North Platte River: Glendo Dam to the Wendover Train Crossing

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By Anne Fiore

This run has been on my list since boating on the North Platte upstream from Guernsey Reservoir many years ago.

It was pretty windy on the drive up on Friday. Despite the forecast of winds less than 10 mph for Saturday, I was sure it would end up being too windy to paddle, but the winds calmed sometime after midnight and we awoke to clear skies at 6am.

We were all at the put-in before the 7:30 agreed upon time. Boats were deposited and the drivers began the shuttle to Wendover, some 50 miles away. Like clockwork, two hours later the drivers reappeared and after a short safety talk we were underway.

It was a group of 11 people (Penelope Purdy, Kerry and Pauline Edwards, Mary Jo and Steve Houser from Rocky Mountain Canoe Club; Gary Cage, Anne Fiore and Jud Hurd of RMSKC; Andrea Faudel from Poudre Paddlers; Fred Nelson and Greg Cook) and 8 boats (3 sea kayaks, 1 white water kayak and 4 canoes, including one solo). Everyone stayed together throughout the trip.

What a wonderful river! At the put-in, the current moved right along (at 5100 cfs) but the way was wide and clear with no funny swirls. Yes, my kind of river! The description called for a rapid about 10 minutes into the trip and there it was; at this level it was straightforward and quite mild. From there, we really just floated along, with just a few strokes added here and there.

We were in a canyon of pine and junipers which varied to include low-lying fields and some deciduous trees. There were lots of twists and turns and a sprinkling of islands. We kept to the lines where we could see our way, although Gary and others explored various side channels and all were fine.

We bypassed “lunch island” since we’d hardly been on the river for 45 minutes but soon spied a picnic table with two grills on river right, decided it was the place to stop, and headed that way.

Gary settled on a log that I noticed had some rectangles carved into it. As we were finishing up, Kerry Adams referred to “the alligator” and noted there were teeth carved in it, a la Seymour Lipton, so photos were in order.

Then back on the water with more junipers, more pines, and more canyon walls which became high and reminiscent of Utah except that their composition seemed to be of a material softer and lighter and grayer in color.

We made a very sharp left hand turn—the current flowed to the far side on river right with a huge eddy on river left. We continued downstream. I wondered where the haystacks were as we entered a different kind of canyon, much higher though of a composition similar to what we’ve seen all along. Ahead I saw Kerry Adams had stopped and as I got near, there was the roar of water in the distance so we must be approaching the haystacks. The canoeists got out and tried to observe the route. I stayed in, preferring to try and find a route as we approached (slowly). The canoeists followed Kerry; Andrea follows Gary. Jud had disappeared and I hoped all was well. I heard Gary say someone was swimming. I focused on following the tongue and then looked up. This was not what I expected! The waves were pretty high but not very wide; not the south-canyonesque river-wide bumps I imagined.

I turned into the eddy. I was being pulled back upstream and really worked hard to move downstream, finally overcoming the eddy and catching up with the others. The swimmers were out of the water and their boats were being drained. Everyone was safe.

According to Jud, he and Gary were paddling together looking down river at the two sets of waves and he told Gary that this wasn't the haystacks. He went through the first set of waves which were pretty easy and eddied out river right to wait on people. When he saw people coming down he pulled out thinking it would be another easy run through the second set. All of a sudden he saw it was the haystacks and it was too late to push hard to bypass on the left and was pulled into the side of these. He handled the first one okay but the second one dumped him. Drawing upon past experience he floated down and people helped him get to the shore and recover. He didn't want to leave it like that so he went up to try them again and made it, even getting turned around and going down backwards.

Andrea, Greg and Fred took another pass at the haystacks as did Jud. After a bit, we all headed downstream. Before long, the river widened and slowed a little. Up ahead, Kerry and Pauline were pulling out with others lined up behind them. It was around 3:30. I headed toward the others, sad that the trip was over.

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We all had a wonderful time, and enjoyed the company of people from three different Front Range paddle clubs. Two of the more experienced boaters had this to say:

> First, we should remind folks that if they do take a swim in a moving river to get to shore as quickly as possible—hanging onto the boat only makes it harder to coax it back to the bank.
>
> Second, we need to get better at eddying out. This would allow us to get closer to check out what's coming and be able to select or change a line at the last minute.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This trip was organized by fellow ACA paddling club, The Rocky Mountain Canoe Club. The Poudre Paddlers, the other group involved in the day's fun, is located in Fort Collins and is primarily a white-water club. They have a good map and an excellent description of this run on their website: http://www.poudrepaddlers.org/places/place.php?place=5

Gary Cage, Anne Fiore, Russ Hardy, Jud Hurd and Dave Hustvedt spent five days in mid-October paddling on Lake Powell. Anne will have an article with more wonderful pictures in the next issue of the *Mountain Paddler*.