

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Peter Brown (PB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Peter recounts the third segment of his tule reed boat trip, travelling from North Canyon to Buck Farm

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Method of Interview: In person at Buck Farm

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TM: Today is January 2nd, 2021. This is Part 3 of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown. My name is name is Tom Martin. Good evening, Peter. How are you today?

PB: Pretty good, Tom. How are you? Gorgeous evening.

TM: Good. I was on the dish crew tonight, and you were on the dish washing crew tonight. Poor guy came in after us. And so after all that was done...

PB: Every dish in the whole pantheon there that was... Anyway, never mind. *(laughs)*

TM: We are camped at Buck Farm Canyon, somewhere around mile 40 on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon and you are still paddling a tule reed raft.

PB: Forty miles down the Canyon and it's still going strong.

TM: And yesterday you ran what's called the Roaring Twenties. How did that go yesterday?

PB: The Twenties were interesting, for sure. I did swim—I think three times, maybe. The raft does absolutely wonderful, but if it gets a little sideways on like the second of two or three big waves—the second or third one it tends to veer off a little bit. Now, I've been able to hold on. My trick on running any type of rapid right now is actually to drop my legs on either side. I have extreme balance that way. It's really a very, very stable craft. But if it does hit sideways on a bigger wave, it will flip.

So far I've been able to hold on to the raft each time, get it flipped back over on my own, pretty much. One time we did have Fiona came over—the rescue kayaker with me did come over and give me a hand getting it back over. And then I've been able to get back on. So no problems.

TM: And that's Fiona Gormley. Okay, so yesterday we did rapids like 24-mile—short sharp drop—24-and a-half-mile, 25-mile. Now at 25-mile, you had come out of the tule raft, you'd gotten back on the tule raft, and in the tail waves it kind of took you over to the wall there.

PB: *(laughs)* Yes, and that was another thing. Even though I had Tom Martin in the boat saying, "Stay off the damn wall," I got onto the wall.

TM: And that wall is where Peter Hansborough and—oh, what's his name—Richards, drowned...

PB: I can kind of believe it.

TM: ...on the Brown trip, the fateful Brown trip of 1889.

PB: I mean, I was in the water trying to push out because the raft was actually going to go underneath an overhang at one point. So I slipped off of the raft and then was trying to fend it off of the wall. It just was an undercurrent, almost, there, and just kept us stuck there for a few minutes. It wasn't taking it downstream; and then I can't remember exactly how I got out of there. Somebody came over and gave me a hand, I believe.

TM: Maybe Fiona, in the kayak?

PB: No, I think it was basically it just sort of got spit out the other end. But the nice thing was, having... That tule kayak is very buoyant so just being able to hold onto that. Finally there was enough where the current let us go, and I was able to climb back on at that point.

TM: And then Cave Springs, Tiger Wash, you know, the rest of the Twenties down, and then...

PB: I know in 24 the raft flipped but I was able to climb back on that one no problem.

TM: Okay. Alright. And yesterday you and I did a little work—was it yesterday morning, only?

PB: Yeah.

TM: (*laughs*) Did a little work on the tule. What did we do and how did it work?

PB: Yeah, so one of the problems was that my weight, particularly going through the rapids, was kind of squishing the middle bundle so we added a piece of driftwood board that we found. Wrapped that around a bit to all three bundles and then put the seat on top of that. That helps a lot, I think. Now the other thing I did this morning was actually move the seat forward. I redid the straps on the seat, the board that we had, and then moved the whole thing forward about six inches.

TM: How did that help?

PB: That helped quite a bit. The big thing I'm worried about the most is going to be buoyancy on this thing. I think that it's going to get too waterlogged at a certain point and this helps to distribute a little bit more of the weight across the whole thing. But it's still starting to ride low in the water. Another thing that we've been doing is leaning it up as steep as we can get. We've got it about 90 degrees straight up and down right now and there was a lot of water draining out of that thing when we did that.

TM: Which is a traditional drying overnight...

PB: Method.

TM: ...method. Okay.

PB: And the other thing is we've got a layover coming up and if we can keep it out of the water for a day, hopefully get it in the sun, I imagine it'll be right back to where it was. So far the integrity of the wrapping that you and Hazel did on this is just absolutely wonderful. Nothing's falling apart on it at all.

TM: Okay. Anything else you'd like to add?

PB: It is a blast to ride, I tell you.

TM: *(laughs)* You sure look like you're having a lot of fun. Alright. Well, that will conclude Part 3 of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown. This is at Buck Farm camp. Today is the 2nd of January, 2021, thank you very much. Thank you, Peter.

PB: You're welcome, Tom. Thank you.