WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT? WHY I LOVE TO BOAT

I’m not sure where exactly we are. I didn’t bring my guide book. There are two things for sure, we’re someplace nice and we’re headed down river. It’s been a long day. I’m a little tired and maybe a little sunburned. The evening has cooled off nicely, but today was hot, hot. I think we went twenty six very flat miles today. Plenty of room between the boats and very quiet, providing great opportunities to get naked, relax and an soak in the sun (note: broil in the sun at your own risk).

A couple of the folks whipped up a great dutch oven dinner—Mexican food that tasted so great it’s hard to believe how easy it was to make. Filled up my big belly. The dishes are done and the trash is put away.

After dinner I took off to the groover to make a movement and contemplate the evening light on the deep red, red cliff across the river. River poopers rank as the best of all places to “zone out.” There were pretty yellow flowers at my feet and a short distance away, the ever busy water roils its way to the Pacific, and pacific is how I feel.

Someone had the bright idea of taking the left over dinner charcoals and putting together a little campfire around which a number of my fellow travellers were gathered, sitting in their little folding chairs, parked close to the glow. Somebody’s hunched over, jabbing the wood, each prod causing a tiny flame to flicker larger. Some of the couples had slipped off to their camps probably to take in a little private “sparkling.” Luminescent domes of light marked their chosen spots tucked into the tammie thickets. Why do those couples always set up tents, even on clear nights?

The rest of us remained turned towards the fire hedonistically indulging in wine tasting and an occasional smoke. Soon the stories started to flow. Fireside chats. Stories about places I had never been, people I didn’t know and of course the “no shit, there I was...”adventures. Each tale a little louder than the previous. As it was my first trip with these folks so I didn’t have much to say—I find myself missing my regular boat buddies. I’ll get over it, these are wonderful people.

Every now and then a bubble of laughter pop’s into the night like cedar wood cinders, floating away, bright, then, poof—gone. Tale time becomes punctuated by long pauses. The yawning faces nod closer to the fire. One by one the tired boatboys and their friends drift away. I catch myself starting to snore in my chair. “Snort”—“Rude?” I’ve been accused of that. I’m in denial, I prefer to think of my sonorous lapses as an audio/visual demonstration of my great comfort and ease amongst my companions, not rude, I’m just relaxed.

Time for me to head down to the waterfront and climb out onto my boat. A lone shadow tends the fire, I’m ready for bed and really glad I’d taken the time earlier to unroll my pad and get my comfy bag out, setting them up on the front deck. Pull my shorts off and flop down on top of the bag. Using my life jacket as a pillow, I’m ready for the show. It’s a hot night, but down by the river it’s cool—the cool air slides across my 54 years. A soft caress from mother night. Very nice. Gazing straight into a sky still rimmed with the faintest twilight glow, a shooting star arcs its way across the gathering night. It’s going to be a good show.

Hours later the cool has turned cold. I awaken. My glasses are still in place. Crawling into my bag, now wide awake and ready to ponder the infinity of the Milky Way. Are there really more stars in the sky than tammie seeds in the wind on a late spring day? Or is it the other way around? Doesn’t the word “infinity,” fail the concept completely by trying to put a boundary around the boundless trying to comprehend the incomprehensible?

Dark canyon edges loom, while the boat rocks softly. The river slides on forever. So many stars so bright you can almost read a book by their glittering light. I lay awake. Just watching. Waiting for the morning light, so I can do it all over again.

That’s what it’s all “aboat.” Why I love to boat.

Ricardo Martin
Encountering Heidi:

Meeting Others as a Central Event in a River Running Experience

Lilian M. Jonas, William P. Stewart and Kevin W. Larkin

Abstract: Over the past few decades, numerous studies have investigated encountering other people in backcountry recreational situations. Although academics and professionals may recognize that meeting others in backcountry areas could result in positive interactions that are beneficial to the experience, research directed at positive aspects of intergroup encounters has yet to emerge. This paper examines encounters using a symbolic interactionist framework and provides an interpretation of the inter-linkages between encounters, recreation experiences, and identities. Findings are based on more than 10 years of participant observation studies on multi-day white water rafting trips in the western United States. The major point is that encounters between groups of river runners are evaluated at the situational level and based on the nature of the social interaction. Evidence indicates that encounters may be some of the most meaningful events in a river running experience due to opportunities they afford to negotiate river runner identities. Dominant identities, central to many river running experiences, are related to being an adventurer (who is able to face and conquer white water rapids) and being a “river god/goddess” (who is resourceful in providing comfort within a wilderness setting).

Who is Heidi? To put it succinctly, Heidi is someone we “encountered” on a Grand Canyon raft trip one summer. We do not know her last name nor what she does when not rafting. We only know that she was on a solo Grand Canyon river trip, ate spaghetti every other night and had a leaky valve on her small, blue raft. We shared a large beach with her one night, the beach being large enough that we could not see where she was camped. We also invited her for a salmon dinner. A commercial trip on the other end of the beach, out of view from our camp, also invited her for dinner, but they were having spaghetti, so Heidi chose to dine with us. We ate together and exchanged stories. Our boatman examined her raft and shrugged his shoulders; he did not have any spare valves that would fit her tubes. Heidi went to the other group for breakfast and probably had a similar type of encounter. Although both the commercial group and our group could have considered the encounter with Heidi as intruding on our river experience, we defined it as part of that experience. In fact, we hoped to encounter her again as we floated downstream, and we asked trips that were traveling faster than us if they had seen her: Yes, Heidi had dinner with them last night. No, her valves had not been fixed.

On that trip, however, we did have a few encounters that detracted from our river experience. We met a commercial group in a narrow side-canyon with a loud-mouth leader who publically queried us about our recreation research. We passed a group of private boaters that were experiencing some inter-group conflicts and assumed that we wanted to take their camp for the night. We crawled over a string of boats in the mouth of Havasu Creek while avoiding the growls of one boatman upset about people stepping on his boat and quite sure that each new pair of feet added more sand. What made these encounters “unpleasant,” however, was not due to meeting another party along the river, nor due to the encounter making us feel crowded. In fact, we had encounters at some attraction sites with a multitude of parties, but we agreed that the overall impact of encountering all those people at such sites left a positive effect on our river experience. It was the circumstances surrounding the encounters that affected the meaning we attributed to the interaction, and resulted in encounters being interpreted as either pleasant or unpleasant.

The perspective that encounters with other people have a positive and contributory effect on backcountry travel may seem inconsistent with the nature of a river experience. In general, a recreational river trip through the Grand Canyon, or many western rivers with long free-flowing stretches, are viewed as “wilderness” experiences. The peaceful desert environment and deep canyon walls isolate river runners from reminders of civilization. Those who venture on river trips do so for a variety of reasons, including escaping routines of everyday life, seeking privacy, experiencing challenge, and learning new skills (Cohen...
Aspect of the River Experience


While these reasons for going on a river trip may seem “natural,” and thus taken for granted, they are partially constructed through the colorful marketing brochures from commercial outfitters. In general, outfitters are adept at “helping” prospective passengers frame their motivations, and commonly stage the prospective Grand Canyon raft trip as a mixture of white-water adventure and escape:

When your spirit cries for peace, come to a world of canyons; Feel the exultation of high plateaus, the simplicity of sand and grass, the strength of moving waters, and the silence of growth. (Arizona Raft Adventures)

There is no doubt that the canyon changes people, humbles them, gives them a new perspective on their place in nature. New canyon adventurers come full of themselves, but in the canyon, every living thing is on equal footing. In harmony. (Diamond River Adventures)

Ahead, huge rocks seemed to block our escape. Suddenly, the raft spun sideways and we looked back to see our boatman gripping a line with one hand and steering the raft with the other. He was serious, not smiling. Did he realize we were approaching another giant hole nearly backwards? Just as we dived into the hole completely covered with water, a lateral wave smacked the raft from the right, spinning us forward and through a channel of rushing white-water barely wide enough to accommodate the boat. I looked back. Trent was grinning from ear to ear. He knows the river. Everyone hooted and hollered. (Western River Expeditions)

Although not “typical” of a wilderness experience, pampering, especially in the form of eating gourmet meals, is another deliberately anticipated experience promoted by commercial outfitters for prospective passengers:

The guides understand the importance of a hot, fragrant breakfast, laced with fresh fruit after a night under the stars. They appreciate the Zen-like pleasure of a perfect picnic. When it comes to the evening meal, they know it’s an art form – a blend of abundance, beauty, and mind-blowing good food. (Outdoor Adventure River Specialists)

These motivating forces, and their related experiences, become central to one’s identity as a river runner. In this study, we examine two defining components of an “authentic” river running identity: that of adventurer and that of river god/goddess. Encounters during the river experience serve to develop, maintain, and/or challenge such river runner identities, and in doing, provide the context in which the encounters are evaluated as being intrusive, positive, unpleasant, and so forth. In this paper, we provide a symbolic interactionist interpretation of identity and inter-relationships between encounters and identities. Following this, we briefly describe the contexts in which encounters are interpreted and identify the river guides’ role in facilitating their passengers’ interpretations. Finally, we examine how encounters are an important aspect of both the experience and identity of river runners.

Theoretical Framework

Leisure Identities

In general, an identity refers to a person’s location in social life (Hewitt, 1994). When a person has an identity, “he [or she] is situated, that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgment of his [or her] participation or membership in social relations” (Stone, 1981). The term identity is often confused with the concept of role. However, a role can be defined as a perspective from which behavior is conducted. A role in itself is lifeless, an unplayed part that has no substance until the individual claims it for his or her own and breathes life into it by identifying with it (Erickson, 1995; Foote, 1955). While some identities are fleeting because the roles are temporary or mundane, others are more heartfelt or intense as the individual comes to perceive those identities as part of his or her real self. In other words, the role and self merge (Turner, 1976). In the leisure setting, this occurs when the actor commits a lot of time and personal resources to the leisure role, and that resultant leisure identity becomes part of his or her “core” (Hughes, 1945; Mullaney, 1999) or “glorified” self (Adler & Adler, 1991). Those less committed to the leisure role, on the other hand, tend to have less enduring leisure identities, with the leisure role being less central to his or her overall definition of self.

Several studies in leisure research support the relevance of understanding leisure experiences through identity construction. Through a discussion of relationships among roles, identities, and social interactions, Kelly (1983, 1992; see also Samdahl, 1988) argued that leisure serves to negotiate the expression of one’s self and that the creative and enjoyable part of leisure is the enactment or performance of the role (Kelly, 1992, p. 119). DiManche and Samdahl (1994) also emphasized (continued on next page)
the “self” as in a continual state of creation, with leisure providing a context to explore new identities. They suggested that a witnessing audience may inhibit the expression of a desirable identity, and that a leisure context is often an “arena where an actor can take off masks and forget about the audiences’ reaction to a performance” (p. 11). In contrast to DiManche and Samdahl (1994), the thrust of this paper underscores the importance of witnessing audiences to the construction of desirable identities.

The River Experience and Identities

The river experience is often perceived as magical or extraordinary (Arnould & Price, 1993). Part of the magic is associated with escaping from the rules and mundane routine of everyday life and finding oneself transformed by the beauty and remoteness of the river and its canyons (cf., Cohen & Taylor, 1992). This transformation has profound implications for identity as the individual learns to embrace becoming a river runner through opportunities to escape past roles and explore new ones.

While the river experience and emergent river identity are associated with the backcountry (“wilderness”) setting, these also depend on joint action (Blumer, 1969), specifically, the inter-linkages of actions among river runners. Various types of joint actions occur among groups of river runners, and include dramaturgical performances (Erickson, 1995; Goffman, 1967), identity work-up and displays (Birrell & Turowetz, 1979; Mullaney, 1999), and danger constructions (Jonas, 1999). All of these performances depend upon witnessing audiences, which are essential in the identity construction process.

River runner identities are not formed merely once an individual departs on a river trip. In general, identities are negotiated at the situational level, where they are enacted through a reciprocal process between an audience and the actor (Altheide, 2000; Becker, 1964; Blumer, 1969; Fine, 1993; Stone, 1981; Strauss, 1969). In their characterization of identities as negotiated, Pedlar, Dupuis, and Gilbert (1996) explored the ability of audience expectations to change and accommodate a broader range of identities in a given role enactment. Kuentzel (2000) also emphasized the fluid, growing, and “becoming” nature of identity as one negotiates the ambiguity of life’s situations. With the framing of identity being situationally-defined, identities must be continuously constructed and reconstructed in everyday life and are only recognized and confirmed during their enactment (Cicourel, 1973; Douglas & Johnson, 1977; Garfinkel, 1967; Kotarba & Fontana, 1984; Schutz, 1962; Silver, 1996). Identity construction is thus a continuous process that depends on both the activities of the individual and the ratification by a witnessing audience. On the river, this process occurs during encounters, whether they be intra- or inter-group encounters. In this paper, we focus on the latter.

Encounters on river trips in Grand Canyon occur among three main types of river running groups: commercial, private, and research. Most passengers have their first, and often only, river experience on a commercial trip. Commercial passengers arrive from distant locales and spend an average of $1600 per person per week for the on-river services of commercial outfitters; most Grand Canyon river trips are between seven and eighteen days in length. Commercial passengers are generally an affluent segment of society as evidenced by more than three-fourths of them having at least a college degree, and about half having annual household incomes greater than $100,000 (Stewart et al., 2000). While passengers on commercial trips are on a vacation, their guides receive a paycheck and are officially “on the job” throughout the length of the river trip. On private trips, however, both river guides and passengers engage in leisure. Most private trips are on a relaxed schedule in traveling downstream compared to commercial trips. Whereas commercial trips accommodate up to 36 passengers per trip, the majority of private trips have 16 people on the trip (the maximum allowed by the National Park Service) and are usually comprised of family, friends, and assorted “tag-a-longs” resulting in a downstream adventure with a group of people who were not previously a group. Among the river guides, private trips often are characterized by their heavy drinking, wild partying or merely acting as “a bunch of yahoos who don’t have the slightest idea what they are doing.” While most private trips do not fit this description, there is a general assumption among the commercial river guides that private boaters behave much like “primates,” which they occasionally are called.

While private trips can be considered a total leisure experience, research trips are quite different. Neither passengers nor river guides are totally engaged in leisure as they venture on a research trip. Although the percentage varies from year to year, about 10% of the annual “user nights” of Grand Canyon river runners are related to research trips. These trips investigate various phenomena in the river corridor, usually related to studies of sedi-
ment transport, fisheries, archaeological resources, wildlife, or, less frequently, recreation. Those on research trips are concerned about avoiding negative perceptions of themselves during encounters to preclude accusations of acting like privates boaters:

The TL [trip leader] broached the subject of alcohol, “You need to keep a low profile. I know the atmosphere here is to have a good time, and we are one of the most lenient research groups around. You won’t see any other groups with an open beer can on the boat. However, please hide your cans on the boats when we pass other groups. We are a “research” team and we don’t want other groups remarking to the Park Service on our partying...we need to keep a positive image in the Canyon.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

...passengers on commercial and private trips, on the other hand, because of their limited river running experience, have few expectations or predefined notions of encounters ...

The methods employed in this study center on a pluralistic approach to addressing the meanings of encounters in a backcountry setting. During the river trip in which we met Heidi, summer 1998, the three authors discussed the social dynamics of encounters as an interesting research topic. Further discussion led each of the authors to go back and examine field notes taken during this trip, and in the case of the first author, to examine more than ten years’ worth of field notes taken for a separate study that focused on interactions between guides and passengers. She also took more focused field notes on subsequent river trips in 1999 and 2000. The narratives and interpretations within field notes collected by all the authors represent the data used in this study.

These notes were written in various forms and perspectives, or “voices” (Ronai, 1992). Some field notes were collected in journal format (Johnson, 1975) with the first author taking the role of observer (Adler & Adler, 1975; Gold, 1958; Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000) and watching and recording what was going on in the setting, and reporting the “objective” things that river runners said and did. In this fashion, a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the river running arena was obtained. Other notes were collected to capture the more subjective aspects of the river runner self and subsequently took the form of an “auto-ethnography/biography” (Adler & Adler, 1987; Ellis, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hayano, 1982, 1979; Jules-Rosette, 1975; Krieger, 1985, 1983; Ronai, 1992). In this fashion, such techniques as “interpretive recall” (Hadden, Degher, & Fernandez, 1989; Schratz & Walker, 1995) and “systematic sociological introspection” (Ellis, 1991) were used to write field notes on personal experiences as both river guide and passenger.

The multiple methods of collecting and interpreting field notes allowed for a recognition of the ways in which each author was not only an observer but also became involved in the production of events reported (Mitchell, 1991; Richardson, 1992, 1997). While the collection of the field notes prior to 1998 did not focus entirely on encounters, subsequent analysis of the data using a focused grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) revealed that encounters were a central component of the identity construction and affirmation processes of river runners. This information was used on subsequent river trips by the first author to gather more guided field notes focused primarily on the relationship between encounters and identities. By noting both the objective and subjective components of the river experience, the meanings that surround encounters in backcountry settings were more easily described and discussed. By using these multiple methods, we were better able to access both the social and interpretive components crucial to identity formation and modification (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 1989).

Methods

The methods employed in this study center on a pluralistic approach to addressing the meanings of encounters in a backcountry setting. During the river trip in which we met Heidi, summer 1998, the three authors discussed the social dynamics of encounters as an interesting research topic. Further discussion led each of the authors to go back and examine field notes taken during this trip, and in the case of the first author, to examine more than ten years’ worth of field notes taken for a separate study that focused on interactions between guides and passengers. She also took more focused field notes on subsequent river trips in 1999 and 2000. The narratives and interpretations within field notes collected by all the authors represent the data used in this study.

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Findings and Discussion

Facilitating the Meaning of Encounters

Most river guides have been on the river numerous times and have constructed certain expectations and definitions of encounters. Passengers on commercial and private trips, on the other hand, because of their limited river running experience, have few expectations or predefined notions of encounters. Consequently, river guides play an important role in facilitating passengers’ interpretation of encounters (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998). The following field note demonstrates how river guides aid passengers in viewing certain types of encounters:
wall, or put buckets on their heads, because they thought that they were so much better than them and that motors were evil.

(Commercial trip, Grand Canyon)

The dory passengers in the above story probably viewed every encounter with motorized boats as detracting from their identity as river runners in a wilderness setting. Their experience would have been different if the dory boatmen greeted the motor groups with more respect and deference. The following field note also illustrates how negative perceptions of encounters are potentially developed, this time with research trips:

Donna was telling me the story of one research trip where the people worked really hard, and took the hottest time of day to take a break - sleeping in the shade, and a commercial boatman points to them and tells his passengers, “See, your tax dollars hard at work.” This really pissed Donna off, “that boatman really gave us a bad reputation in the eyes of those passengers. Why couldn’t he have come around when we were working our butts off so the passengers could see how hard we really work?!”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon).

The guide in the above story could have led the passengers to interpret the encounters differently, perhaps by emphasizing the dawn-to-dusk work schedule of researchers, and that they were only taking a much-deserved rest. This would have made the encounter between the research and commercial group more supportive of the researchers’ role and their subsequent identities. Researchers occasionally engage in remedial work (Goffman 1967) in an attempt to renegotiate undesired identities imputed on them by others:

We happened to camp just below the commercial group who gave us a hard time for hanging out in the shade in the middle of the day, so we decided to get a little close to them at one in the morning during one of our electrofishing runs. When they passed us the next morning, we asked them, apologetically, “Oh, we didn’t disturb you with the noise from our generator last night? We didn’t mean to shine our Q-Beam in your eyes” They didn’t respond much, but they also didn’t condemn us for sleeping during the day. (Research Trip, Grand Canyon)

In reality, river guides often facilitate positive interpretations of encounters with other groups, because it is in the river guide’s best interest if his/her passengers have an overall enjoyable river experience. Consequently, instead of ostracizing another group by pointing out some sort of major deficiency, or how the other group’s presence disrupts their own river experience, river guides often treat encounters with other groups as a normal, even entertaining part of a river trip. This is evident in the following field note:

Soon after the commercial group from Colorado leaves, another group joins us [in Slickhorn pool - a popular attraction site]. We recognize them as the sport-yak, commercial group that we have been bumping into on the river. Actually, they camped upriver from us at John’s Canyon and recognized us, “Oh, are you the group that were yelling and screaming at the other camp?” Uh yes, we were. “How was your happy hour?” asked one woman, and we answered that it was just fine. Then their TL [trip leader] and some older male passenger, directing their conversation to Lydia and I, tell us about the skinny dippers they saw, and how the TL couldn’t keep the guys from taking pictures, and how this one chap busted his automatic rewind on his camera. “Oh, were you the two that were skinny dipping?.... Another group hikes in and also recognizes us, with the boatman making some snide remark on our previous activities. So, we made a reputation for ourselves on the river. What can you expect? One of the commercial guides invited us to lunch.... We hesitated for a minute, but then dove right in, mingled with the passengers, and felt as part of their group....[Later, on the river] the group that gave us lunch passed us, being amazed by the number of people and amount of gear I had in my small boat. We asked them if they had any beer since we were out, but the guide only laughed and said he couldn’t believe that we ran out of beer. We later pass him, and to our surprise, he throws us three cans of beer, and their passengers applauded as we dove into the water to retrieve them.

(Private trip, San Juan River)

While the commercial river guides teased the private river runners for their wild antics, they did not ostracize them from their passengers, but attempted to integrate them with their group by inviting them to lunch and providing beer. By throwing beer to the private group, the commercial guide provided the material for the private boaters to further enact their scripts as “wild partiers,” evidenced by their diving into the river to retrieve the beer. This both confirmed the private-boater stereotype and demonstrated acceptance of such behavior through applause. In this manner, the river guides facilitated a positive interpretation of the encounter with private river runners, with the encounter becoming a part of their river “entertainment.”

Encounters as Witnessing Audiences

Encounters provide audiences that are able to recognize, shape, and reaffirm identities of river runners. Consequently, when boats pass other boats or occupied camps, the groups often greet each other with a wave, shout, or water fight. Even floating past people who are not river runners on a beach reaffirms a river runner
identity, as the following field note suggests:

As we passed the helicopter landing on river left, we watched the nice man in suit and tie pour bottles of champagne for the good people. We also watched five or six blue helicopters land noisily to deliver more people for the champagne brunch “on the river.” They probably paid a lot for their “Grand Canyon Experience.” We were just freezing our buttocks off in the rain - enduring the third day of cold drizzle. But what about these helicopters “ruining” our wilderness experience? I noticed our guide take our snout-boat directly towards the left shore, just directly below where the good people were having brunch under the Hualapai-made shelters. They point, take pictures, and wave. We waved back, toast them with our beers. Oddly, I didn’t notice any resentment in our group - or even annoyance. For us, it seemed merely a break in the routine of running this flat water stretch; to watch the helicopters pass by and land, one by one. And, even more so, it gave us a sense of authenticity - even superiority. We were able to compare our “Grand Canyon experience” with theirs, which demonstrated that we were having a “real” Grand Canyon experience (getting cold, wet, sandy), while those having champagne brunch were not even getting their feet wet - so to speak. We even had “proof” that we were “real” river runners as they were taking OUR pictures - as if we were natives in this Canyon setting. (Private trip, Grand Canyon)

There have been numerous attempts to have helicopters completely banned from the Grand Canyon, both above and below the rim, because the noise disrupts the wilderness experience. The above field note suggests, however, that encounters with such “horrid” machines could become central to the identity construction process. While the encounter was not defined positively (i.e., helicopters in the Grand Canyon were still seen as unpleasant), it provided a comparison for the river runners. They were able to prove to themselves, and others, that they are “real” or “authentic” river runners. This authenticity was reaffirmed by recognition from those on shore, as indicated by their taking pictures of the river “natives.” This type of identity affirmation occurs even if the encounter is defined as negative by individuals who are generally unaware of the implications to their identities.

When an individual engages in river rafting over a period of time, the river runner identity becomes more central to his or her overall sense of self (Jonas 1997, 1999). As this occurs, affirmation of that identity by other river runners becomes more important. This includes being recognized by name by river runners from other groups, as well as being acknowledged by appearance as a “true” river runner:

After I hiked down the side of the canyon, I decided to venture back into the mouth of Blacktail to find some dunk pools. As I was headed out of the dark canyon, a commercial group was just beginning to wander inside the canyon. The passengers were your typical commercial passengers; all dressed up in their little tourist outfits, floppy hats, a mixture of white and sunburned skin, and generally out of shape. They seemed as if they couldn’t even walk on the rocky ground, probably being only used to pavement. As I greeted them, I was thinking about how they looked out-of-place in the Canyon setting, as if they didn’t belong. I waited for the passangers to awkwardly scamper up the rocks and around some small pools. One gal said to me as I waited for her to pass, “Oh thank you for allowing us in your back yard.” She seemed to consider me, all tanned and scratched, and dressed like a “real” river runner, someone who belonged there, as compared to her and the rest of her group. (Private trip, Grand Canyon)

In the above encounter, the river runner’s wilderness experience was affected by a large group entering into the narrow canyon. The encounter could, on the surface, be defined as threatening one’s identity as a river runner in search of a wilderness experience; instead, it provided the river runner with a comparison of what a “real” river runner is, which in turn, reaffirmed the image of herself as “authentic.”

The River Runner as Adventurer

A central aspect of an authentic river runner identity is being an adventurer; one who is able to face and conquer the mighty rapids. Even though the Colorado River through Grand Canyon contains less than 10% white water (with the remaining 90% being flat water), there is constant anticipation of the next rapids and the thrills it will afford. Illustrative of the focus on white water adventure, the Colorado River through Grand Canyon is often referred to as the “longest stretch of white water in the country.” The feeling of danger, however, must first be constructed before the river runners can experience adventure. As river guides play an important role in facilitating passengers’ interpretation of encounters, they also manage passengers’ view of the rapids as dangerous (Holyfield, 1997; Jonas, 1997, 1999; also see Donnelly & Young, 1988; Fine & Holyfield, 1996; Holyfield & Fine, 1997). River guides engage in a number of rituals and performances that increase the level of danger felt by the passengers, such as when scouting rapids:

“The dance of danger begins at Lava’s lip. The boats are beached, and in ritualistic fashion the guides climb to the sacred vantage, a basalt boulder about 50 feet above the cataract. Once there, weight shifts from...” (continued on next page)
As indicated in the above excerpt, scouting involves stopping at various points above the rapids to view the rapids before running them and determine the safest route through. Often, several groups converge at the rapids at the same time, making the scouting area congested with people. However, river runners typically perceive the encounters as an opportunity to exchange advice on navigating the rapids. It also allows the opportunity for an audience to witness the running of the rapid. While the river guide plays an important role in constructing the danger, the audience plays an equally important role in acknowledging that the river runners endured the danger. This is evident in the remarks below made by a river runner:

I think people would be upset if there wasn’t a crowd at Lava. I really do think that it would be a big let down if you run through Lava and no one saw you. It wouldn’t be as big of a thrill, people couldn’t congratulate you, and you couldn’t pop open a beer and bask in the limelight. (Private trip, Grand Canyon)

Meeting other groups at scouting areas also allows for assistance or support to less-experienced groups or more vulnerable craft. For instance, river guides operating motorized boats will often wait below major rapids to “scoop passengers and gear out of the river” belonging to non-motorized groups. Occasionally, groups will camp together above the rapids so they can run them together the following day.

A motor rig soon lands next to us, with crew and passengers dripping wet. They must have been as miserable as they looked, drenched and wearing little rain gear. The scrawny looking boatman didn’t have anything on but a pair of shorts. He quickly darted up the rocks, probably as a means to get warm, and his passengers followed him. I later found out that the group just decided to go on a river trip on the spur of the moment and weren’t equipped with rain gear. The boatman ended up giving all his gear to the passengers until he had none for himself. “Do you mind if we share your camp for a bit ‘til we dry off and warm up?” Jack (our TL) told him that he was welcome to camp here as there was plenty of room and his passengers didn’t look as if they wanted to be drenched again today. He thanked us and it seemed as if there were to be three groups sharing the one camp. I guess it was O.K. since none of us signed up for it at the registration box. There seemed to be a sigh of relief by all the groups that we were all not planning to run the rapids until morning, when we could provide each other support.

(Private trip, Cataract Canyon)

Although three groups in the above field note shared a relative small beach, the situation was positively experienced as a means to share the experience and thus affirm each other’s adventurer identity. The three groups also felt more secure knowing that there were others to help them run the rapids safely.

Along with the scouting area, eddies below major rapids are often used as vantage points to watch other rafts ride the rapid and tell stories that reaffirm each other’s experience. Since the audience experiences the ride from afar and the performers experience the ride from within, there are multiple narratives of any given run which lead to the explicit co-creation and mutual recognition of an adventurer identity. The narratives that are shared in the camaraderie of the post-rapid eddies often function to define the identities of those participating on the trip.

It was a fun ride, and finally Lars took something head-on [in Hermit Rapids]. We drifted over to the right eddy to get some pictures of the others going through the rapids...The girl guide [on the OU trip - a commercial group] did an amazing job of riding the rapids and not breaking stride; she looked tough and the boat looked real small when it was down in the waves. The OU paddlers got drenched and some looked cold and tired - and they just started...Another ear boat came through and just perched on the crest of one of the monster waves; it spun around and started to get diagonal with the waves. Before we knew it, the boatman [Marty] jumped into the water and ... when the boat came up, the swamper [Marty’s son] was swimming too. He hopped in the boat, and then went to pull in [his father] who grabbed the end of the raft. It took awhile, but they were both in the boat at the end of the waves, looking like drowned rats. They came over to our eddy; [Marty] was visibly shaken. “Why ya jump in?” we asked. He thought the boat was going to flip and didn’t want to be under it. This was the trip of a lifetime for Marty. His son had graduated from high school and was going off to college; they hadn’t rafted together, and wouldn’t be able to again, especially in the canyon. This was IT for father-son bonding, and we got it all on film. Marty told his story of the run, the son didn’t have much to add; we were excited for them. The TL gave us his business card and we’d be sure to mail the pictures of ‘Marty’s swim in Hermit’ to him. We were at the right place at the right time.

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

Having an audience to witness Marty’s experience helped to both interpret the experience through replaying (see Goffman 1967) and ratify the experience through recognition by others. Marty’s identity as an adventurer was also captured on film by the witnessing audience, which would allow him to take “proof” of such an identity back to the “real” world. In short, the performance (ritualistic displays during scouting), the action (running the rapids), and the ratification by a witnessing audience (other groups watching from shore or on boats below the rapids), all seem to create and affirm the identity of the participants as true adventurers.

The telling of stories of western Anglo pioneers also provide contexts that shape an adventurer identity. Many points along the river corridor are linked to events of his-
toric raft trips, and while floating downstream or during mealtimes, public conversations among river runners turn to these events. A frequent conversation topic on river trips is the journey of Major John Wesley Powell in 1869 down the Colorado River. The life-threatening voyage of Powell’s party in wooden boats was an act of discovery, and as told, an epic of high adventure. In varying degrees, the telling of Powell’s trip through the “Great Unknown” functions as an invitation to vicariously experience the dangers and uncertainty of the first Anglo pioneer down the river.

“Well, Powell kicked our asses, but he had lots of practice lining before Cataract!” remarked Matt when we were finished lining the Big Drops and realized that it took the whole damn day. As we were lining, we discussed the fact that John Wesley Powell, the first one officially through Cataract, lined the Drops in less than half a day, but he did have a lot of practice as he lined over 20 rapids before he reached the Drops. Ironically, we relished the thought of truly knowing how Powell and his men felt.”

(Private trip, Cataract Canyon)

Even though the risks of river rafting these days is in stark contrast to the risks had by Powell’s party, today’s river runners still imagine men dangling from cliffs, battling rapids, and fending off starvation from their secure vantage point of life jackets, huge inflatable rafts, and “Zen-like perfect picnics.” The identities of many river runners are able to assimilate aspects of the Powell narrative through Cataract and Grand Canyons, and the telling and re-telling of Powell’s vignetted eases the assimilation (Neumann, 1999, pp. 68-76).

Besides rapids, side attractions are also arenas for identity construction. As mentioned earlier, rapids are only encountered during a small portion of the river trip. However, since the adventurer identity is such a central part of the river runner identity, the process of adventurer identity construction occurs throughout the river trips, albeit generally not as intense as at the rapids. Another place this process occurs is at the side attractions where river runners enjoy short hikes to waterfalls, archaeological ruins, fossil sites, or other geologic formations. Such attractions also provide opportunities for social interaction with other groups of river runners. Like at scouting sites and the post-rapid eddies, encounters as witnessing audiences play a major role in the construction of such identities at these attraction sites.

“Deer Creek Falls was a fun time. When we got there around mid-afternoon, there were at least 30 people milling around the rocks and splash pool area. Where’d all these people come from?... After several attempts at getting-at-one with the waterfall [attempting to swim underneath the 100 foot waterfall], one of the commercial passengers found a new trick to do — he stood on small ledge midway up the fold as if it were a diving board, and looked as if he were going to do a back flip. His pear-shape, white-skin, and clean cut told me he must work in an office building in a far-away urban area...... Myself, and others around, including his wife and three daughters, were fixed on him wondering what his stunt would be. He took a long time, anticipating whatever it was. A few swimmers, including Mike, couldn’t wait and tried again to be at-one with the waterfall. After people cleared-out from below, [the pear-shaped man] surprised us all with a sudden, clumsy, but fully completed, back flip into the center of the white foam and roar of the splash pool. He popped up, and the crowd broke into a clapping and cheering. He came out of the water to the admiring praises of his family, knees quivering like rubber and amazed at his courage. “I knew I could do it!” “Dad are you crazy?!” they admonished, clearly proud of his feat. He went on to tell the story they had just witnessed — why he did it, what he was thinking as he was getting ready to do it, and joking about the danger involved. Each of the girls took turns telling their story of crazy Dad’s back flip at Deer Creek.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

The situation at Deer Creek Falls was probably a high point of the trip for the family. It was clearly a daring move and “crazy Dad” was noticeably shaken. If there were no audience, nor concerned family members to witness, the adventurer identity of “crazy Dad” would not have been negotiated.

Not only do witnessing audiences at attraction sites acknowledge the adventurer identity, they also encourage river runners to engage in daring feats that they would not otherwise do:

Bill and I hiked a few miles up the LCR [Little Colorado River] and swam at a nice pool for a hour. It was very quiet and relaxing without another soul in sight. As we returned from our peaceful swim, we came across a crowd of commercial river runners near the mouth of the LCR. It seemed like there was nearly a hundred people cramped in the narrow canyon, all hanging out on a ledge next to the water, and it took some effort to maneuver around all the people. It was somewhat of a rude awakening from our previous “wilderness” experience just upstream. The commercial river runners were engaging in what commercial river runners typically do in that section of the LCR - strap their life jackets on their bottoms, with their legs dangling from the arm-holes, and float through a narrow stretch of the LCR that contained a number of small rapids. We watched for a while, with slight amusement, and were about to leave when one of the commercial river guides offered me his life jacket and convinced me to join his passengers, some of whom were also encouraging us to join them. Hesitantly, I strapped the life-jacket (continued on next page)
of groups searching for such campsites. Certain stretches of the river are known for a scarcity of beaches (which are used as campsites), and some beaches are valued as campsites for their proximity to attraction sites, rapids, or scenic views. Beaches usually start to be stalked as campsites by late afternoon when a party will “take out” and secure the beach as their own. The field notes below illustrate the focus on securing campsites:

“We were planning on camping at Galloway that night but when we arrived, the lavender boat people were already pulled-in. We took the rapids and pulled-in below at Stone Creek..... As Lil and I were setting up the groover [porta-potty], thinking about quality vistas and privacy, the TL from [the lavender boat people] flagged us down on his way back from the water falls. “Where you gonna camp tomorrow night?” he wondered, and went on to tell his past troubles with setting-up for [camping near] Phantom and the Little Colorado River. He felt like he was getting shoved around by commercials, and had wide-eyed anxiety about securing campsites. His nervousness about campsites was a sore spot with his party; there were some inside jokes going on between him, his buddy, and girlfriend. Seemed like they enjoyed venting their anxiety on us. I was glad not to be in their party; what a drag to be so beach-centric. I can see why the rest of his party had problems with him. They pulled-in early to get Galloway, and spent the whole day re-hashing the Phantom set-up and fighting about an early Galloway. When we told Lars [our TL] about the conversation, he felt like most privates are out of the loop down here. The guides know each other, and their camping patterns. They talk as they leap frog down stream. The privates have a hard time breaking into the loop, and don’t know the campsites well. The lavender TL felt like his group should trust him (he’s been down before!) to know where to camp; but he didn’t really know and was angry that others knew better. Each day he wakes up and frets about where he’ll camp.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

The River Runner as “River God/Goddess”

While many wilderness experiences involve “roughing it” in terms of limited amounts of food and camping gear, river running often engages in the opposite, or “smoothing it.” This is accomplished through eating lavish meals and camping in prime locations “with all the comforts of home,” which turns an otherwise, inhospitable wilderness environment into one of comfort and familiarity. To this end, a considerable amount of gear and supplies are brought on river trips with rafts loaded-up like “garbage barges,” with most of the gear related to eating and camping. This results in the construction of another aspect of the river runner identity which involves the ability to tame the harsh river environment through resourcefulness and familiarity with that environment. We refer to this part of the river runner identity as “river god/goddess,” which overlaps in various ways with the “adventurer” identity. However providing comfort to fellow passengers within the eating and sleeping routines is emphasized within this discussion of the river god/goddess identity construction process.

Finding a prime campsites can be difficult especially due to their limited availability compared to the number
ing with another group or where there are few good camps). Finding a good camp under adverse conditions helps to establish and/or confirm passengers’ expectations of the guide’s ability to win in the struggle to tame the river wilderness. The guides also struggle to obtain the campsites with the biggest beaches, the most shade (in the summer), protection from the wind, and overhangs during rainy days, which confirms their familiarity with the river environment. The passengers, in turn, benefit from the expertise of the river guides in finding the good camp and can feel secure that they have the most ingenious guide on the river, allowing them to vicariously experience the river god/goddess identity.

As the above field note also suggests, river guides actively compete with each other to obtain desired campsites on the river, and those who “win” in the competition can feel triumphant in their struggle to prove that they are the most resourceful on the river. The field note below also illustrates this competition over campsites.

“There are a lot of kayakers and canoeists on this stretch of river. They can do the flat water stretch but are motored back up river once they reach Spanish Bottoms, just upstream from the first rapid Brown Betty. There were some that we passed that didn’t seem very friendly. Maybe they were intimidated by us as we were probably competing for one of the very few camps on Green, and we were rowing as fast as we could to ensure that we would get one of those few camps before they did.”

(Private trip, Green River)

Implicit in the above field note is the notion that camping in close proximity with another party detracts from the river experience. Under certain circumstances, however, campsites are unavoidably shared with other parties leading to an initial framing of the encounter as decreasing the quality of the river experience. However, experiences are continually reevaluated regarding their implications to identity, and an initial negative framing could be transformed to a positive context. Although the river god/goddess identity often involves competition with other groups in proving which group is better at providing comfort for themselves, transforming the losing group into a reluctant witnessing audience, continued competition can also detract from that identity as the river trip becomes transformed into a stressful experience. Consequently to avoid stressful experiences, initially negative encounters between two groups who are forced to share a camp are often renegotiated into something more positive. This is illustrated in the following field note:

“We ended up having to camp near the canoeist, which made neither of us very happy. Cheryl and Matt just walked passed their camp, and these two gals just started to yell at them - for no reason! We overheard them talking to each-other, complaining how we stole THEIR camp. It was pretty rude - we were sure happy that we would be rid of them tomorrow. But later that evening, Fred and this one gal from the other group got to talking, and he brought her over to join us for some drinks. Soon, more folks came over and we all had a great time. When we passed them the next day at Spanish Bottoms, they all lined the banks of the river and mooned us! We all just cheered!!”

(Private trip, Cataract Canyon)

In addition to finding a good campsite, river guides are exalted for their ability to prepare lavish meals under the harsh, wilderness conditions. Meals on river trips, especially for commercial passengers, are considered “rustic gourmet” and advertised as such across the marketing brochures of commercial outfitters. Guides pay extra attention to detail on both meal preparation and presentation, which helps makes mealtime a central experience on the river, which is occasionally shared with other groups:

“The meeting with Billy’s [commercial] boat made me realize how much I had adapted to the culture of food on the river. They invited us to have some of their food for lunch, and though it was largely the same food we had been having for the past few days, theirs was somehow better, because of the little details the commercial trips had that we didn’t. Where we had rather simple sandwich ingredients, they had pita bread, Dijon mustard, etc., and candy for dessert. Somehow these details made all the difference in the world.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

Again, like with finding a camp under competitive situations, preparing lavish meals under harsh conditions results in positive recognition of the river guides’ identity as being competent or even extraordinary. Through the provision of lavish meals, paying attention to detail, being able to sustain fresh food for more than a week in over 100 degree temperatures, and keeping sand out of the meals, river guides again maintain their identities as “gods” over the river wilderness. In addition, river guides also prove themselves by being able to obtain missing ingredients or other items through bartering with other groups on the river. In this fashion, river guides prove that the otherwise harsh river environment is as tame and familiar as one’s own home, where all one needs to do for a missing ingredient is to turn to one’s river running buddies, just as asking a neighbor for a cup of sugar.

“We went over to the say hi to the boatmen on the commercial group camped just downstream from us. One of their boatmen, I think it was the TL, greeted George by name and offered us some cold beers. Although we really should have started with our work, I thought it would have been rude if we didn’t accept the offer. Their TL then started to hit us for some potatoes, “Do you have any potatoes we could spare?” George asked how many, and he only replied, “lots.” I guess they completely forgot potatoes on their trip. George replied, “I’ll check on how many we can spare.” George then hit them up for some lettuce since we forgot lettuce and was using cabbage in its place on our sandwiches.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon)

“When we got below Lava, most of the privates were ready to barter for ice and other supplies. I guess they liked their cocktail hour; we passed a few that held up signs from their campsite “tequila” on one side of the card, “ice” on the other. Lil said they want to trade ice for tequila....”

(continued on next page)
In addition to food and alcohol, river guides also barter for specific services, such as a rowing group obtaining a tow from a motorized group:

“A little later, a commercial snout pulls up and asks us if we mind if they had lunch there. Sure, no problem. How do we hit them up for a tow? The boatman and swumper began to prepare lunch as the passengers went up to hike Dark Canyon. They were out of beer and the boatman comes up to see if he could swap ice for some beer. Jack just happened to have an “emergency” 12 pack hidden and was willing to give it to him, not for ice, but for a tow. “I’m not suppose to, but sure.” We also gave them some of our Dutch oven cake and thought that we got a good deal for the tow.”

(Private trip, Cataract Canyon).

While the obtaining of goods and services from other groups helps the identity of the river guide who, once again, proves his or her competence and knowledge of the river wilderness, passengers’ identities are also elevated as they can boast that it is their guides, or their group who are the most resourceful on the river in the on-going attempt to provide comfort during the river experience. Passengers also benefit from the goods obtained, such as not having to go without potatoes or spend the extra time rowing across flat water.

Sometimes communication between parties to exchange goods and services information on campsites breaks down and parties view each other as threats, resulting in negative encounters and subsequent imputation of negative identities, as the following field note demonstrates:

“There is an interesting phenomenon occurring between commercial and private trip encounters that I hadn’t really noticed before. Commercial boatmen (at least the group I hang out with) intentionally avoid any conversation with private boaters because they are “rude,” and only want things from the commercial boatmen, like ice. “They don’t even say “hi” anymore. They just demand, ‘hey, you got any ice?’ and expect us to give it to them like we’re some delivery service.” Although this attitude towards privates is not old, I believe it has become stronger from a recent incident. Apparently, a female private boater asked a commercial boatman, “Got any ice?” and the boatman responded, “show me your tits!” This offended the female private boater (although the boatman declared - “Hey, it seemed like a fair trade. If I were a private, I would first show them [commercial boatmen] my tits and THEN ask for ice.”) and she reported it and got some boatman in trouble.”

(Research trip, Grand Canyon).

In the preceding instance, some inter-group encoun-
ters are perceived as unfavorable. However, the negative interpretation of the encounter does not rest solely on the fact that it was an encounter, but on the nature of the encounter. In the above story, the private group was not following the “rules” of bartering - they were not part of the close network of commercial guides; they demanded instead of asking; and they violated the river principle, “what goes on the river, stays on the river,” meaning that they complained about what occurred on the river to others in the “real” world. While there may be more underlying reasons for negative encounters between commercial and private trips, in the above performance the commercial guides tried to prove to themselves and their passengers that the private trip was not in control of the harsh river environment and thus were lacking in the river god/goddess identity.

Conclusions

The major point of this paper is that encounters between groups of river runners are evaluated at the situational level and based on the nature of the social interaction. The evidence of this paper indicates that encounters may be some of the most meaningful events in a river/wilderness experience due to the opportunities they afford to negotiate identities. Encounters provide audiences that help shape and ratify one’s identity, and in doing so, have an enormous potential to affect one’s quality of recreation experience.

The identities central to the quality of many river running experiences are related to adventure and making the best out of a harsh environment. Adventurer identities require the social construction of danger and risk. Encounters function as forums to exchange stories, bear witness, and create narratives of situational danger, resulting in a reaffirmation of adventurer identities. River god/goddess identities require taming an otherwise harsh environment and involve the ability to secure good campsites, prepare lavish meals, and, in general, demonstrating one’s competence and resourcefulness in negotiating comfort in a wilderness setting. Camping decisions and the bartering for goods and services are thus frequent issues emerging in encounters between groups of river runners. Particularly for private river runners who are generally not part of the close knit network of commercial guides, anxiety about daily camping decisions or inability to successfully barter reflects problematic identity negotiations. Nevertheless, privates tend to claim more authentic river running experiences and resultant identities compared to their commercial counterparts who are providing catered wilderness experiences in the form of entertainment.

Although scores of studies have addressed relationships between encounters and recreation experiences (cf., Manning, 1999, chs. 4-6), the majority have purposely de-personalized “encounters” to focus on the quantity, rather
than the quality of encounters. This study frames the encounter issue by addressing the question “What role do encounters play regarding the quality of the river running experiences?” By emphasizing the quality of experience and viewing encounters as witnessing audiences, encounters often become central aspects of one’s river running experience.

This study provides a qualified context to understand past research on encounters. The effects of encounters in backcountry settings are complex; understanding such effects requires the inclusion of many factors besides those related to the number of encounters. Such a concern is not a new idea; more than three decades ago Wagar (1964) addressed the importance of understanding the quality of recreation experiences. This study reinforces Wagar’s viewpoint that the quality of recreation experiences are a meaningful focus for studies examining effects of encounters.

At issue is the context of understanding the “quality of recreation experience.” This paper connects the quality of experience to the meanings and identities that are continually negotiated during one’s trip, with a focus on meanings and identities negotiated while encountering other groups of people. Past outdoor recreation research generally frames the quality of recreation experience as if it were something received through exposure to an environment, often generalized as experiential outcomes linked to individual preferences (for critiques of traditional outdoor recreation literature see McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998; Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998). In contrast to past research depicting experiential phenomena as some received bundle of sensory data (cf., Patterson et al., 1998, 447-450), in this paper individual experience is framed as an enactment process linked to situationally negotiated meaning. Thus, to understand the quality of individual experience is to study the meanings of social interaction in shaping identity.

While in final stages of preparing this paper, the first author had a memorable encounter on the river. On a research trip during the Summer, 2000, she re-encountered Heidi and made the following observation in her journal.

“My brother, Pete the boatman, and I stayed at Shinimu to set hoop-nets and minnow traps in the creek while the rest of the crew continued to Forester to set up camp and electrofish. Since it was relatively early in the day when we got to Shinimu, and there was a commercial oar boat trip hanging out in the shade by the creek, we decided to also hang out at the creek until everyone left before we began our work. We hung out with a group from the commercial trip on a flat rock that faced the waterfall. I quickly recognized one of their boatmen who was on a KAS [Kanab ambersnail research] trip that I did the previous year. So, we engaged in “river talk” for awhile, when suddenly, the person who was sitting next to me, on the other side from the boatmen, said, “Hey, aren’t you Lil?” I looked at her, and I was nearly speechless, it was HEIDI! And she remembered me! I thought it was amazing that she recognized me first when I was in the middle of getting this “Heidi” paper completed. It has been two years since that trip where we met - when her valves leaked. I asked her if she ever got her valves fixed and she said that it wasn’t her valves - it was a small hole in her tubes that she had finally found. The rest of her trip went fine and she described all the people she met and the encounters she had. I just thought it odd that here she was, on a solo river trip down the Grand Canyon, the ultimate “wilderness experience,” and what she remembered most vividly was the encounters. Not only did she remember me, she also asked about Bill and how he was doing. I questioned her about this, “Didn’t all these encounters impact your wilderness experience?” She smiled and said that the encounters were part of her experience, “Last year, I went on an off-season, Green River trip and saw no one for two weeks. Spending all that time alone allowed for a spiritual process, where I could be at peace with my own soul. But meeting all these people in the Canyon is just another type of healing process; another way of soul searching. You meet new and interesting people and share a part of your life with them - and that’s just another way of looking deep into your own self.” I told her about how we kept on asking other trips that passed us about her and, I told her about our (her) paper, hesitating because I was afraid that she would be embarrassed. However, instead of being embarrassed, she was delighted that she too, was able to add to our experience - that through encountering Heidi, we were able to see more clearly into the soul of river runners, which we call the river running identity. (Research trip, Grand Canyon).

Lilian M. Jonas, William P. Stewart and Kevin W. Larkin

References


ADVANCE NOTICE DEPT.

New River Gear To Be Auctioned
March 1, 2002

The 2002 river season is just a few months away. To celebrate the joyous moment, GCPBA kicks off the new river year with its annual “on-line auction.” Last year’s auction generated more than $6,000 in profits for the club, which were used to fund our activities, including the legal action filed against the GCNP in an effort to get the federal funding that was used to actuate a forward thinking plan to advantageous and fun fund.

Pfizer Corporation has given us a promise of full funding for the project, including a blank check for the Park’s general fund.

We wish to mount a major research initiative along the river corridor to further quantify the various populations, then relocate gene-selected groups to other beaches in order to increase their numbers and diversity of habitat. The first ten river trips would be used to gather raw data for the federally administered Western Regional Velvet Ant Repository and Research Center. Results of our joint findings with the University would then be used to actuate a forward thinking plan to advantageously place specific ant groups within the corridor. This would require another ten river trips at least, maybe twenty, depending on how many of the interested relatives/friends wanted to go and help with the research. These trips must be conducted in the summer when the “velvets” are active, and not hibernating.

Results from this research will be significant. The ants will survive in a protected environment, and the Resources Division of the Park will have a mountain of new information and specimens at no cost. In addition, we will publish a Grand Canyon Velvet Ant beach guide to be given all commercial and public river-runners for their enjoyment and education. Possible down side is that various beaches will have to be temporarily closed from time to time. I understand this has been done many times in the past and should be no problem.

My uncle, The Honorable Senator Orin Hatch, considers this to be an excellent use of research manpower, and considers it a go. Please get back to me at your earliest possible convenience so that we may begin scheduling launch dates.

At Your Command,
Col. VanDyke Boudreaux Patchouly, Esq. III, Ph.D, ret.

Political Satire Cheerfully Written By Bruce W. McElya