

## Whitewater Rock

Christina Williams was having lots of fun with her family. They were on their first white water rafting trip.

Christina remembers floating on a wide part of the river. The water ran slowly. She and her sister could get out of the raft and swim. She heard a roaring sound as the river narrowed and headed around a bend. The river guide explained that they were almost at a rapid called "Dragon's Teeth."

The next thing she remembers was waking up in the hospital two days later.

Christina's father told her what had happened.

Their raft was the second one in the group. They came up to the rapids at "Dragon's Teeth." The Dragon's Teeth rapid gets its name from a row of rocks that stick up in the water. These rocks make it look like the jaws of a huge animal. This part of the river is much narrower also. The water is forced to go faster. The water tumbles over itself. It is a Class 4 rapid. It is the most difficult part of this river. (Class 5 rapids are the most difficult rapids that a boat can go over.)

"A good river guide should be able to get through Dragon's Teeth without much problem," says Dusty Jones. Dusty is a river guide with Extreme Outfitters. Christina's family was riding with them. "We take hundreds of rafts through that rapids every summer. This year, only four of our rafts flipped over there."

The problem is a rock right in the middle of the Dragon's Teeth. It's the biggest rock in the row.

It is in direct line with the flow of water. Over time, the power of the water has worn away the rock. It's created an undercut where rafts can easily get trapped.



Dusty explains, "A raft will bounce right off most rocks. The raft will follow the water around the rock. But an undercut rock is different. Part of the rock sticks up above the water. But below the water the rock is worn away. There is a gap like a cavity in a tooth. Instead of bouncing off, the raft gets trapped in the gap. Once a boat is trapped, it's really hard to get it out. The current is just too strong."

One raft was able to stay on the left side of the river. It stayed away from the Dragon's Teeth cavity. But the raft Christina was riding in moved forward quickly in the water. The raft was pushed right up against the cavity. A third raft bumped into them. This caused Christina's raft to flip over. Christina fell into the water. She was sucked into the undercut of the rock. The current trapped her there under the water.

"She's lucky we were able to get her out at all," Dusty says. "That was really scary."

It took four people and two ropes to get Christina out. She wasn't breathing.

"We called for help. One of the other guides did CPR. She started breathing again. We try to

be prepared for emergencies. But it would be better if these things never happened.”

Christina was lucky. She had bruises and one broken arm. She still has no memory of the accident. But she will be fine.

She and her family found out later that her accident was the third one on that rock this year. And two years ago, a river guide died in that spot. He was rescuing another rafter who was trapped.

Each year, the undercut on the rock gets bigger. As more water hits it, the rock wears away below the water’s surface.

“I’m sure that there will be more accidents there if something doesn’t change,” says Dusty.

A group of river guides suggested that the rock be moved to make the rapid safer. But others are trying to prevent any changes to the river.

“If we move that rock, then where does it stop? Do we move every rock that makes it hard to get down the river? Changing the river will change how the water flows downstream,” says Jonathan Charles. He is a local rancher. “The river should be left alone.”

“We’re not trying to change the river to make it easier to raft,” says Dusty. “We just want that one spot to be safer. We don’t want anyone else to get hurt.”

What do you think? Should the rock be moved? The Bureau of Land Management is holding a meeting next Tuesday to hear public opinion before making a decision.