

## Pikes Peak River Runners

**Green River, Brown Spiders, Red Rocks  
Green River, Gates of Lodore  
May 1998**



*By Barb Deniston*



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The trip to the put-in was an event in itself.....major hailstorm this side of the Eisenhower tunnel followed by a brief but blinding snow-storm exiting the tunnel (even more "blinding: because we had the top down on the Tracker!) We pasted large smiles on our faces as we passed other cars so people would think we WANTED the top down in a snow storm because it was so much FUN...."Yeah buddy!" The run up Highway 318 was as adrenaline-filled as a good class IV rapid since the gas tank was on E, the sun was setting, and we were lost....so what's new? Thank God for Brown's store which, granted, was two miles past the turnoff to the put-in BUT...they had gas, beer and directions to the put-in that worked! Somewhere around 8:30 p.m. we found the campground as had everyone else except for Pete and Christina who arrived in the wee hours of the morning with diesels bellowing. Pete said his pass through camp was deliberate so we could all sleep better knowing that he and Christina had arrived. (Thanks again Pete!)

The fires were going and coffee brewing. The shuttle left pretty close to on-time and the rigging began. Excitement, anticipation and then the loo-ong wait for the planes to come through the high pass overhead.



Since Jesse and Tobey were going to hike instead of boat, we had the luxury of the Tracker to transport returning shuttle drivers the three miles from the dirt road landing strip to the put-in. We had no problem accommodating 10 people in and on the Tracker on the 1<sup>st</sup> run---- though the Ranger was not impressed with our ingenuity. Actually, the Ranger wasn't impressed with anything we did and was a far cry from the river rangers we generally meet. Jeff Henry was convinced he wasn't a "real" ranger and seriously considered testing him by telling him

the bow lines were flip lines. Discretion won out, however, and we focused our efforts on launching our flotilla of 10 oar-frames, 3 cat-a-rafts, 1 paddle raft and 2 duckies with the 32 people that made up their respective crews.

The up-river wind was strong right from the start and seemed to neutralize the 4000 cfs flow. Magnificent scenery towered overhead and included what appeared to be an enormous amphitheater carved into the canyon wall high on river right. We planned to eddy out to scout Upper Disaster Falls but missed the markers and ran the upper and lower falls with just a boat scout. Sure wish we'd have had a



camcorder to catch Jeff Henry and John Clune in their duckies. Their dance with the waves of Lower Disaster Falls looked as if it had been choreographed with every paddle stroke in sync. Beautiful...unbelievable and unlikely to be repeated...but a vision I won't soon forget. The run was clean for all 32 of us though we gave Tim Walker one demerit for drenching his crew in the tail waves.

We eddied out at Pot Creek on a clean white sand beach and set up camp in soft green grass among the trees fresh with new Spring foliage. Being ever concerned about the health of the "expeditioners", Phil Weisbach provided us with an unending supply of Margaritas ...to ward off scurvy. Dave and Cheryl assured us that we were burning 6000 calories a day so cheese, crackers, T-bone steaks, corn on the cob, biscuits, tossed salad and milk chocolate treats could be consumed with wild abandon....and they were. First day excitement, a hard



paddle against the wind, good company, great food and the babble of the river contributed to an early turn in and a good night's sleep for all.

Having bought off on the 6000 calorie theory, pounds of bacon, mounds of pancakes, gallons of coffee and mountains of fruit were devoured at breakfast. Dave, Cheryl, Keith and Laurie put Martha Stewart to shame. With Triplet Falls and Hell's



Half mile waiting, we were highly motivated to break camp, load gear and be on our way. The river had come up during the night and small trees and large bushes clogged the eddy creating a challenging eddy line...sort of like knowing you can jump a 3 foot barbed wire fence but wondering whether you'll tear the seat of your pants in the process.



Since we had missed the eddy before Upper and Lower Disaster Falls the day before, we had persuaded Pete to take the lead this time so we wouldn't miss the all-important eddy before Triplet Falls and Hell's 1/2 mile rapids.

With scouting complete, Dave volunteered to run first and take everyone's cameras so he could capture individual runs...which he did with amazing expertise...(an accomplished oarsman, chef and photographer...this is one person who COULD quit his day job!). Again, we all ran clean to include Keith who picked a line through an unbelievably narrow chute on river right and shot through the slot with the accuracy of a laser beam.



Now totally exhilarated but out of good whitewater for a while, we began looking for something fun to do. Pete had kicked back and was coasting with the current, Christina was teaching Suzanne to row, and Tasha discovered John Clune's water cannon in the midst of our gear. Bill said we should show compassion for Christina's "student", so our only option was to get Pete! A word of caution here to those who may boat with Pete in the future....he is actually an octopus disguised as a person....no kidding! He stayed on the oars PLUS loaded and shot water cannons north, south, east and west AT THE SAME TIME!!!....okay, slight exaggeration but only "slight"! In the midst of the carnage, Jim and Nancy hoisted a pirate's flag and the battle escalated to manic levels followed ultimately by a substantial lunch to replenish our depleted energy...(part of the 6000 calorie theory.)

Back on the river a short while later, we found ourselves awed by the mighty rock formations and the vastness of Steamboat Rock. The merging of the Yampa and Green Rivers was somewhat anticlimactic, i.e., very orderly like two lanes of traffic courteously merging into one instead of the chaos that results in a parking lot when multiple drivers converge on a lone parking spot. Our stop at Echo Park was anything BUT anticlimactic. Seeing the ancient petroglyphs was an almost religious experience. Who were these people? How did they create the petroglyphs? They are not cut deeply into the rock. How have they survived wind and rain? How miniscule our accomplishments seem in comparison to this "primitive" art.

On the way back to the boats, the wind quickened and the sky down river turned the color of soot...uh-oh! Tasha and Tim decided to duckie so Bill took over as Flipper's paddle captain and Jeff and John joined the paddle crew. This was Tasha's first time in a duckie and she did well- even managing to eddy out on her own after Tim left her mid-river to ferry a water-logged moth to the safety of a tree branch overhanging the river. We all had visions of gruesome headlines reading ..."endangered moth rescued while beautiful damsel is swept downstream never to be seen again..." Of course that didn't happen, but we almost had the unenviable opportunity of explaining in camp how you can flip a raft on flat water. In Whirlpool Canyon, the heavens opened, the wind blew at gale force, the rain drove horizontally up the canyon into our faces and the temperature dropped significantly. We were highly motivated to give Bill 100% in response to his call for the "all-forward" and were making good progress when all of a sudden we came to an abrupt stop, the left tube



dived and John executed one of the fastest "high-sides" I've ever seen. Guess that's what happens when you catch the lip of an invisible whirlpool lurking just beneath the surface. (It was either that or somebody invoked bad karma by copying someone else's video!) With the River gods somewhat mollified, on we went into the driving rain and freezing wind with no visibility to speak of. When asked if he could see, Bill's response was, "Let's hope this is flat water," and John offered his opinion that this experience was about a nine on the Suck-Meter.

We were thankful that Pete had gone ahead to the campsite and that his raft is bright yellow or there's a good chance we'd have missed our Jones Hole site. As we beached Flipper in the reeds to make room for the big rigs, the rain stopped, the sun came out and the angels sang....okay, skip the part about the angels, but the rest is true....just like in the movies only this was for real! Once the rest of our pod arrived, we set up a bucket-brigade formation, unloaded the boats, set up camp and were ready for another gourmet meal in no time at all. First, of course, we warded off scurvy with the limes in our Gin and Tonics. Actually, the very FIRST thing we ingested were milk chocolates hand-carried to each tent site by our trip leader, Dave, who wanted to ward off any ill effects from the recently completed "hypothermia" run. We all agreed that we would go on ANY trip led by Dave and that we would follow him (e.g. his food) to the ends of the earth. Once again, dinner was cooked to perfection from the angel hair pasta to the lemon chicken, garlic bread and strawberry shortcake.

An added bonus was the 27 inch trout Bill caught and filleted for our dining pleasure. Brian also landed what he thought was a twin to Bill's trout...only to find that one of the endangered Squaw Fish was on his line! Exciting but disappointing too.

Though we can't brag about seeing bears, cougars and the like, Ken showed us how to lasso tiny lizards using hollow reeds and fishing line. He and Amy temporarily adopted two little fellows who lay on their backs in their hands and let us stroke their blue-striped tummies while they clutched Ken and Amy's thumbs with their tiny fingered feet. Tim caught a big bull frog whose Adam's apple was enormous and foretold of a great "croak". Though Tasha and I tried to reassure Froggie with some gentle stroking, he was obviously terrified so Tim sent him on his way. Just before dark, Tobey and Jesse surprised us, having hiked 4 miles from the Fish Hatchery Road and hoping we had made camp as planned since they had only a sleeping bag with them (e.g. no tent and no food). Their arrival swelled our ranks to 18 for the march to Pete's camp where we presented him with a strawberry shortcake birthday cake, complete with candle (in the form of a butane fire-starter). Rumor has it that Pete was celebrating the big 50, but we didn't believe it...he doesn't look a day over 45!!!!



With the dawning of the third day came the sound of canyon wrens, the smell of coffee brewing and the orange-edged light leading the sun over the canyon rim. The wave trains of Moonshine beckoned....as did the long drive home so no time was wasted packing up after a "cold" breakfast which, by the way, included whipped cream in our coffee, Entemann's pastry...etc., etc. Another tough day of roughing it on 6000 calories!

Even Ralph and Melvin didn't seem to mind pumping up their tubes to counter a pin-hole leak. Of note here is that because we had one of the tiniest crafts, and because we arrived at the beach first and noted that the beaching space was limited, and because we thought the heavily loaded gear boats should have priority docking, we moored in the reeds. While this may have been chivalrous, gallant etc.....we will NEVER EVER do that again!!! Since this is a wilderness river, it seems the creepy crawlies find new things in their territory to be worthy of exploration and infiltration....infiltration being the operative word here. We hadn't gone 100 yards when Tasha discovered the first spider. We're not talking your garden variety house or garden spider...or even your readily identifiable Wolf, Daddy long-legs or water spider. Actually, until this was over, we wished we had Ken and Amy close at hand to tell us who the hitchhikers were or better yet, to allow us to hitchhike on their "cat". The critters were muddy brown and had bodies the size and shape of almonds with an overall diameter of about two inches. In response to Tasha's initial shriek, Bill grabbed the intruder and hurled him overboard giving us all much comfort until we approached Moonshine. I unclipped my helmet started to pull it on and reached up to my right ear to brush back a tickling hair....yeah...right! Another of the little beasts and yet another, all snuggled down in the foam padding. Oh Joy! This is one of those times that body surfing Lava would have been preferable! Had anyone been trying to read the hand signals from our boat, they wouldn't have known if we were signaling right, left, no problem, danger or abandon ship!

Before we reached Moonshine, we hit a vast expanse of water so wide that it felt like we were on a lake with no obvious downstream direction. We used this segment to practice slow, steady uniform strokes until that got boring....I think around the twentieth stroke?!?!. Then Tasha and I sat back like twin Cleopatras of the Nile and let the guys do the work. No doubt about it...I'm no women's libber...(I just want equal pay for equal work). Moonshine was everyone's favorite. The waves were big, Tim's calls flawless and the run GREAT fun. We would have liked to go back and run this one again and again....kind of like a much longer Kamikaze on the Arkansas at 4000 cfs...It just doesn't get much better! Believe it or not, Ralph and Melvin had stashed some cookies in case energy flagged before we made our lunch stop. Again, the high calorie concept kicked in and we paddled over to help them consume the allotted BTUs.



At some point, we're not sure where, we noted that Keith's boat was upside down about a half mile downstream. Tim called the all forward and Brian set cadence for a fast stroke. We paddled our hearts out in an effort to reach Keith and Cheryl when much to our amazement, they flipped that mighty load mid -

stream and were back on board in under two minutes. Though Tim or Bill can flip "Flipper" in no time flat, we had never seen a fully loaded gear boat flip and be righted in mid stream. We figured Keith and Cheryl set

some kind of record and we'd bet on them in ANY competition! River left had a nice eddy where we took off to get the swimmers warmed up and....you guessed it....to eat lunch. From this point to the final takeout was only a few more miles and some mild water...then unload, pack up and head for home with special memories no camera or wordsmith can capture and Dave's parting reminder that the trip isn't over until we're all safely home.