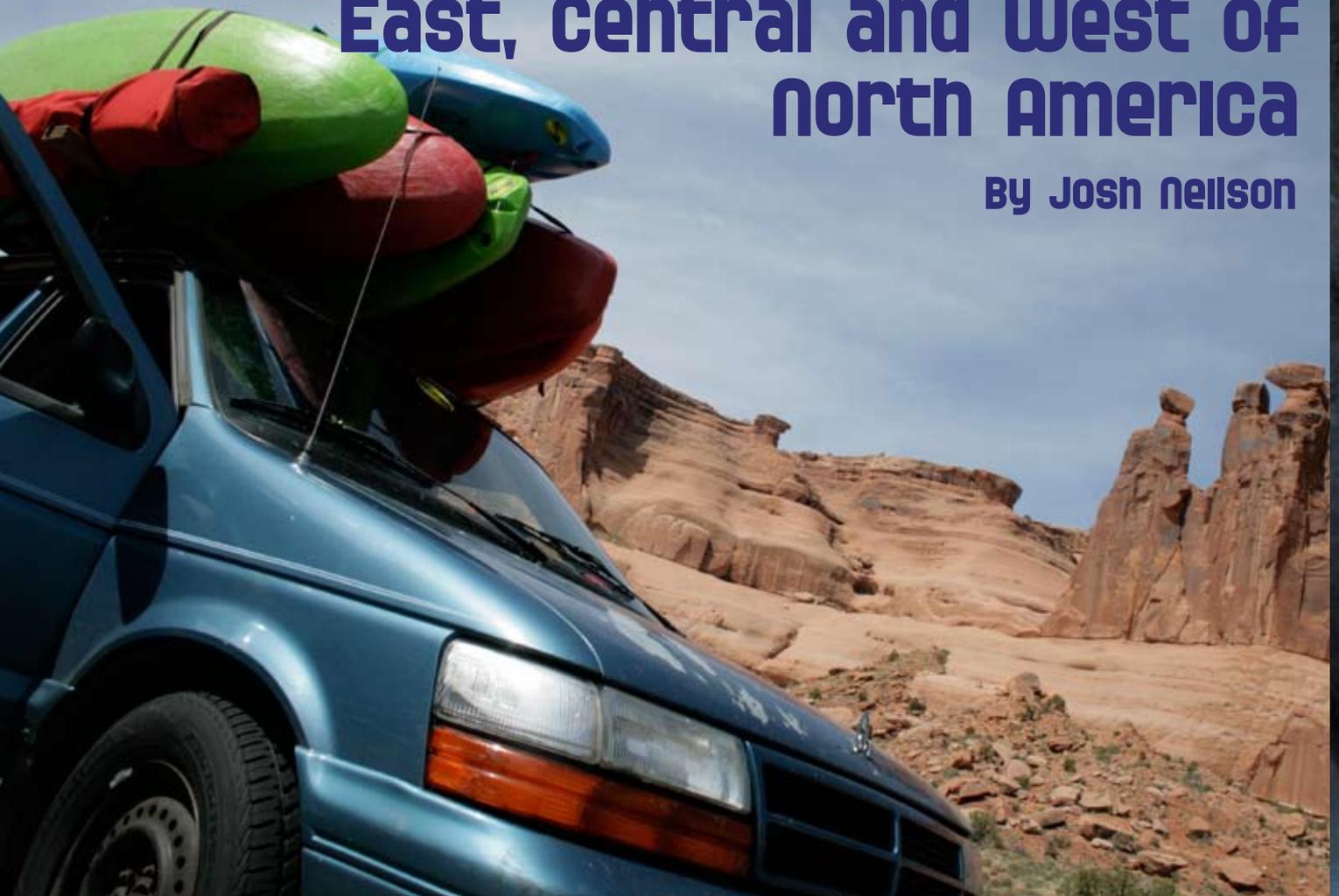


East, Central and West of North America

By Josh Nelson



North America is huge! Getting around takes a lot of time and miles on the sometimes straight roads. In two weeks we covered great distances across the continent, experiencing amazing whitewater from the East, in Canada, through Colorado, to the West in California.

Do you know the Valin in central Quebec? It's a small, tree lined river that runs south into the Saguenay Fjord. From a previous visit we knew the run, but we needed to check the waterfall, as we hadn't attempted it earlier because of the high flow. This time the flow was good and the sun was out, everyone was feeling good! At the fall's lip we set up safety measures and cameras. There was a sweet ramp lead in with a rooster tail coming off the right wall. One by one we threw ourselves into the air and the pool below! When my boat's nose hit the rooster tail I cranked on a left boof stroke and pulled myself forward, fell almost horizontally for 6 meters and stomped my feet down to adjust my angle to 45 degrees. This reduced the impact and the waterfall spat me into the pool below! The intensity continued for a few more miles to the take out!

This run and the one below can be run from early spring's high flows to the low flows of summer!

From Quebec we loaded our car and drove 3,500 kms to Vail, Colorado, for the Teva Mountain Games. The race is on Homestake Creek, a super technical steep run, that at the best of times still hands out beatings! Kayaking here has a different atmosphere to a normal creeking trip! Instead of a quiet, remote gorge you are roadside with cameras lining the banks and cameras on wires following you down and hundreds of people watching your every stroke! Normally you'd scout a rapid, run it then scout the next part, slowly making your way down a tight section. Here you have to memorise about 200 m of class 4+ whitewater and remember everything as you paddle at full speed

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down it! And there is the altitude! At 12,000 feet above sea level doing anything is hard! Walking up the stairs you are out of breath!

We had a few practice runs before the qualifiers for the finals to knock out half the field. Kiwis qualified for the Mens and Women's final runs. Missing the cut by .04 of a second I climbed high on the bank to film the final men. The Kiwis were huddled together to catch a glimpse of Sam Sutton and Mike Dawson, who unfortunately missed the podium cut. Sam, our top qualifier, came down last, super clean through the top of the course, over the one flat pool with good speed and then disappeared into the bottom crux section out of view. We listened to the commentator and watched the timer... "And the new Homestake Creek champ for 2010 is..... Sam Sutton!!" The Kiwis roared and ran to the bottom to see him! He was stoked with this great start to his 2010 racing season!

We had an 18 hour drive ahead to California and the granite slides of the West coast so we split the journey to take in Utah's Arches National Park. Roaring around the park without air conditioning and in 40 degree temperatures we tied the door of our van open and enjoyed some of the finest natural rock formations I've ever seen.

5000 km from the Valin River in Quebec, the rivers had changed, the weather was a lot warmer and there were notably fewer trees. Our first stop was to fix the car. A rock had put a hole in the sump so the engine was using as much oil as fuel! A quick weld job and she was back on the road! We warmed up on the Slab Creek section of the American River before heading into the Upper Middle Cosumnes River





for a section I had heard a lot about. The rest of the crew had run it a few weeks before. I was fired up. We bombed down some sweet drops with good flow. I was the only one who didn't know the lines so I got in behind and followed the boys into the gorge. All day we ran nice slides and sweet drops up to 6 meters high!

Later we came to one called 'V-Slide'. It has a shallow entrance into a pool then, as the name suggests, it forms two big lateral waves in a V shape dropping about 3 meters into a burley hole. There was a sneak line down the right but I felt the most challenging, fun line was right down the middle. There was a possibility that this hole would keep me and a swim might happen but I lined up the meat of the hole and dropped in. 'Crack!' Everything was black with purple and pink stars. I resurfaced from the hole and that was good, but I had gone deep and hit the bottom, cracked my helmet and torn the AC joint in my shoulder. The crew helped to get me out of the run and back to the van while my arm was still working. Minus the injury the run had been super fun but unfortunately the sport involves fast moving liquid directed by gradient and hard rocks!

I'm so grateful for the crew and friends with whom I kayak. Thanks to them I am now recovering, ordered to stay out of the river for at least a month and after that taking it easy for longer on the big stuff. Good advice! I will try to keep my sanity while driving the boys to Big KimsheW Creek and the rest of the High Sierra runs. So that's a brief update on a two week segment of my trip this year! North America is a big place with so much quality whitewater and beautiful places! Get out, explore and stay safe!

For more, check out www.whitewater-koa.blogspot.com

Josh lines himself up for another run.



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