

# boatman's quarterly review

## JOHN O'BRIEN

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## boatman's quarterly review

...is published more or less quarterly  
by and for GRAND CANYON RIVER GUIDES.

GRAND CANYON RIVER GUIDES  
is a nonprofit organization dedicated to

**Protecting Grand Canyon**  
**Setting the highest standards for the river profession**  
**Celebrating the unique spirit of the river community**  
**Providing the best possible river experience**

General Meetings are held each Spring and Fall. Our Board of Directors Meetings are generally held the first Wednesday of each month. All innocent bystanders are urged to attend. Call for details.

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Our editorial policy, such as it is: provide an open forum. We need articles, poetry, stories, drawings, photos, opinions, suggestions, gripes, comics, etc. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Grand Canyon River Guides, Inc.

Written submissions should be less than 1500 words and, if possible, be sent on a CD or emailed to GCRG. Microsoft Word files are best but we can translate most programs. Include postpaid return envelope if you want your disk or submission returned.

Deadlines for submissions are the 1ST of February, May, August and November. Thanks!  
Our office location: 515 West Birch, Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
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## Prez Blurb

**endogenous** [en-doj-e-nis] (adjective) proceeding from within; derived internally.

**I**N THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE, greeting the day through a clear lens of light arrives slow this time of year. Our circadian rhythms are set to be in hibernation mode. Our bodies are put to rest and minds are on pause for rejuvenation. Regeneration is key during winter. After family gatherings, we leap into a new decade full of inspiration, ready to make a change. It is year of the Rat in the Chinese New Year; how suitable for us river rats anticipating the start of another season. As the days get longer, we instinctively rise like our plant friends, pushing through earth, searching for the vitamin D we so crave after so many dark nights.

**gnomon** [no-man] (noun) an object that by the position or length of its shadow serves as an indicator especially of the hour of the day.

In the coming months, the sun will stretch higher into the sky, touching the north side of our window sills, and we'll start to tell time by where the sun hits the beach, probing the shore with driftwood. Spring beckons us to seek sunny camps with patches of light to warmly embrace our bodies. Ancient people tracked planting seasons with some form of a sundial that cast shadows on a ring drawn on sandstone, or they waited for light to peek through an oculus. Over the centuries, sundials evolved into a reminder of the transience of the world and the inevitability of death. Designers would etch mottos like *memento mori* onto them: "Do not kill time, for it will surely kill thee." With a renewed spirit we are reminded to not waste our time on earth or take for granted moments with our loved ones. Sharing stories and rekindling memories fulfills our time with community, providing lessons for the future.

**rhizome** [ri-zom] (noun) characterized by ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.

Rather than narrativize history and culture, the rhizome presents history and culture as a map or wide array of attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis, for a 'rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things,

interbeing, intermezzo.' The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth and propagation.

On January 9th, at 11:57 PM, eight river runners attempted to suspend time, including our own Omar Martinez, Lyndsay Hupp, and Justin Salamon, by taking part in the latest speed run of the Colorado River through Grand Canyon. As their cataraft glided under the Black Bridge at Phantom Ranch, about fifty onlookers cheered, expressing love and support for their pards down below. On the rim the temperatures dropped, fires roared, and pipes froze, an abrupt reminder of how precious to our everyday lives easy access to water has become.

**intersectionality** [in-ter-sek-shun-nall-i-tee ] (noun) the theory that the overlap of various social identities, as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual.

As we step into the 2020 guiding season, many of us will partake in another Guide Training Seminar in Marble Canyon. We are very excited to have an overflow of speakers and ideas to share with the community. This is a place where we have the opportunity to listen to and be inclusive of diverse perspectives which forms a greater camaraderie of those invested in Grand Canyon; proving a place of

greater respect and strength. At this year's GTS, we will be hearing from the Park Service about the new water pipeline they're drilling into Bright Angel Creek and what this means for future water sustainability. Water is Life. Our community also faces the concerning news that the humpback chub is again being considered for down listing to the threatened status from endangered; these fish already teeter on the edge of losing their most fertile spawning grounds to prospective dams on the Little Colorado River. This choice will subtract even more funding from scientific research of the humpback chub from the greater upper basin studies. We need to make sure the federal government takes into consideration all research methods, locations and findings performed regarding the Humpback Chub before a decision is made far from our desert lands. With a new election around the corner, it is imperative to make each of our voices count. Thinking about the future we want, educating ourselves about our local and national political situation is a step in the right direction. Although I too have struggled with hiding on/off-season, I want to encourage everyone to participate in the newest census and elections as they are more important than ever. Let's enjoy the days growing longer, the moments within our nests, and the last chill before we enter a time when shade is sparse and the river is not so close a temperature to freezing in pipes.

*Margeaux Bestard*



Elena Kirschner

# Farewells

GEORGE “BUCK” BOREN—OCTOBER 1, 1945 – AUGUST 18, 2018

IN 1968, THREE BROTHERS from Montebello, California signed on with Western River Expeditions—the oldest brother, only 23 at the time, was Buck Boren. Each brother was sent to run primarily on different rivers—Scott, the youngest, was sent to the Middle Fork of the Salmon. Bill the middle brother bounced around—running the Green, Cataract, and the Grand over the years. Buck, though, was a Grand Canyon boatman from the start and that is where he ran from 1968–1973, first for Western and later for Harris Boat Trips—which he became part owner of, but...I’m getting ahead of myself.

Though most boatmen today never ran with the Boren Boys, those who did know that during the late 1960s and early 1970s they were a core part of the boatman community. “[The Boren Boys] became some of the best Grand Canyon boatmen that ever walked. He [Buck] was a damned good one.” is how Jake Luck, a notorious personality from those days, remembered them in an Oral History interview.

In 1969, Buck met Al Harris, son of legendary boatman Don Harris. The two hit it off, discovering that they shared the exact same birthday October 1, 1945, and the two of them would go on to run together at Western until 1971 when Buck and Al bought Harris Boat Trips from Al’s father Don.

During the winter of 1970, Jack Currey asked Buck and his brother Scott to join Dave MacKay, Bob Quist, Steve Currey, and Amil Quayle along with the rest of the Currey family on an expedition down the Usumacinta and Jatate Rivers which flow through Guatemala and Mexico. On that trip, Buck made the first successful descent through a remote canyon along the Jatate which locals claimed had flipped boats and drown those on board all previous attempts. It was one of the key sections of the trip, and had not yet been scouted when Buck, with Bonnie Currey aboard his raft, bounced off a section of shoreline and was quickly caught in fast moving water which pulled his boat toward the canyon. Unable to get back to shore Buck was left with no choice, and he faced the unknown section of river with Jack Currey yelling after him “Buck you’ve got my daughter on that boat!” As fate would have it, the shear walled canyon did not present a serious whitewater

challenge, Buck suspected prior attempts had been in wooden boats likely smashed against the canyon wall—which was a clear advantage the rubber rafts provided.

In 1972 fate was again in Buck’s corner, when the Dean of Loyola Medical School was aboard his boat running through the Grand Canyon. Buck had always wanted to be a doctor—but a sub-par MCAT score had kept him out. No longer, Buck was accepted into Loyola and started Medical School during the fall of 1973. That year he sold his fifty percent share in Harris Boat Trips for \$5000 to Dave Kloepfer, who along with Al would continue to run the company until it was later purchased by Bill Diamond.

Buck went on to become a Radiologist, marrying Milly Blair, who he had met during the fall of 1970 up in Logan, Utah. I was born in Portland, Oregon during my Dad’s residency there. In 1985, our family moved to Maui, Hawaii where Buck practiced medicine at Maui Memorial Hospital and spent countless hours outdoors.

My Dad’s second pass at owning an outdoor company happened in 2002 when he and I founded Skyline Eco-Adventures—the first commercial zipline operation in the United States. The company grew to include operations throughout

Hawaii and in 2018 we became a Concessionaire of Haleakala National Park running land tours there. It is interesting to me that separated by nearly fifty years, my Dad held a concession contract with two different National Parks—first with Harris Boat Trips in the Grand Canyon, and then during his last year of life with Skyline at Haleakala.

In 2016, Buck underwent a bone marrow transplant as a last ditch effort to treat myelodysplastic syndrome—a cancer much like Leukemia. The treatment was successful, but in 2018 his body began rejecting the transplant and on August 18, 2018 he passed away in Seattle, Washington.

Even as a successful doctor, my Dad was an outdoorsman at heart—his love of the wild, which his years as a Grand Canyon boatman helped to imprint on his life, was passed on to me and I hope will live on in my own son Reef.

*Danny Boren*



**J**oie de vivre sums up John nicely. Beginning and ending dates seem insignificant in comparison to the fullness of the long and full life he led. While his accomplishments are many, it's more about how he did everything than what he accomplished—his passion, joy, kindness, humility, energy, strength, and his monumental positive impact on all with whom he came in contact.

Born in Ohio, John was second of four brothers. His boyhood love of snakes and lizards led him to a life-changing job at the Reptile Gardens in Rapid City, SD, where he lived and worked while getting bachelor's and master's degrees in geology at South Dakota School of Mines. As a teen in mountain-deprived Ohio, John was lured by older brother, George, into a summer backpacking/pseudo-climbing trip to the Wind River Range, to climb Wyoming's highest point, Gannet Peak. Against all odds they summited, and the flame was lit—never to diminish.

As so many people know, John was a unique and incredibly passionate and prolific member of the world's climbing community. He got his start in technical rock climbing in the Black Hills, then quickly moved on to being a "dirtbag climber" (his words) in the early days of Yosemite's infamous Camp 4. John became a big wall climber, being one of the earliest to climb the "Nose" of El Capitan, and performing one of the first documented rescues on Sentinel Dome. He became an expedition climber with nine first ascents around the world with several that have yet to be repeated (including the famed Hummingbird Ridge on Mt. Logan in 1965, and the West Face of Mt. Tyree after the first ascent of Mt. Vinson in 1966–1967). He also has two mountains in Antarctica named after him—Evans Peak and Evans Heights.

John's love for the mountains led him to the Colorado Outward Bound School (COBS) where he worked as an instructor and program director in the 1970s. Sandwiched between COBS and a twenty-year career in the Antarctic was a decade working at the United Bank of Denver complete with, in John's words, "dark suit, maroon tie, and painful shoes." In his position as an Antarctic support contractor, he specialized in remote field camps on islands along the Antarctic Peninsula.

Top: John Evans and Buzz Belknap sportyaking, 1965. NAU. PH.96.4.112.8

Right: Loie Belknap and John Evans silhouetted on a log on Lake Powell in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, 1970, NAU. PH.96.4.189.305

Photos by Bill Belknap, Northern Arizona University. Cline Library



On one of John's early Antarctic experiences in the 1960s he met Buzz Belknap, who invited him to participate in March '65 on a Whitmore-down trip with Buzz's dad, Bill, and river icon Dock Marston. Never one to turn down a new adventure, John launched his river career on an unexpected 65,000 CFS in seven-foot Sportyaks, probably setting a new record for broken oarlocks and inadvertent swims. (Buzz and John presented this epic adventure at the 2016 GTS.)

An unexpected perk from this expedition was that Buzz had a sister, Loie. John and Loie met the following summer (love at first sight) on a National Geographic jet boat photo shoot on Lake Powell—the beginning of what would be 52 adventure-filled years together. What John brought to mountain climbing the Belknap family brought to the river community and, for John and Loie, it was a marriage of mountains and rivers that blessed the lives of many. A highlight was helping father-in-law to be, Bill Belknap, in 1966 fulfill his dream of retracing the little-known escape in 1931 of James Ervin from the Canyon, between Diamond Creek and Bridge Canyon. John chronicled this adventure in a detailed report, and perhaps Loie will share this slice of Canyon history in a future GTS.

John's baptismal Sportyak adventure prepared him well for participation in the Belknap family's Fastwater Expeditions, teaching novices the fundamentals of whitewater boating and camping. He honed his river skills at COBS and also logged some Grand Canyon trips, including rowing support on several Kenton Grua-led Grand Canyon Dory trips when Loie was cooking. John's most recent Canyon adventure was a three-generation trip in 2016 with Loie, their daughter Lynn, her husband Mark Peesel, and granddaughters Zoe and Spencer—who share, not surprisingly, John's passion for rocks, reptiles, rivers, mountains, and climbing. These many passions made John a natural and frequent contributor to the Belknap family's *Westwater Books River Guide* series.

John was a consistent chronicler of his various endeavors. Retirement let him undertake the long-deferred attention to tidying and annotating his journals to make them coherent. These journals are now available for anyone who would like to learn more about John's climbing experiences, or to share a story or memory about John: <https://www.johnevanclimbing.com>.

*Loie Belknap Evans*

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## GCRG is Looking For a New Secretary/Treasurer!

**F**IRST OFF, LET US EXPRESS our deepest appreciation to Fred Thevenin for serving as GCRG's Treasurer for the past ten years, following a two-year term on the GCRG board of directors, no less! Fred's dedication to GCRG and his considerable assistance over the years has been invaluable. We can't thank you enough for all your time and energy, Fred! As Fred has recently transitioned out of the Treasurer position, Grand Canyon River Guides now is seeking to gauge interest within our talented community to fill this important role. Here is a brief overview of the position:

- The Secretary/Treasurer is an officer of GCRG with voting rights, and has no set term limit.
- Unlike all other positions (president, vice president, and directors) who are elected, the Secretary/Treasurer will be chosen by the board of directors and serves at the pleasure of the board.
- Ideally, we would like to find someone who could fill both the Secretary function (keeping board meeting minutes), as well as the vital Treasurer function (monitoring the fiscal affairs of the

corporation—working closely with the Executive Director to review quarterly and annual financial reports, the annual Form 990, and providing guidance on all other matters that pertains to the fiscal health of GCRG), and of course, we encourage the Secretary/Treasurer to participate enthusiastically in board discussions as we work collaboratively towards fulfilling our mission and goals.

- As with all officer and director positions, the Secretary/Treasurer is a much appreciated volunteer, and we are very understanding of river schedules and other obligations.

Are you a team player with a positive attitude? Are you good with numbers? Do you understand profit/loss statements and balance sheets? Would you like to get involved with GCRG in a meaningful way so that we can remain a strong and vital organization on into the future? If this piques your interest, please send us a letter of intent and any other pertinent information to Lynn at [info@gcrg.org](mailto:info@gcrg.org). We look forward to hearing from you!

# Mark Your Calendars—GTS 2020!

## BACKCOUNTRY FOOD MANAGER'S COURSE

- Friday, March 27, 2020
- 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. at Hatch River Expeditions warehouse in Marble Canyon, AZ. Please arrive early.
- To register contact: Rhaeanna Birner, Coconino County Health Department, Environmental Services at [rbirner@coconino.az.gov](mailto:rbirner@coconino.az.gov) or she can be reached at 928.679.8756.
- Cost: \$55
- Bring a chair, mug, bag lunch, and your driver's license (ID is required).
- Dress warmly and in layers (the warehouse can be chilly).

## POINT POSITIVE WORKSHOP SERIES: "WHAT'S IN YOUR RIG BAG? TOOLS AND INFO FOR INCLUSION AND INTERRUPTION"

- Friday, March 27, 2020
- 3 P.M. to 5:30 P.M. in the Old Lodge across the street from Marble Canyon Lodge, Marble Canyon, AZ
- This optional workshop for guides and new leaders welcomes us to read the shifting waters of our river community; with our demographics changing, serving people of different backgrounds and identities effectively is necessary for smooth runs on our trips. Building on past workshop material, this time will get us to understand the relevance of topics like identity, inclusion, power, and intervening when issues come up within our crews and communities. This workshop will provide skills and tools necessary to address issues as they come and encourage a welcoming, affirming river community.
- Outcomes: By attending this workshop, participants will:
  - 1) Understand language related to diversity, equity, and inclusion
  - 2) Learn tools to build trust and rapport across identities
  - 3) Practice tools for interrupting problem behavior
- The workshop is *free* in 2020, sponsored jointly by the Whale Foundation and GCRG.
- To register: [https://www.gcr.org/guide\\_resources\\_pointpositive.php](https://www.gcr.org/guide_resources_pointpositive.php)

## GUIDES TRAINING SEMINAR LAND SESSION

- Saturday and Sunday, March 28–29, 2020 (note: we will also have dinner and entertainment on Friday night for anyone arriving early).
- 8 A.M. till whenever, at Hatch River Expeditions warehouse in Marble Canyon, AZ.
- Cost \$45 (includes all meals from Friday night

dinner through lunch on Sunday).

- If you're sponsored by an outfitter, just let Lynn know. If not, you can send in a check or register/pay online on the GTS page of our website.
- Open to the public—come one, come all!
- Bring a chair, a mug, dress warmly and in layers.
- As soon as we have a draft agenda, we will post it on the GTS page of our website, and please check back for updates.
- Our GTS theme this spring is "Transitions" as we look towards the next 100 years of Grand Canyon National Park, covering everything from climate change to sustainability, canyon and river protection issues, and even learning how to balance your career with other entrepreneurial interests. Plus, a rockin' party Saturday night featuring Idaho boat-folk favorite, Boot Juice! "Science Sunday" will cover bug flows, fish, biogeography, the uncertain future of the Colorado River, and so much more. Both days will be fascinating and *very* worth your time!
- And don't forget the *free* Whale Foundation Health Fair on Saturday (11 A.M.–2 P.M.).

## GUIDES TRAINING SEMINAR RIVER SESSION

- April 1–7, 2020 (upper half, Lees Ferry to Phantom Ranch)—\$275
- April 7–16, 2020 (lower half, Phantom Ranch to Pearce Ferry)—\$375
- Awesome speakers covering everything from river running history to Colorado River protection issues, photography and advocacy, tribal perspectives, and more. Phenomenal line up!
- In addition to the regular GTS flotilla of a motor-rig and oar boats, we may be bringing a replica of Bert Loper's boat (which will give you a hint about the identity of one of the speakers) and a mini-dory. What fun!!
- Spend lots of time hiking in places you normally don't get to go!
- For guides who have work in the canyon for the 2020 river season.
- If you're sponsored, let Lynn know, and your outfitter will pick up the tab. If not, then you'll need to go to the GTS page of the GCRG website to see if you meet freelance requirements and download the application.
- All GTS river trip participants must be current members of GCRG.

# A Primer of Fishery Studies in Grand Canyon: The Nonnative Fish Removal Story

**G**LOBALLY, RIVERS HAVE BECOME the most altered of ecosystems, chiefly due to pollution, water withdrawals, and dams that have modified their former function, and led to large and unforeseen impacts, particularly for fish populations. Extensive research is directed at studying impacts of dams on rivers because they change the physical template (flow, temperature, sediment and organic loads, and connectivity), and by extension, influence fish populations by altering vital rates such as growth, survival, movement and recruitment, as well as severing migration routes.<sup>(1)</sup> Prior to introduction of nonnative fishes and a network of dams, the humpback chub (*Gila cypha*, chub) was broadly distributed throughout the Colorado River (mainstem). Since then, chub have declined over their entire historical range and are now restricted to six populations, a factor that led to it being federally listed as an endangered species in 1967.<sup>(2)</sup> (Currently the chub is proposed for downlisting in the immediate future.) The largest of these chub populations is found in Grand Canyon and is isolated from other upstream populations by Glen Canyon Dam (Dam). Over ninety percent of this population resides within the

Little Colorado River (LCR) and mainstem in regions adjacent to the confluence. The remainder is broadly distributed in small aggregations throughout the mainstem.<sup>(3)</sup> Up through the early 2000s, cold water temperatures from the Dam has largely impeded the growth and spawning of chub in the mainstem. Fortunately for chub, they spawn and rear young successfully in the seasonally warm and saline waters of the LCR, though survival of some juveniles that disperse into the mainstem varies among years.<sup>(1,2)</sup>

Humans have a penchant for change, sometimes it is irreversible; consequently, nonnative fishes were introduced to Grand Canyon from drainages nearby, as well as from other regions worldwide. A few introductions occurred prior to inception of Grand Canyon National Park (1919), some followed afterwards, and more will likely occur again. Principal agents for these actions were the Park itself, enthusiastic anglers, and state and other Federal agencies.<sup>(4)</sup> During the early 1900s, catfish and carp (both nonnatives) were probably the most abundant; whereas, rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*; rainbows) and brown trout (*Salmo trutta*, browns) were just limited to the clearwater tributaries where originally stocked. Once Dam construction began, the rivers' physical template began to change as flow, sediment loads, thermal regime, and supply of organics became altered by the Dam or sequestered in the reservoir. Thus, river flows became seasonally stable and much colder, clearer, and likely less productive. Once again, rainbows were stocked (1964), but this time in Glen Canyon from which a renowned fishery developed. For several decades, the mainstem fish community in Grand Canyon has been dominated by rainbows, the very same species that has through its introductions adversely affected native fishes worldwide.<sup>(5)</sup> By the mid-1990s, further modifications to flow operations at the Dam likely led to an increase in juvenile rainbow recruitment rates in Glen Canyon. This ended the need for stocking (1997) since rainbows were self-sustaining.

By early 2000s, new sampling and analytical approaches were in place to assess adult chub population dynamics in the LCR. The crux to this, and forthcoming population models, was the use of passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags, glass-encapsulated microchips with unique identification, injected into the body cavity of chub and other fishes. This new age-structured mark-recapture model,

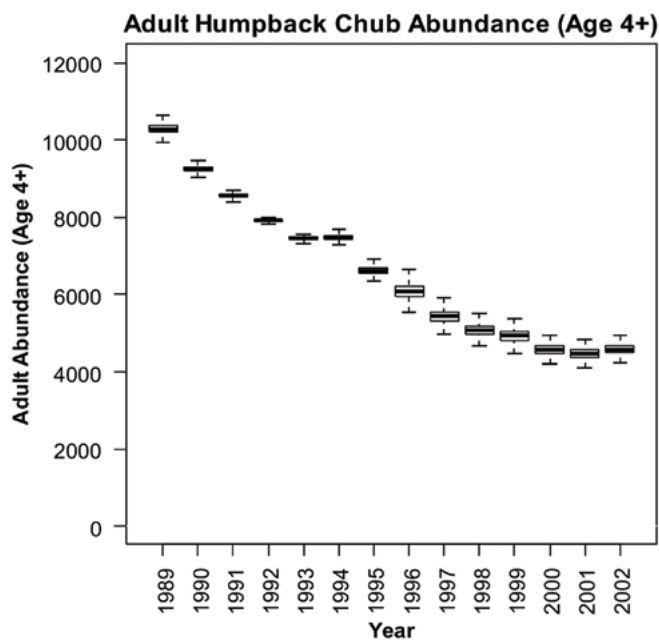


Figure 1. Estimated adult abundance (age four+ years) from age-structured mark-recapture model. Note the nearly fifty percent decline in abundance from 1989 to 2002. (refer to Coggins and others, 2006).



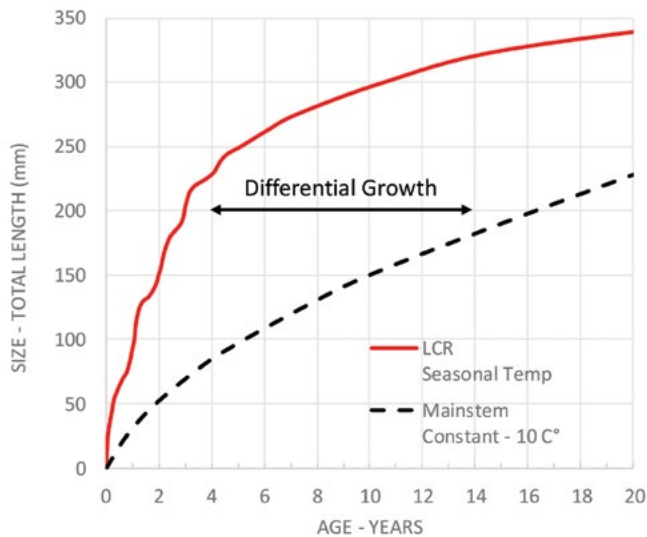


Figure 2. Estimated humpback chub length-at-age relationship for 1) temperature-dependent growth model for the Little Colorado River (LCR; solid red line; temperatures are seasonally variable), and 2) temperature-dependent growth model for humpback chub living in the mainstem Colorado River under a cold constant temperature of 10°C (dashed black line; refer to Coggins 2008).

based on marking and then recapturing individual fish, provided an understanding of past and present chub abundance and recruitment trends.<sup>(6)</sup> Model results suggested that the chub population was collapsing due to a prolonged decline in juvenile chub recruitment beginning sometime in the early-1990's (Fig. 1). These findings were unexpected and elicited angst by fish biologists and managers alike. Young fish are the vulnerable "Achilles Heel" of any population, and sadly, no tried and true methods existed at the time for marking and sampling smaller sized chub. This was problematic since the mark-recapture program was limited to tagging larger sized chub ( $\geq 175$  mm total length, TL) and because chub growth varies by location, slow in the cold mainstem and fast in the seasonally warm LCR. Since fish are mostly cold-blooded (poikilothermic), water temperature governs their metabolic machinery by ratcheting it up or down. Thus, depending on food availability, faster growth or starvation occurs with elevated water temperatures, in contrast, colder temperatures produce minimal growth, but require minimal food intake. An effective strategy for a seasonally varying thermal-environment, it can lead to juvenile chubs having differential growth, essentially different sized fish for a given age.<sup>(7)</sup> Under ideal growth (LCR water temperatures) chub reach adult size (200 mm TL) at approximately four-years of age, but much older (ten years or more) in the colder mainstem, assuming they survive (Fig. 2).<sup>(8)</sup> A critical uncertainty, particularly

when back-calculating an ascribed effect from a management action on chub recruitment.

While there was little doubt that chub numbers were declining, the cause of the decline was unclear. Various factors (e.g., piscivory {eat fish}, competition for resources, water temperature, parasites, and disease) were hypothesized as possible mechanisms for chub decline; however, of these explanations, negative interactions between chub and nonnative fish appeared most likely, and was testable. Thus, to determine if chub would respond positively to a reduction in nonnative fish densities it needed to be conducted as an experiment. A four-year large-scale nonnative fish "Removal Study" near the LCR was proposed and implemented between 2003–2006.<sup>(2)</sup> It was likely to take several years following the removal before an effect in chub abundance or recruitment could be determined. Of course, this assumed that the removal treatment was sufficiently large enough in scope and scale. This study was ambitious and uncertain for such a large river system, and its efficacy depended on the capture probability (proportion of the population caught per amount of shoreline sampled) of electrofishing boats, and the population dynamics of nonnative fishes. Nonnative fish recruitment from local reproduction and immigration from afar could easily offset reductions from fish removal. Lastly, a nonlethal "Control" needed to be established in a reach upstream (Harding Rapid to Nakoweap Canyon) so that changes in fish abundance could be discriminated between removal and non-removal areas. This would help avoid making erroneous inferences about removal efficacy, particularly if a system-wide decline in fish abundance occurred independently.

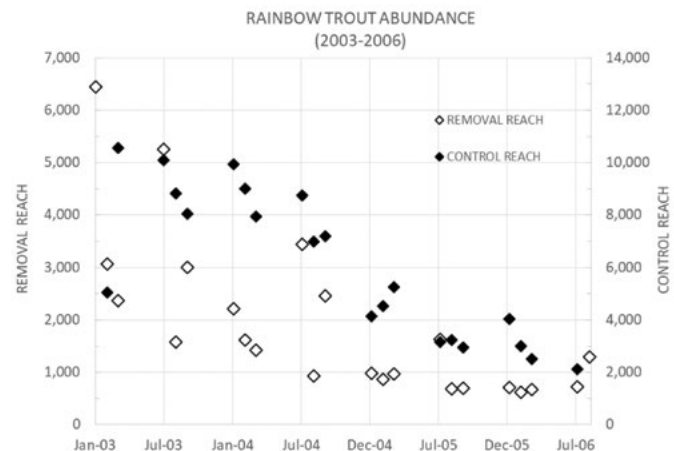


Figure 3. Estimated rainbow trout abundance in both the removal (open diamonds; 56.3–65.7 river mile) and control (black diamonds; 44–52.1 river mile) reaches at the beginning of each trip during 2003–2006 (refer to Coggins and others 2011).

During the study, nonnative fish (eleven species) represented more than 95 percent of all fish caught in the removal reach, which consisted mainly of rainbows (19,020) and browns (479).<sup>(2)</sup> Net immigration rates for rainbow were particularly high during 2003–2004, an effect that dampened the initial efforts to reduce trout abundance. Estimates of rainbow abundance ranged between 5,819–7,392 in January 2003 to a low of 371–1,034 by February 2006 (Fig. 3). Although a substantial decline in rainbow abundance (ninety percent) occurred over the Removal Study, it also coincided with a system-wide decline in trout abundance. Rainbow abundance estimates within the control reach ranged between 5,000–10,600 during 2003–2004 and between 2,000–5,300 during 2005–2006.<sup>(2)</sup> Similarly, rainbow electrofishing catch-rates (population size unknown) also declined far upstream in Lees Ferry, suggesting that the trout reduction in the removal reach was a combined effect from both removal and a system-wide decline (Fig. 3). Based on dietary studies, results confirmed that trout were piscivorous and consume native fish.<sup>(5)</sup> Although rainbows were less piscivorous than browns, their greater abundance (90–100 fold greater) could likely result in a larger cumulative effect on native fish. Both rainbows and browns exhibited higher piscivory below the LCR. Tributary flows and increased turbidity downstream of the LCR often coincide with seasonal dispersal of juvenile fish from the LCR, such that greater piscivory might be expected simply based on higher prey availability, essentially chub.<sup>(5)</sup> Furthermore, there was some indication that native fish abundance increased in the removal reach between 2003–2006, from either increased juvenile chub survival in the mainstem, or increased LCR production of juvenile chub, or both.<sup>(2, 8)</sup>

This positive chub response was promising; however, researchers were concerned that the rapid response by chub was premature, although desired, and may have been related to some factor other than trout removal. By chance, mainstem water temperatures between 2003 to 2007 were seasonally higher than historical temperatures of the past two decades.<sup>(6)</sup> Owing to elevated mainstem water temperatures, juvenile chub should grow faster, and in kind, should recruit to adulthood faster.<sup>(8)</sup> Perhaps mainstem temperatures were somehow confounding the effect of removal by increasing chub growth rates, which would effectively reduce the amount of time small fish were vulnerable to predators. Unfortunately, researchers knew there were no means currently available to determine whether predation was, or was not, a large source of mortality at a population

level, since actual survival and growth of chub in the mainstem were unknown. Sure, little fish are eaten, but did the sum of juvenile chub mortality in the mainstem create a recruitment bottleneck that affected the population size in later years? The apparent knowledge gap was two-pronged: researchers and managers needed a better understanding of juvenile chub survival and growth in the mainstem, and LCR; and secondly, since rainbows were the most likely nonnative fish threat to chub,<sup>(5)</sup> researchers needed a better non-lethal method to estimate rainbow population dynamics near the LCR, and determine their natal source, from near, and far. (*Further findings from past-fishery related studies are to be reported in future quarterly issues*).

Michael D. Yard  
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# Back of the Boat— The Whale Foundation News Bulletin

**S**PRING IS TAKING OVER, a new river season is upon us, and schedules are getting jam packed. Right now, before you head out on that next adventure, I have three reminders for you:

## KENTON GRUA MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

We know that for many guides, building a more complete and full life means going back to school. Sometimes you need specialized training and knowledge to pursue your dreams. The Whale Foundation would like to help you out as much as we can.

Last year the Whale Foundation was able to award a total of \$10,000 to five hard-working guides. This year, if funding allows, we'd like to up the ante even more. If you're going to school, check out <https://www.whalefoundation.org/scholarships>, fill out an application, and we'll help if we can. Don't wait, the deadline is soon!

Check out what Tess McEnroe, one of our 2019 scholarship winners, has to say. Like many in our community, she's out there working to make the world a better place.

## TIM WHITNEY WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Tim Whitney touched the lives of many people, so much so that this program was created to honor his legacy. The core mission: help the Grand Canyon river guide community with their physical health.

One way we try to be there for you is with our Health Insurance Assistance program. If you've got insurance (and we hope you do), we may be able to offset the cost a bit. You can learn more and apply at <https://www.whalefoundation.org/health-insurance-assistance>.

## THE WHALE FOUNDATION CALENDAR

We want to thank everyone who contributed to the 2020 Whale Foundation calendar, photographers and musicians. And of course Bronze Black for his terrific design work. The music is still coming in, and I hope you have had a chance to listen to each monthly installment. There's some great stuff that has pulled my soul right back into the canyon. More music will be coming out each month, so keep ckecking in—  
[whalefoundation.org/music](http://whalefoundation.org/music).

With this year's calendar so full of intimate portraits, we're looking to switch it up in 2021. We'd love to gather photos of epic Grand Canyon: big vistas, thundering waves, bold and beautiful skies, and maybe

those smaller moments that mean so much in a life. If you have photos that fit this profile, please reach out to us. Maybe give yourself the assignment to share that particular spot you know so well. We love to show off your vision. All proceeds go to benefit the great Whale Foundation programs...like the two mentioned above. Email us at [whalefoundation@outlook.com](mailto:whalefoundation@outlook.com).

Thank you much! May the season ahead be a great one for us all.

*Sam Jansen*

## Turning Dreams Into Reality

I'm so grateful to be awarded the Kenton Grua Memorial Scholarship as I work towards my master's degree in Environmental Education from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. I am humbled by your recognition, and so proud to be a part of this incredible community that is centered around a place that has changed our lives—Grand Canyon.

I am creating a curriculum to combine indigenous, traditional ways of knowing and science through watershed education, specifically around rivers. The goal is to connect people to their local waterways while combining cultural beliefs and ecological knowledge. Someday, I hope this program will be transferable and accessible around the world.

This scholarship is helping my dreams turn into reality. Time out there allows us to look downstream both at the river and in life. Opportunities like this recognize the importance of our work as river guides, and reinforce the value of taking pride in what we do.

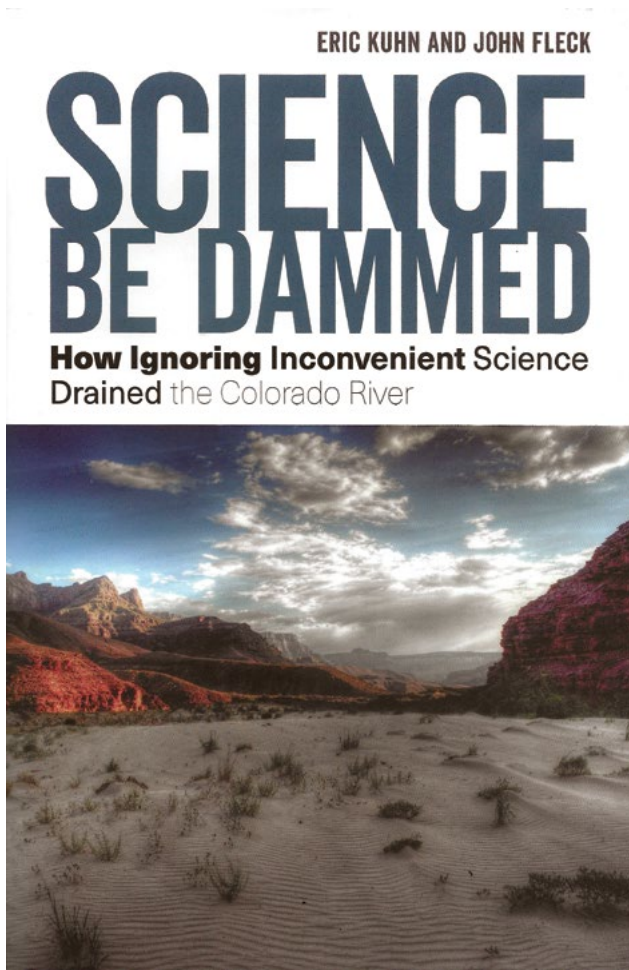
Here's to the simple life of chasing waves with clean lines and full hearts.

—Tess McEnroe (AZRA guide)

## New Books!

*Science Be Dammed: How Ignoring Inconvenient Science Drained the Colorado River*; ERIC KUHN AND JOHN FLECK; The University of Arizona Press; 2019; 289 pp; ISBN-13:978-0-8165-4005-1; \$19.99.

WHAT DO EUGENE CLYDE LA RUE, Herman Stabler, and William Sibert have in common to the water you boat on in the Grand Canyon? The answer—in the early 1900s all three independently warned the federal government that the assumptions on available water supply that they were using to justify spending millions of dollars to build an intricate plumbing system in the Colorado River system were wrong. Incorrect



in not just a small way but by as much as 28 percent over estimation of the average annual flows in the Colorado River. Eric Kuhn and John Fleck's recently published book entitled *Science Be Dammed: How Ignoring Inconvenient Science Drained the Colorado*

*River* explains the convoluted history of why today management of the Colorado River is facing a crisis and why the negotiations for the 2026 Operations Guidelines for the operation of the river demands that we embrace the data in order to make future decisions.

First a confession—having worked for more than 45 years in the Colorado River Basin and in Washington D.C., I have watched Eric and John work in their own ways to help decipher the river history and discuss the future of the Colorado River. The primary theme of this book is both a reminder and a warning that we cannot ignore science if we want to have a sustainable river and ecosystem. Water is precious in the Southwest and the “development at any cost” approach embraced by the decision makers from 1902 through the 1980s does not work with the diminished water supply that the changing climate brings.

This book adds to the literary history of the Colorado River by going through the process of how river development and management has been based on bad assumptions since the negotiation of the Colorado River Compact in 1922. The cumulative decisions that today make up the “*Law of the River*” are based on decisions made with cherry picked data that do not recognize the variability and flow extremes of the Colorado River.

From the late 1800s battle lines were drawn over the management of the Colorado River. The federal government desired agency building and national economic development. The states wanted to protect their rights to develop. Left out of those early discussions were quantifying the needs of the Tribes or Mexico. Certainly no one was concerned about the environment or recreation.

The value of this book is education. The authors take us on a journey through the history of Colorado River study from Lt. Ives' survey of the lower Colorado River for navigation to the most recent studies by climate scientists. The primary conclusion that emerges is that the 21st century's problems on the management of the Colorado River are the inevitable result of critical decisions made by water managers, politicians and developers who ignored the best data that was available. What emerges from the authors review is that Colorado River developers had several opportunities to reset hydrologic reality but chose not to. Future management of the river requires implementing flexibility to respond when runoff diminishes. The *Law of the River* today forces increased risk in overall water management.

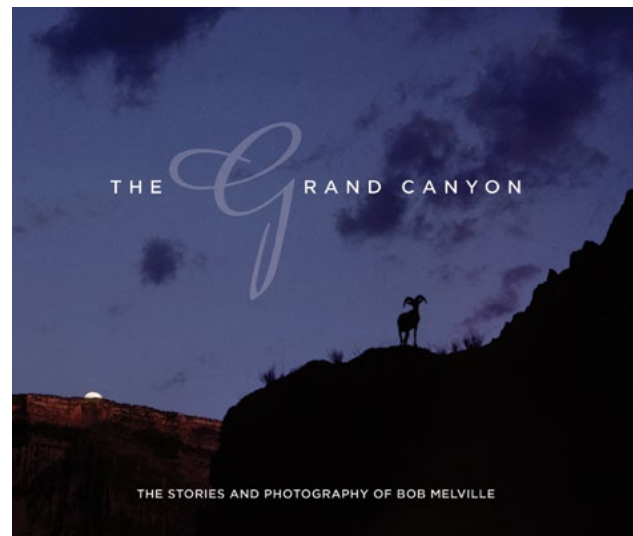
E.C. La Rue in 1922, Herman Stabler in 1924, and William Siebert in 1928 each conducted an independent review of the collected and ancillary data on the Colorado River. Each of these experts concluded that there was much less water available to develop in the Colorado River. Their “inconvenient science” did not match the hopes and dreams of what the politicians and water developers needed to justify legislation, agency and dam building, and expansion of growth in the West. The result today is a disconnect and structural deficit between what the Colorado River Basin states divert and use and what is available to maintain the reservoirs, the river and the delta in Mexico.

This book is a must read if you are interested in the history of water development in the Colorado River. The book helps to knit together the stories and politics of *Cadillac Desert*, helps to understand the drivers of the *Law of the River* and reiterates the importance of using the full set of data in decision-making. As climate changes define a new regime in available water supplies for the Colorado River, the negotiations on the 2026 Guidelines for Colorado River management take on great importance. Windows of opportunity infrequently open that allow for change. This is one of them if we understand and use the lessons articulated in this book.

*Dave Wegner*

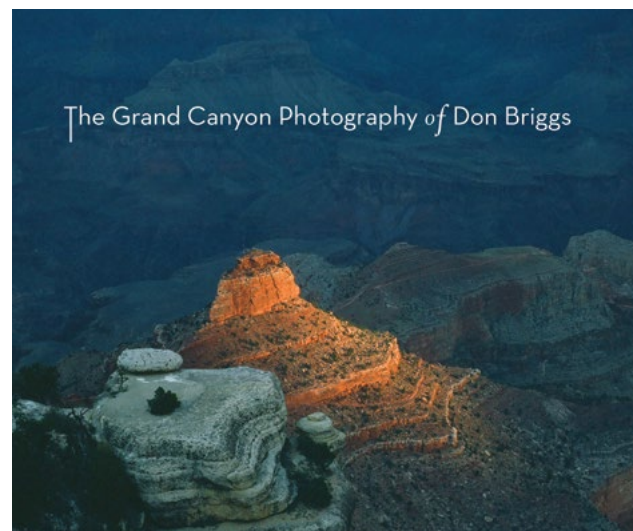
*The Grand Canyon: The Stories and Photographs of Bob Melville*; BOB MELVILLE; Self-published; 2019; 70 pp; ISBN: none; \$73.04.

LONGTIME GRAND CANYON guide Bob Melville’s favorite stories and greatest photographs, culled from a lifetime of adventure and beauty in the American West. An AZRA guide who started in California, then moved on to working in the Canyon for many years, Bob was a genius at telling tales, and you can read them all in this beautifully printed, full-color, eight inches by ten inches, clothbound and dustjacketed volume. Order it directly from Blurb: [www.blurb.com/b/3645101-the-grand-canyon](http://www.blurb.com/b/3645101-the-grand-canyon).



*The Grand Canyon Photography of Don Briggs*; DON BRIGGS; Self-published; 2019; 44 pp; ISBN: none; \$125.

THIS IS THE ONLY Don Briggs book ever produced, prepared just before he passed away in late 2019. It has his greatest Canyon photographs with text captions throughout its 44 pages. The volume is hardbound, eleven inches by eighteen inches, and reproduced to the highest color standards (Don would have settled for nothing less). All of the proceeds beyond cost go to benefit Friends of the River, per his family’s request. Order it directly from Blurb: [www.blurb.com/b/9820426-the-grand-canyon-photography-of-don-briggs](http://www.blurb.com/b/9820426-the-grand-canyon-photography-of-don-briggs).



## Grand Canyon Magic

**T**HIS IS A TRUE, recent story that has to have a simple explanation, except it doesn't, unless you believe in *magic*. It begins, simply enough, in the Forks, Maine, in August, 2019. I had been invited by an old friend, Larry Lorusso, to be a boatman on a 23-day Lees Ferry to Pearce Ferry Grand Canyon trip. He would be the only person I knew on the trip. (I have been a commercial raft guide for 37 years and worked with Larry on the Penobscot River in Maine). I was at the Harris Station Dam on the Kennebec River that morning completing my put-in responsibilities by blowing up twelve boats. A truck pulled into the parking lot, and the driver was a person with whom I had done my first Grand Canyon trip, 33 years ago. He had a passenger with him named Steve Hall. I couldn't wait to share with my old pal from the canyon that I had been invited on a Fall 2019 canyon trip. When I told him my news, surprisingly Steve said, "Me too!" I then said that our group would be launching on October 2<sup>ND</sup>; Steve said, "Me, too" Odd I thought, but there are often two private trips that launch on the same day so I said, "My permit holder's name is Bill," and yet again Steve said, "Me too." At that point I stuck out my hand and said, "Well Steve, it looks like you and I will be in the Grand Canyon together!" And that was the start of the Grand Canyon *magic* I was to experience on this trip.

October 2<sup>ND</sup> arrived, as did our group at Lees Ferry. The group consisted of three kayakers, five rafts with boatmen, four folks in two paddle cats, and four intrepid souls in a 14-foot paddle boat. This was the first time for me to be on a trip with either paddle cats or a paddle boat. One of our leaders was Jim Michaud, who would also be one of the paddle cat operators. He was about to embark on his 37<sup>TH</sup> Grand Canyon trip. I was to discover that Jim was a wizard in his own right. Our group was going to celebrate Jim's 82<sup>ND</sup> birthday on the river. His daughter had arranged for all of us to have T-shirts that said "When I grow up I want to be just like Jim Michaud." Jim was presented with a shirt on his birthday that said "If I ever grow up, I want to be just like me." Inspirational and magical. Our group successfully navigated 149 miles of the Canyon, and watching the crew of the Rio (as the paddle boat was aptly named) under the guidance of paddle captain Larry Lorusso run every rapid with grace and growing confidence was magical as well.

Grand Canyon *magic*.

And so, there we were, at Upset rapid, mile 150. Two kayaks, four rafts, two paddle cats, and the paddle boat

had all successfully negotiated the right-hand run at about 7,000 cfs (cubic feet per second). My turn. I had watched all the runs and all was going swimmingly, until it wasn't.

Pow, I dropped right into the monster hole at the bottom of the rapid. The video, taken by one of the kayakers, shows that the boat actually stopped, surfed up out of the hole, then dropped backwards back in again. This is almost always a sure flip and I was certain I was about to see the bottom of Upset sans boat. The video also shows that my right oar came flying out of the blue oar tower on the frame, slid under the boat and miraculously levered my boat out of the hole, right-side up! Grand Canyon *magic*.

Elation doesn't even start to cover my emotions at that point. I had been granted an undeserved reprieve from the logical consequences of my poor rowing performance. I retrieved my right oar from the water held to the frame by the oar tether strap. To my surprise, the oarlock was still attached to the oar, while the oar tower was still attached to the frame of the raft. For the uninitiated, this is *not* a good thing. The oarlock and tower are supposed to be a single unit. Now they weren't.

Since I was rowing the kitchen boat, I had the major repair kit on board and quickly switched out the damaged oar tower for the spare tower in the kit. This spare is meant to be functional, but just barely (think donut spare tire).

So away we went, grateful for a near miss rather than a full blown flip.

About a half mile downstream from Upset, I glanced to my right as boatmen often do trying to comprehend why today wasn't the day it was my turn to swim, when my eye caught a color that shouldn't be present in the desert. The color was blue. To my utter astonishment, sitting on a piece of ledge about 20 feet from the high water mark, was a blue oar tower, complete with bronze oarlock on top. At first I thought I might be hallucinating, because really, what are the chances that you break an oar tower, then one is sitting on the riverbank, waiting for you if you need it. Then my fellow boatman Jeff yelled, "Scotty, do you see that?" I knew then that at least this was a shared hallucination, which made me feel a bit better.

I quickly found a place to land my boat and ran to the artifact in question. Not only was it a perfectly functioning exact duplicate of the oar tower I had just broken, it was actually from the same outfitter we had rented our boats from. How did it get there?

We continued on to the Ledges where I again swapped out the replacement oar tower with this new, miraculously gifted present which worked perfectly for the final 130 miles to Pearce Ferry. Grand Canyon *magic*.

Our group of sixteen discussed this occurrence at length, and none of us could come up with any reasonable scenario that included leaving a perfectly good oar tower on a ledge after Upset.

So, Grand Canyon *magic* seemed to be the simplest explanation. When I was above the rim, I wrote a brief description of these events on Facebook, with an appeal to anyone who might be able to explain how that oar tower found its way to the Upper Ledges Camp. As it turned out, a young man responded to my request. It seems that the oar tower in question

was being “adjusted” at the Upper Ledges Camp when it fell off the frame and into the water. The crew searched for the tower but was unable to locate it. They left without it. We surmise it was then discovered by another group in lower water who placed it on the ledge so it would be there when I needed it. Grand Canyon *magic*.

So the final sweep of the Grand Canyon *magic* wand is this: That oar tower was lost by the son of a woman I went to high school with, fifty years ago and 2,500 miles away in Maine. What are the chances?

Every word is true. I wouldn't ever invoke the River Gods with anything except the utter truth. Grand Canyon *magic* is a thing. A wonderful thing.

Scott Phair

## This Big One Didn't Get Away!

IT'S JANUARY 5, 2020. With windmill ears and a red coat, my mule, Twinkie, hauled my bony butt to Phantom Ranch and back. A few hikers on the trail toted fishing poles. None had any luck. With my fishing licence and collapsible rig in my saddlebag, I wondered if I would fare any better.

The boat beach at Phantom Ranch sees lots of activity—incoming private boat trips seeking their last opportunity for provisions on the 277 mile river trip, hikers dipping (briefly) in the 47 degree water, and me with my fishing pole in the eddy. My companions gave up on me, but you see, fishing is something that can't

be hurried. And as luck has it, I caught a pan sized rainbow trout *and* a boat fully provisioned.

The new yellow boat slipped its anchor while the Tennessee oarsman and his lady ran to Phantom Ranch for mail and fresh water. The boat started drifting toward the current. I reeled in my hook, bit it off and cast the sinker toward the fleeing drifter. On the fourth try, the sinker caught on and my eight pound test line saved the river trip for the oarsman. (P.S. these pix are *not* photoshopped).

John Sanders



## Into The Darkness And Back Again: The Story of the 2020 Speed Run

**G**RAND CANYON IS USUALLY for going slow, watching the light change, feeling the temperature shift as the sun goes down, chatting with friends, hooting and hollering below rapids, hiking to waterfalls, smelling the calcium carbonate rich springs and the columbine, escaping the grind of everyday life above the rim, becoming a canyon creature. On the rare occasion there is an opportunity to go really fast, to test the limits of human endurance, to see it all in one fell swoop. When that time comes and a speed run is in order, Grand Canyon can serve up punishing conditions and that's what you are in for if you decide to get on the boat at Lees and not get off until you reach Pearce Ferry.

Anyone who has made a speed attempt in Grand Canyon has confronted significant challenges. The current record holder, Ben Orkin, set the record on

*Emerald Mile* setting the record that stood for 33 years of 36 hours 38 minutes. They were riding a flow of around 70,000 CFS and Crystal all but swallowed them up. There are other stories too—those who launched and got turned back at Badger, those whose dreams ended in Crystal, others who hiked out at Phantom. Completing a speed attempt is not a forgone conclusion. It takes a willingness to enter the unknown to push off from Lees Ferry with the hope of not stepping on shore until Pearce Ferry. And some good luck.

On January 9, 2020, at 11:55 P.M. our team, consisting of five members of the U.S. Men's Whitewater Raft Team and three Grand Canyon Guides from Flagstaff, pushed off the Lees Ferry Ramp in a 40-foot rowboat slipping into the dark sinuous flow of the Colorado River on an attempt of our own.

Six rowed, one rested and one steered from the stern using a sweep oar. Members of our support crew hooted and hollered, and then all was quiet except for the whoosh of the rowing seats, the gentle sound of oars entering the current and our occasional conversation to coordinate our movements as we pulled into the moonlight. The full moon was high in the cold, clear sky. We were still warm in our dry suits from our attempt at rest at Marble



Photo credit: Justin Salamon.

January 23, 2016, on a flow of 12,000 to 18,000 CFS. He was alone in an 18-foot Epic Kayak and his tale includes a harrowing swim at Lava where he barely made it to shore with his boat and paddle. Soaked inside his dry suit, and fueled only on Clif Bars he regrouped, returned to his boat and paddled hard for the next 100 miles to set a new record of 34 hours 2 minutes breaking Matt Klema's record of 35 hours 5 minutes that had been set only a few days prior. Many of us know the story of Kenton Grua, Rudi Petschek and Steve Reynolds and their epic experience in the

Canyon Lodge and we were excited and nervous. Anything was possible over the next 277 miles and the enormity of the endeavor weighed on our minds. Yet the immediacy of the task at hand brought us back to the present as we rode the first waves of the Paria Riffle. The pace was good, and we were humming.

Three days prior we held an event to raise money for Grand Canyon Youth at the Canyon Explorations Warehouse where a hundred people gathered to celebrate Speed Runs past and present. Our boat was on display, Brad Dimock and I shared some great



history of speed runs. We also showed the U.S. Men's Whitewater Raft Team's movie *The Time Travelers*. It tells the story of the Team's previous attempt to break the record in January 2017. Initially, the Team, based out of Edwards, Colorado, was looking for a new challenge and over the course of a few conversations they brewed up the idea of challenging the record for traversing the Colorado River from Lees Ferry to the Grand Wash Cliffs. They engineered and built a unique boat—a 48-foot cataraft with six rowing stations equipped with sliding seats, and a sweep oar in the back for steering. There would be eight people on the boat which would theoretically give one person a twenty-minute break every 2.5 hours or so. They trained for nine months while shooting the short film. In the attempt, they were a couple hours ahead of schedule and on pace to break Ben Orkin's record when they hit the Mountain Wave in Lava and a piece of the frame pierced through the tube. Three hours of patching at Tequila Beach put the record out of reach but they still finished in 39 hours 24 minutes. After that difficult second night, the team doubted whether they'd ever want to try it again, but like so many challenges it only took a night of sleep and a little recovery to start thinking about what could be different and how to do it better.

Their learning on that trip led to a shorter cataraft—40 feet long, 12 feet wide—with an improved frame (that wouldn't break) and stiffer tubes. HALA, a manufacturer of paddle boards out of Steamboat, Colorado, created the tubes using an inlay of carbon fiber on the outside of the tubes to add rigidity. The homemade frame was aluminum with six sliding rowing seats, a platform in the stern for resting and a dance floor for the driver to stand on while handling the sweep oar.

We had tested the new craft on Cataract Canyon at 6900 CFS in November of 2019. It was the first time the new team had come together with members from the U.S. Raft Team—captain John Mark Seelig, Matt Norfleet (also a Grand Canyon Guide), Kurt Kincel, Jeremiah Williams, Rob Prechtel and Seth Mason (who needed to step away from the Grand Canyon attempt) and those of us from the Grand Canyon river guide world—Lyndsay Hupp, and me, Justin Salamon. We launched around nine P.M. from Potash, rowed the flat water through the night, slept for an hour just above the confluence and ran the rapids in the daylight. We pulled up on shore at North Wash at six P.M. that evening. Our run was successful and best of all, we enjoyed each other's company. That evening we hatched the plan to do our best to support kids getting on their own river trips by raising money for

Grand Canyon Youth. We left to return to our grueling training schedule. Long hours on a rowing machine four to six times a week, strength training, running, cardio—everything to make our bodies resilient and ready for the demands of a thirty-plus-hour push.

In early December, just a month before our Grand launch, Omar Martinez—also a Grand Canyon guide—bravely joined the team, rounding out our eight-person team just in time for a final training run on Westwater. We had around 3900 CFS and managed to squeeze that big boat through those rapids for a ten-hour adventure from Loma to Dewey Bridge. The team was working well together, we were feeling good about the performance of the boat with members of the U.S. Raft Team excited about how maneuverable and stable it was in comparison to their prior craft. We were on track for the big attempt.

Cataract and Westwater taught us how to handle the craft in whitewater—in the daylight. Badger gave us a smooth entry into nighttime whitewater operations, and we were excited by the performance of the boat. As we traveled downstream, the moonlight above Soap Creek lit the walls creating wild geometric shapes in shadow and light, but as we looked towards the right shore, we noticed that a group was still awake! It was the Canadians that we had shared the ramp with the day before and they had stayed up until 1:30 A.M. to cheer us on as we entered the rapid! What a hardy group. Soap rushed by and House Rock came quickly. The team was concerned about House Rock—they ran it sideways past the big hole on the left during their previous attempt. Luckily, this time we had a smooth line and rode the tail waves into the darkness. The twenties were mostly washed out leading to fun runs, and a moment of closeness with the right wall in 23-Mile rapid, and an easy exit out MNA to conclude the rapids of the first night. We breathed a collective sigh of relief as we entered the rowing thirties, the ease of the forties and Nankoweap rapid to conclude the last of the darkness. We were still chasing the speed record—only a few minutes behind schedule.

Moon shadows on the Palisades of the Desert gave way to the touch of daybreak on tilted mesa as we rowed past the shoals above Kwagunt Rapid. The lighting system, a light bar typically found on off-road vehicles and mounted six feet above the bow of the boat, that we'd used for the rapids during the night was turned off for Kwagunt and we pulled smooth strong strokes into the coming day. Our stroke rate hovered around 20–22 strokes per minute (sometimes speeding up to a less efficient 24–25 rate). We were feeling energized as the first rays of sun reached our boat above Unkar. Until that time, we rode the



Photo credit: Helen Ranney.

14,500 CFS high we launched on before catching lower water. We noticed a slight breeze, but the forecast said it would be from the north—when is the forecast ever right in Grand Canyon? The record was still in sight.

On a side note, it's fascinating to consider that over the day and a half trip we caught three days worth of releases from Glen Canyon Dam. It was possible because we rowed facing upstream with only the person driving and the person resting having a downstream perspective. The power from our legs thrust the boat downstream and we timed our return stroke to avoid "checking" the downstream progress. If done well, we could keep the boat going about 4.5–5 miles per hour above the speed of the current. The movement is much like a squat so that's about 50,000 squats over the course of the whole run. We locked the seats down and took our feet out of the straps on the stretchers in big whitewater. The two rowers in the stern of the boat would turn around in the big whitewater and face downstream to aid with steering (at first, we called this flipping around but we didn't like the sound of flip so later we called it whitewater ready). The transition could be made quickly to avoid allowing our speed to diminish. Imagine running all of that whitewater looking upstream and coordinating your strokes with five others. Another element to consider is that we rarely slowed our stroke rate above big rapids, so set-ups had to be quick and accurate. We used commands like a paddle boat except ours were "hard right" or "move right" for turns. Otherwise it was "all six" meaning keep pulling downstream—sometimes with urgency.



Photo credit: Helen Ranney.

Above Hance we saw a private trip across from Nevills on their feet cheering for us—we were elated by their energy allowing us to arrive at Hance feeling strong and ready. I had the pleasure of driving many of the big rapids, but we all took turns and had our share of driving the big fun. It felt exhilarating entering Hance at the helm of a 40-foot rowboat with seven strong, competent and intuitive teammates making adjustments along the way. It was the best team we could have asked for and our lines reflected the synergy. We were flying.

We cruised out of Hance, caught a private trip above Sock who cheered as well—what amazing support from the river community—ran through the Gorge and got ready to pass Phantom Ranch. Several friends had indicated that they would hike to the Black Bridge at Phantom to watch us go by at around 11 A.M. and cheer. Just upstream we put ourselves together and did our best to look good as we came around the corner. Fifty people greeted us with cheers, banners and cowbells. It was a moment that brought us all to the verge of tears, one that could never be replicated and stands out as one of the most touching experiences of my time in Grand Canyon. Too quickly we pulled under that bridge and another group was ready to moon us at the Silver Bridge. Then we were gone. A moment like no other and we were only 89 miles and eleven hours into a 277 mile, thirty-plus-hour journey.

Above Horn we accidentally caught an eddy. It was probably the third eddy we caught up to that point and one of probably five or six that we caught



Photo credit: Helen Ranney.

the whole trip. We spent little time getting out of eddies, so we don't think it really affected our time. We prepared ourselves to split the Horns and executed a solid line to avoid the wall on the left.

Different rapids loom large in different boaters' minds. For me, I didn't question our ability to run Lava or any of the other big ones except for Crystal. I spent months visualizing the line in Crystal. Partially because during the previous attempt the team had broken the frame on the entry rocks but also because there are so many ways to mess up a line with a big, long boat. Granite was exciting and Hermit a joy. I don't know many lines in Hermit except to go down the middle and despite trying to get to the right, that boat just wanted to run those big waves. It was dreamy. At the bottom of Hermit, we caught a bunch of Canadian canoeists in voyageur decked tandem canoes. They had just run Hermit and had big grins. We thought they were way crazier than us!

But back to Crystal. Anything can happen in there. You can hit the rocks at the entry and go into the hole, you can hit shore and go into the hole, it can all go well but if you're not set up well for the rock island then all of a sudden you're camping on Big Red in the middle of the river. We slowed down at the entry for the right run. I had visualized that run so many times and here we were ready to execute it with the fate of our speed run coming down to those crucial moments of teamwork and luck. We entered a little bit outside to avoid the entry rocks on the right, made up for it with some brute force, put the nose in the slack water next to shore, avoided hitting the shore and allowed the

boat to turn around like a motor run. The stern passed just next to the center hole and we were in the slack water on the right above the island. It was a glorious moment for all of us as we prepared to run the Gems.

We knew that breaking Ben Orkin's record would require a lot of hard work, serious grit, lots of luck and a near perfect run. When we learned of the water levels for January, we considered backing out of the attempt knowing that it was near impossible to go fast enough but the dream had become bigger than the attempt alone. We knew it was a long shot, but we would try anyway and along the way we would raise money for GCY, and get the community fired up on adventures in Grand Canyon. The day before the launch we decided that no matter our overall time or prospects of breaking the record we would put in the best effort that we could. No matter how far behind we would fall, we would keep giving it until we crossed the Grand Wash Cliffs.

The wind picked up in the Gems and at some point, we went from being a few minutes behind our goals to a half hour. It didn't matter, we continued to love that whitewater and pull downstream. Our rotation was tight. Every twenty minutes we switched a rower into the driving position, the driver would switch to resting and the person resting would row again. We had smooth lines in Bedrock and Deubendorf. Our Spot beacon stopped working below Bedrock leading some above the rim to wonder what had happened. Nothing really, just low batteries. Luckily the Garmin InReach continued to work throughout the trip, and many were able to continue



Photo credit: Justin Salamon.

to follow along. Another group cheered from the shores of Stone Canyon as the darkness of the second night began to creep into the canyon.

The members of the U.S. Men's Raft Team had been warning the three of us about the misery and suffering that would greet us that second evening. Dark fell just as we entered the Muav Gorge at Mile-140. After nearly eighteen hours of rowing we weren't even halfway into our journey. Strange things start to happen in your mind when you pile extreme exertion on top of sleep deprivation. Self-doubt, excuses for quitting including questioning the relative safety of the endeavor, prioritizing getting home to see your loved ones instead of achieving some half-baked goal—all of these things begin to swirl when the air gets cold, the night has just begun and there is no prospect of sun for fourteen hours and a hundred miles punctuated by huge moonlit rapids.

That night, we all got cold. I was cold and shivering even in my rowing seat. The driver and person resting had the option of putting on a big coach's jacket or a hunting jacket. Both felt incredible that evening. I would shiver in my rowing seat and look up at the two in the stern and say to myself "only an hour and a half until I get to wear one of those." In hindsight I wish I had just brought another jacket because the prospect of taking the dry suit off to put layers on was unbearable. Our necks were chafed, and the cold was biting. Similarly, even though we brought a groover, no one wanted to peel their dry suit to poop. The

motto "no poop till Pearce" got us through, however uncomfortably. So, we suffered through the night. Rowing like zombies, closing our eyes only to wake up a moment later and still be rowing.

Of course, the rowing was broken up by excitement. Upset was our first big one the second night and it was still early enough that we were energized. The moon was brilliant on the limestone walls as we passed Matkat but when we turned the corner to Mile-150 all was dark in the moonshadow. We switched on the lights as the rumble of Upset filled our ears. We were psyched. The boat dipped as we crossed the first lateral on the left and the lights illuminated the frothy hole, the bow rose to flood the left wall with light, the rapid frothy and white in the glow. The boat traveled down that left side, through the tail waves to shouts of excitement and joy. Then we hunkered in for thirty miles of rowing to Lava Falls.

This is where I hit my low. I was thinking of my little kids—almost three and almost five—and how I'd really like to run the river with them. I was contemplating my shivering body and the 22 hours of exertion that lead to my current predicament. I was thinking about what it would be like to go in the water at Lava and have to self-rescue in this diminished state. I thought "we can blame it on me guys—lets just camp." But none of it took hold—the team was there, and we were supporting each other. Above Lava, I got to rest, and I've been told that before I even laid down I was snoring. I was awakened fifteen minutes later to

“time to get up, Lava is right around the corner.” Up until then I had been driving many of the big ones and there was an unspoken expectation that I would drive Lava. I awoke in a stupor and said, “I don’t know if I’m up for it.” Not much was said as I slipped into a rowing seat. Norfleet had driven Lava during the team’s 2017 attempt, describing it as one of his greatest memories, and graciously wanted to leave it open for me to have that experience. Others certainly could have taken over but after 10 minutes of rowing I was able to shake the cobwebs off and with the support of the group, I got back in the drivers seat. We took a moment to drift and collect ourselves as we passed the anvil. It was the first time we drifted since we pushed off from Lees 23 hours prior.

Enough of that, we got back on the oars and pulled with strong strokes as the deep rumble of Lava shook our cold bones. We were whitewater ready as the moon lit the entire scene—Prospect Canyon, the scout beaches on the right, the cliffs above Lower Lava, and the horizon line. We even considered running it without lights, but we made the prudent choice of stacking the cards in our favor. The boat slid past the entry rocks on the right as I looked up to the lava cliffs to search for the Eye of Odin—I didn’t see it in the darkness and quickly brought my gaze back to the river. We cruised past the last black rock at the entry and in trying to set up for a standard right run, that surging water on the right pushed us just a little bit left. Nothing to do but allow the boat its run as we entered the teacup just right of the Ledge Hole, skirted just left of the V-wave, right of the mess in the middle and barely hit the left side of the Mountain Wave. It was nearly a dry run and the crew was elated! We were through the rapid that had been the end of their last bid. A little dance party ensued—whatever kind of celebration you can have while rowing downstream. Then we settled into the long night.

Suffice it to say that it just takes grit to keep going. We kept grinding as the miles passed by. Fog covered the river at times, cold wet fog. We eerily slid through the pools above Mile-209 in the fog. We called to a group camped above Mile-209 using animal sounds in the wee hours of the night to no response. Around 5:30 A.M. we passed Diamond Creek. Lyndsay was on the stick at that point and I was resting. She had let me rest first—even though it was her turn—because she is a badass and I was falling apart. She woke me as we entered Diamond Creek Rapid. She drove great lines as we entered zombie land. She described the rowers as zombies and the scene below Diamond as a different dimension. The water was sparkly in the moonlight and we were hallucinating campfires on the beaches.

None of us had been below Diamond recently and we were there at low water. Mile-231 was *huge!* I took the stick for Mile-232 and we narrowly passed to the left of the fangs. With Bridge and Gneiss Canyon Rapids having grown to the size of Mile-231 and Mile-232, and with 28 hours of rowing on our bodies, I would say that the crux of the whitewater was the very end. The lines weren’t perfect but as we passed the left wall at the bottom of Gneiss, we breathed a collective sigh of relief as the Canyon allowed us through. That is Mile 237. It was almost seven A.M. and we still had forty flat water miles left to row.

For a while we thought we might make it under the *Emerald Mile’s* record time of 36 hours and 37 minutes but as the miles wore on and the current slowed on the lake, we set our sights on beating the team’s previous time of around 39 hours. The canyon laughed at us as the upstream wind blew on the lake, but we kept grinding out the miles. When the sun came out that second morning, the previous night’s suffering was all but forgotten as we joked and laughed and ate (and rowed). It’s funny to embark on a journey of this sort and not really know where the finish line is. Tourists waved to us from the boats at Quartermaster Canyon and probably viewed us as just some other canyon creatures. Helicopters blasted through the silence and we were ready to see the Grand Wash Cliffs. In a final gesture we rowed hard to what we thought was the finish line and ended with a time of 37 hours 55 minutes only to realize later that we probably hadn’t reached it for another ten minutes making our time 38 hours 5 minutes. If someone comes that close to our time, they can have it. In the end, it wasn’t about the record at all—although it motivated us to try. It was about the time together in the Canyon, the spirit of adventure, and everything it took to get there and to get through.

At around two P.M. we were greeted by friends and loved ones at Pearce Ferry. When we stepped foot on shore it felt as though we had been at sea for a week. The ground didn’t stop moving under our wobbly legs for almost an hour. Our support crew described us as wandering zombies unable to fully complete a task. The derig was mellow, due to a team member’s pressing frostbite issue we barely had time to say goodbye to each other as we drove away in two separate vehicles. Many of the crew headed home the next morning to Colorado. And so our chapter ended.

Some notable firsts for our trip. Lyndsay Hupp is the first woman (that we know of) to be involved in a speed attempt. She was on the team because she is experienced, skilled, strong, fit and one of the most fun people on the river. She also makes delicious



Photo credit: Justin Salamon.

chocolate dipped buckeyes and the best bar on the market—the Huppy Bar! We hope that this ushers in an era where we see more women involved in these attempts—how about an all-women’s attempt at the record? It was the fastest time for an inflatable in Grand Canyon and these two attempts by the U.S. Men’s Raft Team are the first since the *Emerald Mile* to be conducted by a group of rowers on a single boat. Not that we need to make categories, but it was the fastest time on this water level 8,500 CFS–14,500 CFS. We also think that we had the best menu of any speed attempt—Fratelli’s Pizza, chicken nuggets, egg sausage muffins, burgers, homemade cookies, buckeyes, almond fudge, rice balls, pancakes, tons of bars, lots of powders and potions for our drinks—almost 120,000 calories in all. That’s got to be a record.

As we reflect, we realize that the rigors of extended, continuous boat travel are real but despite those conditions, at the end of the trip we remember the good times we had, the laughs, the excitement of running all of that whitewater in one go, the challenge of staying up for two nights and pushing through our limits, and the support of the community around us. A speed run is not your everyday event in Grand Canyon, and it is not one that we ever took for granted. I owe special thanks to my wife Gibby Siemion, for caring for our family while I trained (and who initially got me a job in Grand Canyon). The Team has great appreciation for the community that held us in their thoughts and supported GCY through donations—together we raised over \$13,000 for financial aid to help kids get on rivers! Finally, thank you to Grand Canyon, the place we all love, the arena for our hopes and dreams, the transformer of ordinary lives through extraordinary possibilities.

A final note—each of us would tell this story differently. Imagine eight guide types in one boat! It’s amazing we got it down the river at all from that perspective. If you want to learn more from other’s perspective’s here are some links:

- Like us on Facebook “Rowing for the Record: Grand Canyon Speed Run 2020” for lots of content.
- Lyndsay Hupp tells the story on Brian Dierker’s podcast “Big Adventures”: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/big-adventures-with-brian-dierker/id1489899555?i=1000463828650>
- *Adventure Journal* Article: <https://www.adventure-journal.com/2020/01/cold-hands-sleep-deprivation-and-the-quest-for-a-grand-canyon-speed-record/>
- *Men’s Journal* Article: <https://www.mensjournal.com/adventure/u-s-mens-rafting-team-makes-run-at-grand-canyon-speed-record/>

*Justin Salamon*

## Letter From Ed (Abbey)

I can attract paying customers for you. As you know, I'm no entertainer and not much of a talker — I am willing to make myself available, if anyone wants to interrogate or heckle me, but am not really ~~interested~~ interested in talking about the some old matters I've written about for ten years.

Looked at Bill Greene's land above Cliff Dweller's — great! Am trying to contact him. And as I said, if I do buy 50-40 acres from him, I'd be glad to cut you in later if you wish.

Best,  
Ed

3-28-79

Dear Patrick,  
Enclosed is a check for \$53 — \$100 for Renee's costs (Mike told me this would be right), \$3 ~~50~~ for the guide booklet, and \$50 as a tip for the five boat people (and a great crew they are). I feel uneasy about tipping boatmen, so if you think they would be offended by it use the \$50 for something else — a beer party, for example. Anyway, it was a fine trip, I thank you, and would like to do it again next year, on the same basis, if you still think  
(OVER)

# No Dams, No Trams Near the Confluence

Originally posted on [www.grandcanyontrust.org](http://www.grandcanyontrust.org), on their blog posted December 18, 2019. Re-printed with permission from the Grand Canyon Trust.

**O**N A CLEAR Saturday a young Navajo archaeologist, a Navajo land owner from the east rim of the Grand Canyon, a local photographer, a journalist, and myself ventured to the Little Colorado River Gorge to inspect, evaluate, and do reconnaissance where two dam projects are proposed.

Once we leave the pavement, it takes us another thirty minutes to travel along a bumpy, dusty, rocky road to get to the rim above the first dam site, located near the Salt Trail, a traditional cultural trail used since time immemorial by many tribes associated with the Grand Canyon. As we step out of the vehicle, we walk quickly to the edge of the canyon and with a sigh of relief we don't spot any dams materializing yet. For now, they are just proposals. Instead we are reassured to see only a deep canyon carved out over centuries.

It is good to hear the remote quietness of the area. If you listen closely, you can hear the reddish-brown water flowing gently over travertine rocks thousands of feet down, at the base of the canyon. Above the canyon walls, you see Grey Mountain looming over the desert valley, which gradually meets the southern canyon walls of the Grand Canyon. It is hard to imagine from this view that we are so close to the Grand Canyon, west of us.

**TWO SCHEMES TO DAM THE LITTLE COLORADO RIVER**  
According to applications submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, a company named Pumped Hydro Storage, LLC is proposing two hydroelectric projects, each with two dams, in this remote gorge. The company aims to build a

1,000-foot-long, 150-foot-high concrete arch dam across the Little Colorado River, just upstream from its confluence with the main stem of the Colorado River. It would create a 250-acre reservoir, while another 1,000-foot-long, 140-foot-high concrete arch dam across the turquoise-blue Little Colorado would create a 150-acre reservoir a few miles farther upstream of the first proposed dam, below where we now stand.

These applications were not authorized by the local tribal communities of the Grand Canyon, even though the proposed dams are on the Navajo reservation, within an area where the Hopi and other tribes all have strong ties. At this stage, the company is applying for preliminary permits to conduct studies and determine the feasibility of the projects before applying for licenses to build them.

## ENDANGERING AN ANCIENT RELIGIOUS TRAIL

As we walk closer to the dam site, we stop every hundred yards to get cactus and stickers out of our shoes in this rugged desert terrain. We finally see the spot where three tributaries meet below us: Big Canyon, the Little Colorado River, and Salt Canyon. It is unimaginable to envision a dam stopping this reddish-brown water, much less an ancient, historical, religious trail which leads to the Grand Canyon! How can one dam, let alone two, stop teachings, prayers, and oral traditions? To me this is not just about water or the impact to the environment but eons of teachings that began when we, as Indigenous people, emerged from this canyon.

## REMEMBER THE PROPOSED ESCALADE TRAMWAY?

Next we ventured to another proposed dam site downstream, which took some considerable time because it involved traveling around many side canyons, land formations, and homesteads. Being so close to the proposed Escalade tramway development



Photo credit: Lisa Winters, Grand Canyon Trust





caused all of us more heartache from memories of being in a very long battle against the developers from Scottsdale and our own tribal government of the Navajo Nation to defeat that proposal.

As we took a hike alongside the rim we could not imagine another dam being in place and standing where a future reservoir would be. This impact was more hurtful, because we knew that Blue Springs, the source of the Little Colorado River's milky turquoise-blue color, as well as a huge cultural site—the spot where the Hopi people understand they emerged into this world—would be submerged under mud, debris, and millions of gallons of water. Why would someone do this to all Indigenous tribes who have a connection to this place?

As the day ended we drove to the rim over the confluence and while we were all there standing quietly and praying with every ounce of our being that this place will always remain untouched, we heard the arrival of air-tour helicopters. Another matter which must be addressed and discussed with our cultural leaders and tribal officials.

#### VAGUE PROMISES OF JOBS, TOURISM

With Navajo Generating Station shut down forever and Kayenta Mine closing by the end of this year, Pumped Hydro Storage, LLC claims that these dam projects could replace that economic loss by providing jobs to the Navajo Nation and estimate they would bring \$8 billion in investment. It also proposes an access tunnel to the Little Colorado River that could be used for tourism and claims infrastructure and roads

leading to the dams would provide more economic opportunities in the former Bennett Freeze region. The Bennett Freeze was imposed in 1966 due to a land conflict between the Hopi Tribe and the Navajo Nation over a lease agreement with Peabody Mine. This act banned any and all development in the Western Agency community of the Navajo Reservation. This included infrastructure (water, sewer lines, gas lines, electricity, and all other modern-day necessities) and any home-repairs.

#### LONG-TERM PROTECTION FOR THE CONFLUENCE AND THE EAST RIM

While these dam projects are concerning, strong opposition by Navajo, Hopi, and other Grand Canyon-affiliated tribes can stop these threats and future threats. This is why it is important to focus on the next step of developing an intertribal strategy to secure the long-term protection of the entire Grand Canyon and its culturally sensitive areas.

The Grand Canyon is a place of emergence and reverence, where affiliated tribes' oral histories are shared in our languages, songs, and prayers, and within our everyday teachings that are sacred. We may not share the locations of these sacred spaces, but for us as Indigenous people all the proof you need is to recognize that this is a place we call home and return to when we leave this world. So let us work together to develop this permanent protection goal of the East Rim together.

*Sarana Riggs*

# Guide Profiles

## Amity Jamison Collins, Age 42

**WHERE WERE YOU BORN & WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?** I was born in Independence, KS and grew up in Las Vegas, NV and San Jose, CA.

**WHO DO YOU WORK FOR CURRENTLY (AND IN THE PAST)?** I waited tables all through College and afterwards got a job at Canyoneers as the Food Manager. That year I begged my way onto some motor trips and became a guide. After 10 years at Canyoneers driving big boats I transitioned over to AZRA where I get to drive and row all kinds of boats, big and small.

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN GUIDING?** Sixteen years.

**WHAT KIND OF BOAT(S) DO YOU RUN?** I drive motor boats, guide paddle boats and row dories and oar boats.

**WHAT OTHER RIVERS HAVE YOU WORKED ON?** I have only ever worked in Grand Canyon.

**WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES/PASSIONS/DREAMS?** I love to play in the Grand Canyon any chance I get. I also love to go running, climbing and play in white water wherever I get the chance.

**MARRIED/FAMILY/PETS?** I live with my partner, Omar Martinez.

**SCHOOL/AREA OF STUDY/DEGREES?** I have a degree in Elementary Education and a minor in English.

**WHAT MADE YOU START GUIDING?** After graduating college, I went on a backpacking trip in the Grand Canyon and hiked down to Slate Creek to camp overnight. The next morning we hiked to the river and watched dories run the left side of Crystal. It was the first time I realized that people boated the Colorado River and I've been smitten ever since.

**WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE?** I moved to Flagstaff to go to Northern Arizona University.

**WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR MENTORS AND/OR ROLE MODELS?** There have been many but to name a few; Carolyn Alvord, Shane Murphy and Jack Nichols.



**WHAT DO YOU DO IN THE WINTER?** I've done lots of different things from substitute teaching to this year working in the office at AZRA.

**IS THIS YOUR PRIMARY WAY OF EARNING A LIVING OR DO YOU COMBINE IT WITH SOMETHING ELSE?** Guiding is the primary way I make a living.

**WHAT'S THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN YOUR GUIDING CAREER?** Guiding on an AZRA trip with a group of Wounded Warriors.

**WHAT KEEPS YOU HERE?** The Grand Canyon and the beautiful people that wander around there.

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## Omar Eli Martinez, Age 35

**WHERE WERE YOU BORN & WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?** I was born in Nicaragua, but grew up in southwest Virginia.

**WHO DO YOU WORK FOR CURRENTLY (AND IN THE PAST)?** I work for Arizona Raft Adventures and have worked for Canyoneers in the past.

**HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN GUIDING?** I think this is my eleventh season of guiding.

**WHAT KIND OF BOAT(S) DO YOU RUN?** Motor and oar boats.



**WHAT OTHER RIVERS HAVE YOU WORKED ON?** Daqu, Salween, Rio Suarez.

**WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES/PASSIONS/DREAMS?** I love climbing, traditional and sport, mountain biking, endurance runs. Anything that challenges your abilities (hints my love of Grand Canyon)

**MARRIED/FAMILY/PETS?** My partner, Amity Collins.

**SCHOOL/AREA OF STUDY/DEGREES?** Studied Cultural Anthropology at Northern Arizona University.

**WHAT MADE YOU START GUIDING?** A serendipitous connection through roommates.

**WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE?** Grand Canyon and the Southwest.

**WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR MENTORS AND/OR ROLE MODELS?** I've been so lucky to boat and work alongside incredible people all over. Brad Dimock, Lynn Myers, Larry Vermeeren, Carol Alvord, Lora Colten, Claire Quist, John Crowely, Randy Tucker, BJ Boyle, , Lora colto and that's the short list.

**IS THIS YOUR PRIMARY WAY OF EARNING A LIVING OR DO YOU COMBINE IT WITH SOMETHING ELSE?** This is my primary profession but I do a bit of freelance work as well. Right now some big projects of mine include the building of Diversity, Justice and Equity work into the guiding world.

**WHAT'S THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT IN YOUR GUIDING CAREER?** Seems to shift the longer I guide, but watching Saddle Canyon flash a charcoal black while safely perched on the trail above, gave me new perspective on force and erosion.

Oh, and also, this December I was invited on a last minute effort to fill a seat for a run at the Grand Canyon Speed record. Not particularly thinking about what that would entail I immediately said yes. Just about a month of time to train for a 34-hour endurance event. A group of guys from Colorado had attempted the run a couple years ago in a modified rubber rowing vessel. With a few connections to the Grand Canyon community they enlisted the help of Justin Salamon from CanX and the illustrious Lyndsay Hupp, both long time reputable guides in the canyon. I was lucky enough to be considered for this second attempt.

It was a wild ride, while not clinching the record. The experience itself became a reward, working with a group of people to accomplish an audacious goal in difficult circumstances was incredible. Running rapids in the dark, and watching the canyon walls cruise by bathed in moonlight was really out of this world. I always consider myself lucky every time I venture into the Grand Canyon, but this time felt special. A continuous meditation on time, running the entirety of the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. Fluidity, delirium, and beauty intertwined to create a moment I will not soon forget. And the humility and respect for those who came before us, and will most certainly boat after us.

**WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST QUESTION YOU'VE EVER BEEN ASKED ABOUT THE CANYON/RIVER?** Craziest question, "Is it worth it?" Of course it is!

**WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR FUTURE HOLDS?** Seems like a riddle of a question, but I suppose I would like to see myself become more involved in my community and continue to strive to be a better citizen of my home and world. Create a job where the intersectionality of my skills allow growth of guiding and education on many levels, mouthful.

**WHAT KEEPS YOU HERE?** Easy, Grand Canyon.

## A Tourist in the Grand Canyon

**I**N 1913 THE Grand Canyon National Monument was five years old and the pioneer period of tourism was slowly being replaced by the larger scale commercial ventures in conjunction with the new federal designation to reserve this unique geologic vista. That year a 26-year-old woman from Auburn, New York, came to the South Rim and rode a mule to the river. For Rosamond Underwood, this journey was the beginning of her life in the West and her Grand Canyon experience is interpreted from a few photos and notes

of her trip in a family album. She would return to the West in 1916 to take a job as a school teacher at the Elkhead School in a remote part of Routt County north of Hayden, Colorado, and remain a westerner and Colorado resident for the rest of her life.

On January 13, 1913, Rosamond, with her mother and father, Grace and George Underwood, boarded a train in Chicago bound for Arizona. They arrived at El Tovar on the South Rim on January 17<sup>TH</sup> and toured the newly constructed Hermit Rim Road,



stopping to view and photograph the winter scenes along the way. In her notes she writes “On January 18<sup>TH</sup> dressed early. Breakfast at 4:15. Rendezvous of nine people to ride on the Bright Angel Trail to river.” They stopped and took photographs at Indian Garden and eventually left the mules in “narrow canyon” somewhere in Pipe Creek. When they walked to the river, they took a number of photos which show a



very low winter Colorado River of the pre-dam era. It was chilly, attested by the dress of the participants in the photos. The women are wearing fashionable hats, well secured with scarves. The January temperature at the river appears to be more comfortable than the temperatures in the snow at the South Rim.

It is with regret I did not know about this trip when I first paddled the Grand Canyon by kayak in 1972, as Rosamond was my grandmother and she died in 1974. There are a lot of questions with no answers.

Rosamond’s story as a teacher at the Elkhead School in 1916 was written up in a *New Yorker Magazine Annals of Adventure* article “Roughing It” by Dorothy Wickendon in the April 20, 2009 issue, and then was expanded and published as a book in 2011 with the title *Nothing Daunted*. Rosamond married Robert Perry of Oak Creek, CO, in 1917 after concluding her year as a teacher.

There is another more extensive family journal of an expedition in July of 1927, where Rosamond, Robert and fourteen others spent several days between the Green and Yampa rivers exploring the Lodore and Yampa Canyons with two cowboys, Shorty and Guy, as wrangler guides. The journal is well illustrated with photos showing scenes from Douglas and Zenobia Peaks, view points at the Gates and along the rim of the Canyon of Lodore, finding a horse route through slickrock to the confluence of the Green and Yampa,

with pictures of Disaster Falls, Steamboat Rock, the Mitten Park Fault and more.

At that time the Yampa was called the Bear River.

Dividing up by sex “two bathing parties—one in the Green and one in the Bear—soon made for an unusual sight for Echo Cliff to look down upon, and much refreshed, the party reassembled for lunch. An old Indian campground with burned sand showed where the Indians had assembled for a

feast, and furnished arrowheads and flints for those who searched.” The journal includes a story of the trip, reading parts of the Kolb diary about Lodore from their 1911 river trip, some poetry, and local historical descriptions. We rode “across the cedar breaks to camp with songs and stories—of Queen Anne, the famous leader of a cattle rustler gang who infested this region and who always wore a chamois mask—not to conceal her identity, but to preserve her complexion.”

Rosamond and Robert’s great grandson, Ned Perry, has been a river guide for OARS for the past twelve years, rowing dories in the Grand Canyon and piloting a sweep boat on the Middle Fork of the Salmon in Idaho, following the family tradition of living a purposeful life with plenty of outdoor adventure and exploration and telling the stories that are created and passed along.

*Will Perry*

## Who Am I?

**I**F YOU EVER STOP TO observe the raven (*Corvus corax*), you will soon realize that they are highly intelligent and social creatures. They can pull off their tricks individually, but they really shine when they work together as a team. They are also amazingly adaptive, they live as both predator and scavenger and range across most of the Northern Hemisphere, from dry hot deserts to Arctic tundra. On the Colorado River, where I have spent many, many moons, I have seen them evolve alongside the river runners and tourists. These little rascals have learned how to unzip zippers, make and use tools, recognize faces, problem solve to get into all sorts of trouble and basically just make a mess of everything if you don't properly close and contain your food and gear. Once, I saw a raven fly off with an enormous, half cooked pork chop. He swooped in and snatched it right off the flaming BBQ while his buddies tormented and distracted the poor grill master, the infamous Billy Sims. I've seen them steal anything from cigarettes and prescription drugs, to entire sleeves of cookies and your packed lunch sandwich. Another time, early in the morning, a passenger awoke to only find that his prized gold chain (that he had so intentionally took off for the night and laid beside his sleeping bag) was missing. Angrily, he stormed into the kitchen about to accuse someone of stealing it when we spotted the real thief, the raven, struggling to fly across the river with his shiny, new, heavy but golden burden. It was pretty hard not to laugh... Any season now, I bet they will learn how to open up ammo cans or maybe even drive the boat! If a raven sees you see them, stash their new loot, they will move it again to a place that is more secret! They are fascinated with chicken eggs and love them raw or hard boiled and will happily accept the treat from whomever is offering. However, if you place an egg in the sand, then with your finger draw a

circle around it, they think it's a trap and won't cross over into the inner circle to retrieve the egg. I have had them rummage through my unattended backpack, take what they think is interesting and then leave a tiny rock or crystal on top as if that is somehow payment for whatever they've stolen. While some people may think the *Corvus* species is nothing but a nuisance, the

raven has managed to make its way into the hearts of many and has even become an endearing icon of sorts in communities of the Southwest.

I also observe these funny birds right in my own back yard in Flagstaff. There has been a family living in our Ponderosa Pine trees for a few years now. We have seen them raise two sets of fledglings and have watched all of the hilarious antics that go along with growing up and learning how to fly. We have a little stump that we use to "make offerings" not only to the ravens but to any other forest friend who may seek a snack. One cold morning, I had put out some stale, hard (but homemade!) sourdough. I

watched through my kitchen window as the raven took the hard pieces of bread and one by one soaked them in the bird bath to soften them up so he could eat them. Then, when he was finished with his breakfast, I swear he was checking himself out, grooming his feathers, pondering his own reflection in the water. What was he thinking? Do the ravens wonder about their purpose in life, or what will happen next, or where they will find their next meal? Whatever goes on inside their over-sized bird brain, I think it is pretty obvious that they are intelligent and conscious of themselves (which is more than I can say for some humans). "Who Am I?" asks the raven of his reflection. And then, I wonder, do we ask ourselves that question often enough?

*Erica Fareio*



## John Hance's Glendale Springs

**O**N EAST RIM DRIVE, John Hance's homestead cabin site, what he called Glendale Springs, invites visitation. Outside its recent generations of ponderosas and underbrush, it appears as Hance would have discovered it. To explore the area, visitors should start at Grandview Point and proceed east toward Moran Point. After about four miles, Buggeln Picnic Area will be on the north side of the down-trending road. Slowly continue down the right-bending grade some 400 yards beyond Buggeln Picnic Area until the road runs abreast the rim, difficult to know because of dense vegetation. Immediately beyond that, a shady,

Fifty yards to the southeast, also covered in brush, rises the high, U-shaped dirt embankment Hance made to impound the slowly diminishing Glendale Springs. The short hill directly east of this pool is the last one stagecoaches rumbled down into John's camp—before every-other-day stage service was established using another entry—where Hance greeted one group dressed in a suit, tie, and outsized sombrero.

During the first few years, the folks came in from Hull's cabin to the south. This route can be traced on foot and offers an enjoyably circuitous three-mile ramble through fragrant pines on public lands. From



Looking toward Grand Canyon from the bank of Glendale Springs's catchment, with Hance's cabin on the left, Lyman Tolfree's Grand Cañon Resort's dining room in the center, and Martin Buggeln's 1905 V—V Hotel on the right. Photo Courtesy of Grand Canyon National Park, #12081.

unmarked, pull-out is available to the north. Carefully cross the oncoming traffic. Park, leaving room for others. Get out of the car. Turn inland. Glendale Springs is the deep hollow just across the road.

Follow an entrenched footpath one hundred pinecone-scattered yards downhill through the ponderosas to the remains of Buggeln's V—V Hotel and its foundation. Continuing along the same line, the T-shaped foundation of the Tolfree-Thurber hotels is not readily apparent, but its location can be imagined from the few remaining stones. Hance's cabin site is just beyond that, but with even fewer markers. It's hard to tell anyone ever lived there. There's no kiosk or other notice to indicate this was the birthplace of Grand Canyon tourism.

Glendale Springs proceed a few hundred yards uphill, south of John's tank past several of Martin Buggeln's larger water catchments, to meet a well-defined road before the top of the hill. Turn east. Walk downhill on the road for a half-mile, maybe more, to where the first small valley enters on your right. Turn west into this drainage. Proceed up its gently rising slope for some three hundred yards to the first left-leaning southerly saddle. Turn into it. Hull Barn will come to you in another half-mile.

*Shane Murphy*

**NOTE:** Look for Shane's book, *John Hance: the Life, Lies and Legend of Grand Canyon's Greatest Storyteller*, coming this Spring / Summer.

## John O'Brien

I WAS BORN IN PAGE, while the dam was being built. My dad went up there to work. He was a carpenter, in the union hall out of Flag, and he went to build the barracks before the work got started. I think it was in '56, before there was a bridge. He had a car on the Arizona side and a pickup truck on the Utah side, and there was just a swinging bridge across the canyon. My grandpa worked on Hoover Dam, my mom was born in Boulder City, went to college at Arizona State College, what is NAU now. She had a teaching degree, and the school was getting started in Page. She got a job as a schoolteacher. The school superintendent was a guy from Jerome. My dad had the G.I. Bill from World War II, and he was working on a dam in Montana and was injured. He wasn't going to be able to go back working. There was a circuit, building these dams all around the West. If you got on with a company, or you got on with a foreman, and they liked your work, you could get on the next dam. He thought he would use the G.I. Bill and he went to what's ASU now and he got a teaching degree while he was healing from his injury. He was in Page working probably on the footers for the highway bridge after they built the barracks. This guy tracked him down, because my dad was born in Clarkdale, "We need some teachers, and I know you got a teaching degree."

My mom and dad got married in Boulder City, but they met in Page. My dad had a combination job of Page elementary school principal and Bitter Springs bus driver. We lived in a little bitty trailer behind the trading post at Bitter Springs, which is pretty close to where that new Mormon Church is now. I think we lived in Bitter Springs or Page until I was about four, 'til they finished the dam, and the town and the school emptied out. My mom and dad were both teaching, and they went to work in Tuba City. Dad would still go up and do heavy construction during the summer. I started first grade in Tuba City and finished high school there. I stayed twelve years in Tuba City, and my parents ended up staying 26. They finally retired out of Tuba City, back to Clarkdale, basically to the house that my dad grew up in.

My grandfather in Boulder City worked on the dam for the Six Companies Construction—he was a labor foreman—and he got on with the Bureau of Reclamation as a maintenance foreman at the end of construction. He'd been one of these guys, kind of a farm boy that went to World War I, and after that he didn't want to go back to the farm. We would travel over from Page or Tuba City every summer to spend a week or two with our grandparents in Boulder City. The city had a pool, laid out by the Bureau of Reclamation. It

was a real cool town, and by the time we were there as little kids in the '60s, all those shade trees were up, and big lawns and everything. It was a real nice place. My grandpa, I think he didn't finish college, so he couldn't go very far in the Bureau of Reclamation, but he wanted all of his kids to be civil engineers.

RICHARD QUARTAROLI: Good career.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, in the '30s—they came out of the Depression—the Bureau of Reclamation was like NASA. That was the best and brightest. One of his boys did become a civil engineer, another one was an electrical [engineer]. After a while you've been to your grandparents' house a few times, it wasn't like they lived on a farm, you couldn't go out and ride, I'd start reading my grandpa's books, and one of them was *Time and the River Flowing*. It was the big coffee table edition, and all my uncles grew up at the bottom end of the Grand Canyon. The Belknaps probably took the class pictures for the annual. They knew who the Belknaps were. In fact, my youngest uncle went to high school with Loie, so it was known that there was a Grand Canyon, and it was kind of known that people went through it.

That was one book I kept going back to. It was a cool book to read, great big pictures and cool stories. When I was in high school in Tuba City in the '70s, that's when the big backpacking thing got going. Kelty packs and dehydrated food, and people were doing more backpacking, even in Tuba City—we weren't completely out of the loop. We started doing day hikes in the Grand Canyon, because it was really close from Tuba City to Desert View, Tanner, or Salt Trail.

QUARTAROLI: Were these organized by the school as part of a school group?

O'BRIEN: No, just me and friends. There were all these crazy connections. There was a guy up there who lived in Tuba City, I grew up with his kids. He worked for the Highway Department out of Cameron. His wife was a schoolteacher. He took me on my first backpacking trip. We didn't have backpacks, we had old army knapsacks from Penny Surplus, steel canteens and pistol belts. This would have been '71 or so. We hiked down the Hermit and spent the night at Monument Creek, and we hiked *out* the Bright Angel Trail. On the way down he was telling us one time he hiked out the Hermit, with a vodka bottle full of water from the river. He thought he was going to die. He saw these little deer tracks in the trail, and there was moss in them, and he got down on his hands and knees and started sucking the water out of these deer tracks. Santa Maria Spring was around the corner—that trough was full



of algae. Stuck his head in and drank as much as he could. It wasn't clear to me what he was doing down there, and I didn't find out for quite a few years later. He was actually on one of the [Elmer] Purtyman trips [ca. 1954], where the guy had the appendicitis attack and they had to go out for help. They thought he had food poisoning from Phantom Ranch. I think that was the same trip where they stopped at Hance, and they were going to send one of the boys to hike around the rapids. I think they got lost somewhere on the Tonto. They sent a man and one of the kids. I think in their mind they were going to hike to Indian Garden, to get around Hance and Sockdolager.

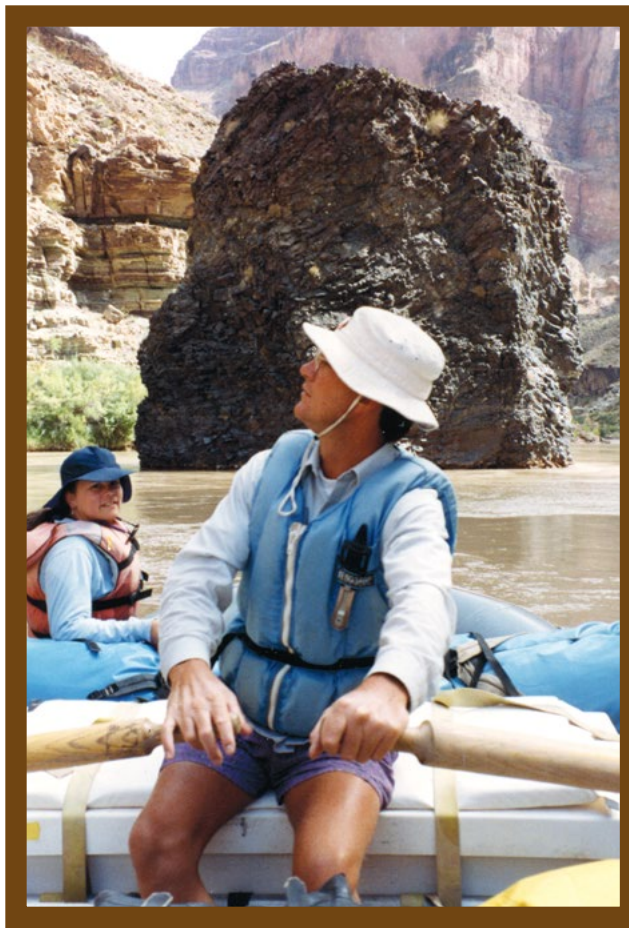
It turned out this guy had been down the Grand Canyon at least halfway, and he'd done a bunch of San Juan trips, but he wasn't a river guide at all. He knew about the Salt Trail from an old article in *Arizona Highways* and he knew the Hermit, because he hiked out it, and somehow he knew there was a loop there. We did that when I was in sixth grade, and I think probably a couple years later went down the Salt Trail with him. Then you get to an age where you can have a driver's license, we started doing the Tanner, and the Grandview—whatever was within reach. At some point in time we found out that you could—if you held your head a certain way—you could buy beer at Marble Canyon or Vermilion Cliffs.

**QUARTAROLI:** Back then, the drinking age was eighteen or nineteen.

**O'BRIEN:** Nineteen, yeah. I think also—I don't know, I shouldn't say—in my mind I think a sale might have been a sale back then. There wasn't that much traffic.

**QUARTAROLI:** A wink and a nod.

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah. We would buy a six-pack for four guys. It wasn't like we were going crazy or anything. We needed the money for gas. We would go to Thunder River, and that was a great hike. I think that's the only one we did on the north side, the Thunder River Trail, a few times. We did all the trails out to Hermit. We didn't do Bass. I knew there wasn't a lot of history published, like there is now. I wasn't a person that was going to go to the library and research it. *Time and the River Flowing* was one of the few books. And then *The Man Who Walked Through Time*, I'd read that book, and the more I got into backpacking, the more I read it. I knew a fair amount about the Grand Canyon. I knew where it was, I knew the rock layers, because when you're hiking it's good to know. I knew a little bit about the history. I considered myself a person that was interested in the Grand Canyon. There were a couple of times where we'd be down on a hike and see motorboats go by. "Whoa!" I have this vivid memory from being a sixth-grader, being down at Granite, and we camped about



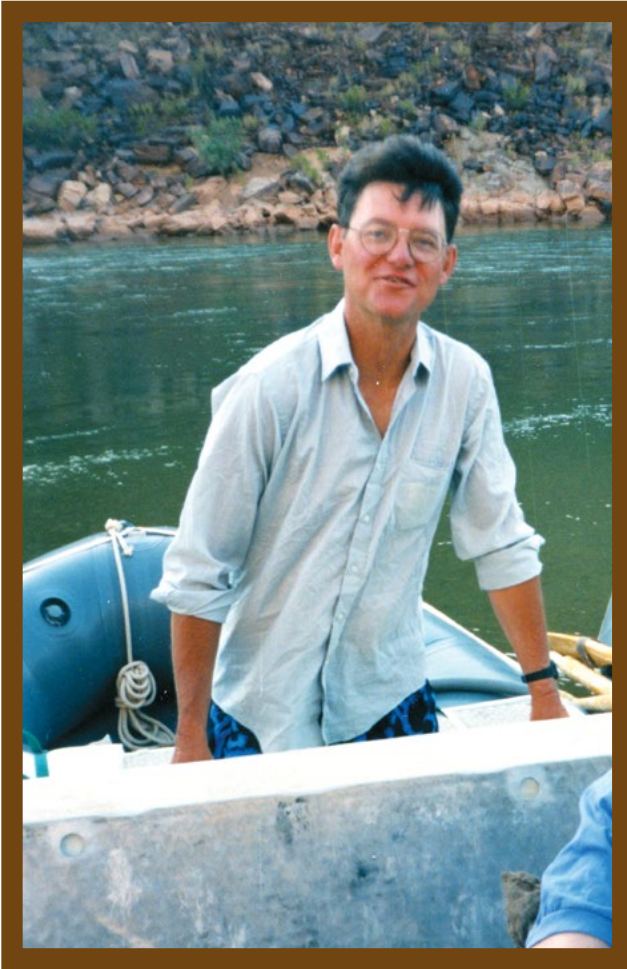
as far upstream as you can go, and there's that fin of schist, and you can't really see what's upstream. "God, I wonder what's up there." You go downstream, you've got the rapid, and it goes around the corner. "I wonder what's down there." I bet we probably hiked that loop four or five times over the years.

I think the week after I graduated from high school in Tuba, we did a hike: we went down the Nankoweap and out the Tanner. That was eight days. By then Harvey Butchart's little books were out. There was a surplus store on South San Francisco—we bought air mattresses. It was kind of funny. This buddy of mine bought these brand-new boots—big, heavy, thick, old-school Raichle [brand].

**QUARTAROLI:** Work boots? Or were they hiking boots?

**O'BRIEN:** They were the hiking boots. They were \$85, twice as much as you'd pay for Redwings, which were considered top of the line. Of course they were stiff, and of course they tore his feet to pieces. By the time we got to the river at Nankoweap, we were completely out of Band-aids on this kid, and he actually poured a little blood out of one boot one morning.

**QUARTAROLI:** Tell us about the hike down Nanko, to the river, crossing, and on up.



**O'BRIEN:** There were three of us, and this one kid who had graduated a year earlier from Tuba High, and me and this gal that had graduated that year. We came down Nankoweap, trails weren't that beat-out, and we'd done the Salt Trail before, and we were expecting that was going to be a route. We didn't come in Saddle Mountain, we came in that top one, where you come down through all the New Mexico locust. That was an adventure.

**QUARTAROLI:** Where? Out near Point Imperial?

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah. It's still right on the Forest, right on the boundary. We came down there and beat through a lot of New Mexico locust, so by the time we got down to the open canyon part, we weren't really worried about exposure—just glad to be out of the locust. We got down fine, we got to the creek, and we got down to the river. I don't remember if we hiked to the granaries or not. When I got [into] river running, you would pull into a camp, tie the boats up and set up camp, and then you would go hiking. When I was a backpacker, you'd get to the river, and you'd take your stuff off and lay down under a tree. That was the whole point of it.

We got to Nankoweap and it was June of '77, and the water was super low. I had no idea. I didn't know if that

was high water, low water. We had these mattresses, and this one guy's feet were so tore up that we basically put him on a mattress, and the heaviest pack on a mattress. I carried the third pack and we walked up and down along the side. We would corral up where we needed to, to get back across, and this guy had two air mattresses, and he pretty much couldn't walk. I remember we practically waded across the river right below Nankoweap. You know where the big gravel bar is?

**QUARTAROLI:** Right. You didn't stay on the west side? You crossed over pretty quick?

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah. We had no idea what we were doing, "Hey, it looks flat over there," and "Hey, it looks like we can get across here. Let's go across and hike over there." You know how hiking is in the Grand Canyon—everything looks good over there. You get over there and, "It's full of mesquite. Let's go back."

**QUARTAROLI:** Did this guy stay on the air mattress? Did you float him down along shore too?

**O'BRIEN:** Most of the way, yeah. We didn't know what anything was named, so obviously he didn't run 60-Mile, he didn't run Kwagunt, or anything like that, but really, we hiked in below what you'd call Nankoweap Rapid. It wasn't much to get across what little bit of channel there was, and we walked across that gravel bar. I don't know if we were ankle deep or knee deep. It probably wasn't knee deep, because it wasn't scary at all. We got above the Little C, and by that time we were all on foot, and we were all on the left bank. We were walking through the bushes, baccharis or whatever it was, tamarisk, and there was a motorboat. We showed up out of the middle of nowhere. I remember I had these P.E. trunks that said "Tuba City High School Football" on them. This boatman looked at us, "Are you guys from Tuba City?" because the young woman that we were with was a Navajo, and I had these Tuba City football trunks. "Hi, yeah, we're from Tuba." "Where are you going?" "Oh, we're going to go out the Beamer Trail." I think we knew the name of it. We had no concept of what a river trip was. It was like seeing a great blue heron fly by. We found the start of the Beamer Trail. Coming across the river crossings we had garbage bags to waterproof our stuff, so we had lost a lot of food, stuff got wet. I remember at Tanner Rapid, the last night, I think for supper for the three of us, we had one Lipton Cup-a-Soup, and one Lipton tea bag. We made tea, split three ways, off that tea bag, and we split that cup of soup—watered it down. In the morning for breakfast we had the same teabag split three ways! (laughter) I remember when we got up to the top—Babbitt's at the time had a grocery store there at Desert View—one of our other buddies from Tuba City met us and picked us up, and we drove over to

that grocery store, and we bought a loaf of white bread, a pound of baloney, and a jar of mayonnaise and a six-pack of Dr. Pepper, and we started making baloney sandwiches and eating them.

QUARTAROLI: You must have been on a good schedule, because the person that met you up there...

O'BRIEN: We knew the day. We got a backcountry permit.

QUARTAROLI: You did pretty good, considering the guy's got torn-up feet, and you're crossing the river on air mattresses.

O'BRIEN: Yeah.

QUARTAROLI: And this is not just a day-in-the-park-type hike. Even hiking out Tanner, it's a long slog to get up.

O'BRIEN: We were eighteen, and...

QUARTAROLI: Still, you were on schedule. That's amazing!

O'BRIEN: We were pretty buff. The day after graduation we backpacked down to Grandview. When you'd get a spare weekend, you'd go to the Grand Canyon and go for a hike. I remember this same kid that was with me was a year older than I am. It was prom, so it would have been the year before that, because he was still a senior at Tuba. We had to go into Bledsoe's Menswear on Aspen and pick up our tuxes. He had a crushed red velvet tux, and I had a blue crushed velvet tux. "We're already in Flag. We should go by the South Rim and get a backpacking permit." Because you had to go stand in line to get a backcountry permit. "Yeah, that's cool. Anything's better than going straight back to Tuba City. We're in the big town now, let's go get a backcountry permit. That would be funny to go stand in line with these tuxedos on, to get a hiking permit!" (laughter) We put those tuxedos on, and got our permit for whatever it was—Hermit or something. Grand Canyon was always there, but the river was not. Parents were in Page probably when Sanderson was getting going, so they knew the river trips were there, but it wasn't something we did, it wasn't something anybody we knew did. Sanderson was right down the street from our doctor's office. We didn't have a way in, and we weren't the kind of people that paid for our vacations. My parents were both out of the Depression, came from laboring families. They were in the first generation to go to college in their families. Fast forward, I went off to college.

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*John O'Brien, aka John O, has a well-deserved reputation as a truly knowledgeable Grand Canyon boatman, always willing to share an explanation or opinion about the*

*place and the River, whether history or geology, botany or a fun and interesting story. This comes from many accounts of river passengers and crew. Unfortunately, I have never had the opportunity to share a river trip with him, but know him well as a historian, with his thoughtful comments on Clio, a river history listserv, among others. His quotes from historians and history (and other) books I may not have even heard of, or never read, are ones that certainly pique my interest. Since 2001 he has been with the engineering department for the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests, but still manages to run at least an annual AZRA Grand Canyon river trip, among others. This interview of a past-president of GCRG took place December 2017, at John O's home in Flagstaff. —RICHARD QUARTAROLI*

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QUARTAROLI: Where was college?

O'BRIEN: I tried a year back east at an engineering school called Rensselaer [Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, NY]. It didn't take long to figure out, wow, I'm not sure I'm prepared for this. A lot of the kids I was in school with had gone to Brooklyn Tech or Bronx High School of Science. I came back the next year to U of A and worked in Cameron and Flagstaff in the summers for the Highway Department—surveying and road crew. We were going up to get our [Christmas] tree yesterday, and I was telling the kids about Highway 64 between Cameron, one summer I was on a survey crew that slope-staked that thing. Sometimes it'd be a half a mile or mile from "the highway." Now it's the highway, and the old highway is over there. I can still remember walking, "Oh, that hill was a bear, carrying the transit up that and down it."

QUARTAROLI: What was your major at U of A?

O'BRIEN: Mining engineering. It's still engineering. I thought about geology, and then somebody said you need a master's in geology to get your first job—it really helps a lot. When you're in Tucson, and there's all those copper mines going, that sounded great. Plus I still thought of myself as a Tuba City boy, and Peabody Coal was going great guns. I thought, "I could get a job with Peabody with a mining degree." My Arizona grandpa had worked in the smelter in Clarkdale for about fifty years. Mining seemed like a regular thing you could go into. We still knew people that after the smelter shut down, they moved to Ajo. Or, "Oh, those people are down in Bisbee." You knew people that were in that line of work. I finished my degree about the time that the bottom fell out of the copper market, so that wasn't very good. I came back up to Sedona and did some construction work, basically labor, ditch-digging, but I

got to do some drilling and blasting.

**QUARTAROLI:** Was this road work in Sedona?

**O'BRIEN:** No, this was utility work, real small-scale stuff, putting in a half-mile-long, four-foot-deep trench for underground powerline. Too small to bring in a piece of equipment to do it, and too big to do it without drilling it and blasting it. I did a lot of shovel work. In about eight months I got on with the Navajo Tribe as a mine reclamation engineer. I got to use my degree, and I worked in Window Rock for five years, working for the tribe, in mine reclamation. I spent two years out at Tuba City as the field office manager. We were doing coal mine reclamation, filling in old coal mines and sealing off any openings or shafts, and trying to put the spoils back in the holes. There's a lot of mining scattered all around the reservation. Most of the BIA offices were partly sited close to a source of coal, because when they were laid out, there weren't powerlines, so you needed a steam plant to have a boarding school, and made your own electricity. They had to be close to a coal mine. Tuba City had Coal Mine Mesa. There were coal mines close to Window Rock—one of the things they looked for. You needed water and you needed power. There were quite a few old coal mines to fill in.

**QUARTAROLI:** I didn't realize. You think of Peabody, and you think of Black Mesa—these major, major, giant... But I wouldn't think of isolated...

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah, little bitty ones.

**QUARTAROLI:** I was thinking you were doing some kind of uranium reclamation. Did you ever get into that?

**O'BRIEN:** That's what the purpose of the Tuba City field office was. When I moved out to that, we started doing inventory in the Cameron area. We also worked on filling in the pit at Copper Mine, which is south of Page on the old road from the Gap. We filled in that pit and cleaned up—there was a lot of plastic left over from the heap leach. We did a lot of EA's [Environmental Assessments] and the initial cost estimates. I'd been there for seven years, and I still had in my mind I was going to be a mining engineer at an active mine. The mining industry was picking back up again, there were a lot of jobs being advertised. I was working in Tuba and stayed there during the week, and I'd come into Flag for the weekend. I rented a room from a guy in Flag, real cheap, because I was only there on the weekends.

In '87, this guy that I worked with, this really smart groundwater hydrologist, a bunch of his friends had gone to U of A for masters or PhDs in groundwater hydrology, they were scattered all around, had a lot of money, and they wanted a good vacation. They called him, "You're in Arizona. We're thinking about doing one of these Grand Canyon river trips. Can you do



a little legwork for us and find us a good one?" He turned to me, "You go to Flagstaff all the time. What's a good river trip, and would you like to go?" I had been working a lot, I'd saved a lot of money. It seemed like it would be a good thing to spend your money on. I used to go hit Charly's for a beer when I got in from the rez, and Dave Barnett was bartending, "Hey, what's a good river company to go on a river trip with around here?" "AZRA's probably one of the good ones. I know a lot of their boatmen, they seem like great people." I go back to work, "The company to go with is AZRA." "Okay, should we do a six-day, or should we go thirteen-day?" "For me, if I do it, I'm only going to do it once in my life, so I'm going to bite the bullet, I'm going to do the whole enchilada. I'm going to do the whole trip. I don't care about the Upper, I don't care about the Lower, I'm never coming back. I want to see everything I can see on my one trip." It was \$100 a day! A thirteen-day trip was \$1,300, "Oh man!"

**QUARTAROLI:** Big money.

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah, you could make a down payment on a four-wheel-drive truck for that. We ended up going, I think in the fall of '88. Randomly that was the trip that had enough room for all these other buddies of my friend, of my coworker. It was the last oar trip of the season. We didn't know anything about it, but the crew was a bunch of AZRA trip leaders that got to do an end-of-the-year...

QUARTAROLI: Right, the crew trip.

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Martha Clark was leading it, Dave Lowry, Bob Melville, Wesley Smith, Cam Staveley—he was the AZRA motor guy. And Jon Hirsh was on it. There was a snout and a paddleboat. I didn't know what to expect, but I knew the rock layers, I knew what Lees Ferry was. When we were little kids in Page, my dad used to take us down to Lees Ferry for a picnic, just to get out of the big city of Page. I knew kind of what to expect, and from reading *Time and the River Flowing*. The crew was so fun and great, and the trip was so great, and there were all these people you would never meet anywhere else in your life. Jon Hirsh was just infectious. I saw him last night—he's *still* got the heart of a little kid!

QUARTAROLI: I was going to say, *big* kid.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, still a big kid—in the kindest way, the kindest way you can imagine. You had this ton of experience on the crew, and ton of wisdom, how to reach out to people. You had quiet crew members, and loud crew members, and thoughtful crew members. “C'mon, you guys! You can sleep when you're dead!” I think the other thing was, I was very conscious of I'll never come back here again, and I don't want to miss anything. I went on every hike, as far as they were going—everything—and realized that I had been a little bit of a stick-in-the-mud. I had this good job, steady job, making good money. I was saving a lot of money and thinking about my next career move, and I realized, man, these people are working and they're having a ton of fun. I wasn't even thinking about the economics, but I realized life is pretty short, and you have to push yourself. I think Martha Clark came out of Outward Bound, and she had that thing about trips. Trips were places where you could grow yourself, and you could find out about yourself, without being formal about it. She thought that everybody could use a good hike. Bob Melville thought people could stand to laugh a little bit more. By the end of the season Wesley was in full Wesley-mode. There were people on the trip that had actually come back just because Wesley was on it. The last night on the river we had a get-together, people reading poetry and singing, limericks that they made up, or haikus or whatever. One older guy was a cardiologist from Michigan, I think. What's the first thing you're going to do when you get back? “I'm gonna get a cheeseburger,” “I'm gonna take a four-hour bath.” He goes, “I'm gonna retire! I've been working since I was eighteen, and I was in the navy as a doctor. I realized there's a lot of fun stuff to do in this world.” I think he literally made up his mind on the course of that trip. He's a very kind of formal—not stiff, but a very formal guy. He was used to being called “Doctor.”

People started calling him by his first name, you could see it was kind of odd for him at first. At the end of the trip, “I'm going to retire when I get home.”

Kevin McClure was an assistant on the trip, from McClure's Transmission. I really hit it off with him. We cracked each other up, and had all these fun adventures. He had done a lot of private boating already. About six months after that trip, Kevin called and said, “Hey, I got a line on a private trip in the Grand Canyon if you want to go.” “Yeah, that sounds awesome.” I still didn't have any interest in rowing, it was just transportation. But it was the idea you could get to all these places you couldn't get to on foot. You had the energy to go hiking, instead of, “This is where we take off our shoes and lay down.” (laughter) Then he invited me on a second one maybe a year later.

QUARTAROLI: You didn't touch the oars on that first one?

O'BRIEN: No, I didn't touch the oars on the first one. On the second one, Marble or something, some mellow day, “Hey, can I row a little bit?” This guy let me row five or ten minutes. “Okay, that's enough.” “Wow. I was thinking I could row a little bit more.” He goes, “Buy your own boat if you want to row a little bit more!” Oh, that's right! This was way before PRO or Ceiba. People had these boats, and the patch kit was the same size as the boat, and they worked on them all winter. Built their own frames, and sanded their oars. That was their baby. There was a guy who was kind of famous on this second trip—or a little infamous. He had actually flipped in 209 the year before, from not paying attention. He thought it would be funny if he got these t-shirts made up with “209” on them upside down. He was a one-upmanship guy. “Are you willing to ride on my boat today?” I don't know why I said this, but not to be topped, I said, “Only if you're willing to let me row.” I had no more idea than the man in the moon what I was doing. But I thought, “Wow, that's a good topper. He'll have to say no.” Then he topped me, he said, “Yeah, that'd be okay.” You hear that thing breaking, at the right level, when you're camped there by that big ol' willow tree, “Boom!” you now, “zuh-zuh-zuh-zuh-zuh, boom!” Anyway, I missed the hole, by whatever grace of God. That got it into my mind that it wasn't probable, but it was possible that I could be a boatman.

Bob Flamme was on that trip, “How does somebody get one of these boats, Bob?” “You just have to ask around.” “Who would I ask?” “I'll ask around for you.” Within two weeks I ran into Bob Flamme at Joe's Place, “Hey! I've got a boat for you, fifteen hundred bucks. It's a 16-foot Shoshone with big tubes, a conduit frame that the Pearsall boys made in their dad's shop.” Took me about three weeks, but I bought a boat, a frame,

and four oars, and some old lifejackets, a big patch kit. I started going up on the San Juan with it—me and my patch kit. (laughs) I learned to read small water, and get through eight-foot, and how to patch a boat, and how to patch the floor, how to get off a rock. This came about the time that I was thinking about moving on and getting a mining job, and leaving the tribe. I realized, man, I've got six weeks of annual leave saved up. Whenever I get this new job, I'll be the low man on the totem pole, I won't have any annual leave, and I might be living who-knows-where, sixty miles outside of Elko, Nevada, or on an island in Alaska. Maybe I'll start lining up some river trips this summer. I'll quit this spring, and I'll do some of these private trips, and have my fun, take my vacation. I'll put some money aside, and when that money's gone, whatever it is, three grand or something—whenever that money's gone, I'll know I'll have to get serious about looking for work.

The first day I didn't have to go to work, I found out there was a boatman's first aid at Hatch. "I'm going to be doing all these private trips this summer. It probably wouldn't hurt to go take this boatman's first aid class." Turns out Howie [Usher] is in it. He needed to take his car into the shop back

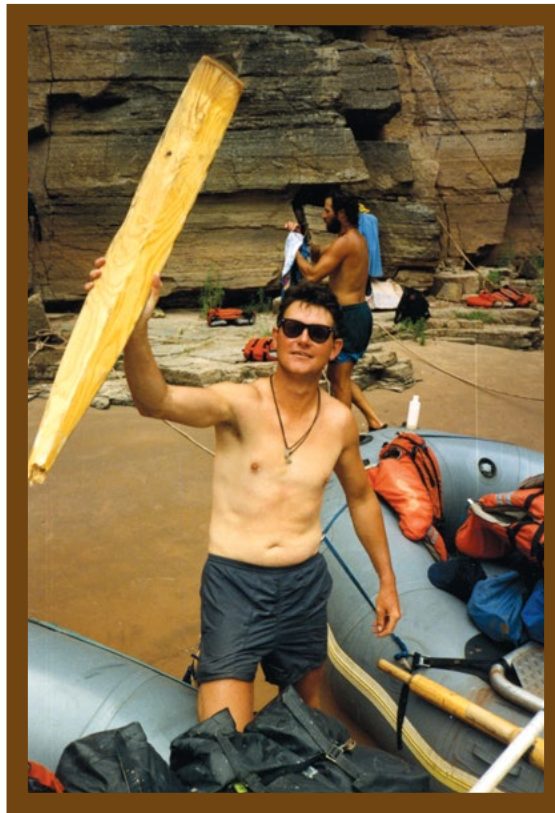
in Flag—his truck. Somehow I was going to be going back to Flag for something. It was a three-day class, Patty Ellwanger's class. We talked about geology, all the way back up, which he had never really focused on the geology of the drive along 89. Monday morning I was walking down Aspen Street, going to get coffee at Café Express probably, and Jerry McLaughlin [Aspen Sports] pulls up, "Hey, man, you want to go on a river trip?" "Yeah!" "It's leavin' tomorrow." "Yeah!" "Well, do you want to know what river?" "Not really." "Can you make it?" "Yeah! Now, what river?" "Dolores." I went up there with Dave Barnett and Jim Duffield and Jerry McLaughlin and ran the Dolores in '92, spring. It was great. They were talking it was one of the first times since the dam went in that they had enough water to let out, so all the camps were overgrown and bushy. I

had three private trips lined up on the San Juan. I had a boat, so I got on those trips: took my cousins, took my friends, my sisters and their kids, my nieces and nephews. I see Worldwide [Explorations] doing these trips. I knew George Marsik from Charly's, "Hey, what have you been up to?" "Oh, I just got off a private trip on the San Juan." "Have you got a boat?" "Yeah." This was at the time when he was actually looking for gear. He had sold some of his gear. I ended up doing four baggage trips for Marsik on the San Juan that summer.

The baggage boatman was not paid, but my boat was getting thirty bucks a day! (laughter) Realistically, the boat was more qualified than I was. Now, I was on a crew, and those guys knew what they were doing. They had the San Juan dialed in, they knew how to get the meals out. There were a lot of those kids' trips, like America on Wheels. They would take these summer camps for pretty well-to-do kids and they would go do some cool thing in this state; and then go to the next state and do something. Worldwide was on one of those things where you'd get these pretty smart, cool kids. I did four of those trips, and it was pretty cool. "Okay, this is what it's like being on a crew, and this is how a river crew works."

Once my *boat* started making

money, "Wow, I'm actually building up my little savings that I was going to go look for a job. Okay, this is the end of my season, I'd better start looking for a job here come Monday." I go into Joe's Place on Friday and young Joe was tending bar, "Is your name John O'Brien? I've got an envelope for you." I started to feel like a boatman, getting mail at Joe's Place. It's from Howie. His brother had a private permit for August, but all of Howie's buddies were working in the Grand Canyon. "Hey, you want to go on a private trip as a boatman?" "Yeah! The Grand Canyon? That would be awesome!" It was a small trip, some of Howie's relatives and friends and his girlfriend Amy. I had pretty great runs in my little 16-foot boat. It must have been a forgiving level. I remember everything was kind of new. That would have been my fourth trip down the canyon, and of course



the first two or three I wasn't looking for landmarks, or where's my marker rocks, or anything like that.

QUARTAROLI: Couldn't read water.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, couldn't read water. It was like, "Wow, that cliff is high!" I'd had a lot of experience hitting rocks on the San Juan, so I started to have some idea. I think I got washed out of the boat in Deubendorff, going over the table rock sideways. Classic beginner move. I didn't flip anywhere, and at Lava we scouted. There was one guy in a ducky, and he was thinking he was going to go for it, and Lava looked terrible. He'd been out of the boat a few times before. He wasn't an ace guy in a ducky. He decided to roll up the ducky and not run it. Howie was the only real boatman, and there was one of his buddies who was also a schoolteacher, and me. I think the other guy had done the canyon two or three times on private trips. Howie asked, "What do you guys think?" I said, "Let's go do it!" "Aren't you scared?" "Oh, you bet!" I realized this is what I came down here for, just to do this stuff. It wasn't really bravado, it was more this Wesley thing of you go do your best, I think this is going to be alright. We've got these lifejackets, we've got these big boats. I was so into doing it that I said, "Sure I'm scared, but let's go do it."

We camped at Tequila Beach, and had that celebration. Of course the guy that rolled up his boat was really bummed, because in his mind he backed out. Our three boats got through, so maybe his boat could have got through—now did he do himself out of an experience? It's kind of an insight into, even when you're having a great trip, somebody else might not be. Also, you have to make your own luck down there.

"Okay, now summer vacation is definitely over.

I've got to go to work in the mines." I get this phone call, and it's Dave Lowry.

This is at a time when people were lined up to be a support boatman at AZRA, and nobody was leaving. It was hard to get on anywhere. "Hey, this guy that I was counting on to be my assistant can't go. I was wondering if you wanted to be an assistant on an AZRA trip." "Yeah!" "Ah, don't you want to know when it is?" "When is it?" "It's in three days. Can you be ready? It's fourteen days." "I can do it!"

QUARTAROLI: "What's to get ready?"

O'BRIEN: Yeah, yeah. But

you know how it is when you call people up, everybody wants to go a year out, but the closer it gets, "Who's gonna feed my cat?" I was in the right place at the right time, ten times in a row. I'm trying to think of who-all was on it: Dave Lowry, Drifter Smith, a couple of long-time AZRA passengers. I'm just the assistant, but I had been down there a few weeks before with Howie. Then a light went on. Oh, look, that's where we camped *here*, and that's where we camped *here*. Whatever I can do to help out, pitch in, do the most. It was another great trip, and "Now the summer is over."

QUARTAROLI: (chuckles) Again, it's over.

O'BRIEN: I get this phone call from this guy who was driving buses for Snow Bowl. His boss, Kim Claypool, asked him if he wanted to do—they call it a second swamper or something—at ARR [Arizona River Runners], and he couldn't make it. I called Kim, and she wasn't on it either, but they needed this person. It was a one-boat motor. Stan Jantz was running it, and Nancy Brian was the interpreter. I think that might be why they went for the second assistant—she was doing a lot of interp. It might have been after the Howie trip and before the AZRA trip. I didn't know Stan Jantz, I didn't know ARR. Nancy Brian had the print sheet for her book, *River to Rim*. I had finished reading Nancy Nelson's book, *Any Time, Any Place, Any River*, and we were talking about that. I had a great time with Nancy Brian. I knew stuff that she didn't expect me to know. I knew that Powell had hired some people to build the Nankoweap Trail so Walcott could get down the trail and study the section, pre-Cambrian. "I didn't think too many people knew about that." Because I just showed up, "No, I'm not a boatman, I've only been on one private trip." Why would anybody know that? I looked



through that book. I was talking about I'd read this book that Nancy Nelson wrote about the Nevills.

We got into the lake above Nevills, and Stan Jantz cuts the motor and, "Hey, guys, this is gonna be Nevills Rapid. John knows all about Norm Nevills. He's gonna give us a little talk about who Norm Nevills really was, and how he fits in with Grand Canyon history." I'm like a deer in the headlights. "Norm Nevills, the first person to do three trips, four trips, five, six, seven. He started out with homemade boats, and he was the first to start using marine plywood. He brought the first women down the canyon, and was the first outfitter." I guess after Stan had heard enough, he bent down and started the motor. He leans over, "That's pretty good! You should think about getting a license and coming down here." That was the first time I ever thought I might be able to be a private boatman, but I never thought I could be a guide.

Here Stan—I knew he had tons of trips, he was well-respected. For him to say that, "Wow, I guess anything's possible." Doing three trips in a row, you start to pick stuff out, even if you're a rookie.

Then Drifter told me, "You should touch base with management. You're a real good assistant. They might need an assistant." Went in to see Allen House, said, "Hey, it was a great trip, I had a lot of fun. If there's any room on any trips later in the season, I'd sure like to be considered as an assistant." I was like (pants like a puppy), "To heck with Monday looking for a mining job! I'm gonna keep my options open here!" I didn't get a call. It's always good to make sure, "Anything open?" I get a call back in a couple of days, "Yeah, we might have an upper half." "Okay, great, I'll come into the warehouse, and whatever I need to do, let me know." It's going to be a Martha Clark trip, and she loved paddleboats. She thought people got into the river more if they were all paddling. I wasn't that stoked on paddling, but it was okay. She said, "How would you feel about paddling the whole way?" I said, "Well, I'd rather row the whole way than paddle the whole way." "We could get you a *boat!*" (laughter) That seemed a giant jump. I wasn't saying I'd rather be in a support boat, but I was stream of consciousness, I'd rather row all the way than paddle all the way.



Allen House comes out with a clipboard, "Look, have you got a river guide's license?" (Hesitation), "No." "That's it, you can't be a support boatman for AZRA if you don't have a river guide's license." I said, "Wait! I've got six trips, I've got my river resume built, I've got my boatman's first aid, and I've studied for the test. I can take the test at the Ferry tomorrow morning." He goes, "God!" throws the clipboard down and walked away. I thought, "Crap! I'm gonna get fired before I even get hired!" Started packing shit boxes. Worst comes to worst, at least I packed the shit boxes before they fired me from being an assistant. I'm packing shit boxes, putting the charcoals in, all the toilet paper lined up, and... "Sign this, dammit!" and a new clipboard that's not broken comes under my nose, and it's a W-2! I'm on as a boatman in the Grand Canyon—paid boatman on the crew! I signed it as fast as I could. I remember

pushing off from Lees Ferry, "I had people on my boat that paid to be on this, they're expecting a professional guide." In my mind I was looking at the lower Lees road, and, "Man, you asked for this. I hope you know

what you're getting yourself into." It was one of those great October trips. There was a sauna, fires every night. The light was perfect, it was never too hot, and you could hike your brains out, and it didn't get too cold during the night—a sweet trip. Took off on Halloween, and I was so stoked for the whole thing. Of course not understanding at all how hard it was to get on at AZRA. I applied for a whole season! There were great people, that had been support boatmen for five years and had never gotten on the core crew, or never gotten a full season.

That was the same winter that Wesley got fired. And a number of the core crew left. It was ten years after the high-water years. I think things were changing, their lives were changing, people got on to do different stuff. A lot of those support boatmen, that nothing ever materialized at AZRA after all their hard work, they left too, they made other plans. In retrospect a couple of years later, I realized one more door just opened in the weirdest way. AZRA was scrambling for oar boatmen. The schedule was made with a lot of input from the A.C., advisory committee. The advisory committee turned



out to be Howie Usher, Martha Clark, and Ginger Hinchman—or Birkeland now—and Sharon Hester. Ginger was doing her master's degree the last year I worked for the tribe, on the tamarisk in the bottom of the Little Colorado, and the stream power, the flooding. Her good friend was Miranda Warburton, who was our archaeologist for the tribe at the Flag office. Ginger was looking how to get into the Salt Trail, to get some more data, and Miranda told her, "You should contact John O'Brien. He's a mining engineer for the tribe in Tuba City." I didn't even know Ginger worked for AZRA. We had these topo maps of the whole area, and I'd been to the Salt Trail a bunch, from being a kid and hiking. I xeroxed them and told them how to get there, "Here's the turnoff you need from 89. Don't go by this corral, it's the second corral. Go down here, and then you're here, and it'll take you about this long, you need this much water. Cache some water here where you go under the overhang." Ginger's, "I can't believe that person knew all that stuff and had all the maps." Two years later she's on the advisory committee. "What about these new people? Does this person know enough about the Grand Canyon?" "Oh, yeah! He knows all about the Salt Trail." (laughter) Sharon Hester was, "Who the hell is this guy?! I've never heard of him. We've got all these people that have been doing support boats for years, and you guys want to give this guy trips!" I ended up with five support boats that season. Even Drifter goes, "I never heard of anybody going from one assistant one year, to five support boats the next year."

When you do five trips in a row, your luck's bound to catch up with you. I started to find out how little I actually knew about running a boat in the Grand Canyon. I've got a lot of respect for the freelancers that can walk in the door, size up a warehouse, size up the system, and adapt to it, and put a great trip on the water. I've always just been an AZRA boatman, I know the AZRA way. In over twenty years, the AZRA way has changed a fair amount. I went to school on these guys and gals and there was so much to learn. Everybody knew things in a different way. Some people were book learners, and some people learned from doing, and some people learned from doing it the *wrong* way a few times. That first year I had all these crazy adventures. There's

a range between the karma boaters and the whitewater technicians. (laughter) I knew I wasn't a whitewater technician, but I had aspirations to be one someday, to at least run a good boat. I found myself down where I was having to put my trust in the karma for a while. I realized that one time when we were coming down right above Granite, and the more experienced boatmen seemed like they were more worried. I realized because it was so random in there, that even if you did everything right, you could still have a misadventure. "I have as good a chance as anybody!" I *loved* that rapid when I was just getting started, because it's all bets are off, it's going to be random, just do your best. Once I got to knowing a lot better about what I was doing, then I started to fear Granite. "Even if I do my best, terrible things could happen."

Most of the stuff I'd learned before that was out of a book. I could take stuff, and I could figure out how to do it, I could ask people, and I could make it mine, and I could get good at it. That was a great thing. I'd start asking to switch out with the paddle captain on a mellow day, and learn to paddle. (chuckles) One of these whitewater technicians—God bless her, great friend now, but at the time pretty resistant. It's hard enough to be down here without having a knucklehead for a boatman. "Maybe you ought to think about taking a summer off and going to whitewater school, over at Camp Lotus or something." "No, I'm not gonna do that." "Why not?" "That's the last thing the Grand Canyon needs is another high-handed California whitewater technician. They need more Tuba City boatmen." I had been leafing through Lavender's book, *River Runners of the Grand Canyon*, and I found out that when Don Harris bailed halfway through that first



trip through the canyon—or not bailed, but he went back to his USGS job—they stopped in Tuba City and got a guy out of a trading post to be one of the boatmen to finish—Loren Bell, the first of the Tuba City boatmen! There's my river genealogy. Of course who knows? Maybe there were other ones, but that was the only one I'd ever heard of before me. I said, "No, I'm not gonna do that. I'm learning right now, I'm doing better."

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O'BRIEN: I'm like Will Rogers, I'm the guy that learns by peeing on the electric fence for himself. I would love to have seen what the problem is out front, but I didn't. Being a river guide, or being a boatman was so different from what I had done before. There's always adventures in Crystal, when that lateral was there. I think this would have been my second season, when I thought I knew what I was doing, but I still wasn't quite there yet. We interchanged at Pipe Creek. You look at people, they hike in, they're hot, they're tired, and somebody who's wearing a dirty shirt, has been on the river for a week, starts saying, "This is what you do if you fall in the water. This is the throw bag." Some of these people, if it wasn't such a long hike, I bet they'd turn around and get right back out of here. You wonder how much of the safety talk can people absorb? We had them pat the top of your head if you're okay. Being the junior boatman, people jump onto the trip leader's boat first. I got these four people on my boat, you barely get time to meet them, and you're running Horn, "Hang on!" There's these three teenagers—two brothers and a kid, a seventeen-year-old kid that had mowed lawns for three years and saved up his money. And this woman who was, in my 35-year-old mind, was an older woman—was probably not as old as I am now—not elderly, but older. We're bashin' through these rapids and having a great time, and it's a hot day, and we're getting wet, and it's all good. We get down to Crystal, scout it, and it looks like it always looks, doesn't look good, but looks doable. I remember coming down and trying to get lined up into that backwards thing, rowing over your shoulder, getting lined up, and start pulling really hard and building my momentum. Seems like I'm getting a lot of good strokes, and this is gonna be a great run. I thought I'd look over my shoulder to see what a great job I was doing, and it looked like the opening credits out of "Hawaii Five-O." (laughter) I really expected to see the shore, like I might be getting too close to the shore. That lateral sticking right out to that top hole, and it was curling right over me. And wham! Man, that water flashed over the top of the boat, "Wow! I can't believe that water hasn't washed off the top of the boat yet."

At least I've still got my oars. And there was nothing in my hands! "Wait a minute, there's not even a boat underneath me!" I'm sitting in the river, underwater, in complete rowing position.

"Oh! I'm in the water in Crystal! I've gotta grab my lifejacket, put my feet up, and start maneuvering away from rocks." I'd heard the safety talk two hours ago, I pop up, and I'm right behind the boat, "Wait a minute! I'm not a passenger, I'm supposed to be saving *these* people!" This is going to be one of those things that takes about thirty seconds to happen, and takes a while to tell. You're in car-wreck mode, when everything slows down. I start swimming over to the boat, which takes maybe one stroke or two strokes, I reach for it, and it goes up on a wave and I can't get it. It comes down and I reach for it, and this kid sticks his head up. He's totally wet, hair completely wet. He's in basically water up to his chest. The boat's completely full. He's looking at me, and I reach out, just trying to swim, and he goes, "You need a hand, mister?" (laughter) "Hell, yeah! Pull me in." Total adrenalin. I grab the chicken line and I pull myself up, and somersaulted into the back of the boat, and I'm sitting there on the floor, in water up to my chin, and I'm thinking, "I've gotta take some breaths, I'm so exhausted. Wait a minute! I can't sit here in the back of the boat. I'm the boatman!" I jump up on my seat, I take one stroke, and I realize I'm sitting on my front hatch black bags, and I'm looking at my cooler. There's water up to my knees in the foot well. I jump back and sit on the—I don't even know where I am, really, in the river, and sit back on the cooler. This should be a good time to do a little inventory and see who's still in the boat. There's the two brothers in the boat, and the kid with the lawnmower business who pulled me in, and "Oh, my God, where's that old lady?!" I couldn't remember anybody's name. The kid that pulled me in goes, "Oh, she fell out a long time ago." I looked downstream, and she's making a left-hand run in her big, floppy, white hat. But she's patting herself on the top of the head, "I'm okay!" "Holy crap!" I'm sure my language was worse than that.

"You kids grab those bailing buckets and get this water out of here! Just start bailing. I'll tell you when to hang on." I get the boat turned down, and I see the paddleboat is trying to cut across to go after that lady, and I hear Brian Peterson cussin' people out, "Dig, goddamn it! You've gotta really dig!" I've got my back into it, and I'm pullin' as hard as I can. Lots of energy in young kids, and they're bailing water, five-gallon buckets every time, three buckets going. We get all the way down to the tail waves below the rock island, and we were the first boat through. Other boats that ran to the right were trying to get over, and we got



a lifejacket. There's probably not any big rapids left for you in North America." "I wanted to check, because if there were big rapids, I want to ride with you." "Janet, there'll be a few big rapids further on down. Every day has *some* rapids in it, but these other boatmen are head and shoulders above me, they are excellent at what they do, they're safe, they're thoughtful, they're true professionals. I don't have anywhere near the experience these other folks do. If you want to get in a big rapid day, I think you should ride with them, because I know you'll be safe."

"Well, John, I'm sure they're very

to her. Those two boys went over to grab her, and I had this vision of a turkey wishbone. Everyone's full of adrenalin. I said, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" When I got to see her face, I remembered her name was Janet. I said, "Janet, are you alright?" "Yes, I'm fine." "No, can you feel your feet?" I was thinking, rock island, compound fracture, and these kids dragging her across. "Can you bend your knees? Are your arms okay?" She goes, "Well, usually I'm in a lot of denial, but I am fine." (laughter)

The trip leader, B. J. [Boyle], comes by, "Wow! You're my hero! You're out of the boat, you're in the boat, then you're rescuing people! That's incredible!" I felt like an inch tall. I was the boatman, I had my own pair of pliers, and my own locking carabiners, and my own lifejacket, river shorts, and I'm out of the boat in Crystal and I'm losin' people in Crystal, and I don't know where I'm at on that lateral. I felt terrible, but I was pumped that we were all okay, and that she didn't have a broken leg or anything. "Man, when we get to camp, I hope you like drinkin', because I'm making everybody a gin and tonic!" Janet goes, "Oh, that sounds good!" I made five gin and tonics, and I got those kids and that lady for a safety meeting. I don't know how old those kids were. I hope the statute of limitations is over. I know none of them were eighteen or nineteen.

**QUARTAROLI:** But you weren't selling it to them.

**O'BRIEN:** I wasn't selling it to them. Sharon Hester came by, "I don't think those kids are of age." I said, "That one kid pulled me out of the river in Crystal. He can have anything I've got!" I probably felt like that guy that rolled up his ducky above Lava. I bailed. We were rigging in the morning and getting the boat loaded, Janet walks over, "John, are there any big rapids today?" "No, you just went through Crystal in

good boatmen, and I'm sure they'll do a great job, but I know if I'm with you, and if anything happens, you'll come get me." Wow, how do you process that?! I was very focused on learning from the other boatmen, and I thought if I learn enough from the other boatmen, I can start teaching the passengers. But it never occurred to me that—and I don't know, it might be a sign of how shallow I was or am or whatever—it never occurred to me I would be learning from the passengers. I have to say, not to take anything away from the great boatmen that I've had the pleasure of working with, and the joy over the years, but the passengers are an unsung resource down there. You meet these incredible people that are willing to take themselves completely out of their comfort zone for two weeks, just to see something amazing. You meet so many great people down there, people like Janet. Brian Peterson told me one time, too, after some other disaster that I had—not disaster, but setback or whatever it was. He said, on getting turned around in Lava, "Bro, being a pro doesn't mean nothing bad ever happens. It's how you get out of it." That thing with Janet, that stuck with me for a long time. That still resonates with me.

**QUARTAROLI:** I was going to say, it still stuck with you.

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah.

**QUARTAROLI:** And there's this bonding experience that comes out of it as a result of things like that. You'll see that in people that go through that, and they shared that. You *think* it's bad, but you got through with your boat, your oars, your passengers, what else can you ask for?

**O'BRIEN:** Yeah, we had an adventure. But that kind of judo, and you think it's a bad thing, and a person is able to turn it around, turn around your perspective and

make it a good thing where you go, “Oh, I didn’t think about it like that. I *did* do something right.”

\* \* \*

**O’BIEN:** I remember asking Bob Melville—because he was such a joker and a clown that the first thing you thought of when you thought about Melville wasn’t about how athletic he was, but he was quite an athletic dude. I was pumping him for information, “What do you think it takes to be a really good boatman down here?” I was hoping he’d say perseverance. . . .”

**QUARTAROLI:** One, two, three.

**O’BIEN:** “I think upper body strength, good hand-eye coordination, reflexes, and depth perception.” “Let’s see, I don’t have any of those four. What about a sense of humor?” He looked at me for one beat, “Well, if you don’t have the first four, that would sure come in handy.” (laughter) One time he had the snout and I was rowing an Avon 18-foot bucket boat, “Hey, Bob, okay if I take the snout today?” Or maybe “just ’til lunch.” We were going to have lunch at Randy’s Rock. Because I didn’t want to take the snout through Bedrock. A snout is a kind of a catamaran that’s made out of side tubes from a motorboat, essentially 22-foot side tubes. The AZRA ones, when I was rowing, were considered state of the art, because they were aluminum [frames] with the speedy rail type stuff, like our PRO frames. There was the back end that held the cooler and had the oar stands and the seat; the middle piece where the people put their feet; and the front piece which was kind of a splash plate. They were like a motorboat you could row, is how I used to think of them. People still use them with a motor off the back. We used to row them off the back end with eleven-foot oars.

I traded off with Bob Melville for the morning. Of course I got way behind, and we ran down through Fossil. Right past that, there’s a riffle, and the current pushes over against the Tapeats wall [“Nels’ Nemesis”], above Randy’s Rock, maybe a half a mile. I didn’t get my mo’ and my angle early enough, and I dragged that side of the snout all the way down that Tapeats wall. Nobody saw me—just the people in my boat. We get in to lunch at Randy’s Rock. “Geez, Bob, I’m sorry. Thanks for letting me row the snout this morning, but I had a little run-in with that wall right up above here, and I dragged your spare oar and your side tube right down that Tapeats wall for a little bit.” He goes, “Wow, that’s a coincidence. I did that in your oar boat.” (laughter)

The very first time I rowed, I took the oars on a snout in Fossil Creek Rapid on my very first trip as a passenger, Jon Hirsh was on the snout that day. “Hey, man, you want to row this thing?” “I don’t know. Is it a

big rapid? Can I row it?” “You can do it!” He wouldn’t tell me if it was a big rapid or not. That big “S” turn, “Get your angle and make sure you don’t crab your oar on the Tapeats ledges over here on the far right.” I was able to do that, and flopping down through there, getting an oar in the water once in a while. The current took the boat, and I had it lined up straight for the shore, and I never did get that turn. We went right up on the shore, on the far left shore, by that big rock that sticks out. We hit that rock with the snout. How can you get out of the current in Fossil?! But I did, “Wow, man, that was terrible!” “Yeah, but you were totally straight on it.” He was Mr. Positive, “That was awesome, buddy!” “Dude! I hit that rock!” When I got my first snout that I was going to take the whole way, I really learned a ton about angle. Rowing a snout once a year for a few years, where all you had was angle and momentum, man! Tell you what, if you rowed a snout and then got on an oar boat, you thought you were in a Ferrari! Zoom! Zoom! Zoom! In four or five days, your boat didn’t seem any lighter than before. But that first day or two at the Ferry, “I’m gonna row over to the other side of the river just because I can!” Learning the snout like that, partly I did it if they needed a snout boatman, I would be able to take that spot on the schedule.

I remember one time pushing that snout into the wind, because at least you could see, you could read the current if you were pushing. Billy Ellwanger pulling up on a Hatch S-rig, “You mind telling me what the fun part of that boat is?” (laughter) Not in any mean way, just being Billy Ellwanger, being a character. I said, “Right now there hasn’t been a lot of fun for the past hour and a half.” When the wind would blow upstream, they were no joke. But it was a way for me to be a part of the history of the company. I think there were a lot of people that broke in on those snouts, and it was a way for me to show that I was willing to learn about the history of the company, I wanted to learn about the history of the Grand Canyon, how they used to do it. I wanted to be someone that was thought of as a snout boatman.

\* \* \*

**O’BIEN:** Same thing learning to T.L. [Trip Leader], because I read a lot. I always tell people I went to graduate school [Colorado State University, master of civil engineering, emphasis hydraulics/hydrology] because I didn’t know how to ski. If I knew how to ski, I probably would have spent the winters working at a ski area. I’d always been a reader, so I would always tell the T.L.S., “I can give the morning alk. You know everybody’s got their strengths, so I knew a lot of geology first, and



I was always willing to give a geology talk. We had some T.L.S. that didn't like to talk as much, or didn't know the geology, or didn't want to know it. I got used to giving morning talks. The next thing, I got into history, was reading *River Runners of the Grand Canyon* by Lavender. There's enough stories and stuff in there that you could do interop out of that all the way along the river—as a boatman, I started to do more and more morning talks, and I think my third season I asked for a T.L. and I got it.

A lot of stuff happened on that first T.L. trip. One of the boatmen dislocated their shoulder telling a story. They were an old kayaker and had loose ligaments anyway, but they were waving their arms and telling a story—

QUARTAROLI: That's a good one, I hadn't heard that.

O'BRIEN: —and their arm came out. I ended up doing the Heimlich maneuver on a passenger on steak night. That's terrifying. Everything was alright. You get some of those trips where (whistles "whew!") you just don't know what's going to happen next. But it all worked out. That ability to get out there and push boundaries and have adventures, and read people, and facilitate some great adventures, and get up in the morning and do it all over again. I don't know if there's anything like it. I guess there must be. There must be people that feel like that about doing accounting. Being a river guide in the Grand Canyon is something that clicked for me in a way that I never thought I would be one, I never expected to be one. It seemed like a giant leap, where you had to have a first aid card and six trips under your belt to be a guide, when people used to get hired out of gas stations, when somebody didn't show up.

QUARTAROLI: In Tuba City.

O'BRIEN: Yeah. Someone broke their leg and couldn't make it.

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O'BRIEN: When we lived in Oakland and I worked in Berkeley, the office I worked in was one block off Telegraph, which was ground zero for used book stores in the Western U.S. You had Moe's right there, and Cody's Books, and Shakespeare. Moe always had a great Grand Canyon section. You'd get these great books for two, three, four, or five bucks, and I would make a box of good Grand Canyon books that I thought boatmen should have in their ammo can or be able to read over the winter, give them away to people on my trip, or stick them in people's mailboxes—*Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* and *Time and the River Flowing*, the small ammo can version—Wallace Stegner's stuff, *Mormon Country*. Just my way of doing something back for people, even after I wasn't working full-time, where people would pass that on to somebody. They know somebody helped them out do their first trip. Like that botany book—I've given those to people because I was stoked with all that information that was in there. I didn't know it, and nobody knew it until that book was put together—not that *nobody* knew it, but only botanists had access to it. I would give that to people I thought were going to be great boatmen, because I wanted them to be invested in that team, in that camaraderie.

Just that time below the rim, and being around

people like Drifter that basically built their lives around being in the Grand Canyon. It's been great for me to be able to still keep doing a trip, and stay fresh and stay in something that really matters to me. I've been able to have my whole family down. Both of my kids have been down as assistants on trips that I've been guiding on. I don't think they'll be guides, but it's a whole 'nother way for them to see their dad doing something different than just being a dad. Take your kid to work for fourteen days. (laughter) I think it's good for them to see that, and the funny stuff. They've grown up on the San Juan. You give your kids the things you didn't have. I think they think river running is fine. It's something anyone can do. If you want to go someplace, get a ducky and a lifejacket and go there. They're very at home on the San Juan. We usually take some friends from school, their friends. We have a bunch of duckies and a bunch of boats and a bunch of kids. Our kids, it's background noise to them. For me, one trip on the San Juan would have been a mind-blower when I was a kid. For them, it's just something you do, like jumping on a trampoline. If you've got the San Juan River in your back yard, you go run it. It's kind of interesting watching that dynamic happen. I don't think they're as attached to it as I am in any way. And that's interesting, seeing that, wondering how that happens. It's good: If all three hundred million people in America wanted to be a river guide in the Grand Canyon, it would be hard to get in. It's a tradeoff, but it's also amazing when you think about all the people that go once and have a great time, but never come back. "Oh, I've got other stuff I want to do." "Really? You mean there's something else?"

It really is a way of life. When you're in the canyon, you're a hundred percent there. When you're not in the canyon, a lot of times you're thinking about being in the canyon, but you're also thinking about, How do I take the things I like about the canyon and apply that to the rest of my life? Like being in the moment, and expecting to laugh all day long, expecting to have fun, expecting to trust the people you're around, expecting that they're going to trust you, and expect that you're going to do your best, expect that if something goes wrong you make it right, expect that you help people out when you can, expect that they'll help you out when you need it. That's always been the thing where, How do you take those lessons and apply them to the rest of your life and the rest of the world, because otherwise it's really cruel when you take people down the Grand Canyon and show them how wonderful it is for twelve, thirteen, fourteen days, and turn 'em loose in Flagstaff and say, "Have a nice life." If the only place you can have fun is the Grand Canyon and you're not coming back... Because you see a few people that come

back and they're going, "I want to have the same crew I had, I want to stop at the same places, and I want to have the same laughs." They're like, "We didn't stop at any of the places we stopped on my last trip." I say, "Yeah, but did we have fun?" "Oh, we had a *great* time." That's the trick. It's not duplicating the same thing over and over again, it's that spirit. I try to tell people on the knowledge front, every place you go has geology underneath it, all the way down. And it has human history. And it has biology and botany and ecosystems. Every river you go to has native fish and introduced fish, and some poor devil's trying to manage that. Everything that we've shown you here in the Grand Canyon is all around you, wherever you live. The same kinds of things are happening, things *have* happened. But I have not found that magic in other places. I try to take that spirit with me of having fun and being good to people and expecting they're going to be good to you. There's something for me about that heading up to Lees Ferry. That's not a drive that bothers me at any time. This expectation I'm going to have a lot of fun, heading up there. It hasn't disappointed yet.



Elena Kirschner

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# boatman's quarterly review

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Elena Kirschner