

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Peter Brown (PB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Peter recounts the seventh segment of his tule reed boat trip, travelling from Grapevine camp to Schist camp

Date of Interview: January 8, 2021, Part 7

Method of Interview: In person at Schist camp

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TM: Today is January 9th, 2021 (actually January 8). We are at Schist camp. Do you know what river mile this is?

PB: Haven't seen the map in a while.

TM: It's got to be in the 90s, maybe 97 or 96, on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon National Park. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History interview. I believe this is Part 6 [actually Part 7] with Peter Brown. My name is Tom Martin. Good evening, Peter. How are you today?

PB: Pretty good, Tom. Gorgeous evening this evening.

TM: Yeah, we're watching the sun up there near the Abyss in the snow and we're down here in our hats, and it's cool. But today you took the little tule raft from Grapevine camp at river mile 87, and you ran Grapevine Rapid, and you ran 83 ½ Mile rapid, and you ran Zoroaster. And then you ran to Phantom Ranch, and the ranger came down and looked at the boat, and then went down and ran Horn Creek, and then ran Granite, and then ran Hermit. And here we are at camp. Please recount your day.

PB: Fantastic. Above Phantom, absolutely no problems with any of the rapids. Grapevine in particular was a lot of fun. It's a long rapid. Didn't fall off. Well, the first time I fell off today was actually in an eddy, and that's the first time that I lost the boat, actually. I let go of the boat. The eddy down below Pipe Springs Rapid—there's a really tight eddy over there. I got stuck in it.

TM: That's on river right.

PB: River right. And that's one of the problems is when it really gets that suction and the boat just sort of disappears from underneath me. And that's what happened this time. I slid off and the boat went one direction and I went the other direction. So I did lose the boat at that time. You came over in the Gem and were sort of corralling the boat. I got up on shore. Then that boat was in the eddy, so when it came back around I just jumped on it and was back onboard.

TM: And to be clear, I didn't touch the boat. I was just running safety in the eddy, just to see what would happen.

PB: It was really nice, yes. Very comforting to have you there, for sure.

TM: But you managed it. How many times did you go around in that eddy? (*PB laughs*) This is a very small eddy on river right. There's two of them; they're back to back as the river makes these bends just below Phantom Ranch a little ways. Did the boat kind of go around the eddy a couple times? Did you get to the boat, but couldn't get on the boat?

PB: No, I think—let's see. Yeah, it was about 180 degrees opposite from me at one point and then I thought, well, I'm not going to catch it. And we were both going around and around. Then I decided, well, let me just swim for shore. So I did. But that was about the time that you got there in the Gem. At that point I figured, well, either you'd corral the boat, or I saw it was coming back around towards me. So I just waited for it to get there and then jumped on. So it was probably about three times that the boat went around and a couple times for me. Once I got back on the boat, it was pretty easy, actually, to get back out into the stream.

TM: Out of the eddy.

PB: Out of the eddy. That's the thing with those eddies, is that sometimes they're pretty powerful and sometimes they slack off.

TM: Okay. And so then we stopped at Horn Creek to scout. What was your Horn Creek run like?

PB: Horn Creek was a blast! Boy, that first wave—you just drop off the tongue, and then you hit that. And then after that it's just smooth sailing.

TM: Smooth sailing, he says. (*laughs*)

PB: Smooth sailing. So Granite was another story. We stopped to scout Granite. I went down on the lower scout to see if there was a possibility for a left-hand run and decided that probably the best was to just go ahead with the right-hand run down the tongue.

TM: And run the meat of it.

PB: Yeah, along with everybody else. There just didn't seem to be any real drops or anything that the tule boat wouldn't be able to handle. So did that. Did fall off in the rapid, climbed back on within... In fact, I would consider it almost more of a slide off the raft, not a real fall off. The raft didn't flip or anything like that. By the way, I forgot to mention, the raft did flip in the eddy, so I had to get that turned back over again before I could climb back onto that one. This one was more of a slide off. I was off the raft for I'd say a second or two, and then able to climb back on...

TM: Right back on again.

PB: ...and finish up the rapid in pretty good shape. And then we get down to Hermit. We didn't scout Hermit, but boy that Hermit is fun! Oh, that was a blast! Stayed on the entire way, just balancing and...

TM: Did you get on the big ride?

PB: Got on the big ride. There's that one wave...

TM: Way down in the little trough and way up in the big wave. Wow.

PB: Got videos of all three of those: Horn, Granite, and Hermit. So we'll see if that's...

TM: With your GoPro on your helmet.

PB: Yep. Hopefully those will come out.

TM: Alright. And have you noticed the little boat riding lower in the water today than before?

PB: (*laughs*) Well, first of all, we're in some pretty fast water, so it's not like I've really had to row hard to get out of anything, other than that eddy. I think it's riding lower in the water, but it's hard to tell. It's still pretty buoyant, still going through everything, still able to punch through the waves. Rides pretty well so no complaints.

TM: Anything else you noticed about the day that went well or didn't go well with that?

PB: Boy, it sure seemed like everybody had great runs. We had a lot of just good times it seemed like. Everyone was having a lot of fun in some of those rapids, particularly Hermit.

TM: Good.

PB: I think everybody was a bit surprised at how fun Horn was, just going left of the Horn there. Other than the first big wave, which everybody seemed to just enjoy going through, after that it was a nice ride.

TM: Well, I'm certainly amazed that the little boat has made it this far. It looks a little beat up, but otherwise it looks like it's hanging together.

PB: It doesn't look like it's gone through 90 miles of—or whatever it is—of Grand Canyon rapids and stuff like that. We'll see. We were able to send a message to Peggy at Lees Ferry this morning when we stopped at Phantom that we're still going with it. So I hope that she's a little surprised as well.

TM: This is Peggy Kohlar, who is the Lees Ferry ranger who checked us in and allowed us to take the boat downriver. By now I think all of us thought that the little boat would be on the back of a raft going downstream, but it's not. Pete is just piloting it right down the river and taking the meat of all the rapids so far. And here we are. So tomorrow is Crystal and we'll see what happens there. And the Gems down below there. And we'll talk again.

PB: Sounds good.

TM: Alright. Thanks, Pete. This will conclude Part 6—what we think is Part 6—[actually Part 7] Grand Canyon Oral History interview at Schist camp on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. It is what we think the 9th of January, 2021. [Actually January 8, 2021] And Pete, thank you very much.

TM: Thank you, Tom.