

A CHRONOLOGY OF RIVER RUNNING – COLORADO RIVER, GRAND JUNCTION TO MOAB

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The history of river running is often dominated by those who pioneered the mainstream Colorado and Green Rivers. Other segments of the Colorado River have a rich and colorful history, that helps put those "expeditions" into perspective. The following chronology has been compiled from a variety of sources over the past twenty-five years using a variety of sources. If anyone has additional information please forward it to me.

The intrigue of rivers lured people from the earliest days. I've often heard comments that People of The First Nations shunned river travel and feared the mysterious canyons. Humanity has common bonds that transpose the ages of civilizations and cultures.

Given a child and water, pause to watch the interactions between them and common objects - sticks and stones. We (People) learn from doing things, our successes and failures contribute to our over-all knowledge of things. It is not unlikely that one or more children from those earlier civilizations noticed the flotation of wood and other objects. In the progression of survival or commerce, those lessons would likely come to fruition when one had to cross a river, or transport goods. Anyone who denies that, at least some curious or ingenious maverick of The First Nations would not travel rivers is in denial of our common humanity. Thus the "honor" of first traverses recorded by we Euros disregards the enormous possibilities from others who lived here for ages.

In the cool shadow of morning, a dark skinned person pushed a log into the river at some place we pass today. Gripping the log and paddling, a new journey to new life, fortune, or curiosity began. The place and time was not recorded, but we follow in the wake of that moment.

The rivers lie semi-dormant until we came with pens and paper from the East.

In 1869 Samuel Adams had gotten wind of J.W. Powell's plan to run the Green & Colorado Rivers. In April he jumped off the train in Green River, Wyoming and tried to convince the Powell crew he had been ordered to join the Expedition. Powell's crew quickly caught on to Adams and made fun of him, when Powell returned on May 11 he sent Captain Adams on his way. Adams scurried off to the Grand (Colorado) River drainage near Breckenridge to form his own expedition.

In July he set off with his expedition down the Blue River, and in less than a week lost several boats. On July 30 the party, already deserted by four members, started down the Grand River. By August 7th the party, still portaging rapids in Gore Canyon, lost its last boat. Adams, Twible and Lillis walked down river where they built a cedar raft. Although some reputed that Adams ran Westwater, he most likely did not. After several

more crashes and attempts Adams turned away from the river, at about the time Powell's crew was at the confluence of the Green, and Grand Rivers.

The Canyon was probably first run in August 1887 by Babcock and Miller, dentists from Glenwood Springs, CO. Their 17' boat was equipped with two water-tight compartments. On reaching the confluence with the Green they rowed their boats back to Moab.

In 1888 Elmer Kane, Frank Emerson and Charles Duke traveled from Grand Junction to Moab prospecting and sight-seeing. The Kane party reported seeing miners in a flat bottom skiff above Moab. They too had claimed to come down river from Grand Junction. Kane planned to continue through to the Grand Canyon. On hearing how dangerous Cataract Canyon was he abandoned the plans. The question is, did they run the rapids of Westwater or portage the canyon? No one knows. Elmer Kane went on to work as a boatman for the Stanton and Best Expeditions.

In the spring of 1889, Robert Brewster Stanton hired Frank C. Kendrick to survey for a railroad from the Grand River to the confluence with the Green River. Kendrick purchased an open dory made of pine with oak ribs, and named Brown Betty. His crew consisted of his Assistant Engineer and three local men from Grand Junction. The five explorers set off on the first of April, and the little dory did well through Horsethief and Ruby Canyons. On reaching Westwater, the group camped in a grove of cottonwoods and climbed to the rim for a look at the rapids. Kendrick's diary records: "River narrow and very dangerous." Showing the prudence not exhibited by his boss (Stanton) Kendrick portaged twelve miles of Stanton's Granite Canyon, which he called Hades Canyon. After reaching the confluence, Kendrick and his men pulled their boats 117 miles up to Green River (Blake, UT). After seven weeks on the survey he had enough, and went back to his family. Three weeks after Kendrick left the Expedition, Stanton and Frank Brown set out to finish the survey – Brown did not survive the expedition.

In Grand Memories, a publication of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, a brief paragraph (p. 137-137), states that in the early days (1879-1905) people living in Castle Valley floated supplies downstream by raft from Dewey to the mouth of Professor Creek. In November, 1888 Francis M. Schafer and his mother ran from Cisco to Nigger Bill Creek (about 30 miles) on a raft loaded with 500 pounds of bedding, supplies and placer mining tools. The raft was later taken back to Castle Creek. From Castle Creek two men towed and rowed the raft back upstream using a 14' rowboat.

In 1896 Minich and Keller left Moab in (a steamer?) moving at the rate of seven miles a day, and made it upstream to Hotel Bottom near Cisco. In 1897, 1898, 1902, 1903 and possibly other years Thomas Branson and his son Jesse shipped lumber from Castle Creek to Moab on rafts 48-64 feet in length. The Bransons sent about ten rafts of lumber down each year, hauling 10,000 - 25,000 board feet. two men worked each raft. The trips took about 3 hours in high water, and ten as the water lowered. Taken overland the enterprise would have taken over five four-horse teams and six men.

Henry Grimm went 22 miles upstream from Moab in August 1898 in a 24' row boat carrying about 500 pounds of supplies. He returned with 6,000 feet of lumber! Johnson, Iverson, Warner and Livingston boated from Dewey Bridge to Moab on August 1901. Walter Mendenhall, of San Juan River fame, floated from Cisco to Moab in a 14-15' scow in fall of 1907.

A U.S. Geological Survey team, under Raymond C. Seitz started from Grand Junction on October 11, 1912 in two skiffs. They bypassed Westwater Canyon.

In mid-August, 1916, Ellsworth Kolb and J.W.Shields left Delta Colorado in a 17' freight canoe. Kolb spent several days inspecting the rapids of Westwater Canyon and decided to portage around them, after which they put in the river until they reached Moab. In October, 1916 Ellsworth Kolb, Bert Loper and Frank Dean ran from Glenwood Springs to Moab, including the rapids of Westwater Canyon making movies and "fighting for his life"! Kolb declared the rapids exceeded anything in the Grand Canyon for "actual violence and peculiar conditions". The newspaper headlines read: "Trip though Westwater Canon was like tickling dynamite with a lighted match--WOW!". Loper continued on to the Confluence and returned to Moab with the help of a motor.

Prospector Frank M. Barnes of San Diego, CA. successfully ran Granite Canyon in 1921. Barnes built a 21' flat bottomed boat in late October for his prospecting expedition. He was unaware of the rapids and set out in blissful ignorance of what lie ahead. Once he entered the canyon, unable to turn back, Barnes flirted with disaster. His boat crashed against rocks and three times filled with water.

John and Parley Galloway (sons of Nathaniel Galloway) ran from Westwater Canyon to Moab in April or May of 1926 using a 16' craft. They may also have run the river in 1924. Harold Leich launched at Grand Lake, CO. in 1933 to begin his solo trip down the Colorado River. Leich used a folding rubber kayak, and planned to run to the Gulf of California. At Grand Junction he built a punt named Dirty Devil and continued through Westwater Canyon. The Dirty Devil wrecked and sank in Cataract Canyon and Leich swam and walked to Hite.

Otis Marston and Preston Walker (from Grand Junction) ran the full length of the Dolores River, from Dolores, Colorado to the Colorado River and down the Colorado to Moab in May, 1948. They used a San Juan River punt (referred to as a "horsetrough boat by Kenny Ross). The run was made without any problems (although they lined Snaggletooth Rapid on the Dolores). This appears to have been the first recorded run of the Dolores River. In May, 1949 Walker repeated the trip, and in May, 1952, he started through again but lost a boat (on the Dolores?) and the group walked out.

Ed A. Hudson and Ed Nichols piloted an inboard motor boat from Fruita, Colorado to Lee's Ferry in 1955. The boat sank in Cataract Canyon, but the boat was raised and the trip continued.

In 1956 Les Jones from Heber City, Utah, began making regular trips down Westwater to make his scroll maps and to make films with a camera mounted on a football helmet.

Tex McClatchey was the first to get into commercial boating on the Colorado River above Moab in 1959. In 1971 McClatchey launched his 40-ton all steel true paddlewheel boat the Canyon King. The boat was 93' long and carried 200 passengers several miles up and downstream from Moab. For the record Mitch Williams and Fred Radcliff were second and third respectively, to begin commercial operations on the river.

By 1974 nine commercial outfitters were operating through the Loma to Westwater section of the river carrying 1,557 user days. At that time private river runners accounted for 114 user days on the same section. By 1975 private use neared 500 user days. These figures do not include power boaters who returned to Loma. In 1974 26 outfitters carried 3,813 user days through Westwater Canyon while private boaters accounted for 2,937 user days.

Today the launch ramps are festooned with boats and equipment "designed" for the river. The people come to the river in droves. We apply for permits, pay fees, and promulgate regulations. And often, in the cool shadows of morning, we forget what lured those first people into these rivers - giving birth to today's recreation and profits.