

Second Trip
13 May, 1956
Bradfield Bridge (Mile 0.0) to Dove Creek pumping station (mile 19.1)
Bob Gant, Bill Rodgers, and George Simmons in Nicholas Needlefoot

Prior to the construction of the McPhee Dam in 1983, navigation on the Dolores River was possible from 15 miles upstream from the town of Dolores, at the confluence of the Dolores River and its West Fork, for 222 miles to the Colorado River. Another 2 miles of travel was necessary to reach an egress point on the Colorado at Dewey Bridge. The segment of the Dolores upstream from the town of Dolores is now a popular "daily" for local boaters in kayaks and small rafts. The McPhee Reservoir occupies 25 miles of the river's former course, and it is possible to launch on the Dolores below McPhee Dam, 11 miles upstream from the Bradfield Bridge. However, the 11 miles is open canyon and a haven, for fly fishermen, and practically all boating commences at the Bradfield Recreation site.

We were aware that numerous archaeological sites occurred in the vicinity, and while mapping along a rim of Dakota Sandstone, encountered one unexpectedly, near the launch site (Fig. 15).

We floated past the old Bradfield Homestead site and then encountered the first of several fences, erected across the river to control the wanderings of cattle (Fig. 16). It was necessary to portage around these rather squeezing under or through them, thereby risking tears which could be inflicted by the barbed wire. This indicated that in some years the spring runoff was not high enough to destroy these barriers.

We paused for lunch (Fig. 17), and then as we progressed downstream, Ponderosa Canyon became deeper and deeper, and when we reached Pealed Pine Canyon, nearly 10 miles below the Bradfield Bridge, it was 1,600 feet deep. The walls of the canyon here the hosts for huge ponderosa pine trees, one of which had toppled athwart the river, completely blocking its course (Figs. 18 and 19).

The Ponderosa Gorge maintained its character all of the remaining distance (Fig. 20), and around Mountain Sheep Point to our exit at Big Canyon Rapids by the Dove Creek pumping station—deep (1,700 feet), narrow, fast water, and accompanied by an abundance of Ponderosa Pine trees.

Figures (as follows)

Figure 14: George Simmons (L) and Bill Rodgers (R) in Nicholas Needlefoot at the Bradfield Bridge (Mile ON), the head of the Ponderosa Gorge. Present day launching is at the Bradfield Recreation Site, 0.6 miles downstream on river left.



Figure 15: Slab House Ruin near Bradfield Bridge. Trees are growing in the ancient rooms. A few slabs are still standing, and the area is littered with pottery shards.



Figure 16: Bill Rogers (L) and Bob Gant (R) with Nicholas Needlefoot. Note barbed wire fence crossing the Dolores River at upper right.



Figure 17: Canyoneers at lunch stop in the Ponderosa Gorge (left to right: Bill Rogers, George Simmons, Bob Gant).



Figure 18: A pine tree lies completely across the Dolores River in Ponderosa Canyon. Bill Rogers rows Nicholas Needlefoot to the portage point by the tree's roots.



Figure 19: Bob Gant (L) and Bill Rogers (R) portage Nicholas Needlefoot around ponderosa.



Figure 20: View upstream in the Ponderosa Gorge from the Dolores Canyon Overlook, 27 May 1973



