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Preface

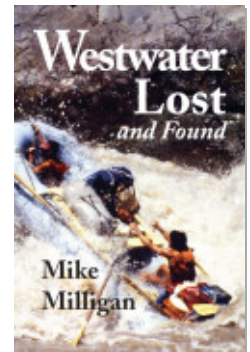
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Preface

On September 10, 1998, I pulled into Westwater during the night and, after setting up camp, approached the launch near the ranger station. The reflection of the moon allowed me a limited view of the Colorado River. The night was still with what seemed like billions of stars set against a dark sky, and the only sound was that of the river's current slowly flowing past me. It was a time for me to reflect and realize it had been fifteen years since I last ran the canyon below. It had not, however, been fifteen years that I had forgotten Westwater. In fact a good portion of my time away had been spent researching whatever information existed about the canyon and surrounding area. I had come back a few times to hike nearby as part of my research, but each time I bypassed the river. Being there that September night was not the same as it was in 1983 when I last ran as a river guide for Western River Expeditions. From 1978 through 1983, I worked primarily Cataract, Desolation, and Westwater Canyons, as well as a few Grand Canyon trips. In this time I developed an interest in the history of each of these areas. As I became more knowledgeable about the history of the Colorado and Green Rivers I found it was a great asset for me as a professional river guide to be able to share the information with customers as we traveled the waterways together. Unfortunately there was little that had been published about Westwater Canyon other than what was in Belknap's *Canyonlands River Guide*.

Before putting on to the river the following morning, I visited with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) ranger Alvin Halliday to ask about any new historical information that may have surfaced during my absence. A few pieces of updated history had filtered up through the years, but not much that would change the story as it existed fifteen years earlier. Westwater was still

considered one of the little-known regions along the Green and Colorado Rivers with little more to say about it than to advertise a wild and scenic river trip.

I was a bit disturbed when I later learned others were just discovering pieces of history that I had known for at least ten to fifteen years. It reminded me of my first attempts to gather Westwater data by contacting a known river historian. A seemingly good contact and extremely interesting, he shared bits and pieces of river history along both the Green and Colorado Rivers. During our few conversations he indicated that he knew a lot about Westwater. However, he had gone through the canyon only once and was not overly impressed by it. He had no interest in the area, much less a desire to write about it. Moreover, though he claimed to have historical information that could be useful to another historian such as me, he was only willing to share it for a price. I was dismayed that he could possibly let the history die or put a price on its survival. At that point I resolved that I would share the information I found.

Inexperienced as a historian, I began by researching those who had boated the canyon of Westwater. Later I expanded my research to other aspects of the human history of the area. With some excitement, I corresponded with individuals whose works I had read or who to me were historical figures, including Don Harris, Pearl Baker, C. Gregory Crampton, Les Jones, P. T. Reilly, John Hoffman, Jackson Thode, Charlie Hunt, and Frank Wright. What originally prompted this research may best be explained by my journal entry dated August 22, 1981.

Probably the most interesting thoughts that came to me this day occurred as I was driving alone between Hanksville and Crescent Junction. I'd thought about all the times I'd been through all of this country and how little I know of its history, geology, botany, and animal life. I've had the feeling lately that I've come across this job as a means of getting my education, and there's something more that I don't know yet. I feel as though I'll be back until my education is finished. So on thinking about all of this beauty I've lived with for over three summers, I feel determined to learn more and become not only an expert oarsman, but also an open book to the stories these canyons have to tell I also want to write a good article on Westwater after my studies.

Until now, twenty-two years later, I have only shared what has appeared in a few articles I wrote for the Moab periodical *Canyon Legacy*.¹

I was further motivated by the tragic death of my mother in Westwater in 1983. Her accident was one reason I for many years performed my research from a distance, away from the river.

After conversing with Alvin Halliday, I was invited to join a group of various experts on a Westwater trip being organized by John Weisheit. I was not well acquainted with John, except for some brief correspondence in the early 1990s regarding the early Westwater river runners. The object of the four-day trip was to gather as much information about Westwater as possible from various experts, including geologists, biologists, river runners, and historians, as a start toward recording and publishing its story. The trip was quite enlightening, and though we encountered rain nearly every day, I was able to experience the canyon with renewed enthusiasm. Furthermore, our group made several discoveries that still need further exploration.

Researching Westwater has not been an easy task. Like many river enthusiasts, I originally focused solely on the historical river runners. By limiting my research to the river runners, I found there wasn't much more to say than what had been known for many years. There have been only a few additions in recent years to the list of river runners before the mid-1950s, where my list of pioneers ends. By that time less than twenty-five people are known to have successfully run the canyon. In contrast one hundred people had gone through the lengthier Grand Canyon by 1949. Of these one hundred people perhaps five had experienced Westwater. Fortunately, the river historian Otis "Dock" Marston did extensive research on the Colorado and Green Rivers for what was expected to be an exhaustive history of the people whose lives intertwined with the rivers. Although we are fortunate for the research Dock did, he did not complete his book due to his untimely death in 1979. The book was to focus on both major tributaries (the Green and the Colorado) leading into the Grand Canyon, but more particularly on the Green River, where history had developed starting with the fur trappers, then Major John Wesley Powell exploring the river's course, and others following him. While Marston did not ignore Westwater or the Colorado River above the confluence, he mostly mentioned

Westwater pioneers in the context of their following the river to Cataract Canyon, Glen Canyon, or the Grand Canyon where their experiences received fuller attention.

Once I had researched all I could on the river runners, it was a natural transition to switch focus from the river to the region around Westwater Canyon. My first introduction to life in the area away from the river was a recorded interview of a former Westwater resident, Owen Madox Malin. On April 23, 1978, Westwater ranger Maryanna Allred Hopkins, Dave Minor of the Bureau of Land Management, and river guide Blake Hopkins interviewed Malin at the Westwater ranger station. Owen was born on November 22, 1908, in Colorado, to Elwood Clark and Maggie Bryson Malin. He had an extensive Westwater genealogy beginning with his mother, Maggie. Commadore Perry Bryson moved his family to the tiny village of Westwater sometime between 1893 and 1896, residing in the vicinity of Westwater Creek. At the turn of the century he had one son, Walter, and three daughters, including Maggie, referred to as the “Bryson Belles.” The family raised cattle and broke wild horses until shortly after the turn of the century, when a fourth daughter, Gracie, died from burns she sustained while falling into their fireplace.² Overcome by the tragedy, the family moved.

Around 1898 Harvey Edward Herbert moved from Telluride, Colorado, to Westwater, leaving behind his wife, Bertha Malin Herbert. Ed Herbert was the stepfather to Bertha’s sons from a previous marriage, Charles E. and Elwood Clark Malin. By 1904, when Elwood was eighteen years old, he had moved to Westwater to join his stepfather. There he met Maggie Bryson, and on July 25, 1906, they were married. The marriage did not last long, and shortly after Owen’s birth his mother abandoned him. Her parents, who had moved to Idaho, took care of him. Elwood Malin remarried, and by 1918 he had invited his son Owen back home to Westwater. The Malins and relatives lived at and around Westwater for over forty years. Ed Herbert was a deputy sheriff and sheep inspector until his death on May 9, 1929. He also assisted Ellsworth Kolb and Bert Loper in 1916 when they made their historic Westwater Canyon run. Elwood Malin’s second wife, Lula, was the town correspondent for both the *Times-Independent* and *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* for a number of years. My research time and again verified Owen’s credibility as

an authority on the history of Westwater. Thus the interview became a foundation for my work on the history of the community of Westwater. Unfortunately, Owen died on March 1, 1984, before I was far enough along with my research for a follow-up interview.

Most of those, like Marston and Malin, who might have been able to answer historical questions about Westwater are gone. All that remains are a few interviews, some correspondence from Westwater residents, the documentation of earlier researchers such as Marston, and old newspapers. I hope with this book to present as many pieces as can now be found to a puzzle that is incomplete—how incomplete we will never know. John Weisheit and others, though, have rekindled my desire to share what information I have.

The principal documentation for this book was written and oral history obtained from regional newspapers and from correspondence with and personal interviews of previous residents, river runners, and historians. Eventually historian and author Gary Topping convinced me that Westwater was not an island by itself and understanding its history meant understanding events that affected the region and the entire country. With this perspective, I was able to improve my history of Westwater by looking beyond its spot on the map. Despite much time and effort, I continue to feel there is much missing information, but so it is with history. Like geological unconformities in which certain strata are missing from an expected sequence in certain places, human history has its unconformities as well.

I can only hope that through my sharing of this material, many will gain a greater appreciation for the region of Westwater. Its story is not simply one of wild rapids, but one of people who tried to make an isolated place their home, who politicked for and promoted their location, who sought roads and industry to keep the place alive. Many who once lived there returned later, just as I did, to remember. I hope their history will now be added to the wealth of knowledge that has been gathered about the Colorado River further downstream.

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The first time I observed the canyon of Westwater from a precipice above Skull Rapid, I was overwhelmed by the scene. It

was during an attempt to rescue a boat that had been drawn into the notorious Room of Doom, and I had tied my boat to a large boulder at the head of Bowling Alley Rapid and climbed above the rapid onto the Precambrian cliffs overlooking Westwater Gorge. Up to that time I had been a river-level observer who was impressed and frightened by the deep, forbidding canyon but hadn't taken the time to thoroughly enjoy its beauty. Standing above the canyon that day, I became enamored with a scene I would return to numerous times. The panorama from above the canyon presents an arch, interesting pyramidal buttes, huge Wingate sandstone cliffs, and the deep slit in the earth that makes up Westwater Gorge. Several years later I came across a title of a poem, written by Rossiter W. Raymond, that captured what I felt that day: "A Thought of God on Earth Expressed."

My exploration of Westwater has spanned several years, and numerous people have helped along the way. They may be separated into three groups since they came in at different phases of the research. In the beginning Dee Holladay generously allowed me to copy his Westwater files and a Westwater river runners' chronology that gave me a starting point. For many years afterwards I enjoyed an annual visit with Dee at his home to discuss river history and share notes. His files introduced me to Otis "Dock" Marston and the collection he left at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Particularly helpful with the Marston collection at the Huntington Library were the associate curators, Virginia Rust and, currently, William P. Frank. Others who helped tremendously and have passed on were Dave Minor, who trusted me with an audio tape of his 1978 interview of Owen Malin; John L. J. Hart, a Denver attorney, explorer and collector of 1950 and early 1960 Westwater river-running history; and Willford Hill, who wrote one of the only known articles on the town of Westwater for the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* on August 23, 1981. Thanks also to their widows, Jane Kelsey Hart and Esla Spaulding Hill, who generously sent me their late husbands' research and notes.

Next, I cannot express enough appreciation to former Westwater residents Myrtle Holyoak, Beryl Marah, Jesse Gruver, Carolyn Hacker, and Gretchen Galyeon for their correspondence and interviews. Owen Malin's children, Dean Malin and Dorothy

Vario, were also extremely helpful with information regarding their father and his place in Westwater history. Especially fun and enlightening were several years of correspondence with Owen's younger brother, John L. Malin (Jack). He, like his brother, had a wealth of information that he willingly shared (except where the gold was hidden along the old narrow gauge railroad route), as did, more recently, his sister Ila Reay. Thanks also to Ruth M. Grennie, whose great-grandparents were located at Westwater and whose great aunt was Owen's mother.

River runners Don Harris, Les Jones, J. Frank Wright, P. T. Reilly, Joe M. Lacy, and Ulrich Martins helped me with their knowledge of and perspectives on Westwater Canyon. William I. Busenbark, nephew of Bert Loper, broke away from his busy schedule to help me with information about his uncle. Harold H. Leich's sons Harold M. and Jeff were very instrumental in providing me with information about their father. In addition to helping me, they donated considerable documentation of their father's 1933 Colorado River trip to the University of Utah. Perhaps someday Harold H. Leich's experience on the upper Colorado River will be published.

I am still amazed at the good fortune of locating and interviewing Roger Green, who supplied me with wonderful details about the christening of Skull Rapid. Ironically, Roger lived less than one mile from Dee Holladay and me at the time of the interviews. Correspondence, telephone interviews, and photos of Westwater from Dick and Margaret Durrance, members of the lost boaters party in 1950, gave me greater insight into their experience in the canyon. Also valuable was a brief but informative telephone call from author Paul F. Geerlings, who wrote the book *Down the Grand Staircase* and was a member of the first inflatable raft party through Westwater in 1950; and thanks to Bruce C. Martin, who provided further details of that experience.

Of the historians who helped along the way, thanks go to John F. Hoffman, Pearl Baker, James H. Knipmeyer, Lloyd M. Pierson, Roy Webb, and the railroad historian Jackson C. Thode, who admittedly claimed there was little history regarding Westwater and the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad but provided me with what was needed. Bill Suran assisted tremendously with Ellsworth Kolb information and photographs. Former

Grand County commissioner Jimmy Walker, who hiked into Westwater Canyon in 1955 with Sheriff John Stocks and rediscovered Outlaw Cave, prompted some valuable history to be recorded by means of a letter from now deceased former Westwater resident Elwood C. Malin. I am grateful to Charlie Hunt, whose original fieldwork in 1928 began with a geological survey that included Westwater. Geologist William L. Chenoweth helped me with information about the Salt Lake Wagon Road through Westwater.

I cannot begin to name all of the assistance I received from various libraries and museums, particularly in Moab, Utah, and Grand Junction, Rifle, Aspen, Lamar, and Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Thanks also to members of the BLM, and one particular person at the USGS who printed for me the daily river fluctuations from 1913 to 1987. The information helped me considerably as I tried to understand the river conditions many of the early boaters faced. Had I known what I was doing in 1987, I would have recorded his name so I could state it here.

I must thank John and Suzette Weisheit, who rekindled my desire to complete this research. The trip through Westwater in 1998 with Dusty Simmons (now Dusty Carpenter) as my river guide allowed me opportunities to explore the landscape throughout Westwater that I could not visit when I previously guided through the canyon. Dusty's husband Kyler, who is a BLM ranger at Westwater, helped me more recently. And I am grateful to geologist Wil Bussard, whose enthusiasm for rocks is truly contagious. I met him on Westwater exploratory trips in 1998 and 2000, and he helped me significantly with the discussion of the canyon's Precambrian rocks. And without the prodding of some friends from my employment, who asked for my assistance with their first Westwater run in September of 1998, I would not have met John, Suzette, Dusty, and Wil. There was considerable help and encouragement from the beginning to the end of my research from Gary Topping, former curator of manuscripts at the Utah State Historical Society and current instructor at Salt Lake Community College. And most recently Marianna Allred Hopkins, with Gary Topping, reviewed this document and unknowingly helped plant the seeds of extended research beyond the original manuscript. Marianna also lent her expertise on the

Westwater area, having been a ranger there and participated in the 1978 Owen Malin interview that eventually extended my research beyond the river corridor. I also cannot forget to thank Karla Vander Zanden. As a Westwater ranger in 1983 she was a good friend and someone who loved the canyon as I did, and she was still there fifteen years later to help me get a perspective on how to present this information.

And all along, there was my family. My wife Marla, who periodically kicked me out of the house and sent me in the direction of Westwater, and our children—Lindsi, Madison, and Buck—hopefully they did not feel too neglected during my absence working on this project. I cannot forget my river friends Roy Christenson, Doug Guest, Lew Grossman, Mark Nelson, Randy George, Loren Watson, and Gary Spackman when acknowledging those who helped me during the long years of research. While their help was indirect, their valuable friendship during the five years I worked for Western River Expeditions was important. I am grateful to Tyler Leary and John Alley for editing this work. I hope I have not missed anyone. And I thank God for the original prompting to study Westwater, for what reason I do not know, but without His help this would not have happened.

Finally, I wish to thank “Pete,” to whom this book is dedicated.