

Vladimir Kovalik

Vladimir worked as a war games research analyst at Stanford University, after a stint in Viet Nam. In 1963 his love of Oregon's Rogue River began by swimming from Galice to the mouth of the river with two friends. In the later 1960s he was introduced to Martin Litton by his best friend Ron Hayes and they began running the Grand Canyon with Litton. The Colorado River snared his mind and in 1972, he and Ron Hayes began Wilderness World outfitting on the Grand Canyon and other rivers in the West. Vladimir was married to Nada and they have a son Kyle and two daughters Kim and Jaren.



{Vladimir Kovalik} {Photo from BQR 2005-06}

“One of the best, brightest, and certainly most colorful characters ever to grace the passageways of the Grand Canyon (or more appropriately—the planet Earth) is a crazy Czechoslovakian named Vladimir Kovalik (VK). Most of us owe the man (and, as he himself constantly points out—his beautiful family, fine friends and wonderful crew) more than we know. Back in the good old days VK, along with his extremely competent wife Nada and his good buddy Ron Hayes (the actor), started a river company called Wilderness World (which ultimately, after a seventeen year run, was sold and thereby metamorphosed into the modern day Canyon Explorations). What we all owe him for, besides that impossibly cool little company and all the great trips and hot-spit crews and magical traditions thereof, is a passion for design and perfection that led to more advances in boats and boating technology than you could shake a stick at: the Campways Havasu, Miwok, Apache; today's Avon Spirit and Pro; whole companies like Riken Inflatables and Maravia that were sucked into the business in part through VK's energy and enthusiasm; as well as boats by Caligari and Metzler; features like self-bailing floors, lace-in thwarts, sitting on the cooler, collapsible frames; not to mention music(al) trips and silent float outs to Diamond Creek...all these things and many more VK had a major hand in.” (*Boatman's Quarterly Review*; Volume 18 #4; Grand Canyon River Guides)



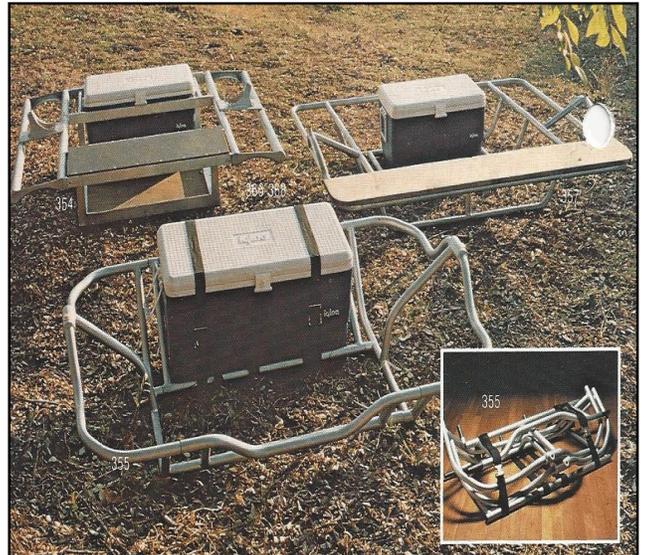
{Vladimir on the Rogue River in 1974 (Photo by Jon Osgood)}



{Vladimir near Trail Canyon Rapid in Grand Canyon, 1973 or 74 (Photo courtesy of Ron Hayes Family)}

Kovalik was an innovator of river craft and gear. One of Kovalik's ideas was the lace-in thwart, a feature he developed after discovering how easy glued in or sewn in thwarts could be ripped from the main tubes. He also designed the bow and stern tapering tubes, and the Campways floor with three sections: eight inch thick sections in the middle, thinning to three inches in the bow and stern.(6) In 1977 Vladimir developed a form-fit cargo bag

By 1973, he had designed the new curved drop-in metal frame, which was perhaps the first frame to use a large cooler as a seat. It was light, strong and graceful looking with no square corners. The frame with small wood hung floors, kept the weight low and centered in a boat.



{Frame designed by Vladimir Kovalik & manufactured by Ole Olsen for Campways}



By 1973 Vladimir's designs and influence had a profound influence on pfd's. The design, initially manufactured by Holcombe, replaced the kapok used as floatation with foam and they had a floatation collar to help keep swimmers face up. When Kovalik teamed up with Dan Baxter, Dan contacted Stearns to produce the Type V vests.

Although there have been many stages in the development of whitewater rafts and equipment, and many gifted people involved in their evolution, the legacy that Vladimir Kovalik leaves is that he changed the paradigm from using whatever gear existed and modifying it for river use, to designing river equipment that was both elegant and whitewater specific.



{1972 Wilderness World's first year in the Grand Canyon. Green River model with WiWo's fiberglass frames. (Photo courtesy of Ron Hayes Family) }