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# Story Of Boating Trip Across Desert Told By Local Oldtimer

## "Voyaged" From Phoenix To Yuma!

Stanley Sykes, 405 North Humphrey, Flagstaff old-timer and resident of Arizona since 1888, once made a boat voyage across the state from Phoenix to Yuma. In "Boating Across the Desert," an article in the current issue of Arizona Wildlife and Sportsman, Mr. Sykes tells his strange story, reprinted herewith:

I think it was about 52 years ago, which would put the time somewhere in the early nineties, that Charlie McLean and I were placer mining with more or less success on the Hassayampa. It had seemed to be a good place to spend the winter, but as the season advanced the mercury sank lower and lower. About Christmas time, or maybe in early January, it got so cold that our dog didn't like it. All he would do was to hunt the sunny slopes of the canyon, and then finally he started South and that was the last we ever saw of him. As he went out of sight around a bend in the canyon, it put an idea into our heads.

"I think that dog, for all his general worthlessness, has more sense than we have," Charlie remarked.

"You're right," I answered. "If we have as much sense as that dog, we'll head South too."

So next morning we packed our two burros and followed the dog. We made it down to Phoenix in a few days, but it was not very hot there, either. We talked it over and decided that as Yuma was reputed to be comfortably warm in the winter, we should perhaps go there. It looked like a longish sort of a walk, but as the Salt River ran past Phoenix and was supposed to empty into the Gila which in turn entered the Colorado at Yuma, the best plan seemed to be to travel by boat.

What could be easier, or more pleasant; we would build a boat and just drift down. That was what we thought and told each other at the time, but it didn't work out just that way. We set about building a boat in a corral, at that time somewhere near Five Points. It may have been called the Five Points Corral.

It was a good boat, with a light wooden frame, canvas covered. We gave the canvas a good coat of white lead and oil, sold our burros and were ready to start. We got a man with a wagon and team to haul our boat, bedding and grub to the nearest point on the river that would float the boat. As I remember it, he left us at a place where the water was about 15 or 20 feet wide and a foot or so deep.

Fortunately the boat was of light construction, which we found later was what saved the situation. For after eating our breakfast, loading the duffle into what might well have been christened "The Pride of the Salt River" and shoving off, the river went dry on us. After riding for half a mile we were confronted with nothing but very dry — in fact dusty — sand. Nothing but sand of the most parched variety down the river bed as far as we could see.

We camped and prospected ahead, finally locating a trickle of water about a mile farther down, so we carried the boat and things to the water.

There wasn't enough water to float the boat with us in it, but by walking along each side and helping the craft over the shallower places we managed to make some progress. Somewhat farther down we came to a dam, and here all the water went into an irrigation ditch. There seemed to be no alternative so into the ditch we sailed. We made about two miles in this fashion and by that time the laterals had drained most of the water away, so we saw nothing but desert ahead of us. This called for a search, first to find the river, then a place where it had moisture in it, and transportation overland to the path of wetness.

This kind of thing kept up for some days, until at last we reached the Gila, and from then on we had a little better going. There was not what could be called too much water, even here, but most of the time one of us could stay in the boat. The other one walked along the bank with a gun, occasionally getting a shot at a quail or rabbit with consequent improvement of the grub pile.

Somewhere down the Gila we

came to a brush dam built clear across the river. But there was a hole about four feet wide in the middle of the dam with a good stream of water pouring through the aperture and a two-foot fall on the lower side. This looked like a perfect setup for some shooting-the-rapids stuff, so we headed into it.

Then there was trouble. One stake was firmly imbedded in the center of the opening, its top just under the water. The boat hit, hung there for a second and then turned over. As it started over we both jumped and at that place, just below the dam was a pool that was plenty deep.

I swam ashore and ran down the bank to the next shallow place. There I took my stand and caught the camp equipment as it came drifting by. Charlie stayed with the boat and got it to shore and beached.

Fortunately we didn't lose anything. In fact we gained more in the way of provisions than we had before the upset. We had some tea in a cloth sack. Of course it got well soaked and after we dried it out we had practically a bucket full. From then on it took about two handfuls of tea to make a cup.

After this we had as much desert, but more water in the river bed so we made pretty good time to Yuma. I don't recall just how long it took us to make the trip. Three weeks, or maybe a month would be my guess now.

Perhaps to anyone else the obvious thing to have done would be to make an inspection of the wetness of the river at Phoenix before starting to build the boat. I admit that idea has some logic behind it. But if Charlie and I had done that perhaps we wouldn't have built the boat and would have lost out on a very fine trip. And just how many others have made the trip from Phoenix to Yuma by boat in the nineteenth century or for that matter the Twentieth — I wouldn't know.

## Ranger Howard Smith Moves To Albuquerque

Howard B. Smith, district ranger of the Beaver Creek district, left Wednesday for Albuquerque, where he will work on grazing management plans out of the regional office. He has been here a year, coming from Sitgreaves National forest east of here.

## Jack Frye Is Visitor At Grand Canyon Park

Jack Frye, president of TWA, spent last week end at Grand Canyon with his wife and Howard Hughes, the movie producer. He flew out from New York, and joined Mrs. Frye, Mr. Hughes, and a friend, Mrs. Wilson, at the Canyon.

## Lift Restrictions On Boulder Dam Visitors

All restrictions on visitors to Boulder Dam and area were lifted Monday, and conducted tours

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