

THE CONFLUENCE

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The Confluence

...wants to be the quarterly journal of Colorado Plateau River Guides. CPRG is a 501(c)(3) river and guide advocacy organization.

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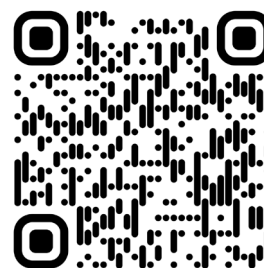
We are always looking for content!

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Front Cover: Mike Ferguson At
Warm Springs With Customer,
June 1976

Back Cover: Kolb Survey, 1921 P.5
*"Piece by piece the 1200 lbs. of
material were taken over the rope,
including the maps after the water
had lashed over the hatch for 24
hours. The maps were perfectly dry
(as was everything else)."* Courtesy:
Emery Kolb. Digital Image © 2009
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The Prez Sez...

Greetings fellow river runners,

We are excited to bring you another issue of The Confluence. This issue has a full Oral History write up on Mike Ferguson. One of the critical missions of CPRG has been and continues to be a resource for historical preservation within the river running community. This Oral history is proof that tradition continues. The work and time that goes into the process cannot be underestimated. A big thank you once again to Robert Tubbs for his dedication to the process, and for providing us with this one. We decided to print the whole thing for your reading pleasure as we dive into winter, we figure you all should have some time after a busy season to enjoy the read. Another thank you goes out to the returning rapids team for their continuing work, research and updates they have provided us with. If you have not had an opportunity to check out their work I strongly urge you to. You can visit www.returningrapids.com for more information. We are working on improving and updating our digital capacity as an organization as well, and will be reaching with more information as that becomes active. CPRG is still involved as a board member of the Utah Guides and Outfitters in their various missions on the plateau. We are still pushing for improved access at North Wash boat ramp, regardless of how little the managing agencies seem to care. We included a signed letter on the North Wash situation that outlines the stance from Glen Canyon and Canyonlands that I leave to the reader to interpret. The letter is addressed to commercial outfitters and entirely disregards the fact that thousands of private boaters also happen to use that stretch annually as well. We hope everyone had a successful and safe season and enjoys their winter. Stay tuned and see you in the spring.

Colin Evans
Chair, CPRG

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Canyonlands National Park and
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area
2282 S. West Resource Boulevard
Moab, Utah 84532

October 13, 2021

To the Whitewater Concessioners of Canyonlands National Park (CANY) and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GLCA):

This letter serves as a reminder to all concessioners that the North Wash ramp is very primitive, and conditions are subject to change. Be advised that using the North Wash ramp could result in damage to boats or injury to clients, guides, and/or visitors. Please consider all risks when electing to use the North Wash ramp.

Attached to this letter are take-out procedures that have been successful in the past. However, if followed, these procedures do not protect you from risk. Concessioners should continue to assess risk, adapt take-out procedures, and consider changing take-out location(s) due to the primitive nature of the North Wash ramp.

Prior to this year's historic low water levels in Lake Powell, the North Wash ramp was deemed unsustainable due to the dynamic hydrology of the Colorado River in this location. The Business Opportunity in the prospectus process explained that concessioners may not be able to take out at North Wash ramp and may need to use alternate takeout locations. Alternative locations include the Hall's Crossing Ferry Ramp, located approximately 50 miles downstream from Hite.

Although GLCA has continually maintained the North Wash ramp, river dynamics eradicated early 2021 ramp improvements before the 2021 river season began. Additional upgrades to the takeout area will not be completed on the North Wash ramp in 2021. If conditions continue to decline, an administrative closure of the North Wash ramp is possible. Both parks recognize that an administrative closure of the North Wash ramp could result in concessioners ending their season early, causing a detrimental loss of business to concessioners and interruption of visitor services. Therefore, we continue to encourage concessioners to consider using the alternative takeout area identified in Hall's Crossing.

Looking to the future, GLCA listened to the concerns expressed by concessioners and local stakeholders and have suspended the Hite Ramp Extension project in order to complete a site-specific study for the Hite/North Wash area to identify viable sites for future construction of a launch and takeout area that could accommodate small boats and river rafts. This contract has been awarded and is currently in progress. Until the study and construction of a new ramp is completed, GLCA and CANY will continue to pursue temporary maintenance work, when possible, at the North Wash ramp for the 2022 season.

CANY and GLCA plan to host a meeting with concessioners this winter to discuss take-out practices, potential short-term solutions, and possible long-term ramp solutions. In addition to discussing the contents of this letter, we look forward to sharing updates about the GLCA assessment of possible takeout locations and our progress moving forward. Please reach out if you have additional questions to Heidie Grigg at heidie_grigg@nps.gov or Leslie Kobinsky at seug_concessions@nps.gov.

Best Regards,

Patricia S. Trap, Superintendent, Canyonlands National Park

William Shott, Superintendent, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

North Wash boat ramp take-out practices that have been successful in the past

Listed below are some of the lessons learned from the National Park Service (NPS) observing and participating in North Wash ramp take-out procedures during the past two decades. The following information is a list of NPS take-out procedures that have been successful in the past. However, there is risk involved in any take-out procedure, especially at the North Wash ramp. Following these procedures does not protect you from risk. To take-out (and put-in) at North Wash, the following procedures have previously worked:

- Equipment has specific load ratings. Do not exceed the load ratings of your equipment.
- Brief the entire operation to all staff before taking out. During the briefing, we identify hazards and important rules to follow. For example, do not step over loaded lines or behind boats on the incline when they are on roller tubes.
- During the briefing, we define roles for staff. We recommend having one person that watches for safety. We have found that it is best to have at least three people; four is better.
- Make sure there is clear communication (radios) in the truck and with the person in charge of the operation at the boat.
- We use a pull line that is long enough for the pull vehicle to be on the flat area above the ramp, so traction is not an issue.
- We only use winches for the end part of getting the boat on the trailer. We have used come-alongs when the winches broke.
- We use ½" Spectra, Amsteel or Dynema Rope for a tow rope (Plasma/UHMWPE ropes). If we do not have one handy, we use (2) ½" Nylon/Polyester static ropes. Specific brands or gear are not endorsed by the NPS.
- We use a "V" bridle on the boat frames always with two points of contact on solid parts of the frame. We never use d-rings.
- We have switched over to using mostly Soft Shackles for connection points. If a metal Clevis is used, check for load ratings.

- We generally do not unload boats before takeout unless we are stacking them at the edge of the river. It's too easy to turn an ankle.
- Blow up roller tubes to be firm. We like the 12" diameter for J-rigs; 8" tubes can be used, but we recommend using more of them to keep a J-rig from dragging on the dirt. A 36" tube is great for getting the boat on the trailer. Any boat drag on the ground increases the tension of the pull line.
- A flat trailer with no rollers will create high tension. Rollers on the trailer will mitigate some of this tension. However, even with rollers, there will be tension when the boat is coming out of the water since the roller tubes don't work well at the shoreline from the irregular edge.
- Using roller tubes on the incline reduces the tension on the haul line. We recommend always having at least two rollers under the boat.
- Move at a slow pace, don't have people run to place tubes. Instead, have people walk the roller tubes. The pulling vehicle should always proceed at a slow and steady pace.
- Place no one downslope of the boat for at least 20 feet. If someone crosses this danger zone, keep that person in sight until they are clear of it. If the pull line fails, the boat will roll downhill off the rollers, and at least another 20' before it stops.
- If we must reset our pull lines, we let the boat back down off the roller tubes so it will not move, and we chock the back of the boat.
- At the top of the ramp, where it is flat, watch for the boat rolling forward on its own. On the flats you can easily push the boat. On a downhill it will move by itself.
- You can angle the roller tubes to cause the boat to turn as the pull angle changes laterally. If the pull angle is still straight you can angle the tubes and get the boat to migrate upstream or downstream (sideways) on the ramp. This allows the operators to pick the path of the boat when hauling it.
- We usually pull all our boats up to the flat area and out of the way of others and then load. We break the operation into pulling, then loading.
- We roll onto a deflated larger tube to get the boat onto the trailer.
- We blow the large tube up under the boat at the halfway point of the boat and the front of the boat 2 feet from the edge of the back of the trailer. Boat is in line to the trailer.
- Once the boat is ready to go on the trailer, we use a vehicle winch and the boat's bowline as a backup line.
- Our vehicle winches are Spectra, Amsteel and/or Dynema. We use them for other recovery operations (vehicles) in the backcountry. Specific brands or gear are not endorsed by the NPS.

Parts and Pieces for rigging:

This equipment should be used only for take-out and stored carefully. A strong, top-notch take-out kit is necessary for everyone's safety. Know their strength and uses. Train with it.

****Specific brands or gear are not endorsed by the NPS.****

Long Line:

We use 1/2" Dyneema (Amsteel Blue) (Spectra) all called Plasma/UHMWPE Rope that will hold 34,000 lbs.

1" Kinetic Energy rope good for 30,000 lbs. We prefer non-stretch lines. Length should be 125 ft plus to get up to flat vehicle area from the waterline.

We run a 165' line. Tying off Plasma rope, we use a Rope Retention Pulley (RRP). These ropes do not like any friction and knots are hard on them. A wrap around the RRP and a tie off is a strong knot option. (See photo 4, 5 and 6.)

We get a factory-made thimble and eye splice on each end of the rope. Nylon/Polyester Rope: We double (2) ½" static lines and tie large knots on each end.

Attachments:

Clevis, Shackle, Carabiners, Hooks: Steel. WWL of 3 3/4 tons (9500 lbs.) minimum.

We use Soft Shackles made of "plasma" rope since they are easy to use. When steel breaks, it flies; Soft Shackles do not. Soft Shackle can connect a haul line to two bridle straps. It can connect a haul line to a truck.

Boat attachment points need to be solid. Two points. We installed two large eye rings (5000-pound rating) on our j-rigs. The corners of frames will work if they are solid, fully welded, and inspected for strength.

Raft frames work well, do not pull in the center, pull on the corners. Do not use boat straps or old bowline ropes.

Knots: be very selective here. The knots you use will have to be untied after huge tension applied to them. We recommend the Bowline family knots tied in a doubled rope.

Bridles:

We run (2) large lifting slings (look for around 5000-pound rating, ours are closer to 15,000 pound). Our lifting slings are clevised to the large metal lifting rings mounted on all of our Snout boats. ½" rope can be used, but it should be in excellent condition and inspected regularly and never tied with an angle between the legs more than 90 degrees (60 degrees or less is preferred). Old bowlines might not be a good choice.

We use ½" rope on our rafts and catarafts, tied to the corners of the frame. Our frames are well tied to the raft rubber.

Winches:

A 9,000-pound winch minimum. Know that as the number of layers of rope on the drum increases, the pulling power of the winch decreases. The fourth layer of line on a 12,000-pound winch drum can pull only 9,000 lbs. Avoid steel winch cables. The winch is only used to get the boat on the trailer. Winches do not like continuous use (we have learned), such as the whole deployment of the line and back into the winch. If they are hot to touch, the brushes and windings are taking punishment.

Roller tubes:

We have found that 12" inflatable roller tubes work well for us. We run three tubes on one boat and have two under the boat at a minimum. Hard rollers do not roll over the odd vehicle tire holes on the ramp. We have used 8" roller tubes, which take more tubes to keep the boat from dragging on the ground. We also use a 36" diameter tube to get the boat really high off the ground, to roll onto our trailer. Using an old snout tube (3 compartments) will work as well (I'd glue over the side valves and place a new valve on the end).

Truck placement:

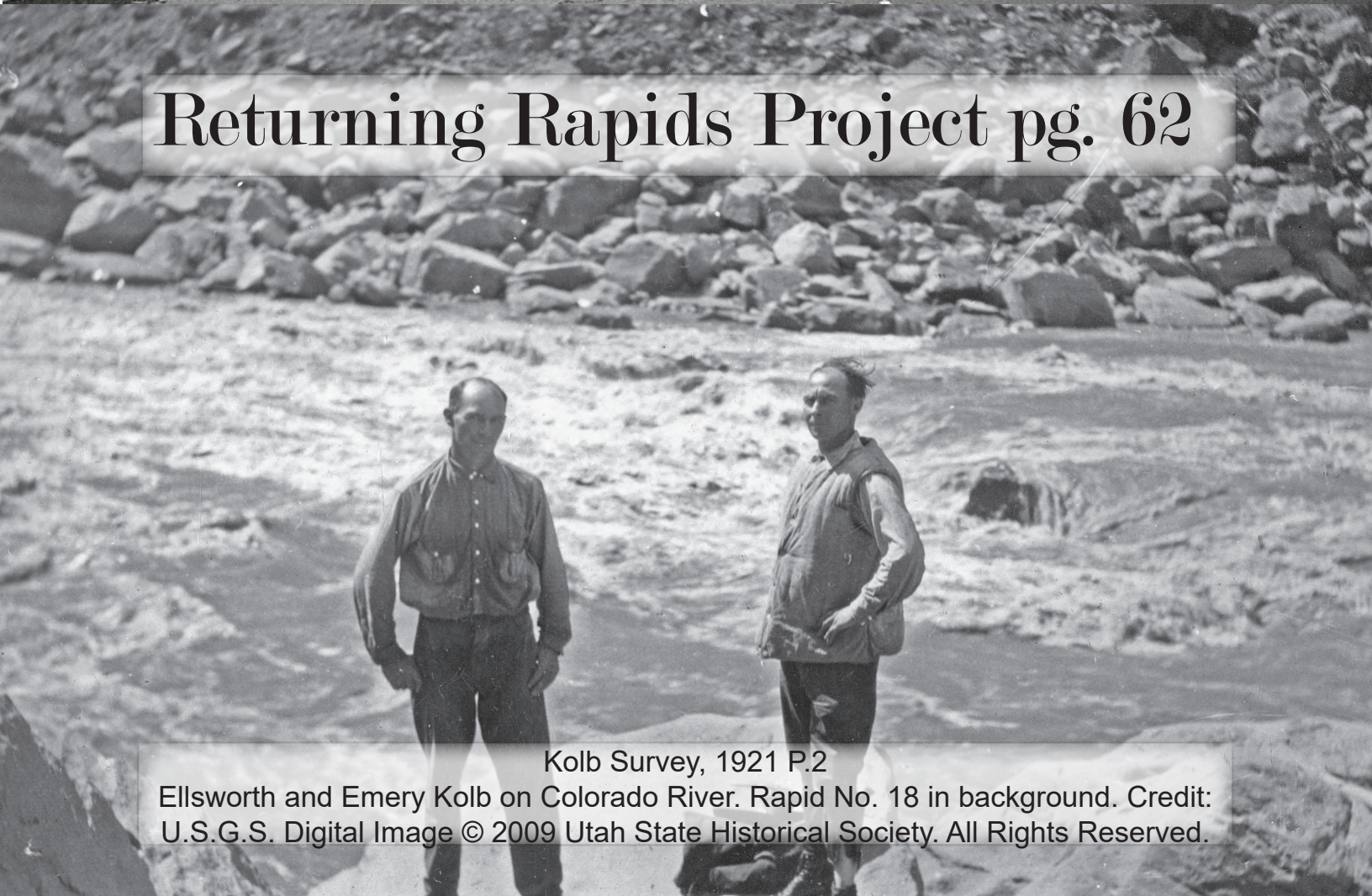
We recommend pulling when the vehicle is at the top of the ramp, as opposed to the incline of the ramp, because the vehicle will have better traction. We have lowered trucks down the ramp with another vehicle to launch a jetboat. Then the second truck helped the first truck off the ramp (empty). Rarely do we have two vehicles at Hite. We have roller tubed a jetboat up the ramp and used our 36" diameter tube to get it on the trailer. We do not block the upper lot with additional vehicles. We reset and shorten the rope length while still keeping our truck on the top of the ramp. We also use our bed winch only to pull the boat onto our trailer.

CPRG Oral History: Mike Ferguson pg. 9



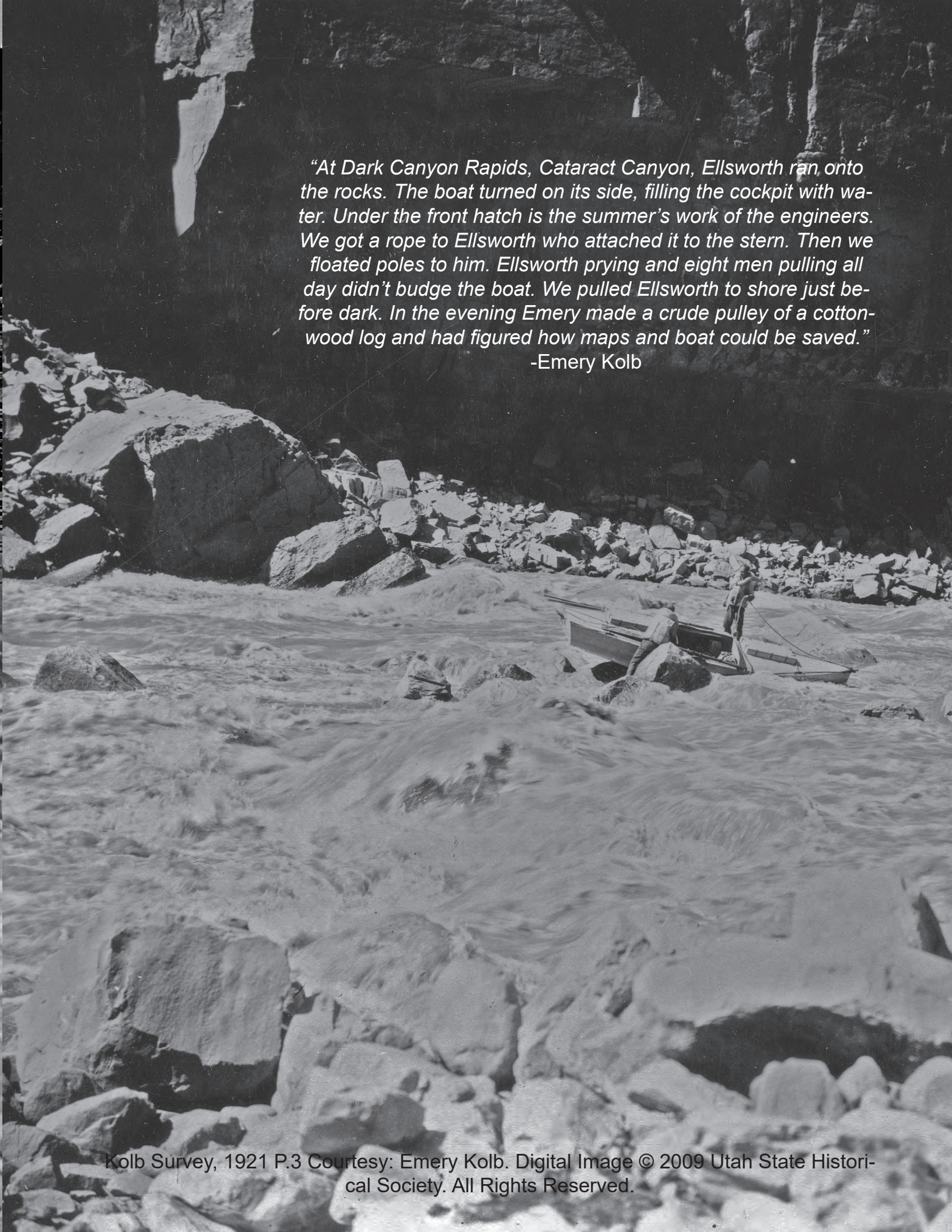
Mike in Lefty Boy
circa 1995

Returning Rapids Project pg. 62



Kolb Survey, 1921 P.2

Ellsworth and Emery Kolb on Colorado River. Rapid No. 18 in background. Credit: U.S.G.S. Digital Image © 2009 Utah State Historical Society. All Rights Reserved.



"At Dark Canyon Rapids, Cataract Canyon, Ellsworth ran onto the rocks. The boat turned on its side, filling the cockpit with water. Under the front hatch is the summer's work of the engineers. We got a rope to Ellsworth who attached it to the stern. Then we floated poles to him. Ellsworth prying and eight men pulling all day didn't budge the boat. We pulled Ellsworth to shore just before dark. In the evening Emery made a crude pulley of a cottonwood log and had figured how maps and boat could be saved."

-Emery Kolb

UNCONFORMITY- A missing section of the rock record forming a boundary between rock strata of different ages. These are caused by a pause in sedimentation or a period of erosion or both. Steno first sketched an angular unconformity in 1669 but it wasn't until the early 1800s when Hutton moved the concept into mainstream geology. He used unconformities as part of his conclusive evidence of deep time and the cyclical nature of processes that make the earth look like it does. There are several types of unconformities, the most obvious being the angular unconformity.

Many river runners have learned about THE Great Unconformity that was first discovered by Powell way down inside the Grand Canyon. This gap in time puts the 505 million year old Tapeats Sandstone in contact with the Vishnu Schist at 1.75 billion years old. What occurred during that 1.25 billion years of missing rocks?? A rather large amount of deposition, uplift and erosion. Twice? Upstream, in Westwater Canyon on the Colorado River, we have a longer missing span of time between that same Schist and the Triassic Chinle Formation. This would put 220 million year old rocks on top of the 1.75 billion years old Schist. The Canadian Shield may be as much as 4 billion years old with very recent Pleistocene glacial deposits on top.

A note from WR: The only thing I might change is the Cutler Group and change it to about 280 or 275 to end, and beginning at 290 or 295 to start.

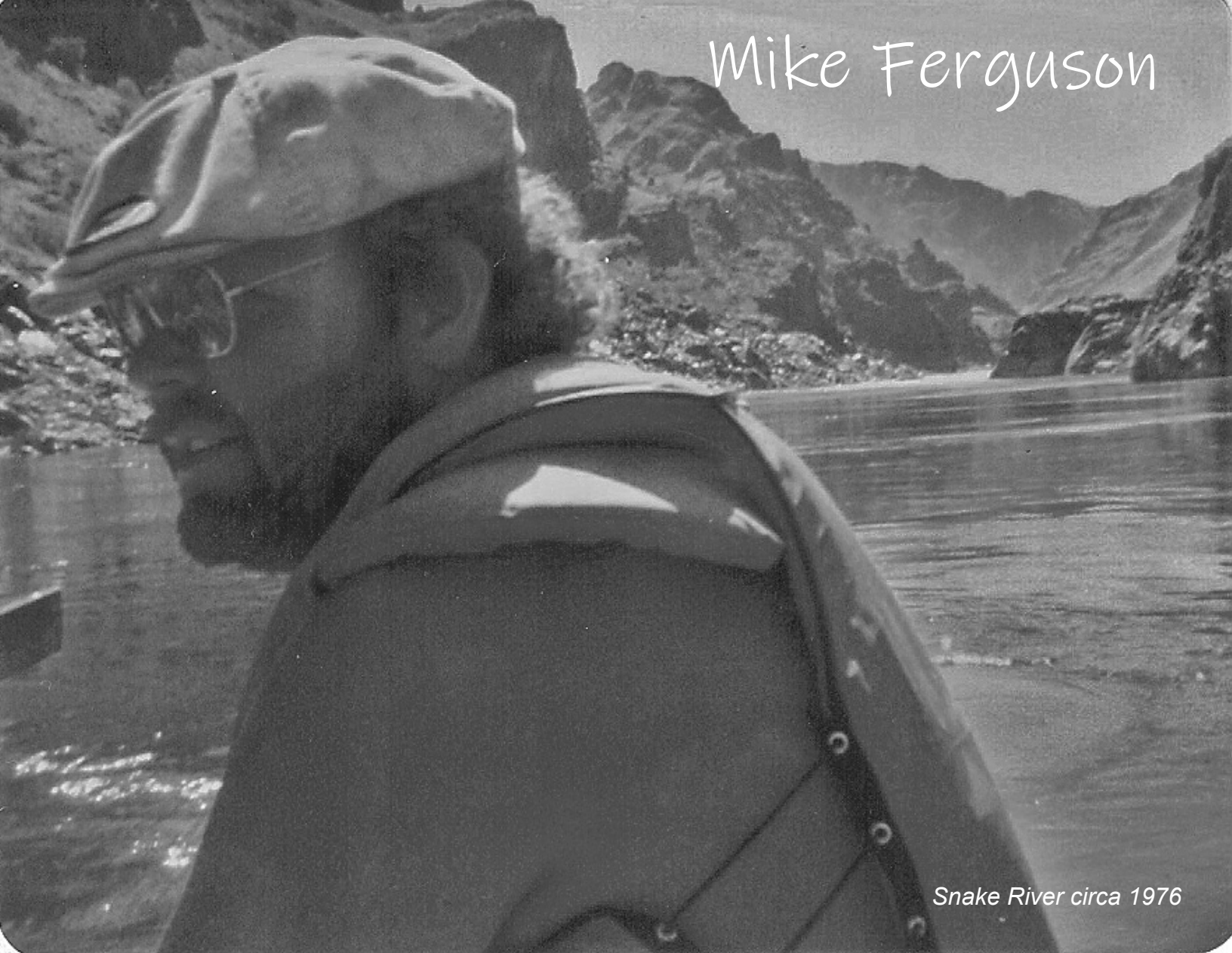
Check out Ancient Landscapes of the Colorado Plateau by Blakey and Ranney.

Also, find one of the videos that animates 4 billion years of plate tectonics.

When did Canyonlands form up? If you squish 4.8 billion years of Earth's history into ONE calendar year, our park sediments were laid down between Pearl Harbor Day and Christmas.-ish

So, when did the Green and Colorado Rivers decide to meet up?? Quiz Friday. 9/25/21

Mike Ferguson



Snake River circa 1976

This oral history is composed from a conversation with Mike by Robert Tubbs at his home near Norcatur, Kansas on January 8, 2018.

Mike Ferguson grew up in the blue collar town of Commerce City, Colorado in the 1960's. Commerce City is the industrial under belly of Denver: train yards, refineries, stockyards, and packing plants abound there to this day. He developed a love for the outdoors when he spent a summer near present day Silverthorne, Colorado while his grandfather worked on the Dillon Dam construction project. This love drew him to the Boy Scouts and their campouts. His troop began a river program which eventually morphed into the river outfitter Adventure Bound. He had mild interest in school until Outward Bound began the "Dare to Care" program at Adams City High School which melded the scouting river program into a high school curriculum. His scout leaders also began a Lacrosse team at the high school which most of the Scouts joined. Many of the bonds he developed with his fellow Scouts and lacrosse players over 50 years ago endure to this day.

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Mike was a key player in the early days of Adventure Bound and thus the river outfitting business in Utah. The 1960's and 1970's saw an explosion of river outfitters across Utah and Colorado, and Mike was in the middle of it. When he left Adventure Bound, he founded Rocky Mountain River Expeditions in 1974, one of the early commercial operators on the Arkansas River. After a few years things went sour at Rocky Mountain and he again left a company he was instrumental in forming to start another river operation from scratch for the City of Westminster, Colorado. Always the perfectionist and independent thinker, Mike soon found himself disenchanted with his situation at Westminster and joined his lifelong friend, Butch Zigers, to help the new owner of a company that would become Adrift Adventures. This time Mike did not leave the company – it left him. After getting the company organized and on firm ground the bottom fell out. The owner lost interest and Adrift was broken apart. After being intimately involved in the start up and structuring of four different river companies, Mike was tired of the river business and needed a change. He began a small construction business with Butch in the Carbondale, Colorado area and continued working there until 2001 when health concerns slowed him down and eventually forced a move to lower elevation in Norcatur, Kansas.

Mike continued to boat as a privateer during his years in Carbondale and has stayed close to the rivers and canyons he loves. He is an entrepreneur at heart and his business acumen, knack for organization, and attention to detail allowed him to be successful over and over again in the river business.

Tubby: So let's start with where you grew up and how you got into floating down the river.

Mike: All right. Well I was pretty much raised north of Denver, in Commerce City, the Adams City High School area. At one time there were several little towns like Derby, Irondale, and so forth. It was decided the area needed one big name, so they settled on Commerce City. It always smelled funny over there because of the refineries and pig lots (laughter).

Tubby: Wasn't there a rendering plant over there?

Mike: Yeah, Pepper Packing, the zoning was real relaxed. The area was agricultural mainly. When people started building houses selling for \$8000-\$9000, folks flocked to them because that's what they could afford. It was working class and that's kind of how we ended up there, our family. I was adopted, so I really didn't know my biological parents. One thing I did, I was always in Scouts, from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts until Explorer Scouts. I would spend my summers out in the mountains, camping and hiking, because scouting did that. I always wanted to get out and be an outdoors person. My parents, that raised me, were in construction. My mom's husband, Sam, was a Union Teamster. During the winter there's no construction work; thus in the summer we lived like kings and in the winter we didn't, you know. Turned out that our scoutmaster and one of his friends were stationed at the Arsenal where they were making nerve gas bombs! (Rocky Mountain Arsenal) I mean we could look out our window and see it, and I knew a lot of my friends' parents worked there. I'd hear stories and stuff about when there would be an accident or something. We just noticed that some of their parents would die early, and you never knew why... if it was the water or what? One time they drilled these wells, and they drilled them too deep. It actually caused earthquakes - the ground shook, windows broke, the pavement and concrete cracked. The Arsenal's attitude wasn't, "Oh we better stop. We're messing it up."

The quakes prompted the community to finally put a board together that could go and tell them, "You have to stop. You're ruining the place." Eventually they shut them down but it took years and years. It was about when the EPA was just getting started.

I don't know if you remember but the South Platte River runs through Denver and it used to be a sewage river. I mean everybody dumped everything into that river and by the time it got to Commerce City, it kind of glowed (laughter). You didn't want to put your foot in it! We always used to joke about floating it; what kind of gear we'd have to have on, you know.

Tubby: Rubber suits...

Mike: (laughing) Yeah, with gas masks and everything had to be rubber, and I could see you when they had a spill, you know, glowing away.

Our scoutmaster's name was George Brown. Before he was our leader, he and a companion went down the Yampa in one of those yellow surplus rafts and a couple paddles. I think they were neoprene... they had fabric and rubber coating on them. It was light-duty material. George said they were what an airplane pilot would have if he went down. These yellow rafts were in the plane.

Tubby: This was their bailout boat.

Mike: Yeah there you go. So they took that down the Yampa in August. George said they went about three or four miles, just after entering the canyon, and the boat was trashed. They didn't know what they were in for or anything about the river.

Tubby: So the boat was sinking on them?

Mike: Yeah, it suddenly turned into a hike, not a float trip. They hiked down the canyon and swam, or waded from bank to bank whenever they had to get from one side to the other until the pair made it to Mantle Ranch. The Mantles helped them out and got them to Echo Park and their cars. That's how George became friends with the Mantles.

He was our scout leader, but that trip was before he became a scout leader. He was still in the army guarding the Arsenal. When his term was up, he decided he liked the area and stayed. George eventually became a Scoutmaster and started a rafting program and lacrosse team. Quickly word got out that these guys were going floating and stuff. I knew I had to get in on that!

My grandpa that raised me worked construction on the Dillon Reservoir dam on the Blue River. The whole town of Dillon had to be moved, and everybody that lived along that stretch up towards... what was the name of that pass?

Tubby: Over Loveland?

Mike: Loveland Pass, yeah. So it was like all along in there, all those people had to relocate. They were bought out. Well, that's where I would live during the summer. I would float the Blue every day and that would be on an air mattress, in cut-offs and t-shirt and that's about it. So I had a little bit of experience about floating, but not overnight or anything and not through big water or anything like the Yampa.

So I heard about this scout troop there in Derby, Colorado. I said, "I'm gonna see if I can join up with those guys." So I started going to their meetings and became friends with a couple guys - Rick Shin and Mike Hanley. It would've been like 9th grade - around there... actually '63. I remember the river trip was over a hundred bucks for seven days. That was pretty much what it costs to go, plus transportation.

Tubby: But that was a lot for a ninth grader in 1963.

Mike: It really was. The scout leaders knew that, so they started joining these fundraiser things where you go out and sell stuff. The worst one... we started out with toilet paper (laughter)... going door-to-door selling toilet paper. (more laughter) It was terrible! I don't know how many rolls they ended up with but that didn't go over. So then they switched to light bulbs, and I'll tell ya, that was tough. It was a company that supported scouting. They give us a discount, and then we could sell the bulbs and make a little profit. Every one we sold was credited to our account. But man, it would take almost three years to get enough money saved up. The last one was selling candy, and the candy is the one that got me on the river. I sold more candy than anybody. It was just easy. People always wanted candy. It was a buck a box and we got 25 cents of it. Before you know it I had enough money in sight to go. I also got a couple of odd jobs and that put me over the top. So my first trip was in '65. The Scouts had been running trips probably three years ahead of that. So I wasn't at the beginning of it, but I came right along when they were just starting to really know how to do it. They had the 10-man assault boats. They got them from one of the surplus stores... maybe Gart Brothers Sports in downtown Denver. They purchased six boats and rigged them out on their own. They really didn't have anybody to ask how to rig a boat in Colorado. Everybody else who had been down the canyon was in Utah.

Tubby: They didn't do the standard stop in and talk to Bus Hatch before you launch?

Mike: No, no, no... they didn't. We just learned by trial and error. They had a setup with a wooden frame on it and oars. There were no plastic bags yet, so they were using... the thing you could buy was what was called a delousing bag.

Eventually the delousing bags started getting really hard to come by so we just start using GI duffel bags. They were just plain cotton. We'd write our name on it and put it in there. They were just coming out with... a couple years later household plastic was invented and then the large trash bags became available. It was, you'd put your sleeping bag in one and put your clothes in the other and that's kind of how you did it. All of our dirties went in the bottom of the bag. We didn't care if they got wet, or not, because they were dirty clothes. At first you didn't know, until they started stinking (laughing). Then we started saying, "I'm not going to do that anymore." We had a boatman and an assistant boatman on each boat.

Tubby: These were paddle trips or they were rowing?

Mike: Rowing trips and you had to earn your way to get on the oars. My very first trip I was just a passenger and I got to sit at the nose. I was one of the bigger kids; thus, I got to sit up front and hold the nose down in the rapids. There was a rowing frame, and we tied down these boxes from the Army-Navy Store... everything was GI surplus. The boxes had clips on each corner that were shaped like an arrowhead, and you would pound them on and that's what would seal the box. There was not one cooler. Everything was out of the can. Cans we wanted to cool down were placed in a gunnysack and drug in the river - soda pop or stuff like that. We did it just like the early guys. Nevills and everybody else that went down on trips back then all did the same thing. Everything was from the can.

Tubby: So this was a Yampa trip?

Mike: Yampa trip. My uncle died a few days before the trip while driving a delivery truck in Nebraska. We were close and his funeral was scheduled for the same day of the Yampa launch. I was 16 and was expected to go, but I chose the river thinking that's what he would want me to do. The family was not happy with me; my first major decision was made. It was the first week after we got out of school. The last day of school was like June 7th and on the 8th we left for the Yampa.

Tubby: And you did five, six, seven days?

Mike: A seven day trip. The Explorers would go first, and then the Boy Scouts would go second. So you had your two different trips and there were two different leaders too. The Explorers, the high school kids, would run the first trip and then the junior high kids would come up for second trip. That's the way school got out - high school got out like June 1st and junior high got out like June 7th, just a week later.

Tubby: Was Brown the guy that was there and there were no other adults or...?

Mike: No, there were always a few parents along, the ones who went to the scout meetings all winter. They were the ones that would go on the campouts and river trips in the summer. Those parents were just like the Scouts, just bigger... older, you know. It's in their blood. They're the same ones that would go on the trips, same fathers and so forth. We were used to having them around. You knew what you could expect from them... what you could get away with and what you couldn't. (chuckles)

The Explorer Scouts were older and they had the most experience so they were usually the boatmen. Some of their names I remember are Rick Shin, Joe Brahe, and Steve Pruitt. On the Boy Scout trips, the Scouts that had the most experience would be the assistant boatman because there were always two guys to share duty on the oars. The rest of the people just rode on the boat, and they had like one paddle in case you got too close to something.

You'd just push yourself away from the wall, a rock, or whatever. It never worked, but that's what the paddle was for. They were bucket boats so we had to bail them.

The scout troop didn't have any problems until 1965. My first trip was in 1965, and it was the year of the flood. That year the South Platte flooded Denver. We were on the river and we didn't know anything about it. Of course when we got off the river, it was a big deal.

Tubby: Yeah, the Platte River went and Big Thompson Canyon as well.

Mike: It flooded the Centennial horse track and all the way out to Commerce City. It hit that whole valley, the lows of that whole area right through downtown Denver. All those places were begging for help. So when we got off the river, there was a lot of work for us. But while we were on the river, we experienced high, high water and we couldn't even make it to the boat ramp. We launched close to where the boat ramp is today because the vehicles just couldn't get to where the boat ramp was.

Tubby: So the road just kind of went under water and you said this is it.

Mike: Yeah, that was it. We pretty much just... I guess this is just because of habit, but we loaded all the boats up, floated down to where we usually launch at, and that's where we stayed the first night... where the boat ramp was. That was the deal - we'll leave from there. That was the year that Warm Springs was formed, in '65. We got there and... they recently did a story on Warm Springs... there are a couple stories that came out last year on the formation of Warm Springs Rapid. One was a video by Rig To Flip. They just finished doing one on Warm Springs. I think there was an earlier one done too that I've seen. Their story was a little bit more complete. It told about guys like Dee Holladay who were there. George Wendt was there... a couple other guys.

All these guys were there and our scout group pulls up. The park service had a motor rig there and they're telling us, "Get over!" We pulled over and it was just unbelievable. I mean, I'd never seen it before so to me it was like, "Okay." I didn't know. All I knew is the day before we got there, our very first day, everybody was hitting whitewater, big whitewater. Hit this one, hit that one. We wanted to hit everything cuz we're gung-ho and we're hitting every wave and everybody's happy until we got to Little Joe and flipped. There was nobody coming; we were way out in front. We got on top of the boat. There was only like three of us with the boat, and we finally had to break out our spare oars and paddle in before Big Joe...

Tubby: ...You got it into an eddy?

Mike: Yeah, landed right there above Big Joe. Nobody was around yet. We're waiting and waiting and finally here... they'd picked up all the stragglers. We were really worried. I was on the scoutmaster's boat, and he was really worried about the other people. The rule was if you flipped or something, you always got back to the boat, but some of our people swam to the shore and so he couldn't account for everybody. He was really concerned until everybody showed up and all were accounted for. Then we learned how to turn a boat upright. They'd never done that before... what it took to get an upside-down boat back upright, and of course, everybody's bags and stuff were wet. You know... all of the above.

Tubby: So you were the only boat that went over?

Mike: Everyone else made it.

Tubby: It was six boats again?

Mike: Yeah and we were the only boat that went over. The Boy Scout leader, he was kind of a hothead; when we got to Harding's Hole, one of the guys and his son demanded to be let off and they walked out.

Tubby: They hiked up to the road?



Mike in Big Joe Rapid, 1979

Mike: Yeah, the river was too much for them - just took the fight right out of them. The son was okay; it was the old man, the dad, "I've had enough." It was like Powell's guys when they said, "We're not going any farther." At Separation, right? They're not going any farther. They hiked out and got killed, da-da-dah-da... right? So I was kind like, "What? They're hiking out?" I'm watching them go and thinking, "Okay?" So we leave them off...

Tubby: ... did they go down to Mantle's? They got up on the road and hiked down to Mantle Ranch?

Mike: Yeah, and then the Mantles, they know the Boy Scouts, so they gave them a ride to Echo Park. Well, so anyway, we floated to the Mantle's and we stopped by every time. We met the Mantles, and we were really good friends with Mrs. Mantle. We'd always bring her candy so she was always...

Tubby: ...Boy Scout candy!

Mike: Yeah, that we sold. She'd get that and we could camp there. They had a hired man named Shorty. The wind would be blowing a hundred miles an hour and he'd just take a piece of rolling paper and one of those cotton bags of tobacco and put it in there. Then he'd roll it like this - no big deal. Shorty was excited to see us. He had all kinds of stories and planned our day, "We're gonna do this and this and this." He'd always make sure we had time to visit Pat Lynch's cave. We offered to help with some chores and did a few things. That's why the trip was seven days because we'd stay there a day and then move on. We headed down to Warm Springs and there were a lot of people there. All the folks you hear about in the stories; they were all there just looking at us. Our scoutmaster and the adults talked with them but no one stayed to help us! They all left! We didn't see anybody run. They were camping down below. The whole deal was that Hatch River Expeditions was there first. They ran and one guy died.

Tubby: Right, that was the day before.

Mike: So that's why the park Service came up. They had a motor rig there as I recall. They'd motored up from Echo Park. So they said, You guys are going to have to portage all your stuff around here." Boy Scouts are not very big - seventh, eighth, ninth graders. I mean, we weren't really big guys. We did have some Explorer Scouts on the trip; they were our boatman.

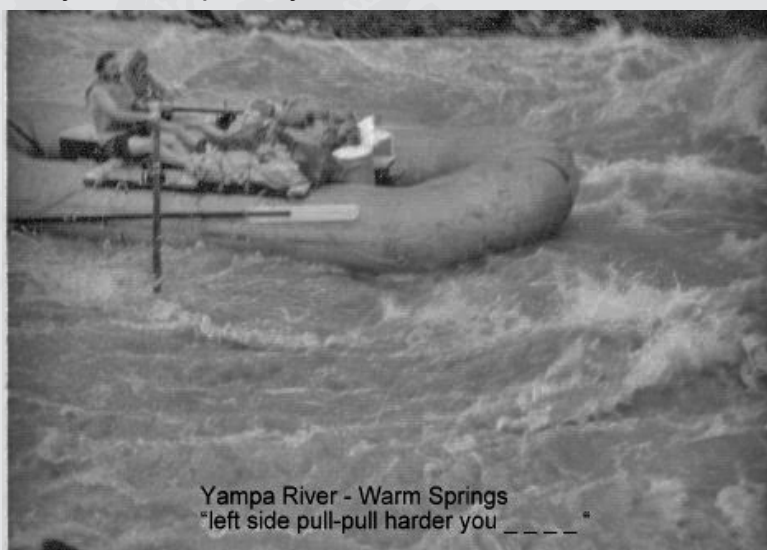
Tubby: So they wouldn't let you run. They closed the rapid.

Mike: They pretty much closed the rapid and then they left... we looked like a bunch of ants going over all these big boulders carrying everything: oars, frames, and...

Tubby: ...and rubber.

Mike: ...rubber. We did one boat, and it about killed us. I mean it's just like one guy could have it but the other guys were too short. They couldn't do any good in the boulders; it was just so hard to try to get anything across there. It just turned out that all the taller guys that were pretty much the same height did the heavy lifting and I was one of those guys. I did countless trips back and forth carrying stuff but we just couldn't do the rubber again.

Tubby: How many days? Did this all happen in one day or a couple days?



Yampa River - Warm Springs
"left side pull-pull harder you _____"

Mike: We got there in the afternoon and portaged as much as we could that night. Then the next day we lined the boats. We took all the ropes that we owned and they're basically... circus ropes we called them. They weren't that great. They were made out of sisal. We tied them all together and put half the troop on one end and half the troop on the other end and just let the boat go out there and thought we could just walk it right through. It didn't work that way (laughter). It's pretty fast, and you had to run with the ropes. If you were the front rope, you were running and the guys in the back would run. If you do enough of it, you kind of get to know what rock you needed to be on at a certain time so you could wrap the rope around it. We would wrap the rope around to put a brake on it. The raft would come in, and then you'd have a hell of a time getting it back out. So I jumped in the boat... I was the first guy to do it. I jumped in the very first boat with a paddle and pushed it off and got it back into the current. The first one you're kind of nervous. I was wearing a horse-collar lifejacket – one of those type-II life-jackets going through there. I just had faith in the guys on the ropes, and it was fine - we were a team. Then I went and did the second one. From the beginning I just got in the boat. After that, I knew I was going to be a boatman - there was no doubt in my mind. I just didn't realize how fast it was going to be.

Tubby: So how far down did you portage the gear? Was it just past the Maytag hole 100 yards, or more?

Mike: ...yeah, more than that. Past where the boulder field was and kind of just set up camp as close as we could so it'd be easier. The second day when we got all the boats back together, we were able to gather everything up and then float down to Echo. It was a hard two days, but we got them all through there and loaded everything back up. It's amazing with Scouts what you can do. Everybody knew how to tie knots; everybody knew how to do stuff because we did a lot of practice before we even went. So I kind of knew already how it was all going to happen.

Tubby: So where was the Park Service motor-boat? It had to be below lower Warm Springs - kind of down around the corner.

Mike: Kind of what I think they call is Doc's Rock, but our Surprise. I think we called it Surprise, but they were right there where the campground is now. They were in that cove. They were basically out there because of the drowning. They really didn't offer much assistance. Glade Ross was there, I think. It was nice to see all these guys, but they didn't have big name tags on - didn't know who Dee Holladay was, or George Wendt... didn't know who he was. A couple of other guys that were there, I didn't... I heard about them but you didn't know until later on in life. So we went down and floated to Echo and that's where we always laid over, at Echo Park. Back then river trips could use the camp there. At that time, you could actually skip a rock all the way across the river and hit Steamboat Rock.

Tubby: That's a hell of an arm.

Mike: But that just tells you how much it has changed; if you see it today, you go, "No way." They used to drive in to camp there. After seeing it back then, I mean, nowadays if that was still there, that would be one of the best places ever to drive in to camp. People would drive into there and stay there for the whole week. It was the car campers that got the upper campgrounds and the river people got the lower campgrounds. The Ranger was in the middle. They had a full-time Ranger there. We were friends with him, Leonard Casterline.

Tubby: Was that cabin in there then - the ranger cabin?

Mike: Mm-hmmm, it was down there. They were trying to save Echo from bank erosion. They put down chain-link fence and they brought in bulldozers and put some rock in, but the force of the Yampa just kept carving it away. When it comes around that corner, it just keeps carving at that bank and that dirt.

Tubby: Every few years the river takes another Big Cottonwood down.

Mike: Exactly - they tried and tried. I think, looking back at it, I might be wrong, but they never had any trouble with the Yampa before at Echo Park. But the dam was just getting done then, and the Green was being dammed up. So now there is more water coming down the Yampa than there is the Green. The Green used to be more water. You'd never come around that corner and hug next to Steamboat Rock the way it does now. The Yampa would go down and meet it. When the Green was shut off, the Yampa just came in there and started carving away at the river left bank because it wasn't channeling over to the other river. The park service dropped the ball on trying to save Echo Park and claimed, "We want to keep it natural." Any and all bank protection was removed. Echo Park died after that. That's my opinion just looking at it.

When we got to Echo we kind of regrouped and talked to the ranger, Leonard. He settled us down. Our scoutmaster, he got really sick from the water he swallowed after the flip and now he couldn't row any more. He couldn't do anything and it made me a boatman.

Tubby: So you got to row Whirlpool and Split on your first trip!

Mike: Yeah! I didn't know nothing about a push or a pull, and the kid (Jerry Shin) that was next to me... I mean he was like in sixth grade. They kind of fudged on him - let him go. So it was him and me with the scoutmaster telling us push, pull, push, pull. Eventually, we wouldn't listen to him (laughter)! It'd be worse, of course, but that's the way we got down and then we camped at Island Park. That would be our last campground. We'd make it down to Island, and then we'd spend a half day hiking around there, going up to the fault and back down. Then that last day we would go down through to Split Mountain take-out and camp at the campground that night.

Next day they'd take us in to Vernal and show us around. We went to the dinosaur museum, downtown museum, and got ice cream before going back to the campground. We camped that night and went home the next day. That was the seven-day river trip, nine day trip with camping. That's why it cost so much. But that's how I started and after that I was a boatman.

The next year in '66, I moved up to being an Explorer Scout. The Explorer Scout leader was quite different. He wasn't much of a boatman, but he was a good enough guy to at least be our leader. So I went back and everything was different. The water wasn't as high - it was a lot tamer. We pretty much just did those two trips, the Explorer Scout one and then the Boy Scout trip. I was there for two weeks and then I came home.

Tubby: So you were rowing both trips that second year?

Mike: Both trips; I got to row and since I did that, I didn't have to come up with as much money. I got...

Tubby: ...you were starting to get the boatman discount!

Mike: There you go - get the boatman's discount and let the newbies pay a little bit more so I didn't have to pay as much. But I still had to pay, so I still had to sell candy (laughter). By the time I got to be a senior... well, in my junior year there was a thing that came in... Adam City High School probably had one of the lowest graduation levels of all the schools around Denver. The people were not graduating. In their junior year most of them went to work full-time, be it farming, at the manufacturing plants in the area, or whatever... building houses. They needed manpower and so a lot of the kids went ahead and wouldn't finish school. The school decided that they wanted to find out why, and they did a study of course. The study received a grant, part of which was through the Colorado Outward Bound School.

They came to Adams City and were fascinated by the river trip which inspired them to start a program called Dare to Care.

Tubby: The river trips were a big thing all across the school? Everybody knew about them, and they wanted to go?

Mike: Yeah.

Tubby: But it was still organized through the Scouts?

Mike: ...organized through scouting. It was a real fine line there... organized through the Scouts, but in 1967 there was going to be the first high school trip and they were going to have their own equipment.

Tubby: You were going to outfit it; the Scouts were going to outfit it?

Mike: There you go! Our first customers (laughter) - we didn't have to pay!

As part of Dare to Care, I went to Outward Bound School. They sent me to the Outward Bound School. In '66 I did one of the early season sessions in Marble, CO. I learned how to do a lot of stuff and a lot of leadership stuff which helped me to become a trip leader on the river. Later on in life it really was a good... I learned a lot about leadership and about people. Everybody has a breaking point, be at high water or be at a hundred and fifty feet up a rock face. I mean it hits you... different people in different ways. I know you probably have heard people say, "Well, god, you know, I'll drive a hundred and eighty miles an hour, but you'll never get me on one of those river trips. I don't see how I could do that." So I was really very lucky that our area was so poor and was on the other side of the tracks. To Outward Bound we were just the perfect... to them we were like a flower and we're just getting ready to blossom, and they're right there making it happen. They were adding the nutrients and water and were going to grow this whole thing.

Those of us that went through the Outward-Bound school came back and were the Dare to Care leaders. We oversaw the program. So it's almost like scouting, but it's a whole other group that's high school though... high school kids. The school went out and bought their own equipment and the boats that were available... they were the kind that used to have a wooden board in the back. I don't know if you ever remember seeing them?

Tubby: With a transom, yeah.

Mike: Yeah. They snap together in the back. They were different than the 10 man assault boats. They didn't have the little rubber splash shield that went around the tubes. That had a grip. I don't know what that does, but it was just the look you know. They couldn't find enough boats so they still needed to use some of the scout's gear.

Tubby: So the high school was buying these or Outward-Bound owned the equipment?

Mike: The high school owned it. Probably the reason I graduated is because two hours out of the day they had a Dare to Care class and it was building equipment and learning how to patch boats; basically getting all the river gear together. The people that took the class are the ones that got to go on the river. So you had to work on the equipment to be able to go on the river trip. Some of these kids had never camped out before so they had to have some campouts ahead of time. Every time we camped out we'd do the best we could to teach them at least the basics and how to be safe. I learned everybody is not the same. People have tendency of getting themselves in trouble in the outdoors if they don't know any better.

Tubby: Well, Boy Scouts are notorious for that.

Mike: No kidding! (laughter) I learned that's why you have only one fire. One fire is all you can have. I mean, everybody wants to have their own little campfire by their tent. You go, "Nuh uh - one fire."

So we had a scout trip followed by a school trip and us Explorer Scouts were the boatmen. We took the high school down. There were biology, geology, and phys. ed. teachers, both female and male teachers. There was an Explorer scoutmaster and a Boy Scout Scoutmaster. We took a lot of adults and when we got to camp, they slept in the middle. Girls slept on one side and the guys had to sleep on the other side. It was pretty strict back then. So that was our trip and many of the participants had never done it before – "This is the best thing I've ever done!" But Outward Bound took it to another level - they rigged up one of those boats with the board in back into a paddle boat. We brought a paddle boat and people...

Tubby: ...so everyone was participating.

Mike: Yeah, that was the very first trip I did with a paddle boat.

Tubby: This would have been your junior year? Senior year?

Mike: Senior year, my senior year and Butch's junior year... Butch Zigurs' junior year.

Tubby: So you met Butch at Adam City High School?

Mike: I lived across the street from him for a couple years when I was in Boy Scouts. Yeah, right across the street from him when I was in 8th or 9th grade. I knew Butch and actually another guy, John LeClair; I knew those guys like from fourth grade - we went to the same elementary school and played little league baseball together.

When I moved across the street from them, I told them what we were doing, and they said, "Boy we want to go!" So they signed up for the Dare to Care class, and they got to go on the trip. It would have been in '67; that was their first trip down. I had Butch with me, and Butch and I flipped in the same hole that I flipped in with my Boy Scout leader at Little Joe. The same thing happened. We were the first boat and no one was around to save us. It was just me, Butch, and a kid from the swim team on the boat. We gave him the rope, and we told him to swim to the shore.

Tubby: Wow, no kidding?

Mike: Yeah, he swam to the shore. We had the oars. We were paddling it, and we got it in before Big Joe. We got the raft turned over because I already knew how to do that. We had it all done when the rest of the group showed up. Everybody was safe and I'd just relived the whole thing again. I said to Butch, "Man, you flipped in the same rapid I flipped in; the very first trip I went on too!"

Tubby: Butch was rowing?

Mike: Yes, he was my assistant boatman, and I was the boatman.

Tubby: At Little Joe he went over...

Mike: ...at Little Joe, yeah, yeah, yeah - Sorry Butch. (laughter) He was hooked after that ya know. I guess there was one other caveat. Our Scoutmaster, George Brown, he taught us how to play lacrosse.

Tubby: Really - on the river or at school?

Mike: At school. He gave all these guys... this is like the guys that carry chains and stuff, baseball bats and tire irons in their trunks... he gave them all sticks. And everybody's going, "We can hit 'em?" (laughter)

And George is going, "Yeah you can hit 'em."

"Okay!"

We had a really good team. It was so tight knit - all the Explorers played. There was also a junior high team and that would have been all the Boy Scouts. We won the state championship three years in a row, one year when I was there and then the next two years after I left when Butch was still there. We beat those private schools like Denver Country Day School and Colorado Academy.

Tubby: Yeah, That's a high brow sport. That's the upper-crust kids.

Mike: It was like... our stuff is all taped together and glued or whatever and those guys had everything. They got the best of everything. It's pretty amazing. It's like one of those shows you see on TV.

Tubby: Good for Mr. Brown.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. He taught us that. The Explorer scoutmasters, Rick Shin and Keith Counts, became coaches for the high school and George Brown stayed with the Boy Scouts in junior high. So the junior high team was his and the Explorers scoutmaster was our coach. For liability we needed a high school teacher to be coach and Keith Counts did that, but Rick Shin was really the coach.

Tubby: Ooh... Keith Counts the Adventure Bound owner.

Mike: There you go. That's how it started.

Tubby: So, was he a teacher?

Mike: Keith was a physics teacher at Adam City High School. George Brown was a lawyer and that's how he made his living. He lived in Commerce City and he always had the Scouts and us Explorers doing things for him, help moving, help with clients, whatever. It was like we were all family. They could come to our meetings. We would go to their meetings. It really didn't matter. It was family. We're all going to be on the river together, so it was always great to go on a campout and stuff. You look forward to it because you know it was going to be a really good time and you're going to be doing something that's really fun. It beat staying at home and doing nothing. So that's what the Dare to Care program at our high school did; it brought people that did nothing and introduced them to the wilderness. A lot of them, hell, they'd never even been to mountains before and they're going over mountain passes... that's when you had to drive over Berthoud Pass to get to the Yampa. That was all new for them.

Tubby: The Dare to Care students were getting all the equipment together and they handled it all, but the general student body were the ones that would come on the trips.

Mike: Right, everybody that signed up for the class participated in the river trips. Okay, so now we've got three trips!

Tubby: Oh, so you're still doing a scout, an explorer and then the high school trip - three by your senior year?

Mike: Yeah. We didn't know anything about it but George from the Scouts and Keith Counts from the Explorers got together and said, "Maybe you guys could run some more trips?"

Tubby: So this is right after you graduated? This would have been the same year?

Mike: Yeah. We said, "Yeah."

We were kind of thinking the same thing because Outward Bound had asked, "Hey, we're doing a program with East High School, would you guys take East High School down?"

I said, "Yeah, we'll take them down." The Denver Post did a 3-page spread on that trip!

Then we started thinking about schools that could afford it. How about George Washington High School? Yeah, we'll take them down. We were thinking about the people that we played lacrosse against and all the girls that we'd seen at those schools, "Let's take them down too!" (laughter) Then we started brainstorming and before you know it we were taking other Boy Scout troops, Girl Scout troops, other schools, and we were booked for two whole months.

Tubby: Now were you doing it... was this in June/July or was it more like May and June?

Mike: It was May, June, and July. We didn't know what was going on legal wise, but we were building numbers.

Tubby: Were Keith and George aware that building numbers was a good thing?

Mike: Yeah, later on after we did it for one summer in 1969. That's when they incorporated Adventure Bound.

Tubby: The winter of '69-70?

Mike: Yes.

Tubby: Okay, so you did 3-4 trips after you graduated...

Mike: ...right...

Tubby: ...your senior year and then what did you do in the fall and in the winter before your first, kind of, full river season?

Mike: I know... this is an amazing thing... some of the guys went to college. Many of us, including myself, had to get jobs and go to work. The draft was going on for the Vietnam War and some went into the service. I was rejected and labeled 4F - no war for me.

When April came around, I was ready to leave for the river. Then next year's winter I'd get a different kind of job. Not the same type of work. I'd try to find different types of work each fall after the river season was over, something I'd never done before, to learn how to do new things, you know. I worked at a body shop, framed houses, poured concrete, was a survey lineman, plus various warehouse and delivery driver jobs. That's how you start building a future. It was a way of learning how to do a lot of tasks we were doing in the summer the right way. We weren't doing very much the right way, at first. We were just kind of doing it, but it wasn't very neat.

We'd see Western River Expeditions on the river and their stuff was like deluxe. We'd see Hatch River Expeditions go by... hmm so-so. Then you'd see ours... it'd be really terr... ours was just... it'd just be a mess. It'd just be a rat's nest. It's just... we just were not professional looking at all - long haired guys and cut-off blue jeans. We came from a whole different way of life compared to Western's people from Utah or Hatch's boatmen... I don't know they came from all over. But you know most of them are right there.

Tubby: A lot of Southern boys too, at Hatch.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. You get to know some of these guys on the river and you become buddies with them. You hear more at a boat ramp than you hear anywhere else. Back then, right? That's how news traveled... was at the boat ramp. Usually we didn't camp next to each other. Back then everybody had their favorite camp spots. There were enough camps because there were only three of us running commercial trips, mainly.

Tubby: Was Outward Bound on the river back then?

Mike: Yeah, they just started to do it right after that. Outward Bound started running their paddle boat trips. Then there was another program that got started called Partners, out of Denver. It was a paddleboat organization as well. At that time the Park Service wanted to put the brakes on Outfitters. They were saying, "Whoa, we're starting to get too many people on the river." The Park Service and BLM came up with Educational Permit Status, completely separate from commercial or private user-days.

Tubby: Right. Well, Grand Canyon started to consider use limits around '69, I believe, and that's what got everybody else starting to think about limits also.

Mike: I know. I called up Grand Canyon one day and said, "Hey, I was wondering what's the possibility of running a trip?" I told them about what I/we did, running trips up in Dinosaur, and they said, "Well, come down whenever you want to go and you'll just have to fill out a permit when you get here." That was it!

Tubby: Right. What were you doing in Dinosaur? Did you have to fill out a permit form or...?

Mike: ...not yet. I never was in the management at Adventure Bound. I was still just a guide - the Scoutmasters took care of all that. The NPS was starting to record numbers, but they were mainly concerned with our safety equipment and making sure we had our life jackets switched over from the horse collar to the...

Tubby: Type V's?

Mike: Well, the type I's. Type V wasn't an option since it didn't exist.

Tubby: Oh, the type I - the Mae West jackets.

Mike: The Mae West ones, yeah. So we started getting commercial... looking that way at least and started using our first pontoon boat. We were running a 33' motor rig down Dinosaur. I don't know where they got it at, but Keith and George found it. I bet they got it from Bucks War Surplus out of Las Vegas. That boat was the beginning of a learning process we would embark on. We ran that 33 footer and George and Keith saw how many people you could put on that boat versus how many fit on a little 10 man assault boat.

Tubby: They started running the numbers and went hmmm.

Mike: Yeah, there you go. That's it exactly! They saw Hatch and they saw Western. They hired Richard Jones, who had left Western to start Worldwide River Expeditions, to teach Butch and me how to cut a 33-foot pontoon boat down to a 28' or 22' pontoon. He taught us how to stitch and patch, move bows and sterns, and so forth. Richard came over to Craig, Colorado and...

Tubby: Adventure Bound had already bought the School Street property by that time in Craig?

Mike: No, we rented the first year and lived in the warehouse. My ex-wife's uncle was a car dealer, and he'd just gotten a new dealership there in Craig which he located out of town to the west. This left the downtown dealership on Main Street empty and we moved in; right across from the post office so everybody saw us! Motorcycles, long hair... I mean hippy types, you know. That was just the look. There was a bunch of guys there and we slept in the warehouse.

That was the first season as Adventure Bound. We had a stationary base in Craig. We also had a teacher/owner living in Rangle, Colorado that supervised and prepared meals for the trips; what a treat, frozen sandwiches - just terrible!

Tubby: So they went all in, incorporated and went for a warehouse.

Mike: Right, because the year before we were a mobile warehouse. We had a Ryder truck and everything moved around in this truck. It was our base.

Our first year we worked out of a Ryder Truck that we rented in Denver and for the 2nd year we were in the old car dealership. Our 3rd season we moved into the School Street warehouse for good. At this point Keith Counts and George Brown elected to give to Butch Zigurs, John Le-Clair, and Rick Shin each 5% of the outstanding Adventure Bound stock as key employees.

Tubby: Oh, you're just the hired help.

Mike: That's right. Butch Zigurs was the trip leader during the birth of Adventure Bound – I got that but I felt like I was side lined mainly due to my temper. One time while playing football or volleyball at Echo Park I got mad, and Keith told Butch to let me go! Butch was in charge and told Keith I was staying. The next trip Keith and Mary Counts were on my boat to check me out. I was nervous, but on the water, well, I shined with good runs, great with people and hard working at camp. Butch was the trip leader but by the next year I would go on to trip leader status also.

George and Keith also elected to sell stock to a lawyer named Jerry Wischmeyer who worked as Legal Counsel for the Colorado Division of Wildlife and another teacher from Adams City High School, Dave Hartman. I suppose they needed the additional capital to keep the thing afloat. Wishmeyer, the lawyer, he knew enough people at the Wildlife and Parks and before you know it, we had a couple more trips.

Tubby: So they're all in. You're cutting up boats. Is this in the summer?

Mike: No, this is in the early spring, April and maybe even March. We brought the boats up from Denver. I don't know where they got the boats at. It would have been 1970. That's really... like you said, Grand Canyon was starting to look at outfitter use allocations.

Tubby: Yes, the early rumblings of use ceilings in Grand Canyon.

Mike: There you go. So they got wind of that somehow and then they knew that in '70 they had to do something. That's when we started doing all the different scout groups and high schools. We started it in May and just did discount trips with different groups of people to get our numbers up. There weren't a lot of rules and no licensing yet. First aid and CPR certifications were not required for crew. The NPS mainly was concerned about making sure that you had a first-aid kit on the trip and Type I life jackets - that was about it. The boats that we had were varied. We learned from Richard Jones how to cut them down and the condition of the boat, when you first unrolled it, decided how much rubber we'd keep. We learned the condition of the rubber depended on how it had been stored. The rubber was often dry rotted in places for whatever reason. These were military pontoons and when you blew a boat up, some of them would have blown out bulkheads, etc. So you'd mark it and that's what determined what you could keep and hence the length of the boat. All we knew was that we didn't want to run thirty three footers because that's what we ran the year before and it was terrible, just too big. A 33' takes two sets of oars thus two frames, or a motor. We wanted to look more like Western River Expeditions - basically 28's and 22's.

Tubby: And Western, they were rowing at that time?

Mike: They were rowing., but Dinosaur was still open to motoring if you wanted to. But they were rowing 28's and the numbers is why. A 28 footer - you could put eleven people on it. A 33 footer could fit 15 but that is a lot of people, too many. I had a 22 footer and could only put nine on it... nine, eleven, fifteen. But you needed a boatmen and an assistant per 15 people on a 33 footer.

Tubby: You started to see the numbers.

Mike: Yeah, I started working with twenty-eights. We started rowing a 28' and at first there'd be two oarsmen that would take turns, just like we learned on the smaller boats in the Scouts. But we noticed Hatch never did that. Western never did it. Their guys were older and each one had their own boat.

Tubby: Right, so you guys were still just rowing the Yampa.

Mike: Yes just the Yampa. So we were doing everything we could to get from... we started training in April, commercial trips in May/June and come the second week of July - that was it. We really couldn't go any farther than that. It had to be a good year to even do that, to go that long. All the time we're still camping at Echo and our friend, Leonard Casterline who was a school teacher in Vernal, he'd be there every summer and he said, "You boys need to go up there and run that Lodore." Our eyes would get real big, and he'd be telling stories about it and stuff, and he goes, "I'm going to have one of my ranger buddies come over and talk to you guys."

So his buddy turns out to be Glade Ross and he comes down and says, "It's a little smaller and a little narrower but there are routes that you can go through. If you're running these pontoon boats, you shouldn't have any problem at all from what I've heard about you guys running here on the Yampa."

We said, "Okay. Well, um, we can go up there and do that? Will you go down with us?"

Glade replied, "Well, I don't know if I'd be able to go down with you but I sure as hell can show you everything on a map."

So, we went over there and went down Lodore. Man that was fun! We had a great time. We go up to Gates of Lodore for our very first trip and Glade Ross came over and did everything he could for us, but he just couldn't go. Then I forgot to bring the map with his notes with us.

Tubby: Was he living at the Gates at that time?

Mike: Yeah, so he told us about everything, you know, writing things down... where to go and where to stop and where to camp. He's the one that basically got us there.

Tubby: This was just boatman; a training trip.

Mike: Boatmen and you got to have a few customers.

Tubby: Oh, you did have some customers.

Mike: Not my choice - the company's.

Tubby: Mm-hmm, now you had another river to keep you busy...

Mike: ...longer season.

Tubby: ...past June into...

Mike: ...July. Yeah, we started running three and four day trips. Sometimes we'd run a two day trip. We'd camp at Echo and then Echo out. We did that on the Yampa lot of times. We'd hang out two days at Echo sometimes just because it was just a cool place to go hiking around. You could go to see the petroglyphs or Whispering Cave, swim across the river and hike up Mitten Park Fault and the Outlaw Trail, and so forth. We knew that area really well.

Tubby: The names of the rapids on the Yampa, were they all named when you got there?

Mike: Yep, they were all named. Yep.

Tubby: Do you know where they came from... like who named Tepee, who named Big Joe?

Mike: No,

Tubby: Little Joe I don't think was ever an official name.

Mike: No, they had a different name for it. There was like a little side canyon that came in through there. No, that was actually all Buzz Belknap putting together those river guides.

Tubby: So you got it off the river guides.

Mike: Yeah.

Tubby: So what about Greasy Pliers because you used to always tell me that you called that Lulu?

Mike: That's right. You're exactly right. Yeah, I did. There was a song... bang bang Lula, Lula bang bang... I don't know... it's just something that people came up with. That was a saying that some of the older people used to say, "Man, that was a Lulu!" That's how it stuck with us. Greasy Pliers actually is a better name, I think. Makes you wonder where'd that come from, you know.

Mike: Then we realized that we needed to go do more trips other places because we're hearing from Western and Hatch, and they're going up to Idaho or down to the Grand, and here we are in Dinosaur. We needed to go somewhere else, and low and behold Western came through for us. One of their boatman and I, we became pretty good friends, and he told me about Westwater and Desolation. I said, "Where are those?" He told me and I wrote them down and so forth. Butch Zigurs, John LeClair, Jeb Stuart, and I went down and we ran Desolation Canyon with a filling station road map (laughter). Looks like we put on here and we never had...

Tubby: ...thank you Gulf Oil, those old maps they handed out for free.

Mike: It was like from here to there, and that was it. I was like, okay, there it is and we didn't really have much...

Tubby: ...was Western doing these commercially at the time or the guys just knew about it?

Mike: Guys knew about them. They said they went down there and it was just a guide trip. And they go, "Now over at Westwater, you just got to go over there and just go drive around and stuff and make sure you're up high enough so you can run the canyon. You can ask around and you'll find a place they'll let you launch your boat." "Oh, okay."

Tubby: So this would have been like spring of '71?

Mike: No actually it was in mid July. We had a week off and we did the Desolation Canyon trip. We rowed that. We didn't have any motors.

Tubby: Did you have passengers, people with you?

Mike: Butch and I...

Tubby: ...but no passengers?

Mike: Nope, just four guides. So here we are on this trip, and we didn't have any money for food, so we're just eating what was left over from the trip before. Everything's in a number ten can, right? So we had a number ten can of bing cherries and a number ten can of pudding, and maybe some Dinty Moore beef stew. That's what we ate. Mosquitoes were terrible and of course a lot of flat water. We finally got down to Jack Creek and there's a little current, not as many bugs. We camped. It was like, "Oh, alright!" Cuz our method of averting the bugs was basically diving underneath the boat and hanging out under there. We used wooden floors suspended with chains and there was an air space down there to hide out in. You can only handle so much and then you think, "Well, we'll get mud all over us and then maybe that'll stop them from buzzing/biting us."

Tubby: Naw, that makes it worse.

Mike: Yeah, then you're a hive, you know. So we went down... I remember pulling into Rock Creek Ranch and getting stuff together. I had a super 8 mm camera and I was getting that out and the guys go, "Whoa! Hold it! Stop! Stop! Stop!"

I go, "What?"

They go, "Look!" There were three golden bears at Rock Creek - mama and cubs.

Tubby: Wow!

Mike: Yeah! I'm taking pictures of them and it's not close enough. It's not great. They are a long way from the river. So we go up and we look around and there's nobody there. It's like everybody's left. There was all kinds of stuff lying around. The place was loaded with shovels, picks, ropes, canteens, and clothing - it was all there. As a Boy Scout, my background was you don't take nothing. You just leave it the way you find it. That's the way we were brought up. Unfortunately a lot of people didn't do that. Next trip you're down there and you go, "What happened to that? There used to be a shovel there." Now the shovel's gone. Things just started disappearing. I thought, "God, if I knew that was going to happen I would have taken it." But we didn't. The next day we rowed all the way out and when pulling into Green River the drive-in movie was showing. It was pretty cool catching a movie, eating bing cherries, and floating into the sunset.

Next we headed over to run Westwater and pulled into Loma. There was a guy selling gas there at the station. Butch was talking to the guy and he says, "We're commercial boatmen. We're in between trips. We heard about this trip over here and we just want to run the river."

And he's going, "Sir, I'm the deputy sheriff here and going to have to arrest you," and he arrests Butch. Then the deputy calls the sheriff in Moab and says, "Here, Butch, he wants to talk to you."

So Butch talks to the sheriff and the sheriff goes, "Ya ya, you know about that. There's a bad rapid down there at Skull. We lost a couple people down in there. Just beware of that rapid; it can take you, okay?" And he adds, "Now, if you get in a whole bunch of trouble, we're not going to be able to come down there because the fair is going on right now in Moab." (laughter)

"Okay."

So he puts the station attendant back on. He says, "Okay, alright" and he hangs up the phone. "Okay, you guys can go." Then he told us everything. "You go down here, take this road, and then you go over there..."

We went to the Westwater ranch, pulled in there and talked to the rancher and we became really good friends with him. Suddenly we're pushing the boats off the side of the hill, going through some crops to get there - alfalfa fields. We had all the boatmen. We emptied the warehouse and came down there with all the boatmen that were left. Numbers... numbers thing going on - had to build up the numbers. We took anybody else that we could find along the way that wanted to go; a hitchhiker- we took'em... I'm not kidding! We ran down through there.

The rancher says, "You guys going to come back?"

"Yeah, we really want to come back."

"I tell you what, when I get a chance, I'm going to put you guys a little channel in here." He put us a little boat ramp in. Come to find out that they ran a liquor store in Grand Junction and their main operation was just west of Grand Junction. We became pretty good friends with the ranch crew which helped out the venture.

Tubby: He had a Caterpillar and he just kinda...

Mike: ...Tractor - just knocked it off a little bit. It was still kind of a drop off there. I mean, you couldn't pull in there with a trailer, motor boat, or anything. There would still be a little bit of a downhill thing but he knocked off the top part.

Tubby: So nobody else was running this commercially?

Mike: ...No, Westwater, no.

Tubby: Just the occasional trip from Bert Loper?

Mike: Yeah, yeah. Really, no kidding? Hatch wasn't interested in it. I always called them the "Throwaway Rivers" because no one really wanted to... they had Idaho; they had the Grand Canyon. This Dinosaur thing, the only part that was good about that was it had Warm Springs. Your customers will only come down the same river with you so long. They'll want to go on a different river. So the more rivers that you ran... each year the same group would come and go down another river and then another river. They would do that. They would follow you even when you leave for a different company.

Tubby: So you were doing this trip in August?

Mike: Yep, in August and it was a blast; big rollers and drops and in August. Ha!Ha!

Tubby: So this was something you were going to start running trips the next season?

Mike: Right, exactly.

Tubby: Get it in the brochure and start selling.

Mike: Yep, start doing that and take bosses down of course - at the end of the season take them down. They didn't do Desolation because it was a long way to go. We needed to get a motor set up for that. That's what we worked on the next winter was to do that. That's actually how I came into my claim to fame. It was during that winter I went to work for a company called the Bandit Company.

If you look at a stop sign mounted on an aluminum pole, chances are you'll see this clamp going around it. It's not like a hose clamp. It works like a hose clamp, but it's just all smooth and it's stainless steel. Those are made by the Bandit Company. That's how I learned... I said, "These oar pins that we use are terrible." I designed an oar pin, and when I designed that oar pin, they decided to offer me five percent of the company, but I had to pay for it! My other three friends all got it free.

Tubby: That was Butch, LeClair, and...

Mike: ...and Rick Shinn.

Tubby: Now who was Jeb that went down Desolation with you?

Mike: Jeb Stuart went down Deso with us on the very first trip. He was Butch's assistant boatman for the longest time until we purchased and designed more rafts. I'm sorry to say he just passed away. He was another Adventure Bound boatman who was with us on the Boy Scout trip when Warm Springs was formed.

Yeah, his dad was superintendent of schools in Commerce City when we were at Adams City High.

Tubby: So how much did a five percent share of Adventure Bound cost?

Mike: I'm remembering about a thousand bucks - on payments! (laughter)

Tubby: Yeah, right!

Mike: Yeah, everything on payments. The good thing about it though was they had... I was on the borderline; I had a temper. I wish someone would have taken me to the side and told me but they never did. Maybe things would have been easier. But anyways, I had this temper that I had to contain and now that I'm an owner of a company, I took it a lot more serious.

My idea was designing equipment that was equal to or better than Western's. That was a lot to chew, but that's the look that we were going for and that's what we achieved. We always looked good after that on the river. Guaranteed, the most paint you'd see along the river would be orange from Hatch Expeditions, and then there'd be a tie sometimes between Western and us. I mean, you're on the river every week you get to see what's going on in the canyon and the campgrounds.

Tubby: You see little paint chips in the sand.

Mike: Yeah, or on the wall, "Whoops! There's orange! Somebody hit the wall. Who hit the wall?" That's how you could tell what was going on. The Boy Scouts were notorious for keeping things clean and you kind of learned that. You wanted to keep the campground looking better than the way you found it. That was always what we did. We strived for that. Quite frankly, that's why the rangers liked us. We were a bunch of long hairs but we still protected the canyon. They knew that and we had a great record. We weren't hurting people. We weren't flipping a lot of boats, and there were people in line waiting to be a boatman because we only had a small number of boats. We moved from two guys rowing a boat to just one guy rowing a boat – think money. Now we looked as good as Hatch or Western on the water.

Tubby: And there were still kids coming through the program back at Adams City.

Mike: Uh-huh, and you got people now turning into swampers, kind of an assistant boatman, trainees we called them. Jeb Stuart was the longest trainee ever. He trained with Butch forever. The problem was a shortage of pontoons and the need for more to expand the business. So basically, Butch and I designed some pontoon boats and had them made in Denver and out of a lighter weight nylon/neoprene rubber.

Believe it or not, not everybody could, but Butch and I could pick one up and put it in the back of the truck by ourselves. That's how light they were. We called them Spider Boats.

Tubby: These were twenty-eights?

Mike: Yep - 28 footers. Get more people! Eleven people!

The lawyer that worked at the Division of Wildlife, he suddenly became our booking agent. All the phone calls went to his house. Jerry and his wife, Sandy, did all the booking. It took them years it seemed like to understand how many people you could put on a boat or trip. I'm not kidding. Even though we were only supposed to have 25 people, we'd bring 50 lifejackets and you'd pack more food because you never knew for sure. There were trips where sometimes I'd have like 18 people on my boat. On a 28 footer! So we had to work with them. It took a season of Butch calling and saying you can't do that. You know, boatmen were not eating. We had to cut our teeth and we did, but it all started with Richard Jones. Without his help we would never have learned anything about pontoons and after that it was just kind of like, I started designing equipment. That was one of my things that I did. Not everything was perfect but a lot of it worked.

Tubby: Back to that Westwater trip. You emptied the warehouse. Did you have like six boats that you took down?

Mike: No I think all we took down was 4 twenty-two footers.

Tubby: And you rowed them?

Mike: Yeah. Yeah.

Tubby: Did you take out at the Cisco ramp right there or did you go on down to Dewey Bridge?

Mike: No, we pulled out right there at Cisco... yeah, there was a ramp.

Tubby: At the pump house?

Mike: Yeah, right there at the end of the canyon where they pull off now. That's where we pulled off at and there was a road that went into there.

Tubby: That was in better shape than the put-in?

Mike: Yeah. Earlier that year we went down and did Cataract - went across Dewey Bridge. We were putting the puzzle together, "The Green goes to here and then it goes there; the Colorado goes from here to here, okay. Now where do they go? They all go through this other canyon, Cataract Canyon. Oh, let's go down there."

Tubby: Did you put in at the Westwater takeout and just take in the whole stretch?

Mike: We put on at the Potash Plant. We actually had a motor but we didn't use it until we got to the lake, and then we ran out of fuel. We really didn't know much about motoring yet; we didn't even have the right fittings to hook tanks and stuff together. We were talking to a guy in Moab, at the last minute, and he was able to pull our whole motor situation together so we could get fuel to the motor. None of the stuff matched. We had a Johnson tank, a Mercury tank, couple of army tanks, you know. Nothing worked right.

Tubby: This would have been like '72?

Mike: Early in 1971.

Tubby: What was the park service like? Go ahead and have fun?

Mike: Yeah, they really didn't care - there wasn't a lot of interest yet because of the lake. It was still filling up. We had current to Gypsum rapid - there was whitewater there; the rapid was still there. Then we had the lake and I think we made it to about five miles from Hite before running out of gas. Hite was on river right then.

Tubby: Oh, it was on river right?

Mike: River right and we rowed the pontoons to there.

Tubby: So was the take out kind of at the bottom where North Wash comes in there at Hite, or where it's at now?

Mike: Hite. It was directly across from where they moved Hite to. They moved Hite from one side of the lake to the other, but you got into it from the same road there.

Tubby: North Wash.

Mike: Yeah. We pulled off there and later that year we ran some trips down through there. Western and Hatch were drawing as many people as they could from the Salt Lake area. We had the Denver area, so we had I think a little better market even though Hatch and Western did have their foot in the door in Denver. But we were starting to get a name for ourselves. People started hearing about... you know, word of mouth is your best advertising, so that's how we were able to call some groups up and say, "Hey we have something special going on. We're going to go down Cataract Canyon and it ends up on Lake Powell. You can go on a houseboat trip after that... dah-de-dah-de-duh." You know, three day trip of course - just to get the numbers up.

After the trip we headed back to Craig, Colorado and moved our location from Main Street over to School Street. Keith and George bought the old Foster lumberyard. We redid that place, rewired, put in outlets, etc. Made our own boatman's headquarters so that we had a place to sleep and shower. Put in a place where we could prep our food for trips. Keith ran it. He and his wife Mary lived in the front of the old store and in the back part we built a dining hall where the crew would get breakfast and lunch.

Meals were served at a certain time and if you weren't there, that's fine, but you weren't going to get it later on. Meals twice a day; it was structured that way. We were on our own for supper.

Tubby: Was Keith living there year round?

Mike: Just for the summer.

Tubby: So he was still teaching.

Mike: Yeah. In May I was running it, so we were having parties. (laughter)

Tubby: No, not Mike Ferguson!

Mike: Oh yeah, and Keith always said, "I heard about you guys' parties! So what else did you guys do that I don't know about?"

We said, "Nothing." And he'd just look at us.

Tubby: "Think we're going to tell you?"

Mike: Yeah, we had a good boatman's hall, and Craig was good to us. The first year was a little rough, but the second year was better.

Tubby: So you were running your Cataract and Westwater trips out of Craig, a lot of miles?

Mike: Yeah. We'd get off a Cataract trip and it's a hundred and what... fifteen degrees at the boat ramp? I think one time the hottest I remember it being was 117 at Hite - still on the river right or Lake Powell right. We had a thermometer there. Just couldn't believe it. I walked up there and I got a cold beer. And it was just like, "WOW!" Then I'd go back and I had to lay in the water. That's all I could do.

Tubby: Was Arth Chaffin still running a store there then? Where'd you get the beer?

Mike: I think there was a little store there, but I'm not sure.

Tubby: A gas station too?

Mike: No, no, not that extreme. I don't recall one. No.

Tubby: Was the bridge across the river by then?

Mike: Yep, the bridge was across.

Tubby: So the highway was going.

Mike: And it just had that little... there was a boat ramp there and that was mostly dirt, if I remember right. He was just a concessionaire I guess. There was power, because it was air conditioned, but it wasn't very big. It could have been a stealth thing as far as I know. You could buy ice, beer, pop, or whatever. That's about all they did there - no fuel or nothing. Not like when they moved across the lake and then set up a real marina.

Tubby: How many trips were you guiding, you figure by your first, second, third season... were you doing like full schedule on Cataract, Westwater, and all that?

Mike: Yeah, yeah.

Tubby: Adventure Bound was getting pretty big.

Mike: Yeah we were getting really big, and we were up to like probably, let's see how many boats; twenty four, maybe 26 boats - all pontoons.

Tubby: Starting to buy your own motors?

Mike: Starting to buy our own motors, Mercury - 20 horse power, and we were running them down Deso. We'd get off of Deso and... I was the guy that would always go... I'm a logistic guy... I'd go, "When we get off of Deso then we should go over and run Cat." So that crew moves...

Tubby: ...because they're already there; they're at the put in.

Mike: Yeah. We'd move and go from here to there, stay on the Green and run from the Green side down or maybe we would just deadhead down to Mineral Bottom and pick up the customers there. We got to be friends with, uh... oh god... he was famous for his tours... Lin Ottinger and his Volkswagen buses.

Tubby: He just had his 90th birthday party in Moab.

Mike: Really? Wow, he was a riot. Butch and I'd go down there and we'd be in-between trips and stuff. We'd always go see him and he'd go, "What do we got to drink mom?"

She goes, "You know what we've got. We got lemonade."

Then he goes, "And then what else?"

She goes, "Well you always got that bottle up there."

We'd be drinking lemonade and bourbon or something, you know. He'd tell us stories and we started hiring him to actually bring people to us. So people would meet in Moab at his place. Then he would shuttle them and take them on a little tour and then bring them down through, maybe 9 miles down from Potash. I don't remember the name of that canyon... a place we can hike into. We did that for a couple years and then it had to go away. He just couldn't handle the numbers. Our numbers were starting to get really large now. We were getting bigger and bigger. We were running bigger trips, and he just couldn't handle large numbers of people. I'm talking 25 plus people each trip, you know. We just hired Wilkins Transportation out of Vernal to move our people.

Tubby: Yeah, certainly the Dinosaur area.

Mike: Yep. Wilkins would come do Deso and he'd do Cataract too.

Tubby: Really?

Mike: He'd do all three for us. Yeah, we were really good friends with the Wilkins. I liked old man Wilkins. He was so funny; we had some good times together.

Tubby: What was he like? Most people in Vernal were pretty straight laced Mormon folk, yeah?

Mike: Yeah, except for Bus Hatch; he wasn't. I drank beers with Bus Hatch. We were in High School. Right after High School we were running trips up there. We were hanging out in Vernal one night and we were at one of those bars and Bus Hatch... we were just sitting there drinking having beer and he was drinking beer and he was telling us all these stories and I said, "Well, what's your name?"

He told us, "Bus Hatch."

"Are you Ted's dad?"

And he goes, "Yeah."

And I'm going, "Really? Well we're..." he doesn't know who we are, you know. We thought we'd met the... couldn't get any better than that, I mean really.

Tubby: You thought you'd just gone to the oracle.

Mike: Yeah, that it was pretty cool. I remember we grew really big. It started getting to the point where it really did matter when things didn't get done by the check list. I made these lists up and we had to check off stuff as it went in the truck. If you didn't check it off, there's probably a good chance you might not have it. We might be getting off... you know how it is... we might be getting off a Yampa trip and we'd get back to the warehouse and it's 8 at night, and we're leaving the next morning at 7am or 6am to go down Lodore, or even worse Deso in August, you know.

If someone else loaded your truck and trailer for you and they didn't check off things right, well, you'd be missing something. It's really embarrassing when you don't have everything. I mean it's great that all my food's there, but I don't have any silverware. I got all these vegetables - I got somebody else's vegetables, but I don't have any chicken or meats. Keith would go, "Aw crap!" and he'd have to hire an airplane. An airplane would fly over and then try to find our group. Someone would have to be with them to say that's our group, drop it, and hope that they find it. Do a couple flyovers and drop them in a couple different places, you know.

Tubby: That cuts into the profit margin.

Mike: That's what... that just tore me up and that's why I left. I mean I had it. I was ready for a trip, and I said, "I'm going to check it - I ain't leaving. I'm not going anywhere until I check this first." I opened up my condiment kit and all I had was pots and no silverware, no spatulas, no nothing and there's the packing list with everything checked off. Says it's on the trailer ready to go and I'm going... you know who was in charge of that? Tom Klineschnitz. [Tom eventually became owner of Adventure Bound]

Tubby: He was working in the warehouse?

Mike: He was working in the warehouse and that was his job to make sure these kits were full... the first aid, repair... you know, all your kits, including the cook kit.

Tubby: Did he come up through Adams City High as well?

Mike: Yeah, his dad was a school teacher. He was my junior high teacher - his dad. He was a good guy and Tom was a good kid - he was just young. He was one of Keith's pets, you know, teacher's pet at school. That's why...

Tubby: ...good at physics huh?

Mike: Yeah, there you go. I saw Klineschnitz and I said, "That's it."

He goes, "Well, I'll leave."

I go, "No, no, I'm leaving. I've had it". And that was it.

Tubby: When was that?

Mike: That would probably have been 1973.

Tubby: ...did you keep your shares in Adventure Bound?

Mike: No, no. I sold them and took that money and started Rocky Mountain River Expeditions.

Tubby: Sold them back to Keith?

Mike: Uh-huh, I sold them back to Keith. I believe the next year Butch, John, and Rick left too.

Tubby: Rick?

Mike: Rick Shin. He was like one of the original guys. He came up through one of the scout troops. Rick gave up the river and became our full time driver/moving guide and equipment guy. Sometimes that happens, you know. Some guys get tired of the stress of doing river trips. I'm superstitious. I don't like camping above a rapid. I definitely don't eat above a rapid - never. No cookies, no cookies above a rapid. Everyone has superstitions, especially baseball players.

Early on at Adventure Bound we started the Boatman's Hall of Fame. Every year guides would nominate boatman and then vote. I continued the practice over at Rocky Mountain River Expeditions. The Hall of Fame members from the Adventure Bound chapter were: 1971 = George Brown (deceased) and Rick Shin; 1972 = Mike Ferguson, Mike Hanley, and Butch Ziguers; 1973 = Al Bussey, John LeClair (deceased), and Jerry Shin.

Tubby: You sold your stake in Adventure Bound, so then what?

Mike: I sold out and I started Rocky Mountain River Expeditions. We just started with some equipment. I bought some pontoons from Bucks War Surplus. I called Buck and he says, "Mike, these are the worst of the worst. This is the only thing we got. I tell you what; you're going to spend more on freight than you're going to spend with me. I'm going to sell them all to you for a couple hundred bucks." We got a trailer load full.

Tubby: These were military pontoons?

Mike: Military pontoons. It might take three to make one. They were that bad with rot. With some of them everything was good and they might just have one spot, maybe in the nose. So we'd take that out and save the rubber and re-patch it...

Tubby: These were all cotton, the old cotton fabric boats?

Mike: Yeah, and we would patch them up. We patched and patched and patched. Lots of Gaco glue and everything Richard Jones had taught us. There was a boatman, Greg Young, that didn't get hired back at Adventure Bound, so I called him and he came over and started helping me. Before you know it, he brought Gary his brother over, and before you know it, the next year we had a company called Rocky Mountain River Expeditions. On some trips we needed more equipment than we had and Keith would lend us some.

Tubby: That bridge wasn't burnt.

Mike: Yeah.

Tubby: And Butch, Rick, and, Jeb stayed on at Adventure Bound?

Mike: They stayed on for another, uh, year...

Tubby: So it was kind of a trickle over to Rocky...

Mike: ...yeah, they all kind of stayed. Most of us after awhile... when you're running... Butch he'd have his crew and Jeb was on his crew, and I had my crew which included Greg Young. Each one of us had boatmen that we ran with; the boatmen we preferred to be around. Butch did the same but we also wouldn't mind taking somebody else. It all depended. People could only work some of the time; some had to go back to school early. By the end of the season basically the owners and their good friends were doing all the trips. So you do what you had to do.

We started Rocky Mountain and the whole idea was... I bought a Udisco paddle boat from the sporting goods store in Vernal, Utah; Sunset Sports I think. They sold me... it cost like a hundred bucks for that Udisco boat. The year that I quit Adventure Bound, I think it was in August, my doctor Doc Baker talked me into going up and doing the Arkansas River because he just loved that area. He had just got himself an aluminum drift boat from up in Idaho. So he was taking a drift boat and I had this boat that I bought, the Udisco. It had small valves on it and little rubber D-rings with nylon rope going through them... plastic rope going through them and there were a couple cross tubes that tied in. I bought 8 paddles, and we had good life jackets, the Mae Wests, and we ran the Arkansas. It was my first time in a paddle boat. The trip was Doc's two kids, Greg Young, his wife Bernie, my brother Jeff, and me. Doc was running his single ended dory boat. We got to Three Points Rapid and he flips. He took the wrong read on it and he went left where you're not supposed to go. He took that thing over the big ole hole and it just went like that and tumbled down.

Tubby: Three points? I don't know the Arkansas. Is that the Texas Creek section?

Mike: Yeah, there you go. Good one.



Paddle boat team on the Arkansas River circa 1973



Doc Baker in a ripple on the Arkansas River circa 1972

Tubby: So you're below Browns Canyon?

Mike: Yeah, yeah the lower half - Texas Creek to Cotopaxi. There was nobody running there; we were the only ones.

Tubby: Was Browns Canyon busy by that time?

Mike: No, no. I knew about Browns Canyon. A friend of mine went fly fishing there and he goes, "You don't want to go there. You can't get a boat down through there - dah-de-dah-de-dah. It's too mean for a boat. You don't want... it's just too rocky and really dangerous." You know, it was a school teacher talking and so you really don't know what you can do. Plus, I knew I didn't want to run the Royal Gorge either.

Tubby: So we have an upside down dory at...

Mike: ...and a paddleboat. We ran on the center-right and we hit another hole. Greg and I were in the back paddling and both he and I... the whole back end was just sucked completely under. We popped up in the water and saw Bernie with the kids and my brother, who was also on the trip, trying to land. It is a fast moving creek. It's not very deep but it's fast. We were trying to catch up and were getting hit by boulders and stuff. It's just not a friendly river to be out in. It's not very deep, big ole gashes in your legs and so forth. Anyways we finally catch up with the paddle boat, and when we were landing it, those D-rings started going "poom-pop-pop-pop-poom- poom- poom." (laughter) They were just all popping off! Also it needed some air and all we had is this little plastic pump. It's got this little hole and these little plastic valves. We're just going, "Man this isn't right!" So we paddled across the river to Doc's boat. He had managed to stay with it and using the rope was able to corral her in. He was on the side of the river by the railroad tracks. We flipped him back up and floated down to Cotopaxi. After that the Arkansas wasn't that big of a deal but it was fun.

That's how we started paddle boating. That opened it all up because suddenly, you know, the bigger boats, the oars and stuff, you're using 12-foot oars and they're just too heavy. Some men can't even lift a 12-foot wood oar to row, let alone a petite female. So the paddleboats gave an avenue to hire girls.

Tubby: Start running the paddle...

Mike: ...running the paddleboats and cargo boat occasionally. Yeah, with cargo boats mixed in - kind of divided it up that way. That's how we did it at Rocky Mountain. We'd get the basic boat. The next year we bypassed Sunset Sports in Vernal and went directly to a supplier, a company out of Salt Lake, and we started buying directly from them. I think at that time we ordered 20 boats for under a hundred bucks a piece. We had the boats and then we started looking for boatmen; I knew this guy and that guy. Greg knew this guy and that guy- people from Westminster High School, Radium High School, Thornton High School... all the people from schools in the old Skyline League. I don't know what it was but that's where our nucleus of boatmen started coming from. East High School, George Washington... those people that came on rivers with us, they wanted to be boatmen also. Suddenly we could hire the girls too. That's how Rocky Mountain got started. We were buying these Udisco boats. We would get them in and tear them apart; pull all the valves and put Bridgeport brass valves in, glue on our own D-rings, and replace the plastic ropes. We'd have the D's sewn and we'd glue them on tight. All this was done during our training sessions for the guides. They needed to know these skills. What Richard taught me I was teaching them so they would know how to patch their boat when they hit a rock. At night they'd have their boat upside down on the bank and they'd be out there buffing it... they knew how to patch it. They wouldn't need me to do it. That was all part of the program.

We actually had a couple mock trips where we'd just camp out in back of our warehouse in Commerce City. We'd make river meals and show guides how to cook so they knew everything before we even got to the river. Similar to what I had done in Scouts.

Tubby: So you did a virtual trip in Commerce City before you went out to the river?

Mike: Right. We joked about running from Pepper Packing down to our warehouse which was only about... you can see the Platte River from where our warehouse was. It was funny; we had our own little joke about that.

Tubby: So this would have been '74?

Mike: Yep. About when the BLM started closing the door, putting limits...

Tubby: ...yeah, right about then use limits came in. Almost everywhere: Deso, Westwater, Dinosaur...

Mike: ...yeah they all started doing that. Plus the State of Utah suddenly comes out and says, "Whoa, you guys need a license. You don't need it while you're in Colorado but the minute you get into Whirlpool Canyon and about half way to Jones Hole, you need one right then. You'll need one when you get off the river. That's where you'll need one!" That was way back in '71 or '72. Utah also began requiring a trip leader had to be at least 21 years of age. That was me - I'm a year older than Butch and John LeClair, so suddenly I'm a trip leader. I'm more valuable. Trip leaders also had to have better first aid certification, and I had that through scouting. We also had to pass a test on the Utah boating regulations to get licensed. Since one of the Adventure Bound owners worked at the Colorado Division of Parks, he was able to talk to the state parks reps in Utah and get them to let guys over here take the test in Colorado.

So we got to do our test in Denver. At that time the Division of Parks and Wildlife used to run trips. They had their own equipment. The sheriff's department up in Craig, they had their own equipment and also ran trips.

Another interesting story... later on we became members of the... I guess we were the Moffat County posse. We went and picked up a dead body one day. A couple was hiking Cross Mountain and... that was something. Butch was there. I was there. A couple other guys... Jeb was there. The sheriff goes, "You know, you're going to get there and it's going to smell. It's the worst thing you'll ever smell. No one's going to blame you if you happen to, you know, lose your lunch."

Tubby: You just went in to help carry a body bag out?

Mike: Yeah, there you go. The coroner and the sheriff were there.

Tubby: This guy had died from a fall?

Mike: Yeah, what they think happened was probably the girl fell and he went in to save her. They both drowned.

Tubby: Oh, they actually went into the river.

Mike: Yep. He was like really huge. That body took in a lot of water so he was pretty heavy. We had to hold him... I remember the skin. It just comes right off to the bone - it just gets you. We didn't have rubber gloves or anything. Grabbing him with our bare hands and we're trying not to lose it. I tell you what, that next trip I went on, my life jacket was on so tight. That was the only time I've ever had to deal with a drowned person.

Tubby: So where was the body at?

Mike: It was right above Deerlodge. They wanted to get it out of there because somebody, of course, was coming, and they wanted to get it out of there quickly. So they deputized us as part of the posse and we went down there and got that body out. We put it in our truck and took it over to the mortuary in Craig. After that we were deputized. I think by doing that it basically kind of changed the atmosphere for everybody - for me it did. It made me a little more responsible.

Tubby: Well, you were growing up too.

Mike: Yeah, made you kind of look... maybe we could do a little better here and there, you know. We shouldn't be having all these parties all the time...

Tubby: So how did Rocky Mountain expand? You were the principle?

Mike: Yep.

Tubby: Did you have a few partners at the very start?

Mike: I had the two Young brothers, Greg and Gary. Gary was fresh out of the Navy and had little river experience. This is where I made the biggest business mistake of my life. If I could ever change it, I would. Before we started RMRE we ran one year commercially under my name to retain user days. What I did was as we started up the first season, I said, "We're going to work on all this equipment. I want everybody to keep track of all your hours and if you have to go buy a meal for us at lunch time, then you buy it, and if it's the next day maybe someone else buys it so I'm not paying for everything." I made them pay for stuff. "If I send you to the store to go get something and if it's under ten bucks, you pay for it." They had to throw some hours at it and some cash. The two brothers signed up for it and come October we sat down. We'd run a lot of people that summer. I was working full time at Timpie Trailers in the parts department.

We'd get off work on Friday night, and Saturday morning we were at Westwater. Sunday night we were driving home and back to work on Monday morning. We were in our twenties, you know - so you do it. We'd use vacation time to run the multi-day trips. I made sure that I was on most of the trips, and I also explored the upper Colorado. I was the guy who actually started calling the put-in there Pumphouse. We found out about the Dolores from another friend of mine. So I started putting these other trips together and then added the North Platte River.

Tubby: So your base trip was the Arkansas? That was your bread and butter?

Mike: We started on the Arkansas with a warehouse in Canyon City. We also had a warehouse in New Castle, Colorado. One day trips out of Glenwood Springs on the Colorado River and one day trips out of Canyon City on the Arkansas River.

Tubby: So you were running from Grizzly Creek down?

Mike: Yeah, from Grizzly Creek down. They were paddle and oar boat trips. Paddle boat trips were a new river thing since most outfitters ran only oar boat trips. It took a while to catch on but once it did, it took off. Greg headed up one operation and Gary had the other. For the multi-day trips... I always did the multi-day trips, the bigger trips. Being a sly fox, I was able to talk my boss at Timpie into going on a trip. I knew if I could get him excited, then he'd give me more vacation dates because I was taking him down the river. So that way I'd get an extra trip in here and there.

When it came to getting commercial BLM permits, we basically came out with 4 trips down Westwater Canyon and 4 trips down Desolation/Gray Canyons. That was our allotment.

Tubby: That was it?

Mike: That was it. Not everybody got treated fairly, but that's the cards we were dealt. We didn't know any better. We didn't know what to do because everybody else was in the same situation. The big guys got more and the little guys got less. That's how it worked and there was a bunch of them.

Tubby: So the mistake you made was?

Mike: It was with Greg and Gary Young. I had, I suppose, 60 or 70 percent of the hours and the money invested into the company and those two only had 30%. But I came up with a way where I said, "You know, if I start this at 70%, you guys are going to be working for me and I think we need to be a team. I'm a team player, so I kept 49% interest and I sold them 51%.

Tubby: Whoops.

Mike: Whoops is right. Suddenly I'm getting out-voted.

Tubby: Sure - 51% and two to one.

Mike: I'm getting out voted on stuff I would never do. Suddenly they're doing everything... the shit that went on, you just went... you know. I was pretty, well straight laced. I drank my share of beer, but I really wasn't into pot or any of that stuff but it didn't take long before that would change. These guys, boatman and boatwoman, were doing it behind my back. Hell, I didn't know it. Once it all hit, I just went, "What?" and at the same time I was going thru a divorce. I was staying with a couple boatman Steve Schutz and Dennis Schell. "Schutzie" owned the house and his buddy Joel Sidell were full-time policeman in Thornton, Colorado but would guide on the weekends. These guys helped me when I was down and out. Joel helped me stay upright during these times. It seemed everything was collapsing; I lost my wife, my house, my land, and Rocky Mountain River Expeditions. I had to leave - I left again.

Tubby: Again and that was in '76 or thereabouts?

Mike: '77, maybe '78 - somewhere in there.

Tubby: Tell me about the Dolores. How'd you learn about it? That was an important trip for Rocky Mountain, yes?

Mike: Yes it was. It was an important... it was through my ability to sell stuff. I was a really good salesman. I was selling equipment, glue, oars, and life jackets on the side. I had my own little company called Colorado Oar House. This is where I got to meet Hank Toll that was running down there all the time. He'd been down the Dolores. He worked at the Denver Federal Center. He was also a lacrosse referee so I knew him a little bit through that. Anyway he told me basically all I needed to know, where to put-on and where to take-off. Everything else was just, "You're going to learn it on the way." He said, "There's one rapid called Snaggletooth and that's the only thing you really got to worry about. Everything else, if you've been running up on the Arkansas and all the rivers you've been on, you have nothing to worry about."

"Okay." I replied. We went up there in April, snow and everything, but ran the trip anyway and it was beautiful.

Tubby: Everybody went - you and the Youngs?

Mike: Yeah and all of our boatmen.

Tubby: And Butch?

Mike: Let's see. Butch wasn't there the first year, he was still working for AB.

Tubby: Did you take a bunch of Udisco paddle-boats?

Mike: Yep, Udisco paddle and oar boats.



Gary Young, Mike Ferguson, Darcel Neal, and Greg Young on the Dolores River, 1975

Tubby: Or as I used to say, U-death-Co.

Mike: Yeah, I know. You know another strange thing about it is, as we got older and equipped with better boats, clients were mad because they didn't think their ride was as good.

Tubby: Because you weren't like snaking through there. (laughter)

Mike: Okay, okay, now I've heard it all. Really! At the end of the trip, "You know Mike, I had a great time but man those other boats are a lot better ride."

I replied, "But these are a lot safer; these have like real rubber, you know." We were talking about Campways boats – we'd stepped up to the Shoshone model for paddle boats. That was the next move up.

Tubby: The Udisco's, at one point you were buying a bunch of those at the start of the season and selling them at the end, weren't you?

Mike: Right, that was my other angle. Selling them and then used that money to buy brochures.

Tubby: You were selling them for more than you paid for them at the end of the year, right?

Mike: Yeah, yeah. That's after using them for the whole summer.

Tubby: I was one of the guys that bought one of those.

Mike: Really? Okaaaay!

Tubby: It was back when we were working together at Adrift that you told me how you turned those boats each year, "Oh, yeah, we'd buy those for a hundred and sell them for two hundred."

I was like, "Ouch! That kind of hurts my pocket-book!"

Mike: Yeah well, there were the new valves, D-rings, and all that we put into them; plus the Gaco paint.

Tubby: Oh, OK!

Mike: That was already done for, but I didn't have to pay for it because that was part of the training. I mean, I had local rafters paying me to teach them how to patch boats. After our boatmen... okay, people they don't know how to patch. So I was teaching locals in Denver how to patch boats - they'd come to my two-day class.

Tubby: Twenty bucks! Come on over.

Mike: There you go. Yeah and give them lunch.

Tubby: So when you did the Dolores, where'd you put in? Where'd you... did you do the whole thing?

Mike: We went up to Bradfield Ranch. It was just like Westwater Ranch all over again. We went up there and they were so nice to us - the Bradfields. They said, "Just go down here. We'd prefer you to put on right down there. That spot right there, that's the best... there's no rocks or anything. That's a good place for you guys to put on.

When you come back if we're not around, over there is where you guys can camp. I want you guys to park up here though because if the water gets high, then your cars will be up on dry ground."

Tubby: Their house was right next to the road...

Mike: ...yeah, and right by the bridge.

Tubby: That house is gone now.

Mike: Yeah, well, they used to rent that house to us. They moved somewhere and rented the house to us. So suddenly that was our warehouse and put-in. We had the whole thing sewed up right there. It was just hard to get people from Denver to go all the way over there. You know, it's a long hike from Denver and we didn't have a building in Cortez or Durango to draw in from that crowd like others that were from there. Guys like Preston Ellsworth, he was running trips there on the Animas and a couple other guys. They started coming over and running the Dolores. But we were the first to do it commercially.

Tubby: So that first trip went how far?

Mike: We went all the way down to Bedrock. We did a couple more trips, and then we did the Wild and Scenic River Study trip where we took all the government agencies down. They all came together as one group. It was a big group. We took every boat we owned, and we had to hire a couple of other guides from other companies to come with their boats to have enough gear for all those people because it got really large. It was just amazing. I mean the organizer, he gave spots to everyone that wanted them. BLM... I didn't know all the different government agencies. I tell you what; there were more clipboards than I've ever seen. Everyone had a clipboard. The first hour everybody held on to them. The second hour some of them were laying around here and there. By the time we launched, I don't know what happened to them.

Man, by the second day everyone was there for the river trip. At the end there was like a half dozen or so of them that really wanted to go down and see that lower section from Gateway to Dewey Bridge, so I said, "Okay, we'll go."

We took them down through there and that was the first time anybody had run a paddleboat trip through there. I went first at Stateline Rapid and landed below. Chris in the paddleboat was second with two oar boats behind her. One guy fell out, and she was able to get him back in before she had to miss this one big hole at the end.

The paddle captain was Chris Raffin; I considered her my best boatman. She died a couple of years later of brain cancer. I nicknamed her Chicken Raper because she... everybody had the flannel Coleman sleeping bags at first, but you froze your ass off in those. She bought one of those military surplus down bags. You know, we all had them, but she bought one and didn't know about them. She slept in it and got out one morning and came to camp. I had this strict rule for getting up at 6:30. You had fifteen minutes to get your tent down, your bags rolled up, your clothes on, and be ready to work in the kitchen. Your bag was at the boat. You didn't wait for it to dry off or anything, you rolled it up. Let's go! That was the rule. Here she comes, she had chicken feathers all... she had down feathers everywhere. They were in her hair, all over her clothes - stuck to her everywhere! She looked like she'd raped a chicken, so that's why I named her Chicken Raper. Dennis Schell told the story recently in a Rig To Flip video. I just saw it a couple weeks ago. Dennis and Chris... they were a river romance... got married. She was the first girl to ever run a paddleboat through Gateway Canyon.

Tubby: So Chicken Raper is the rapid they call Stateline now?

Mike: Yes. I always liked that stretch. It's too bad it just didn't last longer. It was kind of cool how you go into it and then you see that nice canyon wall where it has that crack. Have you ever seen that before? It has a nice crack in the wall and you go, "Oh, man." And it's starting to get narrow. You're starting to get excited, you know. You gotta go over a diversion dam which kind of gets your attention, but it's not any harder than the diversion dam on Desolation. We used to run that one and go all the way to the state park to pull out.

Tubby: Green River State Park?

Mike: Yep. So we had to go through that diversion dam. When we got down to Chicken Raper, it got my attention. I took a look at it, but the hole down below it... man, the left hand side... ohh, that's nasty! There's a route there, a left hand route, but I'd never take it. I mean, it's just too ugly! Everything's fine while you're in the boat but once you're out of the boat is where you can get hurt. I always look at a rapid that way. I always look at it and think if my customers... it's one thing if you're by yourself, but if you have customers, then you look at all your customers. If you have older people on your boat, you're not going to take that route. You're going to take the safest route you can. You can get them a little wet but not a lot wet, you know. You're not going to go for every hole that's in the river. You'll go around some when they're questionable. So, I stayed with Rocky Mountain for a couple more years. Then I left them.

Tubby: Dennis Schell was a Rocky Mountain boatman? Or was he at Adventure Bound as well?

Mike: Actually I met Dennis at Timphe Trailers. When I worked at Timphe he was working out in the shop. D-niner is Dennis's nickname because he just loved running caterpillars. That is what he really liked to do, construction. But during the winter there's not much construction work so he took on this Timphe job.



Dennis Schell and Mike Ferguson run Snaggle Tooth on the Dolores River in 1974

He eventually became a boatman and salesman for me at Rocky Mountain. He worked his way up the ladder through the chain there.

Tubby: Where'd he meet Greg Yeager at?

Mike: Greg Yeager called me one day at Rocky Mountain and said, "I heard about this trip."

I go, "Man, I'm already full." It was training trip.

He says, "I don't want to miss it."

I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, if you pay for the trip, I'll let you go and if I like you, I'll give you your money back." I gave him his money back.

Tubby: Of course you did! (laughter)

Mike: I'm always dealing in something like that. I was a wheeler dealer back then. People thought I could run for Mayor or something, you know. I did, however, secure a position as Vice President and Colorado Director of the Western River Guides Association. I signed up a lot of guides and outfitters – grew the membership. I also designed the entire vendors space at the annual meeting. This was a money maker that allowed WRGA some flexibility and paid for expenses.

Tubby: So then Yeager was a Rocky Mountain boatman?

Mike: Yep, he was a Rocky Mountain boatman. He had a log business that he ran out of Grand Lake in the winter. After I left Rocky Mountain, another guy came along named Kenny Delmain and he bought the Young brothers out, bought the whole company. D-niner worked for him. A bunch of the boatmen stayed and worked for him. He was trying to... he looked at the river business kind of like Marshall Schield looked at it: a good way to profit if they could turn the thing over... to sell the company, buy this thing, and keep our numbers up. He didn't really care about the boatman or the customers - just run'em, run'em, run'em. They just were money people. Unfortunately, he passed away. He had some kind of heart attack and died. That's why Rocky Mountain stopped.

So Dennis and Greg started their own little river company called Rainbows and Rivers. You know, same old thing; it's hard to get it up and running... to get another company going. One day they called me. I was up in Carbondale, Colorado by then. Dennis called me and started asking about where I got all my equipment from.

I said to myself, "Okay, I'll help them out."

Before you know it, they have a river equipment company going, Downriver Equipment in Wheatridge, Colorado. They started Downriver with some of my equipment contacts, not to mention some of my designs. They started selling them, one order at a time and it didn't take long before it was multi orders. They got my old friend Doc Baker, the guy we took down the Arkansas River, to invest and maybe others.

Tubby: The guy with the dory?

Mike: ...with the dory. Yeah, see back in the day we couldn't go on a river trip without having a doc on the trip. So he would go, gladly go.

He was always on those high school trips. They'd always bring a doctor along, or somebody who knew something more than us. Doctor John Baker, he passed away a few years ago. He loved the river and canyons.

In 2014 Dennis called me and said let's do an alumni reunion of RMRE Boatman since it would be 40 years since it started. He went all out with replicas of old river gear, his casket raft that everyone signed. We sat around the fire and sang a ton of river songs and told all the stories. We held it in Kremmling, Colorado and have been doing every two years since.

So, I'd moved on from Rocky Mountain Expeditions and one day one of my dear friends from the Adventure Bound and Rocky Mountain days, Ralph Rupp, calls up and says, "You know, Mike, I saw an ad in the paper, Denver paper."

I go, "Yeah."

He goes, "Well, listen to this... we're looking for somebody to start a river program; a boatman that has the ability to sell trips and put equipment together. We're taking applications for a river director."

I go, "Yeah. Where's this at?"

He goes, "City of Westminster."

I go, "Really? Oh, okay."

So I go over to the City of Westminster. Fill out the application and a couple weeks go by and I get a phone call, "You got the job."

"No kidding!" Okay, now I have another one to put together.

Tubby: So when was that? Was this before or after Wild Water West? Before Marshall Shield?



Westminster rafting system circa 1977

Mike: That was late 70's, before Marshall. That's when I went to the City of Westminster and started a river program for them.

Tubby: So tell me about the North Platte River. That was Rocky Mountain's deal as well wasn't it?

Mike: Uh huh.

Tubby: There wasn't anybody else running up there was there?

Mike: Well, there was Bill Alexander from um... Wilderness Aware... something like that. I met Bill at the boat and travel show in Denver. We'd have a booth down there every year. It was a Tuesday through Saturday in January or February. Most the people came to look at the...

Tubby: ...RVs and stuff.

Mike: Yeah, plus fishing gear and guides. We were right there in the heart of it. We had a good location, and we sold a lot of trips there. People would come and they'd sign up for a free trip, so suddenly we're building what - a data base.

Tubby: People to send brochures to.

Mike: There you go! Yeah. So we did that and we met Bill's crew over at the stockyard section which had its special aroma. We were talking to them and they were telling stories about the North Platte. I go, "We've run the South Platte before down through Greeley for the Audubon Society (that was one of Keith Count's deals)."

Bill would say the North Platte is where it's at. He tells us about it, and I give them credit - they were the first ones to go there commercially, the first company to actually run trips there. They named OFR [Oh F'ing Rapid]; the politically correct name is Narrow Falls Rapid. A couple of the other ones were already named after a nearby side canyon or whatever, like the canyon itself. Windy Gap Rapids, I think was one of those. I don't remember all the rest of them. But there was like a half dozen good rapids.

Tubby: One up there is called Tootsie Roll.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. There you go. It's a technical river. It's even smaller than the Arkansas, very technical. The paddle boats must have it together or they'd be in a whole bunch of trouble. We started running there and soon we were burning folks through; building a bunch of numbers through there. I think clients got tired of running the Gore Range, Upper Colorado, and that's an area where we were also running a bunch of trips. We were pretty much the first big outfitter to come in there. So, we had another place to go and take our repeat customers. People loved going there since it was close to Denver.

Actually to be honest with you, Butch and I, in between all these companies, we had our own little company which ran dory trips and it was called Canyon Dories. He had a dory and I had a dory. We were the first ones to run dorries down through the North Platte. You know, the rivers that are not dam controlled, you don't know what the flow's going to be.

Your gut tells you that the third week of June should be pretty good water, but if it remains cold, it might not be very good; you know what I mean? One time good water wasn't there yet and we ran it pretty low, but we made it. I put a dent in my boat but we made it. We'd run a three day trip through there. We went all the way down to near Encampment, Wyoming.

Tubby: When did you get your dory?

Mike: My first 13' dory Perry Johnson welded only the sides and bottom since I couldn't afford any more than that. I sold that boat to Reno Baldwin up in Glacier. My second dory was the Cactus Rose that Perry welded. I did design her using Butch's ripple as a basic template. I added double ends and also more lift for big waves. It took Perry 40 hours to weld the hatches and boat. I paid part up front and worked with Perry until the bill was paid. After that if the Cactus Rose needed any modifications or repairs, Perry Johnson did them.

Tubby: How did you decide you wanted to build and row a dory?

Mike: Because of Doc. Doc Baker had that one dory, the drift boat he took down the Arkansas. From that day on I was hooked. I was tied in with Timp trailer and they also made van bodies, you know like reefer trailers that were designed to keep food cold. So they had spray on insulating foam. You'd just spray it on like you do with paint. You'd spray on the foam and there was a machine that would shave it down so you could attach a piece of PVC paneling to make the surface wipeable for cleaning. The trucks were used to haul cold food around for daily delivery... produce, meat, whatever needed to stay cold. So Doc had his boat foamed to increase its flotation not realizing that the foam that they sprayed in there was the wrong foam. They sprayed it with foam that absorbs water.

Tubby: Aw, geez.



Mike: When they got done, he said, "I got my boat sprayed down with foam... it's never going sink."

I'm going, "But man, with all that foam inside you only got this one little hatch in the front and that's it."

He replies, "That's all I need. We go on a big trip and I always carry my stuff. You've got all the food so I just need a little place for my cooler up front. Put it right there."

I go, "Okay."

The more times we used it the heavier the boat got. Sooner or later it just got to be too heavy so he brought it by to me one day and he goes, "Mike how much will you give me for that?"

"I don't know, Doc. What'll you let me have it for?"

"You got a hundred dollars?"

"I got a hundred dollars."

"I'll let you have it for a hundred dollars." So I bought the boat for a hundred dollars. A couple weeks later Butch comes to town and says, "Hey, where'd you get that at?"

"I got it from Doc."

"Yeah, how much you want for it?"

I say, "Oh, a couple hundred." (laughter) Butch countered with \$175 and a fiberglass kayak he built from the molds at Plasticrafts in Denver. He didn't tell me that he put too much glass and resin on one side. It was impossible to keep that kayak upright.

Tubby: So the Ripple was Doc's old boat?

Mike: Yes, it was single ended and Butch added the double end to it.

Tubby: Did Butch do the welding to make the double end or was it Perry Johnson?

Mike: Butch made a wood template and Perry welded it.

Tubby: I always thought Butch had welded that boat.

Mike: Nope. Perry did all our aluminum welding. To this day he's still doing all the welding for Downriver Equipment - makes all their aluminum boxes.

Tubby: Really?

Mike: All their aluminum that gets welded, he welds it.

Mike: You know Chuck and Judy right - the Nichols?

Tubby: I've met them, don't really know them.

Mike: Judy came along the same time as Chris Raffin was working for me at Rocky Mountain. She ended up being a really good guide too.

Tubby: They're in Moab?

Mike: Yep, they run bicycle trips now, all over the world. She started out with us. I think she ran for a couple years. You know, it's really weird, you're dealing with brothers, but they're my partners. The Youngs come up with an idea where... I got an invite to go down the Grand Canyon and I went during Rocky Mountain's spring training. So they wanted to be able to go somewhere too.

So later on that year Greg went up to Wyoming and Montana and tried to run as many of those rivers as he could find, trying to find new places to take people commercially. Then Gary decided he wanted to go to Alaska and do a Tatshenshini trip up there. He got some guys together and Judy went on that trip because they were dating. She really liked that; she liked that more than having to do a one day here or a two-three-four day trip there. She liked those longer trips, seemed to offer a little bit more solitude. After awhile Rocky Mountain became known for partying. They were the guys you wanted to go down with to party versus going with Hatch or Western. That's what was going on at Rocky Mountain. That wasn't Judy so she went on her own and really just kind of disappeared - went off the chart. Then she met Chuck and they started doing their own trips, doing their own thing. I'd see them on the Yampa or down in Desolation. I'd see them now and then on the river but they were doing the bicycle thing too. They had a little shop in Moab that they were running trips... our timing was always off because I'd stop in their shop and look for them but they were seldom there.

Tubby: They were in Baja.

Mike: Right.

Tubby: Let's see. We were at Westminster Rafting. You went over there and that seemed to only last a couple of years before you went to Wild Water West.

Mike: Yeah. Let's see, I think I put it together one year and then the next year... maybe I was there for two years 'cause I did put the new boats together. That's right. I was there for two years. Then the third year I talked John LeClair into taking over the program. The City of Westminster let me put together some of the best equipment using new designs. Several boatman including Butch Ziguers, Ralph Rupp, and Alan Bussey from AB and RMRE helped with the equipment and rowed the cargo boats.

Other RMRE paddle guides Chris Zigurs, Terri McDonald, Tierney Williams, and Julie Stagg put together a new river menu, tons of standardized forms, and a colored brochure. We ran rivers under the educational permits, but at the Desolation-Grey put-in the BLM fined us 50 bucks for trespassing because we looked like a professional outfitter. Things were getting weird - time to move on to Wild Water West Inc.

Marshall Shield from Adrift (it was Wild Water West then) made me an offer. The only reason he knew me, I didn't even know he lived in Glenwood Springs, is because I was working with his partner Jim Temple about getting on the water in Dinosaur in 1978 for our dory trips (Canyon Dories). He said yes he would do it but we had to have a Wild Water West boatman with us. So that's when Ed Hasse went down with us as the cargo boatman. He had to be there to make our trip copasetic with the park service. We had to put Wild Water West placards on our dories to be legal. Marshall got wind of it and then out of nowhere I got a phone call from him. He said that he wanted to know if I would be interested in running more dory trips and I said, "Yeah, Yeah I would."

So I went to meet with him. He lived right over on the golf course at West Bank here in the Roaring Fork Valley. So I met with him and he wouldn't tell me the whole deal, the whole truth. Our discussion ended with him saying "Well, you know, I tell you what, why don't we go see my attorney in Denver and then we can go from there."

"Okay."

So he furnishes me with a truck and I drive over to Denver. He meets me at the attorney's office and he has me sit outside. I'm sitting there and pretty soon here comes Jim Temple out of the room.

Tubby: Not happy, I suspect.

Mike: Un- huh. So I ask, "What's going on?"

He replies, "Are you getting involved with this guy?"

I go, "We're going to run more dory trips."

He advises, "Just watch your shorts." (laughter)

Tubby: That sounds like Jim.

Mike: Like I said, he was mad. I go, "What do you want me to do? We want to run more dory trips. That's what we want to do."

He says, "Well, I'll talk to you later."

I say, "Oh, okay." So I'm sitting there. Pretty soon he leaves and I go in and meet the lawyer.

I'm talking to Marshall's lawyer, and he's asking me about insurance and liability. "Also I heard you have good knowledge about river equipment."

I say, "Yes."

And then Marshall goes, "Well, here's the list. I need you to go over to Jim's house and pick all this up and bring it back. He's got a trailer there loaded up with stuff and I need you to pick all that up and bring it back up to Glenwood."

"Okay."

I'm not hired yet but I did it. I went over to Temple's house and he was just... you know, you've been on the river enough to know how it went, "Those are my oars." All the new stuff was his and all the old stuff was Marshall's.

I let it lay that way. I didn't know what was his or not. I was going to go with what he told me, "Jim, I'm just driving a truck and trailer here. I just came to meet the lawyer - that's all."

"It sounds about right." He goes, "I believe you. I believe you."

Tubby: Did you know Jim before that?

Mike: Yeah.

Tubby: You'd met him on the North Platte?

Mike: Well, yeah. He'd bought some goods from me. He'd bought, you know, glues and that kind of stuff from the Colorado Oar House.

Tubby: You know you sent me over there too. I drove a trailer down from Glenwood to get a load of gear Jim's house.

Mike: Oh, really.

Tubby: Somehow there was more stuff to pickup. It was the same thing. Jim told me, "Those are your life jackets over there." They were all the old wasted kapoks, you know, they'd get hard.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. Sinkers !!!

Tubby: I looked at Jim and said, "Well, you know, if I just take all these back, it's not going look so good on me, Jim."

And he goes, "Ahh, okay, grab some of those." It was that kind of stuff.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. I brought one trailer back and before you know it Marshall had me run a training trip, and I think we're going down Cataract. Myke Hughes shows up and I meet him.

Tubby: ...I was there too. It was the Yampa.

Mike: Yampa! That's right! We were in Split Mountain Campground meeting at the take-out. I remember meeting Myke Hughes at Split Mountain Campground. We were going down the Yampa.

Tubby: I met you and Myke that same day. That was the first time...

Mike: ...yeah, the deal was that Myke signed up a bunch of trainee boatmen, and it turned out that a lot of people that went on that trip didn't go on the trip to be a boatman. They just went on that trip because it was cheap. That's when I realized that... I learned that... if I did cheap training trips and especially now that the word's out, everyone was going to want to come. So I needed to charge the regular rate and if they make it, you give it back to them. But eh, it wasn't my money.

Tubby: Yeah, that was my second year with Wild Water West. I was the only returning boatman on that trip.

Mike: Yep, you and Steve, right?

Tubby: Uhh, Steve?

Mike: Haase.

Tubby: No, he was one of the trainees. Ed Hasse had signed up a bunch of people from Snowbird but didn't make the trip. Everybody mixes up Ed and Steve's last names.

Mike: I had met Ed the year before because he was our cargo boatman on that Lodore dory trip.

Tubby: Rich Bullough, Jack Wood, and Steve Haase all got hired off that trip.

Mike: Yeah, I keep in contact with Richard. Yeah, it sounds like he's doing great. He's sure proud of his kid, Clark. He is like the chief of the health department in Park City, has a PHD.

Tubby: I worked one season with you at Wild Water West. I guess it was just one. Then I had to go to school in the summer and didn't come back. So how did the rest of the Wild Water West/Adrift Adventures stuff play out? In other words, how did Myke end up with Cataract and the Tierney's with Dinosaur? Why did Marshall decide he wanted out - all that?

Mike: Well, it all started with... Marshall's dad invented this – it's called a Schield Bantam. It was basically an excavator, like a backhoe. With a regular backhoe all you could do is move a little bit here and a little bit there but you can't go all the way around. Well, Marshall's dad and his brother designed an excavator that could go all the way around and they patented it. That's how they made all their money because they sold that design to like one of the bigger companies, Caterpillar or something. So that's how they got all their money and that's how Marshall got his money.

Tubby: But he was a stockbroker wasn't he?

Mike: Yeah, but he got his start up from his dad, you know. His dad kind of gave him money to put into the stock market and so forth. He was into that penny stock market, you know the little oil things, oil shale things, and the oil exploration deals, selling deals to investors. He thought it would be a neat deal if he could do one for recreation... get outside people to invest in a recreation company. I think he must have gone on a trip with Jim Temple and got hooked on the sport. He then wanted to create something bigger, wanted something with multiday trips and multiple canyons. So after he talked with me, I said, "Well, I'll talk to Butch." I talked to Butch and met with him and so forth. We came into Wild Water West with our dories and our equipment in exchange for stock in the company. Marshall named me Vice President and Butch the Director of Operations. Then we decided that we needed to have a new name because Wild Water West is at the end of the alphabet and I'm a believer at being at the beginning of the alphabet. This is because when people start looking at trips... I've sold enough trips and been at enough trade shows... I always asked, "Did you start at the bottom or at the top of the list?" As a boatman on trips I'd ask people, "How'd you find us? Started at the top didn't you?"

"Yeah, you guys were at the top of the listing so I just called you guys."

Tubby: Adventure Bound.

Mike: Yep, so same thing with Adrift Adventures. Butch came up with the name, that's who thought of it. We got Dennis Schell and Alan Bussey involved selling trips out of Denver. They would go to the sport shows, do our group marketing, and so forth. We hired John LeClaire to be in charge of publication, and he came up with Adrift's seven colored brochure.

We were putting together a company that was going to be year round oriented. Marshall liked the dories because it was a different deal from anything else he had going on. All he had was rubber. He liked the idea that we ran a lot of rivers; he wanted variety. The boats at Adrift were every make and size. You had Green River rigs, Maravia, Campways, and a hodgepodge of equipment. Butch and I limped along the first year but at the end of the season, I sold everything! All new equipment was coming our way! New Avon boats, aluminum frames, new coolers, trailers, trucks and vans. Butch, LeClaire and I designed a new 18' x 5' double ended aluminum dory and built four total. The amount of work was amazing, but with the help of my friends and guides, it all came together.

One day Marshall called me into the office and he said, "I want you to read this article."

So I started reading and I'm wondering, "Where's this at?" I went back to him and asked, "Where's this at? It says Los Angeles - over in California?"

And he's going, "No, it's in Chile!"

I go, "South America?"

He said, "Yes, South America."

I go, "Oh, okay. Yeah, alright; we're going to Chile!"

It just happened that Butch's sister's husband was from Chile. He still had contacts there and most importantly his uncle worked for United Airlines in the freight department. So we took our worst three boats and shipped them down. It should have been our best boats, but we shipped our worst three boats. We decided to build our frames down there. We built boxes to ship the boats in, packaged up our oars, food boxes, and shipped it all to Santiago, to Butch's brother-in-law's best friend who happened to be a diplomat. He had diplomat plates on his car. Butch and Myke Hughes' partner John Johnson, who I nicknamed the Joker, went down early. Hughes was involved because he had brought user days over from other rivers to become a share holder in Adrift.

Tubby: Via Glacier Rafting?

Mike: Yeah, there you go. So he brought those user days in to get into Adrift Adventures... and John Johnson was his partner.

Tubby: He brought days from the Owyhee River didn't he?

Mike: Yeah, and the Grande Ronde River - that's how he got in. We put together this trip to go down there and we had all the pieces. We just needed clients so we offered a deal where... I said, "Why don't we take some boatmen?"

Marshall replied, "Well, I can't afford to take all boatmen. I need somebody to help pay for this thing."

"Well, what happens if we just charge them half price and let them make payments on a discounted rate? Will just take it out of their check." I said.

He goes, "Oh, I'll do that."

So I say, "Okay, I'll ask around." And pretty soon I got some takers. Jeb Stuart came along and he brought some clients so he got a little discount. All the boatmen that went got a discount. I think we were the second Americans to run it. At first we were dragging the boats - the water was low.

Tubby: So you, Butch, and Hughes were the three...

Mike: ...Hughes, yeah and John Johnson.

Tubby: You were the three primary boatmen?

Mike: Yeah. We had backup boatmen too in case someone got hurt or something. That was the whole idea by bringing other boatmen along. Hughes' partner, John Johnson, was a boatman for Western. I was splitting running a boat with him. I'd run one rapid, and then I'd let John row one, you know. We got down to the first big one and it was his turn to row and I said, "Well, you want..."

John says, "Oh yeah, I'll row this."

"Okay."

He didn't know how... couldn't nose it in. We hit it sideways and flipped. I swam forever it seemed like. Finally I was able to get off to the side and eventually here comes Hughes and LeClaire. Butch was already through. So I was waiting for Hughes to come by, and he picked me up and he had my brother already. This is how Johnny Johnson, the Joker, got his name because I said, "I thought you knew how to row?"

And he said, "All I did was motor at Western. I never rowed." (laughter)

I go, "Now you're telling me?"

Butch got really mad, "Why didn't you row?"

I go, "It was his turn."

Johnson knew a little Spanish and the whole idea was for him to be running this operation the following year. You know, we're building this operation. Butch and I are the guys that go out and find new places to run. We needed guys to run what we find and he was going to be our guy in Chile.

Adrift also bought a sailing operation and a guy that I found, Kerry Richardson, became manager of that. He was partners with Bill Alexander. Bill was actually the founder of CROA... when I had the Western River Guides thing going on, he wanted to stop the Western River Guides in Colorado and came to me, "Let's just start CROA, Colorado River Outfitters Association, and get rid of the guide thing. Let's just make it for outfitters."

I said, "No, I want to keep it the guide thing."

He goes, "Well, the organization really isn't for guides anymore; it's all for outfitters so why don't we just have one for Colorado and that way all our money isn't going to Utah. It will stay in Colorado - our dues and stuff, you know. We'll have our own meetings." I wasn't for it but anyways Kerry came over to Adrift to manage the sailing operation in Hawaii. So now we're starting to get rivers in the winter down in...

Tubby: ...Chile.

Mike: ...sailboats, snorkeling over there in Hawaii. Still looking for whatever else we could find, but we wanted to make this like a year round thing where we'd have income year round. Marshall thought that would be a lot better; it'd be easier to get investors to buy in if we were year round. By getting all the investors lined up, each of us had a chance of taking a twenty thousand dollar investment and turning it into a two hundred thousand dollar investment by not getting paid for doing certain things. You know, pounding nails during the day...

Tubby: ...sweat equity.

Mike: Yeah, there you go, sweat equity. So we went along with it and we got to go to Chile and stuff. I'm glad we did that.

Tubby: You just did one trip down there?

Mike: Butch and I just did the one trip. Hughes went back the second year with Marshall and someone drowned. It was a Sobek client that drowned.

Tubby: Hughes was kind of running in conjunction with Sobek?

Mike: Yep. They were there and some friends of ours actually were on Sobek's trip. We didn't even know they went on a river trip. We were working on their house in Carbondale. They're on a Sobek trip we didn't know anything about because they didn't want to say anything, you know. They didn't want... "Keep on our house. Get our house done." You know, "don't say anything to them."

Then they came back and tell us the story of how they almost drowned - all of them. How they finally just all walked out and left Sobek there on the beach. Said, "Nuh-uh, we're not going any farther, you're incapable..."

Tubby: Where was the drowning at do you know?

Mike: It was right down below the waterfall. It's like um...

Tubby: The waterfall that cascaded into the river was at Lost Yak Rapid?

Mike: Yep. I think we flipped at... Entrance Exam is where the Joker flipped when he didn't nose it in. He just went sideways. I mean a guy that knows how to row if he can't go one way, he can go the other way. You can go in backwards... just keep your boat parallel to the... you know, you want to hit it straight on. He didn't even have that sense.

I hung with him, but I guess I should have said, "Get out of the way!" It was a split second decision and I really thought he was going to do it, but when he dropped the oar... everyone knows you can do it with one oar. You take both hands and you pull on one to get it to go where you want to go - he dropped the wrong oar and I knew we were in trouble.

Tubby: That was the winter of '79-'80?

Mike: January of 1980 I think it was. I've got a poster that Buffalo Kaplinsky painted downstairs on the wall.

Tubby: Then the next summer you guys are running Cataract, Desolation; oh no, you didn't have Deso yet, just Cataract and Dinosaur.

Mike: Yep, Cataract and Dinosaur.

Tubby: Did you do any trips on the on the North Platte? You still had that permit, correct?

Mike: We still did some Northgate Canyon launches on the North Platte.

Tubby: Did you do any trips on the Owyhee?

Mike: Nope, never could sell anything - never developed a clientele from up there. We sold some trips on the upper Colorado. We didn't have any other permits. Marshall wanted a Salmon permit really bad. We went to a Western River Guides Association meeting and somebody was selling out. I mean, they had so many offers and Marshall kept saying, "Go over and bug them some more."

I go, "Man, if we keep bugging him he ain't gonna sell it to us. I mean, the chances of him selling to us are slim to none. He's already made up his mind who he's going to sell it to."

He was just playing a game with us, seeing how high we would go. Marshall didn't want to pay as much as the guy asked but he really wanted that. I did all the research for that area. They ran jet boats. Instead of doing a round trip, you just leave all your cars at the beginning, run the trip, and at the end roll all your equipment up and they'd float out one of those jet boats and bring all the gear and customers back upstream to their vehicles. That's still cheaper than doing a shuttle plus you get to go through the rapids again, the other way.

Environmentally, do I think that's cool? No, but if they're doing it? Have you ever run up in the Idaho before? They're the rudest people in the world. I can't imagine what it's like now but back then it was like "Excuse me! I gotta get out of your way?" I mean, they're sitting right in the middle of a rapid and they want you to go around them because they're fishing there, right? So, there was tension back then.

Tubby: It was standard practice to send a boat out early to go make camp. One guy, one boat, and he'd blast down river and grabbed their camp for the night. He'll only be on the water for two or three hours so he's pulling in at lunch time.

Mike: Yep, we did that ourselves. It took us awhile to learn that but when we had a motor rig... this was privately. I bought that rig from Myke Hughes and redid it. It said Tex's Tours on it. Well, we redid that rig and a friend of mine, John Bohns, went in halves with me so we were able to fix it up pretty nice. So we could go down like Cataract, Deso, and so forth and be able to carry everything we wanted to carry. Everything: generator, blender, everything. We got it together and that's what we did. We ran a trip down through Desolation on a motor rig and that was a great experience, especially in the wind. When you switch over from commercial to private, that's a big jump. Usually privates don't have motor rigs, you know, most of them. It's amazing when you have the motor rig and you're catching up to a private trip. When I was commercial, they'd linger and not let you go around them.

They're constantly being in your way because it's that private/commercial thing going on. But when you're a private and they're private, they still get in your way. It doesn't matter because you got the motor. That's the deal.

Tubby: Must be an oar/motor thing.

Mike: Yeah. You know in the old days it was always the kayakers. The kayakers were always the people that kind of fought for private boater rights. They fought the commercials about user days, "Why do you guys get 80% or 90% of all the user days and we only get 10% or 20%?" It was because private boaters, they had no place to buy boats yet. The sport was that young in the 1970's, you know what I mean? There was only one boat dealer and he was just inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Tubby: Ron Smith?

Mike: Yes, he had the Green River boats. He was a nice guy. He was the first to come along, and it was kind of Utah oriented, those boats. It was hard to get your hands on them because he could only make a certain amount. Then Campways came along so there was another avenue. But Udiscos were the cheapest avenue. A lot of privates were using them at first and then moved up the line from there. It's amazing how that all goes together but the kayakers were the first people standing up for equal rights and so forth, use-days and all that. The commercials were going, "Well, you know, we've been running this thing since..."

Tubby: ..."these are our rivers..."

Mike: Yeah, there you go. We make our living on this... while we're running the river we're making a living, and when we're not running river we don't make living.

Tubby: So what was the demise of Adrift Adventures?

Mike: What happened, well, Marshall's goal was to get this thing on the penny stock market. The day of the offering, they have this thing called the offering... well, before that, let's back up one step. They have a dog and pony show. It's where you go and they rent a venue, let's say like a suite at the Regency Hotel. They rent a room in the Regency and there is free food – like finger food, free drinks and the invites to this event come from all the different broker houses in Denver. They show up and we were all there, some of our guides were there, and Marshall's there. We were talking about the different trips, and we had big pictures blown up and stuff. There was a slide show going, and we were basically just explaining what the business was about and trying to stir up interest. So we did that and then the next event was the offering date. That's when we worked with a broker house, with a guy there that was going to take the company public. He then has people who he'll sell the shares to, but you have to have one guy represent you. We just couldn't do it on our own because of SEC rules. Marshall chose this one guy, and we thought we had an in because he had a Chilean background. I think his wife was from Chile. So we thought this whole thing was going to go really well, but the day of the offering, he got indicted by the SEC.

Tubby: Ohhh.

Mike: Yeah, the Feds - Security Exchange Commission.

Tubby: So the whole thing never got underwritten?

Mike: There you go - the underwriter. Yeah.

Tubby: It was never really offered.

Mike: Nope, all that for nothing.

Tubby: Did Marshall just wash his hands of it?

Mike: That's about it. It was like...

Tubby: He didn't want to try again?

Mike: Nope. That was it. We went back to work, sweat equity again, getting everything put away for the summer in the warehouse. Soon after, he called me into the office and he said, "I'm going to dissolve the company and I'd like to offer you Dinosaur."

I said, "I don't have that kind of money to buy... how much do you want for it?" I forget how much it was. Well, Marshall being the number man that he is, he came up with a way where I wouldn't have to have very much money at all. It was like you're paying... you're doing business with the devil. The deal was I got X amount of user days... so let's just say I got a thousand user days. Out of those thousand user days, he kept the proceeds from 800 of them for the next five years. After five years it would be over with. The company would be mine, but for 5 years he would get 800 of them and me only 200.

Tubby: But you'd have to sell all one thousand or you'd get nothing - he had the first 800?

Mike: Yeah. It was like, ugh. I couldn't do it and I think the same offer went to Hughes. I don't know if he took it or not, but he ended up with Canyonlands so he took some kind of offer. I don't think Butch ever showed. I don't know if he offered Butch or not. I mean after my deal, it was, "Nuh-uh, I ain't going to do it." I told Marshall, "I want to at least get my boat, my dory back."

Marshall says, "Well, I'm not giving you a boat."

I go, "I came here with a boat. I should come out with a boat."

And he's going, "Nope. What else do you want?"

I go, "Well, I'll take all the tools downstairs then, the grinder, the welders, the table saw, lathe, and all that stuff. I can use it for my carpentry business."

Marshall said, "Okay, write it up and I'll sign it. Then you sign it and it's done."

That's what I did. Butch went in a couple of weeks later to see what Marshall had to say and to ask about our pay checks we hadn't been getting - both of us were still working for him pounding nails. When he left, Marshall had given him the new dory boats.

Tubby: He got all four dories?

Mike: Two of them were damaged pretty bad. I got one of the damaged ones from Butch for wiring his house. That's how it all works man.

Tubby: Well, Adrift Adventures ended up with the Ripple though.

Mike: I know they kept Ripple, and then D-niner, Dennis, bought the Cactus Rose before the whole thing went down. He bought it during the summer. When it first went up for sale, he bought it. That's how it all... it all went down that way.

Tubby: Let me clarify where all six of the dories ended up.

Mike: Dennis Schell bought the Cactus Rose directly from Marshall. The Ripple went with the Dinosaur permit to the Tierneys. Butch got all 4 of the 18 footers and sold two to Rich Zelter who was doing trips on the Crystal River near Redstone, Colorado.

Tubby: I've heard Myke Hughes has the Cactus Rose.

Mike: Hughes told me he had the Cactus Rose also but after he sent me some pictures I could tell it wasn't my beloved Rose but rather one of the 18 footers Butch had sold to Zelter. Hughes still wanted to name his boat the Cactus Rose and I said, "You just can't! But he did anyway"

Tubby: That would have been towards the end of the summer in '81?

Mike: Yes, I think by '82 Myke was running Adrift all by himself. The bad part about it was... I was still the vice president of the company... the guy I brought in to do the Hawaii thing, the sailboat charters, he actually had a contract I didn't know anything about.

Tubby: With Marshall?

Mike: With Marshall. It was a side contract to where he was guaranteed employment for two more years after the date of his signing it. So we're all going home and he's still working. So I go to the guy and say, "What the hell's going on here?"

He goes to his file drawer and pulls up the contract and says, "Here."

I didn't know anything about this. Then I go into Marshall's office and his response was, "I didn't think you needed to know about it. It's got nothing to do with rivers."

Tubby: What was the guy doing?

Mike: He was doing the sailboats, the charters. He didn't really own a sailboat, but he knew people who did. He had the contacts and he knew the islands that they were sailing to.

Tubby: So Marshall kept running Adrift Adventures sailboat trips for two more years?

Mike: Yeah. Now this is how that worked: Before Marshall went down on the Bio Bio with us that first trip, he decided to go on a sailboat trip and fell in love with the sailboats. Like how he got into the river business - he went on Jim Temple's river trip and said, "Oh, man, I need to do more of this." And afterwards he started buying permits here and there - even before he had anybody to run them. He did the same thing with the sailboat business.

And that guy, I just looked at him and said "Man, you better hope I don't ever see you outside of this room."

I was furious but my wife Terri calmed me down. She said, "He's just trying to make his life good too."

Tubby: Where's he now? Do you know?

Mike: He went to work for Marshall. Marshall moved back to Denver. His wife and kids, they all moved back to Denver. He moved with them and became Marshall's partner in the stock trading business.

Tubby: So Marshall continued to have a brokerage business?

Mike: Yeah, Kerry Richardson thought it was real interesting stuff that Marshall was doing. He was learning all the stuff from Marshall. I never got a grasp of it. I really didn't... I guess I'm more of a worker than I am a... a schemer; seems like they're schemers. I heard through the grapevine that eventually he finally got something to be underwritten. But you know what I got to do? I got to Chile, man! It was cool, man! I got to go down to Chile. Not everybody gets to do that.

Tubby: Right, right. So then you became a privateer?

Mike: Yeah.

Tubby: You said, "I've had it with the commercial industry?"

Mike: Well, yeah or...

Tubby: ...after starting four different companies.

Mike: Yeah, I started making real money building houses, and Butch and I worked together.

Tubby: That was out of Carbondale.

Mike: Yep. We started building houses together and pretty soon Butch started working for this one guy, and he's actually the guy that married me and my wife. At my wedding I told him, "You know, someday I think we're going to be working for you."

He goes, "I wouldn't like that. You guys are too rowdy and too party and stuff. All my guys are not like that. My guys are clean cut."

I said, "Okay," and thought to myself, "We'll see."

I ended up running a few commercial trips; did some trips for Trudy. She used to work for me at Rocky Mountain and later started her own company White Water Odyssey.

Tubby: Trudy...??

Mike: Watkins and then Johnson. She was uh... you know, when you're on the river you needed someone to answer your phones. She was a good sales person. I taught her the ropes and she was selling trips. Then I let her go on a trip. The minute she went on the trip, she didn't want to be in the office any more. I don't blame her. I said, "No, Trudy, I can't... no, Trudy... I need you in the office."

She stayed for the rest of the season and the next year she didn't come back. She said, "If you're not going to have me as a boatman next year, then I'm not coming back." So she went and started her own company, and she's done really well. Time heals everything and I was in-between building jobs she says, "You want to come run river with me this summer?"

I said "Yeah, sure. I'll get to go see some rivers I've never run before." I got to run high water trips over in Taos, New Mexico down the Rio Grande.

Tubby: The Lower Box?

Mike: Yeah, the Box. I was with people that run the river completely different than any way that I'd run a river. They had no downstream vision. Everything was done like here, and then over there, and then here, all just reacting. They spend too much time with what's close and not paying attention to what's coming. Then when they get down there they go, "Oh, shit!"

I said "Yeah, so here - follow me." Da-ta-da-ta-da-ta-da, you go through.

A couple of their boatmen come up to me one day and they go, "Man, you make it look so easy."

I go, "Well it is. You just got to have your line. You got to have your line." They had never learned that. Once they learned that they turned out to be really good boatmen. They just needed somebody to show them, that's all. It's like that with everybody I think, you know with most anything.

Tubby: Did you get on the water the big giant years '83 and '84?

Mike: ...Umm, boy I can't remember.

Tubby: Because the Yampa went to like 30 some odd thousand in 1984

Mike: Yeah, we were down there for the high... I mean it was really high water. The worst ones change over the years. Believe it or not when we were running in there... like if you're there every four days or every five days, you get to know the river really well. That's the advantage of being a commercial boatman is that you get to know the river and the canyon. You know when to pull and when not to pull. It's fun to watch trainees because you'll look behind you and they're going from there, to there, to way over there because they can't feel the river. You need to learn how to feel the river. You just let the river do the work for you. We used to see what's the least amount of strokes we could take in a day.

Now with pontoons that's important because they're heavy. Warm Springs, I mean you know, most of the time people they come around that corner and they try to hug that right shore and they get bounced out, they're sideways, and they're backwards. Then they're pushing away from the hole and they're not... we finally just started running right down the middle. Run right down the middle then there's that flat spot right in front of the hole, two strokes and you're out. You're away from the hole. Now if you miss those two strokes... (laughter)

Tubby: That's different.

Mike: Now I've hit the hole twice. Both times were on purpose. I had the chance of moving away - I was right in the middle and decided, "Nope, I'm staying. I'm going to go through the hole." It was nice to me. It just spit me out.

Tubby: That was in a pontoon?

Mike: Yeah, a 28 footer. Just me and a boatman with the rope in the back to help land cause we made people walk around still.

Tubby: The guests had to walk Warm Springs?

Mike: At Adventure Bound we weren't running people through Warm Springs. Nobody was running people yet. Everybody had to walk around at Warm Springs when it was really high water. That was the code of the outfitter. 'Cause if another outfitter did it and something happened; then they'd really be in trouble insurance wise. So you had to do what the other guy was doing. So we walked people around there for years. Another time I was there and I was on a trip with a three tube, you know, a three tube rig. We called it an A-Rig. There were just three tubes lashed together the way you got them out of the factory.

Tubby: These are snout tubes?



Mike and Butch at Jones Hole, 1984

Mike: Yeah and there's no place to put your feet. Your feet are just straight across. It's really hard to get a stroke. I had a new guy on the oar, and he was on the downstream oar 'cause the upstream oar usually does all the pulling to keep the boat sideways and to pull away from the hole. He popped an oar and we're out in the center. He got the spare oar on and it just wasn't enough time. Sometimes you're just better off to go ahead and hit it than try to get by it with a stroke and a half maybe at the most. It isn't going to happen - best to just line her up, push on it, and go for it. Took it in there and it just spit us out. Spit me out. I was still on the boat. Everybody else was gone, the other two guides. So Warm Springs has been nice to me, but I see a lot of people it hasn't been nice to too. Training boatmen... I trained a lot of boatmen over the years. It's so much easier when you're running river all the time than when you just do one trip a year. It's a lot harder when you're not out there all the time because by the time you get the feel, the trip is over.

Butch designed those bi-yaks. By running those on the smaller rivers around Carbondale like the Roaring Fork and the Crystal River we could keep our feel. We'd also go down and run the Colorado from the Shoshone area all the way down to New Castle. We know the water, but it still helps you to keep your feel. It made it a lot easier when we'd go on longer trips because we were in practice. I don't think you ever forget how to row. I think you always remember that - at least I hope you do.

Tubby: I think you do. How long did you stay in Carbondale then?

Mike: 25 years.

Tubby: So you were up there building homes until around 2000?

Mike: In 2001 we moved out to Kansas because of health reasons; yeah - Hanta Virus.

Tubby: Oh, you had Hanta?

Mike: When all the Indians were dying in Durango, Colorado that's when I got it. I just got done building our southwest style home there in Carbondale, our adobe house. I was planting trees and spreading straw. I think I got it from the straw. I was doing it on a Saturday and Sunday morning I woke up and said, "Oh man, I don't feel so good."

Terri said, "Oh, all you want to do is watch the Broncos."

I go, "No really, I don't feel so good." She had to take me to the hospital and it took them a long time to...

Tubby: ...figure out what it was.

Mike: Yeah, a long time. I missed a couple months of work. But they finally figured it out and I started on blood thinners, Prednisone's, and Synthroid. I mean, it pretty much knocked out my thyroid gland, pituitary gland, and adrenal gland - knocked all that out. Then it leaves scar tissue on your lungs - but I'm still alive.

Tubby: So you lose lung capacity?

Mike: Yeah and the altitude up in the mountains is just... that high, the doctor said my body was producing too many blood cells, I think the red blood cells. I had to go in and get my blood drained like every other week. A pint each trip, I think.

Tubby: Because it was getting too thick.

Mike: Too thick and you run the chance of blood clots - I had several. They could only thin it so much because if you do it too much I could bleed to death from a small cut. So, my Doctor said you got to go to lower altitude.

I had a upland bird house for hunting out here in Kansas and that is where we headed. For years I worked on our house in Oberlin, Kansas and Terri continued working at Aspen Highlands to keep our insurance. She commuted back and forth to Highlands.

Tubby: Through the winter?

Mike: Yeah, maybe get together once a month. We did that until we finally bought this 13 acre farmstead and put a new home on it. After we moved out of town, then she stayed here full time. We have a big enough house now and I updated the barn, shop, grain bin, storm cellar and little house. The house in town was pretty small. You do what you have to do to survive.

Some days I can think of something that happened on the river and start laughing. It doesn't matter where you're at, you still think about the river, you know. Now with the internet, you can just type in Lava Falls and you're at Lava Falls. You can watch as many boats as you want to go through there. "I would never go over there, but he did!" (laughter) And then they make it and you go, huh? I never thought anyone could make it through there. I can't remember much about years and dates and so forth. I had a guy that I reconnected with and he was asking me about some stuff and I was just going, "Man I don't know." I get lucky sometimes when someone puts the date on the pictures. Remember on the back of the picture they'd always put the date on it? Those really help.

Tubby: This has been fun. It's been good to catch up, see what you've been doing. I should have had this talk with you when I first got to know you in 1970s.

Mike: I probably would have been more...

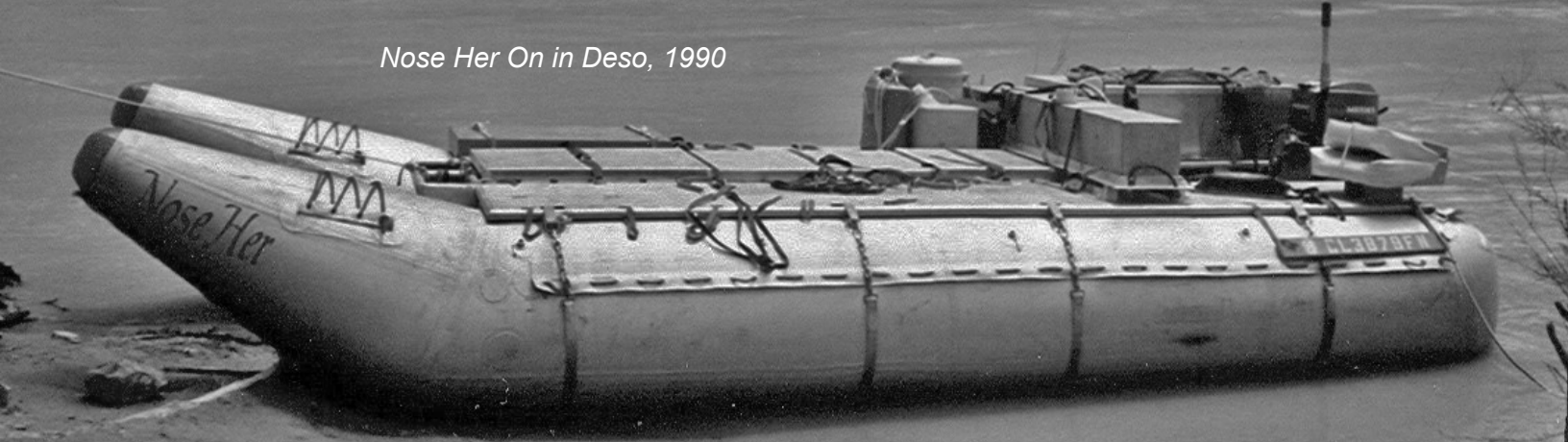
Tubby: ...I would have understood where you were coming from.

Mike: Well there are opportunities all time... river business is just a whole... I never quite got the one day business until I saw it in action. The way they run the one day businesses now-a-days, it's just unbelievable. It's money. Man, all the buses and equipment - guys run five, six, seven trips in a row. It's no big deal for them. That's just what they do every day and they don't know anything... if they don't know anything different. Like moving to Kansas, people here... a lot of people don't even... there's some people that have never been to Walmart. Walmart's in Nebraska 45 miles away. They say, "I'm not going that far to go to a store." They go to the local store and buy Sure Fine brand. That's all they know. If that's how you were raised and you survived, well, what's the reason to switch?

Tubby: Yeah, they're missing a certain curiosity.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. What's on the other side? But living here with Amazon that really helps!

Nose Her On in Deso, 1990



On the Yampa River, 1986



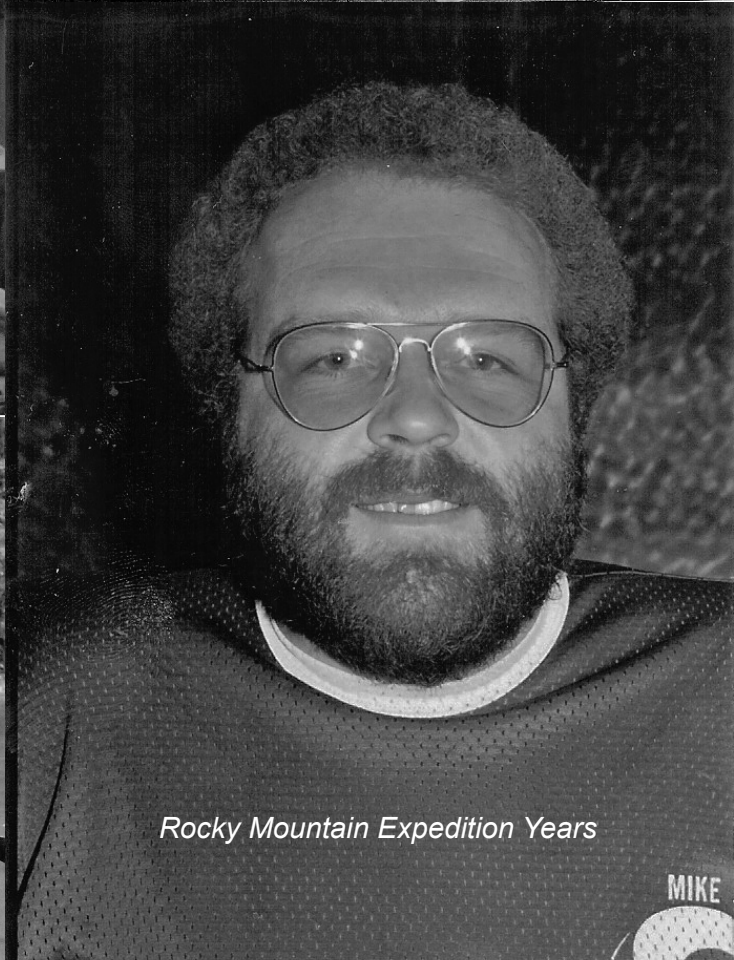
Mike in Shine On, 1985



Brothers wedding at Deerlodge, 1988



Mike and Crew, June 1991



Rocky Mountain Expedition Years

MIKE

Returning Rapids



Project

USGS Survey Through Cataract Canyon: 100 Years Later

September 18-24, 2021

Repeating Photos, Setting Survey Points, and
Documenting Changes

(Abridged Version*)

Trip Participants

- Meg Flynn, Returning Rapids Project
- Mike DeHoff, Returning Rapids Project
- Eric Balken, Glen Canyon Institute
- Chris Wilkowske, Utah Water Science Center, USGS
- Mike Freeman, Utah Water Science Center, USGS
- Ashley Nielson, Colorado Basin River Forecast Center
- Michelle Valdes, River Guide
- Kevin Wheeler, Water Balance Consulting
- Jian Wang, Center for Colorado River Studies, Utah State University
- Steve Dundorf, Bureau of Reclamation
- Rob DeHoff, a very good brother

Some people were just along as participants and were not formally representing their organization/ agency of employment.

* Full version available online at riverguides.org

Trip Objectives

- Re-create the historic La Rue's Riffle photo from 12:25 pm on Sept 21, 1921 one hundred years later to the minute. Possibly re-create other pictures from the 1921 USGS survey through Cataract Canyon.
- Survey in control points/ benchmarks from the Green-Colorado confluence down-river through Cataract to prepare for a river profile on the October 2021 science trip. (Note: Due to permit parameters, no markers were installed in Canyonlands National Park.)
- Document some of the changes caused by heavy monsoons in summer 2021.
- Enjoy being on the river and its canyons.

This material in this trip report is in an upstream to downstream order.

A Prioritization of Survey Photos

The 1921 USGS Survey began in Green River, Utah on Saturday, September 10th and ended at Lees Ferry on the 8th of October. The group was in Cataract Canyon from September 15 – 30, 1921.

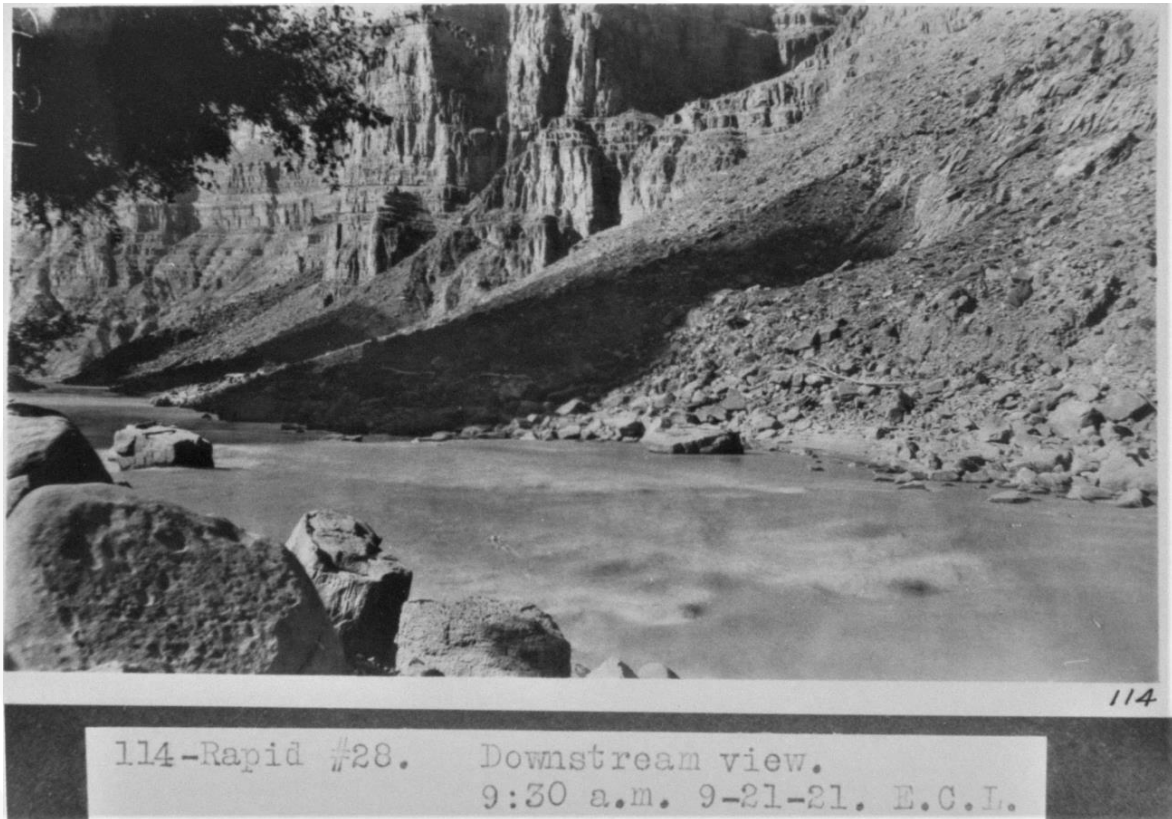
Due to time considerations and other issues, we chose to focus on pictures in the Returned Rapids and Carving Zone of Cataract; roughly river miles 199-193.

In another sense, we wanted to match some key photos near the Gypsum and Palmer Canyon area. Specifically, LaRue's picture #120 from the photographic record taken at 12:25 pm on September 21st 1921.

We also wanted to attempt to re-create a photo of the survey crew at Palmer Canyon.

Catching Up With the 1921 Survey Photos

On the morning of September 21, 2021, we left camp attempting to arrive just upstream of Gypsum Canyon by noon. To manage our time, we decided to be less exacting when matching the first few photos taken 100 years ago by the 1921 Survey crew on Sept 21 of that year. The decision allowed us to slow down and get the photo matches we were really after.

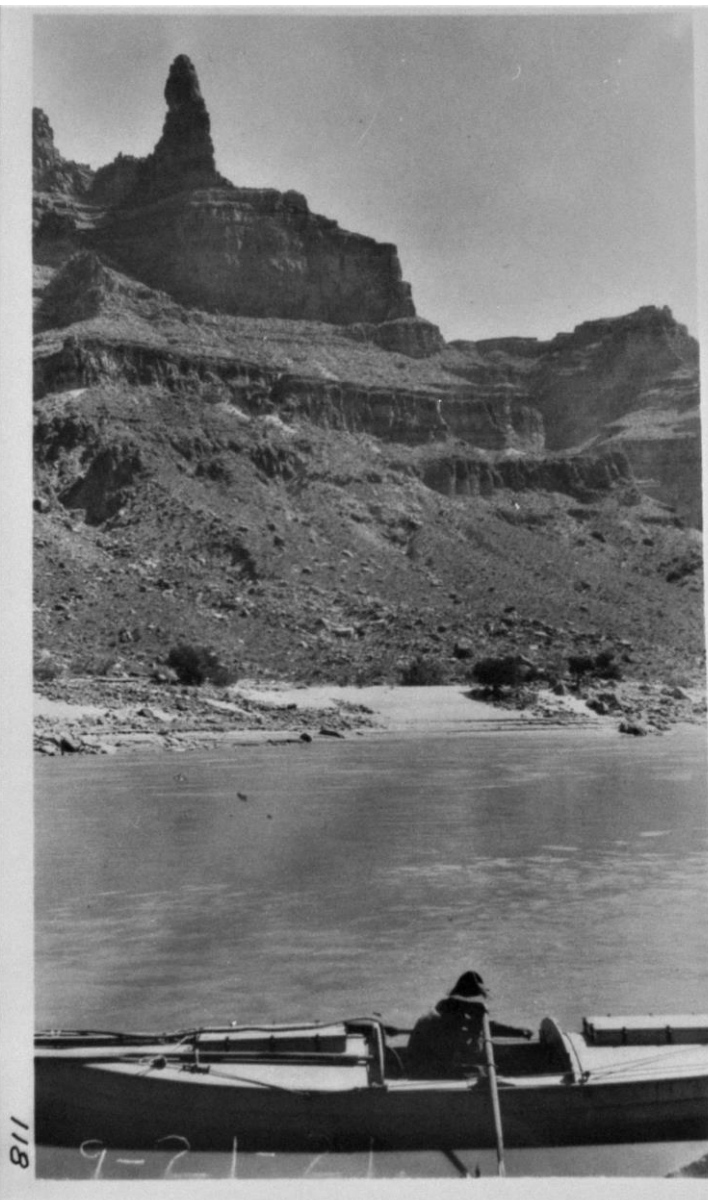


114 - Rapid #28 9:30 a.m. 9-21-1921, E.C. La Rue Collection - photo #114
Doc Marston Papers, Huntington Digital Library, Public domain
https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p1_6003coll5/id/14845/rec/79

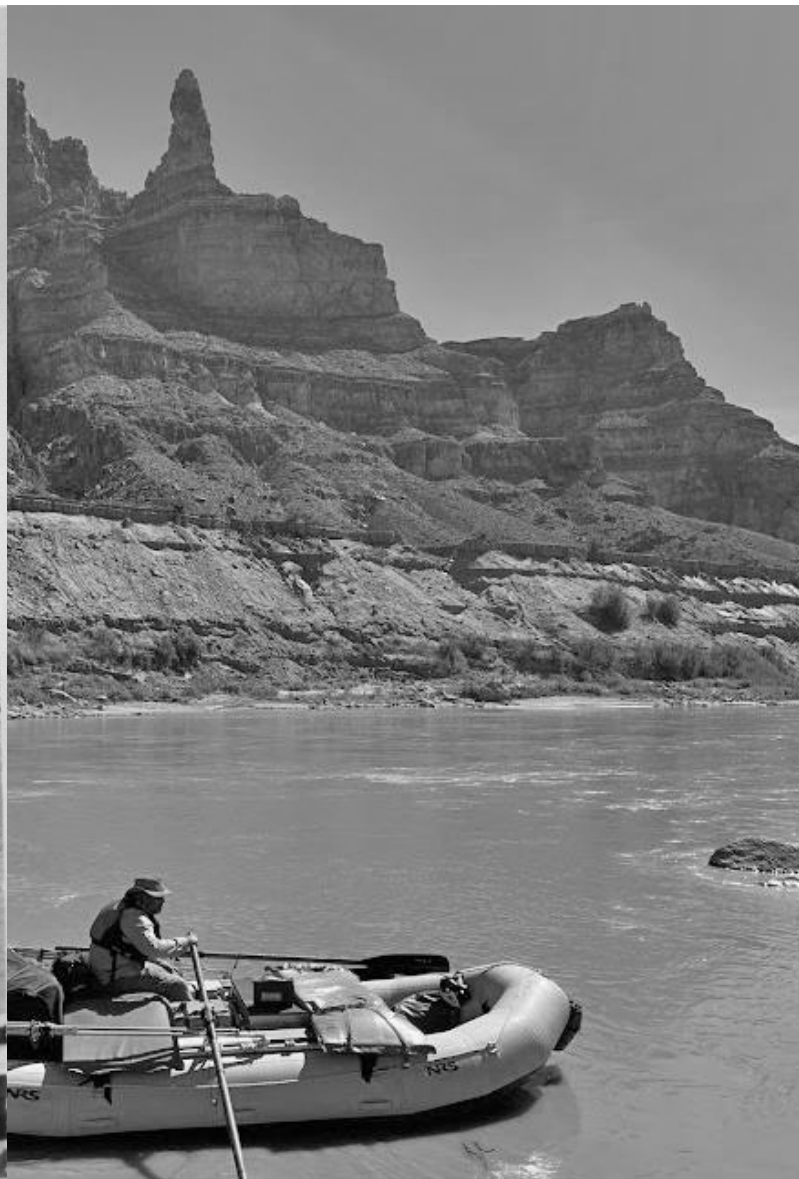


A quick photo taken while going through the Chute 10:30-ish, 9-21-2021, Steve Dundorf

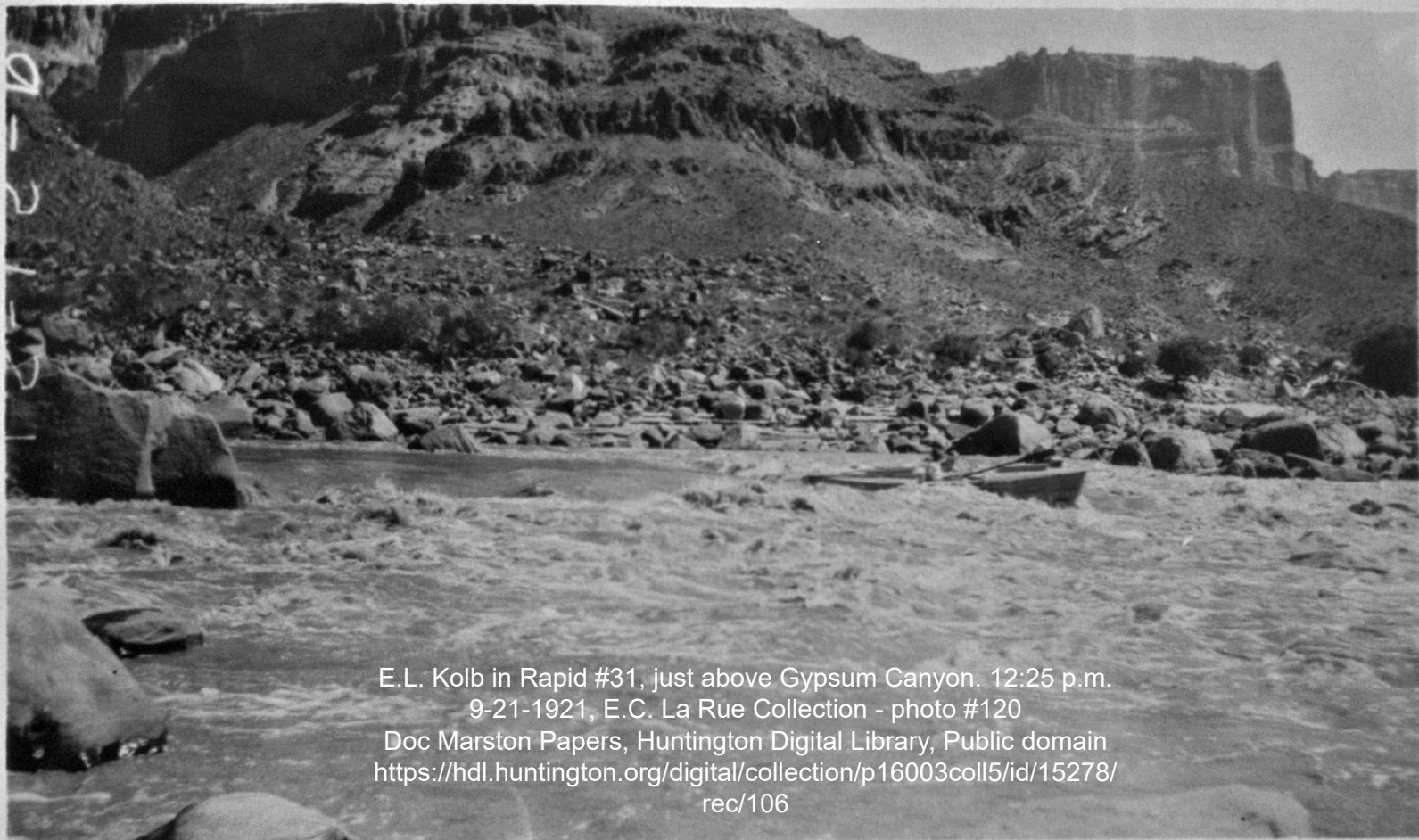
118-Just below Rapid #30, 19 miles below
mouth of Green River. Noon. 9-21-21.E.C.L.



Just below Rapid #30, 19 miles below mouth of
Green River. Noon 9-21-1921, E.C. La Rue Col-
lection - photo #118,
Doc Marston Papers, Huntington Digital Library,
Public domain
[https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/
p16003coll5/id/15134/rec/40](https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p16003coll5/id/15134/rec/40)



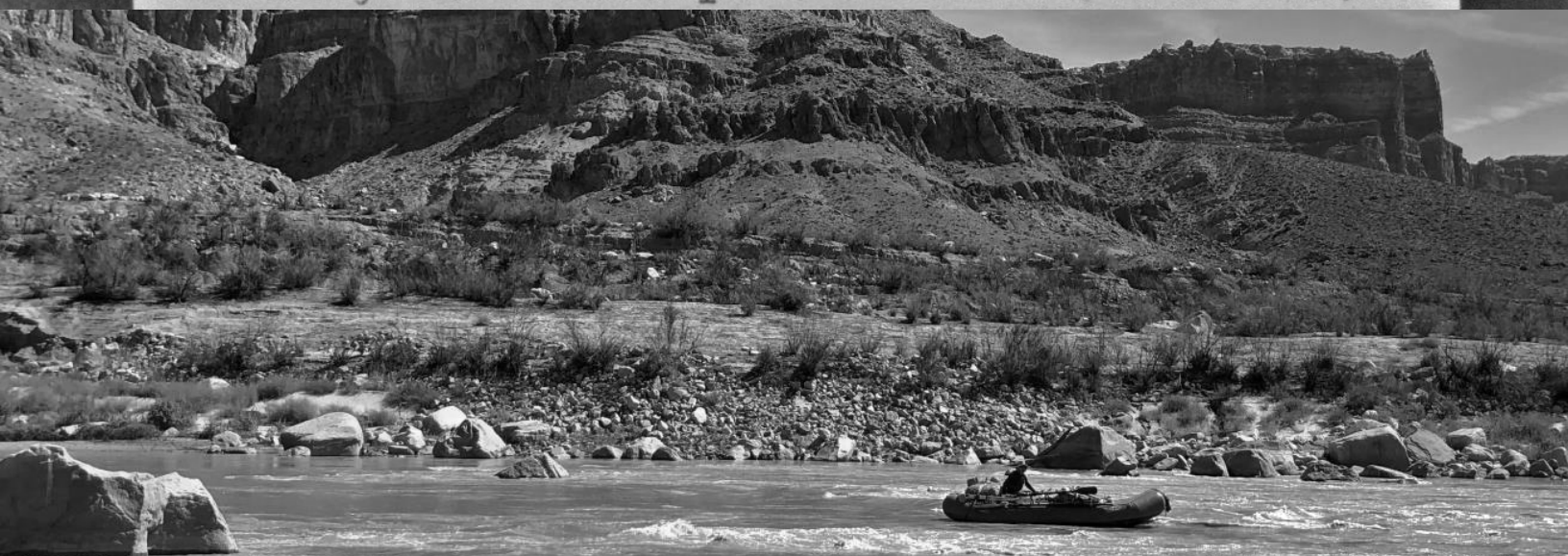
Just downstream of Benchmark Riffle, a bit before
noon, 9-21-2021, Looking from River Right across
the river at approximately River Mile 197.1 Chris
Wilkowske Rowing
Steve Dundorf



E.L. Kolb in Rapid #31, just above Gypsum Canyon. 12:25 p.m.
 9-21-1921, E.C. La Rue Collection - photo #120
 Doc Marston Papers, Huntington Digital Library, Public domain
<https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p16003coll5/id/15278/rec/106>

120

120-E.L.Kolb in Rapid #31, just above Gypsum
 Canyon. 12:25 p.m. 9-21-21. E.C.L.



We have theories about why the riffle is different. It may be that the river/reservoir sediment is not completely carved away. Or that the shifted outflow/wash mouth of Gypsum Canyon may be damming/ changing the water level creating more backwater above Gypsum Canyon Rapid, which is just downstream. A lot can happen in 100 years... ©

Best La Rue's Riffle Match - Mike Freeman in Rapid just upstream
 of Gypsum Canyon. 12:25 p.m. 9-21-2021, Meg Flynn



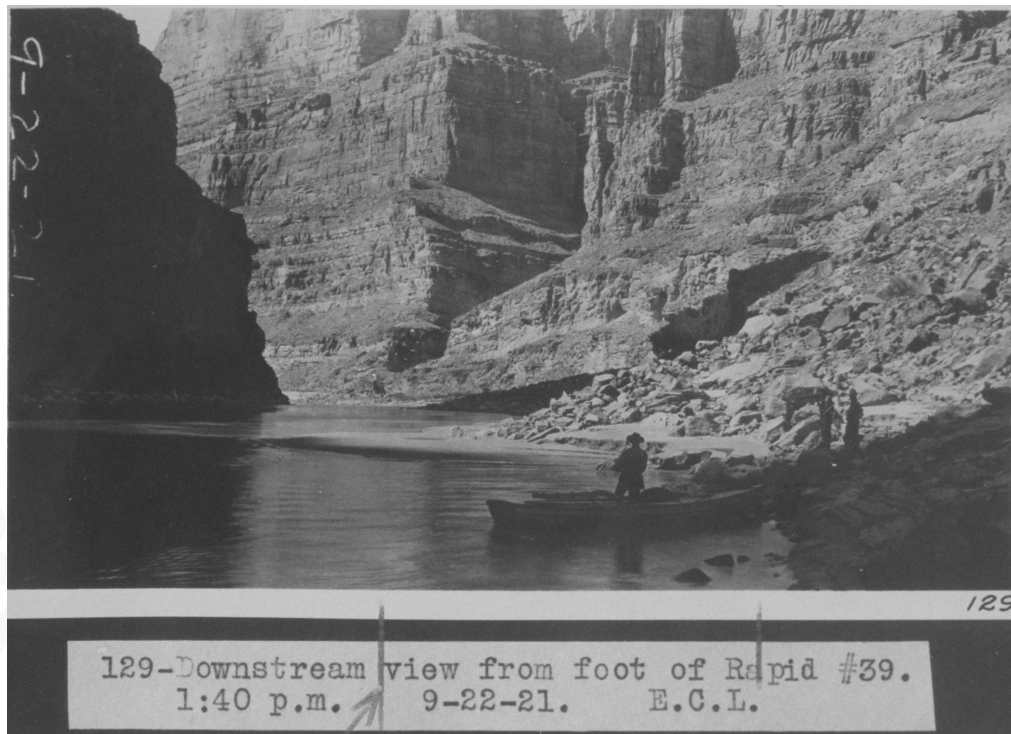
Members of the USGS Survey trip standing in front of multi trunk Cottonwood Tree at the mouth of Palmer Canyon (from Left to Right): Leigh Lint, William R. Chenowith, Eugene C. La Rue, Harry C. Tasker, Ellsworth L. Kolb, John Clogston, Henry Rausch, Sidney Paige, Emery Kolb
<https://cdm16748.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cpa/id/14512/rec/163>

Historic River Elevation at Palmer Canyon approximately 3600 ft. above sea level



Members of the 2021 Survey trip at the Mouth of Palmer Canyon (from Left to Right): Mike DeHoff, Jian Wang, Kevin Wheeler, Rob DeHoff, Meg Flynn, Steve Dundorf, Eric Balken, Mike Freeman, Chris Wilkowske 9-21-2021, approximately 2:16 pm, Michelle Valdes

No Multi Trunk Cottonwood tree, water surface elevation approximately 3620ft at 4570 cfs .
 The group would need to be back about 100-200 feet and lower in elevation but cannot due to the sediment note the ridgeline in the upper left corner.



Downstream view from foot of Rapid #39 E.C. La Rue Collection- photo #129, Doc Marston Papers, Huntington Digital Library, Public domain
<https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p16003coll5/id/14037/rec/61>
 Historic River Elevation from 1921 survey approximately 3575 ft above sea level



Downstream view towards Easter Pasture Canyon. Just downstream of Two Cliffs
 2:52 p.m. 9-21-2021, Mike DeHoff

Steve Dundorf on raft with Jian Wang holding the bowline. Approximate water surface elevation 3618 ft above sea level Approximately 4570 cfs

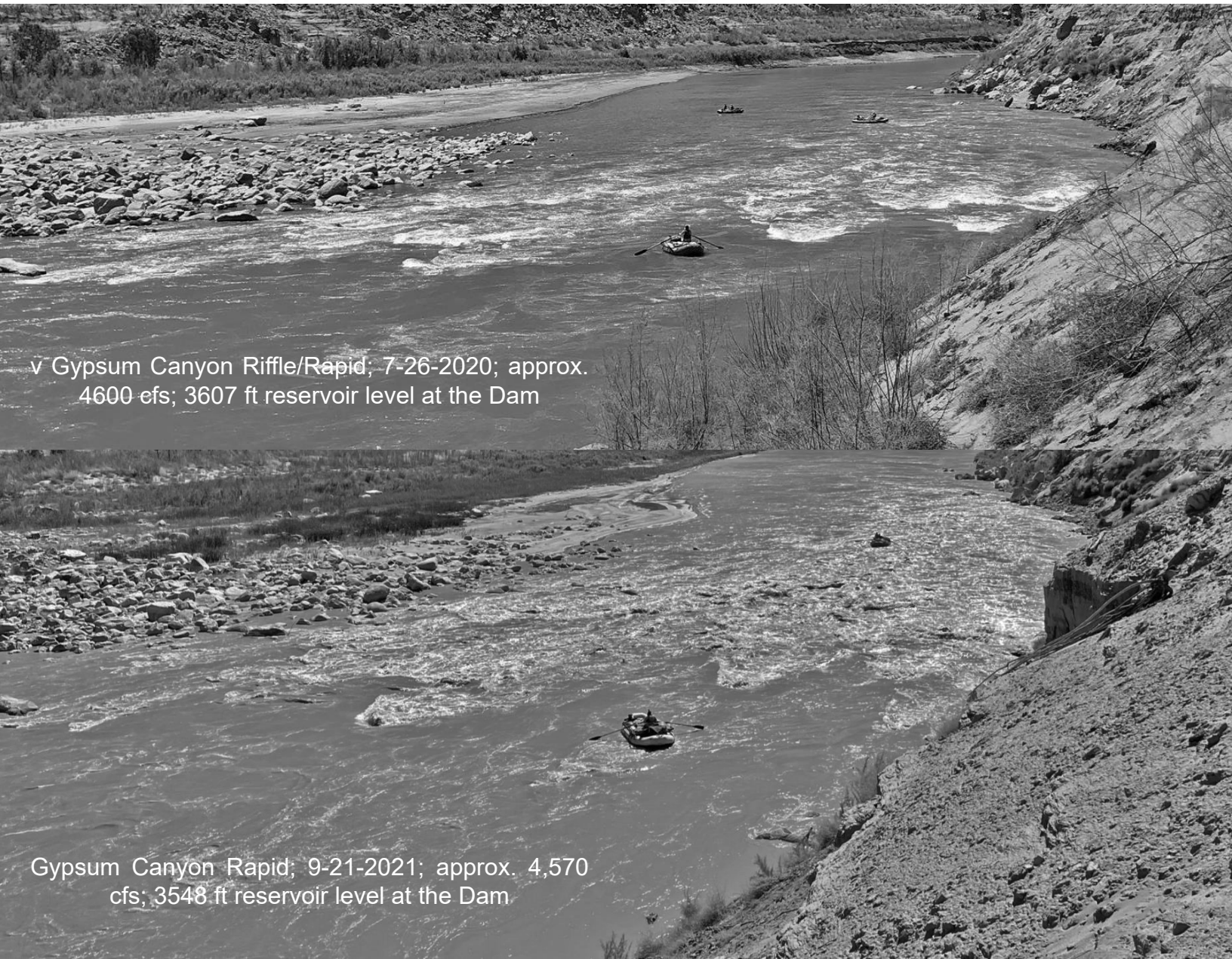
Returning Rapids Extras

And Other Things We Are Watching

Gypsum Canyon Rapid Progress

There are many questions about Gypsum Canyon and its returning rapid. Historically, the rapid here was the next rapid of concern after the Big Drops. Just downstream of this location in Cataract Canyon the corridor shifts from being under the influence of the Paradox Salts to become a place effected by more of a classic incised canyon with side canyons. We do not yet have an understanding of what may be affecting the mobilization of sediment through this reach. We do know that the recent observed rate the river is carving through the sediment is 2.5-4 feet (almost a meter ☺) per year. At this rate, it will take some time to carve out a rapid that had a historically surveyed drop of 8-10 feet.

After close review of the repeat photographs, observing differences in the riverbank is almost more informative than attempting to decipher any changes in the rapid's hydraulic features.



✓ Gypsum Canyon Riffle/Rapid; 7-26-2020; approx.
4600 cfs; 3607 ft reservoir level at the Dam

Gypsum Canyon Rapid; 9-21-2021; approx. 4,570
cfs; 3548 ft reservoir level at the Dam

Effects of a Heavy Monsoon in Clearwater Canyon



The White Jump in Clearwater 2-26-2021 Mike DeHoff



The White Jump in Clearwater 9-22-2021 Mike DeHoff

Clearwater's White Jump As seen in historic pictures

As always, it is incredibly hard to conceptualize the amount of sediment in lower Cataract and its side canyons. The black box below is a rough outline of features that may be revealed in the area we are currently observing. Compare to previous page.



E.O. Beaman's 1871 Picture of Clearwater Canyon, cropped and zoomed
s3619_1871_Beaman_Cataract_Clearwater, USGS Flagstaff



PO789n01_06_014 Clearwater First jump AR Belknap 4_63_CnE Special Collections, J.
Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah

The Mouth of Clearwater Canyon

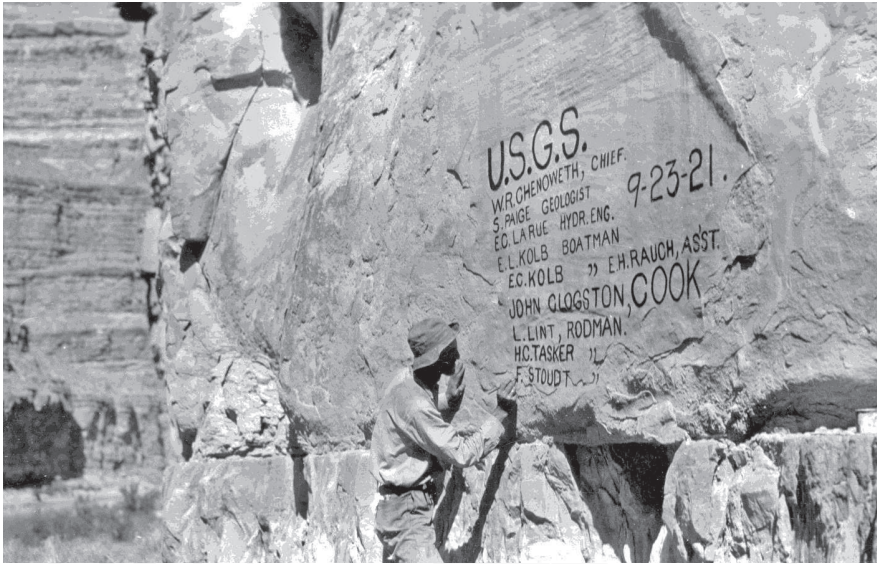


Clearwater Canyon's alluvial fan, 10-11-2019, Peter Lefebvre
Water Surface approx. 3622 ft ,6700 cfs, Elevation at Hite 3617 ft
Reservoir Elevation at Glen Canyon Dam 3614 ft

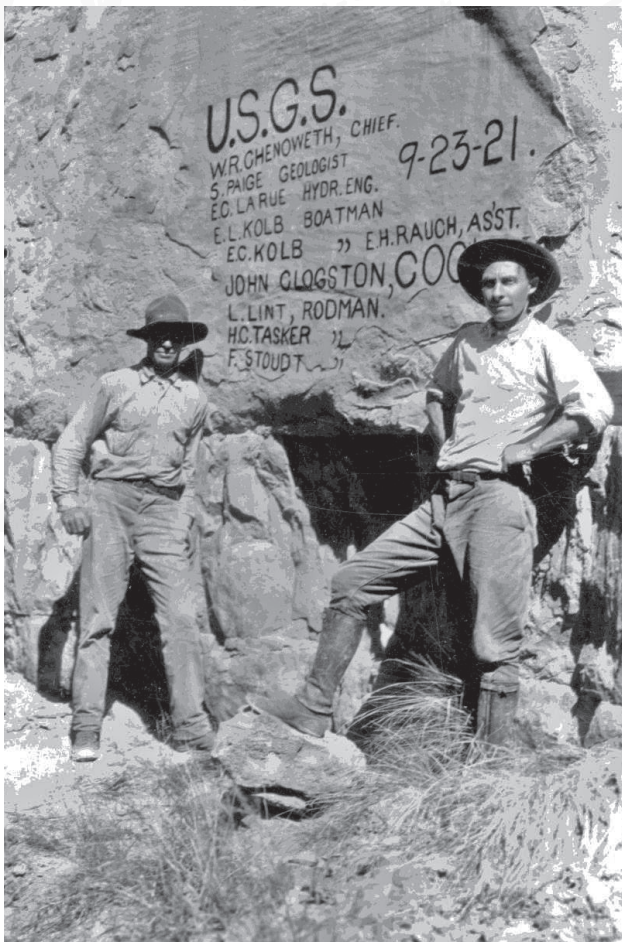


Clearwater Canyon's alluvial fan after the monsoons of 2021, 9-22-2021, Mike
DeHoff, Water Surface Elevation 3616 Approx 4200 cfs
Elevation at Hite 3591 ft (NAV88)
Reservoir Elevation at Glen Canyon Dam approx. 3548 ft (NAV88)

Lost Under the Mud



USGS Party Roster Inscription, painted/drawn on wall near Clearwater Canyon, morning light, 9-23-1921 (Mis-labeled as "USGS Survey Expedition crew member by USGS marker near Rainbow Bridge, Utah, 1921") Best guess is E.C. LaRue is the person depicted painting <https://cdm16748.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cpa/id/70133/rec/126>



There is little to no information about the exact location of the September 23, 1921 USGS Survey Roster inscription in pre Glen Canyon Dam guidebooks. Based on the survey journals, photo records, and rock layers, we guess that inscription was around the Clearwater Canyon area, close to water level. This equates to it having been inundated by Lake Powell and likely covered in mud. Another historic resource lost to the reservoir and the sediment delta.

The Kolb Brothers standing in front of USGS Roster Inscription, 9-23-1921, <https://cdm16748.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/cpa/id/70132/rec/125>

Big Flows in Dark Canyon

Prior to the 2021 summer monsoons, the big eddy against the wall at the mouth of Dark Canyon was over 50 ft deep in places. After heavy monsoon events in August and September, most of the eddy has been filled with sediment from Dark Canyon blowing out.



Mouth of Dark Canyon, 7-22-2021, Meg Flynn



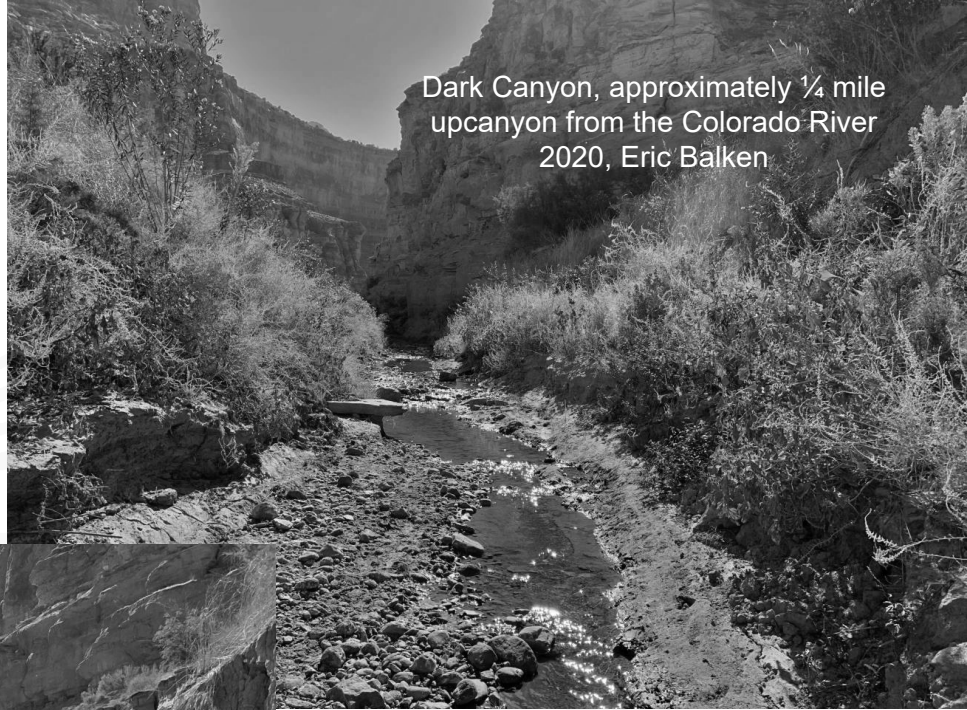
Mouth of Dark Canyon, 9-22-2021,
Mike DeHoff

The new sediment delta is a mix of fine mud, sand, balls of Domimy clays, and gravels. A depth finder registered a depth of 14 feet near the river right bank. The rest of the area at the mouth of Dark Canyon came in between 4-6 feet deep.

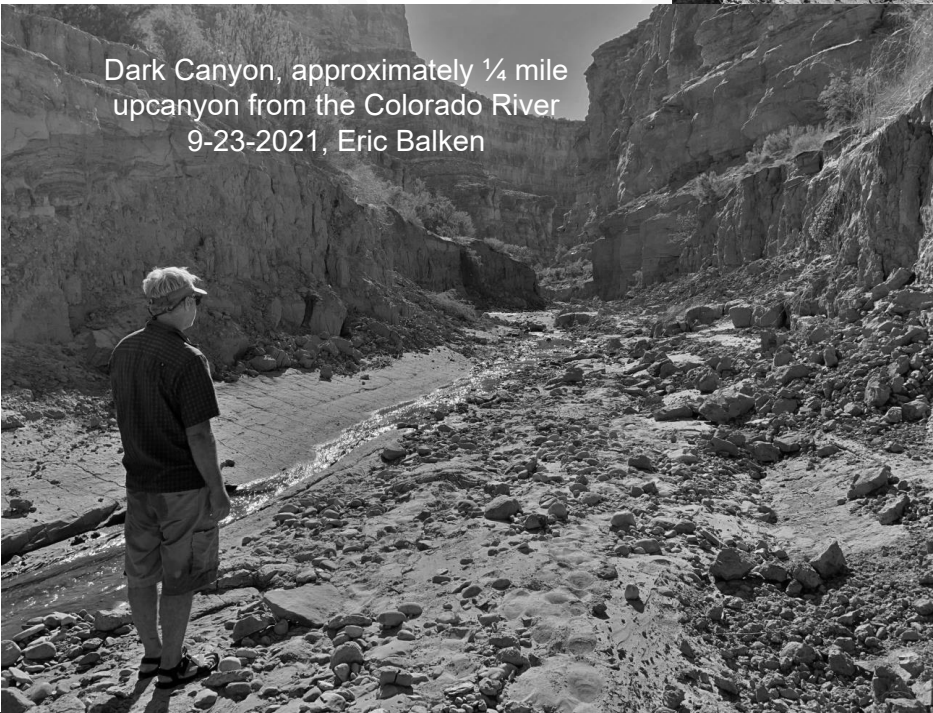
There were historic inscriptions against the big wall that we were hoping would come out as the water continues to drop. Much like other historic markers previously inundated by the reservoir, they may now be covered in mud.



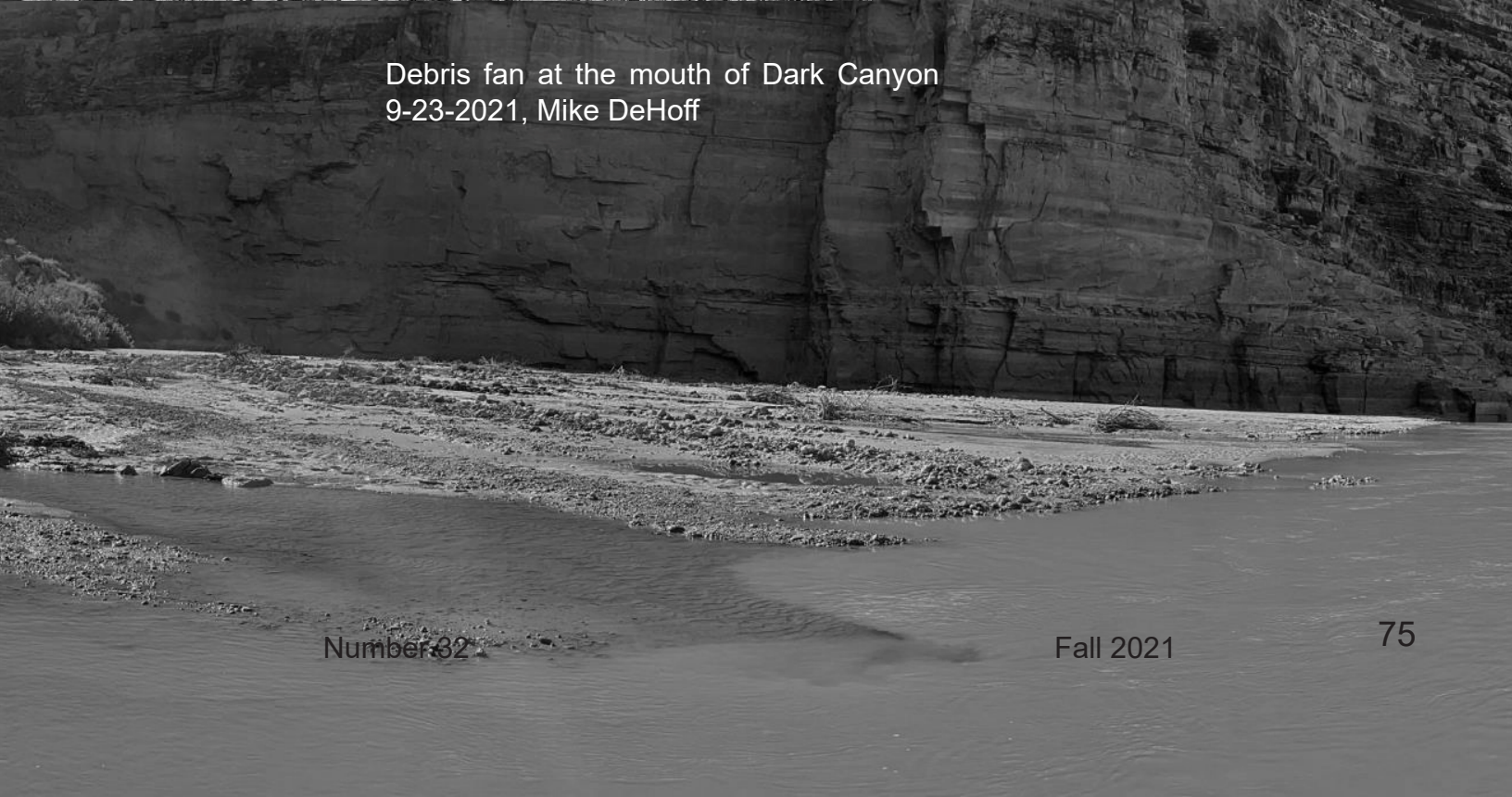
Dark Canyon, approximately ¼ mile
upcanyon from the Colorado River
2020, Eric Balken



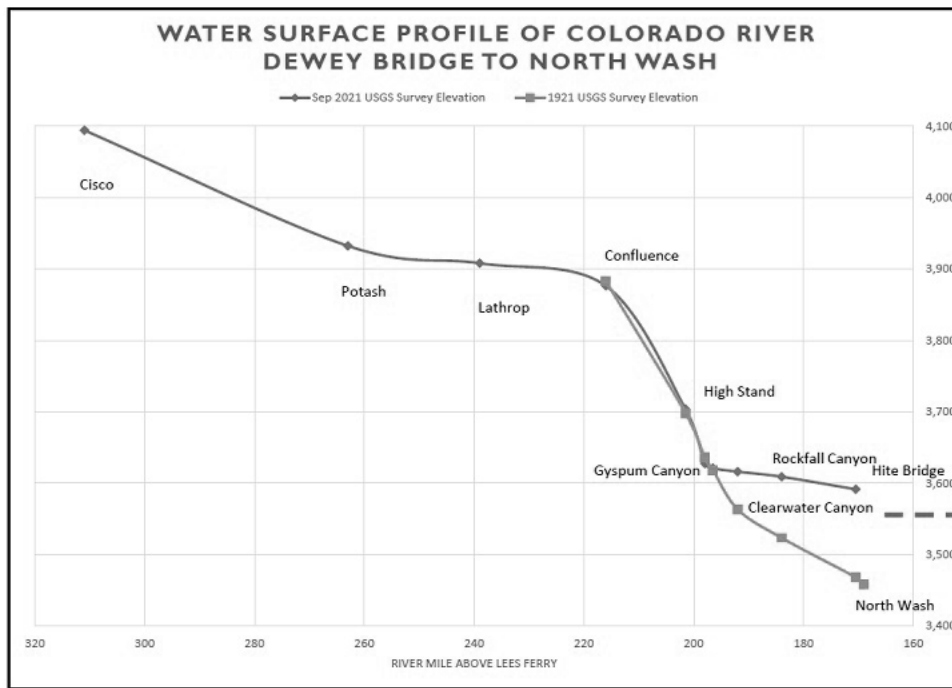
Dark Canyon, approximately ¼ mile
upcanyon from the Colorado River
9-23-2021, Eric Balken



Debris fan at the mouth of Dark Canyon
9-23-2021, Mike DeHoff



Comparison of River Profiles



Water Surface Profile, Potash to Hite, data collected on 2021 trip
Chris Wilkowske, Utah Water Science Center, USGS

Trip Data Tracker:

Dates of trip: Sept 1823, 2021

CFS: Colorado at Potash 2,800 cfs, Green at Mineral 1750 cfs

The Green was very silty at the Confluence

Estimated discharge in Cataract 4,600 cfs

Reservoir level at Dam: 3549 ft above sea level (NAV88)

USGS Hwy 95 Bridge gauge level: 3591 ft above sea level (NAV88)

Notes/ Observations:

Rapid #14 has changed from the outflow of Range Canyon. Noticeable but not dramatic the waves as they go by the mouth of the wash are smoother than they were in Aug 2021 at close to the same flow.

Several camps have been greatly altered by the monsoonal fluctuation of the river and side canyons most notably the camp RL d ownstream of La Rue's Riffle (RM 196.7).

Range, Gypsum, Clearwater, Bowdie, and Dark Canyons all experienced high flows during the heavy monsoons. Sheep Canyon now has a mouth of its wash cut all the way through the Dominy to the river's edge.

A significant delta of sediment has been pushed out of the Dirty Devil River and is creating a small riffle.



Project



The Returning Rapids Project
is a program of
Glen Canyon Institute

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Any errors or oversights – please contact Mike

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Thank you for taking the time to read this. More to come.
Contact the Returning Rapids Project research team at:
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For more information, project updates, or to make a donation please visit our website: returningrapids.com

September 2021

Hamming it up for the camera
No grim faces or poses needed after historic match complete
9-21-2021, 2:17 pm, Michelle Valdes



Selfie – Michelle Valdes, 9-21-2021, 2:17 pm
Photo Credit - Michelle Valdes
Photo Matching - Ashley Nielson
Additional pose coaching from - Kevin Wheeler

