

Charles Kelly. USHS collections.

Charles Kelly's Glen Canyon Ventures and Adventures

BY GARY TOPPING

HE WAS BORN WITH A CHIP ON HIS SHOULDER. Quick to take offense, slow to forgive, arrogant, self-righteous, Charles Kelly (1889-1971) was a walking argument, a fight waiting for a place to happen. His photo-

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graphs reveal a man small in stature but compensatingly pugnacious, often with a week's growth of beard and a defiant cigar jutting from his mouth. Savagely antireligious, he lived squarely in the middle of Mormon Country and dared the Mormons to do something about it. As one of the founding fathers of the Utah Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, Kelly hated even when there was nothing to hate, and confided to his diary that he hoped it would be good for business.¹

And yet there was good in the man, too. He made friends as fiercely as he made enemies, and though he lost some of them through real or imagined affronts, he remained loyal to most. As a historian, he was a bloodhound on a trail, and if he occasionally followed a false scent, he more often treed his quarry. And he followed his quarry into some of the most remote country Utah had to offer: he took the first automobile across the Salt Lake Desert on the Donner trail, and he floated Glen Canyon several times in the years when it was not generally well known. If he later applauded the flooding of Glen Canyon and rushed into print with the suggestion that the reservoir be named "Lake Escalante," he was a formidable defender and student of the backcountry. As the first custodian of Capitol Reef National Monument, he compiled an immense body of interpretive information that fifty years later still serves rangers and visitors alike, and then resigned bitterly in the face of what he considered excessive Park Service bureaucratization.

The first great hate of Kelly's life was his father, a preacher in the mode of Elmer Gantry. Although Kelly danced on his father's grave, he ought to have recalled that he learned two valuable skills during his forced service to his father's profession: music and printing. Always employable through one or the other, Kelly was never without a job, even in the worst of the Great Depression.

Following service in World War I, Kelly settled in Utah with his bride, Harriette Greener. The marriage and the place of residence both lasted the rest of his life. His interest in history came later, as a result of an idle curiosity about the Donner emigrants, but it stuck just as deeply and resulted in a torrent of books and articles, both scholarly and popular, on a variety of subjects including trails, mountain men, Mormons, outlaws, and the deserts and canyons of the Colorado Plateau, all char-

¹Kelly's diary and autobiography are in the Charles Kelly Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. See also A. Russell Mortensen, "In Memoriam," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1971): 199-200. Kelly's Klan involvement is given in Larry R. Gerlach, *Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1982), pp. 28-31.

Hoffman Birney participated in the Steward-Kelly exploration of Glen Canyon in 1938 and co-authored a book with Kelly. USHS collections.



acterized by exhaustive library research as well as interviews and on-site investigations.²

It is not clear just how and when Kelly became interested in Glen Canyon, but it matters little, since Kelly's omnivorous curiosity led him everywhere, and Glen Canyon, one of the earth's most endlessly enchanting places, worked its irresistible spell upon many. It is certain that the people with whom he would share his first river trip in 1932 came into his circle of friends through publication of his *Salt Desert Trails* (1929). The first of those was Hoffman Birney, a prolific writer on western themes, who was then living in Tucson and working on an article about the Mormons. One of his latest books was *Roads to Roam*, an entertaining account of an automotive odyssey through seven western states during the summer of 1928. Birney shared Kelly's love of the backcountry and its history, his irreligion and general irreverence for cultural sacred cows, and his racism. The two took to each

²Mortensen, "In Memoriam"; Kelly diary, August 20, 1936; a full bibliography of Kelly's publications by Howard Foulger is in the Charles Kelly Papers at the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

other naturally and began a collaboration on a book about the Mormon avenger Porter Rockwell, which appeared in 1934 under the title *Holy Murder*. The Kelly-Birney friendship cooled after Birney allegedly took an idea Kelly suggested for a book about the Donners and published it on his own. But in 1932 their friendship was at high tide. "My acquaintance with Birney last summer, which continues by correspondence," Kelly wrote, "was one of the high-lights of the year. He is a real guy." He further noted that they were talking about a river trip on the Green, though Kelly also wanted to run the Dirty Devil.³

That their plans shifted to Glen Canyon was a result of Kelly's meeting with Dr. Julian H. Steward, then professor of anthropology at the University of Utah. Steward (1902-72) was one of Utah's first professionally trained anthropologists and a creator of the department at the University. Trained during the 1920s at the University of California at Berkeley under Alfred L. Kroeber, Robert H. Lowie, and the eccentric Jaime d'Angulo, Steward developed "a broad orientation to the holistic aspects of anthropology, a concern for seeing mankind from the biological, cultural, historical, and linguistic viewpoints," and became, during his later career at Columbia and the University of Illinois, one of the important theorists in the profession. During his brief tenure at the University of Utah (1930-33), he accomplished some important studies in the Great Basin area, through which he met Kelly, and made two expeditions into southern Utah—one into Paria and Johnson canyons and the other through Glen Canyon with Kelly and Birney. It was, in fact, the archaeological promise of Glen Canyon and Steward's offer of university funding for the trip that led Kelly and Birney to change their river trip plans.⁴

The party as finally constituted included, in addition to those three, Byron O. "Barney" Hughes, whom Kelly identified as "some kind of assistant flunkey" Steward had taken under his wing during a previous teaching job at the University of Michigan, and John "Jack" Shoemaker, a son of Birney's Philadelphia publisher. Personal conflicts developed almost immediately. "When final arrangements were being made for the trip Steward acted so flighty that Birney took a great

³Kelly, *Salt Desert Trails* (Salt Lake City: Western Printing Co., 1929); Birney, *Roads to Roam* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1930); Kelly and Birney, *Holy Murder* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1934); Kelly diary, February 3, 1931; January 4, 1932. On Birney's career, see *New York Times*, June 4, 1958, and *Who Was Who in America*.

⁴Robert F. Murphy, "Introduction: The Anthropological Theories of Julian H. Steward," in Jane C. Steward and Robert F. Murphy, eds., *Evolution and Ecology: Essays on Social Transformation by Julian H. Steward* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 1-16; Steward, *Archaeological Reconnaissance of Southern Utah* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941).



Members of the Steward-Kelly expedition prepare to leave Wolgamott ranch, Wayne County, on their way to Hite in 1932. USHS collections.

dislike to him,” Kelly noted. That dislike was hardly mitigated when, at Torrey, Steward claimed that there had been a misunderstanding and that he expected each one to pay his own expenses. Birney lost his temper and expressed the intention of leaving the party, but he later decided thirty dollars was a cheap enough fee for three weeks in Glen Canyon even if he had to pay it himself, and stayed. The damage was done, though, for, according to Kelly, the incident “caused a breach in the expedition, Birney taking every opportunity to rub it into Steward for the rest of the trip.”⁵ As things worked out, he was to have plenty of opportunities.

Getting from Hanksville to Hite in 1932 was inevitably an adventure. The Kelly party built road and pushed the two cars and boat trailer over rough places until they reached the Wolgamott ranch, where they hired a wagon and some horses for the worst stretch of the journey, the roadless route down the floor of North Wash to the river. Another adventure awaited them at the mouth of North Wash where an old prospector, John Young, had somehow heard of their impending arrival and awaited their assistance in ferrying a stranded partner, Harry Correll, from the other bank of the river. Correll and another

⁵In addition to Kelly’s main diary entry of July 31, 1932, which summarizes the river trip, he kept a separate diary during the trip, and it also is in the Kelly Papers at the University of Utah. A copy of Birney’s 1932 river diary is also in the Kelly collection at the University of Utah. All passages quoted here are from those three diaries.

friend, Sam Gates, had wrecked a raft trying to cross the river. Gates had fallen into the water and drowned, and Correll had been marooned on the other side for nine days with no food. Steward and Hughes ferried the dazed and starving man back to the right bank, fed him, and witnessed a recovery so remarkable that the following day he was ready to take up mining again.⁶

After spending a day in camp to get the boats ready and hike up to the mouth of the Dirty Devil River, the party embarked on July 6. None were experienced boatmen. Their two boats, the *Dirty Devil* and the *Bright Angel*, were folding canvas craft borrowed from David Dexter Rust, an old riverman and guide from whom they also received their only information on what awaited them, beyond a set of 1921 USGS river maps Birney had gotten from their author, Col. Clarence H. Birdseye, in Washington, D.C. At least they looked the part, for they banned razors by mutual agreement, and all soon took on the scruffy appearance characteristic of Kelly's style on the river. Birney, appraising the party's appearance on July 7, observed that "Kelly, Steward, and I, being darker, are the most savage looking, with little to choose between us. Steward, cavorting naked on a sandbar, looks like *homo neanderthalis*."⁷

The neophyte rivermen ran their first rapid, a little riffle at the mouth of North Wash, with no trouble: "The 'rapid' didn't even joggle the boat," Birney reported. If that experience fed their confidence, Trachyte Rapid, a half mile below their camp at White Canyon, destroyed it the following evening as they unaccountably attempted to run it in the dark. Few experienced boatmen would have regarded Trachyte as a significant obstacle, but it nearly upset both their boats in a comic display of miscommunication, misunderstanding of the river channel, and poor vision in the darkness. Steward and Hughes, unaware that Birney, at the oars of the other boat, had managed to land above the rapid, ran it in the dark, hoping to rescue swimmers after what they presumed would be a capsized. All wound up safe, though separated, and the mutual accusations made tempers rise. "Steward and Barney swear the waves were six feet high," Birney jibed. "They probably were all of twenty inches." "Everybody was mad," Kelly wrote. "Birney pulled out his bottle of Rainbow Bridge wine, and we killed it." This was a bottle purchased to celebrate their arrival at the

⁶Both Kelly and Birney record the rescue of Correll in their diaries, and Kelly wrote an article about it, "Gold Hunters Are Like That," *Desert Magazine*, July 1942, pp. 13-15.

⁷Birney diary, July 7, 1932.

famous arch. Half of it already had been consumed after a rough day building road south of Hanksville.⁸

And so they continued down the river. "To those who have passed through the perils of Cataract Canyon and the real rapids there, the tiny riffles of Glen Canyon would be a joke," Birney thought. "To us—utterly inexperienced watermen—the rapids of Glen Canyon seem quite serious. We stop and study them all." Unfortunately, their study seems to have produced little understanding, for they still ran everything the wrong way. At their first camp below Hall's Crossing, they became separated when they disagreed upon a landing site and spent the night apart. Much more serious, though, was a near disaster at the mouth of the Escalante River which, swollen by sudden rainstorms, was creating tricky waves and a large eddy below its mouth. Hughes broke an oar, but Shoemaker plied a paddle and got the first boat across. Birney had a rougher time, getting caught in the eddy, shipping buckets of water, and in spite of portaging what seemed to be the worst of the rapid, finding he was still in jeopardy of a series of sand waves—temporary swells created by a false bottom of silt precipitating from saturated water.⁹

The combination of hazards proved to be too much for poor Steward, who simply lost his nerve. Birney and Kelly preyed upon his weakness, as reported in Birney's diary:

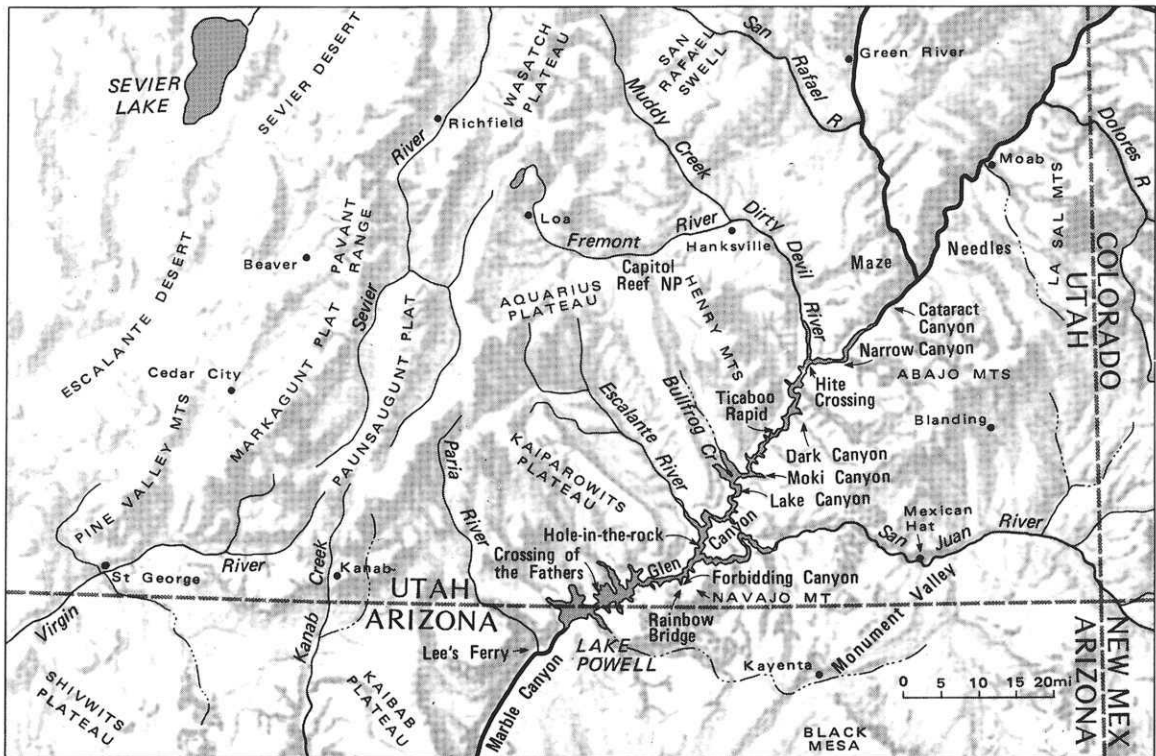
Steward, incidentally, has gone pretty yellow. The river has his goat. The high water at the Escalante, plus the little experience with the sandwaves, seems to have him buffaloeed. He was awake until after three last night, pacing up and down the beach, planting sticks at the water's edge so he could gauge the rise or fall of the Colorado, and otherwise indulging in a lot of useless worry. I entertain him with tales of San Juan floods, their suddenness and terrific violence, which Kelly seconds most admirably.

Later, he confessed that he and Kelly rocked the boat in rapids to try to scare Steward, whom he described as being "like a hen on a hot griddle." In fact, according to Kelly, personal relations within the group had almost completely deteriorated by that time:

Birney was aggravating and unnecessarily bossy, making trouble over trivial incidents. Steward and Hughes were flighty, kept to themselves, and acted like two old maid morphadites. In place of intelligent conversations around camp in the evenings, all but Shoemaker and myself spent

⁸Ibid., July 6 and 8, 1932; Kelly river diary, July 7, 1932.

⁹Birney diary, July 8 and 13, 1932; Kelly river diary, July 13, 1932. Experiences such as these belie Kelly's claim in his article about the trip, "Down the Colorado," *Utah Motorist*, August 1932, pp. 5-8, that "the entire trip was made without accident of any kind" (p. 8).



Map by Brian L. Haslam.

the time singing and composing filthy limericks. . . . The scenery was marvelous and the whole journey intensely interesting to me, but would much rather have made it in different company.

To Birney the whole thing remained a big joke even years later. During a 1937 visit to Washington, D.C., he learned that Steward was there and tried to contact him, evidently with the main purpose of teasing the unfortunate man even more about the river trip. “We called him twice,” Birney reported to Kelly, “but he wasn’t in his office and they didn’t know where he was hiding—so that’s that. I’d have liked to [have] shouted ‘Horsecock’ or ‘Sandwaves, Barney’ in his ear.”¹⁰

Granted, then, that the trip in human terms was a miserable failure, was it of any scientific value? Birney and Kelly, predictably, give Steward low marks as an archaeologist. Kelly thought Steward lazy for his unwillingness to hike very far up side canyons in search of ruins and alleged that “So far I have shown Steward every site he has

¹⁰Birney diary, July 15, 1932; main Kelly diary, July 31, 1932; Birney to Kelly, May 17, 1937, Kelly Papers, Utah State Historical Society.



Above: *Hoffman Birney and Frank Shoemaker in Glen Canyon, 1932. Below: Taking down the boats at the end of the Glen Canyon run. USHS collections.*



excavated.” Be that as it may, Steward’s published report gives detailed data on twenty-eight sites he excavated in an attempt “to discover the place and manner in which those culture elements which had been chronologically differentiated in the San Juan area had become blended into a single culture and spread northward into the Northern Periphery [of the Anasazi area].”¹¹ His conclusion was that Glen Canyon was not that place; rather, it was “a kind of no-man’s land which had been very slightly settled by outposts from both Mesa Verde and Kayenta and which had come into contact with the North-

¹¹Main Kelly diary, July 31, 1932; Steward, *Archaeological Reconnaissance*, pp. 281-82; 329; 354-56.

ern Periphery but had not strongly influenced it." This, one would submit, was a considerable accomplishment for a scant twenty-three days in the canyon, many of which were archaeologically barren.

While Kelly and Birney were also interested in archaeology, their main stated purpose in making the trip was to investigate sites of historical interest. They found many: inscriptions, cabins, trails, and mining remains. Of greatest interest to them, however, was the point at which it was then supposed that the Franciscan fathers Dominguez and Escalante had crossed the river on November 7, 1776, on their return trip to Santa Fe after exploring much of Colorado and Utah. Kelly was aware also of the Mormon pioneer Jacob Hamblin's crossings at Kane Creek and noted that it was understood that the two crossings were one and the same, a realization reached at about the same time by Dr. Russell G. Frazier (1893-1968), a Bingham Canyon physician who became a well-known river runner and Antarctic explorer.

After study of Escalante's diary, Kelly became convinced that the Crossing of the Fathers could not have been at Kane Creek, though he found nowhere else on the 1932 trip that met the description. Frazier visited the locale in 1933 and agreed with Kelly. There the matter stood for four years, until Frazier met a young prospector named Byron Davies, who reported having seen another set of steps cut into the rock about a mile below the previously known crossing. Frazier suspected that the steps were those cut by Escalante. Accompanied by Davies and Kelly, Frazier took a motorboat up from Lee's Ferry in August 1937 and determined that Davies's steps were very old but that they also did not exactly meet the padre's description. He returned in October with a pack train from Cannonville and succeeded in getting the animals all the way to the river via Davies's steps; on that occasion he found yet others that Davies had not previously noted. It was this last set of steps, at what he named Padre Creek, that best matched Escalante's diary. In a *Desert Magazine* article written by Kelly but appearing under Frazier's name, Frazier speculated that the first set of steps discovered by Davies were also Spanish in origin, but later, perhaps around 1800.¹²

Kelly was on the river again in 1938, this time as part of an expedition led and financed by Julius F. Stone (1855-1947). It was not

¹²The Frazier Papers are at the Utah State Historical Society; Dr. Russell G. Frazier, "El Vado de los Padres," *Desert Magazine*, July, 1940, pp. 3-5; Kelly's authorship of the article is claimed in his diary, December 11, 1939. Although the Frazier party correctly identified the Escalante steps, it was not an original discovery. Otis Marston, "River Runners: Fast Water Navigation," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 28 (July 1960): 307, proves that Dave Rust knew where they were at least as early as 1926.

the first money Julius Stone had sunk in Glen Canyon. He had been a leading financial backer of the ill-fated Hoskaninni Company promoted by engineer Robert Brewster Stanton during the years 1897-1902. Stanton had located contiguous mining claims throughout the whole of Glen Canyon, gambling a great deal of his investors' money that he could extract the powdery gold from the river sands. He proved to be unable to deliver on his promise, and his immense wrecked dredge remained visible in the river just above Bullfrog Creek until the flooding of the canyon, a silent reminder of the elusiveness of Glen Canyon wealth.¹³

Stone lost a lot of money on the venture, but the river was in his blood. In 1909 he led and financed a trip down the entire river, guided by the celebrated riverman Nathaniel Galloway. It was perhaps the first such trip motivated purely by love of the country, with no ulterior scientific or economic purposes. Since Stone was financially independent, he could afford to devote attention to scenic and historic aspects of the river that others had to pass by. He was especially interested in the placing of plaques at Separation Rapid in the Grand Canyon, where the two Howland brothers and William Dunn had left the 1869 John Wesley Powell party, and at Frazier's newly discovered Crossing of the Fathers in Glen Canyon. On the latter trip, Stone also wished to investigate the 1642 and 1837 inscriptions near Lake Canyon.¹⁴

The Glen Canyon trip took place during late September and early October 1938 and included, in addition to Stone, Kelly, and Frazier, Stone's son George, their Ohio friend William Chryst, boatman Frank Swain (a river partner of Frazier), and Dr. A. L. Inglesby, a dentist-turned-rockhound who had become a considerable expert on the back-country of southern Utah. Stone was eighty-three years of age at the time, and Inglesby insisted upon making him comfortable by installing an easy chair in his boat. The party carried the flag of the Explorers

¹³The story of the Hoskaninni Mining Company is told by Robert Brewster Stanton himself in *The Hoskaninni Papers: Mining in Glen Canyon, 1897-1902*, C. Gregory Crampton and Dwight L. Smith, eds. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1961 [University of Utah Anthropological Papers No. 54]).

¹⁴A full account of Stone's 1909 trip is in his book, *Canyon Country: The Romance of a Drop of Water and a Grain of Sand* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932). Much of the story of the Separation Rapid plaque installation is told in correspondence in the Frazier Papers, and of its later removal to higher ground above the waters of Lake Mead, in the Harry L. Aleson Papers at the Utah State Historical Society. Stone's account of his 1938 Glen Canyon trip is "Another Fling at Colorado River Rapids," *Ohio State University Monthly*, November, 1938, pp. 17-18. Stone not only paid for the entire trip, but even refused a check from Kelly for a share in the payment for the latter's *Saturday Evening Post* article. See Stone to Frazier, January 7, 1938, and January 27, 1939, Frazier papers; and Kelly diary, February 2, 1939.



Members of the Stone expedition, 1938. Left to right: Charles Kelly, Frank Swain, George Stone, William Chryst, A. L. Inglesby, Julius Stone, and Russell G. Frazier at Lee's Ferry, the end of their trip that began at Hite. USHS collections.

Club, of which both Stone and Frazier were members. Two of the three tin boats were named *Amos* and *Buzz* after Amos Burg and Haldane "Buzz" Holmstrom, who were at that very time making their historic voyage down the river. (Burg was using the first inflatable boat on the Colorado, and Holmstrom would become the first man to run every rapid on a single trip.) As Holmstrom's financial backer on the 1938 trip, Stone had a special interest in its success, and Holmstrom had acknowledged that assistance by naming his boat, in return, the *Julius F.*¹⁵

In order to give him—as Stone titled an article about the trip—"Another Fling at Colorado River Rapids," Swain first turned the boats upstream from North Wash on September 24, motoring up through Narrow Canyon and then the lower reaches of Cataract Canyon in an attempt to top the mighty Dark Canyon Rapid which the 1909 party had elected not to run. Even with only Stone in the bow and Swain in the stern, the underpowered craft was unable to prevail

¹⁵Haldane "Buzz" Holmstrom Papers, Utah State Historical Society, and the Burg and Holmstrom diaries at the Oregon Historical Society document the relationship with Julius Stone. The easy chair used on that trip by Stone is now at the Utah State Historical Society.

against the current; with the throttle wide open, the boat remained motionless in the river, spray breaking over the happy old man for a few minutes until Swain recognized the futility of the venture and turned downstream. The party spent the night below the rapid, and one may well imagine that the sound of booming water in his ears all night brought Stone dreams of remembered rides through rapids in years gone by.¹⁶

The drama done, oar power became the order of the day as the boats drifted back down the river and entered Glen Canyon. Memories rushed in anew as the boats passed Ticaboo, where Stone had met Cass Hite in 1898 and again in 1909, and Stone related the story of how the old miner had given him his only thermometer to replace Stone's broken one and enable him to continue recording temperatures during the rest of his trip. On September 28 they drifted past Camp Stone, Stanton's headquarters during the mining venture and, in a now-famous episode, stopped at the wreck of the old dredge and built a fire from some of its boards to make some coffee, Stone quipping that he calculated that pot of coffee to have cost him five thousand dollars.¹⁷

Frazier and Kelly stopped at Lake Canyon to look for a reported 1534 inscription but found instead the 1642 date, which Stone surmised "may and probably does have some historical significance if it can be identified and properly interpreted." Less mysterious were the inscriptions of the 1871 Powell expedition in Music Temple, and the Stone party varnished them over to protect them from further deterioration. Finally they arrived at their major goal, Padre Creek, where Frazier had found the Escalante steps, and Swain, working from a precarious footing on his boat, drilled the holes and affixed Stone's plaque at the mouth of the canyon.¹⁸

They arrived at Lee's Ferry two days before their transportation to Salt Lake City was due. To their surprise and delight, they discovered that their history-laden trip offered yet another experience when they learned that the remains of Powell's boat, the *Nellie Powell*, were still visible at Leo Weaver's ranch, where they were camped. What they found was a few charred fragments left from a brush fire, but they were still identifiable from the stout construction and blue

¹⁶Stone, "Another Fling"; Charles Kelly, "At Eighty-three He Is An Explorer," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 6, 1939, pp. 20-21. Kelly also kept a laconic diary of the trip. It is in the Kelly Papers at the University of Utah.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Stone, "Another Fling," p. 18.

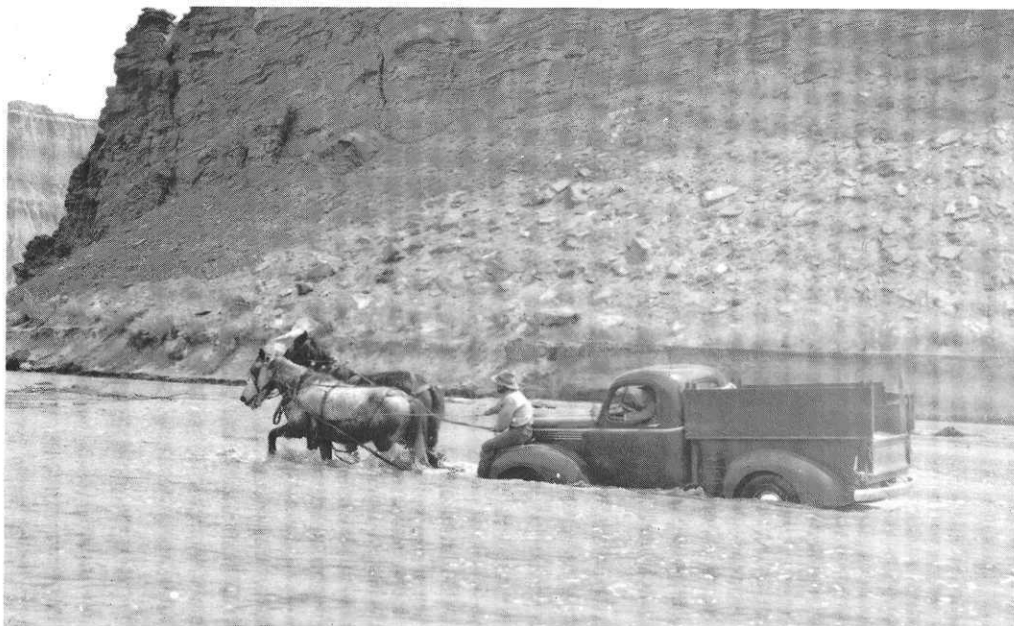
paint as Powell's boat. "This midnight discovery of an old boat used by the first men ever to pass down the great river seemed a fitting climax to our journey," Kelly wrote.¹⁹

Successful as the 1938 trip was, Kelly and Frazier were unsatisfied that they had located all the Spanish inscriptions in Glen Canyon. In fact, they had virtually no evidence of any such inscriptions at all, for a supposed Escalante inscription near Padre Creek had turned out to be meaningless erosional markings, and the reported 1534 inscription at Lake Canyon was nonexistent. All they had for their searches was the 1642 inscription, which they were unable to corroborate as genuine or to connect with any known person. Both men seem to have fallen under the romantic thrall of the area's popular legends of lost Spanish mines and trails, legends that have run far in advance of the meager solid evidence.

At any rate, they set out again in the spring of 1942 on what was to be the last river trip for both men, in search of Spanish inscriptions. Their partner on this trip was Willis D. Johnson whose first river experience had come in 1938 when he had been selected from several applicants at Green River, Utah, to complete the voyage with Burg and Holmstrom as a general camp roustabout. Since that time, he had made other trips separately with both Burg and Holmstrom and had gathered considerable river knowledge, both through his own experience and from watching his partners, two of the most skilled boatmen of their day. Little of that skill, unfortunately, was in evidence on the 1942 trip, which turned out to be a genuine adventure.

Actually, skill was hardly a factor at all, since any skill the three may have possessed was negated by the unsuitability of their boats. Perhaps Kelly and Johnson had been seduced during previous trips into thinking that Glen Canyon's mild rapids offered no serious challenge and that any type of boat could make the journey. Kelly, of course, should have known better from his 1932 experience, but Johnson and Frazier had only been through the canyon with skilled boatmen and superb equipment and probably underrated the hazards. Their boats, at any rate, were ludicrously inadequate. Frazier's sixteen-foot rubber kayak was the only one that stood much of a chance of making the trip, and in fact he was the only one who escaped serious trouble. The others were far too small: Kelly had a six-foot inflatable boat and Johnson an eight-foot one. Frazier and Johnson propelled

¹⁹Kelly, "At Eighty-three He Is An Explorer," p. 77.



Russell G. Frazier and Charles Kelly crossing the Fremont River near Caineville, April 10, 1942, on their way to Hite. USHS collections.

their boats with paddles, but Johnson switched to oars almost immediately when he got out of control in Trachyte Rapid. Even at that, the oars he and Kelly used were so short they offered little leverage and were attached to the boats only by means of hard rubber oarlocks glued to the tubes and inadequate to sustain hard rowing. To complete the problem, the boats were too small to carry all the gear and supplies they needed for the trip; they had to abandon some of their outfit at Hite and even then loaded the boats far too high for stability. They were floating accidents, and the old riverman Arthur Chaffin, examining their outfits at Hite, told them he thought they were crazy.²⁰

The first few days, however, were uneventful. Ticaboo Rapid was “all covered and smooth” in the high water, and Kelly estimated that they were being pulled along at about eight miles per hour—fast current on any river. They noted a great deal of mining activity and stopped at Smith Fork where Johnson showed them the big petroglyph panel. It was one of the most impressive panels in the whole canyon country, well known on the river, and one wonders that they had not found it before. On their second day out (April 12) they landed at Moki

²⁰Kelly river diary, April 10-11, 1942. Photographs of the equipment are in the Utah State Historical Society’s general photograph collection and in two Kelly articles: “River Gold,” *Desert Magazine*, October 1942, pp. 15-17; and “Sand Waves,” *Arizona Highways*, April 1944, pp. 36-39.

Canyon, their first major stop, where they intended to explore a supposedly untouched ruin that Johnson had noticed in 1938. The climb to the ruin presented a real challenge. It was, by Kelly's estimate, nearly five hundred feet above the canyon floor and required use of a series of "Moki steps"—footholds chiseled into the rock by the ancients and now eroded dangerously. Kelly and Johnson were admitted amateurs at rock climbing, and Frazier was probably not much better, though he had done some in the Antarctic. Equipped with only rubber-soled shoes (one of Frazier's soles came off during the climb), "a length of cotton sash cord" (probably not of a large enough diameter to permit an adequate handgrip), and a prospector's pick, they set off. Though the climb presented some tense moments, they negotiated it with no accidents—only to find "W. W. Jones, 1922" inscribed on the cave wall beside the ruin. They had risked life and limb to no purpose.²¹

Drifting on down to Lake Canyon, they revisited the 1642 inscription and came to the decision that it was a hoax perpetrated by one C. Burt, whose name was just beneath the date and of the same apparent age and style. So vanished their last illusion of Spanish romance. Other stops produced more solid historic interest, as they took advantage of the rapid progress made possible by the fast water to stop more often than on previous trips and to explore more extensively. They explored some ruins, visited Dr. W. H. Schock's mining cabin, and climbed to the top of Hole-in-the-Rock where they found some artifacts associated with the 1879-80 Mormon emigrant party and noted the new automobile road that had been built in 1941.²²

The trouble began just below the mouth of the San Juan River as the additional silt began to produce sand waves. Johnson missed the first series, but Frazier and Kelly got into the midst of them, and Kelly shipped water in waves that, he said, seemed to be ten feet high. More sand waves and minor rapids gave them trouble; Kelly had difficulty landing at Aztec Creek for the hike to Rainbow Bridge and shipped water again. The big trouble was yet to come, though, and the terse prose of Kelly's diary tells the story well:

Two miles above Wild Horse Bar ran into combination of rapid and sand waves. Tried to pull to left bank, but got sucked in. Doc was ahead, got into worst of it, but was able to pull through. Willis followed, was turned over by a big sand wave. Went under, but hung on to the boat. I tried to pull down to him, but no chance. Then I got dumped out, but boat stayed

²¹Kelly, "We Climbed to the Moki Ruin," *Desert Magazine*, January 1943, pp. 5-8.

²²Kelly river diary, April 14, 1942.

right side up. Crawled back in and tried to ride the waves, but got sucked into whirlpool on right bank. Went back upstream with the back eddy and tried to pull into rapid again, but was thrown out at same place. Fought it for half an hour, bouncing like a cork, but couldn't get anywhere. Finally grabbed a rock and landed, then had hell of a time to pull boat along shore. Pulled it down to big flat rock and over into quiet water below. Couldn't see anything of Doc or Johnson. They couldn't get back to me. Willis swam ashore with boat, badly winded. Doc picked up two cans of food and landed, waited for me. When I got out we landed on bar below and built a fire to dry out. Had lunch. My pack partly wet. Bedding dry. Willis' stuff all wet. Both of us were pooped.²³

It was, fortunately, the last major trouble, though they put in another wet day and had to row for their lives in another set of sand waves. The gusto of rapids-running, if Kelly had ever felt it, was now gone: "Came on down," he noted, "taking all the inside curves" (thus avoiding the main current tongue, which follows the outside of river bends, and thus avoiding the sand waves that would develop there). With this heightened caution, the trio made it the rest of the way to Lee's Ferry, but it is difficult to quarrel with Kelly's own assessment of the cause of their trouble: "Our little rubber rafts were much too small for the kind of water we found on this voyage."²⁴

The Kelly river trips, then, like most human endeavors, were a mixed success. Kelly's own personality was such that it took a particular type of companion to get along with him. Dr. Frazier was that type—"He is a good guy, and has helped me much," Kelly wrote, "besides being damn good company on desert trips"—as Steward and Birney, who were immensely capable people in their own ways, were not.²⁵ Group compatibility, though, seems to have been unrelated to the scientific results of his trips, for the conflict-ridden 1932 trip was also the one that produced the most and best findings. Kelly's personality, too, prevented him in some way from achieving compatibility with the river itself, from feeling its rhythms and meeting its imperatives, as all great boatmen, indeed outdoorsmen, come to understand their environment. Nevertheless, something kept drawing him back to the river, and the body of archaeological and historical knowledge he helped to build are an impressive monument to a man who left so little else.

²³Ibid., April 17, 1942.

²⁴Ibid., April 18-19, 1942; "Sand Waves," p. 39.

²⁵Main Kelly diary, February 2, 1939.