

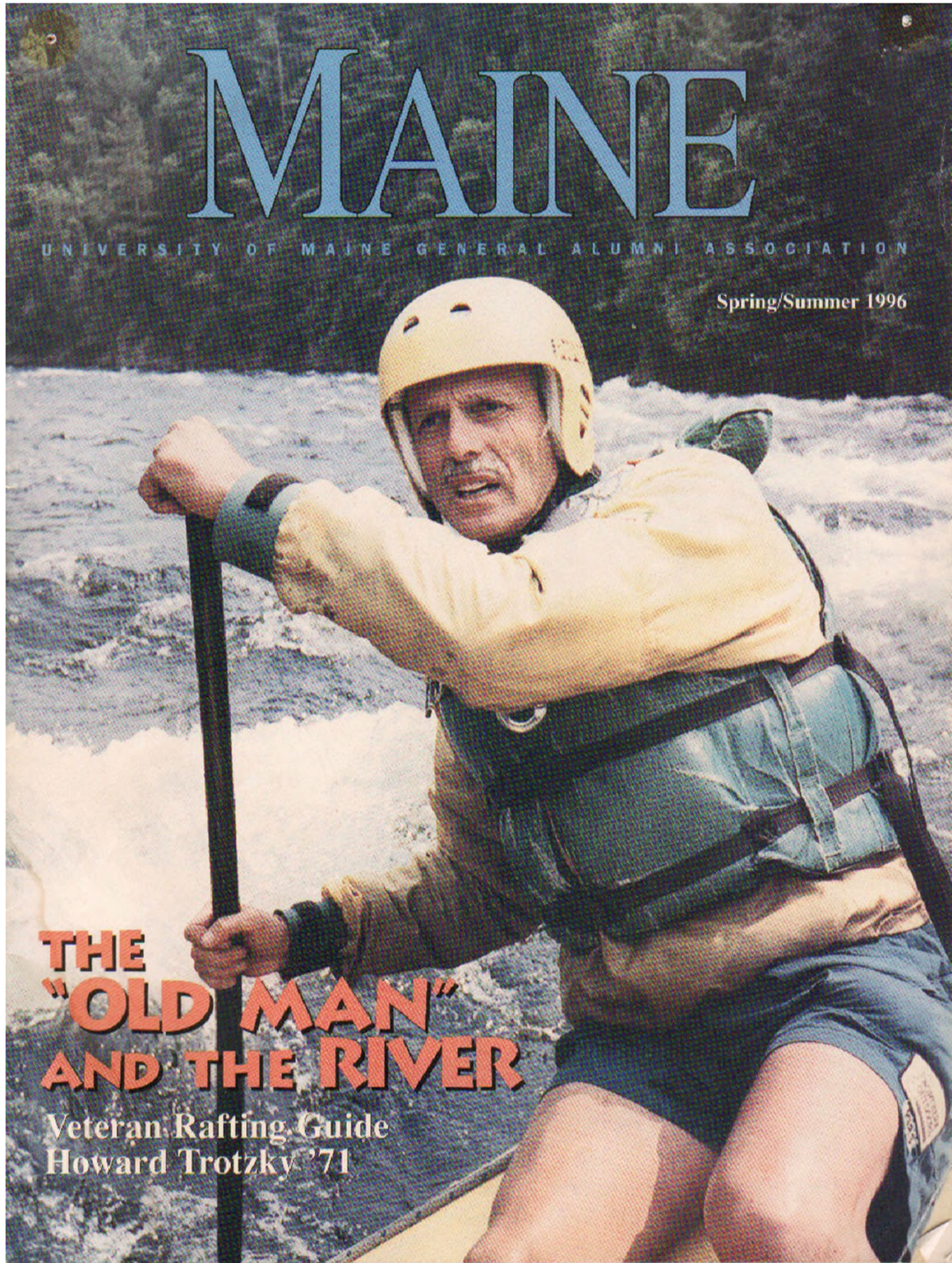
MAINE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE GENERAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Spring/Summer 1996

THE "OLD MAN" AND THE RIVER

Veteran Rafting Guide
Howard Trotzky '71



The “Old Man” and the River

At 56, Howard Trotzky '71G is the oldest of the many UMaine alums who guide thrill seekers down the rapids of the Kennebec. His passion for that river runs deep—it keeps him young and often in the middle of controversy.

By Brook Merrow '78



Photograph by G. Pearl

Howard Trotzky '71G first encountered the Kennebec River in the mid-1950s—a young teenager on a summer camp canoe trip. Since then man and river have been practically inseparable, often navigating turbulent waters together. As a UMaine graduate student he researched the river bottom and fought to ban log drives. And as a whitewater rafting guide he

opposed consolidation of the rafting industry and challenged shoreline development. Twice his work on behalf of the Kennebec cost him a job.

If Howard Trotzky has become the so-called watchdog of the Kennebec, it is because that is where his heart lies.

When Trotzky bought his house in Caratunk, back in 1969 as a graduate student in aquatic biology at the University of Maine with a wife and two young children, he was like a kid in a candy shop. “At the time,” he says, “I saw tremendous potential in the upper Kennebec River Valley for recreation. You were in the middle of vast paper company lands and you had the use of all of the rivers, ponds, lakes, mountains. It was really like living in the middle of a big, huge park.”

Today, Trotzky teaches chemistry and physics at Forest Hills High School in Jackman, where he has worked for eight years. Before that he taught at Windham and Orono High Schools and before that he was a four-term state senator from Bangor.

A seasoned commuter, he lives in Caratunk during the week and travels the 2 1/2 hours home to join his wife, Evelyn in Bangor on weekends. She is executive director of the Pine Tree State 4-H Club Foundation in Orono.

In his classroom on a Monday morning, Trotzky's sophomore chemistry students are sleepy. He peers over his glasses as he talks. Answers to questions are slow in coming. He has gray hair, a trim mustache, and wears khaki pants, striped shirt, and a red patterned tie.

The next class of upper-level chemistry students is more relaxed and talkative. Trotzky banters with them and congratulates one student on his acceptance to the University of Connecticut. A lecture about the Bohr model of the hydrogen atom is diverted into a discussion of Chernobyl and Wiscasset's Maine Yankee nuclear power plant.

It's hard to know that this same earnest teacher of science, who moves from wall charts to spectroscope to blackboard in this tiny square of a classroom, is a north woods Clark Kent, who trades tie and button-down shirt for river shorts and a lifejacket as a whitewater rafting guide on the Kennebec River each summer.

At 56, Trotzky is the oldest active whitewater guide on



the Kennebec and has guided 13 summers for Northern Outdoors, five days a week. That translates into more than 750 trips down through the Kennebec River Gorge, renowned for its spectacular shale walls and booming Class IV waters. The trip begins in the upper gorge, below Indian Pond just west of Moosehead Lake at Central Maine Power Company's imposing Harris Dam where rafting companies line up in an orderly fashion to launch their brightly-colored yellow, orange, and blue inflatable rafts.

"I love the gorge," Trotzky says. "It's a lot of fun in the big waves and the chance for injury is minimal. It's a continuous 2-mile trip up front that's thrilling for everybody, including me."

After about 5 1/2 miles of thrashing about in fabled rapids like Three Sisters, Alleyway, and Magic Falls, the river settles down and rafters can sit back and enjoy a lazy float down to The Forks, the confluence of the Kennebec and Dead Rivers and headquarters for many of Maine's whitewater rafting companies.

Over the years, Trotzky has developed certain strategies to ensure a memorable experience and explains, "The first section of the river I usually don't need a lot of weight in the front. So, I generally pick two women to ride up front. As soon as water comes rushing over the bow of the boat and hits them in the face, the women scream and that picks up the excitement for the ride."

At Magic Falls, a Class IV section, Trotzky puts the two

heaviest men up front for safety purposes. "When you hit Magic hole, you just get buried in the water, the raft almost submerges, and the only thing seen on the photographs are a couple paddle handles above the foam," he says.

Trotzky has a reputation as a conversational, well-informed host. And his lifelong career as a teacher shows up on the river. "People who go on a trip with me end up coming out and saying, 'Not only did I enjoy rafting the river, but I also learned a great deal,'" he says. "I have a knowledge and history of the area, my background in aquatic biology enables me to talk about what lives in the river. But I can also talk about other things, like politics."

Accordingly, Trotzky often is assigned to take VIPs or visiting journalists down the river. He also gets his share of older rafters. "Whenever there's the elderly, infirm, or atypical, they're assigned to me," he says with a laugh. "I do all the elderly because I can talk their language."

A plaque on the wall at Northern attests that he has been the most requested guide for the last 10 years.

"Howard is probably the best person we've ever had as far as dealing with a guest," says Jim Yearwood, vice president at Northern Outdoors. "He's a complete people person. Howard's reason for rafting is to spend a day on the river with other people and share the experience."

Trotzky especially likes guiding the two-day overnight trips. "You talk, get to know people," he says. "You knit people together. I really am good at this. It's a wonderful

experience. Every group has its own way of developing."

Just as Trotzky is teased by the younger guides and called the "old man," he too, likes to dish it out.

"Howard is just fun," says one woman raft guide. "He pretends to be the biggest chauvinist that ever walked. He always teases me about being a woman and how I can't get a raft down the river."

How long does the "old man" intend to guide? "I never really think of retirement in any way, even in teaching," he says. He keeps his health up, rides a stationary bicycle each morning, and tries to eat well, thanks in large part to the home-cooked meals his wife Evelyn sends with him each week.

Despite his popularity at Northern Outdoors, Trotzky won't have a job with Northern this summer. That's because of his recent lobbying activities against an 11th-hour amendment to the existing commercial whitewater rafting bill that would have allowed a handful of companies to double their allocations of rafters on the river. Fearing industry consolidation would reduce economic opportunities for the smaller outfitters, Trotzky worked to oppose the amendment, which eventually died in the house of representatives. Northern Outdoors owner Wayne Hockmeyer supported the amendment and told Trotzky he wouldn't have a job at Northern if he worked against it.

Trotzky has been offered employment with several other rafting companies for this summer.

Ironically, Hockmeyer and Trotzky served together on the original whitewater rafting commission that crafted industry standards in 1983.

"Northern Outdoors has always been on the cutting edge of whitewater rafting," Trotzky says. "They run a quality operation. I wanted to be with the best, that's why I wanted to work for them in the beginning. I feel badly

Rafting, Family Style

Sharyn Peabody '68 jokes about the way she and husband Chuck '66 got into the rafting business in 1983: "We had a VISA card and bought a raft," she recounts.

In 13 years, Crab Apple Whitewater has grown in step with the industry. Last year, Crab Apple, which offers seven different river trips in three New England states, entertained 15,000 rafters—6,000 in Maine—and ran more trips in New England than any other company. It has six full-time, year-round employees and a payroll of 100 in the summer season.

The Peabodys, who met while students at UMaine, arrived in The Forks in 1981 after purchasing the Crab Apple Acres Inn, a 19th-century farmhouse perched atop a hill overlooking the confluence of the Kennebec and Dead Rivers.

"It's been great," says Sharyn. "We raised two children in The Forks. Both are now grown and an integral part of the growing family business."

that I can't work with them now. I feel I was sticking up for what I believe."

Northern Outdoors, one of the largest outfitters in the Northeast today, pioneered Maine's whitewater rafting industry, which started in 1976 when just under 600 people rafted the Kennebec. Today, the industry is comprised of 15 companies that serviced more than 80,000 rafters last year and generated approximately \$8.3 million in rafting income alone.

Does the industry need room to expand? While some outfitters differ vigorously, Trotzky says the industry is healthy as is and says, "Not all the companies have filled up the available allocations. What makes Maine the way it should be in the Kennebec Valley is to have many medium-sized companies that offer diverse trips and personal attention instead of a few massive companies pumping as many people as they can down the river. That compromises the wilderness experience. It's a quality issue. Do you push people through or do you set limits?"

"We have set up a system that allows for rafting companies to compete

and utilize the river. These companies can be very lucrative. To me, it's wrong to concentrate the economic power into the hands of a small number. It's a public resource."

The Kennebec as a public resource. That philosophy was born in the waters of the Kennebec when Trotzky came to know the river from the bottom up doing research as an aquatic biologist in graduate school at the University of Maine in the late '60s. A native of New York City, he fell in love with Maine as a summer camper, returning each year to Camp Modin in Canaan. He graduated from Columbia with a degree in zoology and obtained a master's in science education. Later it was on to UMaine for another master's, this time in zoology.

As a researcher in the university's cooperative fishery unit, he chose in 1968 to study declining fish populations on the Kennebec below Wyman Dam. He soon realized that the extreme fluctuations in water flow caused by releases at the Harris and Wyman Dams were destroying the aquatic insect life. Moreover, Trotzky determined that the log drives were polluting the waters of the Kennebec, a river that often was jam-packed with pulp logs shore-to-shore at the height of the log drives. At its most prolific in 1970, Scott Paper, the principal user of the river, pushed an all-time high of 270,000 cords of wood down the Kennebec.

Two incidents stand out in Trotzky's mind: He recalls one morning anchored in the river a few miles below Wyman Dam in water six inches deep, taking aquatic insect samples from the bottom. After a couple hours, he noticed the current was changing, the water was rapidly rising. "Next thing I saw were logs coming down," he says. "I grabbed a pole and was pushing the logs to the side. The water went from knee-high to waist-high. I

grabbed my current meter, reached the canoe, and jumped in over the side."

Another time, he was 6 or 7 miles below Wyman Dam at the Williams Dam impoundment in Solon when he noticed "blips" on the water, even though it wasn't raining. "It was bubbles of gas coming up. I put the paddle down and pushed some sand and bark away," he recounts. "The bubbles would come right up. I took a test tube and filled it. I smelled it, but there was no odor, so I suspected it was methane."

Sure enough, Trotzky put a match to it right there and it flamed up.

It was clear that the log drives—in particular, the anaerobic decomposition of bark fibers on the river bottom—were polluting the Kennebec and something had to be done.

"I thought, this is a river that's a mess and being abused. Just to do another graduate thesis on a river that's polluted and put it away on the shelf was not what I wanted to do," he says. "I wanted to see the river cleaned up."

So, the graduate student from "away" took on the pulp and paper industry of Maine. He traveled the state drumming up support. In January 1970, he initiated the formation of the Kennebec Valley Conservation Association, "dedicated to the restoration and conservation of the natural resources of the Kennebec Valley." He wrote to Scott Paper and met with pulp and paper representatives. He asked Scott Paper to stop obstructing navigation on the river and was told the company would be glad to transport boats around the jammed areas.

When it became apparent no immediate action was imminent, Trotzky filed suit in September 1971 against Scott Paper, the Kennebec Log Driving Company, Kennebec Pulp and Paper, Central Maine Power, and Hudson Pulp & Paper. Rather than base his suit on the environmental damage done to the waterway, a process that would require lengthy scientific documentation, Trotzky wisely chose to assert his riparian rights. As part owner of a riverfront tract in Caratunk, he sued on the grounds that the use of the river for log drives prevented him from ex-



Whitewater Mom

Like many working moms, Edie Miles '78 sometimes feels guilty—for all the wrong reasons: She loves her job.

"It's a sin to have a job like this," the mother of three says of her position as a raft guide with Wilderness Expeditions.

Miles usually works weekends. While she's pounding down through Class IV rapids in the Kennebec Gorge with a boatful of thrill-seeking rafters, her husband Darrell '75 is back home in Dover-Foxcroft watching the kids.

In her ninth season as a guide, Miles wasn't too keen on guiding initially. "It didn't seem like the thing a mother should do," especially with a three-year-old toddling around.

Miles says her mother and grandmother pitched in to watch the kids when she trained and "tolerated" the new venture.

While few women guides were on the Wilderness staff when Miles first trained, women rafters are commonplace in the industry today. And Miles has always received a favorable response from her male counterparts. "The guys have always been really supportive," she says.

Nine seasons on the river are bound to produce a few harrowing tales and Miles recalls one that happened early in her career when she had a group of rafters, including a couple older men in their 60s. She gave them the choice of running Magic or skirting it.

They chose to run it.

"When you run Magic, you really have to take it on," she says. "I was overly cautious. We should've attacked it. We flipped and we all swam."

When she reached shore, Miles was frantic; she couldn't locate one of her rafters. After a fruitless search running the shoreline, she rejoined her group around the corner and found all of them there, "laughing and having a good time." Evidently, she said, that event really made their trip.

In addition to guiding and bringing up her children, she writes nonfiction and has been published in *Dover East* and *The Boston Sunday Globe*.

Alums on the Rapids

Here's a partial list of those graduates who currently are involved in the business. If you're planning a rafting trip, you may want to request a UMaine alum as a guide.

CRAB APPLE WHITEWATER

Chuck '66 & Sharyn Peabody '68, Owners
Catherine Dufresne '95
Donaki Thrasher '95

DOWNEAST WHITEWATER RAFTING

Rick Hoddinott '75, Owner
Ian Cameron '92

MOXIE OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Mari Carello-Bigner '81

NORTH AMERICAN WHITEWATER EXPEDITIONS

Margaret Heally '94
Rod Nadeau '91
Ken Olsen '91
Brendan Sullivan '95

NORTHERN OUTDOORS

Keith Flewelling '92
Brian Lindquist '94
Andrew Morrison '96
Michael Pilsbury '85
William Poulin '96
Chris Russell '89
Vaughn Smith '88
Craig Stafford '94
Jim Yearwood '83

UNICORN RAFTING EXPEDITIONS

Stephanie Allard '97
John Cangelosi '96
Amy Cangelosi '97
Christie Fry '92
Rick Gause '94
Damon Peters '96
Tom Sylvester '95

WILDERNESS EXPEDITIONS

John Willard '77, Owner
Edie Miles '78
Eric Sherman '83

exercising his riparian rights to the river. He asked the companies to remove all pulp logs on the shores and bottom of the river and Wyman Lake; to stop storing so much wood on the Kennebec that it blocked navigation; and to limit the time and size of the drives.

"I became a pitbull," Trotzky says. "I was going to put an end to this one way or another. I had very little resources and it was taking up time. I wanted an avalanche to fall on those responsible."

He needed the support of Maine's attorney general.

Help arrived in the form of a University of Maine student environmental group called the Effluent Society. With the group's support, he collected 1,218 student signatures on a petition asking attorney general James Erwin to intervene in the suit. He then asked several members of the Effluent Society to present the petition to Erwin.

"I was an out-of-stater. I needed some credibility," Trotzky explains. "I said, 'I need four kids, no long hair, dressed conservatively, all Mainers.'" Five students made the trip to Augusta, including Mac Hunter '74, Karen Schneller, Althea Eaton '75, Carol Kozloski '74, and Walter Whitcomb '74, currently Maine House Republican leader and a member of the General Alumni Association board of directors.

Sure enough, when a photo of the students presenting the petition to Erwin appeared in the *Kennebec Journal* on March 10, 1971, Hunter was in jacket and tie, and Schneller and Eaton wore dresses. Erwin agreed to intervene in the suit.

Hunter, now a UMaine professor of wildlife ecology and Libra professor of conservation biology, was a freshman back then and unprepared for the publicity that resulted.

"It certainly shocked me to find myself at 18 years old on television with the attorney general talking about these things," he recalls.

The impact of that long-ago moment still lingers. "It certainly felt good to make a difference and to see that a small group of young people could effect real change," Hunter says. "Now the river has become a tremendous re-

source for people in many different ways. It would've happened at some point, inevitably, but certainly we accelerated the process."

Several events around the time of the petition converged to ensure the eventual demise of the log drives. A month earlier, Scott Paper announced it would voluntarily end the log drives by October 1, 1976. Two days after the attorney general's announcement, the Maine Legislature filed a bill to terminate the drives. And on March 19, the federal government initiated civil action against the paper companies.

Trotzky's activism was not without a price. Indeed, he admits, "When I get on to something, I have to make a judgment if it's right or wrong. Then I forget the consequences."

In this case, the consequence was a job as a staff biologist with the newly-formed Land Use Regulation Commission (LURC). Pulp and paper representatives on the commission made sure Trotzky would not get the job even though he was highly qualified and had a favorable interview.

Following the campaign to ban the log drives, Trotzky became chairman of the Bangor Republican City Committee and in 1974 won a seat in the state senate where he continued his environmental battles. There, he made his mark as an outspoken, conscientious, unconventional lawmaker who didn't mind taking on difficult issues.

He was controversial, even within his own party. "Howard is an important kind of person," says Bennett Katz, the Republican senate majority leader in Augusta at the time and currently a member of the UMaine System board of trustees. "He was willing to tackle unpopular challenges."

Trotzky has been described as driven, sincere, motivated, irrepressible, sensitive, eccentric, funny, an agitator, an environmentalist, a family man. His politics seemed to emanate mainly from what he thought was best for the people of the state of Maine, not from some partisan outpost. Even as a loyal Republican, he was just as liable to rankle his own party members as he was a Democrat.

Rep. Herb Clark, D. Millinocket,

who served with Trotzky on the 1983 whitewater rafting commission, says it this way: "At times Howard did get underneath my skin. If it was raining, he'd say it's snowing. His intentions are with his heart and that's where he spoke from."

Trotzky worked hard in the legislature and chaired at various times the natural resources, education, energy, and public utilities committees. Given his love for the outdoors, it is no surprise that he considers his legacy to be the environmental laws he helped push through.

According to Trotzky, a bill requiring soils testing on lakeshore property where summer homes were being converted to year-round homes was probably the most important bill he championed. Debate on it was particularly rancorous; the bill was bitterly opposed by many rural senators. One lawmaker was ruled out of order after calling Trotzky "the senator from Manhattan." The bill just barely passed.

Other key legislation he worked for included the returnable bottle bill, for which he was a major spokesman along with then Rep. John McKernan, and the preservation of the Bigelow Mountain Range.

One piece of Trotzky lore illustrates the depth of his commitment. It was 1979 and Richard Barringer was struggling to be reappointed as state conservation commissioner. Barringer's poor relationship with the forest products industry had caused Trotzky to initially vote against Barringer's reappointment.

When it became clear to Trotzky in later conversations with Barringer that Barringer was willing to appoint a director for the bureau of forestry that the forest products industry respected and that Barringer would listen to, Trotzky decided to reverse his vote.

He went to Gov. Joseph Brennan's office. "I sat in front of Brennan and told him I would vote for Barringer if he renominated him," Trotzky explains. "The governor looked at me. He didn't trust me because I was a Republican. He was suspicious, looking at me in every which direction. He said, 'You'll stick by the commitment?' I

Maine alums fill a variety of roles at Northern Outdoors



Jim Yearwood

When it comes to University of Maine graduates, Northern Outdoors is well represented, including vice president Jim Yearwood '83, Michael Pilsbury '85, and Chris Russell '89.

A native of Madawaska, Jim Yearwood wanted to "do something that I was excited about when I got up in the morning."

He found that at Northern Outdoors. In 1981, as an undergraduate majoring in wildlife biology at UMaine, Yearwood answered an ad in the *Bangor Daily News* for guides at Northern Outdoors. He's been with the company ever since.

"The company (Northern Outdoors) was young, but I saw a lot of opportunity to go somewhere with it," he says. "I was always an outdoors person. I stuck with it. I've really enjoyed myself."



Michael Pilsbury

Michael Pilsbury is in his fifth season as a guide with Northern Outdoors. A native of Turner, Pilsbury majored in French and zoology at UMaine.

He admits to a case of "culture shock" when he traded downtown Philadelphia, where he was general manager for a restaurant chain, for The Forks and the life of a whitewater raft guide.

As a master guide, Pilsbury has his whitewater, hunting, fishing, and recreation licenses. He spends half his time in office management and the other half on the river.

Overall, he says, "The lifestyle is super. I'm back home."



Chris Russell

When Chris Russell was an undergraduate in wildlife biology at UMaine in the late '80s, he realized jobs in his field were limited and that if he did find employment, he'd wind up in an office.

So, the Gardiner native parlayed his summer job as a whitewater guide at Northern Outdoors into a full-time position as adventure program coordinator. A master guide, Russell markets and organizes raft trips and outdoor experiences like ropes courses, mountain biking, rock climbing, and fishing to youth groups, colleges, schools, and camps.

"The best part is the people you meet and the friendships that are formed," he says.

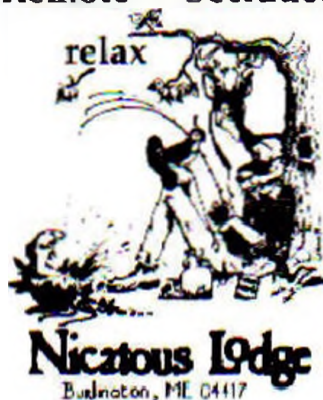
said, "I will stick by that commitment no matter what. I give you my word. I will not deviate."

Trotzky did not deviate. At the time of the crucial committee vote, he was flat on his back at Eastern Maine Medical Center recovering from a back operation. In order to cast the deciding vote, Trotzky traveled by ambulance to Augusta with his wife and a nurse, waited out several hours of de-

bate in Bennett Katz's office lying on a hospital stretcher, and then voted for Barringer, who was approved 7-6.

Katz says Trotzky always had "a clear vision of what he wanted to accomplish" and calls him "irrepressible." But, he points out, "Howard was not necessarily 'one of the boys.' He was certainly respected for the sincerity of his views. But I'm not sure he had a great time in office, when you take a

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look at Howard whitewater rafting and living as a free soul and then look at the confines of the legislature."

Trotzky may be living the life of a free soul, but there's pattern and meaning to it. From his small classroom in Jackman, Maine, he's making a difference. "Your immortality is the contribution you make to society," he says. "Hopefully, you make it a better world in some way. In education, when my students succeed, that's my reward. When you see students go on to fine universities and vocational schools and have good values, you know you're doing something positive."

Ensnared in the upper Kennebec River Valley, Trotzky continues to defend the Kennebec, not always to the delight of those who prefer a more aggressive attitude toward development. His long-range view for the river is for it to remain undeveloped on the shoreline. Yet, he says the most pressing threat is the leasing of shoreline properties. Several years ago, Trotzky fought one rafting company that was able to overturn local zoning and obtain Department of Environmental Protection approval to build a base-camp along the Kennebec in Caratunk. Today, Central Maine Power is selectively leasing sites along the river mainly to rafting companies. And CMI has plans to develop the lower end of Indian Pond.

"I picture the Kennebec as having places with campsites," he says, "yet the river would remain forever in its natural state. We have an obligation to the country, to our children and our grandchildren that they can one day put a canoe in the river and not see rows of camps and parked cars on the shoreline."

It was Trotzky's vision that the Kennebec Valley Conservation Association would serve as the watchdog organization to oversee development of the Kennebec Valley. Unfortunately, it hasn't had the staying power.

"I do think of myself as the watchdog of the upper Kennebec," he reflects, "but I guess I'm getting tired. I ask myself, 'Do I have enough energy to fight the next battle?'"