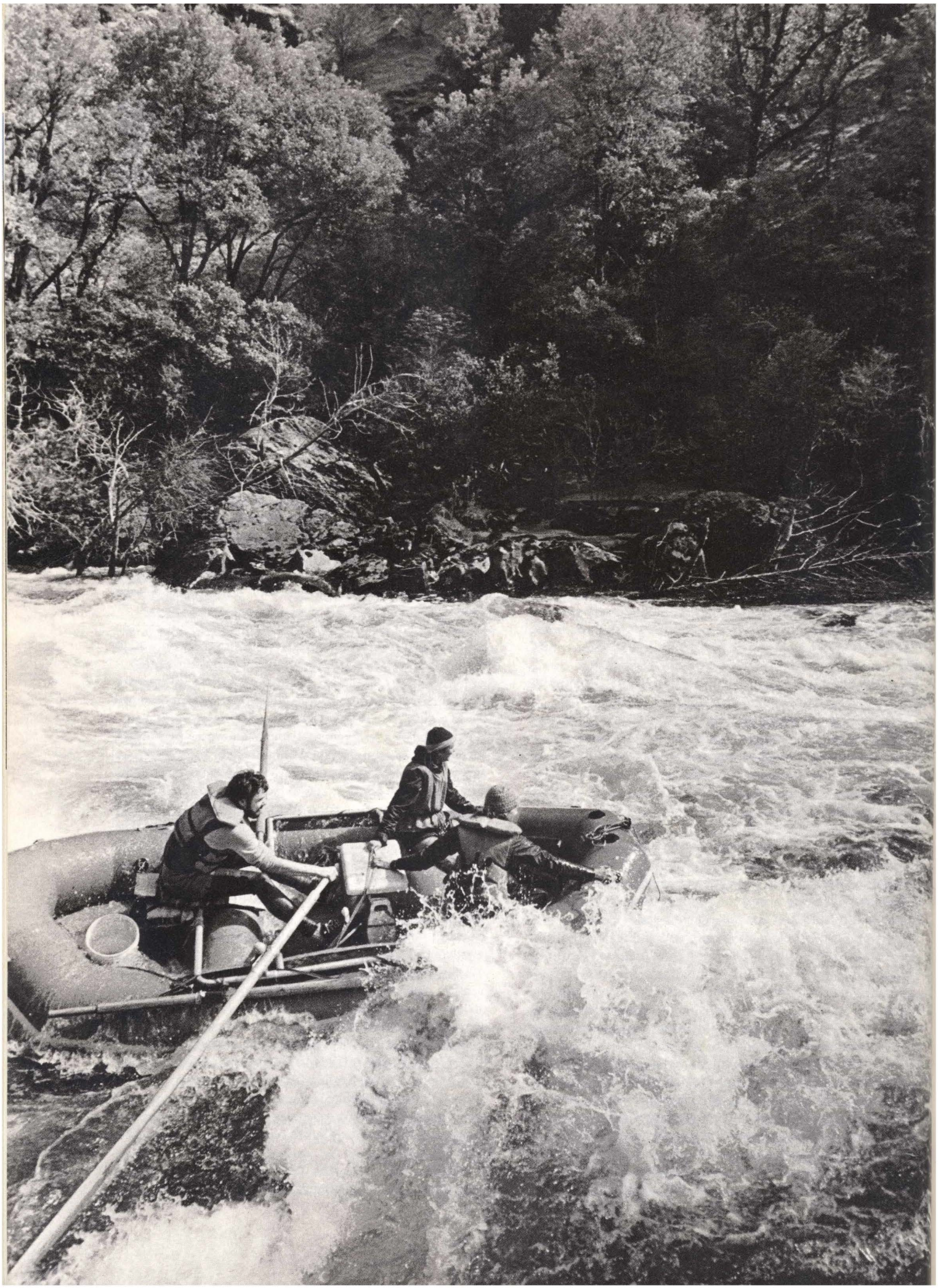


WE ARE GOING with the river now, into the bubbly, riding high on thirty-five hundred cubic feet of whitewater that will rush in a second around Death Rock and down the Devil's Staircase past the mortar holes where Miwok Indians ground acorns into meal, and around Otter Bar with its Gold Rush ruins into Razorback Rapids and under the limestone lair of the bandit Murrieta and over the trembling lip of Chicken Falls to Parrott's Ferry, end of the line. Beyond, the water goes slack and flat-out easy to a dam that stands sixty stories high. There are turbines in the dam to make electricity. After that, the water falls away to the valley, where it helps to make almonds and grapes and sunflower seeds and alfalfa and beef. We shall be going presently into this valley, too, though not in a raft if we can help it.

It occurs to me that dams were invented not only to hold back water but to divide the people. People seem always to be either for dams or against them; and after a dam is built, as most eventually get to be, then people are either for filling up the reservoir behind the dam, or for filling up the reservoir hardly at all.

Such is the case here, on this river. People are divided over how much water should be stored behind the sixty-story dam. Some folks want the reservoir to be filled almost to the top of the dam, so that there might always be plenty of water for making food and electricity. These people want more of what Americans have grown accustomed to having, or wanting, over the years. What most Americans have grown accustomed to wanting is plenty of everything. Other folks figure enough is enough. They want to draw the line at Parrott's Ferry. They want to keep the level of the reservoir a bit more low-down than half-full, believing, as they do, that this should suffice for watts and calories downstream. The line to be drawn at Parrott's Ferry would be symbolic as well as actual, for some of these other folks are the ones who believe that less is more and that small is beautiful, though they do not often articulate such thoughts in the company of cowboys and public-works engineers. Some of these other folks keep such talk to their pads in the gabled city, or save it for purling times in rubber rafts on the runaway river.

Here we go. The rapid up ahead—that's Cadillac Charlie. Why Cadillac Charlie? Don't ask me. This Mother Lode of California is salted and peppered with inexplicable names. The river, for instance: *Stanislaus.* The last of the Polish kings. Right? Wrong, says the boatman. Stanislaus is how the old grubstake missionaries used to mispronounce the Miwok name for a certain chief.

In the recorded beginning, it was called the Appelamminy. At least that's how Mountain Man Jedediah Smith addressed the river he followed east to the Sierra crest. Smith had come roundabout to California in search of beaver, had trapped awhile in the valley, and then, heading for a rendezvous at the Great Salt Lake, had tried to cross the wintered mountains by following the canyons of what we know today to be the Kings and American rivers. Each time deep snow in the passes turned the trapper back. So Smith hunkered down in the foothills and waited for spring, and then followed the Appelamminy to its source. And by that route he did manage to cross the High Sierra, first time ever by a white man. Overland wagons came this way to California, too, though from the other direction. For a time, then, the Appelamminy was the most forgiving way to go.

One can see that it is a working river for certain. It is fast and frothy, chalky-green with the grit of mountains, and its canyon is cut deep into the earth. It has worked hard for itself and for the people. It worked as a sluice for the Forty-niners, gave them the flow they needed to pan their gold. The Genoan Lorenzo Pendola came here in 1852, mined a little and successfully, purchased the ferry at Parrott's crossing, lost some money on the operation, bought a farm downstream. Pendolas plowed the rich riverbottom for a hundred years. Now their fields are growing fish behind the sixty-story dam.

And sometimes, by gross miscalculation, people made the river work against their better interests. As when the Union Water Company brought the Stanislaus to the placer mines at Murphys, on the uphill side of Angels Camp. They needed the water sure enough, for it was high and dry at Murphys. The Union outfit cut a long canal down off the North Fork, and when the water arrived in town everyone cheered. But their joy was short-lived; there had been a miscalculation. Someone had figured the drainage wrong. Such that after the water arrived at Murphys there was only one place for it to go—into the mines. It took ten years to clean up that act. The way I figure it, people still haven't learned.

Friend vs. Friend

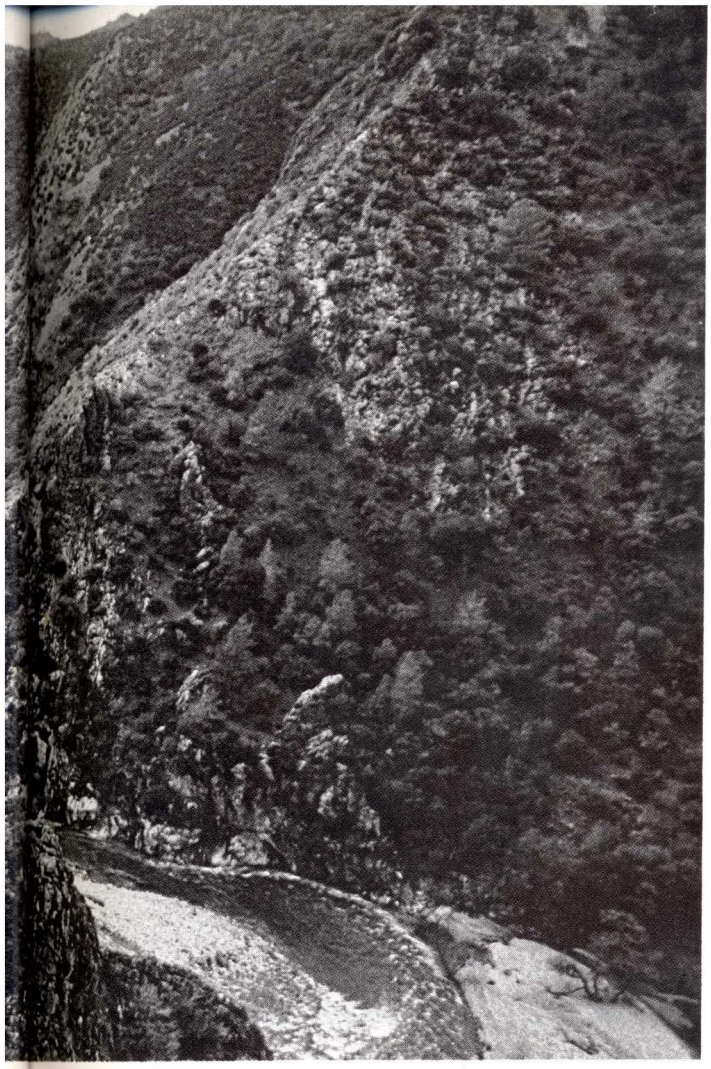
A bitter fight in California pits Friends of the River against Friends of New Melones over custody of the water of the Stanislaus; at stake in a controversy that has turned environmentalist against environmentalist is the most popular whitewater run in the Far West

article by JOHN G. MITCHELL
photography by LEN LAHMAN

When the gold played out in the foothills, the miners took their picks and shovels to the valley and began to grow food. And the water companies followed them, for now water was the new gold of California. Soon there were dams and reservoirs along the full length of the High Sierra, on the Feather and the American and the Mokelumne and Tuolumne, on the Merced and the mighty San Joaquin, on the Kings, the Kaweah, and the Kern. Soon, just about the only river in California that *hadn't* been dammed was the Smith, named for the trapper of Appelamminy fame. As for the Stanislaus, it had been dammed all right—in about a dozen places along its 120-mile length. One of these places was Melones.

The first dam at Melones was raised by the Oakdale and South San Joaquin irrigation districts, with substantial help from the Pacific Gas & Electric Company of San Francisco. The dam stood twenty stories high. It created a pool that, at full capacity, would hold 112,500 acre-feet of water—an acre-foot being some 320,000 gallons (or, as someone waggishly figured, the water-closet equivalent of 60,000 toilets). The project was officially dedicated on Armistice Day 1926. Boosters cheered, for now there would be plenty of everything. At least until the next war. Yet the next war—which should never have happened inasmuch as the one before it was said to have been the war to end them all—had hardly started when people began to say that the dam at Melones was getting old and inadequate and needed to be replaced. And why not, since there was now this Central Valley Project with its powerful friends in the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation? So people began to speak of a *New* Melones Dam. It would dwarf the old one—drown it, in fact. It would hold back the water-closet equivalent of more than 120 billion toilets. If everything went as planned, water rising behind the New Melones Dam would cover all traces of Parrott's Ferry and Chicken Falls and the bandit's cave and the Devil's Staircase. No more bouncing off Death Rock in rubber rafts. Now the traffic would be in submarines or scuba tanks. For this was going to be a dam to end them all. And who knows? New Melones just might do that.

THEY CALL THEMSELVES Friends of the River, and there are about three thousand of them scattered throughout California and the western states. They are mostly urban types, weaned in the suburbs, thirtyish to fortyish now in years, trending toward professional careers. They pay annual dues of fifteen dollars each to help support a staff of twelve with offices in Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. Additional funds are contributed by individual donors and commercial river-rafting entrepreneurs. Last year, Friends of the River raised $120,000 and spent about one-third of it jousting with those who are intent on making further mischief with a number of scenic streams, including the American and the Tuolumne. The remaining $80,000, more or less, was committed to the organization's major cause: saving a



Left: The wild Stanislaus and its canyon above New Melones Dam, "great hillside savannahs, all fresh and green in the soggy winter now, then tawny in drouth, the color of lions." Below: The dam, sixty stories high. "After that the water falls away to the valley, where it helps to make almonds and grapes and sunflower seeds and alfalfa and beef."

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

nine-mile stretch of the Stanislaus canyon between Cadillac Charlie and Parrott's Ferry from drowning behind the New Melones Dam.

It occurs to me that the word "friends" is growing in popularity as an institutional surname. There are Friends of the Earth and Friends of Animals and Friends of the Sea Otter and Friends of the Shawangunks, and now there are Friends of the River. Sometimes the names work as acronyms, sometimes they don't. FOE, for example, works splendidly, for Friends of the Earth is in fact among the most truculent enemies of resource exploitation. FOA and FOSO do nothing whatsoever to enhance the institutional image, but FOR (Friends of the River) is far better. FOR at least strikes a positive note. In the matter of the Stanislaus River, the opponents of FOR decided not long ago to band together under their own friendly banner. Briefly, they were known as Friends of the Dam. FOD, for short. Obviously *that* didn't work at all, for who in his or her right mind could possibly want to be friends with a dam? And then there was the possibility that the opposition might take unfair advantage of the acronym's association with the word *fodder,* meaning coarse food for livestock, or people readily available but of little value, as in cannon fodder. So the enemies of FOR decided instead to call themselves Friends of New Melones. FNM, for short, as in the sound one makes snoring with the mouth closed.

The San Francisco office of Friends of the River is located in a converted Army warehouse at Fort Mason by-the-bay, now headquarters for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Fort Mason, during the second war to end all wars, was used as a staging area for men and materiel shipping out toward the thunder. Now, under management of the National Park Service, Fort Mason, with its surfeit of usable public structures, has become a staging area for actors and artists, dancers and musicians, potters and weavers, public-interest lawyers and *pro-bono* admen, and, last but not least, such environmental activists as one would expect to find hanging around the offices of Greenpeace and Friends of the River. There is also the Zen Buddhist vegetarian restaurant called Greens, where Governor Edmund Brown Jr., according to the gossip columnists, has partaken of sprouts and curd with his friend Linda Ronstadt.

One bright winter morning before my trip down the river, I went to Fort Mason to call on Dick Roos-Collins, FOR's information director, and Don Briggs, a freelance photographer then in the process of producing a short film on the plight of the Stanislaus. Roos-Collins is the author of much of FOR's prodigious output of press releases, fact sheets, summaries, and analyses of the ongoing Stanislaus strife. He is a man who is steeped in statistics, who virtually wallows in the hard data of kilowatts and acre-feet. Just let Friends of New Melones try to run some new statistic up the flagpole, and up rises Roos-Collins to counter it with one of his own. "And on top of that," I was saying after we had adjourned the meeting to a table at Greens, "you've got to contend with the figures that are coming out of the Bureau of Reclamation."

Dick Roos-Collins at Friends of the River headquarters: "He is a man who is steeped in statistics."

"Sure do," he said. "Except it's not called that anymore. They got tired of hearing conservationists refer to it as the 'Bureau of Wreck.' So now it's called the Water and Power Resources Service."

"WPRS?"

"That's right," said Roos-Collins, "and judging by the facts they've been putting out, I'd say the way to pronounce that is *Whoppers.*"

The facts. Sitting there at Greens I found myself marveling suddenly at how many facts one must deal with nowadays in confronting an issue as complex as that of the Stanislaus. I mean facts about rainfall and runoff, peaking periods, power rates, earned surpluses, load center capacities, pumping requirements, transmission losses, reimbursable costs, irrigation subsidies, delivery systems, crop patterns, flow thresholds, groundwater deficits, and diurnal temperature changes, to name just a few. Fighting the good fight was a lot easier in the old days. One could rise up to smite the enemy from the heart. The rhetoric of conservation rolled like poetry from the lips of the knickered bards. With scant concern for diurnal temperature changes, John Muir some eighty years ago could scold the San Francisco water hustlers for seeking to drown the upper Tuolumne behind a Hetch Hetchy dam. "These sacred mountain temples," the great Muir said, "are the holiest ground that the heart of man has consecrated." Not that the *heart* was any more effective then than the mind. Matter of fact, Muir's heart-felt rhetoric could not have had much effect at all, inasmuch as the waters of his mountain temple were ultimately flumed to the spigots of the Tenderloin, there to be mixed with whiskey and other spirits. Ever since, some of Muir's disciples have grown increasingly uncomfortable with their soaring feelings, opting instead to fight the good fight with the sober fact.

Perhaps it is simply a matter of, when in Rome, doing as the Romans do. Dambuilders apparently place little value in feelings. For example: Major General R. H. Groves of the Army Corps of Engineers (the agency that built the New Melones Dam and then turned it over to Whoppers) once issued a memorandum on "improper" terminology. The General opined that there was "a growing trend in the use of the verb 'to feel.' Please avoid its use in any paper that you may prepare for my signature." And he continued, "Any action that I take is supposed to be objective, emotionally sterile, and totally devoid of all feeling." In short, warned the General, "see that your work is purged of this offensive word."

At Greens, I was delighted to discover that, for all his trafficking in facts, Dick Roos-Collins had not developed a Groves-like disdain for emotion. Nor had Don Briggs. In fact—or rather not in fact but in feeling—both had been drawn to the Stanislaus skirmish through a similar hearty attachment to runaway rivers. Roos-Collins' first river had been the one called Stones, back home in Tennessee. Stones River had been running away for thousands of years, maybe millions, when the Corps of Engineers brought it down with a dam. By and by, Roos-Collins came out here to California to be a working friend of all

rivers in general and of one in particular, the "Stan."

Don Briggs' first river was the Colorado, in the wild bubbly of the Grand Canyon. Briggs was living in Denver, then, working as supervisor of special studies and statistics for the Colorado Department of Highways. "So I've been there," he was saying at our table at Greens. "I know how statistics can be used."

So did Mark Twain, I put in. I had been thinking of Twain because the Stanislaus flows through Calaveras jumping-frog country, and the grand roustabout writer had spent a good bit of time thereabouts, probably up to the bar of the landmark hotel at Murphys. I told Briggs that Twain in his autobiography had noted how figures were most beguiling when one kept the arranging of them to oneself; and that, expanding on this theme, he had borrowed Disraeli's line about there being three kinds of lies–"lies, damned lies, and statistics."

Briggs nodded and said, "I know. I was the one in Highways who worked up the cost-benefit ratios. I was spending my weekends outdoors, hiking and rafting in the wilderness, and the other five days of the week I was at my desk, working to destroy it. I had to get out. I guided awhile on the Colorado, then came out here."

So how was this Stanislaus issue going to be resolved? Would victory ultimately belong to the side with the more beguiling figures?

"Not necessarily," said Roos-Collins. "A resolution of the issue will have to involve assumptions about values, too. In the long run, it might not be the numbers that count so much as the images." He turned to Briggs. "How do you see it?"

Briggs for a while seemed to see only the bay beyond the window, where Sierran runoff meets the briny of the sea. Then he said, "How do you express the flow of a river and what that does for you? People go on a river trip and–for some–it totally changes their lives. How do you express *that*? How do you describe the way it can put you right into the middle of an instant? Without sounding corny, how do you describe a spiritual experience to someone who's never been down the river?"

Now Briggs was staring at me. "Hang on," I said, "I'll be going myself, end of the week."

HANG ON, the boatman says sharply. And we do that. The raft folds inward on itself as it plunges–one-two-three–through the waves of the Devil's Staircase, then straightens itself out nice and easy in an eddy at the base of a limestone cliff. Here is another staircase, one of pure white quartz rising out of the water to scale the cliff. A dandy exit for a soggy devil, for certain. We purl on, with the river.

It is foothill country here between Cadillac Charlie and Parrott's Ferry. Our elevation above sea level is about one thousand feet, but we are dropping fast. The sides of the canyon are getting steeper. Rafting, one has a tendency to spend too much time watching the water. The boatman says: Look up at the canyon, too. Great hillside savannahs of wild oats and burr clover and filaree, all fresh and green in the soggy winter now, then tawny in drouth, the color of lions. Chaparral hillsides of toyon and chamise tumbling down to riverine thickets of willow and alder and ash. South-facing slopes with blue oak in pure stands, with digger pine, with buckeye and redbud and blackberry and buttonbush. North-facing, valley oak and incense cedar. And here comes–hang on–Bailey Falls.

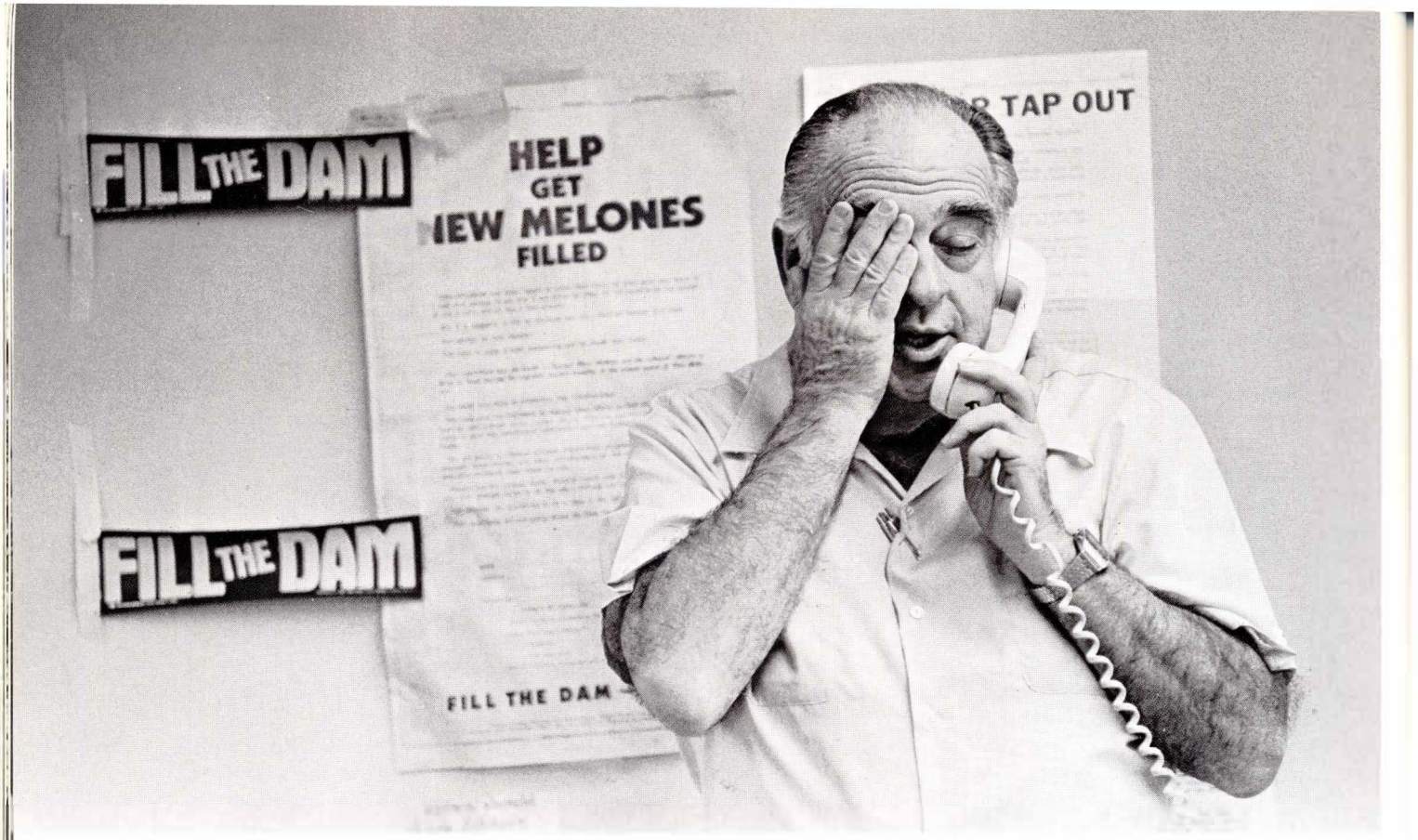
It is a canyon in which, moving with the river, one does not encounter a great deal of wildlife, though ouzels appear to be ubiquitous. There are signs on the sandbars, mule deer mostly. The boatman says there are coyotes, foxes, bobcats, martens, minks, muskrats, and marmots, too. And merlins and kites and Swainson's hawks and golden eagles. And beaver. Signs of beaver cuttings and beavertail skid paths along the banks of the river now. Keep a sharp lookout, the boatman says. Meaning, for beaver; the rocks, he already knows. No doubt old first-time-ever Jed Smith himself had a wary eye for beaver coming up this way eight-score years ago. Country was probably crawling with flat-tail critters then, all the side streams chockablock with sticks and gnawed trees, and the water rising in still, dark pools behind the dams. Kind of like recent damming times, though not quite. Not quite at all, with the proposed people-dam at New Melones growing high and higher on paper over the years, and the projected pool behind it growing large and deeper, and the facts and figures multiplying themselves, and no one in the Corps or the Bureau or the local irrigation districts having the beaver savvy to know how and where to draw the line.

The New Melones project started modestly enough, in 1940, on a drawing board in the Sacramento district office of the Corps of Engineers. Then the dam was to have created a reservoir with a storage capacity of 450,000 acre-feet, at a cost of $6.2 million. Three years later, the Bureau of Reclamation attempted to steal some thunder from its pork-barrel competitor by upping the proposed pool to 1,100,000 acre-feet. The Corps conceded that the Bureau's plan had merit, yet when Congress authorized the Flood Control Act of 1944, the New Melones funding clearly called for the smaller pool. Within two months, however, the Corps was listing New Melones in its reports as a 1.1-million-acre-foot reservoir with an estimated first cost of some $22 million–more than three times the sum just authorized by Congress. And before too long the Corps had the cost up again, to $42 million. Then the Bureau of Reclamation began to press for its own vaulted concept of New Melones: a reservoir of 2.4 million acre-feet, water backed up to Cadillac Charlie, at a cost of $114 million. All of which, in due course, was incorporated in the Flood Control Act of 1962. Work on the dam, however, didn't begin until June 1974, and it was another four and a half years before the dam was topped out.

So how much did it all finally cost?

Only three hundred and seventy-six million dollars, the boatman says (somewhere downstream from Bailey Falls). And that's not even counting–now hold on for *this*–the cost of the interest after construction.

MILTON KRAMER is the public relations consultant who has been retained by Friends of New Melones to fight the good fight as they see it, or possibly as Kramer sees it for them. His office is located in Thousand



Milton Kramer, publicist for Friends of New Melones: "There's a lot of disgust for these people."

Oaks near Los Angeles, but nowadays he is spending much of his time at FNM's headquarters on East Main Street in Stockton. Unlike FOR, FNM is not a membership organization. Its supporters are strictly *ad hoc*—farmers and ranchers with explicable interests in flood control and irrigation, for the most part, as well as various elected officials and civic leaders from Angels Camp, Sonora, Modesto, Manteca, Ripon, and Riverbank, all within the watershed counties of Calaveras, Tuolumne, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin, and all being places in which some people, inexplicably, still turn out waving the flag for Growth.

The way Milton Kramer sees it—or saw it when I drove out across the Central Valley to spend some time with him last winter—the New Melones issue is quite simple. "It is a fight," he said with feeling, "between those who believe their personal pleasure and profit should come first, and those who are devoted to using this project as a model of environmental management of a water resource." As I dutifully took this down in my notebook under his watchful yet sorrowful eyes, I tried to imagine on the one hand Roos-Collins and Don Briggs as slick river-running hedonists laughing all the way to the bank; and on the other, Kramer and the Army's district engineer and possibly a mayor or two as selfless stewards of the natural environment, each of them gussied up in a haircloth shirt like Saint Francis of Assisi. The juxtaposition of roles was intriguing. And when I looked up from my notebook, Kramer went mournfully on. "There's a lot of disgust for these people." (Meaning the other side, FOR.) "The feeling around here is that they represent the 'give-me-mine' generation. They're not even careful about the accuracy of their claims."

Suddenly a scene flashed across my mind's eye. In it, Kramer was standing in the doorway of a large greenhouse, glowering across a low fence at the windowless wall of his neighbor's place. Kramer was holding something in his right hand. It appeared to be a brick.

I suppose that extravagant claims-making is an occupational disease of the business of arguing in public. FOR, as Kramer suggested, has indeed been infected from time to time with a polemical itch. In one recent tract, for example, a footnote baldly states that New Melones "was designed to destroy irreplaceable historical and recreational heritages," as though cultural vandalism, rather than water supply or flood control, was the primary goal of raising a dam on the Stanislaus.

For their own part, Friends of New Melones have not been altogether in a state of grace and verity themselves. They keep throwing bricks at the recreational values of the whitewater stretch upstream from Parrott's Ferry. A paper issued by Kramer's office in Stockton, for example, concludes with the following lines: "Nor is the Stanislaus 'the most popular whitewater in the country.' The Bureau of Land Management states that the amount of rafting on most whitewater rivers in the United States is simply unknown. In the limited statistics gathered, BLM counts more visitor days on at least five other rivers." Now what exactly do we have here? Well, first we have PR Doublespeak: The facts are simply unknown, folks; now, here are the facts. Second, we have the phantom quote: "the most popular whitewater in the country." Now who exactly claimed *that* for the Stanislaus? Was it Friends of the River? FNM doesn't say, but that is clearly the implication. (What Friends of the River do claim is that the Stan is "the second most popular whitewater in the country," number one being the Youghiogheny of Pennsylvania.)

And finally we have the selective statistic: "BLM counts

more visitor days on at least five other rivers." And perhaps it does, though a phone call to the BLM's district office at Folsom is likely to elicit a somewhat different interpretation of the facts. I put my call through to Folsom and spoke with a BLM man named Kevin Clarke. "Visitor days are misleading," he said. "The Colorado in the Grand Canyon drew about 12,000 rafters last year. But almost every one was on the river from ten to thirteen days. If you count actual numbers of *people,* the Stanislaus is right up there. Last year more than 33,000 took that trip, more than went down Middle Fork Salmon, Rogue, Tuolumne, South Fork American. Now, we've come up with some brand new data that seems to show that the Snake at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, may be pulling more people than the Stanislaus. But if you try to make it look like the Stanislaus *isn't* just about the most popular in the West, you're just lying with statistics."

WE HAVE COME NOW nearly six miles to the river's confluence with its South Fork. The Fork itself has come fifty miles, down from the Emigrant Wilderness, from Whitesides Meadow, down through Pinecrest and Lyons reservoirs and the little town of Strawberry and the deserted mining camp at Pine Log (population: 1,500—once upon a time), past the cave called Crystal Palace, and then the waterfall to which mainstem rafters hike on hot summer days. But this is a winter's day and we do not need the waterfall. It is enough to be soaked to the skin and shivering in cloud-shadow on the Stanislaus.

I am curious to know who might have been this way first time ever with a raft or kayak. Surely neither a Miwok nor a mountain man. Not a missionary or miner; no affinity for water. I ask the boatman, but he is uncertain. The record is unclear until 1960. That was the year the writer Peter Whitney ran the nine-mile stretch and proceeded to share his discovery with other California kayakers. Within two years a commercial operator, Wilderness Waterways, was offering guided trips in big fifteen-person rafts. River touring was becoming the rage among outings types in the Sierra Club. Then *Sunset* magazine discovered the Stanislaus. It was a stream, said the magazine, "to make the spirits soar."

As the spirits soared, so did the number of people floating the river—from twelve hundred in 1966 to twelve thousand just five years later. River trippers were queuing up at put-in places along the nearby Merced, Tuolumne, and American, too, but the Stan had more of them. Why? What was the special combination of qualities and circumstances that seemed to make the Stan so different? Accessibility? Certainly, that was a part of it; but most of the other Sierra whitewater rivers were also accessible, three hours, more or less, from San Francisco Bay. Was it scenery and excitement? Surely that as well, for a 1971 California Resources Agency report on waterways rated the scenery and excitement of the Stan "equal to" the same qualities on Idaho's fabled Middle Fork Salmon. Still, Tuolumne scenery was probably better yet. And for sheer excitement, the Stan couldn't begin to touch the Tuolumne with its rambunctious Class V "big drops" and a streambed gradient among the steepest in the world. So why all this fuss over the Stanislaus? Where was its differentness?

Grasping for an answer, some aficionados of the Stan would say that perhaps the river's special character wasn't a differentness after all, but rather a kind of eclectic oneness with rafting rivers everywhere. It was a stream for all seasons, they would say. (It was a stream for all seasons unlike most other streams: in part because of summer and fall releases from upstream reservoirs to the Pacific Gas & Electric Company's powerhouse at Camp Nine, just around the bend from Cadillac Charlie.) It would be said that the Stan had a little of every something that makes a river attractive to outdoor folk, and in certain qualities not a little but a lot. You didn't have to be a river rat to get hooked on the Stan. You could get caught up instead in caving or rock hounding or botanizing or archeologizing or catching trout or just watching clouds and canyon pass by. The river tied it all together, and you could take your pick. Also—and maybe *this* was the important thing—also you could take the river without too much worry about its taking you. It was a forgiving river, someone would say. You didn't have to feel as if you were going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. For the most part, it was a Class IV run, meaning difficult rapids and dangerous rocks, but nothing that a reasonably experienced rafter or kayaker couldn't handle. With pros at the oars, it was a river forgiving enough to allow such groups as Environmental Traveling Companions of San Francisco (and Fort Mason, too) to take the mentally and physically handicapped on overnight trips. And unlike any other first-class whitewater stream, excepting sections of the American, the Stan wasn't too demanding of your time. If you were in a hurry and the water was right, you could put in at Camp Nine at noon and, with no stops, take out at Parrott's Ferry at three. Not that time was all *that* precious, except to the river. So well-endowed in other respects, now the Stanislaus was running out of its own time on the clock that the statisticians were ready to hang over New Melones.

The opening shots in the First Battle of the Stanislaus, as one veteran would recall it, were probably fired in the Tuolumne County town of Sonora in 1971 by Gerald Meral and David Kay, both from the Sierra Club's River Conservation Committee. Meral at the time was chairman of that committee and staff scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund's regional office in Berkeley. Kay then was director of public affairs for one of the major outfitters on the Stan, the American River Touring Association. At Sonora, Meral and Kay urged the county supervisors to demand a sweeping public reappraisal of the New Melones project. Not unexpectedly, the supervisors demurred.

A year or so later, the Environmental Defense Fund, citing deficiencies in the final New Melones environmental impact statement, went into U.S. district court to seek an injunction blocking further planning for construction of the dam. The complaint managed to deep-freeze the dam until April 1974, at which time the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the Fund's final appeal of a lower court ruling. Thus ended the First Battle of the Stanislaus. Score one for friends of the dam.

A kayaker on the Stanislaus: "You could take the river without too much worry about its taking you."

The Second Battle began even before the first one was over. Meral and Kay had been brainstorming with a couple of public relations men from Palo Alto, had come up with the idea of an organization to be called Friends of the River, and had decided to use FOR to press for an initiative measure on the November 1974 ballot. The initiative specifically would amend the state's Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by including portions of the Stanislaus, notably the stretch from Camp Nine to Parrott's Ferry, in a waterways system that already protected reaches of such streams as the Smith, the Eel, and the Trinity. In effect, a Yes vote on the initiative would halt the building of the sixty-story New Melones Dam.

With backing from the National Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth, FOR enlisted thousands of volunteers to obtain the necessary signatures on qualifying petitions, then proceeded to raise and spend some $238,000 in the campaign for Proposition 17. Statements later filed with the California secretary of state showed that FOR received no single contribution of $5,000 or more. The bulk of its expenditures went to, or through, its Palo Alto publicists for the printing and distribution of brochures.

On the other side was an organization calling itself Californians Against Proposition 17. CAP 17 had the support of the State Chamber of Commerce, the Farm Bureau Federation, assorted power and irrigation interests, and, indirectly if not altogether discreetly, the district office of the Corps of Engineers, which presumed to distribute its own perception of the truth in order that "thoughtful citizens" might achieve "rational conclusions." CAP 17 raised $420,000, including thirteen contributions of $5,000 or more from construction firms, construction-related manufacturers, and water users. The two prime contractors for the New Melones project together donated $200,000. Expenditures went mainly into television and newspaper advertising. And a substantial sum went to the firm of CAP 17's principal public relations advisor, Milton Kramer.

A footnote on the amount of that sum appears in an excellent summary of the Stanislaus fight written by historians W. Turrentine Jackson and Stephen D. Mikesell for the Water Resources Center of the University of California at Davis. The note reads: "There is some inconsistency in the cumulative figures for payments to Kramer & Associates, which totaled $33,426.85 on October 2, 1974; $45,550 on October 22, 1974; and $31,792.53 on December 20, 1974." Not that it really matters how much was paid to Kramer & Associates, inasmuch as Proposition 17 is now just so much water over the dam, and in more ways than one. The measure was soundly defeated in the November election by a majority of 53 percent of the voters. Thus ended the Second Battle of the Stanislaus. Score two for friends of the dam.

Licking their wounds after the electoral defeat, Friends of the River conducted a survey of voters and claimed that many had said No to the proposition when they had meant to say Yes. FOR charged that the election had been won by CAP 17 through advertisements—"Save the River, Vote No"—that capitalized on the voter's confusion. But others simply chalked it up to Milton Kramer's shrewd analysis of the electoral pulse. The way Kramer had it figured, thinking Californians could not possibly swallow this whopper about the Stanislaus being a "wild" river. Not when the flow was regulated by releases from the reservoirs upstream. Good grief and yes indeed, Kramer would suggest in his messages then as now, if it weren't for the Pacific Gas & Electric Company's penstock and powerhouse at Camp Nine, there wouldn't *be* any whitewater. Just rocks and a hard place for most of the year.

Now, as we purl and tumble and bounce downstream, I am thinking. Thanks, everybody. Thank you, Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Thank you, Army Engineers and Whoppers. I'd bless your hearts, if I could find them. And thank you, too, Milton Kramer, for explaining how it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, dams without

end. Thank you all for the flatwater pools and penstock and powerhouse turbines that somehow (possibly when we were all looking the other way) carved this canyon in the Earth and gave it gradient and then put all of its rocks and boulders into Class IV place. Now there is only one question.

Whom do I thank for the rain?

IN THE WINTER, warm rain came across the valley and swept up the chamise foothills to the snowpack in the mountains. The rain fell for a day and a night, and on the second day, from a leaden sky across the dusky elevations of the High Sierra, it was falling still. Then, one could hear a faraway sound as of thunderballs rolling down the canyons, and within that sound, others—of boulders grinding and clattering and trees snapping and roots popping like champagne corks. Downstream below Ripon, too far downstream to hear the flood, but not too far down to see it, dairyman John Hertle got into his slicker and went out of his ranch house on the levee to stare again at the Stanislaus swirling around the butts of his willows and cottonwood trees. The water was rising fast. In a matter of hours it would probably be into and over his winter oats, and would drown them. Between Knight's Ferry and the San Joaquin, at least fifteen hundred acres of good cropland would be going under this time, and some folks would be hurt a lot worse than Hertle.

This kind of thing was hard to take. For nearly sixteen years now, John Hertle had struggled to get the New Melones project all in place upstream, in order to have flood control, among other things, downstream. The dam was in place, at last; but not the reservoir. Not the reservoir because of those so-called Friends of the River. Because of them, the pool was being held to less than 300,000 acre-feet, and the federal people in charge were making big releases to keep it that way. All that time and effort over the years, and all the good work by Californians Against Proposition 17, and the hundreds of millions of dollars already invested in the dam. And now—Hertle turned away from the swollen river and stalked back to his house through the rain—and now, this.

There had been bad floods before, to be sure. The one most folks remembered best for having been worst was the tropical storm that hit right before Christmas in 1964. More than two million dollars in damages then, just on the Stanislaus. Till then, some local people hadn't been too pleased with the idea of the federals replacing the old Melones dam with a new one. The flood of '64 made converts of them all. In fact, some organized to get the federals cracking faster on the New Melones project. They called their group the Stanislaus River Flood Control Association, and elected John Hertle as their president. Heading up that association was good training, sharpened his wits for the upcoming fights. In time, the dairyman would be serving as chairman of CAP 17, and later as co-chairman of Friends of New Melones.

It was a generation ago that John Hertle started out here with ten cows. Now he has seven hundred, mostly Holsteins, and runs them on three hundred and fifty of his own acres along the Stanislaus River. Other Central Valley places, people would call a man with a spread like this a "small" farmer. Not here, though. Here, a farm isn't small until its acreage gets down under fifty. Surprisingly for nowadays, about half the farms in the river's downstream counties of Stanislaus and San Joaquin fall into that under-fifty category. It is a circumstance calculated to generate much local interest in matters of flood control and irrigation.

Though protection from floods is of great importance to the people of the valley, the issue of irrigation—insofar as how much or how little water the New Melones reservoir might store and deliver to present and future users—probably touches their rawest nerves. Hertle himself would seem capable of some measure of dispassion on the subject; most of his own irrigation water comes not from the adjacent Stanislaus but from the Tuolumne instead. Yet roundabout the valley are farming friends and neighbors who do look to the Stanislaus for irrigation of their crops, and who are understandably nervous about the unsettled state of affairs behind the New Melones Dam. There was an edge to Hertle's voice when I brought the subject up during a visit to his ranch, right after the first flood of '80. "How would *you* feel?" he said. "When people who are dependent on water to make their living see others wanting to use the same water for what seems a superfluous purpose, like rafting—they just have to get enraged."

Much of the rage has been fueled over the years by great expectations. Thanks to statistical prestidigitations by the Army Engineers and the old Bureau of Wreck, it was expected that water users with prior rights—that is, growers belonging to the South San Joaquin and Oakdale irrigation districts—might look forward to more irrigation water from New Melones than they had received from the old. Anticipating a huge reservoir rolling back beyond Parrott's Ferry to Camp Nine, the dambuilders had allocated 200,000 acre-feet of active storage to satisfy the prior rights of the two irrigation districts. Yet this was double the storage for irrigation provided by the old reservoir; and, in effect, the allocation was found to be unwarranted when the dambuilders in 1973 applied for permits to the State Water Resources Control Board. In a decision unsuccessfully appealed by the Bureau of Reclamation all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, the state control board approved the impoundment of water at New Melones only insofar as it was essential for flood control, fish and wildlife enhancement and water quality improvement downstream, and the satisfaction of prior rights based on diversions from the then existing old Melones reservoir. Additional impoundment for new irrigation and for power generation was expressly forbidden by the state board until such time as the federals defined the project's service area and demonstrated a need for the additional water. Last I heard, WPRS was still shuffling figures to justify such a need.

Not that there isn't a *demand* for additional water. According to Friends of New Melones, depletion of groundwater aquifers throughout the valley—a drying up of the farmers' wells, if you will—has lately "led to applications from twenty-two water agencies or districts seeking a total of 800,000 acre-feet from New Melones—four times

John Hertle, co-chairman of Friends of New Melones: Rage over use of the water for "a superfluous purpose, like rafting."

the anticipated net yield."

Then there is a matter of waste, and not a small one at that. Certain urban folks, not necessarily of a rafting persuasion, perceive a willful waste of water in the valley because water is both cheap and subsidized. And subsidized by *them,* as U.S. taxpayers. I do not happen to believe that is so. The subsidy, yes. But the willfulness? Could even a scant minority of valley farmers, especially the "small" ones, be so cavalier about so precious a resource? I think not, though some studies do show that the more people pay for their water, the more efficiently they tend to use it. I think instead it is the system that is wasteful—the countless miles of ditches and canals, unlined, for the most part; the huge evaporation off huge expanses of flatwater; the gravity flow across thousands of acres of unmulched fields; the dearth of scientific information, available to farmers, as to the most efficient ways to schedule irrigation releases. Critics of these Central Valley-type projects speak of alternatives, of substituting sprinkler or drip systems in the fields, of installing devices to recycle the runoff. Splendid ideas, for corporate farmers. But for farmers with fewer than fifty acres? It doesn't seem possible, without further subsidies.

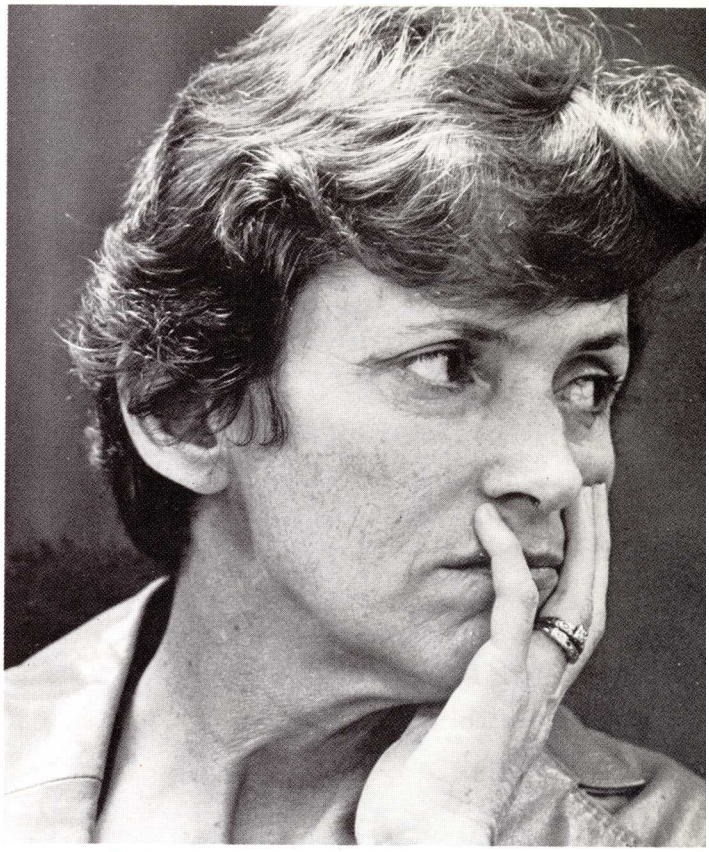
Yet there *is* waste. The U.S. Comptroller General's 1976 report to the Congress on farm irrigation stated unequivocally that "less than half of the water delivered to a farm for irrigation is productively used by the crops." The remainder, according to the report, "may oversaturate the lands, causing drainage problems; or may return to the supply system for further use at a downstream location, degraded in quality by minerals, fertilizers, sediment, and pesticides." It is enough to make one wonder about the wisdom of providing the larger pool at New Melones.

THERE IS SUNLIGHT on the river now. It sparkles across the rips and eddies and along the seeps in the limestone cliffs. The boatman points above our heads. A hole appears, high and dark in the rock above us. It is the cave of the bandit, he says, the place of Joaquin Murrieta, the lair of the Robin Hood of El Dorado. What an hombre he must have been, that old Joaquin, back in the gold days, run off his claim by some ruthless gringos, turned to the life of a killer for vengeance, then shot down himself in a fight near Tulare. It is said, perhaps apocryphally, that the good men who finally brought him down preserved his head in a bucket of whiskey. He was a bad one, all right, that Murrieta. The gringos said he was born to it, for the hue of his Mexican skin, and his cultural differentness.

It occurs to me that human differentness is still a large factor along the Stanislaus River, though not so violently or racially as it used to be. Across the rips and eddies of the New Melones issue flows this strong current of suspicion, intolerance, and anger, one side for the other, ranching posse against rafting bandits, farm against city, old against new, utilizers against conservators, Friend against Friend. It is one thing, and not an uncommon one at that, for people of different persuasions to disagree over something as impersonal as how much water should be stored behind a dam. But it is something else when people involved in an issue go beyond it to find dismal fault with how the *other* involved people choose to pursue their personal philosophy or conduct their own lives. Not that this is uncommon either, for it is hardly front-page news that cultural prejudice is still the crutch of most human beings.

In the case of New Melones, there is a temptation, to which more than a few of the region's newspapers have gladly succumbed, to circumscribe the clash of perceptions as being one between cowboys and hippies, and then to let it go at that. For short copy, I suppose that's all right, if one is willing either to accept both tags in the loosest sense, or cut through the stereotypes and see them as Calaveras County Supervisor Nancy Whittle does. Whittle's family is in the cattle business near Angels Camp, which, I would guess, makes her a cowgirl, however atypical. And atypical she is, for certain. No dark innuendos from Nancy Whittle about malfeasance on the other side, though she does not agree with their point of view. As well she shouldn't, for in addition to being supervisor and cowgirl, she also happens to be co-chairman, with John Hertle, of Friends of New Melones. So I asked her one morning at her office in the county building at San Andreas if it was true what I had heard about these cowboys and these hippies. She laughed and said, "Not quite. Some of the cowboys have beards now, too." And I replied, Yes, and some of the hippies have red necks and pointy-toed boots.

Still, the difference is there, and the clashing perceptions. There are men and women who go from the cities to the mountains with backpacks and kayaks and pitons and freeze-dried foods in the backs of their cars. They hurry across the dull flatness of the valley, past the barns and silos, and the rows of fruit trees and the grapes; and even the eyes of those who aren't driving are fixed dead ahead, toward the high country, the tall timber, the wild rivers, the wilderness. Many of these people do not seem to understand. They do not see the connections. They will go to the high glen beyond the lights of the valley to add boiling water to a four-ounce package of Mountain House freeze dried vegetable beef stew, and if they stop to think of it at all, they will remember that the stew came off a shelf at the Ski Hut in Berkeley. But they will not stop to think that the stuff of the stew came to Berkeley from the valley, or some other dull place one seems always to be crossing in a hurry on the way to camp. After supper, they will sit by the campfire, and the talk will turn to dams. And that, in turn, will lead to a damning of cowboys. Or, more likely, farmers. For some of the visitors up there in the mountains have this image of the farmer only as fat-cat reaper of windfall profits, as rocking-chair lout who is out to *get*



Calaveras County Supervisor Nancy Whittle: "No dark innuendos about malfeasance on the other side."

Nature, and get 'er good. It is an image in which there is no room for a countryman in a slicker, down in the valley on a rain-swept levee, watching the water rise through the willows to swallow his field of winter oats.

Then there is the other side, the men and women of the valley and the foothills who are not much enamored of freeze-dried food and kayaks and wilderness areas. They would have steak on the portable grill and motorboats with skiers in tow on the flatwater, and marinas. Some of these people do not understand, and possibly cannot understand, the value of a canyon that is producing only chaparral and unmerchantable trees, and what the *others* have the audacity to call a "spiritual experience." They would rather trade the canyon for the flatwater and a steady downstream flow through pastoral country more readily accessible; and they would have their own spiritual experiences in the more traditional setting of a church. They see the rafters coming across the valley and up the winding Mother Lode roads to the outposts of the river touring outfitters, these city folks in their scanty summer attire—barefoot, most of them, and sometimes on the river, bare in other places as well. And when it seems to the valley and hill folk that the city folk have the ear of the governor's men, and maybe even the President's men, such that a fine new dam cannot fully be used, then comes the incensement and rage. And the hint of some posse-type trouble.

Down Highway 49 from Angels Camp, heading for the bridge on the Stanislaus River, one passes on the left the

Calaveras County fairgrounds, where jumping-frog contests are still staged in tribute to that long-gone long-haired original hippie from Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain. Just beyond the fairgrounds, hard by the road, is the office of OARS, which is the workable acronym for Outdoor Adventure River Specialists, the largest of the commercial operators offering trips down the Stan. Old white buses, used as shuttles to the river, are parked out back of the office building, and high in a couple of sideyard oaks are two tree-houses where rafting guides spread their sleeping bags on warm summer nights. From the highway, the place appears to have a slight aura of Class IV California Funk, which is perfectly respectable to my way of thinking, but apparently not to others of a probable cowboy persuasion.

Early last summer there was a hint of trouble. The way OARS President George Wendt recalls it, late one night a couple of guides were awakened by fire and smoke from a "burning device" hurled from the highway into the sideyard. The fire was extinguished easily enough, and no one thought too much about it until a few nights later, when someone on the highway pitched a beer bottle through George Wendt's plate-glass window. Wendt shrugged when I asked him about it, and said, "Most of the people up here are real friendly."

FROM ANGELS CAMP, I went back into the valley to visit briefly with two principals in the battle of the Stanislaus, two whom I had heard would shatter the simple assumption that this was a row between cowboys and hippies, but whose personal experiences would confirm the tense reality of friend versus friend. I first went to Modesto to call on Clifford Humphrey, founder of the Ecology Action movement, and then turned north toward Manteca to see the rancher Alex Hildebrand, who served as national president of the Sierra Club in the mid-1950s. Not that Humphrey is against Hildebrand, or that Hildebrand is against Humphrey, for both are friends together of New Melones. On the contrary, it is for that reason that a few of their friends from times gone by are now against *them.*

The name Cliff Humphrey once loomed large in the minds of West Coast environmentalists, and it may hang there yet among minds that are not altogether closed to an honest difference of opinion. Humphrey paid his dues in the budding environmental movement of the 1960s, the one which brought us Earth Day I and a proliferation of new organizations, not all of them acronymic, dedicated to the proposition that it was time to draw the line. In 1969, in Berkeley, Cliff Humphrey took a sledge hammer to the carburetor of his gas-guzzling family car—"just to get things started," as he later explained it—and then stepped back as other young activists proceeded to render the vehicle to rubble. A few months later, he led Berkeley's first Smog-Free Locomotion Day parade, hauling a V-8 engine through the streets in a coffin. And not long after Earth Day, he was traveling across the country—via public transportation—setting up Ecology Action Centers wherever he could find recruits to spread the gospel of what he called a *human* ecology.

It was a people-oriented thing, this ecology according to Cliff Humphrey. It espoused connections between city and country. It spoke to the need for a consensus that would recognize not only the "esthetics of open space, the nice birds, or the reduction of noise in our cities," but also "the guts of our entire culture, the lives of at least two hundred million people." And when it came to listing the priorities essential to keeping those millions happily living in a state of balanced affairs with nature, he spoke of clean air and fresh water. And something else, something a little different from what many of the other Earth Day preachers were talking about. Not wildness, in which, the others said, was the preservation of the world. Not redwoods or grand canyons or scenic rivers, or even genetic diversity. For survival, Cliff Humphrey's third priority was, and is, fertile soil.

He was raised in the San Joaquin Valley, at Stockton, and grew up with the texture of soil under his feet. In the spring sometimes he would mosey up into the foothills with a fishing rod and a flashlight to poke around in the rivers and limestone caves. The place he liked best was up past old Melones, up that deep canyon winding away into the mountains. And once or twice, or maybe more times than he now cares to remember, he also brought an inner-tube to the canyon, slipped it under his arms, and plunged feet-first into the runaway river to bob down the rapids, mile after mile. And all this was before the rafts and the kayaks—and trouble—came to the Stanislaus.

After some years in Berkeley, Humphrey returned to the valley, to Modesto, and brought the Ecology Action Educational Institute with him. He wanted, he said, to be "where the supply is"—meaning the farms that have the soil to grow the food that is eaten in places like Berkeley. Then along came Proposition 17, and Humphrey had to choose sides. He chose the side of New Melones and the full reservoir, explaining that his basic concern was with preserving "the agricultural integrity of the Central Valley and its continuing ability to grow food for export."

There was another element in the New Melones project that Humphrey fancied, and that was a plan to use water from a full reservoir to enhance the quality of the Stanislaus downstream from the dam. It was and is a debatable plan; I mean debatable insofar as Friends of the River have argued that most of its features could still be achieved with the reservoir line drawn at Parrott's Ferry. In any event (without getting into another exchange of statistics), the plan for downriver called for releases of water such that riparian wildlife habitat might be secure against flood and drouth times, that crop-wilting salts might be flushed from the rich bottomland of the Delta, that the sparse spawning run of king salmon might somehow be given a fresh headstart, and that a 55-mile "river trail" might be established for canoeists, with eleven campsites spaced a short day's paddle apart. And also a four-mile "Olympic-caliber" kayak run below Knight's Ferry, with boulders transplanted and conveniently arranged in the streambed by Army engineers, in mitigation of the loss, the drowning, of the boulders and whitewater in the canyon upriver.

Humphrey was not the only environmentalist in the valley to be enamored of the downstream plan. Early on,

the Modesto-based Yokut Wilderness Group of the Sierra Club had taken a supportive stand downstream, and indeed had managed to establish a working rapport with the Corps of Engineers in order to have some influence on its planning process. Such efforts soon cast the Yokut Wilderness Group into disfavor at Club headquarters in San Francisco. The Club, one observer noted later, was interested "not in mitigating losses but in preserving resources intact." There was a certain chill to the air, and a falling away. Then along came Proposition 17. Some Yokuts actively opposed the measure, as did a number of members of the Stockton Audubon Society. Environmental leaders in the cities could not understand why their country brethren were bolting the ranks. It was a time of bitter estrangement; and for a few of the principal individuals, it is a time of estrangement still.

I found Humphrey at his home in Modesto, working in a back room filled with cardboard cartons for filing cabinets. Nowadays he is spending much of his time as a consultant in the field of solid waste management. Among his clients is the City of San Francisco. I had heard reports roundabout that Humphrey's name had been passed along to the governor's people in Sacramento for appointment to the state's Solid Waste Management Board, but that the appointment had never come through. Some of the governor's people, it was said, had memories of a sort that would not forget Humphrey's stand on Proposition 17. Humphrey told me he didn't know enough about that to comment. "But I suppose in some circles I'm still persona non grata," he said. "There are those who may see me as being contaminated. After Proposition 17, the word went around that I had taken a dive for a hundred thousand dollars." He threw out his arms then, as if to indicate his modest surroundings. "And then there was the other story about my wanting to run in this town for mayor. For *mayor*."

Humphrey did not look to me to be the sort who wanted to run for anything, at least not anymore. What he does want to do is to squirrel away some time for his writing, which he used to do more of in the old days, and maybe move back to the big city to spread the word about how the other half lives, out where the supply is.

As I was leaving his home that afternoon, a faraway look came across his face, as though he had entered another time and place, back at the barricades of Earth Day possibly, but more likely farther yet into the canyons of his youth. For suddenly he was saying, "You know, it's really a lovely river. You ought to get up there and see for yourself."

FOR MYSELF, I see the river rolling toward the flash and spray of Dogleg Rapids, pulling heavy water with the South Fork behind us, sweeping hell-for-leather to the end of the line. But my thoughts now are down below that point, beyond the high dam and past the place where the Army engineers would try to replicate this rapid, and around the corner where the Stanislaus meets the San Joaquin, to a place where there are Holsteins in irrigated pastures on an oxbow flat along the river, and the rancher Alex Hildebrand standing on the levee, saying,

Ecology Action founder Cliff Humphrey in the Stanislaus bottomlands: "It was a time of bitter estrangement."

"On issues like this, you have to start from where you are, not where you were forty years ago when we didn't have so many people to feed." Nevertheless, for perspective, perhaps one *should* start forty years ago, if not with the issue, then with Alex Hildebrand himself, and possibly with one of the other old-timers whom Hildebrand no longer counts within the circle of his friends.

It seems to me they all came through or out of Berkeley, one way or another, that Clifford Humphrey and now this Hildebrand. An engineer he was then, though a physicist by schooling, living forty years ago in that alabaster city on the hill across the bay from San Francisco, and working for the Standard Oil Company of California. Hildebrand worked hard at Standard Oil, not so much because the job meant everything to him, but to get ahead a bit financially and then retire to a place of his childhood aspirations—a cattle farm, somewhere on the dusky sundown side of the High Sierra.

The mountains also figured somewhat in Hildebrand's plan, and he could not get enough of them. He was a Sierra Clubber, and, as I mentioned, would become its

Alex Hildebrand, rancher and former Sierra Club president: "You'll gain more than you'll lose with the full reservoir."

president some day. But then, forty years or longer ago than that, he was the kind of man who just liked to get up into the high country, and as often as not, on alpine skis. Then, one of his sometime mountaineering companions and Berkeley friends was David Brower, who would soon hold a high Club post himself, as executive director.

It was a different time for people who loved high places, forty years ago. There weren't so many people to feed. There weren't so many threatened glens to defend. There weren't so many statistics. But the numbers, and the directions people would have to take to deal with those numbers, began to change appreciably in the 1960s. And that was the decade not only in which Alex Hildebrand retired to his cattle farm on the San Joaquin River, but the one in which David Brower began to lead the Sierra Club in a direction of uncompromising environmental feist, such that the two old friends could now see eye to eye on hardly anything. Even after Brower left the Club to found the acronymic grandpappy of them all, Friends of the Earth, Hildebrand remained aloof from the new politics of ecology, believing, as he explained it to me, that the whole damn thing had gone too far. Which, after all, is not the kind of attitude that is in the least inconsistent with being a Friend of New Melones.

Still, the falling away always hurts. Once, before it was finally over between him and the Club, Hildebrand found himself confronted by a couple of skeptical members at a meeting in Los Angeles. "What could *you* possibly care about the environment?" one of them said, or words to that effect. "You're a rancher, aren't you?"

Now, on the levee that protects much of his 150-acre farm from the river, Hildebrand was saying, "The drowning of any canyon bothers me, especially *that* canyon. I share other people's regret in that loss. But so far as whitewater is concerned"—and he shook his head—"you know it's an artificial thing up there, in the summer anyway."

I asked him then what the greatest need for water might be down here in the valley, apart from irrigation. He said, "To get rid of the salt. You've got to have enough flow to carry the salt through to the Bay. If you don't, it's just going to sit there. If you don't do something about this degradation, and New Melones could do a lot, you're going to turn the Delta into a salt marsh and knock it clear out of the food business."

I had been thinking about the food business, not in the Delta as much as right here, or rather in the two prior-rights irrigation districts serviced by Stanislaus water. I was thinking, if farmers like Hildebrand were so concerned about being responsible for all these people that had to get fed, at home and abroad, why was it that fruits and nuts and grapes for wine occupy two-thirds of the irrigated acreage in the South San Joaquin district and that an even greater fraction of the Oakdale district's irrigated land is planted to grasses and clover for cows? Wouldn't more people get fed, and at a cost of less water, if the acreage

Boatman David Dickson in slack water above the dam: "I'd sign aboard with him almost anywhere, except to Niagara Falls."

was planted to barley and soybeans? Hildebrand startled me, for he seemed to be reading my mind. "Friends of the River say people should eat less beef and more barley," he said. "Well, I don't think a hierarchy of environmentalists can tell the American people what they should put on their plates." And then, as if to summarize the discussion, he said, "You'll gain more than you'll lose with the full reservoir, believe me."

As I drove away—one more stop, in Sacramento, and then to the river—I wondered how David Brower would have responded to Alex Hildebrand forty years ago, but each being who he is today and knowing what he knows today, the hatchets buried and the two of them up there somewhere in the snow high above the Stanislaus canyon. And I figured Brower probably would uncork one of his vintage ripostes, such as, "We have to start saying 'No,' Alex. We can grind it all up in five minutes, but *then* what do we do, for encores?"

THE RESOURCES AGENCY of California is one of those rare bureaucracies so huge in numbers of staff and responsibilities that one might expect to find it more fittingly ensconced in gray marble at the foot of Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., rather than in glass and steel on Ninth Street in Sacramento. In this same bastion of administrative power preside the decision-makers who have jurisdiction over the state's forests, parks, minerals, fish, and wildlife, as well as over matters pertaining to local reclamation works, the conservation and development of San Francisco Bay, the quality of the state's air, the disposition of its garbage, and, last but by no means least for a state so heavily dependent on water, the custody of almost all that is wet in subsurface and riparian ways. Times past, one might also have expected such a place to be staffed at the middle-management level by graduates of traditional forestry and wildlife management schools, many of them garbed in the somber attire of traveling salesmen and more than a few grown long in the tooth. But things on Ninth Street began to change a bit when Jerry Brown hit town. Suddenly there were all these young men in Ivy League suits, or, if not so attired, then at least in chamois and goose-down. Not only that but—by appointment of Governor Brown—their boss, the Resources Secretary, was a *woman*, Claire Dedrick. And not only that, Claire Dedrick was a former vice-president of the Sierra Club. By and by, Dedrick resigned, only to be replaced by Huey Johnson. His credentials: founder and former president of the Trust for Public Land, a conservancy-type organization dedicated to the proposition that people in inner cities need parks and open spaces, too. Given the man's background, one might correctly say that Huey Johnson is a human ecologist, though not quite of the same school as Clifford Humphrey.

For some Californians who would settle for mitigation of losses rather than preserving a resource intact, Huey

Mark Dubois, president of Friends of the River: "The skeptics thought he was bluffing. He wasn't."

Johnson was a bit of bad news. In the matter of the Stanislaus River he was very bad news, inasmuch as he seemed to have this annoying habit of referring to the controversial project as the New "Lemones" Dam. Even worse, from the standpoint of the dam's supporters, was the new configuration of the agency's Department of Water Resources. Serving as director of that department was one Ronald Robie, a harsh critic of New Melones during his previous tenure as chairman of the State Water Resources Control Board. Serving as one of Robie's top deputies was Gerald Meral, the very same Gerald Meral who brought us Proposition 17 and Friends of the River. And replacing Ronald Robie as head of the control board was the attorney John Bryson, former counsel to the Natural Resources Defense Council. To Friends of New Melones, it all added up to a mean bunch of hombres, for certain. Or as someone remarked in the vernacular of a previous administration, "When you've seen one Huey, you've seen 'em all."

Then there was this young economist and assistant secretary for resources, Guy Phillips. In September of last year, Phillips released a 55-page report entitled "The New Melones Project: A Review of Current Economic and Environmental Issues." In his brief introduction, Phillips borrowed a theme from another California proposition, 13 by number, otherwise known by its result as the taxpayer's revolt. "Simply stated," he wrote, "the public is increasingly skeptical about investing in projects that do not pay for themselves." Then Phillips went on to demonstrate why, by his calculations, the filling of New Melones reservoir beyond Parrott's Ferry, more or less, could become such a project.

More figures, more conclusions. Regarding generation of power: "Operating New Melones for its full hydroelectric potential will likely cause at least a $385 million drain on the Central Valley Project, which has already been operating at a deficit." Regarding irrigation: "Operating New Melones for irrigation purposes will likely result in a subsidy to the water users from the general public of $571 million over the fifty-year repayment period." Regarding flatwater recreation: "The Bureau's [now WPRS] recreational use estimates of the New Melones reservoir are overly optimistic; they do not reflect actual local experiences or the impact of having several comparable reservoirs in the same local area." Regarding prior rights: "Provision of 93,000 acre-feet of active storage in addition to the 107,000 acre-feet actually stored behind old Melones dam as prior rights is unreasonable in light of the [State Water Resources Control] Board's decision to recognize existing beneficial uses of the water upstream [meaning above Parrott's Ferry]."

No one on Ninth Street was greatly surprised when the other side fired back its statistical ripostes. Nor was I surprised to hear Milton Kramer, the public relations man, say of the Phillips report, "It's a coverup. The information was developed by Friends of the River and fed to the Resources Agency. The figures on power are totally in error, and that stuff on the irrigation subsidy is nothing but sophistry. The whole damn thing is out of touch with reality."

At Ninth Street I dropped by the office of Guy Phillips to ask a few questions about his report, and then together we went up the hall to chat with Richard Hammond, who is Huey Johnson's top deputy. While we were talking there was a knock at the door, it opened, and a secretary announced to Hammond, "Mark's here." Hammond stepped outside. He returned a moment later and said, "That was Mark Dubois of Friends of the River." And I said something about small worlds, since that was the one person I had to see before I went to the river.

COMING DOWN TO THE END now, almost there. Guess Cliff Humphrey was right after all. I mean about its being a lovely river. A forgiving one, too. Goodbye Chicken Falls. Hello down there, Parrott's Ferry.

I think I forgot to introduce the boatman. His name is David Dickson, and he has been awfully good at the oars, with biceps like ropes, and good with the talk about what we've been seeing. Dickson stashes his gear up at Vallecito. He guides in season for the American River Touring Association, and I guess I'd sign aboard with him almost anywhere, except to Niagara Falls. But he'll probably be staying right here for a while, doing his thing on this river, helping out whenever he can with the river's friends. They're such a bit of a different kind, these river people—Roos-Collins and Briggs and Dickson here, and Mark Dubois. I haven't forgotten *him,* and chances are there's not enough time in one life to forget him ever. I think of him now as we swing into view of the high bridge at Parrott's Ferry. I look at the riverbank trying to guess where it was that he waited alone in the night, with his leg in the chain, and the rock, and no key for the padlock, and the still, dark pool of New Melones rising behind its sixty-story dam.

They had tried almost everything else, and lost. They had lost in the courtrooms, lost at the polls, lost in the legislature. Suddenly last spring, they began to lose again on the clock. On Fool's Day, the Army Corps of Engineers pushed a button to pinch off releases through the gates of the new dam. The idea was to store up the runoff, to raise the pool to a level that would enable the engineers to give the dam's turbines a working test of their hydroelectric capability. And the level they required was somewhere above the symbolic line Friends of the River had drawn across Parrott's Ferry.

Dubois last spring was barely thirty years old. A college drop-out turned rafter and river guide, a vegetarian who eschews flesh partly because he believes half of all the water consumed in California goes to feed livestock, Dubois was then, and still is, director of Friends of the River; and he had seen enough of the Stanislaus River—had, as he put it, "touched enough of its magic"—to know that what the engineers were about "just shouldn't be."

In May, as the water in the reservoir rose higher, Dubois sent a message to the Corps' district office and to President Carter. In it, he explained what he would do if the flooding didn't stop. He would go to the canyon at Parrott's Ferry and chain himself to a rock. Drown the canyon, and you drown Dubois. The skeptics thought he was bluffing.

He wasn't. He took a blanket and sleeping bag, and an eye bolt to secure the chain to the rock, and with only one or two friends privy to the exact location of his hiding place and of the padlock key stashed out of reach a hundred feet away, Dubois imprisoned himself beside the rising water. And waited, and watched the boats of searchers pass by, and the helicopters overhead, and the men from the sheriff's office afoot on the other side of the river. Meanwhile Governor Brown cabled President Carter, saying, "I urge you to instruct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to halt the filling of the New Melones Reservoir at the Parrott's Ferry bridge. The beauty of the Stanislaus canyon and the life of Mark Dubois deserve your personal intervention."

Words from other intervenors, apparently, had already come to the Corps of Engineers. A hand reached out. Another button was pressed, and the water stopped rising. Dubois in his self-imposed prison could almost touch the water with one foot when a confidant scrambled down the embankment with news that the Corps had agreed, at least for a while, to hold the line at Parrott's Ferry. Score one, at last, for Friends of the River.

From Ninth Street, I had tracked Dubois down to FOR's office in a house with bikes in the sideyard and backpacks and sleeping bags on the sofas. He greeted me with a huge hand that clamped around mine as though he were tugging at an oar. Dubois stands six feet, eight and one-quarter inches in his bare feet, which is the way his feet often are, since size seventeen shoes are not only costly to come by but consumptive of leather and rubber as well. About going light and easy with such resources as rubber, or water, or using a bike instead of a car, he isn't bluffing. It is clearly his way of life.

Dubois seemed almost embarrassed to speak again of the time in chains beside the river. He said that he had wished for something "more creative," a gesture perhaps less reminiscent of the flamboyant ecotactics of Earth Day. "But you know how it is," he said. "About the squeaky wheel." He preferred to speak of the present. He said he was pinning his hopes now on some action in Congress, on passage of H.R. 4223, a measure by six California representatives to place the threatened Stanislaus canyon within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. That, or some final decision by the Secretary of the Interior to hold the line at Parrott's Ferry. He said, "If we can stop the dambuilding momentum here, maybe we can start to turn things around. As it is, we're just paying more to get less."

I asked him then if he had found the time and opportunity to speak with any people on the other side. He said, "I've been talking with some of the farmers. And, you know, I've discovered that we're not that far apart. We both value life. We just don't agree on how to get there."

All ashore, the boatman shouts. Below the Parrott's Ferry bridge, now, the raft scrapes sand as we scud to the end of the line. We stand on the beach, stretching the muscle kinks and watching the river, and for a long while no one speaks. At least, not to each other. As for the Stan, it goes babbling on to the next bend, there to be silenced in slack water. But here, the river is full of talk. And my own biased hope is that it will go on that way, talking to people forever. ☼