

THE GREAT WINOOSKI RIVER RAFT RACES  
By: Bolton History Group

It was the summer of 1968, the UVM Outing Club held the first Winooski Raft Race. After a few years the event became increasingly popular yet it was a dangerous event for participants and spectators. The inaugural event took 6 hours to complete but the next year in 1969 the event was moved to April which increased the danger with high water levels from the spring thaw compared to the previous summer event. Thrill seekers ready to dust off that long winter cabin fever participated. The rapids with the increased current contributed to the race taking 1 hour and 28 minutes for the winning raft to channel its way through Bolton.



The Winooski Raft races lasted 7 years (1975 the final year) before the plug was pulled on the event due to the outing club no longer sponsoring the event, the danger, increased popularity among the spectators and participants causing traffic problems for the small town, and litter in and along the river. Rafts of all sorts of materials were used including drums, milk cartons, wood and yes, even a few Volkswagen Bugs floating down. The races would kick off from the Bolton Falls Hydro dam area and rafters held their



breath going through the rapids in the most nerve-racking section of the river. Getting through the Railroad bridge proved to be a challenge for the competitors. If your raft made it through without crashing into the trusses then you likely had smooth sailing from that point on. Many weren't so lucky. The Waterbury Fire Department rescued many from capsized rafts but that was the appeal to many participants and the spectators loved to watch. Many locals and those in surrounding towns came to watch the event that would end at the Jonesville bridge.



Photo Source(s): Burlington Free Press as well as Tom Littlefield from Waterbury.

<< Waterbury Village Annex team 1971 as well as 1 of 2 "Water Bugs" that participated in the 1972 race

**Next gathering for the Bolton History Group is Sat, June 8<sup>th</sup> @ 11:00am East Bolton Cemetery**

*Please join us for year #2 of cemetery restoration. We will finish scrubbing headstones. Looking for volunteers.*

*Useful materials: soft bristled brushes, Bucket, water squirt bottle, and a little elbow grease. D2 cleaning solution will be provided, donations of additional jugs is greatly appreciated. Please dress for the weather, you warm up once you start scrubbing! Fingers crossed for a beautiful day!! We move to West Bolton in July!*