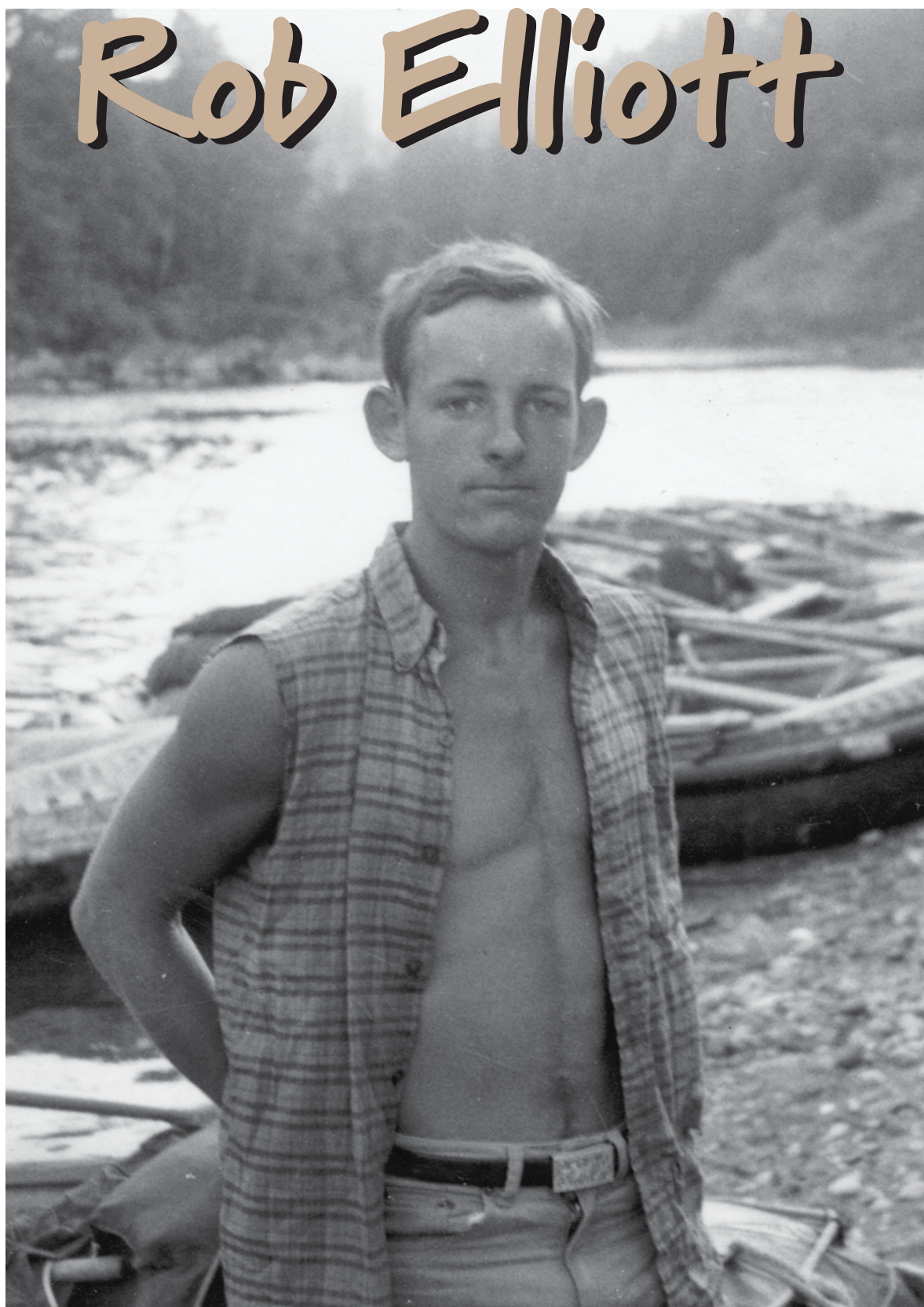


boatman's quarterly review

Rob Elliott



Prez Blurb • Dear Eddy • Back of the Boat • Leopard Frogs
Clogging the Canyon • GTS • Partners in Education • Kent Frost Video
GCY • Lava Dam Failure • Science Update • Thanks!

Rob Elliott

MY FIRST RIVER TRIP was when I was four years-old. That would have been 1948 on the Sacramento River. My father and mother had a double Klepper folding kayak. We put in at Redding on the Sacramento River and went thirty-two miles downstream to Red Bluff. I sat between my mother's legs in the front, my six year-old sister, Joanne, sat between my father's legs in the back, and the four of us went on a little family outing, down the Sacramento River, just us. It was fascinating, it was great fun.

My father got together with some friends, a guy named Bruce Grant, and Maynard Munger—Julie Munger's dad—and Bryce Whitmore, an early river runner in California too, and they started this group, this section of the Sierra Club called the San Francisco Bay Chapter River Outings Group, or whatever they're called. They ordered these folding kayaks from Germany. There were three brand names I remember—Klepper, Erbacher, and Hammar. They ordered them out of catalogs, and they were shipped across the Atlantic. They got these boats and put them all together and started kayaking... This would be probably around 1946 or 1947... They ordered singles, they ordered doubles. They kayaked for about eight years or so. And then about 1955, maybe 1956, my father bought some military surplus ten-man assault rafts, and he became an Explorer Post advisor. Back then Explorer Posts had their thing, they either backpacked or they did fish or public service or climbed or whatever. My father said to his Explorer recruits, "We're going to do river running." They said, "Terrific! Sounds great!" So they built frames and got oars and put these rafts together... It's kind of like for the graduates of the Boy Scouts. They would go into Explorer Scouting, so they'd be a little bit older; they'd be in their mid-teens. The relevancy here is they went off and started rafting on the Eel River, the Klamath River in Northern California, the Rogue River in Southern Oregon, et cetera.

Meanwhile my dad had already been boating for ten or twelve years with his Sierra Club buddies, and they were just doing one-day trips, two-days, sometimes three-days—the Tuolumne, the American, the Stanislaus. His Sierra Club buddies finally said, "Well, Lou, we want to do longer trips...but we can't carry all of our stuff. Can some of your Explorer Scouts bring along a raft or two and carry all our stuff?" So that's how that got married together, right there in the late fifties. The Explorer Scouts would come along happily for free and row all the kayakers' gear on the Klamath River or the Rogue River in Southern Oregon, just for fun. It was a hobby still at that point. Then very soon after that, I can't remember the exact year, but Stewart Kimball, who must be 82 or 83 years old right now, he was the chairman of the Sierra Club River Outings Program. He lived in Orinda, California. He just came down the Grand Canyon with us last May of 1995. Terrific old guy. He asked my dad to be the chairman of the River Outings Subcommittee. I think my father began that right when the Echo Dam stuff was going on in Dinosaur National Monument.

That's when the River Outings program of the Sierra Club really started to take off, because... "We've got to get our membership out on these rivers. We gotta get them in Dinosaur National Monument by the hundreds, if we can, so they can write their congressmen, and letters to the editor... so people can learn about the need for saving these incredible places." That was the thrust behind the Outings Program for the Sierra Club. So my father became the chairman of the River Outings Subcommittee in 1955 or 1956 and held that position for about a seven-year period. He started taking the Explorer Scouts, and instead of just

running kayak support for free, the Explorer Scouts were eighteen years old or whatever, and they didn't want to be Explorer Scouts anymore, they wanted to graduate. And what did they graduate into? Rowing boats for my



Dick Norgaard and Rob Elliott getting their start.

father, for Sierra Club trips such as on the Rogue River in Southern Oregon, because there were no outfitters on the Rogue River suited for running twenty or thirty people down. There were little drift boat outfitters. I remember our very first Sierra Club outing on the Rogue River, one of the drift boaters came along. He was head cook and just kind of led our group down the river, because we had never run it before. But it was the Explorers that had graduated into becoming river guides at this point, for the Sierra Club Outings Program.

...I remember when I was in Boy Scouts, one year when I was a Tenderfoot, we took hardwood boards and steamed them in old five-gallon milk jugs, and bent them to the contour of our backs, and took cotton cord and laced it back and forth, back and forth, so that would go against our back. Then we put screw eyes in the hardwood boards, and then we would put all of our gear in a great big bundle of a tarp and fold it all together and put it on the backpack, and then we all learned the spider hitch for tying it on the backpack. We learned a lot, but it was incredibly antiquated.

The very next year I had a paper route, and I saved up my money. The first thing I did was when I was eleven years old: I bought a life membership in the Sierra Club. That's what I wanted to do with my paper route money. I didn't tell my parents. I was kind of a private, really shy person—especially when I was younger. The treasurer of the Sierra Club, Lewis Clark, called up my dad and said, "That's a terrific thing your son did, Lou!" My dad said, "What?!" Clark said, "He just sent us a check for a hundred dollars for a life membership in the Sierra Club." My father was dumbfounded.

STEIGER: You were eleven years old?

ELLIOTT: I was eleven years old. I did that for two reasons: one was because I really believed in the Sierra Club and thought that protection of the earth and what they were doing was really important. There was another reason, Lew, and this is the businessman in me: I went, "I'm eleven years old right now. This costs a hundred dollars today. It's only going to go up. And I've got a lot of years left. I can be a member of the Sierra Club for seventy years for a hundred dollars! Such a deal!" (laughter)...Well, back to the Boy Scout story. The second thing I did with my paper route money was I bought a Kelty pack. I saw an ad for Kelty packs in the Sierra Club magazine and went, "Wow, I want a Kelty pack!"

STEIGER: What did your dad do for a living when he was doing the Explorer stuff and all that?

ELLIOTT: My dad was a small businessman and had a printing firm. He was an inventor of sorts. I remember on the second floor of his printing shop he had a darkroom, but the darkroom was also a camera. You'd walk out one door from the darkroom into this room that was



Rob Elliott on the Canoe River, British Columbia, summer 1962.

about eight by eight by eight, I suppose, and it was a camera—it had a great big lens in one wall, and then he had a vertical pallet he would put all his information on that he was going to print. The pallet was on a sliding rod outside the lens of the camera room that we were inside of. He would just open up the camera lens and look through there at the material with flood lamps on it, and he'd push the rods along from inside this camera box room to where it was in focus. Then he'd turn the lights off and put a sheet of film behind another pallet inside the camera box room, and he'd flash it. He made his own way of making printing plates for his offset lithography. He was a real inventor. And we loved it. He also had a fireman's pole from the second floor where they did all the film developing and stripping and everything and making of the printing plates. You'd go down the fireman's pole and deliver the printing plates to five or six different press operators down on the first floor.

STEIGER: So the fireman's pole was because you had to get it there fast, or just 'cause it was fun?

ELLIOTT: Oh *both!* (laughs) I mean, why not make workin' fun?, was my dad's idea. His idea of a vacation was just a change of work. But all the river running stuff was a hobby for him. The way he made his money was with this printing company. He also printed a lot of information for the Sierra Club and he printed a lot of

brochures. So he learned a lot about advertising from running the printing business.

But really, somewhere along about the mid-fifties, he seriously lost interest in the printing business. He just kind of left it to his employees to run it, and all summer long he'd be off running river trips for the Sierra Club Outings Program. But he lost money for ten years. He lost money probably from 1954, 1955, right on up through '62, '63, '64...in the river business. And that was all just subsidized by profits from the printing business. Then he got to a point where instead of just hook, line, and sinker selling the printing business and making a big shift into river running, if he needed some rafts he'd sell off a press, which is an asset for producing profits, right? So he wasn't necessarily thinking ahead on all this stuff. He'd sell off a press and buy a bunch of rafts. Then the printing business would be a little bit smaller. He was sort of neglecting it at the same time, because his heart was really, at this point, just sunk completely into running river trips.

STEIGER: Did he get heat from your mom?

ELLIOTT: (chuckles) You *bet* he did! She said, "We've got four kids heading into college. We have this printing business that is making pretty decent money to pay for their college education. And now we're going to lose it all in the river running business and they won't be able to go to college?! This is nuts!" Well, his response was, "You're right, Claire, we won't be able to send them to college. But we can give them all summer jobs, and they can earn money and pay their way through college from their summer jobs." I mean, there's a whole different logic. And I'm really glad he made the decision he did. We made good money as young guides when we were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. Paid our way through college and so it all worked out.

* * *

Worked out indeed. To put it mildly. The company that Lou Elliott started, ARTA (American River Touring Association) not only sent his own kids through college, it introduced people from all over the world to rivers all across the west, among other places. The Grand Canyon branch of the company, under Rob's direction and subsequent ownership (when it became AZRA—Arizona Raft Adventures) has long been in the forefront of pretty much every professional boating area there is— including innovation, equal opportunity, group participation, and labor relations...not to mention community service up the wazoo. In short, it's been a huge company that's had a huge impact on a huge cast of characters, and issues, that came down the pike in Grand Canyon and in 20TH century river running. This interview took place in May of 1996.

* * *

I was a little guy, so I couldn't row a boat until I was probably seventeen years-old. But the first trips I ever went on were the two summers when I was fourteen and fifteen years-old. I took a Greyhound bus from Oakland, California, to Vernal, Utah, in mid-June of 1958, to work on Hatch trips—not for Bus Hatch and Don and Ted, but for the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club had these great big trips—I mean, they were huge, like eighty people on the trip. That's how they ran things back in those days. We went on the Yampa River in Dinosaur National Monument; and on the Green River through Ladore Canyon. I'd work for six weeks, from mid-June to first of August or so, and then I'd take the Greyhound bus back home. I remember when I first arrived in Vernal...it was 2 A.M. and I didn't want to wake up Don and Ted who were, I think, living with their dad and mom at the time. Their dad was Bus Hatch, a really early river runner. And Bus came on these trips too. There was this driving hailstorm, 2 A.M. I didn't want to wake them up, so I just crawled underneath a truck in their warehouse yard and laid out my sleeping bag and went to sleep. Those were really fun trips. My job, I was called a "pot boy." My job was to haul water, wash the pots, gather the firewood, arrange it, and just be a camp helper all the way through. Those were really fun summers. I remember my mom's first advice was, "You'll need seven pairs of socks, Bob, because you'll want a clean pair of socks each day." Of course, it only took me about two days to realize that I don't need seven pairs of socks—*no* socks will be just fine. (chuckles)

STEIGER: Wow. So Bus Hatch was still out there doing it?

ELLIOTT: He was still out there. He rowed a boat in 1958. He was a really interesting guy. He was small, and a great storyteller. Really a fun-loving guy, kind of a Type "B" personality. I remember he had brown hair, closely cropped, and he had a very broad face and ruddy cheeks and he was a stocky little guy—smaller than Ted—Ted's much bigger than his dad, Bus, was. But Don was small, and Don took after his father, genetically, in terms of his physique, his stature.

* * *

I was sixteen in 1960, seventeen in 1961, and those were the years where we went on this circuit—"we" being my dad's company, which was the American River Touring Association, which has since become ARTA River Trips. Here's how the circuit went—and this was all through the early sixties, starting in 1961 for me: we'd do two trips for the Sierra Club on the Rogue River; then we'd move over to Idaho and we'd do maybe one trip on the Selway River; two trips on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, and then a trip on the main Salmon. We'd move up to British Columbia and do one or two trips on



*Young Rob Elliott running Tappan Falls on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, Idaho.
Passenger is Greg Rife (still fishing).*

the Canoe River, which came into the Columbia River at the top of Big Bend, went from Revelstoke into the Columbia and we went down the Columbia a couple of days, and then we went back to Kamloops which was our headquarters city. Then we'd come home at the end of the summer. That was the circuit. About eight or ten of us had this great big old one-and-a-half ton Dodge moving van that was open-air with a little platform on it. We'd put all the gear on the platform and in the back. We'd crawl in underneath the platform and drive all over the West, running these trips. My dad would be with us sometimes, and sometimes he wouldn't. We'd just be runnin' 'em.

* * *

My parents believing in me was certainly a fundamental thing, and I knew they believed in me. We went off and ran these river trips for people when we were sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years-old. I still remember a trip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River where I was the head boatman. I was nineteen years-old, and there was a fifteen year-old running a boat, and a seventeen year-old, and the "old guy" was twenty-four. I forget his name right now. I added it all up and divided it by seven

and went, "Wow, the average age of this crew is seventeen and a third!" Why we didn't kill people is beyond me—other than the fact that my dad believed in us. We had this kind of unspoken thing between all of us young guides, you know, that we'd confront some major obstacle, whether it was logistical or the river or rapids or whatever, or equipment repair which we were always doing, and say, "Well, God, if Lou thinks we can do it, I guess we can. Let's do it!" There was always a presumption of solution. I mean, life was an adventure, and all of those early years in my late teens was adventure, not problems and obstacles. "Why are these trucks breaking down, and why do we have this bullshit equipment that's not working?" No, we never thought that way—it was just, "Hey, we're all kind of on the growing edge of something big here, and it's just for us to figure out."

I remember one trip we got off the Rogue River—this would have been when I was eighteen, 1962. There were ten of us, and we only had room for four in the truck with all the gear. We came off on a Friday, and we were starting a Selway trip on the following Monday. We had two days. We had already put in the food orders, and we got all the food picked up at the IGA Food Market in Grant's Pass and we're headed out. We had to call ahead to Lewiston to an IGA Market there and say, "We don't

have any meat. Can you pull together the following meat order and freeze it and we'll be there in 24 hours to pick it up?" The guy said, "Well, what kind of credit do you have?" "Credit?! We'll just bring cash when we get there." He says, "Well, how do I know you're gonna come through with it?" And we just tried to explain what we were doing. We were just kids on the phone, explaining all this. Then we got the manager of the IGA Market in Grant's Pass to vouch for us and say, "Yeah, yeah, these guys are for real," and we placed the meat order. My sister said, "There are ten of us and six of us aren't going to fit in the truck. What'll we do?" I said, "Let's divide up into three teams of two and hitchhike. The first team to get to Idaho doesn't have to wash any dishes or pots on the first trip on the Selway." We just made it a big game, and off we went.

I had Phil Norgaard in my team. He was really young then, only fifteen. I remember we got a ride in a 1962 Ford Galaxy and drove ninety miles an hour all the way to Portland. The guy had a gun in his center console, we were just like, "This is nuts! This is incredible, but we're gonna win the race!" Then it took us eleven rides to get to the Dalles, which is only about one hour east of Portland. "We're not gonna win it now." We went into the freight yard and asked when the freight train was coming through to Pendleton and the guy says, "Comes through about 11:30 P.M." We said, "Okay, thanks." Phil says, "What are we gonna do now?" I said, "Well, let's go take in a movie. It's seven o'clock. We'll just sit in the movie theater for a while until the freight comes through." So we did that, and we went over to this used car lot, waiting for the freight to come. We heard the freight coming way down the tracks, and this cop drives up across from us, his spotlight pans through the used car lot, right across our chests, and we're frozen. "Freeze! Phil, don't move." The spotlight comes back and lands right on us. We go, "Now we're for sure not gonna win the race." The freight comes through, going pretty fast but slowing down. It's going maybe 25 miles an hour, twenty, fifteen. I go, "Phil, if we don't get on this freight by the time it passes, then we're for sure not gonna win the race, we're goin' off to jail." So we throw our packs in a freight car, and there's only about five cars left on the train, it's goin' maybe fifteen miles an hour, twelve miles an hour at this point, we just start runnin' as fast as we can, and grab on about three cars from the end. (swoosh) Get onto this one freight car and ride all the way to Pendleton.

We wake up about 4:30 the next morning. I look up around this long bend of the track before Pendleton, we see all these bums. I say, "Let's go talk to the bums. I've never met a bum before." Cool. I'm thinking back to a Steinbeck novel or something I'd read a couple of years earlier, and I want to go live this thing, right? Let's go and meet these hobos... Phil says, "Well, wait, what

about our money?" He had forty bucks, I had forty bucks. I said, "Here, fold it all up small and I'll put it inside my bathing suit pocket inside my Levis." "Okay, that's cool." We go up there, and these bums are pretty benign—had a cuss word about every third word.

We finally made it to Idaho sure enough. We were the second team into Idaho, and we head off on the Selway River. We go down to the first camp, about seven miles, to a place called Running Creek. Our team has to wash pots now. The next morning, I'm the last boat to shove off, and I run back in the bushes because I have diarrhea. I take off my bathing suit, and it's really bad. I take my bathing suit, turn it inside out, wipe my ass, and just throw the bathing suit in the bushes. Put my Levis back on, push off down the river, and off we go another ten miles down the river to the next camp. Phil comes up to me and says, "Well, you got my forty bucks, Bob?" And I go, "Oh, shit!" (laughter) I say, "It's in my bathing suit." "Well, get your bathing suit." "No, no, you don't understand, my bathing suit has crap all over it in the bushes back at Running Creek." "Oh, no!" So we go to talk to the head boatman—Steve Gantner. Steve says, "Yeah, you guys can go back there." We said, "We'll walk back tonight before dark..."

STEIGER: Ten miles!

ELLIOTT: Ten miles. It gets dark about 9:30 in Idaho this time of year. "...and get the bathing suit. Roll up in a blanket, sleep overnight, then we'll get up at 4:30 in the morning, we'll be back in time for breakfast. Let's go!" And so (laughs) we go about a mile up the way, across this little bridge, start walking up this road. We said, "We didn't know there was any roads around here!" You know, it's the wilderness, right? And then we hear this Jeep coming up the road, and this guy stops and says, "Where you goin'?" I said, "Running Creek." He says, "That's ten miles, it's seven o'clock at night." "Yeah, we gotta hurry." "Okay, I'll take you as far as I can go. The road goes about a mile up here, and we can take you that far at least." "Okay." We drive down in this big long meadow with these ruts in it and half-way down the meadow he hangs a hard left turn, we go into this little clearing, there's this Cessna airplane. Mr. Henke was his name. He's from Redding, California. He says, "Hop in." We go, "Hop in?!" He says, "Yeah, there's a landing strip up at Running Creek too. If we hurry, you can get your bathing suit and swim back across the river. We'll get you back here and you'll be back in your camp in time for dessert." (laughs) We said, "Cool. This is good!" (laughs) So we hop in Mr. Henke's Cessna airplane, we fly up to Running Creek and land on this strip that's about a ten degree pitch up the hill and I run as fast as I can down to the river, take off my Levis, swim across the river, go right to my bathing suit, grab it, swim back across the river, give Phil his money, pocket my money, hop back in the plane, we get back,



Rob Elliott with his mother Claire on a Sierra Club trip run by Hatch River Expeditions through Desolation Canyon in 1956.

Colorado River was in March or April—Eastertime of 1962, I think. I was nineteen years-old and I was the head cook for a fifty-two-person Sierra Club trip. David Brower was on it, Francois Leydet, and Eliot Porter. Eliot Porter was a famous photographer [published by the Sierra Club in *The Place No One Knew*, and *In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World*,] and Francois Leydet was an author. It was kind of like being on the river with Bus Hatch in 1958. I had no appreciation for the big picture implications of being on the river with David Brower and Eliot Porter back then in Glen Canyon. But I remember the trip very well. Dick Norgaard was absolutely correct. Without him trying to convince me of anything, I realized desert country was really my next thing.

I remember one part of that trip in particular, because it was absolutely pivotal for me. We got to Aztec Creek, which is the creek that came down from Rainbow Bridge. I'd talked the rest of the crew into preparing breakfast for everybody so I could run up there by myself and come back early, so I could

and Mr. Henke goes down, he buzzes our camp about a mile downstream from his little cabin area, lands us, and drives us back to the bridge. We walk down to camp, pull into camp about 9:15, just before dark, just in time for dessert. We tell 'em the story.

* * *

It must have been 1961 that my dad started running Sierra Club trips through Glen Canyon. The area manager for Southern Utah at that time was Dick Norgaard, who since has become a resource economist at UC Berkeley, and he was a great photographer. I still remember discussions with Dick in 1962, when he tried to coax me into coming down to run trips in Utah in the desert. I just said "Oh man, I like all the green trees. I like the fresh water clear as window glass that you can see fifteen feet to the bottom of the river, and it looks like you can touch it. The desert is just... You know, there's no *life*, it's just all the sameness to it. And I love the richness of the Idaho rivers and British Columbia." Dick just kind of... I remember seeing his face, he just kinda shook his head and realized that he wasn't gonna convince me of a thing until I saw it for myself. The first trip I ever did in desert country in canyons on the

bake a birthday cake for someone that had a birthday that day. It's six miles up to Rainbow Bridge, so I left early, about 5 A.M., and half-walked/half-ran all the way up to Rainbow Bridge. Saw it and said, "This is really cool." Half-ran half-way back to camp. At this point it's noontime or so, I suppose. I just stopped jogging and just slowed to a comfortable walk. My head was swimming with the implications of what we were doing on this trip and why we were there. It was really only a year away, or two years at most, that this place was going to be flooded forever. No one else would ever see it this way. I just started crying. I didn't know the word at the time, but it was an epiphany: this was like a religious (chuckles) "flash of light" for me, that this place was gonna be lost, this place that was just so incredibly special. It was among the finest of all of God's expressions on the face of this earth. And right then and there I decided I needed to commit a major part of my life to saving the earth. So it was an important trip for me.

Oh yeah, it was an incredible place. I remember after dinner that night at Aztec Creek, David Brower's daughter, Barbara Brower—she was fourteen, but very old for her age, precocious. She and I sat up late that

night—believe it or not, this is a Sierra Club trip—and we used *paper plates*! Barbara and I sat around the fire after the coals had burned all down, and just threw a new paper plate on the fire, then we'd talk until the plate had burned all up, then throw another plate on the fire. We did that on into the middle of the night, just talking about this place. She was kind of chastising me for how I could possibly run up to Rainbow Bridge and run back...not even see the place? I gave her a little different slant and explained what I had been through that day.

* * *

STEIGER: So your dad...this idea of growing, what possessed him? Did he have a vision or something?



Left to right: Lou Elliott, Joanne, Jim, Claire, Rob, and Linda on a 1967 ARTA outfitted Sierra Club trip, Mexican coast.

ELLIOTT: (laughs) Did he have a vision? Oh my God, did he have a vision! He was consumed by vision...He was one of the world's great salesmen, for starters. He could tell stories. He played the banjo and the guitar and the piano all by ear. He was a great entertainer and people fell in love with him all the time, and would follow him to the ends of the earth. He was the kind of guy that could look ten years out and say, "This is where it's gonna be at ten years from now, so let's get started." And that's how he looked at river running. His favorite thing was program development. We'd be running the Rogue River and he was already thinking Idaho. We'd be runnin' the Rogue River in Oregon and three rivers in Idaho and the Selway and the Salmon—Middle Fork and main Salmon—and he'd be thinkin' British Columbia. We'd be doin' these trips in British Columbia and he'd be thinkin' the coast of Mexico. We'd be doin' the coast of Mexico, he'd say, "Hey, these exact same rafts would work on the Colorado River through Glen Canyon." So he'd be off doin' these things, developing these programs, leaving my sister and me and my other sister, Linda, who worked as a reservationist in our office, and my brother Jim, who worked in logistics and drove trucks...the rest of us would come along behind, making it all happen, picking up the pieces.

My dad, from the very beginning, ran ARTA as a nonprofit association. Marketing. He was thinking he could get vastly more editorial support from newspapers and magazines if it was the American River Touring Association, Incorporated—a nonprofit association for river running. That was his whole idea, and that's why he set it up that way. He was a *master* at generating press coverage with major dailies and magazines...

He set ARTA up as a nonprofit for two reasons: he set it up because he honestly believed he didn't want to make any money at it, he just wanted to take the profits and turn it all back into making it bigger and turning more and more people on to river trips. If they were all turned on to river trips, and families could come together and enjoy this experience on the river, and learn about the natural world, they

were all going to, at some level, become advocates for preserving it. That was always part of his thinking, and that's why...kind of that Sierra Club model, if you will. That was why he set it up as a nonprofit.

There was also the utilitarian pragmatist, Lou Elliott, that said, "This is good sales, because we can generate this media support as a nonprofit."

So as a nonprofit association he had a board of directors. There was a guy named Grant Rogers on the board, and an accountant from Pasadena named Charlie, and each had these nice little nuclear families with a wife and two kids. They got together and said, "Hey, Lou, take us down the Grand Canyon." So he had eight people. "Sure, it'll cost you this much...I've never done it, but I went down once with the Hatches several years ago, and let's go do it!" The board members' families would underwrite the trip.

Eight customers. This was August of 1965. There was my father, there was Steve Gantner and me, and the two Hildebrand brothers, Ross Hildebrand and Kern Hildebrand—the four of us as guides or guides-in-training to run this boat in the Grand Canyon.

I'd never even seen it. I had some prior motor experience along the coast of Mexico and on the John Day River that ran south to north in the heartland of Oregon and flowed into the Columbia...

So here we are, [down] the Grand Canyon with these two families on this trip. We had a 33-foot bridge pontoon, and it was black, we didn't paint it. My father took a tractor tire tube—not the tube, actually, it is the protector between the tractor wheel and the tractor inner tube, called a "boot." It's really quite thick. He made it into an oval in the very back of the floor of the 33, and glued it into the floor so he made this well. Then he had parachute cord that was laced all around this unit, and it pulled the tractor tube now welded to the floor of the boat up off the water level and up around the whole back of the boat, so you could stick



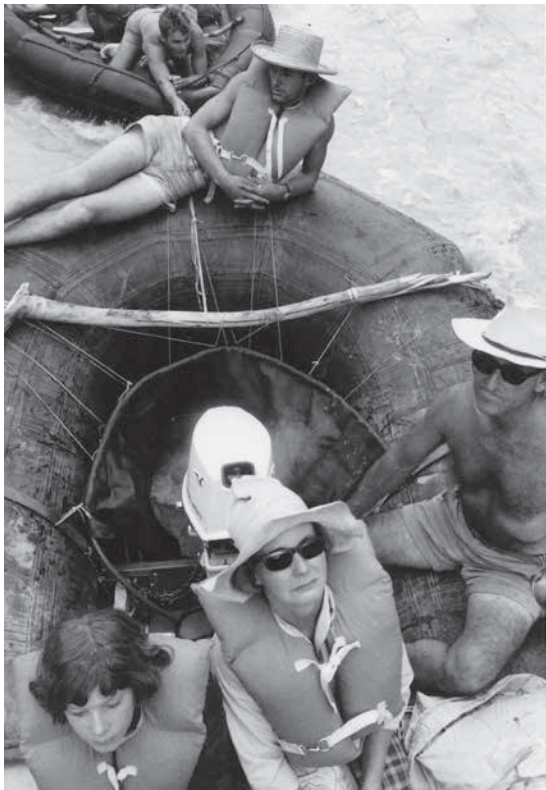
First ARTA raft in the Grand Canyon,
August 15, 1965.

an engine down inside. It didn't occur to him that, "Hey, we could just cut the floors out of these boats." He *knew* he didn't want to hang the motor off the back end like on the Hatch trip he was on, because it was just floppin' all over the place back there. He knew that he wanted the motor protected *inside* the boat. So we have a floor, we didn't cut out the floor, we still had to bail this sucker, but we stuck the motor through this engine well, inside the back of the tube, through this hole in the floor.

STEIGER: So, how come you're not rowing your ten-mans? Why did you go with a motor anyway?

ELLIOTT: I think that's probably...that's probably what everyone did, except Norman Nevills. I mean, that's what everyone was doing in the early sixties. We went, "My God, we have these two families, they have little kids, this is huge water, nothing like

we've seen even on the Salmon or anything. So let's do this big motorboat." That's how we decided to do it, and that's when we started on motors—but, about a month before the trip, these students from UC Berkeley call us up and say, "Hey, we have this little paddleboat. We want to go through the Grand Canyon." My dad said, "Yeah, we're runnin' our first trip in about a month." They said, "Can we come and bring our paddleboat? How much would it cost?" He said, "You can bring your own boat, yeah. A hundred bucks each, and you paddle yourselves down the river, and we'll provide you support. We're goin' anyway, a twelve-day motor trip." So they brought this *amazing* boat down the river, made up of about ten tubes. Each tube is about, oh, eight inches in diameter along the bottom of this boat, except for the outside tubes, which were about ten inches in diameter. So the floor of the boat is made up of eight tubes, the two outside tubes are ten inches. However, these tubes are all inserted inside of nylon sleeves—they're not welded together, they're inside of nylon sleeves that are



Rob Elliott hanging out on back of ARTA's first motor raft towing a paddle raft. Note the motor well which allows the engine to go through an otherwise intact floor. Lov Elliott is piloting the raft, August 1965.

all stitched together. Not only that, but there's aluminum ribs to the boat. These aluminum ribs go through other nylon sleeves that are stitched perpendicular to the nylon sleeves in which the tubes are thrust. And so this tubular arrangement is rather like the hull of a boat as it comes up around the side, and the tubes are all stitched together so they come together to form a prow in the front of the boat. In the back the tubes start to come toward each other in the stern, but instead of making a prow, they end in a little transom about three-and-a-half-feet wide and about maybe fourteen inches deep. It's made of three-quarter-inch or one-inch plywood. In the middle of that plywood transom is an oarlock with a seven-foot oar that rudders this unit. And then you have three people on each side that are paddling. They're not sitting on the tubes, because the tubes wouldn't support them with these aluminum ribs and stuff—rather you're sort of laying down on your butt and your hip, leaning over the side of the boat with short little canoe paddles, four and a half foot-long canoe paddles, and paddling furiously along, while one guy in the center with the seven-foot oar is ruddering.

STEIGER: And you can really rudder!

ELLIOTT: Oh, this is a *great* unit! So we have a hybrid trip right from the get-go—a paddleboat and a motor-boat for twelve days in the Grand Canyon, August 1965. It was an *incredible* trip, one of the finest trips I've ever run in the Grand Canyon. We only flipped the paddle-boat twice: one was in 24 1/2-Mile and one was at the top of Hance. I wasn't in it at 24 1/2-Mile, but I was in it in Hance, and I was ruddering. (laughs) Whoops!

...But those are the only two times we flipped over, the entire trip. The other thing I remember on the trip was that we never hit a rock once. We probably had about 30,000 cubic feet per second, steady, the entire trip. We didn't have peaking flow back in 1965. I think the motor stalled on us only twice in a rapid, 'cause it kind of flooded out, and it always started on the first crank, each of those two times. It was the most flawless trip I've ever run in terms of props, in terms of the motor, in terms of everything.

The water was not fluctuating very much at all. It was pretty high, a lot higher than we expected it. So we *moved*. The other (chuckles) notable thing I remember is we had a Les Jones scroll map—that's all we had. But all these other trips we ran over the years up in Idaho and Oregon and stuff like that, we didn't even have as good as that. The first time I feasted my eyes on a Les Jones scroll map, I thought, "Wow, is this cool or what?!" I still have the map down in my garage. We'd write notes all along it, just like Les Jones did. This is an incredible map, but we still lost our way a little bit. (chuckles) We just set up for the little rapids at Havasu—we never even stopped at Havasu. This is a twelve-day motor trip, and we didn't even do Havasu! Oh, we were mortified.

* * *

So we headed into 1966. My father, optimistically, he thought... "Let's go to thirty people a trip and do three twelve-day trips, nine days in between each trip." ... heading for the scheduling of two boat trips, so thirty people, fifteen on a boat... we were gonna, of course, graduate to side tubes at that point. 1965 we didn't have side tubes. We just had a single unit. So we added the side tubes in 1966, so we can put fifteen people on a boat. But, my father way underestimated demand. We filled up those three twelve-day trips, thirty people per trip, by about March 15 the following spring. My dad turns to me on Easter break from college and says, "Bob, I want to schedule two nine-day trips in those two break slots between the two trips, if you think you and Steve can just run the trips all summer long. I'll have support crew, two sets of equipment, so I'll have a whole second set of equipment for the two nine-day trips." I said, "We don't have any days off at that point." He says, "I know, but this is when the people want to go, and this



Lou Elliott (without the lifejacket) hanging out in the paddle raft with the boys from UC Berkeley, August 1965.

and the McCullough was working pretty decent for us, and the other engines were really on the fritz—we thought they'd be lucky to get the rest of the trip out to the lake with our assistants runnin' 'em. So we said, "Okay, let's take the McCullough." So we took two fourteen-foot oars, because back in those days, you could have a spare engine, but you also had to have spare oars on your motor rigs, like the Hatches had... So we said, "Let's take the oars, we don't need them anyway." We took these two fourteen-foot oars, we cradled

is when we can book 'em. So you do a twelve, and the very next day you do a nine, the very day you get off you do a twelve, the very day you get off you do a nine, the very day you get off you do a twelve." I said, "I'm game if Steve is. Yeah, sure." And Steve said, "Cool, we'll do it." So Steve and I ran those two boats, five trips back-to-back, so that would be twelve-nine-twelve-nine-twelve in terms of the total number of days in a row that we ran in the Grand in 1966. It was pretty incredible, because I don't know where we got the energy. Well, I do a little bit...we were so jazzed.

the McCullough engine in between 'em and humped it on out the Whitmore Trail in the middle of the day (STEIGER: Oh my God!) and loaded it into the Jeep that was waiting for us at the top, and off we went for Lees Ferry to run the final twelve-day trip.

The kind of equipment we ran with was just incredible.

* * *

My dad could hardly keep up on the motor maintenance. We had Johnsons. But he also was trying out a new engine called a McCullough Ox—a great big, heavy engine that easily weighed as much as the Honda four-strokes we're using today. They had this great big propeller, about a ten-inch diameter propeller on the bottom, and much lower RPM than the Johnsons, and he thought this would be the cat's meow. This is like for running barges. And Steve and I...we were getting tired, getting flogged by the end. We came off the second nine-day trip on this schedule, we were slated to hike out of Whitmore Wash and drive to Lees Ferry and start the final twelve-day trip. The guy we met at the bottom of the Whitmore Trail had a message from my dad: "I can't get enough engines. You've gotta bring one of your engines off." We looked at our engines,

I'm an area manager of Grand Canyon for 1966, '67, '68...March of 1968 I turn 24. I'm out of college a couple of months, and the Vietnam era is full-crank.



The one-of-a-kind paddle raft runs the left side of Lava Falls.



Rob and Lou Elliott, August 1965.

Two weeks after my 24TH birthday I get my 1-A notice I gotta report, I gotta go. I show it to my dad and say, “I’m not going. I don’t believe in this.” He said, “Whatcha gonna do?” I said, “Well, I’m gonna become a conscientious objector to war. I don’t think this is right.” I took ten days off, went over and stayed in Dory Schwab’s little cabin in Marin County. I was going to the Unitarian Church in San Francisco across the Bay. I just sat and read and read. I must have written forty pages of material. I distilled it down to the ten best pages, submitted it to my draft board (which helped that it was Berkeley, California), and two weeks later they told me I was a c.o. [conscientious objector] to war. So, got out of the military. This was, oh, early or mid-April at this point, and I’m about to head down the Grand Canyon for another season—or so I think—but I get another notice from my draft board saying, “Okay, you have to do alternative service. You have four choices: carry bedpans in a mental hospital, drive trucks for Goodwill Industries...” I forget the third choice. The fourth choice was “Other,” blank. Go find something to do that meets alternative service requirements. I had heard a friend was working for the Colorado Outward Bound School. We’ll just call it Outward Bound from here on. His name was Chris Brown. Chris’ old girlfriend was Libby Frishman, and Libby was my girlfriend as a junior and part-way through my senior year in college. Libby told me about Chris Brown and working for Outward Bound as a c.o.

for his alternative service. So I wrote a letter—“I’d like a job, here’s my background...” They called me up and had about a ten-minute interview over the phone, hired me on the spot. “Okay, we need you to report July 2, 1968, at our Marble base camp in the Snowmass Maroon Bells Wilderness Area.” I was jazzed.

I still remember my interview at the Marble base camp with the associate director, Gary Templin. Gary was asking me all sorts of questions about climbing and knots and what routes I’d done and where I’d climbed and how much ice experience I had up in Glacier and South America and things like that. Just really curious—he’s not asking me anything about rivers. At the end of the interview he says, “Well,

Rob, we’re gonna send you out for 23 days with a patrol of nine students in the Maroon Bells Snowmass Wilderness Area on a mountaineering course. I said, “That’s great. But what about the river program?” He said, “Oh, man, we just need so many mountaineering instructors and we’re so strapped, we’re growing so fast ourselves, we decided to put off the river program for a year.” So I worked for Outward Bound for the first several months as a mountaineering instructor, which was way cool and has a whole mess of stories all to itself.

The next spring I sat down with Joe Nold, the director of Colorado Outward Bound School. He said, “Okay, we want to start the river program in Dinosaur National Monument on the Yampa and Green Rivers.” All we had to do was get a special use permit at the time. This would have been winter/early spring of 1969. He said, “We’re gonna run it with the women’s courses where there’s a module. They’ll run some in the mountains, some on the river, for three days, *et cetera*, four days. And we’ll also do it with some specialty programs, management seminars, and some high school students... Let’s go!” Joe told me, “I want you to design the program, Rob. The only constraint I’m really gonna give you is that it has to be all paddle.” I had never paddled in my life. I had kayaked, of course, and I’d run a lot of rivers. I had never paddled a raft, ever. And I told Joe that. He said, “That doesn’t matter. You’ve had enough river background, and you know Outward Bound now,

and I know Outward Bound. I know people, and I know how this all works. It can work paddling. Just figure out how to do it." I said, "Okay."

I bought six rafts—they were Green River rafts, built in West Virginia—from my dad, for Outward Bound. We took one of these rafts in March, I think, in Dinosaur, and took a bunch of Outward Bound instructors, some of whom had had some river background—kayaking and stuff—and we had four days to work with. I said, "Okay, the objective here is we're gonna just go figure this thing out and write a manual on how to paddle a raft. We'll have that manual written when we get off the river four days from now. Let's go." And we did it. We just figured out how to do it. That's all that Outward Bound ever ran in all of 1969 and all of 1970. But by the time I walked away from Outward Bound in the fall of 1970, we had 62 paddle instructors, fully qualified, that had gone through the training program and knew how to captain, how to paddle instruct in Dinosaur National Monument.

The other thing of note was about sixty percent of them were women. Joe Nold and I never ever talked affirmative action. We never talked male/female, the woman/man thing. We never even discussed it. We just hired and trained the most competent people we could find, and retained the most competent people we could find. It didn't matter if they were men or women—it never even crossed our minds.

So by July of 1970, technically my alternative service was up, but I made a commitment to Outward Bound to stay with them through the summer program.

Gary was a Green Beret...Gary Templin, the associate director that hired me. And I was a conscientious objector to war. So here's this c.o. and this Green Beret trying to work things out together. He hired me for three hundred dollars a month for Outward Bound. I worked my entire first year for three hundred dollars a month—never complained, never said a thing. He said, "I'll pay you three-hundred dollars a month, Rob, because that's what a private first-class in the Army would get. And that's what you're doin' here, is alternative service." I said, "I'm just happy to be here." I never said a thing. He came to me at the end of the first summer in 1969 and said, "Rob, we want you to

stay through next summer. I know you're up with your alternative service, and it's only right that I raise your salary to seven hundred dollars a month. This private first-class bullshit doesn't really hold anymore. You've proven yourself."

STEIGER: Now you're a sergeant? (laughter)

ELLIOTT: I just said, "That's cool. I like the job, I'm havin' a good time. Happy to do it."

* * *

Oh, summer of 1970...We were doing this management training seminar on the Green River through Lodore Canyon, four-day trip. We have a cancellation about two weeks before the trip, so there's room for one person. I went up to Gary Templin and said, "Gary, can my dad come along on this trip? I'd really like him to come and see what I've been doin' in Outward Bound." Gary said, "Sure, you bet." So I called up my dad, he came along. He had a good ole time. That was the first



Ron Gieger and Rob Elliott running a charter trip for the Emerst and Julio Gallo families in 1967.



Rob instructing "currents and eddies" to Outward Bound students, Lodore Canyon, 1969.

I learned that he wasn't really a very good boatman. (laughter)

STEIGER: You didn't know that before?

ELLIOTT: I didn't know that before. He was a great visionary, he was a great organizer, a great salesman, a great motivator of people, and he taught us all how to row, he taught us about currents and eddies, he was great at methodology, but he himself was not really a great boatman or a great guide. That's why I took the rafts down the John Day River, not him. That's why I ran Lava Falls on the first trip through for ARTA in 1965, because he wasn't all that confident.

But I didn't realize this until the management training seminar with Outward Bound. They say, "Oh, hey Lou, you have some river background, you captain." We rotated captains in the first hour on the water at Outward Bound, so that everybody was brought right into it, right from the get-go. We'd have six captains, ten minutes apart in the first hour on the water, just to kind of sort the crew out, get them sorting each other out, early on. (We could go into all sorts of methodology digressions here...) So my dad's captaining the boat with Outward Bound, and (chuckles) he's really not doing a very good job. And I kind of realized, either the old guy's kind of lost it here [he was 64 years-old at the time], or he never was really good at this—meaning reading the river. So, he did learn what Outward Bound was all about, and he learned what I had been doin' for a couple of years, which is important to the next part of the story...

* * *

Without exception, you can look at the companies running in Grand Canyon (and probably all over the world) today, and still see the fingerprints of the people who founded them. Rob Elliott went on from Outward Bound to become Operations Manager of a six-state ARTA enterprise: California,

Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Arizona... more than 140 guides in all, back in the '70s. In Grand Canyon, at Rob's instigation, the company went from an all motor situation to 75 percent rowing... snout rigs, paddle rafts, finally eighteen-footers too. Furthermore, they started hiring women. Rob married Jessica Youle, and with her help and encouragement, (to make a long story short), they eventually bought the Grand Canyon operation from his dad. Much later, after they'd divorced, Rob bought Jessica out too. Since then there's been oceans of water under the bridge: hundreds of guides who've taken thousands upon thousands of people down the river, and through it all certain themes repeat themselves over and over and over again... youthful exuberance (a pre-requisite, even in the old-timers); social conscience and political activism (think Rob himself, then Don Briggs, Bob Melville, Drifter Smith, John O'Brien, etc., etc., etc... think letter campaigns, trails trips, disability trips, disadvantaged youth trips, diplomat trips...) and participatory zeal that is unending (to this day, some AZRA paddle captains start a trip by having everyone take turns commanding the ship.)

* * *

Of all the different ways that AZRA guides over the years have enhanced the opportunity for self-discovery, the number one way certainly has been participation, to let people row through 36-Mile or Kwagunt... you know, teach people how to paddle. Or encourage them—don't send them away when they offer to help in the kitchen. Participation is a key ingredient. And right up there... and perhaps even more of a key ingredient, is the opportunity for quiet, for solitude, for silence. And that takes time. AZRA was the contractor for a Bureau of Reclamation trip with the Commissioner of Bureau of Reclamation at the time, Dan Beard, that went out as a motor trip April 11, 1994. And we had a whole bunch of different people on it, including Ferrell Sekacacu [phonetic spelling]—the chairman of the Hopi Tribe at

the time. Superintendent Arnberger was on the trip, his second week on the job. John Leshy, the head solicitor for the Department of Interior, and some key figures from the private sector in the water and power communities were on this trip. We went five days to Phantom and talked all about the management of Glen Canyon Dam and the future. But especially we were talking about the future of water policy management in the West. It was a great trip. It was a bunch of heavyweights talking about some heavy issues. And what were the two things that many of the trip members came back to me and said “thank you” for? “That was a really important part of my trip!”? When from Nankoweap to the Little Colorado River we said, “We’ve been talking so much, let’s just do no talking. It’ll just be quiet, just be silence. Let’s not talk.” This is on a motor trip, so we turned off the motor as much as we could between Kwagunt and the LCR, and just drifted. Every once in a while we’d have to yank on the motor a little bit to get us back in the main current, and then shut it off. And that was a high point of their experience, on a *motor* trip.

The second high point of their experience was playing like kids in the Little Colorado River and making trains, putting our life jackets on upside down and making trains to float through the little riffle on the Little Colorado River there. I have a big picture of all these water and power heavyweights going on their little train with their life jackets on like diapers, bein’ like kids.

Those are the two things that they told me was so important about their trip.

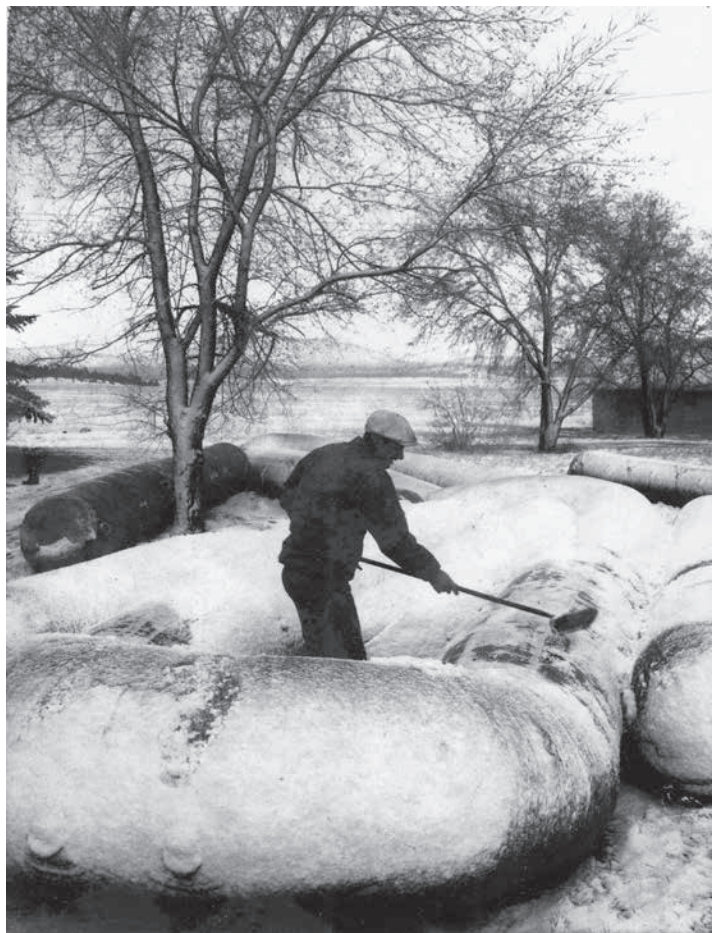
STEIGER: So you made them shut up, and you guys just basically floated all the way down there, from Nankoweap?

ELLIOTT: Yeah, and that’s a very common thing that I can’t take a whole lot of credit for. It’s just hiring the right people and giving them permission to do this kind of thing. I mean, I learned this from our guides as much as I have any responsibility for teaching it to them. I was on a trip once several years ago, and David Edwards, one of AZRA’s great trip leaders, not only said “We are gonna have no talking this morning,” but he started off with some wonderful inspirational readings from Native Americans and poets about the value of silence in our lives. Then we pushed off on a silent float.

But there’s an outfitter responsibility here too. The point I want to make, back on that Bureau of Reclamation trip, was

that we could only just float with the current from Kwagunt to the Little Colorado, *because we had enough time to do that*. We had structured enough time on the trip to allow the guides to create that experience. I think that’s an essential part of what we’re doin’ down there, is makin’ sure we have enough time. (big sigh)

...Now, with all due respects to that “fire in their eyes” that Rod Nash speaks of...Who says that the non-commercial participant rowing his or her raft first time in the Grand Canyon, having only rowed a total of a hundred miles on a river ever before, who is pushing the envelope of experience, and hanging it all out there and discovering incredible insights about themselves in the Grand Canyon—who says that that experience has *any* more value than the lady coming on a trip—a commercial trip, let’s say—from Chicago who’s a hundred pounds overweight, and something about her experience in the Grand Canyon put her in a frame of mind to go back home and get out of that abusive rela-



Rob Elliott getting ready to paint some rubber on a snowy day at the Burris Ranch in Flagstaff, Arizona, March 1967.



Rob Elliott on the Middle Fork
of the Salmon, 1965

tionship she's been in for the last twenty years and decide, "I'm enough all by myself, and I'm gonna lose eighty pounds and I'm gonna get a whole new grip on my life." Who says that that lady from Chicago is having any less valid an experience in the Grand Canyon than the person rowing it themselves for the first time?"

* * *

The evolution of *any* person's history is not in a vacuum—it's with a whole lot of other really formative people that have either inspired them or helped them along the way. My own humble recommendation in this oral history project, is to ask everybody "Who are some of the truly influential guides?" But just as importantly, "Why? What was it about them?"...the very first person I would have told you about was Wesley Smith. I don't know if Wesley gave you any of this, but he was hired by Lou Elliott out of a gas station. He was a tire jockey and my dad was short a couple of swamper. "Wanna go on a river trip?" in Williams, Arizona. He can give you the history on that better than I can. But it's just like from there on it was just

incredible...Why? It would be humility, it would be diversity, and spirituality. Humility because Wesley knew always, from the beginning, that he wasn't making the experience for the people. He was figuring out what they were ready for, what they were looking for, but mostly what they were ready for, and helping make that happen in a really quiet sort of way...

Wesley gives *value* to *every* person: no matter how old they are, what their gender is, what their experience is, no matter what their political views are, how "evolved" they are, or how high their consciousness is, or how struggling they are in their life. It doesn't matter. Everyone that Wesley spends time with is of equal value...

That reminds me of a great story about Martha Clark too, who I also count as one of the truly great guides I've ever known in the Grand Canyon. Martha and I and four other guides were at Saddle Canyon in 1985, and it was a...discovery trip, I guess. It was a trip of people who wanted to come down and experience the Grand Canyon for fourteen days with no interchanges, and also experience some Native American ritual. So there was a wonderful woman along on the trip who was a Lakota Sioux. Her name is Marilyn Youngbird. And there was another guy on the trip, that was running the trip, and he was a wanna-be Native American—he was really Anglo. Around the campfire at Upper Saddle Canyon he said, "I think it's so exciting that we're all down here together on this incredible journey to go through the Grand Canyon and discover some of the Native American rituals and be together on such a special experience." And then he started talking down all of the other trips, motor trips, or all the people that just drank a whole lot of beer and got inebriated in this incredible sacred place of the Grand Canyon, *et cetera*. And as he was talking along this vein, Martha Clark stood up and kind of put her hand up in the air and said, "Wait just a minute, that's not right at all. Yes, we're special, and this is a special trip, and a special opportunity for all of us, but I've done a lot of guiding in the Grand Canyon, and *every* trip I've been on is special, and *every* person that comes through the Grand Canyon is special. Every trip down here is special. That's how I look at it, and you're not gonna change my mind." It was just such a neat sort of blurting out and challenging this kind of elitist sort of notion. And that is one of the things I think that makes someone like a Wesley Smith or a Martha Clark or a David Edwards...

STEIGER: Suzanne Jordan.

ELLIOTT: (chuckles) Suzanne Jordan. One of the most wonderful things about Suzanne Jordan was that yes, she just went off and followed her dream and became a guide in the Grand Canyon, but if you ever had a line-up of people from all walks of life in, say, a

New York subway and you took a person on the street and said, “Okay, see those ten people lined up against that wall over there? Okay, pick out which one is the river guide.” It wouldn’t be Suzanne Jordan. And yet she was one of the truly great river guides I have ever known.

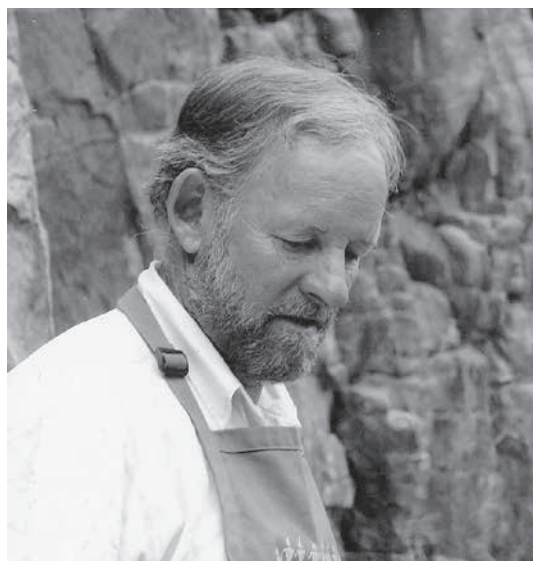
We were at the mouth of Havasu Creek in this tremendous flash flood. It was raining lightly and I was up under a ledge. I was meditating—back when I meditated—and I heard this “ka-thwap!” like a rifle shot. It was the D-rings being ripped off the fronts of the rafts. This frothy, muddy flood of about five or six vertical feet was just *whippin’* at those rafts, and throwin’ ’em out the mouth of Havasu. We had two trips, so we had ten rafts there. I jumped up and ran down the trail and went down the ledges down to where all the guides are, and there’s all this commotion. Dave Edwards is standing on a raft that’s starting to drift out into the main current. He says, “It’s a body!” He jumps on this woman that doesn’t have a life jacket. This person had been washed downstream from the last ford up inside the mouth of Havasu. I look over just in time to see Suzanne Jordan grab a throw bag that we had hung up at the tie-in spot just in case we needed a throw bag there—she grabs this throw bag and whips it out to Edwards as he’s going out in the main current holding onto this woman without the life jacket that had been swept down through the narrows and underneath the rafts. She pulls them to shore. As soon as Edwards is pulled into the shore like a pendulum, there’s about five or six people down there grabbing them. What does Suzanne do? She goes, “I’m not needed here anymore.” She immediately looks up and asks, “Where’s the next need?” I see her kind of squat down and just gun it. She just *runs* off the ledges, and leaps off one of the muav ledges and lands on her belly on the side of a raft. There’s four rafts all takin’ off down the river by themselves without anybody in ’em. “I should maybe be on those rafts,” she figured. (laughter) So there she was, and she floated on downstream and she started rowing one of the rafts to try to get the whole flotilla to shore. She couldn’t row four rafts full of water from the flash flood. She finally pulls in about two miles downstream on the left, and she runs ashore with a rope and puts it through a little eye of the rock and cinches it off and stops the whole flotilla from going downstream. But she’s not the person you would pick out as the river guide from the lineup.

STEIGER: Great story!

ELLIOTT: She was incredible. She was terrific. You know, I almost hate to mention *any* guides, because as soon as you start mentioning names at all, you’re gonna leave out a *whole* bunch.



photo by Dave Edwards



September 2004, in Grand Canyon.

NOTE: This oral history project is made possible by a grant from the Arizona Humanities Council (AHC). The results of this project do not necessarily represent the view of AHC or the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Arizona Humanities Council

As the moon sets, the sun wakes, peeling the dark
blanket off of red peaks that gently kiss the clear sky.
Green water lightly splashed onto sandy beaches, and trees
stretch their slender roots to suck life into their lush leaves.

White waves polish rocks and embrace history;
layers of fluted stones whisper their tales
into mid-day silence.

Wrens weep in wonderment for the beauty that they,
through accustomed to, cannot even fathom, and ornery
wind smiles as it roars upstream.

The heat seemingly melts even the most solid of structures,
cooled lava and deep ridges weld tightly together.
Pools trickle down ledges and fall into springs, nourishing
all that they can reach.

Snakes slither, bugs buzz, and goats graze by the river;
The hot and hissing cliffs begin to cast shadows;
the hush is deafening.

Bats beat their wings and herons nestle
Into the comfort of their own fine feathers.

The stream's mouth yawns as the sun bids "adieu"
Behind the massive mountainous formations.

The moon rises and the desert glows a dim cerulean,
and, though night has come, the stars dance.

The canyon never sleeps.

Samantha Rist