

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Duane Ekedahl (DE)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Duane recounts a 1956 paddle-boat river trip from Phantom Ranch to Lake Mead. This was the first run of Lava Falls in this type of boat. One boat flipped in the rapid, also a first.

Date of Interview: March 24, 2020

Transcriber: Emma Gibfried

Date of Transcription: 5/22/2020

Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Tom Martin

Keys: Colorado River, Grand Canyon, paddle rafts, Lava Falls flip, 205 rapid, Hatch River Expeditions, Bill Gibbs, Wayne Quillin, Dale Monson, Bryan "Kiwi" McLoughlin, Richard "Dick" Humble

TM: Today is Tuesday, March 24th, 2020. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Duane Ekedahl. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon Duane, how are you?

DE: Fine thank you.

TM Duane, may we have your permission to do this Oral History interview over the telephone?

DE: Yes.

TM: Thank you so very much. What year were you born?

DE: 1932.

TM: Where were you born?

DE: In Morristown, New Jersey.

TM: Did you grow up there in New Jersey?

DE: I grew up in Morristown and Dover, another nearby town in New Jersey.

TM: What did your parents do?

DE: My father worked for a newspaper and my mother, until we went to college, she stayed at home and then she went to work as a secretary in a nearby factory to help pay for our college education, my brother and me.

TM: Oh, so you had a younger brother?

DE: One younger brother.

TM: Did you guys do the typical American in the summer car vacation?

DE: No. We were fortunate enough to have a great uncle who had a little cabin on a lake in New Jersey and that was our summer vacations.

TM: Oh wow.

DE: We were very fortunate with that, yeah.

TM: And did you learn how to swim then?

DE: Yes.

TM: Okay, were you good at swimming?

DE: Yeah, pretty good swimmer. We were actually on a little lake on the water, so I became quite comfortable with water.

TM: Did you canoe?

DE: Yes, all of those things. All the boating.

TM: Great. In high school did you participate in sports?

DE: Yeah, I was a baseball player in high school and I played lacrosse in college. Those are the sports I played.

TM: Okay, and then you joined the military service?

DE: I was ROTC in college, so I then served two years at Nellis Air Force Base at that time.

TM: So, two years in Nellis. Nellis Air Force Base is in the desert of Southern California, is that right?

DE: No, it's in Nevada just outside of Las Vegas.

TM: Oh, okay, sorry about that.

DE: And it was an air to ground... It was the final base for jet training during the Korean War. So there was a lot of activity at that base.

TM: What were you doing there?

DE: I went in as a lieutenant. I was assigned to the headquarters squadron as an adjunct to the squadron commander. And this is hard to believe, but he was sent off to school for six months and I became acting squadron commander at age 23. [laughs] But that was strictly an administrative job until we paraded. I had to be the guy out in front for the parade. But it was administrative so that was my job there at Nellis. And that's where I met Bill Gibbs.

TM: What do you remember about Bill Gibbs at that time?

DE: Bill Gibbs was an extraordinary guy. He was a little bit older. A group of us sort of bunked together at the air force base. He had just returned from a Mormon mission with the Maori tribes in New Zealand. He had a law degree and he was very, very bright. He lived in Salt Lake so we would drive up in the winter several times to go skiing. His family owned the Peruvian Lodge in Salt Lake, Mount Alta, a wonderful skiing area. Bill was a very strong guy. Of the group that went down the river, Bill was the brains. Bill was the organizer and he was the driver. He was a very adventuresome guy. I would say that about Bill Gibbs. He had a real influence on me and we were real pals at that time.

TM: So did he kind of walk up to you and say, "Hey Duane, let's go boating!"

DE: Yeah, I'm not quite sure how that happened. I've been thinking through that, how did I get into this? We were kind of roommates along with Wayne Quillin, who was in the group also. It just turned out that there were a couple spaces available. We'd done a lot together, Bill and I, and he just said, "Would you like to?" and I said yes. I think it's as simple as that to join the group.

TM: Was this your first time out west into the deserts of the western U.S.?

DE: Yes, yes, yes.

TM: And of course I'm talking to you today, you're living outside of Washington D.C., so it sounds like you turned around and went back east.

DE: I went back east. I went to get an MBA and I went to work in the chemical industry which is where I had my undergraduate training in chemistry. Then I branched off into business and had a business career which I am now retired from.

TM: Okay, alright, thank you. So you met Bill Gibbs. Did you know anyone else on the trip besides Bill?

DE: Wayne Quillin, was in our little group. I think I had met his brother-in-law, Dale Monson, while on a skiing trip but I didn't really know him before the trip. So these were all new guys to me except for Bill and Wayne Quillin.

TM: Okay, and Dale was out of Salt Lake City as well, is that right?

DE: Yes.

TM: Were all of you in the Air Force at the time?

DE: No. There were the three guys from the Hill Air Force Base that we didn't know. Bill Gibbs, Wayne Quillin, and I were at the Nellis Air Force Base. Then there were two guys, Dale Monson and [Bryan] "Kiwi" [McLoughlin], who were not in the Air Force. So we were all in the Air Force except for two guys.

TM: Okay, so three from Hill, three from Nellis, Dale...

DE: Dale who was Bill's brother in law, and then Kiwi who was the other extraordinary person. I think Kiwi was the muscle on the group and a strong personality. Just really a New Zealander extraordinaire. Very good guy, Kiwi.

TM: Duane, you mentioned something that made me wonder. If Bill Gibbs had been to New Zealand on a mission, do you think that's where he met Kiwi?

DE: Oh, isn't that interesting, it never occurred to me. It never occurred to me. He was down there working with the Maori people and Kiwi worked at the Peruvian lodge, the ski lodge, which the Gibbs family owned. That might be the link there.

TM: Okay, interesting because he's one individual I have not been able to track down at all.

DE: He and Bill were the forces behind this whole venture. Bill the organizer/the brains, and Kiwi the muscle for the trip and just an extraordinary guy.

TM: So how did the story work? You guys would have had to drive from Nellis on old Route 66 over to Williams, the little mountain town of Williams, and then north up to the south rim of Grand Canyon. Do you remember any of that travelling at all?

DE: No, no. I do remember walking down to Phantom Ranch, but I don't recall how we got there. All the provisions and all that Bill did. I wasn't involved in any of the organizing part of it.

TM: Okay. And you guys had a couple mules to help carry your stuff?

DE: Right, yeah. We had one or two mules that took the stuff and then we walked down behind them. There was some dust kicked up, so we sort of alternated where we were but we walked roughly eight miles or whatever it was down to Phantom Ranch.

TM: Okay. Before you guys headed down, Bill spent a little time with the superintendent discussing permits. Do you remember any of that?

DE: No, no.

TM: Because apparently Bill didn't have a permit but he was able to convince the superintendent to let you guys go anyway. [DE laughs]

DE: Yeah, that doesn't surprise me. I think Bill could be very persuasive when he had to be.

TM: So you walked down to Phantom Ranch. Do you remember the boats, how that all worked, did you have to air them up?

DE: I don't remember in much detail, but I remember it was pleasant being there. I think we slept there on the edge of the water, had breakfast, and took off the next morning. We inflated the boats. I have some vague memory of inflating the boats, and off we went.

TM: So I'll just rewind this a little bit. The year before, Gibbs and Monson had gone from Lees Ferry to Phantom Ranch in three rubber boats, a ten-man and two seven-mans, and they had used little outboard motors. The motors weren't there anymore, I think they had taken them out with them, and so did you guys bring motors back in?

DE: No, not to my knowledge. I have no awareness of any motors.

TM: What did you use then to propel the boats?

DE: The oars we had. All we had to do is get the boats off the shore and then the river pretty much took us. I don't recall any heavy rowing other than to kind of position ourselves for a rapid.

TM: So, I'm going to ask for a little bit of specificity here cause I think of oars, I think of ten foot long, they've got a handle on one end and a big long blade on the other. They typically need oar locks to make them work.

DE: No, these were paddles. They weren't oars, they were paddles. I'd say they were about, oh, maybe four feet long. A pretty good paddle on the edge, a broad paddle. A little knob on one end and then that was the oar. And it was tied to the boat.

TM: Okay, so let me back up here. You're a guy that swims well and you grew up in the summers on a cabin on a lake with a canoe. These sound like canoe paddles.

DE: Pretty much, not quite as big as a typical canoe paddle. A little bit smaller than a canoe paddle in length, but otherwise...

TM: Okay, and that would've been familiar to you?

DE: A little bit, yep.

TM: Whose idea was it to tie the paddles to the boats? That's a great idea!

DE: I have no idea, but it would be Bill Gibbs for our group. That would be Bill. He probably decided that after the trip the year before.

TM: It's funny because the year before they didn't have paddles or oars at all, they just had these little motors. So it's really interesting to see that he brought in paddles, clever. Did you guys have a lot of gear or just the shirts on your backs and some food and that was it?

DE: It's pretty much the shirts on our backs. Food was the big issue. There's kind of a humorous story there. Early in the trip we had a quite a few canned goods. The labels all washed off because the boat went over and we didn't know what was in the cans! We would have 2 for \$.89 or \$.33. We had the prices on them but we didn't know what they were so [laughs] that's how we... Sometimes it turned out to be not exactly the combinations you'd want but that was something that happened to us. We joked about it afterwards.

TM: Okay. There were three boats, who did you team up with in your boat?

DE: Well, that was interesting, too, looking back on it because we didn't have permanent assignments. When we started out, and I think throughout the course of the trip, there was an experienced person in each boat. I was in each of the boats at one point or another. The first day out I'm pretty sure I was in the four-man boat, but I don't remember the specifics on it. I know on the last rapid, the one that caused us so much trouble, I was in the four-man boat. I think most of the other time I was in the two-man boat.

TM: I think it was a ten-man and it was fairly large, maybe a 12 or 13/14 feet long.

DE: Yeah, that was the four-man boat. There was just room for four people.

TM: Oh, so there were four of you in it. I see.

DE: In the big boat, right. And two in each of the smaller boats.

TM: Got it, okay. So four men in the big boat and two each in the smaller one,...

DE: Right.

TM: ...in the smaller boats. The river was running 50- to 60,000 cubic feet a second which is water that no one has seen hardly at all since the 1963 Glen Canyon dam but was very common to be boated before the dam, before '63. What do you remember about the river?

DE: A number of the rapids that Bill had maps for were quite different from what we expected. We went out the first day, we expected the very first rapid just around the corner to be a big one, my memory isn't that good about this, and it turned out to be very easy. But then we were later surprised by how some of the lesser rapids were really quite treacherous. At one point, I don't have any idea which rapid, we were almost caught without our life preservers on because we were floating along. We quickly got them back on and we made it in time for the rapid which turned out to be a pretty good sized rapid. That might be in Dick's log, I'm not sure.

TE: I think that story is in there. So the first rapid you encountered was Horn Creek. At low water it's very difficult, but between 50- and 60,000 it basically washes out.

DE: That's what happened, see. In Bill's charts that he had prepared us for, we were going to start off and it didn't happen. So I think that probably was not good for us because we were lulled into the notion that this was going to be a piece of cake. [laughs] I don't know if anyone really thought that, but we didn't know! We had no idea, really. We had so little information.

TM: So the first day... It sounded like you guys were basically on the water all day paddling. It's not like you stopped and went for hikes or looked around.

DE: The only place we deferred for a little while, and it wasn't but a couple hours, I suppose, was Havasu Falls. Are you familiar with Havasu Falls?

TM: Oh yes.

DE: Yeah, of course you are. Well, that was so beautiful. Some of the pictures that you have that I took really show how beautiful it is with the white and then the blue water. And it was fresh water. So we stayed there for a while. Other than that we didn't stop at all. We had no side excursions at all.

TM: Y'all eventually, one by one, sort of lost your hats, is that right?

DE: Yeah, I'm surprised at that, but yeah, I think that happened. I don't remember the specifics of it. All the boats turned over, you see, and we all experienced that. It could be that that's how that happened. And the first aid kit we lost, too, early in the trip. What you've created for me is a recounting of really a wild thing we did. [laughs] It's not like me to be doing that. I think back on my family and my kids and the wonderful life I've had to put that all at risk for this adventure. I certainly wouldn't do it again, I'll tell you that. [laughs] Losing the first aid kit, and I think of this since you recreated this for me, is that rattlesnake encounter I had. If that had struck me there, what do you think would've happened? With no first aid kit at all and a rattlesnake strike, that really disables you doesn't it, or does it?

TM: It does, and I would imagine that Bill would've been smart enough to tell everybody, "Get in the boats, we're heading out."

DE: Yeah, I think he probably would've done that, but in the meantime they would... Well Kiwi also was really good at all this stuff. He probably would've cut it, opened it, bled it and I'd have probably gone on just fine. They couldn't leave me behind, that's for sure! [laughs]

TM: Duane, tell me about your recollections of your encounter with this rattlesnake. Now you're from back East, had you seen...

DE: I'd never seen a rattlesnake before but I had knew a little something about the noise they made. We were camped along the side, probably the second or third day out. We were all just getting ready to... Whether we had sleeping bags or whether we had just rolled up in blankets... We had just finished eating and we were ready to go to sleep. I just wandered a little bit, not very far from where we were. I would say maybe twenty/thirty yards from where we were sitting. I just looked down and here was this classic rattlesnake. Was curled up and his head was up looking at me and it was making the rattle noise. I think if I had taken one more step he'd of had me. I stopped, froze, then just backed up and went back to camp, back to where we were which wasn't that far. We all talked about it a little bit, what to do next. We just stayed right there and just went to sleep. I think I can assure you I was not on the outer perimeter of the sleeping arrangements. [laughs] That was the end of the story. But I think of that from time to time, it really was a very scary moment.

TM: It sounds like there were some big sandy beaches to camp on?

DE: Well, I don't know how big they were, but they seemed sandy. We had nice places. It was never where it was totally rocky where we would beach for the evening.

TM: Do you remember the river? Did the river smell muddy or did it smell...?

DE: Nope, nope, nope, nope.

TM: Okay. For drinking water, did you guys just drink right out of the river?

DE: You know, I think we did. I know at Havasu Falls we loaded up on water. I think we pretty much did.

TM: Okay. And cooked up your canned food? Opened them up, looked inside and said, "Well I guess this is dinner."

DE: That's what we have tonight, yeah.

TM: Just built a little fire right on the beach, I would assume?

DE: Built a little fire. Actually did some fishing, although we never caught anything that I remember. We just had very basic, simple meals like spaghetti and stuff like that but it was sufficient. I think Bill had made all those arrangements. I don't remember being involved at all. I look back on the logistics of this and there's a lot went into it but I wasn't involved in any of that.

TM: So just thinking about general camp scenes there, it sounds like there was a little bit of a flip practice. That started I think on the second day when it sounded like one of the little boats, the two men in a boat, got a little close to a wall and...

DE: We went over I don't know how many times. The big boat went over at least once and the little ones went over maybe three or four times coming down the river. I know our technique was to go right into the vortex of the lip of the...right down the center of the rapid which I think was also different. I think there's a edge through it a little bit. I don't know what the techniques were, but that was our technique. Sometimes a little bit to the left of center was thought to be good. A couple of the times, Bill and Kiwi and others would get out and go forward and sort of check it out and decide which was the best approach to the rapid, but it was always down the lip of the rapid. We never went to the edge of a rapid. I don't know whether that was standard technique or not, but that's what we were doing. And we had our paddles. The only instruction, there was no practice of anything, it was "hold onto the paddle, do not let go of the paddle" was the word. We had a couple of tippings before Phantom Ranch. Those might have been practice for Phantom for me, but I knew that holding onto that paddle was absolutely essential to survive going over in a rapid. And it was.

Tm: Okay, so the idea was the paddle is tied to the boat and if you can hang onto the paddle you're hanging onto the boat.

DE: Right.

TM: That's pretty clever!

DE: And you go with the boat, yep.

TM: How did that work for you guys, right down the middle?

DE: I think it was fine. I know in Lava Falls in the small boat it just flipped us right over. Right over. [laughs] But other than that, I think we were happy with the technique. We thought it was what we had to do.

TM: Just to be clear, it sounds like on some of the rapids, not all of them, Bill and Dale, maybe Kiwi, would walk down and look at the rapid before giving it a go. It sounds like Doris, there's a rapid named Doris, that that kind of caught you guys a little off guard...

DE: I don't remember that.

TM: ...and flipped the big boat. I think that's where the first aid kit was lost.

DE: Oh, that would've been early. That would've been maybe the second or third day out. I don't remember the specifics of why the big boat went over and the little boats didn't. Also, I think we had to patch the big boat at one point. Bill had brought stuff to do that. I think that might've been where that happened, although I don't know. I don't remember that.

TM: There's a wicked part of that rapid if you're too far to the right, and it'll wake up you up.

DE: That could be it. That could very well be it.

TM: So long days on the water. You'd get up, you'd have breakfast and load up and take off.

DE: Take off early and we'd be off the river 4:00/4:30-ish. By the time we finished settling in and having something to eat, we were ready to go to sleep. There was no evening, we didn't play cards [laughs]. There was no evening activity at all.

TM: [laughs] Okay. Yeah, really burning up the calories paddling all day long.

DE: Oh yeah, it was work, yep.

TM: Did you guys get blisters?

DE: Yeah, I seem to remember that. Not to a problem for me, but I think there was some blistering. It wasn't serious, it wasn't anything that caused us trouble.

TM: So losing your hats. This is a summer trip, I believe it was July of 1956. I wouldn't want to be in the desert without a hat. That just sounds a little uncomfortable. Did that cook you guys up some?

DE: Only me. I don't think the others had a problem. I don't think we lost all our hats on the first day or anything, I think it sort of occurred that suddenly we didn't have hats. Although, I don't really remember not having a hat. The specific of not having a hat and being worried about not having a hat I don't remember. I do remember the last day having these little heat stroke type things. These guys were very carefully, they put me... By then we had been through the main rapids, been through all of them really, so I just was given a little special care which was probably what I needed. I don't remember specifics of it.

TM: Easy to overheat. You bet.

DE: I got overheated, yeah, that's what happened.

TM: What else do you remember? I should mention that the river is running eight to ten miles an hour and you guys are paddling to stay in the current, so it would've been easy to make a forty-mile day, forty/fifty-mile day.

DE: That's what we did. Our days were like twenty-five to forty miles a day. We never really had to work at the paddling to get down the river, it was simply to stay positioned in the river. That's all we had to do with the paddles.

TM: How close would you guys float together, the three boats?

DE: Within sight. We would go through the rapid. When the first boat was pretty much through at least the early part of the rapids, some of them are pretty long, the next boat would go. Just enough time so that we could come pretty close to having eyesight of the boat in front so if there was trouble we'd know it. I would say that was about it. It was not right on top of the boat but close enough to the boat in front of us. Now in Lava Falls, you see, somehow I remember the big boat was pretty far behind us. I don't know how that happened, but it actually was probably pretty good because when Dale... I do remember... I don't want to get ahead of you, you take me where you want to go with the conversation. I can tell you the Lava Falls incident when...

TM: Let's talk about Lava Falls now, let's do that. Did you scout it? What time of day did you get there?

DE: I would think that was... I would peg it at late morning. I don't know that, but I would peg it around late morning. Dale and I were the first boat to go through, in the small boat. Bill said later that I think they hit it a little bit left of center, but we hit it right on center and it just flipped right over.

TM: So you're the right-down-the-middle team and it's worked so far, so here we go!

DE: Yeah, that's right. I think there were some rapids where it was a little bit to the left of center, but it was down the middle basically for us to the extent that we could control the boat. This memory is vivid to me, we were over and surfaced and Dale was very close. We were both right with the boat, and Dale with eyes just staring, "I lost the paddle. I lost the paddle. I don't have the paddle." Then I was swept on and continued for quite a while down really rough water. It occurred to me, of all the people to lose, Dale was the only married guy on the trip. That was a shame because there was no thought that he could survive that. Then I worked very hard to get on the overturned boat and I couldn't get up on the boat. Finally it slowed down enough, there might have been a little backwash or something on the overturned boat, and then rather quickly got it off to the side. So I was on the water probably four miles at least and got it off to a little sandy beach area there. I was by myself and quite perplexed as to what in the world would come next or what I would do. I was just gathering my thoughts when around the bend or just up the river came a boat. It was the four-man boat with Bill Gibbs on that boat and they had Dale. Bill said later that he was thinking, "Oh my gosh what am I going to tell Duane's parents?" [laughs] because they thought I was a goner, you see. So it was quite a happy gathering there. Then the other two-man boat came through the rapids successfully and then came up. We then continued on from there.

TM: Remind me, you mentioned you guys had life jackets, what do you remember about your life jackets?

DE: Well, they were just typical life jackets. They were not the red ones with the things...but they were the life jacket of its day. You just, I guess, tied it up in the front. That's all there was to it. But it had a little bit of bulk to it which was a problem for me getting on the overturned boat. But a bigger problem for me was climbing up the side of the mountain on 205. That was my biggest scare because I am not very good with heights. [laughs]

TM: So before we get to 205, I don't want to leave Lava yet. The journal, and I think Richard Humble wrote up the journal, he mentioned that you guys got to Lava toward the end of the day.

DE: That could be, see I really don't know what time of day... I'm just thinking about... That could well be. Yep, that would be correct.

TM: He writes the walk down to the rapid to look at it and said, "We got to camp on top of this thing or we can run it and get it behind us."

DE: Okay, that could very well have happened, yep.

TM: Off you went. So you flipped in the two-man, but the four-man and the other two-man didn't.

DE: Didn't flip, no, they made it. And then, the miracle was that the four-man could pick up Dale, scoop him up. That to me was the real miracle of the trip. I don't know how others felt about that, but I did, and I think we all wondered at our good fortune.

TM: It's funny, because I think of it today and I think of paddle boats in Lava Falls. They'll flip and people will fall out. That's still happening today. But you guys were the first paddle boat to flip in Lava Falls and the first paddle boats to actually make a successful run, which is still happening today. So, it's pretty neat for you guys to do that.

DE: Yeah. It might be that I'm over estimating the whirlpools and the... But it's a long rapid. Well, you know the rapid much better than I do. For us, Lava Falls was the ultimate. That was the one we were looking forward to. We knew from the outset that that would culminate the trip, we thought. We thought if we made Lava Falls, we've made it. Of course that didn't turn out to be so true, but in any event that's the way we looked at it. We took it very seriously.

TM: So then what happened after Lava Falls?

DE: Oh golly, the only thing I remember after Lava Falls was 203...

TM: 205.

DE: ...where we got caught. Yeah, 205 where we got caught. That's the only memory I have after Lava Falls. Then coming off the water, I have some memory of that. Seeing the Hatch people and then getting down to Lake Mead and getting off the water where Bill's brother met us in a boat. But the only memory I have after Lava Falls, let's see... I don't remember that evening...

TM: Well, talk us through the 205 adventure. You guys met another river trip down there, is that right?

DE: Well, I don't remember that either. I remember them after 205, but not before 205. Although it's possible we met another river trip there, I don't have a memory of that. I don't recall it.

TM: I have the benefit, which I haven't emailed you yet, of the trip report from the other trip. [laughs] Their trip log. One of the people on that trip wrote a journal and I just discovered the journal. I'll email that to you just so you can see what their trip was all about. They weren't going as fast as you, and you guys came down on them and passed them.

DE: That's possible, but I just don't remember that.

TM: No, hang on, I think I've got it wrong. They ended up passing you in camp and they were set up... They knew you guys were going to run the rapid at 205 and they raced ahead of you guys to film you is how that worked out.

DE: Ah, well now that could be because I don't remember them until after 205. I don't even remember them hollering to us and saying, "Do this, do that," which apparently they did. They'd be hollering to Bill, but I was in Bill's boat. I just remember them afterwards and not with a lot of detail. I think we got on their boat and talked and they gave us some refreshments, and that's about... I don't remember the people. I was so focused on having come through 205. What I remember of 205 is that we didn't anticipate a problem at all and with the big boat we were caught in that backwater. You sent the drawing of that which was interesting. We were caught in the backwater and we were tumbling around. Bill and Dick got tossed out of the boat. For Bill to be tossed out of a boat that's not tipped was a little bit unusual. We quickly pulled them both back in. I don't remember Dick being upset particularly. I don't much remember that, but we did make the decision to climb the mountain. From that point on I was so focused on that, because we had these life jackets. We wanted to keep the life jackets and a canteen

and go up the side of the mountain, which for me was the scariest part of the trip because I just couldn't look down doing that without losing it. So I don't have a lot of memory of Dick and his problems. The exchange, apparently, between Bill and the people on the Hatch boat about that we should our cut boats loose so it could come out, maybe, rather than just leave it there. The question was, do we leave it there in case we can't get up the mountain then we come back down to our boat? Bill Gibbs made that decision I'm sure, I know he did. The idea was to cut it lose, which turned out to be the correct decision because it did eventually flip out of that little backwater and we reconnected. They grabbed it and then we came back down the mountain without going too far up it before we found a little path to come down. Another really lucky break, I think, for me because I'd of had a hard time coming back down the side of a mountain. But down the river, I don't know, I could handle that. But anyway, that's what I remember of that.

TM: So painting the picture, 205 mile rapid at the flow you encountered has an eddy, a sort of a continuing circular area, along this cliff on the right side of the rapid. The left side's a really big eddy on the left with a big sandy beach and on the right is this cliff. There's a long history, your boat wasn't the first one to get caught in there.

DE: I can imagine, because it catches you a little bit by... Well, we should know. We should've been to the left. I can imagine, I bet people have had some real struggles with that.

TM: Then to get out of the eddy, you guys tried and tried to get out and then decided that there was a shoot, a little kind of passageway up through the cliffs, that you guys could try to scramble up. But you maybe and someone else, I'm not sure, were sort of afraid of heights and hadn't done that kind of stuff before.

DE: That's right, that's me.

TM: Okay. So, you're kind of reluctant to leave the boat but nobody can get the boat out, so I can appreciate there was a little discussion "alright we've got to leave the boat and we're going to climb out."

DE: Yeah, I think so. I would have, I don't remember this, but I'm sure I would have really not wanted to climb the mountain. I think I was persuaded that that was the best option that we had, probably by Bill Gibbs, and that's what happened. I kind of remember that my life jacket kind of pushed me back from climbing the side of this thing. It wasn't a cliff, it wasn't that, but it was pretty steep and we had to work our way up. I was not a happy trooper but, on the other hand, because we came up on a path about a hundred feet up or something, it wasn't very far, then we lucked out.

TM: So once you go up like a hundred/hundred and fifty feet, there is this beautiful little trail that the burros walking around there... It's just this wonderful little flat trail that goes right back down to the river heading downstream.

DE: Right, exactly, exactly.

TM: That must've been quite a treat for you guys.

DE: Oh it was. For me it was huge. It's one of the things I remember most about the whole trip. [laughs]

TM: So the other two-man's were downstream. Apparently they saw the empty four-man coming along, went out and grabbed it and then you guys all kind of...

DE: All came together. [laughs]

TM: Together again. [laughs]

DE: Basically, that was about where it ended, I think, for us. We did have some trouble locating... Bill's brother flew in and spotted us and we spotted him. He was going to come up with a power boat up Lake Mead to get us. We had trouble connecting and we were joking about that. By this time we had run the rapids and I don't think anybody was too upset over the fact that we were having a little problem connecting with Bill's brother. His name's Edwin, I think, an older brother. But we did connect and found our way back to Lake Mead. After that I don't remember very much at all to tell you the truth. [laughs]

TM: I remember some pictures of people drinking cold beers.

DE: Oh, I can imagine.

TM: I'm sure you don't remember a whole lot as Edwin shows up with the beer and everyone's happy.

DE: Another thing in reading Dick Humble's notes some time back, that everybody was eager... Smoking cigarettes was a big deal. I mean, to get through this thing everyone had to have a cigarette. I know I didn't smoke and I know Bill Gibbs didn't smoke, but I suppose the rest of them did. Kiwi, I know, was the beer drinker. Oh my gosh. [laughs] So that was all fun when it was over, but that's about it.

TM: I think the cigarette smokers ran out of cigarettes, is that right?

DE: Yeah, they ran out of cigarettes. The fact that cigarette smoking was such a... One of the key provisions was cigarettes on the darn boat. [laughs] But that was the era back then.

TM: Yeah, it was.

DE: Most everybody smoked. That was a interesting little thing that was going on.

TM: Yeah, it was the norm of the day.

DE: Yeah, that's what we did. That was what they really wanted most was to have a cigarette. That's about it. I'm trying to think if there is any other color I can add, Tom, to the saga here. That I think pretty much covers it. The only one I had contact with after this... Quinn went his way, Wayne Quillin. I stayed in touch with Bill Gibbs. He, in fact, and his family some years later came and visited us in Washington D.C. and that was nice. He had a couple of sons, I think. And Barbara, who I liked an awful lot, she was Barbara Clark. Her grandfather was Jay Rubin Clark who was the grand something or other in that church. Barbara was quite a nice girl. But anyway, I never really stayed in touch with Bill for another 40 years since then. Boy, has it been a long time, I can't imagine. I'm saddened to think that most of these guys probably aren't there. Kiwi, I think, was older so he would be in his nineties now, so goodness knows where he is.

TM: You know you just mentioned something. Bill Gibbs' sons. Do you remember their names?

DE: No. Oh wow, if you could get one of those sons... couldn't you? I really don't think I have that any place. Incidentally you're inspiring me to dig for those photos that had a little bit of names attached to it. They were in the far, far corner of our attic. My ex-wife was even going through stuff in her attic looking for those photos. We found them and next to them was a bag with little photos of our kids growing up which I put together in a disc for them.

TM: Oh my gosh! Well, how wonderful is that!

DE: It wouldn't have happened if it weren't for you, look at it that way!

TM: Oh, that's fun, that's fun. I'm glad you did the digging, good for you!

DE: Yeah. I'll tell you, I had dug every closet, our basement, every...dug, dug, dug. Had all but given up and I thought that last little corner and wouldn't you know it, that's where it was. But anyways, that's how we found those pictures. I hope they were useful to you. Okay, anything else I can...?

TM: I think we've recounted the first paddle boat trip through Lava Falls in Grand Canyon in 1956. Duane, is there anything else about the river trip that you would like to bring up before we conclude the interview?

DE: Not too much. You mentioned this library in Los Angeles. I haven't gone online to pull up their webpage, would that be worth...? Huntington Library or something like that? Cause I have a son that lives in Los Angeles. We get out there once a year, then they come east. Is that a repository of note?

TM: It is a repository of note if you're doing research on 16th century Spanish letters from governors back to old Spain. The stuff that they've got there is just phenomenal. They also have, of course, this Marston collection. The gardens are incredible. They have a Gutenberg Bible and a Blue Boy painting. It's an amazing place. That's where you guys are, you're in there. [laughs] You will be for a long time.

DE: Now, you work with or are part of the Grand Canyon Historical Society, do you do that?

TM: No. I volunteer for them doing this little oral history program, so that's how this all works.

DE: That's your connection. Well, in a much smaller scale, I work with the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, which is fun. I'm a volunteer there and do some work with them.

TM: Great! So you know what saving history is all about!

DE: Yes, yes. I know what curatorial is all about and all that stuff. It's a huge thing for that museum. I mean, the way they document stuff about the Chesapeake Bay, which is wonderful. So what you're doing is good stuff. Well, I'll look forward to knowing when your book publishes so I can buy it on Amazon. [laughs]

TM: Duane Ekedahl, thank you so very, very much for a wonderful interview. Today is Tuesday, March 24th, 2020, this concludes a Grand Canyon Oral History Interview. My name is Tom Martin. Duane, thank you so very, very much.

DE: It's been my pleasure, Tom, I hope our paths will cross here at some point. If you're back to D.C let me know.