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6. The River Runners: Entering the Gorge

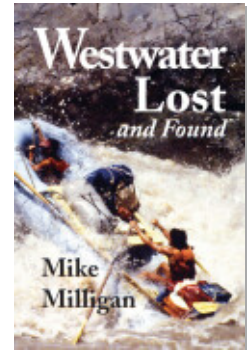
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The River Runners

Entering the Gorge

Just beyond Outlaw Cave to the southeast is Marble Canyon. There is a good chance the name Marble Canyon can be attributed to comments about Westwater Canyon made in 1916 by the famous early whitewater photographer and adventurer Ellsworth Kolb. He compared it to the Grand Canyon, which is immediately preceded by a Marble Canyon. Kolb observed: “It has an inner gorge of granite, and schist narrow and dark colored, a plateau then other walls of bright red sandstone as far as it went in form and color a replica of the Grand Canyon in Arizona over 400 miles farther down the river.” He said, “It is the Grand Canyon in miniature.”¹

Although Westwater may be described as a miniature Grand Canyon, it is even more minuscule in terms of the histories that have been written about it—there are but a few articles. Understandably the Grand Canyon is a natural wonder of the world and there is immensely more interest in it than in Westwater. Still, much of the Grand Canyon’s story, like that of the Colorado River that formed it, extends hundreds of miles upstream to its primary sources, the Green and upper Colorado Rivers and their tributaries. These upstream influences are not exclusively geological but include a considerable amount of history, particularly of men on the river. In fact a few old boaters are

mainly responsible for accumulating and disseminating the history we have of the Grand Canyon. Unfortunately for Westwater Canyon, river historians such as Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, Robert Brewster Stanton, and Otis “Dock” Marston never ran the upper reaches of the Colorado River.

There is an unexplainable but real mystique related to running the Colorado and Green Rivers. That was particularly true for the early boaters who traversed the Grand Canyon. Beginning with John Wesley Powell’s journey, recorded in *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, each expedition that followed wanted to stake its claim in Colorado River history and sometimes to dispute those of others. Such seemed to be the motivation of historian Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, whose 1872 trip with Powell was largely ignored until Dellenbaugh published *The Romance of the Colorado River* in 1904. Likewise, Robert Brewster Stanton questioned both James White’s claims of having been first through the Grand Canyon in 1867 and Powell’s account of the 1869 departure from his party of the Howland brothers and Dunn at Separation Rapid. The parts of Stanton’s book, which was never published in full, that disputed those events appeared under the title *Colorado River Controversies*.

Dellenbaugh’s and Stanton’s considerable research and notes established a foundation for Green and Colorado River history, though their work paled in comparison to what Otis “Dock” Marston assembled during his lifetime. Since the 1960s, there has probably not been a book written on the Grand Canyon that hasn’t quoted Marston or benefitted from his exhaustive research stored at the Huntington Library. Unfortunately, all of these historians were more focused on the Green River than the Upper Colorado, because that was the river of choice for the start of many of the early expeditions. Perhaps a running history of the upper Colorado River would have fared better had Captain Samuel Adams succeeded in following it in 1869. Then again, if Adams had succeeded, nobody would have believed him.

In May of 1869, a young Captain Samuel Adams stepped off the Union Pacific train at Green River, Wyoming, and approached a camp of several trappers that included Jack Sumner. The trappers were awaiting the arrival of Major John Wesley Powell and the boats that would take them on their historic journey down

the Green and Colorado Rivers. The confident Captain Adams, though green, convinced the trappers that he would be accompanying them on the exploratory trip. He was convincing up until Powell arrived, rejected his credentials from Washington, D.C., and nixed him from the expedition.

Shortly after this snub, a determined Adams arrived at a mining camp at the headwaters of the Blue River at Breckenridge, Colorado, intent on tackling the Grand River (as the upper Colorado was then called). At Breckenridge, the slick-tongued Adams persuaded resident miners to build and outfit four boats that were described by Wallace Stegner as being "built on the spot out of green lumber, undecked and with no air compartments." Then with ten volunteers he set off down the Blue River to California on June 12, 1869.

Adams was trying to convince the federal government that a potential thoroughfare existed on the Colorado River between Colorado and California, and that it would be as vital to the Pacific coast "as the Mississippi was to the Midwest." It is hard to comprehend Captain Adams's thinking when existing reports had already established that boats could travel upstream on the Colorado only into Nevada and that above there deep canyons prevented any possibility of such a river highway. But Adams claimed expertise in the matter, having traveled in 1865, in a small sternwheeler piloted by Captain Thomas Trueworthy, up the Colorado River from its mouth to a location above Boulder Canyon. So in 1869 he set out to prove his claim that "there are none of those dangerous obstructions which have been represented by those who may have viewed them at a distance, and whose imaginary canons and rapids below had almost disappeared at the approach of the steamer."²

It did not take long for Adams's experiences on the Blue and Grand Rivers to disprove his claims. Before Adams reached the Grand, five of his party quit and he lost two boats and substantial supplies. Only then did he begin to use more caution in the rapids, but that wasn't enough once he reached Gore Canyon, where he lost the remaining boats a couple of miles into the cataract-clogged canyon. Not to be deterred, Adams built four rafts and worked his way down the Grand River to a location shortly below Gore Canyon, some one hundred ninety miles

upstream of Westwater. There, he lost the last raft, and with only two men remaining, the expedition ended on August 13, 1869. Resolutely, Captain Adams would not admit defeat even at the moment that he called off the survey. Instead he termed the expedition a success, saying that they had conquered the only obstacles along the entire Colorado River and that only a “narrow territory” stood between where they quit and the lower Colorado he had boated four years earlier. He wrote:

One of the main objects of the expedition had been accomplished, which was to ascertain where was the principal fall of water between the point where we started on the mountains ten thousand feet above the sea, and the Pacific Coast. I felt satisfied that nothing more could be done by using further arguments to go on; and with the greatest reluctance we concluded to cross the country by land to Delaware Flats, at the base of the Rocky Mountains. I was satisfied that we had gone over the most difficult portion of our route. Three years before I stood at the head of the Black or Big Canon of the Colorado River, and looking northeast I could see a valley extending seventy-five miles in length. I now stood at a point above, and looking southwest could see the narrow territory which separated us. I confess that it was with no ordinary feelings that I was compelled to yield to the force of circumstances.³

Perhaps Captain Adams could have been the upper Colorado River’s answer to John Wesley Powell had he not been forced to abandon the expedition, but it’s not likely. Adams’s lack of good judgment and poor planning sealed his fate from the start, and even if he had been able to continue further, it is unlikely Adams could have accomplished anything more than turning his party into additional statistics claimed by Westwater, Cataract, or the Grand Canyon. It would be forty-seven years before the upper Colorado, or Grand, River would make headlines.

Ellsworth Kolb and Bert Loper

In the summer of 1916 Ellsworth Kolb left his home at Grand Canyon with the intention of eventually traveling all of the Colorado River tributaries leading to the Grand Canyon. He had already accomplished part of this when he and his brother Emery boated from Green River, Wyoming, to the Gulf of California in

1911.⁴ Kolb's first plan was to boat the Gunnison River through the infamous Black Canyon, connect with the Grand River near Grand Junction, Colorado, and continue downstream to Moab, Utah. It was expected that Emery Kolb would accompany his brother Ellsworth, but unbeknownst to the media, the Kolb partnership was strained and on the verge of breaking up.

William C. Suran indicated that part of the problem was their distinctly different personalities. Emery Kolb "was aggressive, concerned about his financial security, and quick to fight for what he deemed his rights. [He] was a shrewd business man, always looking for an angle that would benefit him and the business."⁵ Ellsworth, on the other hand, was a "wandering spirit." He refrained from the feuding between his brother, Fred Harvey, and the National Park Service over the Kolbs' studio on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. According to Suran, Ellsworth detested the daily routine of working at the studio and delivering lectures, which "set him to brooding about distant places." He wrote Emery's wife in 1914 that "as soon as I am alone I am as carefree as ever and happy whether I am making money or not as long as my health is good. That is all that matters."⁶

One year earlier, during a 1915 lecture that Ellsworth Kolb gave to a First Baptist church in Denver, he indicated that he and his brother were making plans to explore other arms of the Grand and Green Rivers the following year, including the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River.⁷ Working together the following spring did not materialize though. The brothers continued to drift apart and except for their being hired to assist with a United States Geological Survey (USGS) of Cataract Canyon in 1921 and their help locating John and Bessie Hyde's boat in the Grand Canyon when they turned up missing in 1928, there was little more adventure the brothers pursued together.

Instead, Ellsworth Kolb invited an inexperienced Grand Canyon cattleman, John W. Shields, to accompany him in boating the treacherous Black Canyon. Also accompanying them part way was the millionaire Julius Frederick Stone, who funded the expedition and had considerable whitewater experience himself, having boated the Grand Canyon with Nathaniel Galloway in 1909. Stone brought a New York acquaintance of his, N. B. Stearn. On July 26, 1916, the first day they were on the

Gunnison, they lost one of their two canvas boats in the first rapid at Cimarron, Colorado. Four days later on July 30 the party decided to discontinue the trip due to the “dilapidated condition of our boat, in addition to its unsuitability to our needs.”⁸ Stone and Stearn had enough and needed to return to their businesses, while Ellsworth and Shields waited for the delivery of a lost boat that was to have arrived at the onset of the expedition. Finally, a Peterboro freight canoe arrived at Montrose, Colorado. Far superior in strength and endurance to the canvas boats, the freight canoe was a sturdy eighteen-foot, two-hundred-pound canoe that was described in Moab’s newspaper, the *Times-Independent*:

Each end of the canoe was covered with canvas bolted down to the sides, in which to store provisions and equipment. In the event that the boat should be overturned in a rapid, the equipment will not be dumped into the river or damaged by water. There is also a canvas covering for the center of the boat for use in the event of running rapids by use of tow-lines. The boat will then become a regular submarine. In order to provide the compartments it was necessary to place two bulkheads back of the rowing space across the boat so that water could be shut out of the ends. The outside of the boat is covered with water-proof canvas of the strongest texture, and it is believed that it will withstand many hard contacts with rocks.⁹

Postponing their plans to boat the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River until the water dropped significantly, Kolb and Shields instead decided to float the Colorado River from the Gunnison Delta near Grand Junction, Colorado, to Moab, Utah. On August 16, 1916, the boaters pushed off the shore at the delta expecting a leisurely float the entire distance, and except for a brief experience at Black Rocks in Ruby Canyon, there were no incidents during the day to convince them otherwise. That evening, after arriving at the town of Westwater, the boaters were surprised to learn of an unconquered canyon below town. The town’s residents told Kolb and Shields that nobody had ever successfully traversed the canyon and that many had died trying. Particularly dangerous were two rapids named “Double Pitch” and “Whirlpool.”¹⁰

When describing Whirlpool Rapid, one old-timer even told Kolb and Shields that “fishes brains are spattered on the walls” and that “we would never get thru.”¹¹ Perhaps Shields didn’t



Upper Westwater Canyon in 1916. Bert Loper ran the first day of rapids, so he is likely the boater in this seventeen-foot, cedar freight canoe with hatch covers over each end. Ellsworth Kolb photo, Kolb Collection, Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives, Northern Arizona University.

want to be spattered on the wall either. He decided he was not cut out to be a “waterman,” and refused to tackle the Westwater rapids. Kolb, not wanting to run the canyon alone, asked resident ranchers to portage their canoe to the Cisco pumphouse, bypassing the canyon on their way to Moab. Kolb intended running the Westwater rapids another time, and so while the boat was being portaged, he and Shields spent two days in the canyon examining the rapids to get an idea of what to expect when he returned.

From atop the Precambrian cliffs overlooking Westwater’s inner gorge, Kolb wrote: “We could not get close to the Double Pitch but had an excellent view of it from an overhanging ledge. It lived up to its sinister reputation. It was a short but dangerous rapid. What made this section especially dangerous was the fact that one rapid followed another altogether too close for comfort.”¹² For mid-August, the Colorado River was running higher than normal, with flows of 10,100 to 12,100 cfs during the two days they studied the canyon. At these water levels, Kolb could well have imagined fish brains being splattered on the walls when he described Whirlpool Rapid, observing that “all water coming down the canyon which was in a half circle at this point, was



Bert Loper in Black Canyon shortly after the Westwater run in 1916. Loper used dynamite to dislodge the trapped boat. Ellsworth Kolb photo, Kolb Collection, Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives, Northern Arizona University.

thrown against a point of granite extending from one side and the water whirled around at tremendous speed in a 75 foot circle, which it had carved out of the walls which were over 300-feet-high. A ten-foot wave rolled back from the wall. All timber coming down stream was caught and held for hours.”¹³ At the stage of water Kolb observed, he conceded it was impossible to get through Whirlpool Rapid, but he imagined it could be done at a lower stage and expressed a determination to try it later.

A month later, Ellsworth Kolb did return, bringing with him another familiar name in river lore, Bert Loper.¹⁴ Ellsworth first met Bert Loper in Glen Canyon when he and his brother Emery made their historic Grand Canyon trip in 1911. Kolb realized by this point that he needed an experienced boatman if he were to successfully boat Westwater and Black Canyons, and there weren't many more experienced than Loper.

Bert Loper's first boating experiences occurred in 1893 and 1894 when he was prospecting for gold on the San Juan River. He returned to the river in 1907, when he teamed up with Charles Silver Russell and Edwin R. Monett, intending to traverse the Grand Canyon. The party started at Green River, Utah, and continued through Cataract Canyon and into Glen Canyon, where the shutter on Loper's camera got stuck and he left Monett and Russell to have it repaired. The men planned to rendezvous at Lee's Ferry and continue through the Grand Canyon, but the pair did not wait long enough for Loper to return and continued without him, making an historical journey that became a lifelong disappointment for Loper. Alone, Loper then hauled his boat an amazing 160 miles up the Colorado River to Hite, Utah, settling nearby in Red Canyon for six years. Truly, Loper's experience with whitewater would benefit Kolb's agenda. In 1916 Bert Loper was a newlywed, having married Rachel Jameson on April 29, four months before he received an invitation from Kolb to boat Westwater and the Black Canyon. Without taking much time to honeymoon with his new bride, Loper was in Colorado by September 8 ready to run rapids with Ellsworth Kolb.

Starting at Glenwood Springs, Kolb and Loper took turns rowing and playing passenger in the decked-over Peterboro canoe on their way to the head of Westwater Canyon. The boat was built for one oarsman, so during smaller rapids and the

lengthy flat water the passenger rode on top of the boat's stern. Arriving at Westwater, they were met by Frank E. Dean, a professional photographer whom Kolb hired to make quality movies of the now highly publicized historic event of running Westwater Canyon's rapids.¹⁵ Accompanying Dean on horseback were Westwater's deputy sheriff, Harvey Edward Herbert, and rancher William Stubbs, who would serve as guides and potential rescuers should the boaters get into trouble and require a long rope to be pulled out of the steep canyon. The first half of the canyon didn't present any obstacles for Kolb and Loper, and the horsemen could view most of the boating activity from the bench above the river. A camp was previously established a few miles from the head of the canyon where the men and horses could get to the river.

On September 25, 1916, the Colorado River at Westwater was running 3,980 cfs when Loper entered at the head of the canyon. Rather than taking turns throughout the scheduled two-day event, the rapids were divided between the two boaters, Loper getting the first six rapids. Above the river, on a steep trail occasionally used by cattle, the ranchers and Dean followed the boaters downstream. At the head of the canyon, there were numerous places for Dean to set up the movie camera and take pictures of the boat, but as the canyon deepened, his opportunities became limited, so he pushed ahead searching for locations where he could see the boat. Kolb preferred taking closer photographs and stayed as near to the bank as possible. He rode on top of the boat during the calmer stretches, then ran or walked around the rapids, all along cheering Loper on.

Late in the day as Loper approached the inner gorge, Dean and the ranchers headed to camp while Kolb remained behind to photograph the run through a few more rapids. The primary events of running Double Pitch and Whirlpool Rapid were scheduled for the following morning. Now high atop the cliffs, Kolb watched Loper with enthusiasm as he tackled the first couple of rapids; then when the boat drew nearer to Double Pitch Rapid, Kolb waved Loper in for the day. Bert Loper, though, misinterpreted the sign as a "go ahead" and headed toward one of the two worst rapids in the canyon. From the bench, Kolb watched as Loper approached, then dropped into the ten-foot trough of

Double Pitch Rapid. Kolb immediately lost sight of his partner. He feared Loper had capsized in the rapid. Distraught, Kolb searched for over an hour, walking back and forth along the cliff looking for any sign of Loper or the boat. Seeing no sign of either of them, Kolb conscientiously blamed himself for not warning Loper sooner and felt responsible for his death.

As the sun started to set behind the cliffs to the west, Kolb reluctantly gave up looking for any sign of wreckage and climbed up to the trail that led to their camp. Arriving at camp, Kolb met Frank Dean and asked if anybody had seen any wreckage of the boat. Surprised by Kolb's question, Dean replied that there was no wrecked boat and that Loper was in camp. Relieved, Kolb immediately located Loper and shook his hand.

The next day fell to Ellsworth Kolb and was reported in the *Grand Junction Daily News*.

Kolb got away under ideal picture conditions and started for the Little Niagara Whirlpool sections, the most demonical on the entire river. He had not been gone long when his boat got into a place where the waves were running many feet high, tangoing back and forth between granite cliffs and making slaps at his boat that sent it hither and thither like a chip. Kolb, clung on with his masterly skill and rode the bronco.

Suddenly he struck a place that would have made a whirling dervish sea-sick and the boat shot over and he "got out and got under" good and plenty. He reached the life line and keel of the good ship and finally by might and main turned the craft right side up and crawled aloft. The watchful picture men, perched like magpies on the skyline above, did not see the upset. He had inhaled water and choked and gasped for some minutes.

Then came the whirlpool. The picture men who had gone down stream a ways saw his hat floating down the river and all of them had a terrible scare, fearing he was lost. Then came the worst place of all. Straight down the stream Kolb could see the water spouting many feet in the air as it shot with tremendous force against boulder the size of a house in the whirlpool rapid. To the left was a . . . rock which was covered with water about half the time. He saw that by making a corkscrew curve with a back action kick and a swipe at the scenery he might get thru, if he could dodge all the 100-ton pebbles and avoid the geysers of idiotic water that spit at the sky and found a target far below in the chugging foam under the rocks. He made it—not. A wave slapped him a half-ton lick on the face and picked him up, gunboat

and all and rammed him over five feet, right up on top of the [rock]. The boat skidded off upside down, full of water, in the insane foam.

Here Kolb made the movie man above close his eyes and crank, crank, crank with only a prayer and a peep to see if aim was still on the struggle below. Dean's eyes opened wide when he saw, not a dead man floating down stream with a smashed canoe trailing behind, but a very sore mariner whipping his boat back into line, safe beyond the rapid, grinning up the cliff with an "I told you so" expression in his eyes, if anyone could have seen it.¹⁶

Ellsworth Kolb and Bert Loper were for many years given credit for being the first boaters to go through Westwater Canyon and survive, but there's a good chance they were not. They were, however, the first who knowingly descended Westwater with prior knowledge of its sinister reputation. They opened the door to understanding Westwater. There were others before and since who contributed to knowledge of the canyon. A chronological overview of other successful and failed, verifiable and probable boaters within Westwater Canyon follows.

Frank Clarence Kendrick¹⁷

Frank C. Kendrick and his survey party (working for the railroad) did not boat through, but portaged twelve miles around Westwater Canyon, although at least one historian claimed it was not the difficulty of the rapids below that persuaded them. The Denver, Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railway was the idea of Frank M. Brown, who imagined a railway for the delivery of coal from Grand Junction, Colorado, to the West Coast. Frank Kendrick and his party surveyed the then Grand River to its confluence with the Green River, then traveled up it to Green River Station. Robert Brewster Stanton, who was chief engineer for the project and later was known as a historian of the Colorado River, insisted the avoidance of Westwater Canyon was planned and not the product of fear. Still, Kendrick's notes for April 10, 1889, while surveying from the "Box X" Ranch (the Bar X, or Westwater, Ranch) to the mouth of "Hades Canyon" showed some signs of reluctance to enter it. For example, this is the only time Westwater was called Hades Canyon. Kendrick also mentioned that this is "where the woman drowned," a seemingly strange reference with no further explanation.¹⁸ Their boatman on the survey was Charles Brock,

who nearly went into the rapids and had to be towed back to avoid them. Whether it was the rapids or their plan that prompted the portage doesn't really matter; the fact is the canyon had already established a dangerous reputation.¹⁹

Elmer Kane, Frank W. Emerson, and Charles Duke

The first named individuals who may have successfully boated Westwater Canyon, in 1888, were prospector Elmer Kane, San Francisco newsman Frank W. Emerson, and Grand Junction salesman Charles Duke. Much of what we know of Kane's expedition came, more than fifty years after the fact, from what was known as the River Bed case. Between 1929 and 1931, testimony was taken from men who had traveled the Green and Grand Rivers to determine their navigability. The River Bed case involved hearings in Salt Lake City, Utah; Denver, Colorado; and Los Angeles, California, to determine whether the river beds belonged to the United States government (if they were not navigable) or the state of Utah (if they were navigable). From the testimonies came considerable historical data that would otherwise have been lost. During the hearings, Elmer Kane testified he had come down the Grand River from Grand Junction to Moab in a crude raft that he found on a river bank. The raft was made from dry pine logs, and it looked like it had been abandoned for some time. It was approximately fourteen feet long and five feet wide. Kane's party used long poles to keep them off of rocks and provide propulsion.²⁰

A story about a large gold mine in the Grand Canyon prompted Kane and the others to boat the Grand River in the summer of 1888. Kane had traveled from Ouray to Grand Junction to meet with Jack Sumner, who had passed through the Grand Canyon with John Wesley Powell on his initial 1869 expedition. Kane could not locate Sumner so he and the two men decided to travel to the Grand Canyon anyway and inspect some placer mines along their way. They had enough difficulty with the simple raft to force them to search for a boat when they arrived at Moab. There is very little mention of rapids in Kane's testimony. Kane had considerable experience with row boats on other rivers. He claimed he had been down nearly the entire Grand River prospecting. Part of his upper Grand River travel was by pack and saddle horse.

We may never know the complete story, but we do know that Elmer Kane later carved his name in Colorado river history by participating in the second Stanton expedition, which completed the Denver, Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railroad survey through the Grand Canyon in 1890 and by being an oarsman with the 1891 Best prospecting expedition, which ended unceremoniously early after losing a boat in Cataract Canyon and abandoned its mining venture at Lee's Ferry. Concerning his being hired as an oarsman by Robert Brewster Stanton, Kane testified: "So I got on that trip; I saw Mr. Stanton, and got on the party, and the trip through the Grand river with a raft was one of his inducements, because he didn't take anybody but what could take care of themselves and work, and had to be husky and strong, and they were supposed to be swimmers, and good oarsmen, and so on."²¹ Kane during his testimony mentioned seeing three other placer miners with rockers who had come down river to the north end of the Blue Mountains in a flat bottom skiff and had also started at Grand Junction.

James E. Miller and O. D. Babcock

During the summer of 1897, James E. Miller and O. D. Babcock closed their dental practices for awhile to locate Indian relics along the Grand River.²² Their intention was to travel from Glenwood Springs to the confluence with the Green River, then up to Green River Station, from where they would return home by stage. Traveling in a seventeen-foot boat with two water-tight compartments, they were far better prepared than the surveyors and prospectors that preceded them. While there is no evidence they knew the risks of boating the canyon, the brief description they gave in Moab's *Grand Valley Times* left little doubt they had at least tackled some of the canyon: "They report having had some exciting rides over rapids; in some cases boat and passengers diving under the water. The worst places being through the Palisades and the Granite canon above Cisco."²³

The dentists meanwhile corresponded with their hometown in Glenwood Springs as they traveled, and the *Avalanche* reported extensively about them running the Palisade Rapids that formerly existed northeast of Grand Junction. They compared the preparation for this rapid to that of a "soldier going into battle,"

as they entered the rock strewn rapid with “set teeth” determined to get through. Following the description the newspaper reported, “They wisely did not attempt the Black Canyon run, with its 15 miles of length between perpendicular walls of a thousand feet in height, through which two travelers have gone while a dozen have failed.”²⁴ Who knows why the newspaper editor made this comment? The Black Canyon is on the Gunnison River, a tributary of the Colorado River. The only canyon between Glenwood Springs and Green River that remotely resembles this description would be Westwater Canyon. The dentists likely did descend Westwater, but the comment about the “Black Canyon” does create some doubt.

Several weeks later the dentists returned to Moab by rowing upstream from the Cataracts. They had changed their minds about returning up the Green River. From Moab they returned home by stage.

Hidden away in the massive Colorado and Green River histories collected by Otis “Dock” Marston at the Huntington Library is a handwritten note that reads: “experiences of Dr. O. D. Babcock and myself in the summer of 1897.” The note refers to correspondence from Dr. J. E. Miller of Yampa, Colorado, to Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, regarding Miller’s experiences on the Colorado River that year. Unfortunately, the letter has not been located in searches through the Marston and Dellenbaugh records. It might have given more insight into these dentists’ activities in Westwater Canyon. One thing is certain and was noted by the dentists at the end of their exploration: they made photographs. Perhaps someday the letter and photographs will come to light and allow us to finalize their place in Westwater history.²⁵

Walter Everett Mendenhall

Prospector Walter Everett Mendenhall, probably better known for his travels in the San Juan region, testified during the River Bed trials that in the summer of 1907 he took about a fourteen-foot skiff down the Colorado River from Grand Junction to Westwater railroad station at the head of Westwater Canyon. He and his brother, who had secured a mining job in the Lasal Mountains and had persuaded Walter to go along, then spent the winter at Richardson, which is nearer to Moab. They traveled to Moab the

following spring. No specific indication exists that they boated from Westwater down to Richardson, but the next year they still had the boat his brother built at Grand Junction. The brothers probably got back onto the river at Castle Valley for the trip to Moab. The only rapids Mendenhall mentioned were eighteen to twenty-five miles above Moab.²⁶ About three years earlier, Walter's brother had been further down the river examining some of the country in Cataract Canyon.

Raymond C. Seitz

Like Frank Clarence Kendrick and his 1889 railroad survey party, Raymond C. Seitz and his companions chose to bypass the canyon at Westwater. The group of five United States Geological Survey (USGS) surveyors set out from Grand Junction sometime in October 1911 to map the upper Colorado River. Using two "flat-bottomed rowboats, fourteen feet long with a four foot beam," the men traveled light while wagons with their gear trailed them. They primarily used the boats to cross the river and move downstream while surveying. Their survey included the drop in elevation of the river as far as the confluence. Although Seitz did not descend Westwater Canyon by boat, he did include it in his survey. He made observations "from his traverse line along the bench a considerable distance above the water, and elevations of the surface of the water were taken at various breaks along the water surface,"²⁷ but he was able to obtain water readings down to mile 49, suggesting he must have been able to get down to the river bank. He noted that

The boat was portaged throughout the canyon, being taken out at the head and put back on the river at Big Hole, which is at mile 56. No water readings were taken until they reached mile 55, but the fall of the river was calculated from mile 49 [mile 123 on Belknap map] to Big Hole at mile 56 [mile 116], a distance of 7 miles, and the drop is 119 feet.²⁸

Paul Adams

The residents of Westwater Station readily informed anyone they encountered along the river of the dangerous rapids below, but because the station was a half-mile from the water, many of the early boaters and prospectors entered the canyon blindly. One

small, elderly Swiss carpenter, Paul Adams, was not so blind to the canyon's danger since he had spent several months living at Westwater before he attempted his journey. He had started from Rifle, Colorado, in the fall of 1915 and floated his homemade boat to Westwater Station. There he stopped for the winter; then in late May 1916 a letter from Westwater to Moab's *Grand Valley Times* mentioned him once again taking to the river, with the intention of boating to the town of Green River. The letter stated that "every effort was made by Westwater people to dissuade him from attempting to go through the canyon. They bought his first boat and even wrote the sheriff for authority to detain him, but were informed that could not legally be done, and he built a new boat, stocked it and departed."²⁹

Many of the Westwater residents concluded that Adams had died in the canyon, not having heard from him again. One former resident, Beatrix Simpson, wrote to the *Times-Independent* in 1956 concerning a reported skeleton found in Westwater Canyon during the spring. She hinted it could have been Paul Adams: "His aim in life was building a row boat to run the rapids below Westwater and he devoted every leisure hour to that work. We remember him as a pleasant and polite man who talked with an accent, wore silver knob earrings, smoked Union Leader 'Oonion Leadah' tobacco—and would not listen or be dissuaded from his purpose of running the rapids—though no one had been known to accomplish it. This man worked months on his boat and oars and, during high water—in June, we think—loaded and took off."³⁰ How long he was in the canyon is not clear, but Paul Adams did survive the canyon. He, however, did not successfully navigate it because he wrecked his boat and "was barely able to reach the shore and climb out of the canyon."³¹ From Cisco, Adams took a train to Leadville, Colorado, and did not return. Based upon the date of the news report out of Westwater, Paul Adams likely entered Westwater Canyon when the river, in late May, was running at 21,000 to 28,200 cfs. He was fortunate to have gotten to shore.

Frank "Bunny" Barnes

Like many before him, Frank M. Barnes was a prospector working his way down the river panning for gold. Unlike many before

him, he was elderly—described as being about eighty years old when he left Grand Junction, Colorado, in October 1921. He had a placer claim at Temple Bar, which is now buried beneath Lake Mead, and intended to get to it by boat. He left no record of the trip, but it was reported in the *Times-Independent*.

Mr. Barnes, whose boat is a twenty-foot, flat-bottomed craft, did not know of the existence of the rapids in the Granite canyon, and he embarked on the cruise in blissful ignorance of the dangers ahead of him. Once he had entered the canyon, he could not turn back, and he probably experienced the most thrilling sixteen-mile journey that he could have wished for. Several times his boat brushed against rocks, and on three occasions it was half-filled with water. He stated Tuesday to the *Times-Independent* that his success was due, in his opinion, to the design of his boat, which rides lightly on the water and would be hard to capsize, owing to the flat bottom. At one place in Granite canyon, he states, the river takes a sheer drop of from seven to ten feet, and for sixteen miles the stream is a series of rapids and cataracts. The canyon is indescribably beautiful, the black granite walls rising from the river to a height of several thousand feet. The canyon itself is but a narrow crack, and the river races through it at terrific speed. The chief danger lies in the countless sharp rocks which rise out of the water, and if a boat were to strike one of these it would be dashed to pieces.³²

Although Barnes was proud of his boat design, several people who met him below Cataract Canyon described it as being impossibly unstable for river travel—a twenty-foot “clumsy, convex-bottomed boat” that was open, with a steamer trunk lashed on the back. It also carried a tent and stove. One of E. C. Larue’s USGS boatmen tried the boat out and said “it was the most impossible craft for Colorado River travel that was ever built.”³³ Barnes was talked out of running the Grand Canyon below Lee’s Ferry.

The Galloway Brothers

The River Bed case hearings also revealed that John and Parley Galloway had boated Westwater in the spring of 1926 or 1927. Most likely it was 1927, judging from a letter to the editor from John Galloway published in the *Times-Independent* on March 3, 1927. A small uproar had risen regarding John trapping beaver below Moab, and he responded that he would “move my camps



Parley Galloway (in hat), Grand Canyon trip. Photo courtesy of Kay E. Neilsen.



Parley Galloway. Photo courtesy of Kay E. Neilsen.

and work further up the river according to instructions.”³⁴ Like their father, Nathaniel “Nate” Galloway, these brothers hunted and trapped along the Green and Colorado Rivers and were very experienced boaters. Parley Galloway later in 1927 guided Clyde Eddy and a group of college men down the Green and Colorado River from Green River, Utah, to Needles, California. Clyde Eddy based *Down the World’s Most Dangerous River* on that expedition.³⁵

The boat the brothers took down Westwater was a Galloway-type design that measured “16 ft. long, 4 ft. wide at top, 36 in. at bottom, draft 4 in. loaded.” It was an open boat without a cover. John Galloway described their experience:

Well, we had lots of trouble in that Westwater canyon; it is a continual mass of rapids in there; it is a hard granite formation; it has a tremendous fall down through there; all of those rapids have from two to four foot fall in them; I mean straight drops.

And there is a back suction under those little falls that makes it quite a difficult proposition, and dangerous. Some places we could line them, other places the granite wall was like marble, smooth, you couldn’t stand on your feet; steep; some places it was boxed so there was no chance to line a boat, and we had to ride over them.

If I recollect, we were two days in that canyon; we couldn’t even find room to make a bed-down; there was no beaches, no vegetation to speak of. There was places in there that there is some vegetation, but where we happened to hit that night there was no vegetation of any kind, and no bench ground at all, just solid granite. So we had to make our bed in the crevices of the rocks.³⁶

Parley added further that “the rapids are as bad in there as there is in the Grand Canyon.”³⁷

Owen Malin claimed that his father had rescued the Galloway brothers from the canyon sometime around Thanksgiving in the early 1920s. He was certain it was the Galloway brothers, but the season would have been wrong based upon their testimony. Of the event Malin said: “We fished ‘em out over the rim there one time. They’d hung onto those [slick] rocks and tore their fingers all off on the ends. It was quite a mess. Pretty cold and chilled we brought them into the home here. Never did find any of their equipment.”³⁸ Perhaps there were two attempts to run Westwater by the brothers, but their testimony

during the River Bed hearings did not support that there were. They made it through the canyon and boated to Moab.

Hyrum H. Turner

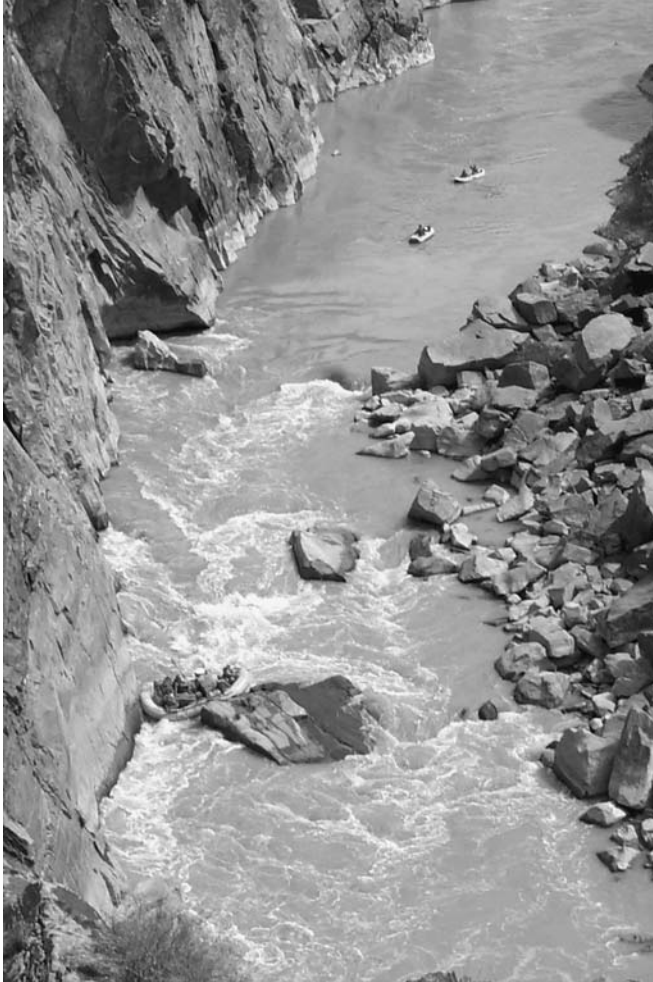
During the late 1920s Hyrum H. Turner, a trapper from Moab, poled his canoe from Westwater to Moab. He was with his two oldest grandchildren, ages sixteen and twenty-one or twenty-two. His canoe was described as weighing ninety-six pounds, somewhat flat on the bottom, and pointed at both ends, which was mostly beneficial for upriver travel. Poling his canoe along until he wanted to cross the river, he would then use a paddle. In his River Bed testimony in 1929 he indicated his Westwater trip had been about a year earlier, placing him in the canyon sometime between 1927 and 1928.³⁹ In fact, during the winter of 1927, state game wardens arrested H. H. Turner and C. E. Malin (Elwood C. Malin) for illegally trapping beaver.⁴⁰ However, John Malin, the son of Elwood C. Malin, claims his father never boated Westwater Canyon.

A. P. Drew

During an interview with Dock Marston, Dr. A. P. Drew of Grand Junction claimed he had gone through Westwater in a large skiff built by his son-in-law, Russell Paige, in 1927 or 1928.⁴¹ Harold Leich, who boated Westwater in 1933, wrote in his journal that Dr. Drew had told him he had been down the Colorado River only as far as Westwater, duck hunting, “but never attempted the dangerous canyon below.”⁴² Drew also warned Leich about Ruby Canyon but said nothing about Westwater Canyon’s rapids, further indicating that he probably did not run Westwater.⁴³

Beppo Saeckler

Highly advertised world champion canoeist Beppo Saeckler made his way along various waterways from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Grand Junction, Colorado in 1930. Leaving Cincinnati on April 13 “he paddled 700 miles down the Ohio river and 200 more on the Mississippi. From St. Louis he and his canoe rode by motor bus to Denver and thence to the Fraser River, a tributary to the Colorado. Since then he has been pursuing the water route. He



Shot of Skull Rapid in low water, 2002. Photo courtesy of Kyler Carpenter, BLM.

expects to paddle from Grand Junction to Moab and thence down the Colorado to the Pacific coast.”⁴⁴ Saeckler was born in Munich, Germany and claimed several canoeing championships there and in Austria. After arriving in the United States he gained notoriety for negotiating the Niagara Falls whirlpools in his canoe and for paddling three hundred miles nonstop from Dayton, Ohio, down the Miami and Ohio Rivers to Louisville, Kentucky, in 39 hours and 59 minutes.⁴⁵

He used a Klepper folding boat that was described as looking like a “tiny rubber canoe.” The European folding boats looked much sleeker than other craft then traveling the western waterways. They resembled elongated kayaks and were shaped by wooden frames with rubber covers. Lighter than other boats, they were more maneuverable, and the collapsible design was convenient for portaging.

Saeckler was credited as the first man to boat through Byers Canyon above Kremmling, Colorado. Turning over a couple of times in rapids at Hot Sulphur Springs he continued on and only portaged around Shoshone Falls.⁴⁶ Newspapers followed Saeckler throughout the country, but the last reference to him may have been in the *Times-Independent*, which announced he was expected in Moab sometime during the week ending June 29, 1930.⁴⁷ The paper never reported that he arrived. Saeckler was fully aware of the difficulties that the Grand Canyon presented, but there is no indication that he expected any earlier major obstacles. Whether he was a casualty of the Colorado River or simply someone who discovered his limitations and abandoned his plans, we do not know.

Three years later, as Harold H. Leich was making similar plans to boat the Colorado, he mentioned he had heard of Beppo Saeckler’s exploits, but “how far he got down the Colorado I was never able to learn.”⁴⁸ Similar to trapper Denis Julien, who disappeared from the Colorado River’s history, Saeckler is missing in action. Spending a few days in Grand Junction, he put on a demonstration of his river skills before an audience of spectators. Then he was gone.

Harold H. Leich

Instead of battling for employment during the Great Depression, Harold Leich opted to follow a briefly transient lifestyle. He enjoyed the outdoors while attending Dartmouth College, and after graduating he decided to “devote his youth to a free-ranging life afloat” rather than squander his youth in a virtually non-existent job market.⁴⁹ Starting in the autumn of 1929, Leich began his journeys by working on a freighter that took him from Manhattan to the West Coast. While in Portland he thought of boating the Missouri on his way home, but his plans changed

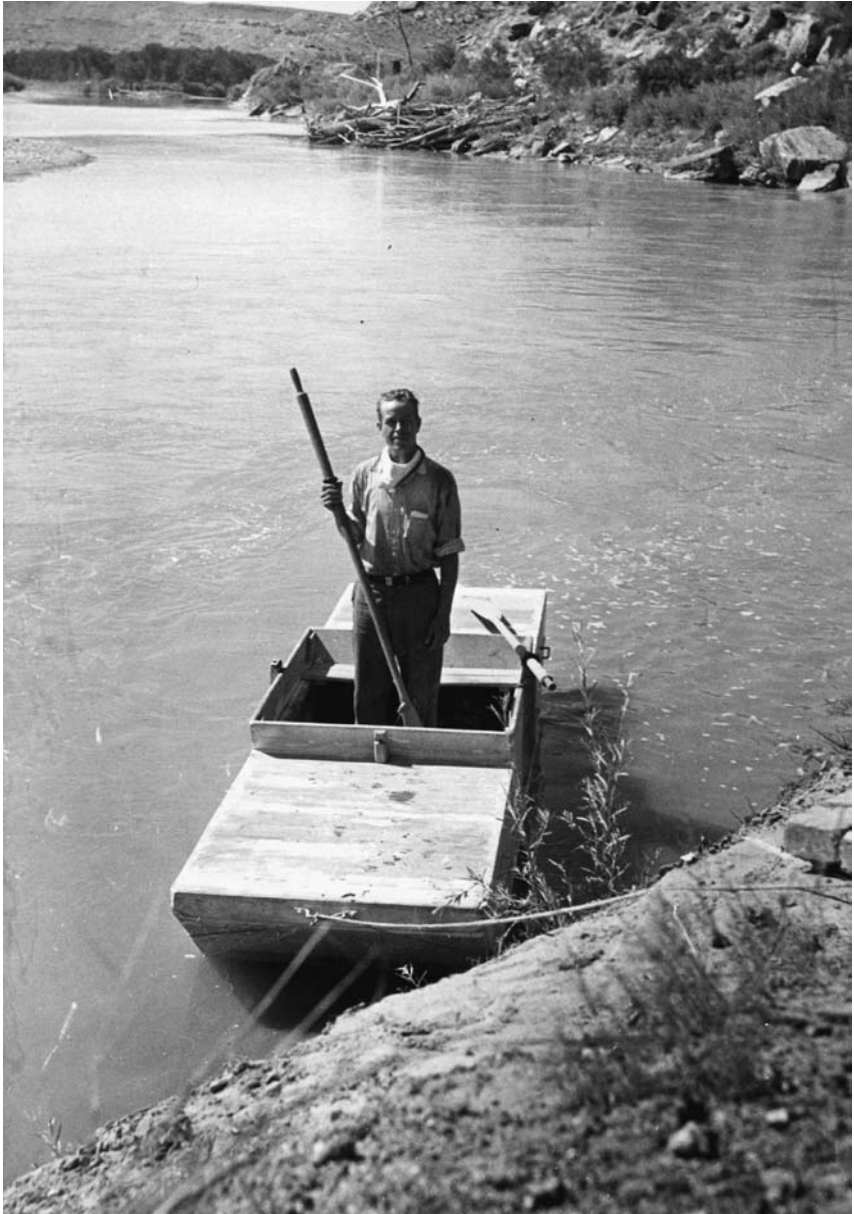


“Utaline: where Colorado River enters Utah. Boat with prospectors—Sims and Fortune—Taken from Utaline camp site.” Photo by Harold H. Leich. One of these prospectors, in the barely visible boat, approached Leich in Grand Junction to rent his newly built *Dirty Devil* to look for dinosaur bones in Horsethief and Ruby canyons above Westwater. The prospectors wound up renting from Grand Junction’s horse doctor A. P. Drew, who had some experience on the Colorado River and owned several boats. They left the river at Westwater’s railroad station. Photo courtesy of Harold M. and Jeffrey R. Leich.

after reading *Down the Yellowstone* by Lewis R. Freeman, and he decided to boat the Yellowstone River instead. Leich worked temporarily at Yellowstone National Park and eventually boated 266 miles of the river from Livingston, Montana, to Miles City. He was an avid reader, and books played an important part in his travels. During the fall of 1930, the writings of Clyde Eddy impressed him, and he became determined to attempt the Colorado River.⁵⁰

On July 21, 1933, Leich shoved off the shoreline from Grand Lake, Colorado, and started his journey down the Colorado River. He was twenty-four years old and had spent several years saving and planning to shoot the rapids on the Colorado, which he had not seen.

For the river above Grand Junction, Colorado, he traveled light, paddling a kayak that he named *Rob Roy* most of the way, with portages at Gore and the Shoshone Dam. At the dam, Leich hailed a trucker and had his boat portaged two and a half miles



Harold H. Leich with the *Dirty Devil* at Cisco Pumphouse in 1933. Harold H. Leich photo courtesy of his sons Harold M. and Jeffrey R. Leich.

to the power plant. At the same location that Kolb and Loper started their 1916 trip down the Colorado River, he slid his boat off the lawn at the turbine house, dropped over the spillway, and continued downstream to Grand Junction.⁵¹ At Grand Junction he stopped for eleven days to build a more buoyant and durable boat for the larger rapids reportedly downstream. He named his new scow the *Dirty Devil* and proudly described it in a local newspaper: "Thirteen feet overall, she was decked over except for a small cockpit, which I protected by a canvas cover snuggled around my waist. Her only disadvantage was that of many another buxom beauty, her weight, 400 pounds on the lumberyard scales. That meant that I couldn't carry her around the dangerous cataracts, but was committed to run every rapid through the Grand Canyon to the Gulf of California. The optimism of four-and-twenty."⁵² On August 13, 1933, Leich left Grand Junction to continue his journey. His only knowledge of the stream ahead came from maps that he had spent a good deal of time studying as he prepared for the trip.

Leich arrived on the morning of August 16 near Westwater launch, where he met Elwood C. Malin, who was washing his car with river water. Malin asked Leich where he intended going with the boat and told him about Ellsworth Kolb and Bert Loper, "the toughest river rats that ever tackled the Colorado." Malin's stepfather, Ed Herbert, had assisted Kolb and Loper with their 1916 Westwater trip, and Malin invited Leich to his home at Westwater to read about it. There he showed him photos of the historical event and pulled out *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* by Ellsworth L. Kolb. At the back of the book was a yellowed newspaper clipping detailing a full account of the 1916 Westwater trip. Leich was not intimidated by the account, which he described as "oxygenated," but he was impressed that Kolb considered Westwater's rapids more dangerous than the Grand Canyon's. Undaunted, Leich was back on the river by noon and headed toward the canyon.⁵³

The Colorado River was flowing at a miserably low 1,820 cubic feet per second when the *Dirty Devil* entered the head of the canyon. Westwater is unusual among river canyons because the whitewater is generally better when the Colorado River is low. Although the river runs slower, there are more rapids than



Harold H. Leich with the *Rob Roy* (a rubber folding kayak) started his journey at Grand Lakes, Colorado, on July 21, 1933. Here he is shown leaving Glenwood Springs. He abandoned the *Rob Roy* for the *Dirty Devil* at Grand Junction. Harold H. Leich photo courtesy of Harold M. and Jeffrey R. Leich.



“Washing down gravel bank at placer outfit. Easy rapids.” This placer prospect, seeking gold, was located below Westwater, between Cisco and Hotel Bottom on the Colorado River. Harold H. Leich photo courtesy of Harold M. and Jeffrey R. Leich.

at medium and higher water because new rocks appear. The sharp rocks rising from beneath the surface can make the white-water run especially difficult for larger boats, particularly at extremely low water levels such as those encountered by Leich.

Leich described the entrance to the canyon: “the Colorado burrows deeply into the hard underlying rock structure. Slowly the steep V-shaped inner trough deepens until the gleaming black walls, nearly vertical on both sides, rise more than a hundred feet above the river.”⁵⁴ Leich successfully tested the *Dirty Devil* in the small rapids in the upper canyon and stopped at Little Hole long enough to prepare his boat for the gorge. The placid water below Little Hole briefly discouraged him—he expected rapids much sooner—but then they began. He wrote: “Things happened so fast that I could not have given a detailed account of the rapids the next day. Time after time the *Dirty Devil* approached bottle-necks in the chasm where the river disappeared in a smother of foam. Sometimes I could tie up the boat safely and make a precarious way along polished slanting walls to take a look ahead. Sometimes the swift current made this impossible, or the walls came down sheer on either side so I could not land. Usually it made no difference, since the gorge was so narrow that there was little choice but to take to the center, glide down on the tongue of the cataract, and try to keep her bow pointed into the waves.”⁵⁵

Nothing has changed from when Kolb, Loper, and Leich ran Westwater; the noted rapids remain Funnel Falls and Skull Rapids. Leich described his encounter with Funnel Falls:

At one point I tied up just above an eight-foot fall, between a large boulder on the left and the vertical granite on the right. I looked it over doubtfully, cursing myself for having tied up so close to the entrance, where I couldn't swing into the best position before starting down the cataract. In spite of a poor entrance, she rode over the drop like a duck and in an instant was in the smoother water.⁵⁶

He continues with a description of Skull Rapid.

The worst place was well in the middle course, perhaps half way between the Little Hole and Big Hole. A rather long rapids, dropping off terrifically, curved sharply to the left halfway through. An there around the corner the entire river spewed itself onto a large dipping ledge. Half of the flow then curled back to the left and flowed down

through the remaining rapids. The other half curled back on itself to the right, swirling in a narrow pool beneath the vertical walls. What would become of a voyager imprisoned in that whirlpool I would not care to imagine. Since the apex of the current ran full tilt onto the sloping ledge, I could not escape running the bow of the “Dirty Devil” high onto the rocks.

She swung around—luckily to the left—and made the rest of the rapids stern first, with the helmsman craning his neck to have a look at what was ahead!⁵⁷

Drought conditions—similar to Leich’s—that existed in 1977 and 2002 provided more recent boaters an opportunity to experience Skull Rapid during extremely low water. Luckily for Leich, the *Dirty Devil* didn’t swing to the right where numerous inflatable boats have briefly plugged up the space between rock and wall, taking on tons of water, before being spit out the backside. Harold Leich’s wooden boat would have been mauled and likely broken had it entered the right slot, and his journey probably would have ended there.

Harold Leich survived Westwater but later wrecked his boat in Cataract Canyon, probably at Capsize Rapid. He swam and hiked thirty-seven miles to Hite, then walked an additional forty-five miles to Hanksville, where he was described as having a shoe on one foot and a gunny sack wrapped around the other, carrying a quart jar with a little water in it, starving, and sunburned. He considered Westwater “far tougher than Cataract Canyon.”⁵⁸

Don Harris and Jack Brennan

In October 1946 the USGS sent expeditions down the Green and Colorado Rivers to measure the flow of all tributaries along them.⁵⁹ Don Harris and long-time boating companion Jack Brennan measured the stretch from the Colorado state line to the Colorado’s confluence with the Green River, where they met two other members of the survey coming down that river.

LaPhene Harris, known as Don, became acquainted with whitewater in 1938 shortly after meeting Norman Nevills in Mexican Hat, Utah, where Harris was assigned to gauge the San Juan River for the USGS. Nevills invited him to participate on a commercial expedition planned for 1938 that would include the first two women to transit the Grand Canyon.⁶⁰ During his time

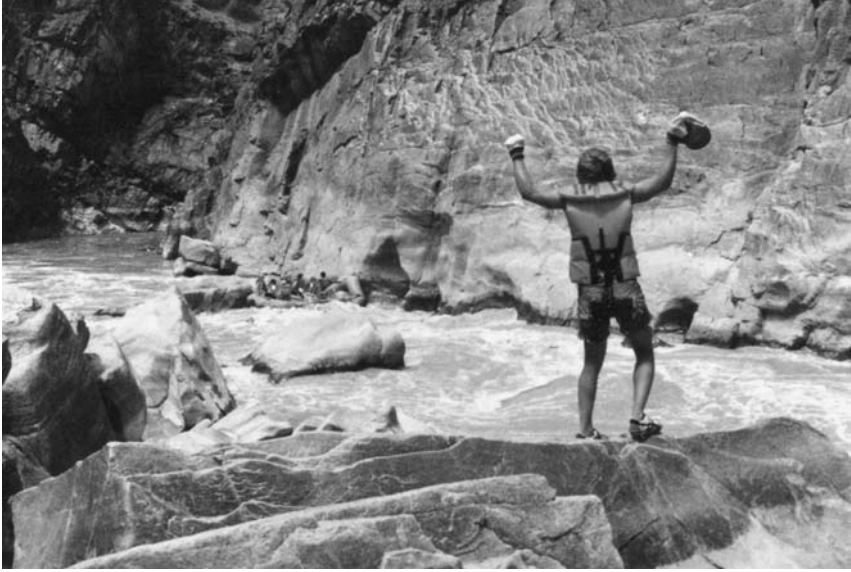
off work Harris volunteered to help build, out of plywood, special cataract boats Nevills designed for the big water the expedition would experience in the Grand Canyon. Harris also helped finance Nevills and offered to man one of the three boats they built in trade for ownership of the one named the *Mexican Hat*.

Nevills named their three creations “cataract boats.” Detractors called them “sadirons” because they were shaped like the old-fashioned irons women heated on stoves for ironing clothes. Each weighed six hundred pounds, was sixteen feet long and unusually broad of beam and stern. The cockpit was forward of the middle, leaving an ample afterdeck on which a single passenger could lie flat while riding through rapids. The interiors contained the usual watertight compartments, arranged according to Nevills’ taste.⁶¹

Starting at Green River, Utah, Don Harris manned *Mexican Hat* as far as Lee’s Ferry, where he quit the party, citing that he was out of work leave with his employer. Other circumstances may have contributed to his departure, including difficulties they encountered in Cataract Canyon. The exodus created a rift with Nevills, who would later be credited as one of the pioneers of commercial river running. The 1938 expedition was his first on big water, and he continued through the Grand Canyon without Don Harris. Harris would later regret his decision to leave, but it did not deter his desire to return to the river.⁶²

With his leave used up, Harris returned to Salt Lake City, where he met Bert Loper. Don Harris had heard about Loper so went to visit him at a nearby hospital to inquire about his river experiences. Loper invited him to go on a Grand Canyon trip the following year.⁶³ In 1939 Bert Loper, at the age of sixty-nine, finally made it through the canyon, with Don Harris.⁶⁴ They would do several other river trips together. Then in the mid-1940s while planning to boat Cataract Canyon, they placed an ad in the *Salt Lake Tribune* for passengers, and Jack Brennan applied. As it had with Harris, the river got into Brennan’s blood. They formed a small commercial business to defray costs of their trips. By the time they came to Westwater, the USGS was paying them to “make an inflow study on the Colorado and Green River system in the state of Utah.”⁶⁵

Harris did not recall much of that first, 1946 descent and survey of Westwater Canyon in the *Mexican Hat*, only that he



Roy Christensen cheers on fellow boaters as they get pooped through the right run at Skull Rapid in 1977. Photo by and courtesy of Roy Christensen.

concentrated more on the river than the surroundings. He would descend the canyon five more times between 1959 and 1967, using fifteen-foot outboard motor boats with fiberglass hulls and specially designed water compartments. Possibly his last visit to Westwater was in 1970 when he walked the lower canyon while assisting with a search for the bodies of three deer hunters who lost their lives while boating the canyon.⁶⁶ Perhaps his deep concentration on the river ahead is the reason the late Colorado historian, Otis “Dock” Marston ranked Don Harris as one of the best rivermen.⁶⁷

The University of Utah Party

Five University of Utah students made the first known whitewater run through Westwater by a rubber raft in 1950. Paul F. Geerlings led the party, which included Bruce Martin, Richard Cutler, Ed Kearfott, and Richard Sklar, on a leisurely trip starting at Grand Junction on Saturday, March 18, and ending the following Tuesday at Moab. Geerlings tried to do his homework regarding Westwater prior to the trip by writing Ross Musselman, a

known southern Utah guide, about the river. Musselman was not familiar with the river, but he did some homework of his own at the local newspaper office. He concluded there was one dangerous rapid and wrote, "Some boats have gotten through but entirely by accident rather than good boatmanship."⁶⁸ Ironically, though Geerlings could not locate anyone who had been through Westwater Canyon, he had, unbeknownst to him, been with just such a person, Bert Loper, a year earlier in 1949 on a Boy Scout trip through Glen Canyon. The Glen Canyon trip was Paul Geerlings's first experience with whitewater, but it was nearly Bert Loper's last because a few weeks later he died at 24 1/2 Mile Rapid in the Grand Canyon, possibly of a heart attack.⁶⁹

Geerlings, motivated by reading accounts of Major John Wesley Powell, chose Westwater Canyon as the first of numerous whitewater voyages because of its proximity, which reduced the time involved so his group would not miss much school. Originally there were about seventeen volunteers to make the run, but as members of the group became aware of their limited knowledge of the canyon and Geerlings's inexperience with whitewater, they gradually withdrew, until only five remained.

Equipped with a ten-man navy rubber landing craft, they ran the canyon when the Colorado was measured just above 3,200 cfs. They had some exciting moments in the rapids including one member falling out at "Cisco Bend" (Skull) Rapid. He held onto a rope and stayed with the raft. Geerlings detailed the experience through Westwater for the *Salt Lake Tribune Magazine*, where he wrote: "We learned that the river made a right angle turn at Cisco bend, but were unable to get any detailed information as to the severity of current either at the bend or below it. Therefore, as we entered the canyon, we anticipated the reported whirlpool rapids with a good deal of enthusiasm but were taken off guard by stretches of comparatively mild water." After a stop at the Outlaw Cave where they discovered a letter dated 1903, they continued.

Back on the river we found the rapids were beginning to justify our expectation. At one point the waves broke over our boat, and we paused momentarily to bail out. We knew that no matter how rough the river might get, we could probably avoid turning over if our bow was held normal to the waves.

But the decision at Cisco was not entirely in our hands, as the river narrowed, a larger boulder obstructed the way, diverting the current into two branches about 10 feet wide. When we saw that the left was gutted with rocks we swerved to the right, but were swept up by the rapids and hurled with tremendous force against the canyon wall. For an instant the swirling water ploughed our port-side beneath the surface, and we clutched at the boat to avoid being washed overboard. Luckily we didn't capsize, and when the current bore us toward an eddy, we paddled furiously to the opposite bank where we bailed out before going on.

However, our troubles at Westwater were far from over for we ran into a series of cataracts where the waves approximated 15 feet. There was nothing to do but keep the bow dead ahead and hang on when the deluge came in.⁷⁰

One might have thought the party, which was comprised of all U.S. Navy midshipmen, except for Richard Sklar, would have felt more comfortable on the water, but afterwards they were described as "six very frightened people."⁷¹ Bruce Martin later recalled that they were fortunate that they "took the trip before the spring runoff, for the rapids would certainly have been worse and perhaps we would not have come through alive."⁷² This may have been what many boaters thought until more experience with the canyon revealed that, unlike other sections of the Green and Colorado Rivers, low water in Westwater can demand more skill and attention than high water.

The Narrow Escape

The leader of the group of six boaters who left Westwater on September 24, 1950, was Theodore Steinway, a member of the famous piano manufacturing family, who had only minimal whitewater experience and an errant government map of the canyon. With him, Dick Durrance (who was world famous for snow sports, involved in building the Alta Lodge in Utah, and started the Aspen Ski Company), Margaret Durrance (professional photographer), Florian Haemmerle (a Sun Valley ski instructor who later became an excellent watercolorist), his new wife Beatrice, and Massachusetts professor John Corley entered the river near the head of Westwater Canyon in three Bavarian Klepper foldboats similar to the one Beppo Saeckler used in



Margaret and Dick Durrance, Ted Steinway, and a farmer at Westwater in 1950. The farmer was likely longtime Westwater Ranch owner Emmett Elizondo. Margaret Durrance photo.

1930, except these were two-man boats.

Because of the low water, Steinway felt there would be no problems in the canyon, but he was immediately surprised: one news item reported they cracked up one of their boats just one mile below the Westwater ranch. A later interview with Dick and Margaret Durrance indicated that two of the three boats were broken shortly after they stopped for lunch. According to their description they lunched somewhere after discovering the Outlaw Cave, so they had traveled more than the one mile first reported. This would explain why they did not return to the ranch, where the terrain would be easier to follow. They were trapped within the walls of Westwater Canyon.

Some of their party had met with known river runner and *Grand Junction Sentinel* editor Pres Walker prior to their departure. The *Sentinel* reported the meeting after the group's rescue, but Dick and Margaret Durrance were not aware of the meeting and claimed the government maps they relied on did not indicate much of a drop in the canyon. They were aware of the fragility of



Dick Durrance (light hat) and Ted Steinway portage foldboat around rapids in 1950. Margaret Durrance photo.

their boats, and had they known of the canyon's steep decline they would not have attempted it. Those who met with Pres Walker informed him that they planned to be two days on the river and arrive at Moab Monday evening.

On Sunday September 24, 1950, Westwater was running at 3,140 cfs. After lunch that day the party lost one of their boats and nearly the life of Florian Haemmerle when he and Beatrice turned over. The upset most likely occurred in Marble Canyon Rapid. Florian was under water wedged into the cockpit of his boat by his backpack, which was stuck between his knees. Eventually he worked himself out, but the incident shook up the honeymooning Haemmerles, and they wanted nothing more to do with the river. Being trapped between the canyon walls with boats that could not take the punishment of the rapids, the party resolved to continue following the river along what little shoreline there was and hike out if possible. They worked both sides of the canyon, crossing the river in the pools below each rapid and

lining the rapids. The foldboats could only hold two people at a time so each time they crossed, they would have to make several trips to ferry everyone and their scant supply of food and water. The Haemmerles remained distressed about the river and were not allowed to ferry across together. According to Dick Durrance they likely camped at Big Hummer and Skull Rapids while trapped in the canyon.⁷³

On Tuesday, Pres Walker phoned the *Times-Independent* in Moab to inquire about their arrival, but no one had seen or heard of the boaters. Walker, with his wife Becky, then flew their plane over the canyon but did not see any sign of the group. At the same time L. L. “Bish” Taylor, publisher of the *Times-Independent*, drove along the river but also found no signs of the party. A full-scale search was begun, and on Wednesday two members of the missing party were spotted high on the canyon walls by Harold (Shorty) Pabst, of beer fame, as he flew his plane over Westwater looking for his friends. He reported them as being ten miles downstream of where they started and about five miles above the Frank Shields Ranch.

From the description given in the newspapers and later interviews with members of the group, they hiked out just above Sock-It-To-Me Rapid onto the Big Hole area. The Durrances recalled a rapid just below them and one in the distance that they could hear but not see.⁷⁴ Frank Shields, who owned a ranch across the river from Cisco, was asked to help with the rescue and given a general description of where the party was located. He ranged his cattle in the area so was familiar with it and rode his horse to a point where he was opposite them on the south side of the river. He then called down to them to try to continue about one and a half miles further downstream to where he felt he could take a boat upstream and pick them up the following day.

Because of their experiences with outdoor sports the boaters were well prepared for the emergency from the onset. They had only two days’ food supply when they began, and once they realized they were in trouble, they immediately started to ration it. This kept them healthy enough to finish the climb. A description of where they were located was given in the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*: “They got thru all except the last bad rapid—but they didn’t realize that. This rapid goes around a bend and they couldn’t see that once over it they would be in smooth water for several miles.”⁷⁵

The following day Frank Shields pulled his motor boat behind a tractor to the west portal of the granite gorge and motored up the river to where the party was. Two at a time he took them back downstream to safety, food, and friends. The rescue was completed by 9:30 P.M. on Wednesday, September 27, 1950. The river flow for the period ranged from 2700 to 3140 cfs, which was a level similar to what most of the boaters before them had experienced. Probably Pres Walker summed up the experience best when he said, "It was quite a voyage and the only trouble was that there were six people with the combined experience of about 1/2 a boatman. They were all damned nice kids, but they were in just too fast company and too rough company."⁷⁶

James Rigg

The first successful recorded run of a medium or higher water level through Westwater was completed by Jim Rigg, co-owner of Mexican Hat Expeditions with J. Frank Wright. Mexican Hat Expeditions ran primarily the San Juan, Green, and lower Colorado Rivers. Jim Rigg's first experience on whitewater was with Norm Nevills when he was invited to help with a San Juan River trip in 1949. Rigg's father, a doctor in Grand Junction who occasionally tended Nevills's family, introduced him to Norm. After Nevills and his wife died in a plane crash in 1949, Rigg and J. Frank Wright purchased his whitewater business at Mexican Hat and changed its name.⁷⁷

Primarily, Rigg was a commercial runner, but he did make some runs for the sport of it. On June 6, 1951, he ran Westwater when it was running 14,200 cfs. Rigg was not one for leaving a record of his feats, so most of his experiences were recorded by those who knew him personally or through correspondence. William J. Davis, who boated Westwater a week later, mentioned in a letter that "I ran it in early June, 1951. Jim Rigg ran it about a week before I did. Jim had more trouble than I did. He was push[ed] out of the main current in to a small eddy and he was held there for half an hour. He was nearly upset once in his attempt to get back into the current."⁷⁸ Frank Wright recalled Jim telling him of a run through Westwater where he took one sixteen-foot, rigid, cataract-type boat for the run. "Jim told me that the distance through the canyon was relatively short com-

pared with other runs. That what few rapids were available were quite close together and that one of them was a 'stinker' and difficult to run."⁷⁹ Just after this run Jim and his brother Bob ran a record two-and-one-half-day Grand Canyon trip that possibly upset river historian Otis "Dock" Marston's scheduled launch promoting motorized crafts as the way to run rivers.⁸⁰

John L. J. Hart made contact with Jim Rigg when planning a 1958 trip through Westwater and recorded in his notes: "Last night I called Jim Rigg who said he had been down the Canyon several times. He said that most of the excitement came in the first mile or so, after the Little Delores. About the last bad rapid is caused by a big rock in the middle of the river which will probably be uncovered by July 5. All the water goes to the right but as soon as you pass the rock, you must turn left into an eddy to avoid being turned over by a granite edge."⁸¹

Why Jim Rigg or any of the other commercial outfitters of the 1950s did not pursue boating Westwater was best described by his former partner Frank Wright, "My guess would be that preparations and travel distances were extensive. The time spent in rapid running was relatively short and risky and that the type of boat and other equipment that was being used at the time we were running rivers was not adequate, and that prospective passengers were not interested enough to pay for a trip of this kind when other runs were available that offered more for their money."⁸² With the improvements of equipment over the next twenty years we are now seeing more than ten thousand commercial and private river runners a year boating Westwater Canyon.

William and Mildred Davis

Margaret Durrance and Mrs. Haemmerle may have been the first women to survive an attempted run of Westwater canyon when they portaged their broken foldboats through in 1950, but Mildred Davis was the first female known to have made it through the canyon in a boat. Pleasure boaters William J. Davis, a Chicago electrical engineer, and his fifteen-year-old daughter left Fruita, Colorado, on June 11, 1951, and ran the Westwater rapids the following day when it was running 16,000 cfs. The father and daughter team had previous experience running the Grand Canyon in cataract boats the year before and immediately after

their Westwater run flew to Lilly Park to begin a Yampa trip.⁸³

Their Westwater run was only the second trip known to have been made at a higher water level. The Davises claimed to have experienced no trouble in the canyon because most of the rocks were covered, making the river more negotiable. This was a level that had made Big Whirlpool (Skull) Rapid legendary, as ranchmen in the area had watched the channel head directly into a cliff, divide in half with the Room of Doom and another large volume of water that scaled up the cliff some seven to ten feet, then fell back on itself. Fortunate would be any boat that could make it to the left side where the water was calm, and the boaters could shout praises to whomever they wanted or of however they ended up getting away from the ugly stuff.

A common feeling among everyone who runs Westwater Canyon is that there is just enough room for your boat and oars. This was how the Davises felt as they entered the gorge and discovered a rapid path from start to finish. Once, William said, he was submerged as a ton of water buried him, but they encountered no further obstacles as their rubber boat quickly passed through the entire canyon. In a 1953 letter to Peter Sparkes, Davis wrote: "I think you should decide in your own mind that you are going to run everything, and do it without looking anything over," which is true by nature of the steep canyon. And with reference to the many senior boatmen of the 1940s and 1950s, he said "this is a canyon that many river men say that they are going to run one of these days, but generally never get around to it."⁸⁴

Charles Bolte and Earl Eaton

By the mid-1950s boating the western rivers became more commonplace, and unless boaters were trying something unusual or met with a crisis nothing was reported of their excursions. One story did catch headlines though in Colorado, where Charles Bolte and Earl Eaton of Aspen decided to motor down the Colorado River from Aspen to Lake Mead in Arizona. The old adage of turning a mole hill into a mountain might best describe how these college students came up with their idea. Neither had ever been on any rapids, and they were only familiar with those near Aspen. From a decision made while skiing, Bolte's desire to

boat the Roaring Fork in the summer soon ballooned into wanting to run all the way to Lake Mead. A young woman who had overheard them talking about shorter runs told them of a trip she made with the Rigg outfitters down the San Juan and how dangerous Cataract and the Grand Canyon were. Probably a little pride and a lot of beer helped them decide to go all the way, and from that point they spread the word they were going.⁸⁵

Too late to back out, Bolte and Eaton prepared for the smaller, more technical rapids with a small boat, and for the larger section of river, they presented *Driftwood*, a large bridge pontoon that they launched at Colorado Springs. Another unique aspect of this voyage was that they used a motor. This had been done in the lower canyons before but not for the length of river Bolte and Eaton planned to travel. Theirs would be the first known motorized trip through Westwater Canyon.

Their start was rough as they ripped a hole in *Driftwood* on the first day. Down the river they went, gaining experience along the way. From what was told them their first real test would be in Westwater, where they arrived on the tenth day. Charles Bolte's journal records the following two days.

Day X [May 7, 1954]

We got a late start—10:30 o'clock, and were all the time eagerly awaiting the notorious bad rapids of "West Water." Crossed the Utah border at about 1:30 and went about 6 miles into West Water Canyon. No bad water at all—a few large riffles. The customary head wind came up at about eleven, but dissipated about 2:30. The canyon is narrow and deep slow moving water for the most part.

Have a campsite overlooking beautiful desert-canyon scenery. We are in what is called "Little Hole" on a flat grassy area about 20 feet above the river. According to map we are 50 river miles from Moab. Expecting bad rapids tomorrow—expect to get an early start for a change.

Day XI [May 8, 1954/3,580 CFS]

Westwater Rapids

Glorying in the hot morning sun while we crawled out of our sleeping bags, we slept soundly until 8:30. After having breakfast, we spent (an other? hour rearranging our cargo—[illegible]? Then off! Almost immediately we found ourselves in a deep narrow gorge—the river only about 75 yards wide at the widest area. Almost immediately we hit some fair sized rapids, but motored through them

flawlessly. It was great fun—and we were screaming and yodeling like kids with a new toy.

At noon we hit the famous rapid which is reputed to be quite bad. It narrowed in quite sharply and the white water followed close to a sheer wall. We went in it fine—the breakers from the bottom to top being about 12 feet high. Doing fine until one tremendous breaker grabbed the back end of the boat and flipped it into wall—breaking a large hole in the motors drive shaft housing. The boat floated through smoothly (as expected) but we were out of power and Earle's oar flew off of the boat.

We fortunately avoided the huge right whirlpool, however, and continued to float without any more docking on the further rapids. We went over one boulder-fall ten feet high without trouble, then a huge explosion wave engulfed me on the front end nearly threw me between the boat and the canyon wall which we immediately hit. I hung on with one hand, my feet in the water, to a safety rope which I constructed that morning, for dear life & pulled myself into the boat. Driftwood did very good work—it made the whole operation seem mild.⁸⁶

On July 8 they reached Lake Mead with a record run that may have only been surpassed on the Colorado River by Bert Loper, who thirty-eight years earlier made his historical run with Ellsworth Kolb. Loper had claimed to have been on the Colorado from just above Glenwood Springs all the way to the Gulf of California.

Ed Hudson and Ed Nichols

On the register that once was located at Music Temple, now buried beneath the waters of Lake Powell, the story is told of yet another historic event. On June 1, 1955, it reads,

Ed Hudson and Ed Nichols Paso Robles Calif non commercial voyage in the good ship "Finally" Glenwood Springs to Lees Ferry. Left Glenwood May 23. This trip completes about 1400 miles of consecutive miles on the Colorado River for Ed Hudson (Glenwood Springs Colo to the Gulf of Lower Calif.) all with motor driven craft. Westwater canyon was roaring fast and rough. Cataract at #24 swamped us and thru us into rocks on Right bank. Got out in 7 hrs.⁸⁷

This was possibly the end of records for the longest run of the Colorado River. Except for the unplanned trip by Eaton and Bolte, nobody else had attempted to continuously run the entire



Westwater Canyon upriver from Skull Rapid photographed from the bench above the Room of Doom.

length of the Colorado. By now dams were going up and giving credit to anyone for running the entire length of the Colorado River, continuously or in segments, could be disputed, in a manner similar to the asterisk that so long stood next to baseball's Roger Maris's home run record that broke Babe Ruth's but in more games. Who can we credit for having run the longest stretch of the Colorado River? What criteria do we use? If we use the untamed Colorado River prior to the construction of Hoover Dam, only Elmer Kane, Ellsworth Kolb, and possibly the trapper Parley Galloway (who we know experienced major rapids beginning at Skull in Westwater and ending at the now submerged Separation and Lava Cliff Rapids beneath Lake Mead) are contenders.⁸⁸ Bert Loper didn't transit the Grand Canyon until 1939, yet he claimed to have done the entire Colorado River beginning at Glenwood Springs. Or do we consider those who came after the dams? Otis "Dock" Marston would have given the record to Bolte and Eaton, but the next year Ed Hudson claimed it. In 1974 yet another party, calling itself "River Love," put onto the Colorado River at a higher elevation than any of the predecessors did. River Love consisted of members of the Smokey Knowlton

family from California. They started their trip at Kremmling, Colorado, and eventually made it to the disappearing Colorado River at the Gulf of California.⁸⁹ It is difficult to give credit to anyone for the accomplishment since none of them ran the complete unbridled Colorado River.

The “good ship ‘Finally’” that Hudson and Nichols ran in was a converted river boat that was sixteen feet long with a five and a half-foot beam running a sixty-five horsepower Jeep inboard motor. This was the first known craft of this sort in Westwater, though Hudson, Nichols, and Dock Marston had been experimenting with them in the early 1950s on the Grand Canyon. Ed Hudson recorded the Westwater Canyon event in his journal dated May 24, 1955.

Then we entered Westwater Canyon, and what a ride we were in for! It was a canyon of mystery to us as all we could get about it was that it was all bad, but all stories were vague and ominous. No wonder!

First signs of danger showed up in the form of a lot of black granite spires and rocks standing upright in the river, and we wound our way through them in fast water but no bad rapids.

A short distance later we come into walls of black granite and the fun started. Bang! We are into the canyon and no way out but straight ahead. Then followed one hour, or 17 miles, of the most concentrated rough water I ever saw. I’m sure glad I have had river experience before, or I’d never have been able to make it out the other end. Just one rapid after the other, and no breaks, all downhill, and fast.

When we came to the Little Dolores River, the canyon was about 75 feet wide and blocked across with large, partially submerged, boulders and no tongue or channel. We were on it before we realized that there was no sensible way through. I made a quick decision, gave the boat the gas, said a quick prayer, and away we sailed through the air and made a perfect landing on a wave on the downstream side.

A short time after this flying episode the hazards came to an end and we had smooth water ahead. I wouldn’t believe it, but no more rough water showed up. Pulled into shore and dried out.⁹⁰

Westwater was running at 13,700 cfs that day.

Les Jones

Judging from fragmented research, I believe an ever-growing number of boaters successfully navigated Westwater during the



Joe M. Lacy took photographs from a plane of all of the Westwater Canyon rapids in anticipation of running the canyon in kayaks. This aerial photo of Funnel Falls was taken April 13, 1961. Joseph M. Lacy photo courtesy of Mayme Lacy.

late 1950s. While acknowledging a few important runs thereafter, I generally end the Westwater journal for river navigation at 1955. Les Jones did, however, run Westwater with some fellow workers in the spring of 1956 to develop a river map of the canyon. His scroll maps were waterproof, and he provided diagrams of how to run difficult rapids. A predecessor to the popular Belknap river guides, Jones's maps were no less popular during the early 1960s. The history of his original scroll-mapping expedition of Westwater is detailed in the next chapter.

Kirschbaum, Lacy, Martins, and Young

No evidence has been presented to dispute that the first kayakers to run the popular canyon were Walter Kirschbaum, Joe M. Lacy, Ulrich Martins, and Ted Young, on the weekend of August 16, 1962.⁹¹

Using a diagram found in a *Boy's Life* magazine as a guide, Joe Lacy built his first kayak when he was approximately fourteen years old. With a large irrigation ditch behind his home at



The first known kayakers through Westwater were, from left to right, Walter Kirschbaum, Joe M. Lacy, Ted Young, and Ulrich Martins. They ran Westwater Canyon on August 16, 1962. Joseph M. Lacy photo courtesy of Mayme Lacy.

Canon City, Colorado, Lacy became fascinated with boating at an early age and would become one of the premier kayakers in Colorado. Kayaking solo and occasionally with friends who used a rubber raft, Lacy did not have the companionship of fellow kayakers until the Salida races started on the Arkansas River in 1949, when kayakers came from Europe to compete. It was during the Salida races that Lacy became friends with many of these foreigners, mostly from Germany, as they found a common language called whitewater. The European arrival for the Salida races also made American boaters more aware of the sleeker crafts that dominated the annual race.

In the early 1960s Joe Lacy moved his family from Denver to Grand Junction, Colorado, where he became city manager. His interest in whitewater continued, and he felt the need to become more familiar with the Colorado River near his new home, including the notorious Westwater Canyon. Unaware of anyone who had previously boated Westwater, Joe Lacy with a friend from Denver flew over the canyon on April 13, 1961, taking sequential photographs of the canyon from the plane to prepare



Ulrich Martins watches Ted Young run Funnel Falls on the first kayak trip through Westwater Canyon on August 16, 1962. Joseph M. Lacy photo courtesy of Mayme Lacy.

for a future run. Frightened by what he observed from the sky, particularly at Skull Rapid, he approached his kayaking friends from the Salida races and coaxed Walter Kirschbaum, Ulrich Martins, and Ted Young to join him the following year.

Kirschbaum, Martins, and Young were fearless boaters and would have descended the entire canyon without stopping were it not for Lacy, who admittedly was scared to death and used his camera as an excuse to scout the rapids. He said:

The biggest thing I remember was those guys were all hot shot kayakers Kirschbaum, Ted Young and Uly. Man, they never stopped to look at a rapid, you know, totally strange river and they're ready to go. And I stopped at every fricken one and I got out there, I had my camera under the guise of taking a picture of them and whatever. All I really wanted to do was look at that rapid before I started in it. Every one! It worked, and that's where the pictures came from.⁹²

And stop he did. Lacy took photographs of the somewhat irritated kayakers running nearly every rapid in the canyon and along the way they named each of them.⁹³ Still his greatest fear throughout



Walter Kirschbaum entering Skull Rapid on August 16, 1962. Joseph M. Lacy photo courtesy of Mayme Lacy.

the canyon loomed near the end where he recalled his anxiety from the year before when he studied Skull Rapid from an airplane.

I'll tell you I don't remember ever being as scared as we were heading down to Skull. I knew it was coming up and once you got close you could see that Room of Doom back there. And figuring your way around in that and I was about to shit my pants, I'll tell you. And when I finally got in and scooted around that left side. I had never paddled so damn hard. Paddle on the right.⁹⁴

Although he was not the first kayaker in the Grand Canyon, Walter Kirschbaum was the first one to run all of the rapids. He did so in 1960 after the Park Service required that he prove his whitewater abilities before they would grant him permission to enter the canyon. He was a champion kayak racer from Germany who moved to Salida, Colorado, in 1955 after changing his boating interest from racing to river exploration.⁹⁵ Kirschbaum admitted that Joe Lacy “urged” him to participate on the 1962 Westwater trip to “help him down” it and that the four of them “had a ball running it.”⁹⁶ Of the trip Kirschbaum confirmed that “everyone ran every stretch of river and there wasn't a single tipover.”⁹⁷ In his letter to John L. J. Hart he emphasized that the

1		MAGAZINE
2	L-R WALTER	NO.
3	KIRSCHBAUM, J. LACY, TED	SERIAL
4	YOUNG, ULRICH WARTENS	
4+5	"REASSURANCE" RPD	
6		
7	"HALF-SHOT" RPD	PIX
8		
9		RPN
10		
11	LITTLE DOLORES RVR	APR 13, 1961
12	L.D. HUMMEL" CAVE	
13	"SURPRISE" RPD	
14	"FIRST STAR" RPD	
15		CANYON
16		
17	"LUSCIOUS" RPD	
18		
19		RPN
20		
21	"BIG HOLE" RPL	RPN
22		
23		RPN
24		
25	"DELICIOUS" RPD	APR 15, 1962
26		
27	"ONE MORE TIME" RPD	AUG 16, 1962
28		
29	"FAT LIP" RPD	AUG 16, 1962
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33	CASTLE VALLEY	
34	PIX AUG, 1961	
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36	KETTSVILLE HAS	

Joe M. Lacy's slide register may reveal not only the names that the first kayak party through Westwater assigned the rapids but also a name of one of the previous Outlaw Cave occupants. Courtesy of Mayme Lacy.



Left to right, Kim Crumbo, Dee Holladay, Senator Frank Moss, and Canyonlands Superintendent Bates Wilson, 1971. After Holiday River Expeditions took Senator Frank E. Moss through Westwater Canyon, he introduced it for consideration under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Kim Crumbo, guide for Holiday River Expeditions, wrote articles about Westwater in the early 1970s and later became a ranger at the Grand Canyon. Photo from Holiday River Expeditions courtesy of Dee Holladay

most “fascinating” part of the 1962 trip was their discovery of Outlaw Cave.

The following summer Walter Kirschbaum, the director for the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, a private coeducational school located in Carbondale, “took 44 boys and girls, and some 16 faculty and wives and little children” down Westwater in motorized pontoon boats; only Ulrich Martins was allowed to kayak on the trip. Kirschbaum was assisted by boatmen working for “Moqui Mak” (Moki Mac) who he said didn’t have much experience with rocky water and busted up “several motors.” Short of motors, Kirshbaum prided himself on being able to handle one of the “big pontoons by canoe paddle.”⁹⁸ The Colorado Rocky Mountain School returned to Westwater a few years later and introduced the canyon to larger groups. By 1966, Dee Holladay, owner of Holiday River Expeditions, claims his company and Ron

Smith, owner of Grand Canyon River Expeditions, were offering the first commercial river trips through Westwater.⁹⁹ It was nearly fifteen years later before other commercial river tour company owners began estimating that the risks involved with boating the short canyon—including the type of equipment and time involved—could interest paying customers.

Following the Pioneers

Since 1955 traffic through Westwater has continually increased. Today there are more than ten thousand river travelers each year. Coinciding broader changes in technology in the past fifty years, the equipment used for recreation has improved tremendously. Until 1950 no one had been through Westwater on a rubber raft. The heavy wooden boats came in various sizes and shapes and could not hold more than a few passengers. With the continual improvements in plastics and rubber, whitewater rafting, both private and commercial, has become considerably safer for the thousands of people who spend their energy and money to see a little piece of our remaining wilderness on rivers such as the Colorado through Westwater. Today, just as in the time of Elmer Kane, Ellsworth Kolb, Bert Loper, and the others, we can describe the descent into the gorge thusly: “The trouble is that it is a narrow granite canyon where you cannot land to inspect each rapid. You start down and have to go on through hoping for the best.”¹⁰⁰



Whirlpool (Skull) Rapid, 1916. An old Westwater resident said fishes' brains are spattered on the wall at this rapid. Grand Junction photographer Frank Dean was responsible for taking moving pictures of Kolb and Loper's run. Ellsworth Kolb photo, Kolb Collection, Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives, Northern Arizona University.