Last Scow on the Fierce Salmon

By Keith Barrette

THERE 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.

Of the three men who accompanied Capt. Harry Guleke, famed Salmon River Rat, to his farewell voyage, Emmett Steeple 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. Guleke was a former construction foreman for McCormick-Russell and is presently semi-retired.

At the time of Guleke's final run on the Salmon River, Oyler was a preferred pilot and guide for boating parties in the Middlefork Primitive Area of the Salmon. He had assisted Guleke along the way, not only as a captain but also in his的认识s and where to fish. After serving in the United States Marine during World War II, Oyler operated a scow on the 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 where he ran a small store and was an avid outdoorsman and adventurer.

Guleke died in 1971. He was a native of the Salmon River area and worked on the river as a youth. He was involved in the construction of the Middlefork Bridge and was a member of the salmon commission. He was one of the first to attempt to save the salmon from extinction.

Emmett Steeple, Salmon, back, sending it arching and curling into waves 30 feet high. The scow shook and cracked like thunder when they hit.

"Ten seconds after we entered the rapids, every man was drenched," Steeple continued. "Guleke's face was a picture of the buffering and lashing dealt by the rapids, the passengers began yelling to be let out.

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

Skeeple, who stands six feet and weighs nearly 200 pounds, recalled that he was picked up and swung back and forth by the scow, which was being handled savagely by the heavy current.

"I saw a flash of something from the banks and was about to dive, but the scow was too fast," Steeple said.

Mallard, major and minor stretches of white water, some then unnamed, Guleke marked each with his own name. "If the salmon can get there," he said, "go down.

During the days following the start of the construction Guleke and Oyler were a perfect team, working together to make sure that the fish were caught and delivered to the market. Their success was evident in the increased number of salmon caught by the end of the season.

Even now, Steeple is pleased to be able to recall the thrill of the hunt.

The river didn't flow through Pine Creek rapids. Steeple said it was a perfect time for salmon because the current should be strong enough to move the fish for miles.

The adventure pulled close in at Warren between a Chin- nese by the name of Coin and Charlie Bemis.

The salmon had been taken from San Francisco by his master when the gold strike had been made in the Florence and Warren areas. In the historic poker game, Coin 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 Coin were both wracked with guilt and they moved to their Salmon River retreat where they lived for 10 years. When they died in 1892, they left their names to the river traveler today of that hard card romance — Polly Creek and Bemis Mountain.

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

At the outset, the party had intended to run the river in the Mariposa, a scow that was 17 miles upstream from Higgins — skipping Ruby Rapids probably the most treacherous and dangerous rapids on the entire course.

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, Steeple said the chimney of the rapids was marked by 30-foot waves on each side, turning the surf into a sheet that was difficult to control.

One particularly heavy wave broke Guleke out of the scow and over the side. Steeple, who was running the forward sweep, had time to grab Guleke by his hand and pull him over so that he did not hit the water. Steeple 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 on the Salmon River by getting a fresh dashing from the scow of the three rapids. The salmon was caught by 30-foot waves on each side.
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EMMETT STEEPLES, Salmon, 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 feet at last we entered the rapids, every man of us was drenched," Steeples continued.

In the midst of the buffetting 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'll 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 swell he was manning, being twisted savagely by the heavy current.

"The river was running so fast," he related, "that we over-shot the Panther Creek landing by 300 yards. If it hadn't have been for about 20 CCC boys grabbing our line, we'd never have made it up the creek 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.

The adventure rolled along in a procession of white-plumed rapid, Long Tom, Raisier, 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-rememberer" 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 precious 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 snow bear and her cubs, just out of hibernation and dipping for spring tonic among the roots and snows of the stream banks.."

Disaster was riding with the party all the way. At Croatot Rapids, where the current hammered 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 number of 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 logger took the box off and put it in the scow. 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 Berris, 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 the years he had run the river.

Legend has it that Polly Berris was the lady makes in a poker game at Warren between a Chinese man by the name of Cahns and Charlie Berris.

At the outset, the party had intended to run the river only as far as French Creek. If they ran into trouble and had to beach the rapids, they would have to return to Riggins. As it is, they ran down the Salmon River to see the country they travel a 30 feet high. The waves crashed over the boat, cracking like thunder when they hit

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