

Cut Down Self Bailing Boats & Miss Piggy

My first memory of Miss Piggy was around June 1972 when I was running Lodore Canyon in my Selway. Glade Ross was rigging Miss Piggy at the Lodore Boat ramp the night before my launch. The second night out we camped at the old Upper Triplet Falls Campground next to Glade and I got to know him. We had flipped in Upper Disaster Falls, recovered our boat at Harp Falls with the help of a Western River Trip who carried us down to the boat. Early the next morning, while scouting Hells Half Mile, Glade rowing Miss Piggy ran by us. Glade was standing up with a big smile on his face, holding one oar and the other locked under his leg while drinking a beer. Glade Ross, Utah River Guide License is 0001, has been running rivers for a long time. He was one of the early Grand Canyon River guides for Hatch River Expeditions before he became a ranger with the National Park Service. Glade was the N.P.S. Ranger at Lodore from before 1972 until he retired in 1996. Here is the story of Miss Piggy told to me by Glade in 1996:

Frank McKnight was rowing a 28' National Park Service donut pontoon boat down Lodore Canyon on the Green River, doing some welding on culverts and other work. He wrecked the boat in Hells Half Mile and lost everything, including the acetylene tanks. The boat wrapped and attempts at salvaging it were unsuccessful. Several weeks later the boat washed off and was recovered and sold for salvage. Ron Smith of Grand Canyon Expeditions bought it even though the floor was completely gone and the middle tubes were trashed.

In 1963 or 64 Glade Ross saw the boat at Smith's boathouse and offered to buy it. Smith's reply to Glade was "what do you want that thing for!" Smith sold it to Ross for about \$10. Glade cut out the middle air chambers so that the baffles of the ends were left intact, with about 4" of extra fabric. He then punched holes in extra fabric and stitched the two ends together. There was no floor and "the only way you could put a floor in it was to hang a piece of plywood on chains." It had a sturdy wooden rowing frame and could carry large, heavy loads.

Jack Currey saw the boat and liked it. By then 28' boats were no longer available, so he bought Korean War 33' boats to cut and splice. About the same time the Hatches were using similar self-bailers on the Salmon River in Idaho. Previous to that many boaters hung plywood floors on boats, but only to give the floor cargo strength and the rubber floor was left in place.

In the late 1960s Glade, along with the Hatches built another boat with "no floor": A plywood floor hung above the water with chains. It was called "Miss Piggy" because its extremely high tubes and short 18' length gave it the resemblance of the TV character. That boat was vulcanized together using the Hatches vulcanizing machine in Vernal. It was used by the National Park Service in Dinosaur National Monument until 1994, when it was apparently sent to the landfill.

{Above interview from notes taken with Glade Ross by Herm Hoops; February 20, 1996; Glade's remembrance was similar to a conversation Herm Hoops had with Don Hatch in 1988}



(Above) Glade removed the two good sections of the boat - the bow and stern - being careful to make the cuts so that they would line up. Using a leather punch, curved needle and heavy cord he used baseball stitches to join the two ends together. Then he glued neoprene pieces, cut from the floor over the stitches. Since the floor was ripped out he left it out and hung plywood floors with chains. Glade completed the project in his step-fathers garage in Salt Lake City. Shortly after the raft was finished two Hatch boatmen (Bruce and Clark Librum), used it to run the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho.

Bus Hatch purchased most of his surplus boats, manufactured by Goodyear and B.F. Goodrich, from Buck's Surplus in Las Vegas, NV. The 28' pontoons were WWII vintage and the 33' pontoons were surplus from the Korean War.

(From March 19, 2012 from Glade Ross to Herm Hoops; Photos Courtesy of Glade Ross)

The question of why Hatch would build a boat for the National Park Service has not been fully answered. One has to remember the 1960s were an earlier time and people often did things or worked together on many things. For example, the NPS had given the Hatches permission to build a food and emergency storage shed at Jones Hole in Dinosaur National Monument, something that would likely never occur today. Uintah County used to maintain the road to Island Park, and in return until around 1988 the National Park Service maintained the road to Cub Creek - including plowing the driveway to Chew Ranch in winter.



Above: Miss Piggy hauls an outhouse in Warm Springs Rapid ~ Bob Ratcliffe on the oars and Chief Ranger John Welch is holding on ~ 1970's

In 2012 Bob Ratcliffe (ex Hatch Boatman, Dinosaur River Ranger, BLM Deputy Assistant Director) sent me the following information (which also closely matches what Don hatch had told me):

Earl Perry loved Miss Piggy – especially her 13' handmade oars. Glade took 4 x 4s and split one end of them and bolted in a piece of plywood for a blade while the handle end was simply whittled down like a giant pencil. They were hard to grab on to, so I duct- taped river rocks to counter balance the oars. It worked ok until you had to row hard and the rocks would slam into your knees. Also had the funky 1 ¼ inch pipe sticking out of the frame and a piece of fire hose clamped to the oar as an oar lock – actually worked pretty good. The frame and boat weighed a ton – frame made out of 2 x 8's, and a #/4" marine plywood floor hung by heavy chains. But she could hold literally tons of gear – we carried many an outhouse kit in as well as those "firepans" Earl had us place in the campgrounds – they really were solid steel army surplus griddles and weighed 238 lbs a piece. We carried in four or five of them on Miss Piggy.

...Earl had me remove the old pagoda style outhouses – which I was to burn – they were so dry and made out of so much wood they really went up – and started burning nearby trees and grass, so I ran down to Miss Piggy to get a bail bucket – but since she did not have a floor in her – so I had no bucket. Ended up dumping food out of a rocket box ammo can to use it to haul water. It was touch and go but triplet is still a nice riparian forest.....

In 2012 I received the following from Earl Perry (an ex Hatch boatman and Dinosaur River Ranger) (some of Earl's remembrances are in conflict by those told to me by Glade Ross, Don Hatch and Paul Thevinin - Thevinin told me the Western Rigs were copied from Hatch):

"These were Western River rigs originally created by Jake Luck, Paul Thevinin, under Jack Currey. That's where Glade got the idea. They cut down 33s to make them; his may have been a cut-down 27. The cut 33s were called Stubbies, and were the item of choice for Western's Selway trips. Petrillo had a story about that from the extreme water of 1974, when ARTA killed 4 passengers on the Main Salmon, which peaked at 132Kcfs. He was on the Selway at about 10 feet, at Moose Creek just below Hamm, having made a landing somehow in the flooded ponderosas, taking a breather with his dudes. Looked up, and there came a dude-less stubby, which tipped over on a wave out in center-current, swept down and up the next, tipped right-side up, swept down and up the next, capsized again, and was swept out of sight. Waves so large, and so spaced, that only 3 were all that were in view. Thinking of Ladle, Double-drop, Wolf Creek. Turned to his people and said, "That's it. This trip is cancelled. Let's start carrying our stuff up to the air strip."

Those Western oars were called "clubs" and we Hatch guys hooted at the poor wretches from Western who had to use them; we had the slim and elegant 13- or 14-foot hickories, though they cost a phenomenal \$25 each. (*Herm's note: The Hatch oars were made by Swanson Boat Oar Company of Albion, PA and were made of ash.*)

At the 2012 UGO Conference in Grand Junction, I received additional information. Dee Halliday told me that:

Around 1964 he, Bob Moran, Jack and Betty Currey were on a trip that had eight boats. Seven were 28' donut pontoons and one was a 33' pontoon. They had ripped up four of the boats, including the 33' one that had lost most of its floor. They "didn't think you could row the damn thing without a floor, but you could." So they cut away the remaining floor to see what would happen and they were able to row the boat, but its length made it hard to control even with two oarsmen and two sets of oars. Dee repaired the four boats in return for keeping one of them. He shortened the 28' boats by sewing the remaining tubes together to make 22' boats from them. Later they shortened two more batches of 12 boats and Dee received three as payment for his work. It appears that this occurred about the time that Glade Ross and the Hatches were doing the same with their boat

Letter From Paul Thevenin on March 1 2012:

Let me preface the rest of this with a comment with which we are all dealing: "EVERYONE REMEMBERS THE PAST AS HE OR SHE WISHES!" I have been involved in a number of events that ended up with a wide variety of versions!

The WW2 pontoons had major defects: they were rubber laid over cotton, they were black. The boats were prone to explode in the afternoon, especially if beached for lunch if not deflated, then, in late afternoon the tubes had to be pumped up or they were too soft to function properly. I can remember leaving Havasu after dark (in a 28-footer) and my feet (standing on the floorboard) were in water up to my ankles - just from temperature loss. Also as the boats aged and water got under the rubber due to patches and loosening bindings the cotton rotted, from whence came the term "rotten cotton". The Korean tubes and future commercial rubber boats used high quality neoprene bonded to nylon. Also, using colors (especially silver) modified the heat effect. I don't remember for sure but I think Western River Expeditions was the first outfit to coat the boats noses with colored "Gacoflex".

Glade Ross was the first "Boating Ranger" in the Grand Canyon that was a boatman when he was hired. Prior to that the Park Service would ask us to help train some of their rangers to run a boat. The problem was as soon as they were relatively trained they would end up in Kansas at the Fort Larned National Historic Site, Agate Fossil Beds outside of Harrison Nebraska, or who know where ... and then we would start the training all over again. When Glade left his Job at the Grand Canyon he notified me of the vacancy and I applied ... was accepted for reporting in April, but was teaching school and told them I couldn't make it until mid-June. They said sorry we need you in April ... then in May they said "OK", but by that time I had committed to Henry Falany and White Water River Expeditions. The boating rangers of today are well trained (most of them ex-commercial boatmen) and have made it a "career".

One more thing on Glade Ross and his license number "001". I think it was 1963 that the State of Utah decided it needed to license boatmen operating on Utah rivers. Ted Tuttle (not the LDS Church leader) was Director of the Parks and Recreation Department for Utah and Bob Anderson, who was in charge of the boating division at that time decided to do something unique ... check with the people to be regulated and get their input. They came to a number of us who where members of the Western River Guides Association and asked us to put together a written test of knowledge and skills that a "boatman" should have. We were to work independently and they would make up the final test from combined information. (If it came to personal preference like entering a rapid bow first or stern first it was not used.) As an incentive, they told each of us independently that we could have the first license issued. When I came to apply for my license and take my test, Glade and I think Smuss Allen were already there. When Ted handed me my packet, the number on the packet had "003" on it. I protested and said that he had promised me number 1. He apologized and said that Bob had made the same promise to Glade. At this time, Sean Connery had just appeared in the first James Bond 007 film, so, I asked if all the licenses would have the "00" in front of each number and Bob said, "Yes." ... and I asked for "007" so that I would "have a license to kill". (Strangely, Ted Hatch also ended up with the 007 number.) I think mine was the first license issued as I finished the test before Glade.

In regard to the boat floor cut out I think the first one came about on the Middle Fork of the Salmon. I think it was at Tappan Falls when Art Fenstermaker ripped a gash in his floor from stem to stern. We didn't have enough patching material to seal it and just sewing wouldn't work. Trying to control the boat was near to impossible so we decided to cut the floor the rest of the way out (with plans to redo it at the warehouse). For the rest of the trip, Art could out maneuver as all with ease. (The passengers had a clear view of the river bottom the rest of the trip.) When we started cutting the floors out on a regular basis we referred to it as "Fenstermaking" the boat.

As far as general "patching and major warehouse work, Western did more of it earlier than Hatch because the Hatches had bought up tons of rubber boats and pontoons, so instead of major repairs they just dumped the old boat out into the "swamp" behind the warehouse and drug out a new one. Once Hatch got into it they initiated the vulcanizing process. The rest of us were still sewing and using "Anchor-Weld" or "Gaco" to put the boats back together. On cutting down 33's to 22's, I think Western started the practice. Doing that kept me busy most winters. In the Salt Lake warehouse up in the avenues which had been the Halls Candy Factory.

One other thing that really kept me busy was when Jack Currey bought the two railroad cars of "Korean War" snouts. His version and mine differs. I remember the load being a HUGE surprise at what we got ... Jack maintains that he knew it all along. Having spent time in Hawaii, my first instinct was to build a catamaran with the tubes ... after much planning and replanning the J-Rig was created (with the J standing for Jack).

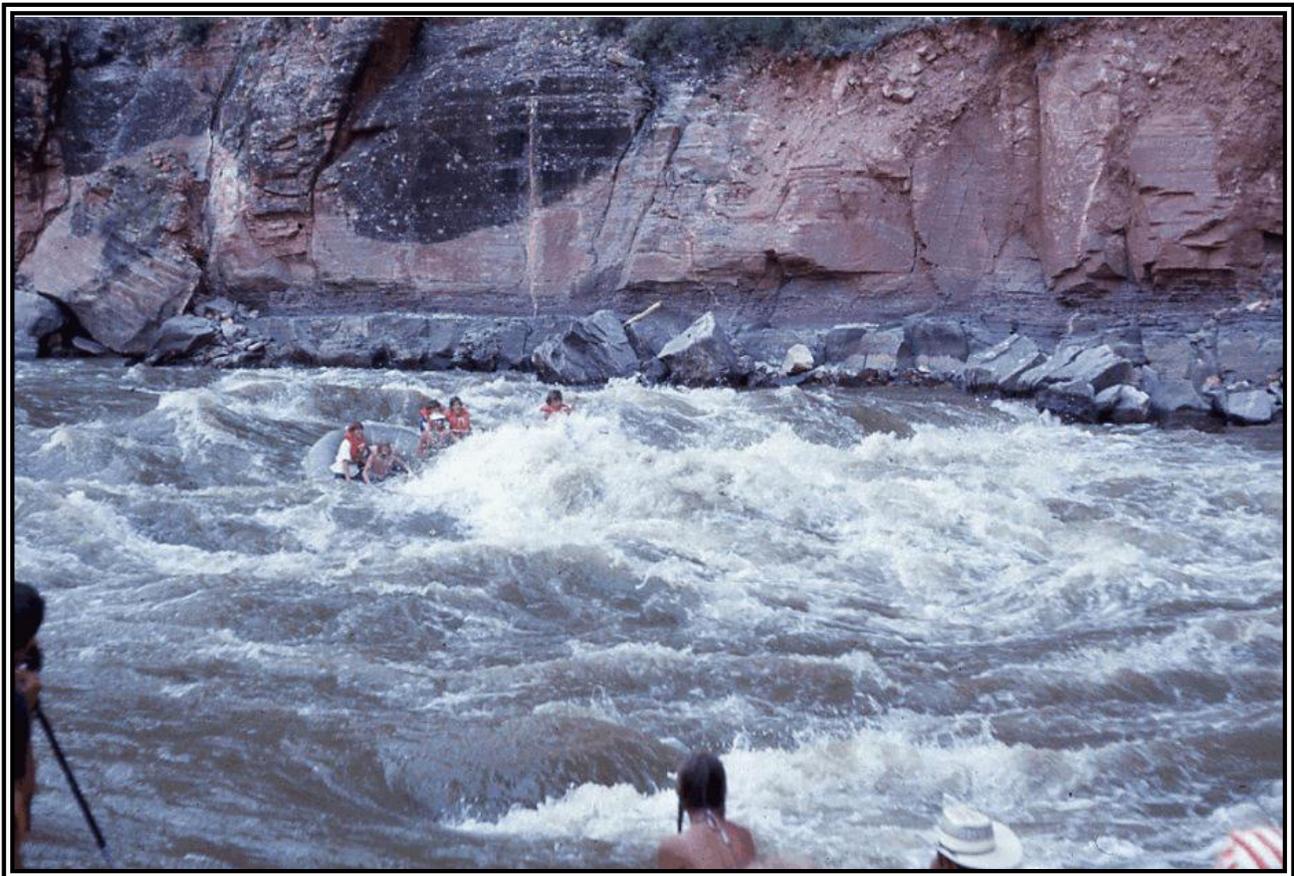
What we did at Western when we couldn't find commercial oars that were long enough was hire a guy in Mapleton, Utah who we nicknamed "Hatched Harry" (I don't remember his name but was a neighbor of Smuss Allen) who did lathe work. He started with a 4X4, shaved the blade end flat, "rough lathed" the edges of the stock and then lathed down to a handle on the other end. We bought hundreds of his oars and never found two the same.

Our oarlocks were much the same as everybody else's. On the pontoons we stacked about two short sections of 2X6 with a hole drilled in the middle for a 1/2" pipe sticking out about 8 inches. Sections of rubber tires were cut, to size and double clamped with hose clamps. On the "10-mans" we used the same stacking affect but they were glued to a 2' by 2' metal plate that was bent to fit the shape of the tube and that was held down by a sheet of rubber that was about 3' by 3' with a hole for the blocks. We used commercial oars at first but most of them didn't hold up in heavy water so we went to "Hatchet Harry" - they were awkward but held up much better.

When we (Western) first started using motors, the motor was tied "up" until we hit long calm water stretches, then lowered the motor and drug two boats until we got to the rapids. The first rapid I ever ran with a motor was Lava Falls! In those days we would let passengers run some of the boats and then when we got to a major rapid we would take our boat through and then walk back for the others.

That day, when we got to Lava I (with Grant Reeder, Stuart's father, on front oars) we took the boat through and then Jack decided that I should try running the 10-mans with a motor, but with Amil Quayle sitting in the middle with the oars "at the ready". Either run with a motor or with oars but never never mix them. Amil's oars were always catching a wave cap and throwing me out of position. On the third run, Amil kept his oars well inside the boat and I made a perfect run until I hit the bottom wave when I looked up and saw the river and looked down and saw the sky ... people on shore said that it was the most graceful flip that they had ever seen.

Paul (Pablo) T. Thevenin



A Hatch River Expeditions "homemade" self-bailing raft in Warm Springs Rapid Yampa River
1971

{Photo by Herm Hoops}