



THIS WAS an earlier run, in 1914, and Capt. Harry Guleke stands at the center of his wooden scow ready for a run down the Salmon.

## Last Scow on the Fierce Salmon

By Keith Barrette

OF the three men who accompanied Capt. Harry Guleke, famed Salmon River Rat, on his farewell voyage, Emmett Steeples of Salmon is the sole known survivor.

In addition to the late Guleke, Max Oyler is also deceased and the status of the Rev. Howard is undetermined. Steeples is a former construction foreman for Morrison-Knudson and is presently semiretired.

At the time of Guleke's final run of the tempestuous Salmon River, Oyler was a preferred packer and guide for hunting parties in the Middlefork Primitive Area of the Salmon. He had counseled Ernest Hemingway, noted author, and many Continental sportsmen among his clientele. After service with the Merchant Marine during World War II, Oyler operated a saddle shop in Salmon up until a few months prior to his death in a Reno, Nev., hospital.

The Rev. Howard was pastor of the Salmon Presbyterian Church when this run was made and was an avid outdoorsman and adventurer.

Guleke at the time of his death was dean of the Salmon River's white water men and their pilot emeritus. He developed river running as a sport on this particular river as an innovation born of necessity.

He began organizing parties and piloting river trips soon after construction of the road that linked Salmon with the down river hamlet of Shoup. Prior to then the most efficient way to ship supplies and mining machinery to the remote places was by river scow. Guleke had engaged in this enterprise.

THE scows were usually built at Salmon, loaded with cargo and then sold for salvage when they reached their destination. There are still standing in Shoup several buildings that were constructed from these salvaged scow timbers.

The scow for this singular trip was constructed in Guleke's boat yard by Steeples, Oyler and Howard. Steeples recalls that Guleke gave valuable information on the boat's construction but was adamant in refusing an invitation to join the party for the run.

talk was about river trips and one of three said at one point, "the best way to see the river is build a boat and go down."

During the days following the start of the construction Guleke was only a mildly interested spectator and adviser. But as the scow took shape, his enthusiasm increased until by embarkation day, Guleke had agreed to pilot the party.

THE party shoved off May 18, 1937 at a time when the Salmon River was running bankful and swift. Steeples said that that particular year the run-off had been at a near record high. A group of U.S. Forest officials were on board as far as Shoup. The scow took on one passenger at Shoup, a man who wanted to ride as far as Panther Creek.

The expedition had an auspicious start and one of the fastest heats of the entire trip. Steeples related that from Shoup to Panther Creek about 9 miles, the scow streaked the course in 45 minutes.

Between Shoup and Panther Creek, the Salmon River is fractured white by the Pine Creek rapids. Some veteran river men consider this particular section of the river one of the most turbulent and hazardous stretches on the entire stream. In fact most river parties nowadays embark at Cache Bar below the mouth of the Middlefork of the Salmon River, because of the risk.

"The minute the nose of the scow reached the head of Pine Creek rapids, I knew we wouldn't have a dull moment," Steeples recalled. "I was glad we followed Cap Guleke's specifications in building the boat. If we hadn't we would have been swamped then and there."

The scow had been especially constructed for high water. It was 28 feet long, 8 feet wide and had sideboards 5 1/2 feet high, "just high enough so we could look over the top. The scow was keeled with spruce planking. The fore and aft sweeps were also of spruce since this wood is light, tough and water resistant.

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it back, sending it arching and curling into waves 20 feet high. The waves crashed over the boat, cracking like thunder when they hit.

"Ten seconds after we entered the rapids, every man of us was drenched," Steeples continued.

In the midst of the buffeting and lashing dealt by the rapids, the passenger began yelling to be let out.

"Shut up and sit down," Guleke ordered the frightened passenger. "I'd get out of here myself, if I could."

Steeples who stands six feet and weighs nearly 200 pounds, recalled that he was picked up and swung back and forth by the sweep he was manning, being twisted savagely by the heavy current.

"The river was running so fast," he related, "that we overshot the Panther Creek landing by 200 yards. If it hadn't have been for about 20 CCC boys grabbing our line, we'd never have got the scow to the bank."

The trip turned out to be not only Guleke's farewell run but also his fastest. The party averaged 40 miles a day during the two to three hours they were able to stay on the river. Running time on the Salmon River is limited by the sun. After the sun reaches a certain point in the sky water reflections are blinding and it is necessary to beach and make camp.

Mallard, major and minor stretches of white water, some then unnamed. Guleke marked each one with a "long-remember" look as if to stamp the scene forever on his memory. The mountain-and-cliff guarded river slipped behind in a moving panorama of gray granite and piñon green.

EVEN the game, Steeples related seemed to sense that Guleke was making one last visit to familiar sights and scenes. They seemed to have postponed the annual trip to the summer range in order to stand along the banks to watch the scow speed by.

"I never saw so many animals along the river before or since," Steeples said. "At one point we counted 13 Rocky Mountain goats among the rocks almost at water line. It was common to see herds of 10 or 15 Rocky Mountain Big-horn sheep and we didn't bother to count the deer. Around almost every bend in the river was a sow bear and her cubs, just out of hibernation and digging for spring tonic among the roots and down timber."

Disaster was riding with the party all the way. At Acrobat Rapids, where the current hammers the cliffs with drifts of seething foam, Guleke steered the scow on the wrong side of the comb and the boat was almost swamped by the breaker that rolled into it.

It was touch and go all the way through Big Mallard to keep the scow from submerging, since the run is complicated by the rapids sweeping the cliffs in a wide, wild curve.

A WATER tight cargo box that Guleke looked after personally inserted a little mystery into the trip. When the scow was beached for camp, the veteran river runner took charge of the box. He stowed it in a safe dry place when the party was ready to resume the run in the morning.

When the group reached Polly Creek, the mystery was cleared. It was here that Polly Bemis, the aged Chinese woman who had grown blind in her declining years, lived. The box contained a large sack of sugar candy, Guleke's final gift to the woman who had been his warm friend during all

game at Warren between a Chinese by the name of Cann and Charlie Bemis.

Polly had been taken from San Francisco by her master when the gold strike had been made in the Florence and Warren areas. In the historic poker game, Cann had lost heavily and in a final desperate effort staked his slave girl Polly against the winnings of Bemis. Bemis held the high cards and claimed his prize. Bemis and Polly were married and they moved to their Salmon River retreat where they lived for 50 years. He died in 1922 and she joined her ancestors at the age of 81. Two monuments remind the river traveler today of that high card romance — Polly Creek and Bemis Mountain.

But the thing that made a deep impression on Steeples was the Chinese woman's garden. He vividly remembers its clean, neat lushness and the uncannily straight rows of flowers and vegetables.

AT THE outset, the party had intended to run the river only as far as French Creek, 17 miles upstream from Riggins — skipping Ruby Rapids, probably the most treacherous and dangerous rapids on the entire course.

But as the run neared its finish, Guleke grew more and more curious and anxious to take the scow through the three miles of white water.

The rough water is caused by the confinement in which the river is held in a canyon. At that high stage of water, Steeples said the chimney of the rapids was margined by 20 foot waves on each side, tossing the scow about so that it was difficult to control.

One particularly heavy wave bounced Guleke out of the scow and over the side. Steeples, who was manning the forward sweep, had time to grab Guleke by his buckskin suspenders just as he hit the water. Steeples did not dare let go the sweep handle long enough to get a better grip on the doused river man, for fear of letting the scow get entirely out of control.

As a consequence, Guleke completed his final run of the Salmon River by being held against the side of the boat and getting a fresh ducking each time the craft bobbed.

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This particular expedition came about, Steeples said, quite out of a chance conversation among Oylar, Howard and himself. The

talk was about river trips and one of three said at one point, "the best way to see the river is build a boat and go down."

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it back, sending it arching and curling into waves 20 feet high. The waves crashed over the boat, cracking like thunder when they hit.

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The adventure rolled along in a procession of white-plumed rapids: Long Tom, Rainier, Bailey Creek, Five-Mile, Big and Little

Mallard, major and minor stretches of white water, some then unnamed. Guleke marked each one with a "long-remember" look as if to stamp the scene forever on his memory. The mountain-and-cliff guarded river slipped behind in a moving panorama of gray granite and pinion green.

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Legend has it that Polly Bemis was the table stakes in a poker

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In subsequent years Guleke liked to joke about the experience by telling friends that he made his last run of the Salmon River both inside and outside of a scow.