

# WHAT TO EXPECT

*On Your Five-Day Hells Canyon Trip*



*First things first:*

## HOME BASE: MCCALL

All of our river trips meet in **McCall** before departure. The closest airport is in Boise, Idaho.  
Boise to McCall is 2.5 hours.

## PRE-TRIP ORIENTATION

Plan to meet us at our Boathouse in McCall at 6:00pm the night before your trip leaves.  
Address: 184 Industrial Loop

## PRE- & POST- TRIP LODGING

Not included in your trip cost. **Please book well in advance** to ensure availability. Contact Lauren for recommendations.

## PLEASE REVIEW THE PACKING LIST IN FULL

Each guest will receive two dry bags at our pre-trip orientation: one large one for overnight items and one small one for daytime items. We recommend bringing clothing suitable for changing weather conditions, as the forecast is never guaranteed and can change without notice. Salmon Raft provides all camping gear with the exception of a pillow (tent, sleeping bag, thick sleeping pad). Tents are four-person, however we bring one tent for every one or two guests (any sharing is within your own party). Our well-rounded menu covers all meals beginning with lunch on Day One and ending with lunch on the last day, including appetizers and desserts. Also provided and included are daytime snacks, fresh drinking water, and other beverages (see drink notes on page 4).







## THE ROUTINE

Each day of the trip, you can expect to be on board the raft for six to seven hours. We aim to get on the water by about 10am and arrive at camp by 4-4:30pm. There are opportunities for breaks, including a long one for lunch, time to swim, stops at historic homesteads, and both short and long hiking options along the river. Our coolers are accessible all day and are stocked with snacks and cold drinks, and water bottles can be filled at any time. At camp, our guides take care of everything! Feel free to relax and enjoy your vacation – read a book, swim, play a beach game, or fish. **Keep in mind that every trip is different – we keep a loose schedule, as many factors can influence pacing (weather, water flow, campsite selection, and group dynamics).**

Our trips feature multiple types of watercraft:

- Gear boat: Floats ahead of the group to select and set up camp
- Paddle raft: Holds 4-6 rafters, 2-3 paddlers on each side
- Oar boat: Holds 2-6 rafters, no paddling required, good for fishing
- Inflatable kayaks (duckies): Single or tandem option (on most trips)

Every day is a little different on the river, with a good mix of whitewater and calm stretches. When you arrive at camp, you'll find everything set up for you: Your dry bags, our full kitchen, toilet system, tables and chairs, tents, shade canopy, and appetizers on the way. Salmon Raft guides are there to make your trip comfortable. If you need anything during your journey with us, please don't hesitate to communicate with any of the men and women who will be taking care of you.



## DAY BY DAY

**Pre-Trip:** 6pm meeting at our Boathouse to receive your dry bags and go over trip details.

**Days 1-5:** 7am departure from our Boathouse on Day 1. Your vehicle will be safe in our parking lot while you are on the river. Our bus will deliver you to the put-in, Hells Canyon Dam (2.5 hours). At the boat ramp, you'll meet your guides, receive your PFDs, and listen to a safety briefing.

You'll experience the most exciting part of Hells Canyon during the first three days. Your 81-mile trip is broken up each day with whitewater, hiking, fishing, and dry land stops to learn about the canyon's history. The designated Wild and Scenic section of Hells Canyon features dramatically steep rocky walls and abundant wildlife viewing opportunities. Bears, otters, bighorn sheep, and over 200 species of birds call the canyon their home. Days 4 and 5 are typically mellow, with plenty of time to hike and fish.

As you begin your journey down river, you'll notice the power of the Snake River. Hells Canyon is known for its "pool-drop" nature -- after every rapid, there is a calm pool afterwards. The river goes back and forth between bursts of exciting waves and mellow stretches that are good for swimming or fishing. You can expect a variety of Class II-IV rapids. Some of our favorites (in order) include: Wild Sheep (IV), Granite (IV), Bernard I (III) and II (III), Waterspout (IV), Sluice Creek (III), and Rush Creek (III) -- just to name a few! Near the end of your trip, we'll take some time to explore the confluence of the Imnaha River – check out the old mine shaft there if you're not spooked too easily.

From early indigenous people to 19th and 20th century homesteaders, there are fascinating historic sites and tales to be told around every bend. You can look forward to visiting pictograph sites and homesteads, turned mini-museums, that will give insight into what life was like in this rugged canyon thousands of years ago.

At camp each night, our guides work like a well-oiled machine to orchestrate a diverse and well-rounded dining experience. Dinner and dessert wrap up as the sky darkens and the stars emerge, offering a sense of peace and scale in one of North America's last remote places. Many of our guests comment on the brightness of the Milky Way, as it comes to life across the night sky.

Each morning of your trip, awake to the smell of freshly brewed coffee and breakfast on the stove. Pack up your things and embark on the next day's journey!

We often use a small, quiet outboard motor on Day 5 to cover the last few miles of flatter water. At the take-out, Heller Bar, we'll say our goodbyes and hop in the Salmon Raft bus back to McCall (about four hours). You can expect to return to our Boathouse between 6:30-7pm.



# THE WHITEWATER

The Snake River through Hells Canyon is legendary for its big and exciting whitewater, however it's important to remember that you're in the very safe and capable hands of our expert guide staff. Rapids range from II to IV, with some heart-pumping waves that will surely be a highlight! There are calm stretches in between the rapids, and we'll pull over to scout these notable sections before running them. This trip is recommended for rafters as young as eight.

## COMMUNICATION

One of the greatest parts of our trips is that there is no cell service! Our guides carry satellite communication for emergencies. We are a team of skilled outdoorsmen and women with certifications such as Wilderness First Responder, EMT, Swiftwater Rescue Technician, and more.

## EXTRA ACTIVITIES

Our river trips are well-rounded and offer opportunities for optional activities like:

- Hiking
- Fishing
- Cliff jumping
- Stops at historic homesteads
- Viewing pictograph/petroglyph sites

Fishing note: Salmon Raft provides all rods and tackle, but guests need licenses from Oregon ([here](#) for age 12+) and Idaho ([here](#) for age 14+).

## RECOMMENDED READING

- [Chief Joseph & the Flight of the Nez Perce: The Untold Story of an American Tragedy](#)
- [National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Rocky Mountain States](#)
- [Roadside Geology of Idaho](#)
- [Topographic Recreational Map of Idaho](#)
- [River Tales of Idaho](#)
- [Home Below Hells Canyon](#)
- [Myths of Idaho Indians](#)

## AT CAMP

Salmon Raft provides four-person tents for every one or two people (you will not share with anyone that is not part of your group). Thick sleeping cushions are also provided for each guest. A pillow is not provided.

Our gear boat crew will set up tables, chairs, and a shade fly for your comfort. The toilet system will be set up from the time you arrive at camp and will be the last thing to be taken down the following morning.

We do not bring a generator or charging stations for the group to share. You are welcome to bring your own battery bank to recharge your phone for photos or a small speaker if you want music. However we ask that you are respectful of the group when using these devices. The sound of the river is quite soothing!



## 10 KEYS TO SUCCESS

It is our goal to provide a fun and safe experience for all of our guests. To make sure you are prepared to make the most of your experience, here are a few things to remember before we see you:

1. Read through trip literature, answer profile questions, and fill out personal details before your trip (these can be accessed through the link in your confirmation email).
2. Don't hesitate to ask questions before you arrive!
3. Understand the risks of whitewater rafting and spending time in the backcountry (easy to miss: dehydration and sun exposure).
4. Bring and utilize appropriate gear -- see packing list. Personal clothing and accessories should be suitable for your trip's weather and current river conditions.
5. Our guides are professionals and will be treated as such. You will be expected to respectfully follow their instructions.
6. Treat your guides and fellow trip guests with kindness and respect. Harassment of any nature is not tolerated at Salmon Raft.
7. Follow the examples of our guides and practice Leave No Trace principles. Leave as little impact on the environment as possible.
8. We love kids! For everyone's safety and comfort, please help be responsible for your children's comprehension and following of our guides' instructions.
9. Remember that you are part of a group. Practice flexibility in knowing that others may have different goals than you.
10. **Have fun!** We invite you to fully immerse yourself in the magic of river life.

## WEATHER CONDITIONS

Our company is based in McCall, which sits at about 5,000' elevation. The starting point for your trip is at roughly 1,600' and continues to drop as we go down river. Understandably, it is a different climate in McCall versus on the river (precipitation, temperature, etc.).

When looking at weather forecasts for your trip, good points of reference are: **Hells Canyon Dam, ID** (starting) and **Heller Bar, WA** (ending location).

Furthermore, please remember that weather can change suddenly and unpredictably when we're deep in the river canyon. Please bring plenty of layers and don't forget your "just in case" items, like a rain jacket. It is imperative to bring clothing and gear suitable to spending multiple days in a backcountry setting.



# AN IMPRESSIVE HISTORY

One of the most special parts of a multi-day river trip is the recognition of the deep history that the Snake River through Hells Canyon holds. You will float through landscapes that have been inhabited for more than 10,000 years! It's impossible to give an adequate and thorough history in just a few paragraphs. As such, we invite you to learn more by engaging in our Recommended Reading list (found on page 3).

We operate on the land of the **Niimiipuu (Nez Perce), Shoshone-Bannock, and northern Paiute Indians**. We acknowledge and respect the rich history and people that were here long before us.

Hells Canyon boasts an impressive depth of nearly 8,000 feet, making it North America's deepest river gorge. Though dammed, the Snake receives an extraordinary volume of water from surrounding drainages in the Owyhees, Jarbidge, Sawtooths, and Teton mountain ranges. This section of the Snake River follows the jagged peaks of the Seven Devils mountain range and creates the border between Idaho and Oregon. Over the course of the last 300 million years, the geology of the canyon has changed dramatically -- beginning with the emergence of a volcanic arc, forming limestone platforms and basalt lava, to the settling of sedimentary rock, the topography of this river section is dramatic and diverse. The landscape is just as diverse, with the top of the canyon holding dense forests and snowy mountain peaks, contrasted by an arid desert environment at the bottom.

Regulatory bodies dictate how much water flows through Hells Canyon each day, depending on hydroelectric needs. Sometimes flows can change day-to-day, and hour-by-hour. While there is talk about dam removal on parts of the Snake River, the biggest conversation is surrounding the four Lower Snake River dams (down river of the section that you'll experience on your trip). In the early 1800s, salmon and steelhead numbers were in the tens of millions. Today, less than 10 percent of these populations return. Impact from humans, deteriorating habitat, poor oceanic conditions -- and dams -- contribute to the sad state of these wild fish. Anadromous fish (ocean-migrating) are incredible in many ways, and their impact runs deep: they provide food for species such as otters, bears, eagles, osprey, and endangered orca populations; a revitalized fish population would boost local fishing and tourism economies; and these fish are central to many native cultures as well.

There is evidence of the canyon's rich history throughout your trip. You'll explore homesteads from the 1800s, see evidence of mining attempts, hear stories of the hardy people that made the canyon their home. We look forward to sharing our knowledge with you, as your experience will be felt more deeply while learning about our area.

# DIETARY RESTRICTIONS & OUR MENU

We are happy to offer modifications to our menu to accommodate guests with dietary restrictions and allergies. Our menu includes daytime snacks, lunches, appetizers, dinners, desserts, and breakfasts. Please note that we cannot always provide the same diversity or sophistication for restricted diets as we do for our regular menu. By the same token, we are often unable to source certain allergen-free snack foods in McCall, so feel free to bring your own items to supplement our supply.

Advance communication is always best, and we can work together to make sure we have what you need.

We can provide options for vegetarian, gluten-free, dairy-free, and some other restrictive diets without applying any additional fees. However, to cover any increase in costs for more complex needs and requests, there may be a supplemental fee ranging from \$5-20 per person per day.

# BEVERAGES

- In addition to endless, fresh drinking water, Salmon Raft also provides:
- Coffee (plus cream and sugar options)
  - Selection of tea, caffeinated and decaf
  - Sparkling water
  - Soda (limited)
  - Juice
  - Domestic beer (such as Coors, Coors Light, PBR, Budweiser, Bud Light, etc.)
    - Supply is calculated for each adult to have 2-3 beers per day
  - Red and white wine
    - Supply is calculated for each adult to have 1-2 glasses with dinner

If you would like anything extra (liquor for cocktails, mixers, etc.) you are welcome to bring your own supplies. We provide a limited supply of cocktail ice at camp in the evenings.

# MORE FISHING INFO

Ample fishing opportunities are available throughout your trip. Hells Canyon boasts some of the best sport fishing in the country. Smallmouth bass and rainbow trout fishing is "fin-nominal" for both traditional spin fishing and fly fishing. We'll also have the chance at the true trophy of the Snake River -- sturgeon! These ancient fish can grow over ten feet long and will put any angler's skills to the test. Sturgeon are handled by our guides as part of our commitment to safe fish handling, however guests are welcome to assist in reeling them in and touching the fish after we land one. Fishing in the canyon is productive from May through September.

Guests need licenses from Oregon ([here](#) for anglers age 12+) and Idaho ([here](#) for anglers age 14+).