

APA-tizer #14

7/2/95

I can write about Summer Fun. Summer is my favorite season, when it's not Autumn, Winter or Fall. I do lots of outdoors stuff (in fact, thanks to modern technology, I'm writing this *outside*. I love having a laptop.) Just last month, six of us went paddling down the Colorado. That kind of thing makes a good yarn, and besides, someone needs to document it. That way, future fen will have evidence of our heroic deeds.

When I started writing the story of *Fans Upon the Colorado*, I didn't think it would be more than a couple of pages. I mean, after all, six of us launched in three canoes, and we spent three days floating and paddling down a calm river. We camped on the banks, ate food and enjoyed ourselves.

Yea, that'll be only a couple of pages...not!

So far I have the story up to the first night, and I'm working on Don and Glade's marsh adventure. Tom promised to write up the firewood collection story. Even though I was one of the two collecting the wood, I don't think I can do justice to the tale. Imagine the two of us (Glade and me) climbing a *very* steep basalt talus slope and hurling driftwood forty feet down to the ground. In retrospect, I suppose that was a dangerous thing to do, but that's where the firewood was.

A small thing kept happening during the trip, but will not one that will be in the final draft. I only include it here because you all are familiar with my environmental tirades.

Every now and then, usually at the campsites, someone would say "Hey, that's a spider, kill it!" or "Look...there's a

fish, quick Glade, catch it." I can't believe I let comments like these upset me, but I couldn't help think, "Why can't they just look at the critter and appreciate wildlife for what it is?"

One time I even blew up at Don when he challenged Glade to catch a small blue-gill fish that swam between our docked canoes.

"Catch it and kill it! Is that all you can think of, Don?" I ranted. "Why can't you just admire the subtle colors and the sleek lines of the fish."

"Jesus Christ, Ken, chill out," Tammy soothed. "Don't go all environmental on us now. Don's just kidding."

I did try to relax after that. The group wasn't seriously impacting the river and we were even picking up other camper's trash. I don't ever expect another person to be as awe-struck by Nature as I am, but every now and then, I like to spend time in the wilderness with people who wouldn't even think about joking about stuff like that - not because they're PC, but rather that they don't even think along those lines.

Tammy calls me "the guy who points stuff out." I like that description. I suppose it's because I have a tendency to play tour guide when I get outdoors. I always try to point out interesting things. (Ask me sometime this winter to point out the star Betelgeuse. I'll also explain that astronomers think it's so close to going supernova that it may have already done so. At 200 light-years away, the explosion could have taken place anytime since the Revolutionary War, but we won't know about it until the light reaches us. Now wasn't that interesting?)

On Wednesday, three days hence,

Aileen, Jazz and I are heading off to the wilds of Beaver Dam State Park. It's about 120 miles north of here and is appropriately wild. Aileen may not share my fanaticism (same root as fan) for the environment, but she accepts my mania for what it is. I don't know how Jazz feels about it, he's just a good dog...

Fans Upon The Colorado

by Ken Forman

Herein lies the tale of six intrepid adventurers. Tom Springer, Tammy Funk, Don Miller, Glade XXXX, Erica Grong and I set out one Friday morning seeking high adventure and excitement. Five of us were veterans of at least one other canoe trip down part of the mighty Colorado River. This trip we planned to travel a stretch of river that straddles the Grand Canyon National Park and Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Twelve miles of easy camping and moderate canoeing.

The Launch

"Yep, it's a flat tire," Erica confirmed.

"So what now?" Tom asked.

"Don't change it," she advised, "the last thing a car thief wants to do is change a tire. Leave it."

With that sage advice, we launched our canoes into the still, warm waters of the bay. With beautiful weather, only a slight breeze, and half a day's paddling before us, we knew things were looking up. Erica and I started with light, easy strokes to limber up our shoulders.

Fifteen minutes later I stopped to take a look around.

"Hey, why'd you stop?" my paddle partner wanted to know.

"Sidebar!"

"What do you mean 'sidebar'? We just got started."

"I know," I answered, "but I want to take a look at the map and wait for the rest of our group."

It's amazing how quickly Ms Grong responded to the break. I hadn't finished my sentence before she stowed her paddle, grabbed her "Carbo-pump," and started fishing for a lighter. I appreciate a canoeing partner who is as quick to slack-off as I am. Besides, had I turned around to check the party's progress, I would have stopped anyway. Don and Glade hadn't launched yet. I sat there and selected stuff to sip. And as I sat there, sipping stuff, the morning's events went through my mind.

The Flashback

Tammy Funk and Tom Springer showed up on my doorstep at just after 9am. Since Tammy looked so fresh eyed and pleasant, and since Tom carried a box of doughnuts under his arm, I invited them in. Good mornings went around and Tammy promptly reclined on my futon; her eyes closing even before her head fully rested on the bolster.

I offered Tom a Coke and Tammy some coffee. Tom said "Sure," Tammy just mumbled "Ungh." I took both to be affirmative.

"Hello, Huh-huh," Erica's husky voice called through my front screen door.

"Come in and have some breakfast."

"Am I late?" she asked.

"It's only nine-fifteen or so. It's early," someone who wasn't Tammy said.

"Is Don here, yet?" Erica asked.

"No, not yet. I told him to be here at eight. I figured he'd be about an hour late, so he's actually only about fifteen minutes late."

I'm usually late to events. The phrase *KST* (Ken Standard Time) got coined to describe my penchant for showing up twenty minutes late. On the other hand, Don Miller is often hours late. He's a great guy and I love having him around, but the only way to keep from strangling him is to plan on his tardiness.

Sure enough, he showed up at 9:23, right on *KST* time.

We packed Tom's Rodeo and my pick-up, loaded up with ice and were on the road by ten o'clock.

The launch point beckoned us from over one hundred miles away, and the mighty Colorado River was just beyond that. Three hours later found us at Pierce Ferry, unloading the canoes and equipment. (Pierce Ferry is, by the way, the spot where all the Grand Canyon river runners and rafters pull out.)

We left my truck a few miles away at South Cove. A few miles away by car, but twelve miles by canoe. It'd wait there patiently while we took three days to travel that twelve miles. Three days of Nature - warm water and wildlife - and partying - beer, wine, food, sidebars.

When Tom, Tammy, Erica and I left to deposit my truck, we figured Don and Glade would have plenty of time to unload the canoes from the trailer, pack their canoe and be ready to launch by the time we'd returned. Our plan was partly successful. The canoes were on the ground.

We weren't in a hurry though, so I took it all in stride. Erica and I loaded our vessel, and started lashing the equipment down. Tom and Tammy's boat needed only a few added bungee cords to

complete its preparation, Don and Glade should be only minutes away.

The Scouts

Tom and Tammy's canoe glided up to our's.

"Why the delay?"

"Take a look at the shore. They haven't left yet."

"Not yet?" Tammy wanted to know.

"What's taking that boy so long?"

"Well, you know, he's Don."

We consulted the map to decide which way to go. My optimistic memory just knew that we'd know how to get where we wanted to get to. The bay, and the marsh, had other ideas.

I think we've all seen too many movies where the heroes forge across a swamp, hacking aside the flora with a machete and fending off various poisonous fauna.

"Maybe there's a way through the marsh." I suggested optimistically.

"Is that how we get out of this bay?" Tammy asked.

"The main exit is to the north, that way," I said, pointing to the left.

By this time, Don and Glade's boat seemed to be gliding through the water so we were all finally underway.

"Which way do we go after we get out of the cove?" someone wanted to know.

"After we get out of the cove, we head upriver - providing the current's not too strong - until we get to a good campsite," I said, indicating our route on the map in front of us. "We're twelve miles from South Cove, where my truck is; we should be able to do that in three days, easy. The first canoe trip, we went thirty-four miles in three days, so this'll be a

snap. If we stay near the banks of the Colorado, we might be able to paddle against the current and make it a couple of miles upriver. There's a waterfall, and a bat cave (please, no Batman jokes) that I'd like to see, and besides, the Grand Canyon is only a couple of miles away. If we make it there, we'll all be able to say that we'd canoed the Grand Canyon."

About this time, the third canoe joined our flotilla, and Tom quickly recapped our discussion. (I seem to recall that Tom actually grunted something guttural and gestured with a clawed hand in the general direction of the marsh. He also succeeded in handing Don a pair of hemostats while the canoes bobbed on a small swell. Tom may be an ape, but he's a communicating, tool using ape.) After some discussion, Don and Glade volunteered to scout a way through the marsh and report back, while the four of us started moving north along the marsh's border.

We paddled for a little while, keeping an eye on the scouts. Periodically they would disappear behind a particularly dense clump of vegetation. The further we got, the more certain we were that our scouting party would return with news of an impassable sand bar.

Eventually we got to the end of the spit; the mighty Colorado River flowing by us, from right to left, as quickly as any respectably sized river might flow. My hopes of canoeing upriver drifted away on the current, but optimism and determination can overcome any obstacle. Or so the theory goes. The other canoe in the party glided up to ours for a confab.

"Now what?" asked Tom.

"Well, we want to head upstream, and if Don and Glade made it through the marsh, they'll be waiting for us. If they're behind us, they'll catch up," I logicked.

Erica put paddle to water and we

moved into the current. All went surprisingly well; Erica is reasonably fit, and I can do my share. We paddled strongly and in sync for a solid five minutes. I thought, "We'll be in Grand Canyon in just a little while." Then I noticed the shore.

Something along the bank caught my eye, so I turned and watched it. Ten strokes later, we hadn't moved. Twenty strokes later, we were still even with the same spot. I started paddling a little harder to make some headway.

I watched that spot on the shore for nearly fifteen minutes before I'd let myself believe that we weren't going anywhere. Looking around, I noticed that Tom and Tammy had moved further into the current and were now struggling to move to the opposite shore. That seemed like the best idea, so I turned us into the current and aimed for the spot Tom was aiming for: a nice little sand beach, just big enough for three canoes, when Don catches up.

Tom's experience with a canoe is matched only by my own, which is to say, this trip marked our third trip together, and our third trip ever. Tom landed on the mark and I reached the shore a little way upriver. By the time Erica and I tied-off next to their canoe, Tom stepped out onto the sand bar. Suddenly the quiet of the outdoors was filled with Tom's loud laughter. We all looked toward him to see what was so funny, (we all like a good joke). Lo and behold, Tom stood thigh deep in the deceptively solid looking bank. You know what I'm talking about, that hollow sounding, wet sucking, found only along the banks of rivers mud/sand that looks firm but isn't? I've always considered it semi-quicksand. Needless to say, we sat in the canoes, had a sidebar, and waited for the scouts.

About two hours later, one of us

spotted a red canoe with two people in it about a half mile upriver. Thinking quickly, I got out my handy-dandy-sooper-duper-authentic-WWI-emergency signal mirror, handed down from my grandfather, to my uncle to me. Don later said, "Damn, that mirror's fucking bright."

With the party reunited, we tied all the boats together into a raft, broke out a six-pack and relaxed. Honestly, these canoe trips are fabulous and the getting back to nature is fun. The camping and swimming is great, too, but the best parts are when the current's swift enough to get us where we want to go. We talk, listen and generally have a great time. These are the best parts. While we relaxed, Don and Glade told their story.

The Marsh

I'm sure Don was thinking, "The thickets of willow don'tt seem impassable. A little effort here could save us much time."

"Sure, we can do this, look here, on the map," Don reassured Glade.

"Let me look at that thing," Glade said, reaching back.

The following section currently under construction

"Catch."

Don tossed the map past Glades outreaching hand, straight into his chest.

Don has a very reassuring sure.'

The Campsite

"See that over there? That's called 'God's Pocket,' best fishing on the lake. And look, there's a Great Blue Heron."

"There goes Ken, again," Tammy laughed, "we bring him along just to point things out."

I nodded my head toward the redhead, smiled my thanks, and continued my impromptu tour. "See that cliff face over there, the one to the north? That's the north rim of Grand Canyon, the Shivwitz Plateau is on top..."

Three red canoes, lashed together, floated down the Colorado. The six of us talked, drank and ate lunch. The lunch part proved to be an exercise in cooperation.

The menu called for a light lunch of salimi, hard sausage, two or three cheeses, apples and sourdough bread. Each adventurer took up a knife and an ingredient. With deft moves and true style, we commenced carving on our respective food stuffs.

"Here."

"Take this."

"Can I have a slice of cheese?"

"Who's got the bread? Thanks."

"How's that salami?"

"Mmmmfggll"

You can imagine the rest.

Tom Springer, bless his heart, brought a bota bag filled with Tropical Rum and a cooler of Capri Sun's Tropical Citrus Twists. We'd take a long pull from the rum bag and follow it with the fruit drink. The afternoon passed in a kind of haze, pleasantly pierced by calls from songbirds or splashes from fish.

Eventually we reached a part in the river where the banks start to widen out and the current slows. The red mud

and silt that flows with the water, starts to settle out and the water takes on a beautiful blue-green. It warms up, too. This area is also popular with skiers who use this part of Lake Mead. The last thing we wanted to do was get swamped by some inconsiderate skier's wake, so we untied the raft and went back to the paddling part.

An hour's effort saw us nearly to our first night's campsite.

"So, where're we camping tonight?" Erica asked for the third time in fifteen minutes.

"See that big black rock? That's Lava Point," I explained. "The river goes to the left of it, we're going to the right. I remember a cove on the left, just after the point, that's nice."

When the water's flat, and the canyon walls stretch off into the distance, there's no reference so it's hard to tell distances. The near end and the farthest may seem right next to each other, when they're viewed from an angle and some distance. Consequently I could understand Erica's mounting disbelief than my navigation.

"You always say 'just one more cove over,'" she whined.

"Yea, but don't I take you on interesting adventures?" I countered.

"Like the last one, where we nearly got stranded in a wild canyon with almost no food or water?"

"Look, we got out of that one alive, didn't we? And you're a better person for having experienced that trip. Besides, I was there, too. I don't feel like repeating that trip. Just paddle and we'll get there."

"Let's take a break and wait for the rest," she offered wisely.

Before too long, the other two canoes glided next to our's.

"Ken sez 'one more cove over,'" Erica teased.

"We have to go around that," Don said, pointing at a bluff in the distance. "That's Lava Point."

"What're you talking about?" I said. "Lava Point's behind us and we're just outside of Cormorant Cove."

Don didn't agree with me, even though we were looking at a map, using a compass and reading the Indian smoke signals in the distance. We looked toward Tom for resolution.

"Don went through the marsh," Tom chuckled. "I'm following Ken."

"Come on, Don, let's take a look and if it's not a suitable site, we'll continue on," I reasoned.

We rounded a couple of protrusions and found a little inlet that served our purposes: a small beach just big enough for three canoes, flat campsites for more than the six of us, and plenty of firewood. We didn't waste any time discussing it, we all knew *this was the site*. We unloaded the canoes (with appropriate breaks for sidebars) and took a look around.

Basalt cliffs, two to three hundred tall, surrounded our little inlet on three sides. Tall, columnar basalt - similar to Lassen National Park, or the Devil's Tower (as seen in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) - majestically thrusting into the sky. Talus slopes, made up broken columns, flanked the base of the cliffs. And firewood, except the wood was forty feet or so up the steep talus slopes. Glade and I volunteered to collect some.

We set up camp, built fires and started dinner preparations. A vulture lazily glided into the cove and bounced off the updrafts caused by the cliffs. I'm not sure if he was eyeing us for future reference or just looking for scraps. Either way, we watched him glide without flapping for about fifteen minutes, just using the local windcurrents. It's no wonder early man wanted to fly; birds

make it look so effortless.

The menu called for me to be the cook so I set up the kitchen and started dinner. The odor of chicken stir-fry soon joined with the smells of a campfire and the smoke from the pipe. Unfortunately someone (me) forgot to pack the rice, so dinner was a little short. Lucky for us, Don's habit of overpacking worked in our favor. He broke out the hotdogs we'd told him not to bring. Thanks Don.

I don't know how late the others stayed up, but I passed out under the light of a nearly full moon.

The First Morning

Mother Nature is kind to those us who appreciate her wonders, either that or she cuts lots of slack for fools. We hadn't even noticed the night before, but the basalt bluffs extended to the east, right where the sun rose. We got to avoid the early morning sun and heat.

I awoke sometime after sunrise and before noon, give or take a few hours. Don't ask me for more accuracy, I don't wear my watch when I'm camping. I awoke, but I wasn't in a hurry to get up, so I just lazed in bed for a while. Then I heard the sound of Tom releasing a long exhale, almost as if he had inhaled a lung-full of gas, and then held his breath for a spell. He was obviously enjoying the morning air, so I decided to join him.

"Wake and bake," he said when he saw me poke my head out of my tent. I think he was forecasting what the day would be like.

"Don't mind if I do," I answered. "When we're done enjoying this morning air, how about a swim?"

"Sure."

Twenty minutes later we were knee deep in the water discussing the wisdom of our decision.

"Damn, this is c-c-c-old," I chattered.

"I don't know, Ken, my feet don't feel cold any more," he replied.

"It's called frostbite."

Nevertheless, we knew we needed to wash the previous day's sweat off.

I held my breath, and did a Nestea Plunge backwards into the water. I've been in colder water before, but not on purpose. The shock caused me to exhale, but wouldn't let me take in a full breath.

"How's the water?" Tom queried.

I wasn't about to let him know how cold it was, but all I could manage was "wwwwho, wwwwho, wwho, it's, wwho, f-f-f-fine."

Being a fine swimmer and always trusting me are two of Tom's finer traits. He jumped right in.

After his heart restarted, we swam around enough to loosen up our muscles.

Tom's face kept contorting into...I don't know, but he seemed to be doing more than just swimming.

"I can't do it," he cried with anguish.

"Can't do what?" I asked, merely for the purpose of this article. I was having similar problems so I knew what he was grimacing about.

"I have to pee so bad my eyes are yellow, but I can't get anything to come out."

It should be noted here that the water's of Lake Mead are very alkaline. So much so that urine is instantly neutralized in the water. The park service posts notices around the lake advising people to urinate in the water rather than on the shore. It should also be noted (for the women) that when a man's genitals are subjected to cold, they shrivel up and try to recede into the abdomen. Right then, our balls were above our kidneys and heading north.