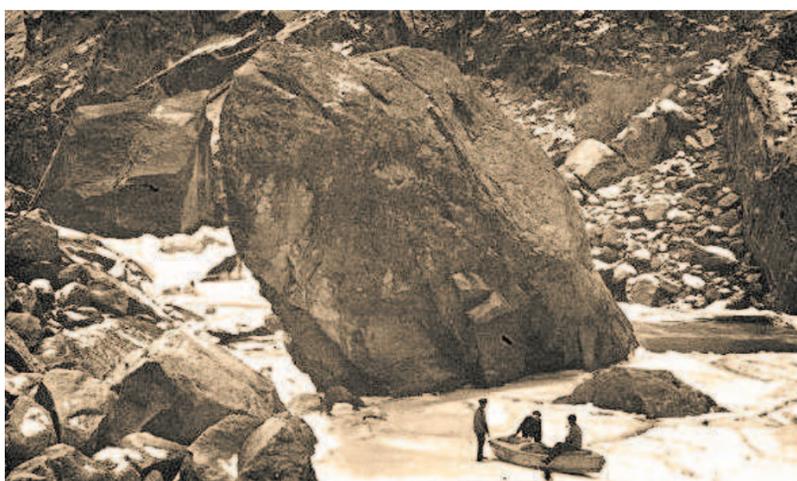


A winter river running tale



Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger



Ellsworth Kolb's group of explorers studies their situation near today's Washing Machine Rapid below Chasm View in Black Canyon. The party spent 18 days trying to move the boat some 4 miles downstream to Red Rock Canyon. Photo used with permission, Northern Arizona University.

Four men stand by the river. Winter has brought polar-like temperatures. Waning daylight sends a chill to their bones. They intend to cross the river, but wading in sends ice water into their veins. It could be this December, but Ellsworth Kolb, historic river runner, assembled this group in December 1916. One of them can't swim. It will take fortitude to make this crossing.

Kolb summoned up this kind of courage many times during his previous attempts to float the Gunnison River through Black Canyon. He and four others put in at Cimarron in July. Having been told that wooden boats wouldn't fit through the tight rapids of the canyon, they launched in canvas canoes. They felt compelled to rope the canoes and lower them (also called lining them) through or around the rapids most of the time. In the end, the canoes collapsed a few times before they gave up.

Oliver Stone, an Ohio businessman who floated with and bankrolled Kolb's adventures, sent two Peterborough freight canoes. Made of wood, these were very sturdy crafts with closed bow and stern. Kolb hired well known river runner and friend Bert Loper to join him.

Kolb's letter of instruction read, "I will not expect you to do impossible things, but will expect you to enlist for the entire trip the same as a soldier... I

do not accept anybody's statement regarding impassable places." They floated the Colorado through Glenwood and Westwater Canyons to give the Gunnison a chance to recede.

Starting in October, again at Cimarron, they floated down to the Gunnison Tunnel in two days. From there the trip down river became more treacherous. The canyon was "more like a crack in a mountain with a torrent pouring through." Working around Flat Rock Falls, one of the boats slid down a sloping rock and wedged between boulders. They only "lost 4 days" dynamiting the rock and repairing the boat.

Lining the boats around some very tight rapids continued until they reached The Narrows. "The granite boulders were slippery as glass and a wet shoe would not hold." Loper fell; landing with his back on a projecting rock. Kolb nursed him with only a hot

water bottle.

The skies, already swollen with rain, dropped snow on them two days later. By that time Kolb had "wrenched" a knee. The two clawed their way up Echo Canyon, "one cripple helping the other." The Dunlap family on Bostwick Park put them up that night.

Fortitude defined: Strength of mind that allows one to endure pain or adversity with courage. That's today's definition. Dictionaries from Kolb's day record the addition, "without murmuring, depression or despondency."

Kolb returned in November with William Wright of Montrose; but it snowed, and rained and snowed again that week. Lawrence Coats took Wright's place, portaging only one boat, now, "under the worst conditions I have ever seen." Coats' brother Adrian and Jay Hall joined them.

Grief pursued them over the ice-covered boulders, and even with the boat

held by a rope "tight as a fiddle string," it crashed into a rapid, broke apart and sank. There seemed to be no warmth in the withering winter sun, as they hiked downstream.

They were on the north side of the river, though. Hall was unable to swim the frigid waters and there they stood; shivering, muscles worn, frayed nerves, resolve at a low point. Fortitude springs forward at moments like this.

After several attempts, they locked arms together. The current was strong enough to lift them all off of their feet, except for hulk-like Hall. Walking sticks dug between river rocks, the waters pushing hard against the weary travelers. One of the Coats brothers sang "Will the waters be chilly when I am called to die." Finally they all made it across.

Kolb had plenty to ponder, "All winter I planned and fussed about that last section..." He was determined to return to the canyon to finish the adventure. Sometimes the most rewarding aspect of any experience from the land comes from working harder than you thought would ever be required. He returned early the next summer to conclude the trip down the river, and achieve his goal.

Kolb made many plans for floating Black Canyon, but not every journey goes according to plan. In fact, no historical Black Canyon expedition went according to plan. One hundred years on from that arctic-like crossing, we have the benefit of knowing that we can also find fortitude when faced with the unimaginable. As the fading light of year's end approaches, maybe that is Kolb's centennial gift to us.

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

The year in review



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



Posse members are taking their annual refresher course for wild land firefighting. Learning from mistakes can help prevent a tragedy. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

Every year wild land firefighters must renew their certifications by completing a refresher course. All members of the posse take the same course in the spring. The course is a study of the things that went wrong during the previous year in an attempt to learn from mistakes of other firefighters. We do the same thing by reviewing the rescues and missions we participated in during the previous year.

I thought it might be helpful to all if I shared some of the things that went wrong for folks this past year. After close to 40 years in emergency services of one form or another, I am amazed at how much I still have to learn.

We had a call out for a lost hunter. The man had found an area where he had cell service and was able to call for help to 9-1-1. The hunter also had a GPS with him and was able to provide coordinates for his location.

The mistake the man made was in not marking the location of his starting point when he left his truck. His GPS was able to tell him where he was, but because he did not mark a starting point, he had no place in his GPS to return to. We found him quickly, before a weather system closed in.

The lesson learned is to always mark your starting point, even if you know the area well. Weather conditions change and your visual landmarks can disappear. Having that starting point marked and other points along the way can help you find your way back.

This past spring, a husband, wife and their little boy took off on an ATV ride with their new side-by-side. When they left the parking area and dropped into Dry Creek, the weather was a pleasant 70 degrees. Late in the afternoon, the machine broke down, leaving them stranded.

As night approached, the temperatures dropped into the low 30s. Fortunately, they had cell service and called for help. Dispatch was able to provide an approximate location from a ping on their call and we were able to find them before midnight.

This family had no extra clothes, food or water. All they had were the clothes they wore when they left earlier that afternoon. Hypothermia was a real possibility for them had they not had cell

service.

The lesson learned here is to always carry some extra supplies and clothes with you, whenever and wherever you go. No matter how short the trip or how close you may be to camp, carry a pack with you, just in case something goes wrong.

There were two hikers who lost their way up near Fence Line on the Plateau. They found a place with cell service and were able to call for help. Dispatch was cut short on the call because the hiker's phone died when the battery ran out. The two folks were found safe and sound eventually, but the duration of their ordeal could have been drastically reduced if they had good battery power for their cell phone.

For as little as 10 bucks you can purchase a 4,000mAh portable charging device. This power bank is about the size of a roll of quarters and weighs a few ounces, but has the power to charge a normal cell phone battery twice.

Carry one of the small power banks with you and remember to use the cell phone wisely. Keep the phone off when you are in areas where there is no service. A phone that has no service will quickly drain all its power looking for service. Keeping it off will reserve the power until you need it and the back up can keep you in touch with emergency services for a long time if needed.

Next column we will continue our review into what went wrong and how we might learn from it. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

Outdoor brief

Ski, snowboard opportunities a bound

Whether you're a self-professed ski bum or looking for a new adventure, now is the time to head to one of the nearby ski resorts.

Within the San Juan Mountains, Monarch Ski Area, Purgatory Resort, Telluride Ski Resort and Wolf Creek Ski Area beckon visitors with lifts open at 9 a.m.

Monarch offers easy access for families and abundant yearly snowfall. For information call (719) 530-5000.

Purgatory Resort offers terrain for all abilities and a family-friendly atmosphere. For information call (970) 247-9000.

Telluride Ski Resort offers visitors an abundance of terrain choices and an opportunity for a gondola ride. View the historic mining town before descending the slopes. For information call (970) 728-6900.

Wolf Creek Ski Area is known for deep-powder skiing, a groomed nordic track and while in Pagosa Springs, visitors can relax in the hot springs. For information call (970) 264-5639.

Among the Rocky Mountains, friends and families may gather and ski at Crested Butte. The mountain resort is best known for in-bounds extreme terrain, but also offers wide open beginning and intermediate runs. For information call (800) 544-8448.

Powderhorn Resort awaits 4,000 feet above the valley floor of the Grand Mesa with some of the best glade skiing in the state. For information, call (970) 268-5700.

Seedling orders accepted by Forest Service

The CSU Tri River Area Extension, in cooperation with the Colorado State Forest Service, is taking orders for seedling trees used for conservation purchases.

No acreage restrictions apply to purchase the seedlings in Montrose, Delta, Ouray and Mesa counties.

The extension office also is pre-ordering perennial wildflowers and ornamental grasses.

All can be ordered through April 10, 2017, with delivery set to occur in early May.

As the seedling program is statewide, inventories are already running out for some specific varieties. For species questions, contact (970) 249-9051 or horticulture agent Susan Carter at (970) 244-1850 or Susan.Carter@colostate.edu.

For seedling tree order forms, contact (970) 249-3935.



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