

International Whitewater Hall of Fame 2005 Nominee Biography



Candidate: **Charlie Walbridge**

Category: Advocate (Living)
Sport: Whitewater Canoe
Years Active: 1964 to Present
Home Base: Bruceton Mills, West Virginia USA

Introduction: (quoted from Affiliate Nomination Form)

“For over 40 years Charlie Walbridge has been actively involved in whitewater as a racer (top ten in slalom and wildwater in the 1970’s), equipment and safety technique innovator, business owner (Wildwater Designs Ltd. 1972-1995), instructor, author, conservation advocate, speaker, expert witness and avid paddler to this day. Approachable, humble, and always friendly, Charlie has probably done more than any other person to promote river safety and develop standards and rescuer techniques almost since the beginning of whitewater as a sport. But he also works hard on a local level, and is currently coordinating efforts to protect the Cheat Canyon...”

“Charlie Walbridge’s work has saved countless lives and kept rivers open and accessible to those who wished to assume personal responsibility and risk. His work, while focused predominantly in the U.S., is imitated and known worldwide.”

Contributions:

- 1974 - Throw Line Rescue Bag, Equipment Design and Development
- 1975 - HiFloat Personal Flotation Device (Life Jacket), Equipment Design and Development
- 1992 - Swiftwater Rescue Harness, Equipment Design and Development
- 1995 - Swiftwater Tow Tether, Equipment Design and Development

- 1977-1979: Participation in river Safety Symposia in Easton, Pennsylvania. Chairman in 1978 and 1979. Responsible for coordinating a program for 100 students in cooperation with The American Red Cross, local clubs, Park Officials, and the Pennsylvania Fish Commission.
- 1978. Member, U.S. Coast Guard Canoe Accident Study Team Representatives of three major canoeing organizations studies a full year of accident reports involving canoes to determine prevention strategies. Results showed 85% not wearing life jackets, and determined that 44% would have been saved had they done so.

- 1979: Developed a series of eight posters on canoe safety with cartoonist Dean Norman under a U.S. Coast Guard Grant. Supervised the development of the Canoesport Packet, a collection of pamphlets on basic canoe and kayak safety, distributed without charge by the American Canoe Association.
- 1979: Member, Committee on Universal River Signals, American Whitewater Affiliation. We developed a nationally recognized system of river signals for on-water communication.
- 1980 and 1981: Presenter at two River Rescue Conferences put on by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in Columbus, Ohio. Spoke on profile of accident victims and techniques for educating recreational paddlers.
- 1981: Member, Safety Review Team, Minnesota Outward Bound School. Working under National Safety Director Bob Box, responsible for evaluating the lake canoeing, wilderness tripping, and whitewater aspects of their program.
- 1981 and 1983: Speaker and Instructor, Pennsylvania Fish Commission River Rescue Symposiums in Harrisburg, Pa. and Scranton, Pa.
- 1982: Co-chairman, River Rescue Symposium, Richmond, VA. Responsible for developing and executing the instructional program for 100 firefighters. Was among those responsible for keeping the James River open to canoeing and kayaking.
- 1984: Speaker and Instructor, Ledyard Canoe Club River Safety Workshop co-sponsored by the A-6 Ambulance District.
- 1985: Co-Chairman, River Rescue Symposium, Washington, D.C. Put on in cooperation with the National Park Service, American Red Cross, Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads, and the Metropolitan DC Council of Governments. This was a most challenging event due to intense political and jurisdictional disputes following a tragic multiple drowning the year previous.
- 1986: Instructor: River Guide Training, National Park Service, New River Gorge NRA.
- 1986: Instructor and Presenter, National Conference of Collegiate Outing Programs, Davis, California. Discussed Eastern River Recreation and River Rescue.
- 1987: Chairman, American Canoe Association and Chairman, Safety Code Revision Committee of the American Whitewater Affiliation. Coordinated the input of over 50 experts to update the nation's only safety code for canoeists and kayakers. Appointed Safety Chairman of the AWA following this revision. Wrote a regular safety column for "American Whitewater Journal".
- 1987: Member, Safety Committee, North American Paddlesports Association, an association of canoe and kayak dealers. Helped to develop safety standards for on-water canoe and kayak demo's at the request of NAPS A's insurance underwriter.
- 1987: Co-Chairman, Ohio Pyle River Safety Symposium. Sponsored by Ohio Pyle State Park, the outfitters on the Lower Youghiogheny, and the American Red Cross, this event included a full day's hands-on river work for 75 firefighters and rescue professionals.
- 1987-present: designed and ran regular summer courses in river rescue for paddlers on the Delaware River near Lambertville, NJ.

- 1987-1989: River Safety Chairman for the '89 World Championships on the Savage River near Bloomington, Md. Supervised squad of 60 volunteers covering the slalom and wildwater races. Worked with the Chairman of Volunteers on logistics issues.
- 1988-89: Member, River Safety Video Work Group, National Park Service, Upper Delaware NSRR, Narrowsburg, N.Y. Served as consultant in preparing their video. Also served as a consultant in the preparation of "Cold, Wet, and Alive", a Coast Guard funded Hypothermia film.
- 1989: Speaker, Ohio Water Rescue Conference, Avon Lake, Ohio. The theme was "Developing National Standards for Water Rescue". This was done under the auspices of ASTM. Participated in swiftwater rescue group. Member, ASTM Committee F-32.05.030 (Water Rescue).
- 1989: Consultant, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Participated in a daylong session discussing ways to reduce river fatalities in Idaho.
- 1990: Speaker, International River Safety Symposium held at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in North Carolina. Gave overview of boating safety in USA to an international audience.
- 1990-94: Supervised development of River Rescue Course for the American Canoe Association. Includes giving prototype courses to over 900 participants, developing curriculum, and certifying instructor-trainers.
- 1991 - Speaker, America Outdoors Confluence '91. Spoke on risk management in the Rafting Industry and assisted in a river rescue workshop.
- 1993 Featured in the ACA/National Organization of Canoe Liveries and Outfitters safety video; also: the American Canoe Association's "Heads UP" River Rescue Video.
- 1993 - Speaker, America Outdoors Confluence '93. Coordinated a panel of six outfitters and other safety experts discussing the best methods for coping with serious injuries and fatalities.
- 1997 - Revision Consultant, American Red Cross Small Craft Safety Program.
- 1997 - Participated in the 1998 AWA Safety Code Revision as the Safety Committee Vice- Chair.
- 1998-1999: Served on the Standards Technical Panel for Personal Flotation Devices run by Underwriter's Laboratories. '<
- 1998-9: Scriptwriter and technical consultant for Whitewater Self Defense, a river safety and instructional video produced for Performance Vide by Kent Ford.
- 2000-2004: Member, Safety Focus Group, Ohiopyle State Park. Chaired by park manager, studied the circumstances surrounding three recent drownings at Dimple Rapid and made recommendations to him to improve safety in the park in general and at Dimple Rapid in particular. Also testified at the coroner's inquest into the three deaths.
- Safety Director, Ohiopyle Falls Race, 2000-2002
- Chairman, Cheat Canyon Coalition, 2002-2003
- 2004: Consultant, McLaughlin Rincon Engineering, Denver, CO. They were engineers of record on a 22 million dollar project to re-water the American River at the Auburn Dam Site near Auburn, CA. Asked to examine a hydrologic model in Colorado Springs and visit the project site before advising the Placer County Water Authority about the difficulty of the rapid that would be produced.

Memberships:

- 1966-1971 - Bucknell Outing Club, Co-Founder and President
- 1976- present - American Canoe Association, Safety Education and Instruction Committee
- 1977 –present - American Canoe Association, Instructor- Trainer; Safety Chairman 1977 - 1997
- 1978-79 - American Canoe Association, Board of Directors
- 1986-1996 - American Whitewater, Safety Chairman
- 1992 - Present - American Whitewater, Board of Directors
- 1999 – Present - Mowglis, School of the Open, Board of Directors
- 2001 – Present - Friends of the Cheat River, Board of Directors

Publications:

- River Safety Task Force Newsletter (1979); Best Of The River Safety Task Force Newsletter (1979) River Safety Report 1983-1985 (1986); River Safety Report 1986-1988 (1989); River Safety Report 1989-1991 (1992); River Safety Report 1992-1995 (1996) River Safety Report 1996-1999 (2000) Published By The American Canoe Association.
- *Boatbuilders Manual*: With Rock, Meyers, and Queitzsch. Six editions, the most recent one published by Menasha Ridge Press in 1987. Currently out of print.
- *Appalachian Whitewater Volume I & 2*. Wrote West Virginia, some Western Maryland, and Pennsylvania descriptions. Menasha Ridge Press 1987, revised 1993 and 1998
- *Wild Water West Virginia*; revised a book originally written by Davidson, Davidson, and Eister; Menasha Ridge Press, 1995 & 2002. It was recently revised and retitled *Canoe and Kayak Guide to West Virginia* and published in 2003
- *Knots For Paddlers*; Menasha Ridge Press, 1995
- *Whitewater Rescue Manual* with Wayne Sundmacher; Ragged Mountain Press, 1995
- *Outfitting Your Kayak*; Menasha Ridge Press, 1996
- *River Safety Anthology* (With Jody Tinsley) Menasha Ridge Press, 1996
- *Outfitting Your Canoe*; Menasha Ridge Press, 1997
- *Whitewater Self Defense*: With Kent Ford; Performance Video, 1998
- Camp Mowglis Staff Manual 2001
- American Whitewater River Stewardship Toolkit - Safety Section 2004
- A number of magazine articles published in American Canoeist, American Whitewater Journal, Boat Pennsylvania, Canoe & Kayak (regular issues & annuals), Downriver, Journal of Emergency Medical Services, Paddler, Pennsylvania Angler, Rescue, River Runner, River, Wilderness Camping, and Wonderful West Virginia.

Honors & Recognition:

- 1980 - Certificate Of Appreciation, The Ohio Division of Watercraft, Department of Natural Resources, 1980 For help developing their river rescue program
- 1981 - Regional Award Of Merit, National Water Safety Congress
- 1982 - Anheiser Busch "Schooner" Award, United States Coast Guard for outstanding contributions to water safety
- 1983 - The Howie Lebrant Award for outstanding contribution to paddlesports
- 1990's - Recognized as one of *Paddler Magazine's* "100 Paddlers Of The Century" for river safety work
- 2001 - "Legends Of Paddling Award", American Canoe Association
- 2004 - "Legacy Award", American Whitewater

Other Information:

Charlie Walbridge has dedicated his life to paddling. He has volunteered tens of thousands of hours to the sport. His contributions to the sport in safety and access have kept rivers open and have increased the fun of the sport. He is highly deserving of induction into the International Whitewater Hall of Fame.