

First Trip
05 May, 1956
Dove Creek pumping station (Mile 19.1) to
Mouth of Disappointment Creek (Mile 43.2)
23.2 miles
Bob Gant and George Simmons

Our first impression was, "The water's cold!" We had no more than pumped our boats and launched them, than they felt soft again, and we had to thoroughly top them off before they were rigid enough to be rowed effectively. Within a few minutes we were at a very unique geologic feature, the Glade Graben (Fig. 6). A graben is a "block" of rock which has been down-faulted in relation to the rocks by its sides, and in this case the down dropping is the result of the solution of salt in an underlying unit of rocks, the Paradox Formation.

A stratigraphic unit named the Paradox Formation underlies the Slick Rock District and extends from there 30 miles northeast toward the Uncompahgre Uplift. This formation is chiefly composed of evaporite minerals including an abundance of halite (common table salt). When salt is buried and under differential pressure it flows, and when the Colorado Plateau was compressed against the Uncompahgre Uplift, the strata in the adjacent pan of the Plateau were folded into anticlines and synclines parallel to the Uncompahgre Uplift. The salt being quite plastic flowed toward the low pressure areas, the crests of the anticlines. As erosion proceeded along the courses of preceding drainages, the water table lowered and upon reaching the salt dissolved it, causing the overlying rocks to collapse. This caused valleys to form along the crests of the anticlines. The drainages continued in their original courses, and instead of flowing in the valleys, they cut across them, and several such anomalies are recognized in this region. The most famous is Paradox Valley, and the closest to the Slick Rock District is Gypsum Valley, along its north boundary.

In the southeast part of the Slick Rock District is a topographic feature known as the Glade Highland, and drilling has revealed that it is supported by another salt anticline, the Dolores Anticline. This anticline is in the incipient stages of rupture, and the Glade Graben represents the first faults of the eventual many which will develop as the fold collapses.

The thought of maintaining a record that might be of subsequent use had not occurred to me. It seemed the presence of other Canyoneers would be a very rare for I had lived near the river for two years during which time it had been navigable for only a few weeks, and I had visited the river almost daily without encountering anyone with the intent of boating. Eight years had elapsed since the only known previous voyage and it was claimed as the first trip on the Dolores (Walker, 1948). I was mapping the geology on aerial photographs at a scale of 1:60,000, but never considered locating the rapids or the exact locations where the few pictures were taken (Fig. 7). This could have been easily accomplished as a road which I traveled frequently was beside much of the river.

We did apply names to a few features, but these were informal names for our own conversations ("Lost Hat Rapids", Figs. 8,9, and 10.), and are mostly meaningless now, 50 years later.

The oars with which we rowed were those which came with the surplus rafts when they were purchased. They were made of hollow aluminum tubes which "gloved" into each other and snapped into place with small spring-loaded buttons. The blades were so small that they caused little more movement than poles. We enlarged the blades by riveting sheet aluminum extensions, and smoothed the edges with folded copper lining. This improved propulsion immensely, but if we pulled too hard, then the oars would bend and could break.

We had scouted all of the rapids from the Dove Creek Pumping Station to an area around Horseshoe Bend and determined that we could run everything but Snaggletooth Rapid (Fig. 11), the only rapid which we new by name from the Walker and Marston trip in 1948, (Walker, 1948; Marston, 1949.) We took another long look without changing our minds, and decided that our boats might split a fabric seam if they pounded into the rocks. There was neither a question, nor any impropriety considered!

The crest of the Dolores Anticline intersects the course of the Dolores River near here, and as one progresses downstream the base of the Chinle Formation (Triassic) is exposed and the top of the Cutler Formation (Permian) appears. At many places in this region the Moss Back Conglomerate is the lowest member of the Chinle, and this stratigraphic unit is elsewhere the host for uranium deposits. The Moss Back overlies the Cutler Formation in the Slick Rock District, and forever hopeful prospectors had explored the Chinle-Cutler contact with several adits in the Horseshoe Group of claims (near Mile 31.5, river left).

About two miles downstream from Snaggletooth Rapid the Dolores River makes an abrupt change in course, doubling back on itself in a two-mile hairpin turn (Miles 29.2 - 31.2) called the Horseshoe Bend. A saddle in the bend isolates a hill to the northeast which rises 300 feet above the saddle and 500 feet above the river. We dubbed this promontory the "Dolores Pyramid" (Fig. 12).

We stopped for a "break" at Mile 31.2 (Fig. 13), river left opposite the south end of Joe Davis Hill knowing that after a little more than a mile we would encounter practically continuous rapids for several miles until we rounded the west end of Joe Davis Hill.

We continued on to the Muleshoe Bend Mile 37.5 to Mile 39.2 where we were on very familiar ground. During the Fall this was one of our favorite hunting areas for deer. The two hunters who lost a coin toss became the "dogs" and hiked over the neck of the Muleshoe. The winners, the "hunters" would conceal themselves behind boulders and trees and wait. The "dogs would walk down downstream on opposite sides of what little river existed at that time of the year, slowly flushing the deer along the bottom of the narrow canyon toward the waiting hunters. The "Code for the Dogs" was that they could

only shoot if a deer turned back toward them. Of come great care must be taken in a hunt of this sort as the game is between facing groups with rifles.

Three miles below the Muleshoe Bend a ranch road reaches the mouth of Disappointment Creek, and having shuttled a vehicle there early in the morning, this was our egress point.

References

Walker, Preston, 1948: Dolores River Tops For Scenery, Fast Water. Sentinel writer tells of experiences on 1st boat trip down Western River." The Daily Sentinel, Sunday May 30, 1948, Vol. 55 (LV), No. 192, p. 6,7; 11 photographs. Grand Junction, Colorado.

Marston, Otis R. [aka "Dock" and "Doc"], 1949: Running the Dolores River, 1948; Diary of Otis Marston: Colorado Magazine, The (published by the State Historical Society of Colorado), October 1949; Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 258-270.

DeVries, Ralph, and Maurer, Stephen G., 1997: Dolores River Guide. Southwest Natural and Cultural Heritage Association. Albuquerque, NM, 98 p.

Figures

Figure 5: Bob Gant with The Waters of Lodore and Nicholas Needlefoot at Big Canyon Rapid, the ingress point by the Dove Creek Pumping Station Mile 19.0, river left (river right and river left are determined from the point of view of an observer looking downstream).



Figure 6: The Glade Graben Dolores River Mile 22.0. The faults bounding the down-dropped block occur in the two gullies, and the offset is most apparent in the Wingate Sandstone which forms the lowest and thickest cliff.

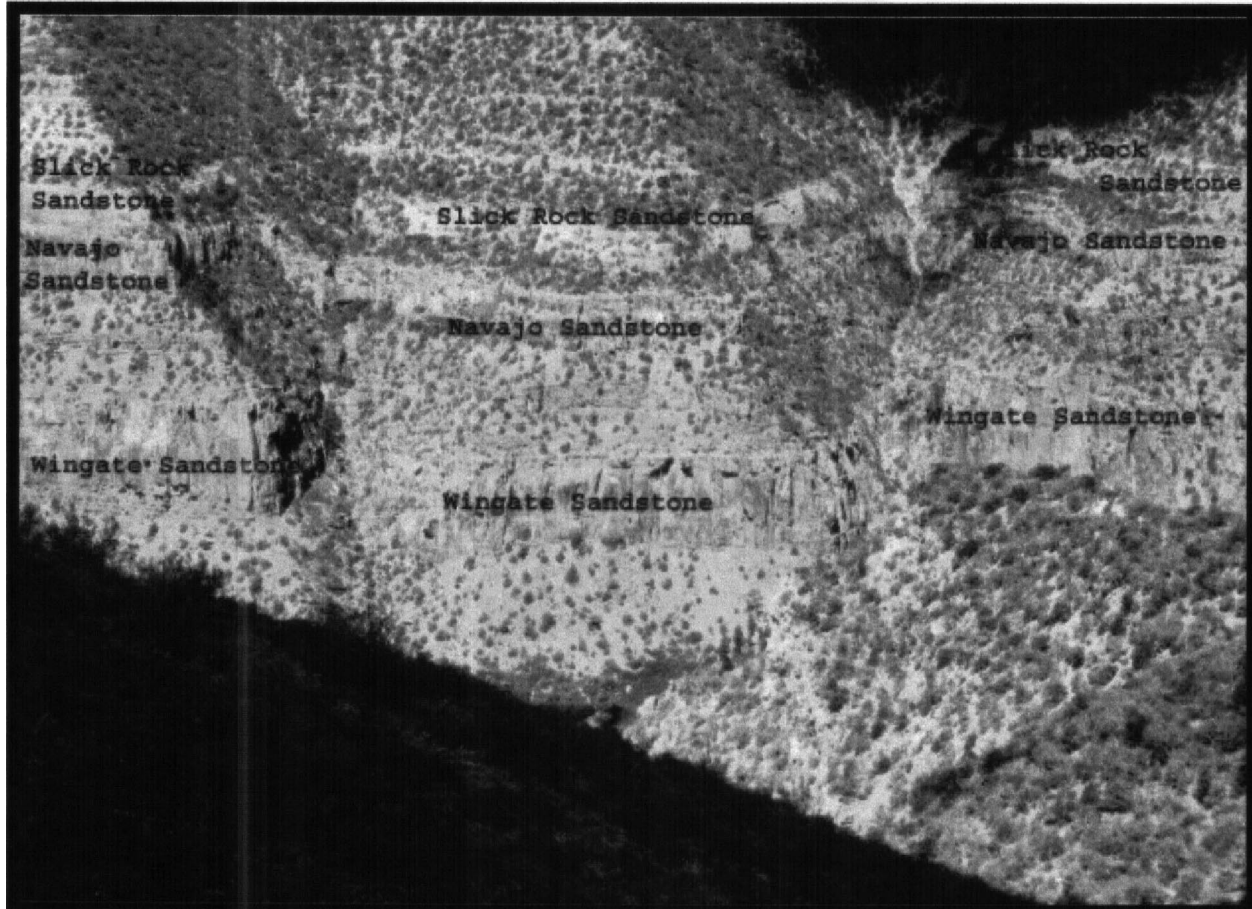


Figure 7: Bob Gant rowing Nicholas Needlefoot a few miles downstream from the Dove Creek pumping station. Mine access road near river, upper right.



Figure 8: "Lost Hat" Rapid. Location undetermined, possibly Little Snag Rapid of DeVries and Maurer (1993, Mile 26.4). A capricious wind whisked my hat aloft before dunking it in the chocolate of the river, a toast to the River Gods.



Figure 9: Bob Gant in Nicholas Needlefoot in lower part of "Lost Hat" Rapid.



Figure 10: We broke an oar in "Lost Hat" Rapid. Bob Gant whittled a long stick which he jammed into the two severed parts, making a firm repair.



Figure 11: Bob Gant surveys Snaggleteooth Rapid, Mile 27.5.



Figure 12: Horseshoe Bend and the "Dolores Pyramid." The Dolores River in flood stage, 26 May 1973; the river on the left side of the view flows toward the camera, and on the right - away and down stream. View from a mine road in the S1/2, NW1/4, Sec.6, T. 42 N., R 17 W.



Figure 13: Bob Gant with Nicholas Needlefoot and The Waters of Lodore at Mile 31.2.

