

House Boating on Lake Powell

(Why didn't we do that???)

by Larry Kline



First Camp Near Lake Canyon



The TravelSmith Paddler and Author

Dawn. Day seven. A voice looms from Paul's tent... "Load and Go!". The wind has calmed. It stopped battering the tent at midnight thirty. The thrashing of the fly was mind numbing. At times I sat leaning against the tent wall just to keep it from collapsing. The sand blasting had also stopped. But the finer stuff came thru the door screen and now covers the tent floor and the top of my bag. No whining!! We pack up in 30 minutes. No one opts for the boom box. But I do have breakfast—two fig newtons and a swig of Gatorade. The other two in the group, Paul Froehler and Alex Thompson, paddled out yesterday... Lucky them. Now, it's just Paul Eckhart, Howard Guenther and myself. Lucky us. Another day in Paradise!

We have 6 miles to paddle before landing at Halls Crossing boat ramp. Should be a piece of cake. The first mile is out Lake Canyon. Steep sidewalls. A stiff breeze in our face and 1 to 2 foot waves. But it is easier than Day 3 exiting Escalante Arm. But not much! After exiting the canyon mouth it

gets really wild. 2-foot waves. Wind and waves at our backs. Course 70 degrees to the wind and waves. Surf is up!!! The waves try and spin the boat. I'm freaking out... I drop off to 30 degrees but now the bow is submerged so I paddle like mad just to make sure I'm ready to brace should I get rolled by a wave. The other two guys stay higher to the wind and make the opposite shore. I get blown past them and finally make landfall ¼ mile downwind.

We hook up at the first bend in the lake for the next leg. All agree to stay together. Now the wind is in our face but the seas are still surfing behind us. After ½ mile the waves come around and it's back to power paddling again. A half-mile later we round the 2nd bend and the wind is gone but the sea is a plain of choppy waves one-foot high that remind us of an infinity of water droplet splashes. The paddling is now lumpy and bumpy. But a lot easier. Whew..... We ended that last day with all 3 boats locked together and Paul's small spinnaker sail wafting us to the boat ramp.

And all this in just 3 miles of paddling!!!! Where is that houseboat anyway!!

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We had started the trip with two days of flat, pristine water. Paddling 13 to 18 miles each day. Straight lining for Escalante Arm some 28 miles down lake. It was ideal. Temperatures hovered at 70. A houseboat would pass by every so often but it was serene nonetheless. Steep canyon walls. Alcoves. Camping on the beach. We made it, but some of us were worn out. A multi-hour debate ensued that evening. But Froehler decided the point, "We did not paddle all this way just to go back without exploring the Arm". We opt to camp at the base of the Arm and do a one-day exploration up to Davis Gulch. Besides, there was an elegant NPS-provided floating out-house nearby with flush toilets. No need to use the boom box!!! One just paddles up alongside, steps out onto the ladder and 2 steps up to the expansive deck. Hey, we could even camp here!

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continued

Day 3 we awake refreshed and paddle 5 miles up the Arm and into the narrow passage of Davis Gulch. Half way up we round a corner and a houseboat sits in front of us. The soft music of an acoustic guitar and a woman's musical voice fill the space. We round another corner just by the boat and a magnificent arch sweeps overhead. We float in a music-filled silence and gaze at La Gorce arch. A short paddle around another corner and we reach a sand-filled alcove at the head of the canyon. There the lake peters into a muddy flat and we hop out and drag our boats thru the mid-calf deep mud. I explore around another corner and give the all clear that it is dry and walkable ahead. We all set out for a 2-3 mile hike to Bement Arch but only Alex and Paul Fowler go the distance. The rest of us wander slowly back taking in the sights. Cottonwood groves and evidence of beaver activity abound. Frogs are jumping and croaking in the beaver pond backwaters. As we prepare to leave, a second houseboat that was at the sandy alcove takes off only to get its 20-foot long, steel gangplank caught in the mud. It cannot go forward or backward. We watch and take bets. Finally they wiggle free and manage to drag the gangway onto the deck. We (and they) all cheer!

On the way out the wind comes to the fore for the first time on the trip. We paddle steady and with effort even though our boats are empty. As we approach the mile-wide opening to the Arm, the wind gets serious. Waves are now two-feet

high. Water flies off the top of the waves. My paddle flies in my face on occasion. I put my face down, lean forward and settle into a strong, steady rhythm. The bow plunges into the oncoming wave and water cascades along the foredeck. The side chop from an occasional passing motorboat only complicates the already chaotic situation. My mouth is dry and I quick take a sip from my Camelback. After perhaps thirty minutes the worst is over. I bear off and head at 45 degrees to the wind for the far shore where our camp is located. After another 30 minutes I am on shore. Sand is blowing in our tents (for the first time!) but it is terra firma and home for the night. We all take a skinny dip to wash off. Burr....the water is chilly. A voice from a passing boat calls out, "Where are your clothes?" It becomes our trip mantra.

Each day I would use my GPS to make a track of our wanderings. Afterwards I printed up maps for each of the guys as souvenirs. I averaged 3.1 mph moving speed each day. That would be a good pace to enjoy the vistas and yet get to bed on time. We paddled some 90 miles on the water and did some 10 miles of hiking.

After the harrowing time at Escalante Arm with the wind in our face, the trip took on its second relaxed interlude. Next month, we will visit that part of the story..... Annie's and Iceberg Canyons....falling rocks... and Paul's encounter with the "critter".



LaGorce Arch