



Bill Belknap

DOCK'S DATA OF NAVIGATIONAL NUMBERS:

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THE 2nd 100 GRAND CANYON RIVER RUNNERS¹

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If any of you attended the public meetings for the last Colorado River Management Plan process, you may have read a statement on one of the posters that reported, "By 1949, only 100 people had boated the Colorado River through Grand Canyon." Besides being incorrect, that statement has been bandied about since around 1970 and has led to much statistical confusion, particularly regarding total numbers of river runners.²

Otis Reed "Dock" Marston, along with his son Garth, first ran the Grand as a passenger with commercial outfitter Norm Nevills in 1942. Dock became a boatman for Nevills and then branched out on his own, leading or being a part of many seminal Grand Canyon river trips: first inboard powerboat run in 1949; first outboard powerboat run in 1951; first and only successful uprun, via jetboats, in 1960; and a sportyak trip in 1963 on extremely low water as Glen Canyon Dam now controlled the flows.

Dock also studied the history of river running on the Colorado River, researching for a comprehensive publication. Among his topics of interest was who accomplished a complete run through Grand Canyon and when they did it. In correspondence with Norm over criteria, they discussed the end point of a trip at Diamond Creek, the Callville/Virgin River area, or Hoover Dam, but settled on the Grand Wash Cliffs, the geological termination of the Grand Canyon. Thus, a person had to boat 277 miles on the Colorado River, from Lee's Ferry, or the Paria Riffle, to the Grand Wash Cliffs, in order to have successfully completed a run of the Grand. Only the first complete run counted, though partial trips could be combined, and Dock listed names in alphabetical order within trips.

Extending his historical research to his Christmas cards, Dock provided lists of the first and second 100 for 1953 and 1954.³ The list of the first 100 from 1953 causes a lot of confusion, leading to the aforementioned misstatement. Dock ended that list at exactly 100, leaving off Leigh Lint in 1923, but also did not note that the total from all trips through 1949 resulted in 110, not evident until you also have seen the Christmas card from 1954. This would have resulted in a 10% increase in the number of unique river runners through 1949, statistically significant. The inclusion of Sandy Nevills, in utero in 1940, also is a bit problematic.

The 1954 greeting included through number 206, for if he stopped at 200 Dock would have left off six people from Bus Hatch's first commercial trip, repeating a mistake such as that for the first 100. Actually, Dock missed one name for 1950, which would have made the count 207. At the end of 1954, there were around 222 folks having made the "cruise," as Dock called it, which included a Georgie White commercial trip. In Bill Beer's book, *We Swam the Grand Canyon*, he wrote that Dock told him that he and John Daggett's swim, the first run in 1955, earned them the numbers 219 and 220.⁴

Neither of these Christmas card lists became readily available, but Dock shared the information with others, mainly in regard to notifying continuing river runners of what their number was, as with Beer and Daggett above. Dock tried to continue the count, but the increase in the amount of “Grand Canyoners” due to the upsurge in commercial river trips made this impossible. Not until Barry Goldwater included a slightly modified list of “The First Hundred,” in 1970 in his *Delightful Journey down the Green and Colorado Rivers*, did Dock’s research in this area become accessible to others than those actually boating the Colorado River and corresponding with him. Due to Goldwater’s publication, Dock’s list was the basis for all accountability of Grand Canyon river runners, taken out of context and repeatedly misconstrued.⁵

With this background established by Dock for early Grand Canyon river runners and trips, the poster will supply an introduction to those trips and their significance. More detailed information may be found in any number of publications, but the best are David Lavender’s *River Runners of the Grand Canyon* and Don Briggs’s video of the same name, based on Lavender’s book, and subtitled *Messing about in Boats*.

The number of unique names on Dock’s second list more than doubles in only five years, with Dock no longer able to comprehensibly continue acquisition after that, as the magnitude is all too evident. At least sixteen trips are represented through 1954⁶, so descriptions will be brief.

Dock “ran the last rapid” over 30 years ago, on August 30, 1979, his *opus* unpublished. While researching, he accumulated over 432 boxes of resource material⁷ – river rat as pack rat, foolhardy canyoneer – for which we are in awe and eternally grateful. And that’s no hokum!



Thanks, Dock, and Cheerio!

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¹ See C.V. Abacus, “Dock’s Data of Navigational Numbers: The 1st 100 Grand Canyon River Runners,” *Boatman’s Quarterly Review*, 22(3)(Fall 2009):21-25, for a review of the 1st 100.

² See Tom Myers, “River Runners and the Numbers Game,” *Boatman’s Quarterly Review*, 10(1)(1997):22-23; <http://www.gcr.org>. I thank Tom Myers for discussion on numbers and other points of river history.

³ Reproduced will be the list of the 1st 100 and the 1949 names from the 2nd 100, from the P.T. Reilly Collection at Northern Arizona University Cline Library, with P.T.’s annotations (NAU.MS.275, Series 1, Box 15, Folder 244a). I thank Brad Dimock for his eagle eye and specific details regarding trips and participants.

⁴ Dock later changed Beer and Daggett’s numbers, possibly by as many as ten.

⁵ Goldwater included Leigh Lint, but excluded Sandy Nevills, thereby ending with Bestor Robinson at #100, as Dock originally did. Gaylord Staveley, who purchased Mexican Hat Expeditions from Frank Wright and renamed the company Canyoners, and Shane Murphy have co-authored versions of the 1st 100 in *Ammo Can Interp: Talking Points for a Grand Canyon River Trip*. I thank Gaylord Staveley for his assistance on Dock’s trips and lists.

⁶ This research report is preliminary.

⁷ Housed at The Huntington Library, San Marino, California (<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf438n99sg>).