Bureau of Land Management

Vale District **Oregon**

Owyhee National Wild River *Boating Guide*

National Wild and Scenic River System

In 1984 Congress designated 120 miles of the Owyhee River a wild river component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Owyhee National Wild River extends from the Oregon-Idaho stateline to Owyhee Reservoir, excluding 14 miles of the Rome Valley.

In 1988 two tributaries to the Owyhee, 57 miles of the West Little Owyhee and 10 miles of the North Fork of the Owyhee, were also designated as National Wild Rivers.

Wild river designation is intended to protect the river along with its "outstanding remarkable values," scenic, recreational, geologic, historic, archaeological and wildlife.

The Owyhee River provides unsurpassed solitude within canyons of unique scenic beauty. The canyon is extremely isolated with very few access points and limited facilities at put-in/take-out sites. Boaters entering this Wild River corridor must assume a greater degree of personal responsibility for their safety. Boating parties must be prepared and equipped for self-rescue and prolonged backcountry emergency medical care.

Cultural History

Evidence of human occupation in the Owyhee Canyon dates back nearly 12,000 years. Native Americans from the Western Plains, Plateau and Great Basin have all been present at one time or another, leaving behind traces that can be used to date and identify their cultures. Seasons and food sources directed much of their life style.

Harsh winter conditions brought the people together in the canyon to seek shelter and survive on stored foods. The long awaited salmon arrived in spring providing fresh meat and a new outlook. The people broke into family groups in early summer and left the canyon to hunt and gather. Surrounding mountains provided berries and deer during the fall. With the return of winter the people migrated back into the canyon.

European exploration began with the arrival of Hudson Bay Company trappers in the early 1800's. White settlement came to the Owyhee in the mid to late 1800's with the establishment of silver mining, Army posts, homesteads, and livestock grazing. Many of today's local residents are descended from these early inhabitants.

Irreplaceable resources of our cultural legacy lie along the banks of the Owyhee River. These valuable clues used to unlock the secrets of our heritage are yours to enjoy. Please leave them in place for others to discover and enjoy.

Fish and Wildlife

Fishing is best during the summer after high water when the river is clear and warm. If the spring is warm and the run-off gradual the fish may start biting early. Game fish include: small mouth bass, catfish, crappie, and trout.

Wildlife is seen primarily in the early morning and evening in the canyon. The bigger mammals are normally out of the canyon by April. Common wildlife include: mule deer, bighorn sheep, antelope, coyote, badger, otter, beaver, muskrat, golden eagle, red-tail hawk, prairie falcon, great horned owl, great blue heron, Canada goose, duck, common merganser, plus many species of lizards and snakes.

Livestock Management

Livestock grazing within the Owyhee River Canyon began in the mid-1800's as a means to feed a growing population. Today, livestock use continues on public and private land within the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Use in the canyon, primarily watering and trailing, is managed through allotments, pastures, seasons of use, and monitoring. You may see livestock or signs of use at the following water gaps, trailing sites, and grazing areas. Cattle tend to concentrate at these sites, representing less than ten percent of the corridor. Use the following information to help plan you trip.

Middle Section (Three Forks to Rome)

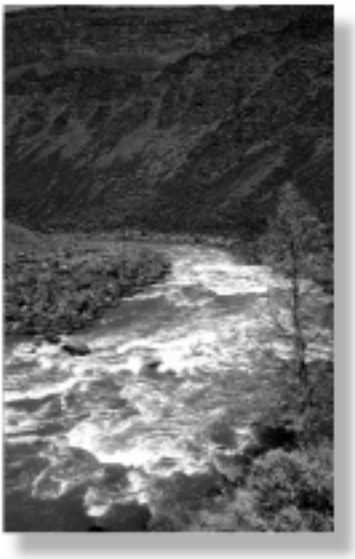
Notable Area	River Miles	Season of Use	Type of Use
Three Forks	Mile 0	Feb 15 - 28, Jun 30, Oct-Nov	Trailing/Water Gap

Lower Section (Rome to Leslie Gulch)

Notable Area	River Miles	Season of Use	Type of Use
Rustler's Cabin	Mile 22	Apr 1 - Oct 30	Water Gap/Trailing
Rye Grass Creek	Mile 24	Nov 1 - Mar 31	Trailing
The-Hole-in-the-Gr.	Mile 39	Nov 1 - Feb 28 (east side of river)	Grazing
		Nov 1 - Apr 15 (west side of river)	Grazing
Below Birch Creek	Mile 52	Apr 1 - Feb 28	Grazing

Low Flying Aircraft

The majority of aircraft over the Owyhee are military jets on training missions. The aircraft are flying in designated military operation areas. Light civilian aircraft may also be seen or heard while floating the Owyhee. Aircraft landings are not authorized within the Owyhee Canyon. Please obtain the aircraft number and contact the BLM if you see any aircraft landing in the canyon.



Half-mile Rapid Class IV-V

Upper Section

The BLM, Vale District, Jordan Resource Area manages the Owyhee River from the Oregon/Idaho stateline to the Owyhee Reservoir. Information on floating the Owyhee River upper section, above the Oregon stateline, may be obtained by contacting the BLM; Boise District Office; 2948 Development Avenue; Boise, Idaho 83705; (208/384-3300).

Middle Section

From Three Forks to Rome, Oregon the river is very challenging. This section of the river is 39 miles, requiring 2 to 4 days to float. It is a "drop and pool" river where long sections of flat water are interrupted by difficult Class III, IV and V+ rapids. The rapids include long boulder gardens and heavy hydraulics, which preclude small rafts, drift boats and open canoes. Constricted channels and the possible need for portages can make the use of large rafts difficult. The middle section of the river is recommended for highly skilled boaters equipped with kayaks, catarafts or medium sized rafts.

Lower Section

From Rome to Owyhee Reservoir is the most popular section of the river. This section is 50 or 67 miles, depending on which take-out is selected, and requires four to six days to float.

Montgomery Rapid, Class IV

Numerous Class II and III rapids and at least one Class IV, will challenge the skills of boaters floating in rafts, catarafts, kayaks, drift boats, and canoes. This section of the river is also a "drop and pool" type. Quiet water extends to the lip of short Class II and III rapids before falling sharply over rock gardens into another pool.

Skill level for this section of the river should be at least intermediate level. All boaters should be able to navigate Class III water safely. Boaters should scout the more difficult rapids and, if necessary, line or portage around them. Every party should include expert boaters capable of handling technical Class IV whitewater.

Taking off the river at Leslie Gulch will require crossing about 10 to 12 miles of Owyhee Reservoir slackwater.

The Float Season

The normal float season is during spring runoff from March through June. Peak flow usually occurs in March or April, and peak visitation follows beginning the middle of May and continuing through Memorial Day weekend. Unstable spring weather conditions can result in rapid and severe fluctuations in water level. Be prepared for extreme weather conditions, including strong winds, rain and snow.

Optimum water level for the Three Forks to Rome section is between 1,500 and 3,000 cfs. Below Rome, the recommended float levels are between 1,000 and 8,000 cfs. Although both sections have been safely boated below and above these levels, extreme caution is advised. Huge holes, standing waves and fierce hydraulics begin to develop above recommended levels, while the rapids become extremely rocky and technical below recommended levels. At river levels above 4,000 cfs, the Three Forks to Rome section is for experts only.

Current gauge readings for the Owyhee River at Rome can be obtained by calling the River Forecast Center (503) 261-9246 or the Rome Launch Site (541) 586-2612. Internet address www.or.blm.gov/Vale/Recreation/rec.htm. Please do not call the Rome Launch site before 8 am or after 5 pm Mountain Standard Time.

Trip Registration

Boater registration is mandatory, due to the extreme isolation of the river, at the put-in facility. Permits are not required for noncommerical groups. Prior to launching contact the river specialists at Rome for up-to-date information. Owyhee flow, weather, and road conditions are highly variable.

River Access

Three Forks, Rome, Birch Creek Historic Ranch, and Leslie Gulch are the only authorized river put-in and take-out sites. The roads to Three Forks, Birch Creek and possibly Leslie Gulch may be impassable during wet and stormy conditions.

Three Forks Launch Site: Gravel bar put-in with four primitive camp sites; registration box, bulletin board, toilet and parking area. Seventeen miles north-east of Rome, or 16 miles southwest from Jordan Valley on US HWY 95 turn south onto Lower Soldier Creek Rd (Three Forks green HWY sign). Continue for 35 miles to Three Forks. Access road is dirt and infrequently maintained. 2WD

high clearance vehicle is adequate with a dry road: need 4WD when wet. If the road is saturated it may be closed temporarily. Road grade into the canyon is steep with tight turns, motorhomes or trailers over twelve feet are not recommended.

Rome Launch Site: Dirt ramp put-in and four camp sites with tables; Wild and Scenic River Station, registration box, toilets, potable water, and parking area. Thirty-two miles southwest of Jordan Valley off of US HWY 95. Turn south at the east bank of Owyhee River and continue .25 mile to launch site. Maintained gravel road excellent for 2WD vehicles.

Birch Creek Historic Ranch: Grassy sand bar take-out located 1 mile down river from Birch Creek; caretaker with radio, potable water, bulletin board, and toilet. Boaters continuing to Leslie Gulch please camp on the opposite side of the river from Birch Creek. There is plenty of area for day-use, however road access visitors and boaters taking-out are limited to the Birch Creek side for camping.

About 10 miles north of Jordan Valley and 10 miles south of the Oregon/Idaho stateline on US HWY 95 turn west onto the Cow Creek Road (Jordan Craters HWY sign). Follow Owyhee River signs 28 miles to Birch Creek Historic Ranch, then 1 mile down river to the take-out. Access road begins as maintained gravel and deteriorates to a jeep trail. 2WD high clearance vehicles are adequate with a dry road to the Owyhee Canyon rim. 4WD is recommended from the rim to the take-out, and for the entire trip when the road is wet. The road may be temporarily closed if saturated. Road grade into the canyon is steep with tight turns, motorhomes and trailers over 12 feet are not recommended.

Leslie Gulch: Concrete ramp take-out, eight camp sites with picnic tables, toilets, and bulletin board. Twenty-five miles north of Jordan Valley or 18 miles south of the US HWY 95 and HWY 55/78 junctions on US HWY 95 turn west onto McBride Rd (Leslie Gulch sign). Follow BLM signs to Leslie Gulch. Access road is gravel and dirt maintained and adequate for 2WD vehicles. However, if the road is wet it can be rutted and very slippery, 4WD is recommended. The road may be temporarily closed if saturated.

Shuttles

Commercial services to tow boats through Owyhee Reservoir and to shuttle vehicles are available. Commercial shuttle businesses are not under BLM permit. Contact area Chamber of Commerces for further information.

River Use Regulations

The BLM is committed to maintaining the natural conditions of the Owyhee River. People using the river are asked to respect the area's wild character and to minimize human impacts during their visit. In order to accomplish this objective BLM asks that Owyhee boaters meet the following **River Use and Camping Regulations**.

Class III Rapid in Upper Section

1. Maximum party size above Rome is 15 persons; below Rome maximum party size is 20 persons. Many of the Owyhee's most popular campsites are small and could easily be damaged by overcrowding with even the most careful camper.

2. Aircraft landing is prohibited within the Owyhee River Canyon.

3. Motor-driven watercraft and violation of Oregon State Marine Board regulations are prohibited on the Owyhee River. Help preserve the Owyhee wild character by using motors only below river mile 55 where the reservoir slackwater begins.

4. Pets must be kept under control at all times. This is for their protection as well as wildlife and livestock. Pet solid waste in camp must be deposited, like human waste, in the portable toilet and removed from the canyon.

5. Three Forks, Rome, Birch Creek Historic Ranch, and Leslie Gulch are the only authorized river put-in and take-out sites. Development, vehicles, and relatively large crowds are limited to these areas to help control resource and visitor impacts.

6. Boater registration is mandatory at the put-in facility prior to launch. Permits are not required for noncommercial groups. BLM highly recommends that you contact the Vale District or Rome Launch Site prior to launching for up-to-date information. Owyhee River flow, weather, and access road conditions are extremely variable.

7. Camping on any area posted "closed" is prohibited.

8. Discharging of firearms into or from within any area posted no shooting or safety zone, or in violation of state law is prohibited. During the float season (March-June) BLM highly recommends that there be no discharging of firearms anywhere within the river corridor.

9. Defacing, disturbing, or removing historic/prehistoric artifacts is prohibited. Several cultural sites are on private property, and the rights of the private owners should be respected. Enjoy our cultural heritage and leave archeological features unspoiled and in place for others to discover.

10. Observe posted regulations at launch sites. Check with BLM or on-site bulletin boards for updates to river use regulations.

Camping Regulations

1. Camp on sand or gravel bars to avoid trampling vegetation if water level permits. Choose a campsite that does not require any digging or trenching; it scars the land, increases erosion, and you could disturb or damage cultural artifacts. Please, leave the campsite as if you were never there, so the next floater can enjoy a pristine experience.

2. May 1 through May 31, camping at Rye Grass Hot Spring Camp, river left, river mile 24; and Greely Bar Hot Spring Camp, river left, river mile 44 is limited to one day and one night per river trip. Laying-over tends to increase pressure on these delicate areas and discourages visits by other boaters. Camping within 200 feet of any hot spring is prohibited.

3. Hike-out Camp, river left, river mile 14; and Greely Bar Hot Spring Camp, river left, river mile 44 have only one identified camp site. Group size is limited to 20 people at each camp site. Nearest camps to Hike-out are located approximately one quarter mile up river and one mile down river from Hike-out. Nearest camps to Greely Bar are located approximately one mile up river and one mile down river from Greely Bar.

4. Carrying a firepan or similar container is required for all parties. Wood and charcoal fires are permitted only in firepans or similar containers. Firepans or similar containers must be large enough to contain the fire and all charcoal, burnt wood, melted plastic, glass, or metal, etc. Elevate the firepan with legs or rocks. Using a firepan eliminates the deposition of charcoal, and increases useable camp space by eliminating the construction of multiple rock fire rings.

   a. Using a wood fire for cooking is discouraged; drift wood may not be abundant. Gas or liquid stoves are an efficient, clean and inexpensive alternative.

   b. Collect only driftwood for fuel, or better yet bring your own wood. Standing vegetation, live or dead, must not be cut or destroyed. It is part of the natural setting and provides critical wildlife habitat. Distrubing (trimming, cutting, burning, etc.) hackberry trees, live or dead, is prohibited.

   c. Firepan contents (charcoal, burnt wood, melted plastic, glass or metal, etc.) must be removed from the river corridor and deposited in an appropriate refuse container.

   d. Put-in sites: If you plan on having a campfire at either Rome Launch Site or Three Forks, bring your own firewood. There is no woody material to gather and burn at these sites. You will also need to have a firepan for Three Forks; Rome Launch Site contains three steel fire rings for campfires.

5. Strain kitchen waste water to remove solid food particles. Place food particles in the garbage and remove from the canyon. Waste water, including bathing water, may be deposited outside of camp above the high water line or amid stream, never in an eddy. Do not use soap or deposit waste water near side streams or springs. Keeping the camp free of food particles and waste water will help eliminate pests such as stinging insects, rodents, and snakes.

6. Remover all garbage from the canyon; some refuse may be burned in the firepan to reduce bulk, and placed in the garbage for removal from the river canyon. Pack-it-in-Pack-it-out. Help keep the campsites and beaches clean and pristine for the next floater.

7. Carry and use of a leakproof portable toilet is required for removing solid human waste (feces) and toilet paper from the river canyon. The toilet(s) must be large enough to serve the entire group for the complete length of the trip. Solid waste must be deposited at a designated disposal site. Designated sites can be found in nearby towns. There are no disposal sites in the river corridor.

8. Stay in a group and as far away from wildlife and waterfowl as possible when they are encountered.

9. Use of chalk and other materials to highlight petroglyphs is prohibited. Any damage to petroglyphs including scratching, chipping or altering in any way is prohibited by state and federal law. Photographers should use a polarizing filter to enhance petroglyhs.

10. Double check your camp before leaving for litter and items you may have left behind.

Reducing impacts on the river environment, helps preserve the area's natural character for future use and enjoyment.

Safety

1. Check your raft and other equipment in advance and make necessary repairs or replacement.

2. A servicable and approved "Type III or V" life jacket designed for white water is required for each member of your party. Life jackets should be worn securely fastened at all times while on the river and while lining boats through rapids. Carry an extra jacket on each raft.

3. Have first aid kits, pumps, and patch kits adequate to handle any emergency.

4. Carry at least one extra oar or paddle for each raft. Each raft should be equipped with long stern and bow lines and bailing buckets.

5. Always treat, filter, and/or boil spring water before using it as potable water. Several springs are located on the river guide maps.

6. Poison ivy, water hemlock, and other poisonous plants grow along the edge of the river. Check the local library and extension service for poisonous plant information. People have died from eating what they thought were edible plants.

7. Rattle snakes and scorpions may be seen in camp, along the river, or during a hike. Simply stay alert and give them their space.

Emergencies

Tell someone where you are going, when you expect to return, and the telephone numbers listed below. Such information provides a link to the outside world in case your party has an accident or emergency.

Rescued party may be responsible for any costs associated with search and rescue operations relating to its trip!

In case of emergency, contact any of the following:

- Malheur County Sheriff
  Vale, Oregon
  (541) 473-5125

- Rome Launch Site
  Rome, Oregon
  (541) 586-2612

- Vale District BLM Office
  Vale, Oregon
  (541) 473-3144

For additional information:

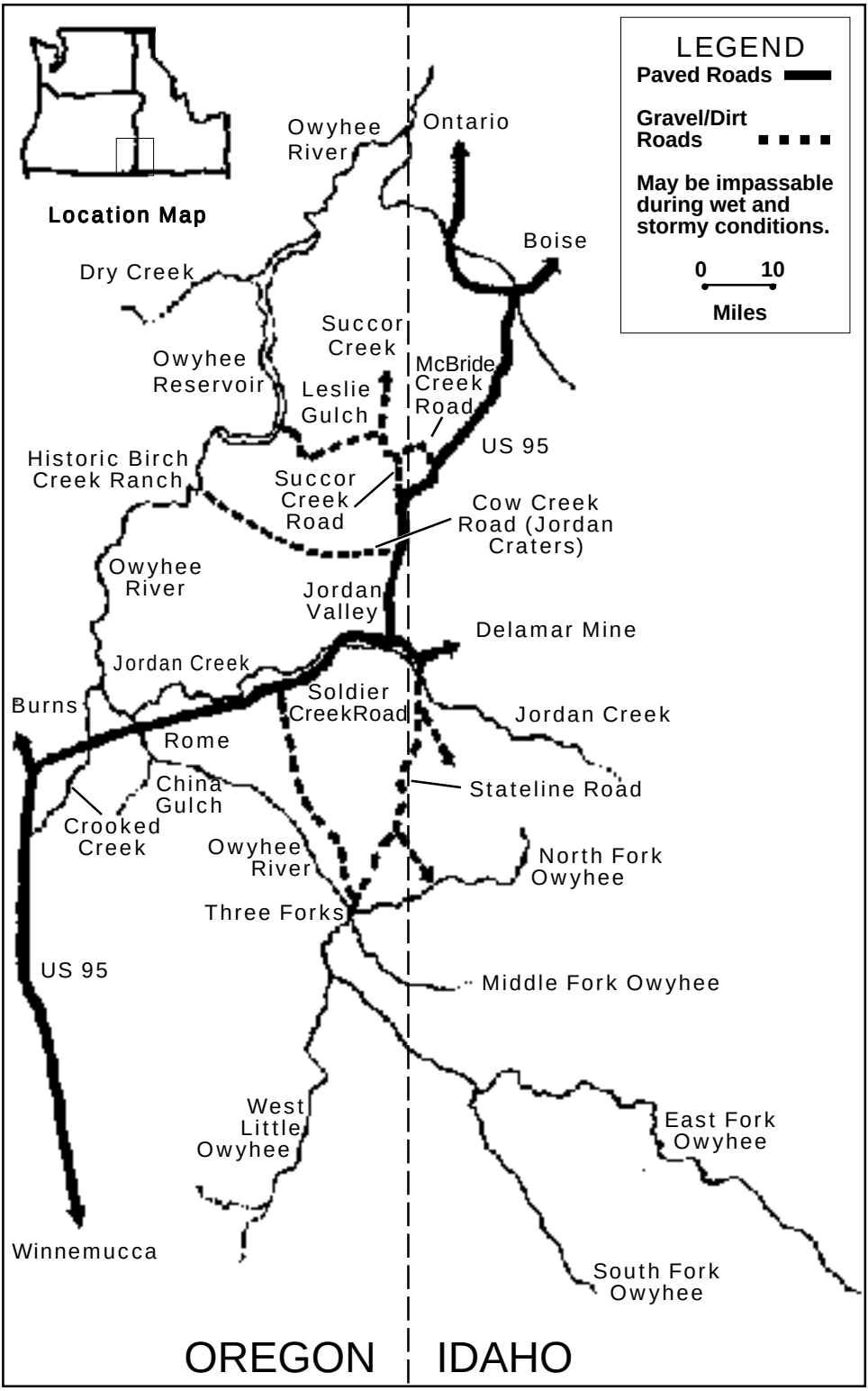
Bureau of Land Management
Vale District Office
100 Oregon Street
Vale, Oregon 97918
(541) 473-3144 or
visit web wite at http://www.or.blm.gov/Vale

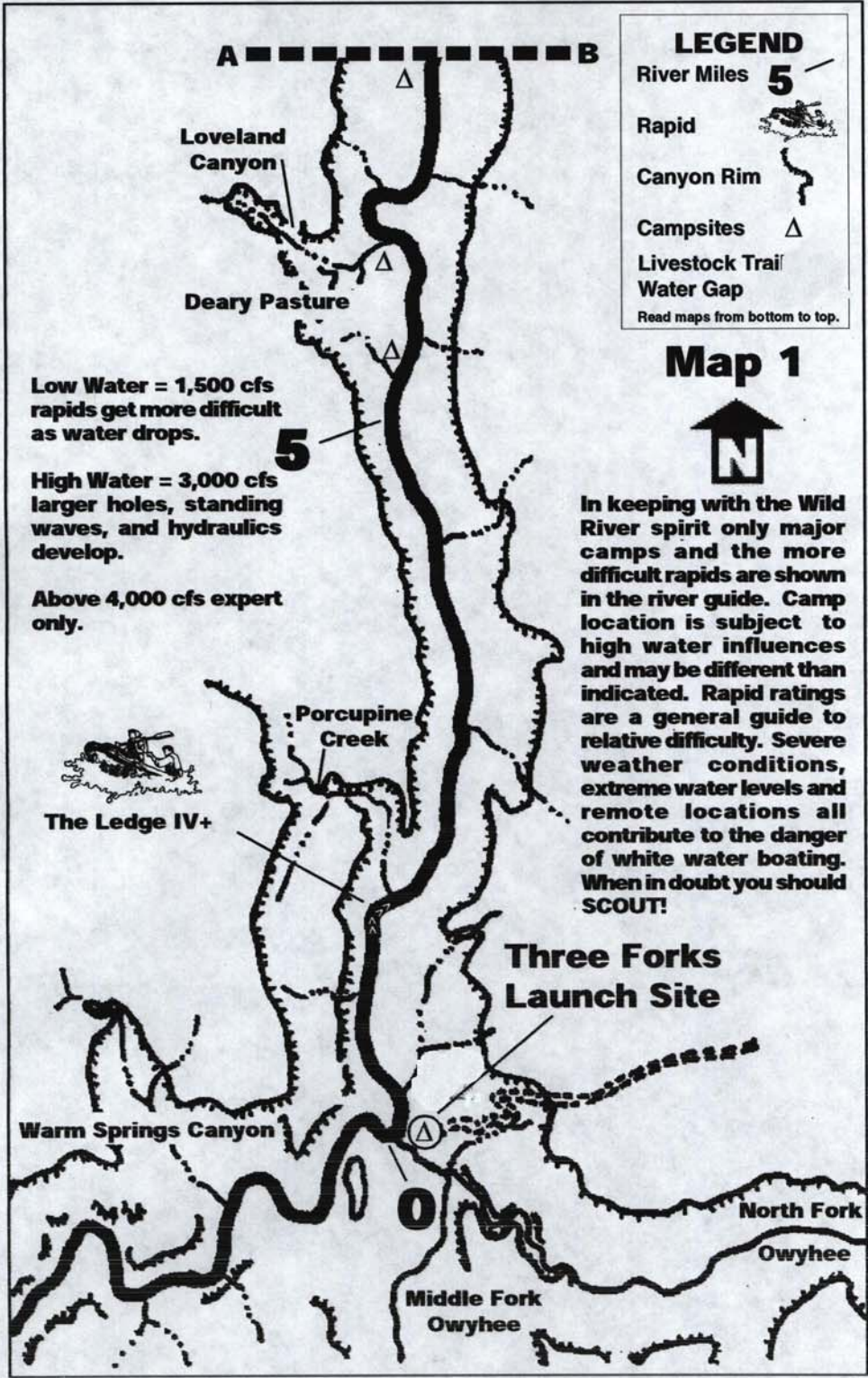
Have an enjoyable and safe float trip!

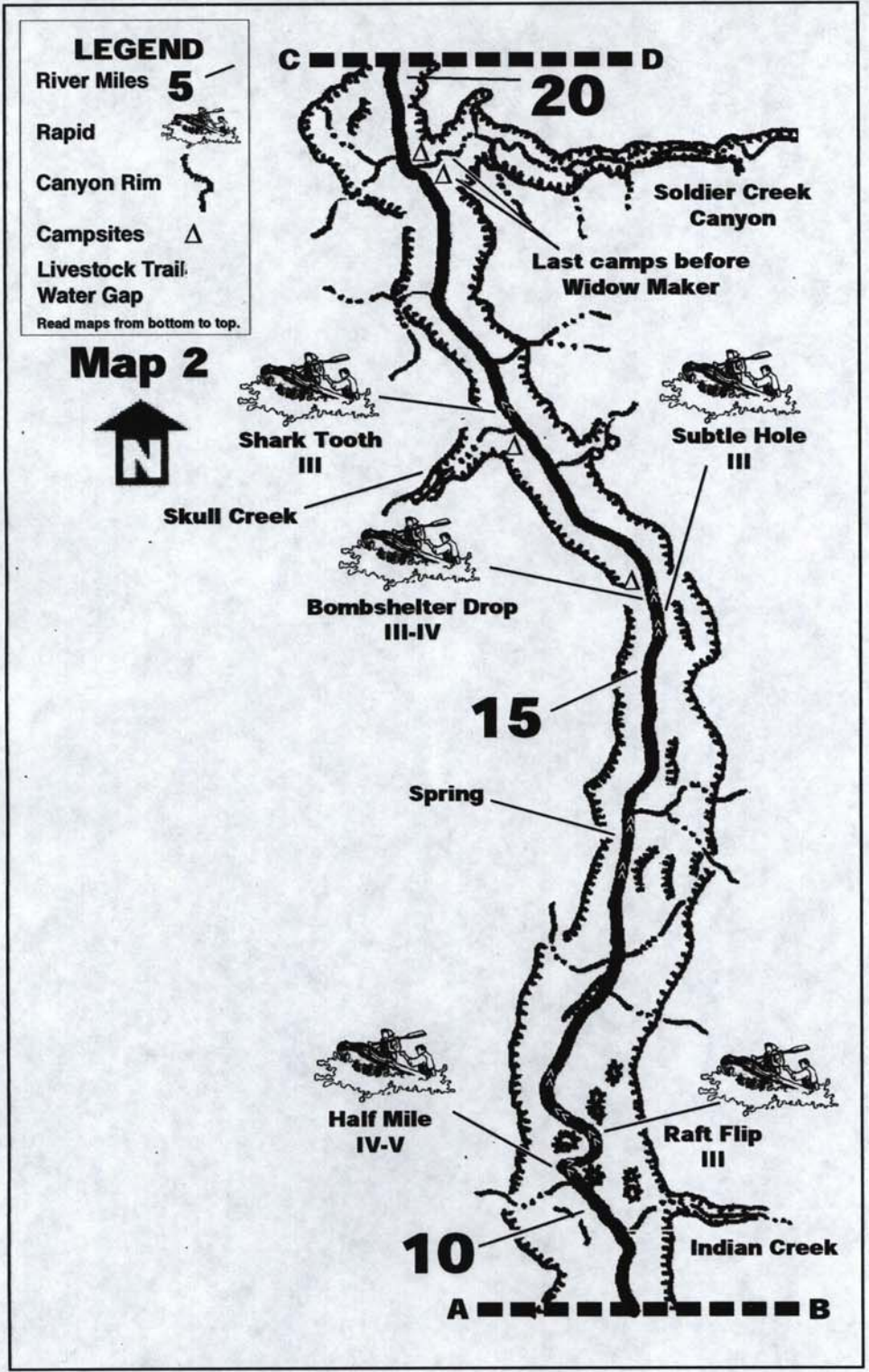
LEAVE NO TRACE
OUTDOOR ETHICS

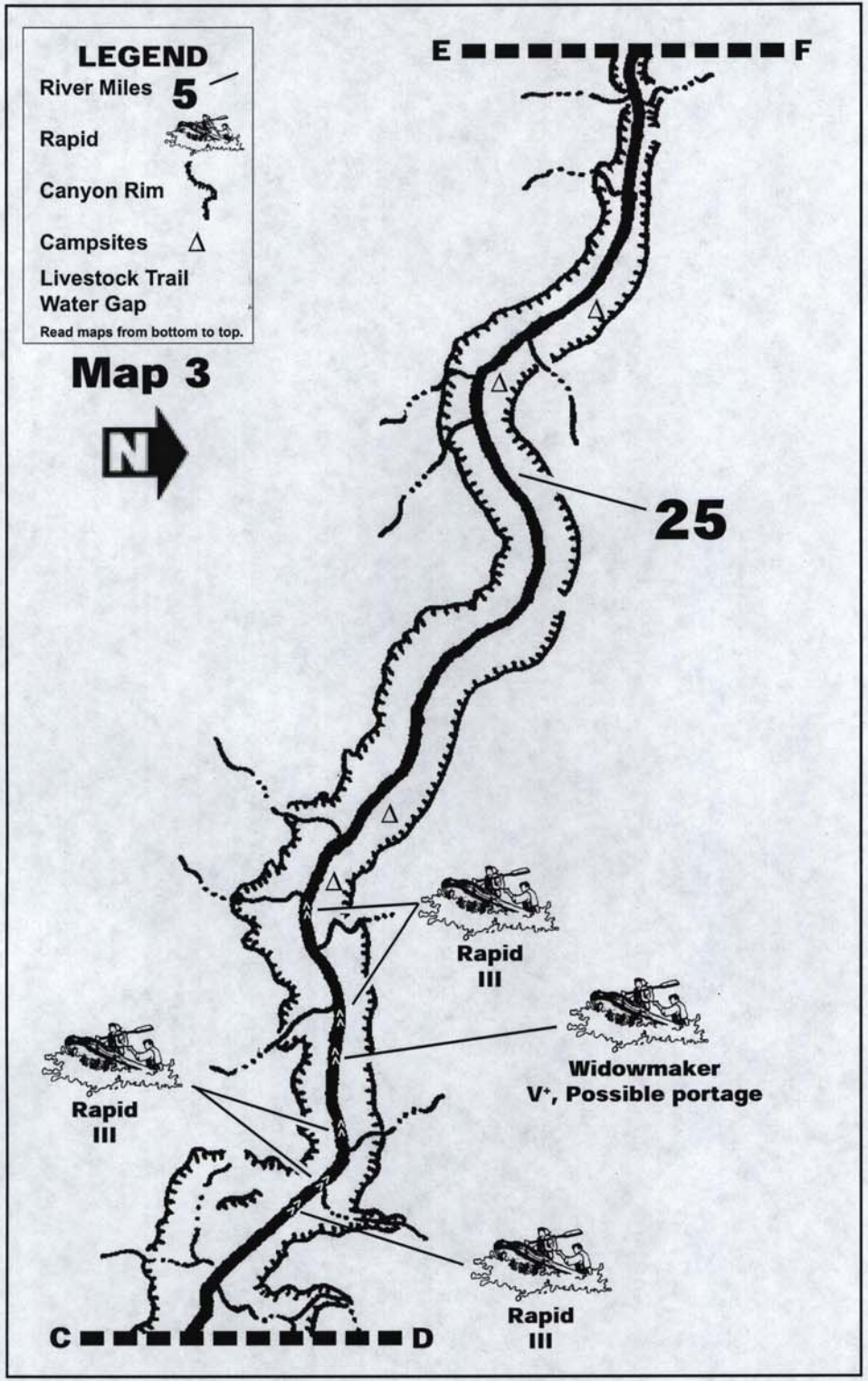
- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

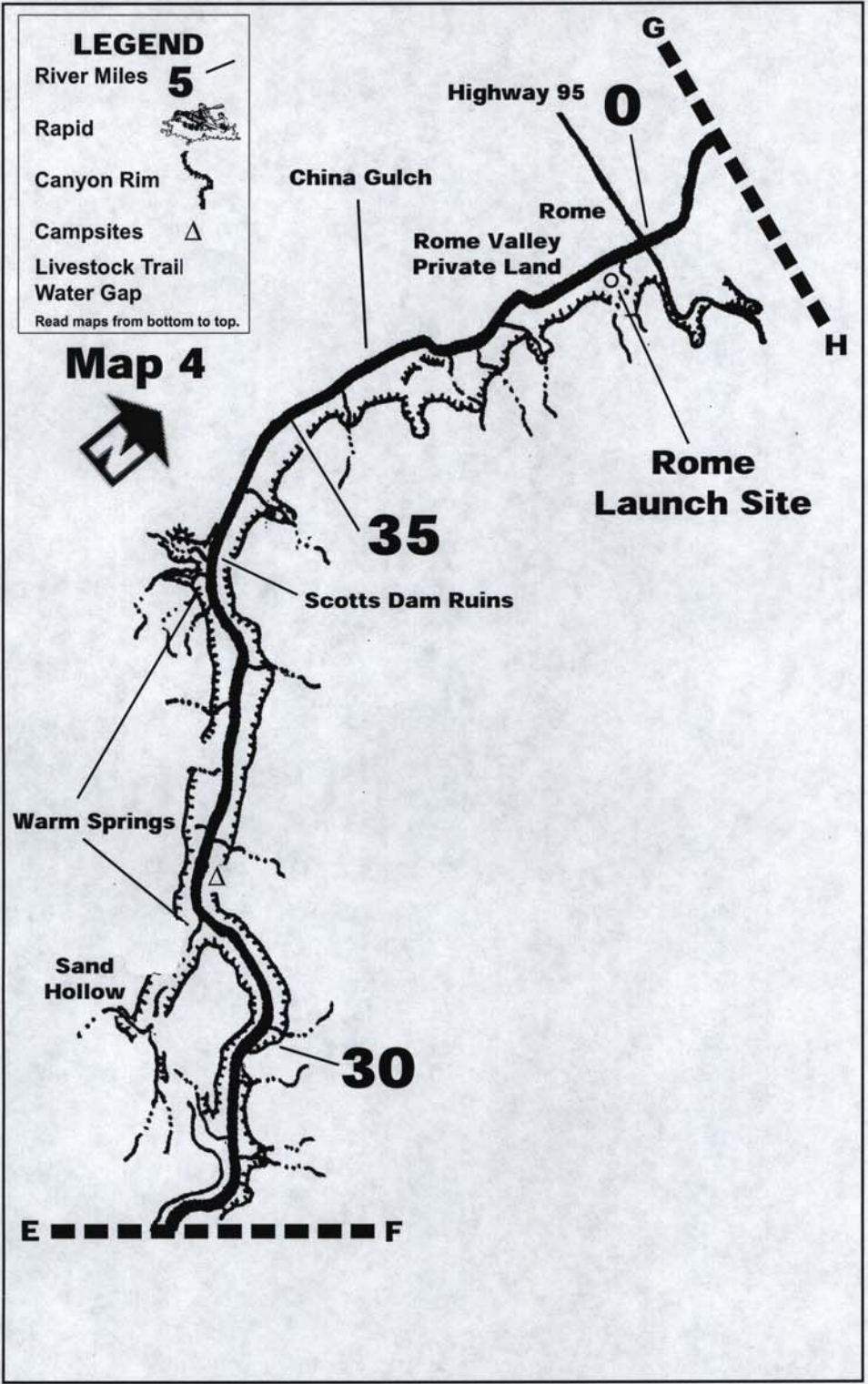
For Information & Materials Call 1-800-332-4100 or
visit web site at http://www.lnt.org

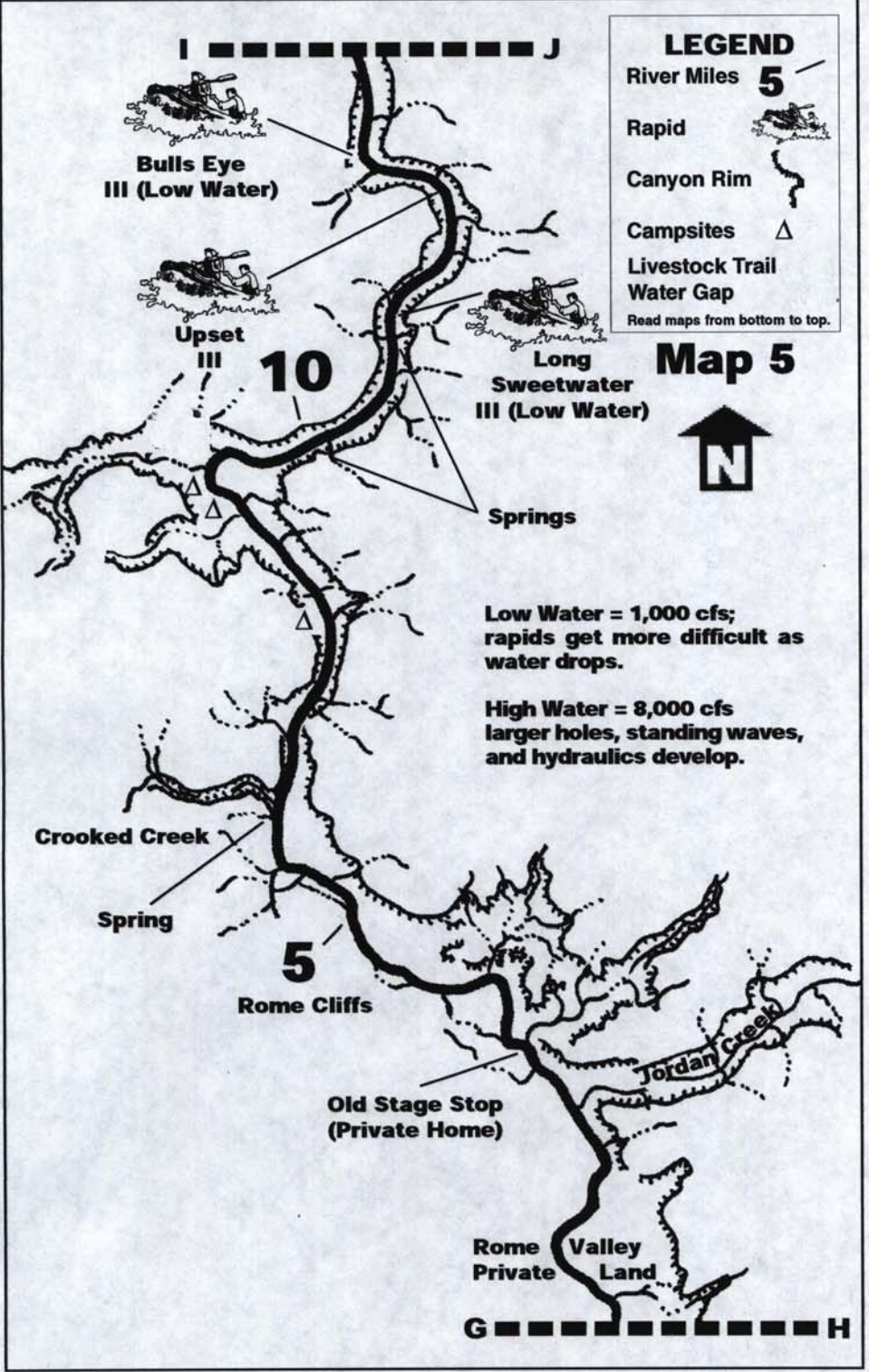

LEGEND
Paved Roads
Gravel/Dirt Roads
May be impassable during wet and stormy conditions.
0 10
Miles
Location Map
Owyhee River
Ontario
Boise
Dry Creek
Succor Creek
Owyhee Reservoir
Leslie Gulch
McBride Creek Road
US 95
Historic Birch Creek Ranch
Succor Creek Road
Cow Creek Road (Jordan Craters)
Owyhee River
Jordan Valley
Delamar Mine
Jordan Creek
Burns
Soldier CreekRoad
Jordan Creek
Rome
China Gulch
Stateline Road
Crooked Creek
Owyhee River
North Fork Owyhee
Three Forks
US 95
Middle Fork Owyhee
West Little Owyhee
East Fork Owyhee
Winnemucca
South Fork Owyhee
OREGON
IDAHO
NEVADA

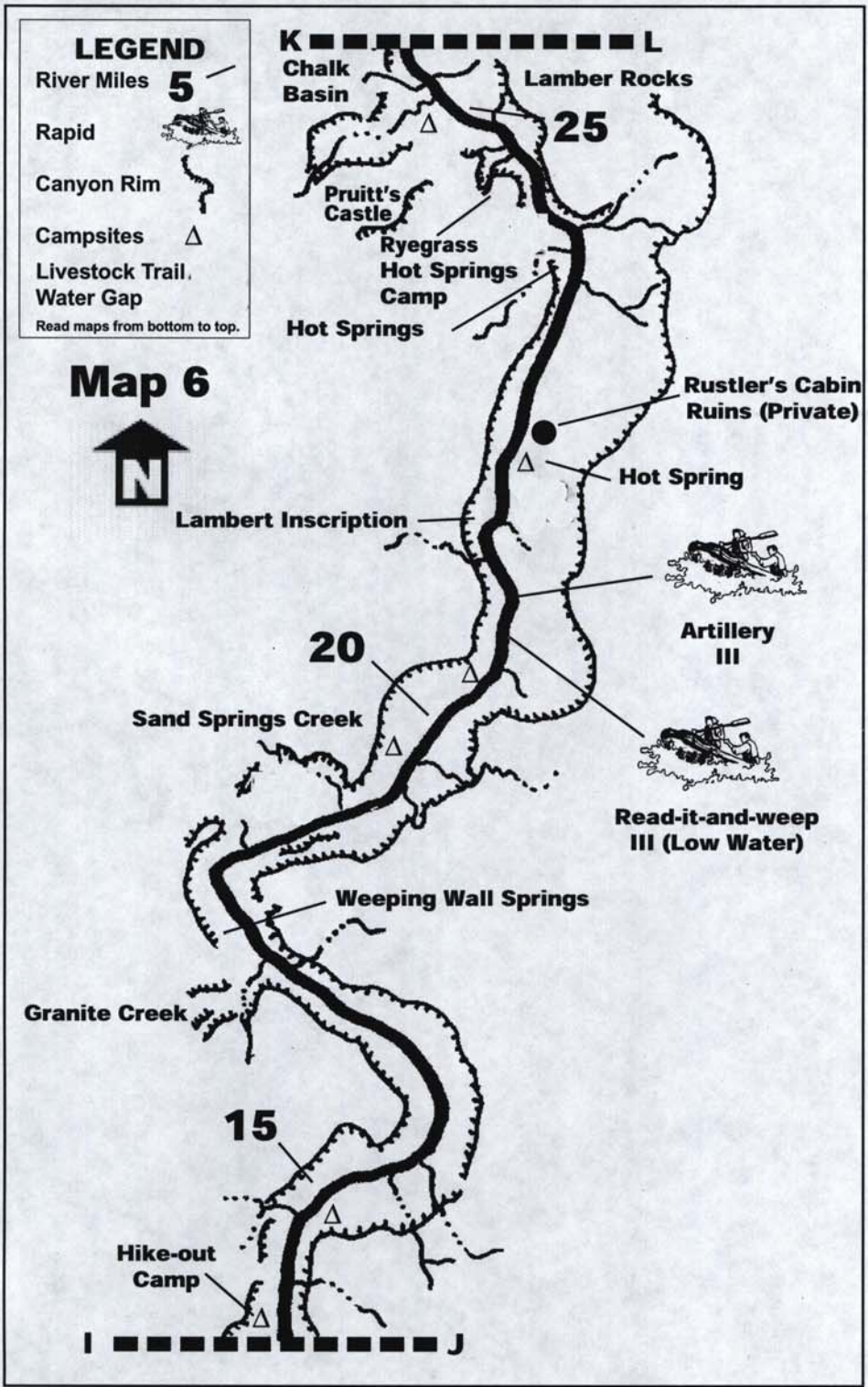

A
B
LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 1
N
Loveland Canyon
Deary Pasture
Low Water = 1,500 cfs rapids get more difficult as water drops.
High Water = 3,000 cfs larger holes, standing waves, and hydraulics develop.
Above 4,000 cfs expert only.
5
In keeping with the Wild River spirit only major camps and the more difficult rapids are shown in the river guide. Camp location is subject to high water influences and may be different than indicated. Rapid ratings are a general guide to relative difficulty. Severe weather conditions, extreme water levels and remote locations all contribute to the danger of white water boating. When in doubt you should SCOUT!
Porcupine Creek
The Ledge IV+
Three Forks Launch Site
Warm Springs Canyon
0
North Fork
Owyhee
Middle Fork Owyhee

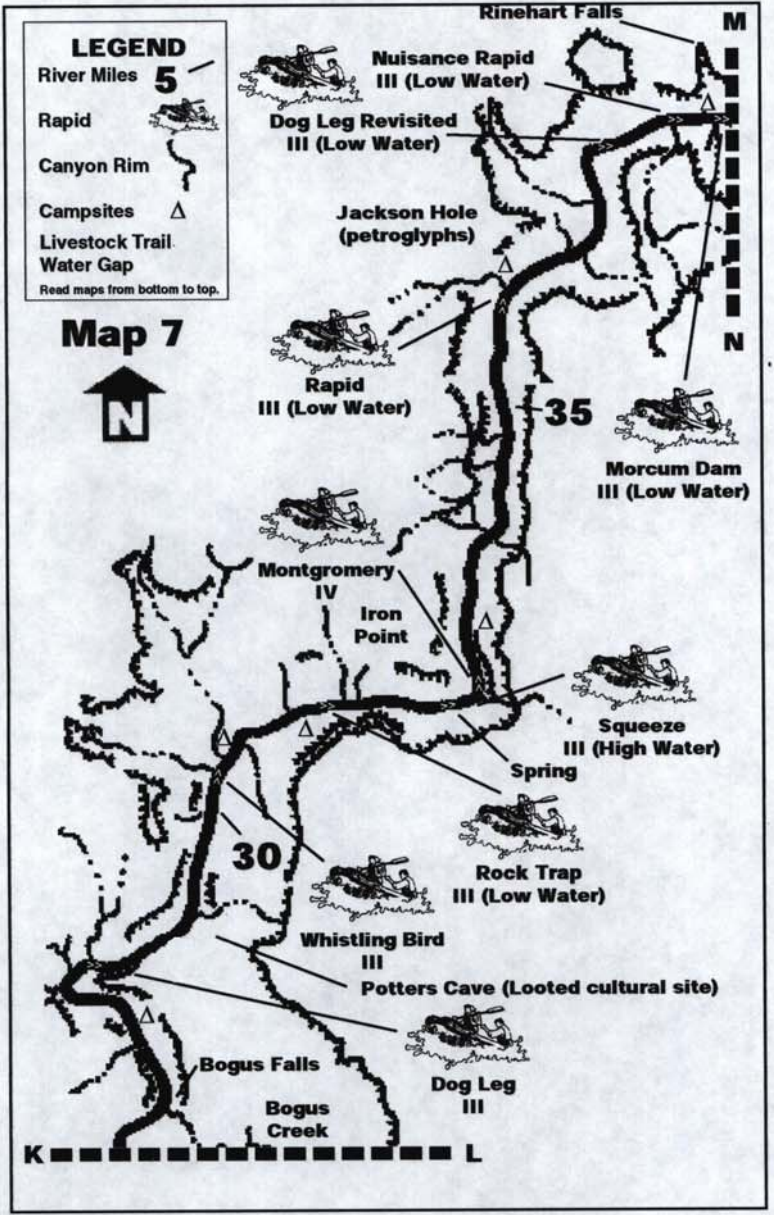

LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 2
N
C
D
20
Soldier Creek Canyon
Last camps before Widow Maker
Shark Tooth III
Subtle Hole III
Skull Creek
Bombshelter Drop III-IV
15
Spring
Half Mile IV-V
Raft Flip III
10
Indian Creek
A
B

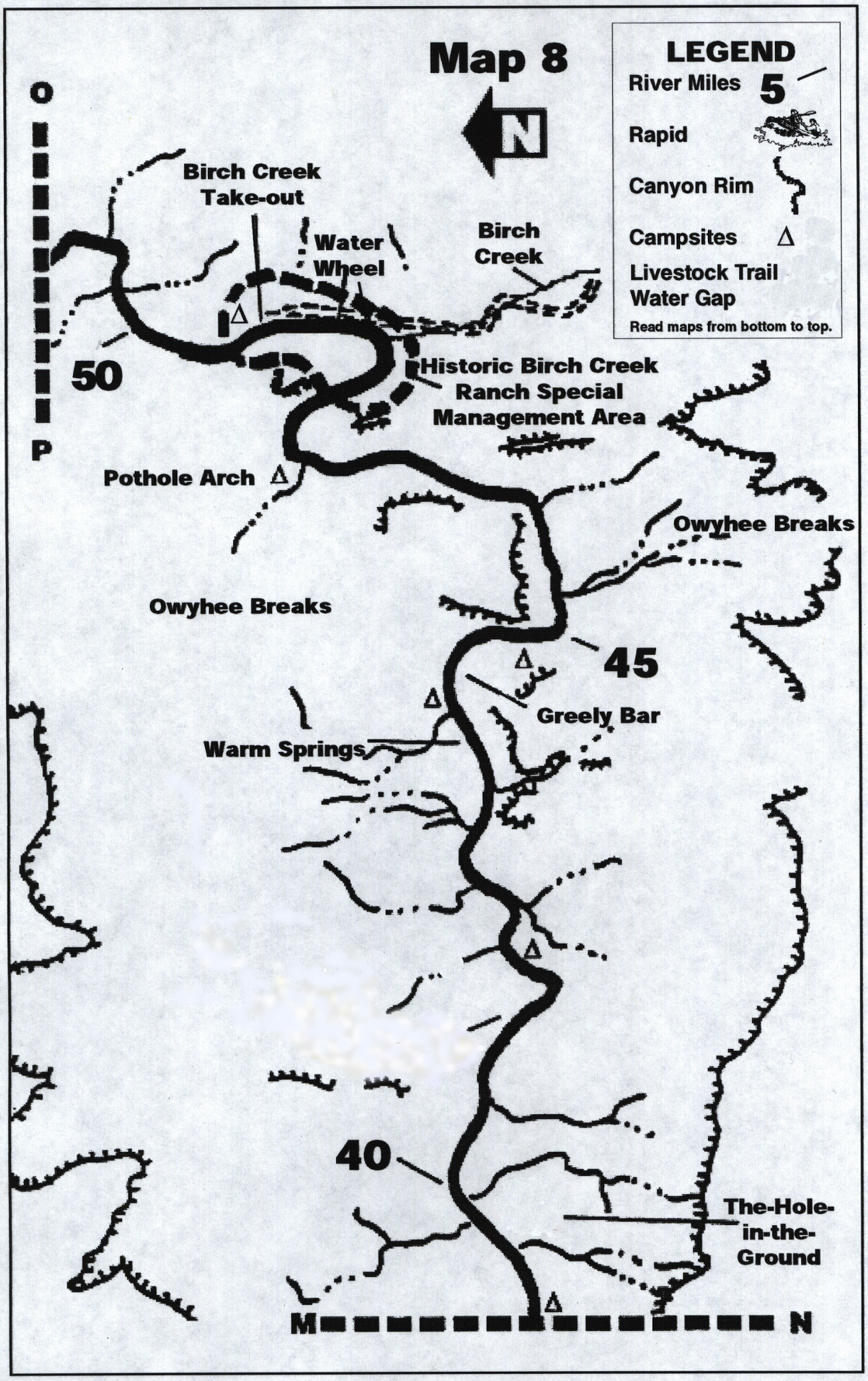

LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 3
N
E
F
25
Rapid
III
Widowmaker
V+, Possible portage
Rapid
III
Rapid
III
C
D

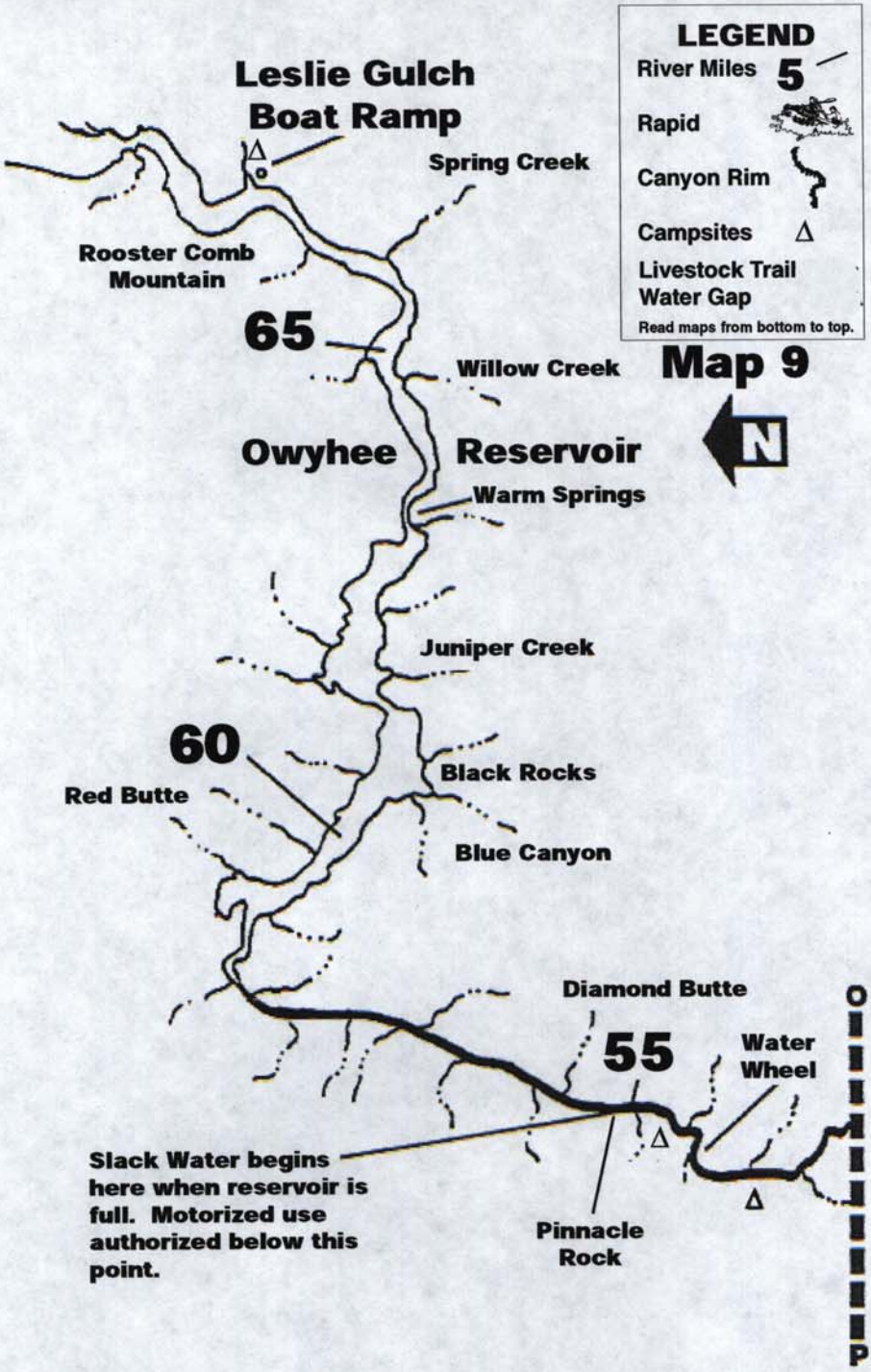

LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 4
N
G
H
Highway 95
0
China Gulch
Rome
Rome Valley
Private Land
Rome
Launch Site
35
Scotts Dam Ruins
Warm Springs
Sand
Hollow
30
E
F


I
J
LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 5
N
Bulls Eye
III (Low Water)
Upset
III
10
Long
Sweetwater
III (Low Water)
Springs
Low Water = 1,000 cfs;
rapids get more difficult as
water drops.
High Water = 8,000 cfs
larger holes, standing waves,
and hydraulics develop.
Crooked Creek
Spring
5
Rome Cliffs
Jordan Creek
Old Stage Stop
(Private Home)
Rome
Private
Valley
Land
G
H


LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail, Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 6
N
K
L
Chalk Basin
Lamber Rocks
25
Pruitt's Castle
Ryegrass Hot Springs Camp
Hot Springs
Rustler's Cabin Ruins (Private)
Hot Spring
Lambert Inscription
Artillery III
20
Sand Springs Creek
Read-it-and-weep III (Low Water)
Weeping Wall Springs
Granite Creek
15
Hike-out Camp
I
J


LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
Map 7
N
Rinehart Falls
M
N
Nuisance Rapid
III (Low Water)
Dog Leg Revisited
III (Low Water)
Jackson Hole
(petroglyphs)
Rapid
III (Low Water)
35
Morcum Dam
III (Low Water)
Montgromery
IV
Iron
Point
Squeeze
III (High Water)
Spring
30
Rock Trap
III (Low Water)
Whistling Bird
III
Potters Cave (Looted cultural site)
Bogus Falls
Dog Leg
III
Bogus
Creek
K
L


Map 8
N
LEGEND
River Miles 5
Rapid
Canyon Rim
Campsites
Livestock Trail
Water Gap
Read maps from bottom to top.
O
P
Birch Creek
Take-out
Water
Wheel
Birch
Creek
50
Historic Birch Creek
Ranch Special
Management Area
Pothole Arch
Owyhee Breaks
Owyhee Breaks
45
Greely Bar
Warm Springs
40
The-Hole-
in-the-
Ground
M
N



BLM/OR/WA/GI-99/003-1122.33+RE2000

Comments

Please provide the Vale District any post trip comments you have on visitor services, river conditions and/or river management.