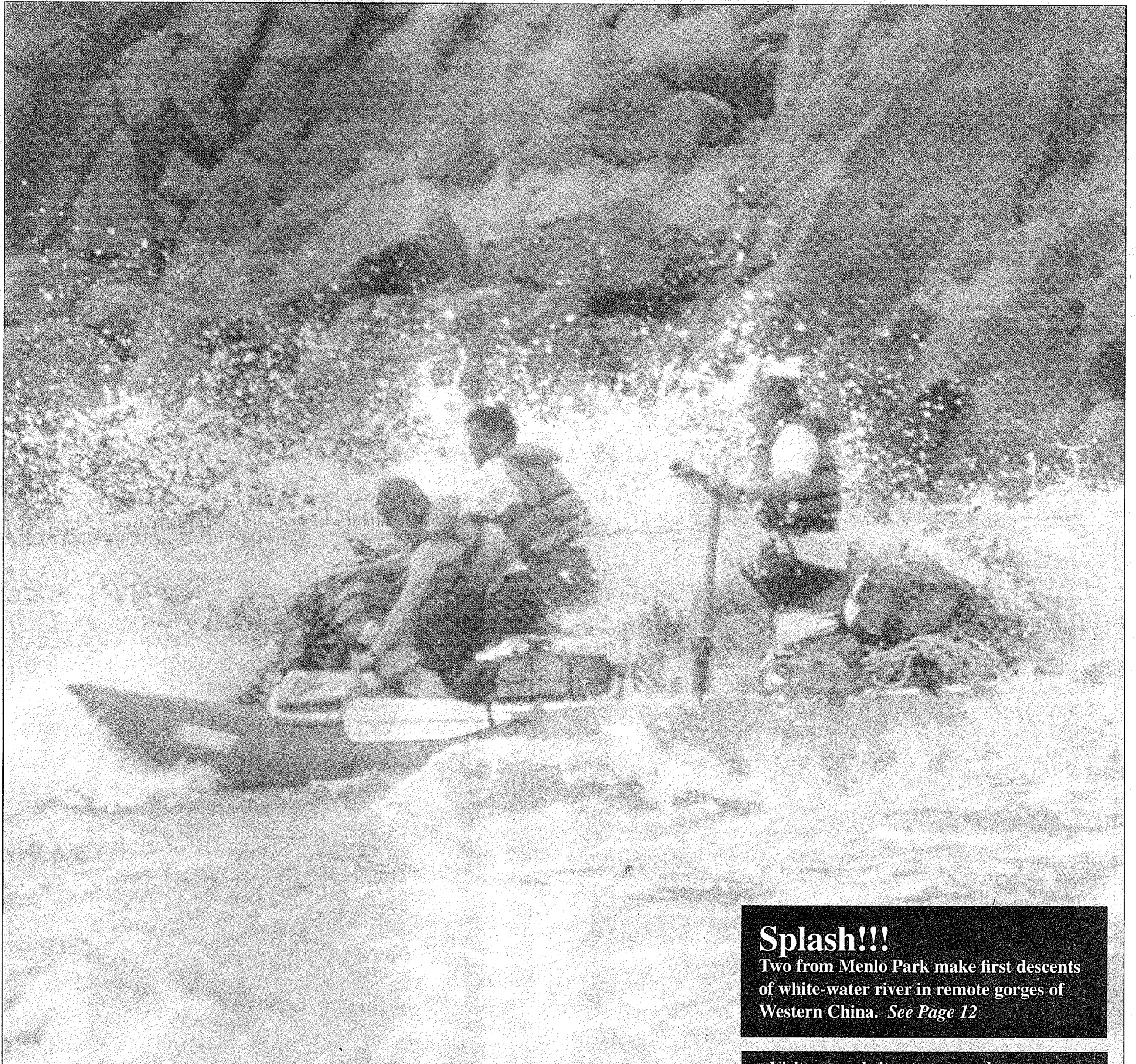


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The Almanac

JULY 8, 1998 ■ VOL. XXXIII, NO. 44 ■ 50c



Splash!!!

Two from Menlo Park make first descents
of white-water river in remote gorges of
Western China. *See Page 12*

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ATHERTON

Lawyer seeks council
seat; endorsed by three-
members of council,
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SECTION 2

Health & Fitness:
Avoiding the sun's
damaging effects.
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Atherton lawyer endorsed by three council members in his bid for council seat

By JESSIE SEYFER

Although the official filing date is not until the middle of July, candidates for the Atherton City Council are already making themselves known. Atherton attorney Alan Carlson, who has lived in the city for 10 years, announced his candidacy July 2.

He is being endorsed by current council members Bob Huber, Nanette Chapman and Malcolm Dudley, who are also endorsing Councilwoman Didi Fisher. Ms. Fisher earlier said she would seek another four-year term.

There are three seats on the five-member council up for election November 3. They are currently filled by Mr. Huber, Ms. Fisher and Councilman Bill Conwell. Mr. Huber is not seeking re-election.

Mr. Conwell said he had made a decision about running but was "not in a position to announce it at the moment."

Mr. Huber said he would en-

dorse Mr. Conwell if he were to run.

This is Mr. Carlson's first foray into city politics, although he has worked as an attorney for the city in negotiations with the Atherton Police Officers' Association.

He said he is extremely proud of the understanding that was achieved between the two parties since he was retained in 1995.

"I don't have an agenda for radical change," he said. "My intent is to preserve what the town already has. Atherton is a wonderful community."

Speaking on behalf of himself and Ms. Chapman, Mr. Dudley added, "We both feel that he is such an outstanding candidate that we have to give him our support."



Alan Carlson

Filing period opens July 13 for candidates in November elections

By MARJORIE MADER

With summer barely here, it's already time for candidates to file for the local November 3 elections.

Filing period for candidates opens on Monday, July 13, for elections to four school boards, the Atherton and Menlo Park city councils and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board. There also will be elections for openings on the Sequoia Hospital District Board and the San Mateo County Harbor District.

Prospective candidates for district boards have until 5 p.m. Friday, August 7, to take out papers and return them to the Registration Election Division, 40 Tower Road, San Mateo. There isn't a filing fee.

Candidates for the Atherton and Menlo Park city councils must pick up papers from the respective city clerk's offices during the same period.

If an incumbent does not file for re-election, the filing deadline is automatically extended five calendar days.

Elections will be held in the following cities and districts:

Atherton: Three seats for a four-year term. Incumbent Dianne "Didi" Fisher has announced her candidacy for re-election while Councilman Bob Huber has decided against

running. Councilman William Conwell hasn't announced his intentions. Atherton attorney Alan Carlson said he will be a candidate.

Menlo Park: Three council members, each for a full, four-year term. Incumbents Steve Schmitt and Bernie Valencia said they will run; incumbent Robert Burmeister hasn't announced his intention.

Las Lomas Elementary School District: Three seats for a four-year term. Trustee Kerry Bouchier won't seek election; incumbents Lee Anderson and David Fichtner haven't announced whether they will be candidates.

Menlo Park City Elementary School District: Three seats for four-year terms. Incumbent Karen Canty will be a candidate; Trustee Joe Terhar won't seek re-election. Trustee Valerie Rynne hasn't announced her decision.

Ravenswood City Elementary School District: Three seats, each for a four-year term. The terms of trustees Ruben Abrica, Lois Fronto and Boman Siwatu expire.

San Mateo County Board of Education: Three seats, each for a four-year term; one two-year term. The terms of incumbents Susan Alvaro, Andrew Estigoy and Beverly J. Willis-Gerard expire. Appointed incumbent, Dr. Catherine Casserly, must run for the remaining two years of the term if she is to continue to fill the position vacated by Richard S. Gordon when he was elected county supervisor.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District: Ward 6, which includes Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley, Woodside and part of Redwood City, one seat for a four-year term. Ward 5, representing Palo Alto, one seat for a four-year term. Incumbents are Betsy Crowder of Portola Valley for Ward 6; Nonette Hanks of Palo Alto for Ward 5. Prospective candidates must file during the same filing period with the open space district at 330 Distel Circle, Los Altos.

Sequoia Hospital District: Four terms.

San Mateo County Harbor District: Two terms of four years each.

For further information, call the county Registration-Elections Division at 312-5370 or the appropriate city clerk's office.

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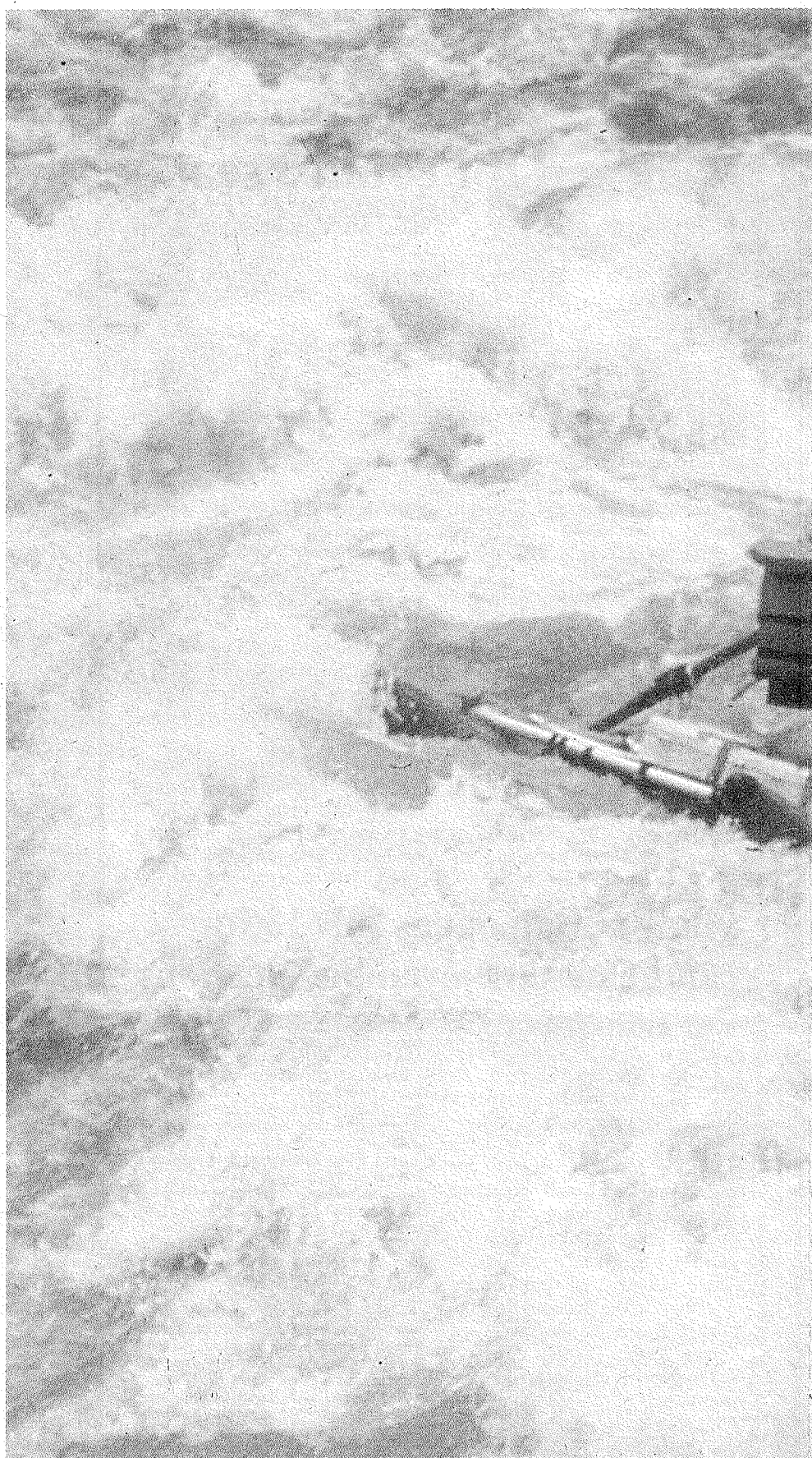
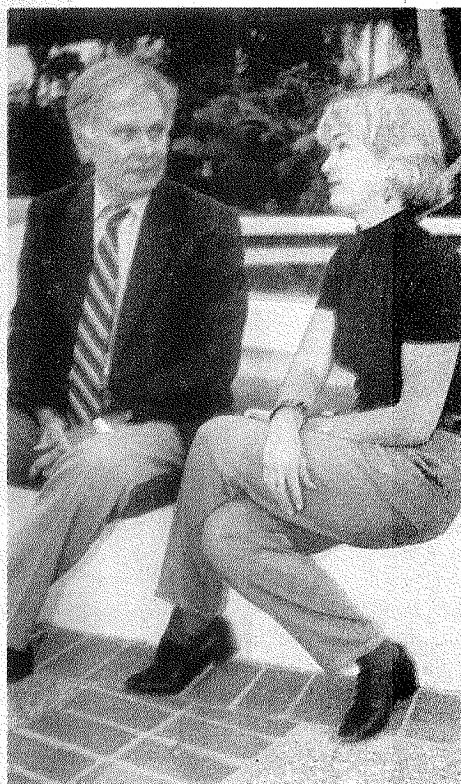
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Bigger Than the Grand Canyon

David Hettig and Kym Gentry of Menlo Park descend rapids bigger than those in the Grand Canyon in first descents on the Mekong River in China's rugged west

By Marion Softky

In their other life, David Hettig and Kym Gentry of Menlo Park appear like the normal Silicon Valley professionals they are. Mr. Hettig is an attorney specializing in wills and estates; Ms. Gentry is sales and marketing director for Creative Network, a small computer consulting firm in Palo Alto.



The river slowed ominously as the group of eight Americans and a Chinese scientist floated toward the gorge where half a mountain had slid into the Mekong River in the wilds of Yunnan Province in western China. “We thought, ‘Uh-oh,’” says Menlo Park attorney David Hettig, one of the Americans on the first descent of a 100-mile stretch of the Grand Canyon-scale river that descends 2,500 miles from the Tibetan plateau to the storied delta in Vietnam.

The rafters pulled out to scout the rapid. Uh-oh indeed. “These were the biggest rapids any of us had ever seen. They were like two of the largest Grand Canyon rapids put together — and then some,” Mr. Hettig recalls, adding

half jokingly, “We spent the night on the bank above the rapids, and everyone sat down and wrote their wills.”

The first to go through the rapids the next morning was Dr. Fred St. Goar, a Menlo Park cardiologist and “superb kayaker.” Pictures show a very small dot among frothing waves. “He had the ride of his life,” says Mr. Hettig.

Mr. Hettig rowed the rapids with Han Chunyo, a paleogeographer from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as passenger. He describes the next harrowing moments: “I went into the hole, and the oar ripped right out of my hand. I had to get the knife out and cut the spare oar free — and not stab the raft — and get the oar into the oarlock, while being bounced by six-foot waves.” Another 16-foot raft flipped, and Dr. Robert Rabkin of Sausalito did the rapids under water — but somehow alive.

They named the rapids “Dragon’s Teeth” for the dragon that the locals think lives underground. Sometimes he moves, causing the

Cover Story

Left: David Hettig plunges solo down the "No Exit" rapid - so vicious they rated it "11 on a scale of 10" on the Mekong River.



Above: This charmer was typical of the friendly, unspoiled villagers who enchanted the rafting crew members on their voyage down the remote Mekong River. She specially loved the bubbles they brought along to entertain the children.

Below: Kym Gentry shares a moment with a village family. Many were minorities who had never seen foreigners and didn't even know Chinese.



the Mekong River. In November 1995, they spent 10 days scouting the 100 miles above the Man Wan Dam, a day-and-a-half bumpy ride west of the provincial capital of Kunming. In April 1997, Mr. Hettig and a somewhat different group spent another 10 days floating and bouncing down the hundred miles downstream from the Man Wan Dam. This dam, completed in 1992, is the first of 10 planned for the Mekong River. On the second trip the flotilla drifted through the construction project for the next dam.

Next September Mr. Hettig hopes to join a

third exploratory trip, this time to the Litang River, closer to Tibet.

Woman on board

Mr. Hettig's second trip featured a new wrinkle — and not in the land. A woman joined the formerly all-male group.

Kym Gentry, also of Menlo Park, brought, not heavy river experience, but knowledge of China and Chinese, fearless energy, and a gift

(Continued on next page)

earthquakes that regularly shake the seismically active area. One such earthquake triggered the landslide that created the rapids.

The pioneering trip down 100 never-rafterd miles of the Mekong River was more than just an adventure. It was a geological reconnaissance sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and led by geologist Peter Winn of the non-profit Earth Science Expeditions to check maps and identify geologic features in remote areas of western China away from roads and trails.

The Mekong River, the 11th longest in the world, originates on the Tibetan plateau near the Yangtze. It flows south through 5,000-foot canyons, formed, like wrinkles on a tablecloth, as India relentlessly shoves under Asia to raise the Himalayas and Tibet. Then — larger, wider and slower — the river passes through Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam on its way to the South China Sea. This is also earthquake country, where the dragon under the earth is often restless.

Through the gorges of western Yunnan Province, the Mekong River is much like the Colorado through the Grand Canyon, Mr. Hettig says. Over their 200-mile exploration, it drops 9 feet per mile — slightly less than the Colorado in the Grand Canyon. This drop makes for big rapids, which are graded on the Colorado River scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is basically unrunnable.

The trip was also an amazing opportunity for the rafters — all of whom had Grand Canyon experience — to see an area of China so remote that many natives didn't even speak Chinese and had never before seen foreign "round eyes."

"Many of the people had never been more than two days' walk from their home," says Mr. Hettig. "They are still plowing with bare feet and wooden plows."

Nevertheless, for Mr. Hettig the people, not the thrills and spills, were the high point of his trips. "They are just delightful," he says.

Mr. Hettig has actually been on two trips on

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Cover Story



"Across the Bridge Noodles" were among the treats offered David Hettig and his tripmates at a 20-course farewell banquet put on in Kunming by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which sponsored their geological reconnaissance trip on the Mekong River.

Splash

(Continued from previous page)

with people.

Ms. Gentry has been to China four times and speaks Chinese. A graduate of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, with an MBA in international management, she has worked in Beijing with Hewlett-Packard. She has also traveled the fabled Silk Road alone, riding trains, trucks, buses and planes — "any way I could. It was great," she says.

Later this summer, Ms. Gentry will leave her high-pressure, high-tech job as sales and marketing director for Creative Network, a small consulting firm based in Palo Alto, for Pakistan. There she will apply her business ability to helping a women's cooperative develop a handicrafts business and personal skills. "I'll help them develop independence and keep their culture alive," she says. "I want to go into non-governmental international work with women and children."

Mr. Hettig has another life locally that is not involved with his passion for white water. An attorney specializing in wills and trusts, he has been working for years with the YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula on building a new branch in East Palo Alto. He also helped human rights activist Ginetta Sagan of Atherton found the Aurora Foundation to supplement the work of Amnesty International in helping prisoners of conscience around the world.

Mr. Hettig first discovered the urge to challenge big rivers by reading the late Wallace Stegner's

"Beyond the 100th Meridian," which chronicles John Wesley Powell's historic first descent of the Grand Canyon. He's been rafting every since. "It's in my blood somehow," he says.

Trip 2

Again the participants in the 1997 expedition — seven Americans, an Australian professor of ecotourism, and Ma Da from the Chinese Academy of Sciences — met in Kunming to assemble their commissary and pack for the jolting ride along the old Burma Road past 10,000-foot mountain ranges to the Mekong River.

In Kunming they got a view of the new China. Besides supermarkets, Mr. Hettig was impressed with street corner groups of young women, in snappy short skirts and makeup, holding cell phones. "That was the image we have," he says. "The only people in Mao caps and jackets were elderly. Politics was not obvious, but economic activity was thriving."

Ms. Gentry adds, "This was the first time in China I could use my credit card."

For Ms. Gentry, the low point of her trip came after the first three days of lots of rain — with inadequate rain gear — and no rapids. She was scrambling up a muddy slope and fell and rolled down the hill in the mud. Fortunately she was OK. "If anybody in the group got hurt, it put the whole group at risk," she says.

Her high point for the trip was also the people, especially the children. And at every stop people would come down from their fields and villages to see the strangers. One teacher brought his whole school of 50 children to see the round eyes. Many were minorities and could not even understand

Chinese. "In a place like this, it's always the children you talk to. The kids are being taught standard Chinese," Ms. Gentry says.

The people were friendly and curious. And their radius was what they could walk. Ms. Gentry remembers giving a woman a ride across the river. Normally she would have walked 10 hours up stream to a ferry and then walked back on the other side for another 10 hours. "Most of these people had never been more than two days walk from their home," says Mr. Hettig. "They had no idea why we were there or where we came from."

Ms. Gentry adds, "Of most interest to these people was our technology — other than me." Indeed she must have been a surprise; she's slender, very blonde, and speaks Chinese.

The villagers respected the river, but they couldn't swim. "The river is to be feared and respected," says Ms. Gentry. "This is their life. It can give life and it can take it away."

Between starlit nights on pristine beaches with fireflies flashing, the rafters plunged through dramatic rapids with names like Red Button, Big Dynasty, Horse and Pig, Chinese Lunch ("after it eats you, it's hungry again"), Ganbai (a Chinese toast meaning bottoms up), and No Exit.

No Exit earned its name. It flipped one boat and scared off a couple of the men who had families. "It was by far the worst rapid any of us had ever seen — basically unrunnable. On a scale of 10, it was an 11," Mr. Hettig says. "It has five big waves 15 feet high; any one would flip a raft. Waves were exploding into spray 20 feet in the air."

While several team members

portaged around the rapid, Mr. Hettig let his raft go downstream unloaded on a line, but that took so long, he finally ran the last half of the rapid alone, without load and without passengers — and managed to avoid, just barely, the big “keeper hole” waiting to trap and keep him.

That was the only time on the trip Ms. Gentry was afraid. “When I saw David trying to get that raft out of the eddy, then I was afraid for him,” she says.

Between the rapids and camps, some of the scientists recorded geologic features and tried to take measurements with their Global Positioning System (GPS) equipment that precisely records locations by checking with a satellite. The idea was to check and correct older maps, many of which were inaccurate. The only trouble was they had trouble with the GPS. “The canyons were too deep to get good readings,” says Mr. Hettig.

The miracle was that during the two trips over surging mountains of water in deep, remote canyons, no one was hurt. That’s a tribute to teamwork, Mr. Hettig says. “It has to be a team working through problems. It has to be a team where everybody looks out for each other and for themselves.”

Memories of Tiananmen Square

Kym Gentry of Menlo Park will never forget her semester abroad in China in 1989; it ended with the ill-starred demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.

Her class of 40 foreign students returned from Shandong to Beijing late in May before returning home June 3. Their professor told them, “Don’t go to Tiananmen Square, keep your heads down, and don’t use a camera,” she says.

“So I went. I participated in the marches, I talked to the kids, I met some of the student leaders, I talked to writers and artists for my college newspaper,” Ms. Gentry continues. “It was like Woodstock. It was full of kids, and they were great, and they were tired. It was a cesspool.”

One night when her class was locked in the dormitory after curfew, Ms. Gentry heard a parade going by. “I climbed out the window in my bare feet and

pajamas and joined in. They were putting up the Goddess of Democracy.”

Ms. Gentry says the kids, who were demonstrating in crowds up to a million people, knew there were tanks outside the city, but “they didn’t think the government would come in and kill them,” she says.

By the time Ms. Gentry left June 3, the day before the historic massacre, the kids were tired and beginning to go home of their own accord. “It was winding down,” she says.

She got home and learned what happened June 4, when the tanks turned on the students and killed hundreds. She says, “I was devastated.”



Kym Gentry

Ladera author signs book at Kepler's

Mary O'Shaughnessy of Ladera and her sister, Pamela O'Shaughnessy, co-authors of the Perri O'Shaughnessy novels, will be at Kepler's Books at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 14, to sign their fourth novel, “Breach of Justice,” (Delacorte Press).

The book is part of a series that began with the sisters' first novel, “Motion to Suppress.” The leading character is attorney Nina Reilly, who practices law and lives in South Lake Tahoe. Pamela O'Shaughnessy, a graduate of Harvard Law School, worked as an attorney in the Tahoe area for several years and now resides in Pacific Grove.

Mary O'Shaughnessy has lived in Ladera with her husband and children for the past eight years. Two of the children attend Menlo-Atherton High School; one is a student at La Entrada School. Ms. O'Shaughnessy's background is that of a writer and editor for multi-media projects.

The sisters have just completed



Sister act: Pamela O'Shaughnessy, left, and Mary O'Shaughnessy will be at Kepler's Books on July 14 to sign their latest novel.

a book tour to a dozen cities, including Washington, D.C., Chicago, Miami, and Denver. They also have a new paperback out, “Obstruction of Justice,” which has gone into its second printing, with a total of 715,000 copies in print. Last summer their

second novel, “Invasion of Privacy,” was on the New York Times bestseller list.

“Our novels are a mixture of legal thriller and mystery, with a little humor and social comment thrown in because we can't resist,” says Mary O'Shaughnessy.

'Road rage' leads to assault on driver in Atherton

By JESSIE SEYFER

What started as a struggle to merge into a lane on Marsh Road ended in an assault on a driver by three men in another car on Sunday, July 5, Atherton police reported.

The driver told police he was slapped and punched in the face, and a Club anti-theft device thrown at his hip while he was in his car at the intersection of Mid-

dlefield Road and Oak Grove Avenue.

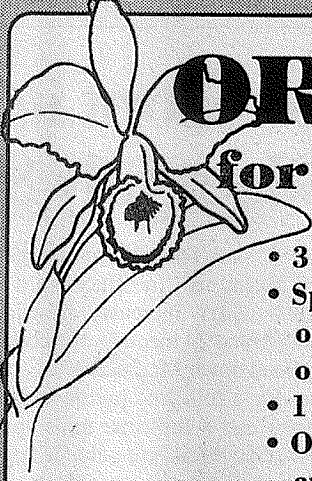
The incident began around 5:30 p.m. Sunday, when the driver, heading west on Marsh Road, attempted to merge into a lane and was blocked by a car, occupied by three men, he told police.

Once he managed to merge, the car tailgated him, said Police Capt. Steve Chaput.

When the cars reached the in-

tersection of Middlefield Road and Oak Grove Avenue, the three men got out of their car, surrounded the other car and assaulted him, Capt. Chaput said.

When the traffic light turned green, the man drove off. Based on a report by a witness and from the driver's account, Atherton police were able to determine the license plate number of the car with the three men. The suspects are being sought, said Capt. Chaput.

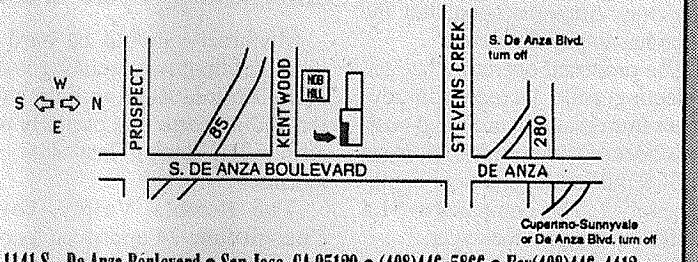


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