

Transcription: Grand Canyon Oral History

Interviewee: Peter Brown (PB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Peter recounts the twelfth segment of his tule reed boat trip, travelling from Whitmore Wash to Trail Canyon

Date of Interview: January 21, 2021, Part 12

Method of Interview: In person at Trail Canyon

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Keys: Trail Canyon, Colorado River, Whitmore Wash, tule reed raft, 205-Mile Rapid, 209-Mile Rapid

TM: Today is Thursday, January 21, 2021, and this is Part 11 (actually Part 12) of a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Peter. How are you today?

PB: Real good, Tom. Beautiful day today. Nice and warm for sure, the warmest day we've have.

TM: It is. You're sitting next to me in shorts and a shirt. And people washed their hair today.

PB: Took baths.

TM: Very nice day. We are today at the mouth of Trail Canyon. This is at river mile 219.5, in Grand Canyon National Park on the Colorado River. This is our day 23 of our 29-day river trip—our 30-day river trip; I got to look at the math here. The last time we talked, we were at river mile roughly 189 at Whitmore Wash, where we did a layover. And we ran from Whitmore all the way to the bottom of 209 Mile Rapid. We did a layover there and today we have moved down to where we are here at Trail Canyon, for another layover. So tell me about running the tule boat for a 20-mile day from Whitmore to 209.

PB: Oh, we've had a couple of other 20-mile—well, one other 20-mile day, and one 17- or 18-mile day. Tule does fine on those long days. It keeps up with the rafts no problem, runs the riffles no problem. The biggest problem I've had so far on any of the sort of flatwater days we've had—the rapids aren't that bad, it's the eddies after the rapids, or even after the riffles that can kind of suck the boat under, in some cases, and stall it, for one thing, and in some cases even knock me off, just because the boat's going one way, and I'm going the other way, it seems like. But otherwise, it's still doing fine. Structurally, it's very sound. I think these layover days are having a very positive effect in terms of buoyancy on it. It doesn't seem to be losing any more freeboard than it's had in the past. It's been pretty stable for the last several days it's been in the water.

TM: Yes, I noticed that, that it's amazing to see the boat, look at it, and go, hmm it's floating at the same waterline it's been at.

PB: And keeping my eye. Of course, staring at the front of the boat all the time, it's got a little bit of an upturn to it and that is still out of the water. There's no question that it's... It's about the same...

TM: Right. The bow and the stern are out of the water.

PB: It's about the same as it's been for most of the trip. I think that's been my biggest surprise, is how buoyant that tule reed really is.

TM: Really is, yeah.

PB: It's not been in the water every day, but it's certainly been in the water for most of the—what 21 days, 22 days, whatever—23 days we've been out.

TM: Right. You ran a fairly large rapid a couple days ago in 205 Mile. What was that like?

PB: Pretty good. The last few rapids have been just fine in terms of staying on the boat; boat performing very well; going through the waves no problem at all. Again, I've fallen off, I think, twice since we talked last, and both times it was in eddies.

TM: Okay. Again, you hit the eddy fence, the boat goes one way, you're going another, and over you go.

PB: You get that eddy fence where one portion is going down. That sucks that one bundle under and then the other bundle just flops up so it's trying...

TM: So it kind of rolls you off.

PB: Rolls me off, yep. Doesn't flip the boat, but rolls me off and then just climb right back on and keep going.

TM: As we now are at 219.5 mile, we have 60 miles to go—a little less than 60 miles—to exit the Grand Canyon, and only 40 miles of rapids left.

PB: Yeah.

TM: When we started this at Lees Ferry, you were very optimistic that the boat was going to make it (*PB laughs*), and I was not. And I still have my doubts. But you seemed—I mean, are you just an optimistic guy (*PB laughs*), or what was it about this little boat that you said, "Oh, it's going to make it just fine"?

PB: Well, I think it was. Even leaving Lees Ferry, it seemed to be very structurally sound. So I think our questions were going to be whether it would survive some of the rapids.

TM: The pounding in the rapids.

PB: I've hit some big waves sideways with that thing and it's held together no problem at all. And then the second question, of course, was going to be the buoyancy. That's been my concern all along. But so far, no, I was very optimistic when we left Lees Ferry just because, man, it was riding high then so it seemed like it was going to do it, Tom. (*TM laughs*) And it's still going to do it (*laughs*).

TM: Well, I don't doubt you anymore, Peter Brown. (*PB laughs*) I just need that optimism and we'll see what happens.

PB: Yep.

TM: Anything else about the boat? It looks like, again, where your feet are on the boat you've sort of worn through the outer band, and now it's starting to tear up the inner band just a little bit.

PB: Yeah, I would say that the boat is definitely showing some wear. I mean, it's not like it's pristine when we left Lees Ferry. There's definitely pieces that are kind of pulled out; whether that's waves or rocks or whatever. I've certainly not tried to hit any rocks at all, and I think I've been pretty successful at that. But dragging it up on the beach, all of those kinds of things, it's going to get a little wear, and certainly where my feet were. It would have been nice, probably, to think about maybe some extra padding there; an extra board, maybe a bundle of sticks or something like that, that would be more resistant than the reed itself.

TM: Okay. And I also noticed that the bindings are starting to slide around a little bit. Some of the bindings now have moved considerably and are loose.

PB: Yeah, yeah. Which is another thing. I mean, if we're going to try to take it on down to Mexico, I think we could probably tighten those up, but...

TM: Down to the Sea of Cortez.

PB: Exactly.

TM: Yeah. We'll do that next trip.

PB: Okay.

TM: Anything else you want to mention here?

PB: No. It's been a blast, Tom. I thank you for inviting me to do this. *(laughs)*

TM: Well, thank you for paddling the thing, Peter Brown. And with that, this will conclude Part 11 (actually Part 12) Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Peter Brown. My name is Tom Martin. Today is Thursday, January 21st, 2021. This is day 23 of a Grand Canyon river trip on the Colorado River through Grand Canyon National Park. We are at Trail Canyon, 219.5 mile. Thanks, Pete.

PB: Thank you, Tom.