

“Those Who Dared”

by Kari Fraser

Grand Lake & Shadow Mtn. Reservoir

September 15, 2007

I have been told that The Grand Lake Day Paddle has a reputation for attracting challenging weather—a reputation that, for the record, pre-dates *my* involvement in the trip. Grand Lake 2007 turned out to be one of those paddles that shows that reputation is (somewhat) undeserved. Or, for those more familiar with the vagaries of high country weather in September, Grand Lake 2007 was one of those days that reminds us persistence sometimes pays off in blue skies, yellow autumn sunlight and temperate breezes.

Launch was scheduled for 10:00 AM from the Hilltop Ranger Station (which is really a parking lot and a permit kiosk). Sitting in my car at Hilltop at 8:30 AM, hot coffee in hand, I watched the rain pour down on my windshield and the shrubbery at the edge of the lake flatten in the wind. The day that was forecast to have partly cloudy skies and temperatures in the 70s was getting off to an interesting start.

By the time fellow paddlers started rolling in 30 minutes later though, the rain had stopped. By the time all of us had gathered and gotten our boats down, the wind had stopped too. After an on-shore chat that included my admonition that I was willing to lead us out in almost anything *except* lightning, our band of 10 pushed off under mottled grey and blue skies that made it easy to hope for sun, and a temperature in the mid-40s that made hauling along our wet suits and drytops worthwhile.

We were: Dan, Ted, Mike, Jan, John, Janet, Carol, Rick, Kristy and Kari (me). And what a gorgeous fleet we composed! I think the only (boat) color we didn't have was that bright acid green, but we made up for it with two black-hulled crafts.

We set off around 10:15 AM and paddled south along the eastern shore of Shadow Mountain Reservoir, ad-



miring the Osprey that nest at the very top of the trees along the shore. Conditions were flat calm, which felt remarkable given the earlier weather. The unpredictable skies and post-Labor Day season effectively kept away the motor boats; we did not see a single one until we got down to the islands at the reservoir's south end.

After meandering around the islands (I think there may be as many as eight) we stopped for a snack break on one, and Ted (who lives in nearby Granby) generously explained both the workings of the reservoir and the progression of the pine beetle blight in the area.

Another hour or so of paddling brought us back to Hilltop, but not before a fast-moving thunderstorm bore down on us and hurried us along the final stretch of our return. By the time we got back to Hilltop and the protected area at the mouth of the canal that connects SMR with Grand Lake, it was once again windy, raining, thundering and dark. We collectively agreed to wait it out for 10 minutes to see if the now-whipping wind would blow the whole mass past us.

It did. So we set out once again, now a group of seven, as three had opted to call it a day after the SMR portion of the trip. We proceeded through the short canal, the weather improving as we went, and entered Grand Lake under once-again partly-cloudy skies with a brisk wind at our backs. We circumnavigated Grand Lake counterclockwise, a direction that added more miles before lunch but allowed us to take advantage of the good conditions and paddle while they lasted. It also allowed us to choose at least three or four lake front homes to put on our wish list for RMSKC to purchase for club members' use! Grand Lake, too, was blissfully free of motor boats, but we had the company of some other intrepid paddlers in inflatable kayaks, sea kayaks and canoes.

Of course, our pleasant tailwind became a brisk crosswind as we crossed the east end of Grand Lake, but we all reached the town beach on the north shore safely, if a bit hungrily. The snack shack near the beach was open despite the waning summer season, adding ice cream, cookies and the like to the fare stashed in our hatches. So fortified, we began the last leg of our day's journey in the strongest wind yet—now a headwind which, according to the retrospective weather report, was blowing about 30 miles per hour.

Perhaps needless to say, we did NOT practice towing on the way back (the flyer for the trip suggested that we might). Many volunteered to be the tow-ee, but not-a-one raised a paddle to be the tow-er. We reached Hilltop for the third and final time at about 3:00 PM, feeling just blessed enough by the weather to appreciate our good luck and good timing, but not so spoiled to feel that we had it easy. Not bad for mid-September in The Rockies at 8400!