

5 THE SALMON

Floating nickname: River of No Return.

Flow chart: 425 miles from central Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains to the Snake River confluence in Hells Canyon near the Oregon border.

Great for this alone: Its world-famous tributary, the Middle Fork of the Salmon—a recreational Mecca listed by *National Geographic* as one of the top five rivers in the world to float.

Splashy quote: "The Middle Fork of the Salmon is the most celebrated wilderness river trip in America."

—Bob Volpert, *Idaho River Journeys*

Rivers aren't naturally about bragging rights. About being the biggest, the longest, the first to acquire Wild and Scenic River designation, the best at any one particular thing—or several. Not, at least, until humans enter the equation.

Then some rivers swiftly become gushing run-on sentences of superlatives. Few like the Salmon River and its must-mentioned Middle Fork, however, could be described like this:

"The Lower 48's longest free-flowing river within a single state, featuring the continent's second deepest gorge and one of the nation's top catch-and-release fly fisheries—all situated in continental America's largest wilderness area, and boasting one of the finest places anywhere to shoot Class II, III, and IV rapids."

You get the picture.

Back in 1805, the Salmon River gave the Corps of Discovery expedition enough pause to seek an alternative westward route when local Indians told them if they went down it they would not return. Hence the nickname—and the fact that people love flocking to the river that Lewis and Clark missed.



THE SEA DART BOAT, VIKING INGENUITY GOES LUXE

EDITOR'S PICK

Take the best aspects of a canoe and combine them with a kayak and what do you have? Not a canyak or kaynoe, fortunately, but the Sea Dart, a sleek hybrid designed in part by David Escobedo, founder of Escobedo Construction.

"It is tough enough to paddle in swift currents or light surf, yet weighs less than 55 pounds, so one person can carry it," explains Escobedo. Plus, it looks great in the water. Made from Joubert marine plywood imported from France, the boat's wooden planks are joined using lapstrake construction, a method that dates back to the Vikings, and then coated with

high-test epoxy, hand-sanded, and polished. "Neither screws nor nails mar the cockpit or slick lacquered deck," Escobedo says.

The process takes three months and requires about 30 man-hours to make. But as the first tests on Lake Austin, Texas proved, it's time well spent. The 16-foot-long deck skiff tracks straight, drafts shallow, and provides a secure platform for poling or casting. Plus, just like all of Escobedo's work, each boat is made to order with custom options like a cushioned captain's seat, paddle tray, and Yeti cooler. seadartboat.com

—Holly Hendrix