

SELDOM SEEN

Returns

It was March 14, 2000, day two of GCAN's "Restoration Celebration and Rendezvous" at Glen Canyon Dam. This marked the fourth rally at the dam for Ken Sleight. After devoting more than half his life to fighting the world's 19th-largest dam, he was not about to miss the largest rally yet, a celebration to officially launch the formation of a people's movement to decommission the dam.

The timing of the rally was not random, for March 14 was the third International Day of Action Against Dams and For Rivers Water and Life. While Sleight and others gathered at Glen Canyon, 65 other actions in 25 countries were simultaneously taking place – all to celebrate, educate and demonstrate for dam-free rivers. The rally also fell on the eleventh anniversary of the death of acclaimed Southwest writer Edward Abbey. It was Abbey's novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* that brought widespread public attention to the possibility of resurrecting Glen Canyon after the dam. No matter the vehicle, whether via a precision earthquake or houseboats packed with ammonium nitrate, Abbey's Gang was determined to someday see Glen Canyon again. None of the Gang longed for this more than Seldom Seen Smith – in real life Abbey's good friend Ken Sleight.

Now, standing adjacent to Abbey's pickup, the bed of which formed part of the stage, Sleight repeatedly remarked, "This is great, this is great. It's really going to happen now." Considering this single event at the dam brought together a diverse crowd of some 250 Native American activists, river lovers, organizations and businesses from across the country – and with only six weeks notice at that – it was impossible not to feel the enthusiasm present for draining the reservoir that flooded Glen Canyon.

During an interview at the dam Sleight noted, "When we first started organizing to oppose Glen Canyon Dam in 1957, we had little support." One of the first commercial river outfitters on the Colorado River, Sleight helped form Friends of Glen Canyon to fight the dam's construction. Although the dam was indeed completed in 1963, Sleight and others fought on, turning their efforts to stopping the filling of the reservoir. Through the years he persevered, challenging the reservoir's partial inundation of Rainbow Bridge National Monument, and captaining a houseboat no less on the occasion of the dam's 20th anniversary ceremony in 1983, presided over by then-Interior Secretary James Watt. "Sometimes I felt like we were out there all alone," Sleight said, "but whenever there was an opportunity, I wanted to do my part to keep up the fight."

On March 14 Sleight joined a host of other longtime Glen Canyon lovers and defenders, most notably David Brower, whose checkered history with the dam often plagues him. That story dates back to 1957, when Brower was serving as the first executive director of the Sierra Club. In this capacity he was approached by the Bureau of Reclamation (BuRec), which courted – and received – Brower's approval for a special proposal linked to Glen Canyon. In exchange for BuRec canceling plans for dams in Dinosaur National Monument, Brower consented not to oppose Glen Canyon Dam or any other dams in the Lower Colorado River Basin.

"I learned of my mistake almost immediately from my friend Wallace Stegner," Brower told the March 14 crowd. "I then tried to convince the Sierra Club board of directors that we had to change our position and oppose this dam, but they would not go along." Determined to fight this and other ill-conceived projects, David Brower and Ken Sleight teamed up in the 1960s, leading successful campaigns that stopped BuRec from building dams in the Grand Canyon. And finally, in 1996, Brower did convince the Sierra Club board to pass a unanimous resolution calling for the immediate decommissioning of Glen Canyon Dam. Prior to his death in early November, building support for Glen Canyon restoration was one of Brower's top priorities.

Another of Ken Sleight's friends on hand March 14, providing her unique blend of music, humor and wisdom, was longtime Glen Canyon river runner and folk singer Katie Lee. Lee is among a handful of individuals who had the privilege of knowing Glen Canyon intimately before it was flooded. She had always vowed never to visit Glen Canyon Dam, but came on March 14 nonetheless, agreeing with Sleight that this event



could not be missed. While reading from her book *All My Rivers Are Gone*, she described how the Bureau of Reclamation, or "Wreck the Nation" as Lee likes to call it, should strive to become the "Bureau of Restoration." As she launched into a rousing rendition of her classic "Wreck the Nation Bureau," GCAN staff unveiled a life-sized image of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt wielding his dambusting sledgehammer at Glen Canyon Dam before the cheering crowd.

In the spirit of Katie Lee's songs, which so effectively bring Glen Canyon to life and so eloquently make the case for its restoration, Austin, Texas folksinger Bill Oliver debuted a tune which is quickly becoming the anthem for the Glen Canyon campaign: "Drain It!" Together with fellow folksinger Peg Millett, four "Drainettes" in hardhats providing background vocals, and a ceremonial Chinese river dragon (aptly named Glen) dancing amidst the crowd, this event was clearly a celebration.

Asked why he himself did not get up on stage and speak at the event, Sleight remarked, "It was a privilege to open the two-day rendezvous in Flagstaff yesterday. I've spent plenty of time in the past preaching at this dam, and am glad to allow others the opportunity." Those others included former US Poet Laureate Robert Hass, Sage Douglas Remington of the Native Environmental Justice Advocacy Fund, and Juliette Majot of International Rivers Network, which promotes the International Day of Action around the world.

One of the most moving speakers was Dineh (Navajo) Medicine Men's Association President Thomas Morris, who provided the initial blessing. In 1974, several of Morris' predecessors joined Ken Sleight in the unsuccessful effort to sue the Department of the Interior over flooding the base of Rainbow Bridge, a Navajo sacred site. At the rally, Morris noted, "This reservoir has brought nothing but problems to our people. We cannot pray to our sacred gods because these sites have been flooded. We must get them back."

The festivities concluded with the reading and signing of the *Glen Canyon Declaration*, which calls for the restoration of Glen Canyon and the Colorado River watershed. Along with the 50-plus organizations and businesses that lent their endorsements, Ken and nearly 200 others signed their names to the declaration. "This is only the beginning; tens of thousands more are now on their way," commented GCAN President John Weisheit.

As the rally drew to a close, Sleight and new and old friends alike packed up for a post-event party 15 miles down the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry, where he and Edward Abbey first met. "We may not need that precision earthquake Seldom prayed for," said Sleight. "The social movement represented here today is going to make it happen regardless."

SUPPORT THE GLEN CANYON DECLARATION

Join the more than 75 groups and countless individuals that have endorsed the Glen Canyon Declaration launched at Glen Canyon Dam this past March 14. Please ask your friends, family and other organizations that you might be affiliated with to do so as well. The actions called for in the declaration are:

- The Bureau of Reclamation should begin the process of developing and then implementing a decommissioning plan for Glen Canyon Dam, including a restoration and recovery plan for those areas inundated by its reservoir and those communities adversely impacted by the reservoir's draining.
- The Bureau of Reclamation should establish a federal laboratory to serve as the nation's primary research facility for river and riverine habitat restoration, and give strong consideration to locating this facility in the town of Page, Arizona. In building their own large dams, many countries emulated what they saw as the success of Glen Canyon Dam. It is thus fitting for this site to offer new inspiration with an international center of excellence in state-of-the-art river restoration and dam decommissioning research and development.
- All new management plans affecting the Colorado River watershed should undergo rigorous analysis of basinwide impacts and a complete assessment of the potential for dam decommissioning in meeting the plan's objectives.
- No new dams within the Colorado River watershed should be constructed, nor should existing dams be reconstructed in the event of their failure.
- Operating licenses should be required for all federal dams, as has long been the case with all non-federal dams. Federal dams must be subject to periodic relicensing reviews to both ensure compliance with environmental laws and safety standards, and provide meaningful opportunities for public participation in decisions about the environmental, social, and safety impacts of these projects.
- The Bureau of Reclamation should provide the necessary funding to support scientific research on the biological and habitat requirements of the endangered native fish of the Colorado River, and to ensure the full recovery of these species.
- The National Park Service should implement a program to quantify, monitor and evaluate the presence of a wide range of pollutants including toxic and radioactive metals, petroleum compounds, bacteria, and other contaminants in Lake Powell reservoir to ensure full compliance with all laws protecting water quality within Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

To endorse the declaration, or to receive a copy of the full text, contact GCAN or visit www.drainit.org

The Sustainable Water Project Tour – No Reservoirs Required

In conjunction with the Fourth International Day of Action Against Dams and For Rivers Water and Life, March 14, 2001 join GCAN and a host of other organizations planning events to publicize the tremendous waste of Colorado River water, and the conservation strategies available that will enable the river's restoration. The tour will begin in Salt Lake City in early March and conclude in Palm Springs on March 14, with stops in Albuquerque, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and a number of other sites in between.

For details contact GCAN or visit www.drainit.org

