



Bert Loper's Testimony from the Colorado River Case

Continued from Bert's testimony as published in THE CONFLUENCE, Number 24, Fall 2001. Editorial comments are in brackets.

Q : On one occasion when you were on this trip was it necessary for you to bring some supplies a short distance by boat?

A: We had a pack train meet us at certain points along the river; the last place the pack train was due to meet us was at the mouth of Piute Canyon, twenty-one miles from the junction; the pack train always beat its time about a day, until this time it was four days late; we was running out of grub; and one night about sun down we heard a shot fired, and here came the packer on horseback, but no packs: he came down and he told us the big rains had made part of the trail up the big cliff up Piute canyon slip off, and he couldn't get his packs out.

So Mr. Trimble came to me and asked me what we had better do.

I says, "Have him come into Spencer canyon; that was where the pack train had met us the last time, three weeks before."

We had to take the boat back up the river and get those supplies.

Q: How did you get the boat up the river?

A: We drug the boat up the river the next morning; they gave me the bulk of the grub they had left, and I stripped down to my BVD's and was preparing to go up and take the boat up the river; when I got up to where the boat was, Mr. Hugh Miser, the geologist in our company, was up there, also in his BVD's, if it hadn't been for Mr. Miser, I don't know how many days it would have taken me to get up.

That is what you call a heart breaking trip.

Q: How many miles was it?

A: It was seventeen, and it took us two days of the hardest work I ever done, to get that boat up there.

Q: Through that seventeen miles were there any rapids?

A: No sir

Q: What stage was the water?

A: It was very low, there was reefs across there that wasn't four inches deep, because Mr. Miser was a big man, and I wasn't so little it took about all we had to go up there in two days, seventeen miles. ...The supply train arrived about an hour after they had gotten the boat up the river.

Q: And then did you and Mr. Miser start down stream?

A: Not until the next morning; it was late then, and we had had two very strenuous days.

Q: In going down stream, did you find enough water so you could row?

A: It took the two of us a whole day to make seventeen miles.

Q: The question is , did you find enough water so you could row?

A: No sir.

Q: What did you do?

A: We pulled that boat a good part of the way, got out, went down the same as we went up; although there was places we could ride, and lots of places we couldn't. That place I told you there was a bar across there, that wasn't over four inches deep; we just ended the boat around; we could pick this end up and pack it around until we got it across that reef or sandbar.

Q: Mr. Loper, in spots or at various places along the river on this trip was there no deep water from one side of the river to the other?

A: There was places that there was water that we could ride over, but the shorter the bend is, you will find—you are more able to find a channel for a short distance until the river straightens, or commences to make the reverse curve, then you have a crossing—many times you have a crossing from one bend to the other, you have no channel, your channel spreads out the same as the sand does.

Q: Could we sum up this way, generally, throughout these trips you had trouble with sandbars?

A: Sure, yes sir.

[Discussion clarifying “crossing bars” and “crossing channels.” He did not see any boats on the San Juan River during the year 1921 while he was there. There was no ferry boat at Mexican Hat.]

A: ...finishing trip and going to Lee's Ferry and back up with a 26' stern wheel boat—having to push it on occasion over sand bars.

[The following are excerpts from the Charles Russell and Ed Monette mining trip. Bert did some placer mining in Glen Canyon, first entering there in 1907 when he went on a prospecting trip, starting from Greenriver, Utah, September 19th, 1907, and from there he went to Hite in Glen Canyon. Besides himself, Charles Russell and Ed

Monette were members of the party.

The party was equipped with three steel boats made by the Michigan Steel Boat Company. They were launch hulls, sixteen feet long, about eighteen inches deep, forty-eight inch beam, with no motors, although they

were made for motors. He and his companions made compartments for the boats and decked them over. They were keel boats.

When they left Greenriver the water was quite low because when they started each morning it was a guess to see who would get out and get wet first and sometimes they would all get wet by getting out. On that trip immediately below Greenriver, they hit a riffle]

A: ...where the iron divides the channel, and I believe we struck the gravel just below the harbor, and then, as I remember, we had no more trouble until we got below the mouth of the San Rafael, when we began to encounter the sand.”

[In Labyrinth and Stillwater canyons trouble was encountered a nearly every channel crossing.]

A: ...one or the other, or all of us would run aground.

[A channel crossing is a place where the channel leaves one side of the river bed and crosses over to the opposite side of the river bed. On a loop the channel is naturally expected to be on the outside and if the river starts to make a reverse curve the channel has to change over from the outside of the first loop across the river to the outside of the next loop, so in this crossing the channel spreads out. It is in these places where you have trouble navigating these rivers because there is no channel, it spreads out evenly over the shifting channel.

Difficulties with channel crossings and sand bars occurred daily and sometimes several times a day.]

Q: Is it more difficult to take a keel boat off a sand bar than a flat boat?

A: A great deal more difficult; you just draw the width of your keel more than you will a flat bottom boat.

Q: How did you and Mr. Monette and Mr. Russell get through Cataract Canyon?

A: We struck numerous rocks in the rapids, but we only portaged one rapid, boats and loads and everything.

Q: And do you recall which rapid that was?

A: If I am not mistaken, it is No. 55 in the book there; I think it is 55, what used to be locally known as the sixteenth cataract, which is a bad one in Cataract Canyon; we got over that nicely; I struck a rock, my boat went completely under the water, but it was made so it came right up and went on; no trouble at all.

[The members of the party wore life preservers and did not run a rapid without having them on. Many times they would not be taken off between rapids.]

A: if we was starting out of smooth water, probably wouldn't put them on until we got to the first rapid. The life preservers were not worn on the Green River.

[On the trip in 1907 the party camped at “Mill Creek Bend” (Mille Crag Bend) at the end of Cataract Canyon, where Narrow Canyon begins which is six or seven miles long, very narrow, and the water is still so that a person, in order to make time in a boat at all, has to work



hard. It had rained that night, the party was wet, the boats were wet. From the end of Cataract Canyon the party proceeded on down past the mouth of the Dirty Devil to Hite, there they stayed several days.

The water in the narrow part of lower Cataract Canyon is not over one hundred feet wide and is very still and deep. The water is quiet in Narrow Canyon too, because it is very deep.]

A: Frank Bennett and I made a trip through there; we had a pole about sixteen feet long; we pushed it down in several places, clear to the end, lots of places never touched bottom.

[From the Fremont or Dirty Devil down to Hite they had the same "old conditions again." At the mouth of North Wash they had a crossing bar, and naturally the channel crossed also.]

A: The channel across the gravel reef of this crossing is always very narrow; there is just one little channel through there, and there is one place in particular in Glen canyon where that channel has been there ever since, I think, and is still there; we made a trip through it this month, the same place.

[He went to Hite and Glen Canyon in 1907, and stayed there until 1915. He went back again in 1916, and then came out again in the same year. He made one trip out in 1914, but went back again.]

A: I had my place there all the time.

[He was there for about eight years. At that time he, Mr. Monette and Mr. Russell went down to the old Stanton dredge, which is located about forty-two miles below North Wash, and after taking out a little gold that was placer mined they went back to Hite. At Hite they were 125 miles from a railroad, so the provisions and supplies that he had sent for had to come by freight team. He then went down to Lee's Ferry, where he was supposed to meet Mr. Russell and Mr. Monette, but on arrival discovered that they had gone down the Grand Canyon with an Arizona engineer. He pulled his boat back up the river from the Stanton dredge back to Hite. This was in November 1907.]

A: It took me—must have taken me five days, because I didn't know how to rope a boat then like I got to learn afterwards; I couldn't make the time.

[When he started down the river from Hite he went direct to Lees Ferry; that was the beginning of the next year (1908); the first day of the new year. It took him five days to make that trip, from Hite to Lee's Ferry. During the trip he grounded numerous times and ran on to rocks in several places. "...but the most serious one was in Shock Rapid," which is about one hundred miles above Lees Ferry.

He knows of a rock ledge that runs across the Colorado River in Glen Canyon, and he recalls crossing that ledge on this trip. This ledge is located just below the mouth of the Lake Canyon. He did not have much trouble in getting down over the ledge, but just before he got in it he ran on to some gravel, and as he went over the ledge, "I drug my oar, seemed to be smooth." He was still using the steel boat. When he got to Lee's Ferry he obtained enough supplies to take him back to Hite. The journey back upstream from Lee's Ferry to Hite was

an awful trip.

A: I was wet to the waist for about 24 days in February; started in January, and one thing that caused that trip, probably, to be so hard, was the mental condition along with the other, because things were looking pretty blue.

There were times during the trip that he did not know that he had any feet under him. In towing the boat up the stream he had a line about one hundred twenty feet long attached to the bow and then a round to the stern.

A: I would get up there to where I would quarter my boat like that and walk up the river, and the action of the water on this side of the boat will keep it out in the river to a certain extent. While you can walk along there on those turns in Glen Canyon there is always places there you have got to get out and wade in order to get your boat around the point of sand on the turn of a sand bar. That is where I would always get wet.

When you come to a rapid you coil your rope up and put it in the boat and get the nose of your boat and get out in the river to go up over the rapid.

[That is what is called nosing the boat. He made this trip alone. After returning to Hite he spent that summer all by himself placering on the Olympia Bar, about 35 miles below Hite.

A: By the way, in making this trip up the river I was pretty badly run down, took me all summer to get over that; I was pretty badly shot. I made the same trip afterwards and didn't hurt me near so bad, because I had different conditions.

[His nearest neighbor at that time was about three and a half miles away, and about fifteen miles away lived Cass Hite. After that summer he located at Red Canyon. He saw no other placer miners at that time, Mr. Adams being on his place in Red Canyon but not mining. When he went back up the river in the summer of 1908 some people were mining where he, Russell and Monette had done some placer mining. They mined for a while and then left by wagon from the old Stanton dredge. There was no one else there after they had left. After high water, he went up the river to Red Canyon with Mr. Adams. During the time he was there placer mining he obtained food by wagon from Hanksville or Greenriver, the supplies being brought to the river at Hite.]

Q: Then how would you go to Hite to get them?

A: Dragged my boat up the river

Q: Mr. Loper, just describe Hite, Utah as you saw it there in 1907.

A: Hite, the post office at Hite consisting of two log cabins is at the head of a bar approximately two miles long, not very wide; some places, maybe a quarter of a mile wide; other places, not so wide; and Trachyte Creek comes down to the river in the middle of that two miles. There is where Hite and Gibbons had their little farm, but their cabin was a mile up the bar.

There was cultivated and irrigated land on both sides of Trachyte Creek, there being probably twenty acres under cultivation. The fields were on a bar on the side of the river. There were willows along the river but no trees. The walls of the canyon on the right hand side was pushed back away from the river itself at that particular place, but the walls on the left hand bank was approximately quite close; just a talus slope down to the

river.

[Red Canyon was on a high bar, 195 feet above the river. On the lower bar or bottom land there was a little ranch of about seven to nine acres under cultivation where horse feed, fruit and grapes were raised. There was a chicken yard, wagon, mower and things like that.]

Q: I suppose that is all irrigable from the river, isn't it?

A: No sir. From Red Canyon there is springs, four miles up; Red Canyon flows quite a little stream, there is a point of land runs down here, a ditch comes around like that (indicating).

[He left Red Canyon to make a trip through the cataracts in 1914, and then he went back there in 1914, and then was up and down the river. Between 1907 and 1914 he had an opportunity to study the river, and he did study the river.]

A: I lived with that river so much, it pretty near became a part of me; I would sit on the banks and watch it; I would boat it; I would do everything, about the only companion I had.

[During those seven years he was living there alone and up to that time traveled on the river from Greenriver, Utah to Lee's Ferry. During that time he also made numerous trips to the (Stanton) dredge; other trips to the Olympia Bar, and a trip or two to the California Bar; short trips like that.]

A: I never counted them trips.

[During the seven years that he was there he had an opportunity to observe, and he did observe, the conditions of the channels, sand bars, and so forth, at the various stages of the river.]

Q: At what different stages of the river did you note changes in the channel?

A: At all stages except high water, then your channel is in one place; extreme high water there is only one place for the channel, that is on the outside of the (bend of the) river.

Q: What about the sand bars, did you always find those in the same location in the river?

A: Sand bars left by high water is invariably on the inside bend of the river; but when the river starts to go down, and the summer rains start, they begin to cut under bars left in high water, and, in other words, the high water cleans the river; it has a house-cleaning every spring.

Immediately after that the summer floods come along, and undoes the work of the high water, fills the channel full of sand again that the high water has cleaned out.

[Questions and answers about channels not being reliable.]

Q: Now, then, why is it that a person coming down the river at a stage other than high water would not be warned to look out beyond those curves for that condition you describe [river turning back on itself at bends and the channel disappearing].

A: They are warned.

Q: If they know the river, that is?

A: All the years I have spent on the river I never learned where to go over the crossings; that is, there is places there, we will say there is places through that crossing that is two feet deep, but I can't find it until I run on to the bar and get out and wade around. ...At Red Canyon I have had the whole channel right in front of my cabin; didn't belong there; belonged on the other side; but I have had it there. And maybe before the night was over it would be back where it belonged. I have seen that.

[In December, 1911 he made a trip from Hite to Lee's Ferry with a man named (Bert) Seaboldt and George Meiss. He used an eighteen foot boat, fifty two inch beam, flared sides and flat bottom, which drew about six inches of water. The object of that trip to Lee's Ferry was for Mr. Seaboldt to obtain information and data on the way regarding placer mining. The boat was not equipped with a motor.]

