

# Smoked Boogers, Eggs and Sudden Discomfort

Kayaking the Canyon in January

Ebb Exranger, aka Pete Winn, 1975



**Pete Winn at motor on a GCNP river ranger trip with paleontologists.**

Ebb is not my real name, and this story isn't just about smoked boogers, eggs and sudden discomfort. It's really about an ex-pig (the human variety). I think it started with the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in the late 1960's. Someone demanded the right to call policemen "pigs." Of course, the policemen objected, so the name stuck. Well, park service rangers are kind of quasi "pigs," so when I got a job as Grand Canyon's first oarpowered river ranger, my old river guide buddies started calling me "Piglet." The name grew on me, so I named my kayak "Piglet Too." Made me think of Tigger, Eyore and Winnie the Pooh. I regarded the name as a term of endearment.

Being Piglet was great during the river season. I got to run the Canyon, literally and figuratively. For example, on one of my patrol trips, near Nankoweap I caught an old friend, who was lead guide for a Willy World trip, without his lifejacket on, a big no-no. I could have given him a twenty-five dollar fine, a slap on the wrist, but he'd just be more careful not to get caught again. So instead I pushed him into the river and wouldn't let him out until he understood why wearing a lifejacket at all times while on the boats was a regulation. There was no way he could file a complaint about Piglet brutality.

All the President's Men (Nixon's cronies) came on one of my official patrol trips. They were great party boys and fantastic liars. We realized we were going to run out of beer by the time we reached Phantom, so I radioed out for a dozen cases of whole blood (our code word, since we weren't supposed to drink in uniform). The message got to the wrong secretary, and political panic overcame the powers that be. After that, the park superintendent (who had been on the trip) ordered us to change our password.

I was a G-5, bottom of the totem pole. Of course, Nixon's men were all GS-15s and were constantly telling me what to do. One at a time, I convinced them to take the oars and proceeded to direct them into a bad spot. After a few good scares, they decided they could get their own beer.

The biggest problem, however, came at the end of the river season in October. I was a full time river ranger with no reason to continue running the river. What was I to do? I started going on backpack patrols so I wouldn't get stuck in Peyton Place (the South Rim community). My supervisor tried to justify this to his supervisor, but eventually the Chief Ranger didn't buy it. He was short on law enforcement rangers who could pass for a hotel employee, and I was selected to infiltrate the dorms of those dirty hippies. It wasn't my fault that I was the only ranger with a beard, long hair, sandals and a necklace. There was no way I was going to bust those guys and gals for doing the same thing I used to do. And for sure I wasn't going to go to twelve weeks of cop school to learn to shoot Hell's Angels.

After going through all that crap, I needed a great escape. The park service wouldn't let me take Piglet Too on a patrol trip, so I decided to do a trip without their permission. I wasn't too worried about getting caught – I knew their only river ranger had just quit.

Kayaks don't hold very much food and gear, so I made a couple of bust-ass hikes to stash food along the river. I got a bad case of ankle tendonitis from hiking Desert View to Tanner and back in one day, so for my second stash I took two days to hike the Beaver Creek trail to Havasu and then to the river and back.

So how do eggs, smoked boogers and sudden discomfort figure in? I was a proud survivor of "Black Beard's Death," which means you really have to like eggs. You had to put a whole raw egg in your mouth, stand on your head in a three foot pit in the sand, break the shell with your teeth and swallow the entire egg raw, shell and all, without letting of that nauseating mix dribble in or out of your nose. If you did, you'd probably loose your Oreos and for sure you'd loose your only chance to join the Survivors (no one tried twice). But that didn't have anything to do with why I stashed eggs for my kayak trip.

I got the idea from a book called *Diet for a Small Planet*. I figured I needed a high protein, high energy diet that consumed the minimum amount of volume in my kayak. Eggs are a complete source of protein, there are lots of calories in the yolk, and they keep really well. So at each cache I stashed twenty-seven jumbo hard boiled eggs, nine for each of three days (plus I brought the same amount with me to Lees Ferry).

Eggs can get boring, even with Tabasco, so I needed to bring a luxury item to compensate. My favorite treat was smoked boogers. Not the human variety, those are better raw. These are canned. One of my biggest frustrations as a river guide was to fail to convince a pretty female passenger to stop wearing makeup on the river. When I finally accepted that I'd failed, I would wait until she was almost done with her lunch, then I'd palm a big, ugly smoked oyster, dripping with oil, sit down next to her and after getting the attention of others I'd make a big show of picking my nose, show her the oyster and then gobble it up. So I packed a tin of smoked oysters for each meal, full of

laughs and greasy energy.

The sudden discomfort was actually a bad habit that I had no intention of kicking. I packed a bottle of it in each stash for general medicinal purposes. Most of you have seen it called Southern Comfort, but it has nearly killed a few of my friends. At first it really warms your tummy, but it often leaves suddenly and can cause severe discomfort, especially the next morning.

The final preparation for my trip involved a paint job. I choose Canyon colors and did a good job of camouflaging my kayak, helmet, lifejacket and paddle. Just as I finished, the phone rang. It was Henry, an old river guide friends. He'd heard I quite my job and wanted to know if they'd hired a replacement. I told him no and he could probably have the job if he wanted it.

He didn't want it. He wanted to know if he was going to get caught if he did an illegal solo kayak trip over the Christmas holidays. Turns out he'd stashed food at two camps on his last commercial trip that fall and had just finished camouflaging his kayak. Small world! After some discussion, we decided we'd break the law together.

He arrived at my apartment in Flagstaff on December 31, and we headed for the ferry late in the afternoon on January 1. We both knew the Lees Ferry ranger and didn't want to upset him, so we put-in below the Paria Riffle and began paddling after dark. We paddled past Navaho Bridge to make sure no one saw us and began what became truly unforgettable adventure.

Kayaking at night without a moon was spooky. Even the little riffles sounded and felt huge. We were constantly yelling at each other, hoping the other guy wasn't swimming. It occurred to both of us that by going together, we had added an unexpected degree of responsibility to the trip.

I won't bore you with the day-to-day details of our adventure. Only a few memories really stick out. We were really surprised by easy it is to kayak the Canyon. It was the second time for each of us and we didn't feel threatened at all. I swam four times (I only swam twice on my first trip): House Rock, Lava Falls, the whirlpools at 219, and 232. The swims weren't bad, but putting my spray skirt back on with frozen fingers was a real hassle. Henry rolled in Soap Creek and Crystal. He lost his helmet in Soap, but had a wetsuit hood to keep his head warm. We spent several days kayaking solo, not knowing where the other guy was.

For the first few days, I had eaten my eggs with the shell on. I hated peeling them and figured the calcium wouldn't hurt me. I was wrong. It took three days for the shells to find their way out, and when they did they were rough. After that I started peeling my eggs.

By the time we got to Hance (fourth day lunch), it was apparent that my diet wasn't giving me enough energy. So we hatched a plan to buy a box of candy bars from Phantom Ranch. Since the rangers and the Fred Harvey hippies there knew me, we stopped and hid above the Black Bridge. Henry hiked to the store at Phantom and bought thirty Paydays, full of nuts and caramel. He told the cashier it was his girlfriend's birthday and was giving everyone in the camp a candy bar since he'd forgotten to bring a cake. I really doubt she believed him.

We kayaked past the bridges to Phantom in the dark to avoid being seen. Paddling the whirlpools beneath the Silver Bridge in pitch black was probably the scariest run of the whole trip. Fortunately, the next day we ran all the biggies without a hitch.

Henry made a couple of mistakes when he cached his food. He had had too much to drink, and couldn't remember where he buried them (one at Grapevine Camp, the other at Lava Camp). We had to break out the Southern Comfort to jog his memory. Then, after we found the first stash, he

popped the cork on a bottle of wine to celebrate. He learned the hard way that a little wine on top of Southern Comfort leads to sudden discomfort. He had also stashed a backpackers stove with his food, and white gas had leaked into his granola. White gas belches and farts not only stink, they're flammable.

There were some backpackers camped at Lower Bass, a really hard place to hike to in January. We tried to sneak past without being seen, but one of them yelled out. He announced he was a Grand Canyon National Park back country ranger and that we were busted. Curiosity got the best of me, so I paddled over to see who he was. He certainly wasn't anyone I knew, so I told him I was an NPS river ranger and asked to see his hiking permit. Turns out neither party had permits.

After a good laugh, we headed on downriver. We were full of Grand Canyon energy. The river was running a good 20,000 cfs at its peak, so we got to run over the top of Rancid Tuna Fish Sandwich Rock, down the little channel on the left side of what was later to be called "Randy's Rock," through the narrow shoot on the left side of Bedrock, and into and around Helicopter Eddy above Granite Narrows. We laughed all day.

From Lees Ferry to somewhere around Deer Creek, the air temp in the shade never got above freezing. We both had ice in our beards and our lifejacket buckles were frozen from spray in the rapids. It seemed like our hands were permanently wrapped around our paddles. During long flat stretches in shadow, we would pry them loose and stick them in the fifty degree river water to warm them up. Other than cold hands, we were hot, both literally and figuratively. It was the best place in the world to be.

Ten days after we started, we cruised into Pearces Ferry. We'd finished off the Southern Comfort and wine, and it was time to think about beer. Our shuttle driver (Beth) wasn't there, so we walked the ten miles to Meadview, catching the store just before it closed. On our way back through town we disturbed a dog that just happened to belong to the Lake Mead ranger.

The ranger caught us about a mile down the road and offered us a ride to the lake. We knew each other, and he knew I'd just quit working for the Park. Word travels fast in Peyton Place. I did my best to convince him we'd put-in at Diamond Creek (so we were on the Hualapai Reservation only and he didn't have any authority). I'm sure he didn't believe me, but all he did was drop us off by our kayaks on the beach.

The next morning Beth showed up. She claimed she was a day early, and we were the ones who were lost in time. We had no choice but to believe her.