT OR DAFT?

He'd carried the two-man raft some 3,500 vertical feet into the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountains. In sleet. In rain. It was just my fiancé Mark and me, two Michiganders with four fishing poles. And a raft, oar, and foot pump. I'd tried to talk him out of the raft but he'd been driven to do something manly, I suppose.

Late afternoon on our third day we reached a lake Mark thought



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looked "fishy," and set up camp. Next morning Mark got up early to fish the shoreline, only to return to bed without a fish.

A bit later, he pulled himself from his sleeping bag in a painful, wriggling motion not unlike that of an insect pupating.

"Remind me why you've practically killed yourself to bring this raft here?" I asked.

"When the fish start yanking your fishing rod out of your hands, you'll know why," he said, with a rather annoyed look. "Besides, why limit ourselves to fishing from the shoreline when a raft will allow us to fish the entire lake?"

"Because my pack would be five pounds lighter?"

It took me twenty minutes to pump up the raft. Mark had the two spinning rods rigged up and noted that there were six-inch waves lapping at the shoreline and some rather ominous-looking clouds gathering to the west. "I figure that if you paddle," he said, "I can keep two lines in the water and increase our chances of catching a fish."

"Then you figured wrong," I said, positioning myself in the raft. "I'm going to fish *and* paddle."

Because the wind kept wanting to whip us around, in no time I was rowing with one hand and jiggling with the other. This lasted for about an hour, during which time the wind picked up, creating larger waves that made rowing even more difficult.

Reluctantly, I handed my rod to Mark. "I'm heading to shore," I said. "And now that I think about it, this was one of our dumber ideas. In the middle of nowhere, in the middle of an ice-cold lake, in a puncturable raft filled with sharp, pointy lures."

"Just keep rowing."

We reached shore just as the wind raised the lake's swells to three feet. We stumbled onto the rocky shoreline and hung onto the raft so the wind didn't rip it out of our hands. In the time it took us to deflate the raft, the dark clouds passed over and the sun returned with big white puffy clouds.

"So," he said shyly, "are you still going to marry me?"

"Well, I haven't seen any other man carrying a raft into these mountains to win me over. Or catching fish, for that matter."

Mark and I have been married three years now, and we've returned to Montana three times. The raft has stayed home.

AMY PETERSON  
*Haslett, Michigan*

### BARE NECESSITIES

Our first overnight boating debacle—and we've had our share—was in 1985. Our twenty-foot pontoon boat was "packed to the nines" with everything I could sneak past my space-frugal husband. You see, I'm a city gal and comfort is not something I give up easily. How my pioneer sisters made it out West without all manner of creature com-