

The Story of Cop Rock

by Joe Daly, July 2021

Cop Rock on the Stanislaus River is appropriately named because in the early 1970's Dick Linford and four other ECHO guides took 25 policemen from the San Francisco Tactical Squad on a two-day trip on the Stan. While almost all river trips here were very normal, little about the trip was. To begin with, the cops arrived at put-in with their guns, even after we had told them our company policy was no guns on our trips. Their attitude was, we are cops; we always have our guns with us – "If we can't take our pistols, we're not going." After much discussion among the guides and then with the "men in blue", a compromise was reached whereby all the guns were put in one black, military surplus, square bottom bag.

Police tactical units tend to be the most macho of law enforcers, and these men were clearly out to have a good time. For a weekend trip, "rules" - who needs them? Go big or go home. Guides struggled to give paddle directions. The cops did pretty much what they wanted, including breaking 12 wooden paddles, demonstrating how strong they were. Somehow everybody made it to camp.

A rousing late-night party around the campfire involved a sizable amount of drinking, and as the evening progressed, the cops decided that now was the time to open up the waterproof bag and bring out their pistols, and to try them out against the very large limestone cliff on the other side of the river. Needless to say, the limestone wasn't impressed.

The next day the macho men were, of course, not at their sharpest. No one recalls exactly what happened. But as they started out the next morning, rounding the bend just below Upper Chinese Camp, their lack of paddling discipline ended them up in a classic wrap against the boulder at the left of the rapid's wave - so classic that the rapid became known forever more as "Cop Rock" rapid.

The guns in the black bag were apparently in another raft because we got no complaints about wet weapons. Thank heavens.

Joe Daly (below right) started as an ARTA guide in 1971 and then went on to create ECHO River Trips with his partner and former ARTA guide Dick Linford (below left) – ECHO was remarkably successful and was transferred to another company in 2015 after 40+ years in operation.

