

# Boatman's Quarterly Review

**SACHMIDT**



Published quarterly by and for  
GRAND CANYON RIVER GUIDES.

GRAND CANYON RIVER GUIDES  
is a nonprofit organization dedicated to:

**Protecting Grand Canyon**  
**Setting the highest standards for the river profession**  
**Celebrating the unique spirit of the river community**  
**Providing the best possible river experience**

General Meetings are held each Spring and Fall. Our Board of Directors Meetings are generally held the first Wednesday of each month. All innocent bystanders are urged to attend. Call for details.

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Our editorial policy, such as it is: provide an open forum. We need articles, poetry, stories, drawings, photos, opinions, suggestions, gripes, comics, etc. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Grand Canyon River Guides, Inc.

Written submissions should be less than 1500 words and, if possible, emailed to GCRG. Include postpaid return envelope if you want your submission returned.

Deadlines for submissions are the 1st of February, May, August and November. Thanks!

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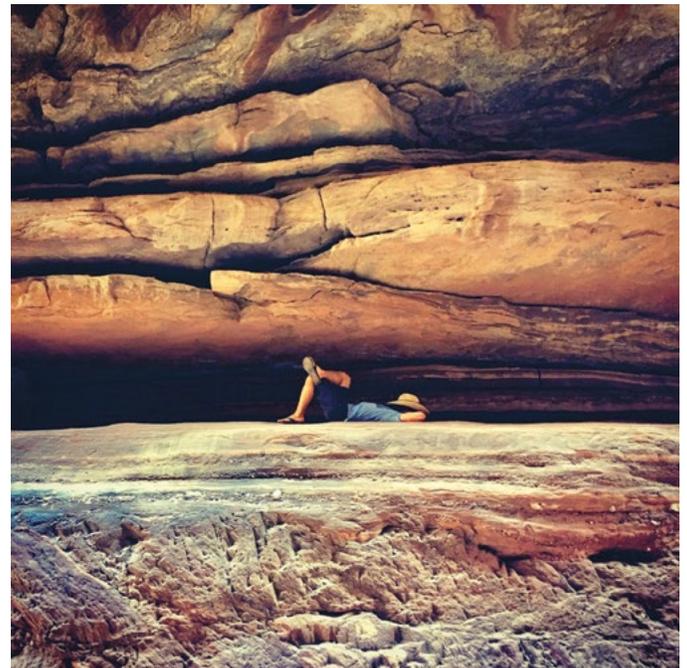
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**Boatman Working.** Photo by Benjamin Dale

**On the Cover: Rachel Schmidt on the Rio Usumacinta, Chiapas,  
Mexico circa 1992.**

# Prez Blurp

## Mírame en mis ojos, y dime en que piensas.

Individually, we have our reasons for keeping an affair with the Mistress Grand Canyon that likely evolves through deeper experiences and time spent within the canyon. The people we meet, and every fresh crew we drop into an adventure with, become threads to braid a story that can be infinitely tied to our lives. My curiosity in people is what has kept me bound to guiding in Grand Canyon for the last few years. Due to social distancing and waves of quarantine, we have an opportunity to tap more intimately into the connections we create. Finding one another in the same social and political climate, we make a choice to expose our vulnerabilities and open ourselves up to risk by leaving our homes, engaging in small group gatherings or speaking up for a call for action. As we are submerged in this environment together, perhaps it is easier to engage in the difficult conversations regarding social justice, land acknowledgement, a presidential election, health concerns, and protecting sacred waters. Almost immediately upon meeting anyone, I find the need to share and ask those words, “Look me in the eyes, and tell me what you are thinking,” inviting conversation with grocery store clerks, the person dancing in their mask on the street corner with headphones and sun shades while I wait at a red light, or each person that steps off the bus for a river trip.

Masks, they are a new mandatory accessory in our lives. It displays our care and respect for the vulnerability of each person we cross paths with. Elbow bump, air hug, the toe

tap foot five. Growing into a society that depends on expression through our eyes more than ever, these words, “look me in the eyes and tell me what you are thinking,” become apparent to ask. In lieu of flashing smiles, we engage with the blink of an eye instead. Often, we escape our deepest vulnerabilities through averting our eyes from a conversation; our facial expressions or the motion of our mouth can show acceptance or distrust; a grin or sad lip lets us understand more quickly how a comment might have made someone feel. Similarly, we need to listen clearly to the voices drowned out by loud crowds of propaganda, or brushed aside for a buck. Don’t let a mask muffle those words.

In broaching the question of returning to work, I want to be and am willing to be the boots on the ground, advocating for and practicing what needs to change for Grand Canyon and the folks in and around it; it is where I am most suited at this time. Being reunited with the waters of the Colorado River has been a welcome return to my routine, while sharing with its visitors various conflicts we have fought to keep the place protected and what new current threats it faces. Out of respect for the Tribes’ wishes, I have not stopped at the pristine blue waters of the LCR or Havasu and now use the opportunity of floating by to share what knowledge I have; expressing why it is important to respect these boundaries and cultural concerns. My hope is to create and perpetuate important dialogue in the flesh with folks who make the choice to travel. Down there, it’s become very clear: you cannot hide from any one difficult conversation that the rim world is fighting. There is no

escape in Grand Canyon, especially today. The LCR continues to be threatened with potential dams, further jeopardizing precious habitat of the humpback chub and disturbing Native lands. By continuing to share our experience with people and by allowing them to taste, smell and feel the dirt beneath their nails, it formulates an opportunity for stronger advocacy, not just for the place, but for the people who were forced into the margins from a borderless land.

All fears were felt on my first trip. The intensity of breaking my own circle and trying out new procedures was daunting. I am doing my best to mitigate the virus within my group and to others on the river. It certainly helps that it is quieter down there. The dark skies of Arizona hold the finest place to view Neowise, the visiting comet. You can see the breath in each new shoot of willow and arrowweed that has popped up on the sandy shores; the catclaw acacia reaches out sharply as you duck towards a scout or groover spot. Despite any obstacles though, catclaw or otherwise, GCRG is going to continue down the path of opening our eyes and trying to be a better, more accessible voice for our entire community during this pandemic and beyond. I respect and honor the decision each of us make on behalf of working in the Grand Canyon. The choice is yours, and it is valid. In the words of Michelle Obama, “Your story is what you have, what you will always have. It is something to own.”

As your president, I am honored to have been able to serve over the past year. You never really know what your run is going to be until you push off shore, and this past year has been a microcosm of the phrase read and run. Plan A ended at Plan Q and

you better make it work. To the best of our abilities, GCRG has done so through our collaborative work with the Whale Foundation and Grand Canyon Youth to create the Grand Canyon Relief Coalition. Through the generosity of our community and our supporters, the Throw Bag Fund has awarded \$70,000 for guide relief and we are now seeking ways to serve a broader spectrum of needs within the community. Wow! I am blown away with that success and ever so grateful.

Our hope is to continue to welcome and amplify the voices of our Native community and develop a bolder vision of how to do so. Towards that end, as a board, we felt it necessary to support the Black Lives Matter movement, and we have already been taking steps to broaden and educate ourselves on our own homogeneous demographic. A statement is nothing though, without actions. We're seeking out ways to thoughtfully develop concrete solutions to the questions and issues raised by that statement. Although GCRG has always set aside space for sharing and amplifying Native Voices at the GTS land and river sessions, an important shift in our organization occurred as a result of one of these

panels. The powerful intertribal panel we hosted at the GTS land session in 2019 made us all question the pomp and circumstance of the 100th year anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park. After all, colonialism and historic trauma for indigenous peoples is the untold story of Grand Canyon National Park. While Grand Canyon guides have been grappling with this fact for at least the last couple of years, it is time for GCRG to acknowledge it as well and work towards more diversity, equity and inclusion. Change takes time, and with the constant work of evolving old habits and listening to and educating ourselves on the buried voices that have always been here, GCRG hopes to represent, honor, and give an equitable platform for the voices to all people of Grand Canyon, past, present and future.

No Good at Goodbyes.

I will exit by continuing to walk humbly barefoot through the soft sands, confident that the Board of GCRG and future leaders have a strong voice to keep up the fight, positively addressing the challenging transitions we encounter. Let us continue to support one another with empathy, faith and pride; rolling forward by fostering relationships built on greater trust; looking honestly into one another's eyes sharing open communication.

*Margeaux Bestard*



Photos: Margeaux Bestard



# Dear Eddy

In reference to Vladimir Kovalik's "Farewell" in the Spring BQR, Volume 33, Number 2.

**M**uch has been written and spoken about Vladimir Kovalik's accomplishments. It doesn't need repeating here. With his passing, I feel the need to write about my relationship with VK. What he did for me and my love for the man. An equal amount has been written about VK's wild character. About his turn on a dime, Czech accented verbal tirades. I can set the record straight on that part. People know VK the legend. I'd like to share some of VK the human.

"Vhat to hell Chohn? You are fucking fired! Now get to hell out there and finish packing trip!"

My VK firings usually lasted less than a few seconds. Just as fast, we would be laughing our asses off together. We laughed a lot. I spent enough time with VK to know his hard-baked crusty exterior was just a thin coating over his loving, cream filled inside. Once I knew that cream filling, I didn't need to respond to a verbal shellacking. I knew what was inside him. VK sensed that in me. He had a way of reading people. An instant after a verbal whiplashing... and I mean an instant, VK would be talking to me like a loving father would.

"Chohn, you are not like other boatmen. You are quiet. You vaant to be architect? You got to go back to school, not fucking Flagstaff." VK would take me under his wing like that for guidance every day we were together. Sometimes I was too dumb to listen.

VK was right about school. He also knew I was in love with rivers as much as he was. And he was passionate, a contagious passion. Everything VK did, said, or lived, he did with passion. He was most passionate about his family. If you know any Kovaliks, his passion shows in them. For me,

the passion explains his sometimes-volatile exterior... as well as his loving insides. When you couple his passion with the fact that VK had no limits on himself, you see how he accomplished so much in life.

"Chohn, havink idea don't mean shit. Everyone has idea. It's executing the idea that matters."

Executing the idea is what VK always did. You need a better white-water boat? You design it, travel the earth to find a manufacturer and put it on the water. Mae West life jackets no good for whitewater? He designs a better one, gets it made and puts them on his passengers. Tired of bailing waste deep water out of your boat in big water? VK comes up with a self-bailing floor, builds it into new rafts and gives them to his guides. I learned the "execute the idea" lesson from him. Because of VK, I have a

longtime reputation in my profession of being too stupid to believe it when people tell me it can't be done. I owe him big time for that.

VK was a businessman like I have never seen. His mind worked so fast that people who didn't see it happen can't comprehend it. By the time a normal person could see an opportunity, VK had already grasped it and was doing it. He was fearless in business. The man lived through World War II, fought Germans with Czech partisans, got sent to the Gulag by the Russians and escaped to America (the short version). What are you gonna do? Scare him? I don't think so. Fearless in life... and VK lived life full on.

VK knew how to make money at everything he did. River trips, design, cars, real estate, you name it. If it interested VK, he could make money doing it. You think people would be



Photo courtesy Lisa Markey, 2020.

interested in rafting the Usumacinta in Guatemala? By then VK has booked it, bought four-wheel drive vans that run on propane, loaded them with gear and driven across the hemisphere to run the river. No fear. River equipment? Forget it, he invented, influenced and/or sold everything we're still using. Buying or selling real estate and cars like commodities was natural to VK. Like most successful people, he knew the value of a dollar.

"Sixty damn dollars for oil change! Chohn, never buy an expensive car. They just keep fucking, fucking and fucking you on service."

I wasn't about to go buy a convertible Porsche like the one VK was driving that week. The point is VK had the ability to see what was possible in me. He had the vision to see what was possible in anyone. If you weren't living up to it, he was going to tell you. I needed that.

In '78 I was passionate about getting a Grand Canyon job with Wilderness World. I knew all the VK stories and had seen WiWo's slick equipment and organization on the river. I was working warehouses, driving shuttles and rowing baggage trying to break into Grand Canyon. I landed a chance on a WiWo baggage boat and got my foot in the door. Then Kyle Kovalik came into the picture to run WiWo.

Kyle and I hit it off from the start. We had so much in common we became close. Besides being the new young guys at Wilderness World Grand Canyon, we both pondered how we would ever live up to the accomplishments of our fathers. We would talk about it at times. Kyle had a big shadow to live under in the river world. I know Kyle made an easy peace with Kyle being Kyle and VK being VK.

In those early days when Kyle came to run the WiWo Grand Canyon operation, he was always taking care of me—not unlike VK would do. Whether it was giving me carpentry work to survive off season, or letting me live in the Flagstaff WiWo house, he was there. Kyle knew how much it meant to me to get a Canyon crew

spot. He came up with a plan to send me to Oregon to be Area Manager of the Rogue River operation that upcoming season. The following season when Wilderness World Grand Canyon went to two crews, I would have a spot.

Off I go to be Wilderness World Oregon Area Manager. When I get to Oregon, VK meets me at the WiWo house next to a four-car garage that is the warehouse. He was living a couple miles down the road. The WiWo house is completely empty. No people, no furniture... nothing.

"Where is everybody?"

"Chohn, this is Oregon. You go to Galice, find boatmen, hire them. We go downriver."

"OK, what about warehouse and shuttle people?"

"You and me."

I became Wilderness World Oregon Area Manager of VK and me. I was 23 and VK was 53. He could physically/mentally work most humans into the ground. We did everything from buying food, to rigging, to rowing, to shuttles. Mostly by ourselves. WiWo had a Monday-to-Friday, five-day Rogue trip schedule. We would come off the river, eat with the clients Friday night and be in the store Saturday morning buying food. Buying food for a trip with VK is a whole separate story. I'd finish packing the trip on Sunday and we'd be back at the put-in Monday morning. At least Monday we'd have other guides to help. It was a brutal schedule.

VK relished hard work. Half our Oregon warehouse was full of new river equipment used in VK's gear for sale enterprise. The other half was full of gear we were using on the crick.

"Chohn, truck with more gear is coming. We must move everything in warehouse."

"When do you want to do this VK?"

"Vhaat? Now! Vhat to hell you think?"

There was this inner rule for VK that he would work harder than any young guide. He could, and he aimed to prove it to me on regular basis. The two of us humped mountains of

heavy gear around every day like men possessed.

"Chohn, don't need to be stronger than boat. Must be smarter than boat." So, we moved the boats around together in coordinated effort.

I still take pride that I earned VK's respect in these insane, two-person work exercises. Respect not because I kept up with him physically, but because I didn't complain. Two minutes after we moved the whole warehouse VK would get another idea.

"Chohn, get that new Callegari down. You test row it next trip and tell me what you think."

I know it was VK's unspoken way of saying good work. In essence meaning, here, take a brand-new slick rig to row. He loved to be generous without making a big deal out of it.

I thought of Oregon as a stepping-stone to the Grand Canyon. Now I see those times closest to VK as nothing short of a gift. I've been lucky to have many mentors, none quite like Vladimir Kovalik. The only way I can pay that back is to mentor others. He would want that.

Rest easy my old friend. Thanks.

*John Markey*

# Farewells

Suzanne Jordan — November 5,  
1949–July 4, 2020

Suzanne Jordan and I met back in the mid-'70s, when men were men and women need not apply. I was surfing a sticky wave on the Stanny in California, not real sure I could work my way out of it, when over the fluid horizon appeared this flaming redheaded wild woman with flashing green eyes, freckles everywhere, flowing skirt and silver bangles on her wrist, throwing her head back, laughing madly and rowing her “Huck Finn” right over the top of me. She saw me alright, and with a skillful flick of her wrist missed running me over by a hair, cackling the whole time.

At the ARTA Vallecito House later that day I found her rigging for the next day's trip and introduced myself. Without batting an eye, she reached out her tiny, gnarled solid rock of a hand to shake mine, and in her deep Alabama accent said “Jeffy, I don't understayend what all this fuss is about! Boat-*mun*, boat-person, river guide??!! Honey, river guiding is what I *do*, but boatman is who I *ayem*!” That was Suzanne: unvarnished, simple, salt-of-the-earth, an inner strength bursting to get out with the biggest of hugs for the universe.

There commenced a friendship that lasted a half century of moving water all over the world, but mostly in Grand Canyon, which was probably the only place that could contain all that energy and power and love. She had it all, and like those forever-buried rapids we all hear about but can't see for ourselves any longer; Dark Canyon, Lava Cliff, Lost Yak, she will forever remain the best and the biggest there ever was. There've been a lot of demi-legends down there. Suzanne was the real deal. I can't say it better than the selected testimonials, so I'll just stick to telling a story or two.



Suzanne Jordan. Photograph by George Bain

We arrived at Crystal in '83, during those two weeks of 75,000 CFS when the “Glory Hole” moved rocks as big as houses. We'd heard that a Georgie-rig had flipped in it just the day before, and were, shall we say, shitting ourselves. Our AZRA trip, led by Suzanne, nervously arrived where the beach should have been, but only the tippie-tops of the tammies shaking way out there in the current told us where camp used to be. The cliff behind was half underwater, and all we could do was catch the eddy behind it and camp on what was left of the scout bench. Yeah... that one. The moment we disembarked, the earth shook under our flops and we

started to de-rig to stop our brains from exploding. Suzy put her hands on her hips, tilted her head in all her glory, and told her crew, “Ya'll gotta come with me rayt now and see this hole before it gets too dark! Ya'll won't believe it!” We grousched about it getting late and setting up camp first but there was no arguing. So we followed her to the overlook and she owned it, smiling and laughing, head tilted to the heavens. The next day we watched a third motor-rig flip. Then we had to run the damn thing. Never been so scared in my life. Might not have had the guts, except for Suzy's spirit carrying us along in her deep current. She sensed what

At Diamond Creek after the epic '83 trip, "theunflippables," Sturgis Robinson, Kevin Johnson, Jeffe Aronson, Suzanne, Joel Schaler, Bob "Moley" Haymond.

was inside of each one of us, that redheaded whirlwind; lifting a box here, untying a line there, bearhugs and smiles and basically the kind of whatever-you-call-that grace, and it grounded and lifted everyone, all at the same time.

After that '83 high water, which was a milestone in the lives of all of us lucky and stupid enough to have ridden it, Suzy was at the height of her skills and the mistress of her trade. We went down to Chile to "de-stress" and relax... on the Bio-Bio. Yeah, no shit. Side by side, sharing a rickety mushy boat, scouting the first of the day's endless class-fives. She'd won the coin toss and was rowing Milky Way, leaving the next one to me.

She strolls up and down the bank, leveling with things, marking every rock, each raucous hole and heaving tongue, the roars of the challenge mixed with a glacial-till milk-white 200-foot waterfall blasting over an imposing black basalt cliff right into the middle of the dang rapid, making concentration a tad interesting.

"You see that slot, Jeffy? I'm gonna pull into that hard and straighten up and hit that big wayev, and then I'm gonna pull left and miss that big black rock over theyer and catch that tiny surgin' eddy. That's where I want you to bayel fast until I yell stop! Then hold on and I'm gonna pull out and run that big ol' hole and over to that tongue and into that eddy over theyer. Then I'll give you the oars."

Never in doubt, she strolls back to the edge of things for her final assessment. I then feel the two Sobek boys come up behind me, one over each shoulder. Back in them days, there were zero women rowing for Sobek. One of them says to me, "Where you gonna row it?" I respond, "You'll have to ask Suzy, she's the one rowing it." They look at each other, one flicking his head towards where he wants to powwow with his pard,



private like, without me. They soon return to their over-my-shoulder and in-my-face positions and say, "You sure she can do it?"

"Well," I respond, a tad red-faced; "You sure better hope so, because she's ten times the boatman you'll ever be, and if she has any problems whatsoever, you'll probably die."

She nailed it, of course, like she did pretty much everything in her bigger-than life. We males floundered through.

She taught us all so much during her ground-breaking career, first with ARTA, then AZRA, schooling us with masterful strokes. You'd finish the day after rowing against a howling wind in low water on a two-ton snout, or guiding one of them fully-loaded paddleboats full of grumpy paddlers who actually paid for this, finally arriving at some beach ready and rarin' for a head-butting session with whatever unlucky soul happened along, and Suzy'd be there to gather you up, fists on hips, wild red hair flying, green eyes flashing, smile lighting up her face, head tilted to one side, Navajo-style full skirts and turquoise and silver bangles on those tiniest and strongest of hands, all if it just barely keeping up with her. That was Suzanne: the one we went

to for advice, the force that kept us always seeking to be the best Grand Canyon river guides, the best people, we could be. To be in her presence was to be calmed by Mother River, embraced and equal and a swirling part of the soaring magic and power.

Everything ends, like it or not. Never again will *Our Canyon* see the likes of her, our mentor, the whirlwind who, assessing and directing everything, paved the way for all who followed, male or female. She who taught us humility and the inner strength born of heartbeat, how to exude perfect love whilst banging a few heads together. There isn't enough space to write everything she deserves here. We owe ya Suzy and we won't forget. Like Dark and Lava Cliff, you remain forever in our heads and hearts, immersed in your swell and rollicking motion, carried along by your forever currents, your great Southern whoop calming us in the tailwaves.

The Talented Misfits down there, especially the many awesome women guides, but really all of us, we didn't make it in without our own enormous dose of dedication, skill, and spirit. Still, every time we float past the pantheon of Gods: Vishnu, Zoroaster... we have some of our own to thank

for paving the way, Suzanne Jordan first among equals.

In the words of some friends:

Suzanne was a force of nature, a raw talent and intelligence that didn't come from education. Where did she get that? She read people as well as she read water, and always, always seemed to know what to do. Lives like hers give meaning to the term "old soul." I remember when Harry Frishman came down the river as an AB (assistant boatman) and got stuck in the left eddy above Bedrock. SuZanne ran the rapid in her boat, hiked up and traversed along the cliff, jumped into Harry's snout rig and rowed it down the left side, just as smooth as butter. We miss you already, Suzy!

— Nat Cobb

I have never worked with a better leader. I have never had a better boss. I never had a more supportive colleague. No other guide ever taught me as much as she. That high water summer, I was terrified most of the time but when she said "run it," I never hesitated because she had my back. This woman was a hero and I am sorry that she never met my daughters because Suzy is what I want them to grow up to be.

— Sturgis Robinson

She was such a great combination of bad assery and sweet, soulfulness. I fondly remember watching her totally own those snout rigs when I first got to the Big Ditch in '76.

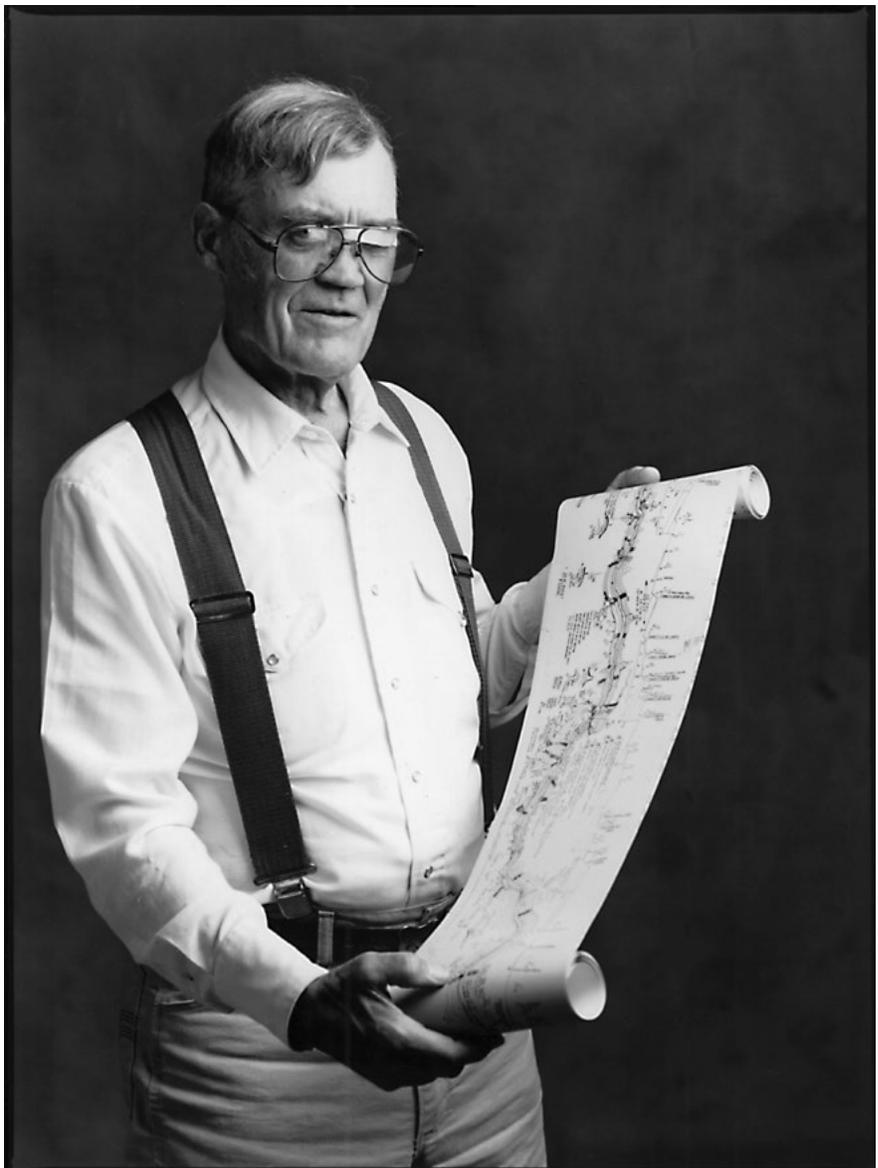
— Kyle Kovalik

Jeffe Aronson

### Les Jones—August 4, 1922 - June 14, 2020

On June, 14, 2020, the River Community suffered a great loss. Les Jones, age 98, passed peacefully in Afton, Wyoming. Les was born on August 4, 1922 in Winnet, Montana and spent his formative years herding cattle, rounding up wild horses, and "messing around in boats" on the Missouri River. This early tutelage of learning to navigate eddies, whirlpools, currents, and rapids would fuel his intense love for river running, boat building, exploration, and map-making.

In 1953, Les moved to Salt Lake City and joined his cousins, Bus and Don Hatch, to raft Lodore Canyon. After an inspiring trip, Les designed and built a self-support oared kayak and ran Cataract Canyon solo from Moab to Hite in a record time of 37 hours. Les never left the confines of his kayak; he tethered to shore



Les Jones. Photograph by Dugald Bremner

with a sand stake to sleep. Later that year, "Buckethead" Jones (a moniker given to him by Otis "Doc" Marston because he made movies of his expeditions from a camera mounted onto a football helmet covered with a bucket) was the first to solo-kayak the Grand Canyon down to Phantom Ranch. Les ran the Grand Canyon three times before 1964 and is credited as the 207th person down the Grand.

In 1955, Les ran and mapped 203 miles to Riggins, Idaho on the Middle Fork and Main Salmon. In the spring of 1956, Les ran Westwater with some fellow co-workers with the sole objective to map and diagram its rapids. Due to a late start and complications navigating the rapids, the paddle boat expedition was forced to camp at "Whirlpool Rapid." Later that evening, a human skeleton was discovered in the rocks and the rapid was renamed "Skull."

In the '70s, Les explored a number of Southern Utah creeks, namely the Muddy, Black Box on the San Rafael, Escalante, North Fork of the Virgin, and Main Virgin. He also targeted the Uinta Range, just a few miles from his home in Midway, Utah, and explored the Yellowstone River, 75 miles of the Provo River, Hayden Fork, Stillwater Fork of the Bear River, Henry's Fork, and Blacks Fork. He has to his credit over a dozen first descents.

Les was also instrumental in the formation of major national conservation groups and river guide organizations. He was one of the founding members of American Rivers, one of the largest and leading river conservation organizations in the country. He was also a founding member of the Western River Guides Association (now America Outdoors) and served as its Safety Director for many years.

Despite these significant accolades, Les is mostly remembered for creating the first printed river running maps. His "scroll maps" were a predecessor to the ever-popular Belknap river guides but Jones' maps were no less popular during the early 1960s. Les began taping usgs maps together and filling in the missing contours by hand on scroll paper strips seven to ten inches wide. His maps contained rapid ratings, drawings of major rapids, historical points-of-interest, and inspirational and conservation messages. The maps are masterful works of art for the sharper eye.

A few of his maps included:

- Westwater Canyon
- Gray & Desolation Canyons
- Cataract Canyon
- Grand Canyon
- Middle and Main Salmon
- Hell's Canyon
- Yampa

In 2018, Les donated his 17-foot homemade aluminum kayak to the Grand Canyon National Park Museum. The Museum loaned his kayak to the Special Collections and Archives at the Northern Arizona University to be featured in their annual exhibit "Splendor and Spectacle: The 100 Year Journey of the Grand Canyon National Park."

In the Spring of 2020, due to Lake Powell's receding waters and the Colorado reclaiming its canyon corridor, local outfitters gathered in the pre-season to review Les' original notes and study his early Cataract Canyon scroll map to prepare for the newly uncovered rapids in the lower canyon.

I asked Les once what was his favorite river to run. He responded emphatically, "The river I haven't run yet." Words to live by.

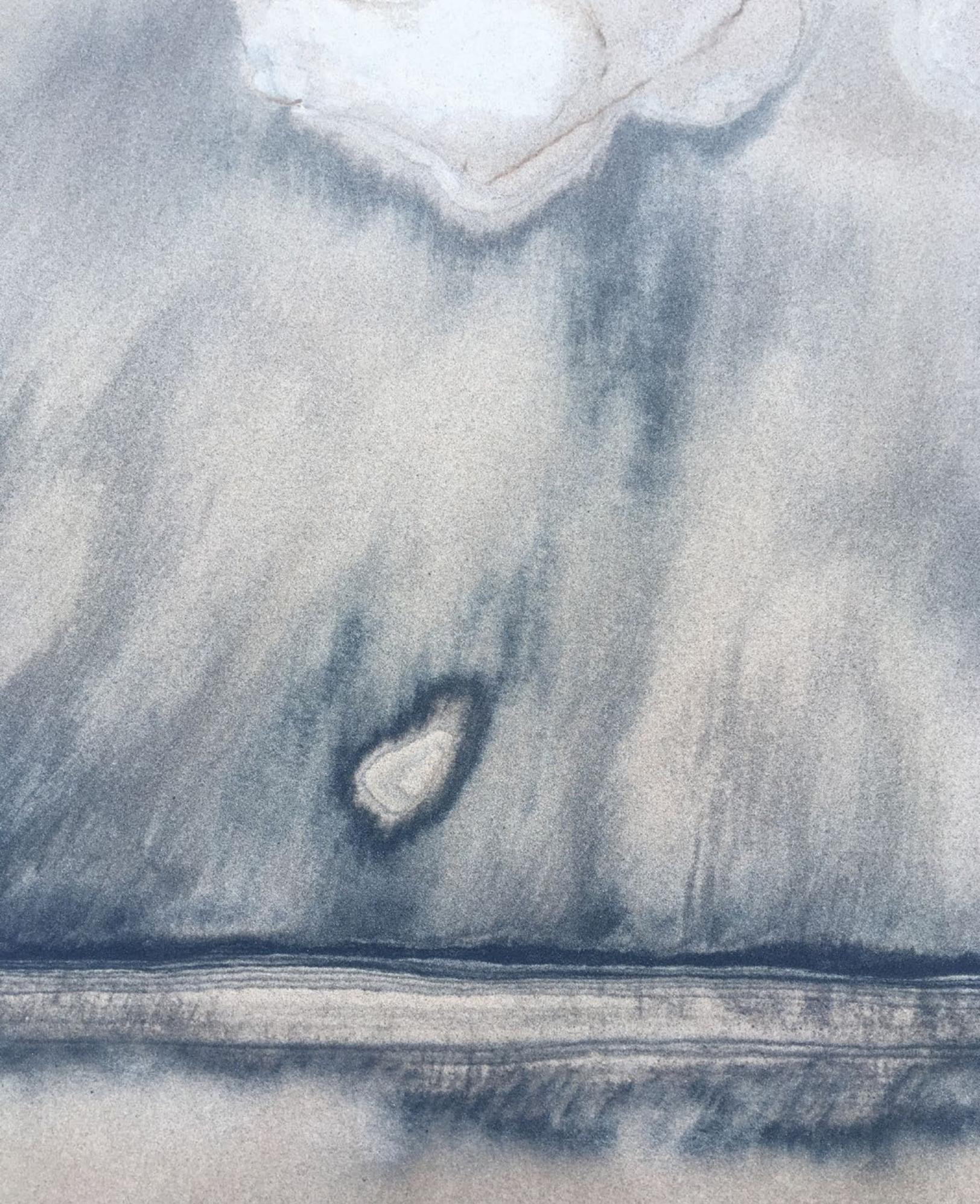
Les attributed his longevity to "daily prayer, daily scripture study, mountain air, and a daily dose of blueberries." He ate a clamshell of blueberries daily. Appropriately, a commandment from Les on his epitaph reads: "Ride the wilderness white waters in reverence before God, with a prayer. His strength will be in you."

Rest In Peace, my friend. It was an honor to know you and I'll see you on the river.

*Christian Jones*

#### Dick McCallum – August 3, 2020

**D**ick McCallum passed away on August 3rd. Dick was a commercial boatman with Georgie's Royal River Rats, co-owner/founder of Grand Canyon Expeditions, and owner/founder of Grand Canyon Youth Expeditions/Expeditions. His oral history interview appeared in the *Boatman's Quarterly Review*, Volume 7 Issue 2, Spring 1994. We did not have enough time to get a memorial article together for this issue so look for one in the next *BQR*.



# DESPAIR, WHITEWATER RAFTING, AND THE ART OF GETTING RESCUED

The commercial Put-In on the South Fork of the American River, a verdant field called The Nugget, lies just below Chili Bar hydroelectric dam and just above “Meatgrinder” Rapid (Class IV) on the right-side bank of a tranquil stretch of flat, cold, viridian-green current. It’s a pleasant starting point, shaded by grandfather oak trees every twenty yards or so and catered by blackberry bushes on the park’s water-side ambit. It is under one of the grandfather oak trees where we gather the crowd, forming a half circle around a taughtly-inflated yellow raft, upon which, life-jacket buckled, helmet strapped, paddle in hand, the Lead Guide gives her Safety Talk. Fifteen minutes from now, after the Talk is over and the passengers have been assigned to their guides — who (myself included) are loitering under another oak nearby, looking insouciant, tan, and slightly hungover — the squadron of rafts will push off the bank, floating calmly toward “Meatgrinder” and the 21 subsequent miles of other class III/IV rapids (with such colorful sobriquets as “Troublemaker,” “Triple Threat,” “Satan’s Cesspool,” “Hospital Bar,” etc). The passengers are tense and nervous. Some of them crack jokes just a little too loudly. Others whisper anxiously, shifting their feet back and forth like spooked horses.

The Lead Guide begins her spiel, starting with the two most important safety tips for our trip today: 1) Never Stand Up in the River! (this is to prevent “Foot Entrapment,” a leading cause of death on the South Fork) and 2) Always Keep Your Hands on the T-Grip!, which leads into the Safety Talk’s first one-liner of the day:

“If you don’t keep your hand on your T-Grip, you might give someone a case of Summer Teeth. Summer Teeth. Some’er here, some’er there!”

She gesticulates emphatically. The crowd roars. Ever so slightly, a little bit of the tension leaks away.

Next the Lead Guide begins to talk about paddling ethic, explaining that as long as all the passengers in a boat paddle at once, in sync, like a Trojan Warship (more laughter), then the guide will be able to control the boat safely, and the scary rapids will go smoothly. Of course this is a setup to another one-liner I’ve heard in the Safety Talk a trillion times:

“If everybody paddles at *different* times, do you know what that raft is gonna look like? A drunken spider. Just a crazy drunken spider flopping down the river.”

Scattered chuckles. Groans.

(Ouch. Not as much of a reaction as the “Summer Teeth” bit. Must’ve been a sloppy delivery. It’s not the first time I’ve seen “Drunken Spider” tank, though. Note to self: consider

canning Drunken Spider next time it’s my turn to give the Safety Talk.)

Finally the Lead Guide segues into the last third of her Safety Talk, *What Happens if you Fall Out of the Raft or if the Raft Flips Over*. There are unsettled shifts in the crowd at the mention of Flipping<sup>1</sup>; you can tell the passengers have been anxious about it since they arrived. The Lead Guide goes through every possible rescue scenario in turn. If you fall out of the raft, you can pull yourself back into the raft using the D-Rings and Perimeter Straps like this—. Always swim with your feet facing downstream, so you can kick off of oncoming boulders. If you are under the raft after it flips, then (uh), get out from under it. The Lead Guide pulls out a “throw-bag” (the crude device we use to reel passengers in like fish) and demonstrates its many uses by throwing the bag at an involuntary volunteer, a meek but smiling middle-age man, who twitches, surprised at the throw. Then she shows how to pull people up from the water’s level into the raft, again using the involuntary volunteer, by grasping him by his life-vest’s lapels and rolling haphazardly backwards into an awkward coital cuddle on the raft’s rubber bottom, emitting more rolling laughter from the crowd.

And finally the Lead Guide arrives at the last bit of wisdom in the Safety Talk. It’s an old aphoristic bit I grew up hearing from my mom and dad. An aphorism I have since applied to dozens of scenarios outside of rafting, and one which I still repeat to my friends at times, especially my de-

pressed friends, the bluesy ones, the tired and frustrated and glum ones. It's an aphorism to cure despair.

"The number-one rule of getting rescued," the Lead Guide pontificates sagely, "*is to participate in your own rescue.*"

The words idle in the air a moment. A few passengers laugh, unsure.

"That's right. *Participate in your own rescue.* If you fall out or if the boat flips, don't just float paralyzed and helpless. Try to swim back to the boat! Get your ass back there!"—the shocked crowd chuckles—"... be an active participant in your own rescue."

The crowd is sort of stunned at the passion the guide is channeling. There is an awkward moment where nobody says anything. A downstream breeze lifts off the river, brushing cool air against our faces. The sun is climbing higher in the sky; we are all getting hot, ready to jump in the water.

The guide has good reason to shock her audience, I have to admit. It's true what she's implied. You'd be surprised how often people freeze up when they fall in, allowing the current to pull them away from the raft, or how often passengers panic in the water, screaming, clawing at anything within reach. Not infrequently while rescuing somebody back into the boat have I been pulled into the water myself. Sometimes swimmers to go completely still, semi-catatonic, frozen in cold fear, unable to grasp the throw bag I've thrown them or unable to swim

toward the boat—literally scared stiff. I've seen swimmers almost drown their guide even as they're rescued, clambering over their guide to get air, pushing their guide underwater. This latter scenario is the scariest.

On the other hand, the swimmers who do participate in their own rescues, who do grab the throw bag, who do swim toward the boat, who do spring into action when they should—these are the passengers who are able to laugh about the experience later. Which is to say—these people are able to move past their trauma in a healthy way. It's a poignant contrast. Every swimmer experiences the same trauma—falling out accidentally or getting ejected forcefully, cold waves hitting their face, gasping for air—but the passengers who take agency in their peril, who take an action, any action, to save themselves, are the ones who feel good about the experience later, who even grow from the experience, who allow the day to be *more exciting* and a better story via their brushes with doom.

So whenever I'm consoling a friend, or if I am feeling despair myself, I remember this aphorism: *participate in your own rescue.* It's the most important thing. Apply it to anything. If you're depressed, seek counseling. If you're lonely, introduce yourself. If your government isn't treating you well, then go march, demonstrate, vote! If you fall out of the boat, swim back to the boat! If someone throws you a rope, grab on to it! Participate in your own rescue.

The aphorism lingers in our thoughts while the Lead Guide divvies up the passengers into groups of six to eight and introduces them to their guides. Today I have two couples—one couple from Dallas, another from San Francisco—and a family of four from Oakland. A totally random bunch, as usual. We climb into the boat together and I kick us off into the current, making introductions and jokes as we drift, answering any questions, critiquing their paddling techniques. The sun is out and it is a perfect day for mayhem. We will spend eight hours together; when its over, we will be a tight-knit group of Trojan Warship paddlers. And looking around at their faces now, "Meatgrinder" distantly gurgling, waiting, I note how random it is that all of us are meeting here today, and how, out of this chance encounter, any one of these faces might get the opportunity to rescue the other, and what an opportunity, what an honor, that is.

Finn Anderson

Footnote:

1) Flipping's the hot scary topic of rafting, sort of like avalanches are to skiing. The difference is that flips happen quite often, whereas avalanches are extremely rare. My record is eight flips in one day, courtesy of a group of frat-bro passengers who really wanted it. I'll admit I'm pretty proud of this achievement.

# ADOPT-A-BEACH REPEAT PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT: EXPANDING INTO OUR 25TH YEAR

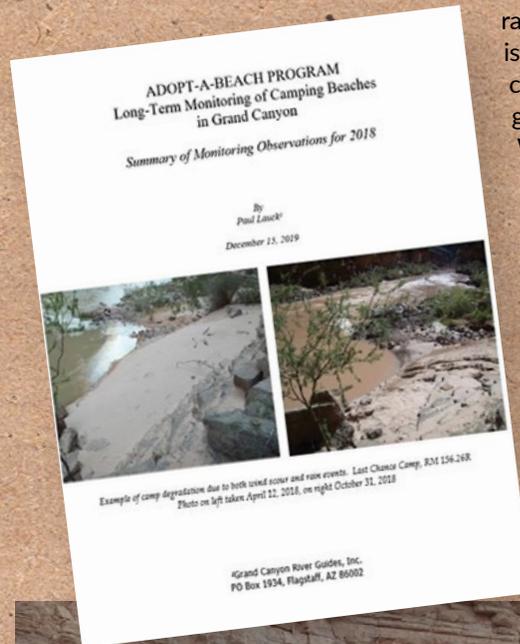
**W**ow! It was 24 years ago, the final week of March 1996, that the first controlled test release of 45,000 cfs from Glen Canyon Dam was conducted. The Beach-Habitat Building Flow, as it was known then, was a brave, bold adventure in environmental mitigation. The beaches in Grand Canyon were in a continuous state of deterioration, and the release was a big part of a plan to help restore the eddy deposited habitat.

A group of guides saw that this presented an *excellent opportunity!* How about we conduct a bit of tried and true Citizen Science by collecting photographs of 44 select beaches before the release, afterward, and throughout the summer, to document the changes? And so the Adopt-A-Beach Repeat Photography Project (AAB) began. That was over 16,000 photos ago and the AAB has been contributing observational, qualitative data ever since.

Originally funded by the Colorado River Conservation Fund, with other donations, the AAB is now supported by the U.S. Geological Survey under Grant/Cooperative Agreement No. G18AC00125 as well as a grant from the Grand Canyon Fund, a non-profit charitable grant-making program established and managed by the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Association.

The photos were first acquired using waterproof 35mm "instamatic" cameras. Post processing meant taking the cameras to a film processing center which was costly and time consuming. So was the scanning and digital storage of the resulting prints. And the quality of the results was sometimes inferior or possibly unusable. Around 2007, it was time to upgrade and AAB purchased 45 digital cameras and waterproof cases to store them in.

Today there are over 16,000 photos of the designated AAB beaches (plus



random others) in the archive. This is arguably the largest set of data collection through repeat photographs anywhere outside of NASA! Well, OK, at least for the Grand Canyon.

These photos are used by GCRG and GCMRC to document and analyze changes in the camps. They also appear in presentations to administrative groups such as AMWG and TWG to illustrate how and why beaches change, and, hopefully, how actions supported by these committees can help improve camp conditions. They



Tuckup camp, September 9, 2018.



Tuckup camp, April 10, 2019.



Upper Hot Na Na camp July 19, 2018.



Upper Hot Na Na camp April 1, 2019.



Shinumo Wash (Silver Grotto) camp August 5, 2018.



Shinumo Wash (Silver Grotto) camp June 21, 2019.



Zoroaster camp April 7, 2018.



Zoroaster camp April 7, 2019.



Owl Eyes camp, September 12, 2018.



Owl Eyes camp, May 21, 2019.



Lower National camp, October 28, 2018.



Lower National camp, July 1, 2019.



Gneiss Canyon camp, April 16, 2018.



Gneiss Canyon camp, April 13, 2019.

have been incorporated into texts on the use and viability of science via repeat photography and simply as historical documents. If you want, you could page through the archive just to reminisce and visit beaches you know. There are also some photos containing boats and guides you may recognize.

The folks at the USGS have been so appreciative of your work that they are currently building a dedicated web page on the GCMRC website on which to present the archived images *and* the annual reports analyzing the beach changes for the previous twelve months. The comparative results for each year are also entered onto a spreadsheet style page for quick reference. There is also an Access database where you can query for results and volunteer observations by beach, year, month, water level etc.

I should add that GCMRC, in an attempt to gather more sediment input info, is also soliciting reports on any and all tributary flash floods you find. No photos necessary, just a date and location are appreciated.

GCRG has also updated to a new archive page. The immense quantity of images created the need to switch to another repository, Flickr. We want to be prepared to add more of these valuable documents in the years ahead. As the transition is in process, a little editing is taking place to cull the few blurry or mis-labeled photos. You can find the new and improved site (under construction) at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/147271391@N08/collections>.

Much thanks to our volunteer photographers. Yes, I repeat, these were collected by *volunteer* photographers. Guides, passengers, private boaters and the occasional hiker who took the few minutes to duplicate the photographs at their chosen beach. Applause, applause!

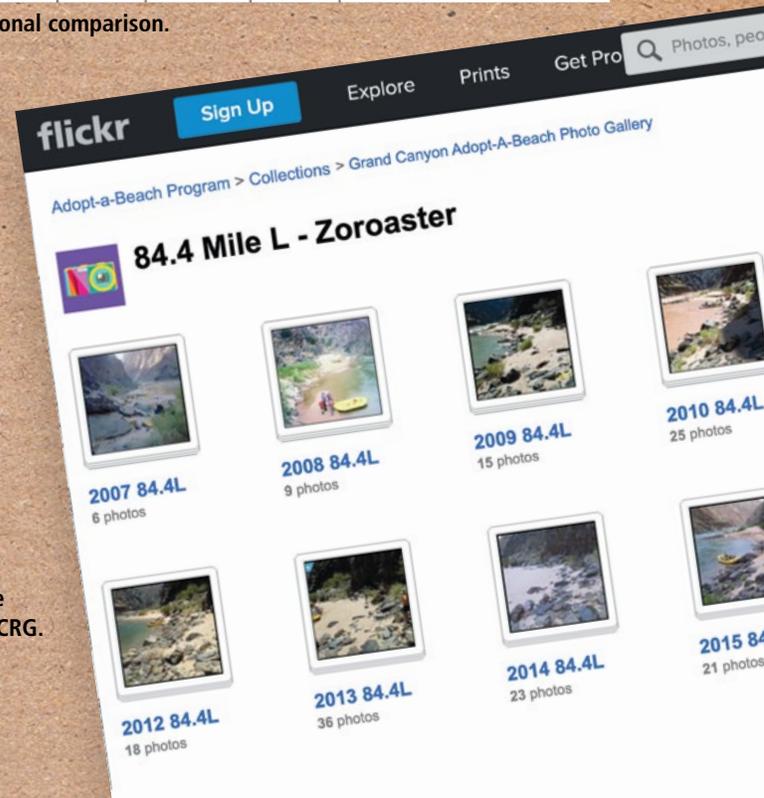
Here are a few "eye candy" highlights from the 2019 photo set. I know that some of you only want to "read" the photos in a story. If you

Camp name	Rvr mile	2018	thru	Season	Reason
		No change	Degraded	Improved	
Soap Creek	11.3 R			X	Parking improved at both upper and lower
12.4 Mile	12.4 L	X			No appreciable change
Hot Na Na	16.6 L		X		Most of camp removed by flash
19.4 Mile	19.4 L				No late season 2018
Upper North Canyon	20.7 R		X		Recession and cutbank, wind scour
23 Mile	22.7 L				No late season 2018
Shinumo Wash	29.5 L		X		Recession and cutbank
Nautaloid	35.0 L		X		Recession, rocks exposed at parking
Tatahatso	37.9 L	X			No appreciable change
Martha's	38.6 L		X		Rain gully through camp, cutbank
Buck Farm	41.2 R		X		Recession, erosion from traffic, more veg
<b>Total per Reach</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	
Nevills	76.0 L		X		Recession and cutbank, rain erosion
Hance	77.1 L				No late season 2018
Grapevine	81.7 L		X		Wind scour, recession at front, veg increase
Clear Creek	84.6 R				No late season 2018
Zoroaster	85.0 L				No late season 2018
Trinity Creek	92.1 R				No late season 2018
Schist	96.6 R				No late season 2018
Boucher	97.3 L	X			Sand moved by wind without negative effect
Crystal	98.7 R		X		Cutbank at higher CFS level
Lower Tuna	100.2 L		X		Recession across front, veg increase
Ross Wheeler	108.3 L	X			Maybe slight veg increase
Bass	109.0 R		X		Rain erosion and cutbank
110 mile	110.0 R		X		Cutbank and veg increase
Upper Garnet	114.9 R		X		Rocks exposed at parking
Lower Garnet	115.1 R		X		Rain gully and cutbank
<b>Total per Reach</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	
Below Bedrock	131.7 R				No late season 2018
Stone Creek	132.5 R		X		Cutbank, severe recession
Talking Heads	133.7 L		X		Cutbank, severe recession
Racetrack	134.2 R			X	Graded at parking due to human traffic
Lower Tapeats	134.5 R				No late season 2018
Owl Eyes	135.2 L		X		Lots of recession across front
Backeddy	137.8 L		X		Vegetation increase
Kanab	144.0 R				No late season 2018
Olo	146.1 L		X		Trib flashes erode camp
Matkat Hotel	148.9 L		X		Multiple rain erosion gullies, steeper
Upset Hotel	150.9 L	X			Multiple changes thru season balance out
Last Chance	156.3 R		X		Rain erosion and possible wind scour
Tuckup	165.2 R		X		Huge rain gully and cutbank recession
Upper National	167.0 L		X		Rain erosion gullies thru camp
Lower National	167.2 L		X		Multiple flashes remove sand, deposit rock
<b>Total per Reach</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	
Travertine Falls	230.6 L				No late season 2018
Gneiss	236.1 R				No late season 2018
250 Mile	250.0 R				No late season 2018
<b>Total per Reach</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Total Reporting</b>	<b>31 of 44</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>	

Results page from Seasonal comparison.

want to see more, or if you have any queries about the AAB program, email me at [zeketheguide@gmail.com](mailto:zeketheguide@gmail.com). I hope to see you all on the river soon.

Sample page from the new AAB archive webpage through GCRG.

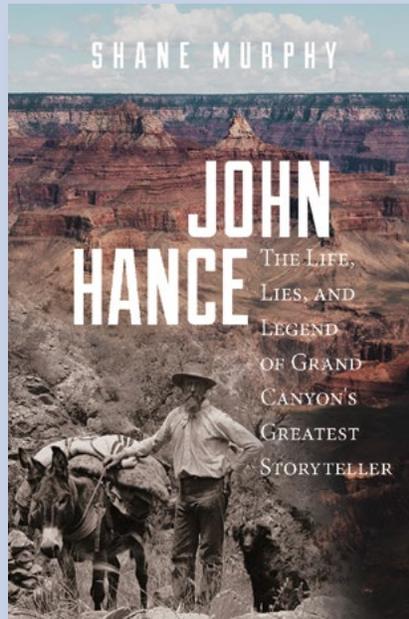


# BOOK REVIEWS

*John Hance: The Life, Lies and Legend of Grand Canyon's Greatest Storyteller*; Shane Murphy; University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City; 2020; pp 197; ISBN 9781607817536; \$24.95.

*"Captain John Hance, —a genius, a philosopher, and a poet, the possessor of a fund of information vastly important, —if true. He laughs with the giddy, yams to the gullible, talks sense to the sedate, and is a most excellent judge of scenery, human nature, and pie. To see the canon only, and not to see Captain John Hance, is to miss half the show." —Chester P. Dorland, Los Angeles, Cal., August 26, 1898*

I guess everybody who has been through Hance Rapid in, on, under, or near a boat has heard of Captain John Hance. Most of us remembered a story or two, and maybe even re-



layed those stories to others. Knowing Hance's reputation for stretching the truth takes a lot of pressure off a river

guide sharing a John Hance story, there's just not a lot of precedent there for sticking to the absolute truth. Shane Murphy has written a book that may put the pressure for accuracy right back on.

I first met Shane when he was running for Canyoneers. My earliest memory of him was when he lapped me on a trip at Mile 209. I was on a private that launched the same day as one of Shane's Canyoneers trips sometime in 1989. He knew a few of the folks on the trip I was on and chatted with us at the ramp. Much later in our same trip we were camped at Mile 209, and a Canyoneers boat pulled in to say hello. Shane was driving. That made quite an impression on me, realizing he was going to finish a second trip before we finished our first. Shane ran for Canyoneers for a long time, but pursues other interests

*The Last Canyon Voyage: A Filmmaker's Journey Down the Green & Colorado Rivers*; Charles Eggert, forward by Roy Webb; The University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City, Utah; 424 pp, ISBN 9781607817345; \$34.95.

**T**he *Last Canyon Voyage* introduces us to a forgotten historical figure and an event that took place prior to the Flaming Gorge and Glen Canyon Dams. In 1955, Charles Eggert and co-captain Don Hatch, of Hatch River Expeditions, set out to follow in the wake of Major John Wesley Powell's 1869 exploration of the Green and Colorado Rivers. It would be the last opportunity for anyone to transit by boat the remaining free-flowing Green and Colorado Rivers from Green River, Wyoming, to Lake Mead.

As a cinematographer and conservationist, Charles Eggert desired to document as much of the canyons as possible. He realized

that there would not be another opportunity to capture what remained of John Wesley Powell's voyage from 1869. Don Hatch expressed that it had "always been a dream of mine, but I've never found a good reason to do it—except just wanting to." In 1955, and with a nudge by Eggert, a reason for Don came to fruition because of existing discussions about building a number of dams on the Green and Colorado Rivers.

Out of obscurity, Charles Eggert's place in the history of the Colorado and Green Rivers is captured in the foreword by historian and author Roy Webb; and an introduction by river historian Alfred E. Holland Jr. provides a biographical sketch that reveals Charles Eggert's early life and what brought him from Michigan to the West, and more importantly what motivated him to be a leading cinematic figure in the conservation efforts of the 1950s and '60s. From the

footage Eggert shot from the 1955 and 1956 expeditions, he produced *A Canyon Voyage* and *Danger River* which contributed heavily to conservationist efforts preventing additional dams from being built during the 1950s and early 1960s. Besides Flaming Gorge and Glen Canyon Dams, other dams were considered at Red Canyon, Echo Park (Dinosaur), Rattlesnake (Desolation Canyon), Dark Canyon (Cataract Canyon) and Marble Canyon. His film, *The Sculptured Earth*, also influenced the Canyonlands National Park designation in 1964.

The majority of *The Last Canyon Voyage* is the planning of the expedition and the trip itself. Eggert describes soliciting for "rugged" customers to help fund the outing, and like a personal journal he does not refrain from sharing his judgments of those who eventually became the starting crew of seven men and a woman. He also describes running the now submerged Ashley Falls, Red

as well, including history, exploration and the history of exploration. Shane has been to Antarctica multiple times, and is the editor of the book *Shackleton's Photographer, Frank Hurley's Annotated Diaries*.

Shane has put together this book with an incredible amount of research, across Tennessee, Missouri, the Verde Valley, Flagstaff and of course the South Rim.

John Hance grew up in Tennessee and Missouri as the son of a subsistence farmer, learning how to farm, hunt and manage livestock. When the Civil War broke, he enlisted on the Confederate side. In less than a year he was a POW for the rest of the war.

Following his release, Hance came west as a teamster, hauling freight, often for the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army, needed supplies hauled to forts, camps, and reservations. Hance had a skill set that allowed him to go where the Army went and find work. He ended up around Prescott and

the Verde Valley, where he and his half-brother did some farming, to sell livestock feed and food to the Army, and hauling freight for the Army. When Camp Verde closed up, Hance moved on to Grand Canyon.

Hance may not have been the first Anglo-American to live near the rim, but he was there early, probably as a cowboy at the Hull Ranch. Hance built his cabin near the rim, and began working on a "trail" or at least a route, first to the Tonto Platform and then down to the Colorado River. He did make a living guiding tourists down the trail as well as charging others for the use of the trail. During this time he located several mining claims. I was surprised to find out he was not that much of a miner, but was willing to sell his claims to others, or form partnerships and let others do the mining. I learned much more than I expected to about the South Rim before the arrival of the railroad. Also interesting was the importance of the

Hance trail for initial access to the Tonto Plateau. Hance's trail opened the Tonto Plateau and the schist canyons below it to Anglo mining exploration. Some of the Cameron brother's claims around Bright Angel were discovered and claimed using the Hance trail.

This is a great book for anyone wanting to know more about John Hance at the Grand Canyon, but also for those who seek to understand how John Hance became the character that he was. There is plenty of detail and an extensive section of notes and bibliography.

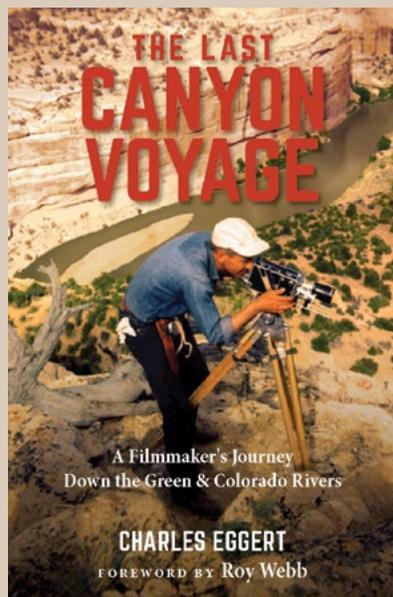
John O'Brien

Canyon, Flaming Gorge, Dark Canyon Rapid and Glen Canyon.

Along with the enjoyment of following details of their voyage he includes periodic references to Powell and some from Clyde Eddy's, *Down the World's Most Dangerous River*, and it is interesting to follow the bonding that takes place between the individuals themselves. Once the party arrives at Glen Canyon, Charles Eggert takes on a more reverent tone while describing several hikes he and his companions made. Of an unnamed canyon he reflected:

"I peered into the opening and entered, feeling as though I were an intruder in another's house. I came upon a place of such perfection that I exclaimed out loud, 'Oh!' Before me was a vast chamber, almost perfectly round, with a domed roof of golden sandstone, and cut through it to the sky was a crescent-shaped slit in the rock. Edging one side was the blood-red light of the setting sun. The

color seemed to melt into a thousand hues as it ran down to the floor of the chamber, where it was a soft yellow. In the center was a pool, a round emerald, surrounded by a band of golden sand. The water's surface



was so still that it reflected a mirror image of what was above it. Low on the walls circling the pool grew lacy, maidenhair fern.

Nothing was stirring, not the slightest ripple on the water, not a leaf on the fern. Even the molecules of air seemed suspended in silence. The sound of my 'oh' had no place here, and its echo bounded back and forth, back and forth, as though it were the first sound ever to enter this place. I thought it would never diminish, never escape. Yet it did finally cease, and I felt heavy silence. I thought I had entered the very soul of the Earth."

*The Last Canyon Voyage* is more than a river book. It's a book that reminds us of what rivers do for us emotionally and spiritually. It's their beauty, solitude, wildness, and shared fun and hardships that bond us together.

Mike Milligan

## Ongtupqa

I can't be sure what is happening  
As I sink to the bottom of time  
Vishnu bubbling his lips in the water  
Sandstone gods waiting in patterns  
I can't pretend to grasp the wind that blows between them  
I am simply the resin of their ancient embrace  
Potent - piercing the current with my hands  
And running them down the red rocks  
So I can feel - for a moment - that I am a part of this  
But my prints do dry  
And my heart does set  
As the moon of ripening burns in its place  
Healing - she heals me  
Holding - she holds me  
Lifting - she lifts me  
Chanting - she chants me  
Lunar medicine pouring forever  
Until I wake in the great unconformity  
And read 175 million invisible pages  
From the womb of the mother  
And see the celestial secrets  
From the throat of the canyon whale  
And hear elves laughing  
From the heart of the emerald chasm  
Ongtupqa holds my spirit  
As I tumble through the lava  
And find the perennial bliss  
That flows steadily in my form  
While the sun lifts my multicolor being  
With his thousand arms  
The teacher speaks  
From limestone peaks  
And becomes quiet  
In travertine cascades  
But the Mojave spits me out  
Onto her crushed skin  
And reminds me that I am made of water  
And along the river, I too, can carve my way  
Into the center of the universe

River Ripa  
August 2018

# Poetry

## Lava Saga

'Twas a blistering day on the old Colorado.  
The sun was so hot, it was burning my shadow.  
For a while we'd been seeing black rocks all around,  
But nothing prepared us for hearing that sound!  
The biggest of monsters, it's said, on this river  
Emitted a growl that could make a bear shiver.  
It echoed upcurrent and let us all know  
That sure as I was born we had Lava below.  
The river was beautiful, splashin' and rushin'  
Which wouldn't mean squat if I got a concussion.  
Elise went to scout and regard the hydraulics  
'Cause it might toss you out, but it's no place for frolics.  
And when she got back we were urgently told  
To hold on as tight as mere mortals can hold.  
"The big flips happen rarely," Cy'd said with a grin...  
We paused (but just barely), and then we dropped in.  
Now the view from the top made me shake where I sat—  
I was staring right down into God's laundromat!  
As we shot past the laterals into the V,  
I heard someone's caterwauls — "someone" was me.  
We went up! We went down! We pitched and we wallowed  
Like a bright yellow Cheeto the river had swallowed.  
We hit the big wave, and the voice of our guide  
Was heard over the roar as she called to high-side!  
And it turned out that shift of our weight was enough.  
We came out right-side-up, though the tail waves were rough.  
"Yee haw!" cried the boatmen. "Wahoo!" yipped the passengers.  
Things were all here, still attached to their fasteners.  
And I felt a bit different — by which I mean better:  
Part thrilled and part cowed and most certainly wetter.  
We hit Son of Lava victoriously,  
Then Elise made a turn, and her left oar popped free!  
She reacted real quick, reaching 'round past my mother  
And while she was reaching, right out popped the other!  
But her line carried us without one single whack.  
By the time we were out, she had both her oars back.  
So we talked of the river, the tricks that it played  
As we ate bagel lunch in a pocket of shade.  
Three cheers for the boatmen who run Lava Falls!  
It's a wild crazy place and it takes major... guts!  
They show us the canyon, its wonder and splendor,  
And keep us intact through the watery blender.  
Yet, though on this day, we all made clean runs of it,  
It's true what they say...  
"You are always above it!"

by Elli Hebert  
2019



# Permanent Protection for Grand Canyon Takes Another Step Forward

The Grand Canyon region, the physical and spiritual home of at least eleven Native American Tribes, a major watershed for the Colorado River, and a natural landscape so magnificent that it has been dubbed a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has also, unfortunately, been sought after by miners for decades. In 2012, after a previous spike in prices drove more than 10,000 mining claims to be staked on public lands north and south of Grand Canyon National Park, the Department of the Interior announced a twenty-year ban on mining on one million acres of public lands that abut the national park. The two-decade length of the ban is the longest a ban can be put in place administratively; permanent mining bans (or mineral withdrawals as they're officially called) require an act of Congress.

Since the beginning of the Trump administration, concerns have escalated that attempts will be made to not only lift the temporary protections for the region, but to create a market atmosphere using taxpayer dollars that would render current market constraints on the industry moot, thereby opening the door for uranium mining in the Grand Canyon Region. Indeed, the Administration has taken several steps over the course of the past four years that give uranium miners a leg up, from listing the radioactive metal as a "critical" mineral worthy of special regulatory treatment for the first time in U.S. history, to calls to limit public environmental reviews of uranium mines and remove temporary mining bans like that around the Grand Canyon all under the guise of "national security." But the fact is that the world doesn't need more uranium. In fact, there's so much of it in the global market today that prices have been, for the most part, well below economic for U.S. miners for the

past thirty plus years. This is exacerbated by the fact that U.S. deposits are of far lower quality and thus more expensive to mine than deposits elsewhere around the world, including in countries that are our allies.

In 2019, the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill would make the temporary mining ban permanent. In late October, that bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives with Republican and Democratic votes. But before the bill can become law, it must also pass the U.S. Senate; if the Senate version isn't identical to the House version, the bill must go through a conference committee of select members of the House and Senate to reach an agreed upon version before it can go to the president's desk for signature. This path is—clearly—rife with obstacles, not the least of which is a president who may not support a permanent ban even if the House and Senate were to pass it. But nothing is impossible, the unexpected can happen, especially if the permanent ban isn't the only ingredient in the cupcake. And that's where the campaign has seen some exciting developments recently.

In December of 2019, a similar version of the bill was introduced in the Senate, but unfortunately, and in no small part because of the impeachment proceedings and then the global pandemic that has overtaken the nation since the beginning of 2020, that Senate bill has not moved any further (i.e., to a committee hearing or a vote on the Senate Floor). But much to the delight of Grand Canyon supporters everywhere, in July, there became another path forward: The National Defense Authorization Act or NDAA. The NDAA is a bill that is considered by Congress annually and mostly has to do with the Department of Defense's

budget and spending. However, bills that are related to actions by the defense department—uranium mining, for example—can sometimes also get tacked on as amendments. Because time limits the number of introduced bills that can actually be considered and voted on, the NDAA is a surer path all the way through the legislative process given its higher level of priority. This year, House leadership added the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act to the NDAA as an amendment. On Tuesday, July 21, 2020, that amendment passed and the House of Representatives passed its version of the NDAA.

Since then, the Senate has passed its own version of the NDAA as well, which does not look the same as the House version, so to reconcile the two, select members of the House and Senate will need to confer and come up with a version that both chambers can agree upon before the bill can be sent to the president's desk for signature. This process may take several months and amendments that were included can still be struck down. However, this latest development is a heartening reminder that support for permanently banning new uranium mines on public lands around the Grand Canyon remains strong in the House. At a minimum, this is a strong position from which to re-start this process if necessary, in the next Congress, which starts in January of 2021.

*Amber Reimondo*

# The 2020 Pioneer Award: Jason Nez National Park Service

Originally published in *The Ol' Pioneer*, Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2020 and reprinted with permission. This article has been edited.

The Grand Canyon Historical Society announced that the 2020 Pioneer Award was presented to Jason Nez, National Park Service archaeologist and fire fighter. This prestigious award was presented to Jason on July 11, 2020.

Jason has made unique contributions to the understanding and preservation of both contemporary and prehistoric native cultures of the Grand Canyon region. He has also played a major role in protecting sacred lands of the region.

Jason is Diné and grew up on the Navajo Nation at Coal Mine Mesa. He has spent his life in and around the Grand Canyon region and has over 15 years of experience as an archaeologist in northern Arizona and on the Navajo Reservation. He is familiar with the pioneer stories of John Hance, Ralph Cameron, and W.W. Bass, but contextualizes them within his Native viewpoint.

Jason's cultural demonstrations throughout northern Arizona are a valuable contribution to understanding Grand Canyon's longer-term human history and to preserving often overlooked Native traditions and ways of life. He crafts tools, including atlatls and darts, and demonstrates ancestral native tool fabrication and utilization, including hunting techniques, to audiences around the region.

Jason frequently appears as a speaker presenting a Native perspective, communicating how he connects the past with the present, working diligently to paint a picture

of the past and share this "lost history" with others who share his passion for those who came before. As a speaker at the 2019 Grand Canyon History Symposium, Jason presented an intimate view of life as a Diné person living in a mostly Anglo world.

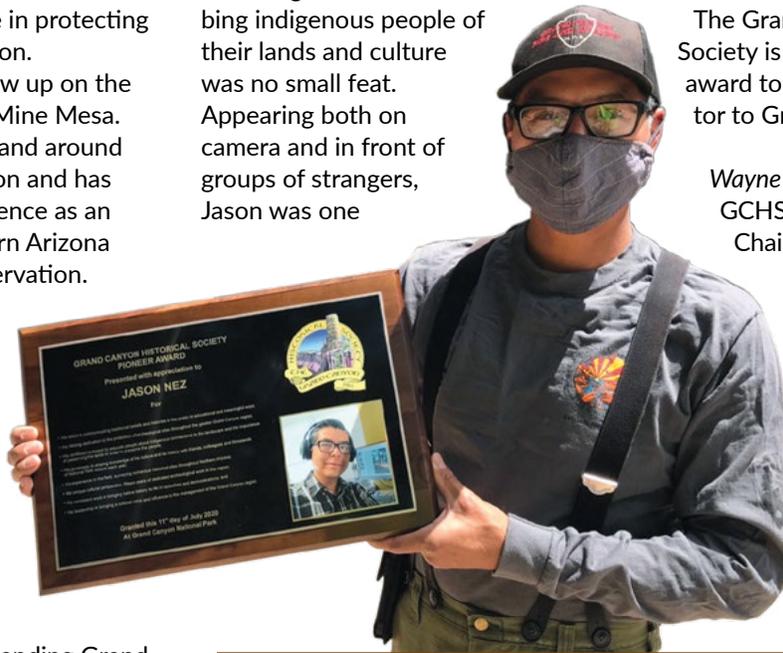
A major life accomplishment for Jason was his role in the fight against the proposed tramway to the confluence of the Little Colorado and Colorado rivers in eastern Grand Canyon. To stop the historic pattern of "foreign investors" robbing indigenous people of their lands and culture was no small feat. Appearing both on camera and in front of groups of strangers, Jason was one

connected, and if landscapes and resources are destroyed, the people are destroyed.

Having an indigenous person stand up and tell the truth of their history, both the good times and the hardships, has been a new experience for many; Native histories have not been thought of as equally as important as the Anglo pioneer stories. Jason Nez has dedicated his life to sharing the knowledge of his people's past, so that others may better understand the present.

The Grand Canyon Historical Society is pleased to present this award to an outstanding contributor to Grand Canyon's history.

Wayne Ranney and Haley Johnson,  
GCHS Pioneer Award  
Chairpersons



Jason Nez receiving Pioneer Award plaque.

Editors note: You can read back issues of *The Ol' Pioneer* on the GCHS website at [www.grandcanyonhistory.org](http://www.grandcanyonhistory.org)

of the many powerful voices that helped stop this development, a moment in history that will never be forgotten. Jason told the world that the Sacred Confluence of the Little Colorado River and the Colorado River is to be revered and respected, that Native histories and the land are



# GCRG'S COMMENTS AGAINST THE BIG CANYON PUMPED STORAGE PROJECT

The Little Colorado River (LCR) continues to be at risk. At the end of May, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) granted preliminary permits to Pumped Hydro, LLC (a Phoenix based company) to conduct feasibility studies for two hydroelectric projects on the LCR. After considerable outcry, the developer pivoted to a different approach, planning four hydroelectric dams on and above a tributary to the Little Colorado River, called Big Canyon, on the Navajo Reservation. **Grand Canyon River Guides submitted the following comments to FERC before the August 3rd deadline.** Our collective voices make a difference! Stay tuned...

Re: Pumped Hydro Storage, LLC;  
Notice of Preliminary Permit  
Application Accepted for Filing  
and Soliciting Comments, Motions  
to Intervene, and Competing  
Applications for:  
[Project # 15024-000 - Big Canyon  
Pumped Storage Project](#)

Dear Secretary Bose,

Grand Canyon River Guides, Inc., (GCRG) founded in 1988, is unique in that it provides a unified voice for river guides and river runners in defense of the Colorado River through Grand Canyon. Our non-profit educational and environmental 501(c)(3) organization is comprised of over 1,700 individuals who are passionately dedicated to the continuing preservation of this national icon. Consequently, Grand

Canyon River Guides' goals are to:  
**Protect the Grand Canyon**  
**Provide the best possible river experience**  
**Set the highest standards for the guiding profession**  
**Celebrate the unique spirit of the river community**

As passionate defenders of the Colorado River through Grand Canyon and the surrounding region, Grand Canyon River Guides respectfully submits our comments in opposition to the above referenced permit application (P-15024-000) for the following reasons:

#### Cultural Concerns:

- This project would be located entirely on Navajo land, yet the developer, Pumped Hydro, LLC, has not consulted with nor received permission from the Navajo Nation, the Cameron Chapter, local residents who reside near the dam sites, or ranchers with grazing permits in the area. In fact, on June 8, 2020, representatives of the local grazing district voted to oppose the Big Canyon Pumped Storage Project. Without consent of land owners, the developer will not be allowed access to conduct feasibility studies.
- The entire Little Colorado River drainage, of which Big Canyon is an integral part, is a rich cultural landscape, sacred to not only the Navajo Tribe, but also to the Hopi, Zuni, and the other eight affiliated tribes of Grand Canyon. Consequently, all affiliated tribes should be consulted on a nation-to-nation basis.
- Petroglyphs, archeological sites, ceremonial practices, and traditional cultural properties could all be negatively affected.

#### Groundwater, Springs:

- Since Big Canyon is dry most of the year, the primary source of water for this project is ancient

groundwater that would be pumped from three wells sunk into the Redwall/Muav aquifer. This aquifer in turn supplies the seeps and springs that feed the Little Colorado River.

- The Big Canyon Pumped Storage Project would be a terrible waste of ancient water in the hot, dry desert, where every drop is precious and necessary to sustain life.
- The massive amount of groundwater pumped from three wells, the significant evaporation loss from the reservoirs, and the leakage from the fractured rim rock/Kaibab Limestone, could adversely affect the base flow of the Little Colorado River.

#### Native Fish:

Because of the direct hydrological connection between Big Canyon and the Little Colorado River, there are serious ramifications for native species. The endangered Humpback Chub (HBC) is a native fish endemic to the Colorado River that evolved around three to five million years ago. The largest population of this endangered fish is found in Grand Canyon, primarily in the Little Colorado River and its confluence with the Colorado River. Please note:

- The endangered humpback chub spawn in the Little Colorado River where warmer water and suitable spawning habitat is available, while water released from Glen Canyon Dam in the Colorado River is too cold for successful reproduction.
- Any change to the key conditions of the Little Colorado River (such as flow, temperature, chemical composition, turbidity, etc...) could profoundly affect the recovery goals/plan for HBC by disrupting a spawning population that is critical to the survival of this ancient, endemic species.
- This permit application fails to include the following relevant "political subdivisions that there

is a reason to believe would likely be interested in, or affected by, the application,” namely:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- Bureau of Reclamation

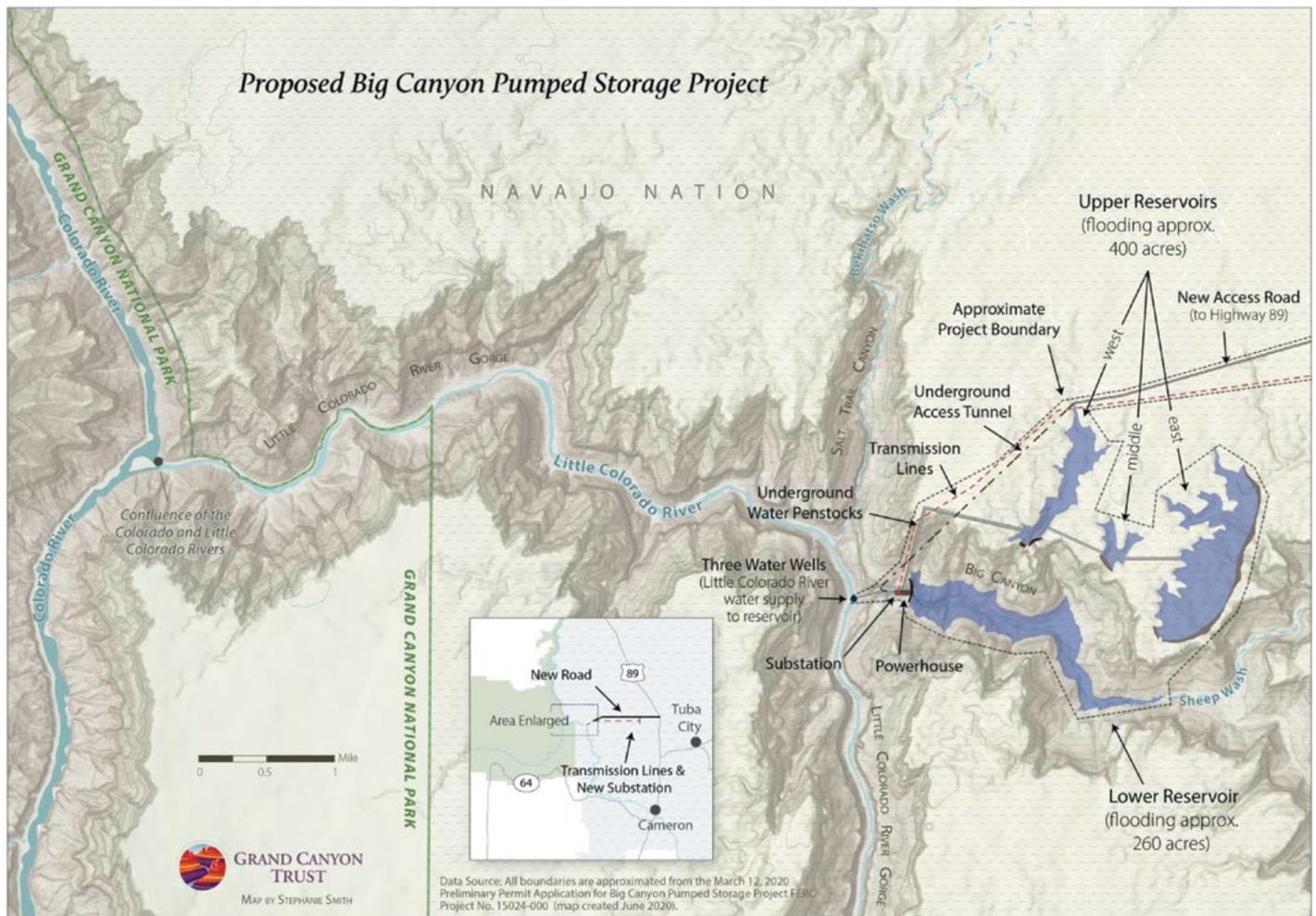
As we have expressed here, Grand Canyon River Guides vigorously opposes the Big Canyon Pumped Storage Project (p-15024-000) because of the profound cultural, hydrological, and ecological impacts to Big Canyon, the Little Colorado

River, and ultimately, to Grand Canyon itself. Furthermore, we respectfully request that FERC consider extending the comment period by another sixty days in consideration of the tragic impacts of COVID-19 within the Navajo Nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Grand Canyon River Guides, Inc.

<i>Lynn Hamilton</i>	Executive Director
<i>Margeaux Bestard</i>	President
<i>Al Neill</i>	Vice President
<i>Mariah Giardina</i>	Director
<i>Lars Haarr</i>	Director
<i>Zeke Lauck</i>	Director
<i>Billie Prosser</i>	Director
<i>Justin Salamon</i>	Director
<i>Lynne Westerfield</i>	Director



Map courtesy of Stephanie Smith, Grand Canyon Trust

# RACHEL SCHMIDT

I was born in Seattle in 1963, and we moved to Eugene before I was one. My parents were still working on their master's degrees. But then in 1966 when they graduated, they were both in the education profession and we moved to Germany. Long story short, my parents had met in Europe, in a German language school, and they just wanted to go back. I am named Schmidt for a reason. (laughter) So we moved there when I was three. My parents put me directly in a German kindergarten and said, "Learn German." (laughs)

**Williams:** Sink or swim.

**Schmidt:** Yeah, sink or swim. And it was taught by the nuns, who were terrifying, but I did learn German. So I went to the German kindergarten and became a fluent child in German, before I started in the American schools, because my parents taught in the American schools. My mom thought it would be a little weird if she was a teacher and she sent her kid to a non-American school—she had to support the system. So yeah, I grew up as an only child in Europe, with parents who were teachers, who had teachers' schedules, so that really gave us the freedom to do a lot of traveling. So traveling was definitely part of my world at an early age, which was awesome.

**Williams:** And in the summer, mostly there?

**Schmidt:** Summer, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, we had all the holidays, and predominantly we would travel in Europe. Every other summer we would come back to the U.S. because my parents had to do continuing education and often did a road trip across the U.S., visiting family, and then back to Germany for the school year. When I got older and really started wanting to travel, I told my parents "Well, you taught me all about traveling, so..."

My mom lied about my age so she could get me in first grade sooner. She had to get back to work and didn't need a kid around the house. For the first two or three years of grade school I couldn't even celebrate my birthday because she was afraid she would get in trouble. But she fixed that a few years later and we got the date corrected, so I could actually celebrate my birthday in school.

We started in Munich, Germany, and by the time I was in first grade, we were in Bitburg, Germany, which is right near the Luxemburg border. We stayed there for my entire schooling. All my friends were the kids of military, and my best friends would leave every three years as they rotated out. So I totally got used to meeting new people, being heartbroken because my best girlfriend had left, and then had to meet new friends. But I think that was an education in itself.

I was actually in the same school as my parents, so ended up having my mom as an English teacher. I got [caught] kissing in the hall by my dad when he was a guidance counselor in the same high school, so I was really glad when he moved to a different school; but everyone loved my mom as a teacher, so it worked out pretty well.

I had an awesome science teacher in seventh grade, Mr. Gray. He took us out backpacking and climbing and rappelling. It was definitely the first time I did that kind of thing, which was awesome.

**Williams:** You probably got an "A."

**Schmidt:** Yeah, I sort of did pretty well. I guess teachers as your parents could go either way. You could either be totally rebellious or you could be a straight "A" student, and I went the straight "A" route (laughter) and actually was valedictorian of my senior class.

**Williams:** Oh! Little-known trivia fact!

**Schmidt:** It was only a class of eighty people, but still.

\* \* \*



Skiing in Germany, age 8.

*Doing these interviews with friends you have known for decades is so much fun. It's not like you regularly sit down and talk to your friends for hours about their life journeys, so it was a treat to have that excuse with Rachel. The trajectory of everyone's story is so interesting and Rachel's is especially full! It is clear that from early on she has always looked forward and followed her heart. And we are all grateful for that!*

*These days as co-owner of Ceiba Adventures, a river outfitting service in Flagstaff, Rachel uses her skills and positivity helping support private trips.*

*Interviews were conducted in Flagstaff in person and by phone in March and April, 2020.*

*—Mary Williams*

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Over in Europe, in the military system they have a similar program to Outward Bound, only it was called Project Bold—technically for people, like Outward Bound was, for juvenile delinquents, but I wanted to go there because it was cool climbing and backpacking and camping down in the Bavarian Alps. I did a program there between my junior and senior year and learned all kinds of things. And then the summer after I graduated from high school I went back as an assistant. And I got to be the assistant to this awesome, hard-core mountaineering gal who was probably about ten years older than me. Her name was Cathy Day and she definitely opened my eyes to the world beyond what I knew. She was a NOLS instructor, and being ten years older than me—I heard



Early days of bike touring on the California coast.

a LOT from her about how hard it was to be a female in this industry. All that went straight over my head. It was like, “Whatever.” (laughter) “I don’t get any of that.” But she was awesome and I learned a lot from her, and I think I learned a lot of where I could possibly go, things I could do. At that point, when I finished that summer, I was sure my next thing was that I was going to be a NOLS instructor, for sure.

I graduated from high school in 1980 and then I just wanted to get as far away from home as possible. I didn’t want to stay in Europe, I wanted to go to a university where there was either snow or sun. Growing up in Germany, we lived in what’s called the Eiffel, and that is one of the grayest, rainiest places, just like the Northwest. We were technically residents of Oregon, so I could have gotten in-state tuition at Oregon, but I was like, “No! It’s rainy and cold there.” So I applied to all schools in California and Colorado. I was heartbroken when I didn’t get accepted at Stanford, but looking back, I’m thankful—I probably never would have ended up here if I’d gone there. So I ended up at University of California Santa Barbara, which is definitely... everyone says, “Oh man, the party school!” But it was an amazing place to go. I had an uncle who lived in L.A., he helped me get set up in Santa Barbara, but I knew no one. It was full-on new place, new people, no history.

So I worked my butt off, I got some scholarships, and I became a California resident within a year, which was awesome in the UC system. It’s amazing.

**Williams:** And what did you think you were going to study when you first went there?

**Schmidt:** You know, I really had no clue, so I just took the broad spectrum of anything. For some reason I signed up for calculus, and I cried over my homework every night. It was just hateful! And after that first quarter, I sold my calculus book and said, “I will never take another calculus class.” But that wasn’t quite true.

I just took anything, had fun, but the whole NOLS world was still on my mind. So after two years I managed to get into a NOLS semester course in the Rockies. I had to promise my dad that I would go back to college.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Growing up, obviously I learned German. I was exposed to all kinds of languages, but German was sort of second nature, and I studied it all the way through high school. It’s really helpful when you learn a language as a kid. It makes all the following languages you learn, a lot easier. So before I was getting ready to take a year off from college, my parents said, “Hey, you know, we’re thinking of going

to an Italian language school." And I thought, "Sign me up, I'll go with you!" So I took a year of Italian at college and I was ready to go. So then comes summer and they said, "Oh we decided we don't want to go." I said, "Sorry, I took a year of Italian, you're going to drop me off down there, I'm going to go to Italian language school. That was the summer of '82. They dropped me off at a place called Perugia and I spent the summer there in language school. It was another eye-opening, awesome experience.

**Williams:** Wow!

**Schmidt:** Yeah, it was really cool.

**Williams:** So are you still fluent?

**Schmidt:** No.

**Williams:** Can you speak any Italian?

**Schmidt:** No. But I blame that on the fact that I later learned Spanish, and they're so similar that Spanish took over. But I used it that whole summer. That fall I came back to the States and did a NOLS course; went back to Germany at Christmas to see my parents, and tried to get a job in Italy so that I could practice my Italian. I ended up in Northern Italy in a place called Val Gardena and got a job in a hotel, running the bar. Northern Italy is really cool because there's a real mix of German and Italian, so the owners of this restaurant spoke predominantly German. All the clients and the community spoke Italian, so I got to really work on all of that. It helped to end up with an Italian boyfriend for a little while. But yeah, it was sort of this really cool year: language school, a NOLS course, and then back to Italy for winter skiing and working, still remembering that I promised my dad that I would go back to college. (laughter) Oh man!

\* \* \*

Greetings from Perugia



VAL GARDENA, ITALY



**Schmidt:** But the NOLS course—to back up—the NOLS course was another sort of amazing outdoor education. The semester courses you spend... what all did we do? We spent a month backpacking in the Wind River Range. We spent a couple weeks caving in the Bighorn Cave System, somewhere up... I'm not even sure where that was.

**Williams:** Wyoming?

**Schmidt:** Yeah, somewhere up in Wyoming. Then we spent three weeks—this was my first true exposure to the Southwest—we spent three weeks in the Grand Gulch area, sort of Fish and Owl Canyons, just backpacking. And then another couple weeks doing snow camping in the Absarokas. So it was amazing.

**Williams:** Pretty well-rounded.

**Schmidt:** Yeah, a little bit of everything. But yeah, I think that was definitely the beginning of my infatuation with the Southwest, for sure. And that was in the fall of '82, so it wasn't overrun with people. You would be out in these places and you would see no one. I finished that, and again was thinking, "I'm going to do an instructor's course, I'm going to become a NOLS instructor, but I have to go back to college, I promised." (laughter)

So I finished my awesome year off and went back [to Santa Barbara] for school and then, of course, I had to decide what I was going to study. And this is where that calculus comes back in, because I sort of narrowed it down to a geography, or a geology major. And truly the geography major looked too easy, and so I agreed to go into geology, which meant I had to go back and do a full year of calculus, a full year of chemistry, which were all hateful, but I was a little more mentally prepared



for it. So yeah, I became a geology/environmental studies major.

A lot of people around here might be familiar with Rod Nash, [who] was sort of the big guy on campus as far as the Environmental Studies Program. I took Environmental Studies 101, which was called Wilderness and the American Mind—something like that.

**Williams:** Yeah, that sounds like a Rod Nash title...

**Schmidt:** Yeah, and he wrote a book that his whole class was based on. I'd go into that class, and he always had amazing slide shows, and you would come out of that class—I mean, this was a huge lecture hall, well over a hundred students—and you would come out and you would just be pumped. It's like, "Yes! I'm going to go backpacking! I'm going to get out there! I'm going to do this and that!" I mean, he was truly inspirational as far as that. He was a good speaker, and it was just like, "Wow. Okay." School was a mixture of geology which had field studies, field camps, you were outside... geology students worked hard and they played hard, and then environmental studies—it was just an awesome combo, for sure, and definitely got me fired up for getting through school.

A couple of courses, again, brought me back to the Southwest. One was a small, twelve-person class with Rod Nash, that was a study of public lands, and included a San Juan River trip, which I got to ducky, and the water must have been moderately high, because I remember sand waves.

**Williams:** Had you been on the water at all, or paddling?

**Schmidt:** Maybe once, in Europe, for a one-day trip or something. But that was amazing. And somewhere in that same time period that I took another course that was also a study of public lands, where we traveled around, and I did end up, through that program, doing an internship at the Maze in Canyonlands, tracking bighorn sheep. So over those next few years finishing school, I definitely got my taste of the canyon area.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** My first Grand Canyon experience, a group of us hiked into Havasu. This might have been in '84. I didn't really know that much about the Grand Canyon, other than looking over the rim. And one day of the trip a friend [Laura] and I hiked all the way to the river. We got down near the river, and the trail wasn't super-obvious, so we hiked down the waterway all the way to the mouth, and saw where the blue water and the gray water were mixing. It was probably March. We turned around to go back, and we were swimming back up the mouth, but the current was pretty strong. I swear I nearly drowned. Laura was a good swimmer, and she pretty much did the lifeguard pull, and I'm like clawing my way back up the wall to get back upstream enough so we could get on land. We had this epic day, hiking

all the way down there, and feeling like I was going to drown. (chuckles) And several years later I come back on a river trip, and there's a trail that takes you directly to the river, and I looked down at the confluence and thought, "What was I thinking?! How did I miss that?!" (laughs)

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** I helped pay my way through college by working in the salmon canneries in Alaska.

**Williams:** Oh! I worked on processors there! What year?

**Schmidt:** I think it was like '84 and '85.

**Williams:** I was there in '80 and '81. Oh, too funny!

**Schmidt:** Yeah, Kenai Packers. I got sort of lucky, I worked in the can shop the first summer, which was a dry job. I don't know how I lucked-out with that. The second summer I worked in the freezer, which was also... You know, I never had to work on the "slime line." Every once in a while I'd get to go out and help to unload boats, where you'd go sit in the hole and sling fish over your back, into the big basket, to pull them out to go into the cannery. It was amazing. Yeah, living—we were "bluff rats," just camping out and waiting for the jobs to come.

**Williams:** Was that in Seward?

**Schmidt:** That was in Kenai. Some friends and I, in the two or three weeks while we were waiting for [fish]—you know, the fishermen would strike because they wanted better pay and all that—we opened a little restaurant called the Home of the Broken Egg. I mean, this bluff was amazing. It was like a pallet city, and people would set up camp. And these are people from all the lower forty-eight [states] looking to make the big bucks. Some friends of mine were musicians, and we would have music, and we would serve breakfast—just to get rid of the boredom (laughs) while we were waiting to go to work. You know, it covered the cost of our food. And it was fun. So that was really great.

**Williams:** Did you have a tent, or what?

**Schmidt:** I must have had a tent to live in. And we had the whole kitchen set-up with tarps. You know, just a total tarp city. It was funny, because there were all these different contingents. There was this whole Hawaiian contingent of people who were more long-term workers. It was just a wild world up there.

**Williams:** Were there a lot of college students?

**Schmidt:** There was a fair number of college students, it varied over the course of the season. There were the locals who worked every summer, who actually had a home to go to. We were just sort of the trash that came up trying to get work. I went up there and took my bike, because by this time I had actually started mountain biking already, which is a big part of my life now. I was going to ride my bike all the way to Fairbanks, but that didn't ever quite happen. But I did do some biking out



Salmon cannery antics.

in the middle of nowhere, by myself, pre-cell phones. Never thought about bears.

**Williams:** No bear spray?

**Schmidt:** No bear spray. I mean, I think back...

**Williams:** All by yourself.

**Schmidt:** ... I'm lucky to be alive, with a few of the places I went on my own—things that a parent these days would never let you do. I think it was a good thing I didn't have a phone, because if I had told my parents what I was actually doing, it would have driven them berserk! But, like, yeah, camping out, hitchhiking. One of the summers I came back from there, I took the ferry back down. I caught a ride from Seattle, where you came in on the ferry, down to Portland, and then from Portland I rode my bike all the way down the California Coast, Highway 101, all the way back to school at Santa Barbara.

**Williams:** All by yourself?

**Schmidt:** Yeah.

**Williams:** (laughs) That's awesome! But you're in your twenties, and at that time that's just what you did.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Let's see, I graduated December of '85, so it took me five-and-a-half, six years, to graduate, but I did finish with a degree in geology, and a minor in environmental studies. I ended up getting to swamp a Cataract Canyon trip somehow that summer, and it turned out it was a group of Germans who couldn't speak very good English, so here the swamper, who'd never been down Cataract, got to be the translator and lo and behold, there's all these rocks you can talk about! And I was a geology major! Like, "This is awesome!"

**Williams:** Perfect! "My niche!"

**Schmidt:** Yeah! I got off that Cataract Canyon trip, and I was, "Ding! This is what I'm going to do!" So I



Cannery camp on the Kenai Bluffs, "Home of the Broken Egg."

immediately—this is with Tag-A-Long Tours in Moab—I immediately ingratiated myself with them and said, "Hey, I really want to come back next spring and learn how to row a boat." And that was my goal, so I ended up back in Moab the following year, the spring of '86, as the little newbie, wannabe boatman, and learned how to run the Moab Daily. (laughs) So that was truly the beginning of my boating career, the Moab Daily with Tag-A-Long Tours. I think I might have gotten a couple of Deso trips, and maybe a couple of Westwater trips that year, and I probably got to swamp a Cataract trip or something.

**Williams:** Did you just love it?

**Schmidt:** Yeah. And, you know, I also was into biking, and that was, like you said, Moab before the mountain biking boom. There was one bike shop. You could still go out and get completely lost on the trails that are mainstream today. I mean, there were no signs, there was very little trail marking. It was an adventure. Any time you went off the beaten path, you were out there. And again, it was like...

**Williams:** No cell phone.

**Schmidt:** No cell phone. If you get stuck, you break down, you have a flat tire and can't fix it, you're screwed, start walkin'! Truly. You had to learn how to fend for yourself. That was part of the deal, came with the terrain. People are soft these days and I'm right with them! Trail Forks? Where am I? How many miles have I gone?

**Williams:** Damn, no cell service here!

**Schmidt:** I know. I know. I'm glad I lived in that age. I'm glad I grew up with that. You know, I think it made me more self-reliant for sure. If you're going to get yourself into something, you're going to go out there, you'd better know how to get yourself back. You know? It's not a phone call away. So I'm glad I learned that, for sure.

I'd been to Moab for that Cataract Canyon trip I swamped, and then finished school, got to do some field work in Tucson in the Santa Rita [Mountains], and then worked my way to Moab and kind of parked there for the better part of eight years. Moab was home. I thought, "I will never leave Moab."

**Williams:** And you were a year-rounder there?

**Schmidt:** Yeah, pretty much, year-rounder for the first year. (laughter)

**Williams:** So what did you think about Moab back in those days?

**Schmidt:** Oh, I loved it! It was a funky little mining town. I mean, it was at the end of the mining era, it hadn't become what it is today. Mountain biking was just starting; boating was already well-established; but there were very few people who could really make a go of it year-round. I'll bet the full-time population was definitely under 4,000. A lot of rednecks. It was awesome. It was amazing, you could go anywhere. It's like I've always said, you could travel the rest of your life on the Colorado Plateau and never see it all. You don't have to go beyond that, if you didn't want. You just went out and did things: biking, hiking, climbing, boating, whatever. I worked for Tag-A-Long my first two seasons there.

**Williams:** And mostly rowing?

**Schmidt:** Yup, rowing—a little bit of motor boating, but mostly rowing. So two seasons at Tagalong, and one long winter in Moab. I think maybe that was when I realized I didn't have to spend my entire winter in Moab, and the next fall, the fall of '87, my boyfriend at the time [Clark] worked for Sheri Griffith River Expeditions, and he got the offer to go to Africa and work on the Zambezi. We had been talking about going traveling after the river season ended, and it was like, "Well, shoot, you've got to go take advantage of that. I'll see ya'. Have fun! You can't say no to that!"

I piddled around Moab that fall, and my parents still lived in Germany, so I went back to Germany to spend time with them. Clark, in the meantime, did a season on the Zambezi, and he had a bunch of connections in France. So we made plans to meet up in Europe when



First year boatman on the Moab Daily.

the Zambezi. "Let's just go traveling, at least, first." So I don't know, it was maybe late February. We pooled our money, bought tickets, flew into Nairobi, and started traveling. I thought, "Okay, we've got two or three months" before we would have to be back in Moab. We went to Kenya, Tanzania, and then as we got in the depths of being in Africa, "Well, we are pretty close to Zimbabwe. Why don't we just go back there and see if you can get a job?" So it's like, "Okay, we'll see what happens." And we made our way over there. I'm glad I went to Africa then, because I think I would be, with

illnesses, and all the different [political] shit going on down there now, I don't think I would feel the same way now. But we traveled by bus, by boat [for] pennies. We were rich because we were Americans, but truly we were on a five-dollar-a-day budget. And we showed back up in Zimbabwe and met one of the owners of Shearwater where Clark had worked before, and they said, "Sure! That'd be great. You should come back. And oh, who's this, your girlfriend? Oh, I guess she can hang out." And I was indignant. I'm like, "Okay, I'm a two-year veteran boatman of the Moab Daily!" And all of a sudden there comes flooding back to me my friend Cathy Day, who had shared with me all her trials and tribulations of being a woman in the outdoor education field. I'm like, "This isn't fair!" And Clark's like, "Just shut up. Let's just get there, we'll work it out." And sure enough, everybody needs a boatman, and it's a fifty-foot rule, and so Year Three of my boating career, I became a boatman on the Zambezi! Like, "Wooo!" (laughter)

**Williams:** From the Moab Daily to the Zambezi! One big step!

**Schmidt:** Exactly! And then at that point it was like, "We don't need to go back to Moab. We'll get back there sometime, but we're staying in Africa." So yeah. I was eyes wide open, the Zambezi, high water, big water, pool drop, crocodiles...

**Williams:** Hippos?

**Schmidt:** Yeah, the Zambezi Daily is like every big rapid in Grand Canyon in one day, plus some. There was an opportunity to flip your boat every day. We were rowing boats. There wasn't a whole lot of paddle boating, but during the course of my four-month



Living the Airstream Dream, Moab, Utah – 1988.

he was done with his Zambezi season. We spent some time in Germany with my parents; we spent time with his friends on a small vineyard in France, I practiced my French. I got pretty conversational with French, and drank lots of wine, and ate lots of cheese and bread. And then it was getting to be spring, it was like, "Well, wow, we should probably be thinking about going back to Moab." And Clark was like, "Well, why don't we go back to Africa?" You know, he could get a job again on the Zambezi, working for this company called Shearwater. There were only two companies at the time working on

season, I think I had eleven flips, which was right about average with all the other veteran boaters who were there, so I felt pretty good—even had a Daily Double one time.

**Williams:** Is that where you do two trips?

**Schmidt:** No, where you flip twice in one daily trip.

**Williams:** Oh my God.

**Schmidt:** It was the beginning of apartheid, and Zimbabwe was the only country that was still allowing visas for South Africans to travel. A lot of the other African countries had shut down any travel for people holding South African passports. So Zimbabwe was sort of the shining star of independence at that time. A lot of our clientele were both travelers who were traveling to see Victoria Falls, where we were based out of, as well as a lot of white South Africans and white Zimbabwean farmers. And it's a hard-core, male-dominated culture.

**Williams:** I imagine they're pretty hardy.

**Schmidt:** Very hardy. Oh, very hardy. And, you know, ready for a big ride. They would come down and stand in

front of your boat in the morning and look at you like, "So you're the boatman?" And I'd just be looking at them like, "Yup! I'm your boatman!" And you'd really just want to stuff them in the first, biggest hole and hope that they all swam. And by the end of the day, they all had a lot more respect for [me]. But, you know, it was really interesting.

**Williams:** Did they do that to the other [guides]?

**Schmidt:** Not to the male boatmen. There were one or two other gals that were working there at the same time I was, and there had been a few in previous years. There was a big influx of American boaters, because they had the experience; and there were definitely Zimbabwean boaters who were in the mix, but they were using the skills of the whitewater rafting experience of U.S. boaters, because it was a new industry for them. So yeah, it was fun, it was wild, it was terrifying.

**Williams:** Did you ever have any epic swims or rescues or anything?

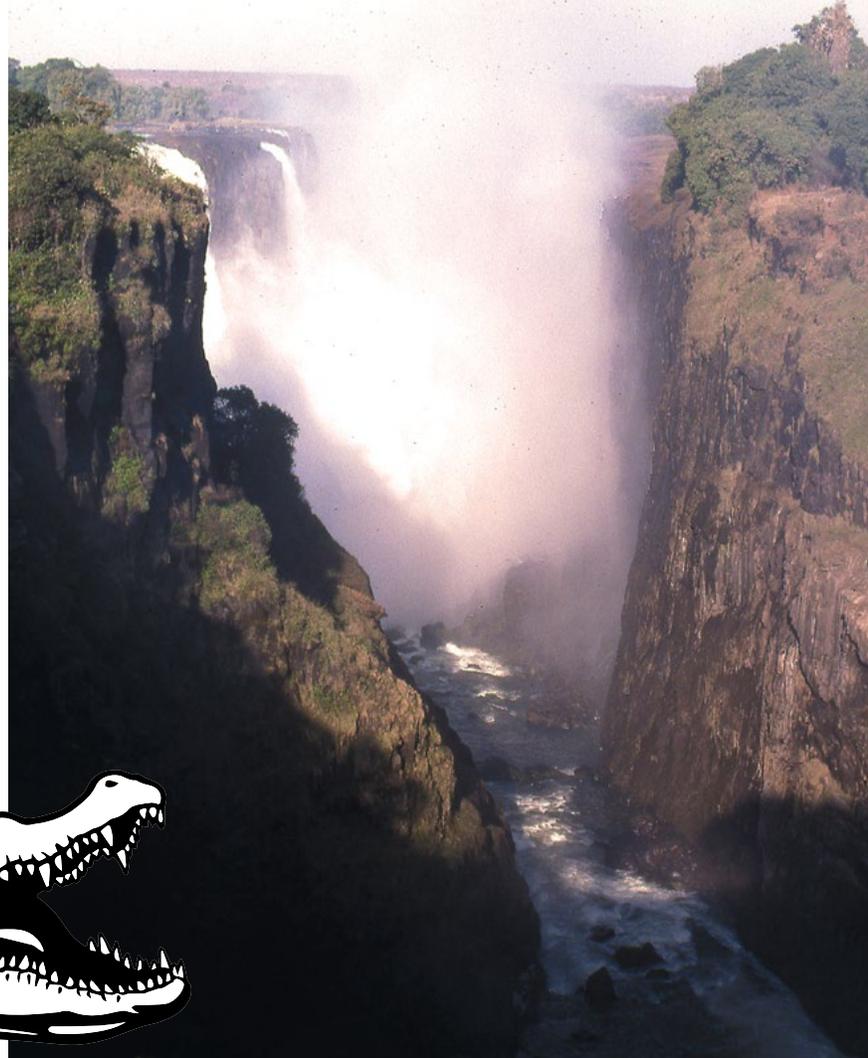
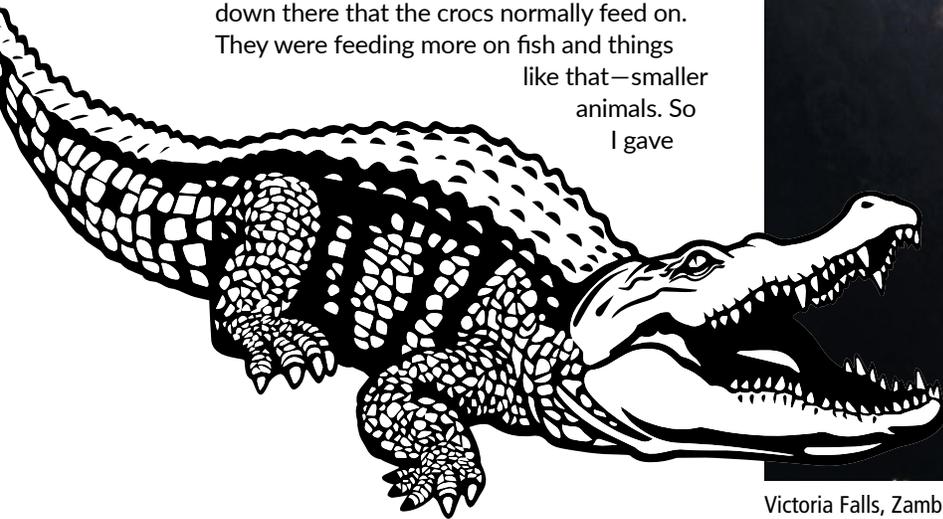
**Schmidt:** It was all pool drop, I mean, huge rapids, but a pool down below. The scariest thing was knowing that there were crocs in there.



Surfing Rapid 18, Zambezi River, November 1988.

Over the course of the season, you saw big crocs in between all the rapids. I went to the croc farm in Victoria Falls and learned way too much about them, knowing that they were used to ritual, like same time, every day, women coming down to wash clothes—things like that. Well, okay, every day we come down to the river to launch. We're all jumping in at the same time, and the buffet is about to start floating. Yeah, we definitely saw a few aggressive moves every once in a while, but never truly had a close call. The Zambezi, where we were running, was in a big basalt gorge, so my theory was there weren't a lot of large mammals down there that the crocs normally feed on. They were feeding more on fish and things

like that—smaller animals. So I gave



Victoria Falls, Zambezi River, on the Zambia–Zimbabwe border.

myself a little reprieve, thinking, “Well, they’re not after large mammals, like [the ones] in the open low lying areas.” (laughs)

**Williams:** Right, where they’re used to taking elephants and zebras.

**Schmidt:** Yeah. Exactly. So that was how I got through it. (laughs) Sobek was on the Zambian side, they also did some float trips up above the falls, and there was actually a hippo attack. The hippos were actually more dangerous than the crocs, and the big bull hippos would charge intruders in their territory. The story we heard, and saw the boat afterwards—this bull hippo just shredded a whole quarter panel of a boat because it was in his territory. That was actually Kelly Kalafatic who was rowing that boat. That was when I first met her. Talk about inspirational women!

So we ended up in Africa for a whole year, unplanned, and just like, “Let’s go for it!” (laughs) And third-year boatman! Woo!

**Williams:** Well, you went from a second-year boatman to about a tenth-year boatman after a season there.

**Schmidt:** Yeah. At least in my own mind. (laughs) Oh man. But yeah, so [we] came back from that, and I was making the move from Tag-A-Long Tours to Sheri

Griffith Expeditions, and we came back from Africa and got invited on a Grand Canyon private trip. And that was my first Grand Canyon trip.

**Williams:** What time of year?

**Schmidt:** It was a spring trip. It was March or April. I didn’t have my own boat, I was sharing a boat, but we all kind of shared around. We had a bunch of rowboats. I remember we had a paddleboat. It’s like I have little snippets of memory from that trip, and one of them I remember was we were sitting in the paddleboat, up above Bedrock, just thinking about our run and José Tejada, who now owns Sheri Griffith River Expeditions, was the captain, and he heard this noise, and the next thing I knew, he dove across the boat, and this big barrel cactus came plummeting down off the cliff, right onto our paddleboat! I think it was probably kicked off by a bighorn or something, but I just have this total vivid memory of that. It’s like, “Oh my God!” And he dove across the boat and ended up in the water, and we’re above Bedrock, which I haven’t even run yet for the first time, so I don’t really know how scary it is. (laughs)

**Williams:** And meanwhile you’re getting attacked by a barrel cactus!

**Schmidt:** Yeah.

**Williams:** That's good!

**Schmidt:** I have that memory and I remember doing our own shuttle before the trip. I remember the trip leader was insistent that we get dry ice. A couple of us drove all the way to Flagstaff. We'd come from Moab, went to Lees Ferry, and a couple of us had to go to Flagstaff to try to find dry ice and block ice. I just remember it being this epic journey—everything we did, just to get on the river! There wasn't anyone to call to do our shuttle. We had all our own gear. I had my little Toyota pickup, that was jammed to the gills with gear. It was fun, it was awesome.

**Williams:** And was everybody mostly guides from Cataract?

**Schmidt:** Everyone was mostly guides, and almost everybody worked for Sheri Griffith: José, Sheri Scouten, Larry Hopkins—a handful of people.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Some people at Sheri Griffith had connections in Costa Rica. So it's like well, I'd love to go there and learn Spanish... and boat. In fall of 1990, I went to Costa Rica for the first time, and I worked for Costa Rica Raft the first year, but I lived in Turrialba, which is sort of the hub of the day trips in Costa Rica. I wanted to learn Spanish. I had my grammar books, and I met a Costa Rican friend who became a great tutor.

I worked that first season, for like four months, and felt like I came back with decent Spanish, which was cool. And, boated in an awesome place. I worked there for the winter, came back to Moab, worked in the Southwest all summer long, and was planning on going back to Costa Rica and, sort of happenstance, I got invited to be on the Project Raft Team Grand Canyon. Which was sort of funny because I hadn't started working in Grand Canyon yet but I had contacts with people who did, who were putting together this team and needed someone who was familiar with the rivers there. So, I lucked out with that and went down to Costa Rica again, in the fall of '91 with Project Raft and stayed to work.

**Williams:** Who was on your team? Do you remember?

**Schmidt:** Well the person who asked me was Larry Hopkins, who I had worked with at Sheri Griffith. But let's see... Nancy McClesky, I'm pretty sure Linda Jalbert...

And so that was the first time I met some of those people. It was a great event. I also, in that whole scene, met the new owners of an Idaho rafting company and that was how I ended up getting some work on the Middle Fork of the Salmon for a season, working for my friend Emily Johnston. Going to Idaho to work for Emily and James, that was where I met Julie Munger. We both ended up working for them, so another small little world.

I made tons of connections down there but the

unfortunate thing about that year, after Project Raft and the start of the season, I was trying to learn how to kayak, and just getting to the point where I had my roll, and sort of comfortable running Class III, when I dislocated my shoulder. (laughs) On a run in Costa Rica at the beginning of that season so that was more or less the end of my kayaking career.

So I come back up to the States to rehab my shoulder, and spent two or three months working on that, and then got an invite to go down to Southern Mexico. So that was my intro to Chiapas. A friend of mine, Barry Miller, who I had worked with previously, was working with Slickrock Expeditions down in Mexico, and they were just starting to run the Rio Jatate with paddle boats. It had always been a self-support kayak trip. And Cully [Erdman] really wanted to open it up to more clientel with paddle boats and a small support boat. So, I came in to run paddle boats which was super exciting. I mean, that river is wild, it's like Havasu on steroids. You know, you're actually running travertine falls and just wild things you would never think you could make it through.

**Williams:** And what are the sizes... the range of these drops?

**Schmidt:** The vertical drop in places was easily, like thirty feet. But you were sliding over these travertine ramps on four inches of water, down into a big hole at the bottom. It was crazy. It was boating like you've never done before. So it was another big learning curve but really exciting.

I took the train all the way from the border, in New Mexico, down into Chiapas, all by myself, to go to work. (laughs) And that was an exciting journey as well. But I spoke Spanish so I did just fine. And that was when I first met Scott [Davis]. Cully, running Slickrock Adventures, and Scott, running Ceiba Adventures, were based out of the same place. Scott had his river running and caving and birding trips, and Cully had more kayak-oriented trips, but they worked together, shared shuttles, did a lot of logistics together.

After Mexico I came back to Moab and worked on the Middle Fork of the Salmon for part of the season. Did mountain bike tours, had an awesome schedule; Moab boating, Idaho boating, mountain bike tours for Western Spirit Cycling in Colorado and Idaho—it was a great scene. Like, "Wow, I can do this year 'round!" So that was just the big explosion of the guiding world for me. I continued to do that through '92, '93.

**Williams:** So '92, '93 were you going back down to Chiapas?

**Schmidt:** Back down to Chiapas and working for both Slickrock and Ceiba.

**Williams:** So how did the transition to Ceiba work? (laughter) Where did the relationship fit into the work...?

**Schmidt:** So, when Scott and I first met we just hit it off, we were great friends, could talk for hours, and the



Clockwise: Rio Agua Azul waterfalls, Chiapas, Mexico.  
Rio Congrejal shuttle, Honduras.  
Guatemalan lancha lunch on the Rio de la Pasion, in  
the Peten of Guatemala.  
Strangler fig, Petexbatun, Guatemala.



next year I drove down instead of taking the train. Scott always would drive down with a bunch of his gear, and it was in his four-wheel-drive van called "The Iguana," pulling a big pick-up bed trailer full of stuff and a bunch of his guides. So that year, I drove down with them, which is a four or five day event, leaving from Arizona via Durango, Colorado, where Scott was living, and heading down across the border. That year I worked mostly for Slickrock. I'm sure I helped out with some Ceiba trips, and did some work in Belize for Slickrock. And then drove back home in "The Iguana" at the end of the season. I went back to Moab boating, biking, Idaho, Colorado, and got to swamp my first Grand Canyon trip for Hatch with Scott. So that was in '93. That was probably in the time range when it changed from just being friends into being a couple. (laughter)

In '93, at the end of the season, Scott worked on "The River Wild" which was a big boating production. When he finished up with that project he moved from Durango to Flagstaff and that was more or less when I moved to Flagstaff as well, and moved in with him.

Left: Rio La Venta, Chiapas, Mexico.

Below: Old school mountain bike tour guiding, White Rim, Canyonlands, Utah.





Adventures with Scott: Rio Chocolja, Chiapas, Mexico; Gooseberry Mesa, Utah; Cueva El Chorreadero, Chiapas, Mexico.

I spent most of '94 going back and forth between Flagstaff and Moab, just filling in my schedule. Those first trips were super fun. I boated with all kinds of different people and it was funny because now, at this point, I did have several years of experience but you did have to do the baggage boat first. (laughs) There were all kinds of funny things that happened as a baggage boatman but it was like "OK, this is the direction I'm going, the direction I want to go." So by the time I got through '94, the next season I pretty much did the same—back to Mexico, back up to the States, and ended up with a decent schedule from CanEx. I still did some mountain bike tours, you know, filling in my schedule like any guide does. And it was great because I got to do a little bit of everything.

**Williams:** That's sort of been a keystone, I think, of your career. Fitting in all these really different things that you love to do.

**Schmidt:** Right, and then that led right into actually getting married. (laughs)

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** That was a big deal, especially since I think we're going on twenty-five years this year. And yeah, for the record, I'm married to Scott Davis, who when I met him was a Hatch boatman. He was also the owner of the original Ceiba Adventures in Mexico, which is where we met. You know, there's all kinds of funny things there. It's like we met and hit it off just as great friends. We were good friends for a while before anything moved forward, but once it did move forward, my only fear was he wasn't a mountain biker. He had some "Walmart Special" bike, and not only was I into boating, but mountain biking was a huge passion, so I was a little nervous about that. But he proved himself early on, and that's become our passion together.

A couple things about him in my world is, he always says that I would probably still be living out of the

back of my truck if we hadn't gotten married. He definitely expanded my world as far as what the realm of possibilities were. He doesn't really do anything half-assed. Little did I know what I was in for. We make a good pair. He's sort of the Big Picture guy; I sort out some of the details as far as, "Wait a minute, you can't do that. We have to think about this." I'm really good at playing devil's advocate—sometimes almost too much. (laughter) We were spending a lot of time in Mexico when we first got together and were married, we often would play the "good cop, bad cop" in all kinds of situations, whether it was dealing with Mexican police, or dealing with a van driver, or whatever it was. My Spanish happened to be better than his. He knew all the words for car parts, and I knew the rest. (laughter) [We were] a very good pair, as far as that goes. So yeah, that was a big deal in 1995. How old was I then? I was thirty-two years old and my mother thought I would never get married. When I told my parents I was getting married, she was like, "Wow!" And later she asked me, "What did he do to make you say yes?" (laughter)

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** So the engagement story... we were in Mexico, we were out on a little day run on some small river in Chiapas, and had two friends with us, Dave Kashinski and Denise Nadeau. We were on our way back and the van broke down and of course, Denise and Dave were just hanging out waiting, and Scott was under the van, and I'm just helping out—and what I became really good at was becoming the mechanic "ayudante," the helper. And we got things going, whatever was wrong with it, got back in the van, and we were on a small dirt road so Denise and David were up on the roof rack and Scott and I were in the van, and as we're driving along Scott's like "Well, what about getting married?" (laughter)

And my reply was "Well... sure... maybe next year?" And Scott says "Oh no, if we're going to get married and

you say yes, we're getting married this year. There's way too many men out there in the Grand Canyon world for you to stay single." (laughter) It was not very formal. It was more of a discussion than a proposal. (laughter) But I did say yes.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Let's see, other big moments after that... when we got married was when I had started working in Grand Canyon, so that was a big change.

**Williams:** Were you working for CanEx then?

**Schmidt:** Yes. I had swamped one Hatch trip maybe, and gone on one private trip, and then put my resume out there to all the rowing companies, and CanEx was the one that came back and offered me a couple of baggage boats. So I was like, "Sure!" And it clicked, and I never left. It was a good fit. In 1994, I did my first baggage boat [for CanEx], all the way to twenty years later. I think my last trip with them was in 2015 and although I'm not big on statistics, I believe I have made over 100 trips, but who knows? (laughter) But yeah, that turned into just a great thing, great people, and just a lot of fun.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Like I said, mountain biking is a passion. A couple big events for me were the Leadville 100 Mountain Bike Race, twice—once in my thirties and once in my forties.

**Williams:** Where does that go from?

**Schmidt:** They say it's a 100-mile ride, but it's really like 103 or 105 miles, and it starts in Leadville, Colorado, and it's a big out-and-back. You ride over 100 miles, you have, I think it's like 10,000 feet of climbing. There are some people who are out there for winning the gold medal, but most everyone else is just out there to survive, and so you're not in that big of a hurry, and you have conversations while you're riding. It's just an awesome event, something you just want to complete—it doesn't matter how you do. And I actually did alright, I came in like tenth and eleventh in the women's both times. I was pretty psyched about that.

**Williams:** Nice! And what were your times, generally?

**Schmidt:** Oh, I want to say mine was right in the ten-and-a-half-hour range, which for me is totally admirable. (laughs) And I still have hopes of doing it maybe one more time, maybe in my, who knows, could be in my fifties or sixties—we'll see.

**Williams:** Do you stop at all?

**Schmidt:** You have rest stops, and Scott was my wheel boy on both rides, along with either my mom or another good friend, Barb. They have these rest stops, so you can get refilled with food and water, so you see them like three or four times along the way. That was a cool experience.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Boating-wise, my first and only boatman motorboat trip was a GCMRC trip on a flood flow in 2004. That was moderately terrifying, but I ran a motorboat from Lees Ferry down to Phantom before I hiked out. It was on, 30,000–40,000 [CFS], so that was pretty exciting. You don't have any rocks to hit, you just have to hold on! (laughter)

**Williams:** And how come you ran a motorboat?

**Schmidt:** Well, it was one of those scenarios where it happened at last minute. I was originally the cook, and once they got to Lees Ferry, they realized they had way too much gear for the science equipment and the food, and so they added a motorboat, and they're like, "Well, who's gonna drive it?" "Well, Rachel, can you drive?" And I was like, "Sure," because I'd run a few motorboats in Cataract, and I'd swamped a fair number of motor



Leadville 100 finish line.



**Dawn to Dusk 12-hour race: Team Bumblebee Bitches won 1st place, Marieke Taney, Rachel & Kat Spillman.**

trips, so I wasn't like I didn't know what a tiller was. (laughter) So anyway, I ended up as a boatman. Parke Steffensen was my official swamper. He was probably much more competent than I was at the time, but I was the one who said yes.

**Williams:** Smart girl!

**Schmidt:** Yeah. The biggest run I remember was in Hance, and I had radio communication with Scott, because Scott was running the science motorboat. That was my biggest worry, and I was following him, and he ran first, and he was radioing to me and telling me things. I remember just having this enormous ride. You know, my eyes were probably like saucers before we made it to the bottom, but we made it through, which was good. It was exciting.

I ended up collecting firewood one afternoon, because I think it was November. I slipped and banged up my wrist so I hiked out because my wrist was all bruised up. Someone else took the boat on down which was probably just as well because then the water dropped out and I would have been running, like, on 8,000 [cfs]. (laughs)

**Williams:** Yeah, that might have been a good thing.

**Schmidt:** Yeah, it was probably good. Truly, I'm more of a rowboatman.

**Williams:** Did you paddleboat a lot too?

**Schmidt:** I did a bunch of paddleboats because CanEx runs the little 14-foot paddleboats, unloaded, and super-sporting. I learned how to paddleboat in Costa Rica and then Mexico, so I was pretty up on that. I definitely did my share of paddleboating for CanEx, and

had some big runs, and definitely turned over a handful of boats. It's a lot of work, you know. And it's not just the flat water, it's those miles. Any paddleboat captain in Grand Canyon can attest to this, it's the flat water, it's the miles in the wind, or no current—that's the true paddleboat captain's expertise, is getting people excited about going downstream when there isn't any big whitewater.

**Williams:** Yeah, I've done that a time or two. It can be a challenge.

**Schmidt:** It can be a challenge, but it's fun. It is fun. You can be absolutely terrified, but sometimes the crews that you have the least confidence in come through for you, and you are just like so high on life, and so are they.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** Let's see, what else? My parents had moved back to the States. My dad passed away in 2003. My mom's still awesome and hanging in there. She's one of those people whose glass is always half full—and that's maybe a wine glass. (laughs) But she has always been an inspiration to me, and I just hope I can be as positive as her. She has so often visited us on the holidays and gone to parties with us, and I don't even have to worry about her. I see her over in the corner just chatting away with someone she doesn't even know, and having an awesome time. (laughs) So she's an inspiration. She turned eighty last year.

\* \* \*



Big run in Specter, and yes, it did turn over!

**Schmidt:** And then there's... health and turning fifty! (laughter) Before I turned fifty, I had my round with breast cancer. I've been a healthy person all my life, so it wasn't until I was like forty-six that I ever spent a

night in a hospital. I think about the biggest thing I had ever had before that was stitches. (laughter) So that was sort of a wake-up call, being in a place where you feel like you are the healthy person, but yet you're in the mix with people who are very sick... but again, I had a lot of awesome support with that. It was the winter of 2009–2010, and went through the whole surgery, chemotherapy, radiation treatments, and all of it. When I was talking with my oncologist, it was like, "I have a river trip in May of 2010, and I'm going on that trip!" (laughs) "I have these goals. We gotta get this shit done because I've got life to deal with!" (laughter)

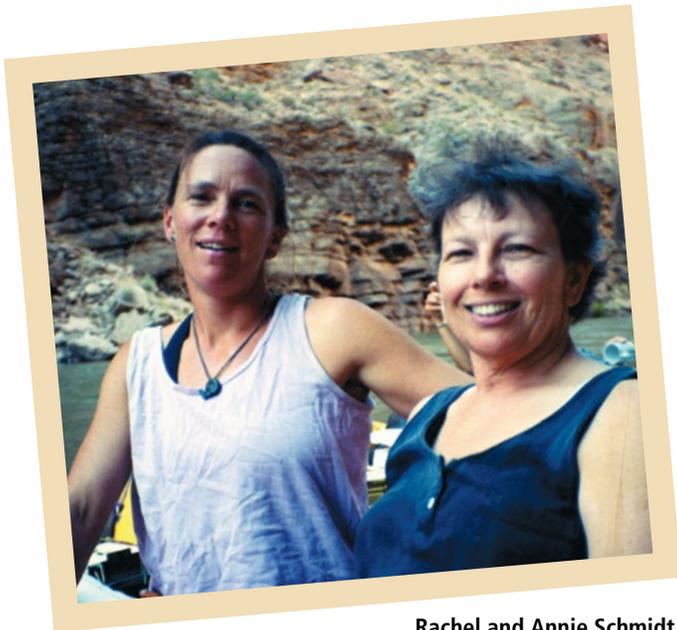
In my chemotherapy, when my hair started falling out, my good friend Marieke [Taney] turned me on to her hairdresser. Weren't you there?

**Williams:** Yes I was! I remember that fun party.

**Schmidt:** Yeah, the hair cutting party—haircut/shaving party. That was awesome, that was a great way to just celebrate going bald.

**Williams:** Yes. Perfect.

**Schmidt:** But yeah, it was like, "Wow, this can happen to anybody," even when you're a healthy person. So my advice, the hindsight advice of the older person to all of our younger friends is like, "Stay healthy, stay on top of



Rachel and Annie Schmidt.



Julie Larsen doing the deed with friends and wine to help celebrate.

things, get your baseline studies done, put the money out to do that, so you know if things change.”

And then in 2016, I had a big year of body parts. I had my shoulder fixed, rotator cuff surgery, with some added stem cells, because most of the doctors had told me, “Oh, you need a full shoulder replacement.” And it wasn’t any one event, it was probably just years of rowing boats, and playing hard, and riding bikes, but it had finally caught up to me. But I did a little research and ended up going to Texas for rotator cuff surgery where they also use stem cells to help with the rejuvenation of the joint and the actual surgery.

And that same year, it’s like, okay, things all happen at once, and I was starting to feel that I had hip issues. My shoulder was in February or so, and then that same year in November I had a hip replacement. So yeah, it was a big year. It was my first year completely not on the river. And that was definitely a big deal. I was down to only one or two trips a year just because Ceiba was taking a lot more time. And then funny as it goes, it’s like, “Well, you know, maybe I don’t need to continue being a guide right now.” So truly, 2015 was my last commercial

different buddies of ours.

**Williams:** What a great idea! Were there any that were particularly memorable?

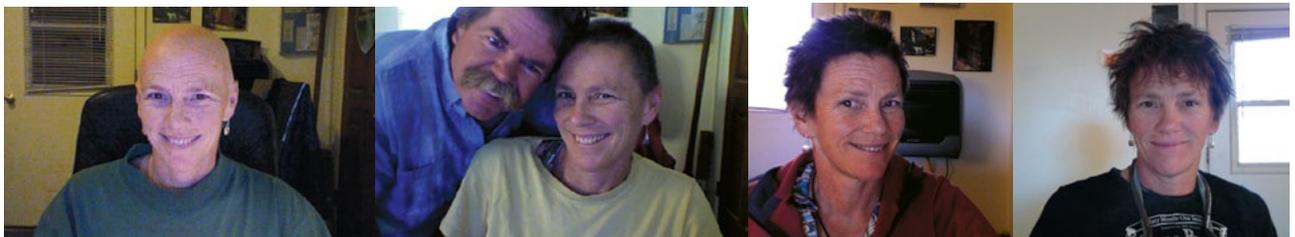
**Schmidt:** Well, the number one ride, because my birthday is in January, and I feel like it might have been either right before or right after my birthday, we went down on the Black Canyon Trail, which is south of Cordes Junction, and there were about seven or eight of us, and it was frigid! (laughter) And we had to run a shuttle, and we all, like, left the trailhead in our Puffy jackets. We did this 25-mile ride, which is through this spectacular scenery, but it was so fricking cold. I totally remember that one. (laughter)

**Williams:** Way to kick off the year!

**Schmidt:** Exactly, exactly. Most of the rest of them were a lot more pleasant.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** We’re in that age range where we came in on the coattails of a lot of amazing women who made it a lot easier for us to come into this whole world of



December 2009 thru October 2011.

boating. I feel like it was a lot easier for me coming in ten, fifteen, twenty years after some of the pioneer women that made their way and made their stand, being totally credible boatmen no matter where they were working.

**Williams:** Yeah, I do too.

**Schmidt:** And we're surrounded by so many of those people here in Flagstaff, and up in Moab, so hats off to those before us who made it easier, for sure.

**Williams:** You had mentioned that you had a mentor early in your youth...

**Schmidt:** Well, a couple. I think I might have mentioned the very early youth mentor was a junior high science teacher. And right when I graduated, I worked with a gal who was probably about ten years older than me, Cathy Day, and she worked predominantly with NOLS. She definitely was an amazing person and I didn't even realize what—didn't even have a clue what she was offering, her experience, to me. It's funny how in hindsight you go back and think, "Wow, that person was an amazing person for what they had accomplished and what they were doing."

**Williams:** Yeah. And the time of life that you were at, you didn't even know to realize that.

**Schmidt:** Exactly—especially when you grow up as an only child with educators as parents, who were the best for being supportive and telling me, "You can do anything you want." I didn't even know that there were stumbling blocks out there. And maybe I ran into a few, but I was maybe naïve in even realizing that's what they were. (laughter)

**Williams:** I can picture that!

**Schmidt:** It's like you're just positive. "Oh, I'm doing this and I'm doing that." Yeah, in hindsight you realize the benefits you were afforded by other people making their way in, and even just being positive about things so you didn't even dwell on events that may have seemed negative.

**Williams:** So when you first got into boating, did you have any sort of teachers that you learned from? Or did you just kind of jump in?

**Schmidt:** I definitely sort of just jumped in. I mean, I feel like there were a few different people along the way. Barry Miller was a good friend of mine, and he worked out of Moab, but he also was a Selway River ranger. I ended up working a lot of river rescue courses with him out of Moab, through Canyonlands Field Institute. And boating-wise, he was definitely a big mentor and supporter, as far as that went. Bego Gerhart, who wore a skirt, who I met in my twenties. He was always a huge supporter of women in the field, and he was a super-good friend in those early days when I was learning how to boat. And then early on, my Year Three of boating when I ended up with a season on the Zambezi. The people I was with were all awesome supporters of anybody learning how to boat.



Desert mountain biking in Arizona.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** We can't have this conversation without talking about our dogs!

**Williams:** Right.

**Schmidt:** That was one thing, I never had dogs growing up, because we lived in Europe, we traveled a lot, my parents always told me, "Well, you know, it's not fair for us to have pets because we can't take care of them all the time." So my first dog, I was super-hesitant to get, but, you know, Scott had grown up with dogs, and had dogs all his life, so he was like, "We need to get a dog." And I'm like, "Well, how do you have a dog when

you work on the river all summer?” Our first dog, Maya, spent a lot of time with a lot of different people every summer. I would get these messages when I got off the river, “Oh yeah, Maya went to Durango with us. Oh yeah, she did this and that.” So I don’t know quite how it all worked, but we ended up with this awesome dog who people loved to take care of. And we passed her around and had her with us for like ten years.

**Williams:** I think we had Maya a couple of times.

**Schmidt:** I’m sure you did! I know Fritz and Dirk took Maya a bunch, and yeah, she went all over. She was like the happiest black lab mutt, rescue dog, that had ever been.

**Williams:** And she would go to Mexico with you and everything?

**Schmidt:** She went to Mexico with us. She was the sweetest dog in the world, but she could look really fierce if someone wasn’t used to dogs. So she was a great guard dog as well.

And then we ended up with Millie, who Lynn Roeder pawned off on us. She had rescued her from a pound in Parowan, Utah. And Millie came with tons of baggage, as you know.

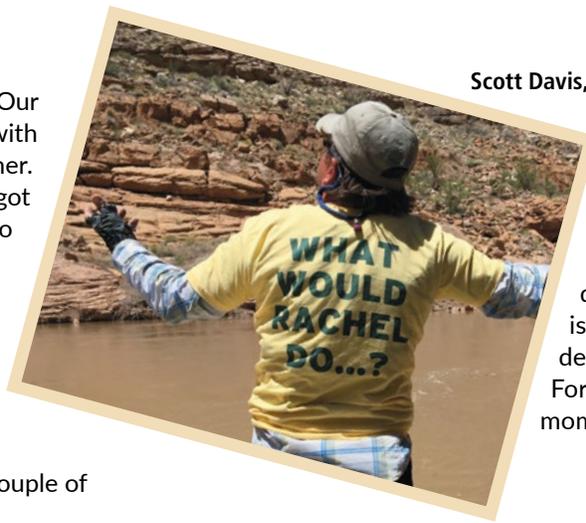
**Williams:** Yes. (laughter)

**Schmidt:** And then finally we decided it was time to have a dog we started from almost scratch, and our most recent addition is Nitro. He’s just a young punk, but he’s an awesome companion. Oh my God, when you’re hanging out a lot at home, or without a lot of people around because of the COVID, it’s certainly nice to have a dog, that’s for sure.

**Williams:** So did the black dogs start with Maya, and you just always wanted black ones after that? Or where did the black ones come from?

**Schmidt:** You know, I think a little bit was Scott had always had labs, but yeah, there was a time at Ceiba where all we had were black dogs there. There were six of them. Now Ceiba has expanded into a much bigger

Scott Davis, looking for answers.



variety of dog faces. But yeah, any given day at work there can be six or seven dogs there, so we’re definitely dog-centric—as is all of Flagstaff—but definitely a dog-centric place. For all their pain-in-the-butt moments, we love them.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** I have a couple little mottos. And every once in a while someone who’s heard them for so many years, will say them back to me, like out of the blue. But I feel like the river brought this out in me, and this is maybe a way I look at life... “If you make everyone around you look good, you’re going to look good.” And that definitely is key on the river—especially as I moved into being a trip leader. It’s like you don’t have to micro manage, and if you make everybody else look and feel good, you’re going to look good. So that’s definitely one of my mottos.

And then another one, “Indecision is the key to flexibility.” I think we’ve all felt it when we’ve been the trip leader on a trip, especially when you’re out front, and you’re trying to figure out where you’re going to stop, and if there’s going to be shade, and what all of your guides on the trip are thinking of your decisions—and are you going to make the right one? If you don’t set in stone what you’re going to do, then you have so many more options. I deal with a lot of private trips, and I have lots of conversations. And really, what you try to pass on is that. Don’t get worked up on exactly what you’re going to do. You’ll only make it hard for yourself. If you just open yourself up to what experience you’re going to have, and be positive about it, you’re going to enjoy so much, and your next trip is going to be completely different.

**Williams:** Yeah. That’s really good advice.

\* \* \*

**Schmidt:** But yeah, I just... It’s been an awesome ride. I mean, Grand Canyon is always going to be there—especially right now [when] people have been limited going downstream with the whole COVID-19—whether it’s a government shutdown, or a pandemic, it’s like the Grand Canyon is still going to be there for us. We don’t have to worry about that going away, we just have to make sure that we can get back there.

Millie and young Nitro. Photo by Geoff Gourley.





Photo: Margeaux Bestard

### Grand Canyon 7/9/20

So NOW here we are from near and far  
The raw authentic and pure at heart  
We came with angst the world gripped with  
fear  
But then our souls united into new air... Into  
the river & canyon, to see, love, learn and  
hear...  
To hear the heartbeat of our collective  
drum, our spirits, this experience and  
family now one  
What have we discovered together & alone?  
>>> our trip close to an end yet we shall  
depart renewed... to the homes that we  
know  
But now a new home rests and resides, this  
river & canyon forever alive!!!!  
It burns, it glimmers and will always shine  
bright... Each of us stars sparkling  
through night... like the rising sun &  
moon our energy soars  
We've opened our hearts to universal doors.  
New friendships old friendships bound  
forever through love... all that this is and  
all left that was.  
I look at you all it's the most beautiful site  
I feel love I hear laughter godamn this feels  
right  
So lets eat, drink & dance with stars and  
moonlight  
We have each other & that will do for  
tonight

### Grand Canyon 7/10/20

Once again we gather round  
The final night we celebrate all we've  
found... in the river, in these walls, on  
this inspiring ground.  
I feel tears coming like a waterfall, yes soon  
on their way...  
But not yet, oh no... not today... still smiles  
and laughter... because that's how we  
love and that love will stay.  
In paraphrased words of a wizard... his  
name yes Ben...  
This isn't final and this trip doesn't end.  
This here now is the real world, and with  
you it can stay >>>> Just close your eyes  
to come back here & remind... that this is  
reality, this IS a wonderful blessed life.  
Let the Wizard's wisdom ring true for us, for  
me and all you!  
I hope you've found healing  
I KNOW we've had fun  
Thank you for being here  
The river we've run  
Now let's go forth and bring back to the  
world  
The magic the wonder the love that swirls  
Forever in our minds hearts and souls  
Now and forever this beauty we hold  
I love you I'll miss you  
But the next trip shall come  
be free  
be kind  
be all we've become.

Owen Gray  
July 2020

### Ode to a Short Haul

The rocks rolled,  
crushing your foot.

The rangers came  
at twilight.  
The helicopter returned  
at daybreak,  
lifting you,  
your leg on the ranger's lap,  
twirling gently  
in a canyon  
pas de deux.

Cindy Stafford  
2019



## Care To Join Us?

If you're not a member yet and would like to be, or if your membership has lapsed, get with the program! Your membership dues help fund many of the worthwhile projects we are pursuing. And you get this fine journal to boot. Do it today. We are a 501(c)(3) tax deductible non-profit organization, so send lots of money!

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- \$20 Short-sleeved t-shirt size (S, M, L, XL, XXL) \_\_\_\_\_
- \$22 Long-sleeved t-shirt size (S, M, L, XL, XXL) \_\_\_\_\_
- \$30 Sun Hoodie—does not include SPF (XS, S, M, L, XL) \_\_\_\_\_
- \$15 Baseball cap (classic style or soft mesh cap) \_\_\_\_\_
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## boatman's quarterly review

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**Thanks to all you** poets, photographers, writers, artists, and to all of you who send us stuff. Don't ever stop. Special thanks to the Catena Foundation, the Adopt-a-Boatman sponsors, "Circle of Friends" contributors, and innumerable GCRG members for their generous and much appreciated support of this publication.

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The Dusty Dozen, Western River Guides Association Meeting, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1970's. Left to right: Elwood Masoner, Les "Buckethead" Jones, Bob Smith, Don Hatch, Clair Quist, Ken Sleight, Jerry Sanderson, Ted Hatch, Al Harris, Dee Holliday, David Mackay, Don Harris. Photo by Verne Hauser.