

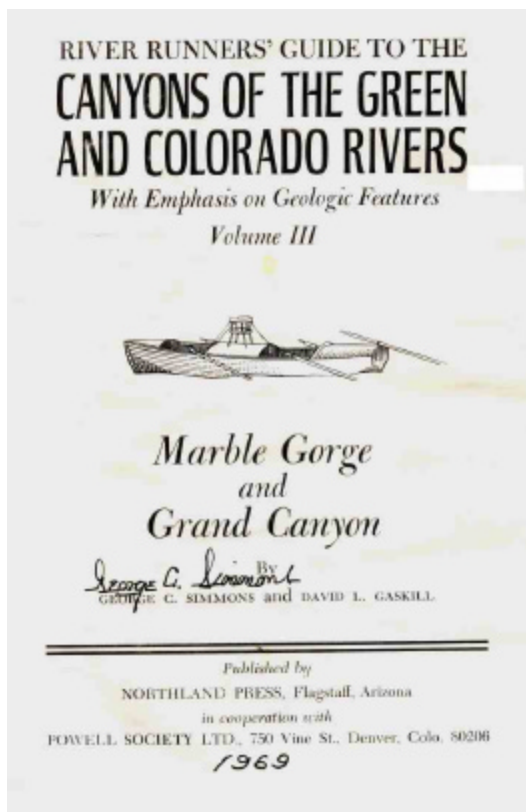
The Powell Society

by Herm Hoops

The Powell Society was an interesting assemblage of kindred souls: geologists, doctors, lawyers and professionals from Boulder and Denver, Colorado. The Society, as a collection of free spirits, had never taken life too seriously, but one day, relaxing in the shade by the river bank below Powell Point, Dave Gaskill suggested that the Powell Society “get serious.” He and George Simmons proposed a geological log and river guide of the entire Colorado River from Green River to Lake Meade. At that time the best map and information was from the river survey.

They selected the name “Powell Society” on their application to participate in the Bureau of Reclamation’s 1958 river trip to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of John Wesley Powell’s passing through the site of Flaming Gorge Dam.

The commemoration was the idea of well-known Denver attorney Jerry Hart. The trip wouldn’t be able to be conducted on the 100th Anniversary because of the dam construction at Flaming Gorge. The trip was probably the last transit of Flaming Gorge before the coffer dam materials, piled along the sides of the river canyon, were pushed together to close the channel. Ten years later, again to the date of the occurrence, The Society marked the 100th Anniversary of the parting at Separation Rapid in the Grand Canyon.



Society members George Simmons and Dave Gaskill became aware of Gene Shoemaker’s plan to repeat Powell’s trip of 1868 and replicate all of Hiller’s photographs of the Powell trip. The U.S.G.S., Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Society planned to sponsored the trip. Gene Shoemaker was a famous astro-astronomer who combined his knowledge of geology and river running. (The publication “In the Footsteps of John Wesley Powell,” was published in 1987, and began photo matching work that continues.)

Simmons and Gaskill proposed to Gene that they combine with the trip and create geological river logs for six segments of the Colorado River. The Society’s proposal was accepted and Gene Shoemaker, Dave Gaskill, Phil Hayes and Felix Mutschler spent the entire summer running the Colorado River in 10-man rafts from green River to Lake Meade. Several other members of the Powell Society joined in various segments of the trip.

U.S.G.S. funds were originally budgeted to publish the comparison photographs as a professional paper. Ultimately the money budgeted was not available and the Powell Society, working with Johnson Press of Boulder participated in the publishing of the book "In the Footsteps of John Wesley Powell." In the meantime the Society published their river logs:

- Dinosaur National Monument and Vicinity by Hayes and Simmons
- Desolation and Grey Canyons by Mutschler
- Labyrinth, Stillwater and Cataract Canyons by Mutschler
- Marble and Grand Canyon by Simmons and Gaskill
- Yampa Supplement

The Yampa supplement was eventually incorporated into the Dinosaur publication. Most of these river guides are out of print. Mackay Marine and Outdoor Supply of Murray, Utah have recently republished the Desolation and Grey Volume.

Although the river maps are small, one can follow the progress down the river through detailed descriptions. The guides locate and rate all of the rapids, rating them on the 1-10 Colorado River Rating System. Thus the ratings are open to some individual interpretation, but they provide historic insight on the old silt-laden Colorado and the present day river.

The authors, now retired, are well-known geologists. David Gaskill lives west of Denver, Colorado. George Simmons, who, since his retirement from the U.S.G.S., has served as a N.P.S. volunteer in Big Bend, Cataract and the Uinta National Forest. Felix Mutschler, recently deceased, was a Professor of Geology at Eastern Washington University. Phil Hayes lives near Grand Junction, Colorado. Non-geologists who have contributed to the work of the Powell Society include Parkman T. Brooks of Ketchum, ID; Bob Gaskill of Winona, KS; Dr. George Ogura of Denver, CO; Marvis Ogura who organized the lecture programs, and Dr. Henry W. Toll Jr who is to days contact with this "interesting assemblage of free spirits!"

References:

Personal interview with Dr. Henry W. Toll Jr., Powell Society; 1982;
Letter from Dr. Henry W. Toll Jr., Powell Society 1986 Herm Hoops
Powell Society River Guide Books