

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Peter Brown (PB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Peter recounts the eleventh segment of his tule reed boat trip, travelling from Ledges camp to Whitmore Wash camp

Date of Interview: January 16, 2021, Part 11

Method of Interview: In person at Whitmore Wash camp

Transcriber: Ashlyn Van Wyk

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Keys: Ledges camp, Colorado River, Whitmore Wash camp, Upset Rapid, tule reed raft, Lava Falls Rapid, Connon Bliss, Truffle Beach

TM: Today is Saturday, January 16, 2021. This is a Part 10 (actually Part 11) Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown. My name is Tom Martin. Good evening, Peter. How are you today?

PB: Real good, Tom.

TM: Great. We talked a couple days ago at Ledges camp on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. This evening we are at Whitmore Wash camp, at 188.5 roughly, also on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park. Let's pick up two days ago. We had gotten to Ledges, we had run Upset Rapid, and then what happened?

PB: Well, next day we had a 20-mile day that we went down to Stairway camp. Mostly flat water, couple smaller rapids in there. In terms of the tule boat, did just fine. No swims at all, a whole day of no swims.

TM: A 20-mile day with no swims. Pretty good.

PB: Yeah, and tule boat did just fine in terms of actually moving through the water well. No issues, no trouble whatsoever.

TM: Able to keep up with the other rafts and...

PB: Able to keep up with the other rafts. It is a little bit slower than the other rafts, it seems like. I mean, they can pull ahead of it. But otherwise, no. Still moving through the water very well.

TM: Okay. And so last night was at Stairway, 171 mile-ish?

PB: And then today was the exciting day.

TM: What happened today?

PB: Well, so we left Stairway, rowed eight miles down to 179 where there's a little rapid called Lava. Scouted that on the left. Most of the rafts and the Gem ran it on the left. We decided that probably for the kayaks—we had two kayaks in the water today, in addition to the tule raft—we were going to run it on the right. So I followed Connon. Not sure of Connon's last name.

TM: Bliss.

PB: Bliss, of course—Connon Bliss, in his kayak. He's run that several times. He actually did flip himself, he said. Turned over, but he got back right up. Anyway, so I followed his line, hit the right-hand entrance just perfect. Got through one wave and then the second wave basically shot me up. I'm pretty sure I slid off the back of the raft. I think I fell off the back. But I have a GoPro video of that, so I'll be able to confirm that when I get home. Swam through, was in the water—didn't let go of the raft—was in the water two other waves, climbed back on the raft, and by the tail waves I was back on and going fine.

TM: Paddling like nothing happened.

PB: Paddling like nothing happened. Made the eddy at Truffle Beach and pulled in no problem whatsoever.

TM: Okay.

PB: So otherwise, I think that was a pretty successful run, even though I really wanted to stay on the raft through the whole thing.

TM: Right. I'd say it was amazingly successful. Do you think the boat suffered any consequences? Because we ran eight miles below Lava Falls Rapid. Then afterwards, this afternoon, it ran normal like it normally does?

PB: It did, yeah. Pretty much.

TM: Okay. Same flotation, same...

PB: Same flotation. I do have to report that there's that rapid just above Whitmore, little riffle...

TM: With a bunch of rocks in it?

PB: No, no. Maybe 2 miles back.

TM: Oh, okay.

PB: There's actually a big wave in that and I just was not kind of expecting it, and I fell off of the raft in that one too. So took another little swim, but that was just me being asleep, I think, more than anything.

TM: Okay. And then crawled back in and kept going again.

PB: Crawled back on, and away we go. No, no, it was keeping up just fine. We got here at a nice hour; we still had some sun. And it was a gorgeous day, beautiful day.

TM: So you're kind of warming on me the idea that the boat might actually make it through the canyon.

PB: Oh, it's going to make it through the canyon. Of course it's going to make it through the canyon.

TM: What would be possible ways that it would... What might go wrong?

PB: Well, I still think that water saturation—and having the layover day—right now it's right on the beach, it's standing straight up, it's draining well. It'll be in the sun most of the day tomorrow. I think, again, waterlogging is going to be the potentially main problem. One other note on that is that actually

yesterday, day before—I can't remember. One of the last two camps we had, it was not completely vertical. It was more on a 30/40 degree slant on the side of the hill. I almost think it was lighter the next morning. It was really easy to pull down into the water. I was wondering if actually not completely vertical might be better, because then more of the surface could actually drain. Right now, any water at the top is going to have to drain all the way down to the bottom to...

TM: Through the fibers of all the plant below it.

PB: Exactly. No idea there. One of the things, Tom, I almost wish we...really, to make this a good experiment to have done...and particularly thinking that the waterlogging is going to be the potential reason why it couldn't go through the whole canyon, is next time you do this is if we could figure some way to weigh it every night and then in the morning. How much it has lost in terms of moisture.

TM: Right. From either standing up or laying it flat down?

PB: Right. We could experiment with different drying techniques. Because I do think in terms of structural integrity, you guys did a fantastic job with the... So far, I have not noticed any of the bundles coming loose or anything like that. Certainly there's strands that are off here and there, feet rubbing on it...

TM: Yeah. I guess the question I have is, would agave rope/braided agave rope, lots of it...

PB: Been as useful as...

TM: Been as useful as what we used, the braided nylon here, which was only, what eighth-inch diameter cord?

PB: Yeah, I mean, it's pretty small stuff.

TM: It's pretty small. Yeah. But wrapped around and around and around and around, basically we must have used a thousand feet of this stuff, I guess. I don't know, not a thousand feet, but certainly hundreds to do that. And so if you had...

PB: If you had that much agave.

TM: ...that much agave cord, it was the same deal.

PB: I've not hit any rocks that—occasional rock, but there's been no real major scrapes or anything like that. One thing would be being really careful getting it... It scraped across a couple of rocks to just pull it up on shore, type of thing, or pulling it down in the morning to get it in the water. So if one was really careful, I can't imagine the agave cordage wouldn't do just as well.

TM: Right. No, that would make sense. Well, we'll leave that for another day, and in the meantime the boat's going to get a day to dry out here, maybe two. And then we'll be back on the water again. But we do have a number of layovers coming up on this trip. Today is day 18 for us, and we have 10 more days to go 100 miles. So we will be doing a lot of stopping and putting the boat in the sunshine.

PB: Well, and another thing I really do think helps a lot is not having—going through rapids, there's a lot of water washing over the top surface, which tends to be—it's not in the water, so it's going to have a

lot more buoyancy than what's in the water. So that's going to help in terms of the overall buoyancy as well, I think.

TM: Is running smaller rapids, you mean.

PB: Yeah. Just not having the water washing over it as much.

TM: And of course I was thinking that pre-dam, actually pre-Hoover Dam, there would be a couple more rapids that you're not going to get to run—Separation and Lava Cliff down at Spencer Canyon. But it doesn't seem like the rapids are a big deal in this thing. You ran right side of Lava Falls today, and hopped back on, and off you went.

PB: Yeah, so far. I'll tell you, I said it today, but the bigger problem quite often—and I remember this in the rafts, too, running the rafts—is the eddies, just because it gets caught in those eddies. It's a little leaf on the waves there so goes where the eddy wants to take it.

TM: Okay. But you're able to power back out of those.

PB: I'm able to power back out of those.

TM: Yeah. Okay.

PB: Just takes a little bit more effort than... So, yeah.

TM: Well, with that, we will conclude what we think is Part 10. (actually Part 11)

PB: Yeah. Sounds good.

TM: Okay, Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park at Whitmore Wash. Today is Saturday, January 16th, 2021. Peter, thank you so very much.

PB: Thank you, Tom.