



The *Gem* in the Little Colorado River lagoon, June 14, 1957. Courtesy Joe Szep

In order to get the boats closer to the good water supply in Nankoweap Creek, Pat proposed lining the boats downriver a few hundred yards against the upstream eddy current, along the shore and past the place where the whirlpool would form every few minutes. There was one small problem. The high water meant the “shore” was a steeply sloping hillside covered with thick mesquite trees. The *Susie R* was lined down before lunch, and the other boats pulled down in the afternoon through the thorny brush. A storm blew through camp just after dinner, with gusty winds blowing sand and rain. This kind of storm was what Ranger John Riffey would call “a six-inch rain” ... the raindrops being about six inches apart. Fortunately, almost all gear was already put away for the night, and the storm moved through quickly.

Another storm was brewing though, one Pat did not include in his log. He spoke openly to the group about stopping the trip. One option was to hike out the Nankoweap Trail from where they were camped. Other possible exit routes were at the Little Colorado River, where it was possible that a helicopter was still removing pieces of the airplane wreckage from the year before, or to hike out the Tanner Trail. After that, an easy exit at Bright Angel might also work. Another idea Pat offered was to stay at Nankoweap and see if the river dropped.

Susie spoke alone with Moulty about what he thought the trip should do, and he said he had no problems going on downriver, with a possible termination of the trip at Phantom “in view of how some of the party felt.” Susie mentioned that Pat was worried Moulty would not be able to make the pull-in at the boat beach at Bright Angel. Moulty assured Susie he was not worried about that in the slightest.

After a good night's rest, the group took their time getting out of camp in the morning. Moulty took the opportunity to hike back up to Little Nankoweap and look at the whirlpool again, but it was no longer there. The river runners could now clearly see the river had dropped during the night. Indeed, the Lee's Ferry gauge was now reading 114,000 cfs. The canyoneers loaded up the boats and were back on the river by 10:00 that morning. Kwagunt Rapid was scouted but was washed out, as was 60 Mile Rapid. The island at the confluence of the Little Colorado River and the main stem was completely under water, and a large lagoon went for over a half mile up the Little Colorado River drainage. At the top of the lagoon was a very muddy Little Colorado River, turned from blue to red by the storm of the night before. The group had lunch in shade afforded by some small cliffs on the south side of the Little Colorado. While they could see pieces of the United and TWA wreckage on the slopes of Chuar and Temple buttes, there was no helicopter removing debris.

After lunch, the boaters left the Little Colorado River and headed toward Tanner. Moulty had asked Pat what he thought Lava Chuar Rapid would be like, and Pat replied that it "should be" all washed out. That was not the case. Laterals in a herringbone pattern off either shore collided in the middle of the channel to make the biggest waves the river runners had seen so far. Moulty had an exhilarating ride, getting the *Gem* well up in the air. The same was true for the normally small riffles at Espejo and Comanche creeks. A lateral wave came in on the *Gem* from the side and Moulty noted he took on six inches of water, while Brick caught some good air in the same rapid. Pat was ahead of him and got a good view of the underside of the *Flavell*. The *Susie R* received a boatload of water as well, and lost a bailing bucket.



Priss Ratican photographs her uncle Moulty Fulmer, and Susie Reilly, while Pat Reilly repairs the fiberglass boat *Flavell*, June 15, 1957. Courtesy Joe Szep