



# The Lower Salmon River

**Trip Guide**  
4 Day Trips



**Oregon River Experiences** <sup>LLC</sup>  
18074 S. Boone Ct. Beavercreek, OR 97004  
phone and fax: 503-563-1500  
toll-free phone: 800-827-1358  
email: [info@oregonriver.com](mailto:info@oregonriver.com)  
web site: [www.oregonriver.com](http://www.oregonriver.com)

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The Salmon River is born high in the Sawtooth and Whitecloud Mountains of central Idaho. From these headwaters the river flows 425 miles to its confluence with the Snake River. With no dams along its length, the Salmon is the longest completely free flowing river in lower 48 states.

We run the lowest section of the river, where the Salmon has carved the second deepest canyon in North America. The rapids are thrilling, and many consider this to be our most exciting trip. Yet the rapids, while big, are relatively easy. The Salmon is an ideal place to join a paddle team, learn to row, or try an inflatable kayak.

Powerful rapids and large roller coaster waves aren't the Lower Salmon's only attractions. Majestic rock-walled canyons, deep blue skies and starry nights, the most beautiful white sand river beaches you'll find anywhere, and fabulous swimming in warm, crystalline water combine to make this a classic river trip.



## Natural History

Over the millenia the Lower Salmon River has carved a canyon through layers of volcanic and metamorphic rock. Some of this rock is particularly hard and resistant to erosion, which has created spectacular, narrow gorges. Surrounding the river are semiarid grasslands, dotted here and there with stands of ponderosa pine and mountain mahogany.

Many species of both warm and cold water fish are found in the Salmon River, including steelhead, chinook salmon, rainbow trout, bass, and sturgeon. A wide variety of bird life fills the sky above. The Salmon boasts one of the highest concentrations of raptors in the world, including golden eagles, kestrels, and nighthawks. And many mammals may also be seen, including beaver, otter, minks, and raccoons. Cougar and bobcats, though rarely seen, live here as well.

## Human History

The Lower Salmon is rich in history. The earliest inhabitants of the region were here 10,000 years ago, although permanent villages didn't begin to appear along the river some 5,000 years later. In modern times, the earliest contacts between the Nez Perce Indians and European explorers date from the early 1800's. The discovery of gold in 1860 brought a flood of miners to the Salmon canyon, and precipitated several confrontations, which erupted into the Nez Perce War.

## Weather

The weather in the Salmon River canyon is usually very pleasant. This is a semiarid environment: hot and dry summers are the norm. The river water itself is cool early in July, but as river levels drop the water warms to the high 60's.

Here's some climate data for the nearby town of Lewiston. Temperatures in the river canyon are generally a few degrees cooler.

	July	Aug.	Sept.
Average daytime high temperature	89	88	77
Average nighttime low temperature	59	59	51
Average monthly rainfall	0.70"	0.80"	0.80"

## For More Information

For more information about the Lower Salmon River contact our office to request our natural and human history pamphlet. A map, *The Lower Salmon River Boater's Guide* (which includes history and natural history information as well) may be purchased from the BLM (208-962-3245), or at the Hells Canyon Recreation Center on Hwy 129 outside Clarkston (509-758-1957). For additional, in-depth reading we recommend the following books:

*River of No Return* by Carrey and Conley; Backeddy Books, 1978.

*"I Will fight No More Forever: " Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War* by Merrill Beal; University of Washington Press, 1963.

*Roadside Geology of Idaho*, by Alt and Hyndman; Mountain Press, 1989.

# Itinerary

## First day

We meet at 7:30 AM at the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, Idaho. (Please have your breakfast before our meeting time, and arrive in your river clothes.) Our Lead Guide will meet you in the motel lobby. If in doubt about where to find us, ask at the desk, and they will direct you. After a brief orientation you will pack your things into our river bags, and park your vehicles at the motel. We will then go by van or bus to our launch site. Depending upon river level, we begin our river trip at either Hammer Creek or Pine Bar. (A start at Pine Bar shortens our trip by 10 miles -- appropriate for low water trips.) Once we arrive at our launch site, you'll meet the rest of our guide crew, and they'll conduct a short safety and orientation briefing, which will include instruction on paddle and rowing techniques. We're normally on our way downstream by mid-morning.

## A typical day

Each day is a bit different. But a typical day on the river begins with freshly brewed coffee around 7 AM, and breakfast by 8 AM. After breakfast we'll pack our bags and load the boats. Then, after a brief orientation to the day's adventures, we'll head downstream.

We're on the river an average of four to five hours per day. Along the way we stop for a riverside picnic lunch. We may also stop to swim, to explore historic sites, or to scout rapids. We usually arrive in camp by mid to late afternoon, and while the guides prepare hors d'oeuvres and dinner, you'll have time to swim, fish, read, or nap. (There are a few places to hike, but for the most part hiking opportunities are limited.)

## Last day

We typically arrive at Heller Bar, our take-out point, between 2:00 and 3:30 P.M.. Once we've unpacked, you'll board a van or bus for the ride back to Lewiston. (On small trips, we completely de-rig the boats, and our guides will accompany you back to town. On larger trips, you will say good-bye to the guides when you leave Heller Bar, as they will stay behind to finish de-rigging.) The ride back to Lewiston takes about an hour. You'll arrive back in town between 4:00 and 6:00 PM.

## Trip Highlights

Until recently the Lower Salmon has been less well known than other Idaho river trips. But it is becoming increasingly popular, for good reason. The Lower Salmon offers clear water, hot sunny weather, fun roller coaster style waves, and huge sandy beaches that are perfect for camping and swimming.

During the course of our 72 mile journey (62 from Pine Bar) we'll wind our way through open canyons, and float through four scenic wilderness gorges. These are Green Canyon (at mile 7), Cougar Canyon (mile 19), Snow Hole Canyon (mile 24), and Blue Canyon (mile 47). Each has a distinct character, but all are spectacular.

Our first day on the river begins with mild rapids which are ideal for a warm up, especially for those behind the oars or paddling an inflatable kayak. Over the course of the next several days we'll encounter numerous exciting rapids. The Lower Salmon is a large volume river. This means the rapids are large, at most water levels, too: big, rolling rapids with towering waves. Demons Drop, Half and Half, Lorna's Lulu, Snow Hole, and China are a few of the more exciting drops, but there are others, as well. At midsummer flows most of the rapids are class III, with one or two class IV drops. Early in July during a high water year, many of the rapids become class IV thrillers. (Rapids are rated I through VI. Class I indicates the smallest possible rapid, while VI indicates steep, turbulent, highly dangerous rapids and waterfalls.)

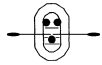
After three days on the Salmon we meet the Snake River at the edge of Hell's Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America. We'll encounter a few rapids on the Snake, but for the most part this section of river is placid. For this reason we'll hook our rafts together to form a group "barge" on the Snake, which the guides will maneuver downstream with the aid of a small outboard motor. This segment of our journey presents us with a great opportunities to unwind, socialize, watch for golden eagles and bighorn sheep, and gaze up at the canyon walls.



## Raft Options

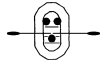
We offer four different boat types on the Salmon: guided oar rafts, "row-your-own" oar rafts, paddle rafts, and inflatable kayaks.

### Guided oar rafts



Our 14 to 18 foot-long guided oar rafts are the most stable of river boats. They're ideal for young children and anyone who wants to hang on while the guide rows the rapids. And they're a great boat to choose if comfort, safety, relaxation, and sightseeing are your primary interests. (1 to 5 guests plus guide per oar raft; your guide does all the rowing.)

### Row-your-own oar rafts



"Row-your-own" oar rafts and catarafts are small, lively versions of the boats our guides row. They're the boat to choose if you're looking for excitement, freedom and a sense of accomplishment combined with a high degree of comfort. A rental fee applies to all row-your-own rafts: please visit our web site or contact our office for details. (1 to 3 guests per raft. O.R.E. guides provide instruction and supervision but are not present in the raft with you.)

Prior rafting experience is recommended, but you need not be an athlete nor do you need prior rowing experience to pilot your own raft. We outfit you and a boat partner with one of our custom designed rafts, rigged with frame and oars. We provide coaching and encouragement, and while your guides lead the way you float "follow the leader" style down the river. You trade off rowing with your boat partner and have ample time to relax, take pictures, or take in the passing scenery. Oregon River Experiences pioneered row-your-own river vacations. This is the ultimate "hands-on" river adventure.

### Paddle rafts



Paddle rafts are fast and exciting. These popular craft mix whitewater excitement with teamwork and group fun. (4-7 guests plus a guide; everyone gets to paddle.)

### Inflatable kayaks



Inflatable Kayaks are small, highly maneuverable one-person craft. They're fast and exciting but also surprisingly stable. We bring along one or more inflatable kayaks to be shared by the group. (1 guest per kayak. O.R.E. guides provide instruction and supervision.)

### A few important details about raft options

- ✓ Paddle rafts are available when a minimum of four adults request this option.
- ✓ Inflatable kayaks are available on a shared basis, but may be reserved for exclusive use for an additional fee.
- ✓ You are welcome to switch between boat types, but because of the need for training and practice prior to substantial rapids certain restrictions will apply.
- ✓ Paddle raft, inflatable kayak, and row-your-own raft availability is subject to water level limitations.

## Pre-Trip Details

### How to Sign Up

Call, write or e-mail us. We'll hold your reservation for 10 days while we await your deposit, which confirms your reservation (\$100 p.p.).

### Where and When to Meet

We meet at 7:30 AM on the day your trip begins, in the lobby of the Red Lion Hotel, 621 21st St., Lewiston, Idaho. Lewiston is roughly 325 miles east of Portland, Oregon, and about 95 miles south of Spokane, Washington.

### Getting To and From Lewiston

#### ✓ If you Drive

Lewiston is at the crossroads of highways 12, 95, and 195, in western Idaho, not far from the corner where Washington, Oregon, and Idaho meet. From Portland take I-84 past Boardman to US-730. Take US-730

into Washington, and turn right onto US-12. Follow US-12 through Walla Walla to Lewiston. Once in Lewiston, US-12 becomes Main Street. Continue east then turn right on 21st Street. The Red Lion is 1/10th of a mile further along, on your left.

#### ✓ If you Fly

There's a regional airport in Lewiston. Service is provided by Alaska, Horizon, and Delta Airlines. Plan your flight to arrive the day before your river trip begins.

The Red Lion provides free airport shuttle service to guests staying at the hotel. Their shuttle bus meets all flights.

Car rentals are also available in Lewiston.

### River Shuttles

Your trip fare includes transportation to and from the river. A chartered van or bus will transport us from Lewiston to our put-in near Whitebird, Idaho, a 1.5 to 2 hour trip. At trip's end we will be transported from our take-out at Heller Bar back to Lewiston, a one hour ride.

### Accommodations (before and after your river trip)

We recommend the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, which is our meeting place for the trip. For reservations phone 800-232-6730. They offer a discount to our customers, so be sure to tell them you're taking a river trip with Oregon River Experiences. For a lower price (but fewer amenities) we recommend Inn America (across the street from the Red Lion). Again, in order to receive the best rate tell them you are taking a river trip with O.R.E..

## What to Bring

Weather in the Salmon River canyon is typically warm to hot, and little rain falls. Still, cool wet weather can occur on any trip. And it can be quite chilly when it's overcast, breezy or rainy, especially when you're in a raft. So please pay close attention to selecting your clothes and gear for your river adventure. Hopefully, you'll never need most of the cool-weather gear we recommend that you bring. But please do bring it, just in case!

### What to wear

#### ✓ On cool or rainy days

Appropriate clothing for these conditions is clothing that dries quickly, and keeps you warm even when the garment is wet. Modern high-tech synthetic fabrics such as polypropylene, capilene, and polyester fleece do both. (Wool provides warmth when wet, but does not dry quickly and is less comfortable. Wool is often less expensive, however, especially when purchased from Thrift or Military Surplus stores.)

Think in terms of layers of clothing for changeable and cool weather. As conditions change, you can add or subtract layers as needed. The first layer in cool weather should be long underwear made of synthetic materials such as polypropylene or capilene, which provide warmth and wick moisture away from your skin. The middle layer(s) should consist of polyester fleece (or wool), and will provide further warmth. The outer layer consists of a rain jacket and rain pants (ponchos are not recommended). Rain gear made of modern waterproof, breathable fabrics such as Goretex are best. But for a less expensive option, coated nylon will work, too.

A surprisingly large percentage of heat loss occurs from our heads. For this reason, a wool or synthetic hat will go a long way towards keeping you warm.

Wetsuits are generally not needed on the Salmon. However, they do make inflatable kayaking more comfortable in cool weather, and for this reason O.R.E. provides wetsuits on a shared basis for kayakers. If you'd like to bring your own suit, look for an 1/8" thick "farmer john" style (which can be worn in conjunction with a sweater and raincoat). Thicker, full-body scuba style suits are warm, but they're less comfortable, and their bulk makes rowing and paddling more awkward and difficult.

### ✓ On hot days

Nylon shorts and bathing suits are worn, as well as a hat to keep the sun out of your eyes. Cotton shirts may be worn to keep cool and to ward off sunburn. If you are particularly sensitive to the sun you may want to bring lightweight cotton clothes (such as a surgeon's outfit) for sun protection.

Cotton clothing is recommended for hot weather only! Wet cotton will lower your body temperature. This is great for keeping cool during a heat wave. But cotton provides no warmth when wet.

### ✓ On your feet

For footwear while on the river we recommend nylon or canvas tennis shoes, or sports sandals such as Tevas. For extra comfort you may want to wear nylon or polypropylene socks as a first layer. Wetsuit boots work well for cool weather and cold water, but they are usually unnecessary on the Salmon. Sport sandals and shoes also work well in cool weather when combined with thick wool socks or neoprene wetsuit socks. Sport sandals are comfortable for rafting, and are preferred by many of our guides. But they're generally more expensive, and do not protect your feet as well as do shoes.

### ✓ In camp

You may want a change of shoes, and comfortable clothing for lounging. This clothing may be of cotton fabric.

## Where to find it

Check with local sporting goods stores. If they cater to outdoor sports (hiking, backpacking, etc.) rather than team sports, they should have most of the items you need. Gear is also available through mail order and on-line by contacting REI (800-426-4840, or [www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com)), L.L. Bean (800-341-4341, or [www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com)), or Northwest River Supply (800-635-5202, or [www.nrsweb.com](http://www.nrsweb.com)).

## Rental Equipment

O.R.E. offers camping equipment for rent to those who do not own or do not wish to transport this gear. High quality, two-person backpacking style tents are available for \$30 per trip. Sleep kits (Polarguard sleeping bag, cotton liner, self-inflating sleep pad, and ground cloth) are also available for \$30 per person per trip. Reservations and advance payment are required. To place a reservation for a tent or sleep kit please call our office at 1-800-827-1358.

## How to pack it

Pack your gear in a manner appropriate for your journey to Lewiston. When we meet we will supply you with a watertight river bag, into which you will pack your clothing. This bag is roughly 14" in diameter and 24" tall. We'll also provide you with a second, larger river bag (roughly 16" in diameter and 33" tall), which you will share with one other person. Into this second bag will go your tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, and other bulky items. Items that you want to keep handy during the day but which must stay dry (camera, binoculars, a book, etc.) go best in a 50 caliber military surplus ammo box. O.R.E. provides these boxes on a shared basis. If you would like your own, they are available at most surplus and some outdoor stores, and work best when painted white or a light color and lined with foam. (Please note: ammo boxes cannot be carried in paddle rafts or inflatable kayaks.)

**A few words about the term *waterproof*.** The bags and boxes we provide are watertight under most conditions, even when temporarily submerged. However, leakage can occur, and we recommend you wrap your sleeping bag and clothing in heavy-duty plastic garbage bags for extra protection. We also recommend that you pack your camera, binoculars, reading material and similar items in large zip-lock food storage bags.

## Equipment Checklist

### ✓ River Gear

- \_\_\_\_\_ swimsuit, or shorts and T-shirt (avoid cotton shorts)
- \_\_\_\_\_ tennis shoes or sport sandals
- \_\_\_\_\_ wool or synthetic "ski" hat — for cold/rainy days
- \_\_\_\_\_ wide-brimmed hat (preferably with chin-strap), or baseball cap — for sunny days (wide-brimmed hats do a better job of keeping the sun off, but baseball caps can be worn beneath the helmets used by inflatable kayakers)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair socks (wool or synthetic)
- \_\_\_\_\_ waterproof rain jacket and rain pants
- \_\_\_\_\_ Polypropylene or Capilene long underwear tops and bottoms (midweight or expedition weight)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 warm sweater or jacket, polyester fleece or wool
- \_\_\_\_\_ water bottle or canteen

- \_\_\_\_\_ waterproof sunscreen (SPF 15 minimum), lip balm
- \_\_\_\_\_ sunglasses, with strap (i.e. “chums” or “croakies”)

✓ Extra river clothing, camp clothing

- \_\_\_\_\_ camp shoes (or *lightweight* hiking boots)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 pair long pants
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1-2 pair shorts
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1-2 long-sleeved shirts
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1-2 short-sleeved shirts
- \_\_\_\_\_ socks and underwear

✓ Camp Gear

- \_\_\_\_\_ compact, lightweight tent (freestanding is preferred)
- \_\_\_\_\_ compact, medium-weight sleeping bag
- \_\_\_\_\_ compact foam sleeping pad (Thermarest is a popular pad), or air mattress
- \_\_\_\_\_ small tarp (to place beneath your tent, or as a groundcloth for sleeping under the stars)
- \_\_\_\_\_ personal toiletries, including small towel, biodegradable soap, dry-skin lotion, prescription medicines
- \_\_\_\_\_ small flashlight or headlamp with extra batteries

✓ Optional Items

- \_\_\_\_\_ gloves (especially if you’ll be rowing) — bicycling, weight lifting, or gardening gloves work well
- \_\_\_\_\_ binoculars
- \_\_\_\_\_ camera and film
- \_\_\_\_\_ reading material
- \_\_\_\_\_ pen and journal or notebook
- \_\_\_\_\_ compact fishing gear
- \_\_\_\_\_ spare glasses, sunglasses
- \_\_\_\_\_ small daypack, ammo box, or small dry bag
- \_\_\_\_\_ beer or soft drinks (up to 2 six-packs per person), wine or liquor — all in unbreakable containers. (We provide coffee, tea, and juice; also wine with some dinners). Please note: Consumption of alcohol is prohibited during the day — but is o.k. once we arrive in camp.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People sensitive to the sun may want to bring lightweight long-sleeved cotton clothes for sun protection.

Please do not bring: pets, guns, valuable jewelry, cellular phones, or radios (personal Mp3 or “walkman” type music players are okay).

## Additional Information

### Your trip fare includes the following

- ✓ The services of our professional guide staff.
- ✓ Transportation to our launch point from Lewiston, and from our take-out back to Lewiston at trip’s end.
- ✓ All meals, from lunch on the first day through lunch on the last. Our menu is delicious, varied, and hearty. Meals are freshly prepared by our guides from the highest quality ingredients. Juice and water are available at each meal. Coffee, tea, and cocoa are available at dinner and breakfast, and complementary wine is served with some dinners. Special dietary needs may be accommodated with advance notice.
- ✓ Durable, professional quality rafts and river running equipment, including U.S. Coast Guard Approved lifejackets.
- ✓ Waterproof river bags for your personal gear.
- ✓ Cups, plates, and eating utensils.
- ✓ Camp chairs.

### Fishing

Fishing on the Salmon is generally only fair for bass and trout during the summer (although fishing improves in the fall). If you would like to fish you’ll need an Idaho fishing license, which may be purchased at a number of sporting goods stores in Lewiston.

### Camping

We select beautiful beaches for our camp sites. Our guides establish a central kitchen and social area, and trip members select spots in the surrounding area to pitch a tent or roll out a sleeping bag. O.R.E. will set up a portable toilet at each camp, which will be located with privacy and convenience in mind.

O.R.E. practices minimum impact camping, and the crew will instruct you on the simple steps we follow to protect the environment in the Salmon River Canyon.

## Gratuities

Our guests sometimes ask whether it is appropriate to tip the guides. Tipping is optional, but if your guides did a great job then feel free to thank them with a gratuity. The amount is up to you, but tips between 8% and 20% of trip cost are typical. Gratuities are customarily presented to the Lead Guide, and will be shared equally among all guides on your trip.

## Nearby attractions

While in the area consider a drive up Highway 12 along the Lochsa River. Along the Lochsa you'll find many lovely trails, good camping, and a number of excellent natural hot springs. Or pay a visit to nearby Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, the deepest canyon in North America. For more information on Hells Canyon contact the HCNRA at P.O. Box 699, Clarkston, WA 99403, (509) 758-1957. Also consider a visit to the Nez Perce National Historic Park just east of Lewiston.

## Cancellations and Travel Insurance

The size of our trips is strictly regulated by law, and your reservation means we cannot sell the spaces to others. So we strictly adhere to the cancellation policies we explain in our reservation materials. For this reason we strongly recommend that you consider the purchase of travel insurance, which will reimburse you if you must cancel your trip due to illness.

## Emergencies

It may be difficult for family and friends to reach you while you are on the river. In case of emergency they should contact the local Bureau of Land Management office (Cottonwood, Idaho) at 208-962-3245. They should also call the O.R.E. office at 800-827-1358.

