

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



Neutral Buoyancy by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | JULY 2016

It was a tolerably warm noon on a Thursday in June of 1995. John Q. Ladd, a 27-year-old Caucasian from Charlotte, had just arrived in his burgundy 1989 Dodge Caravan minivan at the Bear Creek Lake public boat ramp off of Canada Road (NC 281). The four-hour westward journey to the mountains had been fairly uneventful, save for a mumbling man at a gas station in the college town of Cullowhee.

John pulled up beside the unoccupied dock and parked. He then extricated his new polypropylene kayak from the rear of the van. It was short enough (9'-5") to fit inside when laid diagonally across the seatbacks.

Five minutes later, the van was properly parked, and he was paddling away. *Ok, which way to Flat Creek Falls? Need to head southeast to Mill Cove.*

After initially heading towards the dam, John got himself oriented correctly, and was soon paddling like a champion towards Mill Cove. *This two-mile water transit won't be that bad. There's hardly any wind. I bet I'm almost halfway there. Piece o' cake.*

Nine minutes later, John saw the little island in the hard left-hand turn. *Yes, we're making great time. Might as well take a water break. Don't want to get dehydrated.*

He then reached behind his seat and removed his backpack. The ice-water was refreshing. When putting the water bottle back, he felt a smaller plastic bottle. *What is this? Oh, it's the 'heavy water' that Ken gave me. How could I forget? Should I do a little 'zap'? Oh, why not? We've got all day. No one to meet. No one to check in with. No place to be. If not now,*

when? These are ideal conditions. Fair weather. What could go wrong out here? I'll even wear the life jacket for additional safety. [John was a good swimmer.]

Suddenly a bass boat with two Caucasian fishermen accosted John just as he swallowed a big slug of the neural water. *Just my luck.*

"Doing some fishing?" the obese man sitting on the bow's swivel chair asked.

"No, just some flatwater sightseeing," Mr. Ladd said.

"There's some good kayaking on the Tuckasegee River, just on the other side of the spillway," the bearded man at the helm said.

"Oh, thanks for the tip," John courteously replied. "I'll keep that in mind."

"So, where are you headed?" the man on the bow then asked. *Darn! He just had to ask. Must not tell them 'Flat Creek Falls', as it is surrounded by private property and they won't like my legal way of getting to it. Think up something fast!*

"Sols Creek. I heard that there's an impressive rock face on the mountainside."

"Indeed there is," the helmsman agreed.

"I'll just snap a few pics," John said. "No mountain climbing today."

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