

Niobrara

Before we put out canoes in the Niobrara River last Saturday morning, the UNL campus recreation staff tested our stress level with a detour through a muddy goose farm about midnight.

It was raining and the van, which was stuck in the mud of the driveway, had to be pushed. The geese were yacking and we feared the folks at home would wake up.

So, while trip leader Bruce Rischar cranked the engine and the wheels spun, the rest of us pushed. Success was ours. The van was freed, so we boarded and drove to the "real" campsite, set up tents and crashed, only minutes before it began pouring.

The next morning, water was everywhere, except on us. (Bruce had told us to wear wool and propylene underwear.) It was only misting now.

Before the 16 of us put in our canoes, I was thinking, "Is this going to be fun? A drag? Just plain wet? Gawd, it's misting now. What if a thunderstorm hits and lightning strikes me dead?" People die of such things, you know. My mortality became real to me last week after I crashed into a Subaru while on a scooter. Alas, we put in our canoes, paddled for about an hour, and then the misting stopped.

Now LaVonne Juhl, my canoeing partner, and I didn't have to constantly wipe the rain spots from our glasses.

After this weather development, canoeing down the Niobrara was smooth going.

Getting into the nature out there was great. But we all know the best part of any outdoor activity — whether it's canoeing, fishing, or mountain climbing — is eating.

When the time came for lunch we pulled our canoes onto the bank and got out the goodies —kipper snacks, bagels, cream cheese, strawberry preserves, apples, hot chocolate, sardines, clams, wheat crackers and American cheese.

The lunch crew set them all upon a food cooler. All the delicacies of life — the sardines

especially — sat on the cooler, which was next to, I might add, a fresh cow paddy. First it was Emily Cameron and then it was Cathy Sutura, followed by me and Wolf Kreutzberger who lightly stepped in the manure.

"Don't step here," Wolf said. His warning was heard by all, but wasn't heeded. The food — which we surrounded like ants on bubble gum — made us forget what was beside it. That is until we stepped in it.

The pleasure of eating can't be abused, so it was back into the water. LaVonne and I wanted to stay at the front of the pack. So we paddled hard. But, as from the beginning, we ended up at the back with staff leader Jenard Navarrete and his partner, Manuela Raith, who were to stay behind.

Jenard was a gracious teacher. He showed us why we were lagging behind. After practicing a few new strokes, LaVonne and I were on our way, passing up Cathy and her partner Karen Gillen.

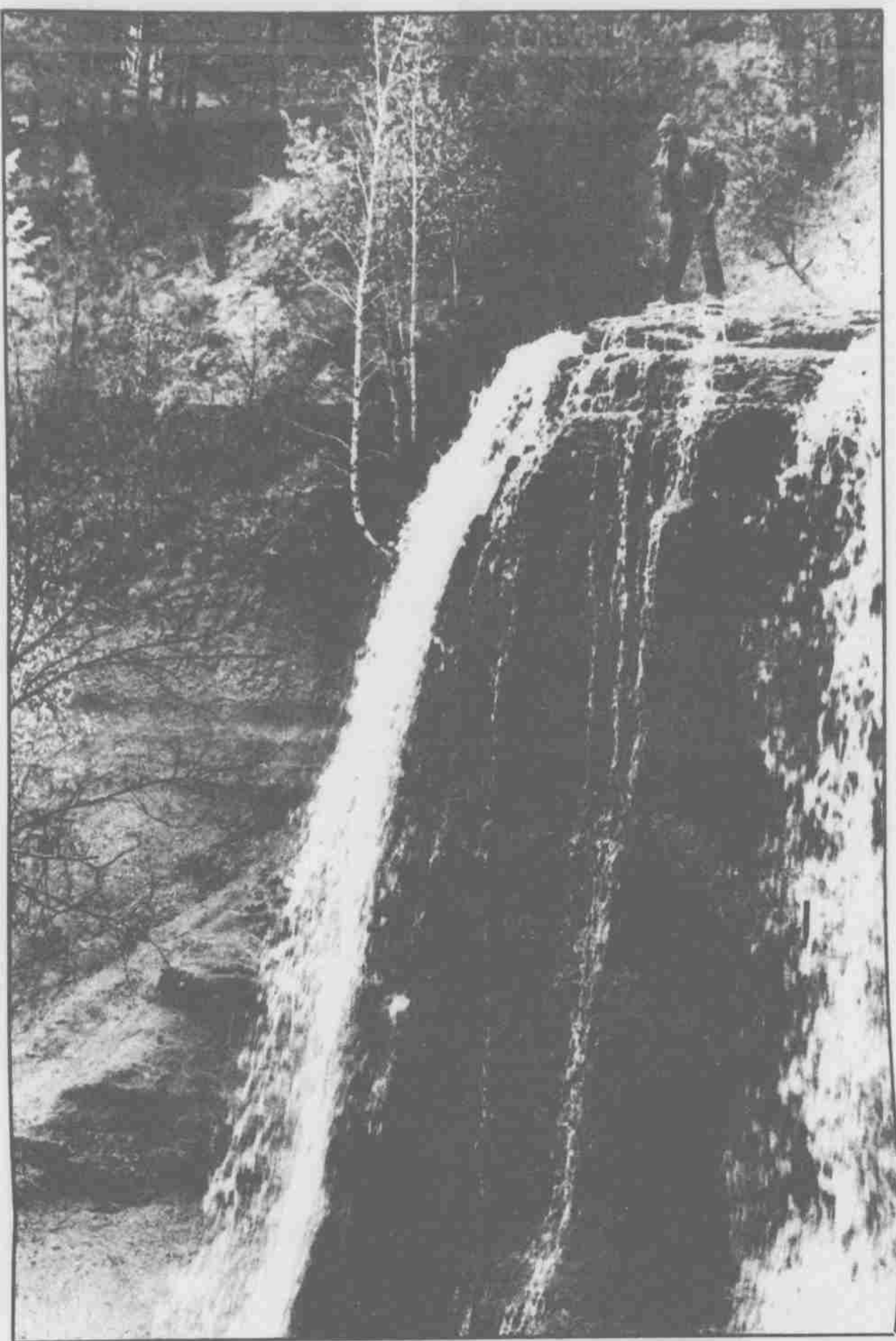
We arrived at Smith Falls about 2 p.m. We were to set up camp with the horses that graze near the falls.

"We're going to be sleeping by them tonight?" one canoeist asked. Apparently. So we cleared dung and sticks for smooth ground for our tents and then hiked to the falls.

The next day, while breaking for lunch on a sandy bank, I listened to the river. It flowed calmly by, and crickets and other insects hummed and buzzed. The trees were red, orange and yellow — their fall colors. I picked up some sand and felt it between my fingers. It was an altogether different world than downtown Lincoln, near where I live. No telephones, screaming police cars, nor the screeching of traffic of 10th Street. Only the calm gentle sound of nature.

The trip was good wholesome fun, a nice change from the bars of Lincoln.

Campus Recreation staff was well-prepared and trained. I'd encourage anyone to go on a trip with them.



*Story
and photos
by
Michael Hooper*

Clockwise from upper left: Emily Cameron, and Daniel Shattil, both of Lincoln, peel out from the bank of the Niobrara; canoers with the UNL Campus Recreation's trip down the Niobrara, paddle easy at a bend in the river; trip leader Bruce Rischar gazes over the edge of Smith Falls, which drops 85 feet; trip canoers from left, Shattil, Cameron, staff member Jenard Navarrete, Campus Recreation director Stan Campbell; UNL student LaVonne Juhl, visiting UNL professor Wolf Kreutzberger from Germany, Juhl's son Clifford, Cathy Sutura and Karen Gillen, both UNL students, Manuela Raith, a UNL employee, Kevin (munchie man) Palmer and his mother Bonda, a campus recreation employee; Dave Kleiber, a UNL student and staff member, Chuck Rey, staff member and UNL student, and Rischar.

