

## Aux-Arcs Deliverance

*When one's young, everything is a rehearsal. To be repeated ad-lib, to be put right when the curtain goes up in earnest. One day, you know that the curtain was up all the time. That was the performance. – Sybille Bedford*

“Untie the rope from that tree.” The Arkansas thug pointed the barrel of his six-gun at the base of the oak, then at me. To his side, his smirking partner held his shotgun pointed down. “Now tie it to that other tree over there.” The revolver swung around to the intended tree. I untied the rope and re-tied it to the other tree. “I don’t like that knot. Tie it again.” Meekly, I asked, “What knot do you want me to tie?” “Don’t you be back-sassin’ me. Just tie it up right.” The barrel lifted to my chest. Three of our party of six cowered behind me. The other two were desperately clinging to willow saplings swaying from the swift current in the middle of the cold, raging river, just inches below their feet, and screaming, “Help; hurry; help.” “Now, untie the rope from that rock,” gesturing toward the other end of the tether. After I untied it, he insisted, “No, do not re-tie it. I don’t like that rock. Go down to the river and get another.” Exasperated, one of my friends pled, “Listen, Mister, we don’t want any trouble. We don’t have time to be re-tying the rope. We’ve got to save our friends from drowning.” We were trying to get a line over to our buddies by throwing a rock secured to a rope, with the other end anchored to a substantial tree to avoid losing it if we missed. It was all the rescue we had. “Do what I say!” The hooligan panned the gun around. “We’ve got money. Do you want money?” My friend reached into his pocket and held out what cash he had. “Shut up.”

How did we ever get into this predicament? First, let me tell you about the place from which we came and explain why we were there. Our school was Washington University in St. Louis. The metropolis, best described as a “city of Northern charm and Southern efficiency,”<sup>1</sup> is in a location with little of what is good and most of what is terrible. Seven hundred miles from the nearest ocean (at New Orleans), more than eight hundred from any substantial mountains (the Rockies) and 300 miles from Lake Michigan, St. Louis does boast a big muddy river that is too dangerous for boating because of barge traffic. With no natural barriers to the inhospitable climactic intrusions of the Arctic and the hot and humid insect-infested tropics, the town suffers debilitating northern plains blizzards with cold temperatures as low as negative 25 and summer wet bulb temperatures often as high as 90 (humans cannot survive above 92.) One year, the temperature was below freezing for 57 consecutive days. Disastrously, the local utility placed the second most polluting coal-fired electrical generating facility in the U.S. at Labadie, Mo., 40 miles directly up from the prevailing non-favorable favonian winds to the city. The combined heat, humidity and particulate matter result in an unbreathable atmosphere.

If one is not going to get way the hell out of town altogether, the Ozarks (formerly Bermuda) offer the only alternative to the swelter and smog. In the early aughts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French trappers happened upon the low mini-mountains of present-day northern Arkansas and southern Missouri. In these high wooded hills are found several natural arches, low bow-shaped bridges, *arcs* in French, left after eroded sandstones. To travel to them was to go *aux arcs* or to the arches, pronounced something close to Ozarks (at that time, more like *Ozartch*.) The Ozarks may be called mountains because they represent the only highlands between the Appalachians and the Rockies. The orogeny follows from the protrusion into the earth's mantle of what is known as the St. Francois Dome. Why do geologists believe that Bermuda was here? As the theory goes, the same geophysical hotspot that caused Bermuda was originally under Yakutat, Alaska. As the North American

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy’s quip about Washington, D.C., apropos to St. Louis.

Plate slid north, the hotspot was under Washington State. In the early Mesozoic Cretaceous period, the plate slowly shifted northwest, and the geothermal feature was under Missouri, forming the dome and lifting the entire Ozark Plateau.<sup>2</sup>

The uplifted region was an island for hundreds of millions of years in the vast North American craton (then covered in seas) that stretches from the Arctic to the Gulf and the Rockies to the Appalachians.<sup>3</sup> The hills' remaining granitic and rhyolitic rocks represent the exposed portion of a vast mid-continent karst terrane. Millions of years of erosion of the cherty and carbonate dolomites resulted in deep fissures in the rocks. The copious rains emanating from the moisture of the Gulf of Mexico seep and often flow through breaches into underground streams and basins. In the Ozarks, there are high valley streams above the water table with dry creek beds except after short periods of maximum precipitation. Otherwise, rainwater flows into the cavities below. The trapped waters bound from underground aquifers in some four thousand four hundred springs, including several of the largest freshwater springs in the world. (The Geological Survey has measured thirty springs in Missouri with discharges ranging from 1,200 to 6,000 cubic feet per minute.) Some underground bodies of water are so large that springs ebb and flow with lunar tides. The largest sometimes generate entire rivers, the founts their sole initial source. Although the spring-fed streams are not freestone, they are cold enough in their first several miles below major springs to support stocked trout despite the summer tropical environment. The waters remain oasis-like cool in the summer heat, and their pool and drop nature makes them ideal for canoe travel. The gentle riffles in the drops are fun to navigate, and the pools offer delightful swimming and are brimming with Ozark 'trout' – the smallmouth bass. Almost every summer weekend, we escaped *aux-arcs*.

Of course, I paddled the 134 miles of the protected waters in the state: the Current River and its main tributary, the Jack's Fork, guarded by the Ozark National Scenic Riverways Act of 1964, as well as the 44 miles of the Eleven Point River, secured by the separate Wild & Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. Hard-fought, protracted political battles were necessary to pass this legislation, and the advocates must have tired enough to leave the other 51,800 miles of waterways in the state open to environmental degradation. (Many of these rivers flow through rolling agricultural land - particularly in Northern Missouri, and are of little sporting interest.) Nevertheless, the 1.2-million-acre southern Missouri Ozark-St. Francis National Forest lands contain hundreds of miles of crystal-clear, free-flowing spring-fed streams to enjoy and we aimed to navigate most of the best. I count the Meramec with its tributaries, the Huzzah and Courtois; the North Fork of the White River (above where it is dammed into Norfork Lake); the Black, Roubidoux, and Gasconade. But more than any other, I prized the Big Piney for its remote, tranquil and yet-to-be-overwhelmed character, with a plethora of smallmouth bass and hospitable and affordable cabins in which to stay. The Current and Jack's Fork have become overrun by partying college-age drunks, and I lusted over more wild and remote challenges in the region.

If there ever was a malevolent nemesis for Ozark Mountain stream enthusiasts, the Army Corps of Engineers earned the title. The Corps never saw a river it did not wish to dam. Dams were initially constructed for navigation, then for flood control and finally justified for purposes of irrigation and electrical generation, and worse, solely to provide flatwater recreation. Dams brought jobs and prosperity to entire regions of the country, especially during the Depression. Never mind the environmental destruction and the loss of critical

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequently the Bermuda hotspot upheaved the Appalachian Nashville Dome and then The Clingmans Dome that formed the Great Smokey Mountains. Geothermic hotspots do not move. The mantle plates above do. (There are alternate theories having to do with tectonic plates colliding.)

<sup>3</sup> A craton is a large stable block of the earth's crust that has resisted deformation over a (geologically) long period of time. This craton is responsible for the uninterrupted flow of the competing weather systems from the Arctic and the Gulf.

habitat. The dams blocked anadromous fish from their spawning grounds and ruined countless valleys and canyons. Environmentalist David Bower once said, "In the absolute epicenter of hell on earth, there stands a dam." John McPhee: "Rivers are the ultimate metaphors for existence, and dams destroy rivers. Humiliating nature, dams are evil." Even Thoreau saw the deleterious effects on the fish spawn, advising the fish "to keep a stiff fin and hope for a better world."

River runners are not as numerous as the hordes of flatwater enthusiasts – power boaters, water skiers and bass-boat fishermen, and therein the votes lay. The Corps and the BLM in the West grew and bloated into a pork-barrel bureaucracy that ate rivers by the score. Eventually, they constructed seven hundred and forty of them. Dams beget dams. Dams were constructed with little to no worth - they had their own intrinsic value. The Ozarks are no exception. The Osage River was dammed into the fetid Lake of the Ozarks (more appropriately, an impoundment than a lake) for no discernable purpose other than for flatwater sports in a region barren of natural lakes.<sup>4</sup> For naturalists, the result offers little but oil slicks, gas, diesel and noise pollution and sewage seeping in from thousands of failed septic systems. When the trapped waters are drawn down in the dry parts of the year, the unsightly 'bathtub' ring left is yet another reminder of the wholesale ruination of nature.

I knew exactly where to go to experience higher quality white water canoeing experience: the undammed gem of the Ouachita and Boston Mountains in northwestern Arkansas. The subrange is the highest of the Ozarks (by one thousand feet), most deeply folded and eroded, with beautiful canyons of magnificence and grandeur and rivers with the steepest white-water gradients, at least before the salivations of the Corps. The need to dam pristine mountain river valleys there was never justified for flatwater pastimes, abundant enough on the Arkansas River for the minor urban populations centered on the Little Rock, Hot Springs and Fort Smith triangle. Hydropower generated from the relatively small Ozark stream flows was miniscule.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, eight lakes were way more than adequate for flood control, a fool's errand at best.<sup>6</sup> At the very least, the most profound canyons could have been spared.<sup>7</sup>

When the last whitewater gem of Arkansas was threatened with a dam, environmentalists said 'enough.'<sup>8</sup> The only deep canyon river still never dammed in the vast White River drainage was the Buffalo. Ironically, an obstetrician guided the birth of a movement that saved the resource. For ten years, Dr. Neil Compton was the president of the Ozark Society (OS), founded to "preserve wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and unique natural areas in the Ozark-Ouachita region and surrounding lowlands." Begun with an attempt to save the scenic box canyon of Lost Valley at the head of the Buffalo, Dr. Compton had a much grander vision: protect the entire watershed as the Buffalo Gorge National Park. Tipped off that the esteemed Arkansan Senator William J. Fulbright might be sympathetic to his idea, Compton wrote a letter in July of

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<sup>4</sup> Bagnell Dam does generate an insignificant amount of hydropower.

<sup>5</sup> The average installed capacity of the five electric generating dams of the White River is 165.8 megawatts. The other three generate no hydropower. Contrast that to the average installed capacity of the ten largest electric generating dams of the Columbia River at 2,393 megawatts – 14.43 times greater on average.

<sup>6</sup> "Flood control is often a zero-sum game. Someone floods more so someone else will flood less. Politics often trumps engineering. Political compromises or political power produce flood control projects that harm... unsuspecting or unorganized victims downstream." Not to mention the permanent flooding of what is above the dam.

<sup>7</sup> Old timers will tell you that the North Fork of the White with its precipitous canyon, superior whitewater and overall scenic beauty was pre-eminent of all the rivers of the region.

1961 that was answered with the surprising promise to sponsor legislation to fund a survey of the possibilities by the National Park Service. Coincidental was a full-page photograph of a canoe camp on the river with the Buffalo River's stunning Big Bluff in the background that appeared in the July 14, 1961 issue of the widely read Time Magazine. The scene of Big Bluff had been captured by A.Y. Owen<sup>9</sup>, a master photographer on a trip sponsored by the Ozark Wild Waterways (canoe) Club (OWWC) out of Kansas City, wholly unrelated and unknown to the effort fostered by the OS. The OWWC was formed in 1956 and, from its inception, had been fighting to preserve pristine rivers, primarily in Missouri - the Current, Jacks Fork, White, and Eleven Point. Now, two conservation organizations had joined to save the Buffalo from diluvian inundation.

The ardent conservationist and U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas saw the photograph in Time and telephoned the OWWC to communicate his interest in visiting such a phenomenal canyon. Perhaps the club could arrange an escort down the river? The trip was planned for the following April with all the attendant media attention. Dr. Compton joined as trip photographer. Impressed with his experience, Douglas added his influential voice to the proposal. Now, there was an active chorus advocating for the park.

With dismay, we watched the pro-dam movement building and another group more vociferous that just wanted the river valley and the life the members enjoyed in the valley left alone, with neither a dam nor a park. The political battle received national press attention. Significantly, Arkansas Governor Orval E. Faubus changed his neutral position and, in 1965, joined the conservation effort. The true reason that all the dams on the White River were initiated in the Flood Control Act of 1938 was for employment relief during the Great Depression. The nation was much more prosperous post-WW2 and not so desperate for dam-building jobs, and after a bitter political fight, in 1972, President Nixon signed the Buffalo National River bill, and the river enjoys in perpetuity all the protections that come with the administration of the National Park Service. Back home in St. Louis, we free-flowing Ozark stream enthusiasts were ecstatic and vowed to canoe the river. But how to organize such an expedition? Particularly given the dangers inherent to visiting the deepest part of the region. One needed a posse.

For generations, the severe impediment to any enjoyment of the Ozarks was the backward, lawless residents who lived there. We called Ozarkians 'Hoosiers,' not the proud Indiana type, but more true to what St. Louis Post-Dispatch columnist Elaine Viets wrote: "Hoosier is a low-life redneck, somebody you can recognize because they have a car on concrete blocks in their front yard and are likely to have just shot their wife who may also be their sister." In the last decade, I attended a "Folk Ways" festival at beautiful Meramec Springs State Park where 60% of the natives were obese, 4 of 10 morbidly so, in wheelchairs in their 30s. Fully 3 in 10 had the mark of incest. Women give birth after three months, but only for the first time. Ten percent of the residents lived in their basements with a tarpaper roof over the 1st-floor deck. Why? Because they had had a feud with another redneck. Feuds did not resolve with a fight, an argument, a gunshot or arbitration. To settle the score, homes were burnt to their foundation. These louts did not work, preferring to 'live off the land,' which meant food stamps and poached game out of season. Meth was the preferred intoxicant, child marriage prevalent, and sexual abuse the standard.<sup>10</sup> In any given year, some counties contributed nary a dime in federal taxes other than for government employees.

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<sup>9</sup> "Boys with Their First Car" is an instantaneously recognizable photo by A. Y. Owen. "By the mid-1950s Owen was a nationally known photographer, taking assignments from Life, National Geographic, Fortune, Sports Illustrated, Time, and other publications." The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture. Owen also recorded many scenes from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> The scene was authentic, complete with an idiot savant off to the side, out of earshot of ladies and children, reciting a 200-line poem: something about an unfortunate man who could not find a suitable wife because he had a corkscrew

The rocky land with poor soils did not support crops other than sparse hay grown in the stream 'bottoms.' Grass ranching was mostly unprofitable. The lead had been mined until the veins gave out. The oak and hickory old-growth timber had been clearcut by 1930, and some handsome stands of Yellow Pine had been taken, too. The replacement scrub oaks and hickories were worm-eaten and worthless. Missouri red granite quarries were closed because no one built with granite anymore. In short, this was an economic and cultural wasteland. The Western Appalachian residents were mostly descendants of marauding lawless gangs of disbanded Southern Civil War sore losers who ruled the region for decades. There were no people of color as they were harassed, if not outright captured and murdered, out of sight. Vacation homeowners had to hire a security guard 'caretaker' who often absconded with anything of value anyway.

The posse found me. Five younger white water canoeing enthusiasts also had their eyes on the Buffalo. In the winter of '73, I was 25, and for the oldest of the group at 20, I was, let's say, a veteran. They sought someone who could make it six, 2 to a canoe. Looking for more experience, they discovered I worked as an off-and-on riverboat deckhand for several years. I was their man. They had organized the trip, rented canoes from the university sports club, planned the meals, studied the maps, arranged transportation and were all set if I would join the trip. More than happy to go, I was a little concerned about the male hormone level of the leader. But this was my chance to go, too.

We left too early in the season, in late March of 1973. I remember because our generation's all-time athlete hero, Bill Walton, was playing basketball for the unbeatable UCLA Bruins team, and we listened to the last two games of the NCAA Tournament on the radio while camping by the river. The Bruins won the championship game on March 26.<sup>11</sup> He was our hero because he was firmly opposed to the Vietnam War, demonstrated against it and was arrested for a protest at the university. His famous coach, John Wooden, bailed him out of jail and drove him home, telling him the best thing he could do to end the war was to write to the U.S. president, listing all his reasons for opposing the war. Walton wrote the letter, asking Nixon to resign, which he did (but not because of the merits of the argument in the letter.)

We left in the rain, drove all night in the rain, camped in the rain, and waited several days to tackle the river in the rain. This much rain meant that the rivers would be up, in flood, dangerous, and I knew the trip was a washout. But the leader had everyone convinced that we could handle it. That he was an expert. That it would be fun. Moreover, on the first day, he planned to run the upper section with the steepest gradient, Boxley to Ponca. I advised against the paddle, reasoned, cajoled, implored, begged, pleaded, and finally announced that anyone who attempted canoeing in flood tempted fate. And I, for one, was not going to do it. One other waivered; four were hell-bent on leather.

On launch day, we had breakfast at a country café early in the morning. The discussion continued and became heated as I made my last pitch for reason. I was labeled a coward and decided to back off. What the hell? If they wanted to commit suicide, I could not stop them, and in 1973, there was no 988 suicide prevention number to call. As we finished our meal, a gentleman approached the table. He apologized for overhearing our conversation about the merits and perils of the flooding river, saying, "Please follow my pick-up. I want to show you all something." That something was visible from the nearby bridge across the river. That something was that the river was in mud-flood, turbulent and boiling, impassable, murderous at best. The man was Arkansas taciturn, said nothing when it was obvious, and did not even point or gesture. That one could not hazard any attempt could not have been more apparent than if the river bed was dry. To my astonishment,

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penis until he found a mate that had a corkscrew vagina. But, on the wedding night, they discovered that their genitals had opposite threads.

11 Our interest was further piqued because the games were played in St. Louis.

our mad leader believed the man wanted to show us a problematic spot that needed to be scouted and set about plotting a course to navigate that section. What could I do but shrug at the blind man feeling the elephant's trunk? But two more fully-sighted members of our party demurred, leaving only two fools for whom coffins had to be purchased.

At the Boxley launch site, we cast off the determined, saying we would pick them up at Ponca later. We did not need to tarry as the river moved with a raging alacrity. We four gutless slackers sauntered down the gravel road that followed the torrent. Driving, I turned down the first road that gentled down to the river, knowing that we would be searching for corpses close by the spot where we had left the foolish machos. As we approached with windows rolled down, we heard faint cries of a terrified “help” that became more strident with our approach. Serendipitous, there they were, tenaciously perched, hanging on to the small trees wafting above the torrent on a flooded island. Their half-submerged, ripped and twisted, mangled canoe was wrapped in a log jam just upstream.

Wretched and hypothermic, their weakening cries had a measure of glee when they realized some hope of rescue. What were we to do? We could not swim over to them. All we had was a rope and a strong-armed 3<sup>rd</sup> string college quarterback. That’s when we fashioned the plan to tie the rope to a rock and throw it out to them with little hope of success. We learned four lessons on the first few heaves: the current was strong enough to float the stone and carry it; once wet, the mass of the rope increased, and even free of the rock had momentum, carrying with it the prospect of losing it altogether if it was not secured at the riparian end; that a kidney-shaped stone must be found to better secure it; and that the line had to be coiled the length of someone’s arm carefully to play out uniformly and not be arrested by kinks in the loop.<sup>12</sup>

As we perfected our method, an old pick-up jostled down the two-track. Our tormentors had arrived. At first, we thought, “Good, we can get some help!” When they emerged with pistol and shotgun drawn and menaced, “What you boys a’doin down here trespassing our land?”<sup>13</sup> the worst fears of any urban outdoorsman were realized. For me, the scene was eerie and unreal, as if I were a character in a play with a script unwritten, and if I did not play my part convincingly, the fiction would unravel and become very real.

The play was in one act. The antagonists exhausted their parts. They had their fun with us fearful youths, albeit with their cowardly use of deadly weapons. Their grievance was not against us but against their own feckless lives. Their characters required a shared “we was just funning you’all” grin at each other. They exited stage behind, back up the road from whence they came.

We still had to save our buddies. Hard to communicate across the roar of turgid waters, we advised each of them not to commit to the rock or line unless it was in easy reach. And to tie the cord around their torso, given their weak hypothermic grip. Had they heard us? We naturally left the ‘expert’ leader to be retrieved last. Our quarterback’s arm was tiring. With practice, the rope got very close to the targeted boatman. He retrieved it. The taut line swung him around, downstream in the current. The most challenging part was holding the line against the stiffest part of the flow. The first rescue made it to shore, and two of us were

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12 One member of our party was a physics major who later explained that the carrying capacity of moving water is governed by a formula, where it is equal to a constant multiplied by the speed of the current *cubed*. That meant that the river coursing at 7 to 8 miles an hour could buoy a weight 350 to 500 times larger than a docile one-mile-per-hour stream. The estimate of 7 or 8 MPH was probably conservative. At any rate, we realized that if our quarterback hurled at a target upstream, the hapless stranded would have a better chance to seize the rope or stone as it corked by.

13 The land was not posted.

dispatched to help him up the bank. There was not enough time to untie the knot swelled tight by the cold water. The line was cut.

Finally, the 2<sup>nd</sup> made it to shore. Both were dried by what blankets we had and whisked shivering into the waiting car with the heat registering full blast, driven back to camp where wet clothes were exchanged for dry, a bonfire was lit and they were fed hot soup. No one commented on their stupidity. It was too close a call for opprobrium.

As the evening progressed, temerity exceeded timidity, anger rose, and we resolved to report the crimes to the sheriff the next morning. We found an equable, avuncular man in a swivel chair in a cluttered office. More of a politician than a cop, the sheriff listened patiently to our story, which was first rushed out, then refined, augmented. We each had our say. The descriptions were detailed, and the pick-up truck was described. Here was how the sheriff responded, “What these fellers did was a crime. Felonies. That land is not theirs. It was bought from an old couple that took fair value from the Park Service.<sup>14</sup> There is a lot of animosity about change here in the valley. People feel that they had no vote or choice in the matter. This has not been the first encounter between those who feel invaded and canoeists and it will not be the last. I could arrest them boys. But then I would have to arrest half the county. And I cain’t do that. Things will calm down here in a couple of years. There are smarter people in the county who take the long view and know that it is a good thing that happened with the park.<sup>15</sup> We want you boys to come back and enjoy your float, but it’s gonna’ be a couple of weeks before the waters go down. Please do not hold this against the good people of the state of Arkansas. The best news is that you all are safe and no one got hurt. Rest assured them boys will get a talkin’ to about their actions and a warning, and I’ll personally make sure that the complaint is published in the local journal.” That seemed to soothe us, but the terror of that day had left a memory that we had to carry forward. We got some lunch, packed up camp, and started the journey back to St. Louis.

Those two rescued fools were lucky. For us to chance down to the very place where they were marooned was fluky. The road ended right across from the predicament, so we did not have to bushwhack along the bank to get to them. That there was a way down to them at all was fortuitous. Even the shore was a gentle slope, and they were not pinned across the river up against one of the bluffs that require technical gear to climb. Why was that long rope in the car in the first place? Why was the strong-armed rock thrower even on the trip? What would have happened had we shuttlers simply followed instructions and waited at the take-out? Suppose they overturned on a rock or floating debris in the middle of the river without the willow supports just below the wreck. Could they have swum those cold waters to shore? They would not chance it from the stilts upon which they were perched. And suppose they had made it across to shore. They had no waterproof matches to ignite a fire. Even if they made it to the road, would there be a kind soul to happen along to pick them up? The malevolent gunmen could just as well have cut the rope and thrown it into the river, sealing their fate. None of us asked the questions. On the long drive back to St. Louis, no one spoke of the incident and no recriminations were made against the firebrand ringleader. Like post-WW2 German survivors, we did not have the capacity to contemplate anything but the good luck to survive. We wanted to forget.

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14 Under the terms of the legislation that created the National River, all lands would be mandatorily sold within 25 years of the deaths of the owners (not the heirs) who were using the property for non-commercial residential or any agricultural purposes at the time of the enactment of the law. Those who wished to sell early would be bought out at fair value.

15 A new National Park Service report shows that 1.5 million visitors to Buffalo National River in 2020 spent \$66.3 million in communities near the park.

The audacity of the fools that had to be rescued did not end with their reckless actions down on the river. A week after our return, the bill for the lost canoe and paddles came due, and the leader sought me out. He reasoned that we all had been on the trip, and the ‘mishap’ could have happened to any of us (not!) The faulty argument continued, “We all shared in the expenses of the trip and the lost canoe is another expenditure that we all incurred and this is what you owe.” There was no remorse for his reckless actions. There were no thanks for saving the fool’s life. There are times when unabashed impudence and effrontery are so brash and brazen demands are so unreasonable that one is left speechless. Confronted with the choice of drawing a sword and severing his tongue or deflecting the gall to an improbable event in the future, I chose the latter, explaining that I was a little short on cash at the moment, what with the expenses due to my impending marriage in six weeks. If they would be so kind as to attend the wedding, I was sure that I would be flush with money gifts at the reception after and if they would just come then and ask, I would be happy to pay my share. I knew no one would ever ask for a debt to be paid by someone on their wedding day, and I never saw or heard from the others again. Nor did I ever float the Buffalo or revisit the state of Arkansas. I had had my fill of the depraved scoundrels down there.