

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Peter Brown (PB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Peter recounts the fifth segment of his tule reed boat trip, travelling to Basalt camp

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Method of Interview: In person at Basalt camp

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TM: Today is January 6th, it's Wednesday, 2021. This is a Grand Canyon oral history. I believe this is Part 4 [actually Part 5] with Peter Brown. My name is Tom Martin. We are at a big sand dune here at Basalt camp, at 70 mile. We've had a layover today, which means we've gone hiking and hung out at camp and taken care of camp chores. I did spend today putting some more knots on lots of knots, tying it up a little tighter in a couple spots. Pete, we haven't talked in a couple days, and I think you ran some rapids yesterday, like Tanner and Lava Chuar, Carbon—which wasn't much—

PB: Nankoweap.

TM: That's right. We started at Nankoweap, didn't we? How'd that day go?

PB: Pretty good. The only time that I flipped the raft was in Nankoweap, about five minutes after we left camp—not even that, three minutes after we left camp. There's that big rock at the top of the rapid, which I told myself to pull right, pull right. I was going right, but it was heading right for the rock. So then I decided, well, let's go left and I flipped on the tail wave off of that rock. But otherwise, got right back up. Stacy, in her duckie, was right behind me and she flipped too, so she was rescued by Hazel. But otherwise, no, yesterday was fine. We had a great time. It was a nice run down here.

TM: How did you do in Tanner? Tanner's the biggest rapid you've run so far?

PB: I'd say House Rock.

TM: House Rock.

PB: Yeah.

TM: Well, it depends on where you go.

PB: Yeah, exactly. House Rock, so far I think, has the biggest waves that I can remember. Tanner was pretty good. Tanner did no problem at all. I think that I've got the technique down pretty well in terms of straddling it; legs off the side; really learning to lean into the waves a lot more, using body motion. The paddle can help, just as a regular kayaker you can push off of a wave with the paddle and that helps with the balance.

TM: Helps to brace, in a way.

PB: And brace, in a way. One thing I did learn, yesterday, or the day before—yesterday, yeah—in House Rock...and of course I hadn't realized this before, but the seat... So we have the inflatable seat on it that

is from a duckie. Only the back is inflated right now, the bottom is pretty much deflated, and I'm sitting right on the board that we put across the three bundles—strapped to the three bundles. But the one thing I hadn't even realized was, I got the seat on the wrong side and that actually helps to flip the boat over. I can just push the seat underneath the boat and that gives it extra buoyancy to actually then when I pull it and bring it over, it comes right over. No problem at all.

TM: So the seat is helping you right the boat if it flips.

PB: Exactly. And getting on is not a problem at all. Once I have it back right side up, climbing on is fairly easy. Just kind of flop over the top of it and then swing my legs up.

TM: So what would it be like to flip without the seat?

PB: It's a good question. I think it could still be turned over fairly easily. I'm realizing that one time when I did have issue pulling it back over, I think the seat was on the wrong side. I think I was working against the seat, trying to... It was on my side and I'm trying to pull it. All I need to do is just push the seat back underneath the boat, and then it pops right back over no problem. But yeah, I think...

TM: I'm mean, traditionally, you wouldn't have a seat.

PB: No.

TM: And so how would that impact the paddling?

PB: And you know, it would be fine without the seat, I do believe. I think we could do it no problem. I mean, right now the seat is just pure comfort for me. It's very easy rowing the boat in the long flat stretches that we have occasionally. It's nice just to have that back rest to lean back against.

TM: Okay, alright. Then, when you flip it back over, how do you manage control of your paddle and the boat?

PB: Just keep hold of the paddle the whole time. Once I got it back over, I can hold onto the paddle, still climb up on top. Quite often, I'm turning it over still in the waves if I flip at the top of the rapid. So for example, Nankowep is a perfect example of that. There's still quite a bit more to go at the top rock there. I am a little bit worried on places like Hermit—or not Hermit, but Hance—some place where there's a fairly long stretch that if I flip at the top, if I can get the raft back over and straightened up again, everything might be okay. If I can't, then it might be a long effort trying to get it flipped over.

TM: A long swim.

PB: A long swim.

TM: Yeah.

PB: But we'll see. I'm excited for it. And the only other thing that I want to report is... I don't know why I didn't say this the very first time, but this one has to do with the aesthetics of the raft. It smells good.

TM: It smells good.

PB: Going down the river, you get that waft of tule reed as we're going. And it is...

TM: Kind of a sweet grass kind of a smell?

PB: Sweet grass smell.

TM: Nice.

PB: You said you remember it from cutting it and probably working with it. It's a very pleasant...

TM: It does have a pleasant... Yep, pleasant odor.

PB: Yep. Can't say that about a rubber raft, for sure.

TM: *(laughs)* Certainly can't. Cool. Well, with that, this will conclude these little mini Grand Canyon oral histories on the Colorado River here as we stare at the tule reed boat. I should also mention that today was a good day to stand the boat up on its end, and it spent all day standing up on its tail, hopefully drying out a little bit. Hope for the best. Alright, thank you very much, Pete.

PB: Sure thing, Tom. Thank you.