

POWELL HOUSEBOAT VI

SEPTEMBER 27 — OCTOBER 3, 2021

By Willie Younger

EDITOR'S NOTE: This joint trip with paddlers from Houston was cancelled in 2020 because of Covid. When originally planned it was decided that we'd put in at Bullfrog, in the Middle of Nowhere, Utah, instead of Wahweap, Arizona, which is located near Page, a sizeable city with good stores for last-minute provisioning. Each place is about the same, very long, distance from Houston, but Bullfrog's a day closer for the Colorado folks.

It didn't work that way because the dropping water levels shut down the ferry between Hall's Crossing and Bullfrog, which made the Texans' trip even longer. But they traveled together and reported having a good time seeing the aliens in Roswell, special geology points of interest, and much more.

The paddlers were RMSKC's Marsha Dougherty, Sue Hughes, Dave Hustvedt and Clark Strickland, with HASK members Linda Davis, Carl Kuhnen, Christy Long, Robert Rollen, Leslie Taylor and Willie Younger. RMSKC member Jud Hurd stayed home because he'd gotten hurt falling off a ladder, and Chris Arceneaux and Kent Williams remained in Texas because of Covid and house moving issues. They were missed!

Late in September, members of the Houston Association of Sea Kayakers (HASK) and paddlers from the Rocky Mountain Sea Kayak Club (RMSKC) met at Lake Powell's Bullfrog Marina in rural Utah. To begin the process of getting to know one another better, avoid the drudgery of camp-prepared grub, and marvel at the stunning orange glow of a Sunday sunset over the canyon ridges, we opted to dine at the marina's lakeside restaurant.

The plan was to board a rented houseboat on the following day. This comfortable watercraft would serve as our mothership and allow us to scout the canyons from our kayaks. It worked to our advantage, and it proved to be a most pleasant week of communing with nature and each other, while investigating the arms of this lake.

Admittedly, it was an arduous, more than two-hour task to lug our gear and boats downhill from the not-very-conveniently-situated parking lot to our mobile floating lodge. But by late Monday morning we were motoring away under the guidance of the RMSKC leaders.

The remainder of Monday was set aside to secure a site for anchoring the houseboat to a beach just past Moki Canyon on the main channel of the lake, rock hunting, swimming in refreshingly cool water, dining on superb cuisine as prepared by a set of our teammates and determining which of the nearby canyons we would paddle the next day. Simply put, we chilled out after a grueling drive from Texas and Colorado!



Captain Dave

About half of our ten-person crew opted to pitch their tents on shore, while the remainder chose to sleep in the boat's cabins or the upper boat deck where fresh air and stargazing could be enjoyed without being covered with a blanket of red sand.

Unfortunately, many of the tent campers found that the beastly winds meant endlessly blowing sand which proved to be more than most were willing to endure. So, these folks eventually retreated to the grit-free comforts of our buoyant chateau.



The very windy, very sandy sandbar that changed minds about sleeping out in a tent



Unloading the boats for the first day's paddle



In awe, we explored canyons that had been artistically carved by the relentless forces of nature over millions of years. With colorfully layered rock walls towering 500-600 feet above the water, we felt small and humble. In the interior of the box canyons, we examined ancient cliff dwellings and petroglyphs of long-vanished indigenous people while being greeted by the devilish cries of the ravens soaring over the striated cliffs.

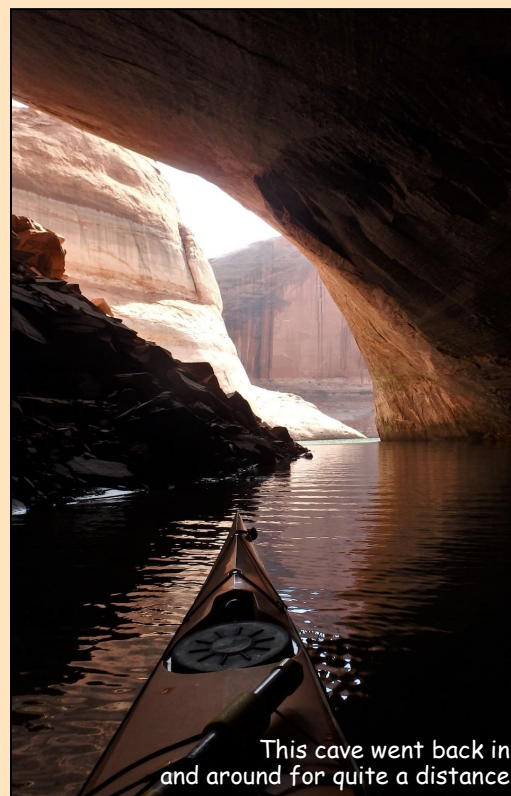
We discovered flowing springs, abandoned campsites, Indian climbing steps and encountered a gaggle of giggling teenage girls removing trash.

We reverently offered up prayers of thanksgiving in a cave-like formation we named the Copper Cathedral because of the magnificence of its arching shape and metallic color.



Petroglyphs on the wall behind Defiance House in Forgotten Canyon

And, while totally unamused, we tolerated the wakes and reflective/refractive waves of self-absorbed inconsiderate jet skiers and speeding power boaters.



This cave went back in and around for quite a distance

Each evening we feasted on gourmet meals prepared by pre-selected pairs of kitchen masters. After dinner, on one very still, quiet and star-studded evening, we relaxed around a cozy campfire on the beach, telling tall tales and mischievously renaming the constellations.

If this sounds like a luxurious 'wilderness' outing, you're right. However, the pay back was the considerable time, energy and inconvenience of loading and unloading our kayaks onto and from the houseboat.

Yet, without reservation, I can say that this Utah trip was the most visually stimulating experience of my life. In many ways, it was a spiritually uplifting odyssey for me.

If you've never been to the high desert art gallery called Utah, I'd advise you to visit as soon as possible!

And if Lake Powell is on your itinerary, you had better go sooner than later. It seems the long-lingering drought out west has the lake receiving only half as much water each day as goes out of it, and such conditions are only predicted to worsen in the coming decades. While we were there, the lake level dropped about one and one-half inches a day.

This dire situation has some water management authorities suggesting that the best course of action may be to open the dam's gates wide, halt all hydro-electric power generation and let the supplemental flow of river water be released to head downstream to Lake Mead. To many Americans, this may represent a perfectly sensible plan. After all, isn't it critical to society's long-term well-being that the neon lights of Lake Mead's neighboring entertainment enterprises in Las Vegas are kept burning brightly for as long as technically feasible?

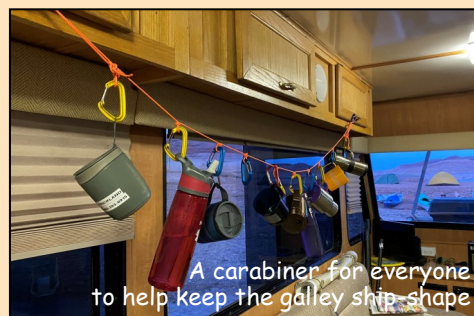


DAILY NOTES,

and most photos by Linda Davis



MONDAY: Got our houseboat at Bullfrog Marina, loaded and stowed our gear, and hauled our kayaks to the top deck. Motored out to tie up and camp on the main channel just past Moki Canyon.



TUESDAY: Kayaked 13.3 miles through Moki Canyon. Lots of work cleaning sand out of tents, and a fly massacre before dinner.

WEDNESDAY: Broke camp and hauled ten sea kayaks to the roof. Motored up-lake past Smith Fork Canyon (opposite Forgotten Canyon) and stopped just past Knowles Canyon, with Mt. Ellsworth to the north. Paddled 3.5 miles to Knowles Canyon. Enjoyed the Copper Cathedral grotto.

THURSDAY: Paddled 10.5 miles in Forgotten Canyon. Some hiked two miles round trip up to see the Defiance House petroglyphs. The return trip was very windy.



FRIDAY: Paddled 10.5 miles in Cedar and Warm Spring Canyons. Checked out the dump station bathroom. Beer can shish kabob for dinner, with an evening campfire.

SATURDAY: Broke camp again, by now we'd gotten the loading and unloading kayaks down pat! Landed in Hansen Canyon and shared our boat's slide with kids, they shared fireworks. Some people paddled across the main lake to Crystal Spring Canyon; crossing the lake on the return trip they mastered a straight line formation. A few practiced rolling and cowboy reentries.



Beach around the corner from the entrance to Knowles Canyon



Rolling and reentry practice in Hansen Canyon

SUNDAY: Captain Dave took us safely back to the marina, we cleaned the boat, loaded our gear and paid a porter to schlep it up the long hill to the parking lot.



Carl, one of many who collected trash



Authors Willie Younger and Linda Davis, in Roswell on their drive to Lake Powell

POST TRIP COMMENTS

Marsha: What an amazing blessing it is to have a great group of folks who all like to do this sort of thing. And then come from all directions to meet at this wonderful place out in the desert and have a good time.

Sue: Not very good weather, and the low water made many of our favorite canyons lots shorter, but everyone had a good time. I love my new HASK day-glow green shirt! Thank you so much for a wonderful souvenir of a super trip.

Linda: What a great trip. I am so impressed with all the people who went and all the hard work it took to make it all work. Christy and I kept looking at each other while paddling because at about every turn we were in awe at the beauty. I feel privileged to have been a part of that trip!

**MORE PHOTOS ON
THIS PAGE AND THE NEXT**





Willie and Robert on the front deck



Lunch stop, with an attempt at a group shot



Marsha and Dave trying to light the oven

