

Journal of Otis "Dock" Marston: Moab To Hite

Diary: March 28 to April 4, 1964

Special thanks to Roz Jirge and the Marston Collection at the Huntington Library.

Note: Brackets are notes from the editor, John Weisheit. This was a trip done in Sportyaks.

Bill Belknap and I arrived Moab by VW March 27 - space in Bowen Motel - checked in with Bates Wilson - lunch at Arches Café - saw Sam Taylor at Times-Ind - Connie Cauntly [?] - Bill left for G. Jct. to get Buzz - Jorgen Visbak & the Culp ar. about 4:30. Helen Stite & the Arps [?] reported arrival at Apache Lodge in the evening.

March 28

Early breakfast & we were at the dock above the bridge before 9 AM. Tex McClatchy had his 29' MAJOR POWELL and a small Buehler [a jet boat] in the water. Stite, et al were soon in. Connie carried our gear to the docks and it made a good fit on the boat.

Lloyd [blank space] drove the Buehler. We were away about 9:30 with the Culp riding in the Buehler. Just at the Portal the Powell rode onto a sand bar & we were fast.

All passengers finally unloaded into the Yaks & an hour or more of strain & grunting freed the craft. Gene Culp fell & was wet to his waist line.

The riding was cold & everyone covered all they could but Gene's cold bath was a little too much to compensate.

A stop for lunch gave an opportunity to get warm.

We were at the Junction at 2:45 & Tex showed us a Kolb name painted on the wall at LB of Green about 200 yds up from confluence. I finally found the boulder with the other inscription where the DEF and a 5 were very plain.

Tex landed us at Mile 212.8 LB and was on return trip by 3:40 PM.

Buzz napped while 3 of us headed up Butler Canyon [Lower Red Lake?]. A definite trail took off up the left hand wall and approached the wall at the head of the talus - then disappeared. No markers were on it & it was probably a deer trail. We were back at camp about 6 PM.

More than enuf dinner which reduced the worry over bulk.

Easter Sunday - March 29

Cold night down to about 25 with a frost. Bill was up at 4 to build a fire and shift his covers. Jorgen & Bill slept cold but Buzz & I did not suffer.

Buzz had a box of candy eggs to celebrate. Temp was

28° when he got up. There was a 1/4" of ice on the bucket. Sun was welcome in camp at 8:30. Water 42°. Later measures raised some question on this temperature as a noon measure below Rapid No. 2 was 57°.

After much packing of gear we were away & crossed to the 1st Steamer MAJOR POWELL inscription just below the lower end of Spanish Bottom. This sign is one of the largest inscriptions.

A current of about 3 mph carried us to head of No. 1 RB & we ran it after a looksee.

Landing at head of No. 2 RB showed us a course that could be run but we lined 100' RB before running the lower end.

Lunch at head of No. 3. Half way down this rapid on upstream side of boulder 6' higher are faint initials - HW.

We ran No. 3 and landed LB. What is an island along LB at higher stages was now a part of LB with a small pond in the water course.

It appeared that either side canyon at 211.5 or 211.2 could be climbed.

Above the beach at 211.75 and about 2' elev. above the River were the two springs found by Bob Cox. One was running about a cup a second.

No. 4 was easy & we ran its long course.

No. 5 was rough & rocky & we lined it on the right.

We did some looking for No. 9 opp. a side canyon but with no results. Just below on LB were small caverns which could have been Gun's [?] "CATACOMBS".

We landed RB just above a side canyon RB & an S rapid for a fine camp.

This camp was 150' above the head of Rapid No. 7 & we could see No. 6 upstream.

Monday - March 30.

Cool night with some dew but all slept warm having gained technics from the experience of the night before.

We looked over the long S of No. 7 which showed 2 courses. Bill & Buzz ran the course close to RB. Jorgen & I crossed and, after more search for No. 9, we lined 100' of LB and ran out the remainder.

No. 8 was easy. We found more "CATACOMBS" at the head of this rapid LB.

We stopt at the head of the "BIG FLAT" starting above Y Canyon & lunched in the shade of a large boulder. I walked back above No. 8 to search for a McCormick pix [photographer for the Best Expedition].

As we cleared the beach we saw bodies moving on the beach at the mouth of Y Canyon & found Kent Frost & 3 others who had walked down Y. Kent tried out a Yak & was sold.

Rapid No. 9 was easy & while talking with Kent, we recognized the McCormick pix.

Rapid No. 9 had some waves about 5' high & a clear course down RB. I broke an oar lock at the head & thot I



Marston near Cove Canyon (now submerged)
Photo: Belknap's Canyonlands River Guide

was due to get rolled but managed an easy run.

At 206.85 we saw no rock which could account for the Hoover-Peterson tragedy [refers to a boating fatality that occurred circa 1960]. We did not stop & I forgot the A. G. TURNER inscription.

Noted the side canyon at 206.2 LB. The islands shown on the map below 206.85 were gone.

We landed above Rapid No. 13 LB & Bill found the [drawings of inscription] signs which are opposite the down River side of Range Canyon & 30 - 40' above the River. Bill thinks the baloney could have hit one of the big boulders here & this theory seems logical.

There is a chimney in Range Canyon on Up River side which may have been Hislop's route. The bottom of Wide Valley & Range Canyon looks very difficult.

Tuesday - March 31

Night was warmer with slight breeze and a thin overcast. We have had difficulty with the lack of strength of the salt from the fancy shaker & this morning Buzz discovered it was sugar. We had almost adjusted to this change.

[Written at bottom of page: There were passengers with Pat Reilly last year who were highly critical of the food he served. Bill Belknap 3-30-64 Cataract Canyon]

The confusion re rapids between 205 & 204 remains as there is one too many rapids at the stage we are riding.

We moved down to No. 15 which is the point of loss of the Best Exp. boat. We located all of the inscriptions which have been listed. We found a faint R.G.F. near the rk. where his name & date are [written in left margin and circled: "F.G.F. not R.G.F."].

No. 15 was lined & portaged at LB.

The BEN HURT was atop the island at No. 20 & is a complete wreck. The transom was completely gone, the sides torn and the whole hull structure broken near the bow.

We took the left channel of No. 20 & Bill claims a run without getting out of the Yak. There were some brief pauses enroute.

The Hoover-Peterson oar was not seen [a memorial]. Calf Canyon offers no route out.

We ran No. 21 EXCEPT a small section along LB near the foot - lining & short portage.

At No. 22 Buzz liked a course on the left & made a fine rock & curling wave dodging run. The remaining three saw a course along right side which ended as Jorgen would say "DOWN THE GRAND MIDDLE [printed in the left margin is: DOWN THE GREAT MIDDLE]. When we got into it there was a strong drive against a boulder with a cushion wave that worked for me but not for Bill & Jorgen. Bill pulled left & avoided it. Jorgen slammed the rk & capsized. Bill took about 5 gallons & I was awash - praying for the shields that had not arrived. Jorgen ran the boat to shore but it got away and ran thru the riffle which is the lower end of No. 22. I had dropped thru this & was fairly full of water but bailed most of it & recovered the derelict.

We camped on the beach RB where the Kolb's camped when Emery was sick.

Jorgen's camera is wet but seems to be recovering.

Bill found a 2" Leica lens.

No. 22 is in 2 sections at this stage with 100 - 150 yards of slack water in between. This has led to confusions. The SLICED BOULDER is at the foot of the short lower drop & opposite a point about 200' above our camp. The bottom of the lower slice is about 1' above River level.

Correction - DOWN THE GREAT MIDDLE

Losses in the capsizing were Jorgen's cap and an oar which broke the lock.

Wednesday - April 1

Warmer night with occasional overcast moving in. It is overcast & clearing this morning. The Kolb inscription was sighted by Jorgen just above our camp.

There is one shrub on the point LB at head of 22 - none at lower end or at 23.

Wed. April 1

We photographed the Kolb inscription. It was a rather large undertaking for Emery to climb onto the ledge & do this paint job. A Hatch party register was in Hill & Hill bottle atop the milk can.

Rapid No. 22 & Rapid No. 23 each have two sections at this low stage & the Sliced Boulder is at the foot of the lower drop of No. 22.

We lined No. 23 & moved down thru 24 & 25 & pulled in to look at No. 26 when a storm hit hard with rain, wind, snow & hail. I tried to start a fire while the others crawled into wet suits. Bill pulled me into one & the warmth improved the complexion of things.

We took off after lunch. Jorgen & Bill decided to nose & line 26 but Buzz & I took on wet - very wet runs.

We lined the rapid just above Waterhole Canyon & camped upstream from the outlet.

Another storm hit when we were lining & another after we got into camp. The latter one stayed with us but there was little wind & a continual sprinkling of rain.

Thursday - April 2

Could not locate the White [Georgie White] register nor the seam of jet [?]. There was a small wind hole at the plunge pool 150 yards back from the River. There are cross canyons here.

Stormy weather delayed departure until almost 11. A bumpy course invited a run of the rapid below & we all took it on.

Gypsum was an easy lining. Buzz ran most of a bump course LB.

Palmer Canyon was a bumpy course on left side of the island.

Rain & wind stopped us for a fire on RB above Clearwater. There was a site here that had not been worked. Everybody was cold. The rapid was lined by two & Buzz ran his Yak & mine for a sneak course RB. Broke a lock on my Yak.

Bowdie was rough & was lined.

We moved down to camp in side canyon LB about

188. Little wood in this section; a stream is running.

A cave offered some protection. The overcast cleared about 9.

Friday Apr. 3

Rain started again at 4 AM & fire was a problem. Buzz slept in the open & was wet. Rain was not steady but there was no drying of anything. It was difficult to get started.

We noted the cross canyons where Ellsworth Kolb climbed to the top both sides in 1921. Search for the large painted register, the art work of La Rue, revealed nothing to us.

There was a lively riffle at Cove Canyon and the fan stood about 3 to 4 feet above the River.

Search for D. Julien 1836 was successful when Bill sighted it. It was as described by the several observers and showed its age. The observation by second to note it was confirmed. Much photography must have put it in the record by film.

Mile 184 Rapid was very rough & we lined it. The rainy weather made the slide scar very brilliant. We ran No. 44 and nosed & lined No. 45 where a red flood was coming down the creek. There was a sharp drop at the bottom which got lensing for the lining job.

This type of operation proved the worth of the wet suits and Bill's suggestion to bring them deserved the orchids.

We ran the rapids below which were absolutely were plenty lively & added water loads in the boats. Island Rapid had a big island at right & called for a run close to the cliff at left bank.

We noted the Hoover-Peterson painted marker at upper side of Sheep Creek outlet & started a run of the rapid. All but a narrow sneak course at right was a mass of holes about 4' deep and no place for a Yak. The sneak course had two small eddies where the Yak stopt & it was necessary to row out but the run involved no hazard if this course was maintained. Bill landed & ran back to warn Jorgen while I coasted below in event he did get into trouble. He came thru smiling.

We stopped at two warm sulfur springs at Mile 173 RB. In the lower one it was possible to row into the pool of clear, bubbling water.

We camped at Mile 171 LB among the rocks where there was plenty of wood. The drift in this section had been scarce.

The weather couldn't make up its mind whether to clear or not.

Saturday - April 4th

We were up early. It had rained slightly but showed signs of clearing. Everybody kept busy & we cleared at 8:10 on a smooth River running about a 1 mile current.

There were two small sulfur springs at about Mile 171 RB which came from higher up than River level. Stanton mentions a small spring in this area where he camped & Brown came up River for a talk with him [the Frank Brown and Robert Stanton railroad survey of 1889].

We picked up a good current at the Dirty Devil which

had some flow.

At North Wash the riffle gave a good ride & below it, current increased so we were making up to 5 & 6 mph.

At a mile above the airport we greeted Slim [blank space] who was fishing but told us we could not land our Yaks at the strip because of the mud [possible reference to the new reservoir, Lake Powell]. He offered to drive his pick-up down to the ferry & drag our gear back.

We landed at the Ferry at 10:35 & Slim left as Woody Edgill took charge. We dragged boats out & sorted enuf gear to clear Bill & Buzz.

At 11:15 Bill Wells circled overhead & Woody drove us to the strip for taking the Belknap duo out.

Back at the Ferry we loaded Yaks & gear & took all to the store, had a beer - then took a Yak to the strip & left a note for Al Culp.

At the store the Nielsons drove in & we rode their jeep down to the ruin. Just as we left them, Al flew over & Jorgen & I started to walk to the strip. 250 yards below the strip we met Al, his son Gene & a friend, Shelly.

Woody appeared in his truck & we hauled gear to the store, then returned to the plane, flew up over Cat, the Standing Rocks, the Needles, the Dirty Devil & returned to Hite.

Dinner opposite the store & to bed in & out of trailers.

Sunday - April 5th

We cooked bfst. opp. the store and soon Bill drove in with the VW. He had left Moab around 4:30 & hit some snow over the mountain.

We sent Culp, et al off & were about ready to move out when they returned due to heavy rains over the Junction. They then saw us off as we crossed the Ferry.

We stopt in Hanksville to see the Robinson's & Barbara Ekker. Edna knew the Stevens who had run cattle in Stevens Canyon - Albert Stevens.

We stopt at Harry Aleson's at Teasdale for dinner finding Dean Brimhall there.

Over the mountain in a snowstorm put us in Richfield for the night & we reached Boulder City at 2 PM, having visited Juanita Brooks in St. George.

End