

Rocky Mountain Canoe Club -Founding and Early History

Jeff Keeler, Founding member

The Rocky Mountain Canoe Club is 30 years old in March! Where were you on March 23, 1975? That was the date of the first RMCC meeting – the Founding Meeting that gave the club its name, its mission, and planned its first trip.

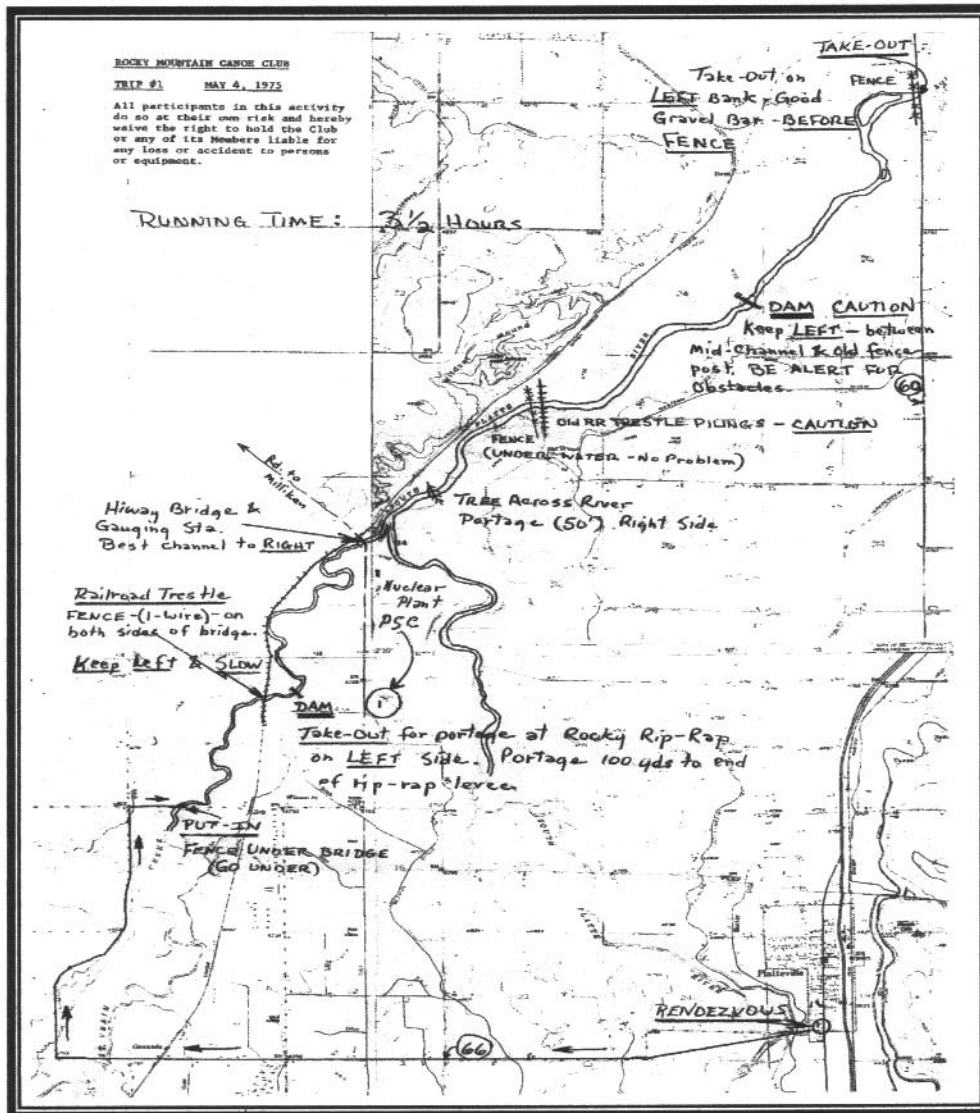
Let me back up a bit. About a week earlier I had been reading the Boulder Daily Camera and noted a small article inviting anyone interested in starting a canoe club to the National Bureau of Standards (now NIST) meeting room on March 23. I had purchased my 15' Grumman with a shoe keel a couple years earlier and had paddled in Boulder Creek, the South Platte, and the Colorado, Delores, and North Platte Rivers with the CU Rafting Outdoor Program. So I was keen to meet up with other canoeists and paddle some real rivers using the white water skills I had learned a few years earlier on the Lehigh River in Pennsylvania.

The first RMCC meeting had about a dozen folks there – mostly couples from Longmont who preferred fishing trips and knew the meeting organizer, Bob Mumford, a Longmont developer who also wanted to get on the water. A few others at the meeting were looking for river experience, not necessarily fishing or whitewater, but just people to go canoeing with. Besides myself, Bob McLaughlin and Bruce/Jeanne Waters attended. We wanted to go canoeing and had boats but needed a group for shuttles and paddling.

The strange discussion that occurred at this first meeting was the enthusiasm for a fishing trip in canoes on the Delores River between Cahone or Slick Rock and Bedrock! No one had scouted the river, just looked at access from a road map. Any of you that have done this stretch know the “River of Sorrows” isn't called that because of the fishing! I had rafted the Delores 2 years earlier and knew that Snaggle Tooth Rapid wasn't what these folks had in mind for a long weekend fishing trip. After a little discussion the group realized that a milder St. Vrain River trip near Platteville on a sunny Sunday May 4th afternoon was likely to preserve these RMCC founders for trips in the decades to come. I have the original trip map that Bob Mumford put together and it is shown below.

We all had aluminum boats, mostly Grumman 17' rock scrapers that worked just fine. Mine is still around to this day but now owned by John and Kathy Mullen. Bob and Linda McLaughlin still paddle theirs, but I believe a river ate Bruce and Jeanne Waters' a few years later. The other folks on the trip seem to have moved on and I don't have a trip roster. We didn't consider liability waivers or even membership at that point.

After that first very successful and enjoyable trip, we arranged several more informal trips by sending out notices once a month with real trip leaders much as we do today. The RMCC was off to a roaring start. The enthusiasm for new trips continued to grow. We read whatever we could find about Colorado rivers, discovered places that we'd never heard about, made lots of new friends and learned all sorts of new paddling techniques from each other.



That fall we elected officers for the 1976 season. I was nominated for first president, but declined so I could finish my CU degree. We elected Bob McLaughlin as first RMCC President, Jeanne Waters as first RMCC Secretary, Don Walker as first RMCC "Program Chairman" in charge of meeting planning, and I was the first RMCC Trip Planning and Leader Coordinator. Our dues were \$3.00/year and we made posters to put up in local boating and mountaineering shops. We wrote a "mission statement" that describes the typical boating season, trip leaders, training opportunities, and the year-end slide show. I would get calls from both locals and visitors wondering how to go canoeing in Colorado when all they see is Clear Creek Canyon. Many joined the RMCC and have made it the success it is today – we know them as the "old timers".

Although in the last 30 years the equipment has changed a lot and we have members that routinely paddle whitewater much more extreme than what we did those first few years, the RMCC has remained remarkably close to its root principles and goals – to offer open canoeing trips, training, and camaraderie. We soon got into environmental issues, a real newsletter, our present logo, and all the other aspects and traditions that we love today. Thirty years ago was a great time to go canoeing and it still is today! - Jeff Keeler