

THE ROGUE WILD

River has taken dozens of lives over the years

By Jeff Duewel
of the Daily Courier

Donald F. Myrick wistfully remembers a Rogue River trip he missed in October 1967, with a fellow trial attorney in town named Charles A. Telfer.

"The girls wanted to go see the fall colors, and there wasn't room for four people," said Myrick, now in his 80s. "So I was scheduled to go the following week."

The trip turned into one of the great tragedies of the Rogue River's storied past. Today the dangerous Telfers Rock stands forebodingly near the wall of Mule Creek Canyon, creating a nasty wave when the water flows high, and rearing its ugly head during low flows.

Telfer, his wife Shirley, and Linda Smith, wife of local dentist Donald Smith, pushed off from Grave Creek on Saturday, Oct. 14, in Telfer's 15-foot drift boat. Boat-builder Jerry Briggs sold Telfer the boat earlier that year, Briggs recalls today.

The Telfer party stayed Saturday night at Marial Lodge, where they talked to seasoned veteran Bob Pritchett about running the canyon, as told by Virginia Pritchett to river historian and author Roger Fletcher. Telfer was to follow Pritchett but was late Sunday morning, Fletcher said.

Briggs said he also stayed at Marial, and on Sunday followed Telfer down the wily canyon, though some time later. Below, he saw a drift boat being fished out of the water and no sign of occupants.

"I said, 'Oh boy, they all drowned.'" A string of life vests and gear floated out of the canyon earlier as Pritchett's group waited for the Telfer party. Billy Pyle, who rowed for Pritchett, pulled Smith's body out of the water not far below the canyon, according to Fletcher and accounts published in the Daily Courier.

The Telfers' bodies were not found until Oct. 25, by Dave Hellfrich, another guide.

Briggs believes Telfer floundered at the rock now named for him, but said no one witnessed the spill. The most dangerous spot in the canyon is actually the Coffee Pot, near where the river narrows to less than 15 feet in low flows and surges menacingly up and down.

"Some people believed he wrecked at the Coffee Pot, I think he wrecked on the rock above it," Briggs said. "That time of year the water would have been pretty low. You kind of have to run the bow of your boat close to the bluff and pull away to get by it safely."

"It was always my opinion he was boating a little bit over his head."

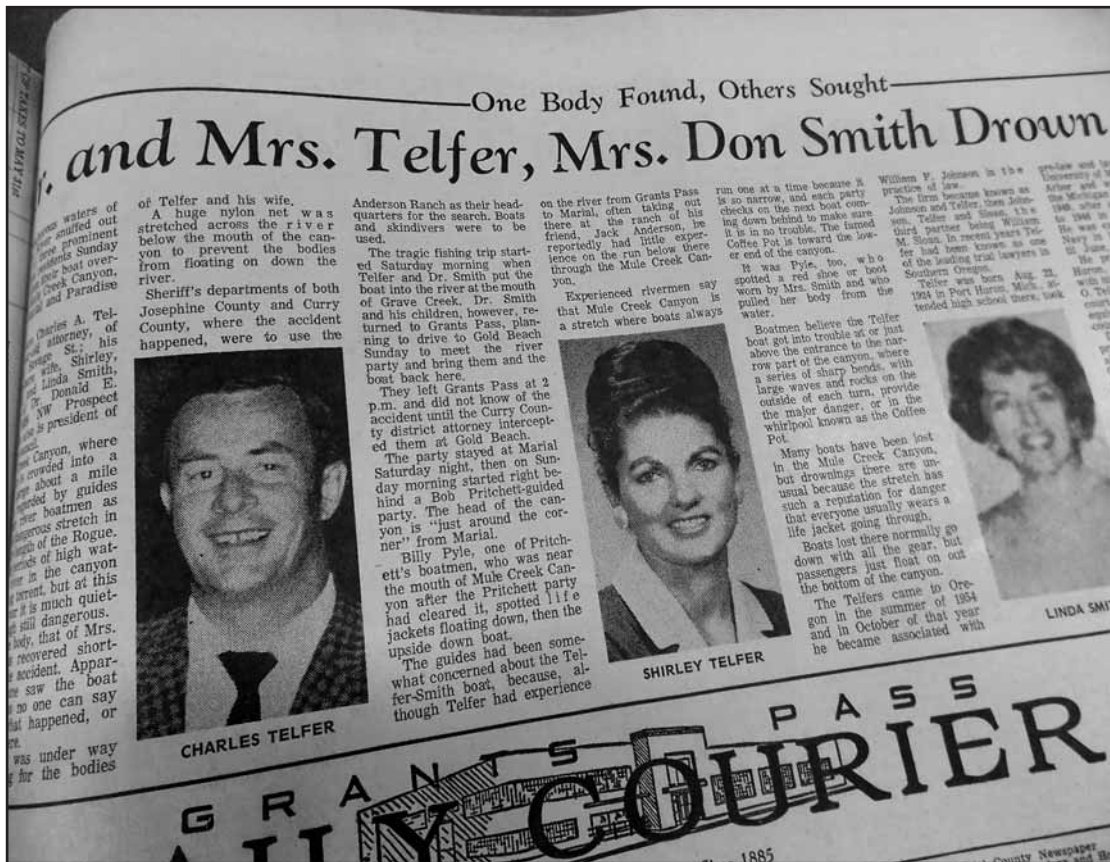
The boat Briggs sold Telfer had been painted pink at one time and called the "Pink Lady" for a publicity stunt for a McKenzie River parade. Briggs built the boat two feet shorter than his 17-foot Rogue River boats, because "all the guys said you couldn't run the bigger boats up there on the McKenzie." A smaller boat is more maneuverable, but less stable.

"I tried to get Telfer to buy a 17-footer," Briggs said. "I think if he had, they might not have ended up like they did."

Telfer, originally from Michigan, was in line to be circuit court judge, recalled Joan Sloan, wife of Telfer's law partner William Sloan. The Sloans now live in Sunriver.

"We came home and the minister was on our front step. We couldn't believe it," Joan Sloan said. "He was a special man, an excellent lawyer."

Myrick got a phone call the day of the tragedy and talked the late Henry Turk into flying them over to Gold Beach, to intercept Donald Smith and his two children, who had driven over to meet Linda.



The top of the Daily Courier on Oct. 16, 1967, reveals the tragic end of three people in Mule Creek Canyon a day earlier. The place where the drift boat presumably swamped is called Telfers Rock.

"We brought Don and the kids home; I moved in with him for a week," Myrick said.

Myrick said he couldn't believe Telfer left the life jackets in the boat, unused.

"I wished I had gone with him," Myrick said. "We'd have had our damn life jackets on."

When Rogue rafting legend Ferron Mayfield's older brother Darryl drowned at Rainie Falls in August, 1981, Ferron stepped back and asked himself, "Should I be doing something else?"

Then he had a dream.

"I asked Darryl, 'How is it being dead?' and he said, 'It's fine, the fishing's great and the weather's nice.'"

Ferron told Darryl he had plans to take Darryl's raft to South America for some crazy river running.

"He said, 'Go ahead, there's plenty of boats and fish where I am now.'"

It's easy to see why Ferron Mayfield, owner of Ferron's Fun Trips, is known as one of the great Rogue storytellers.

On that fateful day, Darryl was guiding for Bryce Whitmore's Wilderness Waterways and rowing the raft through the middle chute at Rainie, one alternative to plunging the dangerous falls.

The dudes were on the bank, but one of the



A plaque lies at the Mark Brandt Wall of Fame at Reinhart Volunteer Park, in memory of the former Grants Pass High athlete who drowned in the Rogue River in 1969.

Rogue about a quarter-mile above Morrison's Lodge. People were strung up and down the river for the annual Boatnik whitewater hydroplane race, between Grants Pass and Carpenter's Island.

Brandt, pushing a styrofoam box with picnic items, according to news reports the next day, disappeared in the cold water, near the bottom of Taylor Canyon. His father, former sheriff Bill Brandt, who died in 2007, found his son's body halfway through Ennis Riffle eight days later. River guide Glen Wooldridge's boat was used to recover the body.

Brandt, a 1968 Grants Pass High School graduate, was recruited for football by coach Ara Parseghian at Notre Dame and played one sea-

son on the freshman team.

The "Wall of Fame" at Reinhart Volunteer Park in Grants Pass, where famous local athletes are remembered, is named after Brandt. His sister, Lindi Baker, is presiding judge for Josephine County Circuit Court.

The Rogue River has taken dozens of people over the years to their death, usually those not wearing life jackets. Here are a handful of other notable Rogue River tragedies that occurred in the Wild and Scenic portion of the Rogue River:

■ **GARY DOLLARHIDE.** Dollarhide, age 18, drowned on Jan. 12, 1979, after falling out of a 12-foot raft in John's Rapid a few miles upstream of Marial. He was helping a friend on a trapline when the accident occurred. Dollarhide played football, basketball and pole vaulted at Hidden Valley High, where he graduated in 1978.

■ **CHAPIN CLARK.** The former dean of the University of Oregon Law School drowned at age 71 at the Coffee Pot in Mule Creek Canyon in October 2002, when a drift boat he was riding in wedged in the narrow section of the canyon. He was wearing a life jacket but was submerged under the boat for some time.

Four years later, a direct result of the incident, rules went into effect requiring guides and all passengers in whitewater rated Class III or higher to wear life jackets, and requiring guides to receive more rescue training.

■ **TREACHEROUS 2012.** In May, 19-year-old Joshua Eddy of Rogue River drowned below Rainie Falls after falling in the river while taking photos. On July 2, 17-year-old Garth Hall fell to his death at Hellgate Canyon Overlook during a fishing trip.

On July 9, 20-year-old Sean Kruger drowned while trying to swim across the Rogue just upstream from Griffin Park. His body was found a week later by rafters just downstream.

On July 19, Ronald Mongini, 66, of Lincoln, Calif., jumped out of a raft to save his dog between Hog Creek boat ramp and Hellgate Canyon. His body was found a few days later near Indian Mary Park.

■ **BLOSSOM BAR.** Five people lost their lives there since 2007, even though all were wearing life jackets. The vast majority of drowning victims on the Rogue were not wearing life jackets, but four of the five recent deaths involved being pinned under water at the infamous Picket Fence. Two died in September 2011. William Martindale, 68, of Sherwood, drowned when apparently trying to swim to shore with rope to pull his drift boat off the Picket Fence. Robert Nynam, 68, of Eugene overturned his raft on the river's north side and apparently suffered a heart attack.

■ **RONALD DUMAS.** Dumas, 75, of Williams, fell out of drift boat and drowned below Whitehorse Park while fishing in March 2010.

■ **STEVE REED.** Reed, 43, of Grants Pass drowned after jumping 100 feet off a rock above Hellgate Canyon on July 23, 2008.

■ **DAVID IRIZZARY.** The 17-year-old Grants Pass teen drowned after being swept over Rainie Falls in July 1999. He had been swimming with friends above the falls.

■ **WALTER HOWELL.** Howell, age 42 of White City, fell out of a drift boat below Whitehorse Park in February 1999, and drowned. Two other people in the boat survived.

■ **ERIC HAGAN.** The 17-year-old drowned while riverboarding near Brushy Chutes, 1 1/2 miles above Robertson Bridge, on April 28, 1998. According to his friends, the accident occurred when Hagan became entangled in a rope tied to the board and a tree. He had tried to perform a 360-degree spin, and the line snared his ankle.

■ **TED WAGERLE.** 56, of Grants Pass drowned on Oct. 26, 1997, when he slipped into the Rogue River at Matson Park while bank fishing.

Rainie Falls, shown looking upstream, is the only Class V rapid in the Wild and Scenic Section. Most, if not all, rafters go around the falls through a dynamited slot.



TIMOTHY BULLARD
Daily Courier

Notable Rogue River rapids

Class	Name	Description
IV	Nugget Falls	Nasty rapid above Gold Hill where kayakers go to play and compete.
IV	Powerhouse	A mile downstream from Nugget, dangerous chute with huge reversal at the bottom. Scene of a few drownings over the years.
III	Galice Chute	Popular rapid for weekend rafters, who can dry out at the Galice Resort and Store if they fall in.
III	Argo Falls	Known for swallowing up floaters who underestimate the big waves.
III	Grave Creek Falls	A fun drop of 6 or 8 feet at the beginning of the Rogue's Wild Section.
V	Rainie Falls	A dangerous 15-foot drop that most boaters go around through a dynamited slot. It's 2 miles below Grave Creek.
III	Upper Black Bar Falls	Easy for rafts, but drift boats must avoid the boulders in the middle by hanging close to the wall on the right. It's in the Wild Section.
III	Mary's Pothole	A hidden hole below Horseshoe Bend in the Wild section that can upend wary floaters.
IV	Mule Creek Canyon	A chasm like no other on the Rogue, that narrows to 15 feet at the infamous Coffee Pot at the bottom end.
IV	Blossom Bar	A massive boulder garden in the Wild Section guarded on one side by the dangerous Picket Fence. It's another rapid blown up by dynamite years ago to widen passage for boats.

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DAVES

OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT

Arctic Cat ATV/ROV may not be ridden by anyone under 16 years of age. See dealer for details.

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