

CUT DOWN BOATS & MISS PIGGY

My first memory of Miss Piggy was around June 1972 when I was running Lodore Canyon in my Selway. Glade Ross (and I believe his brother-in law) was rigging Miss Piggy at the Lodore Boat ramp the night before my launch. The second night out we camped at the old Upper Triplet Falls Campground next to Glade and I got to know him. We had flipped in Upper Disaster Falls, recovered our boat at Harp Falls with the help of a Western River Trip who carried us down to the boat.

Early the next morning, while scouting Hells Half Mile, Glade rowing Miss Piggy ran by us. Glade was standing up with a big smile on his face, holding one oar and the other locked under his leg while drinking a beer. Glade Ross, Utah River Guide License is 0001, has been running rivers for a long time. He was one of the early Grand Canyon River guides for Hatch River Expeditions before he became a ranger with the National Park Service. Glade was the N.P.S. Ranger at Lodore from before 1972 until he retired in 1996. Here is the story of Miss Piggy told to me by Glade in 1996:

Frank McKnight was rowing a 28' National Park Service donut pontoon boat down Lodore Canyon on the Green River, doing some welding on culverts and other work. He wrecked the boat in Hells Half Mile and lost everything, including the acetylene tanks. The boat wrapped and attempts at salvaging it were unsuccessful. Several weeks later the boat washed off and was recovered, it was tossed in the N.P.S. boneyard and sold for salvage. Ron Smith of Grand Canyon Expeditions (who had a Dinosaur permit at that time) bought it even though the floor was completely gone and the middle tubes were trashed.

In 1963 or 64 Glade Ross saw the boat at Smith's boathouse and offered to buy it. Smith's reply to Glade was "what do you want that thing for!" Smith sold it to Ross for about \$10. Glade cut out the middle air chambers so that the baffles of the ends were left intact, with about 4" of extra fabric. He then punched holes in extra fabric and stitched the two ends together. There was no floor and "the only way you could put a floor in it was to hang a piece of plywood on chains." It had a sturdy wooden rowing frame and could carry large, heavy loads.

Jack Curry saw the boat and liked it. By then 28' boats were no longer available, so he bought Korean War 33' boats and began cutting and splicing them. About the same time the Hatches were using similar self-bailers on the Salmon River in Idaho. Previous to that many boaters hung plywood floors on boats, but only to give the floor cargo strength, the rubber floor was left in place.

In the late 1960s Glade, along with the Hatches built another boat with "no floor": A plywood floor hung above the water with chains. It was called "Miss Piggy" because its extremely high tubes and short 18' length gave it the resemblance of the TV character. That boat was vulcanized together using the Hatches vulcanizing machine in Vernal. It was used by the National Park Service in Dinosaur National Monument until 1994, when it was apparently sent to the landfill.

{Above interview from notes taken with Glade Ross by Herm Hoops; February 20, 1996; Glade's remembrance was similar to a conversation Herm Hoops had with Don Hatch in 1988}

The question of why Hatch would build a boat for the National Park Service has not been fully answered. One has to remember the 1960s were an earlier time and people often did things or worked together on many things. For example the NPS had given the Hatches permission to build a food and emergency storage shed at Jones Hole, something that would likely never occur today. People forget that Uintah County used to maintain the road to island Park, and in return until around 1988 the National Park Service maintained the road to Cub Creek - including plowing the driveway to Chew Ranch in winter.

In 2012 Bob Ratcliffre (ex Hatch Boatman, Dinosaur River Ranger, BLM Deputy Assistant Director) sent me the following information (which also closely matches what Don hatch had told me):

Earl Perry loved Miss Piggy – especially her 13’ handmade oars. Glade took 4 x 4s and split one end of them and bolted in a piece of plywood for a blade while the handle end was simply whittled down like a giant pencil. They were hard to grab on to, so I duct- taped river rocks to counter balance the oars. It worked ok until you had to row hard and the rocks would slam into your knees. Also had the funky 1 ¼ inch pipe sticking out of the frame and a piece of fire hose clamped to the oar as an oar lock – actually worked pretty good. The frame and boat weighed a ton – frame made out of 2 x 8's, and a #/4” marine plywood floor hung by heavy chains. But she could hold literally tons of gear – we carried many an outhouse kit in as well as those “firepans” Earl had us place in the campgrounds – they really were solid steel army surplus griddles and weighed 238 lbs a piece. We carried in four or five of them on Miss Piggy.

...Earl had me remove the old pagoda style outhouses – which I was to burn – they were so dry and made out of so much wood they really went up – and started burning nearby trees and grass, so I ran down to Miss Piggy to get a bail bucket – but since she did not have a floor in her – so I had no bucket. Ended up dumping food out of a rocket box ammo can to use it to haul water. It was touch and go but triplet is still a nice riparian forest.....

In 2012 I received the following from Earl Perry (an ex Hatch boatman and Dinosaur River Ranger) (some of Earl’s remembrances are in conflict by those told to me by Glade Ross, Don Hatch and Paul Thevinin - Thevinin told me the Western Rigs were copied from Hatch):

“These were Western River rigs originally created by Jake Luck, Paul Thevinin, under Jack Currey. That's where Glade got the idea. I didn't know the one you call Miss Piggy was a park boat; I thought it was his personal rig, but then he had a lot of boats up there (including the war canoe) whose status was unclear to me. They cut down 33s to make them; his may have been a cut-down 27. The cut 33s were called Stubbies, and were the item of choice for Western's Selway trips. Petrillo had a story about that from the extreme water of '74, when as you may remember ARTA killed 4 passengers on the Main Salmon, which peaked at 132Kcfs. He was on the Selway at about 10 feet, at Moose Creek just below Hamm, having made a landing somehow in the flooded ponderosas, taking a breather with his dudes. Looked up, and there came a dude-less stubby, which tipped over on a wave out in center-current, swept down and up the next, tipped right-side up, swept down and up the next, capsized again, and was swept out of sight. Waves so large, and so spaced, that only 3 were all that were in view. Thinking of Ladle, Double-drop, Wolf Creek. Turned to his people and said, "That's it. This trip is cancelled. Let's start carrying our stuff up to the air strip.””

“In 83 we motored Lodore on 8Kcfs. 4.5 hours Lodore to Split. The most impressive sub-time was 29 minutes from Rainbow landing to Split. Glade did in fact do a double-life jacket on that trip, but after swimming out of Cataract on 90Kcfs it made sense to him. I believe one of his people got out of the river in a mile and a half, and the one who swam longest went another 15 miles before getting out. They realized there had been trouble when the upside=down pontoon with its lower unit sticking boldly up swept past Hite. Later on it made sense to me: I adopted his idea as standard practice for every time I run Cat above 60K; double life jackets, crotch straps, wet or dry suits, and helmets all around. Those Western oars were called "clubs" and we Hatch guys hooted at the poor wretches from Western who had to use them; we had the slim and elegant 13- or 14-foot hickories, though they cost a phenomenal \$25 each. (*Herm’s note: the oars were made by Swanson Boat Oar Company of Albion, PA and were made of ash.*)

In the photograph of Miss Piggy in Warm Springs Rapid Bob Ratcliffe is on the oars and Chief Ranger John Welch is holding on.